BEGGING AND ALMS-GIVING IN URBAN IRELAND, 1815-1850

by

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Thesis for the degree of PhD in History

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October 2014

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Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly thank my doctoral supervisor, Dr Jacinta Prunty, for her kindness, support and guidance during the past three years. Our regular meetings have always been enjoyable and instructive, and it has been a pleasure to work under such a passionate teacher. Professor Marian Lyons has provided great support and encouragement for this research, as have Professor Jacqueline Hill and Professor Terence Dooley, and this is greatly appreciated. My colleagues among the department's postgraduates have been a constant source of assistance, advice and inspiration, and the weekly research seminars proved useful in fostering not only a shared knowledge of fascinating topics within history but also a sense of camaraderie. At various points, Dr Georgina Laragy, Dr Caroline Gallagher and Dr Ciarán Reilly, among many others, have encouraged and supported my research.

As a researcher I am indebted to many archivists and librarians, and I am happy to acknowledge their assistance. Many fruitful days were spent in the Representative Church Body Library and I would like to thank Dr Raymond Refaussé, Dr Susan Hood, Jennifer Murphy and Mary Furlong for their assistance. Dr Brian Donnelly and his colleagues at the National Archives of Ireland have been helpful, as have the staff at the National Library of Ireland. I would like to thank Dr Bernadette Cunningham, Siobhán Fitzpatrick and their colleagues in the Royal Irish Academy Library, as well as Penny Woods and colleagues in the Russell Library, Maynooth; Rev. Robin Roddie in the Methodist Library and Archives in Belfast; Valerie Adams in the library of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland; Noelle Dowling in the Dublin Diocesan Archives; Sister Marie Therese in the Presentation Convent, George's Hill Archive in

List of abbreviations

BNL	*Belfast Newsletter*
CSOOP	Chief Secretary's Office Official Papers
CSORP	Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers
DIB	James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish biography: from the earliest times to the year 2002* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2009)
DDA	Dublin Diocesan Archives
DMP	Daniel Murray Papers
DMSP	Dublin Mendicity Society Papers
FHLD	Friends Historical Library Dublin
FJ	*The Freeman's Journal*
IHS	*Irish Historical Studies*
JHP	John Hamilton Papers
NAI	National Archives of Ireland
NLI	National Library of Ireland
ODNB	H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (eds), *Oxford dictionary of national biography, from the earliest times to the year 2000* (60 vols, Oxford, 2004)
OS Memoirs	Angélique Day, and Patrick McWilliams (eds), *Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland* (40 vols, Belfast, 1990-98)
Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A	*First report from His Majesty's commissioners for Appendix A inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, with appendix (A.) and supplement, Appendix A*, H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii, 1
Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C	*Poor Inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (C.)—Parts I and II. 1836, Appendix C, Part I. Reports on the state of the poor, and on the charitable institutions in some of the principal towns; with supplement containing answers to queries. Part II. Report on the city of Dublin, and supplement containing answers to queries; with addenda to appendix (A.)., and communications,* H.C. 1836 [C 35], xxx, 35
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RCBL	Representative Church Body Library
RIA	Royal Irish Academy

Note on editorial conventions

The italicisation of words in primary sources has been retained in quotations. Where emphasis results from editorial intervention, this is acknowledged. Interventions in editorial matter are illustrated by the use of square brackets [   ]. The spelling in primary sources has not been modernised. Certain contractions, such as w^{ch}, have been silently expanded.

Listing of contemporary illustrations, maps, tables and figures

Introduction

Begging was a ubiquitous feature of life in pre-Famine Irish society. Towns and cities were frequently described as being 'infested' with 'swarms' of mendicants and the use of such language affirmed the widespread association of mendicancy with disease. Indeed, beggary was seen as a threat to society on a number of fronts. Yet, the questions of mendicancy and alms-giving were also framed by a universal sense of Christian obligation amongst all classes of society to assist those poorer than themselves. The example and teaching of Christ, as expounded in the New Testament, was intrinsic to the language of charity in this period and deeply influenced how individuals and corporate bodies perceived and responded to street begging. Nonetheless, indiscriminate charity was widely believed, especially by members of the 'respectable' middle classes who drove the philanthropic impulse of this period, to constitute a considerable evil, undermining industry, thrift and self-help, and encouraging idleness and pauperism. The long-held distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor coloured all approaches to beggary.

Begging and alms-giving were central features of the public discourse on the question of the poor of Ireland and their relief. This discourse was shaped by wider social and economic factors, and in line with these fluctuating forces, societal perceptions and responses varied. The emergence of mendicity societies – charities with the specific purpose of supressing street begging – across Irish and British towns and cities in the first half of the nineteenth century arose from middle-class concerns over the extent of mendicancy and the deleterious effects of urbanisation, while also reflecting the emerging associational culture of middle-class life.

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The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of significant change for each of the main five denominations in Ireland – Roman Catholicism, Church of Ireland (Anglican), Presbyterianism, Methodism, and Quakerism. This was a period of revival and renewed strength for some, division and embattlement for others. Tensions in cross-denominational relations increased and were subject to occasional heightened discord. In an era marked by the prolonged debates and campaigns for or against a national poor law, in which doctrinal thinking and the personal zeal of clergymen and the laity were key influences, each of the five denominations perceived and responded to beggary and alms-giving in distinct ways. The nuances of each denomination's worldview and organisational structure carried through to the negotiation of mendicancy, despite the fact that moralising middle-class philanthropists of all denominations shared similar views and deployed an almost homogenous language of condescending charity. The unfathomable extent of beggary during the Great Famine levelled previous definitions and calculations of the problem.

Literature review

The historiography of poverty and welfare in nineteenth-century Ireland has, to date, been largely focused on the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act, the Great Famine and the post-Famine decades. Long-standing survey works have used the Famine as an end/start point,[1] while a recent edited collection of articles exploring poverty and relief mechanisms commences with the passing of the Poor Law Act.[2] The cataclysmic impact that the Famine exerted on Irish society was such that historians' emphasis on this event

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[1] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine, 1798-1848* (Dublin, 1972); Joseph Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973).
[2] Virginia Crossman and Peter Gray (eds), *Poverty and welfare in Ireland, 1838-1948* (Dublin, 2011).

and its legacy is understandable. By comparison, the pre-Famine decades remain relatively neglected. Moreover, the specific topics of begging and alms-giving, ubiquitous throughout pre-Famine Ireland, have been largely overlooked.

Reflecting the historiographical emphasis on the Poor Law Act and the workhouse system, the role of the central state has been at the core of much work pertaining to poverty and welfare in nineteenth-century Ireland. The institutional shadow of the workhouse looms large over the historiography of this period.[3] However, the role of the main churches and religious societies in framing how individuals perceived and responded to poverty, begging and alms-giving remains largely omitted from historians' studies, and this thesis aims to make a contribution towards addressing this lacuna.

Crucial to understanding how contemporaries addressed begging and alms-giving is an analysis of the wider international debate on poverty, the poor and the question of how such individuals should be provided for, if at all. The most significant contribution to the historiography of this aspect of nineteenth-century Irish poverty is Peter Gray's *The making of the poor law*, which examines the long and fraught ideological debates and campaigns which preceded the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act.[4] Gray demonstrates that mendicancy, vagrancy and alms-giving were never too far from the centre of the discourse on the condition of the Irish poor. Fresh outbreaks of distress, such as those of the late-1810s and the mid-1820s, 'created new classes of paupers who were neither

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[3] John O'Connor, *The workhouses of Ireland: the fate of Ireland's poor* (Dublin, 1995); Helen Burke, *The people and the poor law in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Littlehampton, 1987); Michael Farrell, *The poor law and the workhouse in Belfast, 1838-1948* (Belfast, 1978); Michelle O'Mahony, *Famine in Cork city: famine life at Cork union workhouse* (Cork, 2005); Joseph Robins, *The lost children: a study of charity children in Ireland 1700-1900* (Dublin, 1980).
[4] Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law, 1815-43* (Manchester, 2009).

'casual' nor 'professional' but structural'.[5] These periods of crisis witnessed renewed zeal among Irish and British elites to address the problem of Irish poverty.

The cultural nuances surrounding mendicancy and alms-giving are the subject of important works by Laurence M. Geary and Niall Ó Ciosáin.[6] Drawing on the voluminous testimony recorded by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the State of the Poor of Ireland in the mid-1830s (hereafter referred to as the Poor Inquiry), both Geary and Ó Ciosáin concluded that distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor were not limited to moralising middle-class philanthropists and commentators, but were also to be found among the lower classes of Irish society. Their work correctly argues that approaches to beggary were inherently complex, with perceptions being coloured by religion, social class, and gender. The professional beggar, best illustrated by the 'boccough' who was a caricatured fraudulent lame beggar,[7] was considered a significantly different creature to the impoverished independent labourer or artisan, who resorted to mendicancy only at times of acute distress caused by external factors. In his most recent work, Ó Ciosáin has developed his analysis of the Poor Inquiry material pertaining to the 'boccough'. Noting that first-hand encounters with a 'boccough' were rare in the source material, Ó Ciosáin concludes that the use of this trope by the Irish poor was a means of meeting societal expectations that discriminated between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, yet continuing the widespread practice of indiscriminate alms-giving, on the grounds that:

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[5] Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law*, p. 17.

[6] Laurence M. Geary, '"The whole country was in motion": mendicancy and vagrancy in pre-famine Ireland' in Jacqueline Hill and Colm Lennon (eds), *Luxury and austerity: Historical Studies XXI* (Dublin, 1999), pp 121-36; Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Boccoughs and God's poor: deserving and undeserving poor in Irish popular culture' in Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 1998), pp 93-9.

[7] For the 'boccough', see Chapter Three.

'There were certainly beggars, organized and fraudulent, to whom one should under no circumstances give anything, but they were always somewhere else.'[8]

It had been hoped at the start of this research to devote a large part of this thesis to the daily experiences of street beggars. Given that beggars and vagabonds have been subjected to, as Caitriona Clear has observed, 'at best, walk-on parts in Irish social history',[9] a detailed analysis of the lives, backgrounds, motivations, emotions and decisions of individual beggars – which Thomas Gray described as the 'short and simple annals of the poor'[10] – was anticipated. Yet, it was quickly realised that the nature of the available source material precluded any such analysis. Any historian dealing with the poor must tackle the fact that his subjects were, almost invariably, not the creators of the primary sources in which they appear. Traces of the poor and their lives survive in police reports and court records, yet one must heed E.P. Thompson's advice to researchers not to pursue the poor head-first into the archives of crime. Their existence constituted more than disobedience against the prevailing system of law and order.[11] Published reports of parliamentary committees inquiring into poverty and distress, the memoirs of middle-class social campaigners, the registers and minute books of charitable societies, and the records of church relief initiatives give further insights into the experiences of poverty. However, when the poor appear in such records, they are generally observed at a remove. As Rachel Fuchs has stated, 'the poor often become visible to historians only when they meet the literate middle classes in the workplace or public arenas. As a result, historians have largely observed the lives of the

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[8] Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), p. 107.
[9] Caitriona Clear, 'Homelessness, crime, punishment and poor relief in Galway, 1850-1914: an introduction' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 1 (1998), p. 118.
[10] From Thomas Gray, 'Elegy written in a country churchyard' (1751), available at Thomas Gray Archive (http://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=elcc) (7 Mar. 2013).
[11] E.P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 59.

underprivileged through middle-class eyes that viewed them from a safe distance through lenses distorted by fear, distrust, and disgust.'[12]

For street beggars, this is particularly the case. The mendicant's perspective is, nearly without exception, beyond the reach of the historian. Whereas historians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain are well served by collections of paupers' or beggars' letters to parochial authorities[13] – since 1601, the parish performed a statutory function in welfare provision in England and Wales – there are no bodies of similar sources for contemporary Ireland. For the second half of the nineteenth century, though, one collection is worthy of note, namely petitions, dating from about 1850 onwards, sent to Dublin Castle by or on behalf of convicted prisoners, seeking the remission of custodial sentences.[14] While there will be no attempt here to present 'the beggar's narrative', Chapters One and Three will touch on some themes explored by Tim Hitchcock in his work on street begging in eighteenth-century London.[15] Among these themes are the dynamics of alms-seeking, in terms of the often casual nature of the resort to mendicancy by practitioners and the importance of visibility to a soliciting mendicant. A common theme running through this thesis is the fact that the poor, including those who engaged in street begging, regularly deployed agency in their engagement with individuals and relief mechanisms. Paupers are not to be seen as powerless dupes but as individuals who weighed up consequences and made decisions, based on the most advantageous anticipated outcome.[16]

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[12] Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and poverty in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 154.

[13] For instance, see Thomas Sokoll (ed.), *Essex pauper letters, 1731-1837* (Oxford, 2001).

[14] Criminal Index Files (NAI).

[15] Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the streets of eighteenth-century London' in *Journal of British Studies*, xliv, no. 3 (July 2005), pp 478-98; idem, *Down and out in eighteenth-century London* (London, 2007).

[16] Recent studies which consider how the poor exerted agency include Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The poor in England 1700-1850: an economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003); Fuchs, *Gender and poverty*, pp 1-19. For a recent Irish angle to this question, see Georgina Laragy, 'Poor relief in the south of Ireland, 1850-1921' in Crossman and Gray (eds), *Poverty and welfare in Ireland*, pp 53-66.

In her pioneering 1974 work on *The poor of eighteenth-century France* Olwen Hufton coined the term 'economy of makeshifts', by which she meant the disparate survival strategies employed by the poor. While Hufton centred this 'economy of makeshifts' around the practices of migration (for the sake of employment) and localised begging, subsequent historians have subsumed other strategies into this makeshift economy, including petty theft, pawning, prostitution, resort to parochial or charitable relief, and kinship networks.[17] Hufton portrayed mendicancy as a life-skill taught in youth and drawn upon in times of acute distress. 'This apprenticeship, for it was no less, occurred long before any other formal service as domestic servant, labourer, or textile worker. Should work run out, should they find themselves in later life between jobs or unable to support themselves on the proceeds of their labour, begging was their natural recourse…'[18]

Yet, Hufton's work neglects to address the matter of shame in how and why people took the decision to beg. Perhaps, this is a matter which simply did not appear in the sources for eighteenth-century France. Given the sheer ubiquity of the concept of shame in material for pre-Famine Ireland, most notably in the Poor Inquiry testimony (see Chapter One), the question remains whether Irish society was more concerned with concepts of shame and pride regarding poor assistance and independence. Was there shame attached to begging for its practitioners?

A key consideration of this thesis will be whether the five subject denominations – Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist and Quaker – perceived and responded to beggary and alms-giving in different ways. Can Roman Catholic approaches, for example, be distinguished from those of Anglicans or Presbyterians? In

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[17] Steven King and Alannah Tomkins, 'Introduction' in King and Tomkins (eds), *The poor in England 1700-1850*, pp 1-38.
[18] Olwen H. Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974), p. 110.

considering this fundamental question, an important paragraph from the pioneering

social historian of nineteenth-century Ireland, Timothy P. O'Neill, is to be considered.

O'Neill's early research, arising from his doctoral thesis and disseminated in a number

of significant articles four decades ago,[19] remains important, and this study of street

begging and alms-giving will consider his assertion that:

> To the Protestant moralist the effects on the recipient and the result of
> almsgiving on the economy and society were of the greatest importance and so
> all charity had to be carefully examined to ensure that it did not create a new
> class of beggars or endanger the economic framework. The Irish poor had
> different values and held different notions about charity. They regarded
> charity as a duty for the donor and all beggars were recognised as objects
> worthy of help.[20]

Here, O'Neill draws distinctions between Protestant and Catholic attitudes to labour,

industry and poor relief in nineteenth-century Ireland. The reader is presented with the

attitudes of what O'Neill describes as, on the one hand, 'the Protestant moralist' and on

the other, 'the Irish poor'. While not explicitly stated, this latter category was implicitly

pigeon-holed as being homogenously Roman Catholic, an assumption which is

problematic, particularly if one is to consider the working-class Presbyterian poor in the

towns of eastern Ulster or the substantial Church of Ireland distressed working classes

of Dublin city.[21] In criticising O'Neill's argument, Seán Connolly has demonstrated that

aversion to indiscriminate alms-giving was not unique to any one denomination, stating

that 'in this, as in other matters, the real line of division was social class rather than

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[19] Timothy P. O'Neill, 'The state, poverty and distress in Ireland, 1815-45' (PhD thesis, University College, Dublin, 1971); idem, 'Poverty in Ireland 1815-45' in *Folk Life*, xi (1973), pp 22-33; idem, 'Clare and Irish poverty, 1815-1851' in *Studia Hibernica*, xiv (1974), pp 7-27; idem, 'Fever and public health in pre-Famine Ireland' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, ciii (1973), pp 1-34; idem, 'A bad year in the Liberties' in Elgy Gillespie (ed.), *The Liberties of Dublin* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1974), pp 76-83.
[20] Timothy P. O'Neill, 'The Catholic Church and relief of the poor 1815-45' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxxi (1973), p. 133.
[21] For studies of these significant urban Protestant working-class communities, see Jacqueline Hill, 'The protestant response to repeal: the case of the Dublin working class' in F.S.L. Lyons and R.A.J. Hawkins (eds), *Ireland under the Union: varieties of tension. Essays in honour of T.W. Moody* (Oxford, 1980), pp 35-68; Ronnie Munck, 'The formation of the working class in Belfast, 1788-1881' in *Saothar*, xi (1986), pp 75-89.

religion'.[22] More recent contributions to this historiographical discussion by Maria

Luddy, Margaret Preston, Oonagh Walsh and Virginia Crossman have stressed the

importance of class, race and gender in understanding the dynamics of welfare provision

in this period.[23] Another contribution to this historiographical debate has been put

forward by Niall Ó Ciosáin in his recent work on the Poor Inquiry. Ó Ciosáin differs

from O'Neill and Connolly in stating that when considering alms-giving in this period,

'the distinction is not between denominations but between the clergy of all

denominations and the representatives of the state on the one hand, and the laity of all

denominations on the other'.[24] The points argued by O'Neill, Connolly and Ó Ciosáin

will be explored in this thesis.

While social class largely influenced how individuals negotiated begging and alms-

giving, nuances particular to specific denominations can be identified. The language of

Catholic philanthropists emphasised the importance of good works (in the form of alms-

giving) for the remission of the temporal punishment for sin and for one's salvation. The

question of good works and alms-giving greatly exercised many Protestant polemists

eager to associate 'Popish' dogma with idleness, pauperism and vice. Yet, this thesis

will explore Brian Pullan's argument that distinctions between how Catholic and

Protestants perceived beggary ought not to be unduly focused on the question of good

works.[25] The Roman Catholic Church in Ireland experienced a revival from the late

eighteenth century, and the growth of female religious orders and congregations formed

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[22] S.J. Connolly, 'Religion, work-discipline and economic attitudes: the case of Ireland' in T.M. Devine and David Dickson (eds), *Ireland and Scotland 1600-1850: parallels and contrasts in economic and social development* (Edinburgh, 1983), p. 244 n. 4.
[23] Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995); Margaret H. Preston, *Charitable words: women, philanthropy and the language of charity in nineteenth-century Dublin* (Westport, CT, and London, 2004), pp 41-65; Virginia Crossman, 'Middle-class attitudes to poverty and welfare in post-Famine Ireland' in Fintan Lane (ed.) *Politics, society and the middle class in modern Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp 130-47.
[24] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 118.
[25] Brian Pullan, 'Catholics and the poor in early modern Europe' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, xxvi (1976), pp 15-34.

one crucial aspect of this revival. Roman Catholic approaches to begging and alms-giving will be placed in the context of this increasing confidence and social standing, and will be examined in light of Maria Luddy's assertion that within Irish Catholicism, charity was a means 'of asserting Catholic identity, and Catholic distinctiveness from their Protestant rulers'.[26]

Much of the historiography of Irish parish vestries and their performance of civic functions is focused on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In his search for the 'old Irish poor law', David Dickson placed the parish vestry at the centre of corporate initiatives to alleviate poverty prior to the introduction of the poor law and workhouse system in the late-1830s.[27] In her PhD thesis in 1995 and a number of subsequently-published articles, Rowena Dudley explored the role of the Dublin parishes in civic administration between 1660 and 1730, concluding that the demands of an increasingly complex and urbanised society exposed the limitations of localised parochial bodies to provide civil services, which gradually came under the control of centralised government.[28] In his study of the Dublin parish of St Paul's, Brendan Twomey used the vestry minute book for the first half of the eighteenth century to assess the impact of the vestry on the lives of parishioners and for assessing the involvement of the local elite in the civil and ecclesiastical work of the vestry.[29] Toby Barnard's use of vestry minute books constitutes the most extensive examination of the dynamics of office-holding at

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[26] Maria Luddy, 'Religion, philanthropy and the state in late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Ireland' in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds), *Charity, philanthropy and reform from the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 159.

[27] David Dickson, 'In search of the old Irish poor law' in Rosalind Mitchison and Peter Roebuck (eds), *Economy and society in Scotland and Ireland, 1500-1939* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 149-59.

[28] Rowena Dudley, 'Dublin parishes 1660-1729: the Church of Ireland parishes and their role in the civic administration of the city' (PhD thesis, 2 vols, University of Dublin, 1995); eadem, 'The Dublin parishes and the poor: 1660-1740' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, liii (1999), pp 80-94; eadem, 'The Dublin parish, 1660-1730' in Elizabeth FitzPatrick and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *The parish in medieval and early modern Ireland: community, territory and building* (Dublin, 2006), pp 277-96.

[29] Brendan Twomey, *Smithfield and the parish of St Paul, Dublin, 1698-1750* (Dublin, 2005), pp 26-42.

the lowest level of civic government.[30] Yet, looking forward into the nineteenth century, one finds that historians' use of vestry minute books is not as extensive as for earlier periods in Irish history. A notable exception to this neglect of the nineteenth-century parish vestries, and their source material, is the work of the late John Crawford on the Church in Victorian Dublin, and his case study of St Catherine's parish.[31] The early- to mid-nineteenth century witnessed significant changes in the role of the parish vestries in civil government, yet the parish's evolving role in welfare provision in this period of administrative upheaval remains unexamined.

The multiplication of charitable societies across Ireland and Britain from the late-eighteenth century forms a crucial context for this thesis's analysis of street begging and alms-giving. James Kelly has stressed the importance of the emerging associational culture among the rising middle classes to the growth of charities in this period, while noting features peculiar to the Irish context, most notably the lack of any national state system of poor assistance. Kelly also makes the important point that contrary to parish bodies, charities founded in the late-eighteenth century targeted their resources at specific categories of the distressed poor, and 'were more selective both in the numbers they targeted and in the assistance they provided'.[32] In his study on voluntary societies in general, Robert Morris develops this theme, showing these bodies, of which charities formed a substantial proportion, to share three distinct traits: they were urban-based, were formed and driven by the elites of the middle classes, mainly from the professional

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[30] Toby Barnard, *A new anatomy of Ireland: the Irish Protestants, 1649-1770* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2004).

[31] John Crawford, *The Church of Ireland in Victorian Dublin* (Dublin, 2005); idem, *St Catherine's parish, Dublin, 1840-1900: portrait of a Church of Ireland community* (Dublin, 1996).

[32] James Kelly, 'Charitable societies: their genesis and development, 1720-1800' in James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell (eds), *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), p. 103. For more on this associational culture, see the various contributions to Colm Lennon (ed.), *Confraternities and sodalities in Ireland: charity, devotion and sociability* (Dublin, 2012).

and commercial classes, and their goal was to improve the condition of the labouring classes with minimal state assistance or interference.[33]

Adopting James Kelly's argument about selectivity and discrimination in voluntary charity provision, this thesis will present a case study of the mendicity society movement which flourished across Ireland and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. Mendicity societies were voluntary-funded charities founded in urban centres with the primary purpose of suppressing street begging. To date, the historiography of Irish mendicity societies has been limited. Brief case studies of the Dublin, Galway, Drogheda and Belfast societies are provided in the works of Jacinta Prunty, John Cunningham, Ned McHugh and Alison Jordan.[34] These accounts all stress the financial embarrassment which underpinned these institutions' (almost invariably brief) existence and their eventual supplanting by the Poor Law union workhouses, yet the stark concentration of these societies in relatively small towns in Ulster has gone without analysis. Audrey Woods's administrative history of the Dublin Mendicity Society is admirable in its extensive use of source material but fails to locate this important charity within the context of wider voluntary charitable provision in Dublin city and also in the context of the international mendicity society movement.[35] The use of the term 'movement' (as discussed in Chapter Four) is justified by the fact that charities with similar objectives and founded by individuals with similar social and cultural expectations operated in an intellectual environment wherein information was transmitted from society to society, recording experiences, precedents and advice.

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[33] R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary societies and British urban elites, 1780-1850: an analysis' in *Historical Journal*, xxvi, no. 1 (Mar. 1983), pp 95-118.

[34] Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), pp 205-209; John Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea': Galway, 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004), p 47-54; Ned McHugh, *Drogheda before the Famine: urban poverty in the shadow of privilege, 1826-45* (Dublin, 1998), pp 46-51; Alison Jordan, *Who cared? Charity in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast* (Belfast, n.d. [1992]), pp 20-24.

[35] Audrey Woods, *Dublin outsiders: a history of the Mendicity Institution, 1818-1998* (Dublin, 1998).

Robert Morris is correct in pointing out that there was no central parent society for British mendicity societies but this thesis will argue that his implication that these charities 'were connected only in so far as each urban centre tended to copy and follow the example of others' is open to question, and this matter will be considered.[36]

   This thesis will focus on beggary and alms-giving in an urban context and in this light will engage with Jacinta Prunty's study of the urban geography of the Dublin slums, wherein the author emphasises the interconnectedness of all aspects of poverty. The key questions of infectious disease, poor housing, beggary, perceived immorality, intemperance and irreligion were all linked, not only in how the poor lived their lives on a daily basis but in how contemporary middle-class social commentators perceived and dealt with those living in poverty. In assessing begging and alms-giving in Dublin city, Prunty draws upon a wide range of sources in considering a number of themes, some of which are developed in this thesis: the association between beggars and petty crime; fears that wandering mendicants introduced disease into urban centres; the disproportionate prevalence of women among the country's mendicant classes; the urban centre as a magnet for migrant rural dwellers in distress; the varying motivations that drove people to mendicancy.[37] In his recent work on the growing town of Belfast in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, Seán Connolly demonstrates that the emergence of voluntary societies, devoted to philanthropy, religious devotion, cultural or literary pursuits, or sociability, reflected the 'strong sense of collective social responsibility on the part of Belfast's leading and middle-ranking citizens'.[38] This associational culture was a singularly urban phenomenon, responding to the rapidly advancing challenges of urbanisation and industrialisation. Furthermore, these

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[36] Morris, 'Voluntary societies and British urban elites', p. 103.
[37] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, *passim*.
[38] S.J. Connolly, 'Improving town, 1750-1820' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Belfast 400: people, place and history* (Liverpool, 2012), p. 169.

institutions advertised the social and cultural expectations of the middle classes who comprised the founders and managing committee members of voluntary societies. According to Connolly, the many philanthropic initiatives in nineteenth-century Belfast, across all denominations, 'inevitably operated within the limits set by the same bourgeois social and economic philosophy that had discontinued the assizes of bread [a medieval law regulating the price of bread] and sought to outlaw any attempt by trade unions to curtail economic activity'. As much as the British middle classes sought to encourage 'improvement' among the urban poor,[39] moralising Irish philanthropists laboured 'to inculcate the approved virtues of industry, thrift and self-help'.[40]

In terminating at the year 1850, this thesis will consider themes surrounding begging and alms-giving during the Great Famine. While engaging with Famine historiography, this study will, it is hoped, make a contribution to the still nascent historiography of the urban experience of the Famine. While Belfast and Cork have been examined by Christine Kinealy and Gerard MacAtasney, and by Michelle O'Mahony, there is surprisingly still no comprehensive history of Dublin during the Great Famine, although a chapter in Cormac Ó Gráda's *Black '47 and beyond* is a notable exception to this historiographical lacuna.[41] A ubiquitous feature of pre-Famine Irish society, mendicancy prevailed to an unfathomable and overwhelming extent during the Great Famine. Begging has been mentioned in nearly all works on the Famine period but has not been subjected to detailed analysis. The obvious question, as to how begging, alms-giving and attitudes to these practices evolved in the face of so catastrophic an event, has gone without answer – and seemingly without being asked.

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[39] Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: the rise and fall of the Victorian city* (London, 2004), *passim*.
[40] S.J. Connolly and Gillian McIntosh, 'Whose city? Belonging and exclusion in the nineteenth-century urban world' in Connolly (ed.), *Belfast 400*, p. 244.
[41] Christine Kinealy and Gerard MacAtasney, *The hidden Famine: poverty, hunger and sectarianism in Belfast 1840-50* (London, 2000); Michelle O'Mahony, *Famine in Cork city: famine life at Cork Union workhouse* (Cork, 2005); Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and beyond: the Great Irish Famine in history, economy, and memory* (Princeteon, NJ, 1999), pp 157-93.

Thesis structure

This thesis will examine perceptions of and responses to street begging in Irish urban centres between 1815 and 1850. Particular attention will be paid to Dublin and Belfast, while the experiences of the populations of other large cities and towns will also be considered. The chronological range of this study spans from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to the end of the Great Famine. M.J.D. Roberts has usefully shown that mid- and late-Victorians largely saw the immediate post-war years as the 'bad old days', representing the extremes of distress in the first decades of the century. 'Progress was then measured from that base line and efforts to control the situation could be explained in terms of a natural revulsion against intolerable excess.'[42] Contemporary sources regularly set 1815 as a starting point in assessing the decline or improvement of the moral and material condition of the population. Among the most important questions asked of local elites by the Irish Poor Inquiry of the mid-1830s was: 'Is the general condition of the poorer classes in your parish, improved, deteriorated, or stationary, since the Peace, in the year 1815, and in what respect?'[43] The significance of this date was not lost on charitable institutions. Both the Dublin Mendicity Society and the Belfast House of Industry identified the cessation of the Napoleonic Wars as a leading cause of the increase in distress and street begging in the late-1810s.[44] Given the pre-Famine focus of the main body of this thesis, the question arises: how did attitudes to begging and alms-giving change, if at all, during the Great Famine? Terminating this thesis at 1850 facilitates a consideration of these issues during the Famine.

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[42] M.J.D. Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship: the London Mendicity Society and the suppression of begging in England, 1818-1869' in *International Review of Social History*, xxxvi (1991), p. 202.

[43] *Poor Inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (E.) containing baronial examinations relative to food, cottages and cabins, clothing and furniture, pawnbroking and savings' banks, drinking; and supplement, containing answers to questions 13 to 22 circulated by the commissioners*, p. i, H.C. 1836 [C 37], xxxii, 2.

[44] *Report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1818* (Dublin, 1819), p. 1; *Poor Inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (C.)—Part I. Reports on the state of the poor, and on the charitable institutions in some of the principal towns; with supplement containing answers to queries*, pp 12-13, H.C. 1836 [C 35], xxx, 48-49 [hereafter, *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C*].

The first section of the thesis, encompassing chapters one to three, will examine the issue of mendicancy. Chapter One examines the difficulties faced by contemporaries and historians in defining begging and beggars. As well as considering varying legal and cultural definitions of begging and vagrancy, this chapter will survey alms-seeking in Ireland in light of Hufton's concept of an 'economy of makeshifts' which the poor negotiated on a daily basis. Chapter Two will move this discussion of beggary from definition to measurement. Crucial to contemporary debates on poverty was the extent of beggary in the country. Attempts to gauge the level of mendicancy on a local and national scale will be considered and these efforts will be placed into the context of the emergence in the 1830s of statistical societies throughout Ireland, Britain, Europe and North America which had an acute interest in the social and moral improvement of the poor. Chapter Three will explore the many ways in which begging was perceived in the early-nineteenth century. Mendicancy was seen as a threat on many levels and a number of these perceived threats will be analysed as case studies. Attention will also be given to perceptions of begging as a natural right of the poor, while the common association of mendicants with superstitions and popular folk culture will be explored.

In the second section of the thesis, comprising chapters four to nine, the focus will shift towards the responses of charities and the five main denominations in pre-Famine Ireland to begging. Chapter Four presents a case study of the mendicity society movement, which flourished across Ireland and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. This chapter will contrast the mendicity societies with the earlier houses of industry, which also had a remit of suppressing mendicancy, and will conclude with an analysis of the decline of these charities in the late-1830s. Chapter Five considers Roman Catholic perceptions and responses, commencing with an analysis of Catholic teaching pertaining to good works and alms-giving, as spelled out in contemporary

catechisms. The flaws found in these teachings by numerous Protestant polemicists will be considered alongside the refutation of such polemical utterings by senior Catholic clerics. The views of the long-neglected figure of Archbishop of Dublin, Daniel Murray (1768-1852), will be closely analysed, as will those of Mary Aikenhead (1787-1858), foundress of the Religious Sisters of Charity. Chapter Six analyses the views of various Church of Ireland clergymen on poverty, a national poor law, begging and alms-giving. Clerics of all denominations concerned themselves with the plight of the poor and Anglican ministers were no different. This chapter will introduce the topic of evangelicalism, which will also be relevant to later chapters, and will then consider the role of parish vestries in suppressing street begging. Chapter Seven analyses the approaches of Irish Presbyterianism to mendicancy and alms-giving. As 96 per cent of Presbyterians lived in Ulster, this chapter will be largely focused on the northern province. However, the views of Dublin minister, Rev. James Carlile, and Church of Scotland divine, Rev. Thomas Chalmers, will broaden the study. While based in Scotland, Chalmers's writings will be utilised as an insight into contemporary Presbyterian, as well as evangelical, thought on social issues. The chapter will conclude with an examination of how Presbyterian kirk sessions negotiated beggary, contrasting them with their Scottish counterparts. Chapter Eight considers how Irish Methodists perceived and responded to begging and beggars. As a denomination characterised by its appeal to the poor, the views of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, form a natural starting point for this chapter. An examination of Wesley's teachings will lead into the second half of the chapter, which analyses the Methodist-run Strangers' Friend Societies. These charities, formed in Irish and British cities from 1785 onwards, aimed at relieving the non-local poor, yet explicitly excluded street beggars from the benefits of their assistance. Chapter Nine turns to members of the Religious Society of Friends

(hereafter, Quakers), the historiography of whom has focused on their admirable relief efforts during the Great Famine. Quakers' disproportionate representation in philanthropic endeavours will be considered before addressing the published views of a number of key Quaker social commentators on poverty and mendicancy. The chapter will conclude with an examination of Quakers' corporate responses, namely the poor committees of their monthly meetings, the most localised congregational assembly within Quakerism.

In examining begging and alms-giving in the first half of nineteenth-century Ireland, one cannot avoid the Great Famine. Chapter Ten, which examines church and charitable responses to beggary during the Famine, is an attempt to bring together some of the main issues addressed throughout this thesis and which were prevalent to an incomprehensible extent during the catastrophe of the Famine. The responses of the Dublin Mendicity Society, the last survivor of that important movement, and the five subject denominations to beggary and alms-giving during the Famine will be analysed. Among the issues explored in this chapter are the urban experience of the Famine and the evolving language used when discussing mendicancy. These themes mostly centre on what changed from before the Famine and in this light, the significance of the 1847 Vagrancy Act, overlooked by most historians of the Famine,[45] will be analysed.

Critical analysis of primary sources

British Parliamentary Papers are indispensable for any study of nineteenth-century Irish social history and this thesis will make extensive use of numerous items from this

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[45] For exceptions to this trend, see Peter Gray, *Famine, land and politics: British government and Irish society 1843-1850* (Dublin, 1999), p. 276, and Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity: the Irish Famine 1845-52* (Dublin, 1994), p. 198.

body of material. A number of large-scale inquiries were held in the first half of the nineteenth century into the condition of Ireland; those held in 1825, 1830, 1833-36 and 1849 are most relevant to this study. Of these, particular attention will be paid to the Poor Inquiry, which sat between 1833-36 under the chairmanship of the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately. The Poor Inquiry examined hundreds of witnesses in selected areas across Ireland on the social and economic conditions of their respective localities. The subsequent reports, totaling more than 5,000 pages, provide an unequalled insight into the lives of and societal attitudes towards the poor in Ireland in the years immediately prior to the establishment of the workhouse system, and a decade before the catastrophe of the Great Famine. Almost 800 pages of Appendix A of the inquiry's reports comprise verbatim, first-hand testimony from members of all social classes – from landlords, their agents, merchants and clergymen to farmers, shopkeepers, labourers and beggars – as to the social conditions in their locality. The topic of begging is considered in Appendix A under the heading 'Vagrancy' and comprises the largest stand-alone section in the Poor Inquiry's entire published output. As Niall Ó Ciosáin has observed, 'it is rare to be able to listen to the voices of people anywhere in the past with the clarity that this report allows and it is particularly rare for the "hidden Ireland" before the Famine'.[46]

Despite the Poor Inquiry reports' undoubted usefulness to historians, some of whom have drawn extensively on these sources for a wide range of studies of pre-Famine Irish society,[47] the voluminous output of the inquiry presents challenges for the researcher.

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[46] Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Introduction' in Maureen Comber (ed.), *Poverty before the Famine, County Clare, 1835* (Ennis, 1996), pp iii-vii, at p. iii.

[47] K.H. Connell, 'Illegitimacy before the famine' in idem, *Irish peasant society: four historical essays* (Oxford, 1968), pp 51-86; Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland starved? A quantitative and analytical history of the Irish economy, 1800-1850* (London, 1985), pp 24-8, 197-213; L.A. Clarkson and E. Margaret Crawford, 'Dietary directions: a topographical survey of Irish diet, 1836' in Rosalind Mitchison and Peter Roebuck (eds), *Economy and society in Scotland and Ireland, 1500-1939* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp 171-92; Geary, '"The whole country was in motion"'; Prunty, *Dublin slums*; Mary Cullen, 'Breadwinners and providers:

For example, while historians of nineteenth-century Ireland are in unanimous agreement that poverty and destitution disproportionately impacted on women, by far the majority of witnesses who testified to the commissioners were men.[48] There is a largely satisfactory spread among the witnesses between the different social classes and denominations, but women are conspicuous by their near-total absence, thus representing a weakness in this important source. Women's perspectives on employment, domestic labour, diet, perceptions of the poor and poverty, and the dynamics of alms-giving, for instance, are all but absent. Interestingly, the few women whose testimony was recorded were female beggars.

The manner in which the testimony was recorded also raises important questions. In the parishes that were visited by the inquiry's commissioners, locals of all social classes were invited to attend and answer questions, in open and in public, on the social and economic condition of their locality. As Ó Ciosáin has observed, the presence of all strands of society influenced the statements given by various witnesses. 'It is very likely that farmers were influenced by the presence of their landlords, labourers by the presence of the farmers, who employed them and from whom they held their small plots, beggars by the presence of those who gave them alms, and all groups by the presence of the clergy.'[49]

In the opening pages of their first report in July 1835, the assistant commissioners were up-front in acknowledging the weaknesses in their on-going endeavour. As well as experiencing difficulties in negotiating local social and religious tensions and power dynamics throughout the country, the assistant commissioners believed that their largest

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women in the household economy of labouring families, 1835-6' in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (eds), *Women surviving: studies in Irish women's history in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Dublin, 1990), pp 85-116.
[48] See, for instance, Cullen, 'Breadwinners and providers', pp 109-10, 112; Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 207; Geary, '"The whole country was in motion"', p. 123.
[49] Ó Ciosáin, 'Introduction', p. vi.

challenge was the sheer scale of the inquiry. 'To determine what measures might be requisite to ameliorate the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, required an investigation extending to almost the whole social and productive system; for the poorer classes in Ireland may be considered as comprehending nearly the whole population.'[50] In the end, the commissioners and their assistants were overwhelmed by the sheer extent of the project, and initial plans to inquire into the condition of those employed in trades, manufacturing, fishing and mining were not realised, due to pressure on time and resources.[51] An important limitation of the Poor Inquiry's reports relevant to this urban study is the fact that the reports pertain largely to social conditions in rural Ireland. The considerable bulk of testimony illuminating cultural practices around begging and alms-giving centres on rural mendicants and their relief by labourers and farmers. A dedicated study on street begging in Dublin city, as well as outlines of charitable provision in other large urban centres,[52] somewhat mitigate this spatial bias.

The minute books of a wide range of corporate entities will be extensively utilised in this study. Such bodies include parish vestries, kirk sessions, Quaker monthly meetings and charitable societies. Organisational minute books are important sources and have been used to great effect by a number of historians, particularly for case studies of individual welfare institutions.[53] Yet, minutes are limited in what they record. Lists of attendance, correspondence, resolutions and financial matters are usually to be found

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[50] *First report from His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, with appendix (A.) and supplement*, Appendix A, p. vii, H.C. 1835 (369), xxxii, 7 [hereafter, *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*].

[51] *Third report of the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 24, H.C. 1836 [C 43], xxx, 24.

[52] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II,* pp 1a*-46a*, H.C. 1836 [C 35], xxx, 411-456. Parts I and II of *Poor Inquiry, Appendix C* are dedicated to large urban centres. A much-expanded version of the short report on Waterford city is available in manuscript form: Report on the state of the poor in Waterford city and on the charitable institutions of that city, 5 April 1834 (NLI, MS 3288).

[53] Woods, *Dublin outsiders*; Deirdre Lindsay, *Dublin's oldest charity: the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society 1790-1990* (Dublin, 1990); Dudley, 'Dublin parishes 1660-1729'; Ruth Lavelle and Paul Huggard, 'The parish poor of St. Mark's' in David Dickson (ed.), *The gorgeous mask: Dublin 1700-1850* (Dublin, 1987), pp 86-97.

but the intriguing debates that informed such matters are not. Minute books present only what someone, internal to the institution, has decided should be recorded. This was typically the decision of a clerk who recorded the decisions of the meeting. Discussions deemed unimportant or controversial may have been omitted. In the case of parish vestry meetings, particularly in large urban centres, the difficulties arising from this inherent limitation are mitigated by resort to newspaper reports. For example, nineteenth-century vestry meetings in Dublin, especially the annual Easter vestry meetings, were usually reported extensively in the public press, recording the prolonged and often fraught debates and the names of contributors to these discussions.[54] The consultation of newspaper reports alongside the manuscript vestry minute books deepens the researcher's understanding of this important institution. Of the numerous charitable societies which catered for the urban poor of early-nineteenth-century Ireland and whose records exist, the Dublin Mendicity Society, the Belfast Charitable Society and the Dublin Parochial Association will attract particular attention.

Newspapers and periodicals will be used extensively throughout this thesis. Irish towns and cities were well served by a proliferation of newspapers in this period, yet, as with all publications, they must be used with caution. As much as the creators of any other primary sources, reporters, editors and proprietors had bees in their bonnets and the historian must heed E.H. Carr's advice in being attentive to the sound of the buzzing.[55] The stories reported in papers, and the manner of their reporting, were vulnerable to bias and prejudice, while stories were oftentimes paid for by interested parties. Newspapers and periodicals all forwarded an ideological agenda, but the extent

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[54] The most insightful complementary use of vestry minute books and newspaper reports is to be found in the work of the late John Crawford: Crawford, *The Church of Ireland in Victorian Dublin*; idem, *St Catherine's parish*.

[55] E.H. Carr, *What is history?* (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 23.

to which this agenda was blatant varied.[56] The liberal nationalist newspaper the

Freeman's Journal would be expected to report on issues differently than the

Presbyterian-ethos *Banner of Ulster* or the evangelical Church of Ireland magazine *The*

Christian Examiner. These differences are illustrated aptly by Niall Ó Ciosáin, noting

the fondness of Tory and Protestant-ethos papers (such as the *Dublin Evening Mail*, the

Sligo Journal and *The Times* of London) to depict Daniel O'Connell as a 'Big

Beggarman'. The use of the trope of beggary was linked not only to disagreement with

O'Connell's political views but also with the widespread association of beggary with

Catholicism within British Isles-Protestantism.[57] These factors carried over into street

and trade directories. The most commonly-used directories, such as those published by

Messrs Wilson (from 1751), Watson (1768-1822) and Thom (from 1844), carried a

noticeable Establishment and Protestant ethos. The very limited coverage of Catholic

charities in these volumes arose from the fact that Catholic-ethos organisations operated

largely out of sight and did not court cross-community publicity, largely due to the

prohibition until 1860 of the registration of Catholic charitable societies. These charities

advertised in Catholic directories, aimed at a Catholic readership and carrying

information particular to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.

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[56] James H. Murphy, *Ireland: a social, cultural and literary history, 1791-1891* (Dublin, 2003), pp 78-93; Marie-Louise Legg, 'Newspapers' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *The Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2002) , pp 406-407.

[57] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 123.

SECTION ONE

Chapter One

Defining begging and alms-giving

Introduction

In approaching the subject of begging in nineteenth-century Ireland it is necessary first to acknowledge the complexities involved in defining exactly what and who is being discussed. Terms such as 'begging', 'mendicancy' and 'vagrancy' can be consulted in a dictionary, yet the varying use and evolution of these terms throughout the past centuries challenges one's ability to approach the issue from a historical perspective. As shall be seen, both contemporary observers and historians have undertaken the unenviable task of cataloguing and attempting to define what is meant when referring to, for instance, 'beggars', 'vagrants' or the 'idle poor'. The efforts have resulted in categorisations that are rarely concise. However, without such attempts to classify the various groups that constituted the destitute poor, as defined either by themselves or the status quo in any given society, one cannot undertake a satisfactory analysis of the issue of mendicancy.

This chapter aims to analyse definitions of the mendicant and vagrant poor in Ireland, firstly by examining pre-nineteenth-century categorisations and then by bringing the topic forward into the pre-Famine decades. The evolution of the terminology deployed in the public discourse on the mendicant poor will be demonstrated, as will the usefulness of ambiguous legal definitions in categorising and rounding up suspicious characters who were believed to be engaged in or capable of deviant behaviour. The chapter will conclude by considering cultural and popular definitions of beggars, arguing that the personage of the 'boccough', the notorious lame-beggar of pre-Famine

Irish society, and attitudes to same, reflect notions of discrimination at a popular level towards beggars and alms-giving.

Key questions for this chapter will be: What was meant by begging? In terms of alms, what was sought and given? Who were the street beggars? The varied experiences and motivations of those who begged is considered by applying Olwen Hufton's concept of an 'economy of makeshifts'. In some instances, begging was carried out without resort to other survival strategies; in others, alms-seeking was a practice that individuals resorted to occasionally and in accordance with their fluctuating economic circumstances. As will be seen with the various themes pertaining to mendicancy running through this entire study, the experiences of street begging in early- to mid-nineteenth-century Ireland were never homogenous. The circumstances which motivated an individual to go out into the streets and seek alms differed from person to person. Some commentators crudely lumped all beggars and vagrants together and categorised them as the lazy, idle poor who preferred the mendicant life to one of industry. To the historian, such imprecise categorisations must be avoided. If one was, for the sake of argument, to embrace Henry Mayhew's famous threefold breakdown of the poor of London into those who will work, those who cannot work and those who will not work – into the third of which Mayhew clumsily massed beggars, thieves and prostitutes[1] – it would be evident, as demonstrated below, that street beggars in nineteenth-century Ireland transcended all three groupings.

Begging: defining the practice

Begging in the nineteenth century took on more forms than the mere solicitation of alms. At times, begging was cloaked under the guise of the sale of some trivial item,

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[1] Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Mayhew's poor: a problem of identity' in *Victorian Studies*, xiv, no. 3 (Mar. 1971), p. 309.

such as flowers or home-made devotional articles. A statute of 1774 included unlicensed street sellers within the confines of the definition of vagabondage, noting that this practice – 'hawking about small wares, whereby they cannot earn a subsistence' – constituted 'indirect begging'.[2] Encompassing peddling and street entertainment, charring and prostitution, shoe-blacking and tin mending, 'the beggarly professions came in an almost unlimited variety'.[3] Alms solicited or given could take a number of forms and here an important distinction between the provision of private charity in rural and urban contexts requires assertion. The Poor Inquiry evidence reveals that in rural areas, alms were most commonly given in the form of potatoes or lodgings, while in urban areas money (and occasionally provisions) was the most common form of relief.[4] When solicited, people gave what they had to hand and which would not be too burdensome to relinquish. For labourers and small farmers in rural areas, any cash raised during the year largely went towards the payment of rent. On the other hand, occasional rummages into the large stockpile of potatoes for passing vagrants were less likely to impact on the household budget. According to the surgeon and statistician William Wilde, the potato was 'the circulating medium for the mendicant'.[5]

In urban areas, cash played a greater part in people's daily lives and was, therefore, provided as alms on public streets more frequently. Beggars calling to the houses of the wealthier inhabitants of a town or city were usually dealt with by domestic servants, who were frequently criticised in public discourse for giving alms, usually in the form of left-over food ('broken meat'), to street beggars at the doors of their employers'

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[2] 13 & 14 Geo. III, c. 46, s. 5 [Ire.] (2 June 1774).
[3] Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the streets of eighteenth-century London' in *Journal of British Studies*, xliv, no. 3 (July 2005), p. 491.
[4] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A,* pp 2-409; Return of answers to queries from the Poor Inquiry, by Rev. William Walsh, Parishes of Clontarf, Coolock and Santry, Dublin, n.d. [*c.* 1833], answer no. 30 (DDA, DMP, 32/3/44).
[5] [William R. Wilde], 'The food of the Irish' in *Dublin University Magazine*, xliii, no. 154 (Feb. 1854), p. 133.

residences.[6] An inhabitant of Mountjoy Square, Dublin was rebuked by the city's mendicity society because 'his servants are in the constant habit of giving broken meat to mendicants' and he was urged 'to stop a practice so injurious to the objects of this association'.[7] The Galway Mendicity Society attributed the continued presence of beggars on the streets to 'the relief that is still given by servants and other mistaken persons, at the doors, and is certainly the greatest abuse of charity that can be conceived'.[8] In her advice manual to female servants, the prolific English writer Eliza Haywood (*c.* 1693-1756), who spent some time in Dublin as an actress, warned that 'tho' Charity and Compassion for the Wants of our Fellow creatures are very amiable Virtues', servants ought not to give left-over food to beggars without the permission of their masters.[9] She further advised her readers not to give alms to mendicants on the streets.[10]

'Idle vagrants' and 'sturdy beggars': drawing distinctions between the mendicant poor

The terminology pertaining to mendicancy was varied, impassioned and moralising. Adjectives describing beggars, such as 'idle', 'refractory', 'sturdy', 'licentious', 'incorrigible' and 'profligate', were commonplace and framed these individuals as more than just a nuisance; they constituted a threat to the moral and economic well-being of society. The use of these terms set such individuals apart from the 'respectable' poor, who endeavoured to labour honestly and independently. The terms 'vagrant' and

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[6] *FJ*, 21 Sept. 1826; *An address to the Mechanics, Workmen, and Servants, in the City of Dublin* (Dublin, 1828) in (DDA, DMP, 30/11/17); Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 17 Dec. 1822 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/2); Report on the state of the poor in Waterford city and on the charitable institutions of that city, 5 Apr. 1834, f28r (NLI, MS 3288).
[7] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 June 1824 (NLI, DMSP, 32,599/3).
[8] *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1825.
[9] [Eliza Haywood], *A present for a servant-maid. Or, the sure means of gaining love and esteem* (Dublin, 1744), p. 29.
[10] [Haywood], *A present for a servant-maid*, pp 44-5.

'beggar', as defined in a contemporary dictionary, carried different meanings. A vagrant was 'an idle wanderer; a vagabond; one who strolls from place to place; a sturdy beggar; one who has no settled habitation, or who does not abide in it'.[11] The transiency and unsettled nature of the vagrant is here central to this definition. A beggar, on the other hand, was 'one that lives by asking alms, or makes it his business to beg for charity'.[12] The terms are clearly closely associated but distinct; nonetheless, they were widely interchangeable in the first half of the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by the fact that the lengthy section of the Poor Inquiry's reports focusing on begging in pre-Famine Ireland was printed under the heading 'Vagrancy'.[13]

Many of those labelled as vagrants were able-bodied agricultural labourers (*spailpíní* or *spailpíní fanach*), traversing the country in search of short-term employment. After planting their potato crop labourers, particularly those living in the west and south of Ireland, left their homesteads for the spring and summer months and migrated, sometimes elsewhere in Ireland but commonly across to England and Scotland for work, while their wives and children would spend these months begging.[14] Indeed, this custom continued, certainly among Connaught labourers, into the post-famine period.[15] These

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[11] John Ogilvie (ed.), *The imperial dictionary, English, technological and scientific; adapted to the present state of literature, science and art; on the basis of Webster's English Dictionary…* (2 vols, Edinburgh and London, 1850), ii, p. 1148.
[12] Ibid., i, p. 177.
[13] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, pp 475-793.
[14] For instance, see *First report from the select committee on the state of disease and condition of the labouring poor, in Ireland*, p. 19, H.C. 1819 (314), viii, 383; 'Report of Dr John Cheyne, physician attached to the Dublin House of Industry, on the fever epidemic in Ireland', 1819 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1819/229); 'Hibernicus', 'On the poor laws: [letter] to the editor of the Christian Examiner' in *Christian Examiner*, xi, no. 74 (Aug., 1831) p. 591; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 475 (Headford, County Galway); ibid., p. 488 (Tuam, County Galway); ibid., pp 491-2 (Aghavale, County Mayo); ibid., p. 762 (Coleraine, County Londonderry); William Thomas Thornton, *Over-population and its remedy; or, an inquiry into the extent and causes of the distress prevailing among the labouring classes of the British islands, and into the means of remedying it* (London, 1846), p. 89; [Mrs] S.C. Hall, *Tales of Irish life and character* (Edinburgh and London, 1910), p. 96; Jonathan Bardon, *A history of Ulster* (Belfast, 1992), pp 276-7.
[15] George Cornwall Lewis, *Local disturbances in Ireland; and on the Irish Church question* (London, 1836), p. 311, quoted in William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A history of Ireland in the eighteenth century*, (5 vols, London, 1919), i, p. 228; *Ninth annual report of the commissioners for administering the laws for relief of the poor in Ireland, with appendices*, pp 50-51, H.C. 1856 [C 2105], xxviii, 464-465.

labourers were typically seen as the deserving, honest, working poor, yet in the event that they could not obtain casual work in rural areas, often resorted to begging. In their pursuit of alternative means of subsistence, the appeal of towns and cities was significant.

'Deserving' and 'undeserving' poor

To examine street begging in any historical period is to study societal perceptions of the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. The 'deserving' were seen as the typically industrious and honest poor who were destitute due to no moral flaw on their part. These included unemployed labourers and artisans, as well as the old, the young, the sick poor, deserted mothers and their young families. To philanthropists and social commentators this category of the poor represented the truly 'deserving' who, following Christ's example, were to be relieved. On the other hand, the 'undeserving' poor were seen in a different light and their destitution was usually attributed to self-inflicted moral failings, such as idleness and drunkenness. Their dependency on others was not to be encouraged and they were to be overlooked, banished or punished. For some, beggars of all descriptions fitted into the latter category and were to be distinguished from the 'respectable' poor who did not beg. In a sermon in aid of the Protestant Colonisation Society in Dublin around 1840,[16] Rev. J.B. McCrea drew on the words of Moses: "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). To McCrea, the category of poor spoken of here was not 'the wretched, abject, and mendicant', whose support would merely encourage 'that evil which we understand by pauperism', but instead, 'that portion of society which we

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[16] This society, founded in 1830, settled Protestant families on uncultivated land in the west of Ireland and engaging in scriptural teaching.

call the working classes, or the industrious poor, whether pastoral, agricultural, and the manufacturing, the labour of whose hands is necessary to their maintenance and the comfort of their families…and which are an essential part of every happy and prosperous nation'.[17] Poverty was an indispensable part of society, sanctified by God and ought to be assisted; beggary, on the other hand, was an evil which must be eradicated.

In speaking of the distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor, it is important to note that these terms are not anachronisms utilised by historians in their retrospective analysis. Rather, the terms 'deserving' and 'undeserving' were employed regularly by various commentators across all religious and political divides, in their consideration of poverty and beggary.[18] The trope of the importunate street beggar was regularly contrasted with the silent suffering of the honest poor, resigned to their wretched abodes, out of sight. In 1811, the Belfast House of Industry contrasted what it termed 'the disgusting importunity of the habitual beggar' with 'the more affecting claims of silent unobtrusive distress',[19] while a decade later, the Roman Catholic bishop of Limerick, Charles Tuohy (1754-1828), praised the city's poor committee for their 'wise discrimination' between those poor who resisted the urge to solicit assistance and

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[17] J.B. McCrea, *Protestant poor a conservative element of society; being a sermon preached in Ebenezer Church, Dublin, for the Protestant Colonisation Society of Ireland* (Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1840]), p. 8.
[18] For a small but representative sample of examples, see *Observations on the House of Industry, Dublin; and on the plans of the association for suppressing mendicity in that city* (Dublin, 1818), p. 12; Thomas Dix Hincks, *A short account of the different charitable institutions of the city of Cork, with remarks* (Cork, 1802), p. 35; Last will and testament of Fr Paul Long, 14 July 1836 (DDA, DMP, 33/9/21); Richard Graves, *A sermon in aid of the United Charitable Society for the Relief of Indigent room— keepers, preached in St. Werburgh's Church, February 21st, 1796* (Dublin, 1796), p. 8; *Annual report for the year 1818, of the Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society, (originated in the year 1790)* (Dublin, 1819), p. 5.
[19] *BNL*, 8 Feb. 1811.

'the common vagrant beggars, mendicant by profession, born so, and will live and die so'.[20]

Begging as part of the 'economy of makeshifts'

For some begging was their sole source of income. For others begging was just one part of the 'economy of makeshifts'. In these cases begging could be resorted to at times of acute distress, brought on by unemployment or a family illness. Individuals could dip in and out of mendicancy as their economic circumstances fluctuated. Hufton captures the dynamics of this phenomenon:

> From early infancy, in fact, the children of the poor learnt to cadge a living, learnt about the viability of an economy of makeshifts, learnt the knack of presenting a cogent case, and the places and situations under which they would receive the most sympathy. This apprenticeship, for it was no less, occurred long before any other formal service as domestic servant, labourer, or textile worker. Should work run out, should they find themselves in later life between jobs or unable to support themselves on the proceeds of their labour, begging was their natural recourse…'[21]

Hufton's concept has proved influential and lasting in capturing the desperate and disparate methods by which poor individuals and families scraped out a basic existence. It is a model which has shaped how social historians have approached the question of poverty and poor relief in Britain and, more recently, in Ireland.[22]

While this study is concerned, largely, with the solicitation of individuals in a public place, it behoves us to acknowledge what was arguably the most commonly resorted to avenue of relief for the destitute poor – namely, the network of informal support provided by relations, neighbours and friends. The poor did not live in a social vacuum

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[20] *Leinster Journal*, 15 June 1822.
[21] Olwen Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974), pp 109-110.
[22] Steven King, *Poverty and welfare in England, 1700-1850: a regional perspective* (Manchester, 2000); Steven King and Alannah Tomkins (eds), *The poor in England 1700-1850: an economy of makeshifts* (Manchester, 2003), *passim*; Donnacha Seán Lucey, 'Poor relief in the west of Ireland, 1861-1911' in Virginia Crossman and Peter Gray (eds), *Poverty and welfare in Ireland, 1838-1948* (Dublin, 2011), pp 37-51.

but resided, laboured and struggled within communities comprising multitudes of families living similar experiences. In a period prior to a statutory relief network and when organisational support, through parishes and charities, was largely ad-hoc and subject to strict moralising from wealthy benefactors, the ability to fall back on such a support network was arguably the first avenue of choice for many poor families. Due largely to the scarcity of appropriate sources, this is an avenue of poor assistance which remains largely unexplored by Irish historians.[23] Some efforts have been made by historians of England in recent years.[24] The fact, however, that the utilisation of informal support remains largely irrecoverable for historians does not warrant the exclusion of this topic in any analysis of the experiences of the poor in this period. It was a support mechanism that merits acknowledgement in the absence of detailed analysis.

Who were the beggars?

For historians examining poverty and welfare, comprehensive personal and demographic information on the poor is scarce. This is particularly so in the case of the poor of early-nineteenth-century Ireland and more so in regards to the destitute poor who comprised Ireland's mendicant classes. Nonetheless, certain sources provide an insight into the backgrounds of street beggars. A breakdown of stated previous occupations of inmates at the Dublin Mendicity Society for 1826 is one such record,

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[23] To date, only brief references to the familial and neighbourly support have been presented by historians of Ireland: Mary Cullen, 'Breadwinners and providers: women in the household economy of labouring families, 1835-6' in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (eds), *Women surviving* (Dublin, 1990), p. 107; Virginia Crossman, *The poor law in Ireland, 1838-1948* (Dundalk, 2006), p. 4. The informal and mutual support provided among prostitutes has been considered in Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800-1940* (Cambridge, 2007), pp 61-70.

[24] See for instance, Heather Shore, 'Crime, criminal networks and the survival strategies of the poor in early eighteenth-century London' in King and Tomkins (eds), *The poor in England, 1700-1850*, pp 137-65; Sam Barrett, 'Kinship, poor relief and the welfare process in early modern England' in King and Tomkins (eds), *The poor in England, 1700-1850*, pp 199-227.

which categorises 2,099 paupers into sixty-nine different occupations.[25] This source is useful as the Mendicity Society, unlike other urban charities who shunned mendicants from its scope, was founded to specifically remove beggars from the city streets. The paupers who passed through its doors, therefore, were those who habitually or were most likely to engage in street begging. But an analysis of the inmates of a sole institution cannot constitute a comprehensive overview of the city's entire mass of beggars, and this caveat must be kept in mind when considering this source.

To visually represent this information, the eight most common occupations (representing 72 per cent of the total) have been extracted and presented in Figure 1.1 as individual categories. The remaining 28 per cent (consisting of sixty-one different occupations) have, in the interest of clarity, been amalgamated and presented as 'Others'. Examining solely the most common eight occupations, it will be seen that these can be split between unskilled labourers – scourers, charwomen, washerwomen and day labourers – and unemployed textile workers. For many persons in these occupations, there was little if any security in their regular income and at times of under- or unemployment, begging was a natural recourse as a survival strategy in accordance with Hufton's concept of an 'economy of makeshifts'. Criminal records for the middle of the century confirm that scourers and charwomen were among those convicted for the crime of street begging in Dublin. In the 1850s, Ellen Fullerton was described by respectable householders who petitioned on her behalf as a 'most industrious poor woman, constantly working for charring'; Catherine Maher (sixty years old) was also described as a charwoman, as was seventy-four-year-old Anne Farrell who

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[25] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 25a*.

'always earned her bread by charring'.[26] In each of these cases the intervention of respectable inhabitants, typically shopkeepers and merchants, led to the remission of the 14- or 15-day sentence and the early release of the prisoner. The evidence for Dublin supports the findings of Tim Hitchcock, whose work on street begging in eighteenth-century London found that charwomen were not only the most numerous 'working mendicants' but also 'the group who most effectively confused the division between pauper employments and outright beggary'. Charwomens' pleas for work, as they knocked on the doors of city inhabitants, were frequently indistinguishable from pleas for material assistance (alms). According to Hitchcock, 'in the end, it is clear that charring made foggy and indistinct the boundary between begging and service'.[27]

While Figure 1.1 is helpful in identifying the typical occupations undertaken by some of Dublin's mendicants, some problems arise as to the extent to which the statistics are representative. Firstly, it appears that the sixty-nine occupations exclude children. This is quite a substantial omission, given that a large proportion of street beggars in nineteenth-century towns and cities were children. Juveniles' engagement in mendicancy ranged from outright solicitations of alms to the offering of some trivial paid labour. According to a German traveller to Dublin in 1828, 'the streets are crowded with beggar-boys, who buzz around one like flies, incessantly offering their services'.[28] Secondly, it is not recorded how the information on the paupers' previous occupations was ascertained and it may only be assumed that this was through face-to-face inquiry of the mendicants upon their admission to the Dublin Mendicity Society's asylum. As such, the questions of whether such information is reliable and whether the paupers had

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[26] Criminal Index File of Ellen Fullerton, Jan. 1850 (NAI, Criminal Index Files, CIF/1850/F/4); Criminal Index File of Catherine Maher, Aug. 1854 (ibid., CIF/1854/M/25); Criminal Index File of Anne Farrell, Dec. 1856 (ibid., CIF/1856/F/27).
[27] Hitchcock, 'Begging on the streets of eighteenth-century London', pp 489-90.
[28] [Hermann von Pückler-Muskau], *Tour in England, Ireland, and France, in the years 1826, 1827, 1828, and 1829, with remarks on the manners and customs of the inhabitants, and anecdotes of distinguished public characters. In a series of letters* (Philadelphia, PA, 1833), p. 326.

an interest in misrepresenting their previous economic activities have to be asked.

Thirdly, beggars were admitted into the mendicity asylum on a voluntary basis and

Figure 1.1 Previous occupations of inmates of the Dublin Mendicity Society, year ending 1 January 1827
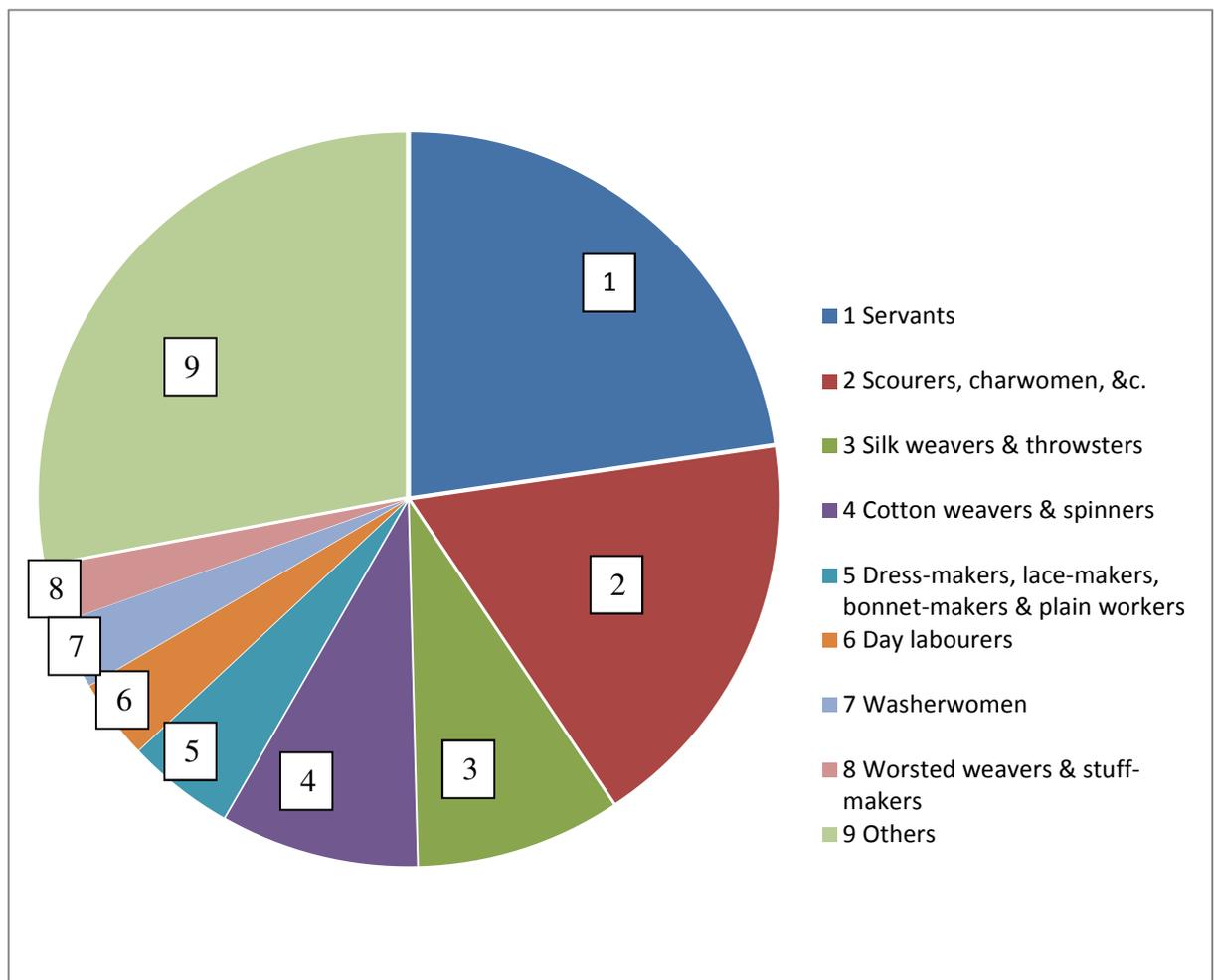
Source: *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 25a*.

the aforementioned source, therefore, excludes those mendicants who declined to engage with the charity.

Fourthly, and most importantly, in considering the prominence of textile workers in this sample, the subject year (1826) is significant. Late-1825 and 1826 witnessed a

severe economic downturn in Britain and Ireland, caused by a British monetary crisis. British manufacturers dumped their goods onto the Irish market, undercutting small Irish manufacturers, which led to the collapse of many woollen, silk and cotton businesses and consequential mass unemployment. In Dublin city the south-western quarter known as the Liberties, where the city's textile trade was concentrated, suffered enormous distress, compounded by a typhus fever epidemic. One estimate put the number of destitute at 20,000 in this quarter alone.[29] Given the impact of this economic downturn and accompanying fever epidemic, it may be suggested that the proportion of textile workers on the books of the city's mendicity society increased beyond its usual rate, as newly-unemployed individuals and their dependents sought charitable assistance. In 1826 the annual report of the Dublin Mendicity Society noted that unemployed factory workers were 'the most common and alarming group of beggars' in the city.[30] The following year, the society reported that the more than 2,000 people on its books included 'the unprecedented number of 736 tradespeople (including their families)'.[31]

The above occupational break-down may, then, be considered to be somewhat skewed in how it depicts the prominence of former textile workers among the inmates of the Mendicity Society. On the other hand, the downturn of the mid-1820s dealt a fatal blow to textile industries in the Liberties, as well as to other Irish urban centres. Thousands of artisans never returned to this line of employment, and many either emigrated, found

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[29] Timothy P. O'Neill, 'A bad year in the Liberties' in Elgy Gillespie (ed.), *The Liberties of Dublin* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1974), p. 79; *The census of Ireland for the year 1851. Part v. Table of deaths. Vol. I*, p. 200, H.C. 1856 [C. 2053], xxix, 464. For the social impact of this crisis in Dublin city, see David O'Toole, 'The employment crisis of 1826' in David Dickson (ed.), *The gorgeous mask: Dublin 1700-1850* (Dublin, 1987), pp 157-71.
[30] Audrey Woods, *Dublin outsiders: a history of the Mendicity Institution, 1818-1998* (Dublin, 1998), p. 51.
[31] *Tenth report of the General Committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1827* (Dublin, 1828), p. 44.

alternative employment or took to street begging.[32] The above figure, therefore, may be

interpreted not as over-representing textile workers among the beggars of 1820s-Dublin

but in reflecting a shift in the demographics of the city's mendicant classes, among

whom small manufacturers were now more prominent. The evidence from the Poor

Inquiry supports the argument that unemployed textile workers generally formed a

substantial group from which street beggars in large Irish urban centres derived.

According to the Assistant Commissioners who carried out examinations in Cork city in

the mid-1830s, 'the majority of the distressed persons in the parish are persons reduced;

many, from the decay of the woollen and cotton manufacturers, scarcely any whose

parents had been beggars'.[33] The inquiry in Dublin city was told by a Richard

Browning, a Protestant employed by the Roman Catholic clergy of Camden Street

chapel to ward off street beggars congregating at the church doors, that most mendicants

he encountered 'were women, widows whose husbands had been weavers, or in

different branches of trade connected with weaving; they were mostly elderly'.[34]

Despite these instances of typically industrious individuals resorting to beggary in

circumstances of distress, there was evidently an underclass of professional beggars

who refused to work and who survived through begging. The language of social

description in nineteenth-century Britain referred to a 'residuum', that is a morally toxic

layer existing beneath the respectable working class.[35] This mass of unskilled urban

poor offended the sensitivities and challenged the expectations of middle-class society

regarding the virtues of industry, providence, sobriety, and religious piety. Their

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[32] O'Neill, 'A bad year in the Liberties', p. 81.

[33] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 672. For destitution among Cork city's former artisan class, see Maura Cronin (née Murphy), 'The economic and social structure of nineteenth-century Cork' in David Harkness and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *The town in Ireland: Historical Studies XIII* (Belfast, 1981), p. 146.

[34] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 43a*.

[35] Geoffrey Crossick, 'From gentlemen to the residuum: languages of social description in Victorian Britain' in Penelope J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, history and class* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, 1991), pp 162-4.

lifestyles and values were ones of moral degradation. This 'residuum' seems to correspond to Karl Marx's 'lumpenproletariat', which he described as 'a recruiting ground for thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, people without a hearth or home'.[36] For one English poor law commissioner, this class of persons constituted 'the refuse of society',[37] while reformatories campaigner Mary Carpenter's description of what she termed the 'dangerous classes',

> those who have already received the prison brand, or, if the mark has not been yet visibly set upon them, are notoriously living by plunder, - who unblushingly acknowledge that they can gain more for the support of themselves and their parents by stealing than by working, - whose hand is against every man, for they know not that any man is their brother[38]

captures the sense of this category of people being marginalised from 'respectable' society. An Irish insight into this 'residuum' can be gleaned from the autobiography of novelist William Carleton. Carleton left his rural County Tyrone home place around 1817 and travelled south through Ireland before reaching Dublin sometime the following year. Among the most striking images of his autobiography is the account of his one night's stay in an underground lodging place occupied by multitudes of professional beggars:

> There were there the lame, the blind, the dumb, and all who suffered from actual and natural infirmity; but in addition to these, there was every variety of impostor about me – most of them stripped of their mechanical accessories of deceit, but by no means all…Crutches, wooden legs, artificial cancers, scrofulous necks, artificial wens, sore legs, and a vast variety of similar complaints were hung up upon the walls of the cellars, and made me reflect upon the degree of perverted talent and ingenuity that must have been necessary to sustain such a mighty mass of imposture.[39]

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[36] David McLellan, *The thought of Karl Marx: an introduction* (3rd ed., London, 1995), p. 185.
[37] *Reports and communications on vagrancy*, p. 2, H.C. 1847-48 [C 987], liii, 240.
[38] Mary Carpenter, *Reformatory schools for the children of the perishing and dangerous classes, and for juvenile offenders* (London, 1851), p. 2.
[39] William Carleton, *The autobiography of William Carleton* (1896; reprint London, 1968), pp 164-5.

A denominational break-down of beggars in Ireland is next to impossible. What figures that survive are varied and unreliable. For instance, in the first two years after the opening of the Dublin House of Industry (1773-5), an institution founded 'for the relief of the poor, and for punishing vagabonds and sturdy beggars', Catholics comprised 69.8 per cent of inmates.[40] Of the 388 paupers at the Limerick House of Industry between 1774-93 whose occupation was listed as 'beggar' or 'stroller', twenty-four (6.2 per cent) were Protestants,[41] while the historian Donal McCartney provides the statistic – regrettably unreferenced – that one per cent of vagrants in nineteenth-century Ireland belonged to the Church of Ireland.[42] Institutional figures provide varied statistics. Henry Inglis stated that upon his visit to the Dublin Mendicity Society's asylum in 1834, 200 of the 2,145 paupers (9.3 per cent) were Protestants,[43] while of the 5,322 convicted vagrants imprisoned at the Richmond Bridewell during 1849, 244 (4.6 per cent) were members of the Church of Ireland and none were Dissenters.[44] A return for the parish of Urney, County Tyrone submitted to the Poor Inquiry estimated that 14 per cent of the parish's beggars (that is, sixteen out of a total of 116 mendicants) belonged to the Church of Ireland, while the remaining paupers were Catholic and Presbyterian, although the precise break-down is not provided.[45] Regardless of the beggars' denomination, the need to expose these paupers to the redeeming death of Jesus Christ was stressed by the various churches. Institutions, such as the House of

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[40] *Observations on the state and condition of the poor, under the institution, for their relief, in the city of Dublin; together with the state of the fund, &c. published by order of the Corporation instituted for the Relief of the Poor and for punishing Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars, in the County of the City of Dublin, March 25th, 1775* (Dublin, 1775), p. 19.

[41] David Fleming and John Logan (eds), *Pauper Limerick: the register of the Limerick House of Industry 1774-1793* (IMC, Dublin, 2011).

[42] Donal McCartney, *The dawning of democracy: Ireland 1800-1870* (Dublin, 1987), p. 27.

[43] Henry D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834. A journey through Ireland, during the spring, summer, and autumn of 1834* (2nd ed., 2 vols, London, 1835), i, pp 16-17.

[44] *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-eighth report of the Inspectors-General on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1849; with appendices*, p. 26, H.C. 1850 [C 1229], xxix, 346. These figures do not allow for cases of recidivism.

[45] *Poor Inquiry. Fist report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 409.

Industry and Mendicity Society in Dublin, allowed Catholic and Church of Ireland chaplains (either paid in-house employees or external parish clergymen) to attend to the spiritual needs of the poor, while chaplains were also employed in the Poor Law Union workhouses.[46]

Gendered roles

   All too often the primary sources pertaining to mendicancy in nineteenth-century Ireland simply refer to individual or numerous 'beggars' or 'vagrants', and little demographic or socio-economic information is revealed about these individuals. In this light, the difficulty with the source material prevents any comprehensive analysis of the sex of beggars, and how gendered roles shaped how all sections of society negotiated beggary. Yet, some insights can be gleaned from the sources.

   By far the majority of mendicants in pre-Famine Ireland were women. Numerous sources support the assertions of historians such as Cullen, Prunty and Geary, who are in unanimous agreement on this point.[47] This can be seen, firstly, in the level of institutional engagement by beggar women. In the 1770s most of the inmates of the House of Industry in Dublin were female, while half a century later, addressing its members in its second annual report, the Dublin Mendicity Society reported that it was to the female sex that 'the great portion of your poor belong'.[48] Of the 2,823 admissions into the Mendicity Society's institution during 1824, 1,687 (59.8 per cent) were adult

[46] *General rules, by-laws, and regulations for the House of Industry, with the duties of the officers, &c. &c. &c. confirmed by the Board* (n.p. [Dublin], 1813), p. 25; Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 20 Apr. 1824; Arthur Moore to Daniel Murray, 18 Nov. 1841 (DDA, DMP, 33/4/4).
[47] Cullen, 'Breadwinners and providers', pp 109-10; Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), p. 207; Laurence M. Geary, '"The whole country was in motion": mendicancy and vagrancy in pre-Famine Ireland' in Jacqueline Hill and Colm Lennon (eds), *Luxury and austerity: Historical Studies XXI* (Dublin, 1999), p. 123.
[48] *Observations on the state and condition of the poor, under the institution, for their relief, in the city of Dublin*, p. 19; *Second report of the association for the suppression of mendicity in Dublin, 1819* (Dublin, 1820), p. 5.

women, while the 457 adult males made up just (16.2 per cent) of admissions. The remainder were children.[49] The proportionately higher level of female engagement with charities and institutions in the early decades of the nineteenth century persisted into the period following the 1838 Poor Law, and most inmates in workhouses in the middle of the century were women and children.[50] For instance, among the 1,468 people admitted to the Belfast workhouse in a three-month period in 1844, there were 802 adults and 666 children. Of the 802 adults, 526 (65.6 per cent) were women.[51]

Aside from institutional admissions, most informal supplications on streets and at people's doors were undertaken by women. Furthermore, in rural areas, the task of dealing with beggars at the farmhouse or cabin door was usually the preserve of a female occupant, but whether this was because of gendered expectations of women's role within the domestic setting, thus seeing charity as a naturally feminine realm, or the more practical explanation that women were more likely to be in the house when beggars called, is not clear.[52] Gendered dynamics in the provision of assistance to the poor was also evident in eighteenth-century Breton society, where female members of noble families acted as godmothers to local pauper children and provided them with references for domestic positions in urban centres.[53] The Poor Inquiry's report on vagrancy and mendicancy in Dublin city in the mid-1830s stated: 'if you frequent the more public and fashionable streets, at every corner your eyes alight upon some young widow; or the deserted wife, with two or three helpless children…At almost every door your alms are solicited in the shape of a purchase of some little article by a female, who

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[49] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 19 Apr. 1825.
[50] Dympna McLoughlin, 'Workhouses and Irish female paupers, 1840-70' in Luddy and Murphy (eds), *Women surviving*, p. 119.
[51] Michael Farrell, *The poor law and the workhouse in Belfast, 1838-1948* (Belfast, 1978), p. 59.
[52] Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), p. 75.
[53] Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France*, p. 114.

urges on your attention the claims of a sick husband or children.'[54] An 1809 report into

charitable institutions in Dublin estimated that 'four-fifths of those who subsist by

begging are females'.[55] Evidence for late-eighteenth-century France and England

indicates that women were also most likely to engage in street begging in those

countries.[56]

In explaining this widespread trend Laurence Geary has submitted that women's

employment opportunities were more restricted than those of men, resulting in greater

levels of women resorting to habitual or occasional begging. He is correct also in not

ignoring the time-honoured tradition of seasonal migration by the *spailpíní*.[57] As Mary

Cullen has observed of this phenomenon, 'the basic division of labour was that the wife

supported herself and the children, and her husband saved to re-establish the family at

home'.[58] However, it was not the case that it was only in these rural areas that women

were the prime movers in mendicancy. In her examination of poverty in nineteenth-

century Dublin, Jacinta Prunty noted the high levels of women whose destitution was

attributed to the unemployment or death of their husband, typically an artisan in the

textile industry.[59]

Certain factors which rendered women more likely to resort to begging than men

transcended the urban/rural divide. Women and children were more likely to receive

sympathy and alms than an able-bodied man. It was also believed that men were more

likely to consider begging a shameful practice, a view that runs throughout the Poor

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[54] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 27a*.
[55] *A report upon certain establishments in the city of Dublin, which receive aid from parliament* (Dublin, 1809), p. 20.
[56] Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France*, pp 114-15; Matthew Martin, *Letter to the Right Hon. Lord Pelham, on the state of mendicity in the Metropolis* (London, 1803). For Martin's claim that up to 90 per cent of London's beggars were women, see 'Summary of 2,000 cases of paupers' towards the end of his *Letter*.
[57] Geary, '"The whole country was in motion"', pp 123-4.
[58] Cullen, 'Breadwinners and providers', p. 107.
[59] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 211.

Inquiry evidence.[60] Novelist William Carleton captured this sense of male shame, in his depiction of an exchange between Owen McCarthy, an industrious and honest labourer, and his wife Kathleen, whose family is driven to destitution and beggary during the economic downturn of the post-1815 period:

> "Beg: that u'd go hard wid me, Kathleen. I'd work – I'd live on next to
> nothing all year round; but to see the crathurs that wor decently bred up
> brought to that, I couldn't bear it, Kathleen – 'twould break the heart widin
> me. Poor as they are, they have the blood of kings in their veins; and, besides,
> to see a McCarthy beggin' his bread in the country where his name was once
> great – The McCarthy More, that was their title – no acushla; I love them as I
> do the blood in my own veins; but I'd rather see them in the arms of God in
> heaven…than have it cast up to them, or have it said, that ever a McCarthy
> was seen beggin' on the highway."[61]

However, Geary makes the important point that 'women were no less aware of the social taint, but the responsibility for putting food in their children's bellies devolved ultimately on them'.[62] The dynamics of begging in Ireland mirrored those in France, where the mother of a family played the dominant part in the organisation of a family's mendicant endeavours, drawing on her own experience and relationships with prospective alms-givers.[63]

Many historians of the nineteenth century have embraced the division of everyday life into the public and private sphere. According to this model the public sphere of government, business and commerce, the professions and civic life constituted the realm of men, while the private sphere, that of the domestic setting, was the domain of women. This simple division has regularly been deployed by historians wishing to illustrate the gendered roles and power dynamics at play in the nineteenth century. With

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[60] To illustrate this point using the word-searchable online version of the House of Commons Parliamentary Papers (http://parlipapers.chadwyck.co.uk/home.do), the word 'shame' appears 151 times in *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, and was used not only in the language of officialdom (as represented by the narrative of the assistant commissioners) but also at a popular level, as recorded in the first-hand testimony of farmers and labourers.

[61] William Carleton, 'Tubber Derg; or, the Red Well' in idem, *Traits and stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1844; 2 vols, reprint Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire and Savage, MD, 1990), ii, p. 374.

[62] Geary, '"The whole country was in motion"', p. 124.

[63] Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France*, p. 114.

female access to education and employment in the professions restricted – or in many cases, prohibited – women were confined to their 'proper sphere' of domesticity, respectability, and maternal and matrimonial duty. The public sphere, through which power was accessed, was impenetrably and unapologetically male.

This model, as useful as it may be, is applicable only to the higher echelons of society and falls asunder, however, when one considers the lower classes in the early-nineteenth century, particularly in Ireland. As Timothy P. Foley has argued, the mid-century debate regarding the employment of women demonstrated the limited applicability of the public/private spheres framework, as this debate 'almost exclusively concerned itself with the condition of women of the middle and upper orders'.[64] The fact was that many poor women worked outside their home and in public. The prominence of women among street sellers in Dublin at this time is perhaps best recorded in the recently-published collection of long-lost prints by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, which provides a detailed insight into the lives of the urban poor in eighteenth-century Dublin.[65] The evidence regarding mendicants in pre-Famine Irish towns further questions this model and supports Rachel Fuchs's assertion that such an analytical framework has 'limited relevance to how people actually lived their lives'.[66] For those women whose primary, or at least a significant, source of income was begging, their presence in public streets was paramount to the success of their supplications. Yet, this work raised questions about their morality, as in the eyes of middle-class commentators, the prostitute or 'night walker' typified the 'public' woman of the lower orders who constituted a threat to civil and moral order on many fronts. In 1820, the Dublin Mendicity Society asserted

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[64] Timothy P. Foley, 'Public sphere and domestic circle: gender and political economy in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (eds), *Gender perspectives in nineteenth-century Ireland: public and private spheres* (Dublin, 1997), p. 35.
[65] William Laffan (ed.), *The cries of Dublin: drawn from the life by Hugh Douglas Hamilton, 1760* (Dublin, 2003).
[66] Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and poverty in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 7.

in its annual report that street-based employment was not suitable for women: 'An individual so occupied, a mind once degraded by beggary and its vices, is not to be so reclaimed'.[67]

Street begging and children

Social commentators in the early-nineteenth century were increasingly concerned about the number of children engaged in street begging. Invariably the children of the poor, young mendicants represented the rising generation of the labouring classes who had been lost to lives of idleness, vice, intemperance and crime. Their ubiquitous presence in the streets of towns and cities fuelled fears of effrontery, disobedience and nuisance. More gravely, street children represented a real and growing threat to civil peace and order. The growing focus on the street child in this period was also coloured by evolving views of urban environments. In a period when towns and cities across Britain and Ireland were experiencing unprecedented population growth and its accompanying rise in overcrowded tenements, public health crises, poverty, destitution and crime, the street, as the most obvious manifestation of urban space, came to be associated with a litany of evils and vice, and the exposure of children to such corruptive influences shaped contemporary views of child beggars. The innate vulnerability of young people struck a chord among those interested in the plight of street children. Yet, the experience of child beggars was not homogenous. Some were orphans or deserted children, who took to any means necessary for survival, begging being the most natural and ubiquitous of these options. In many other cases child

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[67] *Second report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1819*, p. 5.

beggars were a source of additional income to the family's household budget and supplemented any earnings derived from the labour of their parents or siblings.[68]

Begging was seen as a stepping stone endeavour in a criminal's career, leading invariably to thievery and prostitution for boys and girls respectively. As well as being seen as a deplorable nuisance, and constituting in certain circumstances a criminal offence in its own right, street begging represented a stage in the descent of a poor child into delinquency and vice.[69] An editorial carried in the Dublin-based *Correspondent* in 1818 reflected the views of a large portion of contemporary opinion, which tended to source a range of social evils to the prevailing system of street begging:

> [Mendicancy] instructs the young thief to steal from his thoughtless
> benefactor, and rears the young robber to the perpetration of dexterous
> burglaries, by means of which the mature villain enters and plunders. It is
> hardly possible to point out any of the prevalent street-crimes of this
> metropolis, or any thing foul, filthy, or infectious, which has not its roots in
> the enormous mendicity, which we shamefully suffer to lay us under all
> manner of exactions and contributions.[70]

The pernicious influences to which poor children were vulnerable derived not solely from inanimate sources, such as the environment in which they lived, but also from hardened, criminalised individuals preying on these juveniles. Under the influence of such persons, invariably older youths or adults, the street child was 'initiated into vice'.[71] This process is captured in Charles Dickens's portrayal of Fagin initiating Oliver Twist into a gang of thieves through making a 'very curious and uncommon game' of pick-pocketing.[72] While the unknowing and naive Oliver merely enjoys what he considers to be a game, the reader is left in no doubt that Fagin is, in modern parlance, 'grooming' Oliver for a life of thievery – that is, preying on the child's

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[68] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 253; Woods, *Dublin outsiders*, p. 11.

[69] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 27a*; J.J. Tobias, *Crime and industrial society in the nineteenth century* (Harmondsworth, 1972), pp 88-92.

[70] *The Correspondent*, 13 Jan. 1818.

[71] *Report of the committee for investigating the causes of the alarming increase of juvenile delinquency in the metropolis* (London, 1816), p. 32.

[72] Charles Dickens, *The adventures of Oliver Twist* (Oxford University Press ed., Oxford, 1987), p. 61.

vulnerability from an adult's position of power and influence. While the terminology

was different in the nineteenth century, fears of such individuals and their practices

influenced middle-class perceptions of poor juveniles. Later in *Oliver Twist*, this

corruptive process is vividly narrated:

> In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils; and, having prepared his
> mind, by solicitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of
> his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, was now slowly instilling into his
> soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for
> ever.[73]

In the pages of the *Belfast Newsletter* in 1851 is to be found evidence of Dickens's most

infamous villain resounding in the popular mind, when the paper referred to boys and

girls who engaged in organised theft being 'regularly hired or supported by "Fagins" of

the lowest grade'.[74] In his examination of the alleys and courts which harboured

deviants in mid-nineteenth-century Belfast, Presbyterian minister William Murphy

O'Hanlon asserted that 'unwary youth' were 'entrapped and drawn into these places as

flies into a spider's web', where they were corrupted, ruined and primed 'to plunge

headlong on in their career of vice and degradation'.[75]

A specific example which illustrates the reality of such 'grooming' by mendicants in

an Irish urban context is that of Mary Quin, 'an itinerant beggarwoman' who was

convicted in September 1840 of kidnapping four children from Belfast. Quin wandered

through County Antrim pretending to be the widowed mother of the children, 'whom

she treated most unmercifully while training them to the various tricks resorted to by

pauper children to impose on the humane'. Quin was also known to have induced girls

'of very tender years' to leave their parents 'and, by introducing them to houses of ill-

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[73] Dickens, *Oliver Twist* p. 134. Fagin later advises his colleagues: "Once let him feel that he is one of us – once fill his mind with the idea that he has been a thief – and he's ours. Ours for his life!": ibid., p. 141.
[74] *BNL*, 16 June 1851, quoted in Brian Griffin, *The Bulkies: police and crime in Belfast, 1800-1865* (Dublin, 1998), p. 75.
[75] W.M. O'Hanlon, *Walks among the poor of Belfast, and suggestions for their improvement* (Belfast, 1853), pp 21-2.

fame, brought them to a course of prostitution'.[76] Cases such as Quin's reminded the public that characters such as Fagin were not confined to the pages of fiction.

Legislative definitions

The wording and enforcement of legislation is another way in which society framed definitions of beggar and vagrants. Legislation, by its very nature, comprises written statutes which define rules of behaviour in a society and outlines punishments for those who fail to abide by those rules. Yet, the law can be problematically wide-ranging, ambiguous and antiquated, and this was the case with vagrancy laws in Ireland. Laws curtailing vagabondage in Ireland dated back to 1542[77] and in the following centuries, numerous acts were passed by Irish and English parliaments dividing the poor between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving', whose resort to begging was to be regulated and punished respectively.[78] In the mid-1630s, the Irish Parliament passed an act for the erection of houses of correction, targeting 'rogues, vagabonds, sturdy beggars, and other idle and disorderly persons'.[79] The lumping together of vagrants with 'tories' and robbers – illustrating the common association of beggary with crime, sedition and outrage – influenced the passing of the 1703 act which provided for the transportation of such individuals to British plantations in America[80] and four years later, the transportation legislation was extended so as to include 'all loose, idle vagrants',

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[76] *BNL*, 11 Sept. 1840.

[77] This act, 33 Hen. VIII, c. 15 [Ire.] (1542), was based upon an earlier English act, 22 Hen. VIII, c. 12 [Eng.] (1530-31).

[78] Comprehensive accounts of the history of Irish legislation in this field are given in: George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish poor law* (London, 1856); Law Reform Commission, *Report on vagrancy and related matters* (Dublin, 1985).

[79] 10 & 11 Chas. 1, c. 4 [Ire.] (1635).

[80] 2 Ann., c. 12 [Ire.] (4 Mar. 1704). See Patrick Fitzgerald, 'A sentence to sail: the transportation of Irish convicts and vagrants to colonial America in the eighteenth century' in Patrick Fitzgerald and Steve Ickringill (eds), *Atlantic crossroads: historical connections between Scotland, Ulster and North America* (Newtownards, 2001), p. 116.

defined as 'such as pretend to be Irish gentlemen and will not work or betake themselves to any honest trade or livelihood, but wander about demanding victuals, and coshering from house to house'.[81]

The eighteenth century saw a number of acts limited to specified cities and which transformed how the mendicant poor were defined and managed. An act of 1704 provided for the establishment of a workhouse in Dublin city 'for employing and maintaining the poor thereof'.[82] This marked the first provision, through public taxation, of measures for the relief of the destitute poor together with the punishment of idle vagrants and beggars, yet as the century progressed this institution, at James's Street on the western extremities of the city, evolved into a foundling hospital.[83] A 1735 act facilitated the establishment of a workhouse in Cork city, 'intended for employing and maintaining the poor, punishing vagabonds and providing for and educating foundling children',[84] yet this institution never admitted mendicants and throughout its history, catered solely for abandoned children. The Charitable Society in Belfast, established in 1752, differed from the Dublin and Cork entities in that, firstly, it was funded through voluntary income and, secondly, its remit regarding vagrants appeared to be less punitive and more reformative. The society's poorhouse, eventually opened in the 1770s, was intended 'for the Support of vast Numbers of real Objects of Charity in this Parish, for the Employment of idle Beggars who crowd to it from all parts of the North, and for the Reception of infirm and diseased Poor'.[85]

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[81] 6 Ann., c. 12 (30 Oct. 1707), cited in James Kelly, 'Transportation from Ireland to North America, 1703-1789' in David Dickson and Cormac Ó Gráda (eds), *Refiguring Ireland: essays in honour of L.M. Cullen* (Dublin, 2003), p. 114.
[82] 'An act for erecting a workhouse in the city of Dublin, for employing and maintaining the poor thereof', 2 Ann., c. 19 [Ire.] (4 Mar. 1704).
[83] John O'Connor, *The workhouses of Ireland: the fate of Ireland's poor* (Dublin, 1995), pp 31-4; Helen Burke, *The people and the poor law in 19th-century Ireland* (Littlehampton, 1987), pp 51-61; Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714-1830* (Dublin, 1946), pp 130-35.
[84] O'Connor, *The workhouses of Ireland*, p. 34.
[85] *BNL*, 6 July 1753; Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast: an illustrated history* (Belfast, 1983), p. 33.

The most significant act pertaining to beggars, prior to the nineteenth century, was a statue of 1771-72, facilitating the establishment of houses of industry throughout Ireland. The opening sentence of the 'Act for badging such poor as shall be found unable to support themselves by labour' stated that 'strolling beggars are very numerous in this kingdom', thus outlining the context for the statute's new relief and punitive measures.[86] This act created a visual distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' which went beyond perceptions. The attachment of a badge onto the garments of 'the helpless poor' identified them to prospective almsgivers as being worthy of charity.[87] This conveyed the inherent implication that those without such a 'licence to beg' were deemed, by the newly formed corporations on whom the powers of relief and punishment of the vagrant poor were bestowed, to be 'sturdy beggars and vagabonds'. Not only were they not deserving of charitable relief, but their wayward life warranted marginalisation and punishment.

Upon the establishment of the Dublin House of Industry, the punitive powers of the city poorhouse (founded in 1703-04) were transferred to the new institution. Within a few years, however, the system of granting begging licences was discontinued in Dublin, due in part to the overwhelming number of applicants but also because of 'the difficulty of discriminating between the meritorious poor and the impostor' which 'demonstrated this method to be useless and impracticable', according to a later report.[88] Despite being empowered to curtail mendicancy, the governors of the House of Industry exerted these powers only occasionally, usually at times of crisis and in response to

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[86] 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire.] (2 June 1772).

[87] While the badging of parish paupers in Dublin dated back to the late-seventeenth century, it appears that the practice had declined by the 1730s, when Jonathan Swift published his famous proposal for badging the city's poor: W. A. Seaby and T. G. F. Paterson, 'Ulster beggars' badges' in *Ulster Archaeological Journal*, 3rd series, xxxiii (1970), p. 96; Raymond Gillespie (ed.), *The vestry records of the parishes of St Catherine and St James, Dublin, 1657-1692* (Dublin, 2004), p. 151; Jonathan Swift, *A proposal for giving badges to the beggars in all the parishes of Dublin* (London, 1737).

[88] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 18a*.

public outcry. Thus, in July 1801 the governors informed the public that as they 'intend in a short time to enforce the Laws against Vagrants, &c. they earnestly request that the Public will not give Alms to Beggars in the Streets, as such a practice must necessarily defeat all their endeavours for that purpose'.[89] The injection of new blood and administrative reform could also result in a fresh zeal in suppressing street begging. The accession of Major James Palmer to the governorship of the House of Industry in 1820 was cited by one newspaper as the cause of a renewed initiative to curtail mendicancy, stating that 'the former apathetical feeling no longer remains'. The provision of additional cells for 'sturdy beggars and disgusting objects' and increased vigilance by the police led to 'several of these sturdy fellows, who were the terror of respectable females when walking unattended' being apprehended and confined in the institution.[90]

In the nineteenth century social and public order legislation was at times vague and ill-defined, ultimately leaving the definition of crime up to the discretion of the police. Writing of Victorian Britain, F.M.L. Thompson observed that some of the relatively minor laws dealing with public order 'were vague and generic, allowing in practice considerable discretion in their interpretation. Thus the police could in effect decide what constituted a public nuisance, a disorder, or a threat to the public peace.'[91] Frederic Eden's 1797 *State of the Poor* noted the 'very dubious nature' of English vagrancy laws, which 'must frequently require nice legal acumen to distinguish whether a person incurs any, and what, penalty'.[92] The legislative pitfall in terms of public begging in Ireland was highlighted by the 1830 parliamentary select committee on the poor in Ireland, which criticised the fact that the early-eighteenth-century legislation facilitating the

[89] *FJ*, 7 July 1801.
[90] Ibid., 21 Nov. 1820.
[91] F.M.L. Thompson, 'Social control in Victorian Britain' in *The Economic History Review*, 2nd series, xxxiv, no. 2 (May 1981), p. 197.
[92] Frederic Morton Eden, *The state of the poor: a history of the labouring classes in England, with parochial reports*, ed. A.G.L. Rogers (1797; reprint London, 1928), p. 55.

transportation of vagrants remained in force. Noting the need for continued vigilance in enforcing anti-begging laws, the committee stated that it 'cannot but think that a more constitutional and efficient system may be adopted than one which allows the penalty of transportation to be inflicted upon the mere authority of the presentment of a grand jury, and this, not for an offence defined with precision, but, under contingencies extremely vague and uncertain'.[93] This view drew the support of Poor Law Commissioner George Nicholls[94] and such sentiment can also be found in the Poor Inquiry's report on vagrancy and mendicancy in Dublin, wherein the commissioners argued that 'the whole legal code respecting vagrancy is contradictory, uncertain and but little acted upon'.[95]

While legislation provided for the strengthening of previous provisions and new acts bestowed powers of arrest and detention to the police and certain welfare institutions, it is clear that both before and during the nineteenth century, the ambiguity surrounding terms such as 'vagrants' was used to the advantage of authorities, on behalf of the general public, and to the detriment of the vagrant under suspicion.[96] A late-eighteenth-century statute added the proviso that a 'stranger' under suspicion could be detained for not satisfactorily explaining his presence in a particular location.[97] For instance, in Kilcullen, County Kildare in December 1821, local magistrate William Brownrigg detained to Naas Gaol 'four very suspicious persons as vagrants as they could not give a proper account of themselves'. In two of the cases, the arrested men claimed to be traders in tin ware and linen but had no such materials on their person. In each case, the magistrate commented that the vagrant 'could not give any satisfactory account of

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[93] *Report of the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland; being a summary of the first, second and third reports of evidence taken before that committee: together with an appendix of accounts and papers*, p. 23, H.C. 1830 (667), vii, 23.
[94] Nicholls, *A history of the Irish poor law*, p. 100.
[95] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II,* p. 29a*.
[96] For an analysis of this feature of the vagrancy laws in eighteenth-century Ireland, see Neal Garnham, 'The criminal law, 1692-1760: England and Ireland compared' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Kingdoms united? Great Britain and Ireland since 1500: integration and diversity* (Dublin, 1999), pp 220-2.
[97] 36 Geo. III, c. 20, s. 15 [Ire.] (24 Mar. 1796).

himself'.[98] It is clear that vague definitions of crimes such as 'vagrancy' were being used to detain and subsequently prosecute those deemed by the authorities to be suspicious or deviant. The Poor Inquiry concluded that the word 'vagrant'

> is now held to apply to persons suspected of great crimes but against whom there is not sufficient legal evidence of such crimes, and who have no ascertained mode of obtaining an honest livelihood, and who are, therefore, presumed to live by dishonest and illegal means.[99]

In Dublin city individuals were occasionally arrested and confined on the suspicion that they *may* engage in begging. In 1824 the city's mendicity society directed its street inspectors, in co-operation with the police, to apprehend individuals 'whom they may find prowling about the streets, without any visible occupation, or means of subsistence, whom they have reason to suspect are there for the purpose of begging, although not in the act of begging at the moment'.[100]

The situation was not rectified by the passing of the 1838 Irish Poor Law, which omitted vagrancy clauses against the recommendation of Nicholls, the act's architect.[101] Under the 1838 act the newly established Poor Law Union Boards of Guardians were empowered to relieve the destitute poor who could not support themselves. This was carried out through the workhouse system and guardians were explicitly prevented from providing outdoor relief. Yet, against the wishes of Nicholls, the Whig government dropped plans to include vagrancy clauses from the act, leaving the question of beggary unresolved under the new Poor Law system. Wishing to address this defect, Lord Morpeth introduced an ultimately unsuccessful mendicity bill in March 1840, pointing to the defects of the present laws: 'that their definitions were obsolete and uncertain, or

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[98] 'Papers relating to the committal of four men to Naas jail, County Kildare, on charges of vagrancy', 1-22 Dec. 1821 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/SC/1821/187).

[99] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II, p. 31a*.

[100] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 23 Mar. 1824.

[101] 1 & 2 Vict., c. 56 (31 July 1838).

that they subjected the parties to such severe penalties as to defeat their own object; they gave the extreme punishment of transportation for vagrancy; and such was their severity, that, being repugnant to the feelings of the people, they could not be enforced.'[102] A similar want of clarification in the Scottish vagrancy laws was held in the 1840s to contribute to localised variations in implementation and, consequently, ineffectual methods for suppressing vagrancy and mendicancy.[103] These ambiguities in the legislation were not confined to the vagrancy laws. The Medical Charities Act of 1851, which transferred responsibility for dispensaries to the poor law unions, established a system by which, according to the wording of the legislation, 'any poor person' was entitled to receive free medical treatment at their local dispensary.[104] The imprecise definition of just who qualified for free medical treatment led, in one historian's terms, to 'gross abuse' of the system in the post-Famine decades.[105] The inefficacy of the existing statutes pertaining to mendicancy in Ireland was also criticised by political economist Nassau Senior in a comprehensive article on Irish vagrancy laws. 'There are, indeed, such laws in the statute-book; but defects in their machinery, the severity of their punishments, and the absence in their enactments of any reference to a legal provision for the poor, have rendered them inefficient.'[106] These difficulties were finally addressed and legislated for at the height of the Great Famine, when the government passed the 1847 Vagrancy Act, which criminalised public begging,

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[102] *Hansard 3*, lii, 1251-4 (19 Mar. 1840). See Peter Gray, The *making of the Irish poor law, 1815-43* (Manchester, 2009), pp 302-303.

[103] *Report from Her Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws in Scotland*, p. lxii, H.C. 1844 [C 557], xx, 68.

[104] 14 & 15 Vict., c. 68, s. 9 (7 Aug. 1851).

[105] Laurence M. Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland, 1718-1851* (Dublin, 2004), p. 211. For more on the 1851 act, see ibid., pp 210-16.

[106] [Nassau William Senior], 'Mendicancy in Ireland' in *Edinburgh Review*, lxxvii, no. 156 (Apr. 1843), p. 399.

encouraging a child to engage in begging or wandering from one Poor Law union to another for the sake of obtaining relief.[107]

Nineteenth-century cultural definitions of beggary: the case of the 'boccough'

Outside the realms of legislation and the criminal justice system, cultural perceptions and definitions of vagrants and beggars pervaded and informed daily life. The 'deserving' / 'undeserving' distinction was firmly cemented into the consciousness and cultures not only of the middle and upper classes, but also into those of the poorer classes. Here, the figure of the 'boccough' is illustrative. Beggars known as 'boccoughs' or 'bacachs' represented the archetypal class of imposters, who resorted to fraud and intimidation to solicit alms from the public. Boccoughs, also known as 'fair beggars' or 'trading beggars', were professional mendicants.[108] Originally referring to a lame beggar – 'bac' being the Irish word for lame – the term 'boccough' had evolved by the 1830s to carry connotations of dishonesty and imposture. One account presented 'boccoughs' as belonging to a 'mysterious brotherhood' and a 'Bacach tribe' with its own language, marriage customs and initiation practices, and which was unchristian, insular and somewhat organised.[109] According to the 1851 census, the third largest category of occupation among the 'lame and decrepit' in Ireland, after labourers and servants, were mendicants.[110] The term 'boccough' was applied 'to sturdy, wandering beggars who feigned disease or deformity or who mutilated or impregnated their

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[107] 10 & 11 Vict., c. 84 (22 July 1847).

[108] Geary, '"The whole country was in motion"', p. 123.

[109] William Hackett, 'The Irish bacach, or professional beggar, viewed archaeologically' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology,* 1st series, ix (1861-62), pp 262, 265.

[110] *The census of Ireland for the year 1851. Part III. Report on the status of disease*, p. 68, H.C. 1854 [C 1765], lviii, 72. The census report also lists others versions of the term, such as 'bacach' or 'losg' denoting lameness; 'bacaighe' meaning a hindrance; 'clarineach' meaning 'going on stools': ibid., pp 69, 113.

children in order to excite compassion', Geary has observed.[111] The use of this term

seems to have been limited to west Ireland and by far the majority of references

contained in the Poor Inquiry reports were by individuals from counties Roscommon,

Sligo and predominantly Clare.[112] The popularity of this categorisation of a certain class

of beggars extended into south Munster and was evident in County Cork in the 1830s,

where the Poor Inquiry's assistant commissioners noted that 'there was a sort of beggars

called "boccoughs", who used to make themselves appear lame, but there are very few

of them now'.[113] In Clonakilty, County Cork, the inquiry officials heard that

'boccoughs, who are or were guilty of various knavish tricks…are becoming

comparatively scarce, except at fairs…they constitute quite a distinct class of

mendicants.'[114] Rev. Patrick Mullins, a Catholic rector in Kilchreet parish in County

Galway, told the Poor Inquiry that: 'they frequently assume the appearance of being

crippled or maimed for the purpose of exciting pity; none do it but the fair beggars.'[115]

Occasional references to the 'boccough' were recorded in urban centres. The assistant

commissioners who carried out examinations in St Finbar's parish in Cork city noted

the former prevalence of "boccoughs" who made 'a regular trade of begging', 'attended

fairs and weddings, where they got a great deal of money, but were sometimes detected

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[111] Geary, '"The whole country was in motion"', p. 123. Accusations of mutilation and serious mistreatment of children were regularly levelled against beggars: Arthur Dobbs, *An essay on the trade of Ireland, part 2* (Dublin, 1731), p. 45; *FJ*, 26-29 Mar., 26-30 Apr. 1768, cited in Joseph Robins, *The lost children: a study of charity children in Ireland, 1700-1900* (Dublin, 1980), p. 103 n. 6; Richard Woodward, *An address to the public, on the expediency of a regular plan for the maintenance and government of the poor…* (Dublin, 1775), p. 10; Richard Whately, *Christ's example, an instruction as to the best modes of dispensing charity. A sermon delivered for the benefit of the Relief and Clothing Fund, in Doctor Steevens' Hospital* (Dublin, 1835), p. 21. A particularly harrowing case of cruelty is recorded in: *Full and true account of the trial of two most barbarous and cruel beggar—women, Sarah Mullholland & Maria Burke, who were found guilty of strangling a child, for the purpose of extorting charity!!! Together with various particulars concerning the impostures of other street beggars* (n.p. [Dublin?], n.d. [*c.* 1830]), broadside held in the RIA library, Dublin (SR 3 B 53-56(561)).
[112] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, pp 510, 527, 608, 618, 621, 636. See also Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Boccoughs and God's poor: deserving and undeserving poor in Irish popular culture' in Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 1998), p. 95.
[113] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 652.
[114] Ibid., p. 655.
[115] Ibid., p. 478.

in their false sores and lamenesses'.[116] Another use of the term outside the rural, western region is the recollection of writer Anna Maria Hall (1800-81) of witnessing a crowd of beggars surrounding her carriage upon entering Wexford town, wherein she makes reference to 'a *bocher*, or lame man [who] succeeded in clearing a space that he might give my honour a dance'.[117] The 'boccough' also appeared in the travel writings of a mid-century French writer, who noted the similarity between this Irish figure and Walter Scott's Edie Ochiltree in *The Antiquary*.[118]

The image of the 'boccough' was not unique to Ireland but must be seen in an international context. 'As a representation, the boccough shares many aspects of the classic image of the undeserving poor in early modern Europe.'[119] In the works of novelists such as Carleton and the Banim Brothers, travel writers such as Thomas Croften Croker, and ethnographers such as John Windele, 'boccoughs' make frequent appearances but are rarely quoted directly. Irish people had voluminous information about the boccoughs but seemingly, very few people had ever met one. Niall Ó Ciosáin has suggested that by the mid-nineteenth century, the 'boccough' constituted 'very much a figure of speech', a trope created and utilised, in the case of folklorists, to salvage some aspect of that disappearing society of pre-Famine Ireland. Furthermore, the image of the 'boccough' validated prevailing notions of charity and reciprocity among the Irish lower classes which complicated distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. 'Instead of stigmatizing informal charity, however, this image functions within the evidence as a reinforcement of the virtue of almsgiving. There were

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[116] Ibid., p. 671.
[117] Hall, *Tales of Irish life and character*, p. 92.
[118] Amédee Pichot, *L'Irelande et la Lapys de Galles esquissas de voyages, d'economie politique, d'histoire, de biographie, de literature, etc., etc., etc.* (2 vols, Paris, 1850), i, pp 379-81.
[119] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 95.

certainly beggars, organized and fraudulent, to whom one should under no

circumstances give anything, but they were always somewhere else.'[120]

Begging, as shameful and destitute a practice as it was, was sometimes seen as merely

a step towards a more desperate fate. Evidence indicating a pecking order of deviance

among contemporary perceptions of the destitute poor adds further depth to one's

understanding of the practice of begging, those who engaged in it and how they were

perceived by wider society. The concept of there being a rung on the social (and moral)

ladder lower than mendicancy was embraced by the Poor Inquiry commissioners in

Dublin, who referred in stark terms to those who were born and reared into a life of

mendicancy, noting that of these individuals, 'few now pursue the same course of life.

They have descended a step lower! – their daughters have become prostitutes, and their

sons thieves; they are outcasts even from the "boccough's" dwelling.'[121] In the mid-

1830s a Mr McCarthy, chief constable of Drogheda, opined that some of the town's

prostitutes 'are the children of mendicants, who have never pursued any course of

industry…and appear to be separated by a marked line from even the lowest of the

labouring population'.[122] This idea of a 'downward spiral' has been identified by Jacinta

Prunty, who quotes the governors of the Dublin House of Industry as labelling theft and

robbery as the final resort of an unsuccessful beggar.[123] A contributor to the *Christian*

Examiner, an evangelical Church of Ireland magazine, presented a similar picture in

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[120] Ibid., p. 107.

[121] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 27a*. For this common gendered dichotomy (poor boys became thieves and poor girls became prostitutes), see: *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 31; 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 41a*; 'Hibernicus', 'On the poor laws' (Aug. 1831), p. 590; *Report of the committee for investigating juvenile delinquency in the metropolis*, p. 10; Anon., 'The garret, the cabin, and the gaol' in *Irish Quarterly Review*, iii, no. 10 (June 1853), p. 305. According to the governor of the prisons of Glasgow, 'juvenile begging…almost invariably, on the part of the girls, leads to juvenile prostitution': quoted in William Logan, *An exposure, from persons observation, of female prostitution in London, Leeds and Rochdale, and especially in the city of Glasgow, with remarks on the cause, extent, results and remedy of the evil* (2nd ed., Glasgow, 1843), p. 36. For this gendered dimension, see also Heather Shore, *Artful dodgers: youth crime in early-nineteenth-century London* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 10.

[122] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I,* p. 50.

[123] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 196.

1831 of the lower orders of the poor, stating that 'it is a common practice for the ruined labourer to commit some minor crime, in order to get into gaol, while his wife and infants set out to beg, and the elder children become thieves or prostitutes.'[124]

Conclusion

Defining begging, beggars and alms-giving in a historical period requires caution and sensitivity. The ambiguity around terms such as 'beggars' and 'vagrants', for both contemporaries and historians, has long been problematic and necessitates constant questioning. Any study of this topic must grapple with a wide range of inherent complexities which arise from numerous factors: the fluid nature of the poor person's resort to beggary; the various day-to-day dynamics of alms-seeking; the various forms in which alms were bestowed; the disparate experiences of men, women and children as street beggars.

This chapter has explored the different reasons why individuals in early-nineteenth-century Ireland resorted to street begging. Motivations changed from person to person. For some, beggary was an attempt to relieve short-term distress; for other, alms-seeking was a regular source of income and could be considered as something of an occupation. Beggary carried a varied significance in people's own 'economy of makeshifts'. Most beggars were women and children, and much of the primary sources suggest that this was due to men's sensitivity to the shame involved in begging. However, women's vulnerability to spousal desertion and their relatively limited employment opportunities also contributed to this gendered imbalance, while the fact that women were more likely

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[124] 'Hibernicus', 'On the poor laws' (Aug. 1831), p. 590.

to face the challenge of feeding their children suggests that pragmatism and urgency overtook any possible sense of shame.

Demographic, social and economic information on street beggars has been considered, in an attempt to provide some insight into the backgrounds of those who begged. In the Dublin Mendicity Society in the mid-1820s, most inmates – all habitual mendicants – were unskilled labourers or unemployed textile workers, but critical analysis of this particular source suggests that only a skewed picture of the institution's inmates is possible. Having stressed the importance of considering how contemporaries defined beggars, vagrants and alms-giving, this thesis will now consider how societal attempts to measure mendicancy were central to wider approaches to the condition of the poor.

Chapter Two

Measuring begging and alms-giving

Introduction

In her account of visiting Wexford town around the middle of the nineteenth century, the writer Anna Maria Hall mirrored the reflections of numerous other travel writers in noting the ubiquity of beggars throughout Ireland. 'You cannot walk out in a country town without meeting at every turn a population of poverty. I have attempted to count the beggars – I found it impossible; the barefooted creatures were beyond number…'[1] Hall's remarks are revealing in highlighting the sheer extent of beggary as well as many contemporaries' attempts – rudimentary or otherwise – to gauge the level of poverty and mendicancy. For many, including Mrs Hall, the problem of beggary was simply beyond quantification.

The necessity to measure the extent of beggary in a locality was driven by a number of factors. The wealthier classes were acutely aware of the large sums of money and provisions bestowed upon beggars in alms every year. The cost of poor relief was central to the prolonged and contentious debate throughout the United Kingdom about the suitability of a statutory rate-based poor law in both Ireland and Britain. Contemporaries wished to know how much money beggary was costing them and their social peers. Having acquired some information and estimates, these could be measured against the projected cost of any new poor relief system.

This chapter will examine how contemporaries perceived the need to measure the extent of street begging in towns and cities, as well as on a national basis. These efforts were undertaken in the context of the emergence of the new discipline of statistics, by

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[1] [Mrs] S.C. Hall, *Tales of Irish life and character* (Edinburgh and London, 1910), p. 95.

which statisticians sought to provide objective and irrefutable information on a range of social questions which exercised the minds and concerns of respectable society. The condition of the poorer classes was among the most consistently analysed questions of this period, and statistics pertaining to the lives of the poor were recorded and disseminated in public lectures, pamphlets, parliamentary reports and newspapers. Statisticians and social commentators in many countries embraced the associational culture of the period and founded statistical societies as part of a transatlantic movement whose goals were the social and moral improvement of society, and the dissemination of ideas and discourse on this topic. This chapter will place the popularity of statistical inquiry in Ireland into the context of this transnational movement. Social questions, including mendicancy and the condition of the poor, were among the most commonly debated topics of discussion. Having analysed the role of statistical societies in disseminating this new discipline, this chapter will examine national and localised estimates of the number of beggars in nineteenth-century Ireland. The extent of mendicancy was one element that framed how the problem of the poor was perceived and approached.

Emergence of statistical inquiry

In a paper to the Dublin Statistical Society in the late-1840s, founding member James Anthony Lawson reflected, firstly, on his contemporaries' attempts to define the new discipline of statistics and, secondly, on the objectives of the society. Lawson stated: 'Upon the best consideration I can give it, I think Statistics may be defined as "the collecting of facts which relate to man's social conditions".'[2] For Lawson and his

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[2] James A. Lawson, 'On the connexion between statistics and political economy' in *Transactions of the Dublin Statistical Society*, i, session 1 (1847-48), p. 3.

colleagues in the 'statistical movement',[3] the new discipline held out the possibility of affecting great change. Statistical analysts championed 'improvement', which was 'one of the guiding ideas of social thinkers in this period'.[4] Evolving from Enlightenment-era concepts of societal progress, 'improvement' was seen by those engaged in the public sphere as the ultimate goal of a civilised, Christian society and the term became pervasive in contemporary public discourse. Through the collection and analysis of facts, subjects of wide social concern could be better understood. As such, the pioneers in statistical inquiry saw their endeavours as being part of a wider movement that was abounding in excitement, intellectual stimulation and promise. This was achieved through the development and refinement of new methodologies. The compilation of vast quantities of figures, presented as objective facts which were collected in a scientific manner, allowed researchers and social campaigners, in presenting their findings, to argue from a higher moral platform than would otherwise be the case. Statistics allowed for the testing of subjective theories and opinions through the use of cold, objective facts. According to Lawson, statistics 'supplies the facts which are the basis and subject matter of political economy; secondly, by means of facts it supplies a test to determine the correctnes[s] of the abstract conclusions of political economy, an office somewhat similar to that of experiments in Natural Philosophy'.[5]

Lawson's sentiment was echoed by Professor Mountifort Longfield, the first holder of the Whately chair of political economy at Trinity College Dublin, in a paper to the Dublin Statistical Society in June 1849. Longfield stressed that investigations 'should be

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[3] This phrase has been used by Cullen: see M.J. Cullen, *The statistical movement in early Victorian Britain: the foundations of empirical social research* (Hassocks and New York, 1975).

[4] Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), p. 44.

[5] Lawson, 'On the connexion between statistics and political economy', p. 5. Among the contemporary critics of statistics was Thomas Carlyle, who dismissed the practice of statistics as 'wash and vapidity, good only for the gutters': Thomas Carlyle, *Chartism* (London, 1840), p. 10. Carlyle shared Charles Dickens's disregard for the Utilitarian-bent of the statistical movement; indeed, Dickens's *Hard Times*, perhaps the sharpest critique of Utilitarianism, is inscribed to Carlyle.

conducted with caution, making allowance for the exaggerations of oratory, taking care to examine all that had been said upon every side of the question, and receiving no statement at second-hand, but always tracing them to their source, where any such existed, and the statements were not mere inventions'.[6] The importance assigned by Longfield to procedure, balance and the sourcing of information demonstrates the rigour which the early statisticians applied to the discipline.

As is common with a new intellectual phenomenon, contemporaries framed definitions of the discipline, in an attempt to answer the obvious questions: 'what is it?' and 'what is its purpose?' The Statistical Society of London defined statistics in its maiden publication as the collection of 'facts which are calculated to illustrate the condition and prospects of society' and the purpose of statistical science was 'to consider the results which they produce, with the view to determine those principles upon which the well-being of society depends'.[7] The Dublin society's vice-president, Sir Robert Kane, envisaged the organisation as performing a similar role, namely 'the collection and digestion of all those classes of facts which come within the recognised, though somewhat indefinite domain of statistical inquiry, by affording information as to the finances of the state, the resources of our territory, the numbers, the condition, the habits, or the industry of the people'.[8] The very term 'statistics' was not new, but rather experienced a semantic shift in these years as its meaning evolved from 'information pertaining to a state', often non-mathematical, to 'information in a numerical form'. This linguistic evolution was touched upon by Thomas Larcom in 1844, who stated that

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[6] *Report of the address on the conclusion of the second sessions of the Dublin Statistical Society: delivered by Mountiford Longfield, LLD, QC, Regius Professor of Feudal and English Law in the University of Dublin, a vice-president of the society. Together with the report of the council, read at the annual meeting, 18th June 1849* (Dublin, 1849), p. 6.

[7] 'Introduction' in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, i, no. 1 (May 1838), p. 1.

[8] *The address on the opening of the fifth session of the Dublin Statistical Society, delivered by Sir Robert Kane, vice-president of the society. Together with the report of the council, read at the annual meeting, 19th November, 1851* (Dublin, 1851), p. 3.

'a map is itself a statistical document, and what we commonly call statistics ought to be called numerical statistics'.[9]

The increasing zeal for the employment of statistical analysis in this period is reflected in the multiplication of statistical societies across western Europe and north America from the 1830s. This new 'statistical movement' was pioneered by the Manchester Statistical Society, formed in 1833, and the London Statistical Society, established the following year. In Ireland, the Ulster Statistical Society first met on 29 March 1838, while the Dublin Statistical Society was founded nine years later and merged with the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland in 1855.[10] The impetus for the formation of the Dublin society arose directly from the crisis of the Great Famine, which raised fundamental questions about the social, political and economic policies being implemented by the state in Ireland. The prominence of this concern was reflected in the early papers delivered before the society, addressing topics such as political economy and laissez-faire, the condition of labourers, emigration and 'A notice on the theory that there is no hope for a nation that lives on potatoes'.[11]

The description of this phenomenon as a movement is appropriate, as these societies were not founded in a vacuum. They arose in urban centres, in the same period, and were established by individuals – invariably middle- and upper-middle-class men – from similar social backgrounds, and for similar purposes. Crucially, there was an appetite for knowledge of the activities and proceedings of other statistical societies. Mirroring the practice of other movements of this period that addressed social questions,

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[9] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 27.

[10] 'Statistical Society of Ulster' in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, i, no. 1 (May 1838), p. 52; Walter F. Wilcox, 'Note on the chronology of statistical societies' in *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, xxix, no. 188 (Dec. 1934), p. 419. In 1862 the Dublin Statistical Society became the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland.

[11] *Report of the address on the conclusion of the first session of the Dublin Statistical Society, delivered by his grace the Archbishop of Dublin, president of the society. Together with the report of the council, read at the annual meeting, 19th June, 1848* (Dublin, 1848), p. 9.

such as the fever hospital and mendicity society movements, mutual advice was sought and proffered. Upon the foundation of the Ulster Statistical Society, the secretary was ordered to 'open a correspondence with the Statistical Society of London and any other similar societies and also with clergymen of parishes, professional men and all others likely to forward the objects of this section'.[12] R.W. Rawson and G.R. Porter, who were both leading members of the London society, were elected as honorary members of the Ulster society in its first year of existence.[13]

Peter Gray has argued that the Dublin society 'marked a new departure in Irish intellectual life' in being the first public body committed to the application of scientific methodologies to Ireland's social and economic problems, and also in the widespread dissemination of its proceedings through Ireland by way of publications and public lectures.[14] Although the Dublin Statistical Society was, according to Mary Daly, 'a rather late arrival by United Kingdom standards', its members were active in international debates surrounding the very nature of this new discipline.[15] The issues which gripped the London statisticians also concerned their Irish counterparts. The first meeting of the Ulster society appointed committees to investigate the issues of education, Anglo-Irish trade, 'the physical and intellectual condition of the working classes', the state of agriculture and the use of mechanical power in Belfast and its

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[12] Documents relating to the Ulster Statistical Society 1838 (PRONI, Young and Mackenzie Papers, D2194/23), cited in Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), *Problems of a growing city: Belfast, 1780-1870* (Belfast, 1973), p. 110.

[13] List of members, Statistical Society of Ulster, 1st November 1838 (PRONI, Young and Mackenzie Papers, D2194/23), cited in PRONI, *Problems of a growing city*, p. 113. For Rawson and Porter's involvement in the London society, see *Quarterly Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, v, part I (Apr. 1842), p. 92.

[14] Peter Gray, 'Irish social thought and the relief of poverty, 1847-1880' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xx (2010), p. 141.

[15] Mary E. Daly, *The spirit of earnest inquiry: the Statistical and Social Inquiry of Ireland, 1847-1997* (Dublin, 1997), p. 10. In 1850, an associated Social Inquiry of Ireland was formed by members of the Dublin Statistical Society and 12 years later, the two entities amalgamated to form the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland: Daly, *The spirit of earnest inquiry*, pp 16-17.

vicinity.[16] Statistics were collected on a wide range of issues which assisted investigation into the political and economic condition of the country: censuses of population, birth and mortality rates, agricultural output, emigration, employment rates, industrial output, the traffic of goods, passenger traffic. While this was the case across Britain and Ireland, there was a particular emphasis in Ireland on the collection of statistics relating to the occupation of land. The fact that the first report of the Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, founded in 1850 as an off-shoot of the Dublin Statistical Society, focussed on the occupation of land reflected the significance this subject held for the early statisticians.[17]

The demographic profile of the members of these statistical societies was typical of the philanthropic and cultural societies which flourished across Britain and Ireland during this period. The members were almost invariably male, urban-based, well-educated, and middle-class. The leading members of the Manchester Statistical Society were doctors and bankers.[18] A listing of the founding members of the Dublin society reads like a listing of the city's elite of senior Church of Ireland clergymen, professors at Trinity College Dublin (particularly previous and current holders of the Whately chair in Political Economy), prominent medical men, legal practitioners and merchants.[19] A

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[16] *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, i, no. 1 (May 1838), p. 50.
[17] *Address of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, president of the society. Report of the council; and lecture on an international code of commerce, by Leone Levi, Esq at the annual meeting of the society, 3rd November, 1851* (Dublin, 1851), p. 7. See also Mary Daly 'The Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland' in Kieran A. Kennedy (ed.), *From famine to feast: economic and social change in Ireland, 1847-1997. Lectures on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* (Dublin, 1998), p. 2.
[18] Asa Briggs, *Victorian cities* (Harmondsworth, 1980), pp 109-110, 117; T.S. Ashton, *Economic and social investigations in Manchester, 1833-1933: a centenary history of the Manchester Statistical Society* (1934; reprint Brighton, 1977), pp 1-12.
[19] *Report on the conclusion of the first session of the Dublin Statistical Society*, p. 2; *Address on the opening of the fifth session of the Dublin Statistical Society*, p. 2. See also Gray, 'Irish social thought and the relief of poverty', pp 141-56.

similar listing of the Belfast society's members is dominated by clergymen, medical doctors, members of parliament and merchants.[20]

   As significant as the emergence of the statistical societies was, the use and development of statistical inquiry pre-dated the 1830s. In the 1790s Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835) undertook his pioneering twenty-one volume *Statistical Account of Scotland*, distributing identical printed forms to each of the 936 parishes of the Church of Scotland, inquiring into a comprehensive range of topics, such as 'geography, history, wages, prices, population, industry, agriculture, fisheries, farm size, the progress of enclosure, poor relief, and the general topic of the manners of the people'.[21] In Ireland, Sinclair's influence was evident in the work of William Shaw Mason, the author of the three-volume *Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland* which was published between 1814 and 1819, who referred to Sinclair as 'my respected guide through this hitherto unexplored region of science'.[22] In contrast to Sinclair's completed project, Mason's was abandoned after just three volumes, which covered less than one hundred of Ireland's 2,500 parishes.[23] The collection of statistical surveys of Irish counties published between 1801 and 1832 also warrant mention. Directed by the Royal Dublin Society, these surveys provided detailed information on many features of twenty-three counties – such as the prices of wages, labour and provisions, the number and size of towns, and the number of schools and charitable institutions – but the focus was fundamentally on the state of agriculture in each of the surveyed counties.[24]

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[20] 'List of members, Statistical Society of Ulster, 1st November 1838', in PRONI, *Problems of a growing city*, pp 112-13.

[21] Rosalind Mitchison, 'Sinclair, Sir John' in *ODNB*, l, p. 759.

[22] William Shaw Mason, *A statistical account, or parochial survey of Ireland, drawn up from the communications of the clergy* (3 vols, Dublin, 1814), i, p. viii.

[23] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 114.

[24] Henry F. Berry, *A history of the Royal Dublin Society* (London, 1915), pp 182-5; James Meenan and Desmond Clarke, 'The RDS 1731-1981' in James Meenan and Desmond Clarke (eds), *RDS: the Royal Dublin Society, 1731-1981* (Dublin, 1981), pp 20-23.

Statistics, social inquiry and moral threats

The sense of almost limitless potential held out by statistical analysis was evident in the extent to which the new discipline was applied to social and moral questions of great public concern. For contemporaries, the collection of statistics allowed for a more scientific approach to the alleviation of social problems, and this emphasis on social inquiry and improvement was central to the evolution of the 'statistical revolution' throughout the century.[25] The early statisticians were acutely aware of the privileged position in which they found themselves, in contrast to earlier commentators on social issues. In March 1856 social reformer and philanthropist James Haughton, in a paper illustrating the fundamental importance of education in tackling poverty and crime, said

> We have advantages which our forefathers had not, and which render our neglect of duty quite inexcusable: these are, abundant statistics proving the intimate relation between crime and ignorance, and the fullest publicity given to statements of various undoubted authorities on the subject.[26]

The aforementioned assertion by James Anthony Lawson that statistics was 'the collecting of facts which relate to man's social condition' indicates that the ethos of social improvement was present in the Dublin society.[27] A more direct statement of this ethos was made by Robert Kane in 1851. In asserting that 'the interest felt by our members in the moral and material welfare of the artisans and poorer classes is fully shown by our proceedings', Kane revealed a sense of pride among the early statisticians in their emphasis on the moral and temporal condition of the lower classes.[28] The role of statistical inquiry in shining a light on a 'hidden' Ireland has been stressed by Cormac Ó Gráda and Peter Gray, the former of whom has noted that the increasing number of

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[25] Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), p. 5; Daly, *The spirit of earnest inquiry*, p. 12.

[26] James Haughton, 'Education the surest preventive of crime, and the best safeguard of life, property, and social order' in *Journal of the Dublin Statistical Society*, i, part vi (1856), p. 324.

[27] Lawson, 'On the connexion between statistics and political economy', p. 3.

[28] *Address on the opening of the fifth session of the Dublin Statistical Society*, p. 5.

travellers' accounts, statistical county surveys, parliamentary inquiries, censuses and ordnance survey publications in the first half of the nineteenth century was 'making aspects of the real Ireland better known at home and abroad'.[29]

Early statistical inquiries focussed on what Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle termed 'the Condition-of-England question'[30] – namely, the state of the working and domestic lives of the labouring classes. The founding members of the statistical society in Manchester, a city whose economic and demographic expansion in the opening decades of the century epitomised the modern city,[31] defined their aim as being 'to assist in promoting the progress of social improvement in the manufacturing population by which they are surrounded'.[32] At a time of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, the condition of the urban labouring classes and the slums in which they resided not only worried but threatened the middle and upper classes, both in Ireland and Britain. In a century that was ravaged by numerous disease epidemics, comprehensive statistics on mortality rates and their connection to housing and sanitary conditions was considered of utmost importance to the common good. Jacinta Prunty has observed that

> On investigation all aspects of poverty were found to be inter-connected: high mortality, poor sanitary provision, overcrowded and substandard housing, 'immorality', vagrancy and casual work, drunkenness and the dispiritedness due to unemployment, criminality and the mixing of all sorts in the 'rookeries' of the back streets; illiteracy, prostitution, irreligion, the disintegration of the family unit, and indeed the degeneration of the 'urban' race. The spiralling nature of poverty, where children born into such circumstances were unable to escape, was especially worrying.[33]

As Bulmer et al. have noted, these early statisticians were 'working in a time receptive to the statistical approach', while the spirit of the age has also been captured by G.M.

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[29] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Industry and communications, 1801-45' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union I, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 150; Gray, 'Irish social thought and the relief of poverty', pp 141-56.
[30] Carlyle, *Chartism*, p. 1.
[31] Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: the rise and fall of the Victorian city* (London, 2005), *passim*.
[32] Cited in Ashton, *Economic and social investigations in Manchester*, p. 13.
[33] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 1.

Young, who observed that 'it was the business of the [1830s] to transfer the treatment of affairs from a polemical to a statistical basis, from Humbug to Humdrum…Statistical inquiry…was a passion of the times.'[34]

Concern for the vulnerability of the poorer classes to immorality and vice, which were seen as arising from their temporal circumstances, shaped how statisticians deployed their new discipline, and this concern 'fuelled an urge to investigate and change them'.[35] Facts were collected on what were considered 'moral statistics': incidences of crime, convictions and recidivism (particularly relating to public intoxication); alcohol consumption and the number of public houses; school attendance rates; the number of people sharing beds in slums.[36] In an era characterised by religious revival and missionary zeal, the moral consequences of the neglect of religious piety and practice figured prominently in the 'moral statistics' created and disseminated by statisticians. Eight of the first fourteen reports prepared by the Manchester Statistical Society concerned education, religious instruction and irreligion.[37] In Dublin, while topics such as land proprietorship, absenteeism and agricultural matters were to be found among the early papers to the city's society, temperance, poverty and crime also figured prominently.[38]

The collection and use of statistics was not confined to learned societies and their intellectual members, and from the early-nineteenth century, the state increasingly collected detailed information on its citizens and matters which may affect their lives.

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[34] Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales and Kathryn Kish Sklar, 'The social survey in historical perspective' in Martin Bulmer, Kevin Bales and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds), *The social survey in historical perspective, 1880-1940* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 8; G.M. Young, *Portrait of an age: Victorian England* (Annotated ed., London, 1977), pp 48-9.

[35] Bulmer et al., 'The social survey in historical perspective', p. 11.

[36] Cullen, *The statistical movement*, pp 65-74, 136; Eileen Janes Yeo, 'Social surveys in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' in Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (eds), *The Cambridge history of science. Volume 7: the modern social sciences* (Cambridge, 2003), pp 89-90; Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and poverty in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 165.

[37] Ashton, *Economic and social investigations in Manchester*, p. 141.

[38] *Transactions of the Dublin Statistical Society* (1849-51), *passim*.

The best examples of this state initiative are the decennial censuses (commencing in Ireland in 1821), the mapping of the country by the Ordnance Survey from the 1820s, and the numerous select committees and royal commissions which investigated many aspects of life in Ireland. These parliamentary inquiries, seen as typifying the prevailing zeal for the collection of facts and figures, were not immune from criticism from various quarters. Irish nationalist John Mitchel dismissed the 'reports of innumerable Commissions which the British Parliament was in the habit of issuing, when they pretended to inquire into any Irish "grievance" – and which were usually printed in vast volumes, bound in blue paper, and never read by any human eye'.[39] In the early stages of the Whately Poor Inquiry, the *Connaught Journal* stated that 'the people of Ireland have reason to be sick of commissions. For years and years commissions for almost every possible purpose have intersected the country, and still we are as far as ever from anything like substantive relief.'[40]

Perhaps the most cutting criticism of this phenomenon is Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, first published in 1854, which portrays a northern English industrial town polluted as much by the Utilitarian obsession with emotionless and objective facts as by the smoke from the factories and mills. In the fictional setting of Coketown, 'where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in',[41] merchant Thomas Gradgrind wishes for its inhabitants to be guided not by nature, aesthetic beauty, 'Taste' or 'Fancy' but 'Facts': "Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else."[42] Later in the novel, a government official echoes this sentiment: "You are to be in all things regulated and governed by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force

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[39] John Mitchel, *The last conquest of Ireland (perhaps)*, ed. Patrick Maume (1860; Dublin, 2005), p. 68.
[40] *Connaught Journal*, 20 Oct. 1834, cited in Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 129.
[41] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Bantham Classic ed., New York, 1964), p. 83.
[42] Ibid., p. 25.

the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether."[43]

Statistics and mendicancy

From the early days of the statistical movement, the issue of mendicancy attracted the interest of the pioneers of this new discipline. Just months before the foundation of the Manchester Statistical Society, its main instigator, William Langton, founded a Manchester branch of the Provident Society, which had the stated objective of encouraging 'frugality and forethought, the suppression of mendicity and imposture, and the occasional relief of sickness and unavoidable misfortune amongst the poor'.[44] Attempts, however, to gauge the level of mendicancy in a particular area at any one time were inherently plagued with difficulties too numerous to comprehensively outline. Yet, a number of these problems merit discussion. Firstly, the sheer extent of beggary, particularly in urban areas, was an obstacle to those seeking to correctly enumerate the number of street beggars. Secondly, how could one satisfactorily enumerate members of an inherently marginalised group of people, whose domestic environment in the slums, dens and rookeries of city back streets were perceived and spoken of as unchartered territories?[45] Thirdly, and this has been discussed above in Chapter One, while there were many professional and habitual mendicants, many resorted to begging only in times of utter destitution. For individuals or families, this may have been a once-off occurrence, or could have been a regular part of what Hufton termed 'the economy of makeshifts'. The question of varied and uncertain definitions of poverty and beggary greatly inhibits any attempt to calculate the number of beggars.

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[43] Dickens, *Hard times*, p. 30.
[44] Ashton, *Economic and social investigations in Manchester*, p. 4.
[45] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 18.

Fourthly, the transient habits of mendicants and vagrants posed a problem. Unlike an enumeration of subjects which are fixed and immoveable – for instance, houses in a particular parish – efforts to count beggars were inherently handicapped by the mobility of such individuals. In large urban centres, it could prove considerably more difficult than in rural areas to identify an individual as a local or a 'stranger'. The question of how to label someone as being local to a given area further complicates the matter. Take the example of the hypothetical mendicant, born and reared in west Connemara but who had lived continuously in Dublin for ten years by the time he appears in the source material. Was he considered by contemporaries to be a local Dublin mendicant or was he to be classed as a migrant or 'strange' beggar? How is he to be seen by historians, utilising such source material? More often than not, this depth of demographic information is not recorded in the primary source material pertaining to street beggars and thus remains beyond the reach of historians. Nonetheless, insights into the seasonal and mobile nature of Irish mendicants can be gleaned from a selection of sources. A police report from Dublin, dated 17 June 1817, stated that a group of 'sixteen men, apparently country men', arrived in the city, begging for alms. Such groups were regular sights in nineteenth-century Dublin. The police document stated that 'there are groups only of a Monday, in consequence of going to Dunleary expecting to commence a week's work, and not being able to procure it, they beg their way back to their respective parishes'.[46] This inflow regularly increased beyond all 'normal' levels at times of acute distress, for instance in periods of inclement weather, bad harvests and disease epidemics.

The problem with quantifying beggars was described by antiquary John Peter Boileau, in a paper to the Statistical Section of the British Association in Swansea in August

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[46] Police report on country beggars in Dublin, 17 June 1817 (NAI, State of the Country Papers, SOC 1825/6).

1848. Boileau, who was among the vice-presidents of the London Mendicity Society,[47]

stated:

> The statistics of mendicancy in the united empire, if they could be correctly collected and compiled, would be a valuable addition to our knowledge, and lead to many important conclusions for the management and employment of our poor, enabling us more correctly to appreciate the large funds devoted to these purposes. I fear, however, that no means at present exist for this general object.[48]

The problem of quantifying the number of those reduced to utter destitution persisted into the late-nineteenth century, when Charles Booth, in his famous survey of the labouring classes in London, commented that 'the lowest class of occasional labourers, loafers and semi-criminals…are beyond enumeration'.[49]

The use of institutional records, while a useful endeavour, also fails to provide a completely satisfactory picture. While mendicity societies actively engaged with street beggars and maintained and published regular statistics regarding admissions, numbers relieved and discharges, these figures do not encompass all those engaged in mendicancy. Many individuals declined to engage with the mendicity societies and other relevant institutions, such as houses of industry and workhouses, for a complexity of reasons. While many vagrants and beggars were admitted either voluntarily or by compulsion, many fell through the net. As such, the reports and figures published by these institutions cannot provide accurate estimates for the levels of street begging. As

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[47] *The thirty-second report of the Society for Suppression of Mendicity, established in London, 1818* (London, 1850), p. v. For further information on Boileau, see Alan Bell, 'Boileau, Sir John Peter' in *ODNB*, vi, pp 448-9.

[48] John P. Boileau, 'Statistics of mendicancy' in *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, xii, no. 1 (Feb. 1849), p. 43.

[49] Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London* (12 vols, London, 1892), i, cited in Eric J. Evans (ed.), *Social policy, 1830-1914: individualism, collectivism and the origins of the Welfare State* (London and Boston, 1978), p. 158.

Geary has correctly observed, 'it is easier to qualify than quantify begging in pre-famine Ireland'.[50]

The desire to quantify beggary on both a local and national scale was also grounded in the respectable classes' concern of the monetary cost of poor relief and beggary. In a period when the suitability of a statutory rate-based poor law for Ireland was being debated, the cost of such a scheme was being contrasted with the prevailing situation of voluntary poor relief. Estimates of the level of mendicancy were frequently accompanied by estimated costs of alms-giving. Dublin Barrister James Butler Bryan claimed to the 1830 parliamentary inquiry into the state of the poor in Ireland that, based on rather crude calculations, approximately £1 million worth of potatoes were given by rural householders to beggars every year.[51] According to a letter-writer to the *Belfast Newsletter*, the town's estimated 300 beggars (excluding their families) received £5,200 annually from inhabitants in private alms given on the streets,[52] while one report claimed that £100,000 was given annually to street beggars in Dublin alone.[53] In 1811 Matthew Martin, who investigated mendicancy in London in the 1790s, spoke of the need to ascertain the true extent of street begging, 'both in respect to the average number of LONDON BEGGARS, and the gross amount of the sums annually extorted from the public by their importunities'.[54] In proposing measures to curtail street begging

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[50] Laurence M. Geary, '"The whole country was in motion": mendicancy and vagrancy in pre-Famine Ireland' in Jacqueline Hill and Colm Lennon (eds), *Luxury and austerity: Historical Studies XXI* (Dublin, 1999), p. 127.

[51] *First report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 24 March-14 May*, p. 46, H.C. 1830 (589), vii, 218.

[52] *BNL*, 1 June 1810.

[53] Anon., *Arguments in proof of the necessity and practicability of suppressing street begging, in the city of Dublin; illustrated by some important facts respecting institutions which have been established in other places for that purpose* (Dublin, 1817), p. 8. This figure of £100,000 appears to have been accepted by other commentators on social conditions in Dublin: Whitley Stokes, *Observations on contagion* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1818), p. 55.

[54] Matthew Martin, *Substance of a letter, Dated Poet's Corner, Westminster, 3d March, 1803, to the Right Hon. Lord Pelham, on the state of mendicity in the Metropolis* (London, 1811), p. 12.

in the city, Martin asserted his aim as being to reduce the expense to the public of managing the poor.[55]

Statistics of destitution and mendicancy on a national scale

Estimates of the extent of mendicancy throughout Ireland are available from as early as the eighteenth century. In 1729 Arthur Dobbs provided the bizarrely particular estimate of 34,425 'stroling [sic] Beggars' in Ireland, 'of which there are not 1 in 10 real Objects', while ten years later, Philip Skelton recorded contemporary estimates of up to 50,000 beggars 'rambling from place to place'.[56] In 1837 English Poor Law Commissioner George Nicholls, who was appointed to draw up a report on the suitability of the new English Poor Law system to Ireland, referred to the 'almost universal prevalence of mendicancy', adding that 'mendicancy and wretchedness have become too common to be disgraceful'.[57] In his testimony to the 1825 select committee on the state of the country, Mallow banker Robert de la Cour, who had previously served in the position of High Sheriff for the County of Cork, estimated that of the approximately 7 million people then living in Ireland, 'I think I under-rate the number of those who procure the means of their subsistence by beggary and plunder at 1,000,000 including men, women and children; I think that is as low an estimate as can be taken'.[58] The Whately Poor Inquiry estimated that of the 8 million people living in Ireland, 2.385 million persons, or 30 per cent, were 'out of work and in distress during

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[55] Martin, *Substance of a letter, on the state of mendicity in the Metropolis*, p. 14. See also ibid., p. 21.
[56] Dobbs' astonishingly precise estimate results from calculations of the average number of beggars per parish in the country: Arthur Dobbs, *An essay on the trade and improvement of Ireland* (Dublin, 1729), p. 46; Philip Skelton, *The necessity of tillage and granaries. In a letter to a member of parliament living in the county of ___* (Dublin, 1741), pp 43-4.
[57] *Report of Geo. Nicholls, Esq., to His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, on poor laws, Ireland*, p. 5, H.C. 1837 [C 69], li, 207.
[58] *Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland, more particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to the disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom. 24 March-22 June, 1825*, p. 558, H.C. 1825 (521), ix, 558.

thirty weeks of the year'.[59] The commission's secretary John Revans dissented from this estimate and in a pamphlet criticising the inquiry's final recommendations, he suggested that the number was considerably less.[60]

Nicholls provided a considerably more conservative estimate of 82,806 destitute poor among a total population of 8 million in Ireland.[61] 'According to this estimate, there is precisely one destitute person for every eighteen families in the present population,' Nicholls observed.[62] However, Nicholls's methods and estimates have been questioned by historians, claiming that he greatly underestimated the extent of destitution in Ireland, in a 'hastily prepared report' which 'confirmed what [government] ministers wanted to hear– that a workhouse-based system [based on the 1834 Poor Law model in England] was both 'safe' and desirable for Ireland'.[63]

Area-specific mendicancy figures

In the summer of 1798 Rev. James Whitelaw, the Church of Ireland vicar in St Catherine's parish in Dublin city,[64] undertook an extensive survey into the condition of the poorer classes in the capital. Whitelaw's investigation can be considered as a pioneering social survey that conformed to the description of Bulmer et al., in that it 'involved field work, the collection of data at first hand by a social investigator rather than reliance upon reports by others or on pre-existing data'.[65] Similar first-hand

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[59] *Third report of the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 5, H.C. 1836 [C 43], xxx, 5.

[60] John Revans, *Evils of the state of Ireland; their causes and their remedy – a Poor Law* (London, n.d. [*c.* 1836]), p. 95.

[61] *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, Esq., to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department on poor laws, Ireland*, p. 51, H.C. 1837-38 [C 104], xxxviii, 707.

[62] *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, on poor laws, Ireland*, p. 51.

[63] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine, 1798-1848* (Dublin, 1972), p. 112; Virginia Crossman and Peter Gray, 'Introduction: poverty and welfare in Ireland, 1838-1948' in Virginia Crossman and Peter Gray (eds), *Poverty and welfare in Ireland, 1838-1948* (Dublin, 2011), p. 3. For a less negative consideration of Nicholls, see Mary E. Daly, *The famine in Ireland* (Dundalk, 1986), pp 47-8.

[64] Rosemary Richey, 'Whitelaw, James' in *DIB*, ix, pp 904-906.

[65] Bulmer et al., 'The social survey in historical perspective', p. 3.

methods were used by Thomas Willis in Dublin in the mid-1840s, in his investigation into the social and sanitary conditions of the city's poor,[66] and also by Peter Mayhew and Charles Booth in London in the 1850s and 1880s respectively. An example of early social surveying which was contemporary to Whitelaw's endeavour was Matthew Martin's investigation into street beggars in London in the 1790s, which involved the establishment of a Mendicity Enquiry Office, the printing and distribution of relief tickets, and the collection of personal histories of two thousand beggars. Such extensive information facilitated the publication of comprehensive statistical tables and analysis.[67]

Whitelaw visited thousands of abodes in Dublin's poorest and most wretched slums, navigating the city's streets and back-lanes with the assistance of a copy of John Rocque's 1756 map of the metropolis. Whitelaw appears to have met with co-operation from the slum dwellers he encountered, with Prunty observing that 'widespread fear of being suspected of disaffection, overtaken by rumours that the survey would result in measures to relieve the poor, ensured very full co-operation with what was a government-sanctioned but privately-funded survey'.[68] Whitelaw's survey is significant in its depiction of the hovels which constituted the homes of so many of the city's poorer classes, who formed 'the great mass of the population of this city',[69] and his was the first Irish study into the interlinked problems of overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions and epidemic disease that characterised nineteenth-century slums. His study is regrettably silent on the estimated number of beggars in the city.

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[66] Of his survey, which focused on the impoverished parish of St Michan's on the city's north side, Willis asserted: 'I went through every house in these streets, and through every room in each house, omitting none, save some few that were occupied by parties so apparently respectable so as to forbid any inquiries of this nature': Thomas Willis, *The hidden Dublin: facts connected with the social and sanitary condition of the working classes in the city of Dublin,* ed. David Dickson (1845; Dublin, 2002), p. 47.

[67] Martin, *Substance of a letter, on the state of mendicity in the Metropolis*; Matthew Martin, *An appeal to public benevolence for the relief of Beggars, with a view to a plan for suppression of beggary* (London, 1812); Tim Hitchcock, *Down and out in eighteenth-century London* (London, 2007), pp 3-6; Anon., *rev.* Anita McConnell, 'Martin, Matthew' in *ODNB*, xxxvi, pp 966-7.

[68] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 20.

[69] James Whitelaw, *An essay on the population of Dublin. Being the result of an actual survey taken in 1798, with great care and precision, and arranged in a manner entirely new* (Dublin, 1805), p. 4.

Figures for the Dublin House of Industry, depicted in Table 2.1, reveal that 8,197 individuals were admitted into its care during 1800. The House of Industry was a multi-faceted institution that catered for various categories of the deviant and sick poor, and regrettably, this figure of 8,197 does not specify how many of these paupers were habitual mendicants. Assuming a population of 172,000 in the city around the turn of the century, approximately one in twenty of the city's residents had been admitted into the House of Industry in that year alone. It need also be stated that this source does not specify whether or not repeat admissions are taken into account. While this estimate does not equate to the extent of mendicancy in the city, it is helpful in identifying and assessing poverty and destitution in Dublin at the turn of the nineteenth century, albeit through the unsatisfactory records of only one institution.

Three decades later the voluntarily-funded charity, the Dublin Mendicity Society, which somewhat superseded the largely state-funded House of Industry in suppressing street begging, provided figures for the number of mendicants on its books, crucially giving figures for repeat admissions. Each year throughout the 1820s and into the 1830s, the institution was relieving an average of 3,760 individuals per annum, which represented 84 per cent of those who applied for relief. Of these 3,760, 60 per cent were 'New Cases' and the remaining 40 per cent were 'Re-admissions'.[70] Street beggars in mid-nineteenth-century Dublin were evidently turning to the Mendicity Society on more than one occasion, having been previously crossed off the charity's books.

According to a pamphlet published in 1818 as part of the campaign to establish a mendicity society in Dublin, 'it may be safely stated that there are not less than 5,000 begging poor in and about this city.'[71] This figure was also cited approvingly by

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[70] Figures cited in 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 23a*.
[71] Anon., *Arguments in proof of the necessity of suppressing street begging*, p. 7.

Table 2.1. The numbers admitted into the House of Industry, Dublin during 1800.[72]

			Total
Males		2,068	
Females		6,129	**8,197**
Of whom there were:	Healthy	4,944	
	Unhealthy	3,253	**8,197**
Previous condition:	Labourers	1,122	
	Manufacturers	1,992	
	Servants	2,705	
	Children and others in no previous occupation	2,078	**8,197[73]**
Ages:	Under 5 years	648	
	5-10	500	
	10-20	1,861	
	20-40	2,850	
	40-55	1,428	
	55+	910	**8,197**

Warburton et al. in their history of Dublin city, published at the height of the 1817-19

typhus   epidemic.[74] If this estimate is to be taken at face value, and given that the

city's population was then believed to be approximately 180,000, it can be estimated

that 2.7 per cent of the city's population resorted to begging for survival or to

supplement other income.[75] But, as with any statistics pertaining to the mendicant class,

this figure of 5,000 beggars is to be taken as merely indicative but not precise.

Furthermore, the fact that this estimate originated from a campaign aimed explicitly at

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[72] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 21a*.
[73] The 'Previous condition' figures, as provided in the primary source, add up to 7,897, which is 200 less than the stated total of 8,197.
[74] J. Warburton, J. Whitelaw and Robert Walsh, *History of the city of Dublin, from the earliest accounts to the present time; containing its annals, antiquities, ecclesiastical, history, and charters; its present extent, public buildings, schools, institutions, & c. to which are added biographical notices of eminent men, and copious appendices of its population, revenue, commerce, and literature* (2 vols, London, 1818), ii, p. 1346.
[75] According to the 1821 census, Dublin city had a population of 178,603: W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 5.

gaining public support for the suppression of mendicancy throws further doubt as to the accuracy of this figure.

Nicholls's aforementioned estimate of just more than 80,000 destitute persons in Ireland in the mid-1830s included a calculation of 5,646 destitute poor in Dublin city. Of these 5,646 destitute poor, 960 were designated by Nicholls as 'street mendicants' who were distinct from those individuals receiving relief in institutions such as the House of Industry and the Mendicity Society.[76] Nicholls was, therefore, estimating that in Dublin city there were almost 1,000 habitual beggars who, for unknown reasons, were not receiving relief from the two main institutions with responsibilities for confining and dealing with mendicants. This corresponds with the assertion of the Mendicity Society that there was a cohort of habitual street beggars who never applied to the organisation for relief,[77] presumably preferring the freedom of a vagrant life to institutional enclosure, supervision and regulation.

According to Rev. Thomas R. Shore, curate in the Church of Ireland parish of St Michan's,[78] out of an estimated population of 212,000 living in the city in the mid-1830s, there were '40,000 or 50,000 so destitute in Dublin who know not in the morning how they will obtain support in the day'.[79] This represented approximately 22 per cent of the capital's population. However, a divisional president for the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, Charles Sharpe, gave a significantly lower total of between 12,000 and 15,000 'persons now in Dublin who do not know where they will get a breakfast to-morrow'. In addition to this figure, Sharpe estimated that in the city, there

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[76] *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, on poor laws, Ireland*, pp 50-51.
[77] *Second report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, 1819* (Dublin, 1820), p. 21.
[78] For the identification of Rev. Shore as being based in St Michan's, see St Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 23 Dec. 1828 (RCBL, St Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 276.05.5); ibid., 27 Mar. 1837; Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 4 May 1830 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/4).
[79] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 32a*.

were 70,000 or 80,000 [persons] who would take alms and would seek them if they thought they could get them, and have the means of supporting themselves'.[80]

Estimates of the extent of street begging in Dublin city were provided by two officers of the Irish Constabulary who testified before the Poor Inquiry and it is significant that these two estimates differ considerably from each other. At first glance, these individuals, by the nature of their employment in possessing powers to drive-on or detain beggars, may be regarded as reliable sources of information as to the number of mendicants in the streets of Dublin. However, the disparity in the estimates raises a metaphorical eyebrow and at first sight, may diminish the strength of their figures. Chief Constable Michael Farrell, who had held that position for twenty-six years, divided the city's mendicants into four categories: approximately 100, excluding their children, who resorted to begging from genuine destitution, 'whose very manner of begging, look and dress bespeak them at once to be objects of real charity, so that he [Farrell] cannot himself refrain from giving them alms in the streets'; 500 regular beggars, including children; 500 who lived on the outskirts of the city and begged in surrounding villages; and 100 who were 'strangers passing through'.[81] Farrell's figures gave a total of 1,200 beggars in Dublin. A colleague of his, Chief Constable of the College Street Division Henry Gilbert Goodison, estimated that there may have been as many as 8,000 mendicants in the city – more than six times greater than the estimate provided by Farrell.[82] The disparity between these two accounts is striking and given that these two experienced and senior policemen would have shared a relatively good knowledge of the city and its social conditions, the most likely explanation for this anomaly is that they had different understandings of what constituted a 'beggar', the term used by both

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[80] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 4.
[81] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 41a*.
[82] Ibid., p. 41a*.

men. While Farrell drew upon some kind of rudimentary categorisation of those he considered among the mendicant poor, Goodison merely provided the estimate of 8,000 beggars, 'using the word in its widest significance, including men, women, their children, and orphans'.[83]

Similar disparities arose in Clifden, County Galway. The town's founder and landlord John D'Arcy expressed his belief to a public sitting of the Poor Inquiry that not more than three or four people in the town lived exclusively through begging, while a Catholic priest put this number at 'fifteen and upwards'. Most interestingly, a group of five men, comprising a builder, two masons, a weaver and a freeholder, contradicted the local landlord and asserted: 'There are more than fifty persons, this day resident in Clifden, who are supported entirely by begging.'[84] The men then proceeded to name each of the approximately fifty persons included in this estimate. The question arises of whether D'Arcy, who founded Clifden in 1815 as a regional commercial centre, played down the true extent of poverty and mendicancy in his town in the interest of presenting his relatively new development as a hub of industry. Another possible explanation for the disparity in estimates is that D'Arcy was opposed to a proposed compulsory poor rate, of which, as a landlord, he would be a principal contributor. This explanation would correspond with Niall Ó Ciosáin's assertion that it 'could be in the landlords' interest, therefore, to play down the extent and growth of poverty'.[85] Yet, on the other hand, manipulated figures may have been presented for unknown reasons by the priest or the group of five men and it must be considered that these deponents and D'Arcy, divided by religion and social class, most likely possessed disparate interpretations of what constituted begging.

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[83] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 41a*.
[84] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 485.
[85] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 43.

Turning attention back to Dublin city it can be seen that other potential sources of information as to the extent of mendicancy, namely the street inspectors who were employed by householders and businesses throughout the city, were written off by the Poor Inquiry commissioners. 'The street-inspectors could give no account but of the numbers frequenting their own very limited beats. Even of these gentlemen, who suffering from the annoyance, contributed largely to attempt its removal, not one felt himself competent to give anything like a decided opinion as to the extent to which vagrancy and mendicity prevail in Dublin.'[86] One exception was Edward Ost, who was 'appointed and paid by the inhabitants of the five houses in Dawson-street nearest to Nassau-street' and whose duty was to 'walk backwards and forwards, opposite to those houses, for the purpose of keeping beggars from importuning persons who frequent the street'. While declining from giving an estimate of the extent of mendicancy in the city, Ost stated that that there was seldom a day when he would not encounter forty or fifty beggars 'on my beat'. Fellow street inspector William Flinn, who was employed by a 'few of the inhabitants of Grafton Street', also estimated that 'there are 40 or 50 a day on my beat on most days'.[87] On the other hand, a significantly inconsistent figure was provided by pastry-cook and confectioner W. Mitchell, of No. 10 Grafton Street, who was among a number of traders who employed a street inspector to ward off beggars outside their premises. Mitchell estimated that there were no less than 15,000 beggars in the city, of whom 'not less than 40 or 50 pass my door every day'.[88]

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[86] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II,* p. 41a*.
[87] Ibid., p. 42a*.
[88] Ibid., p. 44a*.

Conclusion

Discussions of poverty and destitution in nineteenth-century Ireland frequently included estimates of the extent of street begging, arrived at according to varying standards of calculation. There were good reasons for trying to quantify mendicancy. In the context of the decades-long debate surrounding the suitability of a statutory provision for the poor, which became more urgent by the 1830s, the cost of maintaining the status quo in contrast to the prospective new system was a concern of the wealthier classes, who would be the principal rate-payers under the eventual new Poor Law system. Efforts to quantify street begging were part of a wider effort to employ statistical analysis in the 'improvement' of the moral condition of the lower classes. Statistical inquiry was seen by its adherents as the exercising of rationale in arriving at unquestionably objective results, from which solutions to social problems could be derived.

The provision of calculations and statistics on the extent of beggary were given by many commentators on a local and national scale. Yet, the evidence supports the assertion in Chapter One (above) that varied definitions on what and who constituted a 'beggar' complicated attempts to gauge the problem. Every interested party – government officials, police officers, casually-employed street inspectors, social commentators – based their estimates on their own understanding of begging, and given that these understandings were far from homogenous, the resulting calculations could vary greatly. In the instance of two senior Dublin policemen, there was a six-fold difference in their estimates of the number of beggars in the city. Having examined attempts that were made to measure begging and alms-giving, Chapter Three will now consider some of the various ways in which mendicancy was perceived.

Chapter Three

Perceptions of begging and alms-giving

Introduction

The English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray was among the numerous visitors to Ireland who commented on the prevalence of mendicancy and their own personal experience with Irish beggars. Thackeray's description of beggars in Ballinasloe is a case in point:

> I think the beggars were more plenteous and more loathsome here than almost anywhere. To one hideous wretch I was obliged to give money to go away, which he did for a moment, only to obtrude his horrible face directly afterwards half eaten away with disease…and as for the rest of the beggars, what pen or pencil could describe their hideous leering flattery, their cringing, swindling humour![1]

This short paragraph from Thackeray usefully highlights many of the perceptions of beggary which ran through public discourse on the question of the poor. Thackeray mentioned the extent and unpleasantness of the town's beggars. The author felt compelled to give alms merely to be rid of this nuisance. One mendicant is presented as being disease-ridden and 'as for the rest of the beggars', they were beyond description and utilised skills of the trade ('hideous leering flattery, cringing swindling humour') to procure alms. More benign portrayals of Irish beggars and the practice of mendicancy were provided by the Presbyterian army surgeon John Gamble, who travelled around Ireland in 1810. Gamble's many references to soliciting mendicants note the 'poetical and animated' address of Irish beggars, in contrast to their English counterparts, while

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[1] William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Irish sketchbook of 1842* (1843; Nonsuch ed., Dublin, 2005), p. 215.

the number of beggars in Dublin proved not the extent of poverty in the city but of the prevalence of charity among the inhabitants.[2] Thackeray's beggars were disease-ridden nuisances while Gamble's were interesting characters legitimately seeking assistance.

Gauging perceptions of mendicancy in early-nineteenth-century Irish society is far from a simple task. Attitudes towards beggars and beggary varied greatly, yet most recorded views portrayed mendicancy in a negative light. Beggars propagated disease, sedition and all manner of moral evils in a community. However, mendicants could also be viewed with sympathy, as their fellow men pitied the plight of the poor and looked upon their woes as an opportunity to follow Christ's example in relieving the sick and the distressed. Beggars could also be viewed as merely ubiquitous figures, always present in the social landscape, and not necessarily good or bad but constant.

This chapter will approach this topic from a number of angles. The perceived natural right to beg was touched upon by a number of commentators and this concept will serve as an opening to this chapter's analysis. Before exploring some of the ways in which beggars were seen as societal threats, the image of the ubiquitous mendicant will be analysed. Focus will then shift to the visibility of beggary in urban centres and how the spectacle of mendicancy could both shock middle-class sensitivities and be used by those same middle classes as a stick with which to strike at those inhabitants reluctant to support public charities. Many commentators spewed out a litany of threats posed by beggars to urban communities and this chapter will concern itself with three of these threats: street begging as a means of spreading disease, a threat to economic activity, and as a practice carrying associations with the supernatural. A fresh analysis will also be presented of the cultural role of beggars in pre-Famine Ireland, examining how

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[2] John Gamble, *Sketches of history, politics, and manners in Dublin, and the north of Ireland, in 1810* (New ed., London, 1826), pp 48, 90.

mendicants could occasionally be seen as benign and even socially important figures. Yes, they were regularly accused of propagating vice but beggars could also be welcomed as purveyors of news to the often-illiterate lower orders, and could be viewed as repositories of an older Gaelic folk tradition, especially appreciated by the poorer classes and, later in the century, by middle-class protofolklorists. Such an approach is not, and could not be, comprehensive, but will prove insightful. An important point to be made is that this chapter is limited to perceptions of mendicancy as recorded in written primary sources. The bias is, therefore, heavily weighted in favour of the educated, literate middle classes and the range of qualms that *they* held over the practice of public alms-seeking. Occasional insights into how the poorer classes viewed beggary are accessible but they are overshadowed by the views of their social superiors.

The right to beg

The act of begging, whilst being widely viewed as a nuisance, a threat and, in certain instances, a criminal offence, was also considered by many to constitute a natural right. The solicitation of assistance from one's fellow man was seen as a natural resort for those in distressed circumstances. In 1826 a gentleman was walking across Carlisle Bridge in Dublin city when he observed a woman being dragged away by two watchmen for public begging. The woman had an infant and two other 'half-starved' children with her. In the eyes of the gentleman the woman constituted a truly deserving case who had a legitimate reason to beg. Writing a letter to the *Dublin Morning Register*, the man commented bitterly: 'Now, Sir, is it not heart-rending to think, that a poor mother who sees her children starving at home, and steals out in the dark of the

evening to implore some sustenance for their support, is to be thrust into a dungeon with the vilest characters that the guardians of the night arrest…'[3]

In an 1830 pamphlet addressing the proposed establishment of a poor law system in Ireland, Henry Flood[4] championed an individual's right to publicly seek alms. 'There is no right more clearly recognised by God and nature, than the right of sueing for the sympathy of our fellow-creatures,' Flood asserted. 'We have peculiar tones of voice, and our features particular muscles, to give expression, as in a universal language, to our wants;…an appeal in public, decent and modest, should not, however frequent, be denied.'[5] His argument was not unqualified, however, and carried the stipulation that 'such beggars as offend, by violent importunity, or by infectious and disgusting exhibitions, should be removed'.[6] Flood did not deny that some beggars were undeserving of assistance. In his opinion begging and alms-giving benefitted both the supplicant and the solicited passer-by. For the former, the exchange exposed them to individuals whom they should aspire to emulate – the sober, the clean, the industrious, the responsible: 'The mind of the sufferer, by enjoying the light of heaven, even by the view of others in health and spirits, and by the hopes of receiving alms, acquires a train of cheerful thoughts which cannot exist in workhouses, or in the society of wretches like himself.'[7] The good example which the upper classes could instil in the lower orders was a common theme in the moralising language of philanthropy in this period. For example, to James Digges La Touche, of the famous Dublin Huguenot banking family, a Sunday School education promoted many beneficial effects for all classes in society:

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[3] Cited in *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 27 Feb. 1826.
[4] The author is not to be confused with the well-known late-eighteenth-century parliamentarian Henry Flood.
[5] Henry Flood, *Poor laws: arguments against a provision for paupers, if it be parochial or perpetual* (Dublin, 1830), p. 15.
[6] Ibid., p. 15.
[7] Ibid., p. 15.

'it brings them in contact together, and tends considerably to harmonise the different ranks of society'.[8]

On the other side of the exchange, beggars reminded the givers of charity of their Christian duty to the poor, whose penury was hidden away in slums which the wealthier citizens rarely experienced first-hand. Flood asserted:

> If misery exists, it ought to be known and to be seen; the presence of the poor, at the entrance of places of worship, disposes our minds to God, who has exempted us from the sufferings we see inflicted on others, perhaps more meritorious, perhaps our former companions and friends. The presence of the poor in the thoroughfares of pleasure or businesses, are living lessons of prudence and moderation to the young and the presumptuous. Children, even before reflection, hence acquire an early habit to feel an interest in their good will and in their blessings.[9]

This view depicted mendicancy as a dual-role exchange, in which both the alms-seeker and the alms-giver performed social and moral roles. Each party reminded the other of their responsibilities. In his travels around Ireland John Gamble met an elderly beggar woman near Monaghan town who sought alms from him. Satisfied with the woman's 'judicious' appeal for assistance, Gamble gave her some money and they parted company 'mutually satisfied with each other'.[10]

This perception of the alms-giving transaction was succinctly expressed in the first report of the Edinburgh Mendicity Society in 1814, wherein the charitable society asserted that in removing importunate beggars from the city streets, it did not wish 'to interfere with the exercise of private charity. They have no intention of robbing the benevolent of this highest privilege which affluence can give; who, in relieving the wants of virtuous and unobtrusive poverty, will find abundance of room for gratifying

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[8] *First report of the commissioners on education in Ireland*, p. 65, H.C. 1825 (400), xii, 69.
[9] Flood, *Poor laws*, p. 15.
[10] Gamble, *Sketches of history, politics, and manners*, pp 184-5.

the best feelings of the human heart'.[11] The language here was similar to that used by the Dublin Mendicity Society five years later, when it expounded on the act of alms-giving, but crucially, noted the flawed logic inherent in an act of indiscriminate assistance: 'It is indeed a custom founded on a prejudice hard to overcome. The benevolent mind will naturally follow the ready impulse; the heart, perhaps, is warmed with the idea of extending relief to apparent misery, and waits not for the slow and needful process of inquiry which can alone insure [sic] its right application: but, be it remembered, this is not charity.'[12] Here, the mendicity society implicitly advertised and extolled its own system of inquiry into and clarification of paupers' true condition before assistance was provided – if provided at all. Criticism of 'mistaken benevolence' ran through numerous reports and studies on the problem of street begging, exposing the folly of indiscriminate alms-giving.[13]

In recording apparently-verbatim testimonies by members of all social classes, the reports of the Poor Inquiry shed light on the immeasurable sense of Christian charity, solidarity, and sociability among the poorer classes which was utterly distinct from, in Niall Ó Ciosáin's words, the 'instrumentalist principles which had dominated discussions of poor relief within the elite for a century or two before the 1830s'.[14] This 'older view of charity', which can be associated with the pre-Famine period, is illustrated in testimony recorded in Inishannon, County Cork, wherein one witness

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[11] *The first report of the society, instituted in Edinburgh on 25th January 1813, for the suppression of beggars, for the relief of occasional distress, and for the encouragement of industry among the poor. With an account of receipts and disbursements from 27th February to 1st November 1813* (Edinburgh, 1814), p. 15.

[12] *Report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1818* (Dublin, 1819), p. 17.

[13] *Report of the general committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1820* (Dublin, 1821), p. 25; *The fifth report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year* (Londonderry, 1830), p. 7; Report on the state of the poor in Waterford city and on the charitable institutions of that city, 5 Apr. 1834 (MS 3288), f28r.

[14] Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), p. 83.

(seemingly, an innkeeper) asserted that he would rather continue giving alms directly to beggars at his door than pay less in monetary terms in a poor tax: 'We would much rather give as we do at present; we do not feel it going;…if I was forced to pay it as a tax, it would not be charity, it would not be my own act;…I would not feel the pleasure of relieving a poor creature with my own hand.'[15] These vignettes demonstrate that throughout all ranks of society – from County Cork innkeepers to the middle-class philanthropists of the Dublin and Edinburgh Mendicity Societies – people placed significant importance on the personal encounter between giver and receiver of charity.

The ubiquitous street beggar

Mendicants were ubiquitous figures in pre-Famine Irish towns and cities, as well as in rural areas. The Biblical teachings 'For ye have the poor always with you' (Matthew 26:11) and 'The poor shall never cease out of the Land' (Deuteronomy 15:11) were countenanced by contemporaries as reflecting God's vision for the world and were regularly cited by polemicists, social commentators and charitable societies.[16] Some, though, drew distinctions between the poor – that wide category of individuals whose definition has always been in a state of flux – and beggars. The former were to be tolerated, the latter suppressed. Similarly, poverty was distinguished from pauperism,

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[15] Cited in Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, p. 83.

[16] *Annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society; (founded in 1790) for visiting and relieving distressed strangers, and the resident sick poor, at their habitations, in Dublin and its vicinity: with an account of some of the cases relieved, and a list of subscribers, for 1823* (Dublin, 1824), p. 5; *Report of the general committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1820* (Dublin, 1821), p. 9; Michael Fitzgerald, *Wickedness and nullity of human laws against mendicancy, and the anti-Christian character of the Irish Poor-law, proved from the consideration of alms-giving, mendicancy, and poor-laws, on Christian and Catholic principles, in a sermon, preached in St. Michael's, Limerick, (on Whitsunday, the 4th of June, 1843,) on behalf of the Thomond-gate male and female schools* (Dublin, 1843), p. 17.

which were seen as the result of misfortune and depravity respectively.[17] Referring to the above passage from Deuteronomy, Catholic priest Rev. Thaddeus O'Malley stated: 'But that blessed Providence, as benevolent as it is wise, has nowhere decreed that amongst those poor there shall be a class of beggars without any other security for the morsel that sustains life in them than the chance pity of the passer-by.'[18] O'Malley drew on this Biblical passage in his argument in favour of a statutory poor law which, he believed, while not possibly extinguishing poverty, ought to target habitual mendicancy.

Estimates as to the precise extent of mendicancy varied, yet it is clear that every town and city had a noticeable extent of paupers and beggars, immeasurable and certainly not invisible. While most sources examined in this thesis depict the beggar as a deviant figure, mendicants were treated by some commentators as merely ubiquitous characters, a constant part of the urban landscape. In one historian's words, beggars were 'a normal part of every street scene'.[19] In such sources the description of beggars reflected a desire neither to denigrate nor champion these individuals, but merely to acknowledge and record the fact that they were an omnipresent part of society. James Malton's painting 'View from Capel Street, looking over Essex Bridge, Dublin' (1797) (Image 3.1) captures this sense of the ubiquity of mendicancy. The painting, part of a set published in the 1790s, was intended to showcase the grandeur of late-eighteenth-century Dublin, particularly the Georgian architecture framing Parliament Street and drawing the eye as far as the Royal Exchange, two recently-completed civic developments. Included in Malton's depiction, however, is a ragged, seemingly indigent beggar, cap in hand and

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[17] Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), p. 122.
[18] Thaddeus O'Malley, *Poor laws – Ireland. An idea of a poor law for Ireland* (2nd ed., London, 1837), p. 1.
[19] Tim Hitchcock, 'Begging on the streets of eighteenth-century London' in *Journal of British Studies*, xliv, no. 3 (July 2005), p. 493.

soliciting alms from a gentleman on horseback. Even within the splendour of pre-Union Dublin, the street beggar was a ubiquitous part of life.[20]

This sentiment occasionally arose in travel accounts by foreigners who typically had no partisan interest in how they represented Ireland's mendicant classes. The German geographer Johann Georg Kohl recorded how in his 1842 travels in Ireland, his Bianconi car was 'constantly surrounded' on the roads between Limerick and Kilkenny, via Cork, by gangs of beggar children in pursuit and soliciting money. 'Bianconi's cars are so constructed as to be of great advantage to these beggars, for the passengers are placed in such a manner as to have them constantly before their eyes, and very close to them…An alteration in the form of these carriages would, should it ever take place, therefore sensibly affect the poor mendicants of Ireland.'[21] The image of the child beggar in pursuit of a car is memorably depicted in Daniel Maclise's 'An outside jaunting car in a storm' (Image 3.2), which accompanied John Barrow's *A Tour round Ireland through the sea-coast counties in the autumn of 1835*, while a Famine-era tract by American evangelical Asenath Nicholson described a coach as a 'rallying point for beggars'.[22]

The visibility of street begging

As a survival strategy begging must be visible to be successful. The invisible mendicant, by the very virtue of him/her not being observed, is ignored by the prospective alms-giver and remains empty-handed. In nineteenth-century Ireland

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[20] A beggar is also portrayed as an inconspicuous character in Malton's 'The west front of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin' (1793).

[21] Quoted in Constantia Maxwell, *The stranger in Ireland from the reign of Elizabeth to the Great Famine* (London, 1954), pp 243-4.

[22] Asenath Nicholson, *Annals of the Famine in Ireland*, ed. Maureen Murphy (1851; Dublin, 1998), p. 142.

Image 3.1 James Malton, 'View from Capel Street, looking over Essex Bridge, Dublin' (1797).

Image 3.2 Daniel Maclise 'An outside jaunting car in a storm' in John Barrow, *A tour round Ireland, through the sea-coast counties, in the autumn of 1835* (London, 1836).

AN OUTSIDE JAUNTING CAR IN A STORM.

beggars could maximise their chances of receiving alms by increasing their visibility, whether through importunate solicitation or through frequenting well-travelled locations through which large amounts of people passed. In 1856 the Church of Ireland clergyman and Poor Law Inspector Rev. Caesar Otway told the story of hearing some years previously that £100 was once paid 'for a beggar's right to beg on Palmerstown Hill, near Chapelizod' outside Dublin city.[23] Whether or not £100 was ever paid, or to whom, for the right to beg on Palmerstown Hill is not important; what is significant is the perception, passed down orally, that beggars prized prime locations for plying their trade, where their visibility and access to prospective alms-givers was maximised. Given the importance of visibility to the successful solicitation of alms, this aspect of the problem focused minds and mobilised public opinion. During the construction of Nelson's pillar on a prominent site half-way up Dublin's Sackville Street, the city's main thoroughfare, it was feared that the new memorial column was poorly sited and 'promises to be a rallying point for beggars and idlers to gather round, and choak [sic] up a very important opening in the confluence of four streets'.[24] As Jacinta Prunty has observed, 'it was the visibility of such persons that led to public concern'.[25] Addressing the related urban problem of prostitution, Maria Luddy has argued that the 'most common concern about prostitution was its visibility'.[26]

The visibility of ragged and disease-ridden mendicants offended the sensitivities of the middle classes who increasingly prized respectability in one's conduct and appearance. M.J.D. Roberts has written of the 'well documented increase in sensitivity to the sight of suffering among bourgeois ranks over the period of accelerated

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[23] *Ninth annual report of the Commissioners for Administering the Laws for relief of the poor in Ireland, with appendices*, appendix A, no. 4, p. 54, H.C. 1856 [C 2105], xxviii, 468.
[24] *Leinster Journal,* 14 May 1808.
[25] Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), p. 196.
[26] Maria Luddy, "'Abandoned women and bad characters": prostitution in nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Women's History Review*, vi, no. 4 (1997), p. 491.

commercial and urban growth, of intensified intellectual and political ferment, which began in the mid-eighteenth century'.[27] The removal of these eye-sores from public spaces frequented by the respectable classes was an important motivating factor behind initiatives to suppress street begging. In the first report of the Londonderry Mendicity Society, the public was reminded of 'how great has been the improvement effected by the removal of so many miserable objects from public view'.[28] To some commentators, the visibility of mendicants was linked to the perceived natural right to beg, to solicit assistance from one's fellow man. Beggars could be considered an indispensable presence in a truly Christian society. One anonymous author went so far as to implicitly criticise legislative attempts to suppress the visibility of mendicancy as mere measures to protect the interests of the urban middle classes. Referring to the beggars and vagrants who were criminalised under the 1847 Vagrancy Act, the author, aiming his acerbic comments at the supporters of the statute, wrote: 'They [beggars] may crawl along the by-ways or through the fields – they may pine in the prison – they may die in their desolate homes – but they must not drag their gaunt frames and ghastly visages into "The marts where merchants most do congregate."'[29]

The ability of beggary to shock the wealthier classes partially drove opposition to the relocation of the Dublin Mendicity Society's premises from Copper Alley in the city centre to Usher's Island on the western outskirts of the city. Householders from St Audeon's parish, whereto the institution was to be relocated, complained that Usher's Island was 'the principal entrance to the City from the West of Ireland' and feared the

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[27] M.J.D. Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship: the London Mendicity Society and the suppression of begging in England, 1818-1869' in *International Review of Social History*, xxxvi (1991), p. 205.

[28] *The first report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year* (Londonderry, 1826), pp 6-7.

[29] Anon., 'Tenant right, repeal and poor laws: dangers and duties of the Conservative Party and landed interest in Ireland' in *Dublin University Magazine*, xxxi, no. 181 (Jan. 1848), pp 142-3. The final phrase in this quote is from William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

concentration of 'such a mass of pauperism & wretchedness' at this prominent location.[30] To allay these fears the society assured the parishioners that access to the institution from Usher's Island, which fronted onto the River Liffey, 'will only be made use of by the gentlemen of the Committee and the Visitors of the Institution, and in that respect it will not at all differ from a private house. The entrance for the poor will be altogether from Island Street [a back lane to the rear of the property] and so cannot in the least degree be a nuisance to any one'.[31] A later minute explicitly stated that the purpose of erecting a 'proper wall' at the front of the premises was 'so as to prevent the Mendicants being seen at work from the quay'.[32] These arrangements ensured that the beggars' access and egress to and from the institution would be kept out of sight of the main thoroughfare.

The importance of the spectacle of mendicancy is evident in the Dublin Mendicity Society's decision in September 1818, and again in September 1828 and August 1839, to parade beggars through the streets of the city.[33] The motivation behind these bizarre exhibitions was to increase pressure on those 'most callous and thoughtless' inhabitants of Dublin who refused, yet were able, to financially contribute to the society, and these parades were usually held at times of diminished income due to falling subscriptions.[34] The initiative also carried an implicit threat: if the institution fails due to insufficient

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[30] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 18 June 1822 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/2).

[31] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 25 June 1822.

[32] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 28 Oct. 1823 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/3); ibid., 23 Dec., 30 Dec. 1823.

[33] Audrey Woods, *Dublin outsiders: a history of the Mendicity Institution, 1818-1998* (Dublin, 1998), pp 21, 84, 116. See also *FJ*, 21 Sept. 1826. A similar instance of an unidentified mendicity society 'of a commercial town' parading paupers to the houses of non-subscribers is cited by an anonymous pamphleteer, but it is not clear whether the author was referring to the Dublin society and one of the aforementioned instances: Anon., *A letter to the Right Hon. Lord Goderich, on the deplorable condition of the helpless poor in Ireland, with a plan of relief, as at present partly in operation in several districts of the province of Ulster. By a member of a parochial poor relief committee* (Dublin, 1827), p. 21.

[34] *Twenty-second annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1839* (Dublin, 1840), p. 8. The parading of beggars was discussed in the summer of 1836, at a time of 'alarming emergency' for the society, but postponed: Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 13 June 1836 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/5); ibid., 14 June, 14 July 1836.

financial support from the public, behold what will hereafter be unleashed upon the city. A number of sources indicate the use of verbal aggression by the hordes of mendicants to secure contributions from non-subscribers. According to one commentator, the procession stopped outside the houses of individuals who had refused to subscribe to the charity 'and set up a shout of execration'.[35] A newspaper report claimed that the mendicity society 'sent the starving paupers to besiege the houses of non-subscribers, with incessant applications for assistance, and the consequence was, that their funds for the ensuing year were amply sufficient for the demands that were made upon them'. Such a policy was justified, and indeed encouraged, by the paper's editor, who argued that 'itinerant beggars should be allowed to infest the doors of such characters as these', who absconded from their duty in contributing to the suppression of mendicancy in their city.[36] With crowds of mendicants congregating and shouting outside their home, the besieged householders undoubtedly felt much pressure and intimidation to financially support the institution in future. The Coleraine Mendicity Society deployed a different tactic, in threatening to publish the names of those who did not subscribe to the charity.[37] The Dublin society came under pressure in 1830 to cancel its proposed parade of beggars due to the 'determined opposition' of the Lord Mayor and the government, although the reason for this opposition is not recorded. Through gritted teeth the charity consented to the request but not without expressing its belief that previous parades had proved 'both harmless & beneficial'.[38]

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[35] John Douglas, *Observations on the necessity of a legal provision for the Irish poor, as the means of improving the condition of the Irish people, and protecting the British landlord, farmer and labourer* (London, 1828), p. 24.
[36] *BNL*, 10 Jan. 1832.
[37] *OS Memoirs*, xxxiii, p. 73.
[38] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 14 Sept. 1830 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/4); ibid., 12 Oct. 1830.

Spread of disease

The association between disease and mendicancy predates any scientific understanding of the former. Disease, while being no discriminator between the social classes, nonetheless targeted the poor disproportionately. Consequences of poverty, such as an insufficient diet and wretched living conditions, increased one's susceptibility to infection and in pre-Famine Ireland, the onslaught of illness could rapidly propel a once-industrious and independent family into a life of dependency and even destitution. The cost of medical treatment from what became the three pillars of 'orthodox' medicine – physicians, surgeons and apothecaries – was beyond the means of many poor people, who at times fell back on generational practices of 'unorthodox' practitioners, domestic remedies and occasional self-treatment.[39] Whereas in England, medical care was provided to the poor through the parish-based Elizabethan poor law,[40] the absence of a poor law in Ireland left a vacuum for the systematic relief of the sick poor which would not be filled until the middle of the eighteenth century. The emergence at this time of medical charities aimed at relieving the sick poor, and the gradual evolution of a network of voluntary hospitals, county infirmaries, dispensaries and fever hospitals, transformed the welfare landscape of modern Ireland.[41] However, while advances were being made in the provision of welfare services, as well as the scientific understanding of diseases and their treatment, traditional perceptions surrounding disease persisted, including the centuries-old association between mendicants and the spread of disease.

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[39] James Kelly, 'Domestic medication and medical care in late early modern Ireland' in James Kelly and Fiona Clark (eds), *Ireland and medicine in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Dublin, 2010), pp 109-35.
[40] Joan Lane, *A social history of medicine: health, healing and disease in England, 1750-1950* (London and New York, 2001), pp 44-54.
[41] Laurence M. Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland, 1718-1851* (Dublin, 2004).

The connection between beggars and the dissemination of plague was appreciated by societies in medieval and early-modern Europe when stigmatisation and expulsion of the vagrant poor was common.[42] In Ireland in the same period similar associations can be identified. The enforcement of punitive measures against vagrants and beggars intensified at times of plague,[43] with Thomas Moylan King commenting that: 'The beggar was not merely a nuisance, an idler and an annoyance; he was a definite source of danger to the community, from whom the shadow of plague was never very far distant.'[44] The spread of fever during the 1739-41 famine led to increased punitive measures against vagrants and beggars,[45] while throughout the nineteenth century, beggars were blamed for introducing and disseminating disease – most commonly typhus fever, cholera and smallpox – to both rural and urban areas across Ireland.[46] Indeed, the very language deployed in public discourse on the topic of mendicancy was full of the imagery of disease and pestilence. Areas were commonly described as being 'infested' with 'swarms' of beggars, evoking images of an onslaught of immoral, diseased-ridden vagabonds of Biblical proportions.[47]

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[42] Robert Jütte, *Poverty and deviance in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2001), pp 22-3.

[43] Colm Lennon, '*Dives* and Lazarus in sixteenth-century Ireland' in Hill and Lennon (eds), *Luxury and austerity*, pp 56-7; Joseph Robins, *The miasma: epidemic and panic in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), pp 27-8.

[44] Thomas King Moylan, 'Vagabonds and sturdy beggars, I: poverty, pigs and pestilence in medieval Dublin' in *Dublin Historical Record*, i, no. 1 (Mar. 1938), p.12.

[45] David Dickson, *Arctic Ireland: the extraordinary story of the great frost and forgotten famine of 1740-41* (Belfast, 1998), p. 56.

[46] In the case of typhus, see: *FJ*, 10 Sept. 1817; *Dublin Journal*, 13 Sept. 1817; *Report from the select committee on the contagious fever in Ireland*, p. 2, H.C. 1818 (285), vii, 54; F. Barker and J. Cheyne, *An account of the rise, progress, and decline of the fever lately epidemic in Ireland, together with communications from physicians in the provinces, and various official documents*, (2 vols, Dublin, 1821), i, p. 66; ibid., p. 141. For cholera in 1832, see: *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 560; Robins, *The miasma*, p. 76; Michelle Mangan, 'A comparison of the experiences of Dublin city and Limerick city during the cholera epidemic of 1832' in Gillian O'Brien and Finola O'Kane (eds), *Georgian Dublin* (Dublin, 2008), p. 189. For smallpox in the 1880s, see J.P. Murray, *Galway: A medico-social history* (Galway, n.d. [*c*. 1993]), p. 107.

[47] Examples of the use of such language throughout this period include: Richard Graves, *A sermon in aid of the United Charitable Society for the Relief of Indigent room-keepers, preached in St. Werburgh's Church, February 21st, 1796* (Dublin, 1796), p. 8; John Milner Barry, *Report of the House of Recovery and Fever Hospital of the city of Cork, from 8th November 1816, to 8th November 1817: containing observations on the occasional causes and prevention of the present epidemic fever* (Cork, 1818), p. 21;

The belief that beggars were a common factor in the propagation of typhus fever throughout pre-Famine Ireland is supported not only by the sheer volume of primary sources attributing some responsibility to this origin but by an understanding of the nature of typhus fever and its propagation. Such an understanding only became possible in the middle of the nineteenth century when the publication of William Jenner's work in 1849 led to the identification of typhus, typhoid and relapsing fever as distinct diseases, while it was not until 1869 that the Irish Registrar General distinguished between typhus and typhoid.[48] As was widely known among the Irish population generations before it was proven scientifically,[49] wandering mendicants were ideal agents for disseminating typhus fever from locality to locality. Typhus is a febrile disease of the small blood vessels which become damaged following 'invasion' by *Rickettsia*, bacterial organisms which each measure approximately $1/50,000^{th}$ of an inch in length. The disease is carried by body lice, which leave their host for a new host following fluctuations in body temperature.[50] Therefore, the lice-ridden rags worn by the wandering beggars of the pre-Famine period were ideal vehicles for the safe breeding of the febrile organisms, while the insanitary habits and transient lifestyle of such individuals ensured the spread of the disease.

While the precise nature of typhus and its manner of propagation was unknown in the early nineteenth century, the integral link between mendicancy and the disease was

First report from the select committee on the state of disease, and condition of the labouring poor, in Ireland, p. 70, H.C. 1819 (314), viii, 434; *FJ,* 4 Feb. 1819; 'Copy of resolutions of the governors of the Cork House of Industry', 13 Apr. 1819 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1819/271/A); *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 13 Nov. 1824.

[48] E. Margaret Crawford, 'Typhus in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Greta Jones and Elizabeth Malcolm (eds), *Medicine, disease and the state in Ireland, 1650-1940* (Cork, 1999), p. 122.

[49] According to Laurence Geary, 'the exposure of the Irish people to centuries of fever left them with an unrivalled knowledge of the symptoms and consequences of the disease': Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland*, p. 75.

[50] William MacArthur, 'Medical history of the famine' in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds), *The great famine: studies in Irish history, 1845-52* (Revised ed., Dublin, 1994), pp 265-6; Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland*, p. 70.

appreciated. The first report of the Dublin Mendicity Society, founded in 1818 at the height of the aforementioned epidemic, asserted that 'crowds of unfortunate and clamorous beggars' frequently carried about 'in their persons and garments the seeds of contagious diseases'.[51] The *Freeman's Journal*, in September 1817, echoed these views, stating that 'it is ascertained that contagious infection is retained a long time in the foul rags of these miserable outcasts, and has been too frequently scattered by them through the country, with general and baleful effects'.[52] In a similar vein Dr Francis Barker of the Cork Street Fever Hospital in Dublin asserted that 'fever and mendicity, like many other evils, are reciprocally productive, and the suppression of either must tend to that of both'.[53] Through the spread of disease, the mendicant's nomadic habits led to increasing demands for the limited resources of the country's medical institutions and charities. In a report of a sub-committee of the Kilkenny House of Industry, it was stated that the claims on the funds of the city's fever hospital and dispensary 'must diminish when the beggar is prevented from strolling about, and spreading where he goes the seeds of contagion'.[54]

Case study: Beggars and the 1817-19 fever epidemic

The end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 saw the demobilisation of hundreds of thousands of men across Europe. The regular British armed forces serving at home and abroad dropped 44 per cent from 239,431 in December 1813 to 134,699 in April 1817.[55]

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[51] *Report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1818* (Dublin, 1819), p. 2.
[52] *FJ*, 10 Sept. 1817
[53] F. Barker, *Medical report of the house of recovery and fever-hospital, in Cork-street, Dublin* (Dublin, 1818), pp 43-4.
[54] *Leinster Journal*, 19 Apr. 1820.
[55] *Return of the effective strength of the regular and militia forces, on the 25th June, and 25th December, 1813; distinguishing foreign and colonial corps, cavalry, foot guards, and infantry; and specifying the*

In France, the final years of the Napoleonic wars saw considerable levels not only of demobilisation but also of desertion.[56] In Britain, Ireland and France, these newly unemployed men returned home in the midst of a Europe-wide post-war economic downturn and 'swamped the rural labour market, which was already glutted with excess labour, with even greater numbers of the unemployable'.[57] With limited means to earn a livelihood, many turned to a traditional survival strategy and took to the road, adopting a vagrant life and subsisting through either casual labour where they could find it or begging, or both.[58]

Added to the distress of this international economic downturn were a number of consecutive poor harvests and a severe typhus fever epidemic. This outbreak was particularly destructive in Ireland. In Dublin another factor, singular to the city, contributed to the deepening of the demographic and medical crisis. In 1816 the city's House of Industry, which for more than forty years had been the main place of confinement for street beggars, ceased admitting mendicants through compulsion into its premises in the north city. This policy shift, undertaken by the state-funded institution on the orders of Dublin Castle, was initiated with the stated aim of focusing

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number of each serving at home and abroad, p. 1, H.C. 1813-14 (117), xi, 283; *Return of the effective strength of the British army, serving at home and abroad (exclusive of artillery) on 25th April 1817, distinguishing officers, cavalry, foot guards, and infantry*, p. 1, H.C. 1817 (337), xiii, 203. Further illustrating the reduction of the armed forces in the post-war years, the army budget fell from £43 million in 1815 to £10.7 million in 1820: Peter Burroughs, 'An unreformed army? 1815-1868' in David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds), *The Oxford history of the British army* (Oxford, 1994), p. 163. In 1814, Patrick Colquhoun estimated that of the almost 500,000 men then employed in the military, naval and civil departments, two-thirds would be made redundant following the peace of that year: Patrick Colquhoun, *A treatise on the wealth, power and resources of the British empire, in every quarter of the world, including the East Indies. The rise and progress of the funding system explained: with observations on the national resources of the beneficial employment of a redundant population, and for rewarding the military and naval officers, soldiers, and seamen, for their services to their country during the late war. Illustrated by copious statistical tables, constructed on a new plan, and exhibiting a collected view of the different subjects discussed in this work* (London, 1814), p. 417.
[56] Annie Moulin, *Peasantry and society in France since 1789*, translated by M.C. and M.F. Cleary (Cambridge, 1991), p. 46.
[57] E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing* (London, 1970), p. 72. See also M.J.D. Roberts, *Making English morals: voluntary association and moral reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 101.
[58] Moulin, *Peasantry and society in France*, p. 46.

the House of Industry's resources on relieving various categories of the sick poor, whom Chief Secretary Robert Peel described as 'the proper objects of admission into the House of Industry'.[59] The continued admission of 'vagrant and refractory beggars, constituting that class which is called the compelled' would, it was believed, stretch the institution's resources beyond its capacity.[60] In this light, Jacinta Prunty has perceived the decision, taken following overcrowding crises in 1815 and 1816 and the 'anarchy' involved in indiscriminate admissions of the vagrant poor, as revealing the institution determining 'to wash its hands of the troublesome classes'. Ironically, while the House of Industry governors could proudly assert in their annual report for 1818 that the 'aged and infirm now fill the places formerly preoccupied by the vagrant and healthy' resulting in 'more health, cleanliness, sobriety and order'[61] inside the institution, they could hardly ignore the fact that on the city streets outside the walls of the House of Industry, the consequences of their actions were to be seen in horrific reality. Large parts of the Dublin outside those walls, the Dublin of 1818, were anything but healthy, clean, sober and orderly. In the case of Cork, the unique levels of distress was attributed to the diminished quantity and quality of food, increased commercial failures 'owing to the transition from war to peace', 'mendicants flocking to the city, and the needy in general crowding thither in search of employment'.[62]

The fever epidemic raged for almost three years in Ireland and contemporary estimates placed the total number of fatalities at up to 65,000, while 1.5 million people

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[59] Copy of letter (original dated 14 Sept. 1816) from Robert Peel to the House of Industry governors, n.d. (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1820/688). See also Report of Dr Robert Perceval on the admission of sturdy beggars to the House of Industry, 30 Jan. 1821 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/1160/5(1)); *Observations on the House of Industry, Dublin; and on the plans of the association for suppressing mendicity in that city* (Dublin, 1818), p. 6.
[60] Robert Peel to the House of Industry governors.
[61] Quoted in Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 203.
[62] *First report from the select committee on the state of disease*, p. 16.

were believed to have been afflicted with disease at some point during the outbreak.[63] As the country struggled, and in many cases failed, to cope with the level of distress, attempts were made by well-placed observers – mainly, medical practitioners – to identify the causes of the epidemic. A common thread through the wealth of diverse primary sources is the belief, evidently correct, that wandering beggars were a leading, if not the principal, cause for the rapid spread of disease.

A number of histories on the epidemic were published in the decade or so after its demise and all highlighted the role that mendicants played in spreading the disease. In their sweeping history of Dublin Warburton et al. stated that 'through Dublin it [typhus] was supposed to be propagated by 5,000 beggars who conveyed the contagion in their clothes from street to street and from house to house'.[64] The authors echoed the widely-held view that contagion was introduced into the city by the wandering mendicant poor from across Ireland and once the epidemic established a footing amongst the population, its progress through the overcrowded, unsanitary dwellings of the city's poorer classes was unrelenting. Another account of the epidemic is that co-authored by Doctors Francis Barker and John Cheyne,[65] who were physicians in the Cork Street Fever Hospital and House of Industry respectively. Barker and Cheyne attributed the spread of contagion to wandering mendicants and their 'filthy and neglected clothing', while the custom among the poor, particularly in rural areas, of providing lodging to strange

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[63] Barker and Cheyne, *An account of the rise, progress, and decline of the fever lately epidemic in Ireland*, i, pp 145, 62. These figures have been largely accepted as being accurate by historians: Timothy P. O'Neill, 'Fever and public health in pre-Famine Ireland' in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* ciii (1973), p. 10; Robins, *The miasma*, p. 60; Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland*, p. 74.

[64] J. Warburton, J. Whitelaw and Robert Walsh, *History of the city of Dublin, from the earliest accounts to the present time; containing its annals, antiquities, ecclesiastical, history, and charters; its present extent, public buildings, schools, institutions, & c. to which are added biographical notices of eminent men, and copious appendices of its population, revenue, commerce, and literature* (2 vols, London, 1818), ii, p. 1346.

[65] James Quinn, 'Barker, Francis' in *DIB*, i, pp 273-4; J.B. Lyons, 'Cheyne, John' in *DIB*, ii, pp 489-91.

beggars was seen as contributing to 'this evil'.[66] While other factors contributed to the spread of the disease, the significance of beggary in this regard was such that the government (belatedly) passed a fever act in May 1819 to counter this problem.[67] Confirming the argument that beggars played a crucial part in the dissemination of the disease, the physicians of the Cork Street Fever Hospital stated in a letter to the St Catherine's parish vestry in January 1818, by which time the epidemic had raged in all parts of the city, that they were 'satisfied by accounts received from every part of the Country that Beggars have contributed greatly to extend infection'.[68]

In a self-penned report Dr Cheyne expanded on this matter and placed the blame for the spread of disease squarely at the feet of the country's wandering mendicants. While noting the role played by other social factors, such as the holding of wakes and gathering at fairs and chapels, Cheyne continued by stating that

> it is probably not known to what extent the vagrant habits of many of the poor and the migratory movements of the beggars prove injurious by disseminating contagion. These are chiefly observable in the South and West of Ireland, but the North is not altogether exempt from the evil; indeed it is generally thought that the beggars were the great carriers of contagion during the late epidemic, and that to them it was owing that the disease spread so rapidly all over Ireland.[69]

Cheyne based his analysis on correspondence with medical practitioners from across Ireland and his notes attest to the strength with which the association between beggars and disease was held by medical men at this time. Table 3.1 reveals the locations where doctors, in correspondence with Cheyne, attributed the spread of disease to the wandering habits of mendicants. This table is not comprehensive and not every county

[66] Barker and Cheyne, *An account of the rise, progress, and decline of the fever lately epidemic in Ireland*, i, p. 141; 'A table of the population of Church and Barrack Street', n.d. [*c*. late-1817] (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP474/8).
[67] 59 Geo. III, c. 41 (27 May 1819).
[68] St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 24 Jan. 1818 (RCBL, St Catherine's parish vestry minute books, P 117.05.7).
[69] Report of Dr John Cheyne, physician attached to the Dublin House of Industry, on the fever epidemic in Ireland, 1819 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1819/229).

Table 3.1. Reports from medical practitioners across Ireland, in which the spread of disease was attributed to beggars, 1817.[70]

County	Town	Date of report (1817)	Reference to beggars
Cavan	Cavan	19 Sept.	Disease spread by 'beggars'; 'beggars expelled [from the town]'
Donegal	Ballyshannon	17 Sept.	'spread by beggars'
Down	Downpatrick	3 Sept.	Outbreak 'preceded by smallpox which was introduced by vagrant beggars'
Fermanagh	Enniskillen	18 Sept.	'propagated by beggars'
Tyrone	Omagh	18 Sept.	'propagated by beggars'
Carlow	Bagnelstown	18 Sept.	'spread by mendicants'
King's County (Offaly)	Tullamore	12 Sept.	'contagion introduced by stranger beggars'
King's County	Parsonstown (Birr)	15 Sept.	'disease introduced by beggars'
Kilkenny	Durrow[71]	21 Sept.	'caused by misery of every kind - despondency, idleness, but particularly by contagion carried about by beggars from house to house'
Longford	n/a	17 Sept.	'communicated by mendicants'
Wicklow	n/a	1 Sept.	'many cases of fever were traced to strolling mendicants, who were taken in from motives of charity'
Cork	Mallow	20 Sept.	'disease spread by migrating beggars'
Galway	Loughrea	n.d.	'infection from poor beggars who came from Galway'
Roscommon	Elphin	12 Sept.	'contagion spread by beggars'
Roscommon	Roscommon	22 Sept.	'In May, disorder formidably spread by legions of beggars, who traversed the whole face of the country.'

[70] 'Four provincial reports by Drs Perceval and Cheyne on the state of the public health in Ireland', 1817 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP474/22). While other factors, such as the poor quality of food, chronic poverty and poor lodgings, were also presented as factors determining the virulence of the epidemic, this table identifies those reports where mendicants were cited as the propagators of contagion.

[71] This townland is not to be confused with the large post-town of Durrow in Queen's County (Laois).

is represented. In the original table compiled by Dr Cheyne and Dr Robert Perceval of the Hardwicke Fever Hospital, every county, excepting Limerick and Mayo, was included and in seventeen of those thirty counties (56.66 per cent), the correspondent did not specifically attribute the propagation of the epidemic to mendicants. While taking this into consideration it can be seen, however, that the table *does* demonstrate that across Ireland, indeed in each of the four provinces, the introduction of typhus fever into a particular area was attributed by locals to wandering beggars.

In a later document the recorded views of other practitioners were laid out by Cheyne. A Dr Galway, writing from Mallow, County Cork, observed that his area had witnessed an increase in migrating mendicants from County Kerry, and claimed that 'every farmer's pig sty and out hovel was occupied by groups of squalid creatures, who were still seen crawling…[and] begging alms, in all lapses of typhus fever'. At the far end of the country, in Ballyshannon, County Donegal, a local gentleman commented that 'fever has been kept up and widely spread by the hospitality of the people allowing lodgings to mendicants and poor travellers'. In the east, a Dr Johnston in Athy, County Kildare stated that 'fever was brought into this neighbourhood by itinerant beggars and labourers. The inhabitants of the cabins where they lodged all took the fever.'[72] While mendicants were held to be carriers of contagion, it was only through their interaction with other people that disease could be disseminated through the population. Intercourse between the general population and beggars was strongly discouraged, a most difficult proposition given the widespread practice, particularly in rural areas, of admitting wandering vagrants into one's home, where food or a place to sleep would be offered.[73]

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[72] Report of Dr John Cheyne on the fever epidemic in Ireland, n.d. [*c*. 1819].
[73] Evidence of this practice is to be found in *First report from the select committee on the state of disease*, p. 42 (Co. Galway); ibid., p. 70 (Wexford town); ibid., p. 74 (Ballitore, Co. Kildare). In 1826, a public notice issued in Roscrea, County Tipperary advised householders: 'Don't let strolling Beggars enter your

In Galway city, members of the 'lower orders' were advised to be 'particular in the admission of strange beggars to their houses', while a printed notice from 1817, for an unspecified Ulster location, advised the public: 'do not lodge Beggars, unless in an outhouse'.[74] A parliamentary report on the epidemic claimed that the rural poor's association of disease with mendicants led them to be 'stern and repulsive' towards such individuals and driving 'all beggars from their doors, charging them with being the authors of their greatest misfortunes, by spreading disease through the country'.[75] In counties Wicklow and Wexford, the practice of giving shelter to mendicants was admonished from the altar by several priests.[76]

The influx of large numbers of the vagrant and mendicant poor into towns and cities heightened fears of an introduction of disease into those localities. In many urban centres, therefore, systems of expulsion were enforced, thus reviving a practice which had operated across Europe since medieval times.[77] In a number of locations, guards were stationed at the perimeters of the town, with strict orders to prevent mendicants entering. In Tullamore in King's County, 'sickly itinerants' were intercepted by guards and prevented admission to the town, which shut down trade and other interactions with neighbouring areas and was described as being 'thus in a state of blockade'.[78] Similar measures were adopted in Roscommon town.[79] This policy of expulsion and prohibition was praised by the *Freeman's Journal* as being as 'justifiable as that first law, or self-

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homes as they frequently carry infection from one house to another': Poster entitled 'To the public!! Advice to prevent fever', 1826 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1826/15206).

[74] *Connaught Journal*, 15 Sept. 1817, quoted in John Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea': Galway, 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004), p. 57; 'Printed notice giving rules to observe for the avoidance of fever', 10 Dec. 1817 (PRONI, Abercorn Papers, D623/A/131/3).

[75] *First report from the select committee on the state of disease*, p. 76.

[76] *First report from the select committee on the state of disease*, p. 71.

[77] For a consideration of what Jütte has termed 'the ancient remedy of expulsion', see Jütte, *Poverty and deviance in early modern Europe*, pp 165-9.

[78] Barker and Cheyne, *An account of the rise, progress, and decline of the fever lately epidemic in Ireland,* i, p. 60

[79] *First report from the select committee on the state of disease*, p. 46.

preserving duty, that allows the depriving a fellow creature of life, if it shall become indispensably necessary for the protection of our own'.[80] The warding off of beggars was seen as a matter of self-defence, justified by resort to natural law. In a timely work entitled *Observations on contagion*, published in 1817, Dr Whitley Stokes defended such fears, arguing that 'mendicity is a great cause of disseminating contagion. This has been an observation only too well established in various epidemics. This subject should be speedily attended to. It seems inconsistent to lay vessels from Charlestown under quarantine and keep the avenues of the city open to beggars, who flock from all the infected districts of our country.'[81]

Beggars as a threat to commercial life

For the trading community in urban areas, the prevalence of hordes of mendicants posed a constant threat to business. Street beggars caused a nuisance to passers-by, importunately pushing out a soliciting hand or in many instances, a famished infant. Furthermore, persons having intercourse with such individuals ran the risk of contracting a potentially fatal disease. Business owners feared that customers, frustrated with being imposed upon by alms-seekers, would take their custom elsewhere. The first report of the Waterford Mendicity Society complained of the doors of shops being crowded 'by persons whose clamours impeded the transaction of business, and often obliged the intending purchaser to make a precipitate retreat to some other place, where he vainly expected to experience less annoyance'.[82] G.N. Wright's *Historical guide to the city of Dublin* (1825) recalled that just a few years previously 'whenever a well-

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[80] *FJ*, 10 Sept. 1817.
[81] Whitley Stokes, *Observations on contagion* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1818), p. 56.
[82] *First annual report, of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in the City of Waterford* (Waterford, 1822), p. 4.

dressed person entered a shop to purchase any thing, the door was beset by beggars, awaiting his egress'.[83] In the 1770s Church of Ireland bishop Richard Woodward referred to the common practice of shopkeepers providing a weekly subvention to beggars 'on condition of their not molesting their doors, and interrupting their business'.[84] A similar weekly 'allowance' was also provided by shopkeepers in the market town of Naas, County Kildare to approximately 100 local beggars in the 1830s. The stated justification for such charity was that the shopkeepers 'prefer a regular weekly allowance to being annoyed daily'.[85] In Cork city, it was commented that 'the respectable shopkeepers often give to get rid of a teazing [sic] beggar'.[86]

This fear on the part of the trading community is also represented in the first two annual reports of the Dublin Mendicity Society. The reports carried on their title pages the *Spectator*'s assertion of a century earlier that "Of all men living we Merchants, who live by buying and selling ought never to encourage Beggars".[87] The prominence given to this quote in the founding literature of the mendicity society signifies that the commercial middle classes were the main economic grouping that constituted the membership of the organisation and also that this cohort of merchants perceived themselves and their economic interests as being acutely vulnerable to the 'evil' of beggary. The first report of the Dublin Mendicity Society bemoaned the fact that 'the doors of carriages and shops, to the interruption of business, were beset by crowds of unfortunate and clamorous beggars, exhibiting misery and decrepitude in a variety of

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[83] G.N. Wright, *An historical guide to the city of Dublin, illustrated by engravings, and a plan of the city* (2nd ed., London, 1825), p. 125.
[84] Richard Woodward, *An address to the public, on the expediency of a regular plan for the maintenance and government of the poor: in which its utility with respect……..* (Dublin, 1775), p. 25.
[85] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 556.
[86] Ibid., p. 673.The Poor Inquiry also identified this practice in County Antrim (ibid., pp 703, 707) and Mullingar, County Westmeath (ibid., pp 590-91).
[87] This assertion is from *The Spectator*, no. 232 (26 Nov. 1711), quoted on the title pages of *Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818* and *Second report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, 1819* (Dublin, 1820).

forms',[88] while the *Freeman's Journal*, commenting that the capital was 'already overcrowded with groupes [sic] of mendicants', editorialised at the commencement of the 1817-19 fever epidemic: 'one can't stop in the streets for a moment without being encircled and obtruded on by them; all the markets are dreadfully infested with beggars; and most of the shop doors are completely stopped up by them'.[89]

As Jacinta Prunty has observed, 'because of the proximity of the city slums to the wealthy residential districts and the commercial heart of the city, the scandal of the famished and desperate readily spilled over to the very hall-doors and shop-fronts of respectable society, even at times of apparent 'normality".[90] For the inhabitants of Dublin city at this time, who mostly worked within the metropolis, mendicants were a ubiquitous presence on the streets where they lived, worked, shopped and worshipped. According to the Poor Inquiry's report on vagrancy and mendicancy in Dublin city in the mid-1830s, 'if you frequent the more public and fashionable streets, at every corner your eyes alight upon some young widow; or the deserted wife, with two or three helpless children…At almost every door your alms are solicited in the shape of a purchase of some little article by a female, who urges on your attention the claims of a sick husband or children.'[91]

In a charity sermon in 1811 for the benefit of the Belfast House of Industry, which was established two years previously for the purpose of suppressing street begging, the town's inhabitants were reminded of 'the numerous groups of beggars which beset their shops' prior to the activities of the charity.[92] One week later, complaining of what he considered to be the meagre £140 raised at this charity sermon, a 'Paddy Driscol' wrote

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[88] *Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*, p. 2.
[89] *FJ*, 10 Sept. 1817.
[90] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 201.
[91] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 27a*.
[92] *BNL*, 12 Feb. 1811. For the Belfast House of Industry, see Chapter Four.

a letter to the editor of the *Belfast Newsletter*, criticising the citizens of Belfast for their alleged 'apathy'. His first targets were members of the town's business community: 'Are the shopkeepers unwilling to pay a small contribution towards preventing their shops being crowded with beggars, to the great annoyance of themselves and their customers?'[93]

These fears on the part of the commercial classes of urban areas were not confined to Dublin and Belfast. In Drogheda it was observed that the most common form of begging was 'for the mendicants to go from door to door, chiefly to the shops, as these are open, and the tradesman when engaged in serving a customer will often give something to a beggar in order to be rid of his importunity'.[94] For traders the short-term solution of giving alms superseded any consideration of the long-term pernicious practice of indiscriminate alms-giving. Economic survival trumped moral principle. The impact in this regard of the Galway Mendicity Society, which was established in July 1824, was 'immediate and palpable' according to one local paper.[95] Some months earlier, the *Connaught Journal* had called for the establishment of a mendicity society by members of the city's commercial class, 'whose shops are beset, and whose profits must be considerably diminished by the droves of beggars that haunt every part of this Town'.[96] One year later, another paper, the *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, elatedly reported: 'our doors that used to be infested by a horde of vagrants were left unmolested, and strangers could pass in and out of our shops, and make their purchases, without having their eyes offended by the squalid filth, or the ears shocked by the horrid imprecations of

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[93] *BNL*, 19 Feb. 1811.
[94] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 49. See also *Drogheda Journal*, 4 Sept. 1840, cited in Ned McHugh, *Drogheda before the Famine: urban poverty in the shadow of privilege, 1826-45* (Dublin, 1998), p. 46 n. 30.
[95] *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 13 Nov. 1824.
[96] *Connaught Journal*, 6 Oct. 1823, cited in Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea'*, p. 48.

mendicants of the worst description'.[97] This perception of urban business communities

being subjected to irrepressible waves of mendicants was conveyed by Dr John Milner

Barry of the Cork House of Recovery, who claimed that 'swarms of beggars, which

infested our streets…stormed every door and shop'.[98] Another Cork gentlemen

described the city as being 'inundated with them', adding: 'They blocked up the doors

of the principal shops, or attended the public conveyances at their arrival and departure,

cursing or praying with equal fervour, as their application was granted or refused.'[99]

The plight of the Dublin trading community was raised with the officialdom in Dublin

Castle in a letter from Dr Robert Perceval to Chief Secretary Robert Peel in December

1817, when the aforementioned fever epidemic was raging through the city. Dr Perceval

stated that 'trading people must be aware of the loss they sustain by the desertion of

their shops (from apprehension of infection from Beggars) and by the regulations of

quarantine'.[100] Two months later, Perceval returned to the subject of the threat posed by

disease-ridden mendicants to the business community, in a proposal to check the

progress of contagion in the city primarily by suppressing street begging. The plan

centred on, firstly, proposals to establish an office in the city where beggars, once their

claims of destitution were confirmed, could come and have their clothes washed, and,

secondly, a public declaration calling on the citizenry not to give alms in the street.

Perceval referred to 'the interest which shopkeepers must feel in keeping their doors

clear of filthy mendicants, who it is well known deter their customers from frequenting

their shops'.[101] In presenting his plan to Dublin Castle Perceval was acutely aware of

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[97] *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 13 Nov. 1824.
[98] Barry, *Report of the House of Recovery and Fever Hospital of the city of Cork, 1817*, p. 21.
[99] Denis Charles O'Connor, *Seventeen years' experience of workhouse life: with suggestions for reforming the poor law and its administration* (Dublin, 1861), pp 9-10.
[100] Robert Perceval to Robert Peel, 12 Dec. 1817 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP474/44). The text within the brackets is contained in a hand-written footnote, inserted by Perceval into the manuscript letter.
[101] 'Plan for the cooperation of the health subcommittee in preventing the causes of disease & checking the progress of contagion in the city, by Robert Perceval', 19 Feb. 1818 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP474/56).

how sensitive the commercial classes were to the threat posed by street begging and also their power in mobilising public opinion against this practice.

By the 1830s, frustrated by the failure of the state to curtail street begging through the police, the magistrates and the House of Industry, the Dublin business community and private householders resolved to take the matter into their own hands and employed extra-legal street inspectors for the sole purpose of removing mendicants from outside their respective shops and premises. These inspectors possessed no legal powers and appear to have been enabled in their endeavours by the street beggars' ignorance of the inspectors' legal powerlessness. The employment of street inspectors was undertaken by merchants and traders who combined into small collectives, and the average cost to a business owner was between £4 and £5 a year.[102] The principal areas where these inspectors were deployed were, according to the testimony of one such inspector, Westmoreland Street, Castle Street, Dame Street, Sackville Street, College Green, Parliament Street, High Street, Christchurch Place and Wellington Quay.[103] These streets, located in either the medieval city core or the later eastern area of development, represented perhaps the largest commercial thoroughfares in the city.[104]

The Poor Inquiry testimony of W. Mitchell of No. 10 Grafton Street constitutes a first-person account of a shopkeeper who employed an extra-legal street inspector. Mitchell, a pastry cook and confectioner, told the inquiry that he and some neighbours employed 'at our own expense, a street-inspector, who parades all day up and down on one side of the street, from Nassau-Street to No. 16, a distance of about 12 or 14 doors'. For this service, which had operated for the previous two years, Mitchell paid 1*s*. 6*d*. a

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[102] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 29a*.
[103] Ibid., p. 42a*.
[104] *The Dublin directory for 1835, containing a general alphabetical list of the principal inhabitants of the city and suburbs; a street directory; a classification of professions and trades; an explanatory list of streets, &c.* (Dublin, 1835), pp 328, 214, 230, 222-3, 297-8, 263, 218, 327.

week, which totalled £3 18*s*. annually. Before he combined with his neighbours

Mitchell employed a person, 'solely at my own expense, to keep my own shop-door

clear [of beggars]'. The trader's frankness regarding the extra-legal nature of the

practice is striking: 'These inspectors are not constables, nor are they authorized to

apprehend beggars, they are only instructed to remove beggars as much as they can

from the doors of shops, and keep them from besetting carriages.' While reporting

positively on the scheme to date, Mitchell made it clear that its success rested on the

mendicants' ignorance of the legal powerlessness of these inspectors: 'This plan has

operated beneficially, the beggars generally not being aware that the inspectors are not

constables, and have not legal powers'.[105] In assessing the merits of this initiative, one

must consider the context of this undertaking. The city's shopkeepers' resort to such a

draconian measure must be seen in light of the fact that the relevant authorities appeared

to have washed their hands of the matter. Traders thus felt obliged to implement this

unique strategy for dealing with an alarming social problem which threatened their

economic survival.

Superstitious beliefs and the beggar's curse

Superstition pervaded daily life among the labouring classes in pre-Famine Ireland.

The persistence into the nineteenth century of beliefs in fairies, magic, changelings and

witches, operating outside the realms of official religion, is well recorded in the

historiography.[106] Beggars were among the ubiquitous characters of pre-Famine life that

were frequently associated with the non-Christian supernatural. Many mendicants

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[105] Ibid., p. 44a*.
[106] See, for instance, S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin, 1985), pp 100-120; James H. Murphy, *Ireland: a social, cultural and literary history, 1791-1891* (Dublin, 2003), pp 30-31.

claimed to possess supernatural powers, and practices such as fortune-telling were practiced by such individuals.[107] Legislation associating fortune-telling and palmistry with vagabondage dated back at least to the 1630s and continued into the nineteenth century.[108] Associations between wandering mendicants and the supernatural appear also in nineteenth-century literary sources. In William Carleton's *Phelim O'Toole's courtship* a 'poor mendicant', also described as a 'boccagh', provides advice to a childless couple on a folkloric cure to their 'great affliction'.[109] The advice offered by the mendicant is to visit a particular holy well on the appropriate pattern day, kiss a 'Lucky Stone' while saying the Rosary, and circle the well nine times, before leaving behind a piece of material and then departing.[110] The prescribed method demonstrates the frequent intermixture of folk practices – such as lucky charms - with Christian traditions, as demonstrated by the holy well and the pattern day.

There are also numerous references in the pre-Famine period to a fear of the 'beggar's curse'. Author and poor law commentator James Ebenezer Bicheno, who served on the Poor Inquiry, recorded that Irish peasants believed 'that a curse will be upon him who turns a beggar from his door',[111] while Poor Law Commissioner George Nicholls asserted that 'there is a superstitious dread of bringing down the beggar's curse, and thus mendicancy is sustained in the midst of poverty'.[112] These assertions, however, require some analysis. Firstly, the references to belief in the 'beggar's curse' almost invariably arise from rural areas. For example, in a letter to a Dublin physician in May

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[107] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 549.
[108] 10 & 11 Chas I, c. 4 [Ire.] (1635), cited in George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish poor law, in connexion with the condition of the People* (London, 1856), p. 30; William Alex Breakey, *Handbook for magistrates, clerks of petty sessions, solicitors, coroners, &c., being a comprehensive index and synopsis of the common and statute law in Ireland.* (Dublin, 1895), p. 275.
[109] William Carleton, 'Phelim O'Toole's courtship' in idem., *Traits and stories of the Irish peasantry: volume 2* (2 vols, Savage, MD, 1990), pp 191, 188.
[110] Carleton, 'Phelim O'Toole's courtship', p. 191.
[111] J.E. Bicheno, *Ireland, and its economy; being the result of observations made in a tour through the country in the autumn of 1829* (London, 1830), p. 251.
[112] Nicholls, *History of the Irish Poor Law*, p. 206.

1822, a County Cork clergyman expressed his opinion that many poor give alms to beggars to prevent some disaster falling on the household and noted that 'these abuses originate in superstition'. He continued: 'I have often known them to say when a cow has died, that was such a beggar's curse.'[113] An anonymous Anglican clergyman in the south of Ireland identified a similar practice in the mid-1820s: 'The farmers, universally, dread the curse of the beggar; and, therefore, seldom deny a few potatoes.'[114]

The proliferation of these instances in rural areas and the contrasting scarcity of references to the beggar's curse in urban centres may point to the wider prevalence of superstitious beliefs among rural peasant communities but further research would be required into this subject. Such a study could serve as a useful vehicle for investigating the neglected topic of superstitious beliefs in nineteenth-century urban Irish communities. Rare examples of the existence of belief in the 'beggar's curse' in an urban setting do arise. One such instance is provided by the Dublin Mendicity Society's street inspector, George Rogers, who told the Poor Inquiry that 'many persons are induced to give from a fear of the "poor man's curse"'.[115] The same inquiry heard that servants in Carrickfergus frequently gave assistance to vagrants for fear of the beggar's curse.[116] Secondly, the work of Niall Ó Ciosáin, who has mined the Poor Inquiry reports

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[113] 'Letter from Reverend Richard Woodward, Glanworth Glebe, Fermoy, County Cork to Dr William Disney, regarding relief of local poor', 27 May 1822 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1822/441/2).
[114] Anon, *The real grievance of the Irish peasantry, as immediately felt and complained of among themselves, a fruitful source of beggary and idleness, and the main support off the Rock system. With a proposal for their amelioration, to which is prefixed an address to the British nation, on Roman Catholic emancipation. By a clergyman of the Established Church, for several years the resident incumbent of a parish in the south of Ireland* (London, 1825), p. 39.
[115] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 42a*.
[116] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 711.

over the past two decades, demonstrates that in many parishes people did not heed a beggar's curse, on the grounds that a virtuous person would not issue a curse.[117]

A beggar's prayer, on the other hand, was widely regarded and cherished. As a counterpoint to the malevolence of the 'beggar's curse', wandering mendicants also promised to say prayers for the givers of alms and this was a regular trade for some beggars. Prayers could be offered for the living or the dead. This practice was frequently carried out by a 'voteen', one who swapped prayers for alms.[118] An anonymous contributor to the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1833, possibly William Carleton, presented to his readers the character of Darby Guiry, 'the Ballyvoorny beggarman' who 'took care to leave his best benefactor beads, which if not made of the true wood of the cross, were, at least, of the same species of timber, crucifixes procured at Lough-derg'.[119] In his early published writings William Carleton railed against the ignorance of the Catholic lower orders – his former co-religionists – whose belief in the virtue of indiscriminate alms-giving was such that 'a man who may have committed a murder overnight, will the next day endeavour to wipe away his guilt by alms given for the purpose of getting the benefit of "the poor man's prayer"'.[120] In the parish of Moore in County Roscommon, the Poor Inquiry assistant commissioners were told by a weaver, J. McNamara, about the manner in which one local beggar carried out this transaction:

> [There is] a very old man, who is called "Forty bags"; he has been begging
> since he left his service, 15 years ago. His plan is to say prayers for the people
> of each house he comes to; he repeats them in Irish, and it generally takes him
> a full quarter of an hour to go through them. The woman of the house can

[117] Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture*, pp 85-6.
[118] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, pp 48, 487.
[119] E.W., 'The beggarman's tale' in *Dublin Penny Journal*, i, no. 51 (15 June 1833), p. 406. Lough Derg in County Donegal was for centuries (and remains) among the main sites of pilgrimage in Ireland.
[120] William Carleton, 'Tubber Derg; or, the Red Well' in idem, *Traits and stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1844; 2 vols, reprint Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire and Savage, MD, 1990), ii, p. 386.

never understand the half of what he says, and I think they are mostly his own invention; and as to the quality of them, at least they are good for him.[121]

Arriving in the town of Castleblaney, County Monaghan, John Gamble was bestowed with 'a world of blessings' in return for 'some trifling change'. He added: 'Ireland is the best country in the world for an economical man to be charitable in; for he always gets the full value of his money in praises, to say nothing of the prayers put up for his future happiness: whether or no[t] the people have more religion in the heart, they certainly have more on the tongue, than any other people in the universe.'[122] Physician Denis Charles O'Connor, writing in 1861, recalled the regular inflow of beggars offering prayers two decades previously in Cork city. 'Another class, chiefly from the country, walked from door to door in the outskirts, giving prayers in return for potatoes, both parties thinking they had got a fair equivalent for what was given.'[123] The giving of alms in return for prayers was seen by many as a truly equitable transaction. In this exchange the beggar's prayer was an intangible commodity available for purchase, and one which was highly valued.

Beggars as repositories of folkloric tradition

In November 1852 a sixty-year-old blind man named Thady McMahon was arrested and detained in Dublin city for 'being a wandering vagrant'.[124] With three or four previous convictions 'for vagrancy', McMahon was convicted before the magistrates at the Capel Street police office on 18 November and sentenced to fourteen days' imprisonment at the Richmond Bridewell. Two days later a submission was sent to

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[121] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 521.
[122] Gamble, *Sketches of history, politics, and manners*, pp 165-6.
[123] O'Connor, *Seventeen years' experience of workhouse life*, p. 10.
[124] The following details of Thady McMahon's criminal case are contained in: (NAI, Criminal Index Files, CIF 1852/Mc/35).

Dublin Castle on McMahon's behalf by the Irish-language scholar Eugene O'Curry,[125] who would later serve as professor of Irish history and archaeology at the Catholic University in Dublin. O'Curry's letter pleaded for leniency for McMahon, whom he described as an unparalleled repository of Irish airs. The letter reads:

> A blind man named Thady McMahon from Clare has been taken up and lodged in the Richmond penitentiary. I met him accidentally in the act of singing an Irish song and so well did he know the words and the air that I took him to my house and wrote from his dictation several songs and airs which I had long been looking for. The distinguished antiquary [George] Petrie[126] had engaged him to attend at his house at Rathmines to take down from his lips some unequal'd Irish airs. May I then beseech Your Excellency to exercise your wonted benevolence in favour of this very poor man – a very decent individual by ordering him his liberty.

As with all petitions on behalf of convicted criminals, the matter was investigated by Dublin Castle. Sergeant Daniel Ryan informed the Commissioners of Police that 'nothing dishonest is known here by the Police of the prisoner', while relaying the fact that 'Doctor Kelly, magistrate of Capel St Police Court, who committed McMahon, states that earlier applications have been made to him, by members of the Royal Irish Academy for his release, as the society is at a loss for him'. Ryan stated that in Kelly's opinion, 'it would be a charity to liberate the prisoner' and McMahon was subsequently released before the end of his fourteen-day sentence.

There is no doubt that as fascinating as it is, McMahon's case was somewhat unique. The intervention of members of an intellectual elite on behalf of a convicted vagrant – and a recidivist, no less – is unrepresentative of the thousands of such cases which were prosecuted during this period. What can be drawn out of this vignette, however, is the perception of street mendicants as occasionally being culturally important figures who were capable of contributing productively to society. McMahon, a native Irish speaker

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[125] Diarmaid Ó Catháin, 'O'Curry (Curry, Ó Comhraí), Eugene (Eoghean)' in *DIB*, vii, pp 326-9.
[126] David Cooper, 'Petrie, George' in *DIB*, viii, pp 81-4.

who had very little English, was one of the key sources of songs for George Petrie's collections of ancient Irish music.[127] Attributions to McMahon are littered throughout Petrie's monumental published collections of Irish music and these references are suffused with respect, familiarity and affection.[128] For instance, introducing 'Ag an mboithrin buidhe (At the yellow little road)', Petrie stated:

> The following melody, together with the Irish words still sung to it, was noted down during the present year [1855] from the singing of Teige MacMahon, a county Clare peasant, now unhappily blind and pauperised, but whose memory is still a rich depository of the fine tunes of his native county.[129]

McMahon, hailed in 1886 as the 'last of the shanachies', learned his ancient trade at the feet of the legendary storyteller Peter O'Connell. He came to Dublin to receive treatment for a cataract and after being 'discovered' by O'Curry, McMahon became well acquainted with some of the most prominent figures in mid-nineteenth-century Dublin's intellectual circles. An interview[130] conducted with McMahon with the assistance of an interpreter in the mid-1880s, when he was an inmate in the Kildysart workhouse in his native County Clare, reveals that during his time in Dublin, his associates included: scholar and librarian Dr James Henthorn Todd, a member of the Royal Irish Academy who, along with O'Curry and John O'Donovan founded the Irish Archaeological Society; surgeon and politician Dr Robert Spencer Dyer Lyons, who was a member of the Royal Irish Academy and a close associate of John Henry Newman; Lyons's wife's brother John Edward Pigot, who, as well as serving as a lawyer and being associated with the Young Ireland movement, was a member of the

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[127] David Cooper (ed.), *The Petrie collection of ancient music of Ireland* (Cork, 2002); Mrs. Morgan John O'Connell, 'The last of the shanachies' in *The Irish Monthly*, xiv, no. 151 (Jan. 1886), pp 27-32; Thomas Wall, 'Teige Mac Mahon and Peter O'Connell, seanchaí and scholar in Co. Clare' in *Béaloideas*, xxx (1962), pp 89-104.
[128] Cooper (ed.), *The Petrie collection*, *passim*.
[129] Quoted in Wall, 'Teige MacMahon and Peter O'Connell', pp 89-90. The names Teige and Thady are frequently interchangeable in the west of Ireland, similar to Jack and John in the English language.
[130] O'Connell, 'The last of the shanachies', p. 31. Mrs O'Connell was Mary Anne Bianconi, a daughter of transport entrepreneur Charles Bianconi.

Royal Irish Academy, the Irish Archaeological Society, the Celtic Society and the Society for the Preservation and Publication of the Melodies of Ireland, was a prolific collector of traditional airs and a friend of Petrie's; Fenian John O'Mahony, an accomplished Gaelic scholar; Patrick Weston Joyce, an historian, linguist, collector of folk music and collaborator of Petrie's; physician and antiquarian enthusiast William Stokes, who was a friend of Petrie's; and Stokes's son, Whitley Stokes, a renowned Celtic scholar.[131] It appears that McMahon was treated well by his new associates in Dublin. His interviewer wrote: 'Many a tumbler of punch has Teague partaken of in a corner of [Petrie's] diningroom while "singing songs, and the doctor [most likely Petrie] playing them on the fiddle", and some other tricean "taking them down".'[132] McMahon, who allegedly returned to Clare on his own accord, was portrayed as enjoying a privileged position among the paupers in the Kildysart workhouse, receiving a regular supply of newspapers and tobacco from O'Mahony. Furthermore, he was presented to the reader as living a blissful life in the workhouse, proudly sharing his fond recollections of his time in the company of the academic elite in Dublin. O'Connell wrote that 'he is, in fact, the only thoroughly happy person I ever saw in a workhouse' and later, 'the last of the shanachies is….that phenomenon, a thoroughly cheery and contented pauper.'[133]

From Petrie's collection, it is evident that McMahon was not the only pauper whom Gaelic scholars resorted to in their pursuit of the words and airs to ancient Irish songs. A

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[131] Andrew O'Brien and Linde Lunney, 'Todd, James Henthorn' in *DIB*, ix, pp 391-3; David Murphy, 'Lyons, Robert Spencer Dyer' in *DIB*, v, pp 669-70; Georgina Clinton and Sinéad Sturgeon, 'Pigot, John Edward', in *DIB*, viii, pp 119-20; Maureen Murphy and James Quinn, 'O'Mahony, John' in *DIB*, vii, pp 664-7; Frances Clarke and Sinéad Sturgeon, 'Joyce, Patrick Weston' in *DIB*, iv, pp 1076-77; Helen Andrews, 'Stokes, William' in *DIB*, ix, pp 107-9; Georgina Clinton and Sinéad Sturgeon, 'Stokes, Whitley' in *DIB*, ix, pp 105-7. While McMahon's contemporaries are only identified by their surnames in the 1886 article, it is evident that the piece referred to the aforementioned individuals, given their involvement in antiquarian studies, their largely common association with bodies such as the Royal Irish Academy and their link to Petrie.
[132] O'Connell, 'The last of the shanachies', p. 32.
[133] Ibid., pp 27-32.

County Limerick woman named Mary Madden, described by Petrie as 'a poor blind peasant woman from Limerick, now resident in Dublin', was also the source of many ancient songs.[134] McMahon and Madden are significant in being the sources of a considerable amount of folkloric material provided to the leading Gaelic scholars in nineteenth-century Ireland. Furthermore, they constituted personified examples of the traditional peasant associations between wandering beggars and storytelling. The examples of McMahon and Madden support the work of George Zimmerman, who has analysed the recording of this tradition by the protofolklorists of the early-nineteenth century. Zimmerman quotes antiquarian John Windele's account of encountering such individuals in west Cork:

> Here we found…a veritable sample of our genuine Irish boccaugh [*bacaigh*], a race for whom I entertain an ancient liking. I have always regarded them as reliques of our old Irish Society; the representatives of those numerous tribes of Carrouchs (*cearrbhaig*: gamblers) – Stocachs (*stócaigh*: youths) – tale-tellers and gillys, who once pursued their vagabond vocation, administering to the pleasure and entertainment of thanes and their retainers, in the old feudal halls and chambers, incurring by their attainment to the native chiefs, the displeasure of the poet Spen(s)er.[135]

Another story-telling beggar is described by Windele as enjoying the 'superstitious veneration' of the lower orders and in the habit of coming to the peasant's home equipped with news regarding neighbouring families, before outlining 'the genealogy of their parents and their connections'.[136]

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[134] Cooper (ed.), *The Petrie collection*, pp 105-6. Elsewhere, Petrie adds that Madden was from 'the city of Limerick': ibid., p. 161.
[135] Quoted in George Denis Zimmerman, *The Irish storyteller* (Dublin, 2001), p. 184.
[136] Quoted in ibid., p.185.

Conclusion

Perceptions of beggars in pre-Famine Irish society encapsulated a whole array of issues and emotions. The God-given right to beg, to solicit assistance from one's fellow man, was championed by many commentators. This sympathetic approach viewed begging as first and foremost a natural resort for the utterly destitute who were deserving of assistance, yet the need to be vigilant against fraudulent cases was also stressed. The exchange between beggar and alms-giver constituted a fundamentally important relationship, and one which bestowed roles and responsibilities upon both parties. The genuine alms-seeker had the right to solicit assistance, possessed a reasonable expectation of receiving charity and presented to the solicited an opportunity to engage in an act of Christian benevolence. The alms-giver was gifted with the privilege of relieving his fellow man, a duty associated with his station in life and allowing him to emulate Christ's example.

Most sources depicted beggars in a negative light and this has been explored through the motifs of the mendicant as a spreader of disease and as a threat to the operation of commercial business. In the latter case the prominence of merchants in the mendicity society movement attests to the acute vulnerability of traders to the evil of street begging. The negative perception of mendicancy carried over into public concern regarding the visibility of beggars in towns and cities. As with the related social problem of prostitution, the ubiquity and visibility of beggary threatened the moral and physical health of the community. These concerns were cited by inhabitants of Dublin when protesting against the relocation of the Mendicity Society's premises on a prominent site overlooking the main western road into the city. The spectacle of beggary could, on the other hand, be used as a tool by those same middle classes and this is to be seen in the parading of beggars through the streets of Dublin as a means of

applying pressure on householders who declined to support the institution. The importance of the visibility of the mendicant was also appreciated by the destitute themselves, and beggars were all too aware of the significance of securing a prime location at which to ply their trade.

The popularity of superstitious beliefs and customs in pre-Famine Ireland ensured that beggars were occasionally seen as filling certain cultural roles. This theme was portrayed in official sources, such as parliamentary papers, as well as in the literature of the period, most notably in the works of William Carleton. The fascinating, yet unrepresentative, case of Thady McMahon throws light on the tradition of the wandering mendicant as story-teller and a link to older popular customs. McMahon was a walking, living personification of Scott's Edie Ochiltree, who was portrayed as 'the news-carrier, the minstrel, and sometimes the historian of the district'.[137] This chapter has demonstrated that perceptions of beggars in early-nineteenth-century Ireland were varied, and were regularly shaped by social class, economic interests, cultural traditions and the daily realities of life. Chapters four to nine will examine how charities and different religions viewed mendicancy and alms-giving.

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[137] Walter Scott, *The antiquary* (1816; Everyman's Library ed., London and New York, 1969), p. 45.

SECTION TWO

Chapter Four

The mendicity society movement and the suppression of street begging

Introduction

The emergence of numerous mendicity societies throughout Ireland and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century was symptomatic of the increased public concern towards the threat posed by mendicancy. Arising mainly in the aftermath of the 1815 cessation of hostilities and during the economic crisis of the mid-1820s, mendicity societies reflected middle-class zeal to tackle the 'evil' of street begging, which threatened to spread disease, encourage moral licentiousness among the labouring classes, and undermine the incentive to be industrious. The fundamental purpose of the mendicity societies was to suppress street begging in a given town or city. This was not to be done simply by removing beggars from the street and confining them in a custodial institution. Instead, the mendicant poor were to be put to work at useful employment, where they would learn basic skills and 'habits of industry' which would assist them to gain employment and become independent. Child beggars in these institutions were provided with a rudimentary education, but one which also instilled the virtues of industry, cleanliness, order and religion.

This chapter will place the Irish mendicity societies firmly within the context of a British and European framework and will suggest that these societies constituted a distinct movement, sharing mutual interests, goals and methods, and reflecting the wider transnational debate that influenced public debates on social questions and the exchange in information across national frontiers, aided by a rapidly growing print culture. Mendicity societies reflected middle-class enthusiasm for alleviating social and moral problems through a culture of association. This chapter will consider a number of the

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significant challenges which mendicity societies invariably negotiated, from the need to

attract cross-denominational support to the availability of sufficient legal powers to

suppress street begging. The decline of the mendicity societies will be considered in

light of the introduction of the rates-funded Irish Poor Law, which impacted on the

financial viability of the charities. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the

efficacy of Irish mendicity societies in suppressing street begging.

Charitable societies and associational culture

   The *modus operandi* of mendicity societies reflected the more general shift towards

specialisation and discrimination in the provision of charity which emerged in the

second half of the eighteenth century. As their names suggested, mendicity societies

were charities devoted mainly to the suppression of street begging in their locality. By

approaching this increasingly-visible problem of urban life through voluntary bodies,

mendicity societies offered a system of regulation of street begging. These charities

were founded, run and supported largely by middle-class men, mostly from the

professional and commercial classes who were prominent members of the urban

community. By offering their voluntary services to these initiatives, these individuals

emphasised the virtue of civil duty which contributed to the formation of middle-class

identity. (Of course, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the role that self-interest

played in philanthropy).[1] The public was assured that in the hands of such 'respectable'

pillars of the community, their subscriptions and donations would be applied to the most

truly 'deserving' cases. The publishing of comprehensive reports, full accounts of

income and expenditure, statistical tables of the number of paupers relieved, and

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[1] Laurence M. Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland, 1718-1851* (Dublin, 2004), pp 3-4; James Kelly, 'Charitable societies: their genesis and development, 1720-1800' in James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell (eds), *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), p. 95.

occasional vignettes of individual cases 'provided the public with a distinct impression of effectively targeted relief'.[2]

Contrary to the workings of mendicity societies in the first half of the nineteenth century, earlier charities in Irish urban centres specifically excluded common beggars from the benefit of their benevolence. The idle poor were seen as a deviant and immoral grouping who were 'undeserving' of the limited resources of charitable funds. Most charities in Ireland focused their efforts on the industrious poor, such as distressed artisans and manufacturers.[3] Sturdy and refractory beggars were not considered to be fit objects for charity. In Dublin the Charitable Association was formed in 1806, according to one historical account, 'to afford relief to all but common beggars', while it is evident from the title of the Society for the Relief of Industrious Poor, a largely Quaker entity founded in 1813, that the idle poor were excluded from its remit.[4] According to the Methodist preacher Dr Adam Clarke, who founded the Dublin Strangers' Friend Society in 1790, 'however deplorable the state of street Beggars may appear, they are not in general the most necessitous', while also advising the charity's subscribers that mendicants 'are not proper objects of your Charity'.[5]

In Belfast the institutional relief of destitution was carried out predominantly by the town's Charitable Society, established in 1752 (and incorporated in 1774) for 'the support of vast numbers of real objects of charity in this Parish, for the employment of idle beggars that crowd to it from all parts of the North, and for the reception of infirm

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[2] Kelly, 'Charitable societies', p. 105. See R.J Morris, 'Voluntary societies and British urban elites, 1780-1850: an analysis' in *Historical Journal*, xxvi, no. 1 (Mar. 1983), pp 95-118 for a detailed discussion of some of these themes.

[3] Kelly, 'Charitable societies'.

[4] J. Warburton, J. Whitelaw and Robert Walsh, *History of the city of Dublin, from the earliest accounts to the present time; containing its annals, antiquities, ecclesiastical, history, and charters; its present extent, public buildings, schools, institutions, & c. to which are added biographical notices of eminent men, and copious appendices of its population, revenue, commerce, and literature* (2 vols, London, 1818), ii, p. 901.

[5] [Adam Clarke], *The nature, design, and general rules of the Stranger's Friend Society, as established in Dublin, 1790* (Dublin, 1799), p. 3; ibid., p. 6.

and diseased poor'.[6] The society's poorhouse, located on a prominent site at Clifton Street overlooking and closing the vista from the recently laid out Donegall Street, served as a multi-faceted asylum for the delivery of a wide range of services, from the care of the elderly and the education of abandoned children to the confinement of vagrants and the insane. By 1775 the charity was distributing sums of cash, on average 2*s.* per fortnight, to selected deserving cases, typically widows, the elderly, infirm or chronically ill cases, or mothers with young children.[7] Deserving cases were either issued with begging badges, supported outside of the institution or admitted into the poorhouse. At various times constables were employed on a temporary basis, charged with the duty of apprehending and confining prostitutes and vagrants in a 'Black Cart', 'excepting such Beggars as shall be badged & licenced to beg by the Belfast Char. Society'.[8]

In Cork a poor house had been established in the mid-eighteenth century 'for employing and maintaining the poor, punishing vagabonds, and providing for and educating foundling children'. Powers were granted to beadles, constables and citizens 'to seize and apprehend…any sturdy beggar or beggars, or other idle vagabond or vagabonds', and upon conviction before a Court of Assembly, such individuals were liable to be confined to the workhouse for up to four years.[9] Whereas a Dublin poorhouse, founded in 1704, initially served as a place of punishment for vagabonds and

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[6] *BNL*, 6 July 1753, quoted in R.W.M. Strain, 'The history and associations of the Belfast Charitable Society' in *Ulster Medical Journal*, xxii, no. 1 (1953), p. 33. A comprehensive history of the institution is given in R.W.M. Strain, *Belfast and its Charitable Society: a story of urban social development* (London, 1961). See also Jonathan Bardon, *An interesting and honourable history: the Belfast Charitable Society, the first 250 years, 1752-2002* (Belfast, 2002).
[7] Belfast Charitable Society minute book, 20 Mar. 1775 (Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Belfast Charitable Society papers, minute book no. 4).
[8] Belfast Charitable Society minute book, 26 Apr. 1817 (Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Belfast Charitable Society papers, minute book no. 10). See also ibid., 12 Sept. 1774 (minute book no. 3); ibid., 2 May 1812 (minute book no. 10); ibid., 8 Feb. 1817 (minute book no. 10); 'Belfastiensis', 'Belfast Charitable Society: beggars' badges and bang beggars' in *Belfast Municipal Art Gallery and Museum Quarterly Notes*, no. 24 (Dec. 1913), p. 4. For references to the 'Black Cart', see Belfast Charitable Society minute book, 5 Apr. 1806 (minute book no. 9); ibid., 19 July 1806 (minute book no. 9).
[9] 9 Geo. II, c. 25 [Ire.] (17 Mar. 1736).

beggars before evolving into a foundling hospital, its Cork counterpart never admitted

any mendicant poor. Despite the fact that the primary purpose of the Cork poorhouse

was to suppress and punish mendicancy, the institution exclusively admitted foundlings

from its opening on 12 March 1747 onwards.[10] By 1810 the institution had retained its

sole remit of admitting foundlings.[11] In 1838 Assistant Poor Law Commissioner

William J. Voules reported that the governors of the Cork founding hospital justified

their policy of exclusively admitting foundlings by reference to the 1772 act allowing

for the establishment of houses of industry, to cater for vagrants and beggars. This,

however, does not reveal why the institution excluded mendicants from its remit for the

first number of decades, given that, as Voules noted, 'the suppression and punishment

of mendicity was the primary object of the [1737] Act, and that the receipt of exposed

and foundling children was only its secondary object'.[12]

Houses of industry: precursors to the mendicity societies

The publication in the 1760s of two influential pamphlets by the Church of Ireland

Dean of Clogher, Richard Woodward (see Chapter Six), led to the passing of legislation

for the erection of houses of industry across Ireland, establishing a system of licensed

begging and a place of detention and industry for unlicensed street beggars. The

legislation empowered, but did not compel, grand juries to partially fund these

institutions, and additional income was to come from church collections and charity

sermons.[13] In the end, only twelve houses of industry (including the existing Belfast

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[10] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 30; *Appendix to the sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, Appendix D. No. 7, p. 186, H.C. 1840 [C 253], xvii, 598; M.V. Conlon, 'The relief of the poor in Cork' in *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, xl, no. 151, part I (Jan.-June 1935), p. 2.

[11] *Beggars and foundlings: Cork, Waterford and Limerick. Returns relative to the number of sturdy beggars and foundlings in the cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick*, p. 2, H.C. 1831-32 (565), xliv, 454.

[12] *Appendix to the sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, Appendix D, no. 7, p. 186.

[13] 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire.] (2 June 1772).

Charitable Society) were established.[14] The Dublin House of Industry opened for the

admission of beggars on 8 November 1773 and for nearly fifty years, maintained its

founding principles of apprehending street beggars through the employment of beadles

and confining them in the north-city premises off Channel Row (later North Brunswick

Street).[15] In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the House of Industry

started admitting increasing amounts of the sick poor and its focus increasingly shifted

in this direction. An 1809 report into Dublin charitable institutions which received

parliamentary assistance found that the House of Industry had achieved limited success

in its original object of suppressing street begging. Instead, the institution's focus was

on 'the relief of the aged and infirm, and of those who laboured under temporary

distress from want of employment'.[16] This pattern crystallised in the 1816 direction

from Chief Secretary Robert Peel, implementing a recommendation from the

aforementioned 1809 report,[17] that the House of Industry cease admitting beggars and

vagrants and, instead, concentrate its resources on relieving varying categories of the

sick and infirm poor in its multi-faceted institutional campus lying in the north-west of

the city.[18] The impact of Peel's decision was significant. At a time of considerable

social and economic distress and dislocation, caused by the post-war downturn,

demobilisation of large swathes of the armed forces, and the prevalence of a typhus

fever epidemic, the main institution in Dublin city with legal powers for the

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[14] David Fleming and John Logan, (eds), *Pauper Limerick: the register of the Limerick House of Industry 1774-1793* (IMC, Dublin, 2011), p. xii.
[15] Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998)*, pp 202-203.
[16] *A report upon certain charitable establishments in the city of Dublin, which receive aid from parliament* (Dublin, 1809), p. 39.
[17] For the House of Industry, see ibid., pp 13-40. The recommendation is at ibid., p. 40.
[18] Copy of letter (original dated 14 Sept. 1816) from Robert Peel to the House of Industry governors, n.d. (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1820/688). The institutions of the House of Industry, which Thackeray described as 'a group of huge gloomy edifices', comprised penitentiaries, hospitals and a lunatic asylum: William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Irish sketchbook of 1842* (1843; Nonsuch ed., Dublin, 2005), p. 316; *(Ireland). Report of the commissioners appointed by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to inspect the House of Industry, and to report upon the management thereof, with a view to the introduction of such reforms and improvements, as would render it, not only less expensive, but more efficient for the purposes for which it was originally designed*, pp 13-15, 19-21, H.C. 1820 (84), viii, 289-291, 295-297.

apprehension and confinement of street beggars was effectively stripped of this responsibility. This measure gave rise to a public campaign throughout 1817 and 1818 in which the city's inhabitants demanded the formation of a new institution for the suppression of street begging. In the absence of any action from the central state or the local grand jury, the initiative of local men, largely from the professional and merchant classes, came to the fore and resulted in the establishment of the Dublin Mendicity Society in January 1818, drawing on the precedent set by similar charitable societies in Hamburg, Munich, Bath, Belfast and Edinburgh, and aimed at suppressing 'the disgusting and baleful influence of mendicity'.[19] In London too, the inaction of the state in enforcing anti-begging measures spurred the middle-class founders of the city's mendicity society into action in 1818.[20]

The emergence of the mendicity society movement

The poverty, social distress and demographic dislocation that arose following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 were direct causes of the emergence of the mendicity societies. With occasional exceptions, such as the Bath and Belfast societies founded in 1805 and 1809 respectively, the early mendicity societies were established in the years immediately following the end of hostilities, when the demobilisation of hundreds of thousands of working-age men led to an increased demand for labour at a time of falling wages and rising food prices. Given these circumstances it is no surprise that throughout the British Isles, vagrancy levels rose sharply in the immediate post-war period.[21] In his

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[19] Quoted in Audrey Woods, *Dublin outsiders: a history of the Mendicity Institution, 1818-1998* (Dublin, 1998), p. 193. Useful accounts of the immediate background to the establishment of this society are given in: Anon., *Arguments in proof of the necessity and practicality of suppressing street begging in the city of Dublin* (Dublin, 1817); *Observations on the House of Industry, Dublin; and on the plans of the association for suppressing mendicity in that city* (Dublin, 1818); *Report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1818* (Dublin, 1819).
[20] M.J.D. Roberts, *Making English morals: voluntary association and moral reform in England, 1787-1886* (Cambridge, 2004), pp 103-4.
[21] H.V. Bowen, *War and British society, 1688-1815* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 35.

analysis of the London Mendicity Society, M.J.D. Roberts argues that this reaction to urban mendicancy can be dated to the cessation of the French wars in 1815.[22] The evidence for Ireland supports this argument, with accounts attributing the emergence of these early societies to the cessation of hostilities, the large-scale demobilisation of men and the consequent upsurge in beggary. The first report of the Dublin Mendicity Society asserted that the extent of mendicancy in the city, while always considerable, 'was greatly increased by the effects of the termination of the war upon the trading and agricultural interests in this country – by the disbanding of large portions of the army and navy', as well as two years of famine and disease epidemics.[23]

The mid- to late-1810s were a period of 'almost unexampled scarcity'.[24] The post-war demobilisation, together with a decline in agricultural prices, poor potato crops and a two-year nationwide fever epidemic[25] resulted not only in alarming levels of mendicancy throughout Ireland, but, according to one account, 'gave it a character, form and virulence which appeared to place it beyond the reach of cure'. The same report, referring to Dublin, continued: 'Every asylum in the city being full, begging appeared not only excuseable [sic] but justifiable; every hand distributed alms, a great part of the disgrace of seeking charity being removed.'[26] An observer, writing in 1816, painted a grim picture of Dublin city:

> The city presented a spectacle, at once afflicting and disgusting to the feelings
> of its inhabitants; the doors of carriages and shops, to the interruption of
> business, were beset by crowds of unfortunate and clamorous beggars,
> exhibiting misery and decrepitude in a variety of forms, and frequently carrying
> about in their persons and garments, the seeds of contagious disease; themselves

[22] M.J.D. Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship: the London Mendicity Society and the suppression of begging in England, 1818-1869' in *International Review of Social History*, xxxvi (1991), pp 202-203.
[23] *Report Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*, p. 1. See also *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 37.
[24] *Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*, p. 2.
[25] Mary E. Daly, *Social and economic history of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin, 1981), p. 13; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Poverty, population, and agriculture, 1801-45' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v. Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 108; L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1978), p. 101.
[26] *Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*, p. 1.

the victims of idleness, their children were taught to depend on Begging, as affording the only means of future subsistence; every artifice was resorted to by the practised beggar to extort alms, and refusal was frequently followed by imprecations and threats. Mendicity developed a violent character…The benevolent were imposed upon – the modest shocked – the reflecting grieved – the timid alarmed. In short, so distressing was the whole scene, and so intolerable was the nuisance, that its suppression became a matter of necessity.[27]

It was in this context that in towns and cities across Britain and Ireland middle-class men, largely from the merchant and professional occupations, came together to form voluntary associations with the primary aim of suppressing street begging in their locality.

The first of these societies to state its aim specifically as the suppression of street begging was a pre-1815 entity. The Bath Mendicity Society was formed in 1805 and by 1818 similar associations had been established in Oxford, Edinburgh, Chester, Birmingham, Salisbury, Bristol, Liverpool, Coventry, Kendal, Kingston and Colchester.[28] These charities drew inspiration from an initiative of a Hamburg institution, founded in 1788, under which a committee was formed, the town was divided into districts, house-to-house collection of subscriptions was undertaken, the circumstances of the poor were investigated, and a spinning school was commenced for women and children.[29]

Of the Irish mendicity societies, forty-five have been identified to date, as set out in Map 4.1. In mapping the geographical distribution of these societies a number of points are to be made. Firstly, the concentration of the charities in Ulster is striking. Twenty-nine of the forty-five societies (64.4 per cent) were located in the northern province.

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[27] Cited in *Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*, pp 2-3.

[28] *The first report of the society established in London for the suppression of mendicity* (London, 1819), p. 27; Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship', pp 206-7.

[29] The importance of the Hamburg institution as a model for the later mendicity societies is to be found at: *Account of the management of the poor in Hamburgh, since the year 1788. In a letter to some friends of the poor, in Great Britain* (Dublin, 1796); Anon., 'Management of the poor in Hamburg' in *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, iii, no. 13 (31 Aug. 1809), pp 94-9; 'Extract from the report of the establishments at Hamburg, in 1799' in ibid., pp 99-101; Leaflet advertising forthcoming publication of 'an account of the management of the poor in Hamburg since the year 1788', 1 Sept. 1817 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP483/31); *Observations on the House of Industry, Dublin*, pp 3, 5; *Hansard 1*, xxxi, 689 (8 June 1815).

Eight societies were to be found in Leinster, with six and two in Munster and Connaught respectively. The reason for the singular concentration of mendicity societies in Ulster may be explained as an Irish manifestation of the Scottish model of voluntary approaches to poor assistance, particularly given the fact that 96 per cent of Irish Presbyterians, who shared many cultural identities and theological worldviews with the Calvinist Church of Scotland, lived in Ulster. Just as Ulster Presbyterianism influenced social, cultural, political and economic practices in the northern province, so too did it shape poor relief initiatives.[30] One-third of all of the Irish mendicity societies were located in the two counties of Antrim and Down, largely in locations where Presbyterians constituted 50-80 per cent of the population. Mendicity societies in Ulster differed from those elsewhere in Ireland not only in their geographic concentration but also in the fact that in many locations, they were founded in relatively small towns and villages. The sixteen societies located in Leinster, Munster and Connaught were established mostly in towns and cities with populations of more than 10,000, as represented in Table 4.1. Yet, of the twenty-nine Ulster societies, twenty-one (72.4 per cent) were to be found in towns with populations smaller than 5,000. Indeed, the Stillorgan and Portarlington societies were the only non-Ulster entities in the '< 5,000' category.

Just as the charitable fever hospital 'movement' spread through Britain and Ireland in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century,[31] it would be fair to state that the

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[30] Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law, 1815-43* (Manchester, 2009), pp 116, 119.
[31] John V. Pickstone, 'Dearth, dirt and fever epidemics: rewriting the history of British 'public health', 1780-1850' in Terence Ranger and Paul Slack (eds), *Epidemics and ideas: essays on the historical perception of pestilence* (Cambridge, 1999), pp 132-3; W.F. Bynum, 'Hospital, disease and community: the London Fever Hospital, 1801-1850' in Charles E. Rosenberg (ed.), *Healing and history: essays for George Rosen* (New York, 1979), p. 98.

Table 4.1. Irish cities and towns where mendicity societies were founded, 1809-40

	Location	County	Population in 1831 census[32]
Pop = > 20,000	Dublin	Dublin	232,362
	Cork	Cork	107,016
	Limerick	Limerick	66,554
	Belfast	Antrim	53,287
	Galway	Galway	33,120
	Waterford	Waterford	28,821
	Kilkenny	Kilkenny	23,741
10,000-20,000	Derry	Londonderry	19,620
	Drogheda	Louth	17,365
	Sligo	Sligo	15,152
	Clonmel	Tipperary	15,134
	Newry	Down	13,065
	Dundalk	Louth	10,078
5,000-10,000	Armagh	Armagh	9,470
	Carlow	Carlow	9,114
	Carrickfergus	Antrim	8,706
	Ennis	Clare	7,711
	Parsonstown (Birr)	King's County (Offaly)	6,594
	Bushmills	Antrim	6,869
	Enniskillen	Fermanagh	6,056
	Coleraine	Londonderry	5,668
	Roscrea	Tipperary	5,512
< 5,000	Downpatrick	Down	4,784
	Newtownards	Down	4,442
	Ballymena	Antrim	4,067
	Knockbreda	Down	3,900
	Monaghan	Monaghan	3,848
	Ballyshannon	Donegal	3,775
	Dungannnon	Tyrone	3,515
	Portarlington	Queen's County (Laois)	3,091
	Carrickmacross	Monaghan	2,979
	Lurgan	Armagh	2,842
	Bangor	Down	2,741
	Antrim	Antrim	2,655
	Larne	Antrim	2,616
	Kilmood	Down	2,219
	Omagh	Tyrone	2,211
	Portaferry	Down	2,203
	Ballycastle	Antrim	1,683
	Hillsborough	Down	1,453
	Hollywood	Down	1,288
	Caledon	Tyrone	1,079
	Saintfield	Down	1,056
	Kilmore	Armagh	937
	Stillorgan	Dublin	650

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[32] *Population, Ireland. Census of the population, 1831. Comparative abstract of the population in Ireland, as taken in 1821 and 1831*, H.C. 1833 (23), xxxix, 3.

contemporary proliferation of mendicity societies also represented a 'movement', in that institutions with common objectives were formed under comparable conditions, by persons from similar social backgrounds, and driven by almost identical social and economic reasons. Furthermore and crucially, these societies, typically based in urban centres, were not founded in an intellectual vacuum but in an environment where information regarding the work of like-minded charities was increasingly accessible. The founding literature of these charities, such as published statements and reports, typically made reference to earlier mendicity societies and the influence derived from these predecessors. The efforts of societies in Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Munich and Hamburg, for instance, were known to the men who founded the Dublin Mendicity Society in January 1818 and who based their proposals for suppressing street begging on 'the result of actual practice, crowned, in more instances than one, with the most complete success'.[33] Similar language was used in a campaign (initially unsuccessful) to establish a mendicity asylum in Kilkenny. The public were told: 'The practicality of the measure has been proved by the best of all tests, experience, on the Continent and to different parts of the United Kingdom.'[34] Precedents established in Edinburgh and Gloucester influenced those who established the mendicity society in Belfast in 1809 (see below), while other Irish mendicity societies were also formed based on precedents set in England.[35] In considering the financial viability of the Newry Mendicity Society, its managing committee contrasted its accounts with expenditure

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[33] Woods, *Dublin outsiders*, p. 12; *FJ*, 28 Jan. 1818; *The Correspondent*, 28 Jan. 1818; *Arguments in proof of the necessity of suppressing street begging*, *passim*; *Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*, p. 26.
[34] *Leinster Journal*, 22 Apr. 1820.
[35] 'Abolition of mendicity' in *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, ii, no. 11 (30 June 1809), pp 437-8; George Nicholls, *A history of the Irish poor law, in connexion with the condition of the People* (London, 1856), p. 100.

levels at the Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry and Edinburgh institutions.[36] The founders of the Kilkenny Mendicity Society consulted the published reports of earlier mendicity societies, 'those valuable associations on the Continent, in Great Britain, also in Ireland'.[37] Similarly, the 1821 report of the London Mendicity Society, founded three years earlier, noted that similar initiatives had been undertaken throughout England in the previous three years and commended 'the successful progress already made by many of these associations; and it has been observed, that upon the public roads contiguous to those towns which have Mendicity, or Vagrant Offices, not a beggar is to be seen'.[38]

Member societies of the movement were characterised as such by more than merely knowledge of the workings of similar bodies. Instances of co-operation between societies attest to the prevalence of a sense of belonging to a wider movement, wherein shared experiences informed the workings of individual organisations. Upon its establishment in 1821, the Waterford Mendicity Society forwarded its resolutions to the Dublin society for its consideration, thanking the latter for its co-operation and assisting in their labours.[39] The first report of the Waterford Mendicity Society made particular mention of the Dublin association, which furnished the southern city's body with 'every information in their power' and helped shape its 'original principles'. The Dublin members were also praised and thanked for being 'most earnest and assiduous in giving the instructions of their more enlarged practice to the friends of the Mendicant Asylum in Waterford'.[40] That same summer, a Rev. Price, secretary to the Waterford society,

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[36] *OS Memoirs*, iii, pp 93-4.
[37] *Leinster Journal*, 19 Apr. 1820.
[38] *The third report of the society for the suppression of mendicity, established in London, 1818* (London, 1821), p. 13.
[39] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 May 1821 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/2).
[40] *First annual report, of the Waterford Mendicity Society*, p. 11.

was elected an honorary associate of the Dublin committee.[41] Members of societies were also known to travel long distances to personally meet the founders of new bodies and offer advice first-hand. At an early meeting of the Cork Mendicity Society, 'a young Gentleman connected with the Dublin Association, Mr. Hudson, kindly attended, and gave to the Meeting information of a highly useful and interesting nature'.[42] The example of Irish mendicity societies supports Robert Morris's argument that voluntary societies were influenced and driven by 'the stimulus of action taken in other towns', yet his implication that the lack of a overarching central body prevented any meaningful connection between the different charities is challenged by the example of some of the Irish mendicity societies.[43]

The proliferation of mendicity societies in Ireland at this time was such that in September 1820, the committee of the Dublin institution claimed in a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant that they had the satisfaction 'to observe that benevolent persons in remote parts of Ireland had succeeded in establishing similar institutions in several towns, and with the view to send up persons, in some instances, to be instructed in the system at their establishment in Dublin, where from the spacious accommodation hitherto possessed, the working of it could be shewn to advantage'.[44] The co-operation and exchange of information between the members of this movement transcended national boundaries, as seen in the London Mendicity Society's 1821 letter to the Dublin society, enclosing two of the former's reports and requesting any similar material published by the Dublin institution. In signing off, the London correspondent assured the Dublin committee of their guaranteed co-operation 'in the promotion of our

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[41] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 June 1821.
[42] *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 3 Nov. 1826.
[43] Morris, 'Voluntary societies and British urban elites', pp 98, 103.
[44] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 4 Sept. 1820 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/1).

mutual object'.[45] These instances support Jacinta Prunty's description of an 'urgent international debate', wherein the 'merits of poor law systems in Edinburgh, Bath, Hamburg, Munich, Amsterdam, Paris, New York and elsewhere [were] scrutinised and compared with the system proposed for or prevailing in Dublin'.[46] Within England too, there were connections between mendicity societies, both in terms of philosophy and personnel. Matthew Martin, who undertook an investigation into street begging in London in the 1790s and appeared as an expert witness to the 1815-16 London Mendicity Committee, was an early supporter of the Bath society as well as serving as an officer of the London society, while a Rev. Francis Randolph also served on both the Bath and London mendicity society committees.[47]

Urban-based

As seen in Map 4.1 most mendicity societies, certainly outside of Ulster, were founded in large urban centres. This was the pattern of charitable societies in general in this period. The consequences of urbanisation, such as a growing population, overcrowding, squalid living conditions and spread of disease, intensified the scale of poverty and destitution in these centres. Furthermore, it was in the same urban centres that men (and at times women) from the middle classes came together in a culture of association. Of the many Ulster societies located in towns and villages with relatively small populations, the Caledon Mendicity Society is an interesting case, as it was established upon the initiative of and largely supported by the local landlord, the Second Earl of Caledon. This charity was founded in 1829 by the earl and his wife for the purpose of giving relief to 'objects of real charity and to detect impostors and strangers,

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[45] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 6 Feb. 1821.
[46] Prunty, *Dublin slums*, p. 197.
[47] Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship', pp 206-207, 209.

who have no claim to our assistance'.[48] Accounts for the mid- to late-1830s show that the main sources of income comprised an annual contribution of £100 from Lord Caledon and subscriptions averaging around £172 per annum.[49] The instance of Caledon is a unique example of an improving landlord – the earl erected stone-built houses and flour-mills in the town – distributing relief to the poor of his community using the mendicity society model.[50]

The funding of mendicity societies

Mendicity societies resembled other charities in sourcing their income largely from voluntary sources, distinguishing them from the houses of industry, which were funded mostly from parliamentary grants and local taxation, such as grand jury presentments. In 1831 the Coleraine Mendicity Society's income came from donations, subscriptions, cash received from the sale of broken stones, court fines and church collections.[51] Voluntary income consistently comprised around 90 per cent of the Londonderry society's total revenue, with other income coming from fines and the sale of sundry items.[52] Evidence for the societies in Dublin, Armagh, Drogheda, Sligo, Carrickfergus

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[48] 'Account book of the Mendicity Society of Caledon, 1829-1869', 24 Jan. 1829, p. 9 (PRONI, Caledon Papers, D2433/A/11/1).
[49] Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland…* (2 vols, London, 1837), i, pp 243-4.
[50] For Caledon's improving policies on his estate, see Lewis, *Topographical dictionary of Ireland*, i, pp 243-4; *OS Memoirs*, xx, pp 1-4.
[51] 'Historical notes compiled by Maxwell Given CE, Architect, Coleraine, for the History of Coleraine, vol. 7', 30 Mar. 1906, pp 1707-10 (PRONI, Maxwell Given Papers, D4164/A/7).
[52] *The first report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year* (Londonderry, 1826), p. 9; *The second report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year* (Londonderry, 1827), p. 12; *The thirteenth report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, May 13, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the year ending July 31, 1838* (Derry, 1838), p. 8.

and Waterford among others confirms this trend of near or total dependency on voluntary contributions.[53]

Financial uncertainty and embarrassment appears to have been the universal experience of mendicity societies. Reliance on voluntary income ensured consistent financial uncertainty. They were subject, therefore, to the appetite of the public for addressing the problem of street begging. The mendicity asylum in Galway closed in 1829, one year after its establishment due to indebtedness, and between its re-opening in April 1830 and its eventual closure seven years later, the society was plagued by constant financial pressures and came to depend on income from the labour of the paupers for its survival.[54] Constant financial insecurity was also the experience of the Drogheda asylum, which operated between 1822 and 1838,[55] while the Limerick mendicity society saw its income drop from just more than £600 in 1823 to little over £200 six years later.[56] What is not clear is whether this sizeable decrease resulted from a waning of public support for the institution or perhaps the effects of the economic downturn of the mid-1820s, which would have negatively impacted on the society's subscribers and donors. An 1838 trade directory described the Limerick Mendicity Society as follows: 'Little can be said of this Society, as the charity is so badly supported that they cannot do much.'[57] The failure of the Ballycastle Mendicity Society in County Antrim was attributed to the continued alms-giving of farmers and shopkeepers who, in 'finding the mendicity little or no relief, gave up their subscriptions for its support'.[58] Some societies existed precariously between survival and dissolution,

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[53] *Third report of evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 8 June -7 July. With an appendix of documents and papers, and likewise a general index,* p. 660, H.C. 1830 (665), vii, 840; ibid., pp 669, 691, 698, 711.
[54] John Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea': Galway, 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004), pp 52-3.
[55] Ned McHugh, *Drogheda before the Famine: urban poverty in the shadow of privilege, 1826-45* (Dublin, 1998), pp 46-51.
[56] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 95.
[57] *Deane's Limerick almanack, directory and advertiser, 1838*, p. 37.
[58] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 726.

and this was caused by uncertain and fluctuating levels of income. The number of street beggars in Armagh city typically increased 'when the Mendicity Society is dissolved, which occasionally happens in consequence of funds being inadequate', according to the Church of Ireland Primate of Ireland, Lord John Beresford.[59]

The funding of mendicity societies through subscriptions and donations was not the reserve of the wealthier classes. The Dublin society regularly received sums of money from 'tradesmen and labourers' and these instances included either individual tradesmen giving 10*s.* or a group of workers for a large company donating a cumulative sum. For example, employees at Guinness's brewery donated £38 15*s.* 7*d.* in 1840.[60] Given that the Guinness family had long connections with the mendicity society, it is to be wondered at how and why this particular charity was chosen for this communal donation. Were employees influenced, unduly or otherwise, by their employers' connections to the charity or were they being pragmatic in supporting a cause which attracted the benevolence of their paymaster? These considerations tie in with John Cunningham's analysis of the Galway Mendicity Society, which in 1824 expressed its 'peculiar satisfaction' at the donation of half a crown each by forty-six of the town's weavers. Cunningham correctly asserts that this donation is better understood when one considers that these weavers, who were employed in 'the Hall of this town', were subject to a committee whose membership overlapped with that of the Mendicity Society.[61] Donating to the middle-class and merchant-run charity may have been an act of self-interest by these working-class men, in terms of their future employment

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[59] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 294.
[60] *Twenty-third annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1840* (Dublin, 1841), p. 44; *Twenty-second annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1839* (Dublin, 1840), p. 72.
[61] Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea'*, p. 46.

prospects, while the society's public advertisement of the weavers' donations also served to embarrass wealthier inhabitants to contribute.

What relief and punishment did the mendicity societies offer?

Mendicity societies promised to citizens of European, British and Irish towns and cities, frustrated by the seemingly constant imposition of hordes of street beggars, a method of suppressing mendicancy which was relatively inexpensive and regulated by prominent members of the civil community. The key attraction of the societies was that they offered food and work for those who would habitually resort to mendicancy for sustenance. These charities, therefore, removed the excuse for begging. The rationale was that with all the 'deserving' paupers receiving the basics for survival inside the mendicity asylum, those beggars who continued to solicit alms in the streets proved themselves to be 'undeserving' by the very fact of their public alms-seeking. Admission to the mendicity asylum was not unqualified. In Sligo proof of residence in the town for the three years prior to application was required.[62] In Dublin a similar rule, requiring six months' residence, was in place but reportedly not strictly enforced.[63] The citizens of a given town or city were encouraged not to dole out alms to mendicants found begging in the streets but instead to refer alms-seekers to the mendicity society's premises where their claim to destitution would be assessed. This had the effect of ensuring that citizens were not 'double-taxed'.

The mendicity institutions differed from the houses of industry and the later workhouses in that paupers generally did not reside in the building.[64] Exceptions to this

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[62] Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea'*, p. 48.
[63] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 35.
[64] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 13 July 1830 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/4); McHugh, *Drogheda before the Famine*, p. 47; *Second report of evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 18 May-5 June*, p. 376, H.C. 1830 (654), vii, 552; Report on the state of the poor in Waterford city and on the charitable institutions of that city, 5 Apr. 1834 (MS 3288), f18r-f19r;

rule were the Sligo Mendicity Society, which in 1828 was providing accommodation for forty-three of the sixty-six paupers on its books, and the Clonmel society which lodged fifty paupers at its premises.[65] The general practice was that applicants, who invariably came from the most destitute classes of an urban centre's population, were admitted in the morning, provided with food at stipulated times and discharged in the evening, when they returned to their places of residence or found shelter on the streets. During the day the able-bodied were put to labour, such as breaking stones or oyster shells, picking oakum and spinning, while the infirm and elderly were given succour and occasionally allocated basic work.

The guiding principle of these institutions was similar to that used by the New Poor Law workhouses in England (and later in Ireland) from the 1830s – namely, 'that the condition of persons within charitable institutions should not be raised above the level of the lower class of the working orders out of doors'.[66] These charities did not wish to undermine the incentive and moral virtue of 'honest' and independent industry to the working classes. Those who entered these institutions were subject to discipline and order, while the provision of relief for the destitute removed the excuse for resorting to mendicancy. A distinction could, therefore, be drawn between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, to be relieved and scorned respectively, and the private giving of alms could be curtailed appropriately.

Relief was not unqualifiedly given but had to be earned, either through genuine distress or hard labour. Removing these individuals from the streets and from a state of idleness for a few hours each day decreased their chances of resorting to alms-seeking. However, mendicity societies did not – and could not – completely prevent this

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Second report of the Mendicity Association, Londonderry, p. 6; Frederick Page, *Observations on the state of the indigent poor in Ireland, and the existing institutions for the relief* (London, 1830), p. 25.
[65] *Sligo Journal*, 13 May 1828; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 702.
[66] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 342.

eventuality. In the late-1830s, it was noted that many relieved at the Limerick Mendicity Society during the day would 'take up the trade of begging on their return home each night, to the great annoyance of the shopkeepers'.[67] In Dublin a number of women 'notoriously prostitutes' were reported as attending the institution during the day and being 'on the streets at night'.[68] To these individuals the mendicity societies were clearly yet another survival option to be utilised. They could enter the asylums voluntarily, and receive shelter and food during the day before returning to their habitual practices in the evening. The poor exerted agency and made decisions for themselves, drawing on their knowledge of the various welfare options available to them in the 'economy of makeshifts'.

While the habitual recourse to beggary, regardless of the cause of such resort, usually sufficed as a requirement for admission to the mendicity institutions, the benevolence of managing committees did not extend to certain individuals whose distress was seen as being self-inflicted. This was seen most clearly in the cases of men who went on strike. The partners and children of such men also suffered. In March 1836 the Dublin Mendicity Society received two new admission cases – Sarah Doody and her son James, and Biddy Loghlin and her five-month-old son James. In both instances, the women's husbands had been tailors who left their employment due to a strike or 'combination'. The minutes of the managing committee's meeting record that Sarah Doody's husband, Timothy, 'in consequence of combination…has quit his work, of which he had enough, & went to England, where he remains', presumably in search of alternative employment, while Biddy Loghlin's husband, William, 'is gone to England & that there

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[67] *Deane's Limerick almanack, directory and advertiser, 1838*, p. 37.
[68] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 12 Oct. 1824 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/3).

is a turn out [ie. a strike] among the tailors'. The committee then resolved to refuse admission to both these women and their young children.[69]

This instance throws light on a number of matters. Firstly, the intolerance of the managing committee for 'combination' among the working classes is evident and may be explained with regard to the fact that the committee comprised almost entirely men from the merchant and professional classes who had an economic interest in the suppression of industrial dissent and insubordination.[70] Those committee members who were not merchants, for instance those in the legal profession, most likely shared their colleagues' concerns of the restless lower orders and perceived these social questions through similar moralising viewpoints.[71] (The Methodist-run Strangers' Friend Society also excluded men whose distress was caused by 'combination' from the benefits of its relief).[72] Secondly, it is significant that in both these cases, the husbands were described as having gone to England, most likely seeking employment. Whether they were unable to find suitable employment in Dublin city due to economic conditions or possibly on foot of being black-listed because of their 'turn out', it is not possible to say. But the fact that they travelled to England, and not to another Irish city, demonstrates the fluidity of employment options between the two islands for many in the working classes. At this time, Britain was a realistic location for employment – either temporary or permanent – and this was true not only of agricultural labourers, many of whom found seasonal work in England and Scotland, but also among the artisans and skilled

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[69] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 Mar. 1836 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/5).

[70] Jacqueline Hill writes that 'combination' was 'the pejorative term used by employers and those hostile to the practice of journeymen combining to try to maintain or improve wage levels, or limit the number of apprentices': Jacqueline Hill, 'Artisans, sectarianism and politics in Dublin, 1829-48' in *Saothar*, vii (1981), p. 17. 'Combination' was prohibited in Ireland under a statute of 1803, which was repealed in 1824. For 'combination' in early-nineteenth-century Belfast, see S.J. Connolly and Gillian McIntosh, 'Whose city? Belonging and exclusion in the nineteenth-century urban world' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Belfast 400: people, place and history* (Liverpool, 2012), pp 239, 244. See also Kelly, 'Charitable societies', p. 95.

[71] A number of middle-class deponents, such as clergymen and merchants, expressed their suspicion of 'combination' to the Poor Inquiry: *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, pp 115-16.

[72] Ibid., p. 18.

working classes of urban centres, facilitated by the availability of quicker, cheaper and more frequent travel across the channel, via the new steam service.[73]

The ability of mendicity societies to apprehend and confine street beggars varied from place to place. In most cases though, the lack of powers to physically remove mendicants was the source of much debate and complaint by the managing committees and local householders, who were critical of this weakness. Some mendicity societies employed beadles to suppress mendicancy, but the exact nature of their work is difficult to ascertain. Did they physically man-handle beggars out of public streets or did they use persuasion, intimidation or threats to ward off mendicants? In 1831 the Coleraine Mendicity Society and poor house was paying its 'bang-beggar' an annual salary of £7 16*s.*, while the following year, this figure increased substantially to £17 11*s.* 8*d.* for 'persons to prevent street begging'.[74] More definitive information on the powers exercised by such individuals is available for the Belfast House of Industry. This institution employed two constables who apprehended and confined street beggars under authority deputed from the town's Charitable Society, which had been granted such powers by a 1774 statute (13 & 14 Geo. III, c. 46 [Ire.]). Beggars were confined in a 'miserable vault' in the House of Industry for up to twenty-four hours before being released, while the most 'incorrigible' inmates were taken before a magistrate.[75] The Londonderry Mendicity Society's constables also possessed powers of apprehension: two, or sometimes three, officers called 'bangbeggars' were employed 'to go round the

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[73] David Fitzpatrick, "A peculiar tramping people': the Irish in Britain, 1801-70' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v*, pp 626-7; Barbara M. Kerr, 'Irish seasonal migration to Great Britain, 1800-38' in *IHS*, iii, no. 12 (Sept. 1943), p. 370; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 56.

[74] *OS Memoirs, xxxiii*, p. 71; *Municipal corporations, (Ireland). Appendix to the first report of the commissioners. Part III. – Conclusion of the north-west circuit*, pp 1050-51, H.C. 1836 [C 26], xxiv, 50-51. It appears that this parliamentary report formed the basis of Maxwell Given's presentation of the mendicity society's accounts for the years 1831-32 in 'Historical notes compiled by Maxwell Given' 1906, pp 1707-10. This conclusion can be reached by the fact that no additional information is provided in Maxwell's account, which is transcribed word for word from the earlier source.

[75] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 12. In 1810 the House of Industry advertised for a 'stout active man, to take up all persons found begging in the Streets of Belfast, and to keep the Streets free from Mendicants': *BNL*, 28 Sept. 1810.

City in every direction, and to apprehend any one they may find begging', who were then confined in the city bridewell.[76] After being sent away by the master 'over the bridge', the mendicants were allegedly discouraged from re-entering the town by the one penny toll on the bridge. If caught a second time, the beggars were confined in a bridewell attached to the mendicity asylum.[77]

Upon its foundation in 1818 the Dublin Mendicity Society employed street inspectors to clear beggars from the city streets. The efficacy of this method was weakened, however, by the absence of legal powers for these inspectors to remove or detain mendicants. To overcome this problem the institution's officers accompanied members of the Dublin police on their beat and the former's role was limited to 'pointing out persons in the act of begging to the police' who would subsequently arrest and detain the culprit.[78] The society was all too aware that its officers possessed no legal powers to apprehend any beggar. The weaknesses of this system were apparent, such that the Poor Inquiry commissioners expressed their view that the system which prevailed in Dublin 'presents far less facilities for their [the beggars'] apprehension than that adopted in London'.[79] M.J.D. Roberts has argued that the employment by the London Mendicity Society of its own constables resulted from the belief 'that existing police agents in London were demonstrably uninterested in enforcing the begging provisions' of the English vagrancy legislation.[80] Interestingly, just as the formation of the professional Metropolitan Police in 1829 led the London Mendicity Society to relinquish its policing

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[76] *The third report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year* (Londonderry, 1828), p. 6.

[77] *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, Esq., to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department on poor laws, Ireland*, p. 11, H.C. 1837-38 [C 104], xxxviii, 667; *Third report of the Mendicity Association, Londonderry*, p. 6; *Colby's Ordnance Survey memoir of Londonderry* (1837; 2nd ed., Limavaddy, 1990), p. 168.

[78] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 33a*; Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 17 May 1836.

[79] Ibid., p. 33a*.

[80] Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship', p. 217.

duties regarding mendicants,[81] it appears that the Dublin society waned in its deployment of street inspectors in the mid-1830s, around the time of the establishment of the Dublin Metropolitan Police along the lines of Robert Peel's London force. Indeed, the 1830s witnessed the unusual phenomenon of private residents and businesses employing extra-legal street inspectors, who possessed no legal powers of any kind, for the sole purpose of removing beggars from outside their respective homes and places of business (as examined in Chapter Three).

Mendicity societies were also occasionally involved in sending paupers to foreign lands either for temporary employment or permanent settlement. Assisted emigration was hailed throughout the nineteenth century as a suitable means of alleviating Ireland's crippling poverty. Such measures were proposed by the Poor Inquiry of the 1830s and put into practice by certain landlords during the Great Famine.[82] In the 1820s the Cork Mendicity Society 'apportioned a part of their funds for the purpose of sending the redundant poor labourers to England' and negotiated with steam-boat owners to provide passage at reduced prices for these paupers.[83] In 1832 the Dublin Mendicity Society was asked to consider a proposal to send out orphans aged between six and twelve years to Australia, where they would be disposed 'among the settlers as servants, apprentices and the like'.[84] The society again considered such a measure during the Great Famine.[85]

[81] Roberts, 'Reshaping the gift relationship', p. 218.
[82] *Poor Inquiry. Third report, 1836*, pp 26-7; Gerard Moran, *Sending out Ireland's poor: assisted emigration to North America in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2004).
[83] *Report from the select committee on the laws relating to Irish and Scottish vagrants*, p. 12, H.C. 1828 (513), iv, 214.
[84] Thomas Wright to Daniel Murray, 18 Oct. 1832 (DDA, DMP, 31/3/112).
[85] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 28 Mar. 1848 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/6).

Belfast House of Industry

The Belfast House of Industry constituted an anomaly within the mendicity society movement. The name of the institution is deceiving, associating it with the twelve houses of industry established across Ireland on foot of the 1772, or related, legislation.[86] The Belfast House of Industry was, in fact, a mendicity society in all but name and this can be seen in its founding objectives, the nature of its work, and the manner in which it was funded and operated. This anomaly has proved deceiving to historians, some of whom have mistakenly placed the asylum within the context of the houses of industry.[87]

Founded in June 1809 the Belfast House of Industry, located in the Smithfield market area, defined its 'principal object' as being 'to remove all pretexts for begging'.[88] It is significant that the initiative for the foundation of this institution came just weeks after a significant downturn in the town's manufacturing base. According to one contemporary estimate as many as 2,000 calico looms in Belfast and its hinterland 'were struck idle in five weeks'.[89] It may be suggested that many of those labouring poor took to begging from the town's inhabitants. The House of Industry's founding proposals were published and circulated throughout the town, under the name of a 'Society for the Abolition of Mendicity, and for the Relief and Encouragement of the Industrious Poor of the Town of Belfast'[90] and the rules and regulations spoke of its driving principle being 'not merely to check the growth of mendicity at present, but to cut it up by the roots, to come at the very source and spring of the evil that rankles in the vitals of every

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[86] 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire.] (2 June 1772); 13 & 14 Geo. III, c. 46 [Ire.] (2 June 1774).
[87] Alison Jordan, *Who cared? Charity in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast* (Belfast, n.d. [1992]), p. 24.
[88] Raymond Gillespie and Stephen A. Royle, *Belfast. Part I, to 1840*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 12 (Dublin, 2003), p. 22; *BNL*, 14 July 1809.
[89] John Dubourdieu , *Statistical survey of the county of Antrim, with observations on the means of improvement; drawn up for the consideration, and by direction of the Dublin Society* (Dublin, 1812), pp 410-11.
[90] 'Abolition of Mendicity', p. 436.

large town'.[91] Poor Law Commissioner George Nicholls distinguished between the Belfast House of Industry, comparing it to the mendicity societies, and the town's Charitable Society or 'Poor House' which he perceived as being akin to the Dublin House of Industry. The Belfast House of Industry was founded, he said, 'expressly for the suppression of mendicancy, and it has strong rooms to which persons found begging are committed, under sanction of the local authorities'.[92] The Poor Inquiry of the 1830s also located the Belfast House of Industry within the mendicity society movement, describing it as 'the first society established in Ireland for suppressing mendicity'.[93] The organisation's first report saw its work as 'the result of an experiment hitherto untried in Ireland', emphasising the innovative nature of the society at a time when houses of industry had been established throughout the country and mendicity societies were absent from the welfare landscape.[94] A public campaign in Kilkenny city for the establishment of a mendicity society hailed the Belfast House of Industry as the first Irish mendicity society.[95] Widespread support and enthusiasm for this new initiative – Ireland's first mendicity society – is evident from the appointment of the committee of the Belfast Charitable Society and the clergy of the town (of all denominations) as honorary members.[96] The Methodist-run Strangers' Friend Society took the decision to dissolve itself so that public efforts and money would be focused on the new charity.[97]

Like other mendicity societies, the Belfast House of Industry was supported almost entirely through voluntary income, most commonly subscriptions and donations.

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[91] 'Rules and regulations for the House of Industry, in Belfast, laid before a general meeting of the town for their approbation, and unanimously agreed to' in *Belfast Monthly Magazine*, iv, no. 21 (30 Apr. 1810), p. 263.
[92] *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, on poor laws, Ireland*, p. 11.
[93] *Poor Inquiry. Fist report, 1836, Appendix C. Part I*, p. 11.
[94] 'Rules and regulations for the House of Industry, Belfast', p. 261.
[95] *Leinster Journal*, 19 Apr. 1820.
[96] *BNL*, 14 July 1809.
[97] Ibid., 15 Sept. 1809.

Charity sermons raised money, as did court fines and bequests,[98] while in 1831, the institution benefitted from an untypical source of income when it received half of the proceeds of a ventriloquist show.[99] The charity adhered to the general mendicity society model by providing only day accommodation for the poor – namely, 'that class of poor who have no place of residence convenient for working in'.[100] The institution encouraged industrious individuals to engage in employment, mostly the spinning of flax or wool (either on-site or at the paupers' abode), knitting and picking oakum. One year after opening 309 spinners of linen yarn were employed, as well as stocking knitters and oakum pickers.[101] The destitute poor were also incentivised away from mendicancy by the House of Industry's provision of food, fuel and straw to deserving cases approved by visitors.

Inter-denominational appeal of mendicity societies

In a period marked by increasing sectarian tensions the establishment and management of mendicity societies provided opportunities for inter-denominational collaboration in the public sphere of philanthropy. Public figures who differed in their religious views co-operated for the common good through these charities. The mendicity society model, which was applied by individual branches of the movement, was agreeable to the various doctrinal views of the Irish churches, as well as the social, economic and cultural outlook of the middle-class men who formed and ran the organisations. The nineteen-man committee of the Ballyshannon Mendicity Society

[98] Rev. Hugh McNeile to Mr. Tennent, 11 Aug. 1827 (PRONI, Tennent Papers, D1748/C/1/132/1); *BNL*, 12 Feb. 1811, 26 Sept. 1828, 26 June 1829; *Martin's Belfast directory for 1841-42…* (1841; reprint Belfast, 1992), pp 246-7; *BNL*, 3 Aug. 1810.

[99] P. Frederick Gallaher [sic] to William Cunningham, 30 Dec. 1831 (PRONI, Cunningham and Clarke Papers, D1108/A/28A). For the identification of 'Gallaher' as a ventriloquist, see P. Frederick Gallaher [sic] to William Cunningham, 29 Jan. 1833 (PRONI, Cunningham and Clarke Papers, D1108/A/28B).

[100] *BNL*, 14 July 1809; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 11; Jordan, *Who cared?*, pp 20-21; *Martin's Belfast directory for 1841-42*, pp 246-7.

[101] *BNL*, 15 May 1810; 'Rules and regulations for the House of Industry, Belfast', p. 267.

comprised nine Catholics and ten Protestants.[102] The ecumenical nature of the

management of mendicity societies can also be seen in the raising of income from

collections in different churches and meeting houses. The Carrickfergus Mendicity

Society was supported through collections in the local Church of Ireland church and

Presbyterian meeting house, as well as by voluntary subscriptions.[103] The income for the

Sligo society, the chairman of which was Presbyterian minister Rev. Heron,[104] included

donations collected at sermons preached at the town's Anglican, Presbyterian and

Independent places of worship.[105]

These charities were secular in nature and embraced all denominations, both in terms

of their serving members and those paupers relieved. The fact that the Antrim Mendicity

Society relieved Catholics, who comprised 'the least competent in means and numbers

to contribute' to the charity's income, was hailed a 'practical illustration of disinterested

benevolence'.[106] As with most large secular charities in urban centres Protestants

formed a disproportionately large number of the members, reflecting the greater social

and economic prominence of Protestants in nineteenth-century urban Ireland. But, the

rising strength and confidence of the Catholic middle classes was also represented in the

membership of the mendicity societies. Catholic priest, poor law advocate and member

of the Dublin Mendicity Society managing committee, Rev. Thaddeus O'Malley,

pointed to the collaboration between clergy of all denominations in mendicity societies

as evidence for the suitability of having ministers serve on the poor law boards of

guardians.[107] (The subsequent stipulation[108] that clergymen could not serve as guardians

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[102] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 118.
[103] *Third report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, Appendix, p. 698.
[104] Fióna Gallagher, *The streets of Sligo: urban evolution over the course of seven centuries* (Sligo, 2008), p. 169.
[105] *Sligo Journal*, 22 Apr., 13 May 1828.
[106] *BNL*, 14 June 1831.
[107] O'Malley, *Poor laws – Ireland*, p. 67.
[108] 1 & 2 Vict., c. 56, s. 19 (31 July 1838).

was one of the features of the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act which distinguished it from the English act of four years previously). Testifying to a parliamentary select committee O'Malley asserted:

> Now I have been acting for many Years on the Mendicity Committee in Dublin; we had Clergymen of the different Churches there; and I never knew any thing approaching to an Unpleasantness to occur between them. I think it most desirable to bring the Clergy of both Churches together, and I do not know any more fitting Occasion than the administering [of] Poor Relief.[109]

The common contemporary Protestant accusation that Catholics invariably gave indiscriminately to beggars does not tally with the prominent part played in the mendicity society movement by Catholics. (The question of Catholic' beliefs and indiscriminate alms-giving is analysed in Chapter Five). Archbishop of Dublin John Thomas Troy and his coadjutor Daniel Murray (who succeeded Troy as archbishop) were among the founding vice-presidents of the Dublin Mendicity Society. In June 1821 Troy co-signed, in his capacity as the society's chairman, an appeal to the public not to give alms to beggars,[110] while Murray dedicated a pastoral to advocating the work of the charity.[111] The third annual report singled out the Catholic clergy of the city for their 'zeal and intelligence' not only in raising funds for the nascent charity but by their 'repeated exhortations to their flock on the true nature of Charity, and by explaining to them at the same time the benevolent views of this Institution'.[112]

Lay Catholics, such as the prominent lawyer and government advisor Anthony Richard Blake were among the members of the Dublin society's managing

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[109] *Report from the select committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor, and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence taken before the said committee*, p. 836, H.C. 1846 (694), xi, 872.
[110] *Sixth report of the general committee of the Association of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1823* (Dublin, 1824), pp 28-31.
[111] Draft of pastoral by Archbishop Daniel Murray regarding the Mendicity Society, 12 Nov. 1836 (DDA, DMP, 31/5/27).
[112] *Report of the general committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1820* (Dublin, 1821), p. 27.

committee.[113] The society was one of twelve causes which were bequeathed the sum of £50 each by the Roman Catholic gentleman John Moore of Portland Street, the others including eight Catholic orphan houses and poor schools. Moore also left money for the building and furnishing of the Marlborough Street chapel (later Pro-Cathedral), while the multi-denominational appeal of the Charitable Infirmary on Jervis Street and the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society is evident by their inclusion among the beneficiaries.[114] In his will a Thomas Bennet bequeathed more than £2,000 to friends and families, as well as towards the completion of the Marlborough Street Church in Dublin, the city's Mendicity Society and also towards poor relief in Galway.[115] It is clear that prominent members of Dublin's Catholic community were active supporters of the city's mendicity society but it would be wrong to conclude that the goals of the charity were, therefore, shared by all Catholics. The fact that the aforementioned individuals were all middle-class men is perhaps more relevant as to why they put their support behind the movement.

Catholics also played prominent roles in mendicity societies outside of Dublin. In Ballymena Fr Bernard McAuly collected subscriptions for the town's mendicity society upon its establishment.[116] In May 1828, the report read aloud at the annual meeting of the Sligo Mendicity Society made particular mention of the support 'of several most respectable Roman Catholic subscribers to the Institution'.[117] The support of the Roman Catholic clergy was seen as crucial for the anticipated success of the Galway Mendicity

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[113] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, pp 341-2. For Blake, see Richard Hawkins, 'Blake, Anthony Richard' in *DIB*, i, pp 580-81.

[114] Extract from the will of John Moore (d. 7 June 1828), Portland Street, Dublin, n.d. [*c*.1833] (DDA, JHP, 35/2/77). While Moore's profession could not be established by the present author, that he was a person of significant social standing is evident from his being listed among the nobility and gentry in an 1823 directory, as well as his death being recorded in the public press: *Wilson's Dublin Directory for the year 1823…*, p. 33; *FJ*, 11 June 1828. For Moore's will, see: Extract from financial statement, regarding construction of Pro-Cathedral, Dublin, Nov. 1831 (DDA, JHP, 35/3/40).

[115] Last will and testament of Thomas Bennett, 9 May 1828 (DDA, DMP, 33/9/14/1).

[116] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 718.

[117] *Sligo Journal*, 13 May 1828.

Society upon its establishment in 1824. The *Galway Weekly Advertiser* stated 'we are convinced that their co-operation will secure the support of some who are too much wedded to old habits, to look at such an Institution without a little jealousy, and might otherwise be tempted to consider it an innovation upon established customs, that ought not to be complied with'.[118] A year later, the same paper reported that the exertions of both Catholic and Protestant clergy had achieved 'astonishing' success in suppressing beggary in the town.[119] Roman Catholic priests were also active supporters of the Drogheda mendicity asylum in the early-1830s,[120] while Edmund Rice, founder of the Christian Brothers, was among the leading members of the Waterford Mendicity Society, being elected in 1826 as the society's chairman. Five years later, a resolution proposed and seconded by two of Waterford's Protestant clergymen, expressed gratitude to 'the Gentlemen of Mr. Rice's establishment' for their attendance at the asylum and in imparting religious instruction to male inmates.[121]

Inter-denominational tensions

Despite the aforementioned instances of inter-denominational co-operation, wider political and religious interests and tensions found their way into the board rooms of managing committees on occasion. According to one account, the Waterford Mendicity Society fell victim to 'political and religious party-spirit, which unhappily thwart some of the best endeavours to ameliorate the condition of the Irish people', but the precise

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[118] *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 17 July 1824. For the Catholic clergy's work in collecting statistics on the number of mendicants to be relieved in Galway, see ibid., 21 Aug. 1824.
[119] Ibid., 21 May 1825.
[120] McHugh, *Drogheda before the Famine*, pp 48-9.
[121] Seán E. Ó Cearbhaill, 'A memory that lived and a charity that died: Edmund Rice and the Mendicity Institute' in Peter S. Carroll (ed.), *A man raised up: recollections and reflections on Venerable Edmund Rice presented in 1994 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of this death* (Dublin, 1994), pp 168-9; Dáire Keogh, *Edmund Rice and the first Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 2008), p. 68. For his involvement with the mendicity society, see ibid., p. 15; *First annual report of the Waterford Mendicity Society*, p. 42.

nature of this disagreement was not expanded upon.[122] In 1828 members of the Catholic community in Sligo town, including Bishop of Elphin Dr Patrick Burke and a Fr Donleavy, announced their intention to withdraw their support for the town's mendicity society in protest against the steward's signing of an anti-Catholic Emancipation petition which had been sent to parliament. The Protestant-ethos *Sligo Journal* was scathing in its criticism of Bishop Burke and Fr Donleavy for introducing 'party politics' into the workings of the charity which had, it said, been 'founded on the broad basis of Christian charity, without reference to peculiar tenets of religious beliefs'. The unwelcome introduction of partisanship into the affairs of the society was, the paper continued, to the neglect of the largely-Catholic poor, who were 'waiting with all the anxiety of impending misery and starvation, the final determination of the Protestant supporters of the institution'. The newspaper, directly addressing Bishop Burke, also praised those Catholics who 'so nobly spurned the mandates of you & your Priest…[and who] refused to sanction by their signatures, the filthy and abominable calumnies which he uttered against their Protestant friends'.[123] In its annual report for that year the mendicity society expressed its full support for the steward, against whom, the report stressed, there was no accusation of misconduct in his performance of his official duties and who was being targeted for exercising his constitutional rights in signing a political petition in a personal capacity.[124]

Decline of the mendicity societies: the 1838 Poor Law and 'double taxation'

In most cases, the mendicity societies ceased to operate in the late-1830s and early-1840s and this decline can be directly related to the introduction of the 1838 Poor Law.

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[122] Jonathan Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1837), ii, pp 257-8.
[123] *Sligo Journal*, 30 May 1828.
[124] Ibid., 13 May 1828.

The main supporters of the mendicity societies were the middle classes and petty

bourgeois (such as artisans and small shopkeepers), who were also liable for the new

poor rate. With the introduction of the new compulsory assessment, these rate-payers

were more reluctant to subscribe to the mendicity societies, which catered for the same

class of destitute poor now eligible for admission to the workhouses. The problem of

perceived 'double taxation' impacted on other charities' level of subscriptions and

donations, as former supporters became more selective in how they distributed their

disposable income in light of the new poor rate. These concerns were voiced by

Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, in a letter written in the summer

of 1839. Expressing excitement at the forthcoming opening of a new 'Laundry' at

Baggot Street, Dublin, McAuley continued: 'The Poor Law Tax is breaking up all

contributions.'[125] The following year she made a similar observation in a letter to a

Sister in Naas, noting the difficulty in sustaining charitable institutions in the face of the

poor rate: 'The poor law Tax has deprived us of much help. We find it very difficult to

keep up the poor Institution.'[126]

　　Throughout the 1830s, while the poor law question was prominent in public discourse

in Ireland and Britain, mendicity societies were conscious of the likely impact that the

introduction of a poor rate would have on their voluntarily-generated income. The

experience of the Dublin House of Industry, whose subscriptions fell dramatically after

it started receiving an annual parliamentary grant in the 1770s, was cited by the city's

mendicity society in an annual report. Table 4.2 depicts the noticeable decline in

subscriptions as the House of Industry became more dependent on parliamentary

funding. The threat of a compulsorily assessed poor law was regularly used with great

effect by charitable societies to pressurise the public into parting with some of their

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[125] Mary C. Sullivan (ed.), *The correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841* (Dublin and Baltimore, MD, 2004), p. 199.
[126] Ibid., p. 322.

money. In the late-1820s, the Dublin Mendicity Society warned the city's inhabitants that in the event that insufficient income was raised from the usual voluntary sources, the organisation would petition parliament to legislate for a compulsory rate for the support of the society.[127] 'That resolution,' managing committee member Anthony Richard Blake informed a parliamentary inquiry, 'appeared to have a very beneficial effect; subscriptions came in almost immediately upon it.' When asked for his opinion as to what would have been the effect on voluntary contributions had a compulsory rate been introduced, Blake replied that such sources of income would have ceased. The committee was told by Blake that in towns and cities where institutions such as mendicity societies existed and operated, people refused to give alms to beggars in the streets. His explanation was: 'It results, I apprehend, from their feeling that they already contribute to the support of the poor, and partly from knowing that the distressed may be relieved through the mendicity establishment.'[128]

Blake's assertion here that the existence of mendicity societies ended public alms-giving ought to be questioned, though, as it was the near-universal experience of these charities to criticise the continued practice of alms-giving to street beggars even after the mendicity asylum had been established.[129] The charities urged the public to continue contributing to their coffers at least until such a time as the poor rate was introduced.[130] In its final report, for the year ending July 1838, the Londonderry society expressed its support for the recently-enacted Poor Law under which, it hoped, 'apprehended abuses will be checked, the evils will be corrected, and the measure be attended with advantage to all'. Yet, noting that the Poor Law had yet to be enforced in the city the society,

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[127] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 341.
[128] Ibid., pp 341-2.
[129] *Sixth report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1823*, p. 28; *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 1 Jan. 1825; *The third report of the Mendicity Association, Londonderry*, p. 6; *OS Memoirs*, iii, p. 101.
[130] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 26 Apr. 1836.

Table 4.2. Subscriptions and parliamentary grants received for the House of Industry, Dublin, during the first twenty years after its establishment (1773-92).

Year	Subscriptions (£)	Parliamentary Grants (£)
1773	2,891	0
1774	3,808	0
1775	3,125	0
1776	2,063	3,000
1777	2,081	1,000
1778	1,779	3,000
1779	1,736	2,000
1780	1,321	3,000
1781	1,421	6,000
1782	2,774	8,000
1783	2,197	9,500
1784	1,448	8,000
1785	1,162	8,600
1786	1,192	8,600
1787	987	8,000
1788	695	9,000
1789	709	9,000
1790	485	9,000
1791	248	8,000
1792	313	9,757

Source: *Nineteenth annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1836: with resolutions upon the subject of the poor laws* (Dublin, 1837), p. 27. The figures have been rounded to the nearest pound.

acknowledging its own imminent demise, beseeched the public to continue their subscriptions and donations, and urged that the poor 'must not be left to perish between the old and the new mode of relief'.[131] In the end, most mendicity societies were dissolved around the time when inhabitants witnessed the most tangible evidence that the Poor Law was operating in their area – the collection of poor rates and the opening of the local workhouse.[132] The Ballymoney Mendicity Society, for instance, continued

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[131] *Thirteenth report of the Mendicity Association, Londonderry*, pp 6-7.
[132] The declarations of the first poor rate and the opening of the workhouses for the reception for paupers occurred almost invariably in the years 1841-42 in the country's 130 Poor Law Unions: *Appendices B. to F. to the eighth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, appendix E, no. 10, pp 384-6, H.C. 1842 [C 399], xix, 396-398.

to operate as late as 1842,[133] but there is no record of its existence following the opening of the town's workhouse in March 1843. The Waterford society also appears to have declined around 1840. A newspaper notice published in February 1840 referred to the continued difficulties in keeping the institution open, and announced a special public meeting to consider the urgent problem.[134] The decision to close the Belfast House of Industry was taken at a meeting on 31 May 1841, less than three weeks after the first paupers were admitted into the town's workhouse.[135] It appears that the closure of the House of Industry had been anticipated some time in advance, as in December 1840 the institution's premises were advertised as being for sale.[136] A newspaper notice in late-1842 records a bequest of £100 to the House of Industry, 'which institution being dissolved' the legacy was appropriated to the Surgical Hospital with the sanction of the Commissioners of Charitable Bequests.[137] In Derry, the first inmates to enter the workhouse in November 1840 were ninety-five paupers transferred from the city's mendicity asylum.[138]

Ireland's houses of industry also ceased to exist following the introduction of the Poor Law. In some instances, the new workhouses were established in the former houses of industry premises. Such measures made sense in locations where a large segregated institution designed for the poor and deviant already existed. The cost of acquiring a new site and building a workhouse was, thus, avoided. The North and South Dublin Union workhouses were established in the House of Industry and Foundling Hospital

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[133] In December 1842, the society received the sum of 10s. 'for the use of the poor', seemingly as a charitable donation in lieu of a criminal conviction: *BNL*, 9 Dec. 1842.
[134] Ó Cearbhaill, 'A memory that lived and a charity that died', pp 169-70.
[135] *BNL*, 4 June 1841.
[136] Ibid., 25 Dec. 1840.
[137] Ibid., 23 Dec. 1842. For the decline of the Belfast House of Industry, see Christine Kinealy and Gerard MacAtasney, *The hidden famine: poverty, hunger and sectarianism in Belfast, 1840-50* (London, 2000), pp 30-31.
[138] Patrick Durnin, 'Aspects of poor law administration and the workhouse in Derry 1838-1948' in Gerard O'Brien (ed.), *Derry and Londonderry: history and society. Interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1999), p. 539.

respectively. In Cork the former House of Industry was used for meetings of the board of guardians between June 1839 and December 1841, when the new purpose-built workhouse was opened.[139] Upon the opening of the Limerick union workhouse in 1841, the final 489 inmates of the city's House of Industry were transferred to the new institution.[140]

The case of Dublin makes for fascinating reading. The Dublin Mendicity Society was almost unique in remaining in existence after the introduction of the workhouses – and indeed in outliving the Poor Law system.[141] In seeking to explain this, one must consider the sheer size of the city and the number of destitute poor in this urban centre. In most other towns and cities where mendicity societies were founded, these charities could not have been sustained alongside such a large institution as the local workhouse, both in terms of the ability of local rate-payers to support both systems and the demand for the various institutions' welfare services. The sprawling metropolis of Dublin, on the other hand, possessed both a large enough pool of prospective supporters to continue subscribing to charitable causes concurrent to paying their Poor Law rates, and the constant flow of local and non-native poor. The key to the Dublin Mendicity Society's survival and longevity was its ability to adapt to new circumstances, tailoring its services to provide for newly defined and focused categories of the city's destitute poor. No longer were young children or infirm adults admitted into the mendicity institution, as these individuals were catered for in the city's two workhouses. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 demonstrate the stark modification in the charity's inmate base arising from the introduction of the Poor Law system. On 25 April 1840 infirm females comprised almost 42 per cent of the mendicity society's 2,735 inmates, while just weeks later,

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[139] Michelle O'Mahony, *Famine in Cork city: famine life at Cork union workhouse (*Cork, 2005), pp 21-30.
[140] Fleming and Logan (eds), *Pauper Limerick*, p. xv.
[141] The Dublin Mendicity Society remains in operation in 2014. See http://www.mendicity.org/about.htm (31 July 2014).

following the opening of North and South Dublin Union workhouses, there were no infirm paupers (male or female) recorded in the institution. The number of able-bodied poor, while not gone completely, had diminished considerably. The number of child inmates was reduced significantly and there were no longer any 'young children' to be found on the charity's books.[142] Whereas the number of mendicity society's inmates dropped by around 2,000, there were just more than 2,000 inmates in the newly-opened workhouses, and most of these individuals had been previously catered for in the Mendicity Institution.[143] A clear connection can, thus, be established in the use of the city's poorer classes of these respective welfare institutions.

The Dublin Mendicity Society's long-held fears that a poor rate would impact detrimentally on its own income levels were borne out upon the introduction of the Poor Law system. Table 4.5 and Figure 4.1 demonstrate the rapid fall in income, both annual subscriptions and casual sources, for the association in the years after the establishment of the Poor Law system. Subscriptions fell from £6,365 14*s*. 11*d*. in 1839 to £1,891 10*s*. 2*d*. just one year later, representing a drop of 70 per cent. In the following two years, the society again witnessed a 70 per cent decrease in subscriptions, falling to £563 19*s*. 8*d*. in 1842. A brief surge in subscriptions was recorded during the first half of the Famine period, but by 1848, subscriptions had fallen to the relatively low amount of £708 4*s*. 8*d*. In explaining the drop in income around 1840, the public knowledge that the society was now catering for a considerably smaller number of paupers surely impacted on the inflow of subscriptions. Nonetheless, the 'double taxation' factor was undoubtedly the main reason behind this substantial decrease.

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[142] *Twenty-second report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1839*, p. 15.The total number of inmates is mistakenly given as 2,715 in ibid.
[143] Ibid., p. 15; *Seventh annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with appendices*, p. 44, H.C. 1841 Session I [C 327], xi, 342.

Table 4.3. Categories of inmates in the Dublin Mendicity Society on 25 April 1840.

Males		Females		Total
Able-bodied	102	Able-bodied	499	601
Infirm	204	Infirm	1143	1,347
Extern sick	11	Extern sick	155	166
Children in upper schools	135	Children in upper schools	185	320
Children in infant schools	107	Children in infant schools	103	210
Young children	44	Young children	47	91
TOTAL	**603**		**2,132**	**2,735**

Source: *Twenty-second report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1839*, p. 15.

Table 4.4. Categories of inmates in the Dublin Mendicity Society on an unspecified date in June 1840.

Males		Females		Total
Able-bodied	25	Able-bodied	225	250
Children in upper schools	35	Children in upper schools	42	77
Children in infant schools	31	Children in infant schools	45	76
TOTAL	**91**		**312**	**403**

Source: *Twenty-second report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1839*, p. 15.

Table. 4.5. Subscriptions and other casual income received by the Dublin

Mendicity Society, 1830-48.

Year	Annual subs (£)	Casual income (fines, legacies, anonymous donations etc) (£)	Total income (£)
1830	6,038	4,609	10,647
1831	5,311	4,236	9,547
1832	3,922	2,908	6,830
1833	3,849	2,848	6,696
1834	4,061	2,951	7,011
1835	3,908	2,611	6,519
1836	4,844	3,399	8,242
1837	4,247	5,177	9,424
1838	4,793	3,877	8,670
1839	6,366	4,815	11,181
1840	1,892	2,915	4,807
1841	661	1,330	1,991
1842	564	1,336	1,900
1843	592	974	1,566
1844	717	1,209	1,927
1845	662	1,321	1,983
1846	1,143	1,165	2,308
1847	1,569	2,015	3,584
1848	708	977	1,685

Source: *Thirty-first annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1848* (Dublin, 1849), p. 21. Figures have been rounded to the nearest pound.

Figure 4.1. Subscriptions to the Dublin Mendicity Society, 1830-48
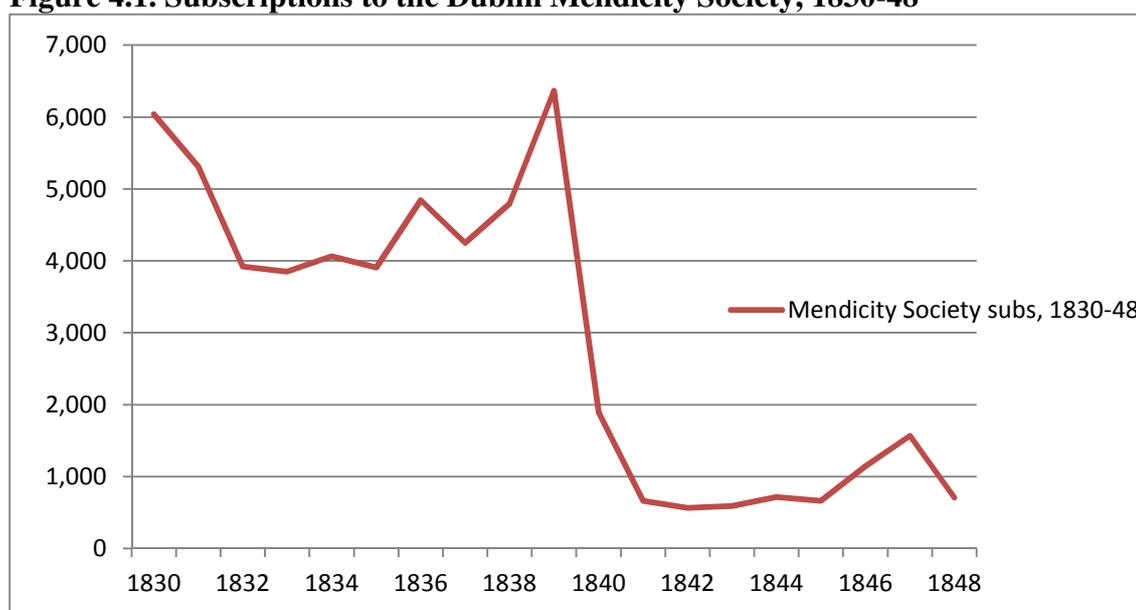
Source: *Thirty-first report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1848*, p. 20.

In considering the decline of the mendicity societies, whose duties were largely superseded by the Poor Law workhouse system, a number of issues may be analysed – one being whether the same men who served on the mendicity societies' managing committees became members of the workhouse boards of guardians upon the emergence of the new system. The first thing to say is that clergymen of all denominations, as noted above, frequently served as members of the managing committees of the mendicity charities. Twelve of the Londonderry Mendicity Society's committee of forty-two men (28.6 per cent) were clergymen in its final year of operation, while the two secretaries were also two clergymen.[144] Under the 1838 Poor Law clergymen were specifically prohibited from serving as poor law union guardians and it could be argued that the exclusion of clerics from boards of guardians prevented a large number of individuals who had considerable amount of experience of first-hand relieving of the poor as well as administrative skills. Of the members of an eight-person sub-committee from among the Londonderry Union board of guardians in 1842, one (Sir Robert A. Ferguson) can be definitively identified as having been a member of the city's mendicity society, while the names of two other poor law guardians (Messrs McClelland and Mehan) match those of two members of the earlier charity.[145] In Belfast a John Cunningham and a Charles Thomson served as directors of the House of Industry (the former as treasurer) in 1810 and three decades later, individuals of the same names were among the guardians of the poor law union.[146] (Seemingly the same John Cunningham bequeathed £100 to the Belfast House of Industry but as it was dissolved

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[144] *Thirteenth report of the Mendicity Association, Londonderry*, p. 3.
[145] Ibid., p. 3; *Londonderry Union. Return to an order of the honourable House of Commons, dated 11 March 1842; - for, copies of the contracts entered into for the building of the Londonderry Union poor-house…*, p. 35, H.C. 1842 (189), xxxvi, 231.
[146] *BNL*, 4 May 1810; Belfast Board of Guardians minute book, 4 Jan. 1842 (PRONI, Belfast Board of Guardians papers, BG7/A/1); *Poor Law (Ireland). Copies of any communications, &c. by the Poor Law Commissioners to any boards of guardians in Ireland, in reference to 15th & 16th clauses of the amended Poor Law Act…*, p. 27, H.C. 1844 (346), xl, 659; Michael Farrell, *The poor law and the workhouse in Belfast, 1838-1948* (Belfast, 1978), p. 28.

by late-1842, this money was appropriated to the Surgical Hospital, with the sanction of the Commissioners for Charitable Bequests).[147] James McTier and John Know were also two officials of the Belfast House of Industry who served among the town's first Union guardians.[148] In Dublin in 1841, Sir John Kingston James Bart and John Mackay were members of the mendicity society managing committee at the same time as they served as elected guardians in the North and South Dublin Unions respectively.[149] These cases appear, however, to have been merely a handful of instances where continuity in personnel can be identified and they must not necessarily be considered representative.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the case of the Dublin Mendicity Society's honorary secretary, Joseph Burke, who ended his involvement with the charity when he was appointed as an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner in April 1839.[150] Burke's appointment to a state position followed on the heels of years of correspondence with (or perhaps canvassing of) senior political figures, both Tory and Whig, as well as a direct request to Lord Morpeth for a Poor Law appointment.[151] To Burke, a member of the Irish Bar and clearly an ambitious man, a position with the new Poor Law administration was a natural progression from his employment with the Dublin Mendicity Society. Indeed, in his appeal to Morpeth Burke specifically drew on his

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[147] *BNL*, 23 Dec. 1842.
[148] For their involvement with the House of Industry, see *BNL*, 25 Dec. 1840. Their service as poor law guardians is recorded at: Belfast Board of Guardians minute book, 4 Jan. 1842 (PRONI, Belfast Board of Guardians Papers, BG7A/1) for John Knox; Farrell, *The poor law and the workhouse in Belfast*, p. 28 for James McTier.
[149] *Twenty-fourth annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1841* (Dublin, 1842), p. iii; *Dublin Almanac, and general register of Ireland, 1841*, pp 815, 816.
[150] *Twenty-second annual report of the Mendicity Society, Dublin*, p. 11; *Sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners. With appendices*, p. 24, H.C. 1840 [C 245], xvii, 424; Letter of resignation of Joseph Burke as Honorary Secretary of Dublin Mendicity Society, 29 Apr. 1839, in Letter book of Joseph Burke, f134r (NAI, M 2591). Joseph was the younger brother of genealogist John Burke, founder of *Burke's Peerage*: *FJ*, 4 May 1839; Letter book of Joseph Burke, f13r-f13v (NAI, M 2591); Helen Andrews, 'Burke, John' in *DIB*, ii, pp 41-2.
[151] Letter book of Joseph Burke, f9r-f17r (NAI, M 2591). For the letter to Morpeth, dated 17 Jan. 1837, see ibid., f17r-f18v. A similar petition was sent to Irish M.P. Richard Lalor Sheil and the English Poor Law Commissioner George Nicholls: Joseph Burke to Richard Lalor Sheil, 5 June 1837 in ibid., f86v-f87v; Joseph Burke to George Nicholls, 22 Mar. 1838 in ibid., f114r-f114v.

service to the mendicity society, 'which has given me an experience as to the state of the numerous poor of this city, that I submit might prove useful in the working or carrying into effect any legislative measure for the amelioration of their present & very deplorable state'.[152] These examples suggest that some level of continuity existed between the mendicity societies, and the new workhouses and poor law administration in urban centres, in terms of the individuals who were responsible in overseeing the administration of the new institutions. Of course, a key difference was that while the administrators possessed great independence in the mendicity societies, which operated as private entities, the manner in which the workhouses were run and relief provided therein was governed by legislation and guardians were accountable to the centralised Poor Law Commissioners in Dublin.

How effective were mendicity societies?

The crucial question remains: how effective were mendicity societies in supressing beggary and relieving destitution in Irish towns and cities. In answering this question, one may turn to the views of contemporaries but in most cases where a judgement of the efficacy of a mendicity society is to be found, it was the opinion of an individual directly associated with the charity and with, therefore, an obvious interest in presenting a positive picture not necessarily reflective of reality. This is not to be overly cynical but merely cautious. According to Thomas Brodigan, treasurer and secretary of the Drogheda Mendicity Society, the institution 'completely suppressed street begging, which was a great evil previous to the establishment of the asylum'.[153] Yet, the little information available on the Drogheda mendicity asylum depicts an under-resourced institution failing to meet its foundational aim of ridding the town's streets of beggars.

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[152] Letter book of Joseph Burke, f18r (NAI, M 2591).
[153] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 376.

The Poor Inquiry noted that while the society, founded in 1822, initially succeeded in mitigating the nuisance caused by mendicants, reduced subscriptions had limited the resources of the charity and reduced its efficacy. The society was providing neither work for the able-bodied poor nor education for child inmates, yet was still expending on average 1*s*. 9*d*. a week per pauper. 'We visited this institution and it appeared to us to be so conducted that little good could be expected to be derived from it,' the report asserted, before later stating that 'notwithstanding this asylum, the streets of Drogheda are much infested with beggars'.[154] This report presents a significantly different image of the Drogheda asylum to that provided just three years earlier by Brodigan.

The Londonderry society can be cited as a body which received praise beyond its own members. Londonderry M.P. George Hill claimed that 'there is no such thing as street begging in the city of Derry', attributing this to the work of the city's mendicity society.[155] Another observer identified noticeable decreases in street begging in a number of urban centres following the establishment of mendicity societies. 'I found no begging, certainly, in the streets, neither in Dublin or Limerick, very little in Cork, and very little at Waterford: I mean actual mendicants pestering you in the streets, I did not find that,' the English magistrate, parochial overseer and poor law writer Frederick Page noted.[156] Page, who personally visited the mendicity asylums at Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Belfast, was especially complimentary towards these charities' ability to provide for their poor on such marginal budgets.[157]

The Dublin Mendicity Society was praised in the House of Commons by Henry Grattan (Junior), as alleviating the daily pressures and intimidation felt by shopkeepers by soliciting beggars: 'He knew that, but for the exertions of a Mendicity Society,

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[154] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 54-5.
[155] *First report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 172.
[156] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 61.
[157] Page, *Observations on the state of the indigent poor in Ireland*, p. 25.

supported by voluntary contribution, in the city of Dublin, it would be impossible, at that very moment, for any shop-keeper to keep his door open for the purpose of carrying on business. But for the exertions of that Society, the doors would be besieged with mendicants, that all passage must be impossible.'[158] The *Freeman's Journal* also extolled the benefits that accrued to the city traders from the mendicity society, 'which has so amply relieved their doors from a nuisance which, in no small degree, impeded their business, and injured their interests'.[159]

Just as praise for the mendicity societies transcended religious and social boundaries, criticism of these charities did so as well. Three members of the Whately Poor Inquiry – the Church of Ireland dean of the royal chapel at Dublin Castle, Rev. Charles Vignoles (1789-1877); the Catholic peer Lord Killeen; and a Protestant Tory landed gentleman from County Meath, J.W.L. Naper – dissented from the commission's recommendations for the direct provision of poor assistance through the encouragement of voluntary associations, and cited the insufficient financial support of mendicity societies across Ireland as among the reasons for their opposition.[160] In the main body of the commission's reports, the Clonmel Mendicity Society was described as having failed to suppress the increasing number of beggars in the town, estimated to total 150 in the mid-1830s.[161] Roman Catholic bishop James Doyle told the 1830 select committee on the poor in Ireland that a short-lived mendicity asylum in Carlow town, with which he was involved, failed due to the organisation's lack of powers to apprehend and detain the mendicant poor. Doyle noted that contrary to the society's founding principles, its

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[158] *Hansard 2*, xvi, 1090-1 (9 Mar. 1827).
[159] *FJ*, 15 Sept. 1818.
[160] *Poor Inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (H.) – Part I. containing reasons for recommending voluntary associations for the relief of the poor; and reasons for dissenting from the principle of raising funds for the relief of the poor by the voluntary system, as recommended in the report. Also, Tables No. I, II, II, referred to in third report*, pp 8-9, H.C. 1836 [C 41], xxxiv, 650-651.
[161] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 699.

activities actually contributed to an increase in street beggars in the provincial town.[162] The Quaker and Poor Law Assistant Commissioner Jonathan Binns painted a woeful picture of the Waterford Mendicity Society and its inmates, who were described as being sickly, wretched and largely idle.[163] Yet, Binns perceived the mendicity society movement as a worthwhile cause and this is shown by his lamenting that in Tralee, where pauperism prevailed to a great extent, there was no mendicity asylum, 'that which almost every town in Ireland should possess, in the absence of some legislative provision for the poor'.[164]

In his account of visiting Dublin in 1834, Henry Inglis contrasted his negative impression of the mendicity society's asylum with the House of Industry, the latter of which was 'as fine an institution of the kind as I have any where seen'. In the mendicity society's premises, on the other hand, a small number of paupers were at work while 'hundreds, for whom no employment could be found, [were] lying and sitting in the court, waiting for the mess which had tempted them from their hovels, and the incertitude of mendicancy'. He noted the rudimentary education facilities for children and seemed to criticise the practice of sending children home to their abodes at the end of the day, thus returning them 'to the hovels in which vice and misery are so often united'.[165]

In assessing the efficacy of Irish mendicity societies, an important question relates to the resources – both material and legal – at these institutions' disposal. What was it possible for these charities to do in terms of suppressing street begging? Financial uncertainty plagued mendicity societies throughout their relatively short existence.

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[162] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 406.
[163] Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland*, ii, p. 257.
[164] Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland*, ii, p. 370. See also Gray, *Making of the Irish poor law*, p. 15.
[165] Henry D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834. A journey through Ireland, during the spring, summer, and autumn of 1834* (2nd ed., 2 vols, London, 1835), i, pp 16-18.

Some fluctuated between dissolution and re-establishment, while others experienced a constant struggle to make ends meet. Funded solely through voluntary and casual sources, mendicity societies were subject to the whim and appetite of the public for anti-mendicancy measures, and this appetite was tempered by the number of beggars seen on local streets at any given time. It is clear that in towns and cities where these charities were established, many well-off householders who, it was felt, ought to have contributed, did not do so and this abstention from public charity was a bone of contention for many societies, who took to drastic measures – including the parading of beggars to the homes of such individuals – to exert pressure on those who refrained from supporting the charities. In this light, mendicity societies' efforts were constantly shaped by limited budgets.

These societies were innovative in catering specifically for that class of the poor who were prone or vulnerable to resorting to street begging for survival. The provision of relief, in the form of food, daytime shelter and occasional paid labour, resembled the widespread contemporary emphasis on the virtues of industry and the evils of unqualified assistance. Succour was to be earned, either through sweat or true suffering. This rudimentary system conformed to the distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Paupers had the opportunity of learning skills, such as spinning, by which they could gain economic self-dependency, yet their in-house labour was such that it did not undercut the independent labouring classes. Children received a basic education in many mendicity societies, while the Dublin society in particular published reports of former child inmates who had secured respectable positions in domestic service or apprenticeships.

As well as the provision of material and moral succour, mendicity societies also endeavoured to remove refractory beggars from the streets. The ability of the societies,

in this regards, varied from place to place. The Belfast and Londonderry societies, for instance, employed constables who exerted legal powers, and the apprehension and confinement of mendicants appears to have been a regular undertaking by these paid officers. In Dublin, on the other hand, the lack of these powers prevented the mendicity society from enacting similar policies. In assessing the efficacy of mendicity societies, it is here argued that this network of charities were innovative developments on the welfare landscape of pre-Famine Ireland. Limited by uncertain sources of income and the niggardliness of many potential subscribers, these charities succeeded in putting large numbers of individuals, otherwise likely to resort to mendicancy, to work and in education, however rudimentary. It must be remembered that for the urban middling classes who founded, supported and ran these charities, street begging was not only a nuisance and a moral evil, but, as demonstrated in Chapter Three, constituted a very real threat to the economic survival of small and modestly-sized businesses, and the means of disseminating contagious disease.

Conclusion

Mendicity societies were part of the middle classes' embracing of an associational culture in approaching social problems of the early-nineteenth century. These charities differed from the earlier houses of industry in being voluntary-funded charities, not founded on foot of legislation and (typically) providing only daytime accommodation to mendicant inmates. Building upon a regular theme in this thesis, it has been argued that these societies constituted part of a mendicity society movement, which spread across Ireland, Britain, and parts of western Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Conforming with Robert Morris's argument that voluntary societies were stimulated by the example set by earlier bodies, mendicity societies built upon the experience gained

and precedents set by earlier societies, and all members of this movement shared mutual backgrounds, interests, objectives and methods of operation. Significantly, this chapter identified an exchange of information between various societies, reflecting the transnational discourse of social improvement in this period, aided greatly by the mass expansion of printed media. Yet, while constituting a movement these charities did not answer to a central entity, and were established and supported through local initiative.

The Irish manifestation of this movement had particular features and yet within Ireland alone, there were distinct regional features. Most notable was, firstly, the concentration of societies in Ulster and, secondly, the prevalence of mendicity charities in relatively small towns and villages in the northern province. It has been argued that a prime reason for this geographic concentration was the popularity for the Scotch model of poor assistance, wherein voluntarism and corporate minimalism were cherished. The distinctive Presbyterian feature of Ulster society, which shared many worldviews with the Calvinist Church of Scotland, is crucial to explaining this.

Financial uncertainty marred the existence of all mendicity societies and their eventual decline, with the exception of the Dublin society, arose directly from the introduction of the Irish Poor Law and compulsory assessments for the support of the workhouse system, which catered for a similar class of the poor as the mendicity societies. Figures for Dublin reveal a considerable overlap between the inmates of the Mendicity Society and the city's newly-opened workhouses in 1840. The ethos of mendicity societies conformed with the middle classes' desire for the promotion of industry and restraint among the poor, and their appeal transcended religious boundaries. In assessing the impact of the Irish mendicity societies, it is argued that they could be successful in promoting industry and education among those of the poor who could resort to street begging. Their success was dependent on the all-too-uncertain

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support from public subscribers and were stunted by the decision of many inhabitants not to part with their money. Emerging from the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and declining with the introduction of the long-awaited Irish Poor Law, the mendicity society movement constitutes an important, yet overlooked, element in the welfare landscape of pre-Famine Ireland.

Chapter Five

Roman Catholic approaches to begging and alms-giving

Introduction

The gospel parable of the suffering beggar at the door of the rich man's house (Luke 16: 19-25) was a recurring motif in Roman Catholic discourse on begging and alms-giving. Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Irish Sisters of Charity (Religious Sisters of Charity), attributed her conversion to Catholicism and her call to devote her life to the poor to the influence of hearing this parable as a young girl. Around 1802, shortly after the death-bed conversion of her father from Protestantism to Catholicism, Aikenhead heard a preacher recount the parable of Dives and Lazarus. She subsequently followed her late father in converting to the Roman church and in 1815, with the assistance of Fr (later Archbishop) Daniel Murray, Aikenhead founded the Sisters of Charity, whose fourth vow of service of the poor distinguished this congregation of female religious as a significant presence within Irish Catholicism and Irish society.[1]

While Brian Pullan is correct in asserting that distinctions between Catholic and Protestant approaches to alms-giving cannot be limited to the matter of good works and the remission of sin,[2] these considerations do serve as a useful starting point, as they allow for an exploration of the teaching of the Catholic Church. This chapter will analyse distinctions in how Catholics and Protestants understood Catholic teaching on

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[1] [Mary Padua O'Flanagan], *The life and work of Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the congregation of Irish sisters of Charity 1787-1858* (London, 1924), pp 8-9; S.A. [Sarah Atkinson], *Mary Aikenhead: her life, her work, and her friends, giving a history of the foundation of the congregation of the Irish Sisters of Charity* (3rd ed., Dublin, 1911).

[2] Brian Pullan, 'Catholics and the poor in early modern Europe' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, xxvi (1976), pp 15-34.

charity and good works, with both sides perceiving disparate moral consequences for both giver and receiver in the alms-giving transaction. Consideration of Catholic approaches to poverty and begging, however, will not be confined to the question of good works. Instead, this chapter will attempt to retrieve a sense of distinctly Catholic perceptions and responses. Attention will focus on the emergence of confraternities by lay Catholics and also the growth of female religious orders and congregations in the decades before the Great Famine. A case study of the views and responses of Archbishop of Dublin Daniel Murray, a neglected figure in Irish historiography, allows for an analysis of hierarchical approaches to begging and alms-giving. This period also saw a substantial growth in the number of female religious communities, perhaps the Catholic Church's main corporate approach to tackling social problems such as poverty and beggary. Special attention will be given to the Religious Sisters of Charity, founded in 1815 by Mary Aikenhead upon the encouragement of Murray. The role that the laity played in framing wider Catholic responses to poverty will also be explored and these issues will be examined in light of Maria Luddy's assertion that within Irish Catholicism, charity was a means 'of asserting Catholic identity, and Catholic distinctiveness from their Protestant rulers'.[3] In this light, it is significant that the most prominent Catholics engaged in relieving the poor – most notably, members of female religious communities – came from the rising merchant and professional classes, reflecting wider societal trends wherein the middle-classes drove campaigns aimed at the moral and social improvement of the lives of the poor.

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[3] Maria Luddy, 'Religion, philanthropy and the state in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth- century Ireland' in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds), *Charity, philanthropy and reform from the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 159.

Roman Catholic teaching on alms-giving

In considering Roman Catholic approaches to street begging and alms-giving in this

period, it is useful to start with a contemporary Catholic catechism which outlined the

church's basic teaching on such matters. Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin James Doyle

(1786-1834) published a revised catechism in 1828, based upon the earlier version of

the Archbishop of Cashel, Dr James Butler (*c*. 1683-1774).[4] The publication of a revised

catechism was part of Doyle's wider programme of pastoral revival in his diocese,

where he oversaw the development and expansion of Sunday school catechesis,

confraternities and chapel libraries.[5] Unlike the Roman Catechism, which was

disseminated among parish priests, Doyle's publication was designed to be accessible to

Catholic children, who were urged to be diligent in studying the text at home and in

school.[6] While alms-giving was not specifically addressed in the catechism, a section

pertaining to good works is crucial to the question:

> Q. Will strict honesty to every one, and moral good works, insure salvation,
> whatever church or religion one professes?
> A. No; unless such good works be enlivened *by faith that worketh by charity*.
> Galatians 5:6.
> Q. Why must our good works be enlivened by faith?
> A. Because the scriptures say, without faith is it impossible to please God –
> and he that believeth not shall be condemned. Hebrews 11:6. Mark 16:16.
> Q. Are we justified by faith alone, without good works?
> A. No; *as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is*
> *dead*. James 2:26.[7]

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[4] Butler's catechism proved extremely popular and the Catholic Book Society published a twenty-sixth edition in 1836: *The Most Rev. Dr James Butler's Catechism: revised, enlarged, approved and recommended by the four R.C. Archbishops of Ireland, as a general catechism for the kingdom* (26th ed., Dublin, 1836).

[5] Thomas McGrath, 'Doyle, James ('J.K.L.')' in *DIB*, iii, pp 444-6.

[6] James Doyle, *The general catechism, revised, corrected, and enlarged, by the Right Reverend James Doyle, D.D., Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and prescribed by him to be taught throughout the dioceses of Kildare and Leighlin* (Dublin, 1843), p. 2.

[7] Ibid., p. 21. Later in the century, Archbishop Paul Cullen frequently drew on this passage from James in asserting the place of good works alongside faith in the spiritual path to salvation: *Weekly Telegraph*, 8 Jan., 19 Feb. 1853. Interestingly, this specific passage was drawn upon in a message of appreciation to Church of Ireland minister Rev. Thomas Drew in the impoverished Christ Church district of Belfast: 'The annals of Christ Church, Belfast, from its foundation in 1831', typescript copy by Rev. Abraham Dawson, 1858, pp 17-18 (PRONI, Records of Christ Church, Belfast, CR1/13/D/2).

Here, the Catholic emphasis on good works is clear, but good works must complement faith in God. Through good works, an active and living faith is fostered. In a similar light, the Presentation Sisters were beseeched in the mid-nineteenth century to 'lay up treasures of virtue and good works which shall follow us beyond the tomb'.[8] According to the Catholic archdeacon of Limerick Michael Fitzgerald (*c.* 1788-1863): 'Faith is a vital and active principal. Faith, working in charity, is a fire that consumes the dross of selfishness, lights up generous emotions, and warms the heart with the glow of high and holy purposes.'[9] *The poor man's catechism*, a tenth edition of which was published by the Catholic Book Society in Dublin in 1832,[10] outlined that a perfect faith was one which was firm, entire and active:

> As you believe, so you must practice; you must join good works with faith. A faith without good works, is a dead faith, and will turn to your confusion at the last day. God will then examine not only how you believed, but also how you lived. As the body is but a dead carcase without the soul, so faith also is dead without charity and good works. *Though your faith be strong enough to move mountains, without charity it availeth nothing.* – I Corinthians 13:2.[11]

Such views contrast with Protestant teachings, which since the sixteenth century stressed salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*).[12] Indeed, the twelfth of the Thirty-Nine

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[8] 'Short sketches of the lives of some of the nuns who entered the community from 1790 to 1870', n.d. [*c.* early-twentieth century], p. 38 (Presentation Convent, George's Hill Community Archive, Dublin, GHAD/P/16). The language here was inspired by Matthew 6:20-21: 'Lay not your treasure on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, but lay up for yourself treasures in Heaven.'

[9] Michael Fitzgerald, *Wickedness and nullity of human laws against mendicancy, and the anti Christian character of the Irish Poor-law, proved from the consideration of alms-giving, mendicancy, and poor-laws, on Christian and Catholic principles, in a sermon, preached in St. Michael's, Limerick, (on Whitsunday, the 4th of June, 1843,) on behalf of the Thomond-gate male and female schools* (Dublin, 1843), p. 50. Similar themes were expounded upon by Archbishop Daniel Murray: copy of Daniel Murray pastoral letter, 8 July 1850 (DDA, DMP, 34/6/77).

[10] Founded with hierarchical approval in 1827, the society printed and distributed Catholic literature as cheaply as possible and claimed to have printed five million books within ten years of its establishment, which were distributed not only throughout Ireland but in England, Scotland, Wales, the British settlements and America: Patrick J Corish, *The Irish Catholic experience: a historical survey* (Dublin, 1986), p. 172; Thomas Wall, 'The Catholic Book Society and the *Irish Catholic Magazine*' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, fifth series, ci (May 1964), p. 292.

[11] [John Mannock], *The poor man's catechism; or, the Christian doctrine explained; with suitable admonitions* (10th ed., Dublin, 1832), p. 9. This work was first published by Mannock (1681-1764), an English Benedictine monk, in 1752: see Philip Jebb, 'Mannock, John' in *ODNB*, xxxvi, pp 520-21.

[12] Another Catholic catechism from this period explicitly contrasts the Roman church's doctrine of good works with the teachings of 'Luther, and other heretics': [John Joseph] Hornihold, *The real principles of*

Articles of the Anglican Communion asserts that good works 'cannot put away our sins'.[13] And for some Protestant commentators in this period, it was to these fundamental tenets of Roman Catholicism that Ireland's endemic poverty and beggary was to be attributed.

Roman Catholics and indiscriminate alms-giving

Among the most common perceptions of Roman Catholics long held by Protestants of various denominations was that the Catholic emphasis on good works encouraged indiscriminate alms-giving, which in turn supported pauperism and beggary among the lower orders. This argument centred on the idea that Catholics believed that they could atone for sin by engaging in good works, perhaps most commonly by giving alms to the poor. It followed that it was in an individual's interest not to distinguish between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving'; the more alms one gave, the more likely it was for their sins to be forgiven. The indiscriminate furnishing of alms was incentivised for the giver, thus encouraging dependency and pauperism in the receiver. Furthermore, it was held, Catholics doled out alms not with a view to relieving true distress but with one eye on who was observing their good works.

Alleged Catholic recklessness in alms-giving undermined the traditional distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Beggary was not merely enabled, but encouraged. The natural conclusion which Protestants drew from this line of reasoning was that Roman Catholic views and practices regarding charity led to moral and temporal impoverishment. The popularity of this argument in public discourse not just

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Catholics; or, a catechism by way of general instruction, explaining the principal points of the doctrine & ceremonies of the Catholic Church (4th ed., Dublin, 1821), p. 314.

[13] 'Thirty-Nine Articles', accessed from Church of Ireland website (http://ireland.anglican.org/worship/14) (8 Sept. 2013).

in Ireland but throughout the United Kingdom is demonstrated by one contributor to the

Westminster Review in 1844:

> The duty of public and a most indiscriminate almsgiving is one of the most
> fatal errors of the Roman Catholic church. When proclaimed from the pulpit,
> as it often is, a country is inevitably demoralized. Protestantism was
> favourable to industry, for it led men to reflect that heaven could not be
> purchased. Catholics do not say that it can, but they dwell more upon what are
> called good works. Beggars therefore swarm, and swarm most in Roman
> Catholic states; witness Ireland, Italy, Spain.[14]

The Church of England minister and poor law commentator Joseph Townsend (1739-1816) attributed the abundant number of beggars in the Spanish city of León to the alms received (in the form of food) at convents and the bishop's palace: 'On this provision they live, they marry, and they perpetuate a miserable race.'[15] Negative views of Catholic charity were not unique to Ireland. As demonstrated by Alan Forrest and Olwen Hufton, the second half of the eighteenth century in France saw Enlightenment thinkers question the indiscriminate nature of Catholic charity, with abbeys and monasteries receiving the butt of criticism for allegedly attracting and encouraging swarms of vagrant beggars. This manner of charity, it was argued, served to benefit not the poor but the givers of alms. Furthermore, Catholic practice was actually failing the poor, by increasing their numbers and providing no incentive to industry and self-dependence.[16]

The work of Rev. John Graham (1766-1844) constitutes one of the more striking examples of this way of thinking. The Church of Ireland minister, who was 'a zealous

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[14] Anon., 'Coningsby' in *Westminster Review*, xlii (1844), p. 54, quoted in Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), p. 121.
[15] Joseph Townsend, *A journey through Spain in the years 1786 and 1787; with particular attention to the agriculture, manufactures, commerce, population, taxes and revenue of that country; and remarks in passing through a part of France* (3 vols, London, 1791), i, p. 379.
[16] Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution and the poor* (Oxford, 1981), p. 18; Olwen H. Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974), p. 194.

and even fanatical participant in protestant commemorations of the Williamite period',[17]

identified 'a very perceptible connection between Popery and idleness, mendicity and

disease'. To Graham, 'the Papist' was habituated into idleness and vice. 'He is taught

that poverty confers a degree of merit, both upon him who suffers under it, and the

person who relieves him.'[18] The reverence for mendicant clergymen – 'the bare-footed

Friar' – diminished the 'horror of beggary': 'he is led insensibly to admire not only the

costume of mendicity, but the address and the artifice of the mendicant; he smiles at the

assumed crutches of the light-footed cripple, or the pretended blindness of the

clamorous impostor on the bridge.'[19] Turning his attention to the question of the

distinctive Catholic emphasis on good works, Graham pontificated at length on the

inherent relationship between this perceptibly Catholic belief and the country's endemic

beggary:

> The doctrine of works atoning for sin, is the sheet-anchor of mendicity in
> Ireland: and it would require an East Indian Treasury to remedy this
> progressive evil – if no other remedy exists but almsgiving. The most selfish
> and uncharitable contribute to perpetuate this nuisance, by giving alms to all
> who solicit it with sufficient importunity, merely because they trust it will
> purchase to themselves a license to commit sin with impunity, or prove the
> means of liberating their departed relatives from purgatory…[20]

Graham's views must be seen in its particular historical context before blindly accepting

his arguments at face value, which Timothy P. O'Neill appears to have done.[21] During

the 1810s, a small group of ultra-Protestants were exhibiting a disproportionate level of

influence in Dublin city in their campaign of opposition to Catholic Emancipation,

while a growing evangelical sentiment would become emboldened two years after the

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[17] Norman Moore, *rev*. Colm Lennon, 'Graham, John' in *ODNB*, xxiii, pp 222-3.
[18] John Graham, *God's revenge against rebellion: an historical poem on the state of Ireland, with notes and an appendix, consisting of a pastoral epistle from Rome, and two letters to the editor of the* Dublin Evening Post (Dublin, 1820), p. 48.
[19] Ibid., p. 48.
[20] Ibid., p. 50.
[21] Timothy P. O'Neill, 'The Catholic Church and relief of the poor, 1815-45' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxxi (1973), p. 133.

publication of Graham's work, with the launching of the 'Second Reformation'.[22]

Graham's work was but one of many in which polemicists sought to convince their

Protestant audiences of the moral impoverishment of a rapidly advancing Irish

Catholicism.

The Presbyterian minister Rev. James Carlile, based at the Abbey Street congregation

in Dublin, wrote to Rev. Thomas Chalmers on the misguided Catholic practice of

indiscriminate alms-giving, noting that this was done largely through a belief that such

works atoned for sin. (This letter from Carlile to Chalmers is dealt with in greater detail

in Chapter Seven). The novelist William Carleton, who converted from Catholicism to

the Church of Ireland in the early-1820s, also drew his readers' attention to what he

alleged was the distinctly Roman Catholic practice of indiscriminate alms-giving to

beggars. 'They act under the impression that eleemosynary good works possess the

power of cancelling sin to an extent almost incredible.' Such a belief led directly,

Carleton argued, to the conclusion that any sin, no matter how gross, can be atoned by

alms-giving. 'The principle of assisting our distressed fellow-creatures, when rationally

exercised, is one of the best in society; but here it becomes entangled with error,

superstition, and even with crime – acts as a bounty upon imposture, and in some degree

predisposes to guilt, from an erroneous belief that sin may be cancelled by alms and the

prayers of mendicant impostors.'[23] These words were first published in 1833, at which

point Carleton was mixing in evangelical Church of Ireland circles in Dublin and had

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[22] Jacqueline Hill, 'Dublin after the Union: the age of the ultra-Protestants, 1801-1822' in Michael Brown, Patrick M. Geoghegan and James Kelly (eds), *The Irish Act of Union, 1800: bicentennial essays* (Dublin, 2003), pp 144-56; Irene Whelan, *The bible war in Ireland: the 'second Reformation' and the polarization of Protestant-Catholic relations, 1800-1840* (Dublin, 2005).
[23] William Carleton, 'Tubber Derg; or, the Red Well' in idem, *Traits and stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1844; 2 vols, reprint Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire and Savage, MD, 1990), ii, p. 386. In an infamously anti-Catholic passage in his first published short story, but omitted from later reprints, Carleton expounded on this simplified thesis that a life-long sinner can effectively wipe his slate clean through the Catholic sacrament of penance: [William Carleton], 'A pilgrimage to Patrick's Purgatory' in *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine*, vi, no. 34 (Apr. 1828), pp 268-71.

come under the influence of the polemicist and publisher Rev. Caesar Otway, who published Carleton's first writings in his evangelical *Christian Examiner*.[24]

Implicit in such assertions was that Catholic alms-giving was confined to casual exchanges and did not benefit from organised initiative, inspection, and oversight. The reality, however, was more complex. The multiplication of charitable societies throughout Ireland from the middle of the eighteenth century included many Catholic-ethos organisations, mirroring their Protestant counterparts in having a formal structure of patrons and personnel, a system for the investigation and relief of distress, and published annual reports including accounts. The *Catholic Directory* for 1821 lists numerous Roman Catholic orphan schools, free schools, Magdalene asylums and widows' homes in Dublin city,[25] while the emphasis on inspection and discrimination is evident in the first report of the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Limerick city, which assured its supporters that the charity carried out 'the strictest enquiry into the circumstances and merits of each case' and 'has never encouraged the practice of casual and indiscriminate relief to the poor'.[26]

The matter of Catholic teaching surrounding sin and atonement was one of the questions asked of a number of senior Catholic clergymen by an 1825 parliamentary select committee.[27] The committee's predominant objective was to investigate the state of Ireland, with particular regard to the disturbances and outrages which marked the country in the early-1820s. Throughout the extensive reports and witness testimony, however, it is clear that the state of Irish Catholics and their religion 'formed, as might

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[24] James H. Murphy, *Irish novelists and the Victorian age* (Oxford, 2011), pp 45-69.
[25] Patrick Cunningham, 'The *Catholic Directory* for 1821' in *Reportorium Novum*, ii, no. 2 (1960), pp 324-63.
[26] 'First report [of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Limerick, 1849]', reprinted in Bob Ryan, *An open door: the history of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Limerick 1846-1996* (Limerick, 1996), pp 40, 45.
[27] These clerics were Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin James Doyle, Archbishop of Armagh Patrick Curtis, Archbishop of Dublin Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Tuam Oliver Kelly, and Bishop of Ardagh James Magaurin.

have been expected, the leading topic of Examination'.[28] In his testimony, Archbishop of Dublin Daniel Murray gave a comprehensive and convincing denunciation of the suggestion that Catholics operated under the principle that a certain amount of good works would cancel out an equal number of sins. By this argument, Catholic doctrine thus facilitated the commitment of bad works in the knowledge that a good work would negate the sin. 'I cannot find any language sufficiently strong to mark my abhorrence of that demoralizing doctrine,' said Murray, adding that he felt 'wounded' and 'grieved' at the suggestion being made.[29] Murray explained that good and bad works were not credits which could be accumulated, with the goal of merely collecting more of the former than the latter. Rather, the only means by which sin could be annulled was through true repentance:

> How then, according to our doctrine, is this sin, once committed, to be blotted out? Upon no other condition, than that of sincere and deepfelt repentance. No other good works that we can perform, will ever remove the stain that has been fixed upon the soul. We may fast, we may pray, we may give alms, we may go to confession and receive absolution; all is nothing towards the effacing of that sin, until the heart is changed by contrition and repentance, and that repentance must be so intense, and our hatred to that sin must be so sincere; that rather than commit the same or another grievous sin in future, our resolution should be to incur in preference a thousand deaths.[30]

Having expressed genuine contrition, the sinner ought to seek an amendment of the wrong and also seek absolution through the sacrament of penance, administered by the appropriate authority – that is, an ordained priest.[31] This sentiment was consistent with Murray's unequivocal opposition to street begging and indiscriminate alms-giving, which can be seen in a pastoral letter of a decade later. Extolling the virtues of the Dublin Mendicity Society, Murray exhorted his flock 'that in the distribution of your

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[28] *Report from the Select Committee on the state of Ireland: 1825*, p. 3, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 3.
[29] *Second report from the select committee on the state of Ireland*, pp 225-26, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 235-6.
[30] Ibid., p. 226.
[31] Ibid., p. 226. This was also asserted by Archbishop Kelly: ibid., p. 251. For Doyle, see ibid., pp 193-5.

Charities, you will have that excellent Institution in view, as it is certain that your Alms would be much more profitably employed, for the relief of the real Poor, if given thro' it, than when bestowed indiscriminately on the Mendicants, who solicit your aid thro' the Streets'.[32]

Such sentiments were not limited to the hierarchy. Responding to queries from the Poor Inquiry Commissioners in the mid-1830s, Rev. Patrick Coleman, Parish Priest of St Michan's parish in Dublin, stated that 'By far the greater number [of the parochial poor] are deserving of Charity'.[33] Other priests in Dublin city parishes marked out their local poor as being genuine by way of their being 'disposed to work'.[34] According to a Catholic priest in County Galway, however, those living in his locality drew a line between the public solicitation of alms and private requests for charity, supporting the thesis that the lower classes exhibited some level of discrimination in how they negotiated mendicant solicitations: 'There is a feeling against street or public beggary peculiar to the inhabitants of this country. Alms are given privately in provisions, and to some in money.'[35]

The views expressed by various Protestant commentators were oversimplified interpretations of Catholic doctrine. They misinterpreted the Catholic emphasis on the place of good works in the sinner's search for salvation. However right or wrong such conclusions may have been, one can at least appreciate how these views may have been formed. In John Mannock's Catholic-ethos *Poor man's catechism*, for instance, one

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[32] Draft of pastoral by Archbishop Daniel Murray regarding the Dublin Mendicity Society, 12 Nov. 1836 (DDA, DMP, 31/5/27).
[33] Return of answers to queries from the Poor Inquiry, by Rev. P. Coleman, P.P. St Michan's parish, Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1833] (DDA, DMP, 31/4/34).
[34] Return of answers to queries from the Poor Inquiry, by Rev. Paul Long, P.P., Barony of Thomas Court and Donore, Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1833] (DDA, DMP, 31/4/88); Return of answers to queries from the Poor Inquiry, by Rev. A. O'Connell, P.P. St Michael and St John's parish, Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1833] (DDA, DMP, 31/4/90).
[35] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 4.

finds what appears to be advocacy for indiscriminate poor relief in line with scripture: 'let your *beneficence extend itself to all* (Galatians 6:10), both good and bad, thankful and ungrateful, deserving and worthless; for it is in this manner that God does good to us'.[36] In the view of the Catholic archdeacon of Limerick, Rev. Michael Fitzgerald,[37] alms-giving was a sacred duty for Christians as much as an imperishable right for the poor. Fitzgerald shaped his views around what he considered the benevolent mode of poor assistance in Catholic countries, contrasting this with the follies and cruelties of Protestantism, the English workhouse system and the science of political economy. For Fitzgerald, the Calvinist portrayal of good works as being non-essential for salvation was contrary to fundamental Christian principles, and served to 'cut up the roots of good works, and seal up the fountains of Christian benevolence'.[38] The Irish poor law system post-1838, centred on indoor relief limited to the workhouse, represented the ultimate degradation of the poor, exemplified in the dehumanising label of 'pauper' being applied to inmates. He asserted:

> The word pauper – that horrible word which Christian lips should never apply to a fellow-being – is of pure English coinage. To English ears it sounds as something worse than felon; and it was evidently devised for the purpose of conveying as much of hatred, contempt, and abhorrence for the poor, as two small syllables could be made to contain.[39]

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[36] [Mannock], *Poor man's catechism*, p. 241. A later example of such sentiment is the use by Archbishop of Dublin Paul Cullen of a passage from the Book of Tobit (4.11), "Alms deliver all from sin": *Weekly Telegraph*, 21 Feb. 1852. Interestingly, while being included among the books of the Bible in Roman Catholicism, Tobit is not considered a canonical text in Protestantism and appears in the Apocrypha in the Authorised (King James) Version.

[37] A figure neglected by historians, Fitzgerald's life is recorded in a short article in the journal of the Roman Catholic diocese of Limerick: Robert Cussen, 'Memoir of Archdeacon Michael Fitzgerald (1788-1863)' in *Our Catholic Life*, xviii, no. 4 (Summer, 1970), pp 23-24, 28. For his funeral service, see *FJ*, 10 Feb. 1863.

[38] Fitzgerald, *Wickedness and nullity of human laws against mendicancy*, p. 6.

[39] Ibid., p. 19. For this perceived connection between the pauperisation of the poor and the Protestantism of the British state, see *Weekly Telegraph*, 5 Mar. 1853.

Furthermore, the increasingly-popular science of political economy, characterised by its 'iron-hearted calculations as to the treatment of the poor', served to criminalise and vilify alms-giving.[40]

Fitzgerald argued that alms-giving was 'a sacred duty – a part of the sacrificial duty of Christianity' and furthermore, the poor possessed a moral entitlement to assistance from their fellow men. 'If your brother be poor, he has a right to your alms by the *magna charta*[sic] of the everlasting empire of Christ'.[41] Obligation and right were correlative concepts which shaped how Fitzgerald viewed this relationship, between giver and receiver. To refuse alms to a beggar was to refuse assistance to Christ, who preached "Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me" [Matthew 25:45].[42]

Fitzgerald held back from the views of those liberal Irish Catholics, such as Bishop James Doyle and Rev. Thaddeus O'Malley, who supported a full legal provision for the poor.[43] Instead, his proposals were based on vague notions of an 'exhaustive store of private beneficence, expanded to its utmost development by the laws, the habits, the public opinion, but, above all, by the religion of the people'.[44] A crucial feature of Fitzgerald's work, and in this it departed significantly from contemporary clerics-cum-social reformers, was that it did not depict a deviant element among the country's beggars. There were no 'undeserving' poor, no idle vagrants and sturdy beggars in Fitzgerald's outlook. The poor, who were created in the image and likeness of Christ, were to be recipients of sympathy and charity, not scorn and maltreatment.

[40] Fitzgerald, *Wickedness and nullity of human laws against mendicancy*, p. 5.
[41] Ibid., p. 27.
[42] For the use of this scriptural passage, see ibid., p. 3.
[43] Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law, 1815-43* (Manchester, 2009), pp 27-33.
[44] Fitzgerald, *Wickedness and nullity of human laws against mendicancy*, p. 18.

Image 5.1. Contrasting Catholic and Protestant approaches to poverty, as portrayed in a Catholic-ethos publication (n.d. [*c.* early-nineteenth century])
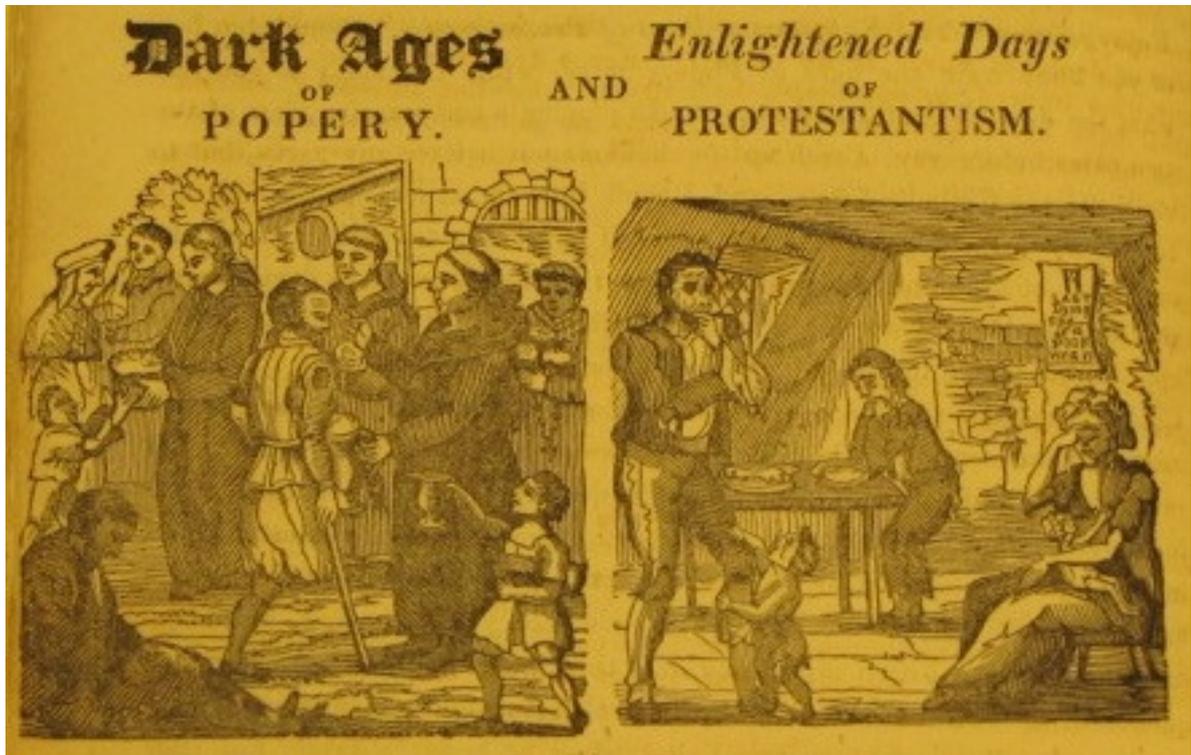
Source: Anon., *People of England!* (n.p. [London?]), n.d. [*c.* early-nineteenth century]), consulted at NLI (P 1211(3)).

The appeal to the monastic tradition of providing welfare to the poor featured in Fitzgerald's views and this was echoed by other contributors to the public discourse on the condition of the poor in Ireland and Britain. A polemical English publication from the early-nineteenth century seeking 'to vindicate the Catholic Clergy and People' from the frequent accusations of superstition, ignorance and error similarly defended the medieval monastic approach to assisting the poor.[45] Sarcastically the anonymous author contrasted, through text and imagery, 'The Dark Ages of Popery' and the 'Enlightened

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[45] Anon., *People of England!* (n.p. [London?]), n.d. [early-nineteenth century]), p. 1, consulted at NLI (P 1211(3)).

Days of Protestantism'. Visually, as seen in Image 5.1, the former were represented by a group of regular clergy bestowing generous portions of food upon relatively healthy-looking paupers. The countenances on the faces of both givers and receivers are ones of contentment and affability. 'The Enlightened Days of Protestantism', on the other hand, were represented by a labouring family in their wretched abode, with ragged clothes and no food. Each member of the family is idle, while a famished infant cries at its mother's breast. The contrast between the two images – Christian endeavour versus idleness, abundance of food versus penury and malnourishment, sociability versus loneliness, contentment versus despondency – is stark.

Case study: Dublin and the archiepiscopacy of Daniel Murray (1823-52)

The return of Paul (later Cardinal) Cullen to Ireland in 1850, and his influence during the following twenty-eight years, first as Archbishop of Armagh and from 1852 as Archbishop of Dublin, has been identified as a landmark in the history of Irish Catholicism. Emmet Larkin described this period as having witnessed a 'devotional revolution' in Irish Catholicism: the majority of the country's inhabitants became regularly practicing Catholics; the number of priests and female religious rose significantly; clerical discipline was strictly imposed; and a new emphasis was placed on devotional practices.[46] While Larkin's thesis has been influential,[47] it has not gone unchallenged. Critics have argued that many of the reforms that Larkin attributed to the Cullenite era were already developing in the first half of the century.[48] For instance,

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[46] Emmet Larkin, 'The devotional revolution in Ireland, 1850-75' in *American Historical Review*, lxxvii, no. 3 (June, 1972), pp 625-52.

[47] Larkin's thesis was most famously developed in David W. Miller, 'Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine' in *Journal of Social History*, ix, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), pp 81-98.

[48] Patrick J. Corish, 'The Catholic community in the nineteenth century' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxxviii (1983), pp 30-31; S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (2nd ed.,

Cormac Begadon's recent work has identified a Catholic revival in Dublin from the middle of the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the growth in the number of confraternities, reinforced by the expansion of a Catholic religious print culture.[49] While Cullen's influence cannot be denied, the transformation of Catholicism in Dublin city during the archiepiscopacy of Daniel Murray, between 1823 and 1852, warrants attention, particularly given his relative neglect by historians.[50]

Daniel Murray's reign as Archbishop of Dublin witnessed the multiplication of bodies with a duty of service to the poor.[51] While his archiepiscopacy spanned the three decades prior to 1852, Murray's influence in the archdiocese and beyond was felt long before his accession to the see. From the time of his being appointed to a Dublin curacy around the turn of the century and taking up the position of coadjutor to Archbishop John Thomas Troy (1739-1823) in 1809, Murray was a leading player in Irish ecclesiastical high politics, being chosen by his fellow bishops to represent them in Rome at the height of the controversy over the proposed royal veto over episcopal

Dublin, 2001), introduction, pp 18-26; Thomas G. McGrath, 'The Tridentine evolution of modern Irish Catholicism, 1563-1962: a re-examination of the 'devotional revolution' thesis' in *Recusant History*, xx, no. 4 (Oct. 1991), pp 512-23.

[49] Cormac Begadon, 'Confraternities and the renewal of Catholic Dublin, *c*. 1750-*c*.1830' in Colm Lennon (ed.), *Confraternities and sodalities in Ireland: charity, devotion and sociability* (Dublin, 2012), pp 35-56. Numerous confraternities promoting catechesis and acts of devotion were established in the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin by the 1790s: Catherine Ann Power, 'A history of the Brigidine Sisters in Ireland and Australia 1807-1907' (PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2013), pp 36-40.

[50] This neglect is captured in the very title of Donal Kerr, 'Dublin's forgotten archbishop: Daniel Murray, 1768-1852' in James Kelly and Dáire Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic diocese of Dublin* (Dublin, 2000), pp 247-67. See also Corish, *The Irish Catholic experience*, p. 168. James Kelly describes Murray as 'one of the most overlooked archbishops of the modern era', while Larkin, in a 1976 work, acknowledged his undue neglect of Murray in his famous article four years earlier: James Kelly, 'The historiography of the diocese of Dublin' in Kelly and Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic diocese of Dublin*, p. 4; Emmet Larkin, 'Introduction' in idem, *The historical dimensions of Irish Catholicism* (New York, 1976), no pagination [fourth page of introduction]. In the more than thirty years since Patrick Corish's observation that a full-length study of Murray was 'badly needed', no such work has appeared: Patrick J. Corish, 'Irish ecclesiastical history since 1500' in Joseph Lee (ed.), *Irish historiography, 1970-79* (Cork, 1981), p. 168.

[51] To focus here on charity work during Murray's episcopacy is not to ignore the fact that his predecessor, Archbishop Troy, was also engaged on such social questions and his reign also witnessed an upsurge in the number of religious communities in Dublin relieving the poor: Cormac Begadon, 'Laity and clergy in the Catholic renewal of Dublin, *c*. 1750-1830' (PhD thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2009), pp 71-2.

nominations.[52] As coadjutor, Murray was a source of information for Rome on the state of Irish Catholics, and exerted a stabilising influence during his brief presidency of Maynooth College (1812-13).

Murray's reign witnessed an upsurge in philanthropic endeavour among lay and clerical Catholics, particularly in terms of poor relief and the provision of education for poor children. Charity sermons were held in Roman Catholic chapels and churches in Dublin city on most Sundays of the year, with specified Sundays set aside for certain charities. The designation of specific Sundays to particular causes was evident, however, during Troy's reign, demonstrating a level of organisation and co-ordination among the clerical and lay elite of the city's Catholic community.[53] According to a Catholic directory for 1836, 'there is scarcely a Sunday in the year, on which there is not a charity Sermon [in Dublin], on many two, and on some even three'.[54] In testimony to the 1830 parliamentary inquiry into the state of the Irish poor, the Catholic lawyer and government advisor Anthony Richard Blake stated that 'there is scarcely a Sunday in the spring, autumn and winter months, upon which I have not an application to attend at some one place of public worship or another to assist as a collector'.[55] 'Murray identified the much-neglected education of the people as an urgent issue and, as a first step, he set about finding religious men and women who would undertake that work.'[56] It was during Murray's episcopate that the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Charity, the Ladies' Association of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Society of St Vincent de Paul, all of whom worked among the poorest classes, were established in Dublin city. It was upon Murray's suggestion that Edmund Rice deputed two of his Christian Brothers

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[52] Kerr, 'Dublin's forgotten archbishop', p. 254.
[53] Begadon, 'Laity and clergy', p. 73.
[54] *A complete Catholic registry, directory, and almanac, for the year of our Lord, 1836*, pp 50-51.
[55] *Second report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 18 May-5 June*, p. 341, H.C. 1830 (654), vii, 517.
[56] Kerr, 'Dublin's forgotten archbishop', p. 248.

to establish the lay order in Dublin, with the aim of catering for poor boys in St. Andrew's parish.[57] His interest in education was not limited to the plight of the poor and Murray encouraged the Jesuits, who established Clongowes Wood College in 1814 for the education of better-off boys, and the Loreto Sisters, who provided education for better-off girls. Murray also encouraged overseas mission work, as shown by his introduction of the Association for Propagation of the Faith into the city in the late-1830s and his assistance to Fr. John Hand in the establishment of All Hallows College in Dublin in 1842.[58]

This Catholic revival in the first half of the nineteenth century was not singular to Ireland, but was witnessed across Europe, partially in response to the defeat of revolutionary and Napoleonic France. In Ireland, the post-war decades saw an increasing number of independent-minded clergymen participating in the public sphere to challenge the authority of the Established Church and this rising confidence was crystallised in the ultimately-successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation throughout in the 1820s.[59] Daniel Murray was among a handful of senior clergymen whose internal diocesan reforms, most notably in terms of improving clerical discipline and defining expected standards of behaviour, laid the groundwork for the more wide-reaching reforms arising from the 1850 Synod of Thurles and associated with Paul Cullen's episcopates in Armagh (1849-52) and Dublin (1852-78).[60] Dublin also assumed a new central significance in Irish Catholicism, as the location for national episcopal meetings

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[57] William Meagher, *Notices of the life and character of His Grace Most Rev. Daniel Murray, late Archbishop of Dublin, as contained in the commemorative oration pronounced in the Church of the Conception, Dublin, on occasion of His Grace's months' mind. With historical and biographical notes* (Dublin, 1853), p. 93.
[58] Thomas O'Connor, 'Murray, Daniel' in *DIB*, vi, pp 829-31.
[59] Donal A Kerr, *'A nation of beggars'? Priests, people, and politics in Famine Ireland, 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1994), pp 17-18.
[60] S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin, 1985), pp 70-72; K.T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1999), pp 157-8.

and also due to the formidable influence of Troy and Murray, whose episcopates spanned sixty-six years of immense change.[61]

Daniel Murray and the Dublin Mendicity Society

That Archbishop Murray and his predecessor, Dr Troy, were prepared to co-operate with other denominations in tackling the city's social problems, and most relevantly to this study, in suppressing street begging, is seen in their service as Vice-Presidents of the Dublin Mendicity Society.[62] They were not the only Catholic prelates who gave their service to corporate initiatives suppressing street begging. The Bishop of Down and Connor William Crolly subscribed to and chaired meetings of the Belfast House of Industry,[63] while his successor in the see, Cornelius Denvir, served as a collector of donations for the same institution alongside a number of Protestant ministers and laymen.[64] Denvir also served as governor of the town's Charitable Society[65] while the temperance campaigner Fr Theobald Mathew served as a governor of the House of Industry in Cork city.[66] Murray was one of three Catholic prelates appointed to serve on the newly established Board of Charitable Bequests in 1844,[67] and was also an active member of the Commissioners of National Education (who oversaw the establishment

[61] Corish, *The Irish Catholic experience*, p. 168.
[62] *Report of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1818* (Dublin, 1819), [unpaginated], f2r. Troy and Murray also chaired meetings of the society at times: *FJ*, 15 Feb. 1820; Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 5 June 1821 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/2); *FJ*, 1 Feb., 27 Apr., 3 May 1830. Due to the absence through illness of Murray, the 1838 annual general meeting was adjourned to a future date 'so as that it should be honoured by his grace's presence': *FJ*, 11 Jan. 1838.
[63] *BNL*, 4 Apr. 1834, 5 Mar. 1830.
[64] Ibid., 24 Nov. 1837.
[65] Ibid., 16 July 1847.
[66] O'Neill, 'The Catholic Church and relief of the poor', p. 140; John F. Quinn, *Father Mathew's crusade: temperance in nineteenth-century Ireland and Irish-America* (Amherst, MA, 2002), p. 58.
[67] The others were Archbishop William Crolly of Armagh and Cornelius Denvir of Down and Connor. The three prelates' involvement with the Board attracted criticism from some quarters, as the recommendations of the Board were seen as being anti-Catholic and infringing on episcopal independence: see *FJ*, 20 Jan. 1845.

of the national school system from 1831) and the Poor Inquiry of 1833-36. Murray also chaired meetings of the civic and cross-denominational Mansion House Relief Committee, and served on the managing committee of the Charitable Infirmary.[68] The fact that these positions were open to Catholic clergymen reflected, as Seán Connolly has illustrated, 'the new respectability of the Irish Catholic hierarchy', as 'the first half of the nineteenth century saw a steady growth in the degree of recognition offered to Catholic churchmen by the Irish establishment'.[69] Niall Ó Ciosáin has highlighted the importance of Catholic clergymen as witnesses to parliamentary inquiries in the pre-Famine decades and the sheer ubiquity of Catholic priests among the witnesses to the Poor Inquiry. In some areas where evidence were taken, Catholics were the most prevalent witnesses who provided testimony to the state representatives. The entire body of witnesses in St Finbarr's[70] parish in Cork city comprised six Catholics: three priests (including the temperance campaigner Fr Theobald Mathew), two laymen (both members of the Josephian Society, a confraternity for young men, established by Mathew, whose members visited the sick and conducted catechism classes) and the editor of the pro-Catholic *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*.[71] A small number of female religious – such as a Sister M. de Chantal Coleman, superior to the Sisters of Charity convent in Cork city, and Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Sisters of Charity[72] – were also among those who provided information to the inquiry, but their relatively small representation reflects the wider dearth of women among deponents to parliamentary inquiries.

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[68] *FJ*, 12 Feb. 1831; 'List of the governors of the Charitable Infirmary, in Jervis-street, for 1830', n.d. [*c.* Jan. 1830] (DDA, DMP, 31/2/134).

[69] Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland* (1985), p. 10.

[70] This is spelt 'St Fin Barre's' in the Church of Ireland parish records.

[71] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 670.

[72] Ibid., p. 27; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, pp 25e-26e.

This increased regard for Catholic clergymen is seen in an instance from 1821, when Archbishop Troy was consulted for his opinion on the matter of Catholic beggars in the Dublin Mendicity Society's premises refusing to eat food containing flesh, with 'religious scruples' being cited as the paupers' reason for refusing the food. In his letter to the archbishop, the association's secretary Fenton Hort asserted that

> As we have always understood that we were acting under the high sanction of your Lordship's authority in setting before them food so prepared, and as it is of extreme importance to the Institution that no misconception should exist upon the subject, I venture to request that your Lordship will have the kindness to state whether under the peculiar circumstances attending their situation as Mendicants, those professing the Roman Catholic Religion are bound by their religious duties to refuse to eat food so prepared, or whether they may partake of it without fear or scruple.

In his reply, Troy explained that the mendicants were entitled to eat the food without fear 'as I have dispensed them from the fast and abstinence prescribed by the laws of [the] Catholic Church'.[73] This instance supports Connolly's argument that this period witnessed a growing recognition by the Protestant establishment – whether by state agencies or the Protestant-dominated charitable sector – of the role the Catholic Church could play in the public sphere. In February 1831, at the annual general meeting of the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society, the chairman, Lord Mayor Sir Robert Harty, was accompanied on the platform by two representatives of the city's Roman Catholic and Anglican communities – Dr Murray and Rev. Franc Sadleir of Trinity College respectively.[74] The Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society and the Mendicity Association were evidently considered non-denominational bodies, as seen by the various shades of Christianity represented among its officers and membership. The fact that these two charities were listed alongside Catholic-ethos societies in the *Catholic directory* further affirms that they were viewed as acceptable organisations with which

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[73] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 13 Mar. 1821.
[74] *FJ*, 5 Feb. 1831.

respectable Catholics could become involved.[75] Despite this gradual opening of doors to Irish Catholics, embers of partisan resentment and suspicion continued to smoulder, and on certain occasions impacted upon Catholics moving within the public sphere. This was demonstrated in the unanticipated and embarrassing rejection of Archbishop Murray's application for membership of the Royal Dublin Society in November 1835.[76]

Murray on poverty, begging and charity

An insight into Daniel Murray's views on poverty can be gleaned from an 1837 charity sermon in aid of St Vincent's Hospital, Dublin, the first Catholic medical institution in Ireland which was founded in 1834 by the Sisters of Charity for, in Mary Aikenhead's words, 'God's nobility – the suffering poor'.[77] In Murray's view, to suffer worldly poverty was not to be seen as punishment from God and such an existence was not to be regretted. Instead, the poor were encouraged to consider their suffering in light of Christ's endurance of poverty and pain during his time in this world. Christ had suffered so that mankind did not.

> Oh! You, my brethren, whom Providence has doomed to feel the hardships of poverty, will you after this complain, that the path through which He has marked your way through life, is rugged, and painful beyond the power of endurance, since it has been thus smoothed by the footsteps of Jesus?[78]

For the poor, the reward for enduring such suffering was not to be experienced in this life but in the kingdom of heaven.

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[75] *Complete Catholic registry, 1836*, pp 108-9; *Complete Catholic directory, almanac, and registry for the year of our Lord, 1838,* pp 337-9.
[76] This episode is dealt with in Kevin Bright, *The Royal Dublin Society 1815-45* (Dublin, 2004), pp 111-45. For the religious break-down of the membership, of whom around 90 per cent were Protestant, see ibid., p. 118.
[77] [O'Flanagan], *Life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, p. 147.
[78] Daniel Murray, *A sermon, preached on the nativity of our Blessed Saviour, in the Church of the Conception, Marlborough-Street, on the 25th December, 1837, by the most Rev. Doctor Murray, and published for the benefit of St. Vincent's Hospital, Stephen's Green, at the desire of some friends of that charitable institution* (Dublin, 1838), pp 14-15.

> If you have hardships to endure, (and you have many,) did He not vouchsafe to soften their rigour by enduring them before you? If you have privations to suffer, (and assuredly you have,) do you not suffer them in company with the Son of God? Can you repine at a condition which in preference to every other He chose for His own, particularly when you have the positive assurance of his word, that, "if you suffer you shall reign with Him?" (2 Timothy 2:12) If he deprive you, for the present, of the dangerous and transitory riches of this world, will you not be amply repaid by the imperishable treasures of the next?[79]

Murray identified nobility and righteousness in the silent and resilient endurance of poverty. It encouraged individuals to be happy with their lot. It encouraged frugality and industry, but also piety and devotion. He asserted that 'God loves the virtuous poor, who are really satisfied with the lowly state which He has marked out for them'.[80] Through such resignation and submission, poverty was to be sanctified by God.

> Every moment of toil and hardship that you endure will be numbered and placed to your account. Every drop that labour wrings from your brow, will go before you to add a new ray of brightness to your immortal diadem; and the day of retribution will soon come, when you will feel by experience, the truth of that saying of St. Paul, (Romans 8:18) that "the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in you".[81]

Poverty was not a curse but a means to encourage endurance and resilience among the lower orders. Furthermore, suffering constituted a sacrifice and represented a spirit of self-denial, described by Murray as being 'at all times essential to a Christian life'.[82]

The language and imagery used here by Murray raises important questions not only regarding the views of this particular prelate of the poor, but regarding the usefulness of charity sermons as sources for historians. How are we to interpret the language used and themes explored in sermons? Is every assertion to be taken at face value as being the

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[79] Murray, *Sermon preached for the benefit of St. Vincent's Hospital*, p. 15.
[80] Ibid., p. 16.
[81] Ibid., p. 17.
[82] Lenten pastoral of Archbishop of Dublin Daniel Murray, 7 Feb. 1833 (DDA, DMP, 31/4/37). Using similar language, the Catholic Archdeacon of Limerick Michael Fitzgerald described self-denial as 'that habit, than which none is more valuable in a religious, a moral, and even an economical point of view': Fitzgerald, *Wickedness and nullity of human laws against mendicancy*, p. 39.

true opinion of the preacher? In all denominations general sermons were opportunities by the preacher to expound on the scriptural basis for the denomination's catechetical teaching. With charity sermons, however, there was another motive – namely, to persuade those in attendance to put their hands in their pockets and contribute towards the funds of a particular charitable cause. In this light, the social and economic profile of the congregation, their willingness and ability to part with their money, and the influence of the preacher over his audience were all important dynamics.

Catholics and a legal provision for the poor

On what was arguably the central social question of the first half of the nineteenth century in Ireland – whether a poor law should be introduced – Irish Catholics were by no means united. Archbishop Murray, Lord Killeen and Anthony Richard Blake were among the Poor Inquiry commissioners whose final report in 1836 rejected the suitability of the English workhouse system for Ireland and instead proposed a system based on the voluntary model of relief,[83] while Killeen was one of three commissioners who dissented from the inquiry's conclusions regarding the suitability of voluntary relief.[84] Since the 1820s Daniel O'Connell had been making ambivalent statements about an Irish poor law, before finally committing himself to opposing what became the Irish Poor Relief Act of 1838.[85] On the other hand, many priests and senior clerics, such as the archbishop of Armagh, Dr William Crolly, who had previously served as parish

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[83] *Third report of the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, H.C. 1836 [C 43], xxx, 1. In his testimony to the 1830 parliamentary committee on the state of the poor in Ireland, Blake asserted that 'a compulsory provision for the poor would tend to prevent the growth of those independent feelings and industrious habits, through which alone I look for the regeneration of Ireland': *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 343.
[84] *Poor Inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (H.) – Part I. containing reasons for recommending voluntary associations for the relief of the poor; and reasons for dissenting from the principle of raising funds for the relief of the poor by the voluntary system, as recommended in the report. Also, Tables No. I, II, II, referred to in third report*, pp 8-9, H.C. 1836 [C 41], xxxiv, 650-651.
[85] Gray, *Making of the Irish poor law*, pp 87-91, 178-218.

priest in Belfast, and most notably the bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, James Doyle, supported a legal provision for the poor.[86] Doyle's arguments for state provision for the poor arose from his perception of a moral and economic crisis in the mid-1820s and he believed that the state was the only possible agency for the long-term alleviation of Ireland's endemic distress.[87]

Among the most prominent Roman Catholic clergyman who promoted a statutory provision was Rev. Thaddeus Joseph O'Malley (1797-1877), a curate at the Marlborough Street chapel in Dublin city.[88] O'Malley was a well-known social radical who engaged with various political theories and among whose most controversial proposals was for a commune-style system of residence and employment for the urban working classes.[89] O'Malley followed in the tradition of Bishop Doyle in espousing a liberal Catholic viewpoint that has been identified by Peter Gray as exerting a significant influence on government policy in the 1830s. 'The Irish Catholic case, paralleling that of French liberal Catholicism, was principally for public welfare relief as a social entitlement, a moral bonding agent which would create equitable relationships in a fractured society by imposing fiscal responsibilities on the propertied, while offering the destitute poor an alternative to self-defeating agrarian or trade-

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[86] *Poor Inquiry, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, p. 14; Gray, *Making of the Irish poor law*, pp 27-33.
[87] Gray, *Making of the Irish poor law*, pp 27-33. For Doyle's writings, see Thomas McGrath (ed.), *The pastoral and education letters of Bishop James Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin, 1786-1834* (Dublin, 2004).
[88] David Murphy and Sinéad Sturgeon, 'O'Malley, Thaddeus Joseph' in *DIB*, vii, pp 681-2; Fergus A. D'Arcy, 'Federalist, social radical and anti-sectarian: Thaddeus O'Malley (1797-1877)' in Gerard Moran (ed.), *Radical Irish priests 1660-1970* (Dublin, 1988), pp 91-110.
[89] Thaddeus O'Malley, *An address to mechanics, small farmers, and the working classes generally, upon a feasible means of greatly improving their condition; with a word in their behalf to employers and landlords* (Dublin, 1845). O'Malley's proposals were dismissed in a review published in the politically nationalist *The Nation* as Benthamism bordering on socialism, with the reviewer writing that 'we would rather see the family of a tradesman inhabiting the poorest room in the Liberty, with his wife and children, than crowded in Mr. O'Malley's household, if they were to gain by it the diet and lodging of Prince Albert': *The Nation*, 4 Oct. 1845.

unionist violence.'[90] O'Malley mirrored the views of fellow social commentators of this period in espousing a paternalistic concept of society, according to which the uncivilised lower orders were in need of moral guidance from the wealthier classes. To O'Malley, 'the best if not the only chance of giving them a right direction is, to subject them like children to the guiding control of a parental authority'.[91]

As well as in his published works,[92] O'Malley's views can be gleaned from contributions he made to public meetings and which were subsequently published in the press. At the 1838 annual meeting of the Dublin Mendicity Society, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately, a well-known critic of an entitlement to relief for the able-bodied poor, claimed that the experience of England demonstrated that where a legal provision was established, misery and pauperism were not reduced but sustained. He concluded that the only effective way to suppress street begging was for inhabitants to financially support the mendicity society. O'Malley responded by claiming that, on the contrary, the case of England pointed to the virtues of a legal entitlement to relief, and beseeched Whately to name a country in which there were fewer mendicants than in England, adding 'and to what other cause can we attribute that most striking result than to its assured legal provision for the poor?...And how could we compulsorily put down the trade of mendicancy without a compulsory provision for the really destitute?' Taking up O'Malley's challenge, Whately asserted that there was less pauperism in Scotland than in England – implicitly championing the traditional Scottish system of voluntarism and minimalism in poor relief – to which O'Malley replied:

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[90] Peter Gray, 'The Irish Poor Law and the Great Famine', p. 7, paper presented to the International Economy History Congress conference, Helsinki, 2006, accessed at University of Helsinki website, (http://www.helsinki.fi/iehc2006/papers3/Gray.pdf) (25 Feb. 2014).
[91] Thaddeus O'Malley, *Poor laws – Ireland. An idea of a poor law for Ireland* (2nd ed., London, 1837), pp 59-60.
[92] O'Malley, *Poor Laws – Ireland*; idem, *A sketch of the state of popular education in Holland, Prussia, Belgium, and France* (Second ed., London and Dublin, 1840); idem, *An address to mechanics, small farmers, and the working classes.*

'There is a legal provision for the poor there also.'[93] Some degree of tension can be identified in this exchange between Whately and O'Malley, which is compounded by the newspaper report's recording of cries of 'Hear, hear' to some of O'Malley's – and only O'Malley's – assertions. While it is tempting to attribute this friction to inter-denominational tensions seeping into the meetings of the non-denominational Mendicity Society, it is also possible that Whately was merely the latest target of O'Malley's notoriously litigious temperament.[94] The tension of the exchange was certainly compounded by the fact that the question of poor relief was one about which both these men thought deeply and felt strongly. Interestingly, just a few months earlier, O'Malley had expressed his support for Whately's thoughts on the need for moralising among the lower orders.[95]

In setting out a vision for a national provision for the poor, O'Malley addressed general Catholic, as well as his own, attitudes to mendicancy and alms-giving. The priest presented beggary as an evil practice which the vast majority of Irish Catholics, both lay and clergy, would gladly see suppressed. When asked whether alms-giving to beggars at the door was a duty for Catholics, he replied: 'But I would not have the Beggar come to their Door. The Trade of Mendicancy I look upon as almost necessarily immoral. The impudent Hypocrite fares best by it. For the really deserving and silently suffering Poor it is a cruel Resource, to which it is a Disgrace to the Legislature to condemn them.' He added that only from beggars themselves would complaints be

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[93] *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1838

[94] During his life, O'Malley fell out with a priest and bishop in Philadelphia, for which he was briefly excommunicated; clashed with Archbishop John McHale, for which he was suspended in 1840; was dismissed two years later by the government from his position as rector of the University of Malta; dismissed in 1862 from the chaplaincy of the Westmoreland Lock Hospital; and on foot of writing a controversial pamphlet in 1870, which proposed changes to ecclesiastical discipline, O'Malley was dismissed as chaplain to the Presentation Sisters and forbidden to perform sacramental functions: Murphy and Sturgeon, 'O'Malley, Thaddeus Joseph', pp 681-2.

[95] O'Malley, *Poor laws – Ireland*, p. 59.

heard of the prohibition of mendicancy and a vagrancy act which criminalised this practice would, therefore, serve as a measure for the relief of the industrious poor.[96]

Female religious, beggars and alms-giving: the case of the Sisters of Charity

Donal Kerr identifies Daniel Murray's involvement in the establishment of the Sisters of Charity, of Mercy, and of Loreto as his greatest achievement[97] and the particular instance of Mary Aikenhead and the Irish Sisters of Charity serves as an interesting case study for examining how female religious regarded begging and alms-giving. A number of female religious orders and congregations targeted the poverty and ignorance of the lower classes, and driven by a zeal characteristic of philanthropists of all denominations of this period, they undertook moralising missions among the poor of towns and cities. While these female religious sought to improve the temporal conditions of the impoverished, the main thrust of their work was to introduce the poor to religious instruction through catechesis.[98] For example, outlining the system of instruction for poor girls in her institution in George's Hill in Dublin city, founded in 1766, Teresa Mullally, later of the Presentation Sisters, stated that 'besides the spiritual instructions I hope they will be trained to morality, decency & industry which is so much wanting among our poor'.[99] The founding documents of the Presentation Sisters' convent in

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[96] *Report from the select committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor, and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence taken before the said committee*, p. 837, H.C. 1846 (694), xi, 873.

[97] Kerr, 'Dublin's forgotten archbishop', p. 248.

[98] Rosemary Raughter, 'Pious occupations: female activism and the Catholic revival in eighteenth-century Ireland' in Rosemary Raughter (ed.), *Religious women and their history: breaking the silence* (Dublin, 2005), pp 25-49.

[99] Teresa Mullaly to Archbishop John Thomas Troy, n.d. [*c*. 1802] (Presentation Sisters George's Hill Archive, GHAD/FD/146).

Cork stated explicitly: 'The Principal End of This Religious Institute is the Instruction of Poor Girls in the Principles of Religion and Christian Piety.'[100]

While numerous female congregations and orders were founded in Ireland between the late-eighteenth and the late-nineteenth centuries,[101] the establishment of the Religious Sisters of Charity in Dublin in 1815 marked a new departure in Irish social and religious history, as this new congregation pioneered social work by female religious in the wider community. Aikenhead's new congregation adopted the model of non-enclosure pioneered by the Daughters of Charity in seventeenth-century France.[102] In not being restricted within the convent walls, these female religious were unique in publicly working among the sick and poor of their locality. As the French community's co-founder St Vincent de Paul observed, 'their monastery being generally no other than the abode of the sick; their cell, a hired room; their chapel, the parish church; their cloister, the streets or wards of hospitals; their enclosure, obedience'.[103] It was not until 1858 that the Daughters of Charity first arrived in Ireland and as such, the Religious Sisters of Charity must be seen as an indigenous, home-grown manifestation of the earlier French model. The foundation of the Sisters of Charity in 1815 was of such importance that Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy identified it as among the most 'significant events and dates for Irish women'.[104]

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[100] 'Rules and Constitutions of the Religious Congregation of the Charitable Instruction established in the Convent of the Presentation of our Blessed Lady in Cork agreeable to the bull of His Present Holiness Pope Pius VI', n.d. (Presentation Sisters George's Hill Archive, GHAD/C/5). See also *Rules and constitutions of the Institute of the Religious Sisterhood of the Presentation of the Ever Blessed Virgin Mary, established in the City of Cork, for the charitable instruction of poor girls conformably to the rules of the late Pope, Pius VI...* (Cork, 1809), pp 11-15, held at GHAD/C/7(1).

[101] In 1800 there were 120 nuns living in eighteen houses across Ireland; by 1851, the number had increased to 1,500 nuns in 95 convents: Luddy, 'Religion, philanthropy and the state', p. 160.

[102] Susan E. Dinan, *Women and poor relief in seventeenth-century France: the early history of the Daughters of Charity* (Aldershot, 2006), pp 45-6.

[103] Cited in Dinan, *Women and poor relief*, p. 46.

[104] Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy, '"Cherchez la femme": the elusive woman in Irish history' in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (eds), *Women surviving* (Dublin, 1990), p. 4.

As noted above, Aikenhead's entry into religious life was encouraged by Fr (later Archbishop) Daniel Murray. Their long and close friendship resembled that of Cardinal Paul Cullen and Margaret Aylward in the second half of the century.[105] Murray arranged for Aikenhead to serve her noviceship in the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary at York, escorting her and an associate there in 1812 and making the same journey three years later to accompany them back to Dublin. During Aikenhead's time in the northern English convent, Murray was a regular correspondent, outlining his plans for the congregation and the rules upon which the new body would be based. In one letter Murray wrote to Aikenhead: '…you will not be surprised at my reminding you that your family in future are to be the poor of Jesus Christ'.[106] Until his death, Murray retained a close association with Aikenhead and the Sisters of Charity, preaching sermons on behalf of the community's poor schools and orphan houses,[107] and bequeathing money to the Sisters of Charity 'for the purpose of being distributed amongst the Sick Poor whom they shall visit'.[108] Concern for the poor was central to Murray and Aikenhead's worldview and this was reflected in the distinctive stipulation that the Sisters take a fourth vow of 'perpetual service of the poor' in addition to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience commonly taken by female religious congregations and orders.[109]

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[105] Jacinta Prunty, 'Margaret Louisa Aylward' in Mary Cullen and Maria Luddy (eds), *Women, power and consciousness in 19th-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), p. 63; Anne-Marie Close, 'A meeting of minds? Margaret Aylward and Paul Cullen' in Dáire Keogh and Albert McDonnell (eds), *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his world* (Dublin, 2011), pp 216-30.

[106] Daniel Murray to Mary Aikenhead, 26 Jan. 1813 (Religious Sisters of Charity Archives, Caritas, Sandymount (RSCA), 1/B/4) cited in 'Dublin cause for the beatification and canonization of the servant of God Mary Aikenhead foundress of the Sisters of Charity (1787-1858). Positio on the life, the witness and the fame of sanctity of the servant of God (2 vols, 1994), volume I', held at RSCA. For Murray's involvement in Aikenhead's novitiate in York, see [O'Flanagan], *Life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, pp 20-36.

[107] *FJ*, 14 Mar. 1817, 10 Feb. 1821, 11 Dec. 1830.

[108] Evelyn Bolster, 'The last will and testament of Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin (d. 1852)' in *Collectanea Hibernica,* no. 21-22 (1979-80), p. 158.

[109] [O'Flanagan], *Life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, pp 39-42.

In a letter to the Poor Inquiry, dated December 1833, Aikenhead outlined the primary work of the Sisters of Charity:

> The object of our institution is to attend to the comforts of the poor, both spiritual and temporal, to visit them at their dwellings and in hospitals, to attend them in sickness, to administer consolation in their afflictions, and to reconcile them to the dispensations of an all-wise Providence in the many trials to which they are subject. The education and relief of orphans, and religious instruction of the lower orders, is part of our duty.[110]

Any sense of moral judgement of the poorer classes is strikingly absent from Aikenhead's letter. No distinction was made between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. The prevalence of destitution in the suburbs and villages to the south-east of the city, Irishtown, Ringsend, Beggar's Bush and Ballsbridge, was attributed to a want of employment, the unavailability of satisfactory medical treatment, and the consumption of unwholesome food. Poverty was caused by external factors, not by the poor themselves. While the taking of spirituous liquors by the poor was acknowledged by Aikenhead, this practice was explained away with the qualifier: 'they often resort to it in despair, to drown the recollection of their sufferings'. Aikenhead adds: 'The poor are, generally speaking, very docile and remarkably patient under their sufferings and privations; they are grateful beyond measure for the least kindness shown to them, and are most anxious to procure employment even at the lowest wages.'[111] Her fellow Sister of Charity Mother Catherine (née Alicia Walsh) identified the suffering of the poor as being caused by their sheer poverty and not by any moral flaw on their part: 'poverty seems for the most part the causes of most of their sufferings. That is the general cause of their sickness.'[112] To these female religious, the poor of Dublin suffered temporal poverty with admirable fortitude, and were presented as possessing the traits of appreciation and industriousness. They were not the idle, imprudent and wicked poor so

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[110] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Addenda to Appendix A*, p. 25e.
[111] Ibid., p. 25e.
[112] Diary of Mother Catherine, 12 Mar. 1818, p. 12 (RSCA, MS RSCG/1/C/15).

often criticised in public discourse. While beggars and alms-seeking were not specifically mentioned by Aikenhead in her extensive correspondence, the absence of judgements of mendicants is striking. Furthermore, Aikenhead had no qualms in acknowledging her own 'begging' on behalf of the poor. In a letter of January 1837, she referred to the 3,000 'begging notes' she had recently sent out across the city soliciting financial assistance for the work of the Sisters. 'The fruit of this begging amounts to nearly £35,' she informed her correspondent.[113] In December 1843, Aikenhead informs the same person: 'Now we prepare for the great approaching Festival, commencing by our usual begging. Pray for success!'[114] Using similar language, Mother Catherine's diary records an instance in which the sister 'went to beg for the poor in John's Lane Market'.[115]

The encouragement of female religious orders and congregations was one means of addressing the shortage of priests to attend to pastoral duties in their parishes. While the number of priests in Ireland increased substantially – rising from 1,614 in 1800 to 2,655 in 1871[116] – this growth was outpaced by the rapid increase in population, particularly among the largely-Catholic poorer classes. This insufficient supply of priests is suggested in evidence for Dublin city, where complaints regarding the delay in procuring a priest to attend a sick or dying person were not unknown.[117] However, it is possible that these complaints arose from pastoral neglect and lethargy from individual clergymen rather than from lacunae in the wider institutional church.

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[113] Mary Aikenhead to Mary de Chantal, 3 Jan. 1837 in *Letters of Mary Aikenhead* (Dublin, 1914), p. 71. See also Mary Aikenhesd to Mary de Chantal, Feast of the Epiphany 1842 in ibid, p. 126.
[114] Mary Aikenhead to Mary de Chantal, 16 Dec. 1843, in *Letters of Mary Aikenhead*, p. 158.
[115] Diary of Mother Catherine, 29 Aug. 1819, p. 26.
[116] Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland* (1985), p. 33.
[117] Anonymous letter to Fr John Hamilton, 30 Mar. 1837 (DDA, JHP, 35/7/111); Anonymous printed letter on pastoral reform, 1838 (DDA, JHP, 36/1/248); Anonymous letter to Archbishop Daniel Murray, 3 June 1839 (DDA, JHP, 36/2/184). On the insufficient number of priests in Dublin, see Donal Kerr, *Peel, priests and politics: Sir Robert Peel's administration and the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1841-1846* (Oxford, 1982), p. 51.

The emergence of lay and religious female activists at this time was influenced by a number of factors: the growth of a confident Catholic middle-class from the mid-eighteenth century; the Catholic revival in the early years of the new century; the broader appeal of philanthropy to women of the wealthier classes. This sentiment of female philanthropy flourished across all denominations, as well-off women brought to their work with the poor a middle-class sense of morality which was 'suffused with religious rhetoric and imagery'.[118] The work of female religious, however, was influenced by a distinctly Catholic two-fold framework: charity benefitted both the giver and the receiver, and the bestowing of relief served to bring about the spiritual redemption of both parties. The constitution of the Sisters of Charity asserts this sentiment: 'The end of this Congregation is, not only that its members, aided by Divine Grace, attend to the salvation and perfection of their own souls, but also that, assisted by the same, they labour seriously in works of spiritual and corporal mercy, for the salvation and consolation of their neighbour.'[119] To Mary Aikenhead, providing assistance to the poor contributed towards 'our own perfection and the salvation of our neighbour'.[120]

Séamus Enright has argued that the death of Archbishop Murray in 1852, coming two years after Cullen's return to Ireland and the Synod of Thurles, marked the end of an era in which lay and religious women played an important, and crucially public, part in the affairs of Irish Catholicism. Noting the exception of Margaret Aylward, the foundress of the Ladies' Association of Charity (1851), St. Brigid's Orphanage network (1861) and the Sisters of the Holy Faith (1867), Enright remarks that 'women were progressively

[118] Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), p.2.
[119] Cited in Mary Aikenhead to unidentified priest, 13 June 1840, in *Letters of Mary Aikenhead*, p. 519.
[120] Mary Aikenhead to mother Francis Magdalen, 5 Sept. 1840, in ibid., p. 327.

disempowered and marginalised as the Church became more structured and better organised'.[121]

Lay Catholic attitudes to beggary

In heeding Patrick J. Corish's advice not to limit studies of churches to the clergy,[122] the role of lay Catholics in approaching poverty and street begging shall now be examined. Due to the dominance of men in the public sphere of this period, the source material is heavily-weighted towards utilising middle-class men as case studies. Many middle-class Catholics in urban centres, a large number of whom were merchants by occupation, partook in religious and philanthropic initiatives, influenced by a combination of economic self-interest and a genuine feeling of religious benevolence.[123] Many wealthy individuals also carried out their philanthropic duties through their wills and charitable bequests. The Roman Catholic gentleman John Moore of Portland Street bequeathed the sum of £50 to each of eleven different causes, including eight Catholic orphan houses and poor schools. Moore also left money to go towards the construction of the Marlborough Street chapel (later Pro-Cathedral).[124]

Many religious congregations were established on foot of substantial contributions from members of the Catholic commercial and professional classes. The first convent in Cork city of the Sisters of Charity was founded in 1826 through a bequest totalling £3,150 from a Miss Ellen Mahony and her sister, who were aunts to the lay

[121] Séamus Enright, 'Women and Catholic life in Dublin, 1766-1852' in Kelly and Keogh (eds), *History of the Catholic Diocese of Dublin*, p. 293.
[122] Corish, 'The Catholic community in the nineteenth century', at p. 32; idem, 'Irish ecclesiastical history since 1500', p. 154.
[123] Corish, *The Irish Catholic experience*, p. 153.
[124] Extract from the will of John Moore (d. 7 June 1828), Portland Street, Dublin, n.d. [*c*.1833] (DDA, JHP, 35/2/77).

philanthropist Ellen Woodlock (1811-84).[125] In 1833 a Loreto convent was established

in Navan on foot of £1,000 which was left by a local business person, while three years

later a Mercy convent was founded in Carlow following the donation of £7,000 by a

local shopkeeper.[126] Many members of male and female religious communities came

from socially and politically prominent families and these family connections played an

important role in the life of these communities. For instance, one contemporary

newspaper report observed that 'many of these ladies [Sisters of Charity] are connected

with some of the first and most ancient Catholic families in the kingdom'.[127] Sister

Francis Theresa of the Sisters of Charity was a sibling of Richard More O'Ferrall M.P.

(1797-1880) and it was through this familial connection that the Sisters secured £20

from the Lord Lieutenant for relieving cholera victims in 1833.[128] The superior of the

Sisters of Charity's convent at Clarinbridge, County Galway was a sister of the novelist

and poet Gerald Griffin (1803-40), who retired from a successful literary career and

entered the Christian Brothers in Dublin.[129] The Griffins were a wealthy middle-class

family from Limerick who typified the rising Catholic middle-classes centred on what

Kevin Whelan has described as the Catholic core area of mid-Munster and south

Leinster.[130] The best known of the network of philanthropic, wealthy Catholic families

in Dublin were the O'Brien / Ball families. Anna Maria O'Brien, who introduced

Aikenhead to Daniel Murray, was involved in the establishment of the Maria Female

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[125] Bishop John Murphy to Archbishop Daniel Murray, 24 Oct. 1824 (DDA, DMP, 30/8/21); [O'Flanagan], *Life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, pp 84-5; Luddy, *Women and philanthropy*, p. 41.
[126] Caitriona Clear, 'The limits of female autonomy: nuns in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Luddy and Murphy (eds), *Women surviving* (Dublin, 1990), p. 22.
[127] *FJ*, 15 Nov. 1833.
[128] Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'O'Ferrall, Richard More' in *DIB*, vii, p. 460; O'Flanagan, *Life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, pp132-3; Mary Aikenhead to Richard More O'Ferrall, 3 Aug. 1833 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1833/3968).
[129] [O'Flanagan], *The life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, pp 164-5, 268; Bridget Hourican, 'Griffin, Gerald' in *DIB*, iv, pp 273-5.
[130] Kevin Whelan, 'The regional impact of Catholicism 1700-1850' in William J. Smyth and Kevin Whelan (eds), *Common ground: essays on the historical geography of Ireland, presented to T. Jones Hughes, M.A., M.R.I.A* (Cork, 1988), pp 253-77; James H. Murphy, *Ireland: a social, cultural and literary history, 1791-1891* (Dublin, 2003), pp 63-4. Griffin's high regard for his sister's congregation is reflected in his poem 'The Sister of Charity': *Connaught Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 1845.

Orphans Society around 1801 and the House of Refuge in Ash Street in 1808. O'Brien's husband, John, was involved in the Poor Clares' acquisition of land at Harold's Cross, while her sister, Frances Ball, founded the Loreto Sisters.[131] Margaret Aylward, foundress of the Sisters of Holy Faith, was born into a wealthy Waterford merchant family with connections to the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Sisters, and in whose home Thomas Francis Meagher and Daniel O'Connell were frequent visitors.[132]

An 1832 return from the Dublin Mendicity Society, sent to the Commissioners of National Education regarding the society's poor schools, identified twelve Roman Catholics among its managing committee of fifty-eight men. Of these twelve (comprising just more than one-fifth of the membership of the committee), four were clergymen, while the remaining eight were laymen.[133] These Catholic men included barrister and M.P. Daniel O'Connell, lawyer, government adviser and poor law commissioner Anthony Richard Blake (1786-1849), and Queen's Counsel and Commissioner of the National System of Education John Richard Corballis (*c*.1797-1879).[134] Blake was for many years an active member of the Dublin Mendicity Society, testifying before the 1830 parliamentary poor inquiry as to the institution's efficacy and its emphasis, where applicable, on encouraging industry among the inmates.[135] Other Catholics who served on the mendicity society's managing committee included Fr

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[131] Begadon, 'Laity and clergy', pp 85-6.

[132] Jacinta Prunty, *Margaret Aylward 1810-1889: Lady of Charity, Sister of Faith* (Dublin, 1999), pp 14-15. Meagher's father was a generous contributor to the Waterford congregation of the Sisters of Charity, in which his sister-in-law was a member, and donated £100 upon its foundation, as well as furnishing the convent's chapel at his own expense and acquiring cloth of silver vestments from Rome: [O'Flanagan], *Life and work of Mary Aikenhead*, pp 255-6.

[133] Dublin Mendicity Society application to National Commissioners for Education, 19 Jan. 1832 (NAI, Commissioners of National Education papers, ED/1/28/1).

[134] O'Connell and Corballis were also among the general members of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce in 1836, although the officers appear to have all been Protestants, mainly Anglicans and Quakers: *Report of the council of the Chamber of Commerce of Dublin, to the annual assembly of the members of the association, held on the 1st of March 1836* (Dublin, 1836), pp 34, 38.

[135] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 341.

Thaddeus O'Malley, Fr James Monks (who had previously served as the Catholic chaplain to the House of Industry) and Fr Matthew Flanagan.[136]

In considering the approaches of wealthy Catholic laymen towards poverty and street begging, the example of Edmund Rice (1766-1844) provides a useful case study.[137] Becoming wealthy through the provision trade in late-eighteenth-century Waterford, Rice devoted considerable time, energy and his personal fortune to pious and charitable causes in the city before establishing a male religious order (the Christian Brothers) who provided an elementary education to poor boys, similar to the efforts of Nano Nagle with poor girls in Cork city earlier in the century. Rice's efforts were aimed at relieving the spiritual and temporal poverty of Waterford's Catholic community, and Dáire Keogh has demonstrated the success of the Christian Brothers in introducing large swathes of the marginalised and impoverished classes to Catholic piety and devotion, as set down by the institutional church. 'Rice's Brothers assisted in the moulding of a distinctively catholic urban working class, by promoting literacy alongside piety and instilling in their pupils the middle-class virtues of personal discipline, hard work, and sobriety.'[138] A further context for Rice's – and Nagle's – work among poor children was the influence of European Catholicism in shaping his spirituality. St Ignatius of Loyola and St Teresa were particular influences upon Rice, who took the former's name at his first profession. Meditation, prayer, Eucharistic devotion and good works lay at the heart of Rice's nascent order of Brothers.[139] While Rice's schools were open to both

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[136] *Twenty-second annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1839* (Dublin, 1840), p. 5. For Monks, see Dr John Thomas Troy to Charles Grant, 30 Nov. 1820 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1820/1300); Dr John Thomas Troy to Charles Grant, 16 Dec. 1820 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1820/1297); Dr John Thomas Troy to Charles Grant, 2 Dec. 1820 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1820/1248).
[137] The best introduction to Rice and the context of the rising Catholic middling classes is Dáire Keogh, *Edmund Rice and the first Christian Brothers* (Dublin, 2008).
[138] Dáire Keogh, 'Rice, Edmund Ignatius' in *DIB*, viii, p. 467.
[139] Keogh, *Edmund Rice and the first Christian Brothers*, pp 102-4.

praise and criticism,[140] the comments of two assistant Poor Law Commissioners in the mid-1830s point to a wider societal impact of the Brothers' system: 'Since the establishment of Mr Rice's schools the change produced in the General deportment and habits of the people is admitted by all.'[141] Sir John Newport, a liberal M.P. for Waterford city, described Rice's schools as bringing about 'infinite benefits' for poor boys, 'the inhabitants of this city, in particular and to the public generally'.[142]

According to Keogh, Edmund Rice exemplified fellow 'agents of improvement' in cultivating discipline, hard-work and sobriety among his pupils. As a lay man Rice was involved in charities for orphans and 'distressed room-keepers', and later in his life as a Brother, he worked closely with Fr Theobald Mathew in the latter's temperance crusade.[143] Rice's active support for the city's mendicity society - serving as chairman in the mid-1820s - demonstrates, no different than his social peers of other denominations, his aversion to street begging and the need to suppress the practice through associational initiatives.[144] A crucial element to Rice's work, and which he borrowed from Nano Nagle's work, was effecting a moral reformation in the poor. Evangelising initiatives brought into the fold numerous poor persons, hitherto alienated from the institutional church, and introduced them to European Catholic spirituality and moral instruction by way of catechesis. 'In contrast to the spirit of the Protestant Reformation, which emphasised the relationship of the individual with God, [this

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[140] For criticism, see Keogh, *Edmund Rice and the first Christian Brothers*, p. 131.

[141] Report on the state of the poor in Waterford city and on the charitable institutions of that city, 5 Apr. 1834 (MS 3288), f 87r.

[142] Sir John Newport to Lord Melbourne, 1829 (Christian Brothers General Archive, Rome), cited in Keogh, *Edmund Rice and the first Christian Brothers*, p. 132.

[143] Ibid., pp 132-6.

[144] Ibid., p. 68. See also ibid., p. 15; *First annual report, of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in the City of Waterford* (Waterford, 1822), p. 42; Seán E. Ó Cearbhaill, 'A memory that lived and a charity that died: Edmund Rice and the Mendicity Institute' in Peter S. Carroll (ed.), *A man raised up: recollections and reflections on Venerable Edmund Rice presented in 1994 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of this death* (Dublin, 1994), pp 168-9.

distinctly Catholic pedagogy] rooted man within an ecclesial context and was directed towards his moral formation and the salvation of his soul.'[145]

In considering the perceptions of the laity to begging and alms-giving, another viewpoint can be gleaned from the Irish-language poetry of the Ulster poet Aodh Mac Domhnaill (1802-67).[146] In his poem 'Ceol na mBacach' ('The Song of the Beggars'), Mac Domhnaill lashed out at the Roman Catholic authorities in Famine-era Belfast for what he considered their collusion with the Presbyterian and Anglican authorities in suppressing beggars with an unduly heavy-hand and, according to one secondary commentator, 'trying to ingratiate themselves with Belfast's ruling classes at the expense of their own flock'.[147] The implied target of the poem was the Bishop of Down and Connor, Cornelius Denvir, who in July 1847 was among a number of the town's clergymen and gentlemen of different denominations who agreed at a public meeting to impose a strict regime of clearing the streets of beggars and quarantining the sick poor in an effort to prevent the spread of contagion.[148] Mac Dhomhnaill wrote:

> '…There sat a Bishop from the Church of the Pope
> And a hundred parsons of the English kind
> To issue decrees and warrants of arrest
> Against those who supported them all of their lives…
> But I'll never believe, from priest or from brother
> That it's wicked to be destitute, abandoned or poor
> For I've heard it said, by poets and authors
> That Jesus was born among those who were poor.
> Colm Cille preached to men and to women
> From the time of the prophets it's always been taught
> That every proud man who places his trust in riches
> Will never gain entry to the kingdom of God.'[149]

[145] Dáire Keogh, 'Evangelising the faithful: Edmund Rice and the reformation of nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism' in Lennon (ed.), *Confraternities and sodalities*, p. 61.

[146] Vincent Morley, 'Mac Domhnaill, Aodh (McDonnell, Hugh)' in *DIB*, v, pp 914-15.

[147] Antain Mac Lochlainn, 'The Famine in Gaelic tradition' in *The Irish Review*, no. 17/18 (Winter 1995), p.102.

[148] For this municipal crack-down on beggars and vagrants, see *BNL*, 30 July 1847.

[149] 'Song of the Beggars' in Colm Beckett, *Aodh Mac Domhnaill, Dánta* (Dublin, 1987), pp 63-4, cited in Mac Lochlainn, 'The Famine in Gaelic tradition', pp 102-3.

To Mac Dhomhnaill, Denvir's co-operation with the mostly Protestant authorities constituted a traitorous abandonment of his own flock. Yet, other themes emerge from this piece, namely the corruption of Denvir's (Catholic) benevolence through association with Protestants, but more significantly, the undermining of the bishop's humane empathy, and subsequently his pastoral efficiency, through his fraternising with the moral trappings of wealth. To the poet, the poor were not to be dismissed as a category of people that can be coldly pigeon-holed and vilified as being deviant, but were in fact those who demonstrated the true virtue of Christian suffering.

Conclusion

Catholic commentators on social questions regularly turned their attention to the questions of begging and alms-giving. A concern with the ubiquity of beggary was not the reserve of Protestant commentators, as Catholics were also prominent in the public discourse on poverty, a poor law and mendicancy. Catholic contributions to this discourse were not marked by consensus, however. Archbishop Daniel Murray and Thaddeus O'Malley echoed wider middle-class concerns over indiscriminate alms-giving, seeing this practice as encouraging pauperism rather than industry and self-dependence. Some commentators, such as Michael Fitzgerald, appealed to the monastic tradition of indiscriminate assistance to the sick and poor, associating this tradition with Catholicism and contrasting it with the perceived harshness of Protestant approaches to poverty. Fitzgerald, as with Mary Aikenhead, did not frame their worldview in terms of the 'deserving' / 'undeserving' poor distinction, yet many of their co-religionists, both clerical and lay, did embrace such concepts.

The question of Catholic emphasis on good works and the remission of sin (or, rather the temporal punishment of sin) exercised both Catholic and Protestant figures. What

may be suggested is that Catholics' understanding of the place of good works in Catholic teaching differed depending on their social class. While clerics could expound at length on the precise theological arguments, as demonstrated above in Archbishop Murray's testimony to the 1825 select committee, the evidence suggests that among the Catholic lower classes, many of whom remained utterly ignorant of the formal strictures of their faith, alms-giving to beggars carried a more simplistic association with folkloric tradition. Protestant arguments that many poor Catholics gave alms to atone for sin, while being simplistic and not accounting for other motivations (see Chapter One), may be close to the truth, albeit a truth contrary to the worldview of the clerics of a church eager to stamp out superstitious practices and replace them with order and respectability.

Archbishop Daniel Murray has been presented as a case study for examining Catholic attitudes to poverty and charity. A long-neglected figure, Murray was central to the revival of the church's fortunes in the first half of the nineteenth century. Building upon the work of his predecessor, Murray was influential in the founding of many religious communities and philanthropic initiatives, perhaps most important of which were the Religious Sisters of Charity. Mary Aikeanhead's congregation pioneered new methods for female religious to engage with the poor and the source material demonstrates that the imagery of beggary was regularly drawn upon in framing their work among the urban poor. Edmund Rice also serves as an interesting study, not only in reflecting the increased wealth and prominence of the Catholic middle classes around the turn of the century, but in his work among the poor of Waterford city. In working with other denominations in the city's mendicity society, Rice embraced the middle classes' associational culture and values of industry, cleanliness and restraint, while discouraging street begging and indiscriminate alms-giving.

Chapter Six

Church of Ireland approaches to begging and alms-giving

Introduction

Addressing the annual general meeting of the Dublin Mendicity Society in January 1838, the city's Church of Ireland archbishop, Richard Whately, boasted of having never given money to a street beggar since coming to the country seven years earlier. Whately rejected the notion that one should give alms out of feelings of sympathy. Surely, one's Christian feelings ought to prevent one from indiscriminately doling out alms to paupers 'who most practiced deception on the public, and to give them money was but to pay them for the purpose of keeping up the system of public misery and street begging'.[1] This refusal to give alms seems to have been a well-known trait of Whately's. W.R. Le Fanu, whose father was one of the prelate's acquaintances, relates Whately's recollection of one particular mendicant who solicited alms from him: '[Whately] used to tell of a beggar who followed him asking alms, to whom he said, "Go away; I never give anything to a beggar in the streets." The beggar replied, "And where would your reverence wish me to wait on you?"'[2]

The case of Whately provides a useful entry-point into considering how members of the Church of Ireland perceived and responded to street begging in the subject period. Through Whately, one can perceive the widespread Protestant antipathy to indiscriminate alms-giving, yet his example highlights the fact that members of a single

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[1] *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1838.
[2] W.R. Le Fanu, *Seventy years of Irish life being anecdotes and reminiscences* (2nd ed., London, 1893), p. 78. See also E. Jane Whately, *Life and correspondence of Richard Whately, D.D. late Archbishop of Dublin* (2 vols, London, 1866), i, p. 150.

church cannot be crudely lumped together in terms of how they approached social problems. The case of Whately brings to light the complexities in negotiating how different people negotiated begging and alms-giving. Whately was a Church of Ireland archbishop and theologian but not an evangelical; his views on begging and alms-giving were grounded in scripture but also in political economy; he never gave alms to a beggar but was a regular and relatively generous contributor to charitable causes.[3]

This chapter shall consider how members of the Church of Ireland perceived and responded to street begging in pre-Famine Ireland. This will be done through considering the views of a sample of influential Church of Ireland clergymen from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries pertaining to begging. The evolution of views surrounding the inter-linked issues of poverty, mendicancy and the virtue – or otherwise – of almsgiving will be demonstrated, followed by an examination of urban parish vestries in the first half of the 1800s. Prior to the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act, parish vestries were the main providers of corporate assistance to the poor in many parts of the country. Vestries possessed various legal powers to respond to street begging and it will be shown that these civil functions of vestries waned in the first half of the century, reflecting wider changes that affected the operation of local government.

By way of an introduction to the main body of this chapter a brief outline of the emergence of evangelical Protestantism will be provided. This will consider the importance played by evangelicalism in framing public discourse on poverty and mendicancy, as well as influencing the workings of charitable societies. Evangelicalism was a broad movement which was embraced by Protestants of various denominations

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[3] In his biography of the archbishop, Donal Akenson argues that Whately can be used as a conduit for analysing evolving public attitudes, and social and economic changes in Ireland during his episcopate: Donald Harman Akenson, *A Protestant in Purgatory: Richard Whately, Archbishop of Dublin* (Hamden, CT, 1981), p. 223.

and the themes considered in this introduction will be relevant to later chapters on Presbyterian and Methodist approaches to begging and alms-giving. Introducing evangelicalism at this point is neither to suggest that all members of the Church of Ireland were evangelicals, nor all evangelicals Anglicans. Instead, this chapter, the first of four on the main Protestant and Dissenting denominations in pre-Famine Ireland, is an appropriate place in which to introduce this topic.

Evangelicalism and perceptions of poverty, begging and alms-giving.

The role of Protestant evangelicalism in shaping how contemporaries perceived and responded to poverty and begging is indispensable to any study of how the main Protestant churches negotiated these social questions. Arising from British and American Protestantism in the eighteenth century, evangelicalism was a movement of reform and revival which is difficult, if not impossible, to strictly define for, in Boyd Hilton's words, 'it was not a precise phenomenon'.[4] What can be identified are doctrinal traits largely shared by evangelicals of all denominations. Evangelicals stressed the four central doctrines of Christ's atoning death on the Cross for the sins of mankind, the Bible as the chief source of religious authority, conversion to a new life of faith in Christ and assurance of one's personal salvation, and an activism in spreading the gospel.[5] Evangelicals' beliefs were not new, being grounded in Judeo-Christian

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[4] Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), p. 7.
[5] D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp 2-17. For a discussion on the viability of this four-pronged model of evangelicalism, see J.N. Ian Dickson, *Beyond religious discourse: sermons, preaching and evangelical Protestants in nineteenth-century Irish society*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes, 2007), pp 5-8.

theology, but 'what distinguished evangelicals was the emphasis they gave to particular

doctrines, and the fervour with which they practised 'vital religion".[6]

Evangelicalism, as understood by historians of nineteenth-century Ireland, Britain and

America, was a movement which transcended international boundaries. Its roots can be

traced to the missionary zeal of John Wesley and the early Methodists from the 1730s

onwards. A later manifestation of this movement's evolution emerged from within the

Church of England in the 1790s and was associated with the Clapham Sect group of

merchants, barristers and politicians in London, of whom William Wilberforce (1759-

1833) was the most influential.[7] Wilberforce's *Practical view of the prevailing religious*

system, published in London in 1797 with a Dublin edition appearing the same year,[8]

proved to be something of a guiding text for this growing persuasion within Irish and

British Protestantism. Evangelicalism built upon the movement for the reformation of

manners and morals that emerged in the 1780s and the impetus provided by millennial

expectation which, in itself, had been created by the momentous political crises in

France, Britain and Ireland. Furthermore, evangelicals' zeal for conversion and activism

was complemented by the emerging associational culture of middle-class life, and

spurred the formation of numerous voluntary societies. As Irene Whelan has observed,

'the evangelical movement throughout the British Isles entered the new century on a

wave of enthusiasm expressed through the phenomenal spread of voluntary

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[6] Hilton, *The age of atonement*, p. 8.
[7] Stewart J. Brown, *The national churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801-1846* (Oxford, 2001), pp 55-6.
[8] William Wilberforce, *A practical view of the prevailing religious system of professed Christians, in the higher and middle classes in this country, contrasted with real Christianity* (Dublin, 1797). The Dublin edition was printed and published by Robert Napper and Bennett Dugdale respectively (both Methodists), who produced large amounts of Methodist and Protestant-ethos works, such as the annual reports of the Hibernian Bible Society. Wilberforce's *Practical view* reached its fourteenth edition in Britain in 1820 and by 1827, it had been translated into Dutch, French and Spanish, as well as being published in various editions in America: John Wolffe, 'William Wilberforce's *Practical view* (1797) and its reception' in J. Gregory and K. Cooper (eds), *Revival and resurgence in Christian history: papers read at the 2006 summer meeting and the 2007 winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, Studies in Church History, no. 44 (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 178.

organisations devoted to everything from Bible and tract distribution to Sunday Schools, home and overseas missions, and countless other charitable and philanthropic concerns'.[9] While the precise number of evangelicals is not known the ramifications of this movement were 'widespread and pervasive'.[10] Andrew Holmes has argued convincingly that while Irish Presbyterianism was influenced by the Methodist tradition of revival, the former experienced a unique manifestation of evangelicalism that ought not to be lumped together with other denominations' experiences of 'vital religion'. Evangelicalism challenged older traditions in Presbyterianism, yet also 'reflected the needs and aspirations of a considerable section of Presbyterian opinion, including better-off farmers, the urban middle classes, especially women, and their upwardly mobile working classes'.[11] The various denominations' own manifestations of evangelicalism are not to be treated as homogenous entities, yet, differences aside, Irish evangelicals – Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist – shared many interests. Irish evangelicalism also had dimensions which distinguished it from its British manifestations. One of these was that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in response to the growth, assertiveness and success of political Catholicism (a denomination associated by many evangelicals with error, superstition, and the Anti-Christ), evangelicalism increasingly advocated the protection of the rights and privileges

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[9] Irene Whelan, 'The Bible gentry: evangelical religion, aristocracy, and the new moral order in the early nineteenth century' in Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes (eds), *Protestant millennialism, evangelicalism and Irish society, 1790-2005* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 55. Also David Hempton, 'Evangelicalism in English and Irish society, 1780-1840' in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington and George A. Rawlyk (eds), *Evangelicalism: comparative studies of popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and beyond, 1700-1900* (New York and Oxford, 1994), p. 156.
[10] Hilton, *The age of atonement*, p. 26.
[11] Andrew Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice, 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2006), p. 306; idem, 'The experience and understanding of religious revival in Ulster Presbyterianism, *c*. 1800-1930' in *IHS*, xxxiv, no. 136 (Nov. 2002), p. 362.

of an embattled Protestant minority, the various branches of which co-operated in the Bible society and Sunday School movements in pursuit of common interests.[12]

Turning to the questions of poverty, begging and alms-giving, it can be seen that evangelicalism greatly influenced how these matters were viewed. Evangelicals placed greater emphasis on the sufferer's spiritual poverty than on their bodily wants, as it was their spiritual salvation through personal conversion that was ultimately sought. This salvation was paramount and was the focus of evangelicals' associational and voluntary work in the towns and cities of a rapidly changing society. This represented a shift in the language of philanthropy when compared with the middle of the previous century, when the need to provide temporal relief guided how charity was framed and bestowed. An English evangelical controversialist at the turn of the century captured this shift in perception: 'How preferable is that bread which endureth to everlasting life, to that which perisheth; and how much more to be dreaded is a famine of the word of truth, than a dearth of earthly food.'[13] John Bird Sumner, the evangelical bishop of Chester and later archbishop of Canterbury, saw alms-giving as duly relieving immediate temporal poverty – 'this it may and ought to do' – but failing to strike at the root of the pauper's destitution, namely his soul weighed down by original sin: 'No effort of man can take away the consequences of the first sin.'[14] Sumner drew on the Biblical story of the crippled beggar who asked alms of John and Peter as they entered the temple, to whom Peter replied: "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Instead of bestowing alms, the

[12] Miriam Moffitt, *The Society for Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics, 1849-1950* (Manchester, 2010), pp 12-13; R.F.G. Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian heritage* (Belfast, 1985), p. 110.
[13] Richard Hill to a clergyman, 10 Nov. 1800, Edwin Sidney, *The life of Sir Richard Hill, Bart.* (London, 1839), p. 472, quoted in Boyd Hilton, 'The role of Providence in evangelical social thought' in Derek Beales and Geoffrey Best (eds), *History, society and the churches: essays in honour of Owen Chadwick* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 220. See also Hilton, *Age of atonement*, pp 88, 98.
[14] John Bird Sumner, 'Sermon VII. The surest mode of benefitting the poor' in idem, *Christian charity; its obligations and objects, with reference to the present state of society. In a series of sermons* (2nd ed., London, 1841), p. 109.

apostle assisted the indigent to his feet, "and he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3: 1-8). According to Sumner, alms would have provided mere temporary sustenance and the beggar's wants would have remained. 'But by what he [Peter] did, when he bid him to *rise up and walk*, he removed his wants, instead of relieving them; he lifted him up to a state which before he could not have reached; the man became a new creature.'[15] Just as Christians of all denominations grounded their charity in scripture, Sumner here presented a biblical precedent underpinning the evangelical zeal for personal conversion and rebirth in Christ.

While salvation trumped bodily relief, the former was inextricably linked to the improvement of the social conditions of the poor.[16] How could the slum dweller be convinced to turn to Christ and be assured of salvation when living in the morally polluting environments of filth, idleness, intemperance, illiteracy, nakedness and all manners of vice? In preaching the gospel to the irreligious poor, the personal, face-to-face encounter was the preferred means. This method drew inspiration from the pastoral mission of Christ and facilitated the personal evangelisation of the poor by urban missionaries. This model was deployed by evangelical philanthropists, from the deacons and visitors of Thomas Chalmers's scheme in St John's parish, Glasgow (see Chapter Seven) to the Methodist visitors of the Strangers' Friend Society (see Chapter Eight). The focus of evangelical charity was on the individual and his/her salvation.

Yet, despite these shared approaches, evangelicals could hold contrasting opinions on poverty and poor relief. These differences were somewhat caused by a disparity in

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[15] Sumner, 'Sermon VII. The surest mode of benefitting the poor', p. 111.
[16] Brian Dickey, '"Going about doing good": evangelicals and poverty *c.* 1815-1870' in John Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical faith and public zeal: evangelicals and society in Britain 1780-1980* (London, 1995), p. 44.

views among evangelicals as to the working of divine providence in the world, with a distinction being drawn between 'moderates' and 'extremists' who perceived worldly happenings as being mostly consequences of man-made actions or divine interferences respectively.[17] Thomas Chalmers railed against a state provision for the poor, championing private charity by individuals and, at most, minimal interventions by corporate bodies. In terms of temporal wants, Chalmers's target was not poverty but pauperism, and he saw the evangelising work of Christian missionaries, visiting the homes of the poor and detecting genuine cases and imposture through their moralising inspections, as, in Hilton's words, 'the only sure way to effect a moral regeneration of society'.[18] Chalmers's opposition to a compulsory poor scheme was in stark contrast to the views of the evangelical Church of Ireland rector of Powerscourt, Rev. Robert Daly. In an 1830 article published in the evangelical *Christian Examiner* magazine, Daly outlined how he had shifted from a position of outright hostility to a poor law to one whereby he believed that a statutory provision was a 'national duty', necessary for the temporal and moral alleviation of the poorer classes.[19] His main (and seemingly unique) argument was that a statutory provision would alleviate the pastoral pressures on clergymen, whose duties were overly concerned with relieving the temporal poverty of their flock. Under the proposed poor law these clerics would have greater liberty to attend to the spiritual wants of the poor. Again, this demonstrates that while common traits can be identified among nineteenth-century evangelicals, their approaches to social questions could vary greatly. Yet, evangelicals considered these questions with an eye to a common ultimate objective – the salvation of the souls of sinners through personal conversion.

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[17] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, pp 15-17.
[18] Ibid., p. 81.
[19] [Robert Daly], 'Letter to the editor: Improvement of Ireland – poor laws' in *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland magazine*, x, no. 55 (Jan. 1830), pp 1-8.

The views of Church of Ireland clergymen, *c*. 1700-*c*. 1850

As the Church of Ireland was the principal institution in the eighteenth century that exercised a role in the provision of poor relief, it is not surprising that the condition of the people and questions regarding poverty and mendicancy coloured the pastoral work of Anglican clergymen and influenced their contributions to public discourse on these matters. The condition of the poor did not escape the attention of Archbishop of Dublin William King (1650-1729) in the early-eighteenth century, who established alms houses, granted badges to the poor and forbid the destitute to beg outside their own parish.[20] Dean of St Patrick's Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) was widely known for his philanthropic endeavours, and his published work includes tracts on the state of indigence and beggary in Dublin city. Swift drew a firm line between the local Dublin beggars, who were to be badged and relieved by their own parish, and the 'the Evil of Foreign Beggars', whom he wished to see whipped and driven out of the city, 'and let the next country Parish do as they please'.[21] Swift viewed the vast majority of the city's mendicants as 'undeserving Wretches', too lazy to work and whose destitution was owed to 'their own Idleness, attended with all Manner of Vices, particularly Drunkenness, Thievery, and Cheating'.[22]

The most significant contributions to the ever fraught debate on provision for the poor were two pamphlets by Dean of Clogher Richard Woodward proposing the establishment of county poor houses throughout Ireland. In the first of these pamphlets, Woodward (1726-94)[23] criticised the prevailing system of relief which was deficient of a statutory provision for those in distress. He railed against the iniquity of the system

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[20] Lecky, *A history of Ireland in the eighteenth century* (5 vols, London, 1919), i, p. 230.
[21] Jonathan Swift, *A proposal for giving badges to the beggars in all the parishes of Dublin* (London, 1737), p. 6.
[22] Swift, *Proposal for giving badges to beggars*, pp 8-9.
[23] James Kelly, 'Woodward, Richard' in *DIB*, ix, pp 1036-9.

based on voluntary and unsystematic relief, whereby almsgiving frequently arose 'from the Sympathy of Wretches almost as poor as those whom they relieve', while 'the Thoughtless, the Unfeeling, and the Absentee contribute nothing'.[24] The rural poor were the subject of his sympathy as, with less access to charitable organisations or philanthropic benefactors than their urban counterparts, they were at a significant disadvantage. Woodward's proposed scheme, which excluded the children of the poor, for whom the charter schools were supposed to cater,[25] envisaged the establishment of a multi-faceted poor house in each county for various categories of poor. These entities would comprise a 'hospital, for Aged and Disabled Poor; an Infirmary, for the Sick; a House of Correction, for Vagrant Beggars'.[26] The employment of the poor in productive industry which would benefit wider society was central to Woodward's initial proposal. Each person was to be put to work according to 'their Faculties and Strength'. While the elderly and maimed were not to be expected to work on an equal footing as able-bodied young men, the limited work which they may have been capable of undertaking would, it was argued, increase 'the Aggregate of National Industry, and the Security of Property'.[27] Woodward did not envisage an eligibility test, as applied in the nineteenth-century workhouse system, but argued that every pauper residing in a particular county should be entitled to relief in the poor house.

It would be incorrect, however, to interpret his scheme as encouraging unqualified sympathy for the poor. On the contrary, Woodward echoed the widespread disdain for the 'undeserving' idle poor and, in his tract, the clergyman clearly stipulated the terms under which vagrants and beggars were to be handled:

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[24] [Richard Woodward], *A scheme for establishing county poor-houses, in the kingdom of Ireland* (Dublin, 1766), p. 5.
[25] See Kenneth Milne, *The Irish charter schools 1730-1830* (Dublin, 1997).
[26] [Woodward], *A scheme for establishing county poor-houses*, p. 6.
[27] Ibid., p. 6. Such work was to include knitting stockings, making fishing nets, picking oakum or basic mending.

The Vagrants should be punished with hard Labour for one Week, the first time they are committed, and may be marked on the Back of the Right Arm in Gunpowder (as the Children of the Foundling Hospital are marked) with the Letter V. By this Method, their Reproach may be concealed by their Cloaths, if they shall return to honest Labour, and yet they shall be known, if sent a second Time to the House of Correction. If they be taken a second Time begging, they should be sent again, whipped, and condemned to one Month's hard Labour, and marked with the Figure II. The third Time they are taken, they should be condemned to one Month's hard Labour, and be whipped twice every Week, ie. eight Times in all, and marked with the Figure III. The fourth Time they are detected begging, they should be sent to the Common Gaol, and transported as Vagabonds, by Presentment of the Grand Jury…[28]

Two years later, Woodward made a more detailed contribution to the poor law debate in his *Argument in support of the right of the poor of Ireland to a national provision*, in which he advocated a 1 per cent tax on agricultural and commercial output to fund a national system of poor assistance.[29] Indeed, he has been credited by a number of historians with being the influence behind the revolutionary 1772 legislation, which allowed Irish grand juries to establish houses of industry.[30]

Woodward's plans, disseminated and debated in the 1760s and 1770s, came at a time of economic crisis and reflected wider concerns regarding the level of poverty, destitution and mendicancy throughout Ireland, but particularly in Dublin. The evolution of the capital's poor house (established in 1703-04 in the western extremities of the city) from a place of detention for mendicants into a foundling hospital, and the weakening strength of the Protestant community, who carried a large proportion of the burden in reliving distress, are important contexts. David Dickson has argued that the emergence of the houses of industry as a statutory reality must also be seen in 'the

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[28] [Woodward], *A scheme for establishing county poor-houses*, p. 10.

[29] Richard Woodward, *An argument in support of the right of the poor in the kingdom of Ireland to a national provision; in the appendix to which, an attempt is made to settle a measure of the contribution due from each man to the poor, on the footing of justice* (Dublin, 1768).

[30] Constantia Maxwell, *Dublin under the Georges, 1714-1830* (Dublin, 1946), p. 130; R.B. McDowell, 'Ireland in 1800' in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds), *A new history of Ireland, iv: eighteenth-century Ireland, 1691-1800* (Oxford, 1986), p. 677; David Dickson, *New foundations: Ireland, 1660-1800* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2000), p. 186; Kelly, 'Woodward, Richard', pp 1036-9; Mel Cousins, 'The Irish parliament and relief of the poor: the 1772 legislation establishing houses of industry' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, xxviii (2013), pp 95-115.

context of a slightly wealthier society concerned to tackle an unsavoury aspect of life:
regular uncontrolled begging, both by the infirm and the sturdy, most evident in the
capital',[31] while Mel Cousins stresses the growth of Dublin's population, the rise in
vagrancy (or perhaps societal concern about vagrancy) and the evolution of the city
workhouse into a foundling hospital.[32]

Woodward's pamphlets provide an insight into the evolving philosophical treatment
of poverty and begging by contemporary clerics. The language used by Woodward
focused on relieving the temporal plight of the destitute, while punishing the bodily
frailties of 'undeserving' mendicants. His concern was with the provision of suitable
lodgings, food and clothing to the poor, and (as noted above) with increasing 'the
Aggregate of National Industry, and the Security of Property'. There was none of the
evangelical centrality of securing the soul of the sinner which is associated with the
language of charity in the following decades. While Woodward spoke about 'humanity',
'compassion' and 'justice', nowhere did he suggest the importance of personal salvation
or spiritual regeneration.

Woodward's somewhat utilitarian model contrasted sharply with the sentiments
echoed three decades later by the evangelical rector of Powerscourt, Rev. Robert Daly
(1783-1872), in his outline of a proposal for inducing the Irish poor to lift themselves
out of poverty. A 'renowned preacher and militant evangelical', Daly was a leading
figure in the 'Second Reformation' of the 1820s and from 1843 until his death, served
as bishop of the united dioceses of Cashel, Emly, Waterford, and Lismore.[33] His
activism involved running local schools, leading to accusations of proselytization, and

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[31] David Dickson, 'In search of the old Irish poor law' in Rosalind Mitchison and Peter Roebuck (eds),
Economy and society in Scotland and Ireland, 1500-1939 (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 154.
[32] Cousins, 'The Irish parliament and relief of the poor', p. 108.
[33] Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh, 'Daly, Robert' in McGuire and Quinn (eds), *DIB*, iii, pp 32-3; Desmond
Bowen, *Souperism: myth of reality. A study in souperism* (Cork, 1970), pp 90, 119-20.

supporting various evangelical missionary societies. He was well placed to drive, together with the evangelical members of the landed Wingfield family, a religious revival on the Powerscourt estate throughout the 1820s and 1830s.[34] In evidence to the Poor Inquiry of 1833-36, Daly extolled the virtues of a charitable scheme he had witnessed first-hand in Brighton, which promoted a savings scheme among the poor and was supplemented by a cash sum doled out by the charity in question. According to the clergyman, the scheme's advantages were that, it was based, firstly, on the principle that where possible, gratuitous relief should not be provided and, secondly, that it taught the poor 'the importance of very small, if habitual, savings'.[35] The encouragement of prudence and self-sufficiency would benefit both the giver and receiver. Noting that the Brighton scheme led to 'the suppression of mendicancy and imposture', the author contrasted the previous system of poor relief in his County Wicklow parish with the system prevailing in the 1830s (and which was based on the Brighton initiative): 'Under our former system of almsgiving, it seems to be the object of the poor to be as miserable and squalid as possible, in order to extort alms; under this it is the object of the poor to vie one with the other in comfort and decency of appearance.'[36]

An article published in 1830 in the *Christian Examiner*, an evangelical Church of Ireland magazine, provides a probing insight into Daly's experience of and views on the inter-related issues of poverty, vice and mendicancy.[37] The *Christian Examiner* was established in July 1825 by Rev. Caesar Otway (1780-1842), a well-known evangelical controversialist, writer and editor who had published a number of anti-Catholic

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[34] Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law, 1815-43* (Manchester, 2009), p. 26; Whelan, 'The bible gentry', pp 62, 66-7.
[35] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II, Addenda to Appendix A,* p. 40e.
[36] Ibid., p. 40e.
[37] The article was written anonymously by 'R.D.', who is evidently Daly: see Robert Daly, *A letter to the editor of the Christian Examiner, on the subject of a legal provision for the poor of Ireland* (Dublin, 1829).

pamphlets since 1814.[38] In the article Daly, who had served as an officer to the poor in his parish for the previous fifteen years, outlined the development of his views on a statutory poor provision, evolving from a standpoint of outright opposition to his later belief that 'a national legal provision for the poor is a national duty'.[39] According to the author, a disproportionate amount of the clergy's time was exerted on handling requests for poor relief. As such, they could not devote sufficient time to the spiritual well-being of their congregation. A statutory relief scheme, which would remove the burden from the parish, would benefit both clergymen and their parishioners, Daly held:

> I conceive, that among other blessings to be derived from a national provision for the poor, one, and not the least, will be the improvement it will introduce in the intercourse between the minister and the poor of his flock; *temporal wants will not form the main subject of every conversation, and his visits will not be sought with the hope of extracting some pecuniary assistance, but with the view of receiving that instruction which can make wise unto salvation.* I am, moreover, induced to give my opinion on this subject, because I know that no one has more opportunity of learning by experience, the real state of the poor under the present system, than the clergyman of a parish [emphasis added].[40]

Not surprisingly, the author had much to say on the topic of mendicancy, and saw the practice of indiscriminate alms-giving as a greater evil than any faults in the English Speenhamland poor law system, which was becoming the subject of increasing public denunciation.[41] While acknowledging the merits of the argument that a compulsory poor rate would diminish much of the charitable spirit in the alms-giver and the gratitude of the recipient, Daly asserted 'but I have long and attentively watched the spirit in which alms are given and received, under the system of sturdy mendicancy which exists in our country, and I do unhesitatingly say, that nothing was ever levied more in the shape of a

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[38] C.J Woods, 'Otway, Caesar' in *DIB*, vii, pp 1010-11*;* James H. Murphy, *Ireland: a social, cultural and literary history, 1791-1891* (Dublin, 2003), p. 79.
[39] [Daly], 'Letter to the editor: poor laws', p. 2.
[40] Ibid., p. 7.
[41] Under the Speenhamland system, which was first introduced in 1795, the English parish supplemented labourers' wages in relation to the price of bread. The opponents of the system perceived it as an encouragement to idleness, dependency and pauperism.

tax, than the contributions extracted in this country by the noise and importunate clamour of beggars'.[42] For the clergyman, the prevailing Irish system only encouraged unqualified relief, thus fostering idleness and dependency. In his analysis of Irish poverty the author adhered to the traditional model of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, and identified the archetypal threats long associated with the mendicant poor – crime, vice, sedition and disease:

> …the strolling mendicant utters his imprecations against those who do not contribute according to the scale which he has laid down, and spends the produce of his day's collection in drunkenness and profligacy; passing through the country he sows the seeds of dishonesty, immorality, and vice, increases sedition, and discontent, and in times of the prevalence of fever, carries its infection throughout the land.[43]

Daly's views provide a useful comparison with those of Woodward decades earlier and reflect the shift in the lexicon of the poor law debate. The influence of evangelicalism and moralism ensured that spiritual salvation trumped temporal assistance, yet the latter remained a matter of utmost urgency and importance.

This view of the mendicant poor posing a threat to civil order is reflected in another contribution to *Christian Examiner* a year later. The author, who signed off as 'Hibernicus', adopted a different tone from the earlier contribution, and alleged that Roman Catholicism, in particular its mass of priests, was the fundamental source of all that was evil in Ireland. In presenting his argument, the author drew on the popular motif of the beggar as a personification of Popish error and deceit. 'Hibernicus' stated that Popery was 'adverse to all improvement, either of body or mind', before continuing:

> It is unquestioned, that wandering beggars are the chief agents of the priests, in mock miracles and prophecies, deceptions, and impostures of every kind; they are still more useful in the frightful system of *espionage*, which forms,

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[42] [Daly], 'Letter to the editor: poor laws', p. 5.
[43] Ibid., p. 5.

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perhaps, a more powerful source of dominion, than even the confessional itself. They form also a fluctuating medium for the conveyance of sedition and agitation from one district to another.[44]

For the author, whose views reflected the evangelical obsession with Popish 'error' and 'priestcraft', wandering mendicants constituted not only a threat to the state, but a cancerous influence on the spiritual and moral well-being of the impressionable poor. The beggar's deviance transcended the temporal and spiritual spheres of human existence.

Applying these beliefs to his argument in favour of a poor law, 'Hibernicus' stated that one advantage of a statutory poor provision would be to remove responsibility for such paupers – almost invariably Catholics – from the priests to appointed officers, who would presumably be Protestants. The sheer viciousness of this piece, with its unbridled focus on the perceived moral wickedness of Catholicism, must be seen in the context of increasing sectarian tensions in public discourse in Ireland throughout the 1820s and into the 1830s. This period witnessed the continued refinement of distinct political consciousness among the Catholics and Protestants of Ireland, as political issues, most notably the tithe system and Catholic emancipation, came to the fore of newly-excited and mobilised political movements. Other factors, such as an increasingly confident and assertive Catholic middle-class demanding to be placed on equal footing as their Established Church counterparts, the emergence of evangelical movements in each of the main Protestant denominations and the radicalisation of the Orange movement, fanned the flames of sectarian hatred and suspicion, and moulded the language

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[44] 'Hibernicus', 'On the poor laws: [letter] to the editor of the *Christian Examiner*' in *Christian Examiner*, xi, no. 73 (July 1831), p. 508.

employed by commentators and polemicists in discourse on poverty, education and other contentious matters.[45]

   Archbishop Richard Whately was among a number of leading Christian political economists in the first half of the nineteenth century who were, in Peter Gray's words, 'concerned with reconciling universal truths of classical political economics with the moral teaching of Christianity, arguing that the two were complementary and must be united in the service of good governance'.[46] While not an evangelical Whately shared the moralising conceptions of poverty with the revivalist wings of the Established Church and flavoured them with political economy. His criticism of a rate-based relief provision bestowed upon the able-bodied poor as an entitlement, as per the Speenhamland system in England from 1795, countenanced both 'the moral and economic hazards involved'.[47] For Whately, this system tempted the diligent labourer away from industry and independence, and served as a 'bounty on idleness…a bounty upon lying…a bounty on theft'.[48] In his evidence to an 1832 parliamentary inquiry on the tithes system, Whately expressed his unyielding opposition to the introduction of a compulsory poor law for the able-bodied in Ireland. Ever-conscious of the increasing cries for reform of the Speenhamland system, Whately asserted that the provision of a legal right to relief would encourage dependency and idleness among the lower orders, thereby encumbering any attempt to foster industry:

> It would tend to make them leave their parents and their children to parish support, instead of attending to them as they do now, and to prevent them from laying by any thing for a time of distress. They would work as little as

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[45] Irene Whelan, *The bible war in Ireland: the 'Second Reformation' and the polarization of Protestant-Catholic relations, 1800-1840* (Dublin, 2005).

[46] Gray*, The making of the Irish poor law*, p. 123. See also Brown, *National churches of England, Ireland and Scotland*, p. 82.

[47] Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law*, p. 125.

[48] Letter from Richard Whately to directors of Bulcamp House of Industry, 2 June 1823, reprinted in *Report from His Majesty's commissioners for inquiring into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws*, Appendix C, pp 260c-261c, H.C. 1834 (44), xxxvii, 264-5.

possible, and get all they could from the parish. I have seen that operate a great deal in England, and I think it would operate with much more rapid and destructive effect in Ireland.[49]

Whately was careful, however, to insist that his views did not extend to the relief of the 'blind, the permanently infirm, cripples, idiots and the like', but were limited to the able-bodied poor.[50]

Whately's views on begging and alms-giving were based on personal activism, stressing the need for the better off to go out and work among the distressed. Underpinning this work was the moral requirement for '*discrimination* in charity'.[51] The archbishop's notorious eccentricities were evident in the manner in which he dealt with street beggars. During his time in Oxford, where he served as a member of the town's mendicity society, Whately personally inspected beggars' pockets to ensure that they were not hiding money.[52] His views on alms-giving were outlined in considerable detail in a sermon preached in aid of Dr Steevens' Hospital in the mid-1830s. The archbishop drew on 'Christ's example' in drawing distinctions between the sick poor, who were almost invariably deserving of assistance, and the able-bodied beggar, from whom indiscriminate charity must be withheld. The numerous instances in the gospels wherein Christ aided the sick and cured illnesses contrasted sharply, Whately argued, with the two instances of him providing alms – in the form of food – to the hungry.[53] After

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[49] *The evidence of His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin, as taken before the select committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the collection and payment of tithes in Ireland, and the state of the laws relating thereto* (London, 1832), p. 97.
[50] *Evidence of the Archbishop of Dublin…the collection and payment of tithes in Ireland*, p. 97.
[51] Richard Whately, *Christ's example, an instruction as to the best modes of dispensing charity. A sermon delivered for the benefit of the Relief and Clothing Fund, in Doctor Steevens' Hospital* (Dublin, 1835), p. 25.
[52] Whately, *Life and correspondence of Richard Whately*, i, p. 149.
[53] The first instance is told in Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15, and the second in Matthew 15:32-39 and Mark 8:1-9.

feeding the multitudes, Christ sent them away, 'not allowing them to remain in expectation of a daily renewal of the like miracle', Whately observed.[54]

The explanation for this disparity in approach could be simply explained. The provision of aid to the sick poor results in the reduction of the number of sick persons, albeit allowing for a certain few who will 'feign sickness or infirmity'. On the other hand, 'the relief of mere poverty – the supply of food, clothing, and the like, to all that are in want of them – … must manifestly tend to multiply its objects. It could not fail to happen but that vast multitudes would forsake their usual occupations and cease to work, when they found that they could be maintained in idleness.'[55] Relieving the poor was a Christian duty, but assistance must be bestowed warily so as not to foster mendicancy: 'if no one gave alms, there would be no beggars.'[56] Indiscriminate alms-giving exerted a corruptive influence on both parties within a charitable transaction – the benefactor and the recipient. The former negated his duty to ascertain the credentials of the soliciting poor person and determine 'whether they are doing good or mischief', while the mendicant was being induced to continue 'the wretched and demoralizing trade of begging'.[57] Indiscriminate alms-giving actually constituted a 'sin' on the part of the giver, Whately believed, as this misspent charity maintained the beggar in his life of idleness and vice.[58] The morally debilitating effect of this transaction, furthermore, extended beyond the two immediate parties to 'real objects of compassion', whose 'modest and simple' pleas for assistance were dwarfed by the extravagant fabrications or the grotesque bodily exposures of the fraudulent and professional mendicant.

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[54] Whately, *Christ's example*, p. 10.
[55] Ibid., p. 11.
[56] Ibid., p. 21.
[57] Ibid., pp 23, 21.
[58] Ibid., p. 22. See also *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1838.

Indiscriminate alms-giving only served to facilitate and encourage what the prelate termed 'this wretched kind of lottery', in which style won out over substance.[59]

In late-1833 Whately was appointed to chair the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the State of the Poor of Ireland.[60] Overseen by (at any one time) nine commissioners and based largely on the ground-work of a large team of assistant commissioners who carried out extensive investigations across much of Ireland, the Poor Inquiry constituted the largest investigation at that date into the conditions of the poor in Ireland, and its printed reports represent an unprecedented source for historians examining poverty in pre-Famine Ireland. The inquiry's third and final report forwarded Whately's views, previously articulated in public and in private, which were shared by most of the commissioners and other influential commentators such as Nassau Senior, a lifelong friend and former pupil of Whately's. The inquiry rejected the workhouse-based New Poor Law in England, instead championing the 'Scottish system' of minimalist state action, wherein assistance would be provided largely through voluntary agencies and without a compulsory poor rate, thus preventing a right to relief for the poor and the burden of an additional tax for rate-payers. (A limited state provision was to be made for certain categories of the poor, such as the impotent and sick poor).[61] On the question of begging the inquiry mirrored Whately's disdain for indiscriminate alms-giving, stating that 'the abundant alms which are bestowed, in particular by the poorer classes, unfortunately tend…to encourage mendicancy with its attendant evils'.[62] Voluntary

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[59] Whately, *Christ's example*, p. 20.
[60] This paragraph is largely based on Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law*, pp 92-129. See also Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), pp 26-69.
[61] Among the measures proposed by the Poor Inquiry were: a state-assisted emigration scheme; a system of agricultural education and improvement, including land drainage and reclamation, to be overseen by a Board of Improvement; and improved housing for the rural poor, the expense of which to be met partly by the landlord and partly through local rates.
[62] *Third report of the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 25, H.C. 1836 [C 43], xxx, 25.

charities, such as mendicity societies, were to fall under the regulation of a Poor Law Commission, yet the direct provision of relief was to remain in the hands of the voluntary organisations. The report also advocated for revised vagrancy laws, empowering magistrates to either transport convicted vagrants to the colonies as labourers (this was aimed at the mendicant poor who were willing to work) or confine them in Irish penitentiaries for an indefinite period of time, a measure targeting the refractory, able-bodied and idle beggar.[63]

Parish vestries and street begging

Many corporate bodies had their roles to play in negotiating poverty and suppressing beggary: municipal authorities, the central state, the charitable sector, and the various churches and religious societies. Parish vestries constitute a particularly interesting case, not only given their relative historiographical neglect, at least regarding their nineteenth-century incarnations, but also because of the technical complexities inherent in the nature of their association. Parish vestries exerted ecclesiastical functions according to their status within the Established Church. But, they also carried out civil duties, such as relieving poverty and suppressing street begging, the operation of which were approved at meetings open to parishioners of all denominations. These initiatives may be seen, then, not as the institutional responses of the Church of Ireland to social questions such as poverty and beggary but as civil responses of the community.

The parish vestry was an assembly of male rate-paying householders in a given parish, which met at least once a year – Easter Monday or Tuesday – to levy a local rate (a cess) on parishioners to fund the provision of ecclesiastical and civil services within

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[63] *Poor Inquiry. Third report, 1836*, p. 27.

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the parish. From the middle of the seventeenth century the parish vestry was a unit of local government and the extent to which the vestry exerted those civil functions varied from place to place. Parish vestries were most active in Ulster and in large urban centres in the rest of Ireland, as it was in these locations that there was a greater concentration of members of the Established Church. The operation of the parish at this level of local government is linked to the fact that the Church of Ireland church acted not only as an ecclesiastical space, for worship and prayer, but as a civil space, open to parishioners of all denominations. In some Church of Ireland churches since the sixteenth century, leases and contracts were drawn up in the church porch.[64] Control of the vestry, however, remained in the hands of the Anglican members, mainly through the prohibition on Catholics and Dissenters to fill influential vestry offices, notably that of churchwarden. Vestry meetings also served as civil forums, where parishioners – regardless of religion or class – could engage in discussion and debate. Vestry meetings were public meetings, open to all parishioners and, in John Crawford's words, 'proved something of a forum for the expression of grievances'.[65] At times of heightened tensions among parishioners, the expression of grievances could result in riot and affray breaking out at Easter vestry meetings, requiring the intervention of the police.[66] Of course, such incidents were the exception. In the nineteenth century, vestry meetings were also open for members of the press to attend and report on proceedings.

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[64] See, for instance, Raymond Gillespie, 'The coming of reform, 1500-58' in Kenneth Milne (ed.), *Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin: a history* (Dublin, 2000), p. 159; 'Will of Richard Lloyd, 1820' in Eilish Ellis and P. Beryl Eustace (eds), *Registry of deeds, Dublin: abstracts of wills. Vol. III, 1785-1832* (3 vols, IMC, Dublin, 1984), p. 337. For evidence of this practice in early-modern England, see William Brown (ed.), *Yorkshire Deeds*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series (10 vols, n.p., 1922), iii, p. 26.

[65] Crawford, *Church of Ireland in Victorian Dublin*, p. 153. At a contentious Easter meeting of the St Michan's vestry in Dublin in 1838, a Catholic parishioner interrupted the proceedings of the select vestry (at which only Anglicans could vote) on a number of occasions, being advised: "You are only allowed to attend here as a matter of courtesy, and you cannot interfere in the proceedings." When told that Protestant members do not interrupt proceedings in the Catholic chapel, the man replied: "I think a vestry meeting is a different thing altogether. It is a temporal matter": *FJ*, 17 Apr. 1838.

[66] See, for instance, the vestry meetings in St Paul's parish, Dublin: *FJ*, 2 Apr.1839; St Peter's parish, Dublin: *FJ*, 22 Apr. 1862, 7 Apr. 1863. Also, John Crawford, *The Church of Ireland in Victorian Dublin* (Dublin, 2005), pp 153-4, 163-8.

While the range of responsibilities the Irish vestries held paled in comparison to their English counterparts, the state remained quite satisfied, until the middle of the nineteenth century, to devolve certain powers onto the parish. The civil duties of the Irish vestries, particularly in urban areas, included road maintenance, tree planting, fire fighting, street cleaning and the provision of lighting, as well as poor relief and policing. These services were financed by the parish cess.[67] Despite the range of duties undertaken by many vestries, the main unit of local government in Ireland during this period was the grand jury, which comprised twenty-three large landholders appointed by the sheriff of the county.[68]

The vestry acted as a welfare body which distributed alms to the poor, most commonly in the form of money, food, fuel and clothes. Some urban parishes established and maintained an alms house for those paupers entered on its poor list,[69] while coffins were regularly provided for the local poor.[70] Relief, however, was not distributed on an unqualified basis. In adherence to the traditional distinctions between the meritorious and deviant poor, parishes limited relief to selected groups, usually the

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[67] Brief synopses of the operation of the parish vestries are to be found in Donald Harman Akenson, *The Church of Ireland: ecclesiastical reform and revolution, 1800-1885* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1971), pp 52-5; Toby Barnard, *The kingdom of Ireland, 1641-1760* (Basingstoke, 2004), p. 134; Raymond Refaussé, *Church of Ireland records* (Dublin, 2006), p. 28; Maighréad Ní Mhurchadha, 'Introduction' in eadem (ed.), *The vestry records of the united parishes of Finglas, St Margaret's, Artane and the Ward, 1657-1758* (Dublin, 2007), pp 18-21.

[68] Akenson, *The Church of Ireland*, p. 53; David Broderick, *Local government in nineteenth-century County Dublin: the grand jury* (Dublin, 2007), pp 7-17.

[69] St Peter's parish, Drogheda, vestry minute book, 28 Sept. 1772 (RCBL, St Peter's parish, Drogheda, vestry minute books, P 854.05.1); St Paul's parish, Cork, vestry minute book, 19 Oct. 1818 (RCBL, St Paul's parish, Cork, vestry minute books, P 349.05.1); ibid., 5 Apr. 1825; St Peter's parish, Cork, vestry minute book, 29 Dec. 1755, p. 38 (RCBL, St Peter's parish, Cork, vestry minute books, P 342.05.1); ibid., 14 Aug. 1797, p. 238; ibid., 3 Apr. 1809, pp 305-6; St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 9 Feb. 1800 (RCBL, St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 117.05.6); ibid., 24 Apr. 1800.

[70] Lisburn parish, County Antrim, vestry minute book, 5 Apr. 1779 (PRONI, Lisburn parish, County Antrim, vestry minute books, MIC1/4, microfilm); St Andrew's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 29 May 1807 (RCBL, St Andrew's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 059.05.1); St Paul's parish, Cork, vestry minute book, 24 Mar. 1818; St Thomas's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 8 Apr. 1825 (RCBL, St Thomas's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 80.5.2); Naas parish, County Kildare, vestry minute book, 24 Apr. 1832 (RCBL, Naas parish, County Kildare, vestry minute books, P 487.05.1).

local and 'deserving' poor.[71] Writing of eighteenth-century Ireland, Rowena Dudley has commented that relief was given to 'strange' beggars at times, 'but with the intention of encouraging the beneficiary to leave the parish'.[72] According to Toby Barnard, 'there was a universal reluctance to take responsibility for strangers, unless to return them to their places of origin or – in extreme cases – to bury them at the public charge'.[73] The welfare of the local poor was paramount. While a parish-based poor law had operated in England and Wales since 1601, Ireland remained without a statutory provision until the Poor Law Act of 1838. Therefore, when parish vestries undertook the relief of the poor in their locality, this was done without statutory authority and at the discretion of the parish officers. An exception to this was the inclusion of a clause in an act of 1665, empowering the churchwardens of St Andrew's parish in Dublin to assess parishioners 'for the relief of the poor'.[74]

The need to visibly identify those deemed to be worthy of alms was always stressed and many parishes distributed begging badges to their own poor. Badges were signs of authentication. With beggary long associated with imposture and fraud, such legitimisation was a means to, firstly, discourage the fraudulent pleas of the sturdy beggar, secondly, protect the 'honest', 'deserving' and local mendicant in his pursuit of alms, and thirdly, prevent the provider of charity from unknowingly misappropriating his benevolence. Badges and licences were typically made from tin, copper and pewter, and were attached to the beggar's garments in such a way that they were clearly visible

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[71] Toby Barnard, *A new anatomy of Ireland: the Irish protestants, 1649-1770* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2003), p. 287.
[72] Dudley, 'The Dublin parishes and the poor', p. 87.
[73] Barnard, *The kingdom of Ireland*, p. 138.
[74] 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix, C, Part II.*, p. 6a*; Raymond Gillespie, 'Introduction' in idem (ed.), *The vestry records of the parishes of St Catherine and St James, Dublin, 1657-1692* (Dublin, 2004), p. 13. For a discussion of this act (17 & 18 Chas. II, c. 7 [Ire.], 'An act for provision for ministers in cities and corporate towns, and making the church of St. Andrew's, in the city of Dublin, presentative for ever'), see Dudley, 'The Dublin parishes and the poor', pp 81-4.

to others. These licences to beg were issued by the local minister and the

churchwardens. The practice of badging the local parochial poor dated back, in Ireland,

to at least 1634, when the parish of St John the Evangelist in Dublin licenced its

beggars.[75] The enthusiasm for badging continued throughout the seventeenth[76] and into

the eighteenth century, with fluctuations depending on wider economic and social

conditions and throughout the 1700s, there is evidence of parochially-organised badging

in Dublin city,[77] Cork city,[78] Kells, County Meath, Ardee, County Louth and across

Ulster.[79]

Badging in the nineteenth century

The practice of badging beggars appears to have declined in the late-eighteenth

century but was retained in some areas into the nineteenth. Badging was employed,

however, mostly at times of acute crisis. This was particularly evident during the

economic downturn which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars. This recession,

coupled with rising unemployment, the demobilisation of hundreds of thousands of now

unemployed soldiers, and a particularly devastating fever epidemic, left deep scars on

the social fabric of Irish and British society. In 1818 the vestry of St Canice's parish in

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[75] Raymond Gillespie (ed.), *The vestry records of the parish of St John the Evangelist, Dublin, 1595-1658* (Dublin, 2002), p. 94. See also ibid., p. 167.

[76] W.A. Seaby and T.G.F. Paterson, 'Ulster beggars' badges' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, xxx (1970), p. 96; W.J.R. Wallace (ed.), *The vestry records of the parishes of St Bride, St Michael le Pole and St Stephen, Dublin, 1662-1742* (Dublin, 2011), pp 98-9; Raymond Gillespie, 'Rev. Dr John Yarner's notebook: religion in Restoration Dublin' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, lii (1998), p. 30.

[77] Barnard, *A new anatomy of Ireland*, p. 287; S.C. Hughes, *The church of S. Werburgh, Dublin* (Dublin, 1889), p. 44.

[78] Dudley, 'The Dublin parish, 1660-1730', p. 293; St Fin Barre's parish, Cork, vestry minute book, 15 May 1773 (RCBL, St Fin Barre's parish, Cork, vestry minute books, P 497.05.1).

[79] 'Extract from vestry minute book of the parish of Inver [Larne], County Antrim' in W.H. Crawford and B. Trainor (eds), *Aspects of Irish social history, 1750-1800* (Belfast, 1969), p. 132; Seaby and Paterson, 'Ulster beggars' badges', pp 99, 101-106; Myrtle Hill, 'Expressions of faith: Protestantism in nineteenth-century Tyrone' in Charles Dillon and Henry A. Jeffries (eds), *Tyrone: history and society* (Dublin, 2000), p. 639; Ardtrea parish, County Tyrone, vestry minute book, 26 May 1729 (PRONI, Ardtrea parish, County Tyrone, vestry minute books, MIC1/319/1, microfilm); ibid., 7 May 1784.

Kilkenny city met to ascertain 'the number of native poor to be Badged in the parish', while two years later, the sum of £2 5*s.* was applotted for 'Badges for the poor of the Town' in St Nicholas' parish in Galway city.[80] Smaller town parishes also found it necessary to retain this practice and in 1815 the Mullingar vestry resolved that as the town was 'infested with Sturdy Beggars from other parishes, Countys and even provinces, to the great annoyance of the publick and injury to the real objects of Charity in the parish' and 'in order to remove these inconveniences, the poor and meritorious objects of Charity belonging to the parish shall be badged and licenced to beg'.[81] Badging prevailed also in Ulster in the post-war period. In Ballymoney, County Antrim in 1817 the sum of 10*s.* was spent by the vestry on 'Printing Handbills relating to Beggars', while the following year parochial expenditure included £1 for 'printing Lists of badged and other Poor'.[82] Elsewhere in County Antrim, in Dunluce parish, £1 6*s.* 8*d.* was expended on 'Badges for the Poor of this Parish' in 1817.[83]

An example of the licencing of the poor persisting in a rural area in the early-nineteenth century is provided by physician Lombe Atthill (1827-1910), whose posthumously-published autobiography presents a medical practitioner's retrospective but first-hand insight into pre-Famine Ireland. Atthill recorded that his father, a Church of Ireland rector in Doncavey parish in north-western Fermanagh, 'had to issue a kind of

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[80] St Canice parish, Kilkenny vestry minute book, 26 Oct. 1818 (RCBL, St Canice parish, Kilkenny vestry minute books, P 622.05.1); St Nicholas parish, Galway, vestry minute book, 2 May 1820 (RCBL, St Nicholas parish, Galway, vestry minute books, P 519.05.1). The provision of tin badges was approved by the Mayor of Galway in 1817 'for the use of the poor of the town and county of the town alone…as strangers will be exempted': *FJ*, 29 Sept. 1817. Badges were also issued in Tuam in 1818: W.J.V. Comerford, 'Some notes on the borough of Tuam and its records, 1817-1822' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, xv, no. iii (1931), p. 110.

[81] Mullingar parish vestry minute book, 15 Nov. 1815 (RCBL, Mullingar parish vestry minute books, P 336.05.1).

[82] *Ireland. An account of all sums of money levied in the several parishes of Ireland, by authority of vestry, for building and repairing of churches, salaries of parish clerks and other officers, and other incidents; particularly distinguishing any sums which may have been raised for purchase of organs or stoves, or salaries of organists or choristers. Part I* (n.p., n.d. [1824]), p. 354, consulted at NLI (Ir274108i1).

[83] Ibid., p. 377.

ticket, which he distributed to those who were supposed to reside inside the bounds of his parish. They were supposed not to be relieved at his house without producing this.' The purpose of this ticketing system was to police the 'regular trade' of mendicancy, at a time when beggars were 'met on every road and seen at every door'.[84] The parish vestry minute book for the parish supports Atthill's account, with the vestry resolving in February 1801 'that the poor of the foresaid parish shall be forthwith badged, and that no person shall be allowed to receive a badge except such as shall produce two respectable parishioners to vouch for them upon oath'.[85]

The issuing of parish badges throughout Dublin city had declined by the early-nineteenth century, possibly due to the opening of the House of Industry in 1773. This early poorhouse was established on foot of a statue of the Irish parliament[86] for the purpose of suppressing street begging in Dublin, which had reached epidemic levels. Under the institution's founding legislation, the governors were empowered to issue begging badges and licences to designated mendicants, which served 'to distinguish real Objects of Charity from Vagrants and sturdy Beggars'.[87] These licences were seen as the 'legal Credentials of their [the beggars'] Poverty and Inability'.[88] Upon its opening, the House of Industry issued 1,800 badges to the city's mendicants.[89] A total of twelve houses of industry were established across Ireland under the 1772 act and the badging of

[84] Lombe Atthill, *Recollections of an Irish doctor* (1911; reprint Whitegate, 2007), p. 22.

[85] 'Notes on the old minute book of the vestry of Doncavey parish church, edited by Wilson Guy of Fintona in the year 1932', p. 33 (PRONI, Fintona Papers, D1048/4). Atthill's father is identified as the parish rector in ibid, pp 30, 31, 33.

[86] 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire.] (2 June 1772).

[87] *An account of the proceedings and state of the fund of the Corporation instituted for the Relief of the Poor, and for Punishing Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars in the County of the City of Dublin, published by order of the corporation, March 22d, 1774* (Dublin, 1774), p. 8.

[88] Ibid., p. 9.

[89] *Nineteenth annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin, for the year 1836: with resolutions upon the subject of the poor laws* (Dublin, 1837), p. 11.

beggars was carried out by these institutions in their respective localities.[90] The

establishment of the Dublin House of Industry, which quickly developed a national

responsibility for the destitute, appears to have occurred concurrently with the declining

practice of parishes issuing badges to their local poor. As such, it may be suggested that

the emergence of the House of Industry alleviated pressure from the parishes in dealing

with the scourge of street beggars. It is important to note, however, that responsibility

for relieving or punishing mendicants was not completely removed from the parishes.

Instead, Dublin vestries co-operated with the House of Industry in apprehending

unlicensed beggars and vagabonds, who were subsequently detained in the House of

Industry. In July 1793 the vestry of St Andrew's parish resolved that it would implore

its parishioners to 'discontinue giving alms to public Beggars', before committing that

> we will Individually and collectively co-operate with the Corporation for the
> Relief of the Poor &c in the city of Dublin [ie. the governors of the House of
> Industry] in their laudable endeavours to free the streets of this Metropolis
> from beggars – That we will for that purpose point out to their Beadles such
> Impostures and public Beggars as may come within our knowledge and That
> we will to the utmost of our power protect their officers from Violence in the
> execution of their duty.[91]

Other Dublin parishes – St Catherine's, St Werburgh's and St Mary's – passed similar

resolutions in the same month, committing themselves to co-operating with the House

of Industry in apprehending street beggars and protecting the latter institution's officers

in the exercise of their duties.[92] This instance serves as an important indication of cross-

institutional co-operation between various bodies with responsibility for the relief of the

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[90] David Fleming and John Logan (eds), *Pauper Limerick: the register of the Limerick House of Industry 1774-1793* (IMC, Dublin, 2011), pp xii-xiii. For Kilkenny, see *Leinster Journal*, 11-14 Oct. 1775. Interestingly, while the Kilkenny corporation for relieving the poor was founded soon after the passing of the 1772 act, it would be another four decades before the city's House of Industry was to open: *The Moderator*, 15 Jan., 2 Apr., 28 Apr. 1814; Fleming and Loran (eds), *Pauper Limerick*, p. xii.

[91] St Andrew's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 4 July 1793.

[92] St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 6 July 1791 (RCBL, St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 117.05.5); St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 12 July 1791 (RCBL, St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 326.05.2); St Mary's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 29 July 1791 (RCBL, St Mary's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 277.7.4).

poor and suppression of mendicancy. Yet, it exposes the dearth of historical research into the dynamics of poor relief between various entities in this period, and highlights an undoubtedly fruitful field of future research.

Parish vestries, public health and the suppression of beggary

Crucial to the maintenance of civil order at this time was the protection of the public from epidemic disease and in this respect also the parish vestries exerted responsibility. Powers were granted to the vestries following the devastating typhus fever epidemic of 1817-19. In June 1819, at the tail-end of the epidemic, parliament passed the Fever Act, which empowered vestries to elect unpaid officers of health, who had the authority to direct that tenements, lanes and streets be cleaned, and that nuisances be removed from the streets. These officers were also empowered to apprehend and dismiss from the parish 'all idle poor Persons, Men, Women, or Children, and all Persons who may be found begging or seeking Relief' in the interest of 'preventing the Danger of Contagion and other Evils'.[93] In some instances, parishioners who were qualified medical practitioners were elected to these positions, such as David Brereton M.D. in St Michan's in 1831,[94] and in St Thomas's parish in 1828, four of the ten elected officers of health were medical practitioners.[95] These positions were invariably filled by respectable parishioners, those who typically also served as churchwardens, sidesmen and overseers.[96]

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[93] 59 Geo. III, c. 41 (14 June 1819).

[94] St. Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 23 Nov. 1831 (RCBL, St Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 276.05.5).

[95] St Thomas's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 7 Apr. 1828.

[96] Among the officers of health in St Michan's parish in the 1830s were Mark Flower of Old Church Street and merchant William Hill of 47 Pill Lane, who also served together as sidesmen and overseers of licenced houses: St. Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 7 Apr., 23 Dec. 1828, 9 Apr. 1832, 20 Apr. 1835. Hill also served as churchwarden: ibid., 4 Apr. 1836.

The legislation was given the royal assent in June 1819, by which time the worst of the fever epidemic had passed. In St Catherine's parish in Dublin, the first officers of health were appointed two months after the legislation was introduced, while it took nine months for the first officers to be appointed in St Werburgh's parish.[97] The latter case could be seen as evidence of procrastination on the part of the parish vestry. On the other hand, given that the epidemic had abated significantly by this point, the parishes had no urgent need to make such appointments, which carried additional costs and administrative duties.

It appears that throughout the 1820s officers of health were not annual appointments in most vestries. Instead, officers of health were appointed in response to short-term crises, and when the emergency abated, these appointments were then rescinded.[98] However, when crisis struck, parishes were not always proactive in appointing officers of health. Evidence of this procrastination was to be seen in the autumn of 1826, when Chief Secretary Henry Goulburn wrote to the Dublin vestries alerting them to the fact that 'fever is now extending itself among the Poor of this City' and reminding them of their powers under the 1819 act.[99] The St Michan's vestry promptly elected five Officers of Health.[100] However, by this time, epidemic fever had been raging throughout the city for around four months.[101] A public meeting of the parishioners of St George's parish on 31 August 1826 heard that officers of health had not yet been appointed,

[97] St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minutes, 24 Aug. 1819 (RCBL, St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 117.05.7); St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minutes, 25 Mar. 1820.
[98] This assertion, evidenced by examination of numerous vestry minute books, is supported by Francis White, *Report and observations on the state of the poor of Dublin* (Dublin, 1833), p. 22.
[99] St Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 5 Sept. 1826 (RCBL, St Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 276.05.4); St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 29 Aug. 1826.
[100] St Michan's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 5 Sept. 1826.
[101] *FJ*, 17 July 1826.

despite the claims of one parishioner – a medical practitioner named Dr. Reddy – that fever was prevailing extensively in the parish.[102]

This epidemic waned in 1827 and it was not until late-1831 that officers of health once again became standard appointments at parish vestries, not just in Dublin but in urban centres across Ireland. In 1848, Mark and Engels famously described communism as being a spectre haunting Europe, but in the early-1830s, the spectre haunting Europe was that of cholera, which would eventually reach Ireland in early-1832. While typhus fever was endemic in many parts of Ireland, with Laurence Geary writing that the Irish had an 'unrivalled knowledge' of the disease,[103] cholera at this time was an unknown malady across western Europe. St Paul's parish vestry in Cork city later referred to 'the alarming period when that new and destructive Plague the cholera made its appearance in this City, and this Parish was first visited by its deadly Ravages', further labelling the disease a 'hitherto unknown Pestilence'.[104] Following its first arrival in Ireland in the spring of 1832, wandering beggars were blamed as being among the most serious causes for the spread of cholera,[105] with one authority referring to the 'fertile source of contagion, originating in vagrancy and mendicity'.[106] It is important to note that the parish vestries were not the only corporate entity which had duties in responding to this epidemic. The state-run Central Board of Health, established following the 1817-19 fever epidemic and which retreated into administrative hibernation during the 1820s, was revived in late-1831. This body largely offered advice to local bodies on how to prevent contagion and how to respond when cholera cases were identified, and also oversaw the establishment of local hospitals.

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[102] Reddy's claims were challenged by others at this meeting, including a fellow medical practitioner: *FJ*, 1 Sept. 1826.
[103] Laurence M. Geary, *Medicine and charity in Ireland, 1718-1851* (Dublin, 2004), p. 75.
[104] St Paul's parish, Cork city, vestry minute book, 17 June 1833.
[105] See *BNL*, 17 Feb. 1832; Joseph Robins, *The miasma: epidemic and panic in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), pp 66, 76.
[106] *BNL*, 8 Nov. 1831.

Some parishes continued to appoint officers of health throughout the 1830s and into the 1840s, but mostly, these duties pertaining to the sick and poor were devolved elsewhere. As late as 1851, however, the Lisburn vestry received a report from its officers of health, whose sanitary activities included 'keeping the town clear of strolling beggars'.[107] At the following year's Easter vestry in Belfast parish, the health officers' employment of three constables specifically for taking up street beggars was criticised as being insufficient.[108] This interestingly suggests a desire for a strengthened provision of parochial officers for suppressing street begging at a time when the town was served by numerous charitable organisations, not to mention a state-funded workhouse. The powers of parish vestries to appoint officers of health was repealed by the 1866 Sanitary Act,[109] which extended earlier legislation for England to Ireland and was passed at the height of yet another cholera epidemic.[110]

The punishment of mendicants: the role of parish constables and beadles

From the early modern period right into the nineteenth century, one of the main duties of Irish parish vestries in towns and cities was the preservation of law and order within their jurisdiction. At a time before the establishment of a national police force, responsibility for maintaining the public peace in cities and towns fell on the shoulders of bands of paid night watchmen, supervised by voluntary constables who were appointed annually by the members of the vestry. This was typically the case both in

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[107] *BNL*, 28 Apr. 1851.
[108] Ibid., 14 Apr. 1852, 3 May 1854.
[109] 29 & 30 Vict., c. 90, s. 69 (7 Aug. 1866).
[110] Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums, 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), pp 70-71.

Ireland and England.[111] The apprehension of beggars and vagrants was among the most common duties of watchmen, constables and parish beadles. In the 1750s a beadle was employed in Shankill parish in Belfast to prevent vagrants from entering the town,[112] while in July 1791 the vestry of St Mary's parish in Dublin appointed a parishioner 'to assist the Beadle of this Parish' in bringing about the apprehension and punishment of 'idle vagrants so offending any where about the Church'.[113] A mayoral proclamation of October 1769 urged all Dublin parishes to direct their beadles and constables to apprehend and present before a Justice of the Peace 'all such sturdy strolling Beggars and Vagrants', for their committal to the Bridewell.[114] In June 1785, twelve years after the opening of the city's House of Industry, Dublin remained plagued by a 'great number of idle and disorderly vagabonds and sturdy beggars, who have for some time past infested the same, to the great annoyance of the inhabitants, and disgrace of the police of this city'.[115] The community-wide measures proposed by inhabitants of the city rested largely on increased vigilance by parochial watchmen, constables and beadles. That such a meeting was held to discuss the sole issue of the policing of mendicants and vagrants suggests that the long-standing problem with the mendicant poor was still considered urgent, the prevailing night watch system was insufficient and the impact of the House of Industry in forcing beggars from the streets was questionable.

Neal Garnham has observed that the watch system in eighteenth-century Ireland was open to criticism on the grounds of corruption and woeful inefficiencies: absence from

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[111] Elizabeth Malcolm, *The Irish policeman, 1822-1922: a life* (Dublin, 2006), pp 17-18; N.J.G. Pounds, *A history of the English parish: the culture of religion from Augustine to Victoria* (Cambridge, 2000), pp 193-5.
[112] *BNL*, 11 Oct. 1757, quoted in Raymond Gillespie and Alison O'Keeffe (eds), *Register of the parish of Shankill, Belfast, 1745-1761* (Dublin, 2006), p. 37.
[113] St Mary's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 29 July 1791.
[114] *FJ*, 2-4 Nov. 1769.
[115] *FJ*, 14-16 June 1785.

duty and intemperance on the part of watchmen and constables were not uncommon features of the system.[116] As early as 1737, Swift referred to instances of corruption among parish beadles in Dublin city, who were bribed by 'Foreign Beggars'.[117] In 1783, the St Werburgh's vestry resolved that 'George Boswell, for his various Neglects of Duty and Misconduct…shall never be employ'd here after as a constable in said Parish'.[118] It was the perception of such inefficiencies in the parochial watch system that led the government to establish a centralised, state-funded police force for Dublin city in September 1786, to the strong opposition from Irish MPs, and Dublin parishes and householders, who were now paying more for a police force over which they held no power and which they perceived as grossly inefficient. Once important and indispensable parochial appointments, parish constables and beadles had become redundant by the middle of the nineteenth century. (The night watch system had been replaced by the state force of the 1780s). In Dublin the provision of constables was devolved onto the municipal power, Dublin Corporation, in the early nineteenth century, while by the 1830s, the constables in Drogheda, including two 'bang-beggars' whose remit was focused on apprehending mendicants, were employed by the town's corporation.[119]

In St Thomas's parish in Dublin, the annual vestry meeting in April 1832 was the first at which no constables were appointed, while in St Andrew's and St Werburgh's

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[116] Neal Garnham, *The courts, crime and the criminal law in Ireland, 1692-1760* (Dublin, 1996), p. 31. See also, E.J. Young, 'St Michan's parish in the eighteenth century' in *Dublin Historical Record*, iii, no. 1 (Sept.-Nov. 1940), p. 5; St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 25 Nov. 1819.

[117] Swift, *Proposal for giving badges to the beggars*, p. 12.

[118] St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 20 Mar. 1783.

[119] Crawford, *The Church of Ireland in Victorian Dublin*, p. 151; *Municipal corporations, (Ireland). Appendix to the first report of the commissioners. Part II.-Conclusion of the north-eastern circuit, and part of the north-western circuit*, p. 829, H.C. 1835 [C 28], xxviii, 387. See also *Poor (Ireland.) Returns to orders of the honourable House of Commons, dated 5th March 1828; - for a return of the corporations in the counties, and in the counties of cities and towns in Ireland, instituted for the relief of the poor, and for punishing vagabonds and sturdy beggars, in pursuance of act 11 & 12 Geo. 3 c. 30: - Also, for a return of the hospitals, or houses of industry, and for the relief of the poor, that have been built by the said corporations, in pursuance of the said act*, p. 8. H.C. 1828 (291), xxii, 460.

parishes, the election of constables appears to have ceased in 1833 and 1835 respectively.[120] This trend was by no means universal, and St Michael's and St Bride's parishes were still electing parish constables in 1841. Constables remained among the parochial officers to be elected annually in St John's into the early-1860s.[121] However, an 1841 newspaper report of a vestry meeting in St Bride's parish suggests that the importance of the position had diminished almost to the point of uselessness. Upon the election of three men as constables for the succeeding year in St Bride's, one parishioner enquired into the duties of the constables, to which another parishioner quipped 'If you get your coat torn, the parish constable will replace it with a new one', which was met with laughter.[122] This sense of an increasing decline in regard for the position of parish constable, as the powers of office were gradually devolved elsewhere, is supported by a letter to the editor of the *Freeman's Journal*, published in March 1856. The writer, who signed off as 'A.B.', addressed his letter regarding the approaching Easter vestries to the Catholics of Dublin. In the writer's opinion, the annual assessment on the city's householders for expenditure on coffins for the poor and maintenance for deserted children should fall within the remit of the statutory poor law system, while fire engines should be provided at police stations. Addressing the continued practice of electing parish constables, the writer opined:

> Parish constables are officers not required. They are generally selected from
> the lowest class, and licenced by the Lord Mayor as bailiffs to levy rents, to

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[120] For previous annual elections of the parish constables, see St Thomas's parish, Dublin vestry minute book, 19 Apr. 1824, 27 Mar. 1826, 16 Apr. 1827, 7 Apr. 1828, 20 Apr. 1829, 12 Apr. 1830, 5 Apr. 1831. The absence of elected constables is evident in ibid., 23 Apr. 1832, 1 Apr. 1834, 21 Apr. 1835, 5 Apr. 1836. For St Andrew's, constables were elected on the following sample dates of annual Easter vestry meetings: St Andrew's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 14 Apr. 1800; St Andrew's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 31 Mar. 1822 (RCBL, St Andrew's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 059.05.2); ibid., 27 Mar. 1826, 20 Apr. 1829, 23 Apr. 1832. The first annual meeting at which no constable was elected is recorded in ibid., 8 Apr. 1833. For St Werburgh's, see the following sample dates for the annual election of constables: St Werburgh's parish, Dublin vestry minute book, 8 Apr. 1822, 27 Mar. 1826, 8 June 1833, 31 Mar. 1834. The first annual meeting at which no constable was elected is recorded in ibid., 21 Apr. 1835.
[121] *FJ,* 14 Apr. 1841, 22 Apr. 1862.
[122] *FJ,* 14 Apr. 1841.

seize and sell as auctioneers, and under colour of law, to commit many acts of oppression. The poor man, being often unable to replevin, becomes the victim of the unnecessary functionary, and, in fact, it is an office which is a disgrace to the Protestant church, and should at once be abolished.[123]

The position of parish beadle appears to have suffered a similar fate to that of parish constable – a slow decline into worthlessness, rather than a single-blow eradication of the office. This was demonstrated in a disagreement that arose at the Easter vestry in St Anne's parish in 1862, when one parishioner questioned the propriety of continuing to pay the salary of 'a useless officer in a cocked hat'.[124]

Conclusion

In examining Church of Ireland approaches to begging and alms-giving, this chapter has analysed the views of some of the leading and most prominent public figures, almost invariably clergymen, in pre-Famine Ireland. Swift, Woodward, Daly and Whately were all leading clerics and social commentators, and all addressed the problem of mendicancy, either in print or in their pastoral work. This illustrates the extent to which beggary was considered by these individuals to constitute a social problem of some importance. Given that their expressed views span a century and a half, it is to be expected that different factors influenced their approaches to beggary.

This analysis of Church of Ireland approaches has introduced the topic of Protestant evangelicalism into this thesis. In considering poverty and the place of the poor in society, evangelicals laid more emphasis on the spiritual state of the distressed than on their temporal wants, as demonstrated in the contrasting views put forward by Richard Woodward in the third quarter of the eighteenth century and contributors to the

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[123] *FJ*, 22 Mar. 1856.
[124] Ibid., 22 Apr. 1862.

Christian Examiner, such as Robert Daly, decades later. No matter how much assistance was given to the poor, they remained weighed down by original sin until such a time as they were reborn in Christ. Evangelicalism also manifested itself in the proliferation of religious and philanthropic societies, many of whom devoted their efforts on the threat and impact of mendicancy. Yet, the story of Church of Ireland views on beggary in this period is not limited to a consideration of evangelicals. The figure of Archbishop Whately is unavoidable for anyone researching poverty and welfare in the mid-nineteenth-century Ireland. As well as chairing the Poor Inquiry, Whately frequently explored poverty, begging and alms-giving in sermons and in print. His steadfast opposition to a statutory poor law and also to indiscriminate alms-giving were to be found in the final reports of the Poor Inquiry, with many of the commissioners sharing Whately's sentiments. Whately was certainly of his time in framing his approaches to beggary in scriptural terms, and basing his 'discrimination in charity' on his interpretation of the teachings and example of Christ, as well as on his readings of modern political economy.

This period also saw an overhaul in the role of the parish vestries in the life of their local community. The civic duties of parishes, which had grown since the seventeenth century and had been defined and cemented through legislation, were gradually chipped away. These responses evolved throughout and beyond the pre-Famine period, shaped by the increasing influence of the state and charitable societies. Many of the parishes' powers were devolved to central authorities: the power to badge their own local poor; to police their own parish; to provide officers of health to prevent the spread of contagion. Some of these powers were lost with the passing of the Church Temporalities Act of 1833,[125] by which parishes could not levy a church-related cess on parishioners, and

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[125] 3 & 4 Will. IV, c. 37 (14 Aug. 1833).

most notably the 1864 Cess Abolition Act,[126] which, five years before the

Disestablishment legislation, removed entirely the parishes' power to levy a compulsory

rate, thus ending the civil role of the Irish parish vestries.

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[126] 27 Vict., c. 17 (13 May 1864).

Chapter Seven

Presbyterian approaches to begging and alms-giving

Introduction

Presbyterianism was the third largest denomination in nineteenth-century Ireland, yet constituted the largest single religious grouping in the north-east of the country. Presbyterians' distinct religious culture, which distinguished them from their Catholic and Anglican neighbours, shaped many aspects of Ulster society, including poverty and welfare provision. Being the largest and most influential Protestant denomination in Ulster,[1] Presbyterianism gave a distinctive 'flavour' to social concerns and poor relief initiatives in the province. This distinctiveness can be seen through the expressed views of leading Presbyterians (largely clergymen) and in the corporate responses of Presbyterian communities to mendicancy.[2] The striking proliferation in Ulster of mendicity societies (see Chapter Four), voluntary bodies which sought to suppress begging through the promotion of industry and the negation of any entitlement to relief, attests to the relevance of Calvinist thinking when considering questions of poverty and alms-giving.

This chapter will present a social and cultural consideration of Presbyterianism in Ireland, before analysing the views of leading Presbyterian thinkers towards street begging. Particular emphasis will be placed on the writings and exertions of Church of

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[1] According to the 1861 Census, Presbyterians comprised 26.3 per cent of Ulster's population, with Anglicans, Methodists and others constituting 20.4 per cent, 1.7 per cent and 1.1 per cent respectively. Roman Catholics made up 50.5 per cent of the province's population: W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 53.

[2] It will become clear that when speaking in general terms about Irish Presbyterianism, one is almost invariably referring to Ulster Presbyterianism, as it was in the northern province that Irish Presbyterians were concentrated.

Scotland minister Rev. Thomas Chalmers, who, although based in Scotland, visited

Ireland, corresponded with Irish ministers, displayed a strong interest in poverty in

Ireland and appeared before a parliamentary inquiry into the condition of the poor in

Ireland. Chalmers exerted considerable influence within Irish and British

Presbyterianism, but what is also crucial for this study is that he was a leading player in

the wider British Isles debate on poverty, begging and poor relief. As such, Chalmers is

a suitable subject for a case study into Presbyterianism perceptions of and responses to

mendicancy in this period. The shift in attitudes towards the poor must also be seen in

the context of the rise of Christian political economists, such as Chalmers, who

combined, what one historian has described as, 'two hitherto unrelated intellectual

disciplines, natural theology and political economy'.[3] In addressing the social questions

of the day – from poor relief and rates of employment to intemperance and crime –

these individuals grounded their arguments in scripture and drew inspiration from the

teachings and example of Christ. According to Peter Mandler, these Christian political

economists concluded 'that the natural progress of human improvement consisted, not

in the attainment of higher standards of material comfort or higher states of happiness,

but in the striving for higher levels of virtue'.[4]

Mirroring the model used in preceding chapters, the corporate approaches to poverty

and street begging adopted within Irish Presbyterianism will be analysed. This concerns

the role of the kirk sessions – the lowest rung of the ladder of church organisation – in

identifying the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' mendicants in the parish, and distributing

relief to, or withholding relief from, such persons. It will be argued that the Irish kirk

sessions mirrored those within the Church of Scotland in adhering to a traditional

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[3] Peter Mandler, 'Tories and paupers: Christian political economy and the making of the New Poor Law' in *Historical Journal*, xxxiii, no. 1 (1990), p. 86.
[4] Ibid., p. 87.

Calvinist model of collecting and distributing alms on a voluntary basis, it being held

that such an approach protected, firstly, the recipient from the corruptive power of

dependency and, secondly, the giver from the burden of compulsory assessment. Alms

were not distributed without qualification to beggars but were doled out to 'deserving'

paupers who were subject to communal regulation and moral judgement.

Presbyterianism in nineteenth-century Ireland: a social and cultural consideration

Presbyterians constituted between eight and ten per cent of the total population of

nineteenth-century Ireland. They were the most geographically concentrated religious

grouping in the country, with 96 per cent of its communicants residing in Ulster,

particularly in counties Armagh and Down.[5] While in Ireland generally, Anglicans

enjoyed membership of the Established Church and were disproportionately well

represented amongst the landed class across the country, in Ulster Anglicans in the

middle and lower classes 'ceded economic and social dominance to the Presbyterians'.[6]

The latter typically dominated skilled labour and middle-class occupations in urban

areas, held larger farms than any other denomination and were 'less likely to be found

among the ranks of the landless labourer'.[7]

R.H. Tawney argued that from its inception in sixteenth-century Europe, Calvinism

was predominantly an urban phenomenon, disseminated by and among urban workers

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[5] At the 1840 meeting of the General Assembly of the Irish Presbyterian Church, among the objections to holding the following year's meeting in Dublin, as opposed to Belfast, was the relatively small number of Presbyterians in Dublin and the southern part of the country generally. Concerns included the expense and inconvenience for most attendees – coming from north-east Ulster – to travel to Dublin. Former moderator of the General Synod of Ulster, Rev. Robert Stewart (1783-1852), was reported as saying that he 'would be perfectly willing to go to Dublin for a Missionary meeting, *but local business should be transacted in the North*. He was unwilling that Commissioners and persons having perhaps only a question or two to ask should be dragged to Dublin [emphasis added]': *BNL*, 9 July 1844.

[6] Sean Connolly, *Religion and society in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dundalk, 1994), p. 4.

[7] Ibid., p. 4. See also Andrew R. Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice, 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2006), pp 28-9.

and those engaged in trade and industry.[8] Yet, in Ulster, Presbyterianism prevailed

throughout the region, in the growing towns as well as in rural communities. This

chapter, adhering to the thesis's urban focus, shall be largely confined to Presbyterian

communities in urban centres but much of the commentary examined herein was not

bound to a spatial context.

Direct and indirect exposure to poverty, mendicancy and moral vice were part of

urban life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Presbyterian responses to these

problems were driven by Calvinistic principles inculcated over many generations.

Emphasis on the role of the individual in helping himself out of poverty was influenced

by a strong individualistic streak among Presbyterian congregations. To Calvinists, in

Tawney's words, 'the spurious charity of indiscriminate almsgiving' as practiced by the

Roman church undermined the virtues of industry and thrift.[9] In the Calvinist Church of

Scotland, the national church since 1690, the sick and infirm, seen as undoubtedly

worthy objects, were entitled to parochial assistance as a matter of legal right. On the

contrary, the able-bodied poor, capable of surviving through their own labour, were

consistently refused all claims to a right to assistance; their occasional relief was 'left

entirely to the discretion of the kirk session, as a matter of charity'.[10]

Presbyterian attitudes to the poor, poverty and alms-giving were shaped by the

teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564) and the leader of the reformation in Scotland,

John Knox (*c*. 1514-1572). Calvin, the French theologian seen as the founding

proponent of Presbyterian theology, pointed to St Paul's writings in his championing of

the virtue of 'the rich spontaneously and liberally relieving the wants of their brethren,

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[8] R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the rise of capitalism* (1926; Harmondsworth, 1972), pp 112-14.
[9] Ibid., p. 119.
[10] George Nicholls, *A history of the Scotch poor law, in connexion with the condition of the people* (London, 1856), p. 114. According to Nicholls, 'the chief characteristic of Scottish Poor Law administration, as contrasted with that of England, is the pertinacity with which all claim to relief on behalf of the able-bodied poor has been resisted': ibid., p. 112.

and not grudgingly or of necessity'.[11] Charity and alms-giving was a Christian duty but its virtue was negated by compulsion. A mandatory poor rate, in this light, would remove the Christian grace from this act of charity. Calvin approvingly quoted St Paul's assertion 'that if any would not work, neither should he eat' (2 Thessalonians 3:10), prohibited indiscriminate alms-giving and proposed a system of moral inspection for all families.[12] Tawney has argued that Calvin did not distinguish between moral and economic factors in his outpourings on pauperism. 'The idleness of the mendicant was both a sin against God and a social evil; the enterprise of the thriving tradesman was at once a Christian virtue and a benefit to the community.'[13]

Throughout the nineteenth century the contrast between the fortunes of Ulster and the rest of Ireland was portrayed by Protestant commentators as proof of the positive and baneful effects of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism respectively. The largely Protestant north-east was seen as thriving under the Act of Union and this region experienced rates of growth and economic development more akin to British than Irish urban centres.[14] This region also saw an acute concentration of capital in Protestant hands.[15] In contrast, the south and west, where Roman Catholicism prevailed, was

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[11] 'Calvin's commentary on Exodus 16', available at Bible Hub, (http://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/exodus/16.htm) (17 July 2014).

[12] Tawney, *Religion and the rise of capitalism*, pp 122-3; Robert M. Kingdon, 'Calvinism and social welfare' in *Calvinist Theological Journal*, xvii, no. 2 (Nov. 1982), p. 221. Church of Scotland minister Rev. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) also drew on St Paul's writings, in emphasising the virtue of independence, industry and self-sufficiency. 'The poor must have bread, but the Bible commands and exhorts [2 Thessalonians 3:10-12], that wherever possible, that bread should be their own, and that all who are able should make it their own by working for it': Thomas Chalmers, *The influence of bible societies on the temporal necessities of the poor* (3rd ed., Edinburgh, 1817), p. 28.

[13] Tawney, *Religion and the rise of capitalism*, p. 123.

[14] Noting the strength of industrialisation in the town, a French visitor to Belfast in the late-nineteenth century commented that it was 'the least Irish of all Irish towns': quoted in Stephen A. Royle, 'Workshop of the empire, 1820-1914' in S.J. Connolly (ed.), *Belfast 400: people, place and history* (Liverpool, 2012), p. 199.

[15] Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Industry, 1820-1914' in Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (eds), *An economic history of Ulster, 1820-1940* (Manchester, 1985), p. 65.

characterised as being economically backward.[16] Whereas Protestantism fostered

industry and economic growth, 'Popery' was accused of weighing down and stunting

any shoots of initiative, self-reliance and general 'improvement'. For some Protestants,

Ulster was seen a new Canaan, the biblical 'Promised Land' to which God's people had

been delivered and this view was certainly held among Irish Presbyterians.[17] Patrick

Fitzgerald has demonstrated that the greatest volume of Scots migration into Ulster

occurred in the 1690s, in response to a devastating famine in Scotland. The late-1690s

saw an estimated 41,000 Scots flow into the northern Irish province, most of whom

were Presbyterians.[18] For Irish Presbyterians the comparison between their forefathers'

escape from famine, disease and destitution, and the exodus of the biblical Israelites

from Egypt was apparent.[19] In his comparative study of settler mind-sets in Ulster,

South Africa and Israel, Donald Akenson adds some nuance to the matter. 'At the grass-

roots level, this Calvinistic sense of being of the elect merged with the "Old Testament"

saga of the Chosen People. Although the Scots colonists of the north of Ireland did not

delude themselves into believing that they were *the* Chosen People, the analogy was

strong, and they acted under the conviction that they were *a* Chosen People.'[20]

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[16] Jacqueline Hill, 'The protestant response to repeal: the case of the Dublin working-class' in F.S.L. Lyons and R.A.J. Hawkins (eds), *Ireland under the Union: varieties of tension. Essays in honour of T.W. Moody* (Oxford, 1980), p. 55.

[17] Jonathan Bardon, *The plantation of Ulster: the British colonisation of the north of Ireland in the seventeenth century* (Dublin, 2011), pp 129-33; Hamilton Magee, *Fifty years in the Irish Mission* (Belfast and Edinburgh, n.d. [*c.* 1905]), p. v; ibid., p. 36; ibid., pp 195-9.

[18] Patrick Fitzgerald, "Black '97': reconsidering Scottish migration to Ireland in the seventeenth century and the Scotch-Irish in America' in William Kelly and John R. Young (eds), *Ulster and Scotland, 1600-2000: history, language and identity* (Dublin, 2004), pp 71-84. See also L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1978), pp 27-30; S.J. Connolly, *Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland 1660-1760* (Oxford, 2002), p. 161; David Dickson, *New foundations: Ireland, 1660-1800* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2004), p. 48.

[19] The association of Protestants in Ireland with the Biblical Israelites had been made by reformed commentators since at least the early-seventeenth century: Alan Ford, 'The Protestant Reformation in Ireland' in Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Natives and newcomers: essays on the making of Irish colonial society, 1534-1641* (Dublin, 1986), pp 69-70; R.F.G. Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian heritage* (n.p. [Belfast], 1985), p. 9.

[20] Donald Harman Akenson, *God's peoples: covenant and land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1992), p. 119.

This uniqueness of Ulster was portrayed in an address to an anti-Repeal crowd in 1841 by Rev. Dr Henry Cooke,[21] the theologically conservative leader of subscribing Presbyterians.[22] Cooke attributed the relative prosperity of Ulster under the Union to 'the genius of industry' combined with 'the genius of Protestantism'.[23] It is significant that this meeting was held as a celebratory event marking Daniel O'Connell's refusal to publicly debate Cooke on the matter of repeal of the Act of Union. To Cooke and many Ulster Presbyterians, O'Connell, perceived as colluding with 'Papist' priests in maintaining Irish Catholics in ignorance, squalor and political disloyalty, was 'the genius of knavery and the apostle of rebellion'.[24] Ulster Presbyterians held that the distinctive Protestant character of the north-east was a direct cause of the exceptional economic prosperity of the region. In its maiden edition on 10 June 1842, marking the bicentenary of the founding of the first presbytery in Ireland, the Presbyterian-ethos newspaper *The Banner of Ulster* referred to the 'singular coincidence' between the prevalence of Presbyterianism and the improvements in domestic and economic life in the north-east, particularly in Belfast. 'There is strong and unimpeachable evidence in these facts, that the easiest mode to improve any country is to improve its people; and that the surest method of making a people free, and keeping them free, is to implant amongst them a knowledge of the Gospel, and preserve it in its purity and truth.'[25]

In presenting divergent pictures of the north-east as a prosperous, morally pure region and the parts of Ireland outside Ulster as being economically and morally impoverished,

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[21] R.F.[G.] Holmes, 'Cooke, Henry' in *DIB*, ii, pp 813-14.

[22] To summarise briefly, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish Presbyterianism split on the question of whether ministers and ordinands ought to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), with non-subscribers ('New Light' Presbyterians) arguing that Christian doctrines could not be imposed by ecclesiastical authority but, instead, were matters for personal conscience: Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian heritage*, pp 62-7.

[23] *BNL*, 26 Jan. 1841.

[24] Ibid., 26 Jan. 1841.

[25] *Banner of Ulster*, 10 June 1842. See also Andrew R. Holmes, 'Irish Presbyterian commemorations of their Scottish past, *c.* 1830-1914' in Frank Ferguson and James McConnel (eds), *Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2009), p. 55.

many Presbyterian observers deployed the motif of beggary as a prism through which to view these two contrasting societies. The perceived ubiquity of beggary outside Ulster indicated idleness, improvidence, and misplaced benevolence among the 'Popish' lower classes, who were subject to the corruptive influence of their priests. As a counterpoint, the (alleged) absence of mendicancy in the north-east pointed to a widespread spirit of industry, 'true religion', thrift and relief mechanisms that did not encourage pauperism. This sentiment was captured in an article entitled 'The Irish Presbyterians: effects of Presbyterianism in Ireland', published in the Edinburgh-based newspaper *The Witness*,[26] an evangelical Church of Scotland title, and re-published in September 1840 in the *Belfast Newsletter*. The author, recounting a recent trip to Ireland and writing for a Scottish Presbyterian audience, contrasted 'the smiling comfort, prosperous agriculture, busy enterprise, and quiet security of the Presbyterian North' with the rest of the country, where 'crowds of beggars…swarm in those districts where Popery sits like a night-mare on the energies of the population'. The recurring image of ubiquitous beggary prevailing in the largely Catholic south and west was deployed effectively by the author, and the reader could not miss the associations made between 'Popery', idleness and mendicancy:

> Let any man pass from Drogheda, where this pestilence of beggary and moral degradation first meets the stranger as he goes south, to Dublin, where may be seen, not only in the streets, but at the Mendicity House, appalling exhibitions of teeming wretchedness. Let him pass on to Limerick, marking, as he journeys, the striking contrast between the richness of the soil, the greenness of the natural verdure, and the starved and ragged-looking population, who besiege the coach with their importunities, and pour out their fluent blessings or ready imprecation at every halting place, according to their success or failure in extorting money.

In Galway, the writer observed 'crowds of beggars on every side' and implicitly linked this beggary to the fact that there was 'no trade flourishing but priestcraft – none well-

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[26] For *The Witness*, see M.A. Taylor, 'Miller, Hugh' in *ODNB*, xxxviii, pp 201-204.

fed but Priests'. To emphasise the destitution and beggary of the country outside of Ulster the author concluded by figuratively conveying his reader to Belfast, 'the capital of Presbyterianism'. He wrote: 'Arrived at Belfast, let him observe the stir and enterprise, the wide streets, the handsome buildings, the well-dressed people, the nearly total absence of importunate beggars, the harbour filled with vessels which trade with all the world, and the signs of comfort and industry which everywhere prevail.'[27]

These comments, made by and for Presbyterians, reflected wider Protestant fears and suspicions towards Roman Catholic priests, who were seen as the disseminators of superstitious error and political radicalism. To Protestants fired up with the zeal of evangelicalism and the 'Second Reformation', eager to disseminate the bible and to convert as many of the poor as possible, priests were accused of actively thwarting scripture reading among their parishioners, indicating the contrasting emphasis placed by Protestants and Catholics on the significance of the bible in their religious practice.[28] 'Give me the circulation of the bible,' pronounced Thomas Chalmers, who displayed a great interest in religious and social matters in Ireland, 'and with this mighty engine I will overthrow the tyranny of Anti-Christ and establish the fair and original form of Christianity on its ruins.'[29] Many of the social, economic and political ills of Ireland were attributed to the dominance of 'Popery' and 'priestcraft' throughout the country.[30]

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[27] *BNL*, 8 Sept. 1840. An interesting exception to this sentiment was Ulster Presbyterian physician and travel writer John Gamble's assertion that the large number of beggars in Dublin, where there was no compulsion to relieve the poor, attested to the city's inhabitants' charitable spirit: John Gamble, *Sketches of history, politics, and manners in Dublin, and the north of Ireland, in 1810* (New ed., London, 1826), pp 89-90.

[28] Anon., 'The state of Ireland' in *Christian Examiner*, i, no. 1 (July 1825), pp 7-8; *On the state of Ireland. Fourth report: viz. minutes of evidence, 26 April-21 June, 1825*, pp 494-501, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 510-517; *A review of the existing causes which at present disturb the tranquillity of Ireland, recommended to the serious attention of landholders, the established clergy, and the Hibernian Sunday School Society: also, an exposure of the system adopted by the Roman Catholic clergy to deter their flocks from reading the sacred scriptures* (Dublin, 1822), pp 14-15; [James Carlile], *Memorial recommending the establishment of a mission to the Roman Catholics of Ireland* (Dublin, 1825), p. 7.

[29] Quoted in Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian heritage*, p. 112.

[30] For example, see Anon., 'The state of Ireland', at pp 7-8; *Sligo Journal*, 20 May 1828; Anon., 'The Irish missionary school in Ballinasloe' in *Christian Examiner*, new series, no. 41 (2 Nov. 1846), pp 161-2;

This centuries-old association in the Protestant mind between Roman Catholicism and superstition resurfaced during the sectarian tensions of the 1820s and 1830s.[31]

Ironically, as S.J. Connolly has shown, this period saw in the Irish Catholic prelates and clergy a determination to suppress such superstitious practices. This suppression of 'all incantations, charms and spells; all superstitious observations of omens and accidents; and such nonsensical remarks'[32] was undertaken with such zeal that some commentators remarked of Catholic priests becoming more Protestant in their manners and customs.[33] Crucially, this period also witnessed the growing confidence of Irish Catholicism, mobilised into a significant political force by Daniel O'Connell with the support of Irish priests.[34] In a Famine-era tract, Rev. John Edgar urged 'Presbyterian Ulster [and] Presbyterian Scotland' of the need to bring enlightenment, regeneration and spiritual freedom to the poor of Ireland, thus negating the effects of what he termed 'THE PRIEST'S CURSE'.[35] In a later publication on the Presbyterian missions in Connaught, Edgar lamented: 'Whatever other ills have been driven from Connaught, Popery is there still, with all its priests, palsying human energy, darkening human intellect, crushing human liberty, besotting human mind.'[36] Whereas the missionaries toiled daily in teaching poor girls skills so as to encourage them to become self-reliant and economically independent, the local priest was accused of subjecting these families

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Irene Whelan, 'The stigma of souperism' in Cathal Póirtéir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork, 1995), pp 135-7; Miriam Moffit, *The Society for Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics, 1849-1950* (Manchester and New York, 2010), pp 1-45. For the perception of priests as instigators of sectarian violence and murder in the 1798 Rebellion, see James Kelly, *Sir Richard Musgrave, 1746-1818: Ultra-Protestant ideologue* (Dublin, 2009), pp 71-83.

[31] Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice*, pp 101-2.

[32] *The Most Rev. Dr James Butler's Catechism: revised, enlarged, approved, and recommended by the four R.C. archbishops of Ireland, as a general catechism for the kingdom* (26th ed., Dublin, 1836), p. 41.

[33] S.J. Connolly, *Priests and people in pre-Famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin, 1985), pp 110-15.

[34] Patrick M. Geoghegan, *King Dan: the rise of Daniel O'Connell, 1775-1829* (Dublin, 2008), pp 231-32, 258.

[35] John Edgar, *The General Assembly's Irish schools. The priest's curse* (n.p. [Belfast?], n.d. [*c.* 1847]), p. 16.

[36] John Edgar, *Connaught harvest* (Belfast, 1853), p. 5.

to 'persecution' in keeping them 'ignorant, and idle, and ragged, penniless, and hopelessly poor'.[37]

Turning to Belfast, it will be evident that these Presbyterian fears and suspicions of Catholics must be placed in the context of demographic changes in the northern town. Eighteenth-century Belfast had been, in Gillespie and Royle's words, 'an overwhelmingly Presbyterian town', with an estimated two-thirds of its population being Presbyterian in 1792. However, Catholics quickly changed from being a miniscule proportion of the town's population (1,000 in 1784, or less than 7 per cent) to a sizeable minority (19,712 in 1834, or around one-third of the population).[38] An indication of this immense growth in the town's Catholic population is the fact that of the four Roman Catholic churches in Belfast in 1837, three had been erected in the previous twenty-two years.[39] Migrating Catholics came into Belfast from the surrounding countryside and mainly comprised the impoverished, poorly educated and unskilled. In 1802 Martha McTier, from a well-known radical Presbyterian family, bemoaned the fact that the 'R Catholics here [are] now a large though poor and unknown body'.[40] That the town's first sectarian riots occurred in this period is not insignificant and was emblematic of the simmering community tensions.[41] Catholics constituted a disproportionately large element of Belfast's destitute classes, thus

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[37] Edgar, *Connaught Harvest*, p. 6.

[38] Raymond Gillespie and Stephen A. Royle, *Belfast, Part I, to 1840*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 12 (Dublin, 2003), p. 8.

[39] Ibid., p. 21. This increase in church-building was not unique to northern Catholicism and of the thirty-one places of worship across all denominations in Belfast in 1840, twenty-two (71 per cent) had been built since 1801: ibid., figure 4, p. 7.

[40] Martha McTier to William Drennan, n.d. [1802] in Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan-McTier letters, 1802-19* (3 vols, Dublin, 1999), iii, p. 92. McTier added in the same letter: 'I begin to fear these people, and think like the Jews they will regain their native land': ibid., p. 92.

[41] Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster* (London, 2000), p. 321; Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, *The 'natural leaders' and their world: politics, culture and society in Belfast, c. 1801-1832* (Liverpool, 2012), pp 80-83.

ensuring that the respectable Presbyterian middling classes' fears of the feral lower orders were somewhat coloured by sectarian mistrust and animosity.

Rev. Thomas Chalmers, poverty and alms-giving

The personage of Rev. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)[42] looms large over any study of nineteenth-century Irish or Scottish Presbyterianism and the wider British Isles-wide debate on poor relief. An evangelical Church of Scotland minister, social reformer and political economist, Chalmers exerted a towering influence on British intellectualism in the first half of the nineteenth century. Chalmers pioneered a social experiment aimed at eliminating corporate poor assistance, and encouraging thrift and independence among the labouring classes; he led the splitting faction which in 1843 broke away from the Scottish national church to form the Free Church of Scotland; his writings on Christian political economy, underpinned by his own experiences in an urban ministry, supported many of the moralising arguments of Thomas Malthus regarding the depravity of the lower classes. Chalmers, like other moralists, 'located the fundamental cause of poverty and misery in the moral failings of the poor – their lack of foresight, self-help and sexual restraint – and in the indifference of the upper classes and the tendency of ill-designed institutions to encourage such attitudes (in England the poor law; in Ireland absenteeism and non-paternalistic landlordism)'.[43]

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[42] Stewart J. Brown, 'Chalmers, Thomas' in *ODNB*, x, pp 879-87.

[43] Peter Gray, 'Thomas Chalmers and Irish poverty' in Ferguson and McConnel (eds), *Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century*, p. 96. The most useful modern biography of the Scottish divine is Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford, 1982). For the wider impact of Chalmers' theological, economic and social teachings, see Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), pp 55-6.

Although based in Scotland, Chalmers's influence extended throughout Britain and Ireland, and indeed beyond, in the fields of theology and political economy. Within Irish Presbyterianism, he was viewed as an unequalled theologian and 'champion of the truth'.[44] He was even compared to Moses, as a heaven-sent prophet bestowed with the task of leading his people – God's chosen people – to salvation.[45] Chalmers was in frequent communication with Irish Presbyterian ministers, such as Rev. James Carlile, Rev. Henry Cooke and Rev. Samuel Hanna,[46] and was a much sought-after speaker, receiving numerous invitations to travel to Ireland to preach sermons.[47] So popular as a speaker was he that in advance of his sermons at the new meeting houses at Fisherwick Place in Belfast and Dromara in 1827, the public were advised that only those with entrance tickets would be admitted to the service.[48] His writings were widely read in Ireland, and some of his works were re-published and sold in Belfast and Dublin.[49] In 1829, Rev. James Carlile, Secretary to the Hibernian Bible Society, wrote to Chalmers, seeking permission for the society to re-print his *Influence of Bible societies, on the temporal necessities of the poor*,[50] and expressing the society's belief that 'the circulation of that Tract in this country might under the blessing of God be of great and extensive utility'.[51] Chalmers also took an active interest in Irish social conditions, for instance inquiring into the management of the poor in Dublin city and the Irish

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[44] *Banner of Ulster*, 19 Aug. 1842. See also *BNL*, 9 July 1847.

[45] This comparison was made in the 1840s, when Scottish and Irish Presbyterianism was marked by much internal strife, as well as continued strained relations with the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches: Patrick Maume, 'From Scotland's storied land: William McComb and Scots-Irish Presbyterian identity' in Ferguson and McConnel (eds), *Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century*, p.84.

[46] Cooke and Chalmers papers (PRONI, T3307).

[47] James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 30 Mar. 1820 (PRONI, Cooke and Chalmers papers, T3307/2); James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 23 Feb. 1821 (ibid., T3307/3); James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 17 Sept. 1827 (ibid., T3307/9); Samuel Hanna to Thomas Chalmers, 16 Apr. 1842 (ibid., T3307/62); William S. Crawford to Thomas Chalmers, 30 Sept. 1833 (PRONI, Sharman Crawford papers, D856/G/1); R.F.G. Holmes, *Thomas Chalmers and Ireland* (Belfast, 1980), p. 15.

[48] *BNL*, 1 Aug., 21 Sept. 1827; J.L. Porter, *The life and times of Henry Cooke, D.D., LL.D. President of Assembly's College, Belfast* (2nd ed., London, 1871), pp 148-9.

[49] *BNL*, 1 Dec. 1820; *FJ*, 17 Jan. 1822, 15 Feb. 1827.

[50] Chalmers, *Influence of Bible societies*.

[51] James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 28 Jan. 1829 (PRONI, Cooke and Chalmers papers, T3307/15).

Presbyterian Church's famine relief efforts in Connaught.[52] Among the charities that benefitted directly from Chalmers's sermons were the Society for the Education of the Poor in Ireland and the Glasgow Auxiliary of the Hibernian Society for establishing schools and circulating the Holy Scriptures in Ireland.[53] Chalmers also had some familial connections to Ireland: part of his wife's childhood was spent in Gracehill, County Antrim where her mother was buried, and Chalmers's eldest daughter married a son of Belfast minister Rev. Samuel Hanna.[54]

The *Banner of Ulster* noted how Chalmers's achievement in reinvigorating the Church of Scotland, through the establishment of new churches and schools, had been 'communicated to Ireland'. The paper continued: 'It is impossible to conceive the amount of influence that he has there wielded, and will continue to wield, over the people of Scotland, and the Presbyterians of Ireland.'[55] The Church of Scotland minister's visit to Belfast in August 1842, when he delivered two sermons in the city, was eagerly anticipated weeks in advance, with the public being advised that given Chalmers's age – he was then sixty-two years old – this was expected to be their last opportunity to hear him in person.[56] (During this visit, he contributed the sum of £5 to the Presbyterian Church's bicentenary fund.[57]) Indeed, following his death in 1847, the *Belfast Newsletter* eulogised: 'Amongst ourselves, in Ulster, the memory of Chalmers will long be enshrined with the devotion with which we would guard the recollections

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[52] James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 28 Jan. 1829; Magee, *Fifty years in the Irish Mission*, p. 55.

[53] *BNL*, 2 Jan. 1818; Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian heritage*, p. 112; Henry R. Sefton, 'Chalmers and the church: theology and mission' in A. C. Cheyne (ed.), *The practical and the pious: essays on Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)* (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 170.

[54] Wright, *The 'natural leaders' and their world*, p. 222 n.129.

[55] *Banner of Ulster*, 9 Aug. 1842. See also, ibid., 19 Aug. 1842. Between 1834 and 1841, a Chalmers-led Church of Scotland campaign raised £305,000 from voluntary subscriptions, which financed the erection of 222 new churches: John Wolffe, 'Anglicanism, Presbyterianism and the religious identities of the United Kingdom' in Sheridan Gilley and Brian Stanley (eds), *The Cambridge history of Christianity: world Christianities, c. 1815-c. 1914* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2005), viii, p. 310.

[56] *Banner of Ulster*, 16 Aug., 19 Aug. 1842.

[57] Ibid., 9 Aug. 1842.

of one born upon our own soil, as he has been the champion of the liberties which are in Ulster held dear.'[58]

In 1830 Chalmers was invited to appear before a parliamentary committee investigating the state of the poor in Ireland. Already a high-profile public figure in Britain and Ireland, Chalmers appeared, in Peter Gray's description, as a 'star witness' at the proceedings.[59] In his testimony to the committee, Chalmers extolled the virtue of private charity, collected and distributed in a voluntary manner, in contrast to the English parish-based system of assessed compulsory poor rates and a legal entitlement to relief. The English system, Chalmers held, led to idleness, dependency and pauperism, while the Scottish system of voluntarism and minimalist corporate intervention encouraged private and 'individual benevolence' among the poor person's relatives and neighbours.[60] Based on his celebrated St John's experiment in Glasgow between 1819 and 1823, Chalmers's approach was in stark contrast to the increasing momentum for a statutory provision for the poor in Ireland and a revised poor law in England. In the impoverished urban parish of St John's corporate minimalism in the direct provision of relief was combined with a regime of moral inspection, which sought to distinguish the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' poor and allocate resources accordingly. According to Chalmers, his experiment led to a significant decrease in

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[58] *BNL*, 8 June 1847. Similar sentiments were expressed by Presbyterian ministers in Belfast. In a sermon just days after Chalmers's death, Rev. William Gibson of the Rosemary Street congregation in Belfast said 'Perhaps no heart ever beat with an intenser [sic] yearning for the good of *our* unhappy country than his own', while Rev. James Morgan lamented: 'Ireland may well bathe his yet unburied corpse with a flood of tears': William Gibson, *The teacher from the tomb: a discourse on the life and character of the late Dr. Chalmers* (Belfast, 1847), pp 29, 39.

[59] Gray, 'Thomas Chalmers and Irish poverty', p. 96.

[60] *Second report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 18 May-5 June*, p. 296, H.C. 1830 (654), vii, 472.

destitution and mendicancy, as well as reduced parish expenditure on poor assistance, although his claims of success were challenged by his critics.[61]

Chief among these critics was William Pulteney Alison, a Scottish Episcopalian physician and social reformer who was a fellow professor of Chalmers's at the University of Edinburgh.[62] Alison differed from Chalmers in perceiving the voluntary charity system in Scotland as leaving the destitute 'miserably neglected' and resulting in increased poverty. Where Chalmers saw the minimalist system as curtailing beggary through the encouragement of self-reliance, Alison argued that this Calvinist approach tended to normalise and institutionalise beggary.[63] Alison, who shared Chalmers's interest in the condition of the poor in Ireland, later described a statutory poor law, taxing the owners of property and bestowing a right to relief on the destitute, as representing 'justice to Ireland'.[64]

To Chalmers the strict Calvinist theology underpinning Scottish responses to social issues such as poverty, unemployment and mendicancy resulted in a relatively reduced degree of pauperism, profligacy and idleness, and greater independence among the lower classes. The Presbyterian emphasis on personal independence lent itself to a voluntary model of poor relief, which would protect the poor themselves from a 'slothful dependence upon the liberalities of those around him'.[65] Addressing the 1830 select committee, Chalmers stated that, from his experience, 'the morale which

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[61] Gray, 'Thomas Chalmers and Irish poverty', p. 97. For Chalmers's views prior to his Glasgow experiment, see: [Thomas Chalmers], 'Causes and cure of pauperism' in *Edinburgh Review*, xxviii, no. 55 (Mar. 1817), pp 1-31; [idem], 'Causes and cure of pauperism' in *Edinburgh Review*, xxix, no. 58 (Feb. 1818), pp 261-302.

[62] L.S. Jacyna, 'Alison, William Pulteney' in *ODNB*, i, pp 744-7. Chalmers taught Divinity, while Alison lectured in the Theory of Physic and Clinical Medicine: *BNL*, 11 Oct. 1833, 3 Oct. 1834.

[63] [William P. Alison], 'Evils of the state of Ireland' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xl, no. 252 (Oct. 1836), p. 503.

[64] [William P. Alison], 'Justice for Ireland – a poor law' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, xl, no. 254 (Dec. 1836), pp 812-31. For the Alison-Chalmers dispute regarding the merits of the Scottish poor laws, see Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the godly commonwealth*, pp 289-96.

[65] Chalmers, *Influence of bible societies*, p. 15. See also [Chalmers], 'Causes and cure of pauperism' (Mar. 1817), pp 1-31; [idem], 'Causes and cure of pauperism' (Feb. 1818), pp 261-302.

accompanies the voluntary mode of relief tends to sweeten and cement the parochial society in the unassessed parishes'.[66] Referring to his twelve years' ministry in the rural parish of Kilmany in Fife, Chalmers praised the system of non-compulsory poor assistance which prevented unnecessary interference in the lives of the poor. The provision of assistance by the richer members of the community, spontaneously and privately, was preferable to the distribution of periodic alms by the 'known and public' kirk sessions.[67] The former fostered a healthy gracious relationship between the rich and poor, while the latter needlessly raised expectations. Chalmers claimed that in his parish the lower orders were relatively comfortable, and attributed this to a lack of a guaranteed welfare provision and the encouragement of habits and notions of independence and self-dependency:

> Our parochial charity, from the extreme moderation of its allowances, does not seduce our people from a due dependence on themselves, or to a neglect of their relative obligations. It is not the relief then administered by our kirk sessions which keeps them comfortable…I look upon a compulsory provision to be that which acts as a disturbing force upon certain principles and feelings, which, if left to their own undisturbed exercise, would do more for the prevention and alleviation of poverty, than can be done by any legal or artificial system whatever.[68]

The moral and spiritual well-being of the lower orders was central to Chalmers's view of poverty and alms-giving. In an early publication, the Church of Scotland minister claimed: 'The exemption of Scotland from the miseries of pauperism, is due to the education which their people receive at schools, and to the bible, which their scholarship gives them access to.'[69] Furthermore, Chalmers argued that the collection of a trifling sum – for instance, 1*d*. per week – on a voluntary basis from the labouring classes, which went towards the distribution of bibles among the poor, exposed such individuals

[66] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 284.
[67] Ibid., p. 287.
[68] Ibid., p. 287.
[69] Chalmers, *Influence of bible societies*, p. 14.

to the spiritual splendour of exercising charity.[70] 'The great defence which such a Society establishes against pauperism is the superior tone of dignity and independence, which it imparts to the character of him who supports it.'[71] This newfound dignity and independence fostered bourgeoning motivations in these subscribers to protect themselves against a degrading fall into pauperism, what Chalmers termed 'the shame of descending'.[72]

For Chalmers, the success of voluntary private charity was evident in the extent to which his Scottish parishioners resorted to relatives and neighbours for support, either sporadically or on a regular basis. This system not only relieved householders of the expense of assessed poor rates but encouraged responsibility, generosity and Christian kindness amongst parishioners.[73] It provided people with 'the opportunity of exercising their kind affections' when in a position to do so, he asserted.[74] This informal benevolence, 'distributed unseen and by private individuals', was morally superior even to the relief afforded by voluntary charitable societies and was put forward as the appropriate manner in which to deal with the traditional categories of the 'deserving poor' – the elderly, deserted children, the sick poor in their own homes and the temporarily unemployed.[75] Such assertions reflected the centrality of informal and private charity, as well as individual responsibility, in the relief of the poor in this period, existing beyond the remit of organised charitable societies and church bodies. Where appropriate, charity was a private affair. Regrettably for the historian, this method of charity was invariably undertaken in a manner which did not lend itself to the keeping of records.

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[70] Chalmers, *Influence of bible societies*, p. 23.
[71] Ibid., p. 25.
[72] Ibid., p. 26.
[73] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 288.
[74] Ibid., p. 296.
[75] Ibid., pp 313, 319.

In justifying his argument Chalmers mirrored Archbishop Whately (see Chapter Six) and drew upon the example of Christ in refusing to provide unlimited sustenance to the hungry:

> On two occasions, when the multitude were overtaken by hunger, He brought down food by miracle. It is quite evident that had this been His system it would have disorganized the whole of Judea, and the population would have run in multitudes after Him for the purpose of being fed; and accordingly the third time He was applied to, He detected the sordid principle upon which they ran after Him, and said "You have come to Me, not to see the miracles but to eat of the loaves and be filled," and instead of performing the miracle again, He put them off with a moral and spiritual advice.[76]

Chalmers framed Christ's initial benevolence as resembling that of modern public charities; the indiscriminate manner of doling out assistance 'would have disorganized and put into disorder the whole population'.[77] Christ's refusal of food on the third occasion supported Chalmers's model of poor assistance. Many years before, Chalmers warned against 'the power of charity to corrupt its object'[78] and it was this fear of encouraging dependency that he perceived in Christ's refusal. Symptomatic of contemporary moralists and social commentators, Chalmers found a gospel basis for his own approaches to relieving penury.

Chalmers's views and practices have been placed by Tristram Hunt into the context of the renewed enthusiasm for medievalism in the first half of the century, in response to the increasing individualism and materialistic nature of urban life, leading to the moral decay of communities. Chalmers appealed to romantic impressions of a rural, familial and communal basis for alleviating distress. The inherently Christian practice of visitation to the sick and poor was central to this appeal to an idealistic model of

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[76] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 320.
[77] Ibid., p. 320.
[78] W. Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (4 vols, Edinburgh, 1849), i, p. 381, quoted in Rosalind Mitchison, 'The creation of the disablement rule in the Scottish Poor law' in T.C. Smout (ed.), *The search for wealth and stability: essays in economic and social history presented to M.W. Flinn* (London and Basingstoke, 1979), p. 207.

benevolence. 'Chalmers argued for a new urban feudalism through the introduction of pastoral cadre back into manufacturing communities. By subdividing the cities into parishes, the intimate face-to-face interaction and Christian compassion redolent of the countryside would re-emerge in the cities.'[79] Amidst a popular taste for medievalism, with a public reading the novels of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)[80] and marvelling at the revivalist Gothic architecture of Augustus Welby Pugin (1812-52),[81] Chalmers's appeals to traditional communal benevolence, faith and decency fell on receptive ears.[82]

Chalmers and Irish mendicancy

For Chalmers, mendicancy was a state of existence that could be reformed through education. He proposed, therefore, that legislators undertake to improve the provision of education to the poor in Ireland, but acknowledged that this initiative would not bear fruit for some time. As such, the Irish should provisionally tolerate the continuation of beggary, which would recede as the poor gradually lifted themselves out of their ignorance.[83] The trade-off was between short-term mendicancy and long-term social harmony, and to Chalmers, the annoyance of the former was worth the advantage of the latter. The alternative, he claimed, was to introduce English-style poor laws, thus institutionalising an entitlement to relief and encouraging pauperism. He told the 1830 select committee:

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[79] Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: the rise and fall of the Victorian city* (London, 2005), p. 96. For Chalmers's contrast between the congregational solidarity of rural Scotland and the irreligion and isolation of cities, see [Chalmers], 'Causes and cure of pauperism' (Mar. 1817), pp 22-3.
[80] David Hewitt, 'Scott, Sir Walter' in *ODNB*, xlix, pp 490-510.
[81] Kenneally, Rhona Richman, 'Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore' in *DIB*, viii, pp 313-15; Marian Lyons (ed.), *Pugin at Maynooth* (Maynooth, 2012).
[82] Hunt, *Building Jerusalem,* pp 81-127; Stewart J. Brown, *The national churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland, 1801-1846* (Oxford, 2001), pp 81-4.
[83] Chalmers also saw 'a universal education, both Christian and common' as the appropriate amelioration for the distress of the labouring poor: *Banner of Ulster*, 3 Feb. 1843.

One thing is abundantly obvious, that the act of becoming a mendicant is one of unmixed degradation, and the self-respect inspired by education stands directly and diametrically opposed to it. It is now so with the act of becoming a pauper; a state sanctioned by law, and in entering upon which, the consciousness of right and the resolute assertion of it, awaken feelings that serve to temper the humiliation of charity…I should therefore be exceedingly sorry if Irish mendicity were exchanged for English pauperism. I think that the floating mendicity of Ireland will fall under the operation of those moral causes which might be brought to bear upon it; but if, in order to escape from this, you establish a law of pauperism, you will in fact establish so many parochial fixtures, a nucleus in every parish, around which your worst population will gather, and from that under the influence of an impatience to be delivered from this evil of mendicity, you should, in getting quit of that which is conquerable by education, precipitate yourselves into that which is unconquerable by education.[84]

In considering Chalmers's testimony to the 1830 select committee, many points could be made but just one theme will be considered here. Chalmers referred to and championed a method of poor assistance which was identified at the start of this thesis as being largely beyond the scope of the historian, due to the lack of primary sources – namely, the informal and private provision of assistance to the poor and distressed, largely provided by relatives, friends and neighbours. The select committee's investigation was an opportunity for Chalmers to advertise and justify his St John's experiment and in doing so, he pointed to the flourishing of neighbourly support for the poor as vindication of the merits of his scheme. Just as his experience in the rural parish of Kilmany proved to him the ultimate preference for private, kin-based assistance to corporate interference,[85] Chalmers's urban poor scheme succeeded, he claimed, in promoting a sense of Christian sympathy and charity among his impoverished city parishioners. However, his outline of the St John's experiment did not countenance the probability that these kindly expressions of communal charity and solidarity were present in the Glasgow parish prior to the commencement of his scheme in 1819. It

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[84] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 325.
[85] Ibid., p. 288.

cannot be stated, therefore, that Chalmers's poor scheme introduced, or at least encouraged, these sentiments among a supposedly uncharitable community.

Some leading Irish Presbyterian ministers and social commentators echoed Chalmers's concerns regarding the relief of the poor through indiscriminate means. Among those who shared this belief was Rev. James Carlile, based at the Mary's Abbey congregation in Dublin.[86] In a letter to Chalmers in April 1830, Carlile wrote of Irish Catholics: 'They regard giving to the poor as one of the first if not the very first duty of Christianity', adding that there was 'much error & superstition' associated 'with their means of charity. The idea of its being highly meritorious in the will of God is almost universal and accompanied I fear not infrequently with the notion that it makes atonement for sin.'[87] This last point is crucial to understanding how non-Catholics, such as Carlile, viewed Catholics' seeming overindulgence when it came to relieving beggars. The cause of the mendicant's penury did not matter, and was not to be considered. What counted was that charity was being sought and the prospective giver was presented with an opportunity to atone for sin. According to Carlile, 'much of the alms giving however that is provided on this principle is given to beggars indiscriminately, crowds of whom are usually to be found at the doors of certain places of worship on occasions of peculiar solemnity'.[88] In concluding his letter, Carlile suggested that 'the poor would eagerly grasp at a compulsory provision and readily give out all their habits of helping one another', thus mirroring Chalmers's own views based on his experiment in St John's. A compulsory provision, in encouraging dependency

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[86] Linde Lunney, 'Carlile, James' in *DIB*, ii, pp 350-51; Robert James Rodgers, 'James Carlile, 1784-1854' (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1973).
[87] James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 26 Apr. 1830 (PRONI, Cooke and Chalmers papers, T3307/12B).
[88] Ibid.

and discouraging 'spontaneous charity', would only serve as 'a premium on pauperism'.[89]

Echoing this sentiment in an address to a public meeting in Belfast at the height of the Great Famine, Rev. John Edgar counselled his audience of the evil of poor assistance by compulsory means, even given the extraordinary levels of distress then prevailing in the town. 'He could not entertain the idea of any attempt to suppress that cry [of distress and wretchedness] by any compulsory means…Before they attempted to check it by the strong arm of the law, it was necessary that they should conscientiously see that they had used the very best means in their power for the relief of those persons who really have a claim upon the town.'[90] Aside from the obvious contexts of Edgar's firm Calvinist beliefs and the Famine-related levels of extraordinary destitution, another important context for this sentiment is the unique (for Ireland, at least) level of population growth in Belfast, rising from 18,320 in 1791 to 119,393 in 1861.[91] The prolonged influx, largely of poor labourers, increased during the Famine years, surely straining the (largely Protestant) inhabitants' tolerance of non-locals. This constant migration into Belfast, together with the wider social dislocation caused by industrialisation, led to an increasing population residing in poor, overcrowded housing in areas infested with poverty, disease, crime and beggary. This underworld of mid-nineteenth-century Belfast was exposed in a series of articles written by Congregationalist minister Rev. William Murphy O'Hanlon in the early-1850s, based on his personal investigations into the 'dark and noisome haunts' of the town.[92]

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[89] James Carlile to Thomas Chalmers, 26 Apr. 1830.
[90] *BNL*, 23 Feb. 1847.
[91] S.J. Connolly and Gillian McIntosh, 'Imagining Belfast' in Connolly (ed.), *Belfast 400*, p. 17.
[92] W.M. O'Hanlon, *Walks among the poor of Belfast, and suggestions for their improvement* (Belfast, 1853), p. 1.

Presbyterian corporate responses: kirk sessions and charities

The structure of Presbyterian congregations[93] was based on a strong individualistic model, whereby congregations chose and dismissed their own ministers, paid their stipends and erected their own churches. This model of ecclesiastical government reflected the strong independent streak present in Irish Presbyterianism. Social, cultural, economic and ecclesiastical independence was cherished.[94] Hempton and Hill have written of Ulster Presbyterianism as constituting 'in effect a state within a state'.[95] Congregations were self-disciplining and responses to moral misdemeanours by communicants were undertaken within each congregation by its kirk session.[96] The kirk session was a meeting of the minister and elected lay elders of each congregation, and represented the base of Presbyterianism's hierarchical series of church courts. The sessions largely operated as a disciplinary body, 'trying' congregants for moral misdemeanours, such as fornication (specified as 'antinuptial fornication' in one congregation),[97] Sabbath-breaking and habitual drunkenness.[98] Whereas Roman Catholics could avail of the sacrament of penance, by way of a one-to-one interaction

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[93] Since the seventeenth century, Irish Presbyterianism was riven with divisions, such that by the early-nineteenth century, it was divided into the Synod of Ulster, the Secession Synod and the Reformed Presbytery (Covenanters): R.B. McDowell, 'Ireland on the eve of the famine' in R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds), *The Great Famine: studies in Irish history, 1845-52* (1956; Dublin, 1994), p. 70.

[94] Connolly, *Religion, law and power*, p. 168. This independent trait among Ulster Presbyterians was identified in one Ordnance Survey compiler's observation of County Antrim Presbyterians' 'notion that they have no superiors, and that courtesy is but another term for servility': quoted in S.J. Connolly, 'Aftermath and development' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), p. 21.

[95] David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster society 1740-1890* (London and New York, 1992), p. 16.

[96] Myrtle Hill, 'Culture and religion, 1815-1870' in Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Tomás O'Riordan (eds), *Ireland, 1815-70: emancipation, famine and religion* (Dublin, 2011), pp 46-7.

[97] Ballymoney (GSU) kirk session book and congregational history, f28 (PRONI, Presbyterian Church records, CR3/3/1/B/4).

[98] The next higher entity is the presbytery, comprising the ministers and an elder from each congregation in a given jurisdiction. The highest tier is the synod, which consists of ministers and a representative elder from all congregations, and meets once every year. See Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice*, pp 35, 166-75; Christine Kinealy, 'Presbyterian Church records' in James G. Ryan (ed.), *Irish Church records: their history, availability and use in family and local history research* (Dublin, 1992), pp 75, 82. The kirk sessions in Scotland possessed a similar remit: Brown, *The national churches*, pp 27-8.

with a priest, in Presbyterianism congregants' sins were subject to public inquiry at the kirk sessions. The same applied to applications for poor relief.[99]

Irish Presbyterianism's corporate responses to poverty and mendicancy were structured along similar lines to those of the Church of Scotland. Poor assistance was provided to certain of the 'deserving' poor from monies received at weekly voluntary church collections and distributed by the kirk sessions. The collection and distribution of this money was carried out on a voluntary basis by ministers and lay elders, and was not conferred on the needy as a matter of right.[100] Writing of the kirk-based old Scottish poor law, Rosalind Mitchison has observed that: 'This care of the poor was not carried out by the sessions as servants of the state. It was part of the general social obligation of a Christian community, an obligation so central that it was very rarely explicitly laid down…Silence on the subject in sermons comes from the assumptions of basic morality, not from indifference.'[101] In their extensive study of the Scottish kirk sessions records, Mitchison and Leah Leneman found that beggars appear in the minute books in small numbers. Most of the alms-giving was carried out by individuals in a private capacity, usually at communions and other public occasions, and for the recipients, such charity was merely one way of making ends meet, as opposed to a permanent source of income.[102]

Surviving Irish kirk sessions books reveal that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, financial assistance was provided to certain of the deserving poor, such as the

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[99] Callum G. Brown, *The social history of religion in Scotland since 1730* (London and New York, 1987), p. 92.

[100] W.T. Latimer, 'The old session book of the Presbyterian congregation at Dundonald, Co. Down' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd series, iii, no. 4 (July 1897), pp 227-32; William Fee McKinney, 'Old session books of Carnmoney, Co. Antrim' in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 2nd series, vi, no. 1 (Jan. 1900), pp 9-10.

[101] Rosalind Mitchison, 'The making of the old Scottish poor law' in *Past & Present*, no. 63 (May 1974), pp 62-3.

[102] Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman, *Sexuality and social control: Scotland 1660-1760* (Oxford, 1989), pp 36-7.

sick, widows, victims of crime and those who suffered for the sake of their religious beliefs.[103] The Rosemary Street congregation in Belfast provided financial assistance to families facing funeral expenses in the mid-eighteenth century.[104] In some congregations, pew rents for impoverished members were paid from the poor fund or a special collection, thus negating a possible cause of non-attendance among the poor.[105] In certain places, dealing with the poor was a standard fixture of the kirk sessions. The Belfast Second Presbyterian congregation collected funds from its communicants, averaging just more than £4 per month, and donated the sum to the town's poor house (most certainly the Belfast Charitable Society). Updated reports on the poor funds were reported on a monthly basis.[106] In the Fitzroy congregation in Belfast, formerly called the Alfred Street congregation, consideration of the 'Poor of [the] Congregation' was one of the items of business earmarked for meetings of the sessions.[107] The four congregations in early-nineteenth-century Dublin operated charity schools and alms houses, each of which was funded through voluntary donations, Sunday collections and an annual charity sermon.[108]

Unlike Scottish Presbyterians, and Irish and English Episcopalians, Irish Presbyterians did not belong to the established church. Therefore, their corporate institutions were not empowered under legislation to deal with so large a responsibility

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[103] For instance, see Aghadowey Presbyterian Church kirk session minute book, printed note inside front cover (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland Archive, Aghadowey Presbyterian Church records, no reference number); ibid., 7 Aug. 1704, f16r; Carnmoney Presbyterian Church kirk session poor list, 18 Mar. 1782 (Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland Archive, Carnmoney Presbyterian Church records, MIC/1P/37/6, microfilm).

[104] 'Funeral account book, Rosemary St. Presbyterian Church (3rd), Belfast, 1752-70', *passim* (PRONI, Presbyterian Church records, MIC1P/7/2, microfilm).

[105] Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice*, pp 63, 69; Memorial of the Presbyterian congregation of May Street, Belfast to the Lord Lieutenant, 4 Apr. 1832 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP1832/404/16).

[106] Register of the Second Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast (PA), 6 June 1824 (PRONI, Presbyterian Church records, CR4/9/A/1); ibid., 4 Dec. 1825, 4 Mar. 1827.

[107] Alfred Street Presbyterian Church, Belfast, kirk session minutes, 2 Jan. 1839, p. 27 (PRONI, Presbyterian Church records, MIC1P/14/1, microfilm).

[108] G.N. Wright, *An historical guide to the city of Dublin, illustrated by engravings, and a plan of the city* (2nd ed., London, 1825), pp 97-100.

as poor relief. Irish kirk sessions, in contrast to their Scottish counterparts, had no legal powers in managing mendicancy. Furthermore, the kirks' endeavours regarding the relief or punishment of the mendicant poor were limited to within the Presbyterian community. This was an internal system, wherein congregations exerted self-regulation and control. In Ireland it was the corporate entity of the Established Church – the parish vestry exerting its civil responsibilities – that held responsibility for cross-denominational poor relief and suppression of begging. In Scotland, on the other hand, an act of 1592 recognised the kirk sessions as the appropriate agents 'for punishment of masterful beggaris and releif of the puir'.[109] The Scottish Poor Inquiry commissioners in the 1840s recorded the prevalence of parishes licencing local, known beggars, adding that 'begging is in many places a recognised means of subsistence for paupers'.[110] Badges identified the wearer as being of the 'deserving' poor, and the prospective alms-giver would then be in a position to dole out charity on a voluntary basis. There would be no assumptions of entitlement on the part of the beggar and no compulsion upon the giver. A fascinating paradox of the Scottish situation is that while begging could be tolerated within a system of voluntary charity, the 1845 Scottish Poor Law specified that relief was to be limited to those who 'have maintained himself without having Recourse to common begging, either by himself or his family'.[111]

A rare case of an Irish Presbyterian congregation providing begging licences to its local poor arose in 1774 in Ballycarry, County Antrim. Located 8km north of Carrickfergus and 23km north of Belfast, Ballycarry (or Broadisland) is the oldest Presbyterian congregation in Ireland. It was here that Rev. Edward Brice established a

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[109] '[An act] For punishment of masterful beggars and relief of the poor', James VI, c. 149, no. 69 (5 June 1592), cited in Mitchison, 'The making of the old Scottish poor law', p. 63.
[110] Quoted in Nicholls, *History of the Scotch poor law*, p. 142.
[111] 8 & 9 Vict., c. 83, s. 76 (4 Aug. 1845).

presbytery in 1613.[112] In February 1774 the congregation's kirk sessions adopted a detailed resolution which ordered its members not to give alms to 'foreign Vagrants' and divided the local poor into three categories.[113] The division, and the prescribed manner of dealing with such individuals, adhered to Calvinist views of the virtue of private, voluntary charity. Those poor 'who are incapable of using any Industry; but capable of moving from House to House' were to be provided with begging badges and were to receive no alms from the public collections. Those 'who are capable of using some Industry; but not sufficient for their support' were to be afforded assistance from local inhabitants 'in a private Way according to their several abilities'. They were also entitled to receive no more than 6½*d*. per month from the public collections. The third class, 'who are neither capable of any Industry, nor yet able to crawl from House to House for support', were to receive alms from the Sabbath collections.[114]

A number of points merit discussion. The first category of paupers was to be provided with the means to support themselves, through licenced begging. Any alms proffered to them were at the discretion of local inhabitants, thus avoiding the burden of a compulsory rate for the well-off and any entitlement to relief for the destitute. Similarly, regarding the second category, it was merely *recommended* to locals that such persons be assisted – there was to be no compulsion - and the amount allowed to the poor from the collections was, by public consensus, subject to a maximum figure. Those of the third category were to be assisted through the public collections, but in the event that such funds were found to be insufficient, it was ordered that 'the Minister Do make Representations of such Insufficiency to the Congregation'. Again, the importance of avoiding a compulsory rate was underlined. Local inhabitants were not, however,

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[112] Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterianism heritage*, p. 12.

[113] Typed copy of the Broadisland (Ballycarry) Presbyterian Congregation kirk session minute book, 20 Feb. 1774 (PRONI, Calwell papers, D3784/4/11).

[114] Ibid.

merely the beneficiaries of rights but were subject to expected behavioural norms and duties. As these measures were internal communal agreements, and had no grounding in civil law, the penalty for failing to meet the expected standards was congregational disapproval and possible expulsion. The resolution continued:

> Resolved that any Inhabitant within the Bounds of this congregation, who gives alms of Lodging to a Vagrant Beggar (unless in a case of Starving) is and will be deemed an Enemy to industry and the real Poor, as well as to the good order of this Cong[regatio]n. – and that any of our own Poor, who shall hereafter lodge or harbour a foreign Beggar shall be deemed to have thereby forfeited the Protection and Support of this Cong[regatio]n.[115]

For local named persons to be approved for a begging badge, their nomination had to be sanctioned at a 'publick Meeting'.[116] As with the dispensing of justice within the Presbyterian congregation, the relief of poverty and handling of beggars was subject to the public approval of the community, wherein operated an independent system of social welfare and moral regulation.

Conclusion

The manner in which Irish Presbyterianism responded to mendicancy differed from that of other denominations. On a corporate level Presbyterians utilised the internal church courts (kirk sessions) to draw distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. Any alms provided to the local poor were raised through the voluntary church collections, and there was no compulsion on congregants in generating income and no entitlement to relief on the part of the receiver. Voluntarism and corporate minimalism were central to this system of poor assistance. Any relief given was subject to the regulation of the kirk and applications for relief from the poor were,

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[115] Typed copy of the Broadisland kirk session minute book, 20 Feb. 1774.
[116] Ibid.

as with any moral misdemeanours, subject to the public judgement of prominent members of the religious congregation.

This chapter has also examined how Presbyterians perceived begging and alms-giving, and how these perceptions were expressed in public and private discourse. The use of Thomas Chalmers as a case study allows for an examination of the Calvinist and evangelical thinking that underpinned how many Irish Presbyterians in the early- and mid-nineteenth century approached beggary and alms-giving. It has been argued that although based in Scotland, Chalmers's links with and influence on Irish Presbyterianism and the poor law debate were significant, and this analysis complements Jonathan Jeffrey Wright's recent conclusion that Chalmers's social thinking influenced the philanthropic endeavours of Belfast's largely-Presbyterian middle classes.[117] Drawing on Christian teaching and political economy, and the example of his St John's experiment in the urban setting of Glasgow, Chalmers championed the voluntary and minimalist model of poor assistance which was widely operated by Irish and Scottish kirk sessions. These sentiments were also expressed by Irish ministers, such as Rev. Carlile and Rev. Edgar, who touched upon the question of the poor and criticised alleged Catholic recklessness in encouraging indiscriminate alms-giving. The trope of beggary was also deployed by Presbyterian polemicists in arguing for Ulster's distinctive character, attributing it to the concentration of Protestantism in the north-eastern corner of the island, in stark contrast to the prevalence of Roman Catholicism, weighed down by error, superstition and idleness, throughout the other three provinces.

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[117] Wright, *The 'natural leaders' and their world*, p. 222.

Chapter Eight

Methodist approaches to begging and alms-giving

Introduction

Methodism arose from within the Church of England in the mid-eighteenth century, when Anglican minister John Wesley (1703-1791)[1] cultivated his system of itinerancy, field preaching and evangelising, with particular emphasis placed on enthusiasm and the personal experience of salvation, through conversion. Methodism proved to be particularly attractive to the working and lower-middle classes in England and the movement's early advances were made in the manufacturing districts of the north-east and north-midlands, as well as in coal mining and fishing communities. Wesley's revivalist movement is widely seen as the spring board for later manifestations of evangelical religion across the major Protestant faiths.

The embryonic movement made its first appearance in Ireland in the 1740s and just as in Britain the early Methodists in Ireland appealed to the poorer classes. Indeed, the first Methodist societies in Ireland were founded by working-class soldiers in the British army.[2] Methodism remained popular among this social grouping into the nineteenth century. In 1852, on the first Sunday after soldiers in Dublin were granted the right to worship in their chosen church, an estimated seventy men, from the Royal Barracks in the north-west of the city, marched to the nearby Methodist meeting house at Blackhall

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[1] Henry D. Rack, 'Wesley, John' in *ODNB*, lviii, pp 182-93.
[2] Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable enthusiast: John Wesley and the rise of Methodism* (London, 1989), p. 366; Dudley Levistone Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland: a short history* (Dublin, 2004), p. 28.

Place to attend service.[3] Preacher Fossey Tackaberry noted the existence at Richmond and Islandbridge in Dublin of two congregations, 'chiefly composed of soldiers and their wives'.[4]

Among the most abiding features of early Methodism was its appeal to the lower classes of eighteenth-century society and its focus on relieving the poor. According to Henry D. Rack, John Wesley was 'unusual' for his time in his 'distrust of the rich…and for his love of the poor, whom he treated with respect', while David Hempton has described Wesley as a 'remorseless critic of the theatrical materialism of the rich [who] railed against luxury, waste, and the evils of inherited wealth'.[5] This is evident in an entry in Wesley's journal in 1785: 'The poor in Ireland in general are well behaved; all the ill breeding is among the well-dressed people.'[6] In a similar vein, Robin Roddie has asserted that Wesley 'attributed many of the economic ills of the time to the greed and waste of the rich rather than to the more usual culprits of sloth and improvidence of the poor which many evangelicals were prone to do'.[7] Some historians have gone as far as to argue that Wesley did not distinguish between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. In the eyes of Methodism's founder, the destitute poor were not responsible for their desperate situation and were, therefore, universally considered to be deserving of both temporal and spiritual succour, this argument holds.[8] This chapter will develop this view and argue that in fact, while Wesley appears to have not discriminated between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, Methodists and their charitable organisations,

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[3] C.H. Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland. Vol. III: modern development* (3 vols, London, 1888), iii, p. 426; Robert Huston, *Life and labours of the Rev. Fossey Tackaberry; with notices of Methodism in Ireland* (2nd ed., London, 1860), pp 60-61.
[4] Huston, *Life and labours of Rev. Fossey Tackaberry*, p. 127.
[5] Rack, 'Wesley, John', p. 191; David N. Hempton, 'Wesley in context' in Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (eds), *The Cambridge companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 68.
[6] Quoted in Constantia Maxwell, *County and town in Ireland under the Georges* (London, 1940), p. 156.
[7] Robin Roddie, 'John Wesley's political sensibilities in Ireland, 1747-89' in Kevin Herlihy (ed.), *The politics of Irish dissent, 1650-1800* (Dublin, 1997), p. 99.
[8] John Walsh, 'John Wesley and the urban poor' in *Revue Francaise de Civilisation Britannique*, vi, no. 3 (1991), pp 17-30.

founded with the express purpose of aiding the distressed poor, were no different from other denominations in imposing strict and moralising regulations governing the provision of charitable assistance. Far from being an 'open house' for all manner of paupers Methodist charities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries adhered to the widespread contemporary practice of prohibiting relief to sturdy beggars and those whose destitution was seen to be self-inflicted.

Methodists' approaches to charity were as moralising as those of Anglicans and Presbyterians and in being so, differed from the teachings and actions of John Wesley. This discord between the founder's example and that of subsequent Methodists will be set in the context of the evolving social aspirations of Methodists in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries and the popularity of the middling classes' associational culture. This will be examined through a case study of the Strangers' Friend Societies, a movement of Methodist-run charities which flourished throughout Ireland and Britain between 1785 and the mid-nineteenth century. These charities deployed the traditional distinction between 'common' street beggars and the 'deserving' poor, who were to be shunned and embraced respectively, and which stood in stark contrast to the life and example of John Wesley. While the focus of this case study will be the Dublin Strangers' Friend Society,[9] this organisation will be set in the context of the British Isles-wide movement, in which like-minded individuals founded similar charities in an environment in which there was an exchange of information between member societies.

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[9] For a recent study of this charity, see Ciarán McCabe, 'The early years of the Strangers' Friend Society, Dublin: 1790-1845' in *Bulletin of the Methodist Historical Society of Ireland*, xix (2014), pp 65-93.

John Wesley and Methodist attitudes to the mendicant poor

Throughout his life John Wesley held a genuine concern for the welfare of the poor. Wesley's philanthropy was framed to imitate the example of Jesus Christ, and his writings on the topic of poverty were peppered with references to the life and teachings of Christ. It was in accordance with Christ's commandments that Wesley "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38) and "do[ing] good to all men" (Galatians 6:10).[10] A number of commentators have identified strong Catholic undercurrents in Wesley's thinking towards the poor, evident in the influence on him of Thomas à Kempis's *The imitation of Christ* and in the Methodist founder's emphasis on the importance of good works as a sign of true faith, unusual for a Protestant thinker given its distinct place in Catholic theology.[11] This seeming Catholic influence can most notably be seen in what one historian described as Wesley's 'intensely literal vision of the poor as the embodiment of the suffering Christ-figure'.[12] In an early sermon, Wesley preached: 'A poor wretch cries to me for an alms; I look and see one that has an immortal spirit, made to know, and love, and dwell with God to eternity. I honour him for his Creator's sake. I see, through all these rags, that he is purpled over with the blood of Christ.'[13] These teachings were used against Wesley by his opponents and in one instance, he was accused of teaching that a 'second justification' through good words was necessary for

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[10] Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesey's social ethics: praxis and principles*, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville, TN, 1992), p. 25.

[11] Richard P. Heitzenrater, 'The *Imitatio Christi* and the great commandment: virtue and obligation in Wesley's ministry with the poor' in M. Douglas Meeks (ed.), *The portion of the poor: good news to the poor in the Wesleyan tradition* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1995), pp 51, 59; Walsh, 'John Wesley and the urban poor', p. 20. For Wesley's own exploration of these themes, see John Wesley, *The doctrine of salvation, faith and good works, extracted from the homilies of the Church of England* (13th ed., London, 1797). The rules of Methodist societies required members 'zealously to maintain good works, in particular to give alms as you possess, according to your power…': *The nature, design, and general rules of the Methodist societies, established by the Rev. John Wesley. To which are added, the rules of the band societies* (London, 1798), p. 12.

[12] Walsh, 'John Wesley and the urban poor', p. 20.

[13] Quoted in ibid., p. 20.

salvation,[14] thus presenting the Methodist founder as refuting the Protestant keystone of 'salvation by faith alone' (*sola fide)* and associating him with 'Popery'.

Wesley's concern for the poor was not that of an ivory-tower controversialist and throughout his life he endeavoured to visit and work among the poor. In his first religious society at Oxford, sometimes termed the 'Holy Club', Wesley and his colleagues visited the sick poor, the elderly and prisoners.[15] In one published work, Wesley wrote: 'Let us alone with the poor, the vulgar, the base, the outcasts of men…suffer us "to call sinners to repentance"; even the most vile, the most ignorant, the most abandoned, the most fierce and most savage of whom we can hear. To these will go forth in the name of our Lord, desiring nothing, receiving nothing of any man…'[16] These sentiments were uttered, as well, in his private correspondence. In June 1775 he urged a Miss March: 'Go and see the poor in their hovels…Jesus went before you and will go with you.'[17] Elsewhere, he wrote:

> How much better is it, when it can be done, to carry relief to the poor than send it! And that both for our own sakes and theirs. For theirs, as it is so much more comfortable to them, and as we may then assist them in spirituals as well as temporals; and for our own, as it is far more apt to soften our hearts and makes us naturally care for each other.[18]

Visiting the sick was not merely fulfilling one's Christian obligation to the poor but served as a means of obtaining, in Richard Heitzenrater's words, 'an increase in lowliness (humility), patience, tenderness of spirit, and sympathy – i.e., an increase in virtue'. And as such, Christ served as both the model and as the empowerment of this activity for Wesley.[19]

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[14] W.C. Sydney, *rev*. S.J. Skedd, 'Hill, Sir Richard' in *ODNB*, xxvii, pp 172-3.
[15] D. Rack, 'Wesley, John', p. 184; Walsh, 'John Wesley and the urban poor', pp 17-30.
[16] Wesley, John, *A farther appeal to men of reason and religion. Part III* (6th ed., London, 1786), p. 138.
[17] Quoted in Heitzenrater, 'The *Imitatio Christi*', p. 52.
[18] Cited in Rack, *Reasonable enthusiast*, p. 363.
[19] Heitzenrater, 'The *Imitatio Christi*', p. 52.

Wesley's strain of evangelicalism was open to all, both rich and poor, but he warned the former of the danger they ran in preferring the joys of material wealth to the eternal pleasures of the soul. While contemporary social commentators centred their moralising censure on the perceived idleness and irreligion of the poor, Wesley was arguably unique in not only rejecting this view of poverty but, moreover, of attacking the apparent sloth and excess of wealth. 'It is no more sinful to be rich, than to be poor,' Wesley asserted in a published sermon on the gospel parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. 'But it is dangerous beyond expression. Therefore, I remind all of you that are of this number that have the conveniences of life, and something over, that ye walk upon slippery ground. Ye continually tread on snares and deaths. Ye are every moment on the verge of hell.'[20] Wesley's view was that the pursuit of earthly wealth distracted the mind of the believer from what are described in the gospel of Matthew as the 'treasures in heaven'.[21] This sentiment is perhaps most aptly captured in his famous charge to fellow Methodists: 'Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.'[22]

George Whitefield (1714-70),[23] an early colleague of Wesley's in the foundation of Methodism but whose Calvinism drove an unbridgeable barrier between the two evangelists, drew on similar attitudes in castigating those rich who failed in their duty to the poor, utilising the trope of the beggar. The rich 'had rather spend their estates on their hawks and hounds, on their whores and earthly, sensual, devilish pleasures, than comfort, nourish, or relieve one of their distressed fellow creatures. What difference is there between the king on the throne or the beggar on the dunghill, when God demands

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[20] John Wesley, 'Sermon XLVIII: Dives and Lazarus' in John Wesley, *Sermons on several occasions: in four volumes* (5th ed., 4 vols, London, 1797), iii, p. 255.
[21] Matthew 6:19-21.
[22] John Wesley, 'The use of money' (17 Feb. 1744), available at Wesley Centre Online (http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-chronologically-ordered/) (21 Aug. 2014).
[23] Boyd Stanley Schlenther, 'Whitefield, George' in *ODNB*, lviii, pp 640-49.

their breaths?'[24] Whitefield's conclusion was that upon the day of judgement, there would be no difference and, as with the Rich Man in the biblical parable, the negligent rich would have to answer for their failure to fulfil their moral duties to assist the poor.

Wesley's work among the various classes of the poor contrasted, as noted above, sharply with that of contemporaries. For such a prominent public figure in mid- to late-eighteenth-century Britain, Wesley was unusually silent in the debate on the merits of the national poor law. For him charity was a matter for Christians on a personal and communal level, and did not pertain to the political state. Throughout his life Wesley freely gave alms to mendicants and was known on occasion to beg for the poor. One such instance occurred in Bath in 1783, when he was aged eighty years.[25] Wesley was, in John Walsh's terms, 'unimpressed' with the traditional distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor, and gave alms indiscriminately 'with almost Franciscan abandon'.[26] Walsh asserts that Wesley

> saw charity as a paradigm of grace itself, which descended to a world of
> sinners, who, in the eyes of their Maker, were all equally undeserving. Charity
> must not be restricted to sect or party, or to those we loved and respected, but
> must embrace all – even the ungrateful and repulsive; it should struggle to
> reflect a divine love which "soars above all scanty bounds, embracing
> neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies; yea, not only the good and
> gentle, but also the forward, the evil and unthankful".[27]

Wesley placed the destitution of the mendicant poor on a par with the meritorious Lazarus of the gospel parable. The neglect by the Rich Man of the beggar Lazarus[28] was used by Wesley as a template for one of his own stories based on a childhood experience. Given the significance of this passage, which is peppered with excerpts from the Lazarus parable, it is here quoted at length:

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[24] George Whitefield, 'The great duty of charity recommended' in idem, *Sermons of George Whitefield* (Peabody, MS, 2009), p. 242.
[25] Rack, *Reasonable enthusiast*, p. 361.
[26] Walsh, 'John Wesley and the urban poor', p. 17.
[27] Ibid., p. 27.
[28] Luke 16: 19-31.

> At Epworth, in Lincolnshire, the town where I was born, a beggar came to a house in the Market-place, and begged a morsel of bread, saying "she was very hungry". The master bid her be gone, for a lazy jade. She called at a second, and begged a little small beer, saying "She was very thirsty". She had much the same answer. At a third door, she begged a little water; saying "She was very faint". But this man also was too conscientious to encourage *common beggars*. The boys seeing a ragged creature turned from door to door, began to pelt her with snow-balls. She looked up, lay down, and died! Would you wish to be the man who refused that poor wretch a morsel of bread, or a cup of water? "Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores:" – being more compassionate than their master. – "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom…"[29]

Wesley's account of this incident must be read with some care, yet this is not to deny its authenticity or its significance as an insight into his views. In framing this vignette Wesley clearly availed of poetic licence and consciously grounded it in scriptural reference and imagery, impressing on his audience the suggestion that this woman was a deserving object of pity. This was achieved through the implicit comparison of the beggar's suffering and death with that of Christ. Firstly, her specific complaints – of being hungry, thirsty, and faint – echoed Christ's words in Matthew 25:35-36: 'for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.' Secondly, the account of the woman's death – 'She looked up, lay down, and died!' – mirrored the final moments of the crucified Christ ('when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost' (Matthew 27:50)). Both the beggar and Christ were presented as performing one final act of desperation and resignation to their fate before dying. But, in both cases their temporal death was not their ultimate fate, for Christ was resurrected and Wesley's beggar woman, like the beggar in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, was carried "into Abraham's bosom".

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[29] Wesley, 'Sermon XLVIII: Dives and Lazarus', pp 256-7.

For historians, estimating the extent to which the beliefs and actions of religious leaders were followed by their adherents is an impossible exercise. For instance, it cannot be ascertained the extent to which Wesley's lack of distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor trickled down to members of Methodist societies, but it is clear that these views were not accepted by some of his fellow Methodists.[30] English Methodist Thomas Wood was one who embraced and encouraged the concept of the less meritorious poor, yet did not expand on what criteria ought to be applied when considering such distinctions. The poor as a category of people were 'objects of pity' to be relieved by the wealthier members of society, 'but tho' their distresses call aloud for relief in some way or other, yet some of them are far more deserving than others, and their cases require more help'.[31] In George Whitefield's sermon on the duty of charity, he remarked on charity of the right and wrong kind. The giving of alms so as to be seen by others was not true charity deriving from a love of God, nor was 'when we give anything to our fellow creatures purely to indulge them in vice: this is so far from being charity, that it is a sin, both against God and against our fellow creatures.'[32] The consequences to the beggar of the giving of alms were to be countenanced by the benefactor; otherwise, the exchange was useless and morally benefitted neither the giver nor receiver. Was the mendicant likely to descend further into drunkenness and idleness with these alms or were they to use the money to secure necessities, such as food, fuel or clothing? Whitefield was clearly arguing here that indiscriminate alms-giving was an evil – a sin, no less – which could be avoided through the considered bestowal of alms. It appears that decades before the blossoming of charitable societies, Whitefield was

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[30] On this point, see Heitzenrater, 'The *Imitatio Christi*', p. 53.
[31] Thomas Wood, 'The cries of the poor heard, and their cause pleaded' in *Methodist Magazine*, xxv (Dublin ed., Mar. 1802), pp 98-9.
[32] Whitefield, 'The great duty of charity recommended', p. 247.

anticipating the system of personal visitation and inspection that characterised so many of these charities' work among the poor.

Methodism in Ireland

The first Methodist preacher to visit Ireland, George Whitefield, arrived in 1738, but it was John Wesley's twenty-one visits between 1747 and 1789 that drove the early growth of the movement in Ireland, through his considerable organisational and disciplinary skills. An Irish headquarters was established at the Wesleyan chapel on Whitefriar Street in Dublin[33] and the following decades witnessed an increasing number of preachers travelling across the country. The last decade of the eighteenth century witnessed a significant upsurge in personal and communal devotion and zeal in the Protestant churches in Ireland. Irene Whelan has observed that while the reformists in the Church of Ireland played a role in this new religious excitement, 'it was on the fringes occupied by Methodists and Nonconformists that the really dynamic activity was taking place'.[34] By 1789 the Methodist community in Ireland numbered more than 14,000 and this figure doubled in the following two decades. Membership peaked at 44,000 in 1844 but fell to 26,000 a decade later, as the movement saw a large proportion of its flock emigrating during and after the famine years.[35] Throughout the nineteenth

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[33] The Whitefriar Street meeting house was built around 1750 and is included in John Rocque's map of 1756: Kenneth Ferguson, 'Rocque's map and the history of nonconformity in Dublin: a search for meeting houses' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lviii, no. 2 (Autumn 2005), pp 137-40.

[34] Irene Whelan, *The bible war in Ireland: the 'Second Reformation' and the polarization of Protestant-Catholic relations, 1800-1840* (Dublin, 2005), p. 86.

[35] John A. Vickers (ed.), *A dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (Peterborough, 2000), pp 176-7. While the increase in Methodists in Ireland in the early part of the century was impressive, it paled in comparison to the level of growth across Britain and north America. Between 1790 and 1830, the number of members of Methodist societies in England rose from 55,705 to 285,530, Scottish Methodist membership tripled, and Welsh membership rose by a factor of twenty. In America, the number of Methodists increased from less than 1,000 in 1770 to more than 250,000 by 1820: David Hempton, 'A tale of preachers and beggars: Methodism and money in the great age of transatlantic expansion, 1780-

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century Methodists constituted the fourth largest religious grouping in Ireland – behind Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians – but by 1871, made up just 1 per cent of the population.[36] As with their co-religionists in England, Irish Methodists concentrated their efforts on the lower orders of society and also pioneered the sending out of Irish-speaking preachers among the majority Catholic population.[37] By 1816 twelve of the twenty-one Methodist preachers based in Ireland were able to preach in Irish.[38] Methodist societies in Ireland endeavoured to pay the arrears of those confined in debtors' prisons, while preachers succoured condemned individuals at the gallows.[39] Irish Methodists mirrored the political conservatism of their English counterparts and while sympathising with the largely impoverished Roman Catholics, they remained as loyal servants to the crown and played little or no role in fermenting political discontent in the country.[40]

Even among contemporaries of different denominations Methodists in Ireland were praised for improving the moral condition of the lower classes. One such account derived from the travel writings of Presbyterian army surgeon John Gamble, who advanced the clichéd contrast between the Established Church minister – lazy, slothful, overly engaged in intellectual pursuits and pastorally negligent – and the Methodist preacher, who had regular contact with his flock (numerous times a week). Gamble

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1830' in Mark A. Noll (ed.), *God and mammon: Protestants, money, and the market, 1790-1860* (Oxford, 2002), pp 123-46, at p. 123.

[36] W.E. Vaughan, 'Ireland *c.* 1870' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v: Ireland under the Union, I, 1801-70* (Oxford, 1989), pp 738-9.

[37] S.J. Connolly, 'Mass politics and sectarian conflict, 1823-30' in Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, v*, p. 78; *Minutes of the Methodist conferences in Ireland* (3 vols, Dublin, 1865), ii, pp 336-7; ibid., p. 341; William Graham Campbell, *The apostle of Kerry: or, the wonders of the Irish general mission, being the life and labours of the Rev. Charles Graham; together with those of the celebrated Gideon Ouseley, who travelled with Mr. Graham on the above mission for many years. Also two appendices, containing one of Mr. Graham's sermons, and also one of Mr. Ouseley's Irish hymns, camp meetings, &c.* (3rd ed., Toronto, 1869), pp 74, 78, 114, 291.

[38] Whelan, *Bible war in Ireland*, p. 87.

[39] Campbell, *The apostle of Kerry*, pp 73-4.

[40] For Wesley's loyalty to the Hanoverian monarchs, see David Hempton, *The religion of the people: Methodism and popular religion,* c. *1750-1900* (London and New York, 1996), pp 79-80. For the Irish situation, see Campbell, *The apostle of Kerry*, pp 118, 125.

asserted that Methodists were 'productive of much benefit, by the introduction of religion among the most uncivilized members of the community, to whom they have given a decency of deportment, a decorum of manner, and freedom from gross vice, which laws could never have affected'.[41] Around the same time that Gamble was travelling on this particular journey the *Belfast Newsletter* applauded the 'incalculable benefits [which] have arisen to society from the assiduity and perseverance of the Methodist preachers, particularly so among the lower ranks of the community; to the instruction and reformation of whom, their pious and indefatigable labours are principally directed'.[42] A stringent defence of Methodism was published by Lord Castlereagh's private secretary, Alexander Knox, the Anglican son of a Methodist father, in reply to a scathing attack on the movement by John Walker, Church of Ireland minister at the Bethesda Chapel in Dublin. Knox wrote:

> When therefore I consider the practical effects of Methodism especially amongst the working classes, I cannot view it, in any other light than as a gracious appointment of Providence, for evangelizing the poor. And the more so, because I cannot conceive any thing more indispensable to persons of that class, in order to their attaining serious religion than some institution of this nature.[43]

Methodist concern for the poor was seen as contributing to the moral improvement of the lower classes and furthermore, this concern for the poor was genuine and was seen to be so. In 1809 an unidentified Methodist wrote to the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Charles Agar, who was patron of the city's House of Industry, complaining of the conditions in the institution, taking into consideration 'the publick indignation felt

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[41] John Gamble, *Sketches of history, politics, and manners in Dublin, and the north of Ireland, in 1810* (New ed., London, 1826), pp 176-7.
[42] *BNL*, 28 Aug. 1810.
[43] Alexander Knox, *Remarks on an expostulatory address to the members of the Methodist Society* (Dublin , 1802), p. 29, quoted in David Hempton, 'Methodism in Irish society, 1770-1830' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, xxxvi (1986), p. 117. See also Anon., *Strictures on a pamphlet, entitled the monstrosities of Methodism; asserted to have been written by a curate of the Church of Ireland…* (Dublin, 1808), p. iv.

by the poor in general against it'.[44] The writer's genuine sympathy for the poor runs through the letter, as he is scathing in his criticism of the inferior quality of clothes and food, and lack of soap and water, for the female inmates. Even so, the writer shared the views of many contemporaries in deploying moralising language when considering and defining the class of mendicant women in the House of Industry:

> What a shameful picture is presented in almost every one of the female wards, naked women! Women without a shirt of petticoat or cap to cover them, so that delicacy is shocked…Near 20 of these destitute women are to be found within these walls! Women not of abandoned habits, not of that description, whose crimes might have involved these miseries, but virtuous women! Poor creatures who by sickness or by necessity, were obliged to seek a refuge in this House of Mercy![45]

Methodists, however, were not universally welcomed and praised in this period. The nature of Methodist prayer meetings and public sermons were frequently criticised in the eighteenth century as time-wasting popular entertainments for the labouring classes; the 'enthusiasm' of Methodism, characterised by sensual outpourings, arising from spiritual reawakening, offended genteel sensibilities; itinerant preachers were compared to medieval mendicant friars, linking the new religious movement with vagrancy and dependency.[46] There was always a tense relationship between Methodists and their Anglican elder relations, the latter seeing prayer gatherings as resembling Catholic confession, 'enthusiasm' as contrary to reason and meetings as interfering with Anglican service.[47] Writing of the English eighteenth-century context W.E.H. Lecky captured the resentment which the Methodist preacher provoked in the Anglican minister:

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[44] 'Civis' to Archbishop Charles Agar, 15 Apr. 1809, f1v (Methodist Library and Archives, Belfast, 16/1).
[45] Ibid., f2r.
[46] John Walsh, '"The bane of industry"? Popular evangelicalism and work in the eighteenth century' in R.N. Swason (ed.), *The use and abuse of time in Church history*, Studies in Church History, no. 37 (Woodbridge, 2002), pp 223-41. The first schism in English Methodism after Wesley's death saw internal accusations of financial malpractice, with some preachers accused, in one instance, of resembling "begging friars; and whining canting Jesuits": Hempton, 'A tale of preachers and beggars', p. 125. 'Enthusiasm' was a pejorative term customarily used by critics of Methodism.
[47] Hempton, 'Methodism in Irish society', p. 136.

To an ordinarily cultivated mind there was something extremely repulsive in his tears and groans and amorous ejaculations, in the coarse anthropomorphic familiarity and the unwavering dogmatism with which he dealt with the most sacred subjects, in the narrowness of his theory of life and his utter insensibility to many of the influences that expand and embellish it, in the mingled credulity and self-confidence with which he imagined that the whole course of nature was altered for his convenience.[48]

Further evidence of popular anti-Methodist sentiment is seen in the frequency by which itinerant Methodist ministers were attacked or forcibly prevented from preaching. A recent study of anti-Methodist crowds in eighteenth-century England concluded that this agitation was driven largely by ingrained localism and antipathy to what was perceived as outside interferences to King, Church and community.[49] Accounts of such disturbances in Ireland include those in Dublin city (1747), Cork city (1749-50), Waterford city (1773) and Enniskillen (1773).[50] In 1819 Methodists running a Sunday School in Tralee, County Kerry for the education of their own children were targeted by the local Church of Ireland curate, who was reportedly behind a campaign of threats and intimidation against parents and children attending the school.[51]

Methodists and street beggars: a case study of the Strangers' Friend Societies

From Methodism's early days in Ireland preachers and the laity were active in initiatives aimed at relieving poverty and sickness. Methodists founded charities such as the Widows' Alms Home and the Female Orphan School in Dublin in 1766 and 1804

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[48] William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A history of England in the eighteenth century* (7 Vols, London, 1913), iii, p. 100.
[49] Michael Francis Snape, 'Anti-Methodism in eighteenth-century England: the Pendle Forest riots of 1748' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xlix, no. 2 (Apr. 1998), pp 257-81.
[50] Cooney, *Methodists in Ireland*, pp 30-37.
[51] John Busteed to Charles Grant, 28 Sept. 1819 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1819/535).

respectively,[52] and the Association of Friends of the Sick Poor in Waterford in 1790.[53] In Cork city, Methodists founded and ran the Benevolent Society,[54] while members of the Dublin community established an association for the assistance of impoverished elderly men.[55] Preachers also occasionally provided chaplaincy services in institutions for the poor and deviant, such as a Brother Dobbin, who in the 1830s was preaching in the Clonmel House of Industry every Friday to around forty inmates.[56]

The most significant of these philanthropic initiatives were the Strangers' Friend Societies, which spread across Ireland and Britain between 1785 and the middle of the next century. As with the statistical and mendicity society movements, analysed in Chapters Two and Four respectively, Strangers' Friend Societies constituted a movement comprising individual entities that exhibited similar characteristics: their founders shared similar socio-economic backgrounds and moral outlooks on society; they were driven by mutual interests to establish these philanthropic organisations; the workings of the various charities were known to other societies; and there was an exchange of information between the various charities, representing the transmission of information on social questions in this period. In the case of the Strangers' Friend Societies, the founders were invariably Methodist men, typically from the lower-middle or middle classes, and were located in urban centres. The transmission of information between the various societies is best represented in the personage of Rev. Adam Clarke, a leading Methodist minister and theologian, and who founded Strangers' Friend

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[52] F. Jeffrey, *Irish Methodism: an historical account of its traditions, theology and influence* (Belfast, 1964), p. 69; *Dublin charities, being a handbook of Dublin philanthropic organisations and charities; including benevolent and educational organisations; shelters, refuges, orphanages, hospitals, reformatories, industrial schools, &c. &c., in, or applicable to Ireland* (Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1902]), pp 115, 135.
[53] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland*, p. 210.
[54] Thomas Dix Hincks, *A short account of the different charitable institutions of the city of Cork, with remarks* (Cork, 1802), p. 28.
[55] C.H. Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland. Vol. II: the middle age* (3 vols, Belfast and London, 1886), ii, p. 302.
[56] *Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Magazine and Miscellany*, xi, no. 21 (Mar. 1834), p. 92.

Societies in four cities in Ireland and England. With each new charity, Clarke drew on the experience gained in his earlier initiatives.

The relief provided by the societies, typically money, food and clothes, was limited to industrious individuals and families who, if assisted through a temporary distress, were likely to return to 'habits of industry'. For example, an artisan's tools that had been pawned were sometimes redeemed, while the arrears of indebted prisoners were settled by the charity.[57] As the title of the charities suggested, non-local 'strangers' were also provided with relief, most commonly by assisting them in returning home, either to Britain or elsewhere in Ireland. The influence for targeting the 'strange' poor derived from two biblical passages: "But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born amongst you, and thou shalt love him as thyself" (Leviticus 19:34) and "I was a stranger, and ye took me in; sick, and ye visited me; naked, and ye clothed me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me…In as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:35-36).[58]

The first Strangers' Friend Society was founded in London in 1785 by John Gardner, a retired soldier. One penny a week was collected from members and distributed among the poor of their neighbourhood. The London charity met with the approval of John Wesley, who wrote to Gardner: 'My Dear Brother; I like the design and rules of your little Society, and hope you will do good to many.' Wesley offered a subscription of 3*d*.

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[57] *Annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society, (founded in 1790) for visiting and relieving distressed strangers and the resident sick poor, in Dublin and its vicinity; with an account of some of the cases relieved, and list of subscribers for 1840* (Dublin, 1841), p. 18; *For the year 1806. The annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society, as established in Dublin, in 1790* (Dublin, 1807), pp 11-12.

[58] For the societies' use of these passages in their literature, see the title pages of [Adam Clarke], *The nature, design, and general rules of the Strangers' Friend Society, as established in Dublin, 1790* (Dublin, 1799) and *The report of the Strangers' Friend Society, for the year 1803. Instituted in the year 1790* (Dublin, 1803).

a week for the new charity.[59] The model of the London charity was embraced and adapted by Adam Clarke, who founded the Bristol Strangers' Friend Society the following year,[60] on foot of which he established societies in Dublin, Manchester and Liverpool in the early and mid-1790s.[61] By the turn of the nineteenth century Strangers' Friend Societies had also been formed by Methodists in Leeds, Bath, York, Hull and Bradford.[62] To date, societies have also been identified in Rochester, Stockport, Burnley and Edinburgh.[63]

Methodists also founded a Belfast Strangers' Friend Society but this organisation had a somewhat disjointed existence. A society by this name was briefly active in the mid-1790s before being revived in 1808, only to be dissolved one year later upon the establishment of the town's House of Industry at Berry Street, near the Smithfield market. This latter institution performed similar functions to the Strangers' Friend

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[59] In a letter to Wesley, dated December 1785, Gardner informed him that objects of the charity 'must be poor strangers, having no parish, or friend at hand to help them': John Telford (ed.), *The letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. sometime fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford* (Epworth Press ed., 8 vols, London, 1931), vii, p. 308

[60] For the foundation of the Bristol society in 1786, see newspaper notice in *Bristol Mercury*, 2 Sept. 1822; *Chilcott's descriptive history of Bristol, ancient and modern; or, a guide to Bristol, Clifton, and the hotwells: containing an account of the Bristol riots. With topographical notices of the neighbouring villages etc.* (4th ed., Bristol, n.d. [*c*. 1840]), p. 197; *The report of the Strangers' Friend Society, instituted in the year 1786, for the purpose of visiting and relieving sick and distressed strangers, and other poor, at their respective habitations; for the year ending June 24th, 1833. With its rules, and a list of subscriptions and donations* (Bristol, 1833).

[61] [Clarke], *Nature, design and general rules of the Stranger's Friend Society*. An earlier version of this text gives the incorrect date of 1791 for the Dublin society's establishment: [Adam Clarke], *The nature, design, rules and regulations of a charitable institution termed the Stranger's Friend: begun in Dublin, in 1791, and afterwards established in Manchester, Liverpool, and other places, humbly recommended to the consideration of all those who earnestly wish to ameliorate the condition of the poor* (n.p., n.d. [1798]). See also J.B.B. Clarke (ed.), *An account of the religious and literary life of Adam Clarke, LL.D, F.A.S., etc., etc., written by one who was intimately acquainted with him from his boyhood to the sixtieth year of his age* (3 vols, New York, 1837), i, pp 305-6. For the Manchester society, see G.B. Hindle, 'A venture in charity, 1791-1803' in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, xxxvi (June 1967), pp 41-8.

[62] Robert F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the common people of the eighteenth century* (London, 1945), pp 212-16.

[63] Timothy Stuart Alexander-Macquiban, 'British Methodism and the poor: 1785-1840' (PhD thesis, Dept. of Theology, University of Birmingham: 2000), pp 94-110; G.B. Hindle, *Provision for the relief of the poor in Manchester, 1754-1826* (Manchester, 1975), p. 82; Edward Baines, *History, directory, and gazetteer, of the county palatine of Lancaster; with a variety of commercial and statistical information in two volumes* (2 vols, Liverpool, 1824), i, p. 566; 'Review of E.B. Ramsay, *The nature and obligations of Christian benevolence*' in *Edinburgh Literary Journal*, ii, no. 31 (13 June 1829), p. 22.

Society, and the members of the Methodist charity undertook the decision to dissolve their own body. This was done so as to prevent duplication of relief to the poor and subscriptions from the public, and Methodists co-operated in the establishment of the House of Industry.[64] The minute books of the Belfast Charitable Society, which ran the city's poor house, reveal a reference to the Belfast Strangers' Friend Society from this period. In June 1809 the former body resolved that 'a Female Lunatic, name unknown, recommended by the Strangers' Friend Society, be admitted into this House'.[65] A Belfast branch was again in operation in the late-1820s and into the 1830s, but little is known of its establishment, activities or the span of its existence.[66] In its approaches to poverty the Belfast Strangers' Friend Society mirrored other sister organisations. Meetings were held weekly at the Methodist Chapel at Donegall Square where communications were read, cases considered and visitors appointed. In public pronouncements the society stated that it endeavoured to identify and relieve 'deep retired distress in those abodes of wretchedness which at once conceal want and despondency' but insisted that, firstly, applicants were visited before being relieved, 'to prevent imposition' and to 'relieve real distress', and, secondly, that relief was given 'without partiality to sect or denomination'.[67] In the final year or so of its existence the society provided food, clothing and fuel to 685 families (comprising 1,942 people) many of whom were in 'the most deplorable distress'.[68] Scant evidence reveals the existence, but little else, of Strangers' Friend Societies in Armagh, Waterford and Cork. The autobiography of Methodist preacher Matthew Lanktree refers to the establishment

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[64] John Joseph Monaghan, 'A social and economic history of Belfast, 1801-1825' (PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1940), pp 446-7.
[65] Belfast Charitable Society, committee minute book, 17 June 1809 (Linen Hall Library, Belfast Charitable Society committee minute books, book no. 9).
[66] *BNL*, 29 Jan., 9 Sept. 1828, 19 Aug. 1836. However, the society is not mentioned in the Poor Inquiry commission's detailed outline of Belfast charitable institutions: *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 7-17.
[67] *BNL*, 30 Dec. 1808.
[68] Ibid., 15 Sept. 1809.

in Armagh in November 1808 of 'an association for the occasional relief of sick poor, and distressed strangers', which exerted a 'powerful influence on the public, removing prejudice, and exciting a spirit of benevolence and liberality'.[69] A Strangers' Friend Society was also in existence in Cork for 'the relief of destitute strangers, who, of all objects of distress, should not be left to contingent aid'.[70]

The geographical distribution of Strangers' Friend Societies throughout Ireland and Britain in the early-nineteenth century is illustrated in Map 8.1. The charities, as can be seen, were invariably urban bodies, catering for the poor of large towns and cities. This upsurge of urban-based charitable societies in this period was not particular to the Strangers' Friend Societies but was to be seen across Ireland and Britain. It was in the towns and cities that slums were developing, concerned philanthropists undertook pioneering social surveys, and the rising middle classes sought to fulfil their social obligations, and also protect their interests, by engaging in charitable work in the context of a culture of association. As such, towns and cities contained the middle class philanthropists who would establish, operate and financially support charitable societies. In the case of the Strangers' Friend Societies, they were founded where there was a large enough and active Methodist community, and throughout Ireland and Britain, that was in the towns and cities.

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[69] Matthew Lanktree, *A biographical narrative of Matthew Lanktree, Wesleyan minister: embracing a period of upwards of forty years; comprising numerous characteristic sketches of co[n]temporaries, and historical notices of the rise, progress and influence of Methodism in various parts of Ireland* (Belfast, 1836), p. 206. I am grateful to Rev. Robin Roddie for this reference.
[70] Will West, *A directory, and picture, of Cork and its environs* (Cork, 1810), pp 80-81. For the Waterford society, see R.H. Ryland, *The history, topography and antiquities of the county and city of Waterford; with an account of the present state of the peasantry of that part of the south of Ireland* (London, 1824), p. 202.

The exclusion of street beggars from relief

Strict stipulations prohibiting street beggars from the assistance of Strangers' Friend Societies were universally imposed. The Manchester society asserted that only 'proper objects' were to receive assistance from the charity and 'all kinds of Street Beggars, Vagrants and many of those who are found in the different Lodging Houses are excluded'.[71] In an 1830 newspaper notice seeking continued public support, the Bristol society quoted from a recent benefactor, who claimed that 'giving alms to mendicants, without any inquiry as to their necessities, appears to be an encouragement to an idle profession; and as a system of intimidation is now adopted by these vagrants, it is a duty incumbent to resist their demands'.[72] The societies embraced the widespread suspicion of the idle, able-bodied poor and concentrated their efforts on relieving those deemed likely to return to habits of industry.[73]

The Dublin society imposed a similar exclusionary policy towards mendicants. In a 1799 pamphlet, Dr Adam Clarke informed his readers that 'however deplorable the state of street Beggars may appear, they are not in general the most necessitous', while later advising subscribers that mendicants 'are not proper objects of your Charity'.[74] Instead, the Dublin organisation focused its resources on the poor who inhabited wretched cellars and garrets throughout the city's slums, who did not resort to public begging and, in many instances, had no network of relatives or friends on which to fall back. Subscribers were assured that those relieved by the charity formed 'a most deserving class of the community. It will at once be seen that they are not the noisy importunate

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[71] Quoted in Hindle, *Provision for the relief of the poor in Manchester*, p. 85.
[72] *Bristol Mercury*, 21 Dec. 1830.
[73] Timothy Stuart Alexander-Macquiban, 'Friends of all? The Wesleyan response to urban poverty in Britain and Ireland, 1785-1840' in Richard P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The poor and the people called Methodists* (Nashville, TN, 2002), pp 139-41.
[74] [Clarke], *Nature, design, and general rules of the Stranger's Friend Society, Dublin* (1799), p. 3; ibid., p. 6.

beggars, who impede our progress in the streets, hang about our doors, taking every opportunity to exhibit their misery'.[75] At the height of the 1817-19 typhus fever epidemic, when the numbers of mendicant poor wandering through the country multiplied, the Benevolent Strangers' Friend Society, which broke away from the original body around 1816,[76] praised the recently-formed Mendicity Society for removing from the public eye 'the painful and obtrusive sight, of clamorous street beggars', before continuing: 'But many deserving poor, whose cause we now plead, never appear in the streets, but when lawfully employed: their misery retires with them to their lonely dwellings, where their wants are discovered, and the hand of mercy is stretched out to save them from famishing.'[77] The Poor Inquiry's report in the mid-1830s on the Dublin Strangers' Friend Society observed that

> the persons relieved are all those in distress and of good character, except common beggars. Inmates of the Mendicity, or persons who had recently been so, unless in a way of obtaining a livelihood, are not considered objects for relief by this society, which is chiefly confined to persons who have some mode of living, trade, or occupation, and who with some little help might obtain a livelihood.[78]

The Strangers' Friend Societies restricted their charity to the industrious, independent poor whose unseen, silent suffering was borne in stark contrast to that of the poor whose destitution was seen as being self-inflicted. Like most charities the Strangers' Friend Societies abhorred the visibility and nuisance of street begging and this 'residuum' was kept firmly beyond the scope of the societies' benevolence. This applied not only to the mendicant poor but to individuals whose unemployment was caused through their involvement in 'combination'. 'If he is a combinator or coalesces with such, he is

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[75] *Annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society, (founded in 1790) for visiting and relieving distressed strangers, and the resident sick poor, in Dublin and its vicinity; with an account of some of the cases relieved, and the list of subscribers for 1831* (Dublin, 1832), p. 4.

[76] Robin P. Roddie, 'Keeping the faith: Ireland's Primitive Methodism' in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, lvii, no. 6 (Oct. 2010), pp 225-45.

[77] *Annual report for the year 1818, of the Benevolent or Strangers' Friend Society, (originated in the year 1790)* (Dublin, 1819), pp 5-6.

[78] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 16.

refused relief,' the Poor Inquiry was told by one of the society's officers.[79] Despite Wesley's lifelong mission of extending a charitable hand to all persons in need, Methodist charities adhered strictly to contemporary distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. The testimonies of several officers of the society to the Poor Inquiry reveal that the merits of helping the 'deserving' poor, while excluding those whose destitution was self-inflicted, prevailed throughout the institution. Such sentiments were not merely for the purposes of public pronouncements but were deeply held by the Methodist members of the charity. Treasurer Francis White spoke of the fundamental importance of the visitors investigating each case so as to determine the moral disposition of the applicants. 'The grounds of refusal of relief are want of good character, or the same person attempting to obtain relief from more than one visitor, or having been recently relieved; by want of character I mean where distress has been brought on by drunkenness, extravagance, or indolence, or breach of moral duties.' White continued by stating that 'there is nothing exclusive in the institution; all persons in distress and of good character are eligible for relief, except common beggars'.[80]

One of the charity's two secretaries, bookseller J.O. Bonsall, echoed this view, stating that some recipients of relief were 'persons reduced from respectable situations in society, and which are attended to, unless it is discovered that they have become reduced, and continue poor, from their own faults'.[81] Bonsall held that 'mere beggars' were catered for by the city's mendicity society and, therefore, fell outside the remit of the Methodist organisation. This moral classification of the poor was shared by Arthur Jones, the other secretary of the charity, who stated that the Strangers' Friend Society catered neither for persons relieved by the Dublin Mendicity Society 'nor persons so

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[79] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 18.
[80] Ibid., p. 17.
[81] Ibid., p. 18.

low as that in circumstances'.[82] Public appeals also highlighted the temporal and moral

disparities of the clientele relieved by the two organisations.[83]

The identification of industrious, honest and 'deserving' cases was crucial to the

Strangers' Friend Societies' work. If assistance was provided to morally dubious

characters, it would undermine the incentive to labour and be self-sufficient. A system

of visitation to the homes of the poor without prior notice was a mutual trait of these

Methodist charities across Ireland and Britain. The benefits were numerous. Home

visitation allowed the charity's volunteers to gain a first-hand insight into the lives and

suffering of the poor of their locality, increasing their humility and sympathy. The

importance of visiting without notice was designed so as to detect instances of fraud,

such as multiple applications for relief to the same charity or the concurrent receipt of

assistance from more than one charity. These were regular concerns for the large

amount of charities competing for the donations of Dublin's inhabitants. An officer of

the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society told the Poor Inquiry: 'I have known

persons relieved by the Strangers' Friend Society, who received money from us in the

same week, and almost at the same time.'[84] The Dublin society's object was to 'make

every enquiry to prevent imposition, and then, without partiality to sect, party, or

denomination, relieve *real distress*'.[85] Frank Prochaska has argued that Methodists were

among the first to make home visiting a part of their charitable endeavours.[86] While

domestic visitations were a key part of the emerging charitable societies in this period,

the practice was not an innovation of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

The Wittenberg *Beutelordnung*, an outline for a civic poor relief scheme believed to

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[82] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 19.
[83] *FJ*, 7 Dec., 1818, 4 Feb. 1819.
[84] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 6. See also ibid., p. 17.
[85] *Annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society, 1803*, p. 4; *Annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society, 1806*, pp 5-6.
[86] Frank Prochaska, *The voluntary impulse: philanthropy in modern Britain* (London, 1988), p. 44.

have been written by German reformer Martin Luther around 1520, included the provision of visitors to poor householders 'to inquire diligently into their need and deprivation…for there are many these days who are ashamed to beg and in extreme poverty'.[87]

Home visitations also gave the Methodist volunteers a greater opportunity to discuss religious matters with the poor and to effect moral improvement in them. In the total reformation of the individual, the 'spiritual welfare' of the poor was as important as the improvement of their physical state. By directing the poor to Christ 'as the unfailing Source of light and happiness', the society taught them 'that in him they may find a sovereign balm for their afflicted spirits. It is believed that these efforts have not been wholly vain, and that many of these children of sorrow have experienced the consolations of true religion.'[88] In its 1851 annual report, the London Strangers' Friend Society boasted of the reforming impact that its visitors had exerted on reformed sinners, who were 'roused to a sense of moral and religious duty'. The visitors' actions proved, it was held, that the destitute were capable of redemption, through a personal moral revolution: 'Drunkards have become sober; Sabbath-breakers and profane scoffers have learned to hallow the day of the Lord; the idle have become industrious; and many who once pursued the broad and headlong paths of sin and death, have been turned from the error of their ways, have been blessed with true repentance, and are now endeavouring to amend their lives according to God's holy words.'[89] This aspect of

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[87] The English translation of this document is to be found in Donald Durnbaugh, *Every need supplied: mutual aid and Christian community in the Free Churches, 1525-1675* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp 215-18, quoted in Carter Lindberg, '"There should be no beggars among Christians": Karlstadt, Luther and the origins of Protestant poor relief' in *Church History*, xlvi, no. 3 (Sept. 1977), p. 327.

[88] *Report of the Strangers' Friend Society, (founded in 1790) for visiting and relieving distressed strangers, and the resident sick poor in Dublin and its vicinity, with a list of subscribers, for the year ending 31st December, 1851* (Dublin, 1852), p. 6.

[89] *Report of the Benevolent, or Strangers' Friend Society, established 1795, for the purpose of visiting and relieving sick and distressed strangers, and other poor, at their respective habitations in London and*

Methodist charity was undoubtedly influenced by Wesley's lifelong obligation, certainly since his time in the Oxford Holy Club, to visit the poor. Drawing inspiration from the example of Jesus in working among the sick and distressed, Wesley demanded that he and other Methodists had personal contact with the people they were relieving.

The societies' annual reports published short biographies of individuals and families that had been relieved during the previous year. These case studies were carefully chosen and aimed to assure current subscribers that their money was being well spent, while convincing prospective benefactors of the efficacy of the charity's work. As James Kelly has argued, the publishing of such vignettes 'provided the public with a distinct impression of effectively targeted relief'.[90] The merits of the cases were outlined, noting the past industriousness of the individual/s involved, the manner of the society's intervention and the (usually) satisfactory outcome. Representative vignettes in the Dublin society's reports included: a man, married with six children, whose destitution was caused by his 'having failed in business' and suffered two subsequent attacks of fever; Catherine Kelly was left with seven children when her husband went abroad 'for want of employ[ment]'; James Cooney of 67 Plunkett Street was 'known to have been an industrious man (by trade a shoemaker)'; Catherine Crowder of 14 Cole Alley and Ann Lynch were both widows with children. J. Usher of 57 Plunkett Street, who had, it was claimed, previously been in receipt of an annual salary of £1,000, lived in a garret with his partner and child, whose poverty was such that he was forced to sell the family's prayer book.[91] In the report for 1828, the reader is told of a man, 'J. McC.', a resident of 4 Thomas Court, located just off Thomas Street, who 'was once

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its vicinity: with an account of some of the cases visited, and a list of the subscribers, in the year ending September 30, 1851 (London, 1850-51), p. xl.

[90] James Kelly, 'Charitable societies: their genesis and development, 1720-1800' in James Kelly and Martyn J. Powell (eds), *Clubs and societies in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2010), p. 105.

[91] [Clarke], *Nature, design, and general rules of the Stranger's Friend Society* (1799), pp 19-23.

respectable but, through losses and disappointments, was obliged to relinquish his business'. He and his family were assisted by the society for a few weeks before moving to the country.[92]

Conclusion

Upon its emergence in mid-eighteenth-century England and Ireland, and its expansion thereafter, Methodism was marked by a focused mission to relieve the temporal and spiritual wants of the poor. This mission was instilled with its unique doctrinal approach by Methodism's founder, John Wesley. This chapter has argued that throughout his life, Wesley appears to have viewed and treated the poor indiscriminately, not drawing the distinction (as most contemporaries did) between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving'. Wesley's view was somewhat influenced by Catholic approaches, in seeing the poor as temporal representations of Christ. Their suffering mirrored His suffering, and to relieve them was to relieve Him.

Methodists shared many of the concerns and fears of street beggars held by contemporaries of other religions. The fears of the commercial middle classes were represented in the society's exclusion of 'combinators' from receiving charitable assistance. Of more pertinence to this study, members of the Strangers' Friend Society in Dublin expressed revulsion of the visibility of beggars in the city streets, and the importunate soliciting mendicant was habitually contrasted with the meritorious poor artisan or labourer, suffering in resigned silence. The society maintained a policy of

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[92] *Annual report of the Strangers' Friend Society, founded in 1790: for visiting and relieving distressed strangers, and the resident sick poor, at their habitations, in Dublin and its vicinity; with an account of some of the cases relieved, and a list of subscribers, for 1828* (Dublin, 1829), p. 12.

excluding 'common' street beggars from its charity, leaving such individuals to the charity of the Dublin Mendicity Society.

Chapter Nine

Quaker approaches to begging and alms-giving

Introduction

In a letter to the Chief Secretary Charles Grant circa November 1820, Anne Marie

Byrne, described as 'a mendicant', petitioned the state for assistance.[1] Byrne, who also

went by the surname Hodges and was known to subsist in Dublin city 'by writing

begging petitions', claimed that her children had died and she was on the brink of

starvation.[2] Informing Grant of assistance she had previously received, Byrne wrote:

> Only for M Daltons family I should be starved to Death with cold and hunger
> – my shoes was wore out going to the Park. Mr Dalton gave me money to get
> shoes. Quakers is good to every one. The[y] never ask the person where the[y]
> go to worship, the[y] show charity to every perswasion, according as the[y]
> know the want.[3]

In the end, the city's Charitable Association undertook to relieve Byrne, but solely on a

once-off basis, as the charity did 'not wish to encourage persons of this description'.[4]

What is significant about this vignette is the portrayal of Quakers and their attitudes to

poverty, begging and charity. From her letter it is evident that Byrne is not a Quaker, as

she speaks of the members of the Society of Friends in the third person. Her views are,

therefore, those of an outsider. The specific details regarding her benefactors – the

Daltons of the Coombe – are helpful. The evidence suggests that the family referred to

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[1] S. Hill to Chief Secretary's Office, n.d. [*c*. Nov. 1820] (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/909/4).
[2] S. Hill to Chief Secretary's Office; Letter from the Charitable Society of Dublin regarding Anne Marie Byrne, 8 Nov. 1820 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/909/5); Anne Marie Byrne to Chief Secretary's Office, n.d. [*c*. Nov. 1820] (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/909/1/A).
[3] Anne Marie Byrne to Charles Grant, n.d. [*c*. Nov. 1820] (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/909/3). For Byrne's identification of the Daltons as being based at The Coombe, see Anne Marie Byrne to Chief Secretary's Office.
[4] Letter from the Charitable Society of Dublin regarding Anne Marie Byrne, 8 Nov. 1820.

was that of Stephen Dalton, a 'Grocer and Oil-merchant' at number 27 the Coombe.[5]

The relevance to this chapter of Byrne's testimony is her generalised positive views towards the Quakers and how they treated the poor. She claimed that Quakers relieved indiscriminately, without regard to one's religious denomination. They did not seek to convert, but to feed and clothe, the poor. Whereas popular and historiographical attention on Irish Quakerism has focused on their admirable relief efforts during the Great Famine, here is an instance, a quarter of a century before the appearance of the potato blight, where Quakers were praised by a Dublin street beggar as being truly Christian givers of unqualified and non-judgemental relief.

This chapter will examine Quaker attitudes to begging and alms-giving in nineteenth-century Irish urban centres. As with other chapters examining the perceptions and responses of churches, this analysis shall firstly outline the social and cultural position of Quakerism (which constituted a religious society and not a church) in nineteenth-century Ireland, before considering individual and corporate responses to street begging. Members of a numerically marginal sect in Ireland, Quakers made notable contributions in the spheres of business and philanthropy. Wherever they have settled, Quakers have distinguished themselves in their organisational efficiency.[6] It may be suggested that a primary cause of this is the truly democratic and egalitarian structure of Quakerism. As a religious sect without clergymen or a hierarchy, the onus is on all Friends to involve themselves in the administration of the religious society. Furthermore, their exclusion, as a dissenting sect, from participation in political life until the 1830s drove Quakers to

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[5] *Wilson's Dublin directory for the year 1822…*, p. 60.
[6] See Julia B. Rauch, 'Quakers and the founding of the Philadelphia Society for Organising Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendicancy' in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, xcviii, no. 4 (Oct. 1974), pp 438-55.

focus their energies elsewhere.[7] As will be outlined below, these energies were to be seen in Quakers' disproportionately high level of participation in charitable societies. It will be demonstrated that as members of a religious denomination that did not adhere to any dogma, Quakers' approaches to social questions, such as poverty and begging, were not restricted by theory. Pragmatism marked Quaker responses to such matters. Yet, certain attitudes were held which mirrored those of other denominations, and indeed fell into line with the views of wider respectable society – namely, an abhorrence of idleness and dependency, and encouragement of independence, industry and true charity. Prior to the catastrophe of the Great Famine, Quaker meetings limited their organised poor relief to distressed members of their own Society, thus allowing individual members to engage on their own terms with the poor of other denominations. In the case of Anne Marie Byrne she was assisted by a Quaker acting in an individual capacity and not by the corporate structure of the monthly meeting.

Quakerism

The Society of Friends (Quakers) emerged as one of the most significant radical sects in mid-seventeenth-century England and quickly spread to Ireland. The Society was founded in the middle of the century by George Fox (1624-1691),[8] who preached the immediacy of Christ's teaching and example, and that truth was to be attained not by outward sacraments but through an 'Inner Light'. According to Richard S. Harrison,

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[7] The first Quaker to take his seat in Westminster as an M.P. was Joseph Pease (1799-1872) who, following his election in South Durham, was allowed in 1833 to affirm rather than swear an oath of loyalty: see A.F. Pollard and Charlotte Fell-Smith, *rev*. M.W. Kirby, 'Pease, Edward' in *ODNB*, xliii, pp 350-52; *Report from select committee on Quakers' affirmation*, H.C. 1833 (6), xii, 137; *Parliamentary Review and Family Magazine*, ii, no. 4 (1833), pp 212-13, 219. The first Irish Quaker elected as an M.P. was Jonathan Pim, who entered parliament in 1865: see Bridget Hourican and James Quinn, 'Pim, Jonathan' in *DIB*, viii, pp 137-8.
[8] H. Larry Ingle, 'Fox, George' in *ODNB*, xx, pp 637-46.

'this was the light of Christ within, the light of conscience and of the Holy Spirit which alone could illuminate the scriptures'.[9] Central to Quaker worship at a meeting is waiting in silent expectation for guidance from God. The inward experience of God trumps outward expressions of religious fidelity.[10] The patience and concentration required for this form of worship is such that idolatry and decorations in meeting houses are considered superfluous, and Quakers' places of worship are noted for their simplicity in style.[11] Given the purity of the direct relationship between man and God, Quakers see no need for a clergyman, a human intermediary, in their worship. At meetings Friends may contribute spontaneously to the ministry, to share their experiences and insights with their fellow worshippers. An article carried in the *Belfast Newsletter* in November 1811 is useful in describing a Quaker meeting. In this instance, the meeting was held in a Presbyterian meeting house on Donegall Street:

> Precisely at the hour appointed, two females neatly attired, accompanied by an old and respectable looking man, took their seats…The meeting-house was soon filled, and among the audience there were some sailors, though not many, and but a few of the Society of Quakers. There was silence for half an hour. The youngest of the females (she appeared to be about 30) then rose, and in a calm and solemn manner offered up a most fervent and impressive prayer. This done, she sat down, and all was silence again. She then rose a second time and delivered a serious exhortation to all who were present at this gathering, as she called it. The tendency of her address was to persuade [those

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[9] Richard S. Harrison, 'Spiritual perception and the evolution of the Irish Quakers' in Kevin Herlihy (ed.), *The religion of Irish dissent, 1650-1800* (Dublin, 1996), p. 69.

[10] Some Quakers contrasted their silent waiting on God with the emotion-driven outpourings of Methodist 'enthusiasm' in worship. This is illustrated in the Welsh Quaker John Griffith's recollection of Methodists attending a Quaker meeting in Parsonstown (Birr) in 1749 – 'I think no people are more at a loss what to do with silence in worship': 'A journal of the life, travels and labours, in the work of the ministry, of John Griffith, late of Chelmsford, in Essex, in Great Britain, formerly of Darby, in Pennsylvania' in *The [American] Friend's Library: comprising journals, doctrinal treatises, and other writings of members of Religious Society of Friends*, v (1841), p. 371.

[11] David M. Butler, *The Quaker meeting houses of Ireland: an account of the some 150 meeting houses and 100 burial grounds in Ireland, from the arrival of the movement in 1654 to the present time, and a guide to the sources* (Dublin, 2004), p. 6. English Quaker and traveller William Bennett wrote of his entry to the town of Ballina, County Mayo in 1847, where he held an impromptu meeting with two co-religionists: 'I think I was never more sensible of the value and privilege of our simple views, in the belief that acceptable worship may be performed, where "two or three" are gathered together in silence and retirement, without dependence upon place, or building, or appointed ministration': William Bennett, *Narrative of a recent journey of six weeks in Ireland, in connexion with the subject of supplying small seed to some of the remoter districts…* (London, 1847), p. 12.

present] to believe in the word of God and in Jesus Christ his beloved son…After speaking for about twenty minutes, she sat down, and silence again prevailed. – She then rose a third time…After a variety of other suitable admonitions, she terminated her discourse. The old man rose and made a short address, principally founded upon that chapter in the Acts of the Apostles which relates the visions of Cornelius and Peter. He concluded by warmly exhorting the audience to avoid taking the name of God in vain. He then sat down, and after a short silence the two females and he shook hands, after which he rose and said the meeting was broken up….[12]

To Quakers the individual experience of the Holy Spirit is prioritised above adherence to Scriptures, although the Bible remains a foundational text. The living of a Christian life, in both domestic and business spheres, matters more than adherence to a Christian creed; religion is something to be experienced.[13]

In early Quakerism, simplicity in one's life, for instance in clothing and in speech, was designed to ensure one's dedication of time, energy and spiritual devotion to God. Elizabeth Lamb's retrospective account of her life as a Quaker in Belfast in the 1830s and 1840s recalls that frivolous entertainments, such as dancing and theatre-going, were frowned upon within her community, and she also reveals contemporary attitudes towards clothing and cultural expectations: 'No pretty bright ribbons were allowed, or jewellery, or curls and as for flowers and feathers and plaited hair, they were regarded with horror. We thought far too much about dress in those days…The men Friends wore the plain collarless coat and white cravats, the brims of their hats varied in width, some broader and some narrower.'[14] The equality of women has been a cornerstone of Quaker belief and practice since the mid-seventeenth century. In the early modern period, and certainly until the twentieth century, the prominent role of women in Quakerism

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[12] *BNL*, 5 Nov. 1811.

[13] For a useful outline of modern Quaker beliefs, see Philip Jacob, 'What Friends believe' at the Quakers in Ireland website (http://www.quakers-in-ireland.ie/about-us/principles/beliefs/) (18 Oct. 2013).

[14] Quoted in Sandra King, *History of the Religious Society of Friends, Frederick Street, Belfast* (Belfast, 1999), pp 16-17. Quakers were commonly seen by other denominations as dour, strict individuals with little time for leisure or frivolity. For instance, among the characters portrayed at a fancy dress ball in Dublin Castle in May 1819 were 'a Quaker, sermonizing against gaiety and dissipation' and 'a Quaker, remarkably well dressed, and of very grave deportment': *BNL*, 14 May 1819.

contrasted with wider societal norms, by which women faced a much restricted role in public life. Unconditional opposition to violence and war are other long-cherished beliefs of Quakers.

Quakerism has long been associated with activism in campaigns focused on matters of moral improvement and social justice. As one of the dissenting sects barred from parliament, Quakers focused their energies in the fields of commercial and philanthropic endeavours, and flourished. They were prominent in campaigns launched on behalf of disadvantaged groups such as slaves, aborigines and prisoners.[15] Among well-known Quakers were penal reformer Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), educationalist Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838), anti-slavery agitator James Cropper, and Joseph Sturge (1793-1859), who campaigned against slavery and for extension of the franchise, peace, teetotalism, Sunday schools and public parks.[16] Demonstrative of the dissemination throughout the British Isles of ideas of social and moral improvement, these individuals were among a number of influential English social reformers of the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who visited Ireland in their endeavour to spread their social agenda.[17] Quakers were also to be found among the many travellers who published accounts of their time in Ireland, and this is well represented in C.J. Woods's recent research guide on travellers' accounts. Of the eighty-seven travel accounts identified by

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[15] Christine Kinealy, 'Potatoes, providence and philanthropy: the role of private charity during the Irish Famine' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The meaning of the Famine* (London and New York, 2000), p. 152.
[16] Francisca de Haan, 'Fry [née Gurney], Elizabeth' in *ODNB*, xxi, pp 92-95; G.F. Bartle, 'Lancaster, Joseph' in ibid., xxxii, pp 360-63; M.W. Kirby, 'Cropper, James' in ibid., xiv, pp 406-7; Alex Tyrell, 'Sturge, Joseph' in ibid., liii, pp 240-41.
[17] Elizabeth Fry and Joseph John Gurney, *Report addressed to the Marquess Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, respecting their late visit to that country* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1827). For Joseph Lancaster's visits to Ireland, see *The Correspondent* [Dublin], 9 Mar. 1815; Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast: an illustrated history* (Belfast, 1983), p. 81. For Cropper, see James Cropper, *Present state of Ireland: with a plan for improving the condition of the people* (Liverpool, 1825). Sturge's visit is recorded in Stephen Hobhouse, *Joseph Sturge: his life and work* (London, 1919), p. 37.

Woods for the period 1798-1849, ten (11.5 per cent) were written by Quakers, predominantly English and American.[18]

Quakers in Ireland

The first Quaker meeting in Ireland was 'settled' in Lurgan in 1654 upon the initiative of William Edmundson (1627-1712), a grocer and former soldier in Cromwell's New Model Army.[19] By 1701, there were fifty-three Quaker meeting houses and an estimated 6,000 members in Ireland, representing approximately 0.3 per cent of the total population.[20] The figure for the mid-eighteenth century has been put at between 3,000 and 5,000.[21] According to an 1818 estimate, the number of Irish Quakers had 'much declined' since 1750, falling to an estimated 4,500 individuals who were spread across forty-two meetings; in Dublin, there were 130 families, comprising around 600 people.[22] In 1827 Quaker John Joseph Gurney, brother of Elizabeth Fry, observed: 'Belfast is the Liverpool of Ireland. A few years ago there were only two or three

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[18] C.J. Woods, *Travellers' accounts as source-material for Irish historians* (Dublin, 2009).

[19] Thomas Wight, *rev*. John Rutty, *A history of the rise and progress of the people called Quakers in Ireland, from the year 1653 to 1700. Exhibiting their Labours in the Gospel, their Zeal in the Promotion of Christian Discipline and Sufferings for Conscience-sake. Together with the Characters and Spiritual Experiences of some of their principal Ministers and Elders, and other Occurrences*, (Dublin, 1751), p. 342; Lawrence William White and Jessica March, 'Edmundson, William' in *DIB*, iii, pp 581-2.

[20] This is based on a total population in Ireland of around 2 million: K.H. Connell, *The population of Ireland 1750-1845* (Oxford, 1950), p. 4; S.J. Connolly, *Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760* (Oxford, 2002), p. 43.

[21] Connolly, *Religion, law and power*, p. 160.

[22] J. Warburton, J. Whitelaw and Robert Walsh, *History of the city of Dublin, from the earliest accounts to the present time; containing its annals, antiquities, ecclesiastical, history, and charters; its present extent, public buildings, schools, institutions, & c. to which are added biographical notices of eminent men, and copious appendices of its population, revenue, commerce, and literature* (2 vols, London, 1818), ii, pp 832, 835.

Friends; now there are thirty families.'[23] Quakers remained a small and obscure sect in Ireland, with 2,731 members in 1901, just 0.06 per cent of the population.[24]

Whereas the early Quakers were 'relatively humble farmers, traders, and artisans', they had by the mid-nineteenth century progressed up the social ladder and were prominent in the middle and upper middle-classes, particularly in the fields of textile manufacture, shipping, railway development, and retailing.[25] Warburton et al. claimed that in Dublin city, Quakers formed 'a highly respectable part of the commercial portion of the metropolis'.[26] This prominence in commercial affairs was not limited to the capital. In Cork city the Quakers were 'very wealthy, and engross the Woolen [sic] trade'; those in Waterford formed 'the most opulent and respectable part of the commercial interest of that town'; and the Clonmel Friends constituted 'the greater part of the wealthy Protestant population'.[27] In 1848 *The Nation* attributed Quakers' disproportionate success in business to 'a genealogy of industry…The Quaker character

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[23] Quoted in King, *History of the Religious Society of Friends*, p. 10.

[24] S.J. Connolly, 'Society of Friends' in idem. (ed.), *Oxford companion to Irish history* (2nd ed., Oxford, 2002), p. 548. The 1901 census put the total population at 4,458,775: W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 3.

[25] David Dickson, *New foundations: Ireland, 1660-1800* (2nd ed., Dublin, 2000), p. 135; Connolly, 'Society of Friends', p. 548; David Dickson, *Old world colony: Cork and south Munster, 1630-1830* (Cork, 2005), pp 410, 413; L.M. Cullen, *An economic history of Ireland since 1660* (London, 1978), p. 146. A burial register for the Lisburn Monthly Meeting in the first half of the nineteenth century shows a large number of farmers, grocers, merchants and shopkeepers in the local Quaker community: Lisburn Religious Society of Friends Monthly Meeting burial register (PRONI, Records of Religious Society of Friends in Ulster, MIC16/22). See also Richard S. Harrison, 'Dublin Quakers in business 1800-1850' (M. Litt thesis, 2 vols, University of Dublin, 1987).

[26] Warburton et al., *History of the city of Dublin*, ii, p. 835.

[27] Ibid., ii, p. 832. In 1797, Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas Hussey described the Quakers of Waterford as 'the most regular and industrious sect' in the city: quoted in Dáire Keogh, 'Evangelising the faith: Edmund Rice and the reformation of nineteenth-century Irish Catholicism' in Colm Lennon (ed.), *Confraternities and sodalities in Ireland: charity, devotion and sociability* (Dublin, 2012), p. 58. In the mid-1840s, the Society of Friends in Clonmel were 'a numerous, respectable, and wealthy class': *Slater's Directory for Munster, 1846,* p. 176. A Famine-era travel writer expressed his belief that all the flour-mills and stores in Clonmel belonged to Quakers who 'have made the trade of Clonmel, and that within the lifetime of the present generation': Alexander Somerville, *Letters from Ireland during the famine of 1847*, ed. K.D.M. Snell (1852; reprint Dublin, 1994), p. 50.

is synonymous with "one price", with frugality, neatness, and punctuality. The Quaker morality makes the best men of business in the world.'[28]

Commercial success and material wealth were not the universal experience of Irish Quakers and poverty was not unknown in Quaker communities. The existence in each monthly meeting of a poor committee, which existed to solely serve Quakers in distress, attests to this fact. The occasional personal vignette can also be extracted from the source material. For instance, the register for the Limerick House of Industry in the late-eighteenth century reveals a single individual among 2,908 inmates specifically identified as a Quaker. Admitted by compulsion on 28 August 1786, 19-year-old James Nicholson, who was from the 'North', died in the institution less than three months later.[29]

Despite their small numbers, Irish Quakers were far from marginal in the public sphere. As early as the final quarter of the seventeenth century Quaker Anthony Sharpe served as overseer of the poor and cessor of the poor in the parishes of St Catherine and St James.[30] In the associational culture of early-nineteenth-century Ireland, Quakers were prominent members of numerous voluntary organisations, particularly charitable societies. Silk merchant Samuel Bewley (1764-1837),[31] from one of Ireland's best known Quaker families, was among the most prominent philanthropists and civic leaders in Dublin. In 1820 alone, Bewley was a committee member or trustee of the following charitable societies: the Kildare Place Society, the Dublin Weekly and Sunday Schools, Simpson's Hospital for the Reception of Poor, Decayed, Blind and

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[28] *The Nation*, 22 Jan. 1848.
[29] David Fleming and John Logan (ed.), *Pauper Limerick: the register of the Limerick House of Industry 1774-1793* (IMC, Dublin, 2011), pp 62-3, inmate no. 1758.
[30] Raymond Gillespie (ed.), *The vestry records of the parishes of St Catherine and St James, Dublin, 1657-1692* (Dublin, 2004), p. 15.
[31] Helen Andrews, 'Bewley, Samuel' in *DIB*, i, pp 517-18.

Gouty Men, the Cork Street Fever Hospital, and the Dublin Mendicity Association.[32] In addition to his charitable work Bewley's involvement with the General Board of Health, the Royal Dublin Society and the Dublin Chamber of Commerce also attests to his sense of civic duty.[33] He lobbied the authorities at Dublin Castle on behalf of Friends who fell victim to the law and gave his name as a reference for one Friend seeking a government position.[34] Samuel Bewley was certainly not representative of the Dublin Quaker community at this period, as regards his prolific activism in voluntary bodies. But he provides an insight into the range of organisations in which Quakers were prominent members. From the mid-seventeenth century, Quakers were active in founding and operating charitable organisations in Dublin, such as the Meath Place Mission (founded 1686), the Cork Street Fever Hospital (1804), the Dorset Nourishment Dispensary (1816), the Liberty Crèche (1824) and the Strand Street Institute (1860).[35] Four of the six founding members of the Dublin Savings Bank, established to encourage thrift among the poor, were Quakers.[36] While Bloomfield Hospital, which opened in 1812, catered specifically for Friends suffering from mental derangement, every other charity

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[32] *The Gentleman's and citizen's almanac (Watson's) for 1820* (Dublin, 1820), pp 190, 193, 199, 200, 209. Other charitable societies in which he was involved were the Association for the Improvement of Prisons and of Prison Discipline in Ireland (committee member); St Catherine's parish Sunday school (joint-founder); Sick Poor Institution (committee member); Meath Hospital; the Hibernian Society for Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace; and the Society for Promoting the Comforts of the Poor (committee member): *A statement of the objects of the Association for the Improvement of Prisons and of Prison Discipline, in Ireland; together with some reports of particular gaols in that kingdom* (Dublin, 1819), p. 14; Helen Clayton, *To school without shoes: a brief history of the Sunday School Society for Ireland, 1809-1979* (n.p., n.d. [*c*. 1980]), pp 8-9; *Institution for administering medical aid to the Sick Poor, and assisting them and their families with the necessities of life during sickness; and for preventing the spreading of contagious diseases* (Dublin, 1810), p. 5; Andrews, 'Bewley, Samuel', p. 517; *The first number of reports of the Society in Dublin for Promoting the Comforts of the Poor. Vol. I* (London, 1800), p. iii.
[33] 'Establishment of a General Board of Health for Ireland', *Edinburgh medical and surgical journal*, xvi (Oct., 1820), p. 623; Andrews, 'Bewley, Samuel', p. 517; Kevin Bright, *The Royal Dublin Society, 1815-45* (Dublin, 2004), p. 96; L.M. Cullen, *Princes & pirates: the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, 1783-1983* (Dublin, 1983), p. 57.
[34] Petition from the Society of Friends to Chief Secretary Charles Grant, 1 June 1821 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/177); Letters from Joseph Morris to William Gregory, June and July 1821 (NAI, CSORP, CSO/RP/1821/1351).
[35] Margaret H. Preston, *Charitable words: women, philanthropy and the language of charity in nineteenth-century Dublin* (Wesport, CT, and London, 2004), pp 109-10.
[36] Harrison, 'Dublin Quakers in business', ii, p. 461.

driven by Quaker initiative was open to all.[37] Among the members of the Dublin Statistical Society in the mid-century were Jonathan Pim and Richard D. Webb, the latter of whom was a successful printer and served as the society's librarian.[38]

Corporate structure

Whereas Anglicanism and Presbyterianism in Ireland was organised at a local level through the parish and kirk sessions respectively, the lowest rung on the Quaker organisational ladder was the local meeting. At this local level, business meetings were held on a monthly basis, in addition to the weekly gatherings for Sunday worship. In the provinces of Leinster, Ulster and Munster – Connaught being excluded due to the lack of Quakers there – Quarterly Meetings were held four times per year. From these Quarterly Meetings representatives were appointed to attend the national Yearly Meeting.[39] The local meetings also exerted disciplinary functions. Moral transgressions, such as drunkenness, fornication, and unfair business practice, were frowned upon, and punished by way of public self-condemnation by the culprit, admonition and censure by his or her peers, or ultimately, being 'testified against' by the monthly meeting. In 1687 and 1700, instances of drunkenness were so scandalous among Irish Quakers 'that some who had been guilty of it, having condemned themselves under their own hands, were furthermore required to give Copies of such their papers of Self-condemnation to the

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[37] Glynn Douglas, Rob Goodbody, Alice Mauger and John Davey, *Bloomfield, a history: 1812-2012. Providing care for 200 years* (Dublin, 2012); Warburton et al., *History of the city of Dublin,* ii, p. 835. Bloomfield was modelled on tea merchant William Tuke's revolutionary system of 'moral treatment' at the York Retreat, founded in 1796: Anne Digby, 'Tuke, William' in *ODNB,* lv, pp 535-7.

[38] W. Neilson Hancock, *On the causes of distress at Skull and Skibbereen, during the famine in Ireland, a paper read before the Statistical Section of the British Association, Edinburgh, August 2nd, 1850* (Dublin, 1850), p. 2; Linde Lunney, 'Webb, Richard Davis' in *DIB,* ix, pp 822-3.

[39] Olive C. Goodbody, *Guide to Irish Quaker Records, 1654-1860* (IMC, Dublin, 1967), pp 1-47; Maurice J. Wigham, *The Irish Quakers: a short history of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland* (Dublin, 1992), pp 36-7.

People of the Town where they were most known'.[40] As with the Presbyterian kirk sessions, the Quaker meetings' exertion of discipline was enabled by the culprit's yielding to public rebuke. Social exclusion was also applied. Habitual drunkards were prevented from sittings of disciplinary meetings and from holding public offices within the church.[41] At a national level, Irish Quakers sought to ensure that local meetings adhered to strict convention. In 1740, query forms were distributed to local meetings throughout Ireland, inquiring into the moral condition of Irish Quakers. Among the queries were whether Friends did 'keep to plainness of Habit, Speech and furniture', visit ale-houses, engage in 'Back-biting' and gossip against one another, and duly record births, marriages and burials. The condition of the poor, and the fate of their children, also caught the attention of the national meeting: 'Are the Poor taken due care of, and do their Children partake of necessary learning to fit them for Trades?'[42] Giving poor children the opportunities of independence and self-reliance was seen as important. Highlighting the disciplinary functions at local level, meetings were asked 'Is care taken to deal with and censure Transgressors in due time?'[43]

Quakers and the poor

The evidence suggests that Quakers' attitudes towards the poor and destitute in Ireland mirrored what G.M. Ditchfield has identified among the Unitarians in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century England – namely, that the poor were seen as victims and were not to be held accountable for their moral failings. Whereas Ditchfield argues that those moral failings identified as prevailing among the poor were attributed

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[40] Wight, *History of the rise of Quakers in Ireland*, p. 451. See also ibid., pp 452-3.
[41] Ibid., p. 451; Richard S. Harrison, *Merchants, mystics and philanthropists: 350 years of Cork Quakers* (Cork, 2006), pp 57-8.
[42] Wight, *History of the rise of Quakers in Ireland*, pp 323-4.
[43] Ibid., p. 325.

by Unitarians to the profligacy of Government and the rich,[44] for Quakers in Ireland, the fundamental cause of the country's temporal and moral poverty was the generations of oppression suffered by the majority Roman Catholic population, particularly in terms of the prevailing system of landholding. Jonathan Pim, who campaigned for land to be transferred from landlords to tenant farmers, argued that the moral failings of the Irish poor was not due to their Roman Catholicism and or an innate aversion to industry, but to the demoralising impacts of the Penal Laws.[45]

Many Quakers aimed their criticism of social conditions in Ireland at the prevailing landholding system, thus focusing on the rural element of the Irish social question. Ireland's endemic poverty was regularly attributed to the negligence and selfishness of Irish landlords and their allies in the British aristocracy.[46] A proposed plan, framed and published by thirteen Quaker men in 1825, attributed Ireland's social, economic and political misery to landlord absenteeism and high rents. Proposing to encourage resident proprietary of land and capital investment, the plan aimed to create an expanding class of small farmers: 'instead of an oppressed, defrauded, turbulent, lawless, uninformed, idle, poor, miserable peasantry; would spring up an industrious, independent, well-instructed, affluent and contented yeomanry'.[47] It was the plight of the peasantry of western and southern Ireland, and not the urban workforce of towns and cities, that attracted most attention from Irish Quakers. This was the case not only during the

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[44] G.M. Ditchfield, 'English Rational Dissent and philanthropy, *c.* 1760-*c.* 1810' in Hugh Cunningham and Joanna Innes (eds), *Charity, philanthropy and reform from the 1690s to 1850* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 199.

[45] Jonathan Pim, *The conditions and prospects of Ireland and the evils arising from the present distribution of landed property: with suggestions for a remedy* (Dublin, 1848), pp 24-30. See also *Statement of some of the causes of the disturbances in Ireland, and of the miserable state of the peasantry; with a plan for commencing on sound principles, an amelioration of their condition, thereby removing the causes of the disturbances, and bringing the country into a state of peace and quietness* (Dublin, 1825). For a discussion on these views, see Helen E. Hatton, *The largest amount of good: Quaker relief in Ireland, 1654-1921* (Kingston, Ontario, and London, 1993), p. 4.

[46] James S. Donnelly Jr., "Irish property must pay for Irish poverty': British public opinion and the Great Irish Famine' in Chris Morash and Richard Hayes (eds), *'Fearful realities': new perspectives on the Famine* (Dublin, 1996), p. 73.

[47] *Statement of some of the causes of the disturbances in Ireland*, pp 8-11.

Famine years, when distress in the west and south outstripped that elsewhere in the country, but at times of more 'normal' social conditions. For instance, Ebenezer Shackleton's 1832 pamphlet in favour of a statutory Poor Law in Ireland saw such a measure as the best means of curtailing agrarian unrest.[48]

Irish Quakers' monthly meetings typically operated a poor committee to cater for distressed Quakers in the respective locality. The corporate responses of Quakers to poverty were, therefore, limited to their own community. It was left to individual Quakers' own initiative to engage in charity aimed at other denominations.[49] One explanation of this may be the profoundly individualistic nature of Quaker life. Rejecting clergymen, liturgy, rites and sacraments, Quakers experienced religious assurance on an individual level. Admittedly, worship was held in a communal meeting, but silent waiting lent itself to deeper personal reflection. The structure of Quaker meetings also encouraged greater personal responsibility than in other denominations. On a more practical level, a partial explanation for the limited nature of Quaker corporate relief was the small size of the Irish Quaker community, which paled in comparison to Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists. The assistance which could be generated from within the community was limited and most effective when focused at the distressed within the same community.

In the Waterford city monthly meeting, the provision of cash sums 'for the use of a friend in straitened circumstances' was a regular item of expenditure at the turn of the century.[50] The poor committee of the Lisburn monthly meeting outlined its object as providing 'for the care of poor friends in the Bounds of the Mo[nthly] Meeting of

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[48] Ebenezer Shackleton, *Poor Laws: the safest, cheapest and surest cure for boyism of every kind in Ireland* (Dublin, 1832).
[49] Harrison, 'Dublin Quakers in business', ii, p. 454.
[50] Waterford Friends monthly meeting poor house accounts, 13 July 1799 (FHLD, Waterford monthly meeting records, MM XI P2); ibid., 9 Nov. 1799, 28 June 1800, 14 Feb. 1801.

Lisburn'.[51] The Cork city monthly meeting maintained pensioners on its poor list, purchased medicines for poor Friends and even paid for mentally ill members to be treated at the York Retreat, which catered solely for insane Quakers.[52] The Dublin monthly meeting poor committee, whose members included the leading Dublin Quakers of the day,[53] provided assistance to co-religionists experiencing poverty due to temporary distress. After the committee was informed in 1808 that one member, Benjamin Rickman, was 'likely to be out of Employment', it resolved to 'render him much advice & assistance as may be necessary'.[54] The Dublin meeting also operated a poor house at Cork Street, but it is not clear whether this catered solely for Quakers or for the poor of all denominations. It was significant that this poor house was located in the heart of the Liberties, the city's manufacturing district, where poverty and disease were acutely prevalent. The Liberties was the district most populated by Dublin Quakers, undoubtedly attracted by the concentration of small industry and the location of their meeting house at Meath Place.[55]

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[51] Lisburn Friends monthly meeting poor committee minutes, n.d., f1 (PRONI, Records of the Religious Society of Friends in Ulster, MIC16/21, microfilm).

[52] Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 5 Mar. 1826, f18r (FHLD, Cork monthly meeting records, MM VIII P1, first book); Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 3 Nov. 1810 (FHLD, Cork monthly meeting records, MM VIII P4); Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 3 Aug. 1848 (FHLD, Cork monthly meeting records, MM VIII P5); ibid., 26 July 1849, 25 Feb. 1863. See also Harrison, *Merchants, mystics and philanthropists*, pp 56-7.

[53] Minutes of Dublin Religious Society of Friends committee for the poor, n.d. [*c.* 1815], f1r (FHLD, Dublin monthly meeting records, MM II P 3).

[54] Ibid., 9 Sept. 1808.

[55] The Meath Place meeting house was established in 1687 and remained in operation until 1952: Butler, *Quaker meeting houses of Ireland*, pp 46-7; Colm Lennon, *Dublin Part II, 1610 to 1756*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 19 (Dublin, 2008), p. 24. In his demographic survey of Dublin city at the turn of the century, Rev. Whitelaw noted 'a considerable number of Quakers' in the parish in St Catherine's in the Liberties: James Whitelaw, *An essay on the population of Dublin. Being the result of an actual survey taken in 1798, with great care and precision, and arranged in a manner entirely new* (Dublin, 1805), p. 8.

Quaker views on poverty, charity and begging

Quakers, by their very disposition, rejected dogma, seeing creedal ties as negating the individual's experience of the 'Inner Light'. This outlook on religion and one's relationship to God carried over into Quakers' philanthropic beliefs and practices. There is no evidence that Quakers, en masse, adhered to particular social and economic theories, such as Utilitarianism or *laissez-faire* economic theory. Quakers thus approached social questions 'unencumbered by theory… [and] unfettered by untested preconceptions'.[56] It is possible, however, to identify certain themes on which Quakers found common ground with social thinkers of other denominations. Unsurprisingly, idleness, superfluous charity and encouragement of dependency were counter to Quaker approaches to the poor. The importance of self-reliance and independence is evident in the Cork monthly meeting's decision in September 1844 to discontinue Mary Corlett's weekly allowance 'as her son in law disapproves of her being dependent on the Society for support and is desirous of making adequate provision for her himself'.[57] The same meeting discontinued Thomas Sinton's weekly allowance

> as it appears not only that he is of ability to earn a livelihood, suited to his present condition but also that he has sufficient open and opportunity so to do, and it is the judgement of this committee that a man so circumstanced, and in the prime of life and health, is not of the class for whom the Society's provision was ever designed or with whose maintenance it ought to be burdened.[58]

The decision by Martha Robinson to refuse the offer of 'suitable apartments both to reside, and to work in' was not met with approval and it was resolved 'it is not reasonable that our Monthly meeting should any longer contribute to her rent'.[59] These instances, all taken from the minutes of the same meeting, demonstrate communal

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[56] Hatton, *The largest amount of good*, p. 27.
[57] Cork Friends Poor Committee minutes, 9 Sept. 1844, f8v (FHLD, Cork Monthly Meeting records, MM VIII P1, third book).
[58] Ibid., f8v-f9r.
[59] Ibid., f9r.

approval for personal responsibility and taking care of one's own relatives, as well as disapproval for unwarranted idleness and aversion to industry.

To Quakers, beggary rejected one's Christian duty to labour and be industrious, but also went against the Society of Friends' work ethic. In 1659, a meeting at Skipton in north Yorkshire was advised that 'each particular Meeting should be expected to care for its own poor; to find employment for such as want work or cannot follow their former callings for reason of the evil therein…and to help parents in the education of their children, that there may not be a beggar amongst us'.[60] Similar views were echoed by the English Quaker Henry Tuke (1755-1814), philanthropist, writer and son of William Tuke, who founded the York Retreat.[61] In an 1807 pamphlet, which ran to at least eight editions by the 1850s and was published by the Irish Quakers' Dublin Tract Association, Henry Tuke considered the moral dynamics governing acts of charity.[62] The focus of the piece lay not on the impact of alms-giving on the receiver, but instead, on the consequences for the giver. The author cited, from the Old Testament, the proliferation of alms-giving among the Jews upon their release from captivity and restoration to the Holy Land, when 'almsgiving was become a popular virtue; yet it appears that many performed it in such a manner, as to indicate that their motive was not pure benevolence: but that they were seeking the praise of men, and preferring it to the praise of God'.[63] One should not give alms with the intention of being seen to do so, for this corrupts the intention of the giver and the virtue of the charitable encounter. The author approvingly quoted from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them" (Matthew 6:1): 'the prohibition is not

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[60] Goodbody, *Guide to Irish Quaker records*, p. 11.
[61] H.F. Gregg, 'Tuke, Henry' in *ODNB*, lv, p. 526.
[62] Henry Tuke, *Religious Duties, consisting chiefly of extracts from the Holy Scriptures…* (8th ed., London, 1856).
[63] [Henry Tuke], *On justice, and love or charity. Extracted from a work on the duties of religion and morality* (5th ed., Dublin, 1841), p. 15.

absolute against performing charitable actions, so that they will be publicly known; for this in some cases, is not only unavoidable, but may also be proper, in order to let our light shine before men, and our examples become beneficial to others'. Rather, the prohibition lay against the motivation of the giving, 'for where this disposition prevails, the consequence is serious and lamentable: "Ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven."'[64]

The travel account of the Quaker Jonathan Binns is interesting in its depiction of Irish beggars, whom the author mainly experienced in provincial towns and not in large cities. Binns served as an agricultural assistant commissioner on the Poor Inquiry in the mid-1830s and travelled across Ireland in this capacity, carrying out investigations into the social conditions of the poor. Binns's recollection of his arrival into Ballinasloe mirrored many contemporary travel accounts in describing the carriage being surrounded by soliciting mendicants. Binns's description recorded not only the 'considerable inconvenience' caused by the beggars – 'so extreme was their importunity, that they actually assailed the outside passengers by pulling at their legs!' – but reflected a conscious distinction that some of those paupers were not deserving of assistance. He claimed that the women beggars did not appear to be distressed or in true want, and 'might very properly be designated sturdy resolute beggars, they laughed and asked charity at the same time'.[65] In Philipstown (Daingean), King's County Binns's emphasis was on the practical complexities inherent in doling out alms to street beggars: '…the windows were frequently crowded with miserable women, carrying children upon their backs, and soliciting charity with pitiful lamentations. To relieve all was impossible – and to relieve only a few increased the number of those who begged.' Nonetheless, Binns drew comfort from the work in which he was engaged and the long-

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[64] [Tuke], *On justice, and love or charity*, p. 15.
[65] Jonathan Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1837), ii, p. 23.

term consequences of the Poor Inquiry's investigations: 'Under such distressing circumstances, my consolation was, that I was engaged in preparing a full and honest statement of their wretched condition, with a view to the introduction of legislative measures of relief.'[66] His comments regarding mendicancy in Cork city reveal that while he drew the common distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, he perceived beggary to be a legitimate resort in lieu of a statutory provision, as per the status quo in Ireland: 'But what can be said in denunciation of a custom which seems to be *obliged* by the absence of an legal provision for the aged, the infirm, and the deserving needy?'[67]

Conclusion

In Ireland the Society of Friends has been long – and remains – best known for its admirable relief work during the early years of the Great Famine. But, in the generations before that catastrophe, Quakers distinguished themselves in business and philanthropy, two fields in which Samuel Bewley was prominent in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Dublin. Bewley, rather than being representative, was an exceptional figure in terms of his prolificacy in associational involvement but the example of Bewley does provide an insight into the manner in which Quakers provided assistance to the poor. On a corporate level, Quaker poor relief was provided through the poor committee of the monthly meeting and this assistance was allocated only to impoverished Quakers. It was left to Quakers to act in an individual capacity when organising relief to members of other denominations, as reflected in Bewley's involvement in a wide range of charities whose objectives covered many of the

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[66] Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland*, ii, p. 40.
[67] Ibid., ii, p. 147.

perceived moral and temporal evils of the lower classes. It is here suggested that this reflected the Quaker trait of independence of spirit and thought. Just as no strict dogma was adhered to by Quakers on a devotional level, Friends generally did not adhere en masse to prevailing theories of economic and social improvement. Given the independence of mind and action, it may be further suggested that the instance of Irish Quakers is one where it is more difficult for the historian to identify and nail down a distinctive denominational approach to begging and alms-giving.

<center>**Chapter Ten**</center>

<center>**Street begging and alms-giving during the Great Famine**</center>

Introduction

During the winter of 1847-48, a widow living in utter destitution in Limerick city buried five of her young children. The woman was not a native of the urban centre and wished for her children to be buried in her birthplace 'many miles from this city', yet given the considerable distance from Limerick to the rural burial ground, no one would assist her in carrying the coffin on such a long journey. On five occasions during this winter, the widow bore the coffin containing one of her children and walked the long distance to 'her native place' alone, returning each time to her surviving children who were ravaged by disease. According to the newspaper article which reported this story, the woman was living in utter destitution in 'a dilapidated dwelling, in one of the lanes' in Limerick, seemingly had neither income nor familial support, and was required to beg from the city's inhabitants so as to procure a coffin for each of her dead children.[1]

This vignette is just one of many recorded instances that were publicised during the Great Famine, when more and more people solicited alms for the expressed purpose of burying a dead family member. Other accounts describe a mother carrying her dead baby while begging alms for the child's burial; a wife soliciting alms for her husband's interment; a daughter seeking assistance to bury her mother who died on the way to a workhouse.[2] These instances demonstrate how the calamitous levels of distress and death during the Great Famine influenced changes in the nature of begging and alms-

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[1] *Nenagh Guardian*, 29 Jan. 1848.
[2] *The Nation*, 9 Jan. 1847; *FJ*, 16 Jan. 1847, 23 Dec. 1846. See also *Connaught Telegraph*, 29 Dec. 1847; *Nenagh Guardian*, 16 Feb. 1848; *Illustrated London News*, 13 Feb., 20 Feb. 1847.

giving. Alms, once solicited to sustain life, were now being sought to honour death. Yet, these examples also raise an important question for this thesis: given the widespread prevalence of destitution and pauperism during the Famine, how does one comprehensively and concisely negotiate begging and alms-giving in this period of singular distress?

This chapter will approach begging and alms-giving during the Famine by considering a number of themes: the changed nature of begging during these years of extraordinary distress; the urban experience of mendicancy arising from localised influxes of rural migrants; and the impact of the 1847 Vagrancy Act. The remainder of the chapter will follow the approach adopted in Section Two of this thesis, by considering how the Dublin Mendicity Society and the five subject denominations negotiated street begging in these years (Chapters Four to Nine). The urban focus of this thesis will be retained as much as possible, but in some aspects, the available sources are not tied down spatially to an urban context. While the sources allow for a discussion of Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian attitudes and responses to begging and alms-giving in the Famine period, the paucity of sources pertaining to the Methodist and Quaker angles is problematic and prevents a detailed consideration. Nonetheless, the Methodist and Quaker experiences of charity and poor assistance will be analysed, and will be tied in to the wider themes of the chapter.

Urban begging and the Great Famine: initial considerations

The disparity between the rural and urban experience of the Great Famine will serve as a backdrop to this chapter. Contemporaries were aware of how the urban experience of the Famine differed from – and was greatly overshadowed by – that of rural Ireland.

One letter writer to the *Freeman's Journal*, 'A FRIEND TO THE POOR', contrasted the survival strategies open to the rural and urban poor, concluding that the latter were at a disadvantage:

> The poor of Dublin alone are all but forgotten. Numbers of hard-working poor tradesmen have been thrown out of employment in consequence of the distressed state of the country. They have no "public works," and only a fraction of them can find shelter in the poorhouses and mendicity. They must inevitably die if some well devised scheme of relief be not immediately set on foot.[3]

The evidence suggests that contrary to Patrick Lynch and John Vaizey's findings that Dublin city and other 'maritime' economies were relatively isolated from the horrors of the Famine,[4] the populations of these large centres knew only too well the misery of these years.

As outlined in Chapters One and Two, contemporary discussions of begging centred on attempts to strictly define and measure the problem. In times of 'normality', such attempts were problematic at best. During the catastrophe of the Great Famine, they were utterly futile. Destitution and beggary were so prevalent that they defied all means of definition and enumeration. Previous categorisations, always imprecise, were thrown to the wind as entire swathes of Ireland's population were reduced to destitution and beggary. Sweeping generalisations, in many cases not far from the truth, that entire populations of villages and towns had become paupers and beggars were to be found in newspaper reports during the Famine.[5] Similarly common were claims that the number of beggars in a town or city totalled multiples of previous calculations – one paper referred to the 'thousands of street beggars' in Belfast[6] – or were simply incalculable.

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[3] *FJ*, 4 Jan. 1847.
[4] Patrick Lynch and John Vaizey, *Guinness's brewery in the Irish economy, 1759-1876* (Cambridge, 1960), pp 165-7.
[5] *Nation*, 19 Dec. 1846; *Anglo-Celt*, 26 Feb. 1847.
[6] *BNL*, 9 July 1847.

Influx of rural beggars

An obvious point which may be made at the outset is that beggary increased to an immeasurable extent in Famine Ireland, both urban and rural. Always a crucial element of the 'economy of makeshifts', a practice to be resorted to in times of distress, begging now became the main means of subsistence for multitudes following the failures of the potato crop and subsequent developments, such as large-scale estate evictions and public health crises. Given the overwhelming pressure of poverty and starvation, and the insufficient resources for survival, begging also became more desperate and the practice took on an urgency that was, generally, hitherto absent. Testifying to a parliamentary committee in March 1849, the Catholic parish priest of Kenmare, Rev. John O'Sullivan, stated: 'That is the worst feature of the present state of things; you have more begging, and the beggars are more importunate than ever.'[7] Different dynamics were at play in large urban centres than in rural areas. Towns and cities were more prone to concentrated stints of migration by non-local destitute individuals and families than rural areas.[8] As the sites of workhouses and other welfare entities, and as centres of communications and transport, towns and cities attracted large numbers of non-local poor, escaping food shortage or eviction and desperate to gain employment, avail of relief or emigrate. The vulnerability of urban centres to this influx was identified in one election candidate's political statements in 1847, when he claimed that William Gregory's notorious 'Quarter Acre Clause' 'must have the effect of *swamping* Dublin and the other large towns in Ireland by the paupers from their rural districts'.[9] Of course, Dublin and other urban centres had always been magnets for the migrant poor but a key

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[7] *Third report, select committee on poor laws (Ireland),* p. 152, H.C. 1849 (93), xv, 230.
[8] Ibid., p. 47.
[9] *FJ*, 2 Aug. 1847. The Quarter Acre (or Gregory) Clause stipulated that only those holding land of one quarter acre or less could qualify for relief and this act led, unintentionally, to mass evictions. For a recent consideration of this clause and its architect, see Brian M. Walker, 'Villain, victim or prophet?: William Gregory and the Great Famine' in *IHS*, xxxviii, no. 152 (Nov. 2013), pp 579-99.

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development evinced in the Famine period, as in so many aspects of Irish life, was the sheer scale of the phenomenon.

Cork city experienced a significant influx of paupers from its rural hinterland in late-1846 and into the following spring and summer, with one estimate putting the figure of new arrivals at 300 daily. The *Cork Constitution* reported in late-April 1847: 'The incursion of rustic paupers into the city continues unabated…they may be seen coming in in droves, the bedclothes strapped to the shoulders of the father, while the children carry pots, pans, jugs, old sacks, and other articles.'[10] The St Vincent de Paul conference in Cork city found that destitute labourers from the rural west of the county, 'who in great numbers crowded into the city, presented the most melancholy and distressing spectacle, both morally and physically'.[11] In 1847 the recent influx into Belfast of 'strangers', who replaced the native poor as the main relief applicants, was attributed to the cessation of public works and the re-shipment of Irish poor back home by English and Scottish Poor Law guardians.[12] The 'thousands of street beggars' who were to be found in the streets of Belfast that same summer were described as strangers and blamed for bringing contagious disease into the town.[13] In Wexford County Gaol in February 1850, two-thirds of the inmates were not natives of county Wexford and of this grouping, most were imprisoned for stealing potatoes, turnips and other petty offences.[14]

An influx of rural paupers was also experienced in Dublin city, which was described by the late architectural historian Maurice Craig as resembling a 'gigantic refugee

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[10] Cited in James S. Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London and Boston, 1975), pp 86-7.
[11] *Report of the proceedings of the Society of St, Vincent de Paul, in Ireland, during the year 1848* (Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1848]), pp 13-14.
[12] *Banner of Ulster*, 22 Jan. 1847.
[13] *BNL*, 9 July 1847.
[14] *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-eighth report of the Inspectors-General on the General State of the Prisons of Ireland, 1849; with appendices*, p. 103, H.C. 1850 [C 1229], xxix, 314.

camp' during the Great Famine.[15] In January 1847 members of a mob that looted several bread carts in Dublin city were found to be from counties Wexford, Wicklow, Kildare and Clare.[16] All but one were from outside Dublin. Welfare organisations in the city also experienced significant pressures in these distressed times, and institutions such as the North and South Dublin Unions workhouses and the Bow Street asylum for the 'houseless poor' attracted large numbers of the destitute into certain parts of the city,

> All flocking to the metropolis in vain hope of relief, impressed with the belief that where the seat of Government is, the noble and the wealthy will be found, but alas, on their arrival sad disappointment is their lot, they find nothing but distress and destitution and see around them, as it were, a making of their wants in the deserted mansions of the noble and untenanted dwellings of the once opulent Merchants, and then in the bitterness of despair hide themselves in this [Bow Street] asylum until hunger drives them to seek the shelter of the poor-house.[17]

All too rarely can a human face be put on this scale of destitution and mortality. One such case, however, was that of John and Ellen Mulhern, a married couple who died in utter destitution in early-1847 in 'a small hut in the yard of a house' (No. 6 Hendrick Street), a minor street in the heart of Dublin's north city markets area.[18] The Mulherns were among the countless multitudes who migrated to Dublin in search of improved survival options, coming from their native County Leitrim about a year previously with their four children. As the family had been receiving food from the local parish relief committee and both parents were found with little or no food in their stomachs, it may be deduced that what little food the family received had been given to the children.

The language used in some primary sources reflected the significant shift which had occurred in Irish society, and the extent to which beggary was afflicting the country.

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[15] Maurice Craig, *Dublin 1660-1860* (1952; reprint London, 1992), p. 309.
[16] *Illustrated London News*, 16 Jan. 1847, cited in Noel Kissane, *The Irish Famine: a documentary history* (Dublin, 1995), p. 57; Cormac Ó Gráda, *Black '47 and beyond: the Great Irish Famine in history, economy, and memory* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), p. 167. See also Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, pp 173, 178.
[17] North Dublin Union Board of Guardians minutes, 14 Apr. 1847, cited in Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin slums 1800-1925: a study in urban geography* (Dublin, 1998), p. 287.
[18] *FJ*, 16 Feb. 1847.

Towns and cities were no longer merely 'infested' with 'swarms' of beggars but, in some instances, were spoken of as being in 'a state of siege' by beggars who, according to another account, were launching an 'incursion' into urban areas.[19] Extreme measures were deployed, with inhabitants of Moy, County Armagh removing their door knockers due to the intolerable number of beggars calling daily.[20] In Cork a mayoral proclamation ordered that all 'strolling beggars, vagabonds, and idle persons seeking relief' be removed from the city and armed constables were stationed along the outskirts of the city to prevent the entrance of rural paupers.[21] For the destitute in towns and cities, begging was not the only survival strategy open to them and the fact that the greatest number of arrests for prostitution in nineteenth-century Dublin was during the Famine years suggests that this was the most expedient source of income for many poor women who flooded into the city.[22] That the increased number of arrests indicates an upsurge in prostitution, and not necessarily the authorities' zeal to suppress the practice, is supported by the admission figures for the Westmoreland Lock Hospital, which by the middle of the century was catering mainly for prostitutes suffering from venereal diseases. The hospital's average intake rose from 744 in 1842-7 to approximately 1,000 in 1848-52 and of these women, more than 70 per cent were from outside Dublin.[23]

Change was also to be seen in the men, women and children who were taking to the streets soliciting alms. The dire conditions drove to beggary countless multitudes who would have been typically industrious and too proud to beg. In an article on distress in Dublin city, *The Nation* captured this sense of a shift in the experience of street begging.

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[19] *BNL*, 15 Jan. 1847; Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork*, p. 86. Nenagh was described as bring 'overrun by strolling beggars': *Nenagh Guardian*, 16 Feb. 1848.
[20] *BNL*, 15 Jan. 1847.
[21] Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork*, p. 87.
[22] Maria Luddy, 'Prostitution and rescue work in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Maria Luddy and Cliona Murphy (eds), *Women surviving* (Dublin, 1990), p. 56.
[23] Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, p. 179; *Dublin hospitals, Statements of the number of persons relieved during each of the last three years engine 31 December 1851, in each of the Dublin hospitals…*, p. 4, H.C. 1852 (121), xlvii, 248.

Whereas many pre-Famine accounts spoke of the impertinence and arrogance of many mendicants, *The Nation* portrayed many Famine-era Dublin beggars as inexperienced, new to the 'trade', and utterly and genuinely desperate for any assistance:

> Many, obviously unskilled in the hard lessons of mendicancy, creep out of alleys and lanes, in the grey of the evening, and make mute signs to the passengers in the streets, stretching out their hands with an indecision which plainly shows the struggle going on within…Hundreds – thousands – bred to industry, have now to make fellowship with the hardened vagrants, the makers of their own shoes, with broken bully, and the outworn prostitute. This is the condition of Dublin, the beggared capital of a starving nation.[24]

This passage depicts the Famine as having caused a sea-change among the mendicant classes of the capital and having driven typically industrious individuals into beggary and pauperism. Not only was the Famine devastating the Irish poor through starvation and death, but their moral strength and independence was being corrupted. Not surprisingly for the organ of the Young Irelanders, *The Nation* traced the origins of Ireland's decay to the Act of Union and comprehended its remedy in Repeal.

The 1847 Vagrancy Act

The Irish Poor Law Act of 1838 was devoid of any specific mention of, or provision for, mendicancy. Despite the recommendations of at least three poor inquiries and the Irish Poor Law's designer George Nicholls as to the necessity for revised and well-defined laws suppressing begging,[25] vagrancy clauses were omitted from the final

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[24] *The Nation*, 27 Mar. 1847.

[25] [Nassau Senior], 'Mendicancy in Ireland' in *Edinburgh Review*, lxxvii, no. 156 (Apr. 1843), p. 392; *Report of the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland; being a summary of the first, second and third reports of evidence taken before that committee: together with an appendix of accounts and papers*, p. 23, H.C. 1830 (667), vii, 23; *Third report of the commissioners for inquiring into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, p. 27, H.C. 1836 [C 43], xxx, 27. In his second report on the proposed Irish Poor Bill, Nicholls advised as to the necessity of vagrancy clauses, either within the Poor Law itself or by way of a separate enactment, writing 'To establish a Poor Law, without at the same time suppressing mendicancy, would be very imperfect legislation, especially with reference to the present

statute. This omission arose from the Whig government's belief that in the absence of a

legal entitlement to relief – a pivotal tenet of the Irish legislation – criminalising the

soliciting of assistance would be an unjust cruelty.[26] Long anticipated by social

commentators who addressed the question of Irish poverty, this omission represented a

weakness in the Poor Law legislation and was subject to criticism.[27] Between December

1839 and February 1840 numerous boards of guardians from across Ireland wrote to the

Poor Law Commissioners in Dublin, calling for some legislative measures to be enacted

for the suppression of mendicancy, to operate alongside the nascent workhouse system.

The urgency felt by boards of guardians for the enactment of a vagrancy law was driven

by the fear that ratepayers would be subjected to double taxation – namely, the assessed

poor rates as well as alms to beggars, who were regularly paid-off merely as a way of

getting rid of this nuisance.[28] In March 1842, a petition on behalf of the inhabitants of

Dublin city was sent to the lord lieutenant, criticising the Poor Law's repealing of the

former legal powers to detain and convict street beggars, and calling for the government

to enact legislation to restore such powers.[29] In the months prior to the passing of the

eventual act of July 1847, public meetings across Ireland called on the government to

insert vagrancy clauses into any poor law legislation that was under consideration.[30]

The 1847 Vagrancy Act[31] filled the legislative hole left by the Poor Law of nine years

previously. While introduced at the height of the Famine, the Vagrancy Act was not

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condition of the Irish people': *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, Esq., to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, on poor laws, Ireland*, p. 28, H.C. 1837-38 [C 104], xxxviii, 684.

[26] *Hansard 3*, xlii, 695 (30 Apr. 1838), (Colonel Edward Conolly); ibid., 697 (Sir Edward Sugden); ibid., 714 (Lord Edward Stanley).

[27] *Hansard 3*, xlii, 695 (30 Apr. 1838), (Colonel Edward Conolly).

[28] *Mendicancy, Ireland. Resolutions passed by boards of guardians in Ireland, relative to the suppression of mendicancy and vagrancy*, H.C. 1840 (168), xlviii, 357. See also Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish poor law, 1815-43* (Manchester, 2009), pp 302-303.

[29] *Appendices B. to F. to the eighth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners*, p. 346, H.C. 1842 [C 399], xix, 358. See ibid., pp 347-9.

[30] *FJ*, 2 Mar., 4 Mar. 1847.

[31] 10 & 11 Vict., c. 84 (22 July 1847).

implemented as an enlightened government initiative to deal with the social scourge of mass beggary. Instead, the measure was a political concession to Lord Lansdowne to ensure his vote for the Poor Law Extension Act.[32] The Vagrancy Act widened the range of powers of apprehension and confinement for petty offences. A man's desertion of his wife and children, thus landing them as paupers upon the workhouse doorstep at the expense of local ratepayers, was liable to three months' imprisonment with hard labour. The act of begging 'in any public Place, Street, Highway, Court or Passage', of facilitating mendicancy among children, and wandering from one poor law union to another, were all criminalised under this act, and these offences were to be punished with one months' imprisonment with hard labour. The Vagrancy Act had the impact of tripling the convict population between 1847 and 1850, with new prisons being established to incorporate this increase.[33] Across Ireland, the daily average number of prisoners in individual county gaols increased substantially by between 43 and 352 per cent, with the inspectors-general of prisons directly linking this increase to the influx of beggars from pauperised rural districts to 'more favoured localities in the hope of obtaining relief'.[34] In many cases, such individuals were subsequently imprisoned for vagrancy or petty theft. The authorities' use of the Vagrancy Act did not always include a custodial element and in many cases the act was used to remove 'strange' vagrants from the locality. In the six months following the passing of the measure, no fewer than

[32] Peter Gray, *Famine, land and politics: British government and Irish society 1843-1850* (Dublin, 1999), p. 276; 10 & 11 Vict., c. 31 (8 June 1847).
[33] Elizabeth Dooley, 'Sir Walter Crofton and the Irish or intermediate system of prison discipline' in Ian O'Donnell and Finbar McAuley (eds), *Criminal justice history: themes and controversies from pre-independence Ireland* (Dublin, 2003), p. 198; Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, p. 187. The Dublin County Grand Jury attributed the substantial rise in committals to Kilmainham Gaol to the implementation of the Vagrancy Act: *FJ*, 21 Apr. 1848. The new prisons opened during the Famine years were the bridewells in Ballina and Swinford (County Mayo), Ballybay and Clones (County Monaghan), Newtownards (County Down), Castletowndelvin (County Westmeath) and Tinahealy (County Wicklow): Cf. *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-fourth report of the Inspectors-General on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1845; with appendices*, p. 92, H.C. 1846 [C 697], xx, 348 and *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-ninth report of the Inspectors-General on the general state of the prisons of Ireland, 1850; with appendices*, p. 117, H.C. 1851 [C 1364], xxviii, 493.
[34] *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-eighth report*, p. viii.

5,612 vagrants had been sent out of Belfast 'to country districts', each receiving 'the means of subsistence to take them away'.[35] In 1849, of the 7,698 beggars imprisoned in Dublin, more than 6,000 (*c.* 78 per cent) came from other parts of Ireland.[36] Only one-fifth of Dublin's convicted beggars were natives of the city. Outside of these large urban centres, the implementation of the Vagrancy Act was slow. The *Connaught Telegraph* criticised the government for the lack of enforcement in Castlebar, where disease-ridden 'strolling beggars' were swarming in the town to such an extent as to pose a threat to the lives of inhabitants.[37]

While the Vagrancy Act led to an increase in convictions and prison committals, the successful implementation of the measure also led to saturation of some custodial facilities, thus limiting the authorities' continued ability to enforce the statue. One witness to the 1849 select committee on poor laws stated that in Tuam and Ballinrobe, County Galway, the 'vagrancy clauses are not acted upon; and they could not be acted upon, for the gaols are full'.[38] On the other hand, the provisions of the act could also be utilised by beggars. A poor law inspector for Galway city claimed that ninety-two paupers had allowed themselves to be deliberately caught publicly begging in the hope of being sent to prison for one month.[39] To the utterly destitute of the Famine period, a term in prison on foot of a conviction for begging guaranteed shelter and food for up to one month. Such instances, of which there are many, point to how the poor must not be seen always as a mute, helpless category of people. Instead, the mendicant poor regularly exerted agency and made choices as to how they were most likely to receive assistance.

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[35] *BNL*, 7 Jan. 1848.
[36] *Thirty-second annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1849* (Dublin, 1850), p. 12.
[37] *Connaught Telegraph*, 15 Sept. 1847.
[38] *Third report, poor laws, select committee, 1849*, p. 183.
[39] Cited in Christine Kinealy, *This great calamity: the Irish Famine 1845-52* (Dublin, 1994), p. 198.

The Dublin Mendicity Society and the Great Famine

During the Famine years, the Dublin Mendicity Society – seemingly the sole remaining member of that short-lived movement – remained consistent to its founding principles in beseeching the public not to give alms indiscriminately to beggars in the streets. That the streets of the city were still beset with mendicants was attributed mainly to this practice, 'an evil of such enormity in its influence on the vagrants themselves, on their unfortunate children, and on society at large'.[40] The Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers' Society also retained its long-held policy of not providing assistance to 'habitual' beggars. The recipients of its relief, the public was assured, comprised 'the humble artisan, the decent industrious tradesman, overborne by sickness or the pressure of the times', and not 'the sturdy beggar or habitual mendicant'.[41] The pressures of this period of extreme distress did not alter how these charities viewed their remit, their sense of duty to the civil community and their desire to draw distinctions between the merits of the poor of their locality.

In Dublin the work of the Mendicity Society in setting the destitute to employment inside their premises at Usher's Island was complemented by the strengthened exertions of the police in removing beggars from the streets. The police's use of its powers under the Vagrancy Act appears to have been sluggish, such that in February 1848 members of the Mendicity Society expressed their 'deep regret' that 'since the passing of that act and its partial enforcement, the evil of mendicancy is but little abated'.[42] The extent of beggary was becoming unmanageable and the mendicity society considered the propriety of once again appointing its own network of street inspectors to rid the streets of beggars. Following a mayoral proclamation and the easing of other duties, the city

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[40] *FJ*, 20 Feb. 1849.
[41] Ibid., 25 Nov. 1846.
[42] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 Feb. 1848 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/6).

police concentrated resources on clearing away street mendicants.[43] The considerable changes effected by these initiatives are evident in the Mendicity Society's public expression of gratitude in October of that year to the city's police for its exertions in 'removing from the streets all idle and sturdy beggars…to the great relief of the citizens and other inhabitants of Dublin'.[44] The picture created by the Mendicity Society's minute books is clouded, though, by a newspaper report from October 1847, one year earlier than the charity's public expression of gratitude to the city police. The press report from the Exchange Court Police Office recorded that the police had used their newly-defined powers under the Vagrancy Act to apprehend and confine 'several men and women' under this legislation 'as idle, strolling beggars who sought relief by soliciting alms at shop doors, and in some instances feigned illness in order to excite the commiseration of the bystanders'.[45] A meeting of the North Dublin Union guardians in September 1847 seems to throw light on the matter. The lord mayor, Michael Staunton, informed those present that the provisions of the Poor Law Extension Act 1847, which allowed outdoor relief under the Poor Law system, were not yet fully enforced in Dublin city and until such a time, the Vagrancy Act was not to be implemented with the full rigour of the law. 'At present such was the general distress that it was feared some injustice might be done on the indiscriminate application of the vagrant act.' However, he advised the meeting that the police, nonetheless, possessed the authority 'to take up any person annoying the public'.[46] This suggests that enforcement was not fervently desired or ordered but nonetheless, the police were instructed not to hesitate in enforcing the Vagrancy Act if the circumstances required. As the aforementioned case

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[43] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 10 July 1848.
[44] *FJ*, 13 Oct. 1848. See also Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 3 Oct. 1848.
[45] *FJ*, 30 Oct. 1847.
[46] Ibid., 2 Sept. 1847.

before the Exchequer Court Police Office proves, these instructions were on occasion obeyed.

In 1849, as distress continued in the surrounding countryside, Dublin city was once again described as being subjected to 'the daily influx of paupers from the provinces'.[47] By this time criticism of the insufficient enforcement of the Vagrancy Act were not made against, but rather by the police commissioners, who were critical of the city's magistracy in not handing down sufficient sentences for those charged under the vagrancy legislation. Of 146 arrests made in the Castle Police Division between 1-16 July 1849 for vagrancy, ninety-two cases (63 per cent) were discharged, which, the police commissioners argued, undermined the work of the police in curtailing mendicancy in the streets.[48] The reasons for this high number of dismissals were not stipulated but it is not unreasonable to speculate that the severe strain on custodial facilities (as noted above) meant that there was nowhere for magistrates to confine convicted beggars. The report of the Inspectors-General of Irish Prisons for 1849 referred to the impact of the Vagrancy Act on prisons, in 'filling them with paupers'.[49] In Dublin it was common practice (as it was in Carlow town) to confine convicted beggars in prison for just twenty-four hours due to the lack of accommodation.[50] The strong possibility that human compassion was also a motivating factor on the part of magistrates in many cases ought not to be dismissed.

The increased police vigilance in the suppression of street begging met with the approval of the Mendicity Society's governors and the expression of gratitude to the police for their endeavours in this regard became a routine feature of the charity's

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[47] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 17 July 1849.
[48] Ibid., 31 July 1849.
[49] *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-eighth report*, p. x.
[50] *Prisons of Ireland. Twenty-eighth report*, pp 28, 70. An exception to this trend was the Richmond Bridewell, where 70 per cent of committed vagrants served sentences of seven days or greater: ibid., p. 26.

annual meeting. A vote of thanks to the Police Commissioners was passed at the February 1849 annual meeting 'for the active energy exhibited by them during the past year in removing from the streets upwards of 3,000 male and female vagrants, the great majority of whom consisted of strangers from even the remotest districts of the country without any legitimate claim on the Metropolis, and without which vigilant watchfulness the state of this city would be utterly insufferable'.[51] These 3,000 beggars comprised approximately 1,800 males and 1,200 females, and no further information is available as to the number of children among these totals.[52]

The Dublin Mendicity Society's involvement in the punitive treatment of street beggars complemented its relief work. Paupers regularly used the city's mendicity asylum as an alternative to the two workhouses,[53] demonstrating the fluidity with which the poor availed of the city's various welfare institutions. While in early 1847 the North and South Dublin Union workhouses were each catering for more than 2,000 paupers on a daily basis,[54] an average of around 900 individuals were receiving food and being put to work every day in the Mendicity Society's premises at Usher's Island, being discharged from the institution at nightfall.[55]

In Belfast, a marked decrease in the number of street beggars was identified within weeks of the passing of the 1847 Vagrancy Act. In the northern town, the successful enforcement of the act was believed to have resulted from the coordinated efforts of numerous agencies. 'The co-operation of the Day Asylum, the Soup-kitchen Committee, the Board of Health, and the Charitable Society, have thus, with the help of their agents, almost completely rid our town of a nuisance which had become altogether intolerable.

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[51] Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 20 Feb. 1849. See also ibid., 20 Feb. 1850.
[52] *FJ*, 20 Feb. 1849.
[53] Ibid., 2 Jan., 6 Jan. 1847.
[54] *FJ*, 21 Jan., 5 Feb. 1847.
[55] Ibid., 1 Feb., 20 Feb. 1847.

We are authorised to state that not fewer than *one thousand beggars* have been conveyed, through the agency of the Committee, from this town during the past month!'[56]

Roman Catholicism

In the summer of 1847 the Archbishop of Cashel, Michael Slattery, wrote to the president of Maynooth College, Laurence Renehan, criticising the government's responses to the failure of the potato crop and resulting social calamity. 'We are still struggling with famine and fever, and what is more than both, the demoralization of our people consequent on the system of relief that this incapable Government has inflicted on the country. Every feeling of decent spirit…has vanished, and instead there is created…a Nation of Beggars.'[57] Slattery's use of the image of beggary mirrored the sentiments of many contemporaries, in decrying the universality of pauperism and beggary among large swathes of the poorer classes. Slattery's main concern in this letter was the 'demoralization of our people', with 'the able-bodied poor obliged to leave their work and the young their schools' to join the crowds of paupers congregating at the soup kitchens 'where their scanty rations are doled out, mixed up with all manner of persons good and bad'.[58] The poor were being driven from morally improving endeavours, such as labour and education, by the extremities of the times to receive their pauperising rations and to Slattery, this dynamic was reducing the Irish people to a 'Nation of Beggars'.

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[56] *Banner of Ulster*, 17 Aug. 1847. See also ibid., 30 July, 20 Aug. 1847; *BNL*, 30 July 1847.
[57] Archbishop Michael Slattery to Laurence Renehan, June 1847 (Maynooth College Archives, Renehan Papers), cited in Donal A. Kerr, *'A nation of beggars'? Priests, people, and politics in Famine Ireland, 1846-1852* (Oxford, 1994), p. 41.
[58] Archbishop Michael Slattery to Laurence Renehan, June 1847, cited in Kerr, *'A nation of beggars'?*, p. 41.

Catholic bishops and archbishops spoke increasingly in their pastoral letters of the alarming distress among the poor and beseeched their flocks to give generously to charitable funds. In his 1847 Lenten pastoral, Archbishop Daniel Murray urged his flock to consider the advice contained in the Book of Tobit (4:9): "If thou have much give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so, to bestow willingly a little."[59] The importance of alms-giving, and the immeasurable eternal blessings which alms-giving will bestow on the giver, was underscored as never before. The Ladies' Association of Charity, a charitable society founded by Margaret Aylward whose philanthropic work in Dublin city commenced during the Famine, used this imagery in a public appeal for funds towards the end of the Famine period: 'Alms are compared to the dove which Noah sent from the Ark, and which returned to him in the evening with a green branch of life; for in the evening of our days, as death draws on, and the deluge of sorrow surrounds us, this dove will return to us bringing confidence, peace, joy, and immortal glory.'[60]

Across the world, the Catholic Church was active in mobilising sympathy and financial assistance for the victims of the Irish famine, with donations being received in Ireland from Great Britain, France, Italy, India, Canada and the United States. Pope Pius IX donated £500 from his own funds and Paul Cullen, rector of the Irish College in Rome, oversaw a substantial network of donations, which were channelled through him to Archbishop Murray in Dublin.[61] In March 1847, Pius delivered a Papal Encyclical beseeching Catholics across the world to pray for the suffering poor of Ireland and 'to

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[59] Lenten pastoral of Archbishop Daniel Murray, 9 Mar. 1847 (DDA, DMP, 32/3/46).
[60] Printed appeal for funds, from the Ladies' Association of Charity, 1851 (DDA, DMP, 32/7/37). See Jacinta Prunty, *Margaret Aylward 1810-1889: Lady of Charity, Sister of Faith* (Dublin, 1999).
[61] Christine Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland: the kindness of strangers* (London and New York, 2013), pp 126-42.

give alms for the relief of the Irish Nation. You know the power of almsgiving and the rich fruits which proceed from it.'[62]

The work of numerous female religious communities in relieving the destitute was retained through the Famine years. The Sisters of Charity in Dublin organised a food and clothing distribution scheme for the many who sought assistance from the congregation. The records pertaining to this congregation suggest that the absence of discrimination in Mary Aikenhead's charity was retained throughout this period. One account records an instance when Aikenhead was shocked to see a workman at the Harold's Cross convent turn away a man seeking assistance. Upon being told that the supplicant was "only a beggar", Aikenhead is recorded as demanding: "Call him back at once and send him to the Convent door. You had no right to send him away. That poor man may yet open heaven for me."[63] The role of the soliciting mendicant remained important to Aikenhead's worldview.

The Famine years saw the multiplication of conferences of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, a network of Catholic charities adhering to Vincentian traditions of poor assistance. The Society was founded in Paris by Frederic Ozanam in 1833 and by the time the first Irish conference was established in Dublin eleven years later, there were 130 societies across Europe.[64] The local conferences of St Vincent de Paul utilised similar moralising and gospel-driven language as Protestant charities, seeing the relief of temporal poverty as of equal importance as rectifying the spiritual privation of the poor. Reports spoke of their objectives as being 'to stimulate and encourage industry

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[62] Pius IX, 'Praedecessores nostros, Encyclical to the Universal Church requesting aid for Ireland', 25 Mar. 1847, at University College Cork MultiText Project in Irish History website (http://multitext.ucc.ie/d/Pius_IX_Praedecessores_nostros_Encyclical_to_the_Universal_Church_requesting_aid_for_Ireland_1847_March_25) (13 May 2014).

[63] Quoted in [Mary Padua O'Flangan], *The life and work of Mary Aikenhead, foundress of the Congregation of Irish Sisters of Charity 1787-1858* (London, 1924), pp 331-2.

[64] Máire Brighid Ní Chearbhaill, 'The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Dublin, 1926-1975' (PhD thesis, NUIM, 2008), p.5. For an outline of the Dublin society's early history, see ibid., pp 1-19.

and habits of religion among the poor'.[65] The societies wished to encourage independence in the poor and during the Famine years particular emphasis was placed on removing children from the streets and exposing them to the fruitful rewards of education and religious instruction. The St Mary's conference in Clonmel paid particular attention in 1848 to those children who 'spent the day in the street exposed to the worst examples of vice and immorality, mendicancy, and idleness'.[66]

Presbyterianism

Irish Presbyterians were marked by a widespread, although by no means universal, view that their congregations were largely immune from the worst ravages of the Famine period. This argument fitted in with the self-perception of the Presbyterian heart-land in north-east Ulster as being a region with a distinct social, cultural, religious and political identity, and one characterised by industry, sobriety, independence, moral righteousness and 'true religion'. As illustrated in Chapter Seven, this was contrasted in discourse with the perceived temporal and moral backwardness of the largely-Catholic south and west. Yet, in early-1847 the Presbyterian-ethos *Banner of Ulster* expressed surprise at the extent of distress in Belfast and its hinterland. The independent character of the Presbyterian poor of the north-east was central to the paper's wonder at the prevalence of destitution: 'The poor in our neighbourhood have often a feeling of becoming pride that leads them to bear privations without complaint – and they are overlooked. Sometimes the very worst cases of suffering require to be excavated.' This surprise complemented the paper's hesitancy over the fact that much of the donations

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[65] *Report of the proceedings of the Society of St, Vincent de Paul, in Ireland, during the year 1848* (Dublin, n.d. [*c*. 1848]), p. 14.
[66] Ibid., p. 16.

raised to date in Belfast were to relieve Famine-related poverty elsewhere in Ireland: 'the people of Belfast have been benevolent at a distance, and heedless of the distress at their own doors'.[67]

In a series of letters between Presbyterian Dublin Castle official George Mathews[68] and Presbyterian ministers in April 1847, a number of ministers asserted that their congregations had been spared the visitation of famine and disease. This was commonly attributed to the relative prosperity and comfortable domestic conditions of their congregations, in stark contrast to their neighbours of different denominations.[69] In one instance, in rural Fahan in County Donegal, Rev. John Macky stated that 'the Presbyterian people are generally temperate and industrious and provident and have suffered comparatively little from the present calamity'.[70]

Regrettably, the aforementioned letters of Presbyterian ministers, which were replies to inquiries from Mathews regarding the extent of death in their congregations, confined themselves to local mortality levels and do not shed light on poverty, begging and relief mechanisms in their respective localities. In order to consider Presbyterians' attitudes towards mendicancy and alms-giving during the famine years, one must, therefore, look elsewhere. What becomes clear is that despite the pronouncements of various Presbyterian commentators, Belfast and the north-east were not immune from poverty, destitution and mendicancy. Before, during and after the famine, Belfast was no different from towns and cities throughout early-nineteenth-century Ireland and Britain

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[67] *Banner of Ulster*, 5 Feb. 1847.
[68] For the identification of Mathews as a Presbyterian, see Andrew R. Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice, 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2006), p. 60.
[69] John Rutherford, Ballydown congregation [Banbridge], County Antrim to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP1849/95); ibid., M. McDowell, Ballybay congregation, County Monaghan to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847; ibid., William Magill, Cork [city?] congregation to George Mathews, n.d. [*c*. Apr. 1847]; ibid., James Denham, Londonderry congregation to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847; ibid., David Maxwell, Newtownards congregation to George Mathews, 9 Apr. 1847. These items are among a large number of letters, none of which are individually catalogued, to be found at OP1849/95.
[70] John Macky, Fahan congregation, to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP1849/95).

in being regularly described as 'infested' with street beggars.[71] Christine Kinealy and

Gerard MacAtasney have slayed the myth – propounded by contemporaries and

developed by polemicists – that Belfast escaped the ravages of the famine.[72] That is not

to say that Belfast did not remain the industrial powerhouse of the Irish economy during

the middle of the century. Indeed, the wealth and commercial success of the town was

cited by the Poor Law Commissioners as grounds for refusing a loan to the Belfast

board of guardians for increasing the size of the workhouse to cater for the influx of

non-local paupers.[73]

In early-1847 the *Banner of Ulster* despatched a reporter to investigate the conditions

of the poor in Belfast's hinterland.[74] Upon entering Newtownards, which lies 15km east

of Belfast, the first person the reporter met was a beggar, a man aged around fifty years

and showing features of physical impairment. The beggar sought alms from the reporter

'and told a pitiable story'. Upon visiting the mendicant's lodgings, the journalist

witnessed scenes which could have described a Famine-era hovel anywhere in Ireland: a

small lodging comprising a kitchen and a bedroom; no furniture, as all possessions had

been pawned or sold 'to support existence'; a single sod of peat on the fire; a wife and

children ragged and starving. The reporter informed his readers: 'I gave him a little

assistance, receiving for it a grateful blessing, and then passed into other abodes in the

town.' What assistance was given was not specified. Yet, here is an instance wherein

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[71] A charity sermon heard of 'the numerous groups of beggars which beset our shops': *BNL*, 12 Feb. 1811; a public meeting on the issue of street begging was told that 'Never was there a time in which the streets were more crowded with mendicants than at present': ibid., 23 Feb. 1847; a vestry meeting heard of 'the large number of strolling beggars who infest the streets of Belfast': ibid., 14 Apr. 1852; one man was 'pestered with beggars at his door': ibid., 20 June 1856. See also *Banner of Ulster*, 17 Aug. 1847.

[72] For a critique of the historiography which suggests that the Protestant north-east escaped the worst of the famine, see Kinealy and MacAtasney, *The hidden famine*, p. 1. The impact of the famine throughout Ulster has also received attention in Christine Kinealy and Trevor Parkhill (eds), *The famine in Ulster: the regional impact* (Belfast, 1997); John Crowley, William J. Smyth and Mike Murphy (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Cork, 2012), pp 416-57.

[73] Kinealy, *This great calamity*, p. 129.

[74] *Banner of Ulster*, 5 Feb. 1847.

alms (of some kind) were provided to a soliciting beggar by an individual who we may assume to be a Presbyterian, given the very ethos of the *Banner of Ulster*. What is significant is that this assistance was provided only after the pauper's circumstances were investigated and confirmed: 'Desirous to ascertain the truth, I accompanied him to his abode…I discovered that all he had primarily told me was pure fact.' The beggar spoke of being habitually in employment as a labourer but being presently without work, and this was accepted by the reporter as the truth. His two young daughters procured some small subsistence through 'flowering' and this meagre income largely supported the family. These details framed the beggar and his family, whose confessional allegiance was not mentioned, as typically industrious, thus suggesting to the reader that the resort to mendicancy arose from utter desperation and the extremities of the times.

In his analysis of Presbyterian responses to the famine, David Miller has argued that some Presbyterian spokesmen were 'simply in a state of denial that their community was truly suffering'.[75] It may be suggested that to such individuals, the acknowledgement of distress and beggary within Presbyterian congregations would reflect poorly on the community's failure to support its most vulnerable members. To a community that prided itself on the independent and self-sufficient temperament of its members, such a failure constituted a challenge to this self-image. Miller puts forward another important explanation, however – namely, that estimates of the extent of poverty within a given congregation did not in many cases include those local Presbyterians who were not regular church attendees or attached to the congregation. Turning again to the correspondence between George Mathews and Presbyterian ministers, the former's request in a circular letter for information on 'the number of

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[75] David [W.] Miller, 'Irish Presbyterians and the great famine' in Jacqueline Hill and Colm Lennon (eds), *Luxury and austerity: Historical Studies XXI* (Dublin, 1999), p. 167.

persons in your Congregation, who have died since last July' was most certainly

interpreted literally by some respondents, who limited their answers to regular and

active members of their congregation.[76] Despite the strong sense of discipline inculcated

within Presbyterian communities, many professed Presbyterians – estimated by Andrew

Holmes to be as many as one-fifth of Irish Presbyterians[77] – had no formal attachments

to any congregation.[78] This phenomenon was recorded in many of the aforementioned

letters to George Mathews. For instance, Frederick Buick of Ahoghill stated that 'there

are many [Presbyterian] families who belong to no congregation'.[79] These individuals

tended to be of the lower classes,[80] as asserted by Rev. John Weir of the Townsend

Street congregation in Belfast: 'But there is a large body of Presbyterians under the

inspection of "Town Nuisances" and not actually under pastoral care, among whom (as

reduced to deep poverty) the ratio of mortality must have been greatly increased.'[81] The

disconnect between many poor Presbyterians and their local congregations may be

explained by firstly, their unwillingness, or communal prohibition, to attend service

without suitable clothing; secondly, their lesser concern, compared to their wealthier co-

religionists, with 'respectability' and social mores that were associated with attendance

at the meeting-house; and thirdly, the lack of disposable time to attend church and

attend to the duties of a congregant. As such those Presbyterians most likely to be

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[76] Miller, 'Irish Presbyterians and the great famine', pp 166-7.
[77] Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice*, p. 306.
[78] For example see John Weir (Townsend Street, Belfast congregation) to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP1849/95); ibid., Henry William Carson (Keady congregation) to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847; ibid., Frederick Buick (Ahoghill congregation) to George Mathews, 20 Apr. 1847. For a discussion on this matter, see Holmes, *The shaping of Ulster Presbyterian belief and practice*, pp 60-70, and Miller, 'Irish Presbyterians and the great famine', p. 167.
[79] Frederick Buick (Ahoghill congregation) to George Mathews, 20 Apr. 1847.
[80] Speaking generally in 1825 of Irish non-Catholics, Rev. Henry Cooke expressed his view that 'when Protestants are poor, they do not come to churches…I have seldom found a poor Protestant above the rank of a mendicant, that would attend church. It is a great evil, though arising from ideas of decency': *Third report from the select committee on the state of Ireland: 1825,* p. 362, H.C. 1825 (129), viii, 376. It appears that Cooke's use of the term 'Protestants' pertained to the various Protestant faiths and was not here used by him in the common contemporary manner for referring to members of the Established Church.
[81] John Weir (Townsend Street, Belfast congregation) to George Mathews, 12 Apr. 1847.

affected by poverty and disease were those least likely to come to the attention of the local minister and kirk, and, therefore, least likely to be recorded in the primary sources.

The denial of Famine-related distress and beggary in the Presbyterian north-east of Ireland was not universal, however, as was demonstrated in a *Belfast Newsletter* editorial in January 1847:

> Notwithstanding the existence of a union workhouse, a charitable society, soup-kitchens, and munificent private subscriptions, not to speak of many other agencies, there is in this town a greater number of beggars and of really destitute people than, we are certain, ever crowded it at any former period. The streets are thronged with them, the houses of the better class of operatives are literally besieged with them, and every humane institution is filled to inconvenience.[82]

A month later, in recognition of the continuing distress in the city, a public meeting was held to establish 'an asylum for the houseless poor' which aimed to relieve 'the thousands of destitute poor persons who throng our streets'.[83] That there was a sizeable increase of destitution and beggary in Belfast at this time is not to be doubted, but as with pronouncements made at any public meeting aiming to mobilise public support and funds for relief schemes, these claims are to be considered with caution. It was in the interest of the organisers that the extent of destitution be inflated. To be approached in a similar manner is a letter to the Presbyterian-ethos *Banner of Ulster*, also in February 1847, which made a direct comparison between the 'starvation and pestilence' of Skibbereen and Bantry with the 'poverty and misery' of Ballymacarrett, 'within a stone-thrown of the town of Belfast'.[84] (By this time, Ballymacarrett, the population of which tripled between 1811 and 1841,[85] had been for a decade included within the municipal

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[82] *BNL*, 26 Jan. 1847.
[83] *BNL*, 23 Feb. 1847.
[84] *Banner of Ulster*, 2 Feb. 1847. Just days later, the same paper's editorial again evoked the image of Skibbereen in depicting the level of distress in Belfast: *Banner of Ulster*, 5 Feb. 1847.
[85] The population of this suburb rose from 2,250 in 1811 to 6,697 three decades later: Raymond Gillespie and Stephen A. Royle, *Belfast. Part I, to 1840*, Irish Historic Towns Atlas, no. 12 (Dublin, 2003), p. 10.

boundary of Belfast).[86] While the comparison was surely an exaggeration, this quote demonstrates that knowledge of the extent of starvation and death in the impoverished south and west was well-known in the far corner of the island. By the spring of 1847, eighteen months after the first appearance of the potato blight, 'Skibbereen' had already entered the lexicon of Irish Famine discourse.[87]

While acknowledging these cautions and possible exaggerations, the timing of these pronouncements and the establishment of the Belfast asylum 'for the houseless poor' in the spring of 1847 is significant. The early months of 1847 were arguably the pinnacle of Famine-era desolation: the winter of 1846-47 was singular in living memory in its severe weather conditions; workhouse admissions reached their peak, in most cases reaching levels far beyond capacity; fever was rampant throughout the country and in many workhouses; the rate of emigration, particularly into British cities was rapidly accelerating.

Some Presbyterians, most notably the temperance campaigner and evangelical Rev. John Edgar,[88] were at the forefront of initiatives to provide relief to the destitute in the famine years, both in Belfast and beyond. Edgar was involved in the campaign for establishing 'an asylum for the houseless poor' and for suppressing street begging in Belfast.[89] He co-operated with the Church of Ireland minister of Christ Church parish and fellow evangelical, Rev. Thomas Drew, in forming the Belfast General Relief fund in January 1847 which, during its brief four-month existence, raised £7,000 largely for

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[86] *Municipal corporation boundaries (Ireland). Copies of instructions by His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, with reference to the boundaries and division into wards of the several cities, boroughs and towns corporate in Ireland; likewise, copy of any letter or report received in answer to such instructions. Reports and plans*, pp 19-21, H.C. 1837 (301), xxix, 47-49.
[87] In an editorial in the first week of January 1847, the *Freeman's Journal* bemoaned the fact that inhabitants of Dublin were more aware of the suffering of cottiers in Skibbereen than the poor in their own city: *FJ*, 4 Jan. 1847.
[88] R.F.[G.] Holmes, 'Edgar, John' in *DIB*, iii, pp 573-4.
[89] *BNL*, 23 Feb. 1847.

the relief of distress in the west of Ireland.[90] Further afield he led the General

Assembly's missions in Connaught,[91] providing direct relief to the poor and establishing

industrial schools for females, under the auspices of the newly-formed Belfast Ladies'

Relief Association for Connaught which had raised more than £4,500 by the end of

1847.[92] These schools, sometimes called 'sprigging schools', provided instruction in

sewing and needlework to poor girls and women, in the hope of enabling them to

support themselves, as well as literacy classes with particular emphasis on Bible

reading.[93] With many of the girls previously subsisting through begging – 'all, with few

exceptions, [are] the poorest of the poor', Edgar wrote[94] – it was envisaged that their

industrial skills would foster an independent spirit and lead them away from their

previous lives of mendicancy, while the children's instruction in literacy and Bible

reading would save them from irreligion and the evils of Popery. These initiatives

resembled the early industrial classes founded in Belfast, Ballymena, Limerick and the

Claddagh in Galway, which trained boys and girls in trades – usually shoemaking and

sewing respectively.[95] Edgar's initiatives were publicised by a number of short and

popular pamphlets outlining the work of the [mission] in the west. An estimated 30,000

copies of his *Cries for Connaught* were circulated in this period, while the popularity of

his *Distress in Connaught* led to a number of New York gentlemen donating £338 19*s*.

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[90] Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger*, pp 265-6.
[91] It should be noted that missions attached to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland were established in Connaught prior to the famine: Hamilton Magee, *Fifty years in the Irish Mission* (Belfast and Edinburgh, n.d. [*c.* 1905]), pp 17-31; W.D. Killen, *Memoir of John Edgar, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Systematic Theology for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Belfast, London and Edinburgh, 1867), pp 193-4. See also R.J. Rodgers, 'Vision unrealized: the Presbyterian mission to Irish Roman Catholics in the nineteenth century' in *Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland*, xx (Mar. 1991), pp 12-31.
[92] Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger*, p. 146.
[93] See John Edgar, *Irish industry. Woman's work and woman's worth* (Belfast, 1851); idem, *Connaught Harvest* (Belfast, 1853); Holmes, 'Edgar, John', pp 573-4; Magee, *Fifty years in the Irish Mission*, pp 42-3, 79-88.
[94] Edgar, *Irish industry*, p. 11.
[95] Susan M. Parkes, *A guide to sources for the history of Irish education, 1780-1922* (Dublin, 2010), pp 56-7.

9*d*. to Edgar for his work.[96] In a published letter, Edgar spoke of how typically industrious families had been driven to begging for a basic subsistence. 'Ere yesterday, seventeen persons, none of them a beggar, all of them decent neighbours, came to the house where I now write, in the hope of getting a meal; a family of four came for their supper here last night, not knowing where to find breakfast this morning.'[97] Prior perceptions and categorisations of individuals were transformed by the desperate circumstances prevailing in the country.

In the spring of 1847, a matter of weeks before his death and at a time when the famine was ravaging Irish society, Rev. Thomas Chalmers published a review article in which, given the extreme circumstances then prevailing in Ireland and Scotland, he conceded the necessity of a certain level of government intervention. While remaining consistent with his life-long championing of voluntary benevolence, Chalmers could not but admit that private charity was unequal to the task[98] and he allowed for some element of state involvement:

> What may suffice in ordinary, clearly will not suffice for the present overwhelming visitation. There is an imperious call for the Government to come forward – and this not to supersede the liberalities of the public, but to superadd thereto the allowances of the State; or rather, for the State to be the principal almoner in such a dire emergency, and its distributions supplemented to the uttermost by the charities of the benevolent.[99]

It would be mistaken, however, to see this as a repudiation of Chalmers's previous arguments, for he concluded the article, possibly his final published work, with what was ultimately a defiant parting shot aimed at statutory poor laws, to which he attributed

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[96] Holmes, 'Edgar, John', pp 573-74; *BNL*, 26 Jan. 1847.
[97] Cited in Killen, *Memoir of John Edgar*, p. 207.
[98] For opposing arguments on whether this article represented a significant *volte face* by Chalmers, see Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the godly commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford, 1982), pp 367-9 and Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), pp 110-112.
[99] [Thomas Chalmers], 'Political economy of a famine' in *North British Review*, vii (May 1847), pp 261-2.

'the growth and increase of an all-absorbing pauperism' and a 'growing and gathering mischief'.[100] Chalmers reiterated his stance of the previous three decades, that the safeguarding of the condition of the poor was through their moral salvation and this was to be achieved by the provision of education:

> …on the vista of Irish questions there opens upon our view an argument of as much higher importance than any that we have now touched upon, as the moral is higher than the economical or the physical, - what is best to be done for the education of a people, using this term in the most comprehensive sense of it, as education both for the present and the future world.[101]

This indicates that Chalmers was not a blinkered ideologue, but instead could display some intellectual flexibility when required. While Chalmers's prescriptions for poor assistance and charity fell out of public favour in both Ireland and Scotland in the middle of the century, Peter Gray has demonstrated that his influence on the poor law debate in Ireland outlived the Scottish minister. According to Gray, the power of Chalmers's arguments were insufficient 'to prevent the passage of the 1838 [Irish Poor Law] bill, but helped form a negative attitude towards the consequent relief system in Ulster and shape the minimalist attitude towards working the law that was long to distinguish that province'.[102]

Church of Ireland

The popular view that the north-east escaped the worst of the Famine due to the largely Protestant nature of that region was common among members of the Established Church. The annals of the Church of Ireland parish of Christ Church, Belfast speak of

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[100] Ibid., p. 288.
[101] Ibid., p. 289.
[102] Peter Gray, 'Thomas Chalmers and Irish poverty' in Frank Ferguson and James McConnel (eds), *Ireland and Scotland in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2009), p. 106. See also Gray, *Making of the Irish poor law*, p. 25.

the north-east region in such terms, drawing a clear line between the greater role of

industry in Ulster than in the west and south, where a greater proportion of the lower

classes subsisted through rudimentary agriculture.

> The counties of Down and Antrim were, in a great measure exceptions to the
> extreme destitution suffered in other localities. Their inhabitants possess, in
> general, more energy of character than their countrymen of the South and
> West, and are of more untiring industry. They had long found, in various
> branches of manufacture, resources independent of the soil, or, at least, not
> immediately affected by the destruction of its products.[103]

Many of the key figures in the poor law debates of previous decades remained cemented

to their respective positions. Whately, a long-standing critic of any compulsory

provision and a champion of spontaneous yet discriminating private charity, denounced

outdoor relief and the extension of the Poor Law, while distributing £8,000 from his

own purse to various causes during the Famine years alone.[104] The archbishop is also

notable for his public criticism of those engaged in proselytism during this period of

distress, which he saw as unduly taking advantage of the extreme desperation of the

destitute poor.[105]

Contrary to the wealth of material pertaining to poverty and beggary in vestry minute

books for the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, these sources are strikingly

silent on such matters during the Famine years. Across Ireland the civil responsibilities

of parishes had been reduced considerably and devolved elsewhere, such that by the

mid-1840s, many vestry minute books record merely the annual election of parochial

officers and a scarce break-down of budgeted expenditure for the coming year.[106] The

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[103] 'The annals of Christ Church, Belfast, from its foundation in 1831', typescript copy by Rev. Abraham
Dawson, 1858, p. 108 (PRONI, Christ Church, Belfast records, CR1/13/D/2).
[104] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, p. 101.
[105] Richard Whately, *Address to the clergy and other members of the Established Church, on the use and
abuse of the present occasion for the exercise of beneficence* (Dublin, 1847).
[106] See, for example, St Nicholas's parish, Galway, vestry minute book (RCBL, St Nicholas's parish,
Galway, vestry minute books, P 519.05.1); Mullingar parish vestry minute book (RCBL, Mullingar parish

same was true in Dublin city and only occasional evidence can be found in the vestry books suggesting the impact of the Famine. St Mary's parish's budget for poor coffins and interment of the poor almost doubled during a two-year period, rising from £20 in 1846 to £35 in 1848.[107] This suggests a significantly higher rate of mortality among the poor of the parish, but could also have been affected by increased prices of coffins and interment. In St Catherine's parish, also, did the allocation for poor coffins rise significantly, from £50 in 1847 to as much as £74 the following year, before dropping again to £50 in 1853.[108] As noted in Chapter Six the responsibilities of Irish parishes to alleviate and punish various categories of the poor diminished in the early-nineteenth-century, with the emergence of numerous charitable societies catering for such individuals and most notably, the passing of the 1838 Poor Law, and the formation of a centralised state police force.

In Dublin the Church of Ireland responded on an institutional level to the crisis of the Famine through a newly-formed charity, the Dublin Parochial Association (DPA). Founded in March 1847 the DPA defined its objective as being 'for the relief of the poor of all denominations through the medium of the Parochial Clergy' of the Established Church.[109] The Church of Ireland clergy were held to be 'the most fitting channel of relief' by virtue of their prominent pastoral position within their immediate locality, 'ascertaining those who are deserving of assistance, and detecting imposture'.[110] This sentiment shaped how the DPA perceived its target base. The 'respectable' poor, unused to charitable assistance and unsuited to the horrid

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vestry minute books, P 336.05.1); Naas parish vestry minute book (RCBL, Naas parish vestry minute books, P 487.05.1).

[107] St Mary's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 14 Apr. 1846 (RCBL, St Mary's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 277.7.6.5); ibid., 24 Apr. 1848.

[108] St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 5 Apr. 1847 (RCBL, St Catherine's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, P 117.05.8); ibid., 24 Apr. 1848, 28 Mar. 1853.

[109] Dublin Parochial Association minute book, n.d., f1v (RCBL, Dublin Parochial Association papers, MS 129.1.1).

[110] Dublin Parochial Association minute book, 29 Mar. 1847.

surroundings of the workhouse, were its subjects: '…there must always remain a numerous class of persons suffering under privations of the severest kind, who will not (nor is it desirable that they should) seek for aid through a public channel, and whose sufferings are often more trying from the very causes which, if known, would constitute their strongest claims upon compassion'.[111] Among those recommended for assistance were sixty-year-old attorney Robert Lee and his wife, 'both Protestants', living at 6 Erne Place, in the south-east of the city, and whose destitution was attributed to a want of employment.[112] The inculcation of notions of respectability was seen also in the DPA's provision of a prize in 1847 rewarding 'habits of Personal and Domestic Cleanliness' to roomkeepers 'of unexceptionable character'.[113]

While not explicitly stated, it is clear that the DPA did not include habitual beggars among its beneficiaries. Such individuals were catered for in workhouses. Despite its founding assertion of being open to the poor of all denominations, the DPA allocated a disproportionate amount of its charity to impoverished Protestants, of whom they were many thousands in mid-century Dublin. According to one estimate, 22.7 per cent of the DPA's beneficiaries were Catholics, in a city wherein Catholics comprised nearly four-fifths of the population.[114] The fact that an estimated ten per cent of inmates in the North Dublin Union workhouse admitted in early-1847 and who subsequently died were Protestants indicates that some of the city's Protestants availed of relief through the poor law system, in addition to voluntary charitable societies, yet these were most certainly less 'respectable' elements of the poor than those relieved by the DPA.[115]

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[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 6 Aug. 1847.
[113] Ibid., 1 Oct., 5 Nov., 3 Dec. 1847.
[114] Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, pp 185-6.
[115] Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Church of Ireland mortality during the famine' in Kenneth Milne (ed.), *The Great Famine: a Church of Ireland perspective* (Dublin, 1996), p.14.

A critical argument of this thesis is that one cannot generalise about how members of a particular religion responded to social questions such as poverty, begging and alms-giving. While certain practices carried a tinge of denominational singularity, one cannot with accuracy speak of Catholic, Presbyterian or Anglican approaches to begging. A Famine-era illustration of this fact is an article published in the *Dublin University Magazine* (*DUM*) in the first half of 1848. The *DUM* was a literary and political publication which attracted some of the brightest young Anglican and Tory intellectuals among Trinity College Dublin's student body in the mid-nineteenth century, although there was no formal association between the magazine and the college. Among the main aims of the magazine was to stringently defend the interests of the embattled Church of Ireland in an era of retreat and retrenchment for the Established Church.[116] Contrary to widespread support for the 1847 Vagrancy Act, the article in question was stinging in its criticism of the statute for its criminalisation of the fundamental human act of seeking assistance from one's fellow man. The article in question, authored anonymously, argued that the Vagrancy Act served to penalise solicitations for charity, diluted the traditional relationship between the giver and receiver, and undermined the fraternal bond which is so fundamental among Christians:

> To pronounce the act of asking assistance from a brother, a crime – to declare thus, that not only are Christians not one family, of one blood, one by creation, one by redemption – one by inter-communion of kindly offices – but that the separation, distinctness, and mutual estrangement of members, is to be of such a character, that for one to ask succour of another, is an offence which the law will punish.[117]

The new law was 'directly contrary' to the teaching of Christ, to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, wherein the former is damned to Hell for his neglect of the soliciting

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[116] See Patrick Maume, 'Le Fanu, Joseph Thomas Sheridan' in *DIB*, v, pp 417-19; Elizabeth Tilley, 'Charting culture in the *Dublin University Magazine*' in Leon Litvack and Glenn Hooper (eds), *Ireland in the nineteenth century: regional identity* (Dublin, 2000), pp 58-65.

[117] Anon., 'Tenant right, repeal and poor laws: dangers and duties of the Conservative Party and landed interest in Ireland' in *Dublin University Magazine*, xxxi, no. 181 (Jan. 1848), pp 142-3.

beggar, the latter of whom was "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom". The author

continued: 'Here is the beggar's mission recognised and recommended.' In undermining

'the beggar's mission…their appointed mission', the Vagrancy Act oppressed these

servants of God, 'denies them the common privilege of man – the sacred privilege of

Christian men'. This statute contradicted God's scheme for mankind. The danger of

encouraging 'sturdy beggars' through indiscriminate alms-giving was certainly

acknowledged, but this could be achieved in a manner that would 'not imply direct

opposition to the principles of Christian morals'.[118]

Methodism

Of the five churches and religious societies examined in this thesis, Methodism is the

most elusive in terms of Famine-era sources. Much of the historiography concentrates

on the 'Souperism' debate and the mission work of evangelical Protestants in the west

of the country. The most recent work on private charity during the Great Famine

devotes just three pages to Methodist endeavours,[119] while a short article by the prolific

Methodist historian Rev. Dudley Cooney comprises the only other study of Methodists

and the Famine.[120] The experience of Methodists during this period remains, therefore,

largely undiscovered. Extracting an insight into how Methodists negotiated begging and

alms-giving in the Famine years is almost impossible and refining such attempts to the

urban context is problematic again.

The reason for this difficulty is the nature of the source material and Cooney suggests

three main reasons: in comparison to Quakers, Methodists lacked financial resources

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[118] Anon., 'Tenant right, repeal and poor laws', p. 143.
[119] Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger*, pp 268-70.
[120] Dudley Levistone Cooney, 'Methodists in the Great Irish Famine' in *The Green Dragon*, no. 3 (June 1997), pp 10-13.

and did not establish relief schemes on the same scale as the Quakers; Methodists'

charity in this period was not subject to the bitter accusation of proselytism which

characterised much Famine-era assistance provided by evangelical Protestants to

Catholics; and Methodists did not direct appeals to central government. Arising from

these three factors, much of Methodists' work in assisting the Famine poor went

unrecorded.[121] Furthermore, tracing the work of the Strangers' Friend Societies during

the Famine years is challenging. The sole surviving minute book of the Dublin society

ceases at 1825, while the numerous account books all date from the post-Famine period.

Famine-era newspaper references to the charities are scarce and reveal little.[122] While

almost all of the pre-Famine annual reports survive, a report from 1852 represents the

last known surviving report of the Dublin society, with none remaining from the Famine

years.[123] Therefore, this section pertaining to Methodists during the Famine years will

not be confined to urban areas but will encompass the efforts of Methodists across

Ireland.

In distressed areas, Methodist ministers co-operated with clergymen of all

denominations in affording relief to the destitute. In Castlebar, County Mayo, a market

town of more than 5,000 inhabitants in 1841,[124] the local Anglican minister, Methodist

preacher and Catholic priest took turns in attending the soup kitchen. 'The crowds of

starving people, crawling into town from the surrounding country, rendered this duty

almost unbearable,' wrote Rev. William Reilly, who deployed the language of

contemporaries in presenting the distress as being beyond description.[125] Fossey

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[121] Cooney, 'Methodists in the Great Irish Famine', p. 10.
[122] *FJ*, 25 Mar. 1846, 2 Feb., 23 Feb. 1847.
[123] These reports are held in the pamphlet collections of the NLI and RIA.
[124] W.E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick (eds), *Irish historical statistics: population, 1821-1971* (Dublin, 1978), p. 40.
[125] Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland. Vol. III*, p. 375. For more on this common theme of contemporary commentary on Irish poverty, see Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), pp 168-9.

Tackaberry of the Primitive Methodists in Belfast co-operated with Anglican and Presbyterian ministers in urging the town's population to refrain from consumption of alcohol, in a bid to stave off poverty, disease and death.[126] Methodists in England also contributed to the alleviation of distress. In early 1847, collections made by congregations across England raised a total of £13,000, of which £5,000 was forwarded to the British Association for the Relief of Extreme Distress in Ireland and Scotland.[127]

Irish Methodism saw its numbers diminish during the Famine years due to excess mortality and emigration. Although Methodists were disproportionately represented among Ireland's middle classes, poverty and destitution were not unknown within their community. At their annual conference in June 1847, the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists noted the losses sustained in the previous year through death and emigration, as well as 'how many of our poorer members were obliged to take refuge in the workhouses, together with those who are prevented from attending the means of grace for want of clothing'. Nonetheless, the conference expressed its 'great thankfulness that our Society has been preserved in such a state of prosperity'.[128] One Dublin minister estimated that 6,350 Methodists, comprising approximately one-seventh of the Irish Methodist population, were in distress and 'from accounts we daily receive *this distress is frightfully increasing*'.[129] That many Methodists sought out accommodation in workhouses demonstrates that destitution and pauperism prevailed among Irish Methodism. Disease also was not an unknown experience of Methodists during the

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[126] *BNL*, 11 Nov. 1845, 9 June 1846.
[127] *FJ*, 8 Mar. 1847.
[128] *Minutes of several conversations between the members of the conference of the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists, begun in Dublin, on Wednesday the 30th of June, 1847* (Dublin, n.d. [1847]), p. 10.
[129] Quoted in Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger*, p. 269.

Famine and Crookshank estimated that more than 1,000 Methodists died during 1847 alone.[130]

Quakers and famine relief

The Quakers are best remembered in Ireland as distinguishing themselves in the relief of the poor during the Great Famine. Historic and modern debates on the Famine regularly allocate blame to various parties, typically the landlord class and the British government, for not preventing such a level of death and misery. The Quakers, on the other hand, have received unqualified praise for their endeavours, which, reports invariably state, were characterised by efficiency and generosity, and did not carry the taint of proselytism.[131] According to Timothy P. O'Neill, Quaker relief was exceptional because 'they were amongst the first in the field, the scale of their activities relative to the size of their numbers made their operation remarkable and their innovative approach made them acknowledged experts'.[132] The Quakers' organised relief efforts attracted donations from across Ireland, Britain, Canada and the United States, and in the late-1840s, Quakers distributed more than £200,000 in famine relief, comprising grants, food, clothing and blankets. In Christine Kinealy's opinion, 'their work was particularly important because it was direct, was based in the communities where it was required, and had no ideological or religious agenda'.[133] Kinealy's assertion may be questioned, however, as it ought to be argued that all philanthropy carried some agenda, either

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[130] Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland. Vol. III*, pp 376, 378-9.

[131] Cathal Póirtéir, 'Folk memory and the Famine' in Cathal Póirtéir (ed.), *The Great Irish Famine* (Cork, 1995), pp 224-5; Peter Gray, *The Irish Famine* (London, 2004), pp 54, 86.

[132] Timothy P. O'Neill, 'The charities and famine in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland' in Hill and Lennon (eds), *Luxury and austerity*, pp 150-51.

[133] Christine Kinealy, 'Private responses to the Great Famine' in Donnchadh Ó Corráin and Tomás O'Riordan, (eds), *Ireland, 1815-70: emancipation, famine and religion* (Dublin, 2011), p. 88. See also Helen Hatton, 'The largest amount of good: Quaker relief efforts' in John Crowley et al. (eds), *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, pp 100-107.

hidden or overt. In this light, it may be suggested that the Quakers' agenda was less offensive to Catholics than that of the large Protestant churches. Helen Hatton has similarly concluded that Quakers, unlike many other Protestants, did not equate destitution with Roman Catholicism. 'Crucially, they asserted that while an emergency was one thing, which charity might rightly move to relieve, famine such as stalked Ireland was not a limited single event, and they made their position unmistakeable.'[134] Despite their disproportionate representation among the civil and philanthropic elite of nineteenth-century Irish society, Quaker communities were not unaffected by the excess mortality caused by the Famine. The average number of burials in the Quaker cemetery in Cork Street, Dublin almost doubled from thirteen or fourteen between 1841-46 to twenty-five for the period 1847-51.[135]

Part of their success and popularity was the work of a number of Quakers who travelled across the country, investigating the state of various localities and distributing assistance first-hand and according to their own discretion. William Forster spent some days in Cavan town, where he distributed 'a good deal of money in private charity' to the destitute of the town, and whose benevolence during his short stay there was so well known that he was regularly swarmed by crowds of beggars.[136] The Quakers were also involved in the establishment of soup kitchens throughout Ireland, an initiative undertaken in previous times of distress but never on such a large scale.[137] For instance,

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[134] Hatton, 'The largest amount of good: Quaker relief efforts', p. 107.
[135] Ó Gráda, *Black '47*, p. 171.
[136] *The Anglo-Celt*, 9 Apr. 1847.
[137] For earlier provision of soup kitchens, or soup 'shops', see *(Ireland.) Report of the commissioners appointed by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to inspect the House of Industry, and to report upon the management thereof, with a view to the introduction of such reforms an improvements as would render it, not only less expensive, but more efficient for the purposes for which it was originally designed*, p. 16, H.C. 1820 (84), viii, 242; St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minute book, 18 Jan. 1796 (RCBL, St Werburgh's parish, Dublin, vestry minute books, P 326.05.2); ibid., 3 May 1796; Thomas Dix Hincks, *A short account of the different charitable institutions of the city of Cork, with remarks* (Cork, 1802), p. 42; F. Barker and J. Cheyne, *An account of the rise, progress, and decline of the fever lately epidemic in Ireland, together with communications from physicians in the provinces, and various official documents*, (2 vols, Dublin, 1821), i, p. 126. The Dorset Nourishment Dispensary, founded by seven women in 1816,

the Quaker ironmasters Abraham and Albert Darby donated fifty boilers for soup kitchens.[138] The importance of teaching the poor skills in the hope that they could thereafter support themselves was stressed by Quakers, who established lace-making, spinning, weaving and knitting initiatives, while fishermen were supplied with hemp to make nets and were aided in retrieving their pawned equipment.[139]

In late-1846, Quakers founded Central Relief Committees in Dublin and London which not only distributed relief but set about gathering detailed information on the prevailing conditions across the country. This reporting network was a significant feature of Quaker Famine relief and the depth of information gathering is recorded in the published transactions of Quakers during the Famine period.[140] According to J.C. Beckett, 'it was the reports sent in by Quaker agents in every part of the country that helped to enlighten British public opinion, and the government about the true character of the situation in Ireland'.[141] The drivers of the Dublin committee were Joseph Bewley (1795-1851),[142] whose family were well-known tea and coffee merchants in the city, and Jonathan Pim (1806-85),[143] a leading draper and textile manufacturer. The Irish Central Relief Committee, however, operated as a stand-alone entity outside the realms of the Yearly Meeting and this accounts for the paucity of references to Famine-era distress in the minutes books of monthly meetings across Ireland. As Helen Hatton has commented, given that the committee functioned 'without the full, official weight of the

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also distributed soup to the poor of Dublin for many decades: D.J. Corrigan, *On famine and fever as cause and effect in Ireland; with observations on hospital location, and the dispensation in outdoor relief of food and medicine* (Dublin, 1846), p. 31.

[138] Hatton, 'The largest amount of good: Quaker relief efforts', p. 103.

[139] Hatton, 'The largest amount of good: Quaker relief efforts', pp 103-4; Rob Goodbody, 'Quakers and the Famine' in *History Ireland*, vi, no. 1 (Spring, 1998), pp 27-32.

[140] *Transactions of the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends during the famine in Ireland, in 1846 and 1847* (1852; reprint Dublin, 1996).

[141] J.C. Beckett, *The making of modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London, 1969), p. 341.

[142] See Andrews, 'Bewley, Samuel', pp 517-18.

[143] Hourican and Quinn, 'Pim, Jonathan', pp 137-8.

Society' behind it, its accomplishments 'were even more remarkable'.[144] The CRC was emblematic of the Quaker approach to relieving destitution in this period, which remained largely independent and stood apart from the approaches of other denominations. This independence of spirit was also displayed in English Quakers' refusal to participate in the national day of fasting and humiliation on 24 March 1847, an initiative launched by royal proclamation and intended to raise funds for and encourage sympathy with the suffering poor in Ireland. (Quakers rejected the day of humiliation as an exercise in superstition and infidelity).[145]

The exceptional circumstances of the Famine years resulted in a widened scope of the Quakers' relief efforts in Dublin. The widespread visiting of the poor of all denominations in their abodes was undertaken, as depicted in two surviving manuscript case books. The case entries typically record the individual's name, address, number of people in the family, employment situation, and the assistance provided, which invariably comprised items of clothing, but was occasionally supplemented by small amounts of cash. In no instance, at least as recorded in these books, was assistance provided to individuals deemed to be 'undeserving'. The recipients' habitual industriousness was noted and the poor whose lives are recorded in these records are invariably presented as victims of circumstances beyond their control and certainly not of their own design. Teresa Watson, whose address was given as '150 New St. top back room', was described as 'an industrious deserving person, she is much straitened'; the family of John Sears of Taaffe's Place 'appeared decent poor people, he having worked on the railway until he took [ill] about two months ago' with rheumatism; Margaret Whelan, who lived in the cellar of 14 King Street was 'an industrious poor women',

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[144] Hatton, *The largest amount of good*, p. 9.
[145] Peter Gray, 'National humiliation and the Great Hunger: fast and famine in 1847' in *IHS*, xxxii, no. 126 (Nov. 2000), p. 200. In Bradford, all shops, except those operated by 'Friends', were closed for business on the fast day: *Leeds Mercury*, 27 Mar. 1847.

who earned money by washing and whose husband was out of work'; Pat Murphy of Cemetery Lane was noted as 'a labouring boy apparently very decent and deserving'.[146]

Conclusion

Ireland had been subjected to numerous periods of famine and pestilence throughout its history. In the century prior to the Great Famine, notable economic and social crises, both national and localised, were experienced in 1739-41, 1799-1801, 1817-19, 1822 and 1826-7.[147] Yet, the catastrophe which unfolded following the first appearance of *phytophthora infestans* (potato blight) in the autumn of 1845 represented a turning point in the social condition of Ireland, and was rightly perceived as such by contemporaries. For instance, nationalist agrarian reformer James Fintan Lalor, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury and moralist Charles Trevelyan, and Irish political economist William Neilson Hancock – individuals with undoubtedly disparate political views – all perceived the Famine crisis as a transformative event in Irish history, which held out the potential to usher in an era of 'social revolution'.[148] To the Scottish divine Thomas Chalmers, the urgency and singularity of the crisis was such that state involvement in the provision of poor assistance, of which he had been a career-long critic, was an absolute necessity, albeit a short-term measure. The Great Famine differed from earlier crises in the persistence of the distress, spanning several harvests; the depth and geographical spread of destitution and misery; the public awareness, alerted through printed media, of the

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[146] Poor relief case-book for Dublin city, 1847-1853, f3v (FHLD, Dublin monthly meeting records, MM II P4); ibid., f5r, f11r, f16r.

[147] *The census of Ireland for the year 1851. Part V. Tables of deaths. Vol. . Containing the report, tables of pestilences, and analysis of the tables of deaths*, pp 124-235, H.C. 1856 [C 2053], xxix, 388-499.

[148] Gray, *Famine, land and politics*, pp 328-38; idem, '1847 – Year Zero? Interpreting the Great Famine as a transformative moment in Irish history', unpublished paper read at 'Negotiating crisis in Irish history' conference, RIA, Dublin, 13 Sept. 2012. See also idem, 'Accounting for catastrophe: William Wilde, the 1851 Irish Census and the Great Famine' in Michael De Nie and Sean Farrell (eds), *Power and popular culture in modern Ireland: essays in honour of James S. Donnelly, Jr* (Dublin, 2010), pp 50-66.

desperate conditions faced by so many; as well as, of course, the sheer extent of starvation, death and emigration. Famine-era change can be identified in various aspects of how poverty and the poor were perceived and negotiated, and this chapter has developed the theme of transformation to analyse how perceptions and responses to begging and alms-giving evolved during this period of crisis.

One theme that emerges from the Famine-era source material is that previous categorisations and definitions of the mendicant poor were superseded by the sheer extent of distress, desperation and mendicancy. No longer were Irish beggars to be easily defined or their extent enumerated. Previous arrangements, whereby urban charities would cater largely for a local population, were done away with, as towns and cities were swamped by masses of mendicants. These urban centres had always served as magnets for the rural poor but the sheer scale of migration was surely without precedent. The very language used when discussing beggary was also shaped by the expediency of the social circumstances, and this language reflected the unrelenting influx of paupers and the heightened fears of the native population as the Famine crisis deepened.

The 1847 Vagrancy Act was another novel aspect of how begging was framed by society during the Famine. While filling a legislative hole left by the 1838 Poor Law Act – which was devised outside of times of crisis and designed without the possibility of a large-scale social catastrophe in mind – the Vagrancy Act was framed and passed during the height of the Famine and must be viewed in that context. Yet, the legislation was not introduced as a direct response to the situation prevailing in Ireland but was part of a political deal to court support for another Famine-related bill. An immediate effect of the Vagrancy Act was the criminalisation of begging at a time when the instruments of officialdom for managing destitution – that is, the poor law union workhouses – were

failing utterly in their task, due to the scale of hunger and pauperisation. Powers for arresting common beggars and wandering vagrants were utilised, such that the significant increase in Ireland's prison population can be directly linked to the enforcement of this statute, while allowing for other Famine-related factors.[149] The use of this act was not limited, however, to the authorities. As seen above in the evidence of a poor law inspector in Galway city, many paupers were known to resort to explicit street begging in the expectation of being caught in the act and in the hope of being sent to prison, where some level of sustenance was guaranteed. During the Famine years, therefore, the poorer classes continued to exert agency in how they negotiated various welfare and custodial mechanisms. In many cases, the poor engaged with welfare institutions on their own terms and are not to be seen by historians as powerless dupes.

Tracing how the five subject denominations responded to the extremities of the Famine, with particular regard to begging and alms-giving, is difficult. Self-evidently, church attitudes overlapped with those of wider society. Yet, certain questions must be asked: did the churches' lines of thinking on poverty, begging and alms-giving continue as before the Famine? Was some thinking modified? Were the churches' perceptions and responses collectively marked by shared attributes, or were there denomination-specific nuances?

As in the pre-Famine period, Christian denominations were guided through the Famine crisis by the gospel imperative of charity. It was one's moral duty to assist the poor. Yet, the distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, which has been traced back at least as far as medieval times, continued to frame how the poor and

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[149] The number of people committed for indictable offences (of which begging was not included) rose from 31,209 in 1847 to 38,522 in 1848, and to 41,989 the following year. Non-violent crimes against property trebled and one historian has noted that 'the surge [in total committals] was more the product of desperation than of malice': Cormac Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine* (Basingstoke and London, 1989), p 43-4.

the question of their assistance were approached. As before, the Dublin Mendicity Society, which drew support from all denominations, beseeched the public to desist from indiscriminately giving alms to street beggars, a practice seen as corrupting paupers as well as wider society. Vignettes of suffering, usually publicised in newspapers, allowed the public to read of instances of 'deserving' individuals driven to public begging by the extraordinary circumstances of the Famine. The Limerick woman whose children's coffins were procured through begging; the Newtownards beggar, who was habitually industrious but whose mendicancy was driven by want – these cases of beggary were framed as being unquestionably 'deserving' of assistance. Yet, it was held, many importunate and idle mendicants persisted in swarming into towns and cities, creating intolerable inconvenience for pedestrians, exerting excessive pressure on relief mechanisms, and introducing disease. This deviant grouping among Ireland's class of beggars – a fluid and constantly evolving social category – was to be dealt with by way of a newly-passed Vagrancy Act, which criminalised public begging and led to a substantial increase in the country's prison population.

Many common themes can be identified in the language used across all denominations. The five subject denominations continued to lay emphasis on the virtues of industry and independence among the labouring classes, and, as argued throughout this thesis, these virtues are not to be seen solely through theological eyes. They were cherished by the growing middle classes whose desires, tempered by the horrors of the French Revolution in the 1790s, for passive and obedient labouring classes idealised thrift, providence, industry, sobriety, restraint and self-sufficiency in the poor. On the other hand, denominationally-specific themes can be identified, for instance, the noticeably Catholic emphasis on alms-giving which infused the language of Catholic clerics and philanthropists, such as Archbishop Murray and Margaret Aylward, in these

years. In reporting on the prevalence of distress, parish or congregation authorities across all denominations could overlook those poor who were not regular attendees at the church or meeting house. The existence of a body of poor persons unattached to their spiritual community remained a feature of each of the subject denominations.

The Famine years also saw changes in how the five denominations responded to beggary on a corporate level. Interestingly, in most cases, the manner in which responses differed from those earlier in the century (and examined in Section Two of this thesis) was not a direct result of the Famine catastrophe. The reining in of the civil powers of parish vestries had commenced long before the Famine, resulting in a stark lack of reference to the catastrophe in vestry minute books for parishes across Ireland. The Famine period saw the emergence, in Ireland, of local conferences of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, which catered for the destitute classes in urban centres. Yet, this movement within European Catholicism had been multiplying since 1833 and the establishment of the first Irish societies was part of this pre-Famine impulse. Ubiquitous features of pre-Famine Ireland, begging and alms-giving reflected many aspects of Irish life in being subject to significant transformations during the Famine years. Change was witnessed in the very nature of begging, the purpose of the alms-seeking, the type of person who begged, the indefinable and immeasurable extent of the problem, the legislative status of the practice, and, in some instances, in how key social commentators perceived poor assistance. Yet, despite these changes, the poor continued to negotiate the 'economy of makeshifts' and charity remained grounded in scripture, yet overlaid with the distinction between the 'deserving' / 'undeserving' poor.

Conclusion

It was stated at the start of this thesis that begging was a ubiquitous feature of pre-Famine Irish society. The main body of this study bears out this statement. Beggars begged out of necessity. The practice was not just ingrained in the culture of the poor – what Fuchs has termed 'the culture of expediency'[1] – but was a necessary source of income for many in distress. In a period before any legal entitlement to assistance, the need to subsist by begging was incontrovertibly real for many. What requires assertion, however, is that alms-giving to beggars was also prevalent in this period. People who begged subsisted, either completely or in part, upon the alms provided to them. Not only beggars but alms-givers were ubiquitous in pre-Famine Ireland. This may seem quite obvious but making the explicit point allows one to think more deeply about the question of beggary. The solicitation and provision of alms was an exchange requiring two parties, driven by varying motivations. The reasons why people gave assistance to mendicants included a sense of Christian duty to the poor, a desire to be rid of an inconvenience, or a superstitious fear of the repercussions of refusal. Individuals resorted to mendicancy only if they possessed a reasonable expectation of receiving some assistance. Even in cases of desperation, there was an expectation that among the many passers-by the beggar accosted and the many doors on which he or she knocked, a certain proportion of instances would result in the bestowing of alms. This understanding of the nature of charity – 'the knack of presenting a cogent case and the

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[1] Rachel Fuchs, *Gender and poverty in nineteenth-century Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), pp 14-17.

places and situations under which they would receive the most sympathy', as Hufton has observed[2] – informed how beggars, either casual or professional, plied their trade.

This thesis suggests that for historians researching street begging in this period, there are many complexities. Contemporary discourse on the poor and on beggary was beset with the difficulties of defining just what and who were being discussed. Legal and cultural definitions of begging and vagrancy were imprecise, shifting and problematic. The socio-economic categories of individuals who begged were fluid and ever-evolving. Was there ever a 'typical' beggar? It is demonstrated in Chapter One that the mid-1820s economic downturn, which impacted severely on urban textile workers, led to an increased proportion of artisans among the mendicant classes of Irish cities. The case of charwomen raises the question of where did casual employment end and begging commence. Begging is, by definition, the solicitation of alms, yet it regularly encompassed the sale of trivial items or the offering of a service. Begging was part of the 'economy of makeshifts' which the poor negotiated on a daily basis.

Begging in nineteenth-century Ireland was a practice which involved and enforced gendered attitudes and roles. Poor women were acutely vulnerable to destitution and pauperism and many accounts note their predominance among mendicants. While many sources speak of a singularly male sense of shame towards begging, one must countenance Geary's assertion that women ultimately carried the responsibility for ensuring that their children were fed and this urgency superseded all possible notions of shame. Children were prominent among the mendicant classes and various contributors to public discourse portrayed these child beggars as victims of the moral pollution of city slums. Beggary was part of the decline into more serious grades of degradation, typically thievery for boys and prostitution for girls.

[2] Olwen H. Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France, 1750-1789* (Oxford, 1974), pp 109-110.

Measuring mendicancy was also plagued with difficulties. How does one satisfactorily estimate the numbers of an imprecisely-defined category of inherently marginalised individuals, to many of whom seasonal migration, vagrancy and rootlessness was a way of life? It is argued in this thesis that contemporaries' concern with the extent of mendicancy is to be seen in the context of the wider societal debate on a proposed statutory poor law. In the 1830s, the cost of the prospective rates-funded system of relief needed to be set against the current casual and voluntary system of alms-giving. Mendicancy was one of the most prominent matters of social and moral concern that exercised the membership of statistical societies across Ireland and the transatlantic world from the 1830s onwards. Statistics, bounding in possibility and excitement, heralded, its new disciples believed, an opportunity to arrive at fully-informed conclusions through the negotiation of objective facts.

Perceptions of beggars in pre-Famine Ireland were varied. These included fears that beggars spread disease and impeded the successful running of businesses, mainly shops in urban areas. Beggary was associated, by some, with the supernatural, and the extent to which beggars' prayers and curses were heeded varied from person to person. The ubiquity and visibility of beggars offended the sensibilities of the wealthier classes, but could be cunningly used by those same 'respectable' classes, as represented by the members of mendicity societies, in striking fear into inhabitants who failed to subscribe to their charity. It has been argued that the mendicity societies constituted a movement wherein charities not only shared mutual motivations and objectives but exchanged information amongst each other. The interchange of information (and sometimes personnel), as well as the offering of assistance between societies, marked them out as more than merely a mass of unconnected bodies. They constituted a movement, not rule-bound or orbiting around a pivotal entity, but linked by an exchange of ideas and

common interests. The decline of these societies can be directly linked to the introduction of the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act, which raised fears among rate-payers that they would face 'double taxation', by way of poor rates in addition to subscriptions to their local mendicity society, for the support of the same category of paupers. These fears led directly to the dissolution of most Irish mendicity societies in the same period as the introduction of the poor-rate assessment and the establishment of the workhouse system.

The rise of evangelicalism in transatlantic Protestantism in the late-eighteenth century influenced how Protestants (not just Episcopalians) viewed issues surrounding poverty. In seeking a remedy for the condition of the country's paupers and beggars, emphasis shifted from concern for the mendicant's temporal wants, as emphasised by Bishop Richard Woodward in his 1760s scheme for a national provision for the poor, to his spiritual poverty, as argued by the evangelical rector of Powerscourt, Rev. Robert Daly in 1830. The first half of the century was a period when parish vestries lost most of their powers to curtail beggars, through a combination of the emergence of institutional responses to mendicancy, such as the houses of industry and the workhouse system, as well as the wider transference of civil powers away from parishes.

Thomas Chalmers has been deployed as a case study in evangelical, as well as Presbyterian, social thought. His many visits to the country, his correspondence with Irish ministers and his expert testimony to an 1830 select committee on poverty in Ireland, justifies the emphasis placed on him in this thesis. Chalmers adhered to Calvinistic thinking in championing a voluntary approach to poverty and mendicancy, putting this into action in his famous St John's experiment in Glasgow. Reflecting the significance of scriptures to social commentators of this period, Chalmers drew on the example of Christ to defend his opposition to indiscriminate alms-giving to beggars.

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The trope of beggary was used by Presbyterian commentators to present the north-east of the island as being fundamentally different to the 'priest-ridden' rest of the country. The perceived beggary and economic backwardness of the largely Catholic south and west was contrasted with the industriousness and economic vibrancy of 'Protestant Ulster'.

A genuine concern for the poor was held by the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, who imbued his followers with this sentiment. Wesley regularly drew on the image of the beggar in his sermons and correspondence, and in one instance, shaped his recollection of a childhood encounter with a mendicant around the biblical parable of Dives and Lazarus, the Rich Man and the Beggar. Wesley gave freely to beggars and does not seem to have drawn a moralising distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. Yet, the Strangers' Friend Societies' policy of exclusion of beggars from their charity diverted significantly from Wesley's worldview.

As members of a religious sect with no formal dogma, Quakers did not approach social issues from positions of strict creedal adherence. Instead, innovation and independence of thought characterised Quakers' approaches. On a corporate level, Quaker monthly meetings usually maintained a poor committee for impoverished fellow congregants but Quaker involvement in the relief of other denominations was left to individuals to carry out in a personal capacity. They did, however, generally share the views of their social peers, insofar as industry and self-sufficiency were championed, the provision of relief to the 'deserving' poor was encouraged, and idleness and dependency were disdained. In this regard, Quaker social commentators – invariably middle-class men – reflected wider middle-class emphasis on the virtues of industry, restraint, sobriety and cleanliness.

Reflecting the singular experience of poverty, distress, starvation and death during the Great Famine, the nature and perceptions of beggary underwent some shifts during these years. Contemporaries struggled to define or measure the country's beggars. Urban centres were overrun by an influx of rural migrants, desperate to access charity or an emigrant's ticket. The 1847 Vagrancy Act, long neglected by historians of the Great Famine, impacted greatly on the country's criminal justice system and fed into the revived debate on what ought to be done with Ireland's chronic mendicancy problem. While some commentators, such as Thomas Chalmers, modified their expressed views on begging and alms-giving, charity remained grounded in the distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor.

This thesis argues that middle-class philanthropists and social commentators, regardless of their confessional allegiance, largely held shared beliefs on the merits of discrimination in charity and the evils of unqualified alms-giving to street beggars. An aversion to indiscriminate charity was held as strongly by members of the Catholic hierarchy as by the most fervent Ulster Presbyterian minister. In considering these matters, emphasis must be given to the influence of middle-class interests and expectations from the early decades of the century onwards, and how these shaped the language of philanthropy. In an era of moral and material 'improvement', the poor were to be assisted in removing themselves from idleness, misery and pauperism, yet were not to be lifted beyond their natural station or rank in society. Limited social mobility was the experience of the poor in this period. Every man, woman and child was born into a particular station in life, and that rank carried with it expectations of one's responsibilities. While the language of charity deployed in the public sphere was invariably condescending towards the poorer classes, it was appreciated by wealthier members of society that their material comfort depended on the labour of the poor. By

his neglect of his duties to be industrious, the idle labourer or artisan not only sinned against God but against wider society. Religious reform, the rise of evangelicalism, the strengthening conservative impulse in reaction to the horrors of the French Revolution, the impact of industrialisation and urbanisation, and fear of the impact of these societal changes contributed to the creation of an urban middle-class identity in Ireland and Britain, adherents of which championed the virtues of industry, sobriety, religious devotion and piety, self-help, personal cleanliness, political obedience, and 'moral restraint'. While not forgetting the example of Christ in working among the poor, middle-class philanthropists and commentators believed that, to paraphrase Lord Acton, absolute charity tended to corrupt absolutely.

Moving down the social ladder, the matter becomes complicated. It is clear that most of the alms-giving to beggars was undertaken by members of the labouring and poorer classes. For example, the middle-class members of mendicity societies regularly beseeched domestic servants to desist in giving alms, in the form of food, to beggars calling at the doors of the wealthier members of urban society. In both rural and urban Ireland, most of these poor alms-givers were Catholics. Yet, some evidence, such as the Poor Inquiry testimony from north-east Ulster, reveals that indiscriminate alms-giving was practiced there too by labouring Protestants. Sources agree that most of the country's beggars were supported largely by those slightly better-off than themselves; in urban locations, these were usually labourers, artisans and shopkeepers. In this light, Niall Ó Ciosáin's assertion that 'the distinction is not between denominations but between the clergy of all denominations and the representatives of the state on the one hand, and the laity of all denominations on the other'[3] is as questionable as Timothy P. O'Neill's approach, which was outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Seán

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[3] Niall Ó Ciosáin, *Ireland in official print culture, 1800-1850: a new reading of the Poor Inquiry* (Oxford, 2014), p. 118.

Connolly's claim that social class was the true line of demarcation in how individuals negotiated mendicancy is closer to the truth.

Delving further into this matter, it is evident that complexities abound and nothing is black-and-white. Yes, the poor were the main supporters of beggars but the drawing of distinctions between various categories of mendicants was not unknown among the lower orders. Members of all classes distinguished between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. This terminology is found in abundance in the contemporary language of charity, as reflected in pamphlets, charity sermons, addresses to public meetings and private correspondence – all reflecting the views of the wealthier classes – yet these moralising categorisations are also to be found, for instance, in the extensive Poor Inquiry testimony from materially humble members of society. As outlined earlier in this study, some of the historiography of poverty in pre-Famine Ireland suggests that 'Protestant moralists' practiced discrimination in charity, while Roman Catholics indulged in indiscriminate charity free from moralising sanctimony. Such crude generalisations are problematic. While it is undoubted that each denomination's approach to mendicancy carried a 'flavour' distinct to that denomination, more significant were the overlaps in how individuals with opposing theological doctrines negotiated beggary and charity.

Further fields of research

As well as subjecting beggary and alms-giving to considerable analysis this thesis has raised questions and pointed to themes that require further research by historians of nineteenth-century Ireland. The role of the churches and charities in responding to beggary proved such a rich vein of research that the role of the state did not receive the

same level of attention, and this is a matter which warrants further attention, for instance in regard to the powers of the police to apprehend and detain street beggars. While there have been histories of the many associations that managed the various categories of poor in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ireland, the Dublin House of Industry is an institution long in need of extensive analysis. The provision of informal private support within a kinship network remains largely unexamined in an Irish context, and a study of this subject would deepen our understanding of how the poor viewed their distress and the relief options available to them, as well as exploring the extent to which friends, families and neighbours were important features in the lives of the poor. It is probable, however, that such a study would be impossible given the lack of sources. The prevalence of children in urban begging was remarked upon by countless commentators but this phenomenon has not been subjected to detailed analysis. Perceptions of the corruptive nature of the urban environment, particularly the morally corrosive effect these 'debilitating environments'[4] had on vulnerable and impressionable children, would be sure to reward the researcher and such a study would complement the work of Felix Driver and Tristram Hunt on nineteenth-century British cities.[5]

Further studies could also build upon the themes examined and approaches taken in this thesis. While focused on the questions of begging and alms-giving, this study has probed numerous aspects of nineteenth-century Irish society. It is here suggested that mendicancy can be deployed as a vehicle with which to drive a wide-ranging analysis of Irish society in the first half of the nineteenth century. This thesis has been concerned with perceptions of and responses to street begging in the period 1815-50, yet this topic

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[4] Heather Shore, *Artful dodgers: youth crime in early-nineteenth-century London* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 2.
[5] Felix Driver, 'Moral geographies: social science and the urban environment in mid-nineteenth-century England' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, new series, xiii, no. 3 (1988), pp 275-87; Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: the rise and fall of the Victorian city* (London, 2005), pp 13-185.

has provided insights into wider social and cultural developments: the growing confidence and assertiveness of the Catholic middling classes; the rise of Protestant evangelicalism and its influence in shaping social thought; the evolving role of the parish vestries in the civil life of local communities; the importance of the culture of associations in spurring the formation of hundreds of charitable societies across Ireland and Britain. A theme which has run through this thesis is the transnational interchange of social thought on questions such as poverty and begging, and this is proven by the proliferation of the various social, philanthropic and intellectual movements identified and analysed above. These include the statistical societies, Strangers' Friend Societies and, most pertinently to this study, the mendicity societies. The debates on begging and alms-giving need to be viewed in an transnational context. Irish mendicity societies, while arising from local initiative, were part of a transnational mendicity society movement, drawing inspiration from the pioneering Hamburg institution and, in some cases, exchanging information directly with similar institutions in Britain. The Irish poor law debate was heavily influenced by the parallel debate in Britain, both in terms of the main commentators and their ideas. The aforementioned movements of social improvement transcended national boundaries and were international phenomena. The impact of religious revivals also introduced an international element into the Irish context. Evangelical Protestantism flourished in North America, as well as Ireland and Britain, while the Catholic revival in Ireland mirrored the growing assertiveness of the Catholic Church in Europe. To study begging and alms-giving in pre-Famine Ireland is to study a variety of social, cultural, economic, political and religious factors, both internal and external to Ireland, which shaped how all classes of society, from British parliamentarians to Dublin artisans, perceived and responded to the intractable question of the poor and their relief.

APPENDIX

A listing of Irish mendicity societies in existence between 1809-40
(arranged alphabetically)

Antrim

The town's mendicity society was established in 1825 and continued until September 1836, when 'from a variety of causes, it was abandoned'.[1] Assistance was given to the 'aged and infirm poor who have resided seven years in the town or neighbourhood of Antrim'. Elderly labourers and women were the most common group of applicants. The charity dealt with on average around 140 cases each year but this number included some repeat cases.[2]

Armagh

The society was in existence in 1830 and provided relief for up to 500 inhabitants of the city. Income derived from 'voluntary contributions from the inhabitants of the city of Armagh'.[3]

Ballycastle

This charity failed owing to influx of 'strange' beggars and continuation of alms-giving in the streets.[4]

Ballymena

Founded on 1 February 1826, the Ballymena Mendicity Society was funded by voluntary contributions, petty sessions fines, a parochial applotment and an annual contribution of £30-50 from the town's proprietor, Mr Adair. Relief was limited to poor persons resident in the area for seven years and most applicants were women. The numbers relieved varied between 115 and 145 annually, and shopkeepers were the main supporters of the charity.[5]

Ballymoney

The society was established in 1821 'for suppressing vagrant mendicity, by giving employment and relief to the poor at their own dwellings'.[6]

Ballyshannon

The Ballyshannon mendicity asylum was founded circa 1830. Relief was given mostly to 'widows and the families of reduced labourers'; a weekly allowance of 4*d.* to 9*d.* was provided to cover rent. Just more than 100 people were relieved annually, of whom in 1834 seven were Protestant. The society employed a 'bang-beggar' for removing beggars from the streets.[7]

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[1] *OS Memoirs,* xxix, p. 18. See also ibid., p. 26; *BNL*, 24 June 1828, 14 June 1831, 2 Apr. 1833; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 109-11.

[2] *Poor Inquiry. First Report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 109-11.

[3] *Third report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, Appendix, p. 660; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 294; *BNL*, 2 July 1830; Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 39.

[4] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 726.

[5] *OS Memoirs*, xxiii, p. 103; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 111-13; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 726.

[6] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 151. See also *BNL*, 2 Apr. 1833, 9 Dec. 1842; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 727; *Ireland. An account of all sums of money levied in the several parishes of Ireland, by authority of vestry, for building and repairing of churches, salaries of parish clerks and other officers, and other incidents; particularly distinguishing any sums which may have been raised for purchase of organs or stoves, or salaries of organists or choristers. Part I* (n.p., n.d. [1824]), p. 354.

[7] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 118-19.

Bangor

This charity was founded 2 April 1826 for 'the suppression of mendicancy and the encouragement of industry'.[8] It was 'supported by subscription, from which food and clothing are distributed to the poor'.[9]

Belfast (House of Industry)

The Belfast institution was founded in June 1809 and was dissolved in 1841, shortly after the town's workhouse opened for the reception of inmates. It was located at the corner of Marquis Street and Smithfield, an impoverished area of the town. This was the first Irish mendicity society and employed paupers in spinning yarn, among other activities. Outdoor relief was provided, while constables were empowered to apprehend and confine street beggars in the House of Industry's cells.[10]

Bushmills

The society was recorded as being in existence circa 1834.[11]

Caledon

Founded in 1829 by second Earl Caledon and his wife, who subscribed £100 per annum, this charity aimed to provide relief 'objects of real charity and to detect impostors and strangers, who have no claim to our assistance'.[12]

Carlow

The Carlow Mendicity Society appears to have been a short-lived initiative. Some boilers were fitted up in an old gaol premises and tickets for food were distributed to the town's mendicants, with labour also being provided. According to Bishop James Doyle: 'We had a mendicity association in Carlow for two or three years, which we gave up because we found it only increased the number of our beggars; we could not exclude vagrants from the town, we had no authority to prevent street-begging, and the inhabitants found it too burthensome to support the mendicity, and at the same time to support paupers in the streets.'[13]

Carrickfergus

This society was founded on 1 May 1827 'to remove and prevent street-begging by assisting the aged, helpless and infirm, and employing the labouring poor'. It was funded by subscriptions, petty sessions fines and charity sermons. Yarn was provided to the poor for manufacture, for which they were paid. Relief was given in the form of weekly allowances, a supply of food or fuel, and a limited supply of rented lodgings. The charity relieved, on average, 162 people annually.[14]

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[8] *Appendix to the sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners. Appendices A. B. C. D. & E.*, p. 216, H.C. 1840 [C 253], xvii, 640.

[9] *OS Memoirs*, vii, p. 24. See also *BNL*, 7 Oct. 1831, 24 Feb. 1835; Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 183.

[10] *Poor Inquiry, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 11-15; *BNL*, 20 Dec. 1814; *Second report of Geo. Nicholls, Esq., on Poor Laws, Ireland*, p. 11; Jordan, *Who cared?*, pp 20-24. See above, Chapter Four.

[11] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 727.

[12] 'Account book of the Mendicity Society of Caledon, 1829-1869', 24 Jan. 1829, p. 9 (PRONI, Caledon Papers, D2433/A/11/1); Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, pp 243-4; *OS Memoirs*, xx, pp 1-4.

[13] *Second report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 18 May-5 June*, p. 406, H.C. 1830 (654), vii, 582.

[14] *OS Memoirs*, xxxvii, pp 52, 68-9, 97-9, 145-6, 174. See also *BNL*, 11 Sept. 1829, 15 Jan. 1830, 25 June 1833; *Third report of evidence from the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 8 June-7 July. With an appendix of documents and papers, and likewise a general index*, Appendix, p. 698, H.C. 1830 (665), vii, 878; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A,* pp 710-11.

APPENDIX (continued)

Carrickmacross

The society was in existence in the late-1830s and relieved around 100 families, who received between 4*d*. and 9*d*. each week.[15]

Clonmel

The Clonmel Mendicity Society was in existence in the mid-1830s. It provided relief to around 124 people who received allowances of food and money; some lodging was provided on the charity's premises. 'The inmates are orphans and widows, and four or five infirm old men.'[16]

Coleraine

Founded in 1825, the society provided weekly payments of 5*d*. to 15*d*. to 'poor housekeepers'. The managing committee comprised subscribers of £1 1*s*. per annum. Among the paid officers were 'persons to prevent street begging'. Income came from subscriptions, donations at charity sermons, bequests, mayoral court fines and church collections. Two-thirds of applicants were women.[17]

Cork

The Cork society was founded circa 1826 and located in old barracks on Barrack Street, which was converted to a mendicity asylum. It appears that there was an overlap of duties with the Cork House of Industry. The institution catered for annual average of 2,879 inmates in late-1820s.[18]

Derry

This society was established on 13 May 1825 'for the suppression of street-begging, and for the encouragement of industry among the very poorest members of the community'. It was dissolved circa 1839, upon the introduction of the Irish Poor Law. Mendicants were put to labour, such as picking oakum, making nets, spinning and breaking oyster shells, while beadles were employed to apprehend street beggars. Relief was provided both inside and outside the mendicity asylum.[19]

Downpatrick

Established 'for assisting the aged and infirm and preventing vagrancy', this society was in existence around the mid-1830s.[20]

Drogheda

The Drogheda society was founded in 1822 and closed around 1838. Drogheda Corporation employed two bang-beggars to apprehend and confine beggars in the mendicity asylum.

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[15] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i , p. 275; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 390.

[16] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, pp 699-702; Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 371.

[17] *OS Memoirs*, xxxiii, pp 71, 72-3 (list of named subscribers); *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 121-2; *Municipal corporations, (Ireland). Appendix to the first report of the commissioners. Part III – Conclusion of the north-western circuit*, pp 1050-51, H.C. 1836 [C 26], xxiv, 50-51; Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 388; *BNL*, 13 May 1834.

[18] *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, 6 Nov., 15 Nov. 1826; *FJ*, 23 Nov. 1826; *Third report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, p. 701.

[19] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 65-68; *First report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, pp 172-4. A complete and bound collection of the society's annual reports (1825-38) is held in the McClay Library, Queen's University Belfast, Special Collections (hHV4545 MEND).

[20] *BNL*, 18 Dec. 1835; Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 495.

Mendicants were employed in street cleaning, picking oakum, making nets, knitting and stone-breaking. The daily numbers of those relieved fluctuated between seventy-five to 125.[21]

Dublin

The Dublin society was founded in January 1818 and in late-2014, remains in existence. Among the largest and most prominent of Dublin's charities in the early-nineteenth century, the Mendicity Society attracted considerable support from clergy and laity of all denominations. Day relief, mainly food, was provided to mendicants and education facilities for children. Paupers were put to work in various forms of manual labour. The charity later established the city's first public baths.[22]

Dundalk

The Dundalk society was in existence circa 1835. It was supported by subscriptions, many of which came from women.[23]

Dungannon

This society was recorded as being active in the late-1830s.[24] The *OS Memoirs* state: 'There is in Dungannon a mendicity association kept up by subscription of the townspeople and from which several poor people have an allowance of from 4*d*. to 10*d*. weekly. The small sums collected at church are divided among the most deserving Protestant poor at Easter and Christmas.'[25]

Ennis

Founded in 1832, the Ennis charity was still in existence circa 1838.[26]

Enniskillen

The Enniskillen society was a relatively early Irish mendicity society, being founded in 1822. Income included an annual contribution (£5-10) from Enniskillen Corporation and voluntary subscriptions. Around 150 'beggars, and creatures approaching to beggary' were on the charity's 'mendicity list', with weekly allowances of 4*d*. to 1*s*. 8*d*. being provided 'to keep them from begging in the street'.[27]

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[21] *Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830*, pp 375-6; *Third report, state of the poor select committee*, *1830*, p.669; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 54-5; McHugh, *Drogheda before the Famine*, pp 46-51.

[22] Dublin Mendicity Society Papers (NLI, MS 32,599/1-32,616); published annual reports in NLI and RIA; 'Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the city of Dublin', *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part II*; Woods, *Dublin outsiders*.

[23] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 571; *Poor (Ireland.) Returns to orders of the honourable House of Commons, dated 5th March 1828; - for a return of the corporations in the counties, and in the counties of cities and towns in Ireland, instituted for the relief of the poor, and for punishing vagabonds and sturdy beggars, in pursuance of act 11 & 12 Geo. 3 c. 30: - Also, for a return of the hospitals, or houses of industry, and for the relief of the poor, that have been built by the said corporations, in pursuance of the said act*, p. 8, H.C. 1828 (291), xxii, 460.

[24] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 577; *BNL*, 12 Feb., 23 Aug. 1839.

[25] *OS Memoirs*, xx, p. 42.

[26] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 602; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 643; Henry Maunsell, *The only safe poor law experiment for Ireland: a letter to the right Honourable Lord Viscount Morpeth* (Dublin, 1838), p. 11.

[27] *Municipal corporations, first report, Appendix, Part III*, pp 1069, 1082, 1084; Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, i, p. 607; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Supplement to Appendix C, Part I*, p. 63.

APPENDIX (continued)

Galway

The Galway society was founded on 16 July 1824 and eventually closed in 1837, having shut its doors on several occasions previously, due to insufficient income . The mendicity asylum was located at Wood Quay. Beggary was discouraged through the encouragement of employment for local mendicants and 'strangers' were warned to leave the city. Food and work was provided for inmates.[28]

Hillsborough

This society was in existence in 1836.[29]

Hollywood

The Hollywood charity was founded 'for the purposes of encouraging industry, affording relief to the indigent inhabitants, and checking and counteracting mendicity in the parish'.[30] It existed throughout the late-1820s and into the 1830s.[31] Income came from voluntary sources, including a charity sermon by Rev. Henry Cooke.[32]

Kilkenny

An attempt to found a mendicity society appears to have failed in 1820, but another (successful) attempt was made three years later.[33]

Kilmore

This society was in existence circa 1837.[34]

Kilmud (or Kilmood, or Kilmoodanagh)

The society was established 'for raising funds to be applied to the relief or maintenance of the poor, which are distributed at their own dwellings monthly'.[35]

Knockbreda

In January 1830, the Knockbreda society had been established for two and a half years, during which time it gave relief each week to more than eighty 'distressed poor objects, who, without such aid, must have endured all the horrors of misery, wretchedness and want'.[36]

Larne

The Larne Mendicity Society was in existence as early as 1831 and continued until at least 1840. In early-1832 the society had approximately 100 paupers on its list and subscriptions for the previous year totalled just less than £270.[37]

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[28] *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 17 July, 6 Nov. 1824, 21 May 1825; Jonathan Binns, *The miseries and beauties of Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1837), i, p. 412; John Cunningham, *'A town tormented by the sea': Galway, 1790-1914* (Dublin, 2004), pp 47-54.
[29] *BNL*, 6 Dec. 1836; *Appendix to the sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, 1840*, p. 214.
[30] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Addenda to Appendix A,* p. 38e.
[31] *BNL,* 23 Dec. 1828, 6 Mar. 1829, 18 June, 25 June 1830, 7 June 1833.
[32] *BNL*, 13 Aug. 1830.
[33] *Leinster Journal*, 19 Apr. 1820, 27 May 1830, 21 June 1833.
[34] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 184.
[35] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 191.
[36] *BNL*, 8 Jan. 1830.
[37] *BNL*, 10 Jan. 1832, 1 Feb. 1831, 11 Feb. 1840; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 730.

APPENDIX (continued)

Limerick

Located at the south-western end of the city (near the Circular Road), the charity's premises were opened in December 1818. Initially, an allowance for mendicants' lodgings was provided but this was discontinued by 1830. The society catered for 150 mendicants in the mid-1830s and most inmates were women and children. The charity's school closed on foot of a dispute between Catholic and Protestant committee members as to the use of the bible 'without note or comment' as class-books.[38]

Lurgan

Among the main sources of income was a regular contribution from Charles Brownlow M.P. of Lurgan House and petty sessions fines.[39]

Monaghan

The existence of the society was recorded in 1834 and 1837.[40]

Newry

The society was founded circa 1825 and in the mid-1830s was relieving eighty-seven 'absolute paupers', who received an allowance between 3*d*. and £1 per week. Some employment, such as spinning, was provided for mendicants at the charity's premises. In 1834 a new institution called the Newry Workhouse and Mendicity was established, which provided outdoor relief to the town's paupers.[41]

Newtownards

Founded on 13 January 1824 at the request of the Marquis of Londonderry, this society covered the parishes of Newtownards and Comber. It was partially funded by a compulsory assessment on the estates of Lord Londonderry. Officers visited relief applicants before the provision of assistance. On average, forty people were relieved annually on the mendicity asylum's premises, and an additional 300 were in receipt of outdoor relief.[42]

Omagh

A society existed in the mid-1820s.[43]

Parsonstown (Birr)

A society existed in the mid-1830s.[44]

Portaferry

This charity received £1 from James McMullen of Portaferry 'for the benefit of the poor'.[45]

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[38] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1836, Appendix C, Part I*, pp 94-6. See also *Deane's Limerick Directory…1838*, p. 37; Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 277.

[39] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 551 (Shankill parish); *BNL*, 1 May 1840.

[40] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 384; *Charitable donations and bequests (Ireland). Return to an order of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 18 March 1844; - for, returns made into the Office of the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests, since 1830…*, p. 60, H.C. 1844 (458), xliv, 60; *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 393.

[41] *OS Memoirs*, iii, pp 91-105.

[42] *Appendix to the sixth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners,1840*, pp 214-17.

[43] *Minutes of evidence taken before the select committee of the House of Lords, appointed to inquire into the state of Ireland, more particularly with reference to the circumstances which may have led to disturbances in that part of the United Kingdom. 18 February-21 March, 1825*, p. 119, H.C. 1825 (181), ix, 119.

[44] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 456.

[45] *Charitable donations and bequests, since 1830*, p. 194.

APPENDIX (continued)

Portarlington / Ballybrittas

Lewis recorded that: 'At Portarlington and Ballybrittas are dispensaries, and a mendicity society on Dr. Chalmers' plan is supported by subscription.'[46] The society had income totalling around £300 per annum.[47]

Roscrea

The society was founded in 1828 and aspirations to cater for fifty mendicants were frustrated due to insufficient income. Relief was limited to '18 old and infirm persons…who are dieted and lodged in the house'.[48]

Saintfield

This charity was in existence in 1833.[49]

Sligo

The charity was founded in April 1824 and was dissolved in 1841, upon the foundation of the Poor Law Union.[50] In the late-1820s, the charity was catering for an average of more than 26,000 relief cases each year, most certainly including many repeat cases. The total expenditure of the society was between £280-400 per annum, which was raised solely through voluntary sources.[51]

Waterford

Established in 1820 and closed around 1840, the Waterford society was a relatively early member of the Irish mendicity society movement. The foundation of this charity was a direct response to the upsurge in street begging in the city. The founders co-operated with the members of the Dublin Mendicity Society when establishing their organisation. In its first year, the society's income totalled more than £1,000, almost all of which came from subscriptions and donations.[52] The Assistant Poor Inquiry Commissioner Jonathan Binns painted a rather bleak picture of the mendicity asylum, describing it as 'miserably neglected' and 'a terrible scene of desolation and starvation'.[53]

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[46] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 248 (Lea parish). See also *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Supplement to Appendix A*, p. 127.

[47] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 465.

[48] *Poor Inquiry. First report, 1835, Appendix A*, p. 699.

[49] *BNL*, 31 Dec. 1833.

[50] John C. McTernan, *Olde Sligoe: aspects of town and county over 750 years* (Sligo, 1995), pp 245-6.

[51] Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 570; *Third report of evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 8 June-7 July*, Appendix, p. 691, H.C. 1830 (665), vii, 871; ibid., p. 731; *Sligo Journal*, 13 May 1828. See the *Sligo Journal* throughout the late-1820s for regular coverage of the town's mendicity asylum. See also: *Poor (Ireland.) Returns of the corporations in the counties, and in the counties of cities and towns in Ireland, instituted for the relief of the poor, and for punishing vagabonds and sturdy beggars*, pp 10, 18.

[52] *First annual report, of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in the City of Waterford* (Waterford, 1822); Lewis, *Topographical dictionary*, ii, p. 694.

[53] Binns, *Miseries and beauties of Ireland*, ii, pp 256-7. See also Report on the state of the poor in Waterford city and on the charitable institutions of that city, 5 April 1834, ff 18r-29r (NLI MS 3288); Seán E. Ó Cearbhaill, 'A memory that lived and a charity that died: Edmund Rice and the Mendicity Institute' in Peter S. Carroll (ed.), *A man raised up: recollections and reflections on Venerable Edmund Rice presented in 1994 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of this death* (Dublin, 1994), pp 159-71.

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