

**‘DIGGING FOR GOLD’: IRISH BUILDERS IN
POST-WAR LONDON - HISTORICAL
REPRESENTATIONS AND REALITIES.**

Volume 1 of 2

Michael Bernard Mulvey

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Maynooth University



Department of History

Head of Department: Prof. Filipe Ribeiro de Menezes

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Redmond

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the lived experiences of Irish male migrants who came to London during and after World War Two to work as builders in the construction and civil engineering industries. Using extensive primary, archival and secondary sources, this research blends socio-economic, construction and cultural history to compare and contrast a wide range of cultural representations disseminated about these workers through Irish public discourse, culture and folklore. Twenty-one original oral histories collected for this project are a crucial part of the primary research, supported by an array of corroborative journalistic and corporate documentation. This research concludes that these representations focus too narrowly upon a range of negative stereotypes, connotations and socio-economic outcomes. Contrary to these representations a significant majority of post-war migrants – whilst struggling through the inevitable hardships of immigration - eventually led (or lead) productive, moderate, happy, socio-economically viable, stable and rewarding lives in London.

This is the first research to make an objective evidence-based empirical survey, in quantitative and qualitative terms, of the cohort of Irish migrants who worked on the post-war reconstruction of London. It is also the first research to establish the geographic, socio-economic and cultural patterns to their migration stories and to link those patterns to underlying theoretical concepts. An example is the synthesis of theoretical ideas relating to social capital, networking, cultural circuits and ethnic entrepreneurship. This posits that Irish migrant construction workers generally operated within an ‘auto-segregated’ workspace and socialised within a volitional self-enclosed community. This community exhibited characteristics of both ethnic and diasporic enclaves and gradually developed a form of niche ethnic economy. Other novel aspects of this work are: the granular analysis of the casualised recruitment system known as ‘the lump’ and the performative masculinities it elicited; the crucial role played – albeit surreptitiously – by women in the Irish migrant construction environment; the detailed histories of key Irish-founded British construction firms; and the elucidation of how their entrepreneurial success fed back into developments in Irish political and economic life in the post-war decades. The hope is that this research ignites further and deeper historical interest in the histories of the people who created the metropolitan centres of the world, rather than simply the structures of the cities themselves.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and I have not obtained a Degree in this University or elsewhere on the basis of this Doctoral Thesis.

I hereby request a stay of 2 years on the deposition of this thesis in the Institutional eTheses Archive managed by the Library (<http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie>) in order to facilitate my publishing of this work. I have written to the Dean of Graduate Studies in this regard, provided written support from my Supervisor/Head of Department, and have submitted Form C (Thesis Depositor Declaration Form).

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Signed:



Michael Bernard Mulvey

DEDICATION

In memory of my uncle, Jimmy Mulvey, a great man with a pick, a shovel and a pen, and my youngest brother, Stephen, who died during this research. Both left way too early, and I miss them more than I can say.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this thesis would not have been possible without the financial support of the John and Pat Hume Postgraduate Scholarship Bursary (2014-2016) and the Irish Research Council Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (2017-2019) for which I am very grateful.

At the risk of understatement, I am not known for my brevity! My academic supervisor, Dr. Jennifer Redmond has maintained extraordinary patience, charm and enthusiasm in the face of my often verbose, frequently rambling and inarticulate attempts to say what I mean – often recognising before me that my thoughts need re-arranging. Her patience at my inability to meet agreed deadlines, incisive critical eye and academic rigour pushed me across the line. I owe her profound thanks. I am indebted also to Professor Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, Dr Jacinta Prunty, and all the teaching and departmental staff at the History department in Maynooth University. A special mention to Professors Marian Lyons and Terence Dooley, both of whom were instrumental in my decision to undertake a doctorate after I had completed my undergraduate studies.

My debt to Dr. Reg Hall is equally profound, both in academic and personal terms. He has been a constant inspiration to me, musically and as a family friend, since my teenage years. When he learned I had aspirations to research the Irish in London, he was characteristically enthusiastic, generous and open about his own research experiences. His vast range of archival sources have proved invaluable as have his constant reminders to stay focused on the thesis aims. If I have it is, in no small measure, because of the generous support which Reg brought to my historical forays.

My grateful thanks to Dr. Tony Murray at London Metropolitan University, who curates the Archive of the Irish in Britain, and who graciously accepted my endless requests for random access. Thanks also to Professor Linda Clarke, Dr Christine Wall and staff at the Centre for the Study of the Production of the Built Environment (ProBE) at Westminster Business School with whom I was a Visiting Scholar whilst undertaking this research. The staff of the National Archives of Ireland (Dublin), The UK National Archives (Kew), The British Library and the Metropolitan Archives (London) were constantly helpful. Their professionalism and generosity as academics and curators does them credit. A big thank you also to Alex McDonnell of the Aisling Project in Camden, who kindly helped with information on Arlington House and put me in touch with Joe McGarry, who gave me essential information on the days of the ‘lump’ in Camden.

My undergraduate ‘study-buddy’ Ita Murphy was a huge help to me both with finalising the oral history aspects of the research and for general advice. My friends and compatriots in the London-Irish traditional music community all helped in various ways; especially Karen Ryan and Pete Quinn, Gary & Teresa Connolly, John & Maureen Carty, Tony Conboy, Sean Gilrane, Gregory Daly, Bryan Rooney, James Clenaghan, Tommy Keane, Jaqueline McCarthy, Richie Pigott, Jimmy Keane, Pat Mulvey and many more– my grateful thanks to you all.

Obviously the most profound debt of love and appreciation go to my family, my wonderful wife, Alison, my children, Matthew, Ciara and Sinéad, who really have endured my panic attacks, tantrums and moods with endless patience and tolerance; I can never repay the debt. Nor can I repay

that debt owed to my own parents, Tom and Mary, who were part of the post-war mailboat generation, who toiled and sweated all their lives so that we would have more opportunity than they did. My father, especially, was one of those post-war migrant builders and encouraged me into the construction industry. Although, like most of his compatriots, he was mildly bemused that their experiences merited serious historical research, once he got used to the idea he was generous with his time and his reminiscences. I am distraught that he is now too ill to understand his contribution.

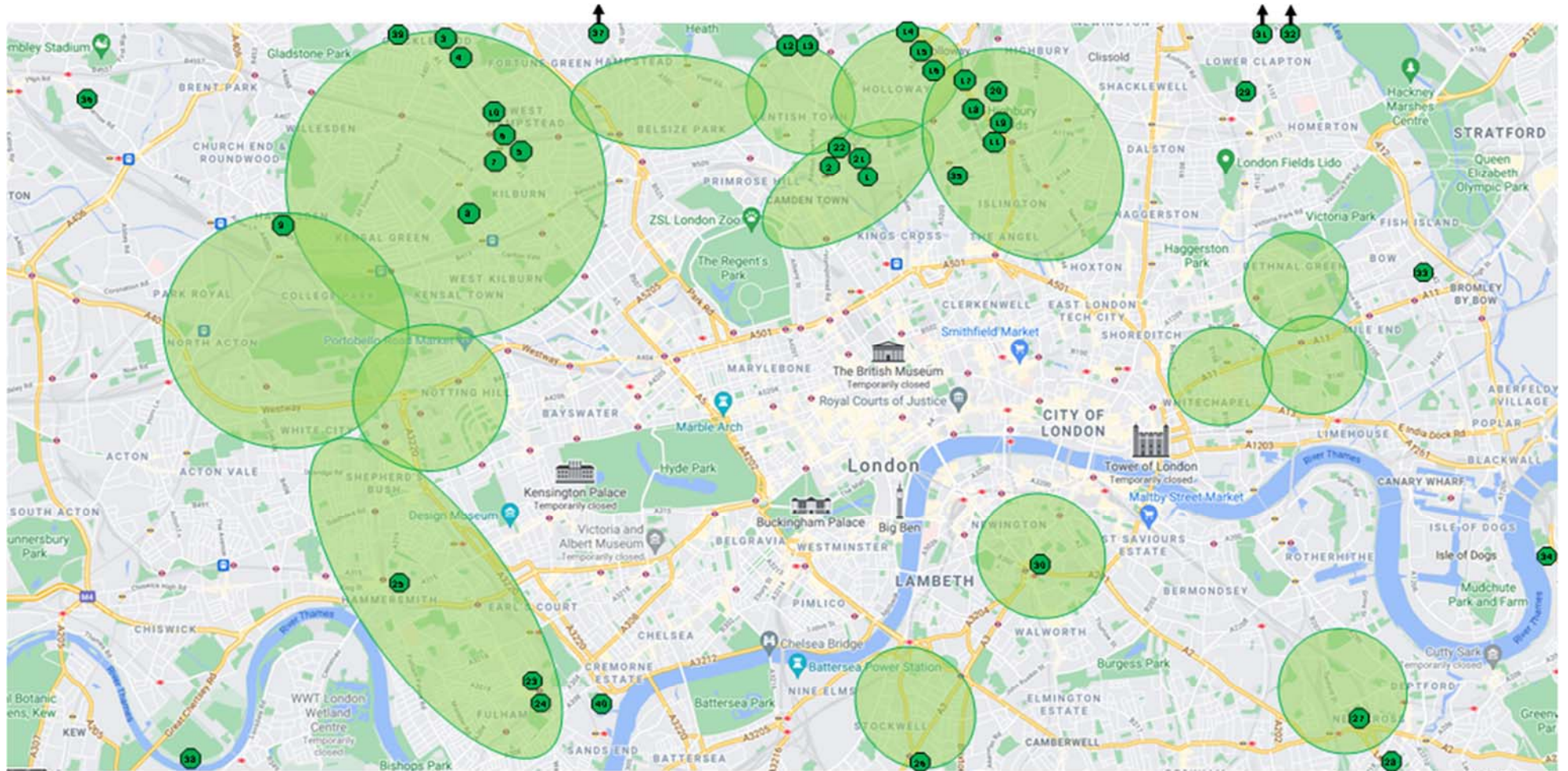
Most of all I acknowledge the immeasurable contribution made by the interviewees who agreed to partake in this research; who gave of their time and experiences freely and openly. They and their wives and partners are really a different breed – gentle, courteous, charming, intelligent, tough and resilient; their like will not be seen again.

Abbreviations & References

Abbreviation	Meaning / Source
AIB	The Archive of the Irish in Britain, Irish Studies Centre, London Metropolitan University, London
BL	The British Library, London
BNA	The British Newspaper Archive available at findmypast.ie/html
LMA	London Metropolitan Area
LMArch	London Metropolitan Archives, London
NAI	The National Archives of Ireland, Dublin
NAUK	The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew
OI#	Original Interview # - see Appendix A
ONS	UK Office for National Statistics
ProBE	The Centre for the Production of the Built Environment, Westminster University.
RC	Reinforced Concrete

LONDON MAPS

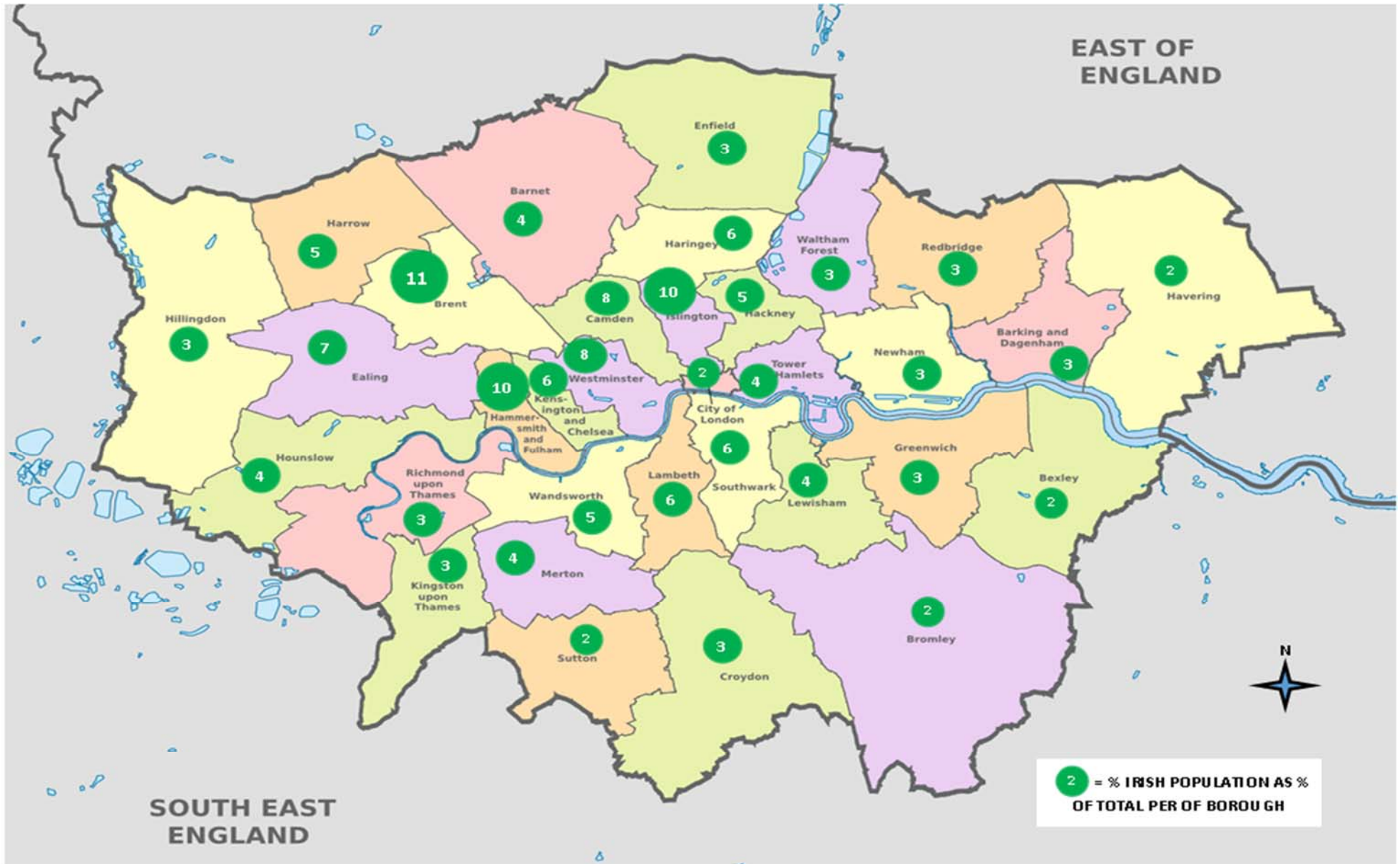
Map 1 – Inner London, Irish Migrant Builder Population Clusters (approximated) & Significant Sites of Irish Associational Culture, 1940-1995.



Source: Map data ©2019 Google
Not to Scale

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 London Irish Centre 2 Buffalo Club/Electric Ballroom 3 Galty more Dancehall 4 Crown Pub 5 Sacred Heart Church, Kilburn (Quex Road) 6 National Ballroom 7 Biddy Mulligan's Pub 8 Aras na Gael Cultural Centre 9 Mean Fiddler Club/Dancehall 10 Banba Dancehall | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11 J Murphy & Sons ('Green' Murphy) - original HQ 12 J Murphy & Sons ('Green' Murphy) - present HQ 13 Forum Dancehall (owned by J Murphy) 14 Archway Tavern Pub 15 Gresham Ballroom/Dancehall 16 Half Moon Pub 17 Round Tower Dancehall 18 Victoria Pub / Tommy Flynn's Pub 19 Thatch / T&C2 Dancehall 20 Favourite Pub | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 Arlington House (Rowton House) 22 St. Hal's RC Church 23 Hibernian Club Dancehall 24 White Hart Pub 25 Hammersmith Irish Centre 26 Swan in Stockwell Pub 27 Harp Dancehall 28 Lewisham Irish Centre 29 Sugaw'n Kitchen Theatre Pub 30 Shamrock Dancehall, Elephant & Castle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 31 JMSE ('Grey' Murphy) HQ 32 Abbey (Gallaghers) - original London office 33 Fitzpatrick plc - original London office 34 O'Keefe - original London office 35 Lowery - original London office 36 MJ Clancy - original London office 37 Durkan Bros - original London office 38 Byrne Bros - original London office 39 McNicholas Construction ('Green'/'Brown') 40 Balloon Tavern Pub |
|--|--|---|---|

Map 2 – Greater London, Irish Population Distribution across London, (Adapted from 1981 Census, See also, Appendix C, pp.5-6.)



Map Source: <https://londonmap360.com/london-boroughs-map> (Not to Scale)

Introduction

*'Oh, Mary, this London's a wonderful sight,
There's people here working by day and by night.
They don't sow potatoes, nor barley, nor wheat,
But there's gangs of them digging for gold in the street,'*

(From 'The Mountains of Mourne' written by Percy French in 1896¹)

'History is trying to find the truth behind the nonsense'²

Dónall Mac Amhlaigh observed that 'historians have written books about the Irish in Britain without ever really knowing the Irish immigrant labouring class [...] they can't tell you what those workers felt and what they thought'.³ Around the same time, Cambridge historian G.M. Trevelyan wrote that 'without social history, economic history is barren and political history unintelligible'.⁴ These ideas have influenced my approach to this work. As a British-born, second-generation Irish migrant raised in 'London-Irishness' and construction work, I was always intrigued by the sectoral concentration of the Irish in this industry. My initial ideas took shape after reading Marc Bloch, the great French historian, who wrote that 'the act of a society remodelling the soil upon which it lives in accordance with its needs is [...] an eminently "historical" event'.⁵ Historians of British working-class culture have tended to treat Irish immigrant labour history as a component of British industrialisation.⁶ Post-war social history often analysed the industrial working-classes from a Marxist perspective, seeking to homogenise migrant groups like the Irish into a unified labouring proletariat. For example, O'Day argues that E. P. Thompson's seminal work *The Making of the English Working Class*, (1963) - which undoubtedly pioneered the practice of social history - nonetheless sanctioned

¹ Peter Gammond, *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music* (Oxford, 1991), p.209.

² Dr. Reg Hall speaking at the Irish Centre in Camden Town, the night of the launch of his book, *A few Tunes of Good Music*, 27th March, 2016.

³ Dónall Mac Amhlaigh in N. Gray (ed.), *Writers Talking* (London, 1989), p.184 as cited by Sara Goek, '“I Never would return again to plough the rocks of Bawn”: Irishmen in Post-War Britain' in David Convery (Ed.), *Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working-Class Life* (Dublin, 2013), pp.157-74, p.159.

⁴ Trevor. L. Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry* (Oxford, 1981), p.ix. Williams added histories of technology and industry to Trevelyan's maxim.; Ryan Hester, *Historical Research: Theory and Methods* (Waltham Abbey, 2018), p.9.

⁵ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, (Manchester, 1992), p.21.

⁶ Alan O'Day, 'Revising the Irish Diaspora' in D. George Boyce and O'Day, Alan (eds.), *The Making of Modern Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, (London, 1997), pp.188-215 at p.209.

successive (mainly middle-class) British historians to skirt around the issue of Irish migrant labour within the workforce.⁷ Construction history developed in the early 1980s and is now a well-established field within the humanities, although research has, until relatively recently, focused upon classical, vernacular and international architecture, utilitarian and functional aspects of construction, and esoteric case studies of historic structures.⁸ Recent interdisciplinary research has begun to look more closely at the humanist aspects of construction and the lived experiences; blending aspects of social, economic, cultural, industrial and oral history.⁹ This thesis sits very firmly within that purview; mindful that academic histories, particularly in the socio-economic field have, so far, looked only superficially at the contribution of migrant Irish builders.

Hitherto, no comprehensive, focused investigation has been made of migrant Irish construction workers in London in the lead-up to, during and after the Second World War. Whilst this lacuna in Irish transnational history has been partially rectified since Mac Amhlaigh's original remark, I maintain that extant attempts to historicise the story have, for too long, over-emphasised the limited range of stereotypes and cultural constructs which make up a canonical metanarrative.¹⁰ What was actually a heterogenous range of lived experiences was, until relatively recently, reimagined myopically by historians and public alike; it was a 'subject too often dealt with by means of second-hand narrative and unexamined clichés'.¹¹ Some recent cultural studies and academic research have begun to redress this imbalance.¹² This work attempts to close the lacuna further by retelling the history of the migrant Irish

⁷ O'Day, 'Revising the Irish Diaspora', p.209.

⁸ The best example of the establishment of Construction History as a discipline lies in the existence of the Construction History Society, founded in 1983, and the publication of the Construction History Journal since 1985. See <https://www.constructionhistory.co.uk/publications/construction-history-journal> (accessed 25 September, 2020). For detailed information on content of CHS Journals since 1985, see Dr Bill Addis, 'The contribution made by the Journal Construction History towards establishing the history of construction as an academic discipline' in *Construction History*, Vol. 29, nr.2, (2014).

⁹ See, for example, the work of ProBE (Centre for the Study of the Production of the Built Environment) at the University of Westminster. See <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/research/groups-and-centres/centre-for-the-study-of-the-production-of-the-built-environment-probe/about-us> (accessed 25 September, 2020). As part of the structured learning element of Maynooth University PhD programme I undertook an International Module (HY872A) as a Visiting Scholar at this centre, which proved very influential in my structuring of this research. ¹⁰ For an in-depth analysis of canonical narratives of Irishness in Britain see Marc Scully, 'Discourses of authenticity and national identity among the Irish diaspora in England', PhD thesis, (The Open University, 2010), pp. 12, 43-4, 100-13, 142-86, 284-8, 317-326.

¹¹ Roy Foster, reviewing Enda Delaney, *The Great Irish Famine*, (Dublin, 2012), cover page.

¹² The best examples being : Clair Wills, *The Best are Leaving: Emigration and Post-war Irish Culture*, (Cambridge, 2015) and Barry Hazely, *Life History and the Irish Migrant Experience in Post-War England: Myth, Memory and Emotional Adaption*, (Manchester, 2020). See section 1.3 for a full review of current literature.

builder community in London, as ‘a plain tale with few pretensions’,¹³ employing ‘the austere passion for fact, proof, evidence, which are central’ to good history.¹⁴ It does so by critically examining a fresh range of primary research sources, including twenty-one original oral histories collected for this project,¹⁵ and by advocating the precedence of these life histories and documentary sources over the stereotypes and mythologies which have mediated the historiography to date.

The Irish ‘habit of going away’ has been a demographic feature of Ireland since medieval times and Irish migration to Britain can be traced back to at least the 1400s, continuing in varying volumes throughout the early-modern and modern periods.¹⁶ Charting Irish people’s movements between Ireland and Britain over the centuries is a process fraught with inconsistencies, since the British governance of Ireland until the early twentieth-century meant that Irish movement to and from Britain was treated as internal migration. Focusing on the period 1940-1995, this research chronicles the gradual establishment of a settled post-war community of Irish construction labour in London and considers its spread and influence by reference to established theories of ethnic enclaves and ethnic economies.¹⁷ To place this phase of Irish emigration within the modern Irish diaspora as a whole, it is useful to adopt Jackson’s division of migrant waves.¹⁸ Figure 1.1 illustrates the major waves to Britain since 1820.¹⁹ In the first wave (c.1830s-1920s), a period dominated by the Great Famine and post-Famine legacy, immigration to Britain reached just over 600,000 but was dwarfed by that to the U.S. and Canada.²⁰ The second (c.1940-1970) and third (c.1980-1990) waves - the subject of this

¹³ Charlotte Bronte (writing as Currer Bell), *Jane Eyre*, (London, 1996), Preface, p.5.

¹⁴ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), p. 116.

¹⁵ See Appendix A.

¹⁶ Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.1;

Angela Moran, *Irish Music Abroad: Diasporic Sounds in Birmingham*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2012), p.2.

¹⁷ Theoretical discourse on these concepts is wide-ranging (as shown in chapter 2, pp.70-76) but is rooted in the works of Peach (Ceri Peach, ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’ in David .P. Varady (Ed.), *Desegregating the City: Ghettos, Enclaves and Inequality*, (New York, 2005), pp.31-48, ‘Pluralist and Assimilationist Models of Ethnic Settlement in London, 1991’ in *Tijdschrift voor Economisch en Sociële Geografie*, (1997), Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 120-134), Portes (A. Portes, ‘Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology.’ In *Annual Review of Sociology*, Issue 24, (1998), pp.1-24) and Kaplan (David H. Kaplan, Wei Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, (Lanham, 2006).

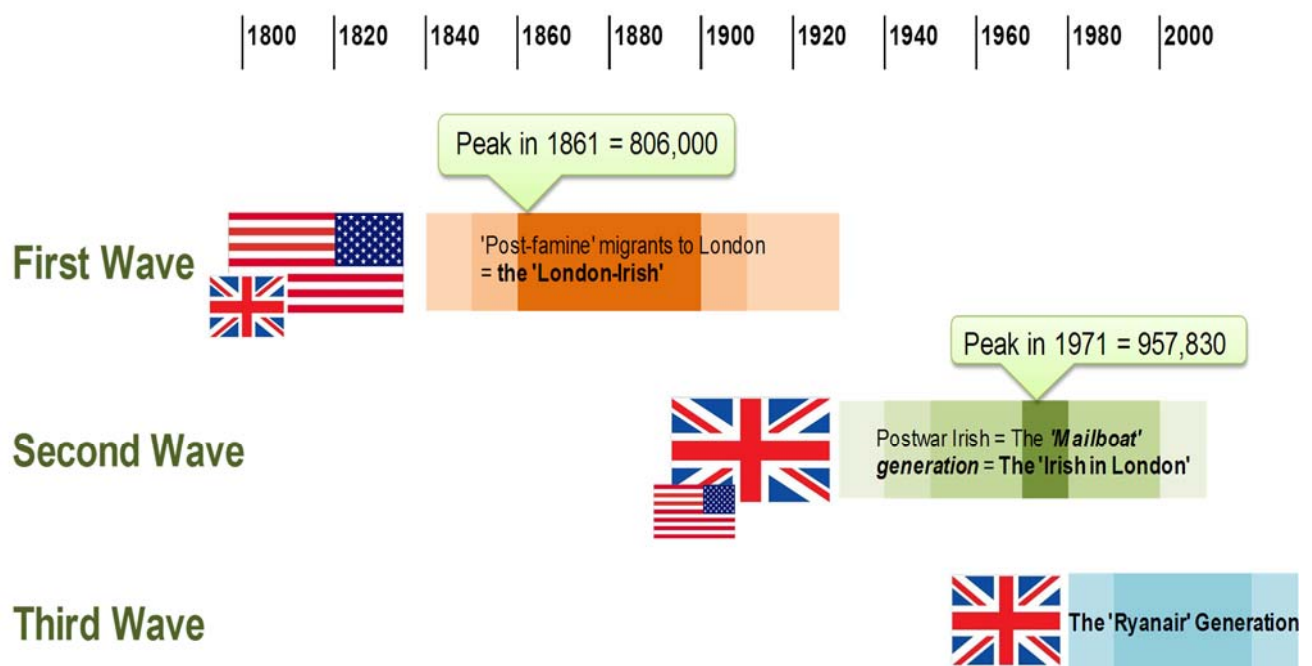
¹⁸ John. A. Jackson, ‘The Irish in Britain’ in in P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), p125.

¹⁹ Periodisation of these ‘waves’ of migration is approximate and intended to be merely illustrative. Detailed statistical data is given where relevant throughout the remainder of this research.

²⁰ Between 1815 and 1845, 1-1.5 million people emigrated from Ireland. From 1845 to 1870 a further 3 million left. Between 1856 and 1921, 4-4.5 million had left. The overwhelming majority of these went to the United

research - were overwhelmingly to Britain. The second-wave - also referred to as the ‘mail-boat generation’²¹ - emulated, in numbers at least, the post-Famine emigrations.²² It probably commenced in the wake of the Great Depression in the 1930s, accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s to upwards of 800,000 - some 16% of the Ireland’s population at the time²³ - and peaked at 957,830 in 1971,²⁴ exceeding the peak of the first-wave post-famine migration by some 350,000.²⁵

Figure 1.1 - The Modern Irish Diaspora in Britain; major waves of emigration



(Source: Compiled from data in John. A. Jackson, ‘The Irish in Britain’ in P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), p125.)

States and Canada. See R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p.345 ; Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007*, (Basingstoke, 2008), p.172.

²¹ Tony Murray, *London Irish Fictions: Narrative, Diaspora and Identity*, (Liverpool, 2012), p.39 & p.99.

²² Estimates are varied but for examples see Enda Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, (Oxford, 2007), p.2, p.12-13, p.17 ; P.J. Drury, ‘Migration between Britain and Ireland Since Independence’, in P.J. Drury (ed.), *Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986) (Irish Studies 5), pp.114-15; and John Archer Jackson, ‘The Irish in Britain’ in P.J. Drury (ed.), *Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986) (Irish Studies 5), pp.125-27.

²³ Arthur McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945*, (Basingstoke, 2013), p.118 quoting Dudley Baines, “Immigration and the Labour Market” in Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, Andrew Newell, *Work and Pay in 20th Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2007), p.336.

²⁴ Jackson, ‘The Irish in Britain’, p125.

²⁵ Walter, Bronwen, ‘Time-space patterns of second-wave Irish immigration into British towns’ in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Vol. 5, (3): 1980, p.300. First-Wave migration, using this categorisation, would refer to the pre and post-Famine refugees who spilt predominantly into the northern industrialised towns of Great Britain: Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester and into London in the nineteenth centuries and the pre-Independence decades of the twentieth century and whose antecedents became second, third and fourth-generation [etcetera] British-Irish.

The Irish population of Britain was around one million by 1961.²⁶ The Irish in London form a significant part of that ‘“other Britain” [...] a complex mosaic of competing national and ethnic identities, a diverse society that included migrants and other minorities and outsiders of various forms, and incorporated overlapping class, gender, and regional cultures within fluid and ever-shifting structures of power and authority’.²⁷

The background to the post-war construction labour migrations is rooted in the first-wave spailpín and British Victorian navy traditions.²⁸ The industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the establishment of a mobile class of manual civil works engineers, responsible for the construction of the first canals (known as navigations, hence the term ‘Navigator’ shortened to ‘navvy’), tunnels and railways.²⁹ The original navvies were a broad mix of mainly British Isles ethnicities, though - contrary to popular perception - not dominated by the Irish. Indeed, ‘For all the handed-down myths that the Irish built the railways, rarely did they exceed a third of the overall navvy force’.³⁰ This cohort of British industrial manpower gradually disappeared after the First World War, but the cultural legacies of the navy era lingered within the construction industry. During the interwar years of boom and bust economics the dwindling numbers of original Irish navvies probably began to blend with rural Irish labour from a similar – but distinct - tradition of seasonal agricultural migration from the western counties. The spailpín tradition also dated from the post-Napoleonic decades

²⁶ Kathleen Paul, ‘A Case of Mistaken Identity: The Irish in Post-war Britain’ in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 49, *Identity Formation and Class* (Spring, 1996), pp. 116-142, p.119.

²⁷ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.2, citing Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, (London, 1969), p.312. ²⁸ Spailpín, anglicised as spalpeen. A Gaelic term for a labouring man. A song from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century tells the story of ‘*an spailpín fánach*’, ‘the wandering labourer’, who hires himself out to farmers to make his living. Seasonal migration, both within Ireland and across the Irish Sea to Britain, formed an important part of the life cycle of many rural communities over the centuries, probably peaking in the decades immediately after the Great Famine. Although there are many similarities between the early post-war migrant construction workers and the old spailpíni, there is one important distinction. The original spailpín was a landless labourer in Ireland, whereas most of the post-war Irish migrant builders came from smallholding landowners and cottier families. See Sara Goek, ‘Na Spailpíni: Irish Seasonal Labourers in Britain in the 20th Century’, (Cork, 2013), available at: <https://thedustbinofhistory.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/na-spailpini/>.

²⁹ For a general history of industrial revolution navvies, see: Earl Thomas Brassey Brassey, *On Work and Wages*, (London, 1872) ; Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, (Middlesex, 1968); James Edmund Handley, *The Navvy in Scotland*, (Cork, 1970) ; Dick Sullivan, *Navvyman*, (London, 1983); David Brooke, *The Railway Navvy: "that Despicable Race of Men"*, Vol. 1, (Exeter, 1983) ; Patrick MacGill, *Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy*, (Edinburgh, 1999).

³⁰ Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, p.35; Brooke, *The Railway Navvy*, pp.27-8, 118-9.

and continued in Britain probably until the mid-1950s.³¹ Critically, spailpíni were **not** navvies, and vice versa; they were predominantly agricultural labourers; some later became navvies but most did not; they were a different form of labour with different roots and traditions.³²

Ireland's trade war with Britain from 1932-1938 and the subsequent hardships of the Second World War caused significant economic depression in Ireland well into the post-war period.³³ Official Second World War recruitment campaigns by the British government saw thousands of new migrants – many of whom had previously undertaken seasonal migration work as spailpíni in the north and east of Britain – recruited by Britain for essential wartime construction and civil engineering works. Wall states 'The reconstruction of Britain at the end of the Second World War demanded a rapid increase in output from a construction industry suffering severe shortages of labour and materials', observing further that the industry's solution lay in standardisation, industrialised production, prefabrication, componentisation and modularised design.³⁴ Missing from this list was the largescale labour-force needed to implement these strategies.³⁵ The wartime migrations triggered a new phase of chain-migration predominantly from the west of Ireland to Britain – and especially London – which responded to this demand for labour. An unintended consequence of the second wave was to temporarily veil Britain's dependence on its colonial migrants, delaying the race-relations problems that would eventually arise in the 1970s and 1980s, when earlier post-colonial Windrush and sub-continental Indian immigration had consolidated and second-generations were asserting their

³¹ For a general review of this tradition see inter alia Foster, *Modern Ireland*, pp.348-9 ; Anne O'Dowd, *Spalpeens and Tattie Hokers: History and Folklore of the Irish Migratory Agricultural Worker in Ireland and Britain*, (Dublin, 1991) ; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Seasonal Migration and Post-Famine Adjustment in the West of Ireland' in *Studia Hibernica*, No. 13 (1973), pp. 48-76 ; Ultan Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain: A History of the Irish Navy*, (Dublin, 2001), p.23, 27, 123; Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.115. For a thorough history of seasonal migration specifically from the east Mayo region, see Jack Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens: Aspects of Migration and Emigration from the East Mayo Area, 1815-1970*, (Cork, 2017).

³² S. Condor, *The Men who made Railways*, (1868), p.169 as cited in Cowley, *The Men who Built Britain*, p.23.

³³ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.522; Bill Kissane, 'The not-so amazing case of Irish Democracy' in Conor McGrath, Eoin O'Malley (Eds.), *Irish Political Studies Reader: Key Contributions*, (London, 2003), p.23; Proinsias Breathnach, 'Uneven Development and Capitalist Peripheralisation: the Case of Ireland' in *Antipode*, vol.20 (2), (1988). pp.122-141, pp.131-132.

³⁴ Christine Wall, *An Architecture of Parts: Architects, Building Workers and Industrialisation in Britain. 1940–1970*, (Abingdon, 2013), p.18.

³⁵ Jim MacLoughlin compellingly argues that British capitalism had benefitted, over a century or more, from cheap migrant Irish labour via the 'emigrant nursery' which Ireland became in the late nineteenth century. See Jim MacLaughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, (Cork, 1994), pp.27-8.

ethnicities.³⁶ A putative third wave of Irish migration (nominally referred to as the ‘Ryanair’ wave) started in the early to mid-1980s and continued until the rise of the Celtic Tiger economy in Ireland saw significant return migration from Britain around 1995-1998.³⁷

Post-war Irish builders were initially drawn from the itinerant migrants of the interwar years (a blend of older navvies and spailpkins of all ages), then mainly from the mail-boat migrants and their second-generation descendants, and latterly the Ryanair wave. Settling at first mainly in north-central London (particularly the areas around Camden Town, Kentish Town, Kilburn and Cricklewood) this cohort gradually spread radially outward in all directions through the late 1940s, 50s and 60s.³⁸ Mapping the sociological trajectory of these migrant workers the focus moves from an initial class of semi-nomadic labouring men, working casually on major infrastructural civil engineering works across Britain, to the gradual formation of an ethnic-controlled economy where casual, yet ostensibly permanently-employed migrant labour began to settle residentially in clusters.

Crucial to this transition was the rise, within the second-wave and third-wave communities, of migrant entrepreneurs. From c.1930-1990, their shrewd - often unscrupulous - endeavour and bourgeois capitalist tendencies saw the establishment of a significant number of major construction and property empires together with hundreds of small, independent labour-only subcontract businesses – sometimes called ‘mushroom’ subbies.³⁹ The pre-eminence of the Irish community in the British construction industry was recognised as early as 1972, when Kevin O’Connor wrote:

The Irish have become so influential in the building industry that on certain big money jobs it’s not sufficient merely to be Irish to get work. In certain areas, one must come from a particular county in Ireland!

³⁶ For a detailed account of the social and political tensions created by non-white immigration after the Second World War see Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Postwar Britain*, (Oxford, 2000), pp.1-10.

³⁷ Peadar Kirby, Pdraig Carmody, (eds.), *The Legacy of Ireland’s Economic Expansion: Geographies of the Celtic Tiger*, (Abingdon, 2010), p.viii.

³⁸ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.90-92 ; Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004* (London, 2004), pp.20-22.

³⁹ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.93. A humorous, slightly pejorative colloquialism to indicate the organic nature of small breakaway ‘one-man band’ Subcontract firms / gangs and their dependency on the network of larger Subcontractors and particularly Main-contractors and the propensity of such firms to misappropriate plant and materials on these vast construction sites. For a 1960s example of this phenomenon in practice, see Interview with Tom M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.7-9.

Sections of the Victoria Line – London’s latest underground artery which travels under the Thames – were built by teams of Donegal men who jealously guarded the big earnings for themselves.⁴⁰

The rise of the entrepreneurial Irish subcontractor was contingent upon the British construction industry’s deregulation and de-unionisation in the period after WW2. This in turn allowed self-employed subcontracting to become the default method of procuring labour, particularly lower down the contractual chain. Expansive and ever-increasing opportunities arose for capitalising on the supply-demand relationship of Irish migrant labour to a seemingly-limitless volume of post-war construction work. The ethnic-controlled economy developed because subcontracting enabled it. But for labour-only subcontracting Irish migrant males would not have been queuing in Camden Town and Cricklewood in their hundreds each morning; they would not have been frequenting Irish-run pubs to collect their wages; they would not have been socialising in uniquely Irish dancehalls, because those dancehalls were, by and large, funded by Irish property entrepreneurs. The story of the post-war Irish builders is inextricably linked to the story of those subcontract companies who gave them work, initially ‘on the lump’ and, later, legitimately.

Migrant Irish construction workers were at the junction of class and ethnic prejudice for much of the post-war period; often treated as an underclass in both social and civic terms by their host community,⁴¹ and as social failures by their originating community. To some extent, the migrants themselves acquiesced in perpetuating many of the traditional stereotypes associated with the labouring poor. Donal Foley characterised the Irish in Britain as:

...always hewers of wood and drawers of water, and so they have remained to this day...[sic] This was much in evidence during the war and post-war years in Britain [...] Often they had no tax cards, no insurance stamps. In fact, there were no records at all of many of them. They were hard-working, well-paid slaves, exactly what Britain wanted to rebuild their devastated country.⁴²

⁴⁰ Kevin O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, (London, 1972), p.123.

⁴¹ Although (as shown in chapters four and five) in terms of the racial and ethnic hierarchies which persisted amongst some of the indigenous post-war Londoners, the Irish were not on the lowest rung, but probably somewhere below white English and Europeans but above all peoples of colour.

⁴² Donal Foley, *Three Villages*, (Dublin, 1977), p. 141. For the avoidance of doubt, this rather hyperbolic phrase was coined by Foley – a legendary journalist in Irish media terms – for dramatic effect. It has been cited by several critics of Irish migrant culture whose work is referred to in various chapters throughout this thesis. Its use is not intended to infer equivalence in any way between paid migrant labourers and the abhorrent practice of enforced slavery throughout modern history.

Cultural representations of the Irish in Britain have long focused (I argue excessively so) on the archetypal Irish male construction worker. Murray observed that ‘whilst these migrants [...] were subordinated to a neo-colonial economic equation of British demand and Irish supply, their identities are celebrated, nevertheless, through the narrative mechanics of a long-established oral tradition of Irish exile and masculinity’. Consequently the very processes of hearsay narration and cliché in and of themselves ‘demonstrate that whilst Irish migrant identities are configured according to individual circumstances, they are also narrativized within wider discourses of Irish history and mythology’.⁴³ As Gibbons remarked, ‘Understanding a community or a culture does not consist solely in establishing 'neutral' facts and 'objective' details: it means *taking seriously* their ways of structuring experience, their popular narratives, the distinctive manner in which they frame the social and political realities which affect their lives’.⁴⁴ The crux of the issue of representation versus reality was summed up, in my view, by Sara Goek’s review of *I Could Read the Sky* in 2013:

Numerous studies and media representations have focused on negative aspects of Irish experiences in Britain or the problematic nature of the group including discrimination, crime, mental illness, and social marginalization. While these are valid concerns, commentators concomitantly neglect the positive personal and collective values migrants used to negotiate and rationalize the circumstances in which they found themselves and that they continually draw on to make sense of their life courses.⁴⁵

O’Day’s rejection of the ‘monocultural ethnic identity’ seems to me entirely appropriate as does his contention that there exists ‘a rupture between the “imagined” Irish migrant, captured in nationalist thought, and the “real” Irish migrant, whose ambition and experience seemed to gainsay the idea of a unified or singular identity’.⁴⁶ I have shown this in my research by reference to multiple sources. ‘Hard’ empirical documentary evidence and statistical data discernible from various archival and secondary sources is blended with ‘soft’ evidence of

⁴³ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.54.

⁴⁴ Luke Gibbons, “Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History,” in *The Oxford Literary Review* Vol. 13.1– 2: (1991), pp. 95– 113, p.13 as cited by Joe Cleary, “Misplaced ideas? Locating and dislocating Ireland in colonial and postcolonial studies” in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, (Eds.), *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, (Cambridge, 2002), p.109.

⁴⁵ Sara Goek, ‘ “I never would return again to plough the rocks of Bawn’: Irishmen in Post---War Britain’ in David Convery (Ed.), *Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working-Class Life*, (Dublin, 2013), pp.157-74, p.4, citing T. O’Grady, ‘Memory, Photography, Ireland’, *Irish Studies Review*, 14, 2 (2006), p.261.

⁴⁶ Enda Delaney & Donald M. MacRaild, ‘Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities Since 1750: An Introduction’ in *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol. 23, Nos. 2–3, (July–November 2005), pp. 127–142, at p.134

lived experience: the folkloric and anecdotal evidence, the song-cultures, the dramatic and fictive representations and mythology.

Migrant Irish builders were simultaneously participants in – and beneficiaries of – the momentous environmental, social and cultural changes in post-war London; most of the landmark developments of modern London were built in this period of peak migration.⁴⁷ Moreover, they contributed significantly to the propagation of a multi-generational London-Irish community. Mapping their socio-economic and socio-cultural evolution and the ways in which it intersected with, shaped, and was shaped by urban industry, social-life, culture, class and ethnicity of London gives fresh perspective on this period of Irish migration to Britain.

⁴⁷ For example: local, regional and national networks and infrastructures relating to power - the National Grid, public sanitation, waste and clean water, natural gas and oil distribution; transport - London's arterial and peripheral motorway networks, major ring-road developments, North Circular and South Circular roads, the M25 orbital motorway, a vast array of cross-city road networks; Landmark commercial and residential developments such as the Barbican, The Southbank, Broadgate and Canary Wharf; London's public transport infrastructure - Underground Subway network, the Victoria Line and the Jubilee Line, Piccadilly Line to Heathrow Airport and the Central Line eastwards into Essex, The Channel Tunnel, Blackwall and Dartford Tunnels; mass private, public and high-rise social housing.

Chapter 1.

Framing the Research: Aims, Literature, Theory & Methodology

This study aims to show, in historical terms, how migrant Irish builders helped to tangibly and physically shape the built environment of the new London which emerged in the last half of the twentieth century, and in doing so were themselves, in turn, socially and culturally shaped by the immigrant experience. I argue that the ‘mail-boat generation’ became a part of the social and ethnic fabric of the new city. The structure of this thesis aims to foreground the specific industrialised nature and the distinctive historical character of this large but unique cohort. Underpinning this organisational framework are a number of interrogatory aims, methodologies and theoretical ideas. This chapter explains these aspects of the research in greater depth.

Triangulation of sources has been a significant and novel aim for this research. Chapter two utilizes and cross-references a variety of quantitative and qualitative data to statistically estimate and define the size, shape and character of the cohort of Irish construction workers in London. It also innovatively deploys ethnic entrepreneurial theory to explain the development of an ethnic-controlled economy and how this shaped the lived experiences of these men. The bulk of historical research is organised on a thematic basis, arranged primarily into spheres of work, associational culture and the mythology of cultural representations. Here, again, some original approaches have been used. Chapter three is a uniquely detailed investigation into **what** Irish migrant builders did throughout the post-war period.⁴⁸ This cross-references British constructional and architectural histories of London with primary-source Irish material, oral histories and corporate records probing the breadth, scope and nature of the works these firms and their workers undertook.

Chapter four looks at **how** the work was done; how construction firms procured and managed labour resources and what pay and working conditions were like for the workers. It

⁴⁸ Chapter 3 is supplemented by Appendix D which provides more granular detail concerning locations, types and dates of specific projects, redevelopments and schemes on which Irish migrant labour was deployed. Specifically in relation to Irish entrepreneurial activity (section 3.4) Appendix B is also supplemental, providing documentary reference materials pertaining to Irish entrepreneurial activities.

posits fresh perspective on issues such as agency and remuneration which subvert the orthodoxy of Irish migrant labour as mere powerless, exploited workhorses. Both chapters combine to show how the community of Irish migrant builders transfigured over time into an ethnic economy, complete with its own socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Chapter five then demonstrates how the ethnically-distinct construction labour market was fundamental to the development of post-war Irish associational culture in London. Where practicable (mainly in chapter six) elements of the canonical metanarrative are compared and contrasted to the empirical findings.

1.1. Central Research Questions

The key questions which arise from an analytical consideration of the lived experience of Irish construction workers in post-war London include:

- What trends or patterns to the experiences of migrant Irish construction workers in post-war London can be identified?
- To what extent does the lived experience of migrant Irish builders reflect or refute the dominant public and cultural discourse of the ‘forgotten Irish’ embedded in Ireland’s collective cultural memory of Irish construction workers?
- Was the culture of casual or informal employment widespread within the Irish diasporic enclave? If so, were there causative factors?
- What patterns are discernible from the entrepreneurial activity associated with Irish construction workers in this period? Are there any obvious reasons for these?
- To what extent has the legacy of the post-war Irish migrant builders contributed to the present London-Irish ethnic community?

By contextualising the dominance of Irish labour in post-war reconstruction; identifying and chronicling the stories of key actors including entrepreneurs, their companies and the people who made them, these research questions help position Irish builders within the socio-economic history of London and its environs in the late twentieth-century. Moreover, the social and cultural relevance of Irish builders is considered from the varied perspectives of metropolitan London, Irish London and Ireland.

1.2. Terminology

This thesis is essentially about the Irish contribution to the built environment of post-war London. However there are terminological and syntactic difficulties in subjectively labelling those who made contributions. The Irish worked in almost every facet of what is conventionally called the ‘construction industry’, predominantly heavy civil engineering, groundworks and drainage, infrastructure, substructure and superstructure concrete, but also marine, structural, mechanical, electrical and building services engineering, carpentry, plastering, interior fitting-out and finishing trades and many other ancillary and maintenance processes. For simplicity, in this thesis generic references to ‘Irish builders’, ‘Irish construction workers’ or ‘Irish constructors’ should be taken to encompass any or all of the above work.

An equally important terminological distinction is that between the two major waves of Irish immigration to London. Hall categorises the ‘London-Irish’ as the assimilated, multi-generational, London-born children of Irish-born first-wave migrants. This would include most ethnically-Irish east Londoners and Cockneys born in the first half of the Twentieth century; descendants of first-wave Irish who worked in the London Docks and settled along the banks of the Thames downriver of the City of London. The ‘Irish-in-London’ are then defined as: second/third-wave Irish-born migrants who began arriving during the interwar period; came in much larger numbers during and after the Second World War; again in the early 1980s; together with their London-born second and third generation offspring.⁴⁹ I have adopted Hall’s dichotomy of ‘London-Irish (first-wave) versus Irish-in-London (second wave)’, although there is some unavoidable blurring of these lines during the interwar period

Regarding geopolitical terminology, in the ordinary everyday working lives of the Irish construction labour market, for the most part, the men that laboured on London’s construction sites, side-by-side, drew no distinction between the two states on the island of Ireland. Consequently for the purposes of this thesis, which is about the realities of construction life, ‘Irish builders’ encompass both those of the Republic and Northern Ireland.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.ii-iii.

⁵⁰ Where, for the sake of historical completeness, it is useful to identify which part of the island of Ireland certain individuals and companies originated from, then this is done.

Defining the limits of London as a metropolis has always been a moving target. Like all great cities in the post-industrial age, its history is one of urban spread and geographic expansion. To confine the analysis of Irish building activities to a dogmatic geographical definition of London *per se* is to ignore the significant contribution made to this history by the satellite towns, conurbations, remote infrastructural projects and the Irish communities which grew out of this labyrinth of developmental expansion. Consequently, I place no strict geographic limits on London, but instead, to do justice to the story being told, I take a pragmatic approach. I have been guided by a number of official statistical sources which attempt to interpret London as a metropolis in geo-political and geo-spatial terms.⁵¹ Most ‘indigenous Londoners’ recognise the M25 orbital motorway as a loose boundary to the Greater London metropolis. Since it is evident that even amongst these various statistical definitions, the boundaries of ‘London’ are fluid, in this thesis London is broadly taken as the **London Metropolitan Area** (hereinafter referred to as the **LMA**) defined by ESPON.⁵²

1.3. Literature Review

The extant historiography of manual construction workers in the UK generally is sparse; even less so with Irish migrant workers. What little history there is about the second-wave Irish diaspora in London and its relationship to the construction industry tends to lean towards the stereotypical folklore embedded in cultural memory; the ‘down-on-his-luck’ navvy versus the entrepreneurial adventurer.⁵³ Ultan Cowley’s 2001 work *The Men who Built Britain: A History*

⁵¹ The ONS defines London as a region in itself and, from a labour market perspective, uses Travel To Work Areas (TTWAs - See London Region Population Map, Figure 6.1 - UK Office for National Statistics, London Region Population Map 2010 available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk>, (accessed 21 February, 2017). See also Introduction to the 2001-based Travel-to-Work Areas, ONS, October, 2007). The ESPON project, carried out under the auspices of the EU defined the ‘London Metropolitan Area’ – also known as the ‘London Commuter Belt’ – as a definitive Functional Urban Area (FUA) which includes a number of contiguous Morphological Urban Areas (MUA). Some of the MUAs are satellite or dormitory towns and settlements outside the Greater London area which include significant post-war Irish settlements contiguous with London; for example, Luton and Dunstable, Slough, High Wycombe, Stevenage, Grays/Tilbury, Welwyn, Brentwood, Harpenden and Potter’s Bar (See European Spatial Planning Observation Network, ‘British urban pattern: population data’ in ESPON project 1.4.3 Study on Urban Functions, (March 2007), p. 119). Similarly the ONS also categorises the Greater London Urban Area (GLUA) as a conurbation and the largest urban area in the United Kingdom with a population of 9,787,426 in 2011 (See ONS categorisations available at <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/articles/747.aspx> (accessed 27 June, 2018).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Marc Scully, ‘Emigrants in the traditional sense?’ – Irishness in England, contemporary migration and

of the Irish Navy is the only historical work thus far which attempts to historicise the experience of the Irish in British construction, albeit on a nationwide basis and over a much longer periodisation.⁵⁴ Indubitably well-researched and detailed, nonetheless the structure is somewhat disorganised; it suffers from a surfeit of nostalgia in places, and lacks any critical analysis of the underlying behavioural patterns. In some ways it embraces many of the cultural representations this research challenges; focusing more on folkloric aspects of navy culture and championing an anachronistic – in my view misplaced – continuum between the nineteenth-century navvies and post-war Irish migrant builders. Comprehensive and detailed, it contains a wealth of primary-source references, albeit citations of sources are often erratic and incomplete. It remains, to date, essentially the only secondary source dealing specifically with Irish construction work in Britain. Garcia’s 2015 work, *Rebuilding London* references much of Cowley’s work but is not focused solely on the construction and engineering industries, useful though it is as a general review of the post-war migrant story.⁵⁵ Again it lacks material analysis, in theoretical terms, of the migratory lived experience.

Conversely, a particularly relevant and useful source for close critical analysis of Irish migrant construction workers is Sara Goek’s comprehensive article, ‘I never would return again to plough the rocks of Bawn’: Irishmen in Post-War Britain’, which deals specifically with some of the sociological themes relating to Irish transitory work culture, albeit at a necessarily superficial level, but usefully blends original oral history with cultural discourse and theory.⁵⁶ Donall Mac Amhlaigh’s memoir, *An Irish Navy: The Diary of an Exile* adds to the knowledge of lived experience, particularly in the immediate post-war period and amounts, essentially, to an autobiographical account of the early post-war period.⁵⁷ A recent work of

collective memory of the 1950s’, in *The Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 23.2, 2015, pp. 133–148, p.145 citing M.J. Hickman, ‘Thinking about Ireland and the Irish diaspora’, in T. Inglis (ed.), *Are the Irish Different?* (Manchester 2014), pp. 133–43.

⁵⁴ Ultan Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain: A History of the Irish Navy*, (Dublin, 2001). Cowley covers the entire period of the Second Industrial Revolution in Britain, referring (in part) to the construction of the Victorian railways and canals networks and the major infrastructure civil engineering projects of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was compelled, in my view, to cover such periodisation because he postulates a misplaced, anachronistic connection between the original Victorian navvies and the post-war migrant Irish builders.

⁵⁵ Miki Garcia, *Rebuilding London: Irish Migrants in Post-war Britain*, (Dublin, 2015).

⁵⁶ Sara Goek, ‘I never would return again to plough the rocks of Bawn’: Irishmen in Post---War Britain’ in David Convery (Ed.), *Locked Out: A Century of Irish Working-Class Life*, (Dublin, 2013), pp.157-74.

⁵⁷ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navy*. Additionally Patrick MacGill’s earlier ‘navy memoirs’ and novels, particularly *Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy* (London, 1914), *The Rat-Pit* (London, 1915), and

literary criticism which has provided ample background information in relation to pre-war and early post-war Irish navvies is Liam Harte's *The Literature of the Irish in Britain: Autobiography and Memoir, 1725-2001* which provides extracts of a number of other relevant memoirs relating to migrant Irish navvies.⁵⁸

Clair Wills' *The Best are Leaving: Emigration and Post-war Irish Culture* is one of three recent works of cultural and literary criticism which have contributed significantly to this area of research and particularly the ideas of stereotyped identity which underpin my own thinking on Irish migrant builders.⁵⁹ Wills takes a broader view across the post-war Irish in Britain; whereas this research focuses specifically on construction and engineering labour. Both works seek to understand the stereotypes of Irish migrant life which came to dominate the depictions in popular culture; those essentially rooted in class, nationality and rural fundamentalism. Wills' evidential focus is, however, limited in archival scope and often relies on representations of identity amongst Irish migrants as expressed in specific literature, journalism, popular television and radio culture, and film. By contrast, this research emphasises original oral histories, anecdotal building-site culture and the crucial importance of working-song culture to the development of specific stereotypes of the 'Irish navy'. Two further anthologies of London Irish fictions have proved equally helpful in examining this process of stereotyping: Tony Murray's *London Irish Fictions* highlights aspects of navy culture which have become tropes in Irish literature; and the slightly later *Irish Writing London: Volume 2 Post-War to the Present* which expands and builds upon the same theme.⁶⁰

In considering the Irish diaspora as a whole, and the British and London aspects of migration in particular I have relied upon a number of key works. Older over-arching general studies of the Irish-British diaspora include: O'Connor's ground-breaking 1972 work, *The Irish in Britain* and John A Jackson's 1963 book and paper in PJ Drury's 1986 edition of *Irish Studies* 5 (both of the same title). Together with Fitzgerald and Lambkin's comprehensive *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007*, these works have all provided a sound benchmark of

Moleskin Joe (London, 1923) have proved useful background reading to the lives of first-wave spailpín/navvy culture.

⁵⁸ Liam Harte, *The Literature of the Irish in Britain: Autobiography and Memoir, 1725-2001*, (Basingstoke, 2009), pp.115-21, 139-43, 202-7, 234-9, 242-51.

⁵⁹ Clair Wills, *The Best are Leaving: Emigration and Post-war Irish Culture*, (Cambridge, 2015).

⁶⁰ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*; Tom Herron, (Ed.), *Irish Writing London: Volume 2 Post-War to the Present*, (London, 2013).

general migration studies from which to focus.⁶¹ Enda Delaney's meticulously-detailed *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971* overlaps considerably with my periodisation, and provides invaluable empirical and statistical information including comparative Irish emigration/British immigration and census data. Although covering the broader spectrum of migration as a whole, since independence, Delaney's research draws attention to a number of previously under-utilised primary sources which relate directly to this research. Chapter three, covering the wartime Group Scheme recruitments was particularly useful in reconstructing the profile of migrant labour into London's building industry in the early decades of the post-war era. Delaney's later work *The Irish in Post-war Britain* is a wider-ranging survey focusing more on social history and examining the impacts of social class, gender, ethnicity and geography; it also provided high-level data on settlement patterns in and around London and referenced a significant body of other relevant research.⁶² Mary Daly's highly-revealing (and long-overdue) edition of Spencer's 1960 report for the Newman Demographic Survey into integration of Irish immigrants into the Catholic Church in England and Wales provided invaluable data on religious practice and the development of Irish social influence on Catholicism in London.⁶³

In addition to the books discussed above, a plethora of journal articles and monographs have provided further layers of granular detail on immigration and the diaspora in Britain. Supplementing Daly's work, Breda Grey examines Irish Catholic networks and their effect on immigrant integration in Mary Gilmartin and Allen White's *Migrations: Ireland in a Global World*.⁶⁴ Delaney's extensive contribution to migration studies, reflected in published journal articles, have also influenced my thinking about post-war migration to Britain; works focused on migrant networks, gender and Catholicism in the British diaspora being key to some of the concepts I discuss in chapters five and six.⁶⁵ Jennifer Redmond's *Moving Histories*, an

⁶¹ Kevin O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, (London, 1972) ; John Archer Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, (London, 1963); John Archer Jackson, 'The Irish in Britain' in Drudy, P.J. (ed.), *Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), pp.125-138; Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007*, (Basingstoke, 2008).

⁶² Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, 2000) ; Enda Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, (Oxford, 2007).

⁶³ A.E.C.W. Spencer, , Mary. E. Daly (Ed.), *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants in England and Wales*, (Dublin, 2012).

⁶⁴ Breda Gray, 'Migrant Integration and the Network-Making Power of the Irish Catholic Church' in Mary Gilmartin, Allen White, (Eds.), *Migrations: Ireland in a Global World*, (Manchester, 2013), pp.55-79.

⁶⁵ Enda Delaney, and Donald .M. MacRaild, 'Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities Since 1750' in *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol 23, Nrs2-3, (2005), pp.127-142; Enda Delaney, 'Gender and Twentieth Century

enlightening new work on female emigration to Britain, highlights the contrasts and contradictions in Irish societal attitudes between female and male migration to post-war Britain; male wage labourers emigrating to London were in many cases subjected to similar class-based prejudices, both at home and abroad, albeit for very different reasons from the gender-biased moral approbation heaped upon women for making the self-same migratory choices.⁶⁶ Donald MacRaild's work, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939* is another source of detailed contextual information as is Johanne Devlin Trew's *Leaving the North: Migration and Memory, Northern Ireland 1921-2011*, which deals with emigration from Northern Ireland largely to Britain.⁶⁷ Two influential essay collections have also added context in terms of the Irish diaspora generally. Bielenberg's *The Irish Diaspora* covers a wide spectrum of the nineteenth and twentieth-century diasporas in Britain Europe and America in general terms. Breda Grey's essay on the multiculturalism experienced by 1980s immigrants was particularly useful in shaping my thoughts on identity, positionality and the stereotyped imagery of Irish men working in construction.⁶⁸ *Location and Dislocation in Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*, edited by MacLaughlin, is focused on what has become known as 'new wave' (third-wave) migration amongst the Ryanair generation. The essays in this collection overlap chronologically with the end of my periodisation but nonetheless provide a wealth of theoretical and empirical analysis in relation to diverse aspects of the migrant experience including the professional labour market, women's experiences in London and Irish culture in exile. Of particular relevance to my work is Bronwen Walter's essay dealing with late twentieth-century Irish settlement in London, which contains a wealth of statistical data useful in mapping both male and female settlement patterns in the 1980s and 1990s.⁶⁹

John Corbally innovatively compares and contrasts the experiences of white Irish migrants in post-war Britain to those of colour – specifically Caribbean and South Asian – in

Irish Migration' in Sharpe, Pamela (ed.), *Women, Gender and Labour Migration*, (London, 2001), pp.209-223; 'The Churches and Irish Emigration to Britain, 1921-60' in *Archivum Hibernicum*, Vol. 52, (1998), pp.98-114.

⁶⁶ Jennifer Redmond, *Moving Histories: Irish Women's Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic*, (Liverpool, 2018).

⁶⁷ Donald MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939*, (Basingstoke, 2015); Johanne Devlin Trew, *Leaving the North: Migration and Memory, Northern Ireland 1921-2011*, (Liverpool, 2013).

⁶⁸ Breda Gray, 'From Ethnicity' to 'Diaspora': 1980s Emigration and 'Multicultural' London' in Andy Bielenberg (ed.) *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), pp.65-88.

⁶⁹ Bronwen Walter, 'Contemporary Irish Settlement in London: Women's Worlds, Men's Worlds' in Jim MacLaughlin (Ed.), *Location and Dislocation in Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities* (Cork, 1997), pp.61-93.

his unpublished PhD thesis *Shades of Difference*, which provided some of the theoretical grounding for chapters five and six of this research.⁷⁰ Delaney also deals specifically with the European context in his informative essay, ‘Placing Post-war Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981’ published in Bielenberg’s above-referenced collection.⁷¹ Few non-fiction works capture the desolate aftermath of the Second World War in continental Europe and Britain better than Tony Judt’s majestic *Post-war*,⁷² and this has been essential to explaining the rapid economic revival which created such demand for Irish labour. Jerry White’s award-winning *London in the Twentieth Century* was equally crucial in analysing London’s interwar growth, wartime destruction and subsequent reconstruction.⁷³ A copiously detailed general history of London, it contains meticulous accounts of planning and reconstruction, the debates surrounding planning issues, administration and political structures and - where relevant - of the roles of some of the Irish in London. For general reference to Ireland’s chequered history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries recourse has been made to a wide spectrum of works centred around Roy Foster’s *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*.⁷⁴

Academic work aimed specifically at the post-war Irish diaspora in London has been harder to come by. With the exception of Sorohan’s complex, and excellently-detailed sociological analysis of ‘Irish London’ in the 1970s-1990s,⁷⁵ and Murray’s aforementioned critique of London-Irish literature, secondary reading has focused upon Hall’s ground-breaking work *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, Dunne’s *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London*, and Harrison’s *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004*, all of which are rooted in collected oral histories and provide many invaluable first-hand testaments of the migrant experience of the Irish in London.⁷⁶ Orienting Irish migrants specifically within the British and London-regional construction and engineering industries has been mainly via

⁷⁰ John Corbally, ‘Shades of Difference: Irish, Caribbean, and South Asian immigration to the heart of empire, 1948-1971’, (PhD Thesis, University of California, Davis, 2009).

⁷¹ Enda Delaney, ‘Placing Post-war Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981’ in Andy Bielenberg (ed.) *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), pp.331-356.

⁷² Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*, (London, 2005). The early chapters in particular provide an excellent panoramic history of post-war Europe and set the context of war-damage and the reconstruction of Britain in a wider European context.

⁷³ Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and its People*, (London, 2008).

⁷⁴ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, (London, 1989).

⁷⁵ Sean Sorohan, *Irish London During the Troubles*, (Dublin, 2012).

⁷⁶ Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music* (Croydon, 2016); Catherine Dunne, *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London* (Dublin, 2003); Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004* (London, 2004).

primary sources, but some secondary sources have assisted in mapping the post-war picture. A number of demographic studies have been essential to the statistical quantification of the cohort undertaken as a key part of chapter two. O'Connor and Goodwin at the University of Leicester published an invaluable statistical guide, 'Locating Irish Workers in the British Labour Force Survey', which was used in the compilation of the cohort estimate in section 2.2.⁷⁷ The work of Mary Hickman, Sarah Morgan and Bronwen Walter often includes demographic statistics, and in particular, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain* proved invaluable in substantiating the involvement of the London-Irish in post-war construction.⁷⁸

Another important aim has been to link, where possible, collective and individual migrancy with detailed histories of the construction and engineering projects they contributed to and this exercise requires an in-depth understanding of the industry and those projects. Christopher Powell's pioneering work, *The British Building Industry Since 1800: An Economic History* provides an excellent empirical history of the industry in terms of size, structure, content and conditions over the last two centuries.⁷⁹ London's built environment, planning and development history, both pre-war and post-war, is detailed in two excellent works of architectural history: Lionel Esher's 1981 work, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England, 1940-1980*, which provides project-specific and architectural guides to London's post-war reconstruction; and Donald Foley's *Controlling London's Growth: Planning the Great Wen, 1940-1960*.⁸⁰ The civil engineering heritage of London is explained in the Institute of Civil Engineer's series *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*.⁸¹ Williams' *A History of the British Gas Industry* provides an excellent grounding in understanding the exponential growth in gas infrastructure work which provided years of casual employment for thousands of Irishmen through the 1960s and 1970s.⁸²

⁷⁷ Henrietta O'Connor, John Goodwin, 'Locating Irish Workers in the British Labour Force Survey', Report for Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, (CMLS Working Paper no. 25, 2000).

⁷⁸ Mary J. Hickman, Sarah Morgan, Bronwen Walter, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain: A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health profile*, (London, 2001).

⁷⁹ Christopher Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800: An Economic History* (London, 1996).

⁸⁰ Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England, 1940-1980*, (London, 1981); Donald Foley, *Controlling London's Growth: Planning the Great Wen, 1940-1960*, (Berkeley, 1963).

⁸¹ Denis Smith, *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, (London, 2001).

⁸² Trevor. L. Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry* (Oxford, 1981).

For an understanding of the social history of manual work as a process, Arthur McIvor's thorough analysis, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945*, has been essential reading as background to theories of work practices and contextualising Irish work in the UK construction industry.⁸³ The sociology of the construction industry has recently been the subject of an ground-breaking study in Darren Thiel's 2012 work, *Builders: Class, Gender and Ethnicity in the Construction Industry*, another essential source for understanding the structural intricacies and cultural relevance of masculinities, class and ethnicities on the modern building site.⁸⁴ Many of the individual histories of the major companies who oversaw the post-war reconstruction era employing large Irish workforces (and particularly the notoriously-reclusive Irish companies themselves) are yet to be written but those which are available have been consulted.⁸⁵ Only two published autobiographies detail the rise of Irish construction entrepreneurs: *Once Around the Track: the Life and Times of Phil Trant and the Trant Family Business*, (Listowel, 2010) which tells the story of the Kerry-born founder of one of Southampton's largest civil engineering firms; and *On the Strength of a Ten Bob Note: A Memoir of an Irish Emigrant* (2014), which is Sligoman Joe Kennedy's memoir of building a construction empire in post-war Manchester, but which also details his time in London.⁸⁶ Some companies have published online histories of their foundation and these have proved invaluable in reconstructing the story of Irish entrepreneurial activity. Chief amongst these is *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, published online by the Murphy Group in 2013.

Fictional and creative works which remediate and often, to a greater or lesser extent, hyperbolize the immigrant experience into aesthetic narrative form are the bedrock for analysing how the Irish builder's identity is culturally constructed and reconstructed over time. Novels such as O'Grady & Pyke's *I Could Read the Sky*, John B Keane's *The Contractors*, and William King's *Leaving Ardglass* re-imagine the experiences of the migrant builder and navy

⁸³ Arthur McIvor, *Working Lives: Work in Britain since 1945*, (Basingstoke, 2013).

⁸⁴ Darren Thiel, *Builders: Class, Gender and Ethnicity in the Construction Industry*, (Abingdon, 2012).

⁸⁵ Roy Coad, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W Laing CBE*, (London, 1992); Peter Cooper, *Building Relationships: The History of Bovis 1885-2000*, (London, 2000) ; Berry Ritchie, *The Story of Tarmac*, (London, 1999) - all chronicling the rise of British construction giants who shaped the post-war industry. Some companies have published online histories of their foundation and these have proved invaluable in reconstructing the story of Irish entrepreneurial activity. Chief amongst these is *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, published online by the Murphy Group in 2013.

⁸⁶ Patrick Trant, *Once Around the Track: the Life and Times of Phil Trant and the Trant Family Business*, (Listowel, 2010); Joe Kennedy, *On the Strength of a Ten Bob Note: A Memoir of an Irish Emigrant* (Mayo, 2014).

in London.⁸⁷ Other powerful depictions of the tragic navvy narrative emerge in Peter Woods' *Hard Shoulder* and in Jimmy Murphy's moving drama *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*, which deals with the preclusion to suicide amongst the ranks of the 'failed navvies'.⁸⁸ Many short stories reinforce these cultural identities and motives, including Edna O'Brien's *Shovel Kings* and *Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass* by John McGahern.⁸⁹

1.4. Theory

Whilst this research primarily aims to chronicle the history of the post-war Irish builders in a more systematic and empirical way, any effective analysis needs to consider the theoretical paradigms which underpin thematic and chronological narratives. Irish builders in post-war London should be regarded historically as a distinct social group, whose positionality, identity, ethnicity and cultural relevance in relation to both their new and old environments constantly shifts through time and socio-economic space. A key aspect of this research has, therefore, been the use of relevant inter-disciplinary theories to analyse the lived experiences of these workers. The novel application of concepts rooted in construction economics, social sciences, ethnography and cultural theory has revealed fresh perspectives on the histories of these migrants beyond mere chronology. The theoretical framework elucidated below therefore draws on conceptualisations of migration, economics, oral history, cultural and migrant entrepreneur theories, to observe the Irish experience during London's post-war reconstruction through diverse analytical lenses.⁹⁰

Irish emigration to construction and engineering works in post-war London is part of the 'great fact of Irish social history from the early nineteenth century'⁹¹ and of 'the great

⁸⁷ Timothy O'Grady & Steve Pyke, *I Could Read the Sky* (London, 1997); John B Keane, *The Contractors* (Dublin, 1993); William King, *Leaving Ardglass*, (Dublin, 2008).

⁸⁸ Peter Woods, *Hard Shoulder*, (Dublin, 2003); Jimmy Murphy, *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*, (Dublin, 2001).

⁸⁹ Edna O'Brien, 'Shovel Kings' in *Saints and Sinners*, (New York, 2011); John McGahern, 'Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass' in *Creatures of the Earth*, (London, 1992).

⁹⁰ The theories of Ravenstein, Everett Lee, J.A. Jackson, Enda Delaney, Jim MacLaughlin, Donald Ritchie, Ken Howarth, Arthur McIvor, William DuBois, Mary Hickman, Stuart Hall, Homi Bhaba and Avtar Brah are considered. Likewise gendering and masculinities amongst the London-Irish builders is considered through the prism of the writings of theorists such as Butler, Mac an Ghaill, Chris Haywood, Darren Thiel and others.

⁹¹ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.345.

European migration of surplus agricultural labour into productive urban industry'.⁹² Theorising the generalised process of migration and the driving forces behind it is a peculiarly interdisciplinary process which enables a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of this specific cohort. A key work which has helped shape the theoretical framework of this research is Harzig and Hoerder's influential general study *What is Migration History?*⁹³ The process of migration constantly evolves and changes as a result of modernity and globalisation. Even in the relatively brief post-war period of five decades the circumstances of migration for the Irish-in-London changed significantly because of improved technology, travel, educational opportunity and living standards both in Ireland and Britain. Theoretical definitions of migration are, consequently, inherently unstable. That said, the benchmark remains Everett Lee's classic definition in 1966: 'migration is defined broadly as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence' and involves 'an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles'. However, Lee went on to specifically exclude 'the continual movements of nomads and migratory workers, for whom there is no long-term residence, and temporary moves like those to the mountains for the summer'.⁹⁴ This is relevant insofar as the story of Irish migrant constructors in London is one of transition from itinerancy to long-term residence.

Lee's work drew on earlier theories of EG Ravenstein (1834-1913) in the late nineteenth century who formulated a set of 'laws' of migration, which despite the significant changes in the world wrought by modernity, technological change, and globalisation still essentially hold true.⁹⁵ These laws, as modified by Lee and later theoreticians of migration studies, are summarised below. Most of them apply to the Irish migrant builders upon whom this study focuses and the very fact that, for example, Irish migration to Britain in the post-war period was focused overwhelmingly on London, alone fulfils a number of the conditions Ravenstein posited.⁹⁶ There are, however, some unique features of the post-war Irish builders in Britain,

⁹² Tony Judt, *Postwar*, (London, 2005), p.456.

⁹³ Christiane Harzig, Dirk Hoerder, *What is Migration History?* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹⁴ Everett S. Lee, 'A Theory of Migration' in *Demography*, Vol. 3, No. 1. (1966), pp. 47-57, p.49 reprinted in JA Jackson (Ed.), *Migration*, (Cambridge, 1969), pp.282-297.

⁹⁵ See Jackson and Lee *ibid.*; D.B. Grigg, 'E.G Ravenstein and the "Laws of Migration"' in *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol 3, (1977), pp.41-54; R. Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, (New York, 1991), p.16; C.B. Bretell and J.F. Hollifield, (Eds.), *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, (New York, 2000), pp.27-29, 35-36; Delaney, *Demography*, p.9; P. Guinness, *Migration*, (London, 2002), pp.11-12; Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, pp.301-302.

⁹⁶ Assuming a mid-point of 1970 to the date range of this research, and therefore citing 1971 as closest proximate census point, The Small Area Statistics for Great Britain, 1971, (available at <http://casweb.ukdataservice.ac.uk/1971/>, accessed 23 Dec 2015) shows c. 240,000, 32% of all Republic of

particularly in the immediate aftermath of the war, which modulate the applicability of Lee's definition and Ravenstein's over-arching framework to this social grouping.

Table 1.1 - Ravenstein's Modified Laws of Migration

Internal Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of migrants travel short distances • Town-dwellers are less migratory than those of rural areas • Large towns and cities grow more by migration than by natural birth rate increase • Migration increases in volume as industries and commerce develop and transport improves • The primary direction of migration is from under-developed agricultural areas to the centre of industry and commerce • The major causes of migration are economic
Out-migration [Internal and External]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migrants going long distances generally move by preference to one of the great centres of commerce or industry • Most migrants are adults • Females are more migratory than males within the country of their birth, but males more frequently venture abroad
Step-migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Migration proceeds step-by-step
Stream and counter-stream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each current of migration produces a compensating counter-current

Firstly, as Fitzpatrick and Lambkin observe, the objective definition of migration as permanently changing 'residence' overlooks the subjective and highly emotive corollary of moving 'home', which for the majority of Irish migrants is the lasting cultural and emotional consequence of migration.⁹⁷ The meaning of 'residence' and 'home' can – and, for most post-war Irish migrants to Britain, I would argue did - mean two very different things. The majority of second-generation post-war Irish in Britain (including this author) grew up – at least until teenage years - learning almost intuitively that 'home' meant Ireland, and that their existence in Britain was a form of indefinite temporary residence.⁹⁸ This had very profound implications for the development and operation of an ethnic-controlled economy and, potentially, an ethnic enclave, as chapters two through four demonstrate.

Ireland-born migrants living in London with the nearest settlement, Birmingham at a mere 44,000, less than 6%, as cited in Sean Sorohan, *Irish London During the Troubles*, (Dublin, 2012), p.6.

⁹⁷ Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, p.5.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Pam Schweitzer (ed.), *Across the Irish Sea*, (London, 1991), p141, Catherine Dunne, *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London*, (Dublin, 2003), pp.43-4, 68-9, 86-7, 147-8, Nottingham Irish Studies Group, *Making it Home: Experiences of Being Irish*, (Nottingham, 2001), p.25, 33 all as cited in Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.66.

Secondly, the migratory process, for many of the early post-war builders, uniquely straddles the ‘permanent – semi-permanent – nomadic’ spectrum envisaged by Lee’s definition, which expressly excluded all but permanent migration. The typical economically-active migrant Irishman in British construction at the end of the Second World War can reasonably be assumed to fall within an age-range of c.17-50 years . Birth dates for this grouping therefore probably fall between 1895-1925. Consequently it can be hypothesized that a substantial portion of these early post-war migrants were probably spailpíni,⁹⁹ following a well-worn trajectory which, applying the categorisations adopted by Manning,¹⁰⁰ took them from *sojourners* engaged in seasonal agricultural migration, through *itinerants* during the era of semi-nomadic encamped capital projects to eventual *settlers* in the post-mechanisation era from the 1950s onwards.¹⁰¹

Thirdly, Lee’s exclusion of nomadic forms of migration fails to account for this significant quotient of migratory experience. Jackson challenged ‘the myth of the static society’ which assumes ‘by harking back to some pre-existing rural utopia, that the natural condition of man is sedentary [and] that movement away from the natal place is a deviant activity associated with disorganisation and a threat to the established harmony’.¹⁰² Jackson recognises - in Lee’s repudiation of this ‘peripatetic existence’¹⁰³ - the socially exclusionary discourses of ‘otherness’ rooted in xenophobia, classism and localism which hinder acceptance of the migratory process on all sides. This has particular relevance to issues of anti-Irish prejudice experienced throughout the early stages of the period, as chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate.

⁹⁹ The traditional seasonal agricultural migration from Ireland to Britain stretching back to the nineteenth century and centred particularly on western seaboard counties such as Mayo, Sligo and Donegal - See Introduction, fn 24 and fn.27.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History*, (New York, 2005), pp.8-9.

¹⁰¹ For two relatively good examples of this trajectory, see Reg Hall’s interview with Tommy Healy, the flute and fiddle player from Tubbercurry in Co. Sligo, whose experiences were articulated in Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.29, p.560 and Sarah Goek, ‘Na Spailpíni: Irish Seasonal Labourers in Britain in the 20th Century’ in *The Dustbin of History, Online Blog*, available at <https://thedustbinofhistory.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/na-spailpini/> [Accessed 23 December, 2015] and interview with Bernard McNicholas, construction businessman who discusses his father’s and grandfather’s experiences of seasonal migration leading to itinerant semi-nomadic migration in Anne Holohan, *Working Lives*, (London. 1995), p.155.

¹⁰² J.A. Jackson, ‘Migration – Editorial Introduction’ in *Sociological Studies 2 – Migration*, (Cambridge, 1969), p.3. as cited by Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, p.5.

¹⁰³ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.115.

Akenson posits a simple binary dichotomy of forced or volitional migration in Irish history, arguing that for the vast majority of migrants leaving is a matter of choice. Volitional migrants, he adds, always react to ‘the constraints that surround their lives’ but nonetheless are ‘intelligent, self-aware, responsible persons, each of whom made a conscious decision to leave Ireland’.¹⁰⁴ Lee’s widely accepted ‘push-pull’ theories,¹⁰⁵ Redmond argues, provide further nuance to Akenson’s basic tenet, by recognising agency as being subject to a myriad of external and internal influences.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Lee also emphasises the importance of personal sensitivities, individual risk profile (attitude to adventure), education and intelligence, networks of personal contacts and knowledge of proposed destinations, work ethic and similar highly variable factors.¹⁰⁷ The tensions created by push-pull factors can be summarised in the observation by Baines that ‘the attraction of another location only has meaning when compared with the conditions at home’.¹⁰⁸ Almost all the interviewees in Appendix A contrast the draw of increased affluence, employment prospects and the sense of adventure which construction work in London offered against the oppressive poverty, poor earning-capacity and lack of opportunity in rural Ireland.¹⁰⁹

In stark contrast, the enduring representative image of emigration as ‘exile’ is deeply embedded in Irish cultural memory, literature, song and theatre. Famine lore and the history of Irish nationalism, particularly with regard to Irish-American emigration, has been characterised as analogous to a sense of forced estrangement from home¹¹⁰ and genuine

¹⁰⁴ Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer*, (Toronto, 1996), p.37.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Push-pull’ factors influencing Irish migration are discussed in more detail in: Delaney, *Demography*, pp.8-11; Monica Boyd, ‘Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and New Agendas’ in *International Migration Review*, Vol. 23. Nr. 3, (1989), pp.638-670; Murray Watson, *Being English in Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 2003), pp.64-67 (Watson also raises some very interesting arguments regarding the influence of employment prospects, ambition and lifestyle on migration decisions); David Fitzpatrick, ‘The Irish in Britain: Settlers or Transients?’, p.7, in Patrick Buckland and John Belcham (eds.), *The Irish in British Labour History*, (Liverpool, 1993), pp.1-10; Enda Delaney and Donald .M. MacRaild, ‘Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities Since 1750’ in *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol 23, Nrs2-3, (2005), pp.127-142.

¹⁰⁶ Redmond, *Moving Histories*, pp.38-9. Factors such as whether it is practical or realistic to stay home if the outlook is severe poverty, hunger and unemployment; the probability of financial support either within the family unit or from the state; the long-term employment prospects; the prospects of land inheritance, marriage and any meaningful life chances all impact upon decision-making.

¹⁰⁷ Everett S. Lee, ‘A Theory of Migration’ in *Demography*, Vol. 3, No. 1. (1966), pp. 47-57, 56-58.

¹⁰⁸ Dudley Baines, *Emigration from Europe 1815-1930*, (Cambridge, 1995), p.21.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.20, Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), p.346, Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), p.447, all in Appendix A.

¹¹⁰ Kerby Miller, Bruce Boling and David . N. Doyle, ‘Emigrants and Exiles: Irish Cultures and Irish Emigration to North America, 1790-1922’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 86 (Sep., 1980), pp. 97-125.

homesickness.¹¹¹ Terms like ‘rupture’¹¹² and ‘unhealable rift’ are deployed in post-colonial literature.¹¹³ Murray, speaking of the London-Irish community, cites exile as ‘a potent ingredient in the configuration of identities’.¹¹⁴ As chapter 6 demonstrates, much of this lore and cultural heritage is hard-wired into communal Irish memory and is reflected in narratives of post-war Irish migration to London, particularly in folksong, despite evidence of lived experiences to the contrary.¹¹⁵

Although the War of Independence, the Civil War and the ongoing Troubles in Northern Ireland may have caused some forced migration,¹¹⁶ there is little debate amongst theorists that the primary motive for Irish migration in the twentieth century was economic. This reality partially accounts for the predominance of Irish male labour in construction and engineering; such activities were comparatively well-paid in the post-war period, driven inevitably by pent-up demand. Ravenstein’s law that ‘The primary direction of migration is from under-developed agricultural areas to the centre of industry and commerce’ has been recast by a number of theorists as the ‘core/periphery’ model. Jansen posited as far back as 1969 that ‘the social structure and cultural system both of places of origin and of destination are affected by migration and in turn affect the migrant’.¹¹⁷ This is essentially the lived experience of Irish builders in post-war London which, over time, shaped and affected the communities they left, created and/or integrated with, whether temporarily or permanently. Experiences were constantly remediated – often in exaggerated or mythologised form - through a wide variety of social and cultural channels both in Ireland and London.

The often subconscious implementation of economic cost-benefit analysis is another theoretical conceptualisation which probably informed the migratory decision-making of this cohort to an even greater extent.¹¹⁸ Stark *et al* posit a view, for example, that decisions to

¹¹¹ Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, pp.51-52.

¹¹² Edna O’Brien at Irish Writers in London Summer School, London Metropolitan University, 15 June 2015.

¹¹³ Edward Said, ‘The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile’ in *Harper & Queen* 269, (September, 1984), p.51.

¹¹⁴ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.6.

¹¹⁵ See also Appendix G, Migrant Folksong & Verse.

¹¹⁶ Gemma Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War*, (Cambridge, 2014), p.98-105 ; Johanne Devlin Trew, *Leaving the North: Migration and Memory, Northern Ireland 1921-2011*, (Liverpool, 2016), p.40.

¹¹⁷ Clifford Jansen, ‘Some Sociological Aspects of Migration’ in J.A. Jackson, *Sociological Studies 2 – Migration*, (Cambridge, 1969), p.60 as cited in Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, p.303.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Oded Stark and David E. Bloom, ‘The New Economics of Labor Migration’ in *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 75, No. 2, Papers and Proceedings of the Ninety-Seventh Annual Meeting of the

migrate are not – as the canonical metanarrative often depicts – ‘acts of desperation or boundless optimism’¹¹⁹ made solely by the migrant but are more often ‘calculated strategy’ resulting from collective decision-making within a family or household and are influenced by local community circumstances, relative familial and local hierarchies, risk diversification and mutual interdependence. Under this model, migratory arrangements and ‘patterns of remittances’ are better explained as ‘an intertemporal contractual arrangement between the migrant and the family than as the result of purely altruistic considerations’; the arrangement often taking the form of a verbal contract of co-insurance, which in turn encourages the economic performance of migrants through the exploitation of ‘network and kinship capital’.¹²⁰ Particularly in the early decades of the post-war chain migrations, it was common for young single men to remit part of their earnings home to parents and/or siblings, to return home regularly to provide labour for key farming activities such as harvesting and hay-saving and to utilise established networks of kin, friendship and business to facilitate opportunities for siblings and relations – particularly younger brothers or nephews within the construction and engineering industries of London Chapters four and five give examples of all these conventions.

To some extent therefore, as Delaney concludes, there remains no discernible single coherent theory of migration.¹²¹ As such the classic definitions of migration require some nuance to give context to this research: the instability of terms such as ‘home’ and ‘residence’ as they apply to post-war Irish migrants; Lee’s exclusion of itinerant and nomadic migrants; and the dislocated chronological shifts through the sojourner-itinerant-settler trajectory. In particular, Akenson’s articulation of forced-versus-volitional causation needs recasting, as Redmond suggests, primarily to reflect the concept of economic compulsion. Phizacklea’s formulation perhaps best synthesises migration and construction economic theory as it applies to post-war Irish construction workers: ‘Nearly all labour migration is characterised by economic compulsion due to the decomposition of backward productive sectors, principally agriculture, structural unemployment in the dependant [peripheral] social formations and the

American Economic Association (May, 1985), pp. 173-178 cited in Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, p.303.

¹¹⁹ Stark and Bloom, ‘The New Economics of Labor Migration’ *ibid.*, pp.174-175.

¹²⁰ Delaney, *Demography*, pp.12-13 ; Stark and Bloom, ‘The New Economics of Labor Migration’ *ibid.*, pp.174-175.

¹²¹ Delaney, *Demography*, p.19.

higher nominal and real wages offered in the dominant [core] capitalist formation'.¹²² This (what amounts to an) adaption of 'core-periphery' theory offers, in my view, a plausible hypothesis for the systematic exploitation of migrant labour supply chains from peripheral economies (in this case Ireland) in the interests of prioritising core economies (in this case the London construction market). It was developed in the 1960s by economic geographers as a theoretical exposition of imperialism, since when an extensive body of literature has focused on the key concepts of dependency and international structural inequalities.¹²³ Summarising the theory, Breathnach and Jackson state:

A fundamental feature of this [international economic] system has been the generation of interregional and international economic relationships based upon functional complementarity, giving rise in turn to an idea of an international division of labour involving a set of underdeveloped peripheral economies with limited economic functions and orientated, in a dependant fashion, to serving the needs of a set of developed, diversified and dominant core economies. These needs have been served primarily by the global periphery acting as a reservoir of primary materials and (particularly in the late twentieth century) of cheap labour for the global core.¹²⁴

Similarly, Zolberg argued from a slightly different perspective, that a conceptual shift in migration theory occurred in the late 1980s from the view of international migration as 'aggregate movements of individuals in response to differential opportunities, to a view of this process as a movement of workers propelled by the dynamics of the transnational capitalist economy, which simultaneously determine both the "push" and "pull" factors'.¹²⁵ Petras further further observed that a key factor 'in determining the movement of labour from the periphery to the core is geographical location'; particularly where - as in the case of Ireland in the twentieth century - an under-developed economic state is geographically proximate to an

¹²² Annie Phizacklea (ed.), 'Introduction' in *One Way Ticket: Migration and Female Labour*, (London, 1983), pp.1-11, at p.7.

¹²³ Delaney, *Demography*, p.17; O Kostoska, S Mitikj, P Jovanovski, L Kocarev, 'Core-periphery structure in sectoral international trade networks: A new approach to an old theory' in *PLoS ONE*, 15(4), (April, 2020), p. e0229547.

¹²⁴ Proinnsias Breathnach and J.A. Jackson, 'Ireland, emigration and the new international division of labour', in *Complimentary Irish Migration*, ed. Russell King, (Dublin, 1991), No. 6, p.1, cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.17.

¹²⁵ A. Zolberg, 'The Next Waves: Migration Theory for a Changing World', in *International Migration Review*, 23 (3), (1989), pp. 403-29, cited in Mary P. Corcoran, 'Informalization of Metropolitan Labour Forces: The Case of Irish Immigrants in the New York Construction Industry' in *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol 1, (1991), pp 31-51, p.48.

advanced capitalist economy.¹²⁶ This was precisely the case throughout the post-war decades as contiguous swathes of construction labour transited from the peripheral west of Ireland to the core global economy of London.

MacLaughlin emphasises that, on its own, geographical core-periphery theory, which tends to focus on spatial considerations - areas, regions and states - is insufficient to explain the scale and composition of Irish emigration. Rather, as capitalism turned 'viral' throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it fed off various social, geo-political and historical processes including the restructuring of Irish rural societies (especially in the wake of the Great Famine), changes in property relations, urbanisation, industrialisation and developments in transportation and technology in order to 'serve the wider needs of the world economy, not least by transforming some [societies] into emigrant nurseries for supplying industrial nations with cheap and adaptable labour'.¹²⁷ The very persistence and magnitude of Irish emigration is, he contends, indicative of Ireland's peripheral *status* as well as *location* (my emphasis). Britain, as a nearby global core economy, tapped into Ireland's peripherality to feed industrial and commercial growth; clearly benefitting not only from its proximity, but its post-colonial status, and the development of cheaper transportation and technology for most of the twentieth century. The transience of Irish labour 'rendered Ireland central to the process of core formation in the world economy' by appropriating isolated pockets of rural Ireland - as 'emigrant nurseries' - into the capitalist world economy.¹²⁸ Areas such as Donegal, Mayo, Leitrim, Sligo, Roscommon, Galway and Kerry stand out among many others, and most of the history recounted in this research emanates from these locations. Over the post-war decades London stood out as a metropolis both from without and within the core economy of Britain and drew economic migrants to it in much larger numbers than other industrial centres, hence Irish labour predominated in the post-war construction boom which London experienced.¹²⁹

The relationship between labour resource and capitalism is another key theoretical conceptualisation in understanding and explaining the post-war history of Irish builders. The

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Petras, 'The global labour market in the modern world economy', in *Global trends in migration: theory and research on international population movements*, (New York, 1981), p.56 cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.17.

¹²⁷ MacLaughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery*, p.47.

¹²⁸ MacLaughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery*, p.2.

¹²⁹ Delaney, *Demography*, p.84, 151. See also chapter 2.2 *infra*.

casualised nature of subcontracted labour in the post-war rebuilding of London was, arguably, the main economic determinant of Irish entrepreneurial success in construction. There are two intersecting theoretical concepts in socio-economic research which, I contend, go to the question of why Irish migrant labour constituted itself the way it did in post-war London, exhibiting, over time, many of the characteristics of an ethnic labour enclave, as I discuss in chapter three. The first of these is Sassen's model of informalization in advanced urban economies, which posits that the changing needs of advanced capitalism – particularly industrialisation – induces informal economies in metropolises.¹³⁰ It does this by drawing immigrants from peripheral societies and absorbing them to serve the needs of emergent casual labour markets. Such markets encourage the growth of smaller enterprise, particularly in the informal economy and casual employment sectors, to fulfil sustained demand created by increasing urban populations. However, in doing so, these markets incite exploitability amongst immigrants.¹³¹ Sassen's research looked primarily at immigrant labour in American cities, but the theoretical models arrived at are, I contend, equally applicable to post-war Irish immigration to London.

Secondly, in a highly original historical comparison of labour and capitalist relations, Wall (citing Biernacki)¹³² discusses, in historical terms, the ideological difference between British and German conceptualisations of manual skill. German industry saw collective and individual labour as an essential element of the production process, both economically and socially. Therefore German labour, even today, is by-and-large contracted on a virtually full-time permanent basis and investment in vocational and technical training for construction workers is highly developed. By contrast British 'construction employers frequently conceived of labour as a [mere] variable input to the construction process, something to be bought when necessary and not intrinsic to the production process itself'.¹³³ Payment based on productive output alone (customarily known at site level as 'price-work' or 'piece-work') became the norm in the post-war British construction industry, despite the labour unions' attempts at collective bargaining.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ S. Sassen-Koob, 'New York City's Informal Economy', Paper presented at the *Second Symposium on the Informal Sector*, Johns Hopkins University, (October 1986), p.2.

¹³¹ S. Sassen, *The Mobility of Labor and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*, (New York, 1988), p.48.

¹³² R. Biernacki, *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain 1640–1914*, (California, 1995).

¹³³ Wall, *An Architecture of Parts*, p.32.. See also Thiel, *Builders*, pp.40-43.

¹³⁴ Thiel, *Builders*, p.42.

(Having) successfully resisted the introduction of piece-rates to construction for decades [...] they finally were agreed under wartime conditions in the 1940s. [...] In this scenario, education, training and qualifications become almost irrelevant as a worker is employed on the basis of *what he produces*, not through the transformation of his *capacity* to produce while under a contract to an employer.¹³⁵

The British construction industry's obsessive predilection for competitive price-work converged neatly with (particularly Western) Irish experiences of rural farm capitalism. The post-war migrant builders, who came overwhelmingly from rural subsistence farming communities, in most cases instinctively understood - and were acquiescent in - the *laissez-faire* nature of such working arrangements.

The nature of construction differs substantially from manufacturing and product engineering, particularly in its over-reliance on competitively-tendered contracting coupled with lengthy and complex sub-contract and supply-contract chains.¹³⁶ The capitalist ideals of standardisation and mass factory-system production had considerable limitations in construction because of its bespoke and craft-skilled nature and extended production periods required, although technological advancements have improved standardisation substantially in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Fragmentation and division of work pervaded all elements of the construction industry but particularly the labour-supply market. This created ideal conditions for casualization – a labour procurement system which tolerated – and perhaps encouraged - operatives to stay ‘under the radar’ of societal and state regulatory processes;¹³⁷ precisely what happened to a significant number of migrant Irish builders and entrepreneurs during the development of the ‘lump’ system of casualised employment.¹³⁸

Whilst the empirical history of Irish labour in the post-war rebuilding of London has traceability in a variety of archival documents, the lived emotional experience of the men - as McIvor puts it ‘what it *felt* like to be a worker in this period’¹³⁹ - was only to be discerned through the testimony of the protagonists themselves. Fictionalised representations of the London-Irish builder tend to focus on stock – and somewhat mythologised - aspects of the

¹³⁵ Wall, *An Architecture of Parts*, p.32. See also Thiel, *Builders*, p.43.

¹³⁶ Thiel, *Builders*, p.13.

¹³⁷ Thiel, *Builders*, pp.13-14.

¹³⁸ As section 4.4 demonstrates.

¹³⁹ McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.4

canonical metanarrative.¹⁴⁰ To capture the diverse ‘history of everyday lives’, twenty-one original field interviews were collected as part of this research, transcribed and included in ‘Appendix A - Oral Histories’, together with a number of pre-existing oral history archives and published oral histories.¹⁴¹ The testamentary evidence in these interviews is sufficient, I contend, to challenge the dominance of the canonical metanarrative.

To contextualise the relevance of oral evidence to migrant labour history, I have been guided by a wide range of reading centred on two particular works. Lynn Abrams’ comprehensive work *Oral History Theory* raises a series of thoughtful and sometimes provocative ideas about the practice of oral history, such as the ethical dimensions of interviewing and recording individual stories.¹⁴² Since Irish migrant history is, in many respects, akin to working-class folklore, Alessandro Portelli’s foundational work *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, which explores the relationship of folksong to working-class identity and consciousness, has influenced my approach. He used literature, folklore, and linguistics to develop a method for the study of subjectivity by focusing on the implications of the verbal strategies used by the narrators.¹⁴³ I have sought to mirror many of these approaches in drawing conclusions from the interviews in Appendix A.

Abrams sums up the difficulties of oral history practice succinctly: ‘in the process of eliciting and analysing the material, one is confronted by the oral history interview as an event of communication which demands that we find ways of comprehending not just *what* is said, but also *how* it is said, *why* it is said and *what* it means. Oral history practice then demands that

¹⁴⁰ Typically such representations highlight prejudice against the Irish, exploitation of young, newly-arrived migrants (often by their fellow Irishmen), insanitary and inhospitable living conditions, stakhanovite working practices, the Cuchulainn myth, reckless risk-taking; aspects of the lived experience which – whilst undoubtedly rooted in fact, do not fully represent the diverse trajectory of the post-war migrants lives. See chapter six for further discussion.

¹⁴¹ See section 1.3. - Literature review. These include those curated by the Irish Cultural Centre, Kings-cross-voices, the Irish in Britain Archive and the Reg Hall Archive at the British Library. Research derived from these oral histories – where practicable - corroborates the other methods of investigation outlined above. Further anecdotal oral evidence is drawn from a wide variety of (mainly online) sources including local history/folklore forums expressing direct oral testimony of the experiences of migrant builders. Where possible the use of such oral testimony has been corroborated by triangulated evidence from other sources in order to ensure credibility.

¹⁴² Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (London, 2016).

¹⁴³ A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1991), p.vii.

one thinks about theory'.¹⁴⁴ Oral history as a process has its own peculiarities and difficulties which need to be weighed in the balance when using interview material. Linda Shopes, for example, has cited the tensions between popular and professional historiography, the tendency of populist history to sanitize formal history, the relationship of personal histories to social change and the 'problematics of conceptualizing community solely around [...] a series of life history interviews'.¹⁴⁵ Portelli characterised oral history as different because, amongst other things, 'historical, poetical and legendary narratives often become inextricably mixed up...[sic] so that personal 'truth' may coincide with shared imagination'.¹⁴⁶ A similar theory is advanced by Daniel James in considering the ways in which personal narratives can assume an 'epic' mode when recounting communal events or experiences; those which may be regarded as macrohistorical. James considers such a narrative mode implies the individual's broader alignment with the community and its values, leaving little room for expressions of real individual identity.¹⁴⁷ Similar considerations apply to the testimonies elicited from my own interviewees, for example, in the way in which often many of the site-based anecdotes and stories concerning 'characters' in the Irish migrant labour market assume an epic status in the retelling, even amongst the protagonists and participants in the events themselves, who often exaggerated such retellings for effect.

Equally thought-provoking is Barry Hazley's *Life History and the Irish Migrant Experience in Post-War England: Myth, Memory and Emotional Adaption*, a unique application of Popular Memory Theory to the post-war Irish Diaspora in Britain, based upon his PhD thesis at Manchester University. Hazley's conceptualisation of the 'cultural circuit' as a means of proliferation and mythologisation of individual anecdotes, stories and cultural product cultivated a theoretical precedent for chapter five of this research.¹⁴⁸ Atrophied or contaminated memory is a theorized risk in an age where hyperreality and multimedia saturation often leaves us unknowingly influenced by circulating and intervening media,

¹⁴⁴ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, (London, 2016), p.12.

¹⁴⁵ Linda Shopes, 'Community Oral History: Where we have been, where we are going', in *Oral History*, Vol. 42, No.1, (Spring, 2015), pp.97-106, p.97.

¹⁴⁶ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, (New York, 1991), p.49.

¹⁴⁷ Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*, (Durham, 2000), p.162 cited in Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, Krzysztof Zamorski, (eds.), *Oral History: The Challenges of Dialogue*, (Amsterdam, 2009), p.120.

¹⁴⁸ Barry Hazley, *Life History and the Irish Migrant Experience in Post-War England: Myth, Memory and Emotional Adaption* (Manchester, 2020).

propaganda, books, films, social consciousness – for example, where modern politically-correct thinking influences how subjects mediate events of decades ago in their memory.¹⁴⁹ The dynamics of one memory leading another can also be problematic – the interviewer or perhaps a friend or relation who is present interposing or suggesting memories.

All these theoretical pitfalls lead to the recurring question which oral history as a practice faces, namely, how do we retrieve from the collected data of life-history narratives a coherent picture of individual and collective memory and corroborate its relationship to documented fact?¹⁵⁰ A further consideration is the process of memory narrative reconstruction; the manner in which we all subconsciously conduct a process of sieving and selection of memory. The application of these theoretical approaches to oral history raises potential difficulties with biographical interviews which need to be factored into their use as historical data. These include, for example: the potential discomposure of participants at interview; intersubjectivity and the influence of class, gender, age and ethnicity of the interviewer in juxtaposition to the interviewee. Moreover, oral histories of Irish migrants in Britain should be contextualised within the wider purview of multi-ethnic immigration and theoretical frameworks of transnationalism, race, and ethnicity.

Thanks to its position as one of Europe's leading ports, the metropolitan centre of London has been the beating heart of the world's mercantile circulatory system throughout modern history, and at the onset of the twentieth century was already a 'melting-pot' of ethnic diffusion.¹⁵¹ Jewish immigrants, for example, fleeing the anti-Semitic pogroms of eastern Europe substantially increased the non-British population of London from the 1880s onwards. Similarly, in the wake of the Great Famine, the Irish had settled mainly in the docks of east London, and by 1861 became 'the largest [migrant] settlement in Great Britain', numbering 178,000 people.¹⁵² This wave became assimilated –predominantly through subsequent London-born generations (made up of 'cockneys') - into what Reg Hall defined, in the post-

¹⁴⁹ Susannah Radstone, Bill Schwarz. 'Introduction: Mapping Memory.' In Susannah Radstone, Bill Schwarz (Eds.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York, 2010), pp. 1-10.

¹⁵⁰ Ross Poole, 'Memory, history and the claims of the past' in *Memory Studies*, issue 1(2008), pp.149-166.

¹⁵¹ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.103.

¹⁵² Sam Davies, et al, (Eds.), *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790-1970* (Oxford, 2000), p.547, citing Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London*, (Manchester, 1979), p.19, p.46.

First-World-War period, as the London-Irish.¹⁵³ Throughout the twentieth century the Irish occupied an ambivalent position within the hierarchies of ‘ethnic othering’ of migrant communities in London. Corbally explained it as: ‘the difficult dialectic of assimilation and racialisation endured by white Irish people, demonstrate[ed] that the Irish have been excluded from full membership in English society in unacknowledged ways’.¹⁵⁴ After the Second World War, the onset of globalisation, de-colonisation and the movement of mass populations across national, geographic and continental borders, complicated these issues of identity even further.

This ambiguous migrant existence in London rendered Irish identity a complex mix of socio-cultural factors in the post-war period. At a generalised level, my theoretical framework for ethnicity and identity starts with seminal works by Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* and Avtar Brah’s insightful analysis in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*.¹⁵⁵ There is a significant cross-disciplinary body of research on migrant identity in the urban space and the ongoing debates around the social theories of assimilation and pluralism (multiculturalism) – a particularly pertinent issue for the Irish community in London, which can, in some senses, be seen as petri-dish for post-war assimilationist theories. In shaping the various aspects of migrant identity amongst Irish construction workers into a coherent theoretical framework, the work of social geographer Ceri Peach has proved decisive. Peach’s ground-breaking work on assimilation-versus-pluralism in urban migration,¹⁵⁶ and his later research on ethnic ghettos and enclaves in *Desegregating the City: Ghettos, Enclaves and Inequality* helped shape my thinking in regard to the specific nature of Irish ethnic formations in London.¹⁵⁷ From this sprang the development of ideas of auto-segregation within the workspace, which I explore as a conceptual explanation for Irish construction workers collective hesitancy to behave in accordance with assimilationist models of migration.

Irish identity has also been theorised by reference, amongst others, to Sean Sorohan’s

¹⁵³ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.ii-iii.

¹⁵⁴ John Corbally, ‘The Othered Irish: Shades of Difference in Post-War Britain, 1948–71’ in *Contemporary European History*, No. 24, (2015), pp. 105-125, p.108.

¹⁵⁵ Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay, (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (London, 1996); Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London, 1996).

¹⁵⁶ Ceri Peach, ‘Pluralist and Assimilationist Models of Ethnic Settlement in London, 1991’ in *Tijdschrift voor Economisch en Sociale Geografie*, (1997), Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 120-134.

¹⁵⁷ Ceri Peach, ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’ in David .P. Varady (Ed.), *Desegregating the City: Ghettos, Enclaves and Inequality*, (New York, 2005), pp.31-48.

incisive look at *Irish London During the Troubles* and Tony Murray's excellent analysis of how Irish identity in London is predicated upon narrative forms in *London Irish Fictions*.¹⁵⁸ Paul Gilroy, on this point, asserts that 'diaspora disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location and consciousness'.¹⁵⁹ In this way, for example, performances of the canonical metanarrative of the Irish navy by the Irish themselves can be seen as both an outward strategy of multicultural pluralism and simultaneously a subtle form of post-colonial, ethnic resistance to full assimilation.

A crucial component of the history of post-war Irish construction work was the rise of entrepreneurial activity within the Irish labour force. There is a significant body of research on ethnic entrepreneurship in migrant urban communities upon which this work has drawn, in particular Kaplan and Li's *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, which influenced my thinking on what kind of ethnic economy – if any – the Irish migrant community created around post-war construction work.¹⁶⁰ Thierry Volery's important essay 'Ethnic entrepreneurship: a theoretical framework' in the *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship* was equally compelling and, taken together, these works point towards an *ethnic-controlled economy* as the theoretical model most suited to Irish construction activity.¹⁶¹ I was also influenced by Áine Corrigan's unpublished 2006 thesis, 'Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States: Ethnic Strategies and Transnational Identities', which theorises various conceptual frameworks for transnational entrepreneurship and the ideas of ethnic/diasporic enclaves within urban economies.¹⁶² Although this work deals with late twentieth-century Irish migrant entrepreneurs in New York and Boston, the approaches taken by Corrigan – I argue - relate equally to Irish migrant construction work in post-war urban London.

In chapter six I synthesise my ideas regarding migrant masculinities and performative Irishness, which I see as a homosocial form of gender performance. Consequently, the work of Judith Butler, in particular her seminal theory, in *Gender Trouble*, that all gender is constituted

¹⁵⁸ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*; Sorohan, *Irish London During the Troubles*.

¹⁵⁹ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.11.

¹⁶⁰ David H. Kaplan, Wei Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, (Lanham, 2006), pp.1-10.

¹⁶¹ Thierry Volery, 'Ethnic entrepreneurship: a theoretical framework' in Leo Paul Dana (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship: A Co-evolutionary View on Resource Management*, (Cheltenham, 2007), pp.30-41.

¹⁶² Aine Corrigan, 'Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States: Ethnic Strategies and Transnational Identities', (Unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2006).

through ‘repeated performance’ has underpinned this line of reasoning.¹⁶³ In theorising the various configurations of industrial masculinities I have generally consulted the influential works of Connell, Tosh and Mac an Ghail.¹⁶⁴ The excellent journal article ‘Migrating Masculinities: The Irish diaspora in Britain’ proved of particular use in the context of Irish migrant workers.¹⁶⁵ Some migration theorists contend that gender analysis has revealed a ‘covert form of male homesickness felt mainly by those who have failed to establish themselves in the role of breadwinner, with a resulting collapse of masculine identity’¹⁶⁶ This theory also points to notions of precarious manhood and its influence on Irish masculinity and as such is vital in deconstructing the ‘superman’ or ‘Cuchulainn’ myth.¹⁶⁷ This has become a pervasive stock formation of Irish manual labour in this period. alongside neo-Nationalist constructs of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity and the importance in the workspace of male aggression, ‘hardiness’ and the masculine use of profanity, aggressive sarcasm and bellicosity. In addition to the theoretical works outlined above, McIvor’s *Working Lives* and Thiel’s *Builders* both deal very comprehensively with workplace masculinities.

In the remaining chapters the various theoretical propositions discussed above are applied to the lived experience and conduct of many of the migrants who became embroiled in the construction employment enclave. From one perspective these theories help illuminate the way in which decades of migrant employment amongst insular self-enclosed working communities impeded the classical models of assimilation whilst simultaneously offering an alternative perspective on the development and persistence of Irish cultural nationalism as an ethnic bonding agent within the London-Irish community.

¹⁶³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p.33 cited in Anthony Elliott, *Contemporary Social Theory: An Introduction* (Abingdon, 2009), pp.215-20.

¹⁶⁴ Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Sydney, 1995) ; John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire*, (London, 2017) ; John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (London, 2008) ; Máirtín Mac an Ghail, *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*, (Buckingham, 2000).

¹⁶⁵ Liviu Popoviciu , Chris Haywood & Máirtín Mac an Ghail, ‘Migrating Masculinities’ in *Irish Studies Review*, 14:2, (2006), pp.169-187.

¹⁶⁶ Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, pp.51-52.

¹⁶⁷ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, pp.42-54, citing Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1996), p.25.

1.5. Research methodology

This research synthesises two established historical specialisations; Irish diaspora studies and socio-economic history, with a third emergent field of historical research; that of construction history. Feminist historian Mary Cullen, advised: ‘History, in the sense of the closest approximate reconstruction of what really happened that can be achieved, will always need the convergence of as many different stories from as many different points of view as possible’.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, where practicable, ‘methodological triangulation’ - the cross-referencing of research obtained by differing methods - is employed.¹⁶⁹ Because of this multi-disciplinary approach there is a wide spectrum of primary sources from which to draw in writing this thesis. Primary evidence is, in the main, derived from (i) the collected oral histories of twenty-one individuals who participated in the post-war London reconstruction process.¹⁷⁰ (ii) tabulated statistical data, bibliographic information and sampled case-studies collated from multiple sources, relating to the founders and management of some of the most prominent London-based Irish building and civil engineering companies.¹⁷¹ Evidence was adduced from targeted, archival accounting/administrative records and project-specific documentation for Irish-rooted construction businesses and relevant projects, national statistics of both the Irish and British administrations, regional and trade-related journals and newspapers, project-specific reportage and secondary-source oral history interviews / life narratives. Some contributions were received from businesses themselves on foot of sixty specific written appeals, but the response was negligible, reflecting the deeply-entrenched culture of secrecy amongst most Irish-founded construction firms.¹⁷²

Appendix A comprises transcripts of original field interviews (hereinafter referred to as ‘Original Interviews’ or OIs) conducted, over the course of this research, with twenty-one

¹⁶⁸ Mary Cullen, ‘Telling it Our Way: Feminist History’ p.254 in Liz Steiner Scott (Ed.) *Personally Speaking: Women’s Thoughts on Women’s Issues*, (Cork, 1985), pp.254-266.

¹⁶⁹ Denzin, N. K., *The Research Act: A theoretical introduction to Sociological Methods*, (New York, 1978), p297.

¹⁷⁰ Interviewees experiences are transcribed in oral histories included at Appendix A.

¹⁷¹ See Appendix B.

¹⁷² Noel Grant, Managing Director (and son of the founder) of Martin Grant Homes Ltd and Whelan & Grant Ltd, kindly provided a brief emailed biographical sketch of his father and the development of his businesses in April, 2017. Patrick Trant, chairman of Trant Engineering Ltd, founded by his father Phil Trant, from Kerry, in 1958, provided a complimentary copy of *Once Around the Track: The Life and Times of Phil Trant and the Trant Family Business*, (Listowel, 2010). John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, Jackie W, (OI#11), County Mayo, Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, and Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo all discussed the formation and running of their individual subcontracting businesses freely during interview.

migrant builders who came to London in the post-war period and one further contextual field interview.¹⁷³ Selected from personal referral, public appeal to Irish county newspapers and radio stations, London-Irish cultural centres, elderly care welfare groups and snowball sampling sources, all the interviews were conducted in person and face-to-face (although occasionally partners/wives were present and participated on an ad-hoc basis). Following a rigorous ethical review process by Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee, written approval was given for the conduct of face-to-face biographical interviews. ‘Study Information and Interview Consent’ documentation was also provided to every interviewee and consented to in writing.¹⁷⁴ Interviews were recorded on digital audio recording equipment and the digital files relating to those interviews remain in the possession of the author as lead researcher (confidentially stored on encrypted and secured server). On completion of the project, a digital copy of the project’s interview data will be deposited with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive in Maynooth University where the interviewee has consented to this. Otherwise the interview recordings will be destroyed.

The use of biographical oral history methods is well-established in academia¹⁷⁵ and in particular migration, both internal and international, ‘emerges as one of the most important themes of oral history research’.¹⁷⁶ Rogaly contends that a key strength of the oral history approach is that, ‘It produces a specific kind of knowledge ... [sic] one that is attentive to the diversity of experiences’ and that this gives oral history potentially important roles both in furthering understanding and in contesting stereotypes regarding migration, identity, and class’.¹⁷⁷ Oral testimonies not only ‘have the potential to actually challenge the categories and assumptions of official history’ but can reshape the ways in which migration is understood.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Interview with Dr. Reg Hall, an ethnomusicologist and historian with particular expertise related to the experiences of post-war Irish migrants in London. For convenience, this interview has simply been numbered OI#22 and is included in Appendix E.

¹⁷⁴ See Appendix A, preamble sheets (i)-(iii).

¹⁷⁵ Rogaly, ‘Disrupting migration stories’, p.531, citing A Blunt, ‘Cultural geographies of migration: mobility, transnationality and diaspora’ in *Progress in Human Geography*, Issue 31 (2007), pp.684–694; K. Burrell, P. Panayi (Eds), *Histories and Memories: Migrants and their History in Britain*, (London, 2006); J Herbert, *Negotiating Boundaries in the City: Migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Britain*, (Aldershot, 2008); V Lawson, , ‘Arguments with the geography of movement: the theoretical potential of migrants’ stories’ in *Progress in Human Geography*, Issue 24, 2000), pp.173–189; B Taylor, M Sliwa, ‘Polish migration: moving beyond the iron curtain’ in *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 71, (2011), pp.128–146.

¹⁷⁶ A Thomson, , ‘Moving stories: oral history and migration studies’ in *Oral History*, Issue 27, (1999), pp.24–37, at p.24.

¹⁷⁷ Herbert, *Negotiating Boundaries in the City*, pp.7-8.

¹⁷⁸ J Herbert, R Rodger, , ‘Frameworks: testimony, representation and interpretation’ in R Rodger, J Herbert

Interviewees memories have been a vital source of direct and corroborative evidence. Data, reaching back to the immediate post-war years, harvested from interviews includes autobiographical, biographical, anecdotal accounts of events and descriptions of projects, working experiences, friendship and kinship, community and socio-economic systems, and personal views of community values and attitudes.

Interviews were kept semi-structured and quite informal; highly conversational, although where possible I attempted interviewing strategies built around the ideas of interventive interviewing, focusing on linear, strategic, circular and reflexive questioning.¹⁷⁹ Each interviewee was told explicitly, at the outset, that they have information that I would value, whilst intentionally leaving vague just what that information might be and how I would value it. I established rapport with each subject through general discussion of construction industry and Irish cultural experiences in London. These interviews explored the individuals' life histories – looking at their origins in Ireland, the circumstances and reasons for their migration, the manner in which they became construction workers and their familial, domestic and social lives. Unsolicited political comment and evidence of social attitudes were often expressed, together with anecdotal material, in colourful dialect and vernacular (sometimes profane, offensive and abusive) language. Given the nature of the work and industry under analysis, this is to be expected, and therefore I have not mediated any such expressions in the transcriptions.

Transcriptions are arranged in the order in which the interviews were conducted and are each assigned an individual interview code. The interviews are each prefixed with an original identifier code shown as OI#1 which means: OI = Original Interview, #1. All of the interviewees elected to remain semi-anonymous and are therefore only identified by their first name and first initial of their surname. There are a limited number of instances where subsequently interviewees elected to be fully identified where it was deemed necessary within certain sections of their respective narratives. Each OI transcript has an identifier footer on every page of that transcript. So for example: **OI#1 -Tom - 1** refers to page 1 of Original

(Eds), *Testimonies of the City: Identity, Community and Change in a Contemporary Urban World*, (Aldershot, 2007), pp.1–19, at p.7.

¹⁷⁹ A process used in social psychology. See for example, K Tomm, 'Interventive Interviewing: Part III. Intending to Ask Linear, Circular, Reflexive or Strategic Questions?' in *Family Process*, Issue 27 (1988), pp.1-15.

Interview number 1, which is Tom, from Leitrim. This has been arranged as such to enable the reader to see at a glance on any page of the transcripts which interview – and which page of each individual interview concerned - is being viewed.¹⁸⁰

The interviewees, I contend, typify the heterogeneity of post-war Irish male migrant builders who settled in London. The only specified requirement was that they had migrated to Britain – and London in particular – in order to earn a living working within the construction industry at any point between 1940 and 1995. No restriction was placed on the duration of the migrant experience. It was, nonetheless, a reality of timing that – due to ageing and natural deaths - the majority of participants left Ireland in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. In addition to the field interviews analysed above, there have been a number of supplemental (ad-hoc) interviews carried out, usually by telephone, of varying lengths. References to interviewees, sources and dates for these are given where appropriate. The interviewees are scheduled below at Table 1.2 below for ease of reference:

Table 1.2- Original Field Interviewees in Appendix A

Original Interview Code	Name/County	Year of Birth	Origin	Age at Emigration
Prefix OI# = Original Interview				
OI#1	Tom M	1937	Leitrim	21
OI#2	Dinny D	1925	Donegal	18
OI#3	Kevin H	1934	Galway	18
OI#4	Patrick M	1944	Leitrim	22
OI#5	Michael H	1945	Connemara	21
OI#6	Michael Mc	1937	Armagh	17
OI#7	Tony C	1946	Roscommon	16
OI#8	Ben C	1955	Leitrim	19
OI#9	Tom Mc	1942	Cork	14
OI#10	Gregory D	1952	Donegal	25
OI#11	Jackie W	1955	Mayo	27
OI#12	Paddy B	1928	Mayo	21

¹⁸⁰ Additionally, in accordance with Maynooth University doctoral thesis requirements, the entire appendix is paginated as Appendix A/1, A/2 etc.

Table 1.2- Original Field Interviewees in Appendix A

Original Interview Code	Name/County	Year of Birth	Origin	Age at Emigration
OI#13	John P	1934	Roscommon	17
OI#14	Sean G	1968	Leitrim	19
OI#15	Pat C	1945	Connemara	21
OI#16	John F	1951	Mayo	18
OI#17	John H	1955	Wexford	16
OI#18	Pat F	1947	Roscommon	18
OI#19	Terence O	1955	Clare	14
OI#20	Noel O	1951	Clare	15
OI#21	Joe Mc	1950	Antrim	18

A further novel area of primary research is the Corporate Histories information contained in Appendix B which support chapter 3.4, providing a detailed and tabulated schedule of more than 100 Irish construction firms founded in the London construction market during the post-war period. In addition outline narrative case-studies of three key Irish firms – the most prominent of the post-war Irish entrepreneurial era are included. The establishment and progress of these businesses has been chronicled; the types, size, complexity and nature of key projects executed by them has, where possible, been narrated. There has not, hitherto, been a comprehensive, methodical analysis of the history of entrepreneurial activity amongst migrant Irish builders in London. The granular detail provided largely endorses and explains other aspects of the migrant Irish experience: the development of the ethnic and diasporic enclaves; the prevalence of ‘lump’ labour-only subcontracting amongst migrant Irish builders after the 1950s; the relationship between Irish construction business and the Irish social scene particularly the dancehalls, pubs and the cheque-clearing system ; and finally the interaction of Irish entrepreneurial activities in London with Irish domestic economic expansion and political influence from the 1960s onwards.

1.6. Conclusion

This thesis seeks to firmly establish the dominant role of Irish migrant construction labour within the context of post-war multicultural London. It shows that the post-war Irish builder has made a lasting and significant contribution to the built environment and cultural fabric of London as a global metropolis. The legacies of that contribution can still be traced in the infrastructural and architectural evolution of London in the last half of the twentieth century, and, to some extent, in the political, corporate, social and cultural identity of present-day London. The following chapters aim to show that life for the community of London Irish builders in the post-war era was multifaceted, enormously varied and more complex and positive than the stereotypical depiction of Irishness – ‘*the forgotten Irish*’ - embedded in collective cultural memory through canonical metanarratives.

As the preceding literature review suggests, there is a significant gap in the historical documenting of this cohort of the Irish diaspora which requires analysis, in detail and with empirical evidence; namely the range and variety of experiences which Irish builders underwent from c.1940-1995. As part of this analysis, the research seeks to challenge stereotypical assumptions of Irish exceptionalism amongst the working classes, particularly those related to physical superiority, masculinity, endurance and hardship; the ‘Cuchulain trope’ as it has come to be known.¹⁸¹

I have examined the relevant aspects of cultural and contemporary social theory which touch upon the historical account of this cohort of twentieth-century Irish diaspora. In recent times such theoretical perspectives have ‘brought topics such as selfhood, power, domination, sexuality and gender to the fore of intellectual and public political debate’¹⁸² and it is a central tenet of my research framework that, in respect of these theoretical constructs, little, if any, intellectual rigour has been applied to analysis of the lives of post-war Irish builders. Armed with a structure around which to interrogate the constructed metanarratives of their lives in post-war London, I have then articulated the methodology through which these narratives will be tested and the primary and secondary sources which will be utilised in the research. The

¹⁸¹ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, pp.42-54 ; Wills, *The Best Are Leaving*, p.124 & fn.39.

¹⁸² Anthony Elliott, *Contemporary Social Theory: An introduction*, (London, 2009), p.8.

goal of this approach to theory and method is to conceptualize how this social grouping negotiated the fundamental physical, social, psychological and cultural conditions which confronted them across the migratory process.

How did a relatively small cohort of the Irish diaspora help rebuild a city physically laid waste by the ravages of war and undergoing social and cultural upheavals of its own? What were the effects of this diasporic enclave's emersion in the metropolitan capital? How did they encounter a post-colonial Britain struggling to emerge from the pyrrhic victory of a physically and economically calamitous defeat of Hitler? As Marx presciently observed, 'we make our own history, but not under circumstances of our own choosing'.¹⁸³ How, then, did the particular circumstances of this small cohort of the Irish diaspora shape their migrant experiences? The following chapters examine this in detail.

¹⁸³ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, 1852 as cited in Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, p.305.

Chapter 2. ‘Heading out for London Town’¹: The Migrant Irish Builder in Context

‘For England is a small Island, the world is infinitesimal amongst the planets. But London is illimitable.’²

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to broadly define, quantify and contextualise the cohort of Irish builders in London, situating them within the overall Irish diaspora in Britain. A wide array of statistical data – including relevant census information – is extrapolated and tabulated to approximately quantify the size of the cohort. My own oral interviews add considerable qualitative research data from which further deductions are made.³ There is general consensus amongst scholars of Irish history that emigration is one of its defining characteristics, whether it is called the ‘Irish habit of going away’ as elucidated by the monk Strabo and retold by R.C Geary,⁴ or the ‘great fact of Irish social history’ as Roy Foster termed it.⁵ The migrant Irish who settled in London to work in post-war construction are a significant example of this phenomenon. They are a complex and variegated group of people to contextualise; understanding who they were, where their political and socio-cultural roots lay, and why they went to London is an important part of the process. I have long been convinced – both as a result of personal experience and observation – that ‘there was no universal historical experience of being Irish in post-war Britain’⁶ and that differences of geographical origin, education, time and duration of migration, gender and social class in Ireland influenced the experiences of migrants in London. That said, there are underlying patterns and commonalities which permeate those employed in construction after the Second World War; patterns which enable broad conclusions to be drawn about how and why large numbers of the cohort

¹ Line from Kieran Halpin’s song, *Trip Through Holyhead*, see: Appendix G, p.16.

² Ford Madox Ford, *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City*, (London, 1905), p15.

³ Collected and transcribed at Appendix A.

⁴ R. C. Geary and W D. Kelly, *Population And Economics In Ireland In The Recent Past and an the Near Future*, ESRI Memorandum #151, (November, 1982), available online at <https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2012-08/MEMO151.pdf> (accessed 22 Jan, 2018), p.2.

⁵ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.345.

⁶ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.5-6.

experienced work and associational culture in similar ways, albeit sometimes with radically different outcomes.

This was primarily an emigration of the young; throughout the post-war period the average age of Irish migrants rarely exceeded thirty-five and, at times, was as low as twenty-five.⁷ Interviewees, for example, averaged nineteen years old at the point of emigration.⁸ Extensive analysis of the interviewee profiles suggests that the bulk of the male migrants who made up the Irish builders of post-war London were probably born in the timespan from the start of the twentieth century up to the mid-1970s, with most being born and raised in independent Ireland, either as the Free State or a Republic. Irish builders were simultaneously significant contributors to the extraordinary post-war growth of the city and beneficiaries of its preeminent position at the economic, social and cultural heart of global Britain. Their socio-economic *modus operandi* within the construction and civil engineering industry in the LMA was, as I show later in this chapter, consistent with theoretical formations of an ethnic-controlled economy. A complex web of economic and socio-cultural networks developed in and around the sites of Irishness which spread from the central hubs of north London,⁹ work opportunities, recruitment, accommodation, sports and social activities and news from ‘home’ were all exploited through these networks. Context is given to this aspect of the lived experience by theorising the concepts of the ethnic-controlled economy, ethnic and diasporic enclaves and diasporic networks and discussing in appropriate detail how such theories are reflected in the lives of construction workers.

To understand what shaped and motivated these migrants and how they negotiated the challenges of working and living in the ‘Heart of Empire’,¹⁰ requires an understanding of the environment in which they were socialised. As one migrant acerbically told sociologist Liam Ryan, ‘if you want to understand the Irish in England, you’re wasting your time and money coming to London; go back to Ireland and take a good look at the Irish at home’.¹¹ Section 2.3

⁷ Delaney, *Demography*, p.177, 232.

⁸ See Table 2.5 and Appendix A.

⁹ See Map 1, p.xiii.

¹⁰ John Corbally, ‘The Jarring Irish: Postwar Immigration to the Heart of Empire’ in *Radical History Review*, Issue 104 (Spring 2009), pp.103-125, at p.103.

¹¹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.7 citing Liam Ryan, ‘Religious Practice Amongst Irish Emigrants’ in *Social Studies*, 3, nr2 (1974), p.222.

therefore examines the socio-economic, cultural and political roots of the cohort, pre-emigration, looking at the historical contexts and influences which combined to shape their worldview. Through all the viscerally symbolic events of modern Irish history run two constant threads of collective consciousness– the culpability of Britain as an imperial coloniser and the heartache of emigration and exile. Perspectives on Irish builders in Britain therefore need to embody these influences. Political and popular culture (particularly communal and national Famine memory) often characterises Irish emigration as unique and exceptional in the wider global context and excusable within the context of independent Ireland.¹² Mapping the arrival of mailboat migrants in London within the broader patterns of post-war population shift and migrations across continental Europe challenges the mis-placed notion of twentieth-century Irish emigration as simply a continuing consequence of nineteenth-century British perfidy. The final section places migrant Irish builders within the British industrial landscape and London's place within it by identifying and describing specific infrastructure projects, public and private works and other culturally-significant reference points.

2.2. Defining and Quantifying the Irish Migrant Builder

This section provides a detailed description and estimate of the size, over time, of the cohort of Irish builders in post-war London. By way of representative evidence, it also provides some corresponding statistical analysis of the collected oral histories. The aim is to give some sense of the size, shape and diversity of the cohort whose lived experiences are examined in detail in chapters three and four. In broad terms 30% of the post-war Irish immigrant community who moved to Britain settled, either immediately or eventually, in London.¹³ This cohort increased substantially as the community settled in the 1960s and 1970s and the second and third generations of London-born Irish grew.¹⁴ They were by no means the first Irish to

¹² Niall Ferguson, 'What did the British Empire ever do for Ireland?' in *Sunday Business Post*, (January 26, 2003), available online at <https://www.tcd.ie/Economics/staff/orourke/fergusononireland.htm> (accessed 25, February, 2018). See also Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.20, citing the Commission on Emigration, *Reports*, p.137; Liam Kennedy, *Unhappy the Land: The Most Oppressed People Ever, the Irish?*, (Sallins, 2016), pp.11-14.

¹³ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.89.

¹⁴ For a comprehensive review of the demography and social patterns of second-generation Irish in London and Britain see Mary. J . Hickman, Sarah Morgan, Bronwen Walter, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain: A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health profile*, (London, 2001).

settle there; in modern history London has constantly been the ‘hub of enormous and continuous movements of population’ and Irish communities in London stretched back several centuries.¹⁵ Indeed the Irish population of London has consistently outnumbered any other British city by a significant margin since the Famine.¹⁶

Incomplete, imprecise and often anecdotal evidence throughout the twentieth century means that the process of quantifying the cohort of post-Second World War Irish migrant builders – specifically those engaged in construction and civil engineering work within the LMA at any point from 1940-1995 - is nebulous and fraught with difficulty. Whilst Hall’s categorisation of ‘London-Irish -v- Irish-in-London’, strictly applied, admits only the inclusion of those immigrants who settled during the wartime and post-war periods,¹⁷ from a discursive perspective it would be obtuse to ignore the extant infrastructure of the original (London-Irish) first-wave migrants. This community – almost entirely east-end (cockney) Roman Catholics - was in decline as an ethnically-separate group by the close of the war because of gradual integration into the host community. Nonetheless the (Irish-in-London) mail-boat migrants utilised the remnants of the social networks of this community to establish a foothold in their new host community.¹⁸ The cohort of Irish-in-London, therefore, crossed several identifiable ‘sub-waves’ of migration, drawing members from interwar migrants (both first/second wave), British Ministry of Labour Group Recruitment Scheme (war-work migrants), post-war ‘mail-boat’ migrants (second-wave) and later ‘Ryanair’ (third-wave) migrants.

The interwar migrants were a mixture of the remnants of pre-First World War navvies and the pre-Second World War migrant wave who came to Britain probably first as seasonal agricultural migrants and gradually transitioned to major civil-engineering infrastructure works, typically Scottish hydro-electrical projects, then later to work in London. This migration route was first closed, when travel restrictions were placed upon the Common Travel Area after

¹⁵ H.A. Shannon, ‘Migration and the Growth of London, 1841-1891’, in *Economic History Review* 5, no.2, (1935), pp.81-83.

¹⁶ Sorohan, *Irish London* pp.5-6; Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.89.

¹⁷ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.ii-iii. See also Chapter 1, s1.2, p.13.

¹⁸ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.ii-iii. Examples of this included post-war Irish migrants accessing work and social contacts via familial connectivities that stretched back several generations to post-Famine migrants. Another example was the construction works procured by Irish contractors as a result of the connections between the Ford Motors plants at Dagenham and Cork City. At Dagenham many of the ethnically ‘English’ line workers were 3rd or 4th-generation descendants of Irish post-Famine migrants.

the fall of France in 1940,¹⁹ then rendered largely obsolete under the joint British Ministry of Labour / Irish Department of Industry and Commerce group recruitment arrangements reached in 1941.²⁰ Many of these men were later engaged in wartime activities such as bomb-damage clearance and munitions factory projects and therefore intermingled with the war-works migrants (see below) and became, in many cases, indistinguishable from them. These migrants were the earliest members of the cohort and generally followed the *sojourner-itinerant-settler* pathway referred to earlier.²¹

Somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 migrant workers were expressly recruited for war-works under the British Ministry of Labour Group Recruitment Schemes which ran from c.1941-46.²² By 1942, 55,200 were registered with the police in Britain, almost 90% of whom worked in wartime construction. By September 1945, the registered number of migrant Irish wartime builders was 105,900.²³ The status of these workers up to 1946 was analogous to that of the ‘gastarbeiter’ or guest-workers recruited in post-war central Europe. They were ‘conditionally landed’; a status which allowed Britain to repatriate them to Ireland at any time, and to dictate where and when they worked. They were also required to register with the police.²⁴ Once all the British wartime travel restrictions were finally lifted in 1947 many of these men stayed - some continuing to follow the *sojourner-itinerant-settler* pathway but, probably, a larger element settling permanently in London. By far the largest element of the cohort were the migrants who came to London in the post-war ‘mail-boat’ exodus triggered largely by the Group Recruitment Schemes during the war and the subsequent economic recovery of Britain in the 1950s. As Delaney observes, ‘The patterns of settlement during the war established migrant pathways which were to prove significant [...] throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, as before, the south-east, mainly London, was the focus of Irish settlement’.²⁵ Hall corroborates this view: ‘The Second World War was a turning point in the

¹⁹ Delaney, *Demography*, pp.117-8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.128-31.

²¹ See section 1.4.

²² Dudley Baines, “Immigration and the Labour Market” in Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, Andrew Newell, *Work and Pay in 20th Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2007), p.336, quoting Delaney, *Demography*, p.130.

²³ NAUK, ‘Moving Here Migration Histories’ web archive, available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.movinghere.org.uk/galleries/histories/irish/workin%20g%20lives/working%20lives.htm#SWW> (accessed 6 September, 2020).

²⁴ Delaney, *Demography*, pp.128-31.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.145. See also p.151.

fortunes of the London-Irish'.²⁶ This wave ran from the end of the war until the early 1970s reaching a peak in the 1971 census, when there were 958,000 Irish-born residents of Great Britain.²⁷ In terms of construction workers, patterns of settlement among the mail-boat migrants were more stable, because enclaves of permanent settlement were gradually established across London, particularly in the north and west of the city, and by the late 1960s in virtually all corners.

A small core of itinerants, mainly single men did not settle and remained vacillating between nomadic employment, destitution and vagrancy,²⁸ and there was a separate group of sojourners, who tended to be mainly better-educated, middle-class younger Irishmen who would go on to become specialised tradesmen, professionals or civil servants and, de-skilling themselves, went to work 'on the buildings' in London usually for the summer vacation for a period of 1-3 years. Ben C (OI#8), who went on to become an oil-platform undersea welder was a prime example of this type of sojourner,²⁹ as was nineteen year-old Jim Moher, from County Tipperary, who was looking to save some money to go to university. He got his start as a bricklayer's labourer on the Barbican courtesy of a cousin, who worked in a bar in Clapham, south London, frequented by Irish building workers.³⁰ Many of these 'college-boy sojourners' underwent this experience of working on London building sites – almost as a rite of passage - during their summer vacations; amongst them Michael Tubridy, the traditional musician who was to achieve later fame as a founder member of The Chieftains and then became a civil engineer; and the acclaimed author John McGahern.³¹ The smallest element of the cohort were those migrants who came to London in the later third (sometimes referred to as the 'Ryanair'³²) wave of migration which followed the economic downturn of the late 1970s

²⁶ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.111.

²⁷ P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), Table 6.3, 'Irish-born residents in Britain', 1931-1981, p.114.

²⁸ See for example the detailed account of the life of Joe McGarry (Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, pp.489-529.)

²⁹ Interview with Ben C, (OI#8), County Leitrim, (19 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, p.129.

³⁰ Linda Clarke, Charlie McGuire and Olivia Muñoz-Rojas, *Building the Barbican 1962 – 1982: taking the industry out of the dark ages*, (ProBE), (London, 2012), p.10.

³¹ Many middle-class Irish 'college-boy sojourners' underwent this experience of working on London building sites during their summer vacations. The author John McGahern writes eloquently of this 'vacationing' experience in several of his stories. Examples from the collected oral histories in Appendix A include Michael, Armagh, (OI#6), Tony, Roscommon (OI#7), and Ben, Leitrim (OI#8).

³² C. Wall, L. Clarke, C. McGuire, and O Muñoz-Rojas, (ProBE/Leverhume Trust), *Building the Barbican 1962-1982: Taking the Industry out of the Dark Ages*, (London, 2012), pp.10-11.

and 1980s to work in the construction and civil engineering industry, often at a more supervisory and managerial level than their earlier compatriots.³³

What of British-born children of Irish builders? – the ‘second-generation Irish’ who entered the construction industry, of whom there were many. *Prima facie* their inclusion is justified; statistical data suggests that as the migrant community settled in the later decades of the post-war period, a significant proportion (10% as at 1983) of second-generation Irish in London (overwhelmingly men, yet again) gradually entered the construction industry.³⁴ However the second-generation Irish present both quantitative and qualitative difficulties. Hall argues persuasively that:

The exact size is difficult to estimate, as second and subsequent generations, who formed an integral part of Irish London, were enumerated in official censuses as London-born without comment on ethnicity. While some rough estimate can be made for second-generation London-Irish by looking at Irish-born heads of households, the issue of identifying who considered themselves to be primarily Irish is complicated by fluctuating levels of national consciousness among descendants of Irish immigrants, according to prevailing political and social moods.³⁵

There are several examples, amongst the oral histories included, of second-generation Irish working in the London construction industry in the post-war period and in secondary literature. Thiel offers corroborative examples of this trend, and the present author is a further example.³⁶ A further complication was that some of the cohort frequently traversed occupational categories when registering for migration, travel or census information both in Ireland and in Britain. There was a great deal of occupational mobility between unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled labour amongst the migrant community across the construction industry. Deskilling – skilled men describing themselves as unskilled - was also a regular occurrence during the wartime migrations because of restrictions placed on the emigration of both rural agricultural labourers and skilled tradesmen by the Irish government.³⁷

³³ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.39, 99.

³⁴ Hickman *et al*, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain*, Table 21, p.32.

³⁵ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.17.

³⁶ Thiel, *Builders*, p.20.

³⁷ Delaney, *Demography*, pp.128-137.

Finally, as demonstrated below, the available statistical data is often incomplete, imprecise and contradictory. Constructing an estimate of the numbers of the cohort throughout the post-war period has required assimilating and interpolating disparate data on the Irish diaspora in Britain and London, the individual waves of Irish migration, and the occupational status of the migrants within those waves. Taking in to account potential inaccuracies, what follows is as reasonably accurate an estimate of the size of the cohort of Irish migrant builders throughout this period as can be gleaned from the available information. The broad picture of Irish migration into Britain during the second-wave is illustrated graphically in Figure 2.1 below.

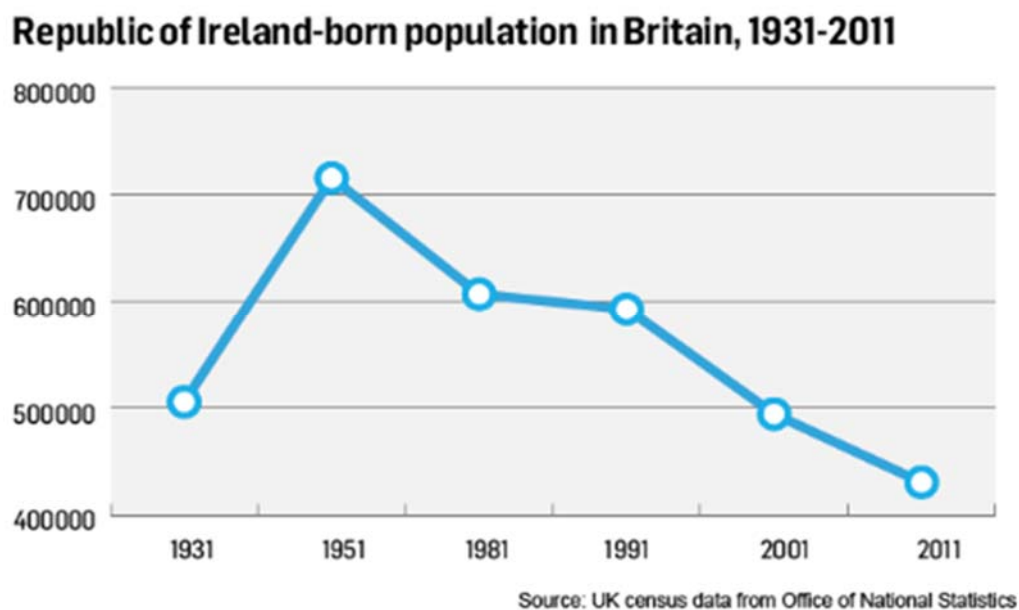


Figure 2.1 - Republic of Ireland population in Britain, 1931-2011
 (Source: UK Census data from ONS (accessed 20 March, 2019))

This macro-level view of the second-wave must then be examined in greater depth in order to arrive at a reasonable estimate. The most obvious approach is to assess each sub-wave separately, looking at the various statistical data available for each and assessing the probable numbers of the cohort based upon those sources. The starting point for looking at individual waves of migration must be the various data on estimated numbers of emigrants leaving Ireland. Three main sources have been used in compiling this cohort estimate: MacLaughlin’s *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery*, P.J. Drury’s *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*

and Enda Delaney's essay on comparative post-war migration to Britain. Notably, Drury and Delaney cite the same original source, the various Irish State Census of Population reports.³⁸

A comparison of this data as shown in Table 2.1 reveals periodic discrepancies but broad alignment on the extent of net migration between 1926 and 1986 which was in the order of 950,000-980,000 people. The interwar wave is, in some ways, the most difficult to approach quantitatively, since theoretically the wave has no definitive starting point; as established, migration to London stretched back through all the decades of the twentieth century and there is evidence that members of that cohort may have been born in the late nineteenth century and could still have been working in construction or civil engineering in the post-war period. One MP remarked in 1908 that there were 100,000 navvies and 30,000 Irish labourers coming to work in the UK, but as with much of the pre-independence period, there are no statistical data to verify such claims, since these movements were regarded as internal UK migration.³⁹ Mac Amhlaigh's memoir, in 1952, recounts meeting 'old Punch Flanagan from Roscommon' who had migrated to England in 1899, aged fifteen. This put him at 68 years old when Mac Amhlaigh worked with him.⁴⁰ A start point of 1926 has been adopted as it aligns with Delaney's (citing Walshaw) estimates of earliest migration from Irish Free State to Britain and marks the start of Irish state records on post-independence migration.⁴¹

From 1931-1991, census data show the ratio of Irish immigrants into Britain from the Free State/Republic of Ireland to those from Northern Ireland remained remarkably stable at approximately 3:1 with some minor deviations.⁴² Drury's data on annual net migration as set out in Table 2.2 below indicates the gender ratio of post-war migrants, which generally saw more females migrating than men, however this varied across the period, with the war years, for example, being skewed in favour of males.⁴³

³⁸ See sources cited at Table 2.1 overleaf.

³⁹ HC Deb (13 March, 1908), Vol. 70, available at: https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1908/mar/13/unemployed-workmen-bill#S4V0186PO_19080313_HOC_70 (accessed 30 May, 2019).

⁴⁰ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.75.

⁴¹ Delaney, *Demography* p.45, citing R.S. Walshaw, *Migration to and from the British Isles*, (London, 1941), table 13, p.72.

⁴² Drury (ed.), *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, Table 6.3, Irish-born residents in Britain, 1931-1981, p.114, citing Census of Population, Britain.

⁴³ Tracy Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain during the Second World War' in Andy Bielenberg, *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), pp.56-59.

Table 2.1 - Comparative estimates of average annual Emigration from Irish Free State / Republic of Ireland to Great Britain , 1926-1986.

Years	MacLaughlin		Drury		Delaney		Mean Estimate		
	Annual		Annual	Approx	Annual	Approx	Annual	Combined	
	Average	Approx total	Average	total	Average	total	Average of	averages total	
	Emigration	Emigration	Emigration	Emigration	Emigration	Emigration	sources	Emigration	
1926-36	10	16,000	160,000	16,675	166,751	n.a	n.a	16,338	163,376
1936-46	10	18,000	180,000	18,711	187,111	n.a	n.a	18,356	183,556
1946-51	5	24,000	120,000	20,037	100,187	24,384	121,920	22,807	114,036
1951-56	5	39,000	195,000	34,966	174,832	39,353	196,765	37,773	188,866
1956-61	5	42,000	210,000	34,461	172,307	42,401	212,005	39,621	198,104
1961-66	5	16,000	80,000	16,121	172,307	16,121	80,605	16,081	80,403
1966-71	5	n.a	n.a	10,781	53,905	10,781	53,905	10,781	53,905
1971-79	8	n.a	n.a	-13,617	-108,936	-13,617	-108,936	-13,617	-108,936
1979-81	2	n.a	n.a	2,523	5,046	2,523	5,046	2,523	5,046
1981-86	5			15,062	75,310			15,062	75,310
	60		945,000		998,820		561,310		953,665

Sources: Jim Mac Laughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, (Cork, 1994), p.24, table 3.1, 'Estimated Irish Emigration, 1926-1966', citing John Kennedy, *The Irish in Britain*, (London, 1973); P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), table 6.2, 'Estimates of net emigration from ROI by main destination', p113, adapted from Census of population and Irish trade Journal and Statistical Bulletin, various years; Enda Delaney, 'Placing Postwar Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981', in Andy Bielenberg, *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), p.332, table 17.1, 'Average Annual Irish Net Migration, 1946-1981', adapted from Census of Population, 1981, I: Population of District Electoral Divisions, Table J, p. xxi.

Table 2.2 – Male Migration as % of Total Migration (derived from annual net migration data)

	Average annual net emigration [outward]								
	Male	Total	Sex- Ratio % Males	Census mid- point	Male	Total	Sex- Ratio % Males	Census mid- point	
1926-36	7255	16675	44%	1931	1961-66	7523	16121	47%	1961
1936-46	11258	18711	60%	1941	1966-71	4950	10781	46%	1971
1946-51	10309	24384	42%	1951	1971-79	-7659	-13617	56%	1971
1951-56	21657	39353	55%	1951	1979-81	1606	2523	64%	1981
1956-61	21914	42401	52%	1961	1981-86	8717	15062	58%	1981

Sources: P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), Table 6.1, Average annual natural population increase, net emigration and population change, 1926-86. p.109, adapted from Census of Population of Ireland, Vol. 1, 1981 and Central Statistics Office, Dublin.

Table 2.3 distils and extrapolates these data, applying various stated percentages and weightings, to arrive at an approximate representative estimate of the size of the cohort in each sub-wave. Data is contradictory in places; e.g. estimates of the proportion of Irish migrants employed in the construction industry from around the midpoint of this period (1960-1970) vary from 38% up to 60%.⁴⁴ Nevertheless the estimate as constructed shows that the average size of the cohort across the post-war period was just over 102,000, and that the peaks of construction industry manpower were reached during the Second World War (88,000) then again in 1971 (160,000) and 1981 (164,000) boosted by the addition of second-generation construction manpower within the London-Irish community.

⁴⁴ Sorohan, *Irish London* at p.8 quotes 38% clustering within the building trade in 1966, citing Liam Ryan, 'Irish Emigration to Britain Since World War II', in R. Kearney (ed.), *Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad*, (Dublin, 1990), p.57; Brendan Caulfield and Ashok Bhat, 'The Irish in Britain: Inter-marriage and Fertility Levels, 1971-6', in *New Community*, 9, 1 (1981), p.73; and Bronwen Walter, *Outsiders Inside: Whiteness, Place and Irish Women*, (London, 2001), p.180. However, it is not clear whether this includes the significant numbers of labour also engaged in civil engineering. The latter, higher figure of 60% (which has been utilised in the estimate) applies to 'construction' and is quoted in National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report, 'The Economic and Social Implications of Emigration', (Dublin, 1991), p.182, pp.200-201.

Table 2.3 - Estimated Cohort of Post-war Irish Builders in London, 1940-1995

Irish-Born											
Irish-born residents in Britain, ¹ 1931-1991, (Census of Population, Britain)											
Sub-wave	Decade	Census	Born in RoI	Born in NI	Total	Sex Ratio	Males in	%	Males living	%	Males in LMA
							Britain	Living	in LMA	Working	& working in
							(c) x (d)	in LMA	(e) x (f)	in B&CE	(g) x (h)
Pre-War Second-wave	1930s	1931	367,424	137,961	505,385	44% ⁴	219,842	30%	65,953	80% ⁷	52,762
War-works Recruitment	1940s	1941	452,567	158,140	610,707 ⁸	60% ^B	366,424	30%	109,927	80% ⁷	87,942
Post-war 'Mailboat' Migration	1950s	1951	537,709	178,319	716,028	49% ^B	348,385	30%	104,515	70% ⁹	73,161
	1960s	1961	726,121	224,857	950,978	49% ^B	467,637	30%	140,291	60% ⁹	84,175
	1970s	1971	709,235	248,595	957,830	51% ^B	489,259	46.5% ¹⁰	227,506	60% ⁹	136,503
Post-War 'Ryanair' Migration	1980s	1981 ³	607,428	242,969	850,397	61% ^B	516,737	45.4% ¹⁰	234,599	60% ⁹	140,759
	1990s	1991	608,836	228,628	837,464	45% ^D	376,859	49.3% ¹⁰	185,791	34% ^H	63,169

Second-Generation											
Sub-wave	Decade	Census	2nd Gen M/F ¹¹	Sex Ratio	2nd Gen Males (k) x (l)	% Living in LMA	Males living in	%	Males in LMA	COHORT TOTALS (i) + (q)	
							LMA	Working in B&CE	& working in B&CE (o) x (p)		
							(m) x (n)	in B&CE	(o) x (p)		
Pre-War Second-wave	1930s	1931				n/a				52,762	
War-works Recruitment	1940s	1941				n/a				87,942	
Post-war 'Mailboat' Migration	1950s	1951				n/a				73,161	
	1960s	1961				n/a				84,175	
	1970s	1971	1,436,745	52% ¹⁶	747,107	32.0% ¹⁰	239,074	10% ¹⁵	23,907	160,411	
Post-War 'Ryanair' Migration	1980s	1981 ³	1,275,596	49% ¹⁶	625,042	37.0% ¹⁰	231,265	10% ¹⁵	23,127	163,886	
	1990s	1991	1,256,196	48% ¹⁶	602,974	49.0% ¹⁰	295,457	10% ¹⁵	29,546	92,715	

Average size of cohort in post-war period 102,150

Table 2.3 - (Cont.) Estimated Cohort of Post-war Irish Builders in London, 1940-1995

Notes & Sources:

- 1 Source for census information 1931-1981: P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), Table 6.3, Irish-born residents in Britain, 1931-1981, p.114, citing Census of Population, Britain
- 2 The start year of 1924 has been chosen as it aligns with Delaney's (citing Walshaw) estimates of earliest migration from Irish Free State to Britain (see Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.45, citing R.S. Walshaw, *Migration to and from the British Isles*, (London, 1941), table 13, p.72
- 3 1981 has been used as the commencement date for this wave of migration because it was the point at which Irish migration to Britain resumed a numerical dominance that had fallen away in the 1970s. See National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report, *The Economic and Social Implications of Emigration*, (Dublin, 1991), p.162
- 4 Sex-ratio for period based on estimates from Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, 2000), Table 2.1, p.40, adopting ratio of 1:1.298 (male/female)
- 5 For definition of London Metropolitan Area (LMA) see chapter 1.3, Definitions, pp.25-26. Unless stated otherwise, a constant of 30% has been applied to the total estimated cohort of Irish builders to arrive at an approximate estimate of Irish builders in London at any given point. See Delaney, *Irish in Post-War Britain*, pp.88-90.
- 6 Assessment of % of male workers operating in Building and Civil Engineering Construction (B&CE) based on various sources as noted in column.
- 7 80% attribution based upon estimate as at autumn 1941, nearest data point available, see Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.137.
- 8 No census took place in 1941 due to Second World War. These notional figures have been interpolated using straight-line proportional basis between 1931 and 1951 censuses.
- 9 Source for percentage estimates: extrapolated from National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report, *The Economic and Social Implications of Emigration*, (Dublin, 1991), pp. 182, 200-201.
- 10 Source for percentage estimates: Mary. J. Hickman, Sarah Morgan, Bronwen Walter, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain: A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health profile*, (London, 2001), Table 9, p.20.
- 11 Earliest collected data for 2nd-generation British-born Irish starts at 1971, and it has been assumed for the purposes of this crude estimate that 2nd-generation Irish contribution to the construction workforce was minimal before this date, since the mail-boat migration has been shown to be overwhelmingly young, single migrants. Totals are calculated by applying a multiplier effect to the baseline Irish-born migrant population. Unless stated otherwise, a multiplier of 1.5 x the Irish-born population has been used to calculate the estimated 2nd-generation population. Source: Mary. J. Hickman, Sarah Morgan, Bronwen Walter, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain: A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health profile*, (London, 2001), pp.10-11, p.20.
- 12 Source for percentage estimates: interpolated from data in Henrietta O'Connor, John Goodwin, 'Locating Irish Workers in the British Labour Force Survey', Report for Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, (CMLS Working Paper no. 25, 2000), p.14.
- 13 Source for percentage estimates: Own calculations extrapolated from average annual net emigration data, 1926-1986, see Table 2.3 above.
- 14 Source for percentage estimates: interpolated from data in Henrietta O'Connor, John Goodwin, 'Locating Irish Workers in the British Labour Force Survey', Report for Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, (CMLS Working Paper no. 25, 2000), p.18, table 4.
- 15 Source for percentage estimates: Mary. J. Hickman, Sarah Morgan, Bronwen Walter, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain: A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health profile*, (London, 2001), Table 21, p.32.
- 16 Source for percentage estimates: Mary. J. Hickman, Sarah Morgan, Bronwen Walter, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain: A Demographic, Socio-economic and Health profile*, (London, 2001), Table 1, p.8.

Table 2.4 below compares the estimates in Table 2.3 against other data for the construction industry as a whole in Britain. By applying the same formula to available data on total British construction industry manpower throughout the post-war period, a tabulated estimate is derived of the probable extent of Irish migrant male labour within the industry as a proportion of total manpower at various points over the period. In 1931, for example, the total number of males occupied in building and civil engineering work in England and Wales stood at 1,270,000.⁴⁵ Applying the 80% attribution rate established from table 2.4 to all Irish migrant

⁴⁵ H.W. Robinson, *The Economics of Building*, (London, 1939), pp.5-6 cited in Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.120.

males in Britain (approx. 220,000), infers that the Irish migrant male labour-force of 176,000 accounted for around 14% of the total manpower – a not inconsiderable contribution.

Table 2.4 - Irish Migrant Builders as Proportion of Total British Construction Labour (Approx. Estimate)

Irish Migrant Builders as Proportion of Total British Construction Labour
(Approx. Estimate)

Year	Total GB Construction industry manpower	Irish Migrant Male population						As % of Total Manpower
		note:	1st generation	% in construction	2nd generation	% in construction	Total Irish in construction	
1931	1,270,000	²	219,842	80	n.a	n.a	175,874	14%
1948	1,450,000	³	322,676	73	n.a	n.a	235,554	16%
1951	1,390,000	⁴	348,385	70	n.a	n.a	243,869	18%
1968	1,800,000	³	432,910	60	n.a	n.a	259,746	14%
1971	1,480,000	⁴	489,259	60	747,107	10	368,266	25%
1973	1,600,000	³	466,779	60	649,455	10	345,013	22%
1991	1,640,000	⁴	376,859	34	602,974	10	188,429	11%
<i>Average across period</i>							259,536	17%

Notes & Sources:

- ¹ All data on Irish migrant male population drawn from Table 2.3 unless otherwise stated. Shaded figures are interpolated from preceding and succeeding census figures.
- ² H.W. Robinson, *The Economics of Building*, (London, 1939), pp.5-6 cited in Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.120.
- ³ Department of the Environment (various dates), *Housing Statistics*, HMSO, cited in Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.181.
- ⁴ McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.12

Some interesting points can be deduced from the above analysis. The total workforce of Irish migrant labour across the British construction industry in the post-war period averages around 260,000 men, of which the London Metropolitan Area probably accounts for an average of 102,000 (40%). Irish migrant males averaged 17% of the total British construction industry manpower across the post-war period. This estimate broadly accords with Jackson, Cowley and Baines.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly the high-point of Irish migrant labour’s contribution to manpower

⁴⁶ Cowley (*The Men Who Built Britain*, p.243) cites J.A. Jackson’s estimate of Irish labour accounting for 17.85% of UK construction labour in 1963, and also the UK ONS Labour Force Survey estimate of 14.3% for 1985. Baines estimates that by the 1990s the Irish-born males accounted for at least 16% of the total UK construction labour force as compared with 7% of British-born workers, (see ‘Immigration and the Labour

in the British construction industry was the early 1970s – which matches the peak of the post-war migrations as a whole. The Irish population of Britain was some 960,000 in total at this time, and yet again, just under 40% of the total Irish population, overwhelmingly men, were engaged in construction and civil engineering work.⁴⁷

Table 2.5 - Biographical Oral History Interviewees (Inc. in Appendix A)

Original Interview Code	Participant's Identifier Name	Year of Birth	Appendix A Page Refs	Origin	Age at Emigration	Decade of emigration					Period in London	Years in UK
						1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s		
OI#1	Tom M	1937	A/1-24	Leitrim	21		x				1958-present	60
OI#2	Dinny D	1925	A/25-36	Donegal	18	x					1943-1973	30
OI#3	Kevin H	1934	A/37-54	Galway	18		x				1952-1997	45
OI#4	Patrick M	1944	A/55-77	Leitrim	22			x			1966-1977	11
OI#5	Michael H	1945	A/78-93	Connemara	21			x			1966-1990	24
OI#6	Michael Mc	1937	A/94-111	Armagh	17		x				1954-1964	10
OI#7	Tony C	1946	A/112-126	Roscommon	16			x			1964-1976	12
OI#8	Ben C	1955	A/127-149	Leitrim	19				x		1974-1976	2
OI#9	Tom Mc	1942	A/150-162	Cork	14		x				1956-1972	16
OI#10	Gregory D	1952	A/163-199	Donegal	25				x		1977-1993	16
OI#11	Jackie W	1955	A/200-225	Mayo	27					x	1982-2005	23
OI#12	Paddy B	1928	A/226-260	Mayo	21	x					1949-2010	61
OI#13	John P	1934	A/261-284	Roscommon	17		x				1951-2004	53
OI#14	Sean G	1968	A/285-324	Leitrim	19					x	1987-2005	18
OI#15	Pat C	1945	A/325-352	Connemara	21			x			1966-present	52
OI#16	John F	1951	A/353-386	Mayo	18						1969-present	49
OI#17	John H	1955	A/387-410	Wexford	16				x		1971-present	47
OI#18	Pat F	1947	A/411-434	Yorkshire/Roscommon	18			x			1965-1980	15
OI#19	Terence O	1955	A/435-458	Clare	14				x		1970-present	48
OI#20	Noel O	1951	A/460-488	Clare	15			x			1966-present	52
OI#21	Joe Mc	1950	A/489-529	Antrim	18			x			1968-c.2002	34

Market' in Crafts, Gazeley, Newell, *Work and Pay in 20th Century Britain*, p.336, n10).

⁴⁷ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.204-5. Cowley's calculations in relation to the 1951, 1961 and 1971 census reports derive much lower figures of 46,000, 63,000 and 71,000 respectively but Cowley caveats his calculations by pointing out the significant discrepancies between the census report data and the Ministry of Labour figures for the same period and, in respect of the 1971 data, the absence of any allowance for second-generation British-born Irish. Moreover the census figures for 'Irish' labour *per se* exclude Northern Ireland migration, therefore it is impractical to make direct comparisons.

Basic biographical information for the twenty-one field interviews conducted with post-war Irish migrant males is set out in Table 2.5.⁴⁸

Statistical data extrapolated from these oral histories and the collated background information provides a further level of definition, albeit observational, for this cohort, covering almost the entire period of this study, with the earliest participants arriving in the late 1940s and the latest in the 1980s. Their stories are detailed and diverse, providing a comprehensive source of empirical data in support of the broader contentions and conclusions of this research. The individuals whose histories are chronicled here range in age from the oldest at 93 to the youngest at 47. The average age of the participants at the time they left Ireland was nineteen years old, although it is notable that three of the migrants concerned were only fourteen or fifteen when they left.⁴⁹

The relative chronology of the interviewees' migrations is illustrated in chart form below in Figure 2.2:

Migration-by-decade
(showing decade/number/%)

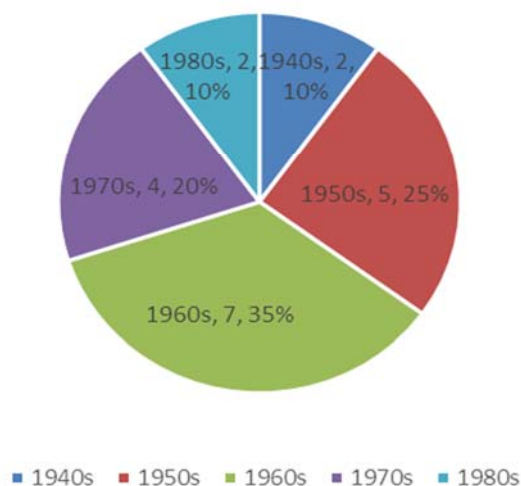


Figure 2.2 - Migration of Oral History Participants (By decade)

⁴⁸ See Appendix A. N.B, years in UK calculated as at 2018.

⁴⁹ These were Tom Mc (OI#9) from Cork, and brothers Terence O (OI#19) and Noel O (OI#20) from Clare.

Geographically, most of the oral histories relate to individuals who originated in the mid-west or north-west of Ireland; Mayo, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim and Roscommon mainly, followed by Clare, Cork, Wexford and two interviewees from Northern Ireland (both later settled in Ireland permanently). The geographic spread of interviewees is illustrated in Figure 2.3.

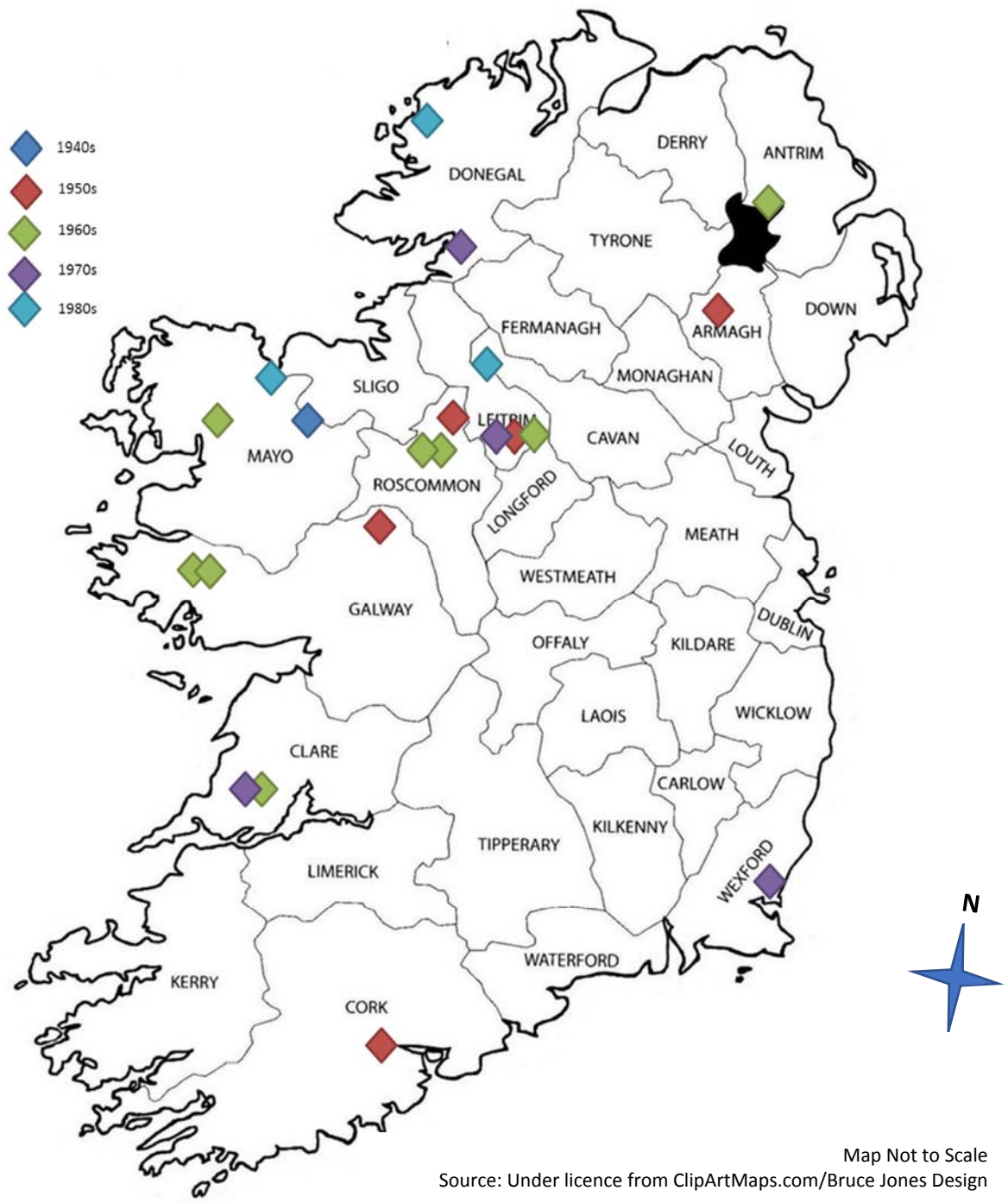


Figure 2.3 - Participants in Oral History Interviews, Migration by Decade/Origin

Six of the twenty-one participants have spent an average of over fifty years living in or around London; five of those six still reside in London, equating to approximately 30% permanent migration. Paddy B, from Mayo (OI#12), spent sixty-one years in London before returning to Ireland in 2010. The average period of emigration across the whole group of interviewees is thirty-two years. Between all twenty-one participants they have accumulated 678 years of emigrant life in London, 592 years of which was working time in the construction industry of the post-war period (the difference is accounted for in retirement and sick-leave etc). The activities of these participants ranged across the heavy end of the construction spectrum; this is in keeping with most analysis of Irish migrant work patterns in construction, where the Irish tended to operate mainly in heavy civil engineering and building infrastructure work. The group interviewed for this project worked predominantly in building construction (35%), infrastructure (21%) and civil engineering (18%). The full analysis of work patterns amongst the cohort is given in Figure 2.4:

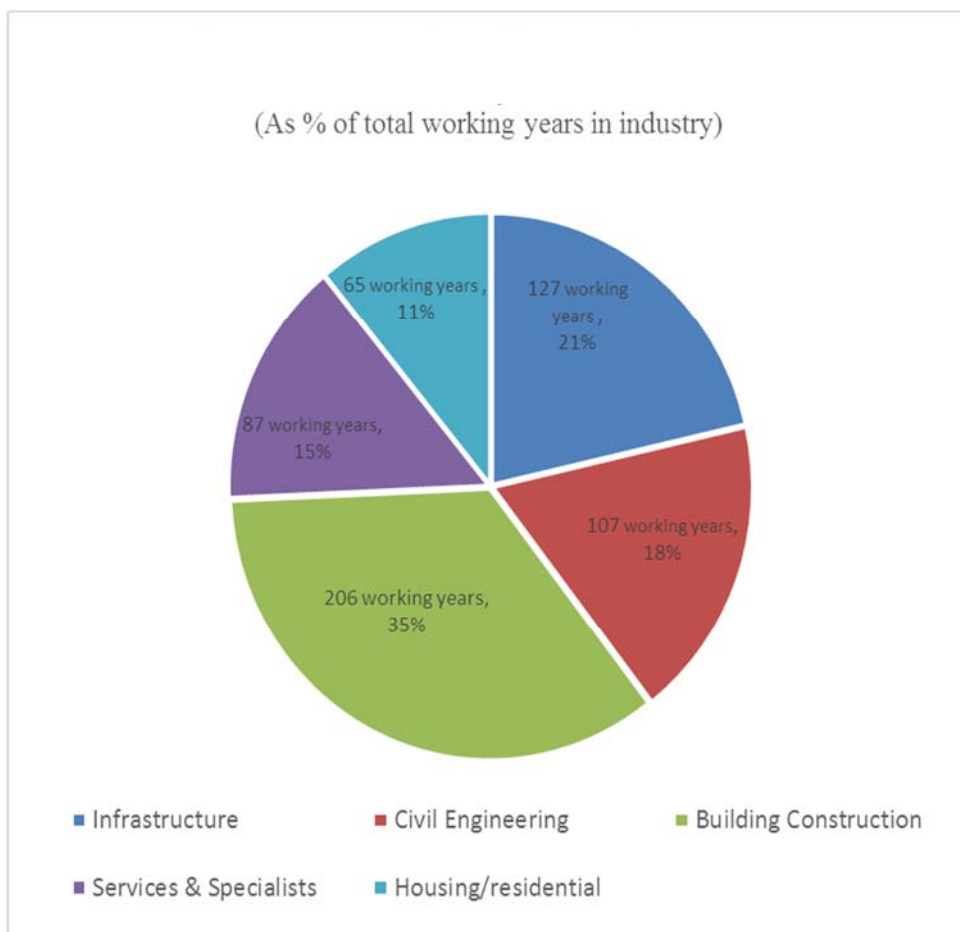


Figure 2.4- Participant in Oral History Interviews, Construction Industry sectoral experience

Table 2.6 (i) and (ii) below sets details the full working profiles of this group of interviewees. In terms of their employment status, twelve of these twenty-one migrant males were, at one time or another, working casually within the (sometimes illicit) labour market known as ‘the lump’ but for the most part this was short-term status whilst they established themselves and became settled migrants.

Table 2.6(i) - Working Career Profiles - All Interviewees

Original Interview Code	Participant's Identifier Name		Industry sectors worked in (as % of total migrant working)									Roles undertaken	Settled Operational Status	Notable Companies worked for
			Lumper	Working years in construction	Infrastructure	Civil Engineering	Building Construction	Services & Specialists	Housing/residential					
Ol#1	Tom M	Initially	40	10	10	50	30	100			Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting, demolition / Drainlayer - drainage and sewer works/ Carpenter - shuttering, 1st & 2nd fixing	SE-sole	Martin Grant, John Byrne, Kenny & Reynolds Ltd, Cementation, Kilby & Cayford Ltd, Willmott Dixon, Norwest Holst, small subcontractors	
Ol#2	Dimmy D	No	3			100		100			Timekeeper	Emp	Sir Robert McAlpine,	
Ol#3	Kevin H	Initially	45	20	10	50	20	100			Labourer - Tunnels, tower blocks, general building.	SC-minor	Balfour Beatty, Sir Robert McAlpine, John Mowlem, John Laing, Wimpey, Tersons, small subcontractors	
Ol#4	Patrick M	Majority	11	30	20	30	20	100			Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting, demolition / Drainlayer - drainage and sewer works/	Emp	Wimpey, OC Summers, small subcontractors	
Ol#5	Michael H	Initially	24	40	30	20	10	100			Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting, demolition / Drainlayer - drainage and sewer works/	Emp	Green Murphy, Grey Murphy, small subcontractors	
Ol#6	Michael Mc	No	6		10	10	80	100			Labourer - general building, external works, landscaping, handyman, Electrical Engineer	Emp	Higgs & Hill Ltd.,	
Ol#7	Tony C	No	12	80		10	10	100			Labourer, Ponyboy, Teaboy, Banksman - Tunnels	Emp	John Mowlem, Mitchell, John Cochrane, Green Murphy	
Ol#8	Ben C	Yes	2				100	100			Labourer - demolition	Emp	McWeeney Smallman, small subcontractors	
Ol#9	Tom Mc	No	16		30	50	20	100			Labourer - Tower blocks, general building.	Emp	Tersons, John Laing, Brown McNicholas, Fitzpatrick, small subcontractors	
Ol#10	Gregory D	Yes	16			100		100			Labourer - groundworks, foundations, Tower blocks, external works, concreting, demolition	Emp	O'Rourke, John Laing, small subcontractors	

Table 2.6 (ii) Working Career Profiles - All Interviewees

Original Interview Code	Participant's Identifier Name	Lumper	Working years in construction	Industry sectors worked in (as % of total migrant working)						Roles undertaken	Settled Operational Status	Notable Companies worked for
				Infrastructure	Civil Engineering	Building Construction	Services & Specialists	Housing/residential				
OI#11	Jackie W	No	18			20	80	100	Labourer - general building / Handyman, Electrical Engineer - Facilities Management	SC-medium	Small business owner	
OI#12	Paddy B	No	51		30	40	30	100	Bricklayer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting,	SC-medium	Green Murphy, John Laing, Vogue Brickwork, Small business owner	
OI#13	John P	Initially	46		50	50		100	Labourer, soldier, drainlayer, machine-driver, company director	SC-medium	Sir Robert McAlpine, Taylor Woodrow, Green Murphy, Grey Murphy, Cubitts, JJ Maunders, Small business owner.	
OI#14	Sean G	Initially	18	50	50			100	Labourer, drainlayer, setting-out engineer, machine-driver.	Emp	Cementation, MJ Clancy, Barnhill Contracting (USA), Fairclough, Balfour Beatty, John Browne, Morrison Construction, small subcontractors.	
OI#15	Pat C	Initially	52	10	20	40	30	100	Labourer, drainlayer, civil engineer, company director	SC-medium	Small business owner	
OI#16	John F	No	40	60	30		10	100	Labourer, steel fixer, publican, dancehall bouncer	Emp	John Laing, Alred McAlpine, small subcontractors	
OI#17	John H	Initially	47	80	20			100	Labourer, tunneller, drainlayer, sewer-man, street-mason.	Emp	Green Murphy, Green McNicholas, McInemey	
OI#18	Pat F	Initially	15			80	20	100	Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting, demolition / Drainlayer - drainage and sewer works/	Emp	small subcontractors	
OI#19	Terence O	Initially	48			70	30	100	Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting, demolition / Drainlayer - drainage and sewer works/ small builder business owner	SC-minor	Green Murphy, small subcontractors, small business owner	
OI#20	Noel O	Initially	52	20	20	10	50	100	Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works, concreting, demolition / Crane driver	SE-sole	Green Murphy, Harrington, Higgins, Balfour Beatty, Laing O'Rourke, small subcontractors.	
OI#21	Joe Mc	Majority	30	50	50			100	Labourer - groundworks, foundations, external works.	Emp	Wimpey, Limerick Surfacing, Grey Murphy, Henry Brennan, small subcontractors	

21% 18% 35% 15% 11%

592 127 107 206 87 65

Average time working in construction **28** Years

One-third of these men never worked as lumpers, but two-thirds worked almost all of their careers in construction as employees – i.e working either casually or in Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) formal employment. Around 10% eventually ended up working as ‘self-employed’ contractors under what was known as SC60 status – essentially ‘sole traders’. A further 10% established small, often casualised, subcontract enterprises employing less than ten other operatives, who were usually friends or relations recruited through the ethnic social networks established in London. Some 20% of the group went on to establish formalised small or medium-sized subcontracting enterprises and/or jobbing-building firms employing perhaps ten or more operatives on a fairly regular basis. Most worked for a mix of major British, and newly-founded Irish companies, the most common being John Murphy & Sons (‘Green Murphy’) whom 30% of interviewees had worked for at some point in their working careers. John Laing, Balfour Beatty, John Mowlem and Wimpey were also prominent employers of this group. A further significant observation is that 60% of the group worked throughout their careers for a variety of small Irish-owned subcontractors, often owner-working firms with 1-10 employees.

Finally this group can be classified further in terms of their places of settlement within London, and the degree of transience or itinerancy which their working lives demanded of them. From Table 2.7 it can be observed that around half of interviewees experienced below-average levels of itinerancy in their working lives.⁵⁰ Only three were significantly mobile as a result of working in construction and seven settled permanently in London, experiencing no ‘long-distance’ work. Approximately half the interviewees eventually settled in suburban London and half in inner London, with all but three interviewees being located in either of the traditional Irish settlements of north or east London. This data supports a central tenet of this research, namely that there was little consistency or homogeneity to the working lives or settlement patterns of these men and (whatever about the interwar years, certainly in the post-war era) the popular stereotype of the Irish migrant construction worker as the itinerant ‘pincher kiddie’ or ‘long-distance man’ was not the commonly-shared lived experience .

⁵⁰ For the sake of clarification, Table 2.7, levels of itinerancy are an approximate estimate (drawn from interview notes) where ‘average’ means moderate levels of relocation involving change of accommodation between various locations in London and the south-east region, as far as the south-coast or occasionally further. Significant itinerancy means more than 3-4 major relocations of longer than 3 month duration, between regions/cities/projects. Occasional sojourning for specific projects of less than 3 months duration is not considered significant itinerancy.

Table 2.7 - Itinerancy / Settlement /Location - All Interviewees

Original Interview Code	Participant's Identifier Name	Transience	Working Areas	Residing Areas	Quadrant
OI#1	Tom M	Average	London/SE	Inner London	east
OI#2	Dinny D	Average	London/SE	Suburban London	east
OI#3	Kevin H	Average	London/SE	Suburban London	north
OI#4	Patrick M	Average	England	Suburban London	west
OI#5	Michael H	Average	London/SE	Inner/Suburban London	north
OI#6	Michael Mc	None	London/SE	Inner/Suburban London	south
OI#7	Tony C	None	London/SE	Inner/Suburban London	west
OI#8	Ben C	None	London/SE	Inner London	city
OI#9	Tom Mc	None	London/SE	Suburban London	east
OI#10	Gregory D	Average	London/SE	Suburban London	north
OI#11	Jackie W	None	London/SE	Suburban London	north
OI#12	Paddy B	Average	London/SE	Suburban London	north
OI#13	John P	Significant	England	Inner London	east
OI#14	Sean G	Significant	UK	LMA (Dartford)	east
OI#15	Pat C	Average	England	Suburban London	north
OI#16	John F	Significant	England	Suburban London	north
OI#17	John H	None	London/SE	Inner/Suburban London	east
OI#18	Pat F	Average	London/SE	Suburban London	south
OI#19	Terence O	None	London/SE	Inner London	east
OI#20	Noel O	Average	London/SE	Suburban London	east
OI#21	Joe Mc	Average	London/SE	Inner London	north

The historical context underlying the settlement patterns of this cohort justifies examining economic geography and ethnographic theories as potential explanations for the ways in which, over time, the cohort of Irish migrants constituted their communities in post-war London. Peach's theoretical work on modes of accommodating minority migrant groups

and spatial patterns of ethnic residential segregation examines the dichotomy (which he labelled the ‘Melting Pot versus Mosaic’) between assimilation and pluralism (multiculturalism).⁵¹ In ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’ Peach also critiques Ezra Park’s classical proposition that assimilation – the American ‘*brick-in-the-pond*’ three-generational model – was the inevitable (and preferred) outcome of ethnic spatial diffusion.⁵² This theory posits that degrees of assimilation correlate proportionally with residential segregation; ‘high levels of segregation equated with non-assimilation’ and vice versa.⁵³ By reference to Jewish migrant communities in Canada and north London, he demonstrates that both upward social mobility and suburbanization can sometimes occur whilst communities remain segregated. The crucial distinction in these cases is that ‘Jewish concentration does not constitute a ghetto, but a voluntary enclave’.⁵⁴ Whilst the conventional analysis of spatial segregation applies to most migrant groups in London (including the Irish as a wider composite group) and spatial diffusion of the post-war Irish in London accords broadly with Parks’ model, I suggest that construction workers are also an exception whose settlement patterns resemble a voluntary enclave.

The complexities of Irish cultural identity described later in this chapter and chapters six and seven clearly show that residential clustering was only one of many identifiers for Irish construction workers in London. Why, for instance, were they slower to assimilate both than some of their fellow Irish migrants (outside construction work) and the first-wave Irish who settled in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century? Perhaps more than any other immigrant community in Britain Irish builders were shaped and defined by their working environment. The construction and civil engineering industry and the sites upon which these men laboured were, as Clair Wills articulated, simultaneously their workplace and the most socially-significant part of their migrant experience.⁵⁵ The comparatively unique and bespoke nature of work organisation and fragmentation within the construction industry in post-war Britain lent itself to a peculiarly segregated ‘gang’ or ‘crew’ structure;⁵⁶ akin to what Peach defines as a

⁵¹ Peach, ‘Pluralist and Assimilationist Models of Ethnic Settlement in London, 1991’, pp. 120-134.

⁵² Peach, ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’, p.46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.31-2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.43-7.

⁵⁵ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.111.

⁵⁶ See section 4.3, pp.197-8 and also Appendix D, pp.4-14 for a detailed description of the ‘top-down’ fragmentary and hierarchical organisational structure of the post-war British construction industry.

voluntary form of plurality.⁵⁷ Civil engineering, public infrastructure, groundworks, formwork, concrete substructure and superstructure were the key construction activities Irish migrant labour undertook.⁵⁸ The outdoor, sequestered nature of these works permitted – indeed in some ways encouraged – labour to form segregated detachments. Moreover the profit motive privileged productivity and output above all; a feature of ensuring that these detached gangs worked at peak efficiency was to compose them of friends, relations, housemates, newly-arrived neighbours or ‘townies’ of the same ethnic background; almost all interviewees repeatedly emphasised that their co-workers were always predominantly Irish, often relatives or neighbours from home.⁵⁹ In theoretical terms I categorise this working practice as a form of ‘workplace auto-segregation’;⁶⁰ an idea borrowed from social sciences which, I posit, offers an adjunctive to the classical ethnographic view.

As outlined above, it would be wrong to ‘assume that assimilation was the desired outcome for all groups’.⁶¹ For Irish construction workers – particularly those working within the ‘lump’ system – even after the initial residential clusters in central north London diffused and the migrant community spread to the wider suburbs,⁶² workplace auto-segregation and the associational networks and cultural circuits it fostered prolonged marginalisation. In this scenario Irish building workers remained impervious to acculturation, I argue, for longer than other migrants. Irish nurses, health workers, domestics, London Transport workers, factory workers, middle-class professionals and the like had working lives which integrated more fully with the host population and fellow migrants from other ethnic groups. As outlined below, even by the late 1990s, at the end of this periodisation, some Irish migrant builders still expressed nationalist sentiment and tended towards enclavic behaviour. At a corporate level, as the decades unfolded, some of the larger companies became less ‘visibly’ Irish, whilst others maintained strong cultural links with their Irish roots. This unique facet of their migrant

⁵⁷ Peach, ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’, p.36.

⁵⁸ See chapters 3 and 4 and Appendix A for details.

⁵⁹ For example, see figure 3.1, chapter 3, demonstrating such a gang working for J Murphy & Sons in 1970s made up entirely of Irish migrant workers.

⁶⁰ For detailed discussion of the sociological concept of self-segregation see: Gill Crozier, Jane Davies, ‘“The Trouble Is They Don’t Mix”: Self-Segregation or Enforced Exclusion?’ in *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Vol.11(3), (2008), pp.285-301; Deborah Phillips, ‘Parallel lives? Challenging discourses of British Muslim self-segregation’ in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol 24, (2006), pp.25-40.

⁶¹ Peach, ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’, p.35.

⁶² The gradual process of Irish migrant residential diffusion and ethnic spread is shown graphically on Maps 1 & 2, p.xiii-xiv.

experience mediated the way in which this community settled in London and the wider LMA over time; differentiating them, albeit marginally, from the wider migrant Irish community and other ethnic minority migrant groups settling in London simultaneously. For example, post-colonial Caribbean migrants (the ‘Windrush’ generation) often saw Britain as their ‘mother country’ and tended to follow a stronger assimilationist trajectory.⁶³

Further questions arise from this theoretical focus: did the nature of economic activity in this cohort, over the post-war decades, mirror other migrant communities and diasporas? Was the reliance upon the industrial economy of construction work a determinant of the lived experiences of Irish migrant construction workers? Again the starting point for analysing these experiences through a theoretical optic is Peach’s work on ethnic enclaves and ghettoization.⁶⁴ As shown above, Irish migrant settlement in post-war London generally followed the classical pattern of outward rippling but enclavic tendencies need not manifest solely in residential patterns, but are sometimes discernible in socio-economic and associational behaviour in the workplace and social orbit.⁶⁵ The primary socio-economic feature of the Irish construction worker’s environment, I posit, was the initial formation of a community which exhibited many of the characteristics of a voluntary ‘ethnic enclave’ in and around north London. In turn, the economic activity of this cohort, began, over time, to generate an ‘ethnic economy’. Geographers have identified various types of ethnic enclaves and economies and, as Peach emphasised, it is important, for example, to ‘recognise the difference between the chosen enclave and enforced ghetto’ within the typology.⁶⁶

There was no compulsion to ethnic segregation amongst migrant Irish save for, perhaps, an economic motive towards cheaper accommodation costs in the areas of Kilburn, Cricklewood, Camden and Islington in the immediate post-war period, therefore the question of ghettoization does not arise. Like the Jewish community which settled in nineteenth-century east London, Irish migrants maintained a degree of self-segregation in spite of social mobility and suburbanization. However, in contrast, the post-war Irish communities did not relocate into

⁶³ Peach, ‘The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave’, pp.47-8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.31-48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.33-5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.48.

reformed enclaves, as the Jewish community did in north-west London.⁶⁷ In some senses most of the first-wave Irish immigrants (Hall's London-Irish categorization) followed the classical three-stage assimilation model developed by the Chicago School of the 1920s and 30s.⁶⁸ By the Second World War most of the first-wave Irish migrants were fully acculturated and, by and large, identified as Londoners, albeit of (staunchly Catholic) Irish origin. Peach, again using the Chicago model, distinguishes between ghettoised enclaves usually populated by peoples of colour which are dually segregated, ('nearly all Blacks lived in urban areas; almost the whole population in such areas was black') and European ethnic enclaves where – particularly if Caucasian English-speaking – enclaves were voluntary, dually diluted and rarely (if ever) formed even a majority of the population of 'their' areas.⁶⁹ This latter observation applies precisely to the post-war Irish settlements shown on Map 1.⁷⁰

Portes defines the ethnic enclave as 'dense concentrations of immigrant or ethnic firms that employ a significant proportion of their co-ethnic labor [sic] force and develop a distinctive physical presence in urban space'.⁷¹ Zhou clarified this, adding that the ethnic enclave requires 'a physical concentration within an ethnically identifiable neighborhood [sic] with a minimum level of institutional completeness'.⁷² Corrigan argues further still that:

The ethnic enclave provides a shelter where disadvantaged immigrants seek employment in ethnic businesses that are controlled by co-ethnic entrepreneurs. Ethnic enclaves are typically self-enclosed communities, which are located in ethnic neighborhoods [sic] and require dense networks'⁷³

Whilst the Irish communities which formed in post-war north London probably would not meet the strict criteria of institutional completeness and self-enclosure, there is nonetheless copious evidence in secondary sources which confirm that these post-war settlements meet some of

⁶⁷ Peach, 'The Ghetto and the Ethnic Enclave', p.44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.32-4.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.38.

⁷⁰ See Maps 1 & 2, p.xiii-xiv.

⁷¹ A. Portes, 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology.' In *Annual Review of Sociology*, Issue 24, (1998), pp.1-24, at p.13.

⁷² M. Zhou, 'Revisiting Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Convergences, Controversies, and Conceptual Advancements.' in *The International Migration Review*, Issue 38, (2004), p.1040.

⁷³ Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*, (2006), Maynooth, p.16.

these criteria.⁷⁴ One interviewee, Kevin (OI#3), described Kilburn High Road in the mid-1950s as “black” with Irishmen at that time.⁷⁵ According to Bailey and Waldinger, the ethnic enclave is also characterized by ‘an external, informal training system that shapes the employment relationship and increases the availability and quality of information for workers and employers’.⁷⁶ Chapters three and four demonstrate incontrovertibly that the system of ‘lump’ labour recruitment which had developed in north London by the late 1960s accords with this characteristic.

The concept of the ethnic enclave is inextricably linked with that of the ethnic economy. Much research has been done regarding the typology of ethnic economies and the theoretical framework around which this contextual analysis is framed starts with Kaplan and Li’s *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*.⁷⁷ Criteria are outlined and discussed, in socio-scientific terms, relating to different types of ethnic economy. The relationship between ethnic business networks, residential segregation, the urban landscape and underserved markets are theorised as key components. This latter point has particular relevance to the post-war Irish ethnic economies, since it was – as chapters 3 and 4 and Appendix B demonstrate – the exponential demand for construction labour which facilitated the growth of the Irish migrant construction sector. The key components of all ethnic economies are proprietorship, specialization, ethnic markets, integration with co-ethnic supply chains and the wider host economy, and spatial concentration, the last of which, Kaplan theorises, might be the essential determinant of a true ethnic economy.⁷⁸ Beyond the generic term ethnic economy, further classifications have been theorised. Bonacich et al discussed the ‘middleman minority’ theory which configures an internally cohesive ethnic economy positioned between and dominant host and a subordinate, often ostracized, ethnic workers.⁷⁹ This categorization has some merit as applied to the migrant Irish construction workers – particularly during and immediately following the Second World War – because it relies upon a concentration in labour contracting, the temporary sojourning

⁷⁴ See for examples: Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.88-95, Sorohan, *Irish London*, pp.5-10.

⁷⁵ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.44.

⁷⁶ Bailey, T. and R. Waldinger, . "Primary, Secondary and Enclave Labor Markets: A Training System Approach." In *American Sociological Review*, Issue 38, (1991), pp.432-445, at p.432.

⁷⁷ Kaplan, Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, pp.1-10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

status of workers, ambivalence to the host community and resistance to assimilation, all factors found in the post-war Irish construction market.⁸⁰

Light and Gold, similarly, theorised the ‘ethnic economy’ (though in slightly different terms), as ‘any ethnic or immigrant’s self-employed group, its employers, their co-ethnic employees, and their unpaid family workers’.⁸¹ Moreover, they postulate the related but distinct concepts of the ‘ethnic ownership economy’ and the ‘ethnic control economy’. The former, based on property rights and ownership, consists of small and medium-size businesses – usually of self-employed operatives – owned by ethnic or immigrant entrepreneurs and their co-ethnic helpers and workers. The latter refers to industries, occupations, and organization of the general labour market in which co-ethnic employees (not owners) exert appreciable and persistent economic power; an ‘ethnic economy whose basis is de facto control based on numbers, clustering, and organization; the ethnic-controlled economy’.⁸² The distinction is crucial insofar as participants in the ethnic-controlled economy exert control rather than ownership authority, and are completely independent of the ‘ethnic ownership’ economy. Immigrant economic activity is perceived as ‘an interactive consequence of the pursuit of opportunities through the mobilization of resources through ethnic networks within unique historical conditions’⁸³ This, it is suggested, allows fellow migrants to secure more and better jobs in the mainstream economy, reduce unemployment and improve working conditions.

Both of these forms of ethnic economy exhibit high degrees of sectoral specialisation – precisely the condition brought about by Irish economic activity in post-war London. Kaplan defines both these types of ethnic economy as ‘ethnic niche’ economies.⁸⁴ Whether any of these theorisations can be definitively applied to all Irish construction activity is a moot point. Kaplan goes on to postulate that the extent of separation from /integration with the host community and the scale of economic activity can determine the existence of a true ethnic enclave

⁸⁰ Edna Bonacich, ‘A Theory of Middleman Minorities’ in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (Oct., 1973), pp. 583-594.

⁸¹ I. Light and S. Gold, *Ethnic Economies*, (San Diego, 2000), p.3, cited in Kaplan, Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, pp.4-5.

⁸² Volery, ‘Ethnic entrepreneurship’, pp.30-31.

⁸³ H. Aldrich and R. Waldinger, ‘Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship’ in *Annual Review of Sociology*, no.16, (1990), pp.111-135 at p.21.

⁸⁴ Kaplan, Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, p.5.

economy.⁸⁵ Parallel economic activity with a high level of ethnic self-financing and banking facilities which essentially corral the money-flow is seen as a marker of a very mature ethnic economy;⁸⁶ it is unlikely this criteria would apply to the Irish construction economy, albeit that Irish pubs and dancehalls acted as clearing houses for converting cheque wage payments into ready cash from the late 1970s onwards, but those cash reserves were eventually dispersed into the wider UK money-system or trafficked into the Irish economy, notably often without having been subject to British taxation.

Synthesising these various theoretical concepts, Corrigan proposed the diasporic enclave. Arguing that theorisations of the ethnic enclave (as applied to Irish migration) give insufficient credence to the development of transnational links over time, she defined it thus; ‘an opportunity structure based on networks between immigrant entrepreneurs and co-ethnics within the host society, as well as transnational networks connecting the diaspora to opportunities within the homeland.’⁸⁷ ‘Diaspora’ infers certain characteristics common to most migrant communities: ‘dispersion from the homeland, the maintenance of homeland nostalgia or myth, a perception of not being fully accepted in the host country, an ideology towards return, a group consciousness and group solidarity’.⁸⁸ The community of post-war Irish migrant builders displayed all these characteristics to varying degrees and, broadly, the trajectory of the post-war Irish entrepreneurs aligns closely with these theoretical concepts.⁸⁹ Rippling outwards from an initial London-centric ethnic labour-supply enclave in the early post-war decades, the more tenacious entrepreneurial firms then used the consolidated networks of kin, friendship and socio-economic patronage to cultivate business opportunities and resource work at a wider transnational level both within the host community but also at pan-national level across the UK, Ireland and, eventually (for some of the very largest ethnic Irish entrepreneurial ventures) internationally.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Kaplan, Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, pp.4-6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

⁸⁷ Aine Corrigan, ‘Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States: Ethnic Strategies and Transnational Identities’, (Unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 2006), p.6

⁸⁸ W. Safran, ‘Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return.’ In *Diaspora*, Vol 1, no.1, (1991), pp. 83-99 cited in Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*,(2006), Maynooth, p.266.

⁸⁹ See chapters 3 and 4 for detailed particulars.

⁹⁰ Kaplan, Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, pp.5-6.

Waldinger *et al* defined ethnic entrepreneurship as ‘a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing common national background or migration experiences’.⁹¹ Shared ethnicity is central to this idea, and therefore defining an ethnic group is relevant to the concept. Yinger, for example, defined it as ‘a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients’.⁹² An alternative term used to ‘ethnic’ (for example by Corrigan) is ‘immigrant’ entrepreneurs, which in turn would only include the individuals who have actually immigrated over the past few decades and would exclude members of ethnic minority groups who have been living in the country for several centuries.⁹³ In the context of this research, and, once again, adopting Hall’s dichotomy of ‘London-Irish versus Irish-in-London’, suggests the inclusion only of those immigrant entrepreneurs who settled during the inter-war and post-war periods.⁹⁴ As chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, both the mail-boat and Ryanair generations of post-war Irish migrants, operating within the LMA construction and engineering industries, conformed over time with both categories (ownership and control) of a ‘niche’ ethnic economy at different periods and, indeed, most post-war Irish entrepreneurs operated in and between both categories at different stages of development.

The trajectory of entrepreneurial development was achieved by exploiting the full range of social and capital networks available to Irish migrants. Delaney and MacRaild considered ethnic networking theory in their survey of Irish migratory networks in the diaspora, remarking that the intersection of formal and informal networks are perennial and highly influential: ⁹⁵

migrants often sought out well-established pathways of movement that had been shaped by particular economic and labour market conditions. In developing networks that could respond to the work made available in new places, migrants were demonstrating sensitive and rational

⁹¹ Waldinger, R., H. Aldrich and R. Ward, ‘Opportunities, group characteristics and strategies’, in R. Waldinger, H. Aldrich and R. Ward (eds), *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*, (London 1990), pp. 13–48, p.13.

⁹² M.J. Yinger, ‘Ethnicity’ in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Issue 11, (1985), pp.151–80.

⁹³ Volery, ‘Ethnic entrepreneurship’, p.31

⁹⁴ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.ii-iii.

⁹⁵ Delaney and MacRaild, ‘Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities Since 1750’, pp.127-142.

choices [...] the Irish were active, not passive, in the construction of their worlds.⁹⁶

Further academic debate around ethnic enclaves and the ethnic economy hypothesis has focused on the relevance of industrial clusters and the need to conceptualize physical space as critical, though not determinant, in the creation of enclaves. Lefebvre, for example, conceived of ethnic enclaves as networked, socially-produced environments rather than a contiguous, circumscribed physical space.⁹⁷ Spatial utility is often dictated by the types of businesses concerned. Retail and service-based industries often require shopfront and office space – even if retailing to within an ethnically-segregated community, whereas manufacturing businesses can operate within much lower quality space.⁹⁸ The structure of the post-war Irish construction community in London equates to the industrial cluster model; ‘networks of small or medium-sized firms (SMEs) interconnected within a single industrial sector both spatially and economically’ and which ‘depend crucially on the existence of trade networks and market channels and on relations of trust and cooperation [...] and a penumbra of ancillary services.’⁹⁹ Such structures may be localized or disbursed.¹⁰⁰ The serendipitous creation of the post-war Irish ethnic-controlled economy in London generated a ‘multiplier effect’ for the Irish ethnic group: internally re-invested profits; internalised labour opportunities generated by the enclave; and expansion through promotion and openings created for new firms.¹⁰¹

Even in the early decades of the post-war migrations an informal, loosely-structured ethnic economy operated at an underlying ‘inter-site’ level which enabled relational connectivities; kinship, friendship, localism, homogenous bonding, political alignments and working hierarchies to foster work opportunities and nurture close ties amongst groups of migrant builders based on norms of patronage, reciprocity and trust. The successful

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.129, 132.

⁹⁷ Pnina Werbner, ‘South Asian entrepreneurship in Britain: a critique of the ethnic enclave economy debate’ in Leo Paul Dana (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship: A Co-evolutionary View on Resource Management*, (Cheltenham, 2007), pp.375-89, p.375.

⁹⁸ Kaplan, Li, *Landscapes of the Ethnic Economy*, p.8.

⁹⁹ Werbner, ‘South Asian entrepreneurship in Britain’, p.376-7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.379.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.377. Chapter 5 demonstrates that the associational culture of Irish migrant builders from the early 1950s onwards fostered the creation of a new networked infrastructure for the Irish-in-London community built around an ancillary web of cultural products; dancehalls, pubs, county associations, GAA Clubs, cultural centres, ethnic shops and social clubs disbursed around the various industrial clusters across London.

exploitation of such socio-economic networks for the purposes of gaining remunerative employment or generating profit-making construction enterprises has been conceptually theorised as social capital.¹⁰² These networks extended deep into the social structures of the Irish-in-London. Gradually the intersection of work-based networks with religious observances and social activities oiled the wheels of the ethnic economy.

At the level of recruitment of labour these networks operated in complex and multi-layered ways. Fitzgerald and Lambkin explore the concepts of diasporic networks of family, townland, locality and region, all co-operating and interacting at various stages of the migration process,¹⁰³ overarched by mutual nationality. They concluded that diasporic networks follow the same basic structures of 'home' and dispersed 'family' networks 'whether considered at macro, meso or micro-level. Relying on Gabaccia's pioneering work in *Italy's Many Diasporas*, they conclude that: 'At this intermediate level, meso-diasporas' are named as parts of the global Irish 'macro-diaspora'; it is understood that the 'homeland' to which they relate is still the island of Ireland. Below this level, sets of 'micro-diasporas' are named, conversely, as part of the 'homeland', ranging from the province down to the county, barony, parish, townland and family.'¹⁰⁴ From an urban Irish perspective cities and towns, and former townlands subsumed into those urban units might be added.

In the context of obtaining employment within the established Irish diasporic enclave that existed in the post-war construction industry in London, the key feature is the intersection of social and entrepreneurial networks within the Irish migrant community and the ways in which immigrant entrepreneurs could 'navigate a hierarchy of networks that form the diasporic enclave. These networks function both as a source of economic opportunity and a mode of diasporic belonging'.¹⁰⁵ Corrigan argues that:

Ethnic groups with a high level of self-organization, through densely connected networks, provide co-ethnics with a collective capacity for organizing new enterprises Networks connect immigrants to other immigrants, as well as to non-immigrants through participation in a set

¹⁰² Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*,(2006), Maynooth, pp.209-212.

¹⁰³ Patrick Fitzgerald and Brian Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007*, (Basingstoke, 2008), pp.270-274.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.274, citing Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, (London, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*,(2006), Maynooth , p.206.

of mutual expectations and prescribed behaviours. Networks provide form and organization to social life and enhance group solidarity and trust.¹⁰⁶

Summarising the discussion above, I posit that, in broad terms, the business trajectories of Irish builders in post-war London transitioned from long-standing but gradually relaxing enclavic tendencies which led to the formation and operation of an ethnic-controlled ‘niche’ economy and later in the migratory cycle –probably from the late 1980s onwards – merged into an integrated ethnic economy .

2.3. Irish Contexts

Into what sort of new nation were the post-war migrant Irish builders born? Context determined, at least initially, their reactions and attitudes to settlement in the ‘Big Smoke’.¹⁰⁷ Most post-war Irish builders who settled in London brought with them the imprimatur of post-independence Irish nationalism and rural fundamentalist culture. Nationalist ideology in the Free State was underpinned by Gaelic and Catholic dogma; ‘the pure nation had to be made, for it was still a dream, not a reality’.¹⁰⁸ In nation-building and the forging the cultural sense of national identity, the horrors of An Gorta Mór provided a powerful weapon, lingering long in Irish communal memory both at a national and local level.¹⁰⁹ Foster recognises one of the persistent political legacies of Famine lore as ‘an abiding resentment of England’¹¹⁰– a particular irony given The Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, (1948-1954), reported to Dáil Éireann that virtually all migrants leaving Ireland since the 1930s had gone to Great Britain.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. , p.207, citing Aldrich, H. and C. Zimmer. 1986. ‘Entrepreneurship through Social Networks.’ in D. L. Sexton and R. W. Smilor (Eds.), *The Art and Science of Entrepreneurship*, (Cambridge, MA, 1986), pp.3-24 ; D. Massey, , A. Rafael, A. Jorge, and G. Humberto, *Return to Aztlan*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles,1987); M Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ Vernacular nickname amongst working-class migrants for London.

¹⁰⁸ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century*, (London, 1998), p.40.

¹⁰⁹ Niall O’Ciosán, ‘Famine Memory and the Popular Representation of Scarcity’ in Ian McBride (Ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, (Cambridge, 2001), pp.95-117.

¹¹⁰ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.342.

¹¹¹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.16, citing ‘The Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948-1954’ (Dublin, (1955), Pr.2541, *Reports*, p.117.

In socio-economic terms, Ireland's lack of modernity - especially by comparison to its imperial neighbour – largely accounts for the highly conservative, provincial theocracy which emerged after 1923. Modernization depends largely upon demographic expansion, urbanization and industrialisation.¹¹² Because emigration was predominantly undertaken by the young, the residual demographic profile of Ireland into the early twentieth century trended towards an older population, causing what one caustic commentator referred to as 'the perpetual survival of the unfittest'.¹¹³

Breathnach argues that low general income and declining population prevented the achievement of economies of scale needed to boost industrialisation in twentieth century Ireland.¹¹⁴ MacLaughlin, conversely, contends that it was the development of the capitalist world economy as part of the global modernisation process, dominated by Britain and later the United States, which drew Ireland inexorably into the role of an emigrant nursery within the core-periphery matrix, repeatedly depriving her of the large workforce of agricultural labourers, artisans and craft-workers needed to bolster industrialisation.¹¹⁵ Whelan concurs, remarking that when agricultural employment dropped by 25% between 1926 and 1961 mass emigration filled the void in industrial employment opportunities, with 40% of all males born in Ireland between 1936 and 1940 remaining permanent emigrants.¹¹⁶ The paucity of industry in turn explains the low level of urbanisation; By 1946 the population of towns as a percentage of total Irish population was just under 40%, only 2% more than it had been a decade earlier.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Charles Tilly, 'Does Modernisation breed Revolution?' in Jack. A .Goldstone (Ed.), *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, (Belmont, 2008), p.45 ; Diana Kendall, *Sociology in Our Times* (Boston, 2007), p. 11.

¹¹³ C.H. Oldham, 'The Incidence of Emigration on Town and Country Life in Ireland', in *the Journal of Social and Statistical Enquiry*; Society of Ireland, vol. xiii, 1914, p.213.

¹¹⁴ Proinsias Breathnach, 'Uneven Development and Capitalist Peripheralisation: the Case of Ireland' in *Antipode*, vol.20 (2), (1988). pp. 122-141, p.130, cited by Jim Mac Laughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy* (Cork, 1994), p.6.

¹¹⁵ Breathnach, 'Uneven Development', *Antipode*, p.132. See also. Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish Industry, 1801-1922*, (London, 2009), p.2-3 citing George O'Brien, Ireland's leading economic historian in Saorstát Éireann, Irish Free State, Official Handbook, (Dublin, 1953), see also Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p.342.

¹¹⁶ Christopher. T. Whelan, 'Class Transformation and Social Mobility in the Republic of Ireland' in Patrick Clancy (Ed.), *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, (Dublin, 1995), pp.324-358, at p.332.

¹¹⁷ Delaney, *Demography*, p.114.

At no point throughout the twentieth century has urbanisation in Ireland exceeded one third of that of the United Kingdom.¹¹⁸

Hazley observes that ‘the Irish in post-war Britain constituted a flow of commodified labour, a “replacement population” whose function was to inhabit those segments of the technical division of labour hastily evacuated by Britons’.¹¹⁹ So long as such demand existed for - and the country regularly exported - ‘cheap and adaptable labour for the modern world system’ through the emigrant nursery,¹²⁰ then ‘Ireland could safely reproduce more children than its households could support’.¹²¹ By the early years of independence the problem was systemic, according to Fitzpatrick, ‘Children were “reared for emigration” in the hope that they would not only fund further emigration, but would also provide social insurance for their parents through remittances’.¹²² Remittances from emigrants in Britain to Ireland continued until at least the 1960s and in some cases thereafter.¹²³ Ryan describes how ‘migrants sustain and reproduce multi-stranded networks involving regular transactions and communications across national borders [...] to create amorphous transnational communities’.¹²⁴ At their height, these networks became a self-perpetuating cycle and an ‘essential prop of the western rural economy, supporting an [by then] archaic system of farming and landholding’.¹²⁵

The first half-century of Irish independence was, therefore, largely characterised by an overtly conservative insular, backward-looking rural hegemony dominated by politicised clericalism and an ethos which sought to glorify rural life, seeing it as the repository of clean living, family values and community stability. Commins defined this social environment as rural fundamentalism; ‘a set of values and beliefs by which a positive view was taken of the family-owned farm as the basic unit of agricultural production; having a numerous class of

¹¹⁸ See Table 8.1, ‘Urbanisation levels in European Countries, 1920-1980, in Béla Tomka, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe*, (London, 2013), p.314.

¹¹⁹ Barry Hazley, ‘The Irish in post-war England: Experience, memory and belonging in personal narratives of migration, 1945-69’, PhD Thesis, (Manchester University, 2013), p.100.

¹²⁰ Jim Mac Laughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, (Cork, 1994), p.3.

¹²¹ David Fitzpatrick, ‘Ireland since 1870’, in R. F Foster (Ed.), *The Oxford History of Ireland*, (New York, 2001), p.175.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.176.

¹²³ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.42.

¹²⁴ Louise Ryan, ‘Questions of Migration: Geographical and Transnational Mobility in the Twenty-first Century’ in *Sociology* Volume 39, Number 2, (April, 2005), p.385.

¹²⁵ David Fitzpatrick, ‘Ireland since 1870’, p.176.

landowners; farming as an occupation; agriculture as the basis of national prosperity; farm or small-town living'.¹²⁶ This remains a recognisable feature of some parts of Irish rural society even today;¹²⁷ it only began to wane in the 1960s with the introduction of a compulsory - rather more secular - secondary education system and was certainly the dominant paradigm throughout the period of this study.¹²⁸ Sociologically rural fundamentalism is also entwined with issues of class, social fluidity and occupational mobility.

Complexities of class mobility also add context; for the Irish male migrant in this period, the move to London to work in construction typically meant leaving a home environment in which they were members of a small-farm, parochial *petit-bourgeois* eco-system and entering a vast, urbanised labour-market at the lowest entry-level as semi-skilled/unskilled labour. As discussed in the next chapter, even when migrants left Ireland as skilled tradesmen, they more-often-than-not entered the UK market as de-skilled labourers in order to obtain footholds in the workplace.¹²⁹ This probably added to their (already well-developed) sense of resentment and determination to 'screw the system' which became a feature of casual labourers within the Irish ethnic labour market in London. Paradoxically, significant wage differentials between rural Ireland and urban London together with comparatively limitless employment opportunities in the metropolis resulted in increased real wealth despite the drop from lower-middle/upper working to lower-working-class for most of the migrant builders who stayed working.

The most important way in which rural fundamentalism and originating social class impacted the post-war Irish migrant builder was the innate commercialism which it instilled in

¹²⁶ P. Commins, 'Rural Social Change', in P. Clancy, S. Drudy, K. Lynch and L. O'Dowd (eds), *Ireland: A Sociological Profile* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1986), p.51. See also D.F. Hannan and P. Commins, 'The Significance of Small-scale Landholders in Ireland's Socio-economic Transformation', in J.H. Goldthorpe and C.T. Whelan (eds), *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 79-104.

¹²⁷ See, e.g. County Roscommon 'No' vote in Same-sex marriage Referendum, 2015 (source: *Irish Times*, Sun, May 24, 2015).

¹²⁸ Denis O'Sullivan, *Cultural Politics and Irish Education Since the 1950s: Policy Paradigms and Power*, (Dublin, 2005), p.62, 103.

¹²⁹ Scientifically this represented a drop in occupational class hierarchy of 3 categories from class IV (farmers, smallholders, *petit-bourgeoisie*) to class VII (Semi-skilled/unskilled labour). This class schema was developed by social scientists Erikson and Goldthorpe and widely adopted in pan-European sociological studies - see Table 1 - Class Schema in Whelan, 'Class Transformation' in Clancy (Ed.), *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, pp.328-31.

the stereotypically-labelled ‘entrepreneurial adventurer’ migrants.¹³⁰ Naturally this quality did not apply to all migrants, but almost all of those who built construction business empires in post-war London and the wider LMA came from this rural bourgeois smallholder social class rather than the spailpín tradition as the constructed metanarrative depicts.¹³¹ So did most of the later migrants who aspired to small-business ‘start-ups’, capitalising on the deregulation of UK construction, and who established the ethnically-Irish subcontractor market during the 1960s and 1970s. The post-Famine transition of land-holdings, together with the gradual twentieth-century development of cash-crop and commercial farming practices alongside subsistence farming meant that these men learnt the basics of transactional *petit-bourgeois* capitalism from a young age.¹³² They were simultaneously capable of intense and sustained periods of physically demanding manual labour. A good example is Bill Durkin, a mailboat migrant from Bohola, (Mayo), born in 1938, emigrated to London in the early 1950s and went on to found the Durkin Group, which, by 1990 had grown to a turnover of £70million. He recalled his early life in Mayo:

We were always occupied and always doing something," Mr Durkan recalls. At 15 he was working on the roads with Mayo County Council, and from an early age he was involved in business - from snaring rabbits to selling goats. "It made you very streetwise for when you went away. It taught you how to survive. [...] It's like if you went in to buy a suit of clothes, you would always ask for a discount and say ‘come on now give me the real price!’ All that came from our upbringing.¹³³

¹³⁰ Scully, ‘Emigrants in the traditional sense?’ citing Hickman, ‘Thinking about Ireland and the Irish diaspora’, pp. 133–43.

¹³¹ Examples include Bill Fuller and Phil Trant (maternal cousins) both from outside Listowel in north Kerry, as was John Byrne (Bill Fuller and John Byrne attended the same national school). All three were the sons of middling and strong farmers. Indeed, Patrick Trant (Phil’s father) was described as ‘a significant and prominent Kerry farmer’ (source: Patrick Trant, *Once Around the Track: The Life and Times of Phil Trant and the Trant Family Business*, (Listowel, 2010), p.11) . John and Joe Murphy from Caherciveen in south Kerry were also sons to a smallholding farmer. The Gallagher family who founded the Abbey dynasty owned a middling farm in Cashel, Tubbercurry, Co Sligo. The McNicholas family from Bohola in Co. Mayo came from an 18-acre smallholding farm (Interview with Bernard McNicholas in Anne Holohan, *Working Lives: The Irish in Britain*, (Uxbridge, 1995), p.155. See section 3.4 and appendix B for further details.

¹³² Andy Bielenberg, Raymond Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland Since Independence*, (New York, 2013), pp.55-67.

¹³³ ‘Building from Mayo to Manhattan - and back’, interview with Bill Durkin, The Irish Independent Online, (16 March, 2006), available at <http://www.independent.ie/business/26394486>, (accessed 30 March, 2015). There are many more examples of this experience amongst migrant Irish entrepreneurs of the post-war era, including Michael & Jack Gleeson from Galway, Joe Kennedy, the McNicholas brothers, Paddy B, (OI#12), and the Gallagher brothers from Sligo/East Mayo, The Murphy Brothers, Bill Fuller and Phil Trant from Kerry, the Byrne brothers from Limerick, the Carey Brothers from Tipperary and John P, (OI#13) from Roscommon.

In the immediate post-war years Ireland also took part in the American-backed European Recovery Plan (ERP), commonly known as the Marshall Plan, and between 1948 and 1952 received £47 million in funding, most of which was used to fund ‘projects in the agricultural sector, reflecting the intention of the US authorities that Ireland would increase agricultural exports, and to fund the importation of US goods, alleviating the balance of payments deficit.’ Notably the terms of ERP funding compelled the development of Ireland’s ‘Long-Term Recovery Programme’ and the formation of the Central Statistics Office in 1949, which ironically, simply served to chronicle the comparatively dismal rates of employment prevailing in Ireland in the 1950s. Comparatively, Ireland’s economic dependency rates in the 1950s and 1960s approached 1.8 whereas Britain and continental Europe’s rate varied between 1.3 and 1.4, highlighting the significance of the unemployment problem in Ireland.¹³⁴

By the peak of the emigration crisis in the mid-1950s even the British construction press were highlighting the levels of unemployment in Irish construction.¹³⁵ This was essentially the ‘push’ factor which accelerated the second-wave migration after the war. Britain’s unprecedented economic upturn was the ‘pull’ factor. Combined with the legacies of loss and destruction from the war it created ‘an insatiable demand for labour’ as was the case in Europe’s north-west quadrant which precipitated vast movements of people across the European continent.¹³⁶ Post-war Irish immigrations to Britain were, contextually, part of these mass movements of people which were happening in three forms: from the rural to the urban; from one European country to another; and from colonial (or post-colonial) periphery to metropole. Arguably Irish migration fell within all three of these categories.

Delaney argues that in most cases Irish migration to Britain was seen as a temporary expedient which could be relatively easily reversed if things didn’t work out and was ‘rarely the outcome of a decision to make a new life elsewhere; “A Week’s wages will pay the fare over, and if things do not work out another week’s wages will pay the fare home again”’.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Economic dependency is defined as the ratio of the numbers not working in the population compared to the numbers actually in paid employment. See John FitzGerald, *Understanding Ireland’s Economic Success*, ESRI Working Paper No. 111, (Dublin, 1999), pp.16-17.

¹³⁵ *Contract Journal*, January 16, 1958, p.273.

¹³⁶ Tony Judt, *Postwar*, (London, 2005), p.333.

¹³⁷ *Delaney, Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.15, citing William Ryan, ‘Assimilation of Irish Immigrants in Britain’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, St. Louis University, 1973), p.116.

Whilst this was largely self-evident, set against that view there are several examples amongst the oral histories included in this research where the option of return was very unlikely: Tom Mc from Cork had such dire personal circumstances and poverty in his native place that return was very impractical,¹³⁸ likewise Patrick F (OI#18).¹³⁹ Fellow Roscommon-man John P (OI#13) was age-restricted to a boy's insurance stamp which exposed him to pursuit by the authorities in the UK for conscription to do National Service;¹⁴⁰ a combination of being unable to maintain accommodation and employment rendered it almost impossible for him to remain or return, so he enlisted.¹⁴¹

So for some, at least, migration to Britain was always intended as a permanent move. These migrations were, unsurprisingly, driven by (often significant) wage differentials between city and countryside and in and between regions and nations; and by the 'desire to escape hardship, isolation, the bleakness of village life and the hold of traditional rural hierarchies';¹⁴² in short the ascendancy of modernist attitudes and 'youth culture', as the Americanisation of Europe (and in this context particularly Ireland and Britain) took hold in the wake of the Marshall Plan.¹⁴³ This is hardly surprising if one looks at the parlous state of Ireland after the war. Delaney, for example, comments that 'by the end of the Second World War the Irish economy was still unable to generate enough jobs to absorb the large numbers looking for work [...] the economy declined even further in the 1950s, raising concerns about the capacity of the

¹³⁸ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, pp.149-152.

¹³⁹ Interview with Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.410-414.

¹⁴⁰ The citizenship status of Irish migrants to Britain in the 1930s and 40s was further complicated by the fact that the British establishment claimed Irish citizens as British subjects once they entered British jurisdiction, irrespective of the legislation passed by the Dáil in 1935, (Deidre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s*, (New Haven, 1984), p.143, cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.65). Judges states that 'Eire citizens too were full British citizens in the United Kingdom, whatever might be argued in favour of a different national status in their own country under the Eire Nationality Act of 1935.' (AV Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain, 1939-45*, p.2. See also Delaney, *Demography*, p.65.) This had implications for the status of Irish migrant workers later on when, in 1939, the British government passed National Service Acts, introducing compulsory enlistment for migrant men who had lived in Britain in excess of two years and therefore fell within the ambit of these acts. Exemption was made for those Irish migrants who could prove they were 'temporary' residents.

¹⁴¹ Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, pp.263-264.

¹⁴² Judt, *Postwar*, p.333.

¹⁴³ For detailed accounts of the process of Americanisation in European and British culture, and the various resistances to this process, see *inter alia*: Alexander Stephan (Ed.), *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*, (Oxford, 2006) ; Adrian Horn, *Juke Box Britain: Americanisation and youth culture, 1945 – 60*, (Manchester, 2011) ; and Howard Malchow, *Special Relations: The Americanization of Britain?*, (Stanford, 2011). See also William J. Crotty, David A. Schmitt, *Ireland and the Politics of Change*, (London, 2014), pp.151-154.

Irish state to function as a viable unit'.¹⁴⁴ Crotty and Schmitt corroborate the stagnancy of the post-war Irish economy by comparison to its nearest European neighbours.¹⁴⁵

There are numerous examples in the collected oral histories of this socio-economic driver having motivated the post-war migrant builders. John P (OI#13) described his decision-making process for leaving in the following terms:

John: The streets were filled with gold in England at the time [...] You'd see the lads coming home, lovely suits and living it up [...] they'd be older than you, you'd see they had two suits and all this kind, and of course, he'd be telling it was better than it was, he'd be bragging about it, what he was getting and the like [...] he said I'm going to England, I was working on the quarry, and you had to get the policeman on your side at that time, to give you a permit, to sign it, to leave [...] me being only 17, I was issued with boy's cards [in England], so I was only getting boy's wages. So that was hard enough, but I was getting loads of money [...] 'Twas still a lot better than I was getting on the [County] Council here! [in Ireland]¹⁴⁶

John's account confirms the effects upon young Irish people - during the modernising decades of the 1950s and 60s - of the returning migrants coming 'home' each summer or Christmas, showing off their (often exaggerated) affluence and prosperity. Rather than the profane, exploitative, unhealthy and ungodly place that England was often depicted as by the clergy and their devout parents, it appeared to offer prospects far greater than their native place; this is reflected repeatedly in other oral histories. Michael (OI#5), for example:

Michael: Well really, like, the money just wasn't there [Connemara] to be earned; if you got bad weather in the winter, say, you weren't earning any money – nothing at all. Other people used to come home each year with nice clothes on them and they'd be able to hire a car and all that sort of thing, and we were left nothing at all. It was a thing we knew we'd have to go.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.15.

¹⁴⁵ Crotty, Schmitt, *Ireland and the Politics of Change*, p.151.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, pp.262-263.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.79.

Tony (OI#7), a later college-educated migrant, who migrated temporarily in the late 1960s recounted this continued effect of the ‘flash-Harry’ returnee from ‘beyond in London’ on the youth of Ireland emerging from the dark days of the 1950s:

Tony: Well, I’d see these fellas coming back from England before ever I went there, and you’d be wound-up with the flashy mohair suits and the scatter of money; at Christmas they’d be at the back of the church at midnight Mass creating chaos, y’know? [Laughter] and the talk of dancehalls and all..¹⁴⁸

Even the recognition that the depictions of life ‘beyond in England’ may have been exaggerated did not deter the post-war generation. As Jack Foley explains, ‘It would be impossible to grow up in the east Mayo region in the 1950s without hearing all sorts of stories about life in England – not all necessarily true!’.¹⁴⁹ The essential point was that these stories, even when knowingly exaggerated, offered hope; economic possibilities beyond anything which post-war Ireland could. They were the real trigger for the chain-migrations which accelerated so rapidly through the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, the majority of the twenty-one oral histories cite the dire poverty and bleakness of Irish rural life as the chief motivator for emigrating from Ireland.¹⁵⁰

Ironically, whilst in practice some elements of modernity and technological advancement such as electrification and rail transport had reached the urban and regional hubs of Ireland much earlier than the 1960s, many of the migrant builders of the post-war reconstruction period were recruited from deeply isolated rural villages and townlands around which such modern advancements had skirted. For example Patrick C (OI#15) from the remoter reaches of Connemara, who left in 1966, recounted not having seen a train, other than from afar whilst working remote fields, until the day he boarded the train in Galway City to go to London.¹⁵¹ By way of corroboration, Cowley observes similar sentiments in his interviews about leaving, and remaining :

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.113.

¹⁴⁹ Jack Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens*, p.139.

¹⁵⁰ See: Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.2 ; Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.57 ; Interview with Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, p.414 ; Interview with Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.326-7.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.326-7.

A few emigrants expressed guilt because they'd 'run out' on those at home, but countered it with the assertion that 'Everyone was going at that time, you'd feel strange staying behind' meaning that anyone with any 'go' in him would have done the same. Most offer the explanation that the family holding could not sustain the numbers of children reared on them and off-farm employment in Ireland was unavailable. Many who remained, and prospered, have repressed guilty feelings around the plight of emigrants describing them as 'shiftless,' 'unreliable,' 'lacking staying power,' or 'unable to settle down for the long haul.'¹⁵²

On the whole, the Irish state was, for most of the post-war period, trapped in a political paradox largely of its own making. Because of the expectations created and perpetuated by the nationalist utopian rhetoric of rural fundamentalism and economic autarky, its very existence continually depended primarily upon the family-owned farm as the basic unit of agricultural production and the mainstay of national economic prosperity. But this economic policy resulted in a lack of industrial or commercial growth in the state and a serious deficiency in social and material amenities by comparison to its nearest neighbour and most of Western Europe. The dominance of Catholic social orthodoxy and an absence of social policies aimed at any semblance of family planning led to the constant replenishment of 'surplus' population within this social structure, and therefore the constant need was to export surplus population via the emigrant nursery, as discussed in detail earlier. Indeed Kathleen Paul rather neatly encapsulates the post-war political consensus which emerged at state level as between the new Irish state and its former colonial neighbour in the following terms:

UK policymakers were ever eager to increase the volume of Irish migration, confident that such additions would work to the benefit of the UK economy, while Irish policymakers acquiesced in the loss of labour power and economic dependency in return for utilization of its surplus population and emigrant remittances. This official disposition of labour contradicts contemporary and current popular assumptions that migrants constitute a burden upon the host state. Formal management of Irish migrants further suggests that policymakers on both sides of the Irish Sea regarded labour as a commodity to be sold and distributed by organs of the state.¹⁵³

Several historical accounts also characterise post-war Irish mass migration to Britain as

¹⁵² Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.136-7.

¹⁵³ Paul, 'A Case of Mistaken Identity', pp.125-126.

providing a social and political safety-valve for an unstable polity in Ireland.¹⁵⁴ For example, Travers speculates (in interview with Ferriter) that, ‘if there was no emigration, there would certainly be large-scale [political/social] instability in Ireland, particularly in the 1950s’ and Delaney, Fitzgerald and Lambkin also echo this viewpoint repeatedly.¹⁵⁵ Hirschman’s Exit-Voice-Polarity theory suggests that migratory decisions had political consequences: ‘large-scale emigration may have made it possible for democratisation and liberalisation to proceed in several European countries prior to the First World War without political instability being seriously affected’.¹⁵⁶ One senior Irish civil servant was quoted confidentially as stating that, ‘if this country could not export at least 30,000 labourers to the United Kingdom each year an impossible unemployment situation would result in the Republic’.¹⁵⁷

As, gradually, over the decades of the post-war era, the mail-boat generation and, later, the Ryanair generation coalesced into a settled, ethnically vibrant London-Irish community, the rise of the Celtic Tiger by the mid-1990s precipitated a significant period of return migration. In the wake of the global economic collapse of 2008, Marc Scully compared contemporary Irish government and state attitudes to migration with those of the 1950s and observed:

A regular rhetorical strategy of Irish government ministers across party lines has been to position current emigrants as ‘entrepreneurial adventurers’ through contrast with the ‘down-on-his-luck labourer’ of previous generations. Such a strategy does not allow for much nuance in the experiences of the Irish diaspora, arguably doing the 1950s generation of migrants a disservice by portraying them, in Akenson’s terms as ‘mere passive bits of flotsam on some alleged historical tide’.¹⁵⁸

Whether the post-war migrants left as economic adventurers or unlucky labourers, the Irish

¹⁵⁴ Delaney, *Demography*, p.15.

¹⁵⁵ Diarmaid Ferriter, *What If? Alternative Views of Twentieth-Century Irish History: An Entertaining and Thought-Provoking Counter-History of Twentieth-Century Ireland*, (Dublin, 2006), pp. 239-52 ; Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.36-37 ; Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, pp.244-245.

¹⁵⁶ A. O. Hirschman, *Exit, voice and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations and states*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), and Stein Rokkan, 'Dimensions of State Formation and Nation-building: a possible paradigm for research on variations within Europe', in Charles Tilly (ed.), *The formation of National States in Western Europe*, (New Jersey, 1975), pp. 526-600 both cited in Delaney, *Demography*, pp.18-19.

¹⁵⁷ NAUK, Doc Ref: DO 35/3917, G.W. Tory (British Embassy, Dublin) to N. E. Costar, (Commonwealth Relations Office), 31st August, 1951.

¹⁵⁸ Scully, ‘Emigrants in the traditional sense?’ citing Hickman, ‘Thinking about Ireland and the Irish diaspora’, pp. 133–43.

State was perfunctory towards them once beyond Ireland's shores, unless and until they became - as a number did - wealthy potential net contributors to the Irish polity.¹⁵⁹ The 'safety valve' of emigration remained the default state policy in post-war Ireland for dealing with surplus population.¹⁶⁰ The construction and engineering industries provided far and away the most employment opportunities for Irish male workers as economic agents, and generated the largest economic contribution to the Irish economy.¹⁶¹ These various Irish social and political contexts profoundly affected how they negotiated the transition to urban working conditions in the construction industry, the kinds of employment practices in which they engaged, and the social lives and living conditions which they experienced.

2.4. Wider Emigration Contexts

To put the post-war Irish migration into context and dispel some of the myths of exceptionalism associated with Irish migration to Britain, this section looks at how it fits within the broader framework of emigration as both an Irish and European phenomenon. Lee argues that 'Emigration was not unique to Ireland. But the type of emigration, the scale of emigration, and the impact of emigration were. In no other European country was emigration so essential a prerequisite for the preservation of the nature of the [host] society. The interests of the possessing classes came to pivot crucially around emigration.'¹⁶² Akenson applies a different perspective, 'Irish exceptionalism has been too long an unexamined doctrine. Actually, much of what happened in Ireland occurred elsewhere in Europe as well, and most of the things that

¹⁵⁹ This point is further examined in chapter 3 and Appendix B, but examples of entrepreneurs who became notable developers and cultivated political capital from such activities include the Gallagher family, from Sligo, Joe Murphy, John Byrne and Patsy Byrne (unrelated), all from Kerry, Bill Durkan and the McNicholas family, from Mayo and later, in the 1990s, the Mulryan brothers from Roscommon.

¹⁶⁰ Daly, *The Slow Failure*, pp.138-9, p.150, 162.

¹⁶¹ Well-established, wealthy Irish-rooted construction empires in Britain afforded new opportunities for Irish political economy to benefit from British industry. For example in 1968 the Irish economy accrued £48 million from investments in UK industry (*Irish Post*, 13 February, 1970, p.13). Irish-registered construction and development empires flourished on the London property market in 1980s and 1990s. The social mobility and educational advancement of a significant number of Irish migrants working in construction and engineering, and their sons and daughters, created opportunities for advanced entrepreneurial networking. All these factors came to shape Irish state attitudes to its citizens within the British construction, engineering and property industries over time.

¹⁶² J.J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society*, (Cambridge, 1989), p.374.

Irish migrants did were done by other Europeans also'.¹⁶³ Both perspectives are valid, but illuminate different aspects of the migration process.

In the twentieth century, until the outbreak of the First World War, America remained very much the favoured destination for most Irish emigrants but the restrictions placed upon immigration during and after the Great War meant that those leaving Ireland in the 1920s and 30s were compelled to look to Britain as an alternative source of work.¹⁶⁴ Given the political upheavals of the earlier decades and the revolution that unfolded after 1916, the option of Britain – ‘perfidious Albion’- as a destination had potential cultural and political drawbacks for the newly-independent, nationalist Irishman.¹⁶⁵

However, by the end of the 1920s the world was plunged into a global depression as a result of the Wall Street Crash and emigration became for many a matter of survival rather than mere subsistence. Foley’s accounts of migrant workers from the west of Ireland ‘tramping the roads [of midland England] from farm to farm, seeking engagement of any type and surviving as best they could – often by begging – aware that conditions were even worse in Ireland’ reflects the context of economic slump.¹⁶⁶ John Mulroy, from Swinford, County Mayo went to London in 1930 at nineteen years of age and recalls men who couldn’t get work in King’s Cross and who walked, thumbed and worked their way up to Peterborough in a week, looking for agricultural work pulling beet.¹⁶⁷ Such accounts suggest that Cowley’s ‘tramp-navvy’ was more a consequence of the Great Depression than a continuing legacy of the nineteenth-century itinerant engineering navvies.¹⁶⁸ Seasonal migration had, it is true, been a traditional source of income for the Irish agricultural labouring man - the spailpín:¹⁶⁹ to the ‘Green Fields of Canada’, for example; or tattie-hoking in Scotland and the north of England.

Dinny D (b.1925, the oldest of the interviewees), who migrated from The Rosses in

¹⁶³ Donald Harman Akenson, *Ireland, Sweden, and the Great European Migration, 1815-1914* (Liverpool, 2011), p.7.

¹⁶⁴ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.12-15; Daly, *The Slow Failure*, p.140.

¹⁶⁵ Gerard Carruthers, *Literature and Union: Scottish Texts, British Contexts*, (Oxford, 2018) p.99.

¹⁶⁶ Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens*, pp.101.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.101-102

¹⁶⁸ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.83-85.

¹⁶⁹ A Gaelic term for a labouring man. See fn.28, p.5, chapter 1.

north Donegal just after the Second World War explained his migration decision as behaviour learnt from the wider prevailing culture of seasonal itinerancy in Donegal at that time:

Interviewer: Was that kind of seasonal migration?

Dinny: Absolutely – seasonal – go home for the winter – and go to Scotland for the summer. I had members of my family living in Edinburgh; I had 2 sisters married in Edinburgh and I was a young laddie of eighteen, **I was the youngest of a family of eight and the time came to go because there was no employment; it was inevitable that you went if you were able.** [emphasis added] [...] Oh yes [emphatic] - oh, I had two brothers who went to Scotland before me that were older than me and I knew that that was where I was going to go.¹⁷⁰

Seasonal migration, particularly in the west of Ireland remained well into the post-war period; there is evidence that migrants, for example from Mayo and Donegal, were still going to Scotland and northern England for seasonal farm work in the 1950s¹⁷¹ and as late as the early 1960s.¹⁷² Kevin, a migrant builder from Galway, recalls working with such a gang at that time:

Kevin: There was one particular gang I remember, now, and ‘twas all made up of all Mayo men – now I’m talking winter time – and this Mayo gang, first off they’d leave Mayo and go to Scotland – did you know that? They’d do potato-picking in Scotland, then when that finished they’d come down to London and get a job with Tersons full-time on the railway for the winter, then they’d head back Mayo to whatever little bit of a farm they had.

Interviewer: So it was almost seasonal...And was that still going on in the ‘50s?

Kevin: Oh it was yeah. I was in a gang, there was about thirty of us, with Tersons that time, and I’d say there was only about a half-dozen of us that *wasn’t* from Mayo! All the rest of them were older men that came every season in the winter to work before going back for summer.¹⁷³

A proportion of the post-war Irish builders who eventually settled in London – particularly those who were in Britain before the war and migrated from other parts of Britain to London, or those who arrived in the 1940s and 50s - probably followed the *sojourner-itinerant-settler* pathway described in section 1.4.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.25.

¹⁷¹ Jack Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens*, p.131. See also Sarah Goek, ‘Na Spailpíní’, pp.3-4.

¹⁷² Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.115, citing John .A. Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, (London, 1963), p.77

¹⁷³ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.45.

¹⁷⁴ For two relatively good examples of this trajectory, see Reg Hall’s interview with Tommy Healy, the flute

When set against the context of habitual Irish migration over the preceding centuries, the second-wave migration was significant, certainly, in terms of numbers; at its peak exceeding the first-wave (post-Famine) migration to America by some three hundred thousand.¹⁷⁵ Of more significance, however, was Aine Corrigan's observation that 'transnational lifestyles give rise to a new type of sojourning that keeps migrants straddled between host society and homeland in a lifestyle of disembeddedness and increased transience.'¹⁷⁶ Irish migrants builders – especially those who became the backbone of the reconstruction force which remade the metropolis immediately after the Second World War – made great strides economically, socially and culturally both in London and back home in Ireland.

As section 3.4 details, many of the post-war entrepreneurial builders –once they had established a firm financial basis and sufficient surplus capital – made various investments in the Irish economy, contributed to cultural activities in Ireland, established other businesses in their local communities, and became influential in Irish politics. The Gallagher Brothers from Tubbercurry, in Sligo, for example built a bigger empire in Ireland than they had in Britain, but it was their initial success in Britain that facilitated this. Likewise Bill Fuller, John Byrne, Joe Murphy, John Murphy, Patsy Byrne, Bernard McNicholas all had commercial investments, political links and cultural networks, usually with their 'homeplace'. In many cases this was altruistically-driven, though fundamentally all these men were hard-headed capitalists. Many migrants transplanted their regional cultures, recovered and sometimes exceeded (subjectively viewed) their pre-emigration social class, and adapted to life in a global environment whilst maintaining the essential traits of their homeland. Ireland was not geographically far from London, so Corrigan's definition does not resonate, for them, in geographic but in cultural transience; it was the resistance to assimilation and the relentless tension between the new cosmopolitanism of London and the pull of rural fundamentalist culture which shaped the lives of many of these workers.

and fiddle player from Tubbercurry in Co. Sligo, whose experiences were articulated in Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.29, p.560, Goek, 'Na Spailpíní', *supra* and interview with Bernard McNicholas, construction businessman who discusses his father's and grandfather's experiences of seasonal migration leading to itinerant semi-nomadic migration in Holohan, *Working Lives*, p.155.

¹⁷⁵ Walter, Bronwen, 'Time-space patterns of second-wave Irish immigration into British towns' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Vol. 5, (3): 1980, p300.

¹⁷⁶ Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*, p.19.

The second-wave Irish migrations to London should also be contextualised within the broader perspective of the mass movements of peoples across Europe in the wake of the devastation wrought by the Second World War. By comparison to the continental Europeans, their island geographies meant that Britain and Ireland suffered comparatively little physical destruction of property and numerical loss of manpower as a result of war casualties.¹⁷⁷ The rapid recovery of Western Europe – including Britain – after 1945 has often been characterised as an ‘economic miracle’ and was certainly the foremost factor in regenerating the construction market in Britain; in turn, creating the urgent demand for migrant labour.¹⁷⁸ Judt’s monumental work *Postwar* suggests that the European post-war recovery must be viewed socio-economically as an inversion of the insular, nationalist, and Malthusian protectionism of the 1930s.¹⁷⁹ The Marshall Plan hastened a prolonged period of sustained commitment by national states to co-operation, liberalised trade arrangements and public and private infrastructure spending.¹⁸⁰

In terms of the move from agricultural small farmer to city-dweller the Irish emigration experience was by no means unique. Comparatively there were much larger numbers of itinerant workers moving internally on mainland Europe, following the cataclysm of the Second World War. Over 12 million people moved from countryside to cities in Italy, Spain and Sweden in the decades after the war.¹⁸¹ International migrations to feed the post-war economic leviathan were even more significant.¹⁸² In what sounds remarkably like the typical post-war Irish migration narrative, Judt outlines the trajectory of intra-European migrants of

¹⁷⁷ The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report 2014–2015, available online at https://issuu.com/wargravescommission/docs/ar_2014-2015?e=4065448/31764375 (accessed 08 Jan, 2017), p.39. The figure includes estimates of approximately 3,600 to 7,000 Irish Free-State born combatants killed fighting for the Allies. See ‘Roll of honour for Irish WWII dead’, *BBC News*, Thursday, 11 June 2009, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8095110.stm (accessed 8 Jan, 2017).

¹⁷⁸ Barry Eichengreen, ‘Mainsprings of Economic Recovery in post-war Europe’, in Barry Eichengreen, Michael D. Bordo, Forrest Capie (Eds.) *Europe’s Postwar Recovery*, (Cambridge, 1995), p.3.

¹⁷⁹ Judt, *Postwar*, p.325.

¹⁸⁰ Andy Bielenberg, Raymond Ryan, *An Economic History of Ireland Since Independence*, (Abingdon, 2013), pp.16-18.

¹⁸¹ Judt, *Postwar*, p.333.

¹⁸² Italian workers in their thousands were dispatched to the Wallonia mines of Belgium in 1946 and by 1970 7 million Italians had left Italy for economically thriving metropolises in Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland and Britain. By the mid-1960s Greece was losing an average of 117,000 workers per year and from 1961-1974 1.5 million Portuguese left for the northwest of Europe mainly. West Germany, the economic powerhouse of the European recovery, was by the end of the 1960s importing additional labour in the form of strictly temporary ‘Gastarbeiter’ (Guest-workers) from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Tunisia and Morocco. (Source: Judt, *Postwar*, pp.334-5.)

this period:

Like Finnish migrant workers in Sweden, or Irish labourers in Britain, these men—most of them under 25—came in almost every case from poor, rural or mountainous regions. The majority were unskilled (although some accepted 'deskilling' in order to get work). Their earnings in Germany and other northern countries played an important part in sustaining the economies of the regions they had left behind, even as their departure alleviated local competition for jobs and housing. In 1973, the remittances of workers abroad represented 90 percent of Turkish export earnings, 50 percent of export earnings in Greece, Portugal and Yugoslavia. The demographic impact of these population transfers was significant. Although the migrants were officially 'temporary' they had in practice left their homes for good. If they returned, it would only be many years later, to retire.¹⁸³

A distinctive feature of the second-wave Irish migration, in the post-war pan-European context, was its longevity and permanence; Irish migration to London – once triggered by the wartime and early post-war recruitment drives - continued in significant numbers virtually throughout the second half of the twentieth-century. Return migrations became significant in the 1970s and then at the close of this study's timeframe, in the mid-1990s, but otherwise the migration outflows to London were consistently high.¹⁸⁴

Migrants from the Commonwealth, particularly those from the Afro-Caribbean peripheries, the West Indies and Barbados, were encouraged to come to Britain in the immediate post-war period as part of the nation's recovery programme. They became particularly associated with nursing and healthcare, working at various levels within the National Health Service, staffing public transport services and municipal councils in London.¹⁸⁵ Caribbean men were also known to work as builders, mainly in the finishing trades, although they were comparatively low in numbers set against the Irish influx.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless the question of the treatment of Commonwealth migrants of colour is a vitally important context in understanding how the Irish established themselves in multicultural Britain, and

¹⁸³ Judt, *Postwar*, pp.334-5.

¹⁸⁴ Paul Sweeney, ICTU, 'The Irish Experience of Economic Lift Off', Paper presented at *A Colloquium Celebrating Ireland's Presidency of the European Union*, (Montreal, May 2004), Table 1: Net Emigration from Ireland, 1850–2003, p.8. See also for examples, Irish government (*Irish Post*, February 28, 1970, p.11.) and Irish TGWU (Transport and General Workers' Union) campaigns for repatriation, (*Irish Post*, February 28, 1970, p.1.)

¹⁸⁵ Judt, *Postwar*, p.335-6.

¹⁸⁶ Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role?: The United Kingdom 1970-1990*, (Oxford, 2011), p.191.

London especially, in the post-war era.¹⁸⁷ The various migrant communities subsisted within a hierarchical framework of ethnicity which favoured white, English-speaking Irish over other migrant ethnicities – particularly those of colour - without affording them full parity of esteem with the ‘native’ white British.¹⁸⁸

Contextually, whilst Britain, along with Germany, was the first nation to recover economically from the war, benefiting significantly in terms of labour from the continuation of its wartime recruitment arrangements, Ireland’s economy remained in the doldrums triggering decades of chronic emigration. But Ireland was not unique in this; the second-wave Irish migration which largely fuelled Britain’s reconstruction programme should be seen for what it was - one fraction of a much larger and similar pattern of economic migration across the continent of Europe.

2.5. UK and London Contexts

Given the importance of the London construction industry to post-war Irish migrant builders, any meaningful analysis of their working lives requires a contextual backcloth of the history, structure and culture of this industry in national, regional and local terms. So this section considers how the post-war Irish immigrants were positioned within the wider industrial structure and fabric. However, what Powell referred to as the ‘labyrinthine complexity’ of UK construction is a copious field of study in its own right.¹⁸⁹ The primary context in which demand for Irish building labour in twentieth century London flourished is the growth of the construction industry itself driven by the city’s limitless capacity for conurbative expansion, urban spread and regeneration. The development the capital was nothing short of spectacular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the start of the Second World War, shortly before this research begins, London had quadrupled in size from its nineteenth-century area with 860,000 houses built in the interwar period and a population

¹⁸⁷ See section 4.5.

¹⁸⁸ Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era*, (London, 1997), p.109.

¹⁸⁹ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.177. See also supplemental information Part I of Appendix D to this thesis containing a comprehensive guide to the complex history, structure and culture of the UK construction industry, the key points of which have then been used to focus analysis in this section.

of 8,615,000; more than one in five of the population of England and Wales lived in London. The proportion of population in major towns of the UK remained fairly constant at 52% until 1950, then in the post-war building boom, rose from 52% to 71% by 1980.¹⁹⁰ At no point since 1950 has the rural population of the UK exceeded one third of the total. This can be starkly contrasted with Ireland, where at no point in the twentieth-century did urbanisation exceed one-third of UK levels.¹⁹¹

The destruction and chaos of the war is a further crucial context; it changed the face of London forever and, together with a reconfiguration of pre-war plans for London's redevelopment (which had been 'shelved' as a result of the war), helped create the market to which the post-war Irish builders gravitated in significant numbers. Sir Ian Kershaw suggests that in many ways 1945 - which marked the start of re-building - was in effect 'year zero' in a new historical epoch.¹⁹² The destruction and desolation caused to London residents and businesses by the Luftwaffe during the Blitz left vast swathes of the old City of London and the wider suburbs, especially along the eastern stretches of the Thames Corridor where the vital London docks were situated, uninhabitable.¹⁹³ White described 'desolation on a Pompeian scale [which] had obliterated much of the City's medieval street pattern and wiped away its tightly-packed Victorian offices and warehouses'.¹⁹⁴ The new London was not, however a facsimile of the old. As Jerry White confirms, 'It was not until the 1950s that the twentieth century firmly began to impose its will on the recalcitrant legacy of the nineteenth. In the process it made its own version of London'.¹⁹⁵ The post-war Irish community, numbering 111,671 by 1951 and by far the largest immigrant community in the city, took a significant part in that process.¹⁹⁶

By the start of the Second World War a number of highly successful British main contractors were operating in London and had established reputations for the successful

¹⁹⁰ See Table 8.1, 'Urbanisation levels in European Countries, 1920-1980, in Béla Tomka, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe*, (London, 2013), p.314.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² *Out of the ashes: Europe's rebirth after WW2, 1945-1949*, The 2015 Raleigh Lecture on History, University of Cambridge, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPvU5FY5kOo> (accessed 9th October, 2015).

¹⁹³ See also Appendix D, pp.19-22.

¹⁹⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.42.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁹⁶ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.89.

delivery of major infrastructure, commercial and housing projects. The most prominent of these were: Robert and Alfred McAlpine (two separate businesses), Taylor Woodrow, John Laing, George Wimpey, John Mowlem, Richard Costain, Balfour Beatty and Cementation. All these firms, together with a further number of major and medium-sized main contractors were known to be employing significant numbers of Irish migrant builders in 1941.¹⁹⁷ Taylor Woodrow, for example, had an unauthorised agent named Dwyer operating in Mayo in 1942 who recruited one thousand men, allegedly complete with their own priest, for a major Ministry of Works project, bringing them in via Liverpool port.¹⁹⁸

Moreover by then, there were at least two well-established main contracting businesses founded by interwar Irish migrants working in and around London; M.J. Gleeson (Galway) and Fitzpatrick (Cork). The Gallagher brothers (Sligo) who went on to found the Abbey dynasty were working as farm labourers before the outbreak of the war, and began their entrepreneurial activities because of the demand created by it. The interwar period and the early years of the Second World War also saw a number of the legendary names of the post-war Irish business community following a similar pathway: John Murphy, Bill Fuller, John Byrne, Michael and Patrick McNicholas, Michael J Clancy and Pateen Lowery were all struggling migrant workers based across north London with pretensions to greater things at this time. All would go on to achieve considerable wealth and influence in Britain and in their native homes.¹⁹⁹

Another highly significant context which shaped the fortunes of the post-war Irish builder was the organizational changes which the UK construction industry underwent in the decades after the war. Decasualisation of labour resources was the main feature affecting Irish migrants; this began to change as soon as the result of the war became obvious; the National Joint Council for the Building Industry adopting new National Working Rules in April 1945.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ See Home office Communique ref: Gen.203/6/390 dated 21st November, 1941., NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/535. This is a critical piece of documentary evidence in the history of the post-war migrant builders because it establishes that each of the major British construction companies listed employed Irish migrant labour in sufficient numbers, by December 1941, to justify their being authorised to issue Leave Certificates without recourse to further governmental bureaucracy and governance.

¹⁹⁸ Alan Jenkins, *On Site 1921-71*, (London, 1971), p.138, cited in Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.115. Notably this was in breach of the agreements (to which Taylor Woodrow were participants) which had been reached between Ministry of Labour / FCEC and the Irish Government in 1941, see Section 3.2.

¹⁹⁹ See section 3.4 and supplemental Corporate Histories – Appendix B.

²⁰⁰ *The Builder*, 20 April, 1945, p.356.

In the three decades following the war the industry fragmented significantly and this proved an important stimulus to the growth of small business enterprises as a peculiar feature of the London regional construction market and a key determinant in migrant Irish entrepreneurs entering.²⁰¹ The dominant change in process which most influenced the fortunes of the mail-boat builders was the rise of subcontracting. It was particularly suited to the post-war Irish migrant entrepreneurs and many of the working men themselves. Many acquiesced willingly in its operation even at the lowest levels of the construction hierarchy. Self-employment and small-scale subcontracting was a means of maximising short-term earnings potential whilst maintaining personal anonymity, minimising exposure to the civic, fiscal and legal obligations of formal British citizenship and offering entrepreneurial opportunism. Moreover, ‘lump’/labour-only subcontracting (also termed industry-wide as LOSC) in the 1950s enabled many to avoid the National Service Acts, and later to circumvent the construction industry tax compliance schemes in various ways. Whilst these may have been seen – especially by young, unsettled Irish migrant builders – as positive features of LOSC, both from an individual and an industry-wide basis, there were a number of negatives.

Both Thiel and Clarke *et al* have highlighted diminutions across the UK construction industry in the social value of craft labour, the stability of employment, the quality of work, the productive outputs and the apprenticeship and training opportunities which the subcontract system leads to.²⁰² It was a widely-held view amongst the post-war skilled workers in construction that subcontracting equated to de-skilling and would result in sub-standard construction work. One site production manager who, after a 56-year career with John Laing (one of the most highly reputed contractors in the UK throughout the twentieth century and a significant employer of Irish migrant labour) was asked about the biggest changes during his long career ‘recalled the end of the 70s when the company began to use sub-contractors instead of people of its own’.²⁰³ However, probably the most important feature of the subcontracting

²⁰¹ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry under Professor E. H. Phelps Brown into Certain Matters concerning Labour in Building and Civil Engineering*, Cmnd 3714, (1968) available at UK Parliamentary Archives, . Catalogue Reference: HL/PO/JO/10/11/1459/1554, (Hereinafter ‘*Phelps Brown*’), pp.111-23. See also Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.143.

²⁰² Thiel, *Builders*, pp.12-13; Linda Clarke, Christine Wall, ‘Findings: A Summary of Report entitled: Skills and the construction process: A comparative study of vocational training and quality’ in *Housing Research*, Issue 172, (March, 1996), pp.1-4.

²⁰³ *Retired Employees News (REN)*, John Laing Charitable Trust, spring 2014 edition, p.5.

system, from the viewpoint of the Irish migrant builder, was that the further down the contractual chain a subcontractor operated, the less visible they were within the wider purview of state regulatory authorities, or indeed the employers or main contractors on large projects.

There were two immediate and critical tasks facing the UK in 1945; the orderly transition from a wartime command economy to a peacetime mixed economy, and the replenishment of housing stock. In July 1945 an administration led by Clement Attlee won a huge majority in the first post-war election on a manifesto which promised the creation of the Welfare State and significant public intervention in the capitalist economy.²⁰⁴ A radical programme of nationalisation included health and welfare services, and state ownership of the major utilities.²⁰⁵ Manpower was critical to the replenishment of housing stock and delivery of the New Towns Programme and Irish migrant builders largely fulfilled that demand.²⁰⁶ The *Contract Journal*, for example, in February 1955 reported on the progress of Crawley New Town, being constructed at that time by the Crawley Development Corporation. By then it had completed six planned neighbourhoods and had just contracted with Wimpey (one of the key British employers of Irish construction labour) for the infrastructure, roads, sewers and site works for another two of the planned nine neighbourhoods.²⁰⁷

Irish migrant builders were often heavily involved in constructing these new town projects from the ‘turning of the first sod’.²⁰⁸ Examples include Tom M (OI#1) (involved in housing projects in Stevenage),²⁰⁹ Michael H (ditto: Crawley),²¹⁰ and Paddy B (ditto: Harlow, Stevenage, Welwyn Garden City, Baldock)²¹¹ amongst many others. Irish migrant labour also benefited from the construction of these new towns because they were given options (sometimes discounted) to rent or purchase properties. In the case of Stevenage, in

²⁰⁴ Martin Chick, *Industrial Policy in Britain 1945-1951: Economic Planning, Nationalisation and the Labour Governments*, (Cambridge, 2002), p.1.

²⁰⁵ Chris Rhodes *et al*, ‘Privatisation’, Research Paper 14/61, House of Commons Library, (20 November, 2014), p.2, available at <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/case-study/privatisation-uk-companies-1970s/> (accessed 13 March, 2019).

²⁰⁶ *Contract Journal*, 26 December, 1951, p.2415. See also Appendix D.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 23rd February, 1955, p.935.

²⁰⁸ Wall C., Clarke L., McGuire C., and Muñoz-Rojas O. (ProBE), *Building a Community: Construction Workers in Stevenage 1950-1970*, (London, 2012b), p.9.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p19.

²¹⁰ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.86.

²¹¹ Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sep. 2016), Appendix A, pp.237-9.

Hertfordshire, the Irish settled in their hundreds into new suburban living; to some extent this demonstrates the diversity of experience, subverting the stereotype of the ethnic clustering in north and west London and indicating a modicum of Irish social mobility at a relatively early stage of settlement. Certainly the evidence of English workers recounting the Irish settlers in Stevenage shows none of the signs of ethnic or sectarian tensions experienced earlier in the post-war period.²¹²

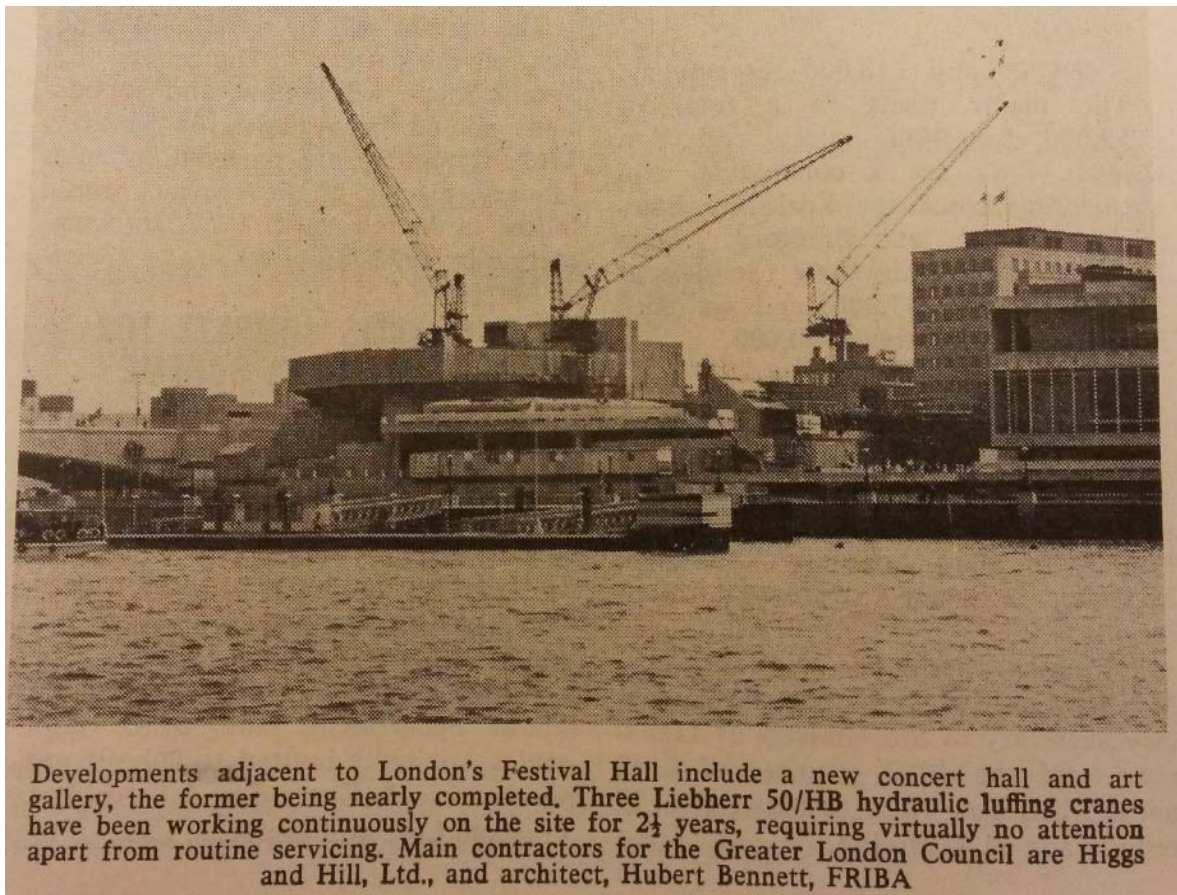


Figure 2.5 - Southbank Project, 1966 (Source: *Contract Journal*, 23 July, 1966, p.420)

Public sector infrastructure work was also promulgated in the inner London area by central government departments, especially during and immediately after the war by the Ministry of Works and its successor bodies.²¹³ Significant long-term contracts were secured by fledgling Irish firms Murphy, McNicholas, Clancy, Lowery and the like in the 1950s and

²¹² Wall et al, *Building a Community: Construction Workers in Stevenage 1950-1970*, p.4,9. See also Mclvor, *Working Lives*, p.119 and section 5.6.

²¹³ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.143.

1960s through these public-sector procurement channels, allowing them to establish firm financial and reputational foundations as reliable subcontractors.²¹⁴ The totem for Britain's post-war economic revival was the highly Modernist and New-Brutalist South Bank Project, (Figure 2.5) which included the Royal Festival Hall, opened as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951.²¹⁵ To the LCC planners, this landmark project represented the functional coupling of technocratic design, advancing construction technologies and political vision in an aspirational 'brave new world' of machine-aesthetic architecture.²¹⁶ To the skilled and semi-skilled labour who worked on the project – many of whom were migrant Irish builders - it meant sometimes difficult and dangerous conditions. Dubliner Brian Behan, brother of Brendan and also a writer, worked on the Festival of Britain project in 1951 and again in 1959, and characterised the project from the labouring man's viewpoint: 'Here on the South Bank of the Thames at Waterloo, Mac's men wrestled and fought with that great bear earth while sergeant death stretched his fingers round every throat. Four men died before that silly roof was stuck on, like a clown's hat on top of a grizzly bear's head.'²¹⁷

The acceleration of growth in public-sector construction also stimulated private-sector activity. The first and most visible sign of this was the redevelopment of large bomb-damaged sites in London. Irish migrant entrepreneurs of the calibre of John Byrne and Bill Fuller – school classmates from north Kerry – made their initial fortunes in precisely this way. Fuller 'assembled 600 Irish labourers and thrived during and immediately after the war from demolishing damaged buildings in Stepney and Islington, where it was said "what Hitler didn't knock down Fuller did"'.²¹⁸ John Byrne, though less high-profile at the time, was likewise said to have made his initial fortune in redeveloping bomb-damaged sites and selling them on to NCP (National Car Parking Ltd), who became the prime post-war developer of central London multi-storey car parking.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ See chapter 3 and Appendix B for further details.

²¹⁵ Esher, *A Broken Wave*, pp.108-111.

²¹⁶ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.46-47 ; Esher, *A Broken Wave*, pp.108-111.

²¹⁷ Brian Behan, *With Breast Expanded*, (London, 1991), p.162.

²¹⁸ Clavin, 'Biography of Fuller, Bill (William)' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography, online ed.*, (accessed 3 March, 2017). See also Ann Scanlon, Bill Fuller, Obituary, in *The Guardian*, (9 September, 2008).

²¹⁹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p15. See also Kelly Geeson, *The history of National Car Parks : From rubble to a financial bubble*, available on Property Forum Website, (9 October, 2008), available at <https://www.propertyforum.com/property-in-the-uk/35-the-story-of-national-car-parks.html> (accessed 16 March, 2019).

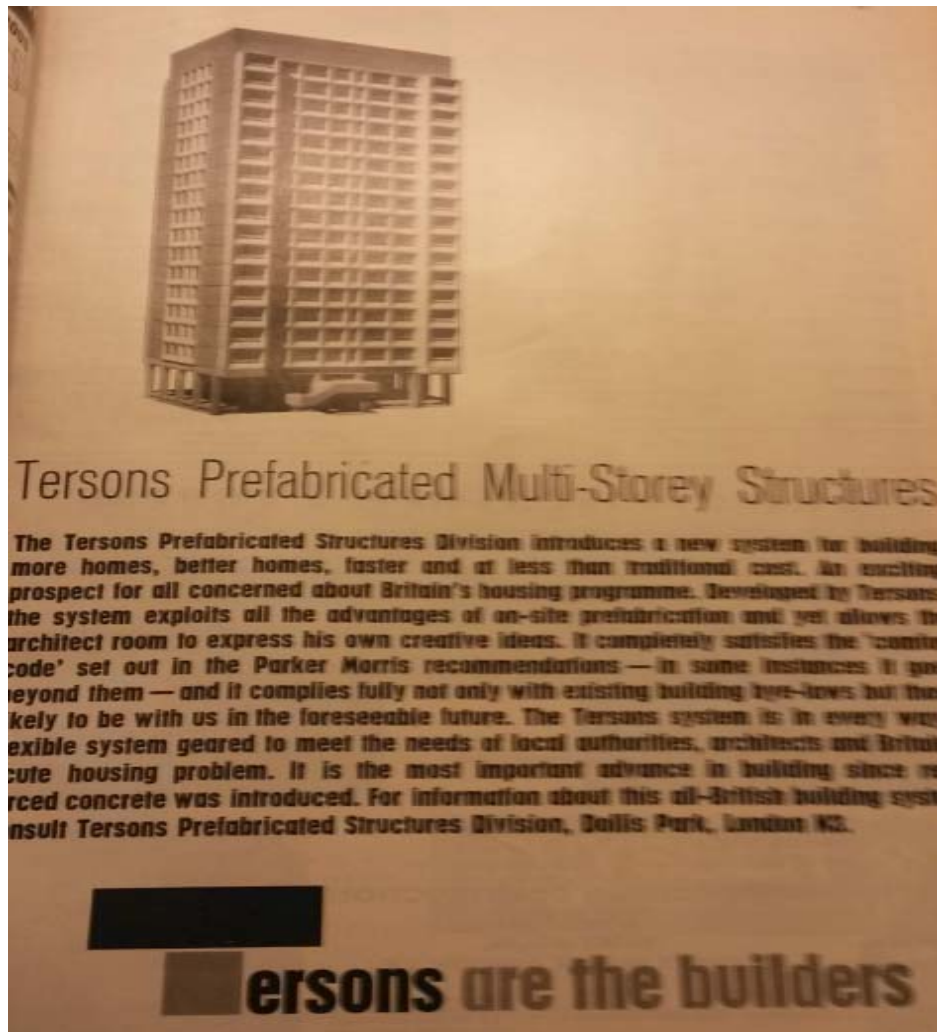


Figure 2.6 - Advertisement for Tersons Multi-storey system building.
 (Source: *Contract Journal*, January, 1964, p.181)

The change in design and technology within the architectural profession was yet another contextual change benefitting Irish migrant builders particularly. The era of residential tower blocks emerged as a solution to the social housing crisis and was brought about by the combination of offsite prefabrication, system building and Brutalist architecture. The construction of these ‘skyscrapers’ was pioneered by contractors such as Tersons (Figure 2.6), whose head office was in Dollis Park in north-west London, right in the heart of the mail-boat generation’s primary London settlement area. Tersons was a substantial employer of Irish migrant labour both directly and through the subcontract system at this time.²²⁰

²²⁰ Wall et al, *Building a Community: Construction Workers in Stevenage 1950-1970*, p.4.9. See also Mclvor, *Working Lives*, p.6, 13, 32. See also Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.47-48, Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, pp.155-156.

By the end of the 1960s self-employment and subcontracting firms were increasing, in what was essentially a reversal of the nineteenth century trend towards integration. The construction industry was becoming significantly fragmented by this trend creating ample opportunities for small businesses with unfettered access to ethnic labour markets and social capital. Irish migrant entrepreneurs were beneficiaries of this fortuitous coincidence of labour law deregulation and the economic competitive advantage engendered by the interplay of production and consumption which unfolded in the post-war decades.²²¹

The 1970s and 1980s saw a general trend of cyclical slumps in UK construction activity, with both global and UK domestic political crises hampering growth. In the context of Irish migrant labour, and the by now well-established ethnic community of builders in London, this remained a reasonably stable period of growth. Companies such as Murphy, McNicholas, Carey, Clancy, Byrne, O’Keefe, O’Rourke became familiar names in London construction during this period, largely because their workload focused in essential civil infrastructure, road and rail works, heavy civil engineering and concrete superstructure.²²² In terms of Irish migrant labour it is notable that this period coincided with the return of net immigration from Britain to Ireland, which, in the 1970s reached 104,000, reflecting at least to some extent the dire state of the UK economy at the time.²²³ Construction activity recovered to a new peak in 1990. This was precipitated mainly as a result of renewed economic confidence in the Thatcher administration which assumed power in 1979 and preemptorily rejected the post-war consensus of Keynesian economic policy in favour of neo-liberal orthodoxy. Massive privatisation and denationalisation marked a total reversal of the preceding four decades of public spending on construction activity.²²⁴ From 1990 until the end of our periodisation in 1995, the construction industry in London struggled with difficult trading conditions. In 1994, the industry saw an upsurge in activity, with contract awards in the first quarter up 50% on the previous year.²²⁵ Notably the April edition of *Building* tabled the top 30 wealthiest UK builders – three of whom:

²²¹ Andrew Tallon, *Urban Regeneration in the UK*, (Abingdon, 2006), pp.223-225.

²²² See Appendix B, in particular tables 1 and 2, pp.6-14.

²²³ Paul Sweeney, ICTU, 'The Irish Experience of Economic Lift Off', Paper presented at A Colloquium Celebrating Ireland's Presidency of the European Union, (Montreal, May 2004), Table 1: Net Emigration from Ireland, 1850–2003, p.8.

²²⁴ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, pp.192-193.

²²⁵ *Building*, 15 April, 1994, p.27.

John Murphy, Ray O'Rourke and JJ Gallagher were all post-war migrant entrepreneurs from Kerry, Mayo and Donegal respectively.

Flagship projects upon which Irish migrant labour honed its stereotypical image over the post-war decades included the Festival of Britain Southbank project (1951),²²⁶ the Barbican Development (1962-1982),²²⁷ the Victoria Line underground railway (1964-1969),²²⁸ St. Katherine's Dock development (1969-1973),²²⁹ the Thames Flood Barrier (1974-1984),²³⁰ the construction of the M25 London Orbital Motorway (1973-1986), the expansion of airport construction at Heathrow, Gatwick, London City Airport and Stanstead, Broadgate (1985-present),²³¹ London Docklands redevelopments (1982-1998)²³² and the Jubilee Line project (Phase 1 Fleet Line, 1971-1979, phase 2 – JLE, 1993-1999).²³³ These were the major capital projects which included substantial levels of Irish migrant labour, employed predominantly via the subcontract system.²³⁴ Irish migrant labour undertook front-end activities such as groundworks, site preparation, substructure concrete works, structural concrete frames, insitu steel reinforcement and major drainage, pipelines and cabling works, typically in isolation from other trades and specialist building activities which followed. This accounted, in some regards, for the undeserved reputation of Irish migrant builders as simply 'heavy diggers'.²³⁵

Another very significant contextual change for Irish builders in post-war Britain was the rise of private owner-occupation, particularly during the Thatcher era from 1979 onwards. Some post-war migrant Irish builders established significant reputations in the private-sector residential housing markets. Three such examples are: M.J. Gleeson (originally from Coolmore, Co Galway) – who built the Nonsuch Park estate in Surrey (the former Royal estate

²²⁶ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.46-47.

²²⁷ Wall C., Clarke L., McGuire C., and Muñoz-Rojas O. (ProBE), *Building the Barbican 1962-1982: taking the industry out of the dark ages*, London, 2012d).

²²⁸ 'Building London's Victoria Line', Documentary film *Yesterday's Britain Series*, Nr. 29, (Crowborough, 2002), available at <http://www.eavb.co.uk> (accessed 18 March, 2019).

²²⁹ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.77.

²³⁰ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.12-14.

²³¹ 'Our Journey' available at <http://www.broadgate.co.uk/about/ourjourney> (accessed 18 March, 2019).

²³² White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.77-78.

²³³ *Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) Project Profile Report*, OMEGA Centre, University College London, (London, 2009), Part D.

²³⁴ See Appendix D for supplemental details.

²³⁵ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.227-228.

founded by Henry VIII and one of the private housing developments which helped create suburban London in the mid-twentieth century);²³⁶ Abbey Group (the Gallagher family, from Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo) – who by the time of their flotation on the Irish Stock Exchange in 1973 were building around 1000 houses per annum in Britain and had a land bank in excess of £10 million (sufficient to construct over 3,000 further homes in the years following), a figure which rose to £46 million in 1980, making Abbey the 19th largest housebuilder in Britain;²³⁷ and Martin Grant, a carpenter from Tipperary who, by the mid-1970s was building award-winning speculative private housing estates of c.500 houses such as Merrow Park, in Surrey.²³⁸ In later decades some Irish migrant construction businesses began to diversify into specialist areas of contracting and the building services engineering sector in small measure.

2.6. Conclusion

The definition and quantification of post-war Irish builders in London, as set out in section 2.2 above, is essential context in understanding the history of this unique group of migrants. It has situated the community of migrant Irish construction workers amongst the wider Irish diaspora in Britain, and amongst the construction and engineering industries. The approach is novel; no such methodological approach has been taken in the existing literature on the subject. The key conclusion is an average cohort size across the post-war period (up to 1995) of 102,150; not insignificant as a workforce by any objective standard. The analysis also categorises the various strands of immigrant labour which combined from other groups, gangs and projects to settle in London from the 1940s onwards, initially to assist in the war effort and later to rebuild the shattered ruins of London. I have also set out comprehensive statistical data

²³⁶ Appendix B, p.11, see also Museum Curator, 'When the Railway came to Epsom and Ewell.' In Epsom and Ewell Local and Family History Centre Newsletter, Issue No.23, (January, 2010), p.1. available at <http://www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/NewsletterJan2010Web.pdf> (accessed 18 May, 2018).²³⁷

Irish Press Newspaper, 13 February, 1973, p.10; Michael Ball, *Housing Policy and Economic Power: The Political Economy of Owner Occupation*, (Abingdon, 2003), pp.61-66 & Table 3.4.

²³⁸ 'Our History' at <https://www.martingranthomes.co.uk/about-us/our-history/> (accessed 9 June, 218). See also Merrow Residents' Association's Response to the Guildford Borough Proposed Submission Local Plan, available at <http://www.merrowresidents.org.uk/planning/MRA%20Response1.pdf> accessed 9 June, 218), p.1.

relating to the interviewees, which largely corroborates the generalisations drawn from the cohort estimate.

The chapter then contextualises the post-war Irish migrants by reference to their place of origin, rural Ireland, and shows how their roots in a newly-independent, post-colonial environment, with all the concomitant political, socio-economic and cultural experiences shaped their relationship to Irish identity and emigration. The absence of industrialisation and urbanisation – caused by a toxic combination of post-colonial stasis, economic autarky and an ideological attachment to rural fundamentalist, *petit-bourgeois* principles - was, I would contend, the primary reason for independent Ireland's inability to sustain employment for its citizens, and consequently for the post-war emigration problem. Paradoxically, those very conditions of rural fundamentalism, frugality and hardship equipped many of the migrant builders to deal with the class and occupational changes experienced on emigration to London; enabling them to cope with the casualised, cash-based commercial world of the post-war shadow economy and the often brutal industrial environment.

Examining the post-war migrations as they relate to the broader spectrum of Irish migratory history, seasonal agricultural migrations and the nineteenth-century navy traditions allows them to be placed in their proper context in historical terms. Comparison with the wider transnational movements of people across continental Europe adds additional perspective to the story. In the wake of the Second World War the working experiences and life-trajectories of these predominantly western Irish rural migrant builders was in some ways similar to that of migrants from the economic peripheries of Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Yugoslavia. They were all 'guest-workers' whose sojourns often ended in permanent – or certainly much-prolonged – settlement in their adoptive countries.

Finally, contextualising London as a metropolis, the level of destruction it suffered during the war and the resultant resurgence of plans for redevelopment and expansion provides a sense of the enormity of the rebuilding process, highlighting the necessity for the significant volume of migrant construction labour. Further context is given for the British construction industry and the post-war recovery and regeneration programme. Construction labour was almost exclusively male and employed by an industry with its own history, character and

regional idiosyncrasies; these have been highlighted and discussed. The structural organisation of the industry – particularly its use of subcontracting – is paramount in the story of how Irish builders came to exert so much influence on the London construction market, particularly in the later decades of the twentieth century. By looking in detail at each of these contexts, the groundwork has been laid to examine in greater detail the lived working experiences of this cohort; chapters three and four undertake that examination.

Chapter 3.

‘The broad-backed sons of Ireland come to Rebuild London Town’¹

3.1. Introduction

Having previously defined, empirically quantified, and contextualised the post-war migrant Irish builders, chapters three and four take a more in-depth look at their occupational lives; *what* they did, and *how* they did it. This chapter looks at *what* they did; the breadth and detail of the reconstruction process in which these men participated. Because, as outlined in chapter 2.2, many men working on London’s post-war reconstruction had come in the 1920s and 1930s, from seasonal and peripatetic spailpín work in north and central Britain, I start by looking at what initially drew them to the city and how they began to form distinct Irish settlements, particularly around Camden Town and Cricklewood. Focus then turns to how those fledgling settlements were enlarged and expanded by the British government’s 1941-1946 wartime Group Recruitment Schemes and how a post-war flood of chain migrants eventually saw construction workers forming settled migrant Irish communities during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

The reconstruction process is periodised; sub-section 3.2 deals with the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and 3.3 covers the last three decades of the post-war period, the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Additional granular detail is provided, showing the immense volume of construction and civil-engineering projects and the labour demand created by London’s inter-war and post-war redevelopment, to assist understanding settlement patterns and the lived working experiences of these men.² Irish construction workers’ preoccupation with heavy civil-engineering and structural concrete gradually led to permanent settlement across (predominantly north) London. Post-war trends in architecture and planning, particularly the

¹ Refrain from Kevin Burke, *London Town*, unpublished song co-written in collaboration with Cal Scott, see *inter alia*, ‘A virtuoso with the soul of Ireland’ in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 15, 2014, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/a-virtuoso-with-the-soul-of-ireland-20140514-38a26.htm> (Date accessed: 05 April, 2016).

² The granular detail of London’s redevelopment is a crucial corollary to the narrative of lived experience, providing further evidence of enormous range and types of construction and civil-engineering projects available to post-war migrant Irish builders worked. Appendix D therefore supplements this chapter.

rise of Brutalist architecture, concrete as a dominant superstructural and envelope material, working skills and methods which modernity – and particularly the war effort – demanded, and Ireland’s continued role as an emigrant nursery for British construction labour all were all contributory factors.³ The resultant clustering of migrant communities in London and the effects of socio-economic networks amongst the migrant community, are all examined in turn. The final section of analysis, sub-section 3.4, deals specifically with the phenomenon of Irish entrepreneurial activity and the crucial rise of what became colloquially known as ‘the Irish Subbie’.⁴ Entrepreneurship amongst the Irish working-class in London is analysed statistically and thematically.⁵

So why did Britain - and London, especially - exercise such an irresistible ‘pull’ on the Irish rural farming male in the post-war period? The most significant factor in this period was, of course, the post-war economic ‘miracle’ – or as the British preferred to call it, the ‘Golden Age’ - which created a sustained demand for paid employment in an urbanised industrial environment within comparatively easy commute of rural Ireland.⁶ As so often before, Ireland had what Britain needed; a surplus of young, fit and healthy, physically-able labour. The extant communal infrastructure of the first-wave migrations (which settled mainly in east London after the Famine and continued more-or-less until the First World War) was in decline by the end of World War Two. Subsequent London-born generations integrated into the host community as largely hybrid east-end (cockney) Roman Catholics and over subsequent generations became less obviously identifiable as an ethnically-separate group.⁷

From the 1940s onwards a new London-centric Irish occupational enclave began to emerge as settlement increased amongst formerly semi-nomadic migrant construction workers, emanating from the north London boroughs. Within this new community a complex web of social, business and cultural networks emerged and initiated a new ethnically-Irish labour-exchange market. The new ‘Irish-in-London’ utilised, where practicable, some remnants of the first-wave ‘London-Irish’ infrastructure, but as is shown in chapter 4, this was limited mainly

³ Jim Mac Laughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, (Cork, 1994), pp.27-8.

⁴ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.150.

⁵ Appendix B provides a further important supplement to this section, containing more detailed biographical and statistical data, tables and information drawn from a wide variety of primary sources.

⁶ Marc Levinson, *An Extraordinary Time: The End of the Postwar Boom and the Return of the Ordinary Economy*, (London, 2016), p.16

⁷ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.ii-iii.

to social and cultural infrastructure, rather than economic and work-related. The oral histories collected for this research point incontrovertibly to the operation of this community and its associated networks providing the primary source of initial, and often continuing employment for the majority of the post-war migrant Irish builders. That said, the earliest post-war migrants could not avail of fully-operational networks to the same extent as those who came in the later decades; indeed it was they who developed these networks.

The logical starting point for examining this labour-exchange market is to look first at migrant Irish employment during and after the war. Many of the early migrants worked directly for major well-established British contractors such as Sir Robert McAlpine, John Laing and George Wimpey because the Irish entrepreneurial subcontract market did not begin to fully develop until the mid-1950s. Some – particularly McAlpine - had employed Irish migrant labour in substantial numbers as far back as the mid-nineteenth century and had an established pattern of migrant employment and an accompanying network of recruitment agents in Ireland in the interwar period.⁸ Cowley's description of the position of Irish male migrants in the British construction and civil engineering world at the end of the 1940s serves as a helpful framework around which to begin to analyse the life experiences of this cohort of migrant labour:

...the Irish 'subbie' was not yet an industry phenomenon, but many of those who were only finding their way, as humble navvies, were indeed, as Bernard McNicholas put it, 'weighing up the situation' [...] The three most distinct Irish elements in the industry were, however, already in place – the steady solid 'company men', mainly employees of reputable building firms on housing contracts, from which they went home to good digs each evening after work; the new breed of 'long-distance men', who went exclusively for the big money on remote civil-engineering projects such as dams and power stations, where accommodation was mainly in camps and there was nothing to do but work and save; and the 'lumpers' who worked for labour-only subcontractors, per paid cash day [sic] and drank it each night, and had no National Insurance stamps and little or no involvement with the Revenue Commissioners [sic].⁹

⁸ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.112-116, Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.11, 55, 59, 66, 74. 102, Catherine Dunne, *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London*, (Dublin, 2003), pp.115-6.

⁹ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.150. The reference to Revenue Commissioners is misleading; the tax-collecting agency of the British government throughout the twentieth century was the Inland Revenue.

However, Cowley's analysis does not highlight the mercurial and peripatetic nature of construction work which meant that the divisions between these categories were actually highly porous. Many Irish migrant males moved freely from long-distance man to 'lump' worker to company man and, occasionally, back again either through necessity or choice. Tommy Healy and Edmond Murphy, for example, both arrived during the war, Tommy as an agricultural labourer in Gloucestershire and Edmond as part of the post 1941 war-works recruitment, working on airbase constructions in East Anglia. Tommy graduated to long-distance railway work and later ended up in London working as, amongst other things, a carpenter. Edmond ran a successful civil engineering subcontractor business.¹⁰ The period during immediately and after the War tended to see more transience and itinerancy because of the precarious social and legal status of immigrant workers, and the instability of British society and industry itself; both still recovering from the trauma of the conflict.

As the economy recovered, in the 1950s, movement between these employment categories persisted but lessened, in inverse proportionality to permanent settlement patterns. Kevin H, (OI#3), Paddy B, (OI#12) and John P, (OI#13), who all arrived in the late 1940s/early 1950s, all spent time as casual long-distance men, then settled into permanent employment with large British main-contractors and eventually operated as subcontractors in their own right, albeit on a small scale.¹¹ Tom M, (OI#1) started his working life in late-1950s London as a company man in a glazing factory, moved to casual employment as a 'lumper' on out-of-town drainage and gas works, gradually became a 'regular casual' then subsequently became a company man again, working direct for the Kerry developer, John Byrne. Later he worked as a self-employed subcontractor for a number of medium-sized British contractors. His career trajectory was quite typical.¹² Transition within and between these types of employment was, generally-speaking, an age-related process reflecting technical ability, manual dexterity and physical utility, pay rates, domestic and familial arrangements, locational mobility and willingness to travel.

¹⁰ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.560-1, 598. See also Reg Hall, "It was Great Altogether!", liner notes booklet accompanying CD Publication *The Continuing Tradition of Irish Music in London*, The Voice of the People Series, Topic Records, (London, 2015), pp.9-10.

¹¹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), pp.37-54; Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), pp.226-260; Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), pp.261-284, all in Appendix A.

¹² Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.1-24.

Locating the migrant Irish worker within specific sectors of British building and construction is not a simple process. There is much anecdotal evidence via primary and secondary source evidence linking Irish migrant builders to certain companies, both established British and ‘new’ Irish: site stories, newspaper and trade journal references; doggerel verse and working-song culture point to substantial employment of Irish migrants by the largest of the established nineteenth and twentieth-century British construction conglomerates. Dominic Behan’s repertoire of working songs,¹³ for example, references various British building and civil engineering contractors as do Cowley and Garcia, although citation of sources is limited and erratic.¹⁴

The wartime Home Office Communique dated 21st November, 1941 is critical evidence in locating the migrant Irish within the British construction industry.¹⁵ It demonstrates unequivocally that - both during and after the war - the major British construction companies listed were employing Irish migrant labour in significant numbers. These companies and their London locations are set out in Table 3.11, and as can be seen, include all the major British companies later associated with Irish migrant labour and subcontractors:

Table 3.1 - Major British Construction Companies licensed to issue Leave Certificates for Irish migrant workers 1941-1946

Company Name	Head Office (1941)	Notes / Relevance etc
Sir Robert McAlpine	Park Lane, London, W	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Scottish roots
Sir Alfred McAlpine	Water Street, Liverpool.	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - brother of R McAlpine - Scottish roots
John Laing Construction	Mill Hill, London, NW7	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Cumbrian roots
Taylor Woodrow	Ruislip Road, Southall, Middx.	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Lancashire roots
Bernard Sunley	Park Lane, London, W	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Scottish roots
Mitchell Construction	London / Peterborough	Major Civil Engineering Contractors esp. tunnelling projects
George Wimpey & Co. Ltd	Denham, Uxbridge, Middx.	Major contractor - building and civil engineering.

¹³ Chapter 5 deals with the Irish working-song culture of the post-war era.

¹⁴ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, Multiple references, (e.g. p. 11, 99-100, 125, 204, 221, 245, 261), Miki Garcia, *Rebuilding London: Irish Migrants in Post-war Britain*, (Dublin, 2015), pp.74-87.

¹⁵ NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/535/Gen.203/6/390, unpaginated file of loose papers. By December 1941, Irish migrants were employed by all these companies in sufficient numbers to justify their authorisation to issue Christmas Leave Certificates internally, without recourse to normal governmental bureaucracy and local police procedures. This document is also discussed later in its main context of the British Government Group Recruitment Schemes for war works instigated in 1941.

Company Name	Head Office (1941)	Notes / Relevance etc
A Monk & Co.	Padgate, Warrington, Lancs	Civil Engineering Contractors
William Townson & Sons Ltd	Bolton, Lancs & Holborn, London WC	Builders, Contractors, Timber Merchants, &c.
Johnston Brothers Contractors Ltd	Minories, London EC	General building contractor in/around central London
Constable Hart & Co	Westminster, London, SW1 & Birmingham	Major Road surfacing contractor founded in pre-WW1 roadbuilding boom
Lehane McKenzie and Shand	Shand House, Derby	Major civil engineering contractor - Scottish roots
M.J. Gleeson	London Road, North Cheam, Surrey.	Ethnically-Irish major building & civil engineering contractor. ¹⁶
W & C French Ltd	Buckhurst Hill, Essex	Major civil engineering contractor - Essex roots
Christiani & Neilson	Victoria Street, London SW1	Major civil engineering contractor - Danish roots
Shellabear & Price	Staines, Middx.	Bulk earth-moving contractors & plant hire contractors
C Bryant & Sons Ltd	Small Heath, Birmingham	Housebuilders & general contractors - expanded nationwide post WW2
Hadsphaltic Construction Ltd	Minories, London EC	Major Road surfacing contractor founded in 1924
Higgs & Hill Ltd	South Lambeth Rd, London, SW8	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - London roots
Cementation Co. Ltd	Victoria Street, London SW1	Major civil engineering contractor - Grouting specialists - Doncaster roots
Richard Costain Ltd	Walton-on-Hill, Surrey	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Manx roots
Ashford Builders Co Ltd	Bloomsbury Place, London, WC1	General building contractor in/around central London
Haymills Contractors Ltd	Hangar Lane, Western Avenue, London, W5	General building contractor - East Anglian roots
Dorman Long & Co	Grosvenor Gardens, London, SW1	Engineering & Bridge building contractor - Middlesborough roots
Howard Farrow Ltd	Golders Green, London NW	General building contractor in/around central/north London
Sir Lindsay Parkinson & Co Ltd	Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2	Major civil engineering contractor - Lancashire roots
R.M. Douglas & Co Ltd	Erdington, Birmingham	Major civil engineering contractor - Scottish roots
G Percy Trentham Ltd	Hillingdon, Middx	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Birmingham roots
Wates Ltd	London Road, Norbury, London, SW6	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Anglo-Scottish roots
Balfour Beatty & Co	Queen St, London, EC4	Major contractor - building and civil engineering - Anglo-Scottish roots
Peter Lind & Co	Piccadilly, London WC	Major civil engineering contractor - Danish roots (links with Christiani & Neilson)
John Mowlem Construction	Ebury Bridge Road, London, SW1	Major civil engineering contractor - Dorset/London roots

Source: Primary source unless otherwise stated: NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/535 – Communique ref: Gen.203/6/390 dated 21st November, 1941

¹⁶ The term 'ethnically-Irish' in the context of corporate identity is used to distinguish a British-registered business founded and/or registered at Companies House in the UK by an Irish-born person in Britain from an 'Irish contractor' – which conventionally refers to a contracting business founded and/or registered with the CRO in Ireland.

These companies probably employed a mix of interwar seasonal and itinerant (First/second wave internal) migrants and newly recruited pre- Group Recruitment Scheme war-works migrants. In fact, private recruitment agents for corporate construction and engineering businesses in Britain had been operating indiscriminately throughout Eire and Northern Ireland in the lead-up to the Second World War and had continued to do so in 1939-41.¹⁷ A.V. Judges invaluable report into wartime recruitment of Irish labour to Great Britain confirms that by June 1941 there were twenty recruiting agents for British companies in Dublin alone – adding ‘not all of them very reputable characters’.¹⁸ Kevin H (OI#3) remarked, ‘McAlpine used to come over here to this country recruiting...did y’know that?’ and Stephen Croghan referred to the demeaning process of ‘labelling’ men with luggage labels stating destinations when they were recruited.¹⁹

During the interwar period many of the itinerant labouring men recruited by these agents diversified from agricultural labour into heavy engineering and construction work as demand from companies like McAlpine, Wimpey and Carmichael accelerated in the wake of significant expansion of hydro-electric power and water infrastructure projects, particularly in the Scottish highlands.²⁰ Taken together with the various other sources discussed above and detailed later in this chapter, a pattern of continual employment is traceable which validates the contention that by the start of the Second World War there was already a substantial culture of employing largely itinerant Irish migrant labour within the British construction industry. Most of these employees were probably not dyed-in-the-wool ‘company men’ as Cowley terms them, but some did stay and develop long-term careers with many of these major employers.

Conversely, ‘lumpers’– i.e. those casually employed as lump-sum, day-rate, labouring men - did not really appear in any significant numbers until the mid-to-late 1950s when the redevelopment of infrastructure in London accelerated on the back of economic recovery and fragmentation of the industry saw the market for ethnically-Irish subcontractors begin to grow. They were often newly-arrived men, single and finding their ways around the industry, some of whom would go on to become ‘company men’, occasionally ‘long-distance men’ and less

¹⁷ Daly, *The Slow Failure*, p.145.

¹⁸ Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain*, p.9.

¹⁹ Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain*, covering memo ref: E.S.2, 19 March, 1951. See also: Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.43; interview with Stephen Croghan in Catherine Dunne, *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London*, (Dublin, 2003), p.115-16.

²⁰ Scottish and Southern Energy plc, *Power from the Glens; Neart nan Gleann*, (Perth, 2005).

often, successful construction entrepreneurs in their own right. Again, the domestic circumstances of the migrant, for example whether in a relationship with children or dependants, was also a key determinant. Often the passage of time and the decision to settle permanently - which cultural critic Stuart Hall suggests usually took most migrants around seven or eight years from arrival – would affect when and how each man sought employment within the industry.²¹ My own view is that as the Irish ethnic labour market in London developed in the interwar and immediate post-war period, when regularly-paid and permanent construction work became more available, the levels of Irish migrant itinerancy and mobility decreased proportionally. Men found themselves better able to combine regular working patterns and reduced travel with settled domestic arrangements and family-raising.²²

A crucial source is, of course, personal testimony. The present author worked with many of major British contractors over a thirty-five year professional career in construction and can attest to having encountered Irish mail-boat and Ryanair migrants (in varying numbers) in virtually every such organisation and at various levels, from senior managerial to General Operatives ('GO's' – the modern term for labourers). The collected oral histories show that most interviewees worked for at least one major British or Irish contractor during their careers.²⁴ Repeatedly interviewees emphasised that they worked almost exclusively with fellow Irishmen. Archival documents from 1974, (Figure 3.1) relating to a typical civil engineering contract for part of the Thames Flood Prevention Scheme at Barn Elms in west London shows 'daywork sheets' submitted by J. Murphy & Sons Ltd ("Green Murphy"), the main-contractor for this project. The average labour force was twelve men; on each sheet all the names of the individuals listed were Irish names. This is unsurprising, since Green Murphy was the largest employer of migrant Irishmen throughout the latter decades of the post-war period, but nonetheless it tells part of the story.²⁵

²¹ Stuart Hall, 'Multiculturalism' on BBC Radio 4 documentary programme *In Our Time*, (13 May, 1999), available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00545hw> (accessed 13 April, 2019).

²² Delaney, *Irish in Post-War Britain*, p.116; Ryan, 'Assimilation of Irish Immigrants', p.134. Table 2.7 above (Section 2.2) also substantiates this view as it demonstrates a below-average level of itinerancy for most interviewees, who primarily came to London from the late 1950s/early 1960s onwards, and tended to settle in London; travelling out on an ad-hoc basis when necessary, rather than the 'camp' lifestyle of the earlier migrants. Major infrastructural projects located significant distances from London still drew seasoned 'long-distance' men.

²⁴ See chapter 2.2, Table 2.6.

²⁵ LMA, Doc Ref: GLC-HE-R-30-16A – John Murphy & Sons Ltd, Barn Elms Project Contractual Docs. (unpaginated), Daywork Sheets for w.e. 13 July 1974, 17/24 November 1974, 8/15 December, 1974.

Long-distance men – also known variously as ‘travelling men’, ‘pinchers’ or ‘pincher kiddies’ - were a remnant of the earlier tramp-navvy culture which Cowley ascribes to the era of nineteenth-century navvying and interwar public works projects, e.g. hydro-electrification projects in Scotland, dams, power stations and railways.²⁶ I would contend, however, that the ‘new breed’ of ‘long-distance men’,²⁷ ought not to be conflated with their nineteenth-century predecessors who were a different class of manual worker, subsisting in very different environments and conditions; one is the natural successor of the other but they are not the same.

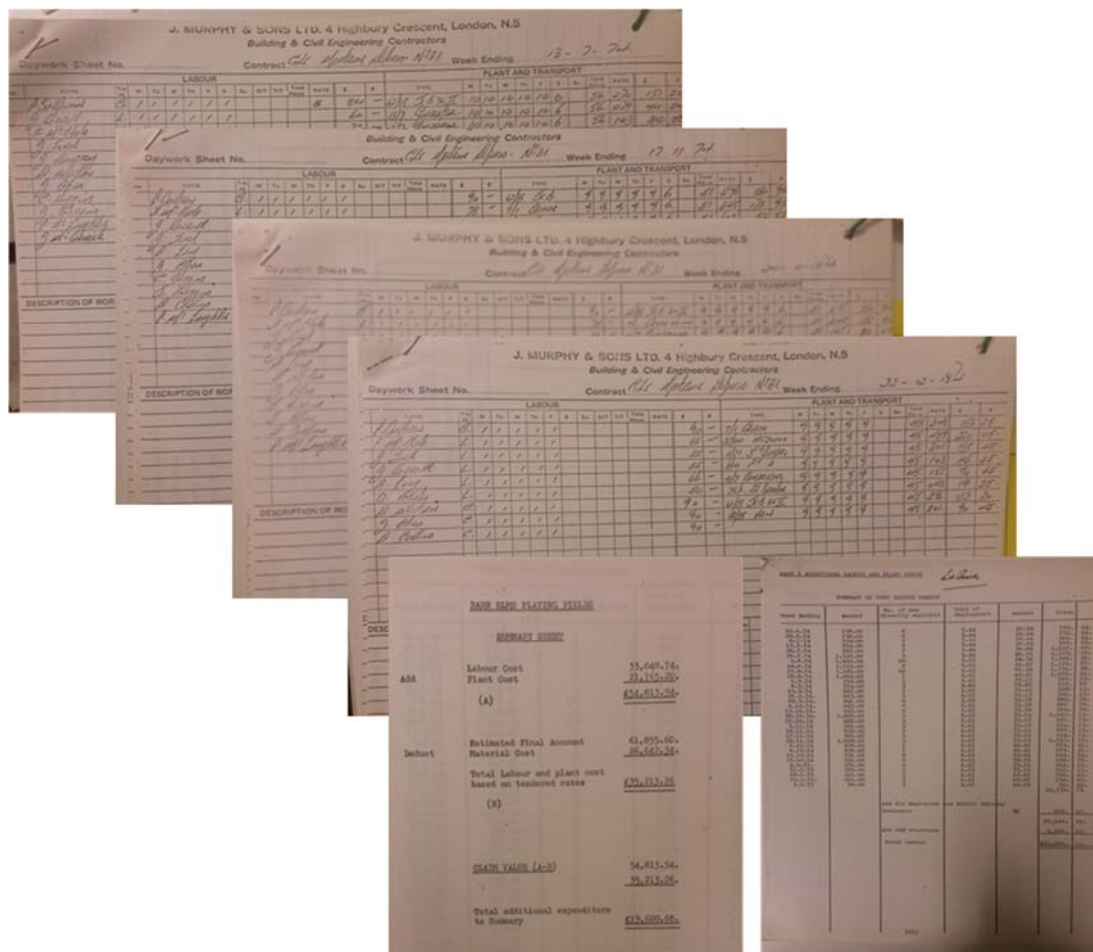


Figure 3.1 - Archival documents - J Murphy & Sons Ltd, Daywork Account, Barn Elms Project, 1974. (Source: LMA, Doc Ref: GLC-HE-R-30-16A)

A fourth category which Cowley touches upon briefly, is the entrepreneurial class of migrant construction worker, many of whom operated as small but successful subcontractors, dealing with ‘lumpers’ and legitimate employees alike.²⁸ Over the post-war decades, a number

²⁶ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp. 82-83, 139, 182-183.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Section 3.4 and Appendix B of this thesis contains biographical details of all the major London-based Irish entrepreneurs of the post-war period.

of Irish-born construction entrepreneurs grew their enterprises from casual labour gangs – working solely for established British main-contractors - into formal subcontract organisations and, sometimes, eventually into fully-corporatized major contracting organisations. One particularly good example of the opportunism and entrepreneurial instinct associated with this smaller, but highly important, category of Irish migrant builders can be seen in the story of how Michael ‘Pincher’ McNicholas got started in the cable installation business by mere chance and capitalised upon his good fortune.²⁹ These four categories of Irish migrant builders are explored chronologically and thematically below.

3.2. ‘Paddy on the Road’: The Early Post-war Migrants (1940s, 1950s and 1960s).

Preceding chapters showed how in the early twentieth century, large groups of seasonal agricultural labourers- spailpíns³⁰ - came to Britain particularly from the western counties of Ireland. Another term commonly used to describe these migrant Irish labourers at that time was navvies, linking them to the original ‘navigators’ (shortened to navvies) who built the canals and railways of the Industrial Revolution. Navvies were considered a breed apart in many ways; they were seen as low-class, rough workers, highly itinerant and reckless.³¹ Dinny D, (OI#2) was a timekeeper for Sir Robert McAlpine on one of their largest contracts in 1950³² and confirmed that for shovelmen, at that time, ‘the standing title, really, was ‘navvy’³³ Sykes’ observation work on a Scottish hydro-electric project in 1953 used the term.³⁴ In general terms, however, the post-war use of the term ‘navvy’ as applied to Irish mail-boat migrants is, I would contend, an anachronism, and had begun to fall out of use amongst construction workers by the late 1950s.³⁵ The identifiable class of navvies which Cowley writes so admiringly about had, suggests Dick Sullivan, all-but-dissipated quietly after the Great War:

²⁹ Interview with Bernard McNicholas in Anne Holohan, *Working Lives: The Irish in Britain*, (Uxbridge, 1995), p.156.

³⁰ See Chapter 1, pp.5-6 and fn.28.

³¹ Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, (Middlesex, 1968), p.29.

³² Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.33. The project was the enabling phase of the Tar and Ammonia Products Works project at Beckton, east London, was awarded to Sir Robert McAlpine for a contract value of £1,046,000 (£34 million at equivalent 2016 rates) in early 1950. See ‘Summary of Civil Engineering Contracts’, *The Engineer*, December 21, 1956 p.xlviii

³³ Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.33.

³⁴ A. J. M. Sykes, ‘Navvies: Their Work Attitudes’ in *Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 1969), pp. 21-35

³⁵ For example, in a sample analysis of wartime travel permits issued between 1942 and 1945, of a total of 4,320 Irish males engaged in construction-related activities only 15 described themselves as navvies, the

Often they were nameless, known to each other only at second-hand by nickname. They were a homeless, wandering itinerant people belonging nowhere except to the island as a whole. They survived the Great War as a separate community, but not for long. Navvying was killed by a lack of large scale public works (worsened by the Slump), by bureaucracy and by the petrol engine. Probably in that order. By the mid-1950s they were quietly ending as a recognisable separate community. Individuals did live and work on [in construction].³⁶

Reg Hall agreed with Dick Sullivan, ‘Oh, I’d say it [the end of authentic Victorian navvying] was before. They’re gone by the War’ [First World War].³⁷ There was a very small remnant of the early twentieth-century tramp-navvies - Cowley calls them ‘Pincher Lads/Kiddies’ or ‘Long Distance Men’ - who, by the 1940s and 1950s, were likely to be ‘in their late fifties or older and, if they were still moving about, had no family or permanent address’.³⁸ Donall Mac Amhlaigh recalls meeting two such men, ‘Punch’ Flanagan from Roscommon and ‘Moose’ Connolly from Galway, in the early 1950s:³⁹

They’re much to be pitied, these old men, spending the last days of their lives moving around from camp to camp and from room to room without a sinner to mourn them when they die a lonely death in some dirty, broken-down old lodging-house. They worked and they drank and they fought while they were there and now as their time draws near they have nothing to do but stretch their bones in some corner, turn their faces to the wall and wait for death.⁴⁰

The early 1940s and 1950s mail-boat migrants –by necessity - led a semi-nomadic working life travelling from one work location to another, generally staying in camps or digs. Interviewees Tom M (OI#1), Dinny D, (OI#2), Kevin H (OI#3), Patrick M, (OI#4), Michael Mc (OI#6), Gregory D (OI#10) and John P, (OI#13) all referenced experiences of seeing and talking with Irish men whose appearance, conduct and demeanour closely mirrored that of the pinchers and

overwhelming majority calling themselves unskilled labourers. See Wartime Travel permit Analysis –Appendix C, p.3. (This sample is secondary analysis of original statistics compiled by Dr. Jennifer Redmond as part of an IRC Postdoctoral Fellowship completed (2009-11) at Maynooth University. Reproduced by kind permission of the author. See Redmond, *Moving Histories*, pp.28-30). Notably, many skilled men signed-up for emigration as ‘unskilled’ due to Irish government restrictions on skilled labour being allowed to be recruited by British Group Recruitment Schemes.

³⁶ Dick Sullivan, *The Navvyman*, (London, 1983), p.5

³⁷ Interview with Dr Reg Hall, (OI#22), Croydon, (3rd June, 2016), Appendix E, pp.3- 4.

³⁸ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.188-189.

³⁹ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, pp.32-33.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.54-55.

long-distance men, some still working as late as the 1970s.⁴¹ Only three of the interviewees, John P (OI#13), John F (OI#16) and Sean G (OI#14) were themselves significantly transient in their working careers, and these three were a working generation apart (John P migrated in early 1950s, John F in the late 1960s and Sean G in the mid-1980s). Notably, though, none of these men self-identified as ‘Long-distance men’ or ‘pinchers’, which rather suggests that the ‘pincher’ culture had more to it than simply being itinerant; these men often seeing themselves as noble tramps of the road.⁴²

Of the remaining eighteen oral histories, eight worked virtually all their careers within the LMA; seven were moderately transient – occasionally working in the Home Counties and outside the LMA; and three went slightly further afield to coastal areas of England or perhaps once or twice to the midlands. Bearing in mind that across the post-war period automotive transportation improved substantially decade-by-decade, this suggests that the transience of the immediate post-war period had disappeared by the 1960s except where adopted as a chosen way of life by certain men. Patrick M (OI#4) talks about his brother, Jimmy’s, predilection for disappearing from London, on a whim, occasionally to work further afield. This kind of wanderlust did mimic the itinerancy of traditional navvy culture but was only practised by a fraction of the post-war migrant Irish builders: ‘Jimmy used to go every so often down to Southend or Brighton working for a couple of months at a time for Dave S again on the gas with a buddy of his called Tommy C from Kerry. [...] So Jimmy would go off and stay down at the seaside when the work was there with these guys.’⁴³

A restless, unsettled wanderlust was a common feature of these old ‘pinchers’. Mac Amhlaigh reflects that when his friend Mike Ned and himself decide to ‘jack’⁴⁴ the job they

⁴¹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.22; Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.34, pp.35-6; Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.45; Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.65; Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.107, Interview with Gregory D, (OI#10), County Leitrim, (25 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.178-179, 189-92; Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, p.270, 277. However it is of note that in all these accounts the interviewee’s reaction to seeing such men tends to suggest they were becoming an exception to Irish migrant workers in London by then.

⁴² A. J. M. Sykes, ‘Navvies: Their Work Attitudes’ in *Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 1969), pp. 21-35, p.25.

⁴³ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.69. Note the use of the term ‘townie’ for a fellow county-man, despite the considerable distance between them geographically. Patrick and Jimmy came from south Leitrim, some 30-40km from Dowra which is in north Leitrim, yet the development of the ethnic labour enclave encouraged a relaxation of the normally inflexible geo-cultural strictures of parochial and county boundaries amongst the Irish migrant builders.

⁴⁴ A common construction-industry colloquialism for quitting a position or giving notice of leaving a job.

were working on, the time clerk took umbrage: ‘He made a miserable song and dance about the whole thing. “ But you’ve only just started”, he said, “You can’t just keep starting and finishing on jobs like this all the time. Think of the trouble you put us people to” ‘.⁴⁵ Dinny (OI#2) recounted a similar disposition amongst both the navvies and the timekeepers when he worked for McAlpine at Beckton in the very early 1950s, where men were liable to ‘jack’ at the drop of a hat or as the mood took them, but where the employer was equally as casual.⁴⁶ Sara Goek provides a plausible explanation for this behavioural trait as it applied to the later generations of migrant Irish, citing the great Donegal fiddleplayer Danny Meehan – a London-based Irish migrant builder for most of his life but also an itinerant worker by choice who moved extensively around the UK:

I had a lot of kindred spirits over there. Men who were like me, you know. They loved the hard work and they loved the fun in the pubs and they loved the music. [...] But those men were always well valued by contractors because they had a lot of energy. They could do the job well and a bit of hard work never phased them so the contractors all loved that certain breed of man who travelled from job to job and if he had a decent dry warm bed he didn’t need any fancy decorations or anything, you needed to get your head down, you know.⁴⁷

However, Goek emphasises that whilst to Danny, Patrick’s brother Jimmy mentioned earlier, and many of this ilk of Irish migrant builders, these qualities were a positive aspect of lived experience, ‘English commentators highlighted the same traits for negative reasons, associating frequent movement and willingness to endure poor conditions with unreliability and an inability to think beyond short-term monetary gains.’⁴⁸ British contractors undertaking major infrastructural projects in the 1950s and 1960s were always in need of certain numbers of manual workers prepared to ‘lodge away’,⁴⁹ but ordinarily preferred the more reliable, stable, settled married types for permanent employment. Itinerancy was therefore equated with casualisation; moreover it was relative. Some workers were prepared to travel two-to-three hours per working day and return to a base (as Joe McGarry described earlier) and so could be working as far away as Birmingham, Bristol or Southampton, commuting from London on a

⁴⁵ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.34.

⁴⁶ Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.34.

⁴⁷ Goek, ‘“I never would return again to plough the rocks of Bawn’, pp.157-74, citing *Danny Meehan*, interview with the author, 11 June 2012.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, citing Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, p.200; S. Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity: Irish Catholics in England, 1880-1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), pp.25-6.

⁴⁹ Major infrastructure projects like power stations, motorways and railways always necessitated a high degree of mobility.

daily basis, or perhaps lodging intermittently.⁵⁰ Old-time navvies like ‘Punch Flanagan’ and ‘Moleskin Joe’ (the former real, the latter fictional) lived a different kind of itinerancy.⁵¹

The post-war long-distance men still exist in an altered form in the modern construction industry. Sean G (OI#14) was effectively still living the life of a long-distance man in the early 1990s until his return to Ireland.⁵² Typically seen lodging in variable quality boarding houses and caravans adjacent to site – often motorway projects – they usually return to their domestic home in London at weekends. The working accommodations of these men is much improved from the itinerant ‘tramp-navvy’ described by Cowley.⁵³ It became, in any event, unusual to see ‘Long-distance men’ working in the LMA, since the proliferation of ethnically-Irish social centres and accommodation meant there was no need to live that lifestyle. A very small percentage of men chose the long-distance life from time-to-time, often for a change of scenery, the potential for additional earnings, and sometimes because the pernicious effects of alcohol and ‘damping down’ necessitated a change of accommodation.⁵⁴

Major long-duration and multi-phase infrastructure projects such as British Petroleum’s Kent Oil Refinery – better known amongst migrant Irish labourers as the ‘Isle of Grain’ – on the east coast of Kent and the M1 Motorway project still entailed temporary encampments.⁵⁵ Conditions remained rough and rudimentary and Irish migrant workers spent extended periods apart from their families and homes.⁵⁶ However, the days of the ‘pincher laddies’ became less common as the post-war era unfolded and communications, accommodation and transport became more efficient. By the late 1960s the Phelps Brown Report spoke of navvies in purely historical terms, referring to long-distance men as ‘travelling men’; ‘the successors of the navvies who dug the canals and built the railways in the Nineteenth Century’.⁵⁷ By then, they

⁵⁰ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.505.

⁵¹ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.75, MacGill, *Moleskin Joe* (London, 1923).

⁵² Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.308-318.

⁵³ For typical examples of this ‘newer’ Long-distance working life see Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.308-9; . Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.61-3; Interview with Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.336-9; Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.466. Contrast this with the lifestyles described in, e.g., Sykes, ‘Navvies: Their Work Attitudes’, and in Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.82-85, 188-9.

⁵⁴ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.69-70. See also Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.189.

⁵⁵ Linda Gray et al, ‘Building The M1 Motorway’, p.4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.32.

⁵⁷ *Phelps Brown*, p.29.

constituted a small minority of the 1.5 million construction workforce (some 300,000 of whom were Irish) and, Phelps Brown concluded, ‘the great majority of construction workers seek work only in their own home areas’, with only 13% of workers prepared to work any more than ten miles from their home.⁵⁸ The bulk of post-war migrant Irish builders who lived and worked in London bore little resemblance, in terms of working life or culture, to the nineteenth-century railway and canal navvies.

How did this large cohort of mobile migrant labourers end up settling in London? Hall talks about the gradual transition, from c.1920 onwards, of groups of migrant Irish labourers from hydro-electric and agricultural work, which tended to be located in isolated rural areas (like the Scottish Highlands) to major projects in the south-east. Settlement in Camden Town, for example, Hall attributes, in part, to two specific major projects in metropolitan north London:

The big thing [...] is Wembley Stadium, 1924.⁵⁹ [...] The reason they all went to Camden Town was because of the Craven A building [...] that building went up in the 1920s and that took a huge amount of Irish labour and that’s why they settled in Camden Town [...] that’s the way they were recruited. [...] it was Wembley Stadium, which opened in 1924 with the great Wembley Exhibition, which had considerable Irish labour there.⁶⁰

These two projects were important examples in the history of Irish migrant labour insofar as they are known to have employed large Irish workforces early in the interwar period. Wembley Stadium’s construction employed 12,000 men at peak and was entirely built of concrete;⁶¹ a material which the Irish migrant builder handled better than most.⁶² Predictably, they were both

⁵⁸ *Phelps Brown*, p.29.

⁵⁹ The original Wembley Stadium (now demolished) was one of several concrete structures built for the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, an event intended to boost national confidence after the losses of World War I. As well as 216 acres of exhibition buildings and the stadium, this massive construction project also included 15 miles of new roads and the construction of Wembley Park Metropolitan Railway Station. The contractor for the project was, indeed, Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons, which corroborates the view that a large contingent of Irish construction labour was employed on the project. See Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.251-2, ‘Engineering Timelines’ webpage, available at: <http://www.engineering-timelines.com/scripts/engineeringItem.asp?id=394> (accessed 14 December, 2017).

⁶⁰ Interview with Dr Reg Hall, (OI#22), Croydon, (3rd June, 2016), Appendix E, pp.3- 4.

⁶¹ *A Portrait of Achievement: Sir Robert McAlpine*, Corporate Brochure, (Hemel Hempstead, 2010), available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20160508151434/http://www.sir-robert-mcalpine.com/files/page/200/SRMBrochure2010_web1.pdf (Accessed 22 May, 2019), p.10.

⁶² This predilection for concrete work amongst Irish labour is amply demonstrated throughout the remainder of this chapter and by reference to Appendices B and D. Almost all the major and medium-sized Irish subcontractors in the post-war era specialised in concrete-related substructure and superstructure works,

built by the British firm Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons, the largest single employer of twentieth-century migrant Irish labour whose founder, nicknamed ‘Concrete Bob’ throughout the industry, pioneered the use of this material in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries.⁶³ Such projects explain (also dispelling glib local myths⁶⁴) the initial settlement of Irishmen in significant numbers around north-west London in the interwar period, but they are merely the ‘tip of the iceberg’. The demands of interwar London’s construction boom saw colossal growth in all directions, drawing a steadily increasing flow of hitherto transitory Irishmen to settle.⁶⁵ Gradually, hitherto largely itinerant – indeed often seasonal – migrant builders began settling in areas such as Camden Town, Cricklewood and Kilburn.⁶⁶

Galway man Michael Gleeson’s firm, M.J. Gleeson & Co, the earliest – and to date in overall terms the most successful - of the post-war migrant entrepreneurs, also began expanding into London from Sheffield around this time, predicated entirely upon their speculative purchase of the considerable Nonsuch Park Estate in suburban Cheam in Surrey, south of London.⁶⁷ By 1936-1937, Gleeson was developing residential houses close to railway links to London, on Nonsuch Park at the rate of 500 properties per year.⁶⁸ As a result of this highly lucrative development spree, Gleeson’s London office was established in Worcester Park, north

employing mainly Irish shuttering carpenters and steel-fixers. Fitzpatrick & Sons had already established a reputation as ‘concrete paving specialists’ as far back as the 1920s. Forty, amongst other construction historians, singles out the Irish migrants in Britain as concrete specialists - Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, (London, 2012), p.225.

⁶³ ‘Concrete Comments’ in *Concrete International: Design & Construction*, Vol 18, (1996), p.80.

⁶⁴ George Melly remarked that Camden Town was as far ‘as an Irishman with two suitcases could walk on a rainy night’ – see Harrison, *The Scattering*, p.9, but this was dismissed by Hall in typically robust language – see Interview with Dr Reg Hall, (OI#22), Croydon, (3rd June, 2016), Appendix E, p.4.

⁶⁵ Although insufficient statistical and evidential data exists to link Irish migrant builders to the plethora of specific individual developments, a significant number of the major contractors who carried out most of this interwar redevelopment are included in Table 3.1 and this, together with the sheer size of the Irish migrant workforce transiting into London in the interwar years speaks for itself. See Appendix D for supplementary information.

⁶⁶ Appendix D elaborates on much of the workload undertaken by Irish migrant labour in the this early period, some of which was quite prestigious. The ‘heart of empire’ - Parliament Square – for example (See Figure 3.2) , was refurbished by Cork-rooted migrant Irish contractors Fitzpatrick & Sons Ltd in the 1920s; it was one of their first major contracts along with the repaving of the Mall adjacent to Buckingham Palace. See Volker Fitzpatrick PLC website, available at <http://www.volkerfitzpatrick.co.uk/en/aboutus/storysofar> [accessed March, 2015].

⁶⁷ This was the turning-point in the company’s expansion into the London and south-eastern region of England. Suburban expansion at this time ‘came about through a partnership between local speculative builders, who put up the houses, and the newly electrified rail companies, who provided the only realistic means by which their new residents could get to work each morning in central London’- see Museum Curator, ‘When the Railway came to Epsom and Ewell.’ In *Epsom and Ewell Local and Family History Centre Newsletter*, Issue No.23, (January, 2010), p.1. available at <http://www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/NewsletterJan2010Web.pdf> (accessed 18 May, 2018)

⁶⁸ Fred Wellings, *British Housebuilders: History and Analysis*, (Oxford, 2006), p.45.

Cheam, then part of rural Surrey.⁶⁹ The huge expansion in domestic housing, commercial, industrial and civil engineering works became the major driver of the interwar construction boom in London⁷⁰ and accounts for the presence of an Irish-born construction workforce in London which probably stood at approximately 60,000 men at the outbreak of the Second World War.⁷¹



Figure 3.2 - Fitzpatrick & Sons Ltd labour repaving Parliament Square, c.1924
(Source: Volker Fitzpatrick PLC website, available at <http://www.volkerfitzpatrick.co.uk/en/aboutus/storysofar> [accessed March, 2015])

Data in respect of Irish immigration during the war years is, again, somewhat discrepant. Two main sources have been consulted: the British government's data on war works recruitment, labelled 'British Ministry of Labour Group Recruitment Schemes' (hereinafter 'Group Schemes');⁷² and the reports of the Irish government's *Commission on Emigration and*

⁶⁹ See M.J.Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

⁷⁰ Appendix D, pp.3-6.

⁷¹ Extrapolated from Table 2.11 - Estimated Cohort of Post-war Irish Builders in London, 1940-1995, p.142. It should be emphasised (per note 8 of Table 2.3) that this estimate is based upon a proportional interpolation of the 1931/1951 census figures, since WW2 prevented a census in 1941. Therefore it is a 'best-guess' estimate.

⁷² Delaney, *Demography*, pp. 128-9.

Other Problems (1956).⁷³ Table 3.2 below gives a comparative ‘probable minimum’ estimate derived by interpolation of the datasets, which indicates that male migration into Britain during the Second World War was in the order of 135,000.⁷⁴

Table 3.2 - Male migrants to Britain, 1939-1946, comparative summary

	(a) Irish travel permit cards issued	(b) Areas of employment in Britain totals	(c) British MoL GRS	(d) Comparative 'probable minimum' estimate
1939	0	7,316	0	7,316
1940	17,080	14,767	0	14,767
1941	31,860	28,619	14,064	14,064
1942	37,263	33,642	27,792	27,792
1943	29,321	26,835	29,551	29,551
1944	7,723	7,341	11,330	11,330
1945	13,185	12,109	11,736	11,736
1946	10,547		18,510	18,510
	146,979	130,629	112,983	135,066

Notes & Sources

- Columns (a) and (c) are reproduced from Table 3.3: ‘Numbers going to Employment in Britain’ in Delaney, *Demography*, p.129. The original source data is Commission on Emigration, *Reports*, table 96, p128; NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/1528, AV Judges, Irish labour in Great Britain, 1939-45, Table 4, p.78; Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report for Years, 1939-1946*, p.55, 1947, XII, 459; NAUK, LAB 8/1487, recruitment of Group Labour in Eire: number of persons who travelled in 1946. Column (a) relates to the totals of Irish travel permit cards issued. For the avoidance of doubt, this data can be challenged on the grounds that issuing travel documents is not conclusive proof of travel or arrival in Britain. Column (c) are the British figures for wartime recruitment under the Group Schemes. The figure of 4,688 stated by Delaney for 1941 (Sep-Dec) has been extrapolated pro-rata to 14,064 to allow for the 12-month period from Jan-Dec.

- Column (b) is reproduced from Table 3.5: ‘Numbers of Irish male emigrants employed in different areas of work in Britain and Northern Ireland, September 1939 to December 1945’, Tracy Connolly, ‘Emigration from Ireland to Britain during the Second World War’ in Andy Bielenberg (Ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), p.59. The original source data is Trinity College Dublin, March Papers 8300/1-31.

- Column (d) is derived by taking the ‘best fit’ estimates for each year from cols (a)-(c), i.e. where only one total is available for that year it is used, where two or more figures are available the most probable figure is used.

Obviously not all male migration was via the Group Schemes, and not all Irish males migrating in to Britain at this time were construction workers, or were based in London. Extrapolating further from the *Commission on Emigration* statistics on ‘Numbers of Irish male

⁷³ Both Delaney and Connolly carried out comparative analysis of these statistics but, as both authors explain in detail, the incomplete nature of the information makes definitive conclusions impracticable. These data have been reproduced in respect of male migrancy (construction overwhelmingly male-dominated at this time) at Table 3.2. The Commission on Emigration reports provided a further layer of detail in relation to this time period which enables further extrapolation to estimate numbers of migrant Irish construction workers in London.

⁷⁴ See Delaney, Table 3.3: ‘Numbers going to Employment in Britain’ in *Demography*, p.129; Tracy Connolly, Table 3.5: ‘Numbers of Irish male emigrants employed in different areas of work in Britain and Northern Ireland, September 1939 to December 1945’, ‘Emigration from Ireland to Britain during the Second World War’ in Andy Bielenberg, *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), p.59

emigrants employed in different areas of work in Britain and Northern Ireland, September 1939 to December 1945', allows an approximation of the total increase in Irish male migrant builders, as a result of Group Scheme recruitment, in the metropolis over the war years. Table 3.3 shows the areas of employment in which Irish migrant males worked over the wartime period. According to A.V. Judges's report up to 1941, 80% of unskilled Irish migrant labourers working in Britain (col. d) were recruited for Building and Civil Engineering work ('B&CE').⁷⁵ Therefore by applying this factor generally to column d of table 3.3 and adding it to column b derives a notional total for each war year of male migrants in B&CE (col. f). Across the post-war period in round terms thirty percent of the migrant Irish population headed to London, therefore a rough approximation of those migrant builders who went to London for wartime work is 33,000 (total of col.f = 109,745 x 30%).⁷⁶

Table 3.3 - Irish male migrants - areas of employment in Britain, 1939-1945

	(a) Agriculture	(b) Building & Construction	(c) Clerks & Skilled	(d) Unskilled Workers	(e) Totals	(f) Total in B&CE	(g) % of Total in
1939	843	956	2,266	3,251	7,316	3,557	49%
1940	5,408	1,180	2,278	5,901	14,767	5,901	40%
1941	1,773	2,655	3,156	21,035	28,619	19,483	68%
1942	4,767	1,172	3,873	23,830	33,642	20,236	60%
1943	3,584	1,473	3,468	18,310	26,835	16,121	60%
1944	1,361	226	1,414	4,340	7,341	3,698	50%
1945	3,148	632	2,085	6,244	12,109	5,627	46%
	20,884	8,294	18,540	82,911			
					130,629	109,745	
					Average 1939-1945		53%

Notes: For estimating purposes the number of unskilled workers engaged in building and construction work has been assessed as 80% of total. See Enda Delaney, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, 2000), p.137 citing AV Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain, 1939-45*, (hereinafter cited as 'Judges, Irish labour in Great Britain'), NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/1528.

Sources: Table 3.5: 'Numbers of Irish male emigrants employed in different areas of work in Britain and Northern Ireland, September 1939 to December 1945' in Tracy Connolly, 'Emigration from Ireland to Britain during the Second World War' in Andy Bielenberg, *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, 2000), p.59 (original source data Trinity College Dublin, March Papers 8300/1-31)

⁷⁵ Delaney, *Demography*, p.137 citing Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain, 1939-45*, NAUK, Lab 8/1528.

⁷⁶ These estimates cannot fully reflect the reality that Irish migrant labour was a highly mobile and reactive body of labour and various groups of migrant builders were constantly moving in and out of London throughout the course of the war to carry out essential construction and civil engineering works all over the south-east region.

Severe restrictions were placed upon entry to the UK after the fall of France in 1940, but Britain recognised early on that it would need significantly more labour for the war effort, particularly as its stock of young male labour was being depleted by military conscription. Ireland's official policy of neutrality translated, in practice, to 'neutral on England's side' as the state's covert acquiescence was tantamount to an acquiescent policy of exporting surplus labour to Britain.⁷⁷ From early 1941 the Irish and British governments negotiated *sub-rosa* on aspects of recruitment policy for war-workers including the establishment of a liaison office staffed by British civil servants in Dublin.⁷⁸ The greatest demand was for war-workers capable of heavy civil engineering and building work.

A considerable sticking point in these new negotiations was the further assurances required by the Irish government regarding conscription and compensation for injuries sustained by war-workers. The Irish Department of Foreign Affairs issued a press statement in April 1940 assuring seasonal migrants at that time that they would not be liable for military conscription.⁷⁹ By June 1941 Britain gave satisfactory assurances and a *modus operandi* for basic recruitment throughout the war was all fleshed-out at a conference held in Dublin in July 1941.⁸⁰ Modifications to the basic system were made throughout the war. In October 1941 a minimum age-limit of 22 years was added and the role of the growing number of private recruitment agents in Ireland was – at least ostensibly – severely curtailed. Public approbation at these agents had spilled over into the Irish national press and thereafter direct recruitment via newspapers was forbidden, with agents merely authorised to interview prospective recruits.⁸¹ In truth this was probably little more than window-dressing; as late as August 1943, two years later, there were still forty-eight separate private recruitment agents operating across the Free State.⁸²

By Christmas 1941 a substantial force probably approaching c.90,000 Irish construction workers was already operating in and around London, made up of interwar (seasonal and

⁷⁷ Mary Lennon, M. McAdam and J. O'Brien, *Across the Water* (London, 1988), p.24-25.

⁷⁸ Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain*, covering memo ref: E.S.2, 19 March, 1951, para 2 & main report p.14.

⁷⁹ Copy of press statement on position of seasonal agricultural workers, 1 Apr. 1940, (NAI, DFA 220/530), as cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.118.

⁸⁰ Department of Industry and Commerce: recruitment of citizens of Eire for employment in Great Britain, 23 June 1941, p.1-3, (NAI, DT S 11582 A), as cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.119.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.120.

⁸² Memorandum ref: E.M.7725/1942 from E.B. Morgan dated 31 August, 1943, (NAUK, Doc Ref: LAB 8/694).

internal) migrants and new recruits under the Group Schemes.⁸³ The new wave of migrants recruited from 1941 onwards were brought to Britain ostensibly to assist the war effort and their contribution to the construction, maintenance, repair and renewal of Britain's war infrastructure was considerable.⁸⁴ It coincided with the British implementation of The War Damage Commission, set up following the War Damage Act 1941.⁸⁵ The bomb-damage repair work authorised by this legislation formed a significant element of the war works carried out by Irish migrant civilian labour during the war.⁸⁶ Obviously, when the Blitz was ongoing, running repairs and daily debris clearance were the priority of the civil defence authorities. John Mullany a Mayo migrant recalled:

I came to London to work on repairing the bomb damage. The bombers were coming over then, every place. We used to repair houses, putting up blackouts on the windows, and putting in windows and doors, measuring them, so that the people could occupy them. We used to travel all round London.[...] The next thing, the flying bombs came. They were a terror altogether. [...] I saw some terrible damage done with them.⁸⁷

Jimmy 'Jock' Taylor, an Edinburgh native working in London in 1944, recalled that 'of the 900 men billeted in the Kensington Palace Hotel to clear up the damage caused by the flying bombs, 600 were Irish'.⁸⁸ By August 1947 over 2,200 workers billeted in Onslow Square, South Kensington were Irish.⁸⁹ An 'Irish Building Worker's Conference' held in Holborn in London, in February 1946, saw representatives of twenty-six hostels across the city attend.⁹⁰ Taken together, this evidence suggests that Irish migrant workers doing bomb-damage repairs probably numbered in excess of 20,000 during the war.

⁸³ Extrapolated from Table 2.11 - Estimated Cohort of Post-war Irish Builders in London, 1940-1995, p.142. It should be emphasised (per note 8 of Table 2.3) that this estimate is based upon a proportional interpolation of the 1931/1951 census figures, since WW2 prevented a census in 1941. Therefore it is a 'best-guess' estimate.

⁸⁴ An extant UK Home Office communique from the chillingly-named 'Aliens Department' refers in its opening paragraph to the 'large number of Irish labourers already employed in this country'. See Home office Communique ref: Gen.203/6/390 dated 21 November, 1941 (NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/535).

⁸⁵ Under Treasury direction, the Commission received notifications, arranged claim settlements and made compensation payments in respect of damage by enemy action to land and buildings in the United Kingdom – see NAUK, War Damage Commission and War Damage Office records, available at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C1035> (accessed 9 Jan 2016).

⁸⁶ *Irish Democrat*, December, 1945, p.8.

⁸⁷ Pam Schweitzer, (ed.), *Across the Irish Sea*, (London, 1989), pp. 136-137.

⁸⁸ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.561.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, citing *Irish Democrat*, August, 1947. Based on a 75% estimate of the total billet of 3,000; Harrison, *The Scattering*, p.35;

⁹⁰ *Irish Democrat*, March 1946, p.1.

London-based Irish labour was also mobilised extensively on the massive armaments factories programme which the British war effort required. The huge £7 million⁹¹ underground factory for Bristol Aeroplane Company, built at Corsham in Wiltshire in 1943 is one example. The Ministry of Aircraft Production contracted Alfred McAlpine,⁹² to build their largest project to date; workers (most of whom probably transferred from London billets) were instructed to work ‘twelve by seven’:

The vast undertaking required the recruitment of an army of 10,000 workers, [...] accommodated in prefab huts in eight camps with canteens and all other amenities including a cinema, and of course a number of bars: McAlpines could not let such an army of workers – many of them Irish and heavy drinkers – loose on surrounding towns and villages.⁹³

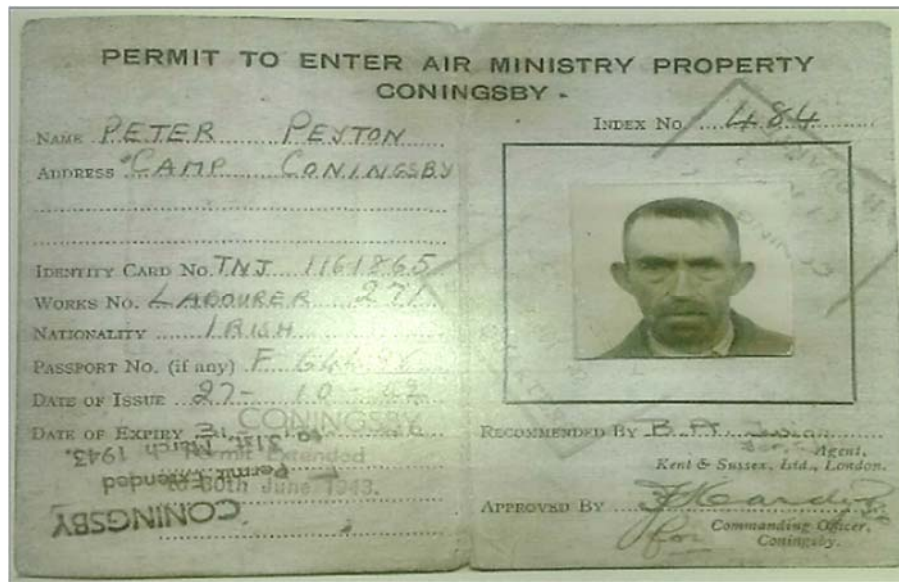


Figure 3.3 - Work permit of Peter Peyton, 1942
(Photo reproduced courtesy of Jack Foley, original source Mairín (Peyton) Noone.)

In addition to munitions factories, from early 1940 until the close of the war, 465 airbases were constructed all over Britain for the RAF and the USAAF.⁹⁴ The Irish builder’s speciality - reinforced concrete⁹⁵ – prevailed on these projects with hand-laid paved runways,

⁹¹ £350m in current money. Calculation based on average annual inflation of 5.2% p.a. per Bank of England data, available at <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator> (accessed 10 Jan, 2020).

⁹² A company owned by Robert McAlpine’s younger brother and one of those authorised to issue leave certificates to Irish labour in 1941.

⁹³ T Gray, *The Road to Success: Alfred McAlpine 1935-1985*, (London, 1987), p.35.

⁹⁴ Michael Stratton, Barrie Trinder, *Twentieth Century Industrial Archaeology*, (Abingdon, 2000), p.112.

⁹⁵ This predilection for concrete work amongst Irish labour is amply demonstrated throughout the remainder

perimeter tracks, and hard-standings as standard. During the peak construction year of 1942, sixty thousand men turned out new airfields at an average of one every 3 days, in addition to sixty-three major extensions to existing stations.⁹⁶ Peter Peyton (b. 1878) from Swinford in Mayo was one of those sixty thousand and, despite his sixty-five years, helped lay concrete paving at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire in 1942-3 (see Figure 3.3). Peter was typical of the spailpín sojourner-itinerant builder, having spent most of his earlier life travelling annually to England for seasonal agricultural work. His son, Paddy, later worked in Britain in the post-war period too.⁹⁷

Most of the military infrastructure required for prosecuting the war was located in rural central and eastern England and further afield, which necessitated dormitory-style camp living, and an itinerant, rough and temporary lifestyle, as can be seen with the case of Peter Peyton mentioned earlier. Patrick Early, from Leitrim, had been in Britain since 1937 working as a carpenter and forging a reputation as a militant union advocate for Irish construction workers. His nomadic working life saw him traverse Britain before helping to build the Mulberry Harbours in 1943-4.⁹⁸ John Murphy (c.1913-2009), from Caherciveen in Kerry, worked on the construction of Dunmore (Essex) and Weathersfield (Suffolk) airbases. He also carried out bomb-damage repairs to airfields throughout the war and was hired for obstacle removal in the English Channel.⁹⁹ Doubtless this experience armed him with considerable technical, engineering and organisational skills; after the war he founded J Murphy & Sons ('Green Murphy'), probably the most noted of the post-war entrepreneurs. Edmund Murphy and Pack Meehan (Sligo), Tommy Healy (Mayo) and Pat Fitzpatrick (Cork) had similar experiences.¹⁰⁰ Evidence suggests that the bulk of the airbase programme relied upon Irish migrant labour. It has been compared, as a feat of constructional prowess, to the building of the first-generation

of this chapter and by reference to Appendices B and D. Almost all the major and medium-sized Irish subcontractors in the post-war era specialised in concrete-related substructure and superstructure works, employing mainly Irish shuttering carpenters and steel-fixers. Fitzpatrick & Sons had already established a reputation as 'concrete paving specialists' as far back as the 1920s. Forty, amongst other construction historians, singles out the Irish migrants in Britain as concrete specialists - Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, (London, 2012), p.225.

⁹⁶ Potts, 'Construction during World War II', p.849.

⁹⁷ Jack Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens*, pp.180-1.

⁹⁸ *Irish Democrat*, October 1945, p.6

⁹⁹ See: Gerry Harrison, 'Builder off the Holyhead boat who rose to become Rich List millionaire' in *Islington Tribune* (15 May, 2009), p.14; 'John Murphy: Businessman whose name was synonymous with the construction industry' in *The Independent* (UK), (22 May, 2015); Order of Service for funeral of John Murphy, Daniel O'Connell Memorial Church, Caherciveen, Co. Kerry (Thursday, 21 May, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.561.

of Victorian railways in the mid-1800s.¹⁰¹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, serious concerns were voiced in the British establishment and Parliament regarding security and the reliability of Irish migrant builders working on top-secret military projects.¹⁰² In the minutes of the Ministry of Supply pre-contract meeting for 'Phoenix' of October 1943, a small note was added, 'A statement was made by the contractors that they had been informed that labour from Eire could not be employed on these contracts'.¹⁰³ Similarly remarks were made at the Ministry of Supply 'most secret' meeting on Phoenix in November 1943.¹⁰⁴ The *Irish Democrat*, in 1945, retrospectively protested about the prohibitions on the Mulberry Harbours.¹⁰⁵ The notion that Irish migrants might become fifth columnists was nevertheless thought real, as Judges recorded, 'The possibility that, in the event of invasion, Eire citizens resident in the United Kingdom would prove hostile to British interests was seriously contemplated'.¹⁰⁶ He adds that the 'sheer prejudice and anxieties of employers and government officials on security grounds [...] [and] by differing habits and social customs ' was overcome '**above all**, by their [Irish migrants] willingness to work'.¹⁰⁷ This archetypal British establishment anti-Irish prejudice therefore dissipated somewhat over time.

By August 1944 the governments of both countries had jointly revised the detailed procedural policy for the group recruitment schemes of Irish migrant labour for war works.¹⁰⁸ The entire scheme was administered under the auspices of the UK Ministry of Labour and the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors ('FCEC'), whose agents had been operating in Ireland for several years by then. The dominant requirement remained for 'heavy labourers', a

¹⁰¹ Stratton, Trinder, *Twentieth Century Industrial Archaeology*, p.112.

¹⁰² See for example: HC Deb, Aerodromes (Defence), (22 January, 1942), Vol 365, available at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1942/jan/22/aerodromes-defence#S5CV0377P0_19420122_HOC_365 accessed 30 May, 2019)

¹⁰³ Minutes of Ministry of Labour pre-contract meeting, 22nd October, 1943, Gosport Town Hall, NAUK Doc Ref: AVIA 22/1018, Mulberry Harbours 1943-46, (file ref: Visit #2 - 13 Dec 2016-AVIA 22.1018-Mulberry Harbours 1943-46.pdf), p.12. N.B. 'Phoenix' was the codename for the secret project to construct the Mulberry harbours.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.19,28.

¹⁰⁵ *Irish Democrat*, November 1945, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain*, p.3, cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.118 & fn.27. See also Rachel Pistol, *Internment during the Second World War: A Comparative Study of Great Britain and the USA*, (London, 2017), p.19.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁰⁸ Enda Delaney, 'Irish Migration To Britain, 1939-1945: Documents and Sources' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, XXVIII, (2001), pp.47-71, at pp.64-66.

role very much seen by the British establishment as the traditional preserve of the Irish male.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, in June 1945 the London Repairs Executive, a body formed a year earlier to oversee bomb damage clearance and housing repairs, reported that repairs had been completed to 503,000 damaged houses, a rise of some 135,000 in just under a month. This was largely attributable, it claimed, to an increase of 113,000 in the civilian labour-force available to undertake such repair works from a force of 24,000 in June 1944 to 137,000 by March 1945.¹¹⁰

British Ministry of Labour statistics for the Group Recruitment Schemes show Irish male labour recruitment up to March 1945 probably reached at least 94,000, a third of whom were likely to have been billeted in London, excluding the substantial pre-existing migrant workforce.¹¹¹ In the period 1940-1946 a total £450 million of Treasury funds was spent on repairs, demolition and debris clearance directly attributable to air-raids.¹¹² In the same period a total of 103,607 Irish males emigrated via the Group Recruitment Schemes, overwhelmingly to work in construction and heavy engineering, an average of 17-18,000 per year.¹¹³ These disparate statistics are unlikely to be mere coincidence, suggesting that migrant Irish labour probably accounted for 75-80% of civilian labour.

A letter to *The Times* in July 1946, remarked that the British Lord Chancellor, whilst honouring those Irish who had volunteered for military service, had completely ignored the volunteer Irish civilian war-workers (putting the number at c.100,000) admitted on temporary permits who had paid the British Treasury some £2million in compulsory National Insurance contributions.¹¹⁴ The British official history of the Second World War did later acknowledge that 'Irish labour was valuable [...] out of all proportion to its numbers' during the war effort.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain*, p.2.

¹¹⁰ *St. Pancras Chronicle*, March 9th, 1945, p.3. Notably the report does not indicate where this additional civilian labour was sourced from.

¹¹¹ See Table 3.2, and Delaney, *Demography*, p.129, table 3.3. Extrapolated. This estimate is based upon British MoL figures.

¹¹² P Chantler, *The British Gas Industry: An Economic Study*, (Manchester, 1958), p.44.

¹¹³ Delaney, *Demography*, p.129, Table 3.3.

¹¹⁴ *Irish Democrat*, July, 1946, p.5. This is an early example of a controversial phenomenon later labelled by Mary Hickman as the 'myth of homogeneity' whereby Irish migrants were, in terms of ethnicity, treated as white British indigenous workers statistically, yet simultaneously often discriminated as migrants in social and cultural terms by the indigenous British population. See Mary J. Hickman, 'Reconstructing deconstructing 'race'', p.288-307; Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.30.

¹¹⁵ Peggy Inman, *Labour in the Munitions Industries*, (London, 1957), p.168-74, cited in Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.119. The official British WW2 history was published by the British HMSO office over several decades following the ending of hostilities.

This wartime recruitment campaign set the trend for the post-war eruption in construction migrants to Britain.

Whereas the British Minister for Reconstruction, in 1941, forecast increasing national labour levels by 1947 to 800,000 men using de-mobilised service personnel and government training schemes, in practice evidently, Irish migrant workers remained an essential element of the clean-up operation until well after the end of hostilities.¹¹⁶ *The Irish Democrat*, in December 1945, reported upon the agreements reached with government by British trade unions representing Irish migrant workers in regards to bomb-repair works primarily in London, citing such matters as pay, periodic home leave and subsistence allowances.¹¹⁷ In addition to the bomb-damage recovery, which would take decades, Appendix D details much of the construction activity in the immediate post-war period, including the New Towns programme,¹¹⁸ on which the Irish builders were heavily engaged. Michael Mc (OI#6) came to London in 1954 and, typically, ‘double-jobbed’ to get established.¹¹⁹ Apart from working his regular position with British Rail in Watford, he also did casual construction work on the Hemel Hempstead new towns project. He recalled: ‘That was an Irish subbie who had that work as well. I noticed a lot on the Hemel Hempstead job though; a lot of the hod-carriers were Irish.’¹²⁰

The early 1950s saw the lifting of wartime restrictions on building and civil engineering works.¹²¹ Many migrant Irish originally recruited for war work remained in London. Some of these men, as the *Irish Democrat* observed earlier, were skilled craftsmen who had deliberately de-skilled to obtain permits to travel for war work (e.g. Edmund Murphy, Tommy Healy). They were now able to revert to their craft status as normal commercial enterprise began to recover. Average annual migration from Ireland to Britain rose steadily, decade-by-decade, once wartime security permit restrictions were lifted and state regulation of migration in both Ireland and Britain lessened after July 1946.¹²² By 1951 there were 716,000 people born on the island

¹¹⁶ Appendix D, p.9.

¹¹⁷ *The Irish Democrat*, December, 1945, p.8.

¹¹⁸ Appendix D, pp.8-11.

¹¹⁹ Other examples of the phenomenon of double-jobbing amongst interviewees include Tom M - Leitrim (OI#1), Kevin H – Galway (OI#3), and John F – Mayo (OI#16). It was very common amongst migrants of all ethnicities newly arrived in London to take advantage of multiple employment opportunities if available.

¹²⁰ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.104.

¹²¹ These restrictions were harsh and controlled normal trading activity within the construction industry. See Potts, ‘Construction during World War II’, p.848. see also *Contract Journal*, 2 April, 1952, p.1279.

¹²² Delaney, *Demography*, Table 4.1, p.163.

of Ireland living in Britain, 203,000 of them in London alone.¹²³ However regulation of male travel persisted longer than female,¹²⁴ therefore male Irish migration from independent Ireland reduced from an annual average of 11,258 in 1936-1946 to 10,309 in 1946-1951.¹²⁵ By the start of the 1950s the perilous state of the Irish economy and the incipient demand for reconstruction labour in Britain meant the five-year period 1951-1956 saw average annual male migration more than double to 21,657. It peaked again in 1956-1961 to 21,914, indicating around 110,000 men for that decade alone.¹²⁶ Thereafter up to the start of the 1970s average annual net migration of Irish males from the Republic reduced drastically, to 7,523 in the period 1961-66, then to 4,950 from 1966-1971, reflecting the upturn in Irish economic fortunes under Lemass.¹²⁷

What was, by this point, a haemorrhage in demographic terms was the result of a complex web of factors, but there can be little doubt that economic hardship was at the top of the list. Every interviewee for this project, bar one, cites the lack of opportunity and long-term prospects for employment as the primary reasons for their decision to emigrate. Late modernity, the march of urbanisation and the rising socio-economic mobility in post-war Britain have been cited as the main reasons why Ireland was unable to retain the young manual labour population it was producing by this time. McNabb observed that the closed and rigid class-structures of earlier twentieth century Ireland which accorded low social status to farm labourers and the cottier classes were undergoing rebellion. Farm workers were leaving for England in their droves because they could gain ‘more respect’ than was accorded them at home: ‘With the emancipation of the working class and the change-over to the wage system, farmers’ sons remaining at home are finding it difficult to maintain their social standing.’¹²⁸ Redmond observed a parallel situation subsisted for women in domestic service.¹²⁹ The tensions between traditional Irish rural communities and class revolt in the post-war period were straining the former to its limit; McGahern’s observation that the countryside was emptying towards London was prescient.¹³⁰

¹²³ See chapter 2.2, tables 2.1-2.3 and White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.96.

¹²⁴ Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.29.

¹²⁵ Delaney, *Demography*, Table 4.1, p.162.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.231.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.231.

¹²⁸ P. McNabb, ‘Demography and Social Structure’ in J. Newman (ed.), *The Limerick Rural Survey, 1958-1964*, (Tipperary, 1964), at pp. 193, 209, 218 cited in Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.114.

¹²⁹ Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.136, 203.

¹³⁰ John McGahern, ‘Oldfashioned’ in *Creatures of the Earth*, (London, 1992), p.238.

Meanwhile, throughout the 1950s the remnants of the largely itinerant Irish builders who had served the war economy so well by being highly mobile and adaptable as a unified workforce were now sundered and re-settling in various clusters throughout London – primarily in north London, where they had begun to establish themselves before the war.¹³¹ These clusters gradually grew and interconnected in socio-economic terms to form a dynamic communal network characteristic of an ethnic enclave. New arrivals as outlined above swelled this community of construction workers to probably somewhere between 74,000 and 100,000 men (including those who settled in satellite towns and new towns within the LMA) by the 1960s.¹³² One third of my interviewees came to work in London in this early post-war period.¹³³ The earliest arrival, Dinny D, (OI#2) was a timekeeper for McAlpine during the demolition and clearance of 320 bomb-damaged dwelling houses in 1950.¹³⁴ He recalled that: ‘The McAlpine’s workforce on site at that time was 156 men [...] All directly employed [...] and 95% of them were Irish; there were so few Englishmen, my goodness, because you knew by the surnames and the accents’.¹³⁵ Some of these men were almost certainly erstwhile wartime workers. Dinny sometimes called them ‘shovelmen’ and this term accurately reflects the almost universally physically-demanding manual nature of the excavation and construction work they undertook. They were also referred to as ‘foot-iron men’.¹³⁶

Dinny’s recollections reinforce the key part played by McAlpine in the early chronology of the post-war Irish migrant builders; also endorsing the anthemic status of the song *McAlpine’s Fusiliers* to this generation of migrant builders. John P (OI#13) who arrived in London from Roscommon in the mid-1950s - via Manchester – accumulated merit credits over the first few jobs to earn the label of a ‘Macs man’:

Interviewer: Did you work for McAlpine’s?

John: I did, I worked for ages for them, and Taylor Woodrow and Wimpeys of course! Nothing wrong with them, y’see, if you done one job with McAlpine’s and was alright - you had to be a good auld grafter [...] once you had two or three of them, then “he’s a Macs man” y’see?¹³⁷

¹³¹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.88-95, Sorohan, *Irish London*, pp.9-10, Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.364, 562.

¹³² See chapter 2.2, table 2.3.

¹³³ See chapter 2.2, table 2.5.

¹³⁴ See fn.33 and Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, pp.25-36.

¹³⁵ Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, pp.30-31.

¹³⁶ See chapter 4.2 and figure 4.3 *infra*.

¹³⁷ Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, p.270.

John P's memory infers that new Irish mail-boat migrants did not self-identify as 'navvies'; one definitive characteristic of the navy class being, according to Sykes', their zealous reluctance to be seen as tied to any contractor or employer; something they regarded as anathema.¹³⁸ Amongst the oral histories collected for this research five interviewees worked either directly or via a subcontractor for McAlpine, two (Dinny D, OI#2 and John P, OI#13) in the early 1950s,¹³⁹ one in the late 1960s (John F, OI#16)¹⁴⁰ and one in the mid-1990s, (Noel O, OI#20) although none were company men in the long-term.¹⁴¹ Mac Amhlaigh also highlights McAlpine's pre-eminence of as an employer, commenting in 1952: 'I never saw as many *'pinchers'* in one pub as there was in the *Jolly Smokers* tonight. I heard that it was a big new job that McAlpine was starting that brought them to Northampton.'¹⁴²

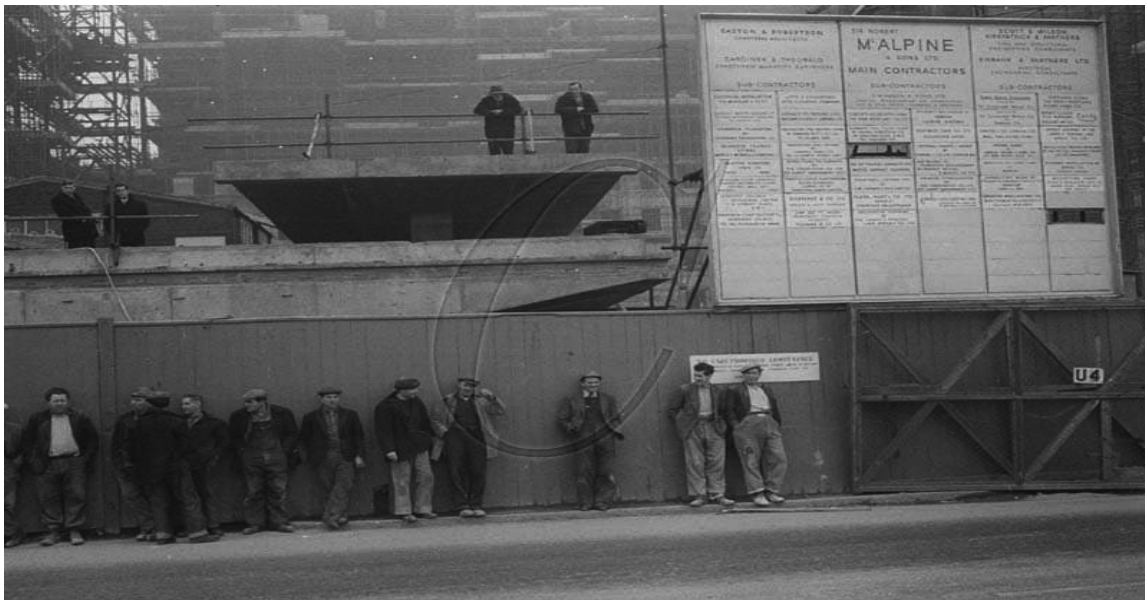


Figure 3.4 - Irish migrant labourers waiting to start shift outside major McAlpine project in 1950s London

(Source: Printed from original album cover of 'Paddy in the Smoke' (Topic Records 12T176) available at <https://mainlynorfolk.info/folk/records/paddyinthesmoke>)

O'Brien contends Irish representation increased at managerial level within McAlpine over time: 'If you visit a McAlpine project, the Construction Manager, or General Foreman, and all the gangers are always Irish.'¹⁴³ Dinny D's experience aligned with this view: 'McAlpines, my friend, were Irish to ninety-odd percent. Even in head office there were

¹³⁸ Sykes, 'Navvies: Their Work Attitudes', pp. 21-35, p.25.

¹³⁹ Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, pp.25-35.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.369.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.475.

¹⁴² Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.74.

¹⁴³ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.154.

Irishmen who climbed that ladder to as near the top as you can go!’¹⁴⁴ The primacy of McAlpine as an Irish employer receded in the later decades of the post-war era, as the settled community spread out to work with a wider selection of other British contractors or elected to work for the expanding Irish subcontract market instead.

The expanding post-war field of opportunity – particularly for those migrant Irish of an entrepreneurial turn – was centred on infrastructure: energy and power, roads, rail, bridges, tunnels, water and sewerage services. These elements all involved heavy civil engineering work, the field of expertise the Irish had made their own during the Second World War. For example, in 1949, a crew of Irishmen – probably at least 3,000-strong - were engaged in constructing what was then Europe’s largest oil refinery near the future location of the power station, which would follow in the mid-1960s.



EUROPE'S LARGEST OIL REFINERY—PROGRESS ON THE ESSO REFINERY AT FAWLEY, HAMPSHIRE, WHICH IS TO GO INTO PRODUCTION IN THE AUTUMN : A view of the distillation units at the refinery which is being constructed by the Esso Petroleum Company (lately Anglo-American Oil Co.) on the shores of Southampton Water. Rising in the foreground is the chimney-stack of the boiler-house. Inset above on right—Construction work in progress on a 49-ft.-diameter sphere which will be used for the storing of butane.

Figure 3.5 - Fawley Oil Refinery, Southampton, 1951

(Source: *The Sphere*; London Vol. 205, Issue. 2670, (Apr 14, 1951): 69.

Esso’s Fawley Oil Refinery (civil engineering works by George Wimpey, built 1949-51) was constructed to an astonishingly fast programme of nineteen months at a cost of £37.5 million (at 1951 prices) and supplied oil via industrial-scale steel pipelines to power stations in London.¹⁴⁵ The site was so remote that many of the 5,000 workers had to be housed in a

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, pp.30-31.

¹⁴⁵ *The Irish Times*, September 15, 1951, p.1 ; *The Sphere*, (London), Vol. 205, Iss. 2670, April 14, 1951, p.69.

temporary camp, complete with canteen, club and cinema. Work kept on schedule, even during the awful winter of 1950-51, the bleakest in local memory.¹⁴⁶ Later, Noel O (OI#20), worked on Fawley power station after arriving in London in 1965. His experience fulfils the itinerant-settler trajectory discussed earlier, where young, newly-arrived migrants tended to chase the big money as travelling men for some years before settling back in London.¹⁴⁷ Fawley had a high proportion of Irish migrant builders because of the heavy civil-engineering nature of the work involved as illustrated in this newspaper article of the time:

While luxury liners sailed in and out of Southampton's docks overhead, just thirty-three feet below the sea floor a motley crew of Irishmen and Scots were "bent nearly double and pouring with sweat, grimly tunnelling their way through the earth below the sea bed", the Southern Daily Echo was shocked by the 'mole man' wage of £100 a week but thought they were "worth every penny".¹⁴⁸

Another refinery which attained near-mythological status in the folklore of urban Irish construction workers was aforementioned 'Isle of Grain', on the east coast of Kent. Dominic Behan's legendary working song *McAlpine's Fusilier's* references this project: '*I stripped to the skin with the Darky Flynn [sic] / Way down upon the Isle of Grain*'¹⁴⁹ and given that Sir Robert McAlpine and George Wimpey – two of the most ubiquitous British employers of Irish migrant labour – were the main-contractors, it is unsurprising that Irish migrant labour made a significant contribution.¹⁵⁰ The cultural symbolism of this vast project amongst the Irish (imbued to some extent by Behan's splenetic lyrics) is that of the archetypal nomadic encamped navy living the desolate, compounded life of the itinerant labourer. In fact of the 8,000

The scale of construction undertaken on these post-war industrial behemoths is hard to comprehend; 100,000 tons of steel, 300 miles of steel, cast-iron and concrete pipework and 100,000 cubic yards of reinforced concrete, almost all of which was hand placed and finished by manual labourers – again, largely the work of Irish labour.

¹⁴⁶ *The Telegraph*, 19 Sep 2014. Available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/lifestyle/life-journeys/11088042/fawley-refinery-petrochemical-plant.html> (accessed 11 June, 2019).

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.465-468.

¹⁴⁸ Adam Smith, 'Fawley Power Station' citing the *Southern Daily Echo*, 21 June, 1965.

¹⁴⁹ Liner notes to track 16, Frank Harte and Donal Lunny - *There's Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*, (Daisy DLCD022), available at The Living Tradition Website (<http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/dlcd022.htm>, accessed 18 March, 2015). The reference to Darky Flynn is erroneous. The individual concerned was actually Darkie Finn, from Doocastle, County Mayo. This song, and Darkie Finn, are examined in greater detail in chapter 5.

¹⁵⁰ Documentary film titled 'Kent Oil Refinery (1954)' (BP ASSET ID:802382) at BPVideoLibrary, available at <https://www.bpvideolibrary.com/record/399> (accessed 11 June, 2019). Amongst other tasks, they helped drive 6,000 precast concrete piles into the marshy subsoil, mixed and placed 37,000 tonnes of cement, 14 million bricks and excavated and trenched 600 miles of steel pipeline installation.

workers employed at peak productivity, only 1,500 were accommodated on site.¹⁵¹ Reg Hall recalls, as a schoolboy, fleets of buses carrying Irish migrant workers, passing his house in Gravesend each day.¹⁵² Cowley observed that the proximity of this project to London led to a high labour turnover and ‘gave employment to thousands of Irishmen and became something of a legend in Camden Town, Kilburn, Cricklewood’ which were all developing into post-war ethnic Irish clusters by then.¹⁵³ Fawley and Grain were two of twelve such massive oil refinery projects being undertaken throughout post-war Britain at the time,¹⁵⁴ all of which, it can be confidently asserted, were built in large part by Irish migrants, many of whom were based in London.

The atomic power programme embarked upon by Britain in the mid-1950s also provided ample work and business opportunities.¹⁵⁵ Typically these projects involved camp-based accommodations for at least some of the workforce. At Oldbury Magnox Station, near Bristol, several hundred of the workers lived on the camp accommodation, but some chose to arrange their own offsite digs and lodgings. An RTÉ ‘Radharc’ documentary film interviewed some of the many migrant Irish workers employed on this project in 1965 and found a highly diverse range of opinions. The camp accommodation is shown to be basic but clean and comfortable and the site canteen facilities were good by comparison to many projects in London. This, and the higher wages available for working on these remote specialist projects probably explains why many migrant Irish workers opted for this kind of camp life on a temporary basis.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, between 1960 and 1983 some £1.3 billion of public water infrastructure funds was spent constructing 44 large dams nationwide, some 10% of which were awarded to one Irish contractor, M.J. Gleeson.¹⁵⁷ In the LMA region 5 of these dams were constructed by Gleeson, John Laing, W.C French and Higgs & Hill – all of whom employed significant Irish labour.¹⁵⁸ Associated with dam construction were water reservoirs

¹⁵¹ Documentary film titled ‘Kent Oil Refinery (1954)’

¹⁵² Interview with Dr Reg Hall, (OI#22), Croydon, (3 June, 2016), Appendix E, pp.2-3.

¹⁵³ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p168.

¹⁵⁴ *The Sphere*, (London), Vol. 205, Iss. 2670, April 14, 1951, p.69.

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix D, p.14.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Irish Men Build Nuclear Power Plant 1965’ at RTÉ Archives Exhibitions, available at <https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1030-emigration-once-again/139198-oldbury-work-camp/> Oldbury Nuclear Power Station was built by the ubiquitous Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd (<https://arquivo.pt/wayback/20090719150823/http://www.industcards.com/nuclear-uk.htm>) between 1961-1968 (<https://mythornbury.co.uk/thornbury/oldbury-power-station-history>) (All accessed 11 June, 2019).

¹⁵⁷ See Appendix D, pp.14-5.

¹⁵⁸ British Dam Society, Register of British Dams (CRE, 1994), cited in Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.260-1.

and Irish labour was involved in a number of such projects in and around London in the early part of the post-war era.



Figure 3.6 - a typical public water sewer connection tunnel being excavated by hand
(Source: Timothy O’Grady & Steve Pyke, *I Could Read the Sky*, (London, 1997), p69.)

Depicted historically as semi-skilled or unskilled workers, Irish tunnel-men were the elite of heavy manual labouring. Throughout the twentieth century the ‘tunnel tiger’¹⁵⁹ came to be seen in a different, far more skilled, more heroic light by their fellow workers in other parts of the industry. The London Underground rail system was the primary source of such works for the migrant Irish. Kevin O’Connor, for example, refers to the virtual monopoly of Donegal men on the construction of the Victoria Line extension between 1962 and 1968.¹⁶⁰ The reputation of Irish tunnel tigers stood the test of time; the *Irish Post* newspaper, in 1995, referred to building experts claims that practically all the tunnellers in Britain’s private sector civil engineering sector were Irish, coming mainly from Donegal, Mayo and Galway.¹⁶¹ Similarly Cowley quotes an English pit-ganger on the Victoria Line project who said, ‘If it

¹⁵⁹ A term first ascribed to them publicly in Ewan MacColl’s 1960s song-title from the album *Solo Flight*, Topic Records, (London, 1972). See chapter 6 and Appendix G, p.9.

¹⁶⁰ O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.123. For example, in 1958 more than one hundred Irish tunnel miners working for Balfour Beatty & Co. excavated new interchange and escalator tunnels and a sub-surface station, tickets halls and administrative office, by hand, as part of the new Central Line refurbishments at Notting Hill station in the midst of what was then an Irish and Caribbean migrant population cluster. See *Contract Journal*, 13 March, 1958, p.1286.

¹⁶¹ *Irish Post*, 18, February, 1995, pp.1-3.

wasn't for the Irish there wouldn't be a single bloody tunnel built in England'.¹⁶²

There were three major tunnel projects which formed the bulk of the Irish workload for the early post-war period. The Victoria Line was the largest. Earlier, in 1956, Edmund Nuttall were contracted to build the Dartford Tunnel under the Thames.¹⁶³ Some 1,200 miners undertook the work,¹⁶⁴ many were migrant Mayo and Donegal men who would later transfer to the Blackwall Tunnel, then the Victoria Line. The Southbound Blackwall Tunnel bore, built in two phases, with the new Northern Approach (1958-1960) being constructed by a joint-venture of Holland, Hannon & Cubitts and Fitzpatrick & Sons, (see Figure 3.7) the latter one of the earliest and most successful Irish firms founded in London by a Cork-man in the 1920s.¹⁶⁵ The main Blackwall Tunnel (1960-1967) was constructed by Balfour Beatty.¹⁶⁶ Irish migrant labour played a fundamental role in delivering these projects.

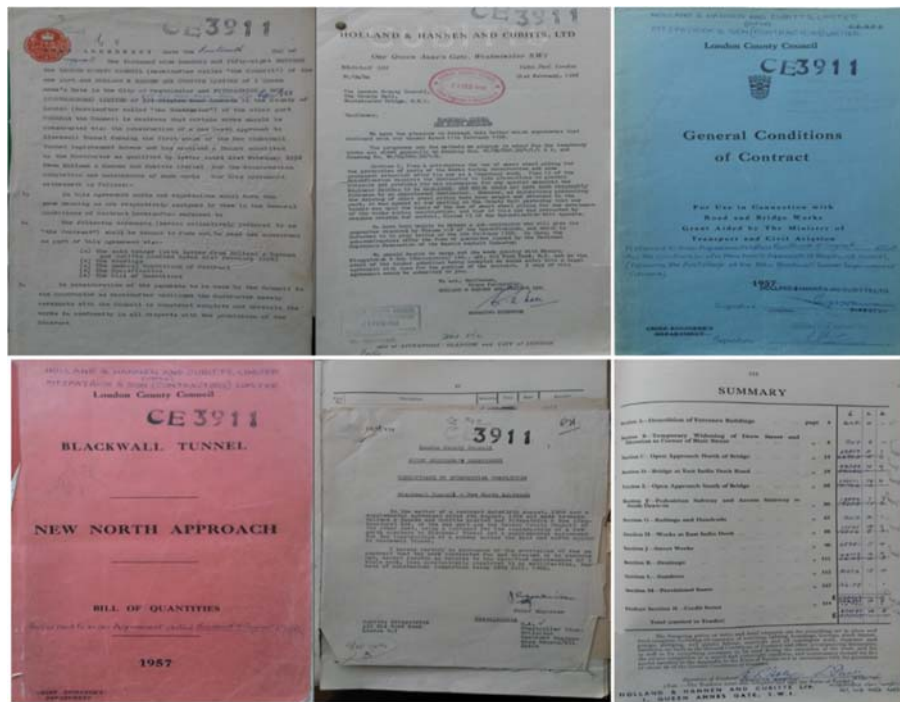


Figure 3.7 - Archival copies of Contract Documents for Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach (1958-1960) (Source: LMA/CE3966)

¹⁶² Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.178.

¹⁶³ Edmund Nuttall Civil Engineering Ltd are a major British civil engineering contractor founded in Manchester in the late 19th century, now BAM Nutall, they built many of the major UK tunnel projects of the 20th century.

¹⁶⁴ Fourteen miles downstream of central London, and an essential additional crossing point on the Thames which would, in the second half of the post-war period, form part of the colossal M25 orbital motorway. This project involved mainly hand excavating soft clay manually via a Greatshield system. See, F. Campbell-Golding *et al*, 'Decompression Sickness During Construction Of The Dartford Tunnel' in *British Journal Of Industrial Medicine*, no.17, (1960), pp.167-180.

¹⁶⁵ See Appendix B, pp.6, 15, 26-36.

¹⁶⁶ Margo Cole, Jackie Whitelaw, 'Balfour Beatty 1909 – 2009: The first 100 years' in *New Civil Engineer*, Issue 10, (17 December, 2009), pp.6-7.

In a somewhat nostalgic 1969 BBC documentary showing miners and labourers hand digging and installing tunnel linings and rings on the Oxford Circus section of the Victoria Line, the voice-over commentary stated:

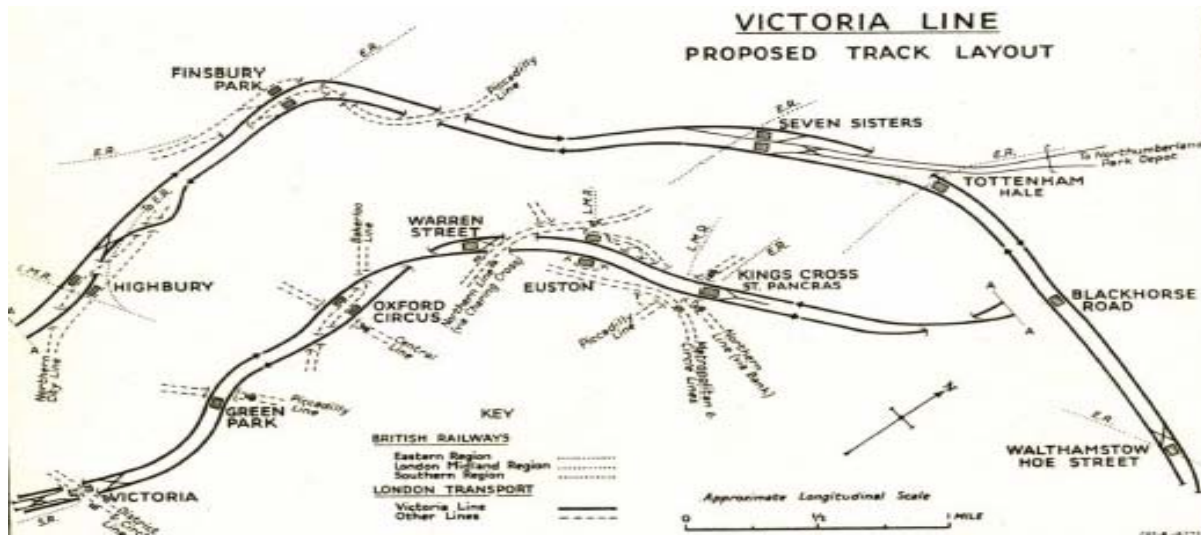


Figure 3.8 - Victoria Line Proposed Track Layout

(Source: C.H.S Tupholme, 'Excavating for London's New Victoria Line' in *Ground Engineering*, (March, 1969), pp.24-33, at p.24

It was work for big, strong and enduring men. For men with iron in their arms and buttocks, for the shovel rather than the machine. It was a return, in some respects, to the methods of the Victorian engineers; muscles to match the iron determination to face the task [...] Where did they come from? Where have they come from so often in the story of these islands? **Sons of Ireland, almost all of them.** [...] back again, better paid, and with pneumatic drills, to help to mine the new Victoria Line.¹⁶⁷ (emphasis added)

Three of the interviewees for this research worked at various stages of their careers on tunnel projects, including two on the Victoria Line itself: Tom M, (OI#1), batch-mixed concrete at sub-surface level;¹⁶⁸ Tony C (OI#7) was a banksman at seventeen, and two years later, a pony-boy, pushing bogeys up from the tunnel-face to the spoil removal zones at the bottom of the tunnel shafts;¹⁶⁹ and Kevin H (OI#3) worked on the Fleet Line project in the mid-1970s, the first phase of what later became the Jubilee Line:¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ *How They Dug The Victoria Line*, BBC TV & British Transport Films, Dir. B Privett / D Washbourne, (1969), 16:45mins, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwRRSJ_wtIq (accessed 22 Sep. 18)

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.22-24.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.115.

¹⁷⁰ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, p.189.

Well we were, more or less, on top most of the time, but if they were short of men on the face you'd be brought down and put into a gang. There was one particular gang I remember, they were Donegal men – most of the gangs were either Donegal or Mayo and a few Galway – and, of course, the Donegal team had to be top guns again! They went by so many rings, y'know the steel lining rings? And if the Galway or Mayo men did four, well, then the Donegal gang would come back with five.¹⁷¹

Almost all the interviewees who came to London in the 1950s and 1960s had some experience with tunnel work, even if it was just occasional. Some had tragic tales; Kevin H and the well-known Irish traditional fiddle player Brian Rooney both lost brothers on tunnel projects, one on the Clyde Tunnel and one on the Victoria Line.¹⁷² Several spoke of the camaraderie juxtaposed with the fierce rivalry of daily productivity, as Kevin H does above. The ever-present physical dangers of death and serious bodily injury posed by tunnel work; falls, collapse, amputation, cuts and bruising, were recognised as damaging over the long-term by many within the industry. Maurice Brick, a veteran builder of the 1960s tried tunnelling in his time, and recalled the two Donegal tunnellers who shared digs with him one lonely 1960s Christmas, concluding that they 'made tons of money. The work was hard but, I'll tell you, they were harder. [...] I gained a great deal of respect for the Donegal fellows after that.'¹⁷³ Chapter 4.4 examines dangerous working, recklessness and health and safety; it constantly proved to be one of the fundamental issues in the working lives of Irish migrant builders in all construction activity, but especially so tunnel work.

John Leonard, a Monaghan man raised in Donegal, contributed an account of his experiences working as a miner on the Victoria Line project in the mid-60s to the London Irish Centre.¹⁷⁴ Together with Tony C's (OI#7) recollections, and Cowley's field interviews it gives an insight to the daily working lives of Irish migrant tunnel-men at this time; details such as the hierarchy of relationships between the supervisory staff – who were almost entirely English

¹⁷¹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.46.

¹⁷² Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.40; '*An Godfather: Bryan Rooney*', Sonta/ TG4 television documentary (2014 –Dir:James Clenaghan), at 16.10mins – 16.29mins.

¹⁷³ Maurice Brick, 'A hard Christmas it was in London in the 1960s' in *Irishcentral.com* blog, available at <http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/ahardchristmasitwasinlondoninthe1960s135401063237423631> (accessed 25 Jan, 2017)

¹⁷⁴ 'John Leonard's Story' in *London Irish Centre: Our Stories*, London Transport Museum, available online at https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/assets/downloads/LIC_final.pdf (accessed 25 Jan, 2017).

– and the Irish tunnel gangs.¹⁷⁵ The main tunnel bores were excavated partially by tunnel boring machine ('TBM') and digger shields but there was also a significant amount of smaller-bore 12-foot diameter tunnels which all had to be hand-dug using pneumatic airspades as shown in Figure 3.9. John Leonard recalled the harsh nature of this work:

I was mining with a spade until they introduced the digger shields. When the shields came in, conditions improved. It was all conveyor belts and no digging, all you had to do was build the segments [...] I remember the work as very hard. At first you had 12 hour shifts, though there were breaks where you had to come up to the surface, and tea was sent down. When they brought in the shields it was three eight hour shifts; a day shift from 7 o'clock to 3 o'clock; an afternoon or 'back' shift from 3 o'clock to 11 o'clock; then the night shift from 11 o'clock to 7 o'clock.¹⁷⁶



Figure 3.9 - Irish 'tunnel tigers' – almost certainly Donegal men - working with pneumatic airspades at tunnel face.

(Source: still image taken from *How They Dug The Victoria Line*, BBC TV & British Transport Films, Dir. B Privett / D Washbourne, (1969), 16:45mins, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwRRSJ_wtIg (accessed 22 Sep. 18)

¹⁷⁵ General Foremen ('GF') and Pit Bosses were generally English cockneys, as were the site engineers. Names like Sid and Fred were recounted for these supervisors, who operated entirely separately - both in administrative and cultural terms - from the Irish mining gangs. On the Victoria to Oxford Circus phase, where the main civil engineering contractor was John Mowlem & Co, the GF was rather dramatically referred to as 'The General' and was responsible for agreeing a price for each section (known as 'workshops') with each mining gang, which would be based upon tender-rate information provided by the contractor's quantity surveying team. See Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.178-9 ; Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.116.

¹⁷⁶ 'John Leonard's Story' in *London Irish Centre: Our Stories*

Leonard remarked, ‘You worked in a five man gang. There was a leading miner, two miners and two miner’s labourers. Each section of work would have a price based on an estimate of how much work was required and how much time’. The pricing mechanism worked on the basis of incentivised hours with a flat hourly rate of pay and was based upon how quickly each gang would take to excavate for, and install each 2ft wide tunnel lining ring, consisting of six separate segments. ‘If the price didn’t suit the gang you might split up, move to another gang on some other part of the line’.¹⁷⁷ Tony C (OI#7) emphasised that the tunnel gangs were seen very much as the elite of the Irish migrant workforce at the time and, as is shown in section 4.3, earned quite spectacular money for their labours.¹⁷⁸ But as Tom M (OI#1) pointed out, the reputation of the Irish tunnellers on this particular project had a ‘trickle-down’ effect to the more ‘ordinary’ tradesmen and labourers as well, who also earned better than average wages.¹⁷⁹

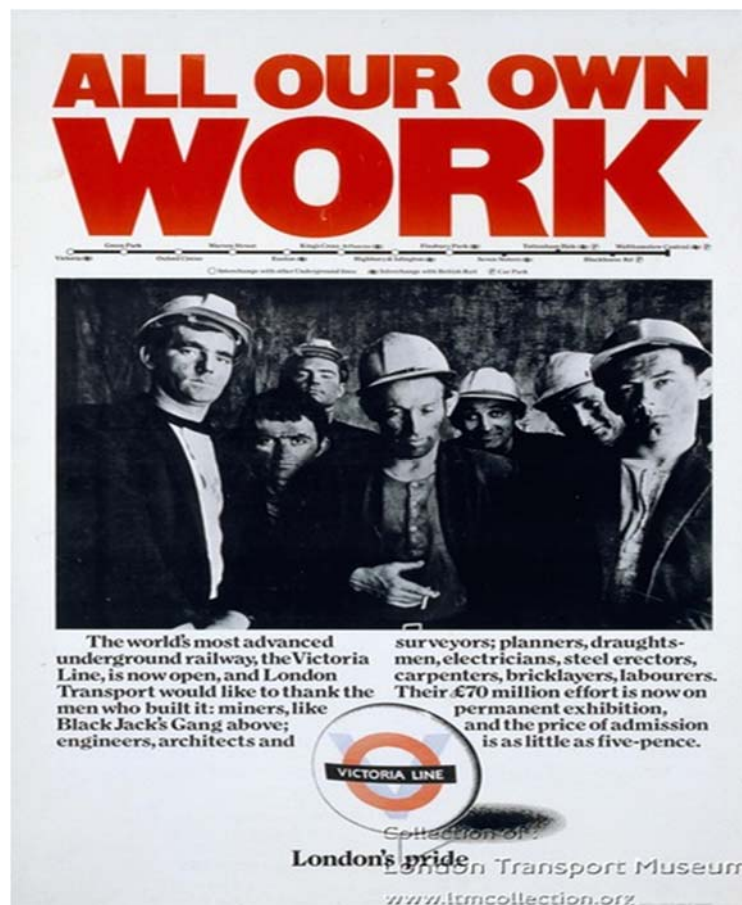


Figure 3.10 - Poster; ‘ “All our own work- Irish diggers”’, artist unknown, 1969.

(Source: London Transport Museum, Online Museum Reference number: 1997/8775, available at http://www.ltmcollection.org/museum/object/object.html?_IXMAXHITS_=1&_IXSR_=r5Z14VJISb&IXsummary=gallery/gallery_sub&IXgallery=CGP.050.022&_IXFIRST_=13, [accessed 26 Aug, 2015])

¹⁷⁷ ‘John Leonard’s Story’ in *London Irish Centre: Our Stories*

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.117.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.23.

The Victoria Line copper-fastened the reputation of the Irish migrant builder as the civil engineering world's elite; it is where Ewan MacColl coined the phrase 'tunnel tigers' and, as can be seen from Figure 3.10, even London Transport themselves acknowledged the huge contribution which Irish tunnel-men (most of whom were Donegal and Mayo) made to this flagship post-war project.¹⁸⁰ It was, though, in the overall picture of what the Irish did in the post-war reconstruction period, merely another part of a much larger jigsaw.

Irish migrant entrepreneurial endeavour was beginning to making inroads to new technological developments such as aviation infrastructure and the larger defence infrastructure market, with Fitzpatrick & Sons became involved in paving works for the new USAAF bases being built around this time.¹⁸¹ Wimpey, whose initial London Airport construction contract at Heathrow lasted ten years, until the mid-1950s, were expressly reported in Irish newspapers as employing 1,200 Irish migrant builders who lodged in temporary camp facilities which included a Catholic chapel and a GAA pitch.¹⁸² These are further examples of the constant stream of major projects which were pulling Irish migrant workers in their droves into heavy civil engineering works.

As with tunnel work, the Irish migrant builders reputation for roadbuilding stems from the 19th-century navy legacy, but was brought back into sharp cultural focus in the late 1950s again mainly by Ewan MacColl.¹⁸³ The construction of the M1 was the 'flagship' development in terms of the employment of Irish migrant labour at this time, and MacColl, for example, put the Irish workforce at over half the total.¹⁸⁴ Another crude assessment based upon an interpretation of collected interviews and commentary suggests that 30%-50% of the labour

¹⁸⁰ London Transport Museum accompanying commentary to the poster in figure 3.10 reads: The miners who excavated the Victoria line **were mostly Irishmen**. It was hot, tough work, but **the men could earn at least £100 a week**, a large sum in the mid-1960s. This poster featured 'Black Jack's Gang' -members of the tunnelling crew when the new Tube line opened.' (emphasis added)

¹⁸¹ 'Fitzpatrick narrows the generation gap' in *Construction News* (online), (17 May, 2001), unpaginated, available at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

¹⁸² *Western People*, October 12, 1946, p.4.

¹⁸³ MacColl and BBC Radio producer Charles Parker collaborated in 1959 (BBC Home Service, 5 November, 1959) to make a documentary series "Radio Ballads" which included "The Song of a Road" chronicling the life of Irish migrant builders constructing the M1 Motorway. This included a song composed by MacColl called "England's Motorways" which is now part of the canon of Irish migrant working songs. See Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.176 & fn 32. See also chapter 6 and Appendix G.

¹⁸⁴ Liner notes to 'Song Of A Road' by Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker & Peggy Seeger, (November, 1959), available online at: <https://ewanmaccoll.bandcamp.com/album/song-of-a-road> (accessed 20 March, 2019)

force was Irish.¹⁸⁵ Another major road project which involved Irish migrant labour was the infamous ‘Westway’ or the ‘Western avenue’ which was a 3.5-mile (5.6 km) long elevated dual carriageway section of the A40 trunk road in west London running from Paddington to North Kensington.¹⁸⁶ John F (OI#16) learnt much of his steel-fixing skills from fellow Irishmen on this section of motorway construction, working for a Cork subcontractor called Sullivan.¹⁸⁷ The Elephant & Castle roundabout realignments, Hammersmith Flyover (1961), Hyde Park Corner Underpass (1962) and the Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach were other major schemes built largely by Irish migrant labour at this time.¹⁸⁸

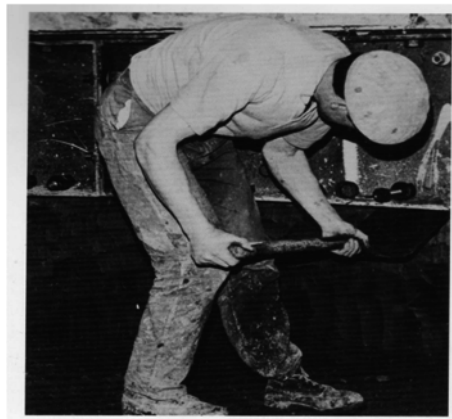


Figure 3.11 - Civil engineering operative cutting back London clay 20m below the Thames
(Source: R.J. Barwick, ‘The Reconstruction of London Bridge: 1967 to 1973’ in *The Construction Historian*, Issue 04 (April, 2019), p.18.

Notably whilst the Irish reputation for concrete bridge construction was being enhanced on Laing’s M1 project, in the centre of London, amidst the forest of new office developments discussed below, John Mowlem & Co – another of the wartime recruiters of Irish migrant labour – were rebuilding another vital traffic route to cope with the exponential increase in vehicular traffic, namely London Bridge (1967-72). Irish labour was involved with Mowlem particularly in the substructure and superstructure concrete and excavation works, which were highly complex feats of civil engineering. The supporting piers were constructed in London clay some 20 metres below the bed of the river and within 5 metres of two existing Northern Line Underground tunnels; this was arduous, complex and dangerous engineering work as the

¹⁸⁵ Linda Gray et al, ‘Building The M1 Motorway’, p.32 citing BCL, MS 4000/6/1/14/6/C, Parker/MacColl interview with un-named Irish worker.

¹⁸⁶ Constructed between 1964 and 1970 to relieve congestion at Shepherd’s Bush caused by traffic from Western Avenue struggling to enter central London on roads of insufficient capacity. The Main-contractor for the Westway project was John Laing & Sons. See Berry Ritchie, *The Good Builder: the John Laing Story*, (London, 1997), p.141.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.360.

¹⁸⁸ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.71.

foundation shafts for the new piers had to be carefully excavated by hand because of the proximity to the London Underground railway tunnels (See Figure 3.11).¹⁸⁹

The discovery of vast reserves of North Sea gas in 1959 precipitated a further boom in work opportunities for the migrant Irish builders, particularly when in 1966 in the Gas Council undertook the gargantuan task of converting virtually every one of the estimated 35 million gas appliances in 13.5 million properties across the country.¹⁹⁰ Considerable numbers of Mailboat migrants and temporary sojourners worked ‘on the gas’ – mainly via the subcontract system. Usually these small gangs operated at tier 4 or lower in the contractual chain¹⁹¹ – on the installation of the vast network of submain and domestic distribution.¹⁹²



Figure 3.12 - - Irish migrant labour working for J Murphy & Sons on high-pressure 'trunk' gas mains and sub-mains for North Thames Gas Board in mid-1960s

(Source: *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, (London, 2011), p.23)

A few of the post-war ‘start-up’ Irish entrepreneurial civil-engineering businesses – particularly J Murphy & Sons (Green Murphy) on a national basis and M.J. Clancy & Sons Ltd in the south-east region – were big enough by the mid-1960s to secure primary contracts for the high-pressure trunk, arterial ring and trunk mains direct from the North Thames Gas Board,

¹⁸⁹ R.J. Barwick, ‘The Reconstruction of London Bridge: 1967 to 1973’ in *The Construction Historian*, Issue 04 (April, 2019), pp.16-19.

¹⁹⁰ Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry*, p.181.

¹⁹¹ See Appendix D, Table 1, pp.10-11.

¹⁹² Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.206-7.

which oversaw gas supplies in the LMA. Obviously London and the LMA was the largest – and most complex – element of this operation. As Williams observed: ‘Central London [...] could fairly be called unique in the whole country. Apart from the remarkable variety and congestion of buildings, and the problems of carrying out roadworks amidst some of the busiest traffic in Britain, there was a very mixed population’.¹⁹³ By the end of that decade, ‘Green Murphy’, for example, had up to ninety separate gas mains installation gangs operating just across the middle of England.¹⁹⁴

Joe Murphy, younger brother of John by four years, also established a business laying cables in 1958, although he had been working with his brother’s company before that. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he hired thousands of Irish immigrants and gained a reputation for being a tough employer who paid well.’ The success of Joe’s company, JMCCE (J. Murphy Cable Contractors & Civil Engineers Ltd) - known in the London-Irish vernacular as ‘the Grey Murphy’ - was predicated entirely on securing lucrative North Sea oil contracts as well as contracts from bodies such as the GLC and British Rail; like his brother, he had become a multi-millionaire by the second half of the 1960s.¹⁹⁹ The McNicholas Brothers from Bohola, Co. Mayo operated two separate cabling companies which thrived in this constantly-expanding labour market for subsurface infrastructure. A television documentary about the family said that, ‘they dig 1250 miles of trench and open 100,000 holes in Britain’s roads every year. In fact, the infrastructure of Britain is now largely in the hands of the rural Irish’.²⁰⁰

Nine interviewees recount carrying out gas and cable installation at various points of their working lives.²⁰¹ Patrick M (OI#4) seems to have spent most of his time in London working in this sector. He remembers starting within 2 days of his arrival in London in 1967,²⁰²

¹⁹³ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, , p.190, 192.

¹⁹⁴ Murphy Group (Corporate authors), *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, (London, 2011), p.16

¹⁹⁹ Sean Boylan, ‘Biography of Joseph (John) Murphy’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography, online ed.*, Online: Royal Irish Academy; Cambridge University Press, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridge->

[org.iproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9611&searchClicked=clicked&quickadvsearch=yes](https://dib-cambridge-org.iproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9611&searchClicked=clicked&quickadvsearch=yes)

²⁰⁰ Channel 4 Documentary: (Dir. Molly Dineen) ‘The Pick, the Shovel and the Open Road’ (1990).

²⁰¹ See: Interviews with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), p.53; Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), pp.59-74; Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), pp.115-22; Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), p.157; John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), p.272; Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), pp.311-21; Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), pp.340-1; Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), pp.465-75; Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), pp.512, 522, all in Appendix A.

²⁰² Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.59.

the seemingly endless volume of work available at that time, and working in various parts of southern England including Exeter and Shrewsbury on gas and cable work. He worked for OC Summers, one of the larger North Thames Gas Board subcontractors who in turn procured labour resources through the subcontract chain using informal gangs all paid in cash.²⁰³



Figure 3.13 - McAlpine's Stag Development in 1961

(Source: *A Portrait of Achievement: Sir Robert McAlpine*, Corporate Brochure, (Hemel Hempstead, 2010), available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20160508151434/http://www.sir-robert-mcalpine.com/files/page/200/SRMBrochure2010_web1.pdf (Accessed 22 May, 2019), p.22.

Whilst infrastructure works and heavy civil engineering remained the mainstay for post-war Irish builders, aspects of the reconstruction of London's building stock, especially the ubiquitous use of reinforced concrete and the avant-garde fashion for high-rise building saw many Irishmen involved in the 'skyscraper craze' of the 1950s and 1960s. Kevin H (OI#3) worked for Mowlem on the Millbank Tower, on the north bank of the Thames between Lambeth and Vauxhall bridges, around 1959; he saw the contract to completion in 1963.²⁰⁴ He recalled the labour force on the project was 50-60% ethnically Irish.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.66-9. See also Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.206-7. For cash working in the ethnic control economy see section 4.3.

²⁰⁴ 118-metre high skyscraper originally built for the aviation giants Vickers; one of the earliest post-war tower-block offices, and for a short time the tallest building in London until surpassed by the Post-Office Tower in 1964. See *John Mowlem & Co, Mowlem 1822 - 1972*, Company brochure, (London, 1973), p.7.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.51-52. For the avoidance of doubt, this form of anecdotal evidence of involvement in major construction projects is vital in tracing Irish migrant activities due to the absence of official statistics on the employment profile of major companies.

Migrant Irish labour was also thought to have been heavily involved with the construction of a glut of late 1950s skyscrapers: the Post-Office Tower, built by Peter Lind & Co; McAlpine's huge Stag Development at Victoria together with another large tall-structure project in Aldwych;²⁰⁶ Taylor Woodrow's art-deco style office headquarters of English Electric Co Ltd (1958-1960) at the old Gaiety Theatre site just down the road from McAlpine;²⁰⁷ and later (1968-9) the 118-metre high Commercial Union Tower (now St Helen's Tower) in Leadenhall Street, one of only four top-down engineered concrete framed tower blocks built in London at the time.²⁰⁸ Kevin moved on in 1963 to work for George Wimpey & Co – whose reputation for employing Irish migrant labour had by then earned it the acronym 'We Import More Paddies Every Year'²⁰⁹ – on the notorious Center Point development (1963-7).²¹⁰ recalling that ' Mostly it was all west of Ireland foremen and labour on that job, all Mayo and Galway and all that!'.²¹¹

Other interviewees worked on the new concrete monoliths created by early post-war public housing policy. Paddy B (OI#12) was a bricklayer building social housing for Edmonton Council in the early 1950s, then in Winchmore Hill, Enfield, St. Albans and Brent Cross; the latter working for John (Green) Murphy's property development arm.²¹² Tom M (OI#1) worked for a Gaelic-speaking Mayo subcontractor known as 'Black Mick' in the 1960s who, in turn, subcontracted work from another of the wartime migrant Irish recruiters - Costain Construction.²¹³ He helped build a block of over twenty storeys in Twickenham and a low-rise office development in Richmond in west London.²¹⁴ His brother Patrick also worked for 'Black

²⁰⁶ Featuring one of the first skyscrapers to grace the London skyline, this huge development was constructed on a five-acre site close to Victoria station. See *A Portrait of Achievement: Sir Robert McAlpine*, Corporate Brochure, (Hemel Hempstead, 2010), available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20160508151434/http://www.sir-robert-mcalpine.com/files/page/200/SRMBrochure2010_web1.pdf (Accessed 22 May, 2019), p.22.

²⁰⁷ *Contract Journal*, 16 January, 1958, p.265. 'Ethnically-Irish' means either Irish-born, or first-generation London-born Irish.

²⁰⁸ Esher, *A Broken Wave*, pp.115. See also Emporis Buildings Directory, available at <https://www.emporis.com/buildings/110664/st-helens-london-united-kingdom> (accessed 22 May, 2019).

²⁰⁹ Toby Shelley, *Exploited: Migrant Labour in the New Global Economy*, (New York, 2007), unpaginated, available at <https://books.google.ie> (accessed 24 May, 2019).

²¹⁰ At the major junction of Oxford Street, St Giles' Circus and Tottenham Court Road, the development comprised a thirty-three-storey tower; a nine-storey block to the east including shops, offices, retail units and maisonettes; and a linking block between the two at first-floor level. See National Heritage List for England (NHLE), List Entry Number: 1113172, available online at <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1113172> (accessed 24 May, 2019); Valerie White, *Wimpey: The first hundred years*, (London, 1980), p.26.

²¹¹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.47-48.

²¹² Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Appendix A, p.235, 244.

²¹³ See table 3.1.

²¹⁴ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p12.

Mick’ at Richmond and similarly worked for ‘some subbie that was looking for skins down in Isleworth’ on a thirty-seven-acre council estate for Hounslow Council being constructed by John Mowlem; a job on which the original contractor had been put into administration as a result of an industrial strike.²¹⁵ Tony C (OI#7) worked directly for the Irish main-contractor McInerney, from Clare, who broke into the British market in the 1960s building social housing, on a fourteen-storey block of flats in Bethnal Green, east London.²¹⁶ Tom Mc (OI#9) recalled that Terson ‘used to do an awful lot of the tower block work’ as did John Laing.²¹⁷

3.3. ‘Paddy in the Smoke’: The Settled Irish Builders (1970s, 1980s and 1990s)

The second half of the post-war migration period from c.1970 until the rise of the Celtic Tiger economy in the mid-1990s represented, in general terms, a period of consolidation and settlement for Irish migrant builders working in London and the wider LMA. The early 1970s saw the Irish labour pool expand as migrant settlement peaked at 957,000 nationally, with approximately 136,000 Irish-born males and a further 24,000 British-born second-generation Irish in London working in construction and civil engineering.²¹⁸ The casualised system of bogus self-employment which dominated the informal parts of the industry around London continued both to draw newly-arrived migrant recruits and keep seasoned ‘lumpers’ gainfully employed, often in the manner described by Joe McGarry.²¹⁹ Legislative changes and a clampdown by the UK Revenue (HMRC) began to change attitudes towards casual working and limit opportunities in the mid-1970s;²²⁰ coinciding to some extent with the simple acceptance by many of the mailboat generation that their temporary sojourns were, in fact, becoming permanent migrations. The extent to which parts of north and west London had become hubs of Irish migrant activity by the early 1970s prompted some Irish migrants to recall that working ‘on the buildings, [in] areas in London such as Kilburn or Harlow offered an urban, industrial version of a traditional Irish community living’.²²¹

²¹⁵ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.69, 73.

²¹⁶ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, pp.118-9.

²¹⁷ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, pp.154-5.

²¹⁸ P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), Table 6.3, Irish-born residents in Britain, 1931-1981, p.114, citing Census of Population, Britain. See also chapter 2.2, table 2.3.

²¹⁹ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.506-10.

²²⁰ Discussed in more detail in chapter 4.4 *infra*.

²²¹ Catherine Dunne, *An Unconsidered People: The Irish in London*, (Dublin, 2003), pp.62-63, cited by Corbally,

Attempts to outlaw the ‘lump’ began inducing Irish subcontract firms to move some way towards legitimate employment terms by the mid-1970s, a change which in turn made some of the larger Irish-rooted companies a more attractive career option for those who might otherwise have become ‘company men’ with McAlpine, John Laing and Wimpey. An important consequence of this change was that some of the larger ‘new’ Irish entrepreneurs – particularly Green and Grey Murphy, McNicholas Engineering, M.J. Clancy, Byrne Brothers and Careys – were able to move higher up the contractual chain, from being merely tier 3/4 labour-only subcontractors or specialist engineering subcontractors to being more ‘visible’ from an entrepreneurial viewpoint as main-contractors and specialist subcontractors in their own right.²²²

The UK construction industry, and London in particular, struggled during the 1970s against the background of global economic crisis.²²³ The depth of economic recession into which the British construction market had slid by the middle of 1975 is well-documented in repeated editions of *Building Magazine*.²²⁴ Powell characterises the nature of the British construction industry as a whole in the later post-war era as one of full but temporary and transitory employment, emphasising in this period that ‘Labour turnover was particularly high amongst younger men (they were relatively numerous in building) and among the unskilled and those employed by larger firms [...] Men were spared the need to drive themselves as hard as they once had for fear of losing their jobs’.²²⁵ Despite the nationwide slump, the Irish ethnic labour market in London was operating at its peak efficiency. Amongst the migrant Irish working within the casualised ‘lump’ labour market the fear of job security was replaced by a mode of performative Irishness which privileged profit and wages over safety, welfare or quality; the mantra of most of the lower-tier supervisory staff during this period was ‘tear it all out rough’ – a command to achieve maximum productivity at all costs.

‘Shades of Difference: Irish, Caribbean, and South Asian immigration to the heart of empire, 1948-1971’, (PhD Thesis, University of California, Davis, 2009), p.185.

²²² For example, Byrne Bros Ltd, the major concreting and formwork specialist founded in Putney, south London in 1969 by north Kerry brothers Patsy and Johnny Byrne, undertook one of their first major contracts in 1972 for another British wartime recruiter, Sir Lindsay Parkinson, at the NALGO headquarters in London ‘Byrne Bros. See 50th Anniversary Timeline Video’ available at: <https://www.byrne-bros.co.uk/50th-anniversary/> (Accessed 17 July, 2019). See also Appendices B and D.

²²³ See section 2.5.

²²⁴ See for example, *Building* April-June 1975, Vol 228, nos 14-26.

²²⁵ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.181.

Later in the 1980s, as the mail-boat generation became an older settled community,²²⁶ a larger proportion of the third wave ‘Ryanair generation’ came as higher-educated professional Irish migrants.²²⁷ Many obtained – or gradually developed from manual worker positions into – relatively senior and mid-level management roles in large well-established construction companies.²²⁸ Some of the bigger Irish-founded companies discussed in section 3.4 had, by then, developed into substantial, well-established enterprises and offered opportunities to these better-educated ‘New wave’ migrants.²²⁹ Third-wave migrant and second-generation London-born Irish males (and increasingly more females) worked as site engineers, foremen, site agents, quantity surveyors, health and safety officers and contracts managers.²³⁰

The majority of new male Irish migrants (even allowing for the later twentieth-century improvements in third-level education in Ireland) still usually started in the British construction industry doing manual work – an *Irish Times* survey from the mid-1980s suggesting that 76% of Irish males in Britain were manual workers; mostly in construction.²³¹ This might suggest some deliberate de-skilling (discussed earlier) amongst potentially college-educated Irish migrant men, prioritising gainful employment and remuneration. It may also point to manual work being seen in Irish migrant masculine culture as a rite of passage, irrespective of educational attainment. Third-wave Irish migrants were of similar ages and cultural backgrounds to the second-generation London-Irish, many of whom also followed their fathers into the construction and civil engineering sectors, and both benefited from much-improved educational opportunities becoming professional managers, engineers and surveyors.²³² This facilitated more opportunity and a greater degree of control over the selection and appointment

²²⁶ Sorohan, *Irish London*, pp.9-10, citing Walter, *Outsiders Inside*, p.79. See also Bronwen Walter, ‘Time-Space Patterns of Second-Wave Irish Immigration into British Towns’ in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1980), pp. 297-317.

²²⁷ Murray, *Irish Fictions*, pp.99-147.

²²⁸ MacLaughlin has identified that third-wave migrants (or ‘new wave’ as MacLaughlin categorised them) from the early 1980s onwards left Ireland with considerably higher levels of education. In the mid-1980s between 19-29% of all emigrants from Ireland were graduates and professionals, although the majority were still secondary school-leavers. (see Jim MacLaughlin, ‘The New Vanishing Irish: Social Characteristics of ‘New Wave’ Irish Emigration’ in Jim MacLaughlin (ed.), *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*, (Cork, 1997), pp.133-157, at pp.144-7, 153.

²²⁹ For an excellent example of this, see ‘Introductory Address delivered by Professor Philip O’Kane on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws honoris causa on Mr John J. Murphy’, University College Cork, (11 May, 2001), pp.1-3.

²³⁰ The present author attended Willesden College of Technology in the mid-1980s and trained as a construction professional in a year intake of mainly ethnic Irish of approximately 70:30 second-generation London-Irish to new migrants.

²³¹ MacLaughlin, ‘The New Vanishing Irish’, p.153, citing *The Irish Times*, 13 July, 1988.

²³² Hickman *et al*, *Second-Generation Irish People in Britain*, pp.34-7.

of ethnically-Irish subcontractors on specific projects, thus becoming part of the potential ethnically-controlled economy discussed earlier.²³³

The settled Irish migrant builders in post-war London worked on a vast array of capital projects including two of the largest and most complex projects ever built in Britain, the Thames Barrier and the M25 orbital motorway.²³⁴ The oral histories reference a number of other major motorway and road projects of the post-war period. The final 3-mile length of the M1 motorway, between Junction 2 and Junction 1 with the A406 was opened in July 1977.²³⁵ John F (OI#16), worked on this final phase as a steel-fixer, and recalled the extraordinary speed achieved, working largely alone, making up heavy ‘rebar’ cages for bored pile foundations, ‘That was a step-up from steel-fixing normally; speed-wise. I would wear out a nips in a week! I was putting on an average of two thousand ties a day’.²³⁶ Patrick M (OI#4) recalls a chance exchange in a west London pub which resulted in him working on the Woking Bypass project, also in the mid-1970s, for a year or more with a dozen fellow Irish migrants, travelling out each day by van from Sheperd’s Bush. They were working for an Irish subcontractor called McCarthy but ‘the main contract was a sort of a joint-venture arrangement with Tarmac Construction and another big company. I was doing pipework and drainage, rolling in fill and hardcore and stuff, working with various machines.’ He learned how to set out road works from the Irish foreman he worked with on that project.²³⁷

Two decades later major road infrastructure was also required to make the gargantuan

²³³ See section 2.2.

²³⁴ Crude analysis (Appendix C, pp.17-19) of cost information and timelines for the various sections of the M25 construction programme over its 13-year total duration suggests that the average labour level of ethnically-Irish labour employed either directly by the main contractors or via the subcontract chain may have been over 2,200 working days per month, which, based on a 28-day working month equates to 70 men for the entire 13-year duration of the project. See also Appendix D, pp.24-5.

²³⁵ Advance works on the Five-ways Interchange (Junction 2) was by Cementation, Staples Corner Interchange (Junction 1) by Taylor Woodrow and main works by Costain – all contractors with reputations for employing Irish migrant operatives – or more probably by this stage of the post-war period, Irish subcontract firms. See ‘M1 London – Southward Extensions’ at The Motorway Archive, available online at <http://www.ukmotorwayarchive.org.uk/en/motorways/motorway-listing/m1> (accessed 6 June, 2019)

²³⁶ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.364-5. A steel-fixer’s main hand-tool was a pair of case-hardened steel pliers/pincers known as ‘nips’ or ‘nippers’ and used to connect steel rebar rods together with short-strands of finer diameter steel rod/wire known as ‘ties’ which are put around the two intersected main reinforcing bar (‘rebar’) rods and twisted together to join the bars and keep them in place. In this case John was making up circular ‘cages’ of c.450-600m diameter using heavy-duty steel rebar (reinforcing bars) of perhaps 25mm diameter linked together with smaller cross-sectional linking rings. These cages might average 30 metres in length depending upon the depth of the concrete piles.

²³⁷ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.70.

Canary Wharf development the iconic feature of post-modern London it is now. Sean G, (OI#14), who had earlier worked for Cementation on the Dartford Crossing project, transferred to the Limehouse Link, a major part of the LDDC scheme to relieve traffic congestion around Canary Wharf:²³⁸

I got a job on the Limehouse Link [...] I was setting out on that with a subbie. I started on the Limehouse Link in the autumn of 1990, and I left around March, April 1993 [...] It was a joint venture between Fairclough and Balfour Beatty. I was a setting out Engineer with a subby [...] They were Irish, yeah, he was from Tipperary.²³⁹

Notably Sean, who was on the Limehouse Link for around three years in total, also recalled several other Irish subcontractors employed by the British main-contractors, including the ubiquitous J Murphy & Sons, Barnhill Construction and Henleys, both from Galway.²⁴⁰

As in the early post-war period, Irish labour also continued to be very heavily involved in water engineering infrastructure. One of the most significant projects ever carried out in London took place between 1988 and 1993 when the 80km long Thames Water Tunnel Ring Main was constructed.²⁴¹ Again, John Murphy & Sons Ltd (Green Murphy) secured two phases of the overall construction project, stages 2A and 5, both worth c.£20million each. Costain also won a £20 million contract to construct an 8 km tunnel to link Thames Water's reservoirs near Heathrow with Ashford Common Water Treatment Works, near Staines.²⁴² Taylor Woodrow constructed 275,000 prefabricated concrete tunnel segments.²⁴³ Irish labour probably

²³⁸ Costing over £200 million, it was one of the largest road projects of its time in the UK and comprised a tunnel starting near the existing Rotherhithe tunnel approaches, passing under the Limehouse Basin and Limekiln Dock and emerging at South Poplar. It bypassed the notorious A13 Commercial Road, which had always been an area of severe congestion. See 'Construction Of The Limehouse Link Road' in *Construction News* (CNPlus Archive), 9 February, 1990, available online at: <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/archive/09feb90-uk-ben-roskrow-reports-on-the-construction-of-the-limehouse-link-road-1-of-3-08-02-1990/> (Accessed 11 June, 2019).

²³⁹ Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.302-3.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.311-13.

²⁴¹ Costing a total of £250million this was a major infrastructural engineering project designed to deliver 285 million gallons of water per day to 5.5 million Londoners. Comprising sixteen deep-level pumping stations, located an average of 40 metres below the London streets – designed to avoid clashing with London Underground tunnels – and connected by 2.54 metre diameter cast concrete tunnels. Since the initial phases there have been two further extensions to the main. See Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.82-3.

²⁴² 'Murphy Tipped For Ring Main Stage 5 Tunnel Contract For Thames Water' in *Construction News* (CNPlus Archive), 22 March, 1991, available online at: <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/archive/22mar91-uk-murphy-tipped-for-ring-main-stage-5-tunnel-contract-for-thames-water-21-03-1991/> (Accessed 11 June, 2019)

²⁴³ JP Farrow *et al*, 'Tunnel Ring Design, Development, Testing and Manufacture for the London Water Ring Main' in 'Tunnelling '94: Papers presented at the seventh international symposium' held by Institute of Mining

accounted for 30-40% of labour productivity on this immense project.²⁴⁴ This was one (albeit major) example of a constant flow of civil engineering projects during this last quartile of the twentieth century in which Irish labour featured significantly. M. J. Clancy, formed in 1958 by Michael Clancy from County Clare, a mailboat migrant who came to London in 1948, alongside Murphy and McNicholas, became a much more significant presence in the water industry when, in 1974, it acquired the much larger and well-established water and gas public works contractor R.E. Docwra Limited.²⁴⁵

In the later decades, tunnel work remained a constant source of work for Irish migrant labour in London, as did rail. Kevin H's (OI#3) recollections of working nightshifts on the Green Park section of the Fleet Line (1971-7) gives some sense of the perfunctory manner in which dangerous civil engineering works were still treated at that time, both by employers and the workers themselves:

I spent a year in the tunnels building the Jubilee Line...I think 'twas called the Fleet Line [...] I think 'twas Balfour Beatty. They were working day shifts and night shifts on that job... especially on night shifts; you'd go down at seven o'clock and come up again maybe at ten o'clock at night, have a break across the road in Flanagan's Pub in Green Park. We'd be in the public bar and across the way in the saloon bar there'd be the strippers performing at ten o'clock and us out working! [...] if you touched the seat [...] the cement dust would fly up in the air!...all the miners used to come up into Flanagan's Pub just near Piccadilly – between Green Park and Piccadilly.²⁴⁶

Other major London rail and tunnel projects in the latter half of this chronology dominated by Irish migrant labour were the Piccadilly Line extension to Heathrow Airport, built by Mowlem (1975-7),²⁴⁷ and the Stanstead Airport Rail Link built by J Murphy & Sons (1988-91). On the Channel Tunnel described as 'the biggest project since the Pyramids' and 'the building site of the century'.²⁴⁸ All the civil engineering contractors involved in the consortium were seasoned employers of Irish migrant labour: Balfour Beatty, Costain, Tarmac, Taylor Woodrow and

and Metallurgy / British Tunnelling Society, (London, 1994), pp.552-77.

²⁴⁴ Assuming that Green Murphy/Costain contracts employed predominantly Irish labour, they accounted for £60 million of the total £250million value, i.e. approximately one-third.

²⁴⁵ Clancy Docwra Limited, 'Our History', available at [http://theclancygroup.co.uk/whatwedo/Our history/](http://theclancygroup.co.uk/whatwedo/Our%20history/) (accessed 7 March, 2015); Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.204.

²⁴⁶ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.46.

²⁴⁷ King, 'A century of tunnelling', p.24.

²⁴⁸ *Construction News*, Centenary Edition, (June, 1996), p.12, cited in Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.211.

Wimpey.²⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that none of the official histories of the Channel Tunnel project expressly mention Irish migrant labour, however, it is probable that many of the second-tier and lower subcontractors were Irish. J Murphy & Sons and JGL, founded by Donegal man Josie Gallagher were both involved in the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (‘CTRL’) works which followed the main tunnel bores.²⁵⁰ Thiel refers to anecdotal evidence that regional clusters of Irish migrant tunnellers monopolised sections of the Channel Tunnel project to the exclusion of other workers, including other Irishmen– similar to those practices experienced on much earlier projects such as the Victoria Line.²⁵¹ Cowley claims that ‘no less than one-third of the 15,000-strong workforce on the [...] Channel Tunnel’ were Irishmen or ‘men of Irish descent’.²⁵² Peak workforce on the project – according to Gourvish – was just under 14,000 in 1991 when tunnel-boring reached maximum productivity, and this included subcontractors.²⁵³



Figure 3.14 - Technological developments: J Murphy & Sons TBM in use on Stanstead Rail Link Project in 1988. Inset: TBM before launch (Source: *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, (London, 2011), pp.38-39).

Tunnelling work on the iconic extension of the Jubilee Line (1993-9) was, it seems, the domain of Donegal men yet again. Josie Gallagher’s fledgling subcontract business JGL – fresh from the Channel Tunnel – was heavily involved in the early stages of the project. Gallagher

²⁴⁹ ‘The Channel Tunnel’ at *Institute of Civil Engineers Website*, available at: <https://www.ice.org.uk/what-is-civil-engineering/what-do-civil-engineers-do/the-channel-tunnel> (Accessed 9 July, 2019).

²⁵⁰ *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, (London, 2011), p.58; ‘Interview with James Clark Medal Winner, Joseph Gallagher’, in *Tunnels and Tunnelling*, (September, 2017), pp.19-21.

²⁵¹ Thiel, *Builders*, p.163, fn9.

²⁵² Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.247.

²⁵³ Terry Gourvish, *The Official History of Britain and the Channel Tunnel*, (Oxford, 2006), p.125.

himself was a tunnel-boss on the JLE and it was estimated in 1997 that of the 596 occupants of Arranmore, Gallagher's homeplace – a relatively small island three miles off the west coast of Donegal - some 160 were employed on the project.²⁵⁴ Another Donegal tunnel-man, John McNulty, who subsequently ran an Irish pub in Cricklewood, also worked on the JLE in the 1990s and went on to advise later Irish migrant tunnellers working on 21st-century projects such as Crossrail.²⁵⁵ Kerry labour-supply contractors Danny Sullivan Group, founded in 1986, supplied contract labour to the project, and the O'Rourke Group, founded by Leitrim/Mayo migrant Ray O'Rourke in 1977 - and destined to become a giant of British construction after buying out John Laing in 2001 - won one of their earliest major civil engineering packages on the JLE.²⁵⁶

Irish migrant builders had, by the mid-1970s positioned themselves in significant numbers in the public sector through working as employees of Direct Labour Organisations, large British main-contractors who undertook public-sector works (Terson, Marshall Andrews, Mowlem, Laing etc) but also increasingly through a network of Irish-founded subcontractors and small-to-medium sized contracting organisations. Thomas McInerney & Sons, from Clare broke into the UK market in the early 1950s; by the mid-1970s, it was the biggest local authority housing contractor in London.²⁵⁷ Others like Fitzgerald & Burke (founded 1975, Mayo origins), Kenny & Reynolds (founded 1961, Longford/Roscommon origins), Durkin Brothers (founded 1970, Mayo origins), P.J. Diamond (founded 1977, Mayo origins), BDL Group (Burke Dry Lining, founded 1977, Galway origins), Duffy & Carr (founded 1977, Donegal origins) and Mullaley & Co (founded 1972) also built the foundations of their not insubstantial commercial contracting businesses on local authority and GLC contracts for housebuilding and council property maintenance and refurbishment during the latter decades of the post-war period.

Private residential housebuilding, particularly speculative developments where the developer buys up land and develops large housing estates from greenfield or brownfield sites

²⁵⁴ John Dodd, 'Danger! 'Tunnel Tigers' at Work' in *Readers Digest*, (September, 1997), pp.4-5.

²⁵⁵ Derek Laud, *The Problem With Immigrants*, (London, 2015), p.76.

²⁵⁶ Irish Building Magazine Online, (17, August, 2018), unpaginated, available at: <https://www.irishbuildingmagazine.ie/2018/08/17/kerryman-leading-award-winning-uk-construction-group/> (Accessed 15, July, 2019); 'Jubilee Line Extension (JLE), Project Profile', p.21.

²⁵⁷ Barry O'Halloran, 'McInerney built around a long history of adversity' in Irish Times Online, (17 Jan, 2011), available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/mcinerneybuiltaroundalonghistoryofadversity1.1278025> (Accessed 11 April, 2017).

remains, to the present time, one of the commercial mainstays of the Irish migrant builder's work. Development of huge suburban middle-class housing estates enabled M. J Gleeson and Abbey Group – both operating on a UK-national and supra-national basis (mainly in Ireland) by the 1980s - to remain the largest migrant Irish builders of the twentieth-century. Equally lucrative smaller developments of perhaps 50-100 houses at a time were built by companies like Martin Grant Homes (founded 1978, Tipperary origins), Connolly Homes (founded 1963, Mayo origins), Whelan Homes (founded 1975) and Devine Homes (founded 1985, Derry origins). Many major British contractors were by this stage utilising the growing market for Irish migrant subcontractors, particularly in respect superstructure concrete. Thames-side residential and mixed-use developments became de rigueur. Chelsea Harbour (1985-87) was a typical example, built by Bovis Homes who sublet the substructure and superstructure works for seven major tower blocks to Byrne Brothers.²⁵⁸

High-rise commercial office space thrived again in the 1970s and 80s. Seifert's iconic NatWest Tower (1970-81) – for a decade, Britain's tallest building - was constructed on Old Broad Street.²⁵⁹ Kevin H worked as hoist driver and general labourer on this Mowlem-built project for eight years and recalled, 'I'd say that job was 80% Irish...you could say nearly 90%...an awful lot of Irish lads. I'll tell you one man [...] worked on that job; the piper Tommy McCarthy was a chippy on that job.'²⁶⁰ Growing Irish migrant superstructure specialists such as P.C. Harrington Group, founded by Patrick and John Harrington (Tipperary) in 1968, capitalised hugely on the colossal wave of redevelopment in Docklands, carrying out over £100million of concrete and formwork superstructure works in the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁶¹

The Irish migrant property developer Ballymore Properties, founded in 1980 by chairman Sean Mulryan - a bricklayer from County Roscommon small-farming stock - had by

²⁵⁸ 'Byrne Bros., 50th Anniversary Timeline Video' available at: <https://www.byrne-bros.co.uk/50th-anniversary/> (Accessed 17 July, 2019).

²⁵⁹ The NatWest Tower is now known as Tower 42. It was built as the corporate headquarters of NatWest Bank and is located at 25, Old Broad Street, in the City of London financial district. Built by John Mowlem & Co between 1970 and 1980, it was the tallest building in the UK from its opening in 1981 until 1990 when One Canada Square was topped out at Canary Wharf – see Christopher Hibbert, Ben Weinreb, John Keay, Julia Keay, *The London Encyclopaedia* (3rd Edition), (London,2011) p.574.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.52. Tommy McCarthy is a very important figure in traditional Irish arts; see e.g. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *Flowing Tides: History and Memory in an Irish Soundscape*, (Oxford, 2016), p.186 and 'Tommy McCarthy: Biography' available at: <http://www.tommykeane.com/tom-biog.php> (Accessed 13 July, 2019).

²⁶¹ *The Forum: The Staff Newsletter of the P.C. Harrington Group*, (Spring, 2007), p.2.

the early 1990s begun to develop residential and corporate properties across the City and Docklands and would go on, by the turn of the century to develop property across Ireland, Britain and Europe worth an estimated €22 billion and to have a personal worth estimated at €344 million.²⁶² Much of his business success began with the office boom triggered by Canary Wharf and the Docklands redevelopment, and substantial City of London projects such as the Spitalfields Market Redevelopment.²⁶³ Likewise, O'Rourke, mentioned earlier, got its big break from famed architect Richard Rogers on another landmark 1980s project, the Broadgate redevelopment at Liverpool Street - judged in 1997 to be 'by far the most impressive piece of post-war planning in the City'.²⁶⁴ In an article about Ray O'Rourke later in 2015, when Laing-O'Rourke had become a global construction enterprise, Building Magazine recalled:

From the outset, O'Rourke broke the subcontractor mould, offering a broad package of services that included flooring products and installation services. His big break came at the Broadgate office scheme in the City of London in the mid-1980s, where he first met Rogers, a forward-thinking client who enthused about his designs and precast concrete solutions. Rogers gave him the chance to take on greater responsibility. "Why did we pick Ray?" Rogers says. "Because he did things differently, and he was succeeding."²⁶⁵

Gregory D, (OI#10), talks about the best (and best paid) work he had in London being 'a job down in Liverpool street and it was huge [...] it was at the stage it was a concrete shell, and there was a crowd of lads from north Mayo. There was over thirty from around Belmullet and Erris and they were a great crowd'. It is probable that this was a gang of shuttering carpenters and labourers working for O'Rourke on the Broadgate project.²⁶⁶ Ruddy Joinery, another mailboat migrant firm started by husband and wife Patrick & Eileen Ruddy, in 1968, were a carpentry subcontractor working for O'Rourke on the same project, which demonstrates that by the mid-1980s onwards the ethnic networks of Irish firms were entering into reciprocal trading arrangements probably based as much on patronage and nepotism as on commercial

²⁶² 'Mulryan of many talents' in *Shopping Centre News*, (16 May, 2006), available online at: http://www.shopping-centre.co.uk/news/archivestory.php/aid/1135/Mulryan_of_many_talents.html (Accessed 30 September, 2014).

²⁶³ 'Historic Market Rejuvenated For A New Century' at: <https://www.ballymoregroup.com/project/detail/old-spitalfields-market> (Accessed 16 July, 2019).

²⁶⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.80.

²⁶⁵ Adrian Barrick, 'What makes Ray run?' in *Building Magazine*, Issue 30, (September, 2004), unpaginated, available online at: <http://www.building.co.uk/whatmakesrayrun/?3038849.article> (Accessed 1 December, 2015).

²⁶⁶ Interview with Gregory D, (OI#10), County Leitrim, (25 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.174-88.

considerations.²⁶⁷ Paddy B (OI#12), a distant cousin of O'Rourke, served a formal apprenticeship in Sligo as a bricklayer then migrated to London in the late 1940s and later started up his own small subcontract business. He worked both at Broadgate and later at the British Library in Euston, another iconic modernist building built by John Laing where he recounted resolving several technical bricklaying design issues for the architects. Paddy reckoned the British Library to be one of the best projects he worked on as a migrant in London. Soon after that project Paddy returned to Ireland permanently.²⁶⁸

Irish migrant labour participated significantly in post-modern London both as builders and users. The mailboat generation was, by now, largely being replaced within the day-to-day construction industry of London by third-wave Ryanair migrants and increasingly large numbers of second-generation sons and (rarely) daughters of the mailboat generation. Even the youngest mailboat migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s were now generally reaching their late fifties and early sixties in age, and were either settled and assimilated largely into London-Irish life, or were thinking about retiring back to Ireland – something which the rise of the Celtic Tiger economy in the early 1990s made a more viable option. Return migration had always been a feature of the Irish diaspora in Britain from the 1960s onwards; it is a complex and variable area of migration studies and has been the subject of extensive research by a number of scholars.²⁶⁹ In many cases migrants who had been in London for decades experienced difficulties in adjusting to life back in rural Ireland. Many had accumulated moderate wealth from property ownership within London and the suburbs and were able to utilise equity in such properties to finance purchases back in Ireland, or build holiday homes which were used with increasing frequency as an alternative to permanent return.

²⁶⁷ Interview with Gregory D, (OI#10), County Leitrim, (25 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.174.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Appendix A, pp.240-8.

²⁶⁹ Published research on return migration includes: Enda Delaney, 'Placing Post-war Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981' in Bielenberg (ed.) *The Irish Diaspora*, pp.331-356; Fiona McGrath, 'The Economic, Social and Cultural Impacts of Return Migration to Achill Island' in Russell King (Ed.), *Contemporary Irish Migration* (Dublin, 1991); Elizabeth Malcolm, *Elderly Return Migration from Britain to Ireland: A Preliminary Study* (Dublin, 1996); George Gmelch, 'Return Migration to Rural Ireland' in Hans Christian and Judith-Marie Buechler, (eds.), *Migrants in Europe: The Role of Family, Labor, and Politics* (New York, 1987).

3.4. ‘The Fortune You Left Home to Make’:²⁷⁰ The Migrant Entrepreneur

Probably the single most critical element in the story of the post-war migrant builders, as a cohort, was the rise of the Irish entrepreneurial contractor. So profound was their influence – both good and bad – on the lives of the wider migrant community and concepts of Irishness itself, that they merit particular attention. Consequently this section deals specifically with the phenomenon of the London-Irish entrepreneur - colloquially known as ‘the Irish Subbie’ - as distinct from the daily lives and experiences of the migrant workforce in general. These businessmen, who seized upon opportunities and capitalised on the seemingly limitless demand for labour across the whole period of post-war London’s reconstruction, often started as manual workers themselves but, as with all instinctive entrepreneurs, unique factors set them apart from their workaday fellows. This section aims to identify those factors.

It is important to note at the outset that Irish ethnic entrepreneurship fits within a wider transnational experience of migrant entrepreneurship stretching back to pre-industrialisation. Significant research exists on the general topic, including theoretical conceptualisations and definitions dealt with earlier.²⁷¹ Migrant entrepreneurs were present amongst Chinese, Protestant Huguenot, Puritan, Jewish, Italian, Russian and many other transnational migrations throughout the history of the capitalist world.²⁷² Unsurprisingly, given its status as central power in the development of advanced capitalism, much of the historical research has focused on America, but studies have also looked at Britain and Europe.²⁷³ One particularly relevant study from the perspective of analysing construction entrepreneurs within core urban metropolises is Mary Corcoran’s work on Irish migrant entrepreneurs amongst the illegal immigrant community of the New York Construction Industry in the 1980s.²⁷⁴ This research provides a clear comparative to the earlier experiences of the post-war Irish in the London construction industry, and establishes that many of the features of casualised working and ‘the

²⁷⁰ Line taken from a working folksong by Pat Cooksey, *The Reason I Left Mullingar*, published by Banshee Music, (Dublin, 1979) available at http://www.patcooksey.com/lyric_mullingar.html, (Accessed 30 May, 2017).

²⁷¹ Chapter 2.2, pp.73-7.

²⁷² Christiane Harzig, Dirk Hoerder, *What is Migration History?* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.30-35.

²⁷³ Examples include: Ivan Light, Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles*, (Berkeley, 1988); Chinese Historical Society of America, *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, (1987); together with a significant number of comparative studies published in the *Journal American Ethnic History*.

²⁷⁴ Mary Corcoran, ‘Informalization of Metropolitan Labour Forces: The Case of Irish Immigrants in the New York Construction Industry’ in *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol 1, (1991), pp.31-51.

Lump' which developed in London were replicated in modified forms (to adapt to U.S. legal jurisdictions) .

The Irish 'Subbie' as an ethnic entrepreneur in London can be contrasted to those ethnic entrepreneurs encountered in much of the existing studies undertaken, primarily on a number of operational levels. Construction work is, in many ways, an exceptionally bespoke process within the capitalist world's industrial landscape. As chapter 2 and Appendix D demonstrate, construction, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was a highly fragmented industry heavily reliant upon casual labour hire as its primary factor of production. Unlike almost all other industrial processes, construction subcontracting requires modest initial fixed capital costs in terms of office, factory or retail space, although it normally has potentially high plant and equipment costs, particularly in the late twentieth-century, as technological improvements reduced labour input substantially. However for the majority of the period under consideration in this research start-up costs for construction work – especially as a subcontractor operating well down the contractual chain –were minimal by comparison to other economic activities. Workload within the construction subcontracting sector was entirely responsive to demand-driven labour requirements from outside the Irish ethnic group; that is the wider London-regional construction industry. Indeed, another significant contrast between Irish migrant entrepreneurs in the construction sector and other migrant entrepreneurs was the extent to which Irish businessmen – largely, it would seem, as a result of being white and English-speaking – quickly and significantly penetrated the construction industry labour markets in both London and, later, in New York. Historically this was not new; the extent to which Irish migrant entrepreneurs penetrated growing capitalist markets particularly in nineteenth-century America is well-established.

Firms in London were generally organised into divisions by specialisation; for example groundworkers, concretors and shuttering specialists, steelfixers, drainlayers, pipelayers and gas installers. Further subdivision into crews or gangs followed, led by a ganger, who was usually skilled/semi-skilled and experienced, perhaps another one or two semi-skilled operatives and two or more general operatives (labourers). In the civil engineering sector particularly, mobility was vital; such gangs usually operated with a truck or van loaded with tools, plant and basic materials drawn from a central stores, either of the main contractor or, if the subcontract firm was sizeable enough, of their own. Work rotas and schedules were, again, allocated by either the main contractor's project manager/site agent/foreman (on larger

projects) or by office-based roving contracts managers taking direction in turn from (for example) regional public/private sector directorates.

In all likelihood thousands of Irish-owned firms have come and gone across the six decades of the post-war period as a whole. Many of the smaller sole proprietor/self-employed subcontractor businesses were short-lived ventures; many failed and became insolvent; some were successful and were sold on and acquired by British firms or subsumed into larger Irish firms, for example Swift Structures Ltd.²⁷⁶ Some just came to their natural end as proprietors retired and in some cases moved back to Ireland.²⁷⁷ Historians of immigration agree that entrepreneurialism is key to successful settlement for any cohort. Panayi, for example, states that by the 1980s the Irish in London ‘have developed a broad social structure, with a significant middle-class which includes [...] **most notably, entrepreneurs working in the construction industry**’.²⁷⁸ (emphasis added). Central to this development was the UK industry’s de-regulation of labour procurement after World War Two, and the turn to subcontracting. Without this, Irish migrants would have probably worked directly for British main-contractors in much greater numbers and would have integrated more rapidly and efficiently into British industry to a greater degree than was the case. Moreover, depending upon their cultural and social disposition, most would either have assimilated faster into British culture and society, returned to Ireland or gone further afield.

The Irish ethnic economy grew organically because entrepreneurial opportunism and ‘lump’ subcontracting facilitated its development. Mapping the progress of these post-war entrepreneurs amongst the Irish migrant community in London can only be attempted using representative samples as in practice the numbers, size and nature of such commercial enterprises were in constant flux. The detailed research for this section is set out primarily in Appendix B and consists of a tabulated record of 106 separate London-based Irish construction businesses varying in size from the largest turnover businesses in excess of £100million annual

²⁷⁶ Swift Structures Ltd was founded by the Co Mayo-born brothers Jim and Matt Halligan in Luton, in 1967, and later bought out by their brother-in-law and fellow Irish entrepreneur Ray O’Rourke in 2000. See *The Irish Independent*, 17 February, 2000, available online at: <https://www.independent.ie/business/builder-orourke-buys-out-firm-of-family-rivals-26124380.html> (accessed 7 May, 2019).

²⁷⁷ See for example interviews with: Jackie W, (OI#11), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), all in Appendix A.

²⁷⁸ Panikos Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration: A Documentary History of the Effects and Experiences of Immigrants in Britain Since 1945*, (Manchester, 1999), p.19, citing Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971*, (London, 1988), pp.229,231.

turnover down to small sole-proprietor enterprises of around £50,000 p.a. turnover (measured at 1995 prices).²⁷⁹ This survey does not purport to be a complete review of all Irish-founded businesses – for the reasons stated above such an exercise is well-beyond the scope of this research, but it is a representative picture of how Irish-founded businesses performed in London and the LMA over the post-war period. So far as can be ascertained, most of these firms drew the bulk of their labour resources from the Irish ethnic networks created in the post-war period.

London Maps 1 and 2 ²⁸⁰ illustrate ethnographically how Irish migrant construction workers formed initial spatial clusters in north central London (Camden Town, Kentish Town, Islington, Highgate, Hornsey, Holloway Road, Kilburn, Cricklewood, West Hampstead, Paddington, Westbourne Park, Maida Vale). Over time these groupings dispersed outwards to form other contiguous clusters in outer north London (Hendon, Finchley, Haringey, Barnet, Brent Cross, Enfield, Potter's Bar, Winchmore Hill), north-west London (Willesden, Harlesden, Neasden, Wembley, Kingsbury, Harrow, Watford), west London (Shepherd's Bush, Hammersmith, Fulham, Acton, Ruislip, Greenford), east London (Hackney, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Poplar, East Ham, Barking, Dagenham, Seven Kings, Ilford) and smaller clusters in south London (Wandsworth, Elephant & Castle, New Cross, south Wimbledon, Merton, Lewisham).²⁸¹

The first post-war Irish construction entrepreneurs were already in England in the interwar period. As might be expected, the trading record of a company, performance within the industry and longevity are the main factors in ranking entrepreneurial activity from a reputational viewpoint. North Galway native Michael Gleeson, who changed the name of the company in Sheffield he had acquired from his 'townie', Andrew Donnellan, to M.J. Gleeson Ltd around 1915, was by far the most well-established Irish migrant contractor (both nationally and in London) prior to the Second World War and remained so until the close of the century.²⁸² Fitzpatrick & Sons Ltd had been incorporated in 1921 and the Gallagher brothers formed a

²⁷⁹ See Appendix B, Table 1 – pp.7-12.

²⁸⁰ See pp.xiii-xiv

²⁸¹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.88-95, Sorohan, *Irish London*, pp.9-10, Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.364, 562, Maryse Hodgson, *London's Ethnic Population: Census Statistics from the 1981 Census*, (GLC Statistical Series Nr. 44, 1985), p.6, Table 1.

²⁸² Appendix B, pp.17-23.

company in 1938 after a period of informal trading.²⁸³ With the exception of Gleeson and Fitzpatrick all the remaining early-stage entrepreneurs – the Gallaghers, John Murphy, the McNicholas brothers, Michael Clancy, Phil Trant, Joe Kennedy, Bill Fuller, John Byrne, Pateen Lowery and the others shown in Appendix B - were working as manual construction and engineering operatives themselves and managing small mobile gangs of men. They were, in effect, ‘self-employed working proprietors’.²⁸⁴ Irish migrant builders brought with them a high degree of adaptability and transferable manual and management skill derived from their largely rural bourgeois subsistence-farming background; Fitzpatrick characterised the Irish as ‘a model industrial proletariat’ and the degree of enterprise and work-ethic shown by the post-war migrant generations in the construction industry would suggest he was correct.²⁸⁵

Some early-stage entrepreneurs progressed from working for British subcontractors or, more often, large well-established British main-contractors like McAlpine to found their own companies. Some were recruited first as part of the British Ministry of Labour’s recruitment campaign for war-workers from 1941 onwards,²⁸⁶ or as casual labour-only sub-contractors, often well-down the contractual chain at tier 3 or 4, after the war when, in 1948, collective wage agreements in construction were abandoned.²⁸⁷ These were unincorporated, casual-labour ‘collectives’, operating generally on a cash-only basis, drawing labour-resource entirely from the developing ethnic labour enclave. These ‘shadow’ firms subsequently developed often into various forms of self-employment, incorporated labour-only subcontractors,²⁸⁸ plant providers and ‘recruitment’ agencies. The more successful entrepreneurs eventually attaining main-contractor and management-contractor status becoming involved in Joint-ventures, consortia and corporations. These firms - some now very substantial organisations – form an important part of both Irish and British economic history.

The earliest Irish entrepreneurs - ‘foot-iron’ men,²⁸⁹ - had ‘pulled themselves up out of

²⁸³ Appendix B, pp.36-45.

²⁸⁴ *Phelps-Brown*, pp.111-115.

²⁸⁵ David Fitzpatrick, ‘Irish Emigration, 1801-1921’ in *Studies in Irish Economic and Social History*, No 1 (Dundalk, 1984), p.32 cited in R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p.357.

²⁸⁶ One example is Edmond Murphy, from Aclare, Co. Sligo, who arrived in London in 1944 after being recruited to build airbases in Suffolk. He went on to found his own civil engineering firm which, although not a major concern, did moderately well in entrepreneurial terms. See Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.568-9, p.597.

²⁸⁷ *Phelps-Brown*, pp.111-114.

²⁸⁸ Formally registered companies incorporated at Companies House.

²⁸⁹ See chapter 4.2, figure 4.3 referring to shovelmen in 1940s/1950s.

the trench [...] and into a Mercedes'.²⁹⁰ The immediate post-war years was a period of painful austerity by comparison to today's relatively affluent standards.²⁹¹ Britain's technological know-how and mechanized resources were severely depleted by the war effort, so that reconstruction of the 'homefront' depended almost exclusively on raw physical manpower.²⁹² Early Irish construction entrepreneurs were all ideal vendors of raw physical labour since they had all started by selling their own labour and so came to recognise the ideal physical requirements for a 'good shkin'.²⁹³ Trading in 'shkins' was a reality indelibly rooted in the development of ethnic Irish labour employment networks and problematic notions of performative male Irish identity.²⁹⁴



Figure 3.15 – Entrepreneurship in the Ethnic Economy – montage of advertisements placed by Irish construction and engineering firms in the *Irish Post* newspaper in 1970. (source: *Irish Post*, 1970, various editions)

²⁹⁰ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.195.

²⁹¹ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951*, (London, 2008), p.171.

²⁹² Martin Chick, *Industrial Policy in Britain 1945-1951: Economic Planning, Nationalisation and the Labour Governments*, (Cambridge, 2002), p.189; Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-war World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain*, (London, 2002), p.212.

²⁹³ A 'Good skin' – vernacular phonetic spelling; the basic unit of Irish construction labour as it came to be euphemistically referred to in places like Cricklewood, Kilburn, Camden Town and Shepherd's Bush.

²⁹⁴ These issues are dealt with from the perspective of the men themselves, and the lived experiences of working on the 'lump' in chapters 4.4, 4.5 and 6.

Mac an Ghaill and others have considered the theoretical aspects of what was essentially a contingent masculine identity coalescing around nationalism, physical prowess, working-class values of manual labour and notions of ‘subordinated masculinity’.²⁹⁵ To many within this highly-gendered, class-stratified and ethnocentric world, these (generally older) entrepreneurs who had ‘made it in a big way’ represented a somewhat atavistic hero-figure, representative of tangible socio-economic achievement in a community where ‘emigrant status, social exclusion and subordinated/dislocated masculinity’ were the norm.²⁹⁶ To others – particularly those of a more socialist political outlook, they represented the commodification of Irish manual labour and an acquiescence to post-colonial British exploitation inherent in the concept of the emigrant nursery.²⁹⁷

Critical analysis of the reasons why some immigrants ‘make it big’ in entrepreneurial terms centres on the ostensibly risk-laden nature of the emigrant process – the notion that the economic migrant in the host community has ‘nothing to lose’- and is therefore more predisposed to taking exceptional risks. This can certainly be seen in chapter 4.5 in relation to individual attitudes to workplace welfare and health and safety regulations, for example. In respect of business activities, Waldinger has argued that risk and innovation are ‘particularly salient traits of ethnic business’.²⁹⁸ Corrigan elaborated this point: ‘As emigration involves a tolerance of risk and uncertainty, immigrants are less averse to risk than others, and therefore may be particularly inclined towards entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, removal from the social controls of home makes it easier for immigrants to take risks’.²⁹⁹ I contend that both these factors have even more relevance to the early post-war Irish entrepreneurs, most of whom were largely penurious and precarious when they landed in Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s – when Britain itself was also in a precarious state of existence, all of which engendered a uniquely-heightened tolerance of risk.

This is borne out by the data in Figure 3.16, which shows that of 106 firms founded by Irish migrants in London, between 1960 and 1990 start-up numbers rocketed by comparison to

²⁹⁵ Liviu Popoviciu, Chris Haywood & Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, ‘Migrating Masculinities’ in *Irish Studies Review*, 14:2, (2006), pp.169-187,

²⁹⁶ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.43.

²⁹⁷ Jim Mac Laughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, (Cork, 1994), pp.27-8.

²⁹⁸ R. Waldinger, H. Aldrich, and R. Ward, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies*, (Newbury Park, 1990), p.32, p.112.

²⁹⁹ Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*,(2006), Maynooth, p.127.

earlier decades. The notorious ‘lump’ labour-only subcontracting market reached its apotheosis at this time, as did male manual-worker immigration to London.³⁰⁰ Irish entrepreneurs operated mainly as small-to-medium firms of labour-only, or labour-and-plant subcontractors and small-scale civil engineering businesses who carried out works as both main-contractors on smaller projects or as subcontractors to the major British and Irish companies in the LMA. Such was the ubiquity of the ‘slightly-dodgy, chancer’ Irish subbie in the London construction market by the 1980s, that the popular perception became something of a cliché.³⁰¹

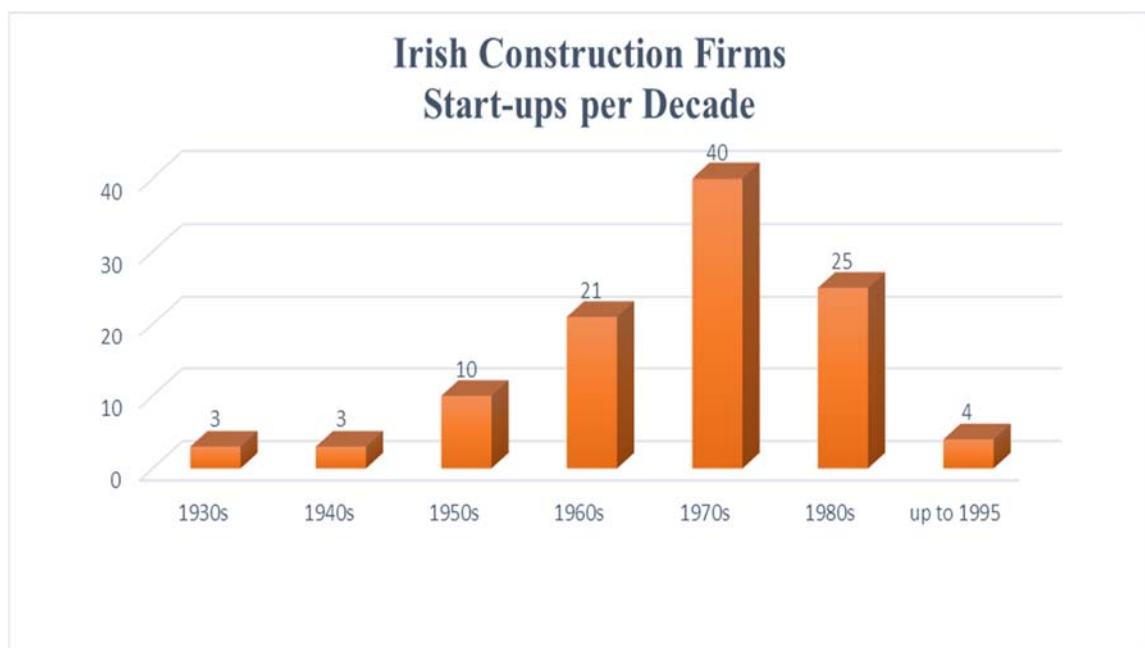


Figure 3.16 - Irish Construction Firms in London - Start-ups per Decade.
(Source: Appendix B, Table 1 – pp.7-12)

It would be seriously misleading, however, to cast all Irish entrepreneurs in this role. There were a significant number of professionally-run general ‘jobbing’ contractors who did small-scale property developments, Borough Council, Catholic diocesan and parish contracts and Local Authority works. ‘Housebashing’ (a term which came to apply to the refurbishment and upgrading of residual pre-war public-sector or private housing stock) – was another area of work which required minimal up-front capital investment. Examples of these medium-sized contracting businesses, some of which started early on in the immediate post-war period, include Kenny & Reynolds Ltd (Longford/Roscommon), Fitzgerald & Burke Ltd

³⁰⁰ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.178, *Phelps Brown*, pp. 14-15, 111-23, *Cowley, The Men Who Built Britain*, p.191, *Harrison, The Scattering*, p.117.

³⁰¹ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.391-2. See also chapter 4.4.

(Mayo/Galway), P. J. Diamond & Co (Mayo) and T Peyton & Sons (Mayo). Peyton were reported in the *Western News* in Mayo as having secured a typical-sized £35,000 contract in 1956 to rebuild St Gregory's Church, in Earlsfield, (near Wimbledon) after it was bomb-damaged. The news report emphasised that the directors, management and the twenty craftsmen and labourers employed by Peyton were almost exclusively Irish, as indeed were the clergy associated with the south London parish.³⁰²

The growth of Irish migrant entrepreneurial activity over the post-war period can be illustrated by looking at the financial patterns of turnover for the companies included in the survey. Table 2 of Appendix B (at pp.14-16) sets out the estimated profile of growth for the 106 firms surveyed from 1945-1995. There are large gaps in the available information regarding turnover,³⁰³ nonetheless it provides a reasonably reliable profile of the progress – over time – of the 106 firms included, which comprise the majority of Irish migrant companies still trading in London as at 1995. Table 3.4 below shows the top 20 most successful firms established by Irish migrant entrepreneurs during the post-war period. Unsurprisingly, the oldest established firms remained the most successful financially over the post-war period. Until the start of the 1960s, only three Irish-founded companies had made any visible impact upon the UK construction market.³⁰⁴

Michael Gleeson, from County Galway founded MJ Gleeson & Co in the early part of the twentieth century.³⁰⁵ Pat & John Fitzpatrick from Cork City, registered Fitzpatrick & Sons in London in 1921, and by the early 1930s had developed an enviable reputation for concrete street paving,³⁰⁶ and the Gallagher Brothers from Tubbercurry, in County Sligo, emigrated to Britain in the 1930s and founded the Abbey Homes dynasty.³⁰⁷ Matt Gallagher and his brothers Joe, Dan, Hubert and James could be all described as fulfilling the stereotypical 'mobile entrepreneurial adventurer' identified by Mary Hickman.³⁰⁸ Gallagher's early emigrant experience echoes much of the mythology of the Irishman 'made good':

³⁰² *Western People*, August 04, 1956, p.8.

³⁰³ See Appendix B, note 2, p.B/7

³⁰⁴ M.J. Gleeson, Fitzpatrick & Sons, Abbey Group.

³⁰⁵ See M.J.Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

³⁰⁶ See Volker Fitzpatrick PLC website, available at <http://www.volkerfitzpatrick.co.uk/en/aboutus/storysofar> [accessed March, 2015].

³⁰⁷ See 'A return to family ways' in *The Irish Independent*, 4th August, 2012, p.5.

³⁰⁸ Scully, 'Emigrants in the traditional sense?' – Irishness in England, contemporary migration and collective memory of the 1950s', pp. 133–43.

Table 3.4 - Top 20 Irish Migrant Entrepreneurs - Sample Corporate Growth Profile 1945-1995

Company Name	Date Founded	UK Turnover (000s)										
		1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
M.J. GLEESON GROUP PLC	1915	£19,636	£22,909	£26,182	£29,455	£32,727	£36,000	£45,000	£72,970	£119,244	£165,518	£191,838
MURPHY GROUP (GREEN MURPHY)	1951			£4,613	£10,380	£16,146	£21,913	£36,104	£49,220	£68,338	£142,710	£152,141
ABBEY PLC	1936	£9,409	£14,636	£19,864	£25,091	£30,318	£35,545	£40,773	£46,000	£56,524	£60,567	£144,245
MCNICHOLAS CONSTRUCTION (GREEN MACS)	1949		£144	£861	£1,579	£2,297	£3,015	£4,042	£7,768	£11,493	£46,524	£130,091
JOHN SISK & SONS	1984 (1)									£3,328	£28,702	£93,449
THE CLANCY GROUP PLC (M. J. CLANCY & SONS)	1958		£300	£1,200	£4,884	£17,094	£29,304	£41,514	£53,724	£65,934	£78,144	£90,354
J.M.C.C. /J.M.S.E IRELAND (GREY MURPHY)	1958				£1,265	£4,426	£7,587	£11,008	£15,119	£29,648	£51,477	£81,953
MCNICHOLAS PLC (BROWN MACS)	1957				£3,249	£5,332	£6,258	£6,781	£8,665	£23,708	£54,412	£64,260
DURKAN BROS / DURKAN GROUP	1970							£4,042	£12,657	£24,319	£36,759	£56,712
O'ROURKE CIVIL ENGINEERING LTD	1977								£8,273	£22,061	£35,850	£49,638
FITZPATRICK & SONS LTD (NOW VOLKER PLC)	1921	£1,000	£3,000	£5,000	£8,000	£22,319	£24,855	£27,391	£29,928	£32,464	£35,000	£48,380
CAREY GROUP PLC	1969						£1,628	£9,770	£17,911	£26,052	£34,194	£42,335
BYRNE BROS / BYRNE GROUP PLC	1969						£150	£500	£1,200	£2,305	£45,161	£39,000
BREHENY CIVIL ENGINEERING	1963					£1,668	£5,837	£10,007	£14,177	£18,346	£22,516	£37,476
MARTIN GRANT (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	1974								£11,970	£18,605	£25,240	£31,876
KELLY GROUP	1988										£7,827	£27,393
PC HARRINGTON CONTRACTORS LTD	1968						£750	£1,000	£1,250	£1,500	£22,515	£26,332
JOHN REILLY (CIVIL ENGINEERING) LIMITED	1986										£9,072	£20,411
BARHALE PLC	1976								£4,201	£9,452	£14,704	£19,955
DUFFY GROUP LTD (DUFFY & CARR)	1977								£536	£8,822	£19,665	£17,855

(source: Extracted from Table 2, Appendix B, pp.14-16.)

All shaded figures are interpolated estimates based on nearest available factual data (i.e. published accounts at Companies House or other indicated sources).

Starting as a farm labourer in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, he [Gallagher] lived the arduous and nomadic existence of the tramp navvy, working on building sites from 1934. Much of his earnings were remitted to Cashel, which he visited every few years, returning to England with a younger brother in tow. In early 1939 the British government's frantic preparations for war prompted Matt and his brothers Joe, Dan and Hubert, soon joined by James, to use their savings to make a down payment on two old trucks and begin transporting materials needed for building air raid shelters, runways and factories. Initially basing themselves in Liverpool, when the systematic bombing of Britain's cities commenced in 1940, they leased a shale pit in Lancashire and split into different areas, hauling landfill to bombsites.³⁰⁹

The 1950s saw the embryonic founding of some of the 'big names' of the post-war Irish migrant entrepreneurial network: the McNicholas brothers, from Bohola, in County Mayo, Michael Clancy from Ennis, County Clare, and Pateen Lowery from Connemara and, of course, the ubiquitous Murphy brothers, John and Joe, from Loughmark, County Kerry. Such has been the predominance in London-Irish industrial and social culture of the Murphy name, and, since the 1960s, the ever-present image of the familiar racing-green vans and lorries, that the name has indeed become synonymous with the archetypal Irish builder. Consequently it is often assumed – erroneously - that the Murphy brothers were the original pioneers of the 'Irish subbie'. All of these men went on to build substantial construction businesses which remain very commercially successful to the present time, and all of which drew their labour almost entirely from the Irish ethnic market of post-war London.

Geographic patterns and similarities occur. Figure 3.17 demonstrates the rate of growth of Irish entrepreneurial activity in post-war London by county. Table 3.5 together with Figure 3.18 at the end of this section illustrate the counties of Ireland from which the founders of these firms came. Allowing for the absence of precise origins for some 20% of the sample, all of the major post-war migrant entrepreneurs up to 1995 came from the western counties of Ireland.³¹⁰ County Leitrim produced the largest number of moderately successful contracting businesses during this period. Slow but steady growth was a feature of Irish migrant enterprise until around the mid-1980s when there was a steep rise in turnover for the major Irish companies, as they

³⁰⁹ Clavin, 'Biography of Matt Gallagher' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography, online ed.*, Online: Royal Irish Academy; Cambridge University Press, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridge-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9609> (accessed 3 March, 2017).

³¹⁰ Companies House data states that the nationalities of founding directors are Irish-born, but is no more specific than this.

became better-established within the mainstream UK construction industry, and as second-generation descendants of the original founders assumed control of most of the large enterprises.³¹¹ This was also the period of rapid economic recovery from the 1970s recession during the deregulated era of Thatcherite neo-liberalism and the rise of trade subcontracting as the common feature of the industry; a development particularly suited to Irish migrant venture-entrepreneurs.

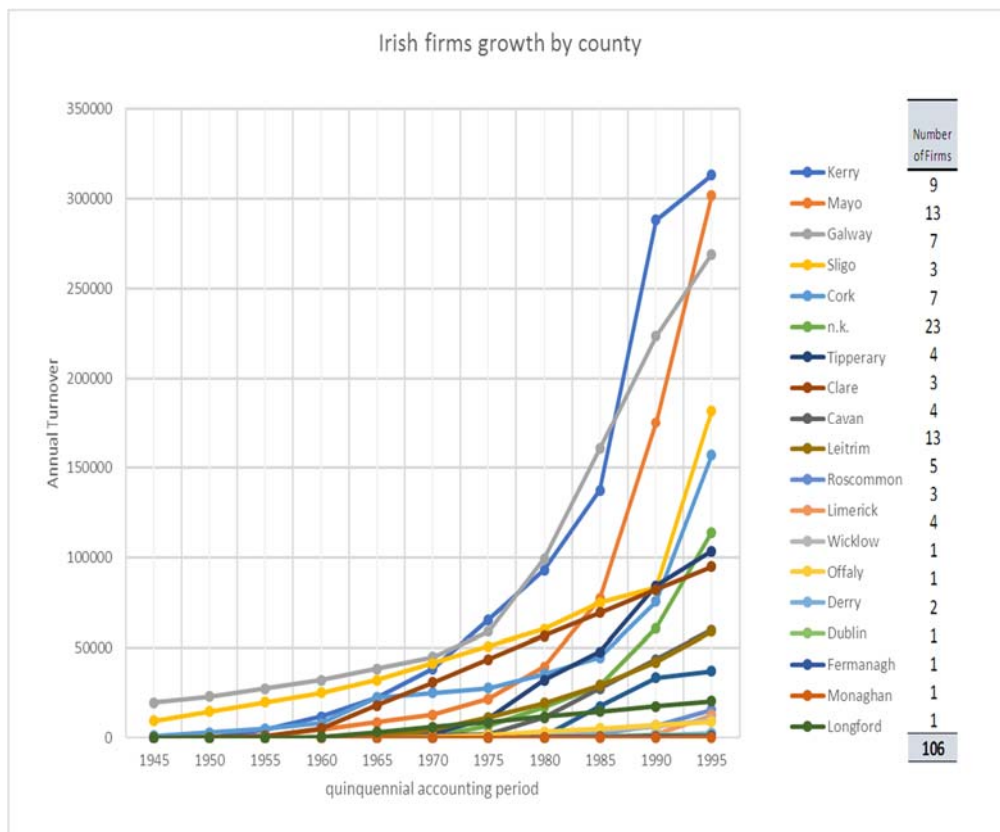


Figure 3.17 - Irish firms growth 1945-1995 by County of Origin

Most of these families came from small-holding or middling farm backgrounds and were raised in a time of rural fundamentalism in post-independent Ireland, where petty-bourgeois capitalism was the prevailing economic system, and where subsistence income was dependent mainly upon buying, rearing and selling cattle, growing crops and saving turf.³¹²

³¹¹ See for example Clancy Group, founded by Michael .J. Clancy in 1958. Michael died in 1984 (see *Connacht Tribune*, 12 October, 1984, p.6.) following which his sons Dermot and Kevin assumed control of the businesses (see also *Irish Independent*, 9 March, 2014, under heading 'Irish Richlist'). Similar successions took place at Murphy Group, McNicholas Engineering, Abbey and Fitzpatrick PLC.

³¹² Examples include Bill Fuller and Phil Trant (who were maternal cousins) both from outside Listowel in north Kerry, as was John Byrne (Bill Fuller and John Byrne attended the same national school). All three were the sons of middling and strong farmers. Indeed, Patrick Trant (Phil's father) was described as 'a significant and prominent Kerry farmer' (source: Patrick Trant, *Once Around the Track: The Life and Times of Phil Trant and the Trant Family Business*, (Listowel, 2010), p.11) . John and Joe Murphy from Caherciveen in south Kerry were

Table 3.5 - Irish Migrant Entrepreneurs - Corporate Growth Profile 1945-1995 by County of Origin

County	Number of Firms	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
Kerry	9			£4,613	£11,644	£22,146	£38,261	£65,565	£92,945	£137,313	£288,165	£313,197
Mayo	13		£144	£861	£4,829	£8,649	£12,843	£21,635	£39,430	£77,134	£175,085	£301,740
Galway	7	£19,636	£22,909	£27,468	£32,027	£38,273	£44,942	£58,927	£99,375	£160,668	£223,689	£269,349
Sligo	3	£9,409	£14,636	£19,864	£25,091	£31,986	£41,383	£50,780	£60,177	£74,870	£83,186	£181,926
Cork	7	£1,000	£3,000	£5,000	£8,011	£22,383	£24,972	£27,562	£35,557	£44,485	£75,585	£156,932
n.k.	23						£1,077	£6,766	£17,117	£29,332	£60,678	£114,018
Tipperary	4						£2,378	£10,915	£32,006	£47,762	£84,282	£103,606
Clare	3		£300	£1,200	£5,244	£18,054	£30,864	£43,674	£56,484	£69,294	£82,104	£94,914
Cavan	4					£695	£1,390	£2,085	£11,268	£27,406	£43,544	£59,682
Leitrim	13					£449	£4,700	£11,177	£19,186	£29,166	£41,924	£58,918
Donegal	5					£88	£236	£383	£1,066	£17,599	£33,465	£36,934
Longford	3				£466	£3,162	£5,949	£8,737	£11,669	£14,601	£17,532	£20,464
Roscommon	4							£589	£1,569	£2,550	£6,802	£15,730
Limerick	1										£2,000	£12,469
Wicklow	1							£489	£2,931	£4,208	£6,082	£10,260
Offaly	2						£538	£1,655	£3,440	£5,225	£7,010	£8,795
Derry	1										£1,324	£2,648
Dublin	1								£359	£807	£1,256	£1,704
Fermanagh	1								£200	£532	£865	£1,197
Monaghan	1							£9	£53	£98	£142	£187
Grand Total	106	£30,045	£40,989	£59,006	£87,311	£145,886	£209,533	£310,947	£484,833	£743,051	£1,234,720	£1,764,670

(Source: Adapted from Table 2, Appendix B, pp.14-16.)

Consequently all these men were pre-conditioned by their upbringing to understand the concepts of small-scale capitalist exchange and trading – they were not proletarian wage-earners nor were they urbanites - and simultaneously they were physically capable of sustained periods of heavy and intensive manual work. Almost all these businesses were founded by

also sons to a smallholding farmer. The Gallagher family who founded the Abbey dynasty owned a middling farm in Cashel, Tubbercurry, Co Sligo. The McNicholas family from Bohola in Co. Mayo came from an 18-acre smallholding farm (Interview with Bernard McNicholas in Anne Holohan, *Working Lives: The Irish in Britain*, (Uxbridge, 1995), p.155. See also chapters 2.3, 4.2 and appendix B for further details.

siblings (mainly brothers) who came to Britain in relative penury and worked as manual skilled and semi-skilled labourers, learning the business first-hand, accumulating small amounts of capital and establishing networks of kin and friendship before starting up on their own.³¹³ Some ‘branched out’ by misappropriating resources from Irish companies they worked for.

Another common theme was the tendency to diversify business activities into separate companies after initial set-up. The Murphy Brothers, John and Joe, did this (at his death in 2009, John Murphy had created and grown over 18 separate businesses under the umbrella of a complex series of holding companies)³¹⁴ as did the McNicholas Brothers.³¹⁵ The Gallagher Brothers split the businesses into numerous separate companies, evenly spread between Ireland and the UK before floating the group on the UK and Irish stock markets in the 1970s.³¹⁶ Most of these businesses tended to specialise in the traditional areas of Irish construction work; heavy civil engineering, tunnelling, concrete substructures, slabs and frames and infrastructure cabling, pipelines and trenching, and to a lesser extent, private and social housing. All the major Irish subcontractors mentioned employed mainly Irish labour, often favouring their own counties above others, so for example, Green and Grey Murphy were both known for employing Kerry men in more numbers than any other county. Likewise McNicholas favoured Mayo natives.

The larger enterprises all implemented patrimonial succession planning ensuring ultimate control remains with descendant - predominantly male - generations of the family. This practice is by no means unique to Irish socio-economic relations.³¹⁷ In some senses it is

³¹³ Businesses which started as sibling brothers and then diversified include: Abbey PLC (Gallagher Brothers, Co. Sligo); J Murphy & Sons / JMCC (‘Green’ and ‘Grey’ Murphys, John/Joe Murphy. Co. Kerry); McNicholas construction/McNicholas Engineering (‘Green’ and Brown Macs’, Michael and Patrick ‘Pincher’ McNicholas, Co. Mayo; Durkin Group, Co. Mayo; O’Rourke Civil Engineering Ltd, Co. Mayo/Leitrim; Carey Group, Co. Tipperary; Byrne Brothers, Co. Kerry; and John Byrne (Property Development), Co. Kerry. All these businesses were developed, managed and diversified by brothers.

³¹⁴ Biography of John Murphy included in Funeral Mass Order of Service, 21st May, 2009, Caherciveen, Co. Kerry; Boylan, ‘Biography of Joseph (John) Murphy’ in *Dictionary of Irish biography*.

³¹⁵ Interview with Bernard McNicholas in Anne Holohan, *Working Lives: The Irish in Britain*, (Uxbridge, 1995), p.156, *Irish Post Newspaper*, 11 May, 1974, pp.14-15.

³¹⁶ *Irish Press Newspaper*, 19 Feb, 1973, p.10, 14 May, 1973, p.10; *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 14 May, 1973, p.8.

³¹⁷ This is one of the commonest traits of migrant entrepreneurial behaviour stretching back to antiquity; anthropologically it can be classified as an example of the neo-Darwinian theory of kin altruism. See Chulguen Yang, Stephen M. Colarelli, Kyunghye Han, Robert Page, ‘Start-up and hiring practices of immigrant entrepreneurs: An empirical study from an evolutionary psychological perspective’ in *International Business Review*, Vol. 20, Issue 6, (2011), pp.636-645, p.636-8.

similar to the tradition of ‘keeping the name on the land’ via patrilineal succession.³¹⁸ Clancy Docwra are now on their third generation of brothers/cousins as directors.³¹⁹ The Gallagher dynasty remains firmly in the control of first cousins, sons and grandsons of the founders. The Gallagher Group was headed by Patrick (son of Matt) Gallagher until his untimely death in 2006 and the Abbey Group remains headed by Charles H (son of Charles Snr.) Gallagher and his son, David.³²⁰ Carey Group is now run by first cousins, the sons of the founding brothers.³²¹ The ‘Green’ McNicholas is currently run by the grandsons of founder, Patrick McNicholas, although the ‘Brown Macs’ founded by Patrick’s brother, Michael ‘Pincher’ McNicholas was sold off to major international construction conglomerate, Skanska, by his son, Bernard, in 2006.³²² J Murphy & Sons are still ultimately owned by a holding company consisting almost entirely of various 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation Murphys.

Many Irish-in-London entrepreneurs maintained a regular attachment to ‘home’; again, a common trait amongst Middleman minorities.³²³ Most of the larger and more successful all reinvested some of their profits and business acumen back into parallel business ventures in Ireland such as farms, commercial and residential property and factories during the 60s, 70s and 80s.³²⁴ Examples include the Murphy Brothers – both of whom set up subsidiaries of their UK operations in Ireland. Murphy International Ltd (registered in Ireland) is a group company of Drilton Ltd, the Murphy Group’s (Green Murphy) ultimate holding company. Joe Murphy (Grey Murphy) acquired an existing steel fabrication business in Ireland in the late 1960s and rebranded it Joseph Murphy Structural Engineering Ltd (JMSE). The business became a major player in the steel contracting business by focusing on contracts from semi-state bodies. By

³¹⁸ Linda Price, Rachel Conn, ‘“Keeping the Name on the Land”: Patrilineal Succession in Northern Irish Family Farming’ in John R. Baker, Matt Loble, Ian Whitehead, *Keeping it in the Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms*, (London, 2012), pp.93-4.

³¹⁹ See ‘Senior management changes announced at the Clancy Group’ Clancy Group PLC News Archive, available at: <https://www.theclancygroup.co.uk/news/senior-management-changes-announced-at-the-clancy-group/> (accessed 18 October, 2019).

³²⁰ *The Irish Times*, 29 July, 2006, p.12; Abbey PLC, Published Group Accounts, 1995, p.8.

³²¹ *Construction News*, 30 April, 2020, available at: <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/news/peoplemoves-news/carey-family-takes-charge-in-leadership-shake-up-30-04-2020/>

³²² *Southern Star*, 30 March, 2015, available online at: <https://www.southernstar.ie/News/Death-of-Bernard-McNicholas-27032015.htm> (accessed 22 January, 2016) ; *Irish Post*, 30 March, 2015, available online at: <http://irishpost.co.uk/londonirishconstructionmagnatebernardmcnicholaspassesaway/> (accessed 22 January, 2016)

³²³ Edna Bonacich, ‘A Theory of Middleman Minorities’ in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (Oct., 1973), p. 586.

³²⁴ *Sunday Independent Newspaper*, 28 September, 1975, p.28 ; *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 03 November, 2013, p.37 available online at: <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/crowds-mourn-kerryman-who-transformed-the-dublin-skyline-29721960.html> (accessed 1 July, 2014).

the late 1980s Murphy's interests in Ireland included nearly 1,000 acres of land in north Co. Dublin; the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin; an office block on Baggot St., Dublin; farm lands in Longford; and a mews house in Wilton Place, Dublin.³²⁵

The Byrne Brothers invested heavily in their home parish in south Limerick,³²⁶ as did the McInerneys in Clare,³²⁷ and millionaire builder-turned-impresarios John Byrne and Bill Fuller (who, incidentally were school classmates) in North Kerry.³²⁸ In addition to establishing major property empires, the Abbey Group and Gallagher Group, operating nationwide in the UK and Ireland (but mainly Dublin) by the mid-1960s, the Gallagher brothers diversified into ancillary ventures, establishing a joinery company, Gowna Wood Industries, in their hometown Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo (c.1950), and a plumbing and heating firm, P. J. Matthews Ltd, in Dublin in 1952. More ambitiously, during 1955–6 they opened three factories under the business name Basta Industries, manufacturing builders' hardware also in Tubbercurry.³²⁹ These enterprises were not entirely altruistic, of course; these were, after all, hardened capitalist businessmen but a sense of patriotism and county loyalty nonetheless underpinned such ventures. Most were also known to harbour Irish nationalist sympathies of varying degrees – the result of their age and upbringing in rural revolutionary Ireland.³³⁰ Fuller, for example, stood bail for Provisional IRA members brought before the Irish courts in the early to mid-1970s, and associated with Neil Blaney and other nationalist hardliners expelled from Fianna

³²⁵ Boylan, 'Biography of Joseph (John) Murphy' in *Dictionary of Irish biography*.

³²⁶ *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 4 October, 2013, available at: <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/mourners-pay-tribute-to-the-man-who-built-london-29633350.html> (accessed 29, May, 2014).

³²⁷ 'Ambrose McInerney: Clareperson of Year 1982', Commendation in *Clare Association Dublin Yearbook*, (1982), p6.

³²⁸ By the late 1960s John Byrne had become a property 'tycoon' in every sense of the term. After initially making his fortune in wartime and post-war London, he returned to Ireland, apparently at the direct request of Sean Lemass in the early 1960s. He developed the landmark O'Connell Bridge House, one of Dublin's most prominent buildings which was completed in 1964 at a cost of £1m together with a number of other prominent Dublin office blocks, the old St. Vincent's Hospital on St Stephen's Green and the St Anne's apartments in Ballsbridge, near his home at Simmonscourt Castle (See: 'Crowds mourn Kerryman who transformed the Dublin skyline' in *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 3 November, 2013, available at <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/crowds-mourn-kerryman-who-transformed-the-dublin-skyline-29721960.html> (accessed 10 July, 2014) ; *The Kerryman*, (North Edition), 6 November, 2013, available at <http://archive.irishnewsarchive.com> (accessed 22 May, 2015). By the mid-1980s Byrne had developed over 250,000 sq. ft. of office property in Dublin, including Davitt House, much of which was leased to the Irish State. Back in his native Kerry, he co-owned the Brandon Hotel in Tralee, and was a director of Listowel Race Company. (See *The Kerryman*, 17 February, 1984, p.11).

³²⁹ *Sligo Champion*, 25 April, 1969, p.1, 17 October, 1969, p.13 ; Joseph McNabb, 'Biography of Patrick Joseph Gallagher' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography, online ed.*, Online: Royal Irish Academy; Cambridge University Press, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridge-org.iproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9611&searchClicked=clicked&quickadvsearch=yes>

³³⁰ See chapter 2.3.

Fáil. His Old Shieling Hotel used IRA men as bouncers, and hosted weekly performances by the Wolfe Tones, a band known for their controversial rebel songs.³³¹ The influence of these British diasporic entrepreneurs on Irish economic development throughout the post-war period also, somewhat inevitably, paid dividends in political terms during a key period of Irish national development from the late 1950s onwards. The extent of political influence these men exerted varied; John (Green) Murphy, for example, had almost no discernible interaction with leading Irish politicians, Bill Fuller likewise. Yet John's brother Joseph (Grey) Murphy became inextricably linked with the alleged corruption of the Irish political and planning system, as did fellow Kerry-man John Byrne.

In some cases their political impact was profound. By far the most politically regnant of the 'British construction diaspora' was the Gallagher dynasty, from Sligo; it was said of patriarch Matt Gallagher, that:

He led a process of social engineering whereby the country became substantially suburbanised and owner-occupancy the norm in towns and cities, as it had been in rural Ireland since the turn of the century [...] [His influence] coalesced with wider changes to act slowly but inexorably as a solvent upon seemingly intractable cultural and religious sensibilities: absorbing much of the lower classes, this recast the Irish bourgeoisie in a more demotic and socially liberal mould. In this sense, Gallagher shaped Irish society in his image, his dreary, monotonous housing developments reconceived as crucibles of modernity.³³²

The extent of their industrial and construction enterprises in post-war Ireland brought the Gallagher brothers into contact with ambitious politicians, in particular, in the mid-1950s, the future Taoiseach Séan Lemass.³³³ As then Minister for Industry and Commerce, Lemass cultivated close links with the British-based entrepreneurial diaspora, particularly the

³³¹ Fuller bought and refurbished the Crystal Ballroom in central Dublin in 1948, similar dancehalls in Parnell Square, Bray (Wicklow) and Tramore (Waterford) before embarking upon the construction of a chain of hotels in the 1960s. He built Teach Furbo Hotel near Spiddal, Co. Galway (now the Connemara Coast Hotel) despite local opposition in 1968, the Atlantic, in Ballybunion, Co. Kerry and the famous Old Sheiling Hotel in Raheny, Dublin. Frequented then by a string of IRA leaders and nationalist politicians, Fuller also employed then unheard-of traditional musicians, including Paddy Moloney and Matt Molloy – later of *Chieftains* fame. (See: Clavin, 'Biography of Fuller, Bill (William J)' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.2; Ann Scanlon, 'Bill Fuller, Obituary', in *The Guardian*, (9 September, 2008); John Glatt, *The Chieftains; The Authorized Biography*, (New York, 1997), pp.51-2).

³³² Clavin, 'Biography of Gallagher, Matt' in James' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.4.

³³³ Clavin, 'Biography of Gallagher, Matt', pp.1-2.

Gallaghers and Kerry-born property tycoon, Byrne, whom he invited back to Ireland in the early 1960s to begin redeveloping Dublin.³³⁴ Lemass patronised James Gallagher - Matt's younger brother by five years and himself a returned migrant builder from London - who served as a Fianna Fáil TD for the Sligo-Leitrim constituency between 1961 and 1973 and again from 1977 to 1981.³³⁵ He vigorously supported Lemass's reforms, which, he argued, opened Ireland up to foreign investment and trade. However, his electioneering was controversial; 'a political rival at the time noted that most candidates did not win votes by spending £3,000 and promising families free petrol'.³³⁶

Fianna Fáil in Ireland benefited from generous donations from the Gallagher dynasty – monies which must have included profits funnelled from London-Irish construction activity - and even the dispatch of senior employees to party headquarters during elections. In return, the grateful ruling party made sure that Gallagher Group and Abbey Group interests in Ireland were underpinned by state grants and contracts, and house-building returns were boosted by financial aids for homeowners.³³⁷ Deriving commercial advantages from this culture of political wire-pulling became the norm for the Gallaghers. In 1966 Matt Gallagher helped establish and run Taca, a Fianna Fáil fund-raising organisation for property and construction businessmen, and was one of its biggest contributors – along with John Byrne.³³⁸ He also built 169 houses gratis, mainly for Taca employees, but also for business associates, such as the infamous accountant Des Traynor, and politicians, such as Neil Blaney, who as minister for local government (1957–66) was the final adjudicator of the very planning appeals which permitted such developments. In 1964 Blaney excluded 101 acres held by Gallagher at Kilbarrack from a Dublin Corporation compulsory purchase order. Having bought this land cheaply when it was earmarked for the local authority, Gallagher then built 800 homes there,

³³⁴ Statement of Evidence by John Byrne dated 4th December, 2000, Appendix XV(8)(1)(b), (unpaginated) comprising 4 pages, downloadable from Moriarty Tribunal available at: https://moriarty-tribunal.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/transcript_55.pdf (accessed 14 August, 2014).

³³⁵ *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 4 august, 2012, p.6, available online at <https://www.independent.ie/business/irish/a-return-to-family-ways-26883252.html> (accessed 20 October, 2019).

³³⁶ Clavin, 'Biography of Gallagher, James' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.2.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ For discussion on the formation and activities of Taca see: J.H. Whyte, 'The North Erupts and Ireland Enters Europe: 1968-1972' in J. R. Hill, (Ed.), *A New History of Ireland Volume VII: Ireland, 1921-84*, (Oxford, 2003), pp.317-18; Paul Bew, Helen Hazelkorn, Henry Patterson, *The Dynamics of Irish Politics*, (London, 1989), pp.91-3.

which he sold to Dublin Corporation at open-market value.³³⁹

Such blatant political graft coined the pejorative term ‘Tacateer’ to describe this generation of British construction expatriates; ‘the 1960s generation of “men in mohair suits” who forged a new Ireland yet remained bound to the old.’³⁴⁰ Predictably, ordinary working Irishmen in London long-suspected that considerable amounts of cash were funnelled, by these Tacateers, from construction and dancehall profits generated through evading the British taxation system.³⁴¹ Tom, (OI#1), who worked for Byrnes in the 1970s certainly implies ‘irregularities’ in the way the bar system operated in Byrnes’ Galtymore dancehall.³⁴² Frank McLoughlin, another Irish builder who worked the dancehalls in London, intimated that most dancehalls were funded by illicit receipts from ‘subbies’.³⁴³

This unholy alliance of Fianna Fáil politicians and London-Irish entrepreneurs reached its apotheosis under Lemass’s son-in-law, Charles Haughey, who became Taoiseach for two periods (1979-1982, 1987-92). From the late 1950s, Matt and James Gallagher, John Byrne, Haughey, Traynor, together with most of the expatriate Irish construction tycoons shared a worldview :

Scornful of what they saw as the sanctimonious moralism that enveloped Irish society and revelling in an attitude of worldly and grasping cynicism that subordinated means to ends, they regarded themselves and like-minded, similarly self-made entrepreneurs (political, artistic and commercial) as the vanguard of an assertively materialistic and more prosperous Ireland.³⁴⁴

A rogues gallery of corrupt politicians routinely circumvented the planning system, building regulations, local council legislation and byelaws to create ‘a culture of kickbacks, special access to contracts and massive tax evasion that would enable [them] to live in a style of conspicuous consumption, often at the expense of the public purse.’³⁴⁵ Carlisle Trust Ltd, a

³³⁹ Clavin, ‘Biography of Gallagher, Matt’ in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.2.

³⁴⁰ Clavin, ‘Biography of Gallagher, James’ in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.3.

³⁴¹ Rosita Sweetman, *On Our Knees: Ireland 1972*, (London, 1972), p.31.

³⁴² Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.15.

³⁴³ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.673.

³⁴⁴ Clavin, ‘Biography of Gallagher, Matt’ in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.2.

³⁴⁵ R.F. Foster, *Luck & The Irish: A Brief History of Change, 1970-2000*, (London, 2007), p.88.

company set up by John Byrne was behind the infamous Ansbacher accounts scheme.³⁴⁶ From 1971 until the mid-1990s, tens of millions were deposited with Ansbacher and the money was treated for tax purposes as if it had been lodged offshore.³⁴⁷ Joe Murphy's company, JMSE, also became embroiled in this culture of corruption, with allegations of payments made to minister Ray Burke during the 1980s in return for planning 'favours'. Burke admitted accepting £30,000 from JMSE as a 'totally unsolicited political contribution'.³⁴⁸ By the early 1990s, the Irish government could no longer resist the outcry of public disdain and instigated a series of tribunals of enquiry - McCracken, Moriarty and Flood/Mahon - which ultimately exposed these circles of corruption; ensnaring John Byrne, Joe Murphy and Patrick Gallagher in scandal and intrigue.³⁴⁹ Dermot Bolger described Patrick Gallagher as the kind of flamboyant, well-heeled 'stroke-puller' to which Irish society afforded a peculiar sympathy.³⁵⁰

Conversely, many of these entrepreneurs also became involved in charitable works and invested time and money into non-profit activities in Ireland. John Murphy, for example, won the 'Kerry Person of the Year' award in later life for supporting medical research, specialist charities, education, and recreational and sporting activities in both Britain and Ireland. At University College, Cork, he funded a civil engineering laboratory and a postgraduate research fellowship, maintained a long relationship with the college, employing many of its civil engineering graduates.³⁵¹ The Gallaghers' philanthropic activities were, it seems, encouraged by their political associates in an effort to redeem what was, by the late 1960s, a disreputable name for scurrilous, shameless political corruption and graft.³⁵²

Was the motivation behind the venality of the 1960s and 1970s expatriate London-Irish building entrepreneurs mere avarice? Patrick Gallagher, interviewed in 1998, stated that 'Haughey was financed to create the environment that the Anglo-Irish had enjoyed, and that we as a people could never aspire to'. His father, Matt, the patriarch of the Gallagher dynasty,

³⁴⁶ Elaine Byrne, *Political Corruption in Ireland 1922 - 2010: A Crooked Harp?*, (Dublin, 2012), pp.147-8.

³⁴⁷ *The Irish Times*, 10 Nov, 2014, available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/what-was-ansbacher-1.1994945> (accessed 24 Oct, 2019).

³⁴⁸ *Construction News*, 14 August, 1997, p.16.

³⁴⁹ Elaine Byrne, *Political Corruption in Ireland 1922 - 2010: A Crooked Harp?*, (Dublin, 2012), pp.144-53.

³⁵⁰ Dermot Bolger, *Letters from the New Island*, (London, 1991), pp.292-3.

³⁵¹ *The Independent Newspaper*, 18 May, 2009, available online at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/johnmurphybusinessmanwhosenamewassynonymouswiththeconstructionindustry1686892.html> (accessed 22 May, 2015).

³⁵² Clavin, 'Biography of Gallagher, Matt' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.3

thought that ‘Fianna Fáil was good for builders, and builders were good for Fianna Fáil, and that there was nothing wrong with that’.³⁵³ The alternative viewpoint is probably the more palatable to the thousands of Irishmen who swung the pick in post-war London and didn’t climb out of the trench and into the Mercedes; the myth of the returning exile made good:

Inspired by his immersion within a more advanced society to further a long-delayed process of modernisation, for good and for ill. Doing so entailed undermining, mainly by co-option, a hidebound and repressive social system controlled by a small, self-perpetuating middle class happy to connive at the mass emigration of the underclass from which he was drawn. It was predictable that this role fell to a member of the British building diaspora, an occupation and setting that provided an uneducated manual labourer with one of the few means of financial advancement and of returning home to a position of influence.³⁵⁴

Whether viewed as benevolent benefactors or unscrupulous exploiters of thousands of migrant Irishmen (or as is more likely, a complex mix of both), the influence of these construction entrepreneurs on Irish migration and British construction history cannot be exaggerated.

A telling statistic is that by 1993, the top twenty Irish migrant construction companies accounted for approximately £1.15 billion of British construction industry turnover compared to the equivalent top twenty UK-founded construction firms at £23.06 billion,³⁵⁵ - approximately 5% of UK construction industry output³⁵⁶ – by far the largest ethnic-minority contribution to UK construction. As one man, who worked his entire working life - from seventeen until retirement – on the shovel for John Murphy nostalgically put it: “*The Green, the Grey, the RSK, Lowery and Pincher Mac*”! and as yer man said, “*I worked for Laing, but not for long!*” [Laughter]...they were the men, the kings...³⁵⁷

³⁵³ Elaine Byrne, *Political Corruption in Ireland 1922 - 2010: A Crooked Harp?*, (Dublin, 2012), pp.132-3.

³⁵⁴ Clavin, ‘Biography of Gallagher, Matt’ in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., p.4.

³⁵⁵ Table 3, Appendix B, p.15.

³⁵⁶ Appendix B, Table 3, p.B/15; ‘Top 50 League Tables’ in *Building Magazine*, 29th July, 1994, p.21.

³⁵⁷ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.405.

The Major Irish Construction Entrepreneurs in Post-war London

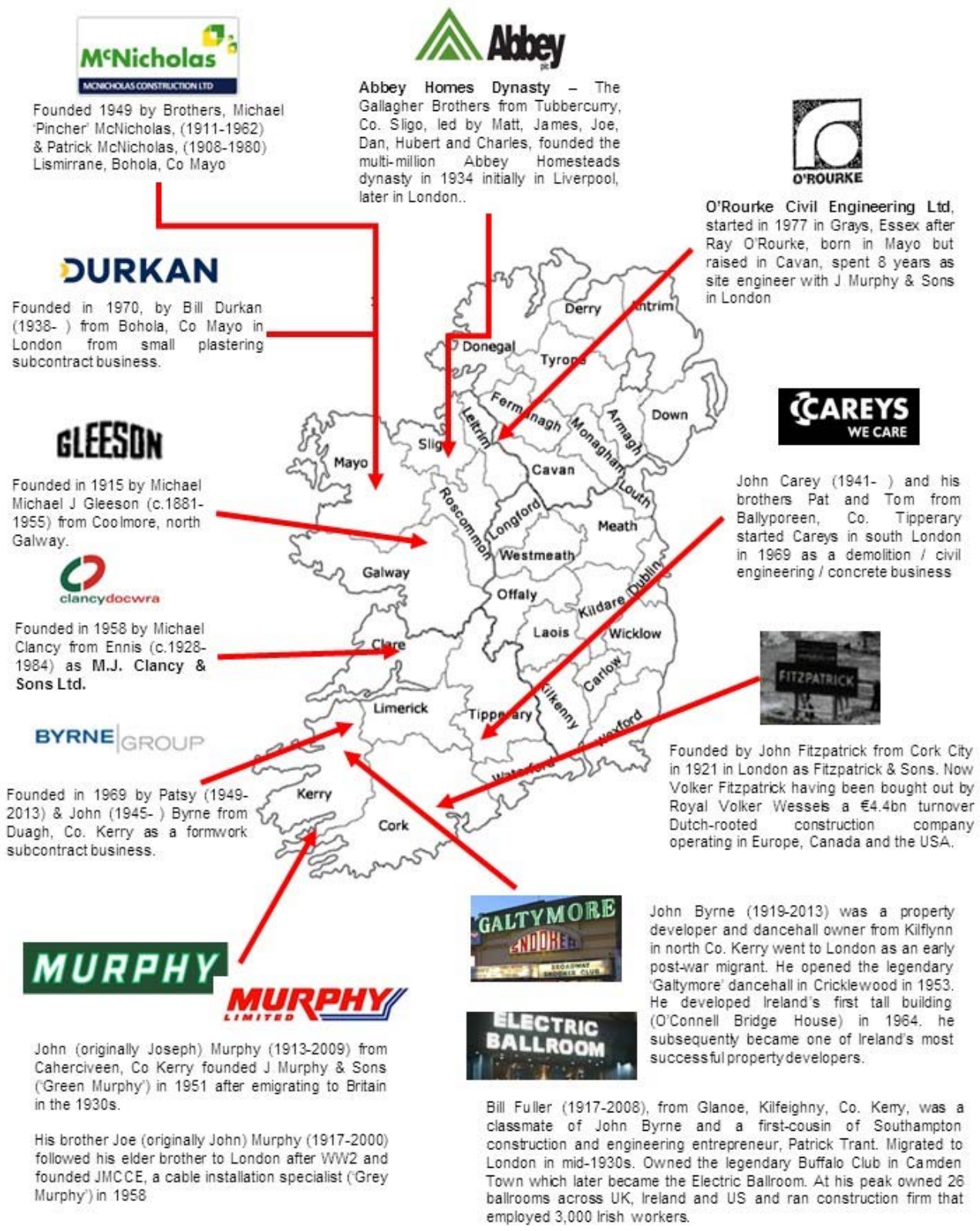


Figure 3.18- Major Irish Construction Entrepreneurs in Post-war London (compiled by author)

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has chronicled the story of how a cohort averaging 102,000 (predominantly) men transitioned from rural Ireland to London over a half-century period and gradually settled in various clusters around the city, working almost entirely on the vast industrial process of reconstructing post-war London. A key aim of this research was to establish that migrant Irish builders were predominant in the post-war reconstruction of London. It can objectively be concluded from the formidable array of construction and civil engineering projects detailed in this chapter that Irish labour was gainfully employed in very significant numbers.

Irish migrants dominated the delivery of civic infrastructure – particularly water, power, tunnelling, road and railway construction. They were also key participants in a variety of early-stage operations – notably substructure and superstructure concrete works - in the delivery of a plethora of colossal building projects in London. As the decades unfolded, Irish migrant labour naturally diversified into ancillary trades, moving on to other areas of housing infrastructure and small building works in which they also thrived. Over time many migrants progressed from (apparent) unskilled labourers to carpenters, plasterers and bricklayers and also took up supervisory and management roles as gangers, foremen, site managers and senior managerial roles. I argue that this reflects an under-estimation of inherent skillsets many of these men brought with them from Ireland; the notion of de-skilling addressed earlier in this chapter. The reasons for this ostensible skills deficit are looked at in greater detail in the next chapter.

The role played in the fortunes of Irish migrant labour by the rise of Irish entrepreneurial activity was crucial and section 3.4 details why. At its root was the serendipitous resurgence, from the 1960s onwards, of labour-only subcontracting as the key form of labour employment within the UK construction industry. The ease of entry into the market and relatively low start-up capital costs for labour-only subcontracting facilitated the development of the key ethnically-Irish companies which employed so many thousands of migrants who flooded into London from the 1950s onwards.

However, what this chapter has not examined is what it was actually like to experience building work, as an individual, within the Irish occupational enclave which developed in the late 1950s and grew to dominate migrant Irish life until the early 1990s. Chapter four gives voice to the workaday lives of the manual labourers and skilled tradesmen themselves – those whose daily physical exertions in the tunnels and sewers, on the roads and bomb-sites, and later the high-rise concrete skyscrapers, helped shape the modern metropolis.

Chapter 4. ‘Hard is the Work and Long the Day’:¹ The Lived Experience.

4.1. Introduction

Understanding the lived experience of working ‘on the buildings’ gives critical perspective to the role of the Irish in rebuilding post-war London. Dovetailing with the industry-centred history, in essence where chapter 3 looked at *what* the Irish migrant builders did, this chapter looks at *how* they did it, relying primarily the direct testimony of some of these men but integrating other relevant primary and secondary sources. It also compares and contrasts the various fictional and cultural representations of this cohort, where relevant to the lived experiences solicited from these testimonies. The sections are arranged thematically to deal with important socio-cultural elements of the Irish migrant working experience: recruitment and hiring; attitudes to work; skill and physical capacity; the role of gangers, foremen and pacemakers; money, casualisation, payment and the phenomenon of the ‘lump’. Finally – and crucially - how Irish builders experienced occupational welfare, health and safety.

4.2. ‘Don’t forget your shovel if you want to go to work’:² Recruitment, Working Culture, Skills and Environment

New arrivals to the world of the Irish migrant construction enclave were often faced with informal recruitment processes perpetuating a toxic culture of hegemonic masculinity which demeaned and humiliated them as mere unskilled ‘labourers’. Construction work, in the UK particularly, is still perceived as ‘a relatively low-status industry with hard and inflexible working conditions and a persistent “laddish” culture in a white, male-dominated

¹ Line from ‘*Just a Note*’, composed by Ewan MacColl, song nr. 12 in Frank Harte and Donal Lunny - *There’s Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*, (Daisy DLCD022), available at The Living Tradition, CD Liner notes, (<http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/dlcd022.htm>, accessed 18 March, 2015).

² Irish folk-song composed by Christie Hennessy; released by Christie Moore on his ‘*Time has Come*’ album in 1987.

environment'.³ In terms of recruitment, an image of 'identification with stereotyped male values and building site mythology'⁴ has always prevented significant female participation except in professional design, management and administrative roles (and, by and large still does). It also dominated the formal - and, more importantly for the Irish community, the informal - recruitment process for males into the construction industry at site level. The pressing search for paid employment usually elicited the question 'Any chance of the start?'; a stock phrase for enquiring about the prospects of work and establishing credentials and an 'intention to do business'. Failure to 'look the part', ask the right question with the right intonation, to the right people in the hierarchy of London construction sites was a giveaway of inexperience and could cost a young man 'the start'.⁵ So, in John McGahern's short story *Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass*, this rite of passage was remembered by the protagonist labourer in a moment of on-site boredom:

They'd said to roll my jacket in the gutter before I went in, and when I got on the site to ask for the shout. 'Who has the shout here?' I asked. They pointed Barney out. 'Any chance of the start?' I asked...[...] His eyes went over me – shoulders, arms, thighs. I remembered my father's cattle they had stood for sale in the Shambles once, walking stick along the backbone to gauge the rump, lips pulled back to read the teeth; but now I was offering to shovel for certain shillings an hour: [...] 'Have you ever done any building work before?' Barney asked. 'No, but I've worked on land.' They'd said not to lie. 'What kind of work?' 'The usual – turf, oats, potatoes.' 'You've just come over on the boat, then?' 'Yesterday...and I heard you might give me the start.' 'Start at twelve, then'⁶

Although fictional, this closely reflects comments and recollections from real-life interviews.⁷ The formal structures of industrial management were rife with inherent hierarchical masculinities and manual workers themselves saw physical capacity and hardness

³ Andrew Caplan *et al*, Research report: 23, *Race Discrimination in the Construction Industry: A Thematic Review*, for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009), p.5.

⁴ Caplan *et al*, Research report: 23, *Race Discrimination in the Construction Industry*, p.5.

⁵ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, p.153-4.

⁶ John McGahern, 'Hearts of Oak and Bellies of Brass' in *Creatures of the Earth*, (London, 1992), p.28-9.

⁷ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.6-7; Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.31-32; Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.42-5, 52; Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, p.153; Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, p.290.

and machismo as an industry-wide badge of membership.⁸ Some newly-arrived migrants struck lucky; Kevin H (OI#3) found ‘No problems getting the start, the foreman was Irish – from Kerry - and the boss was an Englishman, a real gentleman, and in fact he gave me the chance to – an opportunity - to bring in men to work with me’.⁹ In general, though, interviewees confirm that the ignominy of speculatively asking for work directly on sites in this way was the least-favoured route to ‘getting the start’ for most newly-landed Irish migrants, although the alternatives were, sometimes, no less undignified.¹⁰

A more common experience was entry to the industry via the ethnic control economy.¹¹ The enduring image of working ‘on the lump’,¹² was the routine of the early-morning pick-ups by ‘subbies’ trucks and vans at various locations around London. This was the primary hiring method for the bulk of the casual labourers in construction, overwhelmingly Irish migrants, usually newly-arrived, disorientated and young. These daily routines, again, bore more than a passing resemblance to the hiring fairs of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ireland.¹³ The vernacular terminology used for this process was the ‘call-on’, and it is well-defined both in fictional and non-fictional representations of male Irishness in post-war London. Camden Town and Cricklewood were the most notorious locations, particularly the pick-up points at the Crown pub and Camden High Rd, but there were several others around London too.¹⁴ This hiring method was by no means uniquely post-war or Irish; indeed, the ‘call-on’ was routinely conducted to select casual day-labourers up and down the docks and mines of Britain, America and the wider industrial world during the Depression and continued in the London Docks for

⁸ McIvor, *Working Lives*, pp.82-92 ; Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.161-184.

⁹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.42.

¹⁰ See fn. 8. Above.

¹¹ See section 2.2 for definitions of these sociological concepts.

¹² See section 4.4 for history of the ‘lump’.

¹³ The Irish rural culture of the hiring fair existed from pre-Famine Ireland and continued until the 1930s. For detailed accounts of the hiring fair system see: Denis A. Cronin, Jim Gilligan, Karina Holton, *Irish Fairs and Markets: Studies in Local History* (Dublin, 2001), p.90-95 ; Dr Patrick J. O’Connor, *Fairs and Markets of Ireland: a Cultural Geography*, (Dublin, 2003), p.86, p.114-15 ; May Blair, *Hiring Fairs and Market Places*, (Belfast, 2007).

¹⁴ Several interviewees corroborated Camden High Street and Cricklewood as primary pick-up points. There were many such pick-up points (Some less busy than others) scattered around London by the mid-1970s.

Other routine pick-up points were identified in oral histories throughout the 1950-1995 period:

Hammersmith/Sheperd’s Bush - See Interviews with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.21-22, Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.69, John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.378.; Elephant & Castle - See Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.50, Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.524 ; Tottenham – See Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Appendix A, p.237.

example as late as 1937.¹⁵ One migrant labourer to 1960s London eulogised this hiring process in the following terms:

All you had to do was go to Camden Town and you'd get work; just pick a colour – whatever colour you liked...RSK was brown, Murphy was green or grey, Lowery was blue, Pincher Mac was green...You wouldn't enquire where, what time, how long, what price...just jump on a wagon and away you went...it was a fabulous time really. If you stood in the middle of Camden Town and there was a road goin' up – Kentish Town Road, and on each side of the road there'd be nothin' for two, three hundred yards but vans and lorries...But you wouldn't get a lot of the buildin' workers there...all these lads were what they called the 'Heavy Diggers'¹⁶

He recounted, too, his father's excoriating opinion of these casual labourers as '**them savages**' [emphasis added] compared with those (more respectable, like him) Irishmen permanently employed by the more stable and reliable British contractors, such as Wates,¹⁷ where he got the three breaks every day, changing facilities on the job, would be home for six o'clock, holiday pay and a contributory pension.¹⁸ Clair Wills, discussing the making of Philip Donnellan's landmark 1965 documentary, *The Irishmen*, reinforces the general contempt held for these men, highlighting that the hardened physical appearance which was such an asset during the call-on (one young migrant builder interviewed by Donnellan said, 'You'd need your trousers dirty, or you're not wanted', very much echoing McGahern) could simultaneously be a liability outside the enclave, with indigenous Londoners also heard to describe such men as 'savages'.¹⁹

Casual labour hire within the EEE degraded manual labour to a mere unit of production. The commonplace terminology for working men throughout the Irish enclave was 'Skins' (vernacularly barked by gangers as "Shkinz").²⁰ Aggressive physicality was commodified as part of the hiring process and this, in turn, spawned a culture of performative Irish masculinity

¹⁵ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.173.

¹⁶ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.227-228.

¹⁷ Wates Construction were a large, well-established and 'reputable' British construction company during the post-war period.

¹⁸ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.227-228.

¹⁹ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p163.

²⁰ Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004*, (London, 2004), pp.21-22. See also Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.72, Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.502.

which grew out of this working life and which impacted every facet of the migrants' life.²¹ Fictional representations have effectively dramatized this commodification process;²² William King's novel *Leaving Ardglass* captures the degradation of the early morning recruitment process for two young newly-arrived County Mayo migrants with the stark opening line 'Camden Town is a cattle fair'.²³ By comparison to the literary and folksong representations, factual accounts tend to be predictably less dramatic and more mundane, as shown below.



Figure 4.1- Irish labourers at the 'call-on' at the Crown Public House, Cricklewood, c.1982 (Source: Still taken from 'The Crown in Cricklewood', available at: <https://blackcablondon.net/2013/02/21/cabbies-curios-the-crown-in-cricklewood> (accessed 2, April, 2015))

By the early 1950s the demand for productive labour in the construction industry in and around London was frenetic,²⁴ and this, combined with the essentially casual nature of construction employment created a demand-and-supply loop where experienced labour was highly transient, mobile and fluid, more-or-less incentivised to move indiscriminately between jobs which offered the best pay and working hours.²⁵ Foley's recollections of seeking work

²¹ Performative Irishness is examined in greater detail in chapters 6.3 and 6.4

²² For detailed analysis of literary and fictionalised representations of the 'lump' labour subcontracting system, see: Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, pp.42-56; Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.161-184; and Herron (Ed.), *Irish Writing London: Volume 2 Post-War to the Present*, pp.65-80.

²³ King, *Leaving Ardglass*, pp.28-30.

²⁴ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, pp.140-50 ; Foley, *Controlling London's Growth*, pp.84-99.

²⁵ See examples: Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), , p.92, Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), pp.236-8, Interview with Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb.

with Murphy Cabling Company (Grey Murphy) after migrating to Camden Town from Mayo in the early 1950s reflect the mood: ‘The transport lorry arrived, a ganger jumped out and walked quickly down the line – ‘You, you, you’ – he made his choice and those not hired walked away. About ten of us squeezed into the back of the open-backed lorry and headed out to Luton, where a cabling job was underway.²⁶ British main contractors, whilst not officially recruiting from the casual Irish ethnic labour market, were covertly less concerned about the vagaries of formal employment and simply needed to recruit labour to resource projects on an ad-hoc basis. Kevin H (OI#3), from Galway recounted working for Tersons – who were a substantial British contracting organisation by then, and who, rather ironically, later gave evidence to the Phelps Brown inquiry into the casualisation of labour employment in the British construction industry.²⁷ He recalls:

Around that time in 1953-54, I’d be doing odd bits of casual work on the buildings but at weekends we used to work on the railway. A big gang of us would be picked up on a Saturday evening by coach, at the Nag’s Head on Holloway Road and Seven Sisters Road and taken out to work on the tracks at night-time. There was a company called Tersons who used to bring us out and it would be all casual work, maybe four or five pounds in the hand for a Saturday night’s work.²⁸

A form of hierarchical nepotism tended to radiate out from townland to parish to county amongst the post-war Irish builders.²⁹ A ‘townie’ was, at that time, a colloquial term -still sometimes used in rural Ireland and amongst Irish migrant builders - for someone from the same area or locality. It originated with the townland, the smallest spatial unit and social network of Irish society.³⁰ Two people from the same townland would sometimes be referred to as ‘townies’. Over time amongst the London migrants, the term came to apply to someone

2018), p.334, all in Appendix A.

²⁶ Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens*, p.137.

²⁷ *Phelps Brown*, p.192.

²⁸ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.44.

²⁹ For a detailed explication of ethnic nepotism theory see, *inter alia*: Yang et al, ‘Start-up and hiring practices of immigrant entrepreneurs’ in *International Business Review*, p.637-43; Adam Bellow, *In Praise of Nepotism*, (New York, 2004), p.108, 369.

³⁰ It should be noted, for clarity, that ‘townie’ can also be used to differentiate between those from the town in a certain area and those from the surrounding countryside. Townland studies as a form of local history have become increasingly popular and by extension, the concept of the townland diaspora as an element of local migration studies have been promoted by historical ethnographers. See e.g. Fitzgerald and Lambkin, *Migration in Irish History*, pp.270-272, citing W.H. Crawford and R.H. Foy (Eds.), *Townlands in Ulster: Local History Studies*, (Belfast, 2008), and Jacinta Prunty, *Dublin Slums 1800-1925: A Study in Urban Geography*, (Dublin, 1998).

from the same locality, regional town or even county and there often arose an expectation amongst the workforce that ‘townies’ would favour their own in the choice of employment and allocations of work. So, Kevin continues, ‘I was in a gang, there was about thirty of us, with Tersons that time, and I’d say there was only about a half-dozen of us that *wasn’t* from Mayo! [...] And of course, one of the bosses in Tersons at that time was a townie, a Mayo man, so of course again it was the connections. T’was all about the connections...who you knew’.³¹ Hall mentions a fiddle player well-known in the traditional music subculture operating in London at this time, who was almost certainly the ‘boss’ Kevin H refers to above: ‘Jimmy Dunleavy was older still and had been in London on and off since 1932. He was another Mayo man from Toocananagh near Bohola, and he too was a carpenter, a foreman on the buildings well respected in his trade, and at one time he drove a coach for Tersons’. Dunleavy worked on railway work, both in Britain and back in Mayo in 1943, thus was also part of the seasonal migrations from Mayo which Kevin H describes.³²

Only four of the twenty-one interviewees experienced the anxiety of the ‘call-on’ or having to speculatively avail of the pick-up points around London in order to secure construction employment; three in the 1960s and one in the late 1980s.³³ Significantly, all four who did were particularly young and susceptible to exploitation when they arrived in London, two brothers from Clare being still legally minors. Noel (OI#20) was only fifteen years old when he arrived in London in 1966 and, predictably, headed for Camden Town:

we got the tube from Euston to Camden Town and I got out at the station. And I seen all these men, they were all lined up along Kentish Town Road and Camden High Street.[...] Seven o’clock in the morning and I said to my brother, I said “What’s all this about?” He said come on keep going, don’t worry about that. [...] But anyway I ended up on the buildings working for Scan S and I was picked up at The Archway; picked up there and I was taken to Mill Hill.³⁴

Gerry Harrison’s important work on the history of the London Irish Centre captures the

³¹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.44.

³² Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.596.

³³ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.439-441; Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.460-463; Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, p.290; . Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, pp.489-529. The remainder of the twenty-one interviewees in Appendix A either arrived later than the mid-1960s or availed of personal kin and friendship networks instead of casual labour recruitment routes.

³⁴ Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.460.

grim reality of these early morning pick-ups in Camden:

The shuffling groups of men sometimes emerged from cafés. In Camden Town there was Lee's, a Greek establishment in Inverness Street [...] and also Peter's Café in Camden Road. Those who wanted to work in London would assemble at their allotted pitches at about 7.00 a.m. Those who did not mind work further afield had gathered well-before, at 6.00 a.m. or earlier. [...] "*The word was 'You want a shift?' 'The first thing the ganger-man or agent would look at was the working boots. 'He looked at you like a horse. The only thing he didn't inspect was your teeth. Your boots were your CV'*" [...] ³⁵

Harrison goes on to quote a typical exchange during this recruitment process: 'I'd ask, "Any work to be done?" He answered, "What kind of work?"...' "Any kind of hard work". The quick response was "You jump in the back of that van then"'.³⁶ Joe McGarry – who spent the majority of his migrant life working in Camden Town during the peak of the enclave – emphasises the influence of townie-ism during the call-on procedure in Camden Town: 'Now a lot of them might have been regulars, "regular casuals", they would have been known as, who went out every day with the particular subcontractor and that contractor **would have been a townie of theirs**; a ganger-man would have been from the same village in Mayo or Donegal or Kerry, or wherever' [emphasis added].³⁷ Likewise when Leitrim-man Tom, (OI#1) went looking for work on the Victoria Line in the mid-1960s, he availed of neighbourly connections with decision-makers already working on that project:

We heard there was good money to be made. And the timekeeper on that job...well, one of the timekeepers, cos there was two or three shifts on that job...was from Carrick [Tom's home town] I met one of the leading miners on one tunnel section; he was Joe F, a neighbour of ours from the Corries. I knew him to see – He was a good bit older than me, like, put it that way. He said to me, 'I have a job down below for ya' ³⁸

Three-quarters of those interviewed arrived after the mid-1960s by which time the building industry in and around London had become exceedingly busy for the Irish.³⁹ The enclave was well-established, socio-economic networks were operating at full efficiency and

³⁵ Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004*, (London, 2004), p.23. N.B. also the flat-capped worker pictured in Figure 4.1., who clearly fits this profile.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.23.

³⁷ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.503.

³⁸ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.22-23.

³⁹ O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.121-129. See also *Contract Journal*, Editorial, January 2nd, 1964, p.19.

most new arrivals were using familial and friendship networks within the ethnic labour enclave and the wider Irish community.⁴⁰ Favour and patronage were common features throughout these networks; behaviours accorded with anthropological concepts of kin selection, ethnic nepotism and reciprocal altruism amongst those who exercised power of selection of labour, with siblings, cousins and ‘townies’ all often favoured over strangers.⁴¹ Referrals by reputation were also a common feature. At site level individual and gang reputation was probably more important in the development of social capital in the wider work environment; reliability, sturdiness, hard graft, skill, discretion and experience were highly valued commodities and were incrementally accumulated on each contract, adding value to one’s ‘employability’.⁴²

Note, for example, the advertisement from Cementation Construction Ltd (Figure 4.2), a well-established British contractor, placed in the *Irish Post* newspaper in April, 1970, which actually names two Irish general foremen, Logan and McGauran, recruiting on this new project and seeks the ‘old acquaintances’ of these foremen to work on this new project. This accords very closely with the remarks John P (OI#13) makes regarding becoming a ‘Macs Man’ for example. This is the occupational ethnic enclave at work. There are repeated examples of this form of hiring practice throughout the collected oral histories.⁴³ Tom (OI#1) had two younger brothers working in London simultaneously in the mid-1960s, both of whom benefited from the altruism which operated within the enclave, and the interconnected circles of kin, friendship and acquaintance. Patrick (OI#4) landed in London on a Sunday afternoon with no real plans of any kind and by Tuesday was out working on cable gangs. His older brother Jimmy was by then a well-established shovelman working for gas subcontractors and availing of his own

⁴⁰ Networking theory in relation to Irish migration generally is covered in a number of academic texts, most importantly in Delaney & MacRaild, *Irish Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities Since 1750*, p.129, 132, and Delaney, *Demography*, pp.17-18, 177-9.

⁴¹ Chulguen Yang, Stephen M. Colarelli, Kyunghye Han, Robert Page, ‘Start-up and hiring practices of immigrant entrepreneurs: An empirical study from an evolutionary psychological perspective’ in *International Business Review*, Vol. 20, Issue 6, (2011), pp.636-645, p.636-8.

⁴² Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, p.271-2. N.B Comments about becoming ‘a Macs man’.

⁴³ For a detailed explication of ethnic nepotism theory see, *inter alia*: Yang et al, ‘Start-up and hiring practices of immigrant entrepreneurs’ in *International Business Review*, p.637-43; Adam Bellow, *In Praise of Nepotism*, (New York, 2004), p.108, 369. For examples in interviews, see: Interviews with various participants as listed and dated in Appendix A: Kevin H, (OI#3), p.17 ; Patrick M, (OI#4),p.16 ; Ben C, (OI#8), p.12 ; Gregory D, (OI#10), p.12 ; Jackie W, (OI#11), p.14 ; Paddy B, (OI#12), p.13 ; Sean G, (OI#14), p.10 ; John H, (OI#17), p.5 ; Noel O, (OI#20), p.4 ; Joe Mc,(OI#21), p.12.

network of contacts and townies.⁴⁴ Patrick describes how connectivities between siblings, in-laws, fellow footballers, musicians and drinking partners were constantly exploited, largely from altruistic motives: ‘[...] So there was kind of a circle of contacts that was all connected up to this one particular subcontractor’.⁴⁵ Similarly Michael (OI#5) from Connemara, who arrived in London around the same time as Patrick. ‘knew a foreman for Murphy, he was a neighbour of ours from Connemara’.⁴⁶ Tony C (OI#7), who at only seventeen worked under-age as a banksman on what was, in the mid-1960s, by far the largest infrastructure project in Britain - the Victoria Line extension - again mentioned the presence of an older brother already working there which enabled him to get started.⁴⁷

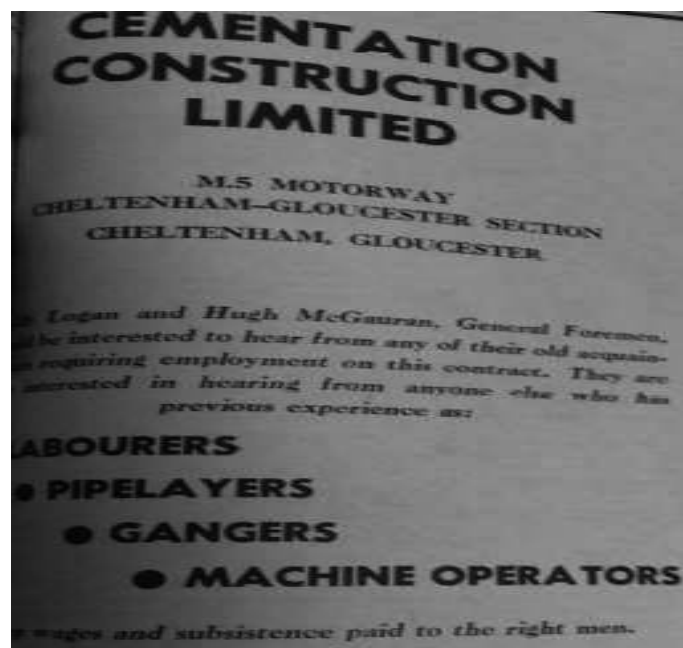


Figure 4.2 - Advertisement for Irish labour on M5 Motorway project, Cheltenham.

(Source: *Irish Post*, 25 April, 1970, p.12).

Once recruited, new migrants needed to acclimatise to the working culture and environment of London’s Irish ethnic construction market. Historically ingrained prejudices related to craft and skills in UK construction resulted in Irish migrant builders (particularly those casual labourers working within the ethnically-controlled economy for Irish-owned labour subcontractors) often being treated as ‘second-class builders’ as well as second-class

⁴⁴ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.59, 69.

⁴⁵ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.59-60.

⁴⁶ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.80.

⁴⁷ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.115.

citizens.⁴⁸ Whether or not possessing any formally-recognised skills acquired before migration, Irish builders were automatically associated by most UK firms with the ‘heavy-end’ of construction work, which was (and to some extent still is) considered ‘low-skilled’.⁴⁹ Notwithstanding the substantial reduction in manpower resulting from improved mechanisation within the industry post-war, manual labour remained an intrinsic part of ‘heavy-end’ activities, requiring intense, physically-demanding and manually dexterous skills.⁵⁰ Yet such skills were unrecognised beyond the men themselves, with most operatives classed first as ‘navvies’ then as ‘general labourers’ or ‘general operatives’. Manual construction work was seen by most as a ‘mere’ unskilled or semi-skilled labour – in some way of less economic or social value, a lower grade kind of work requiring, perhaps, less intelligence. Redmond highlights comparative attitudes to Irish migrant women engaged in domestic work in the same period, pointing up the contradiction that Irish women who would not dream of engaging in domestic work in Ireland were seen as fulfilling ‘the lower status jobs within a low status occupation’ willingly in Britain, whereas British women would rather be unemployed than engage in such work.⁵¹

This skills-based class discrimination was a legacy of wartime recruitment. Restrictions and regulations were imposed on migrant war-workers by the Éire Government, preventing skilled tradesmen from travelling to London.⁵² Moreover, post-colonial sensibilities of class and ethnicity combined with protective resistance from domestic construction trades unions in the UK to prevent Irish ‘war-worker’ labourers being recognised as having any ‘craft’ value by comparison to skilled trades within the British construction industry.⁵³ Judges’ reference to ‘disreputable agents’ rings true in regards to the de-skilling issue, since there is evidence that some of the British recruiting agents made false promises to skilled Irish craftsmen that if they signed on as labourers they would later be upgraded to tradesmen shortly after arrival in

⁴⁸ See chapter 2 and Appendix D

⁴⁹ Most post-war migrant Irish males were expected to - and generally did – operate in substructure groundwork, excavation and concreting; infrastructure sewer work, drainage and sitework; superstructure concreting, formwork and reinforcement, some bricklayers, hod-carriers and scaffolders. See also table 2.6, chapter 2.2, and table 1, Appendix B, pp.6-11.

⁵⁰ Construction ‘labourers’ fell from 400,000 to 150,000 from 1965-1985 – see Department of the Environment, *Housing and Construction Statistics*, London: HMSO, annual series

⁵¹ Redmond, *Moving Histories*, pp.203-7.

⁵² Delaney, *Demography*, p.136-8.

⁵³ Judges, *Irish labour in Great Britain*, p.9, p.36, .

England.⁵⁴ This was further highlighted by *The Irish Democrat* newspaper in 1945, ‘Men from the south of Ireland could only volunteer to come to this country as labourers [...] carpenters and bricklayers were compelled to swing the pick and shovel, usually at labourer’s rates’.⁵⁵ There is also countering evidence that skilled Irish tradesmen and agricultural workers willingly acquiesced in de-skilling in order to obtain travel permits during the wartime recruitments.⁵⁶ Over time, a proportion of Irish migrants (generally as men settled and aged) were able either to reverse their de-skilling or acquire new skills and crossed into other less physically-demanding trades: internal carcassing and first-fix carpentry, plastering, rendering, screeding, tiling, plumbing and electrical works, flooring and decorating. Eventually Irish migrants could be found in some numbers in most building trades.⁵⁷

Why were Irishmen – most of whom were ostensibly untrained in formal apprenticeship terms – so proficient at heavy-ended construction activities? Wills, in theorising the premis advanced by the title of her book *The Best Are Leaving* considers Gaelic Revivalist notions of physical and moral virtue rooted in Darwinist theories of racial typology; the concept that capacity for hard outdoor work and frugal living begets ‘robust rural stock’ and that this, in turn, fitted them for the rigours of strenuous industrial construction work.⁵⁸ Whilst this was, as Wills contends, a hard-wired stereotype in the Irish migrant consciousness, it had merit, too, in rational terms. As one wartime Donegal migrant observed, those from the western counties were used to working rough land in rough weather; physically-conditioned to short intermittent periods of highly intensive manual labour.⁵⁹ In the case of excavation and shovelwork, in a TV documentary interview from the late 1980s, a shovelman, (working for McNicholas Engineering Ltd, digging a trench in central London) when asked why Irishmen are so famous for digging retorts, laughing, ‘Because an Englishman cannot dig’⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.24-7.

⁵⁵ *Irish Democrat*, December, 1945, p.8.

⁵⁶ Delaney, *Demography*, p.136-8.

⁵⁷ See Chapter 2, table 2.6 and Appendix B for variety of trade skills demonstrated across individual and corporate careers.

⁵⁸ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp. 24-5.

⁵⁹ Paddy Boyle interview, part 01 in *The Reg Hall English, Irish & Scottish Folk Music & Customs Collection*, The British Library Sound Archive – available at: <http://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Reg-Hall-Archive/025M-C0903X0458XX-0100V0#sthash.wgFzObOz.dpuf> (accessed 6 April, 2017).

⁶⁰ Channel 4 Television Documentary ‘Cutting Edge’ series: ‘*The Pick, the Shovel and the Open Road*’, produced & directed by Molly Dinneen, (broadcast March 25, 1991).

So why could Irishmen dig?, one might ask. Derision aside, proficiency and conditioning are, of course, relative; had this shovelman migrated to the coalfields of the industrialised north of Britain, he would have found ample examples of Englishmen who could dig.⁶¹ Irish migrant builders were better at the heavy and rough construction trades only by comparison to most of the other labour available within the post-war London labour market. London labour (quite apart, obviously, from the significant depletion to its ranks caused by the Second World War) was, by the mid-twentieth century overwhelmingly an urban industrialised workforce (focused more on light-industry, engineering, manufacturing, dockwork, distribution and retail), and conditioned to factory production, repetitive tasks and standardised work.⁶² In particular, British labour became heavily-unionised after the war, adhering to collective bargaining, strict divisions of skilled and unskilled labour and trades union membership. By the mid-1960s almost all British heavy industry had unionisation levels of around 70-80%; coal mining membership was over 90%. By comparison construction unionisation hovered around 36%, making it a far more exposed to subcontracting, fragmentation and individualism.⁶³

Chapter two showed that large parts of Ireland remained relatively unaffected by industrialisation in contrast to significant urbanisation in the UK. As late as the 1960s ‘in the much of the west of Ireland, and especially on marginal land, many farms were very small, and provision of a subsistence living for the farming family was a major goal. It is on farms such as these that we find the biggest reliance on manual labour, and also evidence for implements such as spades’.⁶⁴ Dexterity in the use of spades, shovels and other tools and implements for working the land was consequently an intrinsic and indigenous part of Irish agricultural craft and was passed from generation-to-generation through learnt behaviour. Spadework was the most important skill in smallholding farm work and, according to Bell, Ireland had a bewildering range of spadework techniques in use depending upon location. For example, the process of digging potato ridges with the Loy (described by one practitioner as “sculptors of the soil”) persisted extensively in the rural west of Ireland until the mid- twentieth-century. The

⁶¹ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, pp.78-92.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.9-16, White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.185-216, Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.46.

⁶³ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, p.209, Table 6.2.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *A History of Irish Farming 1750 – 1950*, (Dublin, 2008), p.19, p.35.

Loy is no longer used for tillage work, but the skill to handle it has been preserved in a number of counties as part of rural heritage.⁶⁵

Throughout the twentieth century Irish farms expanded on the back of mass emigration.⁶⁶ This subsistence lifestyle overlaid with the social conditions of rural fundamentalism described in chapter two, meant young people raised on smallholder owner-occupier farms across the west of Ireland were, until well into the post-war period, trained in dexterous manual labour⁶⁷ and boys especially were familiar with the use of mechanised vehicles and heavy plant.⁶⁸ Seasonal agricultural migration also left the cultural imprint of a Stakhanovite work ethic on the post-war building generation via inter-generational experience and learnt behaviour. One farmer in Yorkshire remarked, in 1908, that ‘when on piece-work they do not mind how hard or long they work [...] they come to save money but do not care to work by the day at the ordinary rate of pay for day labourers’.⁶⁹ This focus on earning-capacity in the migrant workplace carried over into the post-war era; hardiness, capacity for hard work and skill as a shovelman was valued and admired.⁷⁰ This again suggests a conditioning towards capitalist productionism, i.e. incentivised payment by results rather than flat-time rate.

Interviewees, however, did highlight differences in the London construction market and the need to acclimatise: the types of manual tools, the longer hours and productivity rates expected, the short-handled spades and picks and the more confined spaces.⁷¹ Patrick M, (OI#4), explained, ‘they [a subcontractor from Clare] brought me out and showed me the

⁶⁵ See ‘#Ploughing16: Spade work of a forgotten era’, in *The Irish Examiner*, (September 19, 2016).

⁶⁶ By around 1911, the average size of Irish farms had grown to 15-30 acres and by the end of the century had more than doubled to 75 acres – see Address by Mr Trevor Sargent T.D., Minister of State for Food and Horticulture at the launch of *A History of Irish Farming 1750-1950* on Thursday the 8th of May, 2008 in the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks, Dublin. Available at: <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/press/ministersspeeches/archivedspeeches/speechesbyministerofstatetrevorsargent/2008/08may2008addressstheLaunchofahistoryofirishfarming1750-1950inthenationalmuseumofirelandcollinsbarracksdublin/> [Accessed 10 Oct, 2016].

⁶⁷ Predominantly through cultivation of potatoes and other crops, the raising of cattle, the harvesting and saving of hay, and the digging and harvesting of peat turf.

⁶⁸ To some extent this explains the propensity for some ostensibly untrained Irish migrant labour to become heavy plant, excavator, dumper and crane drivers in the 1970s, 80s and 90s; see s.4.5 *infra* for further details.

⁶⁹ Jack Foley, *Swinford Spalpeens*, p.92.

⁷⁰ See section 4.4 and Interviews, Appendix A: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.22 ; Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), p.64; Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), p.116; Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), p.243; John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018),p.367.

⁷¹ See, for example, Interview with Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.32-4 and fn.8, Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.66-70,

ropes...doing cable work. I was straight on to the cable work [...] I'd never seen the likes of the short-handled forks and shovels they were using'.⁷² This mirrors comments from Connemara native, Michael (OI#5), who went to London around the same time as Patrick in 1966:

We were doing post-office ducting, digging of course! All hand dig in them times, sure we were used of the digging anyway, I didn't really find any problem with it. The only thing it took me a while to get used of was digging ground with a fork and the shovels were very short compared to what we'd use at home. [...] We used foot-irons as well, to save the boots, sure they were a great support when you were digging. We had to get our own boots, mind, they weren't supplied by the companies.⁷³

Of all the tools and implements mentioned by the men interviewed for this research, the foot-iron perhaps most epitomises the character of the early post-war period when manual digging was the skill in most demand. Tom M (OI#1), recounted, as a newly-arrived 21-year-old in the late 1950s, seeing gangs of Irish labourers alighting from trucks in the carpark of the famed Crown Public House in Cricklewood 'with th'auld foot-irons in their jacket top-pockets'.⁷⁴ During the heyday of hand



Figure 4.3 - 'The Foot-Iron'
(Source: <https://www.oldgardentools.co.uk/clothing>)

excavation the foot iron (Figure 4.3) was an invaluable tool of the shovelman; 'you strapped this strip of steel under your boot, between sole and heel. To protect the leather from the digging. [In] flinty ground, boots without the foot-iron wouldn't last a week'.⁷⁵ A representative comparison in literature is Edna O'Brien's short story *Shovel Kings* where the main character, Rafferty, also explains the difference in tools and the harder work involved in digging London clay.⁷⁶

⁷² Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.59

⁷³ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.80.

⁷⁴ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.24.

⁷⁵ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p188, citing Bill Brennan interview.

⁷⁶ Edna O'Brien, 'Shovel Kings' in *Saints and Sinners*, (London, 2011), p.7.

In the case of concrete, formwork and steel-fixing, Adrian Forty characterises the skills-based discrimination thus:

Because, supposedly, anyone can do it, the work of making concrete carries little prestige; compared to things made out of materials whose workmanship relies upon crafts with long traditions and established patterns of training, concrete has, for most of its history, been looked down upon as inferior [...]. But to say that concrete requires no skill is an oversimplification...⁷⁷

The oversimplification of concreting skills is easily supported by evidence from the workers themselves. Joe Keeley, a shuttering carpenter from Dublin - remarking about concrete bridge construction on the M1 motorway - made the point that bridge shuttering posed complex new challenges both for carpenters and concretors and Tom Mc (OI#9) remarked about a colleague's skill at concrete finishing with a spade instead of a tamp.⁷⁸

Interviews with: John F (OI#16), a steel-fixer in 1960s London on projects such as Brent Cross;⁷⁹ Paddy B (OI#12), a time-served bricklayer from Mayo who worked on such complex projects as the British Library in Euston;⁸⁰ and Sean G (OI#14) and John H (OI#17), who both describe in detail the complexities of constructing heading shafts for tunnels by hand and machine;⁸¹ all speak to the skills oversimplification argument. These men self-identified as skilled in manual terms, irrespective of how they were seen by the wider construction community. This 'concrete snobbery' inherent in UK construction hid the huge earnings being made by Irish subcontracting businesses engaged almost exclusively in concrete-related construction work in this period. Forty cites the distinction between high-quality concrete work and ordinary concrete work such as plain floor slabs as a potential reason for the opprobrium of the established construction crafts.⁸² Irrespective of the differential skills levels involved in concrete placement, steel-fixing or complex formwork, the post-war revolution in concrete

⁷⁷ Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, (London, 2012), p.225.

⁷⁸ Wall C., Clarke L., McGuire C., and Muñoz-Rojas O. *Building the M1 Motorway*, ProBE, (London, 2012), p.20; Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, p.154. Tamping the surface of wet concrete is usually done with a long straight-edged timber held at either end and lightly tapped across the surface of the slab to give a slightly rippled coarse surface to the concrete for finishing screed.

⁷⁹ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.364-5.

⁸⁰ Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Appendix A, pp.240-55. 'Time-served' is the term generally used to describe a tradesman who served a formal apprenticeship as a youngster.

⁸¹ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.394-6, Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.308-310, 323.

⁸² Adrian Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, (London, 2012), p.226.

construction shifted the balance between the productive economic values of professional designers, traditional skilled craft labour, and seemingly ‘unskilled’ concrete labour and, to the distinct disadvantage of the former. It also changed the essence of the skills-base in construction radically. In socio-economic terms, male Irish migrants to post-war London were the main beneficiaries of this shift.

The manual workers interviewed also exuded an underlying sense of mutuality; that they were possessed of skills and abilities which a fellow-worker who had ‘soldiered’⁸³ – who had been through the same physical rigours - would instinctively possess themselves and would, recognise and respect in others. Tom M (OI#1) did no formal carpentry apprenticeship. He regarded much of the ‘formally’ educated construction industry as lacking in the innate skill that is learnt from simply doing manual work repetitively and well: ‘The point about it is that some of these guys, they had no idea, really...no idea. I mightn’t have been qualified, but I knew how to do it! [...] With a lot of men, it wasn’t that they weren’t able, but they didn’t know how’⁸⁴ ‘The worst thing in the world’ according to one migrant builder, ‘is to [be put to] work with somebody who’s never worked manually’.⁸⁵ This suggests mutual recognition of an innate ergonomics as and between manual workers, which could be learned through experience but was also somewhat dependant on individual physique. As Jim Ward puts it, ‘you don’t have to talk to one another even – you just know what you’re going to do. There’s no discussions really – you just get on with it.’⁸⁶ This was by no means a viewpoint unique to Irish migrant builders, but applied across all manual workers in construction. It is a part of the wider spectrum of identity issues related to class and gender; an expression of masculinity associated with male corporeal strength and ‘instrumental effectiveness’.⁸⁷ Adapting Thiel’s conceptualisation, I would contend that it represents a perception amongst manual construction workers that skill is not simply a matter of formal training or education, but is embedded in mental and physical acuity. To paraphrase Thiel, ‘Working-class men thus co-opt and

⁸³ This was a term (e.g. “We soldiered together”) used in conversation by older Irish migrant builders to engender a sense of camaraderie and commonality. See for example, Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, pp.90-1.

⁸⁴ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.11.

⁸⁵ *‘It was a new world’: Building Sizewell A Nuclear Power Station*, ProBE Pamphlet, Available at <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/file/6486/download?token=gJq0EGZv>, (accessed 18 Jun, 2017), p.31.

⁸⁶ *‘It was a new world’: Building Sizewell A Nuclear Power Station*, ProBE Pamphlet, Available at <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/file/6486/download?token=gJq0EGZv>, (accessed 18 Jun, 2017), p.31.

⁸⁷ Thiel, *Builders*, p.122.

reproduce the values of corporeal strength and [innate mental acuity], becoming implicit in their self-expression and supplying a reservoir of power and status embedded in broader “subterranean” meaning’.⁸⁸

4.3. ‘Tear it all out Rough’⁸⁹: Supervision – Foremen, Gangers, & Pacemakers

Supervision is an essential feature of capitalist production management in virtually every walk of industrialised society. Throughout the post-war era, in most well-established builders, construction supervisors were generally promoted from the ranks of skilled and semi-skilled tradespeople, based on ability, experience and perceived leadership skills. However, as in every walk of life, the supervision of low-paid migrant labour, often working illegally, has been, and remains open to abuse of the worst kind.⁹⁰ As the name implies, a ganger in post-war London managed a gang of tradesmen or labourers. He was the main recruiter and overseer of newly-arrived migrant labourer; equivalent in terms of authority to, perhaps, a corporal in a military unit. Sometimes referred to as foremen,⁹¹ chargehands or leading-hands, their brutality and toughness are tropes throughout British and European industrial lore and by no means the preserve of Irish migrant workers. Accounts of the (mainly English) Victorian railway navvies contain numerous tales of the exploits of gangers, both virtuous and nefarious.⁹²

In the post-war world of London-Irish subcontracting the conventional units of productive labour ranged from a pair (a skilled operative plus an unskilled G.O. ‘General Operative’, Labourer) up to a gang or crew averaging six to ten workers. In some trades, such as bricklaying or plastering, gangs comprised two bricklayers-plus-one labourer, or three-and-

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ A couplet from the well-known Irish folk-revivalist ballad, *Paddy on the Road* runs; ‘I’ve had gangers big and tough, tell me “tear it all out rough” / When you’re building up and tearing England down’. It was written in 1968 by Dominic Behan, (1928-1989), a brother of Brendan and Brian. The phrase is a working command; a metaphor for “dig harder”.

⁹⁰ See *Labour Exploitation - Construction Industry Headline Trends*, published by ‘The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority’, (GLAA), available at <https://www.gla.gov.uk/publications/labour-exploitation/> (accessed 23 June, 2020).

⁹¹ An erroneous usage, since a foreman in the true sense outranks a ganger and would be militarily equivalent to the rank of Sergeant perhaps.

⁹² See for numerous examples of ganger-man folklore both Dick Sullivan, *The Navvyman*, (London, 1983) and Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, (Middlesex, 1968).

one, where the labourer mixed and distributed bricks, mortar or plaster for two or three skilled operatives. In tunnelling work a five-man gang was the norm.⁹³ Gangs or crews were usually led and overseen by a working foreman or ganger and supervised either by the owner-subcontractor or (in larger firms) contracts managers on a visiting basis. Production and efficiency were maximised by incentives and by ensuring the make-up of such gangs and crews included a blend of sufficient skilled experience and unskilled physical capacity. An example of one common incentive method used was vernacularly known as ‘job and knock’;⁹⁴ a gang were paid a full day/night shift but given the remainder of the shift off subject to early completion of a preset task or activity (which would ordinarily be expected to take the gang a day or more to complete).

In general terms skill and ability mattered less than productivity. The toxicity of working ‘on the lump’ within the ethnic labour market was epitomised by the presence of the dreaded ‘ganger-man’; for most men the visceral embodiment of exploitative capitalist productionism - brutal, hyper-masculinised and abusive. The malevolent reputation of the ‘ganger’ within the London construction industry has, in some ways, been amplified in the public consciousness by analogy with the more infamous ‘gangmasters’ of recent migrant trends from further afield, and resultant tragedies such as the Morecombe Bay disaster.⁹⁵ Their reputation was equally shaped by the cultural construct of ‘Paddy as a hard-working, well-paid slave’ exploited by unscrupulous employers.⁹⁶

Invariably playing a central role in the melodramatic re-imagining of the early post-war era, almost all the recognised ‘navvy narratives’ feature the domineering and ruthless labour supervisor.⁹⁷ These tropes are steeped in the impressionistic folkloric memories of

⁹³ See chapter 3, pp.136-40.

⁹⁴ Sarah Pink, Dylan Tutt, Andrew Dainty, *Ethnographic Research in the Construction Industry* (Abingdon, 2013), p.29.

⁹⁵ Don Pollard, ‘The Gangmaster System in the UK: Perspective of a Trade Unionist’ in Stephanie Barrientos (Ed.), *Ethical Sourcing in the Global Food System*, (Abingdon, 2006), pp.115-28. See also ‘A working life: the gangmaster’ in *The Guardian*, 29 July, 2011. See also Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#21), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.515.

⁹⁶ Hazley, ‘The Irish in post-war England’, PhD Thesis, pp.146-7. For the avoidance of doubt, hyperbolic references to the term ‘slave’ and ‘slavery’ are cited by several critics of Irish migrant culture whose work is referred to in various chapters throughout this thesis. Its use is not intended to infer equivalence in any way between paid migrant labourers and the abhorrent practice of enforced slavery throughout modern history.

⁹⁷ A phrase used by cultural critic, Tony Murray, to describe the body of fictional and semi-biographical literature dealing with the lives of Irish construction workers in London. See Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, pp.42-56.

industrialisation, manual work, forced labour, indentureship and slavery. As Murray explains, invariably a ‘Cuchulainn-like figure, emerges’, and in most of the post-war literature it is loosely based around the real-life character of the infamous ‘Elephant John’ whose life and reputation is discussed in chapter six.⁹⁸ In John B Keane’s *The Contractors* Crazy-Horse is this talisman, in *I Could Read the Sky*, he is ‘The King’, in *Leaving Ardglass*, MJ Galvin’s ruthless ganger is ‘The Horse’ Muldoon:

Above the thud of their boots, a big red-faced man with a head of black hair shouts abuse at them. Did they think they had all fucken day? Such a crowd of lazy fuckers he’d never met in all his life. [...] ‘Who’s your man?’ I ask. ‘That’s the one and only Batt Muldoon – Horse Muldoon, as he’s known all over London’ [...] He whips a newspaper out of a young fellow’s back pocket: ‘Is it for readin’ the fucken newspapers you came to England, lad? Into the fucken truck or you’ll find yourself back in the bog, or up to your arsehole in rushes’. He keeps on roaring as they clamber into the wagon, like cattle for market.⁹⁹

This passage in particular emphasises, yet again, the diminution of human labour to the status of farm animals through the repeated reference to cattle markets.¹⁰⁰ The bucolic treatment of younger, less experienced migrants emphasises hegemonic masculinity and oppressive authoritarianism as modes of social control over the workers.¹⁰¹ Often-times these ubiquitous archetypes are present but unidentified; in Edna O’Brien’s short story *Shovel Kings* we immediately meet the indefatigable Irish ganger mistreating his fellow countrymen with impunity: ‘Lads in a line, stripped to the waist because it was so hot, each man given a certain number of yards to dig, four foot six inches wide and four foot six inches deep. The foreman in his green Wellingtons walking up and down, putting the fear of God into us. A brute, and an Irish brute at that’.¹⁰² Kevin Burke’s recent song, *London Town*, based upon his own father’s experiences as a 1940s migrant from Sligo, further reiterates the theme of the universally-hated ganger: ‘He signed on with a ganger from Dublin / The cruellest little tyrant that ever you met

⁹⁸ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.50. For a detailed characterisation of ‘Elephant John’ O’Donoghue, John Murphy’s infamous labour manager, see interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.389-406. John H worked directly for ‘the Elephant’ for several decades.

⁹⁹ King, *Leaving Ardglass*, p.30.

¹⁰⁰ Cf., John McGahern’s reference to selling cattle, *supra*, p.188.

¹⁰¹ Hegemonic masculinity is a theoretical concept developed by cultural theorist, Robert W Connell, which, as it applies to Irish builders, refers to a social ascendancy of one group of men over others’ – see Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Sydney, 1995), pp.76-7.

¹⁰² Edna O’Brien, ‘Shovel Kings’ in *Saints and Sinners*, (London, 2011), p.7.

/ Had him sweating in trenches for twelve hours a day / T'was hard work but all he could get'.¹⁰³ Similar representations are to be found, for example, in John McGahern's treatment of Irish builders in London. In *Faith, Hope and Charity*, after Cunningham is killed when a trench collapses in on him:

The men stood about the site in small silent groups after the ambulance had gone, the different engines idling over, until Barney, the old ganger-man, stormed about in his black suit and tie and dirty white shirt, as if he'd suddenly gone epileptic. 'What the fuck are yous all doing? Come on. Get a move on. Do you think you get fukken paid for standin' about all day?'¹⁰⁴

The factual evidence of lived experiences of post-war Irish migrants working under supervision is, however, by and large heterogeneous and the reality is, as seems to be the case in most facets of this story, somewhat less one-sided than the fictional depictions. Many of the collected oral histories echo similar images but to varying degrees.¹⁰⁵ Patrick F, (OI#18), for example, recounts a very similar experience:

If you got an Englishman you were delighted, because your own was the worse [sic] you could get. I don't know why they were like that, I don't know. Maybe they were afraid of their jobs as well, I don't know. But they were brutal now, brutal, ah Jaysus they were. I went out in the van, anyway, and we were put down in a trench digging one day. Jaysus that was brutal. And we had to dig it. T'was deep you know. We had to dig from here and throw it up on another shelf up here and then that fellow would throw it up another shelf, and Lord I wasn't too bad, I was up the top, I was just throwing it out but the poor fellows down in the bottom, and the stuff falling down on top of them and everything, do you know, it was awful.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Kevin Burke, *London Town*, unpublished song co-written in collaboration with Cal Scott, see inter alia, 'A virtuoso with the soul of Ireland' in the Sydney Morning Herald, May 15, 2014, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/a-virtuoso-with-the-soul-of-ireland-20140514-38a26.htm> (Date accessed: 05 April, 2016).

¹⁰⁴ John McGahern, 'Faith, Hope and Charity' in *Creatures of the Earth*, (London, 1992), p.105.

¹⁰⁵ See Interviews, Appendix A: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.13; Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), pp.46-7; Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), p.87; Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), p.106, 110-1; Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), p.119, 123; Ben C, (OI#8), County Leitrim, (19 Jan. 2018), p.146; Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), pp.233-4; John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), p.271-4; Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), pp.316-9; Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), pp.333-4, 341; John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), p.359, 366, 381; John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), pp.389-406; Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), p.515-6.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.419-20.

Notably, Patrick counterbalances that episode with another, where an older, more empathetic ganger helps him adjust to the work. Many interviewees echoed Patrick's view that Irish 'subbies' and their gangers were far worse than their English counterparts to work for, one commenting, 'I think the only ones ever done me harm was me own, y'know? My own countrymen. An Englishman would never do ya no harm'.¹⁰⁷ Frank Scanlon, a migrant builder from Co. Sligo told some of the 'scams' that Irish subbies perpetrated on their own men:

Subbies might not to pay their men their wages. Sometimes they would disappear on payday, or they would tell the workers to meet them in a certain pub or at the office, and they wouldn't turn up, or someone at the office would say they weren't there. And it was a rare foremen or ganger who would collect the men's money and pay it without keeping something back for himself. There were other dirty tricks, such as only paying five days' pay for six days work, or sacking a man and not paying for the time he had worked'.¹⁰⁸

A further example of this sort of abuse was recounted by Kevin H (OI#3), who was left stranded in Hastings without pay or transport by an Irish subcontractor in the mid-1950s.¹⁰⁹ Most interviewees had similar stories.. Gregory D recounted an appalling experience working for a ganger from Offaly he described as 'a chronic alcoholic and he was mentally unstable as well. He used to go to the pub at lunch time, and he would drink as much whiskey as he could, and he used to come back like a lunatic, y'know, like a lunatic'.¹¹⁰ The ganger went on to cause a very serious accident. Gregory warned the subcontractor employing them both that 'he's a dangerous man. He should be locked up' but was ignored. In fairness, Gregory clarified that this was an exceptional incident. Terence O's (OI#19) comments also echo King's dramatic reincarnation of the archetypal ganger-man: 'I got some shifts with Murphy and that, but I very quickly learned that this is not the life for me, I mean [...] gruelling, gruelling work, I mean don't get me wrong, the building sites weren't much better, but - Oh God there was some animals working for Murphy - and if you got the wrong ganger - forget it!¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See for examples: Interviews, Appendix A: Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), p.42, 50; Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), p.92 ; Ben C, (OI#8), County Leitrim, (19 Jan. 2018), pp.146-7; Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), pp.335-7; John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), pp.380-1; John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), p.406.

¹⁰⁸ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.564.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.50-1.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Gregory D, (OI#10), County Leitrim, (25 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.182-4.

¹¹¹ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.440.

John H (OI#17) corroborated Terence's view:

But there was rough ones there, don't get me wrong, like but I mean, like thick bastards, y'know? They would always pick the thickest man in the gang and make him the ganger; that was always their philosophy. Because he'd never know when there was a day's work done. Do you understand the logic behind that? If you think; where you'd say, "Now lads, I think ye's have a good days work done there" – the other fella, he wouldn't know. And y'see mostly he didn't even want the money; once he got the pat on the back, the bit of power. And that's how they got on.¹¹²

Kevin (OI#3) recalled his experience of a harsh Galway foreman on the Center Point development in central London in the early 1960s: 'I worked on nightshift and we'd a Galway foreman [...] and boy was he some terror! You only got the bare ten minutes break at three o'clock in the morning and 'twould be ice-cold outside and he'd be shouting "out, out" and driving you out of the hut [...] Mostly it was all west of Ireland foremen [...] The gangers from the west were clannish'.¹¹³ Conversely many interviewees had positive memories of supervisors, such as brothers Patrick (OI#4): 'Most of the gangers I worked with were all fairly sound. I'd say that a lot o' the men that had the problems with the gangers being 'hard' or 'brutal' were maybe the problem themselves! [laughter] because they weren't doing a whole lot,¹¹⁴ and Tom (OI#1): 'Sure there was a rake of Irishmen like that [...] when they'd see the ganger-man coming they'd feckin' start heaving away. Ah yeah there was a lot o'them that way; when he'd be gone then, they did fuck-all! [...] If you were working away steadily you wouldn't have much to worry about. Not at all!'.¹¹⁵ These are but two of a number of contradictions to the metanarrative that all gangers were brutal and exploitative.¹¹⁶

There were also a considerable number of Irish migrant builders who, despite rudimentary education, the pressures of performative Irishness within the construction market, and the difficulties associated with living and working through the initial stages of arriving and settling, nonetheless worked to improve their work prospects and achieved varying levels of

¹¹² Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.405.

¹¹³ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, pp.47-48.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.66.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.13.

¹¹⁶ Examples in Interviews, Appendix A: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), pp.7-8, 19; Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), p.52; Ben C, (OI#8), County Leitrim, (19 Jan. 2018), p.147; John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), p.272.

social mobility in their careers. A significant proportion of Irish carpenters were gradually promoted to foremen and site agents (later site managers) for companies like McAlpine, J. Murphy & Sons, Bovis, Tarmac, Higgs and Hill, Mansell, Willmott Dixon, Norwest Holst, Cubitts, William Verry and many other large and medium-sized contractors operating in London throughout the period from c.1970-1990.¹¹⁷ These were not ‘gangsters’ in the sense written about earlier in this chapter, but were, on the whole, well-respected and able tradesmen who could manage labour in a productive way, read and interpret technical information, set out construction work to line, level and datum, order materials and keep records. Many retired after modestly successful careers with one or two companies and were well-valued as managers throughout the industry.

Nonetheless the prevailing narrative in relation to Irish supervisors remains that of Brian Behan, brother of playwright Brendan and the songwriter Dominic, and also a radically active socialist: ‘Many a novice complainer in an Irish work gang was shut up with a belt across the face by an Irish foreman intent only on bonus profit for himself’.¹¹⁸ Kevin O’Connor suggested that the system of individual work-gang bonuses which encouraged such bullying was part of a wider repression of worker’s rights and fair working conditions that started with gangsters.¹¹⁹ Wills also notes that in the making of Philip Donnellan’s iconic documentary, *The Irishmen*, much of the background research material on taped interviews revealed visceral anger at ‘the behaviour of Irish gangsters on construction sites in England. All of which tends to suggest that perhaps, on balance, their pernicious reputation was well-deserved.’¹²⁰

One unusual feature of the Irish labour enclave in post-war London was the use of productivity pace-setters, known as pacemakers. In the non-unionised illegal construction market of 1980s New York, where similar covert tactics were used by Irish entrepreneur builders, they were called ‘pushmen’.¹²¹ There is little evidence of the use of such Stakhanovite measures elsewhere in UK industry, although the decades after the Second World War did see

¹¹⁷ All these firms can be shown to have employed Irish migrant carpenters as foremen, chargehands and gangsters throughout the 1970s-90s in London. See e.g. Interview with Denny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), Appendix A, p.30; Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.399-401.

¹¹⁸ O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.90.

¹¹⁹ Ibid..

¹²⁰ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.176, fn. 29.

¹²¹ Corcoran, ‘Informalization of Metropolitan Labour Forces’, pp.45-6.

a marked increase in the use of scientific management techniques like Work Study, Time and Motion Analysis and incentivised bonus systems to enhance productivity.¹²² With the post-war Irish subcontractors, however, there was no scientific rationalism applied to the idea of incentivised production. The role of the pacemaker – one usually held in contempt by their fellow workers - was described in detail by Michael H (OI#5),¹²³ and an unusual example cited by Reg Hall: ‘A particular firm hired a tough man, who went round each of their jobs on an auto-cycle. He’d get down in the trench and, by working for only an hour, he could set a fast hourly pace. If the other man kept up with him, he was OK and was an acceptable worker, but if he couldn’t, there’d be fight and he would be sacked with no wages’¹²⁴ Terence O (OI19) recalls working with a Connemara man, Paddy, who had been a pacemaker for Green Murphy many years earlier and was still able to outwork men half his age and twice his size.¹²⁵ This could have been the same pacemaker John H (OI#17) also experienced being tested by Green Murphy as a newly-arrived seventeen-year-old aspiring tunnel man:

[...] you’d go sinking these shafts, eight foot square and maybe thirty foot deep [...] they’d put you with the pacemaker for the day; I didn’t know he was a pacemaker [...] This bloke was – oh SAVAGE with work! And ah course you’d be young and strong, you were trying to keep up with him and then he’d go back and he’d tell the bloke in the evening whether to keep you or not.¹²⁶

Pacemakers were, in actuality, relatively few in number and in many ways were the toughest of tough men; but then as Michael H elaborated, they needed to be: ‘The pacemaker would often get a leathering in the pub, he paid for his extra fuckin’ money – both ways – by digging and by getting a couple of belts and digs as well! [laughter] [...] but remember, the average daily money then was about four pounds and ten shillings, so an extra ten shillings was worth having. [...] the pacemaker would get three free dinners on the extra he’d earn’.¹²⁷ Michael Mc (OI#6) also witnessed the long-term damage such men suffered: ‘to see after a decade of that kind of work, how battered and in bits they were physically. I’d see some of them at Mass and, y’know. I found that upsetting’.¹²⁸

¹²² R.E. Calvert, *Introduction to Building Management* (Fifth Ed.), (London, 1986), pp. 304-45.

¹²³ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.88.

¹²⁴ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.564.

¹²⁵ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.455.

¹²⁶ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.394.

¹²⁷ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.88.

¹²⁸ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.111.

4.4. ‘Twas great diamonds!’:¹²⁹ ‘The lump’ as a Lived Experience.

In John .B. Keane’s navy narrative, *The Contractors*, the protagonist, Eddie Carey tells a newly-arrived migrant, ‘You must decide to accept what seems like dishonesty on building sites for what it is, just a way of life. If you have a rigid conscience you’ll never get anywhere. You have to bend to survive no matter what outfit you join’. ¹³⁰ This one quote sums up the nature of working within the ‘lump’; the construction industry vernacular for Labour-only subcontracting (‘LOSC’). It was the dominant feature of ethnic Irish construction work in post-war London. ¹³¹

Several factors led to this: (i) the introduction, in 1948, of compulsory National Service for all healthy males 17 to 21 years old; (ii) the post-war deregulation of labour employment within the UK construction industry and the shift to self-employment; (iii) the substantial increase in sustained demand for construction labour over the period c.1950-1970 (iv) the transactional petit-bourgeois capitalism inherent in the small-farming culture of independent rural Ireland; (v) the low start-up costs for labour-only subcontracting and the relatively low regulatory standards for formal entry to the market; (vi) the slow decline of union membership within UK construction generally, exacerbated by an aggressive policy of de-unionisation under the Thatcher administration of the 1980s; (vii) The indoctrination - through formal state education, religious education and parochial culture - of a majority of Irish children raised in the 1920s-1960s with strong credos of rural fundamentalism and Gaelic-Catholic nationalism; (viii) The absence of formal education beyond basic National School education for most rural smallholding families; (ix) The initial plan of most male migrants to return to Ireland after ‘a few years of short-term sojourn in a strange and foreign place’.¹³² Many of these elements are self-explanatory or elaborated elsewhere in this research and require no further analysis; some, however, merit further attention.

¹²⁹ Traditional musician Finbarr Dwyer describing the ‘good money’ to be made in construction work in post-war London, speaking on audio podcast of *The Rolling Wave* – RTE Tribute Programme to Finbarr Dwyer (1947-2014), broadcast 16 March, 2014, available at: <http://www.rte.ie/radio/utills/radioplayer/rteradioweb.html#!rii=b9%5F10261398%5F1852%5F16%2D03%2D2014%5F> (Accessed 9 July 2016).

¹³⁰ John B. Keane, *The Contractors* (Blackrock, 1988), p.156.

¹³¹ *The Irish Times*, (Aug 22, 1973), p.12, *Contract Journal*, April 23, 1970, p.653-4, Antony Seely, *Taxation in the Construction Industry*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 814, (23 June, 2017), p.3.

¹³² Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.8, 32,63, 124, 128.

Casual labour is an age-old feature of British industry; the Victorian navvies operated in ‘butty gangs’ and call-ons were common in docking and mining during the Great Depression.¹³³ For capitalist construction entrepreneurs and migrant labour operating at the lowest levels of the subcontracting system (tiers 3/4), it became the default mode of employment in the post-war period.¹³⁴ The ingrained lack of transparency in procurement policies— particularly labour resources – in contracting bodies made this facet of construction open to abuse, particularly in relation to tax defaulting and health and safety.¹³⁵ Trade unions, notably the NFBTE¹³⁶ and public sector bodies like CITB¹³⁷ lobbied throughout the period of the ‘lump’ to reduce the prevalence of casual labour by imposing mandatory registration for building workers, but employers’ bodies resisted the change, arguing that almost half the self-employed labour within the industry wanted to maintain that system of casual employment.¹³⁸ For main and subcontractors it allowed them to evade corporate responsibilities for large swathes of the productive resources from which their profits were generated and was the traditional means of de-unionisation.¹³⁹ For Irish migrant workers it enabled them to stay outside the legitimised welfare and employment system of British life and stay out of the tax and National Insurance net. In the immediate aftermath of the World War, as British historian Richard Vinen observed, ‘Irish nationalists resented the idea that they might be required to fight for the British Empire’.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, from 1948 until its abolition in 1963, avoiding National Service in the British military was the strongest reason to remain incognito as a young Irish building worker.¹⁴¹ Casualised labour hiring amongst Irish migrants, it should be noted,

¹³³ For a detailed history of casual labour-only subcontracting, see inter-alia, *Phelps Brown*, pp.111-2.

¹³⁴ Table 1, Appendix D, pp.10-1; *Phelps Brown*, pp.121-3.

¹³⁵ Kathryn Higgs, ‘Being Clear on Transparency’ in *RICS Construction Journal*, (November/December, 2018), pp.10-11.

¹³⁶ National Federation of Building Trades Employees (1918-70) was the main trades union federation amalgamating the various construction-related unions existing within the UK industry. See Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *Historical Directory of British Trade Unions*, vol.3, (Abingdon, 1994), pp.40-41.

¹³⁷ Construction Industry Training Board.

¹³⁸ *Phelps Brown*, pp.112-7, *The Builder*, January 14, 1966, p.77; *Contract Journal*, February 2, 1967, p.519. ¹³⁹ Erik Sutherland, ‘Modes of exploitation and safety in the British construction industry’ in *Radical Statistics*, (Autumn, 1998), p.7.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Vinen, *National Service: A Generation in Uniform 1945-1963*, (London, 2015), e-book available at: <https://books.google.ie> (accessed 23 May, 2016).

¹⁴¹ The citizenship status of Irish migrants to Britain in the 1930s and 40s was complicated by the fact that the British establishment claimed Irish citizens as British subjects once they entered British jurisdiction, irrespective of the legislation passed by the Dáil in 1935 (Deidre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s*, (New Haven, 1984), p.143, cited in Delaney, *Demography*, p.65). Judges states that ‘Eire citizens too were full British citizens in the United Kingdom, whatever might be argued in favour of a different national status in their own country under the Eire Nationality Act of 1935’. (AV Judges,

was by no means a phenomenon confined to Britain in the post-war period. A similar ethnic networking system existed in 1980s New York and was run along almost identical lines, albeit within differing jurisdictional and social conventions.¹⁴²

By the late 1950s the ‘lump’ had taken hold at the lowest levels of subcontracting. Between 1961 and 1966 census data showed an increase of almost 60% in self-employed sole-traders in construction from 93,000 to 147,000.¹⁴³ Data on the full extent of self-employment during this period – the apotheosis of ‘the lump’ era, was considered highly unreliable and by the start of 1967, the UK government had appointed Professor Phelps Brown of the LSE to head an extensive inquiry into the practice of ‘lump’/LOSC.¹⁴⁴ One estimate put the potential Labour-only contingent of construction operatives at 200,000 by 1968;¹⁴⁵ another a decade later at 400,000.¹⁴⁶ Extrapolating the 1968 percentage estimate of nationwide Irish manpower in the construction industry (14%),¹⁴⁷ to the above data suggests that Irish ‘self-employed’ may have numbered some 28,000 nationwide, suggesting that perhaps around 9,000 operated in the London construction industry. Most of these were bogus self-employed working as LOSC on the ‘lump’ and often ‘employed’ gangs of between four and ten men purely in cash, so the real figure was probably much higher.

By 1970 the government was planning legislation to “curb the lump” by means of registration and statutory obligations for main contractors to deduct tax from unregistered subcontractors.¹⁴⁸ The Construction Industry Contracts Bill became law in April 1970, compelling registration of bona fide labour-only subcontractors and mandatory tax and CITB levy deductions for unregistered self-employed subcontractors. This effectively tried to close the tax-avoidance/evasion loopholes which most Irish migrant builders working on the ‘lump’ were using.¹⁴⁹ In 1973, there were 117,000 working proprietors registered with the Inland

Irish labour in Great Britain, 1939-45, p.2. See also Delaney, *Demography*, p.65.). See also UK Civil Service Memo Ref: 8844/1956, Burt to Bond (20th March, 1956), NAUK-LAB6.603.

¹⁴² Mary Corcoran, ‘Informalization of Metropolitan Labour Forces: The Case of Irish Immigrants in the New York Construction Industry’ in *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol 1, (1991), pp.31-51.

¹⁴³ *Phelps Brown*, pp.22-3.

¹⁴⁴ *Contract Journal*, Vol. 215, February 23, 1967, p.904 ; *Phelps Brown*, pp.22-4.

¹⁴⁵ Roy Lewis, ‘Report of the Phelps Brown Committee’ in *The Modern Law Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1969), pp. 75-80, p.76.

¹⁴⁶ *The Independent Newspaper*, 8 May 1994, p.5.

¹⁴⁷ See table 2.4, Section 2.2.

¹⁴⁸ *Contract Journal*, March 5, 1970, p.23.

¹⁴⁹ *Contract Journal*, April 23, 1970, p.653-4.

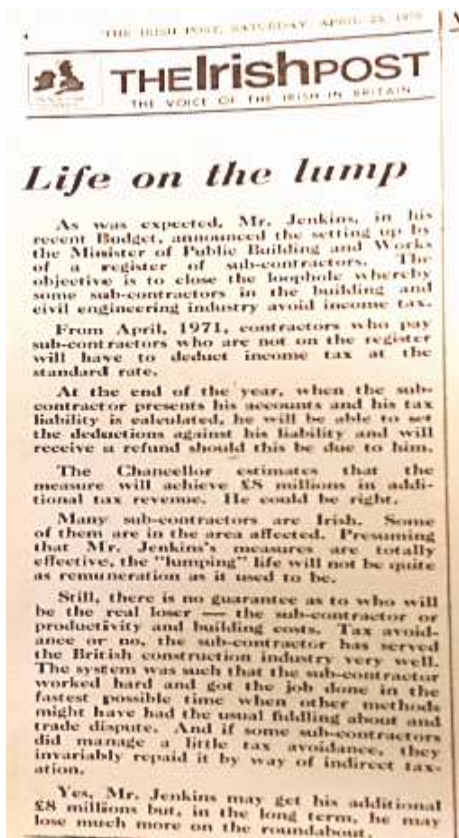


Figure 4.4 - 'Life on the Lump' - Irish Post Editorial, 25 April, 1970

Revenue who were effectively self-employed sole traders and partners.¹⁵⁰ Although construction had slumped and unemployment stood at over 120,000 by 1975, Manpower – a major labour-supply firm, confirmed Phelps Brown's finding that Labour-only subcontracts offered employers a far less regulated and consequently cheaper form of employment.¹⁵¹

There can be little doubt that Irish migrant LOSCs operating inside the ethnic control economy were (if not actually, ostensibly) seen by the British public as the prime suspects in what became a systemic culture of tax-abuse in UK construction. Irish migrant public opinion was divided and ambivalent to the practice of LOSC as the *Irish Post* editorial from 1970 in Figure 4.4 demonstrates. Discourse on the pros and cons of the 'lump' was vociferous in the letters section of the (then new) weekly newspaper the *Irish Post*; one taking issue

with the editorial alleging that LOSC's used 'significant backhanders' to induce contractors to turn a blind eye whilst they bought 'big farms and pubs' with 'blood-money' earned from 'abusing their own countrymen'; others countering that banning the 'lump' was an attempt by trades unions to subvert honest endeavour; another pointing out that the less than five percent of migrant Irish labour in trades union membership shamed the memory of James Connolly.¹⁵²

By 1974, the issue of the 'lump' had become headline news within the Irish community; The fate of 'lump' subcontractors was, seemingly, sealed in January 1974, when the *Irish Post* headlined the Inland Revenue's annual report that losses to UK tax revenue - as a result of 'self-employed building subcontractors' disappearing before paying due tax or becoming intentionally insolvent - had risen in five years from £7million in 1968 to over £20million.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.181.

¹⁵¹ *Building*, 17 January, 1975, p.63; *Phelps Brown*, p.120.

¹⁵² *Irish Post*, 16 May, 1970, p.6; 16 February, 1974, p.15; 13 April, 1974, p.16, 11 May, 1974, p.9; 25 May, 1974, p.6; 22 June, 1974, p.6; 23 February, 1975, p.7;

¹⁵³ *Irish Post*, 5 January, 1974, p.1.

John H (OI#17), who worked on the ‘lump’ for J. Murphy & Sons around this time, recalled the brazen approach taken by Irish ‘lump’ subcontractors, which mirrored the headlines:

Well yeah. You could form your own company. A lot of the lads formed their own company there. And like, same old thing, you could have a hundred-thousand pound even back then on one ticket.¹⁵⁴ You buy an auld broken-down truck, park it up outside your house, that was your transport – you were claiming against your tax for that. Your wife was your secretary, your phone was your business phone and...right? All of a sudden the bills came in and ‘Westmeath Builders’ and all them all went bust overnight! [Laughter]...d’ya know what I mean? They were calling themselves everything!¹⁵⁵

Several notable prosecutions of Irish migrants followed in the wake of the Revenue report. A month later, an Irishman was prosecuted for tax-evasion and forgery of 715 tax-exemption certificates.¹⁵⁶ By May 1974, two more Irish subcontractors were tried at the Old Bailey and subsequently jailed for nine and fifteen months each, again for using forged tax certificates; the UK Revenue were, by this time, proposing the introduction of formal identity cards and specimen signatures to counteract such forgeries.¹⁵⁷ In June, *The Times* reported that an Irishman in Cricklewood, jailed for a year for using forged tax-exemption certificates and vouchers to evade over £5,000, admitted ten other offences.¹⁵⁸ In late June/early July there were headline reports in Irish newspapers of dawn raids by the Revenue and scores of arrests and interrogations.¹⁵⁹ By far the most notorious of the ‘lump’ trials started with six Irishmen arrested and charged in Leeds,¹⁶⁰ the charging of four Irish directors/managers working for J. Murphy & Sons Ltd (‘JMS’ / Green Murphy) in north London and raids on sites in Gateshead, Macclesfield and Nottingham.¹⁶¹ John H (OI#17) was working on one of the London sites run

¹⁵⁴ John is referring here to the 714 Certificates introduced as part of the Construction Industry Tax Deduction Scheme introduced by the UK Parliament in 1971. These were colloquially known amongst Irish builders as ‘tickets’. 714I and S certificates, for individual self-employed subcontractors were valid for turnovers of up to £150,000 (see HMRC COG909290 Supporting Guidance: employer compliance: guidance by subject: construction industry scheme (CIS): construction industry tax deduction scheme (CITDS) background, available at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/cogmanual/cog909290.htm> (accessed 11 April, 2016).

¹⁵⁵ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April, 2018), Appendix A, pp.391-2. For clarity, ‘Westmeath Builders’ was a made-up name to emphasise his point.

¹⁵⁶ *Irish Post*, 2 February, 1974, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ *Irish Post*, 4 May, 1974, p.1, 3; 25 May, 1974, p.3. These were eventually introduced a year later (see *Irish Post*, 29 March, 1975, p.3; 12 April, 1975, p.3.)

¹⁵⁸ *The Times*, 14 June, 1974, p.3.

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 28 June, 1974, p.9.

¹⁶⁰ *Irish Post*, 20 July, 1974, p.1.

¹⁶¹ *Irish Independent*, 28 June, 1974, p.9; *Irish Post*, 6 July, 1974, p.2.

by JMS which was raided that week: ‘Murphys was all cash-in-hand. Because Murphys didn’t go on the cards until 1974. They had to! I remember it well, cos we got no wages that week because the Inland Revenue took every packet without a payslip in it’.¹⁶² By October the charge sheet had increased to fifteen individuals, and three companies: JMS, JAC Construction Ltd, and JM Piling Ltd, both subsidiaries of JMS.¹⁶³



Figure 4.4 - The 'LUMP' controversy: Newspaper headlines
(Source: *Irish Post Newspaper*, various editions, 1974-77)

The Revenue investigations throughout 1974-77 uncovered a complex network of subsidiary companies owned by - but also operating as subcontractors to - JMS and various associated companies on their civil engineering projects in London and Leeds. These companies were, in turn, subcontracting work to self-employed LOSCs all operating without - or on forged - tax-exemption documents. Meanwhile in another significant ‘lump’ fraud trial

¹⁶² Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.391.

¹⁶³ *The Times*, 1 October, 1974, p.2.

nineteen accused – again mostly Irishmen – were charged with tax-evasion at Winchester Crown Court in March 1975.¹⁶⁴ The Leeds arrests, which related to a wholly-owned subsidiary of JMS, resulted in prison sentences varying from 6-months suspended to 3 years for six men, and fines of £5,400 in total.¹⁶⁵

In March 1976, after the (then) biggest tax-evasion case in British legal history, JMS and three of its directors (managing, finance, company secretary) were convicted of defrauding Revenue of almost £1.5 million; the directors were jailed for three years apiece and fined £10,000. Another director got 18 months jail and five other managers were variously given suspended sentences and fined in excess of £6,500. JMS itself and its subsidiaries were collectively fined £750,000, subsequently reduced by £75,000 on appeal.¹⁶⁶ A further slew of high-profile prosecutions in 1977 saw six Irish migrant builders in Edinburgh charged with tax-evasion of £460,000; there were subsequently sentenced for 3 years apiece, a Mayo man charged with selling 300 forged tax-exemption certificates to ‘lumpers’ in Manchester, and another six fraud arrests in London, at the Old Bailey, again, all Irish and all pleading guilty.¹⁶⁷ In sentencing one judge remarked, ‘Britain loses millions of pounds each year because building sub-contractors “on the lump” pay no tax’ adding ‘The building trade had a bad name [...] this case was just the tip of an iceberg. The practice must be stopped and such swindles would not be tolerated’.¹⁶⁸

But on the whole, such abuses were tolerated, as the benefits to employers and large contractors in terms of reduced labour employment costs, management and overhead costs, incentivised productivity, and reduced union strength were seen to outweigh the losses to tax revenue. The prosecutions of 1974-1977 amounted, in reality, to show trials and political rhetoric promised further wholesale reform. But rather than curb the problem of casualised

¹⁶⁴ *Irish Post*, 1 March, 1975, p.2.

¹⁶⁵ *Irish Post*, 22 February, 1975, p.9.

¹⁶⁶ *Irish Press*, 26 March, 1976, p.3; *The Times*, 30 March, 1976; p.2; *Irish Post*, 15 May, 1976, p.5, 16 April, 1977, p.5. Particularly intriguing about the JMS prosecutions is the fact that John Murphy himself was completely exonerated from any responsibility for the systemic tax-avoidance his company had engaged in as, by what can only be seen as either astonishing good-fortune or business foresight, he had sold his interest in JMS in 1972, to venture capitalists London and Northern Group. In 1977 he bought back his 75 per cent share for £5.03m through Drilton, a subsidiary of an Isle of Man investment company wholly owned by Murphy family interests, (see *Irish Post*, 14 May, 1977, p.3; *The Independent*, 8 May 1994, p.5).

¹⁶⁷ *Irish Post*, 8 January, 1977, p.2; 15 January, 1977, p.9; 22 January, 1977, p.1.

¹⁶⁸ *The Times*, 8 June, 1974, p.3.

construction labour, by the early 1980s, the incoming Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, intent on a radical programme of deregulation, tax reform and de-unionisation increased the opportunities for bogus subcontracting markedly. In 1984 there was a 33% increase in the number of 1-3 person subcontracting firms. In all probability most of these were disguised wage labourers masquerading as small entrepreneurs.¹⁶⁹ By the mid-1980s self-employed subcontractors accounted for 38% of all manual labour and by the end of the century it had risen to 45% and continued rising into the 21st century.¹⁷⁰ Prosecutions for tax-evasion continued into the 1980s and 90s; prison sentences tended to give way to large fines, and the systemic ‘fiddling’ carried on. Tom (OI#1) recalled an Irish drinking-partner who worked in a local tax office at the time:

I remember in the later 1970s and 80s, the 714 tax certificates came in – that was supposed to do away with the ‘‘lump’’ but sure you could buy fake ones in a lot of the Irish houses! I can’t remember the name of this Irishman who I’d meet for a drink in Bethnal Green Road; he worked in the tax office in Whitechapel. He reckoned there was a ‘‘room full of 714 tax payment certificates’’ that they couldn’t trace to any tax or to subcontractors...sure I’d say it’s odds-on most of them were Irish.¹⁷¹

In terms of the effects of these tax-avoidance schemes on the labour which worked within the Irish construction enclave, the culture became endemic and part of the performative expectations for those dependent upon work from Irish subcontractors. This was a period when no-one asked for names, because so many worked on the lump;¹⁷² Joe McGarry’s (OI#24) detailed account of working within the ethnic control economy of the late 1960s and 1970s explains how remuneration worked. Payment was strictly cash, net of any deductions; mostly false names were used.¹⁷³ McGarry’s is the lived experience of the most socially isolated and deprived grouping of (not-exclusively) Irish migrant builders, namely those who vacillated

¹⁶⁹ Thomas E. Uher, Philip Davenport, *Fundamentals of Building Contract Management*, (Sydney, 2009), p.202.

¹⁷⁰ F. Behling M. Harvey, ‘The evolution of false self-employment in the British construction industry: a neo-Polanyian account of labour market formation’ in *Work, employment and society*, Vol 1, #20, [2015], p.6-8.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.14.

¹⁷² Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004*, (London, 2004), pp.21-2.

¹⁷³ Almost all the researched oral interviews highlight this practice, which persisted amongst both forms of casual employment. See e.g. Interviews with: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.21; Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), p.68; Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), p.86; John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), p.370; John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), p.391; all in Appendix A.

between temporary hostel accommodation, alcoholism and vagrancy.¹⁷⁴ He exposes a system of informal recruitment which was, perhaps, more sophisticated and nuanced in its operation than appeared outwardly: ‘casuals’ or ‘irregulars’, grading criteria, the ‘sub’ system, the Arlington House regulars, the unwritten - but understood - pay structure of the ‘pound breakfast’, these were all key features. The crucial point was that no ostensible coercion was involved; the men themselves exercised agency - albeit many had little other practical choice: ‘Everybody knew the rules and everybody knew how it was going at the time. Now it meant you always had money. But it meant you never had money. Because we were spending that as quick as we were getting it, you see what I mean. You always had [just] enough’.¹⁷⁵

The stark reality of this system was encapsulated in the remarks of leading-hand Frank Docherty in the 1990 Channel 4 documentary which looked at the history of one of the major Irish construction firms of the post-war era, McNicholas Engineering: ‘I don’t disapprove of the hiring fair if you want to call it that [...] there is some guys that will get ripped off, some cowboy subbies there, but the majority of them are sound, you do your day’s work and you get your day’s money’.¹⁷⁶ Most ‘lump’ subcontractors were, however, seen as dishonest:

Most of them [the operatives] were getting ripped off. [...] A lot of them fellas, they’d be sacked with a big firm because, the likes of McAlpine and Wimpey and all o’them, if you start losing days, you were no good to them; the subbie would only be too delighted if you were losing [days] because he’d have you booked in anyway, he was probably on day-work.¹⁷⁷

What John P (OI#13) was referring to above was another swindle regularly undertaken by ‘lump’ subcontractors – particularly if they were being paid on ‘daywork’ rates as was often the case with hired labour – of claiming payment for non-existent labour, a scam known vernacularly as ‘dead men’. Hall records a further example from the ‘traditional music’ network at its most efficacious in the late 1960s, when a gang of - now legendary - musicians were given work by music-loving subcontractors on a railway modernisation project down in

¹⁷⁴ Interviews with: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.22; Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), p.510, all in Appendix A. Joe Mc’s first-hand knowledge of the “lump” system as a mere 22 year-old, reveals important sub-cultural features of this process.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.506.

¹⁷⁶ Channel 4 ‘Cutting Edge’ series: ‘The Pick, the Shovel and the Open Road’, produced & directed by Molly Dinneen, (broadcast March 25, 1991).

¹⁷⁷ Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, p.270.

Kent with the somewhat predictable result that next-to-nothing was done work-wise. As the interviewee wryly observed, ‘they all got paid, and in all probability so did a couple of ‘dead men’.¹⁷⁸ Another ‘scam’ which Irish groundwork and ‘muck-away’ subcontractors routinely employed was ‘fiddling’ delivery notes and quantities. Michael Mc (OI#6) who worked briefly on the massive South Bank project in the early 1950s explained:

That job cost the British government a fortune and there was all sorts of scams with sand and gravel lorries being checked in, the driver would slip the gateman an envelope and then the deliveries would be taken off site again and sold elsewhere. That went on regularly, so I was told. Same thing happened with the muck-away lorries for spoil [...] most of them left site only half-laden or maybe less, but they had no weighting station so there was a massive fiddle going on [...] A lot of the big fellows got their start from the scams that went on there.¹⁷⁹

Patrick (OI#4) worked predominantly in the booming natural gas sector digging trenches and reinstating for gas pipelines delivering domestic and commercial gas supplies. He described the essentially casualised employment terms of the Irish ethnic market operating within the construction industry at that time:

Nobody agreed any pay or terms or whatever beforehand [...] You just went out and if you got a start, you got a start and went at it. [...] There was no paperwork or records involved at all. ‘Twas all new to me, and it was all done on a nod and a wink. [...] That was all cash work, there were no cards or stamps involved or deductions or anything. It was, I guess, maybe around ’73 or ’74 it all started to tighten up a bit with that cash working thing. They brought in a thing that you were exempt from tax, 714 certs or something?¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ ‘Bobby Casey, Martin Byrnes, Raymond Roland, Brendan McGlinchey and Liam Farrell worked for a few weeks at Ashford. They travelled each day by company van and they had to dig pad foundations 6ft x 6ft x 6ft, shore them up with timber for safety, and then fill them with concrete. The contractors were two Mayo brothers who would only hire musicians. Martin Byrnes worked well enough, but stood around talking too much, but as far as the others were concerned, Brendan McGlinchey was “too light for the digging”, Raymond Roland did practically nothing but stand on the edge of a hole and drag on his pipe, and Bobby Casey “wasn’t too keen” on working at all’. (Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.574-5.)

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.109.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.59. This refers to The Labour Construction Industry Bill, 1970, which proposed compulsory registration. This proposal was amended by the incoming Conservative Government to a voluntary registration scheme based around a fiscal construction employment status, thereby in effect endorsing mass self-employment as a way of collecting at least some taxes. Rather than deter or diminish the worst aspects of ‘The lump’, this in effect exacerbated them. The Finance Act 1975 then established a fiscally-defined self-employment unique to the construction industry through a two-tier taxation system. The first tier of self-employment classified the genuine self-employed under the so called 714 certificate, through a business test and their direct payment of taxes. Under the second tier, the contractor deducted taxes at source, through the so-called SC60 certificate – source: F. Behling

By the later stage of the Irish migrant experience, in the early 1980s, most main contractors were paying wages by cheque rather than cash as this was seen as less liable to theft, robbery and tax-evasion. However the vast majority of migrant Irish workers – especially within the ‘lump’ system – neither had, nor wanted, bank accounts because these were seen as far too intrusive of their private lives and their covert existence outside the conventions of UK citizenship. Consequently, as detailed in chapter 5.4, Irish pubs became covert ‘clearing-houses’ for conversion of contractors and subcontractors payments into cash.¹⁸¹

At times, it seems, the Irish ethnic-controlled economy was awash with cash. A familiar trope of Irish migrant builders in song and literary representations is the ‘down-on-his-luck labourer’ – it is a narrative of social failure perpetuated both by their host communities and by the Irish state from which they migrated.¹⁸² Yet repeatedly throughout the collected oral histories in this research the opposite is the case; the factual evidence suggests that construction work for the Irish in the post-war period paid - in many cases very well. Irish migrant builders rarely, it seems, felt exploited in monetary terms. The Commission on Emigration found that there was ‘no doubt that the rather wide difference between what the unskilled worker earns in this country and what he could earn in Britain was a strong incentive to emigration’ and this is reflected almost constantly throughout the oral histories.¹⁸³ Later, in 1968, Phelps Brown attributed the dominance of lump subcontracting and the resultant high earning-potential to the overwhelming demand for labour in the post-war period.¹⁸⁴ Paddy B (OI#12), confirms this, recounting just how feverish the labour market in 1953 had become at Harlow Newtown in north-west Essex (one of many sprawling post-war suburban new-town construction projects

M. Harvey, ‘The evolution of false self-employment in the British construction industry: a neo-Polanyian account of labour market formation’ in *Work, employment and society*, Vol 1, #20, [2015], p.10-11.

¹⁸¹ Almost all the researched oral interviews highlight this practice. See e.g. Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.14, Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.74, Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, pp.86-7, Interview with Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), pp.250-1, Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), pp.273-4, Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.375-80.

¹⁸² Marc Scully, ‘Emigrants in the traditional sense?’ – Irishness in England, contemporary migration and collective memory of the 1950s’, in *The Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 23.2, 2015, pp. 133–148, p.145 citing M.J. Hickman, ‘Thinking about Ireland and the Irish diaspora’, in T. Inglis (ed.), *Are the Irish Different?* (Manchester 2014), pp. 133–43.

¹⁸³ Delaney, *Demography*, p.180, citing the Commission on Emigration, *Reports*, p.172.

¹⁸⁴ *Phelps-Brown*, para. 345-7, p.122.

instigated by the British government as part of the reconstruction process after the War).¹⁸⁵ This was typical across almost all LMA construction activity by the mid-1950s. Mac Amhlaigh witnessed poaching of migrant labour from one Irish company to work for another at times of high demand.¹⁸⁶

Tunnel work on the Victoria Line in the mid-1960s was the project most noted for high earnings by Irish migrant construction workers. Tony C (OI#7), who was a seventeen-year-old teaboy on the Victoria Line remarked that, ‘these guys [tunnel miners] were making money that was legendary in London at the time. Y’know, there were rumours of £150-a-week when others were only making £15 or £20-a-week’.¹⁸⁷ Kevin H (OI#3), corroborated Tony’s view, ‘They were earning top money them men, back in the ‘70s they were earning maybe seventy or eighty pounds a week, top money when the average was only maybe twenty or thirty pound, y’know? And the more rings they put in the more money they got’.¹⁸⁸ Maurice Brick, another 1960s migrant, recalls men he shared digs with: ‘there were two from Donegal and they worked in the tunnels and made tons of money’.¹⁸⁹ When asked why he specifically went looking for work on the Victoria Line, Tom M, from Leitrim was very clear, ‘Because there was money on it! We heard there was good money to be made’.¹⁹⁰ Tommy Harvey, from Clare, also worked as a miner on the project, recounting, ‘Oh the money was good. That’s why we went down there. We weren’t there for the craic, we were there for the money. Especially given that we were working with compressed air’.¹⁹¹

This point was elaborated in typically Rabelaisian language by Con Curtin from Brosna, during a radio interview shortly before his death in 2009.¹⁹² Con, a very popular traditional

¹⁸⁵ See Appendix D and Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, (Abingdon, 2009), pp.20-40.

¹⁸⁶ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.34.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.117.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.47.

¹⁸⁹ Maurice Brick, ‘A hard Christmas it was in London in the 1960s’ in Irishcentral.com blog, available at <http://www.irishcentral.com/roots/ahardchristmasitwasinlondoninthe1960s135401063237423631> (accessed 25 Jan, 2017)

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.22.

¹⁹¹ Tommy Harvey, ‘Last of the navvies: Irishman who dug all-night tube line’ in *The Irish Times*, Aug 19, 2016, available online at <http://www.irishtimes.com/lifeandstyle/people/lastofthenavviesirishmanwhodugallnighttubeline1.2762215> (accessed 13 Jun, 2017).

¹⁹² Dónal Nolan, ‘Death of legend Con Curtin’ in *The Kerryman*, 29 April, 2009, available online at: <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/kerryman/news/death-of-legend-con-curtin-27382441.html> (Accessed 9 July 2016).

musician and, later, landlord of the Balloon Tavern - a legendary traditional Irish music pub in Chelsea in the 1970s - worked for John Murphy for ten years: 'I was on the Victoria Tunnel - I done all that - great money but dangerous work - I didn't give two shits for I was on good money. And I was married that time but I was a tyrant - mad for money'.¹⁹³ Con goes on to elaborate on just how lucrative this dangerous work could be:

Interviewer: 'So did you follow the money?'

Con: [emphatically] 'YES...YES'

Interviewer: 't'was all priced?'

Con: 'Well...er...so much a foot...yes...twelve o'clock in the day...ah I'd have nearly half a week's wages made...that's the gospel truth...'¹⁹⁴

John H (OI#17) corroborated Curtin's view: 'The Donegal men were all tunnel-drivers; any tunnel you'd go into you'd find Donegal men. Tough cases but mad for the money – mad for money'.¹⁹⁵ Despite often being classed as 'unskilled' or 'semi-skilled', there was a tacit recognition that manual work required a combination of brawn, brains and bravery – sheer physical power and endurance, but also varying degrees of manual dexterity, mental skill and competence, and personal bodily risk.¹⁹⁶ There was often talk, at an informal negotiating level, when subbies were agreeing prices with gangs and individual operatives, of 'danger-money' being allowed within rates for particularly risky work.¹⁹⁷ The important factor here is that such earnings were spectacular not just by comparison to Irish wage levels, as Delaney and Daly observed, but even by comparison to average British wage standards of the time.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ 'The Balloon in Brosna', Irish radio documentary from RTÉ Radio 1, Ireland - *Documentary on One* - the home of Irish radio documentaries, available at http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/2009/0521/645978-the_balloon_in_brosna2/ (Accessed 9 July 2016).

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.407.

¹⁹⁶ This goes to the issue of the demarcation between skilled and unskilled labour, as discussed in detail in section 4.2 *supra*.

¹⁹⁷ The author recounts an episode c.1983 on a refurbishment project of a 1950s concrete office block in Moorgate, London, a former bank building, where an apprentice bricklayer was covertly paid 'danger-money' as part of a weekly bonus, to construct the new facing brick walls of an internal skylight some 8 storeys high by hanging on a rope harness from the temporary scaffold roof of the building, thereby saving the main contractor some £5,000 in scaffold tower erection costs. The danger money paid was considerably less than the cost of the scaffolding. See also: Arthur Mclvor, 'Was Occupational Health and Safety a Strike Issue? Workers, Unions and the Body in Twentieth-Century Scotland' in *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies*, 8(1), (2016), pp.1-45.

¹⁹⁸ Delaney, *Demography*, p.180, citing the Commission on Emigration, *Reports*, p.172; Daly, *The Slow Failure*, pp.177-8.

The obvious attraction of tax-free income from working on the margins of the industry under the ‘lump’ system, as discussed above, inexorably drew Irish migrants into construction. Finbarr Dwyer, a college-educated secondary school-teacher from West Cork, one of the best-known of the post-war Irish migrants to London because of his fame as a traditional musician, left professional teaching to become a shuttering and formwork subcontractor in the 1970s. He confirmed how the move from ‘normal’ employed status to ‘subbying’ could pay off:

I went [to England] in March 1966 because, really and truly there was no money in teaching in Ireland at that time, and there was less in England! I remember when I started off – teaching - in England I was getting £23 a week less tax. And then I started carpentering [sic]...and I was a useless carpenter...and I got £75 sterling for five and a half days... T’was great diamonds! ¹⁹⁹

Similarly, Michael Mc (OI#6) recalled a young plasterer, McDermott from Roscommon, when asked which company he worked for in the early 1950s replying: ‘Are ya mad! sure there’s no company would pay me enough to keep me in beer money - I’m on the lump!’ [Laughter].²⁰⁰ Kevin H (OI#3) attributed some blame to anti-British nationalism, ‘You see some of them [speaks in whisper] didn’t like paying tax to the Queen - you know, you had those diehards’²⁰¹ who were mirroring Matt Gallagher’s intention of ‘screwing the English to make his fortune’.²⁰²

These examples illustrate the conception of migrant construction work in the minds of these men as very much a temporary expedient designed to generate maximum cash in the shortest time. Corbally rightly identified this trait, contrasting the prevailing attitudes of the ethnically-Irish lump workers compared to their fellow migrants of colour:

The Irish wore a badge of satisfaction about being "on the fiddle".
Many Irish workers enjoyed a tax advantage due to their uncertain

¹⁹⁹ Finbarr Dwyer speaking on audio podcast of *The Rolling Wave* – RTE Tribute Programme to Finbarr Dwyer (1947-2014), broadcast 16 March, 2014, available at: <http://www.rte.ie/radio/utills/radioplayer/rteradioweb.html#!rii=b9%5F10261398%5F1852%5F16%2D03%2D2014%5F> (Accessed 9 July 2016).

²⁰⁰ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, pp.105-6.

²⁰¹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.54.

²⁰² Terry Clavin, ‘Biography of Matt Gallagher’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., Online: Royal Irish Academy; Cambridge University Press, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridge-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9609> (accessed 3 March, 2017).

status as citizens/foreigners and took advantage of this to earn cash in hand and avoid taxes.²⁰³ As one Irishman recalls drolly, the culture of corruption was almost a source of pride. Workers from Ireland often had three or four names. "You never asked a man his second name. He could be Paddy Murphy or Paddy Reilly, you wouldn't ask, 'cos if you did you'd get a belt in the mouth."²⁰⁴ But whereas such corruption created consternation toward those of color, it was part of the almost humorous conception of the Irish in England in this case, not a universal trait with which to condemn the whole group.²⁰⁵

In a number of key respects this behaviour corresponds closely to Bonacich's 'Middleman Theory' of minorities – particularly the concentration in labour contracting, the temporary sojourning status of workers, ambivalence to the host community and resistance to assimilation.²⁰⁶ For most – but not all - these attitudes changed over time, as Irish migrants settled permanently in London, married, raised families and as the construction industry turned to migrants from the war-torn corners of eastern Europe to replace the 'irregular casuals' of Joe McGarry's time.

4.5. 'Let no man complain, Paddy does not die in vain': The Irish Builder and Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare at work.

In Dominic Behan's popular 1968 migrant working song *Paddy on the Road*, the couplet '*But let no man complain, Paddy does not die in vain / When he's building up and tearing England down*' gives voice to long-held resentments and notions of fatalism and exploitation within Irish construction labour ranks in Britain, rooted in the same historical aspects of British colonial oppression and nationalist grievance outlined above.²⁰⁷ Paradoxically, whilst occupational health and safety has always been a somewhat vexed issue in UK construction, Irish migrant builders in particular earned a reputation as reckless (and subcontractors as mercenary) in their attitudes to health and safety and willing to engage in excessive risk-taking

²⁰³ NAUK, PRO, IR 40/16306. "Evasion of Tax. Irish Labourers." 1966.

²⁰⁴ "I Only Came over for a Couple of Years ... " Interviews with London Irish Elders,' by David Kelly in collaboration with the Irish Studies Centre, London Metropolitan University. (s11. 20)

²⁰⁵ John Corbally, 'Shades of Difference: Irish, Caribbean, and South Asian immigration to the heart of empire, 1948-1971', (PhD Thesis, University of California, Davis, 2009), pp.182-3.

²⁰⁶ Edna Bonacich, 'A Theory of Middleman Minorities' in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (Oct., 1973), pp. 583-594.

²⁰⁷ See also sections 2.3 and 5: where the cultural implications of these ideas and the song culture promoting them are dealt with in greater detail.

in return for high financial rewards.²⁰⁸ This section reviews the representations and realities of these seemingly contradictory viewpoints during the post-war rebuilding of London.

Dominic himself is not thought to have worked much, if at all, on the building sites of London, but his older brother Brian was a labourer and trades unionist activist in London during the 1950s and worked for two periods on the Southbank project, the second time earning himself a 6-week prison sentence for inciting wildcat strikes.²⁰⁹ He penned perhaps the most visceral glimpse of the complex psychological reaction to death on construction work, written after witnessing the fatal crushing of a manual worker under the wheels of a wagon one evening on the Southbank project:

Work stops. What man can think of work looking in the face of death? Death is the only equalizer. A falling man will be smashed no matter how strong. The men stream off out the gates, leaving the jibs of cranes swinging silently pointing towards the moon. It's not the firm's fault, but they are blamed just the same. The men know that even if the firm are blameless it's always their own kind who lay crushed and mangled beneath the planner's beams. [...] The following day the man is gone and all but forgotten.²¹⁰

Although an abstract representation, this passage movingly captures the air of exploitation and inevitability and the brutal realities experienced on a daily basis by migrant construction workers on one project, which cost the lives of four men – not uncommon in the 1950s.²¹¹

As with all aspects of social and cultural activity the concept of work itself is layered with complexities and contradictions. Whilst it is widely accepted that work is good for us on a number of levels: economic stability, emotional fulfilment, physical well-being, self-worth, and individual contribution to society and the community,²¹² construction and civil engineering

²⁰⁸ Scottish and Southern Energy plc, *Power from the Glens; Neart nan Gleann*, (Perth, 2005), p.4., Nick Hayes, 'Did Manual Workers Want Industrial Welfare? Canteens, Latrines and Masculinity on British Building Sites 1918-1970' in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Spring, 2002), pp. 637-658, Sykes, 'Navvies: Their Work Attitudes', pp.23-24.

²⁰⁹ Brian Behan, *With Breast Expanded*, (London, 1991), pp.161-77. See also section 6.2.

²¹⁰ Behan, *With Breast Expanded*, pp.162-3.

²¹¹ Sir Robert McAlpine, the ubiquitous main contractor on the Southbank development, well-known as the primary employer of post-war migrant Irish labour, had three fatal accidents on the project in 1958 and one in 1959 (see *National Builder*, March 1960, p.233).

²¹² McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.150.

work is, by its very nature, one of the most hazardous occupations in the UK, fraught with daily risks and hardships. In the early post-war period construction was in the top six most hazardous occupations by accident frequency rate,²¹³ and as McIvor observes, ‘a competitive spirit was part-and-parcel of machismo work culture, as was a high tolerance of danger and a propensity to take risks in manual employment’.²¹⁴ Industrial capitalism, and in particular the ethos of productionism, disproportionately influenced the nineteenth and twentieth-century culture of work in Britain, often privileging profit, exploitation and corporate power over the welfare of industrial labour.²¹⁵ It also induced generations of working-class men – many immigrant – to routinely put their own safety and health at risk in unsafe working environments where they came to see the risk of injury and long-term debilitation as merely inevitable.²¹⁶

In UK construction and civil engineering safety and welfare regulations were light-touch throughout the early post-war era; personal protective equipment (‘PPE’) – now standard throughout construction and engineering – was virtually non-existent. Boots, safety helmets, gloves, safety-harnesses, eye protection and various safety equipment that are now mandatory - and even rudimentary latrines, drying rooms and canteen facilities were often not provided by main contractors and subcontractors, and later when they were, belligerent, masculinised workers trying to prove their ‘toughness’ often refused to use them.²¹⁷ Hayes, for example, observed that ‘Construction was almost exclusively an all-male world. Inherent within was a philosophy that placed little productive value on improving working conditions, and instead stressed worker self-reliance’ concluding that:

difficult, uncomfortable or dangerous conditions" were reinterpreted positively by workers: "seen, not for themselves, but for their appropriateness to a masculine readiness and hardness"; understood more through "the toughness required to survive them" than as an imposition. Working life and endurance thus became an intrinsic "heroic exercise of manly confrontation”²¹⁸

²¹³ McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.169.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.91.

²¹⁵ Luis Suarez-Villa, *Globalization and Technocapitalism: The Political Economy of Corporate Power and Technological Domination*, (New York, 2016), p.28. See also ‘Census of Production’ in *Contract Journal*, January 16, 1958, p.260.

²¹⁶ McIvor, *Working Lives*, pp.91-2.

²¹⁷ Hayes, ‘Did Manual Workers Want Industrial Welfare?’ pp. 637-658, Sykes, ‘Navvies: Their Work Attitudes’, pp.23-24; McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.161-2.

²¹⁸ Hayes, ‘Did Manual Workers Want Industrial Welfare?’ pp. 637-658, Sykes, ‘Navvies: Their Work Attitudes’, citing David Hall, *Cornerstone: a Study of Britain's Building Industry* (London, 1948), p.89.

Occupational health and safety for the Irish builder in particular was further complicated by extraneous - although by no means unique - factors which shaped their attitudes to and calculations of working risk: the existential vagaries of the migrant experience, cultural alienation, and the transience and precarity of working life; the desire to maintain anonymity when working on the ‘lump’, performative expectations within the workspace, and the amplification of toxic masculinities centred on recklessness and bravado. The cultural legacies of Irish nationalist and Gaelic masculinities shaped their notions of performing work and complaining about health and safety on site.²¹⁹ These factors manifested in an unusually high tolerance for risk, as Corrigan observed.²²⁰ It is unsurprising, in these circumstances, that they suffered the disproportionately high rates of occupational fatalities observed.

Bracken and O’Sullivan - interpreting Balarajan’s 1995 paper on ethnic variations in British health outcomes - concluded persuasively that ‘the overall mortality rates of Irish-born people exceeds that of other residents of England and Wales by approximately 30 per cent for men and 20 per cent for women’. Moreover, the Irish had high rates in respect of ‘death by accident’ and the highest rates in the age groups 15–24, and 65 years and over.²²¹ This statistic is telling; construction and civil engineering work (the default occupation for male Irish manual workers, as chapter 2 shows) is amongst the most accident-prone of industrial activities.²²² To properly understand the realities of the Irish experience with occupational accidents requires an overview of the available statistics, starting with the wider UK industrial position. Because of the sporadic and disparate reporting, a novel part of this research has been the compilation of aggregated statistics for post-war UK construction industry accidents and fatalities, drawn from a cross-section of available sources.²²³ This has enabled some statistical analysis of the Irish experience and permitted some tentative conclusions.

Significant improvements were made to the regulatory framework for occupational health and safety and the reporting of accident statistics over the post-war decades; as a result

²¹⁹ Catriona Kennedy, ‘Women and Gender in Modern Ireland’ in Richard Bourke, Ian McBride (Eds.), *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, (New Jersey, 2016), pp.372-3

²²⁰ Corrigan, *Irish Immigrant Entrepreneurs in the United States*,(2006), Maynooth, p.127.

²²¹ Patrick J. Bracken & Patrick O’Sullivan, ‘The Invisibility of Irish Migrants in British Health Research’ in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol.9, Issue 1, (2001), pp.41-51, p.44 citing R. Balarajan, ‘Ethnicity and Variations in the Nation’s Health’ in *Health Trends*, Vol. 27, (1995), pp. 114–119.

²²² McIvor, *Working Lives*, pp.155-6.

²²³ Appendix C, pp.7-8, British Workplace Accidents Statistics 1940-1995 Aggregated.

work became markedly safer, at least in statistical terms. Construction, however, was considered almost an afterthought in terms of occupational hazard control within the Factories Acts and, as elucidated above, builders and building sites were not well-suited to the kind of highly-regulated safety measures which process, manufacturing and industrial factories more successfully implemented. In the early 1940s the average annual death rate from work-related accidents in all UK industries was just over 1,200, but this excess death rate probably reflected wartime attrition.²²⁴ Non-fatal accidents averaged around 270,000 per annum.²²⁵ Between 1945 and 1950 there were just over one million construction-related accidents, including 4,140 fatalities.²²⁶ By this stage construction work was the sixth most dangerous industrial occupation in UK with an accident frequency rate of 2.64%.²²⁷ The 1948 Factories Act introduced new reporting regulations which were industry-specific. Prior to this there was widespread under-reporting, particularly of construction-related accidents and the risk of injury or death was almost a 'given'.²²⁸

Fatal accidents in construction - 61.5% of which were in or around the London Metropolitan Area - averaged 230 per annum through the 1940s and 1950s (an average of 23% of industry-wide deaths) then began to rise inexorably throughout the 1960s, averaging 260 per annum.²²⁹ By 1966 construction deaths spiked at 292, accounting for 42% of all industrial fatalities; four times more than factory-based industries.²³⁰ By the middle of the decade the construction press reported that regulations were routinely ignored at all levels and training fatally deficient.²³¹ This was partly due to the rapid increase in construction activity during the post-war boom and the resultant jump in numbers of construction workers, but can also be attributed in part to the rising tide of Irish migrants coming into the British construction industry at that time. The spike in fatalities coincided precisely with the heyday of the infamous 'lump' era of Labour-only subcontracting in which the Irish ethnic economy in London was so

²²⁴ Appendix C, pp.7-8, British Workplace Accidents Statistics 1940-1995 Aggregated..

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid. Mclvor (*Working Lives*, pp.155-6) argues this period averaged 2000 deaths p.a, whereas Factories Inspectorate Reports indicate an average of 840 p.a. This wide differential can probably be attributed to the serious under-reporting plaguing the industry in this period.

²²⁷ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, p.169.

²²⁸ Arthur Mclvor, *A History of Work in Britain, 1880-1950*, (Basingstoke, 2001), p.132.

²²⁹ Appendix C, pp.7-8, British Workplace Accidents Statistics 1940-1995 Aggregated.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ *Contract Journal*, April 2, 1964, p.602, October 1, 1964, p.587.

crucial; this was not mere chance.²³² By the end of the 1960s Phelps Brown's report into construction condemned its safety record as the worst in British industry.²³³ There were 957,000 Irish-born migrants living in Britain by 1971, approximately one-third of those in and around London.²³⁴ In 1974 construction-related work accidents stood at 35,598 across the UK including 166 fatalities.²³⁵ Following the introduction that year of the Health and Safety at Work Act ('HSWA'), a landmark piece of legislation in industrial safety and welfare, construction accident statistics began to gradually improve. By 1995, the totals for construction had reduced to 12,251 accidents in total and 79 fatalities, so it can be concluded that by this stage, the effects of the Irish ethnic control economy and the 'lump' era were in decline, and regulatory controls were being applied far more stringently.²³⁶

From the 1940s up to the end of the century, the Irish migrant building labour-force in London grew from an annual average of c.73,000 to c.164,000.²³⁷ The *Kerryman*, in 1988, quoted 35 Irish workers killed in construction accidents in London, with a further possible 9 unidentified fatalities likely to be mainly Irish as well.²³⁸ Total construction-related fatalities in 1988 were 137, of which some 60% (eighty-two deaths) probably occurred in London. If the *Kerryman*'s statistic of 35-40 Irish construction-related deaths is correct, it represents a fatality rate of almost 50% of those in London, which is in excess even of Bracken's estimates for overall mortality amongst the Irish. It is simply not possible, given the absence of specifically Irish accident statistics, to draw definite quantitative conclusions. Sample extracts from Irish county and regional newspapers over the post-war period suggest some 42 deaths and serious injuries to migrant construction workers from the early 1950s to the end of the century. However, whilst informative, as data this is incomplete, anecdotal and of no statistical

²³² See section 4.4 *supra* and also Julian Birch, *Employed or self-employed? Contract labour in the British Construction industry*, Sectoral Activities Programme Working Paper Ref: SAP 2.38/WP.63, Industrial Activities Branch, (International Labour Office, Geneva, 1993), pp.3-4; Erik Sutherland, 'Modes of exploitation and safety in the British construction industry' in *Radical Statistics*, (Autumn, 1998), pp.6-8.

²³³ Roy Lewis, 'Report of the Phelps Brown Committee' in *The Modern Law Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1969), pp. 75-80, p.76.

²³⁴ P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), Table 6.3, Irish-born residents in Britain, 1931-1981, p.114

²³⁵ Appendix C, pp.7-8, British Workplace Accidents Statistics 1940-1995 Aggregated.

²³⁶ Appendix C, pp.7-8, British Workplace Accidents Statistics 1940-1995 Aggregated. See also The Health and Safety Executive, *Historical picture: Trends in work-related injuries and ill health in Great Britain since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work act, 1974*, (October, 2015), available at www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/history/. (accessed 12 Nov, 2016).

²³⁷ Section 2.2, table 2.3, *supra*.

²³⁸ *The Kerryman* Newspaper, 10 February, 1989, p.26.

relevance.²³⁹ Assuming the constant of around 60% of total construction accidents occurring in London is typical, and using the *Kerryman's* 50% fatality rate (from 1988) across the entire post-war period suggests 355,000 non-fatal accidents (an average of 3-4 accidents per migrant) and 2,900 fatalities over the half-century periodisation.²⁴⁰ Whilst this is a crude approximation and probably exaggerated, it gives some empirical credence to Behan's rhetoric.

Bracken also highlighted the paucity of definitive occupational accident data amongst post-war Irish migrant construction workers; this was attributable to 'the continued use of an ethnic categorisation, which is essentially based on skin colour [...] an anachronism in British health and social research'. From this Bracken concludes that the 'continuing myth of "white homogeneity"' rendered the Irish virtually invisible to British health research. At the same time the Irish continued to be racialized as inferior and alien Others'.²⁴¹ The examples of this subaltern status quoted from interviews and secondary sources later in this chapter demonstrate, in a very real and practical way, the pernicious effects of such invisibility on the lives of migrant Irish builders. Of course many Irish migrant construction workers were knowingly complicit in perpetuating this lacuna – at least initially – when they kept to the unwritten code of anonymity within the enclave. Murray observed that this was strictly adhered to²⁴² – I contend as a form of resistance; first to evade National Service, then later more-or-less any form of regulatory tax, insurance or welfare bureaucracy.

Tommy Harvey, who left Clare for London aged nineteen and, after initially working on the buildings, became a tunnel miner on the Victoria Line project (1962-1971)²⁴³ recalled the tragic consequences the culture of anonymity in 'lump' subcontracting, citing two such deaths on the Victoria Line project:

²³⁹ Appendix C, pp.9-10. - Extract of Irish County/Regional Newspaper Articles 1950-2000 – Fatalities & Serious Accidents.

²⁴⁰ Using totals from Appendix C, Table X – British Workplace Accidents Statistics 1940-1995 Aggregated implies **non-fatal accidents** derived as 1,185,455x60% (London constant) = 711,273x50% (Bracken's Irish accident %) = **355,637**; implies **fatal accidents** derived as 9,651 x 60% (London constant) = 5,791 x 50% (Bracken's Irish accident %) = **2,895**.

²⁴¹ Bracken & O'Sullivan, 'The Invisibility of Irish Migrants in British Health Research', pp.41-51, p.47/49 citing Mary J. Hickman, 'Reconstructing deconstructing 'race': British political discourses about the Irish in Britain' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 21:2, (1998), p.288-307; Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.30.

²⁴² Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.49.

²⁴³ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.185-187.

People died there alright... I knew one fella who got killed on night in the pit bottom. He put his hand on a live cable and it blackened him to death. **He was a Galway man and he wasn't down under his proper name. His mother came into the morgue and she took down the wrong name and put his correct name up.** He was a young man. A man about 25 or 26 years of age. Men working on the Victoria Line, as in any tunnel, were most likely to get killed sinking shafts to the tunnels. Another friend of mine, a Kerry man, who was as young as me, was in a pit bottom on Christmas Eve and they were sending down big timbers. One of them came off the sling and killed him dead. It was very sad. (Emphasis added) ²⁴⁴

The Health and Safety Executive and its predecessor, the Factories Inspectorate, 'under-recorded prevalence amongst the most vulnerable, casualised, least secure, poorest paid workers in small companies or working with subcontractors'.²⁴⁵ The inevitable consequence was that, in the event of injury or accident, the individual identity of post-war Irish migrant builders was often unknown and/or unrecorded, since their very existence within UK society was economically and culturally 'anchored in [casual/cash] paid labour'.²⁴⁶ As a result of the informal sub-contract system and what Mac an Ghail *et al* called the 'deregulated and relatively non-unionised nature of the construction industry, the workplace helped to produce a subordinated masculinity operating in dangerous conditions that resulted in high rates of injury and early death among work colleagues'.²⁴⁷

Civil engineering work, particularly, is a tough and hazardous activity. The interwar and early post-war Irish migrant labourers – mainly long-distance men who worked the major hydro-electric projects were inured to such dangers.²⁴⁸ The Loch Sloy hydro-electric project which ran from 1945-1950, for example, witnessed twenty-one fatalities during construction; a plaque (Figure 4.5) still displayed in the generating station offices paying testament to the mixture of Scottish, Irish, German and Polish ethnicities involved.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Tommy Harvey, 'Last of the navvies: Irishman who dug all-night tube line' in *The Irish Times*, Aug 19, 2016, available online at <http://www.irishtimes.com/lifeandstyle/people/lastofthenavviesirishmanwhodugallnighttubeline1.2762215> (accessed 13 Jun, 2017).

²⁴⁵ C. Wolkowitz, *Bodies at Work*, (London, 2006), pp.102-103.

²⁴⁶ Liviu Popoviciu, Chris Haywood & Máirtín Mac an Ghail, 'Migrating Masculinities' in *Irish Studies Review*, 14:2, (2006), pp.169-187, p.176.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. Irish migrant 'lump' labour-only subcontractors generally operated as tier 4 sub-subcontractors, at the bottom rung of the contractual chain. See s.4.4 above and Appendix D, table 1, pp.9-11.

²⁴⁸ Patrick Campbell, *Tunnel Tigers*, (New Jersey, 2005), p.44-6.

²⁴⁹ Arthur Ross, 'The Loch Sloy Hydro-Electric Scheme 1950' in *Arrochar, Tarbet and Ardlui Heritage*, available at <http://www.arrocharheritage.com/LochSloyHydroElectricScheme.htm> (accessed 6 June, 2017), p.3/36.



Figure 4.5 – Plaque commemorating fatal accidents on Loch Sloy Hydro-scheme, 1949-50.
 (source: <http://www.arrocharheritage.com/LochSloyHydroElectricScheme.htm>)

The ingrained culture of hegemonic masculinity engendered an often cavalier attitude at both management and worker level to personal safety in the building and civil engineering industries until the end of the twentieth century and indeed arguably remains a significant cultural problem. It was a relic of the Victorian navy age: ‘The navvies were careless, and lived up to their reckless reputation with great bravado’.²⁵⁰ The tunnel-tigers who built the hydro-electrical schemes of Scotland in the immediate post-war era, a good many of whom were migrant Irish who transitioned to London later, were particularly inclined to excessive risk. The lower regard for health and safety issues than there is today inevitably led to higher accident rates and deaths amongst the workers’.²⁵¹ Patrick Campbell, from Dungloe in Donegal, was a 1950s migrant working on one of the Scottish hydro-electric schemes and recounted in his memoirs that, ‘I had always known that tunnel work was dangerous. There were threats to life and limb everywhere. Falling rocks and live cables were a constant threat and the heavy machinery operating in a confined space posed an additional hazard’.²⁵² Tommy Harvey vividly recounted the dangers of working in compressed air in more detail:

²⁵⁰ Terry Coleman, *The Railway Navvies*, (Middlesex, 1968), p.29.

²⁵¹ Scottish and Southern Energy plc, *Power from the Glens; Neart nan Gleann*, (Perth, 2005), p.4.

²⁵² Patrick Campbell, *Tunnel Tigers*, (New Jersey, 2005), p.44. Campbell continued in the tunnelling business after his initiation on the Pitlochry hydro-electrical scheme in 1958 and worked on the construction of the Clyde Tunnel in the early 1960s, the project Kevin H’s step-brother was killed on in the late 1950s. The Clyde Tunnellers Association, formed much later in 1995, pursued claims on behalf of some 740 mainly Irish and Scots-Irish tunnel miners who had worked on the Clyde and Tyne tunnels between 1959 and 1964 and had contracted bone necrosis, a highly debilitating and painful disease which permanently damages bone joints causing incapacity. Spurred on by a tunneller on London’s Dartford Tunnel who succeeded in pursuing a claim against Balfour Beatty in 1994, Campbell himself had also been diagnosed with the condition later in life. The difficulty in pursuing such claims on behalf of Donegal and Mayo tunnel men, particularly so long after the event, lay in the irony that whilst decompression sickness is a recognised cause of bone necrosis, equally so is excessive alcohol abuse.

You had to be in good health to go down there. You had to be fit and your body had to be right. It was dangerous work. When you finished your shift you come back into the chamber and get decompressed to get the compressed air out of your body [...] The bends were very, very painful, you'd go mad with the pain. It really hurt. It did. You had to go back.²⁵³

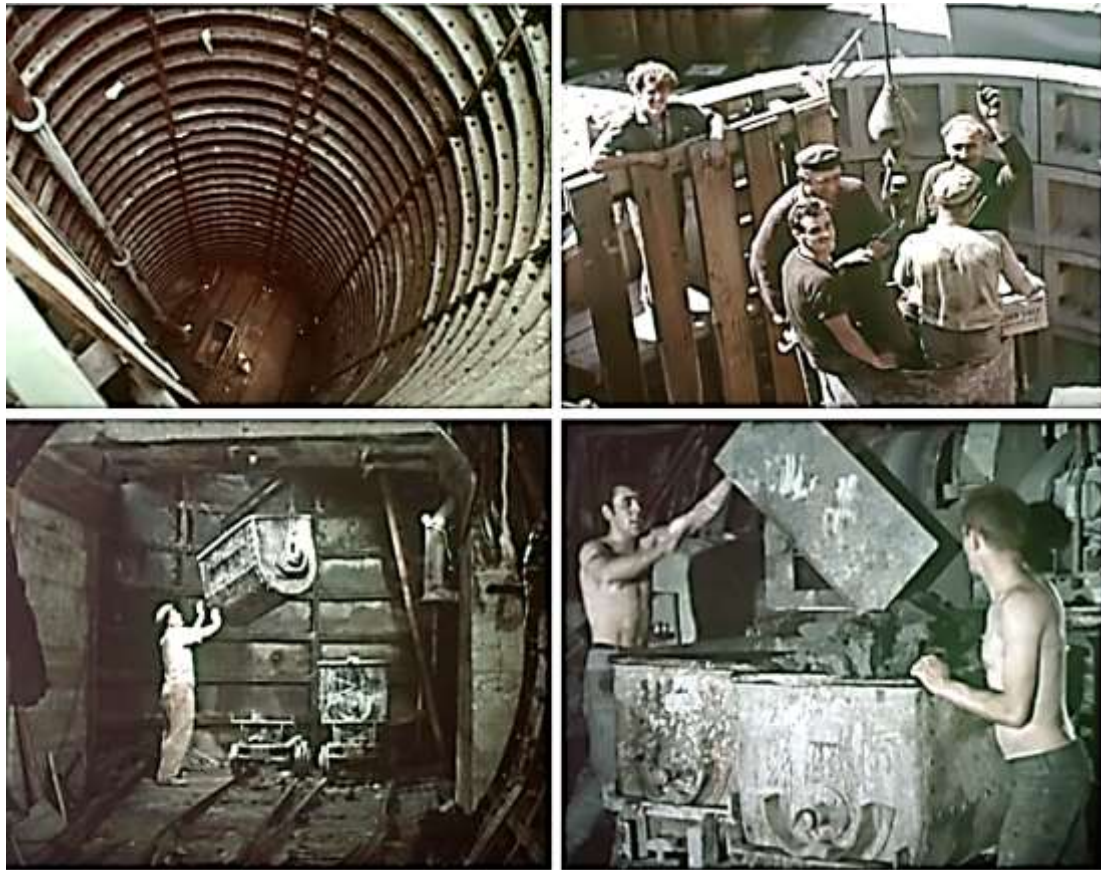


Figure 4.6 - Photographic montage of Irish migrant workers on Victoria Line Project c.1965-7

(Source: still frames from *How They Dug The Victoria Line*, BBC TV & British Transport Films, Dir. B Privett / D Washbourne, (1969), available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwRRSJ_wtIg (accessed 22 Sep. 18)

Con Curtin reflected the ineluctable attitude to the ever-present dangers in a radio interview towards the end of his life: ‘You couldn’t talk when you’d go down. When you’d come up you’re decompressed [...]when you were underneath the ground the stars never leave the sky...when you’d go down, you’d look up, stop, as much as to say “will I ever come up here again alive?”’²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Tommy Harvey, ‘Last of the navvies: Irishman who dug all-night tube line’ in *The Irish Times*, Aug 19, 2016, available online at <http://www.irishtimes.com/lifeandstyle/people/lastofthenavviesirishmanwhodugallnighttubeline1.2762215> (accessed 13 Jun, 2017).

²⁵⁴ ‘The Balloon in Brosna’, Irish radio documentary from RTÉ Radio 1, Ireland - *Documentary on One* - the

Figure 4.6 above illustrates many of the commonplace risks to which Irish migrants on tunnel and heading projects regularly exposed themselves; note for example, the depth of the headings down which men and materials were regularly lowered (often recklessly, in concrete skips, as can be seen top right), to gain access to tunnel workfaces, the compressed air conditions in which they worked, and the complete absence of safety helmets, equipment or clothing. Some fell to their deaths or were hit by falling objects, as in the cases of Kevin H's brother and the fatal accidents remembered by Tommy Harvey. The conscious agency exercised by such men in trading physical danger and intense discomfort for lucrative earnings is reflected again and again in the accounts of Irishmen in tunnel work. Cowley recalls that 'the macho ethos of the Irish soft-ground tunnellers, mainly from Mayo and Donegal, brought them big financial rewards, but their disregard for health and safety often proved disastrous in conditions where compressed air workings exposed them to the risks of 'the bends' and bone necrosis disease'.²⁵⁵ Much of the health and safety issues that arose on major projects like the Victoria Line were dealt with by the Factories Inspectorate up to 1974 and thereafter by the newly-formed Health and Safety Executive ('HSE') created under the new HSWA.

Nonetheless accidents amongst Irish labour – particularly in tunnel work – remained commonplace, as Figure 4.8, a report on the Harrow Tunnel Rescue (mere months after the new legislation was enacted) and Figure 4.7 show. Some three decades after the Victoria Line project was completed, workplace fatality – albeit at a much-reduced rate – was still a feature of Irish migrant construction activity. On another major London Underground project of similar size and complexity, the Jubilee Line Extension (1993-9), a major British newspaper reported:

Horror stories like the one last September [1995], when labourer Michael Foley was killed after being hit by a dumper truck driven by a man working for McFenn Engineering. The driver, who gave his name on site as John Green had been recruited 'on the lump' from Cricklewood Broadway. His real name was Raymond Kent. The tragedy happened while he was working on London Underground's Jubilee Line extension.²⁵⁶

home of Irish radio documentaries, available at http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/2009/0521/645978-the_balloon_in_brosna2/.

²⁵⁵ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.179.

²⁵⁶ *Sunday Independent Newspaper*, (11 February, 1996), unpaginated, available online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/lifes-work-the-skins-their-boots-and-the-gangerman-1318374.html> (Accessed 14 July, 2018).



Figure 4.8 - Harrow Tunnel Rescue, Report from *Irish Post*, 15 March, 1975, p.3



Figure 4.7 - Armagh migrant builder killed in fall into tunnel shaft . (Source: *Irish Post*, 30 April, 1977, p.1)

These are just some examples of real-life accounts of the dangers of tunnel-work which shaped the experiences of many of the London-Irish builders in the decades after 1945. Such examples (with due allowance for artistic licence) endorse the cultural representations of civil engineering work and reflect the lived experiences of these men. Arguably matters improved as construction technology and mechanisation moved into the 21st-century, albeit for two migrant Irish builders, Patrick O’Sullivan and Martin Carroll, who were injured, one fatally, on the new Wembley Stadium project in 2009 the earlier tropes of Irish migrant construction sadly rang true. Their employer, Tipperary-rooted P.C. Harrington Group, were fined £175,000 by the HSE.²⁵⁷ There is a tragic irony to how many Irish migrant builders may have been killed or seriously injured building both Wembley Stadiums, given that the original, completed in 1923, was one of the McAlpine projects which initially attracted Irish migrant builders of the interwar period to settle in north London.

As has been shown in the preceding sections of this chapter, as well as working as tunnel miners, the bulk of Irish migrant builders were particularly dominant in the substructure and superstructure elements of the construction and civil engineering processes, which meant labour and plant was concentrated mainly on demolition, heavy excavation and concrete works, initially after the Second World War using mainly manual labour and hand tools. Consequently another major cause of death and serious injury amongst the Irish builders in post-war London was the collapse of trench excavations. In the main such collapses occurred as a result of lack of earthwork support (more commonly called shuttering or planking and strutting) which consisted of timber strong-backs and planks framed out against the sides of a trench so as to provide a bulwark to any slippage of the excavation batter (see Figure 4.9). The installation of such protective measures was often seen by all parties, main contractors, subbies and the operatives themselves, as an unnecessary hindrance – a nuisance - costing additional time and money. By the mid-1960s – the peak of the ‘lump’ era - over 200 accidents per year were caused by trench collapse, of which some 10% were fatalities.²⁵⁸ Given the uncontested domination of Irish migrant labour in this element of construction and civil engineering works, one can safely assert that probably over 75% of these accidents occurred to Irish migrant

²⁵⁷ ‘Wembley death costs construction firm GBP 175,000’ at *Safety & Health Practitioner Online*, (July 9, 2009), available at; <http://www.shponline.co.uk/wembleydeathcostsconstructionfirmgbp175000/> (Accessed 5 February, 2015).

²⁵⁸ *Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1966 (Chief Inspector of Factories)*, 313, [Cmnd. 3358], H.C. 1967-68, xxxi.275, 39.

builders within the London Metropolitan Area, suggesting some fifteen fatalities per year and probably over 150 non-fatal accidents.



Figure 4.9 – Typical London infrastructure gas/cable installation trench from late 1950s - showing earthwork support in place
(Source: <http://www.lowery.co.uk/history.aspx> accessed 16 Jun 2017)

Cultural representations of common fatalities such as trench collapse are referenced in many Irish songs and stories of the post-war era and, on the whole, mirror the realities of these dangers, with obvious allowances for dramatic effect. Dominic Behan's song *Crooked Jack* contains the refrain: 'Come Irishmen both young and stern / With adventure in your soul / There are better ways to spend your days / Than in working down a hole', a clear inference to the dangers and ill-rewards of trench work.²⁵⁹ In Edna O'Brien's short story *Shovel Kings*, the protagonist, Rafferty, is put to work digging trenches for electricity cables in north London and reflects: 'At his first sight of it, it was hard for him, as he said, not to imagine those men, young though they were, destined for all eternity to be kept digging some never-ending grave'.²⁶⁰ This dark mood is reflected in much of the literature and cultural output of artists seeking to reflect the realities of Irish migrant workers in construction and is, perhaps intended as a countervail

²⁵⁹ Dominic Behan, *Crooked Jack*, 1965, Coda Music Ltd.

²⁶⁰ Edna O'Brien, 'Shovel Kings' in *Saints and Sinners*, (London, 2011), p.7.

to the buccaneering attitude often reflected, for example, in the balladeer song culture of Dominic Behan, the Dubliners and Christy Moore. In *I can Read the Sky* the Cuchulainn-like figure of ‘the King’ of whom ‘they say no man alive could dig like’ also ‘saw timbering go and a tunnel turn into a grave’.²⁶¹ Perhaps the most prosaic representation can be found in John McGahern’s short story *Faith, Hope and Charity*, where the unfortunate Cunningham is killed by the trench collapse as his long-term working partner Murphy watches on helpless from above. His alarming reaction reflects the clandestine existence of most workers in the Irish ethnic labour market:

What slowed them up most was not the digging but the putting up of the shuttering behind them....The only warning given was a sudden splintering of timber before the trench caved in. [...] All that got through Murphy’s shock as he rode with the body in the ambulance to the London Hospital was, ‘The police’ll be in on this. The assumed names will come out. I might have to have an earlier holiday than I expected’.²⁶²

As shown in the previous section, the casual work environment of the Irish ethnic economy meant that most men were essentially working as bogus sole traders.²⁶³ The example McGahern recounts above – where a workplace fatality would inevitably become the subject of an unwanted official enquiry often occurred in reality. The *Contract Journal* of January 1976 carried the report of the death of Anthony Byrne, a thirty-nine year -old labourer working as part of a gang for a subcontractor called Quinn Contractors caused by the collapse of a 3.5m deep cable trench being excavated for GPO cables to a new communication centre. The report cited ‘Failure to shore up the sides of the trench excavation with sheet piling’ as a potential contributory factor in Mr Byrne’s death and confirmed a Factories Inspectorate investigation and official inquest were to follow.²⁶⁴ Similarly, in 1977, an Irish builder from Clifden, in Connemara was killed in a trench collapse, the details of which can be seen in Figure 4.10. Notably the Magistrates Court fined the company £50. The comparison of such a derisory fine compared to the colossal fine of £750,000 and multiple prison sentences handed down a year earlier for defrauding the Inland Revenue is telling;²⁶⁵ corporate manslaughter and negligence

²⁶¹ Timothy O’Grady & Steve Pyke, *I Could Read the Sky*, (London, 1997), p125.

²⁶² John McGahern, ‘Faith, Hope and Charity’ in *Creatures of the Earth*, (London, 1992), pp.104-105.

²⁶³ See s.4.4, and Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.391-2.

²⁶⁴ *Contract Journal*, 15th January 1976, p.18.

²⁶⁵ See section 4.4.

were not generally accepted concepts in law at this time, and the crime of tax evasion evidently outweighed personal injury in judicial minds.

Trench and wall collapse remained a constant feature of Irish migrant experience in London construction. In March 1990, 45-year-old Danny Flanagan, a migrant Irishman, was working, in Walthamstow, for an Irish subcontractor, Patrick Corrigan, employed by UK major contractor Costain Ltd when the wall they were underpinning collapsed into the trench they were working in, killing him instantly and seriously injuring his colleague, in many ways mirroring McGahern's prose. Again the HSE inquiry returned a verdict of accidental death, effectively absolving the contractor and subcontractor from responsibility.²⁶⁶ Similarly, an Irishman from Manor Park in east London successfully sued his Irish employer for damages of £55,000 in 1976, after he was knocked into a trench by an excavator.²⁶⁷



Figure 4.10 – Trench Collapse – (Source: *Irish Post*, 29 January, 1977, p.7.)

²⁶⁶ *Irish Independent Newspaper*, June 6, 1990, p.11.

²⁶⁷ *Irish Post*, 27 November, 1976, p.3.

High-voltage electrical cable-strikes became common amongst London-Irish builders in the 1960s-1980s when most cabling excavation work was still being undertaken by hand-dig in London clay which was, by the mid-1960s already saturated with pre-existing cables and ducts. Patrick M (OI#4) – who narrowly avoided the same fate himself - recounts two such incidents in the 1970s and 1980s, one fatal, another almost so, both involving settled Irish migrants working in construction hitting unforeseen (and often unmarked) HV cables, in one case putting out electrical power in the Soho area of central London for several days.²⁶⁸



Figure 4.11 - Demolition of Chiswick Empire - west London, 1959.

(Source: Alisdair McDonald, see <https://jamesrmacdonald.wordpress.com/alisdair-macdonald/> (accessed 5 Feb, 2018).

²⁶⁸ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.75.

Demolition accidents were also common and remain a significant problem to this day.²⁶⁹ Public concern for construction-related risk in the post-war period was rare; it was culturally accepted that all manual trades carried risk which by today's standards would be seen as excessively high. Demolition was particularly so. A west London newspaper reported a local interest story on the demolition of the Chiswick Empire cinema in west London in 1959. Figure 4.11 above shows workmen completely unprotected at the very top of the building, standing on the wall being demolished, wielding pick-axes with apparent impunity and disregard for their own safety.²⁷⁰ The foreman of the demolition gang was named as Dennis Keane, suggesting this was an Irish labour gang. Falling accidents were reported in local Irish and UK newspapers as the cause of death to at least eleven London-Irish builders over the post-war period.²⁷¹

In hindsight, some interviewees recognised the very real dangers in which they routinely placed themselves. Ben C (OI#8), a college summer sojourner to London in the early 1970s recalled, fatefully, working with virtually no prior training on a large demolition project and suffering two potentially fatal slips on the same day.²⁷² As the technological advancement of post-war society unfolded through the 1950s, 60s and 70s, so did the increased proliferation of a vast array of mechanised plant; most of which, if misused, could maim or kill.²⁷³ In the decades prior to the introduction of the 1974 HSWA, there was little in the way of enforcement legislation to compel main contractors or subcontractors even to train operatives in the correct use of mechanical plant and equipment. Tom (OI#4) started life as a labourer and drainlayer and often drove dumpers and tipper-trucks on a number of sites in London, despite having no prior driving experience.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁹ Evan A. Nadhim *et al*, 'Falls from Height in the Construction Industry: A Critical Review of the Scientific Literature' in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Jul 2016, issue 13(7), no 638, pp.1-2. See also, Erik Sutherland, 'Modes of exploitation and safety in the British construction industry' in *Radical Statistics*, (Autumn, 1998), pp.3-17.

²⁷⁰ *Brentford & Chiswick Times*, 6th November, 1959, p.5.

²⁷¹ Appendix C, pp.5-6. Note that as this information is incomplete and some accidents are simply reported in newspapers as 'building site accident', but it nonetheless serves to illustrate the scope of accident occurrence amongst the post-war Irish migrant builders.

²⁷² Interview with Ben C, (OI#8), County Leitrim, (19 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, pp.139-140.

²⁷³ On large construction projects, mechanised and static plant would include tracked and wheeled excavators, dumpers, concrete pumps and skips, mobile and static craneage, tipper lorries, teleporters, hoists and forklift trucks, mixers, bogey-skips, scissors-lifts, jackhammers, compressors, Kango drills, diamond-cutters, steel tube scaffolding, acrow props and many other types of large and small mechanical plant and power tools.

²⁷⁴ Interview with Tom M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.4.



Figure 4.12 - Death of Kilkenny man from falling from height at Paddington Railway Station in 1977.
(Source: *Irish Post* , 26 February, 1977, p.2)

Similarly Noel (OI#20) described the relaxed attitude to the operation of vehicular plant throughout the Irish contingent on construction sites in the 1970s: ‘ ’78, ’79 [...] You needed no certificates for anything to drive any machine. You could jump up on any digger if the ganger man was there and he said to you, “do you reckon you could drive that machine? Jump up and have a go” and if you could drive it all well and good, they’ll have you’.²⁷⁵ Noel became a tower-crane operator in just such a manner, and many years later as a result of improved regulation had to retrospectively complete training and licensing, having spent decades driving cranes. This, too, was commonplace. Crane accidents were particularly horrific. For example in 1964, on the North Circular Road near Finchley, an area of high migrant Irish labour settlement, a static tower crane jib carrying 6.5 tonnes collapsed onto a coach, killing 7 people.²⁷⁶ Patrick F (OI#18) also experienced a gruesome accident on the construction of the new Charing Cross Hospital in the early 1970s: ‘ah, I seen awful accidents there. I seen a fellow

²⁷⁵ Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.471.

²⁷⁶ *Contract Journal*, June 25, 1964, p.1022.

falling off the crane one day and he came down on the starter bars - you know the starter bars?²⁷⁷ - Ah they went straight up through him. The roars of him. Ah he was dead, but I mean he wasn't dead just straight away. Ah shocking, but anyway'. Tom Mc (OI#9) witnessed another horrific fatality on a platform hoist on a John Laing project in Silvertown in the late 1960s, and then also went on to describe his own near-misses on Terson contracts.²⁷⁸ Patrick Crotty, 60, was killed on 31st August, 1976 on the foreshore of the River Thames at Barnes in west London. Originally from Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, he lived alone in Tottenham, north London and was a crane driver of some 18 years' for a small Luton-based civil engineering company known to employ a strong Irish contingent. Whilst driving a tracked mobile crane, helping to move concrete piles along the foreshore and closer to Barnes Bridge,²⁷⁹ Crotty had, seemingly, kept the driver door of the cab open on the offside, so that when the crane tipped he was probably thrown out of the cab. A predictably swift and peremptory inquiry by the newly-formed HSE found that as a result of driver error - lifting beyond the prescribed safe working load - the crane suddenly tipped sideways over towards the river, trapping the driver beneath the cab and below the waterline.²⁸⁰

There is little doubt that Irish builders were prone to misdemeanours on their own account, notably where alcohol was involved. Tom Mc, for example, recounts 'borrowing' a dumper from the site he was employed on whilst drunk one night in east London.²⁸¹ Luckily no-one was hurt during this escapade. One can only speculate how much such behaviour was the self-fulfilling product of years of oral story-telling and cultural exchange amongst the gangs of migrant Irish labourers in and around the pubs of London. Donall Mac Amhlaigh, in his now canonical memoir of early post-war construction migrancy, tells in a semi-comic tone a very similar incident with a dumper truck that went entirely out of control.²⁸² Consequently the reputation of Irish migrant builders for cavalier and reckless behaviour was, it might be argued, well-deserved.

²⁷⁷ Starter bars are the construction term for L-shaped steel reinforcing rods which are cast in to a ground or upper floor slab and positioned to provide a starting overlap for vertical structural column reinforcement and concrete cast upwards from the slab.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, p.159.

²⁷⁹ Part of a flood defence project called 'Upstream Defences – Project 33' for the (then) Greater London Council.

²⁸⁰ LMA Doc Ref: GLC-HE-R-36-WA Dawson fatal accident report, File 33.1A

²⁸¹ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, p.155.

²⁸² Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.29.

Whilst this chapter tends to focus on occupational fatal accidents amongst the post-war Irish, the vast majority of construction accidents in the UK were non-fatal, ranging anywhere from minor scrapes, cuts and burns to near-fatal falls, cable-strikes, head injuries, amputations and impact injuries. Patrick F (OI#18) broke his arm on the Charing Cross project, but was unable to obtain any form of proper treatment, ‘working for a sub-contractor [...] They took me back and said, “Oh you’ll be alright now, you can do bits and pieces around, you can clean the toilets” [...] next thing the job finished and they feekin’ sacked me. You know, so there was nobody to take - then of course we were only working on the cash’.²⁸³ Added to this catalogue, if construction workers managed to negotiate all these imminent risks, are the long-term effects of continued exposure to hazardous waste materials, asbestos, toxic chemicals and fuels and, moreover, the eventual damage to limbs, muscles, backs and hips from years of repetitive strain. Donall Mac Amhlaigh’s first job on emigrating to England was working as a porter in a hospital in Northampton, where he witnessed the adverse effects of building works during the early post-war decades as a result of lack of any form of protective clothing or equipment: ‘Maybe the cement or the diesel oil from the mixer was the cause of the skin trouble for they say that building workers often come in with the same ailment’.²⁸⁴ Similarly Armagh man Michael, who worked in London in the 1950s also recounted the long-term adverse effects of head injuries, which were so common in this era.²⁸⁵

‘Irish Workplace Accidents’ in Appendix C provides a sample of original research from regional and county newspapers in Ireland, oral interviews and journal articles covering the period 1945-1995.²⁸⁶ News is given of deaths and serious injuries caused to Irish migrant builders at work mainly in and around London during the post-war period. It must be emphasised that this data is small – fifty fatalities and serious injuries over the six decades – yet certainly an illustrative sample of the whole picture amongst post-war Irish migrants. In the absence of definitive ethnic data for Irish construction workers from the British HSE, Factories Inspectorate or Office of National Statistics – a tangible result of the ‘myth of white homogeneity’ discussed earlier – regional and local Irish newspapers and oral histories offer perhaps the only empirical source of evidence on specific fatalities. Whilst far from a complete

²⁸³ Interview with Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, p.419.

²⁸⁴ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.21.

²⁸⁵ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, pp.99-100.

²⁸⁶ Appendix C, pp.9-10.

picture (30% of the county origins of the victims are unknown) this table suggests that: the average age of fatality amongst the Irish migrant construction workers in the post-war period was around 33 years; the most common cause of fatality was falling from height, followed by building collapse; the counties most affected by fatal or near-fatal accidents were Mayo, Leitrim, Kerry and Limerick. All the interviewees suffered minor injuries; some more serious. The acceptance of reckless endangerment was endemic amongst the manual labour force, and to some extent allowed employers and main contractors at least a partial defence of contributory negligence on the part of the workers themselves.²⁸⁷ In practice liability rarely became an issue, as both employers and employees simply accepted that the risk of serious injury lay with the men themselves; that was, in essence, a 'given'.

4.6. Conclusion.

This chapter demonstrates clearly the wide diversity of experiences encountered by the migrant Irish builders within the work sphere of the construction industry in and around London. In the final analysis, I contend, the majority of Irish migrant builders acquiesced in the efficient creation and maintenance of an ethnically-bound employment enclave in London. Working mainly in the 1940s and 1950s as direct employees for the big British main contractors, a significant cohort of the itinerant wartime and immediate post-war recruits gradually settled in London and integrated into the demand-driven supply chains of the indigenous London regional construction industry. Yet the Irish migrant community resisted total immersion in the host economy by drawing labour almost exclusively from their own ethnic pool. The new wave of Irish migrant businessmen who established themselves in the post-war period, like most other migrant groups, favoured their own ethnicity, albeit for mainly capitalist rather than entirely altruistic motives. Despite the peripheral status of Irish labour; what Wills described as being 'in, but not of, the social fabric of Britain',²⁸⁸ these informal associations within the work sphere were 'part of the larger organisation of modern capitalism and its interdependent patterns of social stratification'.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ McIvor, *Working Lives*, pp.174-8.

²⁸⁸ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.111.

²⁸⁹ Thiel, *Builders*, p.157.

The dominant narrative of these migrant labourers as social failures should also be challenged; many willingly acquiesced in the operation of the ‘lump’ system. As Frank Docherty expressed it, ‘See, we’re not doing this work ‘cos we’ve no choice. We’re doing it because we **want to do it**, because we **enjoy doing it** and because we’re **making money** at it’ [emphasised by speaker].²⁹⁰ Joe Mc ((OI#24), the epitome of the seemingly ‘down-on-his-luck’ semi-vagrant, alcoholic ‘permanent casual’, summed-up the attitude of many of his fellow migrants who spent time ‘on the lump’: ‘it wasn’t all gloom, doom and disaster, it was fucking hilarious at times. Do you know, it was great, if you were young enough and mad enough’.²⁹¹

The day-to-day operation of the ethnic control economy was a culturally-bound process which reflected a range of male performative activities and masculinities, some peculiarly Irish, as reflected in the interviews and evidence set out earlier (These masculinities are discussed in greater detail in section 5.3). The cultural processes and structures underpinning the enclave were not reliant upon the social networks and infrastructures of the preceding London-Irish communities but were adapted from rural Irish norms.²⁹² As Thiel articulates, these processes and structures ‘drove the industry’ (in this case of the Irish-in-London) throughout the later decades of the post-war era and, ‘rather than having obliterated past cultural and social forms, the march of capitalism had competed, coincided and reproduced them; and history reigned into the present’.²⁹³

It is, I contend, impossible to disentangle the complex socio-economic relations embedded in both the work and leisure spheres of the Irish migrant builders. Which is why any analysis of this somewhat unique cohort would be incomplete without a detailed examination of their leisure activities and associational culture both within and without the diasporic enclave. This examination is undertaken in chapter five.

²⁹⁰ Channel 4 Television: ‘The Pick, the Shovel and the Open Road’, produced & directed by Molly Dinneen, (broadcast March 25, 1991).

²⁹¹ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, p.516.

²⁹² The first-wave migrations which started to arrive after the Famine and continued more-or-less until the First World War were, by the end of World War Two, almost entirely east-end (cockney) Roman Catholics and their community was in decline as an ethnically-separate group because of gradual integration into the host community. See Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.ii-iii.

²⁹³ Thiel, *Builders*, p.157, citing M. Buroway, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labour Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago, 1979); M. Dalton, *Men Who Manage: Fusions of Feeling and Theory in Administration*, (New York, 1959); D. Roy, ‘Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop’ in *American Journal of Sociology*, 57(5), (1952), pp.427-42.

Chapter 5. Associational Culture among Irish builders in Post-War London

*'Oh mother dear, I'm over here, and I'm never coming back,
What keeps me here is the rake o' beer, the women and the craic'¹*

5.1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the associational culture of those settled Irish migrants employed in construction in post-war London. Starting with a broad examination of relations between Irish migrants, British and other ethnicities in London, it goes on to detail at how the migrants adapted the culture they brought from home to reflect hybridised aspects of Irish migrant identity particular to London. Various individual aspects are then reviewed thematically, moving through settlement patterns, accommodation, sport, pubs, music, dancehalls and religious practices and demonstrating how these were all linked with the cultural patriotism many migrants brought with them. Irish builders were a significant sub-set of the broader diaspora in London, probably accounting for (on average) around 40% of the total post-war London-Irish.² With such a significant cohort operating almost exclusively within the ethnically-circumscribed working environment of labour-only subcontracting, homosociality was commonplace. The diasporic network pervaded all levels of Irish migrant activity through ideological cultural nationalism, Catholic church infrastructure, sporting organisations such as the GAA, and County and Provincial Associations.

Interlinked around the labour-contracting system was a complex secondary support network. Worker's cafes, stations and Irish-run pubs became hiring 'pick-up points'. Some Irish pubs also operated covert cheque-clearance systems facilitating 'lump' cash payments to workers. 'Irish' shops supplied county newspapers, and consumer goods imported from Ireland (e.g. Figure 5.1) and became news and information hubs.³ Localised networks of labour-hirers and

¹ Line from Dominic Behan's song, *'McAlpine's Fusiliers'*, see Appendix G, p.5.

² See section 2.2 – 'Defining the Cohort', table 2.4 for approximate estimates and Appendix C, p.2.

³ Other examples include Mandy's Irish shops in Willesden, north London, and Tooting, south London, Kays Irish Music Centre, Camden Town, Kelly's Butchers Shops at various locations around London. There were

go-betweens developed, sometimes utilising clustered 'Irish' lodging houses and digs. Informal lodging and accommodation networks operated across London through word of mouth via Irish pubs, commercial dancehalls, and the GAA. Irish dancehalls – most of which were owned, financed, run or patronised (through sponsorship etc) by wealthy (or former) construction entrepreneurs, publicans and developers.



Figure 5.1 - Advertisement for speciality 'Irish' butchers shop, 1970 (Source: *Irish Post*, 23 May, 1970, p.18)

Finally within the social sphere of the Irish migrant construction worker, and inextricably linked to the work-related networks, were a series of further formal and informal support structures. These included the institutions of the Catholic church with its own affiliated welfare and housing agencies – predominated by the Irish Centre in Murray Street in Camden Town - parochial social-clubs, dancehalls and associations such as the Knights of St. Columba. Cultural centres were run by various organisations: County Associations, Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, The Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (PTAA), the Legion of Mary and Conradh na Gaeilge. The interconnectivity of work and social activities is traceable via pubs, social clubs and dancehalls, GAA clubs, golf and darts teams. Formal structures and practices adapted from Irish rural culture and religious practice and the interconnectivity of parochial and social activities are explored. These sites and networks of sociality helped shape the lives of migrant builders and the wider Irish community in London.

numerous such shops in cluster locations such as Kilburn, Cricklewood, Archway, King's Cross, Fulham, Sheperd's Bush and Ilford throughout the post-war period.

5.2. Irish-in-London? Ethnicity, Positionality and Pluralism

How, then, did Irish migrant construction workers negotiate relational positionality towards Londoners and other migrant populations?⁴ Did their ethnicity and occupation result in differential treatment from other migrants? Irish migrants were seen by both the Irish and British establishments as the ‘middle nation’, occupying ‘a halfway house between Britain and Ireland’; an ambiguous position with ‘a foot in both camps – with obligations to each’.⁵ In the ethnic and racial hierarchy which pervaded British post-colonial society, the Irish occupied an intermediate position, somewhere between that of white British workers and Caribbean and South Asian immigrants.⁶ As Corbally sardonically explains it, the indigenous British attitude saw them ‘inhabiting a unique position as white “Others”, perplexingly placed between immigrants of colour and the host population, they were different, but somehow not deserving....[sic] the Irish were not quite immigrant enough’.⁷ Ironically three interviewees saw the arrival of migrants of colour in the early 1950s as easing the positionality (relative to native Londoners) of the Irish migrant community by effectively providing a more distinctive ‘other’ for xenophobic hostilities.⁸ Tom Mc, from Cork, recalls years later saying to a black friend of his, ‘Don’t take this the wrong way, now, but I was delighted to see ye fellas arriving, ’cos it took the pressure off us Irish!’.⁹

The legal position of the migrant Irish in Britain after 1946 was substantively framed by two legislative arrangements: the British parliament’s Ireland Act, 1949, which categorised Ireland as ‘not a foreign country’ in legal terms,¹⁰ their Commonwealth citizen status (which ended in 1949, when Ireland formally left); and the Common Travel Arrangement which had

⁴ The term ‘relational positionality’ refers to the juxtaposition of the self to others within social structures and the social and political context of identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability status (See: Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex” ; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London, 1996), p.149.

⁵ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.82 and p.179, citing Liam Ryan, ‘Irish Emigration to Britain Since World War II’, in R. Kearney (ed.), *Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad*, (Dublin, 1990), p.67.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.125, citing Rose et al., *Colour and Citizenship*, p.176.

⁷ Corbally, ‘The Othered Irish’, p.106.

⁸ See Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.17-18, and Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.98. See also comments of John Lydon in Sorohan, *Irish London*, p.98.

⁹ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, pp.152-3.

¹⁰ See legislation.gov.uk, available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/41> (15, September, 2020).

been in force since Ireland gained independence in 1922. By operation of these acts - by comparison to Commonwealth and other foreign-national migrants who were also migrating to London in numbers during this period - the Irish were afforded uniquely 'special status', giving them voting and welfare rights.¹¹ This took an apparently racist turn when, in 1962, the British government, via the new Commonwealth Immigration Act legally categorised Irish migrants differently from non-white migrants by reconstituting (and limiting immigration from) the 'New Commonwealth' whilst maintaining free movement for Irish migrants outside the Commonwealth.¹² Hickman demonstrated that 'bereft of a voice to broadcast their circumstances, the Irish were not conceived of as an ethnic minority' and so were homogenised in statistical, socio-economic and political terms, and yet socially and culturally were discriminated from the indigenous white population.¹³ Whilst this may be generally true, it is also the case that simultaneously migrant builders tended to be uniquely self-segregating.¹⁴

Prejudice was nothing new for Irish migrants arriving during and after the war. The Irish regularly experienced discrimination in London on both ethnic and sectarian grounds; indeed in the early post-war decades, the two positionalities were merged in most English people's conceptions – Irish probably meant white Catholic and vice versa. McIvor observed that the long-held Protestant/Catholic Irish sectarianisms were translocated through migration. Similarly, Arrowsmith concluded that to the British, the migrant Irishman 'denotes religious and political subversiveness, social barbarity, moral laxity and a wild sexuality'.¹⁵ Whilst not as visceral as in Ulster or Glasgow, these tensions were nonetheless present to some extent within the working and cultural environment of London, albeit largely invisible to indigenous

¹¹ Enda Delaney, 'Placing Post-war Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981' in Andy Bielenberg (ed.) *The Irish Diaspora*, (Harlow, London, 2000), pp.331-356, p.342.

¹² Corbally, 'The Othered Irish', p.91, 106-7. There was a trade policy motive behind this apparent racist attitude on the part of the British government. In 1956, preservation of trade preferences with Ireland prompted continued treatment of Irish migrants as if they were nationals (NAUK: PRO, CAB 2113164, 'Irish Republic, Policy following withdrawal from Commonwealth, *Why the Irish Republic is treated as non-foreign*', (August, 1956). In 1966 a minister opined it would "surely be a pity to disturb these convenient arrangements simply to meet the (doctrinaire) view that the special treatment of the Irish is proof of a 'colour bar' mentality on our part." ; NAUK: PRO, HO 344/284, 'Memorandum on the Irish Problem for the ministerial committee, Immigration Control: Irish republic', (November, 1964).

Information about Irish immigrants.

¹³ Mary Hickman, *Religion, Class, and Identity: The State, the Catholic Church, and the Education of the Irish in Britain* (Avebury, 1995), p.215. Also, Hickman, 'Reconstructing deconstructing "race":

British political discourses about the Irish in Britain' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21:2, pp.288–307;

¹⁴ See comment and fn28 later, Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.125.

¹⁵ Aidan Arrowsmith, 'The Significance of Irishness' in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol 14, nr.2 (2006), p.163.

Londoners, who knew little about Irish history or Northern Ireland.¹⁶ George Orwell regarded ‘suspicion of foreigners’ as a salient feature of Englishness in 1944.¹⁷ The American sociologist E.W. Bakke, for example, had noted fierce resentment of ‘foreigners’ – especially the Welsh and Irish – amongst the natives of Greenwich (south London) during the 1930s – an irony considering that many of those ‘natives’ were almost certainly descended from first-wave Irish Famine refugees.¹⁸ Walter also observed that in London prejudice against the Irish was especially marked, since Irish accents act as stronger markers of ethnicity there than in Liverpool or northeast England, where local accents more closely resemble Irish ones.¹⁹

Baines confirmed that ‘working-class immigrants, of whatever ethnic origin, had never been universally welcomed to Britain’ and Kynaston highlights that ‘for many years the most widely stigmatised ‘others’ in British society had been the Jews and the Irish’, communities who, by the close of the Second World War numbered 400,000 and 600,000 respectively.²⁰ *The Kilburn Times* – a local newspaper covering the London area which became synonymous with the post-war Irish migrant community – reported a protest meeting in March 1953 following complaints that local firms had adopted a ‘No Irish Need Apply’ policy towards vacancies and that in recent years there had been a ‘growth in certain prejudices, especially in regards to colour, and that there had been deliberate discrimination against the Irish by employment agencies’.²¹ At a trade union delegation in Colwyn Bay in May 1966, one senior delegate claimed to have worked with Southern Irish labourers [sic] and remarked of them, ‘they work like pigs, and in some instances smell like them’.²²

As Corbally remarked, ‘it is fair to say that most immigrants nonetheless faced

¹⁶ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, pp.119-20. For further analysis of migrated sectarianisms in the Irish diaspora see: Johanne Devlin Trew, *Leaving the North: Migration and Memory, Northern Ireland 1921-2011*, (Liverpool, 2013), pp.110-26.

¹⁷ George Orwell, ‘The English People’ (1944) in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Eds.) Vol III, (1968), p.16.

¹⁸ E White Bakke, *The Unemployed Man: A Social Study*, (London, 1933), pp.7-8, cited in White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.126.

¹⁹ Bronwen Walter, ‘Contemporary Irish Settlement in London: Women’s Worlds, Men’s Worlds’ in Jim MacLaughlin (Ed.), *Location and Dislocation in Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities* (Cork, 1997), pp.61-93, p.88.

²⁰ Dudley Baines, “Immigration and the Labour Market” in Nicholas Crafts, Ian Gazeley, Andrew Newell, *Work and Pay in 20th Century Britain*, (Oxford, 2007), p.337 ; David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951*,(London, 2008), p.270.

²¹ *The Kilburn Times*, 20 Mar., 1953, p.5.

²² *Daily Mirror*, Monday 23 May 1966, p.2.

particularly tough conditions and tense attitudes from locals. Imperial immigration thrust all immigrants into similar areas of the major cities, regardless of their diverse origins'.²³ Probably the most iconic, and yet contested and divisive, representation of the early post-war Irish experience of discrimination in London are the 'No Blacks, No Irish, No Dogs' signs (hereinafter referred to as 'signs') usually placed in shop or lodging-house windows. Murray argues persuasively that 'notions of an assumed "ethnic fade" or naturalised assimilation of the Irish into the host community are problematic' largely as a result of the proliferation of these signs.²⁴ That said, debates concerning these signs, and the credibility of their existence resurface every few years. Mary Kenny, in a 2015 review of Patricia Kennedy's history of Irish migrant welfare in Britain, *Welcoming the Stranger* remarked: 'I would like to have, sometime, a reliable source for the claim that England was awash with signs saying: "No blacks, no dogs, no Irish". It is often claimed, but never sourced: Ms Kennedy gives as her source, Ultan Cowley [...] but that, too, provides no source, other than hearsay'²⁵



Figure 5.2 - Photograph of Sign in a boarding house window, 1960s.

This photograph is, of itself, contentious insofar as there appears to be no traceable provenance attached to it.

(© London Metropolitan University Library Services and Special Collections) – courtesy of Dr. Tony Murray).

²³ Corbally, 'Shades of Difference', p.101.

²⁴ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.29, citing personal accounts of witnessing these from the film.

²⁵ *Irish Catholic*, 11 June, 2015, available online: <http://irishcatholic.ie/article/lifeamongirishengland> (accessed 22 June, 2015)

Another contentious newspaper debate later in 2015 involving the *Guardian* in the UK and *Sunday Independent* in Ireland prompted further heated exchanges, with one female migrant writing that on her arrival in London in 1961, ‘After passing a number of B&Bs **with the ‘signs’**, near Euston Station, I was directed by a helpful policeman to the Kings Cross Area. “There are **Irish-run** B&Bs up there”, he said, adding “But be careful, every second one is a knocking-shop” (emphasis added).²⁶ Another, Lorraine Fannin, wrote to the *Guardian* of her time as a student from Belfast attending Reading University in 1966:

I was upset and insulted to find notices galore that said ‘No Irish, no coloureds,’” she revealed. “I was so indignant that I took a photo and sent it with a covering note to the Belfast Telegraph. “I also brought it up at the university, where they tried to soothe me with the explanation that it really referred to the rather ‘rough Irish navvies’ who were then working on the many building sites around the Thames Valley.”²⁷

Oral interviews with migrant builders mirror much of the public controversy of this topic; eight interviewees in Appendix A recall seeing these signs at some point, many insistently so.²⁸ None were specific as to where and when, but given that most of these migrants are recalling events from over half-a-century ago, that is hardly surprising. Tom M (OI#1), who arrived in London in 1958, suggests that he thought these signs didn’t really start appearing in numbers until the Black and Asian migrants began to appear in London in the early 1950s and were aimed primarily at this new migrant influx rather than intentionally at the Irish.²⁹ As far-fetched as this notion might initially sound, the apparent absence of ‘No Irish’ signs prior to the significant influx of West-Indian migrants in the early-to-mid 1950s does lend the idea some chronological credence. Michael Mc (OI#6) adds further substance to this notion with his passing comment that ‘At that time the Jamaicans, well, they hadn’t started bringing them in - that’s why you never saw ‘no blacks’ on the (rooms-to-let) signs at that time – this was before their time’.³⁰

²⁶ *Sunday Independent*, 6 Dec, 2015, quoting a Ms Dorcha Lee of Navan, Co. Meath.

²⁷ *Guardian*, 25 October, 2015.

²⁸ Interviews with: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.18; Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), p.49; Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), p.85; Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), pp.95-6; Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), p.345; Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), p.428, all in Appendix A.

²⁹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, pp.7-9.

³⁰ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, pp.98.

Whilst looking for digs in Hammersmith in West London around 1956, Michael came upon a sign in a lodging house window which stated ‘No Irish and **No Culchies**’.³¹ As with many of these urban Irish myths, this particular anecdote – which culminates with an English landlady exclaiming, ‘those Irish are desperate, but by jove you’d want to meet the Culchies!’ – appears in an almost identical form in another of the post-war folk-revival songs. *McAlpine’s Crew* contains the lines: ‘Some digs to find my way inclined as night was drawing near / But as I read **each notice said no ‘Culchies’ wanted here** / How did they know that from Mayo I had lately bid adieu / So in Camden Town of high renown, I joined McAlpine’s Crew’.³² (emphasis added).

A further seven interviewees did not recall having seen any such signs in their time in London.³³ Patrick M (OI#4), who arrived in 1966, suggests that if such signs did exist they had more-or-less disappeared by the 1960s.³⁴ Terence O (OI#19) offered the same explanation.³⁵ A letter to the *Sunday Independent* from Paddy McEvoy in County Down tends to corroborate this view, suggesting that in his first ‘visits’ to London in the early 1960s he had ‘visited the parts of London most populated by émigré Irish, Kilburn, Cricklewood, Camden Town, but not once did I see a “no Irish” sign. If they were as common as the myth-makers would have us believe, I surely should have come across the odd one’.³⁶ The remainder of the interviewees,

³¹ Ibid., pp.95-6. Urban myth has it amongst the London-Irish builders that the pejorative term ‘Culchie’ is a phonetic corruption of the County Mayo town of Kiltimagh, which spoken in a Mayo or Connemara accent, particularly by native speakers, would anglicise to an English-accented ear as ‘Cul-chi-mock’. Michael speculated that the slang term was coined by English landladies who had experienced the rough-living nature of many of the construction workers who apparently emanated from this part of Mayo. The exact derivation of the term is uncertain, but in all probability it was in use in Dublin prior to the post-war migrations (Raymond Hickey, *Dublin English: Evolution and Change* (Amsterdam, 2005), p137).

³² Seamus Duffy, ‘McAlpine’s Crew’ in Frank Harte and Donal Lunny - *There’s Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*, (Daisy DLCD022), available at The Living Tradition Website (<http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/dlcd022.htm>, accessed 18 March, 2015). Written sometime around the mid-1970s. Seamus Duffy is a Mayo schoolteacher, traditional singer, music enthusiast, and presenter on Mid-west radio. This is, of course, another possible example of what Scully terms the ‘rhetorical invocation’ of transnational collective post-memory. See Marc Scully, ‘Emigrants in the traditional sense?’ – Irishness in England, contemporary migration and collective memory of the 1950s’, in *The Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 23.2, 2015, pp. 133–148, p.134.

³³ Interviews with: Jackie W, (OI#11), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), p.221; Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), p.232, 236; John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), pp.276-7; John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), p.378; Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), p.483 all in Appendix A.

³⁴ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.62.

³⁵ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.457.

³⁶ *Sunday Independent*, Nov 29, 2015. It is, of course, possible (though improbable) that these signs were predominantly placed in shops and B&Bs in other parts of London, and that Kilburn, Cricklewood, Camden Town and surrounding areas attracted migrant Irish to them precisely because of their absence.

five in total, were ambivalent about whether such signs existed. Notably of the eight affirmations six had arrived in the 1950s or early 1960s, whereas only two migrants from the pre-1960s period denied seeing such signs. The remainder had all arrived post-1965 supporting Patrick's comment.

The outbreak of the Troubles in 1968 signalled a more difficult period for Anglo-Irish relations, with the 'resurgence of visceral anti-Irish prejudices from the early 1970s with the onset of violent conflict in Northern Ireland and the IRA bombing campaign in Britain'.³⁷ Bloody Sunday in 1972 and the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act ('PTA') in 1974 strained relations even further and the politics of exile once again resurfaced. Fianna Fáil Minister, George Colley, for example, lobbied Irish citizens living in Britain in 1970 to exercise their voting rights to elect British politicians sympathetic to Irish sensibilities.³⁸ High-profile diplomatic rows such as that caused by the wrongful detention of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann head (and later Senator in Seanad Éireann), Labhrás Ó Murchú under PTA in April, 1977 (Figure 5.3) simply reinforced Irish migrant fears of discrimination.



Figure 5.3 - Irish Post report on detention of Labhrás Ó Murchú under PTA in April, 1977 .
(Source: *Irish Post*, 2 April, 1977, p.3.)

³⁷ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.125.

³⁸ *Irish Post*, 13 February, 1970, p.1.

The Irish in London found themselves subject, yet again, to discrimination and prejudice; often Irish builders often bore the brunt, irrespective of whether they were technically UK citizens from Northern Ireland or from the Republic. Hillyard's seminal study of the effects of the PTA on the Irish community in Britain showed that the unskilled migrant building labourer was particularly susceptible to unfair suspicions, arrest and detention.³⁹ Oral evidence shows that younger migrants were the main target of such suspicions. Those interviewees who arrived in London from the mid-1960s onwards, and were therefore still quite young, felt clearly discriminated against because of the Troubles, and in particular the IRA bombing campaigns. Some cited the period as a defining factor in their relationship with their new home. For example, Jackie W (OI#11) 'went with a positive attitude and my mind was subtly changed; I was treated differently, definitely during the 80s with the amount of trouble going on in England. I think that's when the English racist attitude towards the Irish came about'.⁴⁰ Terence O (a teetotaler) and his brother Noel (OI#19 & 20) both discussed episodes of wrongful arrest and physical assault by Metropolitan Police, including outside Biddy Mulligan's pub in Kilburn for alleged drunk and disorderly behaviour and the legacy of injustice left by his subsequent treatment.⁴¹ Noel explained the attitude taken by police in London during this period: 'Terence said to the police man that was putting him into the cell, he said [...] "why have you arrested us?" and the policeman said "For being drunk and disorderly" and Terence says, "I don't drink". He said "You fucking do now Paddy!"'⁴²

Older Irish migrant builders were stopped and questioned by police as well, but on the whole seem to have been treated less unjustly. John F (OI#16) had a narrow escape from serious trouble over a misunderstanding at the time of the Guilford pub bombings,⁴³ and Pat C (OI#15) tells about being accused of car-theft on his way from Holyhead back to London in the 1980s.⁴⁴ John H's (OI#17) experiences at the time of Thatcher's 'Ring of Steel' reveal both his sense of shame at Irish builders' vans being routinely stopped and searched, but also a typically-Irish reliance upon satirical black humour in his anecdote about a fleet of Green Murphy vans being

³⁹ Paddy Hillyard, *Suspect Community: People's Experience of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts in Britain* (London, 1993), p.3, 192, 258.

⁴⁰ Interview with Jackie W, (OI#11), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Appendix A, p.219.

⁴¹ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.453-8.

⁴² Interview with Noel O, (OI#20), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.469-71.

⁴³ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.373-7.

⁴⁴ Interview with Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.343-4.

told by the ‘Elephant’ John to ‘head for the bomb’ after the IRA’s terrorist bomb attack in Canary Wharf.⁴⁵

Latent anti-Irish prejudice, exists today, particularly amongst the aspiring middle-class, largely Thatcherite-Tory, suburban English – the pejoratively-termed ‘blue-rinse brigade’. In the 1990s Sean G (OI#14) and a colleague were lunching in a local pub whilst working as machine-operators/engineers for Clancy Docwra on a major upgrade of the mains sewerage system around Hemel Hempstead. Various shafts had been sunk on the roads and roundabouts nearby and existing sewers opened up, and inevitably foul odours resulted. Two very proper suburban ladies were lunching on a nearby table. One was heard by Sean’s colleague to say loudly to her friend, ‘You know no matter where those Irish go they bring nothing but filth and devastation to the area, with all this smell of foul sewage everywhere, the sooner they’re gone the better’. In reply, the engineer said, ‘Ladies, you’re dead right. No matter where the Paddies go we bring nothing only filth and devastation. But remember one thing ma’am...without the Irish, you’d still be throwing buckets of shite out of the top window’.⁴⁶

The juxtaposition of Irish construction workers to other migrant groups is another important feature of Irish migrant identity-formation in London. Jerry White talks of multiculturalism and pluralism as the ‘battleground on which London’s identity was still being forged as the twentieth century came to an end’⁴⁷ Delaney contests (for want of evidence) Weight’s view that ‘the Irish were guilty of some of the worst racism themselves’ and were actively involved in stigmatising fellow migrants.⁴⁸ Some interviewees in Appendix A cited examples of discriminatory attitudes expressed by fellow-migrant Irish to people of colour;⁴⁹ it should be emphasised that almost all these negative comments were qualified by interviewees as being very much a minority view amongst their contemporaries.

⁴⁵ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.392-3.

⁴⁶ Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.315-6.

⁴⁷ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.7

⁴⁸ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.125, citing Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000*, (London, 2002), p.125.

⁴⁹ For clarification, In all interviewees remarks there is an underlying sense of differentiation – of othering – which does not strike one as overtly racist, but is rather a representation of the subtle structural racial hierarchies of the time and their generation.

Michael H (OI#5) recalls one particularly vehement racist builder he worked with.⁵⁰ Tom (OI#1) talks of when he first arrived in London in late 1958 and lodged in Westbourne Park: ‘That’s the time the trouble started with the blacks. There was [sic] two pubs there... and the blacks were only served in one part of it! Yeah, yeah...they were allowed there; if they went into that bar there, [they were told] “No! You go around to that one” [pointing]’⁵¹ When asked if this was a form of segregation, Tom replied ruefully, ‘Well, that’s the way it was then’. Adding that ‘there was another one [pub] on the Harrow Road [...] that was the very same, only they [male black migrant workers] had this one!’ This suggests some degree of territorial ghettoization amongst competing migrant communities.⁵² Some two decades later, Jackie W (OI#11) also recalled discriminatory language used by Irish migrants against blacks, Muslims and Asians: ‘prevalent amongst the Irish. White Irish yeah and nasty degrading stuff you know [...] I didn’t like it. I would pull someone up over that’.⁵³

Contrary oral evidence also suggests that black Caribbean and Irish migrant construction workers often got on well and occasionally mixed socially – albeit very sporadically and not usually outside of work. Kevin H (OI#3) recalled there were not many non-white migrants when he arrived in London in the early 1950s, noting the arrival of large numbers later. He distinguishes the 1950s ‘Windrush’ generation from the British-born second-generation: ‘They were real gentlemen; the old black generation that arrived, they were lovely people. The young generation grew up with a kind of a rock on their shoulder. The old generation were lovely people’.⁵⁴ Kevin went on to recall:

I worked with two brothers, two black men and their names was O’Sullivan!! [Laughter]. They came from Monserrat. That island had black Irishmen. We used to play twenty-five and forty-five with the Sullivan brothers at dinner time - they could play twenty-five - they could! yes, that’s true! They were lovely brothers; one was a labourer, I think, and one a carpenter.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.91.

⁵¹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 September, 2014), Appendix A, p.17.

⁵² For clarity, Tom did not suggest the pub segregating black men was an ‘Irish pub’ in the context of the London-Irish ethnic enclave; it may have been a local London pub.

⁵³ Interview with Jackie W, (OI#11), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), Appendix A, p.222.

⁵⁴ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 October, 2015), Appendix A, p.45.

⁵⁵ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 October, 2015), Appendix A, p.45.

Tom Mc's (OI#9) experiences certainly suggest a form of ethnic hierarchy both in terms of attitudes to work and physical ability, suggesting, for example, that (unsurprisingly) English tradesmen kept the 'top jobs' in construction for themselves; that continental European and Jamaican migrants were, in some ways, more canny than the Irish when it came to finding work in construction; and that the Pakistani community were less inclined to the more arduous physical work.⁵⁶ Tom M (OI#1) corroborates Tom Mc's view: 'Later on, maybe in the late '70s and that, we were working with larger groups of Asian or Pakistani carpenters. They were very skilled craftsman who knew their job, but they weren't as 'hardy' as the Irish. The West Indians, they were grand lads but they could be lazy feckers!'.⁵⁷ Within the traditional music community there was some evidence of social interaction between Irish and Caribbean working-men;⁵⁸ one comical story in particular concerning the late migrant builder and fluteplayer, Paddy Breen, at an illegal Caribbean drinking den in south London hints at a semblance of mutual respect and camaraderie.⁵⁹ Donal Mac Amhlaigh, writing about working with Jamaicans on Milton Keynes new city development in 1973, suggests that colour prejudice shown by Irish migrants may have been more commonplace than the oral histories indicate:

after being **shamed many times over the past few years by examples of colour prejudice on the part of some of my fellow countrymen**, it is gratifying [...] that there is a strong rapport between the Irish and the Blacks here, not just in the gang, but throughout the site. Increasingly I would say, there is an awareness that we, no less than the West Indians are immigrants [...] most of these Jamaicans are first-rate tradesmen.⁶⁰ (Emphasis added)

What links most of this evidence is the awareness by each minority of their immigrant status, their respective and relative positions within the hierarchies of British society and particularly the construction industry. Corbally cautions, however, that although many Irish migrants, in retrospect, would portray their migrant relationship with other (non-white) ethnicities as one of equivalence in terms of prejudicial treatment, 'the Irish enjoyed benefits from the arrival of newer, more alien immigrants. Indeed [...] they became whiter than they ever had been in the English mind'.⁶¹ A letter to the *Irish Post* (Figure 5.4) in 1977 from a

⁵⁶ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 April, 2016), Appendix A, pp.155-6.

⁵⁷ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 September, 2014), Appendix A, p.17.

⁵⁸ Tom Maree, Liner notes to '*The Godfather*' CD by Brian Rooney, Racket Records, (London, 1999), p.1.

⁵⁹ Hall, "*It was mighty*", p.46.

⁶⁰ *The Irish Times*, (Aug 22, 1973), p.12.

⁶¹ Corbally, 'Shades of Difference', p.7.

black female migrant living in Tottenham - ironically, with an Irish surname - illustrates this overtly complex positionality in terms of ethnicity.

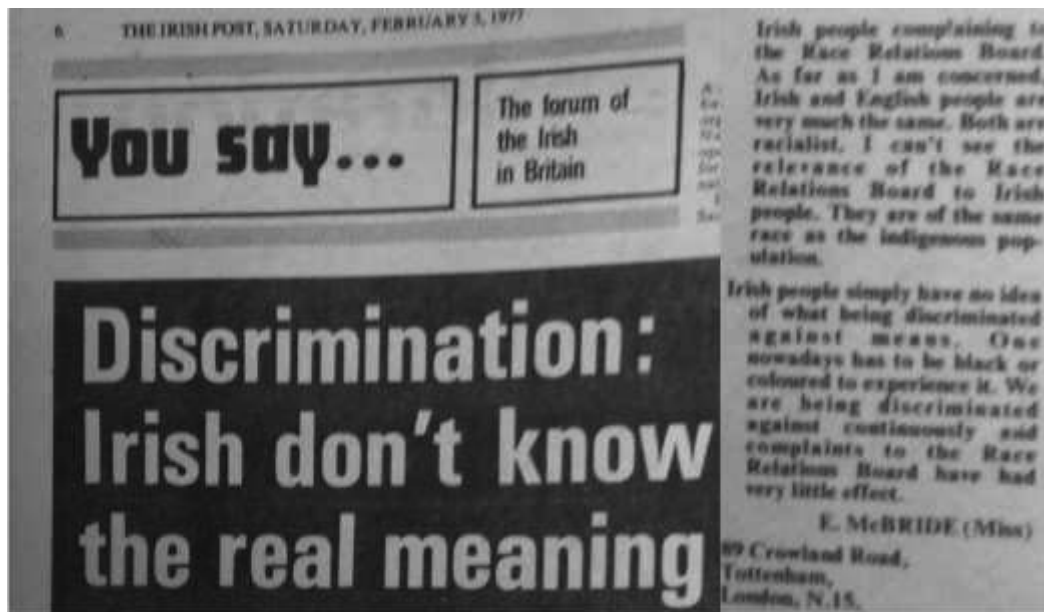


Figure 5.4 - Letter to *Irish Post* from Miss McBride (source: *Irish Post*, 5 February, 1977, p.6.)

The shifting cultural sands of British society itself gradually saw the initial post-war scepticism towards the second-wave Irish migrant builders and their offspring give way to ambivalence, then acceptance. Correspondingly, like all ethnicities, gradually Irish migrants themselves yielded to the massive global cultural shifts of the late twentieth century. So, for example, the 1940s/1950s migrants tended towards communal insularity, lacked confidence, were generally patriarchal and conservative in nature with little ‘marrying out’ into British or other ethnic groups.⁶² By contrast post 1960s migrants absorbed cultural changes both in Ireland – which under Lemass was expanding economically and socially and severing the theocratic links of the past ⁶³ - and, more importantly in Britain, where radical changes in societal views, sexual liberation, feminism, contraception, youth culture, rock music and

⁶² The Newman Demographic Survey analysis of marriage records of 37 parishes of Westminster Diocese , 1948-54, showed that 71% of Irish-born Catholics married other Irish Catholics in this period.(See A.E.C.W.Spencer, Mary. E. Daly (Ed.), *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants in England and Wales*, (Dublin, 2012), p.43, fn.17)

⁶³ Tom Garvin, ‘Patriots and Republicans: An Irish Evolution’ in William J. Crotty, David A. Schmitt (Eds.), *Ireland and the Politics of Change*, (New York, 2014), p.150.

Americanisation were gradually, often unconsciously absorbed.⁶⁴ Irish migrants ‘married out’ more – a greater proportion to West-Indian and Asian migrants.⁶⁵

Both Jackson and O’Connor concluded that by the mid-1960s Irish migrant integration had ‘become assured and settled’ and ‘in the main [...] the Irish immigrant enjoys equal opportunities in the labour market with the native worker’;⁶⁶ Paradoxically, the British social historian Eric Hobsbawm dissented; ‘To say that this [Irish] immigration has been assimilated would be misleading. However, it has increasingly become accepted, because invisible – at any rate compared to the much more obviously recognisable new migrants of the 1950s’.⁶⁷ Underlying this remark is the realisation that full assimilation entails mutual acceptance and agreement between host and incomer and, as Stuart Hall recognised, for Caribbean migrants (who largely aspired to it more than the Irish), that dream became a step too far somewhere around the mid-1970s.⁶⁸

Integration into London life was, arguably, easier for Irish working-class females and the small proportion of middle-class professionals. They tended to work predominantly in nursing, manufacturing factory work and bureaucratised commercial and residential domestic sectors; occupations requiring substantial integration with pre-existing workforces of largely indigenous Londoners, engendering a higher level of cultural assimilation.⁶⁹ Given that society generally and Irish Catholic society particularly was still highly patriarchal, females also tended to undertake most of the childcare within their adopted communities, which again promoted assimilation.⁷⁰ For working-class Irish males (in 1960s around 20% of the Irish in Britain),⁷¹

⁶⁴ Just, *Postwar*, pp.394-8.

⁶⁵ Raya Muttarak and Anthony Heath, ‘Who intermarries in Britain? Explaining ethnic diversity in intermarriage patterns’ in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Volume 61, Issue 2 (2010), pp.275-305 (The empirical analysis in this paper is based on the 1988-2006 General Household Surveys); Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.167; Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.146.

⁶⁶ O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.99; Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, p.108; both cited in Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.180, p.124.

⁶⁷ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day*, (New York, 1999), p.296.

⁶⁸ Stuart Hall quoted in interview on BBC Radio 4 programme ‘In Our Time’ discussing Multiculturalism with Melvyn Bragg and Avtar Brah, Last broadcast 13 May, 1999 available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00545hw> [accessed 29 Sep, 2016]. See also Matt Clement, *A People’s History of Riots, Protest and the Law: The Sound of the Crowd*, (London, 2016), p.169.

⁶⁹ Delaney, *Demography*, p.207, citing Brian Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, (London, 1960), p.215; Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.91-2; John Archer Jackson, ‘The Irish in Britain’ in P.J. Drury (ed.), *Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986) (*Irish Studies* 5), p.131, Table 7.3.

⁷⁰ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.5.

⁷¹ Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p.296.

employment opportunities remained largely embedded in building and construction work circulated within the networks of the ethnic niche economy of the time.⁷² Full assimilation was, in any case, never their aim. As I theorised in chapter two, a form of workplace auto-segregation developed over time; Tony C (OI#7), for example, commented on his experience in the mid-1960s: ‘The Irish [construction workers] in London kind of ghettoised themselves a good bit’.⁷³ As Delaney remarked, ‘many had been living in London for two decades or more by the mid-1960s and “reluctantly they were beginning to realize that for most of them there would be no *going home next year*; that they were here to stay” ’.⁷⁴ This explained, to some extent, the increasing involvement of Irish migrants by the 1960s and 1970s in LMA local and regional politics.⁷⁵

In accordance with Park’s classical three-stage brick-in-the-pond model, the children of Irish migrants born in the 1960s and 1970s obviously tended to assimilate more than their predecessors and develop hybrid and often localised identities.⁷⁶ In London, particularly, many second-generation migrants in the late 1980s began to identify as London-Irish rather than British.⁷⁷ These are, of course, generalisations and there were notable exceptions within the enclave; cultural and political nationalists resisted cultural elision fiercely, and devout Catholic sexual mores were implicit in the post-revolutionary Irish nationalism brought to London by most rural migrants; as Howes contended, ‘more the result than the cause of Irish rural bourgeois values’.⁷⁸ The multiculturalism which permeated the urban centres of Britain both exposed the translocal antagonisms and notions of contingent positionality typical of the long-term migrant experience, and was a feature of the pluralist settlement of first Irish, then Caribbean black, then Asian communities. In some ways this benefitted the Irish migrants as

⁷² See chapters 2-4.

⁷³ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.125. See also s2.2.

⁷⁴ O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.99 cited in Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.180.

⁷⁵ Interview with Tom M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.18. Examples of Irish migrant labour attaining significant local and national political influence around this time include Michael O’Halloran from County Clare who remained an Irish citizen whilst sitting as an MP for Islington north in 1970, (See *Irish Post*, 13 February, 1970, p.2), prospective Liberal candidate Patrick O’Loughlin (See *Irish Post*, 13 February, 1970, p.2) and Michael Daly of Arigna, County Leitrim, who became a Conservative Lord Mayor of Worthing in Sussex.

⁷⁶ See Chapter 2, pp.67-71.

⁷⁷ Sorohan, *Irish London*, pp.101-39; Marc Scully, ‘Discourses of authenticity and national identity among the Irish diaspora in England’, PhD thesis, (The Open University, 2010), pp.323-4.

⁷⁸ Marjorie Howes ‘Public discourse, private reflection, 1916-70’ in Angela Bourke, *The Field day anthology of Irish writing. Vols. 4-5, Irish women's writing and traditions*, (New York, 2002), p.926, cited in Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.109.

‘the new other was now the “dark stranger”, as the Irish were gradually deracialised and seen as an acceptable element of British society’.⁷⁹ It is unlikely the typical Irish builders in the voluntary workplace enclave valued being accepted by their British hosts, save insofar as it enabled them to continue maximising income.

5.3. ‘The Rough Lie-down’⁸⁰: From Itinerancy to Settlement.

The physical process of arrival and settlement in London for many Irish builders was equally fraught with difficulty. The typical trajectory was from single, itinerant war-worker in the immediate post-war years to gradual – usually still temporary – private renter and ambiguous citizen of London in the 1950s and 1960s. The cultural legacy of itinerancy, as described in detail in earlier chapters probably slowed permanent settlement for many migrant builders. If, eventually, marriage and children followed, then the need for permanent accommodation became more urgent. Housing remained a critical infrastructure problem in Britain after the Second World War for several decades. Gradually settling permanently in various Irish enclaves around London, patterns of accommodation amongst Irish builders shifted over time and varied widely across the community. From private-rental ‘rough digs’, ‘spikes’ and ‘lodging houses’ in the initial wartime and post-war decades, through to public-sector council housing and owner-occupier status from the 1970s through to the end of the century as social mobility and wealth improved, again the evidence suggests a broad range of lived experience.

During the wartime Group Recruitment Scheme ‘Irish labourers were segregated as far as possible [...] remote as they often were, on airfield and other civil engineering contracts, from populous centres’.⁸¹ Bristol’s temporary solution to bomb-damaged housing - ‘vast prefab sites’ - were built by ‘hundreds of Irish labourers’ billeted in the empty balloon barrage huts.⁸²

⁷⁹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.125. See also fn. 10 *supra*.

⁸⁰ A piece of profane doggerel verse used by early wartime and post-war Irish migrant builders; "Shepherds Bush for beauty, Maida vale for pride, **Camden Town for the rough lie down**, and Kilburn for the ride" [emphasis added]. The rough lie-down came to be a euphemism for bad lodgings, digs or vagrancy.

⁸¹ Enda Delaney, ‘Irish Migration To Britain, 1939-1945: Documents and Sources’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, XXVIII, (2001), pp.47-71, at p.58.

⁸² *The Daily Mirror* - Wednesday 01 August 1945, p.3

Where accommodation in populous or suburban regions could not be avoided, migrants sometimes got a decidedly more frosty reception: ‘the Ministry of Health had an unwritten but rigid rule that compulsory billeting was never to be used, even as a threat, where Irish workers were concerned, as feelings ran so high’.⁸³ Some of the apparent resentment against Irish migrant labour during the war is, objectively viewed, understandable. Irish men were not conscripted for military service if they were temporarily landed and were seen by, for example, the Women’s Land Army (WLA) as usurping the positions they had been given as part of the national war effort.⁸⁴

The reputation of the newly recruited Irish migrants during the war was not helped by the sometimes perilous welfare situation back in Ireland. In July 1942 an outbreak of typhus in the Spiddal area of Connemara saw some 24 cases diagnosed.⁸⁵ As a consequence ‘Few authorities would agree to the need for compulsory billeting if they suspected vermin and contagious infections’.⁸⁶ By October 1943, a scheme for pre-embarkation medical examination in Dublin had been agreed between the British and Irish authorities,⁸⁷ although Connolly Association representatives attacked the ‘verminous conditions [...] through which Irish workers passed en-route to England’.⁸⁸ Moreover, the language employed by British representatives often betrayed a supercilious and overtly xenophobic attitude towards migrant workers.⁸⁹ The reality was that very often migrants did not leave Ireland infected, but acquired such diseases easily whilst travelling in the UK, often because they were not in robust health to start with.⁹⁰

The period from 1945 to 1951 has been characterised, rightly, as ‘austerity Britain’ and there can be little doubt that the destruction wrought upon London described earlier in this research left a legacy of severe poverty, hunger and deprivation for all the inhabitants of the

⁸³ Delaney, ‘Irish Migration To Britain, 1939-1945’, citing B. Vincent [Regional Welfare Officer, Ministry of Labour and National Service].

⁸⁴ See for example *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 16 April 1943, p.236, where at Peacehaven, in Sussex thirty-three land-workers, formally protested against a decision to move them from their work in favour of ‘Irish labourers’.

⁸⁵ *The Connacht Tribune*, Saturday, 31 October, 1942, p.3

⁸⁶ Delaney, ‘Irish Migration To Britain, 1939-1945’, p.58.

⁸⁷ Memorandum from H Toms (Liaison Officer, Dublin) to Representatives, 16th October, 1943, NAUK Doc Ref: AVIA 22/1191.

⁸⁸ *Irish Independent*, 17 December, 1943, p.5.

⁸⁹ Letter, Bircher-to-Murray, 10th October, 1943, NAUK Doc Ref: AVIA 22/1191.

⁹⁰ Delaney, ‘Irish Migration To Britain, 1939-1945’, pp.58-62; Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.215.

city.⁹¹ Immediately after the war most Irish construction workers were accommodated in temporary encampments, thought to number around 100, on massive infrastructure projects outside London, or in a string of temporary hostels catering for bomb-repair workers. Gradually, as wartime hardships receded and transport links improved, by the mid-1950s most migrant builders based in the LMA shifted from ‘out of town’ encampments back to lodgings.⁹²

Around 1948, a group of Catholic priests from the Dioceses of Westminster, Southwark and Brentwood – with the sanction of the Irish and British Hierarchies – held a conference to discuss welfare and support for what was then considered ‘the continuous arrival of destitute people’ from Ireland.⁹³ This led, over the following years and decades, to the establishment of the London Irish Centre in Camden Square and a small number of welfare hostels around north London aimed at providing temporary shelter, accommodation, health, welfare and social care facilities together with employment opportunities.⁹⁴ Between 1963 and 1975, almost 24,000 newly-arrived migrants were assisted, of which half were helped into permanent employment.⁹⁵

By 1951, if the administrative county and outlying suburbs of London are considered, the Irish population was around 224,000 of which males numbered c. 96,000.⁹⁶ Most of these were single men, working in construction and living in digs and lodging-houses located in 16 boroughs with the major clusters having spread from the initial strongholds of St. Pancras/Camden outwards north-east, north-west and west. Paddington was the largest cluster with 11% of all male Irish, followed by St. Pancras, Hammersmith (both 8%), Kensington, Westminster (both 7%), then Hampstead, the City and Marylebone. These locations provided ‘cheap rooms and lodging for immigrant communities’ despite, as Kynaston noted, ‘Irish who undoubtedly suffered from prejudice – notably landladies reluctant to open their doors to them’.⁹⁷ One letter to an Irish newspaper sought to justify such attitudes: ‘Who could blame a landlady for finding the antics of some such lodgers intolerable? And remember, many of those landladies would have lost family members, even sweethearts in the still-recent war, while the

⁹¹ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951*, (London, 2008).

⁹² Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, pp.81-4. See also chapter 3.2 for details.

⁹³ Harrison, *The Scattering*, pp.31-51. See also chapter 5.6 *infra*.

⁹⁴ NAI-TAOIS-97-6-310-1, Letter & note DOT to DEF, (15, December, 1961); *Irish Post*, 22 February, 1975, p.15.

⁹⁵ Harrison, *The Scattering*, p.52. *Irish Post*, 16 February, 1974, p.19.

⁹⁶ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.89; Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, p.35, Table 8.

⁹⁷ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951*, (London, 2008), p.521.

incoming waves of Irish, who sat the war out in safe, neutral Ireland, were now arriving in their droves, hale and hearty'.⁹⁸ Kevin H (OI#3), who himself had a mixed experience of digs and rooms, having to move when his wife was pregnant; 'we were still friends, it was an understood thing that we had to move. We went from room-to-room for a while, around Holloway. Then we ended up living in Hoxton around 1960-61' reckoned of the reluctance to house Irish builders:

It wasn't that the English didn't like the Irish... 'twas the Irish's (sic) own fault. Because often there'd be a gang of young lads, they weren't used of heavy drinking. They'd come home to the digs at night or to the rooms and the next thing the fight'd start and they'd be pissin' out the window and urinating everywhere and language and drinkin' and messin. That's why you'd see the signs for "No Irish need apply" in digs'.⁹⁹

And yet, conversely, Kevin had, in the main, good digs. There are numerous examples of landladies, both British and Irish, showing great humanity to lodgers and on balance most interviewees in Appendix A had positive experiences of the lodgings system.¹⁰⁰ Patrick F (OI#18) recounted 'coming back [from work] and the landlady, she'd take the money and she'd give me so much out of the wage packet at the time until we got going properly, and I'm sure I was there for weeks without getting work, and she looked after us'.¹⁰¹ This echoes Father Fullam's remarks that there were 'countless cases where English landladies *mothered* the young men [...] treating them very kindly [...] as they would look after their own'.¹⁰² Rooms were often shared, with perhaps four or six men in a room, but as Patrick (OI#4) put it, 'When we went in there first there was third bed, a complete stranger already in there as well. Sure we got on like a house on fire, and then two other guys moved into another room. That's just the way it was, we didn't pass no heed on sharing with other lads'.¹⁰³ Moreover, interviewees emphasised that as bad as some conditions might be, they were an improvement on 'home': 'sure we weren't used to anything else anyway; we never had bathrooms or hot water at home, only what was boiled on the fire, so we never felt like we were missing anything. Ah sure 'twas

⁹⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 29 November, 2016, reader's letter from Paddy McEvoy, County Down.

⁹⁹ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.49.

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.4; Dinny D, (OI#2), County Donegal, (23 Sep. 2015), pp.28-30; Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), p.62;

¹⁰¹ Interview with Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, p.416.

¹⁰² Dunne, *An Unconsidered People*, p.13.

¹⁰³ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.66.

heaven compared to that and, of course, we had the bit of money in our pocket; we never complained. What we didn't have we didn't miss. I was grand'.¹⁰⁴

Conditions could undoubtedly be grim, though. One Irish migrant family home in a slum dwelling in Deptford in south London was described as: 'Squalid, with rotting vegetables mingling with tobacco smoke and coal fumes, dirty water bowls and toddlers barely clothed'. The visiting nurse recoiled 'when Mr Doyle said in his heavy Irish accent, but so *casually*, "There's another one behind you", and I turned and saw a pile of rags on the bare springs of the bed, and hidden in the rags a dirty, tiny, baby'.¹⁰⁵ A *World in Action* documentary broadcast originally in 1963, and featuring mainly Irish migrant builders' families, exposed the inhuman living conditions which many working-class – indigenous and migrant communities – were faced with in the private rental market in poorer parts of London.¹⁰⁶ Abuses were not uncommon; on the M1 Motorway project, many of the Irish migrants lodged in nearby towns such as Luton and Northampton and, for example, 'Bill Swan recalled an incident where Irish workers living in digs were being fed pet food on their sandwiches by the owner'.¹⁰⁷

Inevitably when the Troubles intensified in Northern Ireland during the 1970s, 'Many people now were being turned away from accommodation elsewhere simply because they were Irish, whether they were from the north or south of Ireland'.¹⁰⁸ The 1971 Census showed that over 50% of all migrant Irish in London lived in private rented accommodation, generally 'digs' or lodging houses. Central or inner London accommodated 60% of them, most of whom rented privately. Across Greater London, only 23% of Irish households were owner-occupiers (17% of inner London households) compared to 38% homeownership amongst all ethnicities.¹⁰⁹ Some of these Irish property-owners became landlords themselves, leading Anne O'Neill to observe that 'the Irish exploited their own by offering appalling living conditions to those who had no choice but to endure them'. Men working 'on the lump' with no security,

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.85.

¹⁰⁵ David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951*, (London, 2008), p.283, citing a diary entry from 1946 by a British family welfare nurse.

¹⁰⁶ 'Living in the Slums', *World in Action* Documentary, Series2, Episode 7, Granada Television, (Oct, 1963), available online at: <https://youtu.be/-UOKQLXrb7Y> (accessed 24 Aug, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ Linda Gray et al, 'Building The M1 Motorway', p.33.

¹⁰⁸ Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A history of the London Irish Centre 1954-2004*, (London, 2004), p.115.

¹⁰⁹ Hodgson, 'London's Ethnic Population', Table 7, pp.18-20.

often subsisting on a day-to-day basis, could not afford the luxury of choice.¹¹⁰ The fact that 11% of all overcrowded households in London were occupied by Irish migrants tends to support this observation.¹¹¹



Figure 5.5 - Typical multiple-occupancy Irish builders' digs, Cricklewood, 1960. This room was shared by three migrants.

(Source: Carol Kearney, "*Our First year in London*": *The Experiences of Post-War and 1980s Migrants in London*, Unpublished Minor Thesis, London Metropolitan University, Irish Studies Diploma, (May, 1993), p.13.

Another equally unappealing option for such men was temporary or long-term vagrancy and homelessness, a tragic situation some migrants fell into because of social dysfunction, mainly alcohol, drug and gambling addictions and associated mental difficulties. Arlington House, in Camden Town, was the largest and last of the Rowton Houses, a chain of temporary accommodation hostels predominantly located in London and Birmingham for itinerant, down-and-out or low-paid working men started by the Victorian philanthropist, Lord Rowton, in 1892. No official records remain of the long-term occupants of Arlington House,¹¹² but the official website of the 'Aisling Return To Ireland Project' has one former resident estimating that in the 1970s there were up to 1,000 tenants most of whom worked and paid rent.¹¹³ Sources vary as to the proportion of Irish residents: in 1963, a welfare and advice worker at the London

¹¹⁰ Dunne, *An Unconsidered People*, p.12.

¹¹¹ Hodgson, 'London's Ethnic Population', Table 29, p.76.

¹¹² See email, 8 February 2018, Alex McDonnell > Michael Mulvey.

¹¹³ 'A Brief History of Arlington House' available at:

<http://aisling.org.uk/pages/ahhist.htm#:~:text=Arlington%20House%2C%20opened%20in%201905,disease%20Dridden%20common%20lodging%20houses> (accessed 8, February, 2018).

Irish Centre confirmed that 35% (on average) of the one thousand occupants were Irish.¹¹⁴ In 1982, according to another source, when Camden Council took management of the hostel, the 1200-plus residents were ‘mainly Irish’¹¹⁵ Joe Mc (OI#21) was a long-term resident there with alcohol issues, and a seasoned ‘lump’ worker. He estimates the number of homeless Irish ‘lump’ workers who lodged from day-to-day probably ran to upwards of 200, typically, in the late post-war period from 1970-1990,¹¹⁶ when the Irish migrant construction workforce in London at that time was almost certainly in excess of 100,000 men.

By 1981, the demographic picture of Irish migrant clustering had altered again. Ethnic spread had extended much further outwards and the Irish now lived in every borough in Greater London with even ‘commuter-belt’ boroughs such as Bexley, Bromley, Havering, Sutton, Kingston and Richmond all counting at least 2% of its population as Irish.¹¹⁷ The migrant Irish population by then was 300,621 of whom around 109,000 were working-age men. Just over half by then lived in outer London.¹¹⁸ The stronghold boroughs remained Brent (including Kilburn and Cricklewood), Hammersmith, Islington, Westminster and Ealing which varied from 7% to 11% of total populations.¹¹⁹ From 1971 to 1981 the proportion of private rented accommodation occupied by migrant Irish reduced by one-third, with around 14% of Irish households moving from inner to outer London, Local Authority/Housing Association lettings to migrant Irish almost doubling, and overcrowding amongst Irish households reducing to 6%.¹²⁰ Moreover, owner-occupier home ownership amongst the Irish migrant community rose by 11%, with most of that rise occurring in the outer London boroughs – the more affluent suburban areas.¹²¹

Of the 21no. interviewees in Appendix A, only eight did not become property-owners during their time as migrants in London,¹²² of those, five were relatively short-term sojourners,

¹¹⁴ Harrison, *The Scattering*, p.25.

¹¹⁵ Peter Higginbotham, ‘Rowton House, Camden Town’ at *The Workhouse, The Story of an Institution*, available at <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/RowtonCamden/> (accessed 26 Feb, 2018)

¹¹⁶ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, pp.501-3.

¹¹⁷ See London Maps, Map 1, p.xiii-xiv and Appendix C, p.6.

¹¹⁸ Hodgson, 'London's Ethnic Population', Table 7, pp.18-20.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Hodgson, 'London's Ethnic Population', Tables 25,26,29, pp.63-70.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Tom M, (OI#1), Patrick M, (OI#4), Michael Mc, (OI#6), Tony C, (OI#7), Ben C, (OI#8), Gregory D, (OI#10), Patrick F, (OI#18), Joe Mc, (OI#21).

one became a lifetime Local Authority tenant, one a long-term Housing Association tenant, and one a long-term resident of Arlington House. This can, to some extent, be explained because the relative age-profile and migration periods for many of the interviewees coincides with the Thatcherite ‘right-to-buy’ era of privatised social housing. Most who became owner-occupiers did so because they had growing families; some, including Tom Mc (OI#9), Jackie W (OI#17), John F (OI#16) had lodgers as tenants occasionally, but not multiple occupancy, and usually friends they knew. They had all experienced the lodging system themselves and were strongly reluctant to be thought of as landlords.

These statistics indicate, contrary to the representational myth of Irish labour in post-war London, that a good proportion of those Irish builders who settled eventually became homeowners and fairly middle-class in outlook. All this reflected significant social mobility and ethnic spread, most of which was founded upon the entrepreneurial successes of migrant Irish builders described in chapters 2 and 3. This gradual establishment of settlement clusters and the associated cultural circuits which grew up around them was also reflected in Irish cultural activities practised openly by migrant Irish workers in and around London.

5.4. ‘Gaelic Hearts’ – Cultural patriotism and the Transmission and Adaption of Rural Culture

Implausible though it might seem, the events of the Gaelic revival, the Easter Rising and the War of Independence – over half-a-century earlier – influenced the mindsets of Irish migrant builders reconstructing the post-modern metropolis of late twentieth-century London at least to some extent. Irish nationalism was, as late as the 1990s, still felt by Irish builders as ‘a potentially powerful political mobilising force in imagining an heroic (male) subject position within a nation for whom the normal mode of citizenship is that of emigrant status, social exclusion and subordinated/dislocated masculinity’.¹²³ For several decades after Irish independence, the intensive sanctification of historical narratives shaped a vague, ideological notion of Irish exceptionalism. Townshend summarised it thus: ‘Nationalist sentiment was pervasive – a viscerally absorbed story of oppression and expropriation, based on an

¹²³ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.43, citing Popoviciu et al., ‘Migrating Masculinities’, p.175.

assumption of the “righteousness and exclusivity” of a historically distinct people’.¹²⁴ Gaelic League racial theories were propounded from the turn of the twentieth century and fed into neo-nationalist discourses on loss of national hardiness associated with ‘anti-rural’ Englishness.¹²⁵ Children were socialised into this worldview through family and school. Patriotic Irishness was framed by D.P. Moran’s ‘Irish-Ireland’ movement in terms of de-Anglicization so that ingrained in nationalist ideology – above all else – was the negation of Englishness.¹²⁶ Distrust, bordering sometimes on paranoia, was, consequently, a significant shaper of the mindset of some newly-arrived migrant males, particularly in the early post-war period.

For the vast majority of post-war Irish migrant construction workers who settled in London, this inherited mindset resolved, in migration, into a passive form of cultural nationalism; an inactive but passionately-felt patriotism. It was one of the primary causes of ethnic clustering amongst migrant builders; ideas and notions learnt as children and adolescents in post-independence Ireland were subconsciously recycled, nurtured and disseminated in the overtly masculine and aggressive environment of the ethnic ‘lump’ subcontracting market. James Gallagher, co-founder of the Abbey construction dynasty emerged in the 1970s as a vocal proponent of a united Ireland and made no secret of his scepticism and distrust for Britain, despite having thrived commercially in the wartime and post-war economy.¹²⁷ Joe Murphy, for example, was a member of An Garda Síochána before emigrating to London to found his civil engineering empire. Matt Gallagher, also a co-founder of Abbey, reminisced that ‘having learned nothing in school except that the English had screwed the Irish, he determined on screwing the English to make his fortune’.¹²⁸ Most interviewees were born later in the century and therefore would not have directly experienced the formation of the Irish state but nonetheless were, for the most part, socialised in the environment outlined above. Leitrim-man Tom M, (OI#1) and his brother Pat, (OI#4) had a paternal uncle who was a member of the IRA, taking a minor part in the War of Independence, and went on to become a civil servant in

¹²⁴ Charles Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence*, (London, 2014), pp.53-54 quoting Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000*, (London, 2005), p.195; Eugenio F. Biagini, Mary E. Daly, *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2017), p.525.

¹²⁵ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.43-51.

¹²⁶ Townshend, *The Republic*, p.56.

¹²⁷ Clavin, ‘Biography of James Gallagher’ . See also James Gallagher’s obituary, *Sligo Champion*, 18 March, 1983, p.26.

¹²⁸ Clavin, ‘Biography of Matt Gallagher’.

Roscommon county council.¹²⁹ Tony C (OI#7) had a late brother who became a barman in the local British Legion club and reflected on the irony of his funeral in London.¹³⁰ Most interviewees referenced the nationalist movement in bygone generations, albeit they were, themselves, moderate, non-committal nationalists.

One recreational activity which successfully harnessed this passive Irish patriotism in the migrant environment of London was sports. Well before the second-wave mailboat migrations, the GAA was firmly established in London.¹³¹ For the post-war migrant builders it was an invaluable form of associational culture, since the organisation is deeply rooted within Ireland's social fabric and exported the broad club-parish-county organisational structure it follows in Ireland. At first, 'In 1954 GAA General Secretary Pádraig O'Caomh insisted that the GAA had a vital role to play in [...] stemming the flow of emigrants. [...] For all its great influence, the GAA was no match for the forces – social and economic – which drove the phenomenon of emigration in the 1950s'.¹³² Once the GAA came to terms with the reality of migration to Britain, 'Many of the players, though lost to their home place, were not lost to the GAA. For many amongst this new wave of emigrants, the very existence of voluntary organisations like the GAA helped to soften somewhat the trauma of their exile'.¹³³

It is widely accepted that 'the 1950s were boom years for the GAA in Britain'.¹³⁴ The number of Gaelic Athletic Association clubs registered with the London County Board rose from twenty-six in December 1947, through fifty-six (with 2629 newly-registered players) in January 1957 and sixty-four in 1958, to seventy-six in 1959.¹³⁵ Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of these new players worked in the construction industry. Moreover, many of the County Board officials (Johnny Moriarty, Jim Conway, Mick Walshe) were also subcontractors and contracts managers for various construction businesses. Michael Mc (OI#6) was involved with St Monica's parish GAA team, based in Hoxton, in east London in the early

¹²⁹ Interview with Tom M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.9.

¹³⁰ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.125.

¹³¹ Bureau of Military History, WS Ref #: 1108, Witness: Jeremiah J (Diarmuid) O'Leary, Director of Elections, Sinn Fein, Pembroke, 1918 available online at

<http://www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie/reels/bmh/BMH.WS1108.pdf#page=14> (accessed 6 Sep 2016).

¹³² Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan, Paul Rouse, *The GAA, A People's History*, (Cork, 2009), p.359.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.359.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, (Cork, 2009), p.359.

¹³⁵ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.467 ; Pat Griffin, *Gaelic Hearts: A History of London GAA, 1896-1996*, (London,2011), pp.227-75.

1950s. He recalls Johnny Moriarty,¹³⁶ a kingpin in the Kerry-affiliated *Kingdom* GAA club, effectively running a labour-exchange from Mooneys pub on the Strand in Central London.¹³⁷ The Irish Government's embassy in London recognised the importance of the GAA as a well-organised and key component of the welfare network growing organically in the early 1950s,¹³⁸ Newspapers back in Ireland regularly reported on key matches. For example, June 1952, Mitcham in South London saw over ten thousand Galway and Tipperary supporters throng the local stadium for the annual Monaghan Cup clash in hurling. The importance of such an event in the consciousness of the emigrant Irish builders and navvies stands out from Donall Mac Amhlaigh's elated diary entry for the day: 'As I went into the park, I thought for a moment that I was back in Ireland there were so many of our people there. There were people from every county in Ireland I'd say... [sic] The Irish in London, I'd say, have a great life, plenty of their own people all around them.'¹³⁹

Tom M, (OI#1), was involved as a player for Tara GAA in the 1960s and 1970s after emigrating from Leitrim first to London, then Luton. In London he was regularly involved in club activities and he emphasised the importance of club and county board connectivity within the Irish builders network; how London clubs tended to act as satellites for Irish county teams, and how the London County Board links acted as another employment exchange network.¹⁴⁰ By way of evidence Tom kindly donated a photograph of a Tara GAA Club Social Night held at the Bush Hotel, London, c.1962, (Figure 5.6) explaining that of the ten men pictured, eight were from Leitrim, one each from Cavan and Galway and all but one worked in construction. Whilst anecdotal, it is nonetheless illustrative of the importance of GAA networks to the efficacy of the Irish ethnic construction enclave and tends to support the generalised assertions above. Tom's experiences also reinforce the connectivity between sport and the construction industry, endorsing Walsh's view that 'The Irish community found each other jobs and digs, far more than through any other source and the GAA [...] probably was the greatest source of community care in those days'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Griffin, *Gaelic Hearts*, p.227.

¹³⁷ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, pp.103-5.

¹³⁸ Letter, Irish Embassy London to Dept. of Foreign Affairs, 4th November 1952, papers of Dept. of Taoiseach, S11582, NAI.

¹³⁹ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.25-26.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.18-9.

¹⁴¹ Tommy Walsh, GAA Oral History Project Archive, 2008, cited in Mike Cronin, Mark Duncan, Paul Rouse, *The GAA, A People's History*, (Cork, 2009), p.360.



Figure 5.6 - Tara GAA Club - Social Night - Bush Hotel, Sheperd's Bush, London, c.1962.

(Source: courtesy of Tom M, (OI#1) .

Tom recalls, for example, meeting Roscommon footballing ‘legend’ Eamonn Boland – who in 1943 and 1944 had been a member of the All-Ireland Senior Football ‘Back-to-back’ Championship-winning Roscommon side – on a housing site in Stevenage, Hertfordshire in the early 1960s, where they were building the new town. Boland was a foreman for the Clare building contractor McInerney at that time.¹⁴² Hurling stalwarts in the 1960s at Tomás McCurtain’s GAA club in Seven Kings, specifically targeted migrant Munster-men for subcontract industrial painting work at the massive Ford plant in nearby Dagenham, based on their hurling or footballing prowess: ‘There was a fella from Offaly called Bill Flanagan. He was a supervisor of the painting contractors (at Fords). His rule for hiring was you had to play for the Tomás McCurtain’s club. If you were a good hurler and footballer, you’d get the work. One time, thirteen players out of the fifteen on the team were painters working in Fords’.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.7. See also ‘Building a Community: Construction Workers in Stevenage, 1950-1970’, University of Westminster research project, ‘*Constructing Post-War Britain: Building Workers’ Stories, 1950-1970*’, p.9-10.

¹⁴³ Robert Mulhern, ‘A life on the line of Ford’s Dagenham plant for Irish workers’ in *Irish Examiner*, Thursday, March 24, 2016, available at <http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/features/a-life-on-the-line-of-fords-dagenham-plant-for-irish-workers-389044.html> (Accessed 15 May, 2017).

The well-known Galway hurler, Ambrose Gordon recalled how hundreds of Irish migrant labourers found salvation indoors in the Ford plant in Langley where he worked during the harsh winter of 1963.¹⁴⁴ Similarly the Wexford hurler Tommy Harrell, who became London County GAA Chairman in later years recalled of his early years in London, ‘It’s like two lives over here. I go to work and I talk soccer and rugby all day because that’s all any of them know about. The rest of my life is hurling then. That’s what’s kept me happy in London’.¹⁴⁵ Interconnectivity between the upper echelons of the GAA in Ireland, London provincial GAA and Irish business culture was transplanted to London predominantly by Irish building contractors and subcontractors. The GAA became an essential supply chain to the entrepreneurial labour enclave from which the burgeoning contracting and subcontracting continued to draw throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s and right up to the rise of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland.

Other aspects of associational culture which migrant builders engaged with on a significant scale were traditional music and dance artforms adapted from rural practice, predominantly in the west of Ireland where most of the post-war migrant builders hailed from. Reg Hall’s monumental work on the history of Irish traditional music in London, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, provides copious evidence of the interface. This section will discuss some helpful examples. Two of the formal cultural organisations who marshalled much of the musical and dance activities in post-war London were *Conradh na Gaeilge/ Gasra na nGael* (formerly the Gaelic League) and *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*. Both these organisations had significant patronage from the Irish construction sector.

One such very high-profile example was the Silver Jubilee Concert held by the London region of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann on October 12th, 1976 in the world-renowned Royal Albert Hall in London (See Figure 5.7). Most of the top-billed London-based artists at this event: Martin Byrnes, Bobby Casey, Tommy McCarthy, Brendan McGlinchey and Des O’Halloran all came to London in the post-war period as migrant builders, and indeed many were still working in

¹⁴⁴ Robert Mulhern, ‘A life on the line of Ford’s Dagenham plant for Irish workers’ in *Irish Examiner*, Thursday, March 24, 2016, available at <http://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/features/a-life-on-the-line-of-fords-dagenham-plant-for-irish-workers-389044.html> (Accessed 15 May, 2017).

¹⁴⁵ Tommy Harrell from Wexford who emigrated to London in 1960, quoted in Tom Humphries, *Green Fields: Gaelic Sport in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1996), p.81.

the industry. Note also the extent of business patronage which cultural organisations such as Comhaltas and the GAA were cultivating both within the UK and, more importantly cross-border patronage from significant organisations such as Aer Lingus, B&I Ferries, The Bank of Ireland, Allied Irish Banks and The Irish Tourist Board. Another feature of the London-Irish networks which this poster illustrates is the extent of Irish associational and cultural centres, clubs, pubs, parish halls and the like. The list at the end of the poster shows the main Irish cultural centres located in Camden, Wimbledon, Westway and Slough. Michael Baynes, a post-war migrant builder from Mayo, who founded the east London branch of Comhaltas in 1957 recalled that the east London Irish centre brought two coachloads of Irish to the event and that

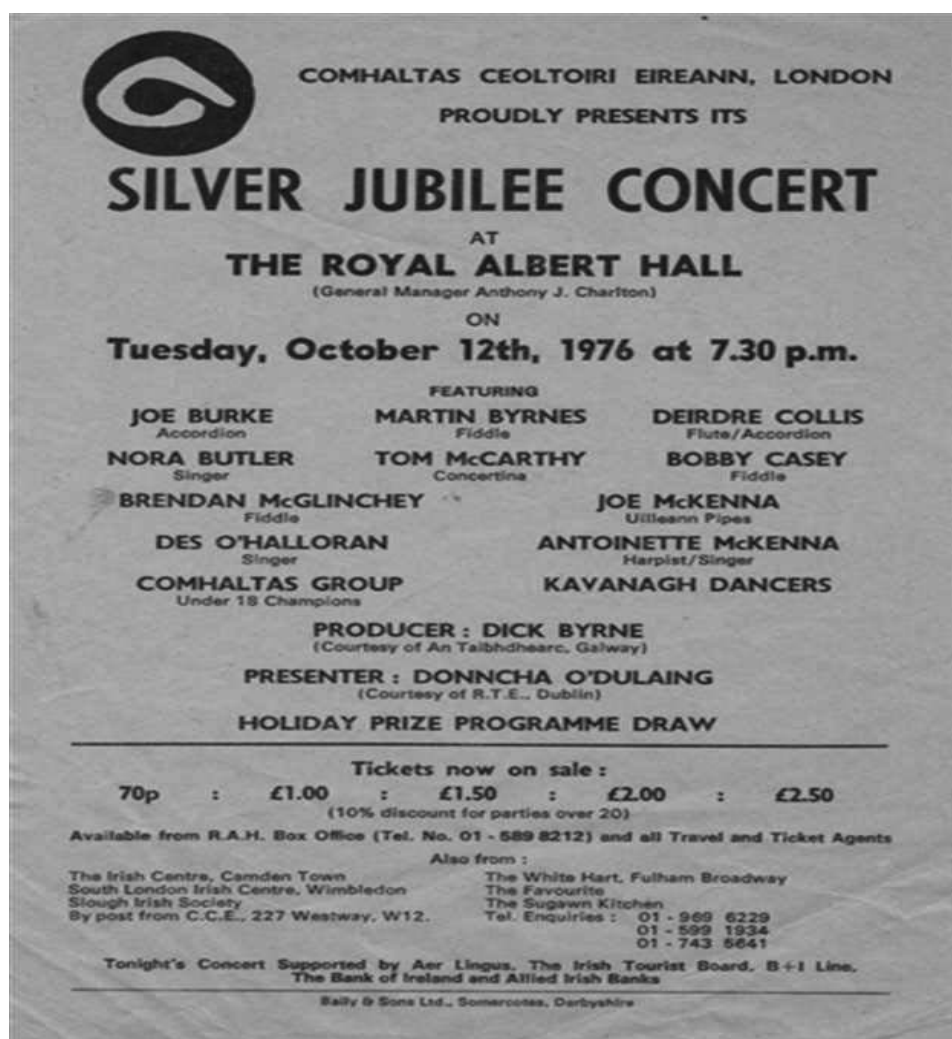


Figure 5.7 - Promotional Poster for Silver Jubilee Concert, Royal Albert Hall, October 12th, 1976.

(Source: Alan O'Leary, private collection)

the hall was sold out.¹⁴⁶ Most of the Irish builders mentioned above, who performed at this concert but were based in London mainly worked in construction and are now regarded as highly influential figures in Irish traditional music globally.



Figure 5.8 – Traditional Irish Music Teachers in London: (Above) Brendan Mulkere, (Below, left) at drums, Tommy Maguire.

(Source: (Above) Courtesy of Mulkere, Egan, Coffey families, (below, Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.782)

Finally, during the 1970s and 1980s traditional music classes were taught to a large and distinct community of mainly second-generation Irish children in various locations around London and Luton. Clare man Brendan Mulkere was one of two very prominent and successful music teachers at this period of London's development. The other, Tommy Maguire, an accordion-player from Glenfarne in Co. Leitrim, was a carpenter who spent his 'day-job' in construction. He held his classes in the Irish Centre, in Camden Square, the central bastion of

¹⁴⁶ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.467; Online post by Michael Baynes, 11th December, 2017 (accessed 12th December, 2017, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10157372612674815&set=a.10150173325714815.365210.531459814&type=3&theater>).

post-war Irish cultural activity until the late 1990s. Most of the pupils sent to these music classes were the children of settled Irish builders.¹⁴⁷

5.5. ‘The Craic was good in Cricklewood’:¹⁴⁸ Dancehalls and Pubs.

By the end of World War One, the breaking down of social and class barriers meant that social dancing became hugely popular.¹⁴⁹ By the early 1950s, according to *The Economist*, up to four million people per week were visiting dancehalls throughout Britain, generating an annual revenue of around £25 million, substantially in excess of that of either broadcasting or football.¹⁵⁰ The immigrant Irish in interwar and post-war London probably saw as a benefit the freedom to go dancing in a social context and to meet and court members of the opposite sex unfettered by the strictures of parochial morality and self-righteous provincialism which ran through rural Irish society.

The development of identifiably ‘Irish’ dancehalls – there were sixty-three throughout London over the post-war period¹⁵¹ – was critical to the working of the ethnically-controlled construction economy and the networks associated with it. Such venues, whilst overwhelmingly popular among the migrants themselves, were inevitably viewed through a lens of suspicion by the morally-obsessed Irish state of the time: ‘Irish-owned dancehalls [...] are purely commercial concerns with little or no interest in the general welfare of their patrons’.¹⁵² This was, of course, true but nonetheless these dancehalls became the social and cultural centres of many of the Irish migrant builders’ lives, providing communal meeting places, function halls for county associations, GAA functions, weddings, baptisms and funerals and more importantly recruitment and employment centres.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Tributes to great fiddle player and teacher, Brendan Mulkere’ in *The Irish World*, available online: <https://www.theirishworld.com/great-fiddle-player-and-teacher-brendan-mulkere-dies/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CAn%20Irish%20rights%20activist%2C%20record,and%20Claire%20Egan%20amongst%20others.> (15 Oct, 2020).

¹⁴⁸ Line from Dominic Behan’s song, ‘McAlpine’s Fusiliers’, see Appendix G, p.5.

¹⁴⁹ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.245.

¹⁵⁰ James Nott, *Going to the Palais: A Social And Cultural History of Dancing and Dance*, (Oxford, 2015), p.1

¹⁵¹ See Appendix C, p.15.

¹⁵² Letter, Irish Embassy London to Dept. of Foreign Affairs, 4th November 1952, papers of Dept. of Taoiseach, S11582, NAI.

There is strong evidence that the commercial dancehalls of the post-war era were largely funded from subcontractors in the building and civil engineering industry. Hall's research found that, 'One of the commonest scams was 'dead men's wages' [...] A small minority were able to set up thriving businesses in construction and even dance halls'.¹⁵³ Michael Mc (OI#6) learned that 'A lot of the big fellows got their start from the scams that went on' with muck-away lorries and aggregate deliveries in the Southbank Project in the 1950s.¹⁵⁴ Frank McLoughlin, who, as a teenager, had worked at *The 32 Club* owned by Kerry men Jim Fox and Bill Fuller;

reckoned all the dancehalls were run by sub-contractors in the building trade and were set up originally with money from the building trade and particularly dead men's money (money the subbies had collected from the contractors as wages for workers who had never existed)...Tom Costello, who ran the 32 Club in Harlesden, was a subbie, and Tommy Healy said that McAvaddy and O'Hara, who ran Irish dance halls in Croydon were sub-contractors.¹⁵⁵

Many of the Irish dancehall promoters and impresarios were indeed former labourers, builders and developers or had strong connections with the construction and engineering world via the networks of kinship and friendship which were the atypical feature of the EEE.¹⁵⁶ They often multitasked as both recruiters and agents of building industry employment and promoters and managers of dancehalls. Mick Gannon, from Mayo, was one of the pioneers of the Irish dancehall in London, establishing the Banba in Kilburn and the Blarney in Tottenham Court Road just after the end of the Second World War. Mick had worked as a labourer, scaffolder and bricklayer before embarking on his new career in 1949.¹⁵⁷ Bill Fuller built a global portfolio of clubs and halls, owned the Buffalo in Camden Town, and in his early days during the war employed between two and three thousand men in his contracting business.¹⁵⁸ John Byrne who owned three dancehalls in London, including the legendary Galtymore in

¹⁵³ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.563.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.109.

¹⁵⁵ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.673.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Intro p.X.

¹⁵⁷ *The Western People*, 20 September, 1952, p.8

¹⁵⁸ Evidence varies as to the actual size of the workforce he employed in this period. See *Irish Independent*, 7 Aug, 2008, available online at <http://www.independent.ie/regionals/kerryman/news/death-of-real-kerry-legend-27377446.html>. See also Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music: A History Of Irish Music And Dance In London, 1800-1980 & Beyond*, (London, 2016), p.672 & fn1.

Cricklewood and the Emerald Harp in New Cross went on to develop, amongst other projects, the iconic O'Connell Bridge House in Dublin.¹⁵⁹



Figure 5.9 - Camden Town Underground station, Northern line. Exterior view showing bomb damage sustained to the Camden High Street facade of the station.

Irish men employed by the then embryonic Bill Fuller business empire - probably by Castlerock Properties Ltd, Fuller's property development company - are seen clearing rubble at station entrance and on the roof. The entrance to the Buffalo Club, owned and managed at that time by Bill Fuller, was originally on the opposing façade from this viewpoint. (Source: *Topical Press*, 17 Oct 1940. Location: Camden Town, NW1. (Photograph: London Transport Museum, Online Museum Image no: U32051, Inventory no: 1998/35652, available at :<http://www.ltmcollection.org/photos/photo/photo.html?> (accessed 16 Jan, 2016).

All the interviewees, particularly those who arrived in London before the 1960s, frequented most of the well-known dancehalls: The Buffalo, the Garryowen, the Banba, the Forum, the Gresham, the Round Tower and of course the Galtymore. Tom M (OI#1) worked for Byrne in the Galtymore in the 1970s and recalls that when they first got a licence to serve alcohol, in the early 1960s, 'it was a St. Patrick's night dance, [years later] the head barman told me they took a thousand pounds in the first two or three hours...some money!¹⁶⁰ He also talked of the fighting that occurred regularly. Likewise John F (OI#16) worked for Bill Fuller as a doorman in the Buffalo in the late 1960s and also confirmed 'there was six of us there; two on the door, two in the bars upstairs, and two on the floor...now...'twas hard work. West of

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Independent*, 3 Nov, 2013, available online at <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/crowds-mourn-kerryman-who-transformed-the-dublin-skyline-29721960.html>. See also *The Kerryman* (North Edition), 6 Nov 2013. Both Fuller and Byrne, incidentally, were from the same part of north Kerry.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.15, 20.

Ireland men coming in [...] you had two elements ...(sighs)...Ballycroy men [...] that didn't like the Bellmullet men, and none of them liked the Connemara men, right? So you had three factions'. Figures 5.10 to 5.14 give some further illustrations of the network of connections between construction work and the Irish dancehall scene. One migrant builder who experienced the heyday of the Irish dancehall observed that 'The people from the remote west, where there was the greatest hardship, were the people who made all the money in the Cricklewood-Kilburn area. They'd have made it and lost it [...] And all of them had two jobs. The pay packet was never opened – the ones I knew. They lived on their second job'.¹⁶¹ Figure 5.11 and Figure 5.12 illustrate this habit of 'double-jobbing' amongst migrant builders.



Figure 5.11 - Gerry O'Reilly, Galway, c.1958

(author's maternal uncle) – Top: Working as shuttering carpenter on site, Paddington. Bottom: Compering band and raffle in Galtymore Dancehall. (Source: author's private collection)



Figure 5.12 - The Buffalo Dance Hall in Camden Town in 1970.

Playing a session upstairs on a Friday Night was R to L: Johnny Minogue, Clare (accordion), Tom Cussen, Limerick (banjo), Seán McDonagh, Galway (concert flute) and Noel Prender (Guitar). Most of these musicians worked predominantly in the London construction industry by day. (Photo courtesy of Tom Cussen)

¹⁶¹ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.563.



Figure 5.10 - The Galtymore Dance Hall, 1957-1998–

Middle photograph, the singer standing in front of the piano in grey suit was Johnny Burke, (Clare), who worked his entire ‘day’ career for J. Murphy & Co.(Green Murphy). Most of the bands in the Galtymore and Hibernian worked construction by day.
 (Sources: Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*; Author’s personal collection)

During the 1960s, John Byrne expanded his dancehall and property development empire extensively. One addition was another famous London-Irish landmark, the Hibernian dancehall, on Fulham Broadway in west London. This was strategically located adjacent to two of the most influential migrant Irish pubs, The White Hart and the King's Head, both known for hosting traditional and folk Irish music from the early 1960s until the mid-1980s. The rollcall of musicians and singers who regularly frequented this triangle of Irish associative culture would rival anything seen in Ireland in that period.



Figure 5.11 - The Hibernian Club - adjacent to Fulham Broadway tube station, c. late 1950s/early 1960s

(Source: Alisdair McDonald, see <https://jamesrmacdonald.wordpress.com/alisdair-macdonald/> (accessed 5 Feb, 2018).

The defining cultural imagery of Irish builders outside of the construction or building site was the ‘Irish pub’ of which there were, by the 1970s and 1980s, some 130 scattered across London, ranging from those which regularly offered Irish-country and traditional Irish music to migrants,¹⁶² to those which headquartered or sponsored GAA events or clubs, to the larger Irish pubs such as the Archway Tavern, The Crown, The Half Moon, Biddy Mulligans and the World’s End which offered a range of social outlets and provided rendezvous points for many

¹⁶² Reg Hall recorded ninety-eight different pubs presenting traditional Irish music at various points over the post-war period, in all four corners of metropolitan London. That was an admittedly conservative estimate and there were arguably many more which presented Irish country and modern music, or which simply served as community meeting places. See Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.654-655. See also Appendix C, p.16.

migrants. Outside of the work environment, these pubs and clubs became the primary site of Irish associational culture in London. Brian Rooney, a London-Irish traditional musician and migrant builder from north Leitrim, who arrived in London since 1967, emphasised the importance of the pub to the Irish builder when interviewed about his life in London by TG4:

The pub had a great role; the Irish lads, they all helped each other out...’twas the jobcentre really - wasn’t it? - the pub. Y’know if you wanted a job you didn’t go to look in the paper or anything, you just ask someone and if they didn’t know, they’d know someone who *did* know where there was work. Sure there was no shortage of work.¹⁶³

In the era of ‘the lump’, when migrant builders shied away from bureaucracy of any kind, seeking anonymity and only dealing in cash payments, some pubs became cheque-clearing houses. Paddy Coyne recounted that at one stage he had a special arrangement made with the local branch of his high street retail bank to lodge an average of £80,000 per week in construction labour wages paid by cheque.¹⁶⁴ Paddy would convert their cheques at the rate of 2p in the pound which, if his estimate of weekly conversions is accurate would yield a commission of some £1,600 per week tax-free. John F (OI#16), who after working as a steel-fixer himself in the late 1960s went on to manage a number of major north London Irish enclave pubs – including the famous Archway Tavern on Holloway Road (Figure 5.12), one of the most iconic of the post-war London ‘Irish-houses’ - also recalled the remarkable profits to be made in the cheque-cashing system in the 1970s and 1980s:

It was me that brought the cheques business into the Archway, [...] We used to do between eighty and a hundred thousand a-week [...] I’d charge 2% up to a thousand and then 1% after that. There wasn’t that many – over a thousand - except the lorry men. [...] You had to be careful, if people got the wind that you were a soft touch they would try it on...and it was all Irish...all Irish.¹⁶⁵

The legendary status afforded to Cricklewood in the iconography of the Irish-in-London lies in two important sites of Irish associational culture, both of which persisted until the Celtic Tiger era of the mid-1990s and both of which were indelibly marked by their connection with

¹⁶³ ‘*An Godfather: Bryan Rooney*’, Sonta/ TG4 television documentary (2014 –Dir:James Clenaghan), 22.02mins.

¹⁶⁴ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.668. Paddy Coyne was a highly-regarded traditional musician amongst the Irish community in west London, and had the tenancy of a successful pub called the Half-Way House in Ealing for many years.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.379.



Figure 5.12 - Archway tavern, c.1985, one of the major sites of Irish associational culture. (source: Author's private collection)

Irish construction workers. The first of these was the Galtymore Dancehall (Figure 5.13) ; the second was the Crown Public House (Figure 5.13), the most notorious ‘call-on’ point for ‘lump’ subcontracting casual construction and engineering labour amongst the Irish and other ethnic minority communities throughout the post-war era.

Representations of Cricklewood – and particularly the Crown pub - in Irish narratives centre on the highly-stereotyped buccaneering navvy trope encapsulated in the Dubliner’s hugely influential version of *McAlpine’s fusiliers* eulogises drink culture and the mythical ‘craic’ associated with Irish versions of hedonism: ‘The craic was good in Cricklewood, when they wouldn't leave the Crown / With bottles flying and Biddies crying, sure Paddy was goin’ to town / Oh mother dear I'm over here and I'm never coming back / What keeps me here is the rake of beer, the women, and the craic’ ¹⁶⁶ The other end of this spectrum sees the more sombre lament for doomed youth penned by writer John .B. Keane in his 1962 play *Hut 42*: ‘Oh take him down to Cricklewood, to mortar, bricks and lime / And let him rot in Cricklewood until he serves his time / Oh Cricklewood, oh Cricklewood, you stole my youth away / For I was young

¹⁶⁶ Ronnie Drew, *Ronnie*, (Dublin, 2008), part 4, available at: <https://books.google.ie/books?id=i0aJyma3aOYC&pg=PT240&dq=craic+was+good+in+cricklewood&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwja8az564bKAhVEthQKHbHSAOcQ6wEINTAE#v=onepage&q=cricklewood&f=false> , (accessed 31 Dec 2015) – see also p.107

and innocent, but you were old and grey'¹⁶⁷ which is reminiscent of his fellow Kerryman Sigerson Clifford's refrain, 'Ah! I should have put a noose about the throat of time / And choked the passing of the hobnailed years'. For the majority of the post-war Irish builders neither of these representations probably bore any authentic resemblance to the spectrum of their lived experiences, save perhaps for occasional bouts of hedonism.



Figure 5.13 - The Crown Public House, Cricklewood Broadway, c.1989, at the height of post-war Irish ethnic labour market.
(Source: https://www.minder.org/locations/S07E03_FatalImpression.htm (accessed 5 Feb, 2018).

Another notorious venue in post-war London was the large public house at the corner of Kilburn High Road and Willesden Lane known as Biddu Mulligan's (Figure 5.17). In the 1970s and 1980s this pub became hugely popular with the migrant Irish population across north London and further afield, particularly as an early evening after-work drinking venue for construction workers. It also acquired a reputation for brawling and disturbances.¹⁶⁸ Originally named the Victoria Tavern, it changed to Biddu Mulligan's in the early 1970s in response to the growing impact of the Irish community on the social scene around Kilburn and Cricklewood. The pub had live music at weekends and was a hugely popular rival to the iconic venues such as the Galtymore and the Crown pub up the road in Cricklewood for most of the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ David Pierce, *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, (Cork, 2000), p.843 (note 3). See also Philip Howard, 'Work starts on £1m Irish Centre extension' in *The Times*, Tuesday, Nov 29, 1977; pg. 3

¹⁶⁸ Terence O (a teetotaler) and his brother Noel (OI#19 & 20) both discussed episodes outside Biddu Mulligan's pub in Kilburn. (Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.453-8.)

¹⁶⁹ Dick Weindling, Marianne Collom, *Kilburn and Willesden History*, available at <http://kilburnandwillesdenhistory.blogspot.ie/> [accessed 17 Oct, 2016].



Figure 5.14 - Biddy Mulligan's Public House c.1974 (Photo: Getty Images)

Irrespective of ethnicity, heavy alcohol and tobacco consumption have long been recognised as symbols of working-class machismo in Britain and Ireland, with the capacity to tolerate tough working conditions and take big risks whilst also consuming excessive alcohol and tobacco being seen as admiral traits.¹⁷⁰ The problems of alcohol addiction, smoking, fighting and gambling were significant in the Irish-in-London construction cohort and were amplified into tropes in the process of cultural representation. By the late 1940s and into the 1950s, the press reportage on the conduct of migrant Irish builders certainly lived up to the stock formation of the hard-drinking, reckless, aggressive, profane and rakish navy. Whether such a reputation was well-deserved is a moot point. My own sample research of reported criminality amongst the migrant Irish labouring class in north London newspapers in the 1940s – 1950s shows seventy-six offences reported, fifty-eight of which specifically mention offenders being labourers.¹⁷¹ Ten of them identified as Irish (although it is likely, given the names and addresses, that most of them were migrant Irishmen), fifty-one involved fighting - half of those were pub fights – and a further twenty-four involved additional express charges of being ‘drunk and disorderly’. The average age of the offenders was thirty-three.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ McIvor, *Working Lives*, pp.89-90. See also, for example, Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.10.

¹⁷¹ As shown in chapter 2, the interwar and wartime settlements of Irish builders spread outwards radially from the area bounded by Camden Town/Kentish Town and areas north of King’s Cross/Euston.

¹⁷² Appendix C, p.11-14.

The extent to which the reporting of Irish misdemeanours resulted from preconceived English racial stereotyping remains uncertain; clearly in the minds of many English people Irishness was associated ‘with drink, fighting and dirt’.¹⁷³ After all, as Clair Wills aptly puts it:

Unreliable, shiftless, drunken, dirty, in the early years flea-ridden – attitudes towards the Irish poor were conditioned by long-held prejudices against Britain’s violent and ungrateful neighbours. Those given to bigotry and intolerance had after all recently been proved right about the Irish bent towards low-down treachery, when Ireland remained steadfastly neutral and refused to help Britain during the war.¹⁷⁴

Nonetheless, research shows the propensity of Irish migrant males to become drunk and disorderly, a misdemeanour which Delaney wryly observed ‘was truly an Irish pastime’ and which often led to more serious crimes like assault, wounding, criminal damage and theft.¹⁷⁵ In a north London newspaper court-report from 1948 headed ‘Troublesome Irishmen’, one magistrate criticised the lack of any official organisation to look after the welfare of Irishmen in Britain, going on to say, ‘one had respect for Irish people, but the samples he was getting before him were “beyond the pale; some of them behaved like savages [...] This court is being packed with people from Ireland committing all sorts of offences here and doing just what they like, and we cannot get rid of them” ’¹⁷⁶ March 17th, 1950, saw the Marylebone magistrate, having dealt with a large number of drunks, predominantly shamrock-wearing Irish, comment sardonically ‘Are the effects of St. Patrick’s day nearly over now?’¹⁷⁷ Around the same time in Birmingham, the Young Christian Workers Association, which monitored the behaviour of migrant Irish in Britain for the Irish government, reported forty-eight of seventy-five people appearing before magistrates for drunkenness one Monday morning were Irish and that ‘drink made the otherwise congenial Celt “more argumentative and very prone to fighting” ’¹⁷⁸ Almost a decade later in a remark very similar to that of the magistrate in 1948, the chairman

¹⁷³ J Rex and R. Moore, *Race, Community and Conflict*, (Oxford, 1967) cited in Mary J. Hickman, ‘Reconstructing deconstructing ‘race’: British political discourses about the Irish in Britain’ in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, (1998) 21:2, pp.288-307, p.298.

¹⁷⁴ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.5-6.

¹⁷⁵ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.181 citing John R. Lambert, *Crime, Police and Race Relations: A Study in Birmingham*, (London, 1970), p.125.

¹⁷⁶ *St. Pancras Chronicle*, 20 August, 1948, p.5.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, March 24th, 1950, p.3.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Some Notes on the Situation of Irish Workers in Birmingham’, Report Prepared by Maurice Foley, Young Christian Workers’ Association, (July, 1951), DFA 402/222, NAI, quoted in Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.182.

of the London Sessions court commented that ‘this court is infested with Irishmen who came here to commit offences and the more that can be persuaded to go back the better’.¹⁷⁹

Media reporting changed as Irish settlement progressed in the post-war era, with the local press reports of drunk and disorderly Irishmen in the 1940s and 1950s more-or-less dying out by the mid-1960s. Nonetheless alcohol consumption amongst male Irish migrants remained problematic throughout the post-war period, with one analysis in 1973 finding that Irish males were five times more likely to be admitted to English psychiatric hospitals because of alcohol dependency than indigenous males.¹⁸⁰ Mac Amhlaigh’s memoir is replete with references to various pubs and the effects – sometimes soothing, mostly violent – of alcohol consumption on the young migrants in his company.¹⁸¹ Cowley also references alcoholism as a major factor, particularly in the life-trajectories of the ‘lumpers’ and unsettled migrant Irish builders and there can be little doubt that alcohol addiction was, indeed, a hugely detrimental feature of the lives of a small, but nonetheless significant, proportion of the post-war contingent.¹⁸² He quotes an interview with Bill Brennan a former resident of Arlington House where he states, ‘I started drinking – I drank for forty years – everything I earned – good money. It was into the van of a morning, out of the van in the evening, no such thing as, ‘Will we go to the café?’; out of the van, into the pub...[sic] you might have a few drinks, or you might do the session’.¹⁸³

The relationship of the Irish migrant builder community to alcohol continually ebbed and flowed as the decades passed after the war, but remained strained. Sean G (OI#14) remarked as late as 1987 how the Irish migrant males were behaving around Cricklewood and Kilburn on his first summer in London as ‘greenhorn’: ‘I was eighteen, I enjoyed the work but the drink culture, my eyes were opened up big time to the carry-on of the Irish over there, I couldn’t believe it like, what I was seeing. I suppose it was connected in a way to the drink culture, but I just felt that the Irish let themselves go in the part of London I was living in’. He describes a social milieu structured around heavy-drinking and delinquency: ‘to be honest...I

¹⁷⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, May 4th, 1957, quoted in Jackson, *The Irish in Britain*, p.157 and Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.181.

¹⁸⁰ Brendan M. Walsh and Dermot Walsh. ‘Validity Indices of Alcoholism: A Comment from Irish Experience.’ In *The British Journal of Preventive and Social Medicine*, 27.1 (1973), pp.18-26, p.20.

¹⁸¹ E.g. Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.8, 10.

¹⁸² See for example, Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#21), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, pp.509-20.

¹⁸³ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.150. quoting an interview with Bill Brennan, a post-war Irish migrant who became a resident of Arlington House, the renowned hostel for itinerant working men in Camden Town.

didn't enjoy that summer because I couldn't believe how the Irish were letting themselves go, and I was a very proud young Irish lad'. Referring to one incident where 'bouncers' savagely beat a young drunken Irishman outside the Crown pub in Cricklewood, 'they pulled him outside and they hammered him up against the wall, through the window so everybody could see it, and nobody done a thing to intervene - including myself like! - And the sense of guilt I felt over that is still with me today'.¹⁸⁴

Such incidents, which were well-known and common amongst Irish migrants,¹⁸⁵ suggest that perhaps the real distinction between the 1940s/1950s and the later decades lay in the development of the voluntary ethnic enclave to an extent where, for example, dancehalls and pubs became partially self-policing. Dancehall and major pub-owners owners such as Bill Fuller and John Byrne recognised gradually that policing their own venues with tough security men kept the Metropolitan Police away from their businesses, and avoided attention from local authorities. Interviewed in 1997, Fuller recalled when he first leased the Buffalo Club after arriving in interwar London, 'I went to the chief of police in Holmes Road. He was Inspector Harris and a hard man to bargain with, but I said: 'I'll make a deal with you: if you ever get called in to sort out a fight here, I'll put the lock back on the gate'.¹⁸⁶

However, the great majority of Irish migrant males employed in construction did not develop long-term alcoholic dependency, or alternatively overcame any such tendencies at later stages of their lives. Of the twenty-one collected oral histories, three were reformed alcoholics – all of whom became addicted when they migrated to London, but subsequently stopped drinking, mainly after finding long-term partners; three were lifetime teetotallers (two of whom were Pioneers) and the remaining fifteen were alcohol drinkers varying from light to moderate to heavy at various stages of their lives.¹⁸⁷ Although anecdotal and insignificant in statistical terms I would suggest the percentages from this sample are probably broadly representative of Irish migrant builders as a cohort in London. The atypical trajectory of the post-war migrant male started with heavy drinking (bordering on alcohol dependency) in the earliest years of

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, pp.291-2.

¹⁸⁵ The present author personally witnessed several such incidents in the late 1980s and early 1990s in establishments such as the Forum Dancehall and the Half Moon Pub, both in Holloway Road and in the Galtymore in Cricklewood.

¹⁸⁶ *The Times*, 22 August, 2008, p.60.

¹⁸⁷ This information was provided by individuals in strictest confidence and is not included as part of the interview transcripts in Appendix A. For this reason individual interview ID numbers have not been attributed.

entry into the ‘lump’ system; often resulting from a combination of youthful naiveté, social isolation, loneliness, lack of social activities beyond the confines of the pub, and the performative expectations and pressures of gaining acceptance within the work environment.¹⁸⁸ Gradual settlement into life in London then usually tempered these bad habits, with domestic partnership, marriage and family critical to the potential outcomes for the single male migrant builder.

One important and often overlooked contrast to the stereotypical narrative above was construction-worker membership of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (PTAA) – commonly known amongst Irish Catholics as ‘pioneers’ – which catered for teetotal Catholics under the auspices of the Hierarchy in London. During the post-war period, there were several hundred male members of this organisation who worked in the construction industry – most of whom never drank alcohol either pre- or post-migration, consequently subverting completely the stock narrative of the drunken navvy.¹⁸⁹ The formation of a London-wide branch network of the PTAA organisation is yet another example of the transfer and adaption of the parochial structure of Irish rural and town life and has its roots in the temperance and abstinence movements of the Irish Catholic devotional revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁹⁰

The adaption of Irish rural culture in London is an aspect of Irish migration history also covered extensively by both Sara Goek and Reg Hall their research into Irish traditional music.¹⁹¹ Hall argued that the music played by these men ‘was deeply rooted in their background back home, but in their new city environment they found space for themselves in the pubs, dance halls and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann meetings for their music to flourish in ways that perhaps have never been equalled’.¹⁹² Michael Burke and Tommy Healy both from outside Tubbercurry (Sligo), very close to the Mayo border, were members of the earliest post-

¹⁸⁸ Thiel, *Builders*, p.75, pp.91-2.

¹⁸⁹ Maureen Hampton (ed.), *Thanks for the Memory: A History of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association, London Region, 1949-2000*, (London, 2001), pp.20-42.

¹⁹⁰ ‘A Brief history of the Pioneer Association’ available at: <https://www.pioneerassociation.ie/about/> (15 October, 2020).

¹⁹¹ Goek, ‘“I never would return again to plough the rocks of Bawn’’, pp.157-74; Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.560-729.

¹⁹² Michael Burke was the father of legendary traditional fiddle-player Kevin Burke (Bothy Band, Patrick Street, Planxty). Tommy Healy was a spalpín migrant from the early post-war period and also a noted traditional musician – see chapter 3.1.

war *seasonal-sojourner-settler* migrations and also ended up in London at this time, working for Tersons. They both recall traditional music being played by musicians all working for that company. Healy recalls one music session in a north-London pub around the mid-1950s where all thirteen of the participant musicians worked together for them [Tersons].¹⁹³

From around 1960 until the late 1980s legendary traditional music venues such as the Favourite, The Cock Tavern, The Half Moon, The Shakespeare, The Mulberry Tree and the Victoria (Holloway), The White Hart and King’s Head (Fulham Broadway) together with a litany of pubs across London including the: Bedford Arms, Archway Tavern, Blackstock, Hop Poles, Halfway House, Willesden Junction, William IV, Fiddler’s Elbow, Good Mixer, Stag’s Head, Swan and Auld Triangle all serviced Irish migrants construction workers with regular performances of traditional music.¹⁹⁴ It was often said back then that there was much better music to be heard in London than in Ireland’.¹⁹⁵



Figure 5.15 - Traditional Irish Music session - Cock Tavern, Holloway Road, 1970.

(Source: *Irish Post*, 6 June, 1970)

¹⁹³ Reg Hall, *Irish Music And Dance In London, 1890-1970: A Socio-Cultural History*, (original) PhD Thesis, University of Sussex, (Sussex, 1994), p.316.

¹⁹⁴ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.560-652; See also Appendix C, p.16 for a comprehensive list of Irish music pubs in London during the post-war period.

¹⁹⁵ Reg Hall, Accompanying notes to Topic Records Ltd ‘Voice of the People series’, *“It Was Mighty”: The Early Days of Irish Music in London*, (London, 2015), p.4.

The importance in cultural and aesthetic terms of the traditional Irish music pub to a substantial cohort of the migrant Irish builders lies in a much deeper psychological and emotional vein than that of mere social engagement and alcohol consumption:

Two Kerry men, Willie O’Shea and Jimmy Cotter told me that they would not miss the Sunday morning or Friday sessions in ‘The Favourite’ unless they were “on the flat of the back”. Willie O’Shea said; “If you are a traditional music fan you will walk from one end of London to the other just to get to ‘The Favourite’ especially on a Sunday morning. The music is unique and the atmosphere would do any man good after a week’s work [...] It has become something of a tradition with us here in London and maybe it is kind of hard to explain this to people who have not experienced the sessions.”¹⁹⁶

As Reg Hall explains it, traditional music and Irish labour were inextricable; ‘These groupings of people for informal music-making were based on relationships created by common interest in music and [...] common employment. They were seldom the dutiful bonds of kinship and friendship with neighbours that operated in rural Ireland. They did represent, however, new bonds of friendship forged in London’.¹⁹⁷

5.6. ‘The Emigrant’s Friend’ ?¹⁹⁸ The Irish Builder and The Church.

An unpublished early verse of that anthem of ‘Irish navvying’, *McAlpine’s Fusiliers* gives an impression of the attitude to religion which the ‘pinchers’ and ‘long-distance men’ of the early post-war migrations outwardly displayed for public consumption. Old-time spailpíns such as the original author, Martin Henry and his compatriot, Darkie Finn knew the verse but it was never transcribed to the commercial version.¹⁹⁹ It suggests – somewhat profanely - that foremen and gangers were, seemingly, not always too pleased with migrants’ religious observances.

¹⁹⁶ Tom Tobin, *Irish Weekly Examiner*, 31 July 1980, cited in Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.645.

¹⁹⁷ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.575.

¹⁹⁸ Nickname given to Father John Dore, who claimed on RT’s ‘Seven Days’ programme in 1967 that attendance at masses all over north-west London were ‘virtually 100% (*Irish Independent*, 19 October, 1967, p.9).

¹⁹⁹ John J. O’Connor, ‘Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine’s Fusiliers’ in *Ireland’s Own*, (17 Sep, 2018), available at <https://www.irelandsown.ie/mystery-of-the-man-who-wrote-mcalpines-fusiliers/> (accessed 23 Feb, 2019).

And it came to pass, we should go to Mass, on the Immaculate Conception / The foreman met us at the gate, and gave us a terrible reception / “Get down the sewers, ye Kerry hoors, and never mind your prayers / For the only God is a well filled-hod, with McAlpine’s Fusiliers”²⁰⁰

The verse exudes a sense of capitalist industrialism, dismissive of religious observances. However, like all canonical or stock tropes of this cohort, the verse probably gives a somewhat false representation of the relationship between Irish builders and Catholicism.

McIvor observed that ‘“sectarian ethnicity” transferred with migration from Ireland to the UK’ resulted in ‘markedly fewer Catholics in managerial and professional occupations and proportionally more in the bottom end of the employment spectrum in lesser skilled manual jobs’.²⁰¹ Moreover, there was a long-standing tradition of sectarian discrimination in employment in industrial heartlands; in general terms Catholic occupational clustering was in poorer status work where physical injury and chronic occupational disease were prevalent, such as building and civil engineering.²⁰² An overwhelming majority of the post-war Irish migrants in these activities were nominally Roman Catholic.²⁰³ As with virtually all other aspects of the Irish migrant story in London, patterns of religious practice adapted to time and location.²⁰⁴

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as chapters three and four demonstrated, the acute shortage of accommodation after the war meant significant numbers of Irish migrant construction workers were accommodated in temporary ‘out of town’ camps – many would subsequently settle in London. Sykes established that in these men were, on the whole, ‘very devout; many prayed openly night and morning and displayed religious pictures in their lockers; all of them attended mass on Sundays’.²⁰⁵ Mac Amhlaigh, for example, recounts many instances of exceptional efforts to complete his religious observances in spite of work

²⁰⁰ O’Connor, ‘Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine’s Fusiliers’, *ibid.*

²⁰¹ McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.119.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Some were probably Protestant, Jewish or non-denominational Christians, and perhaps Atheist but these were all a tiny minority.

²⁰⁴ For analysis of Catholicism within the London Irish community see, amongst others, Daly, *The Slow Failure*, pp.257-328; Patricia Kennedy, *Welcoming the Stranger: Irish Migrant Welfare in Britain Since 1957*, (Dublin, 2015); Enda Delaney, ‘The Churches and Irish Emigration to Britain, 1921-60’ in *Archivum Hibernicum*, Vol. 52, (1998), pp.98-114.

²⁰⁵ A.J.M. Sykes, ‘Navvies: Their Social Relations’ in *Sociology*, Nr. 3 (1969), p.161.

commitments: ‘Sunday morning I had to get up very early as I had to get to first Mass since I had to be on duty until one o’clock’.²⁰⁶ This is hardly controversial since these men were raised in a new state dominated by Catholic fundamentalism throughout the early and mid-twentieth century. Indeed the post-revolutionary Irish state revered Roman Catholic adherence and social teachings above all other aspects of civil society.²⁰⁷

At the colossal Isle of Grain project (which employed up to 4,000 Irish migrants) in Kent, in September 1952 Robert Stevenson, a Jesuit priest spoke of packed congregations, renewed vows, sermons, devotions and an epiphany of good behaviour breaking out after a week’s evangelising, much to the temporary relief and grudging admiration of McAlpine’s English managers. As Delaney observed there was a certain irony in this (albeit temporary) elysian ‘vortex of self-renewal’ happening ‘in the apotheosis of modernity, a massive building site in the middle of nowhere’.²⁰⁸ By the mid-1950s, such was the extent of this form of encampment that the Hierarchy developed the Camp Chaplaincies Scheme to cater for these construction workers. One of the major encampments this scheme dealt with was the M1 motorway project, which had a workforce peak of 18,000 of which between 3,000 and 6,000 were probably Irish migrant builders.²⁰⁹ One British worker on the project recalled, ‘there was also an Irish priest on the M1, who visited the workers ‘for the craic’ and gave mass services during the week, for example a Wednesday morning at the Leighton Buzzard hostel’.²¹⁰ Actually there were two priests, a Father Nolan from Kerry and a Father McPartland from Armagh, to give Mass to workers each week at the various hostels.²¹¹

Conversely, however, one of the major issues raised by the Irish Hierarchy and the state, in its efforts to stem emigration, was the reported fall-off in religious observances as settlement gradually unfolded.²¹² Jack Gleeson, then chairman of MJ Gleeson, intervened pointedly in a minor furore which erupted in the Irish media in October 1967 – probably the zenith of Irish migrant construction activity in the post-war era. RTE aired a TV documentary entitled ‘Seven

²⁰⁶ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navy*, p.11.

²⁰⁷ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, (Dublin, 2004), p.xxvi-xxxiii

²⁰⁸ Robert L Stevenson, ‘The Irish in Britain’ in *Christus Rex*, 9, no.3 (1955), p.203, cited in Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.139-40.

²⁰⁹ Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, pp.81-4.

²¹⁰ Linda Gray et al, ‘Building The M1 Motorway’, p.32.

²¹¹ K. O’Shea (Fr), *The Irish Emigrant Chaplaincy Scheme in Britain, 1957-1982*, (Naas, 1985), pp.32-3.

²¹² Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, pp.34-6.

Days' which interviewed Dublin men working in construction and seemingly not attending Mass. Gleeson was outraged at this claim, vehemently denying RTE's claims and pointing out that both Irish and British contractors were at great pains to provide Catholic chapel facilities on-site on their more remote projects specifically to cater for migrant religious obligations. Meanwhile Father John Dore, a priest known as 'the emigrant's friend' remarked of the RTÉ programme that it was not typical and that there was 'no need for parents at home to worry'.²¹³ Presumably this was the Church of the Sacred Heart in Quex Road, Kilburn, which, by the late 1960s, was seeing an attendance of 12,000 people each Sunday, the vast majority of whom were Irish migrants.²¹⁴

The Irish Catholic Church has been described as 'both a bureaucratic hierarchical institution and a transnational network that promotes migrant integration and welfare via "network-making power" '; this is self-evidently true of the church's work with Irish migrants to Britain.²¹⁵ The Catholic Church both in Ireland and Britain did far more than the Irish state in the early post-war period for the welfare and support of Irish citizens. In 1942, Archbishop McQuaid founded the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau to help newly-emigrant Irish with family welfare, childcare and social and moral welfare.²¹⁶ The Irish Priests' Committee was formed by a number of clergy within the Bureau and between 1947 and 1955 was instrumental in the setting-up of the London Irish Centre, which still remains one of the key sites of Irish cultural activity in London.²¹⁷ From this central focal-point of Irish welfare and culture, the Hierarchy was able to further marshal the growing number of County Associations which were gradually constituted during the 1950s into a central Council of Irish County Associations.²¹⁸

There were around thirty Catholic Churches in twenty-two parishes in the London region (Westminster & Brentwood) area at this time and most of these had pre-existing social infrastructure from the first-wave assimilated London-Irish communities, especially those in

²¹³ *Irish Independent*, 19 October, 1967, p.9

²¹⁴ Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.169.

²¹⁵ Breda Gray, 'Migrant Integration and the Network-Making Power of the Irish Catholic Church' in Mary Gilmartin, Allen White (Eds.), *Migrations: Ireland in a Global World*, (Manchester, 2013), pp.55-79, p.55.

²¹⁶ Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, p.56.

²¹⁷ Harrison, *The Scattering*, pp.31-51.

²¹⁸ Harrison, *The Scattering*, pp.44-51.

the east-end of London, where the largest pre-Second World War settlement took place.²¹⁹ These social systems began to decay in the interwar period as a result of assimilation, but in the post-war decades congregations were reinvigorated by new immigrants from the mailboat generation. Many Catholic parish churches established new parish halls, and indeed new churches and parishes were built, together with cultural centres and social clubs. In Luton, for example, because of the changing demographic and the spread of Irish migrant settlement outwards from the centre, the number of Catholic parish churches grew from two to eight in the post-war period.²²⁰ In general terms parish social clubs were regularly frequented by Irish migrant builders, who partook in dances, darts leagues, GAA activities, twenty-five drives, bingo and assorted parochial events.

The parochial work of clergy such as Eamonn Casey was also highlighted by Michael Mc, (OI#6), who was in London in the 1950s and 60s: ‘We used to go to Mass sometimes in Quex Road in Kilburn; Father (later Bishop!) Casey [...] did marvellous work for the Irish in London at that time. He got Irish tradesmen to do up some of the bomb-damaged houses in or around Kilburn or West Hampstead.’²²¹ In the early 1960s Casey also pioneered a radical savings bank scheme – the Slough Savings Club Housing Aid Scheme - to allow Irish migrants, many of whom were builders themselves, to buy their own homes.²²² Similar schemes were developed later by clergy such as Fathers John Dore and Paul Byrne, the latter of whom went on to develop Catholic Housing Aid across England, and was the first director of housing charity, Shelter in 1969.²²³

Historians are agreed that the culture of devout and dogmatic adherence did not really begin to change until later in the post-war period.²²⁴ As the decades unfolded through the 1950s,

²¹⁹ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.23, pp.277-90; Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, p.87

²²⁰ Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.157.

²²¹ Interview with Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.8. William Barrett, a migrant to Britain in 1953 corroborated this in a letter to the *Sunday Independent*, *Sunday Independent*, (22 Nov, 2016).

²²² Harrison, *The Scattering*, pp.52-54; see also Kennedy, *Welcoming the Stranger* and Spencer, *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants*, pp.34-6.

²²³ Harrison, *The Scattering*, pp.72-73.

²²⁴ For discussions on this issue see, *inter alia*, Joe Cleary, ‘The Catholic Twilight’ in Eamon Maher, Eugene O'Brien, (Eds.), *Tracing the Cultural Legacy of Irish Catholicism: From Galway to Cloyne and Beyond*, (Manchester, 2017), p.209-214; and Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism Since 1950: The Undoing of a Culture*, (Dublin, 2004), p.xxvi-xxxiii.

1960s and 1970s, in keeping with the realities of urban modernity and the major societal changes of those decades, devotional Catholicism probably became less important to most of these men; as another anthemic folk-song of the 1970s Irish migrations puts it, ‘There’s four shares a room and we work hard for the crack / And sleeping late on Sundays I never get to Mass’.²²⁵ In stark contrast to the relatively mild criticism directed at male recalcitrance of religious observance, Redmond presciently observed that the harshest opprobrium about the Irish in Britain becoming less devout was largely directed towards women. The national and Catholic press in Ireland ‘developed a version of ‘truth’ about women and their alleged behaviour which painted them in the worst possible light’.²²⁶

Interviewees did not generally express strong feelings either way about their Catholicism; religion and the highly masculine, industrialised process of construction do not sit easily together. Several were regular Mass-goers, but did not consider themselves devout. A number had also frequented parochial social clubs for many years, or been part of church-orientated organisations such as the PTAA, the Legion of Mary or the Knights of St. Columba. Tom M (OI#1) and John H (OI#17) had both helped to construct their parochial social club in an old disused crypt at the rear of their church in the early 1980s. Several interviewees had, over decades, assisted and contributed to parish activities both by providing their services as builders and with monetary contributions. The Dioceses of Westminster and Brentwood which between them oversee most of the Catholic parishes where the settled Irish communities grew in the post-war period were also employers in their own right, having extensive property interests across the metropolis, and not insubstantial amounts of their building and maintenance requirements were contracted to Irish builders over the decades.²²⁷

5.7. Conclusion.

The types of associational culture practiced by Irish builders in London did not differ radically from the wider cultural practices of Irish people everywhere. As Hall and Delaney

²²⁵ ‘It’s a Long Way from Clare to Here’, Composed by Ralph McTell, released on his 1976 Album ‘Right Side Up’.

²²⁶ Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.129.

²²⁷ Interviews with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), pp.51-2; Paddy B, (OI#12), County Mayo, (14 Sept. 2016), pp.256-7, Appendix A.

both separately noted, ‘The young immigrants in London quite rightly saw themselves as up-and-coming, facing a new life in a strange new environment, but they actually carried a deep imprint of the ways of their parents and grandparents’. and they ‘adjusted to life in Britain by re-creating the heady atmosphere of home’.²²⁸ However, I contend that as a result of the auto-segregation engendered by the construction industry generally and Irish labour specifically, the ethnocentric focus of these cultural habits – particularly cultural patriotism, accommodation patterns, alcohol abuse and pub culture – was more intense amongst Irish migrant construction workers. Irish migrant culture in London did not precisely mirror home; indeed it could not, because of the change from rural to urban life. Aspects of rural Irish culture – social interaction, music and song, pub culture, sports and religious observance – were adapted to suit the changing post-war modernity of London and the evolving atmosphere of cultural plurality these migrants encountered. This process also modified existing kinship networks in rural western Irish society as new networks were implemented through the emigration process.²²⁹

The voluntary enclave and its associated socio-economic structures grew out of, and was largely anchored in, the development of the Irish migrant construction labour market functioning as a segment of the London and UK construction economies. Ruan *et al* theorise, in terms of Social Network Analysis, that ‘individuals, by their agency, create social structures while, at the same time, social structures develop an institutionalised reality that constrains and shapes the behaviour of the individuals embedded in them’.²³⁰ Applying this idea, I contend that the wider Irish community’s socio-economic networks were rooted in, and dependent upon, an efficient and expansionist construction business sector. The bespoke and diffused nature of construction and civil engineering work – in a male-dominated industry with an ethnic and class-bound hierarchy of mainly indigenous British regional and head-office management – militated against integration. Instead a fragmented and de-unionised supply-chain dominated by subcontracting, where productive resources worked almost entirely in gang systems, perpetuated innate enclavic tendencies amongst the labouring Irish migrants. They consequently maintained a higher degree of self-segregation and, by and large, the supporting

²²⁸ Hall, “*It Was Mighty*”, p.5; Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.170.

²²⁹ David Fitzpatrick, ‘Ireland since 1870’, in R. F Foster (Ed.), *The Oxford History of Ireland*, (New York, 2001), p.176.

²³⁰ Ruan, X., Ochieng, E.G. And Price, A.D.F., ‘The evaluation of social network analysis application's in the UK construction industry’ in Egbu, C. and Lou, E.C.W. (eds), *Proceedings 27th Annual ARCOM Conference, 5-7 September 2011*, (Bristol, 2011), pp.423-32.

structures of the Irish-in-London community, patronised and financed by those self-same builders, did likewise. The system of interconnected Irish-owned construction firms and the underlying multi-tiered subcontracting networks that supplied labour to those firms (and, indirectly the larger UK firms) were at the core of the ethnic niche-economy's concomitant social structures which, by the mid-1960s, encompassed the lives of the majority of Irish migrant labouring men.

Roy Foster, speaking of the writer JM O'Neill's work, described the Irish construction world at this time as 'a revelation of the London-Irish world of people living on the 'lump', of everything in cash, of people with shadowy pasts and behind it all a kind of clientelist mafia-boss relationship and also a slightly sinister kind of politics [...] the London-Irish building site world lent itself so perfectly to this'.²³¹ Read together with the descriptions in chapter three of the political machinations of the Gallaghers, John Byrne and Joe Murphy in 1960s Ireland,²³² it is not difficult to see a pattern of socio-economic hierarchy and ethnic nepotism emerging. O'Connor refers to a similar – and possibly connected – network of 'middlemen' labour contractors in the early 1950s who created an 'Irish Mafia' in the seasonal-agricultural migrant community in Scotland.²³³ What, from without, often seemed a culture of venality and low cunning amongst Irish builders networking across business and associational culture is, I contend, something more complex, rooted in the embers of British colonialism in Ireland and what one historian called 'a sense of belligerent victimhood'.²³⁴ Those wealthy and powerful entrepreneurs who unintentionally and opportunistically created this web of interlinked ethnic support structures from the ruins of post-war London were the socio-economic apex of the Irish community in London. In the dominant patriarchy of the time those males who held sway in how most disposable income was earned and spent were largely apolitical in practice and moderate cultural nationalists by nature. Nonetheless, at least initially, they held no allegiance whatsoever to their new domicile.

²³¹ Profile of J.M. O'Neill in 'Imprint – the Book Show'; *The Loopline Film Collection TV series*, available online at: <https://ifiplayer.ie/imprint-intro/> (accessed 27 July, 2020). O'Neill had worked as a hiring agent for J. Murphy & Sons Ltd during the height of the Lump era, and wrote of that period in his fictional works *Open Cut* and *Duffy is Dead*.

²³² See Chapter 3.4.

²³³ O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.143.

²³⁴ David M. Perry, 'No, The Irish Were Not Slaves Too' in Pacific Standard Online, (Mar 15, 2018) available at: <https://psmag.com/.amp/social-justice/the-irish-were-not-slaves> (accessed 1 Jul, 2020).

Finally, to encapsulate the sense of community and associational culture amongst the post-war Irish-in-London, Figure 5.16 typically illustrates the interconnectivity of formal and informal associational networks.²³⁵ Our Lady of Hal RC Church in Arlington Road, Camden Town, was built in 1933, in response to the growing interwar Irish population settlement in Camden Town (as described in chapters 2 and 3) and served generations of Irish migrant builders who attended Sunday Mass there. Next door, during the 1960s-1980s was Kay's Irish Record Centre, where first and second-generation Irish migrants (including the present author's family) obtained specialist ethnically-Irish folk, traditional and country music which could not be obtained in regular retail outlets in London.



Figure 5.16 - Our Lady of Hal R.C. Church, Camden Town, 1969

(source: Image Nr. 007875, Henry Grant Collection/Museum of London, available at: <https://www.museumoflondonprints.com/image/440792/henry-grant-our-lady-of-hal-church-1969> (Accessed 7 July, 2020))

Within a few minutes' walk of this church were a series of sites of Irish associational culture. The famous Arlington House, the best-known of the Rowton House hostels – frequented by Joe McGarry (OI#24), Donall Mac Amhlaigh, writers George Orwell and Patrick Kavanagh and many other migrant builders when temporarily 'down on their luck'. Also nearby were a plethora of Irish pubs: the Good Mixer, The Dublin Castle, The Brighton Arms, The Cobden Arms, The World's End – all renowned for performance of Irish traditional and

²³⁵ See also London Maps, Map1, p.xiii

country music, showing GAA games, and patronising multiple generations of Irish builders. Finally, the legendary Buffalo Club (now the Electric Ballroom) – one of the first famous Irish dancehalls run by Kerry property developer Bill Fuller was also a short walk away.

Whilst not, I contend, amounting to ghettoization *per se*, this typical voluntary clustering of Irish associational culture along parochial structures was replicated on both similar (e.g. Kilburn, Cricklewood, Willesden, Hammersmith, Fulham) and smaller (e.g. Holloway, Haringey, Tottenham, Kentish Town, Ealing, Greenford, Ilford, Dartford, Mile End, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, New Cross, Lewisham) scales right across post-war London. In many of these sites of Irishness the associational cultures described above were networks for the ‘cultural circuit’ which processed and mythologised much of the lore associated with ‘working on the buildings’ and ‘down the headings’. Here, original stories were instinctively circulated, remediated, reworked and generalised for distribution to a wider audience of fellow migrants. This process of fetishization and mythologisation is the subject of chapter six.

Chapter 6. ‘I’ve Won A Hero’s Name’¹: Mythologizing the Mundane

‘We are the immortals...we have one name and we have one body. We are always in our prime and we are always fit for work. We dig tunnels, lay the rails and build the roads and the buildings. But we leave no other sign behind us. We are unknown and unrecorded. We have many names and none are our own [...] We are immortal’²

6.1. Introduction

Having examined in detail both the working (chapters two through four) and social (chapter five) experiences of migrant Irish builders in London, this chapter maps the genealogy of the myths created by and about Irish construction workers during the post-war period. It discusses how both inward and outward cultural representations of these myths helped shape Irish communal identity in London. It shows how site lore, anecdotes, stories and working songs were appropriated and transfigured and how the distinctive character and unique working and social environment of Irish migrant builders inspired hyperbolised simulation; in turn provoking implicit self-stereotyping and performative Irishness.³ Cohen concluded that, ‘People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity’; I contend that as part of this process of self-identification, Irish migrant construction workers tended to mythologize otherwise mundane industrial events.⁴

During the earliest nomadic phases of the wartime and post-war migrations, Irish migrant working culture, rooted in the *seanchas* tradition of oral storytelling, was informally shared amid gangs, bothies, huts and camps. Songs and shanties,⁵ stories, recitation and

¹ Dominic Behan, line from the song ‘Paddy on the Road’ in *Songs of Dublin*, Gilbert Dalton (ed.), (Dublin, 1978) ; Ossian Publications, (Cork, 1993).

² Timothy O’Grady & Steve Pyke, *I Could Read the Sky*, (London, 1997), p69.

³ See Janetta Lun , Stacey Sinclair & Courtney Cogburn, ‘Cultural Stereotypes and the Self: A Closer Examination of Implicit Self-Stereotyping’ in *Basic And Applied Social Psychology*, 31:2 (2009), pp.117-27 for a detailed explication of the psychological process of implicit self-stereotyping in individuals and at group levels.

⁴ Anthony P Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, (London, 2001), p.118.

⁵ Marek Korczynski, Michael Pickering, Emma Robertson, *Rhythms of Labour: Music at Work in Britain*, (

doggerel verse, anecdote and sometimes simply idle gossip were the mediums by which the history and folklore of this cohort was initially preserved and disseminated. In the 1950s, as settlement progressed, this body of lore circulated around the various building sites and gradually filtered into the replenished (ethnically-Irish) pub, dancehall and social-club scene which – re-energised by the second-wave mailboat migrants – thrived from the late 1940s onwards as the second-wave migrants began arriving in increasing numbers.⁶ The commercialisation and commodification of recycled and mythologised Irish cultural output related to construction workers in London started with the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s, continued throughout the growth of globalised markets for Irish cultural product – particularly folk and traditional song culture, and the influence of punk and the advent of commercial groups like the Pogues in the 1980s and 1990s.

Whilst Delaney observed, rightly, that there was ‘no universal experience of being Irish in Britain’,⁷ nonetheless the working environment and the social milieu of migrant Irish builders fomented what Hazley calls a ‘repository of different tropes and images of the Irish construction worker’, some with potentially toxic and long-term effects.⁸ The lived experiences, he continues, ‘reveal a diverse and complex range of productive interactions with different aspects of the work process within the construction industry, archetypically the most exploitative of migrant occupations, giving rise to a range of competing conceptions of migrant identity and narratives of experience’.⁹ The constant recycling and incremental hyperbolising of these narratives in various forms of artificial representation – song, prose, poetry and drama – against the background of the globalisation of Irish media culture in the late twentieth century gradually consolidated this body of work into the stock stereotypes discussed below. This chapter chronicles this process of mythologisation and examines the effects on Irish migrant identity over the post-war decades.

Cambridge, 2013), pp.57-62; see also John J. O’Connor, ‘Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine’s Fusiliers’ in *Ireland’s Own*, (17 Sep, 2018), available at <https://www.irelandsown.ie/mystery-of-the-man-who-wrote-mcalpines-fusiliers/> (accessed 23 Feb, 2019).

⁶ See section 5.4 for more detailed discussion of this aspect of post-war Irish associational culture.

⁷ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.5.

⁸ Barry Hazley, ‘The Irish in post-war England: Experience, memory and belonging in personal narratives of migration, 1945-69’, PhD Thesis, (Manchester University, 2013), p.146.

⁹ Ibid.

6.2. The Problem of Representation versus Reality

Cultural representations and creative retellings of the lived experience of Irish migrant labour in London are referenced for comparative purposes throughout this research. Most of them highlight the problematic ‘stigma of failure’ associated with the first of Hickman’s three major archetypes of the Irish diaspora, the ‘down-on-his-luck Irish labourer’ in Britain.¹⁰ Wills notes that despite the heterogeneity of actual experience, ‘the stories told about the emigrant and immigrant Irish were remarkably similar’ and ‘representations of Irish migrants turn on [...] a narrow range of stock formations’.¹¹ She attributes this to ‘majority experiences’,¹² particularly amongst early post-war migrants combined with ‘inherited tropes’ including the legacy of ‘Victorian discourses of Celticism, related Revivalist idealisations of rural Ireland and modernising Catholic discourses of Irish purity and respectability’.¹³ To this should be added Gaelic myths learnt by most of the migrants through nationalist school education and informal *seanchas* tradition.¹⁴

The original songs and stories which made up these ‘majority experiences’ were endlessly circulated, embellished through narrativized retellings; infused with the rhetoric of rural fundamentalism, Irish exceptionalism and notions of loss, tragedy, famine, the untamed Irish and epic masculinities. Dramatically recycled by ‘various journalists, novelists, songwriters, community activists and amateur historians [...] in a variety of ways’,¹⁵ they morphed over time into what (borrowing from Scully) I have termed the ‘canonical

¹⁰ M.J. Hickman, ‘Thinking about Ireland and the Irish diaspora’, in T. Inglis (ed.), *Are the Irish Different?* (Manchester 2014), pp. 133–43, p.136. The other two stereotypes Hickman identifies within the popular imagination in Ireland are the *rich ignorant Irish-American*, and the exploitative *mobile entrepreneurial adventurer*. The latter is relevant to analysis of Irish migrant entrepreneurial activity as detailed in chapters 2–4.

¹¹ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.10.

¹² The concept of ‘majority experiences’ amongst the early post-war migrants is compelling. As chapters two and three demonstrate, the wartime and post-war ‘spailpín’ migrants started as nomadic seasonal workers, transitioning to major energy and wartime infrastructure projects in out-of-town encampments. This meant the social grouping of these men were very often organised in tightly-knit gangs of ‘townies’ living together in ‘barracks’, moving from job to job and sharing stories, songs and doggerel verses of what were often mutual experiences. As the community of Irish migrants became larger, further disseminated and settled, these ‘majority’ experiences, in reality, subsided, but by this stage they had already become the ‘stuff of myth’.

¹³ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.10.

¹⁴ For a highly informative analysis of how Irish Gaelic and nationalist mythology was inculcated into post-independent Irish children as part of the formal school curriculum, see Pádraic Frehan, *Education and Celtic Myth: National Self-Image and Schoolbooks in 20th Century Ireland*, (Amsterdam, 2012).

¹⁵ Hazley, ‘The Irish in post-war England: Experience, memory and belonging’, p146.

metanarrative’;¹⁶ a series of collective ‘cultural constructs’ or stock formations of the migrant builder experience. The reconstituted metanarrative typically involves epic failure: the once young, vibrant, devout, clean-living migrant worker who falls on hard times. His emersion in the ‘lump’ labour system results in various combinations of workplace exploitation and residential abuse, alcohol, substance and gambling addictions, social isolation, violence and often homelessness and vagrancy, fading into an isolated, alcohol-riddled old age. Crucial to this process is the ‘cultural circuit’, which Hazely, relying upon the work of Dawson, describes thus:

The relationship between the consumers and producers of cultural forms is not one-way, but is better approached in terms of circuits of discursive production. Within such circuits, stories and images constructed by groups and individuals at one location, situated at the local and private, may be appropriated for particular purposes by groups [...] situated at [...] public levels. Here, the “original” stories are reworked and generalised for distribution to a wider, typically mass, audience, at which point they **become available once more for personal consumption in a different form. What memory theorists have emphasised about this process is its political and power-laden character [...] in the sense that widely distributed generalised forms powerfully shape the possibilities for private memory production.** The circuit gives groups and institutions with particular interests and agendas a powerful role in forming national memory and public norms, a process which inevitably affects how individuals reconstruct and understand their own pasts.¹⁷ (Emphasis added)

In the hierarchy of narrative forms within the cultural circuit of Irish migration it is, I contend, the song-culture and the recycled rhetoric generated from those songs which takes precedence. Songs were the main promoters of discourse amongst the migrants themselves; more so than literary representations, since popular commercial and folk song was regularly performed and played in pubs, hotels, dancehalls and social clubs and simultaneously on radio and television across Ireland and Britain.¹⁸ Prime examples are revivalist folk-songs such as ‘*Crooked Jack*’, ‘*The Reason I left Mullingar*’, ‘*From Clare to Here*’, ‘*John O’Halloran*’,

¹⁶ Marc Scully, ‘Discourses of authenticity and national identity among the Irish diaspora in England’, PhD thesis, (The Open University, 2010), *abstract*.

¹⁷ Hazley, ‘The Irish in post-war England: Experience, memory and belonging’, pp.36-7, citing G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London, 1994), pp. 22-26. .

¹⁸ For example, it is rare to find a male Irish migrant builder who arrived before 1980 that does not recognise the names ‘Darkie Finn’ or ‘Elephant John’. See s.6.3 below for further details.

'*Missing You*' and '*Murphy Can Never Go Home*',¹⁹ and later prose and dramatic works such as *I Could Read The Sky*, *Shovel Kings*, and *Kings of the Kilburn High Road*.

Academic research relating specifically to migrant builders and their lived experiences has constantly been hampered by the paucity of reliable empirical and statistical data, particularly as large numbers of men operated below the radar of the social welfare, taxation and regulatory authorities. Consequently, much cultural theory generated on Irish migrant construction workers has relied upon the only available historical evidence – which consisted almost entirely of limited numbers of original oral histories, biographies, memoirs, and site lore together with the derived simulacra of the cultural circuit: literary, dramatic and folksong reworkings of the original cultural artefacts. Over time these representations became so deeply embedded in cultural memory that – unchallenged – they are often taken as *a priori* history. This has resulted in sometimes gross misrepresentations of this community. Consider, for example, this American review of Tony Murray's *London Irish Fictions*, which opens with the following comments:

A study that considers narratives by and about what the author terms "the Irish in London." It goes without saying that the lack of a commonly agreed-upon designation speaks to **the voicelessness of a good many members of this constituency on many levels** [...] this is a grouping associated with high levels of poverty, alcoholism, and social isolation. In such a commonplace vision, **London functioned as the dumping ground for those who cannot and will not fit in at home, the place where those without the initiative or capital to make it across the Atlantic wind up.** (Emphasis added)²⁰

Patently, the research in the preceding chapters of this thesis demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that the final sentence of this review presents a deeply misleading image of Irish London as a whole.

A further instance of this problem of representation can be seen in the journal article 'Questioning the Paddy Stereotype in Edna O'Brien's "Shovel Kings"' where the author states, 'in his study of fiction about the Irish in London, Tony Murray notes that **the city** [London]

¹⁹ See appendix G.

²⁰ Mary Burke, 'Literature of the Irish in London' (Review) in *Irish Literary Supplement*, Vol.33, Nr. 2, 1 March 2014, pp.6-7, reviewing Murray, *London Irish Fictions*..

has long been full of impoverished elderly Irishmen²¹ (Emphasis added). Murray actually states that, ‘Many of the interviews [in the television programme under discussion] were now living out their final days in extremely impoverished conditions in the very towns and cities they helped rebuild after the Second World War’.²² The former statement is radically more pessimistic and exaggerated than the latter; London was never ‘full’ of impoverished Irishmen at any time in the post-war period. Misrepresentation of the London Irish building community also stems from the uncontextualized use of available statistics, where these are used by cultural theorists in conjunction with stock stereotypes. So for example the statement that, ‘A larger proportion of Irish men working in England in the early 1990s (12%) were classified as unskilled than of Englishmen or Black Caribbeans—whose proportions of unskilled were 5.45% and 8.4%, respectively’²³ suggests that Irish migrants had a disproportionate lack of manual skills, whereas chapter four of this work discusses the deliberately-hidden levels of skill amongst migrant Irish construction workers, and the habit amongst college sojourners of hiding academic and technical education.²⁴ Similarly, the statistic that, ‘The 1991 unemployment rate of 19% for Irishmen in Britain was nearly double that of whites from the UK’²⁵ is at least partially explained in terms of the construction industry by the widespread culture of illegal working and tax-evasion which the ‘lump’ subcontracting system induced. Consequently significant numbers of men were registered as unemployed whilst working within the ‘lump’. The key point in these examples is that statistics are used to evidence stereotyped behaviour but conclusions drawn lack the appropriate nuance and context and consequently lead to generalisations about the Irish in London as an entire cohort.

In essence, the problem of simulated representations of Irish builders lived experiences in aesthetic and consumer art forms is one of dramatic impact; the ordinary, often mundane working lives of most migrant construction workers do not make for compelling storylines, and lack the strong, emotional and epic qualities of foundational narratives. Artistic

²¹ Jeanette Roberts Shumaker, ‘Questioning the Paddy Stereotype in Edna O’Brien’s “Shovel Kings”’, in *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], nr. 63, (Autumn, 2014), p.4.

²² Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.42.

²³ Mary J. Hickman, and Bronwen Walter. ‘Racializing the Irish in England: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity.’ in Marilyn Cohen and Nancy J. Curtin, (Eds.), *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland*, (New York, 1999), pp.267-292.

²⁴ See particularly s.4.2

²⁵ Liam Greenslade, ‘The Blackbird Calls in Grief: Colonialism, Health and Identity Among Irish Immigrants in Britain.’ In Jim MacLaughlin (Ed.), *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society* (Notre Dame, 1997), pp.36-60, p.39.

imagination and dramatic licence are, therefore, employed in the artificial recreation of lived experiences resulting in a disproportionate refocusing on ‘the seductive rhetorical force of epic narratives’²⁶ What is misrepresented is the over-emphasis on negative aspects as the dominant – and sometimes *only* – narrative history of this cohort.

The ‘imaginary of the Irish construction worker in Britain’ - centred around this notion of social, economic and moral failure, albeit often couched in epic and heroic terms - does not match the reality.²⁷ The swaggering, itinerant, highly masculinised, rough-hued Irish migrant; the ‘well-paid slave’ depicted in ‘*McAlpine’s Fusiliers*’ and ‘*Paddy on the Road*’; the poverty-stricken, alcoholic misfit, gambling his life away in a decrepit bedsit; the parasitic entrepreneurial ‘rags-to-riches’ tycoon subbies of the key navy narratives;²⁸ all these depictions - whilst reality for a small proportion of the cohort of migrant Irish builders – are nonetheless stereotypes. The negative stereotypes sadly impacted all-too-many Irish migrant builders over the five decades of the post-war period. Objectively viewed, however, the available evidence (including this research) suggests, in terms of the cohort size of London-Irish builders as a whole,²⁹ the issue of the ‘stigma of failure’ was statistically insignificant. Considering the vast numbers of workers involved in the post-war reconstruction period, cultural representations are, at best, anecdotal evidence and, I contend, ought not to be relied upon as objectively representative of the entire cohort of post-war Irish migrant construction workers.

6.3. The stereotyping of the Irish, by the Irish.

The folk-memory of Irish emigrant social history since the Great Famine defaults almost imperceptibly to the image of the Irish male as the tough, grizzled, toiling navy; a grafter, a wielder of picks and shovels; a builder of cities. Morgan’s 1997 thesis on media representations

²⁶ Elliott, *Contemporary Social Theory*, p.239.

²⁷ Hazley, ‘The Irish in post-war England: Experience, memory and belonging in personal narratives of migration, 1945-69’, p.146.

²⁸ Examples include the Carey, Reicey and Murray brothers in John .B. Keane’s *The Contractors*, MJ Galvin in William King’s *Leaving Ardglass* and Joe Mullan in Jimmy Murphy’s *Kings of the Kilburn High Road*.

²⁹ The Irish migrant construction labour force in London averaged at least 100,000 operatives throughout the six decades of this research. See chapter 2, table 2.3.

of the Irish found that ‘The stereotypes of “Irishness”, symbolic and trait-laden, are hidden as part of everyday, normative discourse [...] firmly positioned within the common-sense ideologies present in the mass media in Britain’.³⁰ From this, I posit that the dissemination of these stereotypes in Irish society (both in Ireland and Britain) began through site lore, oral transmission and doggerel verse during World War Two. It continued into the 1950s and accelerated in the 1960s, particularly through the medium of revivalist folk-song but also via literary, dramatic, journalistic and mass-media representations. I have termed this process ‘the stereotyping of the Irish by the Irish’.

The most important function of these various stereotypes, as they were remediated and recycled through later iterations of literature and song was to bestow aesthetic value and epic status upon the mundane lived experiences of the majority; the ‘monotonous and extremely heavy’ nature of work within British construction’.³¹ The writer Shane Connaughton said of the works of fellow novelist and playwright J.M. O’Neill that it represented ‘men striving for significance out of a most banal event’.³² O’Grady’s passage from *I Could read the Sky* in the epigraph to this chapter is a further example of this motif. O’Neill is now seen as a leading exponent of Irish ‘industrial *noir*’ (Tony Murray called them navy narratives) a literary genre which seeks to ‘ennoble and mythologise both English and immigrant Irish labour on London’s building sites. [...] he brought to artistic life that previously unknown culture of *de buildins*’.³³ This genre differs from the earlier works of ‘navvy’ writers such as MacGill and Mac Amhlaigh,³⁴ in the grim realism and the urbanised situational settings, which generally relate to an established London-centric Irish migrant community; in other words the enclave I have posited throughout this thesis.

Self-stereotyping amongst Irish migrant workers, whilst perhaps rooted in the earlier

³⁰ Sarah Morgan, ‘The Contemporary Racialization of the Irish in Britain: An Investigation into Media Representations and the Everyday Experience of Being Irish in Britain’, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of North London, 1997), p.210, cited in Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.30.

³¹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.31.

³² Profile of J.M. O’Neill in ‘Imprint – the Book Show’; *The Loophole Film Collection TV series*, available online at: <https://ifoplayer.ie/imprint-intro/> (accessed 27 July, 2020)

³³ Kevin O’Connor, Obit. ‘Jerry O’Neill: Publican and chronicler of Irish immigrant life on the building sites of London’ in *The Guardian*, 14 June 1999 ; Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, pp.42-56.

³⁴ Patrick McGill, *Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy*, (London, 1914), Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy* which are essentially autobiographical memoir structured as journey or quest narratives.

works of MacGill,³⁵ was mainly shaped and influenced, in the post-war era, by the working and commercial folksong culture which grew out of the interwar and wartime spailpín migrations.³⁶ These songs and recitations unwittingly set the benchmark for performative Irishness within the UK construction industry and stimulated the mythologization and fetishization of Irish migrant manual labour from c.1950-1990. Patterns are traceable, throughout the developing language of all of these songs. Certain themes emerge in the early wartime verses for example: an insouciant boldness, comradeship, roguery, itinerancy, masculine hardiness, militarism, labour-slavery and exploitation. As the chronology of the songs and verses developed through the 1950s-1990s the themes adapted to reflect later – and more pessimistic - experiences of social alienation, loneliness, bitterness, alcoholism and regret. Notably, not one of the songs reflects any sense of the contentment of marriage and families, the move from casual to more permanent employment, social improvement, settled accommodation arrangements and proprietorship. These were the outcomes which most migrant builders actually experienced, albeit to varying degrees, in later years. Therefore Wills' earlier observation that the range of stereotypes reflected mainly the majority experiences of the earlier migrants can be modified to add that they **specifically excluded** the majority 'positive' experiences of the later decades, focusing almost entirely on the minority 'negative' experiences.

The earliest songs, doggerel verses and stories which became ubiquitous in later decades, can be traced directly back to the interwar and wartime migrations and a small group of spailpíns. Two years before the war, in 1937, a total of 9,783 agricultural workers migrated from certain areas of Clare, Connaught, and Donegal.³⁷ These areas tended to be in the 'Congested Districts', with high population density on poor land and generally small farms. The Tubbercurry and Doocastle localities, where Sligo, Mayo and Roscommon meet, is expressly mentioned in the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1937-1938*, as having sent 352 seasonal workers to Britain.³⁸ Amongst these migrants

³⁵ Arguably the cultural circuit around which MacGill's earlier narrative was remediated would have been limited, particularly in Ireland, where his portrayal of the Catholic clergy as being just as oppressive as the landlords, moneylenders and police did not endear his work to devout Catholics. (see 'Patrick MacGill – The Navy Poet And The War Of Words' available at: <https://dailyscribbling.com/the-odd-side-of-donegal/the-navvy-poet-and-the-war-of-words/> (accessed 8 October, 2020).

³⁶ Appendix G is a selection of the full versions of those working and commercial songs which, I contend, underpin the foundational myths of the metanarrative.

³⁷ Appendix V, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Seasonal Migration to Great Britain, 1937-1938*, (Stationary Office, Dublin), p.62.

³⁸ Sarah Goek, 'Na Spailpíni: Irish Seasonal Labourers in Britain in the 20th Century' in *The Dustbin of History*,

were a gang from around the Cloontia/Shaskeen townlands of Doocastle which probably included Martin Henry³⁹ – who came from a large family famed for traditional music in the locality - and his near neighbours Joe McKeever, Tom Finn and Patrick ‘Darkie’ Finn, who



Figure 6.1 - Irish spailpíns on the 'Beet Campaign' in midland England in 1941

(Source: *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, January 1941, page 5, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>)

were all cousins.⁴⁰ These men had grown up with, and possibly travelled to and around England, with Matt and James Gallagher – from nearby Tubbercurry – who went on to found the Abbey Homes / Gallagher Homes dynasty and the younger Kennedy brothers, John and Joe, from Doocastle who later, in the 1960s, built two separate and hugely successful civil engineering businesses in Manchester.⁴¹

Importantly, Henry was known, before he emigrated, as the village writer - relating local events through his poetic

compositions, some of which were delivered through recitation or song, much in the old seanchaí tradition.⁴² Around 1942, whilst an itinerant war-worker, he wrote the original version of *McAlpine's Fusiliers* which became *the anthemic* folksong of the post-war migrant builder

Online Blog, available at <https://thedustbinofhistory.wordpress.com/2013/03/18/naspailpíni/> [Accessed 23 December, 2015]

³⁹ Martin Thomas Henry (17th Oct., 1918 - 10th March, 1987) was 11 years older than his brother Kevin, who went on to become a famous musician and seanchaí amongst the Chicago Irish community and lived until 2020. He was known, before he emigrated, as the village writer. Martin emigrated to the UK in 1938 or 1939 and worked as a spailpin for the remainder of his life. He worked all over England, down the coal mines of Wigan and Doncaster, in the summer months on the farms in Lincolnshire working on the hay, picking spuds and beet etc and working on construction in London, on and off with Murphy, McAlpine and his brother, Chris's subcontractor business, also in construction in London. He came home to his father's farm most years around Christmas for a few months to help on the farm and drawing turf from the bog. It was during these times that Kevin learned the latest of Martin's poems and recitations while working with him on the bog. When he was a little older, Kevin joined Martin working in England for a few years. He recalled hiring fairs in Bentham in North Yorkshire, where he and Martin were frequently hired for a few weeks at a time mainly bringing in the hay if the weather was fine or, if not they were put mending ditches. (I am indebted to Richard Piggott, of Chicago and Galway for this information (see email 13 July, 2020).

⁴⁰ Patrick 'Darkie' Finn (c.1908-1968) came from Shaskeen. He worked as an itinerant construction worker in England throughout the war and went on to become a highly-valued shuttering carpenter and a ganger for McAlpines in the 1950s, subsequently gaining notoriety amongst itinerant Irish workers after he was directly referenced in both known versions of *McAlpine's Fusiliers*.

⁴¹ See chapters two and three and Appendix B.

⁴² See biographical note about Martin Thomas Henry (17th Oct., 1918 - 10th March, 1987) , *supra*, fn. 26.

era,⁴³ thanks to its later popularity as a commercial hit for *The Dubliners* in the 1960s and 1970s. Henry's version is clearly written as a rousing, quasi-comic broadside ballad⁴⁴ – probably sung at work or in crowded pubs in the evenings – which extols the achievements of the Doocastle spailpíni working for MacAlpine [sic] at that time. The phraseology throughout is mainly celebratory and mentions Henry's cousins by name:

Of course, no doubt, you've heard about our foremost ganger men, /
There is Timber-tack Roddy and the famous **Darkie Finn**, / And it's for
one **Joe McGeever** we'll give three ringing cheers, / He's a regimental
sergeant major in MacAlpine's Fusiliers.⁴⁵ (emphasis added)

Its origins during the Second World War account for the overtly militaristic tone of the song. These men were raised in the shadow of both world wars, civil unrest, revolution, guerrilla warfare, and a long history of colonial garrison towns in their native country. This version also contains a number of stock phrases and references to work and social life which have been remediated throughout Irish spailpín and building-site culture in post-war London: 'When the graft is tough, we're all cat rough, we have no dread or fear/ And 'tis in the pub we'll drink the sub'; 'For the only God is a well filled hod,⁴⁶ With McAlpine's Fusiliers' ; 'we're all long-distance men who've travelled down from Camden Town'.

A less well-known but equally influential song of Henry's is *The Men O'39*.⁴⁷ Originally written, it is believed, as a poem or recitation also in the 1940s, this song is an unmistakable panegyric to the cohort of wartime workers recruited by private agents at the outbreak of the Second World War (before the official Group Recruitment Schemes began in 1942) which, of course, included his own 'townies' from Doocastle. The language employed is, again, celebratory of the old navy and spailpín traditions, referencing the 'Pincher Kiddies and [...]

⁴³ Appendix G, pp.4-5; see also Batty Sherlock, Thomas .B. Ryan, *Ceol agus Cantan as Dumha 'Chaisil*, (Achadh Mór, Co. Mháigh Eo, 2007), p.63; *Mudcat.org Traditional Music and Folklore Collection and Community*, available at <http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=52597>, accessed 30 Nov., 2014]

⁴⁴ Sean Williams, *Focus: Irish Traditional Music* (New York, 2010), p.198.

⁴⁵ Appendix G, p.4.

⁴⁶ A brick hod is a three-sided steel box for carrying bricks or other building materials, often mortar. It bears a long handle and is carried over the shoulder. Hod carrying is a skilled labouring occupation in the building industry.

⁴⁷ Appendix G, pp.3-4. According to information posted at The Digital Tradition Folk Song Database, *Mudcat Café*, Michael Falsey is a local fisherman and musician from Quilty, County Clare, who worked in the building trade in England in the 1940s and 50s. See 'The Digital Tradition Folk Song Database', *Mudcat Café Subject: RE: Origins: McAlpine's Fusiliers (Dominic Behan?)* From: Jim Carroll, (05 Nov 09 - 12:41 PM), Available at <http://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=16925> (accessed 31 May, 2017)

long distance men' and again mentions his cousin, this time hinting that he was involved in recruiting for the big British contractors Wimpey, McAlpine and John Laing:

Some of those Pincher Kiddies came when England needed men,
His catchword was to catch for the famous Darkie Finn.
To slave behind a mixer until your skin is turned tanned,
And to say, good on you Paddy, with the passport in your hand.⁴⁸

Notably, Henry's verse echoes Foley's 'well-paid slave' motif,⁴⁹ and, indeed, this may be the source of the stereotype, and also references the dangers of war-work: 'We got off the bus and scampered when the bombs began to fall / As Hitler, with his doodlebugs upon us all did land', and indicates, in conclusion that these migrant workers, at that time, definitively saw themselves as temporary: 'Now our six months is nearly up and we'll be going home / We'll tell the welfare officer we never more will roam / We'll say farewell to all the girls we met up in the Strand'.⁵⁰ It can readily be seen that Henry's vernacular industrial balladry was instrumental – albeit unintentionally so – in creating the stock formations of Irish builders which cultural theorists have written so much on since.

By far the most influential feature of the spread of migrant Irish working culture was the post-war folk revival, which had a significant transatlantic influence on working-class and bourgeois culture at every level.⁵¹ Two key figures involved in that movement, the English folklorist Ewan MacColl, (1915-1989) and Dublin singer/producer Dominic Behan, (1928-1989, a younger brother of Brendan and Brian) brought the working shanties, poems and songs created by Henry – and probably other unknown and uncredited migrant workers – into the wider public sphere, and latterly into the commercial music world. Between them they also created a number of similarly-styled working-songs which were commercially popularised, and learnt and sung socially by wide numbers of Irish both at home and abroad.⁵² These new ballads were often subtly infused with their own radical left-wing politics; both were avowed

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Hazley, 'The Irish in post-war England', PhD Thesis, pp.146-7. See also Donal Foley, *Three Villages*, (Dublin, 1977), p. 141.

⁵⁰ Appendix G, pp.3-4.

⁵¹ Julia Mitchell, *Postwar Politics, Society and the Folk Revival in England, 1945-65* (London, 2020), p.xix, 22-3, 38, 105-6, 114, 159. MacColl's lifetime relationship with Peggy Seeger (sister of Pete and Mike Seeger, whose folk and blues roots in America came from, amongst others, Woody Guthrie and heavily influenced Bob Dylan) saw the establishment of the Critics Group and the Singers Club in mid-1950s London, just at the point where Irish migrant workers were beginning to settle in significant numbers.

⁵² Appendix G, pp.5-11.

communists.⁵³ Behan, along with his equally famous siblings, was also from a deeply Irish nationalist background and was the most prolific author of popular nationalist ballads of the latter twentieth-century.⁵⁴ Both these seams of political thought are present in their revived versions of the working song genre.

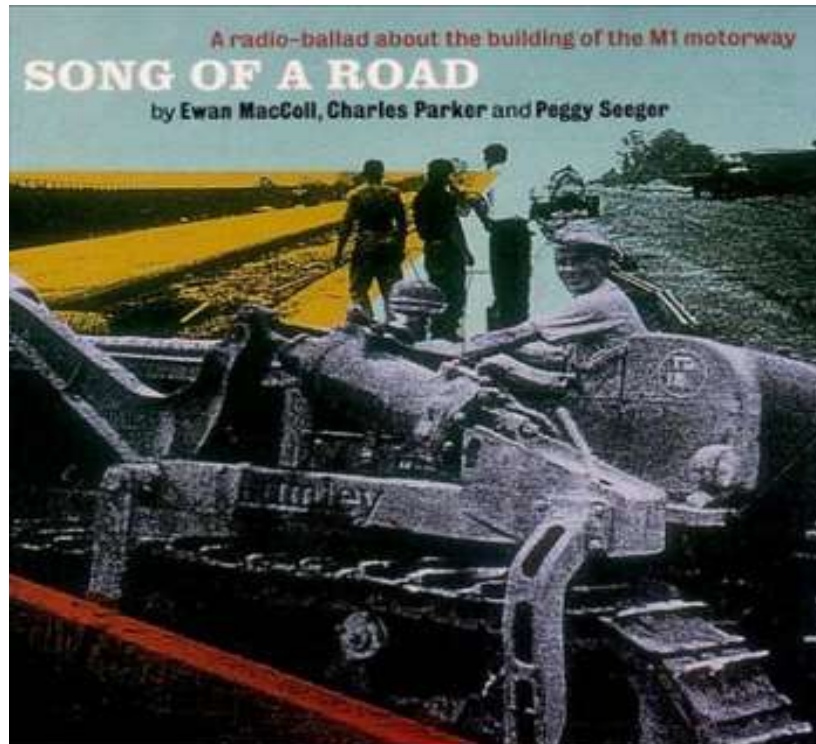


Figure 6.2 - 'Song Of A Road, A Radio Ballad about the Building of the M1 Motorway, (November, 1959)
(Source: <https://ewanmaccoll.bandcamp.com/album/song-of-a-road> (accessed Sept, 2019))

McCull's work with BBC producer Charles Parker in the 1960s⁵⁵ saw him collaborate with luminaries of Irish traditional culture including Seamus Ennis, Behan and Philip

⁵³ Ross Cole, 'Industrial Balladry, Mass Culture, and the Politics of Realism in Cold War Britain' in *Journal of Musicology*, nr.34(3) (July 2017), pp.354–390 ; Neil Spencer, 'Ewan MacColl: the godfather of folk who was adored – and feared' in *The Guardian*, (25 Jan, 2015) available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jan/25/ewan-maccoll-godfather-folk-adored-and-feared> (accessed 20 Jan, 2019); Matt Treacy, *The Communist Party of Ireland 1921 – 2011* (Dublin, 2012), p.237. In Marxist theory, the idea of remunerated manual labour was invested with social and cultural power and frequently drew upon 'metaphors of slavery, hell and imprisonment [...] within modern capitalist production' (see Mclvor, *Working Lives*, pp. 44-5.)

⁵⁴ Stephen Millar, *Sounding Dissent: Rebel Songs, Resistance, and Irish Republicanism* (Michigan, 2020), p.81 ; Michael O'Sullivan, *Brendan Behan: A Life* (Colorado, 1999), pp.1-15. Dominic's father, Stephen Behan, had been in the IRA and was a close associate of Michael Collins during the War of Independence. His paternal uncle, Peadar Kearney, composed the Irish National Anthem, 'The Soldier's Song'.

⁵⁵ O'Connor, *Irish in Britain*, p.89 ; Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.10.

Donnellan, who used both MacColl's and Behan's songs in the production of *The Irishmen* in 1965.⁵⁶ He also produced and presented the BBC radio folk-series 'Radio Ballads', which recorded *Song of a Road* in November, 1959 (Figure 6.2) about the construction of the M1 Motorway, where over half the workforce were migrant Irish builders.⁵⁷ The young Luke Kelly, who later became a folk-legend with the Dubliners, spent 'a year in London in the mid-1960s under the wing of MacColl', whom Kelly cited as his greatest influence in music, 'although they endured an uneasy relationship'.⁵⁸

Henry's version of *McAlpine's Fusiliers* was probably passed orally around the sites, lodging houses, clubs and pubs of 1940s and 1950s London, eventually being learnt in some form by Brian Behan. An elder brother of Dominic, Brian also worked for McAlpine as a labourer (possibly with Henry or Darkie Finn) and was imprisoned as a radical communist trade unionist on the Southbank Project, in London, in the 1950s.⁵⁹ Brian gave the verses to Dominic, who claims to have re-written Henry's original verse sometime in the early 1960s.⁶⁰ The updated song clearly references the more politically-socialist outlook which the Behans shared. Unlike Henry's original, it positions Irish migrant construction workers as impotent pawns, lacking all agency, and trapped within a laissez-faire capitalist framework where power is unevenly wielded for the benefit of corporate contracting organisations and grasping, entrepreneurial, subcontractors.⁶¹ By 1965 the Dubliners had recorded the song (by then copyrighted by Dominic, leading to a long and protracted estrangement and dispute between the brothers) and it became hugely popular; the *Irish Post* later describing it as, 'the iconic emigrant ballad adored by the Irish'.⁶²

⁵⁶ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.161-84.

⁵⁷ 'The Original BBC Radio Ballads – Song Of A Road' at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio2/radioballads/original/songofaroad.shtml#> (accessed 13 September, 2019).

⁵⁸ *The Irish Examiner* (online), 24 January, 2014, available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-20256309.html> (accessed 13 September, 2019). See also Angela Moran, *Irish Music Abroad: Diasporic Sounds in Birmingham*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2012), p.2 for incisive analysis of how the urban experience of Irish emigration to Birmingham shaped Kelly's political persona.

⁵⁹ Behan, *With Breast Expanded*, pp.161-7; O'Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, pp.89-91.

⁶⁰ John J. O'Connor, 'Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine's Fusiliers' in *Ireland's Own*, (17 Sep, 2018), available at <https://www.irelandsown.ie/mystery-of-the-man-who-wrote-mcalpines-fusiliers/> (accessed 23 Feb, 2019). Dominic later copyrighted the version concocted between Brian and himself, leading to a long and protracted estrangement and dispute between the brothers. A close reading of the original versions of *McAlpine's Fusiliers* and *The Men o'39* suggests that Behan combined the significant elements of the original texts and added his own lines and compositions, including characters such as Horseface O'Toole for dramatic effect.

⁶¹ McIvor, *Working Lives*, p.153.

⁶² *Irish Post* (Online), 1 June, 2017. The Dubliners also included Behan's version of *McAlpine's Fusiliers* on their

Behan then wrote *Paddy on the Road* in 1968 one verse of which runs; ‘But let no man complain, Paddy does not die in vain / When he’s building up and tearing England down’.⁶³ Again the working lives of Irish migrants are seen through an unapologetically socialist lens; written in a satirical tragi-comic tone reflecting the fatalistic recklessness which underlay the working and social environment of Irish migrant builders in post-war London. Undoubtedly the overall tenet, as particularly shown by the final verse, is intended to remind Irishmen in no uncertain terms that they are expendable and unlikely to receive any ‘knighthoods or OBEs’ for their toil in England and that: ‘They’ve the concrete master race to keep you in your place / The ganger man to kick you to the ground / If you ever try to take part of what the bosses make / When they’re building up and tearing England down’. This is directly comparable with a spoken verse of *McAlpine’s Fusiliers*, which was usually recited by Dubliner, Ronnie Drew: ‘McAlpine he pours whiskey and John Laing he pours champagne / But paddy’s still pouring concrete, and he never stops for rain’.⁶⁴ *Crooked Jack* is another very popular Behan song in which he conveys the full panoply of political grievances articulated by the growing industrial socialist movement of the early twentieth century. The final verse encapsulates the central tenet of capitalist exploitation viewed through the Marxist lens of Behan’s political ideology: ‘They’ll say that honest toil is good / For the spirit and the soul / But believe me boys it’s for sweat and blood / That they want you down that hole’.⁶⁵

Almost all the well-known working songs which heavily influenced Irish migrant culture in the post-war period were propagated through the performance careers of commercial ballad groups, particularly the Dubliners and the Clancy Brothers, and later, in the 1980s with popular singers such as The Furey Brothers, Christy Moore and Ralph McTell. MacColl and Behan influenced all of these acts to varying degrees.⁶⁶ These songs significantly shaped cultural perceptions of the lives of the male wage-labour immigrants, enveloping such semi-

‘Live at the Albert Hall’ album in 1968.

⁶³ Dominic Behan, ‘Building Up and Tearing England Down’, song nr. 13 in Harte and Lunny - *There’s Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*. The late Frank Harte (1933-2005), a noted folklorist and song collector included this song in an earlier collection as ‘Paddy on the Road’ in *Songs of Dublin*, Gilbert Dalton (Dublin, 1978); Ossian Publications, (Cork, 1993). Written around 1968 by Dominic Behan and recorded by Christy Moore in 1969 on his debut album of the same name. The Dubliners recorded the song on their albums *Prodigal Sons* and *Live in Carré*, in 1983. See also Appendix G, pp.8-9.

⁶⁴ Dominic Behan, ‘McAlpine’s Fusiliers’, song nr. 16 in Harte and Lunny - *There’s Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*.

⁶⁵ Appendix G, pp.7-8.

⁶⁶ See accompanying notes to the song selections in Appendix G.

mythical characters as ‘Ganger McGurk’, ‘Charlie-Joe Devine’, ‘Carrier Jack’, ‘Bald McGann’, ‘Darkie Finn’, ‘Horseface O’Toole’ and ‘The Bear O’Shea’ (all of which names reflect the tendency in the early days of the post-war immigration to use nicknames and aliases to avoid identification) in a cloak of romantic nostalgia which men felt comfortable with as part of homosocial bonding.⁶⁷ In March 1969 *The Navy Boots*, a song rooted in the English Victorian Navy tradition, recorded by the Dubliners was in the Irish ‘pop’ charts; a clear example of the post-war fetishisation of navy culture and lore.⁶⁸



Figure 6.3 - Dominic Behan singing at the Enterprise Public House, Long Acre, London, c1959. Ewan MacColl ran a well-attended folk club session during the post-war folk revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the background are folk musicians Peggy Seeger, Ewan MacColl and AL Lloyd.

(Source: John J. O’Connor, ‘Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine’s Fusiliers’ in *Ireland’s Own*, (17 Sep, 2018), available at <https://www.irelandsown.ie/mystery-of-the-man-who-wrote-mcalpines-fusiliers/> (accessed 23 Feb, 2019). Photo by EFD SS/Heritage Images/Getty Images)

Later populist ballads and folksongs – most of which were written by politically-active Socialist songwriters of the time; *England’s Motorways*,⁶⁹ *The Hot Asphalt*⁷⁰, *Tunnel Tigers*,⁷¹

⁶⁷ Whilst anonymity was one reason for the prevalence of nicknames in Irish workers, the use of nicknames amongst rural communities was in any event widespread especially in the west of Ireland because of the proliferation of common surnames. Donal MacAmhailgh’s memoir mentions men such as ‘Beaver’ Walsh, ‘Red’ McLoughlin, ‘Black’ Molloy and ‘Punch’ Flanagan.

⁶⁸ *The Kerryman*, March 29, 1969) p.2; see also full discussion on roots of this common thematic song in British and Irish working culture at: <https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=3079> (accessed 4 Jul, 2020). *The Navy Boots* is a morality ballad, also known as *The Pit Boots* and *The Courting Coat*. The earliest versions of the song opened with the line, “I’m a bold English navy, who worked on the line”.

⁶⁹ Ewan MacColl, written for BBC “*Song of a Road*”, Unpublished, (c.1961).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Also written by Ewan MacColl, c. 1967, Copyright Stormking Music Ltd

*Don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work,*⁷² *It's a Long Way from Clare to Here,*⁷³ *The Reason I left Mullingar* and *Missing You*⁷⁴ continued the pattern of such songs, promulgating what Clair Wills calls 'the romanticisation and aestheticisation of manual labour'.⁷⁵ More recently, Kevin Burke, the U.S.-based London-Irish fiddler who grew up in the early post-war community, composed *London Town*, which neatly captures the melancholic aesthetic experienced by many of the Irish migrant builders new to an urban industrial landscape: 'He'd take out his fiddle when the work was all done / When the shovels and picks were laid down / [and play] a tune for the broad-backed sons of Ireland / Come to rebuild London Town'.⁷⁶

The mythology created by the constant retelling of site lore, combined with the impact of the working-song culture described above had a self-fulfilling effect. Stories proliferated the cultural circuit about characters like 'Darkie' Finn, 'Moose' Connolly (whom Mac Amhlaigh recalls meeting in Stanford in the Vale)⁷⁷ 'Pincher Mac' (McNicholas) and 'Elephant John' O'Donoghue – all real migrant workers whose mythical personas outperformed their lived experiences. Imagery and nomenclature, for example the tendency to ascribe animal nicknames to these tough, hard-living characters, was a key part of the psychology of these myths. John P (OI#13) recalls how they populated the imagination of Irish labouring in the 1950s:

The job couldn't start if they weren't on it. [...] they'd be waiting on the Pincher Mac and the Pincher this and that, and the Pig Malone, the Sow whoever. Them animals had to arrive before the work'd start! [Laughter]. The craic would be kept going about it...like, this fella went into some town and, y'know he heard the boys, y'know the Pig Malone and somebody else were to be there. So he knocked on the door and the landlady came out and a fag in her mouth. He said "Does the Pig Malone stay here?" She said "No", and he asked for the Horse – oh yeah, the Horsheen something-or other, she said, "No, I'm sorry" she said, "We don't keep any animals here!" [Laughter].⁷⁸

⁷² Composed by Christie Hennessy; released by Christie Moore on his 'Time has Come' album in 1987.

⁷³ Composed by Ralph McTell, released on his 1976 Album '*Right Side Up*', the title of this song came from a chance remark of a fellow building labourer of McTell's on a site in London in 1963.

⁷⁴ Composed by Jimmie McCarthy/Alex Huntley, released by Christie Moore on his 'Voyage' album in 1991.

⁷⁵ Clair Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.183.

⁷⁶ Kevin Burke, *London Town*, unpublished song co-written in collaboration with Cal Scott, see inter alia, 'A virtuoso with the soul of Ireland' in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 15, 2014, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/a-virtuoso-with-the-soul-of-ireland-20140514-38a26.htm> (Date accessed: 05 April, 2016).

⁷⁷ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, pp.54-55.

⁷⁸ Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, pp.272-3.

Whilst these vignettes of life as itinerant labouring men in post-war Britain served mainly as distractions from the daily grind of construction work and sources of pub-banter for the protagonists themselves, the drip-fed remediation, infused with a certain insouciant wit and buccaneering inevitability became highly popular in the politicised consciousness of the Irish community, and gradually mythologised many of these accounts into the stock formations discussed earlier.⁷⁹

By the early 1960s, the constant churn of Irish migrants to and from London, particularly those returning for annual summer holidays or Christmas visits each year began to propagate these new stories from London's building sites across rural and urban Ireland. Under the Lemass administration the country's emergence from the 'obdurately pre-modern'⁸⁰ saw a significant improvement in the economy prompting a return to Ireland – albeit in many cases merely temporarily - of a significant number of early post-war migrant builders.⁸¹ The fermented yarns and stories of life 'on the buildings' seeped into the consciousness of schoolboys and adolescent males eager for 'the chance to escape from the endless insecurity of scratching out a living in rural and small-town Ireland' foreshadowing expectations of their Irishness in London.⁸²

The 1960s also saw a number of literary representations begin to appear which reflected the songs and stories circulating around the construction industry in London and amongst returnee migrants; many of these further shaped the mythologies of the Irish migrant builder. John B. Keane's seminal dramatic works *Many Young Men of Twenty* (1961) and *Hut 42* (1962) both referenced Irish migrant builders' lives and the psychological impacts of the transient migrant existence.⁸³ Likewise in 1961, Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* was set amongst an Irish migrant family working in English construction and examined the neurosis which Murphy suggested was rooted in Irish society and transferred with the migrants.⁸⁴ In 1964

⁷⁹ Susan H. Motherway, *The Globalization of Irish Traditional Song Performance*, (Oxford, 2014), p.144.

⁸⁰ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p.569.

⁸¹ Net emigration of males from Ireland reduced between 1956 and 1966 from a peak average of -21,915 per annum to -7,523 per annum – a drop of 66%. By 1968 average annual emigration fell again to -4,950 and this was followed, from 1971-1979 by return immigration back to Ireland averaging +7,659; see Enda Delaney, 'Placing Post-war Irish Migration to Britain in a Comparative European Perspective, 1945-1981' in Andy Bielenberg (ed.) *The Irish Diaspora*. Longman Harlow: London, 2000, pp.331-356, Table 17.1, p.332.

⁸² Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.31.

⁸³ John B. Keane, *Many Young Men of Twenty*, (Cork, 2016); John B. Keane, *Hut 42*, (Cork, 2016);

⁸⁴ Tom Murphy, *DruidMurphy: Plays by Tom Murphy*, (London, 2012).

Donall Mac Amhlaigh's memoir of life as an Irish navvy was translated from its original Gaelic and published for the first time. By the 1980s realist works such as J.M O'Neill's *Open Cut* (1983) and John Healy's *The Grass Arena* (1988) were opening up the underbelly of Irish migrant life and exposing some of the tragic failures of migration – alcoholism, vagrancy, prostitution and crime.⁸⁵

Self-evidently the reality of life for the early itinerant migrant builders such as Darkie Finn was tough and brutal, but perhaps less epically tragic and more mundane and prosaic than the majority of the navvy ballads and stories would have us believe. The cultural imprint of the mythologised versions of these lives, I would argue, was to encourage an unhealthy degree of masculine performative Irishness amongst the later migrants, as the following section shows.

6.4. 'Once Hard Men Were heroes': Irish Migrant Masculinities and Performative Irishness.

In another relatively contemporary navvy-song, '*Murphy Can Never Go Home*',⁸⁶ the omniscient narrator laments the rise of the technological age in the shape of modern industrial technology; 'Building the blocks of the twenty-first century / What use are they to the labouring man', going on to bemoan that 'Once hard men were heroes / Now they are fools'.⁸⁷ In many ways this verse is an elegy for working-men in the post-industrial age; witnessing the end of physical wage-labour as the dominant resource in the capitalist model of industrial construction and civil engineering. Recent studies on the history of work have, indeed, asserted that 'the traditional work ethic [...] has been eroded as 'traditional' working-class communities [...] have atrophied'.⁸⁸ Historic issues of class, gender and cultural masculinity all impact significantly upon the formation of industrial worker identity irrespective of national and ethnic considerations. Exploring workplace masculinities assists in understanding the meanings of

⁸⁵ J.M. O'Neill, *Open Cut*, (Sevenoaks, 1986) ; John Healy, *The Grass Arena*, (London, 2008). For references to Irish criminality and social dysfunction in the post-war period see Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, pp.80-86 and chapter five *supra*.

⁸⁶ Appendix G, p.15.

⁸⁷ Mick Curry, 'Murphy Can Never Go Home', song nr. 19 in Frank Harte and Donal Lunny - *There's Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish Labour*, (Daisy DLCD022, 2005), available at The Living Tradition, CD Liner notes, (<http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/dlcd022.htm>, accessed 18 March, 2015)

⁸⁸ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, p.45.

manual work to men. Issues of dignity, dehumanisation, alienation and degradation can be diffused through the lens of multiple masculinities. This section seeks to historicize the normative communal conceptions of masculinity, performativity and Irishness and within the context of the London construction industry and show how these conceptions interacted with, and were shaped by Irish female identities.

I conceptualise performative Irishness in the context of the migrant male construction worker in London as the homosocial intersection of gender performance, ethnicity and working lore and myth. Judith Butler's seminal theory on gender performativity is therefore the essential starting point, defining gender as 'a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real'.⁸⁹ The artificiality of gender, she argues, lies in 'a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory'⁹⁰ Brickell develops this idea to suggest that 'performativity involves subsequent repetition or citation of gender [specifically in this case, I contend, masculine] norms. This citation takes place under conditions of cultural constraint or "regulatory regimes," which compel some appearances of masculinity [...] while prohibiting others'.⁹¹ The concept of performing Irishness was best summed up by Marella Buckley: 'Just being an Irish person in Britain plunges Irish people there into a dramatisation of their identity because Britain has been so thoroughly and problematically involved in the construction of what we now know as Irishness'.⁹² This compulsion to fetishize their Irishness in this way was ungendered, although it manifested differently in males and females.

Male Irishness as performance was articulated mainly in unreflective demonstrations of ethnic distinctiveness and 'hardiness', sporting and competitive allusions, expressions of authenticity and through adapted rural culture.⁹³ It could also be said to reflect the daily lived experience for migrant workers in post-war industrialised London: 'the performative

⁸⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p.x (intro) cited in Michael S Kimmel (Ed.), *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, p.45.

⁹⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p.xii (intro).

⁹¹ Chris Brickell, 'Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion: A Sociological Reappraisal' in *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (July, 2005), pp. 24-43, p.26.

⁹² Liam Harte, 'Migrancy, Performativity and Autobiographical Identity' in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (2006), p.227, citing Marella Buckley, 'Sitting on Your Politics: The Irish among the British and the Women among the Irish'. in Jim MacLaughlin, (Ed.), *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society*, (Cork, 1997), pp. 94-132, p.119.

⁹³ For example in linguistic orality, the use of Hiberno-English vernacular, musical and working practices, spoken Gaelic language amongst native-speaking gangs, the transmission of stories, anecdotes and local news from 'home'.

negotiation of prejudice and racism; the fragmentation and transformation of identity under the pressures of migration; the crisis of individuation engendered by the clash of cultures, attitudes and ideologies'.⁹⁴ Masculinity and male hegemony, even within domestic relationships, was a vital component in Irish builders' self-image; they were not alone in this; such ideas apply universally to all working-class, industrialised male subjectivities. Masculinity is unstable and contingent; subsisting within 'various forms of power men assert [...] over women, over other men, their own bodies, machines and technology'.⁹⁵ Such power is, of itself, an act of performance and recognised as bound up with male contestations within the workplace.⁹⁶ These concepts, I postulate, are the elements of 'normative behaviour' which this thesis (specifically chapter four) demonstrates was mandated in order to gain entry and 'acceptance' within the working environment of the Irish migrant builder.

The theoretical concept of hegemonic masculinity was developed by Connell, and initially explains the dominant position of men and the subordination of women within the patriarchy but which extrapolates how certain types of masculine power generates dominance not only over women but also over subordinate masculinities: 'in this second sense of the term, hegemonic masculinity refers to a social ascendancy of one group of men over others'.⁹⁷ This is the specific context in which it applies to the construction industry, and Irish construction work in particular, which has always been perceived to be hypermasculine and typically characterized as hostile, aggressive and uncondusive to 'family-friendly' patterns of work.⁹⁸

Construction and civil engineering works are predicated upon a visceral sense of masculinity and hardness; dominated as they have always been by men. This is particularly so in Britain, where these industries were forged in the pre-mechanised nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a manual labour-force, whose sustained and intensive raw physical strength and endurance were of equal – if not greater – importance than the dexterity and artisan

⁹⁴ Harte, 'Migrancy, Performativity and Autobiographical Identity', p.230.

⁹⁵ L. Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London, 1997), p.123.

⁹⁶ Jeanine Woods, 'Dragging up the Past: Subversive Performance of Gender and Sexual Identities in Traditional and Contemporary Irish Culture' in Pilar Villar-Argáiz (Ed.), *Irishness on the Margins: Minority and Dissident Identities*, (London, 2018), p.31.

⁹⁷ Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Sydney, 1995), pp.76-7 cited in Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, 'Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique' in *Theory and Society*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Jun., 2001), pp. 337-361, at pp.340-341.

⁹⁸ Nick Rumens, 'Queering men and masculinities in construction: towards a research agenda' in *Construction Management and Economics*, Vol. 31, no.8 (2013), pp.802-815, p.805.

skill of the traditional guild trades. Concepts of ‘hardness’ – or as the Irish rural male would vernacularise it ‘hardiness’ – are the very essence of workplace masculinity,⁹⁹ and in addition to the decline of usefulness caused by technological advancement (as Murphy bemoans earlier), the ‘hardy’ working labourer contended with the inevitable physical atrophy caused simply by (often premature) ageing, ill-health and ‘wear and tear’. Normative masculine constructions, eschewing psychological displays of emotion or hurt, saw such decline – and the resultant health issues – often repressed, ignored, ridiculed, or channelled into domestic and workplace violence – in most cases aggravating the problem.¹⁰⁰

Research for Philip Donnellan’s ground-breaking BBC documentary *The Irishmen* speculated that ‘an Irishman [...] chooses unskilled labour because he takes pride in exploiting his body – takes pride in what his body rather than his mind can do’.¹⁰¹ Indeed in Irish work culture masculinity and ‘manliness’ were seen as vital qualities in the true Irish patriot, juxtaposed in the moral framework of Irish nationalism with English degeneracy, marked by what Joe Plunkett bitterly referred to as ‘immorality, obscenity and Birmingham-filth’.¹⁰² For the typical rural migrant builder, though, Irish patriotic masculinity was disrupted by residual issues of class and social order imported from rural Ireland and the antagonisms of perceived forced exile ‘embedded in the continuing failure [...] within conditions of late modernity, to provide the opportunism, meritocracy and cosmopolitanism promised in an earlier period of state modernisation and nation building’.¹⁰³ Irish male migrants of the post-war decades, consequently, ‘assembled a migrant masculine identity by inventing a place, a language and a new sensibility of urban industrial life’.¹⁰⁴ Popoviciu *et al* summarised urban Irish male sensibility in the post-war period as fetishizing or valorising manual work:

⁹⁹ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, pp.80-1, cites qualities such as physical prowess, toughness, (overt and ostensible) homophobia, dispassionate and abstract instrumentalism, risk-taking, aggression, violence, competitiveness, all of which have been demonstrated throughout both the oral and secondary evidence in this thesis. Excessive and posturing consumption of alcohol is another very common aspect of workplace masculinity.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Gilbert, Kristin Constantine, ‘When Strength Can’t Last a Lifetime: Vocational Challenges of Male Workers in Early and Middle Adulthood’ in *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (April, 2005), pp.424-433. See also, Nancy Quam-Wickham, ‘Rereading Man’s Conquest of Nature: Skill, Myths, and the Historical Construction of Masculinity in Western Extractive Industries’ in *Men and Masculinities*, Vol.2, No.2, (February, 1999), pp.135-151. These articles examine themes of physical atrophy of manual labour in blue-collar American workers, but the concepts discussed have universal applicability.

¹⁰¹ Clair Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.181.

¹⁰² Townshend, *The Republic: The Fight for Irish Independence*, p.56.

¹⁰³ F. O’Toole, *The Politics of Magic: The Work and Times of Tom Murphy*, (Dublin,1987), p.49.

¹⁰⁴ Liviu Popoviciu, Chris Haywood & Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, ‘Migrating Masculinities’ in *Irish Studies Review*, 14:2, (2006), pp.169-187, p.176.

With an accompanying vocabulary of masculinity marked by: hard physical labour, strength, reputation, pride and solidarity. Much of their world was highly gendered, taking place within all-male environments. Versions of masculinity were spatially shaped and lived out within male workplaces, community pubs and clubs, and at Gaelic games. A specific, ethnic, gendered regime was culturally constructed, underpinned by an infrastructure of a male-dominated, hierarchical Catholic Church and an Irish nationalist politics that displayed a wide range of cultural signifiers of masculinity.¹⁰⁵

For the Irish builder in post-war London the metanarrative of *Paddy in the Smoke*¹⁰⁶ - the stock formations discussed earlier in this chapter - were constantly recycled through ‘transactive memory’ and performative Irishness.¹⁰⁷ As Murray pointedly observes, ‘Overt exhibitions of masculinity are commonplace on building sites, but what is striking is how such events have become mythologised through repetition in other contexts’.¹⁰⁸ He draws intriguing comparisons between Irish mythology – and in particular the tales of Cuchulainn, which Declan Kiberd regarded as ‘a symbol of masculinity for Celts’ - and the various characters and stories which have emerged in the literature and song of the post-war migrations.¹⁰⁹

Cowley described Irish migrant builders as ‘inured to hardship and able to survive on a level unimaginable to anyone who has never lived rough’.¹¹⁰ Delaney, perhaps more reflectively, calls ‘the image of the Irish navvy as a hard-working and heavy-drinking ‘rough’ and unpredictable character, prone to violence, who refused to settle in any one place [...] one of the most enduring in collective memory’. He quotes an encounter with Irish ‘tunnel tigers’

¹⁰⁵ Popoviciu et al., ‘Migrating Masculinities’, pp.169-187, p.177, citing R. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Sydney, 1995).

¹⁰⁶ The title of an old traditional Irish reel, and the iconic recording of Irish traditional music made under the highly influential folk-revivalist record label, Topic Records, in the Favourite Pub in Holloway, in 1968. The phrase has now passed into London-Irish legend. See <https://www.topicrecords.co.uk/2010/09/paddy-in-the-smoke-various-artists-tscd603/> (accessed 14 Aug, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ Transactive memory refers to the co-production of stories in and between small groups and the capacity of individuals and groups to engage critically with inherited ideologies and create common accounts that reinforce group solidarity. For a detailed analysis of these aspects of oral history see: Jessica Hammett, ‘It’s in the Blood, isn’t it?’: The Contested Status of First World War Veterans in Second World War Civil Defence’ in *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 14, Issue 3, (July, 2017), pp.343-361. For an equally informative guide to performative masculinities, see Rumens, ‘Queering men and masculinities’, pp.802-815.

¹⁰⁸ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.51.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, pp.42-54, citing Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1996), p.25.

¹¹⁰ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.139. Migrant builders of other nationalities, miners, steelworkers and oil-rig workers might all take issue with the exceptionalism expressed here.

in the pubs of post-war Glasgow, where ‘they would explain, **to let us know the hardy breed of men they were, about the terrible conditions they endured**...And it was mostly true’. (Emphasis added).¹¹¹ Tommy Harvey from Doonbeg, Co Clare, another miner on the Victoria Line tunnels of the 1960s proudly emphasised that, ‘We were known as ‘The Tunnel Tigers’’.¹¹² This term was not common usage until after MacColl wrote his song *Tunnel Tigers* in the early 1960s, therefore this is potentially a clear example of the process of mythologisation at work.¹¹³ These comments tend to suggest that the men themselves were using popular cultural epithets and were well aware of their reputations; self-identifying as exceptionally tough and hard. They took pride in the masculine and Stakhanovite environment. ‘Well, they had that reputation...the Donegal Tigers....Tunnel tigers, y’know? It was all macho stuff, y’know?’.¹¹⁴

The best example of this phenomenon of masculine mythologisation is the dissemination of one anecdote regarding John ‘The Elephant’ O’Donoghue (1932-1969) throughout the Irish building community in London in the 1970s, giving rise to numerous remediations and gradual mythologization of this (and other contrived stories) in various narrative forms. O’Donoghue was the most notorious of the gangers and labour managers who worked for J. Murphy & Sons (Green Murphy) and, as can be seen from Figure 6.4, quite literally became a legend in his own lifetime within the London-Irish community.

The most common anecdote told about his nefarious activities has him calling in to a pub in north London on his own one evening after work and encountering a gang of labourers whom he had previously abused, mistreated or fallen out with in some unspecified way on previous jobs, and who saw their opportunity for revenge. The story goes that the Elephant, seeing immediately that he was in potentially serious trouble, loudly ordered six (or ten, depending on the version) pints of beer to give the false impression that he was ordering for a gang of mates who were on their way in, then swiftly headed for the toilet and escaped out a back door/ window. Terence O (OI#19) tells this story as having happened in the Cock Tavern in Holloway Road, adding ruefully that ‘the Elephant’ - as he was ubiquitously known - was, another time, kicked through a café window in Camden Town.¹¹⁵ I have personally been told

¹¹¹ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.114-115.

¹¹² *The Irish Times*, Aug 19, 2016.

¹¹³ See earlier in this chapter, and Appendix G, p.9.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.53.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.441.

variant versions of this anecdote at least six times by different people, with slightly different details.

**‘Elephant John’
is laid to rest**

A FAMOUS Cahersiveen man, immortalised in story and song, was finally laid to rest in his home town on Wednesday morning.

John O’Donoghue, popularly known as Elephant John, died following an illness last Thursday in his adopted home of London. He was 67 years



By Catherine Halloran

old and one of the most famous gangers in London construction.

During his lifetime, John O’Donoghue became a legend on building sites throughout London where he worked as a ganger with successful builder John Murphy — also from Cahersiveen. He was so well known that he became the subject of many stories and songs.

Throughout construction circles, he was known as John Murphy’s right-hand-man. His strength and power earned him the nickname ‘Elephant John’. He was one of the most well-known members of the London construction fraternity.

On Monday, four days

The late John O’Donoghue from Cahersiveen.

after his death, all Murphy Construction sites in London closed early and a special service was held in his honour at Hackney in East London.

Mr O’Donoghue’s remains were flown to Kerry and they were removed to O’Connell Memorial Church in Cahersiveen on Tuesday evening. He was buried in Cahersiveen on Wednesday following a funeral Mass which was attended by many of his building colleagues from England.

Figure 6.4 - ‘Elephant John’ O’Donoghue – Obituary.
(Source: *The Kerryman*, 30 July, 1999)

In the mid-1980s Brendan Ward, a migrant from Leitrim, wrote two semi-fictional, absurdist accounts of London Irish builders – both now out of print (Figure 6.5) but which sold well in the London-Irish community at that time. The books were written in an erratic, tongue-in-cheek form of humorous satire, but referred in places to some real characters, and contained a number of accounts of ‘Elephant John’ including a fictionalised version of the ‘pub escape’ story and this highly-exaggerated character-sketch.¹¹⁶

The Elephant was Murphy’s foreman and ganger, a reincarnation of Fionn MacCumhall (sic): He dug muck with a shovel especially made

¹¹⁶ Brendan Ward, *Builders, Chancers and the Crack*, (London, 1985), pp.7-32.

by a blacksmith outside Sneem. It was the size of four shovels but in the hands of the Elephant it looked only normal. He could dig and fill a lorry as fast as a JCB and that is no exaggeration. This mythic figure was hated and the men who worked for him wished him the cruellest death that could be imposed.¹¹⁷

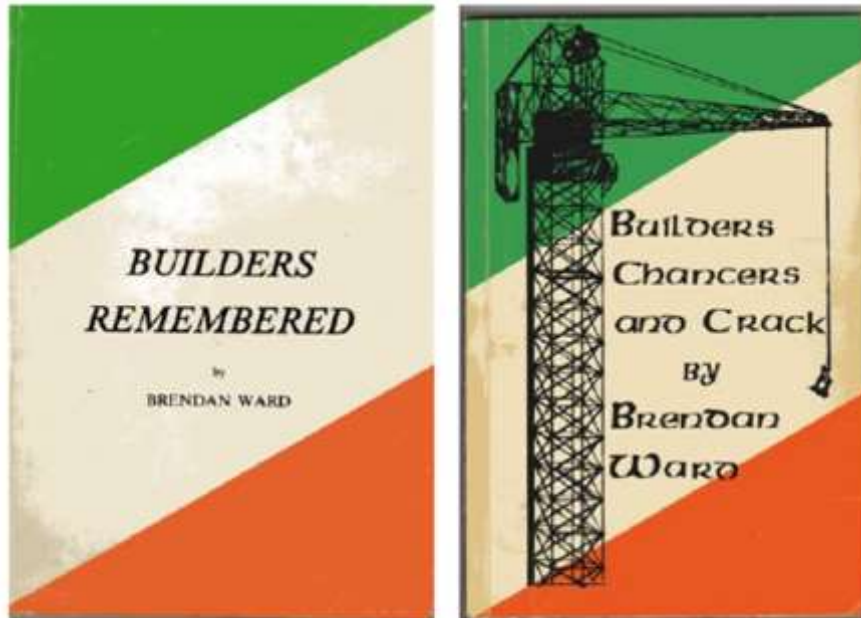


Figure 6.5 - Covers of *Builders Remembered* and *Builders, Chancers and Crack*, Brendan Ward, London, 1985 - both long out of print
(Source: Author photo from Leitrim County Library originals)

In another commercial working-song, ‘Murphy’s Volunteers’,¹¹⁸ written around the same time as Ward’s books, the Elephant is depicted leading a gang of Murphy trenchmen in London in 1939 while ‘German planes were circling and sending shrapnel down’. Ignoring the obvious historical blunder that the Blitz started in 1941, the verse conveniently ignores the fact that John O’Donoghue was born in 1932, and Murphy didn’t start trading until 1951.¹¹⁹ John H (OI#17) who worked for O’Donoghue form many years, provides a far more reliable account of his life and times.¹²⁰

Part of the hyper-masculinity associated with young, single, Irish migrant males was the frequent bouts of alcohol-fuelled recklessness and irresponsibility which were a natural

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Sean McCarthy, Irish Traditional Music Archive, Online Collections available at http://www.itma.ie/inishowen/song/murphys_volunteers_francis_porter (accessed 12 April, 2016).

¹¹⁹ See Fig 6.4 and Appendix B.

¹²⁰ Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.387-93.

response to alienation, the relentless sense of life being ‘dog rough and dog lonesome’,¹²¹ and the daily grind of mundane construction work. As sociologist Margaret J. Sargent observed, the Irish, like the Australians and Americans, have a ‘utilitarian style of drinking’; one which is more likely to result in abuse than the drinking styles of other cultures; utilitarian drinkers use alcohol to alleviate depression or other personal problems.¹²² As one migrant from the 1960s recalled: ‘The men [...] ill-prepared for the culture shock of living in an often hostile place, headed back to their lodgings after **their heroic weekend deeds** [emphasis added]. I would often hear them on a Monday regaling each other about such drink-fuelled depredations, the word *latchico* an overused insult’.¹²³ This was helped by the anonymity that Irish migrant labourers (especially those working on the ‘lump’) carried on large British construction sites. Jimmy McCarthy’s lyric was, by-and-large, correct; on such sites the young Irish migrant was ‘a Paddy [...] or a Mick / Good for nothing but stacking a brick’.¹²⁴ A simple example of this was Tom Mc’s (OI#9) anecdote concerning drunkenly ‘borrowing’ a mechanical dumper at night on a John Laing project in Plaistow, east London in the 1960s.¹²⁵ The laxity with which construction work was generally treated in the early post-war period and the scurrilous – borderline illegal – misdemeanours done by young Irish migrant builders often out of sheer boredom,¹²⁶ and a reckless sense of ‘devilment’ and ‘craic’ became part of the saloon-bar mythology of the Irish builder in London; such stories being constantly borrowed, remediated, enhanced and retold.

Tony Murray contends that narrative representations of Irish working culture ‘migrate intertextually and intergenerically between myth, folklore, ballads, dreams and reminiscence to reveal how personal and collective identities are forged in relation to ethnicity, regional alliance and masculinity’.¹²⁷ A further example of this drift of oral folklore/reminiscence into myth and then representation can be seen in reference to the narratives of physical strength. I

¹²¹ Per Richie Piggott’s recollections of working in London as a college-sojourner, c.1972. This was what many of the older spailpín lump workers would confidentially describe their lived conditions as.

¹²² Margaret J. Sargent, ‘A Cross-Cultural Study of Attitudes and Behaviour Towards Alcohol and Drugs.’ In *The British Journal of Sociology*, 22.1 (1971), pp.83-96, p.85.

¹²³ *Sunday Independent*, 29 November, 2016, reader’s letter from Paddy McEvoy, County Down. ‘*latchico*’ is a vernacular pejorative term for an uncouth or aggressive person, typically a man or boy, regarded as being of low social status.

¹²⁴ *Missing You* – song lyric. See Appendix G, p.14.

¹²⁵ Interview with Tom Mc, (OI#9), County Cork, (1 Apr. 2016), Appendix A, pp.154-5.

¹²⁶ Mary Daly, *Slow Failure*, pp.289-91.

¹²⁷ Murray, *London Irish Fictions*, p.43.

recall a story – perhaps apocryphal – from my days growing up in the Irish traditional music community of 1970s London, concerning the renowned Donegal fiddle-player Danny Meehan (Figure 6.6). Well-known as an excellent street-mason Danny, a former long-distance man, standing over six feet in height, had the well-earned reputation of the rakish, charming, physically imposing strong-man builder. He was working on a particular street in central London one day, when a fellow musician passed the job and hailed Danny from the other side of the street. He was at that moment carrying two eighteen-inch square paving slabs, one in each hand, and without missing a beat, he smiled broadly and waved, slab-in-hand, across at his friend. Two-inch thick slabs as used by local authorities back then would have weighed around 25kg each.



Figure 6.6 – Migrant masculinities at work: Danny Meehan, legendary musician and street-mason, Mountcharles, Co. Donegal. Danny emigrated to London around 1967.
 (Sources: Danny Meehan, Reg Hall, *Irish Post*, various editions, 1977)

Compare this anecdote – which was circulated around a number of London-Irish musical sessions and pubs from c.1975 onwards, to the character of ‘the King’ in *I Could Read The Sky*, where Francie tells the omniscient narrator ‘about the time he saw the King working

the jackhammer when a woman came up to him and asked the way to the post-office. “That way, madam,” he said, “lifting the hammer with one arm and pointing the way”’.¹²⁸ The episode from O’Grady’s fictional novel could easily be a remediation of the story about Danny Meehan – or for that matter it may have been told about any such strong man working the London sites in the post-war decades.

By any objective standpoint, these stories are almost certainly hyperbolised, again demonstrating the process of mythologisation. Whilst it is within the realms of possibility that a strong man could lift a 25kg concrete slab with one arm, it is highly improbable to anyone who has ever used a jackhammer – which in the 1960s and 70s would have weighed in the order of 40-50kg – that it could be lifted and pointed with one arm by even the strongest of labourers. Many similar ‘tall tales’ of epic lifting, digging and carrying circulated around the post-war Irish building community. The literature on Irish migrant work experiences is littered with examples of this compulsion amongst young Irish builders to ‘prove their metal’ in physical terms; in and of themselves acts of masculine performative Irishness.¹²⁹ Mac Amhlaigh, on a site in Edmonton, London, in 1957, recounted just such an experience:

I worked better after that and I tried hard because I didn’t want to have any of the lads saying: **“What kind of a man is that that can’t work like a proper navvy?”** We worked away and when first break came at ten o’clock I had blisters on my hands and my back felt as if somebody had been laying about it with a stick [...] ‘I don’t know how I got through the rest of the day. I’d be exhausted and as weak as a cat and then I’d gather the strength to keep going another little while.’¹³⁰ (Emphasis added).

The fictional accounts have a tendency to aestheticize the masculine physicality of construction work perhaps well-beyond the often mundane way the men themselves saw such work. This can be seen in the epigraph to this chapter from *I Could Read the Sky*, and also this extract from Edna O’Brien’s short story *Shovel Kings*:

They were driven a few miles north to where a group of young men were digging a long trench, for the electricity cables to be put in later on [...] At his first sight of it, it was hard for him, as he said, not to

¹²⁸ O’Grady, *I Could Read the Sky*, p.125.

¹²⁹ Mclvor, *Working Lives*, pp.80-92; Thiel, *Builders*, p.124.

¹³⁰ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.28.

imagine those men, young though they were, destined for all eternity to be kept digging some never-ending grave.¹³¹

Perhaps the most masculine expression of performative Irishness – following the stock formations in the canonical metanarrative, is that of fighting; it fulfils the elements of the ‘Cuchulainn trope’ referenced earlier and constitutes a form of martial masculinity in some senses.¹³² The Irish migrant reputation in this respect – inextricably linked to excessive alcohol consumption - was somewhat legendary, as seen in chapter five and Mac Amhlaigh, again, provides several reference points:

I saw a lot of the boys blind drunk by this time... [sic] A couple of fights started but those taking part were thrown out as soon as they got rough. There’s a big strong priest from County Cork there, Father James Galvin, and he’s six and a half feet if he’s an inch. He’s in charge of the Irish Club and, as the dance was being run by the club, he was responsible for keeping the peace at it. He and another sturdy man went in among those who were fighting and threw them out the door just as you’d throw out rubbish that you had no use for. That was the end of the ructions.¹³³

There was a tough hard fight going on between a lad from the Meath Gaeltacht, Ginger Folan and Black Molloy from Leitrim... [sic] He then told the Leitrim man that he would fight and the priest was sent for. A large crowd stayed after the dance to look at the fight and they were well satisfied for there was a good exchange as long as it lasted [...] There is enmity between those who were given new holdings in County Meath and those who had been there a long time – even in this country!¹³⁴

William Barrett, a permanent migrant to Britain in 1953 recounted similar tales of epic battles and brawls in an Oxfordshire village in the early 1950s.¹³⁵ Irish dancehalls in the Elephant and Castle owned by the well-known wrestling brothers Casey from County Kerry¹³⁶ and an all-out brawl in the Inishfail dancehall in Leytonstone in east London, which at the time

¹³¹ O’Brien, ‘Shovel Kings’, p.7.

¹³² Hammett, ‘It’s in the Blood, isn’t it?’, p.352; Joyce. E. Canaan, ‘One Thing Leads to Another: Drinking, Fighting and Working-class Masculinities’ in Mairtin Mac an Ghail (Ed.), *Understanding Masculinities: Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*, (Buckingham, 2000), pp.114-125.

¹³³ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navvy*, p.11.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24.

¹³⁵ *Sunday Independent*, 22 November, 2015.

¹³⁶ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, p.707.

was owned by the Neary brothers from Mayo and the Clancy brothers, believed to be from Cork:

What sticks in the mind about this one (fight) is the variety of instruments that were deployed, but the chair easily took precedence. Again the whole hall was engulfed and gradually cleared. The last impression I have is of Val Clancy with one or two of the Nearys in hand-to-hand combat, using chairs with a group of five or six others. [including] a group of sailors docked at Tilbury.¹³⁷ They were bored so had decided to come up to Leytonstone to pick a fight with the Pads (sic). I recall counting 25 uniformed policemen outside the hall at Leytonstone at closing time. In those days the Irish were wanted nowhere else except the pub, and even there we had to be selective. I can easily empathise with these men as I recall the rage, bitterness, sense of betrayal, disappointment and above all confusion evident in their eyes.¹³⁸

Performative hegemonic masculinities amongst migrant construction workers were not, however, confined to reckless endangerment, alcohol abuse and savage displays of aggressive behaviour and on and off the building site. The pernicious influence of male dominance was ever-present in the highly patriarchal cultural mores, religious dogma and social and classist hierarchies of earlier centuries. One major legacy was the virtual invisibility of women within the construction workplace and the ostensible absence of female participation in, or influence on, the lives of migrant Irish builders. This was despite that the Irish male migrant population during the post-war period rarely exceeded 50% of the total, and that, as a cohort, Irish females slightly outnumbered males.¹³⁹ However, the prevailing patriarchal hegemony embedded at all levels within socio-economic and cultural power structures ensured that male enterprise and employment took precedence within the advanced capitalist global economy.

The occupational gendering of construction as an industrial process, and Irish migrant construction work in particular is unequivocally patriarchal. Despite extensive research and questioning of interviewees, the participation of women in the actual construction process during the post-war decades – irrespective of class or ethnic background – has been negligible. Wider academic research has revealed periods in history when female participation in the

¹³⁷ Tilbury docks is a commercial dockyard along the estuary of the River Thames on the north shore and would have been easily accessible to Leytonstone by car or train.

¹³⁸ *Sunday Independent*, 22 Nov, 2015, letter from William Barrett.

¹³⁹ Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.4, pp.31-2, 95-7.

construction process has been greater but even these works conclude that on the whole, construction ‘remains an almost exclusively white male preserve, the most segregated sector in the economy’.¹⁴⁰ The complete gender imbalance which was endemic in the early industrial world has been marginally rectified in recent decades but even at the time of writing, the ONS measures female involvement in the UK construction industry at 9-11% overall, with only 1% of those being site-based operatives.¹⁴¹

For migrant Irish women during the post-war period, the issue of occupational representation was peculiarly problematic since the majority of work carried out by Irish ethnic firms and labour was concentrated in the heavy groundwork/civil engineering, pipeline and concrete sectors of the market – by far the most physically demanding and manually intensive.¹⁴² Consequently in the post-war decades very few Irish migrant females attained – in their own right or outside of the domestic sphere - powerful political, entrepreneurial or socio-economic status even (and perhaps particularly) within the Irish enclave. There were exceptions: Mrs Smallman, for example, a wealthy Dublin widow who provided the capital investment for McWeeney & Smallman in the late 1950s, the company going on to become highly successful demolition and engineering contractors throughout the following three decades.¹⁴³ Moreover, approximately 25% of the 106 extant Irish migrant start-up companies scheduled in Table 1 of Appendix B list females (usually spouses) as founding co-directors. This suggests that beneath the veneer of performative patriarchy which enveloped every aspect of migrant Irish life in the London construction sector, many female migrants were quietly fulfilling an essential role in shaping and facilitating the transition of male migrant builders from manual operatives to managers of commercial enterprises. The probability was that many of these rough-hewn manual workers relied upon their wives to deal with the administrative, financial, fiscal and ‘paperwork’ side of running a small business – something which most men’s masculine sensibilities would, in any event, have regarded as ‘women’s work’ until the later decades of the twentieth century, when patriarchal attitudes began tentatively to wain.

¹⁴⁰ L Clarke, and C. Wall, , ‘Omitted from history: women in the building trades’ in Dunkeld, M., Campbell, J., Louw, H., Tutton, M., Addis, B., Powell, C. and Thorne, R. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the Second International Congress on Construction History Cambridge, UK Construction History Society*, (April, 2006), pp.35-59, p.35.

¹⁴¹ Sonia Gurjao, *Inclusivity: the Changing Role of Women in the Construction Workforce*, University of Reading (CIOB), (2004), p.15.

¹⁴² See chapters 2-4 for details.

¹⁴³ See Appendix B, pp.51-2.

Irish migrant women, on the whole, integrated more easily into London culture.¹⁴⁴ They were often less dogmatic than their hyper-masculine male partners and consequently adopted more moderate and diplomatic attitudes to migrant life; for example, as Hickman and Walter noted, unlike their male counterparts, Irish women would often try to hide their accent and origin to avoid the prospects of prejudice against them.¹⁴⁵ This made them better able to negotiate some of the formalities and administrative hurdles of the migratory process. Beyond the entrepreneurial sphere of Irish migrant construction work, where Irish migrant women became the wives or partners of manual workers operating within the ‘lump’, these females often became the stabilising force in such relationships – sometimes saving their male partners from their own potential self-destructiveness. Domesticity, social mobility, money management and stabilised prosperity were more-often-than-not the result of female influence on the migrant construction worker. Emotional security, children and home-making usually resulted for the majority of interviewees in Appendix A.

On a more intimate note, throughout the early post-war period morality, domesticity and sexuality were issues viewed by Irish migrants largely through the prism of Catholic teaching and doctrine. Consequently the clerical patriarchy ensured that men were certainly subjected to far less stringent moral expectations than women.¹⁴⁶ In terms of conjugal relationships the oral histories indicate, unsurprisingly, an overwhelmingly heteronormative and heterosexual preference.¹⁴⁷ However, by the end of the 1960s Britain had undergone a social and sexual revolution; radical changes were happening to gender relations; second-wave feminism was on the rise, as was sexual liberation, contraception and youth culture. Whilst evidence suggests most marriages involving Irish migrant construction workers were patriarchal and masculine hegemony prevailed, such radical social changes were often unconsciously absorbed. No interviewees proffered any information whatsoever as regards their intimate relationships, beyond discussing their marriage and familial arrangements as part of their social lives. This is an area of potential future research, albeit I suspect the significant

¹⁴⁴ Delaney, *Demography*, p.207, citing Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, p.215; Delaney, *The Irish in Post-war Britain*, pp.91-2; John Archer Jackson, ‘The Irish in Britain’ in P.J. Drury (ed.), *Ireland and Britain Since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986) (Irish Studies 5), p.131, Table 7.3; Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.5.

¹⁴⁵ Mary J. Hickman, and Bronwen Walter. ‘Racializing the Irish in England: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity.’ in Marilyn Cohen and Nancy J. Curtin, (Eds.), *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland*, (New York, 1999), pp.267-292, p.287.

¹⁴⁶ Redmond, *Moving Histories*, p.33, 47, 133.

¹⁴⁷ See chapter five.

degree of heteronormativity and social reticence amongst older generations would hamper data collection.

Moreover, homosexuality amongst the post-war Irish migrants, because of the cultural influence of Catholic teaching and doctrine, was a topic so taboo that it was almost never openly mentioned by the interviewees for this research and it was not a line of questioning I regarded as appropriate to pursue. The obvious reluctance to objectively consider the issue of homosexuality amongst migrant Irish males speaks to the dominance of Catholic dogma as an element of performative Irish and workplace masculinity. Male physicality, overt heterosexuality and embedded homophobia were all, in a sense, symbols of national honour.¹⁴⁸ One minor anecdote told by Tony C (OI#7), then a young migrant builder from Roscommon, hinted comedically at the awareness of same-sex relationships but, understandably, dismissed the thought peremptorily. Tony was thrown out of digs he had been renting in 1960s Camden Town after being discovered by the landlady (whom he described as a ‘tough landlady’ who even made him pay a deposit for the key to his room) in bed with his older brother, who had been visiting for the weekend. As Tony describes it, ‘The landlady came up on the Sunday morning and well, let’s just say she thought we were...well...not brothers certainly! [Laughter]...and the next thing...OUT!’ going on to add, ‘and I didn’t get the deposit back on the key either! [Laughter]. Sure I don’t know what she was thinking of, we weren’t tuned into that sort of thing anyway’.¹⁴⁹

Writing about homosexuality in the workplace generally, either from a British or Irish perspective, is a relatively new phenomenon.¹⁵⁰ Despite the preponderance of homosociality in a virtually all-male industry, construction and civil engineering work were so inherently homophobic in this period that tracing any evidence of such relations is difficult.¹⁵¹ The historiography of the homosexual community, however, does provide some guidance - albeit sparse, of the presence of homosexual activity amongst Irish migrant construction workers. Matt Houlbrook’s excellent history of *Queer London* suggests that from the 1920s until at least

¹⁴⁸ Rumens, ‘Queering men and masculinities in construction’, pp.802-815.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), Appendix A, p.124.

¹⁵⁰ Most literature written before the turn of the twentieth century about Queer Theory or homosexual relations is sociological in nature rather than historical. See for example J. Hearn and W. Parkin, *Sex at Work: The Power and Paradox of Organisation*, (Brighton, 1987); B. McNaught, *Gay Issues in the Workplace*, (New York, 1993); Rumens, ‘Queering men and masculinities in construction’. pp.802-815.

¹⁵¹ Robert .W. Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Cambridge, 2000)., p.109.

the 1960s, ‘rough Irish layabouts’ and ‘burly Irish labourers’ were known to have frequented the illicit meeting places for homosexual activity and were both ‘objects of desire, and likely to accept advances.’¹⁵² John Alcock, a sexually-active homosexual in 1940s London recounts that in Paddington – his favourite haunt at the time for procuring casual sex – ‘the Catholic Irish boys were much more prone to go home with a queer gentleman...[sic] for a ten-bob note, something to eat, a clean shirt...[sic] the rent scene was very predominantly Irish’.¹⁵³ Paddington was, at that time, becoming one of the major settlement areas for post-war Irish migrants.¹⁵⁴

In the round, the visceral fear of the newly-arrived migrant adolescent male plunged into this world of hegemonic masculinity, seemingly random fighting and the constant pressure to prove one’s physical capabilities and toughness is a repeated theme in the cultural representations of Irish builders. It is one area of representation which does tend to reflect the realities of site life for the Irish.¹⁵⁵ However, context, again is a crucial element often missing from the depictions and it is evident that this culture of toughness and masculinity was, in practice, no more a manifestation of physical reality in the Irish than in the British and other ethnic groups working in the industry. The stabilising influence of female involvement was present beneath the pernicious veil of male performativity. The socio-cultural influences of hegemonic masculinity, physical toughness and reckless endangerment had subsisted in the British construction industry long before the Irish migrants pervaded the post-war rebuilding programme.¹⁵⁶ What was exceptional in the Irish case was that these traits were amplified and augmented significantly by inherited nationalist and Gaelic articulations of manhood and masculinity which empowered them within the urban Irish environment, whilst differentiating them from the wider carapace of capitalist British industry. As shown above, in the case of working-song culture, dramatic and literary representations, this obsession with physical prowess as a virtue became a trope to be performed almost as a rite of passage.

¹⁵² Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, (London, 2005), p.189.

¹⁵³ Houlbrook, *Queer London*), p.189.

¹⁵⁴ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.90.

¹⁵⁵ See chapter four.

¹⁵⁶ McIvor, *Working Lives*, pp.78-92; Thiel, *Builders*, pp.106-30.

6.5. Reconstructing Identity

The complexities of Irish migrant identity formation in Britain were humorously summarized in a short exchange in Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy*: 'You mean Liverpool-Irish or London-Irish?' 'No, I mean Edgware Road Irish – Irish from Ireland, same as you'.¹⁵⁷ As with most aspects of this story, when it comes to Irish migrant identity amongst the construction workers there is no archetype. Ethnicity alone was complex and fluid; for those steeped in the semi-itinerant, highly self-reliant, masculinised world of construction it was particularly so. The legacy of the spailpín and navvy traditions, as outlined in preceding chapters, encouraged an initial resistance amongst a majority to normative settlement and urbanity; distrust of authority, class systems, social order, unionisation and bureaucracy of any kind.¹⁵⁸ Whilst, as chapter five shows, settlement took place extensively in London, it is arguable that migrant Irish builders – particularly when young and single - were never really comfortable with the idea of suburban domesticity.

Behan's older sibling, the migrant builder, militant trade unionist and writer, Brian wrote 'The Irishman abroad is a strange creature. Ireland isn't your home. But England's not your home either. You don't have a home. You're a sort of pigeon...[sic] a bird of passage'.¹⁵⁹ His contemporary, Leitrim writer John McGahern viscerally captured this sence: 'Part of the pain of emigration was that the small communities they had left were more real to the emigrants than the places where their lives were happening and where their children were growing up with alien accents. There was a hidden bitterness, but sometimes it was not so hidden'.¹⁶⁰ He goes on to recount a building-site anecdote about a young Clare migrant's reaction to news from 'home' that week where exceptionally inclement rains were turning the harvest to disaster: '“May it never stop”, he said, without a trace of humour, [...] I was going home at the end of the summer; he wasn't'.¹⁶¹

This sense of liminality is equally palpable in an extract from an unpublished early McGahern novella, also set in London, where the protagonist reflects on why he has

¹⁵⁷ Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy*, (London, 1990), p.236.

¹⁵⁸ Sykes, 'Navvies: Their Work Attitudes', pp.21-35.

¹⁵⁹ *Irish Post*, 4 July, 1970, p.2.

¹⁶⁰ John McGahern, *Memoir*, (London, 2005), p.280.

¹⁶¹ McGahern, *Memoir*, p.280.

immigrated: ““Do you belong to these people?” Jude asked himself. “You have no need to go. These people must go because they have to work. They are the ignorant and the unlucky. These are the representatives of Ireland’s vast spiritual empire”, he thought, and wished for the sanity of laughter, but it broke sickeningly within him’.¹⁶² The bitterness which McGahern recognises is rooted in the perpetual state of existential ambiguity ‘embedded in the continuing failure of Ireland, within conditions of late modernity, to provide the opportunism, meritocracy and cosmopolitanism promised in an earlier period of state modernisation and nation building’.¹⁶³ Many settled Irish-in-London expressed the sense that they were no longer really Irish to many of their family and friends at home, nor were they really Londoners.¹⁶⁴

Delaney, citing Ryan’s survey of 1,400 Irish migrants living in London at the time, concluded that in the early 1970s Irish migrants to Britain were not a monolithic grouping and had not fully assimilated into their host society.¹⁶⁵ Ryan found that: one third of Irish migrants had not assimilated but had accommodated (to living in London and civic norms and laws but still identified as solely Irish and displayed solely Irish traits and cultural habits): a further third had partially assimilated (complying fully with social, civic, legal, political and religious norms of British life but still identifying as culturally Irish); and a final third had assimilated fully in terms of identity and culture.¹⁶⁶ My research – particularly the oral histories – suggests that, on the whole, Irish migrant construction workers were more likely to resist cultural and social assimilation than the wider Irish migrant population and than first-wave Irish migrants had been. Both Ryan and Delaney concur that irrespective of the level of assimilation amongst the Irish, ‘a distinctive Irish ethnicity could be discerned’. I would argue *a fortiori* that for Irish working-class males the primary features of this ethnicity coalesced around lived experiences within the closed community of construction work.¹⁶⁷ This, in large part, can be attributed to the concept of workplace auto-segregation discussed in chapter two.

¹⁶² Dennis Sampson, *Young John McGahern: Becoming a Novelist*, (Oxford, 2012), p.61.

¹⁶³ F. O’Toole, *The Politics of Magic: The Work and Times of Tom Murphy*, (Dublin,1987), p.49.

¹⁶⁴ Dunne, *An Unconsidered People*, pp.61-63.

¹⁶⁵ Delaney, *Demography*, p.271.

¹⁶⁶ Liam Ryan, ‘Assimilation of Irish Immigrants to Britain’, unpub. PhD thesis, St Louis University, 1973, pp.231-32 cited in M.P. Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholics in England: Studies in social structure since the Second World War*, (Cambridge, 1987), pp.128-9.

¹⁶⁷ Delaney, *Demography*, p.271.

As Mary Gilmartin observed, ‘The relationship between migration, identity and belonging stretches across place and time. The challenge [...] is to interrogate the ways in which this relationship alters and changes across a variety of mutually constitutive scales’.¹⁶⁸ Take the example of Irish migrants to America who settle permanently, often taking up U.S. citizenship enthusiastically. Their children become ‘Irish-Americans’ and wear that identity as a badge of honour. Irish migrants to London and their offspring have much more strained and complex relationships with their host city – despite often having been born and raised there. Modood identified the paradox of geographically proximate ‘British-Isles’ immigrants compared to their wider global compatriots:

It is in fact mostly those groups that have a national-territorial base in the British Isles and a historical grievance with the British state who today shrink from the label ‘British’. While Pakistanis in Bradford have been coming to an understanding of themselves as British, it is the Scots and the Irish – both within and outside their territorial nations – that are in denial about being British, who see one national identity as incompatible with another.¹⁶⁹

Arrowsmith observed that ‘white Irish are assumed [by the British] to have assimilated unproblematically into a ‘British’ identity’¹⁷⁰ and yet, paradoxically, Irishmen ‘are simultaneously discursively positioned as white Europeans and as members of an inferior race’.¹⁷¹ This incompatibility is, I contend, the inevitable consequence of decades of ‘othering’ which Mary Hickman *et al* cite as informing the ‘Myth of Homogeneity’ – that phenomenon which served to keep the Irish as a subaltern, unrecognised ethnic minority virtually until the turn of the twenty-first century.¹⁷² Soroohan contends this began to change after several decades of settlement:

For the first-generation Irish-in-London the expression of an identity in exile never led to the use of a hyphenated identity such as ‘Irish-American’, but many of the Irish in Britain began to recognise

¹⁶⁸ Mary Gilmartin, ‘Migration, Identity and Belonging’ in *Geography Compass*, Vol. 2, No.6 (2008), pp.1837–1852, p.1848.

¹⁶⁹ Tariq Modood, ‘New forms of Britishness: post-immigration ethnicity and hybridity in Britain’ in *The Expanding Nation: Towards A Multi-Ethnic Ireland*, Proceedings Of A Conference Held in Trinity College Dublin, 22-24 September 1998, pp.34-40, at p.39.

¹⁷⁰ Aidan Arrowsmith, ‘The Significance of Irishness’ in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol 14, nr.2 (2006), p.165.

¹⁷¹ Popoviciu et al., ‘Migrating Masculinities’, pp.169-187, p.173.

¹⁷² Mary J. Hickman, ‘Reconstructing deconstructing ‘race’: British political discourses about the Irish in Britain’ in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 21:2, (1998), p.288-307; Tony Murray, *London Irish Fictions: Narrative, Diaspora and Identity*, (Liverpool, 2012), p.30.

themselves as distinct from the Irish at home, and as a group within wider British society. The 1970s was the key decade in the transformation [...] of post-war emigrants from a connected set of impermanent exiles to a self-expressed community within London.¹⁷³

I emphasise the term ‘London-Irish’ here; immigration is generally a process of transition from alienation to some degree of plurality or integration. Hall’s dichotomy of ‘London-Irish -v- Irish-in-London’¹⁷⁴ can and should be extended to the post-war generations of migrants because it represents a dynamic process. In this schema, the London-Irish are essentially the British-born descendants of earlier Irish-in-London.¹⁷⁵ That was so for Hall’s first-wave interwar migrants and is equally so for the second great wave of migration (the post-war mailboat generation) who are continually transitioning from Irish-in-London to London-Irish, with some children and grandchildren still identifying as part-Irish. Brexit has probably served to deepen the complexities of these relationships even further.¹⁷⁶

A substantial proportion of the British-born children and grandchildren of the mail-boat generation (including the present author) went into construction in various capacities themselves.¹⁷⁷ Work on second-generation identity often shows conflicting viewpoints. Many individuals are more comfortable occupying the ‘double-consciousness’ of dual identity and are, with certain (usually politically or culturally motivated) exceptions content to be regarded by their fellow citizens as something of a hybrid. Most British-born Irish take great offence at the ‘plastic’ or ‘wannabe Irish’ taunts adopted as a pejorative by their Irish-born friends and relations.¹⁷⁸ MacAonghusa once again encapsulates the sensibilities involved in this complex identity paradox:

¹⁷³ Sorohan, *Irish London*, p.54.

¹⁷⁴ Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, pp.ii-iii. See also Chapter 1, s1.2.

¹⁷⁵ This categorization would apply, I suggest, unless and until these descendants fully assimilate and self-identify as entirely British, which sometimes takes only one generation. These labels are, of course, entirely arbitrary and bear no relationship to legal citizenship or nationality but nonetheless facilitate categorization for research purposes.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Could Brexit mean more anti-Irish racism as reports of hate crime increase?’ at *Irish Post Online*, June 28, 2016, available at: <https://www.irishpost.com/news/irish-britain-share-recent-experiences-racism-post-brex-it-reports-hate-crime-increases-93141> (accessed 14 June, 2019).

¹⁷⁷ By the early 1990s around 25,000 2nd-generation British-born Irish may have been working in construction in the LMA – see Table 2.3, section 2.2.

¹⁷⁸ Sorohan, *Irish London*, pp.40-54, 101-39. Arrowsmith also writes very compellingly about the complexities of Irish migrant hybridity in relation to playwright Martin McDonagh’s work, see: Aidan Arrowsmith, ‘Genuinely Inauthentic: McDonagh’s Postdiasporic Irishness’ in Lilian Chambers, Eamonn Jordan (Eds.), *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, (Dublin, 2006), pp.236-45.

There is a significant difference between the perceived status of Irish immigrants in England and those in the US. In the US they quickly become American and are so recognised after the first generation. In England one meets second- and third-generation Irish with local English accents who would never regard themselves as English [...] Part of the problem is that the Irish at home don't recognise the Irishness of their cousins in England. That causes great hurt.¹⁷⁹

I argue, apropos Rogaly and McMorran, that in late twentieth-century London the multi-generational network of settled Irish builders in London see their identities as concurrently local, regional and yet migrant in nature.¹⁸⁰ Hickman, for example, noted that 'In the heterogeneous diaspora space of contemporary Britain, Irish immigrants and their children have formed transethnic alliances'.¹⁸¹

These complex identities can, therefore, fluctuate dependent upon their work environments and personal circumstances because the 'simultaneity of mobility and fixity can extend to a single individual at [any] one point in time'.¹⁸² Moreover, elements of transnationalism and translocalism intersect at the varying stages of the migratory cycle because 'individual migrants and their descendants struggle with the labels of identification'.¹⁸³ The reconstruction of identity consequently remains a dynamic, fluxional concept inextricably linked to self-referential lived experiences and yet, simultaneously rooted in the ethnic markers of first-generation migrants, be they parents, grandparents or great-grandparents.

6.6. Conclusion.

The self-stereotyping of the migrant Irish builder and the associated culture of performative masculinity were somewhat inevitable given how important construction work

¹⁷⁹ Micheál Mac Aonghusa, 'Pretenders Looking for Their Crowns': A Review of *Kings* by Tom Collins', in *History Ireland*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2007), pp. 52-53.

¹⁸⁰ Rogaly, 'Disrupting migration stories', p.530, citing C. McMorran, , 'Mobilities and the production of fixities: labour in a Japanese Inn' in *Mobilities*, Issue 10, (2015), pp.83-99.

¹⁸¹ Mary J.Hickman, 'Diaspora Spaces and National (Re)Formations' in *Eire-Ireland*, Nr.47.1 and 2 (2012), pp.19-44, p.40.

¹⁸² A Thomson, , 'Moving stories: oral history and migration studies' in *Oral History*, Issue 27, (1999), pp.24-37, at p.25, 28.

¹⁸³ Thomson, , 'Moving stories', pp.24-37, at p.25, 28.

was to most migrant Irish males in London at this time. The metanarrative voice of what Brendan Ward glibly referred to as ‘Builders, Chancers and the Crack’¹⁸⁴ was, it seems, fated to become part of modern Irish diasporic myth. Although never broadcast to its intended audience, Philip Donnellan’s 1965 BBC documentary *The Irishmen* is an illustrative example of the problem of representation discussed earlier in this chapter. It symbolically fetishized much of the folklore and zeitgeist of the 1950s and 1960s Irish working in British construction.¹⁸⁵ Donnellan’s blend of contemporaneous interviews and footage of heavy construction work in progress to the soundtrack of folk-revivalist working-song culture (mainly from MacColl and Behan) depicts a populist stereotypical – I would suggest unrepresentative – image of the real Irish builder. Indeed Wills identifies the potential to ‘read the film as an indulgent excess of cliché, stereotype and sentimentality’, suggesting that it has the potential to excessively romanticise and aestheticize exile, poverty and manual labour.¹⁸⁶

In my view, this analysis applies in a broader sense to a significant proportion of the cultural representations (literature, drama, song and folklore) of the post-war Irish migrants who worked in the construction industry in London. The effect of these rhetorical simulations of reality – what oral historians have termed ‘the composure and discomposure of dominant cultural narratives’¹⁸⁷ – was to encourage young, inexperienced migrants, keen to progress and improve their lot, to gain approbation by ‘performing’ the expected version of ‘Irishness’. For example, some migrant males did not drink alcohol, gamble or abandon religious observances until they went to London and generally indicated that these behavioural traits were expected of them in order to gain acceptance within the pub-based social milieu and to develop contact networks and employment opportunities.¹⁸⁸

There were, obviously, consequences to this culture of performative Irishness. The various masculinities inherent in manual labour – martial, hegemonic, temperate and useful – blended with the simulated myths of Irish nationalism and the heroics of spailpín culture.¹⁸⁹ In

¹⁸⁴ Brendan Ward, *Builders, Chancers and the Crack*, (London, 1985)

¹⁸⁵ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.161-84.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.177-83.

¹⁸⁷ Hammett, ‘It’s in the Blood, isn’t it?’, p.356.

¹⁸⁸ Interviews with: Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), p.41, 43, 49,54; Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), p.65; Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), p.92; Michael Mc, (OI#6), County Armagh, (8 Nov. 2015), p.97, 109

¹⁸⁹ For an informative review of these various forms of masculinity see: Hammett, ‘It’s in the Blood, isn’t it?’, pp.349-58; Thiel, *Builders*, pp.106-130; Liviu Popoviciu, Chris Haywood, & Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, ‘Migrating

turn this perpetuated a form of post-colonial resistance to assimilation; recycling and intensifying the sense of Irish cultural exceptionalism amongst builders (by comparison to other more integrated occupations) and, over time, becoming the dominant representational identity of the London-Irish male community.¹⁹⁰ Somewhat paradoxically, it also helped internationalise Irish labour by exposing it to one of the largest industrial labour markets which ‘rendered Ireland central to the process of core formation in the world economy’ by appropriating isolated pockets of rural Ireland – as emigrant nurseries – into the capitalist world economy.¹⁹¹

For the migrant Irish engaged in the overtly hegemonic, intemperate and aggressive world of manual labouring, these various outward performances of enclavic working-class Irishness reflected the intensely homosocial environments in which their migratory experiences were played out. Ingman suggests a potential historical explanation for these irresistible tendencies, arguing that: ‘the colonial stereotype of the feminised Celt’ caused the Irish to generate ‘a hypermasculine republican form of masculinity’ that highlights ‘their manliness’.¹⁹² The tendency towards pessimism and the disproportionate emphasis upon the negative elements of loss, social failure and tragedy in these stock formations may, Wills suggests, derive in one sense from cultural or folk memory rooted in the emigrations of the Great Famine.¹⁹³ The symbolic death of the ‘American Wake’ and the ‘ceaseless reiteration of departures and short-lived returns’ arguably embedded a sense of hopelessness in the experience. Irish emigration [to Britain], ‘**if we are to believe the written accounts**, took place in an atmosphere of dread, fear or resignation’¹⁹⁴ (emphasis added).

And yet the overwhelming statistical evidence of numbers of successful settlement, generational propagation and entrepreneurial activity detailed in chapters two and three together with testamentary evidence of the oral histories suggests the reality was different. For many migrants who came to work in construction the sense of adventure, freedom and

Masculinities’ in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol.14:2, (2006), pp.169-187.

¹⁹⁰ Sorohan, *Irish London*, p.54.

¹⁹¹ Jim Mac Laughlin, *Ireland: The Emigrant Nursery and the World Economy*, (Cork, 1994), p.2.

¹⁹² Heather Ingman, ‘Edna O’Brien: Stretching the Nation’s Boundaries’ in *Irish Studies Review*, Vol 10, Nr..3 (2002), pp.253-265, p.255.

¹⁹³ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.2-4.

¹⁹⁴ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, pp.2-4.

economic opportunity outweighed these fears and dreads.¹⁹⁵ Whilst the regrettable inevitability of migration, before the event, is certainly present in many personal accounts, for the most part all of the male migrants who participated in this research saw emigration as a positive opportunity – if not prior to the event, then usually after a few years of moving to Britain. An uncomfortable paradox therefore persists between the ‘romanticisation and aestheticization of manual labour’ depicted in the various mythologised representations and the reality of generations of young, acquiescent Irish migrants whose bodies were ‘alienated, fractured and commodified’¹⁹⁶ in the name of industrial capitalism. The majority of these men nonetheless stayed in London, within construction, some developing lucrative subcontracting businesses themselves; others, alternatively, in time developing and maintaining relatively permanent employment patterns and living settled, improving and moderately rewarding lives as migrants in an increasingly pluralistic metropolis. In the conclusion to this research, I examine the legacy of Irish migrant builders in post-war London.

¹⁹⁵ Interviews with: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.20 ; Kevin H, (OI#3), County Galway, (13 Oct. 2015), pp.53-4; Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), p.77; John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), pp.400-409, all in Appendix A.

¹⁹⁶ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.183.

Conclusion

*But now they toil on foreign soil, where they have made their way,
Deep in the heart of London town or over on Broadway,
And I am left to sing their deeds and praise them while I can,
Those Boys of Barr na Sráide who hunted for the wren.¹*

The final section of this thesis brings together the various strands of historical narrative and discursive analysis set out in the preceding chapters, sums up the discussions of the central research questions about migrant Irish builders in post-war London and draws relevant conclusions.² It also seeks to locate this research within the wider academic fields of migration studies, British industrial and ethnic history and Irish studies. Finally I attach a great deal of importance to placing the contemporary issue of the ‘forgotten Irish’ and the understandable public opprobrium caused by recent television documentaries about the fate of older male Irish migrants into its objective historical context.

Firstly, the preceding chapters provide certainty that the role of Irish migrants in the post-war rebuilding of London is a significant part of the wider history of the global Irish. Few would argue that London is, in historical and cultural terms, one of the great cities of modern civilisation; it is, as Ford Madox Ford rather grandiloquently said, ‘illimitable’.³ This research corroborates the widely-held view of many migrant builders themselves – together with Sara Goek, Reg Hall, Ultan Cowley and Miki Garcia, (the only writers to broach this esoteric topic in any depth) – that Irish migrants were indeed the dominant ethnic grouping within the London construction sector throughout the post-war period. The definition and quantification (in chapter two) of this important occupational ethnic grouping has provided a level of empirical evidence that goes beyond previous academic work either in the fields of construction or migration history.

The geographic, socio-economic and cultural patterns to migration for construction work in London are comprehensively reviewed in chapters two to four. A number of important

¹ Sigerson Clifford, ‘The Boys of Barr na Sráide’, in *Ballads of a Bogman* (Cork, 1955).

² Discussed in chapter one, s.1.1.

³ Ford Madox Ford, *The Soul of London: A Survey of a Modern City*, (London, 1905), p15.

causative factors emerge. In Ireland: a failed policy of post-Independent economic autarchy, rural fundamentalism and petit-bourgeois, small-farm capitalism; a resultant surplus population of young, single, unemployed, penurious males; all leading to mass emigration mainly from the western counties of Ireland.⁴ In London and the LMA: the mass destruction of war followed by five decades of uninterrupted demand-driven economic growth, leading to unprecedented demand for manual labour.⁵ The primary mechanism for Irish labour dominance was the de-regulated labour-only ‘lump’ subcontracting system employed by all the major civil engineering and building contractors in a ‘top-down’ hierarchy. This empowered Irish migrants to form webs of incorporated and unincorporated casual labour-only subcontract businesses, which, in turn, gradually evolved into a dynamic voluntary enclave and an ethnic control economy with a concomitant socio-economic network.

The main features of this system were: the continuous recruitment and (usually short-term) exploitation of a steady stream of fledgling migrant builders within the ‘lump’ subcontracting system; the establishment and growth of a voluntary ethnic enclave of an ethnic and its associative socio-cultural structures and networks across clusters of Irish settlement in London: and the establishment of long-term casual employment opportunity networks for Irish migrant builders from c.1955-1995 – all of which encouraged single male migrant builders to transition from itinerant to sojourner to permanent settler. Superimposed on this cultural framework were what Wills termed the ‘economies of slavery, Victorian laissez-faire and consensus-oriented post-war capitalism [...] which position the Irishman each time as a different form of outsider’.⁶

The key thematic finding which emerges from this research is that the variegated **lived** experience of migrant Irish builders, as a whole, was more positive – both individually and collectively – than the dominant **representations** and derived cultural **discourse** of negative hardship, social isolation, ‘ethnic male deprivation, family fragmentation and an accompanying dislocated masculinity’.⁷ Cultural representations often elevate such dysfunctions to the level of dramatic tragedy; as a result theorisations of Irish migrants as a **community** in London often

⁴ Aidan Beatty, ‘Fianna Fáil’s Agrarian Man and the Economics of National Salvation’ in Rebecca Anne Barr, et al, (Eds.) *Ireland and Masculinities in History* (London, 2019), pp.151-171. See also section 2.3.

⁵ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.196-216, 204-6. See also section 2.5.

⁶ Clair Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.148.

⁷ Popoviciu et al., ‘Migrating Masculinities’, pp.169-187,

start with underlying assumptions of social deviancy, non-conformity and failure as normative. These negative stereotypes of social failure amongst the Irish in London have, consequently, come to dominate discourse. (emphasis added)

To be clear, I do not suggest that the negative facets of Irish male migration within the UK construction industry are somehow exaggerated or unimportant as lived experience. On the contrary, this research has demonstrated the broad sweep of these problems – itinerancy, vagrancy, alcohol and gambling addictions, violence, criminality, loneliness and depression – and the perceived ‘social failure’ associated with them. One or more of these negative experiences were present, at some level and for some periods (usually temporarily and initially) in most migrant’s lives in London. Whether it be the ‘rough-and-ready’ accommodation, the brutal and exploitative subcontractors, discrimination, the drinking, smoking and gambling, the Irish dancehalls and pubs or the annual return ‘home’, all the interviewees reference at least one of these experiences and often several as part of their lives in London. As one newspaper correspondent later described it, the remembered [early] life of the Irish builder in London often amounted to ‘some grim scenarios of life shuttling between the church, the dancehall, the building site, and the digs’.⁸ However, such adversities were, for the majority, surmounted and did not often overshadow or materially depreciate their lives as migrants in the way which ‘industrial noir’ literature, dramatic representation and the song culture suggest.⁹

An equally important empirical finding is that throughout most of the post-war era, ‘soft power’ – political, social and cultural – within the Irish labour market and its associated community resided in and circulated amongst a handful of very influential construction, development and dancehall entrepreneurs and their firms. Chief amongst these were: the Gallagher family, from Tubbercurry in south Sligo; the Murphy brothers, John and Joe, from Caherciveen in south Kerry; the building-contractor-turned-impresario Bill Fuller, from north Kerry; Fuller’s national-school classmate, John Byrnes; and the McNicholas brothers from Bohola in Mayo.¹⁰ These entrepreneurs were at the apex of a symbiotic socio-economic network which also included many more of the medium-to-large construction firms, developers and club owners detailed in chapters three to five and Appendix B. The influence exerted in

⁸ *Sunday Independent Newspaper*, 29 November, 2015.

⁹ See section 6.2 for a detailed analysis of this theme.

¹⁰ See section 3.4 and Appendix B for further details of the formation and history of some of these companies.

Irish London, individually and collectively, by these powerful businessmen – although not deliberately strategic – was nevertheless patrimonial. They impacted communal business development, political and cultural capital, collective and individual employment opportunities and the control of social outlets such as dancehalls, pubs and cultural centres. The construction-related communal enclave therefore predominated both the working and social spheres of the Irish builder's life, subtly discouraging full assimilation into British industrial, civic or social life.

With regard to the historical development of modern Ireland after World War Two, an important corollary to emerge from chronicling Irish entrepreneurialism in London is the extent to which some of these self-made migrant business magnates – Matt and James Gallagher and John Byrne in particular – also exerted powerful political influence in the Lemass and Haughey era of Irish politics and were at the centre of several public planning, housing development and political funding controversies.¹¹

In the context of British ethnic history, Irish migrants (being overwhelmingly white and English-speaking) were perfectly positioned both legally and socially to fully assimilate as British citizens in London, but, paradoxically, most Irish construction workers – certainly initially and in some cases permanently – chose not to. The first-wave migrant Irish assimilated comparatively quickly prior to World War Two, and other professional classes in the second-wave (Irish nurses, for example) seemed to integrate better into London working society. So why were builders different? Cohen, citing the problem of English xenophobia, summarised the condition of post-war Irish migrants generally:

attitudes of extreme xenophobia have been applied by the English to the Irish [...] Formally, however, Section 32 of the 1948 British Nationality Act declared that [...] citizens of Éire were not aliens. Despite this backhanded compliment, many Irish people understand their history as a 'colonial' one – involving subjection to an alien government. When they live on the mainland, they often do so as invisible sojourners, part of the landscape, but rarely active members of civil and political society.¹²

¹¹ See section 3.4 and Appendix B for further details.

¹² Robin Cohen, *Frontiers of identity : the British and the others*, (Harlow, 1994), p.13. Cohen's use of the term *the mainland* to describe the juxtaposition of Ireland to Britain is, I suspect, deliberately provocative and would be deeply offensive to the majority of post-war Irish migrants working in London, who were by instinct Irish nationalists.

Coming from the opposite end of the analytical spectrum, Delaney blames Irish Anglophobia: ‘The irony that such a large proportion of this generation ended up in Britain after years of socialization that demonized the country’s historical role in Irish history was not lost on another interviewee: “In a sense we were taught to hate. We were taught this history, you were sorta [sic] taught to hate England and then sent there” ’.¹³ It could also be argued that Ireland and Irish nationalists in the period after independence were suffering from ‘small nation syndrome’ and the legacy of what social historian Liam Kennedy famously termed MOPE syndrome – ‘Most Oppressed People Ever’¹⁴ – a phrase which has acquired currency amongst Irish cultural critics and which nonetheless accurately reflects the inherent bitter resentment against Britain as the ‘old enemy’ – and which was drummed into most of the post-war London Irish settlers as part of their state education, underpinning the post-colonial resistance of a society ‘at best highly fragmented, at worst pathogenic’.¹⁵ As discussed in chapter two, I posit the concept of ‘workplace auto-segregation’ as an adjunct to Peach’s conceptualisation of residential segregation as the determinant marker of pluralism or multiculturalism. In this respect Irish migrant construction workers were somewhat unique in London.¹⁶

Of the oral histories only one quarter of interviewees stayed permanently in London, the longest of those, Tom M (OI#1) having been in London for 62 years at the time of writing. Six interviewees migrated for less than 20 years, four for 20- 40 years, and eleven for 40-60 years. Those who achieved a moderate-to-high degree of social stability, mobility or integration expressed a deeper sense of gratitude for their lives in London,¹⁷ with the most common retort being that their lives were ‘better than if they had stayed in Ireland’.¹⁸ None, however, expressed any genuine sense of assimilation or Britishness. The persistent dominance of the

¹³ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.56, citing an interviewee in Sharon Lambert, *Irish Women in Lancashire, 1922-1960: Their Story* (Lancaster, 2001), p.88.

¹⁴ Joseph Valente, ‘Ethnonostalgia: Irish Hunger and Traumatic Memory’ in Oona Frawley (Ed.), *Memory Ireland Volume 3: The Famine and the Troubles*, (New York, 2014), p.178.

¹⁵ Oona Frawley, *Memory Ireland Volume 3: The Famine and the Troubles*, (New York, 2014), p.178.

¹⁶ Other migrant groups were engaged in construction work during the post-war period, but none in such numbers or networks sufficient to form ethnically auto-segregated workplace communities. This situation changed in the late 1990s as eastern European and south Asian migrants began to replace the Irish within the London construction industry.

¹⁷ Generally those who had been in London longer, became business owners and/or property-owners, married British-born Irish or non-Irish partners, and/or whose children had assimilated more generally into British life. See for examples: Tom M (OI#1), Kevin H, (OI#3), Jackie W, (OI#11), Paddy B, (OI#12), John P, (OI#13), Patrick C, (OI#15), John F, (OI#16), John H, (OI#17).

¹⁸ See, for example: Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), p.20, Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), p.346, Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), p.447, all in Appendix A.

‘invisible sojourner’ sensibility amongst migrant Irish may have perpetuated a subaltern status. This is another factor in the Irish construction workers resistance to integration. Even when they had, in fact, settled permanently in London, for the most part the majority of men still felt like ‘invisible sojourners’ and conducted their cultural, social and political lives mainly within the Irish ethnic community. As Wills pointedly observes, ‘For [Irish] male migrants in particular, building work and the landscape of reconstruction were not [just] the background to personal stories, but the [very] fabric of their lives. Construction sites were, at once, their workplace and one of the [probably the primary] locations of their community’.¹⁹

The socio-economic status of many of these men changed over time as they settled domestically, raised families, acquired property and sometimes achieved significant levels of upward mobility – often moving beyond earlier residentially-segregated clusters. Nonetheless the long-term effects of workplace auto-segregation were to retard the normative expectations of residential dispersal, ‘that minorities should become diffused throughout the structure of the charter [indigenous] population until their socio-economic profiles become indistinguishable’.²⁰ The social and cultural milieu of many Irish construction workers and their families was delineated from their indigenous or fellow migrant neighbours.

‘The Forgotten Irish’?

Mick Curry’s *Murphy Can Never Go Home* is a poignant song about a migrant builder who spends his life working in Britain, losing touch with his roots in the process - to the point when, wanting to return to Ireland after a hard life on the buildings, he finds he has no one to return to. The chorus succinctly encapsulates the sense of alienation and loneliness in which some of the migrant Irish builders found themselves over the long duration of their lived experience: ‘So he sits in the bar and he smokes his cigar / And he boasts how he's never alone / Ah, but I know he's lying, his big heart is breaking / Murphy can never go home’.²¹

¹⁹ Wills, *The Best are Leaving*, p.111.

²⁰ Ceri Peach, ‘Pluralist and Assimilationist Models of Ethnic Settlement in London, 1991’ in *Tijdschrift voor Economisch en Sociale Geografie*, (1997), Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 120-134, p.120.

²¹ Mick Curry, ‘Murphy Can Never Go Home’, song nr. 19 in Frank Harte and Donal Lunny - *There’s Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*. See also Appendix G, p.15.

Coincidentally, the protagonist of this song emigrated to Birmingham, rather than London, and in 2009, TV3 - an Irish broadcaster - aired a two-part documentary called *The Forgotten Irish*.²² It focused upon the sad lives of four elderly Irish migrant construction workers living single, lonely, socially-isolated lives in Birmingham, having spent their lives working casually in construction. Herron critiques a dramatic remediation of this stock narrative of isolation and failure as it plays out for the character of Jap in Jimmy Murphy's play, *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*.²³

Reluctant to return home an apparent failure, visits home are carefully stage-managed to give all the appearance of success. In *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*, Jap feels the need to perpetuate the image of the wealthy returned emigrant and we see yet another example of an identity based on social expectations or stereotype. His visits home, described in the heroic terms of a returning warrior, are an elaborate act of disguise, a flamboyant lie designed to conceal the truth of his poverty and destitution [...] The swagger, heroism and bravado of this homecoming is in absolute contrast to the reality of their material circumstances in London..²⁴

Both the documentary and the play could have been based upon the song character of Murphy, so similar are the depictions. An archetypal story of the aged migrant builder: socially dislocated, transitory, lonely, sometimes homeless, alcoholic, emotionally and psychologically traumatised, ashamed of his life and hopelessly bereft of his origins in Irish rural society.²⁵ The trope appears again in another modern classic of Irish literature in the form of Uncle Alo, in Patrick McCabe's macabre *The Butcher Boy*: 'The town welcomes Alo as an emigrant made good, with the "great job he has over in London" and "ten men under him" until Francie discovers the truth about his uncle from his father'.²⁶ Mac Amhlaigh's memoirs mention several examples of these tragic outcomes and John Healy's autobiography *The Grass Arena*

²² *The Forgotten Irish* (Waveform Studios, 2009) is a two-part documentary series directed by Maurice Sweeney telling the stories of the Irish men and woman who took the boat to England, in search of work in the 1940s and 1950s. See <https://waveformstudios.net/portfolio/the-forgotten-irish-2009-tv3/> (accessed 30 Sep. 2020).

²³ Jimmy Murphy, *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road*, (London, 2000).

²⁴ Tom Herron (Ed.), *Irish Writing London: Volume 2 Post-War to the Present*, (London, 2013), pp.91-2

²⁵ The relationship of Irish migrant builders, industrialised masculinities and alcohol dysfunctionality is explored in considerable detail in chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.5.

²⁶ Aisling . B McCormack, 'Spectres of a Border Town: Irish History and Violence in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*' in Jennifer Keating (Ed.), *Patrick McCabe's Ireland: The Butcher Boy, Breakfast on Pluto and Winterwood*, (Leiden, 2019), pp.65-92, at p.80.

viscerally exposes the day-to-day savagery of these dysfunctional existences.²⁷

To be clear, it is a travesty that this unfortunate life-narrative was and remains a real and shameful legacy for some post-war migrants to London and the other major urban centres of Britain. The four men depicted in *The Forgotten Irish* were, visceral, real examples of the failure of emigration; one for which Cowley, in particular, has persuasively argued the Irish and British states bear a degree of as-yet-undischarged responsibility.²⁸ The roots of this failure may lie in the early post-war decades, when large numbers of Irish migrants arrived in London by and large impecunious and, in many cases, destitute and sought help from welfare agencies such as the London Irish Centre and Arlington House.²⁹ The Irish Government maintained a policy of non-support throughout most of the post-war period. This included refusing to repatriate Irish citizens who were destitute.³⁰ Moreover at least two of the ‘forgotten Irish’ in Birmingham cited their pre-emigration Irish experiences, centred around abusive state education and impoverished childhoods, as a major factor in their predicaments. Critically, however, objectively viewed this outcome remains a tragedy which has affected a statistically insignificant number of the post-war Irish construction workers given that the average cohort size was in excess of one hundred thousand men over the six post-war decades researched.

Joe Mc (OI#21) provides an important first-hand approximation of the average number of alcoholic, homeless Irishmen who lodged in Arlington House and were engaged as lump-system workers from day-to-day, which he estimated probably ran to upwards of two hundred.³¹ To provide comparative context, typically, in the late post-war period from c.1970-1990, the Irish migrant construction workforce in London was consistently well in excess of

²⁷ Mac Amhlaigh, *An Irish Navy*, pp.32-33; John Healy, *The Grass Arena* (London, 2008).

²⁸ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.249.

²⁹ Harrison, *The Scattering*, pp.31-51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.58. See also NAI-TAOIS-97-6-310-29, Extract of *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 23 November, 1961; DOT Memo ref. S.15273, 21 November, 1961.

³¹ Interview with Joe Mc, (OI#24), County Antrim, (15 Mar. 2018), Appendix A, pp.501-3. No official records remain of the long-term occupants of Arlington House, (See email, 8 February 2018, Alex McDonnell > Michael Mulvey). although in 1963, a welfare and advice worker at the London Irish Centre confirmed that 35% (on average) of the one thousand occupants were Irish (Harrison, *The Scattering*, p.25). The official website of the ‘Aisling Return To Ireland Project’ has one former resident estimating that in the 1970s there were up to one thousand tenants most of whom worked and paid rent. (‘A Brief History of Arlington House’ available at: <http://aisling.org.uk/pages/ahhist.htm#:~:text=Arlington%20House%2C%20opened%20in%201905,disease%20Dridden%20common%20lodging%20houses> (accessed 8, February, 2018).

one hundred thousand men.³² There were, of course, other Rowton Houses and homeless shelters and welfare centres around London during the 1960s-1990s, but Arlington was the largest. This evidence still positions the reality of this stereotype as statistically insignificant for the community as a whole, although for a small cohort it meant long-term, often life-threatening health outcomes. Most other oral history interviewees recollected less dramatic, more uneventful experiences of gradual adjustment.³³ Whilst the vast majority of these young migrants went on to obtain gainful employment, settle and establish meaningful and rewarding lives in London, the cultural narrative disseminated via media and cultural circuits in Ireland—and largely amongst middle-class Britain – was concentrated on the small minority of social failures.³⁴ One notable report to the contrary was by the *Irish Weekly Examiner* in June 1978, which ran the headline ‘Some tragedies but many successes amongst emigrants’ – a rarity in Irish newspapers of the era.³⁵

Where are these post-war London-Irish builders today? A passing comment made by an elderly Cavan migrant, in a 2012 documentary interview, belies an ironic conclusion to the story of these ageing, largely retired workers at the onset of the 21st century. He says of Cricklewood Broadway that ‘Twas ninety percent Irish in them [sic] times, and ten percent foreigners, now it’s ten percent Irish and ninety percent foreigners’.³⁶ Whilst eschewing any notion of being British himself, he clearly does not see himself or his compatriots as ‘foreigners’ either. This ostensibly contradictory perception of their place in ethnic London was discernible in migrant Irish attitudes several decades earlier. Mac Amhlaigh, noted in 1989 how Irish migrant construction workers took exception to being labelled as ‘foreigners’ together with their Polish co-workers:

³² See section 2.2, table 2.3.

³³ Interviews with: Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), p.79, 84, 86; Tony C, (OI#7), County Roscommon, (27 Feb. 2016), p.113; Ben C, (OI#8), County Leitrim, (19 Jan. 2018), pp.127-8; Gregory D, (OI#10), County Leitrim, (25 Jan. 2018), pp.192-3; John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), pp.263-4, 269; Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), p.327, pp.339-40; John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), pp.354-5, 383-4, all in Appendix A.

³⁴ See for example: NAI-TAOIS-97-6-310-27, Extract of *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 5 December, 1961; *Sunday Press Newspaper*, 7 July, 1974, p.2; *Daily Telegraph Newspaper*, 3rd January, 1975, p.5; *Daily Herald* (Dublin), 18 Dec, 1975, p.13; *Irish Post*, 12 April, 1975, p.2; *Irish Press*, 9 February, 1976, p.6, 12 December, 1978, p.9; *Hibernia*, 6 April, 1979.

³⁵ *Irish Weekly Examiner* 1 June, 1978, p.23.

³⁶ Documentary short ‘*Cricklewood Craic*’, Published on 24 May 2012 by fairplanetproduction, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IE7OYQwsHs> (accessed 8 Dec, 2015). ‘them times’ refers to the 1950s-1990s period.

All but the more politically aware of the Irish I knew resented being called foreigners and they did not thank you when you pointed out to them since they came from an independent republic [...] they must surely be foreign – they could hardly hope to have it both ways [...] We seemed to me to be wanting to have our cake and eat it, to be better accepted by the British than any other immigrant group while at the same time making it clear that we were different, and being very slow to forget the wrongs done to us in the past.³⁷

These Irish workers clearly position themselves within an ethnic hierarchy; with – but not the same as – the British as ‘indigenous’, white, English-speaking people as against (presumably) the non-English-speaking white and people of colour. What is uncertain is whether this cohort would still consider British-born people of colour as ‘foreigners’ in that hierarchy. Since the Brexit referendum of 2016, issues of racial hierarchy and positionality in British life have become toxic, with (ironically) some Irish migrants and Britons of Irish descent becoming actively involved in anti-immigration campaigns.³⁸ This speaks to a theme running throughout this research; the ambiguities of Irish identity in Britain.

Equally ironic it is that the few ex-construction workers depicted in this TV documentary – in essence, remnant of the army of builders who came to London in the post-war period – would take great umbrage at the suggestion they themselves might have become naturalised British. Does this mean that they were unwitting participants in an experiment of multiculturalism? Probably, as were all of the various ethnic minorities in London after the war.³⁹ For the significant majority of the Irish-in-London since 1940, the migratory experience has been an indefatigable process of what O’Connor termed ‘risking the schizophrenia’⁴⁰ - a transition from an insecure, insular, under-developed, volitional ethnic enclave to a settled, self-confident, economically and culturally pluralistic London-Irish community.

³⁷ Delaney, *Irish in Post-war Britain*, p.83, citing Donall Mac Amhlaigh, ‘Documenting the Fifties’ in *Irish Studies in Britain*, Vol. 15 (1989), p.12.

³⁸ Mary Gilmartin, Patricia Wood, Cian O’Callaghan, *Borders, mobility and belong in the era of Brexit and Trump* (Bristol, 2018), pp.50-1.

³⁹ For a detailed illustration of migrant Irish contributions to multicultural integration and the subversion of ethnic stereotyping in post-war London see, *inter alia*, ‘The Irish Perspective Disproving The Stereotype’, a documentary excerpt from *Evening Extra*, (broadcast on 5 February 1987), available at: <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2017/0203/849926-understanding-the-irish-in-multi-cultural-britain> (accessed 3 Sep, 2020).

⁴⁰ O’Connor, *The Irish in Britain*, p.169.

The remaining older Irish builders of the post-war migration – those still in London – are, for the most part, in that liminal space between conventional notions of nationalist and ethnic identities. In their worldview ‘the small communities they had left were more real [...] than the places where their lives were happening and where their children were growing up with alien accents’.⁴¹ They are a palimpsest of their original identities and yet are estranged from contemporary Irishness. Putatively neither British nor ‘foreign’, they retain an insular, moderate sense of Irish cultural nationalism yet, pragmatically, in their day-to-day existence they fit only into their narrowly-defined – and rapidly disappearing - version of London. Cultural representations sometimes accurately depict these inflections of liminality, laying bare the complex ambiguities of alienation, displacement, uncertainty and existential crisis often induced by immigration. Micheál Mac Aonghusa in his review of the 2007 film *Kings*, adapted from Jimmy Murphy’s play *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* observed:

Surely the most chilling line of dialogue in *Kings* is the acknowledgement, 'Seo e do bhaile anois' ['This is your home now']. To a single Connemara man who has spent 30 years in London and more or less confined his social life to the boys who 'came over' with him it represents the recognition of life-long alienation of a special kind. . . . Within a few years the home they left is no longer recognisable, and the country in which they work and sleep is foreign in their minds.⁴²

Although the vast majority of post-war Irish builders spoke English as their first language, for the native Irish-speaker particularly the experience often reflected the universality of exile, which Kristeva characterised as ‘Bearing within oneself like a secret vault, or like a handicapped child –cherished and useless – that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you’.⁴³ Michael H (OI#5), from Connemara, exposes the ignominy of language difficulties and dealing with foreign accents in a seemingly trivial anecdote about breakfast-time on a London building site:

The cockney accent - sure I didn't know what in the hell they were talking about! There was another young lad from our place and the first day he went to the café he had no friend to ask for the breakfast, so he asked for it himself and anyway the breakfast came down to him. The lads from Connemara with him said nothing at the table and anyway

⁴¹ John McGahern, *Memoir*, (London, 2005), p.280.

⁴² Micheál Mac Aonghusa, ‘Pretenders Looking for Their Crowns’: A Review of *Kings* by Tom Collins’, in *History Ireland*, Vol. 15, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2007), pp. 52-53.

⁴³ Julia Kristeva (Trans. Leon S. Roudiez), *Strangers to Ourselves*, , (New York), 1991, p.15.

wasn't there two slices of sweet cake on the plate with the eggs and bacon and sausage. The young fellow said "What in the name o'God is this? Sure how can y'eat sweet cake with eggs and rashers?" One of the lads said to him, "What'd you ask for?" he said, "I asked for two slices of cake!"... "Ah, you're thinking about the cake that your mother baked" he said, "here, if you ask for cake you'll get sweet cake...ask for BREAD!" [Laughter].⁴⁴

John F (OI#16), also a native speaker, may indeed have been in the same café; his almost identical recollection echoes Kristeva's point about the isolating effects of language difficulties:

I'm not a big lover – having lived here all my life – of people being held back by only being able to speak the Irish Gaelic – especially if they emigrated to England [...] I seen people from Connemara in this country, they couldn't order their breakfast in the café. When they didn't have English, when it was totally Irish, d'ya know what I mean? And I thought that cannot be a help to anybody who wants to go further afield.⁴⁵

Loneliness and social displacement, especially for those men who remained single, seems to have been a persistent feature of some emigrant experiences. Patrick M (OI#4), had been in London for 10 years but found that, 'I was starting to go out a bit too much in London; I was living on my own, in my own room, which I wanted to do, but long-term it got a bit lonely and sure all I was doing was going to the pub five or six nights a week'.⁴⁶ He returned to Ireland shortly afterwards and met his future wife, but he laboured the point that, 'I would definitely have gone back to England had I not met her, without a shadow of a doubt. I would have gone back to London, I'd have gone out maybe to Ilford where my friend Jimmy G was living'. This man's sense of unbelonging was not so pronounced as to deter him from settling permanently in Britain, had his road not taken a different turn. A similar sentiment is expressed by other interviewees. Terence O (OI#19) highlighted the nagging sense of isolation and ambivalence he sometimes feels, even after almost half a century in London and relative success in socio-economic terms:

Well it was very isolated here, from the minute I came here and it's still happening to this day [...] I am stereotyped the minute I open my mouth by the same auld shite and the same old comments come out of

⁴⁴ Interview with Michael H, (OI#5), County Galway, (7 Nov. 2015), Appendix A, p.82.

⁴⁵ Interview with John F, (OI#16), County Mayo, (4 April. 2018), Appendix A, p.386.

⁴⁶ Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.77.

[...] it doesn't matter if they are working or middle class people, the same stereotype remarks come out. And it's a kind of an interesting thing really, this assumption is made [...] it's still happening to me today, doesn't matter what company I'm in, because I am not [pause] despite my rise from penury I am now essentially a middle class man I guess.⁴⁷

Equally perplexing for the older generations of migrant Irish construction workers who have spent far longer in Britain than in the place most of still them regard as 'home' is the attitudes often experienced towards them – these 'representatives of Ireland's vast spiritual empire', as McGahern called them – by the communities they left behind.⁴⁸ Liam Ryan expressed it thus:

to the fifty acre farmers and the petit-bourgeoisie of the towns and villages of Ireland it [Britain] seemed like a kind of a ghetto for Irish people, a kind of huge Irish slum, a place where none of the better class of Irish people ever went [...] and the threat of a son or daughter to take the boat-train was a threat that the family name might be tainted with the mark of the emigrant and coupled with the labourers and others who somehow weren't talented enough to get employment at home.⁴⁹

It is often conveniently forgotten by those same Irish rural conservatives that the remittances (which took various forms across the post-war decades) made by the emigrant nursery of Irish in Britain largely facilitated the emergence of modern Ireland. The *Irish Post* noted that investments in Britain yielded over £70million to the Irish economy in 1968,⁵⁰ and another (unverified) estimate puts the total amount of cash remitted from Britain to Ireland between 1939 and 1969 at £2.2 billion.⁵¹ However, this appears to be significantly higher than official Irish government figures for the period, which indicate £154 million.⁵² Assuredly the wartime

⁴⁷ Interview with Terence O, (OI#19), County Clare, (21 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, p.444.

⁴⁸ Dennis Sampson, *Young John McGahern: Becoming a Novelist*, (Oxford, 2012), p.61.

⁴⁹ R. Swift & S.Campbell, 'The Irish in Britain' in E. Biagini & M. Daly (Eds.), *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2017). pp. 515-533, p.525.

⁵⁰ *Irish Post*, 13 February, 1970, p.12.

⁵¹ It should be noted that these are total remittance estimates, a significant proportion of which were made by female migrants, particularly those in nursing and domestic industries. Data is not sufficiently particularised to establish specific amounts for each gender. See Redmond, *Moving Histories*, pp.173-4 for further details on this topic.

⁵² R. Swift & S.Campbell, 'The Irish in Britain' in E. Biagini & M. Daly (Eds.), *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2017). pp. 515-33, p.525 citing Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.86. Notably this estimate is said to derive from 'recently published CSO' records, but no source citation is given, and it appears, *prima facie*, to be significantly higher than extant governmental records indicate. NAI, File Ref: DT/SI2865 contains official government statistics on cash remittances for the periods 1936-1942 and 1960-1968. These show that total remittances were: £9.5 million (1939-42), £56.10 million (1960-68). Assuming a

migrations gave rise to ‘prosperity [which] would certainly result in many sending “presents” to their people at home’.⁵³ Between 1936 and 1940 these ‘presents’ averaged £1 million sterling per annum, increased to £2.6 million in 1941, and to £4.7 million in 1942.⁵⁴ By the 1960s annual remittances averaged £6.2 million per annum.⁵⁵ The entrepreneurs, tradesmen, engineers and labourers who generated this wealth were mainly from the small-farm rural fundamentalist background described throughout this work. For most of them, the act of migration to London represented a temporary change in ostensible social class (often downwards as from Ireland to Britain) and occupational mobility counterbalanced, paradoxically, by an increase in wage-earnings, opportunity and real wealth.

Initial feelings and expressions of negativity, ambivalence and isolation by migrant workers in London are outweighed heavily by later optimistic expressions of life in London amongst interviewees. The majority of interviewees consider their lives – and those of their families - to have been materially improved as a result of migration to the metropolis, invariably citing the dire comparative prospects for material and social wealth in Ireland.⁵⁶ These examples demonstrate conclusively, I contend, that the experience of the Irish migrant builders in post-war London was, above all else, heterogeneous and optimistic. There are common threads and themes of hardship, social isolation, discrimination, alcohol and workplace abuse running through the interviews and these have been identified and analysed. But there are few, if any, examples where the lived experience of working in construction in post-war London aligns with the relentless negativity of literary and cultural representation. Real lives have, in the round, been more manifestly positive, varied and complex by comparison to the stereotypical depictions.

linear growth from the 1942 figure (£4.2 million) to the 1960s average per annum figure (£6.20 million) gives an annual average of £5.50 million which applied over the period 1943-1959 (16 years x £5.5 million) = £88 million + £9.5 million + £56.10 million totals to £154 million.

⁵³ NAI, File Ref: DT/SI2865, Memorandum ref SG7 from Department of Industry and Commerce, (Dublin), *Remittances from Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 17 June, 1942, p.3.

⁵⁴ NAI, File Ref: DT/SI2865, Memorandum ref SG7, pp.1-3.

⁵⁵ NAI, File Ref: DT/SI2865, Statement in response to Dáil Eireann question nr. 4 to Taoiseach, 4th April, 1970.

⁵⁶ See: Interview with Tom M, (OI#1), County Leitrim, (21 Sep. 2014), Appendix A, p.2 ; Interview with Patrick M, (OI#4), County Leitrim, (17 Oct. 2015), Appendix A, p.57 ; Interview with John P, (OI#13), County Roscommon, (10 Nov. 2016), Appendix A, pp.262-263; Interview with Patrick F, (OI#18), County Roscommon, (29 Jan. 2018), Appendix A, p.414 ; Interview with Patrick C, (OI#15), County Galway, (24 Feb. 2018), Appendix A, pp.326-7.

The construction industry in London still provides a relatively casualised ‘stepping-stone’ form of employment for many Irish (though far fewer than in the post-war decades) and other ethnic groups settling in London. Indeed several of the contributors to the oral histories in Appendix A still work in construction, albeit most are retired or nearing retirement. In many ways the Polish, Bosnian and Lithuanian migrant workers mentioned earlier have replaced the Irish, Caribbean and first-generation Asian populations as the ‘cannon-fodder’ of the London construction market; gradually learning many of the same lessons about how to ‘climb the ladder’ - both physically and metaphorically.⁵⁷ The Irish entrepreneurial spirit which flourished in the post-war London construction market now thrives on a workforce which is significantly more multicultural than it would have been in decades gone by. The Irish construction world in London has largely dissipated through the passage of time, natural mortality, social mobility, increased affluence, retirement and return migration. Problems of casualization still cause accidents and aggression, but – thanks to improved statutory regulation - at a less problematic level than in earlier days. Labour-gang abuse still exists, veiled even more now behind the increased plurality of language difficulties, but regulation has made it less visible than when the Irish were dominant.

Some of the cohort – John Murphy, Bill Fuller and dozens of others who, as the ‘ordinary Joes’ would see it, got lucky - thrived entrepreneurially, becoming exceedingly wealthy. Some used that wealth to reinvest in the parts of Ireland they called home. More started small and medium-sized construction businesses as trade subcontractors, ‘house-bashers’ and/or jobbing builders. A small percentage of the cohort died prematurely as a result of accidents at work. Some ended their days in difficult and tragic circumstances resulting from the ill-effects of long-term exposure to the Irish ethnic work environment - the ‘performed’ ethnocentric lifestyle expected of Irish builders - which caused problems of itinerancy, homelessness, socio-cultural poverty, alcohol and gambling addictions. It is time, however, to stop shoehorning the post-war migrant Irish builders into these opposite extremes of the social spectrum. The overwhelming majority of these men were neither: ‘McAlpine’s Fusiliers’⁵⁸ - itinerant, clannish, uneducated ‘down-on-their-luck’ navvies with drink problems; the flotsam

⁵⁷ Corbally, *Shades of Difference*, pp.271-73.

⁵⁸ Appendix G, p.5. See also Dominic Behan, *McAlpine’s Fusiliers*, song nr. 16 in Harte and Lunny - *There’s Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*.

and jetsam of industrial Irishness; - nor were they ‘Fitzpatrick, Murphy, Ashe and Wimpey’s gang’⁵⁹ unscrupulous, parasitic exploiters of their own kind.

They were, instead, a cohort of relatively ordinary, hard-working men – from mainly rural, isolated farming backgrounds in Irish society - attempting to live unobtrusive lives as migrants in a newly-reconstructed urban environment – one they themselves had a significant hand in creating. The overwhelming majority led quiet, productive, meaningful lives in urban and suburban London and (later) the wider LMA; they settled and raised second and third generation families who are proud of - and often maintain links (in various forms) with original home communities in Ireland. For the most part they negotiated the pitfalls and bear-traps of emigrant life far more successfully than Irish collective memory and the extant written histories give them credit for. The twenty-first century London-Irish, largely composed of these descendants, see their cultural duality - an unapologetic Irish identity sitting comfortably within a civic, social and economic framework of UK citizenship – as a positive pluralistic outcome of their parents’ and grandparents’ cultural patriotism (although how the resurgence of English nationalism in the wake of Brexit might affect this perspective remains to be seen).⁶⁰

As a new contribution to Irish migration studies this research highlights the range of diverse lived experiences migrant construction workers underwent during their working lives in London.⁶¹ It improves upon existing studies in the level of detail and reference to probative, mainly first-hand, evidence rather than anecdotal and representative. It succinctly challenges preceding academic work in two ways. Firstly, it is the only academic work to specifically investigate Irish migrant construction workers as a discrete identifiable group, rather than as a sub-set of the larger diaspora in Britain. Secondly, it demonstrates how existing work – particularly in areas of cross-disciplinary cultural theory – has generally relied too heavily on secondary evidence and representations and, as a result, is often focused too heavily on popular stereotypes.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.8.

⁶⁰ Gilmartin, et al, *Borders, mobility and belonging*, pp.51-3; See also, ‘Anti-Irish sentiment in Britain: ‘I feel like I am back in the 1980s’ at Irish Times Online, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/anti-irish-sentiment-in-britain-i-feel-like-i-am-back-in-the-1980s-1.3992131> (15, October, 2019).

⁶¹ Chapters 2-4 and Appendix A recount a range of these experiences in detail.

⁶² This over-reliance upon representation is discussed throughout chapters 2-6, but the reader is particularly referred to s.6.2 where this issue is addressed directly.

As an element of British industrial and social history, post-war Irish builders were a force for tremendous good in London: as physical wage-labourers in reconstructing the city; and often as the unwitting (and, at times, unwilling) vanguard of the city's pluralist cultural realignment after the Second World War. Their participation in the construction industry was described as 'immeasurable' by Sir William McAlpine, great-grandson of firm's founder, 'Concrete Bob' McAlpine; in his day by far the largest employer of migrant Irish labour in the interwar and immediate post-war decades.⁶³ This research bridges the lacuna which has existed in British migration history and construction history. It positions these workers in their rightful place; front and centre of London's post-war reconstruction.

Hopefully this thesis also paves the way for further research into areas which, as a result of the practical limitations of time and cost, I have explored only superficially. These might include a deeper examination of the role of women in the relational lives of construction workers, the individual corporate and personal histories of the entrepreneurial migrant builders, the broader psychological effects of performative Irishness, and the transnational links between Irish construction workers in London and other centres of Irish settlement in the USA and Europe. Indeed these core areas of research can equally be applied to other ethnicities and migrant groups both in Britain and internationally. To borrow Dr. Reg Hall's words, the search goes on for the 'truth behind the nonsense'.

⁶³ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.250.

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**‘DIGGING FOR GOLD’: IRISH BUILDERS IN
POST-WAR LONDON - HISTORICAL
REPRESENTATIONS AND REALITIES.**

Volume 2 of 2

Michael Bernard Mulvey

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Maynooth University

Department of History

Head of Department: Prof. Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Redmond

September 2021

(Post-Viva Final Version)

Volume 2 - APPENDICES

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Appendix A. Oral Histories

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Preamble sheets (i)-(iii) - Oral history Study Proformas:

(i) Maynooth University ethical approval letter 19th June, 2015

(ii)-(iii) Informed Consent Documentation pages 1-4

Original Interview Code¹	Date of Interview	Identifier Name	Year of Birth	Page Refs
OI#1	21 September 2014	Tom M	1937	A/1-24
OI#2	23 September 2015	Dinny D	1925	A/25-36
OI#3	13 October 2015	Kevin H	1934	A/37-54
OI#4	17 October 2015	Patrick M	1944	A/55-77
OI#5	07 November 2015	Michael H	1945	A/78-93
OI#6	08 November 2015	Michael Mc	1937	A/94-111
OI#7	22 February 2016	Tony C	1946	A/112-126
OI#8	19 January 2018	Ben C	1955	A/127-149
OI#9	01 April 2016	Tom Mc	1942	A/150-162
OI#10	25 January 2018	Gregory D	1952	A/163-199
OI#11	14 September 2016	Jackie W	1955	A/200-225
OI#12	14 September 2016	Paddy B	1928	A/226-260
OI#13	10 November 2016	John P	1934	A/261-284
OI#14	13 December 2017	Sean G	1968	A/285-324
OI#15	24 February 2018	Pat C	1945	A/325-352
OI#16	04 February 2017	John F	1951	A/353-386
OI#17	05 April 2017	John H	1955	A/387-410
OI#18	29 January 2018	Pat F	1947	A/411-434
OI#19	21 February 2018	Terence O	1955	A/435-458
OI#20	21 February 2018	Noel O	1951	A/460-488
OI#21	15 March 2018	Joe Mc	1950	A/489-529

¹ Prefix OI# = Original Interview

MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY,
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND



Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary to Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

19 June 2015

Michael Mulvey
Department of History
Maynooth University

RE: Application for Ethical Approval for a project entitled: Digging for Gold: The Irish Builder in Post War London Cultural Constructs and Empirical Evidence

Dear Michael,

The Ethics Committee evaluated the above project and we would like to inform you that ethical approval has been granted.

Any deviations from the project details submitted to the ethics committee will require further evaluation. This ethical approval will expire on 30 June 2017.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carol Barrett".

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary,
Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

Cc Dr Jennifer Redmond, Department of History

Reference Number SRESC-2015-046

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. About 20-30 people who lived and worked in London between 1945 and 1995 will be interviewed for this research. Your contribution is immensely valuable. This information sheet explains the nature of the study, and what we will be asking you to do in the interview. It also explains how your interview will be used. You have been given this information sheet because you have been invited or have volunteered to participate in this study, which will form part of a PhD research thesis in Irish Social history at Maynooth University. However, before you decide whether to participate we would like to outline why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information and ask any further questions you may have if anything is unclear.

1. What is this project about?

This project is about the important role that Irish builders, engineers and construction workers played in the rebuilding of London from the end of World War Two until the end of the twentieth century.

We are interested in hearing from those Irish builders who worked in war-torn London, 'McAlpine's Fusiliers' and their like, those who worked for the contractors and subcontract labour gangs which flourished during the 1950s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. This research will examine the factual evidence behind these stories, the companies, and the projects they worked on, allowing us to sift myth from reality.

2. Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being undertaken as part of a PhD Research Project under the supervision of the Department of History at Maynooth University and was initially funded under the John Hume Scholarship Scheme and, from October 2016 onwards, is funded under an Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Postgraduate Funding Programme.

The Principal Researcher undertaking this research is Michael Mulvey and the Research Supervisor overseeing the research is Dr Jennifer Redmond. **Contact details for these individuals are included at the end of this Information Sheet.**

3. Why have I been asked to take part?

We aim to interview around 20-30 people who emigrated from Ireland to London and worked in construction for any period longer than 3 months between 1945 and 1995. You have been invited or have volunteered because you fit this profile. We are especially interested in those who worked in, or were otherwise involved in building and civil engineering. We are also very interested in interviewing the wives and children of men who may have worked in construction and engineering in order to gain a perspective on the role of the family within the community of builders which developed in post-war London.

4. Do I have to take part?

NO - You are under absolutely no obligation to take part – however, we believe that you have something important to contribute to the history of the London-Irish community. If you agree to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. **But please note that you will still be free to withdraw at any time and we will not ask you to give any reasons if you choose to do so.**

5. Why should I take part?

First and foremost you get to be part of the history of your community; you get to tell your story, and your experiences will become part of documented history. The aim of this project is to show that the reality of life in post-war London was varied, hard and rewarding, at times difficult but on the whole optimistic and that the stereotypes of 'Paddy on the Road' and the 'forgotten Irish' are not entirely representative of the whole community of London-Irish builders.

We think that the interview will provide you with an opportunity to reminisce about some of your experiences, the difficulties and the pleasures of migration to London, of working in a physically demanding, often dangerous environment, of the process of carving out a community in London and of the networks of friendship, camaraderie and business that were forged. We also hope that you will find it rewarding to have your contributions recognised publicly and that you will be pleased to have an opportunity to add your account to a historically significant collection of archived interviews.

6. What does taking part mean?

If you agree to take part we will arrange an interview with you and will audio record the interview. We would prefer to interview you in your own home but if you would rather have the interview somewhere else convenient to you that too can be arranged. The interview will be carried out by Michael Mulvey, the Principal Researcher carrying out this project. In the

first part of the interview, we will ask you to tell us about your life story in your own words. In the second part of the interview, you will be asked to help fill out some details on a form about when key events happened in your life. Because we are interested in hearing about your life story in your own words, there is no set time limit but usually this process takes around an hour. You can, of course, also have a relation or friend present at the interview for support if you like.

In the unlikely event that you find the interview process and/or the recollection of past events difficult, upsetting, or emotionally distressing and feel that you would benefit from further support or discussion, a number of helpful support organisations exist which can help. **Contact details for these organisations are included at the end of this Information Sheet.**

7. What happens to the interviews?

You have the option to (a) see a transcript of our conversation exactly how it happened or (b) have a life story narrative written based on the details of your life. Whether you choose either option (a) or (b) you have the choice to remain anonymous or not, and we will protect your identity and details at all times [see item 11 below]. All interview material, paper copies and digital ones, will be securely stored. **Responsibility lies with the Principal Researcher and Research Supervisor named above.** Contact detail sheets will be removed and stored separately and securely.

8. Can I access my interview recording afterwards?

You can request access to your interview at any point after your interview. We can provide in whatever form best suits you, i.e. on CD, by e-mail or in paper copy.

9. What happens to my data if I withdraw from the project?

Your interview data can either be returned to you in whatever format you request, or alternatively you can have all your personal data destroyed by reformatting or shredding as appropriate.

10. What happens at the end of the project?

A digital copy of the project's interview data will be deposited with the Irish Qualitative Data Archive in Maynooth University. Further information about this data archive can be found at their website; www.iqda.ie. The Consent Form attached allows you to choose how your audiotaped interview is dealt with.

11. Can I participate confidentially?

YES - You can choose [1] To be fully identified [2] To be partially identified – where you will be identified only by a Christian name or alias agreed between us and your place of origin [3] **To be completely anonymous** – where you will only be referred to in the research by a unique reference number with your true identity known only to the Principal Researcher.

12. Confidentiality of Data

The University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent. Whilst every effort will be made to respect the Participant's wishes regarding confidentiality it must be recognized that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority.

13. What will happen to the research?

The interviewees and life story narratives will be used mainly as primary research material for the PhD being undertaken by Michael Mulvey. The research findings may also be published in academic journal articles, conference papers and books. The completed thesis will be held in the Maynooth University Open Access thesis repository on the library website.

14. Use of Quotations

We may also wish to use quotations of your words from the research interview in future publications such as academic journal articles, conference papers and books. In this consent form you have been asked to confirm that you are happy for your quotations to be used. The research team will double-check with you before quotes are attributed. It is also possible that after archiving your words may be used by other researchers or academics with the permission of the research team. You will also be asked in your consent form if you are happy with this.

15. Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been ethically reviewed by Maynooth University's Social Research Ethics Sub-Committee – see <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/research/research-development-office/research-ethics>.

'Digging For Gold': The Irish Builder in Post-War London



STUDY INFORMATION & INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

If you are unhappy about any aspect of your participation in this study or you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in strictest confidence and in a sensitive manner.

IMPORTANT CONTACT DETAILS

PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:

Michael Mulvey
M.Litt/PhD Research Student
Mob [IRE]: 00353 [0] 87 981 5385
michael.mulvey.2012@nuim.ie
mickmulvey@gmail.com

Department of History,
Room 53B, Rhetoric House,
Maynooth University,
Maynooth,
County Kildare,
Ireland Tel: +353-1-708 3729 Fax: +353-1-708 3314

FURTHER SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS

IRELAND

AGE ACTION IRELAND LIMITED
30/31 Lower Camden Street
Dublin 2
Phone: 01 4756989
Fax: 01 4756011
Email: info@ageaction.ie
Web: <https://www.ageaction.ie/contact-us>



SENIOR HELP LINE

A confidential listening service for older people by trained older volunteers for the price of a local call anywhere in Ireland, LoCall 1850 440 444. Our vision and mission is that every older person in Ireland would know the LoCall number, call if they need us and receive an empathic response. Our lines are open every day from 10am to 10pm, 365 days a year.

HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE



<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/olderpeople/tipsforhealthyliving/Depression.html>

RESEARCH SUPERVISOR:

Dr. Jennifer Redmond
Phone (01) 7083375
Email jennifer.redmond@nuim.ie

Department of History,
Room 43, Rhetoric House,
Maynooth University,
Maynooth,
County Kildare,
Ireland
Tel: +353-1-708 3375 Fax: +353-1-708 3314

UNITED KINGDOM



Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy
<http://www.icap.org.uk/contact-us/>
96 Moray Road,
Finsbury Park,
London,
N4 3LA
Open 9am - 7pm (Mon-Thurs), 9am - 4pm (Fri)
Phone - 020 7272 7906
CHC (Cricklewood Homeless Concern) - 0208 208 8592



<http://www.mind-yourself.co.uk/contact/>
Open Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm
CAN-Mezzanine, 49-51 East Rd., London N1 6AH
PHONE: 020 7250 8100
EMAIL: info@mind-yourself.co.uk

'Digging For Gold': The Irish Builder in Post-War London



STUDY INFORMATION & INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Participant's Name: _____

Project Title: 'Digging For Gold': The Irish Builder in Post-War London

I have read the Study Information Terms set out at paragraphs 1-15 above and I agree to participate in this study by allowing my interview with the Researcher to be digitally recorded, stored, transcribed, quoted from and otherwise used as set out in the Study Information Sheet and as indicated below:

I further agree that I am over 18 years of age and have elected to participate in this study on the following terms:

I have read and understood the Study Information Sheet items 1-15 inclusive.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I have had my questions answered satisfactorily

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation

I agree to the interview being audiotaped and to its contents being used for research purposes, subject to one of [A] to [C] below.

- A. I agree to being fully identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use OR
- B. I agree to being partially identified by the name _____ and to my age in years and the county of my birth being disclosed but that my real name and any personal identifier data must be removed and my comments made unattributable. OR
- C. I do NOT agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use. Where data from my interview is used my name and any personal identifier data must be removed and my comments made unattributable.

I agree to the transcript[s] of my interview[s] (subject to the conditions outlined above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers.

I agree to my audiotape[s] (subject to the conditions outlined above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers.

I instruct that the original audiotapes of my interview should be destroyed after transcription.

I instruct that the audiotape of my interview should be transcribed verbatim OR

I instruct that the audiotape of my interview should be written-up as an edited life-story narrative based upon the audiotape[s] of my interview[s]. The Principal Researcher is to provide me with a draft copy of the completed narrative for my prior agreement. Subject to my agreement, the Principal Researcher has full discretion and editorial control of the content of the life-story narrative and may add/omit text to the oral interview as necessary.

I would like to receive a copy of my transcript for my retention.

I would like my name acknowledged in the research thesis and on the project web site (without linking it to content or quotation).

Signature of Participant: _____

Participant's Name: _____ [Print]

Signature of Principal Researcher: _____

Principal Researcher's Name: Michael Mulvey

tick



Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Name: Tom Date of Birth: March 1937 [77 yrs]
Place of Birth: Co. Leitrim, Ireland.
Date of Emigration to UK: September 1959.
Date of Interview: 21 September, 2014. + 2 later interviews of shorter duration
Place of Interview: County Roscommon & London.

Notes:

- Interview commences in mid-conversation
- Much of conversation concerns private and family issues which are not relevant to topic. Where this is a significant gap in conversation the text is indicated thus '[off-topic conversation]'
- Tom's memory was evidently failing during this interview, and corroborative evidence of more reliability has been used where relevant to correct known errors in both fact and chronology. Where this happens footnotes have been given.

Early Life & general background information

Tom was born near Carrick-on-Shannon in Co. Leitrim, in the west of Ireland in March 1937¹ and was the eldest of a family of 9 children; 6 brothers and 3 sisters, with an age differential between eldest and youngest of 15 years. His father was a carpenter and small farmer, as had been my grandfather. His mother was a primary school teaching assistant as a young girl then a housewife, helping run the smallholding. She came from local farming stock who were reasonably large farmers by the standards of the area and both sides of his family had lived and farmed around the area for several generations. The family had a 15-acre smallholding which Tom's father had purchased around the early 1930s after returning from an extended period of working as a carpenter in Ardnacrusha hydro-electrical plant in Co. Clare. Tom recalls his father saying that he learned much of his skills as a carpenter from German carpenters who were brought to Ireland by the contractor Siemens to build Ardnacrusha. Tom learnt much of his own carpentry skills from his adolescent days helping his father who contracted in the area and also built a new family home in the early 1950s. He was schooled until 11 at the village National School, following which his parents sent him to the local Presentation Brothers boys' college (A fee-paying secondary school) where he had secondary education until the age of 14. He left before completing either Junior or Leaving Certificate to help his father build the new house. Tom's main pastime as a young man was Gaelic football and he played two or three seasons as a minor for Leitrim County side.

Of the 9 children, one younger brother emigrated permanently to the U.S in the 1970s, and 3 had at one time or another immigrated to Britain temporarily, returning at various stages of their lives. Tom settled permanently in London in 1968. One brother died in London in 1992 in tragic circumstances. Of the children who went to London, Mary (2nd eldest sibling) went

¹ Tom is an elder brother of Pat, OI #4.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

first but only stayed 2 or 3 years before returning to marry a Garda from Sligo. All but one of the family left the home place either to go abroad or to Dublin.

Interviewer: So did you have a fairly good education, d'ya think?

Tom: Well, I suppose I had the [typical] education of the time.

Interviewer: Would you have been aware of migration to England when you were at school?

Tom: Yeah, because some of the schoolmates I was at school with, that was older than me, had already gone, after leaving school. Probably I had a sense that we'd be leaving because there was no work around the place. My cousins, my sister and a good few of my friends emigrated before me. I was in England once before in '58 but that was to Leeds, on a football trip for a week.

Interviewer: So you travelled over with your sister?

Tom: I travelled over with Mary, yeah. Mary was in London a year before me. She was back on holiday and I went back with her. [To London]

Interviewer: So had you been planning to do that for a while or did you...?

Tom: No...just...took a notion...it happened.

Interviewer: Did you know there was a fair prospect you'd get somewhere to stay and somewhere to work and that?

Tom: Oh yeah. Peggy R and Tony K were there [Tom's cousins] and Joe R was there.

Interviewer: But how did you make plans or get organized. Like, were they expecting you?...

Tom: No, but that wouldn't have mattered. Sure half of Carrick stayed with Tony and Peggy! We were all from Carrick, the Cummins's there that's opposite Cryans - there was a butchers there, Cummins's - there was two or three of them there. Peggy and Tony were lookin' after a house for somebody; they had the basement rented and they were looking after it and letting it for whoever...in Latimer Road,² I can't think of the number. I arrived at the end of a week, I think Thursday or Friday, There was so much work in London in the late 1950s that another cousin of mine, Joe, who was a foreman in a glass factory...Triple

² Latimer Road is in North Kensington, in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

XXX glass factory I think it was called...got me a 'start' the following Monday inspecting glass windscreens for scratches.

Interviewer: Sound's a pretty easy job, really.

Tom: Yeah. Marking them with a...putting them up to the light and marking them, and they'd send them all back again then.

Interviewer: I heard a lot of stories about people travelling over at that time being met at the ports by missionary groups or clergy or representatives of the church that would be kind of handing you booklets with moral advice about going to England and all that kind of thing. Did you get any of that?

Tom: No. See I was with a gang and we looked fairly obviously like we were returning. I was no stranger...I didn't look like a new arrival; like it was my first time in London. I wasn't asked to provide any identity documents, immigration papers or travel documents or anything like that - I don't recall being stopped or questioned by anyone at all from Leitrim to Euston. I didn't look for or need any help arriving in London because of that kind of network of friends and relations that was already there.

Interviewer: And what did you make of London?...did it phase you at all?

Tom: Oh it did, o'course, yeah, when I came to it first, yeah. We got off the train from Holyhead in Euston at what...six o'clock in the morning...seven o'clock...rush hour. And then we had to get the tube down to Latimer Road, that's the way we travelled. That was the first time I'd ever seen a tube train or travelled on one.

Interviewer: And were you a regular Mass goer when you went to London?

Tom: Yeah. Just carried on the same as at home.

Mick Noone [another cousin of Tom's] was in London at that time too, come to think of it. He was staying with Peggy and Tony, but it was getting overcrowded so then he got a flat on his own. He worked in a factory somewhere; don't really remember where....Sean Gaffney was another one, he was in a factory...most of my friends at that time were working in factories. And then you had the Morans...y'had Johnnie Moran and Kevin Moran – they were Jamestown as well – and they were working at that big factory out the Brentford Road...Reids or something, was it? It's still there. There was none o'them working on the buildings at that time.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: So what was the journey over like? Did you come the usual route?

Tom: Holyhead to Euston. Dun Laoghaire...yeah it was from Dun Laoghaire at that time. The train ticket was bought at Carrick station. I bought the boat ticket at Dun Laoghaire to go through to Euston, as far as I can remember. I think it wasn't that expensive either. 'Twas only about four quid or something. The journey would be faster now, I'd say! And as far as I can remember that was a cattle-boat, the *Princess Maud* I think it was. I'm nearly sure it was the *Princess Maud*. It was miles rougher than modern ferries because these were not car-ferries, they were smaller and less stable.

Interviewer: And your first job was in this glass factory. What did it pay?

Tom: I think it paid around £4-5 per week, which would have been average for that sort of work. I had to get an insurance card, to register for National Insurance, but I did that easier than most people because I'd been working at home and was registered under the NI system there. I just gave them my Irish NI card at the Welfare Office in London and they gave me the other one then [a UK NI card]. All factories was the same back then, I was paid by cash in a pay envelope every Friday. It was regular PAYE employment³ where I paid tax and NI contributions at the going rates. I done that job for a good while...I must've done it for...that was September I started and I was working over the Christmas and maybe for 6-8 months over the winter of 1958/59.

What I done as well, when I was at that job, I done part-time working in a bar. That was down in Latimer Road as well. Three evenings a week – or something like that – behind the bar, serving beer.

Interviewer: Was that in an Irish house or?

Tom: 'Twas...an Irish-house. An Irishman that had it but they were an English crowd goin' into it! I think...I dunno what county-man was he...think he was Wexford, this fella. [18.09] I was there for a good while in that bar, part-time, maybe done three nights or four evenings-a-week to get a bit more money...casual work, like. But that learnt me the trade, that bar, because I went working, then, in a bar full-time after - a while later. 'Twas easy because you were stayin' in the bar, y'had digs and grub and everything, so it was very...good to do, yeah...good job! I was with a Longford man...worked in several pubs including The General Smuts in White City [where Tom later met his wife].

³ 'Pay-As-You-Earn' taxation where income tax is deducted at source, i.e. from your wages before they are paid to you.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: And if you don't mind me asking, now, would you have been sending money home?

Tom: No, not a lot. I might have sent something if it was a birthday or something. I might send a few quid, but not a regular amount, no. I don't think a lot of the crowd I knew were sending money home regularly, unless 'twas for a special occasion like a birthday or wedding or that; and 'twouldn't be going to the parents.

Interviewer: So what made you turn to the construction industry, then?

Tom: Well, it was what I liked; it was what I was able to do. Even at home I never worked inside at all, I was always out [outdoors]. I liked the bar-work, but I kinda got fed-up with it after a while. The bar-work, to me, was great when y'only done it part-time, like a few hours a night. When you done it full-time you were there all bloody day, like. You'd get fed-up of it, like. But like everything else, it kept me goin' when you didn't have a job [regular employment].

The year of the 'big snow' here, in, what was it?...fifty...what year was the 'big snow'...sixty-one and sixty-two [It was actually 1962-63, Tom corrects this later], I was about the only one [of Tom's friends and family] that was working because I got that job working full-time in a bar; I was able to do work when the building-sites closed down. Oh yeah, sure that was desperate; you couldn't get any work at all [construction work]...it snowed on Boxing Day and it froze, and snowed again and froze. The frost and snow was on the ground until the first week of May! And when they started [back to work]...pipes breaking; you couldn't dig – the frost was gone down three foot in the ground!

Interviewer: I remember reading about that...by all accounts a lot o'them lads went hungry, they couldn't get work.

Tom: You couldn't get work. My younger brother, Jimmy, wasn't working. I was working in the bar; he came to me and I used to give him money. Yeah. And all he was getting...they were signing-on [claiming unemployment benefit]...all the lads were. All he was getting was a couple o'quid-a-week, if that. That's all he was getting at the time

Interviewer: And when did your younger brother come over?

Tom: He was over before me! [22.32] Well, no, around the same time. He left the Uni [dropped out of Galway University] around the same time I came to London. He stayed with Mick Noone – Mick was here at that time.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: And did Jimmy go straight into building or did he do other work?

Tom: No, I think he went straight out on the jobs...

Interviewer: So, in a way, the bar-work had done you a favour, because you had a bit o'work when a lot o'them hadn't?

Tom: Yeah, well, he [Jimmy] wasn't working...he was on the building sites because he wasn't working; he couldn't work. And then they got out – they started goin' out then; they had to bring builders out to get the bloody frost off the streets! He got a job doing that, and I think whoever he was with then, he continued, they kept him on then after.

Interviewer: Tell me about that other unusual job you mentioned during the bad winter?

Tom: Oh the big freeze in '62-'63. Yeah I got a job lighting fires around the big gasholders to stop them freezing up!

Interviewer: So, that was '61-'63. So when did you first go?

Tom: On the building sites? Not long after that, I think. Sure London was full of Leitrim 'connections' on the buildings and in the dancehalls and pubs. McWeeney Smallman was one. The McWeeney family lived in Hartley [a small townland to the north of Carrick-on-Shannon]. A good many o'my mates from school got a start with them in the early 1960s. Somebody told me the Smallman side of the partnership was what in those days we would have called a "jewess" – a rich Jewish woman who was the money behind the firm – I don't know if that's true now, could be all gossip!

I'm tryin' to think of who...what was the first crowd I went with? Ah 'twas easy get a job on the buildings...no problem – very easy. I'll tell ya who I got a start with first – he was O'Keefe, Dave O'Keefe. The brother was a foreman for...ahh whatshisname...he was a Tipperary man, a contractor – subcontractor...⁴

Interviewer: Not Careys?

Tom: No. I can't think of it now, but it'll come to me. But they were building - I think it was Taylor Woodrows (or one o'them big English firms) and they started

⁴ Subsequent unrecorded discussion with Tom and cross-checking with corporate research determined that the subcontractor Tom is referring to was Martin Grant & Co Carpentry, established in 1963. See also Appendix B – Corporate Histories.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

building the Lord's Cricket Ground hotel, if you know where it is. I started at that at the very bottom.⁵ That'd be about in the early 1960s, I think...Dave O'Keefe and Tommy.

Interviewer: So what were you doing there?

Tom: I'll tell you what I was at! I was...that was a huge job...that was a big job. I got the job of – when they'd be striking the decking or whatever – of picking out all the good timber and cleaning it...to re-use, and taking the concrete off the sheets of ply. Well, that's the man that put me working; and getting the Acrows cleaned and everything, and he put me in working with the men putting up [shuttering]...Dave O'Keefe, yeah.

Interviewer: So he was the subby, was he?

Tom: He was the chippy foreman – shuttering foreman. Ah Jusus he was a good man. He got done for fiddling the tax after! Ah he was a smart man. I helped him...that was an awful big job at Lord's Cricket Ground...he put me...he said, "Tom, I'll give you a job, I don't want any word about it to nobody". There was thousands of Acrows on it,⁶ and he says to me, "Pick the best o'them" he says, "Clean them, and grease them and stack them–"

Interviewer: So they can be re-used?

Tom: No...so he took them fuckin' away! [Laughter]... he went on and he started up himself with them - I worked with him when he started!

Interviewer: And who's Acrows were they?

Tom: They were belonging to the firm...no, the subby or the plant-hire or...no...Taylor Woodrow, they belonged to. Two lorry-loads o'them and whatever else he could get...I started work with him. Acrows, column-clamps, tie-bolts...he took *hundreds* of them, and started up on his own. See, he started with the surveyor [QS] that was on the job; that's how he started. Shrewd man.

⁵ Noel Grant, the eldest son of Martin Grant also worked on this job and, being some twenty years younger than Tom, had a somewhat sharper memory and confirmed that the project was a very large hotel project for what was then Piccadilly Hotels (It is now the Danubius Hotel at Regent's Park) and the main contractor was Cementation. The foreman was a George Spain and the project manager was a Tommy Horton both also Irish.

⁶ An Acrow prop or BS prop is a piece of construction equipment. It is a telescopic tubular steel prop, used as a temporary support, particularly in temporary formwork construction, for propping floor decks and beams. These items would be considered as 'small plant' and were probably either owned by the Main Contractor or hired out from an external plant hire company, many of whom sprung up around this time, but there were often so many of these items on a large site that a high percentage would generally be written-off to the contract as consumable plant items.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

He started me first, then he brought his own brother with him. But his own brother, he said, "That fucker'll talk!"...yeah, see he'd be yappin' an' talkin, like, he didn't know when to shut-up. Ah Jesus. That was at the Lord's Cricket Ground Hotel. Ah Jesus, he got done for fiddlin' the tax after that. But he got me started. He said to me on site one day, "Tom, an honest man will never make a decent living in this game". He was a decent shkin and he was only skimming the dregs compared to the bigger firms.

Interviewer: And have you seen him since?

Tom: Never saw him again, I wouldn't know if he's dead or alive. Ah Jeez he was a good chippy, a good foreman too. What I'm saying to you is he knew how to put men to work. Y'know what I mean? There was no such thing as this doing this bit and that. He'd come up and he'd say to you in the morning, like, "That's not finished yet" y'know, and he'd tell ya go down, whatever was there, three or four o'them, and "whatever ye do, finish it!" he'd say, "Don't fuckin' walk away from it and leave it". And he wouldn't let you up to the office. He was the first man I seen doin' that, because he thought there was too many in the office, all sitting at big desks! "Don't come up to the office" he'd say, "I'll come down and see ya"

Interviewer: And were you subbying to him?

Tom: Oh no, I was working on the cards with that man. That was all above board. I can't think of his name, he was Tipperary, the main man...he was the subcontractor for Taylor Woodrows, yeah, and O'Keefe was his foreman. I'd know his name, he was a good man to work for, a fuckin' good buddy as well, Tipperary he was. I was paid by him – we were on cards with him, all straight, he wouldn't do anything else. I can't think of the name of the firm, now. I was working there, I was working on that job – it's goin' in to St. John's Wood Station – I was working on that job at night. There was RSJs going across the entrance into St' John's Wood Station as you go towards Baker Street, and they'd be...ahh I suppose going across the line [Bakerloo and Metropolitan underground railway lines] they'd be maybe sixty foot long, maybe longer and I could walk in on the flange of the RSJ. The flange was maybe that width [shows with arms] maybe a bit more and a big, high - enough to walk along... I walked across the railway lines [in the flange of the beam] and there was nothing underneath me!

Interviewer: You mean [interviewer draws quick sketch of I-beam section] you could walk in there?

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Tom: Yeah, and then to strike the shuttering that was put in to take the floor above it, overhead, to strike that from underneath then. And I was working nights; you couldn't do it during the day, and the trains running in and out underneath.

Interviewer: So you were working what they call 'engineering hours' on London Underground. You had to do it out of time, when the line was off.

Tom: Yeah, and there was a whatya-call-him on the railway...eh...whatya-call-him...a line man [engineering safety man] that was checking all the time, and when you went in at night, he'd fuckin' put a thing into you to see had you any drink!⁷ Ah yeah, I feckin' mean it, and that was a good while ago! [Getting animated]

Interviewer: So they were strict even back then?

Tom: Ah yeah, they were strict on that job, just in case someone fell down. Sure I was what...sixty feet over the railway line and nothing underneath me!

And Tommy O'Keefe's brother, Dave, was with me [34.26] – he done the carrying-out, I was striking them.

Interviewer: This is before you got married? You were still a single man at this time?

Tom: Yeah, 1960 something...Did I miss Ireland? Not particularly, I don't think so. Possibly maybe the first month or so I was there...I went home; I was here a couple of months, I came here I think in September and I went home that first Christmas.⁸ I came back again. There was nothing there for me. I'll tell you something now, to be honest, that I've never told anybody. Lord have mercy on her – if my mother let me do what I wanted to do, I probably would never have left, because I had a job with the council, and my uncle was...well, y'know what he was⁹...she didn't like her son working on the roads – that's a feckin' fact!

Interviewer: With the greatest respect to your mother, would she have taken the same attitude if you had been in the office?

⁷ Tom is referring to London Underground's standard policy of mandatory drug and alcohol testing, which was not initiated until the early 1990s, therefore his memory may be getting chronologically confused about this. It is possible that testing was applied on this particular project, due to its exceptional nature, but this would have been extremely rare in the 1960s.

⁸ It is of note that in this sentence, Tom refers to 'here' – meaning London, when he was actually in Ireland, and that he continually refers to Ireland as 'home'. This is a perennial feature of the Irish migratory experience in London.

⁹ Tom's uncle was the Chief Accountant to Leitrim County Council throughout the 1950s-1970s.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Tom: Oh not likely! [Laughter]. There was no way I was going to go [into an indoor workplace] because I was with the Ganger! And she didn't like the Ganger¹⁰ either because he was too fond o'the fuckin' drink...now d'ya get what I'm at! I was hanging around with the wrong man...even though he was a relation o'hers! Cos I never drank – I was playing football at the time and I might have the odd one, but that'd be all. Ah God! Sure I was playing football three nights-a-week, an' I might have the odd pint after it, but that was all! But the Ganger...sure y'know...but that was it.

I'll tell you where I went then, after that; this is what really fucked it for me. Nothing would do her only to go to work in this factory that opened up in Carrick...out in the Park.

Interviewer: You didn't like it there?

Tom: Oh I fuckin' *hated* it! [Vehement]...I wasn't fit for inside work; I couldn't stand it! Lord have mercy on me father, he was the same. I started out with him. We done two houses up locally after doing the one we moved into and you got a grant that time for taking the thatch off the houses and doin' the roof, and the grant was to pay the two of us, but in the finish-up then I wasn't gettin' fuck-all money out of it. D'ya know what I mean? It was going somewhere else.

Interviewer: It's an old problem...working with your father or staying at a job you started as a lad...you'll be forever the boy, like. You'll never be treated as an equal tradesman, you'll always be the apprentice

Tom: Yeah, like kind of "Do this, get that!" Yeah, I did, yeah.

Interviewer: Obviously, shuttering and formwork and all that is very physically demanding?

Tom: I know it is! But the one thing about shuttering – one thing I had...I done shuttering alright, but I laboured as well, right? And I had no problem with that at all, and that's why I was liked. There was some fuckin' chippies there and they wouldn't do that at all; they wouldn't go near it! They'd be told do something, like, if you were putting down a shutter, to get a shovel and clear a space for it, to get the stuff out or whatever. They'd stand all day to get a labourer around to do that instead of doing it themselves! I'd do that meself and get on with it. So yeah, I guess I was liked for that.

¹⁰ 'The Ganger' was a local nickname given to a notorious character who was a road ganger for Leitrim County Council in the South Leitrim area at this time.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: One of the things that comes out in a lot of the literature about the Irish in construction at this time, was the degree to which a lot of these men felt they were being exploited. Did you feel like you were being exploited?

Tom: No. I never got that feeling whatsoever. I was getting paid reasonable money; definitely.

Interviewer: There seemed to be a lot of guys who felt exploited that, perhaps, weren't able for the work?

Tom: That happened a lot of times. The point about it is that some of these guys, they had no idea, really...no idea. I mightn't have been qualified, but I knew how to do it! And people...the point is, I was often on a job and I'd be sent down with...that's how I got to do them bloody timber windows with...eh...the cords and the sashes and box things.

Interviewer: Do you mean double-hung box sash windows?

Tom: Yeah, that's how I got to know to do it. Sherlock was out feckin doin' a house for Mossie Byrnes and that's the windows that was in it, and I was helping him. Mossie Byrnes' house was out there near Barnet somewhere. With a lot of men, it wasn't that they weren't able, but they didn't know how [...] the easiest way to do a job is the best way to do it. One old boy that I worked with, we worked together for a while – an English fellow - and he told me “Tom, if somebody tells you do something, ask them ‘what way would you like it done?’ and then they have to tell you how they want it done!”

Interviewer: Sounds like good advice. It also will expose those who actually don't know enough to tell you how they want a job done!

Tom: Well that's the point, isn't it? He suggested then, if he's thinking about it [the foreman or supervisor who has instructed you] tell them the way you think it should be done, and ask would that suit you. Carry on...

Interviewer: Was there much thought given to health and safety at that time?

Tom: No...not really.

Interviewer: Did you ever work on a job where anyone was killed?

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Tom: No...but I worked not far away from a job where two people were killed. Just across the road, really. They'd no-one to blame...they were loading out sand on a job on a wet day...a big load of sand and they were piling it up on a floor, and putting it all in the one place and the floor gave way. 'Twas those bloody precast...ah whatdya call them...anyway they piled it all up in the one place in the middle of the floor and it couldn't take the weight.

Interviewer: So would you have had the sense that fatalities were common in construction at that time?

Tom: No...not really. Fatalities were more common underground than up top, really. I certainly didn't see any examples of those stories of the likes of Murphys and other firms putting men's safety at risk, no. I never felt that I was working in a particularly dangerous job...I never felt that way about what I was doing.

Interviewer: Obviously all construction is risky to some extent, but you never felt particularly exposed?

Tom: Well, maybe once; out in Twickenham, out on an eighteen-storey block. They forgot to do a cill on a window...twenty-two storeys it was, but the missing cill was on the eighteenth floor. They asked me to do it, and they put out...I think it was two boards they put on the outside of the scaffold, I had to bring them up from down below myself. The foreman came up and whatever...fuckit I can't think of his name, I was working for a subby. I fuckin' told him, like. I said, “There's only two boards out here, there should be more - it's fuckin' dangerous and nothin' underneath me”. “I didn't ask you to go out” he said! “Fuck ya then I'll come in out of it!” I said to him, and then he had to go and get the scaffolders to sort out the boards properly.

Interviewer: So nearly all your work from that time, then, you didn't do any heavy navvying work...like tunnel work say?

Tom: No, no...I was never in the tunnels.¹¹

Interviewer: One of the enduring myths about construction in those days is the power of the ganger, that kind of ruthless, brutal, bullying type of ganger. Did you ever come across that kind of thing? Another man I interviewed told me he seen The Elephant land on Murphy's job at the Limehouse Link in the '90s and he said he never seen grown men looking so frightened!

¹¹ This statement is contradicted later.

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Tom: Ah yeah, I seen ganger-men on a job with labourers, like, blaggarding them...y'know? Barking at them, "Do this – and do that!" They weren't doin' it right. You'd be shuttering and you'd see them. Sure there was a rake of Irishmen like that...when they'd see the ganger-man coming they'd feekin' start heaving away. Ah yeah there was a lot o'them that way; when he'd be gone then, they did fuck-all! [Laughter]...I know well that was the problem! If you were working away steadily you wouldn't have much to worry about. Not at all!

Interviewer: Another one of the big themes about construction in those days is the aggression and the violence in it. Did you ever come across fights or physical intimidation or anything like that?

Tom: Nah...not really. I seen a row with a – fuckin' Clare...they were Clare, a gang of chippies that was on shuttering. There was two brothers and – they were related, four o' them. It could have been up at that job at Lord's Cricket Ground, I'm not sure. A row about putting up shuttering for columns; when you put up shuttering for columns, you have to stand at the back of them and put your eye on them, that they're in line. But what these fellas done, they plumbed them all. I forget who the foreman was, I think he was Mayo – ah he was a nice man! – And he happened to come down and he stood at the tail-end of these columns and he called me over, I wasn't far away, and he says, "Tom, come over and have a look at this, will ya?" They were fucking lyin' this way [shows with hands]...there was none o' them in line! They were plumb, but they weren't in line. If you do them that way, the plasterer has to come in and straighten them out, y'see? ...ah...fierce crack!...Ah there was murder with two o' them with it, "I fuckin' told ya that'd happen" and all this. They were throwin' down tools and getting contrary with other – sure they were gone by the weekend anyway! Ah there'd be a few fights and that...there wouldn't be a lot, like, there'd be a few lads getting' contrary with other!

Interviewer: And did you ever get involved in any industrial relations, have any dealings with unions or get involved in union activities or anything? (58.26)

Tom: No. Never bothered with any of that. That job at Lord's Cricket Ground, there was a union strike on it, the union was outside it...who the hell was I?...I was working for that Tipperary fella at the time...can't think of his name. He put on a van and brought us down to a job in Aldershot, I think. The Lords job, y'see was a big union presence, they were outside on strike and they closed it down. Because it was...y'know what I mean...a good site, that was it [a prestigious job for the main contractor], there was a big write-up about it in the paper. Well the fella I was working for, that O'Keefe was the foreman, they took us down

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

to that big job down at...er...Gatwick Airport! That was it – a big job goin' on down there.

Interviewer: Rather than have ye idle...I guess he'd have to pay you if you were idle?

Tom: O' course he would, sure it was a strike; 'twas nothin' got to do with us!

Interviewer: So you were working 'legit' as it were, for that man, like on the cards and that. Did you ever work on the 'lump' in the truest sense, like the fellas that were with Murphys and the like, who were just paid a lump of money, y'know...no cards?

Tom: No I never done that, really. I suppose I might have done that with Gerry F, later in life...well, yeah, it wasn't really lump, because he did take the tax, but he only took enough to cover himself, like, y'know.

Interviewer: I'm talking about before the tax exemption system came in, say, more in the '60s now. Like when you just got a lump of money, no insurance, no tax, no holiday pay, no nothing – the 'tear-it-out' merchants as they were called

Tom: Yeah, I know what you're on about, Ah yeah, I done a few o'them whatever they wanted to pay you out like.

Sometimes the smaller subbies would be paid by cheque, then they'd pay their men in cash in the pub. 'Twould have been maybe the early '80s when them all started paying by cheque all the time and sure I never had a bank account or nothing like that. Some pubs would charge maybe five-pence in the pound to change a cheque. That'd be the bigger pubs like the Crown and that. Most of the 'local' Irish pub governors didn't do that. I used to get cheques changed (for the lads working for Martin Connolly) in the Shepherd's Bush Hotel, with another Mayo-man, Tom Conway, sure Tom was sound; he'd been a subbie himself, like. He wouldn't charge ya, although o' course you'd be kinda expected to spend a few bob in the bar at the same time.

I remember in the later 1970s and 80s, the 714 tax certificates came in – that was supposed to do away with the 'Lump' but sure you could buy fake ones in a lot of the Irish houses! I can't remember the name of this Irishman who I'd meet for a drink in Bethnal Green Road; he worked in the tax office in Whitechapel. He reckoned by the early 1980s there was a "room full of 714 tax payment certificates" that they couldn't trace to any tax or to subcontractors...sure I'd say it's odds-on most of them were Irish.

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Interviewer: So, I mean obviously you can't remember every job you would have worked on, presumably, but do any others come to mind?

Tom: Sometime in the mid-1970s I got a start working for John Byrne in the London Irish dancehalls as a kind of handyman/chippy with Roger Sherlock. I was at that I suppose about 8 years.¹² Byrnes [sic] owned the Galty and the Hibernian in Fulham and another one in New Cross, I can't remember the name o' that one. He was some operator... I remember him telling Mossie [his brother and manager] to get rid of a young lad who'd started as a barman because he caught him under-charging for drink.

Sure we used to be sent up to the Galty every-so-often to put up a partition right across the front of the upstairs bar in the dancehall – fully finished, right? The whole works... painted and complete with wall lights and dado rails and all that... d'ya think it had anything to do with the VAT inspections! [Laughter].

He had a flat in Kensington and I remember one time Roger and meself were sent up to put this fancy, very expensive bit of fitted furniture – like a presentation case or something, that we had to put in. This thing probably cost big money at the time, and it didn't fit in the space he wanted it in; he told us to cut it to fit it in... like an antique bit of furniture...no bother to him!

There was another one on the... down beside the Thames... Cannon Row Police Station. That was another big job I was on. Cannon Row... yeah, there was shuttering on that as well.¹³

Interviewer: Was it shuttering you were doing on the Victoria Line as well?

Tom: [Hesitant]... No I wasn't on the Victoria Line, I was on the East London Line, that goes from whatchacallit down there, on that... from Whitechapel to Surrey Quays.¹⁴ That line, that East London line when it was closed. That's not that long ago... ten, fifteen years, that was one of the last jobs I had.

Interviewer: So you weren't on the Victoria Line extension?

¹² John Byrne was one of the big entrepreneurial developers and impresarios along with Bill Fuller and John Murphy who made their fortunes in wartime and immediate post-war bomb clearance and reconstruction and then bought and ran dancehalls. Roger Sherlock was one of the most prominent post-war Irish traditional musicians in the London-Irish scene; a highly renowned flute player from Gurteen, Co. Sligo.

¹³ Tom is struggling to recall the nature of the jobs he worked on here. Cannon Row Police Station was indeed de-commissioned in 1985 and acquired by the Parliamentary Estates Directorate. It underwent an extensive refurbishment from 1985-1989 – this is doubtless the works to which Tom refers. The buildings are Listed under Planning and Heritage legislation and would therefore have undergone conservation refurbishment, suggesting such works as shuttering would have been very limited. (Source: <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/building/northern-estate/normanshaw-parliament-si/> (accessed 20 Sep. 18))

¹⁴ This project was towards the end of Tom's career in construction as it was not undertaken until around 2006-2007.

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Tom: No, I didn't work on the Victoria Line... I did for a bit... but not long. It was overground, making up frames that had to go down underneath, for the tunnels... things they were using down there.

I was a good while on the East London Line. I'd clock-in at Whitechapel and then we were brought down to Surrey Quays, and we'd have the same thing to do, there was an office down there and they'd tell you then ya had to go over to... what-the-hell's the other station... another station on it... but it was my job every day. Go over and the crowd that'd come in working on it overnight would take off three doors [to gain access] and leave them there, and the station wouldn't open in the morning because the doors weren't on. I'd put them three doors on before dinnertime; I'd put on the one they wanted first. Every morning, day-in-day-out. Every morning I went over there, and when I had that done... I came home! [Laughter]... nothing else; he told me, "Tom, that's your job for the day"... they were big heavy doors, like, for one man!

Interviewer: Was it mainly, then, small subbies you worked for?

Tom: They were; mainly, small enough, like. The like of Ffrench, now... Martin Connolly was another one I worked for... one good man! I never worked for the likes of Byrne Brothers or Harringtons or any o' them. So when I was working for Killby & Gayford, for example, that was with Ffrench.

I worked a good while for Kenny & Reynolds, a small firm over in Finsbury Park. Dan Kenny was from Roscommon and Reynolds – I never knew him, he was dead, I think, long before – I think he was from Longford. I was first and second-fixing mostly with them.¹⁵ They were mostly 'house-bashing' and council work. I worked for them on the conversion of Georgian houses into nurses' accommodation at the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital on Hackney Road, in Bethnal Green near to where we lived, which was dead handy; I was walking to work.

In the 1990s my son was working for Norwest Holst and got me some casual work again for an English subbie putting in seats in the new North [Clock-end] stand at the Arsenal FC. The contracts manager there was offering big bonuses to any labour to get these feckin' seats bolted in for the start of the new season.

Interviewer: Were you particularly active politically, like were you particularly nationalistic or...?

¹⁵ First fix carpentry includes all the initial framing work to the internal superstructure needed to get a building to the point of putting plaster on the internal walls. This includes carpentry work needed to construct walls, floors and ceilings. Second fix comprises of all the neater work done after plastering and includes door hanging, architraves, and picture rails, fitted furniture etc.

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Tom: No. I used to go down to Hyde Park Corner to listen to some of the speakers sometimes, but that was just a bit o' crack...shouting at them for fun, like.

Interviewer: Did you experience any hostility from the English when you first came?

Tom: Nah...I never did, really. Apart from the usual shite you might get from some loudmouth in a pub, but you'd take no notice. You wouldn't take any notice... [Recalling]...I remember a pub, now, when I came here first, now I think of it, as you're talking about that. I can't think of the [name]... 'twas up at Ladbroke Grove. I was staying in Westbourne Park at the time and there was a pub there and I can't think of the name of it. That's the time the trouble started with the blacks. There was two pubs there...and the blacks were only served in one part of it! Yeah, yeah...they were allowed there; if they went into that bar there, "No! You go around to that one" [pointing]

Interviewer: That's like apartheid, more-or-less! Segregation...

Tom: Well, that's what it was then. That was when they first started the row against the blacks. And there was another one on the Harrow Road – what? The Frankfurt was it? [Trying to recall]...on the Harrow Road, down from the Prince of Wales...the Frankfurt or something; and that was the very same, only they had this one!

Interviewer: Reg Hall's stories tend to suggest that by-and-large, the Irish lads got on okay with the blacks.

Tom: Ah yeah, sure we had no problem with them at all! Well, now, a lot of Irish people don't like 'em, but...sure the Irish could be fuckin' worse! [than the English]...I seen that meself.

Attitudes with the English maybe changed a bit when the Troubles started, but the likes of me, now, being here [in London] so long, I wouldn't take any fuckin' notice o' them, that's the point. But you'd get a fella maybe after just comin' over that would.

Later on, maybe in the late '70s and that, we were working with larger groups of Asian or Pakistani carpenters. They were very skilled craftsman who knew their job, but they weren't as 'hardy' as the Irish. The West Indians, they were grand lads but they could be lazy feckers!

Interviewer: Did you ever have any trouble with the police?

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Tom: No. never. Sure the wife lived across from the Galty when she first came here and she seen plenty of it.¹⁶ Sure the police'd be waiting for them. The crowd coming out of the Galty would be steamin' – there was no bar in the Galty at that time, so they used to go to the pub – the Crown, maybe, and get drunk before they'd go into the dancehall... and they'd be let in!

The first time they had a bar in the Galty...I forget what year it was – I suppose it would've been in the '60s – sure meself and Sherlock¹⁷ put the second bar for the ceili dancing in; that would've been in the '70s – it was a St. Patrick's night dance, [years later] the head barman told me they took a thousand pounds in the first two or three hours... some money!

Interviewer: Did you ever actually see any of those 'no blacks, no Irish' signs?

Tom: Oh I did! [Adamant]...oh yeah. Ah sure I'd take no notice of that at all! [Tom's wife, Mary, who was also present confirmed that she recalled seeing a similar sign in a lodging-house in Cricklewood soon after she arrived in London in 1953].

O' course I saw them, yeah. Up in a lodging-house or up where they'd be advertised in a shop window... no dogs as well [Laughter]...They'd be ignored. Most of the British that was that way has gone the other way now, they're gone against the coloureds. Down on the allotment we have down there [in London] there's two or three of them down there, auld English fellas, now, and they'd be giving out about the black people now...still at it. But they don't mention the Irish, and I'd say twenty-five or thirty years ago they'd have been included alright!

Interviewer: I was intrigued about how the GAA set-up worked in London. How did you get playing?

Tom: I was playing for Tara's within a few days of arriving in London. Taras had big Leitrim and Roscommon connections, or most of them was that anyway. Kerry men played for the Kingdom and Tir Connail Gaels was Donegal – and still are! Duffy and Carr [A major Irish-founded carpentry and building firm]. Well they're a new club, really, Tir Connail Gaels, but Taras and the Kingdom would be old clubs. See they'd know if there was any half-decent footballers coming over... they'd hear on the grapevine.

¹⁶ The Galtymore Club, on Cricklewood Broadway, was the best-known of the significant number of Irish dancehalls which opened in London in the post-war period.

¹⁷ Tom worked in the late 1970s with the renowned traditional musician, Roger Sherlock, from Gurteen, in County Sligo, as a maintenance crew for John Byrne, the multi-millionaire owner of the Galtymore, Hibernian and Harp dancehalls in London.

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: And was that county allegiance thing quite strong?

Tom: Yeah. 'Twas. Like if you were a Leitrim man you wouldn't go play for the Kingdom – you wouldn't be let, for a start! [Laughter], but you'd go join Taras and that was it. That's the whole point, isn't it? Stick to the county... that was it. There was a good few Roscommon men played for Taras as well, but years ago they were nearly all Leitrim...and Longford...there was a few Longford fellas played for them as well...the Reillys, there was Reillys played for Taras...Drumlish I think they were from.

The GAA was handy if you were looking for the start, they'd have the connections. They'd know the contractors and they'd know who to talk to. They try to get you fitted up with a job if you were playing. Sure I remember meeting Eamonn Boland – he'd been on the Roscommon Seniors that won the All-Ireland in 1943 and 1944, he was a boyhood hero of mine – on a housing site in Stevenage, Hertfordshire in the early 1960s, where they were building the new town. He was a foreman for McInneys¹⁸

Interviewer: And what about the County Associations. Did you have much to do with them?

Tom: A bit. Not a lot. If the Leitrim Association was running a function or anything I might go to it. The head man of the Leitrim County Association here was McNabola from Drumsna [a neighbour of Tom's] – I think he's dead now – a nice man.

Interviewer: And what did you do for fun, Tom?

Tom: Well, sure I always liked the few pints. And I'm fond of an odd bet! [Laughter].

I was always mad for traditional Irish music. I drank in the famous 'Crown' public house in Cricklewood a few times, when the McGovern brothers from Aughavas, in Co. Leitrim, had it. They were all in the building game as well...as far as I know they still run 'muck-away' lorries. I drank with many of the well-known London-Irish musicians - Raymond Roland, Finbar Dwyer, Bobby Casey, Roger Sherlock, Liam Farrell, PJ Crotty, Jimmy Power and Paddy Malynn.

I enjoyed working for John Byrnes [sic] and enjoyed the craic that went on in the dancehalls, especially in Fulham, and I spent many's the hour in the White Hart, The Favourite, The Willesden Junction, The William the Fourth and the

¹⁸ One of the big Irish-founded main contractors rooted in County Clare – see Appendix B of main Thesis.

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Victoria, The Brighton on Camden High Street and, o' course, The Irish Centre in Camden Town.

Interviewer: What do you remember about the dancehalls?

Tom: The Galty was the big one. The Banba [Kilburn], the Hibernian in Fulham. There was one in New Cross [south London]...I think it was the Harp, that's it, got it! The Harp, New Cross is right...Jasus, I was lucky I never got electrocuted down there [Laughter]. I blew all the feekin' lights out in New Cross!

Interviewer: How did you do that?

Tom: Drilling a hole in concrete and it was never marked on the thing [1.25] and there was a live cable in the conduit. Lucky enough I had feekin' leather soles on me boots, I reckon I'd have been a gonner. "Ah no, nothing there, we checked it"...I forget the name of the manager there...when I was working with Sherlock.

Interviewer: I suppose to kind of round off things, would you see Ireland as home, or London as home, or do you feel it's neither?

Tom: To be honest, I'm more at home in London, now, because I know more people. All my friends that I knew around here, or most of them, are all gone

Interviewer: This might be a tough question, but on the whole do you think that you were better off in London than if you had stayed here [Tom's homeplace]

Tom: I'm dead sure I'm better off than if I stayed here! [Emphatic]. Because the point about it is if I had stayed here what work would I have done? Once I'd finished with football, what would have happened then? See the Ganger wasn't interested in football; all the Ganger was interested in was the pub! I'd have had a job with the Ganger as long as I wanted it, I know, but I'd have probably drank meself into an early grave! [Laughter].

You'd have to move out. See when you think about it, I was in a very bad position; I was the eldest of nine children, which had to be kept, and my father wasn't getting regular work, no more than anyone was... that's where it comes in you see. I'd have to keep the house and look after the children. Some of the others would have to go if I didn't. Even if I had got a permanent job with the council, the council wages were very small...like, a load o' rubbish, y'know. The families were too big, the land was too small, and there was no work.

Interview 2

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

[Mid-conversation]

Tom: The family got a big divide of land when they were dividing the land up in Meath, but then Mick went London anyway. That would have been around the early sixties. I worked for Mick Browne meself... good man to work for. He used to take us to Cheltenham once a year, he'd pay for everything for the day.

Interviewer: What were you going to say about Browne and the Rowton House?

Tom: Browne used to pick up the men from the Rowton House in Hammersmith. There'd be four or five blokes in a conversation in the back of the van, going out to a job. I was sittin' in the front with Mick, but the rest of them in the back would be talking about "Who tarmac'd the bed last night"! [Laughter]... God 'twas unbelievable!

There was another fella, you might have heard of, a Kerry fella from Kilburn... I can't think of his name, now, he was a subcontractor. He used to bring out fellas from Camden [Arlington House]. Where the hell was this we were working? We were the other side of the river [Thames] somewhere... not Battersea but somewhere down that neck of the woods. He'd bring out these lads in the van early, like, and he'd pick them up at dinnertime [to go home]. But they done as much work from eight or half-eight of a morning 'til twelve o'clock as anyone else would do in a day. 'Job and knock'... he'd come down, pay them cash-in-the-hand, put them into the van and bring them up [to Camden] again... and by God they could work! He'd be picking them up in Camden Town of a morning, five or six o'them in a gang, and they'd be dying after the drink, and I think he used to pay the breakfast for them, too. They'd do the half-day horsin'-it-out and get the shift and then back on the beer, then, in the afternoon. That was the routine.

Interviewer: And where did he used to pick them up in Camden, d'ya know?

Tom: Not sure. Sometimes by the station, I think, or maybe it was outside a pub... The Bell, I think. They'd have a spot arranged. Well, 'twas the same in Cricklewood with Murphy [Tom asks his wife]... "What was the name of that road, Mary, in Cricklewood where the men used to lie across the barrier of a morning?"... I can't remember either. Some of them'd be outside the Crown, but there's another road up from the Crown as you go up towards Willesden; there's a right-turn and there's lights there... it takes you up to the church... isn't there a church up there, Mary? Cricklewood Lane, that's the one! There's a railing along there and all the men would be leaning against that and all the subcontractors'd be pulling up and it'd be *bump, bump, bump* [making a deal] – "get-in"... gone.

O#1 -Tom M - 21

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: Sean G told me the same sort of routine; he reckoned that system went on until the nineties. Was it Nellie's Café there, up from the Crown or was it the Galty... I can't remember which one it was, but it was one of them that was known as the hiring-spot, the pick-up point. [Laughter]

Tom: And there was another one there in Camden Town, opposite the market there. You know that road opposite the market? That was another spot where they used to be picked up.

Another old friend of mine from the 1960s was Frank Mc from near Dowra,¹⁹ ... 'Hairy Frank' he was always known as in London. Be God he was a great worker too – I thought he was long-since dead. He ended his days in the Rowton House in Whitechapel. I went looking for him once, years ago, but he was 'on the tramp'. Then there was Kieran R, another fightin' man, from Gortletteragh, in Leitrim, who used to work for a big farmer out towards Drumlion before he came to work in London. They were hardy men.

Interviewer: I suppose... was them fellas that was picked up in the Rowton Houses... I guess that was cheap labour, was it?

Tom: Yeah... there'd be no names, no paperwork, nothing at all. Most of them men were signing-on as well; you didn't sign-on every day in them days, maybe just every two weeks. So most of them men, the subbie mightn't even know their full names. That hasn't really changed; sure what do you think the eastern Europeans are doing today?

Interview 3

[Mid-conversation]

Interviewer: So you went looking for work on the Victoria Line?

Tom: Yeah... That would have been around the mid-'60s I suppose... at a rough guess.

Interviewer: So what made you go looking for work on that job?

Tom: Because there was money on it! We heard there was good money to be made. And the timekeeper on that job... well, one of the timekeepers, cos there was two or three shifts on that job... was from Carrick [Tom's home town] – he was Driscoll or O'Driscoll and his house was on the end of Carrick Quay, down on the edge of the Shannon, that's where he was from.

¹⁹ Dowra is a small town in north-east Leitrim, bordering County Cavan.

OI#1 -Tom M - 22

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Interviewer: Tell me about getting that job? What were you doing? Something to do with concrete, you said?

Tom: I met one of the leading miners on one tunnel section; he was Joe Farrell, a neighbour of ours from ‘the Corries’.²⁰ I knew him to see – I knew who he was, but not to talk to. He was a good bit older than me, like, put it that way. He said to me, “I have a job down below for ya,”. Lucky enough I done a job before with the big concrete mixers – nowhere near as big as the thing they had for the tunnel, like. But Joe says, “Did ya ever work one of these yokes?” I said “Yes, not as big as that, but I’d work it, y’know”...”Ya can have that job, now, then” he says, “Okay”.

So you had the scoop, y’know the big one, for putting in the sand and cement or whatever. It was on a wire rope mechanism and you pushed it into the big pile of sand one side and gravel the other. So you’d put in one of sharp sand and two of gravel or whatever was the mix they told us, and throw the bags of cement in after... maybe two bags. ‘Twas like a big mixer and a big wheelbarrow on a drag; you didn’t push it, the dragline pulled it in for you. Like a huge skip...I forget the mix, ‘twas three of gravel and one of sand, I think.

Interviewer: So the mixer would be producing what?...maybe a couple of metres at a time?

Tom: Yeah, or maybe more than that. When it was mixed you had to let it down the chute into the tunnel below into big skips on rails and that went in, then, when they were puttin’ in the rings, down below.

Interviewer: So you weren’t down in the tunnels?

Tom: No. I was underground, but not in the tunnels; I was working overhead. I was gettin’ the same money as the feckin’ fellas downstairs! I was on day shift. I remember when I started using that mixer, I was a bit unsure so I checked the tank and there was no oil in the machine. “There should be oil in this” I told him, “I know” he said; so ‘twas shut down. It would have seized the whole lot up if I’d started it without oil. See he knew then that I knew what I was at.

I was at that for a while. Because the money was good. I must’ve been there twelve months or maybe more on that job.

Interviewer: See, you said in that earlier interview that you only worked on the Victoria Line making up frames for a while to be used in the underground.

²⁰ The Corries is a townland on the Roscommon banks of the River Shannon, just outside Carrick-on-Shannon. These men were ‘townnies’ of Tom’s with whom he would socialise at work

Original Interview # 1 – Tom M - Leitrim

Tom: No. That was on the London Underground work French, much later. That was different work they were doing not so long ago on the Victoria Line [Planned Maintenance and Upgrade works in 1990s]. That wasn’t the building of it. No, I was the man putting down the concrete for the tunnel rings when it was being built. I seen the tunnel face. You could go down and have a look but you couldn’t stay down there long otherwise you’d have to go into the decompression chamber when you came back up.

Interviewer: So can you remember who you were actually employed by on that job?

Tom: No. I can’t actually remember who the main contractor was. No, I wasn’t working for a subbie, so far as I remember there weren’t any subbies on that job...not that I can remember.

Interviewer: So who would have paid you?

Tom: The main contractor paid me. I was on the cards on that job. That Joe Farrell that I told you about, he was the tunnel boss on that section, he told me what to do. He’d send the message up when they wanted concrete. We were paid every Thursday in cash, in a pay packet, yeah. The pay office was on site; the timekeeper had the pay office.

Interviewer: So you reckon that was good money?

Tom: Oh God yeah. I was earning as much-and-a-half-again as I did on any other job. Every man on that was on the same level of money; didn’t matter where you were working or whatever. Probably the miners were getting a lot more, y’know what I mean, but you were expecting that. The rate of pay, generally, though, was an awful lot higher on that than I was earning as a chippy!

Interviewer: One last question, just while I think of it...d’you know what a ‘foot-iron’ is ?

Tom: (indignantly) O’course I know what a foot-iron is! Many’s the day I used one. It’s a metal plate that clips on the boot, to save the leather when you’re digging. I well remember after I first landed in London I seen the gangs of lads coming in off the trucks in the carpark at the Crown in Cricklewood with th’auld foot-irons poking outa their jacket top-pockets. Holy God, yeah, I remember that well...

END

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

Name: ‘Dinny’ – **Date of Birth:** March, 1925
Place of Birth: The Rosses, Co. Donegal, Ireland.
Date of Emigration to UK: 1943
Date of Interview: 23rd September, 2015, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

Interviewer: So how...em...we’ll get on to my stuff in a minute. Just for the tape, now, I’ll state it’s the 23rd September and we’re in Letterkenny and I’m with Vinnie [sic] Duffy. So you were just telling me, now, how...tell me a bit about your background, then, you were telling me how you ended up visiting Carrick. You were in Birmingham for -

Dinny: Well, no, start at the beginning, just very quickly, it’s a matter of three or four minutes. I was born up in the Rosses in west Donegal in 1925; a highly populated, low income, heavy emigration area – mostly to Scotland –

Interviewer: Was that kind of seasonal migration?

Dinny: Absolutely – seasonal – go home for the winter – and go to Scotland for the summer. I had members of my family living in Edinburgh; I had 2 sisters married in Edinburgh and I was a young laddie of eighteen, I was the youngest of a family of eight and the time came to go because there was no employment; it was inevitable that you went if you were able.

Interviewer: So would you say – sorry to interrupt you, but while I think of it, then, you say it was inevitable – so when you say it was inevitable, would you have known that, more or less as soon as you started growing up, then?

Dinny: Oh yes [emphatic] - oh, I had two brothers who went to Scotland before me that were older than me and I knew that that was where I was going to go

Interviewer: You knew there was never any kinda real doubt about that?

Dinny: No, you see I only had a national-school education – and at fourteen left school; did work at home, we had a smallholding, maybe about ten acres or thereabouts and I cut corn with a scythe, dug and sowed potatoes, learnt how to look after animals; we had two or three cows and so on.

Interviewer: I forgot to ask you, Dinny, if you don’t mind me asking, what year were you born?

Dinny: I was born in 1925...1925 – I told that to a taxi driver here, one day and he said “My God, that’s forever!” [Laughter]...that’s what he thought of it!

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

So at the age of eighteen, I left and went to Edinburgh and got a job in a big garden centre at Liberton, on the outskirts of the city where I did landscape gardening, home maintenance gardening, cultivated plants and shrubs and the whole nine yards. I knew nothing about gardening, but I soon learned, and it was a good healthy life. Outdoors – I was young, I was eighteen years old and began to get an interest in girls and the city was a fine place – oh a fabulous city and, anyway, worked at that for about two years or thereabouts.

Then – a very strange jump for a young fella from the Rosses in west Donegal - I saw an advertisement in the press for what was called a *servitor* – did you ever hear that word? A servitor at Edinburgh University Library. Sounds very grand! – but it wasn’t grand...well, it was grand enough, but not *that* grand. A servitor at Edinburgh University Library had the job – incidentally, the library was *immense* – it had somewhere approaching a hundred-thousand books, obviously on every subject known to man – and a few not known! There were three servitors and we had different functions but we were a group together; but the job of the servitor was –

[Dinny embarks upon a detailed explanation of the job function and the operation of the Central Library – not specific to this research]

To ensure that the continuity of the system was maintained by collecting, sorting and recycling the book system. In order for that to happen, the students knew that they didn’t replace books.

Interviewer: And did you get that job through application and interview? Was there any issue with you not having Inter or Leaving Cert education?

Dinny: It didn’t make any difference, all you had to do was push a trolley. Y’see, we weren’t the librarians – there were official librarians qualified to deal with books and students’ and all that stuff; we didn’t deal with students...well, we might peripherally have to deal with the odd one, but we didn’t have to deal with students. All we had to do was maintain the system. I did that for about two and a half years or thereabouts. [10.23] I enjoyed it; the wages weren’t great – what was I earning? About six pounds-a-week, but remember that was the late 1940s, ‘twasn’t bad! I was living in my married sister’s house and giving her two quid-a-week for my keep and I had about four quid for myself, so I was doing okay. But it wasn’t leading anywhere; there was no future in it.

And then I got...an old friend, Jimmy Hennessy who was from Co. Laois. I won’t go into too much detail about him, but Jimmy took a BA degree in UCD

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

in the early 1940s. Jimmy would've been about ten years older than me my senior. He went to St Kieran's in Kilkenny to be a priest to begin with. That didn't work out and he went to UCD and did a BA and...well...no jobs in Ireland even for someone qualified to BA standard; not a prayer! Not a prayer! Anyway, so Jimmy couldn't get a job in Ireland. He came from a farming... his parents were fairly well-to-do farmers – big farm - in Laois, but no jobs.

So he went to Scotland with a [Scottish] civil engineering firm called Carmichael; Carmichael was big then; don't know what they are now. Jimmy ended up working as a timekeeper/wages clerk; they sent him away up the north of Scotland to Kinross for two years. All the workers in Kinross were Irishmen – mostly from Donegal, funnily enough, and he [Jimmy] didn't like Donegal people a lot! [Laughter] Anyway he made friends with a Doherty man from Donegal whose wife had a friend whom Jimmy fell for and he came down to Edinburgh. She was a teacher, and she insisted that Jimmy go to Murray House, the teacher-training college for Edinburgh. Anyway the relationship ended in disaster and they broke up. But Jimmy was now a teacher – she made a teacher out of him – he was teaching at St. Anthony's school in Edinburgh when I met him, and we ended up becoming pals.

The reason I'm going on about him is it was his [Jimmy's] example as a timekeeper up in Kinross that gave me the idea that I should leave the job I had and do the same; I thought it sounded exciting. So an advertisement appeared in the 'Edinburgh Evening News' that Sir Robert McAlpine's firm were looking for timekeepers/wages clerks in southern England or wherever. I applied and got an interview with McAlpine's representative in Scotland at a hotel in Edinburgh; a nice man, old retired man from the firm...nice interview...not terribly demanding, a couple of paper exercises with figures to make sure I could subdivide and count and the like, then we discussed for half an hour or so what I wanted to do, what I did before etc. Then a week later I got you have been successful, would you please appear at Park Lane in London the following week! Sir Robert McAlpine's offices on a set date. So that was my invitation; I gave my notice at Edinburgh University library.

Interviewer: Can I just ask you, did you take up the new role at McAlpines...was the money better? Was that your motivating factor?

Dinny: The money was better, because it was London, and yes, that kind of had a certain influence but basically I got the notion from Jimmy Hennessy that that was the way to get on in the world. I got the idea that if he thought it was the thing to be a timekeeper, then so did I. So anyway, I catch the fastest train in Europe, the famous 'Flying Scotsman' – it did sixty-five miles an hour, and that was fast then! And I took the Flying Scotsman from Caledonian Station in Edinburgh and landed in St. Pancras Station, London.

Interviewer: What year are we talking about now?

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

Dinny: Forty-nine...yes, just four years after the end of the War. I had never been in England in my life; I'd never been south of Midlothian. So it was my first day in England – and this is very important [emphasizes to me] because what this does for your study, I think, is it shows you the hazards of an Irishman trying to make it in the big city and all the - not pain – but especially of the difficulties of not knowing your way around the city and of being alone.

This was the first time I had ever set foot in London and my experiences were a lesson on the hazards and pitfalls of a country-boy landing. So I arrived at St. Pancras and, incidentally, I have a warrant – given to me in McAlpine's letter - for an overnight stay at a small hotel off Oxford Street - comfortable enough - where I was looked after for the night and in the morning, up early, good breakfast and got a taxi – I had a couple o'quid in me pocket, not a lot - to McAlpine's offices at Park Lane. My goodness I couldn't have been more impressed when I looked at it, I thought "My God!...am I gonna work for these people?"...

And into Park Lane. Showed my letters; my credentials and sent upstairs to the man who dealt with assigning staff to contracts. I met him, a very genial, chatty man, he told me that he was assigning me to Beckton Gas Works ¹...only Beckton Gas Works did not exist; it was in the process of being built. Actually it was in the process of demolition and site clearance and preparation before construction could begin.² So here am I now, I'm twenty-four years old, but I'm a very young twenty f...I'm actually in my head about nineteen, because I haven't had, really, very much exposure to the world, you know?...and I'm in a strange city, in a strange land, and the challenge of that is quite considerable. So he gives me a foolscap sheet of paper with two addresses on it that I could, maybe, find lodgings in, because McAlpines had a store of addresses that men used, coming or going; these were two reliable lodging houses and I could go there and see if there was space for me and hopefully there would be. Gave me a guide, showed me the tube guide and all that sort of thing and how to find my way, verbally anyway, out to East Ham. I have no idea, really, what he's talking about, not knowing the geography of the city, I just listened and nodded and took it all in, but anyway I had to obey it. Went out, found the nearest tube-station without difficulty – London can be easy if you just know a couple of things – oh the first time ever I went down an escalator, I'd never seen an escalator – was heavily impressed with that! Boarded the tube train, sat so near the window that I wouldn't miss East Ham when it came up and was fearful that I'd overshoot it, as I didn't know how far it was.

¹ Beckton is an area of reclaimed marshland lying east of Canning Town and Canary Wharf, and south of East Ham, in the Borough of Newham. In the 1950s there was a massive industrial expansion of this area which is now commonly called the Thames Corridor, part of which was a major energy infrastructure project involving the construction of a Natural Gas Generation facility at Beckton.

² It is probable that the project Dinny worked on at this time was the enabling phase of the *Tar and Ammonia Products Works* project at Beckton, which was awarded to Sir Robert McAlpine for a contract value of £1,046,000 (£34 million at equivalent 2016 rates) in early 1950 and was reported in 'Summary of Civil Engineering Contracts', *The Engineer*, December 21, 1956 p.xlviii : contract works consisted of boiler house, power and service, distribution system, roads, railways, storm and effluent sewers.

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

But anyway, now, it's early June; I wasn't used to the heat of London in summer; the sun was splitting the rocks, God almighty, and there was I in a double-breasted suit, collar and tie in a sweltering heat. So anyway, eventually there it is, I made East Ham and I had no way of knowing which way to go so I had to keep asking questions of numerous people on the street, who, hopefully, would be helpful, and they were. In no time at all I found the first address, it wasn't that far from the station. Got there. Lady opens door. I tell her that I've come down from Edinburgh to work for Sir Robert McAlpine but was greeted with indifference, being told that the places in the house were all taken – thank you – very cold. So I'm standing there with one address left, I was beginning to worry about what would happen if the second place couldn't accommodate me either. I don't know anybody, I don't know the place I'm in either. Going in search of the second address, I met a series of what seemed to have been outsiders from the area, as they didn't seem to know what I was talking about. Eventually I met a young woman I thought was local because she had a shopping basket on her arm and I asked her for directions. She told me I was going in completely the wrong direction and took me back the way she was after coming, saying that her own house was not too far from the lodging house I sought.

As it turns out, this young woman was of a similar age to me and as we walked, I explained that I was looking for this second house as suggested lodgings, that I was new to London, just having arrived from Edinburgh³ and was due to start working for Sir Robert McAlpine the following day. The young woman showed me where this second lodging house was, went to walk away and after a few moments doubled-back and said that if I was unfortunate with the second lodging house, that she lived a couple of streets away with her husband and their small child. She must have taken pity on me. Her husband worked in the city, she explained. I wrote her address down, then went looking for the second lodging, as it turned out again unsuccessfully, so had to call on the young woman. She brought me in and gave me tea and was very hospitable. The husband came home around five o'clock and she explained the situation –

Interviewer: Now, I'm not being funny or anything, but he could've taken a very different attitude to you, coming home and finding you in his house? I know plenty of men who would've immediately challenged you and said "What are you doing in my house, with my wife"!

Dinny: Exactly, and that's why I've such a fond memory of East Ham. He kind of shook both me hands, they were two of a kind. This woman and her husband were incredibly charitable to me, a relative stranger, offering me not only lodging space in their home for a total of ten days – I tried to offer them money, but there was no way they were going to accept money – not a hope! Almost offended; but I left money on the table the day I left. The husband then decided

³ Author's note: Dinny seemingly did not tell this girl he was Irish. Dinny's accent is more Scottish than Irish. It might be speculated as to whether this altered the young woman's perception of Dinny, aligned with the fact that he was well-dressed in a formal suit and tie, rather than looking like a navvy.

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

that he was going to take charge of me and showed me London. He took me to the Tower, to St. Paul's, to the Prospect of Whitby – the oldest pub in London, down in Wapping. I had ten of my happiest days ever. These generous people are forever in my memory even now. This episode shows the hazards of a young Irish fellow arriving in London on his own for work.

Interviewer: It does, Dinny, and it's important because it's a very positive and optimistic outcome, but as we well know, there were many such instances that perhaps didn't end so well!

Dinny: Indeed! So anyway, let's get to the business side of things! [33.11] So I reported next morning for work at McAlpine's site at Beckton when the project was around two months into demolition. It consisted mainly of dilapidated and bombed out terraced houses, of which Sir Robert McAlpine is demolishing 320; I think the acreage was about 54-55 acres or so. A massive spread; Hitler had managed to destroy most of them anyway and the ones that weren't destroyed were damaged beyond repair, and anyway the new works had to be built. There was a huge vacant area already cleared. Sir Robert had already commenced digging the foundations for the 'cavern' 4 and was then demolishing the remaining houses'. Two operations were then ongoing on site, namely surface demolition and the dig-down. The site offices were timber frame cabins not of very good quality...that had been on many sites before by the look of them. The site agent - the most important Manager on the site - was Johnny Loftus from County Mayo, an Irishman of around forty years with a BA degree from Galway University. He was a big presence; a genial but authoritative man, a very good manager who went on to join the board of directors at McAlpine.⁵

Because he was the site agent, he had his own private office, of course. My immediate boss was a typical Londoner, another big man and very authoritarian. He had two timekeeper/wages clerks; there was me, a complete rookie; and another man called Jimmy Joyce, a Galway man who was perhaps seven or eight years my senior. Jimmy had originally gone to Maynooth to be a priest but had 'jacked' after a couple of years. Jimmy was very good on philosophy and theology and could talk about Spinoza and...he was an interesting guy...an exceptional harmonica player, having later broadcast on the BBC. I remember him playing on site for the shovelmen during breaks, just to lighten the mood but he was also a very serious musician, being able to play Shostakovich and Stravinsky amongst many others. As Jimmy was the more experienced timekeeper, I leaned heavily on him to guide me because the job was actually more demanding than I had anticipated.

The McAlpine's workforce on site at that time was 156 men,

Interviewer: Can I ask you something, now. Those 156 men, were they all directly employed by McAlpine or were they working for subbies?

⁴ This was an unusual term used by Dinny. I suspect what he means is the deep basement excavation which was probably required as part of the gas processing plant.

⁵ Can this be verified?

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

Dinny: All directly employed by McAlpine, and 95% of them were Irish; there were so few Englishmen, my goodness, because you knew by the surnames. The job of the timekeeper was to ensure that the time worked by each and every man was accurately recorded and that each man was properly paid for the hours worked; there was a system devised in McAlpines to ensure this. First of all, when a new man was recruited he would report to the timekeeper/wages clerk's window with his insurance card. If he didn't have an insurance card he would have to go and get one before being allowed to start on site. Upon reporting for work, the insurance card of each man would be taken and retained by the wages clerks; this would contain personal information regarding the man: his age, address, National Insurance details etc. Timekeepers had no supervisory role on site, so a new starter would 'get the start' from the foreman and work would be allocated only by the foremen or gangers whose authority derived from the site agent.⁶ My job so far as wages were concerned was merely to process the man's wages.

However, the job was more complicated because in order to ensure that these 150 men were all, every day, actively employed by Sir Robert McAlpine, two things had to happen. Jimmy and I had split the workforce in two so each was responsible for around seventy to eighty men each. We both had a sort of card which hung around their necks, leaving our hands free, and this card had written on it the names of our 75 men under our respective watch. At 11 a.m. each morning we would both go out and actually find each man, personally identify him, and tick him off as present for that morning. There was a reason for that; a man could clock-in at the site in the morning, leave the site – it was immense – so if they went, they went. This was to prevent the fraudulent practice of double-shifting, where a man would sign on at one job, sneak off site undetected and sign in on another contract nearby, effectively getting double-wages.

Interviewer: And Dinny, do you think much of that happened?

Dinny: Yeah...it happened...but it didn't happen with McAlpine, too damn right it didn't!...and I don't think it happened much with any big firm. Most of us, that's why we were timekeepers, and we did the same thing at 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Same operation.

Interviewer: So it was basically to make sure the lads were there?

Dinny: We went off to site...now here's where a rookie timekeeper had a real problem; I didn't know any of the men personally, they were just names on a list for me. Y'see what I had to do until I got to know them – but then they were changing day-by-day as well – they weren't static, there were new men coming and going

⁶ Getting 'the start' is a colloquial vernacular term still used widely amongst the Irish and British in construction. This chain of command is typical of mid-sized construction projects in the UK right up to the present time. In Ireland today the phrase 'any chance of the start' is an instantly recognisable refrain to anyone involved in the construction industry and is used, for example, in one of folksinger Christy Moore's famous hits 'The Shovel Song'.

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

every week. What I had to do, certainly in the first few weeks I was there, because I couldn't identify anyone, I had to go and look every man in the eye and say, "Name please", and he would give me his name; Paddy O'Riordan, Sean O'Driscoll, whatever it might be, and I would tick him off as seen. Now the reason that they didn't act the mickey with me or start giving me a 'hard time' was if they didn't give a name which matched their insurance card, they didn't get paid for the day – simple as that! So nobody gave me much lip or made life difficult because their pay depended on being ticked [as present]. So I had total control of them in that way. It was a hazard because they were working with shovels and tools and picks, bars, all sorts of things, and they had to kind of stop and pay attention to me, but once you got to know a face, you didn't have to do that anymore.

Interviewer: So all them men, all that demolition and excavation work that you were talking about, would that ALL have been hand work?

Dinny: No, no, no, no...not at all! Machines were everywhere. Y'see the set-up was most of the initial demolitions of each house was done by a wrecking ball crane machine which was driven by a plant operator, with the clearing and tidying of the site then done by manual labour with picks and shovels. There was also mechanical diggers and dumpers used on site to clear debris, okay they weren't as technologically modern as we might see these days. They did a good part of the heavy-lifting, y'see these houses being demolished were generally red-brick and once you knocked the gable end out the rest just collapsed in; I'm not sure what the debris from such houses was used for.⁷ The dumpers would come in and the diggers would load them. The guys with the 'navvy shovels' would tidy up all the loose debris into the bucket of the machine or into skips.⁸

Now, the 'cavern' dig was already commenced – I think this took...I don't know...15 months or a year, anyway. It was probably about 40 yards or 125 feet wide and long by some 25 feet deep – that's a 'big dig' and all that went out the gate in trucks – the whole lot. As they descended downwards [digging], cranes would lower skips or diggers into the excavation cavern for filling and removal of spoil. The top surface of perhaps 3-6 feet was relatively normal clay, but after that the dig encountered a layer of typical heavy London blue clay, followed by layers of shale – sedimentary rock, which was easier to excavate than the clay.⁹

Interviewer: Tell me something, were the Irish workers driving the plant and diggers and that sort of thing?

⁷ Conventional construction practice at this time given the austerity of the immediate post-war period and the serious shortages of materials would have been to select whichever bricks were re-usable from the demolition spoil and use the remnants or fragments of brick and concrete as hardcore fill beneath concrete ground slabs.

⁸ Navvy shovels are short-handled, square-mouthed spades usually with D-shaped grips. These allowed for close movements in restricted trench and heading excavations. They were used almost universally in construction and engineering in the post-war period and contrast markedly with the long-handled pointed round-head spades generally used for agricultural work in Ireland.

⁹ This is a typical geological feature of the Thames corridor borders running through the middle of London.

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

Dinny: No the guys on the diggers were English, there were very few Irishmen driving diggers; Englishmen came in really where there was machinery, that seemed to me to be the way it was.

Interviewer: I think that changed as time marched on; the Irish began driving lots of the plant on site themselves.

Dinny: Of course, it did. But when I was there Irishmen were basically doing the shoveling and tidying.

Interviewer: Did you or anyone else on the site call these men ‘navvies’ or would they have been known as labourers or?

Dinny: The standing title, really, was ‘navvy’...aye...and nobody objected to that, it’s just the way things were. One of the things I found was that – not all of them but – the occasional Irishman kind of resented seeing me in a good suit with a pen round my neck. I got the feeling that he thought because I was an Irishman I shouldn’t be doing that...and you’d get the odd one that would express it, y’know, he’d sort of say “bloody Irishmen, once he gets a job like that, y’know what he’s like” y’know that sort of thing, y’know.

Interviewer: And yet the site agent on the job was Irish, that’s ironic.

Dinny: Ahh look, sure you couldn’t get more Irish than Johnny Loftus! But anyway Excavations proceeded relentlessly – you could see the difference every day in the depth, even though it was a big area – over eight or nine months. Now here’s a problem; Jimmy Joyce and I had 75 names each – we shared the labour force between us. We would swap timekeepers rotas – I would do Jimmy’s for a couple of weeks and he’d do mine. I don’t know why that was; I think this was probably some sort of management thing to stop us getting too acquainted with the men themselves. You see timekeepers had a certain degree of power; if I got too friendly with the boys on site, I could be marking them present and they’re not there at all. There were scams which went on generally on sites.

Anyway, I didn’t have a great head for heights and as we got deeper and deeper it became a wee bit problematic for me! But I had no way out of it, I had to do it.¹⁰ So the way we got around it was, when we got down the full 25 feet – it’s a long way down! I had to shut me eyes at time! But anyway, the whole idea – as I understood it. I didn’t stay to see all of it – was that cavern would be concreted in, with walls around the edge of the cavern. It would form a sunken basement with solid sides and bottom.

The work back at the office was quite demanding. There was also a staff man called a ‘recoverables’ clerk,¹¹ - he was super good at figures [Dinny explains

¹⁰ The ‘cavern’ to which Dinny refers was probably the contiguous basement coffer dam construction which would have been required to provide the foundations for the process plant construction which was to follow demolition and substructure works.

¹¹ The description of this clerk sounds like an ‘increased costs clerk’ which was part of the quantity surveying functions on site on most large projects at this time. Standard form building contracts, for example the RIBA

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

this role in detail] and he seemed to be rather more elevated in status than us timekeepers. Now the wages sheets were prepared in triplicate and y’see that small desk there now [Dinny points to small table in room] that’s the size they were; that there now, and they were this horrible carbon paper job...oh I hated carbon paper!

Interviewer: Were the lads paid every week then?

Dinny: Oh every Friday, on the nail. Some men ‘jacked’ midweek, which was often the case, if they gave the wages clerks a couple of hours’ notice we could ‘settle them up’.

Interviewer: So presumably you could finish them up – well not you, but the foreman, say – with no notice too?

Dinny: Oh yeah, it was a two-way street, you see. The site manager could give a man his cards at the drop of a hat, too.

Interviewer: Y’see there was an overlap around that time between what I would call the post-war immigrants, and the more...well...there’s a fella called Cowley that’s written about these men, who calls them ‘tramp navvies’¹² There was a class of navvies who used to work in England that were liable to jack at anytime.

Dinny: [Cutting-in] Oh you mean ‘Long-distance men’? Oh yeah, sure they could start at nine o’clock and leave at twelve!

But the wages sheets I found a bit of a trial to start with and was on probation initially but I wasn’t slow either and I kinda picked it up quickly enough. Such was the requirement for exactitude in the preparation of timesheets and wages sheets that the weekly tally sheets had to balance top-to-bottom and across the sub-totals, they could not be out by as much as a penny, and if it was you bloody-well had to find it! Now what was that about? But that was the way they were!

Interviewer: So how long did you stay at that job? And did you get to know about how the rest of McAlpine worked? I suppose what I’m trying to get at is was that Beckton job typical – would McAlpines have had a very large Irish workforce generally?

Dinny: I was with McAlpine for about eighteen months in all, just on the Beckton contract. McAlpines, my friend, were Irish to ninety-odd percent. Even in head office there were Irishmen who climbed that ladder to as near the top as you can go! Like I told you Johnny Loftus became something of a legend in the

(Royal Institute of British Architects) or JCT (Joint Contracts Tribunal) which were being developed rapidly in the post-war era included mechanisms for the recovery of fluctuations in the cost of materials and labour beyond the original tender date for the project. These mechanisms required the compilation and maintenance of detailed records in support of the fluctuations claims.

¹² This is the terminology used by Ultan Cowley in ‘The Men that Built Britain’ to refer to the old pre-Second World War class of itinerant navvies whose lineage lies in the railway navvies of the 19th century Industrial Revolution. Alternative names for such men were ‘Long-distance kiddies’ or ‘Long-distance men’

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

construction industry at this time for McAlpine, and I met men on other jobs who knew Loftus by reputation. He ended up in Park Lane, in head office, and on the board. I mean you can't go further than that.

The job itself [Dinny's job] as I got to know it a bit better it became less threatening to me; in the early stages I found the going very hard. Around a month into the job a senior manager was sent from head office in Park Lane to give me my one-month's scrutiny. To quality-check my work, which, thankfully, I passed without difficulty. But the inspection had made me be perhaps more officious or overbearing than normal; I knew he was watching me like a hawk...if I didn't go out and stare every man in the face, you know, go out and go as close to them as I possibly could, because I knew that that's what he was looking for..., it made me a bit uncomfortable and there might have been occasions when I might have made demands, perhaps unreasonably upon them [the navvies]...it's not a one-way street...y'know the fella with the shovel might have had a case some of the time...

At that time McAlpine was immense, even on a global scale; they were contracting in South America and the USA for example. John Laing was the other major contractor of the time.

[Dinny then discussed his experiences of socialising and interacting with Irish working men both in London and later in Birmingham, where he became a social worker]

One of the most demanding aspects of the Irishman's life working in big cities like London or Birmingham was living accommodation. A considerable number of the labourers I got to know lived on 'the Spike'; I knew some of them in the Rowton House in Birmingham when I later inspected there as a social worker. At one time it housed over eight hundred men in single bunks of 7' x 3', like a 'bed with a canopy' which had very little storage.¹³ The main door to the dormitory was on a drop-latch so that it could not be accessed from outside – except by staff – to prevent theft. Back in the 1940s, a bed in the Rowton House was a shilling-a-night, doesn't sound much, does it? And often some of the itinerant long distance men would get assistance financially from charities such

¹³ 'The Spike' is an itinerant navy term for moving from hostel to hostel, perhaps on a daily or weekly basis. Dinny is referring here to the Highgate Rowton House in Birmingham. Opened in 1903, the buildings original name, Rowton house was taken from its founder, a philanthropist called Lord Rowton who in the late 1800s built a series of buildings in England that provided large numbers of migrant workers with decent living conditions. The guests were predominantly Irish Labourers who were rejected from traditional lodgings and were otherwise forced to stay in squalid conditions. Rowton House originally had lodgings for more than 800 men, all housed in individual wooden panelled cubicles (for an indication of size, The Paragon Hotel currently has 250 en-suite bedrooms). The ground floor housed an enormous dining room feeding vast numbers of men and there were amenities such as shops, a barber and a tailor on site. George Orwell, in *Down & Out In Paris and London*, wrote about lodging houses: "The best are the Rowton Houses, where the charge is a shilling, for which you get a cubicle to yourself, and the use of excellent bathrooms...The Rowton Houses are splendid buildings, and the only objection to them is the strict discipline." Rowton House thrived in this form until the 1960s when it fell into a state of disrepair – see The Paragon Hotel, Birmingham, History, available at <http://www.theparagonhotel.co.uk/history> (accessed 7 Jan, 2017).

Original Interview # 2 – Dinny D - Donegal

as the Salvation Army. Another support for the Irish navvies – albeit more so in the economic depression of the 1930s, before my time in London – was 'The Parish', which meant the Church of England charitable institutions which sometimes looked after working men in need. There were 'private entrepreneurs' I heard about, who would set up small stalls in some of the hostels, like the Rowton Houses, and the wartime hostels and these would be selling tea, milk, butter and other such essentials to the occupants. I think the long-distance men had some sort of a want or need which wasn't merely economic; it was 'a need to be in different places', the books of Jim Phelan and Patrick MacGill will tell you all about the tramp-navvy culture.

Anyway eventually whilst at McAlpines, I responded to an advertisement for a position at Lloyd's Register of Shipping in the City of London, which I thought was probably beyond me in educational terms, but I was fairly self-confident, even being something of a chancer...I was, metaphorically, climbing a ladder...or at least I thought I was! Somewhat to my surprise, I got the position. It was quite mundane, but I stayed there perhaps fifteen months; it was a bit of a 'closed-shop'.

Following this, I gained a position as a housemaster at a Catholic-funded care school, 'The Newman Oratory' in Birmingham, which was how I began to get into social work, since after this school position I got a position as an educational welfare officer for the City of Birmingham Council. In those days, the mid-1950s, there was no mandatory requirements for college qualifications for such a position. I stayed for seven years at this position, covering a number of schools in Birmingham. I can assure you that by comparison to post-war Birmingham, which was 'dire' in the post-war period, Ireland was relatively better off, because we were relatively self-sufficient, even during the war. Irish smallholders – even the smallest who only had perhaps an acre or two – could grow food and keep poultry for eggs etc. In the cities of Britain this generally was not the case.¹⁴ I ended up the National Executive of the National Association of Educational Welfare Officers (NAEWO). Qualifying as a Social Worker in the 1960s, following a degree-course at Oxford University which was funded by the NAEWO, I eventually applied, following the accession of Ireland to the EU in 1973, for a position within the newly-formed social welfare department of the Irish government, eventually returning to Dublin, where I saw out the remainder of my career.

The End

¹⁴ By way of contrast, one of the early post-war migrant builders to London, Galway-man Willie 'the Yank' Heenehan, was known to have kept chickens in the back garden of his council flat in Whitechapel, in the east end of London even up to the mid-1970s (per author's conversation with Willie Heenehan Jnr, Aug, 2015).

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Name: Kevin

Date of Birth: 1934

Place of Birth: Williamstown, Co. Galway

Date of Emigration to UK:

Date of Interview: October 13th, 2015 (Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone)

Notes:

1. Introductory chatting and small-talk etc – interview proper starts at 4.00 mins
2. Kevin was in his early eighties when this interview took place. His speech is somewhat faded and muffled throughout and there is continual (sometimes significantly disruptive) background noise during the oral interview.

Interviewer: Right, so I do three recordings of this on three separate tapes – I'll tell you for why, just in case one of them doesn't record properly or whatever, y'know? Because I wouldn't want to have to come back and do it all again!...There's a question I didn't ask you; when I write this up, would you like your name acknowledged in the credits?

Kevin: Yeah, you can, yeah

Interviewer: Right, now, just so the taper recorder knows, it is October 13th, 2015 and I'm in the Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, with Kevin. The easiest way to start is at the beginning, so can you tell me when and where you were born?

Kevin: I was born in a home in Co Galway. I didn't know my real mother or father.

Interviewer: Okay, what year were you born?

Kevin: 1934. I spent the early years of my life in a home for orphaned children in Galway and around the age of five or six I was adopted. I was reared in Williamstown in Co. Galway and was there until about the age of seventeen. I was around seventeen- and-a-half when I left.

Interviewer: So your adoptive parents raised you. What were they, were they farmers?

Kevin: Well they had maybe five or six acres; it was small and life was a struggle for them, there was no luxuries! And he [Kevin's stepfather] had worked in England in the 1920s in the mines in St. Ives (Cornwall)...but anyhow, that's another story...

I went to school in Williamstown primary -

Interviewer: And did you do any secondary education?

Kevin: No, I finished around twelve or fourteen...and I was just beginning to like it! Y'know, even the teacher wanted me to carry on, but had to leave for work. I still did my School Certificate and got the results and had passed four subjects to Leaving Cert.

Interviewer: And so what did you do after you left school, then?

Kevin: Well, after leaving school, around 1949, I started working for various people around the area... well I done a bit for Bord na Mona with the turf, ya know.

Interviewer: And would your upbringing, now, presumably you were on a smallholding farm, you'd have done farmwork as well?

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Kevin: Oh yeah, digging spuds by hand and cutting turf by hand and saving hay and the usual kinds of small farm work, y'know, it was all hand work that time.

Interviewer: I'd say that was tough, now, on a small farm in Galway?

Kevin: Well, everybody worked whatever fields and whatever bit o'land they had...because east Galway, as y'know, wouldn't be too good land-wise.

Interviewer: What was your... did you have siblings... any brothers or sisters?

Kevin: No, they adopted a couple o'more...another chap after me, they adopted...about 19... 1949 or something. Sadly he came to England – to London... 1955. Worked for a while in London and went to Scotland to work on the Clyde Tunnel...was just starting...and was killed."

Interviewer: Ah Jesus... in an accident?

Kevin: Through beer. They went off on the beer on midday...dinnertime...and they were sinking a big shaft for the Clyde Tunnel. 'Course the driver up on top dropped something down. They had nowhere to go. 'Twas only a shaft...and he got killed.

Interviewer: What age was he?

Kevin: Oh he'd be only about nineteen or twenty.

Interviewer: Ah Jeez...(tuts)..Jeez that happened...that happened with a lot of regularity actually. There wasn't much in the way of health and safety in them days.

Kevin: It did, yeah. And o'course they couldn't get anything 'cos he was adopted. Balfour Beatty I think were the builders... they just turned their hands up.

Interviewer: And what year would that have been around?

Kevin: That was... 'twas the year we got married...um... 1957... '58! That he got killed.

Interviewer: So he was, really, your younger brother? Jeez that's a tough one now... a tough one.

Kevin: Then, in 1952, I went to England.

Interviewer: So tell me, when you were brought up in Ireland was it a fairly regular upbringing? Were you raised Catholic? With the priests and the nuns?

Kevin: I was, like most of my neighbours, but ah sure we'd jump over a ditch when we seen the 'men in black' coming! Y'know... they [the Clergy] were pulling rank big-time in those days...I'll give you a little instance. There was one particular summer...I'd say it around 1947 or '48 it was a very bad summer and as usual we couldn't save the hay, 'twas too wet, and it came down to it that if Sunday was fine he [the Parish Priest] could give the people 'permission' to go and save the hay, but if he didn't give permission they [farmers] wouldn't go near the fields...did y'ever hear that?!

Interviewer: Wow... even if they needed to save hay?

Kevin: Yep, ...and they were desperate... that's right, yeah, to feed the couple of cows or whatever they had, like. He'd give permission at first mass – there might be two masses, first and second mass – and I remember being out and they'd meet the people coming

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

home from first Mass; “Did he say anything today?” To see did he give the go-ahead to go out and save the hay - that’s as true as I’m sitting here.

Interviewer: Wow...Jesus, that’s tough...I never heard that, now. I heard other stories about them but I never the like of that. And if they didn’t give permission you wouldn’t go?

Kevin: No, no...oh no. Ah wasn’t it awful? Well ‘twas trying to save hay for the winter

Interviewer: So the cattle’d have to go hungry or you’d have to buy feed in... some carry-on!

Kevin: Wasn’t it? And, o’ course, the collections at mass; there’d be a Christmas collection – you might have heard this from your own parents at the time – a Christmas collection they’d read the names of everyone that gave the most money. Let’s say such a man gave one pound-five, y’know, and such a man gave a pound, and they’d work right down to the men that only gave a shilling.

Interviewer: And would they be reading people’s names?

Kevin: They’d read them off the altar. That’s true, in a small Parish...you check that! Everybody knew, and they’d start with the big men...Doctor so-and-so gave a guinea... the guinea was popular that time...and down and down and down to the man that gave a shilling.

Break in interview due to technical sound issues – restarts 17.34mins

Interviewer: We’ll carry on. So I suppose, we got as far as you were seventeen when you went to London?

Kevin: Seventeen-and-a-half.

Interviewer: So what made you go?

Kevin: Well, everybody was going then; I was – y’know, all of my friends had gone and I thought I was [as well to go]... There was neighbours of ours over on holidays from London and they said, “If you’re thinking of coming, come over with us” ... exactly, yeah, and we went to a place called St. Albans.¹ That was the first spot in England I went to.

Interviewer: When you left, were you sad?

Kevin: Well...not really...it was an adventure... I was going to conquer the world!

Break in interview due to technical sound issues – restarts at Tape 2

Interviewer: Okay, so we got as far as you decided to go to England, so you had some friends who were back on holiday and they suggested you might like to give London a shot?

Kevin: Yeah, that was it. So I ended up in St. Albans.

¹ St. Albans is a city in Hertfordshire, England, and the major urban area in the City and District of St Albans. It lies east of Hemel Hempstead and west of Hatfield, about 19 miles (31 km) north-northwest of London, 8 miles (13 km) southwest of Welwyn Garden City and 11 miles (18 km) south-southeast of Luton. It is a typical dormitory town of the Greater London Conurbation.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Interviewer: Do you think you would have – was it kind of always on the cards that you’d have gone somewhere anyway? If you had to call it – just roughly – what percentage of your class at school were leaving Ireland at that time, d’ya think?

Kevin: Oh God...seventy percent I’d say. Some went to America but most to England; particularly Birmingham There was a lot from the Williamstown area that went to Birmingham and Manchester.²

Interviewer: Can you remember the journey over? What was that like?

Kevin: I can... by God I can! It took us all day from Castlereagh, well, Ballymoe really. That was the little village that had a railway that time that served Williamstown and Castlereagh areas. You picked that up around half-nine or ten o’clock in the morning and ‘twould arrive in Dublin at maybe six or seven o’clock in the evening. It was one of them ‘all-day’ routes that would stop at every small station on the route up, even for picking up coal and water and things, ‘twould stop. Then you had to get a train from there (Connolly) out to Dún Laoghaire, then queue up and get on the cattle-boat which was very packed at the time... cattle on the bottom deck and people on the top... you got the whiff of cattle all the way over... yes, that’s all true!

Interviewer: Was it the *Princess Maud* you went on?

Kevin: It was...or it one o’ them anyway...that was the *Queen Mary of the Irish Sea* at the time! [Laughter] It was dog-rough, no seats, you’d be all sitting and standing on top of each other. Then a rush to get on the train, then there might be a rough sea also, which you weren’t used to; first time on the water, y’know? It wasn’t too pretty I can tell you. We got off at Holyhead at about two or three o’clock in the morning and then you got the train, and that stopped at a lot of stations down to London; you arrived at maybe eight or half-eight in the morning. [tape 2: 04.08]

Interviewer: Now how did you get on when you arrived? You had come with people you knew –

Kevin: Yeah, that’s right. But the neighbours I came with had only one room and a couple of babies, so I got a bed and breakfast when I got to St. Albans.

Interviewer: If you don’t mind me asking, why St. Alban’s? –

Kevin: Well, that’s where they were living. And we arrived there... oh It was what you might call a ‘gentleman’s town’....

Interviewer: Absolutely! That would have been sort of very ‘middle-England’ at that time. Did you have any problem getting digs?

Kevin: No. Well I was in a local B&B for a week or two and I got a job the first week in a foundry in St. Albans working for an American company... and was that hard! The hands were soft... coming off land. In the foundry the blacksmith used to hold the chisel as it turns, and the lump of steel we’d push into the furnace and as it gradually melted we had to shape it. Then there was three of us with sledgehammers and we’d have to

² There appears to be a fairly well-established chain-migrant connection between areas in Roscommon and north Galway and settlement in Birmingham and the midlands of England in the post-war period. For example many of the author’s network of acquaintances from Roscommon: Paddy Ryan (Bellinagare), Frank Jordan (Frenchpark), Martin Dowd (Killumod), all settled in or around Birmingham.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

hit the steel chisel one after the other in sequence. I missed the chisel once or twice and caught the hand of the man holding the chisel! Oh God that was tough!

That was shift work and the first morning I had to go to work at six o'clock in the morning and of course this was all new country... how I got there I don't know... oh yeah, one of the neighbours I came over with, he lent me a bicycle and I cycled into work. I nearly got killed on the first day!... I was passing by this post van... I can still see it... everybody was on bikes at the time, but as I'm passing by yer man in the post-van he opened the door and I got hit and out into the middle of the road! I survived it; and I stuck that job for six months, how I don't know. There was a morning shift and afternoon shift. The afternoon shift wouldn't finish till ten.

And, eh, on a Friday night there'd be an Irish dance and I used to rush to get to that.

Interviewer: Would there have been a big Irish contingent around St. Albans, then, at that time?

Kevin: Ah there was, yeah. In fact I became friends with three brothers from Leitrim, McGovern, they were lovely lads -

Interviewer: They weren't the ones that went on to have all the pubs, I wonder?

Kevin: No, no – they usen't to drink, and I didn't drink at the time either. That was around 1952-1953, and I later got digs where I stayed, in St. Albans, for about two years. After about two years (1953-54) I got a job in Luton³ where McAlpine⁴ were building the Vauxhall factory⁵ and there was coachloads of men coming out from London every day.

Interviewer: And were you working direct for McAlpine, then?

Kevin: No. I was living in digs about halfway between St. Albans and Luton on what I think they called the A6 at that time but I was working for a little building contractor from Harpenden, which was another real gentleman's town.

³ A nearby, and larger, town. See note 2

⁴ Sir Robert McAlpine & Co, the major employer of migrant Irish construction workers in the post-war era.

⁵ Vauxhall Motors is a British automotive manufacturing and Distribution Company headquartered in Luton and an affiliated company of the German Adam Opel AG, both being wholly owned subsidiaries of General Motors in the United States. In 1953, the company undertook construction of a plant in Dunstable (near Luton) for the manufacture of the 'Bedford Truck', one of Vauxhall's flagship products used in widespread industrial applications including, of course, the construction industry.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway



Figure 1 - The Vauxhall (Bedford Truck) Dunstable Plant under construction, Dunstable, 1953. Photo courtesy of: 'Britain from above' available at <http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/download/EAW052757>

Interviewer: Well, all those towns were very English towns at that time because they would have been semi-rural at the time. So was this builder an English builder?

Kevin: Yes, that's right. Yes English, he was, and very good

Interviewer: And how did you get that start? Did you have any problem finding that job?

Kevin: No problems getting the start, the foreman was Irish – from Kerry - and the boss was an Englishman, a real gentleman, and in fact he gave me the chance to – an opportunity - to bring in men to work with me digging foundations for houses by hand. There was no machines in them days, it was all digging by hand, y'know? And he gave me an opportunity. The rate of pay at that time was around 2s/11d (2 shillings and elevenpence) an hour in the old money– [This equates to 35d in old pennies] and the boss came up to me, after only a week or two, and he gave me a rise.

Interviewer: Right! So you were impressed with this guy?

Kevin: Ah he was a lovely man – a gentleman – and the Kerry foreman, a nice fella also. There was a gang of lads from Camden Town that used to come in and do the concreting and shuttering for the footings and groundslabs after we dug them. I can still see the for-sale boards for them houses... five hundred pound to buy, fifty pound down. Them houses today are over a million.

[Small talk]

Interviewer: So you went working for this builder and you were doing footings? And you brought a few of your own lads in -

Kevin: Well he gave me the chance to - I didn't have the confidence, y'know? But I stuck with what I was doing.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Interviewer: And so the lads that used to come in from Camden Town?

Kevin: They used to come in as a gang and do the concreting and shuttering for the footings and groundslabs after we dug them. A subbie-gang led by an O'Malley man from Mayo. They were subbing to the small contractor I was working for and them lads ... they'd be on about two pound a day.⁶ Yeah. That's right.

Interviewer: And tell then, with the Vauxhall factory? Were you near the factory?

Kevin: I was about halfway between St. Albans and Luton. I could've gone to work in the Vauxhall factory, but I was alright where I was, y'know, at the building. We all knew it was a big job at Vauxhalls, and McAlpine doin' it, well there was other contractors there too... McAlpine used to come over here to this country recruiting... did y'know that? That's right...

Interviewer: Did you ever come across any of the agents or foremen for them? No? Well I know that Donegal fella I was telling you about that worked for them on a big job in London, I asked him straight were there many Irish on that job and he reckoned they were about ninety-five percent Irish there.

Kevin: That's right...he's right. Anyway I left Harpenden then, around 1953-54 and went to London. I just... 'conquer London' [Laughter] and, o' course, there was six or seven Irish dancehalls there, open every night of the week, plus Sunday afternoon.

Interviewer: Do you remember the dancehalls well?

Kevin: Oh God, yeah, the Galtymore! I was in there the first night it opened. And that was some... that was big excitement of course.

Interviewer: So was there drinking in the Galty at that time?

Kevin: No, no, no... oh no, only a tea-bar. If you wanted to dance with a woman, you'd invite her for a tea, y'know? [Laughter] – the chat-up and all the usual. You might have an eye on a woman one night and you might never see her again, y'know? There was different crowds every night, t'was a huge big place and there was so much Irish, y'know, that there was new faces every night.

Interviewer: And do you remember any of the other dancehalls?

Kevin: Oh God yeah! There was another one, where I met me wife, Rita's mother... the Galway Club in Camden Town. There was two dancehalls in Camden Town, one was the Buffalo and the other was the Galway Club.

Interviewer: Do you remember the Buffalo Club?

Kevin: Oh yes, yes. And I had a schoolmate there with an iron hand... "Ironhand Lyons" they called him. We went to school together in Williamstown and he ended up working on the door in the Buffalo Club and anybody that got out of control, well... if you crossed him you wouldn't be back the next night! [Laughter]

The Buffalo had a reputation alright, and the Galway Club the same. There was two brothers there - I think they're dead now – Keane, Mick Keane and Jimmy, and they

⁶ This would compare to an equivalent daily rate based upon a standard 8-hour paid day of £1, 3/6d (one pound, three shillings and fourpence) so £2/day was substantially more than the standard rates being paid.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

were hard men, big men. Mick, in the middle of winter, would be standing up on the concrete steps up to the ticket office - that's where my wife worked for a while, in the ticket office there – and Keane would be there in his white shirt open down to the chest and the sleeves rolled up and any man that stepped out of line... You see with the Galway Club a lot of Connemara men used go to it... it was all Connemara. And if anyone upset the women they'd go and tell... 'cos Mick was Connemara, see? And they went and told him. Next thing was, he'd march down the middle of the floor and, well... oh that's true!

Interviewer: Why do you think they were so... why was it so tough in there?

Kevin: They were very 'clannish' [Connemara working men]. Oh yeah, there was another man with him, I'll never forget who it was. He was an ex-British heavyweight wrestling champion, a guy called Burt Assirati, he was of Italian stock.⁷ He was as broad as he was tall nearly! When you seen the two bruisers up on the top steps, well... you behaved!

Ah they'd come in a gang, sometimes they'd come in from outside Camden for a fight. There was a gang came in from Croydon one night, came especially into the Galway Club to take on the Keanes... with the reputation the Keane brothers had, y'know. Oh yeah and there was another man with him that would do the roughstuff too. There was another man that was famous for banging the big gong in the J. Arthur Rank adverts at the pictures... well I seen him in action in the middle of the Galtymore. He was a Scotch fella. Mick Keane came up from the Galway Club to 'have a go' at the Galtymore. It was all about who was the best man... they had their reputations, and they wanted to keep it.

Interviewer: D'ya think it was anything to do with the nature of the work they were all involved in?

Kevin: Probably a bit, yeah. If you had a bit of a reputation at work, of course it went up a bit, so they thought they were top-gun wherever they went!

Interviewer: So when you went to London in '54 or '55, you weren't married then? So where did you go first?

Kevin: Oh a mate of mine who I had shared digs with in Harpenden; we went to London together and we got a job – I don't remember what it was – but we got digs together... that was in Kilburn. Oh God, yes, at that time... Kilburn High Road; t'would be 'black' with Irishmen at that time, all the men in navy suits with the starched collar and tie, ready for the dances, y'know? The usual carry-on...

I didn't stay long there and we moved to Camden Town and then to the Holloway Road. We lived there when Ruth Ellis was hanged.⁸ D'ya remember that? 'Twas only a few houses down from where we were livin' in rooms, the prison.

Interviewer: And what were you working at then?

⁷ Bert Assirati was indeed one of the best professional wrestlers in postwar Britain, also lauded as the World's strongest man in 1938, he became British champion in 1945 and European champion in 1947. See, *inter alia*, 'Biography: The British Heavyweight Champion (September 1947)' available at <http://www.bertassirati.com/biography.htm>. It was not unusual for wrestlers to undertake the role of dancehall bouncers and indeed Bill Fuller the County Kerry owner of the Buffalo Club was himself a professional wrestler for a while before starting in business.

⁸ This places Kevin in Holloway Road in July, 1955. See <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/ruth-ellis-executed> (Accessed 21 February, 2017).

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Kevin: Oh yeah, I was working in a building company that time. Before that then I was working for British Rail as a porter. I think I was the only Irishman that worked the day the Queen was crowned Queen of England! Nineteen-fifty-three...and I was on duty that day!

Interviewer: That would have been a fairly kind of steady-ish job, wouldn't it?

Kevin: Oh 'twas yeah, and I think I applied for a job as a guard as well, I can't remember. But anyway also around that time in 1953-54, I'd be doing odd bits of casual work on the buildings but at weekends we used to work on the railway. A big gang of us would be picked up on a Saturday evening by coach, at the Nag's Head on Holloway Road and Seven Sisters Road and taken out to work on the tracks at night-time. There was a company called Tersons who used to bring us out and it would be all casual work, maybe four or five pounds in the hand for a Saturday night's work.

Interviewer: So you wouldn't have been working for Tersons during the week?

Kevin: Well, I did eventually ended up working full-time for Tersons for a while, after I got married in '57, but initially we'd be taken on as casual working of a Saturday night, maybe thirty or forty miles outside London, a coachload of us emptying wagons, lifting sleepers and moving tracks and points and all that. It might be four o'clock Sunday afternoon when you got home, and you'd be all covered in dirt and dust from the tracks but I'd still be at work for another building contractor on Monday morning.

Interviewer: So you were effectively working the best part of seven days a week?

Kevin: That's right, yeah, 'twas tough but you were young, y'know. There was one particular gang I remember, now, and 'twas all made up of all Mayo men – now I'm talking winter time – and this Mayo gang, first off they'd leave Mayo and go to Scotland – did you know that? They'd do potato-picking in Scotland, then when that finished they'd come down to London and get a job with Tersons full-time on the railway for the winter, then they'd head back Mayo to whatever little bit of a farm they had.

Interviewer: So it was almost seasonal... And was that still going on in the '50s?

Kevin: Oh it was yeah. I was in a gang, there was about thirty of us, with Tersons that time, and I'd say there was only about a half-dozen of us that *wasn't* from Mayo! All the rest of them were older men that came every season in the winter to work before going back for summer. And of course one of the bosses in Tersons at that time was a Mayo man, so of course again it was the connections. T'was all about the connections... who you knew...

And then anyway, we got married in 1957, in St. Joseph's in Highate Hill – and 'twas only a small wedding; there was no big weddings them days, there was no-one coming from this country, y'know, I'd say at the most it was maybe twenty [guests], y'know.

Interviewer: Just taking a step back, when you first landed in England was there still rationing?

Kevin: Oh God, yeah, there was! That's right, sure if you were in digs, you got the food coupons and you gave them to your landlady and she'd use them to get your food so you might only get like a rasher or two, two eggs or a quarter of sugar a week. The lodging was around two pound ten or fifteen shillings a week at the time and for that sometimes the landlady she'd make up sandwiches for you to take to work, y'know.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Interviewer: Okay, so how long were you knocking around Camden Town, so?

Kevin: Well, after we got married, then, we moved up to Archway and we had a room there. I was labouring for Tersons on the railway, digging trenches and hand-mixing and laying concrete and that sort of thing. There was no machines for (batch) mixing concrete that time.⁹ I was working for Tersons full-time for a good while. It was good work, seven days a week and I'd be earning maybe seven or eight pounds a week probably – which wasn't bad money. That was the thing with us then, that when you went looking for a job you'd ask "Is there seven days in it?" - we wanted to work to make up the money.

Interviewer: So you guys wanted to work seven days? And were the gangs that you were working with at that time, were they Irish?

Kevin: Oh yes [emphatic]. Totally Irish - you might get maybe one or two Welshmen or Scotsmen but that was it.

Interviewer: Why do you think there wasn't many Englishmen?

Kevin: They didn't want that type of work. The Englishman, see, he had his own set of rules... eight to five...he was never a man to work overtime. Whereas the contractors, they wanted you to work overtime, y'know, maybe six or seven o'clock each day. The Englishman, he wanted to go home at five o'clock... that was his way. I don't think it was anything to do with the union influence; the unions weren't that strong [in the construction industry] at that time, but they came on strong later [in the 1960s].

After that, then, I went working in the tunnels. I spent a year in the tunnels building the Jubilee Line... I think 'twas called the Fleet Line;¹⁰ it started in Green Park and it went right around. I was only a year or so working on the tunnels... I can't rightly remember the name of the contractor I worked for... I think 'twas Balfour Beatty. They were working day shifts and night shifts on that job... especially on night shifts; you'd go down at seven o'clock and come up again maybe at ten o'clock at night, have a break across the road in Flanagan's Pub in Green Park. We'd be in the public bar and across the way in the saloon bar there'd be the strippers performing at ten o'clock and us out working! The price of beer went up a penny at ten o'clock and the strippers over in the saloon bar and if you touched the seat like that (pat's nearby seat) the cement dust would fly up in the air!...all the miners used to come up into Flanagan's Pub just near Piccadilly – between Green Park and Piccadilly.

Interviewer: And were you actually part of a mining gang or were you doing something else?

Kevin: Well we were, more or less, on top most of the time, but if they were short of men on the face you'd be brought down and put into a gang. There was one particular gang I remember, they were Donegal men – most of the gangs were either Donegal or Mayo and a few Galway – and, of course, the Donegal team had to be top guns again! They went by so many rings, y'know the steel lining rings? And if the Galway or Mayo men did four, well, then the Donegal gang would come back with five. And of course the

⁹ What Kevin is referring to here is batch-mixing plants for what became known as 'ready-mixed' concrete which is the predominant way in which concrete is delivered in construction now but which would have been rare on all but the very largest projects in the 1950s.

¹⁰ It is probable that interviewee is confused about chronology here, as Jubilee Line/Fleet Line was constructed in mid-1970s and opened in 1979 (REF!!) – He may have worked on this project for one year but it was not in the 1950s or 60s. Possibly interviewee is referring to Victoria Line works which were in 1960s.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

foremen would be rubbing their hands but the miners, the ‘top’ men couldn’t see it....they had this reputation of being tunnel tigers and they wanted to keep that title.¹¹

There was maybe five gangs; there was a Galway gang, a Tipperary gang – there was five brothers there, Landy brothers, I think all of them are dead now – south Tipp.

Interviewer: Now that’s very unusual to hear of a tunnel gang from Tipperary... they were nearly all Donegal.

Kevin: In fact there was one Donegal miner, McCarrick was his name, one of the Sunday supplements had a story on him back in the ‘60s, y’know, I forget what paper it was, but he was known as one of the top guvnors (sic). They were earning top money then men, back in the ‘70s they were earning maybe seventy or eighty pounds a week, top money when the average was only maybe twenty or thirty pound, y’know? And the more rings they put in the more money they got.

Interviewer: And do you think it was just the big money that they were after?

Kevin: A lot of it was competition... they were mad to keep their reputation. Yeah, yeah. The miners were clannish, especially the Donegal men. If you were from Donegal and you’d a reputation as a miner you’d be straight in, but otherwise they’d be very choosy.

Then I went working on the towers. I don’t know if you know the NatWest Tower?¹²

Interviewer: I do indeed. I know it well, yeah. That was in the ‘70s.

Kevin: Well, I worked on that more or less from bottom to top. It went on for about eight years – John Mowlem were the builders; I was working direct for them, I was driving one of the lifts up and down, y’know – a hoist driver – and sometimes I used to do banksman, y’know, for the crane drivers? Because they couldn’t see down to street level so we’d have to give them signals on moving stuff around.

Interviewer: At the time I think that was one of the tallest buildings in Europe.

Kevin: ‘Twas yeah, yeah. It was the tallest in London, for sure. Well I worked on first tower in London around 1959 - the Millbank.¹³ On the Thames, next door to the Tate Gallery. Plus also, CenterPoint, the tower block in Tottenham Court Road, which laid idle for about ten years after ‘twas finished.¹⁴ I was working direct for Wimpey on that job. I worked on nightshift and we’d a Galway foreman and boy was he some terror! You

¹¹ This refers to the steel-segmented tunnel lining rings which were bolted together to line the interior of most London Underground tube tunnels. They were usually around 600mm wide per segment and tunnel miners priced and were paid per tunnel lining segment installed. See XXXX in main thesis.

¹² The NatWest Tower is now known as Tower 42. It was built as the corporate headquarters of NatWest Bank and is located at 25, Old Broad Street, in the City of London financial district. Built by John Mowlem & Co between 1970 and 1980, it was the tallest building in the UK from its opening in 1981 until 1990 when One Canada Square was topped out at Canary Wharf – see Christopher Hibbert, Ben Weinreb, John Keay, Julia Keay, *The London Encyclopaedia* (3rd Edition), (London, 2011) p.574.

¹³ Originally known as the Vickers Tower, this 118-metre high skyscraper was built by John Mowlem & Co for the aviation giants Vickers and was completed in 1963. See *inter alia* John Mowlem & Co, *Mowlem 1822 - 1972 - company brochure*, (London, 1973), p.7.

¹⁴ CenterPoint Tower is in St. Giles’ Circus, at the junction of Tottenham Court Road and New Oxford Street. It was built between 1959 and 1964 by Wimpey. Some 117 metres high, it is now a listed building and an iconic emblem of Brutalist London architecture.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

only got the bare ten minutes break at three o’clock in the morning and ‘twould be ice-cold outside and he’d be shouting “out, out” and driving you out of the hut.

Interviewer: So was that ganger a Wimpey ganger?

Kevin: Oh yeah, indeed he was! Mostly it was all west of Ireland foremen and labour on that job, all Mayo and Galway and all that, yeah. I worked for Wimpey on a couple of occasions, yeah.... ‘twas another, kinda, clannish type again!

Interviewer: Y’know these kind of legendary stories about the brutal gangers... the ‘Elephant John’ type of stories? Did you find gangers like that?

Kevin: I did, surely, but they weren’t all like that, no, no, no - The gangers from the west were clannish. There was two brothers, Mayo men, on CenterPoint and if you weren’t from Mayo you’d no chance of getting in, y’know? They were clannish. If you didn’t do what they told you, you were side-lined, y’know?

Interviewer: I suppose to some extent that’s inevitable. Did you come across many other ethnic minorities, Caribbeans and Asians and those other immigrants who came in the 1960s and onwards? Was there many of them working on the buildings?

Kevin: Oh there was, yeah. Ya see there were almost no black people that I remember in London in the 1950s, very few, but then the government opened the floodgates and by the early 1960s there was many more Caribbeans and Jamaicans and every plane that came in to Heathrow was full o’ blacks and of course they spread out across London to every place they’d get a job. And they were real gentlemen; the old black generation that arrived, they were lovely people. The young generation grew up with a kind of a rock on their shoulder. The old generation were lovely people.

Interviewer: Did you ever work with any o’ them on the buildings, like?

Kevin: I did. I worked with; two brothers, two black men and their names was O’Sullivan!! [Laughter]. They came from Monserrat, the island that got blew up with the volcano? That island had black Irishmen. We used to play twenty-five and forty-five with the Sullivan brothers at dinner time... they could play twenty-five¹⁵ ... they could! yes, that’s true! They were lovely brothers; one was a labourer, I think, and one a carpenter.

When I say carpenter, I done a bit o’ shuttering then meself, y’know? I’d done a bit of shuttering carpentry over the years and I worked for two brothers there in London, they were McAuleys from Cavan. They were subcontractors but they had the cards, y’know? They were proper subcontractors¹⁶ Well myself and this guy, he was a Galway man, he’s living down in Kerry now, well he was a chippy, like, and I went as more-or-less his helper, his mate. I was just on the hammer mainly... and I wouldn’t mind but the McAuleys thought we were the two best carpenters they ever came out of Ireland! [Laughter]

Well y’know I done washing up dishes in Lyons’s Corner House in Tottenham Court Road and I done potman in the Royal in Tottenham; I’d do any job I could get for times when we’d be looking for work. I’d walk miles, walked a lot of streets in London. We all did, y’know? And if you knew somebody that could get you a start, well, you took it and took your chances, y’know?

¹⁵ Highly popular card-game in rural west Ireland in mid-twentieth century.

¹⁶ This infers that these men were working legitimately as registered subcontractors and meeting tax and National Insurance obligations as required by UK law.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

- Interviewer:** Did you ever come across those ‘No blacks, no Irish, no dogs’ signs?
- Kevin:** Oh I did, yeah. I remember seeing them alright. Well, now, I can give you an example. Now this is a big thing, the “No Irish need apply” signs; I seen them myself up on the doors when you’d be looking for digs and... I seen it on building sites! Now not every building site, ‘twas only once or twice I came across it. But d’ya know something (speaks softly)... it wasn’t that the English didn’t like the Irish... ‘twas the Irish’s (sic) own fault. Because often there’d be a gang of young lads, they weren’t used of heavy drinking. They’d come home to the digs at night or to the rooms and the next thing the fight’d start and they’d be pissin’ out the window and urinating everywhere and language and drinkin’ and messin. That’s why you’d see the signs for “No Irish need apply” in digs.
- Interviewer:** See in some ways, when I was coming here today I was listening to the radio and they were talking about the crisis in accommodation in Dublin. But there was a fella came on and he had a house in Dublin and he said he was quite happy to let his house to students but for all these young lads that go out and get hammering drunk, then they come in and they start fighting and they wreck the place. He said what was he supposed to do? Now that’s not very different from what you’re talking about.
- Kevin:** It’s the very same; I seen it firsthand; they were getting’ big money and they’d nothin’ else, really, for them to do only boozing it of an evening.
- Interviewer:** How come you never got caught with the booze, then, Kevin?
- Kevin:** We were pioneers when we got married. That was ’57, and we remained pioneers after that. So I never drank until after we’d been married a while, then I started taking the occasional drink... ‘twas a trap, the drink; it was yeah, and that’s what caused the hassle on jobs. They’d come back from the dinner-break in the pub and o’ course one would be bothering the other y’know?
- Interviewer:** Well besides anything else, you know better than I do, that building sites are dangerous places.
- Kevin:** Oh God yeah! I remember jobs and ... how often it might be that a lump of steel would come down from thirty floors above?... there was no helmets, no nothing back in them days.
- Interviewer:** Again, though, from a health and safety angle... There was a lot of resistance to wearing safety helmets even when they DID introduce them!
- Kevin:** Oh there was, yeah... Including myself! ‘Twas silly, really, sure we were doing damage to ourselves... It was a macho thing... ‘twas a lack of common-sense or a bit o’savvy... trying to prove how tough we were! In the later years, then. I wouldn’t touch... I wouldn’t go in to a site without a helmet.
- Interviewer:** So, going back to the ‘No Irish’ signs, you saw that happen?
- Kevin:** I did, and that was the cause of it; drinking caused a lot of the hassle. In fact, we were at a wedding one time, ‘twas a small wedding so they decided to have their celebration in the house where one of them was living and, of course, it ended up in mayhem... fighting... well, ‘twas an old fued that broke out again, y’know!
- Interviewer:** Apart from these signs, then, did you ever experience any direct prejudice because of your Irishness?

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- Kevin:** Well, you might get the occasional smart remark from an individual that hadn’t much common-sense, y’know? But on the whole I never experienced any bad feeling or prejudice from anyone; it was nice living in London and we made great friends, English - the best, y’know. And in fact, I’d go so far as to say that the best bosses I worked for were Englishmen.
- Interviewer:** Well, you’re not the only Irishman who’s told me that. There’s quite a few told me that.
- Kevin:** Well, that’s right... they were the best bosses [Englishmen]. I got two opportunities to take up [in subcontracting] through English bosses and – if I’d had the neck I might have got on – but anyway I was happy enough... they were the best bosses. Anything that was coming to you, you got extra pay for; y’know... ‘twas appreciated.
- Interviewer:** The other thing I’ve heard was that in terms of money, the one thing was that English people paid what they owed.
- Kevin:** That’s true, they didn’t mess you about... there was no... you weren’t lumbered. An English boss paid you what you were due... you hadn’t to go and beg. I’ll give you a for instance. After we were married it was our first winter and ‘twas cruel, and the work was very scarce around London, around 1957. Anyway around the end of January, 1958, work dried up in London and I got a job in Hastings.¹⁷ I think I got the message about the job from the paper. That time if you were looking for a job you’d go to Fleet Street, where the papers were printed and the morning papers would have jobs going and you’d get the phone number and ring up to apply. So I seen this number and – yes – “*Can you be in Elephant and Castle¹⁸ Monday morning at seven o’clock? There’ll be a lorry there to pick you up*”. It was the back of a lorry – now bear in mind it’s freezing, and it was blizzarding cats and dogs and we’re sitting in the back of this lorry in the little Nissan Hut – you know them little huts they had? – all the way to Hastings. It was a little block they were building. I was put down the bottom mixing concrete; no gloves and pulling up a bucket of concrete by hand on a rope and Ginny wheel all day.¹⁹ By the end of the week there was no skin on my fingers because of the frost and the cement dust; and left there ‘til four o’clock on a Saturday afternoon then had to make your own way back to London. No wages, no pay and we’re only just married, like, but ‘twas winter. I forget which subby it was but they were Irish and I had to go begging for the wages. I got them eventually but a couple of weeks later. An Englishman would have delivered the wages and would have given you extra for the overtime, he appreciated you. Whereas our own countryman – the more you did, the more they wanted. [Tape 2 – 54.25]
- Interviewer:** Like I said, you’re not the first man that’s told me that! Not by a long stretch... does it say something about the subbies?
- Kevin:** A lot of them had to go into the pub to get paid as well. I never had that... never had that. I kept away from that, I was always working for the big contractors so was ‘legit’ (on the cards) and got paid weekly. The other guys who were being paid by subbies in the pub might have to wait ‘til half eleven or twelve o’clock at night to get paid and by the time they got paid, with the drinking the money’d be practically half gone. And

¹⁷ Coastal town in Sussex, southern England, about 75 miles from central London. A trip by lorry to Hastings would have taken several hours during the 1950s.

¹⁸ The Elephant and Castle is a major road junction in South London, England, in the London Borough of Southwark.

¹⁹ A Ginny wheel is a manually operated rope/pulley hoisting system for small loads which was in extensive use until the late twentieth century on construction in the British Isles.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

maybe as well the subby had the pub or was in with the governor of the pub, he'd have control of that as well.

Interviewer: So where did you go after that? You said you got married and ye lived in Holloway...

Kevin: Anyway we got mucked about a bit.. Mollie, my wife, was expecting we had to move because she was pregnant. They had family as well, so the room just wasn't big enough; we were still friends, it was an understood thing that we had to move. We went from room-to-room for a while, around Holloway. Then we ended up living in Hoxton²⁰ around 1960-61 and it was a notorious area at that time, full of gangsters; and now it's one of the most expensive areas in London. Our local pub was controlled by the men in the suits and hats... gangsters... but they were all genuine men, we had no hassle with any of them; we minded our business and they minded theirs. We were there from 1960-1967, so we were there when England won the World Cup in '66.

Interviewer: So all that time, you were kind of doing tower work?

Kevin: I was working for Wimpey on a tower somewhere around Moorgate. I remember during the match I was working in a gang high up in the tower and we were listening to the match on a transistor radio – it was around that time they came out – and Lord have mercy on this big Mayo man he was about twenty stone weight, he was the foreman; and used to sit on these kind of fire rads made out of light aluminium - radiators on the floors - and he got so excited his weight broke the radiator under him – crack! [laughter]

We moved then from there to Edmonton around 1967 and bought a house there for £3000.²¹ We could've got it cheaper 'cos there was never anything done to it from day one... 'tis a listed house now – a Victorian - and they're worth a lot of money. I spent a lot of money on it; did a lot of work on the house,; new roof, new windows, central heating, that kind of thing and decorating – we did a lot of it ourselves. We stayed in Edmonton until we moved back to Ireland in 2001. We moved once more after that to Enfield to a more modern house. There was a huge amount of Irish around that part of north London in them days. We used to go to a dance in Stamford Hill²² and there was a great Irish band, the Benn Brothers, they'd a great accordion player with them, all good musicianers (sic). I forget the name of the hall in Stamford Hill... (Pause)... ah 'twas very popular... everybody used to go there, a lot of Irish. Then we got the big influx from this country [Ireland] in the '80s. And there was some came to Edmonton and we all mated up and joined up, y' know.

Interviewer: So who were you working for around that time?

Kevin: [Recalling]... When we were in Hoxton I was working for... John Mowlem's... still working on the Millbank Tower. The Millbank Tower was around '58 or '59 they started building it –

[Rita, Kevin's daughter arrives back – minor interruption and small-talk]

Interviewer: So was the Millbank Tower, now... would there have been much Irish labour on it?

²⁰ A district in the north central area of inner London, just north of the City of London and adjacent to Shoreditch, Dalston and Clerkenwell.

²¹ Edmonton is an area in the east of the London Borough of Enfield, England, 8.6 miles (13.8 km) north-north-east of central London.

²² Stamford Hill is a district in north London, England. The area is known for its Hasidic Jewish community rather than as an Irish settlement area – although there was a large contingent of Irish, the largest concentration of Haredi Jews in Europe. Stamford Hill is some 3-4 miles from Edmonton.

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Kevin: Oh it was, yeah. I'd say 50-60% was Irish on that job. It went on until around '64. I was working direct for John Mowlem on the Millbank.

Interviewer: And the NatWest Tower?

Kevin: I'd say that job was 80% Irish... you could say nearly 90%... an awful lot of Irish lads. I'll tell you one man you might have known worked on that job; the piper Tommy McCarthy, from Miltown Malbay in County Clare was a chippy on that job. See I knew the foreman from the Millbank project. They were just doing the foundations on the NatWest Tower when I met this old English man that was a foreman on the Millbank and knew me. He said "They're starting work on the NatWest Tower, if you want to get in there go down now and ask them about a start before it gets going". So I did and I was only there a week when I left and went subbying with the McAuleys! ... Anyway about eighteen months later, I quit the subbying and went over to the NatWest Tower again and didn't I meet the same English fella (sic). He said, "Oh... you were here about 18 months ago, weren't you?"... I was tempted to tell him I was just passing through! [Laughter]. But fair-play to him he started me again. I spent eight years with him on the NatWest Tower.

Interviewer: So that brings us up... you're talking now the end of the seventies?

Kevin: Yeah, that's right, yeah. In the early '80s it slowed down again, so I was duckin' and divin' for a while, doing bits and pieces of work around London.

[Interruption – discussion about lunch and refreshments etc]

Anyway through other friends I got a job eventually with MK Electrical at their factory in Edmonton, in the middle of summer. After a few months we came home for a couple of weeks, the usual in the summer, and when we came back from Ireland there was no job at MKs... I had a redundancy notice.

But I got a start soon after with Cagney doing block-paving on the pavements and all that. Cagney, I dunno if y' ever heard o' them – they used to do a lot of Islington Council street works – I was I spent a couple of years with them. Then they closed down and... (pauses)... oh yes, I had a friend who was in the Knights of St. Columba – if you ever hear o' them and his wife worked for a company in Tottenham – beside the Tottenham football ground in White Hart Lane. They were an old London company, (Barbour?) and they were looking for a maintenance man. I spoke to his wife and she had a word with the foreman and got me an interview and and got me in there; and that was my last job in London. It was a good job; I was my own boss. They were eventually taken over by an American company, Tyco, the fireproofing people and they make the water meters. That was my last job in London; I retired with them in '97 and I'm now getting a little pension from them. After that I used to do odd bits of gardening and handiwork for a few neighbours and friends.

[Interruption – small-talk and private discussion]

Interviewer: So going back to the tunnel work in the '60s, did you find that clannish?

Kevin: Well, it was when it come to the miners. Oh it was clannish there. Them all had their own gangs, y' know? And if you weren't one o' them... well... if you were Donegal and you'd a reputation... straight in!

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

Interviewer: My father worked a bit on the Victoria Line and reckoned it wasn't quite so bad when you were up on the surface?

Kevin: No, that's right... because they weren't so much in the mining gangs

Interviewer: Do you think they were any better workers than the rest?

Kevin: Well, they had that reputation...the Donegal Tigers...Tunnel tigers, y'know? It was all macho stuff, y'know?

[Kevin's daughter Rita begins to join the interview at 1:15]

Rita: It's still about who you know in Ireland, y'know?

Kevin: Did you ever see that book, 'The Men that Built Britain' [...] well there was one photograph – a tunnel photograph - of men putting up electric cable to carry the power, well we used to do that job

Interviewer: Cable-work was big work in those days. Did you do much of it?

Kevin: No, no... 'twas only in the tunnel, I did it.

Rita: What line were you on, did you say the Fleet line?

Kevin: 'Twas named the Fleet Line because it came across the old River Fleet.

Interviewer: Yeah, that was a tributary of the Thames. It's still there if you went down the sewers under Fleet Street and all that area

[Small-talk for few minutes]

Interviewer: So I suppose I always ask this question at the end, but all-in-all would you say your experience in London was wholly positive, or negative or neutral?

Kevin: Oh God 'twas positive, definitely.

Interviewer: And I always ask this as well, but how much in the way of direct prejudice did you experience, if any?

Kevin: Well, not really, no.

Rita: Because they were all Irish... they were all Irish...he never lost his Irish accent!

Kevin: Well, yeah, but our best friends were English remember!

Rita: Mind you I remember when I was a child you (talking to Kevin) had an accident... where were you when you had that accident?

Kevin: In the tunnel. In the middle of the night working down...I fell in to a trap-door, 'twas open and I fell into it...

Rita: and this guy turns up at the door [at home]... this guy came all the way out to us... and he was an African guy, wasn't he? [To Kevin] So there I am opening the door in the early morning to this big black guy and I'm thinking... 'cos there wasn't many black people around at that time in Enfield...so I'm thinking Jesus, whose this fella like...

Original Interview # 3 – Kevin H- Galway

and he came all the way out there on public transport...it was kind of out in the sticks at the time... to tell the family about dad. Because in those days they didn't even take down telephone numbers of the men working on jobs.

Kevin: Oh yeah, I was taken into a hospital around Marble Arch... I was only there a few hours. I gave a bang to my knee...ah sure I was OK.

Rita: But as a child you could set your time by him (Kevin) leaving in the morning. He always kissed us all goodbye before he left the house (wistful), three bedrooms he had to go to, and then he'd be back in at six o'clock each night for his dinner... never went off to the pub like a lot of 'em did.

Kevin: Did you say 'twas Bethnal Green you were in? I had a great friend of mine in Bethnal Green, where you (MM) came from. He was Mahoney... a great Cork man... he had two great idols in his life, that he looked up to. One was Napoleon and the other was Count John McCormack! Mention Napoleon to him and he could tell you all about his history. He was great crack, like. We worked together on the NatWest Tower. I used to go down every once in a while to see him in the east End for a drink and then the last time I went down there, I couldn't find him and I asked this man in the street where he lived... ah he had died [wistful]. I forget which pub it was we drank in in Bethnal Green... there was a lot of Irish pubs around there at that time. [Interviewer prompts name of one Irish pub]...oh that's right, yeah, The Bohola Bar, 'twas named after the village in Mayo... yeah we used to go in there, alright.

[Small-talk for few minutes]

Rita: I worked in the housing field and there was a real big issue in London with single Irish men who didn't get married and who were fond of the drink and there was enormous social problems.

Kevin: See there was no TVs back in them days...all they could do was go into a pub and sit and drink.

[Small-talk for few minutes]

Interviewer: I'm trying to think, now, did I ask you this, but you never worked on the lump at all?

Kevin: I never really worked on the lump, only maybe for a week or two in the early days. Because I was on the cards most of my days I got a bit of a pension, so I wasn't too bad. You see some of them [speaks in whisper]...didn't like paying tax to the Queen...you know you had those diehards

Rita: So they were happy to work their whole lives in this country (meaning England) but didn't want to pay tax (admonishingly)...

Interviewer: Well, it was a big issue. And another big issue was that they didn't want to join the British Army, a lot o' them.

Rita: Now this man [(Kevin), who's been very happy working all his life in England, yet if England were playing Russia at football...he'd be supporting Russia [Kevin laughs]. We'd have big rows about it [jokingly], mother used to back me up!

END

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

Name: Patrick

Date of Birth: 1944

Place of Birth: Jamestown, County Leitrim

Date of Emigration to UK: 1967

Date of Interview: October 17th, 2015 [Carrick-on-Shannon]

Notes:

1. Introductory chatting and small-talk etc – interview proper starts at 3.30 mins

Interviewer: Right, so it's the 17th October, 2015 and I'm interviewing Patrick and you were born in nineteen forty?

Patrick: Forty-four

Interviewer: So in terms of background, we know about your family roots. You were born in Jamestown, a small village on the banks of the River Shannon in south County Leitrim, in 1944. You were the fifth of nine children in all, six boys and three girls. The eldest, Tommy,¹ was born in 1937 and the youngest, George, in 1952. You had a fairly typical west of Ireland Catholic small-farmer upbringing.

Patrick: Yep, that's about it.

Interviewer: So what about your own specific education?

Patrick: I went to National School in Jamestown and then had two years of secondary education at the Presentation Brothers School in Carrick-on-Shannon. I left there when I was fourteen.

Interviewer: Which was probably the norm around that time, I guess. So you had no other education apart from that?

Patrick: No, no...just primary school and secondary, that's all, yeah.

Interviewer: So what did you do when you first left school, then?

Patrick: I started to work in Gilmartins, a local wholesale grocers & distributors business in Carrick-on-Shannon, around 1958-59, I started working there for the summer holidays and basically didn't go back to school after that. More or less all the young people did that back then; if you got a job at all you stuck with it.

Interviewer: Do you think you could have stayed on at school if you wanted?

¹ Refer to OI #1 – Tom- Leitrim. Tom and Pat are brothers. Tom is the author's father and Pat is the author's paternal uncle.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

Patrick: Oh I probably could've done, yeah. At that time secondary education was paid for, I think it was around £4/term or something like that. My parents would've paid for the extra education if I'd wanted to, but that was a lot of money to find. Jimmy and Mary, two of my elder siblings, they went on and did the full secondary term. Jimmy went on to university in Galway but didn't finish. Tommy, Brian and myself didn't go for the full secondary education probably because in hindsight they [parents] wouldn't have had the money to send us all.

Mary used to say to me, when we got older, that she felt sorry for me and Brian because we got the 'hand-me-downs' off the others, y'know?, but sure that's the way it was in those days.

Interviewer: Well, I know when I left school, and that was the early eighties, most of my friends left at sixteen, so it wouldn't have been unusual.

Patrick: Well, you see, you were supposed not to work until you were sixteen in Ireland at that time, so my card didn't get stamped² until I reached that age...I don't know what kind of insurance the company would've had on me before then...more than likely I probably shouldn't have been working there 'til I was sixteen. But there was an awful lot of young people worked like that in those days, my brother Johnny did the same when he was serving his time in the bar trade in Dublin; I think in them days serving your time as an apprentice was still treated as part of your education.

[small-talk]

Interviewer: So you were working away, and how did you end up in England then?

Patrick: Well, to be honest, eventually I just got fed up with it; I'd been thinking about going to England for years. At one time I was thinking of joining the army...the Irish army...funnily enough I applied to the Army School of Music twice and I got no replies. Now whether letters arrived at the house and they were put in the fire or not, I don't know...me mother wouldn't have wanted me joining the army naturally enough.

I eventually, anyway, one particular summer, I decided enough was enough, y'know? I'd been just hanging around, working in Gilmartins and playing football and having a good time at weekends and all that; like I wasn't making a whole heap of money, just enough to get by. I gave my mother a pound or two a week, whatever the case may be, y'know.

² National Insurance stamp under the state-sponsored system of social welfare instigated by the Irish Government in the Social Welfare Act. 1952. See Adrian Kelly, *Social Security in Independent Ireland, 1922-52*, Unpublished doctoral thesis, History Department NUI Maynooth, [1995], p.249-252.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

Interviewer: Do you think it was almost inevitable?

Patrick: That we'd end up leaving and going somewhere? Oh yeah. Sure we couldn't have all stayed there [home]. Actually my brother Brian, who stayed in the homeplace, he told me years later that only for me going when I did he would have gone around the same time – it was on his mind to go as well. There was no prospects. Even with the job I had, like it was a handy auld job to have, but there was only...like I ended up I went so far, I was doing stock-taking and ordering stuff and what-not; Brian was looking after one section and I was looking after another. But that's as far as you'd get there; I never found anything wrong with the bosses, or the company itself, y'know, they were grand, but it was a kind of a family run affair y'know, so there wasn't anywhere else to go with it.

Interviewer: So when you did decide to go, was there any particular circumstances involved, like did you have a plan, or go with anyone?

Patrick: No, I went over to Jimmy, actually. He was already over in London and I decided kind of 'on the spot' – on a whim really – to go over to him. Mostly what kept me around here [Leitrim] was football really. We were clear favourites to win a county championship around that time and as luck would have it, that particular year we were knocked out in the first round...we were hammered...and were sort of expected to go the whole way, y'know? And that was a kind of a turning point; I thought feck it to hell, what's the point, y'know? It was time to move on. It was more-or-less...it gave me a kind of a push.

Interviewer: And was there a good lot of your friends had gone?

Patrick: Jimmy G had gone the year before and he was a good friend of mine, Tommy N who had worked with me in Gilmartins, he went around that time too. There was a steady stream of us, x-amount going every year. I remember, 'y'know...I've an old photograph [I haven't it with me now] from about 1957 of an old underage football team from St. Mary's – an under-14 team – and you talk about emigration, well of that under-14 team I'd say only about six or seven of us ended up playing minor or staying around the town – in a matter of four years over half the team was gone...that's how bad it was. I remember one family that went to America, they were Reynolds, they lived up past Summerhill, past the hospital; they all went to America – the whole family! So did the Lynches out near Jamestown and the Morrows in Coolathuma, all families that went completely.

My sister Mary had been to the first to go to London in the mid-1950s. I think Jimmy might also have been over for one of the summers working before he

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

went to University for a year. Then my eldest brother, Tommy, had gone in late 1958 over to his cousins Tony and Peggy K, who had gotten married in London and were living there a few years. He came home around 1965 to Carrick to try and make a go of it with his new wife and their first child but by 1968 he'd gone back to London because work was slack again around Leitrim and his wife didn't settle.

Interviewer: So, did you write to your brother and tell him you were coming or...?

Patrick: Yeah, I wrote to Jimmy to tell him I was coming over.

Interviewer: I know a lot of students went over working in London for the summer anyway.

[small-talk]

Interviewer: So when you went to England I presume you went the usual way, on the train and the boat and all that?

Patrick: Ah not at all...I flew to London! [Laughter]

Interviewer: You flew! You went the posh way, so! [Laughter]

Patrick: There was a train strike in England that particular weekend I had decided to go. Anyway I got a lift to Dublin with my uncle Paul, stayed with...dunno who I stayed with in Dublin that night...Mary, I think, then Paul left me to the airport the next day and I collected my ticket. That was the first time I'd ever seen an airplane...or for that matter an airport! I was twenty-two.

Interviewer: Didn't you mention a friend of yours that had never seen a train til he went over?

Patrick: That's right yeah! There was a friend of mine from over outside Mohill who went to England around ten years before me, in 1956, he was about eighteen or nineteen at that time, and he told me that when they got to Carrick station that day, that was the first time he'd ever seen a train! It's hard to believe now, but that's the truth.

Interviewer: I guess it's just the march of progress. If you think about our children, now, seeing planes and flying and all that; it's second-nature to them. So did you fly with Aer Lingus?

Patrick: I went with Aer Lingus, yeah. 'Twas nearly ten pound to fly one-way to London back then – it was a lot of money – as a fellow said to me years later, I had *more money going over to England than I had coming back!* [Laughter]...I was a bit unusual that way.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

So I went over anyway and Jimmy was supposed to meet me outside of the main entrance at London airport, so I hung around for half-an-hour there; no sign of Jimmy. So I had his address, he was more-or-less Hammersmith – Westbourne Park, so I got a taxi in and he left me off at this place called Tavistock Crescent or Tavistock Road, it's at the back of the Harrow Road there as you head down towards Notting Hill. Jimmy was living with a fellow called Tom Nugent, he had a basement room and Nugent had a flat upstairs. Anyway I rang the doorbell and this woman [Mrs Nugent] stuck her head out. I said "I'm looking for Jimmy M", she shook the head laughing and said, "He's gone to the airport to meet you!" Anyway, Jimmy arrived in about a half hour later...sure there was no mobile phones...in fact there were no phones at all! No communications [laughter]. Tom and Betty N brought me down and gave me a grand dinner; I remember there was several large bottles of Guinness involved anyway...that was my introduction to London! Jimmy had a room already got for the two of us. He was moving out of Tom & Betty N's house that same day anyway, but I think we stayed there that night as far as I can remember, and we went out for a few pints with Tom down in Portobello Road.

Interviewer: And so, did you have any idea when you got to London in 1967 what you were going to do?

Patrick: Not a clue...I was completely on spec. That was a Sunday afternoon when I got there, so we did no work on the Monday because we were just moving into new digs. On Tuesday Jimmy got me set up on the back of a wagon with two friends of his, I think they were brothers from County Clare, they were subbies. They brought me out and showed me the ropes...doing cable work. I was straight on to the cable work...I'd never seen the likes of the short-handled forks and shovels they were using. All the cable work was really starting to take off in a big way at that time. The subbie was a fellow called Hannigan.

Interviewer: And so Jimmy got you fixed up with this gang? Did you talk to this fella beforehand, or did you have any idea what you were going to be earning?

Patrick: No, no, not at all. I didn't really talk to him beforehand, so I had no idea what I was going to be paid. You went out and you got...I think it was around £4/shift at the time, but nobody agreed any pay or terms or whatever beforehand... You just went out and if you got a start, you got a start and went at it. Maybe they did tell me...to be honest I don't remember. There was no paperwork or records involved at all. 'Twas all new to me, and it was all done on a nod and a wink. The ganger-man was a fellow called Sean R from Connemara, another friend of Jimmy's and another man was Jimmy Mc from Donegal; Jimmy knew these men, he'd worked with them before. Mc's wife was a K from Limerick and her brothers used to pal around and work with Jimmy, again

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

they often worked together. So there was kind of a circle of contacts that was all connected up to this one particular subcontractor, he was Hannigan or Halligan, I can't remember.

Interviewer: And can you recall, like, who were they ultimately working for? Who was the main contractor?

Patrick: Connaught, there was a crowd called Connaught Cabling, as far as I can remember. They had a sort of a pale yellow front on their wagons and I guess they must've been working for the LEB.³

Interviewer: And I guess you'd never done that kind of work before?

Patrick: No, no, not at all. The only bit o'labouring I'd ever done before was out on the bit o' land out in Jamestown

Interviewer: How did you find it, was it hard?

Patrick: Oh I found it hard for the first few weeks, yeah. Oh yeah, it was hard going, particularly on the back. I just wasn't used to the digging and shifting; the back would be tired. I'd say it took me a couple of months to get used of it. But we were all fairly fit lads and used enough to working; sure there's nothing worse [in terms of work] than a day in the bog!

[Conversation then ensues about Paddy Boyle's theory that young Irish men were conditioned by seasonal nature of agricultural labouring to work intensively in short bursts of energy and that when this culture transferred to London the intensity of hard physical labour became relentless because of the production demands of gangers/subbies]

Patrick: I'd agree with what Paddy said about the Irish lads – sometimes we were too keen to work – the Caribbeans were much easier going with the work, they wouldn't be breaking their backs, they'd take it nice and steady when we'd be horsing it out. The Indians then, were a bit different again. I worked with a lot of them a good few years later on an auld site in Isleworth⁴ where they were subbies doing cleaning and tidying up and stuff, and they were all hard goers. I don't know what year that was now...Isleworth...the Harlequinn pub was beside us, I remember that much! They were hard workers – full of vim, full of energy, just wanted to get it done.

³ The London Electricity Board [LEB] was responsible for the supply of electricity, and retail and development of electrical appliances to domestic customers and businesses in the London area from 1948 to 1990.

⁴ Isleworth is a small town of Saxon origin sited within the London Borough of Hounslow in west London.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

Interviewer: So anyway, it was 1967, and you got this start, can you remember what month you went?

Patrick: ‘Twas around this sort of time of year, maybe October? So anyway I worked away up until Christmas and worked into the following year then. I don’t remember was it the same crowd I was working with, but then in early spring 1968, we went down to Exeter⁵ again with this Jimmy Mc fellow, the same connection. I’d only seen him a few times but he was connected up with that Gerry or Jimmy H as I said. He was sort of the go-between, he used to get the gangs to go here, there and everywhere, y’know? So we went down to Exeter withy this other fellow, Gerry D; doing the same thing, cable work. We were down there a few months and when that bit of work finished we got to know these new guys. There was this Mc fellow looking for lads to work on a job for Wimpeys – on a Wimpey site doing housing. Some village outside of Exeter - I forget the name of it – they were doing these big shutters with... whaddaya call it... ‘no-fines’ concrete⁶ and I was working with a pipe-layer – an English fellow of Chinese extraction. Peter was his name... great crack... funny name for a Chinaman but there you go [Laughter]. He was setting out all the bends and fittings on this big drainage layout and setting up the manholes for building. It wasn’t earthenware like the usual stuff, it was this salt-glazed Hepworth stuff? And he was setting up the manholes with all these little barren-bends and stuff... the site engineers would set out all the levels for the channels and what have you and he was doing all the benching.⁷ I was giving him a hand mixing up all the stuff for him.⁸ We spent the bones of six months down there; came back around August.

Interviewer: Where did ye stay?

Patrick: Actually, the first place I stayed in down there was a bed and breakfast; ‘twas really only a kind of a place for truckers to stay, y’know? I stayed there only a

⁵ A cathedral city in County Devon in the south-west of England

⁶ This form of lightweight concrete is generally a crushed rock or gravel of 20 mm single size aggregate [10/20] coated in a cement slurry with no fine aggregate addition. Strength is between 5 and 15 N/mm² at 28 days. It has good drainage properties due to its open texture. The ratio of aggregate to cement by volume is generally 8:1 or 10:1 by mass. Because it does not contain any fine aggregate the mix cannot segregate and consequently it can be dropped from a height. Formwork pressures are lower than for normal concrete so shutters can be lighter and pour height lifts greater. No-fines concrete has been used in large in situ panel construction [wimpey housing] and for drainage channels etc. It is specified in the Highways Agency Specification for Highway Works, clause 2603. – *No Fines Concrete*, The Concrete Society, available at <http://www.concrete.org.uk/fingertips-nuggets.asp?cmd=display&id=16> [Accessed 8 March, 2017]

⁷ Drainage work is a complex trade with pipework and fittings requiring precision installation and fitting to predetermined lines and invert levels. Benching is the term given to the concrete or cement/sand mortar bedding and surround which is shaped at the sides and undersides of manhole channels and pipe discharge ends. It has to be shaped and worked smooth to allow waste/surface water to fall into main drainage channels.

⁸ ‘Stuff’ is a bricklaying/construction vernacular for site-mixed wet-mix mortar or concrete usually transported in barrows or buckets and worked into place with trowels.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

couple of months. Jimmy had gotten digs; I don’t know how he got in contact with this one, she was a West-Indian woman married to an English fellow, and it was full-board, I think maybe £5 or £6 a week at the time. I went in with Jimmy after that. I always remember it was the first time I ever got nettles once-a-week or so as a vegetable... full of iron. I remember one Tipperary fellow that was staying there one time with us, he says after getting nettles with the dinner, “The auld cabbage was a bit strong this evening”... I didn’t make him any the wiser anyways, I knew what was in it! [Laughter].

Interviewer: So would all of the fellas working with you, for example on this Wimpey job, now, were they all Irish?

Patrick: Most of the lads I worked with were living in Exeter at that time, now. Yeah... working for McCabe, yeah... [Thinks]... ah no, there was a few local English fellows working for this McCabe but they were mostly Irish.

Interviewer: And I know you got this B&B, and your brother Jimmy got digs with this West-Indian woman there wouldn’t have been any hassle, like. Did you ever find any hassle getting digs?

Patrick: No hassle at all, she was a great person as was the husband as well, y’know. That’s one thing, now, no I never had any hassle getting digs.

Interviewer: Did you ever see any o’ them infamous “No blacks, no dogs, no Irish” signs?

Patrick: No, I never saw any of them signs, myself, no. But I worked with a guy, a chippy, Vincent G from Mayo, and he told me that some years earlier when he first went to London, the odd time he went into a paper shop looking for a Sunday Press or Sunday Independent and he got a very curt reply from the newsagent, like and he had to turn on the heel and walk out, y’know. Other than that I’d say maybe twice while I was over there [in London] I might have got slight sneaky remarks about being Irish but that’s all. Very slight, y’know.

Interviewer: Well, y’know there’s always going to be some bad-mouthed smartarse from time-to-time. Much later than that, I remember taking my father to an England versus Ireland ‘friendly’ soccer match at the old Wembley. This would’ve been maybe ‘92 and there was a little ginger-haired Cork fella that used to work with me at Norwest Holst – a lovely young lad, an estimating assistant. His boss, now, was a kind of a lary cockney type fella, a nice guy though, y’know and there was another fella with us, Tom D, whose people were Mayo and his father was at the game as well. There was these fellas sitting behind us, I’d say they were from somewhere up north... Leeds or Manchester, and they started picking on this young Cork lad, y’know. Blatantly anti-Irish stuff, y’know. And in all fairness, his boss, the English fella, he ate the head o’ them. He fucked

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

'em from a height and told them to behave themselves and kop themselves on, so like it wasn't all one-way traffic.

Patrick: I would've had only very minor things like that happen, now.

Interviewer: So you were down in Exeter; what did you do after that?

Patrick: We came back to London then that August Bank Holiday [1968], meself and Jimmy. We were supposed to go to Bamstead with yer man, but that didn't materialise after all. So we contacted the McHale fellow that sent to us Exeter and he wanted men to go to Shrewsbury.⁹ We decided we'd do that. This ganger man was a Gerry H, a Kerry man that we knew, so we went up with him. The subbie wasn't Hannigan but another one working for the same cable company, Connaught. We were putting in electrical cables for services around the town. Obviously yer man [McHale] must have had contacts up that way and he got us fixed up with an auld room outside the town-centre in Shrewsbury. There was other guys there as well; there was a fellow from Connemara...can't remember now...I think there was six there the first morning, on the gang...and then a couple of days later he went in and brought two or three guys out from Birmingham, which was maybe forty of fifty miles from Shrewsbury.

So we hung around there for about three weeks, but Jimmy went back to London then and I stayed on in Shrewsbury. There was some hubbub with the ganger we went up with, and Connaught brought up a different agent, their own man and he brought up his own people. After that we went working more-or-less direct for Connaughts, albeit still '*under the counter*' so-to-speak, i.e. we weren't employees but were paid direct by Connaught as labour-only subcontractors. The fellow that was looking after the job after that was a Mick F from Kilkenny and he had a guy, Tommy D from Cork who brought his brother Sean working with him and a fellow from Mayo called Ernie P; I ended up sharing a room with Ernie after Jimmy went back to London. I was there in Shrewsbury for the guts of eight or nine, ten months, well into the following summer. It was all cable work all round that locality; taking up paving slabs and breaking up tarmac, digging trenches and laying cable then reinstating the surface, mainly tarmac surfaces I think.

Interviewer: So when you were doing that work, then how were ye being paid, was it piece-work, by the yard or so-much-a-shift?

Patrick: Ah no we were on shiftwork. We were paid by the shift; probably around four pound or four-fifty a day at that time. I can remember at that time that we were

⁹ Shrewsbury is the county town of Shropshire, in the west of England.

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getting £27 for the five and a half days; that was 1968-69, it was pretty good money then. [Tape 2 - 29.00]

Interviewer: One of the things that concerns me most about the stuff written about the Irish who came to work in the building game were very...exploited...most of the research I've done indicates quite the opposite.

Patrick: It was quite the opposite, yeah. We were earning good money them days, but of course it was their own fault, they'd spend it then... in the pub; sure I know that for certain...I done it meself! That's a different story, but it's never highlighted, y'know?

Interviewer: I was talking to a fella from Tipperary last week about working on the Victoria Line and he was on about the tunnel gangs were almost all Mayo and Donegal, but he was on about how they were almost in competition with each other all the time. But even...and they were earning big money

Patrick: Oh yeah, they were earning big, big money, sure they were on pricework. So much a ring in the tunnels.

Interviewer: They were sometimes doing three or four rings a day; now I mean that was savage hard work, but a gang of five or six, I read one fella who said they might make twelve pound a ring, that's maybe forty pounds a day between five or six, which was big money in the mid-sixties.

Patrick: Oh yeah, it is big money. I was getting maybe four pound a day that time. Some of the guys, like our Jimmy, now, might be looking for a bit more, maybe a fiver or five-fifty a day because they'd been there that bit longer and knew the score better. There were some guys then who were saying they were getting six pound a day, but Jimmy reckoned a lot o'them fellows'd be bullshitting y'know? He often said some of them lads, they wouldn't work in a fit...they wouldn't work to keep themselves warm! [Laughter]. Jimmy and some of his buddies, they were great workers. One of his mates, an ex-Irish Army man, Sean B from Kildare, they'd work together as a pair, if they got a bit of pricework sure they'd work for a month; but then again after a month they'd drink it all. They'd laugh at it all, y'know? Sean B was an awful case altogether; sure where he often stayed well you might as well say he'd jump up into a skipper for a sleep.¹⁰ Sure he'd break into derelict houses and whatever and kip down for the night. There were a good few derelict houses around west Kilburn at that time and sure, them lads didn't care where they laid down as long as they got a bed. This fellow,

¹⁰ A skipper is a navy euphemism for a 'squat-house' – there were a great many abandoned houses after World War Two in London, which were unoccupied and often derelict and these provided ongoing temporary accommodation for itinerant labouring men in addition to digs and shelters.

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now, would eat the best of stuff, he'd go the café of an evening and have a big feed of steak.

Interviewer: I wonder why were they like that, d' ya think? Like you'd have thought that the whole point of going over to make big money was NOT to have to live like that!

Patrick: I know...exactly! I could never figure it out. And this particular guy, as wild and all as he was, he had an awful interest in bike-racing; he'd go to the indoor speed-track and pay to watch it of a summer's evening. I happened to work with him a couple of weeks on daywork later on in the early seventies and I was surprised when he was telling me "You should go down and see that speedway racing, Patsy"...just to watch it as a spectator...then again he was a gambler with it too, the auld betting shop, y'know? They were an odd breed of men, really.

Interviewer: They really were an odd breed of men, y'know. There's an awful lot written that compares them to the sort of itinerant navvies, the 'tramp navvies' one writer called them, that built the canals and the railways back in the nineteenth century, but I think those kind of railway navvies dies out around the end of the First World War, but you still hear about the sort of 'long-distance kiddies' as they call them.

Patrick: I remember now you come to mention itinerancy, the time I worked for Devlin, on post-office work for a couple of months, again through this subbie McHale, the ganger man was Sullivan. We were out in this village one day doing this post-office work – ducting with short section four-way clay pipes, earthenware pipes – and anyway I'll never forget I saw this fellow now, there was a kind of a bend coming into the village and he walked round this bend with the hands in the pockets and the hobnail bcots and the shirt fully open – it was a hot summer's day – and the face all red and either he had been sent there or maybe he'd been working with a farmer or something but anyway he went straight to the gangerman who started him there and then – in the middle of the day. That's the guy, a couple of days later he sez to me, "come on and we'll go for a pint" – 'twas the first time I ever drank scrumpy cider. On a blazing hot summer's day, well y'know, it's great to get a pint of cool cider. I didn't drink a lot when I was young and sure I had two pints in the lunch break [you only got a half-hour break them days for lunch] and I was hammered! The ganger man was laughing at me, and the fellow that bought me the two pints was the same – sure they just did it for the crack.

That fellow I think he was from Cork, well I remember he called me over one of the days to tell me that Bobby Kennedy was after being shot...now what year was that? 1968? 1969? That's one thing I remember in that village was the rows of thatched cottages...very middle-England...and the local doctor was a lady

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doctor from Connemara! She used to bring us out home-made cider now and again. It was hard shaley rock out there – it was a devil to dig with an auld jackhammer and shovel...hard digging.

Interviewer: So you sound like you had a decent enough time of it. You were mostly on shiftwork rather than price, so did you ever come across any of these – y'know another theme that you always hear about were these kind of domineering, brutal gangers that would be driving ye on...that kind of thing?

Patrick: Sure I did, yeah, I enjoyed most of the work I did. No I never did, really, no. Most of the gangers I worked with were all fairly sound. I'd say that a lot o' the men that had the problems with the gangers being 'hard' or 'brutal' were maybe the problem themselves! [Laughter] because they weren't doing a whole lot.

Interviewer: See again, depending who you talk to...some people talk about the 'Elephant John' and them types with a reputation...

Patrick: Yeah, yeah, sure you'd be nearly afraid to meet him!

[Small-talk]

Patrick: Eventually anyway that contract finished up around springtime '69 so I went back to Shrewsbury. There were a few local men – Salopians, they were called – that came out working with us and they were great lads...decent workers alright. I remember one in particular, 'Bridgewater' he was known as; he was mad to get out drinking with us Irish lads. The cabling work finished up there fairly soon after as well and so eventually we headed back for London again.

Interviewer: So where did ye stay, this time, when you went back to London?

Patrick: Jimmy had got us a place in Queen's Park, down below West Kilburn there. She was Cavan [landlady] and he [landlord] was Sligo or vice-versa. They were at the bottom of the house and they had two rooms rented out upstairs; meself and Jimmy in one – and when we went in there first there was third bed, a complete stranger, a fellow called Morrissey already in there as well. Sure we got on like a house on fire, and then two others guys moved into another room. That's just the way it was, we didn't pass no heed on sharing with other lads. The two other lads were Sullivan but oddly weren't related. Anyway one of them had a brother who was a subbie doing work for OC Summers – one of the well-known civil engineering companies – who were doing gas work.¹¹ We got a start with them then. Same sort of work really; digging and filling trenches.

¹¹ This was probably for North Thames Gas Board, who were doing significant amounts of gas mains installation works during the late 1960s and early 1970s across London.

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Interviewer: That was gas installation work; wasn't that all quite specialist? How did that work in organizational terms?

Patrick: Well, the contractor OC Summers, they supplied the ganger, the pipe-layer and the pipe-fitter. For gas installations they had to be qualified gas engineers, it was [and still is] quite specialist work. They were using these new [at the time] ductile iron pipe materials with rubber seals on the flange joints and those joints had to be specially made up and tested.¹² Some of them, then, as well would be connected to the older existing gas services and they would be lead joints, again specialist engineering but you learnt on the job and I eventually ended up doing the lead-jointing myself, pouring the molten lead into pipe joints and that kind of thing. It was a tricky enough job, you had to know what you were doing. It all had to be carefully tested and when you were letting in the new gas supply into an old main you had to 'purge' the old mains and put in a temporary stand-pipe and burn off the old gas still in the system. The ganger man was an east London fellow called Stan N and Jimmy W was the pipe-layer. That was great work to get.

Interviewer: So were you still working away on shiftwork or did you do any gas-work on piecework?

Patrick: Well, at that time the work was so busy, you could choose whether to take price-work if you wanted to up the money; we might do it the odd-time but mostly we were on shift-work. We didn't bother a damn about chasing the money, as long as we got a day's wages we were generally happy. I remember the ganger on this job explained to me one day about the price-work that if you could dig and lay two pipe lengths¹³ a day into position ready for testing and backfilling that would cover the gang cost for the 2 labourers plus the three company men, i.e. the ganger, pipe-layer and agent, and the company would still be making

¹² Processed Natural Gas is supplied to houses, factories and other sites via the public gas network [National Transmission System], in most cases now owned and operated in the UK by one of five major gas distribution companies or smaller independent gas transportation companies. This network, which is what Pat and many other Irish builders worked on in the 1960s and 70s, supplies gas up to a primary meter. [A primary meter is the first gas meter within a premises]. Ductile iron pipe was introduced in the early 1970's to replace cast iron, which was obsolete and had a known history of failure. It was supplied in diameters of 4" diameter [100mm] and upward; the joints are of a bolted gland design. The surface of the material has a slightly dimpled appearance and is usually coated in a light black tar enamel finish. Due to the material strength of ductile iron compared to cast iron it was produced in a thinner wall thickness than cast iron. However, this material can [and did] corrode underground through the complete wall thickness within 12 years of installation. Because of this specific risk from MPDI mains, HSE required the major gas distribution networks to decommission all MPDI gas mains in the UK by mid-2003 – source: *Medium pressure ductile iron gas pipes not owned by major gas distribution networks*, OC 438/4, The UK Health and Safety Executive, available at: http://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/ocs/400-499/438_4.htm [accessed March 9, 2017].

¹³ Standard pipe lengths for this type of work varied generally from 3.66 to 5.50m – therefore to dig, wheel, strut and dispose of 8-12lm of trench excavation averaging 600-800mm deep and set out, lay and joint 2-3 lengths of pipe was a significant amount of manual work for two operatives.

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money on that, so they must have been getting a fair whack out of the Gas Board to cover themselves.

We'd be happy enough, meself and Sullivan and Casey, making maybe five or six pound a day. There was none of 'em mad for money, y'know? If the company men then, they'd want a Saturday morning out of it to make up the money, we'd turn up and get a shift for the Saturday morning, sure we didn't really do much, 'twas more a case of turning up in case anyone higher up would make an appearance.

Interviewer: So you were working for OC Summers, then?

Patrick: No I was working for this Dave S, who was subbing to OC Summers, who were contracted to the Gas Board, I guess?

Interviewer: And how were you all paid?

Patrick: That was all cash work, there were no cards or stamps involved or deductions or anything. It was, I guess, maybe around '73 or '74 it all started to tighten up a bit with that cash working thing. They brought in a thing that you were exempt from tax... 714 certs or something?¹⁴ Ah sure, I knew a guy, he was a Wexford guy – anyway he ended up in jail – he had a book of these certificate things and used to go out on the sites selling them; there was a trade in them by the middle or end of the 70s.

Sure you know well that politicians are making laws so they can be gotten around, that's the whole point. Anyways sure most guys that went out working like that in London, you wouldn't use your own name; you wouldn't give your right name to a subbie, you'd use some other name. There's an awful amount of them SC60s and 714s in the names of Michael Collins and James Connolly and so on [laughter]. I was using the name Noone on one job I was working on in them days...this Cork fellow on the job with me used to call me 'midday'! [Laughter].

¹⁴ This refers to The Labour Construction Industry Bill, 1970, which proposed compulsory registration. This proposal was amended by the incoming Conservative Government to a voluntary registration scheme based around a fiscal construction employment status, thereby in effect endorsing mass self-employment as a way of collecting at least some taxes. Rather than deter or diminish the worst aspects of 'The Lump', this in effect exacerbated them. The Finance Act 1975 then established a fiscally-defined self-employment unique to the construction industry through a two-tier taxation system. The first tier of self-employment classified the genuine self-employed under the so called 714 certificate, through a business test and their direct payment of taxes. Under the second tier, the contractor deducted taxes at source, through the so-called SC60 certificate – source: Felix Behling & Mark Harvey, 'The evolution of false self-employment in the British construction industry: a neo-Polanyian account of labour market formation' in *Work, employment and society*, Vol 1, #20, [2015], p.10-11.

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Interviewer: And did you stay at that OC Summers work long, then?

Patrick: I'd say I spent about two years on and off working with Dave S in various places. We were over Dalston way, Homerton in Hackney, around by Victoria Park. Y'see there'd be roads maybe a half a mile long and all those roads had to be dug up and the gas mains re-laid and reinstated. Some of the ground round London, sure it was fairly easily dug; 'twas like coal-dust some of it, because it was 'made-up' ground.¹⁵ It wasn't the original earth. The pavements and roads in places like central London have been dug and re-dug so often to put stuff underneath them. The amount of time we'd dig a trial hole along the route of a new main to see what was down there before we dug it all out and you'd be lucky if you got a space for your new main with all the cables, wires, gas and water pipes, telephone cables; all sorts, and most of the time no record of where or what each service was meant to be. Could be dangerous stuff, like.

Interviewer: What happened after that?

Patrick: Well, let me see... I think I got a job then with my oldest brother, Tommy. I was living up in Willesden Lane, kind of Kilburn way, and Tommy was working for a guy called Mick Joyce – 'Black Mick' they used to call him¹⁶ – he was from the Gaelic-speaking part of Mayo but he was based down around Crawley, in Sussex. His vans used to pick up at Sheperd's Bush and Hammersmith, so I used to get a bus; the first bus out of Cricklewood garage, about twenty-past six to Hammersmith and used to get the van then about twenty-to seven and then an hour's run out in the van.

Interviewer: Where to?

Patrick: I forget which jobs we were working on! We spent a lot of time down around Richmond – no not Richmond – er... Kingston, myself and Tommy on a four or five storey block of offices down there. Costains were the main contractor. We were concreting the floor slabs... ah the usual crack, y'know? Holding up shores and helping the shuttering chippies with strutting and bracing, carrying strong-backs, pouring concrete and that kind of thing. We must've spent six or eight months there and we went [pause]... where did we go after that?... that's what moved me to Sheperd's Bush or Hammersmith... I went to Askew Road in Sheperd's Bush; Jimmy lived there as well but at that time he'd gone to Southend.

¹⁵ Made-up ground refers to ground/earthwork which has already been dug out and back-filled with granular fill material previously – often repeatedly.

¹⁶ The use of nicknames was endemic amongst the post-war Irish in construction. This name derived from the colour of Joyce's hair and was used to distinguish him from a number of other small or one-man subbies also named Joyce.

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Jimmy used to go every so often down to Southend or Brighton working for a couple of months at a time for Dave S again on the Gas with a buddy of his called Tommy C from Kerry. He also used to work with another small subbie – a townie – Eugene D. He was from up Ballinaglera or Dowra way, in north Leitrim and he was a civil engineering subbie doing groundworks and gas work and all that stuff. So Jimmy would go off and stay down at the seaside when the work was there with these guys.

Interviewer: I heard your brother talking about the Bush. Wasn't there a pub that ran a football team he played for? Where did you get work, then, after moving to Sheperd's Bush?

Patrick: Ah yeah, that was the Richmond, Tom was on about. When I moved to Askew Road I started going there as well,¹⁷ the Richmond Arms on Sheperd's Bush Road... I'm not sure who I was working for then... probably still Black Mick. He was doing mainly groundworks and concrete, site development kinda stuff, sewerage and drainage and all that kinda civils work. By that time [mid-1970s] there was mainly machines used to dig foundations and do the groundworks.

Anyway one weekend evening in the Richmond I was drinking with Tony M from Carrick, who was also a regular there and a subbie called McC – Jim McC – came in and asked if we were looking for work. I said, "sure I suppose a change would do no harm" or something like that, y'know. We got out with this fellow then, maybe the following Monday. I spent the guts of twelve months with him on the Woking... Woking is in Surrey isn't it?... yea, on the Woking Bypass. I think the main contract was a sort of a joint-venture arrangement with Tarmac Construction and another big company. I was doing pipework and drainage, rolling in fill and hardcore and stuff, working with various machines.

Interviewer: And can you remember what kind of a job that was? What were you at?

Patrick: The foreman there was a Timmie... [searching memory]... he lived around Willesden; used to train youth soccer teams. A great guy, he brought me out one day and showed me and explained all the profiles and levels that were set up on the road, and he gave me the traveller, y'know and taught me the different colours on the yoke and taught me how to bone-in the levels.¹⁸ "Get it as best

¹⁷ The Richmond Arms, 55 Shepherds Bush Rd, London W6 7LU, was in the late 60s and early 70s a substantial 'Irish' house run by a Keane man from Galway. There was also a link with London GAA activities as a 'junior' football team called St. Gregory's was formed there in the early 1970s of which the author's father and uncle were members.

¹⁸ These are technical Civil Engineering methods of lining and levelling road construction to set out excavations. A 'Traveller' is the name given to a crossbar T-section wooden profile used to verify formation levels of a trench excavation along the length of the trench. See e.g. <http://www.pavingexpert.com/setout03.html>

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you can” he told me. There was a Tony, an English fellow that used to drive the Drott Caterpillar, he’d be flying around the site! There was another fellow then, used to drive another tracked machine, the big Hymac and as far as I can recall - I don’t remember his name - but he was a piper...a musician...he was a contrary auld fucker as well! [Laughter].

Interviewer: Was it mainly Irish again?

Patrick: I s’pose all-in-all there was a vanload of maybe ten or twelve men – all Irish – working for that subbie. A few local lads – mainly machine drivers – were English; the English guys would have been more into the machines than the Irish lads, y’know? There was a fellow from Mohill¹⁹ over there, a fellow called Vincent M – some character – he worked for the same subbie, McCarthy.

There were two brothers from west Cork as well, Hayes was there name. One o’them, there used to be a concrete pipe used in those days, an eighteen inch diameter precast concrete drain, maybe two foot or two-foot six long. This Hayes man would lift that the same as you’d lift a pint of porter! I was doing the drainage and I’d be giving him a hand. I’d say, “Mick, do ya want a hand with that?”...”No!” he’d drawl. I’d be mixing up the mortar for him to rub up the joints on the drains – there was nothing unusual about them, like, they were the auld storm water drains, so there was no real joint tests to do – so I’d mix up a barrel full of stuff for him and he’d have a few pipes done and he have no gloves or nothing for the hands and would go in and rub-up the pipe joints in with his bare hands! Sure he must’ve had hands like sandpaper. Apart from anything else sure the cement would burn the fingertips off ya!

I asked him in for a pint one Saturday when we were finished and after getting out of the van at the Richmond. “No!” he sez to me quietly, “I’m barred outa there!” ...I didn’t ask him why he was barred [laughter]. Mick and John H, that was the two lads, very nice fellows...sure they reckon they were stone mad, the two o’them but I never seen it in them, y’know?

Interviewer: So did you stay long in Woking? Where’d you head after that?

Patrick: After Woking then I worked with a fellow called John G – he’s dead since as well – he had work off OC Summers down around the Old Kent Road²⁰ in an area that was due for demolition and what we were doing was cutting and tapping off the water mains to each house before it was knocked. So we’d have to dig a pit around the main, find it, remove the stopcock and cut back the pipe

¹⁹ Mohill is a small town in south-east Leitrim between Carrick-on-Shannon and County Longford

²⁰ A major thoroughfare in South East London, England, passing through the London Borough of Southwark. It is now part of the A2, a major road from London to Dover.

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into the highway and tap it off. There was John Galvin, Patsy Quinn – he’s dead too now – and meself. I came across that Jimmy White again on that job – the cockney pipe-layer I met on the previous gas works. We spent, I’d say, maybe six months just doing those terminations. We’d do four a day – dig them out, find and trace the water main, cut it back and tap it off, then backfill. The subbie reckoned four a day would cover everyone, us and him. We’d be doing the odd week here and there of putting in new water mains as well.

Interviewer: Sounds like handy-enough work. OC Summers seemed to have that kind of gas work cornered?

Patrick: OC Summers did nearly all that kind of work, yeah; I think they’re long gone but used to be based up around York Way.²¹ There was an offshoot company then, a crowd called ‘Jeffries’ started up and he had been a director of OC Summers and had left to start up on his own and he took a lot of the directly-employed men with him; some of the foremen and ganger-men and the like.

I remember around that time I worked with a firm called Pheonix Construction, I think around 1974-75, ...now I’m not sure was that before or after the Old Kent Road – they were a concrete and shuttering outfit. Again that came from drinking in the Richmond; I got to know a guy, Ray C, from Mohill, a chippy and a Billy B from Cork City. Tommy [brother], knew them fairly well too.

I was playing for a local GAA team, St. Gregory’s at the time and there was a good lock of lads that we got to know through that. Anyways Billy knew some subbie that was looking for skins down in Isleworth²² and I spent the guts of twelve months with them as well.

Interviewer: Oh right, and what were you at with them?

Patrick: ‘Twas a site that had been closed down over a strike. The original company went bust back in the 70s...let me think o’the name now. Seemingly there was an awful hubbub on this job because a concrete stairs collapsed while they were pouring the concrete for it, where it hadn’t been shuttered right... and two guys were killed.

Interviewer: Oh Jeez, that sounds like it must’ve been a mess?

²¹ Major thorough road near Kings Cross in London. OC Summers continue to trade and, ironically, were made a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Laing-O’Rourke Group owned by Mayo brothers Ray and Des O’Rourke in 2001. See, *inter alia*, UK Companies House Beta Service Register Search, available at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00969372/filing-history?page=1> [accessed 12 March, 2017].

²² See p.3 and footnote 4.

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Patrick: Well, anyway it was for the local council – Hounslow, I think – it was low-rise and high-rise council flats, residential accommodation on a big 37-acre site. I was labouring with the shuttering chippies. One of the first jobs I had there, two of us went in to this block that had already had the frame built but I think it had been closed down for twelve months or more on account of this strike before everything had been settled out with the council and this new crowd took over – who was it? John Mowlem’s, that’s it.

But sure as you can imagine everything had been left half-done and sure they had fierce problems there with the sewerage. They [previous builders] had poured concrete into the sewerage and ‘twas all wrong, like, the work itself...there was an awful lot of blaggarding done to bust the original firm y’know? Sure we had to go in and y’know the auld snots on the concrete where the shutters’d be uneven?²³

Interviewer: Ah yeah, sure I seen that before – bad shuttering!

Patrick: Well, meself and this guy Christy M, our first job was with scabbling hammers to break all the concrete snots off the floors, columns and walls; my God that was awful dirty work. We were supposed to be looked after, like, with equipment; scabbling hammers and goggles and gloves and a pint of milk of an evening to take the taste of the concrete dust away [smiles]... we got the goggles and the gloves alright, but there was no sign of the milk! [Laughter].

After that I was working with Ray and Billy, the chippies, doing the acrows and helping erect deck formwork and column clamps and that kind of thing. ‘Twas all timber stuff they were using really so we were putting in strongbacks and acrows for the decks and that kind of thing. They’d [chippies] be putting up the shuttering and we’d follow up putting in all the extra props, braces and strongbacks etc. That was really the last big job I worked on before I came back to Ireland.

Interviewer: Oh right, I see. So you came back to Ireland around then. How did that pan out. Were you intending to head back?

Patrick: Well, I went out doing a few small jobs with a Reilly fellow, another small subbie, from Longford. He was doing small bits of concreting work – another small office block I remember around Kingston way, again. I was with him for a few months as well. That summer I went back home to meet the brother from America, and ended up staying.

²³ A common feature of badly performed concrete work where timber shutters were employed was that if the inside surface of the shutter was not properly oiled and smoothed, then the concrete face would have ‘snots’, basically small protruding blemishes of concrete which would then need knocking or hammering off the surface and making-good.

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Interviewer: So you didn’t do that much more travelling around Job-wise?

Patrick: No, no. I worked nearly the whole time in or around west London, where I lived. The furthest I travelled - apart from the months I worked in the West Country - was Woking and that was less than an hour in the van.

Interviewer: And did you ever work direct for any of the big boys... the Laings or Wimpey or Murphy and them?

Patrick: No, no, I never did funnily enough. It wasn’t that I had anything against them, just the opportunity never really arose. I knew two fellows here now when I moved back to Dublin; they were O’Mahoneys from Kerry. They spent lifetimes working for John Murphy and hadn’t a bad word to say against him. They were working at the end of their tour around London Bridge and Tower Bridge, doing street paving and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: So presumably if you were working in London until 1977, you must’ve been paid by cheque towards the end, or was it cash the whole time?

Patrick: Getting paid by cheque became more common later in the 1970s and 80s. Those two subbies I worked for on the gas and down in Woking, that was all cash wages. The first time I got paid by cheque I was doing a bit of short-term work for a few weeks for a subbie. You’d have to go in then and change the cheque in a pub, but often they [the subbie] would make arrangements with a pub for you. Some pubs took a cut of the cheque and others didn’t. Like if you went in to get the cheque changed of a Friday evening they’d charge you but if you went in on a Monday evening they’d pass no heed and they’d give it you for nothing.

Tommy used to use the Bush Hotel on Sheperd’s Bush Green when the couple that ran it, she was a townie of ours, she was Feely, from St. Patrick’s Park and her husband was a guy called Steve R from Carlow, but seemingly they didn’t charge Tommy for changing all the lads’ cheque’s in the gang he was working with. I think that was for Martin J, another subbie Tom worked with. There was a Mayo fellow in the ‘Bush after that, in my time now, he was Tommy C and the brother that ran it. As I say, if you went into Tommy on a Monday night now, he’d pass no heed changing the cheque.²⁴

Interviewer: Did you ever have any accidents? Like how were things like health and safety dealt with on the gas jobs, for example?

Patrick: Safety-wise now things were very lax back in those days. ‘Twould be normal, for example, to see chippies putting in floors just walking along open joists with

²⁴ I.e He would not charge any form of commission or expect return for changing the cheque into cash.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

no floors or protection around them, same way as the lads used to walk along steel girders and stuff. I seen guys out on roofs, like slate or tiled roofs that'd be sloping, walking up and down with trainers on; no guarantee that your trainers are going to be safe, no harnesses or safety rails in them days.

Thanks be to God, I never saw, or was involved in any bad accidents myself, but I knew a guy from outside the town here that got badly burnt with a cable strike – ah the usual – a jackhammer through a high-tension²⁵ cable that wasn't marked. He lasted two or three months in hospital then died.

I remember a friend of Tommy's Noel from Wexford as well; about 1983-84, he hit a big cable down around Soho. He survived it but it took him about five years to be anyways fit for work again but he did go back to work. That was for the Green Murphys²⁶ he was working. That was the same crack with unmarked cables. Seemingly he was using a jackhammer to break out stuff and this cable was eighteen inches higher in the ground than was marked on the drawing.

Something similar happened to me when I came back from England and I was working for the post-office here doing the same crack, putting in cables. There was another guy had dug a trial hole and said it was safe. I was breaking through with a jack-hammer and noticed this bit of silver foil-looking stuff in the ground. I stopped the hammer and dug around it with a shovel; 'twas a HV cable. Wasn't meant to be there, yer man that dug the trial hole didn't see it. That would've been curtains for me if I hadn't noticed the silver foil... day-day! And then again, as you say, no records of whoever put what in before.

Interviewer: Why did you go for the construction industry, do you think? Was everyone that came over with you in building?

Patrick: Most of the Irish I knew in London worked at the buildings. There again there were some lads, I remember Sean B and Paddy L from Drumsna, now they worked for London Transport on the buses. I always had the impression that the money was much better at the building crack, but y'know it might not have been. By the time you got overtime and shift-work and that kind of thing on the buses, sure there probably wasn't that much in the difference. Considering when I worked at home [Ireland] that I worked more-or-less indoors all the time, when I went to London I got outdoor work and it was a different life, really. See most of us guys from the west of Ireland we were all reared on land, on small farms, so the bit of freedom was there with the outdoor work and we wanted to keep that.

²⁵ Probably means high-voltage or HV cables – the most dangerous forms of underground power cables.

²⁶ J Murphy & Sons – see XXXXXX

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

Interviewer: What about after work. You mentioned the pubs, did you go for the dancehalls as well?

Patrick: Ah yeah, sure I used to go to some of the Irish dancehalls for nights out; the Garryowen in Hammersmith and the Hibernian in Fulham. There was another club, the Emerald in Hammersmith as well that got closed down. Funnily enough I never went to the Galtymore, sure it was a bit out of my way, and sure the other two clubs were beside me, y'know? I guess I was a bit of a 'home-bird', I didn't see the point in galavanting around London when I had those clubs nearby. And sure as well as that we had three great Irish pubs nearby; we had the Swan, and the White Hart and the King's Head all more-or-less next to each other and the finest of music and crack between them...sure they were all completely Irish, y'know? I was also a big soccer man. I used to go and see QPR playing regularly at Scrubs Lane. That was always an enjoyable afternoon or evening.

Interviewer: And I guess you'd have played Gaelic football in London?...most footballers did at some time!

Patrick: Yeah, I did play Gaelic and so did Tommy, but Jimmy didn't for some reason. I used to play for St. Gregory's that operated out of the Sheperd's Bush Hotel there and from the Richmond; I was three or four years playing with them. See I quit playing football when I first went to England. I'd say I was there about four years before I started back playing. I didn't particular go to the GAA to find work or depend on them, but y'know yerself, if you were a footballer of any note, well, you'd be looked after by the GAA in terms of finding work and what have you. And not only that but you'd be canvassed...you'd be headhunted by the bigger clubs.

I know one guy who told me that fellows from a particular club came to his door looking for him to go playing with them, and sure he didn't realise how they even knew he was in London! This guy had played senior football for Laois, and had seen guys getting work down there through the football, that didn't deserve it, so he didn't like that sort of thing and told them he wasn't interested.

Sure I remember one of the best games I saw in London some years back – it was a Championship semi-final between Tir Connail Gaels and the Kingdom²⁷ – 'twas a great game to watch – and when the Kingdom went behind, they started the row because they knew well that the Tir Connail Gaels team was mainly 'imports' for the weekend. Sure most of them were Tyrone County

²⁷ Tir Connail Gaels are a GAA club based in west London and strongly associated [purely unofficial] with Donegal county and Ulster provincial football. The Kingdom are a club based in Kilburn and likewise associated with Kerry football.

Original Interview # 4 – Patrick M - Leitrim

footballers. Anyway the row meant that the game was abandoned and rescheduled for a fortnight later when the Kingdom knew most of those bucks couldn't come back! [Laughter] See the Kingdom had most of their players based in London, which was 'legit'. I forget which subbie it was that was over Tír Connaill Gaels that used to bring over the top players, he was a big stocky Tyrone fellow...oh that happened alright...

Interviewer: Did you go home much when you lived in London?

Patrick: Ah yeah, sure I'd say most summers I'd head home for a couple o' weeks, and then Christmas o' course. Sure really when I think about it, most of the money I made there I left it in Jamestown, y'know? [Laughter] So anyway, this particular year I knew my brother Johnny was coming from America – that was 1977, I think – and I said I'd go home and see him. My cousins, Cha and Paddy were always at me to come back anyway, to Dublin, y'know?

At that time I was starting to go out a bit too much in London; I was living on my own, in my own room, which I wanted to do but long-term it got a bit lonely and sure all I was doing was going to the pub five or six nights a week.

So anyway when I went back I stuck it out for a few months. I got a bit of work in Dublin within a week or two of going. Then that same Christmas, 1977, I met Julie, my wife, in Dublin. I would definitely have gone back to England had I not met her, without a shadow of a doubt. I wouldn't have gone back to London, I'd have gone out maybe to Ilford where my friend Jimmy G was living – I'd played football out there for Thomas MacCurtains.

I went down to an auld Irish festival down in Grays one Sunday, ah back in the early '70s and ended up toging out for MacCurtains against the Wexford lads from Kilburn, Father Murphys, I knew a good few of them as well. Anyway I had friends and contacts out that way.

Really, when I think about it they were some of the best years of my life, I'd say, those years in London. Have you enough heard yet? [Laughter]

Interviewer: Ah yeah, sure that's great, Patrick, I really appreciate that talk, thanks.

END

Original Interview # 5 – Michael H - Galway

Name: Michael

Date of Birth: 1945

Place of Birth: Lettermuckoo, Connemara, County Galway

Date of Emigration to UK: 1966

Date of Interview: November 8th, 2015 (Ennis)

Interview Notes

1. Tape quality [volume, clarity, diction] is variable throughout.
2. Semi-verbatim transcription used because of Interviewee's accent and diction.

Interviewer: Right, so that the tape has us, we're in Ennis and I think it's the 8th November isn't it? And I'm with Michael H, who has kindly agreed to talk to me about his time living and working in London. So I suppose the easiest way is to start at the beginning, where are you from Michael?

Michael: I'm from Connemara...Lettermuckoo, Camus, a small village in Connemara.

Interviewer: If you don't mind me asking, when were you born?

Michael: 1945

Interviewer: So I suppose we might start with your childhood, if you like, and your schooling...you went to National School and...

Michael: Yep, I went to National School in Camus, There was ten of us in the family, seven girls and three boys. I was the fourth eldest.

Interviewer: So you grew up in Connemara? In an Irish-speaking area?

Michael: Oh yeah, we were from an Irish speaking [Gaeltacht] area. When we were at school we loved speaking English and trying to learn to converse in English but at home everything was spoken in Irish...the only time we spoke English at home was to speak to the dog! [Laughter]...things like "lie-down", "come-in" and things like that. And that wasn't much good to me going to London! [Laughter].

Interviewer: No...I can well imagine! [Laughter]...so when did you leave school? And what did you do then?

Michael: I left school at twelve, which was fairly standard in them days, you left between twelve and fourteen usually. I went cutting turf on the bog first, and we used to cut seaweed and sell it and I'd do bits of work on the farm; we had sheep and

Original Interview # 5 – Michael H - Galway

livestock and all that sort of thing. We had about twenty-three acres of a small farm but there was hundreds of acres of *mud*.¹

Interviewer: So I suppose the obvious question, why did you go for London? Was it a given that you'd end up leaving?

Michael: Well really, like, the money just wasn't there [In Connemara] to be earned; if you got bad weather in the winter, say, you weren't earning any money – nothing at all. Other people used to come home each year with nice clothes on them and they'd be able to hire a car and all that sort of thing, and we were left nothing at all. It was a thing we knew we'd have to do.

Interviewer: Did you have any siblings go as well?

Michael: All, bar one, went to England. The oldest didn't because she became a teacher and the two youngest babies, they didn't go, but everybody else in the family went.

Interviewer: What year did you go to England then? How did you go?

Michael: We did the boat, meself and a cousin of mine. It was February 1966.

Interviewer: The year England won the World Cup...

Michael: It was indeed. Well, I'll tell you I was in a flat in Clapham Common in July '66, watching the World Cup on those little black and white televisions you got back then when England won it. Well how that floor didn't collapse...there must've been about a hundred of us inside in the room, all jumping up and down!! [Laughter].

Interviewer: So you went with your cousin, did ye have anywhere to stay or...

Michael: My sister was already there in London, I was able to stay with until we got settled down and new our way around a bit, y'know? We had enough money to keep us going for a week or two while until we earnt some wages.

Interviewer: How did you find London...a bit of a change, I'd say

Michael: Oh I found it very strange to start with, very,very strange. The first day that I arrived there, I said to my sister, "I'll go out now, and walk around a bit, but I won't go too far in case I get lost!" My sister's flat was in the Angel, in Islington. Out I goes, and went down to the High Street, trying to keep the landmarks in my head, and anyway a London bus came along and it stopped to

¹Possibly this is a colloquial reference to common-lands near the sea.

Original Interview # 5 – Michael H - Galway

let me cross...and I was scared to cross it. There was lots of cars and they all stopped, and the bus driver starts blowing the hooter, telling me "come on!" "and I was on a pedestrian crossing, but I didn't know what it was...I thought it wasn't safe enough! [Laughter]...I'd never seen so many cars in my life. Well, I got back home and I said to my sister, "Jesus Christ, what's wrong with the people here" I said. She said, "Why, what'd they do to you? I said "none of them'll speak to you. I said hello to loads of them and nobody tried to answer me, they just looked at me!"... "Oh no" she says, "sure you don't say hello to them here; you're not at home now". I found that very strange to start with, because when you're used to greeting or saluting everyone here [Ireland], you expect the same in London, but they [Londoners] think you're odd!

And the other strange thing I found; I couldn't sleep with sound of the aeroplanes on the flightpath into Heathrow which in them days ran over north London – and that time t'was mostly the prop aeroplanes, and the noise they were making! Another thing I noticed was you'd pull the curtain and the room was still bright; compared to at home, when you don't see your hand in front of you when the dark falls. It took me a long time to get used to them things.

Another thing I found very hard about the English [language] when I used to ask for something in a shop or whatever, the English people, they'd say "pardon?" and they found me very hard to understand. I never heard the word *pardon* used like that before; we'd say "what?" or "what'd you say?"

Interviewer: I'd say it's because in the Irish there's no equivalent to *pardon*, you just wouldn't say that.

Michael: Anyway, so, we landed on the Saturday and by the Monday we had a start straight aways with the Green Murphys, out in Feltham.

Interviewer: God...how did ye get the start so quick?

Michael: We knew a foreman for Murphy, he was a neighbour from Connemara. The work was difficult to start with, not being used to the tools they had there and the way things were done in London. We were doing post-office ducting, digging of course!...everything was hand dig in them times, sure we were used of the digging anyway, I didn't really find any problem with it. The only thing it took me a while to get used of was digging ground with a fork and the shovels were very short compared to what we'd use at home. It's like the young fella that came from Connemara and said to the English ganger, "Boss, why do you have such a short handle on your shovels; we have a longer handle back home", "Well", says the ganger, "the short handle is so you can get down to your work!" [Laughter].

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Interviewer: Just out of interest, did you use foot-irons when you were digging?

Michael: Oh we did, yeah, to save the boots, sure they were a great support when you were digging.

Interviewer: And did Murphy supply you with boots or any other gear?

Michael: The only thing you got from Murphys was your wages of a Friday...nothing else...that's the only thing that you got from them. Nothing at all, at all. So you'd go and buy your own boots.

So anyway, that first day out, well, I'll never forget it, we went to the café for breakfast and there's a big queue of lads, maybe thirty or forty lads all waiting. So anyway I thought I was able to order, egg, bacon sausage or whatever y'know? But when I asked for it, the lady behind the counter said, "pardon?" ...I thought, "what the fuck is pardon?" Anyway we got it straightened out and the next day, to save the confusion, I just said I'd have the same as the fellow in front of me in the queue!...I knew what he'd ordered. I found it difficult to put into English words what I wanted, but little-by-little I got used of it.

Interviewer: I'd imagine, now, that the language might have caused a few problems.

Michael: Well, talking English to an Irish person wasn't too bad, but by God, talking to English people, with the difference in accent and all, that could be very tricky.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, I suppose at least the Irishman who doesn't speak Irish can understand your accent.

Michael: Well you see most Irish would at least speak fairly plainly with the words but... The cockney accent...sure I didn't know what in the hell they were talking about! There was another young lad from our place and the first day he went to the café he had no friend to ask for the breakfast, so he asked for it himself and anyway the breakfast came down to him. The lads from Connemara with him said nothing at the table and anyway wasn't there two slices of sweet cake on the plate with the eggs and bacon and sausage. The young fellow said "What in the name o' God is this? Sure how can y'eat sweet cake with eggs and rashers?" One of the lads said to him, "What'd you ask for?" he said, "I asked for two slices of cake!"... "Ah, you're thinking about the cake that your mother baked"



Figure 1 - 20th C English 'Boot-Iron' or 'Foot-Iron'

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he said, "here, if you ask for cake you'll get sweet cake...ask for BREAD!" [Laughter].

Interviewer: So you got the start with Murphys...and were you with them very long?

Michael: Ah I suppose about four or five months. That was our first job in the country and sure we weren't used to any other kind of work.

Interviewer: And were you working direct for Murphy or working for a subbie?

Michael: Ah no, we were working direct for Murphy; there wasn't many of the smaller subbies around that time, there was no subbies with Murphy, it was all direct labour. We were paid direct by Murphys in cash, 'twas all cash at that time of a Friday. They'd come out to you with the paypackets. I never had any hassle getting paid by them, they were sound like that, no bother.

The agent I was working with was called Johnny Murphy as well – he was from Kerry – there was an awful lot of Kerry men with Murphy, naturally enough. I never worked with the Elephant, although I saw him a couple of times.

Well anyway, Murphy were sound when it came to paying out money, but talking about Health and Safety...well that's a different story! There was no changing huts at all. All that was there on the job was a toolbox². There was no place to change; we went, worked and came back home in the same clothes. There was no place to wash – not even for your hands – and there was no wet-gear on site, so if it rained you got soaked. You'd work through the rain unless it was really bad altogether, y'know?

Interviewer: But if it was just a shower you'd carry on working?

Michael: Ah carry on, yeah. That took its toll on you even as a young lad. There was no gloves or ear-muffs if you were working on the jack-hammer; but then again if they had given us them we'd have said, "What the hell are them for?"...sure we didn't know, y'see? Dust masks?...no dust masks...

Interviewer: There were a lot of men didn't like wearing the safety gear when it was introduced...especially the safety helmets.

Michael: No, we didn't like them either when we went on the real construction work, y'know.

² This was probably a steel tool lock-up which was common on sites for safe storage of hand-held mechanical and power tools.

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Interviewer: Some would say that at that time it wasn't just the companies not interested in health and safety, the men themselves weren't overly interested either.

So where did you go after Murphys then?

Michael: Ah I went working with a subcontractor then, on the building sites. I started on the building.

Interviewer: And why did you jack Murphys... was it just...?

Michael: Ah well, I was interested in more than doing the same thing all the time. I got fed-up with just digging trenches with Murphy. I wanted to get some experience on the construction side.

Interviewer: Were you still living with your sister at this time, now?

Michael: Ah, we had moved out into - not digs, I only ever stayed in digs only for two weeks, we stayed in a room in Kentish Town - a house where did our own cooking and all that. Anyway eventually I met a girl – she's today my wife! – and she lived down in the Elephant and Castle in south London,³ so I moved down there and had digs for a couple of weeks until I got sorted with a room.

So I got work, then, with a subbie called O'Mara from Limerick, doing groundwork and foundations, concreting and that sort of thing. Ah sure them days you could meet men from nearly every county in Ireland on a job; Mayo, Connemara, wherever. The money was a bit better than with Murphy and so was the facilities; there was a changing room and there was a heater that if you got wet you could throw the wet working clothes over to dry for the morning, and there was a bit of a tap – no hot water mind, but that you could at least wash your hands.

Interviewer: And how long you were with that subbie?

I'm not sure, now, to be honest...see we used to chop and change about quite a lot back in them times because there was just so much work around that you could.

Interviewer: Was all your work in London, Michael, did you stay in London?

Michael: I moved to reading for six months...yeah...but we moved around a good bit work-wise; we never stayed too long with the one contractor. If you'd hear now that there was another contractor who was paying maybe a fiver a week more,

³ The Elephant and Castle is a major road junction in South London, England, in the London Borough of Southwark. The surrounding residential and commercial areas area is known by the same name.

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well, then you'd go for that. Oh yeah that happened a lot. And another thing – if you could get seven-days-a-week that'd be a great bonus because the seven days that'd give you a good few bob. You might be talking to someone in the pub; -“where ya workin’?”...-“So-and-so contractors and we're working the seven days”...“Is there much work there?”...“Oh Jeez there's a heap of work; sure come on out with me.”

Interviewer: And where would those conversations mainly take place, now?

Michael: Ah in the pub, in the pub! If you were looking for work, don't bother with the site, go to the pub! And somebody would recommend you to the contractors or subbies. Another thing you'd ask, “Is it a long job?” Like how much work is there in time. Like a fellow, he got the start on this job and the first thing he asked, “how long is the job going to last?” – in case he'd be let off y'see? – and the auld foreman he said, “Well, I dunno, sure Rome wasn't built in a day”...“Oh I don't know about that”, he sez, “I didn't work on that job!” [Laughter]...ah Lord there used to be some crack! ^{25.00}

And then!...The first room we got ourselves after leaving my sister's, well the toilet was downstairs and *we had our kitchen up on the landing!* This was in the Angel...ah no...Kentish Town. There was a little sink, 'twas a wash-hand basin really, and a little small two-ringed cooker, no oven at all. And then, well, you ate your food inside in your bedroom. There was no kitchen only a cooker on the landing;

Interviewer: And what about water, was there a water supply?

Michael: Ah there was water, yeah, but of course there was no bathroom in the houses then. What we'd do then, we'd take our underwear to work with us. We'd be working til four o'clock on a Saturday and the public baths was closing at six. We'd hop off the van into the public baths, put our clean underwear on, go home then, have something to eat and get dressed and out for the night! We were enjoying it! Sure we all had new suits; out on a Saturday night - in those days there was no such thing as buying a ready-made suit; these were all tailor-made suits and the matching belt made of the same material. Everybody had the tie-pins and cufflinks as well; sure we were very dapper! The boring part then was during the week, when you'd come home from work and you'd have your bit o' food, and there was no-where to go only inside in the room; 'twas so boring, no television, no radio, no fuck all! A lot of the lads used go to the pub to pass the time 'cause they couldn't stick it inside in the room...[...].looking at the four walls. See then that started trouble with the landlady; they'd come home with too many pints on 'em.

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There was a crowd I knew stayed with one landlady and she was always giving out to them not to be coming in making noise and all that but that might happen for the nights they wouldn't have money, but then when they got paid anyway they'd start all over again. They wouldn't come home at all then but just go straight to the pub after work. So anyway she came up with an idea; she wrote a note and left it on every bedroom saying "Be in bed by 1 a.m.!" So the first lad got in and saw the note and said "Jesus Christ lads, come and look at this". See they read the note as saying "Be in bed before I am"! Sure they said that was like being a child at home when they'd have to go to bed before their mother! [Laughter].

And there was another fellow then, and he used come home and his wellingtons on. The landlady told him, "Take your wellingtons off when you get inside the door". That was fine except he'd come home some nights with a few pints on him and he'd forget. He'd take them off on the landing and kick them off and they'd hit the door!

Interviewer: And did you ever see these anti-Irish signs they used to talk about? I suppose in some ways, with the antics of some of the men, it's not surprising some of the landlords didn't want any Irish!

Michael: Well see, there was no agents or anything for finding places to stay in them days; there used to be notes on the doors or in the windows advertising vacancies. Ah yeah, I often seen signs that said "No Irish, no blacks", alright. Sure we usen't take any heed of them.

Interviewer: So that was the crack in digs and lodgings and that? Was it rough living?

Michael: But sure we weren't used to anything else anyway; we never had bathrooms or hot water at home, only what was boiled on the fire, so we never felt like we were missing anything. Ah sure 'twas heaven compared to that and, of course, we had the bit of money in our pocket; we never complained. What we didn't have we didn't miss. I was grand. ^{32,12}

Interviewer: So you were happy enough in London. Did you go back home much in the first few years?

Michael: Ah yeah, we used to go home every year. Then after I got married in 1968 and the kids came long – I've three kids and they're all living in Ireland, the three of them – we used to come back every year. My eldest lad was an accountant in London, got cheesed off with it and joined Riverdance -he was obviously a very good Irish dancer. He won eight All-Ireland titles and thirteen All-Britain Championships. Anyway after a few years of that he said he was going to live in Ireland. The middle son he was going with an Irish-descent girl in London;

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the mother was Sligo and the father Donegal. Anyway the parents decided to come home, so he followed them and he's married to her now up in Sligo. The youngest, my daughter, she finished school in London and said she wanted to go to college in Limerick. So all three of them are here. ^{33,30}

[Small-talk]

Interviewer: So taking a step back, now, when you got married in 1968, were you still working for this Limerick fella?

Michael: No, no, I was working then for two brothers from Kerry – Healys - that were subbies. They were doing all sorts of civil engineering and construction work. I was working with another fella from Donegal and I said to him one day about this subbie we had worked for, "That Tom...he's a great man". The Donegal man looked me straight in the eye and said, "Listen" he said, "There's no such thing as a good subbie...if you come across a good subbie, shoot him because he's bound to fuckin' turn bad!...don't give him the chance!" [Laughter]. And the same fellow said to me, one day, when we were talking about going home [Ireland] he says "I'll give you some advice, if you do go home, don't go back to your homeplace"...I asked him why not. "Well," he says, "If 'twas any good there, then you wouldn't be talking to me here now!...that's why you left it, because 'twas no good" [Laughter] ^{38,18}

Interviewer: Most of your work was all civil engineering work, was it? Did you work on the gas?

Michael: No, no. I was never on the gas. I worked mostly construction, but the civil engineering side. So if you were building an estate of a hundred houses, say; building the houses was considered construction but putting in the roads and sewers and the drainage connections, that was all civil engineering work. There was one place we worked on in Crawley, and the construction side of it [our subbie was doing both construction and civils], they weren't allowed to work on a Saturday but we were, because we were doing the roads and sewers – civil engineering. Different rules applied, but it didn't make much sense really. They'd say civil engineering if you were doing maintenance work on a sewer or something like that...see they'd look at things oddly, the managers and that.

Interviewer: So were you working for subcontractors for most of your time in London? And did you ever work...what did they call it...like on the 'lump', cash-in-hand?

Michael: Oh most of the time it was subbies, yeah. Sure everybody was working cash-in-hand; sure who didn't! 'Twas almost the standard way of working. Then they started to pay us by cheque and we'd have to get them changed in the pub; I didn't like that. The pubs would charge so much for a cheque usually, but sure even if they didn't you'd have to buy the governor a drink for his trouble.

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There were other governors then, they'd only give you half the money ...the usual excuse was they were running short of cash on that night; so you'd have to come in on the Saturday, after work, for the rest of it then, and spend a few more pound in there. Ah I used to hate that carry-on. Another thing they used to do when you'd ask them to cash a cheque for you, he'd say "Ah, it'll be a while now, we're very busy" and he'd give you a tenner out of the till to keep you going – like a sub – that would come out of your cheque but then it might be two hours or more before he'd come with the rest of the money.

Another favourite of the subbies was to give you a sub on the Friday instead of your full wages because then you'd have to turn out on Saturday to get the rest of your money. Murphy used to give the sub a lot. Anyway there was this one gangerman with them, he had a few drinks on him one night, and he was kind of boasting in the pub, after work, and carrying on about the responsibility of being a ganger. Another ex-Murphy man along the bar said, "To qualify to be a ganger for Murphy, all you need to be is twenty-four [inches] around the forehead!" [Laughter]

Interviewer: You never went back to work for Murphys again?

Michael: Oh No, just for them first few months when I got started.

[Small-talk]

Interviewer: Did you ever work on any of those really huge projects or for the big British firms?

Michael: No, not really, but I worked on some interesting kinds of projects like sewage treatment works it was very interesting to see how the water cleansing processes worked and the various filtration systems which waste water went through. We were concreting many of these specialist filtration tanks and bases etc. Sometimes the tanks would be designed to be cleaned out by a machine with a scraper bucket attachment that would scrape the surface of the tank. The floor of the tank was dished like a washbasin. Well that dished surface had to be perfect for the machine to be able to operate on it without damaging the concrete. It had to be spot-on. It would have to be the same as finished plasterwork. Also the filter-beds where they put the clinker⁴ in and we were given boxes of these special worms that had to go into the clinker; they came from some other country; it was interesting to see how all this worked. We did tanks for treatment plants in Lingfield in Surrey and Burstow, near Redhill.

⁴ Clinker is the stony residue of burnt coal or iron from a furnace. It is used as a filtration medium in water treatment.

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Interviewer: There was something else I meant to ask you about, when you were talking about digging and going out with subcontractors. Tell me about this idea of pacemakers?

Michael: Well, the thing with the pacemakers, well it was only the likes of Murphy and the cable contractors done that. They'd pace out eleven yards for every man to dig in a day, and that was it. And there was a pacemaker, then, he was given eleven yards too, but he was given ten shillings a day more than the others and he'd have his eleven yards out by maybe three o'clock.

Interviewer: So the idea then was that he'd be paid more to push the other men along with their digging. But if the other men caught up to the pacemaker, did they get the extra ten shillings.

Michael: Not likely, they didn't get any extra ten shillings...just extra trench to dig or something else to do! It didn't seem like there was much incentive for the men to beat the pacemaker except to say "I beat him"...It's like a boxer trying to beat everyone and there'd be lads who just wanted to beat the pacemaker out of pride. They'd take it personally like; "who does he think he is?" But they'd only do it once or twice, to prove they could match the pacemaker...they wouldn't be daft enough to do it every day, no, no.

The pacemaker would often get a leathering in the pub...he paid for his extra fuckin money – both ways – by digging and by getting a couple of belts and digs as well! [Laughter]. Remember though that the average daily money then was about four pounds and ten shillings, so an extra ten shillings was worth having. You'd buy a pound of steak back then for five shillings. You'd get a steak dinner with all the vegetables and extras in the café of an evening when you came in, for three shillings. So the pacemaker would get three free dinners on the extra he'd earn.

Interviewer: Did you have any interest in trade unionism? That would have been fairly strong in the '70s when you were working.

Michael: Ah no, not at all. I was never asked about joining a union; I wouldn't have bothered with any trade union stuff anyway, I wasn't really interested in that sort of thing. Dublin men were usually involved in all sorts of union activity on sites, but nearly all the Dublin men I seen on site, they were painters and decorators, only a few of them ever got involved in the heavy building work. I never seen a Dublin man digging...driving or painting was all I ever seen them at.

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Interviewer: Did you ever have any bad accidents...or see any? Do you think construction was a dangerous job?

Michael: Not really. It's the people that make construction dangerous. I always checked and watched out for where the danger spots were and I think that should have been a priority for everybody working on a site. So where you're working you've to ask yourself, is that safe? It's like driving a car, you need to be careful for yourself. I seen lads myself, and they'd be carrying heavy weight up a ladder but hadn't tied the ladder at the top - t'would have taken a minute or two – then they go off balance and... see it's the people that cause the accidents a lot of the time. It's the people that causes the accidents.

Interviewer: You would have been working in London at the height of the Troubles. Did you have any hassle or notice any changes – like in terms of discrimination and that?

Michael: No, not really, I never really experienced any direct hassle or discrimination myself. The only thing I noticed an odd time was that maybe – the next day or that [after a bombing] some people, even the lads on site, might be a bit iffy with you– you might find the English lads would be quieter with you and more distant. Ah but sure that was a bad time for us, y'know?...sure I was scared myself the times when they were planting the bombs through letterboxes and stuff...and sure them poor horses killed in Regent's Park.

I was pulled one Sunday morning; I was doing a job in Streatham or somewhere, doing some clearing up on a house or something. I had a Sherpa van – ex-Post Office – and I had all my tools in the back and there was a gas bottle. This policeman stopped me and asked me what had I in the van and when he seen the gas bottle he asked me to turn it on to see was there gas in it. He said to me, “No disrespect now, you're Irish” he said, “I've lots of Irish friends, but with all these bombs and what have you we have to take precautions”. I had no problem with that. I said, “I'm not blaming you” and sure in some ways wasn't he right?

The thing that got me [was] if they were fighting for the freedom of the north [Northern Ireland] why take it to other countries and killing people that had nothing to do with the north. There was no guarantee who they were going to kill – it could just as easily have been Irish people. But as the old people used to say - and I remember back when I was a kid and they were putting bombs in places then – why put a bomb where there's people. Why don't they bomb something that'll hurt them in the pocket; a building that nobody was in, or a bridge?

Interviewer: What did ye do in the way of socializing, Michael? Was it the Irish clubs and dancehalls?

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Michael: Ah yeah, well we used to go to the Shamrock Club in the Elephant & Castle – that was owned by Mick and Tom Casey, the wrestlers from Sneem, County Kerry – and the Buffalo in Camden Town. Then there was the Harp in New Cross ⁵ and the Blarney in Tottenham Court Road, the Gresham in Holloway Road.

I used to go to the White Hart in Fulham as well, to listen to Raymond Roland and then over to the Hibernian for the dance. The Hibernian in Fulham was the only dancehall that had a bar in it at that time. That would be around 1966-1967. Then we'd sometimes go to the King's Head opposite the White Hart where Finbar Dwyer and John Bowe used to play. Margaret Barry and Michael Gorman used to play there as well.

Then there was another great box-player, Seanie MacDonagh from Connemara – he and I came to London the same year. Not long after that Sean bought that lovely red Paulo-Soprani box he always played and he brought it into the Gloucester Arms down in the Elephant one Sunday and everyone was admiring it – Martin Mullin and Paddy Breen used to play in there as well and we were all listening to Seanie playing outside the pub and the next thing then the Black Maria pulled up and we were told, “move along lads”.

Interviewer: What about sport?

Michael: I never played football or anything like that; golf was my favourite sport. See there were lots of golf societies at that time – in the 70s and 80s – attached to Catholic parishes. It was a very social scene, lots of Irish lads you'd be out playing with. I loved it.

Interviewer: Just one thing that struck me we didn't talk about earlier. Why do you think the Irish were so clannish when they came here? As you said yourself, the Connemara men stuck together and the Donegal men tended to stick together. Do you think that harks back to the football?

Michael: I think that come from the close areas and when they got together they'd kind of clan together and stay together...it's like an army fighting a war, and they watched each other's backs, and when they all left, then and went to England they said they'd do the same here. It's like getting to know the ones from your village and then the ones from your parish...it's a little army!

Interviewer: I used to hear a lot of the older men when they met back home after being young men in London saying “We soldiered together”

⁵ Check – this was owned by John Byrne who also owned the Galtymore and Hibernian Clubs

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Michael: That's what I mean; the old people used say that...as I said there now, it's like a little army! Another thing, then, was that they were away from home. Everyone understood the reason you were there – 'cos you had no work at home – and they understood that you're feeling that you HAD to leave your home, and then we'll stay together and fight for the same thing...that we're all in the same boat, that's the reason we're here. It was a bonding thing, and it didn't matter what county-man he was, if he was suffering you tried to help...the Irish was good that way.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about?

Michael: Well another thing that people used say to me was about the blacks there in London. "How do ye put up with them blacks?" And I would say to them I worked with black men on the building sites and them men that emigrated from their own country was exactly the same as me! They came for the same reason – that they couldn't make a living in their own place, and them people, they would share half their sandwich with you if you needed it, real genuine people, y'know? I worked with them and they'd lend you money and you'd lend them money; we treated them the same as our townie – we could see no difference in them.

But I'll tell you something, not all the Irish are the same. There was one fella I worked with on this side [Ireland] – because I worked this side for four years [after returning] and he was on about the black people, "They're all over the hospital now" he says. I said "Who?"... "Ah black people". I said "They're good workers". "Well" he says, "I wouldn't let one o'them near me". I said "Hold on a minute now" I said, "If you got bad and that black man was the man that could save you up in the hospital, wouldn't you be glad to have him then?"... "Fuck you!" he says"...you're as bad as them!"

Interviewer: What was it that Ireland didn't give you that Britain could?

Michael: Oh the job, sure you got nothing without the job and money when you're young. I think my education didn't mean anything to me; it didn't affect me at all after leaving school. I was able to read and write, I could read drawings, setting out, I could do all the things I needed to do, so it was okay for me to get by in London.

Interviewer: Do you think London was a tough place to settle? Or was it impressive, or exciting?

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Michael: Not really, although it was quite a shock to come from the country to a place like London in the 60s. The way of living, and the rushing around and the buses and traffic and all that. God almighty...

But I was never out of work...there was always something to get by even at the worst times. Most people I knew in London that came from Ireland did OK, they made a decent living for themselves...well...anybody that WANTED to make a go of it. There's some people that got caught up with the booze and all that, but y'know...it wasn't the country's [Britain] fault. That would've happened in ANY country. I think with the ones that really took to the drink, there was a problem there probably before they ever went off the rails – the drink was their medicine and they took too much of it! There was something in their make-up made them go that way. It had nothing to do with the country.

It's not that many that went astray, and many of them still managed to keep it rolling along, they had a roof over their heads and they often managed to keep working. Sure look at the Polish here now...they're young lads and often very heavy drinkers...they remind me of the Irish lads in London sometimes.

In fact I'll tell you this; if I lived my life over again and had to come to England again I would NOT work for an Irishman...I'd work for the Englishman first, 'cause they treated us better than our own, they always did. I remember an English agent asking would we stay on a few hours later one night to get something cleaned up and finished and he gave us more than the hours we worked and he came and said in the morning "thanks lads for doing that extra work last night". If you did the same thing for an Irish subbie when you went looking for the extra hours at the end of the week, he'd say "Aren't you lucky to have the job!"...that happened every feckin' time.

The Irish contractors they'd have a smart way of putting things when they'd be telling you what to do. Like "Ah ye, so you can lay that length of pipe there and there, and get that trench done over the back and that'll keep you going 'til dinner"...like they were doing you some sort of favour, but the work they gave you would take the whole day normally; they'd be trying to fool you and push you into doing more than was expected all the time.

There was a fella from Westmeath...ah, well...he wasn't good at all. 'Twas mostly pricework I'd be doing for him but maybe once or twice a week the daywork would come in to him and if he put us on daywork well, he'd be there like your bloody shadow all day long. I said to him one day, "The longer you stay there over my shoulder, the less I'm going to do!" To be honest with you, now, most of them Irish contractors, they were the laziest feckers you could meet; they wouldn't work to keep themselves warm! See they were all the time thinking of how to make money without working.

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The Connemara men in London, we used to call these small breakaway subbies gangs “mushroom subbies” [Laughter]

Interviewer: I think we’ve pretty-much covered everything, Michael. Thanks very much.

Any final words about your time in London?

Michael: Ah London was great for me. Any place that you could put bread on the table, a roof over your head, get married and raise kids...sure isn’t that a good country? END

Original Interview # 6 – Michael Mc - Armagh

Name: Michael

Date of Birth: 1937

Place of Birth: Armagh

Date of Emigration to UK: 1954-1964

Date of Interview: November 9th, 2015 (Claregalway)

Interview Notes

1. Recording made in busy commercial hotel.
2. Tape quality [volume, clarity, diction] is variable throughout.
3. Background noise sometimes severe impediment.

[Interview cuts in at Tape 1 - 00.10]

Interviewer: But so I want to hear *your* story, Michael? [Interviewer explains recording process and reason for 3 recorders etc] so okay. So start at the beginning, I guess, I’m with Michael M, we’re in the Claregalway Hotel on November 9th, 2015 and Michael has kindly agreed to speak to me about his experiences in London, in the ‘50s and ‘60s.

Michael: Well, it’s from eh...’54 onwards for maybe ten years.

Interviewer: Well, okay, we’ll go from the beginning shortly, but you were just in the middle of telling me an interesting story about –

Michael: Oh, when we arrived in Hammersmith? After landing the job in Olympia, I arrived in Hammersmith and the bus station was just around the corner heading up towards Earl’s Court, there was a big bus depot there and nearby there was Fullers factory, they had big employment making cakes and things. Anyway, I went around the corner and I saw the noticeboard because I was looking for somewhere to stay. [This anecdote is completed later in interview]

Interviewer: Was this just after you arrived, now, or –

Michael: No, no, no...I started off. I was born and reared up in Armagh, about four Irish miles outside Armagh out towards Tyrone, in a small farming community which was ninety-plus percent Nationalist.

Interviewer: I kind of guessed that wasn’t a Galway accent you had there [Laughter]

Michael: Aye...well I married a Galway girl, y’see. But once you’d finished school you signed on at the Labour Exchange looking for a job and you got huge encouragement by the ‘powers that be’ up in the north to get you out of the

Original Interview # 6 – Michael Mc - Armagh

north!¹ With a name like Mxxxxxx, they didn't even really have to ask what school I went to...it was kind of obvious. Anyway, they got me a job in Watford,² - that would have been around the end of September 1954 - they encouraged me and another fellow to go, and they gave us free travel tickets plus a fiver in my pocket. That was the government...the Unemployment Exchange (sic) in the local village!

That was a deliberate policy – certainly in Northern Ireland, Armagh and Tyrone - to get shot of those they thought might later be 'trouble-makers' – they saw trouble coming and that was the most likely way to get them out...soft-soap them... (In response to interviewer's straight question) basically because we were Catholic...now of course they would deny that and the fiver was in cash so there'd be no record. I'll tell you something, in our urban district council, there were twelve people employed by them and I think something like ninety percent of the rates were paid by Catholics, but there was only one Catholic employed by the council and he was the cleaner!

Interviewer: Well, I think most historians, y'know, irrespective which side of the community they come from, recognise the level of imbalance you were dealing with.

Michael: But then again, of course, I wanted a year off after the Leaving Cert and the times were full of adventure and we had nothing to lose by going to England.

Interviewer: You were just about to tell me about the derivation of the word 'Culchie' the way you heard it?

Michael: Oh yes, that's right. Well, what happened was – now this isn't contemporaneous, you're jumping forward a bit –

Interviewer: I know, I know...and what we'll do is jump back, but I just wanted to hear that story while you have it in your head

Michael: Because I might not be able to tell it to you in an hour – something else will have pushed it out! [Laughter] I can remember I arrived in Hammersmith. Anyway, I went around the corner and I saw the noticeboard because I was looking for somewhere to stay and there *were* some "No Irish" signs but the one that caught my eye was one that said "No Irish or Culchies"...I didn't know what a Culchie was!

¹ Michael seems to be inferring here that the Unionist powers in the north were actively seeking to remove Catholic labour from the state. Alternatively this may have simply been a non-sectarian economic strategy for removing surplus labour from the country.

² A town and borough in Hertfordshire, England, situated 17 miles (27 km) northwest of central London and inside the circumference of the M25.

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Anyway I got fixed up with a place later that day and afterwards was talking to a person who was from home (Armagh) – he was a good bit older than me - who worked as a painter for the local Borough Council in London. He'd be asking you about people from home who were adults to him and I'd be telling him about their children because they were of my generation. So he told me that there were these two young Irish fellows in Hammersmith who came looking for a room to let, suitable for two, but English wasn't their first language, they were Gaelic-speakers and the landlady asked them where they were from, and they said Kiltimagh³, y'see? And sure she hadn't a clue where Kiltimagh was; she thought it was a country or a different place altogether. Anyway things didn't turn out well, and the boys when they got a few bob working they kept coming in inebriated and noisy, so she put them out. She is supposed to have said to someone afterwards, "those Irish are desperate, but by jove you'd want to meet the Culchies!" [Laughter].⁴

Oddly enough the other thing that I can still see in my mind's eye about that notice was that the handwriting was beautiful and it was done with a Parker pen in blue ink. It was written by someone who had education.

Interviewer: That's just so interesting, because that term 'Culchie'...I mean, I knew that when I was a lad and it would have been used regularly in conversation in London *by the Irish*; it would have been used as a pejorative term, like, to wind somebody up, y'know. But it's just interesting that it could have been created by an English landlady!

Michael: So you see when RTE, the national broadcaster was getting going in the early 1960s, and I came back home and spent the rest of my working career at RTE. I was a bit different from many of the young Irish, although actually there were quite a few like me, but they never seemed to come up on the radar as much; I never smoked in my life and I'm not a drinker either.

Interviewer: That's interesting. See I have a theory that many of the young men who went to London weren't the mad heavy drinkers that the stereotype depicts. I think many of them didn't drink before they left Ireland and there were at least some of the 1950s migrants, pioneers, for example, who didn't drink at all. I suspect the

³ The name of a country town in Co. Mayo - see *World Heritage Encyclopaedia* Article Id: WHEBN0002025485, available at http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/en/kiltimagh#cite_note-5 (accessed 9 May, 2017).

⁴ This is in all likelihood a well-worn anecdote remediated through the London-Irish community. The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd Edition) describes the etymology of the word "culchie", as being a mildly derogatory term for a country person or one not from the city of Dublin, as "Apparently alteration of Kiltimagh, Irish Coillte Mach (older Mághach), the name of a country town in Co. Mayo." The word "culchie" is derived from the Irish word "coillte", the plural of coill, the Irish word for "wood", an area of growing trees. It was used, mainly in Mayo and Galway, by townspeople as a condescending reference to people from rural areas. It is more likely that it came into use in Dublin in the mid-sixties as a counterfoil to the country people's use of the word "Jackeen" for Dublin people. It is, of course, plausible that all derivations, including the story of the London landlady are true.

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changing point for most that did come when they found a wife – or partner of some sort.

Michael: Well...yes, the RIGHT one!...yes, well as far as I'm concerned, now I'm giving you my perspective here, at least nine times out of ten those young men DID find the right partner and the women made them settle. See, sometimes the pressure was to get in to that drinking culture because very often that was your only means of companionship, what was a man to do; sit looking at four walls? The radio was mains radio in those days so you couldn't take it into the room with you.

Interviewer: But c'm'ere we'll start this from the beginning again, because I'm jumping about a bit, so I know you were born in Armagh in 1937 and what was your family like?

Michael: I had two brothers. I did my Leaving Cert at the Christian Brothers School up there in Armagh – cycled in every day, and wanted an education.

Interviewer: My own family in the Republic, it was only my father's family who had enough money to pay for secondary education, my mother's family had none. Did money or wealth influence your chances of education?

Michael: No, no. We were different from the south; being from the six counties meant that we got free secondary education that was brought in by the Labour Government after the war. I was the first person from my primary school to benefit from that secondary education. In my last year at school I did the attendance board, and I can still see it to this day; I put in ninety-plus-three – that was ninety people should be at school and three that could leave at any time but preferred to stay at school to get a bit more education.

I went to the Brothers then to do the Leaving Cert (sic)...let me tell you I gave them a rough time! And anything I made in this world, I owe to the Christian Brothers. I was dreadful for scrapping...and the bigger-the-better, you know what I mean? I can remember getting thrown out...oh God, I'll never forget it!...never forget it...

Interviewer: You were fond of a scrap?

Michael: Yes...yes. In other words, I wouldn't tolerate bullying; I never bullied anyone in my life! [Michael embarks upon some school stories about fighting not relevant to this research] So anyway, I got expelled. I was walking home thinking of excuses for my parents, when I met Brother Ahearn and he ripped me out of it! [Gave him a severe dressing down]...ripped me out of it and he says, "The only reason, Michael, that I'm saving your skin is...we need you for

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the football team!" [Laughter] They gave me chances and eventually I had a Eureka moment and copped myself on!

[Michael embarks upon some other school and football stories not relevant to this research]

So anyway, they encouraged me to go to Watford – altho' they'd deny it – with a free ticket and a fiver in cash, altho' wait 'til I tell you about the five-pound-note...I ran into a lot of trouble with that! It was a frigg'in' Scotch one and nobody would take it in London...[Laughter]

Anyway so I headed for London...got the boat and the train down to Euston; and didn't it go through Watford but it didn't stop there.

Interviewer: Which route was that you went, then? Did you have to go down to Dublin?

Michael: No, no, no...Heysham; Belfast-Heysham. There was a fellow from home that had gone before us and he met us at Euston and took us back to Watford, where we were meant to report for work at British Rail at Kings Langley Station. And the station-master was a Welshman called Jones – a very religious man - I was meant to be a general assistant/porter, I could issue tickets, put stuff on the train, help people with their luggage, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: When you went, then, was this for a fixed term or...did you know?

Michael: Oh it was a permanent job if I wanted it. You must remember that there was a dreadful shortage of staff and labour of all kinds back then. At that time the Jamaicans, well, they hadn't started bringing them in - that's why you never saw 'no blacks' on the (rooms-to-let) signs at that time – this was before their time.

Interviewer: Well, now, you just completely confirmed something another interviewee reckoned – that the 'No blacks, no dogs, no Irish' signs didn't start appearing until the black immigrants started coming.

Michael: Paddy, the fellow who met us, brought us back to Watford and he had organised somewhere for me to stay. Brendan, the schoolmate I travelled over with, he had given up secondary education and so was sent to a different job than me, so we parted company.

Paddy brought me up to Ford Langley Road in Watford and there was a café run by a Mrs Perceval, whose husband was a brilliant lithographic artist in Fleet Street who was so good, he only needed to work part of each week, but then unfortunately he'd come back again a couple of days later ossified [Laughter]. Anyway, I've always been very lucky with women, I ended up helping out Mrs Perceval in the café and although I didn't get paid, we had an arrangement

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whereby I'd get the rent reduced by a certain amount as wages, see? When I was assigned to Kings Langley I'd choose to go on the early morning shift, I'd get the first train out of Watford to Kings Langley and that was the station where you'd get the 'bowler hat' brigade who worked in headquarters in Euston and in the City would go from; they were all living along that line...it was the commuter belt.

What happened was, there was roadworks going on outside King's Langley station just coming up to that first Christmas, and the foreman – I don't recall his name, but he was a youngish fellow, mid-thirties at the most – for this small subcontractor asked me would I mind the lights for him when they weren't working, because they'd be stolen and he paid me cash-in-hand for doing that.

Interviewer: And would most of the lads working for that subcontractor, then, would they have been Irish?

Michael: Almost all of them were Irish, yes, and the fellows he had, he tried to mind them well enough and look after them, he was kind enough that way.

But before we did, there was a time lag in the trains back out, so Brendan and Paddy and meself decided we'd go off to get a bite to eat. Just across the road from Euston there was a derelict site and it was being cleaned up; this was a dreary October day, now. There was a group of Irish lads, perhaps half-a-dozen or so and they were piling timber together for burning and generally clearing up this site. I remember looking at them and the first thing that struck me about them was that they were totally ill-clothed and ill-equipped for the work they were doing, no protective clothing of any kind. Y'know often the ones that did fall off the cliff, it was often about injuries – especially to the head – there was no head protection or anything. Now, I'm deviating but; everything would be going fine, and they'd get an injury – back, leg, shoulder, something like that – and no money and any few bob they'd saved, they drank it, and the next thing they're on skid row. ^{34.04}

Interviewer: They'd get caught in the system

Michael: Exactly, they'd get caught in the system. And I was always very sensitive to the lads who were getting casual work because I reckon that a good number of the men on the sites that I worked on that men would get, for example, head injuries that might leave no visible signs but which affected them mentally. You'd get talking to then and you'd know they were damaged.

I remember a Galway man I got chatting with and he got a head injury and was damaged by it, he had a son and the wife must have left him because of the carry-on with drink and what have you. He was addicted to these telephone

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tipping services for the horses – a complete waste of money. So I made a deal with him, I said you give me the money and I'll pay you whatever the odds were if they win. And at the end of the week, I handed him back the stake money...he hadn't a winner! I said there's your money, but I didn't realise the damage he had.

What had happened him, he was mixing concrete on site one day and when he straightened up he hit the back of his head on the sharp-end of a scaffold pole that was sticking out – there was no hard-hats or protective plastic cappings in those days! Anyway, he was hospitalised and when he came out he just wasn't right, y'know? Of course, the wife she wouldn't put up with it, and there he was trying to raise the young fellow himself and trying to earn a few bob. Those were the kind of cases that went terribly wrong.

Interviewer: Oh you're absolutely right, like there were some real tragedies. And your right in pointing out that often those tragedies...there would be something that would trigger it, like an injury. Because most of these guys were working in a casualised labour system they weren't paying National Insurance or tax, so they couldn't get insurance or treatment and couldn't sign on.

Michael: But it was worse than that because National Service was at its height! These young men who went in their early twenties, sure they started putting pressure on them about doing National Service – and what did they do? They would just change their names - give false names at the Labour Exchange or on the jobs they were working on and most of the time the people in charge knew this, but they were so desperate for labour in those days that mostly they'd turn a blind eye. That's another reason that the casual working became the norm.

Interviewer: I know men like that, who went to England around that time who DID National Service rather than go back home to Ireland...but I'd say most Irishmen didn't.

Michael: If you got your call-up papers you always did the medical in the hope that you'd fail; because if you did then you were exempted and you could stay 'legit', work under your own name and stay in the system. If you passed the medical and they put the pressure on to go, you went back underground, returned home for a while and then came back under another name. But a lot of people paid the price for that, because they had lost service and insurance stamps and all that.

Interviewer: What seems to have happened to a lot of men – my own uncles included – was that they ended up living relatively happy and settled lives in England because they got to a certain point where they could see there was no way they could stay underground – you had to be in the system and stay in the system. So they'd get legitimate jobs – PAYE employment – change their names back to their real names...because they ended National Service, I don't remember when, but...

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Michael: Well, they began to phase out National Service in the late 1950s...y' see there was the IRA trouble in '56; the Armagh Barracks and the Omagh Barracks...remember there was trouble here?⁵ and some of the 'hats'⁶ decided "hold on a minute, why are we training these fellows to be soldiers when they'll probably eventually turn around and be attacking us!". So it was probably around that time that they stopped bothering Irish people about joining up...you could join up if you wanted to but you didn't have to. That was around '56 I would say. That's why when I came in '54 I saw a few of these lads – they were a bit older than me and they were under pressure to do National Service – see you had to do it by a certain age – was it 26 or 27? Something like that.

But so, on the railway I would do the early-morning shift, I'd get the first train out and I'd be back into Watford with my day's work done on the 1.33 train in the afternoon, it was about seven minutes, so I was into Watford at 1.40 p.m.

Interviewer: So just so I understand you, so you were doing two jobs, effectively?

Michael: Well, so what was happening then, in the afternoon I'd work on the 'lump'. See I could've stayed in the station – and sometimes did! - The only thing that drove me out was the friggin' mice! [Laughter]...I'm not jokin' ya!

Interviewer: So you'd basically finish your shift in Watford?

Michael: Get the 1.30 train, go up the road to the café and there'd be fellows in Mrs Perceval's café would ask you 'Do you want an afternoon's work?'...sure here was I, an eighteen-year-old fit young man and up for the work.

Interviewer: It intrigues me...here was an army of young men, who hadn't been overly affected by the War. Obviously in the Second World War from the British perspective there were a whole generation of young men killed; there were a whole load more injured – either physically or mentally, or both – who weren't capable of heavy work, so there was a huge shortage of young, fit, healthy, competent men. That's where you guys come in...

Michael: Indeed, that's where I came in! And Mrs Perceval's café was the base.

Interviewer: She ran the café, but she didn't do the hiring?

Michael: Ah no-no-no-no-no! There'd maybe be a Scotch fellow (sic), a carpenter ganger who'd want help on a job for the few hours in the afternoon. There'd be other

⁵ In Ulster

⁶ An old military colloquialism; 'Brass Hats', refers to the powers in charge, the establishment.

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young lads would be taken on for a few hours the same way. It all worked out very well for me there.

Interviewer: Did you ever come across any of the Connemara lads that'd be Irish-speaking?

Michael: I did, but it wasn't til I went up to London, so we'll come to that in order! So anyway, that's what I did, and I helped out in the café and it was taken off the post-office book.

When the weather was bad and I didn't get any lump work, I'd be off down the library studying and had my notebook with me in Kings Langley so when the shift was quiet, I'd do a bit of study then as well.

Interviewer: So at this stage did you know what you ultimately wanted to do?

Michael: Oh yes, yes. See I was always mad into generating electricity when I was at school; I would be reading books about making transformers, I had a bicycle set up and I was fascinated with it and would be trying to make generators as experiments and what have you. See to the people where I came from, this was...the Seventh Wonder of the World – it was wonderful; I was into that stuff and our house was the house they came to to listen to the matches. [Michael explains his development of interest in broadcasting technology through Gaelic football in the 1940s] So I knew I wanted to do something in that line and I became interested in broadcast engineering, which was a new industry back then.

My downfall was, when I was first living in Watford there was a fellow called Whelan keeping a Gaelic football team together out there, but they'd play in New Eltham way down in south London, a long way from Watford. But anyway I had the misfortune to run in to a fellow from home called Seamie McDermott playing a Junior match one Sunday, who played for St. Monica's in Hoxton Square.⁷ The McDermotts were the milk people for Armagh City and Seamie's mother was from a few doors up from us in the village I came from. He saw me playing in the first match in New Eltham that Sunday as he was getting ready to play in the second match and sure he wouldn't hear of anything but that I had to play for St. Monica's from then on, which meant shifting from Watford up to London...so that was my demise!

⁷ St Monica's RC Church, an economically-built but distinctively-designed mission church and priory, by E. W. Pugin for the Augustinians, was built in 1864 on Hoxton Square, a small and – until relatively recently – residential/light-industrial garden square just off Old Street, in the London Borough of Hackney but right on the edge of the City of London. It has a long history of Irish migrant associations stretching back to the mid-nineteenth century – see 'Hoxton - St Monica's Priory' in *Taking Stock: Catholic Churches of England and Wales*, available at <http://taking-stock.org.uk/Home/Dioceses/Archdiocese-of-Westminster/Hoxton-St-Monica-s-Priory> (accessed 15 May, 2017).

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Interviewer: There was an old school friend of mine that lived on Hoxton Square [...] so I know exactly where St. Monica's is. Would you believe that area is now probably the most expensive real estate in London!

Michael: Oh yes, I remember now where I ended up staying with McDermott; in 48, Gladstone Road, in the Elephant & Castle⁸ while I was playing for St. Monica's. The people who owned the house were Kerry and there was a convent at the end of the street. I think Seamie was working in Fords of Dagenham. It was near the Imperial War Museum and we would be up early in the morning and practice Gaelic football on the lawn in front of the museum...much to the annoyance of the fellow in charge of the place! [Laughter] And we were close to Southwark Cathedral as well. [...] But I was still working for British Railways – I actually got a transfer with British Rail and ended up working in...is it Waterloo? Yeah, Waterloo Station, I could walk to it. But it was then I started becoming very observant of the Irish lads. I could walk to work in Waterloo, and it was then that I started becoming very observant of the Irish lads because I think wasn't there was a Rowton House near the Elephant & Castle?⁹ Also there was a Salvation Army place up around Waterloo, I think.

Interviewer: And were you still doing two jobs when you moved down there?

Michael: Oh God, yes! I was still keeping the double-shifting going when I moved down to Waterloo. I'd do the night shift, see. There was facilities for the British Rail workers for showers or baths and hygiene and lockers, food and that kind of thing, so I more or less operated out of Waterloo Station and after finishing the night-shift I'd go off and get a shift on the lump whenever I could.

Interviewer: That was a pretty useful arrangement to have. A lot of them lads, now, were probably living in digs and what have you.

Michael: Now, those digs, at 48 Gladstone Street, was a great place for the guys that worked in the Mooney's Pubs because I think the husband of the woman that ran it worked with Mooneys.¹⁰ There was a fellow called Moriarty, who was a

⁸ The Elephant and Castle is a major road junction in South London, England, in the London Borough of Southwark. The surrounding residential and commercial areas are known by the same name.

⁹ The Rowton House Michael is referring to here was actually located further west along the banks of the River Thames in Vauxhall, but was certainly within normal walking distance of Michael's lodgings in Gladstone Street.

¹⁰ The Irish firm of S. G. Mooney & Son Brewery chain of Dublin, Ireland purchased 'The Boars Head' on Fleet Street around 1700 and it became the first Irish pub outside Ireland. It was renamed the 'Tipperary' in 1918 at the behest of printers in Fleet Street returning from the Great War (refer to <https://www.londonmembers.com/memorials/tipperary-pub> - accessed 16 May, 2017) Clocks by Thomas Tompion (1638 - 1713, 67 Fleet Street) became a notable feature of Mooney's Irish pubs (see also Maurice Gorham, *Back to the Local*, (London, 1949), p.131-132). The pub also became the first pub outside Ireland to have bottled Guinness and later draft. Mooneys had eight 'pubs' in London as late as 1963 and had traditionally employed men to serve behind the bar, but much to the furore of the 50 male barmen the company employed, took on two barmaids in 1963. Although this move has proved popular with the male customers, the male staff held an emergency meeting of their Trade Union, protesting that a woman's place was in the home, and not behind a bar, and also that if a 'pub' sells good beer, it doesn't need female 'gimmicks'. 25-year-old Kathleen Corrigan, who migrated from County Mayo in Ireland, was shown in a contemporary newspaper photo of the time serving in Mooney's in the Strand – refer to

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taxi-man and he ran 'The Kingdom' GAA football team more or less from Mooneys on the Strand.¹¹ He used the pub as his office, really, for everything; if you wanted an afternoon's work or whatever.

Interviewer: So was he doing taxi work from there?

Michael: He was running a *taxi business* AND hiring out labour – he was doing everything - started out working as a barman with them, but ended up as a taxi-man but also placing labour for various subcontractors – essentially acting as an agent. But he'd be looking for you to play for the Kingdom.

[...]

And, going back to the Watford job, one of the things I just remembered; I used to quite enjoy – another odd-job I fell into around that time as well was putting up the clotheslines in newly completed houses on the huge...was it Hemel Hempstead? housing estate being built at that time. I watched all of that going up.

Interviewer: They were all part of that new-town construction schemes the government had going then. There was two or three big schemes I can think of – Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Harlow

Michael: I don't know where Hemel Hempstead is in relation to Watford – it's not too far away, I think, but he'd pick me up in the van of an afternoon and we'd be off fixing these things for the rest of the day; digging and concreting the bases for these lines in the garden, the last thing that went up was the clothesline, and I did a hell-of-a-lot of those I can tell you! That was a great little number. That was an Irish subbie who had that work as well. I noticed a lot on the Hemel Hempstead job though; a lot of the hod-carriers were Irish. That was a tough job and a dangerous job. Even at that relatively young age you wouldn't want to be doing that job for more than five or seven years, sure your shoulders would be gone with the hod-lifting.

Interviewer: Anyway, so you ended up in the Elephant & Castle.

Michael: I ended up in the Elephant & Castle. I was working in Waterloo. So around that time I started going to night-classes at the 'tech' to qualify in broadcast engineering. I was still playing GAA for St. Monica's and there was a fellow I came across playing football from Armagh City who was a payroll clerk for Higgs and Hill and he gave me work with them.¹² One of the jobs he used to get

<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-aug-08-1963-barmaids-cause-an-upset-the-irish-firm-of-mooneys-who-69406575.html> (accessed 16 May, 2017)

¹¹ This is probably Johnny Moriarty, who was heavily involved in the London GAA county board set-up and was from Lispolse in Kerry. He remained involved at club and board level throughout the 1950s-1970s. See Pat Griffin, *Gaelic Hearts: A History of London GAA, 1896-1996*, (London, 2011), pp.227-367.

¹² Higgs and Hill Ltd were a well-established London-based British building contractor who employed notable numbers of Irish migrant builders in the latter twentieth-century. They were founded in 1974 in Vauxhall, now in the London Borough of Lambeth, and went on to complete many prestigious projects including London's former County Hall on the South Bank.

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me to do was down in Bermondsey¹³ - some kind of fantastic canteen they were building - I think maybe for the BBC? Higgs and Hill had the main contract – they had me cutting out openings in brick or concrete walls and floors for building services; ducting piping and that sort of thing.¹⁴ Another job Higgs and Hill gave me with two English brothers who were very handy fellows – and this was a thing I never go over – and this was good fair ground. The foreman came and he marked an 'X' like that and he said if the maps were right - bearing in mind this was a bomb-damage site! There was no benchmarks or anything. "I reckon" he says, "If you dig there, keeping it narrow and throw the stuff well back" and he said "You should come upon the existing sewer." So what he wanted us to do was dig out trenches to connect new sewers to existing; I remember we'd to dig down where he marked the trench –. I did the pointing on the new joint; one part cement to seven parts sand...because it was such a tight spot and the other two fellows were a bit too corpulent to get at it! [Laughter].

And the other thing was – you were talking about Tara's GAA? There was a fellow from Carlow; he was Cooney or Rooney or something like that; he was involved somehow with Tara GAA club¹⁵ and was always on the look-out for players...[...]. Anyway I think he was hiring for Cubitts¹⁶ and was another source of work for many Irishmen in London.

Interviewer: So just to be clear, would you say that the GAA in those days was a significant networking or recruiting influence for building work?

Michael: Huge! Huge!...Moriarty and the Kingdom? Sure there was no other reason they existed; Father Curley, a Galway man with St. Monica's and I can't remember your man's name that was with Higgs and Hill, but he was why Seamie McDermott and me were playing for St. Monica's. There was another McDermott man played centre-half back for that team, a bloody good plasterer from Roscommon and a fine footballer.

We played the Kingdom one Sunday out in Hackney Marshes, which was where St. Monica's home ground was; that was a big win for us, we played out of our skins that day...which wouldn't be very often! Father Curley was beside himself with joy. I always remember Seamie asking the Roscommon

See British History Online: *Survey of London: Volume 26, Lambeth: Southern Area*. Originally published by London County Council, London, 1956. Available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol26/pp1-17#fn66> (Accessed 16 May, 2017).

¹³ A district of south-east London within the London Borough of Southwark.

¹⁴ This remains a common task required in refurbishment construction work where openings for building services, mechanical/electrical services etc. cannot be pre-formed and are therefore cut out manually as work proceeds.

¹⁵ Tara GAA were the team the interviewer's father played for back in the 1960s – a point which came up in general conversation and which elicited this recollection.

¹⁶ Holland, Hannen & Cubitts were a major London-based British main contractor operating in the London Metropolitan Region in the post-war period and well-known for employing Irish labour. They had been one of the contractors employing Irish labour under the wartime recruitment schemes.

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McDermott what company was he working for and he looked up at yer man and said, "Are ya mad! sure there's no company would pay me enough to keep me in beer money...I'm on the lump!" [Laughter] ...I'll always remember that.

That aside, now, when I was living in the Elephant & Castle I'd often notice the Murphy's – the green lorries – they'd be in and out of Waterloo and around the town and I'd get talking to lads – you could go with them (for casual work) if you wanted to, but I didn't 'cause I was busy enough – but they (Murphy) seemed to be good, now, to fellows that had 'gone on the turn' and were there maybe broke, y'know what I mean? Well, they'd give out to them and help them on the lorries and what have you – if they didn't help you then you knew you weren't wanted! – but mostly they'd help lads, they'd give out to them and put them on the lorry and straighten them out for the day, and they'd get their money for the day; most of those lads were in the Rowton Houses and things.

Interviewer: But then again, of course, you could say Murphy were not really helping them in the long-run because it became a vicious cycle for most of them lads; all they wanted was to get enough money to go back on the beer again, then they'd get hammered and the whole thing would happen the same way the next day. But some of them men were great workers, all the same.

Michael: Oh they'd be good workers, yeah. Some of the gangers I knew, they'd take the odd quid off these lads – not for themselves mind! – It was a sort of a 'credit union' and they'd give it them back later and look after them a bit. An awful lot of lads got into trouble with those awful smogs we had in the 50s; work stopped and these lads were living hand-to-mouth and they were flying it; they never thought of saving anything for a rainy day and then of course they couldn't work for long periods. The smart lads, some of them, would put a bit aside; I remember one wiser fellow I was chatting with on a job one day and he was saying to some of the other lads, "well, I'm eight weeks in credit with the digs (rent)" – see he was trying to hint to them to be smarter with the shillings. It was a self-preservation thing. Oh but the smog did cost a lot of people dearly...

Some might take the hint... Then of course food was very scarce anyway back then; I don't recall exactly but I think rationing was still in force a few years after I went to London and when you came out of the station at the Elephant & Castle there was a roaring trade done out of a... 'hot-dog stand' we'll call it (not like the ones you'd see today, mind!)... and McDermott and meself would spend an hour there talking to all these ones goin' off to Rowton Houses and hostels and things. A shilling each they'd give for a mug of tea and a steak & kidney pie... sure that was a good feed!... and sometimes lads that we knew from home

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used to come and they'd sponsor them¹⁷ and the Rowton lads would sometimes slip you the odd half-crown back¹⁸ ...ah they would, they would...but sure you knew well they were gonna hit you for five shillings further down the line! But anyway, it was neither here nor there...there still the old bonding from the local community.

Interviewer: That's another odd comparison now, I was talking to a Connemara man who came in the '60s and he talked about the problems he had dealing with the English – he was a native Irish-speaker, but he also talked about the almost clannish way that the Irish – especially the Connemara men – bonded.

Michael: Well I'm gonna tell you what I know about the Connemara men. That canteen place we were working on – I could still go to it today if they hadn't changed the roads around! We had a Connemara fellow on that job for a few days...an old-style navvy, the hob-nailed boots, corduroy trousers tied at the knees with twine. I had a bit of Irish and talked to him a bit, although the dialects would be different. Anyway he was only there a few days; we worked out from Higgs and Hill that he had met up with Connemara men and had gone off with them. His name was Martin – now I don't know was that his first name or his surname but he spoke a sort of 'broke English' - through him I got to know a few of them Connemara lads, because they didn't forget! You'd meet them at Mass and they'd be saying to one another "That's yer man that helped out Mairtín" or whatever. Anyway I fell in with them and we'd be sitting in the pub and there they'd all be babbling away in Irish to each other and I'd say to them for the craic, "Did yous never learn any bloody English at all?!" But anyway I found them grand...to be honest I was always struck by the innocence and naivety of some of them. So that was the first Connemara man I met, Mairtín.

So anyway, I was still doing the studying on the side, so I was – because I wouldn't work in wet weather like many of the other lads - and then eventually, after maybe three or four years I got the City and Guilds qualification and became a qualified broadcast engineer. I started off to do the first stage in Regent's Street Polytechnic and I finished off qualifying in Wandsworth¹⁹ because when I'd done the Intermediate stage, Associated Electrical Industries gave me a job; in AEI's telecommunications division.²⁰ Shortly afterwards I

¹⁷ I think what Michael is referring to here is that the lads from home would buy these other less fortunate lads the tea and food.

¹⁸ This reflects very closely the old Irish rural custom of 'Luck-money' or 'Luck-penny' by which the beneficiary of a transaction was expected to give back a small amount of the payment for luck – see Steve Roud, *The Penguin Guide to the Superstitions of Britain and Ireland*, (London, 2003), p.56.

¹⁹ A borough in south-west central London, bordering Lambeth, Richmond, Hammersmith & Chelsea. It was another part of London which was reasonably well-settled by post-war Irish migrants.

²⁰ Associated Electrical Industries (AEI) was a British conglomerate formed in 1928 through the merger of the British Thomson-Houston Company (BTH) and Metropolitan-Vickers electrical engineering companies. AEI also acquired Seimen, Edison and Swann – a major German Engineering company. By 1961 it was Britain's largest electrical manufacturer covering a wide range of manufacture, design and distribution within the following divisions: Turbine-Generator, Transformer, Traction, Switchgear, Instrumentation, Electronic Apparatus, Heavy Electrical Plant, Motor and Control Gear,

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ended up installing telecommunications systems at the offices of a big oil company at Victoria – straight in front of you when you come out of the station...I think it was Esso or Shell. It was a bit of a turnaround from my Higgs and Hill days when I was knocking out holes for mechanical and electrical gear and now here I was installing it! But that stood me in good stead because when I was putting the systems in, if I came upon openings or holes that hadn't been formed or cut I'd often do it myself! There was a Galway man on that job was the tea-boy, and I was still very much part of the 'gang'; I'd be sitting down with the lads on site.

Interviewer: That must have been pretty much 'state-of-the-art' technology at that time. What year are we talking about now?

Michael: This was around the late 50s / early 1960s and it was fairly avante garde work because most broadcast engineering was done up to then using thermionic valves, but I was using the new stuff; the semi-conductor, and they didn't take to it. The old technology was very cumbersome and prone to overheating with large valves and all that. The same technology I was using by then would fit in a shoebox! I ended up working on a large systems project in Olympia, near Earl's Court, and that's why I was looking for digs in Hammersmith when I saw the Culchie sign!

I was around four years at that job. I worked on Hatfield Hospital, now that was out a good way, so I'd stay out there. I worked in Southampton. By the start of the 1960s I had ended up getting two job offers as telecommunications and broadcast engineer. Standard Cables and Telephones in Craysfoot offered me £17-a-week, which was damn good money back then. But I ended up going with AEI for £15.10s/week because I saved on the travelling costs and they included a free lunch as part of the deal, so I saved on food as well.

Interviewer: So going back to your days working in the Elephant & Castle and playing up in Hoxton, how did you settle in London compared to the suburbs of Watford? [Laughter]

Michael: One of the most striking things I recall about living in that part of London was the smell. During the war the instructions from the War Ministry were not to save the churches, so there were a lot of churches damaged by incendiary bombs dropped by the Germans. Of course the churches had the best of oak beams and when a church was bombed it'd be lying derelict, but the chemicals were still burning into the timber beams for years afterwards...and the stench was

Cables, Construction (Cables and Lines) Radio and Electronic Components, Telecommunications; employing over 100,000 people and with works in more than 50 UK towns- see 'AEI' in *Grace's Guide to British Industrial History*, available online at <http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/AEI> (accessed 23 May, 2017).

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unbearable sometimes...especially to a fellow like me who didn't smoke!...t'would give you an awful headache.

Interviewer: Did you ever get to work with any of the other migrants coming into London at that time, like the Asians or Caribbeans?

Michael: Well, in my time, now, most of the site labour was either Irish or Scottish; not many English or Welsh and there weren't many coloureds on the sites either. I remember working on that housing in Hemel Hempstead with an old coloured chap from Jamaica one day and we got chatting. Anyway he mentioned something that I ought to read and he wrote it down on a piece of newspaper for me, but I noticed his educated handwriting was lovely and he was using rather a fetching fountain pen – not just a ballpoint.

He was delighted that I noticed this, and he told me, rather ruefully, that back in Jamaica, where he came from, he had been a schoolteacher but now he'd "come to gather the gold from the streets of London". I got quite friendly with this fellow; he was mature enough to realise the predicament he was in, the money he was earning – which was good by comparison to what he'd have made in the Caribbean. He was able to make enough to live on in London and still send back the equivalent of what he would have earned at home. His plan was to make enough to get back home.

Did you hear some of the stories about the building of the Festival Hall? Well, that was a job where many Irishmen worked and it's where some of the big name dancehall owners and businessmen made their money, y'know that? That job cost the British government a fortune and there was all sorts of scams with sand and gravel lorries being checked in, the driver would slip the gateman an envelope and then the deliveries would be taken off site again and sold elsewhere. That went on regularly, so I was told. Same thing happened with the muck-away lorries for spoil...most of them left site only half-laden or maybe less, but they had no weighting station so there was a massive fiddle going on. I was told that by lads that worked on the job. A lot of the big fellows got their start from the scams that went on there.

Interviewer: What about leisure time, Michael, what did ye get up to for fun, apart from football?

Michael: Now I wasn't a big drinker – maybe one or two would be all I'd have. I remember one Sunday, after playing a match being let off in Kilburn High Road...can't remember the pub...the Victoria, is it?... but Jack Doyle, the boxer, was in there that night.

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I'd occasionally go to the Banba in Kilburn but we never went near the Buffalo because we heard it was trouble. Did you hear the story about 'Crusher' Casey – one of the Casey brothers that ran the Shamrock Club – challenging Doyle to a wrestling match? Sure Casey threw him out of the ring into the corner; Doyle wasn't a wrestler, he was a boxer. Anyway the story was that Doyle damaged the dancefloor where he landed and they were never able to fix that part of the dancefloor afterwards!

We used sometimes to go to Mass in Quex Road in Kilburn; Father (later Bishop!) Casey was there at the time. I know all the scandal he had later in life, but I'll tell you one thing, Casey did marvellous work for the Irish in London at that time. He got Irish tradesmen to do up one of the bomb-damaged houses in or around Kilburn or West Hampstead. I recall him giving out jovially to one fellow at the gate of a GAA match that it was about time he made "an honest woman" of the girl he was going with!

Interviewer: Did you yourself ever experience any hassle...like anti-Irish abuse or discrimination in London?

Michael: You know, apart from the lads in AEI calling me 'Mick-Mac' – which was frankly a term of endearment as far as I was concerned...they'd shout down "Where's Mick-Mac"!!, I never got the slightest bit of trouble, abuse or commentary about my Irish identity ; none whatsoever. There'd be a bit of banter around St. Patrick's Day but sure that's all it was...banter.

I eventually qualified as a broadcast engineer in early 1963-64 and was working with a Belfast man – not of my persuasion, but we got on grand – and he was a Daily Telegraph reader. He pointed out to me one day that Irish Television were looking for technical staff. I noted the details, applied and ended up back here in Ireland when RTE, the national broadcaster was getting going in the early 1960s, and I came back and spent the rest of my working career at RTE. I met and married a Galway girl while I was working for RTE, which is how I ended up living here in Galway.

In general terms, though, I can tell you I enjoyed my stint in London immensely, and sure it gave me a good living and a career-changing education.

Interviewer: One of the images that comes up a lot in literature and songs and that is the sort of bullying ganger? The bullying gang leader?

Michael: I can tell you a bit about those. Because I used to see...that gave me a bit of sorrow...y'know if I came along ...especially the trench-men. They would all stop and look around; I didn't like the ganger, he was calling the stroke rhythm

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Interviewer: Wow, did you actually see that happen?

Michael: I saw it, yes. Oh he'd be driving them, yes, but it was his manner. What I seen is; the fella would get down, the soil would be worked out. Y'know, with pickaxes and shovels, and the fella here [at the trench floor] would throw it up to there [approximately a door height] – he'd be expected to throw it up there [as far as the gangers were concerned] – he wasn't pullin' his weight if there wasn't fourteen pounds of soil on that shovel. He would throw up a few of those until he got a heap, then the other fella, who was a level above him, he would be expected to throw the soil up another level in shovelfuls of fourteen pounds a time – and the synchronisation between those was called by – would you call him a foreman, or a ganger? - [Ganger]. He would call it, and you wouldn't mind him calling it, but his comments in between I found galling

Interviewer: I'd heard those stories, alright

Michael: Now, the one thing about Murphy, they would never tolerate that; they would say lads, you've x-amount of yards to do today, whether it takes you seven hours or nine hours, you're getting the same money!

Interviewer: I was talking to a Connemara man yesterday who worked for Murphy, and he told me that they also used what they called a 'pacemaker' . . . y'know.

Michael: That's another thing . . . over my period in London, another thing that upset me was to see the lads that were the pacemakers, to see after a decade of that kind of work, how battered and in bits they were physically. . . I'd see some of them at Mass and, y'know. I found that upsetting.

Interviewer: Sure you can't do heavy work like that for years and it not take a toll, physically and mentally.

Michael: Another thing that struck me was how quickly the tradesmen passed their knowledge on to somebody they took a liking to . . . I remember an English fella, he was a bricklayer, funny what I remember is he smoked too much for my liking! And I remember him showing a young lad everything to do with bricklaying, and giving him all the tips – y'know what I mean? If he thought there was potential there – and that lad had started off bringing the concrete to him! I found that a lot.

Interviewer. . . Listen. I think we'll leave it there. Thanks very much, Michael

END

Original Interview # 7 – Tony C - Roscommon

Name: Tony

Date of Birth: 1946

Place of Birth: Roscommon

Date of Emigration to UK: 1964

Date of Interview: February 22nd, 2016.

Notes:

1. This interview was conducted pursuant to 2 observational essays about working in 1960s London as a tunnel-man which Tony has published online on his own blog-page and which are used as a primary source documents in the main body of this thesis. Therefore there are occasional references to these essays throughout the interviews.
2. Italics have been used throughout to indicate emphasised intonation and/or proper titles etc.
3. The original interview has been subsequently amended by consultation with interviewee via email/telephone discussion therefore is semi-verbatim dialogue which has been re-arranged in chronology and layout to suit interviewee's wishes.

Interviewer: So I suppose the obvious thing is to start from the beginning, Tony. You're from Boyle originally, are you?

Tony: No, no. I'm from a place called Fuerty, outside Roscommon Town. I did the Leaving Cert in 1964 in Roscommon CBS ¹ when I was seventeen.

Interviewer: And tell me a bit about your circumstances. Were you from farming stock or a townie or?

Tony: We came from a small farming background; there were two families really in our household ; my father was married twice because his first wife died and so there was three stepbrothers from the first marriage and then seven in our family, making ten in all. Seems like a big family but funnily enough we were never really all together because there was a big age-gap between my step-brothers and our gang.

Interviewer: And was there much migration before you went to England?

Oh God, yeah, there was! My eldest brother, he went to England just after the war in 1947 or '48 and I remember he needed a passport or travel permit to go then. My other brother Willie – he was a footballer – he went to England too. He went via the turf campaigns here in the late 40s as well, young lads would go working on the Bog of Allen or some of the other big bogs. He became a wanderer in England. . . he'd be moving around a lot. We'd have people back in the summer or neighbours that'd come home for Christmas and there'd always be an enquiry, "any sign of Willie?" and the visitor would say maybe, "Ah I met

¹ Christian Brother's School

Original Interview # 7 – Tony C - Roscommon

Willie on such-and-such a power station job down in wherever”, y’know? He’d move around on these big jobs...he’d go off the radar with us, as it were, we wouldn’t know where he was.

As it turned out, he had continued to play Gaelic football around Manchester/Liverpool in the 50s as he was a good footballer. Probably then got work in North Wales as he remerged circa 1959/60 when he got married to Welsh lady. He had to get ‘letters of freedom’ (as they were known) from his home church in Ireland to confirm that he was not previously married. He would have worked after that for long periods in the North Wales area and was living in Rhyl which we found out later. He was, though, home for our dad’s funeral in ‘73 and my wedding in ‘79. He went ‘off the radar’ again sometime after that. My brother Walter searched for him in the early 90s’ and ‘found him’ in Holyhead!! He stayed married until his death in 2001. He is buried in a graveyard overlooking Holyhead. Some irony in that!

Interviewer: So what decided you on going to England, and why London, d’ya think?

Tony: Well, I’d see these fellas coming back from England before ever I went there and you’d be wound-up with the flashy mohair suits and the scatter of money; at Christmas they’d be at the back of the church at midnight Mass creating chaos, y’know? [Laughter] and the talk of dancehalls and all.

So anyway, I went to England more-or-less as soon as I finished the first year of Leaving Cert. My sister was a nurse round about Hanwell or west Ealing. She worked in St. Bernard’s Hospital; a psychiatric hospital in Southall and she was always the sort of HQ...she was the first call and she’d meet you at Euston and she’d have it set-up; she was good to us too, y’know.

Interviewer: And how did you go, when it came to it?

Tony: So I went on the train straight through from Roscommon Town to Euston. My brother, Walter, who was there two years before me in London, he died in 2006, he was a few years older than me and, would you believe, in his wallet after he died, was his first ticket ever for the journey from Roscommon Town to Euston. Still in his wallet after all those years.

We were kind of nomads really, but the expectation with me was that I’d come back (to Ireland), which I did in September ‘64 and I was going to repeat the Leaving just because I was young and I was still waiting for Brendan [brother] to finish his schooling. Anyway, I didn’t; I went to the Brothers for a few days and I *took umbrage* (as Dickens would say) at some Brother over something he said and anyway, that was that; I’m away again. Because the thing in London back then was that work was so available and people seemed to

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jump...especially those working on the buildings, the younger fellows anyway, they didn’t get kind of *set up* in a job long-term...you just jumped, almost as a touch of *bravado*.

Interviewer: Do you think, then, that if there had been enough work available in Ireland, where you were, would you have still gone to London or further afield? In other words, do you think emigration amongst your generation was, kind of, inevitable?

Tony: I think so, for a number of reasons. One is that the wage differential was big. I did work for a few weeks in a mill, in Castlecoote beside where I lived and I got four pound a week or something like that. One of the reasons I left that job was that I missed one day and I was docked a pound [Laughter]...y’know, it was just crazy stuff!

There was a saying about that mill that I learnt from a neighbour of ours and it relates to the definition in the Catechism of a place called Purgatory, which is that it is “a place where some souls suffer for a time before they went to heaven”; this neighbour of ours used to say about that mill that ‘twas “a place where some souls suffer for a time before they went to *England*” [Laughter]

Interviewer: Presumably you could earn that much in a day in London?

Tony: Well, you could, although...we worked in bars as well, and that wasn’t that well-paid as barmen, not in most of the bars anyway.

Although it was very common enough for most school-leavers to emigrate, we were slightly different from the majority of school-leavers; having done the Leaving Cert. Actually in my class I’d say a good twenty percent went on to become Guards, would you believe. Once you got the Leaving Cert...see Leaving Cert was a prestige thing at that time, to get that far and to be in a Secondary School. You could go to a Vocational School, which a lot of people did, and they would be more into the skills, y’know, plumbers, builders whatever trades there was. More of those would have emigrated than the secondary school fellows.

Then you had a small percentage of the secondary school fellows went on to third-level education. So actually to answer your question, not that many of my school class emigrated permanently because we had a reunion in 2013 and, while a few of them had gone to America, most were back here. But nearly all of them had been in England working at some time...it was treated like seasonal work by many of us.

Some went picking peas or harvesting out in the country, or some of us went over for the summer ‘on the buildings’. John McGahern talks about that in a

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few of his books and stories; I think he was in London working on the sites during the summers. There was SO much work there.

Interviewer: So when you got to London, what did you do work-wise?

Tony: Well funnily enough, the first work I got in London, the first summer I went, was in Lyons's in Greenford² working on the factory line filling cake boxes for distribution by lorry. All along the Great West Road as it was known then, it was all factories of different kinds and that wasn't too far from Hanwell or west Ealing where I was staying with my sister and I'd another brother over in Hounslow. So most of these factories would advertise vacancies along the road front. I only worked at Lyons's for the first summer I was in London.

In between the two 'tours of duty' I did in the tunnels, I did odd bits of smaller work: I worked in Bethnal Green for McInerney for a while³ and I also worked in bars for a while. I worked for a cable-laying firm from Acton...they were Irish, but I don't recall their names now.

Interviewer: So was that around the time you got involved on the Victoria Line as well?

Tony: No, no. It was when I came back to London the second time after September '64 I got into the Victoria Tunnel project because my older brother was already working on it at Warren Street shaft or heading, with his mate, they'd both gotten in there. (39.00) it's amazing to think, now, how a child like me was really employed on such a major construction project [Tony was seventeen at this time] but I was employed as a banksman. The banksman was the man that assisted the crane-driver and you had to learn these two or three main hand signals; to take it up, to slow down the lowering, that you're near the bottom, all that kind of thing.

At Warren Street there was one contractor there as far as I can remember, it was either Mowlem or Mitchell, and the work wasn't subbed out there but the tunnel gangs – the Donegal gangs and the like – they came *as a gang* [emphasises this point]. Maybe five or seven-handed depending on the size of the tunnel rings they were working on.⁴ There was a kind of a linkage – a network of

² J. Lyons & Co. became one of the largest catering and food manufacturing companies in the world. From modest beginnings as supplier of catering to the Newcastle Exhibition (UK), in 1887, the new firm rapidly expanded to become the first food empire which, at its height, was the largest in Europe. In the process Lyons became a household name and the 'Joe Lyons' Corner Houses and teashops, with their 'Nippy' waitresses, caught the public imagination and passed into history. Although Greenford was considered somewhat remote, Lyons had chosen to relocate part of its Cadby Hall main factory there in 1919. See Peter Bird, *First Food Empire: A History of J. Lyons & Co.* (Bognor Regis, 2000).

³ See p.5. See also OI#19- John H – Wexford.doc, p.5, John also worked for McInerney in Bethnal Green/Bow area in the early '70s. It seems McInerney secured a good deal of work around this time from the then relatively newly-formed Tower Hamlets Council.

⁴ This is a key point about the tunnel gangs that we went on to discuss during the interview; these were not subcontract gangs in the formal sense of the word, although in practice they actually were operating as subcontractors, albeit informal labour-only gangs, but they were paid as employed labour by the Main Contractor direct, so did not constitute 'Lump' labour in the sense described elsewhere.

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information, people would have known that the tunnel work was available, and most of these men would bring a 'good CV' with them in terms of tunnel mining; they were 'above in Scotland' on the hydro-dams, or they were down on Canvey Island or whatever, but they'd have a track-record.

Interviewer: You weren't working as a pony-boy then?

Tony: No, I started as a banksman, at seventeen! I also seconded as a tea-boy. One thing I remember clearly, I'm nearly certain that the tea was made in this big enamel bucket; you remember the famous enamel bucket? You could pee into it and you'd hear it cracking. Anyway I'd make the tea and there'd be a quarter pound of tea and a pound of sugar and pints of milk! [Exaggerating]... and I think I'd stir it with a new pick handle or something! And they'd arrive, these big Mayo and Donegal miners with cooked chicken – maybe half chickens – and here they were, well...y'know⁵ And they'd go up, then, to the pub at lunch...the time'd be tight, now y'know? But then they'd go up to the pub beside the heading and they'd down – skull is what they'd call it – they'd skull at least three pints apiece.

And then I went up one night to a restaurant nearby; we were short of milk or something. Now remember Warren Street is nearly the West End⁶ ...anyway I went up to this restaurant and I had the donkey jacket⁷ on...d'ya remember there used to be a joke about that ... 'my wife wanted a fur coat for Christmas, so I bought her a donkey jacket' [Laughter]. So I arrived at this elaborate Chinese restaurant, anyways, as I think I said in the essay, I nearly didn't make it out...I thought the omen of death had arrived the way they looked at me and ran me out the place [Laughter]. And if I'd said to the Donegal fellas that I was mistreated up there, well they'd nearly come up after them. 'What the? Where is it?!' [Laughter]. But you see I was regarded by them...because I had *letters after me name*...I was a college boy... and the fact that I was only...really...a boy...they'd be a bit protective of me.

Because we were from Roscommon, not Mayo or Donegal, we weren't interfering in the hierarchy of workmen there, the miners were the top men and they kind of kept to themselves. Ah y'see when them men were on piecework they were great workers, the Donegal fellows and Mayo fellows.

Then they had these unusual terms... which did exist, y'know ...they had a hierarchy? The Pit Boss...and I think I mention him in the essays, he was a cockney...Fred...well inevitably for a cockney he'd have to be Fred...sure they were all Freds, weren't they? [Laughter]. I think they had a bit of respect for me

⁵ Tony indicated these big men would be tearing lumps out of the chickens; 'horsin' it into them' would be a typical vernacular description.

⁶ The upmarket shopping area of central London, centred on Oxford Street, Tottenham Court Road, and Regent's Street etc.

⁷ A black working jacket with leather shoulder and arm patches used extensively in construction in post-war period.

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because I was educated – to them, see – I had done the Leaving Cert...y’know, ‘This guy, like, can almost read! [Laughter]

Interviewer: It must’ve been some experience at such a young age...did you see any other part of the project or did you just stay at that one heading?

Tony: There was another heading down the road from us at Euston Square and I think maybe my other brother Brendan might have worked there too. See, there was such a turnover of labour at the lower end of the hierarchy, the pony-boys, labourers and tea-boys like me, but there wouldn’t be a turnover at the high-end because that’s where the money was...these guys were making money that was *legendary* in London at the time. Y’know, there were rumours of £150-a-week when others were only making £15 or £20-a-week.

Interviewer: So how did you go about getting work on tunnel jobs like the Victoria Line, I wonder?

Tony: (47.00) The Pit Boss was the man who did the hiring as far as I can remember and the work was usually advertised in the London Evening Standard, I think. My brother spent a good bit of time in London because he was at university here (in Ireland) and would do a year and mightn’t pass or maybe he did pass but got fed-up then and would go to London for the summer. I remember him and his mate – I looked up to them because these guys ‘knew the ropes’ - they’d go straight for an Evening Standard as soon as they hopped off the bus from work and the jobs were there alright.

(42.28) Anyway, you mentioned the big mechanical mixers that your father worked on? Well, I remember I was put on the mixer one day and these things were huge powerful mechanical machines and, at one point, I lost concentration for a moment and the handle on the side of the mixer swung round because I hadn’t hold of it and narrowly missed my head...it would have done serious damage if it had hit me, as it was a big lump of steel.

The second near miss I had was...they bring up the skips...y’know what the skips looked like?

Interviewer: Yeah...I’ve seen video of them working.

Tony: Well, they bring them up on the little bogey tracks – very much like you’d see in the coalmines, y’know. Then they’d drop down this kind of a cradle that links into the sides of the skip and the crane would pull it up them from there. Then it would be brought in to a hoist and tipped into the muck-away lorries off a gantry. Anyway, I was up on the top gantry unclipping the skips as they came up; there were these little clips that kept the cradle fixed to the skip and when it

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came up you’d to unclip it round the sides. On this occasion, anyway, the skip wasn’t properly clipped so when it was lowered onto the rails it wasn’t on right and the next thing the bloody skip rolled down along the edge of the spoilheap, bringing me with it! I didn’t get hurt...but I was just lucky.

(44.36) I remember these two new guys – I think they were Scottish - came down and they were lifting and fixing these steel tunnel lining sections into place and bolting them together...they were heavy. But they were lifted into place with hydraulic or pneumatic pressure arms...like what they use for the auld jack-hammers; these things if they cut-out they jolt back to their starting position very quickly. I could see the mechanical lifting arm jolt back very close to where these two new lads were standing on the Stage⁸ and I could see them look at each other in panic. The next minute...up the ladder they went...gone! You could nearly see them saying, ‘Jeez these boys are crazy here!’ and the big haw-haw out of the Donegal fellows watching them go...thinking ‘fukkin micel!’ [Laughter]. These lads had to go up all these flights of ladders to get out because the tunnel...see we’d usually get up in the bucket of the crane – and if anything happened that on the way up we were...well, y’know! But the health and safety was really...well...non-existent. The nearest they got to a helmet in those days was the four-cornered hankerchief!

Interviewer: A lot of it seems to have been as much to do with the attitude of the working men themselves, like this kind of machismo thing, as it was to do with the failure of the companies to put in any health and safety systems! So did you stay long at Warren Street on that first trip?

Tony: I’m not sure exactly, I think I might have gone home that Christmas, ’64, and when I came back then, I went working as a barman. There were things happening in the 60s. Like the World Cup in ’66, I was in the bars watching that a lot because I was working in bars as well. I worked in the Queen Adelaide up the Uxbridge Road in Shepherd’s Bush in ’65, the Swan in Hammersmith – on the Broadway – and a few other pubs as well. The fellow in the Queen Adelaide was Murphy, a Kerry man but no connection to the green Murphy.

I worked in the east end, near Bethnal Green, on a McInerney’s job and funnily enough I met a fellow that was at school with me on that job and, of all things, he was a QS!⁹ In fact he spent his life working with McInerneys until something happened – maybe McInerneys might have gone down a bit but I remember him in a portacabin there (30.30).

⁸ The ‘Stage’ was the name given to the midway platform with running boards on the Greathead tunnel-shield face, which provided a working platform for the miners at mid-tunnel height.

⁹ A Quantity Surveyor. This recollection amused both of us, because earlier I had been explaining to Tony that I was a QS in very similar circumstances.

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I remember another incident there on that job. It was a block of flats and I was up about fourteen storeys up on the scaffolding outside one of the days and I jumped in the window from the scaffold – the boards of the scaffold were about halfway up the window¹⁰. As I jumped there was a nail sticking out of a timber shutter for the window lintel and it caught the top of my head; thankfully it wasn't too serious. I was taken to a local hospital – probably Bow or Bethnal Green Hospital and treated there. Anyway I think it was the next evening (I was a bit of a Spurs fan at that time¹¹) I went up to White Hart Lane and had a bandage on me head that looked like a Turban and I was being slagged a lot for this thing by a lot of the Spurs boys! [Laughter]... they were calling me an 'Irish Sikh'.

Interviewer: And what else did you do work-wise when you were on that trip?

Tony: Then I got a start out cable-laying with a subbie from Acton for a while. I'll tell you a story about that, though. We went out, actually to Farnborough and Aldershot¹² and places like that laying cable in the heart of, well...talk about troubles!¹³...Anyway this day there was two lorries went out with big gangs of men to lay cable and we were pulling these big old cables around Aldershot or somewhere.

The legend in London that time was that these fellas, they'd be picked up in a bar the night before if there was a 'big pull' on...and the ganger, well, there was a couple of things. One, you'd pull up at the café in the morning for the breakfast and the ganger would order everyone sausages eggs and beans and the add-on to that was the "*fuckin' hurry up!*" [Laughter]. Then when you'd arrive at the job, well, you'd have fellas there with hangovers and whatever...and (allegedly, now) the ganger was to have said one night, "All ye with wellingtons jump into the trench – and there'd be water in the bottom of it – and all ye with other kinds of footwear, down in the trench too or fuck off!" [Laughter]. So the whole lot...hush puppies or whatever...down in the trench.

One night, unfortunately for me, I got into the wrong lorry heading out to this job and the ganger says, "I won't need ye tomorrow now", so that was it, no work the following day...it was literally that casual...super-casual! (01.00.00)

So after that I returned to Ireland until the early seventies and went back to Galway University to complete my degree and teaching diploma for four

¹⁰ This was quite a common configuration of scaffolding to an external envelope and was sometimes known as a 'window lift' of scaffold, designed to allow the efficient construction of window openings.

¹¹ Tottenham Hotspur Football Club – a famous club associated with an area in north-east London whose ground is White Hart Lane.

¹² The Farnborough/Aldershot built-up area or Blackwater Valley Conurbation or Aldershot Urban Area is the name used by the ONS to refer to the loose conurbation on the border between Surrey, Berkshire and Hampshire in England. It was part of the rapid urban expansion of the LMA during the 1960s and 1970s into what is now known as 'Commuter Belt'.

¹³ Tony did not complete this sentence but I think what he was hinting at was that Aldershot was the heart of the British Army military establishment in the south-east of England. It remains a large garrison town.

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years...*the best years of me life* (sic). Anyway I was messing about a lot and didn't think I'd a hope of passing the year around 1966, so I went back to London again and I worked on a job...ah, what was it? There's an arts centre there now...near Old Street...the Barbican!

Bow Street police station is around there, I think, and I remember goin' down there looking for milk and I was ran! [Laughter]

Interviewer: Oh yeah, sure that was a massive project. There was a lot of industrial unrest on that job, some of it involving Irish lads. I found a report about the dispute there and would you believe it that one of the main 'agitators' as they called them was my own namesake! [Laughter]

Tony: Well now I wasn't on the big Barbican site. Opposite the Barbican site there's a telephone exchange or something and I was on that. But I remember the big strike - that was around '66 maybe? – a building strike - and one of the men involved in the strike at the Barbican, now I wasn't working there, mind, but I heard...was Brendan Behan's brother. That was a good job for me, I know I worked a consistent 4 months, which was a long time for me in those days! I know I got paid on the stamps anyways. That building strike went on a long time and I think it caused a crash in the job...we could see the reinforced steel columns from the telephone exchange across the road...and the rods out the top were rusting...we'd be wondering would they be able to use that steel again when they actually go back to work, so it must've been a few months.

Interviewer: So you were working '*on the cards*' as they used to say, on that one [Laughter]

Tony: That reminds me of a fellow I met a few years back asking me, "You were in England, Tony", "I was", "and did you work on the stamps", "Ah sometimes I worked on them". See there was a thing against stamps that time. There were fellas...this bravado (which was against themselves, but...)...anyway, they'd built up books of stamps, they used to call them *comics*, they'd be growling at ya "*ahhh them fuckin' stamps, I don't want no stamps*" y'know?...see even though 'twas against themselves...they weren't looking to the future at all. I get a small English stipend now, y'see, for the stamps I put on in England, and then when I left one summer...someone else – another fella – borrowed the card and worked on it! [Laughter].

But honest to God, that notion of the cards!...see they created this legend that was anti to the interests of the young workers, they didn't kop it, see?...they bought into it all the same, like "*We don't need them*". It was all about this *bravado* hard man attitude.

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There was another time I remember coming in from Aldershot one evening in a green van – ‘twas a small subbie I was working for that time – there was about ten or twelve of us in this van. I think he was from Tyrone, the driver of the van, and he got into some kind of an affair with these two other fellas in a car, y’know like driving in front of us and them pullin’ in and pullin’ out, like. It became a bit of a challenge between them as to who was winning, y’know? Then didn’t the driver of the car more or less indicate to our fella driving the van to *pull in and we’d sort this out*, kinda thing. So the car pulled in and the driver of the van just pulled in front of him, right? And shouted to us in the back, “*We’re havin’ a bit o’bother here!*” [Laughter]. So yer man in the car had the window down and the next thing the back doors of the van opened and ten fellows got out! [Laughter]. Yer man in the car seen that the odds were stacked against him and pulled out and away...of course then the slaggin’ was *what I wouldn’t have done to him*, and all that stuff. [Laughter].

Interviewer: Where were you off to after that then?

Tony: Ah ‘twas after that I got the second *tour of duty* on the Victoria Line again. This time I was a pony-boy. Obviously Fred, the pit-boss thought highly enough of me as a worker to take me on a second time. I was paid direct again by Mitchell or Mowlem, whoever the contractor was. I probably still have my insurance cards from that time.

Interviewer: So this time you were being paid properly with tax and national insurance and all that?

Tony: Oh yeah, it was all legit, we paid our stamp and all that.

See, in some ways, the tunnel lads that I wrote about, they were the same in a way as the itinerant navvies. See they were *tunnellers*...that was their job...so even in the Victoria Line tunnel, there was the constant rumours of the next big job. So for example my memory of that second stint when I was a pony-boy, the later stages of the Victoria Line, all the Donegal miners, they were all talking about the Thames barrier project as the next huge job, and then they started talking about the Channel Tunnel. This was their speciality.

They started in them tunnels, the Donegal men, but they may have gone back generations. I remember listening to an old Donegal tunnel man when he went back to one of the bothies up in Scotland¹⁴ and he was explaining where the stove used to be and where they hung their clothes up to dry and how they ate and all that. In a way it was all so primitive by our standards.

¹⁴ This was a recollection of seeing a documentary about Scottish tunnel men. A bothy was the name given to a working-man’s hut in agricultural and industrial Scotland.

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Tough times perhaps, looking back retrospectively it was tough, say, being in the tunnels and so on but...funny...them fellows never seemed to talk about things being tough, like *at that time*; when they went through it. Retrospectively I often think, how did we do that? - [Discussion then about context and wartime experiences etc and coming to London straight after the war].

Interviewer: Was it just the two stints you did in London, then? We must be coming near the end of your London recollections?

Tony: I went to New York for three summers as a student around ‘68–‘69 so that was sort of the end of the England thing, although I did go back – I went back actually for Christmas ‘69, y’know? The schoolteacher’s Christmas?...I worked in a bar in Northfields, up beside West Ealing, just because my sister worked there.

Interviewer: So it sounds like your work on the Victoria Line was all ‘on-the-cards’, which kind of makes sense because there wasn’t that much subcontracting going on that job, but did you have much direct experience of lump working?

Tony: Ah yeah, I worked on the Lump as well for a time. See when I came out of university after finally finishing, I went back to London for a couple of years – just for the summers now, y’know, not living there all the time.

I was in London actually the summer that the Lump kinda crashed...1972 or 73? I worked for Murphys in Kentish Town. We were on what’s called a ‘*search and find*’ gang – a small gang that went looking for leaks on the gas pipes after they were installed. See these minor leaks they would disrupt the electronics and telephone cables beside them. So the council would get Murphys to dig up the cable boxes and we’d search for the defective gas pipe...‘twas in Chadwell Heath I remember it well.

We were on *Paddy’s Motorbike*...the jackhammer!! [Laughter] with a lovely man, Jimmy Keegan, from Galway City. He was some craic to work with – 110%. When you found these leaks you had to take the joint off the pipe and line it with a special rubber sleeve and then pump this special creosote-like substance into the crack and that would seal it.

Anyway, I was into the cricket (I was drinking in the Swan in Hammersmith that summer in 1968 when Gary Sobers hit the six sixes in one over) and I’d be down the hole in Chadwell Heath and all the toffs would be coming from the City and I’d shout, “*what’s the score in the match?*” and they’d say, “*Pardon, Pat?...match? what match?*” and I’d say “*The test match of course!*”...I’d be

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winding them up see? They'd be looking at me as if to say is this fella for real here asking me about the cricket match? [Laughter].

I remember another incident this day; see the gangers would arrive on site around ten past two in the afternoon because lunch – which was invariably a bar lunch! – would be between one and two and we'd orders to be back for two. This fella that was finishing up this day, he was in his working gear with a vest or no shirt on him (his day clothes must've been in the van) when we went for lunch and he must've had a bit too much and didn't he go to the toilet and forget...he fell asleep or something...ended up having to go home on the train with no shirt on him! [Laughter].

Interviewer: So did you see much of these infamous *bad gangers*, the bullying and intimidating kind?

Tony: Well, then another summer I was on the same kind of small gang work – there'd be maybe four in a gang – and we'd a ganger from Laois – oh a wild man, and a wild driver. There was a place called East Ham and there was a very busy junction where the buses all turned¹⁵ Anyway this Laois ganger was driving the van like a madman and the Genny hitched on the back¹⁶ was bouncing around like those artillery guns you saw towed behind tanks in the war! So we pulled up and started unloading, and out came the signs – no smoking, diversion, no entry etc etc, and all these bus inspectors were getting stroppy with all the chaos. Then the jackhammers started down and before long, with all this chaos created, it was one o'clock and we headed for the pub...much to the consternation of the bus inspectors! [Laughter].

The stuff about the Elephant and these 'bad' gangers? Well Jimmy Keegan was a gentleman, plain and simple, and the fella from Laois was mad but he was okay to work for.

But there was one fella I worked with now, and he didn't say too much, but he was bad enough. One thing I always remember is he was always advocating to 'sub' you, early in the week...almost whether you needed it or not. A lot of the time we didn't need to sub, but there was a logic to getting you hooked into it. Once you were subbed you had to keep turning up for work.

Then there were the Clerk of Works, like he was the boss of things, he didn't dirty his hands with the likes of labourers! And the council clerks and inspectors

¹⁵ East Ham is in the London Borough of Newham now. It is about 8 miles due east of central London and in the 1970s would have been considered on the borders of metropolitan London. Michael Mulvey lived in East Ham for some 25 years when based in London so there followed a general chat about the area. The location which Tony talks about the buses turning was at the south end of Central Park in East Ham at the junction of High St South and Rancliffe Road.

¹⁶ 'Genny' is slang for a generator. In this case a mobile diesel-fuelled generator used to provide power to pneumatic tools, jackhammers etc. This was a large wheeled vehicle usually hitched behind a van or lorry.

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and what have you... 'twas very important to keep in with them guys and keep them sweet with a couple o' bob on the side [Laughter].

Anyway, they brought in a law that summer that made the Lump illegal, and the kind of urban legend that went 'round was that a lot of the Irish subbies who'd been operating the Lump went over that summer for the Irish Derby and never came back! [Laughter]. When they actually began to put the frighteners on the subbies - for the tax like - around '72 or '73 about the Lump...well... 'twas like the Wall Street Crash!

I'll straighten out the chronology of when I was there and where I was: The Barbican, near Walter's pub, that was October 1966 to Easter 1967. Summer of '71 I was with Gerry Galvin, 1973 – Murphy & Company, I was stayin' in XXXX Park – that was Jimmy Keegan. Then 1974, Murphy & Company and John Cochrane & Sons – who I never worked with, but he's on my cards! ...someone had the cards for him and must've given them me [Laughter]

Interviewer: And what about the social side of things, Tony, the digs and dancehalls as you might say...the pubs. You've told me some of that and I know your essays mention the dancehalls, but do you have any specific recollections of those things?

Tony: Well, like even for us in the 60s now, and I remember getting these one-roomed flats or whatever they were and y'know, we'd some tough landladies. I had one off the Camden Town Road – I think that's the one that goes down to the Holloway Road – and I had to pay for the key...like I mean I had to *put a deposit on the key itself* even, as well as the rent! And my other brother, Brendan, arrived and stayed with me for a visit; he came for the weekend from wherever he was in England, and the room had a double-bed and sure we shared the bed. The landlady came up on the Sunday morning and well, let's just say she thought we were...well...not brothers certainly! [Laughter]...and the next thing...OUT!

Interviewer: Are you serious? She threw ye out?

Tony: Yeah. Sure I had an alarm clock to get me up early for work and it went off unexpectedly and made more racket than we'd expected and... anyway, that was that...and I didn't get the deposit back on the key either! [Laughter]. Sure I don't know what she was thinking of, sure we weren't tuned into that sort of thing anyway...

Interviewer: What about your general impressions of the Irish in London in your time? You said your brother, for example, had a different approach to it all?

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Tony: One of the things I'd be kind of critical about the Irish in London at that time was that they became such an *enclosed Irish* community which, I think, held them back a bit. It created, I imagine, quite a challenge for the second-generation London-born Irish – your generation – as it did in America for the Irish-Americans but the Americans almost adapted really. This phrase you see in history, 'the zeal of the convert' – they became almost more American than the Americans themselves.

The Irish in London kind of ghettoised themselves a good bit – some, like my brother, Walter, broke out a little bit. We used to go to a dancehall called Charlie Macks near Scotland Yard, where legend had it that you might be asked to recite prayers or some of the Catechism to gain entry by the matriarch at the door!

I talk about that and hanging around the other Irish dancehalls in the essays I wrote about my days in London. The Gresham in Holloway Road was a big place for me. They used to have a formal dress code so you had to have a tie to get in but if you didn't they'd give you one!...I don't recall if they charged for that. Then of course the challenge for any young fella at the end of the night was getting home because the tubes would be finished; I remember one night walking from the Gresham back to Shepherd's Bush...that's a big walk!¹⁷ Then there was the Buffalo Club in Camden Town, Bill Fuller's club.

But why I said that earlier about my brother was that the few words I said at his funeral came back to me. I said, "*He was no estranged Irishman abroad*"; see he assimilated and in the end he became a barman in the British Legion club. I was there the day of the funeral and I kept thinking about our father, who was an old Republican; he had been in the Old IRA...and there were we in the bastion of British military culture...there was a touch of irony in that. Yet the old soldiers in the British Legion club had great time for Walter and there was a lot of them at his funeral. (29.23)

He worked in Old Street, in the bars in that area. Actually the bar he worked in was a bit of a thieves den. I know he said he met the Krays in there one time. Anyway I think my brother did that more than a lot of Irish did in London...he integrated, whereas most Irish didn't. I think it was a defensive thing, y'know?...the tribe...But I think we (the later 60s migrants) were a bit different.

Walter now, he would know how to get from A to B or B to C, mainly to and from work and the social scene, whereas I was going in to places like Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park Corner...y'know? Speaker's Corner - I remember one

¹⁷ Approximately 7-8 miles of a walk, and that assumes the fastest route was known.

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fellow who became quite famous, he was Lord Soper?¹⁸ But I kind of explored London, that was me, I wanted to see a bit more than just the Irish dancehalls.

Interviewer: It's really interesting you say that; it seems to me there's a bit of a divide between the pre-1960s migrants and the post-1960 ones. I spoke to another fellow a while back who went summer working – much the same as you – in the later '60s and he really emphasised that he wasn't remotely interested in going to the dancehalls and Irish pubs and that – he went to see the 'Stones in Hyde Park in '69...that was his abiding memory of London!

Tony: But you see the pub scene cultivated this dependency on drink. 'Twas all single rooms we had back in those days and it was understandable how people gravitated to the bars in London in one sense, because there was nothing else to do. Then the pubs cottoned onto cultivating more interest through things like darts and other pub games that would be on, like, a Monday night...they'd hardly have those things going on of a Saturday night!

And the fighting went with the pubs. Well there was a Galway fella working on that job at the Barbican with us and if he wasn't in a fight at the weekend, 'twas a poor weekend [Laughter]...he'd come in with black eyes and crooked teeth and all that! Earlier, when I worked in Ealing and was living with my sister, there were these two Connemara brothers – one of them looked awful like Jack Pallance, the well-known actor at the time – they were notorious as fighters.

All in all I'd say I was really a bit too young to take advantage of my time in London. I did in the sense that I saw a lot of London, I saw the sites and what have you. I didn't actually go to the theatre or the pictures much, but the dancehalls was a big thing. I did enjoy London; I always associate it with sunshine because it was mainly summers I was there. I don't remember the darker kind of wintery days much. Mind you I remember being out at Aldershot one time and having to kick the pick-axe head out of the frost in the ground!

Another thing London had was a great health system, y'know, this NHS thing? I remember I went to the dentist and got my teeth done in London because in the fifties in Ireland there was so little help in that way for people...so I owe the National Health Service a thanks for my teeth!

END

¹⁸ Donald Oliver Soper, Baron Soper (31 January 1903 – 22 December 1998) was a prominent Methodist minister, socialist and pacifist. Historian Martin Wellings wrote that, 'His combination of modernist theology, high sacramentalism, and Socialist politics, expressed with insouciant wit and unapologetic élan, thrilled audiences, delighted admirers, and reduced opponents to apoplectic fury.' – see Martin Wellings, 'Renewal, Reunion, and Revival: Three British Methodist Approaches to Serving the Present Age in the 1950s.' in *Methodist History* (2014) Vol. 53, #1, pp. 21-39.

Original Interview # 08 – Ben C – Leitrim

Name: Brendan (Ben) C

Year of Birth: 1955

Place of Birth: Leitrim

Date of Emigration to UK: 1973

Date of Interview: January 19, 2018.

Interviewer: It's the 19th January and I'm in Carrick-on-Shannon with Ben. And Ben is going to tell me about his time in England. So I suppose we'll start with the basics, you are a native of Carrick are you?

Ben: Born in Main Street.

Interviewer: And school here and your family reared here. If you don't mind me asking what year were you born?

Ben: '55.

Interviewer: 1955 ok, and so what I'm interested in are men who worked in, who migrated to Britain and particularly London anywhere from kind of the war, right up to the end of the century more or less. And what I'm interested in establishing that their experiences were very varied and very diverse, and that they didn't all follow the same trajectory and there is a kind of, we have spoken about this before, but there is a series of stereotypes that we all know are attached to Irish men involved in construction.

Ben: The navy.

Interviewer: Usually involves the navy; hard drinking, fighting, rough living, ill education or uneducated. And a kind of basic fecklessness that attaches to. Now I would argue that all those stereotypes have some basis, you know we all know people who probably were like that, but it doesn't represent the entire community not by a long...that would be kind of where I'm coming from.

Ben: We used to get them coming home, typically, my uncles as well, they'd come home and they'd have the suit and the whole lot and making on they were doing well and I had one uncle there he had absolutely nothing, if you'd see where he was living!

Interviewer: Yes, the suit seems, funny you mentioned the suit...

Ben: ...they'd hire a car as well, and '*doing real well*' where they wouldn't have been doing very well at all like. And the money could be borrowed you know. Actually I got married in my uncle's suit that he bought when he was drunk; a Terylene suit, a goldie coloured suit. Very sad actually because I remember he was in Nottingham my uncle Pat, and I think he ended up working on the council as a labourer.

Interviewer: In England?

Ben: Yes England; he was in England all his life. I only remember him coming home twice. And like that he was always with the suit and the hair greased back and went around....But my brother brought my father and mother down to London to see her

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sisters, a lot of them were in London they were nurses. And didn't my father say to Mick, he says, "Would Nottingham be far from here?" he says. "Ah no sure it's only a couple of hours up the road". Jesus, says the father, "We'll go up and...we could surprise Pat". Jesus they went up and eventually found where he was in this little housing estate or whatever and knocked on the door, Jesus, says the woman of the house, "you heard about that quick!" He died 2 days beforehand!

Interviewer: And they didn't have any idea of that, they had gone up expecting to see him?

Ben: Yeah, yeah very sad. And he had a little room in a house with a family, we didn't think that at all, so very sad, very tough on my father like. We'll go up and surprise him, you know.

Interviewer: Remember Jimmy, our Jimmy, don't know if you remember him now, he was dad's next one down from dad?

Ben: No don't remember him.

Interviewer: He came to a terrible end, same thing, mum first started, don't think I ever saw my mother so upset and they had to go and basically clear his room after he died. And she said it was literally a tiny room with a bed and a few books. You know? that's all he had to show for a life time of working.

Ben: As you said stereotypes. There is a lot of them stereotypes. I think it depends on when it was as well, you are talking about back...As you get further into the 70s and 80s they were more educated people going over. We went over as students and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So we will come to that bit. So you were schooled here and educated to what leaving cert standard?

Ben: Yea.

Interviewer: So did you ever have any clear plans to go to England yourself, what did you do when you left school first, did you go working or did you go abroad or?

Ben: No, I finished the leaving cert and I done 4 months up in Finner Camp.

Interviewer: With the army?

Ben: Well it was the FCA, but it was what they called camp staff, so you were kind of there, for...I was in charge of the NCO's Mess because I was Corporal, and then I went back and repeated the leaving cert again, don't ask me why.

Interviewer: Ok you weren't happy with the marks you got or whatever?

Ben: Just hadn't a clue you know, what I wanted to do.

Interviewer: Did you go to the Presentation Brothers?

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Ben: I did, I was a bit of a tear-away, all the rest went to university Pete and Mick.

Interviewer: How many?

Ben: 5 of us, 4 boys and a girl. But Pete was in college on Dublin and he had been to London the year before working on the buildings for to earn money.

Interviewer: Just back track a bit for me, what did your parents both do?

Ben: My father was a commercial traveller, he was in England too years before that as well...on the buildings, I don't know much about that, my older brother would know more about that.

Interviewer: Your mother?

Ben: She might have worked in the council or something. But then of course getting married so that was that.

Interviewer: Sorry, I cut across you there.

Ben: So I was then...I went to the regional tech in Sligo, did mechanical engineering going over to England to earn money.

Interviewer: For the summer?

Ben: Yes for the summer for the 3 or 4 months, '74 I think, I did the leaving cert in '73 and '74 so I must have went off in '74.

Interviewer: And was that a common thing for students to go to London for the summer?

Ben: Yes there was loads went over, actually Pete would be a good man to talk to, Jesus...

Interviewer: Your brother?

Ben: Yeah, he lived...he lived in Euston Station for a couple of weeks, sleeping behind the lockers!

Interviewer: Jesus really...sleeping rough?

Ben: Yes rough, he had no place to go or whatever.

Interviewer: So would that have been amongst the lads that you were at college with, at that time, would that have been kind of, you know, a common thing to do, ah we'll go to London for a few months?

Ben: Common enough if you had a few contacts, we went over to McWeeny's.

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Interviewer: McWeeny and Smallman?¹

Ben: Yes so we had a job with McWeeny and Smallman, well the year I went.

Interviewer: Because you had the contacts.

Ben: Because we had the contacts, I don't know Pete mustn't have had them the first year he went out there. But I remember my father bringing me out to teach me to drive, he was a commercial traveller and he had a company car, but you wouldn't be insured and he'd never ever let you drive. But he brought the two of us out anyways, and he had Pete out first, sure he brought me out to drive and we weren't gone too far he says, 'where were you driving before...' because Johnny Kelly and Martin Kelly and his older brother use to let us drive and my father copped it straight away, because he thought...

Interviewer: He knew....

Ben: Yes but he thought the only reason he was trying to get us a bit of driving lesson was that when we went to London that we might get a job maybe driving a digger or dumper or something...that you wouldn't have to be grafting what he had done himself, he knew, so that was his idea.

Interviewer: Because there is a tradition there that you can see this a lot where you know, you can kind of tell that some of those older fellows probably did have to graft really hard, because they always gone out of their way to make sure that you don't have to.

Ben: Yes sure I wanted to leave school at inter-cert and he says no way, you'll do your leaving and you'll do what you want after that. Because he taught himself to read and write, he didn't know how to read and write and he ended up commercial traveller. But his writing was cat.

Interviewer: Yeah but he did it himself.

Ben: He did it himself.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think a lot of people in those days that generation especially if you came from the sort of the early generations that came out of the new state if you like once we got independence, education was hard come by.

Ben: Probably wasn't available.

Interviewer: Yeah and I think a lot of those guys tried to better themselves off their own back.

Ben: They probably had to work on the land or whatever, they had a small farm out there, the Plains of Boyle as they use to call it. I think that's why a lot of them were so

¹ A sizeable demolition and building contractor founded by a Carrick-on-Shannon native, Bernard McWeeny in London in 1957. See Appendix B.

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able to cope with migration when they did have to go, because they were used to hard work. They probably saw it as a step up.

Interviewer: Probably, well the money would be better for starters whatever happened.

Ben: Well there was no work here. No work here at all, full stop. And whatever you earned in England was going to be better than you get here....and it was your own. (laughs)

Interviewer: Yes and I suppose that's enough to make anybody think about it.

Ben: Yea well, when you are a young fellow and you had no work, like, what do you do?

Interviewer: It's heart breaking, spirit breaking you can't have that. And I'd say the period you are talking about now, would have been a lot better than it was say 20 years before.

Ben: I'd say so yeah, because I would have worked with a lot of them fellows that vintage, a lot of them were drinkers and gamblers ; and horses was a big thing with them.

Interviewer: Yes, Geegees.

Ben: Yes and they'd be all over and they'd be all at the paper there every day and marking off their stuff. Some of them...Jesus that's where all their money use to go... Trying to make their fortune. Sure, they even had me at it, I remember doing 10 x 10p win doubles...it was a pound. Jesus I won 16 pound the first time; Jesus it was nearly like couple of days wages!

Interviewer: Anyway we are digressing not that that's any harm. But so the first year you went was 1974?

Ben: Yes '74 and '75.

Interviewer: And so you went because you had some contacts?

Ben: I went because my brother was going and a load of other lads, students like.

Interviewer: And did you go in a big gang then?

Ben: Wait till I see now, there was myself, Pete, Mahon and Duncan these are all solicitors now these boys! One would be a brother of Judge Mahon, you know the Mahon Tribunal, yeah. Duncan now, he's a big solicitor out in Galway now he would have worked with Butty Sugrue down in the Wellington and...Yeah but we use to go down into...and we thrown in the 50p and what you'd get change of a fiver or a pound or whatever and you know...but he use to be on about this fellow Butty Sugrue...you heard of that fellow?

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Interviewer: Yes he was a legend....

Ben: The Welly was the pub in...the Wellington down in Shepard's Bush or somewhere around there.

Interviewer: He pulled off this big publicity stunt, he buried a barman, he was a Cork fellow called Meaney, it was before 1974 now this was back in the '60s and he buried him alive for...(pause)...supposed to have been 65 days I think or something like that. And they were supposed to have an airpipe and food tube that they were feeding him. They reckon it was all a big con and your man used to come out at night. But it was all over the newspapers.

Ben: Yes he had some reputation, he was very famous at the time.

Interviewer: Yes that would have been predominately why; I think he was a kind of wrestler come promoter, come....you know he ran a contracting business as well I think, he was a Kerry man. Yes he was very well known in Irish London if you like.

Ben: Yes, well Duncan got a lot of work there in the bar, so he was...(pause)...we were on the buildings.

Interviewer: But you all went in a group?

Ben: About 4 of us went I think, I remember well because we went on the boat from Dun Laoghaire.

Interviewer: You got the train up from Carrick?

Ben: That I don't know because we'd have stayed with an aunt in Dublin; I think we stayed with her, the night before or something.

Interviewer: And over on the ferry?

Ben: Over on the boat, it was a rough aul boat, use to call it a cattle boat, now there was no cattle on it, but I think it might have been a cattle boat at some stage converted.

Interviewer: I think again this is to do with timing if you had gone 20 years before, there would have been cattle on it, you'd have been on the top and the cattle on the bottom.

Ben: Yes it was known as the cattle boat. But it was 9 o'clock and the time we got into...we got the train then down.

Interviewer: Where you go to Holyhead?

Ben: Holyhead and then straight onto a train and I think it was 9 o'clock the next morning or 7 o'clock in the morning or something like that.

Interviewer: Into Euston?

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Ben: Into Euston yeah. And I remember we spent the whole fucking day tramping around the place looking for some place to stay.

Interviewer: Right that was the question I was going to ask, so you didn't have anywhere arranged to stay?

Ben: Oh No, no no...(pause) I don't know how the job was arranged anyway. That was a Saturday or a Sunday then...I remember we were walking around with these fucking cases around.

Interviewer: Because there must have been...(pause)..., Tony Keane once said to me, he said, 'ah sure' he was talking about the '60s now when my dad was going over, he said, 'sure half of Carrick stayed with us...' when he was in London they had a flat. I got the distinct impression from the way of talking to people that there must have been vast amount of young men that came from this town that ended up in London around then.

Ben: Jesus we actually stayed in a place, there was a big pub...(pause)...have to try and jog my memory now...was it Matty Feely?...but I'll go back to that first day, because I remember that well. We tramped around the fecking city.

Interviewer: So you literally got off the train with a case and you are walking around?

Ben: Yea. You see Pete had been there the year before, and of course...he knew a...well it wasn't strange to him so I was latching on there. But we got a place in Covent Garden, yeah, there was a big...you'd often see the Rolls Royce and things like that....

Interviewer: Covent Garden is quite a posh part of London; it's right in the middle.

Ben: There was some opera house close enough to that, it was an aul' gym and it was 60p a night! They pulled out a mattress!

Interviewer: Was it like a hostel kind of arrangement?

Ben: No we had to be out at 7 o'clock it was a gym of some sort. And I remember it well over in the corner that they had a kind of a caged off area and there was loads of just mattresses, and we had sleeping bags with us of course. And you got this mattress and it was 60p a night but you had to be gone before 7 o'clock in the morning. But it suited us, because we had to start work at 7 o'clock in the morning.

Interviewer: So this was like probably just the gym that was...this was to get them an extra few bob they'd let it out?

Ben: It must have been; I don't know how we came across it. Because I remember there now, whatever few pound you had you were like 'what will I do with this' and you had it down at the bottom of the sleeping bag and all sorts. I remember looking over....

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Interviewer: Because presumably it couldn't have been a very kind of safe or secure...what's the word homely....

Ben: It wasn't secure at all. Sure it was just a big gym and loads of fellows with mattresses. I remember looking over at this fellow and there was one fellow standing on his head, he looked like an Egyptian type fellow he must have been meditating or something and standing like...two feet straight up in the air, and I was going...what the... What the hell! It was really funny y'know? I would have been very innocent back then, what would I have been '74, 18 or 19, but like...fucking 13 or 14 year old would wipe your eye nowadays.

Interviewer: And was that place you stayed the first night?

Ben: We stayed there a good while, we must have stayed there a good few nights, but then we must have went down to that place in Shepard's Bush. I remember your man changing the money because they wouldn't take the Irish pound even though the pound was a pound. But the Irish pound they wouldn't take it, so your man use to just swap our Irish pounds he'd just give you the English pound for it.

Interviewer: So if you stayed in Convent Garden then, when did you go or how did you go working?



Figure 1 - Covent Garden c.1973
(photo Copyright © 2010-2018 New Video Channel America, LLC)

Ben: That was on the Sunday we tramped around and we got this place and we were in work on the Monday morning at 7 o'clock.

Interviewer: So you arrived kind of Sunday morning?

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Ben: We arrived Sunday morning at 7 o'clock, tramped around got this place 60p a night with the mattress.

Interviewer: And went to work Monday?

Ben: And we were down in Billingsgate at London Bridge at 7 o'clock the next morning.

Interviewer: Working for who?

Ben: For McWeeney Smallman.

Interviewer: So you must have known....

Ben: The job was there obviously yeah that was through Johnny McWeeney because my father would have known Johnny McWeeney well.

Interviewer: So the job was sorted?

Ben: The job must have been sorted yeah, I'd say Pete must have. Because I can't remember...he obviously had...because he had been there before, so he obviously knew where to go or...he must have had a phone number or whatever.

Interviewer: And so you literally turned up Monday morning?

Ben: Monday morning and Jimmy McWeeney.

Interviewer: And so if you were staying in this sort of hostel place what would you do with your gear? Your case and all that?

Ben: That's a good question now Mick...(pause)...I think we must have left it there, maybe it was in behind where that cage place was or where the mattresses was or something. Can't remember now, but we stayed there for about a week. You see that's what I'm trying to feckin figure out.

Interviewer: Because obviously if you went out working, in rough gear like; you'd have been....

Ben: I don't think we had fuck all gear anyway!

Interviewer: I was going to say! Probably didn't really.

Ben: We wouldn't have had any valuables as a fella says! (laughs).

Interviewer: You were working in the clothes you were stood up in more or less?

Ben: Yes I'm trying to think now, where did we go from there, Jesus from there we went...where is that fecking thing down in Hammersmith? that pub down in Hammersmith, something to do with Matty...the Feely's you know Johnny Feely?

Interviewer: No.

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Ben: Something to do with them, some connection there, it was Matty Feely over there? I think we stayed there...might have stayed the night there.

Interviewer: So he was over there at that time was he?

Ben: No it wouldn't have been him, it would have been a brother of his, now I don't know whether the brother was there, whatever the connection would it...some connection there with the Feely's anyway, I think we stayed there one night, we just went down because we know there was a connection, we just always looking for connections.

Interviewer: It's all about networks.

Ben: Yea but after that we went to a place up in Manor House we got our next accommodation and that was a kind of a hostel type place, because I remember we use to go downstairs and get the bit of grub in the evening and it was fucking Chinese, I never seen Chinese fellows before! And I always remember braised pork, I use to eat this braised pork never heard of them been braised either, everything was totally new. But that's what we use to eat. And we use to go the Manor, I remember going to the Manor House pub, it was a fucking massive place, and I couldn't drink the Guinness at all over there, and I didn't like beer either. And I remember going down one night there and I says...

[interruption]

Ben: No they had a place at the bottom of it, I think we went upstairs, I think we had a room where we shared 3 of us in it, but I'll always remember that Chinese food.

Interviewer: You wouldn't be used to that kind of....

Ben: Not at all, nah...braised pork! Jesus I liked it.

Interviewer: And were you working for McWeeney's all this time?

Ben: Yes, I was there for 4 months, 7 days a week never missed a day, finished on the Thursday and got the boat on the Saturday back. I was getting 85 pound a week for the 7 days.

Interviewer: Good money.

Ben: Wasn't too bad now, but you were working from 7 to 7.

Interviewer: Yes it was a long shift.

Ben: Yes it was a long shift. And you get a bit of scrump money as well, scrump money you use to call it. Scrap, because we'd be pulling out bits of brass and bits of...we were in a big demolition, we were knocking a massive big warehouse just at London Bridge, we were going down across London Bridge.

Interviewer: And was it the same job you worked on the 4 months you were there?

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Ben: Yes that's what I was trying to think, I think so.

Interviewer: So it was a very handy place to...you know from the point of view for someone who had never been to London you were slap bang in the middle of London.

Ben: Sure I wouldn't have known that like.

Interviewer: You probably wouldn't no, right on the Thames.

Ben: Yes, we were there...that year was the time the bombs went off up in the Tower and because we use to go over to the Cock, Billingsgate fish market was right there beside us, one side of us and the London Bridge was that side of us and all the boys went around with the big barrows and all that, and we use to go over to the Cock, but that was in full swing when we got to work, that fish market. But midday and early for them at 7 in the morning.

Interviewer: It would be yeah.

Ben: We use to go over to the Cock at lunch time...that was a pub.

Interviewer: In the middle of Billingsgate or the roundabout there?

Ben: Well we use to walk over to it anyways and we were more or less beside...I actually walked down the last time I was in London, totally changed the market is gone all that is all gone, big aul grey buildings all over the place instead.

Interviewer: The market is there but it's not a market, Billingsgate fish market is in Canary Warf now, yeah. It's still there actually, but it's not...it's just called Billingsgate it's nothing like the old one.

Ben: This was like what you'd see in old movies the boys roaring and shouting and all this carry on. We use to drink 6 pints every fecking lunchtime. There'd be dust and we'd be parched, the first, I remember we use to call them bitter taps, your man use to call them. Fill up the beer and then put about that much red in them and the first two pints would be gone like that, and so the first 2 pints would be gone in 2, 3, 4 minutes.

Interviewer: You'd neck them.

Ben: Yes but that's just the thirst. And we use to go to a little café across the road for the breakfast, you'd have a bacon and double egg bacon and sausage and beans and whatever.

Interviewer: You'd have that every morning.

Ben: Loads of bread and a pint of milk.

Interviewer: But you'd be working that off I'd say.

Ben: And there was another little place beside the job as well, and we'd get there around quarter to seven or whatever and you'd get a cup of tea and a current bun.

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Interviewer: To keep you going. And would you have got nothing in the house where you were staying you wouldn't?

Ben: Well not at that hour of the morning.

Interviewer: And tell me now, the kind of places you were staying.

Ben: It was a hostel type thing.

Interviewer: I can't imagine that there would have been much in the way of bathroom facilities and all that carry on?

Ben: That I can't remember, because I remember we use to go to Euston to the super-loo! Did you ever hear of that place, you could go in there and you could go into a little room there and you had a shower and everything, sure Jasus we'd go in there washing off the weeks work off us! Because we use to go into Wards then of a Saturday night in Piccadilly, Wards Irish house did you ever hear of that place?

Interviewer: No.

Ben: That's where they all use to go and there was the Connacht room and the Ulster room and you'd meet loads of fellows from home in there on a Saturday night. But we'd still be in work next morning at 7 o'clock.

Interviewer: Were most of the lads that you were working with would they have been all Irish?

Ben: I'd say the majority were Irish, but one buck he was Polish. There was a couple of English fellows. Mostly Irish yeah.

Interviewer: And who was running it, McWeeney?

Ben: Jimmy McWeeney was running that job, he'd be another one of the McWeeney's he'd be a brother of Johnny's that was out there.

Interviewer: But who owned McWeeney Smallman?

Ben: It would be a Smallman and another brother of the McWeeney's. They were steel erectors as well.

Interviewer: Was he Bernard?

Ben: I think that's right yeah.

Interviewer: And did the McWeeney's always do stone and gravel and that stuff, before he would have gone to England.

Ben: Yes the father had a truck, all he had was a truck sand and gravel in the yard there.

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Interviewer: I was asking my father about McWeeney and Smallman he reckons that Smallman was a woman, she was a wealthy Jewish woman and she had the lollie.

Ben: I use to remember the big Jaguar coming around with the money. Whether that was Smallman or McWeeney himself? You didn't know because you just put your head down and...never went near that big yolk! But I was telling you about the scrump money; that was a massive big warehouse and any cables and all that was brought up to a place way up on the floors and there was two or three fellows all the time, pulling the cables and pulling the copper out of them, and the big ball would be coming down and a lot of the work that we were doing was going in and pulling out the wires.

Interviewer: So how many men now just roughly would you say...this gang?

Ben: On this job about 30, it was a big job.

Interviewer: Literally pulling down the building.

Ben: A lot of drivers and machines like; there would be a couple of cranes, RBs, 43 RB and 38, 22 and 46 RB² and Caterpillars and all them. So that would be all ball and chain work. We'd be going in and you'd have top men they'd be working up at the time, close to the road and that. Everyone wanted to be a top man!...I eventually started working up the top; I was cutting the steel as well, sure I hadn't a fucking clue! I use to just look at your man and he'd light this gas and he'd go along and then you just press the yolk down, no goggles or anything. And sometimes it worked (the gas flowed) and sometimes it wouldn't and...Jesus, I became a welder afterwards, I was saying to myself what was I at!... it was just bang, bang, bang...I hadn't a clue what I was doing!

Interviewer: I'd say when you learnt to weld you must have thought, my god the risks you were taking.

Ben: I nearly I got killed, I remember one day twice in the one day I nearly got killed, it was an awful bad fucking day, it was a Sunday.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of injuries generally now?

Ben: No can't remember anyone getting injured. Except that one day, so the ball was knocking all day so you were just looking at a building there, with floors, you could see all the floors ready to be knocked down. So the ball would come along and he'd

² Ruston-Bucyrus Ltd was an engineering company established in 1930 and jointly owned by Ruston and Homsby based in Lincoln, England and Bucyrus-Erie based in Bucyrus, Ohio. The main selling range in the 1960s were 22RB, 30RB, 38RB, 61RB and 71RB. In addition, there were the large machines including the 110RB which evolved into the 150RB. The 22RB was the most popular machine which was assembled on a production line basis. The most common variants included face shovel, dragline, lifting crane and grabbing crane. Less common variants included drag shovel, skimmer and pile driver. Some cranes were also lorry-mounted. All machines had 360 degree rotation. The model size, an elusively defined number, was possibly the standard face shovel capacity in cubic feet. All the machines were mounted on crawler tracks. See Peter N. Grimshaw, *The Amazing Story of Excavators: Makers of Machines That Reshape the World*, (Wadhurst, 2002).

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knock a bay, they were big steel stanchions...and that was a lot of our time, on the jack-hammer, breaking out concrete, going in around the steel so that the steel could be cut.

Interviewer: And would they reuse that steel?

Ben: That will be all brought away in skips for to be sold. And when the ball wasn't knocking you'd have the chains on and that was another job you'd have, was lashing the big girders that was cut and they'd be dropped over then into a skip and the lorry would come along and pull up that skip onto the back of it. That was the first time I ever seen any of them lorries, y'know? That could drop the skip. Yeah, I remember he'd knock with the ball and all the stuff would fall down, the floor would fall down like that, (shows me manually) and it'd be hanging by the reinforcement rods (the edges of the slabs), so you go out to the edge then and you'd go 'snip, snip' and then the whole floor maybe the length of the street, could just drop down maybe 60, 70, 80ft like. But then he'd move over to another section and he'd be balling over there. And I was out there one day and it was an awful wet day and I put on a helmet because of the rain.

Interviewer: Something you wouldn't normally do?

Ben: No, and whatever the vibration or whatever from one of the floors above, the fucking yolk came down and took the fucking helmet clean off me. Only I had the helmet on I would have been split. And beJesus, I went down for the tea...of course we usen't go down the ladders; you'd swing down through the scaffolding like monkey's and I remember jumping along and I missed my fucking grip and I lost it... and I fell down two bays and just got caught on my stomach! And I was....it was 60 or 70 ft up. I remember that day well I nearly got killed twice. But sure we use to carry bottles of oxygen across 9 inch beams on your shoulder...a bottle of oxygen! You'd hardly lift it off the ground now, but then you'd throw it up on your shoulder and away...sure we were mad!

Interviewer: And you were fit.

Ben: Yes...we were working hard.

Interviewer: Young and fit, if you were able for it, you could...but the risk taking now I'm interested in.

Ben: Just on the safety I remember the first thing Jimmy McWeeney said to me, all wooden ladders, he said when you are going up a ladder he said, hold it by the sides, don't climb like you normally would, because one of them rungs could go, always hold your ladder like that (motions by the side of ladder). Little things stick out in your mind.

Interviewer: But those ladders should have been tied anyway...and I bet they weren't?

Ben: Sure look I was a scaffolding inspector in the ESB and there was no notice taken there either! And another thing Jimmy told me, was to look out for trapped boards

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where a fellow would throw a board across and if you walked over, you know they could be sticking out that far and if you walked out you were gone (vertical fall from height), look out for the trap board he says.

Interviewer: So all that stuff now, is kind of...you just won't see that on a building site now, you'd be locked up.

Ben: The director would go to jail.

Interviewer: That's kind of basic stuff.

Ben: You'd have to be trained. But in those days, there was no one...it was like you know, there was just no such thing as safety. And you were working 7 days a week and that was for the whole summer basically.

Interviewer: You didn't have much time I suppose for social life did you?

Ben: No feck all now. I remember down to Holloway Road one night with this bloke Quigley he was married to a one out from in Drumsna, one of the McLoughlin's.

Interviewer: Because you must have met a few, you must have met the lads.

Ben: I would have, but they were all drinkers and gamblers and that's my recollection of them, you know.

Interviewer: You wouldn't have been mad into that?

Ben: No once you'd leave the job they'd go their way and you'd go your way, it was a big fucking place, Manor House was probably an awful long way.

Interviewer: Well Manor House wouldn't be too far, there would have been plenty of Irish around Finsbury Park and Manor House wouldn't be too far.

Ben: But sure by the time you go home and get a bit of grub you were in bed like.

Interviewer: Yes and especially if you had to be in work at 7 o'clock the next morning.

Ben: Yes sure you'd be up well before 6, well before 6 to get...but then we ended up living out in Ravenscourt Park.

Interviewer: That's worse again, that's further away again.

Ben: Is it yeah? I don't know how we ended up there, but it was kind of like a flat type thing and it wasn't a bad kip now. But I use to go around for a few pints to the local place, it was a big bull, I remember there was a massive big black bull up on a plinth about that height, and there was a polytech there as well, so it was nearly all aul' students in there, sure they wouldn't fucking talk to you, you'd try to talk to a few women and sure they wouldn't want...the minute you open your mouth they wouldn't want to know you.

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Interviewer: Was that snobbery or?...

Ben: I think it was because you were Irish I'd say yeah.

Interviewer: Yes, '74 you are talking the height of the bombing campaigns. So did you find any sort of obvious examples or was it just a general feeling?

Ben: No, just a general feeling, now maybe...as I said that was kind of a student...it seemed more of upmarket place, you just felt you didn't fit in.

Interviewer: So in some ways you were probably lucky enough because you were working 7 days, you didn't have much time to

Ben: Yeah to see that. We use to go up to the other place the Swan in Hammersmith Broadway as well, there use to be a strip show! Big stuff for a young buck from Carrick-on-Shannon!

Interviewer: But you didn't head up to any of the big Irish kind of...Kilburn or Cricklewood or such?

Ben: No, never had the chance to go up you see.

Interviewer: And again presumably with the working schedule you didn't have time, but you didn't do any other kind of social activities you know, gigs or going to see bands or stuff like that?

Ben: I think I went down once or twice to the White Hart in Fulham, that wasn't too far from Hammersmith I don't think.

Interviewer: No it wouldn't be; Fulham would be about 10 minutes on a bus from Hammersmith.

Ben: We never got the bus.

Interviewer: Well you'd walk it in

Ben: No it was all tubes, the buses, to figure them out, maybe I did now...but...

Interviewer: Well you could...you would...would be a couple of stops on the tube from Hammersmith to Fulham.

Ben: Yes the tube was fierce handy to manoeuvre, where I would have found buses.

Interviewer: Yeah tricky.

Ben: Yeah like everything was so alien like, and then where do you get off that's the big thing. So like you wouldn't know where you were going for a start and then how do you know where you get off. As far as I can remember this would be more bands than traditional now.

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Interviewer: It was traditional but it wasn't a session, you had to sit on a stage. Anyway, we're digressing! So that was your first year in London... 1974?

Ben: Yea, I'm trying to think about the second year, I have no recollection, very vivid things about going the first year. Obviously it was boat and train again.

Interviewer: And was it the same set up, did you work for McWeeney's again?

Ben: No we didn't work for McWeeney's we actually worked for Jimmy...he had his own little private job going on; Jimmy McWeeney.

Interviewer: But that wasn't through the company?

Ben: No he was the general foreman on that big job in Billingsgate the year before. But this time he had this other job that he was doing for himself, and I remember...the same driver use to come and drop the skip to bring it all away, but it was a McWeeney fucking Smallman skip hire...

Interviewer: That was being paid through the company?

Ben: Yea through the company.

Interviewer: So he was earning himself a few bob on the side, like, yeah?

Ben: Jesus we use to be...you'd see yourself with shit, dust, all the asbestos...God knows what we were breathing in...

Interviewer: Where was this now?

Ben: I'm trying to think that was, was it in Blackfriars somewhere around there?

Interviewer: That would be south of the River Thames, so go down past...

Ben: That rings a bell I think it was Blackfriars. I know we use to go to Bank in the other place, that's where we use to get to. And use to go up sometimes there was another pub of a Sunday or whatever...no there was another pub just...the Monument?

Interviewer: Basically Monument Station is next to Bank, you could...

Ben: I think you could walk from one to the other, it was underground.

Interviewer: And that's still the case, you still do that.

Ben: Sometimes we use to go up to another bar and there'd be all these fellows having half a bitter, the suits like...the office workers. I remember going home on the train as well, the trains would be jammers sometimes, and you'd get in and you'd have all the room in the world; you were like a snowman...they'd be afraid to touch you! (laughs)

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Interviewer: So was there no...none of what we'd expect on a job today, like a drying room or a changing room?

Ben: Jasus not at all.

Interviewer: Nothing of that kind whatsoever.

Ben: Not at all, no there wasn't. No place to make a cup of tea now or anything like that. There was no changing rooms or anything...I can't quite remember...no, there wasn't, no...

Interviewer: And I know the answer to this, but I'm going to ask it anyway, things like safety clothing, footwear, boots, jackets?

Ben: Ahh not at all. Well, actually there must have been a helmet because I remember putting on that bloody helmet that day, was it a yellow helmet, might have been one or two of them fired around the place for show!

Interviewer: You didn't get issued with boots or you didn't get issued with....

Ben: Not at all...Jasus we didn't get issued with nuthin'!

Interviewer: No, and nowhere to get changed. So you literally came off the job and got on the tube?

Ben: You came to work in your clothes and you went home in your clothes.

Interviewer: So if you got cleaned up the only place you'd be able to get cleaned up is when you went home?

Ben: When you went home, there was no, there was no cleaning I can't remember any fecking jobs I was ever on. But sure that was....That was the way it was. Didn't know any different I suppose.

Interviewer: And that second year then?

Ben: Yes we went to work for Jimmy for a couple of weeks in that job.

Interviewer: So were you if you don't mind me asking now, again I think I know the answer, but when you were getting paid, were you getting paid every week?

Ben: Yes, cash. The first year, with McWeeney Smallman we had what I think what they called a *student exemption card* or something...so you didn't have to pay any tax...but either way you just got an envelope with your money in it. You use to get about a fiver a week from that scrump money.

Interviewer: That would probably help them because the student exemption card, they didn't have to take any tax off you, but they were probably paying you less than the going rate shall we say for whatever a labourer should have been under the

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National Working Rule Agreement or whatever it was, because you were students, maybe I'm not sure now.

Ben: I don't know.

Interviewer: The first week you said?

Ben: £85 a week I think for the 7 days which was kind of good.

Interviewer: Not too bad in '74, wouldn't have been too bad.

Ben: Was supposed to be saving it for coming home.

Interviewer: Did you save any?

Ben: A couple of hundred coming home that was all a bit.

Interviewer: So you are talking about 12 weeks tours.

Ben: 12, 16 weeks.

Interviewer: So if you saved a couple of hundred, you probably saved 3 weeks out of the 12 if you look at it that way.

Ben: Yes but sure you'd be spending on tubes and food and accommodation and all that. But I'm trying to think where we went after that job. Oh I do, we worked in Pontings and it was a big shop we were knocking - massive fucking place, worked for McWeeney and Smallman after that. And then there was a job out at the airport and that was at night, Pete went out to that, but I wouldn't go out working at night. I went working on another job, Kensington High Street?...somewhere up around there. And then I remember being on another job, it was down where New Scotland Yard is, would that be Victoria Street?

Interviewer: Yep it would be.

Ben: There was nutters on that job. I don't know who I was working for, some subbie or whatever. Sure you didn't give a shite as long as you were getting the money.

Interviewer: And can you remember how you would have got that job?

Ben: I can't remember how I got that job at all. Contacts...you'd meet someone on another job. But I remember being on that job...I was a top man in that job, I remember I use to be out on the street and the big thick walls, be about maybe as wide as the table - brick walls and they'd all have to be taken down by hand, you'd have a mattock, d'you know what a mattock is?...Bit like a pick only wider blades. So you'd come down and you'd fucking dig into the brick and you'd crank her sideways and then you'd be kicking in (away from the street). If you were a top man you'd know them, because you'd see the steel toe-caps shining thro' the boots because you were kicking the bricks in all the time, away from the street. But sure there was no scaffolding and stuff, nothing!

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Interviewer: Nothing?...so you were standing on top of the wall you were knocking it over?

Ben: You are standing on the wall and digging...digging into it. There was no safety...safety me arse, like! But I thought this was great you were up there, you were getting a few extra pound.

Interviewer: For being top man?

Ben: Yes and then you'd be drilling; you'd be taking down massive big stones and archways and that, you'd be drilling stones and putting in wedges and hammering them and breaking the stone. Now you'd learn all this on the hoof y'know?³ I remember working with this fellow, Welshy from Dublin, and taking down the archway on that job. He was a sound fellow. But I remember that job, one fellow says to me, he said, "oh that's Scotch Jimmy or whatever, he's just out now", they were all...after a while it dawned on me...most of these fucking guys all had been inside!

Interviewer: Villains.

Ben: Yea...fucking villains! But anyways the boys went drinking one day and he was like...no sign of Welshy or whatever and went to the pub that Welshy had went in, this guy would be in his 50s I'd say. He'd wrecked the fucking pub. Some fellow was turning up the jukebox and he told them to turn it down...and whatever they were drinking at this table and seemingly - this now is what I heard - Welshy had put the hands on the table, took the fucking table and fucked it into the jukebox! Police were around the next day on site and...sure all the foreman said was, "ah nah...casual labour...casual labourer. The guy was here but he's gone, probably never see him again, don't know who he was" A casual labourer, that's what they said to the police. Well he was back the next day...you see the story with him seemingly was, that he couldn't take drink.

Interviewer: The impression that I have gotten from a lot of the stuff that I have looked at, that kind of I hesitate to use the word the 'bottom end of the market' but it was the bottom end of the market in terms of labour. Like students now would be easy to employ that way, they'd be cheap, ready, you are transitory, only there for a few months you are extendable labour. And these other older lads would be kind of, the impression I got from what one fellow was saying that, the lads that worked on the sort of the real casual end of it, they were the lads that couldn't hold down work. They'd go off, if they were 'alcys'⁴ now they'd go off on a rip....

Ben: Drink seemed to be...on both years, it was all the demolition I worked on. Now I worked on one construction job, I think that was up in Kensington High Street and I was working for an Irish subbie and he was a cunt, and it was an English man I remember...he gave me a Saturday, and he said I'll give you Saturdays, I'll look after you, you know whatever. He was a far better man than the Irish fellow. Look he gave

³ An informal term. If you do something 'on the hoof', you do it while you are moving about or doing something else, often without giving it the attention it deserves. This really refers to the very informal nature of learning the demolition trade by 'getting stuck into it' and without any formal tradecraft.

⁴ Slang for alcoholic

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me work or whatever (the Irish subbie) and I was working for him or whatever, but by Jasus they rode ye for it!⁵

The English foreman, he obviously fucking knew that he was ridin' us. He put me in for a load of hours or whatever, probably costing his company money because his company was probably paying the subbie anyway, but he looked after me, he said you are a good worker or whatever. I'll always remember that. I think it was that he gave me a Saturday work, I didn't work as much now the second year as such, I think we just fell on the one job and it was a big job the first year.

Interviewer: Did you notice a lot of the lads that were there permanently shall we say, apart from you were effectively a temporary worker. But lads who were doing that kind of work all the time, was there a big drink culture?

Ben: There was yeah, I think there was yeah. The first time ever I see a man drinking...they called him Slowey...actually I saw it in McWeeneys...Slowey, he use to drive one of the Cats, ... (drinking) whiskey and milk! That's what he used to have, I think he'd have a bad stomach or something. We'd go in at lunchtime we'd be having our bitter pops or whatever and he'd be having a whiskey and milk.

Interviewer: And would you say that your experiences now, would there have been a lot of lads I presume that it would have been, it was a trend if you like to go to England to work for the summer amongst college lads in Ireland? Presumably because it was in the scheme of things...it was relatively convenient.

Ben: It would yeah, because as I said we use to go to Wards in Piccadilly and we'd meet other fellows we knew and sure they're probably doing the same craic...you know yourself, just over for the summer earning money. Sure my older brother used to go to America; that was in the 60s.

Interviewer: Did he? Jesus that would be a big thing to do.

Ben: Yes Atlantic City, we were just talking about it there recently. We were on holidays and he used to have 3 jobs, he was holding onto 3 jobs. Yeah.

Interviewer: Again just for college?

Ben: For college yeah.

Interviewer: That was a big thing to do to go to America.

Ben: Back then yeah, I'd say it must have cost a fortune to go for a start. Like the boat to England was handy enough.

Interviewer: Well you see I know it was a rough old journey but you get there in a day and back in a day.

⁵ A slang term meaning they 'took their pound of flesh' or exploited you.

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Ben: Yes but an aeroplane, sure I remember the flight to England at that time was about 300 quid you know, for a flight to London was nuts. But sure no one started that until Ryanair started. I use to love when you'd get off that feckin' boat and get on the train at Dun Laoghaire to go into Dublin 'Jasus, Jasus' the fucking ticket man come along with this real Dublin accent, Jesus it was like...something inside you went, maybe there was a subconscious tension when you were away or whatever, I don't know. Just your man coming around...'Jasus' and the maybe the hat tilted back a bit. It's like everything was awful busy all the time over in England or something; nobody had any time for anybody. Coming back was just like an internal kind of easing off. Funny the things you remember.

Interviewer: But you enjoyed the few months.

Ben: It was an experience like, but it's gone very sketchy, but we worked fucking hard. But sure you were young, you'd do anything. I would have been a big strong lad. You would have been able for the work. I think that was half the battle if you could do that and you could...My older brother, now, he wouldn't have been able as much for it, I don't think. He wouldn't go at it like me!

Interviewer: But then again I heard people saying and I have seen it myself, where if you were in a gang of lads and you all got on, you know the strong ones would cover for the weak ones, you know they'd kind of make sure that there was enough done that they weren't going to get into trouble.

Ben: Well I worked away doing my own bits, pulling out steel here and there, it wasn't like a production line, it was different from construction. Demolition is a kind of a bit different than construction; you could be at anything. As I said I wanted to get up to the top, I always wanted to get to the top. This mad streak in me! That's why I was always fascinated with your man burning the steel, every time he left it down, I had it up and fucking...it was like you get mad bits of that reinforcing and you had to knock down the man would just ball it all till the steel was left and the rubble would be taken away and your man would cut all the steel...bits that could be put into the skip.

Interviewer: And this scrump money that you were talking about?

Ben: Jimmy took care of that and then he'd come along and throw out a fiver for you or ten, one week I got fifteen fucking pound it was a big aul bonus, you'd never get less than a fiver, any bit of brass or bit of copper if you seen an aul plate or something maybe a name plate that was off something. A bit of a lump of thick brass you'd be down in the rubble and pull that out and that was all brought over there and put to one side.

Interviewer: And he'd sell all of that?

Ben: Sell all of that, probably kept half himself and split the other half. But as I said, there was a crew at one stage came across loads of these big cables, burning, black smoke...burning the shit out of them, pulling out the copper. That was the bonus.

Interviewer: So did you just go for the two years.

Original Interview # 08 – Ben C – Leitrim

Ben: Just for the two years.

Interviewer: And you never went back working again there?

Ben: I was going to go back again, but then I went working for Mac's father, because sure, he kind of talked me into staying working for him, he had a big job coming up. I was only getting 40 quid a week or something, but I suppose it was alright.

Interviewer: Shows you the difference the wage differential.

Ben: But you wouldn't be working 7 days a week or anything, and I suppose I was only after saying it there (in London), that maybe we were been paid a lot less that we should have for the hours we were putting in. '71, about... about 12 pound a day was it?

Interviewer: Yes but that's all cash on the hip.

Ben: That was cash yeah, everything was cash. No paying no tax; didn't pay tax on anything!

Interviewer: I think we'll leave it there will we?

Ben: Yes, I don't know if it's of any help to you now.

Interviewer: Ah yea it's all a great help you know. Like I said I'll write it up.

End.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

Name: Tom

Date of Birth: 1942

Place of Birth: Cork City

Date of Emigration to UK:

Date of Interview: February 22nd, 2016.

Location of Interview: Tom's house in Cork City.

Interviewer's Notes:

1. This interview was carried out in a somewhat febrile atmosphere as a large family visit was taking place during the interview which rendered some of the dialogue unclear. The oral interview has been re-arranged in chronology and layout to suit interviewee's preferred life narrative.
2. Tom emphasised repeatedly the traumatic time which he suffered at the hands of the Christian Brothers through physical and emotional abuse during National School in Ireland which left him with life-long anger management, stress and self-esteem issues which he is certain affected his working life and social life in Britain. I advised Tom confidentially that if he considered these issues to be significant, that there was a list of welfare agencies and advice bodies on the rear of the study information / consent form which could assist him. Tom noted this but declined to consult any of these bodies.

Interviewer: So I suppose to get the formalities out of the way, you're a Corkman, I presume and when were you born?

Tom: I am. I'm a native of Cork City. I was born in 1942. I was one of five siblings that survived but sure in those days there was no contraception, they lost maybe nine or ten, y'know? I was in the middle, then, I had two older brothers, and a younger brother and a younger sister.

Interviewer: And, as we were just talking about [off-tape] your education and schooling was a difficult time?

Tom: I went to the Christian Brothers' School in Cork and, no, I didn't have a very good time there. You were in the desk, then, like that lad I just mentioned [off tape], and they'd come up behind you and give you a beating and then you'd often get a dig in the back of the neck that'd send you flying and that sort of thing. But those issues with school and the beatings definitely affected me later in life...like I was a very angry young man; I couldn't hold a job down for long. See fellas would come up to me on a job and I'd lose it, like. I was a grafter, like, but at the end of the day I couldn't...y'know...

Interviewer: So what age were you at school until, Tom?

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

Tom: I left at thirteen...but to be honest, I didn't go a lot of the time...see we moved down to Farranferris college where they trained the priests,¹ but...we were threatened...like...lots of time me mother...we couldn't go because we had no clothes, no shoes and no food. So we lost a lot of time. Sure you couldn't go...say in the lashing rain like it is there today (points out window)...sure all we had was an auld pair of trousers and a cut-down jumper. The only pair of leather shoes I ever had as a kid was an auld pair o'me aunt's shoes with the heels taken off and o'course I got slagged at school for them! So when we were going to that Christian Brother's School, then, the college was the shortcut there...but we didn't go for about four months one time and we were threatened then with the Industrial Schools for not goin' to school, y'know, the attendance officer'd come around and...so...one day meself and the brother –

There's a fella would you believe now, Mike, is a taxi-driver today in Cork and he was at school with us and he still says that they were the worst beatings he ever seen anyone get...to this very day...that's not very long ago, would you believe that?!...

[Tom's daughter interposes] He used to be a butcher in the English Market, didn't he?

...that's right, he used to be the butcher. But...Eh...we were four months off school then after we ran out after getting this particular beating. He (taxi-driver) knew...like, I'd half forgot it...he made it out that was 1953, like 'twould have been our confirmation year, 1953 and we were four months then up in this...up in this...'twas a seminary, Farranferris College. Anyway then they threatened us again with the Industrial Schools....oh yea, I wound up going to Blackpool School for a while – which was a waste of time 'cos I didn't know anything anyway.

So what we did then, we'd go out to the farmers and we'd do 'thinning'² and we'd get sixpence a drill for that and you'd get an odd five bob and that'd cover your pot of grub. We'd go off then in the summer, then, and we'd pick gooseberries and blackberries in an auld pale and we used to get five bob for a big bucket...like you'd be pickin' all night!...your hands'd be purple [Laughter]. That would get us a bit of cheese and a bottle of Thomas Jennings sauce...'twas like the first version of Worcestershire Sauce!...So we'd look after ourselves that way...sure that's the way you had to be.

But thank God I wasn't like my father, y'know with the drink. He used to come in and he'd wreck the house then he'd knock whatever he could see, he'd break

¹ This is St Finbar's College, Farranferris, a secondary school, on the north side of Cork City, which was open from approximately 1883-2006. Incidentally, this was the secondary school which Finbar Dwyer – mentioned elsewhere in this thesis as a prominent subcontractor in the 1980s and a highly influential musician and cultural icon amongst the London-Irish builders – boarded at as a schoolboy.

² Weeding vegetable drills

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

anything and we started to hide from him and with the beatings we got at school...The father used to delivery Guinness with a horse and cart around the town, and he'd bring in and tap the barrels – there was high and low Guinness they used do in that time – and he'd tap them with a mallet and brown paper, and he'd get the first draw off them then.³ What he couldn't drink during the day, then, he'd come home, we'd have no food, he'd have his dinner. In those days it was the pawn shops that kep' people goin'...you'd pawn the good suit for five shillings. But his [father] wouldn't go...he'd have to have his suit on.

He'd come in then at night and he'd be wrecked (with drink); sure there was no electric, no water, no nothing. And we'd be trying to slip up the stairs waiting for him to fall asleep, it could be two in the morning – he'd rant and rant and wreck and kick and burst everything – and then we'd try and slip up and get a half-crown out of his pocket to get something – the basics maybe, a bit of tea or sugar and a drop o' milk for the breakfast to see us off.....And with the pawn shops, I used to run to the pawn shop for me mother...I was kinda caught in the middle...she never went outside for seven years with the way the father was and all. She had a great auld way about her, the mother, though; every time I feel down about them days I always think how it must've been for them...sure they'd no way out at all...I dunno how they survived really and truly.

Interviewer: So how did you end up in England, Tom?

Tom: My aunt took me away, then in '56 [Tom was fourteen years old then]. She was livin' over (in Britain), me Mam's sister. I was the first of my siblings to go. Stopped here 9.34She lived in Maida Vale ⁴, which was kind a poshy (sic) sort of place then, but she'd a basement flat and she used to do the cleaning for the owner, and she got the basement flat. Anyway I went away meself...see I was a bit street-wise then, on account of all the running around Cork I did for the mother and all that. Even at that time though, when I went over, I saw the sign for "No Irish"...at the end of the street there was a roundabout and I says to Sophie, my aunt, "Sophie, what's that?" and she says back, "Ah don't mind them, they don't want any..."

That whole thing about the "No Irish" signs, though, reminds me that we all had to put up with being the brunt of it...I'd a Caribbean fella I met when I went over to London for a match recently. We were chatting away about them days in London and I said, "*Don't take this the wrong way, now, but I was delighted to see ye fellas arriving... 'cos it took the pressure off us Irish!*" We were like

³ What Tom is referring to here is the tapping process used for the old wooden kegs of Guinness back in the mid-20th century, which required a draft or two of porter to be drawn off each barrel when it was tapped. Tom's father therefore presumably had limited amounts of free alcohol available throughout the day as part of his work.

⁴ An affluent residential district comprising the northern part of Paddington in west London, west of St John's Wood and south of Kilburn. Part of the City of Westminster

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

the Polish are in Ireland now. But y’see what happened the Irish when we went to London, most of us had never had any real work, these were all fellas from out in rural Ireland and they weren’t used to having that amount of money... and of course, well, y’know... they stood out, they did, Mike, at that time, y’know?

Interviewer: And given that you were still only fourteen years old, did you go to school or work?

Tom: So I went to the youth employment then, when I got to London.⁵ I got a choice of three jobs; a glazier, a cobbler, or fixing hoovers and fridges. So I said I’d maybe try fixing hoovers and fridges, like. So I went up to this place in Paddington, Brook Mews, they had a little two-storey workshop there, and I got the hang of it fairly handy. The owner was a German and he took to me for some reason. I was fourteen but I was handy enough and there was loads of work about in London at that time.

Even later when I was on the building work in the 60s, you could look around and within a mile radius there’d be loads of cranes on the skyline. If you were on a job and you weren’t happy you’d wait ‘til dinner time then head up and see the gaffer, the foreman, on whatever job and say *look, any chance of a start?* You might get a tenner or twenty more to start in the morning.

I moved down to the east end then, and started in Spillers, down near the airport.⁶ I applied direct to them and got a job... oh yeah, the brother came over in the meantime, then, Timmy, that’s in Australia now, came over from Cork and we both got work in Spillers. That was around 1959 and I don’t know how long we were there; we were doing twelve hour shifts anyhow, I know that!

Interviewer: Okay, but Spiller’s now, that wouldn’t have been building, was it? Wasn’t that factory work?

Tom: That’s right Mike, It was soon after that then we started on the sites... in Canning Town.⁷ I think that was Tersons we were working for there. I was labouring, on the shovel and jackhammers and all that. Sure we had no safety gear or anything. The compressor would be down the end of the site and we’d be up top and we’d be hungover trying to tie up the compressor hose with a bit of string!

⁵ The Youth Employment Service was founded under the Employment and Training Act of 1948 and was an organisation of the Welfare State which aimed to help young people during the transition from school to work and in the early years of employment. It was, in effect, a youth employment agency. See John P. Wilson, *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of UK Education, Training and Employment: From the Earliest Statutes to the Present Day*, (Abingdon, 2011), p.348.

⁶ This was Spillers flour mills in Millennium Mills, Silvertown in what is now Docklands and adjacent to London City Airport.

⁷ Canning Town is a former industrial district on the west side of Royal Victoria Dock and close to Silvertown.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

That was opposite the Royal Oak there in Canning Town...Rathbone Market⁸. See in those days you got work out of the pub. You’d fellas and they’d come in looking for local labour when a job was startin’ there and you’d just chat him and he might say *well, I need two labourers for the morning* and you’d start then next morning. You’d maybe get a phone number of the foreman or something but most of the time I never got anythin’ in writing or whatever, ‘twas all word o’ mouth.

Interviewer: You were only seventeen, going in looking for a job as a labourer. How’d they know if you were any good?

Tom: Well...[thinks]...put in this way sure - you’d be gone the next day if you weren’t! Oh yeah, sure we were ten-a-penny. I was down in Croydon for a while after that. I think that might have been Tersons as well. See sometimes you’d move around a lot with the one firm. Tersons used to do an awful lot of the tower block work. I know I got married around that time, and the job I was on I used to ring home from there every week.

I was with John Laing after that. I got that start the same way. You’d be drinking in a local pub and there might be a gangerman in there and you’d be drinking with all the different counties and you’d get in that way. John Laing’s job, outside Plaistow Station...sure that was the best job I ever had, meself and the brother. There was this fella, I’ll never forget, Joe Talty was his name...he’d walk with a limp; he was from Clare; when you’d do the bay o’ concrete they’d give it a tamp⁹...he’d fuckin’ level it with the back of a shovel! ‘Twas like that (pointing at mirror)...’twas shiny. He was a wiry fella, about five foot ten or six feet and, boy, he fuckin’ loved it. Wasn’t that some skill? And at the end of the day your man (the foreman) used to put the level on it after ‘twas set and it was spot-on!

But that job, I started off labouring, but then I got with this Polish engineer and he had his own shed. He’d be doing setting out with the dumpy level and stuff and taking concrete test cubes, and I’d get to clean the cube moulds with th’ould shutterin’ oil every day.¹⁰ I’d get an hour each morning and evening to clean these yokes and sure I only lived across the road from the job. It’s that big tower block down the hill from Plaistow Station; I dunno is it still there?

⁸ This was almost certainly part of the late 1950s-early 1960s slum clearance programme for Canning Town and large areas of the east end of London of which Tersons were a prime Contractor.

⁹ Tamping the surface of wet concrete is usually done with a long straight-edged timber held at either end and lightly tapped across the surface of the slab to give a slightly rippled coarse surface to the concrete for finishing screed.

¹⁰ Ready-mix concrete is tested regularly as it is poured for strength and stability by taking random cubes of wet concrete as the pouring takes place. These cubes are taken using square ‘moulds’ which are then registered and taken to testing laboratories and crushed to determine the crushing strength of the set concrete.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

Interviewer: It is, yeah, still there. At the bottom of the hill on the right-hand side.

Tom: Yeah, that's it. Well Laings built that and I used to be helping this Polish engineer; 'twas a great little number...sure I used to get blaggarded by the other lads that I had me own office! [Laughter]. Sure I could clock in and clock out no bother each day so I'd get the full shift and I'd sneak out thro' the fence at end of the job when I needed to and I'd go over to other jobs and then I'd come back and I wouldn't be missed! Sure we landed in drunk one evening, meself and the brother – see I'd the keys to the main gates – and didn't we start the dumper up and drove it back to Stock Street, at two o'clock in the morning. Imagine doing that now?...you'd be imprisoned...Oh Jesus!! [Laughter].

I ended up I think I got transferred to Lesneys¹¹ with them, where they were putting an extension onto the factory in Hackney. Will I tell ya a black lie?

Interviewer: Ah yea, go on then! [Laughter]

Tom: The brother went to Australia and ...er...I put his cards in...and I worked off his cards as well as my own!

Interviewer: Ah well, you wouldn't be the first man to do that...or the last! [Laughter]

Tom: I think it was when we had the big freeze...was it '62 or '63? He went off to Australia and he gave me his cards and I signed up on his name as well as me own (sic). They were tough times, see the English tended to get the easier jobs, then the Pakis came in later and they'd do all the convenient jobs whereas the Paddies were seen as only good for construction. But there was great money in the buildings, all the same.

Here...d'ya know what the Jamaicans used to do when they came over?...if I'd have thought...I'd no confidence between the schooling and all but sure I could barely read or write...they'd go into Woolworths¹² and they'd get a plumbob, a tape and a saw and straight into the shutterin'!

But anyway, we got in with two Greeks – one fella was a chippy – they were two small fellas and...what do they call them things they play at the weddings? [prompted]...that's it, a bouzouki...well yer man used to play that yoke at

¹¹ Lesney was the iconic post-war manufacturer of Matchbox Toy Cars and Lorries, which are now collectables of twentieth century British cultural life. Lesney's factory was in Hackney Wick, where they were the biggest employer of local labour by the mid 60s. The project Tom is referring to is the extension to Lesney's existing premises, undertaken by Laing and completed in 1963 – see 'Matchbox memories: the toy car factory that dominated Hackney's industrial landscape' in *Hackney Citizen*, available at: <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2016/09/07/lesney-products-matchbox-cars/> (accessed 21 September, 2017).

¹² FW Woolworth were a British High Street retail chain which sold cheap hardware and tools amongst its range.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

weddings but he went with Costains to learn as a chippy. Anyway he got the hang of it, right enough and then my mate Billy, he was just an auld van driver but he came back as a general foreman; he was able to read the auld theodolite and all that. I dunno what happened after that, I think I ended up moving down to the east end.

Interviewer: So was all that work you did back then on the cards or off? Were you working on the lump and getting cash-in-hand, like?

Tom: With all the big fellas¹³ you'd be working on the cards.¹⁴ See what happened then, they did away with the cards like, coming into the 60s and 70s, and they introduced this tax exemption system, and it was after that that we went to the sort of 'on the cards – off the cards' ways of working...but all the bigger firms like Fitzpatricks and Laings, now, they'd be working legit, like. Ah sure when the certs came in it all got...there was a lotta...sure they were booking in 'dead-men'¹⁵ and everything...there was...Jesus, y'know.

But fellas that time, like small fellas that would have exemption certs...I know one fella, sure he never done a stroke o'work in his life...worth 40 mil, by all accounts...sure 'twas a business in itself...and we were called *thick Micks* eh?...sure 'twas the *Paddies* that started all that crack! I knew one fella, he'd about forty men working for him and sure he'd be paid the full whack for them all and he'd the exemption, see, so none of that went to where 'twas meant to...

Talking about the tax exemption and all that, I remember a fella at Fitz's and he'd come in of a Monday with a head on 'im like this (gestures a balloon shape) and he'd take out the empty wage packet from his pocket and be givin' out about feckin tax and national insurance and whatever...and he'd ask for the sub. This cockney foreman says to him one morning, "Mick, your fuckin' goin' wrong, y'know your trouble? You've it arseways round, you're throwing away all the fuckin' money and keeping the wage packet!" [Laughter] That wasn't long before I came home (to Cork) and I think I was still with Fitzpatricks.

I worked on the roads for eight years with Fitzpatricks, laying slabs and all that kinda thing. They'd an office in Roman Road that our foreman came out of, but their head office was in Waltham Abbey or Waltham Cross .

Interviewer: Were they ok to work for, Fitzpatricks?

Tom: They were...they were sound. I was with them seven or eight years and...

¹³ Tom is referring here to the bigger long-established British contracting organisations.

¹⁴ The National Insurance stamp and card system for paying legitimate national insurance contributions. Working 'on the cards' meant that you were registered for National Insurance and therefore legitimately paying contributions and, moreover, visible to the Inland Revenue.

¹⁵ Refers to the fraudulent practice, highly prevalent throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s of claiming payment for fictional operatives on a contract.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

Interviewer: They were originally a Cork firm, did you know that? Did they not seem like that at the time?

Tom: No, not really, they didn't... Like myself and the brother, the two of us worked with them and then, see we worked in kind o'gangs and they'd like...what's it called... [thinks]...tender for different boroughs. So we were in Ealing and I was up in Paddington one time, 'twas all like London Borough work, street-masonry and all that, but they did tasty work as well. They did a lot of work for Westminster Council, like that'd be all Yorkstone, and they did lots of ministry work as well, for the government.

We worked in Eton Manor, which was owned by Major Villiers, and he had a place out in Oxford as well, in Middleton Stoney. This Major Villiers used to go round in an electric car and he'd go round barking orders to us. It was all tasty Yorkstone work in there...I was a mason's mate on that job. We used to go out there of a Monday and stay out there for the week. There was big grounds there and we'd be doing all the kind of tasty work...maintaining the estate roads and stuff.

Interviewer: Did you ever work for some of the bigger Irish outfits?

Tom: You mean like Murphys?...no, I never worked for Murphys. I worked with a cable crowd, alright... don't remember who they were but they were up around North London.¹⁶ We were doing a job down in... 'twas the ministry place down in...er, Crowthorne, in Berkshire. I used to leave Forest Gate¹⁷ early in the morning to get through the London traffic and I'd be driving through Ascot 'bout eight o'clock in the mornin'. We were diggin' out for cables for the cameras...y'know, like test centre cameras an' that?

At the time I had an auld Lorry licence. See my elder brother was a lorry driver and I did the test in the early '60s and sure, I passed it first time. These two Dublin fellas [Christy Hamey was one of these men] sez to me in the pub one night when they heard I'd the licence, "What're ya fuckin' doin' on the pick n shovel?" They phoned up after for me to go out with them. 'Twas savage work...Industrial painting...shutdown...a hundred feet up...sliding them fifteen foot lightweights in between the apexes...the fuckin' dirt and the heat!

They got onto this fella anyway...his name was Horneybrooke, but he left Cork when he was young...he was with this firm...ah what were they? [thinks]

¹⁶ In all probability this would have been McNicholas, who were the major Irish cable contractor during the post-war years around London.

¹⁷ Forest Gate is a residential district in east London, England, in the London Borough of Newham. Tom was living here with his wife and family until they returned to Cork in 1972.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

... 'twas only later they got into the civil engineering...Yeomans, they were painters at that time. I ended up with them, driving a 7-tonne truck; going 'round Norfolk and Cambridgeshire doing them bridges. They used to put tenders out for these railway bridges around Ely and Norfolk and this Horneybrooke fella he'd get the tenders before 'twas let and he'd say to Christy Hamey (Christy was a Dub, like), we've a price of £850 Or £800 in for that; if you can undercut it by £50 or £60 the job is yours. Christy used to pay me, 'twas all cash, like, y'know? I dunno how they worked it really. We were fuckin' rakin' it in... we didn't know what to do with the money!

We used to pick up these deliveries at Norwich train station of bitumastic¹⁸ and the red lead¹⁹ for the bridges but we never used all of it, so we'd sell the rest to the farmers. We'd never use it all, like. I remember there was this one big bridge, and we were supposed to put up a hanging scaffold to paint it. It was down for a clean, spotted red lead and two coats of bit (bitumastic paint). Sure y'know you were miles down the river and 'twas very flat country round there. Anyway we ran outa shot one day – you know the shot you'd use for the shotblasting to clean the steelwork – and there was this big compressor nearby belonging to British Rail – so we siphoned out the diesel from the compressor and put it into the feckin' bitumastic paint...sure you'd run it on with one hand when it was like that... 'tis probably still wet, I'd say! [Laughter].

Then we got work doing these high bays in this industrial complex. This thing used to come down on tracks, it was just a mass of steel, 'twas feckin' a hundred feet high. There was a fella after being killed... 'twas all monkeying!²⁰...and with this fella after being killed, no-one'd go near it! Sure after coming off the roads it was some job to try and monkey that and paint it, like.

Interviewer: Jeez, Tom, it sounds like ye all took a fair few chances with the health and safety? I guess that was the way it was in them days?

Wait til I tell ya! Anyway we came from there to Shell Haven²¹ just on the coast there in Essex, first. Two fellas were after being killed on that project too and, same, nobody'd go near it. So we drove the lorry down there and sure there was no health and safety at all, all the handrails were fuckin' rusty, you couldn't tie a boson's chair onto anything, you were taking an awful chance if you did, so couldn't fill up properly (paint kettles) and you'd be tying off the bosan's chair

¹⁸ Bitumastic is a bituminous elastomeric sealant with a flexibility and elasticity in a wide range of temperatures. Application is simple and easy, required no heating. Bitumastic is also suitable for application on vertical surfaces. It is applied cold, and is neither intoxicating nor flammable.

¹⁹ The lead-based pigments (lead tetroxide/calcium plumbate, or "red lead") were widely used as an anti-corrosive primer coating over exterior steelwork. They were generally replaced along with most lead-based paint products in the early 1990s.

²⁰ This is a reference to manual climbing and shinning up and around steelwork for access.

²¹ Shell Haven was a port on the north bank of the Thames Estuary at the eastern end of Thurrock, Essex, England and then an oil refinery. The refinery closed in 1999.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

way too often and because of the handrails you couldn't get any slack and you'd often drop a yard or more when you tried to move the chair up or down. 'Twas awful dangerous work.

D'you know I seen a fella being killed one day, on a job? Yeah,,d'ya know the yoke on the outside of the...I used to use it meself...the hoist...you used stand on it, t'would only take maybe one man and a barrow...you'd pull yourself up on a ginny wheel system. Anyway I was down in the yard this day...I dunno was it in the precast yard on this job...but what he done...I did it meself one time and got an awful fright... 'twas a wet day and didn't the rope slip in his hand and he left go of it and the whole thing crashed down...it just...I was blessed...oh this fella, I was standing to one side and it came down like a bullet. He had two barrows up on it and him standing in the middle of them. 'Twas a thirty-two storey block and he wasn't too far from the top when he came down...bricks, barrows, the whole lot...mangled...That was down in Silvertown; it was a Laings job. Sure on a windy day, it would be treacherous...you'd be saying to yerself, y'know, for fuck's sake like...This fella was English, now, not Irish. Most of the hod-carriers and brickies at that time were English altho' I did tend brickies and carry the hod myself in them times as well.

Interviewer: That must've been a terrible thing to witness. Did you ever get hurt yourself?

Tom: Oh I did, yeah. One time on that Terson's job... 'twas one stop from Croydon station. West Croydon. We were staying in these digs...they were Indian; they worked on the railways. What happened was me, one of the Greeks and this Jamaican, we were striking floor shutters, big nine-by-three strongbacks nailed onto acrows. Anyway didn't one of the long strongbacks come from the hole in the slab above and hit me. I went down on one knee. Yer man, the Jamaican ran, shouting "*Paddy a dead-man*" with all the blood. I was taken by ambulance and got shifted back to the digs. I was inside that room in the digs with the smell o'curry for nearly two weeks and I had nothin' [money]. That was down in west Croydon, London Road. I was lucky in a way because they [the Indians] were okay, y'know?

Interviewer: Sounds like you did a fair bit of work with other nationalities – the Asians and Caribbeans, like?

Tom: I was working on another job near Plaistow Hospital with another Jamaican fella. I was slinging precast units and they were being stood temporarily on the scaffolding and I got another belt of a slinging hook from the crane where the u-bolt came away from the wall and the slinging hook swung down and caught me (a glancing blow) on the side of the head. I was blown down onto the ground and I went to Plaistow Hospital, but they stitched me up anyway.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

But d'ya know there was no ladder, no fuckin' banksman...That thirty-two storey block in Silvertown, d'ya know what I seen this fella doin'? sure he was a wild fuckin' English fella anyway...they were striking scaffolding and there he was with fifteen foot scaffold poles an' he fucked 'em down (threw them randomly) through the rest of the scaffold below. He used call me an 'Irish prick' and all that, but sure he was too big for me then, I was only young then and only after startin' on.

Interviewer: Did you find much of that kind of hassle in London?

Tom: Oh I did, yeah – a fair bit. I remember that job in Silvertown I was the only *Paddy*, really, on that site and that time they used to knock up a lot of their own concrete with the auld electric-powered mechanical mixer – they took big quantities of sand and gravel and there was another fella then adding in concrete from another drum. It was a precast yard. I made up my own run for the barrows with the scaffold boards like. I spent a good bit working on it, to make it easier for meself, y'know? Anyway, I went back after giving the Jamaican lads a hand with some precast lifting and all the boards were taken away and there was this gang of chippies, English lads, there's one or two o'them was rough enough now, that lived around the Green Gate,²² there smirking at me. I fuckin' picked up a hammer and went over to one of them. I said, "*you fuckin' prick, I'm after spendin' an hour doin' that*".

Ah yeah, sure at one time I couldn't even go into the canteen, they'd be throwing bits of bacon over at me and all that. They had a bit more respect for me after that showdown, though. But y'know when you hear other Irish lads saying they never got nothing like that, maybe that's 'cause they were up in Camden Town or Cricklewood or on other jobs where all the gangs were Irish, y'know, if they stuck with your own, like...

But we didn't help ourselves either, Mike. I often seen it with Fitzpatrick and we'd be putting in kerbs and they'd drop the eight yards of concrete on the side o'the road and make you fuckin' barrow it. I'd say to the driver, sure just get the auld chute out and run the lorry back a bit and chute the stuff in, but ah no, these lads would rather make it hard for themselves, "*Ah fuck that, sure I'll barrow it in, I'm a Paddy!*"...like they had to do it the hard way to prove how tough they were.

Interviewer: So, apart from west Croydon, then, what about digs? Did you ever stay in other digs?

²² The Green Gate Public House, at the junction of Greengate Street & 523 Barking Road, Plaistow E13, was a local landmark renowned for 'hardcase' locals and West Ham United supporters until very recently.

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

Tom: I did, yeah. I was in digs in Stock Street in Plaistow. We were payin' three pound a week. Meself and the brother (that's in Australia) used to be inside in a single bed and we'd be fighting for the blanket! [Laughter], pulling and draggin' and there was a hole in the ceiling...fuckin' hell...one room for four of us. We'd come in after the pub and...she'd have crubeens...the two o'them [owners] were from Cork...she'd have crubeens boiling all day!

Anyway we came in from the pub one night and scoffed all the crubeens...he threw us out for that! [Laughter]. He'd be givin' out to her for shavin' the crubeens with his good razor an' all... 'twas a pantomime really. Sure we'd be so tired after a twelve-hour shift we didn't really heed the place at all. They were fond of the drink, the two o'them, and they'd sometimes drink all the money and we'd come back and there'd be no grub. We were lucky 'cause in Spillers ye got a decent bit o'grub at lunchtime.

Interviewer: What about leisure-time, Tom, did you play sport for example, were you a GAA man?

Tom: Not at all, no; soccer was my thing. I used to go out to Dagenham. I played with a Catholic club out there then. I used to come off the shifts with Spillers and I'd go playing soccer with St Margaret's, they'd a Saturday team. Then there was a Sunday morning team...Aragon?...the road ran parallel to the Boleyn. They were all piss-artists like [Laughter] but then again he took me down...I got an auld run out in the youths with West Ham in '59 – an auld floodlit game, like...

Interviewer: Jeez, you must've been a tidy footballer if you trialled with West Ham! I'm a Hammer myself – was a season-ticket holder there for years...for my sins! [Laughter] And did you ever bother with any of the Irish dancehalls or any o'that?

Tom: Oh I did, yeah, I used go the one in Leytonstone²³...the Inishfall, um...we went up to Cricklewood once or twice, to the Galty and that other one in Kilburn...what was it...the Banba? Yea, I think that was it. There was another one then, an Irish one that you had to go upstairs to, in Romford.²⁴ That was around the early '60s like. But you see we used often work off the beaten track.

Interviewer: Was there a big Irish community where you were in Forest gate?

Tom: [Thinks]...well, not really, not at that time, like, in the early '60s. The nearer you got to Fords in Dagenham there were more Irish, alright, but now around

²³ Leytonstone is an area of East London, and part of the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It is a suburban area, located seven miles north-east of Charing Cross in Greater London.

²⁴ Romford is a large town in East London, England, and the administrative centre of the London Borough of Havering. It is located 14.1 miles northeast of Charing Cross and is one of the major metropolitan centres identified in the London Plan

Original Interview # 9 – Tom Mc - Cork

Plaistow and Forest gate, there weren't that many. Generally in the east end at that time it was mainly English, some Irish and the odd Jamaican, like.

Anyway, when yer man Ted Homeybrooke died it all kinda changed...sure 'twas all money in the hand and all of that went to Newmarket²⁵ or on the drink! So we were left thinking what're we gonna do?

After that, I think I..., well it was the late 60s and...we applied for the papers for Australia, the Ten Pound Scheme, 'cause the brother was out there. But he came back to London around '72 and then we headed home to Cork. They were building a lot of houses around Cork City at that time and I got sorted with work, so I asked the wife and we came back in 1972 after I got married and the kids were born. 45.00

Interviewer: So if you had to, how would you sum up your experience in London?

Tom: Well, to be honest I didn't feel like I did well because I fell in with the rest of the Irish, and I drank. I drank a lot and see there was a lot of fellas that came over that stayed away from that side of it and done very well.

I've no regrets though...if I had had more money I'd be dead now because I was in with the drinkers and in with the subbies. I s'pose I done well in the sense that it broadened...how'll I say, I went away from poverty. It took me ages, y'know, with the school and the beatings I got...it took me ages to get out of this kind of depression; I was fuckin' angry and...well, y'know, luckily enough...we were arrested once or twice...nothin' serious like. We'd be starting stupid stuff in pubs, like, where fellas'd pick on us and, well, you had to then like, y'know? If you didn't stand yer ground you were danced on!

From my point of view, like, I could barely read or write anyway, after school, so I'd nothing going for me here... 'twas a terrible country in the fifties. When I came back, I met fellas I knew at school that was after doin' very well. For me, though, like I say, with the upbringing I had – the father an alcoholic and we'd be always trying to fight our corner – going to London, well it got me away from all that and it kinda made me stronger, y'know? I was a bit more streetwise, like.

END

²⁵ An oblique reference to gambling on horse-racing.

Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

Year of Birth: 1952
Place of Birth: Lifford, Co. Donegal
Date of Emigration to UK: 1977
Date of Interview: January 25, 2018.

Interviewer: Yeah, so basically it is the 25th, 26th? - 25th of January, I am here with Gregory and we are going to talk about Gregory's experiences in Britain, in England, in London particularly I hope. So I suppose to start with the sort of basics, just for the record to give us a bit of background to you, where you come from, what year you were born. Do you mind me asking what year you were born?

Gregory: 52... 1952 and I was actually born in Lifford in County Donegal. I was actually born in county Donegal but then when I was four we moved to my mother's place which was just on the Leitrim/Donegal, technically Donegal, just on the Leitrim but we had a bit of land in Leitrim as well.

Interviewer: kind of around Tullaghan is it?

Gregory: yeah. Just outside Bundoran. But anyways that's...my father died in England. My father worked on buildings and he died very young.

Interviewer: Oh right.

Gregory: He died in 1956. I was only 4 when he died.

Interviewer: Crikey.

Gregory: So he died in Derby, he was working as a steel fixer there. He was one of the people who...my father had a job in the post office, y'know, which was a job he could have kept but he had cousins who had gone to Derby and they were writing and sending him all this stuff that there was loads of money, y'know, and he was tempted.

Interviewer: That's a recurring theme you get.

Gregory: So he was drawn there and he gave up his kind of permanent job, so and he died of, well on the death cert, bronchial pneumonia he died of...he was 47.

Interviewer: Jesus very young.

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Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

Gregory: But I went to London then later on, I would have worked at a variety of things. I didn't do third level education I did the leaving cert.

Interviewer: I was going to ask you... so you finished at Leaving Cert?

Gregory: I finished at Leaving Cert but I was very interested in, y'know, quite a few different things and I met a few interesting people. Of course primarily it was the music,¹ y'know?

Interviewer: yeah.

Gregory: And I had done a lot of...

Interviewer: The traditional music?

Gregory: Yeah yeah.

Interviewer: That took you to London?

Gregory: No that... y'know... that kind of opened up a lot of...

Interviewer: Your interests?

Gregory: A lot of other stuff for me. And I did a lot of...I would have been familiar with parts of the country, y'know, at that time... like as a young lad, and I did quite a bit of, y'know, wandering about the countryside.

Interviewer: Ok.

Gregory: And that was very interesting and I got kind of...

Interviewer: Was that kind of after school or between school?

Gregory: Yeah it was. I mean I was down in Clare when I was still in school, down in Milltown Malbay.

¹ Gregory is a noted authority on, and a long-standing practitioner of Irish traditional music.

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Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

Interviewer: Right.

Gregory: Went down on the bus like, and Clancy was there at the time.²

Interviewer: So you met up with Clancy?

Gregory: I did. Yeah he was there, I had very vivid memory of that.

Interviewer: Because he was in London as well for a while.

Gregory: Yeah he was there in the 50s but y'know I was a young lad coming from, y'know, nowhere, and I mean the way the people...the hospitality and the way they looked after me was just incredible. I mean you think people romanticize about Ireland, but God at that time anyway that it was amazing, how people...

Interviewer: I think it was. Now I may be wrong but I always got the impression that it was probably unique at that time in western Europe because that culture seems to me to go back to very old, very old ideas, very old ideas of hospitality.

Gregory: It's fantastic, y'know what I mean and they were so warm, and inclusive, y'know?

Interviewer: You actually see similar things, or I have heard similar stories about places like the middle East, y'know?

Gregory: Yeah I hear that.

Interviewer: that they have this particular...

Gregory: yeah, yeah that's...

Interviewer: You have to treat visitors in a certain way, y'know?

Gregory: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So you did a bit of wandering then?

² This refers to the great Clare piper, Willie Clancy, who now has the largest annual Traditional Music Summer School in the world named after him. Clancy was also a post-war migrant to London and worked as a carpenter on the sites in the 1950s.

Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

Gregory: Well ah I did yeah.

Interviewer: Did you kind of have any particular aims when you had left school, when you were at school, or like when you did your leaving cert?

Gregory: No I just wanted to get away.

Interviewer: You weren't interested.

Gregory: No like I was very, y'know...I certainly didn't want to...I didn't want to - at the time - y'know go study or go to college or anything.

Interviewer: And you didn't want to end up, presumably, in an office?

Gregory: No I had no interest in any of that. None whatsoever. But I was interested in things like landscaping and I had read, even at that age. I started reading very early so I always read a lot, but I got some money then, there was some money left to me. It was enough, now, you could have a house at that time with that.

Interviewer: This was what, in the 70s?

Gregory: Ah God was the early 70's, this was about '74, y'know?

Interviewer: Yeah it was a lot of money then.

Gregory: As I say you could have bought a good house for that.

Interviewer: More or less you would yeah.

Gregory: I had a bicycle, I was really taken with. I went round...all round Ireland on the bicycle. I spent a full year, y'know. I would stay in a place for maybe a couple of weeks, I spent a lot of time in Clare at that time and y'know I... In the summer time I had a tent and then in the winter time I used to stay, I mean I had plenty of money, to stay in bed and breakfasts or hotels and I drank a lot too, y'know? And I was in a position to buy drink for people as well, y'know, and look after the ones without much money, y'know?

Interviewer: Just while you mention the drink now, do you think, I mean you drank a lot at that time, we all drank a lot I think at certain stages of our life, but is that something that you think is kind of culturally embedded in...(the Irish)

Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

Gregory: Aw yeah it was very much so, I mean it was...

Interviewer: Because I always wondered if that was something that affected people. There seems to be some men who only really kind of fell into that when they went to England.

Gregory: Ah no it was very much part of the culture here. I mean I was drinking when I was very young because it was - y'know - it was part of - y'know - making... y'know... proclaiming yourself as an adult. As an adult male in Ireland it was one of the prerequisites that you were able to drink, y'know? You went out, first thing you did. So it was all... but y'know when you are young... like that... I mean of course I have learned an awful lot but... I mean it didn't... I was very functional.

Interviewer: Yeah, it wasn't affecting you.

Gregory: Y'know much later I became dysfunctional. But at that stage I was very able for it and... I mean great times; really great times. And people talk about nostalgia, yeah there is a lot of nostalgia and I suppose, y'know, to use a phrase I heard somewhere, "*tampering with the negatives*" but still it was a great time. It might be great because you were young, y'know?

Interviewer: Of course.

Gregory: But I think I was very privileged in that sense that I did get out and did get to meet those people.

Interviewer: Yeah I think you were unusual in that you had that.

Gregory: I met a lot of that older generation of musicians.

Interviewer: And you had the time to spend with them.

Gregory: Yeah oh yeah. And y'know there was great... as well as that there was a lot of individuality y'know to be found at the time y'know; there was a lot of great talkers of course, y'know it was still an era of talk y'know. I mean when I was going around y'know, cycling around, I'd always look into... I mean the amount of old public houses, like Victorian y'know, 19th-century type public houses, that might have a little shop and a grocery and some of them absolutely beautifully maintained and fantastic interiors. And

Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

y'know they were everywhere and they were talking. There was no television, really television hadn't come into the pub at all at that time so you were talking, y'know I used to always head for the pub when I would come into a new town, I'd go to the pub. And you were likely to meet people there who were...

Interviewer: That kind of era y'know

Gregory: That's gone.

Interviewer: It's gone completely and it is funny, I am a bit younger than you now but I remember the thing that used to attract me most when I was old enough to drink about going to say the local pub in Jamestown was at that time, Kenosys, for example, they didn't have a television in the bar, y'know, or if they did they didn't turn it on very much. So you used to go in and, for me, the best craic was to sit at the bar and just listen to these local lads, y'know, and they'd be scabbing each other and... kind of... but it was, it was almost like an art form in itself, the art of conversation and the art of...

Gregory: Oh yeah it was definitely a skill and I mean it was and some people were really outstanding and great storytellers. In terms of not just telling yarns but telling... y'know... describing... and almost like, y'know, the way a novelist would set a scene. Describing a background or an environment.

Interviewer: It's funny because I wonder as well, one of my ideas about the whole the legacy of the Irish in the construction industry in England is to do with this... I think... an almost inherent skill for storytelling. Y'know and there is an awful lot of, an awful lot of mythologisation that went on y'know, we can come to that.

Gregory: Oh definitely, but just to move on and that, I went to London, I did work at various... I got a job then with the OPW, the Office of Public Works through a friend of mine who was... he was an archaeologist and I worked on a couple of great places. We worked on kind of long term

Interviewer: This is now before you went to London.

Gregory: This is before I went and that was great like. We worked in different parts of the country and I got a good knowledge, he, this man he was from Kilkenny and himself and his father, and all that family, I mean the knowledge they had of the whole country and...

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Interviewer: Is this in terms of archaeology or?

Gregory: In terms of everything, everything, in terms of landscaping, history and the history of an area...

Interviewer: They were interested.

Gregory: They were very broad, they were great company y'know and great people to go around with. But we'd just have bicycles now on those jobs at those times too, y'know?

Interviewer: You had some lucky experiences to meet people like that.

Gregory: Yeah it was lucky as well, and that house was full of books, it was a beautiful old house about three miles outside Kilkenny and I often used to stay there. I mean there was thousands of books in that house. And Larry; Larry Manning he was a great character and, I mean the amount of reading he had done. And genuinely he never, it wasn't a big ego thing

Interviewer: No. He was interested.

Gregory: Yeah.

Interviewer: That reminds me a little bit of McGahern's experiences.

Gregory: Exactly yeah that he talks about

Interviewer: The neighbours with the library.

Gregory: Yeah but I remember when we were working, we were working in a place called Kells which was in Kilkenny and that was, we worked in Graiguenamanagh and Kells, places like that that were off the beaten track completely and they were full of eccentrics and were really kind of backwaters but very, very interesting places. And I remember as regards the music we used to spend, and this really amazes me when I think of it now. We used to cycle from... well I had a place in Callan which was a small town in Kilkenny, a very interesting place but we used to cycle over, now we didn't do it often but we did it, cycle over to a place called The Commons which was in Tipperary and The Commons was part of that mining country. Y'know, it was part of the... where they had the coal mines there... and there was a couple of great players there. And this pub, there

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was a pub called The Commons, it was up on a kind of height and... Ballingarry, it was that area of Ballingarry. It was a big mining area at that time and there was a great crowd of people there y'know, great, and God we would drink seven or eight pints anyway... maybe more... stay there and cycle back in the dark and... that was about thirty miles, y'know?

Interviewer: Jesus.

Gregory: And y'know when you think of that.

Interviewer: Yeah, you couldn't even dream about doing that now.

Gregory: But y'know when I went to London I was I was very small and slight but I was very fit, y'know, and that really, that made a huge difference when I was working on building sites.

Interviewer: So tell me then, what year did you go to London?

Gregory: It was '77.

Interviewer: '77, yeah that fits about right, that's when I first met you I think soon after you went to London. So I suppose what made you go to London?

Gregory: Well the reason why I went to London, I was y'know, I was aware of the music in London now, y'know, but I had my partner by then, now that was really the principal thing and of course she was over there and she encouraged me to come over. And I had, the OPW work that was kind of finished at that time and I was there and I was like "I'll come to London", y'know?

Interviewer: So you were kind of between jobs as it were.

Gregory: Aye, and you see I mean I am sure so many people have been caught in a similar way, when I went to London it was a very temporary thing. I said I'd work a few months in the building and I'd get a few... I'll get a bit of money together.

Interviewer: So you weren't thinking about long term?

Gregory: I wasn't thinking... never, never and that went on for... literally for years. Now we used to come over here and spend a good bit of time over here, especially in the summertime. But I'd work... I'd go back to London. And y'know at some stage then we began... we said we would put some money together, y'know, and get a place over here

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because y'know you could buy a place... that was before... you could buy these couple of acres and a run-down kind of house for a couple of thousand like and they were giving them. I know a couple of thousand was still kind of... but it was still small money for a place and there was lovely places.

Interviewer: It was comparable.

Gregory: I mean those places were all snapped up by Germans and English. Yeah they saw what was going on here, I mean they got so much of that and some very good people came over here as well, y'know. Some of them, there is a couple of them out there now and they are well in their 70s, could of English fellas and they are really, really interesting people to talk to. Because they came here about 1970 and I mean they have seen the changes and they still think, they are very encouraging to talk to because y'know I'd be giving out, y'know condemning the place, condemning everything that is gone, they say no hold on, you are missing the point, it's still great. Y'know a couple of them were saying to me go and live in a place in the south of England for a few years and see how you like it. But y'know so, but anyway...

Interviewer: So when you went to England then did you have any plans workwise? Did you go thinking I'll work on the buildings?

Gregory: Oh yeah it was the building, because that... there was loads of work.

Interviewer: You just knew you'd get work?

Gregory: Yeah there was loads of work and I knew... the fellas I knew, like, y'know, were working on buildings. We lived in a squat, it was a long term squat. 'Twas in Fairbridge road. Now my partner was there before me and she was, she had been in UCD and had a degree, she did a BA. And really in that house there was seven or eight people who had come from Galway, from university in Galway y'know and they had gone... there was a couple of fellas from Louisburgh who had gone working on the buildings and they had been to college, they dropped out.

Interviewer: This is what intrigues me this notion that y'know - particularly at that time in the late 70s - that the Irish were still this kind of... how would you put it, kind of uneducated labouring class if you like... just gets constantly disproved. And an awful lot of those guys were either had been to college and were just between jobs or were just kind of wanting to spend a bit of time in London and see what the craic was like and they all went straight for the buildings because there was a... they knew they would get work.

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Gregory: That's right. That's where the work was and I mean at that time - as you well remember - the pubs were going full steam and any pub you'd go to - especially if you were playing music - you would have a job in no time; you'd have a job the next morning if you wanted.

Interviewer: More or less yeah.

Gregory: And yeah I have worked as

Interviewer: Where is Fairbridge Road ?

Gregory: Fairbridge Road is up there by the Archway.

Interviewer: Oh yeah I know where you were. There was a street, there was a few kind of as you say long term squat kind of houses there.

Gregory: Well that was quite an interesting house because whoever owned it, now that had been a squat since some time in the 60s, it was very early on, and it was very well run. Because we used to do, there was the people who stayed there they were quite good at doing electrical stuff and plumbing and all that and we used to paint and we used to keep the place really well.

Interviewer: So this wasn't like a kip?

Gregory: It wasn't a kip because I knew lots of other ones that were really derelict... y'know? But this house was... and the people that went in there first, there was a woman from she was from Claregalway and she was living with this fella, he was from Galway and they were keeping a very tight rein on things. They were watching who was coming in and out; you wouldn't get away with, y'know you had to do (your fair share). There was a lot of rules and regulations, and there was a lot of people came through the place but there was rules and regulations but...

Interviewer: But it was a handy place to live by the sounds of it?

Gregory: Well it was, it was... it was. It was a fine house and actually that house, the two people who were there originally, they got the house.

Interviewer: That happened a lot in London at the time. There was, we lived in Bethnal Green and there was a whole street of houses. They were all kind of bombed out during

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the war and whoever had owned them or whoever lived there... I don't know they were probably rented accommodation or whatever. But they were more or less abandoned. And eventually as you say in the 60s and 70s people moved into them and those people in the end ended up getting the right to buy them.

Gregory: Yeah, well these people, the man who owned that and it was a man, was in the psychiatric hospital and he had been there for a very long time and he actually died in the psychiatric hospital. And when he died they got possession of the house, they legally had that house. They sold it later on and bought a place. But anyway I wasn't part of, I wasn't a very organised and I wasn't... y'know... I had much more in common with the men I worked with on the building site than I actually had with those... with the people who were living in that house y'know. The people who were living in that house were obsessed with things like psychoanalysis and y'know... what you call your man Lacan?

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Gregory: And it was

Interviewer: Structuralism and...

Gregory: I think we used to spend... I mean, y'know, it used to be endless. But anyway I worked as y'know, I worked off the cards; I was paid at the end of the week, you would be paid in the hand y'know.

Interviewer: When you first went there, how did you get a job?

Gregory: Well I got a job from one of the fellas in the house, he was working and that. I think the very first ones I worked for was Tommy and Danny, they were always around.

Interviewer: These two Donegal men?

Gregory: These two Donegal men. And I remember the tax and then someone saying "don't be paying that; that's nonsense; that's madness" y'know? So I worked with a great variety of subbies - I couldn't tell you their names - but they were subbies, and I worked on some very very big sites down in The City.³

³ This refers to the old City of London, the financial district of London, which is a separate county (the smallest in England) and a city-within-a-city in the sense that it is a separate corporate local authority run by the City of London Corporation which has its roots in pre-medieval London. It is also colloquially known as the 'Square Mile', being 1.12 square miles in total area.

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Interviewer: Were they all Irish?

Gregory: They were all Irish yeah, they were all Irish. I never worked for anyone else, only Irish subbies y'know. I remember the jobs I enjoyed most were with the big jobs where you had a load of (lads)... there used to be great fun on them, there was great craic.

Interviewer: Camaraderie?

Gregory: The best job I ever had was a job down in Liverpool street and it was a huge, it was a huge big... and y'know it was at the stage it was a concrete shell, and there was a crowd of lads from north Mayo. There was thirty... or there was over thirty from around Belmullet and Erris and they were a great crowd. They were great, they were great.

Interviewer: What were they doing the shuttering?

Gregory: There was a lot of them labourers too. But they were doing... (shuttering), yeah there was tradesmen as well yeah and all. But they were all in a group and they all knew each other and I actually knew north Mayo, y'see. I'd been down that way.

Interviewer: That wouldn't have been the O'Rourkes?

Gregory: There was a lot of Ruddy's there now.

Interviewer: Ruddys? Ah yeah I know them. But O'Rourkes were doing a heap of work in Liverpool street around the early 80s, early 80s that would have been. All that Bishopsgate development now, that's what made O'Rourke's name.

Gregory: yeah well that was actually...

Interviewer: And him being Mayo.

Gregory: I must show you a... I wrote a... it's very short, just a little short story but was actually about that site. Because there was a pub called the Eagle and it was almost on the site. You went in through an arch and the pub was there on the site and I really enjoyed that and we had great fun. There was a lot of... y'know... there was some really heavy drinkers. I got on very well with those lads and as I say, I knew Belmullet and I knew quite a bit of the history and a bit of the... and I knew a lot of people from... I'd wandered around Erris and up around there in Rossport and Pollatomish and...

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Interviewer: Fantastic part of the country.

Gregory: Y'know, and that... the Mullet Peninsula, I knew that; I was out on the islands, the Inishskeas and... I kind of knew a good bit about it and these lads were all from there and I got on very well with them of course. I mean it was very much a drinking relationship. I don't think there was any o'them played now, it wasn't a music thing.

Interviewer: But they were good craic?

Gregory: They were yeah. And I remember one day... oh yeah... we were walking down and I saw this thing. I spotted it now, y'know... it was a sign that was up; this pub was being refurbished and there was a sign up opening, and there was a date given and drinks at half price. And I said to them... and there was a few of us... look at that that date, that date there

Interviewer: Keep that in your head.

Gregory: And I was kinda laughing because it was very much a city pub, and we were all in covered in muck. Anyway I forgot about it and about a month later I remember I was working on my own, I had a jackhammer, kango or something and this fella came running up to me. He was one of the lads and said "Jaysus, Gregory", he said "I've great news for you; that pub is opened." [Laughter] And Jaysus we went down and we were covered in muck and, y'know, and anyway there was this fella, Patsy, I never knew his second name. Patsy was kind of... he was a bit scattered in the head, y'know. And he had a big pair of wellingtons on and like... it was bad enough we used to put on shoes that'd be covered in concrete, y'know?. And we said to him look in the door because we didn't want to, but we wanted to see what was... Patsy, he opened the door like that (shows) y'know and he was halfway in and... sorta half in the pub and half out. And we could see these fellas drinking glasses y'know? there wasn't many in it, but glasses of bitter, half pints, little briefcases, suits y'know? And I said to Patsy, I was at the front and I said to him, "What's it like?" y'know, "Do you think we'll get a drink there?"... "Bejaysus we'll drink the fuckin' place dry!" [Laughter]. The barman could hear that, y'know. But the big crowd of us went in and like they didn't know... There was a couple of girls there and it was, y'know...

Interviewer: They wouldn't know what to do.

Gregory: They didn't!...so they served us drink. We got a load of drink there at half price like. And Jesus we were... well...

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Interviewer: You were probably not the clientele the manager was hoping for I wouldn't have thought. [Laughter]

Gregory: no.

Interviewer: But that's, that was labouring was it, you were labouring?

Gregory: Yeah I was labouring. Because... now I was advised - y'know - along the way get a trade, get a trade and get... but I just wasn't interested and it was almost in my head I was trapped in that thing "*look't this is only temporary*" and I was always planning to come back here. We went to Scotland, now, and went around. My partner was with me. We went to the Hebrides, lived on the Orkneys for a while and out as far as the Outer Hebrides. I worked on a... with a fella establishing oyster farms and we used to pick shellfish, winkles and that.

Interviewer: Good God!

Gregory: I had a boat as well.

Interviewer: And that was from London?

Gregory: That was from London. And then I went back.

Interviewer: That's a bit of a culture change.

Gregory: T'was! And out in the landscape like, you are talking about really remote places, like *really* remote.

Interviewer: Sure the Outer Hebrides is as remote as it gets.

Gregory: Fantastic places, like. I loved that, I loved that time. But I came back to London then and I was putting a bit o'money, y'know... like I was signing on as well as working y'know.

Interviewer: Most of the lads were.

Gregory: What I was trying to do was, like... those big jobs down in Liverpool Street, we used to work seven days a week, like, and we worked until 7, 8 o'clock in the evening.

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Interviewer: Long shifts.

Gregory: Long shifts but we were on good money, like y'know? We were on really good money and I used to put that away and try to live off the dole. That's what I was doing y'know? Now I didn't always succeed, like! But I did save, I saved a lot of money, not I mean a lot of money.

Interviewer: But enough.

Gregory: Y'know I did like y'know. But then I worked with smaller...y'know, with fellas that were taking on conversions. Now that was the hardest work I ever did. Like fellas who were doing...you'd be working on conversions. Now that was hard and dirty work. You would be stripping houses like y'know, pulling ceilings down on top of yourself, really really... (dirty). Then I remember working for this fella, he was a Galway fella and he wasn't bad as they went, this fella wasn't bad now...but it was hard work. And I was...I mean he hadn't even cement mixer this fella! I was working...I was keeping a fella - he was a Monaghan fella, a brickie, y'know - and I was mixing. I was on my own. I was mixing the stuff with a shovel! I was putting it into a bucket and I was carrying the bricks as well, and I had to keep, like...I couldn't...like he'd be on piece work⁴ so I couldn't keep him waiting. Imagine a day of that?

Interviewer: Oh yeah that's hard, that's desperate hard.

Gregory: That was hard work y'know.

Interviewer: Well especially if you are hand mixing as well.

Gregory: Hand mixing as well.

Interviewer: That's ridiculous, because normally you would leave the mixer running.

Gregory: But he had other jobs and he might have had one mixer or two mixers but then he'd let me do it and I was *willing* to do it, this was the thing y'know?

⁴This refers to the procuring of skilled and unskilled labour on productivity output; i.e. 'measured rates' or 'unit price per item' of work as opposed to time-related, *per diem* or 'daywork' payment. So in the case of brickwork, as referred to here, it may mean that the operatives were paid either individually or per gang unit on the basis of number of bricks laid, or perhaps square metreage of bricks or pointing, depending upon the precise nature of the work involved. This meant that the operatives were paid for the amount of completed work, rather than the hours actually worked.

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Interviewer: Normally you would leave the mixer mixing and you would bring a stack of bricks up to him.

Gregory: If you were able, if you were willing and able to do it like, they fucking let you do it y'know. I mean like that that was one of the advantages because I was very fit. I was very small and slim but I was very fit whereas a lot of labourers I notice were big fellas who, y'know, they could lift a car but they were clumsy. I was like a ferret in and out and I had great staying power. Y'know I really worked towards that, and of course I used to love to get praise from the old timers, the old men, the old timers, the heavy drinkers.

Interviewer: The long distance kiddies.

Gregory: The long distance men. And I really...y'know...I really kind of identified with the long distance - the *older* men, the long distance men, the men who had come down in the '40s you now.

Interviewer: That is really interesting now because why do you think?...I mean, the trouble is a lot of fellas. I've asked a few people and they don't really about it but there is...I think we all had, in some ways, a kind of a yearning. I mean I didn't go down that road, I laboured for a couple of years and then I went into business y'know? I mean shillings, I had no money to start with so I needed money. But I always...it was those old stagers that you were...you are right, you wanted to be like them. And whatever, there was some sort of romantic attraction about their...^{34.25}

Gregory: It was very romantic yeah. It was very romantic and I saw them as being a purer form of Irishness almost, y'know? There was that in it as well. They were coming and these fellas had stories, they had been around and had *roughed it*, they had tough lives, a lot of them were like a lot of these fellas would be single as well. Y'know, and they weren't family (men), they were outsiders in a sense like that; and ended up very badly, ended up very badly. Ended up with no cars, no f..., y'know. And ended up in...y'know...some of them on the street. But I liked, y'know...I found them very...their philosophy sort of appealed to me, y'know? They weren't motivated by...y'know, and success in the common...y'know... in the common understanding of the word meant nothing to them.

Interviewer: You see what I thought...I had an uncle who was a little bit like that, now. He would have been, he was a couple of years younger than dad, but he was another one

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who was university educated who dropped out, y'know, He was a bit like Danny ⁵ he would have been...y'know. I don't think they...those men really equate to the long distance men *per se*. I think those long distance men came from an earlier time really; but they kind of relate to them because they were...y'know...the likes of Danny and my uncle Jimmy now, they would have...they would have been itinerant to a certain extent, in that they would have lived in...they would have gone where the work was. So if it meant...and very often they would go, they would up sticks and go – y'know Jimmy would disappear for a couple of months! That is why when he did have an accident and he was killed, it was a few weeks before we realized. Because my dad was saying “ah sure that's Jimmy, he could be anywhere”, y'know? He would often disappear for two three months on end and you would find out he was down in Devon working. But he wouldn't tell anybody.

Gregory: Yeah Yeah

Interviewer: And there seems to be this culture of kind of...some of these guys, and some of the younger generation the Danny's and...y'know the likes of Jimmy and that, they seem to have had that wanderlust. They weren't quite the same as the long distance kiddies but they were almost the same, y'know? I think they had a...like the long distance kiddies, the long distance men that I read about, and there was a few that I met, they would, they were much more used to say, sleeping rough. For example, and they wouldn't have a problem with that, y'know? Curly⁶ was supposed to have been of a similar, from that era.

Gregory: Yeah I yeah there were yeah that short story I was telling you, I was going to give it to you but I think I have it, but I must give it to because that is the story, it is about an actual, it is about one of those long distance men. And it is just describing one of them guys who is coming to the end of the line y'know? He just wasn't able to do it anymore. And I wrote this little...it's only a page y'know, a short story, But it's all stuff, it is a real story, it is not...I didn't make it up. I Just put it into, just a, wrote it out. But yeah there were, they did sleep rough and there was that secretive thing about them, I mean they did like to cover their tracks. Now the worst, if you want to ask me about the worst job I ever worked on - and I have no problem saying the man's name. He was a Sligo man and a friend of a friend, so-to-speak. I was back around Sligo at the time, it was a Christmas or something. I never actually met the man but somebody said there's a

⁵ A well-known Donegal/London-Irish musician and character of mutual acquaintance to Gregory and Interviewer.

⁶ A well-known Cork/London-Irish singer and character of mutual acquaintance to Gregory and Interviewer. Curly emigrated to Britain in the early 1950s, first to Manchester, later to London.

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neighbour of yours and he has loads of work over there. But what he has, he was in demolition.

Interviewer: The name rings a bell, I'll check it.

Gregory: So I rang him up and I got a job from him and Jesus like that I only spoke to him on the phone y'know, but that was dreadful, that was really shocking, I mean even though I had a lot of experience.

Interviewer: What kind of a year now?

Gregory: In the eighties, early eighties. I worked on a big job with him down in Russell Square and were taking this beautiful, it was being demolished, a big mansion, y'know one of the, it would have been a period house as well. I don't know how they got away, and there was fantastic fireplaces.

Interviewer: That wasn't in, that wasn't on the corner of Montague Street?

Gregory: It was a corner yeah, it was a corner.

Interviewer: I think I worked on that job.

Gregory: Did you?

Interviewer: As a junior I would have been like, it wasn't, you don't remember the main contractor, was it Mansell?

Gregory: God I can't remember. I know there was an English ganger for the main contractor, there was Irish working there as well. I remember there was a very decent fella, he was a Londoner.

Interviewer: That ran the job?

Gregory: That was the ganger for the English company but I was working for this Sligo subbie

Interviewer: yeah but this fella I am thinking of, he was a Londoner, he was a fella called Dave C, he was a cockney lad but he was a nice fellow.

Gregory: There was one of them, compared to the fellas that this Sligo subbie had - their gang - and there was two, there was kind of an overseer - both from Offaly - and they

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were *bastards*. Like I never came across the likes of them. We were taking down... I remember that that house... I was amazed that the thing was being demolished in the first place.

Interviewer: If that is the job I am thinking of and it kind of sounds very like it because they were all Georgian houses and the one I am talking about now, that was the first contract I ever worked on, I was a trainee site manager basically. And there was four of the in a row, and they were being converted for the British Museum, it was to turn them into offices. But these were, you are right, they were taking down things, it was a PSA job, what they call the property services agency which was like the government, like the OPW, the equivalent of the OPW. But this was listed building and all the cornice were all original, Georgian cast cornice, they all had to be replaced, precisely. There were kind of curved timber doors. This job, stuff like that, as you say marble fireplaces, stuff that would be worth thousands today.

Gregory: Oh yeah be worth a fortune. But we had no safety, it was on none of the jobs I worked on, I wore no hats, we hadn't even gloves. There was no safety...y'know... precautions, y'know. Safety wasn't even; it didn't arise, it wasn't an issue whatsoever like.

Interviewer: No. That was '82 I started in the industry and it was just - just about becoming an issue then, but only just. I don't think you had to wear, it wasn't until the late '80s the early '90s that safety hats became mandatory.

Gregory: I'd say it was early '90s because I worked quite a bit in the '80s there as well and I never saw, there was never anything but that...

Interviewer: Having said that Gregory now in fairness, it was hard to get fellas to wear them anyway.

Gregory: Ah yeah sure I wouldn't have worn them not at all, I wouldn't have worn anything.

Interviewer: I was an assistant manager on a job in the early 90s and I could not - for love nor money get men to put a hat on. And I kept saying to them you are going to, I'll have to fire ye off the site.

Gregory: I so still do a fair bit in the forestry and, well I have a bit of woodland and I still can't bear to wear them. I fucking can't wear them! But anyway I remember one day

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there was two fellas... there now... there was, he employed really... There was some of the men there of course being paid by the day - this was cash, there was no such thing as any kind of stamps or tax or anything like that; we all got paid in cash.

And there was some of the fellas there now, they were really like, they'd be hard, they were living pretty rough. They were good fellas now, I liked them but they were living rough y'know. And they, they would drink, some of them would be older than me, y'know, and I remember there was a Cavan... There was this... this ganger on it now from Offaly and he was a chronic alcoholic and he was mentally unstable as well. He used to go to the pub at lunch time, and he would drink as much whiskey as he could, and he used to come back like a lunatic, y'know, like a lunatic. And he has the foulest mouth that -

Interviewer: Shouting, bawling.

Gregory: yeah and he has the foulest, like he had about six words in his vocabulary y'know, that was the limit. And you can guess what they were!

Interviewer: None of them were very!...

Gregory: But anyway, y'know...I, oh yeah, one of his things was I remember, was "use your loaves", he would be roaring at us, "use your loaves". And this Cavan fella I was working with said, "I wonder what kind of dough went into his loaf?"! And another great thing, another habit he had was "Get the fourteen-pounder, get the fourteen-pounder"⁷, and he would roar this. And the Cavan fella was telling me "Jesus"...about lying in this old room that had and being in the horrors of drink, and he said "that's all I could hear 'Get the fourteen pounder' "! But there was bad ending there now because, when we were coming down (the stairs) I noticed that there was some fireplaces and y'know there was like a limestone surround coming out from them, and I...y'know... the floors were being taken out, and they were being left in, these (fireplaces)...there was really nothing under them. And I said it to your man, the Offaly man...he turned like a dog.

Interviewer: On you?

Gregory: Yeah turned like a dog that I'd think, *who did I think I was* and *who was the ganger* and all that. But anyway there was two fellas then, they were bringing over a lintel; it was a lintel off a window or something, a heavy thing and they stepped on that and down they went, y'know?...and they were really badly injured.

⁷ Refers to a 14lb Sledge Hammer.

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Interviewer: Jeez.

Gregory: ... They were taken away in an ambulance. They were fellas who were being paid by the day.

Interviewer: But that is another one then, presumably there was no insurance on them.

Gregory: there was nothing about it.

Interviewer: Nothing said.

Gregory: No no, because I asked about them and I was told to keep my mouth shut. But shortly after that, it was a time that I got...y'know...I remember coming back. I came back, after lunch one day and there was a load of concrete, a lorry had come in. 48.16 But that Offaly man was there and he started roaring at us again and...he had a y'know... I had a shovel and he just had...his mouth happened to be wide open and I just flung it into it... Yeah. And it just went right into his mouth, as hard as I could. And then there was a kind of...there was...your man kind of went for me then. The other fella, the fella who was over him, he happened to be there. And he said *if I start on you I won't stop*, he was threatening me y'know? So I picked up a brick, and I said *well you can have a go if you want?* So I got out of that, and I was always hoping that I would meet that Sligo fella somewhere...the subbie, like, y'know? Because I was going to tell him exactly what I thought. Because he was a neighbour of some of my family and they thought he was a great fella. He used come back and he was at mass every morning and they thought he was brilliant and he used to get masses said for neighbours, that kind of thing. But I was going to challenge him and say *did you get a mass said for those two fellas that... or the rest of the people that went that way?* Like that was by far and away the worst...

Interviewer: Because he must have known. Like, even big subbies knew what was going on on their jobs like, they had to know.

Gregory: He knew, of course he knew and that ganger, I said it to the fella that was over him, I said *"he's a dangerous man. He should be locked up"* Like if there was any rules, anything at all, I mean that man was lethal. I mean that man... he was out of his mind. He was not safe, he was totally unstable and he was causing...it was him that caused the accident. Like, around a dangerous job like that? Demolition? Having someone like that? But he was on it because he was so abusive, he never left us alone. He keep you... God, I was a good worker y'know?

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Interviewer: This is what I can't understand is like there is an awful lot of gangers you heard about who (background noise)...There's is a lot of gangers that you would have heard about now that were well known for the shouting and blustering, y'know, giving out, that was - I suppose - they would say that was their job y'know? Although I have to say I have an awful lot of evidence from other people that I have interviewed that there was an awful lot of gangers who weren't like that at all.

Gregory: Well that was, that was mainly my experience. But there was fellas who if you were... look, the work was hard, y'know at that stage, like...labouring...there was a lot of physical, tough manual work. But y'know...hard work...but if you were doing it they wouldn't abuse you. That was, what I was saying is that was the worst job ever I worked on. I am singling that out because that was the job that there was abuse. That is really the only job I can say that there was actually abuse on.

Interviewer: I heard about a lot of gangers, gangers have a reputation for shouting and ranting whatever...but they weren't...y'know, they weren't abusive.

Gregory: Now you see, certainly in that era that I was working in, y'know, I don't think it would have worked really. I don't think they would have got away with that, y'know? There was a lot of...I don't think...but I did hear a lot of again, y'know, there might be exaggeration or mythologised or whatever, but I did hear of...y'know...I heard of a lot of that sort of stuff going on in the '50s and that. But that is why I included that because...

Interviewer: But that is a real example; that is something you actually witnessed and experienced yourself.

Gregory: I mean, those fellas that I worked for y'know doing conversions even, that you would be seeing a lot of, you mightn't... you wouldn't particularly like them or have been friendly with them but they never...they wouldn't abuse you, y'know? But you worked hard y'know? Ah no they were y'know... that was an exception, that's why it stands out in my mind.

Interviewer: But you never did get round to finding him?

Gregory: I never met him.

Interviewer: Yeah, and like I said, I find it hard to believe he wouldn't have known that was going on.

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Gregory: Of *course* he knew, of *course* he knew, y'know...and it was the fact that I used to hear the neighbours out there in Sligo talking about God isn't that fella such a decent man, he is such a great man, so religious. That really...y'know?

Interviewer: I can imagine...fuming. But also it kind of says something as well about even the way the industry had developed. I was working at that time, now admittedly I was only a junior but I was working for a, shall we say medium-sized, English main contractor if you like. And there would have been a lot of administrative rules, policy rules in place about things like that, y'know you had the *Health and Safety at Work Act*, it was in force at that time. So in the strictest sense stuff like that should have been reported, but of course, you see...because...this comes back to what we were talking about earlier...if you have subcontractors...I mean...it has changed now because now you have to have your subcontractors provide evidence of everybody they have on the job. But when I started in the industry you would have, you had to keep records of all your own men but if you had a subbie, it would just say...it might say the Daily Site Report might just say *so-and-so subcontractor times ten men*, whatever. *Ten men. There would be no names on there*. So nobody knew who was on that job from those subbies. All you knew was they had ten men. If two of those men fell and got injured, I can't say for sure that anybody would know who those two men were unless the subbie later informed them.

Gregory: You see, the point about these fellas, they were the type of fellas who could have been working under a false name or anything y'know? And they knew that you see. These fly-by-night subbies knew that...these are *non-people*. I mean, that's why he employed them.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah because you don't have to keep any records.

Gregory: But I was amazed that he actually employed me, y'know? Knowing that I was related to some of the neighbours. That I would know, and I might let them know about it, in no uncertain terms. Like y'know?

Interviewer: Yeah it's, maybe he just thought he was doing you a favour and that, y'know, you would keep your mouth shut kind of thing.

Gregory: That was really, really an extreme case y'know. And I remember talking to the fella who was the ganger of the English crowd and y'know, I remember saying that to him about your man - the Offaly ganger – about him being so dangerous and he said "*He's lethal, he shouldn't be on the job*". He said he is a dangerous bastard. But

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y'know...any man that is used to...if you are young and you're fit and you're able to move and you're able to think, construction work is dangerous enough as it is, y'know, if you are young, fit and intelligent. If you're drunk and a maniac to boot? That's...like that is a lethal combination on a building site. And the drink used to really drive him berserk, like, y'know? He was all over the place. Off the head, oh...dangerous.

Interviewer: And isn't it crazy that you could still drink, you couldn't do that on the job now. You just wouldn't; you'd...there'd be people imprisoned if you did that kind of thing today.

Gregory: I mean y'know later on then when I as there y'know after a while, I used to go to the pub too y'know, I mean there was, y'know there was a crowd of us used to go to the pub. But the hard drinking, there was other men who were very steady, they wouldn't go but we used to. I never had more than three pints maybe, four maybe at the most. But still y'know we shouldn't have!

Interviewer: Well some of my other interviewees worked in England a lot later than you and they described exactly the same culture, y'know.⁸ There is always ways around the rules if y'know how to. I am surmising now that you wouldn't get away with it on most building sites now.

Gregory: It is dangerous enough without drink, even a pint or two, you need all your wits about you. I was very lucky, when I think of it like, I was very lucky too, y'know; I would have been rushing into doing things without thinking and... and things...there is so many accidents that could happen y'know?

Interviewer: So did you see any others?

Gregory: No that was the only accident that I actually...I didn't actually see it happen but I was there when it happened yeah.

Interviewer: And the two of them were carted off in ambulances?

Gregory: Yeah, and no more said about it, no.

Interviewer: It is not that unusual I'm afraid.

⁸ See O1#16-Seán G-Leitrim-Rev1, p.7, pp.12-21.

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Gregory: I know. But no I didn't see any other. But I remember...distinctly remember out on a big site, I can't tell you where it was but there was a massive warehouse made entirely of asbestos and we were up with sledge hammers breaking it up. Y'know, no masks or nothing like. I remember standing working along the roof and breaking it down, like. No mask or nothing.

Interviewer: And no one even offered you stuff for it?

Gregory: Ah no. It was only after that I thought that that was asbestos.

Interviewer: Yes, sure I suppose that goes back to the...I don't know when the asbestos regulations came in, it would have been around that time. But there was just a total disregard for the safety of anybody.

Gregory: Well you see that wasn't one you could see. And well... but a lot of people had consequences from asbestos. Major health issues. But no, there would have been no heed on that.

But I enjoyed the big jobs. And as I got... as I had more experience then, you were able to dodge the really heavy manual work. But I mean....

Interviewer: Did you notice as well did the job change, because I think around that time as well there was a lot of...technology was developing and you had different items of plant and what have you?

Gregory: Yes there was less manual work. I mean when I started working on the...we'd still dig out trenches and stuff like that, it was amazing. I remember digging a big...I can't even remember what it was for, but down into the ground but it must have been an area the size of this kitchen and I dug it all out myself down to this level and by hand. It was inside a building; they couldn't get...there was no diggers coming in and I did that by hand and in a very short time as well. But that was...from when I'd start I was going non-stop.

Interviewer: I know it probably sounds like an odd question, well maybe not, but I have had an awful of men that said in some bizarre way you would actually there was an element that you would actually enjoy that type of work?

Gregory: Yes, well I always liked that, to this day I still like doing working the garden or the woodland, I do I still like that work. Outdoor manual work...I do enjoy it, yea...for a very short time (laughs)

Interviewer: Well that's the big difference now you can stop and start when you want to. You are not waiting or looking at some fellow... like you described there, a room this size that is some dig.

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Gregory: I remember that, I'll never forget that, I remember that. And I remember a ganger saying that's...him saying to another fellow "Jeez, that's a fair bit of work" and I thought this was great, like. But again it's proving your worth as a man, and I think that's what it's got a lot to do with this need to...my own view is that there is a certain amount of performance that goes on there with the Irish. It's not just the Irish it happens in all construction work, but the Irish had a particular want for that, that the important thing was to prove you were able for it. But if you think of the stories you hear from any locality from here, Sligo, Mayo...y'know the stories about strong men and feats of strength, y'know legendary figures and that's what stands out. And that was a theme. That was what defined a person too.

And then of course along with the drink - how much you could drink, if you could hold your drink. If you could stay on. I mean we use to go in when we finished work at five or seven o'clock, five, six or seven o'clock and often stayed out the whole night, til closing time. And then up again at half-six in the morning; out, to be in on the job at eight or half eight. And I actually remember doing this; going into pubs on the way home. Drinking with older men as well and having the craic and then being out again working, especially at weekends, Saturday morning, Sunday morning. And cutting out, y'know chasing? for electrics...with a Kango,⁹ standing up on scaffolding boards, and cutting over your head, for about five or six hours, you worked a half day Saturday and Sunday. But having said that about being fit and being active and what have you...I mean I did suffer consequences of that. I mean my back...and all those men had terrible back trouble and also my hearing, it's not bad. My hearing is still ok, but that ear, now, and it's noise induced. Sure we had no earmuffs and when you were inside a building I mean the sound of that was amplified away above what's normal.

I remember for example one day on that site in Liverpool Street and, I was telling you, there was a big concrete shell that was there. And there was a lorry...there was a lift where you threw the stuff on and it went up like that, that was a great job if you got operating that. But one day it had broken down and a couple of lorries of cement came in and they were hundredweight bags at the time.¹⁰ We had to carry those right up about ten flights of stairs all day long... *all day long* and unloading these lorries they didn't even...the lift would be fixed when it was fixed. We were there to do it. I mean that was crazy. That was one of the things that would really get your back.

Interviewer: But then again I remember other fellas talking about a similar thing...and just as you were saying about the strong man stories. There'd always be someone trying to prove that they were better than the next man, so they'd take two bags up! And for no other good reason than to prove they could!

⁹ A 'Kango' is a widely-used proprietary make of heavy-duty, power-operated breaker for use in cutting and demolition of concrete or masonry.

¹⁰ Hundredweight is an old imperial measure equating to 50kg in metric weight. 50kg bags were phased out generally in the early 21st-century for health and safety reasons.

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Gregory: And you'd certainly never gave in. That was the way the whole system worked; instead of throwing it in and saying "*fuck this I'm not doing this*", no. You wouldn't because you'd be losing face... Losing ground yeah.

Interviewer: I was reading Donal McCawley's thing and he talks about there was a great line about what he said, he didn't want them thinking "*what kind of a man is this that can't work like a proper navy*". And that's, y'know...it's that kind of....

Gregory: Well I suppose in my own case there was...As a labourer on a building site there was a *total* lack of responsibility. You weren't paid to be responsible, that was the thing...it was quite mindless in that way and you were taken on...you weren't responsible for really anything. The sort of life I was leading this was all temporary in my head, and as I said we use to come back here and... there was always the thing about we'll get a place and...it was temporary. There was a bit of a farm at home that I knew I'd get at some stage, y'know if I had realised it would have... it was a long... long....

Interviewer: That's what I was going to say, because this temporary arrangement how long did you end up in London?

Gregory: Ah sure I mean I worked for years, I worked for years on the buildings, as a labourer.

Interviewer: You didn't leave London until?

Gregory: '93, y'know? So nearly 20 years. I would never have....

Interviewer: But in your mind was that still always a temporary arrangement?

Gregory: Yes it was always y'know. And now there was the break in Scotland, I was two years in Scotland and then we used to...I use to come home here in the summer time and do various things. I use to do a bit of fishing and things like that. But yeah... putting it off from day to day I'd another week, I'd do another month, I'd stay till the spring, stay till the summer.

Interviewer: But in your head it was still temporary.

Gregory: Yes and I wasn't - as I say - I wasn't motivated, I wasn't interested in... and I could have easily picked up a trade. I would have got more... it would have saved a lot of the hard work. But then again remember how rooted I was in romanticism and that the labouring man... that's was where it was; these old timers... the long distance men. And I'd locate them on a job straight away and they were the ones that I'd spend the time with. And they were coaching me, they were y'know...and I mean I was being...and I saw myself as part of something as part of a tradition as part of...I saw myself as yeah...

Interviewer: Coming from that tradition of these kind of long distance men that had...because they always struck me as these were...well romantic is the only word I can

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think of and they may not have seen themselves that way, they were probably far more pragmatic. But we saw them in that sense.

Gregory: That was a thing coming from a different place, really...a different perspective.

Interviewer: But we saw them, I did as well I use to be quite it's not jealous but in awe of them. That these were exceptional men, because they were different, different from...they didn't...and in some ways it's really interesting. I was reading an article a girl called Sarah Goke which I think you might even know her. She's an American girl who started work interviewing musicians and stuff and she was writing about Danny. And something that Danny had said about this romantic notion of y'know the 'travelling man', the wanderlust thing and not being able to settle down, and not being interested in being married and having any kind of domesticated life. And that to a lot of Irish men, young Irish men particularly, that was something to be admired, and that was something attractive. But she pointed out something really interesting that I hadn't thought of before, which was that to a lot of English businessmen it was the opposite. To them that was actually a disadvantage, because what they saw in that was men that weren't dependable; men that might up sticks and go at any minute. So in itself that way of living might have held those men back from getting...well I suppose progressing up the career ladder. But then again they weren't the type of men who wanted to progress anyway so it didn't matter.

Gregory: Not at all. And y'know just listening to you there, but they didn't and that was one of the things...you used that word, domesticated...they certainly weren't. They had no interest in settling down. And if you think back on that, going way back, the nomadic, the hunter gatherer sort of thing, they were much more in that line than the settled. If you want to compare the hunter gatherer kind of society with the later settled agriculture and the settled people. People who married, who integrated, who looked for careers, looked to better themselves became middle class and all that. These men and they were all men were outside of that. And I saw that very much on the Wood Quay site too. I knew these men were beaten; they were kind of at the end of their time...they were old men, they were coming to the end of their working lives they were living in doss houses. But by God there was a great pride about them, they were really...they were powerful characters, really powerful individuals. And very tough, very, very hard really what you call....

Interviewer: I imagine very self-reliant?

Gregory: Very self-reliant.

Interviewer: These always struck me as men who wouldn't be worried about...I'd be worried about where am I going to sleep tonight, that wouldn't...

Gregory: Not at all! I'll tell you a good story, I don't know if you want to put it down on this. But I may have told you this before, this was relating to Wood Quay but it was about

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the sort of men. Now stop me now if I have told you before. As I said these fellows had all worked in England, and they'd come back. They had gone in the '50s, made lots of money, different work, travelled around. But anyway there was this fellow there *Rhondda-Joe* - because he worked in the Rhonda Valley¹¹... he was a midlands man. But Joe was tough they were all tough. So on the Wood Quay site they started at half eight. But, of course across from the Quays were the early houses and they'd always go to the early houses if they had money, y'know? Because the early houses were open at seven (7 a.m.), so you could be there from seven until half-eight.

Nine times out of ten they wouldn't have, but if they had money they would and it was a very natural kind of thing for them to do. None of them thought it was any... there was anything... out of the way about that. Now you had the archaeologists then who were kind of an elitist crowd coming from Dublin-4, coming from what I would have described as a different planet. Their lives were incomprehensible to me. I mean they couldn't relate to them. Because all these archaeologists were all very middle class, all very upper middle class the Dublin-4 elite.

But, Rhondda-Joe y'know, Offaly Joe use to wear his coat like a cloak, he use to throw it over and he was quite a tall man with kind of long grey hair, and he was a big fellow. Ah he'd be in his 60s coming to pension. But anyway he was there one morning and this small little one came down and she was writing something and it was about 9 o'clock in the morning and she said, "oh there is an awful smell of drink here!" and the other lads said, "ah that's Offaly Joe, that's Rhondda-Joe, he's in the early house". And she said "the early house?", she was interested, "well what do you mean?" (and the lads replied) "They open at 7 o'clock". And she really put down the thing she had and she said "Seven o'clock?!" and she said, "Would you *really* go into a pub at 7 o'clock in the morning?" "Ah yeah, he does", they were saying. Joe was saying nothing and she turned to him and she said, "Is that true Joe? Would you go in at that time of the morning and start drinking?" And Joe just looked at her, and I remember he put his hands on her shoulder, she was a small... he said, "Listen darling" he said, "if you were put up at 6 o'clock to sing onward Christian Soldiers you'd be in the fucking early house yourself!" [Laughter]... Joe was in the Salvation Army hostel. 1.18.43

Interviewer: Getting out of the hostel as quick as you could. God yeah, but as you say they were... an unusual breed of men. You see I think today you don't have those... they are all gone now, that class. But what's interesting is that you still have, there is an element of a kind of itinerancy involved with construction in the... there are still men that will move from job to job. But they are not the same kind of men as they were. Some of them might be heavy on the drinking but most of them... you can't really operate that way now in the construction industry, it doesn't allow to operate that way. And also that class of labourer is more or less gone now don't need them.

¹¹ An area of South Wales formerly associated with the coal-mining industry throughout the Industrial Revolution and the Twentieth century.

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Gregory: What I was doing has finished I'm sure.

Interviewer: More or less, I mean you don't need them now, the only time you do hand digging now is, if there is an area of heavy services that the mini digger or a normal digger can't get into. And sure when you have people who can drive a machine like Sean G, sure he'd put the bucket (of the machine) into the sink he's that accurate. So I think they are a class of men that are kind of... their time has gone unfortunately. 1.20.33

Gregory: Now I did meet, in the course of that time, as well as that type of man that I'm talking about, I met other men who had never got home again. Because, they just and... some of them were now gambling addicts as well as been heavy drinkers. Well the gambling addicts were kind of separate. The gamblers... I use to see them now whenever they'd be paid, they'd be paid cash, straight down to the betting and put the whole lot down on a horse. But I did meet several men who for one reason or another did not attend their parents funerals and who had a lot of sadness around that... and regret, because they hadn't the money or they were in a state of drink or they had gambled the money or they couldn't get... and y'know... I knew exactly what they were talking about, because if you are coming for your parents funeral you have to be in a position not just to be there and not be able to buy a drink. You have to have enough money to be able to... y'know?

Interviewer: Even if you weren't coming for your parents funeral wasn't there this obsession it strikes me, I have heard several people saying, another interviewee, John C, was one of them who when I asked him why did you choose to go to England. I mean the kind of obvious answer that everyone always gives is that *ah well there was no work here, there was plenty of work in England* which is the obvious... but he also said there was lads that were 4 or 5 years older than me that I had known in school and they were coming back every year and they had a new suit and a car maybe or they had had a big wad of money and buying everyone drink. But as he said later on, when... after you have been to England... you now know that *they probably borrowed that suit, or they borrowed the money*. Because there was this obsession with not being seen to have failed. And that seems to have been a huge thing. And in a way it's what you said, I mean you can't turn up at your mother's funeral and not be able to buy a drink.

Gregory: Yea... you just put your finger on it there, that's why those men didn't go home and more of them I'm sure that didn't go home ever not particularly just for the funeral, but because they couldn't keep... they were failures... as they saw themselves as failures and they'd be judged here.

Interviewer: There is lots of that notion of failure has an awful lot to do with I think what you were talking about earlier about this kind of class obsession in this country which there is and I think there was. I mean one thing that does interest me is what you said about the guys who did become the kind of the... more modern version of the more long distance men or the pinchers. A lot of them would have come from what were essentially... middle class... lower middle class background here. They would have come from small farms for example, but because small farming background but because there

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was nothing...because of the farming...the small holding system they had here, if you came from a big family of 10 or 12 kids, that farm couldn't be sub-divided. That was going to go to one person, the rest of you were on your own. So in some ways I wonder if they were kind of...the men who went for that way of life if you like were pushed into it, because there wasn't anything else here for them.

Gregory: Unfortunately I did see in the people who were reduced to living on the street, the winos, y'know...the chronically ill people who were on the street. I did see quite a number of those that I would have regarded as people who *had they stayed at home would have been alright, had there been a place for them at home*. But they mightn't have done much, y'know they might have been maybe in the pub, but they would have survived at some kind of a decent level. But because they were in big cities and not just London but elsewhere to, I mean they just couldn't cope and ended up on the street. Or else if they had remained at home...I mean I could identify people in a community that I know if they were in England they'd be on the street.

Interviewer: I often wondered that, and even in a local community like this. There was a class a lot of the kind of bachelor farmer types. I had an uncle very much the same as that and you often wonder because over here, you are right they didn't have much but they had something, they had a modest income that came from the land or from selling a few cattle. Or they might have a bit of a job doing something. Now it wouldn't be anything great, but it was enough to keep them...

Gregory: Well they'd be kept off the street. And even if they had nothing if they had no farm or nothing and they were just placed on a farm they'd be in a mobile home, they'd be in a chalet, they'd be y'know the community would look after them. That didn't exist in a big city. If you fell out, if you fell off...

Interviewer: Now having said that, there is a whole other kind of area that we haven't talked about. I think that my own view now you might disagree with me here, but my own view is that those men that we are talking about, in relation to the amount of people that were employed and the amount of Irish migrants that were employed in the construction industry over the 50 years from say the war to the end of the century, that's a very very small fraction of the amount of people that went to England, a very small fraction. Those men that ended up on skid-row if you like are a very small fraction of the total amount of men that went. And I think there is a variety of reasons as to why those other men didn't end up that way. And it's too detailed to get into now but I think there is a number of reasons. But one of them is that there were in a way Irish communities replicated in the cities in London and Birmingham and Manchester. Not in the same way as it is here, but they helped to give some people a sense of identity whether you agreed with that or bought into that.

Gregory: Well that was, y'know...you had to stay...that was linked to staying in an area, like if you are moving around, and, you see, in a place like London it was possible to move to different parts of it or to different cities in a way that you couldn't move

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around here. You wouldn't be going from Mayo to come up and live in Leitrim. So you were kind of...so it kind of prevented that sort of thing happening here. But as you said its very complex there is all sorts of reasons as well as that. But I did often think that, I had an uncle now who stayed at home and he would definitely have ended up on the street had he gone to London or Glasgow or any of those cities, he was one of those people who would have definitely I have no doubt about that. But because he stayed at home, he was carried.

Interviewer: Yes, I think as well the big elements of people who didn't end up that way like you said, I mean I think marriage was a big thing, if you were married that helped you. If you got married you tended to become domesticated.

Gregory: yes that was real life-changing.

Interviewer: Or some people had partners but if you became domesticated.

Gregory: Well you see that was anathema to those men we're talking about. And they weren't even interested in relationships as such...any kind of long term...not at all. Any relationship that went over an hour, they were gone!...y'know, sexually or whatever...

Interviewer: One night stands!

Gregory: They weren't interested...not at all...because that was too much of a burden. So in that way...it goes back to that.

Interviewer: Correct me if I'm wrong, but would you say by the '80s there wouldn't have been huge amounts of those kind of men left.

Gregory: No, and when I met them they were old, they were older they were the age I am now...pension age or older. They were still working and up to 70 and over 70. Oh they were, they were very much. They'd be kind of tipping around at that stage. You just physically aren't able for that kind of heavy work at that age. A lot of them would have been quite wrecked from the kind of lifestyle.

Interviewer: So when you did come back eventually!...your continuing temporary move did turn out to be temporary. It was '93 you said was it?

Gregory: Yeah.

Interviewer: So all that time had you been working in the industry all that time?

Gregory: Yes most of it.

Interviewer: And nearly all subbies.

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Gregory: Yes nearly all subbies.

Interviewer: And all Irish men?

Gregory: Yea...all Irishmen...and the only time I would have been working...well supposed to be working on the cards...was Tommy and Dan. They always had work, always, even when work might have been a bit scarce. We might have had to make a few phone calls, they always had work.

Interviewer: They'd find something for you.

Gregory: They'd always put you in.

Interviewer: They are the ones you are saying that were supposedly...

Gregory: Yeah, yeah. They did that for everyone.

Interviewer: Well you wouldn't mind it if that was how they saw it, as long as you were getting what you wanted out of it.

Gregory: I know there is neighbour of mine at home and he worked for a very short period (phone call interrupts) I don't know how long but he worked in the tunnels and he was there but he gets a very small pension but he does get a pension, in sterling, it's very very small.

Interviewer: But I think anyone who worked up to the early '60s.

Gregory: And my mother had a pension.

Interviewer: They would have been pensionable because I wouldn't say there wasn't any such thing as casual work there was, but I know for sure that up until probably the late '50s early '60s, the vast majority of Irish men that worked in construction...especially if you were in tunnelling, you were working for big contractors McAlpines, Mitchells, I forget the other ones, but there was a good few that use to specialise in tunnelling. Now they might pay you as a gang, but they were paying you legitimately and you couldn't work without I have several fellows who said, including John P, you couldn't...in the '50s you couldn't work without...you had to be registered at the Labour Exchange. If you weren't registered you couldn't get a job they wouldn't employ you. Now there was probably some bit of a casual market still going on, but it was certainly - on big tunnel jobs that didn't happen. So they probably would have got some sort of a pension. As you said it wouldn't have been much but it was something. I think the lump thing really kicked in in the '60s and then ran. And so were you working on that basis more or less until you came home?

Gregory: Ah yeah.

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Interviewer: And I suppose to round things up now, you kind of explained most of the experiences, the key points of the experiences you had, but would you say...do you look back at your time in London now, do you think it was something have you any regrets about it?

Gregory: Looking back, y'know, from a personal point of view. What I should have done...y'know I have no regrets about not going into the trade thing, because I really genuinely had no interest in it. I was never any good...I can't drive a nail to this day. I could dig a hole or cut a tree. But as regards trade...I really didn't have the interest in it. But what I should have done was I should have done some kind of academic thing, because I had that kind of a mind and I would have been much more suited to that. And I do...that's one of the things because there was all sorts of opportunities in England to go and study do a degree and you could have done anything. And I'm sorry I didn't take advantage of that. But I was trapped in a particular time and culture, within myself I think, I couldn't free myself from that, I couldn't...it would have gone against the sort of...all the romantic images and ideas that I had. I wasn't going to go through a system of...but all the time I was reading, I was studying, a lot of the reading I was doing...

It was a betrayal that was the word I was going to use...I would have seen it as...somehow a betrayal of the culture I came from? Yes, I would have been...I would have felt a fraud. But as I was saying to you, really a lot of the reading I was doing was studying. Literature, history, natural history, landscape, so I was studying all along. And I spent all my time in libraries and I was interested in cinema in art films and art.

It was always ironic that the number of men I worked with, who outwardly had to maintain this tough, macho, reckless image, yet a lot of them had very artistic, musical and creative streaks behind that façade. Sure look at the amount of musicians we both knew who worked like that? It was Harry was telling me, he's very good at drawing. I noticed him a few times drawing with a pencil and he's very good. And I said *you draw?*...and he said, "*ah yeah, I was always interested in art*". And then he was telling me, he said "*I remember one day*" he said, "*I was working with Ron, and I said*" (talking about what they were doing that weekend) and Harry said, "*God, I went down to the National Gallery yesterday*" and Ron said "*What's that?*" and Harry said, "*paintings...looking at this gallery*" he said, "*it's paintings*"...and Ron said, "*and what's a cunt like you doing in a painting gallery!*" [Laughter].¹²

Interviewer: But then again...and you can see it from several angles, but the thing I find mystifying about that, is to sit back beside Ron as a musician and all the musicians. So there was this...for me, there was always this kind of huge paradox that was going on that somehow...because traditional Irish music is like any other form of music, it's an art form, well I think it is. But I didn't when I was that age, when I was 15 or 16 growing up in London I didn't. Because there was this...it was kind of...it was sitting along this

¹² Harry and Ron are pseudonyms agreed with Gregory for two traditional musicians in the London-Irish community of the post-war era. At this time they were young migrant Irishmen, both working in heavy construction and civil engineering work.

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culture of kind of masculine aggression that was all to do with construction and that you couldn't appreciate anything educational or anything that was...and it's all...that kind of reaction to me is all tied up with class again.

Gregory: One of the things that I found that I could not understand about Ron, is that he use to come in and he'd be telling me he'd spent a Sunday or something drinking with subbies in the pubs around Kilburn or Harlesden or something. And like these subbies were so ignorant! They were, I mean, they were light years away from what the musicians who were builders were like. Like when you listen to the music - to the artistry as you say, the sheer the creativity of it. But a lot of the musicians were brainwashed into thinking "*our Irish music can't be anything more than a hobby*" – because the work came first. And then we'd...these thick ignorant fuckers of subbies would call such-and-such a musician a 'tunnel-rat' or a 'digger-driver' or a 'muck-savage' as if to belittle their value as a musician. I remember thinking sometimes, "*What are you doing listening to people that aren't...y'know, like light years away from your level!*"...but we'd all be drinking with them and...lah, lah fucking music and fucking...sure they couldn't appreciate music, sure they were like retarded! I think that was one of the tragedies of some of the musicians caught in the work culture in London, that they didn't value...what exceptional players they were.

Interviewer: There is a cultural attitude that I noticed too...even my own father he loves traditional music, but there was this part of that was kind of sad, *it's only music*, it's...

Gregory: It's not the real thing.

Interviewer: But it's not so much that it wasn't the real thing, but it was almost like he was saying we don't come from a community, we can't treat that like a classical musician would treat it because they have money, and they are a different class than we are. And it was this kind of thing, he never used the word and he'd probably nail me for saying it, but it was almost like it was *peasant music*, it wasn't really...of any value to anybody except us.

Gregory: That was an attitude that was... I mean that was promoted by Church and State. But there was also the thing and I had come across that and that the people would be very anxious to tell you... "*well y'know we never played music until the work was done...until the day's work was done*" and it was always in the winter, it was always at night, y'know, there is work to be done. But you see a lot of the musicians of the past, of the 19th-century and Coleman's era and that - the really good ones - they weren't interested in work; they were artists; that was their calling. I mean this was the thing, they were reluctant to give music that status.

Interviewer: Do you think that now, because I have a view, again, that's partially to do with the environment you are raised in, it's to do with class, it's to do with this notion that it comes back to the Protestant ethic as they call it, and this whole thing about work must come first, which suits capitalism absolutely to a tee it's what capitalists want! They

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want us to think that...and I thought that for years, for donkeys years, probably even until I moved back here I would say.

I just wonder if a lot of the time, society and especially these men who came from...take someone like a good example for me would be someone like your man is it Joe Kennedy? Big contractor in England made a lot of money, he wrote an autobiography and...he came from a small farming background and they had a shop, I think, as well. So there was this sense of petty bourgeois capitalism in-built in him, y'know? So when he wanted to go to England he sold a cow; he was given a cow as a birthday present or something he reared it and sold it and he saw this as well y'know, I have generated a bit of income here. So when he went to England...he kind of...he saw...he had a tendency for being able to turn profit, being able to turn something into income. And I think if you look at John Murphy who is the same, if you look at all of those big contractors, they all came from small farming backgrounds, where they weren't really...none of them came from a really traveller background. Not urban working class at all, in fact they weren't remotely proletarianised...any of them. And I just wonder because of that they already had this sense of small business if you like. So when they went to England it didn't take much to push them, and the English capitalist system would love that, that's exactly what they want. They want people who were going to put work above everything else. And Irish culture is something you do in your spare time.

Gregory: I knew several extreme examples of that puritanical work ethic even before I left Ireland. And I mean that was...and we all have that to a certain extent, feeling guilty, I have wasted the day I'm wasting time and all that. That's engrained it's engrained and that's the difference. I mean the work ethic amongst some of these people is, frankly, sometimes extreme. But that was the clash of colonialism between the east and the west. It was this puritanical colonialist thing...work...and they were clashing with a different...that they saw as a lazy, which was a totally different perspective on life, entirely. It was every bit as...alright yeah sure, if this is a work ethic it's a work ethic. But they couldn't see any validity in the other thing at all.

But I just wanted to say, an element that was important that should have highlighted - when you are asking me about the length I spent in London and the temporary nature and all that - I would never have stayed there only for the music. It was all that...it was the life of the music and the community that was connected with it; that's what kept me in London. I mean if that wasn't there I certainly wouldn't have stayed. I'm quite sure of that, I wouldn't have stayed in an urban environment working as a labourer...not at all.

Interviewer: It was the music that attracted you?

Gregory: It was the music and the whole social life that went with it, that's what kept me going. And I did, I played a lot of music and...y'know associated with...mixed a lot with the musicians and I was part of that community. I mean that was the community and I was part of it. I mean that's why I didn't stay in Scotland...even though I mean I love Scotland and I love the remoteness of it, but that community wasn't there, to keep you

Original Interview # 10 – Gregory D - Leitrim

there. It was you'd meet people sure, you'd meet people from in different places... I mean what we had in London at that time was very unique.

End.

OI#10-Gregory D-37

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Name: Jackie

Date of Birth: 1955

Place of Birth: Ballina, Co. Mayo

Date of Emigration to UK: 1982

Date of Interview: 14th September, 2016

Location of Interview: Great National Hotel, Ballina

Interviewer: So, you were brought up in the town I presume not in the country?

Jackie: Yeah town.

Interviewer: And what was your background, your parents?

Jackie: My parents, my father was a fitter for Texaco and mother was midwife and nurse, assistant matron and she ended up matron in a hospital.

Interviewer: Were either of them in England?

Jackie: My mum trained in England, yeah trained in Bolton. After the Second World War she saw survivors of the prison camps in Germany and nursed some of them to death, guys came back with their tongues cut out and...y'know?

Interviewer: What kind of standard of education did you get to leaving cert?

Jackie: Leaving cert yeah.

Interviewer: National school plus leaving cert plus?

Jackie: Primary national, leaving.

Interviewer: And did you go any further than that?

Jackie: Yeah I went to technical college.

Interviewer: Was that in?

Jackie: In Limerick.

Interviewer: How long did you spend there?

Jackie: Well, the block releases were three months at a time, 4 block releases and then a year. So 2 years.

OI#11-Jackie W-1

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Interviewer: And what were you studying there then?

Jackie: Electrical.

Interviewer: So it was electrical engineering?

Jackie: Well electrician yeah trade. And then electronics for a year.

Interviewer: Ok and then degree in England?

Jackie: Third level in England.

Interviewer: The one I knew you on, London Metropolitan?

Jackie: Yeah.

Interviewer: That was later in life then, the same as me, you did a mature one later on.

Jackie: Still it's all education.

Interviewer: Absolutely yeah. So, in terms of how many brothers, sisters siblings were left?

Jackie: 3 brothers, 3 sisters 7 in the family.

Interviewer: And where do you come in that?

Jackie: Second.

Interviewer: Second eldest?

Jackie: Yes and the eldest died.

Interviewer: Recently....or just...and the rest are still alive?

Jackie: Rest are still alive. I still have a sister in London and daughter in London now as well.

Interviewer: Ok so did you always have the sense that you'd end up emigrating?

Jackie: No, no..I, I....

Interviewer: So you didn't think it was inevitable as such?

Jackie: No, no I was in full time job and actually just been promoted when I decided to move to England move for music, to play with Tommy McMeniman.

Ol#11-Jackie W-2

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Interviewer: Right, so you could have stayed in Ireland and you think sort of....

Jackie: I would have had a good life here as well, I mean industry, I was in Limerick, living in Limerick and working in Limerick for a company called Kilentha who made film processors.

Interviewer: So you don't fit the profile of the classic exile?

Jackie: No no.

Interviewer: One of thing that interests me is that I think that profile is kind of....

Jackie: It's hackneyed. A lot of people made the choice, I firmly believe an awful lot of people made the choice. In the early 80s and the end of the 70s in Ireland and it was the electronics boom in England.

Break in interview due to noisy location

Interview recommences:

Interviewer: We got as far as we were talking about your decision to come to England.

Jackie: Yes.

Interviewer: So that wasn't driven in any particular way by kind of necessity or desperation?

Jackie: No.

Interviewer: So you came really to play music?

Jackie: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you say there was a sort of electronics boom going on in Ireland at that time?

Jackie: At the time yeah, Wang were in Limerick and opened up factories in Limerick, NIHE was a college that was really set up around the teaching of electronics and they had all the best teachers from England and stuff like that going to work there. And they specialised in European politics with the view towards Brussels and the EEC, so they were geared for that course with languages and politics. And a lot of people that went there ended up working in Brussels probably still there today.

Interviewer: So when you left then did you think was it just a temporary thing?

Ol#11-Jackie W-3

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Jackie: I wasn't sure, I was going to go and see, I didn't have any agenda really, it wasn't to be permanent.

Interviewer: Mainly to play music?

Jackie: I left to play music.

Interviewer: Where did you know Tommy from?

Jackie: I had been over to see my sister when she was studying when she was training and I met the McCarthy's and played with them in the Rainbow in Finsbury Park for St. Patrick's Day, and Johnny Rotten's brother had organised a concert for St. Patrick's Day with two punk bands and the McCarthy's and myself in the middle as they took an Irish band, crazy experience I had never seen a punk before and it was eye opening. And I suppose I had my sister in London so that was a safety valve.

Interviewer: Is that the sister that's still in London?

Jackie: She's still there.

Interviewer: So she's been there longer than you really.

Jackie: Yeah.

Interviewer: When did she go to London?

Jackie: She went probably '77 or '78.

Interviewer: A few years before you.

Jackie: Yeah.

Interviewer: And when you went then presumably it was no big deal for you to come to London you had visited London before?

Jackie: Yes they had accommodation they were living in flats.

Interviewer: So what did you do, come over on the boat?

Jackie: Came on the boat.

Interviewer: Had your fare... and....

Jackie: Came on the bus from Limerick, Slattery's bus it was at the time.

Ol#11-Jackie W-4

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Interviewer: So you went from Limerick you didn't even come from home... ah... sure you were living there at the time.

Jackie: I was living there at the time yeah.

Interviewer: So in your case, there was no real question of like exile or feeling sad, you were leaving for a bit of craic!

Jackie: I was leaving for a bit of craic [pause], I had played with the guys on a few occasions and Tommy said come over you can play in the band. I went over and James Kelly said, what are you doing here? I said Tommy said I can play in the band!

Interviewer: So presumably you were quite excited by the prospect of leaving and going to London.

Jackie: I was yeah, it was something that I enjoyed doing plus there was a certain amount of income with them, so I wasn't going to no work... [pause] just not much work! (laughter).

Interviewer: So when you came you weren't even necessarily sure of working as an electrician or... you didn't have any ideas about that necessarily?

Jackie: No, but when I looked into it there was a real catch-22 about trying to get work as an electrician because you had to be JIB approved.¹ And to get JIB approved you had to work for a JIB approved contractor and to be employed by a JIB contractor you had to be JIB approved so I couldn't get work, it was a catch-22, because it made it very difficult. I did apply for a few jobs and got nothing.

Interviewer: Is that because... my recollection, particularly in the early 80s, as you say the electrical industry was very unionised and very strong.

Jackie: Very unionised, very closed, very strong. Even though I had been a union member in Ireland, but didn't...

Interviewer: Didn't transfer.

¹ The Joint Industry Board for the Electrical Contracting Industry (known as the JIB) was established with effect from January 1968 by the Electrical Trades' Union and the National Federated Electrical Association "to regulate and control employment and productive capacity within the Industry and the level of skill and proficiency, wages and welfare benefits of persons concerned in the Industry." It is, in effect, a trade union for the electrical trade in the UK. In setting the standards for training, competence and terms and conditions of employment, the JIB seeks to maintain stability in the workplace and offer employment conditions that attract, train and motivate the best operatives. See 'Joint Industry Board for the Electrical Contracting Industry (JIB) and regional joint industry boards', Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, available at: <http://nrc-catalogue.warwick.ac.uk/records/JIB> (accessed 13 Sep, 2017).

Ol#11-Jackie W-5

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Jackie:** Didn't transfer, so they kept a closed shop because they were protecting their own jobs, I can understand that at the time. There wasn't an awful lot of work in the early 80s in England, but...
- Interviewer:** Was there not, no there was a recession.
- Jackie:** We were on the end of one you know.
- Interviewer:** Yes it was sort of on the end of one yeah.
- Jackie:** We had the 70s you had all the strikes in the 70s, all the unions were very powerful at the time.
- Interviewer:** So where did you come into Fishguard?
- Jackie:** Yeah Fishguard, Rosslare to Fishguard.
- Interviewer:** And the train down to Euston.
- Jackie:** And the train down to Euston...no!... the bus into Liverpool Street.
- Interviewer:** You got Slattery's didn't you?
- Jackie:** Yes bus to Liverpool Street.
- Interviewer:** It's kind of debatable, I'm just working out in my own mind, whether you are probably what they call the third wave of migrants, the kind of there is a debate at the moment, there's 3 waves of migration to Britain, the first is the post-famine and that kind of goes onto round about 1920 and then there is a second wave that happens after the war which is huge, that's massive the one...that my family came in.
- Jackie:** That was all construction that was rebuilding.
- Interviewer:** Huge, huge wave...that was bigger than a lot of the post famine migration... but then there is a lot of Irish migration experts that say there was a third one that started around the early 80s.
- Jackie:** Well, yeah perhaps. I'd say it would have started sooner, would have started at the end of the 60s, because you had the changing culture a much more...y'know... open culture where people -
- Interviewer:** [cutting-in] Well the funny thing is though in the 60s and 70s you actually had people coming back to Ireland because as you said there was a bit of an economic boom. So you had people that...

Ol#11-Jackie W-6

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Jackie:** That is right that is very true because I knew people that came back as well.
- Interviewer:** But then there was that kind of... you see a bit of it in the Commitments ... there was that real deep recession that hit big time.
- Jackie:** In the middle of the 80s.
- Interviewer:** There was a big wave of people came back again.
- Jackie:** A huge wave because that became very much part of the music scene and the amount of musicians that came over and played in it like Marcus Hennon and all those were third wave yeah. And in between that I suppose people like me where they just did things by choice.
- Interviewer:** Yes so when you first went to London then I'm presuming you went to live with your sister?
- Jackie:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So how did you get on? You were playing music... so...
- Jackie:** Wasn't a lot of money we use to get 6 pounds a sessions, 5 sessions so 30 pounds a week to live on in the early 80s.
- Interviewer:** Wasn't a huge amount no.
- Jackie:** Made life very difficult.
- Interviewer:** That wouldn't have been, I'm guessing now by the average wage in the early 80s would have been maybe 120 quid a week or that.
- Jackie:** Yes and some work that I did get on the side, you could earn... yeah, 25-30 pounds a day you could earn up...maybe up to 150 pounds a week working as an electrician but these were small jobs for a local builder when he was doing other things.
- Interviewer:** Where did your sister live?
- Jackie:** Wood Green.
- Interviewer:** So you were in north London from the off.
- Jackie:** From the off yeah.

Ol#11-Jackie W-7

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Interviewer:** And so I suppose did you always kind of... were you earning a very small income out of music really. So did you always intend to go looking for something else as well?
- Jackie:** I always looked for something else yeah and... first job was in a timber yard selling.
- Interviewer:** Did you need at this stage now, did you kind of register for national insurance and all that stuff?
- Jackie:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** So you did it as... .
- Jackie:** Yes it was all legit. I can even give you the national insurance number if you like [Laughter].
- Interviewer:** I can remember mine as well. You see some of these questions now probably sound a bit odd to you, because...
- Jackie:** It's fine... I have read them.
- Interviewer:** Because a lot of them are designed for much older -
- Jackie:** No I understand that.
- Interviewer:** So I presume you didn't do things like sending money home and... kind of...
- Jackie:** No.
- Interviewer:** Because you'd be beyond that kind of generation.
- Jackie:** Yes, that wasn't necessary.
- Interviewer:** So you worked in a timber yard?
- Jackie:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** How long were you at that for, a few months?
- Jackie:** No, I was at it over a year, as I say the electrical work was very difficult to get into because of the JIB thing.
- Interviewer:** Even though that's what you were qualified in? Probably the idea... I'd suggest you were probably as well if not better qualified than most of the guys that were in the unions in...

OI#11-Jackie W-8

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Jackie:** Probably some of them, I had damn sight more experience of industrial projects and well...
- Interviewer:** That you had already got from working in Ireland.
- Jackie:** I had got from working in Ireland. I have all the stuff, well medium voltage, I worked in the mines, worked on Aughinish Island and the Alumina Plant, worked in the Asahi in Ballina, huge Japanese manufacturing company.
- Interviewer:** So... you went to the timber yard because basically it was hard to get into the electrical work.
- Jackie:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** So it was JIB closed shop really wasn't it?
- Jackie:** Yeah... [pause]...
- Interviewer:** Which is ironic in a way, because around that time I was sharing a flat with a fellow that was an apprentice electrician that was JIB registered whose mother and father were from Wexford and he was second-generation Irish same as me. But he was a real kind of die-hard union man, it was like as you say if you weren't JIB you couldn't be considered... y'know?
- Jackie:** To get JIB was impossible.
- Interviewer:** Well presumably if there was a recession on, they are not going to...
- Jackie:** I did get... I did apply for one job and the guy was very interested, [pause] and his final question was, was I JIB approved, I said no, and he said sorry I can't hire you and that's when I found out the catch-22. And I also interviewed and was offered a job with London underground. And I didn't take it because I had spent 18 months down a mine and the thoughts of working underground again was not really appealing which was probably a mistake in a way because that would have been a very good and lucrative job over the years.
- Interviewer:** I suppose it probably would have been yeah, would be a state job.
- Jackie:** Would be steady, would be good pay rises, and opportunities of promotions, but fear of working underground, I knew travelling home on the tube that I wouldn't be able to do it. But maybe I should have given it a try.

OI#11-Jackie W-9

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Interviewer: But sure...so what did you...

Jackie: I got into electrical, because a contractor came into the timber yard and was talking to me and asked me what did I do and I told him I was an electrician, and he said I have some work I need doing would you come and have a look? I did and he was building purpose made kitchens joinery old style joinery and he was a general contractor housing, Robbie XXXXX from Dundalk.

Interviewer: Was he Irish?

Jackie: He was yeah from Dundalk, Robert XXXX, Robbie XXXX he was known as. Well he was doing jobs for sort of special clientele he had good clientele they were all sort of artists in some description or other, sound recording engineers, that sort of thing, so he had a ...

Interviewer: There was as few lads in London at that time, there was a fellow dad use to do a bit for, funny enough, no he wasn't Dundalk he was Meath, Connie XXXX was his name, don't know if you ever came across him? Ah he was an awful shyster, but he was a great carpenter, great carpenter one of the best I have ever seen, but he was just a scally, but he had a whole bank of as you say, top notch clients, lawyers and artists.

Jackie: We did work for Carroll's, Carroll's Investment Bank, their head office is just behind Buckingham Palace and it was at the Farnborough Air Show. We set up a mock Victorian house to entertain the people that they had invited to the Air Show... unbelievable...5 portacabins and turned the inside into a Victorian mansion with chandeliers.

Interviewer: And this was all with this Robbie fellow.

Jackie: This was all with Robbie this was for 2 days at the air show, must have cost about 70 or 80 grand.

Interviewer: Did you stay with him for long?

Jackie: I stayed with Robbie for 3 years in which I learnt a lot about joinery ended up making sash windows and front doors in the Victorian style, I mean the full whack.

Interviewer: You were making them?

Jackie: I was making them with him.

Interviewer: So you weren't just doing electrical, bits of everything.

OI#11-Jackie W-10

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Jackie: Electrical, plumbing, joinery. It was a case of making a living, I had a child, married with a child, y'see, so making a living and it was great. And then I joined...I needed a much more steady substantial income, so I interviewed for a job at a company called Heat Save which was building-maintenance office blocks, air condition and HVAC, electrical supplies and plumbing in a building. And so it was sort of multi-disciplinary engineering and I spent 5 years with them and worked on some huge buildings in London.

Interviewer: Good work.

Jackie: Yeah, yeah, an 11-story building down off Hyde Park office block, the Ismaili Centre across from Victorian Albert Museum.

Interviewer: And that is now what they would call, what do they call that type of work, facilities management.

Jackie: Facilities management... exactly.

Interviewer: So that was presumably a good career move if you like.

Jackie: Yeah, taxes paid...this was all...it's all taxes paid. And then in 1989 I set up on my own. I got a maintenance contract on Shaftsbury Avenue in an office block looking after their stuff. And you had a question further on in your thing about meeting the elite rich of Irish in... And this is where that happened, about 3 years later... James Prior, I met a guy called James Prior who had a company called Prior Investments who was a self-made multimillionaire of Irish descent from Cork, son of a police sergeant, who'd gone into business through selling, going house to house selling razors and whatever anything he could do, he was a good sales man, he had gone into insurance and from there he had got into a situation where he could start building his own business which became Prior Investments and he built quite a portfolio of properties worth about 50 or 60 million.

Interviewer: You were doing maintenance?

Jackie: Initially he asked me, a friend I use to do some work with another Irish plumber who would do jobs and he'd get me to do electrical works on...because he didn't understand the electrical, so I would do the electrical for him. And James Prior had called him because he had a boiler fault. And, when...he thought it was probably electrical so he asked me to go and have a look.

This all sort of came from my experience with facilities management my area, I had training in refrigeration and boiler maintenance and that made me knowledgeable about these things and I went and discovered that it

OI#11-Jackie W-11

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

wasn't a problem other than his boiler was so ancient it was furred up and needed a replacing. So I told him, and he asked me if I could deal with it, but I phoned the original contractor and he said, ah you deal with it! So I dealt with it. From that he offered me another job, he use to have probably know them, they were in Ireland high class Ironmongers off Tottenham Court Road a little shop they use to sell all fancy door wear brass, can't think of the name of the company. But he wanted a conversion done, they were setting up part of a show room and there was 2 nights and a day for the job to be done, so it was as challenge. And when the shop closed at 6 on Saturday and it had to be open again for 9 o'clock Monday morning. And we succeeded in the job.

And from then the offered me the maintenance of a large office block down in Fleet Street which became a first... now I had two office blocks, and the irony of that, he bought the Rainbow Theatre, then in Finsbury Park, when I told you about playing with the McCarthy's back...

Interviewer: You ended up working for guy that owned it.

Jackie: Yeah, so I ended up working for the guy who then bought it yeah, and sold it, even though he had talked about turning it back into its original glory as a theatre it was an amazing theatre because it had a sort of Hacienda-style balcony.

Interviewer: That's right, I remember it yeah.

Jackie: And he talked about returning it to its former glory, but like all investment businessmen when it came down to it...

Interviewer: So he was basically just an investment businessman.

Jackie: He was turning it over.

Interviewer: Where was he from that fellow?

Jackie: He was from Cork, James Prior, Cork. Son of a sergeant as I said, a police sergeant, very nice man, very kind man no particular angle about the way that he dealt with people, but he did know that, he knew what he had and he know how powerful he was in his own way.

Interviewer: Presumably you wouldn't have seen the likes of him in the Favourite! [Laughter]

Jackie: No, no, no [Laughter]. But he gave me an opportunity of a life time and I took it. He had one saying and it was very important, and it sort of stuck with me all my life, 'it's not waiting for when your boat comes in, it's

OI#11-Jackie W-12

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

recognising that it is in, and taking the opportunity and seizing it,' and it proved true... it proved true. Because from that work I got Cardiff and Bristol, two huge office blocks, nine hundred thousand sq ft each.

Interviewer: So by this time you are talking about a reasonably substantial business you have got here?

Jackie: Yeah, yeah, yeah... I had four full time permanent employees and at one point 50 people working on sort of sub-contract basis. It was quite substantial and at one point I nearly turned over a million which I felt an incredible achievement from a man from Mayo. And I got nominated for an architectural award, British Architectural Award for work I did on refurbishing air conditioning down in Cardiff, so that was from all this meeting with this man and getting a job done that he needed done at two heads in a day!

Interviewer: Well... it's all about taking the opportunities isn't it!

Jackie: Yeah and that was recognised that his boat had arrived! [Laughter]

Interviewer: The boat was in. So was that basically what you did then until the early noughties I guess was it?

Jackie: The early noughties yeah and then the businesses were sold off and the new owners I had had a falling out with one of their representatives in the Cardiff building, I was an advisor on what was happening in the Cardiff building. We had a falling out.

Interviewer: Took umbrage to that?

Jackie: Well the management company, took umbrage. So that Management Company now became the management company for the buildings in London that I was responsible for, so they made my life incredibly difficult; to the point where it wasn't worth doing and I got very ill, but we'll talk about that part later on.

Interviewer: Yeah I mean we don't need to talk about that at all if you don't want to. So I mean really your involvement in the construction industry was very...

Jackie: Orientated towards facilities management.

Interviewer: Yeah and very outside shall we say the stereotypical view of an Irishman in London at that time...you weren't out digging or doing any heavy lifting like.

Jackie: Yes it was the opposite side of it of the coin, it was the start of when the Irish were going into different areas on the building side. Because I was

OI#11-Jackie W-13

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- there through the building and everybody working on the buildings and that would have been what...
- Interviewer:** But you would have been also... professionally technically qualified than earlier generations.
- Jackie:** That's the difference there would be no point in me going working on buildings, even though I *did* do all that work, I did do some of the heavy stuff, I did do building, Robbie like, putting roofs on houses and all this joinery stuff and gave me a good taste...
- Interviewer:** Good grounding.
- Jackie:** Ah, now, I mean 3 years of working with this guy every day and learning something and then being trusted to do it, like, it was a good education nothing missed about it, I didn't lose anything by going with him, I probably gained an awful lot more that was useful for when I was doing facility manager, because I could see a bigger picture.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. It is noticeable, though, all the breaks you got, the guy you worked for are all Irish.
- Jackie:** I did not miss that either, they were Irish, so the Irish community in effect looked out for its own.
- Interviewer:** There was a network there.
- Jackie:** There was some bad apples as there always are that took advantage of everybody and it didn't matter what nationality, and the only people that really screwed me over were Irish men.
- Interviewer:** And why did you think that was, do you think there was any particular reason for that, or is it just...
- Jackie:** One that they were in positions where they became very greedy and they didn't want to give anything away, that was one aspect of it. Two was because they were bullies, they were bullies when they left Ireland and they were bullies when they got there and they didn't change. And that's with any race...
- Interviewer:** I was going to say that's not unique to the Irish.
- Jackie:** Not unique to the Irish, at all, but some of them I think part of it was maybe their lack of education that they have had to force their physicality, strength and bigness and anything like that. They had to make that noticed. And those people that did turn me over were all big burly guys, you know, what am I a small little... small little runt, really (Laughter).

OI#11-Jackie W-14

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Interviewer:** When you say turned you over?
- Jackie:** Money wise, yeah. And one guy took advantage of me working in the timber yard because they use to come to the pub where I played music, and came in and walked with a truck load of joinery products.
- Interviewer:** Without paying.
- Jackie:** Without paying for them, telling the yard man, "oh I know Jackie in there, he's... sorting us out"... filled the truck and drove off!
- Interviewer:** Jesus!
- Jackie:** Oh yeah real blaggards would do anything.
- Interviewer:** Chancers... So in the end presumably you gave up. I mean my interest only goes up to 1995 really, so anything that happened substantially after that?
- Jackie:** Well all the other types of business is after that. Even my illness is after that so it's not particularly relevant.
- Interviewer:** So in 1995 you were still running a surviving business?
- Jackie:** Very successful yeah.
- Interviewer:** But it's noticeable as you say the main sort of problems that you had getting paid and stuff tended to emanate from Irish people?
- Jackie:** Oddly enough there were two races of people that were terrible for paying money, well no it was one... I won't say races of people; there were two *types* of people... one was in the Indian's community, especially ones that were highly educated...um...[thinks]... that would prefer to barter with you, y'know?.
- Interviewer:** Which is a very Irish thing as well.
- Jackie:** Yeah, like... 'fix your teeth; I'm a dentist I'll do your teeth and forget about the money that I owe you' for all the work that you put in in building my house! And that happened to a friend of mine.
- Interviewer:** But also you'd get certainly in my experience of a lot of Irish particularly Irish sub-contractors was - much more so than English businessmen - they would be likely to say, if they had agreed to pay you 1000 pound for doing that, they'd come back and say, ah look this isn't well or that isn't well, I'll give you 600! Just pure blaggarding.

OI#11-Jackie W-15

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Jackie: Pure blaggarding of the highest order. And I worked for Jews, I worked for...

Interviewer: Muslims?

Jackie: I worked for English, and I worked for, I never had any problems with any of those, as far as... in my professional work racism did not enter into any aspect of my life.

Interviewer: That's an interesting comment, I was going to ask you that, so in a professional sense you never felt that and even presumably the JIB thing you don't think that was racist?

Jackie: No, no.

Interviewer: That was just purely because they wanted to keep it...

Jackie: Well I was a union member in Ireland, I was a labour voter, so I understood that aspect, my aspect was always for the work environment because I come from a working class background that's where I come from, so I honour that. Secondly I was pretty well educated you know, and I had lots of friends from different walks of life before I left Ireland.

Interviewer: So you never got the impression that any of that was ethnically driven if you like?

Jackie: No. No. Actually the only place that I particularly felt racism was in the, the, erm...I felt a racist *attitude* was with customs officers and with police.

Interviewer: Right, but that wasn't in the work environment?

Jackie: No, that was coming through Holyhead or coming through Heathrow or any of them, I was always stopped, because I was there when the Troubles were really high you know.

Interviewer: Yeah, well I was going to come onto that, because that presumably is something you would have come to London more-or-less of the height of the Troubles.

Jackie: When it exploded, when it came to London.

Interviewer: Just before that, just to finish up on the construction session, to make sure I have covered everything. In terms of... did you ever presumably because you were on the more maintenance side of construction did you ever had any issues with health and safety?

OI#11-Jackie W-16

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Jackie: Ah yeah, not only did maintenance I did installations. So I did completed electrical upgrade of the power supplies within the building on Fleet Street, I put in a fire alarm and emergency lighting system and I reconstructed 4 floors of the building after the tenants had moved out, carried out the works.

Interviewer: This is in Fleet Street?

Jackie: This is in Fleet Street, I also for Shaftsbury Avenue I did multiple building work and painting contracts where I got people in to redo the buildings and the offices and build or take down or do whatever they wanted to within the structure of the building. So as a company I had a health and safety policy, and health and safety issues were always first and foremost, I worked in Heathrow and so health and safety as you can imagine, health and safety in Heathrow is paramount, actions on sites.

Interviewer: Were you ever aware of it being deliberately flouted, I don't mean in your company but did you see problems with health and safety.

Jackie: With other companies?

Interviewer: yeah or did you ever see bad accidents or? You see one of the things I found was going back through the Irish newspapers there is a whole section I have got there, and it ranges I mean it's much more prevalent in the 40s, 50, 60s but it still happened in the 70s and 80s, is like construction deaths, fatalities, accidents.

Jackie: Yes I didn't come across anything like that.

Interviewer: Good glad to hear it.

Jackie: I mean you know what happened to XXXX dad,² that was the most...the closest thing that I had to any actual involvement in an incident like that and somebody that was carrying out a sub-contract for me almost burned themselves when a spark caught...they were building some frames for offices that it was down in James Street. But that was within their company it was not mine, I have to be realistic.

Interviewer: We have to recognise sometimes as well, that at the end of the day construction is a dangerous...

Jackie: Very dangerous.

Interviewer: It always has been.

² A mutual friend, who's father was killed in a construction accident in the 1990s.

OI#11-Jackie W-17

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Jackie: One person that was working for me actually did break their arm and another person nearly electrocuted themselves through anger after ...I had a lad with me that I put through an apprenticeship, I paid him to go to a college and worked outside, he had some qualifications in refrigeration, but I thought it would be better for him if he got full electrical qualifications, so I sent him to college to do his electrical papers and paid him while he was doing it.

And another person that came working for me took umbrage at that fact that I wanted him to go on and do a HNC³ and he use to argue with me. And after telling him to leave it alone, he um...he didn't and I had told Brendan that I told this guy that it was none of his business it was mine. So the next time the argument came up from this guy with Brendan I went and told him to get lost, that he'd already spoken to him, he said Jackie has already spoken to you about this and he said, none of your business, I think went off in a fit and opened up an electric and stuck his hands in and the thing was live. And there was a fault with the machine.

Interviewer: Deliberate almost sabotage basically?

Jackie: Well no he was angry...he was just angry and didn't notice...switch off the machine on the cover, switch off this machine before removing this cover, isolate this machine before removing this cover! [Laughter]

Interviewer: If we just briefly because I'm going to have to get going shortly. But if we just briefly talk about... I mean I'm kind of loathed to talk about social life really, because I know I was involved with you! But so we don't need to go through a lot of it, I know about the musical background and... um... were you ever, for example, kind of politically active as such?

Jackie: No, other than voting labour, but I wasn't politically active no. And I kept that tradition of when I went to England I believed in the working man's rights and I voted labour all my time in England.

Interviewer: You are...that is one thing in which you are very typical. Nearly everyone that I have interviewed was nobody who was really active as such in politics at all. But a few of them might have been involved in trade unionism in a small way.

Jackie: Yeah I would have been more active in Ireland.

³ Higher National Certificate – a technical trades and management qualification within the building and construction industry during the 1970s and 80s in UK.

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Interviewer: There would be most... especially the old fellows if you ask them about ... they are Republicans their political outlook is Republican but not to any extent that they would have become involved in any Republicanism or any how would you put it, I'm trying to think of the right word, any shady activity to do with Republicans.

Jackie: Same as that, I shunned out of that even when they use to come into the pubs selling An Phoblacht on a Sunday.

Interviewer: Funny enough, I can remember it's one of my earliest memories was the fellow coming in shaking the can in the White Hart in Fulham.

Jackie: There was that political side of it where they would come in on that Sunday morning selling An Phoblacht and forcing it in your face expecting you to buy it because you were Irish. And every time I said no, I got a look for saying no, "what sort of an Irish man are you!" y'know?

Interviewer: Well that would be the implication wouldn't it! You know? And talking of which then would you say the way you were schooled or...the atmosphere the environment you grew up in, would you have considered yourself particularly anti-British?

Jackie: No.

Interviewer: Because sometimes especially in the earlier years the schools would have been very nationalistic.

Jackie: Yeah I actually had a bigger attitude on life than the schooling that I got, I gone into reading and I started reading simple philosophy Hermann Hesse stuff like that and then into more classical writings and serious writings that changed my attitude and when I lived in Limerick I was involved in a lot of things that changed my attitude towards life. I was involved in the family planning clinic as a counsellor and I trained with the rape crisis...when they were setting up the rape counselling services in Limerick, I trained as a counsellor - not that I would ever be involved in the counselling aspect of it.

But, if anybody was going to work within it the idea was that you actually needed to know what it was about. So that was quite intensive and that was carried out in NIHE by psychology lecturers. So that was very intense and politically activated but it was towards humanism rather than anything else. So my view on racists was that actually we are all equal we don't have the right to others and I always felt offended when I was treated any differently.

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Interviewer: So you weren't... it sounds like your education and your upbringing was such that you weren't polarised... you grew up with this visceral hate of anything English.

Jackie: Well the church would have liked that or the schools would have liked that, but they didn't succeed. A friend of mine in Limerick wrote a book that changed the way history was taught in Ireland and England he wrote a dictionary of Irish history, which put page to all the curriculum because it was lie.

Interviewer: Well yeah we now know that most of it was lies yeah.

Jackie: And they had to change the curriculum and books because he wrote this dictionary.

Interviewer: The problem is that the lies existing on both sides.

Jackie: Both sides both sides because of his book England had to change its curriculum and had to change the books.

Interviewer: Did you feel like an outsider when you went to London?

Jackie: [pause] I didn't, but I came to realise that I was! Yeah? [Laughter], I went with a positive attitude and my mind was subtly changed; I was treated differently, definitely during the 80s with the amount of trouble going on in England. I think that's when the English racist attitude towards the Irish came about. But not with the more educated ones.

Interviewer: No, but I think to some extent as well....

Jackie: It was understandable... understandable.

Interviewer: We have to put it into context.

Jackie: I understand about innocent people being blown up, understandable.

Interviewer: They didn't get it?

Jackie: They didn't get it, I mean I was in a situation in Shaftsbury Avenue in one of the buildings where we were not allowed to leave because there was a bomb, I had to telephone kiosk just down the road and the police wouldn't let us out. And at that point I was grateful that the police were there, I was incredibly grateful. And they didn't... that was the one occasion where they didn't stop me and question me because of my Irish accent.

Interviewer: So... I mean... did you experience a lot of being stopped and questioned?

OI#11-Jackie W-20

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

Jackie: No, but any occasion that I opened my mouth in front of a police man I was questioned. Once a police man stopped me to tell me my number plate was broken on my car and I said, "Thank you very much officer, I'll get that fixed that straight away", and he said "you are Irish?" and I said "yeah", and he said "outa the car" and he searched the car top to bottom! I should say when I told you before about customs officers stopping me, I should say that they were all Special Branch boys... they were all plain clothes they were not dressed as customs officers. Yeah not the standard custom officers. But again I suppose they had been briefed to be thorough. Of course and I would have looked like any of those young fellows in Northern Ireland that were....

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Well this was part of the problem wasn't it. The one thing they always missed was that there was just as much chance of the people planting those bombs having my accent as yours!

Jackie: Exactly. Yes, Heathrow, Luton, didn't matter where, all the time, every time.

Interviewer: I mean as you say to some extent you can understand, but...

Jackie: Yes it got wearing. I think the way that I saw it was that, the first time they saw me they photographed me; they knew more about me than I probably knew about myself! but every time, constant. Every time, where are you going? where did you come from? what are you doing? and you know, you tell them where you had been. And there was a bit of a bullying about it, there was a bit of bullying. But thank god that attitude changed in the 90s, that attitude changed.

Interviewer: So this was almost overwhelmingly...

Jackie: In the 80s.

Interviewer: But it was almost overwhelmingly going in and out? At customs points?

Jackie: And occasionally in London if you were stopped by a police man for some reason, they heard the Irish accent, you... you got a grilling.

Interviewer: Yeah, well I heard a great story from XXXX about an incident that happened, he said it use to happen sometimes you'd get stopped coming out of tube stations and out of major tube stations. And he said that he got stopped and the woman behind him got stopped and she was from Belfast, she was a unionist and she was remonstrating with these police men, 'but I'm British, I'm British I'm not Irish', but they just... they... it didn't cut any ice, y'know... you have an Irish accent you must be Irish, you know, which in a way, Jackie, kind of sums up....

OI#11-Jackie W-21

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Jackie:** The stupidity of the mental attitude.
- Interviewer:** Well sums up the complete misunderstanding of the whole situation in Ireland.
- Jackie:** It's the stupidity of one the woman thinking she was anything other than Irish if you were born of the island of Ireland - it is an island after all. I can understand her desire to be British, but she could never be British as long as she lives.
- Interviewer:** But she legally she'd say she was, she'd be Irish.
- Jackie:** She may carry a British passport but on that passport it says Northern Ireland, so doesn't say Britain, doesn't say England.
- Interviewer:** But she's part of... the United Kingdom.
- Jackie:** Part of the empire!
- Interviewer:** Yeah this is what makes nationalities such a joke really something that we are all being far too serious about.
- Jackie:** Far too serious...far too serious about, I was never a nationalist in anything and probably one thing that I always thought about my life was that, the drop of human blood was not worth one piece of soil.
- Interviewer:** Yeah you said it. Did you ever see any of those signs everybody talks about?
- Jackie:** No, I didn't, I didn't, I heard about them naturally, but I didn't, they were supposedly up in Cricklewood and places like that.
- Interviewer:** I think you are too young.
- Jackie:** Yeah I think that's the 50s.
- Interviewer:** I just thought I'd ask on the off-chance.
- Jackie:** Now that was the immigration after the war, that was what all that about you know.
- Interviewer:** Do you think that racism was directed mainly against the Irish, the other white or is or mainly against non-white ethnic groups, that's a bit complicated?

OI#11-Jackie W-22

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Jackie:** No, no the racism wasn't particularly addressed towards the Irish but it was there, it wasn't racism - it was a hatred for what was been done to British soldiers.
- Interviewer:** The Troubles.
- Jackie:** The Troubles, but there was the sort of 'you're all dogs' kind of thing, I did see a certain amount of racism like 'you're not worth a thing'. But I was more educated than the person who was saying that to me, so I never bothered giving it the time of day.
- Interviewer:** Did you ever see racism of the other sort - against black people?
- Jackie:** Yes blacks, Muslims, Pakistani's.
- Interviewer:** Did you see it amongst the Irish?
- Jackie:** Yeah, oh yeah... prevalent amongst the Irish. White Irish yeah and nasty degrading stuff you know. I did, I didn't like it. I would pull someone up over that, not allowed to happen not in front of me.
- Interviewer:** It is... I never had...I would have had neighbours who would talk sometimes about all blacks and Pakistani's in front of the kids and I hated that.
- Jackie:** Yeah, Paki bastards and all that... who was that?
- Interviewer:** Just neighbours in East Ham use to say things like that.
- Jackie:** Horrific stuff, it's bad. One you are not raising your kids to be like that, two you don't want to be part of it.
- Interviewer:** Some one of them were Irish.
- Jackie:** Bloody sure they were.
- Interviewer:** Would you say on a whole would you consider Britain to be a sort of tolerant of place?
- Jackie:** I would mainly think of it as a tolerant place. I always found that the really racist attitude in Britain was mainly amongst a very nationalist set who would prefer if Mosley was still around and alive! And that they could unite under a Nazi flag! And they were those people, but those people are in Germany, they are there in Ireland, they are in America...
- Interviewer:** I think we might have to leave it there Jackie?

OI#11-Jackie W-23

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Interviewer:** I can follow it up and give you call. But I think a lot of the rest of them I probably know the answers to, I never got the impression, I could be wrong but were you overtly religious?
- Jackie:** I went to mass in England, I went every Sunday for the kids for their education, they went to Catholic school, so I did go I did practice, I practiced with Cathy we went to mass up at Holloway Road every Sunday, but not overtly religious, no. It was what a lot of people did, social Catholicism - that's a very good way of putting it and social Catholicism for the benefit of your children. You go when you have to.
- Interviewer:** What about sport, were you a GAA man at all?
- Jackie:** I didn't play and I didn't go, definitely a GAA man my father was Mayo goal keeper '51, so.
- Interviewer:** You have a GAA heritage.
- Jackie:** I have a GAA heritage and I have an interest in it naturally. And we do talk about it and follow it on TV and that.
- Interviewer:** And presumably then most of your experience in London was through the informal social networks, the pubs and the music scene.
- Jackie:** Yeah.
- Interviewer:** Which I know most all about.
- Jackie:** The music scene and the Irish centre, and you know all the history; that's where I first met you in 1982, in *the Favourite*, long time ago.
- Interviewer:** Ain't it just.
- Jackie:** 34 years ago Mick, long adventure thank God for it.
- Interviewer:** Did you ever kind of hang around at the dance halls?
- Jackie:** No. Never. I was in the Galtymore once, somebody wanted to go for a late drink, I left them to it and I paid more to get home in the bloody cab than I earned that night at the session, I was disgusted because all they wanted was a drink in the Galty, and Jesus I thought!
- Interviewer:** So did you consider yourself, I think I know the answer about this I'll ask anyway, but did you consider yourself suitably educated for life in the UK?

OI#11-Jackie W-24

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

- Jackie:** Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I was very open even with the music, like in the *Favourite*, the great thing about the music was that it attracted so many diverse cultures and you became culturally aware, y'know, very fast and they were interested in you and what you were doing and playing.
- Interviewer:** I think there was a cultural movement in London.
- Jackie:** Very much so, was a great melting pot.
- Interviewer:** Yes but amongst the Irish.
- Jackie:** Amongst the younger Irish and the emigrants from South America.
- Interviewer:** Yeah but also even there was a certain element of the older Irish even the Jimmy Powers and the Bobby Caseys.
- Jackie:** Oh yeah, yeah, no doubt about that, yeah.
- Interviewer:** They had a certain way about them that they...
- Jackie:** They would open to anybody, have a conversation with anybody from anything when music was involved. Open doors, there was absolutely no doubt that music was the door opener.
- Interviewer:** And there was a kind of, I thought there was a certain aesthetic that was going on in amongst the Irish that kind of counters this stereotype. Goes against the stereotype. When I think about all the people that I met in music, ok take someone like Danny Meehan, Danny Meehan fulfils that sort of on the face of it, fulfils that kind of navy stereotype, he's big, he's strong, he's a paviour and a street mason...
- Jackie:** Definitely. Yeah but intellectually fulfils...
- Interviewer:** He's on a different plane altogether.
- Jackie:** Completely yeah, completely. He's open to every culture and accepting.
- Interviewer:** Yeah and his attitude to life and to music and to as you say other cultures is completely different from that stereotypical picture.
- Jackie:** Definitely.
- Interviewer:** And well he's just one example I think there are like dozens of them.
- Jackie:** Definitely without a doubt, I think that revolution in Irish music in the 70s worldwide effected more of a culture swing within people that were playing it than anything else. Because even within Ireland before I left you

OI#11-Jackie W-25

Original Interview # 11 – Jackie W - Mayo

had all these cultures coming to Ireland to hear Irish music, to learn Irish music, to play Irish music and we met them all, we interacted with them all, they were interested like nobody's business and we were interested talking to these people, different social attitudes.

Interviewer: But I think in a way as well, that that, the development of that attitude if you like spilled over into the work place and so you got a breaking down of these old kind of....

Jackie: Stupid barriers. I agree with you entirely on that, that's exactly what happened.

Interviewer: There is one more thing I'm going to...I suppose just to complete...but on the whole would you consider the life you lived in London a positive or a negative?

Jackie: Oh very definitely positive. Any negativity that happened to me in London was brought upon by myself. Overall, completely positive. Genuinely I loved it. And here's an irony I was over for Ciara's wedding a couple of months ago and I was amazed at how many more, I use to travel by tube all the time, I wasn't hanging around and I was amazed by how friendly and smiley people were on the tube that I didn't recognise, definitely wasn't like that in the 80s, and it was a different attitude was a different feeling in the air, I don't know if you notice that.

Interviewer: The only thing that I find, I have been intimidated by London the last few times I was there, not because of any attitudes just what seemed to scare me was the sheer volume of people.

Jackie: Yeah it's unreal.

Interviewer: Have you got anything else you want to tell me?

Jackie: No that's fine with me, I hope that was good enough for you?

Interviewer: It was brilliant excellent. Thank you very, very much.

Jackie: Pleasure.

End.

OI#11-Jackie W-26

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

Name: **Date of Birth:** 12/3/1928
Place of Birth: Cloone, Co. Leitrim
Date of Emigration to UK: Dec 1949
Date of Interview: 14/9/2016
Location of Interview: Paddy's House, Swinford, Co. Mayo

Interviewer: There is a good few doing their time in Murphy's now.

Paddy: Well Murphy was a great firm for a lot of the young Irish. I found Murphy very good to work for.

Interviewer: Yea well I'm interested to hear that, because you get varying different stories about Murphy's.

Paddy: I have heard them all so many times.

Interviewer: And they are all stories!

Paddy: I worked for 5 years with Murphy and they were one of the best firms I have ever worked for.

Interviewer: And I know at least half a dozen other men same generation as you who did the same thing, and I mean spent their lives working for Murphy's and wouldn't have a word said against them. And yet you get other people, you get these stories that are told.

Paddy: Look, I had blokes working for me when I was... and they were running me down in the pubs and I was the biggest...

Interviewer: Biggest crook around!

Paddy: And then to your face they'd be great!

Interviewer: Right if you don't mind me asking what year were you born?

Paddy: I was born 12th March, 1928.

Interviewer: You're a fresh looking man!

Paddy: That makes me 88.

Interviewer: You wouldn't have known my dad then, my dad would be nearly 10 years younger than you; '37 he was born. He'd be between generations. And what date did you emigrate to England?

Paddy: I went on Christmas 49/50 between Christmas and New Year.

OI#12-Paddy B -1

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

Interviewer: So you have told me a little bit about your life in Ireland you lived in Cloone till you were around 14, 15?

Paddy: yeah, yeah. And then we moved down to Sligo because Jimmy Higgins was the main builder there and he was a Leitrim man and my dad was working for him so we moved down there.

Interviewer: So your father was a builder as well?

Paddy: Yes well he use to build on his own, he built most of the houses around our way, ...and he use to do all the carpentry work, he use to do the building, build the carpentry work and the lot. But when things started changing even back then he just stuck at the carpentry and he worked for Higgins for years, Higgins was one of the big builders in Sligo. He was the one that use to own the Silver Swan Hotel there. He built that, I was at the building of that, when they were building it. And there was objections and everything because he was changing the course of the river and everything else, what a load of bull.

Interviewer: So you said you played football?

Paddy: I did, we won the County Championship in '44 for Cloone, I don't know where my medal is gone to.

Interviewer: Minor County?

Paddy: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then you played for Sligo you said?

Paddy: Yes but didn't spend long enough there, I left there as well. Like everything else the work came to a standstill.

Interviewer: In terms of education did you...how far did you get in school then?

Paddy: As far as the door! [laughs]

Interviewer: Exactly! I presume you got primary education.

Paddy: Just about.

Interviewer: No secondary education?

Paddy: No, there was no secondary schools, they were more interested in teaching you the Catholicism and Irish was just coming back in, because it was banned all during - I mean there was no Irish taught in Ireland during under British. And then, well, we were still in the Commonwealth mind you, but Irish was just coming back in. So they were

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

doing Irish and everything there. I mean all these kids here learning Irish they go abroad it's no good to them.

Interviewer: Don't get me wrong I'd love to see the language used, but practically how are you going to do it, that's the problem.

Paddy: They'll all go, I can see my own grandkids and they'll be all gone as soon as they are finished school and education.

Interviewer: So you finished school at 14 I presume?

Paddy: Yea around 14.

Interviewer: Did you go to work?

Paddy: Sure I was working then with the aul' farmers around the place for a couple of years, messing around yeah, the farmer would want you to do this and you'd be out when they were setting the potatoes and going to bogs and everything like that, the auld...[pause]... kids weren't...they were supposed to be able to do a mans work then.

Interviewer: Turf and that kind of thing?

Paddy: Oh yeah, and there was a bloke down from us, Sonny McKenna and Jesus he'd want you to start milking the cows and helping him milk the cows and he'd go off to the pub and leave you there! ohhh! It's terrible.

Paddy's wife [intervenes]: In this time your dad was in England and you were the eldest boy?

Paddy: Yes because my dad was over during the war.

Interviewer: Your dad came over to do war work?

Paddy: Yes I mean Ireland went dead at that time; I mean there was just nothing in it, and he came over and he was working on all these camps and everything building... he was up at the London docks building the big barges there that they floated across the channel and made -

Interviewer: Oh, the Mulberry harbours?

Paddy: Yeah,...where they floated them across the channel, he was at the making of them, he was a carpenter so shuffling it all up on the concrete and pouring it in. And he was down in Ipswich on the Yankee camp there or some place where they were building huts and everything. He was in different places. Well them days you were just sent to wherever the work was, just the very same when I came over, you couldn't go for a job, everything came from labour exchange. There was no such thing...you couldn't walk

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

into a job and get a job, you had to go to the labour exchange and they'd give you the job and they told you where to go to. And you got a green-card and they'll see you and you give that to the foreman and he'd sign it and sent that back.

Interviewer: And was that the same for everybody?

Paddy: That was the same for everybody, after the war I mean there was no such thing as walking...onto a building site, everything had to go through the labour exchange. And then if you wanted to pack up...

Interviewer: Which presumably why there was no at that time, there was none of this lump crack!

Paddy: No, no Jesus...everything was all above board, you clocked on every job you had, you clocked on in the morning and nearly every job I went on, I was in Birmingham for a while and use to clock on and that was it

Interviewer: Ok so your father came over and I'm interested to hear that, he worked on the Mulberry Harbours, that's fascinating.

Paddy: *Yes he was in it for 2 years.* He was two years in England.

Interviewer: When did he come back then? 1945 would it be?

Paddy: Must be '45, it was the end of the war anyhow.

Interviewer: And in the meantime you are knocking about doing a bit of farm labouring and trying to keep everything together!

Paddy: I'm getting the turf and the potatoes and the bloody hay and everything.

Interviewer: Trying to keep life and soul together. So when did you decide to go to England?

Paddy: Well I was working with Jimmy Higgins I was with him for about 4 or 5 years, and I was serving my time there with him as a bricklayer. And then in...I don't know why...matter of fact I was out at StrandHill...we were building a wing to the golf links course, to the club house. I was out there, and came Christmas and my mum was...I had a sister down in Northern Ireland and she was having a baby and my mum went down to her and, I thought...oh the house is clear I'll go! Otherwise she'd be...she'd be lonesome and, y'know?

Interviewer: I know.

Paddy: So that was it. I had the opportunity and as well as that I had a girlfriend who was over in Mayo as well and I came over with her, so we came to Birmingham. Well she was

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

here before that, because she had a brother that was working here before that and he was here before that.

Interviewer: Did you always have a sense that it was almost a given that you would go somewhere at some point?

Paddy: Well you had to do something there was nothing, it just went dead in Ireland, you had no opportunity, I had two brothers and they were good plasterers, but the bottom fell out of it and there was nothing going on. They had to go, one of them went off to Australia and the other one went to England.

Interviewer: How many siblings did you have?

Paddy: There was 9 in the house, 4 boys and 5 girls.

Interviewer: Big family, same size as my father's family.

Paddy: And nearly everyone in Drumboher had the same size families. It was roaring with kids and nowadays there is nobody.

Interviewer: And how many of them stayed at home?

Paddy: None of them stayed at home, none of them I mean, I had one brother going off to Australia, and sisters went off to England and some went down Northern Ireland. I had one brother stayed there, matter of fact he was serving his time in Sligo there, but he was an engineer in an engineering firm...but then that closed up and is now a housing estate and he came over here and he was working in an engineering....

Interviewer: Did you have land?

Paddy: No there was no land, there was about 1 acre or something but we had a cow but they were on everyone's land I mean the neighbours there, sure nobody took any notice them days. It's not like nowadays, sure we use to walk across hundreds of acres of land belonging to everybody hunting and shootin' and everything, if you do that now you'd be shot.

Interviewer: I know, everything is fenced off you can't walk anywhere.

Paddy: No them days is completely different.

Interviewer: So you did feel like it was almost given that you would leaving at some point.

Paddy: Yes there was nothing and came over here.

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Interviewer: And did you have any sense that it would be permanent or did you just go thinking I'll earn money and come back?

Paddy: You'd never know, you just didn't know.

Interviewer: Taking your chances.

Paddy: Yes you just went along with a wave kind of thing. Yes you didn't know how long you were going to stay, whether you'd be ran out of it or not! (laughs)

Interviewer: So did you say you had a sister to go to?

Paddy: No I didn't, I had a sister but she was outside of Birmingham in a house there, and I was in Birmingham itself - kind of thing - and I was in digs there. So.

Interviewer: So that's where you landed first Birmingham?

Paddy: Yes that's where I landed first yeah, landed there.

Interviewer: Tell me about coming over, you came over at Christmas.

Paddy: On the cattle boats as it was then, your dad will know all about that. The Princess Maud or...one of them. It was unbelievable, nothing like the boats nowadays, it was unbelievable. There was no room downstairs, every place you were up on the deck and everyone was sick over the top, cases slung every place. And you met, I met several people from school that I went to school with, they were all on the boat from different places, they were all going; some was going to Sheffield, some was going to Manchester, they were going to different places like you just met them on the boat there and they were all....

Interviewer: Was it like a mass exit?

Paddy: It was just a mass exit the boats were packed coming over. Everybody just left it was terrible.

Interviewer: And you went to Birmingham because your sister was there?

Paddy: No I went because the girlfriend was there!

Interviewer: Right ok, and so you landed in Birmingham in 1949?

Paddy: Yes, yes so.

Interviewer: After the arduous journey.

Paddy: Yes and got digs.

OI#12-Paddy B -6

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

Interviewer: How did you get digs?

Paddy: Well her brother knew of people that was there anyway, he was there for a good while a few years, he was a lot older than us, he was there during the war and stuff. So he knew a few... so we got digs there.

Interviewer: Was the digs with... was the house owned by Irish people?

Paddy: No she was an English woman, very nice woman. She'd be out every place with you, they'd what to come out here and there and every place.

Interviewer: So she treated everyone nicely?

Paddy: Yes it was alright yeah, that was another thing people keep saying about bad digs, we were...I was never treated bad every place I ever went and I never heard anyone...we were in one digs in London and she'd take nobody only Irish. I was the first bloke ever went into it!

Interviewer: She wasn't Irish herself?

Paddy: She wasn't, none of them Irish. And I was the first bloke that ever went in there, the first bloke she ever had in her life to stay with her. And I was there for a while on my own and then I brought in some mates they wanted to... and I had my brother there and my sister came over and she stayed with us, and she wouldn't have anybody but Irish.

Paddy's wife intervenes: There was a newsagent opposite the church and there was an advert, 'only Irish people'.

Paddy: yeah. I have never seen that where no Irish.

Interviewer: You never saw that sign?

Paddy: Never seen that and people use to say that, you can't go there, but I have never had that experience. I have had great experience.

Interviewer: The usual answer I get to that question is, ah yeah we did see some of those signs but we didn't see very many of them.

Paddy: Well I never saw any of them.

Interviewer: And we just ignored them. That's the usual answer, but I have never yet met anybody who could tell me where they saw them!

Paddy: Well the only place - there was as newsagent at the top of our road and we had Roscommon men and Sligo men and all sorts...

OI#12-Paddy B -7

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

Interviewer: Is this now in London?

Paddy: Yes there was... Sligo and everything.

Interviewer: So you landed in Birmingham first and you got digs with this woman who was a nice woman.

Paddy: Yes and I was told where the labour exchange was, and they explained to me where it was. So I went down there because that's the first place you got to go next day. And you had to sign on kind of thing and they give you a card to go to a job. So they gave me my green card to go to this job and I went there the following day and that was it.

Interviewer: Do you remember where it was?

Paddy: It was down in Oldbury and it was... they sent me to a job which I had never done, I was on the building for 4 or 5 years before doing lining furnaces... And I thought, well I don't know! Well I thought I'm not going to be beaten! I tagged in and there was... there were these big boilers, it was Allbright and Wilson was the name of the firm down in Langley in Birmingham. And they had I think there was about 7 or 8 furnaces but there was only about 4 going at any time. They use to make I don't know what the stuff was, but you were supplied with a boiler suit and a pair of clogs and gloves, because you could walk along and the whole thing would light up behind you the dust on the floor. They use to put these rocks... because the overalls would be all... if you were cutting out some bad brick work and cutting out... there'd be burn spots and but, I went in there and you crawled in through this hole in the day...

Interviewer: Any protective equipment?

Paddy: Electric lights and there was someone giving you some, and instead of the bricks that came out of it and I was there the very beginning of course, these carbon things and it was that length more long and some longer ones and you had to stand them all up and pack all this stuff in between them, it wasn't sand and cement it was other stuff, stuff that was fire proof.

Interviewer: And who were you directly working for?

Paddy: For that company for Allbright and Wilson.

Interviewer: so there was no subbies involved?

Paddy: There was no such thing as subbies. But that was in the winter time, I was glad in a way, you were inside in the warm! And then... but when the summer came and them days you use to get good summers, it started to get a bit hairy in there so I decided to leave. So I left there and I went out back to the labour exchange and I got a job then with

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Jackson was the name of the company, I remember them. A very nice old boy, a foreman there and they were building a factory, the very first plastic factory, plastic was just coming in. And they were building this factory for plastic making whatever they were doing with plastic, and I got the job there. I remember well going on the job and I had a big three foot six or four foot level or something and my tools and this was new. I hadn't got it long I bought it over there.

Interviewer: So you must have bought the tools out of the money you were earning.

Paddy: Yes and I had the tools and I was lucky in one way because the digs we had, the bloke that... the landlord, he worked in Braids factory! I had access to tools.

Interviewer: Luck of the draw sometimes. (laughs)

Paddy: Yes and I still have some tools that he gave me there yet. So it all works out. But I went in and went down with this lovely level I was proud of this level that I had it a couple of months, I went on and he said, 'that's no good here my aul' brother! I said Jesus. He said have you got a plumb bob? I said no, so he went into the office and he brings me out this great big 4 ft plumb bob with a lump of lead on it well we use to use them in Ireland anyhow, I knew what they were, but that's what you had to use on the job. You had to be spot-on!

Interviewer: They were very fussy.

Paddy: Very fussy but it was a lovely job, this was a factory for the British plastic... that's when plastic just started coming in.

Interviewer: Did that keep you going for a good while?

Paddy: Kept me going I stayed there for another couple of months and we decided to come to London.

Interviewer: That was so... you were still in the same digs?

Paddy: Yes same digs.

Interviewer: So headed for London.

Paddy: Headed for London, came down to London, well Paddy Quinn... the girl I was with anyhow had a brother and she had a brother in London.

Interviewer: Who was Paddy Quinn?

Paddy: He was from Riverstown, Paddy Quinn was a brother of my girlfriend, so she had a brother in London as well, so we got digs there.

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Interviewer: Which part of London were you in?

Paddy: North London. Enfield. Yes I was there and never left Enfield, never left it between then until the day we left and came over here! Mind you I worked in every county around.

Interviewer: And what year did you land in Enfield then?

Paddy: That was in the 50s because I worked in there and I worked in the other place and then decided to come down and I came with them and that was it.

Interviewer: Well Jeez, you must have liked Enfield!

Paddy: Well I mean, lookit, when we came to London in the early 50s there was nothing in the east end it was just flat, there was just nothing and the half of it was blown down; you'd go up and down through streets and all was there was little bits of walls sticking up here and there. And they cleared the roads.

Interviewer: You must clearly remember the bomb damage?

Paddy: Yeah. The bomb damage was just; everything was flat. Well you had to go to labour exchange when you came to London I had to go down to ponders in there was a labour exchange and they'd give you the card to go.

Interviewer: So you went there and where did they send you?

Paddy: Edmonton Council, they were building those big flats on Church Street, they were building some of the Cambridge roundabout at the time. So I was working for there a good while... and I got the sack off there. I was in digs with a Mrs Lees and just at the jamb of her door there was a bit of plaster coming off the wall and everything, and she asked me if I could do something with it. I said yeah I'll see if I can get... So I came down off the scaffolding on a Friday evening and I says, and...I had a little plastic bag and I put a shovel of bloody sand in there and a bit of cement in there and one of the bloody agents from there, said, where are you going with that? I said I'm just taking it home, told him the truth. Drop it down he said, go down to the office. So I had to go down to the office. He says get your cards!

Interviewer: You're kidding!...for a small little bag of flippin!

Paddy: Yea, a small bag of stuff... that was it, and we were working there for a good while we were on bonus and everything.

Interviewer: And one thing I didn't ask you about the jobs you have told me so far, both in Birmingham and London, what was the money like?

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Paddy: We were only getting about £5 a week, wasn't huge money but it was twice as much as you'd get in Ireland and paying £1.50 for my digs, so we were well off really by comparison. And then of course, at the latter end of the fifties, well it wasn't like before going to the labour exchange was phased out.

Interviewer: I'm interested to hear about. So you come to London and you are working for the council so you finished up with the council roughly what year?

Paddy: Was the same year, in late 1950 I think. And then I had to go back to the labour exchange and then they sent me to the co-op. So I worked for the London co-op, I was with them for must be a couple of years.

Interviewer: Was that doing building?

Paddy: Yes they had their own maintenance, they had...

Interviewer: The London co-op as in the shops?

Paddy: Yes the shops and the dairies and everything, sure we rebuilt dairies down there up at Palmers Green and blocks of offices and everything for the staff, ah Jesus, we built a load there. Matter of fact I was doing a job there, a block of offices all in lovely red brick work. And we had to have some fancy diamonds in the front and everything. And there was myself and another bloke, he was a Cork man, brick layer, that was with me, he wasn't all that great! So I was coming back on holiday I came back on holiday for a week or something and came back. And I thought this will be all finished when I get back, when I got back it was still the same, the foreman wouldn't let anybody else on it! (Laughs). No he wouldn't let anyone else on it. And I came back and I had to finish all the front of it. I think Les Merrion was the foreman; he was alright, him.

Interviewer: You stayed at the co-op?

Paddy: I was with them for a year or so and then... ah... the wages wasn't all that great, it was only about 5 or 6 pound, but then everything started springing up and starting to... the work started to really pick up...

Interviewer: Can you remember what changed, you stopped going from the labour exchange you didn't have to go to the labour exchange?

Paddy: Because there was such a demand I suppose. I don't know, but people just started... I don't know how that came about. But at the last labour exchange ever I went to was the one going to the co-op and after that when I left there, went with another bloke, an Irish bloke, Frank Burke was his name, a Galway man, you didn't have to have any... you had to have cards because cards were still on go, there was no subbying, cards were still on the go and everything like that.

Interviewer: But he was contracting?

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Paddy: Yes he was just doing brick work, matter of fact, he was just kind of contracting off big builders, taking the brick work. But you had to pay, you had a stamp card and everything, so it was after that, it was...I worked with him for a good while. And I don't know when that...it was after that it started coming out where you just got paid cash...

Interviewer: So it was really the lump as they called it really started in the 60s?

Paddy: In the 60s was when really the lump started, I mean Jesus.

Interviewer: Because you'd get the impression that that had always been that way, but it hadn't always been that way?

Paddy: No, no it was very strict, after the war and everything early 50s it was very strict, but then in the middle 50s it just started and then the start of the 60s it all loosened up and then when the 60s took off it just got out of hand!

Interviewer: So it would appear yeah, that's what everybody tells me. So you went to work for Frank Burke.

Paddy: Yes I went to work for him and I was with him for a good while, we were working, well we done a big furniture factory for a start down in Ponders End for Betkins Furniture. Tudor roses and everything the furniture company, and we worked...they went bankrupt the firm that we were with. So the banks was paying us at the last end because Tudor Rose went skint, I think! He spent too much money on his factory, two boys they were. And we went out then, we started and then Frank went out to Harlow, Harlow started.

Interviewer: Was that Harlow Newtown?

Paddy: Harlow Newtown yea. When we went out to Harlow Newtown it was just one big farm and you go down there and all you could see was stacks of bricks as far as you could look, every place around, just heaps of bricks and nothing built! It was just a flat... the roads were in and that was it. Bricks were all...

Interviewer: Who was building that; that was all government, well it must have been everyone was at it.

Paddy: Every company under...the every company around the place was in there. Yeah Jesus and an awful lot of them went skint there and we were with a company he was Lord something, what's the name of the company? But we were with Burke anyway, he was doing all the brick work there. He had a big gang; he had a load of blokes there and I mean and he bought a brand new dormobile at the time, you know the ones sliding doors, he had one of them, he use to pick us up. I use to get picked up at the top of Bounces Road there, and he took everyone down there. Everything went mad there, I mean you

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couldn't believe it, you'd be working on the job and tea time you'd be with a couple of blokes and at tea time, they'd gone, they are across the field with somebody else.

Interviewer: Because they are paying better money presumably?

Paddy: They're paying a penny or tuppence an hour more. It was the same at Harlow Railway Station that we use to go by van. But you had all these tippers going with the little boxes on top, picking up the blokes...they'd be all lined up at the station and the blokes would be getting off the train, who are you with? [whispers] *I'll give ya another penny or tuppence here!*...and this is the way, they were all poaching the blokes as they came off the train. Getting you to go here and there and penny and tuppence... I mean we were getting 5 bob an hour, it went up to 7 now, went up by 7 and 6, then it was up then to 10 bob an hour and that's the way it kept going up and up and up.

Interviewer: Because the demand was there.

Paddy: The demand was there and you couldn't get them, a lot of the Londoners they don't like moving out too far. So it was a free for all out there.

Interviewer: But now in your case anyway you weren't lodging out there, you were just driving out there.

Paddy: No, no we were travelling, I was still in my digs in Edmonton at the time.

Interviewer: And from memory now and it's probably hard to tell, well I suppose two things, how much of that labour out there was Irish?

Paddy: Well everybody in our van was Irish, and the biggest part of them was Irish, the biggest part; everybody was Irish out there, very few English. We had a couple of English brick layers just up from Tottenham that use to come down, because his office was up around Stamford Hill and there was a couple of...so we had maybe about 3 brick layers from around Tottenham, they were English, but the rest of them was all Irish. And we had Northern Ireland chaps and all; we had some good brick layers from Northern Ireland there. But I mean...you know what, there was no such thing as JCB's either. It was all hand dug. And there was a few blokes from Kerry and a couple of Mayo blokes and they were putting in the main sewer but there was nothing there; it was field and they were putting in a main sewer. Well there was 4 of them there, some of them digging and another bloke behind shovelling up the loose stuff and another two coming behind that again digging and they were just...phew... they just walked across that field, you think a JCB wouldn't keep up with them! (laughs)...I tell you they were some diggers. And their governor was a Kerry man or someplace down that way but he was also the bookmaker! (laughs). He'd be in the canteen and anyone that wanted a bet on he'd put them on, he'd take all the bets and he was gone. But they reckon he'd... some of the little ones he use to look after himself but any big ones he had (bets) he'd phone them through some place.

Interviewer: he'd lay it off.

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Paddy: Lay it off, making more out of it himself.

Interviewer: And so...so there was a majority of Irish.

Paddy: Mostly Irish that was out there, mostly Irish, every field and every contractor was there.

Interviewer: And would most of them men now from what you can remember would most of them have been doing what you were doing, coming out from London?

Paddy: Yeah a lot of them coming out, yeah, a lot of them from London. And then when the houses started being up and finished, we were offered first preference, we could have lived there; I could have got a house there, tradesmen, all the tradesmen, there were carpenters, plumbers, brick layers, you have first preference of all the houses, they were trying to get them there. We had some blokes, we had some hod-carriers and all that took houses there. I always remember one bloke Stacey was his name from Tottenham, he took one of the houses and he moved in, he had no furniture only a couple of car seats or something to start with, but then all you had to do was go to the shops and you had everything on hire purchase, he furnished the house right out, he had it all furnished up, a couple of months when the payments came in he was gone, furniture and all! [laughs] He was back in Tottenham, I tell you there were some queer characters. Yes he was working with us Stacey.

Interviewer: How long were you in Harlow?

Paddy: We were down in Harlow, we were down there... Must have been a couple of years there, yeah.

Interviewer: This was around the time you got married was it?

Paddy's wife intervenes: Around '54 I'd say, we got married in '57.

Paddy: Yeah we were there then and then we moved on to Welwyn Garden City.

Interviewer: More of the same? New house building.

Paddy: Yes all new houses in Welwyn...we were offered houses, we could get houses there as well in Welwyn Garden.

Interviewer: Yes the ones that seem to be kind of the big ones were Welwyn Garden City, Harlow and Stevenage.

Paddy: Yeah, Stevenage, yeah. We done a load in Stevenage too and out in Baldock, we done a load out there as well.

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Interviewer: It must have been absolutely just...

Paddy: You couldn't go wrong... *you couldn't go wrong!* I was never a day out of work from the day I went out till I retired. You wouldn't if you wanted to, even there was some hard times there, but I was still in work. I mean look when we were up in Church Street and nobody...everybody was looking for...they were coming in every day looking for jobs, but we were still working and building flats and...I was...

Interviewer: Was it mainly house building and flats?

Paddy: Mostly house building and flats, well, a bit of everything, I worked on everything from in prisons, churches, hospitals, synagogues.

Interviewer: The full range. Did you work on the British Library the new one?

Paddy: Yes if you go into the foyer, I spent 2 years in the foyer alone. We were working for a subbie again at the British Library, Laing were the main contractors, but it was all government paid anyhow. And then another firm came in, I don't know what their name is, but when Vogue left I mean... but Laing wouldn't let us go, Laing told the other subbie that we had to stay there and we were on that... we done all the brick work on that foyer and all the entrance and all that.

Interviewer: Because you wouldn't want especially with work like that, you don't want a change of gang half way...you don't know who you're going to get.

Paddy: There was walls up there that had already been built by some other gang and when we came there weren't lying up, and you know they were all handmade bricks, very expensive stuff, they had to knock the whole wall down and we had to just carry on with ours, because they were just a couple of mil out. You were only allowed, I forget now, there was only about 2 mil in about 8 foot...

Interviewer: So very tight tolerance.

Paddy: Oh Jesus your perps, you had to be...and we use to have some terrible arguments with the architects there, oh lord. The architects would insist, now them busts that's in there, they are in different places altogether than what the architect wanted. He put...and they put a cross at the centre for everyone, and you had to have the same bricks, you couldn't have half a one side, he had to have the same all the way around. But when we set it all out, there was no way in the world you could have done it. So we got him up there and told him, we said we can't do that, if you want that you want the same all the way around we'll have to shift it. So he gave us permission...put it where it works! (laughs) And it was the same with another wall, we were building another wall in the British Library too and he said it was so many bricks that had to be so many feet, but when we got it, the bricks didn't match up to what he said. So that had to be changed. We thought well why don't you leave it to us, we'll do it ourselves! (laughs)

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Interviewer: We'll go back to... we have gone out of order there again, we were in Welwyn Garden City. [laughs] And you were still working for Frank Burke at that time. So what happened after that can you remember?

Paddy: Wait till I see what happened after....

Paddy's wife intervenes: It was '59 when you went subbing.

Paddy: Oh yeah. I went out on my own then, I went out, and we started doing... not Welwyn Garden... where was it, out in... was it Maidenhead? We were told it was a firm then... McManus and Co's one of the biggest house builders at that time. Sure they were all over England. We went down to Maidenhead, spent nearly 10 years in Maidenhead. We had a contract there in one field for 447 houses to do and he said to us - and this was in November or the latter end of November -

Interviewer: So this is you on your own now subbing?

Paddy: Yes... I had another bloke, another bloke Joe Nally he was Galway chap and the two of us went on our own. And he said to us I'd like to have a roof on one of these by Christmas and this was November! (Laughs) We gave him 3 roofs for Christmas! We had given 3 at the time. Yes that was a big contract, so we were there, Maidenhead was practically a small town at the time but it built up after that... the whole thing.

Interviewer: So that was the late 50s?

Paddy's wife intervenes: Yeah that was '59.

Paddy: That was '59 yeah. And that went on for years, so we were with them then for years, all over the place with McManus.

Interviewer: And so when - I mean I suppose can't follow everything right through, but through the 60s, would you have been with him through most of the 60s?

Paddy: Ah yeah with him the 60s and probably... yeah would be.

Interviewer: Because you mentioned that you worked for John Murphy?

Paddy: Yes that was... when...

Paddy's wife intervenes: This Joe Nally died in 1970 and he (Paddy) finished the firm then and he went on the cards to get the tax straight and all of this.

Paddy: Yeah because we had a lot, I mean we had an accountant who was doing the work for us and everything else, he died, so I had to try and get all that. So...

Interviewer: Kind of becoming messy.

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Paddy: Yeah it started yeah....

Interviewer: In the 60s could you like... you were employing presumably a few blokes?

Paddy: Yes we had; some of them was... we only had two blokes that wanted to go on cards, so the rest of them wanted... wanted cash. They'd look after themselves, so yeah. That was alright as far as we were concerned.

Interviewer: Well presumably the legal position is as long as they give you....

Paddy: Yeah well you had the book of tickets and you just wrote out the ticket and you just wrote out the ticket and put on what it was, and put a stamp on it and they had to sign over the stamp. And that was you covered. You took that at the end of the year, all them went into the accountant and he had the tax man then. We had an accountant that lived over in Walthamstow way, Shea & Co. and he use to deal with it then, we'd give everything to him.

Interviewer: The men that you paid money to it was up to themselves then?

Paddy: It was... and a matter of fact....

Interviewer: And it wasn't your business?

Paddy: I mean we use to get letters because they use to give us addresses... but they were phoney addresses, but it didn't matter to us we had the signature and they signed it and that was it. And we had one hostel, 2 hostels we had, one was in Aylesbury and the other one was, because we worked out of Aylesbury, where was the other one? The other one was someplace around St. Albans or somewhere, well we must have signed thousands to those hostels.

Interviewer: So these were men that were living in hostels?

Paddy: Supposed to be... the... but the tax people use to write back to us, 'have we got any other known address of these men?' And we use to... as far as we know they are still there, that was all we could do, that was end of story. Yes you never heard of them again. We don't know where they are, they came to work everyday and that was it.

Interviewer: Not your business to know where they were living.

Paddy: That was it, but we had a couple of blokes they were family men and they wanted their cards and they wanted holiday pay and that sort o' thing...

Interviewer: Seems to be, would I be right in thinking there, seems to be lads that were young and single or the older lads that were kind of on the knock; that didn't... settle.

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Paddy: Yea and then of course you got the Irish blokes that never had anything, they just wanted the sub every night. I have had blokes every day that subbed, every day, they had their days wages. And look at that bloke Eddie he was a nightmare! Where was he from now? Irish bloke, Jesus.

Paddy's wife intervenes: Tipperary.

Paddy: Tipp, yeah, that was it, always on about Tipp, he'd get drunk as hell and he'd be on about Tipp, every day he had had to have it, and then it come Friday he'd just have the one day! *'Well that's no good to me, I've got to pay my rent and I have to do this and that...'* Well, you've had it all week, oh yeah... he'd be bawling away there like. But sure!...and then one night...

Interviewer: He'd be drinking it would he?

Paddy: Ah yea he'd drink it, he was in the army here for years and left the army, went over there and... he just...he was...he was a great bloke to have working, Jesus he'd be behind that mixer and that mixer you could eat your dinner out of it, it was perfect, clean as any. But he had to have the sub that night. And we woke up...at about one in the morning and someone is knocking on the door and looked out the window and I use to have a van that use to pick the blokes up...that was parked out the front of the house...and there he is standing at the van and he's looking up at the window, trying to get bloody...trying to get the sub at one in the morning! And he'd already drank everything, ah yeah drunk as an owl. Even my neighbour next door, she said, was somebody at your van last night, I don't know who he was? And I thought yeah, I know who it was – Eddie! Oh lord he was terrible.

Interviewer: So he'd want to work in the lump, he wasn't interested.

Paddy: He never had anything, he got onto me one day in the pub, we were in the pub one day and well matter of fact the governor had slung him out.

Interviewer: Was he a single man?

Paddy: Yea, well he was married, the wife I dunno where she was, they were divorced or whatever, he had left her anyway I don't think they were living together, he was on his own. But we were in the pub one night and he comes up, we'd go into the pub, sitting there having a drink and next thing Eddie is over, *'you never paid me my holiday money, you never paid me this and you have done me out of...'* and he started getting on and on, and I said Eddie you have had...I have got your signature for everything you've had, and you have no holiday money, you are doing that yourself, when you are doing your own cards. *'Ah you are supposed to do all that.'* I said yeah if you'd wanted that we'd've done it that way. And he starting shouting and everything and the next thing the governor came over and says, 'is he annoying you?' I said he's a bloody menace! He turfed him out. Yeah you had all them blokes.

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

Interviewer: So basically your business partner died in 1970?

Paddy: Yea so we dissolved the business and got it sorted out and yeah, where did I go, I think I went with Murphy then. I went with another bloke.

Paddy's wife intervenes: Went bankrupt. What was his name I can't remember?

Paddy: CAT another company that built flats around Enfield, I was with them for a couple of years, CAT they built flats and everything around Winchmore Hill around Enfield and everything and down...but they went bankrupt and all. And then we went with Peter Knowler, he was another subbie.

Interviewer: That's an unusual name.

Paddy: Yea I went with him we were out at St. Albans. I didn't start with Murphy till, oh god...

Paddy's wife intervenes: It was around the 80s wasn't it? Because remember the time we went to America you had to get Murphy to sign to say that you were going back!

Interviewer: That you weren't going to become an illegal immigrant!

Paddy: Yeah, yeah... yeah.

Paddy's wife intervenes: You were with Murphy for 5 years and they stopped house building didn't they?

Paddy: Yea Murphy stopped house building in... we were...

Interviewer: I didn't know Murphy did any house work.

Paddy: Yeah he done an awful lot of house building, oh Jesus he built an awful lot of houses and flats and everything, Christ.

Interviewer: This is John Murphy?

Paddy: Yes John Murphy the Green Murphy, he done an awful lot of work, Jesus he done all over London. But then - and that was on the cards, everything was on the cards then, because he got caught before.

Interviewer: He got caught in 1977, well he didn't...

Paddy: He didn't but this firm got done and a lot of the blokes done time, one of the blokes done time.

Interviewer: He did, in fact 2 or 3 of them done time.

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

Paddy: Yes apparently one of them done time to save him, he'd have got the time but one of them took the blame. They reckon he got well paid for it.

Interviewer: Wasn't he one clever man though, because he had sold, I looked into this and there is plenty in the newspapers about that, he had sold his shares in J. Murphy & Sons about 2 or 3 years before that scandal blew up to one of these venture capital companies, forget what they were called, Northern & Capital or something like that. And then after the whole thing blew over he bought them back again. Smart man. Well he was either smart or extraordinarily lucky! I don't know which one it is.

Paddy: He probably had smart men working for him too. No, but he was... I have seen him... we were up there near Wembley, along the... across the iron bridge what do you call it? Brent Cross, he built a load of houses and flats there, and I have seen him coming on there himself, he'd come out there, he'd have lovely black suit and always in tie. And I seen him jumping down the trench and pulling... oh Jesus... he...

Interviewer: No problem with him getting dirty.

Paddy: No, no and he use to go to Ireland and they reckon he was a menace really, because he'd be in the yard and jump in the van and drive it to Heathrow and get on the plane and then ring up telling them to pick the van up! He'd leave it at the airport.

Interviewer: And Paddy what were you doing for them?

Paddy: We were doing all the brick work, we built a load of houses there.

Interviewer: But you weren't subbing there?

Paddy: No I was working direct, matter of fact...

Paddy's wife intervenes: Because our son Michael he's an apprenticeship with Murphy and he was just working with you, wasn't he?

Paddy: Well Michael was dead lucky to get in there, really, because he was about to... he was stopping all these apprentices... he was coming to the end, but I knew the surveyors and I had done work for them - private work them on their own houses and everything. And so he says leave it with me, and he says, so... he did, he whatever... he got him in anyway and he said look if he can get a place in the college, tell him to go up to the college at Hackney College.

Paddy: Well he use to have to go there when he was doing his apprenticeship with Murphy.

Paddy's wife intervenes: And then the poor lad, the day he finished was the day the apprenticeship finished and he was out. Murphys finished with the housing.

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Paddy: And Murphy, well I was with him for what, 4 and a half or 5 years... well they put me in for 5 years, I was just less than 5 years, but the agent says, well he says, he kept me on.

Paddy's wife intervenes: Just a couple of months.

Paddy: Just a couple of months to get the 5 years, to get the bigger redundancy.

Interviewer: And how did you find Murphy?

Paddy: I found Murphy great, they were really great.

Interviewer: Did you ever come across the Elephant?

Paddy: No he was with the navy gang, I have heard about him often enough and everything, but I have never come in touch with him. Because... Ah yeah Elephant, he got a bad name but I don't know if he was as bad as they say he was either... I never met him but I mean some of the foremen they had there, were a bit funny. I mean yeah some of them, I mean they'd try and skimp over things and sell it to try and... we were... because I had the best of both worlds, I was working on the building, because Murphy has two, they had the civil engineering and they had the building. Well the agent and the civil engineering use to want me to do work for them at the weekends, so I was working for a building firm during the week and the weekend... I was out on the railway bridge! They were doing railway work and everything and all the bridges had to be built and everything, so I use to go out there doing all the bridges there. You know who was a QS for them? Or an agent there for them when I was with them doing a job up at?... the other side of the river up at Silverlock - we were up there, and it was O'Rourke, Ray O'Rourke; they were... he's big now... But he was the agent on the job for Murphy... yeah he was the agent. I remember because he's a cousin of ours.

Interviewer: Ray O'Rourke is?

Paddy: Yes because my mother was and my grandmother... they were O'Rourke's... When he first started he was just doing extensions and things like that and he was doing... he was working for Murphy still when he first got started. He wanted me to go with him, he started doing this job and he came up and he wanted me to go down and do this extension for him, but it was way out the other side of the river.

Interviewer: He did... as far as I can remember he did great work up in... um... he made a huge name for himself in Broadgate¹ in the early 80s.

¹ The Broadgate Development 1984-91, Liverpool Street, City of London. New office buildings around a circular public space, much discussed upon completion. The developer was Sir Stuart Lipton, Architects: Arup Associates with Skidmore Owings & Merrill.

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Paddy: Yea we were up there and he built ITV... the ITV or ITN offices there up past the dental clinic in what you call it street?...we use to pass by it every day and he done all where ITV offices and he done all the work there on that, he done an awful lot of work in Birmingham and all, we were up in Birmingham, well he had a whole big square there, he done an awful lot of work there.

Interviewer: Made a great name for himself and let's be honest there weren't many, I'll have to be careful what I say now, but there aren't many who started up on their own who didn't jump off the back of someone else.

Paddy: But he had a good education he was going for the priesthood at one time.

Interviewer: He was another he's a bit like...he's a little bit like Murphy in some respects in that he's shrouded in mystery. My father reckons he's a Leitrim man.

Paddy: He is... comes from up above Cloone.

Interviewer: But I heard an interview with the man himself on television and he said he was born in Mayo! [laughs]. You are saying what my father is saying, my father made the exact same remark, 'ah no, that's rubbish.'

Paddy: He was up the other side of Cloone, what do you call it?

Interviewer: Well he was schooled in - and he says himself - he went to college in Cavan. Was it Carrigallen?

Paddy: Carrigallen, yeah, I thought it was up the other side not more North... or up at Monkstown, can't think now.

Interviewer: Doesn't matter but there is... there's articles to say he's from Mayo, he has an interview where he says he was born in Mayo and I have more people who say... because he built that... um... they reckon that Jamestown bypass, the road. You see when I was a kid the main road was the road that went through Jamestown.

Paddy: The big arch, that's right use to go through that, remember that.

Interviewer: But it was a disaster when the lorries...

Paddy: Was it him done that road?

Interviewer: The new road yeah he built that. And they reckon he bought it because he made no money out of it, he wanted to prove a point.

Paddy: He done all them houses and flats down where all the aul flour mill use to be in Ballisodare, there use to be a big flour mill there, *Pride of the West* or something where that use to go across and all that went down and they pulled it down, and he built all the houses there, yeah.

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

Interviewer: Ok well look we have a load of stuff to get through yet. So you spent 5 years working for Mr. Murphy, what did you do after that?

Paddy's wife intervenes: You went back out on your own again, just you.

Paddy: Yeah when was it? That was with Nolan yeah, I worked on the Enfield shopping centre and that was with Barrett Brothers.

Interviewer: This was all subbying on your own?

Paddy: No I was working for Barrett then, but yeah we just had the ticket then we had the ticket then...you were just...

Paddy's wife intervenes: We worked out once that however many years he was working in England working, he was half subbing and half on the cards. You always seemed to be 11 years, 11 years... every 11 years it seemed to be.

Paddy: Yea I was there with them and on that shopping centre (Enfield), that was a good job and all. That was when times were hard and all, it was a bit tight... things was tight then. I remember I was working in Church Street, there was a job there in Church Street, they were old council houses and they thought they'd renovate them and built extensions to them. But when they started searching there was no footings in them, they were built back in the 17 or 1800s or something and they were only built on clay. And of course they started digging down to try and put in - underpinning them - and the lot collapsed (laughs). In the middle of the night they started hearing... somebody next door could hear cracking and cracking and they rung the fire brigade up and they had to go down and try and prop it all up, it cracked every place. So they had to pull the lot down and start from scratch. But it had to be built in the same way and use the same bricks.

Interviewer: Presumably listed I would have thought?

Paddy: It was listed yeah² and we had to do all that. And my and Michael we built all the chimney stacks there because they didn't have anybody there that could build a chimney stack (laughs). Talk about!...so we had to go along building all the chimney stacks. And it was after that then I went to the shopping centre in Enfield.

Interviewer: That must be bringing you up near the end of your career I would have thought.

Paddy: Well I was kind of winding down at the time we were at the British Library. It was such a good job and we so enjoyed it, I would've stayed 'til I was 65, but I was there

² This refers to buildings protected for historical and cultural heritage reasons under Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Legislation. Such buildings cannot be materially altered in structure, fabric or materials from their original state unless exemptions are granted.

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2 years, and they kept striking didn't they... And d'you know what, we never lost a penny, we were told to keep quiet, but we got paid all the time while they were out on strike. And we were out on strike with them and there was myself and Peter McCarthy and we were the only two, we were the ones that was on the foyer all the time, and they paid us all the time we were on strike! (laughs) And he said but don't let onto anyone, any of the others! We went to a couple of different places after that, where was it I went to after that. My memory is just awful. I worked for so many firms, you'd never remember them all, like.

Interviewer: You are doing great.

Paddy: We went with Crilly we were at the sugar refinery up in... Tate and Lyle.

Interviewer: Silvertown?³

Paddy: Yea, we built a big extension there in Silvertown, that was Crilly Brothers that was doing that.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel that Irish construction workers were exploited?

Paddy: I never found it, I never felt it... as a matter of fact I have done better than some of the English ones that was there, because... I remember once when I was with... we were on a... I think it was Bovis but it was ... what do you call them that done the Enfield job? Barretts was doing brick work and he had a load of English brick layers there and all, and he was paying me more money than he was paying them and it didn't matter.

Well, I mean the first time I ever got a job with him, the first time I ever went to Barretts there was a foreman there, he was a little English bloke, a cocky bloke, and I went to get the job and he says, "We got a lot of blokes here that call themselves brick layers", he says, he was a bit off hand, like. "Well I said fair enough". I said "if you want you can come out on a trowel with me for half hour", he said... he grunted and groaned, but he didn't (laughs). So I got the job there! and after a month we were the only ones that was getting the overtime we were going in on weekends and on a Sunday and getting paid for the day and going in on a Saturday and worked till about 11 or 12 and getting paid for the day, kind of thing.

Interviewer: I think most of the people that I have talked to that talk of any exploitation two things that comes out, one is that if there was exploitation it seems to have been a lot of the time, gangers - like Irish gangers - who were blaggarding their own men. But, even apart from that a lot of people do say and it comes back a bit to what you said about the kind of the exaggeration that goes on with people like the Elephant is that certainly my own father when I asked him that question said, in his experience most of the time the gangers would leave you alone if you were doing what you were meant to be doing. So if you were working.

³ Tate and Lyle are a

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Paddy: The most people that exploited them was the Irish landlords because a lot of these blokes got paid by cheque and everything. And there wasn't many Irish blokes had bank accounts and there was an Irish governor and he'd say I'll change them and he'd never give them the money until closing time, and he'd stop all the money they had drank and maybe... and he'd charge them so much for changing a cheque.

Interviewer: You never found yourself in that position?

Paddy: No, I got one cheque once a rebate from the tax people back donkey's years and I had no bank account and we were in the pub and I was talking to another bloke, Charlie Connor he was another bloke that was with me, and we were talking and that was a pub in Edmonton, old one on the corner? What do you call it? aul Charlie was... I forget the name. And he says what's that, he said a cheque you can't change it? he said, give me that boy! He looked at it and he just gave me the money for it.

Interviewer: Didn't take anything off?

Paddy: No he didn't take anything off it, no he says, that's alright boy, that's alright boy! But we use to go in there and have a couple of pints anyhow.

Interviewer: I know as you quite rightly say, I know of stories, I know one governor in particular in the west, I won't mention his name, but in a pub in West London who reckoned that he was taking I think tuppance in the pound or thruppance in the pound, this was in the 70s. And he was getting through, he was changing like maybe he got to the stage where he had to make a special arrangement with his bank for the amount of cheques he was changing, because he was changing so many of them. So he must have been making as much out of that as we was out of running the pub.

Paddy: Well that was one thing with Murphy, Murphy use to pay cash at one time, but then after they were robbed, they were robbed there once, Christmas and all, and I mean they always... there was always an extra tenner in there at Christmas in your wage package, and as well as that there use to be a load of money put behind the bar in the nearest pub we were working to. We were up there in Tottenham Lane there the railway station there, we were doing a job there and that was the time the Christmas that they got done. And we use to get paid early and the next thing that came, the word came that the place was robbed, but we were told to hang on. So we hung on and we got the money, the money came that afternoon, but it was late, but the money came that afternoon. But there was always an extra tenner in there for Christmas and the agent had so much money to buy the drinks at the bar for you. And then they use to pay by cheque, then after that they started paying by cheque. But they use to open an account at whatever area you were in, they'd have an account opened up there. And you went in with your cheque and gave it in and they paid you out.

Interviewer: Never heard that, so they kind of had an arrangement made.

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Paddy: They had an arrangement made with the banks, Murphy had an arrangement with the banks wherever you were working and you got paid and you got an extra half hour or so off him to go to the bank and change you cheque. And you handed in your cheque, Murphy was sound - kind of thing - and they paid you your money. We had that... that was the latter end when we were there. I thought Murphy was one of the best firms I ever worked for. There was no such thing... never lost time... even in the depths of winter when there was frost and snow about and you couldn't work outside, you still got it mean....

Paddy's wife intervenes: Yes the holiday stamps.

Paddy: And you had all your holidays and everything, Murphy was good.

Interviewer: What about things like health and safety did you ever had any major...?

Paddy: Well I mean health and safety only came in, in the latter end. I mean, when we worked we could pick up Hilti guns,⁴ we could pick up anything. I mean we were up on steelwork and we could put a Hilti tie⁵ up and you could tie your ties into it and everything like that. But of course now you have got to have a licence to do everything. But I mean them days you never had to have anything. I was in a pub a couple of years ago, and a fellow says to me, look at this - and he pulled out one of those little wallets and just dropped it down, the unfolding one - and they were all tickets, he says, I have to have all them now to do any kind of work on site at all. He said, "Sure you'd nearly need a permit to piss now!" (laughs)

Yes it's a nightmare now to do anything...yeah...you have to have a ticket for everything, you can't go on a job, you have got to have a hard-hat and you have got to have steel boots and steel-toe caps and everything else. Jesus the blokes would go in in runners and trainers and everything back then. We were on jobs where you had... we had to get... we had to be cleared by the police in the Old Bailey we were working there, and we had to get...you had to get clearance from the police and everything, I had to get it several times, RAF jobs and everything we were on to get in there. And you had to wait a week nearly before you came through. But we went in there and we only stayed a week because it was so dangerous, but there was all these big holes where there would be lifts or something going up, and there was blokes and no nothing around and they'd be going up...they might be falling 3 or 4 floors down, and I tell you it was dangerous.

Interviewer: No one taking a blind bit of notice?

Paddy: The foreman that was there he was a labourer on one of the jobs we were on before and he was a dickhead *then* and here he was, a foreman on this one, and we

⁴ Hilti Guns are a proprietary general-purpose power-actuated percussion or drilling tool used extensively in construction from the early 1980s to the present.

⁵ A proprietary trade-named anchor-tie used to temporarily tie into steelwork or masonry for scaffolding or other retaining points.

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thought what the hell. So we stayed a week and that was it, oh Jesus let's get out of here, because some of the work was done, he was supposed to be the foreman.

Interviewer: Did you ever see any serious accidents?

Paddy: Yea, I seen...out at Hornchurch when we were doing at college was the first...no the first bloke I seen was at the co-op, he put a ladder up to an RSJ to tie a thing and the ladder slid, he fell and killed himself and that was it. He died, he was as Dubliner and all. And then at Hornchurch on that college we were building there was a young bloke went off there, surveyor, they were in there and he had a young bloke with him, he had the end of the thing going across and didn't look...walked over the edge, killed! Yeah he got killed. And then we were down in Liphook on an army barracks, we were working on a big army barracks down there in Liphook and there were... we were building big sheds on it and they were digging this big trench along the road, and there was blokes down there and there was all...one side there was all big concrete, there was concrete road in sections and where you put the joint down, and when they had the thing done it was deep and all and there was blokes down there and the next thing the whole thing slid and this concrete thing and everything just slid over on top, buried...one was killed, another bloke got out but he was still alive when they got him and kind of and they were trying to scrape him clear. But then this army bloke dickhead, a major or something he come around with this bloody gib and put this belt around him to lift him out, sure the pulled the bloke to pieces. If they had of left the boys alone and let them scrape and clear him away he might have a chance. But they put this thing around him, "Oh yeah we'll get him out".

Interviewer: Killed him?

Paddy: Killed him dead.

Interviewer: Were most of them Irish?

Paddy: Yeah they were except the young surveyor bloke, he was a young English chap, a trainee I suppose he was with a surveyor that was there. And then at the British Library, there was a bloke killed at the British Library but that was his own fault and all drunk again.

Interviewer: Drunk?

Paddy: Yea you see there was a fence all around the place that you couldn't get out, you are not supposed to go out, but the scaffolders had put a bloody thing up you could walk up and down the other side.

Interviewer: Every job you go on, there is always suppose to be, I mean even in the 90s I worked on the Jubilee line and there was supposed to be these turn-style arrangements so you could only get into London Bridge station and that, or you had to stay inside, if anything happened they knew where you were, and...it was all hog-wash! you could get

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through it, there was run-throughs that the lads created you could come out at West Minister and they wouldn't know whether you, you know.

Paddy: Well there was a bloke there he was found down the shaft on the Monday morning, he was working supposed to be putting a scaffold up there, inside in this big shaft he was putting a scaffold up the British Library and apparently he fell and nobody knew he had gone, somebody thought he had gone home and didn't know. It wasn't until Monday morning they found him dead on the bottom.

Interviewer: I think the problem is that construction is a dangerous profession we have to remember that and it always is and it always will be, you never get rid of it completely.

Paddy: It was like when we went to buy our first house back in the 50s, and couldn't get a mortgage any place, terribly hard to get a mortgage.

Interviewer: Can I ask you a question about that, do you think that had anything to do with you being Irish?

Paddy: No it had nothing to do with me being Irish, all it had to do was because I was working in the building. The bloke told me, he said if you were a postman... I was getting 16 pound a week at the time, he said a postman... It was great money at the time... a postman was getting 5 pound a week and he says, "if that postman comes in here" he says, "he'll get a mortgage but you are classed as casual".

Paddy's wife intervenes: And we had to put 20% down. Those days Edmonton Council use to give out the mortgage and the estate agent went to him first, it was £1750 the house and they wanted - they'd only give us a mortgage for £990.

Paddy: The council wanted nearly half the price of the house in the first place. So we had to find 700 odd quid. So there was one building society that had started, it was...

Paddy's wife intervenes: Yes £350 we had to put down.

Paddy: It use to be the co-op at Palmers Green there was a triangle in Palmers Green, it became Nationwide after that, but it was the co-op at the time. And we eventually got it with them.

Paddy's wife intervenes: And it was 350, 20% we had to put down.

Interviewer: That was a lot of money to find when you were a young couple wasn't it?

Paddy: Yes it was, I had it about 6 weeks before we got married or something and bought the house then.

When I was at school during the war and there use to be savings, my mum use to get saving stamps the war effort and all this.

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Paddy: It was like that detective... I got pulled into the station once in Edmonton, somebody down the bottom of Bounces Road had a burglar and he had gone away with I don't know what he had taken to tell you the truth. But they found a pay packet on the floor and the name started with 'B' and it finished with an 'N' and he was Irish. So they started looking through what do you call it? The register thing... the electrical (Electoral register)... they started looking through that and they found that my name started with B and ended with N. So of course I had a detective come to the door and pushing by and came and then he asked me if I'd go down to the station? And I had a car at the time, I was after buying a car it was an aul' Ford Anglia at the time. And he says, "Is that your car?" I said yeah, "Go away he says! Sure you must be doing well", he says "how much are you earning?" I says, well... I had to show him the pay packet. We were on about 16 pound a week. "Go away!" he says, "d'you think I'd get a job there!" he says "Ours isn't half that!" And they weren't I mean they were poorly paid at that time, the police.

Yes, Jesus, we were earning great money. Now there may have been problems as you said there were certain percentage of men... you got the men that didn't want it anyhow they just...

Interviewer: Certain percentage like that and there was a certain percentage no matter how much money you gave them they were going to drink it. And that's sad but it's a small percentage.

Paddy: The amount of them you see that was driving around London in their bloody Mercedes and BMW's and everything... they had done alright, and I knew a lot of them anyhow, Jesus I knew even a labourer he was driving a Mercedes, and he was looking after two plasterers, no mixer, no nothing he'd come in in the morning about 7 o'clock and he'd have a pile knocked up and he was getting well paid for it, he was driving a Mercedes. Well-off, yea...

Interviewer: Did you ever get involved in or have any cause to be involved in kind of industrial wage negotiations or unions?

Paddy: No, I hated unions to be quite straight about it, I hated them. If I could get away from a job that was a union... I was on a couple of jobs and you had to be on a union, now the British Library you had to be on a union but we never paid anything, the firm paid it for us. We were never asked to pay anything because he told us, it's a union job, he says "y'know what it's like" sort-a-thing. But I don't know whether he was getting the money for it or not, but we never paid anything, even though... they even went to strike over cups of tea, because they reckon it was too dear it was about threepence a cup or something it was too dear they thought and he was a Dublin bloke and all, he was a bloody, that was... he even tried to stop us. He says we were laying too many bricks a day. He said, you are only supposed to lay 150 bricks! You'd lay 150 before tea break in the morning and you know what, he got in between myself and Peter McCarthy for to try and slow us down, he said we were doing too much work at the British Library and he came in...

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Interviewer: Why?

Paddy: The mentality I don't know. And I hated unions. And we always found, well some people didn't, but we always found we always done better under the conservative government than we did under a labour government. When it was a labour government that use to go for all built council houses and everything but when it was a conservative it was a free enterprise, you went out there and we always done better under a conservative government than we did under a labour government.

Interviewer: Ok, well, that's a political view point.

Paddy: It is, not that I was anyway political.

Interviewer: Listen everybody has got some... it's like my kids always politics we are not interested in politics we are not interested in politics and I always say to them well do you want to go to university? Yeah, well then you have got to be interested in politics, everybody has got a political position in some way shape or form. But would you say then that... I mean it's funny when you came from Ireland would you have been overtly political?

Paddy: I didn't even know who was prime minister or who was running, DeValera was in Ireland, he was the only... that's the only thing I knew. And my mum would say, right de Valera, I mean 'twould be de Valera and the Pope!

Interviewer: And that's as far as it went.

Paddy: As far as (Irish) politics was concerned I knew nothing and had no interest.

Interviewer: So did you ever personally encounter any anti-Irish feeling?

Paddy: Myself I have never, personally never no. I mean we were – look - the time the Coronation was it? We were working out at Cuffley and I was the only Irish bloke on the job, it was all young English brick layers and labourers there, and some of them had their dads working with them and all. And of course you know what it's like they were all, the Union Jack was flying and they had the red, white and blue. And I went in with a green, white and gold socks! And we use to have the craic and all the time, but there was never any bad feeling, just a joke and a laugh and we'll all go and have a drink after and...

Interviewer: Did you even notice anything changed, the reason I ask that is because my friend that I was talking to earlier now that I interviewed, he came to England much later than you, he came at the start of the 80s. And obviously that was the height of the troubles then, and he use to now... I think it's obviously because it's an age thing, I would think. But he use to find that he got stopped regularly coming in and out of Ireland, he'd get stopped at customs and if he was stopped he'd often get stopped coming out of the tube station or something like that by police.

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B – Mayo

Paddy: We never had that. We were working up at Liverpool Street the time that that place got blown up. And they use to have, the police had... well right opposite the church that we were working on they had a little hut there and police men and we use to pull our van up there. And there was times, we had stuff to unload there and I have gone across to that, and I'd say "Is it alright if we stand for a couple of minutes?"... he said, "Yeah, you're alright". I mean - and he'd let us unload the van and take it away again.

No I have never found it and I mean look we travelled... not that we drank that much but we use to go around to different pubs here had there, and meet with this one and meet with that one and you'd... I mean often enough you'd see, you'd be meeting someone and you'd say, do you know so and so pub? Well I'll see you in there.

Paddy's wife intervenes: The biggest laugh was - remember when Prince Charles got married? - and the street was all decorated and that, we have a photo, this was when we lived at the back of Middlesex hospital, and there was about dozen people outside our front with coffee tables out and drinks and everything and half of them were Irish people! And it was celebrating!... there was only like my sister and my nephew and girlfriend, that were English... we often look at this and laugh and this was what? '81 when things were bad then.

Paddy: There was a street party and everybody was... Yeah things were bad then that was a good sign to see that happen. We were... maybe, we were lucky but we never had any... no...

Interviewer: I think you have already answered this question, but I'll just double check it, you never saw any of these signs that...

Paddy: No I have never seen any of the signs... never. The amount of people I have heard saying it, but I have never seen it. And I often wonder did them people that told you about them see them either!

Interviewer: I suppose the only other things I was going to ask about was social life, did you frequent Irish dancehall scenes?

Paddy: Ah sure the Round Tower in Holloway Road was our... we were up there regularly as clockwork... the Round Tower on Sunday nights.

Paddy's wife intervenes: And then in later years we had the Harringay Irish Centre.

Paddy: The Irish Centre in Harringay.

Paddy's wife intervenes: Barely 10 minutes walk away from where we lived.

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

Paddy: Well when we first went up there, you had to join, but we had our cards and everything, membership I think that went out the window, after that everyone went in and out and nobody was joining it. It was just...

Interviewer: And what about things like the church?

Paddy: Yes St. Edmonds was... that was...

Paddy's wife intervenes: There use to be dances at church.

Paddy: Yes at the church we use to always go there and the one in Enfield.

Interviewer: Were there social clubs attached?

Paddy: Yes they had a lovely one in Enfield.

Yeah and they didn't have one in Edmondton.

Paddy: They had a hall in Enfield but there was no bar, but in Enfield there was a bar and everything there, a lovely dance hall. And they use to have music in there every Sunday evening. After mass you could go in there and the priest would come in and have a chat with everybody and have a walk around. And he might stay for a couple of hours and he'd be gone then. As a matter of fact he was in there one day and he bought us a drink there. And he is now Bishop! Fr. Arnold, he's now Bishop Arnold. We have had drinks with him in the pub. When we were doing his church, it's dead funny. When we were doing the church he was the priest there, he was the Parish Priest there. And on a Friday evening he'd...'well are you all ready lads?' and he'd have a pair of white flannels on and open neck shirt. And we use to go down to the...yeah the one in Berry Street we use to go there! And he'd buy his round and everything. As a matter of fact, one night he got so bad he had to leave the car after him, one of the blokes drove him home, he had a couple too many. But he was a terrible nice priest.

Interviewer: And what about some of the other dance halls, the likes of the Galty or?

Paddy: Oh the Galty, I have been there and up in Camden Town, and have been to the Camden Hall. The Buffalo.

Paddy's wife intervenes: That was up by Camden Town yeah? We went in there a couple of times, but we were going together 4 years before we got married I think every Saturday night we were at...

Paddy: Sunday night the Round Tower. Well Muldoon he was a Mayo bloke that owned it, Muldoon, that owned the Round Tower.

Interviewer: And what about...you didn't get involved in sports over here Paddy, did you?

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

Paddy: I use to play, I played a couple of times, I started playing Gaelic, but I'll tell you this, it's a different game here. You had all the old ex county men there and lord Jesus I had black eyes, I have had elbows and everything and you'd go up for a ball and bang, it was a harder game. I gave that up. I played soccer for a while I was a member of the Norseman's here at the top of Church Street. I use to play soccer in there for them. Yea we use to go there. I went in there for a good while with them. But then...

Interviewer: Was that mainly an Irish side?

Paddy: No it was an English side, all English. It was one of these clubs, used to play all the different clubs use to play Barclay's Bank and all the different banks and the colleges and everything, use to be nice.

Interviewer: And could you play soccer when you were living here?

Paddy: No I never played soccer here.

Interviewer: I often wondered did the...that was kind of banned wasn't it?

Paddy: Sligo Rovers had a team alright, because I played...I played soccer here alright and the McCarthur Cup, they use to have a cup there and we were building a bakery in there, McCarthur's Bakery in Sligo and we were doing it all up and we played in the team, they had their own team, McCarthur Cup team. Sean Fallon which went on to be a great player, he played for Celtic, he was manager of Celtic after. I played with him, he played in that.

Interviewer: But it was kind of frowned upon, you couldn't cross over?

Paddy: The GAA would ban you if you were found yeah. But we were young, we couldn't care if we were banned or not! We use to just go and play football anyhow(laughs)

Interviewer: And did you ever get involved with the county associations?

Paddy: No, no never. I was in the LDF we joined that when we were underage too.

Interviewer: That's here now, I'm talking about in England, did you ever get involved in the Leitrim County Association or anything like that?

Paddy: No, no....And I was exempt from the army because all the Irish - that was another thing - On the sites they use to get called up and we'd never go, but the law would come out and pick them up, y'know there was conscriptions, for National Service. Well the law knew where a lot of them was working. And I have seen blokes when the law would come in, they'd be jumping out the windows and down the fields - gone, they

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

didn't want to know. But then a lot of the... all the Moores and all them they all joined up, they were all called up and they joined.

Interviewer: You see some did, some went on. I know several men who joined up and did their national service and enjoyed it actually.

Paddy: I was alright, I was exempt, because at that time they were demobbed and they'd give them a crash course and different trades in the army and they were giving them a crash course. Some went for carpentry, some went brick laying plumbing and everything. But you had to have so many qualified brick layers on a job before you could employ one of them. So I mean...I was one of the ones that was qualified and you had to be on the job to take some of these trainees.

Interviewer: So did you have a city in guilds or something?

Paddy: Well I had my papers what I had from Ireland.

Interviewer: What did you get, what kind of papers would you get?

Paddy: It was to say your apprenticeship.

Interviewer: So it's not like because I know in London now you would have had like the city in guilds kind of.

Paddy: Well in them days there was no such thing as going to college, you done your full time on the job.

Interviewer: Exactly but presumably you would have served out your apprenticeship and then got documents saying that you done that?

Paddy: Got the document then and that was it, so I could show that when I came over. Because there was a lot of blokes just chancing their arm or laying a few blocks in Ireland and that was it, they came over here. Yeah I had the papers from Jimmy Higgins. But I seen blokes coming over, I mean I had a Roscommon bloke come on the job, we were doing a job there in St. Albans and we were doing a block of offices and this big tall bloke came in, he was from Roscommon, he says, "do you want any block layers?" I said "Well, there is blockwork on the inside, but it's mostly all brick work", and he was looking for a job, and I thought ah well I'll give him a job anyway. So gave him a job. Jesus he was a great block layer, lord Jasus he'd put a wall up and the back of it was as good as the front kind of thing, it was perfect. But brick laying he was useless. But after a few months he got into it he was alright, yeah I gave him a chance and they were alright. I'd never turn anyone away if they were willing. I felt sorry for him because he was building his own house and the thing came and he had no money, ran out of money and he had to leave the house half built he came over and his wife came over, the two of them came over. But he was alright, I took him on a couple of different jobs we were doing after that, he was alright.

Original Interview # 12 – Paddy B –Mayo

Interviewer: So all in all your time in England, how was it on the whole?

Paddy: It was yeah, I always liked England, nothing against England. I'd probably still be there only for Michael my son, his wife she died, she got very bad and died and the kids were small and we were over...we were staying here for 6 and 7 weeks at a time kind of thing. So eventually we thought look the best thing we could do was to go over altogether. Otherwise if that had happened we'd never been here.

Interviewer: I'd be interviewing you in Edmonton!

Paddy: I'd be back in Winchmore Hill now!

End.

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

Dublin, all stacked there, and when that finished I got a job in the quarry, drawing water to the crusher with a pony and cart.

Interviewer: What quarry was that now?

John: In Croghan.

Interviewer: Oh yeah,

John: Quarried by hand and you used to put the hole for the jerk with a chisel and 14-pound hammer, it would be there, and a fella would be turning it and you'd be sitting on a little bag of hay and down through the solid rock, and they'd put this stick of gelignite down there and run for their lives, and blow it. That's the way they used to quarry there.

Interviewer: What age were you when you were doing that now?

John: About 16, 15 or 16, I went away when I was 17.

Interviewer: Right, I was going to ask you that, so you left,

John: I left when I was 17.

Interviewer: Tell me something now, what was the final factor in deciding to leave or had you always planned?

John: The streets were filled with gold in England at the time.

Interviewer: How did you know that?

John: You'd see the lads coming home, lovely suits and living it up.

Interviewer: These were lads that you had been at school with?

John: Yeah, they'd be older than you, you'd see they had two suits and all this kind, and of course, he'd be telling it was better than it was, he'd be bragging about it, what he was getting and the like. But I went with a lad that I went to school with, from the locality as well, and he had relations there belonging to his sister's husband, and we went to this man. We left here on a Saturday, got there on Sunday in Manchester, and we were working Monday morning. Out, now, where the Manchester United training ground is, Carrington, with Petrochemicals, and they had a ground worker gangs there doing the roads and they were building and putting up more tanks, it was like an oil refinery place.

Interviewer: You don't remember who was the big contractor doing that?

John: Petro Chemicals, they were in the oil and they had their own labour force, oh they had, not just the ground work but, they had steel work and all that sort of, all their own resources.

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

Interviewer: And when you left, did you decide to do that kind of quickly?

John: No, we'd meet at going to the pictures or something, and he said I'm going to England, I was working on the quarry, and you had to get the policeman on your side at that time, to give you a permit, to sign it.

Interviewer: To leave?

John: To leave, we went to Manchester at that time, you got the job working and then you had to the Labour Exchange to get your cards sorted out and get registered, and me being only 17 I was issued with boy's cards, so I was only getting boy's wages. So that was hard enough, but I was getting loads of money.

Interviewer: So, boy's wages were a lot more?

John: 'Twas still a lot better than I was getting on the Council here!

Interviewer: What was the journey like, did you go from Carrick Station?

John: Boyle.

Interviewer: Of course, Boyle Station to Dublin, over on the,

John: Over on the ferry.

Interviewer: Was it a rough business?

John: It was tough that, used to be cattle down in the bottom and all that, and you were lucky, you were going, and you didn't know what to expect.

Interviewer: But on the other hand, I suppose you were young lads?

John: Oh yeah, he was about 19, 18 or 19 and I was 17. Young and fit. Oh God yeah, and the first job we had was wheeling make-up for the bases of these tanks, and the gang of men was from Longford, and he was one of the finest men I ever met, he treated us great; anyone that'd try to put you wrong, that was the thing with the Irish a lot of them...

Interviewer: They'd mislead you.

John: Mislead that's the right word,

Interviewer: Just deliberately?

John: Oh deliberately, and they're telling you should do this and you should that, and the best of it all they never done anything. But this man was sound, I know one thing. And then again with me, because I was getting boy's cards and that was where they went to pick the lads out for the army, so after two years they were after me, hunting me round Manchester, for National Service. So, in the end, no landlady would have me, she didn't want these official people coming knocking on the door.

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

Interviewer: Would they actually come looking for you?

John: Oh God, yeah, I had to pack up the job and when you go for your cards, they'd tell you, "go in and see this gentleman" and there'd be a man sitting in the office, a recruiting fella, looking for you, when are you going to join and all that.

Interviewer: There was an uncle of mine now, that would have been around the same age as you I'd say, he's dead a long time, my mum's brother. And mum was telling me that he basically came back here, and he got out of it that way.

John: Oh yeah, you had your choice,

Interviewer: You could either leave or do it?

John: One or the other.

Interviewer: Right. Tell me one thing, why did you go, because I would have thought in those days most Irishmen would have been going to London, why did you choose Manchester?

John: That's because we had the connection there, it was ideal with the work and we had the best of digs, the governor she was a Manchester woman and her husband was from Kilkelly, Mayo, Pat Coen and it was right beside the church and they were very religious people. So we had it well set up, everything going for us. And then I got fed up running, then I was broke from running. You'd have to pack up a job and it might take a week to get another job, you'd only have your wages sorted out when they'd be rapping on your door again, so anyway, I joined up. Signed up and went, I never regretted it. I done my training in Omagh, in the north [Ireland], that was the headquarters of the Enniskillen Fusiliers, and I think we done three months training or something and then posted overseas, some of my crowd went to Kenya, and I went to the Middle East, Egypt, that was a terrible place. We weren't allowed to go on the road, you had to travel that in the desert, I've never eaten more sand in all my life, it would be on your dinner and everything, we were only in tents and all like that.

Interviewer: I think Len used to talk about the flies, he said the flies were horrific.

John: Like a sandstorm, that sand was a dry, it would blow, and then you'd be burnt to death with sun out. You'd be lying down there beside a machine-gun and the sun on the backs of your legs and all.

Interviewer: How long were you out in Egypt for?

John: It was about two years I'd say.

Interviewer: That's was the Suez Crisis?

John: No, the Suez Crisis came after that, we had moved, as a matter of fact I was back in – as the fella says – 'in Blighty', in Warminster when that was happening, I was preparing for demob. See I signed for...National Service money was useless

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

because...[after] working two years on the buildings and getting a fair old packet... and then to go on National Service and you had to buy all your cleaning gear, even cleaning yourself, soap, toothpaste, and then there's Brasso, boot polish...so you wouldn't have a lot for partying! [Laughter]

Interviewer: How many years did you do National Service?

John: So, I signed on to be a regular soldier for *three* years, and it doubled the wages, because I was a regular soldier.

Interviewer: So, which year did you de-mob then, as they say?

John: I would say 1956, '57 something like that. And then I went back to Manchester again, got de-mobbed back there, but in the meantime when I was out there I joined the Pipe Band. One night I was looking out and there was a line of tents from here to the village!...and this bloke was playing the pipes, practising, and I went up to him anyways and said, "Can I have a word?" So, he took the thing out of his mouth and I said, "Is there...How would I get?[into the Pipe Band]...I used to play a bit on the flute in Ireland, whistle" or whatever, I told him I was in the...driving tanks and that sort of thing...He says, "yeah we're looking for..."[musicians]

Interviewer: Artillery was it?

John: Yeah, the artillery side of it, so he said, "Okay, call up again" and he brought me in to see the Pipe Major, and the Pipe Major said "Oh you'll fit in here lovely" he said, so he pulled a few strings anyway and I got in the Pipe Band. And my first venture on television, in Port Said, my chanter was corked, so I was there, and where did the television man come down with the camera?, recorded me and nothing coming out! We were standing there playing on the side, we were playing some crowd off or some crowd coming in, or something like that, but anyway I kept doing what I was supposed to, but with the noise of all the pipes, they wouldn't have known!

Interviewer: You bluffed your way through it,

John: My photo was on television, but my music wasn't! [Laughter]. But y'know the pipes were easy when you had a bit of music in you, I was a better Piper than the bloody Pipe Major! So anyway, we used to go round then, we had Irish dancers as well, they were well geared up, they were well trained with Agnes O'Connor and all them in London. They were London lads mostly. So they'd send for a Piper...well talk about drink! Well, we'd start on the pints of beer, and a lot of them young lads wouldn't be like me now, the one pint would do them, they mightn't even drink that, so I had their drink as well! [Laughter] "Oh yea" I'd say "I'm able to drink that"; they say drink kills ya, well that's a lie anyway. Anyway, I got through three years, flying colours and went back to Manchester again and went out working on the [sites] - Jesus when I seen the dirt! - I wasn't used to it now, you'd think I never saw it before, when you went into the auld changing huts and all, oh Jesus, I felt terrible.

Interviewer: Who were you working for now?

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

John: I was working for a small building firm in Manchester, J and J Maunders,¹ they usen't to pay a lot either.

Interviewer: Tell me something, well actually there was something that I forgot to ask you, we can back track on it, about I meant to ask you about music, obviously I know you were a big influence when I was learning as a boy, but you learnt your music in this area I presume, did you?

John: I did, the first place was, there was a Priest over here, Father Paddy Sharkey, and he went up to Dublin and he bought 18 band fifes and a set of drums, and he was a man of ideas, fife and drum band, and our first outing was in Croghan at a sports day, he had a band master teaching us and everything.

Interviewer: Could you play anyway? Did your father play?

John: Oh, he did, he played the fiddle, flute and a bit on accordion, I got to be better than the rest of them because I had it indoors, and he played around the clock, he'd be teaching and writing them, and he could write the music and everything, oh he was well clued up.

Interviewer: And where did he learn that, the writing?

John: He learnt from a man in Carrick on Shannon called Paddy McDonagh, he used to teach the fiddle, and my father was,

Interviewer: I think he taught my grandfather as well.

John: He did, he taught them all. And the only time he could have a listen was Sunday morning, his wife used to go to ten o'clock mass, Paddy McDonagh's wife, and he'd go to the house, and she'd be back at 11, and the few bob he used to get for training to be a blacksmith, he used to pay with that. And the first fiddle he bought, he paid 15 shillings for it, at that time he could have bought two cows for that, and they nearly put him in the mental home, they couldn't believe anyone would do that! I learnt a good bit from him and then I picked it up as I go, but there was music in every house nearby, there was something.

Interviewer: I know in our house there was three or four that could play, play something, as you say they could play a couple of tunes on the whistle or they'd be able to play the flute, or my grandfather played the fiddle, there was two of them I think played the fiddle, so anyway, I just wanted to clarify where that came from.

So, when you came out of the army you went back to Manchester and you were working for this small firm, but you weren't very happy with the deal?

¹ A Manchester-based housing company started in Stretford in 1900 and novated to the founder's grandson as John Maunders Construction Ltd in 1969. The company was sold to the Westbury Group in March 1998. See: *The London Gazette*, 18 April 1969, Issue:44830,p.4143 ; *Construction News*, 13 July, 2000, available at: <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/john-maunders-and-family/900322.article> [accessed 5 Feb, 2018].

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

John: No, I didn't want...I thought I would branch out then, the Isle of Grain was going that time in London, down in Kent. It was a massive job and all the Irish fellas went down to it.

Interviewer: Can I just ask on question before in forget, when you did work in Manchester, the first time, and when you came back from the army and that, those jobs that you worked on, would it have been, was it mainly Irish fellas that were working on that?

John: There was Irish and English, there was an awful Irish contingent in Manchester, from the west of Ireland now, Leitrim, Mayo, and Roscommon and Sligo and that.

Interviewer: One of the Kennedy's, he's Sligo, they're in Manchester.

John: Oh yeah, he had a big firm going. But then you mentioned music...I'm going arse about face with this now, but...the first thing was when you got the job, the next trip was to Burtons, to get the suit, and big wide bottoms, 24 inches, 25,

Interviewer: Was that as soon as you got a bit of money?

John: As soon as you got the first or second pay packet.

Interviewer: Could you get a sub?

John: Oh Jesus, they did so, and another thing, you *had* to sub in a lot of cases because of the other crowd [men] that would be working there, that was there years before you, they'd have their money spent with gambling, and "acting the goat" as the fella says [drink]...well, and they'd be putting the hammer on you, and especially, you'd be green after coming from here, you'd think they were honest like, but then we started to find [our way], we got the suit going, then you found the dance hall and the pubs, and the music when you were that way inclined. We used to go in Saturday night into All Saints in Manchester, and there was music in all the pubs there, and then I started sitting in and having a tune, there was some great players around Manchester that time, Felix Doran, was in his prime at that time.

Interviewer: Wow, and he was in Manchester?

John: He was, that's where all of them [went]...Dessie Donnelly, the uncle Dessie that got killed,² and there was a Kathleen Coen, a fiddle player, Kathleen Welsh, her name was Coen, she had a brother, a bus driver in Galway somewhere, he was a great accordion player, I never heard him now; she was a cracker on the fiddle.

Interviewer: Des Donnelly, Des was builder worker as well, wasn't he?

² Des Donnelly was a fiddle player from Fintona, Co Tyrone who was a post-war migrant builder. He was killed in a building site accident in June, 1973. He left an important legacy of music recorded in the 1960s and was a well-known musician amongst the insular Irish traditional music community in London and Manchester in the 1960s and 70s. See 'Remember Des Donnelly' at

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

John: Oh yea, that's how he got killed, was demolition on a wall, wall fell down on him or something. There used to be a gang of them in the pub and then there was another man from...where was he from, around Loughrea or somewhere, Pat Kelly, flute player, he was an elderly man then, and he played with Coleman in America, he used to be telling us all about him.

Interviewer: Would moist of them lads have been in the building game, they would suppose.

John: They would, various but, then again there used to be school caretakers, there was all sorts of...really. Some of the girls worked on the buses, a lot of them worked in Kellogg's Com Flakes, you'd see a gang of Paddy's outside the gate eating them... "*My girl works in Kellogg's*"...everybody's girl worked in Kelloggs! [Laughter]. Ah it was a mighty life; you had money, you had good digs, good clothes, you were able to come home at Christmas, you'd have a hundred pound or something, and you'd be acting like the fellas before you!

Interviewer: So, it was way better than it would have been here?

John: Oh, Jesus here it was shocking at that time, you wouldn't get a shilling anywhere, and the old houses thatched, no running water, it was hard going.

Interviewer: Did you then, is suppose we better stay on track in terms of the timings, so this was when you were in Manchester's, and so did you branch out on your own in Manchester then?

John: No, I went to London

Interviewer: What brought you to, did you have contacts in London?

John: No, I went with another fella from Athenry, he was a good grafter as well, we went down there, we went to Ladbroke Grove, above all places! The lads in the digs then; there was a fella there, Tony Kelly, *the boiler house* they used to call him, he used to drink in a club there called the Boiler, and he never done a stroke in his life, he used to live in the digs there. Sure he never done a stroke in his life but he wouldn't let anyone be out of work; he knew every gangerman and he'd get you a job "*Are ya outa work?*" oh it was a crime to be out...because he knew he'd get a pint or two if you were earning.

Interviewer: Where did he get the money for the digs then, did he have some arrangement made then?

John: I don't know what way, he had a mate there, Frawley – a townie - and I think Frawley used to subsidise him a bit, the poor devil. He used to be kicked out of the digs then, because he used to dampen down³...y'know that was a...[problem]...some of them poor landladies suffered.

³ 'Dampen down' is a vernacular term used by Irish post-war builders for urinary incontinence. In most cases this resulted from the lifestyle of these itinerant workers; the hard physical work combined with erratic diet and constant drinking.

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

Interviewer: That's was a big problem?

John: That was a big problem.

Interviewer: And was that just the drink?

John: Oh drink, yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever find...from the way you're describing it now, you seem to have digs that were pretty good?

John: Oh the best of good, very good. I was in the best, I had two landladies in Manchester, one was from over the road here, beyond the Four P's that's where she was born but she brought up in Elphin, and she was married to a man from Cork, used to call him Fox, and you know o'course why they called him Fox? [Laughter]...he was every bit as cute as one! He was another one, he used to work, he'd be helping out at the market and he'd be doing this and that but he never was tied to the clock, at eight o'clock in the morning or seven.

Interviewer: And so, did you ever come across any of these lads that did have the really bad digs? 'cos there were some of them talking about maybe having...y'know, sleeping six to a room and all that carry on.

John: Oh, they had all that yeah. I never [frequented them]... they were more or less kip houses you might as well say. They'd be let in there and they'd have no money, and they'd be dossing and, y'know? The landlady would be on the beer with them in the day and all that sort o'thing. That was a different kind of set up. That's was for the lads that were drinking independent like.⁴ There was a Donegal crowd had, they had lodging houses, a rake of sisters there in Manchester, and Jesus they were the best of of...I didn't live in any of them now, they were the best of the best, water was running, spotless really. Y'know you could tell the fellas that were living there, when you'd see them out, the way they were [turned out].

Interviewer: Was there a reason why some lads went that way, and some didn't?

John: Just the way they were, it was their makeup, the way they were brought up and all that, a lot of it come from here [Ireland] you know? That's right. And there was a lot of them working with...they had a grudge against the Queen, and they'd wouldn't...one would hear the other at it and they'd wind each other. They'd be like "Why would I pay so much out of my wages on tax?" and that sort of thing, so at the end of the thing [work], they had nothing. A fella that went and had his cards stamped and everything, he had everything you know? he was legit. But them lads, they wouldn't pay tax, and the sobby taking the mickey out of them, he'd be ripping them off, it was their own fault, if no one worked for them⁵...they'd, you know what I mean.

⁴ What John is referring to here are the long-distance men and pinchers of the tramp-navvy kind that Ultan Cowley discusses in *The Men Who Built Britain*, [Dublin, 2001].

⁵ John is referring here to the 'Lumpers' – the Labour only subcontracting firms who

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Interviewer: I do yeah, so when you were working for them.

John: I was nearly always with firms, 'legit' firms; cards were stamped and everything. Whoever was doing the stuff on the lump they must have been fellas that were either mad for the drink or didn't want to pay tax, like you know. Most of them were getting ripped off. Because your man, the ganger or the subby that was organising that, he'd be flippin' paying them less, he'd be taking the tax off them anyway, and maybe a bit more. A lot of them fellas, they'd be sacked with a big firm because, the likes of McAlpine and Wimpey and all o'them, if you start losing days, you were no good to them, the subby would only be delighted if you were losing because he'd have you booked in, he was probably on day work.

Interviewer: He wouldn't be paying you, but he'd be claiming, you mean?

John: He'd be getting paid, you give the foreman a few bob and you'd be booked in on day work, you'd be moving bricks and moving material or that kind o'thing.

Interviewer: Whereas you say the big boys would be, they'd want you there. Did you work for McAlpine's?

John: I did, I worked for ages for them, and Taylor Woodrow. Nothing wrong with them, y'see, if you done one job with McAlpine's and was alright - you had to be a good auld grafter like - and they'd be starting another big job now, you'd look in the gate there and you'd know [someone there] and they'd be like, "oh right, Jesus yeah come out Monday morning and you'll be sound"; you'd be in there. And once you had two or three of them, then "he's a Macs man" s'yee?

Interviewer: Was that in London or in Manchester?

John: In London, I from once I went to London that's where I stayed, and I got married there, 1959 I got married.

Interviewer: You mentioned that before now, did you think that, because I have an idea now that an awful lot of young men that ended up in London and Manchester and places like that, as you said, they were earning big money, and drinking loads and whatever, it seemed to me the ones that kind of survived it, if you like, were the ones that got married, the ones that met somebody, because it calms you down a bit, you have to...

John: Oh yeah definitely, especially when there's children on the way, you have to toe the line, its something that keeps you on the straight and narrow.

Interviewer: So, you worked for the likes of Mc's and can you remember any of the other big boys you worked for?

John: Taylor Woodrows and Wimpeys of course!

Interviewer: Did you ever work for any of the Irish ones, Murphy's or,

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John: Oh, I worked for Murphy, driving the lorry, well working on driving the lorry, both Joe and John, both of them.

Interviewer: Did you know Joe by any chance?

John: No, I never met any of them.

Interviewer: Never met old John either?

John: No never. I tell you want we were at when we were with him, the ganger man was from Mayo, Mick McHale, he was a mighty man for the horses as well. [With] Murphy's, we were all down around Kent, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, around that, to Brighton, you know where they used to lay the cable and that? We'd put the road right after, go back days after, reinstate it, dig it out, put concrete in it and tarmac it, we had a great time. We never did a stroke on a Saturday.

Interviewer: You'd get the shift though.

John: Oh God yea, but we used to have the work done [before]. Saturday we'd go looking for what had to be done like, have a drive round maybe to Brighton and around about. You couldn't go in too early because they used to have traps set; on the bridges, London Bridge, Tower Bridge, Westminster...a fella would take the number of the lorry, you'd be caught!

Interviewer: Did you ever come across the Elephant?

John: No, I never saw him.

Interviewer: He seems to be quite a mysterious figure

John: Oh, he was well known...thank God I never met him, he wasn't a very nice man.

Interviewer: He wasn't supposed to be, I never came across him, now saying that now, there was couple of fellas around Bethnal Green, you might have met them, the likes of Dennis Browne and Frank McGee, that did work, they weren't overly complimentary, but they didn't think he was as bad as was made out. 1959, you said you got married, so you were in London by that time; east London?

John: I was well settled in the east, London then.

Interviewer: And who were you working for at that time then?

John: McAlpine, then after that I started...I'm contradicting myself now, I started having work on my own. I was working with a subbie and the Yank was the ganger man.

Interviewer: The Yank Heneghan? The fella I was talking about earlier? He was supposed to have met the Darkie Finn, y'know? He was working with for Macs at the

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time...reckoned he was hopeless, he wasn't no good at all with the work. But y'see they'd say that for blaggarding. [Laughter].

John: Ah I know, but them fellas...the job couldn't start if they weren't on it. Y'know, say a job in Scotland now, they'd be waiting on the Pincher Mac and the Pincher this and that, and the Pig Malone, the Sow whoever. Them animals had to arrive before the work'd start! [Laughter]. The craic would be kept going about it...like, this fella went into some town and, y'know he heard the boys, y'know, the Pig Malone and somebody else were to be there. So he knocked on the door and the landlady came out and a fag in her mouth. He said "Does the Pig Malone stay here?" She said "No", and he asked for the Horse – oh yeah, the Horsheen something-or-other, she said, "No, I'm sorry" she said, "We don't keep any animals here!" [Laughter].

Interviewer: So, anyway so you went out in your own then soon after.

John: Something happened anyway, the foreman there, he was Tipperary, he was called Barneville, and they were all in with this crowd, used to do petrol stations, Paddy Barneville, so this night I came in from work, I forget who I was with at the time, and the wife said to me "a man rung up and he said think of a bambrack and you'll know who it is; ask him to give me a ring". I rang him back and he says "Could you ever" - I was working for Cubitts,⁶ I think, down in Thames Street or down there somewhere - he said, "Would be ever able to get me a few men?" he said. "I want yourself" because I used to lay the pipes with him and all that. He said, "I have a crowd here and I have to get rid of them, I can't get any drains passed or anything, the drainage inspector he won't even look at their work." They hadn't a clue, a big subby again just send them in men...throwing in men who knew nothing, sure he didn't care if he got the money for it. And anyway I rung him and said alright, so I took four blokes with me that was in Cubitts [Laughter]. I had known them for years, and Jesus we made great shapes altogether, we tore into it. I pulled out a rake of these drains and sorted the manholes out and the drainage man come in, went around with the foreman and inspected everything. "Now" he said, "you've got a drain layer". That was it, I was in. And I'll never forget, I got paid at the end of the week for them all [by cheque], I had no bank account at the time, Jesus anyway.

Interviewer: [interrupting] Presumably in these days, John all the wages would be paid in cash?

John: Everything was in cash, so I went to the Mackworth⁷ on Sunday morning, I was about £250 or something, so I asked Fintan⁸ - arrah he was an ignorant fucker and

⁶ Holland, Hannon and Cubitts were an English main contractor of long standing, formed by the merger of William Cubitts Ltd, founded in 1815, and Holland and Hannon founded at least as early as 1868. See *The Engineer*, November 13th, 1868, p.365. They were commonly known in London as Cubitts and employed Irish migrant builders as direct labour and subcontractors throughout the post-war period.

⁷ The Mackworth Arms was situated at 156-158 Commercial Road, at the junction with New Road. This pub was present in 1817. By the twentieth century it was a Watney's Brewery house, known in the 1920s, during the time of landlord Nathan Dubosky, as the 'Latke House' after the plentiful supply of Jewish snacks that were apparently available to customers. In the 1960s it became an Irish House where traditional Irish music was performed regularly by patrons including this interviewee, and by 1977 it had become a Free House. It closed in around 1985. See *Lost Pubs in London; E1 Aldgate*.

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all, he brought it all down [in cash], "There y'are now, Carty's in the money!"...he was expecting me start buying, see? But, of course, I already had the lads paid in the week and all that. This was Sunday morning. He's subbying now, he's a "big subby" and this crap, y'know? I got in with another fella then and we got a firm going and we'd work off Taylor Woodrows, we done a big school, two jobs in Bromley, we done all the ground work, we had diggers and everything,

Interviewer: Did you buy diggers or hire them?

John: We did buy them. Well, now, this was clever man now, like yourself he was QS. He wasn't a great...he wasn't a good man in the site; he was measuring everything before it was done, or when it was done, and he couldn't understand the workers way of thinking, which is fair enough, y'know but he'd upset the firms. Y'know he'd come in and say, "We'll have to charge them for that!"; y'know he'd rough them up the wrong way before you had your foot in the door! There's ways of doing it, y'see? They'd sign anything for me, but [he was like] a red rag to a bull.

Interviewer: I understand that exactly, but sometimes that can work as well. We used to call that...when I was working, because there was a few lads I used to work with like that, we used to call it playing 'bad cop, good cop', because I would go in and threaten them with all sorts, we're going to charge for this and that, and the man on site then could go in and he'd smooth it all out, "Just sign these sheets and we'll be grand", y'know and cover it that way. That's business, that's the way you do these things, so from then on presumably you just did that [worked as a subcontractor].

John: I did. I'd say his kids were only young when we got going so...I'd say we were twenty-three or twenty-four years at it. He done all the paperwork side of things, ordering and materials and everything, we used to supply all the...he done all of that. Oh I had a great time, sure, I had big cars and everything, but I had no time to drive them! Yeah, I had a couple of Mercs, Jags; the whole lot. Y'see he wanted...when there'd be so much money in, "We'll buy two cars, Sean" he'd say to me, he used to call me Sean. I sat back and said, "You're in charge of the money, so whatever you think."

Interviewer: I think, there was such an amount of work, you could jack on a Friday, and you'd be working on Monday like, no problem at all.

John: The Long Bar in Whitechapel, you could go in there on Sunday morning and you could get, there was ganger men, there was this, if you wanted a job this Sunday morning, lunchtime; any amount of work, go and see the Yank or somebody like that, if you wanted a television, there would be a man there for it, they'd get you a wife, get you a flat! there was somebody there for everything, you could get anything you wanted! [Laughter]

Interviewer: So, the two of you stuck at that for 20 odd years and that saw you out?

Siepnay & Whitechapel, available at <http://www.closedpubs.co.uk/london.html> [accessed 10 Feb, 2018].

⁸ John is referring here to getting a cheque changed by the landlord of the Mackworth Arms, who, it can be safely assumed, was called Fintan.

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John: I did yeah.

Interviewer: How big did you get?

John: Pretty big, there were a lot of jobs that we'd had maybe 30 fellas on for us, three gangs or maybe four gangs.

Interviewer: You didn't want to get any bigger than that?

John: No, you couldn't because you need the supervision, you would need somebody on the site. Getting people like that, you'd see fellas, they'd be good in one place, they'd be no good in another. And another thing...the management want to see the governor, you know that yourself. If I was there now, but the day I would be off the phone would be ringing, what's going on here?

Interviewer: Because they're thinking you're not keeping an eye on things, you're right, that's the way the industry works, especially when you're on site, they want to see that you're there keeping an eye on things.

John: I was at the petrol stations, I had a few bits and pieces.

Interviewer: Was that working for anyone in particular?

John: This crowd used to do nothing but petrol stations, Scertons partners.

Interviewer: I was thinking of Carey's, wasn't they one of them?

John: Oh, they used to do them as well, but this crew they had a job down in Chelsea, this big house, doing it up and gutting it and all that, and there was this old fella who worked for them for years, a painter, he was Scerton himself. He was an old cockney, it was the time of the builder's strike. Anyway I started these two young lads...

Interviewer: Was that in the '70s?

John: It must be yeah, this was before we started the big stuff. I was doing Grano⁹ floors in Fulham, trowelling and all that kind of thing. There was this man who used to come round, a contracts manager, Jim Hart. And I had this lad and he was pretty handy with a trowel, very handy, very good; only a young fella now, very young, but his father was builder in Kilkenny or Wexford or somewhere. There was fireplaces to be built up and fireplaces to be done and holes to be done up the top, but he wouldn't go along with the dinner times or anything like that, he'd have his dinner when he'd feel like it, y'know? "eat when you're hungry and drink when you're dry!" [Laughter]. But anyway, this old painter, he gets to the stage, he must've been tired or whatever and he went up and he laid on this bed, he was an awful man for smoking and there was a gold stitched bed spread on the bed, and didn't he set fire to the feckin' thing around him! [Laughter] And Jesus this Jim Hart, I'll never forget it, I'm

⁹ Refers to Granolithic flooring screed, also known as granolithic paving and granolithic concrete, a type of construction material composed of cement and fine aggregate such as granite or other hard-wearing rock. It is generally used as flooring, or as paving.

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down there and sweating and trowelling this grano in the garages and I've a rake o'them to do, and he comes up to me and starts this "Your effin' bloke!" and he couldn't say it, he was choked, nothing would come out! Well I took no notice, carried on, and said, "What's the matter Jim?" In the end he got it out, and told me your man set the bed on fire, I said "Well I hope you're well insured!", well he nearly fainted, he had a cigarette paper stuck to his lip, he was going to roll, and he wasn't able to! [Laughter]. I was wondering and all how...like I was a bit worried an' all. You know I never heard a thing about it after that.

Interviewer: Could have been dodgy alright.

John: So of course, I had to take him away from there, I was told to sack him, but I didn't. I moved him, but then I had to get another who was handy with a trowel to go in there was another [problem]. It's not all sunshine you know. [Subbing].

But boy am I glad there was no mobiles back then...oh they'd have ruined everything! [Laughter] Oh, I tried everything; looking for men in the middle of the morning and all. But once I got in with him, I stopped all that, it was just the firm. I went out and run a job, or maybe run two jobs. I was with Wates for seven years for our firm, Carden Construction. If I was to run it we'd get the job, and your man didn't like that either - my partner. He'd get...y'know...I had a way of keeping them all happy, and keeping myself happy which is the most important thing.

Interviewer: I imagine, he was an English fella and he was a QS, like the QS I often said, I've still told people, the QS, especially in England, when I was training there, they were quite...aggressive...like aggressive in terms of management, they'd be going in and demanding stuff, we're entitled to this and blah, blah, blah. But it takes a while to figure out there's more ways to skin a cat.

John: When you have your own work, see he's working for a firm, surveyors, you can run around and threaten...he didn't give two ... he was trying to do the same and himself begging for work! You can't do that.

I still had a good life out of all of that, I used to come home about three times a year I had a great life, I wasn't a millionaire or anything, but I had a few quid at the end of it. And the children were raised and they're all fine, that's the...when you look at these things and you're trying to find a measure of were we successful.

Interviewer: Just thinking about other aspects, did you ever come across any ill feeling because you're Irish, did you ever come across that?

John: Oh never, never.

Interviewer: Did you ever see any of these signs that everyone?

John: No I didn't no...I never.

Interviewer: That's another thing that is quite commonly actually, people saying no, I've asked numerous people that question including my own parents and they said no,

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they heard about people who saw them, apparently, but they never saw them. And you didn't get any kind of bad feeling.

John: No, Jesus it was always.

Interviewer: Even when the Troubles were on?

John: No, I didn't. and when the bomb went off on the Isle of Dogs there and blew all the windows out, I was working down there at that time. This reporter, I think 'twas a yank come round, and she said, she asked a few queer questions and all, she didn't know what she was on about. She said, "You're Irish!" I said, "So what?" The bomb went off and I was asleep in Bethnal Green and I didn't know a thing about it. I went down in the morning, I knew what... 'twas Saturday morning. I knew what I had to do, like. Ah no the foreman said, I've another job for you and we were shipped down there. My son was working for some other crowd chipping, and we were working for the Council for a while, this is when I finished up with my own firm and done a bit of patching up with the Council, I had a little truck, just to keep the hand in. I had a couple of years to do for the pension, we were sent down and my job -

Interviewer: This was with Tower Hamlets Council? And was your son working for them, was he?

John: He was working for some crowd, some agency. He was cutting up plywood to patch up and he was flying it. 'Twas was shocking cold weather, I was there sort of directing traffic not letting people go here and every place I looked I could see a curtain flying out where the glass had been blown out of the windows.

Interviewer: But you never got any direct ill feeling or bad comments, and you never found that when you were younger?

John: No, never.

Interviewer: You were talking earlier about digs, good digs and bad digs, did you ever find yourself having to use some of those bad digs?

John: When I went to London first, just to tide over, we stayed about a week. No, it wasn't a kip-house, it was an ordinary house, but they didn't know how to feed a Paddy put it that way! I went with a fella I worked with in Manchester, Manus Donohue was his name. He come from a big farm in Athenry. He had to get out, the brother was getting married and the woman was coming in so there was no place for him. This man was used to big dinners and everything, "Jesus" he said, "We'll die with hunger!" I said "We're only here five minutes yet!" He said it was like a plate of water you know. [Laughter]

[PHONE RINGS 01.17.22] – Conversation starts over

Interviewer: Did you ever come across any of those lads the old style navvies that were sort of...I suppose itinerant?

John: Pincher Kids! They use to love it; that was like an army to them.

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Interviewer: Did you ever come across them?

John: Oh Yes....sure you'd know them and they'd walk with the gimp!

Interviewer: Old men like?

John: Yeah....Yes most of it was around the pub yeah.

Interviewer: But there was a lot of Irish pubs?

John: Oh there was, they use to come in to it as well, the Irish pubs, they made money out of the lump as well; the boys changing the cheques and they use to charge them so much a cheque. Of course then himself [the Landlord] would be out to pay you, to change your cheque, so you'd have to be drinking at the bar, by the time you get it, there would be a big hole in it! [Laughter] You'd have it almost drank!

Interviewer: I reckon...I heard one story that the Crown in Cricklewood at one point had almost like an office?

John: Oh a bank, yeah.

Interviewer: I don't know if we have talked about as much as we can. Were you ever involved in football or GAA or anything like that?

John: No I was always too busy. See, I was playing in pubs and dance halls and all that.

Interviewer: That's with Glenside?

John: Yeah. And then when all that finished, I was with Sean White. Jesus we use to go...some awful times! Sean would get drunk and...I remember one Patrick's day...we were playing somewhere and Jesus didn't they go on the beer in the day time, and I was working and that night I went in to join them, and I knew...I went into this pub where we were meeting and I could hear the laughing and the chatting and all, I was in the other bar and I thinking ah Jesus...and here we go! Jesus. And there wasn't...Jesus when we went into this place and everyone was laughing and staggering and drinking and...But anyway we went out and they had a coach out to the...we went in and next thing all these women with big long green dresses on them, out for Patrick's night...and got up on the stage and nothing would come out of the accordion, you could see the looks and then Sean's wife was out dancing with some fellow and she was lying into him and the next thing Sean threw down the accordion and down off the stage and battered him, oh the Lord, well I'll never forget that night, I swore I'd never play another tune!

Interviewer: So I wasn't going to bother asking you about, all unless you want to talk about the Glenside stuff?, but I know a lot of the stuff about the band and dance hall scene you played in quite a few of the dance halls in London?

John: Well I'll tell you a little bit.

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Interviewer: Please do.

John: I wasn't playing for ...oh I hadn't played for years hardly any. But one night I went down to the...there use to be music in the World Ends Pub at the Elephant & Castle. So I went down there this night and Tommy was paying there and Mick Gallagher was an accordion player and him and Tommy use to fight every night they'd be playing together, and yet they got on great; they had a lovely relationship.

Interviewer: They were both living in London at the time?

John: They were... Tommy McGowan. Anyway Jesus I don't know, I went up and I played a few tunes with them, or on my own I forget now. I'll tell you who was playing there, Mick Gorman and he gave me his flute, he knew I use to play a bit.

Interviewer: That would be a nephew of Michael Gorman's?

John: Yeah Johnny's brother.

Interviewer: That's right yeah.

John: So, that was alright, I done whatever, and came down. But anyway some time after, a few weeks after, I was out somewhere and I came home and Margaret said to me, there was two fellows here looking for you, they want you and they left a phone number and you have to ring them.

Interviewer: Were you living in Beth....

John: No! Not at all, I wasn't. I was living in Juniper Street near Shadwell Gardens, that's the other side of Cable Street.

Interviewer: This is before you had kids now?

John: No we had the kids some of them, but they were babies at the time. And anyway I rang this number, and I didn't know the McGowans at all. Anyway he said now, we are getting a band together here and would you be interested, we heard you playing the flute.

Interviewer: What year was that?

John: I'll tell you 1963. So it could be part of '62 or '63. But anyway I'll make it as short now as possible.

Interviewer: Take your time, I'm in no hurry.

John: So anyway, he said next...next Saturday night he'd come and meet me. He said do you know Martin McMahon? I said I know him well, I knew Martin in the short trousers and that, and the girlfriend Theresa. Oh he said we are getting up this band and Martin had just won the All-Ireland the year before in Clones, he said we have a good band and he said we could win the All Ireland, oh I said, well now I'll give you

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till you get someone else. So we started practice and doing this and that and the other. But there was a Fleadh in Liverpool and I was playing with them then in the hall at the Elephant and Castle – Casey's hall...the Shamrock. But anyway, this night we come out, Saturday night dance was on till about 2 o'clock or something, come out, big coach outside the door ticking over, ready for Liverpool, and off we go. And a lot of the Clare girls came with us, there was dancing and all. And we hit for Liverpool and got in and John O'Shea was playing with us that time and away we go. But anyway the trio, Tommy Corcoran on the flute, McGowan on the fiddle and McMahon on the box, they were the trio. Jesus didn't Ted put us in for it, John O'Shea and Theresa and I were playing. We were sitting up on a builder's table or something. And he says, ye go in for it, ye played well. By Jesus we went up anyway and then I think we got was it second or third in Liverpool. So they said, "ye can win this now if we keep practising!". So we were practising a bit, but we'd have to stay back a bit when they were playing - they were the main men - McMahon and Tommy and the two Tommy's. Anyway come the fleadh in Mullingar in 1963, we goes over to the fleadh we played with the band and the Liverpool band beat us. To get into the All Ireland that time, you had to win the overseas, it was the overseas champions.

Interviewer: So you had to be the champion to get in?

John: Yes overseas. So, that was the band out of it. But the trio now the trio might have been before the band. But anyway we were in for the...on account of getting a place in Liverpool we were in with a shout for the trio in Mullingar. So anyway McGowan and the first trio went up and they played and done well and that. And Jesus we were the second and the Liverpool had a trio there and...Jesus didn't we win it. O'Shea and Theresa and myself. Well the Lord Jesus, McMahon went stone bonkers and them all did. But anyway went on and we were into the All-Ireland then and we went up for the All-Ireland and Jesus didn't we win it!

Interviewer: You won the All Ireland?

John: We won the All Ireland in 1963.

Interviewer: Jeez.

John: The trio, John O'Shea, Theresa McMahon and myself.

Interviewer: That's fantastic.

John: It was mighty...ah Jesus I'll never forget that.

Interviewer: And then of course in '66 the band.

John: We came back then and we done a few fleadhs before that, there was one in Thurles I think.

Interviewer: And was the band....

John: After Mullingar McMahon pulled out.

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Interviewer: Would have nothing to do with it.

John: No he was pig sick and he threw Theresa out of the bed that night, ah Jesus!

Interviewer: And originally would he have been in the Glenside?

John: No it was the McMahon Ceili band then.

Interviewer: Yes that's right. And he'd have nothing to do with it afterwards then. And was that purely he was vexed at what had gone on?

John: Ah I don't know...with she singing and playing the piano, there was more money to be made like that than a big band like that...no use...

Interviewer: But the dance halls in those days were thriving.

John: They were flying all the bands coming from Ireland and all that. Be the lord Jesus I enjoyed that. But to beat them the top, and he got beat in the All-Ireland as well he was in for it again.

Interviewer: To make it worse.

John: Yes John Bowe beat him.

Interviewer: That would vex him. Two great players though.

John: Two mighty players. But we had some great...

Interviewer: You must have done, the dance hall days now, the pictures I have seen and Reg has written some tremendous stuff about the Galty and the Hibernian. 'Cos I think Byrnes was working for the Casey Brothers at one time?

John: That's right yeah and he started on his own. He made money early days during the war with the kind of...he was a contractor as well he was doing what do they call it, I suppose it would have been war damage clearing. I think John Murphy did the same. They were all...because them lads would have been I don't know maybe 5 or 10 years older than we were. So I think they were in London earlier, they were there during the war. The Casey brothers they were wrestlers or something weren't they? They were, they were mighty people altogether.

Interviewer: I never met them, did you know them?

John: I knew Paddy and Mick. There was no flies on them. They were mighty men to make money and they'd spend nothing. But Paddy Casey got all us together once and they had Ealing going that time, the two dancehalls, the Shamrock and th'other one and he said, "This money now" whatever he was paying us, he said is no good divided up. But he said, "If ye left that to me, now" he said ye'd be able to have the deposit on a house and...ah the boys said no, we'll have the few bob. And he was right...Oh he was spot on, he said I'll keep this for you and buy a house and then you'll have something.

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

Ah the dancehalls were chokker in them days. Ya had New Cross, we use to play there as well, that was for Byrnes now, and the Galty.

Interviewer: And there is a great story you told James about Paddy Breen, that was in south London?

John: Yes Paddy use to live around the Elephant. Yeah Jesus there was great aul' feadhls that time. I remember once I was playing against him, we were in a competition and Paddy was good and bejusus when he finished the selection anyway he sung a song for me...and I still beat him! [Laughter]

Interviewer: What was the story James told that you were in some Caribbean or Black drinking club?

John: Oh the Elephant yeah.

Interviewer: Was that down the Elephant.

John: Oh Jesus yeah. They were all black men there...and they had Breen banned with the flute [they didn't want him playing any more in their club], but he got somebody else to...they use to frisk him on the door going in, they'd be telling him, "We can't have that whistle in there"...we all got in anyway and everything was going lovely and calm and the next thing this flute started flying in the corner...oh Jesus.

Interviewer: Jeez he must have been some man to go into a club full of black guys in the 1950s and start playing tradition Irish music.

John: He was out the country working on nights and they were doing a big sewer, a massive big pipe. And Paddy use to go down the pipe and take out the flute...he wouldn't do no work! He'd drink porter till the cows come home. The poor man got killed crossing on the Walworth.¹⁰

Interviewer: I heard that yeah.

John: He was a great character...there wasn't a bad bone in his body.

Interviewer: I always ask this question when I finish up with the interviews, if you take your experiences in England as a whole. Would you say it was a positive experience or you know...have you any complaints?

John: Oh not one bit, Jesus I had a great time in England, I cannot say I would ever of had such a time here. But when I came home it was the right thing to do. I wouldn't go back again now. Ahh it's different, I did go back twice, there was something on in Camden Town and I went over to do Angela's garden or something and it wasn't the same at all...and she took me up around Bethnal Green and all that.

¹⁰ A busy road in south London.

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

Interviewer: So but anyway, is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your days in London or are you happy now that we have covered everything?

John: I think we have, very interesting.

Interviewer: You were never a trade union man?

John: No, no, never.

Interviewer: Did you ever come across any of that?

John: Ah Jasus I did, a little bit. There was a terrible gang around Whitechapel there, union fellows. Tommy Finn, Peter Welsh, oh there was...Ronnie Pepper. Well I joined the union, I use to go to an odd meeting y'know; that use to keep them off my back a bit. They were looking for subs basically that's what I think...that's what it boiled down to. And they were looking to make sure you were paying the rights rate of pay and all that.

Interviewer: But you must have been unusual now to join a union while you were subbying!....

John: Well doesn't it...just shows you who they'd take! [Laughter]. Once you were in the union, showing the card, if a bloke came in on the site he'd go away and leave you along.

Interviewer: You had no more explaining to do.

John: No you didn't have anything.

Interviewer: I have got other questions there about traditional Irish music but I know all that, there is no point in going...we and we know about the links with most of the people that you or I knew I'd say in traditional music in London in that period, nearly all involved in the construction industry, there were hardly any I can think of...but it was...put it this way it was more unusual to find somebody who wasn't a builder than to find someone who was.

John: Did you know the fellow use to live beside Ted McGowan, he was an awful...Paddy Hunt, did you ever hear of him?

Interviewer: The flute player?

John: No this man didn't play anything, but he was an awful man for music. But a gang of them went out to Jersey working and there was Bobby Casey was one of them and a gang of them, and none of them had a ha'penny put together. But Paddy was the man with the money.

Interviewer: Did Bobby work in the construction industry?

John: He did...well he was there! But, Paddy...they went out anyway and bejasus the first day they didn't bother about the work, they went to the pub and of course Bobby

Original Interview # 13 – John P – Roscommon

use to hypnotise them with the fiddle and...he use to adore him and well, anyway, Paddy kept them going for a fortnight in money and Paddy ran out [of money] and they had to come back again – sure they never done a stroke, drunk every day from morning to night. He use to say he'd rather hear Bobby tuning the fiddle.

Interviewer: Ah yeah. Anyway I think we have enough to be keeping us going.

End.

Original Interview # 14 – Sean G – Leitrim

Name: Date of Birth: 10/4/1968
Place of Birth: Ballinaglera, Co. Leitrim
Date of Emigration to UK: 1986
Date of Interview: 16/12/2017
Location of Interview: Author's house, Co. Roscommon

Interviewer: So, we are, Wednesday 13th December and I'm with Sean G. So, I suppose all I need to know, really, to start with I suppose the easiest way to do it, is to start at the beginning as they say. So, tell me where you're from, what year you were born, where you grew up?

Sean: I was born in a place called Curraghlubber, well actually I was born in Garden Hill Nursing Home in Sligo, because that's where my mother went to have me. But I was reared in Curraghlubber Ballinaglera, Leitrim and my family have been around there for 400 years, before that I don't know, because the records go back to the 1700s in the same town land, a place called Curraghlubber.

Interviewer: What year were you born?

Sean: I was born 10th April 1969 a couple of months before Armstrong landed on the moon! [Laughs]

Interviewer: Okay, so you were brought up in North Leitrim obviously.

Sean: Yes just inside the confines of North Leitrim because Drumshanbo would be the midpoint so it's about seven miles into North Leitrim if you like.

Interviewer: And what did your parents do?

Sean: My mother was a general nurse all her life, she worked for 44 years as a general nurse.

Interviewer: Did she ever work in England as a matter of interest?

Sean: No, she didn't, she served her time in Jervis Street Hospital in Dublin and one of her first jobs was pumping drink out of Brendan Behan! When you'd be a trainee nurse that time you'd be given all the dirty jobs!

Interviewer: Well that's certainly a dirty job! [Laughs]

Sean: She remembers that. But then she got a job then in Manorhamilton Hospital, she worked there as a general nurse for most of her 44 years nursing....

Original Interview # 14 – Sean G – Leitrim

Interviewer: And what did your father do?

Sean: He worked with the Department of Agriculture, he was an artificial inseminator, known in the trade as an AI man or a bull man, there was some great stories told when he was working as a bull man, he wasn't tallest of men, but he was fierce craic, he was 5ft 7 like myself. But the first time he was called over to bull a cow, was over in North West Mayo and the people hadn't a clue about what was going to happen, they didn't know anything about this. Basically, it's bull's sperm that's diluted 1 in 10 and it's kept in liquid nitrogen. And that's then injected into the cow. But the artificial inseminator who is carrying out the job, has to know the cow and has to know that everything is right and favourable, it's only certain sperms will match with certain heifers and all that.

Interviewer: Serious scientific business.

Sean: Yes, my father had a very high conception rate now as a bull man, but one of his first jobs anyway over in North West Mayo, people didn't know what to expect, they didn't understand the whole concept of this. So, there was a woman, the husband was over in England and the woman was working on the farm, next thing she seen this 5ft 7 lad, coming up the lane and she met him at the door and "*How're you doing? I'm Josie G-, I'm the bull man*". "*Oh you're the bull man, oh you're welcome Josie,*" says she, "*the heifer is out in the byer Josie*" she says, "*and on the way out*" she says, "*...you'll see a nail on the back of the door for your trousers!*" [Laughs]

Interviewer: She sure had a slightly mis-conceived idea of what it is! [Laughs].

Sean: But there was some great stories told about him at his funeral, because he had a high conception rate, the calves that would have been born would always be lucky calves, you know some calves would die young, but anyway...but he used to take a drink too. He'd have an aul bottle of whiskey shoved down behind the liquid nitrogen to keep it cool, there was no heed on drink driving them days, but you'd never see a drink on him, he was in control of the whole situation. But anyway at his funeral this lady says to me - she was an old woman and my father use to bull all her cattle, and in the business you'd say, if the cow managed to become in calf, you'd say *she held*, you know? She held the sperm, and she says - "*Jesus you're a son of Josie's*" she says to me at to the funeral and my father laid out in the room, "*I'd know by the head o'ya*". I said "*I am surely*". "*By Jasus*" she said, "*he was some character...all Josie had to do was look across the hedge at the heifer and the heifer would hold!*" [Laughs]

So yeah, I grew up on a small farm.

Interviewer: And have you many siblings?

Original Interview # 14 – Sean G – Leitrim

Sean: Yes, there was four of us born in five years. My sister Ursula is the oldest she was born in '68, I was born in '69, in fact we are same age for 13 days, because she was born on the 23rd April '68, I'm second and then Finton is the third, he was born in March '71 and then Enda was born in May '72, there is 4 of us.

Interviewer: And where did you go to school?

Sean: My first school was Urbla National School, and would you believe it Mick I remember seeing the desks with the ink well in them and all that, the ink well was sunk into the desk. And it was a one teacher school and Mary Donal was my teacher and she was a lovely, lovely woman and we are still friends to this day. And that school closed in 1975, so I was only there for about maybe one year, low infants and then I went to Dowra, Dowra was like moving to a big city. And we went down to Dowra and the rest of my national school education was done there. And then my secondary school education then was done in Drumkeeran.

Interviewer: The community school or whatever they call it?

Sean: Yeah where the community centre is now, that's where I went to school.

Interviewer: That was the old school.

Sean: Yes, the new school now is Lough Allen College that was built just after I left.

Interviewer: What age did you leave school at? Did you do junior and leaving and all that?

Sean: Oh, I did yeah, I done my inter-cert as they called it at that time and then I done my leaving cert, and I got enough points in the leaving cert to be accepted into the Sligo RTC as it was known as at the time, Regional Technical College RTC now it's Sligo IT. And there is IT's scattered around the country, Dundalk and Sligo, well I went to the one in Sligo, I done a national certificate in Civil Engineering and then I got a credit in that and I was accepted into the diploma. So, I done a national diploma in water engineering which is civil engineering, but specialising in water, you know.

Interviewer: That's interesting, so when you were growing up, effectively the experience you would have had growing up would have presumably been farm work?

Sean: Yeah.

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Interviewer: And everything involved with that, so did you always intend to go into Civil Engineering?

Sean: I'll tell you, to be honest, I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I enjoyed the building industry because, when I was growing up I'd be helping local builders and stuff, you know local fellas, I enjoyed the work.

Interviewer: You liked that kind of work?

Sean: But Civil Engineering as you know, is not building its more infrastructure like roads, bridges and all that stuff, I hadn't even completed the Diploma when I had a job lined up on the Dartford Bridge, now known as the QE2 Bridge.

Interviewer: Right, I was going to ask you that, so?

Sean: Your man came over and interviewed us before we got the Diploma and the job was ours pending on the Diploma.

Interviewer: Did he come over to Sligo IT?

Sean: No, he came to Dublin, he was sent over by Cementation Construction to recruit young Irish graduates, and we seen it advertised in Sligo on the noticeboard in Sligo IT, and we went up to Dublin on the train, a few of us.

Interviewer: What year was that now?

Sean: '89. 1989.

Interviewer: So, had you up until then had you any specific notion of going to England?

Sean: I went to England during the summers, 1986 I left Drumkeeran.

Interviewer: When was the first time you went to England?

Sean: The first time I went to England was the summer of 1987, because I left Drumkeeran school in 1986, the summer of '86, and in September of that year then, of '86, I started my Civil Engineering course in Sligo IT. When I had my first year completed, that would have been May 1987, I then went to England. That was my first time going to England.

Interviewer: And that was because of this job?

Sean: No, no, no I just went over there labouring, I didn't even have a job, I just went over there for the summer, for the craic and to try and make a few pound for college. The job came later, the job condition was that I

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had to pass my Diploma to get the job on the Dartford Bridge, so your man interviewed us before we completed our Diploma, but he said if you get your Diploma the job is yours. That was 1989.

Interviewer: But you had already been over doing labouring and bits and pieces for long, had you?

Sean: Well, the first year I went over it was all labouring, I was working a subby called Martin O'Halloran, that was in the summer of '87, and I can tell you Mick, I went over,

Interviewer: (Cutting-in) While I think of it, you went over looking for work or whatever, did you have contacts over in England?

Sean: None, none, I'd no contact, I didn't have a job, I had nothing.

Interviewer: So, you literally went on spec?

Sean: I went on spec, yeah, I went on spec.

Interviewer: And how did you cope?

Sean: I'll never forget it, I tell you what, I went from a green-horn from Ballinaglera right - that was before I went to England - and three months later after having spent a summer in London, all the greenhornness was rattled out of me, I'll tell you that!

Interviewer: Did you go over on the boat?

Sean: I went over on the boat Mick, I got from Dublin to Holyhead, then I got a train from Holyhead direct to Euston Station, and when I came out of Euston Station - I tell a lie, I had a contact, just for digs, the fella I went over with was a fella called Martin Sheeran, and he was in college with me in Sligo, he was from Swinford, County Mayo, we could stay with his aunt for a couple days, but just for a couple of days until we got our own little place.

Interviewer: So, it was just to get set up?

Sean: Yeah. But we had no job, or we had nowhere to stay really, we had no permanent place to stay, only this man's aunt, Martin Sheeran's aunt had kindly agreed to put us up for a couple of nights until we got our own place,

Interviewer: If you don't mind me asking a personal question, did you have enough money to keep you tied over?

Sean: Oh, we had enough money to keep us going for a couple of weeks.

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Interviewer: You would have been okay?

Sean: For couple of weeks, yeah. And she was staying in Maura Road in Cricklewood, that's where I was staying. I remember at the time it was the Willesden Green, Cricklewood border, so when we got off the train in Euston we were very tired like; it was nonstop, and we wouldn't have been used to the travelling you know, and when we landed we got an underground train, or over ground, I can't remember, but we went to Willesden Junction instead of Willesden Green. We should have went to Willesden Green, and when we got off in Willesden Junction we were looking for ages for this Maura Road that didn't exist. So, anyway eventually we had to ask a Copper, a bobby on the beat, where was Maura Road, and he said there's no Maura Road around here. So, we thought what the hell is going on here like, so we eventually found out that Maura Road was in Willesden Green, not Willesden Junction, so we had to get a taxi to Willesden Green, and we found that woman very late at night. I got my first job, then, standing outside the Cricklewood café,

Interviewer: Did you literally go up and hang around to see if you could get a start?

Sean: I stood outside with all the rest of the Irish lads at six o'clock in the morning and this subby came up, there was a load of subbys, just one after the other coming up with their vans, and this fella walked up to me and he says, "you looking for a start?" And I said, "Yeah". And that's how I got my start and his name was Martin O'Halloran, he was from County Clare, he was a subby, and I spent the summer working for him. That's how I got my start.

Interviewer: So, what were you doing with him?

Sean: Labouring, just general labouring, you know.

Interviewer: Where did you work?

Sean: Worked all over London, worked in several different jobs, I worked right beside the Highbury Pub, sorry the Arsenal rather, Blackstock Road, we worked there on a job, that was my first job and then I went down to London Bridge, we worked there on another job. He was supplying labour to different jobs around London, I also worked down in Ladbroke Grove,

Interviewer: Must have been kind of good work I'd say for experience as a young lad, you were what age at that time?

Sean: I was 18, I enjoyed the work but the drink culture, my eyes were opened up big time to the carry on of the Irish over there, I couldn't believe it like, what I was seeing, because I went from -

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- Interviewer: (Cutting-in) You would have been used to having a drink or two but not like -
- Sean: I suppose it was connected in a way to the drink culture, but I just felt that the Irish let themselves go in the part of London I was living in. We eventually got digs myself and the Sheeran lad, Martin Sheeran - we eventually got digs in a place, the address was 35 Pine Road, Cricklewood. All the roads in Cricklewood are called after trees, Pine Road and Ivy Road.
- Interviewer: Because at one time it would have been quite a leafy sort of suburb.
- Sean: We stayed in this house, we had one room rented in this house, the address of the house was 35, Pine Road, the fella who owned it was Mayo man and he had all the rooms converted into little bedsits, and we all had our own little gas cooker, but everyone in the house was sharing one toilet like, they weren't great conditions now, it was rough yeah, and also, just the carry on of the Irish at the weekend like, urinating in the middle of the Broadway in Cricklewood like.
- Interviewer: Just out of interest, can you remember how much these digs would cost you in rent, for example?
- Sean: I can't remember now, I can't remember the cost of the digs Mick, but I remember at the time we worked it out, he was making huge amounts of money because there was about maybe 10 or 12 of us staying in this house, and we were all paying rent to this man,
- Interviewer: It wasn't lodging in the way of like, he didn't cook you any food or?... you had to look after yourself?
- Sean: Oh, you had to look after yourself, yeah.
- Interviewer: And you had one toilet in the whole house?
- Sean: One toilet in the whole house, yeah, an upstairs toilet we all had to share, and sometimes you could be waiting outside for half an hour.
- Interviewer: And especially as you say, if the drink culture was that bad like, do you remember the infamous pubs, the likes of the Crown?
- Sean: Oh yeah, we drank in the Crown every weekend, and the Cricklewood Hotel was another place, we also drank in McGovern's down in Kilburn. We went between Cricklewood and Kilburn, you know but, I tell you, to be honest Mick I didn't enjoy that summer because I couldn't believe how the Irish were letting themselves go, and I was a very proud young Irish lad, and these lads, I'm not going to name any names or anything, but like... I'll never forget I felt an awful feeling of guilt one night when I seen two bouncers dragging a lad out of the

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- Crown in Cricklewood, they just pulled him from the bar, whatever shenanigans he was up to I don't know, but anyway they pulled him outside the bar, and I was watching them, and they pulled him outside and they hammered him up against the wall, through the window so everybody could see it, and nobody done a thing to intervene - including myself like! - And the sense of guilt I felt over that is still with me today. I probably couldn't have done anything about it because I was a young skinny lad.
- Interviewer: You probably would have got a hiding for interfering anyway.
- Sean: But I couldn't believe that two Irish bouncers would do that to one of their own, in a strange country. He didn't do that much out of the way, you know what I mean? But he got a serious hammering outside and it was done in full view, everybody could look through the window and see it happening.
- Interviewer: Do you think they were making a...y'know...trying to put fear into everyone else?
- Sean: Probably, yeah, because it wasn't done very subtly, I didn't enjoy the summer because... I enjoyed the work, but I didn't enjoy the exploitation of the...like the landlord was exploiting us too in the house, with conditions and all the money he was making from us, and the same fella, the same Mayo man, I won't mention his name, but he owned two or three houses in Cricklewood, and they were all full up with Irish workers.
- Interviewer: So, he was coining it?
- Sean: Oh, he was coining it, yeah, but one great memory I have is listening to the GAA games on the radio, all the Irish in the street just congregating around the radio, I remember that, that's a good memory.
- Interviewer: Was the subby that you worked for sound enough?
- Sean: If you let him away with it, the level of exploitation would be fairly high as well, if you let him away with it but I didn't let him away with it. He would have done me on the SC60, you know the SC60 is the form you get when you're self-employed, you get a form at the end of the summer and you can claim back your tax, he didn't give me the form, I had to get a solicitor on the job to get the SC60 out of him, you know what I mean? He was living - I'll never forget his address - his address was 110 Southbury Road, Enfield, that was his address and I'd had to go out there to the house sometimes to get the wages where he wouldn't turn up to pay me, I'd have to end up getting a bloody train up to his house in Enfield to get paid like,
- Interviewer: Fucking you around?

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- Sean: Oh, big time.
- Interviewer: Do you think that's because you were young and a green horn?
- Sean: Oh yeah, of course.
- Interviewer: He knew he could.
- Sean: Oh, he knew he could, he never stung me because I always got paid but he made it hard.
- Interviewer: Do you think he would have stung you if you let him away with it?
- Sean: Oh, he would of course, I would have never seen that SC60 only I got my solicitor, Gabriel Toolan from Ballinamore to send him a letter once I came back to Ireland, he said he was going to forward the SC60 on to my address in Ireland, but he never did, so I had to get the solicitor and once he got the solicitor's letter, the SC60 came very quickly after that.
- Interviewer: He would have been scared of the solicitor's letter I'd say, you know yourself a lot of them subbys over there they weren't paying any tax anyway, and presumably the way it was working for you as an example, he was taking tax from you in your pay, is that?
- Sean: Yeah that's exactly what it was.
- Interviewer: So, say he's supposed to be paying you, I don't know, £50 a shift, he would pay you £50 less the income tax, which you then should have been getting back because you were self-employed and presumably as well as that, you wouldn't have been earning enough at that time,
- Sean: I was probably below the threshold.
- Interviewer: So, you would have been on, effectively what he was doing was taking what they used to call emergency tax,
- Sean: And putting it in his own pocket.
- Interviewer: How many other people was he doing that to? And how many people, the stuff I'm writing, the research that I'm writing has a whole chapter on what went on with 714s and 715s and the tax exemption system because that was actually a bigger disaster than the lump. You came way after the lump in the '60s. It was a disaster because it was basically - there was an illegal system of working in the construction industry where everybody was just paid as an ad hoc contractor, so they went to outlaw that in 1974, and what they came out with was even worse than what they started with, it was even more open to

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- abuse than the system that had been there before. Hence you could walk into the Crown or the Archway and buy 714s from people who forged them and used them to trade and to get paid nett of tax, take the tax off the guys who were working for you and disappear, they were all at it. But anyway, I don't want to go on too much about that. So, you spent the summer over there basically?
- Sean: I spent the summer of '87 over there, I enjoyed the work and I met some great characters on the work, but a big portion of the lads I was working with had been in London for years, it was all Irish lads, predominately now, a few English lads, a few Scot lads.
- Interviewer: But mainly Irish?
- Sean: Yeah and I would say 70% of the people I worked with were alcoholics, looking back on it now, because there was, we went for three or four pints every single lunchtime, and soon as the shift was over back again, you know, and there wouldn't have been anything at the end of the week, I came out of London with nothing, I worked hard at it for that summer but I had the whole lot drunk, because I got sucked into the culture, you know, and I came back and in '87, back to college to start my second year, and I completed my National Certificate in Civil Engineering in May 1988, and then I went to London again for the second consecutive summer, Cementation was 1989, that's when I finished my Diploma,
- Interviewer: So, you finished your second year,
- Sean: I finished my second year and I went back to London, I had a contact this time.
- Interviewer: I guess you would have done from the year before, would you?
- Sean: I did, I had a few contacts from the year before and also a lad that I was in college with, Ben Connolly from Rosinnver in north Leitrim, we were staying with his brother; his brother was living in Boreham Wood, where the Etree Studios are.
- Interviewer: He was nothing to Jim Connolly, was he?
- Sean: No, no relation.
- Interviewer: Just wondering [Laughs]
- Sean: We were staying with his brother for a couple of days but then we eventually got digs in Hendon, and they were lovely digs in Hendon, in between Edgware and Cricklewood.
- Interviewer: Was that an Irish house?

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- Sean: No, it wasn't, it was an English lad owned the house, it was a lovely house now, we had the house to ourselves,
- Interviewer: This time you were renting a house effectively?
- Sean: That's right, it was myself and Ben Connolly and a lad from Ballaghaderreen, called Joe Geever. And there was five or six of us in the house, but we had the house to ourselves and it was a lovely house.
- Interviewer: So, that was a different arrangement from -
- Sean: A different arrangement. And myself and Connolly went looking for work, we had no work arranged when we went over. We were working within two days, both of us got two great jobs with the same firm on the same construction project, we went into. It was Shepherds Bush, I think, Duffy and Carr was the subby, they had their headquarters near Shepherds Bush I think.
- Interviewer: Big Tir Connel Gael men I think, Donegal football.
- Sean: Donegal, Sligo connection there, one of them was Sligo I think, or Mayo and the other lad was Donegal.
- Interviewer: They were a big joinery, big carpentry outfit, that was their main -
- Sean: Shuttering, yeah.
- Interviewer: They're still going, but they're not called Duffy and Carr now, they're called Duffy Construction or something like that.
- Sean: We just went into their head office, I don't know, somebody told us about them, oh yeah there was a lad in college with us called Seamus Hardiman from Swinford, County Mayo. His father was a foreman with them, and he also had an uncle who was another foreman with them, so it was two brothers working with the same firm and one of them was called Spot and the other fella was called Dot, Hardman's father was called Spot because he could spot everything, he was a foreman, he could spot everything. And the other fella was called Dot because he kept following Spot around, so it was like a little dot after spot, so you had Spot and Dot! [Laughs]. But anyway, we had heard about Spot and Dot through Seamus Hardiman who would have been Spot's son, and he was in college with us in Sligo. Hardiman told us to go down to Duffy and Carr and do an interview, you know just walk in and see if there was any work, so when we went down there we didn't have any meeting arranged, we just walked in and we seen the head honcho in there, I forget his name, very nice man, English fella, and he interviewed myself and Connolly there and then, and don't forget we had just qualified, we had our National Certificates in Civil

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- Engineering in our back pockets, so we were qualified to set out on a job. So we both got jobs, they were looking for setting out engineers on a big project down in Kingston on Thames - on the banks of the river, a John Lewis superstore - and Duffy and Carr were doing all the ground work and all the shuttering for that job, and myself and Connolly got jobs as two setting out Engineers there for the summer and it was great money. I forget the money now, but it was great money, we were on treble what we were on the previous summer labouring, and we met some great characters down there too.
- Interviewer: So, I imagine you'd kind of wised up a bit by then?
- Sean: We had wised up at that stage, but Duffy and Carr were really looking after us now, they were picking us up from Hendon, bringing us to the job in Kingston and bringing us home again on a minibus. There was a bus coming down from Edgware down through Hendon, down through Cricklewood and going across the city down into Kingston, and it was going on a main drag, it was a great service. We had no travelling expenses.
- Interviewer: Well I have to say now that most of the people that I know, and I know a few people that worked for Duffy and Carr over the years, I never did anything for them, they are very highly regarded; they seem to be, they weren't fly by nights, you know.
- Sean: They were a very professional set up.
- Interviewer: They seem to be, yeah.
- Sean: But again, the drink culture was serious that summer,
- Interviewer: Even the second summer?
- Sean: Oh yeah, we went for pints every single lunchtime during the course of that summer in a pub in Kingston-on-Thames. It wasn't an Irish pub now, it was like a working man's pub, but I enjoyed that summer, I really enjoyed that summer.
- Interviewer: Like you say the drink culture, I would have been working around that time for Mansell's, even in the office and on the site offices there was a drink culture, it was just what you did. You went to the pub at lunchtime and you had three or four pints, and you might then go back again later. I'd say the Irish lads now were probably (bad on the drink), again because a lot of you were young single men, kind of on your own, or just in group together, what else are you going to do, are you going to go back to the digs and look at four walls? You're going to go drinking, so they did.

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- Sean: It was a great summer though, it was the summer of the Euro '88 football championships, Ireland had beaten England with the Ray Houghton header in Stuttgart, that was in June '88 and that happened the day before I went to England, so I seen the first game at home in Ballinaglera, where England were beaten by Ireland, it was the first ever tournament Ireland had qualified for, major tournament, and we had beaten England against all the odds, and then I seen the other two games over in London.
- Interviewer: The famous Christy Moore song [Laughs]
- Sean: The famous Christy Moore song, yes, so it was a great summer because there was a great buzz around with all the Irish fraternity in London supporting the soccer, we had just beaten England and it was a massive thing; I really enjoyed that summer.
- Interviewer: Would you have been hanging around the same parts of town, Cricklewood, Kilburn?
- Sean: No not really. You see I was in Hendon, so it was a little bit out of Cricklewood.
- Interviewer: There's a fair old Irish contingent in Hendon I think as well.
- Sean: We used to drink in some of the pubs in Hendon and we used to go down to the National there in Kilburn.
- Interviewer: That's funny when we were talking earlier about the Bothy Band, that's where I first saw the Bothy, in the National.
- Sean: The Careys owned it at the time, Carey Construction, and Biddy Mulligan's we used to go in there across the road beforehand.
- Interviewer: Dangerous spot [Laughs] I always found that a dangerous spot anyway, I would have been drinking in there around the same time, because we used to college at Willesden Tech, up near Dollis Hill Tube Station, and if we went on the tear then we'd go down to Kilburn then.
- Sean: County Kilburn, there were some great stories about the lads living in Kilburn then. I was probably telling you this one before, there was a fella there called the Cockney Daly, he owned a few houses there, but he had inherited the houses apparently from his mother and father. They called him the Cockney Daly because he was born in Kilburn of Irish parents, and they owned a lot of houses that were converted into bedsits for Irish workers. But anyway by the time the parents had passed away the houses were all paid for and everything fell to the Cockney Daly, who had a serious drink problem but he was also a serious character, so money wouldn't have been a problem, you

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- know?, because the money was coming in every week from the tenants and he didn't have any overheads so he didn't have to work. He made use of his time by drinking. He was walking from Cricklewood to Kilburn one night, and there's a road that connects Cricklewood and Kilburn, its called Shoot-up Hill, and he was walking from Cricklewood towards Kilburn, so he was walking down Shoot-up Hill, and he had been on the beer all day up in Cricklewood there. To make a long story short, he felt that he needed to go to the toilet, and it was a *number you-know-what*, the serious one, and he was in a bit of a predicament because he was desperate and he was at least 15 or 20 minutes away from his destination in Kilburn. But luckily enough he was passing by a house and he knew the owner of the house, he knew her, she was an Irish landlady who had tenants in the house as well. So he was just hoping that she would be there; when he went to knock on the door he was just praying that she'd be there to let him in so he could use the toilet. She did answer the door and he explained his predicament, and the toilet was up at the top of the stairs. So she says, "Will you wait there a minute Cockney, just for once, just bear with me for a minute", so she knew about his predicament and the imminent,
- Interviewer: Disaster was that was befall him [Laughs]
- Sean: Exactly, I couldn't have put it better myself Mick. So she left the Cockney waiting at the threshold outside, the door was open and the toilet was up at the top of the stairs, and the stairs were facing him as he looked into the house, and he could see the door to the toilet at the top of the stairs. So she started lining the hallway with newspaper from the door, right, and she was halfway up the stairs with the newspaper when the Cockney says to her, "ma'm you needn't be worried about any more newspaper" he said, "because the show's all over".
- Interviewer: [Laughs] The damage was done.
- Sean: The tail board had slipped. But there was great stories like that flying around.
- Interviewer: [Laughs] I could well believe it, God Almighty, so did you end up working on the same job for the summer?
- Sean: Yeah, I was on that job for the whole summer, and the job would have been six or eight months in progress by the time we started in June '88 and when we left -
- Interviewer: (cutting-in) What was it, like a corporate trade building or something, was it?
- Sean: It was a John Lewis superstore, in Kingston-on-Thames, basically Duffy and Carr done all the ground work and they done the whole shell

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of the building, all the decks and all the columns, we were setting it out, we spent an awful lot of time levelling the decks where the chippies had been twisting up the acrows.

Interviewer: Good work though,

Sean: It was a great job, and we were working with great people, there were some great foremen down there for Duffy and Carr who knew exactly what they were doing.

Interviewer: Were most of the labour force that they had then all have been Irish?

Sean: Yeah, the whole Duffy and Carr men were Irish, and first generation Irish as well, most of them, there was a great atmosphere on the job like, you know, and it was a nice summer as well, I remember it was nice weather,

Interviewer: That was a better experience than the first year?

Sean: That was a very good experience, yeah. I came back then in September '88 to do my Diploma. You had to get a credit in your Certificate to be accepted on to the Diploma course, a credit was 60% average, so I was lucky enough I got the credit and then I was able to go on the Diploma course. So I finished my Diploma, yeah, and I'd say I was about a month away from doing the exams; that would have been around, maybe two months, it would have been March '89, and we seen an advertisement on the noticeboard in Sligo that Cementation Construction were coming over to a hotel in Dublin to interview graduates for Civil Engineering projects that Cementation Construction were involved in Britain. It didn't specify any jobs but they were just looking for graduates to work on projects in Britain. So we went up, a few of us, went up on the train from Carrick and got off the train in Connolly Station in Dublin and headed for the hotel and we got the job pending that we would get the Diploma.

Interviewer: So, you had to get your Diploma,

Sean: Had to get the Diploma. So when we got the Diploma we contacted Cementation and they sent over all the package. We were on the cards you know?

Interviewer: with a company like Cementation you'd have to be, they were a big outfit, what were actually employed as?

Sean: Setting out Engineer on the Dartford Bridge in 1989. We were Junior Engineers; we were classed as Junior Engineers.

Interviewer: That was a colossal job.

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Sean: It was a massive job. It was an £86 million contract, which was a big job. But there were a lot of good characters on that job too, a lot of English lads on that job now, but there were some good characters on that job.

Interviewer: You were working direct for Cementation?

Sean: I was yeah, and I could have stayed on that job right until the end.

Interviewer: That was a permanent position?

Sean: That was a permanent position yeah. But I left after three months because I got accepted into Middlesex University to do a Degree in Civil Engineering, BEng Honours, so that's why I left. I left Cementation to do that, so I started in Middlesex University in Bounds Green in September '89.

Interviewer: So that was a full-time student again?

Sean: Full time student again, yeah, and I had a few problems because I had been working for the three months at Cementation and -

Interviewer: Did you get a bit of a grant, you must have got some sort of a grant?

Sean: I don't think, maybe I might have got the fees paid, yeah. But anyway, what happened to me then, I was approaching the age of 21, and that was my first introduction really, not my first introduction but my first serious introduction to Irish Traditional music, and my whole world when I realised it, the whole emphasis had shifted from the construction industry and a drink culture and all that towards the Traditional Irish Flute. I just became obsessed with the flute, even though I couldn't play it, but I just done everything I could to try and play it. I was living in digs not far from Wood Green.

Interviewer: This is while you're still going to college now?

Sean: This is while I was going to college, yeah, I was going to college in Bounds Green in Middlesex University, but I didn't do much study because I was just...the music had taken over my life, like. Look, I didn't have any aspirations of becoming a professional musician or anything, because I couldn't even play the damn thing. I knew it was in me but I didn't realise that I was so obsessed with it until I started actually getting into thing. I remember having a tape of Tommy Guihan, a great flute player from the Roscommon, Leitrim border on the shores of Lough Allen, a place called Mount Allen actually, very close to Drumshanbo town, about two miles from Drumshanbo, Tommy Guihan lives. He hadn't made a CD at the time but there were some great recordings of him floating around where he was playing at concerts and it had ended up on radio shows and my neighbours

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Sweden McPartland had taped Tommy playing at these concerts on the radio and Sweep, my neighbour gave me the tape. And this tape became kind of a bible for me, and I was just...I'll never forget the name of the tune, *Over the Moor to Maggie*, it took me about three months to learn that tune, bit by bit by bit, kept playing it and rewinding it on the old cassette recorder; play and rewind, play and rewind, play and rewind. Three months later I had the tune and it was like I was after winning a million dollars. But college had suffered big time like, and to be honest I wasn't bothered about the degree because I had my Diploma anyway, and I really enjoyed that year, I really enjoyed that year.

Interviewer: So, did you go back and do any work?

Sean: No. Well you see I was contracted to college for two years but I pulled out after the first year because I don't think I even sat the exams you know. I was going in and out to class an odd time but I had taken a year off basically. Music had just...I started reading about it...I realised then I could play. Then I was on the look out for a good flute and I was over and back to Ireland. Ireland became a completely different place to me then, because we were arranging music sessions in my home town in Ballinaglera and the craic was absolutely serious. I knew then at the age of 21 that music was going to form a massive part of my life from then onwards.

Interviewer: So, after however long, a year of, when you pulled out of college if you like,

Sean: When I pulled out of college I went back to Ireland for that summer, I went back working on the farm that summer; came back to Ireland and started learning a good few tunes back in Ireland. And I started going to a lot of sessions and all that, and then I went back to London in...I got a job on the Limehouse Link Tunnel, and I was on that job for about three years.

Interviewer: So '89 was the year you went to college you said, wasn't it?

Sean: '89 was the year I went to college, yeah.

Interviewer: So, are we into the '90s now?

Sean: You're into 1990, yeah, you're into the autumn of 1990. Sorry Mick, no, I got a job at Barnhill Construction first, I was working for a firm called Barnhill Construction.

Interviewer: That's another Irish company.

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Sean: Yeah Connemara, one of them is in Connemara anyway, and there was another fella called Wexford Tom, he was another serious character, he was one of the fellas who kind of help set it up,

Interviewer: All of these boys had kind of, you know, Wexford Tom, Limerick Eddie was another fella that dad worked with, they all had these, think there were several reasons for them doing that, it wasn't just craic [Laughs]

Sean: Yeah, this Wexford Tom, Tom O'Leary I think his name was, he was a serious operator now, I worked for them for a while, they were doing massive big shafts, segment shafts, like they would have been relining old sewers, we worked up in Camden.

Interviewer: What were you doing for them, were you driving machines by this time?

Sean: No. I was kind of...I wasn't setting out with them, I was more or less, I was in the tunnels like, I was in the tunnels with the miners, and its great money, hard work. We were down in the pipe track and shield and the miner would be knocking the muck onto a plate. I'd be filling buggies with what he was knocking down, and the miner would be on so much a ring, once they had their target reached that was it, they just packed it up for the week. They could have been finished at one o'clock on a Friday and gone, job and knock, job and finish. It was great money. A lot more money out of that than setting out, so I stuck that out for a couple of years and then I got with...actually Mick I'm getting a little bit mixed up here now.

Interviewer: That's alright.

Sean: Barnhill Construction came after the Limehouse Link. I got a job on the Limehouse Link, Mick. I was setting out on that with a subby. I started on the Limehouse Link in the autumn of 1990, and I left around March, April 1993. I was almost three years on that job. Now I'm unfolding the memory pages! I dropped out of college in June 1990, in Middlesex University - I'm not going to bother anymore - then I went back to Ireland for that summer because I was so immersed in the music, and then I came back to London then around September, October 1990 and got a job on the Limehouse link Tunnel.

Interviewer: Who was that with?

Sean: It was a joint venture between Fairclough and Balfour Beatty,

Interviewer: Who were you working for?

Sean: I was working for a subby, I was a setting out Engineer with a subby, I can't remember his name. He was a sound fella now.

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Interviewer: Were they Irish?

Sean: They were Irish, yeah, he was from Tipperary, but he was a sound man to work for now, I could have got a job direct with Balfour Beatty but the subby was offering better money,

Interviewer: As was often the case.

Sean: And I was doing the same job anyway, also it suited me because the subby was paying weekly, Balfour Beatty were paying monthly,

Interviewer: Big contractors by that time were all paying monthly.

Sean: But it was a fantastic job. I met Marcus Hernon on that job. I often said, "Marcus, you only stuck it for two weeks, I stuck it for nearly three years", but he was heading for Australia. Marcus Hernon, a great flute player from south Connemara, he was heading for Australia at that time, but he got two weeks work on the Limehouse Link, he was working as a scaffolder there.

Interviewer: He's the right build for a scaffolder [Laughs]

Sean: That's the first... he was playing a Hammy Hamilton flute at that time, he had to get a new head made for it and he was delighted with it.

Interviewer: Some player.

Sean: Some player, but that was a fantastic job now, I learnt a lot on that job.

Interviewer: Were you working for this one subby the whole time?

Sean: I was working for the one subby for the three years and I was working on the east end of the tunnel for the three years, the east end portal.

Interviewer: So, you were Canning Town?

Sean: Poplar.

Interviewer: Its hard to believe now, I was probably about a mile and a half up the road from you for most of those three years,

Sean: My God that's a sight.

Interviewer: We were living in Plaistow at that time.

Sean: I know it well, yeah.

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Interviewer: Just off Prince Regents Lane, do you know where Newham General Hospital is?

Sean: I do, yeah.

Interviewer: Just opposite that, that's where Matthew was born.

Sean: Is that right, yeah? So, we were right beside each other.

Interviewer: And Liam Kelly, you're talking about flute players and we're going off the track but while I think of it, you had Marcus Hernon working there for a while, you were on it, I was living a mile and a half down the road and Liam Kelly was living about another mile up, just by the Boleyn Pub, two minutes' walk from Alison's mum and dad. He was in London at the same time, so we could have had a mighty session! [Laughs]

Sean: We could have had a mighty session; there were great timber blowers in the one area there. We were right beside the east end portal of the Limehouse link, Billingsgate Fish Market, and many the morning I was drinking pints in there at half four in the morning, half four in the morning, drinking pints in there, there was an early bar in it for the dock.

Interviewer: I was wondering that because it doesn't look like, you're talking about the new Billingsgate now, the one in front of Canary Wharf.

Sean: Is that the new one?

Interviewer: The old Billingsgate was in the middle of London.

Sean: Oh, was it?

Interviewer: Yeah, that's going back, way back.

Sean: I didn't know that, it looked like a new building anyways.

Interviewer: With the big yellow sign?

Sean: Big yellow sign, kind of a long low building.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, was there a bar in that one?

Sean: There was a bar, we were in there at half four many a morning, especially on a Monday morning now if we had a good old drink on the Sunday. We'd go up there and we'd have, oh my God, we'd have, we had to clock in, it was clock in and clock out with the subby, Balfour Beatty insisted that all the subbys clock in and clock out. If you were on the staff with Balfour Beatty/Fairclough you didn't have

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to clock in and clock out. But all the subbys had to clock in and clock out, and you were given a three minute leeway. We'd be in there at half four in the morning, we'd have maybe eight or nine pints at half four in the morning, and then go to work, as long as we clocked in for half seven, we'd often clock in then go straight back again mind! [Laughs]

That wouldn't be every morning now. If you had a good tear the day before, I tell you you'd need it to settle yourself, you know. But the drink culture on the Limehouse Link was nowhere near as bad as it had been, the first summer I went to London in '87. The drink culture there, I never experienced anything like it. We were in control of the situation on the Limehouse link now, it sounds bad telling you that we were in the Billingsgate Fish Market drinking pints at half four in the morning, but its like having eight or nine pints at night after work, except we were having it before work, there was no heed on drinking.

Interviewer: In those days there wasn't.

Sean: There wasn't, and there didn't seem to be any fatalities on the jobs because of drink and people just accepted it, you know, the work still got done.

Interviewer: These days we'd be locked up for doing that now.

Sean: You'd be locked up for that, yeah, it was one of the biggest road jobs in Europe at the time, it was a fantastic amount of work, I was living in Dartford at the time, down in Kent. There was an Irish club down there,

Interviewer: That must have been around the time we met?

Sean: Yeah, I met you in Dartford Irish Club when I was working on the tunnel, yeah, that would have been the early '90s, and then when the tunnel job finished, I got a job with Barnhill Construction. And one of the first jobs I had with Bamhill was building a road through a park near Mile End, and the name of the pub was the Palm Tree, right in the middle of a park. We built that road, there was never a road going into that pub, that pub was actually part of a street one time, but then the street was flattened during the war, and the only thing left was the pub. The British government made the pub a listed building because it survived the war. They just built a beautiful park around the pub, and the Palm Tree became a drinking house for people like David Jason and all these actors. Barnhill got the job of building a block paved road into it from the main road, very near Mile End.

Interviewer: I remember it.

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Sean: That was the first job I had with Barnhill Construction, we were in that pub every single day drinking. We were extras in some of the stuff they were shooting for. They were shooting ads for beer in there, and then you had Laurel and Hardy impersonators were doing some sort of tribute to Laurel and Hardy and they were all in the pub. These fellas looked exactly like Laurel and Hardy and we were just extras in the pub like, and we were working outside. It was a great job. I have great memories of that job. I was working with a man called - he was from Ballinlough, County Roscommon – Gerry...what was his second name? They called him the Long Miner; he was a huge man; when he lived in Manchester he was known as the original man of steel, because he was just such a hard man; oh he was a tough man. He was living on the job, I was living in Dartford, driving up and down.

Interviewer: When you're talking about tough men, do you mean tough working men?

Sean: I mean tough in every way, the softest part of Gerry was his teeth, I can tell you that now. [Laughs] They were trying to spear him at night with the ranging rods. You know the steel ranging rods you use for setting out? Its like a spear that you stick in the ground, its painted red and white. Well these young cockney kids broke into the compound one night and they stole the ranging rods, and they woke up Gerry and Gerry was sleeping in the compound at night, in the middle of the park; rough enough area around there at night around Mile End.

Interviewer: Sure who are ya tellin? I grew up around there [Laughs]

Sean: You know what its like. But anyway Gerry was chasing them around the park and they were trying spear him with the fecking ranging rods like, you know, and they weren't playing a game. They were trying to stick the ranging rods straight through him like. In the morning when we came in, when I drive up from Dartford into the job, it never took anything out of Gerry, it never bothered him at all, he was just a hard man, you know. What the hell was his second name? I can't think of his second name now, but anyway he was famous. They called him the *original man of steel* when he was working in Manchester because there was a fella getting married and he spent six months in a tunnel with Long Miner - Gerry from Ballinlough, Roscommon - and he had got the suit measured for the wedding but he had to get it re-measured twice before the wedding because he had lost so much weight shovelling after the Long Miner! Shovelling what he was knocking down in the face; he had to shovel it into the buggy, and he had to be re-measured twice because the weight was just falling off him working with the Long Miner. That was in '93, and then I worked up in Camden Town after that with Barnhill Construction and then I got a job, I never left Barnhill on bad terms, I got a job then with MJ Clancy's.

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- Interviewer: Oh, you worked for Clancy's did you?
- Sean: I worked for Clancy's yeah for about three years, better money, I went pipe laying for them then,
- Interviewer: Is that where you came across Andy Fleming was it?
- Sean: I never met Andy Fleming, but Andy Fleming was a big name, a legendary figure in MJ Clancy's, I worked that out pretty quickly, I was only there a couple of weeks and Andy Fleming's name was coming up all over the place, and I heard that he was mad into the music, he was a Kerry man, he trained up a lot of great pipe layers and I worked with two of them, Kinky Mick. Kinky Mick was a Clare man, Mick McMahon from Clare, Kinky Mick they called him, and the other man was Seamus Walsh.
- Interviewer: I'm not sure if I want to know, but why? [Laughs]
- Sean: I'll tell you why if you want to know, do you want to know?
- Interviewer: Do you want it on the tape? [Laughs]
- Sean: We'll leave it, we'll leave it.
- Interviewer: I think I can work it out [Laughs]
- Sean: The first job I had with them was down in Sandwich, down in Kent, and your man Greg Norman had just won the British Open down there, it was in Sandwich that year, and we went down just after him winning it, we brought a pipeline from Deal to Sandwich, a high-pressure pipeline, water main, ductile iron pipes.
- Interviewer: What were you at this stage, wee you setting out?
- Sean: No, I was pipe layer, I was working alongside some of the best machine drivers I'd ever seen. You see when I was working before I wasn't really working with that many machine drivers, setting out you wouldn't really be watching them, but when you've been working closely with a good machine driver, you see.
- Interviewer: Pipe laying is a different thing.
- Sean: You're hand and glove with the machine driver and you're realising my God these guys are artists, because you're working with a laser and you're talking about millimetres you know? And these fellas are able to work with millimetres and they're dealing with 30 tonne, 40 tonne excavators, but they're still dealing with millimetres when it comes to moving earth.

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- Interviewer: One of the things that kind of bugs me about that is machine drivers like that would be described on a timesheet as semi-skilled, so they're not as skilled say as a carpenter.
- Sean: It's an insult.
- Interviewer: I think it's an insult.
- Sean: And a pipe layer too, a pipe layer is a trade too, its not classed as a trade.
- Interviewer: No, it isn't, it's classed as a general labouring.
- Sean: It's a trade because you've to build manholes and everything and you have to be able to sink a shaft when you're working deep, you have to be able to work on bad ground.
- Interviewer: You have to understand as well how levels work and how to get the falls working, and how to set things out to that level of precision, that's not unskilled work, not in any way shape or form. So anyway, you were at that craic for?
- Sean: I was around the country with Clancy's. I was in Sandwich, and I was in Wales, over in a place called Neath, big rugby town, Junction 47 on the M4 motorway,
- Interviewer: I know Neath, I worked there myself, only for a couple of weeks.
- Sean: We done a big pumping station there with Clancy's, a lot of deep shafts.
- Interviewer: I actually liked Neath for some reason.
- Sean: Very friendly people, they didn't have much time for the English - the Welsh lads - the joke at the time was; we were all based in London, but we'd be travelling to Neath on the M4 motorway, we'd come off at junction 47 for Neath; when we were crossing the Severn Bridge - there was two Severn Bridges at that time, the other one was just built and before it was built the one bridge had to do for both directions, once the second bridge was built they changed on bridge for one direction and the other bridge for the other direction.
- Interviewer: (Adding-in) If I remember correctly you went into Wales on the new bridge and out of Wales on the old one, I think.
- Sean: I'll take your word for that, I can't remember that, one thing I do know is there was a toll on the bridge but when you were going into Wales from England you had to pay the toll, but when you were leaving Wales coming into England you didn't have to pay. So the joke was

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the Welsh used to love the fact that the English had to pay coming into Wales but they didn't have to pay to go into England. We were eating the dinner at this pub every single night called the Royal Exchange. It was owned by an ex-Metropolitan Police copper, a lovely fella, a fierce sound man, and he was cooking us the dinner every night in this pub. We were staying in the compound in caravans, we were living on the job like, at this pumping station. We were in the Royal Exchange pub every single night having the dinner and then the pints afterwards. We had great craic, I ended up playing every Thursday night in a pub called Seamus O'Donnell's in Swansea. I was playing the tin whistle there - it was a gig, a mic'ed up gig, and I was playing along with - I can't think of his name now, he was first generation Irish - and he was a great singer, he was a great pub singer and he'd get me up every now and again to play a tune. He used to accompany me on the guitar and he was quite a good accompanist. But all the lads from work, every Thursday night, we'd get a taxi over to Seamus O'Donnell's pub, there was about 13 pubs called Seamus O'Donnell's all around Britain but this was the one in Swansea. It was ran by a Kerry man, he owned the lease, it was a great job, we had great craic on that job, and I really loved the Welsh people, I thought they were very like the Irish.

Interviewer: Were you working direct for Clancy's?

Sean: Oh yeah, everyone was working direct for Clancy's.

Interviewer: Again, I've heard it said that they looked after their people.

Sean: Clancy's were a great company, I worked along with some fantastic lads there, there was a man called Austin O'Shea who was trained by Andy Fleming. He was a fantastic pipe layer and he showed me how to sink the shafts.

Interviewer: Because there's a particular skill even to sinking shafts?

Sean: Oh yeah, I was able to go down - after working with Austin - I was able to go down 15 metres deep, I could sink a shaft beside a building now, say in Piccadilly Circus now, where you'd have a high building, right beside the foot path, I was able to sink a shaft right down alongside that building, 15 metres deep. Maybe repair a collar on an old cast iron water main 15 metres deep and then back fill it and take the shaft out. But you'd have to know what you were doing because, if there was any movement, if everything wasn't tight, you'd have some of the ground coming from outside the shaft into the shaft and that would lead to a settlement later. You couldn't have any ground coming in from outside the shaft. None, because if you did, the walls of the shaft...basically the shafts we were sinking were interlocking sheet piles. We started off using 12 by 12 timbers as frames - they could be rectangular, they could be square, they didn't have to be square, they

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could be rectangular - but basically, the safest shaft is 10 metres squares, safest five metres square. You set up a template on the ground and then you dig down to a safe working depth - and we were digging down about 1.2 metres before we could put in any shoring. Once you go down to 1.2 metres you have to set up your shaft. Four corners - obviously - so you set up eight sheets, two in each corner, set them up perpendicular in each corner. Then you tacked them on with six inch nails on to your template which is already set up. And then what you do is you set up your frame then. We were working with 12 by 12 timbers - foot square timbers first - but then we ended up using hydraulic frames which just pump out hydraulically to the sheet piles. Once you have your eight corner sheets set up, your double perpendicular sheet piles set up, you pump your frame out to them, and then once the frame is set you put all the other sheet piles in in between. They have to be plumb because if you've plumbed the four corners right; the four corners can't move now because they've got the template on the outside on the top of the ground and they've got the frame on the inside, down at 1.2 metres deep so they can't move and they're plumb. That means everything else in between is going to be plumb, so if you have a good machine driver sinking a shaft you're away with it. You need a very good machine driver; it's about having a good driver because once those sheet piles go in he's digging blind, he won't be able to see much, you go down and start digging out inside the first frame and as you're digging down you keep dropping down the sheets accordingly. Then you keep going down a frame every metre until you get down to your required depth, you know, but you're coming across all the services now.

Interviewer: How does the machine driver deal with that, if he can't see down the shaft?

Sean: Oh, he's totally reliant on you as a banksman, you're his eyes, he has to trust you and he also has to be a very good driver.

Interviewer: I was going to say because for most of what he's doing he can't see the bottom of the bucket?

Sean: Once he gets below the first frame, which is 1.2 metres deep his vision would be impaired but once the second frame goes in, he wouldn't see a lot. He would be blind then from the third frame on, from the third frame on he wouldn't see the bucket, absolutely not.

Interviewer: So, he's literally guessing?

Sean: He's not guessing, he's totally reliant on your signals.

Interviewer: Jesus, that's tricky work.

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- Sean: If the place was alive with services you mightn't get the bucket down, so he'll just have to drop down a skip and he's hand digging after that the whole way down, you have to hand dig it all out in layers. If you're in the middle of London you wouldn't be able to do much bucket work now, they wouldn't allow you, it would be in the contract you can't allow an excavator (machine) within half a metre of a live service. We were lucky; we were kissing electric cables with the machine when nobody was looking, if you know what you're doing.
- Interviewer: The problem is if you pull one, serious trouble!
- Sean: Oh, if you pull one, I seen a big cable going down in that job in Sandwich. I won't mention the machine driver now, it was the machine drivers fault, and there was just a massive explosion and he put the whole of Sandwich out. One of the main cables, there was no one hurt, but the whole arm of the machine went black and he went white in the cab.
- Interviewer: I bet he did.
- Sean: He was let go for three or four months, something had to happen, but very lucky that no one got killed there.
- Interviewer: A friend of mine from Wexford, he's still alive thanks be to God, he wasn't in a machine, he was on a jack hammer and he hit a cable in Soho, I remember going to see him in hospital, this was a fit man.
- Sean: He was fried.
- Interviewer: Straight through him; he survived it.
- Sean: He'll never be the same though,
- Interviewer: He was working with Murphy's.
- Sean: Murphy's were a great company, Murphy's were working beside us on the Limehouse Link Tunnel - a great company - some mighty men working with them. Most of them were from Kerry, but they were great characters like.
- Interviewer: Everyone talks about the Elephant.
- Sean: I met the Elephant on the Limehouse Link Tunnel, and I met John Murphy.
- Interviewer: I met him myself once with Louis Mc, and he was an old man then, he was well into...he was 92 or 93 at that time, still working, still in the office, still with the braces and shirt and tie on...some man.

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- Sean: Smart man, considering he left with very little education, Caherciveen isn't that where he's from?
- Interviewer: Caherciveen, a place called Lough Mark,
- Sean: Is that far from the town?
- Interviewer: I don't know, I'd have to check it. I couldn't find it on Google maps. I think you'd have to look at an ordinance survey map to find the place, but they known as the Lakes Murphy's, so they must have been near a lake somewhere.
- Sean: He was a fierce nice man, we met him at a function. When you were a setting out Engineer on the Limehouse Link Tunnel there were so many different companies working on the job. There was Murphy's working on it; you had Balfour Beatty, Fairclough were working on it, they were the main contractors. Then you had the consultants who were there in an overseeing capacity. Then you had all the subbys like Murphy's and everyone else, and because you were the setting out Engineer you were invited to all the parties, like. I met John Murphy at one of those, it was at the Murphy party I met him.
- Interviewer: Nice man.
- Sean: Lovely fella,
- Interviewer: Very smart obviously, and very shrewd, I never got the impression, like you'd hear people all telling stories - especially about the Elephant and most of it was shite to be honest - but most people I've talked to, even the ones that worked for him didn't have a bad word to say for him, you know.
- Sean: They were great payers as well, and all the agents had Mercs.
- Interviewer: And John murphy had the same white, 1960s Merc, he never renewed it. He was that type of a man by all accounts, like I don't need to renew it, I don't need a new car just because I can afford one.
- Sean: Just coming to think of it now, there was another subby there too on the Limehouse Link job called Henley's, have you ever come across them?
- Interviewer: Henley?
- Sean: Henley's...Galway crowd.
- Interviewer: No, was he doing the same sort of work?
- Sean: He was supplying all ground work, good men with him too now.

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- Interviewer: There was a rake of them at that time sure, that was the Limehouse Link and then you went and worked for?
- Sean: Barnhill Construction, then I went with MJ Clancy's.
- Interviewer: So that brought you up more or less to when you came back here, did it?
- Sean: No, after MJ Clancy's, I got fed up travelling around the country with MJ Clancy's.
- Interviewer: Was all their work scattered?
- Sean: Oh, it was all the over the place, I was working down in Bideford, it was on the north Devon coast, that was 1994. We were working down in Bideford; that was one of the best jobs I ever worked on. It was basically a flood alleviation scheme we were doing there. Basically it was a combined flood system in the town of Bideford; we were separating it because when a lot of rain had come, a lot of water would come up through the manholes, and because it was combined sewer you'd have foul sewage coming up as well. So we had to separate it, we were down there for about six months digging up the whole of Bideford town. What a fantastic...they were such friendly people in Bideford; oh they were lovely people, and they loved the Irish and they didn't class themselves as English, they classed themselves as Devenish Celts. We had a fantastic time down there. Our foreman was a fella called Gary Davies, he was a cockney...ah talk about a Del Boy, he was Del Boy...but he knew his stuff now, he was a very, very good foreman.
- Interviewer: That's the thing, you don't mind lads being Jack-the-Lad as long as they can do the business.
- Sean: Oh, but he was some character and that Kinky Mick was down there too, and a pipe layer from the north of Ireland called Steve Brennan. He was a great hurler; he was from Antrim - fantastic hurler, he played hurling at a competitive level in London.
- Interviewer: Would you all be staying down there?
- Sean: We all stayed in the compound in Bideford, yeah. But this Gary Davies he was the foreman down there, he was an unbelievable character, he was a pure cockney now, but everyone loved him like. He could sell sand to an Arab like - you know what I mean - but he knew his stuff. You'd die for him, the sort of fella you'd die for because he was looking after us, we were getting great money down there.

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- Interviewer: Sounds like you had a great sense of comradery and that's the thing, and I think a lot of the big jobs did have that.
- Sean: Any scrap we got on the job Davies would put it all into a kitty and then we'd go out on a big night out; oh geez there was some craic down there now.
- Interviewer: That was Clancy's still now?
- Sean: Clancy's yeah.
- Interviewer: But then you got fed up with the travelling?
- Sean: I went from there to Heathrow Airport, I worked in Heathrow Airport with Clancy's in Terminal Two. They were building an extension on Terminal Two and Clancy's done all the ground work there. I was in there 13 months. A month of days and a month of nights, alternating between days and nights, for 13 months. After the Bideford job finished myself and Gary Davies went on that job in Heathrow. And when the Heathrow job finished to Hemel Hampstead, and that's when I met the famous Gerry Donnelly from Gurteen, County Sligo. I was the main pipe layer up in that Hemel Hampstead job; it was all through farmer's fields, this is still Clancy's, this would have been the winter of 1996, the late winter, January time of 1996. I was living Dartford and travelling from Dartford up to Hemel Hampstead every day, and I was dropping a fella off in Willesden Green on the way.
- Interviewer: That's a tough old journey.
- Sean: I didn't mind it in the morning because I was leaving early, and you'd be beating all the traffic, but in the evening time, driving down...
- Interviewer: Did you go down the M25? Oh, it wouldn't have been opened would it?
- Sean: The Dartford Crossing was open, I had to drop your man off in Willesden Green, so I had to go right through the city. But anyway I'll never forget this Gerry Donnelly, he was an unbelievable character, did you ever see Freddy Krueger?
- Interviewer: Yeah, in Nightmare on Elm Street thing.
- Sean: he was the image of Freddy Krueger.
- Interviewer: Jesus Christ [Laughs]
- Sean: But he was a great machine driver, myself and Gerry worked for six months there together on that Hemel Hampstead job.

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Interviewer: You were laying pipes now?

Sean: Yeah and he was the driver, but he was a fantastic machine driver, but he was a serious character, and it was pint every lunchtime in an English country pub. Every single lunchtime we'd be having the pints.

Interviewer: This man was Gurteen was he?

Sean: Just outside Gurteen, a man called Gerry Donnelly. Anyway this particular day we went in, it was a Friday afternoon and at this stage we had an awful lot (opened up). The Hemel Hempstead town itself we'd have little bits of shafts sunk here and there; we'd be breaking into the existing sewer to re-line it, and a large part of that job too involved the periphery of Hemel Hempstead. We would be working through agricultural land. But this particular time when we went into the pub on the Friday afternoon there was a lot of shafts open; excavations open in Hemel Hempstead itself. That's the first time I ever seen the famous Magic Roundabout. It's like a big massive roundabout in Hemel Hempstead but you had mini roundabouts at every exit, an ingenious design, whoever came up with that, they call it the Magic Roundabout, it's a massive roundabout, but on every exit you had a mini roundabout. I was never held up on the magic roundabout, every town should have a Magic Roundabout (Laughs). We went into the pub anyway at lunchtime, and at this time people were getting fed up with Clancy's, and the smell of the sewer would be coming up the excavation as well you know.

Interviewer: People always get fed up, they can't used to the fact that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.

Sean: You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs and then when we'd be gone. They wouldn't even see what we'd done because it would be all underground; that's the nature of the work. But we went into the pub anyway, myself and Gerry. We ordered our pints and there was a couple of old English ladies - fairly posh, well-to-do ladies sitting a table at the end of the bar - and when we walked in they knew straight away we were working on the project because we were Irish, and we probably had the Clancy hi-vis things on us. But anyway, I suppose the Clancy van parked outside the pub was a bit of a giveaway as well! (Laughs). As I said, the excavations were open up around Hemel Hempstead at the time. The ladies started talking amongst themselves, but loud enough so we could hear them, purposely so we could hear them. One of them said to the other, "You know no matter where those Irish go they bring nothing but filth and devastation to the area, with all this smell of foul sewage everywhere, the sooner they're gone the better." They said it purposely for us to hear it and I knew straight away by Gerry's demeanour that he was going to say something to them. So the barmaid handed us out the two pints, and he grabs his pint and he looked at me, and I knew he was going to say

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something. Then he walked over like John Wayne over to the two ladies with the pint in his hand, and he dropped the pint down real cool in the middle of the two of them, and he says, "Ladies", he says, "You're dead right," he says, "no matter where the Paddies go we bring nothing only filth and devastation. But remember one thing ma'am", he says "without the Irish, you'd still be throwing buckets of shite out of the top window."

Interviewer: [Laughs] Ah that's a killer line. That's class.

Sean: I'll never forget it.

Interviewer: There'd not be much they could say after that, if you're going to do the job you might as well do it right. (Laughs)

Sean: Oh my God, what a line, and there was a lot of truth in it, it was the way he said it so bluntly.

Interviewer: On a serious note, it goes back to what you were saying about, people who don't do any kind of Civil Engineering work, or building work but certainly Civil Engineering work, they think you just turn the tap on or just flush a toilet and away it goes. Nobody ever gives any thought to where it goes, or how you're dealing with it because it's all covered up, it's all nice and neat.

Sean: It's another world under the ground. That was Clancy's; after Clancy's I got a job with John Brown Construction because I got fed up with the travelling. See after Hemel Hempstead finished we were sent to the job in Wales, Neath, that was '96 we were in Wales, we were in Bideford in '94, and then went to Heathrow in '95 and then we went to Hemel Hempstead in '95 and early '96 and then we went to Wales around March '96. That was serious travelling now, getting up at half two in the morning, heading for Neath on a Monday morning, and you weren't back in London til maybe eight or nine o'clock on the Friday night. T'wasn't worth it. We seen the Welsh job out. Once the Welsh job finished I had enough of travelling about, so I got a job at John Brown Construction then.

Interviewer: Just before you tell me about John Brown, did you know any of the Clancy's?

Sean: I met Kevin Clancy, I never remember the father now.

Interviewer: He must have been dead by that stage.

Sean: One of the top foremen and I worked on a good few jobs with him was John K, he was from north west Mayo, near a place called Ballycroy, and he was one hard man, Jesus he was a hard man. Kojak was his nickname; he looked exactly like Telly Selavis, but a bigger

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man and a harder looking man, and he was the main foreman for Clancy's for 30, 40 years. He went around the country for years.

Interviewer: Was he Clancy's equivalent of the Elephant?

Sean: He would be, but even harder I would say. He was a serious man to get work done now, but one thing about John K, you worked hard for him but when the job was on he would always get a bonus from Clancy's and the whole bonus would be drank. He would invite everyone down the pub, he'd call them up; it'd be round after round on him all night. He was decent, he'd always get a bonus for finishing the job.

Interviewer: Some musicians worked for Clancy's as well you know, Paul G.

Sean: I never worked with Paul on a job, but I remember seeing Paul at a couple of training things and that. A fine flute player Paul. The first time I met Paul was up at the top of the Holloway Road, it was right beside Archway Tube Station.

Interviewer: Golden Lion, opposite the Archway Tavern?

Sean: Opposite the Archway Tavern, the Golden Lion on the corner, he was playing along with a Limerick box player called Tom 'the box' O'Connell, lovely man.

Interviewer: Still playing serious stuff, he's a machine driver for Murphy's, I knew Tom from I was 14 years of age. He used to play up in a pub in Dalston. But when I got working for Murphy then, when I was working with Louis Mc I used to be hanging around in the yard in Kentish Town, and I just happened to ask one of the lads, does Tom O'Connell be in and out much? "Tom the Box", he laughed, "He was here ten minutes ago, and he's gone again like"

Sean: Himself and Gallagher were a nice duet now.

Interviewer: Tom's a great player.

Sean: What was I saying before there?

Interviewer: You were talking about leaving Clancy's and going to work for John Brown.

Sean: Oh yeah, I went to John Brown. They were a good company too now, but then John Brown sent us over to Cambridge. We were on a big oil gasworks there; it was a tough commute from London up to Cambridge every day; from Dartford to Cambridge every single day, it was a tight old spin, up the M11 motorway. It was right in the middle of Cambridge, right in the centre of it, the Gas Works there, and the

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whole gas works had to be decommissioned because they were building some sort of a Tesco superstore there. I think it was Tesco; we were just there to decommission the whole gas works and to dig out all the contaminated ground, which had been contaminated over the years with leaking gas.

Interviewer: John Brown, they wouldn't be an Irish company?

Sean: Oh yeah, Cork. JBC Cork.

Interviewer: And most of the lads you were working with would they have been Irish?

Sean: Mixture of Irish and English, mostly Irish. Good company now, very good company.

Interviewer: Where are they based?

Sean: They were based right off the North Circular.

Interviewer: I didn't know they were Irish.

Sean: Oh yeah, Irish, Cork.

Interviewer: Is that Brown with an E?

Sean: That's Brown with an E. There was a foreman there, Tim was his name; oh he was some character, he was one of these foremen who was very cool, never lost the head, but was a serious man to get work done. You had to be a good worker to work under him, that's how he got the work done, he knew the men that he wanted, and once he had the team of men then he let you do the thinking for yourself. He was just co-ordinating things, a great man, a great head on him for work. But anyway, this fella started with us one day and he came in off the road looking for a job and Tim put him working anyway, and it transpired that he was absolutely useless. Like he couldn't even operate a shovel, he could do nothing, he couldn't even put up a bit of Heras panelling¹ around an excavation; he was just awful, he would trip over his own shadow.

Interviewer: Some guys are just like that.

Sean: Just awkward. And so he came in the following day and Tim was just about to let him go, but this particular morning the tea boy never showed up for work, he was from Limerick, I won't tell you his name now but he was a serious man for the drink. It's an awful insult to call this man a tea boy, because he was a fantastic cook like, he used to

¹ Heras is a trade-name for a common form of galvanised temporary fence panelling often used on construction sites as temporary hoardings etc.

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cook all the breakfasts for us and used to make us a dinner in the evening. He was a great worker.

Interviewer: Is this the job in Cambridge now?

Sean: No this wasn't in Cambridge, it was some job in the middle of London, it wasn't the Cambridge job but it was John Browne Construction. But anyway the fella who was useless was on the verge of being sacked but the tea boy never turned in this particular day, because he had a rough night the night before, and he never showed up. So your man - the useless fella - was about to be sacked but his saving grace was that your man (the cook) hadn't showed up to cook the breakfast. So Timmy, the foreman, says "can you cook?" and your man says "oh yeah". He says yeah to everything, so Tim wasn't sure if he cooks or not. He had to cook breakfast for 18 or 19 men, no mean feat. So he gives him the float of money and he went down to the shop and bought all the stuff. We walked into the breakfast room at ten o'clock that morning and it was the finest breakfast any of us had ate in our lives, even the way he had it presented, and everyone was shocked by it because he was such an awkward so and so out on the job. But he was a fantastic cook. Timmy turned round to me when we were going out the door and he says, "Sean, you know it proves one thing, there wasn't a man born yet that wasn't good for something!" [Laughs]. Your man found his niche like, it was a great statement.

Interviewer: Did your man keep him on?

Sean: He was kept on. The other fella came back, but he kept him on then just because he kind of took a shine to him after that. Which was a great statement, "There wasn't a man born yet that was good for something!". So that was John Browne Construction. Then I went working with Morrison Construction, they were a great company; two Scottish brothers, Charlie and Fraser Morrison. Now the reason I left John Browne - again I left them on great terms - was because of Cambridge and travelling all the time, and Morrison Construction got a load of work in London. We were all working on preparatory work for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link which was coming from Paris to Stratford. All the old water mains which were in the ground for 100 years, most of them were cast-iron water mains with lead joints; they didn't have rubber joints in them days, they poured the lead into the joint in a liquid state, and then the lead hardened, and because lead is kind of flexible, that sealed the joint. But these pipes were in the ground for 100 years and some of them were 48 inch diameter, four foot diameter, cast-iron water main. Every single collar on those water mains had to be strengthened because the Channel Tunnel Rail Link was going underneath them, and with the Tunnel Boring Machine, the vibration of the ground would crack the lead and you'd have leaks all the shop. So we had to go down and sink shafts, sometimes 15 metres deep, in the middle of London just to put one collar on a pipe. All the

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collars, as well, wouldn't be the same diameter. They wouldn't be consistent. So there was crowd up in Newcastle that were working on a 24 hour turn around. We'd calibrate the pipe with a set of callipers, we'd give them very accurate measurements of the pipe and within 24 hours they'd have a clamp courier down to us. We'd put the clamp on - it was basically a rubber that you pushed up against the collar - and then you had a clamp on the back of the collar and a collar on the front and then you all these bolts going round like that, going around the pipe in a circular way, 360 degrees around the pipe.

Interviewer: So, this was all being done without disturbing the pipe?

Sean: Without disturbing the pipe. And when you tighten all of them, you'd have to tighten opposite to opposite to make sure. So when you're tightening them, if you tighten the nut at 12 o'clock, you'd have to tighten the nut at 6 o'clock, otherwise you're not going to pull the rubber in square. So you keep going around like that, opposites the whole way around, and you kept going round until you seen the rubber squeezing. Once you seen the rubber squeezing you knew the bolts had done their job. If the Tunnel Boring Machine moved the pipe the rubber would hold it and stop the leak. We were doing that for years; I was with Morrison Construction for about three and half, four years, and I had my own order number for concrete, I had a brand-new van every two years, and I had two lads with me; two lads that I had trained up. I was working direct for two Scottish brothers, Charlie and Fraser Morrison, two Protestant Scottish brothers, two of the soundest fellas I ever worked for. I could order my own concrete, my own shingle, I could order my own sheet piles, everything. Nobody bothered me, all they wanted, I was running the job because we could be three or four weeks in one place then we'd move on to another place but is was all around that area around Stratford. Angel Lane in Stratford, where the tunnel was coming under, and also Hackney Cut, all around there, but it was a great job, it was a fantastic job. I gave up all that to come back to Ireland in May 2005. I walked away from a permanent job to come back to Ireland. I first went to London in June '87 and came back in May 2005.

Interviewer: You don't regret it though?

Sean: I don't regret it, I had great times in London,

Interviewer: You weren't doing huge amounts of music and stuff?

Sean: No because I was working so much outside of London like. But with Brian Rooney, the great fiddle player, I was working with John Browne Construction at that time, the first time I ever met Rooney in my life. We were diverting a gas main outside Heathrow Airport. They were building a roundabout and the gas main was running parallel with the road, so they didn't want to build a roundabout on top of the gas

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main, so the gas main had to be diverted around the roundabout before they built the roundabout, so that's what we were doing. We were there for about two and a half months with John Browne Construction diverting this gas main. We hired a JCB driver, we didn't know who we were getting. This company was recommended to us - we were inside the M25 now, close to the old A4 road. The first time I seen Rooney was on a programme called the Pure Drop,

Interviewer: Was that the one where he's playing with Paddy Hayes?

Sean: No, I never seen that programme until I seen it on YouTube, but he was on another programme with Paddy Glackin and he was on his own playing. Now he shared that programme with - it was all Leitrim musicians. John Blessing, Michael McNamara, John Lee and Seamus Maguire. But I never seen that clip, that clip of Rooney playing solo didn't surface yet, I seen that on a video tape, that was the first time I ever heard of or heard Brian Rooney, but my god what a fiddle player. He played two absolutely beautiful jigs that day, I said I have to meet this man. Little did I know when the JCB turned up in the summer of 1998 - he landed first then the JCB was dropped off on a low loader. And I was watching this fella, I never seen Brian Rooney in the flesh, but this fella was walking very fast with kind of a thin, hardy look and a loose back on him and a baseball hat, and walking very fast, with intent. It was his first day on the job so he wanted to impress us. As the JCB was dropped off I seen him heading for the low loader and I got a good look at his face. I says "That's Brian Rooney!" I said, because I seen him on the telly. "Feckin' hell this is Rooney, he's going driving the JCB" like, I've never seen him in the flesh and he wouldn't have a clue who I was, so I walked over to him and I says, how're you doing? "Hello", he says. I says "you're Brian Rooney" I says, and he looked at me like that (suspiciously), and he says "I am" he says, "and who the fuck are you?" [Laughs]. Myself and Rooney hit it off on the job, but there was a lot of English lads on the job working for the gas company, the client. We went down to the café this particular morning anyway, and Rooney was telling me all about the tunnels that he worked in, and he had to give up the tunnels because he's such a big man. He's over six foot, too tall; imagine being in a six foot pipe jack and you wouldn't be able to stand up straight. He'd have his head bent all the time. It's alright for the likes of me, I'm five foot seven, but if you can't stand up straight all day, its not good for you.

Interviewer: The tunnels aren't really for tall men.

Sean: He was a great worker in the tunnels, but I think the back was giving him trouble. As I told you already I was able to sink the shafts no problem 15 metres deep. That's what I done for a large portion of my time in London, but I never drove a tunnel in my life. I worked in the tunnels with the pipe jackers, the miners, but I never actually drove a tunnel or set up a tunnel ever in my life, but I was fascinated by it. And

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Rooney was explaining to me in the café this particular morning about how to set up a tunnel, and he says the first thing you do is you set up the template and they called that the *Horses Head*, it's a wooden template. I'm taking about hidden tunnels now, not talking about pipe tunnels, I'm taking about hidden tunnels, done with timbers. Rectangular tunnels, for sewer pipes or services. The template you start off with is called the Horses Head, and these English lads hadn't a clue what we were talking about. They turned around to Rooney; "Er Bri what's an 'orse's head then?"...Rooney looked at me like, and then he looked at your man as if he was stupid, and he says, "It's the very same as an ass's head only bigger!"

Interviewer: [Laughs] As if that would help the cockney lads.

Sean: They hadn't a clue what an ass was, that was a great job, I really enjoyed that job now, he was all excited about the CD,

Interviewer: That would have been coming out about then?

Sean: The CD came out in '99, he wanted me to come over, I remember he was going to pick me up from Belfast Airport and bring me down, he was going to send a driver up to bring me down when they were recording that, we struck up a great friendship, I couldn't make it over,

Interviewer: He's a great character, lovely man.

Sean: But you would not think he was a fiddle player if you worked with him, he's a very unique man now,

Interviewer: He is. Was that it then, after that you came back?

Sean: The Rooney job was when I was working with John Browne Construction, after John Browne Construction I went to Morrisons, Morrisons was my last firm. Then I came back to Ireland in the Celtic Tiger years, I caught the tail of the Celtic Tiger, loads of work, I had no job to come back to but, I got a job straight away with Noel Reagan and Sons, I was doing more travelling when I came back to Ireland than I was when I was in England,

Interviewer: That doesn't surprise me, I was the same.

Sean: In the construction industry there is nothing local.

Interviewer: And you have to go where the work is, for something that was supposed to take an hour we've been talking for nearly two hours now, in overall terms like, I know you said you probably didn't see much of the London Irish social scene if you like, in terms of music.

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- Sean: Seen a good few sessions down in the Junction Tavern in Tufnell Park. That's where I met Sean Curtin and Sean Casey. Rooney, then, introduced me to Seanie McDonagh and Austin Dawe.
- Interviewer: Would you say then, in overall terms, did you ever come across - apart from that daft example of the pub in Hemel Hempstead which is just two old biddies, you expect to hear that nonsense somewhere along the line - but did you ever come across any other prejudice?
- Sean: I have to say I didn't Mick, no, because I was working with mostly Irish too, so you wouldn't be experiencing that. Then the English that we were working with were completely outnumbered by the Irish lads, so they weren't going to be at it. And all the companies we worked for - every company I worked for in London - was an Irish company apart from Morrisons, but all the other companies were Irish.
- Interviewer: Even then, I often found, and I don't know if you were the same, a lot of the English lads, who were often second or third generation Irish, their fathers had been builders or whatever, they knew the craic, so would you say in overall terms then, you enjoyed being in London?
- Sean: I did, I had great times in it now. The time I had from 2000, was the year I got married until 2005 when I came back, they were five great years, I was with John Browne for one of those years, then from '01 until '05 I was with Morrisons, I started with John Browne in '98 and I left them in 2001.
- Interviewer: The way you have been talking for the last couple of hours, apart from that first summer, it doesn't sound like any of the companies you worked for you had a particularly bad experience,
- Sean: I tell you Mick, the way it was, I started off at the bottom of the ladder, but experience will tell you what to avoid as you're going forward and I have to say the best company I ever worked for was Morrison Construction, because I was my own boss and of course you're getting more experience, like the setting out experience and the shaft sinking experience and the pipe laying experience. And I had two great lads with me, and we were going around together for four years in a van and you got a brand spanking new van every two years. You got your own diesel card and you got your own order number for everything and there was nobody watching the clock. But my motto was get in early and get home early, we were home some days at half three, in the house back in Dartford.
- Interviewer: It doesn't matter if you've done the work, but the construction industry I always found when you got down to a certain level of the construction industry, when you got rid of the head office management because most of them have preconceived ideas about getting work done and most of it is wrong, if you actually deal with the guys who

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- know how to do the work, it's not about clockwatching its about getting it done, and once its done you don't need to watch the clock. But would you say overall the experience you had in England gave you a reasonably good living for a while?
- Sean: It gave me a very good living yeah, it gave me a massive deposit that I was able to put on the house when I came back here and it also gave me my wife and son. My son was born over there and I met my wife on the first Sunday in September 1995. I met her at half time during the Clare Offaly All-Ireland Final in the Dartford Irish Club. That was in the first Sunday in September 1995. Clare against Offaly; they had a big screen there for the game and Maire was a midwife, my future wife was a midwife in Gravesend Hospital, and I met her there, and both of her parents came from Leitrim. Isn't it funny? Our son was born in March '03 over there. He was two days away from being called Paddy Gilrane; he was born on the 15th March. The reason we came back to Ireland was that the young lad was two and he was beginning to get an English accent, so what do you do? Do you stay here now and bring him up here, or do you bring him back? I didn't think it would be fair bringing him back when he was four or five, because he would have a full English accent and there could be a bit of slugging at the school. He wouldn't have much memory of the craic in London, so that's why we came back and there was loads of work here at that time. If my son hadn't come along I'd still be in London.
- Interviewer: Any regrets?
- Sean: Oh no, none. Even the drinking in the early days no. I don't, I tell you it's a learning experience, it opens your eyes; it puts layers on your personality, that's how I describe it.
- Interviewer: I think that's a great way to leave it, that's wonderful, I really appreciate it Sean.

END

Original Interview # 15 – Patrick C - Connemara

Name: Patrick C Date of Birth: 1946
Place of Birth: Rosmuc, Connemara, County Galway
Date of Emigration to UK: 1966
Date of Interview: 24 February 2018.
Location of Interview: Author's house, north London

Interviewer: So it's 24th February, 2018 and I'm with Pat up in north London and Pat is going to talk about his youthful days [Laughter] emigrating from Galway, from Connemara...it is Connemara originally, Pat?

Pat: Yea, Connemara; Rosmuc, Connemara

Interviewer: So I suppose to start with the basics, when and where were you born?

Pat: I was born in 1946 in Rosmuc. I first went to work part-time in a generating station in Rosmuc which usen't to be working all year-round. It used only be working maybe 6 or 8 months of the year.

Interviewer: Was this after you left school, was it?

Pat: Yea, after leaving the technical school. I probably would have left school around fourteen and went, then, for three years to the local technical school. And of course if we had followed through with what was offered there, we probably could have got a job with Eircom or Telefis Eireann, the telephone people, or one of these things.

Interviewer: Would you have had to have Leaving Cert opportunities or...?

Pat: Well, you had avenues that you could carry on with if you wanted to, but, of course, in them days I suppose a person was a bit impatient if you like. For you to earn a decent wage you'd be talking about maybe four or five years down the line and it seemed a long, long time away to us...especially when people were coming over to England and earning a decent wage literally straight away.

Interviewer: In the area around Rosmuc, now, would it have been a common thing to go away to England?

Pat: Well, it would be, yes, because unless you were one of those people who would have gone cutting seaweed and drying it and selling it would give you some income. You could cut peat or turf and dry it and sell it and that would give you some income as well, and other bits and pieces like that, but it wasn't really enough (income) to be worth doing. It was okay for the first couple of years but then you started thinking well, I need to do something better than this.

Interviewer: So did your family come from a farming background?

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Pat: Well...Connemara, really, it was all hand-work...you couldn't even use a tractor down our part of the country. Not that...I mean they'd have good cattle and well-fed cattle and stuff like that. They'd have their own peat and their own milk. Y'know, they had everything they *needed* in a sense, bar maybe sugar and tea and stuff. So probably the cost of living there wouldn't be that high, because they were nearly self-sufficient. But then you wouldn't be coining any money! You were existing really, is all.

Interviewer: Yea, so it was like subsistence living really...you were existing.

Pat: Although, that said, weren't we happy though?

Interviewer: Well, I guess that's the thing; it's like striking a balance, isn't it?

Pat: The local shop – which is still there today – they [the local customers] would pay their bill for their upkeep and provisions and what have you, every month. Once they bought something t'would be put on the slate, and it'd be recorded, and they'd pay it once a month. But the shopkeepers, they were great, like, to be fair. Like they would actually make an effort to get around to the local houses to give them a Christmas present for their custom.

Interviewer: Well, y'see that kind of way of living...it's gone really, isn't it?

Pat: Ah it is indeed...it is indeed. Y'see Connemara now, well it wouldn't be as difficult because, y'know, you can travel into town now, Sure Galway is local now to my relations, even though it's thirty miles away. It's still only three-quarters of an hour drive, so it's commutable on a daily basis. Them days, now, unless you were good on a bicycle! [Laughter]...and sure you'd want to be *very good* on it! So y'see what I'm saying is that's stuff that's moved on, what with cars and motorbikes and what have you; people can get to town and have a job. Whereas in our part of the country round Rosmuc, sure there was hardly anything bar the generating station back then, which I worked part-time in for a couple of years. And then of course, although it took a few years before it did, they were forever saying, "Ah, it's gonna close down, it'll close down", because it wasn't producing enough.

Interviewer: So it was never going to be a career-move!

Pat: No, no, no...I mean it was nice while I was there, like. I mean, I used to get paid by cheque [Interviewer: wow, really?] – yea – and I'd give the cheque to my mum. Because it was the way you felt, that you needed to put something back. And of course, the same thing happened when we came to this country; we used to send money back to our families.

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Interviewer: We'll come on to that, because that's an interesting point, y'know, because I found that some people did, and some people didn't. So were you the first one to come to England?

Pat: No, no, My sister was here before me and my brother, who's now not so well, as you know. He was here a couple of years before me, which was nice for me.

Interviewer: And is C [Pat's brother] older than you?

Pat: He is, yeah, he's a couple of years older than me.

Interviewer: So, well, I suppose that leads us nicely into, well, how did you decide to leave Rosmuc?

Pat: Well, my brother was backwards and forwards [from England to Connemara] a couple of times and, well, I suppose, you seen him coming home in a nice clean-cut new suit. He was able to hire a car out and stuff like that...[pause]...it seemed like the thing to do. Y'know? Because there was nothing on offer at home, really. If there was, you might have thought twice about it. There was nothing, really, to keep us there, bar the family. D'ya see what I mean? Now it wasn't so easy to move away from the family, to be honest with you...but...

Interviewer: So how many children were there altogether?

Pat: Well, there was nine of us. There was six sisters and three brothers. My youngest brother stayed; he actually did work in the station with the ESB and he was lucky enough to carry on with the ESB until he retired.

Interviewer: And did the rest of you go?

Pat: Nearly everybody else went. Three sisters went to America; another sister came here; one is back in Galway. Y'know they moved around, some came from America back here and stuff like that. But y'know looking back...I mean we're here now talking in 2018, I'm talking about 1966. It'll tell you, I suppose, how...[pause]...naïve we were; I had never seen a train until the day that I sat on it. I'd seen the station in the distance but I never went into the station to see the train. And my biggest worry, when I sat down on the train, believe it or not, (and people might laugh at this) was whether I was on the right train...but of course in Galway in those days, there was only one way you could go...it's the end of the line! [Laughter]. But at the same time, I wasn't amazed when I went in on the train...y'know?...I took it as a new adventure.

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Interviewer: But it says something about Ireland, y'know, that you were...what age were you then? [Pat: Nineteen]...nineteen, and you had never seen a train

Pat: No, I'd never actually seen a train... and that's a fact!...and I'm not ashamed to say it!

Interviewer: No! And you certainly should not be. Another interviewee I recorded from Leitrim told me that one of his friends that he went to England with around the same time as you - this man was from somewhere in the wilds of south Leitrim, around Cloone or Aughavas or that way - and he was the same; he'd never seen a train 'til the day he went. So you weren't on your own by any stretch!

Pat: But it'll tell you how things have moved on. Because not so long ago I was up in Camden Town¹ and there was a young girl that wanted a name for a band - she still teaches music up there - and she said, "Pat, you might have a nice Irish name for a band". So I said to her, "Well, look" I said, "you're on this side of the water now, why don't you call it *Trasna na dTonnta*"², which is a nice little song. "Oh" she said, "How does that go?" "Well", I says, "see that thing you're holding in your hand with the buttons on it? (Mobile phone), why don't you push a few buttons there" I says, "and it'll play it for you!" [Laughter]. Then I said to her "Do you realise how time has moved on since I was their age?" [Pointing to kids]. I told her I remember the first time ever that an electric lightbulb lit in my house. I remember it so clearly; I was only a young lad, and this man from the ESB³ called in and says to my mum, "Mrs Connolly, I'm going to switch this light switch down now because we're going back to the generating station now to turn on the power to this part of Connemara and the reason I'll leave it on is so you'll know exactly when electric light first came to this part of Connemara." Then I looked at her (the music teacher) and said "Now you can press a few buttons on that phone and listen to *Trasna na dTonnta* for yourself!" So that'll tell you how life has moved on in those few decades. Of all the things that's *modernised life*, if you like, since I left Ireland, it's the mobile phone that would probably be the most valuable to me over my lifetime. Especially when the kids were small and I was working down in Southampton and places like that, and they were here. From one end of the day to the next you would not know how people were. Occasionally you managed to get a phone box that worked once in a while, or if you were anyways favourable to the foreman he might let you use the site phone. But you couldn't make a

¹ Pat is a senior and long-serving member of the London Irish community and an officer in Comhaltas Ceoiltoiri Eireann and as such references to 'Camden Town' can generally be taken to mean the London Irish Centre in Murray Street in Camden Town.

² A Gaelic sean-nos song translating as 'Across the Waves'

³ The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) is a state owned electricity company operating in the Republic of Ireland.

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habit of that; 'twould only be once in a while. So the mobile phone is a fantastic piece of kit!

Interviewer: Okay, so when you left then, and you're sitting on the train, tell me about the journey. Did you come to London with your brother?

Pat: No, I didn't. I came with a local lad from a place called Conns, at home. Actually we missed the cattle boat, my brother came over on that, but we came over on a slightly better boat I think...at least so my brother said! [Laughter]. Anyway we landed in er...I think it was Euston.

Interviewer: And what did you make of London. Like, bearing in mind you came from a native Gaelic-speaking locality, didn't you?

Pat: Yeah, well, we never spoke English in the house unless somebody came into the house that didn't understand Irish, and that's a fact, in them days it was your bread and butter. The only time you'd speak in English was if somebody came in just to be polite, out of decency, because we knew they couldn't speak Gaelic. But even in London circles I know people to this day speaking Gaelic and teaching it, which is a marvellous thing.

Well, to tell you the truth I wasn't too bothered with Euston. The biggest thing that amazed me was when I landed in Kingsbury⁴ actually (my brother picked me up from Euston), I'm sure it was a Saturday morning, because everybody left home on a Friday I think! [Laughter] I'll never forget it; once I got into the house and unloaded my few bits and pieces – my cheapjack case and stuff!...you heard of them before did you?

Interviewer: Go on, tell me.

Pat: We used to go to the fairs; Maam Cross fair and all the local fairs and of course there'd be about a dozen stalls there selling clothes; everything a man could want. And I know for a fact I bought my case from a stall called cheapjack! [Laughter]...I mean it looked fine, but I didn't go in to Galway to get it! [Laughter]. So anyways when I spent an hour or so in the house, after landing in Kingsbury, I decided I was going to go out for a walk. I walked up to Neasden. I could not believe how clean everything was. The footpaths and slabs...sure we never used to walk on footpaths at all back in Connemara. That sticks with me 'til today; I thought to myself this is heaven on earth in a sense.

Interviewer: Kind of neat, do you mean, and tidy?

⁴ Kingsbury is a district of northwest London in the London Borough of Brent, not too far from where Pat still lives.

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Pat: Everything was so tidy and neat, exactly. The houses were so nice and uniform and I used to be thinking to myself that there must have been fantastic engineering here. I was more amazed at what was around me and how neat and tidy everything looked; and o'course in them days there wouldn't've been dustbins everywhere and that sort of thing...everything looked A!

Interviewer: As you would have discovered after a while, you were in a nice part of London, there.

Pat: I was; I was indeed and I mean there's other parts of London that wouldn't be near as nice or leafy and suburban as Kingsbury I must admit. But generally that was my biggest amazement; to be honest with you I just thought the place was SO different from where I left! A totally different world, it was, that time. I mean we didn't see anything like that on the...well, come to think of it, hardly anybody in our area HAD a television when I left...to be honest with you, I don't think they did. One or two televisions locally, but very, very few back in 1965-66.

Interviewer: So was your brother here a while before you?

Pat: He was; probably a couple of years before me.

Interviewer: And so were you living in digs or...?

Pat: Well, I was lucky enough. My sister's boyfriend had a place and we stayed with him. He had a house and we had to pay him rent, of course, we paid whatever was the going rate, I don't remember what we paid him. What was the wages them days?...

Interviewer: I dunno...I was going to ask you that! [Laughter]

Pat: Well, I'm just trying to think. If we worked the seven days...which we did...well, we did fairly regular...I think it was about twenty-four quid –a-week if it was the seven days, and maybe twenty, I suppose, if you worked the five and a half days. Something like that.

Interviewer: So you'd be getting...[thinking]...maybe four or five pounds a day – something like that?

Pat: Aye and you worked from around eight in the morning to around half-five in the evening I'd say, or maybe six.

Interviewer: And when you landed here in London, like...did you know you were going to go building, or had you any idea of what you were going to do?

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Pat: To be honest with you, when I left Galway, I hadn't a clue whether I was going to be back next year, or the following week! I hadn't a clue...and I didn't even worry about it. I just said, no plans, this is an adventure and I'll definitely be coming home sometime...are you with me?...but it's very hard to think of...I wish I could pinpoint back then what I would have felt like in fifty years' time.

Interviewer: In your wildest dreams, did you think you'd end up staying here?

Pat: No! No...but, to be fair...every...I could not knock this country AT ALL. I certainly didn't plan it. If I'm honest I probably thought well, I'll go for a few years and play it by ear from there. That's as honest as I could be with you. That's as much as we thought we could put into it. When you're young you can burn the candle at both ends, d'you see? Well you see the other thing is as kids of eighteen or nineteen, when we came, well there's probably kids now that are sharper than us at twelve! Because you see they have everything now. We had to learn it the hard way, if you like, even though anything we learnt or experienced, we didn't think that was hard, y'know? You learned it as you went along, see.

Interviewer: So when you landed, then, and you're with your brother in Kingsbury, did you go to work straight away?

Pat: Monday...the following Monday, after landing Saturday...and I haven't stopped since! [Laughter]

Interviewer: And where did you get a job?

Pat: Well, actually they were looking for guys at that time, y'see, I was lucky enough. They were building a million-pound school in Weybridge⁵ in Surrey and my brother said to me will you come out with us, because we're looking for lads.

Interviewer: And who was he working for?

Pat: He used to work for a subcontractor from Kerry. He was very good, actually. I was introduced to him I think the second or third day after I started and he came up to me and he says, "You're very welcome, Patrick, you're very welcome, but can I tell you something though? Now," he says, "I want you to earn your wages by lunchtime, and -" he says, "- the rest is mine. Because I have to insure you, get you transport and all that, and there will be days – if it's a snowy day or whatever – that you won't be able to earn your wages by lunchtime

⁵ Weybridge is a town by the River Wey in the Elmbridge district of Surrey. It is bounded to the north by the River Thames at the mouth of the Wey, from which it gets its name. It is an outlying suburban town within the Greater London Urban Area, situated 7 miles (11 km) northeast of Woking and 16 miles (25 km) southwest of central London. At the time of Pat's arrival in London, Weybridge would have been considered part of suburban or rural Surrey.

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and I'll make up for that." And that has lived with me ever since. Nowadays the attitude towards the boss is totally different...they don't care whether they earn their wages or not! In them days we would not go home if 'twas a bad day. Even if it was and we were tucked up in the shed until at least eleven o'clock and we'd say we'll try and get a half-a shift in⁶ because this saying of his (the boss) stuck with us and we thought, "Now, we need to earn our wages, lads" and that's the way we went on.

Interviewer: Well, I suppose he was being honest with ye?

Pat: He was! He was being honest, because people think they're making a load of money out of us. But there are times when things don't go right and it all had to be covered.

Interviewer: I guess you found that out later on, when you went out on your own?

Pat: Indeed, I did. It's not that simple running your outfit...and even worse nowadays because there's so many demands on people, you see?

But it was a hell of an experience, Michael. Jumping into vans. I was lucky enough because I was a bit handy with slabs and kerbs and all that sort o'thing.

Interviewer: But how did you come to discover that when you'd never done any construction work before?

Pat: Well, you see, I used to do a bit of building work with my dad, at home and I had a bit of a grá⁷ for that kind of work and the minute they asked me could I lay some of these slabs I said, no problem. I felt always comfortable doing that kind of work. How would I explain it?...[thinks]...I'd have it half-done in my mind before ever I started if you know what I mean; I'd have it figured out in my head before ever I'd go near it. I knew things had to be square and level and all that kind of stuff

Interviewer: Were you the kind of man that could 'eye it in' as they say, that didn't need levels that much?

Pat: I was...I had a 'good eye' as they call it! In them days I could sight a nail at say...pew...sixty metres? Where you'd have to put a line up normally, I could tell if it was straight...of course it wouldn't be as good now! [Laughter] but then I was a sharp as a tack, that way. That's probably a blessing that you're given, is all. It just comes naturally.

Interviewer: One thing that always intrigues me – I see it with my own father and uncles from back then – you all seemed to have...an aptitude for

⁶ A 'shift' is the colloquial term used by industrial workers and construction workers for a paid productive day.

⁷ Gaelic - love

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practical work? You could figure it out; work out how to do it the most efficient way.

Pat: I had good teaching, mind you. My dad used always say to me, “One thing you must remember; if you’re going to do a job, do it right and do it once”. Y’know these things stick with you, “Do it right and do it once”!

They were good days. I mean, everything was done mostly by hand. Down in Weybridge, ah there was all sorts...I was at foundations and everything. To be honest with you, Mick, I was always fairly interested in that sort of work and if you’re interested in something you would be fairly good at it, y’know? There were some great men, some great workers. Very hard on themselves; more so than people being hard on them. They were *hard on themselves* [emphasis added]

Interviewer: There’s something in that which says something about what these days they call the ‘work ethic’, that idea that if you’re gonna do, you should do it well and do it properly.

Pat: You’d come across the odd yahoo, like you do in every walk of life...as the fella used to say, “The food he’s eating is only going to waste!” [Laughter]. Often I heard that term. Not because he wasn’t *able* to do it, but because he couldn’t be *bothered*, y’know? There’s a big difference. If somebody’s not able to do something then you’d make allowances for them but these fellas, some of them, were able to do it but couldn’t be bothered, so that’s a different thing.

Interviewer: That’s interesting, now, because you’d often get these stories about these tough gangers that were very hard on men and brutal with them, y’know? But then you also hear stories of gangers who, if a young lad was inexperienced or just not that toughened up but he was doing his best, they’d cut him some slack, y’know? The more experienced fellas might look out for the younger lad?

Pat: Well, I remember one occasion we were working out in Iver⁸ and I there was this ganger-man from er...and which I had good time for actually, he was a decent fellow, and he was a bit of a musician himself as well. We were working near Iver...near Slough. It was probably around five hundred houses on the whole site I’d say. But I remember this lad landing at the weekend from Ireland; very young, now, and naïve, but a nice young fellow, y’know? And the ganger-man had sat on a bottle the day before, and he had stitches in his backside! So anyway, at teatime he got up and he says, “Who’s this lad”. One of the lads says, “Oh he just started this morning” – “Oh did he now” says the ganger, “I was supposed to know about him. Anyway that’s okay, you

⁸ Iver is a large civil parish in the South Bucks district of Buckinghamshire, England. It now falls within the boundaries of the London Metropolitan Area.

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look a decent sort to me”. That’s the sort of fellow the ganger was. Anyway then he says, “By the way, I’ve a little job for you later”, and I thought to myself ah no, I can see what’s coming here! Anyway after breakfast the ganger says to this young lad, “You come with me, young man, I’ve a little job for you” And of course he was so naïve, he’d do anything that anyone asked him. So the ganger says to the steel-fixer, “any chance you’d lend me them pliers?” And the next thing of course, the ganger drops his trousers and says to the young lad, “Now, there’s three stiches there, and you take them out like a good man!” [Laughter]. And do you know what? He did it, and that young man could do nothing wrong after that! Because he done him a favour; the ganger wasn’t going to go back to the doctor. That’s a fact now!

And the same ganger-man, we worked out in Harlow; it was one Christmas Eve. He came in in the morning and the whole place was solid with ice; an awful night of frost. He went into the shed and, of course, the shed was SO cold and all the working clothes were literally like cardboard because the men had hung them up damp the day before. This ganger, he was called Johnnie; he walked into the shed with a newspaper in his hand and his two wellingtons were in the shed and they were as hard as a rock. He says to me, “Pat, what am I going to do? I can’t wear the shoes working and I’ve only got the wellingtons”. “Well” says I, “you’ll have to heat them up somehow” So he took the newspaper and tore it in two and put each bit down in the two wellingtons and lit them. But just then the foreman called him to discuss something in the next office and off he went. By the time he came back about ten minutes later the wellingtons were melted down to the size of slippers! [Laughter] That’ll tell you the conditions sometimes...the poor sods, like, there was no heat or anything. I’ll never forget it; Christmas Eve.

Interviewer: Was it mainly housing that you worked on over the years?

Pat: Well, we worked on all sorts; they were new houses we were building in Harlow. We did housing and factories, mostly construction work – all above ground; we done a few just normal tunnels, where you’d have to tunnel under a road to a sewer and stuff like that, but these wouldn’t be classed as the big tunnels. It’s still tunnel work, I suppose, but on a small scale. I was quite lucky, really, because I wasn’t long here when a foreman or gangerman in Swiss Cottage passed away sudden and the chap I was working for asked me if I’d look after the site there. So I finished up that job being able to drive my own car and everything, which I was quite lucky. Then I used to go all over the place for this man, I used to look after a few of the sites.

Interviewer: And who was this fellow you were working for? Was he a subbie?

Pat: He was, a subbie, yeah. He had plenty of work, he’d have loads of different gangs.

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Interviewer: This wasn't still the Kerry fellow, now, was it?

Pat: He was, still the same man. I stuck with him for a few years. He treated me well. I'd get a phonecall at the digs where I stayed. He'd ring the house and say "Get Pat to give me a ring". He used to drink in the Castle ⁹ and you'd have to go and pick up your wages there. Now there was other lads that was picking up their wages there and *staying there*, maybe the whole night. Y'see I never had any...

Interviewer: Sure you never drank, did you?

Pat: I did taste it once or twice but it did nothing for me. I couldn't be bothered; I'd rather a can of coke any day.

Interviewer: Like, you did a lot of travelling and worked for a good few subbies and got about. Was it overwhelmingly Irish men that you worked with?

Pat: Mostly...some Scottish. Then after the initial few years I worked with English foremen a lot, who were great people...really great people. Because I think they used to be amazed at how much work we done for them so if you wanted a bit of the day off to go to the dentist or whatever it was no problem for them. I cannot say the same for our own people, mind you. Not all of them, but some of them (Irish gangers) would actually cut you an hour or two if you went to the dentist, for example...or they'd want it (the favour) returned some other way. But then again, that's part of life, you just get on with it. I mean they weren't *bad* bad people, but they could be tough enough at times...

I mean, of course in them days, they didn't have to be hard, you see. They were very clever; a lot of the gangermen were very clever, y'see because what they would say is...say if somebody laid a hundred metres of kerbs in a day – which at that time was no problem, sure two hundred metres even -

Interviewer: Jesus that'd be some going to lay two hundred metres in a day..what? Two of you?

Pat: Maybe three...there'd be only one laying and the other two bringing the stuff over to the layer. But you see what they used to do (the gangers) they'd say well, such-and-such a fellow, he laid three hundred!...that was their way of making you think, "I must lay more"...are you with me? 'Twas the same with slabs, and I could lay as many slabs as any man, but them lads never laid as many as they said...but you didn't know that until you sat in beside them and done it yourself. I remember working down in Southampton. I drove from here to Southampton and I was laying kerbstones down there. The fellow

⁹ A local pub

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they told me was laying all these kerbs, sure all he was doing was watching the lads placing the kerbs in position and then tapping them in with the mallet. But they made a 'name' for themselves, you see, for laying so many kerbs or slabs.

Interviewer: Reg Hall told me about a subbie who had a pacemaker that went around on a bike and he'd go maybe to three or four jobs in a day. This wasn't doing slabs or kerbs now, this was digging cable-trenches and muck-shifting, but your man would dig for an hour or two at a deadly-fast rate and he'd be setting the pace, then and the ganger then would tell the other lads, "That's what ye have to do today, now" If you were young and fit, and you didn't mind doing it.

Pat: See back in our way (Connemara) as a kid, you had to do an awful amount of work by hand, even to sow potatoes was all done by hand. Well, y'see it wasn't so hard on them lads because they had already done a lot of hand work and they were used of it.

Interviewer: A couple of fellows told me that the thing they found strangest working in trenches in England was the short-handled shovel; that they didn't use them in Ireland, 'twas always the long-handled one.

Pat: Well you see with the short-handled spade when you put the effort in and you went down low in a small space, the back was much stronger, you see? Funny, though, I worked down in Cornwall for a while and they had long-handled shovels there and when they seen my shovel they were like, "Oh my God, that'd kill a horse!"

Interviewer: So you got about a bit, Pat, you were in Southampton and Cornwall?

Pat: Oh I done a lot of moving around. I remember staying down in Polegate,¹⁰ this side of Eastbourne. We used to go down on Monday morning, stay Monday and Tuesday night, come back to London on Wednesday night, go back down again on Thursday, Friday and come back Saturday afternoon. We used to stay in a pub in Polegate; I can't remember the name of it off-hand now, but I'm sure when we used to go to bed there the neighbours used to hear us scream [Laughter]. There was no heating in the pub and the bedsheets were starched; 'twas like going to bed on sheets of glass or sandpaper [Laughter]...honest-to-God, I'll never forget bloody Polegate! [Laughter]. But yeah, we used to get around.

Interviewer: You were doing all the driving by this time, were you?

Pat: Well, yeah, you see by that time I went building contracting myself.

¹⁰ Polegate is a village and civil parish in the Wealden District of East Sussex. It is located five miles north of the seaside resort of Eastbourne and is part of the greater area of that town. It is about 50 miles from central London.

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Interviewer: So in relation to when you went to England, when did you start up yourself?

Pat: I'd say maybe three years after I came here.

Interviewer: That's pretty quick?

Pat: It was, but you see I used to do a lot of work for a company down in Southampton with the subcontractor that I was with, and they would always ask for me to do their jobs. They'd say to the fellow that employed me, "If you give us Pat and Col (Pat's brother) you can have the job". We used to be building clubs for this company; they were a precast company – a bit like Bison – and, of course, in the end they were getting a bit fed-up with the company that I worked for. So eventually I said well if that's the case, I might as well do it for them myself and I finished up travelling all over the south. Every town on the south coast I'd say I stayed in; Weston Super Mare, Southampton, Romsey, Fordingbridge, Cornwall, Maidstone, Rochester.

Interviewer: And so were you still living in Kingsbury while you were doing all that travelling about?

Pat: Yep, I was driving from here.

Interviewer: And were you married at that time?

Pat: Not when I first started, no. We used to work hard, but we didn't feel it was hard, to be honest with you, because we'd great interest in the work, we enjoyed it, and if you've an interest in something it's always easier. Now, look, there's always days that's not as good as others; even in our younger days there'd be days when it's pouring rain and you had to work in it because circumstances would make you. I had much more control over what was going on, working for myself, and with the men working for me and what have you, I was able to up the standard a bit

Interviewer: So if you were here and started up on your own say three or four years after getting here, we're talking about 1970-ish. Who would you have been working for, in the main?

Pat: Development companies; housing, clubs, that sort of thing. Because, you see, we used to specialise in drainage as well. Actually I never advertised for work in my life; even today, all my work comes through recommendation. Which is a nice way to be. Some enjoyable things happen to you when you're working for yourself. I remember working out in High Wycombe¹¹ once, this lady wanted a fairly big extension put on her house, and I was there on my own setting it up for the first

¹¹ High Wycombe is a large town in Buckinghamshire, England. It is 29 miles (47 km) west north west of Charing Cross in London.

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couple of days, figuring out which was the best way to handle this; access and all that, squaring the place up etc. Anyway, she says to me, "Would you like a cup of coffee, Patrick?" and she brought me out a cup and says, "I can't understand you, why are you working on your own?" "Ah", I said, "yeah just for these first couple of days, getting things figured out and that". She says, "What are you going to be doing tomorrow?". "Well, I'm trying to get the placed squared up and see how it works out, because it's an odd shape" – which it was! "I suppose I'll have to bring Pythagoras tomorrow" I says. I didn't say any more. Anyway the next day she came out to me with TWO cups of coffee and says, "Where's your friend?" – "What friend?" says I – "Pythagoras, or whatever his name is" – "Ah no", says I, "that's just a name we use for how we square up and measure the buildings and stuff!" – "Ah, well then you'll have to drink the two cups" she says!

Actually the early days – the first four or five years I ever was here, from say '66 until, the early '70s, they were... (tough). Things moved on a bit after around '70-'72, they started getting a bit (easier); diggers and things were taking the hard work out of it. Technology meant that things moved on a lot over maybe four or five years, I believe, anyways. Well, when you think of it, them machines were able to do the work of twenty men! And why they didn't, kind of, have them before that, you'd wonder.

Interviewer: Well, probably technology and money. I mean, straight after the War and probably up until the mid or late '50s Britain was still recovering from the war and there was no money! It wasn't really until the '60s when the economic boom came that people started owning cars and vans. I mean vans must've made the lives of Irish migrant builders substantially better. I mean the lads we were talking about earlier, who had to camp on jobs, they didn't have to do that once transport came in...

Pat: No, that's right, they could actually travel 12 maybe 15 (men) to a van; twasn't that comfortable but it was better than camping on the job. They'd be playing cards coming and going and stuff like that; and they'd have an odd punch-up! ..Ah nothing serious like, but when you've that many lads together there's bound to be one causing problems! To be fair, the work was tough and hard, although them days – because there was no other way of doing it, I suppose – it didn't seem to be. Looking back on it, it definitely was; there's no doubt about it. But when you're young, fit and tough it didn't bother you so much.

And of course they would eat well, to be fair to them, they really did. Even today I know English lads that would ask me, "Is that a myth that they used to fry the pork chops on the shovel?" – I says, "It's definitely NOT a myth. And I'll tell you another thing, that shovel would be cleaner than most pans in most houses today. That shovel would be

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shining”...sure I done it myself often enough! The shovel would be absolutely clean from digging ballast and sand...it would be absolutely shining, there would even be a trace of paint on it! Of course the men looked after their shovels; there’d be many’s a row over someone else using your shovel, because it’s like any (valuable) tool. Often and often I seen them frying a pork chop on a shovel – often – and, of course, on a pan all the time! The tea would be made in a bucket, and you’d put your cup into the bucket but it would be good tea, and the bucket would be very clean; you know they had...[pause]...they had their *own ways of doing it*. They were clean, cups would be washed and everything. I mean...I work with some of them nowadays that won’t even wash a cup! [Laughter]

I’ve seen lads working with us; they’d be in jeans – well, in them days probably wore trousers more than jeans – and they might have last year’s suit trousers that were no longer good enough for going out dancing, are you with me? I’ve often seen them that when they were going home, they’d turn them inside out so they wouldn’t be seen in a bad state going home...some of them, not all lads. They’d have a little bit of respect for themselves, you see? If, for example, they were going on a train, they’d take the trousers off, knock seven sugars out of them, and turn them inside out! They wouldn’t want to be seen too scruffy, you know?

Interviewer: I remember my dad gave me a photo of a football team he played in, Taras, they were mainly Leitrim lads, from the ‘60s and every single one of them was suited up to the nines; turned out immaculately dressed in a dark suit and shirt and tie.

Pat: Not only that, but remember them days, they would not go into Marks and Spencers to buy a suit them days...you know that, don’t you?...you went into either John Collier, Burtons, Austin Reed or one or two others. You’d go in there and you’d be measured, and you’d have it made to fit...you’d look a million dollars! I’m sure you could get them off-the-peg as well, but mostly we’d get them made.

Interviewer: Ye must’ve been earning good money then?

Pat: Well, I mean, in comparison to what we were used to earning at home it *was* good money. You’d go and buy a watch as well. I’ve a watch here somewhere, it’s the first thing I bought when I came here and I still have it and it’s working away...the triggers rusted a bit mind...it’s got a few extra braces put in it! [Laughter] but the watch itself is going strong. Them days, they wouldn’t buy a watch unless it was nice and thin. They regarded a thin watch as the best quality. The other thing I remember they’d buy a Van Heuson shirt...a white Van Heuson shirt... and that’d be the height of fashion...heading for the Galtymore or one of them places! [Laughter].

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I mean, we used to go dancing three nights a week...and still work seven days. I often walked from the Galtymore in Cricklewood back here,¹² I’d be home at two or three in the morning, go to bed for two or three hours, be up again and out to work. I remember we built a big house for some fellow out in Chalfont St. Peter and we had to dig the whole foundation by hand; ‘twas a big house, I’d say the same as digging the footings for two lots of semi-detached houses and I’ll never forget the lad – he was a fellow from...[pause]...I think he was Kerry as well, actually – he used to go the Galty as well and while we were working we used to sing the same songs that we heard the night before! That’ll tell you it can’t have bothered us too much ‘cos we were able to sing *and* work [Laughter]. I’ll never forget, we used to have a pint of milk and two raw eggs in the morning off of the milkman. One morning this Kerry friend, John, he couldn’t drink the raw eggs – he couldn’t get them out of the shell right and he had it all over his face. The top man happened to wander into the shed that time and took one look at yer man and says, “What is that pig doin’?” [Laughter].

Interviewer: So for the most part of your working life, you were working for yourself?

Pat: Well, Yea, after the first four or five years here. I think after those first years, from the early 1970s onwards, things got easier all round.

Interviewer: Was there plenty of work around the whole time?

Pat: I was never a day out, ever, out of work. From that angle it was fantastic here; there was always work if you were willing to do it, you know what I mean? Some people went after the big, big stuff that paid big money; you know, they’d go into the tunnels and what have you, where you could earn really big money.

Interviewer: But there was big risk in that too, wasn’t there? I mean a lot of the big Irish firms, the Murphys and O’Rourkes, Clancys and McNicholas, all them went for that kind of work.

Pat: To be fair I watched...[pause]...I think it was Pincher Mac?...a few o’them used to work alongside us sometimes, and I think...how will I put it?...looking back on it now, I think some of them were abused. Some of the men were abused workwise because there was some o’them they used to be pulling cables now, and the reel of cable – I’m not joking you - would not fit into this room. There might be six or seven lads would have to grab that on their shoulders and walk through rough terrain to pull it off the roll. I knew two of the fellows that often you came across doing that type of work, and they were walking the shape they would draw the cable; they were actually out of shape. They weren’t walking straight; they were walking at an angle and I

¹² A walk of some four to five miles

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thought to myself that fellow is killed from pulling cable. So really that says to you there probably wasn't enough of manpower to do what they were doing.

Interviewer: 'Twas brutal work alright. I read somewhere that a lot of the time the lads that'd be doing that type of work would be pure casual labour; they wouldn't be working regular, they'd be just picked up in the pub. You'd often hear a ganger would turn up...maybe of a Friday; they used to do an awful lot of those big cable pulls of a weekend because services would be closed down and whatever, and they'd just get a gang of lads from whatever pub, it could be any pub; there was so many of them Irish houses in those days and they'd just announce, "there's a pull on in so-and-so tomorrow, do you want a shift?" They'd be recruited that way and they might just be there for that particular pull, y'know?

Pat: But, y'see a lot of people nowadays, they probably would not appreciate the weight of stuff. Y'know if you were to cut those big cables into lengths, you'd be lucky if you lift a metre of it yourself. So you can imagine what it must've been like. These boys were about three metres apart; 'twas sort of like a tug-of-war if you like. They were trying to keep the cable up on their shoulder and walk at a certain angle to try and unroll it, if you like, when some sort of gadget or machinery could have done it for them. Which is what we have now, but that's the way it was back in them days, there was none of that sort of equipment.¹³

Interviewer: But the cables you're talking about were big -

Pat: Sure they were massive, massive yokes...four inch diameter HV cables? That's what I'm saying, they were great men that did that kind of work; Christ didn't they earn their keep? Tough, strong, hardy... they weren't always big, but they were hardy toughs, y'know? They really were. The same fellows that were working with you at 2 o'clock on a Saturday, you'd see them at nine o'clock at night in a dancehall somewhere. A lot of them would go to the pub

Interviewer: So would the people, the lads that you socialised with have been mainly through the dancehalls?...I mean bearing in mind that you'd be from a tradition, a culture of sean-nos singing and the singing tradition in Connemara, did you have that in one box and the country music stuff in another?

Pat: Well, I mean, I always liked country and western music anyways (Irish country) and so did my wife, God rest her. But leading up to that, I mean, we used to be trying to play a bit of music; trying to play the

¹³ It is almost certain that cable-pulling machinery existed at this time in the 1960s, but likely that in the environment of post-war austerity and scarcity it was cheaper to employ manual labour to do such heavy work rather than the purchase costs for such machines.

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box and things...but...we'll say no more about that one! See we were never taught (music), we were only picking it up by ear, as young lads, 'cos my mum and dad played, you see? They both played the box, and my grandfather. As the man said, I know good music when I hear it, but when I hear bad music, I wouldn't know how to make it good! [Laughter].

Interviewer: So where do you think the bulk of the Irish living in London around those times socialised? In the dancehalls?

Pat: Well, some went to the dancehalls, some wandered into the Comhaltas¹⁴ scene -

Interviewer: Do you think the reputation associated with the Irish and the dancehalls is fair? There tends to be a lot of talk about fighting and drinking and that sort of thing...

Pat: Well, I mean if you're going to get, let's say, four or five hundred fellows at a dancehall it does not take much to spark something off, and to be honest with you, one fellow looks at another one's girl and their off. To be honest with you most of the time the same two men who fought each other ended up shaking hands and walking away. It wasn't (a huge issue)...I mean there was the odd occasion. St. Patrick's night at the Galtymore – we mustn't miss St. Patrick's night – not because of the dance, but to be outside afterwards where the boys would be there and there'd be a few of them having skirmishes, the police would be there with their dogs; there might be twenty police with Alsatian dogs and he boys'd be hissing at the dogs trying to rile them! [Laughter]. Y'know, it was all nearly harmless fun really. But on the odd occasion you'd get somebody that would...(take it too far), but you'd get that today if you got that many people together anyway, I'm sure of it. So I couldn't really say that the reputation (of the Irish dancehalls) is altogether accurate. Now, before my time, well, it might have been different.

Interviewer: Or even after...because when...I was talking to a couple of lads, now, that'd be younger than you; they were talking about in the mid-1980s where they'd often have a lot of hassle outside places like Biddy Mulligans in Kilburn. They told me one night they got arrested outside it, for example, and one of the lads who was arrested for being drunk and disorderly didn't even drink! But he was arrested anyway, because he was Irish basically. You may have come between two periods because obviously when the Troubles flared up in the '70s and '80s...did you even come across any hassle yourself from that time?

¹⁴ Comhaltas Ceoiltoiri Eireann (CCE) – a cultural organisation meaning "Society of the Musicians of Ireland" is the primary Irish organisation dedicated to the promotion of the music, song, dance and the language of Ireland. The organisation was founded in Mullingar in 1951 and has promoted Irish music and culture among the Irish people and the Irish diaspora. The London branch of CCE was founded in the later 1950s.

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Pat: Little bits and pieces, but nothing too...if you knew how to handle it, see? To be honest with you, the less said the better when you come in to those kind of circumstances. Because, you know, you'd see people going around collecting for various things¹⁵ and a lot of people would shout abuse at them and that kind of thing and really the wise thing to do was to throw a few pence in the thing and be done with it. I seen it myself in the early days of Roundwood Park.¹⁶ In the early of that festival there would be some of the people shouting at them (Republican collectors) and that kind of thing. I'd say to them you're as well off to throw five pence in the tin, as long as it makes a noise they'll move on.

Interviewer: Part of the problem, as well, was that an awful lot of the Irish were kind of stuck in this position where...they weren't...a lot of them were probably Republican in political terms but...

Pat: You would probably sympathise with the idea, but not the methods.

Interviewer: But certainly by many of the institutions of the state at that time – like the police, for example – you would be typecast; y'know, the kind of 'You're Irish, so you must be involved'...that kind of attitude.

Pat: Well, I experienced that myself coming back from Ireland. Actually that was as late as the '80s. I remember coming through Wales and I was monitored all the way along. 'Twas in September and I was finishing off something on the house at the homeplace¹⁷ and I couldn't finish it in time and had to bring the kids back (to London) for the school. What I decided to do was bring them all back, my wife and the kids, stay here (north London) for the weekend and then go back for another week...and, of course, that was probably the mistake I made.

Interviewer: Because it made you look like you were up to something?

Pat: Yes, exactly and I remember when I come back, I come out of the boat I decided I was too tired to drive back that night and I could not get a B&B. so I pulled up in a car park, thinking I'd better get a few hours' sleep in the car; I'd a Volvo car at the time that you could make a bed in it, y'see, so I went to sleep in the car. But anyways I woke up about half-past six in the morning with the crunching of shingle very close to

¹⁵ Pat was being very cautious in his language here but was clearly inferring Irish Republican Army collectors, who campaigned for funding contributions in many of the Irish pubs in London in this period.

¹⁶ The London Irish Festival was staged at Roundwood Park, Willesden, Brent in north London in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

¹⁷ Like many post-war migrants, Pat maintained a 'homeplace' in Connemara which was used as a holiday home. Many migrants either inherited old farmsteads from parents/relations as they died out, or invested in comparatively cheap rural properties in the later decades of the 70s, 80s and 90s when they had achieved a level of financial security which enabled them to. Some maintained working smallholding farms, perhaps run by brothers or neighbours, whilst working and ostensibly living in London.

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me and when I looked around there was the boys (the police) next to me. I thought "ah no...here we go!". So anyway they kind of fizzled off somewhere and I thought I'd better get meself set up in the car and I thought I'll shoot off and get going, 'cos I wasn't even off the island that time (Anglesea) and I thought I'd get going then when the Little Chef¹⁸ opens I'll get meself a bit o' breakfast. I went in anyways and did that, and when I came out and drove off for the motorway around half-past nine, quarter to ten, I had gone a couple of miles when the next thing I seen this police car again. They tailed me probably for about five miles and then...actually it wasn't a 'they' it was just the one man. Anyways after a while he pulled me up and he accused me of stealing the car, "This car" he reckoned "was stolen in Croydon¹⁹ last weekend, and you've driven to Ireland in it". Then he says to me, "Have you any proof that you own it?". "God" sez I, "I don't know, the only thing I can think of is the..." – what do you call that book that comes with the car? -

Interviewer: The log-book?

Pat: Well, you know you get the whole unit, these days, with the manuals and everything. "The only thing I can think of," I said, "It's possible that the bill of sale is still in the manual from the time I bought it"...and it was. And do you know what he said to me? He says, "What a likely story, huh?" He held me there for about half-an-hour. He went on his phone and maybe he had grounds or whatever. He came back to me anyway and said, "This car was stolen last weekend...well –" he says, "a car the same as this, but the reg(istration) is one digit out". I'll never forget it; that's gospel!

Interviewer: Sure, one digit is enough to make it a different car, isn't it?

Pat: Now what you can make of that I don't know. Of course they were dealing with...y'know, to look at it fairly...they were dealing with tricky stuff, y'see?

Interviewer: I daresay there was a certain amount of prejudice – some of it unfair – towards the Irish, but by the same token they were trying to deal with a problem that most of us (the London-Irish) would have had nothing to do with and...I suppose they had to be suspicious from time to time. But in general terms, did you ever get any – y'know, from when you came here in 1966 – overt problems with...(anti-Irish sentiment)?

Pat: No...(hesitant)...sometimes in certain companies you might feel a bit uncomfortable...and rightly so, sometimes, because things...[pause]...things weren't good. Y'know, like I said to you before, you'd probably sympathise with the *cause* – if I can say it that

¹⁸ British chain of retail motorway cafés throughout UK.

¹⁹ A south London suburb and Borough Council

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way – but not when there’s innocent people being blown to bits...y’know what I mean?...that’s just not on

Interviewer: No, of course not, and that’s the...see most people...the most difficult thing I always found about that period was – and I remember this from being as a teenager, really – was that the vast majority of Irish people felt exactly like you do and my dad did. They had no interest and no sympathy with *violence*, if you like. They might agree with the *political* aims, but they certainly had nothing to do with what was going on. But because you had an Irish accent, you would be under suspicion.

Pat: Indeed. I think the majority of the time that anyone got stopped by the police, one way or the other, would be along them lines – thinking that you had something to hide – that you were up to something yeah. Now, you’d cut them a bit of slack because, y’know, they *were* up against stuff...and I s’pose anything...they had to check it out, y’know, so fair enough.

Interviewer: But when you came, for example, you never seen any of them signs that were talked about...the “*No blacks, no dogs, no Irish*” signs?

Pat: O’ God aye...I seen them alright. Because my brother used to live in Camberley, in Surrey and it’s only shortly before I came here that he moved back up to London. But his friend – well he’s a friend of mine as well! – he kinda moved up with him (my brother) then. And anyway he asked me one night – in fact he asked me a couple of times – “Any chance of coming with me; I need to find myself a lodging house or digs?” see? Anyway we scouted the whole of Willesden, Kilburn, all that local area there around Harlesden and many, many houses that time used to have a poster in the window, “No Blacks, No Irish, and No Dogs”...and that’s a *fact*. And not necessarily in the same order or the same words – are you with me? – sometimes it might be said in a different way. And you know...we’d still knock on the door. Because I used to say to this Peter, “Look Peter, that might be just a general thing they leave up”

Interviewer: Well, I’ll tell you now that my father reckoned that he didn’t see any of them signs “until the black people started to come in to London” and his theory was that it was kind of aimed more at them than at the Irish -

Pat: Aye...maybe, maybe...maybe. But I know a couple of occasions where we actually knocked on a door and the people were quite pleasant, and they weren’t fussed about us being Irish. So you see your father’s argument might stand there, you see? But I used to say when he’d say “ah there’s no point in knocking” – “Ah look, Peter, sometimes personality can swing things”. It’s how you approach these people; if you’re going to go in like a bull in a china shop then you’re

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going to get nowhere but if you talk nice to these people...you know they can quickly judge and so can we whether you might get on.

Interviewer: Also things like being a non-drinker, as you were, that could make a big difference. I interviewed one man who said he had some sympathy with the reluctance of some of the English landlords to take in Irish lads because they’d be *damping down*, like y’know? They were drinking way too heavy and stuff. They’d be messing the bed and what have you.

Pat: Well, this is it, you see. Sometimes them lads, they made their own bed at times...(meaning they didn’t help themselves). It’s like I was telling you about the man that asked me to go and do the singing; he had some kind of a film he wanted to show. There was quite a nice crowd there – at a guess maybe sixty or eighty people there – this was five or six years ago. He asked me would I sing a couple of songs in Irish. I said of course I would. He showed a bit of the film then he’d get me to sing a song, then he’d show a bit more a film and so on. The songs were in Gaelic and I thought most of the people in here won’t even understand them. It went on for about an hour and a half altogether but anyways when we were finished – I can’t remember his name, but it’ll come to me – anyways he said, “What did you think?” I said, “Fine...’twas fine...The only thing” I said “was I kept wishing that you had shown both sides of the coin. Because you seem to have gone hell for leather to find only bad stuff about them men; bad work and bad conditions and...” I said “You never showed a picture of them lads in the pub until after midnight and then wondering why they couldn’t afford heating!” I told him I’d been over here since the mid-1960s and I’d never found myself in them conditions. Now fair enough there was family around me and what have you and that might have helped it a bit but I cannot understand why anyone would drink all his money away and then be shivering with the cold when he went home. I said surely some of them should’ve been able to afford to buy a heater!

Interviewer: The point about balance, I think, is that we all know that there were people in that position and there were men who lived their lives that way...but there were a *vast* amount of people who *didn’t*...and as you said, they never get a mention.

Pat: There’s no point in going around the whole time saying, “Ah the English did this and that to our boys”...not necessarily...to be honest with you in all my time – and I’ve worked in a lot of different places, different towns and what have you – I’ve found the English to be very nice. You could even have a bit of banter with them – if you know what I mean! The times I’ve said to English lads, “All that’s wrong with you” I said, “Is you just want to be Irish!”...just to get them riled up, like, but they’d take it very well. But I honestly think that you need to have a balanced view of all that.

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Interviewer: Well you just illustrated it very clearly when you said you *did* see some of these infamous signs; you chose to ignore them and knock on the door and found that you were generally well-accepted. You had the other example of when times were bad like when the Troubles were on and the police might give you a bit of hassle or whatever. But on the whole from what you've just said, the vast majority of English people you worked with, you got on very well with?

Pat: Yes...indeed I did. It's never all bad or all good, it's somewhere in the middle, y'know? It just upsets me a bit when someone goes to the trouble of doing a film that's not quite accurate. I couldn't help thinking to myself that night, when is he ever going to explain why things were that way

Interviewer: Or, for example, explain that there were a fairly big number of Irish builders from that era who *didn't drink* ...at all. But most of the time that's not mentioned...

Pat: That's right...an awful lot...an awful lot of them! Even today if I go somewhere and we're out drinking they'll (English) say, "What're you drinking Pat" and I'll say "I'll have an orange and lemonade" and they'll say, "Are you not drinking?" and I'll say, "No, I don't drink" and the usual response is "You're the only Irishman I've ever met who doesn't drink!". I usually tell them "You're joking me, 'cos I meet plenty of them!" I remember a classic one in Southampton where the managing director of the company we were doing the work for, his surveyor came for a site visit and I was laying paving outside the side window of the bar in this club - 'cos it was being extended - and the managing director knocked on the window and called me in; this was around lunchtime. So I came in anyways, and he says, "Patrick, I wasn't enjoying myself here with you working on site, will you not have a drink with us?" I said, "Yes, indeed I will have a drink with you" and the surveyor said to me, "What'll you have, Pat". I said "I'll have an orange and lemonade, please" and he says to me, "Ah no Pat, have a *man's* drink!". "Well now, Richard" I said, "Let me put it this way; look in there" and there was guys drinking Guinness and beer and what have you. I said "If you're not man enough to ask for my drink, I am, and I'll buy my own!". The managing director turned to his surveyor and says, "Now...put that in your pipe and smoke it!" [Laughter]

Interviewer: It kind of illustrates that point you were making, though, that there's this kind of image created around construction workers - and *particularly* Irishmen - not just, but *particularly Irish* men that somehow you're not a man if you can't drink.

Pat: Ah yeah, that's right...in fact I've come across that quite a few times. It didn't bother me. In fact yer man kind of felt worse about it than I did afterwards, y'know [Laughter]. It's only the one incidence but you

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can see the thinking behind it. Now I used to say to a lot of young lads that I'd meet out on jobs and what have you, I'd say "Now look, if you're going into the pub with your mates, if you don't want to drink, don't drink!...don't just drink because that fellow's drinking". See they felt they weren't the men unless they were drinking pints the same as the men alongside them.

Interviewer: I heard several men tell me that they didn't drink in Ireland *at all*; that it was only when they came here that they started...and it was because of what you said...kind of peer pressure, really...

Pat: Yeah, and in every walk of life there's a lot o' that. You have to be able stand on your own two feet and if people don't like it, well that's too bad!...and you know what? Sometimes they think, "BeGod he's got some guts"...they think better of you afterwards, because you open the avenue for someone else to do the same. I knew one fellow that used to drink and he said to me, "I hate being Irish with all this drink", I said, "Why d'you drink it?". He says, "Well, the lads...". I said, "Look, do yourself a favour, drink what you want to drink!"

Interviewer: That's the thing, really. I mean I enjoy a few pints myself but

Pat: [Cutting-in] - Sure there's nothing wrong with having a drink or getting drunk if you want to, but these lads were doing it *every* night...and not because they wanted to...but because they felt they had to! An awful lot o' them...you cannot tell me that a lot of them lads that I used to meet out were drinking because they wanted to. I remember going out to Lyon (France) in the early 60s - I was sent out on a special contract out there to learn this stuff, and there was Englishman from Reading sent with me. We had a great time out there; we hadn't a word of French - we nearly died the first night with the hunger because we couldn't order our food! So we had to sit at the bar the next night, waited 'til we saw someone order something and then say "We'll have two of them"! (Laughing). Anyway this lad that was with me, he says, "Are you going for a drink, Pat?". I said, "I don't (drink) but I'll go for an orange with you if you want". He said "You don't drink?" I says, "No...it never done nothing for me" I said "Don't get me wrong; I've nothing against anyone who drinks, if you want to drink fire away, but it just doesn't do nothing for me". He says "Oh, I thought every Irishman drank". Anyways, one thing led to another and he used to have his pint and I'd have my orange juice and we were good mates.

And then we were sent from there to Carrickmacross in Northern Ireland to do a job that we had learned to do in France on this course; we were supposed to go to Libya to do it but that fell through...or I probably wouldn't be here now if I the troubles hadn't kicked off in Libya that time and it all got cancelled, see. But anyway I sez to him one Sunday - Johnnie Perret his name was, from Reading...he still

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owes me a tenner actually! [Laughter] – I sez to Johnnie, “Look Johnnie, I dunno what you’re doing tomorrow, but I am going to go down the High Street to see if I can find a church. He said, “Oh, you go to Mass?” I said, “Yes. I’m not saying I’m the best Catholic in the world, but I’d like to go to Mass, and if I can’t find a church well then I’ll have to say a few prayers myself and that’s the way I left it. Anyways I did find the church and on my way out of Mass who do I see standing inside the door only himself! (Johnnie). Now he’s not a Catholic. I says, “What are you doing here!” “Ah” he says, “I thought if you can go to church, why can’t I!” Now he was sent over to Carrickmacross from Reading; I was sent home on holidays (Connemara) until such time as the job was ready, because it was the middle of summer, then sent back up there. And I landed in the hotel in Carrickmacross...the bloody place was haunted! [Laughter]...you can check it out, it was the Shirley Arms Hotel on the bend in Carrickmacross – anyway that’s another story! So I met Johnnie that night and I said “Are you going down the pub, Johnnie?” So when we got there I asked Johnnie what did he want to drink. He said, “I’m going to try your drink” I said “What!” That would’ve been maybe six weeks since we were in France and he reckoned he hadn’t drunk since the day we came home from France. I said “Why was that?”. “Well, to be honest with you, Pat” he says, “half the reason I drank was just the people I used to be with...and I had to admire how you were able to enjoy yourself”. I said, “Sure why not?...you don’t have to be drink to enjoy yourself!”

Interviewer: To be honest with you, though, Pat that was such a big cultural thing, especially in London, you had to be very strong-willed to do that. The pull of the whole Irish pub thing was very strong.

Pat: ‘Twas...very strong and I would put money on it that – not a majority, maybe – but a big percentage of young lads that came over here, if they’d been with...if they weren’t so *easily led*, let’s put it that way, they might have had a drink, they mightn’t have been pioneers but they might not have been as heavy on it as they were. They mightn’t have gone off the rails so often...which is a crying shame really. I mean there’s nothing wrong with people having a few pints of beer, but there’s a big difference between that and not being able to afford put heating in your room! That’s the way I look at it.

Interviewer: That’s the point, really, isn’t it? There’s a big difference between enjoying a few pints of a weekend and drinking yourself senseless every night because the blokes you’re working with tell you that that’s what you should be doing.

Pat: I mean, can you imagine, that a man gets out of the Earl of Derby²⁰ in Kilburn at twelve o’clock at night or whatever time the pub closes. He

²⁰ A popular Irish public house in the post-war era on Kilburn High Road.

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goes home and sleeps in the same clothes he had on working because he didn’t change them. He’s frozen with the cold and goes back out the following day, partly drunk *going to work*...that’s not a nice way to be. Because I’ve seen them come in drunk at nine in the morning... the same people... and to be fair to them, they’d still do a good days work. You’d think to yourself if that guy had three or four less pints last night, went home to a nice warm bed...what a man he’d be. Y’know, you think how tough he was on *himself*, there was nobody being tough on him, he was tough on himself in my view.

(Interruption: Short conversation about I Could Read the Sky for few minutes – not relevant to this interview)

Before I ever came over here, there used to be ads in the – I think the Irish Independent or the Irish Press, one of the main papers at home – asking for labourers to come over here. You know that don’t you? And mostly at the time of the Beet...working on the Beet harvest. Well, I suppose if you haven’t got the men you’ll advertise elsewhere -

Interviewer: Sure there’s a long track-record of the Irish going over as agricultural migrants from the west anyway. Tommy Healy, the fluteplayer...I don’t know if you remember him?...he went during the war for the harvest, y’know? That happened even way back in the nineteenth century, y’know, there was a pattern, particularly – I don’t think it was so much in Connemara, now, but Mayo and Donegal there was huge amounts of men that used to go. That carried on – that seasonal migration thing – until...well I heard one fella who said he remembers a gang of Mayo men who would come to Camden Town around September time every year and they would come down from Scotland where they had been harvesting. When the harvest was done, then, they’d head down to London and go on the buildings. That’s as late, now...he was talking about the late fifties then.

Pat: Well the guy, now, I was telling you about (earlier) that I went out looking for the room with him a couple of times; on different occasions actually, because he didn’t like where he was the first time – he spent a long time coming over ‘on the Beet’. I was telling you he was in Camberley? And I remember him telling my brother, he says “The next time you go down to see the boys in Camberley, I’ve left a pair of boots in the room; you might pick them up for me?” He did – Colman, my brother – and when he gave them to yer man, he says, “Well, I wasn’t too worried about the boots” he says, “I was more worried about what’s in ‘em!”...All his money was inside in the boot! Which leads me on to something else;, you see? they usen’t even have bank accounts. But at the same time, y’see, them days there wasn’t people around to advise you, see what I mean? There was a lot of stuff around that time where there was very little advice given to people, Nowadays, I mean, you can get everything on the internet instantly.

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But I mean...them days...mortgages was *alien* to people..."what's a mortgage?" Y'know?...nobody there explaining it to them.

Interviewer: I think that in the position that many young Irishmen found themselves in – my dad was certainly one of them; he told me that in late fifties, early sixties – he couldn't get a mortgage because he was considered a casual labourer, y'know? He didn't work for a big company, he was just moving from job-to-job.

Pat: (cutting-in) His paperwork wouldn't stand up. He'd never get a mortgage like that...no, no, no...because they'd want something secure, see? But of course, there wasn't people advising them, see. I mean I know Polish lads that came working for me – only a few years back – and of course I said, "Look" I said, "Do yourself a favour. Do everything proper. Look, pay your twenty-percent; you'll get the majority of it back at the end of the year. Have your paperwork right". I said, "You've two kids coming up, I'm telling you" I said, "You're going to need this later". A couple of years later he says to me "If it wasn't for you, Pat, I'd still be working in between jobs and I'd have nothing". There was nobody to advise us like that. Even when I came over here there was very little advice along them lines; t'was alien to people.

Interviewer: Jesus, would you believe we've nearly two hours done, Pat [Laughter]

Pat: Well I don't know if we have any more to add to it!...but you can pick the bones out of it! [Laughter]

Interviewer: I suppose, just to finish it off, I always ask people have you found your experience in London – on the whole – a positive experience, but given the fact that we're sitting in your house in north London, it would be difficult for you to say no! [Laughter]

Pat: Well to be honest with you – let me put it another way now – I enjoyed my time here; every single day. I even enjoyed many holidays in Ireland. But if I was put on the spot...and somebody said to me you have to move to Ireland...yeah?...I probably could, but I'd say a lot of people (who came over) wouldn't – are you with me? I honestly think a lot of people wouldn't because they felt they have a good living here. I could do it either ways. I mean I have no – I mean I have a place built over there (Connemara) and I love going there and all that kind of stuff. But...I can only speak good about this country – and that's Gospel. All the people I met here, in every which way I couldn't knock it...so, that's all there is to it.

I think myself that Ireland has changed.

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Interviewer: Oh hugely, I think. The Ireland that you and my mother and father grew up in is long-gone. The thing is if they went back to where they came from now, they wouldn't know anybody.

Pat: Well he wouldn't, that's true enough. It has changed beyond all recognition and...something I thought of there now...even the language has changed – Irish. Let me put it this way; I probably haven't changed with it. Because I'm here and I wouldn't be talking it every day like everybody at home is; so it kind of *overtakes you*, if you know what I mean? Because the language is after evolving because there's so much new stuff that wasn't there when I was – I mean there was no CDs, no mobiles phones...what would we call a supermarket, if it was there (when we were young)?...we'd probably call it a *big shop* in Gaelic, a direct translation. They call it something else, outrageous now, I can't think what the word is, it's so awkward...it's a bit like a Polish name! Things like that – but I mean I'm not knocking it, I'm just saying that's the way.

I'll tell you a good example. I was at home...must be three years ago last October. I was sitting down watching TG4. There was a woman – a schoolteacher – talking on the programme which she'd be roughly my own age and she was telling this interviewer how she taught in Donegal, Galway, Derry, Monaghan, Down, on the east coast, somewhere in Offally, Cork, she taught in a lot of schools over the time and they decided, herself and the husband that they'd retire to Galway – to Connemara, I can't remember what part now, but doesn't matter – and they decided to build a bungalow. Now she piped all this out for a half-hour or so, and I could understand every word she said. I remember saying to my wife, "She's got the real Irish that we all grew up with". Of course sadly, she told us at the end that the husband passed away before the house got finished, but that's another story. But *then* there was the news or something, and then another programme came on where there was three youngsters talking again to an interview about all sorts of things. I'll never forget that with all the hard listening I did, I said to Kathleen, "It's easier for me to read the sub-titles than to listen to them speaking Irish"...that's how much of a change there's been. And it's only *then* that I realised that I hadn't kept up-to-date with the Irish, or else the Irish has changed a lot...a bit of both, I think. Because somebody asked me here (in London) did I want to be their *Treoirín na Gaeilge*...I said "I'd be no good to you...I'm not really much good to you. I'd need to learn it myself to get up-to-date!"

END

Original Interview # 16 – John F - Mayo

Name: John F Date of Birth: 1951
Place of Birth:
Date of Emigration to UK: 1969-70
Date of Interview: 4, April, 2017.
Location of Interview: Author's house, Hertfordshire

Interviewer: So what I'm really interested in, John, is the construction-related stuff you recall. So it doesn't have to be all construction *per se*, but if it's related to construction workers; so the fact that you were in the pub game, for example, y'know...obviously that had a lot of interface with building workers.

John F: What about my introduction to the whole thing? Do you want to know about that?

Interviewer: Yea, yea, oh definitely. Well I suppose the easiest thing to do is start from the beginning, then. So you were born...when? Well, just for the tape, it's the 4th April, 2017 and I'm with John in Cheshunt, in Hertfordshire and we're talking about John's experiences migrating from County Mayo to work in England and specifically in and around London. So I guess you can start by telling me what year were you born?

John F: I was born in 1951 in a place called Kilmeena, between Westport and Newport. We had a smallholding, say, twenty to thirty acres, I would imagine. There was four siblings; three boys and a girl. My sister, Anne, she died very young from pneumonia, and that left the three surviving boys.

Interviewer: Where were you in the age-range?

John F: I was the middle one – I'm coming to that (laughs). It was sort of tradition that the farm or whatever you had was handed down from father to son. So the eldest son – should he wish to take it – would get the farm, such as it was, and then of course the other siblings had to find their own way in life. I went to a place called Rosduane National School and after that I went to the Vocational College in Westport – or the Technical College as it was called.

Interviewer: So you did get a secondary education?

John F: Yes, it was a two-year course. You did your Group Certificate, which I did in the summer of '65 and I wouldn't have been fourteen until the following September, so I left school eventually, virtually at thirteen. I had a very good Group Cert, actually, I think it was five or six subjects and I got three or four honours.

Interviewer: And so would that have been the standard of secondary education?

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John F: No, no, you had the Christian Brothers then, which was five years. At the Technical College we did woodwork, metalwork, mechanical drawing, English, Irish and maths...it's a vocational thing, yea? So I left there – as I say, I finished my education before I was fourteen. I worked for a short period for a wholesaler in Westport called James O'Connell, just to earn money, on a travelling shop, going around the locality. Then I moved to Achill and worked in Sweeney's until such time as, around December 1969 I left and decided to come over to England. It was '69 or early '70. I don't know the exact date, and I'll tell you why, because...everybody in Achill, the majority of the young people, were in England and they all came home for Christmas and they'd head back (to England) just after Christmas or early January.

Interviewer: So did you go back (or in your case, over) with somebody returning?

John F: Yes. The plan was...see I got to know the people coming home from England and each year they'd bring friends or siblings back with them (to England). So I had decided on leaving Sweeney's at Christmas and coming to England in the January.

Interviewer: So why did you?...was it the usual story; you just didn't see any prospects where you were, or?

John F: It seemed to be the thing to do...basically. I *could* have got a job – I could've stayed in Sweeney's or I could've got a job elsewhere. That's why I've never said that there was a lack of education or a lack of prospects in Ireland.

Interviewer: So you wouldn't say you were held back in Ireland?...

John F: I was not held back in any way. Had I stayed in Ireland I would have got a job and hopefully would've gone on to live a normal life. Look, everybody in Achill seemed to be heading for England.

Interviewer: So it just seemed to be the *hot ticket*, as they say?...

John F: Yes, yes, yes. So I headed off and I remember the day I left home walking out the village, and two of my neighbours – I don't think I've ever seen either of them since – one gave me five shillings and the other one put a ten-shilling note in me top pocket...yea. And I went to Westport and we got the train from Westport to Dún Laoghaire, the ferry to Holyhead and so on and so forth. When I arrived in Westport at the train it was like being in the pub in Achill – all my mates were there, and they were all going back (to England) yeah?

Interviewer: They were all lads heading back after the Christmas, like?...

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John F: Yes, indeed, and if I heard it once, I heard it fifty times, “Stick with us; you’ll be sound”...nothing could be further from the truth in my case! (laughs) I had my first pint of Double Diamond¹ on the ferry; I’ll always remember it. Then some of the guys were living in Preston at the time, so I said goodbye to them at Holyhead and headed to London.

Interviewer: So you had always intended to go to London anyway?

John F: Yes, to Cricklewood, yes.

Interviewer: So some of the guys headed for Preston, so were you on your own then?

John F: No, no, no...there lots of us heading for London; lads that lived in Cricklewood, lads I knew, that said, “Stick with us; you’ll be sound”...

Interviewer: Okay...I’ve a feeling there’s a sting in that tale! (laughs)

John F: We got to Euston. We got a black taxi to Cricklewood; I was never in one before – I never even saw one before, yeah? And when we got to Cricklewood Broadway, these guys got out of the taxi and ran off and left me to pay the taxi! (laughs)...so the friendships ended there!

Interviewer: That was a rough introduction to London!...

John F: Funnily enough before the Christmas there was a lady home on holiday with her husband, to Achill, that knew I was coming to England. And she came in to Sweeneys and she said to me, “Look, I live in 37, Olive Road, when you come over pop around and see us, or if there’s a problem you’ll be more than welcome to call us”. So when I got out at Cricklewood I thought ‘Olive Road’...where’s Olive Road?...And anyway, I found Olive Road and I knocked on her door – this was like seven o’clock in the morning, a Saturday morning – and she opened the door; she was just going to work. And you know I don’t think I’ve ever seen her since, but I’ve never forgotten her. She brought me in and she put the fire on and she said, “You’re welcome here. Now obviously we’ve got no space for you to *live* here, but you can warm yourself and stay as long as you want. I’ve got to go to work now,” she said, “My husband is upstairs in bed; he works nights” He’d just come in. So I thanked her and I stayed for a few hours in front of the fire, and when I had a few hours rest, I left. And I’ve never seen her since to my knowledge; but her husband did come to me, in the Crown in Cricklewood, years later and he said, “We often think about you, and were you okay, we worried about you”.

Interviewer: So what did you do? I mean when you got to Cricklewood you hadn’t any digs arranged with the guys you travelled with and what have you?

¹ Double Diamond Pale Ale is an English pale ale, first brewed in 1876 by Samuel Allsopp & Sons. It was one of the highest selling beers in the United Kingdom in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

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John F: Nothing. The guys said to me “Stick with us, you’ll be sound”...and they scarpereed! So I walked up to Cricklewood Broadway later in the morning; that morning, and I seen the bus with Kilburn on it, and me father used to live in Kilburn. So I got on the bus – now I had never been close to a black man before – or a black person.

Interviewer: (Cutting-in) Can I just clarify this? So you’ve landed in Cricklewood at six o’clock in the morning and you’ve literally *nowhere* to stay?

John F: Nowhere...and I think I had six pounds in my pockets and no plans. Nothing. So I got on the bus and the only seat available was on the outside of a black man, but I’d never been close to a black man before...I was staring at his ear...he must’ve thought I was nuts! I’ve told this to several people over the years. We didn’t even have a bloody telly at home so even when I’d seen black people it was in *black and white* (laughs). So when I got to Kilburn on the bus I seen the Red Lion pub, my father used to drink there. So I thought well, I’m going to in and have a pint here so when I’m writing home to my parents I can say I’ve been in the Red Lion.

Interviewer: (Cutting-in) So just so I’m clear, you’re father’s still alive at this time but he’s at home in Achill?

John F: In Kilmecna...yes.

Interviewer: So he spent time in London before you?

John F: All through the war. He met my mother in London, yes. In Kilburn, actually. Then they came home and got married and stayed at home, yes.

Interviewer: And you’re the next generation that’s gone again?

John F: Exactly. So I remember I went into the Red Lion to have a pint and I didn’t know anybody there.

Interviewer: You were nineteen at this time?

John F: Eighteen. So I came out and I crossed the road and I walked down to the Prince of Wales at Kilburn Park Station – you can virtually see it, yea? – and I went in with my suitcase, ordered a pint, and this guy came up to me and he says, “Have you just arrived?”. I says, “Yes”. He says, “Have y’anywhere to stay?”. I said, “I don’t know”. He said, “My friend will be in shortly. He’s renting a double-room and his room-mate went to Ireland for Christmas and he’s not coming back, so there’s a spare bed there. He’s...the man that spoke to me was a Tipperary man and his friend coming in was Tipperary too. He says to me, “Have y’any work?”. I sez, “No”. He went over to the phone box

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and he made a phone call; he came back and he said, “If you’re outside here at ten-past-six Monday morning the van will pick you up”.

Interviewer: God...so it was as simple as that? So you didn’t even have to go looking for work!

John F: Nope. As soon as I went in with my suitcase...maybe I was lucky, these were really nice people. Maybe I was lucky...

Interviewer: Might I suggest also that...y’know, you’re a big man and you were probably bigger then. So anybody who was in the subbing game would’ve seen you as potential.

John F: And there would have been a shortage of labour in those days because you didn’t have the eastern Europeans like you have now. So anyway, that was that; his friend came in, took me round to the house in Brondesbury Road in Kilburn. It was a Cork man that owned the house.

Interviewer: Were they good? Were they okay?

John F: No. Two pound a week for the bed in the room and it had a cooker in the corner, yeah? And I started work the following Monday and I was fine. Working for a Tipperary man again, called Brophy. I know he’s dead now, but I think his sons still carry on the company. So I got picked up at six o’clock and I was out in Letchworth, shovelling concrete on a building site. When I left home my eldest brother gave me his boots and his underpants – I’ll always remember, yea! And I don’t know about the underpants, but as soon as I got a week’s wages, I parcelled-up his boots and sent them back, yea? (laughs). I’d got my own boots by then.

Shortly afterwards I started going up Cricklewood – I hung around with these guys in Kilburn, because they were all I knew, you know? Drinking in the Prince of Wales (with these Tipperary lads) and the occasional pint in Butty Sugrue’s which was...let me think now, it wasn’t the Black Lion...the Elephant’s Head?...it was the Nelson, I think.

Interviewer: That’s the fella that did the stunt with burying the barman alive? Wasn’t he a wrestler or something?

John F: Yes, that’s him and I got to know him very well; we became good friends because he had a pub in Sheperd’s Bush called the Wellington and there was a gym downstairs in the basement and we used to train down there. Yea, I trained with Butty. He used to have wrestling in the pub. But those were the days when there was a bucket of soapy water on the counter for washing the glasses, and the barman dipped the glass to wash it and then filled it – and you sometimes had the taste of

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Fairy Liquid in the pint! And if you said anything there was always the chance a big barman’s fist would come around and clump you! (Laughs).

I decided to go to Cricklewood, to the Galtymore, to see if I’d meet some of my mates. I went downstairs to pay my rent on the Saturday and I knocked on the door of the landlord – he lived downstairs on the ground floor but there was nobody in. So I thought there’s nothing I can do. I went up to Cricklewood, went to the Galtymore; met loads of friends of mine. I walked back home and found that I couldn’t get in. I’m knocking on the door but still couldn’t get in. So eventually he opened the door with a chain and I says to him, “I can’t get in” and he says, “You haven’t paid your rent”. I said, “I came down to pay my rent but there was nobody in; I had to go to Cricklewood.” He says, “Have you got it now?”. So I had to pass the two pound in before he would take the chain off. I stayed one more week and I was gone!

I went down to Cricklewood and I got digs with an Achill Island man (a ‘townie’) – I’ll always remember it; he had a three-storey house he bought for...I think it was five and a half thousand pound at the time...in Cricklewood, in Lichfield Road. Him and his wife and baby stayed on the ground floor; his father and mother and his sister stayed on the first floor; and there was five of us – there was two doubles and a single room at the top floor. So five of us had that. There was a cooker on the landing and we had to do all our washing in the bathroom. We paid two pound-a-week each, which was ten pound-a-week...which paid his mortgage.

Interviewer: So how many people were in that house altogether, then?

John F: Well, five and three’s eight, and three’s eleven with the baby.

We used to drink in the Crown in Cricklewood of a Sunday morning, yeah? I can always remember this; you had all these guys who lived in rooms and, to be frank, lived for their beer, right? Tony Molloy (the landlord) would come in and because he owned his own house, he was sort of like an outcast! Often you’d hear guys say “Look at him over there. He’s only gone and bought a house...He’ll be paying for it for the rest of his life! How could he be so dumb!” He was treated differently by some people – almost as an outcast at times - because he now had his own house, he was a house-owner. And I used to sometimes walk down to the Crown with Tony and we would talk. And he would say, “Ah these guys...since I bought my own house, they don’t seem the same...” – and these were all Achill Island people, y’know? His own people. Several years later at a wedding in Colindale, I think, of an Achill Island guy; I’m talking now about after I got married, I met Tony Molloy who was at the same wedding and we talked about it. And I said, “What’s your house worth now?” He said, “Well, one on the street was recently sold for four hundred and

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fifty thousand!” (laughs)...and the guys who were making fun of him are still living in rooms!

Interviewer: Who’s the mug, eh?

John F: Exactly...exactly, y’know. Anyway, I got a job then...I wasn’t labouring for that long and I got a job as a steel-fixer on the Western Avenue flyover.

Interviewer: I’m interested to know, now. Steel-fixing is regarded as a skilled?

John F: (Cutting-in) *Semi*-skilled. Shuttering carpentry is skilled, even though steel-fixing is far more complicated.

Interviewer: Yea, okay, I’d agree with that. My memory of the early days of my construction work were that the shuttering chippies were considered tradesman – steel-fixing wasn’t quite...it wasn’t labouring, but it wasn’t quite -

John F: (Cutting-in) It wasn’t as prestigious as shuttering carpentry and they always got more money, yes.

Interviewer: So it wasn’t quite as prestigious, steel-fixing, but still it’s regarded as semi-skilled, so how did you learn to do it, for one, because presumably you’d never done any steel-fixing before? And how did you convince anybody that you *were* a steel-fixer to get started in the first place?

John F: Well, a friend of mine, who was a steel-fixer on that job – again a lad from Achill Island whom I knew – he said they were looking for steelfixers. So he got me the start and he took me down. The guy...the foreman, I told him I’ve never done this before and he said, “Go over there (to a quiet part of the site) where you’re out of the way and see if you can pick it up. So I went with my mate as we always worked in twos –because it was daywork as opposed to pricework² it wasn’t as demanding.

Interviewer: Yeah, you weren’t on measure

John F: No exactly, not at that point. And so I picked it up and I was fascinated with the drawings and, I must admit I used even, later on, take the drawings home of an evening and study them until I got the hang of them. It was like riding a bike; as soon as learned how to read one

² This is an important distinction to operatives on construction sites. Payment by ‘day-work’ meant that you were paid for each hour or part thereof actually worked irrespective of output (although contractors would often challenge particularly poor productivity which appeared on daywork sheets) whereas price-work (often colloquially referred to as ‘piece-work’ also) was where payment of wages were calculated by reference to preset rates per unit of production (In the case of steel-fixing it would be X-pounds or shillings per ton (imperial) or tonne/kilo (metric) of steel reinforcing bar fixed in place).

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drawing properly, that was it, you were off. And I worked there until the job nearly came to an end, for an Irish subcontractor. It was the Western Avenue flyover, from Paddington to the White City.³ At that stage I think it was the biggest span (of flyover) in Europe, y’know. So I worked there until I picked it up.

Interviewer: Can you remember who the subby was?

John F: The subby was Sullivan, he was a Kerry man – no! – a Cork man and I think Laing was the Main Contractor⁴.

Interviewer: Did he do demolition, that fella, as well?

John F: No. Not to my knowledge. So then when that came to an end I went to Coventry again fixing – with him (Sullivan) - on the Midland Links. It went through Bedworth and on in to Nuneaton and that direction.⁵ That was Laings again.

Interviewer: See again that’s a pattern isn’t it? You tended to get that if you were in with a contractor, you could stay in with that same contractor...if you were ‘oiling the right wheels’.

John F: As a subby you could, yes. That job was different; that was piecework or ‘lump’ as we’d call it, yeah? We worked twelve-hour shifts most of the time. The van would pick you up in the morning and drop the various gangs at the various bridges and then you’d flag down the tea van as it went by during the day to get tea and a bacon roll or whatever. Then the van would come back in the evening to pick you up at eight o’clock in the evening. And we used to do that five days a week and four o’clock Saturday.

Interviewer: And I presume you had digs in Coventry?

³ This is the now infamous Westway route, a 3.5-mile (5.6 km) long elevated dual carriageway section of the A40 trunk road in west London running from Paddington to North Kensington. The road was constructed between 1964 and 1970 to relieve congestion at Shepherd’s Bush caused by traffic from Western Avenue struggling to enter central London on roads of insufficient capacity. It was intended as a link road from Paddington to Ringway 1 of the *London Ringway Network*, part of the GLC Ringway Scheme developed in the 1960s, most of which was subsequently cancelled in 1973. The Main Contractor for the Westway project was John Laing & Sons (Source: Berry Ritchie, *The Good Builder: the John Laing Story*, (London, 1997), p.141.)

⁴ See *supra*, footnote 3.

⁵ This was probably the A444 Bedworth By-pass and Link Road to Nuneaton which was completed in March 1970 and is now a primary road running between Coventry and Burton upon Trent in England. (source: Alan Cook, ‘History of the Nuneaton Area’ at *Nuneaton Millennium Project*, online history, available at http://www.nuneatonhistory.com/uploads/1/8/6/8/18680466/nuneaton_history_alan_cook.pdf (accessed 4 May, 2018). The section John F worked on was the Bedworth Road Viaduct which was completed c.1972.

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John F: When I went to Coventry I walked down Foleshill Road and I met this guy and said to him, “I’ve just been transferred up from London; I’m looking for a place to stay”. He was a Donegal man. He says to me, “I live on me own in that house there. I built it myself” He was a bricklayer. He says, “If you want, there’s no blankets there but there’s a room, you could throw a coat over yourself and get a blanket tomorrow.” So I moved in there and then.

Interviewer: And was there that many Irish in the big cities at that time that you could run into them randomly?

John F: Well, Foleshill Road was all Indians because you had Owen Owen⁶, Jaguar Daimler, The Morris factory⁷...all Indians⁸...you’d step out of the house in the morning and you’d smell the curry in the air. So I lived there with him (the Donegal man). We became great auld buddies; we used to drink in the ex-Serviceman’s Club there, it was a short walk up the road.

Interviewer: Did you ever think of doing any factory work?

John F: No. No. I had no inclination to do that kind of work. The only thing I ever did was I wanted to work and then see how I progressed up the ladder and -

Interviewer: The only reason I ask is that there’s some people I’ve interviewed, who when they first came to London DID get factory work but just hated it.

John F: They did, yes. Some people from where I come from in Kilmeena, a lot of them went to Harrow and worked in the Kodak factory, lots of them. But...it wasn’t for me, y’know...

Interviewer: There is a certain thinking that if you came from the west of Ireland, and if you came from a farming community particularly, they just hated being indoors. They wanted to be...y’know...outdoors and have a little bit of freedom, y’know? Because presumably even, as you saying, on the motorway jobs like up in Coventry, altho’ you’d get dropped off and you have the day and then you get picked up so there’s a certain structure to it, if you like; but *in between* that you’re more-or-less working on your own initiative, aren’t you?

John F: Well, you had a chargehand⁹ but because we were on price-work if there was a gang of five required, four people did it. If there was a gang of four required, three people did it. At the time it was seven

⁶ A long-established departmental store chain with a large department store in Coventry.

⁷ Large automobile factories

⁸ What John was referring to was that these factories and businesses employed a high percentage of the Indian migrant population in the early 1970s.

⁹ A chargehand is a worker, ranking below a foreman but often also referred to as a working-foreman, in charge of others on a particular job.

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pound a tonne for steel¹⁰ so each person had to fix a tonne of steel per day to cover his wages because the ‘going rate’ was £7/day. I remember three of us fixing a hundred tonne in 10 days; so we had £700 going three ways. That’s when you could buy a pint of Ansell’s bitter for one and seven¹¹. But we didn’t get it all in one week. He held some of it back and then topped us up when we had a bad week, when it was raining, y’know what I mean?

Interviewer: Who’s this, now, Sullivan?

John F: Yes, Sullivan. Which we didn’t mind; it balanced out, y’know?

Interviewer: And he was...like, he was fair with ye and all that?

John F: Oh God, yes, yes, yes, very much so. We got paid by cheque, and there was a garage nearby used to cash them and would charge five shillings or something like that. But then what happened was when the unions come, they’d come and say, “There’s four men here, you need five”. So Mr Singh arrived with his turban, right?...to make up the gang. But he’s not a steelfixer, yet he would be getting the same money as us at the end of the week, because he’s part of a gang, y’see?

Interviewer: So...why did he arrive, why did you not get another steelfixer?

John F: This thing happened, and I *vaguely* remember this now, yeah? I remember we ended up with an Indian guy - who was a nice guy -but he wasn’t a steelfixer. We used to send him to the shops and to get bottles of Tizer for us and stuff -

John F: Yes, yes, so when the unions arrived at one end of the job, the guys were going out the other gate at the other end of the job, if you know what I mean? ¹² I went on to Manchester, then, and I remember I landed in Manchester and, again, I had no place to go. So I went to Plymouth Grove, you had the Carousel Dancehall, the famous Irish dancehall and directly across the road there was a doorway, so I put my suitcase in the doorway and, well, I knew I couldn’t go in to the Carousel with my suitcase, so I sat in the doorway and watched everybody else coming and going hoping there might be someone I’d know. Anyway, I fell asleep and when I woke up everybody was gone!

Interviewer: Well, you were tired, obviously -

¹⁰ See footnote 2

¹¹ One shilling and seven pence, which equated to 19 old pence in 1970, about £1 at current values.

¹² What John is subtly alluding to here is that the ‘best’ productive workers, those who could make big money because they worked very efficiently on price-work, as in the case of his steel-fixing gang, would quit the job if the unions imposed unproductive or less productive gang labour on them.

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John F: Yes I was. Anyway these two guys came along – they were English guys – and they said, “Are you okay, have you a place to stay?” I told them I hadn’t and he said, “We live around here; come with us”. And again, I’ve never seen the guy since; this young guy brings me into his room and he says, “you can kip in my bed, because I’m going to work in about two hours, I’ll just kip on the chair”. And I remember I had a lot of money with me and I was worried what to do with it. I had been working on piece-work all summer and that...

Interviewer: That was on this Coventry job?

John F: Yes. I would have had the best part of a thousand pounds in my wallet, y’know? In cash. So I went in to the bed and I fell asleep and when I woke up in the morning the guy had gone. I don’t believe I ever saw him since.

Interviewer: But there was nothing amiss now?

John F: Not at all, not at all...but I was conscious of it...yeah? And the fact that these were English guys and I’d never met them before; complete strangers. I then went up to the Stockport Road and on the advertising boards in the newsagents you’d see rooms advertised. So I got a room and I started working on the M63 for a Donegal man called Doherty. So I worked there for a long time, and then I went straight on to the M62, (24.25) I worked on that as well.

Interviewer: And was this all steel-fixing?

John F: All fixing. Yeah, yeah. And then I worked in Runcorn. Then I came back to Cricklewood in ’72, I think it was; yes, early ’72 and I started...I did the piling steel¹³ on the last section of the M1, which was again...no! I came back and I did a sewage works for Masterson,¹⁴ yea, in Aylesbury, the time of the strike.

Interviewer: What year was that now? ’72? That was the National Strike?

John F: The National Strike, yeah, and this job was a way off the beaten track, and we carried on working; we lived in caravans there.

Interviewer: So the unions wouldn’t know what ye were up to?

¹³ Piling steel refers to the large-diameter steel reinforcing cages used in deep insitu RC bored or augered piles on large-scale structures, in this case probably bridge or flyover abutments and structures.

¹⁴ Martin and Michael Masterson were both from Achill in Mayo. Martin was the elder brother and was known as ‘The Red’ because of his red hair colour. Michael, the younger brother, later founded Masterson Holdings and Getjar Ltd, which together form another prominent late post-war Irish construction empire. He was also a ‘townie’ – in colloquial terms – of John F, hailing from Achill Island in Mayo. See also Appendix B – Corporate Histories, p.79. Martin Grant, from Tipperary was in some form of informal business partnership with The Red Masterson around this time.

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John F: Every Monday morning you had a gang of guys from Coventry and the areas around, see word got around from all over the country that that job was active...

Interviewer: How did you find the whole set-up with the strike? Because I know one of my earlier interviewees, he was working at the same time as the strike was going on and he was working for a Tipperary subbie, funnily enough, I think he was Martin Grant as well.¹⁵ He said they were working on a job in St. John’s Wood and he’d send vans to pick them up and take them to another job in the afternoon to keep them out of the way of the unions. So if he knew the union guys were coming around....so they were basically dodging the unions! But these guys were quite happy to be taken...I mean this particular guy was a Leitrim man and he was working with his brother, but essentially ‘they didn’t really want anything to do with the unions and strikes and that sort of thing because it just meant we were out of pocket.’

John F: Everybody wanted to work in those days...everybody just wanted to work and eh...Masterson put me in charge of the steel there, I remember, and you had steel-fixers coming from all over. So I worked there until...

Interviewer: Presumably because they knew they could keep working?

John F: Well, y’know, these guys...obviously a lot of them had no savings, so when they had the strike, like, they had no money and guys used to come from Coventry and all over, y’know...to see if they could get the start there. And so when that job finished, I came back to Cricklewood and hung around for a while, then I went to do the piling steel on the last section of the M1 (motorway) that goes in to Staples Corner.¹⁶ Now that was a step up (27.52)

Interviewer: Was that with Masterson again?

John F: No no no, that was with...an Englishman, funnily enough. That was a step-up from steel-fixing normally; speed-wise. I would wear out a nips in a week! I was putting on an average of two thousand ties a day.¹⁷

¹⁵ Correction: Subcontractor was Martin Grant. See Appendix A, OI#1 -Tom- Leitrim - Rev 3, p.5.

¹⁶ Staples Corner is a major road intersection in north-west London close to Brent Cross Shopping Centre where the M1 Motorway commences and intersects with the North Circular orbital outer ring road (A406). It was originally designed as part of the British government’s 1960s Ringways policy of outer orbital roads for Greater London. It is also a major national rail and London Underground intersection. (Source: Tony Travers, *London’s Boroughs at 50*, (London, 2015), p.275.

¹⁷ This refers to a steel-fixers main hand-tool which is a pair of case-hardened steel pliers/pincers known as ‘nips’ or ‘nippers’ and used to connect steel rebar rods together with short-strands of fine-diameter steel wire known as ‘ties’ which are put around the two intersected main rebars rods and twisted together to join the bars and keep them in place.

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Interviewer: What was the...what were you doing?

John F: The piling... you had the bored piles, the rigs; these were all Northern Ireland men for soil mechanics. You drill the hole -

Interviewer: These were bored piles?

John F: Yes. You drop the steel cage into it.

Interviewer: So you were making up the cages?

John F: Yes, I was making up the cages. I was getting two pound-thirty a cage, and they were pouring twelve-a-day, so I had to make thirteen, so there was one for the morning, yeah? Now, if somebody else came, then there was two of us, I was getting...(thinks)...twelve twos...like twenty-seven pounds-sixty I was getting a *day*; I reckoned I must've been the best-paid man on that job. But if somebody else came, I'd have to halve that with them. So I decided to do it myself; and I was flying! I was going so fast that...

Interviewer: And you were making up how many cages?

John F: Well, you see the cages were different sizes, but the actual cage on that job was a big cage. I was making twelve a day and I'd have one on the trestles for the next morning, yeah? So that if I was late or anything, they had one, yeah? And you'd get through a pair of nips in a week because, you see, you were tying so fast that as soon as you'd see daylight (in the blades of the nips) it would make it difficult, and I would give them to the ordinary steel-fixers, y'know? But doing it, tying the cages up and down on the trestles all day, I was so fast that some of the fixers would come out and they'd stand watching me tying...flying, yeah! And I was ambidextrous, so I could put on the tie with this hand and tighten it with the other, y'know? It was something you could either do or not; some people could, some couldn't. I tried it and I could. And then, because there was only, I think it was, an inch between each pile, they had to do (cast) every second one, and then when they had gone off they came back after and did the ones in-between. So there was about a six-week gap...

Interviewer: I think they call that contiguous piling

John F: So there was about a six-week gap where I had no work. So I hung around Cricklewood and I drank and gambled and, the day I went back I didn't even have enough money for me breakfast, the day I went back! (laughs)...because I'd help other guys as well, y'know? And so that was that, y'know.

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Then, around that time, there was...oh, on that job there was a foreman chippie¹⁸ - a Galway man - he was the head doorman in the Buffalo in Camden Town¹⁹ or the Carousel, as it was then. So he invited me down one night and I went down and they were short a doorman, and he asked me if I would, er, work on the door.

Interviewer: In the Buffalo?

John F: Yes. Six pound-a-night. So I said yes.

Interviewer: Bill Fuller owned that at that time, didn't he?

John F: That's right, yes and Jim Walshe was the manager there. So I worked in the Buffalo...there was six of us there; two on the door, two in the bars upstairs, and two on the floor...now...'twas hard work. West of Ireland men coming in...

Interviewer: But you were getting six pound a night?...decent-enough money, though...

John F: 'Twas, yeah, yeah, it was. It was hard work because you had two elements, you had...(sighs)...you had Ballycroy men, there was a lot of them there, that didn't like the Bellmullet men, and none of them liked the Connemara men, right? So you had three factions, right? (32.10) And they were all nice guys to drink with and socialise with, but when they were in the same bar together, it was bad news. My workmate was a guy from Connemara who had fluent Irish, and he could understand what the Connemara guys were on about, and when they'd say '*Seanfada*' he knew they were talking about me...which was the Irish for '*Long-John*' obviously (laughs).

So I worked there, and then everybody seemed to be moving up to the Forum; it seemed to take off then, yeah?

Interviewer: I'm just going to interrupt you for a minute; why...is it just?...why do you think? This has come up a few times in interviews; this clannishness that went on...y'know...was it football? Was it, y'know...because I heard the same thing used to happen between gangs of Donegal men and Mayo men that were working on the Victoria Line, the tunnel men, y'know? Same kind of clannishness; if they met up in a pub or a dancehall, there'd be trouble, y'know.

John F: It seemed to be an Irish thing, y'know, and it goes back to...well...the only way I can describe it...it goes back a long way and many years ago y'had the different villages and each village had it's hero. Or in the early days...like the American Pitbull Terrier originated from the south of Ireland. Each village had their prize dog, right? I know I'm drifting

¹⁸ Carpenter

¹⁹ Bill Fuller's legendary Irish dancehall, see Appendix B and Chapter 5.4 Main Thesis.

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away, now, but bear with me. When you had the landlords riding around on horseback, the peasants – so-to-speak – they weren't allowed to keep a hunting animal but they were allowed to keep a terrier for ridding the farmyards of vermin. So the American Pit Bull Terrier, he looked like a terrier, but he was still capable of taking down a deer. There was no darts or pool or anything in those days. Y'know it was pretty barbaric, so y'had each village had its prize fighting dog and that culture seemed to transfer to the people, y'know? I mean...I knew men...big tough men...these were tunnel men and you had the top man from each locality...the top-man from Belmullet or Ballycroy or the top-man from Connemara...

But it translated even in the work itself, it seemed. Because even working...like they were paid...like you could take the tunnel men as a good example. They were paid so-much-a ring, to do so many rings in a day and, y'know, if the Connemara men put in three rings in a day, the Donegal men would have to do four. That was called 'dogging', y'see...they would 'put the word out'... and they, y'know, it had to be...it was a prestige thing. Yes, it was a prestige thing and I used to hear them talking in the pubs about this and headings and...these were great workmen. They took pride in their work and the accuracy; when you're driving a heading you had to...you couldn't go offline...you know...and their accuracy, y'know, these men took pride in their work!

Interviewer: And was it the same kind of vibe in the dancehalls, is that...?

John F: Well...(tentative)...as a doorman you sort of mixed with every sort of crowd. The job was to make sure there was no rows or that, y'know, as best you could, you know what I mean. But a lot of people from some areas has an automatic dislike for people from other areas – even though they never ever probably met each other previously! – it was strange...y'know...sadly, it was strange.

Interviewer: Ah I mean there's always been this thing in Ireland...the kind of 'blow-in' culture, y'know? If you're from a different part of...this kind of 'You're not from round here' attitude. It seems like that might have been translated to London.

John F: It was, yeah. It was funny, then, because later in life when I became a publican, a lot of those guys used to drink in my pubs; granted now, a lot of them were older at this stage and had become married men and settled down, but I found them all the nicest and most-friendly of people. Y'know, they were lovely, but in a younger...in a different environment. The dancehall seemed to be the place to go for trouble, if you know what I mean and when you were the doorman you were everybody's enemy. Y'know, without doormen the dancehall couldn't survive, but you couldn't tell these guys that, y'know...it's like the traffic warden! We had some good times there.

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Interviewer: So how long were you in the Buffalo?

John F: I was in the Buffalo I'd say about two years, yeah?

Interviewer: But presumably at the same time, John, you're working during the day...right?

John F: Oh God, yes, yes. And then after that I moved on to the Forum.²⁰ Everybody seemed to be moving up there, it was the 'in' place.

Interviewer: In Holloway Road?

John F: In Kentish Town, yes.

Interviewer: John Murphy owned that, didn't he?

John F: Murphy owned it, Bernie Daly had the lease of it and the manager was Mick Whelan²¹.

Interviewer: That's the Mick Whelan who eventually had the Thatch club in Holloway Road, isn't it?

John F: Yes, yes, yes, that's him. A great friend of mine, Mick, and I worked there, off and on for years. I worked there and I also lost my job there, and then I worked in the Harp in New Cross for a while too. And then I come back and I had...oh...I got a very good job, then, working on the Esher Bypass, the A3...I was a structural supervisor over fourteen bridges and seven underpasses for a company called French Kier.²²

Interviewer: Ah yeah, I know French Kier alright. Were you working direct for them, now or were you a subcontractor, or what?

John F: No, I was structural supervisor for an English subcontractor who did all their work. Great people to work for.

Interviewer: By this stage, now, it sounds like you've kind of moved up in skill terms or seniority terms?

²⁰ The Forum was a dancehall in Kentish Town adjacent to the yard and head office of J Murphy & Sons Ltd (Green Murphy) and owned, from the early 1960s onwards by Folgate Estates, John Murphy's property company. It later became a very famous rock venue in trendy 1990s London and was renamed the Town and Country Club. See Chapter 5.4 of Main Thesis.

²¹ Mick Whelan was a renowned drummer who played with the famous 'Thatch Ceili Band' in the 1980s when they won two All-Ireland Senior Ceili Band titles at Fleadhanna in 1986-1987. He was also a prominent promoter and businessman who facilitated the employment of musicians and musical associates in the Irish ethnic enclave within the London construction industry.

²² In 1973 W&C French, one of the leading main contractors in Essex and Greater London – and one of the original British main contractors known to employ materially significant numbers of Irish migrants merged with Kier, a company of Danish ethnic origin which developed into one of the major construction and civil engineering contractors of 20th-century British industry.

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John F: Yes. Actually before that I was a foreman on the Brent Cross Shopping Centre. After I left the M1 job, which was finished, the Brent Cross Shopping Centre was starting and I got a job as a foreman steel-fixer on that job. That would be about '73 or '74. I know that because during '75 and the hot summer of '76 we were in Esher.

Interviewer: Who were you working for at Brent Cross?

John F: I don't know...Alfred McAlpine, was it? Or Robert McAlpine – whichever is the civil engineering one. You had civil engineering and construction. They were two brothers, I think, from Scotland. One of them was a civil engineer and the other was in construction. Anyway I was a foreman fixer there, all through that year until it more-or-less finished.

Interviewer: And was that working for a subbie?...an Irish subbie?

John F: No!...D'you know, I honestly can't remember, y'know?

Interviewer: Well sure, it doesn't matter.

John F: Funnily enough, how I got that job again. I went into the Prince of Wales in Dalling Road in Hammersmith after...we were in Butty Sugrue's gym downstairs. And I went into the toilet and the guy next to me had a tattoo on his arm and I remembered a friend of mine in Coventry had the same tattoo. When he turned around and I saw his face it was him, yeah?

Interviewer: The same man?

John F: The same man! And I said to him, "What're ya doing down here?" He said, "I'm a foreman on the Brent Cross Shopping Centre", he said, but he said, "My wife's not well and I'm going back home" and the agreement is that I have to replace myself. So he said, "What are you doing?" So I said, "well nothing really". "Okay", he says, "I'll meet you there tomorrow morning". He met me there the following morning and he says (to the main contractor's site manager) "This is a friend of mine; he can do my job better than me" he said, "I've gotta go". And that was it, I started the job and there we are.

Interviewer: Wow...and you were there 'til the finish.

John F: No, no...I was there all through that summer and then I went and I got a job – a subcontract job of my own, a price-work job where I worked on again for about...it was a pipeline with a culvert section of a bout a mile long. 'Twas good work, I worked there about 9 months...again all that time I worked in the Forum as well, yeah? At night.

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Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, so you're doing a good day's job in construction and then working in the Forum of a night.

John F: Yes. Then I...when I finished the job at Esher, which was late '76 – this was around the time of the Guildford bombings – I was never politically orientated or politically-minded, but I...

Interviewer: Did you notice any difference; was there any hassle or?...

John F: No hassle whatsoever. We were all questioned, right? Because it was the norm; there was a big motorway job with a large contingent of Irish people quite close to Guildford at the time.

Interviewer: So you were arrested?...

John F: Well, no...I was *invited* to come in for questioning, and they went through all my men with me. I'll always remember this; my brother Padraig, right, who later had the *William IV*²³ had (shortly before) come over and I didn't want anybody to know that I had a brother on the job, so I gave him the assumed name of Paul Ryan. So he worked there under the name of Paul Ryan. Now obviously the anti-terrorist squad had been in the (site) office and they'd gone through all the records. So when they...I went down for the interview so-to-speak, they went through all the people and they says to me, "Can you tell us about this Paul Ryan?" I says, "Why do you ask?"...y'know there's certain things you remember what...even thirty years later; "We've had our eye on him for a long time" they said to me! (laughter)

Interviewer: Oh no!...(laughter)

John F: "Oh really?" I said. They said, "oh yes. He's a dodgy customer". "Well, let me stop you there" I said, "His name is not Paul Ryan!"...so I had to tell them the whole story and go through it with them, and everybody laughed, and I thought to myself, "No! you're joking" – the one person that was on a wrong name, yeah? They said, "Oh we've been watching him for a long time"...

Interviewer: Because they knew he had a false name, perhaps?

John F: Well maybe, yea, maybe that was it! But anyways I said, "No, he's my brother, but I couldn't let on or tell everybody, so I gave him my cousin's names"

Interviewer: Sure there were rakes of men working on the jobs in them days under false names! Most guys, if they were on the lump or working for subbies were working in cash -

²³ A well-known Irish music pub until the late '90s, located at 786 Harrow Road, Willesden, London NW10 (source: <https://pubshistory.com/Middlesex/Willesden/WilliamIV.shtml> , accessed 30 August, 2018)

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John F: There was a guy working for me, he had to produce this ‘714’ I think they called it at the time, a ticket for the tax?²⁴

Interviewer: Yea, that’s right, yea (43.43)

John F: And you had to come in, produce your 714 and sign in for it.

Interviewer: Sure you could feckin’ buy one of them in the pub!

John F: Ah they were all buying them, yeah. Anyway yer man with the 714 certificate asked *me* how to spell the name that was on it! (laughing)...I said, “Sign here” and he says “I can’t”, I says “Why not?” and he says “‘Cos I can’t spell the name!”(laughing)

Interviewer: I know, I know...sure by that stage it was getting ridiculous, y’know. But c’mere, the dancehall work...was that all...how would I put it, ‘casual work’?

John F: It was casual work, yea. You just got your paypacket with your £18 pounds or £30 pounds if you did the five nights in the Forum, yea. After that job finished in Esher, I had a few lorries then. I had a lorry on daywork on the (Esher) job which was tipping up and down the haul road. Then I got another and a third and I had a yard down in the White City, where that big new shopping centre is now.²⁵ Then I used to buy lorries from a company up in Colchester and break them, and sell the spare parts. There was a lot of work in that area; I used to sell wheels, I’d buy loads of tyres and I’d have wheels so if you got a puncture it was as easy to swing in, buy a wheel off me for thirty quid, leave your old one in my yard and you were on your way again, d’ya know what I mean?

Interviewer: You were keeping busy! Between the construction work and the flippin’ dancehall work.

John F: We used to be starving with the hunger there, I’m not joking you. Next door to us was a skip company and they used to bring in loads of wood. We had a barrel with holes in it, and in the winter-time you’d have wood burning in it and you’d be standing with your back to it all day waiting for someone to come in. When you’d go home then the pillow would be black with smoke where the back of your head got smoked! (laughs). Because people wouldn’t come in to me a lot of the time until the likes of Midnight Motors²⁶ would close on a Sunday,

²⁴ 714 Certificates were part of the Construction Industry Tax Deduction Scheme introduced by the UK Parliament in 1971. See Chapter 4.4.3 of Main Thesis.

²⁵ White City is a district in the north of Sheperd’s Bush, in the west London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s this part of west London was a large settlement area for Irish migrants, the men working predominantly in construction and civil engineering.

²⁶ A local rival tyre company.

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then they’d come in thinking they’re closed, we’ll try and get this off him, y’know? Anyway Frank Joyce²⁷ rang me one day -

Interviewer: That’s Frank that had the Blackstock?

John F: Yes. He was in the Blackstock then. He says to me, “Can you come up tomorrow morning to the pub” he says, “I’ve someone here I want you to meet”. And I went up and he says to me, “This is Barry Fenton, he’s the area manager with Courages”²⁸ he said. “He has a pub in Dagenham” he said, “that’s looking for a manager, and you fit the bill”. That was exactly as it was put to me.

Interviewer: Had you given Frank any idea that you might be interested in a pub?

John F: No, but Frank...when I moved to Holloway Road, Frank and Josie Joyce lived in a flat, right, and when they moved to the pub I happened to say that I was looking for a place to stay and Josie said, “You can have our flat, sure, it’s empty”. So I moved into the flat. To tell you how easy it was in those days, I moved into the flat and I was giving Josie the rent and she was paying it. Then one day Josie took me across to the council offices across the road and she said, “This is my brother, he’s living in that flat for so long. We’re now in the pub and don’t need the flat. I want you to transfer the flat into his name. And they said to me we need two forms of identification with that address and I said well I have my driving licence and a phone bill...and that was it; the flat was mine.

Interviewer: You could do that sort of thing in those days.

John F: Yes. I had the flat for about two years and then when I moved to the Cock in Holloway Road²⁹ I went in and I said, “I want to give up the flat” and he said, “Don’t give it up, you’ve always been a good tenant. You now have this ‘right-to-buy’ situation, why don’t you actually buy it. So I bought it for £25,600. I put the £600 down as a deposit and I borrowed £25,000. I kept it for two years and I sold it for £66,000, and that gave me the money then to buy my first house.

Interviewer: And where was this flat?

John F: This was in Tufnell Park Road, McCall House. But look, I could tell you of opportunities that I missed over the years, just like everybody

²⁷ The Joyce brothers from Connemara, Frank and Mairtin were native Irish speakers who ran several notable London- Irish pubs including The Shakespeare, The Blackstock and the Auld Triangle in Finsbury Park throughout the latter decades of the Twentieth Century.

²⁸ Courage & Co Ltd were a major British brewery and public house owners (known as the ‘tied-house’ system) founded in Bermondsey, central London in 1787. By the early 1970s they owned and leased over 5000 licensed premises throughout the UK, many in London. (source: Anon., History of the Courage & Co., available online at <http://takecourage.info/index.html> (accessed 31 Aug 2018))

²⁹ The Cock Tavern, on Holloway Road in north London, another well-known London-Irish pub throughout the 1970-1990s.

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else, it's just...that's life...you lose one place and then you catch up somewhere else.

Interviewer: So anyway...you go and see Frank Joyce and -

John F: Yea and the area manager says to me "Go and take a look. This pub has been closed down for violence". In those days it was (reputedly) the second-biggest pub in London. There were 32 beer taps on the counter of one bar. It was huge. In Dagenham...it was called the Fanshaw, in Gale Street in Dagenham...it's gone for years. It was the Fanshaw.

Interviewer: So it was a trouble pub?

John F: Yes. So I said to him, "Well, y'know I have no experience as a publican and I have rocked the boat over the years law-wise and I might have a problem license-wise". He says "If we want you to get the license, you'll get the license...it's a simple as that."! So I went and took over this pub. There was about five or six families of Irish going in to the pub, so I thought at least I have some back-up if it comes to it. I can categorically state I never had trouble from anybody else. They were...I can only describe them as low-life. I was there when it was the Fanshaw and then it changed over to a pub called the Pipers and the Dagenham Girl Pipe Band played outside it at the opening (laughs). I was there for about a year and I ran it very well. It was hard work. There was lots of fights. One woman had eight sons; they knocked me down six times in the bar one night. I remember I thought every time I got knocked down here I have to keep getting up. And the problem was always directed at the management; ordering rounds of drink they wouldn't pay for and stuff like that. So I ruled with an iron fist there; I was young then, I ruled with an iron fist, I had a lot of respect.

Interviewer: Presumably from the door-work you were used to dealing with fights?

John F: Ah yeah...you couldn't let these guys get the better of you...you couldn't. I remember a fight started at twenty-to-eleven one night and it was still going on at twenty-past-eleven... There was an Irish descent guy, I'll always remember it, his name was O'Shaughnessy – he was bad news, right. He'd come in – there was a passageway between both bars – so he was out in the other bar. Now he had to be seen to be doing something to help the local thugs, y'know, because he was one of them, right, and he heard that the fight was going on, obviously. So he came around and on his way he picked up one of the small stools, yeah, and he hit me with the soft part of it on the head (laughs)...the wrong end of it! He bounced the spongy bit off...but he did his best, y'know what I mean! (laughs).

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But in the end, actually, I knew from Gerry Foley – a very good friend of mine; he had the Cock in Holloway Road – that he was leaving. So when the area manager came in to the pub one day I said to him, "Look, I've worked hard here, now" I said "I'd like to get married and start a family soon; this is really not my manor³⁰ I'd like to get back to Holloway Road and I understand the Cock Tavern is looking for a manager and if possible I'd like to go back." So he says to me, "Okay, that's fine" So I remember then I got my official interview and I got stuck in traffic; 'twas in Enfield at the time, Courage's office, so I was an hour late. As I'm going in, he's coming out. I said, "I'm sorry –", "Okay" he blurts, "You've got the pub, I'm off, I've another meeting" (laughter)

Interviewer: So you didn't even get in for the interview...it would only have been a formality anyways, it seems.

John F: Yeah...thankfully, yeah. And he'd appreciated the fact that I'd worked hard in Dagenham, and after I left that pub, it went downhill, apparently, to the point that it was closed. So I worked hard there, and there was so many fights with the Irish lads, but thankfully they didn't get the better of me, I was young and I was, y'know, in good shape at the time – and I had a Rottweiler dog that hated himself! I got him actually from Andy Murphy that had the Plimsoll, which is now the Auld Triangle³¹ A very famous Rottweiler dog that was so angry he hated himself! (laughter)

Interviewer: So he was a useful ally

John F: Oh he was! But when I came back to the Cock in Holloway Road, then, it was totally different. It was all Irish in the Cock in Holloway Road, a big music house and – surprisingly – it was difficult to run. Because what happened is all the people that Gerry Foley had barred, they'd know through the grapevine that Gerry was gone, so they started coming in again and it started all over again.

Interviewer: Just so I know for sure, now, by this time you're doing this full-time now; you're not on construction anymore?

John F: No, no, no...and I'm not in any dancehall either, y'know.

Interviewer: Yea, I guess because running a pub like that is a full-time job, really.

John F: Mick Whelan was very good to me; very very good to me. He got Austen O'Malley the fiddleplayer for the opening night in the Cock and he rounded up a few guests and we had a massive night. But if he had a really big band in the Forum Mick would ask me to pop down.

³⁰ Manor used in this context is a colloquial London euphemism for 'neighbourhood' or 'homeplace'.

³¹ See footnote 27.

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Because the pub would close at eleven officially and people wouldn't start going into the dancehall til later.

Interviewer: No, that's right. They'd only start going when the pubs close, really.

John F: So I'd go down and I'd spend the few hours there off and on for those big bands, y'know. Then I decided, when Johnny Sweeney came to the Archway³² I left the Cock and I moved up. In the Cock, then, I started doing the cheques big-time. Oakwood plant would be coming in, all their men, massive. Y'know there was three bars there and I changed it over... a massive changeover and I could've got sacked 'cos I was only a manager for Courages. The Cock was a very well-laid out, with entrances off of Tollington Way...but anyway I made the decision to change it to pool and if it didn't work out I would've been sacked. But it did because there was no overheads for music and all of a sudden pool became massive, I mean *massive*. There was an article written every week on the *Daily Star* about pool (55.51) and The Cock Tavern became very well-known. The day Channel 4 started actually - I remember it well - I was in the BBC studios setting up this pool table for an event that was shown on the telly that evening.

Interviewer: Did that affect the number of cheques you were changing with the construction workers coming in there...the fact that you changed from music to pool? The change of clientele, so-to-speak...

John F: Didn't affect it in the least. It did in the back bar – because that's where the music guys came in. But there was two other bars and I was used to serving, myself, in the Public Bar, and that's where the punters, the drinkers went, in the Public Bar. You'd need your lawyer in the Public Bar (laughter) on a Saturday night; every two arguing and everyone in the one company. Y'know, there'd be guys here arguing about football and boxing and what have you. I went and bought the Boxing Book once in Foyles; it's a great boxing book to improve your knowledge of the sport, as there was a boxing whizzkid or two amongst my customers!

Interviewer: So the cheque-changing business, then, that just developed because of the number of construction workers who were coming in?

John F: These men didn't have bank accounts and the majority of them weren't paying tax.

Interviewer: Well, and also my recollection of those days is that most of them men wouldn't trust banks with their money; they weren't interested in having bank accounts, they didn't want that kind of formality.

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John F: That side of it I don't know but it became the norm, y'know, for the companies to pay by cheque, the majority of them. Like I said to you earlier, as soon as somebody walked through my door and asked for their cheque to be changed, I gave it to them; they didn't have to buy a drink, but the majority of them would, and often stayed until closing time. Then those who were married with families would go home to their poor wife and small children and blame the publican for not cashing the cheque earlier – not everyone, but a certain number of guys. I seen it more so in Cricklewood; y'know, seven nights a week, these lads. They'd be going to work in vans in the morning and you'd smell their socks at fifty paces, y'know? Yet they expected the wife to sleep beside them. You know these are the things I don't like saying publicly, but it was reality.

Interviewer: Well, I just wonder why these guys felt so compelled, y'know?...you spoke about this before. It seems to be this sort of self-perpetuating culture of who can be the toughest, who can be the hardest, who can drink the most...

John F: But also going back to the early days, the main reason for it was that we lived in rooms with no central heating, no telly. The only place to socialise or to meet anybody was in the local pub. If you wanted to watch football or anything, you had to go to the pub; there was a telly in the pub. There was nothing in your room except a gas fire, so most people didn't want to be there because you'd just be looking at the four walls. So lots of people didn't even change after work, they'd go and do the session and go home afterwards and that was it. But a lot of guys also who had families...they *stayed with their mates* so-to-speak. It became habit-forming.

When Johnnie Sweeney took over the Archway Tavern in '84 I moved. I had a Kerry man, Jim O'Connor, working for me – a lovely man – for two years in the Cock as my head barman, so when I was leaving I said to the company “This guy has been virtually running this place for me for the last two years, he knows everybody and how the place runs and I would strongly recommend that you give him the manager's job”, which they did.

Interviewer: Just incidentally, now, that was a Courage house, wasn't it? And was the Archway a Courage pub?

John F: No. Watneys.

Interviewer: So a lot of those breweries, the big breweries like Watneys and Courage...presumably all those (Irish) pubs were all owned by these big British brewing companies that bought them up. Were they...they must've been wise to the fact that north London was effectively Irish and that all those pubs were essentially Irish pubs and that it was better to have Irish managers?...I'm interested in how the transition went

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from having pubs that, say, immediately after the war would've had *English* landlords in them, y'know...that transition...how did the Irish kinda *break-in* to the pub game, if you like?

John F: I have actually no idea, but I do know that as far as I can remember the pubs in the north London area were...and in west London as well were nearly all Irish landlords. It was a very very strong Irish contingent you see.

Interviewer: My recollection, as a boy...well, not a boy but a teenager was that you could walk down Kilburn High Road and every pub...*like every pub*...more-or-less had an Irish governor. You'd be hard-pressed to find one that didn't.

John F: I actually drove down there with my daughter (she went to Imperial College London) and when I was taking her home one time I drove up through Kilburn and showed her some of the pubs I used to drink in; a lot of them are still there but you would hardly see an Irishman on the street now, whereas in those days you wouldn't see anybody else. You would not see anybody else; everybody spoke with an Irish accent.

In one of your questions there you said "Did the Irish keep to themselves and do they still do so?" and if you've noticed I haven't commented on that...because *they don't*. You know, for example, all the pubs around here now are a mixture of Irish and English, everybody talks to everybody else. In those days they stuck together because it was 99% Irish anyway. I lived in Coventry and when I drank in places like that you had a mixture, and they were all very friendly and sociable towards me as an Irish person and I never found a problem with that.

Interviewer: Again, that's actually quite common. The reason I asked that question is because again, there is this perception that...there's a lot of stuff that's been written about anti-Irish prejudice and that.

(Personal/Irrelevant chat period until 1.04)

John F: I never found any particular prejudice. For instance, Carol Richardson – who got sentenced to life imprisonment for the Guildford bombings, yea? She lived in my flat. After her arrest, the Anti-Terrorist Squad came around and they did their normal questioning, which you'd expect them to do, and that was it.

Interviewer: Well, sure, I suppose they have to do their job.

John F: Exactly!...they asked did you know her? When did you do this or that or whatever, and that was it.

Interviewer: And then, of course, it turned out she was innocent anyway!

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John F: Well, she was innocent. I was there at the time and you get to hear through the grapevine what's what and so-on-and-so-forth; I could go into it at great length but...One of the guys who worked with me - actually I started him on the Esher bypass job - he's spent most of his life in prison. He got 137 years altogether. We used to pick him up of a morning at Hammersmith, on the roundabout, and he wasn't there one morning. Then someone got the paper and his photograph was on it; he shot the train driver at East Ham...remember that? He had this bag on his back containing a bomb. He was going to plant it somewhere I guess...and then this thing started smoking and he jumped off the train. Vince was his first name – he was a really nice guy; he worked with me for ages, he was a great steel-fixer. We dropped him off the evening before and he never talked about anything to do with politics or Northern Ireland or anything. The police came round again and spoke to me; how did I know him? I said he came on the job, I employed him and I got the shock of my life because he seemed a really nice guy...thank you very much and they left! They did the enquiry that was expected of them.

I never suffered any prejudice from anybody.

Interviewer: Did you ever see any of these signs...no blacks, no dogs, no Irish, that kind of thing?

John F: No. I seen 'no vacancies' signs – a job in Manchester, Piccadilly, I seen a job with no vacancies but that was it, basically.

So then I moved to the Archway with Johnnie Sweeney and I turned the upstairs, which used to be a club, into a pool and snooker club with a little bar in it. 'Twas great, absolutely great. Downstairs you had Dingle Spike on a Friday night, Lee Lynch on a Sunday night.

Interviewer: D'ya ever remember a band called Crusheen?

John F: Yes, I do...all of them. Tom Cussen?...no...no...he was with the Shaskeen.

Anyway, with the Archway, we were doing the cheques, and again, pool was massive in those days...absolutely massive. Like you had the *Shoot Pool* that was played in the Forum, it was televised, the four semi-finalists played in my pub.

Interviewer: Would those pool tables be busy all the time?

John F: All day long. We'd open at 11 o'clock, there'd be people in.

(Irrelevant discussion about pool)

Original Interview # 16 – John F - Mayo

Johnnie Sweeney ran the downstairs bar, I rented the upstairs; I had nothing to do with the downstairs...We'd do the cheques together. It was me that brought the cheques business into the Archway, but they'd go to the downstairs bar when they couldn't find the upstairs, d'ya know what I mean? But then it actually came to the point where we were both flat out. We used to do between eighty and a hundred thousand a-week.

Interviewer: In cheques? Jeez, that's serious business...and you'd charge?

John F: I'd charge 2% up to a thousand and then 1% after that. There wasn't that many – over a thousand - except the lorry men. But then I got caught out, as I was telling you, and a whole year's work was gone

Interviewer: Because you changed a load of cheques for a man who went bust?

John F: Yes. You had to sort of rule with an iron fist. You had to be careful, if people got the wind that you were a soft touch they would try it on...and it was all Irish...all Irish. But we knew certain guys that if they came in to cash a cheque you'd say no...word would go round.

Interviewer: See, part of the problem was that the main contractors – now I didn't start work until the mid-'80s really, when I started in the industry but even by then, y'know, the main contractors could finish a subbie, like, overnight if they didn't pay him...and a lot of the time they didn't.

John F: Actually Laing and Taylor Woodrow broke more than their share of subbies, y'know?

Interviewer: Oh yeah, that doesn't surprise me. When I worked at XXXX³³, things like retention money, that was usually 5% retained until after the job was completed. But that could be, y'know, if you were a sizeable subbie like Masterson, say, and you were turning over a couple of million a year, the retention money on those jobs would be big money, y'know, and they were supposed to get that back after twelve months. But of course the main contractors – unless the men chased that money aggressively – they'd keep that money...that's a lot of dough to lose out on.

John F: Peter Sweeney's subcontract business got so big that at one point his wage bill was a hundred and eighty thousand a week, and what happened with Taylor Woodrow, the cheque should have had two signatures, that they gave him and it was only one signature because the other guy who signed was on holidays. So he got the cheque and put it in and it bounced. He had already issued the cheques against it for wages on the strength of it, ya know?

³³ A major British Contractor of the 1980s

Original Interview # 16 – John F - Mayo

Interviewer: That's enough to break ya because of cashflow

John F: It was supposed to get sorted out, and he came up and he told me, "if you'll just please honour the cheques and I'll sort it. So I honoured them and he couldn't get it sorted. Gone. What happened was all the men went out to work the following Monday and started working direct for Taylor Woodrow. He's left high and dry. (1.15)

Interviewer: This is why I was saying earlier it's too simplistic a picture to paint that all the subbies were exploiting men and that all the subbies were making big money out of it, because that's too simple a picture...it's not quite that simple. There were subbies who made plenty of money, yes, but there were also subbies who lost plenty of money and there were subbies who got stitched-up by main contractors, y'know?

John F: But again, I was a little surprised – I know the history of it, and what happened was, in a lot of cases, some of the subbies got a bit too big for their own shoes and they thought that the main contractor couldn't do without them... and they come unstuck.

Interviewer: But there'd be always arguments about money, y'see? I know that from being on the main contractor's side of the fence.

John F: The amount of times that subbies, over the years, would be telling you they threatened to pull their men off the job -

Interviewer: If you did that too often, then eventually they'd say, "Fair enough, you pull your men off the job!"

John F: But that's what happened, and again I've worked for Irish people and I've worked for English people and all the main contractors in this country, with a few exceptions, were English people, and you couldn't find nicer people. I could not fault them, y'know? I found a massive changeover in attitude when I started working for English people.

Interviewer: There was a few Irish main contractors – not many. Murphy, now, was a main contractor, he was a subbie then a main contractor. O'Rourkes.

John F: I knew Dessie reasonably well and then they bought over Laing – and that's what made them really – Laing was massive, absolutely massive then.

Interviewer: Well, they pulled off a real stunt there, y'know, and fairplay to them, they made it work!

John F: Yeah – they're main contractors now; it's all very different to what it was in those days. I found a big change, as I said to you earlier, when I started working for English subcontractors. They were more

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upstanding and reasonable and so-on-and-so-forth. But again, some of the Irish subcontractors I worked for they were also fine.

Interviewer: Yeah, I mean it's a mixed picture. I was reading this book and this theme about the bullying gangers, y'know? There was just a quote that somebody had written along the lines of – what did they call him? The master's eye or something – he was a Mayo man this fella too – yeah that was it; some of these guys that were complaining about the gangers were '*suffering a bit from the master's eye*', which apparently was an old way of saying that they'd be working away as long as he was watching them, but as soon as he went away they'd be leaning on the shovel!

John F: Yeah – ya got a lot of that and ya got some good lads...that's why there was a lot of the lump; you got paid for what you did, y'know? But a lot of the gangermen or chargehands, as we used to call them that sort of lasted a lot longer with the likes of Murphy and McNicholas than it did in other companies' you became a chargehand or a foreman, now you tend to have foremen rather than gangers. But a lot of the gangermen were...they felt it was their duty, as soon as they got promoted to gangerman to make life difficult for the men under them. Not always the best way to get men to work for you. In my latter career I ended up as a structural supervisor and I thought myself to be even-handed and fair and I could go and drink with the guys under me. I got just as much work out of them by being reasonable and polite and - where bonuses and stuff like that was concerned – being fair than if I was the opposite way. I got better results that way.

Interviewer: I think most reasonable guys found the same attitude actually. Most of the interviews I've done personally, I haven't found too many that complained about gangers. Most of them said the gangers were okay as long as you did what you were supposed to be doing.

John F: There's exceptions to the rule everywhere, y'know?

Interviewer: I think that's part of the problem is that very often it's the exceptions to the rule which end up being the story!

John F: There was a downside to my life in this country as well. I had my scrapes with the law; I ended up in prison and all that. To be honest with you, I used it beneficially, because looking back on it now I saw life on the outside and the inside...do you know what I mean? I ended up using the time to my advantage. Afterwards, I did a course and got my publican's licence back...'cos you know the publican's licence is different here than in Ireland. I never made no secret of it and I could tell good stories. To me it was sort of just a way of education – an adventure, that's the only way you could put it. I've seen people come out and they throw their hands in the air and say that's it...sure what's that all about? You have to get on with life, y'know?

Original Interview # 16 – John F - Mayo

Interviewer: So how long were you in the Archway in the finish-up?

John F: I was there for seven years, from '84 to '91 and in the meantime I had a pub called the Devonshire in Tollington Way, which is at the back of the Cock. I bought the lease of it off Ambrose Gordon and JP Flannery. That was a lovely pub, but it was off the beaten track. (1.21) so all you got was the people going out to Holloway Road, who'd pop in for a quick one on the way out, then they'd fall in for another one on the way home, drunk. Then I had a snooker hall in Hackney in partnership with a guy. At the back of Hackney Downs station under one of the Railway Arches. We got it off British Rail and got a grant, I think of twenty-four or twenty-five thousand pounds to renovate it, because it was just being filled with rubbish. I did all the work there actually, not personally but I arranged it all and managed it. I went and got a licence because I was an existing licensee. I applied to Thames Magistrates for a new licence which my partner couldn't get because he was a bookmaker and he had no track record as being a publican. So that was it, it was a good business and he bought my shares eventually. When I moved to Capel Manor in '87 I needed every penny, because there was a major transformation to be done there, y'know?

Interviewer: So how did you end up in this part of Hertfordshire if you don't mind me asking?

John F: No, I don't mind at all. I bought Capel Manor off a guy called Peter Cosgrove back in 1987 for two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand. It was the Clydesdale Stud. I converted the stables into kennels and I built a cattery. I felt there was an opening...always loved it

Interviewer: It's an unusual career change...

(From 1.23-1.29 omitted as general personal chat - off topic)

Interviewer: Well, by God you had an interesting life though. I mean you were hanging around all the Irish music pubs and dancehalls and...

John F: Absolutely, y'know I've skirted over a lot of stuff as we're limited in time; but you know the length of time that I've been in this country, y'know what hasn't come up yet? I didn't go home for over twenty-five years.

Interviewer: Was that kind of...unplanned, planned, deliberate or...? If you don't mind me asking!

John F: Not at all, not at all.

I had an accident at home. The first time I went home I was referred to as '*the madman from London*', y'know? That was the time I fucked a

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priest out of it because he came at me with “pon my word I straighten you” with this Cork accent and all, and I said, “You’ll straighten nobody...go fuck yourself”. And I left and of course my mother was in tears because you couldn’t speak to the priest that way, in her eyes, and I thought to myself, “I’ll never come back here again”.

Interviewer: When was that? Shortly after you’d left?

John F: Early ‘70s yeah, yeah. As I said, I went home that first Christmas and had the accident and thought to myself, “I don’t need this” and the next time I went home...was to Mary’s funeral in ‘95. But the thing is my brother was right in saying that I didn’t officially go home for nearly twenty-nine years because I flew to Dublin, got the train to Westport, went to the funeral that evening, stayed in the Castlecourt in Westport that night, went to the graveside next morning and went from the graveside in Islandeady to Castlebar Station and back, so I never actually went home to my birthplace.

(1.32-1.35 – discussion about family bereavements – off- topic)

Interviewer: Listen, is there anything else you’d like to tell me?

John F: Well, I don’t know so much. I based everything on the questions there and I ticked the boxes; I don’t know if you can use them or do you want...?

Interviewer: Oh I will use them, yes, but I’m interested in what you said about leaving. You’ve explained that as far as you were concerned it wasn’t necessarily a question of not having had opportunity in Ireland, it was more a question of -

John F: It was a way of life...emigration was a way of life, yes.

With regards to me not going home for, as my brother would say, twenty-nine years, if I had my life to live over again, I wouldn’t do that. But there’s a number of people that I know that came over here and sort of disappeared and never went back again.

Interviewer: Did you ever come across those types, they used to call them ‘pincher kiddies’ and ‘long-distance men’, the guys that really...the old-style spikers

John F: I came across all sorts. In my time in this country, both inside and outside, I came across all sorts. Well I never asked anybody, really, (whether they’d been home or not). I remember I went home a few Christmas’ ago. The first time I was at home at Christmas since I was a teenager. There was also another reason why I never went home – to be honest with you, right. I suffered a terrible asthma at home and

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people said if you go to England, with the change of air you’ll never get it. I came to England; I *never* got asthma in England

Interviewer: Are ya serious?

John F: Never, never.

Interviewer: So there is a change of air, then.

John F: Well, and some of it is psychological too, y’know. I came here fully believing I’m in England now, I’ll never get asthma...and I never did. And I used to choke and die, where there was smoke and what have you I’d be on my hands on my knees gasping, I couldn’t play sport or nothing. I had this great big inhaler thing I had to bring everywhere with me; it was just awful.

Interviewer: And when you came here?

John F: Never in my life, ever again did I have an attack of asthma, so whether it was psychological or what, I don’t know.

Interviewer: There’s not much in the questionnaire that we haven’t talked about, really, I can’t see.

John F: I covered about how I came here and how I got the jobs, and this, that and the other

Interviewer: Were you...we talked about the small farm in Achill.

John F: The small farm was in Kilmeena, not Achill

Interviewer: Oh yeah, sorry. So I’m assuming you were brought up the same way as the rest of the gang out there in terms of religion?

John F: Yes. My parents were devout Catholics. Me, I went to church while I was being brought up there but, although I wouldn’t class myself as a bad person, I’m not a church-goer.

Interviewer: You didn’t bother going when you came to England?

John F: No. Obviously funerals and weddings and stuff like that I’d attend church

Interviewer: You’ve told me about the jobs you worked on. It sounds like you were a steel-fixer most of your working life?

John F: Yes, although towards the end I was getting the top jobs like foreman-fixer, doing subbie work on a small-scale and my last job was as a

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structural supervisor, which I held for two-and-a-half years, so I was over all the structures basically.

Interviewer: What about things like health and safety? Did you ever come across dangers or ever get involved in accidents or...?

John F: Not really. You know, the odd cuts and scrapes and what have you but no, no, no, nothing too serious. It was a dangerous game, obviously, but we were streetwise enough to keep ourselves safe. If you were careless...some people took outrageous chances and sometimes they got away with it and sometimes they didn't, sadly. D'ya know what I mean? Some guys, they were lucky. Maybe I was once of the lucky ones, and the guys I worked with.

Interviewer: I think the difference is...if you were working...see today, now, if you or I had an accident on a job – even if we're reckless – the employer has a lot of responsibility for that accident happening, y'know? Now I'm not passing an opinion on whether that's right or wrong, really, because I think it's a difficult issue. There's a part of me that says, probably like you, that...like when I went out working with my father when I was fifteen, he was fixing flooring onto open joists with no platform or scaffolding below and he'd say "If you're going to walk across them joists be fuckin' careful!" but that'd be it in terms of cautionary warnings! You learnt a bit of 'kop-on' y'know?

John F: Yes, exactly. Y'know, if you're walking across a site and there's a hole in the ground, then walk around it. But these days, now, if there's a hole in the ground and you fall down it, there should've been a guard-rail around it. Now I see the sense in that in one way. But there's also a part of me that thinks if you're working on a building-site you should have enough about you...enough savvy not to be stupid enough to fall into a hole! Enough common-sense! I honestly feel – and I might be wrong in this – that there's probably as many accidents still today as there was back then. I can honestly say that of all the people I knew in the building trade I can't remember anyone getting seriously injured.

Interviewer: There were a lot of bad accidents, but I'm not sure about the actual statistics.

To be honest with you John, I'd say we could be done here now. Unless there's anything else you can think of that we haven't covered. I mean we've talked about the dancehalls, the business of cashing cheques and the pubs, the 714 system and how that could be a bit abused and we've talked about the jobs that you worked on. We've talked about politics and the fact that you didn't really have any truck with republicanism during the Troubles. You never noticed any changes at that time personally in people's attitudes?

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John F: Personally in the circles I moved in, no, none at all. I did notice one change when I was in the Archway at the end of my time there. The jobcentre was across the road. The younger generation coming over...when we came over, my generation, you went to the pub, you got yourself a job and 99.99% of people wanted to work. I found the younger generation coming over...many of them headed for the jobcentre...to sign on. I know that for a fact because then they'd come into my club which was across the road – not everybody, but there was always some, y'know, that came over. Rather than roll their sleeves up...y'know...they went for a different approach.

Interviewer: My own view is that the work ethic thing has changed a lot since your day and certainly since my day, even, y'know. An uncle of mine told me he landed in London on a Sunday afternoon and he was on a lorry Monday morning and he was straight out and straight into the working. He found it tough for the first few weeks, he said, because he wasn't used to the digging...but a few weeks into it he was grand

John F: Same as that, yeah. And I always wanted to get up the ladder. Be it a ganger or a chargehand or whatever. Then I wanted to be the foreman, then I wanted a bit of work on my own, then I wanted to get a pub. You have ups and downs; anybody that's lived as long as me will have ups and downs but you have to sort of get on with it. And the guys who sort of lay in the gutter and say "I'm a navy, I've no future"...I don't buy that at all; sorry, I just don't buy it.

(Further off-topic chat until 1.50)

John F: But there's another thing I'd say and, again, most people I've said this to have disagreed with me, but I'm not a big lover – having lived here all my life – of people being held back by only being able to speak the Irish Gaelic – especially if they emigrated to England. Because it is the national language of our country; our native language, but I seen people from Connemara in this country, they couldn't order their breakfast in the café. When they didn't have English, when it was totally Irish, d'ya know what I mean? And I thought that cannot be a help to anybody who wants to go further afield.

I would like to conclude by saying that in addition to the Irish people that I talked about throughout my interview who tended to spend most of their spare time in the pub, I also knew countless Irishmen who led a totally different lifestyles, were both excellent family men and business men, who in my opinion never seem to get talked about as much as those who lived life to the extreme.

JOHN FEEHAN

END

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

Name: John H

Date of Birth: 1955

Place of Birth: Wexford Town, Ireland

Date of Emigration to UK: 1971

Date of Interview: 5, April, 2017.

Location of Interview: Author's house, Essex

Interviewer's Notes:

1. The interviewee is a long-standing personal friend of author, therefore some of the recorded interview is personal recollections and off-topic conversation and anecdote. Author has therefore omitted non-topic conversation.
2. John H spent all of his working life working for J Murphy & Sons, colloquially known as the 'Green Murphys' – see Appendix B to Main Thesis.
3. The nature of the lived working experiences being discussed is such that the language employed is frequently explicitly profane. This is the language and vocabulary of the Irish migrant builder – and all builders in general - as spoken between workers on the building sites of Britain, therefore the author has not edited or softened the language used as to do so would constitute a mediation of the story being told.
4. Recording starts in mid-conversation.

Commencement of transcript:

The initial conversation relates to one of the key characters of the London-Irish construction community, the late John 'The Elephant' O'Donoghue, who was a notorious 'ganger' and contracts manager for J Murphy & Sons Ltd – the 'Green Murphy', one of the most prominent of the post-war Irish contractors founded by John Murphy Senior of Loughmark, Caherciveen, County Kerry. John H knew the Elephant personally and worked under and with him for many years. At the start of the recording John H is telling anecdotes about the Elephant.

John H: Jeez he [the Elephant] went through some fuckin' money...I mean fuckin' hell the money he must've went through. I seen that man getting *thousands* in scrap, when the old bridges would be taken down...sure he'd gamble the lot!...just gamble it...

Interviewer: What?

John H: Just fuckin' gamble it...when money *was* money. He'd drink there in the...[thinking]...in the... Welsh Harp, down there...around there from the Tiger Tavern. ¹ He'd drink in there, y'know. My mate used to go in there because he'd [the Elephant] keep buying him pints as long as he'd keep running in and out to the bookies ² for him all day. [laughter].

¹ The Tiger is a public house in Homerton/Hackney Wick in east London, where John O'Donoghue lived until his death in 1999. (See Main Thesis Chapter 4.4.2 and Appendix B – Corporate Histories)

² Betting Shop

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But, er, him and Murphy ³ would go out then; he'd get an auld broken-down auld car, every Sunday because you'd be never expecting them – you'd be expecting the big Merc.⁴ The two o' them would roll up in this fuckin' auld banger-of-a-thing, wherever they used to keep it, I don't know.

Interviewer: To check up?

John H: To check up on the men, yeah...they were...were...he was no '*back-of-a-clock*' I can tell you that! ⁵ [laughter]. I found him as fair as anything.

Interviewer: Well...yeah, like on the other hand, if you're running a business you would check-up on the men, wouldn't you? You wouldn't take it for granted that they were going to do what they were meant to -

John H: O'course you would, sure that's it! Ah sure, the things he'd get up to. Sure he was barred outa most...he couldn't go on to any jobs sure...for Jasus' sake, they couldn't let him on it, y'know.

Interviewer: Why? Because he was just blaggarding? He sounds like a right character for sure.

John H: Ah sure for fuck's sake. The blokes that worked for him, they wouldn't work for anybody else than John Donoghue...they wouldn't work for anybody else...

Interviewer: Well then he must've been...he can't have been the complete bastard that he's often made out to be?

John H: Not at all...not at all...not at all.

I remember there one day we were working for ...[thinking]...BT ⁶... and there was some problems anyway. Everything was going wrong, y'know, people changing drawings and information and everything like that. Anyway, we heard that the head man was comin' out from BT, right, and it was a pipeline we were on. He was comin' out in a helicopter – because the pipeline, I think, was about sixty miles long, so they used to have a helicopter, y'know, to get from one end of the site to the other, like. Anyway, the helicopter lands anyhow and this head-man gets out – all smart suits and clean boots, y'know – and

³ John Murphy, the construction magnate who founded J Murphy & Sons in 1951. See Appendix B – Corporate Histories.

⁴ John Murphy drove a 1960s white Mercedes-Benz car known as the 'White Ambulance' which he constantly refused to upgrade, despite regularly upgrading his directors and managers vehicles, and which became his trademark vehicle.(Source: *The Independent Newspaper* (UK), April 7th, 2014, p.14)

⁵ A unique euphemism, perhaps from navy or site culture, meaning 'nobody's fool'

⁶ British Telecom, the former state-owned telecommunications conglomerate privatised by the Thatcher administration in 1982.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

comes over and says, “Mr Donoghue?”, “Yes” – he was a bit posh, y’know – he says “What exactly seems to be the problem here?”...”Cuntish!! It’s fuckin’ cuntish, cuntish!!!” [Shouting to mimic ranting] [Laughter]...sure yer man didn’t know what the...turned tale, back into the helicopter and away again, y’know!

Interviewer: [laughing] So was that just blaggarding again or...?

John H: No, no, that’s the way he’d carry on...ranting...everything was ”It’s cuntish...just fuckin’ cuntish”...you’d have to laugh at him, y’know, ‘twas mad stuff.

Interviewer: I saw a description of him once that said he could dig faster than a JCB, that’s when I drew the line.

John H: What? Not at all. Sure a man smokin’ all day every day. Every time you’d see him he’d a fag in his mouth and drinkin’ and carryin’ on. Sure what would any man in that state be able to do? Sure he *had men for diggin’*...why would he be doing it? [Laughter] Anyone that would tell you that was never there. They were never there; they were makin’ it up. Sure he was Murphy’s fuckin’ mate, sure what’re ya talking about!

Interviewer: Well, of course, y’know the other famous story...?

John H: That he was his son? Bullshit...total bullshit. But sure look at *The Headless*. D’ya know *The Headless*? Paddy X⁷ - he tried to make out that the Elephant was his father. Paddy was like the labour manager and they all called him the *Headless Chicken* [laughter]. Ask anyone in Murphys about the *Headless Chicken* and they’ll tell ya. He’ve a place back in Caherciveen – he married a bird from there – but he was born up in the Whittington Hospital,⁸ I knew his mother well. That family – they’re all from Kilrush, in County Clare. *The Headless* tries to make out that he’s a Kerryman but I know he was born in the Whittington Hospital; I knew his mother well and his uncle. Ask anyone in there about the *Headless Chicken*, they’ll tell ya. Anyone who works for the *Headless Chicken*, they’re the *Chicken Nuggets* [laughter]...seriously...you’d be chatting to someone in the yard or on the van about so-and-so and you’ll get “Ah he’s a fuckin’ *Nugget*”.

Interviewer: There was another yarn about the Elephant that you told me earlier; about the young Mayo lad...the pig-farmer?

John H: Ah yeah, well, now I wasn’t there when that was s’posed to have happened, so I don’t know if it’s true, but it sounds like him. This

⁷ Anonymised to protect identity.

⁸ The Whittington Hospital is a district general and teaching hospital of UCL Medical School and Middlesex University School of Health and Social Sciences. Located in Upper Holloway, north London, it is named after Sir Richard Whittington, an English merchant.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

young Mayo lad – he was only after arriving over on the boat and he got the start with Murphy and wasn’t he out on a job that the Elephant was minding. Anyways they went for breakfast some morning and the Elephant starts to blaggard this young fella about the pig-farming and how stupid ya had to be to be a pig-farmer and all this stuff. So he’s like, “What kind o’ pigs were ye rearing?” and “Sure ye culchies were probably ridin’ them” and “What did yer mother feed the pigs on?” and all that sort o’ thing. So he says to the lad, then, “So what did ye do when ye have the pigs all fed up and reared” – and the young lad fired back at him, “Me mother put ties on them, and sent them over to be gangers for John Murphy!” [Laughter]...well the Elephant didn’t pick on him again, but sure he probably didn’t last long at Murphy either I’d say!...

But anyway, y’see when I started there...I started there in, I think, ’72, we were getting £8/day, £45 for a full week.

Interviewer: Okay, hang-on, we’ll do it properly; we’ll go from the beginning and make sure we get it all in order...so...you were born in Wexford Town?

John H: I was born in Wexford Town, yeah...yeah...right beside the tube station [Laughter]...I didn’t have far to walk! [Laughter].

[Private conversation]

Interviewer: But you left then, when?

John H: I left when I was sixteen

Interviewer: What year were you born?

John H: ’55...so me mother reckons anyway! [Laughter]...I know it was the summertime [Laughter]. The old man used to have a pub there [Wexford]...yeah...yeah...ahh I couldn’t settle there, y’know. I couldn’t settle down...it was too quiet, d’ya know what I mean?

Interviewer: And what year did you come to London?

John H: I came here in 1971. I was sixteen when I started with Murphys. I put me age up two years and pretended to be eighteen, so I could get a man’s stamp.⁹ See, there used to be two stamps, a junior stamp and an over-18 stamp. At that time you didn’t have to produce any birth certificates; you could say whatever age you were when you went into the dole office,¹⁰ I’m twenty or whatever...they’d never check it or say “give me proof of it”

⁹ This refers to National Insurance stamps which were required if you were employed directly by a bona fide registered company.

¹⁰ Colloquial term for the Employment/ Social Welfare Centre

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Interviewer: Well, I suppose they had no way of checking.

John H: No. So you did that and they'd just give you your insurance number.

Interviewer: I know there was a lot of men, much older than you now, that went to England during the war and you were supposed to be twenty-one to work as an adult. I know Tommy Healy, from Tubbercurry, he came when he was sixteen, but as you say, sure they had no way of checking!

John H: They didn't care either...they just wanted people to work, y'know. And Murphys didn't ask no questions either because...

Interviewer: So when you came over did you go straight to Murphys?

John H: No. I worked at McInerneys for a while with John Burke.¹¹ He was a foreman there for BICC, the British Insulation Cable Company. McInerneys were building them flats right at the very top of the Roman on the right-hand side.¹² I only stayed there a while and I got a job with Murphys then.

Interviewer: That suited you better?

John H: Well it did, y'know. I liked all the lads there. 'Twas all Irish lads at the time; there were no English lads there at all at that time.

Interviewer: So when you started working, for Murphy or McInerney, was that all cash-in-hand work?

John H: Well Murphys was all cash-in-hand. Because Murphys didn't go on the cards until 1974. They had to! I remember it well, 'cos we got no wages that week because the Inland Revenue took every packet without a payslip in it. We did get cash up to then.

Interviewer: So any of them lads working for Murphy in the '60s or '70s were effectively self-employed men as far as Murphys were concerned?

John H: Well yeah. You could form your own company. A lot of the lads formed their own company there. And like, same old thing, you could have a hundred-thousand pound even back then on one ticket.¹³ You buy an auld broken-down truck, park it up outside your house, that was your transport – you were claiming against your tax for that. Your wife

¹¹ John H's father-in-law, from Connemara. Died c. 1998.

¹² This refers to Roman Road in Bow, east London near where John H lived. The McInerney job on which John worked was the Lefevre Estate built in the early 1970s.

¹³ John is referring here to the 714 Certificates introduced as part of the Construction Industry Tax Deduction Scheme introduced by the UK Parliament in 1971. See Chapter 4.4.3 of Main Thesis. These were colloquially known amongst Irish builders as 'tickets'.

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was your secretary, your phone was your business phone and...right? All of a sudden the bills came in and *'Westmeath Builders'* and all them all went bust overnight! [Laughter]...d'ya know what I mean? They were calling themselves everything!

Interviewer: So when you came over, then, taking a step back. Presumably you had no hassle getting over because you lived pretty close to a port anyway, didn't you? So you just jumped on the ferry and came over?

John H: Yeah. I jumped on the ferry at Rosslare, came over. For some reason, we went to Slough.

Interviewer: Who's we?

John H: Meself and Noel, me brother.

Interviewer: Oh you came with your brother, oh right. The two of ye came at the same time. Is Noel younger than you?

John H: Noel is older than me. Yeah, so we took a look at this place and I thought Jasus I might as well go back to Wexford! [Laughter]. Slough...sure I spent six months there one weekend! [Laughter] So I know...Fuckin' hell...what a shithole! If the world was created from here Slough was the yard...that's where they were dumping all the shite! [Laughter]. But anyways, I got a bus into London and, y'know, went from there.

Interviewer: So where did you stay when you first landed?

John H: I had a cousin here and he helped us out. I was sleeping rough for a while I must admit, because I didn't want to stay with me cousins and that, like, and until you got a few quid together to get a room. Then once you got your room and your first week's rent you were alright then, y'know. But sure everyone had to do it, didn't they?

Interviewer: I guess everyone had to rough it a bit, alright. But the other thing about that, though, John, I don't know how you'll feel about this now, but there's a lot of talk about the rough digs and the dosshouses in the '50s and '60s. The '50s especially, you were only just after the war...everybody was living in rough digs...nobody had any comfort.

John H: But I mean being Irish here after the war was a different story, though, wasn't it? We were only shit; you couldn't get digs – no Irish, no dogs, no blacks. And even in the '70s here; I was so ashamed and embarrassed here all through the '70s when the bombs and all were going off. [13.08]

Interviewer: Did you notice a change?

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John H: Of course I did, because Murphy vans were pulled regular, and out of the vans and searched up against the wall. I couldn't do it, I used to...I knew where the Ring of Steel¹⁴ was in London and I used to get the van to pull up maybe half a mile before and I used to walk through the houses and flats and that and I'd meet them the other side [of the Ring of Steel], y'know. But I was embarrassed.

But I remember the Elephant saying to me one day...I think it was the last one, when Canary Wharf was bombed.¹⁵ It was all glass...and eh...into the stores we were sent, and we got every wheelbarrow and every brush that was in the stores and sent down the two grab-lorries for cleaning up and eh...I said, "Where are we goin' John?"... "What! Go to!...arrgh...head for the bomb...head for the bomb!"¹⁶ [Laughter]...like that's the level we were...y'know...fuckin' hell, I mean, y'know [exasperated]. We're like "what the fuck?" but anyway we heads there and we gets down and there's these fuckin' coppers¹⁷ down there [at the checkpoint into Canary Wharf] askin' us...so I said, "we've come to clean up, like, y'know". He looks at me [in disbelief] and says, "It's fuckin' good innit?" he says, "There's one half o'ya blowin' it up and the other fuckin' half o'ya clearin' it up!"¹⁸ [Laughter].

But I mean ya gotta wonder what the, y'know...the Elephant, like,... "Where are we goin'?"... "Head for the bomb, head for the bomb!"...fuckin' hell...[exasperated].

Yeah...but...oh no...I enjoyed every minute of it... I wish I could turn the clock back to the 1970s and stay there, y'know what I mean? Y'know, the crack in Murphys with all the lads there was... y'know what I mean...and I've always...

Interviewer: So you only worked for McNerneys for what...a few months?

¹⁴ John's chronology is distorted here, he is skipping forwards and back several decades. The 'Ring of Steel' was the name used in the media and by Londoners for the security cordon installed around the old City of London, the financial district, in July 1993 to prevent terrorism following a massive IRA bombing campaign in the City in the early 1990s which included the 1992 Baltic Exchange bombing and the 1993 Bishopsgate bombing. Roads entering the City were narrowed and small chicanes forced drivers to slow down and be recorded by CCTV cameras. At this time the sentry posts were guarded by armed police almost continuously. It was also intended to show the public that the City authorities were taking seriously the threats by the IRA. (source: Jon Coaffee, "Rings of Steel, Rings of Concrete and Rings of Confidence: Designing out Terrorism in Central London Pre and Post September 11th." in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 28, no. 1, (Mar. 2004), pp. 201-211, p.204).

¹⁵ The Canary Wharf bombing took place in 1996. Whilst there is no explicit corroboration of Murphy having been contracted to assist in clean-up operations after the Canary Wharf bomb, there is evidence that John Murphy was personally contacted by British Prime Minister John Major, in respect of the Baltic Exchange bombing in 1992. (Source: Michael Clifford, 'Caroline Murphy and the Murphy Group: One Woman's Construction Empire' in *The Irish Examiner Newspaper*, April 5th, 2014, p.3)

¹⁶ John mimics the Elephant ranting at the men in the yard in a strong Kerry brogue.

¹⁷ Metropolitan Police Officers.

¹⁸ John mimics the cockney accent of the policeman.

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John H: Ah yeah, only a couple of months, like. I've been with Murphy since 1972.

Interviewer: And how did they pay? Like Tom¹⁹ always reckoned they weren't that great payers but he could just have been bullshitting.

John H: Well, we were getting £8-a-shift [in 1972].

John H: And then I went with blokes from the pacemakers; you'd go with him for the day sinkin' a shaft.

Interviewer: Yeah, so what kind of work were you doing with them?

John H: Well, most of the work they were doin' that time was – ah - headin' work and tunnel work, right? And o'course I didn't know anything about it; and you'd go sinking these shafts, eight foot square and maybe thirty foot deep, it all depends.

Interviewer: But you'd never done anything like that before?

John H: No but you had to go in, and they'd put you with the pacemaker for the day; I didn't know he was a pacemaker. He'd tell the bloke in the evening. Ya had two loading skips, one up, one down. You got no break, right? This bloke was – oh SAVAGE with work! And ah course you'd be young and strong, you were trying to keep up with him and then he'd go back and he'd tell the bloke in the evening whether to keep you or not.

Interviewer: So they were testing you?

John H: Yea...that's how it was done, like, y'know? But as I said, I –

Interviewer: So must've made the grade, anyway?

John H: Well, I must've done– y'know what I mean? But anyway I went into the tunnels then; into the headings. I was in them for maybe nineteen years. Because once you learned how to do it, and how to drive a heading, y'know, the tunnel was all the world, like...the Great Escape!

Interviewer: So you'd sink a shaft, and then?

John H: You'd tunnel in – three foot nine be [x] two foot nine, put down your rails, with your bogey and that; pull it in behind you.

Interviewer: This was for big pipelines or?

¹⁹ OI#1-Tom-Leitrim.

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Figure 1 - a typical sewer connection tunnel being excavated by hand (Source: Timothy O'Grady & Steve Pyke, *I Could Read the Sky*, (London, 1997), p69.)

John H: This'd be for the sewers. You'd cut your shovel down then – [short handled] get down there and fuckin' shovel over your shoulder and throw it in like that [shows interviewer].

Interviewer: And you were at that crack for?

John H: I was at that for nineteen years. You were paid by the foot, right? And, er, every...well actually you were paid by a settin'...a settin'd be four foot long, y'know what I mean? You'd have a four-foot-six board, you'd push that on, put a frame in, a temporary frame in, push it on, put a frame in, then you'd put your side boards in. Then you'd go along like that, put your rails down, get your bogey behind...you might have to go in maybe a hundred foot and eh...then you'd get to the main sewer.

Interviewer: So like, in the 1970s, now, how much would you be paid for that?

John H: Eh, eh...I'd make...eh...a hundred-and-fifty pound a week. That was fuckin' some money. And... eh...fairplay to me, I pissed it all up against a wall and the rest I fuckin' squandered [Laughter]. And then when you'd be putting the pipes in and you'd be packing them with concrete on the way out, you'd get half the money for packing. But *everybody* wanted to do that, cos you'd get nothing for sinkin' the shaft; so you sank the shaft as quick as you could, so you could get a few bob on the heading; you wouldn't get anything for sinking the shaft, see.

Interviewer: Well you'd be paid for it, though?

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John H: Yeah but it was just your day-rate, your eight quid, like, and that'd be eight foot square and maybe thirty foot deep and you'd have to sink that by hand.

Interviewer: Oh right, so they weren't doing that with machines in those days?

John H: Not at all, sure what machine would go down that depth? You had a Jones' crane with a skip on it, and he'd drop it down to you. Yeah, and you'd take out so many feet then put down your sheet piles and -

Interviewer: So how many men would there be?

John H: Two. Well, you had a driver and a chaser and the crane-driver...three men. So the man whose driving the heading – who's in front – he'd have the chaser behind him. So you throw the muck back to him, he'd put in the skip, take the skip out, put it up. There'd be one skip empty waiting on the stage, lower that one and empty the full one. The crane driver drops that one down on the stage, then, after it's emptied.

Interviewer: Was that eight-hour shifts?

John H: Yeah, well, at that time we used to work 'til six o'clock in the evening, then we'd get a break at three o'clock. Then we said fuk this, we won't have the break any more and we finished at half-five, y'know what I mean.

Interviewer: So you were at that for a good while, then?

John H: I *loved* it, because you were young and fit...I *fuckin' loved* it. I *loved* it. I must admit, I used to skip down the road in the morning. And it wasn't about the money, I just loved the work, y'know? That was as simple as that –

You'd be on about rough digs...I remember sittin' in the Dundee²⁰ with the likes of the Sinker Sweeney²¹ and all them were there, y'know, and they were all on about the rough digs they were in over the years. And this auld boy starts up and the Sinker... You remember the auld Sinker?

Interviewer: I do, of course, sure he only died there a few years ago, God rest him.

²⁰ The Dundee Arms in Cambridge Heath Road, Bethnal Green, east London was, from c. 1980-1995 a well-known Irish-house with a succession of colourful characters managing and drinking in the pub. It also hosted a lot of traditional Irish music sessions in that part of London.

²¹ John 'Sinker' Sweeney was a renowned tunnel man born in Glasgow of Donegal parents and raised in Donegal and Glasgow. He became a tunnel-boss or supervisor after spending many years working as a miner and later a ganger on projects such as the Blackwall Tunnel and the Victoria Line project. He lived the later part of his life in Bethnal Green in east London. The sobriquet 'Sinker' attaches to tunnel miners renowned for being hardy and tough and able to 'sink' a shaft efficiently.

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John H: And he says, “I’ll tell ya now, aye, I was in digs in Scotland and I got up one night to have a piss in the sink and the dirty bastard of a landlady” he says, “she had it full of tae leaves!”²² [Laughter]

I must admit, ‘cos you know now, I used to knock about with your father and them boys; he was older than me, I know. But I loved older people’s company...I was never happy with lads my own age, because if I was going to learn anything, it was from the likes of your father and Sweeney and them boys...which brings me to another story!

Interviewer: They were gas men, like.

John H: They were, and I remember this bloke...honest to fuck...they used to go to this bloke for advice all the time...and it was just what they’d say to you used to fascinate me, y’know? And I remember this fella I worked with and...he was with a woman, see, and we used to use this pub every dinner-time. One time he says, “Fuck me, I think the barmaid fancies me”, see...which she did, like, y’know, and he says, “I fancy her as well”. Anyway one thing led to another and he was thinking, y’know, “that she wants to take it further, like, but I’ve got me girlfriend as well, like, and I dunno what to do”. So I says to him “Ask Matty Cahill²³- just put it by him and see what advice he’d give you”. So he went down to Matty at the end of the bar and he told him the story anyway, and he says “What d’ya think I should do Matty?” So Matty thought and said, “Well” he says, “it’s like this now...you might as well be sorry for doing it – as sorry for not doing it!” [Laughter]. D’ya know what I mean? – what a vast knowledge of fuckin’ useless information! ...fuckin’ pearls of wisdom! [Laughter]

When I started all the lads were older – way older – than me in Murphys, y’know, and I’d be runnin’ around like a blue-arsed fly because I was the youngest, I was only sixteen. That time they had the paraffin lamps that you had to put out on the road where you’d be working of a night and I had to go round in the evening and trim the wicks, put the paraffin in them, and then light them and put them out – they’d last for forty-eight hours, like. But you had to light them carefully cos you couldn’t put the flame up too high, cos the glass’d go black on the inside and you get two handles of brushes then and catch them and bring them out on the road. Anyway, no matter where I’d put it the gangerman would be behind me, he’d have to move it a half-inch, like, just to show you he’s the boss - just to be awkward – to show you you’re not doin’ it right, y’know?

But this Tommy Mac – he was actually one of the McNicholas’s, y’know the Brown Macs²⁴ -

²² John again mimics a very strong Scots-Donegal accent in telling this anecdote.

²³ One of the older characters John worked with.

²⁴ Tommy McNicholas was actually one of the ‘Green Macs’ – McNicholas Construction Ltd, founded by his Patrick McNicholas (See Appendix B). He was probably sub-contracting or cross-contracting

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Interviewer: He was working for Murphys?

John H: Yeah. He says to me, “Calm down,” he says, “You have to pace yourself.” He said, “There’s only two things” he said “You need in this work” he says, “Right? I’ll give you that bit of advice now.” He said, “One is a good pair of boots, and the other is a good mattress...because if you’re not in one”, he says, “You’ll fuckin’ be in the other!” [Laughter] – And he was right! And kind of forty-two years later I still have a good pair of boots and I bought one of them...eh...what’cha-call-them...memory-foam mattresses. The only problem is I’m sixty-two now and I wish the memory foam would get Alzheimer’s and wouldn’t wake me up in the morning to go to work at five o’clock! [Laughter]...sure what can you do...

Interviewer: So you were at the headings and then what? You went doing street-works after that?

John H: Yeah. I was on street-works then. They had all of Tower Hamlets²⁵ work but there was no great money in it, like, cos Tower Hamlets being a poor borough.

Interviewer: So when you were working on the headings was that all over London more-or-less?

John H: Well, they had all of Tower Hamlets. They had all of Tower Hamlets at the time, then they moved into Camden.

Interviewer: So these were basically all new sewers? Like headings work?

John H: Well, they’d be new building sites. So you’d go into a building site. Then they started taking the work over from Westminster Council. So we’d take the work off of them. And wherever they’d open a new building site – because you have to remember that at that time all the sewers were belonging to the GLC²⁶, now they’re belonging to the Water Board. Right, so Ken Livingstone was in power on the GLC and they had their own people working. So you [Murphy] weren’t allowed to break into the sewer. You’d drive your heading out to the sewer and then, they’d come, and they’d make the hole, because they’d allow...say the invert level was X, they’d allow for floods, for water to build –up etc, so they’d come maybe eighteen inches above the invert level. So they would make the hole and put in the first pipe [the

with Murphy on particular contracts. This is an example of the interconnectivity and networking of the Irish ethnic enclave throughout the post-war period.

²⁵ Tower Hamlets is a London Borough in East London which covers much of the traditional East End.

²⁶ The Greater London Council (GLC) was the top-tier local government administrative body for Greater London from 1965 to 1986. It replaced the earlier London County Council (LCC) which had covered a much smaller area. The GLC was dissolved in 1986 by the Local Government Act 1985 and its powers were devolved to the London boroughs and other entities. (Source: Jerry White, *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People*, (London, 2008), pp.387-400.

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connection into the main sewer] then you would take it back into the building from the road, and give it to the subbie from there. Then the subbie would take it from there and build his manholes and install drainage and all that.²⁷

So that was the type of work we did. But, then you might have to renew the main sewers on the road, then, as well if they collapsed, because they were Victorian, like.

Interviewer: That was Murphy's main work, they had all that. There was very little paving and all that, d'ya know what I mean? Well, there was paving but not – like there wasn't much money in it. The money was in the shafts and headings and all that, y'know?

Interviewer: So at that time would you have been working mainly with John Donoghue or with other gangers?

John H: Ah no I was working mainly with Cyril Hobbs – you probably don't remember him. He used to be down in Bethnal Green there. He ran all of that place. When you think of it – there was a man there; Cyril Hobbs was his name, he died since; he was with Murphy about forty-five years...

Interviewer: I mean, this is a thing we were talking about earlier. The whole kind of image of Murphy as this kind of entrepreneur that made a fortune out of all the guys that worked for him – I mean obviously he made a lot of money – but I've yet to find anybody who worked for Murphy, as you say some of them for forty or fifty years – that had a bad word to say about him.

John H: Sure why would ya? I'm with him forty-two years and I've never lost a day's work. All through the '70s in this country – not all through the '70s but say with Ted Heath's government – there was a three-day-week in this country. I never done three days a week with Murphys; never done it. When the dustman's strike was on, there wasn't as much as a matchstick left in Westminster; Murphys cleared it all. [27.48] They dumped it all in the East End, I know that, in the schools down the East End. The place was crawling with rats. Ah all the secret brigade club, y'know? They were all that.

Interviewer: But at the end of the day, he can't have been that bad to work for if *all these men* spent their lives working for him.

John H: Well there you are. I've never...there's no way you could say anything bad about him; what could you say, like?

²⁷ Murphy, acting in effect as a contractor to the Statutory Authority, the GLC, would install the new sewer main the legal boundary of the building, after which the building owner would employ their own civil engineering / environmental engineering contractor to complete the installation of drainage/water supply etc.

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No...sure they had the best of work in the country – the *best* work in the country. They really did, y'know...

Interviewer: So you would've worked in a number of different gangs and different locations?

John H: Yeah, yeah. Wherever the work was, like.

Interviewer: But you never had to stray much beyond London; always in and around the City?

John H: Yep. That's where the money was.

Interviewer: And would I be right in thinking Murphy and most of the Irish contractors employed almost all Irish at that time?

John H: Yeah. It would be very unusual even to find an Englishman working for most of them. Now you'd have a job to find one [an Irishman] on a job now; go into Kentish Town²⁸ - it's unreal

Interviewer: But you know, John, part of the reason for that is that you won't find an Irishman these days that wants to do that kind of work; they're all professionally-educated now.

John H: Yeah. I know, but this new crowd they brought in on the management side...these are all Laing O'Rourke's men now...then there's another fella there...ah whats-his-name...Bill...ah [struggling to recall]...Bungalow Bill they call him anyway. I said why are ya calling him that?...cos there's nothing upstairs! [Laughter]...y'know...and they were right about him!

[Off-topic discussion]

John H: Well when I started there, the agent²⁹ that you worked for, he had to get the work. There's a crowd in there now, they're just waitin' around for work to come in – as if they're just going to ring you up. It was the *agents* that had to get the work. Cyril Hobbs, now, all through the '70s, '80s and, I suppose, a lot of the '90s ran all Tower Hamlets; he had about...forty men I suppose, at least. There was no mobile phones, there was no laptops, there was nothin' like that, right? He done all the booking-in, the wages, he got the work, he ordered the gear and the materials, he gave all the levels for the work – for the sewers and all that, he was the engineer, right?

Interviewer: But presumably he knew how to do all that? He'd done the work himself.

²⁸ This refers to Murphy HQ and yard at Highview House, Kentish Town, where Murphy operations in the London region are centred and controlled from.

²⁹ This refers to the Site Agent appointed for each project

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John H: Yeah, but he did all that himself; everything...[minor interruption]...and d'ya know how he ran them jobs? An ashtray full of ten-pence pieces. He'd stop at the phonebox, ring Murphy's office, ordering sand, ballast, cement and all that – he had to do all that with an ashtray full of ten-pences running around for phoneboxes. And now they have all these laptops and everything and they *still* can't get it right...it's unreal, 'twould sicken ya! I mean it's all this typing and messaging and all that...I mean, could they leave a note for the milkman? [Laughter]

But every day we used to go to the pub, honest-to-God, y'had to; at that time they didn't want ya if you didn't go and have a few pints every day at dinner-time, ya had to be there. But this Tom Rush, I remember – he had the longest feckin' nose I ever seen on a man in me life! [Laughter] – but it was though, and a'course there was always the candle, y'know, the drip hanging out of it. This woman that drank in the pub, she says "Tom, for Jasus' sake will you wipe your nose, you're making me sick lookin' at ya!" He says, "Why don't you wipe it, it's nearer to you than it is to me!" [Laughter]

Interviewer: But the work didn't bother you, then?

John H: Not at all. Not at all. Sure, it's just...for fuck sake, you never even dreamed about dole or handouts or – it was the work ethic you had, wasn't it? ^{p618j} Ya fuckin – like my auld man was the same – I don't think I can *ever* remember my auld man having a holiday...*ever*.

Interviewer: Well I guess if you go back before the 1960s holidays, really, were something that rich people did...poor people didn't have holidays, they couldn't afford them. Their idea of a holiday was – if you were lucky – you might go down to Kent or somewhere like that, hop-picking.

John H: Yeah, that's right. My auld man used to – he was as fit as anything; he used to play handball every day with the Christian Brothers school, then at the weekend he'd box down the Theatre Royal and then he'd do the pub for the rest of the day, y'know. And I never once – *ever* – saw him using the bar-flap [to get out from the bar]. He used to put his hands on the Guinness pump and – phish – over the counter he used to go. I swear to God, I swear on me mother's life.

When he used to box at the Theatre Royal, he was to box this bloke one night and, ah anyway, the bloke never turned up for whatever reason and they put this other boxer in his place – Kid something-or-other – I don't remember his name; anyway this bloke was good, like, y'know what I mean? Anyway the first round he goes out and knocks seven bells outa my auld fella, like, and he sits down at the end of the round and there's all blood coming out of his ear. He tells his corner-man this fella is too good for me and the corner man says "Sure he

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hardly laid a finger on you, you'll be grand". So he goes out for the second round and comes back to the corner with a busted nose and says "That's it, throw the towel in, this lad's too good for me" and again the corner-man says, "Ah sure he hardly laid a glove on ya". My auld fella says, "Well, you better keep an eye on the referee, then, because somebody's knocking fuck outa me!" [Laughter]

Interviewer: Do you remember Dennis B, he was at Murphys the same time as you wasn't he?

John H: Dennis B, yeah, he was one of the hardest working men I ever knew. He used to be in the headings all the time. Him and Ginger M. Sure, poor Dennis; Dennis wouldn't have his bus-fare home of a Thursday night. We were all paid in cash that time; he'd have it all gambled by dinnertime. He hadn't a red cent. Y'know what I mean...gambled...and after going through that kind of work to *get* the money, y'know? That's a tough thing, isn't it. And he wouldn't have a penny to go home to the kids with and that's a fact.

Interviewer: He'd blow it all on the geegees?

John H: Yeah. Maybe two races. Because he was working with Ginger M and sure the two of them...sure they'd gamble on two flies goin' up the wall! And Ginger, he had a house out in Seven Kings and it was full of lodgers -

Interviewer: So he was making a few bob out of that, too?

John H: Well, his wife was, because if she didn't keep the money from that he'd have that gambled as well. Anyway somebody must've said to him that one of his lodgers was...y'know...tapping the wife! So he went home early from work and he threw them all out. And she came in, after work, and she says, "I wonder where the boys are. They're all late coming in from work tonight". "oh" he says "I told them all to pack their bags and get out, and from now on there's only one pair o'balls goin' up them stairs!" [Laughter]

[Off-topic discussion]

John H: They're all gone, Mick, they're all gone.³⁰ This crowd have come in and they want all their own people in place and they want all the old Irish crowd out.

Interviewer: But isn't there somebody in the family that's going to do something about that?

³⁰ Referring to the old generation of managers and directors who ran Murphy for most of John's working life.

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John H: Well she's there, she brought these people in, Kathy.³¹ She's on the main board. I don't know if their ten-year plan is to run the company down! But, I mean I'm not being funny, she's worth untold millions. It's only her, Bernard and the young daughter who own Folgate³², that's worth £350 or £390 million alone. That's without Murphys at all. She wouldn't be that old, she might be late sixties. The first wife died. She lives there looking over Regent's Park; she've the penthouse there. She knocked the two of them into one, I've been up there, I've done work up there. There's eleven bedrooms in it. A shame about the old man...

Interviewer: I only ever met him for ten minutes – I thought he was a bit of a gentleman actually, although cute as a fox, I'd say.

John H: He didn't want – like if he was an Englishman like I suppose they'd have made him *Sir* John, but he wasn't in to that, and he wouldn't go to any functions or anything like that; he'd send somebody. But even here [in London], they've tried to write articles about him here – I've read some of them and thought "you don't know what you're talking about!"

Interviewer: And would he do – as you said – would he turn up on a job unexpectedly and...

John H: Ah yeah. There was no airs and graces on him. I seen him bringing an auld pram into the fitters shop [in the yard] to get it welded. He...he didn't know the value of money.

Interviewer: Exactly, they came from an era when they had nothing. My old fella was telling me about old Dan Kenny that ran a small building firm that he worked for a while – now he was nowhere near the size of Murphys but it was more of a small outfit. Dan was a carpenter, like. But dad told me honest to God, like, if there was an offcut of timber a foot long, "Ah put that in the van, we might use it somewhere else"...they'd waste nothing; that's the generation they came from, because there wasn't anything during and after the War.

See, I'm not even sure – I heard two different versions of how he [John Murphy] even got started. There's one version that says he went to America first when he was only a teenager, in the early '30s I think it was with a school friend or a neighbour of his, same sort of age, and they joined on as – well, what would you call it, cadet cops or trainee cops, y'know. And according to this story his buddy got shot in a raid and he – that was it – he was out of there after that. I never – I mean that's one version that I heard from a fella that worked at Murphys.

³¹ This refers to Mrs Katherine Murphy, John Murphy's widow.

³² Folgate Holdings Ltd and Folgate Estates Ltd are the property development and real estate companies owned and operated by the Murphy family.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

And then there's another version that says that he just went to England in the '30s and he was working for...eh...the old London Airport, I think, or something like that. And he was so – he did so well, and he was so useful, that when the war started the manager of the airport wrote a letter and got him, basically, exempted from National Service because they said he would be more use bomb-clearing and building airfields and all that kind of stuff, because he was just...good at getting work done! I don't know which of them is true, now, if either!

John H: I don't know either but I'll make enquiries for ya and find out. [46.51]

Interviewer: I wouldn't have a clue which o'them was true. See, that's the thing, because he was such a private man he was almost reclusive, really. These stories got bandied around and he wasn't the type of man to say yes-aye-or-no, y'know? He'd just let them run.

John H: Well, he was some bit of stuff, no doubt about it. I remember him, when he lived up in Highgate³³ before he moved in to the apartment, I think they got a bit frightened up in the house. Because, really, at the time, his sons and daughters could've been kidnapped really when you think about it – be the quare fellas, like, y'know what I mean...for ransom? ³⁴ Dave Murphy – he used to be in the yard [Kentish Town], he's no relation – but Dave Murphy used to take the kids to school. I mean, when you think back, they were prime candidates for ransom and everything y'know.

But I remember him [Murphy] coming in one morning, into the yard, and eh, Sean Sheehan was in charge of the yard. He came walking in down the ramp – y'know the ramp into the yard? – Sheehan says to him, "Jasus Mr Murphy, why didn't you tell us you were coming in today?" He said, eh, "I would've sent one of the vans up to pick you up" or whatever. "*I got a lift in this morning with Pincher Mac – he starts early d'see!*" ³⁵ [Laughter].

Interviewer: I presume all them boys would've known each other? The Macs and John Murphy and all them. They'd have been aware of each other and, sure by the sounds of it they would probably have worked together betimes, would they?

³³ Highgate is an exclusive suburban area of north London at the north-eastern corner of Hampstead Heath, known as a very leafy residential and expensive part of London.

³⁴ A veiled reference to the Provisional IRA, who were engaged in a campaign of extremist physical-force Republicanism throughout the 1970s-1990s, the period when John Murphy's younger children were being raised.

³⁵ John mimics John Murphy's Kerry accent. The reference to Pincher Mac is interesting. Michael 'Pincher' McNicholas was another of the 'big' legends of the London-Irish construction world, the founder of McNicholas Engineering and a long-standing business rival of Murphy. (See Appendix B)

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

John H: “*The Green, the Grey, the RSK, Lowery and Pincher Mac*”³⁶ and as yer man said, “*I worked for Laing, but not for long!*” [Laughter]...they were the men, the kings, like, y’know.

Interviewer: They must have employed the vast bulk of men who came here -

John H: O’course they did! But there was rough ones there, don’t get me wrong, like but I mean, like thick bastards, y’know? They would always pick the thickest man in the gang and make him the ganger; that was always their philosophy. Because he’d never know when there was a day’s work done. Do you understand the logic behind that? If you think; where you’d say, “Now lads, I think ye’s have a good days work done there” – the other fella, he wouldn’t know. And y’see mostly he didn’t even want the money; once he got the pat on the back, the bit of power. And that’s how they got on – the likes of Connie M³⁷ and all them.

Interviewer: That’s the fellow I was talking about earlier! – He’s a labour manager with them now -

John H: No, that’s the son, but his father, he was a ganger...ah one thick bastard...oh Christ. Well, there was no flowers after he burnt himself, I can tell you that! Because he went in, and there was a big tea-urn there, a big thing of boiling water and the telephone wire was around it and, of course, he couldn’t wait to pull it - out of thickness...well he got some doing, he never worked again. But Jasus talk about thick...*T-I-double K!* [Laughter] – oh Jasus, like, unreal – unreal.

But them men would never know when there was a day’s work done. They’d want more and more and more. Then he’d be out tomorrow and they’d tell him what a great man he is, y’know.

Interviewer: And was the Elephant like that? Was he thick?

John H: Oh Jesus he could be thick alright! Oh yeah. But he’d push the blokes, like, he’d be there all the time, y’know.

[Private conversation]

I did see pacemakers on the job sometimes. There was one bloke, he had had polio and he just didn’t know his own strength, y’know, but he didn’t have much co-ordination [physically mimics actions] like that, y’know, and eh...the blokes just used to make a fool of him; tell him what a great man he is, and he used to fall for it. I seen him on the jackhammer, there; he’d be breaking out the old kerb and the old bed out for a mason, waiting to go in because he knew when that was all on he could throw all the kerbs in at five bob a metre – and he could make a good – like most of the kerbs were two metres long, y’know the old

³⁶ John recites this as a rhyme.

³⁷ An alias used to protect identity

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Victorian kerbs? And eh there was ten bob...sure that was a day’s pay in itself! ³⁸ Oh yeah, sure Eamonn G, *‘The Horse’* G they called him, *Ah Eamonn, what a great fella you are;* o’course that made him go twice as fast, y’know. Poor auld Eamonn, y’know...he was the same as the fella now you’d have tied up at the back of the house... and that’s all they knew.

Interviewer: But they’d fall for it?

John H: Mmm...oh yeah, oh yeah...*what a great man you are*...you’d kinda feel sorry for them when you think back, like, y’know-what-I-mean. Because they were just using and abusing them for to make money out of them – out of your own, like! – I think the only ones ever done me harm was me own, y’know? My own countrymen. An Englishman would never do ya no harm, like, you could talk to him.

There was an awful lot of cronyism too, with Murphys – like if you weren’t Kerry, like, d’ya know what I’m sayin? And they thought that if they were Kerry that they were something special because Murphy was Caherciveen...y’know? ³⁹

Interviewer: He did employ an awful lot of Kerry men then?

John H: Oh he did, he did. Some of these blokes, they were getting ridiculous money, and they hadn’t the hands to wipe their arses! Like...what’s goin’ on? All because they’re the ganger’s mates. And the likes of the Headless going back to Caherciveen – “*Come over with me in the mornin’ – I’ll Shtar you!*” ⁴⁰ as if he was John Murphy himself... and him born up in the Whittington Hospital!

[Private conversation]

I ran into Billy M from Donegal there in the Bohola⁴¹ a couple of years back – he was an arsehole when had drink. He says “Hey young fella, I’ll show you this now, it’s not even my birthday and I’m after gettin’ this card. Sure, why would they give me that?” I said “is it a fuckin’ mass-card or what!” [Laughter]. Somebody had given him a little *warning*...

Interviewer: And was it...a warning?

³⁸ Ironic comment

³⁹ John Murphy came from Loughmark in Caherciveen, in south County Kerry.

⁴⁰ Mocking a very strong Kerry accent

⁴¹ The Bohola was another London-Irish tavern in Bethnal Green, probably the last in that part of London. It was still frequented by mainly older Irish working men until c.2010 when new licences took it over.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

John H: O’course, yeah...talking when he should be listening! [Laughter]...but sure he was always the same. He stuck his nose into everything and had a gob on him.

Interviewer: He was another tunnel-man wasn’t he?

John H: He was – and a good one. Oh a fuckin’ good one, yeah. The Donegal men were all tunnel-drivers; any tunnel you’d go into you’d find Donegal men. Tough cases but mad for the money – mad for money. That was most of it, y’know. Billy was good, though – Billy would push the shield. You’d have the shield that would go on which would be a massive cylinder and then the peak of the shield would cut into the bottom then push the shield on and cut into the top. It was hydraulic, like. You’d set up a bullseye in the centre of the face, then you could turn the shield either way or up and down, whichever direction you were going.

Interviewer: It used to annoy me that those men would be classed as unskilled or semi-skilled...although in fairness tunnel men were classed as miners and they were paid big money, but then it was dangerous work.

John H: Oh yeah...like if you had to go into the fuckin’ chambers and you had to come up to the surface...oh yeah that was...feekin’ hell your ears and your nose and all that...it’s like a deep-sea diver isn’t it?

Interviewer: I read one fella’s account of working in compressed air and he said he thought his head was going to explode – would you ever get used to it I wonder?

John H: Oh no, sure you’d never get used to that...sure it’s the pressure isn’t it? Sure you’d have to go into the decompression chamber, if you didn’t you’d get the bends...you’d be killed. It’s as simple as that, y’know. Oh fuck it, it wouldn’t be for me, now, y’know? We took awful chances [on the headings]. We used to go in and we had no air – so we had this brainwave that we’d let an air-line in off the compressor and let it in to the heading...sure when I think back to it...it’s not even air!

Interviewer: You’re lucky you survived that at all! But seriously the thing that gets me is the fact that they would describe that kind of work as *unskilled* work

John H: Yeah...Huh...[looks rueful]

Interviewer: Yeah, like, y’know – how does anybody who can sink a shaft and drive a heading, or set out a tunnel or even when you went on later to street-masonry work...like anybody who says that unskilled work has obviously never done it.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

John H: Well – if you sank a shaft here, say in this room, or...okay, right, say you’ve sank the shaft. It’s easy sink a shaft; set out a template and...anyway, now you’re down thirty foot under the ground, because the sewer you’re driving to, that’s the invert level, right? Different boroughs would have different inverts, it all depends on the high-ground, low-ground. In Tower Hamlets, for some reason, they’re very low. You want to drive a heading dead-straight, cos you want to hit the manhole; you don’t want to hit the sewer any old place in the road, you want to drive a heading to that manhole dead-straight. Now you haven’t got no lasers, so how do you do it?

Interviewer: Between the two shafts?

John H: No, between the shaft – you’ve only got one shaft – and you want to drive to a specific point maybe a gateway on a building site, maybe a manhole on the edge of the site or whatever.

Interviewer: Well, I can figure out a way of how you’d get the direction, I think! But I’m not sure how I’d go from there. The way I would’ve thought you’d get the direction is you’d drop a plumb-line down the middle of the shaft.

John H: Yep. That’s it. That’s it.

Interviewer: If the manhole or the point you’re driving to is over there [pointing] then you’d run a line to it. Yeah, but then how do you transfer that down to the miner?

John H: Well, what you would do, you would get your line at the top of the shaft and you would pull that to the point you’re going to, and then you’d pull the other end across the centre of the shaft. You get me? Then you drop two plumb-bob lines down at the front and back of the shaft to give you a direction to drive in. On the bottom frame, then, you’d put a nail where that plumb-bob is on either side, and then every time you go to put a frame in you’d pull a line across from frame-to-frame, drop your two plumb-bobs and the bloke that would be at the back of me, he’d say, “Go a little left” or right, or whatever. He’s looking through the two plumb-bobs and he’s sighting my frame to go that way or that way.

Interviewer: But couldn’t that be easily out?

John H: It wouldn’t be out.

Interviewer: But it could be.

John H: No. It couldn’t be. It wouldn’t be out – never. How could it be out? You’d just get a wedge, stick in the middle of the frame and go one side or the other. You will be spot-on. I guarantee you’ll be spot-on.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

And you won't rise, because every time you're going in with your new frame, you'd level it with your two side-boards. Then you'd put a floor in and level that.

Interviewer: But you guys would be doing that. There wouldn't be an engineer setting that out for you?

John H: No engineer – you'd work that out for yourself, and you would *never* be out by a mill.⁴²

Interviewer: But an engineer is supposed to be a skilled profession, y'know, an engineer is classed as a skilled job. You're doing the same thing an engineer's doing.

John H: Well, there was no engineers there, no. You couldn't ask an engineer, I never even knew there was such a thing on our work. Well these days, anyway, you'd be doin' it with a laser level and reading off your satellite co-ordinates, y'know?

Interviewer: Much more precise.

John H: Well, yeah, of course, but back then, that's how they done it. And it would be a hundred percent right...how could it be out if you stayed centred?

Interviewer: But again, it's the same with the street-masonry. Did you know Danny Meehan, the fiddleplayer from Donegal?...a big, huge man. He was a street-mason. He would've been in London a few years before you. He did all that cobbled paving in Leadenhall Market,⁴³ all that tasty stuff you can see today -

John H: All done by hand, all by hand. All hand-pointed.

Interviewer: So when you came out of the headings and went doing that...where did you learn to do that kind of tasty work?

John H: Well, there was mason's there and you'd go with one of them, as his labourer.

Interviewer: So just as a matter of interest, why did you do that? Did you get fed-up with the headings?

John H: The headings work just kinda stopped and Stores took over the bits left, they were probably cheaper. Murphys kinda got out of it and Brownes⁴⁴ went in doing bits and pieces, they were probably cheaper.

⁴² A Millimetre

⁴³ A Victorian covered market in the City of London, located on Gracechurch Street, EC1.

⁴⁴ J.Browne Construction Company Limited, a contemporary, smaller, civil engineering contractor based in Enfield, north London, founded in 1971 by Sean Browne from County Cork. (See also Appendix A-OI#16-Sean G – Leitrim, p.34.

Original Interview # 17 – John H - Wexford

Then we moved on into Camden; we were still doing bits and pieces of headings there too, still doing bits of them today if I was honest with you. Sure when you still do the gullies and manholes you still have to get into the sewer. Only today it's all considered confined spaces and you have to have – now tomorrow morning I've to go down a manhole, right -

Interviewer: This confined space, then, is exactly the same kind of headings you were doing twenty years ago?

John H: Yeah, yeah – and it *wasn't* considered a confined space then! But then, what is a confined space? Guess it depends how big you are, doesn't it? But like is this room a confined space? When I get in to me car...isn't that a confined space? [Laughter] I'll go in there tomorrow morning, I'll have to have a rescue-unit, tripod, gas-monitor, a rescue bloke there with an oxygen-tank that if I pass out he'll come down and put the air on me. They'd break any subbie. For you to start up now doing that kind of work, you'd be skint in no-time; you'd lose your house, you'd lose everything you have within the first year; I guarantee it. You're not going to make money, cos these people are gonna break ya, y'know.

[Private conversation]

Interviewer: We all know that the brown-envelope game used to go on all companies were the same. There used to be a bit of that going on at local authority level because that's how you got your work.

John H: I know. See when I think back to my time, anyway, like, the exchange that I knew – the dole office that I knew – was the pub. If you didn't go into the pub, you didn't get no work. Now there's no point in going to the pub because...I never thought I'd see the day when an Irishman would be afraid to go to the pub at night.

It's all changed so fast. When I think back to the social club days that we had...and the amount of people we knew that's not there anymore...it's frightening, like. If I was to start naming them...

END at 1.20hrs

[Remainder of tape - Off-topic conversation]

Original Interview # 18 – Patrick F - Roscommon

Name: Patrick F Date of Birth: 1947
Place of Birth: Yorkshire, UK
Date of Emigration to UK: 1965-66
Date of Interview: 29 January, 2018.
Location of Interview: Interviewee's house, County Roscommon

Interviewer: So you were born in Yorkshire originally?

Pat: I was yeah.

Interviewer: So your mother was English?

Pat: Yeah she was. We came back here...

Interviewer: And where was your father from?

Pat: My father's from up here in Tulsk, and em, we came back when I was 4. I remember that, but em...

Interviewer: Can I ask what year you were born?

Pat: I was born in 1947. I'm coming 71, and em...

Interviewer: You're looking well on it.

Pat: Thanks very much. She, she, I don't think she ever settled really. She tried her best, but she used to go over and back a lot in the summertime when we'd get holidays, we'd be over there, but, and she died when she was 36. I was 11 and there was 2 younger than me, so we had hardship, and the thing about it was, she was sick for about 3 years before she died and my father was robbed with medical bills.

And the day, I remember coming back from school, walking down the hill, and all the neighbours round the house and I thought, what's going on here? You know, because eh, you kinda wouldn't have anybody in the house because eh, it was rough, you know, and eh, she'd be gone. She'd be in hospital a good while before that, but em, he said to me, he said to me, your mother's dead. Jesus, I couldn't believe it, but then again, she'd been away for so long in hospital that I kinda blocked it off but eh, I remember he came up in the room that night and he said to me he had a £20 note but he said, that's all we have, what are we going to do? Are we going to go back to England? What are we going to do?

Original Interview # 18 – Patrick F - Roscommon

.... But asking a child of 11, like? Putting an awful lot of responsibility.

Interviewer: It is, but that's how things used to happen in those days.

Pat: It is. I remember a man said to me one time, your father was very unlucky. If he'd bought ducks, he said, they'd drowned. Honest to God! Yeah, so that was it and then he got all bitter and me and him never got on, you know, he was always, you know, and then I went to school to a teacher who would beat us every day, you know feckin' terrible.

Interviewer: Did you go to school locally?

Pat: I did. I went to school in Killina and there was a teacher there called Josie K and he was just brutal, absolutely brutal.

Interviewer: A lot of them were in those days.

Pat: He got sacked in the end, he did and that was an awful thing to happen. You know, in those days.

Interviewer: It was yeah. I mean you'd be

Pat: So, that will tell you how brutal he was. I left there and I was.... I went into the technical school in Elphin and there was a teacher in there called Liam S and Liam, whatever way Liam had of teaching he taught me how to write a bit and read a bit anyway that was about it, but I really liked the woodwork and em, I stayed there for 3 years. And the last year I was there I made a good bit of furniture for the house, wardrobes and dressing-tables and stuff like that and I thought ...

Interviewer: Getting the hang of it?

Pat: I thought I was a carpenter sure. And then in 1965, I think I was about 18 or 19...

Interviewer: I was going to say what sort of time was this, '64, '65?

Pat: Yeah, it would have been, yeah, it would have been. '65. I think '65 or '66 that I left. I'm not quite sure because I was so innocent I didn't have a clue. I left with a cardboard suitcase and the old £20 note came up again. I left me father, I got on the bus in Elphin along with a guy

Original Interview # 18 – Patrick F - Roscommon

called Eamon Burke. He was a friend of mine. He'd be a few years older. His girlfriend had gone and he wanted to go over and I said I'd go.

Interviewer: What time of the year was this now, can you remember?

Pat: No. I can't, but it must be near winter because they wanted to hold a, wanted to hold a 'going-away' dance for us. You know the way you'd collect a few bob. We could have done with it, I could have done with it, but Eamon said, no, no, we'll go. So, we went. I'd a cardboard suitcase and I had 3 collars that you'd change. The shirt and 3 collars, clean collars that way, and a suit.

Interviewer: And that was it?

Pat: Yeah. And I come down, I'll never forget, we went on the bus. It was a single-decker bus with bicycles and stuff on the top, and we got on the bus in Elphin and we came round the corner and we were coming down, and me and him were sitting in the back seat, we thought we'd have a nice seat at the back and I looked out the window and I see me father at Simpsons forge with a horse, getting him shod, and that was the end of that. And they had warned us so much about the customs, you know, customs....

Interviewer: So, your, at this stage now your father didn't know you were going?

Pat: Oh, he did. He wished me luck, aye. Because would you believe that, I think it was about, what age would I have left technical school at? I don't know, maybe 16? 15? And then I spent a year drawing milk to the Croghan creamery on a Ford Thames pick-up truck, with more smoke coming out, up from the engine inside than there was going out in the exhaust, burning oil like good-oh.

Interviewer: So you did that for a year?

Pat: Yeah, I started that and I was getting £10 a month, aye. I saved up for two months to buy a pair of Beatle shoes. Do you remember Beatle shoes with the pointy toes? Well you wouldn't remember but ...

Interviewer: I do yeah, I remember my mum talking about them, winkle-pickers.

Pat: Winkle-pickers, that's it. And em, Mary Lowe in Boyle was going over to Castlerea to the shop in Castlerea one day, and I said to her, would

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you ever bring, get me a pair? And she bought me a pair and brought them home. And I wore them, and I paid her back then in two months for the shoes.

Interviewer: Now I know this might sound like a daft question, but I'm going to ask it cos I want to hear what you're going to say on tape, why did you go?

Pat: Well you see, being born there I kind of liked the idea of going to be going back to my home, back to England, and then you see with the mother dying I didn't have anything to hold me here and em, you know, there was no money, there was absolutely nothing here at the time.

Interviewer: That's the phrase I was expecting to hear, cos I'd say every single interview that I've done for this project, the answer to that question, the main answer to that question, and there might be other factors, the main thing is there was absolutely no prospects.

Pat: Oh, none at all. If you can imagine having to go out in the morning with a basin to the tar barrel at the end of the house to wash your face, no toilet facilities, 1 room, 1 room we had, bedroom, and all of us that was in the bedroom of a rented house and an open fire, smoke coming out the bloody - more smoke coming out the door than was coming out the chimney!

There was a big, big open hearth and when you'd come back from school then, cos me mother wasn't there and me father would be off doing something or whatever, and you had to start making dinner, pull out the coals and start making dinner. And it was pure starvation at times. Anything would have been better than that, you know.

Interviewer: And this now, we're talking about the early '60s?

Pat: Yeah, yeah. We are, and I can remember, would you believe it, I can remember when we didn't have the light, we had no light. I think this was maybe the last county to be ...

Interviewer: Well, I think between Leitrim and Roscommon they would have been certainly towards the last, or Mayo probably but I know, my father would be ten years older than you and he definitely said when he left in '58 there was no electricity there in the house then.

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Pat: No there wouldn't. There was none in ours. I remember when we moved from one house to another and we had the electricity then, but we didn't have it before cos we had a big Tilly lamp on the ...

Interviewer: So it was then just pure economic hardship?

Pat: Yeah it was, yeah. It was, it was.

Interviewer: So, when you got the bus in Elphin then where was that bus going to?

Pat: Dublin. Yeah, and we got on the boat then and we went over and we were sick on the boat too cos it was an old cattle boat. Actually, we were up on deck and we could see them loading the cattle on the bottom, could see them running the cattle in on the boat.

Interviewer: I've heard that, alright.

Pat: Yeah, it was awful rocky going over

Interviewer: No stabilisers

Pat: No, no. I was sick. And then we got on an old steam train to go down to eh, we had to change at Crewe, and we had to on down to London and em, it took us a whole lot of time to go down there.

Interviewer: And did you have any idea what you were doing when you got to London?

Pat: Not a clue.

Interviewer: Did you have a plan?

Pat: No, only that there was a neighbour supposed to meet us at Euston Station.

Interviewer: A neighbour from here?

Pat: Yeah. He'd already gone over ahead.

Interviewer: Young fellow like yourself or...

Pat: No, he was, he'd be a good bit older and he had a girl, he was married, yeah, and he had bought a house over there in 66 Ritherton Road,

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Tooting Bec, I'll never forget it, because I got lost so many times trying to find it. They wrote the address in my pocket.

Interviewer: Presumably, I'm guessing now, you would have come into Euston Station?

Pat: We came into Euston Station and we met Tommy Cummins there then, that was the guy that owed that house. And would you believe, I was coming off, and this suitcase, and I'd heard so much about the customs and I saw people opening doors and putting their suitcase in, you know, and I thought, oh, and I said to Tommy, have we got to put our suitcases in there to get tested, I didn't realise it was lockers.

Interviewer: Left luggage.

Pat: Left luggage, yeah, lockers.

Interviewer: They used to have them, in those days, they don't do it much now. But you wouldn't have had any customs, I don't think, would you?

Pat: No, no. I don't know why we were so afraid.

Interviewer: I know. [My] Dad said it was like, it was the same as getting, you know, a train from here to Dublin, he said, he got on the train in Carrick, got off in Dublin, over on the boat, nobody asked him for anything, no identity documents, nobody talked to him, he just got off the train at Euston and walked into the streets.

Pat: That's the truth. And it was a train load of us, Irish, honest to God, it was, we were all workers, all going down. Yeah, and you knew well cos they all had the old cap or hat on them the same as, and some of them were old and didn't know anything about anything. They had labels. They had a brown label that you'd put on your suitcase with a piece of string out of it and they had them, not all, just one man that I saw, with this thing, and I asked Eamon, what's that thing on his jacket, that thing down there, you know, and he told me. He said, he said, that's an address where he's going to.

Interviewer: So he doesn't forget?

Pat: No but he probably couldn't read, so I don't know. But he was an oldish man. He probably wasn't... but I mean, I wouldn't have been

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able to read the signs quick enough, you know, I wouldn't have been able to read the signs when I went over there.

Interviewer: I don't think that was that unusual to be honest.

Pat: Yeah, yeah, but even now, this computer is brilliant because it tells the words for you, even now I'm embarrassed, well I'm not embarrassed anymore because, my wife, my wife, I can't spell and do you know the reason I can't spell is because I found out I'm dyslexic and all the beatings I was getting that was making me worse.

Interviewer: Well there was no such thing as dyslexia in them times!

Pat: No. Oh no, it was getting worse.

Interviewer: Ah no, they were tough times. So, go on you landed in Euston and you got to Tooting Bec eventually?

Pat: Yes, I did eventually and I hadn't a clue and I was... they made up a bed for me in the sitting-room, me and another fellow, Eugene. He was a brother-in-law of the wife, and we were friends of the husband himself, Tommy Cummins. And I forget eh, her name but she used to, she was the landlady anyway and em, we arrived anyway. And there was more fellows upstairs in beds upstairs.

Interviewer: Oh, so they had people staying?

Pat: Yeah, yeah, they had yeah. Cos that's the only way they were going to pay for it. Anyway, we arrived there. Next morning then we got up and Tommy said to me, he said, there's a couple of fellows upstairs there and they might have something to...y'know? Course they...we asked them. One lad was from Leitrim, Johnny McGovern, and he was my friend for ages, and Declan Pritchard was another guy.

Anyway, we, we, went off looking for work and would you believe, I put on a suit on me and a tie and everything. Went into the building sites looking for work, sure I wasn't...I wouldn't have a clue. I hadn't a clue. No, sir, no, there's no work here. But I don't know how it happens then, but I remember an awful dark morning lying in the back of a van going off somewhere, off, brought off for work and coming back and the landlady, she'd take the money and she'd give me so much out of the wage packet at the time until we got going properly

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and I'm sure I was there for weeks without getting work, and she looked after us.

Interviewer: That was probably a good thing for her to do cos the likelihood was you'd have found something, a very easy way to get rid of it, I would have thought.

Pat: Yeah, yeah, but no, I'll tell you, because I was so shy and backward and everything. Would you believe when I did get work and I got working for a crowd called S.G.B scaffolding and I was up in the city somewhere, 'twas easy, you wouldn't be noticed, you know, you were only just...

Interviewer: Were you actually scaffolding for them?

Pat: No, I was labouring for carpenters and the first day he said to me was, will you go over there and get an acrow for me and I said, I will, and I went over there and I said to somebody, where's the acrow? Where's the acrow? and he showed me and I carried over one and he said, oh, he said to me, are you only bringing one? Like an idiot I went back and next time I brought two so it nearly killed me. Oh, I hadn't a clue, hadn't a clue.

But anyway, I'm going to tell you when I got me weeks wages then, oh man, I don't really know how much it was but it was an awful lot of money, 'twas an awful lot.

Interviewer: You thought it was a lot?

Pat: Oh, I thought it was a lot of money and I said I'm going to buy a suit, another suit. Burtons yeah, Burtons. I was outside Burtons looking in the window, looking up and down and I was afraid of my life to go in you know, I was so backward I didn't want to go in. Anyway, I took a chance on it anyway and I went in and I saw this suit hanging up, you know, put on the coat of it and yer man said to me, he said, "that suits too big for you" and I said, "no it will be grand, it will be grand". I didn't want any fuss or anything like that.

Folded it up and brought it back to the landlady and sure it was three times too big for me the trousers was down... She said, "you've got to bring that back". "Ah no, it will be alright. It will do good enough". I didn't...Jaysus Christ, when you think back ... I used to walk up and down outside the shop, I was afraid to go into the shop...

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Interviewer: Pure naivety?

Pat: Wasn't it? We got an hour, no half an hour's break then at lunchtime and myself and Johnny, Johnny was there a good while before me so he was kind of... but I used to be rushing back.

Interviewer: Is this still with SGB?

Pat: Yeah, we'd go down to the café to get something to eat and I'd gulp it down and run back again. He'd say to me, will you take your breath. Ah God no, we might get sacked.

Interviewer: Scared of losing your job. And where were you working?

Pat: I was working up the City,¹ but then we went down the Old Kent Road. The Old Kent Road was all being built up then at that time, and that was magic because there was a row of cranes there you could go from one site into the next, you know, 'twas really pick the best job you could get there and there was good money in it an everything like that.

Interviewer: And were you still labouring at this time or did you chance your arm at the?

Pat: I chanced my arm then at the carpentry work and bought a new saw, a new hammer and a nail bar. And Johnny said to me

Interviewer: That's enough to get shuttering.

Pat: Yeah and that's what I wanted. And he said to me, "For fecks sake, you can't walk in with the feekin' new saw". He said, "Will you go out in the back and scrape that old thing and throw - get a bit or throw a bit of water on it, he said to make it look old". And I remember, I was sawing a bit of timber, I don't know what I was trying to do, anyway, a four by two or something and I was sawing away, and the charge-hand, he was a nice fellow, an Irishman, and he said, he said, "gossoon, you put your finger out along the saw like that, when you're sawing, because otherwise...", it was going down like this [shows me], it was making a big thing with it. But anyway, that was great. I got out at the shuttering anyway, I got away at that.

¹ This refers to the City of London, or the 'Square Mile' as it is also know – the old boundaries of early modern London which is now the financial centre of London.

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Interviewer: Did you find many the likes of that charge-hand or the ganger that you were working there with there? He was obviously a decent old skin.

Pat: He was but by Jesus, I'm telling you some of them were ... If you got an Englishman you were delighted, because your own was the worse you could get. I don't know why, why were they like that, I don't know. Maybe they were afraid of their jobs as well, I don't know. But they were brutal now, brutal, ah Jaysus they were.

I was out, you'd be first there, I was out... you know Croydon, that was being built at the time. Croydon was being built at the time and they were doing in foundations or something and I was out of work anyway, I went out in the van, anyway, and we were put down in a trench digging one day. Jaysus that was brutal. And we had to dig it. 'Twas deep you know. We had to dig from here and throw it up on another shelf up here and then that fellow would throw it up another shelf, and Lord I wasn't too bad, I was up the top, I was just throwing it out but the poor fellows down in the bottom, and the stuff falling down on top of them and everything, do you know, it was awful.

And I seen fellows, ah, I seen awful accidents there. I seen awful accidents. I seen a fellow falling off the crane one day and he came down on the starter bars, you know the starter bars. Ah they went straight up through him. The roars of him. Ah he was dead, but I mean he wasn't dead just straight away. Ah shocking, but anyway.

Interviewer: When did that happen, do you know?

Pat: Ah, I don't know. Was it on... I remember I was on Fulham Palace Hospital, the deck.

Interviewer: A job like that now, would there be, presumably even in the '60s now there must have been some sort of an enquiry or something?

Pat: There was. There was indeed, but it was... look-it I fell off, I fell myself and broke me arm, broke, bone came out there in me hand working for a sub-contractor, we were doing decking and the bleddy deck went down and I went down and broke me arm.

Interviewer: Nothing?

Pat: No, nothing. Nothing. They took me back and said, "Oh you'll be alright now, you can do bits and pieces around, you can clean the

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toilets and you can do bits and pieces when you get a chance” and then, next thing the job finished and they feckin’ sacked me. You know, so there was nobody to take ...and then of course we were only working on the cash.

Interviewer: Well you see, this was the big thing because the problem was these fellows if everyone was - and most of them were - working on cash, you’d no way of, how do you complain? Cos the first thing that’s going to happen is the tax people are going to, you know?

Pat: Oh yeah. You were all in the wrong...You were caught in the system. And anyways we built that em, Shooters Hill, the flyover.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, the big roundabout.

Pat: Yeah, I worked on that there, the big flyover going across the top of it.

Interviewer: That was shuttering there as well?

Pat: Shuttering there, big shutters and ...it was tough, yeah, ‘twas. They were awful big, huge shutters, you know. Big strong backs, Yeah, and they had these bars, these, what were they called, these tension bars went through the concrete.

Interviewer: High tension concrete?

Pat: Yeah, a machine pulled them at the end and that held it up, y’know?

Interviewer: That’s very eh, that’s dangerous work.

Pat: It was. It was tough going that time but em, ah you know when I got on shuttering it wasn’t too bad. But I worked me way up to doing second fixing.

Interviewer: Who was the eh, like who...were these mainly smaller Irish subbies that you were working for?

Pat: Yeah, all the time. Whelan and Grant and all them.

Interviewer: Ah Jesus now Whelan and Grant. I know now, I got an email, must be about six months ago from Martin Grant, well actually he’s not Martin, he’s Martin Grant’s son, who would have been that Whelan and Grant.

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Pat: Well I can tell you another one now, Johnny McGovern I told you was from Leitrim. Johnny’s a big subbie now in England.

Interviewer: Is that McGovern haulage, the...?

Pat: No. No, he’s just shuttering. Johnny’s friends O’Rourke, Dessie and Ray. They came over and they slept on our floor in Highgate. Yeah and Ray came down when we were in Shooters Hill doing the fly-over in Shooters Hill. He came down and he worked with us for two days and he said, “feck this lads,” he said, “I’m not having any of this”, he said. And he went back. We lost contact with him but apparently, he went back to night-classes in the Holloway Road and he worked for Murphy then.

Interviewer: He did. He was a ganger for Murphy’s for, well in fact he was a contracts manager ...

Pat: Well I know Ray and I know Dessie and the other brother Paddy.

Interviewer: Are they from? I’ll tell you an interesting ...

Pat: They’re Mayo born, but they lived in Aughavas and Johnny McGovern lived in Aughavas as well and Johnny...

Interviewer: My own father has been telling me for years and all the interviews with him and everything say that he’s from Mayo.

Pat: He’s not. He was only a gossoon when he came to Leitrim and his mother was a school teacher, yeah. And they lived with us now. And Paddy, another brother of his, Paddy stayed with us in the, in the digs. I’m telling you about when we went over to Tommy Cummins see, Paddy stayed there with us, and Paddy, he obviously took after the mother, I think he was in college at that time, but he ended up, I think he went to Canada from London, he went to Canada.

Interviewer: Oh, right. And is he still there, he is?

Pat: I don’t know. But Ray, now, they’re now the biggest in the country.

Interviewer: Potentially, now that Carillion is gone, I’d say. They are certainly in the top four or five, in the country.

Pat: Isn’t it amazing how he got on. Fair play to him.

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Interviewer: I mean he did, he pulled an amazing stroke with the Laing thing cos he bought John Laings for a pound.

Pat: Did he?

Interviewer: Yeah, they were gone, like they were ...

Pat: Bankrupt?

Interviewer: Yeah, bankrupt. I was working in the industry when that happened. It sent shockwaves through the industry cos all the big contractors were like, how is this? It was almost this kind of, “Who does this jumped-up, shuttering subbie think he is?” kind of thing but by God he

Pat: Had his homework done.

Interviewer: Ah, he nailed them, he nailed them.

Pat: Yeah, typical Irishman. He wouldn't be waiting around for anything.

Interviewer: Not at all and I mean, he's done amazing things with it so, I mean, they are struggling a bit profit-wise, I've heard now, but they are all, all the big boys are.

Pat: But if you look at, if you look at yer man from Oran? or your man from Roscommon, up there in Ballymore Properties, Mulryan, yeah, Mulryan and the Baileys from over in Castlereagh.

Interviewer: Ah yeah and that says nothing of the older, all the old em, companies, Murphy, McNicholas, I mean McNicholas is Mayo, Murphy Kerry, Careys Tipperary, em, ah there's loads of them.

Pat: Do you know Selfridges Hotel? That's at the back of Selfridges shop in Oxford Street? Well I worked on that there and we had great money there doing all the rooms, do you know there was panelling in the rooms, then there was bed heads and skirting boards, architraves and all that and we got a price for each room.

Interviewer: Who were you working for there, do you remember?

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Pat: No. I don't. We had a price for each room and Jaysus, we used to work 24 hours, round the clock. Yeah. Sure, you'd do two or three rooms. Sure, it was fantastic money.

Interviewer: Yeah, well if you say do two or three rooms in two or three days you'd have the other two days off like.

Pat: That's right. But sure, that's what we used to do. We'd take a month off and blow the whole lot. I mean I was in Spain, I was everywhere. I was all over the place. And then I worked in Saudi Arabia, I was in Doha, in Qatar for a good while.

Interviewer: You did a bit of travelling.

Pat: Well I bought the house when I came back.

Interviewer: And come here, when you went to England then first, did you have any notion, I know you said you didn't have a plan as such, but did you think you'd stay there as long as you did, or did you not really know, or were you just completely...?

Pat: I didn't no. I didn't know, I had no...I definitely had no gra to come back to Ireland because I had such hardship and such abuse that I just couldn't be bothered coming back. I mean, when you'd see a lad cycling on his bicycle and see the priests Volkswagen coming along the road you'd throw your bike and jump across the hedge and hide, you know.

Interviewer: For fear of the priest?

Pat: Yeah. Well, for fear of the priest, and you were so embarrassed like, cos they used to read out the collections then off the thing, and my father was always down at the bottom, two and six pence, Tom Fox, kind of.

Interviewer: They'd actually read a list of

Pat: They would.

Interviewer: Of who gave what?

Pat: Yeah. And the two teachers would be up the top, ten shillings.

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Interviewer: Well of course, cos their jobs depended on it.

Pat: Yeah. Ah, it was awful.

Interviewer: That's some system.

Pat: Ah, it was awful. And then, you see, they had the *Stations*, what they called the *Stations*, they used to go round the houses and say Mass, you know, and it would be in this house this year, and in the following ... we had to miss out because our house wasn't good enough for it. But we used to love going to the neighbour's house because it was a special day, special morning, and you got breakfast and you, you got ham sandwich, Jesus, ham sandwich, you know, it was unbelievable.

But you know there was one priest, Fr O'Grady, I'll never forget, he was a Dublin man, a skinny thing, and I used to serve mass but I wasn't very good at the Latin, like everything else, I wasn't very good at the bleddy Latin, but if I got going at all I knew, but the first part of the Mass was awful hard. I hadn't a clue.

And this neighbour asked me if I'd come and serve Mass in his house for the Stations. Oh Jay, I was delighted. Joey Flanagan was his name. I was delighted. I was all ready, I was up at all hours of the morning and I was ready and I was over house about two hours before the Mass started and I had me suit on and surplus on and everything and I was ready to go and he handed, he gave me ten shillings. Well, Lord, I thought I was made up, before the Mass started at all.

Now let me tell you about the most embarrassing thing that ever happened and it still affects me all through my life, we sat, the priest went up and got ready and all the rest of it and I knelt down at the back anyway and I was all ready and my heart was pumping. Anyway, he started the Mass and I mumbled a bit or whatever, and he said something else again anyway, I mumbled again, you know, and he turned round all of a sudden and he said to me, "you get up from there", he said, [-] "you get up and you serve this mass properly". Can you imagine that? I still feel that. In front of all the neighbours and everybody.

Interviewer: I had a similar thing, not nearly as bad as that but a kind of a similar thing when I served Mass with a priest at a wedding who kind of told me off for something in front of, you know ...

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Pat: But you were after getting the money and everything, you know. I went up to Joey Flanagan after and I said to him, I said, here

Interviewer: Slightly different in our era, cos after the wedding I gave him as good as he got, you know. But you couldn't, you couldn't.

Pat: No. I wouldn't be able for that, you know.

Interviewer: But in this day and age, you couldn't in that era in Ireland, the priest was completely powerful.

Pat: Oh Jesus yeah. They were, they were the government.

Interviewer: More or less, yeah.

Pat: That Archbishop McQuaid, he was the government.

Interviewer: But come here so, trying to keep things in order if you like, you didn't stay in Tooting all of your time?

Pat: No, no. We got a, I got a, I met this girl anyway and we moved in up in Clapham in a flat there, a lovely flat there, but I, she left. And I stayed on in the flat and I was working down in Tooting doing a bit of shuttering at the time and this guy was hard up and looking for some place to stay and I took him in and em, he, he was dodgy like.

I don't know at the time, but anyway he had the other room and I was in this room and I always used to leave the rent on a Saturday out in the kitchen for the landlord to come and collect it, turn the key in the door and whatever, and anyway, but that was grand anyway, next thing, about a week after he was gone. Never said a goodbye, nothing, gone.

Interviewer: Was he Irish this fellow?

Pat: He was. And I was in bed the next Saturday morning, I'd left the... and the landlord knocked on the door and I went out and answered him, and he said to me, he said, "You haven't paid the rent," he said, and I said, "I have, I left it on the thing there", and he says, "It's not there now". Yer man must have taken the rent and gone with it. So, I was out then.

Interviewer: Jesus, that's a bad bastard.

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Pat: I know. I was out then for a while, until then, I was sleeping in the park for a while, but anyway.

Interviewer: Really? Sleep rough?

Pat: Yeah. I did for that week and then I, then Johnny McGovern who was in the digs and Johnny had moved up to Highgate. Highgate was an awful long way from Tooting for me, so be Jesus, I made contact with Johnny McGovern, there was no mobile phones that time, you know.

Interviewer: Where were you working at this stage?

Pat: I was in Tooting, yeah, wasn't far for me to go down from Clapham, so I moved up to Highgate to Johnny's place up there. Johnny McGovern. That was where the O'Rourke's came and there was another guy there from Leitrim as well, I think there was a couple of us there. We had awful crack in that flat and then we got working in eh, where were we working then, myself and Johnny, out in Barnet I think it was, out there.

But we got a bit of private work for a Jewish woman up the road and she wanted a press made into an alcove, you know, so myself and Johnny went up and we measured the press. I was fairly good, we were fairly handy with the carpentry work by then so it was only a matter of knocking up the two squares and putting a door in the front, two doors in the front of it you know. So we did that, we did that, we knocked it up anyway and I had the old van at the time, bought an old Bedford van and we brought it up as far as the place, and anyway we went in anyway to the room, we feekin' didn't realise that the wall tapered back like this. Jesus, we couldn't get it in, we couldn't get it down, we couldn't get it down the full way, you know. Johnny was only about five-foot-tall and Johnny was above on the top of it jumping on it trying to get... ah we got it in and got paid as well. Oh Jesus Christ. Ah the things. The crack was serious. Ah Jaysus.

Interviewer: So what kind of time are you talking about the early '70s or the '60s still?

Pat: It would be coming into the '70s, yeah. It took a while for us to get organised there. The '70s then I went abroad. Where did I go first?

Interviewer: When did you come back here?

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Pat: 1980

Interviewer: But overall you were away between 65 and 1980? So when you went abroad, did you come back to London?

Pat: I did. I always came back to London. Yeah, I did. It was kind of, I never really went to Birmingham or anywhere like that you know, I never went...

Interviewer: But if you get settled in London, in those days London it was a good city.

Pat: Ah it was a lovely place, yeah.

Interviewer: For the Irish as well?

Pat: Oh Jesus it was yeah, but I mean like, round Tooting and those places and Clapham, those places, you weren't wanted. The Irish you weren't wanted. I remember looking at Hurley's Corner, at the notice boards there and the signs up was 'No Irish'...*no Irish*.

Interviewer: Did you ever come across them?

Pat: I did seen them, yeah. They were there on the notice board in Tooting, yeah. Do you know they had the glass notice boards and pinned up in it.

Interviewer: Did you have any hassle yourself now?

Pat: No cos we mostly stayed with Irish but it was rough, you know. They had old big houses. That house I'm telling you about in Tooting; that was a three-storey house that Tommy Cummins bought that time. He was working with an engineering place doing all them engineering things.

Interviewer: But presumably that's why most of them had the houses let, because they had to. That was the only way they could pay for them?

Pat: Yeah, well Tommy is still alive. He's still very well and he sold the house there for one and a half million.

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Interviewer: I bet he paid now a guess, he probably didn't pay more than three thousand for it?

Pat: I'd say so. Probably. Yeah.

Interviewer: And that would have been a big house in those days.

Pat: Well when I came back in 1980, I paid four [thousand] for this and an acre of ground. But it wasn't what it's like now but ...

Interviewer: You wouldn't buy a new front door for that!

Pat: No you wouldn't. But isn't it an awful different world now, like. Like even that time you'd have to go into Elphin and wind the handle in the box to talk to the...and you could be an hour waiting. I remember telegrams coming from England saying, when me granny was coming home and your man would arrive on a bicycle down from Tulsk, but she'd nearly be home by the time we'd get the message.

Interviewer: And when you were living in London then, did you come home here much at all?

Pat: I came now and again, yeah. But it wasn't eh, it just, I don't know, it wasn't, we had nothing here anyway. We still had nothing then, you know.

Interviewer: Had nothing to come back for?

Pat: Well my brother now lives in Elphin and we're strangers. My sister's gone altogether. She has no contact with us at all. She lives in England. Sad.

Interviewer: It is sad. But it's what happens to a lot of families, especially if your...

Pat: Mother died.

Interviewer: Well that's a big thing. That's a big thing. But also, if families are split up you know.

Pat: But it's difficult though, it's difficult I'll tell you now, it's difficult in relationships as well cos you find it very hard to trust anybody and its only lately that I found this out because I suffered with depression for many years and didn't realise it but it's only, you really don't trust

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anybody because so many people let you down and I've a good woman, and that's the only thing. I don't know how she puts up with me sometimes but you know that's the way it is. You know, it destroyed you.

Interviewer: The construction industry in England, I mean there was plenty of money to be made but there was an awful lot of that was so unpredictable as well you know.

Pat: Oh sure look here, when you get to know people then you know, and you could go on day work and you could clock-on, on one job and go down and clock-on, on another job for to help the subbie.

Interviewer: Oh yeah, he'd be delighted. Cos he's getting paid twice.

Pat: Yeah. But you got a bit extra for it but feck all, but the other thing was then you see, when there'd be a count, everybody would come up to the one floor, count, count, count, down the outside of the scaffolding to the other floor, count again.

Interviewer: They'd count again?

Pat: Yeah. To make up the numbers.

Interviewer: Presumably most of these guys were working, I mean I remember this now, and I'm y'know, younger than you, but y'know, there was a kind of a culture, you didn't ask a man's name, for starters, if he told you his first name that was grand, all of these fellows, most of them were working on false names.

Pat: Yeah. You'd see the eye on the site. When you'd go in on the site first you'd see the eye looking, you know, who's this fellow coming, I know you, whatever.

Interviewer: He'd be trusted.

Pat: Yeah, yeah. You had to pass, you know you just had to pass no heed and you were alright. But if you started looking around or nosing round, you were in trouble. You were in trouble, Jesus yeah. When you think back on it you know. We used to get cheques then and sure some of them would bounce and some of them wouldn't bounce but we'd all have to - but there were special pubs that you'd go into and you'd get

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the cheque cashed. Of course, The Crown was one of them, but there was several of them in the Holloway Road as well.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to The Crown?

Pat: I did. I went up to The Crown with a subbies cheque that I was told, he said...he said, "You'll get that cashed in The Crown". I went in there and was waiting half the night drinking porter, waiting half the night to get it cashed so that when I came back then there was money taken out. And they'd have everything there for you. They'd have the spuds and cabbage and everything for dinner if you wanted you know, you could buy that as well.

Interviewer: You had to pay for that?

Pat: Oh of course. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. They were making money on you. As a matter of fact, I think it was a guy from Longford who owned it at the time, Mel Dean who owned The Crown in Cricklewood, well he wasn't own it, but he ... We'd dance in the Galtymore and the Forum in, in . . . Yeah, yeah. All over the place. I was going out with a girl from the Gresham on the Holloway Road. Her father used to run the place, Jim McCausland. She was Pat McCausland. I was going out with her for years. And there was a bouncer there on the door from Leitrim, now, Sheerin, Padraig Sheerin a man from Leitrim. A big hoor...he was wrestling.

Interviewer: I think there was a few bouncers from Leitrim I remember one.

Pat: Pascal Mooney was the MC. He was writing for the Irish Post at the time.

Interviewer: My old fellow worked for Byrnes that had the Galty. That was a good number. He liked that you know.

Pat: My first daughter was born in the Holloway Road, in the, what the hell was the name of it now, hospital up the Holloway.

Interviewer: Whittington

Pat: Whittington is right. We used to go to the Whittington Stone and have a pint or two.

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Interviewer: That was the pub at the bottom of the hill, or the top of the hill next to the hospital?

Pat: That's right and The Bull was further up the road.

Interviewer: The nurses used to drink in there.

Pat: They did, they did, that's right. And then there was one up the Archway, oh gosh, oh janey yeah,

Interviewer: Not the Archway Tavern?

Pat: No further up. Further up, you know where the Archway Tavern is on the corner? Up that way for the hill and up this way... Suicide Bridge, just under Suicide Bridge there.

Interviewer: Is there one up there?

Pat: There is. There's two pubs up there. There's one called The Wrestlers and the other one was, oh...

Interviewer: I don't think I ever got past The Archway.

Pat: Were you ever in the Half Moon, down the Holloway Road?

Interviewer: Oh God. Was I ever not in it.

Pat: And there was one across the road from the Half Moon, they used to have strippers there on a Sunday morning.

Interviewer: Was it The Cock?

Pat: The Cock is right. Courage House. Jaysus yeah, we used to be in there.

Interviewer: Sure at that time on the Kilburn road or Holloway road were Irish. There was very few of them you'd go into cos even from The Archway Tavern now I remember they had The Archway Tavern, The Golden Lion, I think was the one on the corner, Mother Redcap.

Pat: Yes, Mother Redcaps across the road.

Interviewer: Then further down you had The Mulberry Tree.

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Pat: Do you know at Mother Redcaps, there's a little road beside it, I lived in a flat up there, up top there.

Interviewer: Did you. I remember when I was about 18 I'd say just after I left school, and I went labouring for a couple of years with Powerdays, one of the outfits, but like, the Holloway Road was teaming with Irish, teaming, every, all the restaurants, all the cafes all the pubs everything.

Pat: Do you remember Murphys men, up on the back of the truck with the shirt neck open and they all off down? Jaysus, and the rain or anything, it wouldn't make any difference.

Interviewer: You didn't tog out with Murphy anyway?

Pat: I could have done a few twists with him, but ah, when you'd be hard up you see you'd just, you'd get out, you know. You'd get a day or two here or there.

Interviewer: If you think of anything

Pat: I'll tell you now, we made big money, we made big money but we spent big money, we spent it. Jesus, like I remember driving round in Consul cars and Zephyr Zodiacs and all that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: You said you made big money

Pat: We didn't pay no taxes or anything sure like,

Interviewer: All cash-in-hand

Pat: 'Twas. But then subbies got done. I remember when I first got married working for two weeks for a subbie and he never paid me and the wife, I don't know how she managed. We had a bit of chicken for Christmas dinner. We hadn't a penny not a cent.

Interviewer: Because he didn't pay you. Did he go pop?

Pat: He went off. I don't know where but that was it. They were fly-by-night men you know.

Interviewer: But I mean I heard from other people as well that like that was - and I remember myself - that that was fairly standard, a subbie, you know,

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you'd be Mick Collins Carpentry one week and the following week be Michael Collins Carpentry. And they couldn't do anything about it.

Pat: That's right. You didn't get paid. Ah sure. And none of those boys were paying on the tax they were taking off the men that worked for them. How did they get the jobs in the first place? Do you know, I don't know. Cos then they had this thing, we had to have a certificate get a tax clearance certificate ...715's yeah but sure, you could buy them anywhere.

Interviewer: You could buy them anywhere of a Sunday morning?

Pat: Yeah, we had a fellow by the name of, he was from near here, *The Danger* BXXXX, and he'd have books of them. He was printing them himself. I'll tell you about a robbery he did. He was caught. He was in jail. I don't know if he's out now or not.... *The Danger*, he played football for Roscommon one time, he played on the half-back line and they reckon he was a danger if you went near him, he'd kill you. That's how he got the name.

But he told me they were hard of money and *The Danger* was always dressed immaculately. This was the conman, he was always dressed immaculately, but he might have no soles on his shoes, but was dressed immaculately, and he went into, himself and an accomplice went into the jewellers shop and he was buying a ring for his wife by the way, and looked at the rings and . . .He was chewing chewing-gum and when your man wasn't looking he dropped the chewing gum into his hand, stuck the ring up underneath the counter and about two or three weeks afterwards one of his other mates went in and gave it a chip and it gave way. Now how would you think of that? Hah?

Interviewer: No flies on these lads, I'm telling you!

Pat: He made money. He made a lot of money. He was smuggling Krugerrand up from South Africa in the soles of his shoes for the IRA and eh, that was fine, he, I think he did get caught, that was fine, but the latter end was he was into the drugs and he was caught with the drugs and I think he spent about ten years or something inside. And I think he's still in there.

END

Original Interview # 19 – Terence O – Clare

Name: Terence **Date of Birth:** 1955
Place of Birth: Ennistymon, County Clare
Date of Emigration to UK: 1970
Date of Interview: 25 February 2018.
Location of Interview: Author's house, east London

Interviewer: But ok so it's the 21st February 2018 and I'm in Bow with Terrance who for the record is an old friend of mine. We are going to concentrate today on Terry's time in London. And so I suppose to kind of kick things off for the record when and where were you born?

Terry: I was born in Co. Clare, West Coast of Ireland in Ennistymon, in 1955, October.

Interviewer: Ok and presumably your background was fairly standard for that part of the world?

Terry: Yes the usual auld craic.

Interviewer: Were you from a big family?

Terry: Yes there was 10 of us, 6 girls, 4 boys.

Interviewer: And were you from the town or the country?

Terry: Town Ennistymon town.

Interviewer: Were your parents town people as well?

Terry: They were my father was the local plumber.

Interviewer: Ok and what about school?

Terry: Christian Brothers the nuns, the usual story.

Interviewer: Right and did you go right through school did you leave early?

Terry: Left at 14, I would have liked to carry on, I went to the tech briefly and which I never dreamed I'd go to because I had hated school up to that point. But I went to the tech for about 3 or 4 months and I loved the structure, I loved the...because prior to that it was...you went to school you were in first class, second class, you know that kind of craic, so you were in the same room day in day out all year, and for two years in fact because 1st and 2nd class could often be side by side. So anyway when we went to the tech, I thought that this is great because you had a class, then there was a bit of a change over and you went off to another class and blah, blah lots of different teachers and no nuns, no Christian Brothers.

Interviewer: Which was probably of benefit.

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Terry: Well up to a point there was a couple of teachers there who weren't very pleasant.

Interviewer: Did you have the usual rounds of bad experiences then?

Terry: Well the Christian Brothers were...

Interviewer: Notorious.

Terry: Well yeah and the nuns could be.

Interviewer: My mother went to the nuns and doesn't talk about it now.

Terry: Well when I went into 1st, 2nd, I think it was 3rd class that's where the brother who ran the choir and that was his domain. And I remember within minutes of getting into the class for the first time, and he gave me a test to see if I could sing or not, you know that thing...there is a name.

Interviewer: Can't think of it.

Terry: It's like a little keyboard you blow into, so he played whatever it was, a b or a c or a b flat and sing that, and then you were left or right and I remember him saying to me, sing this and I sang it the note, and he went oh he says, because he had two of my brothers Noel and Goga and he says, at least one of you can sing! So I was in the choir. But he was a particularly nasty man. So music was beaten into me!

Interviewer: And so you left school at 14.

Terry: Well I didn't want to leave school I was getting on grand, and for the first time in my schooling I was really enjoying it and I thought Jesus I thought I could get use to this and I might enjoy this. And but my father who was a tradesman he was just keeping me off school to help him out and in the end...I remember the headmaster said to me one day, "Can you bring your father in to have a chat tomorrow?". So I went in with my father and sat in front of him at his desk and he said, "You have to make a choice; this young lad has missed in the four months he has been here, he has missed two and a half months". And he says "What do you want to do?" And I was about to say I want to carry on and my father says, "Ah he may as well leave then!" And I just looked and thought ok then!

Interviewer: Completely taken out of your hands.

Terry: It wasn't going to be my decision.

Interviewer: No, well I think in those days it doesn't seem like anyone argued with their parents and what your parents said that was it. So you ended up leaving. Just as a matter of interest where do you come in that hierarchy of 10 kids?

Terry: I'm kind of in the middle.

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Interviewer: Ok so did you have brothers or sisters that went away before you?

Terry: I did yeah. Two of my brothers had gone away before I did, before I came to England and one of my sisters was away and there was some also living in Dublin by then. My eldest sister married a Galway man and they lived in Dublin since.

Interviewer: Very similar to us. So when you left school presumably you didn't go straight to London?

Terry: No I was working away...I was working with the auld fellow but I had four or five jobs from the time I was 11, I travelled the whole of Ireland by the time I was 12. I used to help out anybody who drove a lorry or a van I'd be in with them. And there was...

Interviewer: You had that bit of wanderlust.

Terry: Well there was Gussy Hayes he's now living in America, he worked for Padear Barrett who was...he was a local supplier, wholesaler, so we travelled all over Clare, Kerry, Limerick you name it delivering stuff. Even into Galway I think.

Interviewer: So you were very young to be doing that.

Terry: I was about 11 or 12. And I'd be kind of - if it was school holiday time or whatever and by the time I got to 14, I was doing it and up and down to Dublin with John Doyle who was another driver who worked for, can't remember who he worked for, but we used to go to Smithfield in Dublin once a week to pick up veggies and that, and what have you. Can you believe it? We were from a rural part of Ireland and driving to Dublin to get vegetables, doesn't make sense, but we were.

Interviewer: So how did it come about that you decided to?...

Terry: Well I didn't decide, that was made for me, I was 15 coming on 16 and my cousin - first cousin Brian was at home from England on holidays for a couple of weeks in the summer. It was August and midway through the second week, my father said on the Wednesday he said, "You are going to England on Friday". And I said "What!?" He said "You're off to England on Friday". And I said "No I'm not!" and he said "You are; there is nothing here for you, so it's time you were on your way". So I had two days to say goodbye to all my friends and mates.

Interviewer: And how did you feel about that?

Terry: Well I didn't feel too great about it, I was enjoying the craic back home; it was 1970.

Interviewer: But were you earning much money?

Terry: I wasn't earning rakes of money.

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Interviewer: But you weren't too fussed.

Terry: I wasn't too fussed, I was fifteen or sixteen, 1970 and but of course that was the transitional point of Ireland, so I was one of the last of the great migration I suppose if you want to call it. Because all of that century.

Interviewer: What year are we talking about?

Terry: 1970 and very soon after it stopped and the European Union - I mean I had a job in O'Brien's in Ennistymon which is now closed and I did the...when decimalisation came in and so I couldn't have been too much of a dunce given how little school I went to, because I was always slinging school. I used to hardly ever go into school. But I used to do when decimalisation came in, Paddy couldn't cope with it, pounds, shillings and pence, so I use to stand in a shop all day and he'd give me a few bob to do the...converting the money from pounds, shilling and pence to decimalisation for him. That was a good little job, sitting in there eating bananas and sweets and getting a few bob at the end of the day, I used to get about half a crown.

Interviewer: So you were more or less told you were going to England.

Terry: I was told on the Wednesday you are going to England on Friday and that was it. And I came in style.

Interviewer: And you did go to England?

Terry: I did yeah, I went and said my goodbyes and blah.

Interviewer: With your cousin?

Terry: With my cousin Brian yeah in style in a Jaguar, he had a beautiful jaguar car.

Interviewer: He was doing ok?

Terry: He was doing grand, he lived in, I think it was Northampton. So I went to Northampton spent a night there with my father's side of the family. And then came down to London to stay with my brother Goga in Camden.

Interviewer: So he was already here.

Terry: Well established here yeah.

Interviewer: So when you came here had you any plans?

Terry: Of course not.

Interviewer: Of course! You couldn't have had, because you didn't know you were coming. Sorry!

Terry: No plans at all.

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Interviewer: So after a couple of nights you landed in Camden.

Terry: Yes the first night in Northampton and then I landed in Camden and like...and I was sixteen yeah just I'd say, well it was August, I was two months before my sixteenth birthday.

Interviewer: So what was that like?

Terry: Well it was a bit disconcerting it was very difficult, I mean I cried most nights for a while, even no matter how much I closed...I pulled the curtains together I couldn't keep the light out; the pitch black coming from the west of Ireland, and I can tell you now, that's something I still haven't gotten used to after all these years, you are never ever in the dark in the city, not a city like London.

Interviewer: And isn't it bizarre my wife was born and bred in London and she loves the dark in...and she finds the same as you now, when she comes back to London she can't sleep.

Terry: I couldn't sleep and I have always been terrible for sleep and still can't. And I was used to...the stars were nearly on top of your head in the west of Ireland and all a sudden it's light everywhere, you can't see the stars. I was used to seeing the stars every night. In Lyme Street in Camden with my brother and his wife.

Interviewer: What did he have a room / flat?

Terry: Two-bedroom flat, they had a son, so I had to share...and my brother Noel before me, he had to share that same room.

Interviewer: So was he already here?

Terry: He was already here but he was living in Hackney at that stage. So stayed there for I don't know a year or two I suppose not sure really.

Interviewer: And what did you do?

Terry: The very day I was out looking for a job because there was no hanging around.

Interviewer: You were on the street the next day.

Terry: Queuing up for John Murphy's van on Camden High Road.

Interviewer: You're kidding!

Terry: Yes...

Interviewer: The call-off when they used to pull up and...

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Terry: Yes and I was still standing there in October and November in my shorts, didn't even have a jacket, my short sleeves like an eejit getting rejected most days anyway. I'd be rejected along with the all the alcos.¹ They seemed to prefer to a big stout Connie or big Mayo man.

Interviewer: That was the stereotype they were looking for.

Terry: Absolutely which was the wrong thing to do, those big blokes were useless behind a shovel.

Interviewer: So you were literally you turned up and who told you where to go?

Terry: My brother.

Interviewer: Was he working for Murphy?

Terry: No my eldest brother never did any of that, he was a cute hoor. He got sacked in Camden he did lots of jobs, he worked for the post office, he worked here and there and everywhere, he even was a traffic warden in Camden but they sacked him for never giving out tickets. And the first job I got was with...he was an English fellow but had an Irish name, you know the bridge in Camden Station, underneath the bridge there is a row of the little shops there, there was a building contractor back in...

Interviewer: This is after you got fed up standing waiting for Murphy?

Terry: No I got some shifts with Murphy and that, but I very quickly learned that this is not the life for me, I mean...

Interviewer: What was that like for a young fellow?

Terry: Really hard, I mean gruelling, gruelling work, I mean don't get me wrong, the building sites weren't much better, but...O' God there was some animals working for Murphy...and if you got the wrong ganger...forget it! I mean my brother Noel will have probably much better stories to tell about the 'Elephant John' and people like that. I never really came up against them. I thought I'm not going to do this, this is not for me, digging up roads and like...being taken out into the middle of motorways, because I know stories where young lads straight over from Mayo or wherever in Ireland are abandoned in the middle of motorways.

Interviewer: Yes I have got several stories and this isn't hearsay this is fellows who told me it happened. It was earlier than my time - it was back in the 50s, but there was one lad he was down in Chichester or somewhere and just left. So it's not all myth.

Terry: No no no...some is probably myth. Well the *Elephant John* I was told a great story about him years ago, I know that where we use to queue up in Camden for the vans in the morning....

¹ slang abbrev: alcoholics

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Interviewer: That was outside the station more or less?

Terry: It was just up on Camden road...so if you walk out of Camden Station facing up Camden Road, so imagine you are heading for Murray Street. the Irish Centre, if you cross those traffic lights there is a row of shops on the left on Camden Road and it's there - along there. And there's a café and the Elephant John was kicked through the window there once by two brothers who he had abused. But there is a great story about him going into the Cock on Holloway Road one night, because they had to very careful where they went these fellows and he walked into the Cock and again there was three or four Connemara blokes in there, and they were brothers again and as soon as they saw him, they were getting up off their seats to tear into him. And he walked up to the counter without thinking - without even missing a beat - and ordered something like ten pints of Guinness and then went out to the toilet supposedly while they were been pulled. And as he ordered the Guinness the boys sat down and thought okay let's wait and see who is coming in, and he went out the back and disappeared.

Interviewer: He was cute enough.

Terry: Yes, well of course you learn to survive. Now that's probably...

Interviewer: That's the most common story.

Terry: That's probably an urban myth.

Interviewer: I don't know.

Terry: I'd love to think it was true.

Interviewer: I reckon there is some truth in it somewhere. Because I have heard that story from almost everyone that knew or knew anything about Murphy's. I was talking to a fellow who is a QS, he trained me. He was one of the lads that trained me. And his father - and I didn't know this at the time, I met him for the first time in about 30 years a few months ago, and he told me that...I was telling him about the project that I was doing, and he said ah he said, you should have known my father - his father worked in the canteen in Murphy's yard. And he said, when I was fourteen I was giving John Murphy his breakfast! But he told me exactly the same story.

Terry: There you go, but Murphy looked after all those fellows, because the other story goes, and who knows, but when Murphy got his first contact with Camden he said to all the blokes, he said if you can stick with me for a month or so until I get the first payment, I'll look after you, some said can't do this. But apparently the 6 or 7 who stuck with him, they had jobs for life with him. From what I gather he was a sound enough man.

Interviewer: He was and he was a loyal. I mean there has to be something in that, for the simple fact is, you know and I know, I mean I can name you a dozen men off the top of my head, who spent their life at Murphy's and they are not edjets. They are smart enough lads.

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Terry: Have you spoke with Tom O'Connell?

Interviewer: Yeah. Noel and Frank Mc one of dad's friends, John, Denis B all of them lads were lifetime with Murphy, so there has to be something. But anyway you decided earlier on it wasn't for you?

Terry: I decided early on it wasn't for me.

Interviewer: Back breaking work.

Terry: Well it's not only that yeah it is and it's savage.

Interviewer: And savage lifestyle I think.

Terry: I mean all of the blokes I met, even on the building sites. But it's funny there was kind of a slightly different demographic between that and the building sites, a lot of the blokes I met in the building sites, some of them are single fellows and that, blah, but a lot of them were married the Irish fellows. And somehow or other that other side of it a lot of them were single, blah, blah and travelling all over the country, living in caravans.

Interviewer: I think one of the things that someone else picked up and I think it's important that that type of work that Murphy did, that utilities work and the digging work basically, they employed a lot of them lads on the lump, cash in hand.

Terry: They did yeah.

Interviewer: For ages. That didn't work if you were married, you needed some bit of security, you needed to be paying your tax.

Terry: You did yeah.

Interviewer: You needed to be doing things pretty much straight, or at least making some attempt at that. So I think it seemed to be that the itinerant work attracted the...hard drinking single...

Terry: Hard drinking on the building sites too.

Interviewer: Yes but if you like the itinerant...my father told me that you used to get a lot of them lads that used to get work and he used to see them on jobs and they'd be working for people, not Murphy's but people like Murphy. And he said these lads they do a great days work until about 1 o'clock, give them their money and go and drink and then they'd be back the next day doing the same thing.

Terry: Always looking for the sub.

Interviewer: Always working ahead or behind themselves, because all they were doing was earning to drink.

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Terry: I worked with a Dublin chippy he used to have 6 pints of Guinness every lunchtime and how could you go back to work after that!

Interviewer: It was life in those days. But anyway you went to work for this small builder?

Terry: I did and that was all around Camden Chalk Farm all of that stuff, did a big office job at Brendan M's house, didn't even know him then of course, because that was in the early 70s, I didn't meet him until a few years later.

Interviewer: But you must have learnt a lot of the trades.

Terry: I did, I never earned a living as a tradesman as such, did bits of this and that, so I was good all-rounder, brick laying and all of that stuff. So I became an all-rounder.

Interviewer: And was that with this main one?

Terry: No that was only for a short while, it was probably for the first year and then you just...you prostitute yourself.

Interviewer: The right word, John McGahern has a great paragraph from one of his stories about the exactly what you just said about looking for a start. And he said the ganger looked him over in the same way that he would look over cattle when he was a boy, back in Ireland and that was the game.

Terry: Yes and there was plenty of work around and you could kind of...that's the problem though and I think that's what trapped a lot of young Irish men is that you could kind of come and go and but there was a finite amount that you could earn, there was a ceiling. But relative to a guy doing an apprenticeship or some guy working in a shop or whatever it was very good money and that's the trap unfortunately. Because it gives you...a young single man, you have a reasonable disposable income and you are out there, horsing it in every night and it's a trap.

Interviewer: And the impression I get was there was ethnic clustering going on among the Irish that kind of operated completely within English society if you like. We came from it, we know that and that...yet it was totally independent and there was a whole network of pubs and clubs. So you were working within the Irish community.

Terry: I mean I rarely mixed outside of it, of course this happened with lots...

Interviewer: Not to the same extent.

Terry: No because the difference was I think and especially back then for whatever reason, the Irish needed a kind of central point some place they could go, whether it's a dance hall a centre and they were willing out of their own pockets to pay for that, they were willing to put in the work to do if they had to. Because it was an important thing for them, maybe it's to do with entrants of Irish I don't know.

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Interviewer: Could be a lack of confidence.

Terry: Well it was very isolated here, from the minute I came here and it's still happening to this day...I am stereotyped the minute I open my mouth by the same old shite and the same old comments come out of, it doesn't matter if they are working or middle class people, the same stereotype remarks come out. And it's a kind of an interesting thing really, this assumption is made. And there is also this assumption...

Interviewer: And do you think that's as bad today as it was?

Terry: No it's still happening to me today, doesn't matter what company I'm in, because I am not essentially despite my rise from penury I am now essentially a middle class man I guess.

Interviewer: Yes and in fact I would say that most of your generation, not all of them but most of them, because you are kind of half a generation older than my parents or younger than my father for example. And I'm probably 10 years younger than you and there is a definite progression to middle class. And you can see it because you would have been better educated than dad was when he came over, your children will be better educated than you were.

Terry: I hope so, but the one thing I did learn when I came here despite my lack of schooling because I wasn't the best pupil in the world, I was far better educated than most of the people I was meeting here. And that was a real eye opener for me when I came here as a very young lad, I couldn't believe the level of ignorance. And even their simple lack of knowledge of their own language astonished me at times.

Interviewer: But you would speak - even now, I mean I remember as long as I have known you and same to my father in fact it applies to most people from the west of Ireland, their spoken English is much better...than mine is.

Terry: Well dramatically...I have an accent, the guys I was meeting English guys on building sites they were semi...

Interviewer: Semi-literate.

Terry: Well semi is being kind! But yet, yet I was the thicko! Because I was a Paddy. So the piss taking and all of that.

Interviewer: But that comes back to the stereotyping thing.

Terry: That comes back to the stereotype, but that's the interesting thing because right...I don't confess to be you know...I'm not out to...I'm not in competition with Stephen Hawking or anything like that, but even when I sit down with well-educated middle class people who I can easily have a conversation with, I'll still have that stereotype thrown at me.

Interviewer: They make certain presumptions about you.

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Terry: Yes and they are not hearing perhaps, all they hearing is the accent or all the they are seeing is the Paddy in front of them.

Interviewer: But it's the same as, that thing we are kind of going off the topic a bit, but it doesn't matter, but it's an interesting point of discussion but it's the same thing, I would imagine that it's the same thing that you would find with a lot of your singing. When you sing...if you sing...I certainly always felt this that, a lot of it is about how musically literate you are if you like. So for example if you sing a song and I have listened to some of the songs you have composed and they have fantastic lyrics in them. But I would imagine that there is quite a lot of people who aren't listening to all the lyrics because all they can hear is a kind of Irish...an Irish *lilt* to the song.

Terry: Yes there is all that and I can't get by that.

Interviewer: And why should you.

Terry: I sing colloquially.

Interviewer: Why should you and it's like the saying, it's the same thing with people for years and years I'd say that applied to people like Christy Moore and the Dubliners and...Luke Kelly could sing *Scorn not his Simplicity*. Many people would listen to that but wouldn't actually be *listening* to it if you know what I mean. And to me it's exactly the same mentality.

Terry: Interesting I have never really actually focused in on that.

Interviewer: I'm not sure but it's just the theory. But it's the same thing really as people....

Terry: It is and it's very hard to get people to listen to anything unless you have a mid-Atlantic twang.

Interviewer: It's the same thing as people who say and this doesn't apply to...I'm not blaming just English people for this, because you can blame a lot of Irish people as well and...but anybody and you would have heard them people who say, well 'diddly diddly' it's basically all the same tune isn't it!

Terry: Exactly yeah and the Irish can be the biggest culprits they can be the worse.

Interviewer: Because they are not listening.

Terry: Well they are not tuned in. But I come from that tradition from the west coast of Ireland. But don't get me wrong Mick, when I first came here, I used to sit in Gussy Connor's and all of those auld guys, we used to have Seanchai' to entertain us in Ennistymon we had who I learned songs from.

All of these songs that I just...by the time I became a teenager I thought I was shite, I don't want anything to do with this. And then I used to sing and Gussy Connors used to give me half a crown every time I sang there, I used to deliver his produce to him

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his fags and stuff not produce as such, but his beer and his fags, because that was another job I had. And then I used to go in there and sing with all these auld fellows and the boys used to come over from the islands and that, and blah, blah and there would be Irish songs and Irish language going on.

But I thought by the time I came here, I thought I don't want to hear any more of that auld shite, and you know it's kind of...then I think a lot of the Irish who move away suddenly they need that. And that is why you had the centres, you had the Irish centres, you had all of these places wherever, all over this country. And all of the Irish...I mean I have got a song I wrote, I had to phone my brother Noel up who was here earlier than me, to remind me, because I didn't know the Bamba, the Hibernian.

Interviewer: The Buffalo.

Terry: I went to the Buffalo and the Forum and there was another one in South London. But Noel had to remind me and tell me...

Interviewer: The Shamrock?

Terry: The Shamrock, but he had to tell me about the names of the other ones that had gone, they were everywhere.

Interviewer: At one stage there was 30 or 40, Reg Hall has a great list of them in his book. But so coming back to the building industry. So did you spend the rest of your days basically...when did you start on your own?

Terry: Well when I was 16 when I came here, so by the time I was in my late 20s I thought I'm not working for anyone else again, so maybe early 30s or whatever. So I said you know what I'm not doing this anymore because you are just a slave. So I started trying to pull in the bit of work myself. I was doing private work, an awful lot of private work.

Interviewer: Who were you working for as day job if you like at that time?

Terry: I was working for probably one of the last people I would have worked for was Jim Shanahan.

Interviewer: Kevin's father.

Terry: Yes I worked for Jim...he was a good builder and a successful builder, he was that exactly kind of Irish builder, does exactly what it does on the tin and he did loads of work for Paddington churches and all we did was...over west London, we went from one job to another, I mean Jim – that's his entire working life almost. Because he did work, he did exactly what I did, but he worked for many years, he had his own building company and never looked for job, he was always there at Paddington churches blah, blah, you could nearly throw the drawings away by the 30th one; they were all similar. And I worked for Jim on and off for...

Interviewer: But he'd be another example of what we were talking about earlier.

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Terry: He'd be your fathers generation.

Interviewer: There is a few of them lads left now, they were happy enough to make a few bob, but they weren't out to become millionaires. They were happy enough, did ok.

Terry: He did ok, he did grand and tipped away like that for 30 something year.

Interviewer: But presumably you could only do that as we were talking about earlier if you have a good gang of blokes that are working for you because you know they are going to be treated well.

Terry: I started working for Jim in the late 70s and Mil Whitney who was another friend of his and ours, Mel was from Leitrim, lovely man.

Interviewer: I wouldn't have known him, they were all doing their individual bits.

Terry: Mel was in San Francisco in the 60s, came here got married, I worked for him for several years, he was a nice man to work for. I tried at all costs not to work for Irish men at all costs! Because, an English man will always treat you better than your own, and I'm sorry to say that's just how it is. You ask your father.

Interviewer: I have done so far 23 interviews for this project and every single one of them have said that to me, including my own father.

Terry: The English man will always treat you better than the Paddy.

Interviewer: Paddy would stitch you up.

Terry: Yes and you can never do enough for him ever. I don't know what it is and I have a funny feeling it could be similar now with the East Europeans because I mentioned earlier on I'm now back doing private work, I'm pricing up work, I'm losing lots of work to East Europeans and they are doing work so cheaply, I know that they are using all their own labour east European. And even now I drive into Wicks, say I jump into the van and I need to go to Wicks in Tottenham to get something, even at 3 o'clock half 3 in the afternoon, there is a bunch of east European blokes standing on site there looking for a shift, it's like 1970 all over again. And we used to go there at half 6 or 7 in the morning, I can tell you now, actually about half 6, by 7 forget about it, if you didn't get your shift by 7 you may as well go to the early house or go home or go back to bed.

So these guys are being picked up now, even worse now. So these poor guys are being picked up for a couple of hours, been probably ripped off, paid nothing. I mean I do know 3 years ago, an east European guy who was paying 20 quid a shift to his blokes, that's 3 years ago.

Interviewer: That's criminal.

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Terry: It is, I was earning more than that in 1974. So this is how it's gone. And look the thing is though...

Interviewer: If you were 16 now....

Terry: I'd be out there doing it as I was with the Irish subbies back in the day, because it was exactly the same, everybody you ever met back when I came here, complained about the Irish subbie and the Irish who were cheap and who were doing it too cheaply. That was a constant refrain when I first came to this country.

So I'm not blaming...these poor guys from eastern Europe, it's the way the system works. Look at the end of the day, I put in a quote and I have very often people will phone me up and say, you are way over can you?...and I say no, go with the cheapest quote if that's what you want to do. But they are not asking those people have they got public liability, health and safety, are they going to work. I lost a job around the corner from here very recently to render the outside of a house. And I lost the job because I was way too expensive and 3 weeks later there was about 7 or 8 east European guys running up and down ladders rendering a house. You can't do it properly that way.

Interviewer: I knew you were going to say that.

Terry: How do you do it? I want my roof doing, they are doing it off ladders, it's illegal even to do it now.

Interviewer: That's the problem.

Terry: And until some guy falls off the ladder and kills himself in your house and then HSE come along and say hey did you ask if they had public liability.

Interviewer: Because no matter how much of that, even 30 years on there is still a blind eye turned to an awful lot of what goes on.

Terry: And Mick even on the big sites it is.

Interviewer: That's...if you...we are getting off the track again here because we are going into politics but it's part of the system the problem is the system. The system is created that way. The sub contract system is a delight because what you got is chains of liability all the way down here. What goes on down here you don't have to worry about.

Terry: No you don't, you have....

Interviewer: All responsibility for that, because what you are going to say is, well I didn't employ them, I employed him, I didn't know what he was doing, and I'm not responsible for what he does.

Terry: I was working for an Irish subbie back in the 1970s, I left the job, because I said I can't work here it's too unsafe. And it had a cellar and we had taken the whole

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cellar out everything there was only the wall standing with a couple of timbers holding everything together and he starts...there was guys in the cellar working in the basement sorry, doing brick work and he's got a digger out the side of the house. And I said to him you are going to push all the footings in, there is nothing supporting it.

Luckily I left and the next time I met the brick layer which was about 6 months later, he told me they went to breakfast two mornings after I left down to the local café and they heard 'ne no ne no' there was fire engines, ambulances running tearing up the road, when they went the house was in the cellar! In the basement. And he was back in Mayo the next day he was gone. And these were the kind of guys we had to work for who didn't care. They really didn't care. Now I do care, I would want my guys to work safely.

Interviewer: But again it comes back to the interesting question of, do they really...did they really not care or did the system make them not care? I think personally it's a bit of both.

Terry: Ok, I will accept that it is a bit of both. But I have met subbies who really couldn't have cared less. I was asked to do things that I utterly refused to do, because I would have been putting the poor people who would go and live in that building afterwards in danger and I refused to do it.

Interviewer: They had no sense of responsibility for that.

Terry: They had no sense of morality or morals...or they just didn't care.

Interviewer: It's interesting to speculate how much of that is to do with the fact that...

Terry: And these people were been well paid for what they were doing, I'm not saying that these...these sub-contractors were not like getting a pittance for what they were doing. And I went to put a wheelchair ramp in for a lovely old lady in Willesden and I arrived there in the van with the subbie, we got all the tools and mixer out, this beautiful lawn with daffodils and flowers and it was a two stage lawn, so we had to make it a ramp into the back door, because she was now in a wheelchair, blah, blah. And I said ok, I see what the craic is, there was a plan, this was council - well paid, because the council were paying for it. And I said grand I can see what we need to do here. When I think about it, I was about 19, 18 then, but I was...y'know.

So I said ok if you give me a day or so, a couple of days we'll get all of this dug out, and we'll be ready for the concrete and what have you. No, no he says, concrete is coming at 11 o'clock! And I said hang on a minute, I said that's impossible we can't get this prepared in 3 hours, it's now 8 in the morning, it's impossible, I can't prepare this. He said no, just pull a few boards down and just...I said just throw it over all the flower beds? And I said I'm not doing this, I said it will crack as soon as it starts to dry the concrete is going to crack and you are going to hurt this woman. And I left, I said I refuse to do it. He got some other guys there was 3 of us there, the other two guys did this. And within 2 weeks he was back with a jack-hammer breaking up all

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the concrete. But it was like...and an awful lot of them are like that and an awful lot of Irish contractors, it's like take a chance we might get away with it.

Interviewer: Do you think that that has anything to do with the fact that most of them...most particularly Irish migrant labour that came here, probably came initially thinking they weren't going to stay?

Terry: A lot of them. I know this man, he is back living in Mayo now. Another Mayo subbie, it was a quick buck and he knew he wasn't going to be around. So they were kind of...they were men that had families.

Interviewer: Not that that's an excuse now.

Terry: No, but it was kind of...I mean this is the interesting thing, some of us missed that boat, because not to do things like that. But if I have had...well these men I was talking about, I was in my teens and they were in their 30s and they were making hay over here and they were doing ok. They had done exactly what I did but then thought hang on, open their own companies and they made very good money very quickly some of them and they went back home, bought their house in Ireland in the 70s or whatever, built a house. And then brought their young families back with them. And you know that's ok.

Interviewer: It is but as you said the principle of taking shortcuts just for taking reckless shortcuts.

Terry: Well some was utterly reckless.

Interviewer: Well the example that you gave me that is negligent.

Terry: Yes.

Interviewer: Because he knew well what you were saying was right. Or even if he didn't know he should have known, he's supposed to be a builder!

Terry: Yes it's common sense, you are in the game, you know yourself, you can't concrete something without doing a foundation, you have to dig the earth up. But back then it was like a bit of hard core.

Interviewer: The old hard core smashed up bricks.

Terry: But not that was too much for him. And literally he would wave a bag of cement over a mix you know what I mean?

Interviewer: We shouldn't laugh really because it's not funny, like that fellow I was telling you about, he was doing some concrete in our house years ago and he's very funny. But he was talking about a job somewhere in...it must have been a warm day or whatever and they were putting water in the concrete to keep it liquid. And when the clerk of the works came along and said, you better start levelling that concrete

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your man turns around and says on the quiet, “Ah Jasus, there’s is enough water in there that will level itself! I mean but there is all that kind of...[Laughter]

Terry: Fair attitude to everything.

Interviewer: He says you’ll have to put stop end in on that joint and the agent says, that won’t stop the concrete, *no he says but it will slow it down a bit.*

Terry: But sure myself and Noel were working in Guinness Trust Housing the land was donated by Prince Charles, we were hod-carrying, right I did about 7 years hod-carrying ...

Interviewer: That’s a tough number.

Terry: That was when you could use ladders, you can’t do that anymore, we were on ladder work, 2 in 1 gangs, 3 in 1, but I was young and fit, I was keen and we were all priced for it. But it was donated by Prince Charles and we were working there, if it’s below 5 and not rising you can’t build brick work, well we were. And in all as soon as the thaw came there was cracks all over this building.

But I can remember this building site that we worked on and the danger that we worked on, it was the filthiest, it was manky, it was winter, there was at least -and I do not exaggerate - there was at least 2 feet of mud all over this place. And it was nightmare to work in and nobody gave a damn. But we were told that Prince Charles was coming to visit, right and a week before, there was this *massive* clear up, we were all given donkey jackets, all given new Wellingtons, there was even new shovels distributed blah, you couldn’t make this up, this was before PPE. But we were given nice gear and blah, blah. And the scaffolding was all sorted out, because the scaffolding was all dangerous, blah. And on the day of visit it absolutely pissed down with rain- it was biblical. And so, we are all there and all saying is he going to come or not going to come, you have to be on your best behaviour and all that. So we were up about 4 stories up by this stage, myself and Noel. And the next thing the limousine pulls up and by this stage the site is a quagmire again...

Interviewer: Of course because it had been lashing.

Terry: And he got out of the car walked to the gate, someone was holding an umbrella up for him, waved in, back in the car and off he went! That was the site visit! Thank you very much! I was just pissing myself, we were laughing our heads off, we thought they spent a bit of money for once cleaning the place up and he didn’t even appreciate it! I was up there saying ‘hang on Charles, I got my new boots’! You haven’t seen them! They gave me a new donkey jacket. Ah stop! [Laughter]

Interviewer: It kind of says it all though really. And then the following week presumably you go back to total chaos.

Terry: That day you are back to total chaos nobody gave a damn, nobody cared and that’s the way it is.

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Interviewer: Well it has improved, as you said it’s improved in terms of health and safety, but the problem as you were talking about earlier...

Terry: It’s a paper exercise.

Interviewer: Behind it there isn’t really an intension to make...conditions better.

Terry: No an intension to cover their backs the big guys. Because I’m sorry I mean I’m probably the wrong person to speak to because I got a kicking in the banking crisis, I had three nationwide companies going they were owing me a lot of money blah, blah all of that. So from that point of view, I’m biased but my opinion of large building companies, the likes of Carillion is that they are utterly utterly corrupt and they are on some they are verging on criminal enterprises on certain levels to me.

Interviewer: I wouldn’t necessarily disagree with that, but I think that kind of attitude has been there since way before you came to England.

Terry: And it will never go, like I said earlier you have now got east Europeans who are undercutting everyone.

Interviewer: Part of the system, but one of the fundamental problems is, is if you have a construction industry which is predicated upon 2 things, competition and the lowest price. They are the factors they are the real factors. Now I know for tenders these days we have to produce reams and reams of health and safety stuff, but it’s just forms. And...

Terry: And eventually you learn you can cut and paste most stuff. But I still have to have a health and safety woman who I pay every quarter and who will do...when it gets a bit too...some of it I can do myself, some I haven’t got time to do, that’s the big problem, if you are a small contractor.

Interviewer: For a small sub contractor it’s supposed to produce the same volume of documentation as the main contractor almost.

Terry: Well you are doing a lot for the main contractor and again like I said that’s their way of advocating their responsibility, that’s what it ultimately comes down to.

Interviewer: Whereas in the 1970s when you first came to England, the sub contract system allowed them to advocate that responsibility by basically pretending they weren’t there.

Terry: Exactly and...

Interviewer: You lads worked for this man who worked for this man.

Terry: Yes who we saw once a week when he came to pay us never met him.

[interruption]

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Terry: I had worked for him for years he was in an estate agency and he was a builder, and they had a building site, and he...I'd worked for him for years, he knew me well, he knew I didn't drink, so I was now in my late 20s, I stopped drinking about 27, this all happened when I was about 29 I think.

Interviewer: So did they do you for this, did they do you for drunk and disorder?

Terry: I did yea, I pled not guilty the next morning, was unheard of, because most people said, are you in sane it's a 10 pound fine, just pay it. I said not a chance. Anyway I spoke to the man I was working for at the time, who was...he was a JP...

Interviewer: Just to interrupt you there, but that says a huge amount in itself of the whole stereotype thing, even the Irish themselves said...

Terry: No they all said I was mad, because it happened to them so often...

Interviewer: Just pay the fine, so they think we are drunks anyway.

Terry: Yes why are you making things difficult for yourself, this is what exactly what was said to me. This man was a magistrate that I worked for.

Interviewer: But if half the prosecutions that they took out against Irish for being drunk and disorderly were in the same framework as that right was men who weren't drunk and disorderly. The statistics then say that the Irish are double what they are.

Terry: Use to hang around in Kilburn in the black Mariahs waiting for all the Paddy's to empty out...

Interviewer: But that's why the statistics, I mean fair play to you for doing what you did, if everyone else was saying sure he's not worth the hassle pay the fine.

Terry: I know but that's what most people did do that time.

Interviewer: Of course and that goes down on the record that you were drunk, you were guilty.

Terry: Yes you were being a typical Irish man. Well I went back to court on about 3 or 4 occasions on this it was in Wilsenden Magistrate Court where the man I worked for was a magistrate and I went to him and I said listen, this has happened blah, blah, he knew I was a singer as well, I said I was coming out of Biddy's I told him the whole story, and I said, you know I have been arrested, you know me, you know I'm of good standing and you know I don't drink. And I said even if I did drink I never went out on the street and caused agro for anybody. I said would you do me a reference, a character reference? And he said to me, I don't think I could I get involved in all of that, because it's sensitive, I'm a magistrate. And I said to him jokingly, there is half a chance you'll be sitting in front of me when I come up for this in St. Mary's. I said, you could always throw it out, because you know that's not me, you have known me quite a few years. 'Oh well I don't think I could...' now obviously I'm not going to ask him to...

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Interviewer: NO, you are not asking for any favours...but he knows...

Terry: He knows, so he said to me, ah now Terrance...either that or you give me a reference because the chances are I'll come up before someone else. I don't know if I can get involved in stuff like that. And he said if you came up in front of me, blah, blah, I'd have to say we know one another. I said ok sound. So, just to clarify you know me, you know this is not something I'd do, I have never caused trouble in my life, but I said you are willing to give me a reference or pretend you don't know me if I'm in front of you. I said that's fine, you are a good upstanding member of the community. I said you are the same man even though you are a magistrate who get your son in law to go into buildings old people's houses, under value them and then buy them underneath them for your estate agencies so you can develop them. I said you can't do me a favour, I said that's grand, at least we know where we stand.

Interviewer: Says it all really.

Terry: It does yea. But he was the equivalent of you Mick, the next generation, his parents had come here done ok, but he had done even better. And it's like ah you know what I mean we can't be getting involved.

Interviewer: Can't get involved with you drunks!

Terry: And it was wrong of me, so what do I do? I phoned my brother-in-law in Dublin who was a guard, he's retired now, been a guard all his life back in Ireland. I said "What I do Edmund?" he said, "Terrance what's the matter?" Now Edmund I have got great admiration for, he's a pure character, he's a brilliant bloke. He said "Are you insane? Why are you going down this road, why are you bothering?" He said "Look it's as simple as this, he's a policeman, and he has said you were drunk and disorderly."

And I'm not joking you Mick, the second time I went to court there was about 6 police men that turned up to testify that I was drunk on the night. And he [Edmund] said to me...and I told him this and he said "Of course there were." And he said "the next time you go there will be 12!" he said "he's not going to admit that he's wrong because they can't. Once he has arrested you and done that, he obviously thought you were going to just capitulate and he's met a belligerent Irish man, but" he said "he's not going to give up", he said "I'm telling you as a guard, give it up, pay your fine!"

Interviewer: But that attitude is exactly the same thing that resulted in the Guilford Four.

Terry: Well indeed...I'm way down.

Interviewer: Yes it's very trivial by comparison, but the principle is the same.

Terry: Not that dissimilar.

Interviewer: The principle is, if we say you are guilty you are guilty.

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Terry: Of course and I was...Jesus I can't tell you how many times I was arrested. And you are presumed innocent but I was always presumed guilty.

Interviewer: And you are pretty sure that's because you were arrested for being an Irish man effectively?

Terry: Yes I can guarantee you and it's a bit like...Jesus Mick you were born here of Irish people, I can see you are Irish but there is no getting away from it. So you can't hide it. I was walking down south London with my wife [who had just walked in to room] years ago, and it was Sunday afternoon, she lived in south London at the time. And we were walking down and it was again the All Ireland Hurling Final and we are just walking down south London, and I walked by this Irish fellow this Paddy was walking toward me. And as we walked by he told me the score! And my wife went "What?". I said "It's the All Ireland Final today". She said "How did he know?" I said come on! ...he just shouted out, the score is blah, blah. And that was all we said to one another.

Interviewer: I'd often said it to Alison, we'd be doing exactly the same, we'd be walking to the park and I'd say he's Irish. You'd know and as soon as you'd catch eye contact you'd know. I don't know why you just do.

Terry: But it was tough times, whatever generation. I remember one character that stands out for me, was a lovely auld fellow, Paddy - Connemara and he was a pace maker for Murphy's back in the 60s. And I remember working with him and he went into - after all of that - he went back into the construction side of things. My God, I remember we were working in a house in Culford Road in Edmonton; never forget it in the basement. And he put a ramp up and everyone on the site, everybody tried to get up this ramp, this little tiny Connemara bloke. This ramp was...at such an angle and he didn't just half fill the barrow - he filled the barrow. And he was pushing this up all day long and filling skips. Every one of us had a go at getting this barrow up the ramp, men who were twice his size couldn't do it. Murphy's pace maker; 10 bob extra a week he got, and if you couldn't keep up with him in the trench you were dragged out and sent away. That's where - you know the fellow you mentioned earlier? - would be left on the side of the motorway that would have been one of the victims, if this little tiny...because he couldn't keep up.

Interviewer: You see the trouble with that, a lot of them fellows now and he's probably a good example they ended up with terrible health problems.

Terry: He's in the song you'll hear it in the song.

Interviewer: They usually end up with the knees and hips gone.

Terry: My knees is gone, my hip.

Interviewer: Anyone who worked in building, my dad's legs started to go long before he got ill. But some were worse than others.

Terry: Yes and I'm a small framed bloke.

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Interviewer: A small man like that doing that kind of work for 30 years.

Terry: It does have its affects. And even in later years we all know about...you have to have knee pads or that and if you forget them or they are not around, you still carry on...and there is nights when I can't even sleep with my knees. And I went about my hip to the doctor recently and my hip is giving me gip!

Interviewer: Line for a song there!

Terry: But you know what the doctor said, take paracetamol! I said for the rest of my life? I said are you serious! I said second opinion please thank you.

Interviewer: I better go!

Tape 3:

Interviewer: I suppose we could go over kind of chronologically talking about all the different people that you worked for but I'm not sure there's much point in that, because it sounds like you probably worked for a lot of people over the years. And you have talked about the attitudes to health and safety, you have talked about the Irish attitudes to Irish people. There was some things that was interesting from a social aspect. Did you ever have to stay in any bad digs or?

Terry: Well I did, for a short period, but it wasn't the kind of digs they talk about in the 50s or 60s and it was rough, but they weren't digs as such it was a room, I had a room in a place in...I forgotten the place of the street but it's just of Northchurch Road and that was...

Interviewer: Roughish?

Terry: Roughish. But you see I was on that...I was part of that transition - so I fell into that age group. So my experiences are very, y'know...the really unique experiences are from the '50s y'know? the likes of your father and guys of that age.

Interviewer: You are really confirming what I have in my own mind there is this transition that goes on.

Terry: That's not to say that it wasn't rough...

Interviewer: But it's all relative.

Terry: You see the difference as well was, although I came here quite young, I had family here before me, I had two brothers and they were settled, and I had relative security.

Interviewer: Did you? - And again I suspect I know the answer to this, but I'm going to ask it anyway. There is an awful lot of talk and controversy about anti Irish

Original Interview # 19 – Terence O – Clare

prejudice and the kind of attitudes of indigenous English people, Londoners against Irish people.

Terry: Back then?

Interviewer: Yes when you came here.

Terry: There was, but don't forget we had the Troubles.

Interviewer: Putting that to one side, these infamous signs, the no blacks, no dogs, no Irish?

Terry: Never experienced it because I was too late for all of that.

Interviewer: And what did you experience?

Terry: Well I kind of experienced it at all levels an intolerance, the police in particular.

Interviewer: Were you often stopped by the police?

Terry: I have been in virtually in every cell in north, south east and west London. And this is the interesting thing, they talk about profiling and the police...just knew at a glance I was an Irish man, I didn't need to be black or Indian or anything like that for them to be able to pick me out. Just walking down the street they could see I was a Paddy and if they were bored or whatever..."Let's have him in". And I came out of ...I was pulled...I came out of the Britannia [pub] in Mare Street one night and we had been in there, I think Clare may have been involved, I can't think so far back. I was in there with my brother Noel and Noel lives at one end of Hackney and I lived at the other. We came out of the pub at about two in the morning, I went left, I said see you later, good luck. And I got picked up at the bottom of the road very quickly for looking like some guy who was trying to rob cars or something I don't know. But as soon as the accent was heard...I got a lot of abuse in the back of police vans because of being Irish, go back to telling me to fuck off back to my pig sty and go back and live with the pigs and blah, blah. Anyway.

Interviewer: Bearing in mind this as you said a few minutes ago, was during the Troubles.

Terry: Yes this was trouble time, so a lot of trouble. But anyway Hackney police station which is now closed down, so I'm in the cells blah, blah. And then that was it, you just...

Interviewer: And have they told you what you have been lifted for?

Terry: They said, I looked apparently like some fellow who was trying to steal cars. Back then before my hair went grey I had curly hair. And this fellow had curly hair and he "looked a bit Irish"! - But anyway, so half two in the morning by now. So I get pulled in and I get a bit of abuse, blah, blah.

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Interviewer: Verbal abuse.

Terry: Yes and I was living in the Pembury Estate at the time in Hackney, and I swear to you about 6 police cars surrounded me and just hauled me in anyway. I'm in there and I just put the head back and thought here we go again, you know...so I thought I may as well sleep; I was drunk anyway [This was before Terence gave up alcohol]. So woke up the next morning, walked out and just..."Right, piss off, go home!"

Interviewer: Nothing further said.

Terry: Nothing and as I walked out, who walks out behind me, my brother Noel! We were both in two different cells all night, he had curly hair and the two of us were pulled in. But by Jasus in stature we are very different, so I don't know what was going on there.

Interviewer: The curly hair thing was getting a bit ridiculous there!

Terry: Another night we walked out of Biddy Mulligans myself and Noel and there was pandemonium going on outside, there had been a fight.

Interviewer: In Biddy's never!

Terry: Very unusual! But there was something going on, so there was police everywhere I was playing there at the time, I had something in hand an instrument or guitar or whatever. The next thing the biggest police man I have ever seen in my life, I'm not joking he must have been coming up 7ft tall, a sergeant - never forget him.

He just lifted me up, I'm in and Noel immediately said, "What are you doing?" They threw me in the back of the van and Noel was going "What are you doing? he has done nothing". Then the two of us were thrown in the back of the van, they were kicking the shite out of the pot-man from Billy Mulligans who was a poor auld fellow from Swords in Dublin, he was the pot-man. They were going at it, any Paddy they could find...we were taken to Kilburn Station, and I remember I wasn't drinking then, I had given up drink and I was stone cold sober. So I'm thrown in a cell, and separate to them all and there was a bell, so I pressed the bell and no answer. So I put my finger on the bell and I held it for a good 10 minutes. I thought you bastards, I'm not letting you away with it. The next thing, the 7ft fellow, and about two other coppers came down and they said, "Get your fucking hand off that bell now!" he said, "You touch that again" he says "I'll break your back". And I said to him, "Can you explain to me, why you have arrested me?" I said I literally had just stepped onto the footpath when you pulled me. I said I literally stepped out of the pub, so I have done nothing wrong. He said "Drunk and disorderly" I said I'm not drunk, I don't drink, I was about 29 at the time. So he says "You do now, Paddy!"

Interviewer: Wow!

Terry: Kind of an interesting time.

Original Interview # 19 – Terence O – Clare

End

Original Interview # 20 – Noel O – Clare

Name: Noel **Date of Birth:** 1951
Place of Birth: Ennistymon, County Clare
Date of Emigration to UK: 1966
Date of Interview: 25 February 2018.
Location of Interview: Author's house, Essex

Notes:

Interview conducted in Noel's kitchen with his wife, Mary, present throughout. Where Mary interjected in conversation occasionally, this has been noted in footnotes.

Interviewer: Right, what we are going to do is just talk for a while about your early days coming to London, so growing up in Ireland then coming to London and particularly about how and why you got involved in the construction industry and what you remember from those days. Now this study that I'm doing stops at around the sort of mid 1990s, so all the stuff that's going on today, you can mention if you want but it's not really relevant to what I'm doing. I'm going to do the same thing I did with Terry, I'm just going to ask a few simple questions, and you tell me what you think. It's the 21st I think, that's fine, so the 21st February and I'm with Noel and Noel is going to tell me about his early days growing up in Ireland and then coming to London and working in London. Well, I suppose start at the beginning. Where were you born and when you were born, what year were you born?

Noel: 1951 in Ennistymon, Co. Clare.

Interviewer: And did you come from a big family?

Noel: Yes, a family of 10.

Interviewer: And where were you in that line up?

Noel: I was the 4th.

Interviewer: So would you have had, I presume a fairly normal... were you town or country people?

Noel: Town.

Interviewer: So you would have had a fairly regular upbringing Irish Catholic nationalist usual kind of thing?

Noel: Yes, very catholic.

Interviewer: And National School?

Noel: Christian Brothers, the nuns for the infants the convent and then the Christian Brothers first year.

Interviewer: And what age did you leave school at?

Original Interview # 20 – Noel O – Clare

Noel: Fourteen.

Interviewer: And did you go straight to work then or did?

Noel: I helped my father for a while

Interviewer: And what did your father do?

Interviewer: A plumber - he was a plumber by trade, but obviously, rural Ireland, there wasn't a great deal of work. So he use to turn his hand to most things he was...

Interviewer: as I think most lads did in those days.

Noel: He did yeah a bit of block laying, a bit of paintin' and decoratin' and wallpapering, bit of carpentry.

Interviewer: Whatever you had to do.

Noel: Yes, yes, yes - but there wasn't enough there for a plumber to have a full time trade, so you had to be able to turn your hand at anything. So obviously I was his apprentice occasionally after school yes!

Interviewer: And how long did you do that for?

Noel: About 6 months with my father.

Interviewer: And did you do anything else?

Noel: Then I came to England.

Interviewer: My God, so how old were you when you came to England?

Noel: I was just coming up to fifteen.

Interviewer: So you weren't even fifteen!...and how did you come about...well I suppose what made you decide...or did you decide?

Noel: Well...y'know, my father reckons there was no point in me hanging around because he said there was nothing for me. So he said to me, I could end up like himself, end up getting married and a big family and drink - y'know - there was a problem with the drink as well. So he said to me, I'll get your brother and see could he sort you out and get you to England.

Interviewer: This was an older brother?

Noel: Yes we use to call him Gogo but his name was George; so he was in Camden Town.

Interviewer: He was already there.

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Noel: He was, yes, and...eh...he sent the ticket over and then I was dropped off at Limerick and I made my own way over on the train and boat. And then I arrived in Euston and my brother was supposed to be there to meet me, but obviously he ran a bit late. And eventually he turned up and we got the tube from Euston to Camden Town and I got out at the station. And I seen all these men, they were all lined up along Kentish Town Road and Camden High Street.

Interviewer: Was this in the morning, then?

Noel: Yes, yes. Seven o'clock in the morning and I said to my brother, I said what's all this about? He said come on keep going, don't worry about it. But that was it we carried on and that was Thursday and lo and behold -

Interviewer: And was he working in the building game?

Noel: He was off it at the time, he had a road accident. He got a belt of a car coming out of the Molton Arms, what's it called now, Kentish Town Road it's there on the corner as you come down from...what's the name of that pub again, but Amy Winehouse use to drink in it. I was in it many times myself, you come down from Chalk Farm.

Interviewer: The Boston Arms?

Noel: No no, not the Boston no, you come down Chalk Farm and down...

Interviewer: Oh yeah...

Noel: The Hawley Arms, down from the Hawley Arms, it used to be called the Molton Arms, there was a Kilkenny man had it and he was...but anyway he was coming out of there he got a belt of a car. But anyway I ended up on the buildings working for Scan Sullivan and I was picked up at the archway; picked up there and I was taken to Mill Hill.

Interviewer: So what age this was...this was fifteen?

Noel: Fifteen, and I was working in Mill Hill¹ and my first job was, I'll never forget it, I was blackjacking; putting that auld blackjack, was a sealer on the concrete walls.

Interviewer: I suppose they would argue they went easy on you for a little while did they?

Noel: They weren't too bad, they were Connemara blokes, I mean...I got on great with them. So I got a lift to work and then obviously I had to make my own way home. So I got the Northern Line from Mill Hill...I'll tell where it was, it was an animal institution, no research. It's still there because I was up there last year. My company sent me over there for one day and I remember getting out at Mill Hill and getting the bus up to the job and it announced the animal research place.

¹ A north London suburb.

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But anyways that didn't last long. I stayed there only for a couple of months. And then I ended up going with my aunt's partner, doing piling,² you know. So I travelled around a bit of the country doing that and then I ended up in Southampton. So I packed that in and I was working in Fawley Power Station at the time and then I was living in a village just the other side of Southampton called Totten.³ And then I came back. I tell you what happened, I stood on a nail and...

Interviewer: Hurt yourself.

Noel: And then I was hanging around and I said bugger this. So I came back up to London.

Interviewer: So what year did you come here then?

Noel: Was it 1965? Yes, '66 and I came back to London and as I said, yeah...what brought me to Southampton was working on the doing the piles. And we were working right beside Pirelli they had a big massive factory there.

Interviewer: And what were you doing with the piles?

Noel: I was driving...it was a winch...real old thing and..eh, they had all different types, so I was doing that for a while. And I stopped, I packed that in after a while and then obviously I had lots of other jobs, all in construction. I tried my hand at everything.

Interviewer: There was no shortage of work I presume in those days?

Noel: No, no, no...they were great days, y'know. You could have a job Monday morning and if you fell out with the ganger man you'd probably get to start across the road at breakfast time! (Laughter) and it was like that. And plus the fact in them days, I could say probably 95% of the work force were Irish. Mostly ground work and...

Interviewer: Nearly all Irish.

Noel: Nearly...the vast majority of them.

² In modern civil engineering, piling is the installation, either by boring into the ground with an auger and subsequently filling with reinforced concrete, or driving precast piles of timber, steel, or concrete into the ground to support a structure; it is predominantly used where loads need to be transmitted through the underlying soil conditions where soft or made-up. (Source: R Chudley, *Building Construction Handbook*, (Oxford, 1991), pp.167-183.)

³ "Fawley was the fifth of thirteen huge power stations commissioned by the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) in the late 1960s. This vast expansion of generating power spread across semi-rural England demonstrating the pinnacle of nationalised industry in England." It is located outside Southampton on the Solent. Construction at Fawley took place from 1965 until 1971. The site presented an enormous number of difficulties, which were heroically overcome by swarms of civil engineers and construction workers. Mitchell Construction were the main contractors, another one of the British companies well-known for employing a large workforce of migrant Irish builders. (Sources: 'Fawley Power Station' at *Campaigning for Twentieth century architecture*, available at <https://c20society.org.uk/botm/fawley-power-station/> (accessed 10 September, 2018), and David Morrell. *Indictment: Power and Politics in the Construction Industry*, (London, 1987), pp.61-67.

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Interviewer: And was it mainly subbies you worked for?

Noel: All sub-contractors yes – all in-the-hand...

Interviewer: Cash-in-the-hand?

Noel: Yes - the lump.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, that's what it was - and that's how everyone in those days seemed to start off anyway.

Noel: Yes, y'see back in them days, anything went, y'know? We use to have the old SE60s, 715s, the tax - ⁴

Interviewer: Well, sure it got to the point at one stage where you could buy them things in the pub!

Noel: Of course! And there wasn't a word said about it. Ah yes. There was a man in Hackney use to sell them, ah yes...*Scottish Jim*.

Interviewer: In the Dolphin?⁵

Noel: No, no, no he used to...he *did* drink in the Dolphin but he got barred, Joe barred him. He used to live across the road from the Paget Arms - what' the name of that road? Middleton Road off of Westgate Street in Hackney. He was a bit of a fly-by; he was a painter and decorator supposedly by trade!

Interviewer: Supposedly!

Noel: Yeah, yeah...sure he was flogging the 715s, so yes you got a good deal.

Interviewer: Sure back when you were that young now, I don't think there wasn't even 715s then I think it was all just cash?

Noel: Cash, a lot of it was cash-in-the-hand.

Interviewer: Yep - no forms to be filled in at all!

Noel: No, nothing. You just turned up and if you turned up anywhere where the blokes were picked up and if you were right, you got to start.

Interviewer: And how did you find, did you find it hard or was it, did you get used to...

Noel: No, I didn't find it hard because I was young and fit and was able for it. And obviously it...eh...was a pleasure to go to work at times; because there was so many

⁴ SC60s and 715 Certificates were part of the Construction Industry Tax Deduction Scheme introduced by the UK Parliament in 1971. See Chapter 4.4.3 of Main Thesis.

⁵ A public house on Mare Street, Hackney, east London which was a well-known 'Irish-house' throughout the 1970s-1990s.

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great characters from all walks of life, y'know? And they were up to every mischief and unfortunately a lot of them had drink problems.

Interviewer: Yes well I think that was a big feature of....

Noel: Yes - many's the day dinner time'd come and there'd be no going back to work after dinner, they'd come in and just head home. But people didn't seem to care – they didn't y'know? And if the subbie wasn't happy with you, you just left and you got the start somewhere else.

Interviewer: Was there anyone that you worked for a particularly long period for at that time, or did that come later?

Noel: That came later. But we done a lot of services, y'know? Water facilities for the water and gas all the utility, pipe laying and all that for the Water Board. Back in them days, OC Summers and Avon, Lippiatt & Hobbs, they were the major contractors on London. And we worked for a man called Bill Kelly from Mayo.

Interviewer: Did you work for OC Summers?

Noel: Not directly for OC Summers, through a sub-contractor and we done a lot of work for Avon, Lippiatt & Hobbs and that was all through sub-contractor that was all cash in the hand as well.⁶

Interviewer: Yes, because you were in London around the same time as my uncle, dad's younger brother Pat, he came in '66 as well but he'd have been older than you. But he worked for OC Summers as well I think. They did a lot of gas work.

Noel: All gas work, OC Summers, and Avon, Lippiatt & Hobbs done both, gas and water. And then in them days all...most of the people....for the water...

Interviewer: You'd be basically digging trenches.

Noel: That's right yeah or you'd be doing shafts, and doing headings and I done that for quite a while with a man called Jimmy Elliott from Laois and...

Interviewer: He was the subbie?

Noel: No, he was one of the miners, and a man called John Curry he was a Limerick man. And that was their...that was their work, they done mines and headings, tunnels all their lives. And obviously I was the man above driving the little crane and sending all the materials down to them, and I use to lift all the muck up on the little bogies above the hole and tip it up above and the grab lorry would come along and take it away. And you'd send the pipes down to them or whatever we were doing, y'know? So I was with them, we done a good few years with that, there was a lot of work done for sub-contractors, and for the likes of Murphy as well, we used to do like little

⁶ OC Summer Ltd and Avon, Lippiatt & Hobbs (Contracting) Ltd were both sizeable British utilities and infrastructure contractors who were known to employ significant numbers of Irish migrant workers – mainly as cable installation gangs and often under the casualised 'Lump' system which prevailed until the mid-1970s.

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headings and shafts and all that for Murphys. And that was all...eh...SE60; the SE60 sort of came around then.

Interviewer: So there was good work?

Noel: Good work, yes, and good paying work as well, y'know.

Interviewer: But I'd say it was hard work. When I was talking to Terry earlier he was talking about meeting a fellow that was a pacemaker for Murphys ...

Noel: That's right, yeah, there was always a ganger man that was always there to push you and get as much out of you as they possibly could. But that would be digging trenches for services. And then at the end of the day when you had that finished as well there was no such thing as high-abs in them days, whatever was left over had to be shovelled on the back of the lorry. And then when you'd be finished you'd jump up on the back of a lorry and you'd make your way back down to Camden Town and be dropped off there. And a lot of the guys, they went straight into the pub.

Interviewer: And how did you get on with...when you got to...I think you said you were staying with your brother were you?

Noel: That's right, for a while, and then I went off travelling around.

Interviewer: And how did you get on with digs in places like that?

Noel: Fine, the last digs I stayed in in Southampton and I can remember well, it was five pounds (a week) for full board and the woman was an English woman, she was married to a Polish man, Diane H was her name, I'll never forget her. And she used to provide all, even for that five pounds she use to provide sandwiches for us. And then we'd be picked up by coach outside the house and taken to the power station (Fawley) in the mornings. But when I was working in Southampton we had a van and we use to drive into Southampton to the site. But then I gave that up and then obviously I went to the power station. I was painting in the power station, painting read led on the steel; there is no none of that now, red lead. And then what happened to me was, I slid down the ladder and when I slid down the ladder, when I got down to the bottom there was a bit of timber and the nail went straight through me foot. So...then I decided to come back up to London and then I was with the brother for a couple of weeks and then I got digs in Arlington Road in Camden Town.

Interviewer: Near the Rowton House?

Noel: The Rowton House, yeah! The Rowton House was one side, I was up the other side of Arlington Road. Yes.

Interviewer: You wouldn't get digs there today now!

Noel: No you wouldn't know, well it's an exclusive place now?

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Interviewer: It is absolutely.

Noel: But yes Camden Town was eh, I loved Camden Town, there was great life there, there was, there was a big Irish community there, there was music there most nights of the week and the famous Buffalo in Camden Town where I met herself.

Interviewer: Did you meet in the Buffalo?

Noel: Yes, yes St. Patricks night it was, Joe Dolan and the Drifters was playing there!

Interviewer: That's obviously before it became the Electric Ball Room?

Noel: Long before it became the Electric Ball Room. Yes, and then obviously you had all the pubs on Camden Town.

Interviewer: Did Bill Fuller still own it at that time?

Noel: He still owns it now.

Interviewer: Well the daughter does, Bill is dead now. But it never changed ownership now.

Noel: That's going to be all redeveloped.

Interviewer: He was a pretty amazing character by all accounts, that Bill Fuller there is plenty of articles I found about him.

Noel: And he had plenty of characters at the door as well....doormen.

Interviewer: I heard about a few of them yeah.

Noel: Yes many the scrap we seen in there, ah Jasus Christ, remember Mary? And the women as well used to be at it, pulling the hair out of one another in the middle of the floor and we'd make a big circle around them and the next thing the bouncers would fight their way in and to get them out.

Interviewer: I heard it had a bit of reputation!

Noel: It had a reputation alright and my poor sister we were there one night and my two aunts. And after this big shuffle on the floor; well actually the dance was finished and we were making our way out and this big rare-up started at the door and my poor sister got a right-hander, they gave her an awful belt. And then we were just thrown out the road.

Interviewer: I seen that happen myself much later in the Half Moon in Holloway Road.

Noel: And then all the people were annoyed, there was people cut as well where the bouncers had hit them, and then people started going around collecting whatever they could and started firing it in at the entrance. So - cut a long story short we were all

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looking up towards the Brighton⁷ and that; we could see the Black Mariah's⁸ and they were waiting to come and the next thing they all come flying down and then they started rounding up whoever they could. And then they said, remember "Who done this? Who was -", and we said, we just played it ignorant. And a few of the people who had been injured, they were actually across the road, I couldn't say what was there, it was near the Inverness Street, there was a big doorway. And then my sister came over, "Yeah she said, I have been assaulted by one of them blokes in there." And the police man didn't use choice words! He told her to...(F-off) and us as well or we'd be coming! So they rounded up a few blokes, I think probably blokes that were innocent, but that's the way the law used to, the police used to...

Interviewer: They were just interested in lifting a few?

Noel: Yes, just arrest a few Paddys, like - and that was on a regular basis.

Interviewer: I was talking to your brother about that kind of thing and he was saying the same more or less the same thing, that it didn't matter whether you were involved or not.

Noel: That's right it did not, you were there you were arrested.

Interviewer: You were kind of labelled.

Noel: Come on Paddy you are coming with me!..haha...and into the Black Mariah. But I was arrested a few times and I was only charged the once.

Interviewer: With what, drunk and disorderly?

Noel: Drunk and disorderly. And sure Terence was done for drunk and disorderly.

Interviewer: He told me that. And the night he's talking about now he said he wasn't drunk at all because he didn't drink.

Noel: No he didn't drink and he came over and he said to the two police men, "what's going on here?" and the police man said to him, "Fuck off Paddy, or you'll be coming as well". And so my brother, Terence said, "What do you mean?" he said "that man is only after walking out of the pub!" and he (the policeman) says to him, he said, "I told you if you don't fuck off you'll...and the next thing two coppers got a hold of Terry and they threw him in, into the Black Mariah, and there was another fellow - a Kerry lad. And he use to strum the guitar and - I didn't know the lad, but my brother knew him. So anyway this guy came and protested about him arresting Terence, he said "That man has been playing in the pub all night," he said "what are you arresting him for?"

⁷ The Brighton was another London-Irish public house on the north-side of Camden High Street, some 200 yards south of the Buffalo Club, the other side of Camden Tube Station.

⁸ 'Black Mariah' was a slang term used extensively by the migrant Irish for the police vans used by the Metropolitan Police in the post-war period. It is thought to have originated in the USA and fell largely out of use in London in the 1980s.

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So cut a long story short. A lot of people complained, we ended up in Willesden police station and we went in and the arresting sergeant was there and they really abused this Kerry man, and they beat him in the back of the van, they did, yeah, yeah, they were beating him. And I said to one of the police men, I said, “Look, there’s no need for that” and the answer was “he won’t fucking shut up”. And then yer man that was driving the Black Maria he said, “fucking hit him again, he’s in England now, not in fucking Ireland, Paddy!” Scottish guy he was, this cop. But we all ended up in the feekin’ nick. And obviously he went through the process with the arresting sergeant and told him to arrest this Kerry fellow and to search him. They grabbed him and throw him on the ground and they emptied his pockets and he had about 600 dollars in cash and obviously he was in the States. And what was said to him straight away “Oh yeah, I see you’ve been collecting for the IRA!” and obviously the answer he gave them, he said “Fucking so what if I was!”

Interviewer: Which probably didn’t help his cause!

Noel: No, it did not, no... he only got hit more. So anyways they put him into the cell and then I was next.

Interviewer: Was this around the time of the troubles now?

Noel: It was, yes, yes. We were arrested when we came out of Biddy Mulligans, Terry was playing there and Chris Hayes and Joe.

Interviewer: That must’ve been...that’s a good bit after you landed in London.

Noel: Brian Rooney was in there the same night as well and PJ Hynes and Michael Hynes...there was rakes of musicians.

Interviewer: That must have been well after you first came now?

Noel: Yeah, yeah, yeah...that would have been the late 70s, early 80s. But the police man, by the way I said, “What’s, why...why have we been arrested?” (24.30) “Well” he said, “y’know...drunk and disorderly” he put me in the cell. So then Terence came in after me and Terence said to the police man that was putting him into the cell, he said “By the way” he said, “why have you arrested us?” and the police man said to Terence “For being drunk and disorderly” and Terence says, “I don’t drink”. He said “You fucking do now Paddy!” that’s exactly...Terry will probably tell you, I dunno, the fucker, he says “You do now Paddy!”

So we went, we had to go to...was it Willesden Magistrates, or Harrow? Willesden...one o’them anyways – the Magistrates Court. And the funny thing about it was, we knew one of the magistrates, Tom Higgins. So we had a word with him, Tom. They ran a housing association, Higgins Contractors they were. And myself and Terry done a bit of work for them. So Tom Higgins said “Well lads, there’s nothing I can do about this, but-“ he said, “if you come up in front of me” he said “in the court, I won’t be able to try you...because I know you.” Fair enough, anyway, so that was Monday morning when we got the charge and we had to go to court on the Thursday. So the fellow that was beaten up badly by the police, we had a chat with the solicitors that’d be there giving a bit of advice. So they said to this - I think John was his name -

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and they said to him, “When you go into court, now” he said “you go up in front of the magistrate, don’t plead guilty, you have witnesses here” - because he was all black-and-blue, he said “You have two witnesses what happened to you that night.” So anyway, yer man he wasn’t too interested. So we went in anyways and he was the first man to be called up, and his name was John something blah, blah, on such a night you were charged with being drunk and disorderly. So your man the magistrate says...eh...“Guilty or not guilty?” and this particular man John, he pointed over he said, “If he says I’m guilty I’m guilty!” He was referring to the arresting police man. And the magistrate said to him, “Are you guilty or not guilty?”... And he pleaded guilty, so he got eight pounds fine and two pounds cost. And the same thing happened to us, because we were told it’s not worth it, to plead guilty just it will only be a small fine, get on with it.

Interviewer: And that was the way it was.

Noel: That’s the way it was and that probably happened to tens of thousands of Irish men in them times.

Interviewer: And that’s what I was saying to your brother earlier, the thing about that is, that’s why, when the statistics then are done, when the police were asked, when they collated all their national statistics, that’s why the Irish look like they were all alcoholics, because they were all...maybe they were all admitting to charges that they hadn’t been guilty of at all.

Noel: Of course and especially telling a man that didn’t drink that he was drunk.

Interviewer: Yes that’s how the system gets you.

Noel: But then we were our own worst enemy. We should have went the next day or even the same night, you couldn’t get a drink in Billy Mulligans it was so busy. And the same night I was drinking with Chris Hayes’ mum and father were there and her nephew was there, he’s a chief inspector in the police! And, y’know, Christy Kissane he said, that if he had known that Terence had been arrested he said he’d have been straight up to the police station and he’d have got us out. But obviously he didn’t know.

Interviewer: Yes just the way it goes sometimes I suppose.

Noel: And all it was, I came down the stairs, my brother in law was with us as well Dave, but he had walked on he was going down to where the car was parked, because Terence was driving. And I came down the stairs, there was two lads that I knew and I was saying goodnight to them, they were on my left as I came down the side stairs in Willesden lane and the next thing, I just turned around and I just happened to walk into this police man. And he says “Come on Paddy, you’re coming with me!” and that was it - into the Black Maria. And then Terry came down the stairs, “Ah what’s going on here?”...“Fuck off you, Paddy, or you’ll be in there” and he ended up in there and this other Johnny.

Interviewer: Wasn’t that some carry on? But apparently that use to happen with great regularity especially on Kilburn High Road.

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Noel: It happened in Camden, even happened in Hackney... walking the road – twice! Pulled up beside me and took me into the van, but I was never charged but I was taken to Hackney police station and kept there all night. That was the first one....

Interviewer: Oh you fit the description of...

Noel: Yes, just minding my own business. I was walking down from the Windsor, the pub in the there beside... it's in...where the mothers hostel use to be, not Lower Clapton Road is it, where the kids were born. The Windsor there, there used to be a petrol station beside it Murphys. The Grey Murphy had a storage yard that was in there.

Interviewer: Did you ever work for the Grey Murphy did you ever work for any of the Murphys?

Noel: I did for John Murphy we were doing services and you could be...you were never in one place too long, a day or two there, it was you use to do those boxes, they use to call them boxes for the services and the roads you dig it out you put in a new box. And afterwards the cable guys would come along and put them into these boxes.

Interviewer: When did you two get married, were you married by that stage now? We got married in '74.

Interviewer: So you were about 10 years, so when you got married who were you working for, do you remember that? But you would have been subbing?

Noel: Yes, yes...oh, yeah. But I did start working for PC Harringtons in the late 70s.

Interviewer: And you would have been working direct for them, you weren't subbing, you were an employee?

Noel: No it wasn't direct, that was...SC60...Sub-contract. PC - Pat Harrington, but before that I think it was Bill Kelly, he use to employ a lot him and his brother.

Interviewer: Where were they from?

Noel: From Mayo, Claremorris. He lived in what was the name of the road? Askew Road? Anyway, he lived in Chiswick and any business we had to do with him we used to go to his house; he had an office in his house. He was a lovely man, and his brother Jim returned to Ireland. But they did have hundreds of men working for them...hundreds.

Interviewer: And all doing the same sort of thing?

Noel: Yes, yeah doing all that...all building works as well, and plastering and carpentry the whole lot...the brother and him went back to Ireland.

Noel: That's right and then there was the tax...(looks knowingly)

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Interviewer: Most of them did!

Noel: They did indeed! Owed lots of money to the tax man.

Interviewer: At what point did you, kind of...um...there must have been a point - there usually is - where you become a what-do-you-call-it...more of a company man, where you get settled if you like?

Noel: Probably with PC Harringtons around 1977, and I worked for them for 10 years.

Interviewer: And the only reason I ask that now is because I know other interviewees have said certainly at that time in the late 60s, that you didn't stand a prayer of getting a mortgage because if you were considered casual labour. You couldn't prove earnings, for a start, they wouldn't have had any...there was no payslips.

Noel: No there wasn't. The vast majority of Irishmen that was the position they were in.

Interviewer: Yes so like there must come a point say for example of you get married and you want to have kids and you are starting think about if you want to buy a house, there comes a point where...y'know...you can't operate that way anymore.

Noel: No, no, no, no...but you see when you are young and that you didn't really care, you didn't care about owning your own house.

Interviewer: Say for example when you came here, did you think that you would stay here or did you not think about it?

Noel: I didn't even think about it, I was...eh...I was enjoying life, you know...and I was.

Interviewer: And when you got a bit older and all that, were you able to say, for example, were you sufficiently flush with money or earning your capacity if you like to be able to go back home fairly regularly?

Noel: Yes, yes, yes...we went back on a regular basis. There wasn't a year that went by that we didn't go back with the family for the summer for 3 to 4 weeks in the summertime every year, and for special occasions. I was doing fairly well for Harringtons. And then obviously at the time I liked a few pints but I wasn't a big drinker.

Interviewer: What were you doing with Harringtons?

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Noel: I started off striking as they called it then I just started doing a bit of shuttering and then I hurted my back.⁹ So I got a job back on the crane. So you didn't need any tickets or anything for those, it was...he said to come in and bank the crane and I went in and I banked the crane.

Interviewer: Now you need a ticket to open the door of a crane!

Noel: Yes and it all started from there. And the next thing I was on a couple of jobs doing a bit of banking and this old Sligo man he said to me, "Here young fellow you need to get up here" and I had a go and he said to me, this would be...he said "You'll be good at this job he said, he said to me I was a good banksman and I'd be good at this job. So he said "I'll let you have a go and all I can tell you is what to do, and" he said "the rest of it is down to yourself." So it started from there and then I had a bit of practice there and that old man left because he was going to another job, and a younger man came there and we used to do half day each up on the crane.

Interviewer: So I have it straight there at that point you are talking about the 70s now?

Noel: '78, '79.

Interviewer: You didn't need any ticket?

Noel: You needed no certificates for anything to drive any machine. You could jump up on any digger if the ganger man was there and he said to you, "do you reckon you could drive that machine? Jump up and have a go" and if you could drive it all well and good, they'll have you and if you were any good or you were making a good effort they'd leave you on it. (36.38)

Interviewer: So when it did come to the point probably 10, 15 years later when they started to introduce tickets, did you have to do anything?

Noel: I had to do a course; a one day safety and health awareness course because I got my tickets under the grandfather's rights. That's what they use to call it, because I had been driving for so many years. So I didn't actually need to do any test. So I just...I had to go to Oxford to do a one day course, on all health and safety issues.

Interviewer: But that's all you needed?

Noel: That's all and there was about 20 of us and I happened to be...this Paddy was an Irish man an old man himself, and himself and his son actually owned a business.

⁹ PC Harrington are now a large concrete-frame specialist contractor / sub-contractor (See Appendix B to main thesis). 'Shuttering' is the colloquial term for the manual construction – usually by carpenters - of temporary timber-framed formwork or 'shutters' to encase the wet insitu concrete normally used for constructing plain and reinforced concrete structures until set. Formwork was usually built using large-section timber 'strongbacks' and beams, heavy-duty 'shuttering-quality' sheets of plywood, normally in 8 foot by 4 foot sheets, and usually one inch thick, and heavy-duty telescopic steel structural props known as 'Acrow-props'. Shuttering materials could be re-used repeatedly. 'Striking' refers to the very heavy manual dismantling, lifting and transporting of shuttering material for re-use elsewhere on the project. (Source: R. Chudley, *Building Construction Handbook*, (Oxford, 1991), pp.295-299.)

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And they had a few machines. And I was chatting to him and he said to me, he said "I'm not very good at the reading and writing", and I said to him "I'm not the greatest man myself". I said "look, don't worry" I said, "you sit beside me and I'll make sure that you can see everything on the sheet, and you copy exactly what I have done and I'll make sure you can see it" and he did. And he said to me in my time...and this man was 70 now, and he said that's the rules, that's the law they want to have a ticket. And he said well my son...it was my business and I gave it to my son, but he said I still like to do a little bit now and again. So I have to have the ticket.

Interviewer: He's right though wasn't he?

Noel: Yes, yes so he passed the test. I got two wrong and he got two wrong! 2 out, I think 'twas 2 out of 30 questions. And then he said to me, right I'm going to buy the breakfast. And it was supposed to be an all-day course but it finished about 2 o'clock and that was it. And then I got...

Interviewer: So up until then you had been driving a crane for 15 years?

Noel: Quite a few years yes and but anyway...

Interviewer: And machines as well?

Noel: And machines you could drive a machine. There was a machine there a one-ninety or you know a Hitachi or whatever, and you could jump and away you go. And if you could handle it and most men...well 99.9% of the men in them days as well on ever machine they were Irish, all Irish, every one o'them.

Interviewer: And if that was around say '78 that you started driving cranes that was with Harringtons?

Noel: PC Harrington's, Yes.

Interviewer: So you must have stayed with them for a good chunk of time?

Noel: Until 1988 and I was working in Hemel Hempstead¹⁰ and there was a bit of a recession so I get laid off.

Interviewer: That's right there was.

Noel: I got laid off, but the last couple of years, '86, '87 - they were 3 great years, because the auld hoor in Number 10 was in power,¹¹ wasn't she?

Interviewer: That's right, yeah.

¹⁰ Hemel Hempstead is a new town in Hertfordshire, England. Located 24 miles northwest of London, it is part of the Greater London Urban Area.

¹¹ This is a pejorative reference to Margaret Thatcher's premiership taken from Christy Moore's hugely popular folksong *Delirium Tremens* (See <https://www.christymoore.com/lyrics/delirium-tremens/> (accessed 12 Sep. 18)

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Noel: So they were throwing money at us and I earned good money then. So when I got laid off it was November time wasn't it? October or November, so I thought to myself well bugger it, I have a few bob saved, I was after buying a new car, the newest car I ever bought! In Fords in Highbury...a Sierra it was.

Interviewer: Where were you living at that time now?

Noel: In Hackney – Hackney, in London Fields, and I had a few bob saved and then my mate, my friend said to me, he said here...Kevin (thinking)...no not Kevin, is it? ... Which one went back to Ireland?¹² Kevin...no...one of them, one of the lads driving the van. He said I'm going back to Ireland I forget which one, and they said will you come out with us Monday morning. That was for the crowd that was putting in all this cable television that time.

Interviewer: Oh, I remember that!

Noel: Throughout London. So I went with them to drive the van doing the maintenance and reinstating and I was with them for a while. But shortly afterwards been laid off with Harringtons, I didn't get any notice or anything...I was told Saturday morning...you're finished.

Interviewer: This is after 10 years.

Noel: 10 years. Yeah..."you're finished!" and the foreman Joe XXX was his name, he was a Mayo man. He said "Listen Noel" he said, "there was a message left at McAlpine's office to finish you up yesterday but" he said "I didn't get it" because we didn't have mobile phones then. He said, "I didn't get the message, but" he said "look, it's Saturday morning, you are here now," he said, "You'll get paid." And that was the first bad...the recession that Saturday, they started paying a half shift for Saturday.¹³ So he said to me "Look, you don't have to do this, you can go home"...so I went home.

Interviewer: And he gave you half the shift?

Noel: He paid me the half shift.

Interviewer: But that's all you got for 10 years?

Noel: Yeah...because I went into the site he didn't tell me on Saturday or Friday because he didn't know, but the job was finished then, the job was finished. And two weeks later a courier came to the house with a letter. I didn't have a mobile either and Mary, when I came home she said "Look, Harringtons are after sending out a courier, do you want to go back to work?" They wanted me to go Working but I wouldn't go because it was too far. And I wouldn't go back either because of the principle; the way they laid me off.

¹² Mary, Noel's wife, joins in conversation here.

¹³ Conventional wage arrangements, even in the casualised employment market of the construction industry, was to pay a full-shift, i.e. a full day's pay, for approximately 6-hours work on a Saturday, the equivalent of 'time-and-a-half' pay as set out in the National Working Rule Agreements. Therefore to be reduced to a half-day's pay represented a cut of 50% in the normal Saturday pay.

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Interviewer: Well I was going to say after 10 years and all you get is a thanks-very-much...byebye!

Noel: Yes...but I was with them, they paid me...They weren't bad, they were alright to work for. It was...you were busy, you earned your few bob.

Interviewer: Long time 10 years, without as much as how-do-you-do! Mind you I suppose if they said you were on SE60 or...self-employed, I suppose...tough luck, y'know.

Noel: That's right, and I left them and as I said I got laid off and then I was working and doing bits and pieces. And then I went back driving cranes, you know, for everybody - a week here and week there. We done a bit of work for Jim Shanahan and Mel Witney. That was before though wasn't it?

I think it was after you were laid off with Harrington I'm sure it was then yes...¹⁴

Noel: Did I do a bit of work...for...

Yes, you and Terry...you remember?¹⁵

Noel: I think was before wasn't it?

Interviewer: It's hard to remember sometimes it doesn't matter.

Noel: Myself and Terence we were sort of, we were sub-contracting from one sub-contractor to another sort-o-thing¹⁶...

Interviewer: It's funny now, I was even the same myself when I sat down and tried to work out who I worked for over the years, I couldn't get it in the right order.

Noel: I did do a bit of work for Jim Shanahan and another guy called Mel Witney and Griffins and that other Higgins's crowd, they use to do a lot of work like Paddington Churches; houses and refurbishing houses all up around North London, Willesden, Harlesde, Kilburn, Cricklewood, all of them areas.

Interviewer: Tidy work I'd say.

Noel: Yeah, yeah so myself and Terry use to do all the gutting out and all the stud work and partitioning and drains, yes.

Interviewer: So when did you end up going to Expanded or whatever...Laing O'Rourke?¹⁷

¹⁴ Noel's wife, Mary, joins in conversation.

¹⁵ Noel's wife, Mary, joins in conversation.

¹⁶ This refers to 'sub-sub-contracting'. A multi-tiered sub-contract chain is a common practice in the construction industry even today. As the chain descends from Employer/Mian Contractor downwards, the legal and socio-economic relationships become more and more informal and casualised.

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Noel: I was working different firms...Falcon Crane Hire, Euro Lift, Gainsfort.

Interviewer: Because there was loads of different plant hire firms.

Noel: Yes lots of them, and then obviously I got a start...I was working for Harrington...so I was working for Harrington on a job here in Romford and it was a company called Trollope & Colls Ltd, which were part of Trafalgar House, which is now Skanska. And it was Agent Plant Hire (the specialist plant hire firm Trollope & Colls used) and when I was working for Harringtons the cranes belonged to Agent Plant Hire and I got to know the guy that was in charge of the Agent Plant Hire drivers, was a man called Alan N, when I was working there. I had his number, he gave me his number, so obviously I carried on working for Harringtons for a good while. But then as I said there was no work around in the late 80s and then I started doing other bits. And then I started to go back looking for jobs driving cranes again so I tried different companies. And then I rang this guy Alan X ...no...tell a lie...didn't I go work, I went out to out to...um...out towards that place on the A4 there, the big drug the pharmaceutical company, GlaxoSmithKline ...they were building a big complex there. And a young lad rang me and he said to me are you working Noel? And I said...

Interviewer: That's out as you go out towards Heathrow?

Noel: That's right, so I said no, a young fellow called Bill D and he says, there is a job, Alan N is looking for drivers. So he said to me give him a ring; so I gave him a ring and he started me. And that was with Delta; Agent became Delta and...then obviously they went belly - up the plant hire side - and O'Rourke's bought them out and they became Select Plant Hire.

Interviewer: And you went there.

Noel: That was 20 years ago and I'm with them since.

Interviewer: That's permanent now?

Noel: That's permanent, yeah. That was always with Delta as well - PAYE¹⁸ and Falcon Crane Hire - that was PAYE, Gainsford; and Gainsford became Euro Lift, Gainsford were a real old crane hire company.

Interviewer: So from the late 70s that's mainly what you did driving cranes and you had gone off the shovel by then!

Noel: Yes that's right yeah...I got promotion! (Laughter)... yes! And you-know-what-I-mean, as I said I enjoyed - I did, I really enjoyed it. And it's only the latter years, y'know, that I...

¹⁷ Expanded Piling Ltd were a specialist bored concrete piling sub-contractor who later became a subsidiary of the Irish-owned construction giant, Laing O'Rourke.

¹⁸ Pay-As-You-Earn, a universally recognised abbreviation within construction for being 'properly' employed as an employee by a company.

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Interviewer: London was very...I mean my memories, I was a young teenager then in the late 70s early 80s and it was...the Irish community in London was thriving.

Noel: Buzzing it was, it was incredible, there was so many Irish here it was unreal, every Saturday night you went out you felt like you were back at home!

Interviewer: And in my experience anyway it didn't matter which area of London you went to, it was full of them. People for a long time thought there wasn't that many in the East End, it was full of Irish.

Noel: Full of Irish in the East End there was a big Irish community in the East End and obviously there was a lot of good pubs and clubs and the auld catholic clubs as well, St. Anne's I think that's...

Interviewer: In Whitechapel.

Noel: I think that's where I met John Carty the first time...the father.

Interviewer: You would have done, he was a regular.

Noel: That's right yeah and Jimmy Searson obviously and then obviously all the different pubs around East London it was great music in quite a few of them.

Interviewer: And then you could take a wander up to Camden Town again.

Noel: Well that was a regular thing for me, Camden Town. I used to go down there most Saturday nights to see my brother always, because he was an alcoholic and he died a very young man as well, he was only 41, yes. And that time when I came over from Ireland as well, when I came in the 60s, he had a drink problem. Even though he worked on the buildings and obviously he had to give it up, he wasn't able for it and he got a job...

Interviewer: That happened to my dad's younger brother as well, I don't know if you remember him?

Noel: I don't.

Interviewer: Jimmy he was 52 when he died same thing, drink, just overtakes you if you let it.

Noel: That's right and my brother god love him, he thought he didn't have a problem and he had a great wife and she done everything possible she could for him.

Interviewer: Yep, that's the worse of it, we all think, most of us can't see the problems that we have got in front of us most of the time.

Noel: And I use to go down and see him regular on a Saturday night and obviously loved the auld Irish music as well, and we use to always pay a visit to The

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Constitution in York Way, there was always a session there. Y'know?¹⁹ Even Dessie Halloran and the brother that used to play there as well, so it was a great auld pub for the music.

Interviewer: There was so many sessions around London at that time.

Noel: It was incredible, incredible...Camden Town as well.

Interviewer: I mean you literally could pick...there must have been dozens and dozens of pubs that you could go to at that time.

Noel: There was. There was so many, you didn't know which one to go for was the best, where the best craic was. And then we had a great choice of dance halls as well, because there was twenty-six Irish dance halls in London, twenty-six! And funnily enough the night the Galtymore closed down, myself and herself we were up in Cricklewood; we were up in the Windmill – not the Windmill - the Castle up from the Galtymore...was it the...it was a 50th birthday party. No, no...Eileen's 50th wasn't it? a friend of ours from Hackney, Eileen Burke, her daughters used to...her two daughters used to play the music. We were up there for her 50th birthday and about half-eleven quarter-to-twelve the kids came in, well they weren't kids they were teenagers, 'oh the Galtymore is closing!' and the next thing there was no one left in the pub. So we all went down to the Galtymore and I was going to go home and then I turned back.

Interviewer: Would you have frequented the Galty in earlier days?

Noel: Yes before I met Mary; with my aunts when I lived down in Surrey and my sister and my two aunts and my aunts partner Tommy, the guy that I was working for with Simplex Piling, we use to come up to London every Saturday night to the Galtymore.

Interviewer: It was a legendary place.

Noel: It was and I remember seeing them all there, and then you had the Ceili side and the trad, and the modern side.

Interviewer: It was a brilliant idea.

Noel: It was of course, it was excellent.

Interviewer: Because you know dad worked for Byrnes for a good while with Roger Sherlock and some of the stories he used to tell me about Byrnes and the craic that used to go on there.

Noel: And that place it would be mobbed every Saturday night. Well it was great idea because you couldn't go wrong, if you were into traditional music you got your fill, if you were into country music you got your fill too. And obviously there was all the

¹⁹ Another well-known Irish-house in Camden Town/St. Pancras area of north London, right in the centre of the London-Irish community of the post-war era.

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great musicians they all played there as well every single one of them. They played some part of an auld Ceili band or...y'know there was never the same half a dozen guys, you might never see them twice, up on the stage.

Interviewer: And where - would you have...when you were out subbing and moving around the industry if you like, where did you get most of your work from? because I know a lot of the other guys that I have talked to, always said that they if they were stuck for work which they were most of the time, but even when they weren't stuck for work you'd be in the pub having a pint.

Noel: That's right, contacts that was the way it was. And if you knew someone and...if he didn't know he'd say I know someone who is looking for a couple of lads for tomorrow morning. And it was the same in Hackney; there was a few men in Hackney that would always guarantee a man a job, they'd find you something. And one of them was Tommy Mc - I'm still friends with him today your father knows him well as well, he's from Emly in Co. Tipperary, he is working for McNicholas now and he worked for Bill Kelly for years. And obviously he used to be a ganger-man...foreman and he was into everything as well.

Interviewer: He'd know the boys.

Noel: Yeah, yeah, yeah...and if he didn't know someone that Kelly wanted or someone else, he'd know someone that was looking for...and he'd make it his business. And he done all his business in the pub, yes the paying out of the boys and everything; in the Dolphin in Mare Street. Your father knows this man well.

Interviewer: Brian Rooney told me that the pub was the labour exchange! (Laughter)

Noel: It was! And I remember when they started paying, I was working in Camden Town in Murray Street, Camden Passage, Camden Mews and they were building new town houses there, and I was working with a bloke called Mick Cahill, he use to play the spoons.

Interviewer: I remember Mick.

Noel: He's a Clare man.

Interviewer: I remember Mick he used to play in the Favourite?

Noel: That's right and he started...he started paying us by cheque and we used to go to the George Robey²⁰ in Finsbury Park to go to the little hole in the wall. And then you'd have to put your cheque, at the time, in there and you might have to wait for half an hour and it was always guaranteed you'd have a pint or a bit of dinner, because they used to do big dinners in there.

Interviewer: Was it an Irish house at that time?

²⁰ Another London-Irish public house well-known to the Irish community around north and east London.

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Noel: It was yea, was it Redburn was his name? The last pub he was in was the Mulberry Tree in Holloway Road.

Interviewer: Ah yeah I was in there myself.

Noel: And big Joe Sheerin that used to have the Dolphin, a Roscommon man, he went up to that pub on St. Patrick's night and he ordered a drink and he dropped dead on the floor.

Interviewer: In there?

Noel: In there yes.

Interviewer: I didn't know that. I remember that man.

Noel: A tumour, brain haemorrhage, same thing, dropped dead after ordering a drink.

Interviewer: That Joe Sheerin did he have a brother something like a councillor or something like that, he was in Camden?

Noel: Well his brother - I'm not sure about a councillor now - but his brother Pdraig he ran the dance hall on Holloway Road - the Gresham he owned it. And his other brother Declan he was a teacher back in Ireland, in Dublin. And he used to come over every summer for the 3 weeks to work on the buildings.

Interviewer: Was he from Knockvicar or somewhere in Roscommon?

Noel: He's around somewhere...

Interviewer: He's Knockvicar, I think yeah.

Noel: And we were at his funeral and someone got up and gave a little speech, and they said that Joe had been an All-Ireland Champion Wrestler! Now we were going into that pub for years, no one ever knew about this Joe but you could tell he done something because he was afraid of nobody. And if there was any trouble there he was the first man to be out and sort it out. He'd smother it. And if he heard any man tapping for money, he'd come out and you'd get a belt and he'd tell you if anyone is taking money here, I'm taking it! (Laughter)

Interviewer: And, come'er tell me - when you had to go to the Robey to get your cheque changed, did they charge you?

Noel: They did yeah, it was five pence in the pound, which was a lot of money and...y'know... that went on for years.

Interviewer: That was the system.

Noel: Yes, yes and obviously that went on for many years and it made many publicans multimillionaires, even my own friend's brother very wealthy man.

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Interviewer: Well let's be honest if you talked to someone like Reg Hall, Reg would tell you most of the Irish dance halls were paid for by the construction industry as well.

Noel: They were of course. It made a lot of Irish men - the pub game, the entertainment game or whatever it made them very rich.

Interviewer: Bill Fuller made his money even before he wouldn't have bought the Buffalo only for the fact that they made a shed load of money out of building.

Noel: Of course.

Interviewer: And he was very smart. I have some pictures of what happened with the Buffalo was, during the war it got bombed and Camden town tube station got bombed and the Buffalo got bombed as well. And when he...he was operating a building company at that time, Bill Fuller, and he did a deal with whatever it must have been the London transport, or whoever it was - to clear the debris from the bomb site. And in return his price was so much extra of the space that they had a bit of land basically and it kind of...it didn't double, but it maybe added 50% to the size of his dance hall. So when he rebuilt it, it was bigger...clever man.

Noel: I don't know much about the history of the Buffalo I don't know when the Buffalo first opened, in the late 50s was it?

Interviewer: Even earlier than that, I'd say it was the late 40s, no even before that, that club was there in the 30s.

Noel: But it wasn't an Irish club?

Interviewer: It was an Irish club but it wasn't - it had an even worse reputation than it did in the 50s and it was closed because there was trouble. And Fuller this is the legend according to all the stories, Fuller went to the local chief-super whoever he was at the time, basically said to him, if you let me open the club again, I'll guarantee you that you won't have any trouble from...the customers...I'll deal with the trouble myself and he did, because he was a wrestler as well apparently. And a very handy one.

Noel: I could imagine yeah.

Interviewer: It is another interesting fact that not a lot of people would know. Bill Fuller that owned a massive empire from dance halls and John Byrne who built a massive empire from dance halls, went to the same national school! They were in the same class at school and all the way through their lives it's said that they were...they weren't bitter rivals...but they were rivals!

Noel: I didn't know anything about them.

Interviewer: Both from a place called Finuge or something like that in Kerry.

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Noel: He wouldn't be anything now to Byrne Brothers...Patsy Byrne - the contractor?

Interviewer: No they are different...south Limerick or somewhere?

Noel: I don't know, no, I think he was Caherciveen, Patsy Byrnes yeah, that was a big funeral there; he's only been dead about 3 or 4 years.

Interviewer: They're a formwork outfit, I think...

Noel: That's right yeah...A very nice man as well - a proper gentleman.

Interviewer: Did you ever work for them?

Noel: I did for a little while, and I worked on their sites driving the cranes but not directly for them, through the plant hire company.

Interviewer: Apart from the, we have come near to the end, I don't want to keep you much longer it's getting late. Did you ever...well there is two questions I always ask, everyone goes on about the signs in the lodging houses about *no blacks, no dogs, no Irish*. Even my mum and dad now reckon that...

Noel: That wasn't true.

Interviewer: Not that it wasn't true, but they didn't see it.

Noel: I read something about that.

Interviewer: There is a fellow in American who is alleging it isn't true. I think my own gut feeling is that the reality was that it was true, but it wasn't as prolific, as they say.

Noel: I don't think so no, I can't...I have recollection I have seen it in print on the press, but I don't think I ever seen it in lodging house. I have only had a few things said to me over the years....

Interviewer: Apart from the police did you ever had any other...

Noel: Only a couple here and there, y'know, the kind of "Why don't you fuck off to Ireland where you came from". But that was only about twice, I think, in the years that I have been here. I found that I got on with most people. But yes. That was heavily-outweighed by all the good points, of course, yes. Yes I never came across any great deal of grief anywhere, an odd occasion it was always the same some arrogant bastard, y'know what-I-mean - pass comment about you...your nationality, race whatever.

Interviewer: Yes and did you ever end up working with any of the other ethnic minorities, the African, Caribbean's or?

Noel: Not so much now, there used to be a lot of West Indies working on the buildings a lot of them; they were brick layers and carpenters. But not so much now,

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back in the...when I came here first in the 70s, there was quite a lot of them. And obviously I done a lot of work over the years in big housing estates as well.

Interviewer: Did you all mix in together?

Noel: We did yeah, we use to chat in the canteen as well, but obviously after work we went our separate ways. They had their own little communities, even in Hackney...

Interviewer: They had their own pubs?

Noel: Well one of their pubs was the Dolphin, Joe's...the public bar was theirs; you'd never see any of them in the saloon bar, which there wasn't much difference between the two bars anyway.

Interviewer: Rooney and I remember this, the William IV in the Harrow Road when Rooney and Paddy Hayes used to play up there. There was always over in the other corner, there'd be a gang of West Indies playing dominos, y'know, and there was never any hassle.

Noel: There was never animosity at all among the people, and it was the very same as well in The Adam & Eve in Homerton High Street.²¹ The public bar was predominately used by the West Indians and yer man at the time, which was my friend, he was the manager there for Taylor Walkers, he reckoned he said they were way better customers than the Irish man he said, and there was never any grief! And he said when they came in he said they'd spend and he said they were top shelf men and they were, top-shelf.

Interviewer: But you know what's interesting now, I'm not going to put words in your mouth and make you say it now because it's too late, but you are the first...the one thing you haven't mentioned in this interview that almost everybody else did, was the fact that for the most part nearly everyone that interviewed said that they'd much rather work for an English man than an Irish man, because they were getting stitched up by their own. And you know what, I used to think that that was a peculiar thing about the Irish. And then I was listening to a documentary about 3 or 4 weeks ago on Radio 4, about ethnicity in Britain and Will Self who was the presenter, he went into a garage up in Birmingham that was run by these two West Indian men, and he was chatting away to them. And it just struck me, because he said to them, who are your best customers? and they said oh definitely the white people...wouldn't work for a West Indian, they are completely...they would never pay you on time. And it just struck me that's exactly what we say about...

Noel: It's funny isn't it. But you see...because I never really worked for any English men, it was nearly all Irish men and I found the most of them...you were paid. I was knocked a few times as well, I never got paid.

Interviewer: I think it's very hard to go through the building industry especially as a self-employed or subbing and not get knocked at some time.

²¹ A working-class Irish pub in Homerton, Hackney in the late post-war period.

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Noel: That's right, I wasn't stung for too much, a couple of weeks here and there, when the subbie had his last final payment from the job and he done a runner and left people suffering...the last job that it happened to me was actually at The Angel, when they were redeveloping the Angel.²² And it was Balfour Beattys were the contractors there. And obviously it was a sub-contractor that had sub-contracted it out to someone else. And this Irish man, several of the guys there hadn't been paid for weeks and weeks, and obviously was coming up to Christmas and they thought well we won't get no job. So they carried on regardless and the next thing your man had done a runner. And the sites...they weren't liable for any of it, it was down to the sub-contractor that he had been paid. So there was a couple of men there that were crying.

Interviewer: I'd say you are going to see a lot of that happening now even with the Carrillion thing

Noel: Well you see the thing with the Carrillion the small man is going to get stung there, the small contractor, it won't affect the big contractors. That job I was in the Barbican there, Corallines done all the new development there in Barts, it's called Barts Square. So obviously they sold off the land for development and that. But Carrillion went pear shaped there and all the big contractors, they just got people in there on the Monday and they took all their plant off site. But the small man wasn't allowed to go in and get his tools, obviously all the ordering and paperwork. And that was private they won't even get paid.

Interviewer: It's a big stitch-up.

Noel: Of course but the public sector as well all the obviously for the hospitals and schools, the government is going to carry on paying them until April. And it was the same in Ireland as well they had several schools there, but they were 90% finished which wasn't too bad.

Interviewer: Still a stitch-up.

Noel: Yes you know. And another man as well down in Old Street he stitched us up for about a months wages as well.

Interviewer: This is a random question but did you ever come across the Elephant?

Noel: John Donoghue? Yes I knew him well, I did indeed. Sure he lived in Hackney, he was a character alright, he was Mr. Murphy's right hand man.

Interviewer: You never worked for him?

Noel: No, no...never worked with him no. But every morning you go into Murphy's yard he was always there at the gate. John Murphy himself would drive in there in the mornings, he use to always have a big white Mercedes and he'd stop at the gate and park the Merc up, himself and the Elephant would have a chat, Mr. Murphy and himself would get into the car and drive around the yard. And they'd come back down

²² The Angel Islington is an area bordered by City Road and Upper Street in Islington, a very sought-after inner suburb of north London.

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and drop the Elephant off at the gate and Murphy would drive up at the offices. That was every morning. And the Elephant I had many's a craic with him in the pubs in Hackney. And his particular pub at the time, years ago...used to always drink in The Birdcage in Stamford Hill. And that's where he was supposed to...this lad a Liverpool lad, she was a barmaid in there and she was supposed to...he was supposed to be his son, but I don't know what truth is in that. But he ended his life - he lived down Hackney Wick, he had a flat there, and he used to go into the Eagle and he was always in the bookies and not long before he died, myself and Frank Hogan we were going down to the Eagle, and he was coming out of William Hill's, the bookies, because he knew Frank. He used to come into The Britannia in Mayor Street because a lot of the lads from Murphys used to drink in the Britannia. There was quite a few Irish men in Hackney worked for Murphys – the Grey and the Green.

Interviewer: Another man, who knew him well told me he worked with the Elephant for years and he said exactly what you said, he said to me, "Jesus that man must have spent a fortune in the bookies."

Noel: He did and they reckon when he died he had nothing...nothing. They reckon Murphy looked after him...because they use to say he was his son as well.

Interviewer: Yes...they reckon that's a load of old....

Noel: Course it was. But yeah he'd talk away to you, have the craic with you, but he was a ruthless man and they reckon but if you worked with him and you done your work you got well looked after.

Interviewer: Well you see that's the other thing and again John H confirmed exactly the same thing, he said there were men who worked for him for 20 or 30 years and would never work with anybody else. So he must have had some way...

Noel: Yes. They reckon if you worked for the Elephant and you were on his gang or whatever you were well looked after, well paid. Obviously if you weren't able to do it anyway you wouldn't be in the gang.

Interviewer: He'd get shot of you anyway.

Noel: Yes and you see in those days as well, I remember years ago, you'd be out...you could be anywhere...and you have your break; you'd have an afternoon break as well, and they use to come out and bring that out to you on the site, you could get a cup or anything – like a cup of tea, because we always use to finish for tea break at 3 o'clock, but it was 15 minute breaks. I remember, then, the big sites then the alarm would go off; the hooter and break time and if you weren't into the canteen quick enough the hooters would be gone off to go back out again! There was a lot of big contractors back then, they are all gone now. And obviously I suppose GLC was one of the biggest employers, they were just building thousands of apartments and flats, the GLC. Who was the last man in there, Ken?

Interviewer: Ken I think yeah. I personally my memories of that now I was only young but that always seemed like a pretty good time, plenty of work.

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Noel: There was plenty of work, plenty of housing estates been built by the councils. Big one in Tottenham there in Ferry Lane that was massive, there was a public enquiry went into that, because it went way over budget and was taken way too long to build. That was huge.

Interviewer: I just wondered now if you ever came across John Donohue.

Noel: The Elephant yes and he used to go into the pub as well I think it's gone as well the one up beside the hospital the Homerton Hospital, I think they called it the London Hospital. Remember the one Larry and Marie were in, Mary, that pub...

Interviewer: Did he drink in the Tiger as well?

Noel: He used to go into the Tiger. And then he'd go into the Enterprise as well, is it the Enterprise? - the one across from William Hills. That was an Irish-house as well. It's a black man's pub now; the Enterprise and then you got Enterprise you got William Hills the bookies, that's Barnabas Road, there, he use to have another Irish put there the Alma it was called, near Homerton Station and then you had the Eagle. But he tried a bit of auld music in there over the years as well Patsy Webster he's still there. But that was Jim O'Keefe's pub, Jim O'Keefe sold him the lease on it.

Yes, and Jim O'Keefe had the Tiger, I don't know if you knew Jim O'Keefe, your father would probably know him. He worked for the breweries...actually worked in the breweries, which one? I think it was Taylor Walker, Ind-Coope? Taylor-Walker, he worked in their offices for many years and he used to serve as a bar man himself. He worked in the Britannia for years. There was a man there from Galway, Frank Cannon was his name; he played senior hurling for Galway. And then he used to play for the Gabriels. We use to have all the big do's there...wherever they won trophies or anything and they use to have great dos in the Britannia in Mare Street, which became Mr. Pepys beside the Town Hall and now it's amalgamated with the Hackney Empire - it's all one. I think you go from the pub into the Empire.

Interviewer: There is virtually...I don't know what Hackney is like now, but there is no Irish pubs left in Bethnal Green.

Noel: There is - no...even the Bohola is gone - someone said it's closed.

Interviewer: It's gone yeah...closed.

Interviewer: There is a big contractor from Achill, actually, that I was...

Noel: Mitchelson?

Interviewer: Is he from Achill?

Noel: He is, yeah.

Interviewer: No Masterson.

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Noel: Yes...Getjar?

Interviewer: Yes.

Noel: Masterson he went to school John with Mary's brother-in-law Tony McLoughlin, he's a big contractor.

(Mary: And he's married to my best friend's sister.)

Noel: There is Martin Masterson, right, but Martin Masterson is Mitchelsons, there is a Cork man and Achill man Mayo man and obviously Getjar is Masterson...they are no relation but they are from the same village it's called Dereens that's where her mother and father are buried up in the cemetery and obviously there is only the one pub up there Johnny Pattons.

End.

Original Interview # 21 – Joe Mc – Antrim

Interviewer: Yeah that kind of thing. As soon as you'd put a new, say... a new lift lobby screen in or something like that you'd come back the next night, it would be gone. They'd nick it, you know.

Joe: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: And the director, this Mayo fellow, he says, ah there's only one way to sort this out. We have to find out whose nicking it and pay him.

Joe: Well it's the same thing.

Interviewer: That's more or less what you had to do like. You know, pay them not to nick it.

Joe: I mean there's nothing smart about Belfast in comparison to Tottenham, you know what I mean. They still learn pretty quick in either city like, or whatever way you want to look at it, aye.

Interviewer: Well, come here. We did start talking so, you were talking about your em...

Joe: Upbringing yeah?

Interviewer: Your upbringing. So educationally wise did you have a regular sort of?

Joe: Okay I grew up... let's put it this way. I went to a Catholic school in Randalstown. We were bused in to that school at the time. The last of the hunger-strikers went to that school as well. We won't go into names or anything like that, you know the '81 hunger strikers, that type thing. He was in the same class as my sister. So the local community would have called our school a *nest of vipers*, you know, they'd sort of look...our headmaster would have been, you know, head spokesman for the hunger strikers and all that at the time. All that type of stuff.

I then went to a technical college in Antrim town ah, now, I think there was...we done what I think was called a pre-apprenticeship class. The idea of that was very good actually, when you think, we're talking about from '66 or something like that and the idea was pretty good. You went in and done a bit of fitting, done a bit of turning, a bit of electric work. You done a bit of woodwork or whatever it was, to see what you were any good at, and that type thing. So...done the pre-apprenticeship course. At the end of that, the way it was at that time, the ship yard came around and dealt out application forms, you know, to everyone; Mackeys foundry and all of these engineering firms and that type thing. Now the strange thing was, there was 32 in that class, there was only 2 of us Catholic, the rest, 30 sort of, of the Unionist community. Now they all got a job except me and this other Catholic at the time. You know...

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Interviewer: The only two Catholics.

Joe: The only two. Like, you know, when you, when we were rated at that time, I was about 19th in this class but the other Catholic - whose mother actually was a school teacher - he done pretty well, I think he was actually first in the class and this is how blatant it was, at that particular time, in the ship-yard. I think in the ship-yard at that particular time you had about 11,000 employees, 500 of them at that time were Catholics and were known as ah, grease-monkeys, all you were able to do was go around and grease the machines, you know what I mean, that way.

Interviewer: That's all you were let do?

Joe: That's all you were let do is another way of putting it. So, this, I went back, I applied for a job, and my father, he burst out laughing. "You won't get a job", he said. "You might get a job labouring", he said, "You won't get a job..."

Interviewer: Is this in the ship-yard you mean?

Joe: Yeah, or yeah, cos I went back home to my dad, you know, and I said, "Well I filled in the forms, you know." He said, "a waste of time". I said, "What do you mean"? I said, "I'm doing alright", you know the way you think as a 16-year-old. "Ah, don't take no heed of it", he said. He was right. So that was the end of that.

Interviewer: did you say your father was a Galway man?

Joe: No, my grandfather was.

Interviewer: Your grandfather was, sorry, right.

Joe: So, he was a Fall's Road man, but he had it worked out like, it was a total waste of time, you know, but I was young and smart and knew it all and he knew nothing, you know.

Interviewer: As we all did.

Joe: Like 15 years of age, that type, but nothing happened. Eventually wound up not as a, not as a trade, the best I could get at the time - again by a Catholic called Joe and Joe was an older man. I'd gone to school with his daughters and sons, so you know - a big factory, ejector seats for aircraft in Langford Lodge, it was called. So I got a job there helping the fitters...*helping the fitters*. It was all hilarious stuff. They'd give you a box with 10,000 half-inch screws in it, about ¼ of an inch, just come off a machine, and a needle file, so you'd sit there all day with about 8,000 and when you'd that box finished you'd beg them to give you another file [Laughter], and the fuckers would

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give you the same size and off you went again. I got two-and-nine pence an hour at that particular time. That's what I started off as a, you know, at 16 years of age.

Interviewer: What year was this, ish?

Joe: '66.

Interviewer: Right.

Joe: So by '68, ah, they sacked a lot of us. I don't know why at that particular time, they sacked all the young ones, like us, you know. So we got sacked. That left me sort of on the dole round Antrim town and that type stuff. Wound up, ah, various jobs, construction jobs, there was a big job in Antrim town at that time called British Enkalon. They'd come in to build this big factory there. Worked on that with my father for a while.

Interviewer: Was your father a builder?

Joe: Ah, he used to drive machines and em, ah, he used to em, drive cranes, you know, them tall cranes in the city and all that type thing in Belfast.

Interviewer: Okay. So you would have had some experience of, you would have, how would you put it, you would have, you wouldn't have felt out of place on a construction site?

Joe: No, no, no, not at all. Even at 17 years of age I was on a construction site, you know, in Antrim town, in my own locality, you know. I didn't have to go to England to learn what a construction site was, if you follow what I mean.

Interviewer: You weren't a green-horn when it came to building?

Joe: No, but I can remember actually being in a trench, ah, my father was the, ah, my father was driving a JCB, and eh, this ganger man, my father was a very cantankerous old fucker, now for want of a better word...

Interviewer: Ah that's the ideal description.

Joe: Yeah. Nobody would work with him, so this ganger man had the wonderful idea like, well you're his son, you can go work with him.

Interviewer: That was probably worse again!

Joe: Yeah. So, he put me down as banks-man with him, so anyway I wound up in the trench when my father ... so anyway I turned round and the next thing he put the bucket under my arse and fucked me out of the trench, and the whole place was in an uproar and the ganger man said

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well you didn't last too long did you, so he put me away fucking cleaning. No, he put me with another man who was a carpenter, so I was his mate for the rest of the time.

Interviewer: The worst thing you can do in my experience anyway, I worked about a month working with my dad as a mate. He was a chippy, you know, ah, it was a disaster, a disaster. Cos, you can't do anything right. Didn't matter what you were doing, it's wrong. Even when it's right, it wrong. It's not as good as he'd do it.

Joe: He done it that well, my father, done it that well, he brought the bucket in like that, under my arse, picked me up like that and threw me off to the side. And I mean it was really quite skilful what he done. No damage. Very cleverly done like. He must have thought I was doing nothing like. That was the end of me like. That was a firm called McLoughlin & Harvey, like. The general foreman at the site at that time was known as *The Father*. That's what he was known as. The GF was known as *The Father* on site. But, eh, I messed around like that for a while, you know, and eh, the Troubles in Northern Ireland loomed in. Antrim was the first town that anything happened. There was a Civil Rights march by the students from Queens University to Derry and they walked into Antrim town and they were stopped in Antrim town. This is the town that was familiar to me like. And I remember watching it on the news that night. This was quite strange. This was on the ITN news, you know, a Civil Rights march. I think that must have been '68, was it around...

Interviewer: It was '68, yeah.

Joe: '68 yeah. This Civil Rights march stopped at the head of Antrim town.

Interviewer: That's the one John Hume, I think was...

Joe: Yeah, but this was before it took off, so this was the very first time they'd come across anything, they were stopped by the locals; by the police in Antrim town. So, I was actually with my father. My father had me in the car taking me up for a job interview in this factory called Ceramics which made little – y'know, little things for, ah, transistor radios. It was night-shift and I was working on kilns and I had a Potentiometer to take the heat of the kilns all night long. I lasted about 2 weeks at that but, you know this Civil Rights thing had took off and all the rest. Now Antrim, we'd basically go around doing our life. There wasn't much difference, even though there was trouble maybe in Belfast, and trouble you know, in Derry, and that type thing. It still seemed light years away from, even though Antrim town is only 17 mile from Belfast you know...

Interviewer: A different place.

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Joe: Yeah, with an 18-year-old mind you think, ah well, that's a long way away. It eventually got to Antrim. I was in Antrim town one day. I was on the dole and eh, in them days, they used to pay you cash over the counter, they actually had cash over the counter. And I remember what I got, I got ten pound and ten shillings. And eh, there was two guys with me and they got their eh, they were getting about six pound, but because I had worked in various places my dole money was more, do you see what I mean, like. I remember getting more than them. Now this is a long-drawn affair.

Interviewer: No. Go on, you carry on.

Joe: So, on it went. Down we went into the middle of the town. Started drinking. At 6 o'clock in the evening - this is when my life changed - at 6 o'clock in the evening, one of them was called Paddy and the other was called John. We were drinking all day our dole money, you know, as teenagers or maybe a twenty-year-old, or whatever at the time, and eh, 6 o'clock, Paddy says to me, "I'm going. We're going to go to Celtic Park" the dog track on the Falls Road, "me and John, come on with us". I said, "No". Something, instantly told me, no. Don't ask me where it came from. I had this awful feeling, you know, I just knew, no-way, was I going near Belfast that night from Antrim. See, Antrim was a bit north of, Antrim town was a wee bit north of Belfast. No way was I going. They were waiting on the bus and they kept saying, "Come on, come on, the bus is coming, come on." And I said "no, no, no" I just knew not to. And I walked away feeling very strange. I walked away and I went to Ballymena that night.

Yeah. So, I went the other direction. I went to Ballymena. I woke up the following morning and I came down. Had a bit of a hangover, cos I could never handle drink, some people could handle it, but whatever it was with me I just didn't have a normal hangover, you know, to me it was dire. And eh, came down, and my mother had a big radiogram, one of them big wooden radiograms in the kitchen and a lovely range fire was nice and hot and it looked very pleasant, and I sat down and have a cup of tea and then the news came on. Last night in Belfast, two people were murdered last night in Belfast. Two Catholics, one was John McNulty, and the other was Paddy Kelly, you know.

Interviewer: Were these your two...

Joe: These were my two buddies, at 6 o'clock the night before. And I thought, did I hear that right. So obviously the next news cast, I was much more, you know, intent on listening and it was them. Now, there were no phones in them days, I don't think we had a phone. I think the neighbour at the end of the laneway in Antrim had a phone the Murphy's, so we used their phone if anything...like a crisis happened. In the mean time I went in to Antrim town Paddy Kelly's brother came up to me and he said to me "it was Paddy, Joe!". He said, "I was called

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in to Tenants St Police Station to identify him in Belfast." And he said...Paddy Kelly was a boxer, from Ballymena, and he was pretty handy, he had a tri-colour tattooed there, on his muscle, yeah, and apparently, they skinned the tri-colour off him, that was, eh. Now, if you look at the Shankill and you look at the Falls I think they had been to the dog track and they wound up on Agnes Street, which sort of shoots across the two of them, to a cab, you know, to try and get a cab back to Antrim, and that's where they were sort of ... I think Leonard Murphy of, if you've ever heard of Murphy and that mob, the *Shankill Butchers*, as they were known – must've got hold of them and they really tortured them. You don't want to know what they done to them and all the rest of it. But his brother told me, he said he'd never seen Paddy Kelly afraid in his life, you know, growing up with him. As I say, he was a very handy boxer and would have been a lot better as well.

Interviewer: A tough cookie

Joe: Yeah. But he said, the two, these two eyes was staring out from, you know, his face with pure terror. Pure terror, like that, and he never seen this sort of expression. So, anyway, that changed Antrim town. It changed the area. It changed everything. And everybody's going, bloody hell, you know what I mean.

Interviewer: This is serious ...

Joe: This is serious shit, because the two of them had never done anything on anyone, you know what I mean, like they were just...

Interviewer: Ordinary lads.

Joe: They were just ordinary boys at the time. So, this changed things. Now I started trying to sleep after that and what happened was every time I tried to go to sleep I kept getting these visions of demons and all sorts of things, whether I had got, went mentally ill over it or whatever, I have no idea and I make no judgement on myself today as to what it was. So I used to go to bed with crucifixes on me and everything else. Didn't do any good whatsoever and there was this one thing, this one vision that used to petrify me. I'm talking, I'd get into bed, I'd just get into bed, close my eyes, I'm not talking about being half asleep, drowsing, just close my eyes it was like being in a cinema and zoom, this vision would come screaming up at me and it was a woman with a side profile, black-haired, very attractive looking woman and she'd start turning her head towards me to look in, and I'd never let her, I'd get up..

Interviewer: Wake up before...

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Joe: I wasn't asleep now, I was just, I'd just closed my eyes and I became petrified of *trying* to sleep. And I tried to stay awake as long as I could and everything else. I became so paranoid. And then I had this idea they were all going to murder me and it was getting worse and they were murdering drunks and I was going...I was using alcohol to sedate this madness or whatever you want to call it, and all the rest, so I got the idea that there's only one place I'm going and that's, eh, y'know that's London. And I'm thinking...

Interviewer: Did you, sorry to stop you in mid-track, but just while I think of it now, was that, but for this happening, had you ever entertained ideas about going to England prior to that. I mean was it something that people in your area did or?

Joe: That is a very good, good question because if that hadn't have happened, if Northern Ireland hadn't have happened, if the troubles hadn't have happened, you know, it goes on from that, what would we have done. Would we have found work in our local area or stayed or got married in your local area, had kids like everybody else done, and all the rest? But because of this incident, and it wasn't so much their death, it was *my reaction to their death*, and these were visions, and this mental, I don't know if you'd call it mental illness, or call it, you call it what you want, if anybody hears it, but to me it was, "What is going on with me? What is going on with me?" And I became so paranoid and everywhere I went I thought, I thought I was in a gun sight, it felt like, you know, you were in a gun sight, everywhere I walked my nerves became so bad the only thing that would calm me down was a drink and I became obsessed with getting drink, drink, drink. So anyway, I wound up ...

Interviewer: Why London? Why not Glasgow or Birmingham or?

Joe: Because, I heard, ah well you know what I mean, you'd hear things on the radio at that particular time about Camden Town, you know what I mean, Kilburn and Cricklewood, that type of thing and I had this idea, Camden Town is an Irish area, even though I know its England, and the English soldiers were over...It was very complex for me like, you had all these, all the Catholics, oh we can't have, you'd be a traitor if you went to England at that time from Northern Ireland, you'd be almost a traitor and I would have been seen as a traitor for quite a long time, trust me. So off I trod anyway to London town, but I had this idea that there was Irish areas in it and I wound up in Camden Town.

Interviewer: Did you the normal route, over on the boat from Down on the train?

Joe: No, I actually...my brother left me at Larne, you know you'd have Larne to Stranraer and he gave me a few pound as well ...

Interviewer: And you mentioned a bet earlier.

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Joe: Oh Yeah. I won forty-seven quid on a one-pound double in among all that.

Interviewer: Forty-seven quid probably wasn't a bad start?

Joe: It wasn't a bad start there at all, because, ah, let me think, yeah, 47 quid was a lot money, like.

Interviewer: I was thinking that. This is what '68, '69?

Joe: Yeah. You could've had about 8 or 10 pints for a pound so you can figure it out.

Interviewer: Forty-seven quid would have been two or three weeks wages?

Joe: It was. It actually was. So, I got on the boat, sucking diesel, sucking Guinness and there was a lorry driver on it. He was having a pint of Guinness that done him the whole way - he'd a Scammel. I said to him, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to London." I said, "I'll give you two quid if I can go down with you." I wasn't stupid either, I mean I might have had these visions and things, but at the same time I knew what I had to do. Ah he said that's alright. I gave him two quid. He drove me the whole way and he dropped me off at the Bank.

Interviewer: The Bank of England?

Joe: The Bank of...in London, like. All the way from Stranraer to the Bank of England for two quid. I thought it was a good deal. That was a fucking great deal.

Interviewer: That was a great deal. [Laughter]

Joe: A great deal. So, he dropped me off at the Bank and that was fine...

Interviewer: And you were right in the middle of London?

Joe: I'm right in the middle of London. And it was a Saturday morning.

Interviewer: By the way, did you have anybody in London?

Joe: No, no one at all. Because I left out of fear.

Interviewer: Yeah, this wasn't the chain migration.

Joe: No. this wasn't like my father had never been out of Ireland and eh, my mother...

Interviewer: You had no relations there?

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Joe: No relations or anything like that. So, it was just me, fleeing, I can't say, there just is no other word for it, I was just fleeing from my trauma and fear at that time. And as I say I felt like I was being - that I was actually in a gun sight and as I moved the, I was being hunted and it took twenty years before that left me. I thought moving, you know what I mean like, moving away, it didn't go away I still felt like that for twenty years.

Interviewer: Even in Camden Town?

Joe: Even in Camden Town. But I remember arriving in Camden Town and being, it was a Saturday morning and I was absolutely dumbfounded. I remember walking up... I got off at the Bank and I got on the underground and I nearly collapsed when I seen the depth of the escalator, the underground and all that. Then I seen this old lady hopping on in front of me and I thought, Jesus Christ, what's wrong with you, better follow that old woman. So, I followed this old woman, I figured it out anyway. You know the underground system is pretty easy to work out so I ended up in Camden Town so that was pretty easy.

Interviewer: So you made a bee-line for Camden?

Joe: Oh yeah

Interviewer: That was where you were heading?

Joe: This was where I was heading for. So, I got to Camden. Not that I knew much about it, only reports or listening to it on the radio or something, and I was absolutely dumbfounded. Walked up Parkway and it was a Saturday. It was about 12 o'clock, something like that and all I could hear was Irish rebel songs, blasting out of the pubs. Now this wouldn't happen in Northern Ireland. These were known as party tunes. You couldn't...in a pub, even if it was a Catholic pub, you couldn't start blasting out rebel songs in Northern Ireland, like, you know, for the locals going up and down by, but there they were in Camden.

Interviewer: And I would suggest there were a fare few parts of London where you wouldn't have done it.

Joe: Wouldn't have done it either. But Camden, I thought this was something else. I couldn't believe it. Anyway, there was a café, and I walked across to the café, and I went in. And I heard all these Irish voices and I said to one of them, "Is there anywhere I can get digs around here? It was called digs, or in my mind digs. And he was from the west of Ireland, "Ah you'll get a *lie-down*" - was the way he put it, I didn't know what a *lie-down* was but it made sense when I heard it, y'know - "You'll get a lie-down in the big house."..."Where's the big

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house?"..."Out there, turn left and you'll see it in front of you." And that was my introduction to Arlington House. I went down to Arlington House. There was a pub beside it.

Interviewer: So, you went straight to Arlington as soon as you landed in London?

Joe: As soon as I landed in London. It's because I got to Camden. And the other point was, down I went to Arlington House and there was...it was booking in time, say from twelve to two on a Saturday, and I got there and I joined the queue. There was about five or six in front of me. And this Joe-boy behind the counter says to me, eh, "Do you want to book in?" and I said yeah, he said "How long for?" And I said "a week." "Three-pounds-fifty" he said. I thought bloody hell, in the centre of London...Three-pound-fifty!

Interviewer: Nothing wrong with that.

Joe: No, what's wrong with that, nothing at all. Jeez I couldn't believe it. I was expecting forty-seven quid to go in one week or something, you know. So, it went on like that and the next thing, "Have you got I.D.?" which I had my I.D., alright, so he signed me in, gave me a key, round to the mixer, walked in there and it was a Belfast pub.

Interviewer: What was the name of this pub?

Joe: The Good Mixer. It's just on the corner of Inverness St and Arlington. Walked in there and in them days it was a Belfast pub, even though a Galway man owned it, it was a Belfast pub. I heard all these Belfast accents and I thought, fuckin' hell. I walked in anyway and I sat down and I got talking to a few of them like, and they were saying "Are ye just over? What's it like at home?" and all this, and I was telling them - they wanted updates, you know, as to how things were going. Anyway, I heard this one guy, Eugene, from Ardoyne, and I said to him, "Ah, where are you from, Ardoyne?"..."Aye surely, yeah." "How long are you here?" "Ten years", he says. I said, "What!" I couldn't believe that anybody would be ten years, you know, away from home. It seemed like, aww, unbelievable to me that somebody could survive. You see my mind was just to survive...for ten years!

Interviewer: You thought you were just going for a few months?

Joe: Yeah, whatever, but ten years, you know, and this kind of thing. I got on in the big house, and off like that for a while.

Interviewer: So, did you ever try to find anywhere else to stay or were you happy... just happy out?

Joe: I found it an amazing place. At that time there was eleven hundred and forty men in it. Every one of them was working. You paid cash on the

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counter. It's not like for the homeless and the way it is today. You paid cash on the counter; it was a *working man's* hostel. Anybody that travelled down from Newcastle, or travelled down from Scotland, you know, to do a job in London or something like that, they would book into Arlington.

Interviewer: So, this is in what?

Joe: '72 I'm talking about now.

Interviewer: So, is that when you went in '72?

Joe: That would have been when I went to London. I went back and forward before that, Liverpool and various places.

Interviewer: Ah you did a bit of knocking around?

Joe: Yeah, knocking around there.

Interviewer: So, I know this is probably a hard question to ask because, or answer because, em, it's one of the questions I asked Alex O'Donnell about whether there was statistical data and he said it had all been destroyed, but as you're somebody who lived in Arlington House then in 1972, if you had to call it percentage-wise, how many of the residents of those eleven hundred, or twelve hundred men, was it that would have been in there?

Joe: They were all men, yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, how many of those, roughly were Irish?

Joe: Ah, at that particular time you had 200 men- for a start - who *lived-in*, they *lived-in*, right? Lived-in the hostel.

Interviewer: But what does *lived-in* mean? Cos, I thought, they all lived-in.

Joe: Ah no. They lived-in and were employed all-found? Do you know what I mean by that?

Interviewer: No.

Joe: We would have booked in on a weekly basis. If you didn't have the money, you weren't in there the next week, do you follow what I'm saying?

Interviewer: So, you went from week to week?

Joe: You went from week-to-week. Or you could even book in one night. A lot of people booked in one night

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Interviewer: That's what I was saying earlier, my father was telling me you could book in one night.

Joe: Yeah, you could book in one night, three nights or a week. It was sort of like that but there was specific nights that you could book in. if you went up on a Friday night, you had to do the full week. If you went up on a Wednesday night I think you could do one night or two nights or something like that. But there was 200 people who lived in the hostel and were employed by Rowton Enterprises as it was known in those days, Rowton Enterprises, they were employed by them, and it's significant that they were employed by them. So they lived in, they were all-found and at that time they were getting about fifteen to sixteen pound-a-week, as my mate, I got to know him, was Bob McFarland and he worked in there as a bed-maker. So, you had to make up beds, working in the kitchen, working you know, booking people in, and you know, all of that.

Interviewer: So, there'd be a couple of hundred people doing that?

Joe: Aye would have been most of it, quite a lot of them, maybe not a couple of hundred, you know, you can't really stick a figure on it, but you know ...

Interviewer: A good number

Joe: Let's just say, a good number, anyway, and these would be mainly people who couldn't work on a building site like for various reasons, like they would have been disabled and that type thing. The health wasn't good enough to have to go out on a wet and windy November night to do a night shift or something like that. So, there I am. I'm in Arlington House, I'm 22 years of age at that time, I think 22. Yeah, cos that was... why it sticks out is because the decimal, aw, the decimal money changed that year as well. The decimal money changed and I remember in this *Mixer* [Good Mixer pub] it was eight pints for one pound. I can remember that - and round the corner was, ah, Camden, the famous Camden - and going and getting a shift and all that type of thing. So, we were getting something like eight pound a shift ok, which would have been around forty pound-a-week...

Interviewer: Working with?

Joe: Working with sub-contractors, okay?

Interviewer: So, it could be any of the subbies?

Joe: Any of the subbies, hired and fired on a daily basis. No loyalty. Skin...in the back...[of a van or lorry]

Interviewer: So, you did that?

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- Joe:** Oh yeah. I done that for years and years. Yeah, you could have been anywhere.
- Interviewer:** What did they do, the *call-off*, or something in the morning they used to, was it the call-off, they used to call it, where the vans would pull up and you'd...?
- Joe:** Ah, yeah, they used to call it the *pick-up point* yeah. But just before that, I started working with eh, asphalt firm, *Limerick surfacing* who worked for *Wimpey*. That was my first job at that time in London, and they took me out to Gatwick and we were out at Gatwick airport at night and all the rest, and I can remember the foreman asked me to get a letter from Arlington House saying that I was working nights so I had to sleep in the day-time, cos they had all these curfews and it was quite difficult and all the rest.
- Interviewer:** Or cos otherwise they wouldn't let you sleep in?
- Joe:** So, Arlington at the time, I would say, it was a mix; there was a lot of north of England people there, there was a lot of Scottish people there, there was a lot of...very few Welsh for some reason. I could never understand that, no matter where I went the Welsh didn't seem to migrate the way everybody else did. There were Scots everywhere, there was north of England, you know, Newcastle, Geordies all over the place, there was Irish all over the place, there was every county of Irish, there was Northern Irish.
- Interviewer:** So it was a fair mix of people.
- Joe:** There was a fair mix but it was mainly UK and Ireland. It wasn't like, there, you might have had a few strays from Europe would have been in there.
- Interviewer:** Czechs or Poles?
- Joe:** Yeah, yeah, but not to the extent that the world has changed now. Mainly people who worked there at that time would have been Irish or UK, yeah, mainland UK or Irish, north and south.
- Interviewer:** And would most of them work if they weren't as you say, lived-in, would most of them been doing construction work?
- Joe:** They would, yeah. That's why, like when...the pick-up point in the morning; Camden, six o'clock in the morning, 6 am in the morning, all you had to do was appear outside Camden Town tube station. That's all you had to do. Just appear outside the station from six o'clock on.
- Interviewer:** But, my understanding of that as well was that you could appear, but you'd be, like the gangers would kind of ...

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- Joe:** Well they'd select you.
- Interviewer:** Yeah, they'd weigh you up.
- Joe:** Yeah, but that would have been when you'd be like a total stranger to them. Like if you'd done it for years, every ganger-man that came in there knew you.
- Interviewer:** He knew faces.
- Joe:** He knew basically whether you were useless, whether you were a drunk, or whether you were a good worker, and we all were good workers, for the simple thing, you knew you had to get another days work off this guy at some point.
- Interviewer:** I was going to ask you that, cos I have it on good authority now from my own father and from other people, who worked with, now he wasn't, you know, in Arlington or anything, he was living a settled lifestyle then but he often worked with men who did and who had major drink problems, shall we say, and were drunks, and he said they were some of the best workers he ever came across, you know. But he said, exactly what you were implying there, he said they were grand up till about 2 o'clock and then they were off.
- Joe:** But the point, the thing, them subbies had that particular...
- Interviewer:** They knew that.
- Joe:** So, there you are. You're a gobshite from County Antrim, right.
- Interviewer:** Or County Mayo.
- Joe:** Or County Mayo or wherever you are, in Camden town. You find out bloody hell, this is like home. It's like home in one way because they are all Irish and you can feel part of...yeah? You have somewhere to live. You're in Arlington house. You've got somewhere to live. You've got a room, you've got a door, you've got somewhere to keep your clothes, you've somewhere to have a bath.
- Interviewer:** So, you're not destitute?
- Joe:** You're not destitute, right. So, there you go. Somebody tells you, you do know that you can go round there and get a job outside. "You can do what?"..."Yeah, you can go down, all you have to do is go down there, six o'clock in the morning with a pair of working boots on you"...nowadays you need a helmet and everything else - but you needed a decent pair of working boots, which I had anyway, so that's all fine. Down you go six a.m. in the morning. At six a.m. in the

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morning, very few men were there. It might be a smattering of twenty or thirty men there. Now a lot of them might have been regulars, *regular casuals*, they would have been known as, who went out every day with the particular subcontractor and that contractor would have been a townie of theirs, a ganger-man would have been from the same village in Mayo or Donegal or Kerry, or wherever.

Interviewer: So, these guys were all working for the same subbie every day more or less?

Joe: Yeah, even though they were still getting cash in hand, you see, that way like.

Interviewer: They were still working for the same man?

Joe: They were working for the same man. Now if you went down at six in the morning you could have wound up in Bristol that day; that's why you were picked up at six a.m. to be - two hours of a drive, you see what I mean? to get to wherever their site was. And then 2 hours back at night, so that's half a shift, you might as well say on top of a shift. Now, if you went down about half seven to eight o'clock the odds are you could have been working in the City [The City of London, financial district] and you probably would have been working in the City. Someone like Eddie Ginley and them wouldn't have picked you up at quarter-to-eight and you had to be down at eight o'clock.

Interviewer: Eddie?

Joe: Eddie Ginley, he was a contractor. He was a cockney contractor actually. So that was the difference. Six o'clock in the morning you had four hours of travel on top but you got more money. So, say, call the average, just say the average was eight. At quarter-to-eight in the morning being picked up, you were going to get six-fifty to seven [pounds] at that time. Now if you left at six a.m. in the morning you were going to get ten. You see what I mean, like? That's the way it was arranged, ten quid a day.

Interviewer: That makes sense. They graded it so that the longer you were, if you went out earlier, you were paid a bit more because you had a bit more hassle.

Joe: Yeah. And the hassle was four hours on top of your day, that was the hassle, you see.

Interviewer: What time could you still, was it half eight, I suppose, the last pick-up?

Joe: Well, after eight o'clock there wouldn't have been a lot. There wouldn't be much going on. Most would have...a lot of men walked away as well, who for various reasons, had blotted their copy-book

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with different subbies, had got drunk, you know, and all sorts of different things. But most of us were too cute for that, cos we knew we were getting money today and if you wanted that man tomorrow, which most of us...the lifestyle we had at the time, say you were the subbie, I was going to make sure I was the right of you. And how was I going to keep it on the right side of you?...was to work my balls off from when I got up, from I got there 'til I got back. And that suited everybody.

Interviewer: Because then you got your money.

Joe: I knew my money was safe and my future was safe, the next day was safe as well or the week-end was safe. You see it was seven days a week at that time.

Interviewer: And did they buy into...did subbies kind of operate, that kind of sub-system where, you know, they'd tie you in with a sub during the week so you'd have to turn up as well, you know?

Joe: No, no. we were paid. *We wouldn't get in a bloody van in Camden in the morning unless we got a pound at ten o'clock at breakfast time.* Yeah, and if we had money in our pocket we took it anyway to make sure another man who didn't have it, got it. So, the deal was this. The ganger-man came round ten a.m. in the morning and gave you a pound. That was known as the *pound breakfast*. At one o'clock or whatever the dinner break was, half-twelve, he came round at half-twelve and gave you another pound. And say, you were on seven [pounds-a-day], you got your fiver in the evening, that's the way it was. That was him finished with you, you finished with him. Contract over.

Interviewer: Deal done.

Joe: Deal done. Contract over. But the one thing was, they dropped you back in Camden town, not fucking Mornington Crescent, not Euston, not Chalk Farm, right where they picked you up. That was the deal and they done it. Every one of them done it. They brought you back and dropped you off. Sometimes if a ganger-man knew you, he'd say, Joe, for fucks sake, I don't want to drive down there, it's going to take, and you'd say, its fine, and you'd jump out, you know what I mean like, but that was the deal. That was fair enough, they picked you up there and they dropped you back there. So, that there, that was the system.

Interviewer: That was the system. Everybody knew the system.

Joe: Everybody knew the rules and everybody knew how it was going at the time. Now it meant you *always* had money. But it meant you *never* had money. Because we were spending that as quick as we were getting it, you see what I mean. You always had enough.

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Interviewer: Yeah, but you never had anything extra?

Joe: But you never had anything extra to go and pay your rent, you know, a month's rent, or a month's key money, you know up on the Holloway Road, where our sensible married people would have been, and this type thing. So, there it was. The opportunity was there for any one of us to go out seven days a week and to get a few quid, save a few quid, and better yourself; that opportunity was definitely there for all, no matter where you came from, north of England, Scotland, and Ireland. The opportunity was there in Camden town. But that lulled you into a false sense of security and that type thing. What happened was, as time went along, I started drinking more cos of what I was telling you earlier. You see the only solace or peace I got from these visions and things was to knock myself...

Interviewer: Was to get drunk.

Joe: Was to get drunk and there I was, I'd have a fiver at night, wouldn't I? Bear in mind '72, eight pints, that's forty pints.

Interviewer: That's some drinking.

Joe: That's some drinking. I'm not going to drink that. I'm not going to drink that. You might drink two or three at dinner time at that time. Perfectly acceptable, nothing wrong with that. And at night I might drink six, seven pints. Now that left me with money in my pocket, but this is what started to happen; if you got out on a Monday, ah, I've enough there, then to go drinking all day Tuesday. I don't need to go to work, back Wednesday morning, another shift somewhere else.

Interviewer: So now, you've just pointed out, I mean, that shows, yeah, that shows the system...well not just the system, but the drink is the problem there, isn't it? Because, effectively that system would have allowed you to actually save some money.

Joe: A lot of money, if I had not been drinking.

Interviewer: If you had not been drinking.

Joe: Hmm. The system would have been very good.

Interviewer: But instead of saying well if I go out for 5 days and I just go for a pint in the evening...

Joe: If you were able to do that.

Interviewer: If you were able to do that.

Joe: And many did, and could.

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Interviewer: I can put this much money away.

Joe: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: Or, instead of putting this much money away I can drink it all tomorrow.

Joe: Yeah. And that's what started happening. With me. This is my personal experience. Not, yeah, ok, maybe for the first year, two years, I would've went out the five days, do you see, and that type stuff, but say the third year, it was starting to get...

Interviewer: As you say, it was lulling you into a sense of false security, isn't it?

Joe: Yes. So, say I went out on Monday, and by then I might have been up to nine pound a day. So there I am nine pound a day, a pound for a breakfast, a pound for dinner, that's spent during the day getting whatever, a packet of fags, as it was at that time, and all that. There you are now, you've got seven pound left. Now the beers gone up. The price of it after decimal coinage, you know and all that type stuff, so you're maybe left there with five, six pounds the following morning. Now, here's an interesting bit. Right.

Interviewer: You've five or six pounds in your pocket.

Joe: And you walk up the street the following morning, ah, too sick. You know, I'm too sick to go down to that Camden place the following morning. So, you leave it and you walk up the street and you meet Gerry Tipp. Now that man carried you when you had no money, so the first thing you'll say to him is there's a pound Gerry, this was done among all of us, right.

Interviewer: Because you knew he was...

Joe: Because he had already given to me before, so you give him a pound and you carried him all day so you and him went and drank all day even though he had no money you had enough out of your, whatever, and carried Gerry, as an example, and me all day Tuesday. That meant both of us was broke Wednesday morning.

Interviewer: Because you carried him, and he had nothing and neither of the two of you were working?

Joe: But he owes me then, he owes me.

Interviewer: But neither of the two of you were working on Tuesday, so on Wednesday you're skint?

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Joe: So, by Wednesday we're skint. And we're back down six a.m. in the morning and this time, we can't be too picky about anything. The first van that says, yeah, we're in it and gone and that's the way, should it be to Birmingham.

Interviewer: Because now you need some money.

Joe: Now we need money and I need that pound first thing in the morning. And that's how it went. And there you'd go, and Wednesday the same thing, you might go out. And you'd just be thinking to yourself "The weekend's looming here" you might go out three shifts then, you might pull your head in a bit and go out say Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, and you know, get a few quid for the weekend and that type thing. But then an interesting thing starts happening. Arlington House, there was no drink allowed in there. You couldn't bring food in there, or anything like that. There was a canteen in there and that type thing. So, one Sunday I went down to what was called the license grocers in Mornington Crescent, and I got a big bottle of old English cider. I got it under my jumper or under my coat and brought it into my room. And I'm in the room anyway having a great time and smoking away in the room and I'd already had a drink, you know what I mean, in the twelve to two time, on a Sunday like, in the pub [Sunday licensing hours in the 1970s], but I wanted more, because I'm an alcoholic. Anyway,

Interviewer: Presumably at this stage you didn't know you were an alcoholic?

Joe: Ah.

Interviewer: Or did you?

Joe: I did. I would say, I knew it, yeah. I would say that I had a serious problem with it, but it sedated...

Interviewer: Didn't see it.

Joe: I didn't see it. Eh, I didn't want to look at it. I denied it, you know, as they all do in that type thing. So that's all fine. Anyway, there I am sucking away on this bottle of old English. Door raps. Mr. Hill, "Pack your kit. Out."

Interviewer: He's the supervisor?

Joe: He's the governor. He was known as the governor, ex-cop. He was our trouble-shooter. He was an ex-cop. He was about six-foot-six, and he must have been thirty stone and that man, seriously, could pick you and me up like that and fire you from about here over to there and done it many's a time, anyway, out. So that's me out. "Pack your kit. Out." Out I goes. So where do I go now?

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Interviewer: Did someone blow the whistle on you, do you think?

Joe: I don't know. Don't know. He'd be watching to see if anybody's bringing... you know he knew damn well ...

Interviewer: He's smart enough

Joe: He's smart enough. He's was cop. Maybe a detective but I've no idea.

Interviewer: So, so, you're on the street now.

Joe: There you are, homeless. Now this is interesting.

Interviewer: Now when was this, roughly, Joe?

Joe: Your talking, I'd say it must have been '74, '72.

Interviewer: Couple of years after you...

Joe: Yeah, yeah, so I became homeless then. That put a different slant on it then. I'm homeless for about five years. Homeless in Camden for five years. And I still went out working for subbies. This is the point, when I see people sitting in Camden High Street at the minute with a cardboard thing in front of them, and going hungry and homeless and they've got a pair of 501 jeans on, and you know, I'm looking at and thinking, you ...

Interviewer: No sympathy

Joe: Sadly not. You know what I mean like. They do it in shifts in Camden now. Like one will do it for two hours and then they change over.

Interviewer: There does seem to be a certain element of professionalism about it these days, doesn't there?

Joe: But we were homeless, Mick. We were homeless. Hundreds of us, all around Kentish town, Camden town, Euston, Chalk Farm. Homeless Irishmen from every fucking county in it and we were still going out with Irish subbies, and bullying muck out over our heads all day long.

Interviewer: But, if you don't mind me asking, if you were going out and you were, you know, earning, you know moderately decent money with the subbies, why didn't you get digs?

Joe: Because it had got to the stage where you had, where you were going out one day and maybe two days later you were going out again, do you see what I mean like. You weren't able, by this stage or you weren't able to go out the full five days. Do you see what I mean? And it was the same with everyone else.

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Interviewer: Do you think you got fairly quickly to that stage where it became, rather than a matter of choice, it was a matter of, cos you said you *weren't able to get out?* Do you mean you chose not to, or do you mean you weren't physically capable of doing the five days by this stage?

Joe: Oh I was physically capable of doing the five days if I wasn't suffering serious withdrawal from alcohol.

Interviewer: So there was a psychological or emotional thing then?

Joe: It was an emotional thing and it was also the withdrawal. Most people would have called it a hangover in them days, we wouldn't have heard the word withdrawal. I was in serious withdrawal from alcohol because I didn't have enough to top myself up with.

Interviewer: The D.T.'s basically?¹

Joe: The DT's, so I'm in a serious place that's what I'm talking about - not that I wasn't physically strong enough to actually, eh, y'know, and I spent five years like that messing around, you know, in what we called *skippers*. Now, a skipper was a derelict building, so you kicked the door in. We used to smell the letter-box and there was a fusty smell of a house that, *fusty* is a word you may not know...

Interviewer: I know that word.

Joe: So, you opened up the letter-box and you could smell in there that it was dank and dark and nobody had been in there...

Interviewer: You knew there was no one ...

Joe: You knew there was no one living there for years so we'd go round the back and-

Interviewer: Funnily enough, cos I was, em, I would have been, you know, 10 or 11 at, 10 in the mid '70s and there was quite a lot of empty derelict properties still in London at that time.

Joe: Yeah there were everywhere. Derelict everywhere, you know. But this was the thing, like the hippies there in Malden Road in Kentish Town, they took over the whole of Malden Road, and Dr. John, he was a dropped out doctor, he had long hair and a big beard, he used to go in the mixer as well, and he sort of ran a community up there of hippies

¹ Delirium tremens (DTs) is a rapid onset of confusion usually caused by withdrawal from alcohol. When it occurs, it is often three days into the withdrawal symptoms and lasts for two to three days.

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and the homeless Irish would be up there as well and he'd try to organise us but we weren't into fucking joining up and him preaching²

Interviewer: In a Commune.

Joe: Y'know what I mean like? All that type stuff. We were single men and at the end of the day my aim was, and most of my peers at that time, and most of them are now dead; all of them are now dead, you know the significant ones in my mind and in my life either died in Arlington or pre-Arlington or homeless on the streets, y'know, of London or Camden or North West One area, around that particular time. But what a waste of people, y'know, when you actually think of it. To skipper all night in some derelict building actually, just sleep on the floor boards, y'know in some old derelict building with windows crashed out or something, get up and go down and jump in with John Murphy and pull cable all day long, or something like that, what sort of an existence or what sort of a race of people were we.

Interviewer: A tough life.

Joe: Y'know what I mean really, I don't know what we were.

Interviewer: Well a tough life. You see the thing that strikes me about that is that it's a tough life to more or less, inflict on yourself.

Joe: Exactly. Yeah. Cos nobody else done it. I done it to me, you see what I mean like. Like my...

Interviewer: But was there, you also give me the impression that all-that-said-and-done, I mean you talk with a certain degree of nostalgia about it, that there must have been a certain amount of, what do you call it, camaraderie?

Joe: It was camaraderie. A lot of it was the crack. A lot of it was adventure. A lot of it was buck-fucking mad. A lot of it was fuck-you England, the lot of it. It was everything.

Interviewer: Remember you were still young men.

Joe: Yeah, but still, fuck-you and everybody else. Fuck Ireland too, you know what I mean, it was all of that like, it was the whole thing. Full of testosterone, and totally sexually frustrated. There was no women in Camden Town. Seriously. I'd say that was a major problem nobody ever speaks about or anything else. You had all these 20-year-old men and what, run into each other in the pub and the next thing you get a dig in the side of the head and it was all forgot about the next morning. Ah 'twas only the old drink Joe, but that was, I know today, looking

² See also a similar organised 'squat commune' in Fairbridge Road, Hornsey area of north London as described by Gregory in Appendix B - OI# 10 – Gregory - Leitrim, p.11.

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back at it, what was wrong with most people was pure sexual frustration because they had no access. These were homeless people. It didn't mean because they were homeless that it all didn't work.

Interviewer: Well, of course, yeah. You'd still get the same urges as any other man would get.

Joe: The same urges and you're human, do you see?

Interviewer: But when you say there were no women, presumably that's because the lifestyle that you were living didn't allow...cos there were plenty of Irish women and plenty of women.

Joe: But they had more sense than to come near Camden Town in the 70s, let me tell you. Because all you had was buck-mad 20-year-olds, maybe a 30-year-old, like eh, you know.

Interviewer: If you talk to a lot of the Irish community that would have hung around, you know, the Galty or you know, there was plenty of women around if you wanted them, but presumably, you had to have a certain...as you say, women probably wouldn't have come near you guys because...

Joe: Well...I would have been 6-foot-tall in them days. I would have been not a pound overweight or a pound underweight for a start, you know what I mean, even in the worst of my homelessness. What I used to do, right, I was homeless, I'd save a couple of pound during the week, but this is before I got into the depth of it Mick, before I went too bad, right, and I'd go to Alfred Kempson's Emporium which was on Camden High Street, and you'd get yourself a jacket for about 25 pence or something like that, and a pair of trousers and a pair of shoes and a shirt.

Interviewer: Was that used stuff or?

Joe: Yeah, second hand used stuff, you know. So, everybody done the same. So up you'd go to Kentish Town baths, this would be on a Saturday. Right, you might have got a shift on the Saturday morning, cos you'd get a full shift up to twelve o'clock, right, so you were laughing. Right, and you done that.

Interviewer: You got your money at twelve?

Joe: You got your eight quid and you're finished at twelve, so it's down to Alfred Kempson's, get yourself a wee bag of clothes, up to Holmes road, public baths, go in to the bath, soak yourself in there. The guy'd give you a razor for two shillings or what do you call it, ten pence; have a nice shave, clean yourself up, get yourself shampooed, and they used to give you a comb and all the rest of it. Put on your new rig-out

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and walk out and nobody knew fuck all about you any different, because you were young enough to, and resilient enough to look not too bad.

Interviewer: Yeah. You could pull it off.

Joe: Yeah, you could pull it off and off ... I remember one night I went to the Buffalo, it was known as the Buffalo in Camden.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, yeah, Bill Fuller's club.

Joe: That's right. You got it. But this particular time it's called the Carousel, it's now the Electric Ballroom in Camden, right, and I remember heading into the Carousel, suited and booted, you know, not looking too bad, an old grey suit looking for the ladies, as they called it.

Interviewer: What age are you now? Late 20s by this stage?

Joe: Probably, yeah, I'm talking from about 25 till about 26, 27, something like that.

Interviewer: So, you're still in your prime, as it were.

Joe: Still a, you know, physical specimen anyway, but mentally and emotionally, you can forget about that like. Anyway, up the stairs I goes and the place was packed. All the Biddies on one side, and the Paddies on the other and you know, this type thing. That's all great stuff, so I'm going round half-pissed, getting rejected, getting rejected, you know what I mean, getting rejected. This was all par for the course; you just took it, fuck it, I'll just go and get another drink at the bar. Anyway, I'm going walking round the outside, the place is all packed with a slow dance and all of a sudden this absolutely stunning, beautiful woman, she's coming towards me, she's just sticks her two arms round my neck and glues herself to me. I thought, bloody hell, my luck has changed here.

So I'm going, "This is alright!" and the next thing...whack! I'm stretched across the floor, and about six bouncers picks me up and fire me out the front door. The next thing, a woman runs down the stairs and she's trying to tend to me and the woman I was dancing with she's still inside the door and the woman that's tending me turns round and says to her, "You're a fucking bitch, she says, "you set that poor man up." Her boyfriend was one of the bouncers, you see, and this was the game and on it went like. So I thought, what's this? ...

Interviewer: She's probably trying to wind the boyfriend up

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Joe: Wind the boyfriend up and I got a good battering over it, but such was, anyway.

Interviewer: So, you could function at a level?

Joe: You could function, but it was, you had to really watch yourself, well I mean not let myself slip too much. [23.35] You could function, which meant I could work on a level. And believe me some of them were as thick as bull-dung, some of them really were. Some of them gangers, but they got job done for the simple reason they kept on you all day, they horsed you all day, they never left off, and that's why, eh, you know, that's why; they weren't employed for their social skills or anything, in my opinion, they weren't employed for their social skills or anything.

Interviewer: They were effectively gang-masters.

Joe: They were gang-masters and they got the job done, it was as simple as that. You got to take your hat off to them in their own way and they weren't too worried about ah, whether they hurt or damaged your little feelings or anything, you know.

Interviewer: But from what you, in some of your comments you made earlier now, I got the impression that, I mean, obviously, if you like, the archetypal image of these gangers is the kind of Elephant John the brutal bully type, but you also gave me the impression that some of them were probably sound enough, like you know, and you could get on with them at a certain level if you like, you know. I mean, you were saying about the ganger that would, you know, drop you off and he might say to you, eh look, can you get out here and ...

Joe: Yeah, yeah and save him from having to drive maybe put an extra hour on him or something, y'know what I mean, he could live at the Elephant and Castle, and he'd have to drive to Camden and get back to the Elephant where all you had to do was jump in the tube as you were straight across on the Northern Line, and you'd say fair enough, you know, that was it, like.

Interviewer: So, would I be right in thinking like, again, the reality with gangers was probably diverse.

Joe: They were human beings, there was some of them that were complete dogs, yeah, yeah, and there was some gentlemen, like everything else. I mean, I remember working in Hammersmith, we were picked up every morning for a while and then I became a permanent, ah...

Interviewer: A permanent casual

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Joe: A permanent casual which meant I could go any time I wanted. Anyway he was a Taffy, Taffy Sullivan, a fucking lovely man but he had a growl of a throat - I think he died of cancer of the throat eventually - but he was lovely. But the thing about Taffy was on this site he wanted everyone to sign their name in and sign out; nobody was too worried about whether it was your *right* name or not cos this is what they called the lump system at the time, you know, nobody paid tax or nobody paid anything like that. So you'd go up to Taffy in the morning and he'd say, "For fuck's sake Joe, put some other name, other than Murphy or O'Brien, or for fucks sake." I used to put down Malcolm X, fuck it, anything. He said, "This other fucker," he said to me, "Look at him, he said, the fucker... 'Jack Boot' he's put in here!" [Laughter]. So it wasn't all gloom, doom and disaster, it was fucking hilarious at times. Do you know, it was great, if you were young enough and mad enough, do you see what I'm trying to say, like, and all of that.

Interviewer: And I would imagine, fit enough, cos ultimately with the work it comes down to being fit.

Joe: The work came down to being fit ok. So, let's put it this way, I worked for an asphalt firm for a couple of months. They were a Limerick firm, three brothers. This is when I first went over, before I started working for subbies and that type thing, when I was on my cards and that. And I remember I was working, I had a gang. They made me a ganger-man so, and I had a van so was picking up Cockneys or not Cockneys, Londoners, south Londoners, Pearlie Kings, Mickie Coveney and Ronny Johnson and people like that. Fabulous, my first introduction to the lovely Cockneys or you know, Londoners and em, I had them in this gang.

Interviewer: I won't have anything said against Cockneys now John! [Laughter]

Joe: I'll tell you something, neither will I...I fucking seriously wouldn't. No, I'm serious. No Cockney never did nothing on me. Never done anything on me at any time. And, so I had these gang of south London Cockneys from the New Kent Road, Old Kent Road, over there, and that was all great. And, em, I don't know where my head is gone with this, I don't know, I've lost track of what I was talking about.

Interviewer: Talking about gangers and working

Joe: Oh yeah, how fit we were. Now, I had a hand gang laying asphalt, okay. Now asphalt if you're putting base on, you put it on 100ml 4 inches and roll it down ok? Now, that will cover 5 square meters per tonne ok. 5 square meters at 4 inches yeah. Now on a Saturday morning five of us, a couple of Cockneys, a couple of Paddies and myself, we could lay 5 lorry loads of base asphalt with a stinking hangover working against us. Yeah? And be finished by half eleven,

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quarter to twelve to get to the pub. That included the Cockneys by fuck, they could work and all, you understand what I'm saying, yeah. And that's what we done. The sweat would lash out of you because of the heat of the asphalt, you know what I mean, yeah, the heat of the sun if it was summer time and all that type stuff. And if you think back, bloody hell, that was phenomenal. Five lorry loads, it's serious work. Five lorry loads, you know, 15, 16, 20 tonne in some, you know. That is something else.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's savage work.

Joe: That's savage work. But we had big grapes, asphalt grapes...roll it off and right lads, fuck it, come on let's go. Done.

Interviewer: But I mean, that kind of in some ways, you just, you've dispelled one, another one of the kind of myths that I don't like, that somehow the Irish were exceptional in terms of work. I don't think they were exceptional, they were great workers because they were fit, they were able you know, and as you just said, they weren't the only ones who were fit and able, there were Englishmen who were fit and able.

Joe: Fucking fit and well able, Micky Coveney, there wasn't many. But having said that I worked in Shell Haven in later years right, by that stage I with a woman and living eh, and there was this man Curley he was known as, Curley Maguire, and this was the time Mountbatten was blown up, that's how I know, I remember, whatever year that was and I remember that well.

Interviewer: Mullaghmore, in Sligo

Joe: Yeah. But the year, was that '79 or something like that?

Interviewer: It was somewhere round that, could even have been 1980

Joe: I was living, where was I living round that time? Grays, in Essex, right. So, I was in Grays, in Essex, and I was working in Shell Haven for the Grey Murphy on my cards.

Interviewer: Was he employing you on the cards at that stage? I suppose they had to by that stage. Lump was finished, more or less.

Joe: Ah he was. And not only that, I had a woman in my life and I was a bit more, eh...

Interviewer: So, you wanted to be on the cards?

Joe: Yeah, Yeah, so you had to go on your cards by that point in time, maybe as you say the lump maybe had finished.

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Interviewer: They tried to out... well they did never officially outlaw it but I don't think they ever really got rid of it.

Joe: Ah right, still goes on, but the reason I mention that was he'd just come out of a sanatorium. He'd been in for about 4 years with TB, this little Mayo man. He was only about that height, and he was called Curley Maguire. And at that time, I was fit and strong and I wasn't drinking to the extent, d'you know what I mean, to what I had been. I'd calmed down and I was with a woman and behaving myself, living in one of Ronny Kray's houses, and that, sort of just to make things that much more interesting.

So, I'd done my time in jail as well. Don't worry about that, you couldn't live homeless around the Kings Cross, Camden and Euston and not wind up in jail at some point, y'know what I mean. That's just the way it was in the 70s at that time.

But, eh, Curley Maguire, he came out of that sanatorium, that shows you now. He would have been a generation older than me you know, the generation or the wave before me. Well, I tell you something now, that man, there was not a pound of excess fat on him, because he had TB and everything else. That man would not stop from early morning till late at night. He just, the skill he had, he was an old man, but he just carried on and he carried on and he carried on and he carried on. You couldn't follow him. I don't care who you were or what age you were or anything else. So what sort... that's the other side of it, but that's one individual. There's plenty of lazy, fat bastard Irish as well just the same as there was -

Interviewer: I think that's the point I was, I think I would make about that, is I am not suggesting a good number of individuals who were all good workers. The reason that people get, you know, the reason people are good at manual work is cos they have certain skill sets one of them being that they are physically able but also a lot of them have, I mean, you mentioned this earlier, I think the Irish, a lot of the Irish came pre-packaged with a certain level of dexterity for a start, to use a shovel.

Joe: The dexterity to use a shovel. I mean if you had cows in Antrim, from five, six, seven years of age, you had a grape and a byre as it was known there, a barn you might have called it, we called it a byre, you would have been cleaning cows out after cows, and all of that and taking it to the dung heap.

Interviewer: But even if you lived in, shall we say, even if you lived in a big city it was different, but if you lived in a regional town the chances are at some point as a young fellow you'd be saving turf, you'd be cutting turf...

Joe: Which I done, yeah.

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- Interviewer:** You'd be eh, as you said, cleaning out sheds, or you know, you'd be doing manual work.
- Joe:** You were doing manual work from childhood on. I was milking cows when I was seven or eight years of age. My mother would start at one end and I'd start at the other, you know.
- Interviewer:** To an extent that you *wouldn't* have been doing growing up in London.
- Joe:** Yeah. Of course.
- Interviewer:** You'd still have been doing some manual work in London, but it wouldn't have been the same kind.
- Joe:** But there was something I noticed even about the Irish, what you're talking about, the *urban* Irish. Right if we go back to Camden and that time, the rural people like myself and there was very few rural Northern Ireland people in Camden in my time in the 70s there. Most of the rural people were from the western seaboard like, y'know if you want to call it that like. Most of the Northern Ireland people and the Dublin people, the ones from the centre of the city, Belfast, the centre of Dublin, were a wee bit cleverer. They were always painters, and y'know what I mean. They were always painters or plasterers or you know, this type thing.
- Interviewer:** Internal trades.
- Joe:** You didn't get any of them out digging muck on a wet day or rained off, half-days or you know, using whackers or rammers or, they thought you were mad, they thought you were stupid. You were just a buck-mad country person as far as they... they were city people. See we had to go there, we were culchies and we had to go there and learn how to live in the city. They had the benefit, you see, of actually having grown up in a city and already knew, well I don't want to be down there in the rain or whatever, you know, whereas we were... me, for me it was just survival. I had nobody watching my back, so therefore all my family at that time was all in Antrim. I had nobody watching my back so it was just total survival. And it didn't matter to me whether I had to put my arm up a heap of shit in a toilet and pull it out, I'd do it, and it didn't make no odds to me, I felt nothing about that, it got me drunk at that time, it's all I wanted. I didn't want anything else, especially when I was homeless. Like, all I wanted was the next drink and if you said to me well, there's a drain there, full of crap, you know, shit, pull it up, all out with your arm, I'd have done it. It meant nothing to me.
- Interviewer:** You wanted the money.
- Joe:** I wanted the money for drink, and that was it. Wasn't worried about food, wasn't worried about cigarettes, you'd get them anywhere, so.

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- Interviewer:** And do you think that was, would that have been the general kind of attitude of most of the men that you knew in that lifestyle, if you like.
- Joe:** Now I'm specifically talking about *homeless* Irish. Again, we were saying, there's a whole range of Irish that done very well and all of that. The failures, it's a great word, or you know, if you want to be accurate, not so successful or perceived as not successful in social terms, you know, and all of that type stuff, but most of my ...
- Interviewer:** I have to tell you that I struggle even now, how to describe them, because you're right, the default way of describing people like that is as social failures, right. But that presumes a way of measuring success which is only our...is only societies view like you know, it's not necessarily right. I mean who is society, or who am I to say that you are any less successful than John Murphy? You might have wanted to live the lifestyle you wanted, and that's fine. Everybody's individual and everybody's entitled to do that, but society has a way of grading people, doesn't it?
- Joe:** But if you come out of that you come out you're shaking your head, going bloody hell, what happened there? Now, as far as society is concerned this day in my life, I got sober and all the rest of it, and as time went on, I wound up managing in Arlington House, do you know what I'm trying to say. So, therefore, society sees that then as, oh its success and all the rest, but I'm no more of a success. The success...
- Interviewer:** Or necessarily a failure!
- Joe:** Or necessarily a failure, you know, but this is the madness of it do you see what I mean? Okay I sobered up, got back into education a bit, went and done a bit of business administration, you know what I mean.
- Interviewer:** Can I just get the trajectory sorted out because we have jumped around a bit. So you went from being, you went to England in '72. What year were you born in incidentally?
- Joe:** 1950
- Interviewer:** So, you were 22?
- Joe:** Yeah. London. I went to London when I was eh, 22. Yeah, but I'd been in England before that.
- Interviewer:** And then you were homeless for 5 years up until say the late '70s?
- Joe:** Yes.
- Interviewer:** Then you said you ended up living in Grays

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Joe: Yeah, that's right. I'd done a bit of jail. It was not good to be Irish you know in the '70s in London, you know, you don't really need to go into it. So you got arrested for the simplest of things and all of that. I done a few jail sentences in the '70s; that took a bit more time, do you see what I'm trying to say? And then I met a woman. Oh yeah, I wound up in a, what was it, ah...

Interviewer: I'm just trying to get, at one point you seem to have been living in a sort of settled domestic life, then did you become homeless again or something?

Joe: No, no, I got to get back to... sorry, I'm with you now. Okay, so there I am about five years homeless and all the rest, so I'm up in Kentish Town, okay which isn't far from Camden where you can get a shift and you can get yourself out of it. This is where you can, you can walk there in the morning and get yourself out of it. So, I'm still skipping at that time, still living it rough, what do I do? I kicked in this door of an empty house and the next-door neighbours reported it and the cops came. So, the Kentish Town cops came so they lifted me and what a wonderful sergeant he was. He said to me, "Let me feel your hands"; so he shook my hands and my hands was rock hard, rock hard. He said to the rest, "Leave him alone". He said, "Do you work out of Camden?" I said, "I do". He said, "What are you looking for?" I said, "Somewhere to lie down". "Fair enough", he said. Yeah. But, he said, "I'm going to have to charge you anyway cos they're pushing, they're actually pushing for it, you know the next-door neighbours making a deal of it".

So, I went to court and the old sergeant, he spoke up for me. So the magistrate said, "Are you saying that this man, then officer, really only needs accommodation?" And he said, yes, he needs accommodation. So, he said, "Okay, I'll give him accommodation", and he said, "I'll send him to a probation hostel". So, he sent me to a probation hostel in south London off the Walworth Road, which is just down near the Elephant between there and Camberwell. So, in I goes to the probation officer, went off the drink, went into this probation hostel, got a job with an asphalt firm as the foreman; Ringway Surfacing. I'm working seven days a week. I'm getting £137 on my cards, £137. The probation hostel is charging me £13 for full board. I'm giving the probation officers who all lived in on the complex, the rest of the money to look after for me, y'know. Their finance person, David said, "You'll have to open a bank account, you'll have to". But it never happened, it just went on and on and on. So they kept holding on to this money for me and the more I worked, seven days, this asphalt firm thought well this is a wonderful guy, you know, I mean like and all this. I never took a day off, never drank, never done... cos I knew, if I started drinking that's the end of the whole lot, like.

Original Interview # 21 – Joe Mc – Antrim

Met a woman, and eh, Cork woman, and she came in and she started, she was from the local area. She started living with me in the hostel and on it went, and on, but she was an alcoholic and fucking very quickly guess what happened?

Interviewer: You started.

Joe: I started.

Interviewer: Is this around 1980 then?

Joe: '79. I think it was round '79, '80 or something like that. So, I got in a fight over her in one of the pubs in Walworth Road. So they took me in and the Walworth Road cops beat the crap out of me and all sorts of things. So they gave me some date to appear in Camberwell Green courts. So, her and me took off then for Grays in Essex. Down we goes to Grays in Essex. She went to the Welfare...er...she went to the Welfare and they said, "There's a house up here in 66 High View Avenue. So, we went up and the woman Stella said "yeah, lovely in you come". It was thirteen quid a week, the same thing, thirteen quid a week and then she went down a couple of days later, I think to get a job in a local café and got a job at the café and when she was in the café a few days they told her that the house belonged to Ronnie Kray. We didn't know nothing. The Welfare sent us up there, you know what I mean like. Anyway, the madness of it all.

Interviewer: You could say you couldn't make that up.

Joe: Yeah, you couldn't make that up. You couldn't make it up at all. Anyway, the next thing, I contacted, what's his name, the Grey Murphy, and got started with him. McKing was a ganger-man, known as a Greyhound.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Joe: McKing. Yeah, so there was a couple of brothers in it. He was known as the Greyhound. He was like the Pink Panther, he got the name the Pink Panther and the Greyhound. But he was alright to me. Looked after me and I didn't mind him. So that was all very fine.

Interviewer: And what were you doing with them?

Joe: I was driving a dumper and a, what do you call it, a cable trailer on the back, you know, just taking it all round the site, dropping cables off and then you'd be pulling them and that type of thing. There was smoke sheds there cos you were in Shell Haven, and that type thing. But that went on for a while. What happened then? I got another fight over her. You see, she was drunk, I was drunk. In the house, Ronnie Kray's house, and I gave this guy a slap and he came back and stabbed

Original Interview # 21 – Joe Mc – Antrim

me three times about twelve hours later, on Christmas morning, wound up in... that was it. Wound up in jail then. I done 18 months at that time. That took me up to about '82, '83 and then I came out of there.

Interviewer: And presumably you weren't drinking because you were inside?

Joe: No, this is the strange thing. I was well able to survive inside as well. This is the thing I was telling you about, you know I was telling you about those visions and all that, it was twenty long years before they left me, you know what I mean. Twenty years before they left me, before that fear, that trauma left me, so ...

Interviewer: All from that one night?

Joe: All from that one night, you know what I mean. Its mad really, isn't it?

Interviewer: Well, it just goes to show you what can happen you know.

Joe: But, the fear of that was unbelievable at that time, and as I say, I felt, you know like, when am I going to get whacked? I was expecting a bullet all the time. And jail didn't help that much but it was, well, sober, I could, ah, handle anything. Drunk, I could handle nothing only another drink, you know. That is really what I was. That's how I now know, how I'm able to say I'm was an alcoholic you know. There's no other way of looking at it like. Because all I could do was look for another drink.

In Jail I noticed, I was made a number one very quickly on long-term wings. I mean I was only doing eighteen months but in a jail, in Wandsworth say, Wandsworth Jail especially, D-wing is the long-term wing, long-term means more than five years and one day. This is where you had the villains - we're talking the real villains, serious villains like, all the Bank of America robbery at the time, all the big ones, you know, all heading off to the island as they called it.

Interviewer: I'd say scary men, some of them.

Joe: Some of them were quite scary. But I had to give out the food and I had to ... I had a single cell, D147, and the cleaners were all on the ground floor and I was called the number one, not because I was number one on the wing, you were known as a number one because you had a stock of combs, you had a stock of pillow-cases, you had a stock of bars of soap, and that type thing.

Interviewer: The modern parlance they would call you the *go-to-man*.

Joe: Or the *go-to-man*, but there you were just known as the number one. It was very strange. I liked it, you know, there you are going around ...

OI#24-Joe Mc-35

Original Interview # 21 – Joe Mc – Antrim

there's something about it. Fuck it, all it meant is that you had a few bars of soap and you could give them out to people, is all it really meant. So, you went into the '80s then.

Interviewer: So how did you end up, how, cos you said you ended up managing Arlington House?

Joe: Right. I went along living with that woman for a few years. I started working out of the Elephant then. We got a flat, when I came out of jail, we got a flat in...where was it? In Kennington, I lived there with her from about 1981 or something when I came out. She died in '88 so I lived with her in that flat for 7 years and the Elephant and Castle there was still a pick-up point there at the Elephant and Castle in them days, so I worked there with Henry Brennan, who was a Grey Murphy sort of sub-contractor, anyway I worked for him.

Interviewer: Henry Brennan's, another Irish.

Joe: But his actual name was Mick Brennan, but he thought it was much better to call himself Henry cos he'd get more contracts. A fucking shrewd operator anyway. Yeah. Henry Brennan so, but he was a big sub-contractor and I worked with Henry for years. [Laughter]

Interviewer: There's so many stories about that kind of carry on with names. These images that they think eh ...

Joe: Think that Henry sounds a lot better, but, anyway, it was great. And he never left me standing at the Elephant, that's how you know you're alright. If you fuck up, or fucked about, you were left standing and that's it. It's up to you, it began to dawn on you, what did I do yesterday or what did I do the day before and all that. Henry never left me, always took me out. And that was fine.

That was up to '88. '88 what happened then...She died and that was a serious bit of an upset for me. Messed about getting drunk for a period of time. Ah, I had a phone at that time. So, my father was alive, here in Antrim at the time. So he ah, he kept phoning me up and saying, okay, okay, why don't you come home for a while here, stay with me for a while so as I can keep an eye on you and try and ease up on that old drink - this is what my father was saying to me you know. So anyway, I said, fair enough, so back I went to Northern Ireland. 1988, and as luck would have it they were doing a carriage-way, a dual carriage-way from Antrim through to Ballymena and I got a job on it, you know, doing asphalt which I was pretty good at and pretty familiar with, and being a foreman, y'know what I mean like -

Interviewer: Sounds like that was your kind of *best trade* shall we say.

OI#24-Joe Mc-36

Original Interview # 21 – Joe Mc – Antrim

Joe: Yeah, I would say so, cos I liked it and I was pretty good at it and I could rake it spot on, you know, tennis court, or anything like that, I was pretty good. So, got a job on that. Worked there up to about, for a year. Anyway, hung around there for a year, and then the call of London, like you know, a year was long enough. I didn't mess around too much, y'know what I mean, stayed sober for most of it because I was at home among my family and all that. Then I had enough of it and then I broke out. Once I broke out, picked it up, I knew that was it, I had to go back then away from them, you know what I mean cos I would have been making a show of brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, my father, my mother.

Interviewer: You didn't want to do it.

Joe: I didn't want to do it. So, I was gone again. And I wound up...

Interviewer: London is a strange place really isn't it? It's got that kind of a pull. Very strange. I find, you know, I've always found that with London. It's my home town, but it's... I love it here, but it still has a pull, you know.

Joe: Yeah, it has. And that's what I'm saying, you know. I was ten years in Australia. If anybody asks me where's my favourite place in the world is, I would still say Camden Town, me personally, like. Anyway, back to London I went. And I went live with this old boy I used to drink with before old Bob Rickets on the Old Kent Road and I can see this fucking drinking was going nowhere and I had to do something about it so I went into rehab in the East End of London about '89 or something like that. Then I went into rehab there and it was winter, you know what I mean, and it was a form of... I knew I could stay sober for periods of time, Mick, as long as I had something to do, like, employment or work or something but you know I was exhausted. '89 what age was I?

Interviewer: Thirty-nine coming up to forty.

Joe: Coming up to forty yeah. I was exhausted, mentally exhausted, you know the whole life style and everything else. Don't regret one day of it now, but at that point...

Interviewer: No but it does take its toll all the same doesn't it?

Joe: It took its toll at the time so I went into this rehab. Started getting sober in the rehab. Started learning about what was wrong with me. Started learning about what was wrong with me. Started learning how I think, affects how I feel, you know what I mean, affects how I act and you know all sorts of different stuff like that. And spent about a year in there and then I went back to Arlington House. Went back in to Arlington which as you know is in Camden...and there was a big

Original Interview # 21 – Joe Mc – Antrim

change in Arlington. The chief executive noticed I was sober, do you understand what I mean? a lot of the workers were sober, and this type thing.

Interviewer: Arlington was owned by Camden by that time I would think?

Joe: '86 Camden took it over from Rowton Enterprises. That was basically because there was a strike by these workers that lived-in, yeah, because they were still giving them fifteen quid a week or something at the time so they came out on strike. It was all over the news.

Interviewer: What fifteen quid a week that they'd been getting twenty-five years before?!

Joe: Yeah, all the way through. They were still getting the same and they weren't getting anything so there was a big strike at the time. I don't know if he's still alive. If you were interested in that you'd need to speak to Keith Bird, a man called Keith Bird cos he was the sort of union bloke you know in Camden at the time. And Keith sort of backed all these boys that were in Rowton House at the time, as it was known. Camden then took it over, stuck a compulsory purchase order on it and took it over. And that was fine.

Interviewer: Were you still there at that time?

Joe: No, I wasn't there. Camden then, from about eleven hundred rooms, they knocked eleven hundred rooms down cos it didn't meet Camden's own housing standards so they knocked sort of all these rooms down into about 400 rooms. So it was down to 400 rooms then and they, Camden, as a council, didn't really want to run a hostel so it brought in this big, large eh, housing association called North British to run it for them, and by that stage, wait till I see, when was this? We're talking about 1991 something like that, in comes this man called Michael Waite who was the manager of Arlington at that time. He was a very forward-thinking man. He was it from Newcastle or there and the next thing that happened ... There's a few documentaries from that time, have you got them? Well there's two. One was by Channel 4. I'm not sure but it was about 1992 around that time it was made. It was called *What do you expect, paradise?* It was made by Channel 4. And then, there's the other one, *Men of Arlington*.

Interviewer: Yes, the one I've seen bits of that.

Joe: Oh, you've seen bits. It's on YouTube I think.

Interviewer: The whole thing isn't, but clips of it I think

Joe: Oh no. Somebody's stuck it up. The whole things there. But it's on three different sort of ... you know they put sort of 20 minute bits, part

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1, part 2 and part 3. Before they just had a clip. But there was *What do you expect, Paradise*, that was around '91, '92, I think. Rex Bloomstein done that. The previous one was the Strangeways Riots that he done so he took on Arlington House, to do it at that time. And then 2010 Brendan Byrnes, Belfast man, done that one, *Men of Arlington*. So that was all fine. So, where are we? '92.

Interviewer: Is there anything that you kind of haven't talked about, because you have been very comprehensive in talking about your life and ...

Joe: Yeah, that's my life. The one thing I'd like to say, finish and wrap it up with is quite simply there was a lot of us. I'd say there was about 200 of us who were homeless and we would have been a significant number of the people that the sub-contractors took out at that particular point in time. There was many other people they took out but that's quite a lot of people in an area like Camden Town, and Kentish Town and you know.

Interviewer: It is. 200.

Joe: Oh easy 200 of us.

Interviewer: 200 of us would turn up at the call-outs Camden Town, and homeless and be working.

Joe: Now maybe not five days, but still do three, four days and carry each other. You see, that has to be said. But the thing is, a lot of them ended up in Arlington, and Alex done a wee bit of a, Alex was the Irish worker in there, as time went on, and he done a ...

Interviewer: Alex put me in contact with you.

Joe: Yeah. Alex, he sort of, between January and March, thirty-four people had died in Arlington very quickly and he thought, what's all this about? And he actually done a bit of ah, research on the ages of all the different people. And it looked like the Irish on average were dying at fifty-four, the Scottish were making sixty-four, and the English were making seventy. These were only a small snap-shot at that particular time.

Interviewer: But there's definitely a disparity there isn't there?

Joe: Yeah, there's a big a disparity. But he was saying what is this, is it the alcohol, was it the homelessness, was it the emigration, was it, what was it?

Interviewer: I don't know if he came to any conclusions. I would guess, it was a combination of all three.

Joe: That's what he was saying, like, a combination of everything like.

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Interviewer: Because that life-style?

Joe: Has got to take its toll.

Interviewer: You know, I mean, the problem is what we talked about earlier, in some ways as a young man and I can see that it would, a young single man out for a wild life it has potential attraction like, you know.

Joe: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: But, the longer you're at it, the older you get ...

Joe: The bones start creaking.

Interviewer: Yeah it takes, physically it takes a huge toll and mentally it must take a huge toll.

Joe: The mental and the physical you know, and how could you call yourself healthy then. You know the adventure

Interviewer: The adventure is fine while you're fit and healthy, but when you start, I mean, I had an uncle now and I don't mind telling you this, he ended up, well he ended up dead, he committed suicide, to be honest, he was a raging alcoholic, but he wasn't homeless, lived in digs all his life, but didn't get married, which we always found amazing because out of - what was there - 5 brothers, he was far in the way, the best looking, far in the way the most charismatic, far in the way the best educated. He had everything going for him. But for some reason, he didn't.

Joe: But women spot you a mile away, they know. They seriously know. You're not a good prospect, you know.

Interviewer: The drink took him over.

Joe: They know that.

Interviewer: But he got to the stage where the drink had taken him over so much that it was great when he was in his 30s because he was supremely fit, great worker, and I've been told this by fellows that worked with him, but by the time he got to his late 40s the drink had done so much damage that now, like you said, he was not able to work. So, he was now going out doing the odd shift to get enough money to feed the drink to make him worse.

Joe: To feed the drink was all it was at the end of it.

Interviewer: And then it became a vicious cycle, you know.

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Joe: But that's what I meant. If you've got a serious alcohol problem, women know, and they run a mile from you. You know why you were saying why he didn't get married. And you know I used to think why these women have no time for... I mean I went to a dance in the Forum in Kentish Town once and, suited and booted, you know what I mean, and asked this woman to dance, "Oh no", she said, "I wouldn't dance with you". I said, "Why?" She said, "You're a drunk". And I didn't know I was a drunk at that time. And I thought I was behaving myself very well, you know. She said, "You're a drunk, I wouldn't dance with you".

You know; it's all life, isn't it? As we go along...

End.

Appendix B: Corporate Histories

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INTRODUCTION

This Appendix B of the thesis compiles detailed historical research relating to a small but representative sample of construction businesses founded by Irish migrant builders. It focuses on those located in and/or operating significantly within the greater London Metropolitan Area (LMA) in the post-war period. The research upon which these narrative histories are based is drawn from a wide range of original, primary and secondary sources including: corporate histories published and/or provided to the author by the individual companies themselves; original face-to-face interviews with directors/employees of some of the companies; paper-copy and online corporate marketing and promotional materials available publicly; newspaper and trade journal articles and published materials; corporate history books published by some of the companies; secondary source books, journals and compilations, project and company documentation drawn from archives in the UK National Archives, the London Metropolitan Archives, the Irish in Britain Archives and the British Library.

The first section tabulates statistical analysis of the 106 firms of varying sizes which form the basis of the London-based Irish entrepreneurial cohort. Tables 1 and 2 detail corporate and commercial information over the duration of the post-war period. Beyond this first section some selected sample narratives are included which chronicle, where appropriate, the biographical histories of the founders of the larger firms (where discernible), together with the foundation and growth of their businesses over the post-war period.

This appendix is not – indeed cannot be – an exhaustive history of every entrepreneurial enterprise undertaken by Irish builders in the post-war reconstruction period; such a task would be impracticable and wholly disproportionate in terms of time and cost and, in any event, would be lacking substantive detail as a result of missing and incomplete data and research evidence. However, it is a comprehensive survey of the large and medium-sized construction businesses founded, grown, owned and managed by native Irish migrants to London during the period 1940-1990. It is of note that some of these businesses started in the interwar period and thus in the strictest sense, fall outside the periodization of this thesis, however it is contended that because such companies were materially significant to the post-war reconstruction activities undertaken by Irish migrants and experienced significant organic growth during this period, they are indisputably post-war Irish builders and, consequently, their inclusion is merited.

Some of the companies, particularly those of great significance in terms of economic size, growth and importance to the community of Irish builders living and working in post-war London, are also detailed and referred to within the main body of the thesis, in particular chapter 3.4, which examines the Irish entrepreneurial diaspora. This Appendix B forms an indispensable corollary to the main thesis and should be read in conjunction with it.

The selected narrative section is arranged in order of largest turnover and chronological order.

STATISTICAL DATA AND TABLES

General Notes

1. Table 1 (pp. B/6-11) contains general information on the corporate history of the main ethnically-Irish UK-registered businesses founded or headquartered within the LMA and operating during the post-war reconstruction period. Those firms highlighted in **BOLD** text are the largest turnover businesses as at 1995. The table is laid out in the order in which the businesses were researched.
2. All financial data is extracted from UK Companies House BETA Service Company Search website, (available at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/>) unless indicated otherwise.
3. All biographical and corporate history data are drawn from a variety of sources including individual company biographies and histories, directorship information and incorporation documents held on UK Companies House BETA Service Company Search website, (available at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/>), various newspaper articles, company corporate websites and other stated sources.
4. All shaded figures in Table 2 (pp. B/12-14) are interpolated estimates based on nearest available factual data (i.e. published accounts at Companies House or other indicated sources). The majority of financial data is derived and interpolated between digitised records of submitted annual audited accounts. For most companies these digitised documents start around 1990. Some exist for years going back to the early 1970s but these are highly intermittent and ad-hoc. Virtually no digitised financial data is available

for any companies before 1980. The cost of obtaining un-digitised archival audited accounts for each company is £3 per-year-per-company, therefore the total cost - assuming such records still existed – would be in excess of £3,600 and beyond the budgetary limits of this research project) Where other financial data is stated it is usually based upon cited newspaper, online, corporate website and journal sources.

5. Table 3 (p. B/15) is an illustrative comparison table comparing annual turnover for 1993 as between the top 20 UK construction contracting firms and the top 20 Irish-founded UK construction contracting firms (almost all of whom were substantially LMA based). It is intended as a crude measure of the extent of growth achieved by these Irish entrepreneurial ventures by the end of the periodisation of this research. Turnover for the Irish firms is derived by interpolating between stated turnover for years 1990 and 1995 in table 2.

APPENDIX B - Table 1 - POST-WAR IRISH MIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS AND FIRMS (General List)

Firm #	Firm Name	Founders	Founder's DOB	Date founded	Place founded	County Roots (N.K.= not known)	Construction Specialisation
001	MURPHY GROUP	John (James) Murphy (c. 1914/23-2009)	1913	1951	Holloway	Caherciveen, Kerry	Heavy Civil Engineering / Infrastructure - All areas
002	JOE MURPHY (J.M.C.C. /J.M.S.E IRELAND)	Joseph (John) Murphy (c.1917-2000)	1917	1958	Tottenham	Caherciveen, Kerry	Civil Engineering / Utilities
003	MCNICHOLAS CONSTRUCTION (GREEN)	Patrick McNicholas	1908	1949	Cricklewood	Bohola, Co Mayo	Civil Engineering / Utilities
004	MCNICHOLAS PLC (BROWN)	Michael 'Pincher' McNicholas	1911	1957	Cricklewood	Bohola, Co Mayo	Civil Engineering / Utilities
005	ABBEY PLC	Matt / James / Charles Gallagher	1918	1936	Potters Bar	Tubbercurry, Co Sligo	Housing and residential development
006	O'ROURKE CIVIL & STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING LTD	Ray O'Rourke / Dessie O'Rourke	1947/1949	1977	Dartford	Mayo / Cavan / Leitrim	Concrete Frame Specialists / General civil engineering
007	CAREY GROUP PLC	John Carey Snr (1941), Tom (1943), Pat (1945)	1941	1969	Oval, London	Ballyporeen, Tipperary	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
008	FITZPATRICK & SONS LTD (NOW VOLKER FITZPATRICK PLC)	Patrick, John (son), Patrick (Grandson)	c.1900	1921	Waltham Abbey	Cork City, Co. Cork	Roadworks / General infrastructure civil engineering
009	M.J. GLEESON GROUP PLC	Michael J Gleeson	1881	1915	Sheffield, Cheam (Surrey)	Cloonmore, Co. Galway	Multi-disciplinary general contractors

Firm #	Firm Name	Founders	Founder's DOB	Date founded	Place founded	County Roots (N.K.= not known)	Construction Specialisation
010	O'KEEFE GROUP	Patrick O'Keefe Snr	1936	1970	Greenwich	Kerry	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
011	WILLIAM FULLER [CASTLE ROCK PROPERTIES LTD]	Bill Fuller [American Citizen]	1917/1924	1943/1960	Camden Town	Kerry	Demolition/Property Development/Leisure
012	FITZGERALD & BURKE	Matthew J Burke	1943	1975	Winchmore Hill	Mayo	Small general builders - LA housing stock
013	KENNY & REYNOLDS	Dan Kenny / Pat Reynolds	c.1930s	1961	Hornsey	Longford	Small general builders - LA housing stock
014	THE CLANCY GROUP PLC [M. J. CLANCY & SONS]	Michael J Clancy	c.1925	1958	Wembley	Clare	Heavy Civil Engineering / Infrastructure - All areas
015	LOWERY	Pateen Lowery	c.1930s	1950	Finsbury Park	Galway	Civil Engineering / Utilities
016	B&M MCHUGH	Bernard McHugh / Michael McHugh	1938	1967	New Eltham	Leitrim	Civil Engineering / Utilities
017	BARHALE PLC	Dennis Curren	1944	1976	Walsall	Galway	Civil Engineering / Utilities
018	JB RINEY	Brendan Riney	1933	1978	Hackney	Kerry	Civil Engineering / Utilities
019	BREHENY CIVIL ENGINEERING	John T Breheny	1915	1963	Ipswich	Sligo	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
020	POWERDAY PLC	John P [Pat?] / Mick Crossan	1955	1980	Kilburn	Cavan/Leitrim	Labour supply/Waste management / Haulage & Muck-away
021	POWERDAY PLANT LTD	John P [Pat?] / Mick Crossan	1955	1977	Kilburn	Cavan/Leitrim	Labour supply/Waste management / Haulage & Muck-away
022	MJ GALLAGHER	John & Michael Gallagher	1941/1943	1965	Wembley	Leitrim	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
023	BALLYMORE	Sean & Donal Mulryan	1954/1969	1988	Roscommon	Roscommon	Speculative Commercial/Residential Property Development
024	MASTERTON / GETJAR	Michael & Mona Masterson	1950	1980	Borehamwood	Mayo	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
025	DURKAN BROS / DURKAN GROUP	William / Patrick / John Durkan	1938	1970	New Barnet	Mayo	General Contractors / Social & Commercial Housing
026	JOHN SISK & SONS	George H Sisk <i>et al</i>	1940	1984	St. Albans	Cork	General Contractors
027	MULALLEY & CO LTD	Vincent O'Malley & family	1951	1972	Woodford Green	N.K.	General Contractors / LA housing stock
028	PC HARRINGTON CONTRACTORS LTD	Patrick & John Harrington	1935/1937	1968	Southall	Tipperary	Concrete Frame Specialists / Substructure/Superstructure

Firm #	Firm Name	Founders	Founder's DOB	Date founded	Place founded	County Roots (N.K.= not known)	Construction Specialisation
029	OLIVER CONNELL & SON	Oliver & Pat Connell	1945	1974	Ealing	N.K.	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
030	BYRNE BROS / BYRNE GROUP PLC	Patsy & Johnny Byrne	1949/1945	1969	Teddington	Kerry	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
031	MJ ROONEY GROUNDWORKS	Michael J Rooney	1938	1986	New Eltham	Leitrim	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
032	EDENWAY LTD	Pat Liston and Jim/Dan O'Mahony	1936?	1973	Staples Corner	N.K.	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
033	CANTILLON LTD	Bill Cantillon	1932	1967	Neasden	N.K.	Demolition/Haulage
034	TOUREEN MANGAN	Dennis Nolan / Daniel Nolan	1962/1971	1991	Harrow	N.K.	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
035	DUFFY GROUP LTD (DUFFY & CARR)	John Duffy	1940	1977	Sheperd's Bush	Donegal	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
036	WHELAN & GRANT LTD	John P Whelan & Martin Grant	1938/1927	1974	Sheperd's Bush?	Offaly? / Tipperary?	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
037	J.P. WHELAN HOMES LTD	John P Whelan	1938	1966	Biggin Hill	Offaly?	Housing and residential development
038	J.P. WHELAN (INVESTMENTS) LTD	John P Whelan	1938	1973	Biggin Hill	Offaly?	Speculative Property development
039	MARTIN GRANT (HOLDINGS) LTD	Martin Grant	1927	1974	Dorking, Surrey	Tipperary	Housing and residential development
040	SEAMUS O'DONNELL PLASTERING	Seamus O'Donnell	1950	1986	Ilford, Essex	Roscommon	Plastering Subcontractor / Property developer
041	AJ MORRISROE & SONS LTD / MORRISROE GROUP	Brian Morrisroe	1955	1983	Borehamwood	Mayo?	Groundworks/Substructure/Superstructure frames
042	ADDINGTON FORMWORK LTD / CORCORAN CONSTRUCTION	Michael N Corcoran / Nora B Corcoran	1943/1944	1979	Bracknell	N.K.	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
043	BIGGINS & GALLAGHER LTD	John Joe Biggins / Ger Gallagher	1951/1960	1988	Reading	N.K.	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
044	CJ O'SHEA LTD	Crohan & Anne O'Shea	1938/1936	1966	Stanmore	N.K.	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
045	FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENTS LTD	Pat Hickey - Managing Director	1954/1951	1989	Wallington, Surrey	N.K.	Groundworks/Substructure/Superstructure frames
046	KAYBRIDGE CONSTRUCTION	Michael & Philomena O'Connor	1942/1943	1972	Enfield	N.K.	Groundworks/Substructure/Superstructure frames
047	MITCHELLSON FORMWORK	Martin Masterson & Con Mitchell	1952/1954	1986	Slough	N.K.	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure

Firm #	Firm Name	Founders	Founder's DOB	Date founded	Place founded	County Roots (N.K.= not known)	Construction Specialisation
048	PJ DIAMOND / DIAMONDBUILD	Peter Diamond / John Gray	1949	1977	Tottenham	Mayo	Small general builders - LA housing stock
049	TRANT ENGINEERING LTD.	Phil Trant / Patrick Trant	1922	1963	Southampton	Kerry	Civil Engineering / Utilities
050	PATTERSON CONSTRUCTION	Sean & Val Patterson	1960/1962	1985	Hanwell	N.K.	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
051	ARDMORE CONSTRUCTION LTD	Cormac Byrne / Patrick Byrne	1951/1965	1974	Brixton	N.K.	General Contractors
052	BDL GROUP (BURKE DRY LINING)	Frank Burke / Bridget Burke	1947/1948	1977	Hayes, Middlesex	Galway	Drywall Systems / Suspended Ceilings / Plastering
053	MULLIN & SONS LTD	Anthony Mullen	1939	1966	Ealing	N.K.	Small general builders - LA housing stock
054	COINFORD LTD	James & Michael Hickey	1962/1965	1990	Burstow, Surrey	N.K.	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
055	E. & E. O'SULLIVAN BROS. (CONTRACTORS) LTD	Eugene & Edward O'Sullivan	1939/1941	1973	New Barnet	Cork?	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
056	O'SULLIVAN CONSTRUCTION LTD	John O'Sullivan (later Michael & Jeremiah, sons)	1937	1986	Harrow Weald	Cork?	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
057	CAPPAGH GROUP	Thomas Ferncombe / Anne Ferncombe	1942/1944	1973	Wimbledon	N.K.	Waste management / Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
058	COFFEY CONSTRUCTION	Patrick Coffey / Tom Coffey	1945/1947	1988	Southgate	Galway	General Contractors
059	DOVEGUARD	Frank O'Hare	1953	1993	Hounslow	N.K.	Small general builders - LA housing stock
060	GALLAGHER GROUP	Patrick Gallagher	1949	1988	Aylesford, Kent	Leitrim	Quarrying / Civil Engineering / Building / Plant
061	G.G.S. COMPRESSORS LTD	Gerard Gardiner	1961	1988	Enfield	N.K.	Plant Hire/Haulage
062	J.BROWNE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LTD	Sean Browne / Jeremy Browne	1936	1971	Enfield	N.K.	Civil Engineering / Utilities
063	JOHN REILLY (CIVIL ENGINEERING) LTD	John, Michael, David Reilly	1957	1986	Southampton	N.K.	General Contractors
064	KELLY GROUP	Timothy Kelly & Aidan Kelly	1954/1956	1988	Wembley	N.K.	Civil Engineering / Utilities (Cable TV/Comms boom)
065	KELTBRAY	John P Keenan / Brendan Kerr	1965	1976	Esher, Surrey	Dublin?	Demolition / Waste Management
066	KILLOUGHERY LTD	George Killoughery	1933	1957	Purfleet	N.K.	Demolition / Waste Management
067	L LYNCH PLANTHIRE & HAULAGE	Liam Lynch	1954	1986	Finchley	N.K.	Plant Hire/Haulage
068	MCGINLEY SUPPORT SERVICES	John Joe McGinley / Dermot McGinley	1927/1957	1978	Radlett, Herts	Leitrim ?	Labour Supply / Resource recruitment

Firm #	Firm Name	Founders	Founder's DOB	Date founded	Place founded	County Roots (N.K.= not known)	Construction Specialisation
069	MCGOVERN BROTHERS (HAULAGE) LTD	Anthony & Mel McGovern	1945	1968	Willesden	Leitrim ?	Plant Hire/Haulage
070	MCGRATH BROS (WASTE CONTROL) LTD	David & Patrick McGrath	1952/1958	1972	Hackney	Leitrim ?	Waste Management
071	MP MORAN & SONS LTD	Michael Moran	1945	1975	Kilburn	Mayo	Builders Merchants / Hardware suppliers
072	O'DONOVAN WASTE DISPOSAL LTD	Joe O'Donovan	1935	1959	Tottenham	Cork	Waste Management
073	P FLANNERY PLANT HIRE LTD	Patrick Flannery	1950	1972	Oval S. London	N.K.	Plant Hire/Haulage
074	VGC GROUP (PREVIOUSLY VG CLEMENTS LTD)	Sean Fitzpatrick	1945	1960		Cavan	Consultancy / Labour Supply / Resource recruitment
075	MCINERNEY	Ambrose McInerney	1922	1949	Watford	Clare	Housebuilding
076	JOSEPH GALLAGHER GROUP	Joseph Gallagher	1945	1982	Dartford, Kent	Donegal	Civil Engineering / Utilities
077	CLIPFINE LTD	Thomas McCarron	1952	1975	Enfield	N.K.	2nd-fix Carpentry / Fitting out specialists
078	COLOHAN LTD	Patrick & Margaret Colohan	1942	1994	Addlestone, Surrey	N.K.	Small general builders - LA housing stock
079	COLLINSTOWN CONSTRUCTION LTD	Henry & Marian Nolan	1945	1979	Norbury	N.K.	Small general builders - LA housing stock
080	MELCOURT CONTRACTORS	James & Bridget Guckian	1942	1970	Ilford, Essex	Leitrim	Industrial Painting Specialists
081	FM CONWAY	Francis Michael Conway	???	1961	Penge, Surrey	N.K.	Roadworks / Tarmac/ civil engineering
082	E.J. & P DOHERTY CONSTRUCTION	Edward John & Philip Doherty	1922/1924	1962	Leytonstone	Donegal ?	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
083	GREHAN CONTRACTORS LTD	John & Elizabeth Grehan	1939/1943	1972	Hertford	Roscommon?	Small general builders - LA housing stock
084	GEOGHEGAN BROS. LTD	Patrick & Thomas Geoghegan	1939/1947	1973	Stevenage	N.K.	Commercial Industrial buildings
085	CREEGAN PROPERTIES LTD	James & Patricia Creegan	1948/1950	1974	New Malden	N.K.	Property conversions
086	FITZWINN CONTRACTORS LTD	Rita Fitzpatrick & William Wynne	1949/1951	1975	Slough	N.K.	Small general builders - LA housing stock
087	E. MCGIVNEY AND SON LTD	Eugene McGivney	1943	1975	Cricklewood	Ulster?	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
088	CUSACK & CO. LTD	Barbara Cusack / Patrick McHugh/Mary McHugh	1912/1937	1977	Harrow	Ulster?	Groundworks/General Civil Engineering
089	MCGEE GROUP	Thomas Francis McGee	1934	1959	Wembley	Longford?	Demolition / Waste Management/Civil Engineering

Firm #	Firm Name	Founders	Founder's DOB	Date founded	Place founded	County Roots (N.K.= not known)	Construction Specialisation
090	CORCORAN CONSTRUCTION LTD	Michael & Nora Corcoran	1943	1979	Reading	N.K.	Formwork / Concrete Frame Specialists
091	C.F.HARRINGTON (BUILDERS)LTD	Cornelious & Christine Harrington	1940	1967	Wembley	N.K.	Civil Engineering
092	DURKIN AND SONS LTD	Michael, Edward & Monica Durkin	1935/1954	1983	Wembley	N.K.	Civil Engineering / Utilities
093	D. CAWLEY & SONS LTD	Daniel & Pauline Cawley	1952/1953	1985	Loughton	Sligo?	Property conversions
094	DEVINE HOMES PLC	James Devine	1949	1985	Reigate	N.K.	Housebuilding
095	FLAHIVE BRICKWORK LTD	Brendan Flahive / Eamonn Duggan	1945/1962	1985	Watford	Kerry?	Specialist Brickwork Subcontractors /Property development
096	DOHERTY CONSTRUCTION LTD	Patrick & Geraldine Doherty	1950	1987	Ealing	Donegal?	
097	O'HALLORAN & O'BRIEN LTD	John O'Halloran / Tom O'Brien	1947	1972	Surrey	N.K.	
098	MCWEENEY SMALLMAN & CO.LTD	Bernard McWeeney / Mrs Smallman	c.1930s	1957		Leitrim /Dublin	Concrete Frame Specialists/Substructure/Superstructure
099	CONNOLLY HOMES PLC	Michael, William & JohnJoe Connolly	1931	1963	Luton	Mayo	Demolition, site clearance, steel erection
100	J.T . DONAVON LTD	J.T Donavon / T Semplar	N.K.	1955	Ashford, Middx	N.K.	Housebuilding
101	PHOENIX FORMWORK (CONTRACTORS) LTD	Michael Joseph Weldon	1939	1971	Willesden	N.K.	Small general builders
102	OAKWOOD PLANT LTD	Matthew & Bridget Lennon	1941	1964	Edmonton	Leitrim?	Formwork / Concrete Frame Specialists
103	OAKWOOD DEMOLITION LTD	Matthew & Bridget Lennon	1941	1989	Edmonton	Leitrim?	Plant Hire/Haulage/Civil Engineering
104	M.LENNON & CO.,LTD	Matthew & Bridget Lennon	1941	1964	Edmonton	Leitrim?	Demolition, site clearance, steel erection
105	SWIFT HORSMAN LTD (AKA SWIFT STRUCTURES)	Matt & Jim Halligan	1942	1967	St Albans	Mayo	Property development and management, construction
106	RUDDY JOINERY LTD	Patrick & Eileen Ruddy	1938	1978	Flitwick, Bedfordshire	N.K.	

Appendix B - Table 2 - CORPORATE GROWTH PROFILE OF IRISH FIRMS IN UK MARKET 1945-1995

Company Name	UK Turnover (000s)										
	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
M.J. GLEESON GROUP PLC	£19,636	£22,909	£26,182	£29,455	£32,727	£36,000	£45,000	£72,970	£119,244	£165,518	£191,838
MURPHY GROUP (GREEN MURPHY)			£4,613	£10,380	£16,146	£21,913	£36,104	£49,220	£69,338	£142,710	£152,141
ABBEY PLC	£9,409	£14,636	£19,864	£25,091	£30,318	£35,545	£40,773	£46,000	£56,524	£60,567	£144,245
MCNICHOLAS CONSTRUCTION (GREEN MACS)		£144	£861	£1,579	£2,297	£3,015	£4,042	£7,768	£11,493	£46,524	£130,091
JOHN SISK & SONS									£3,328	£28,702	£93,449
THE CLANCY GROUP PLC [M. J. CLANCY & SONS]		£300	£1,200	£4,884	£17,094	£29,304	£41,514	£53,724	£65,934	£78,144	£90,354
J.M.C.C. /J.M.S.E IRELAND (GREY MURPHY)				£1,265	£4,426	£7,587	£11,008	£15,119	£29,648	£51,477	£81,953
MCNICHOLAS PLC (BROWN MACS)				£3,249	£5,332	£6,258	£6,781	£8,665	£23,708	£54,412	£64,260
DURKAN BROS / DURKAN GROUP							£4,042	£12,657	£24,319	£36,759	£56,712
O'ROURKE CIVIL ENGINEERING LTD								£8,273	£22,061	£35,850	£49,638
FITZPATRICK & SONS LTD (NOW VOLKER PLC)	£1,000	£3,000	£5,000	£8,000	£22,319	£24,855	£27,391	£29,928	£32,464	£35,000	£48,380
CAREY GROUP PLC						£1,628	£9,770	£17,911	£26,052	£34,194	£42,335
BYRNE BROS / BYRNE GROUP PLC						£150	£500	£1,200	£2,305	£45,161	£39,000
BREHENY CIVIL ENGINEERING					£1,668	£5,837	£10,007	£14,177	£18,346	£22,516	£37,476
MARTIN GRANT (HOLDINGS) LIMITED								£11,970	£18,605	£25,240	£31,876
KELLY GROUP										£7,827	£27,393
PC HARRINGTON CONTRACTORS LTD						£750	£1,000	£1,250	£1,500	£22,515	£26,332
JOHN REILLY (CIVIL ENGINEERING) LIMITED										£9,072	£20,411
BARHALE PLC								£4,201	£9,452	£14,704	£19,955
DUFFY GROUP LTD (DUFFY & CARR)								£536	£8,822	£19,665	£17,855
TRANT ENGINEERING LTD.					£1,574	£5,510	£9,445	£13,380	£17,316	£21,251	£17,064
MCGEE GROUP / COMPANY LIMITED				£466	£2,795	£5,124	£7,452	£9,781	£12,110	£14,439	£16,768
MULALLEY & CO LTD							£2,163	£5,769	£9,374	£12,980	£16,585
CONNOLLY HOMES PLC					£1,020	£3,570	£6,119	£8,669	£11,219	£13,768	£16,318
CLIFFINE LIMITED									£7,718	£11,577	£15,436
FM CONWAY					£1,688	£3,798	£5,908	£8,017	£10,127	£12,237	£14,347
J.BROWNE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY LIMITED								£5,351	£8,324	£11,297	£14,270
BDL GROUP (BURKE DRY LINING)								£2,234	£5,958	£9,682	£13,406
COINFORD LTD										£2,000	£12,469
FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENTS LTD										£2,057	£12,342
O'HALLORAN & O'BRIEN LIMITED							£1,588	£4,236	£6,883	£9,531	£12,178
OAKWOOD PLANT LIMITED					£391	£2,344	£4,297	£6,251	£8,204	£10,158	£12,111
MCGOVERN BROTHERS (HAULAGE) LIMITED						£860	£3,009	£5,159	£7,308	£9,458	£11,607
LOWERY			£1,286	£2,572	£3,858	£5,144	£6,431	£7,717	£9,003	£10,289	£11,575
BALLYMORE										£3,086	£10,802
ARDMORE CONSTRUCTION LIMITED							£489	£2,931	£4,208	£6,082	£10,260
KAYBRIDGE CONSTRUCTION							£1,319	£3,517	£5,714	£7,912	£10,110
CJ O'SHEA LTD						£3,101	£6,977	£10,854	£14,730	£18,606	£10,096
MCGINLEY SUPPORT SERVICES								£1,154	£4,040	£6,925	£9,811
GALLAGHER GROUP										£2,666	£9,331

Company Name	UK Turnover (000s)										
	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
O'KEEFE GROUP							£1,531	£3,062	£4,594	£6,125	£7,656
C.F.HARRINGTON(BUILDERS)LIMITED						£703	£1,875	£3,047	£4,218	£5,390	£6,562
COFFEY CONSTRUCTION										£1,729	£6,050
PJ DIAMOND / DIAMONDBUILD							£650	£950	£1,750	£3,000	£6,003
MITCHELLSON FORMWORK AND CIVIL ENGINEERING										£2,667	£6,000
B&M MCHUGH						£643	£1,714	£2,785	£3,856	£4,927	£5,998
SWIFT HORSMAN LTD (AKA Swift Structures)						£939	£2,504	£4,070	£5,635	£7,200	£5,489
ADDINGTON FORMWORK LTD / CORCORAN CONSTRUCTION								£328	£1,965	£3,603	£5,240
MASTERSON / GETJAR									£1,742	£3,485	£5,227
AJ MORRISROE & SONS LTD / MORRISROE GROUP LIMITED									£830	£2,905	£4,980
RUDDY JOINERY LTD								£584	£2,044	£3,503	£4,963
J.P. WHELAN (INVESTMENTS) LIMITED							£445	£1,558	£2,670	£3,783	£4,895
VGC GROUP (PREVIOUSLY VG CLEMENTS LTD)					£695	£1,390	£2,085	£2,780	£3,475	£4,170	£4,865
KILLOUGHERY LTD				£360	£960	£1,560	£2,160	£2,760	£3,360	£3,960	£4,560
FLAHIVE BRICKWORK LIMITED										£2,178	£4,356
P FLANNERY PLANT HIRE LTD							£562	£1,500	£2,437	£3,375	£4,312
J.P. WHELAN HOMES LIMITED						£538	£1,210	£1,883	£2,555	£3,228	£3,900
POWERDAY PLC								£0	£1,296	£2,592	£3,888
DURKIN AND SONS LIMITED									£629	£2,200	£3,771
MCGRATH BROS (WASTE CONTROL) LTD							£461	£1,229	£1,997	£2,765	£3,533
CAPPAGH GROUP								£1,073	£1,839	£2,606	£3,372
KENNY & REYNOLDS					£367	£826	£1,285	£1,744	£2,202	£2,661	£3,120
WHELAN & GRANT (HOLDINGS) LIMITED							£146	£875	£1,604	£2,334	£3,063
MJ GALLAGHER						£504	£1,008	£1,513	£2,017	£2,521	£3,025
DEVINE HOMES PLC										£1,324	£2,648
CANTILLON LIMITED						£274	£731	£1,189	£1,646	£2,103	£2,560
M.LENNON & CO.,LIMITED					£58	£349	£640	£931	£1,222	£1,513	£1,804
KELTBRAV								£359	£807	£1,256	£1,704
MP MORAN & SONS LTD								£423	£847	£1,270	£1,693
JOSEPH GALLAGHER GROUP									£381	£1,017	£1,652
POWERDAY PLANT LIMITED								£215	£574	£932	£1,291
CUSACK & CO. LIMITED								£200	£532	£865	£1,197
PHOENIX FORMWORK (CONTRACTORS) LIMITED							£177	£399	£621	£842	£1,064
DOHERTY CONSTRUCTION LIMITED										£382	£1,019
E.J. & P DOHERTY CONSTRUCTION					£88	£236	£383	£530	£677	£825	£972
JB RINEY								£110	£383	£657	£931
L LYNCH PLANTHIRE & HAULAGE										£327	£736
OAKWOOD DEMOLITION LIMITED										£121	£728
FITZGERALD & BURKE								£178	£357	£535	£713
E. MCGIVNEY AND SON LIMITED								£144	£288	£432	£576

Company Name	UK Turnover (000s)										
	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
G.G.S. COMPRESSORS LIMITED										£163	£569
GEOGHEGAN BROS. LIMITED							£47	£165	£283	£400	£518
FITZWINN CONTRACTORS LIMITED								£121	£242	£362	£483
SEAMUS O'DONNELL PLASTERING										£185	£416
MELCOURT CONTRACTORS									£240	£320	£400
O'DONOVAN WASTE DISPOSAL LTD				£11	£64	£117	£171	£224	£277	£331	£384
EDENWAY LTD							£350	£1,500	£3,500	£5,000	£350
OLIVER CONNELL & SON						£100	£150	£150	£200	£250	£350
MULLIN & SONS LTD								£147	£200	£252	£305
PATTERSON CONSTRUCTION										£150	£300
O'SULLIVAN CONSTRUCTION LIMITED										£124	£280
TOUREEN MANGAN											£251
D. CAWLEY & SONS LIMITED										£103	£205
GREHAN CONTRACTORS LIMITED							£26	£70	£113	£157	£200
CREEGAN PROPERTIES LIMITED							£9	£53	£98	£142	£187
E. & E. O'SULLIVAN BROS. (CONTRACTORS) LIMITED								£54	£92	£131	£169
BIGGINS & GALLAGHER LTD										£46	£160
DOVEGUARD											£150
COLLINSTOWN CONSTRUCTION LTD									£38	£69	£100
COLOHAN LIMITED											£100
MJ ROONEY GROUNDWORKS										£150	£52
CORCORAN CONSTRUCTION LIMITED									£17	£31	£45
	£30,045	£40,989	£59,006	£87,311	£145,886	£210,472	£313,451	£489,486	£750,729	£1,238,224	£1,764,670
Growth as % of final 1995 TO	2%	2%	3%	5%	8%	12%	18%	28%	43%	70%	100%
Incremental growth 5yr-on-5yr		0	1	2	3	4	6	10	14	28	30
		27%	31%	32%	40%	31%	33%	36%	35%	39%	30%

Appendix B - Table 3 - CORPORATE TURNOVER COMPARISON – TOP 20 FIRMS

IRISH-FOUNDED VERSUS UK-FOUNDED- AS AT 1993

Company Name	£M	UK EQUIVALENT TOP 20	£M	% Irish -v- Total UK Turnover
	1993		1993	
M.J. GLEESON GROUP PLC	£179	TRAFALGAR HOUSE	£3,877	5%
MURPHY GROUP (GREEN MURPHY)	£147	TARMAC	£2,452	6%
ABBEY PLC	£102	AMEC	£2,184	5%
MCNICHOLAS CONSTRUCTION (GREEN MACS)	£88	BICC (BALFOUR BEATTY)	£1,831	5%
JOHN SISK & SONS	£61	P&O (BOVIS)	£1,642	4%
THE CLANCY GROUP PLC [M. J. CLANCY & SONS]	£84	WIMPEY	£1,587	5%
J.M.C.C. /J.M.S.E IRELAND (GREY MURPHY)	£67	MOWLEM	£1,269	5%
MCNICHOLAS PLC (BROWN MACS)	£59	LAING	£1,264	5%
DURKAN BROS / DURKAN GROUP	£47	TAYLOR WOODROW	£1,150	4%
O'ROURKE CIVIL ENGINEERING LTD	£43	COSTAIN	£1,105	4%
FITZPATRICK & SONS LTD (NOW VOLKER PLC)	£42	BALLAST NEEDHAM	£950	4%
CAREY GROUP PLC	£38	ALFRED MCALPINE	£619	6%
BYRNE BROS / BYRNE GROUP PLC	£42	KIER	£552	8%
BREHENY CIVIL ENGINEERING	£30	RAINE	£446	7%
MARTIN GRANT (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	£29	BARRETT	£405	7%
KELLY GROUP	£18	TILBURY DOUGLAS	£358	5%
PC HARRINGTON CONTRACTORS LTD	£24	MILLER	£357	7%
JOHN REILLY (CIVIL ENGINEERING) LIMITED	£15	BIRSE	£351	4%
BARHALE PLC	£17	HBG (KYLE STEWART/NUTTAL)	£348	5%
DUFFY GROUP LTD (DUFFY & CARR)	£19	BRYANT	£310	6%
	£1,151		£23,057	5%

(Sources: Irish firms - Appendix B, Table A, UK firms – ‘Top 50 League Tables’ in *Building Magazine*, 29th July, 1994, p.21.)

SELECTED CASE STUDIES

M.J. GLEESON GROUP PLC (Founded 1915)

The precise ancestral roots of the Gleeson empire are, like so many of the pioneer Irish builders, shrouded in uncertainty; reflecting the difficulties of genealogical research throughout Ireland in the wake of the political turmoil of the early twentieth century and the scattering of communities. Around the turn of the 1900s, two Gleeson brothers emigrated from their home place, a smallholding farm in the townland of Cloonmore, in what was then the civil parish of Dunmore, in north Galway. According to the 1901 census of Ireland, there were two families of Gleesons in Cloonmore at this time and the two brothers could have come from either; it is probable that they were the eldest sons of John and Sarah Gleeson, illiterate small farmers with a household of four.¹ The two brothers headed for the industrial heartlands of midland England. The elder brother, James, failed to settle and returned to Galway; appearing on the aforementioned census form for 1901. The other, Michael Joseph, born around 1881, then in his late teenage years and nicknamed MJ,² moved to Sheffield and began working for a ‘townie’ – a fellow Cloonmore man and a very near neighbour, Andrew Donnellan³ – as a bricklayer and eventually married his employer’s daughter, thus becoming heir apparent to a small, but potentially thriving business.⁴ The precise transitional arrangements are not known for sure but according to the Stock Exchange prospectus for M.J. Gleeson’s public flotation in 1960 (the first Irish-founded construction company in Britain to float publicly), the company was founded in 1903, although the name did not change to M.J. Gleeson until 1915.⁵ Given that at this time Michael was in his mid-thirties, initial research failed to find any record of military service in World War One and it is not clear how he avoided military conscription which was introduced in 1916. There is evidence that Michael Gleeson was active as a local builder in Sheffield around this period, for example, he was fined twice for ‘lighting-up’ offences during World

¹ 1901 Census of Ireland, Galway County, District Electoral Division (DED) Carrownagur, Cloonmore, unpaginated, household no. 2, Michael Gleeson, National Archives of Ireland, "Census of Ireland 1901/1911" (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie> : accessed 16 May, 2018).

² Ireland Births 1864-1958 Transcription, Registration year 1881, Registration Quarter Oct - Dec 1881, Vol, 4, p.493 available at <https://search.findmypast.ie/record?id=ire/bmd/d/613080004> (Accessed 16 May, 2018).

³ *Sheffield Independent* - 16 November, 1933, p.8.

⁴ See M.J.Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

⁵ Fred Wellings, *A Dictionary of British Housebuilders*, (Beckenham, 2006), p.263.

War One,⁶ fined again for parking offences related to construction activities on the High Street in Sheffield in 1923⁷ and suffered an attempted break-in at the company yard in Chesterfield Road in the same year.⁸

As can be seen from Figures 1-3 below, by 1927, MJ Gleeson Ltd was becoming a well-established builder and public works contractor in the Sheffield area, having just completed a major project for the construction of a new cinema building on the newly-built Manor Estate township on the periphery of the city. The newspaper report of the cinema's opening painted a glowing picture of Gleeson's skill and craftsmanship as a contractor and catalogued many of their previous projects in the locality (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 - (Source: Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 12 December, 1927, p.4.)

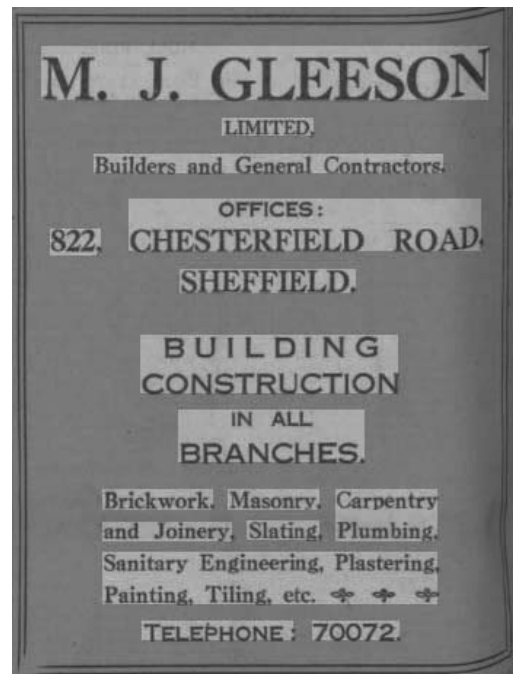


Figure 1- 1927 Newspaper advertisement for M. J. Gleeson Contractors (Source: Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 12 December, 1927, p.4.)

Although at the time he was developing his business he had a relatively limited supply of Irish-born labour in the vicinity of Sheffield, and certainly nowhere near the numbers of Irishmen the company would later have access to after the Second World War, nonetheless Michael Gleeson maintained his links with his homeland, not least by marrying his neighbour's daughter sometime during the First World War. Mrs Gleeson, a devout Catholic who did much charitable work for the poor migrant Irish of Sheffield, died relatively young in 1933 and left

⁶ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, October 27th, 1916, p.3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, October 2nd, 1923, p.7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 5th, 1923, p.4.

Michael in his early-1950s with two young daughters.⁹ Despite such domestic hardships – or indeed perhaps because of them - M. J. Gleeson appears to have thrown himself into his entrepreneurial activities and by the mid-1930s was running a well-established construction business, was President of the Master Builders' Association, but also diversified his activities, becoming the owner of several of the local cinemas his firm constructed and chairman of directors at Owlerton Stadium, a thriving enterprise where greyhound and speedway racing entertained the urban communities of Sheffield and further afield.¹⁰ Indeed Michael had the famed Irish penchant for horse-racing also; he owned several racehorses including one very successful, Carrantrylla, named after the Gleeson homeplace in north Galway, which won the Galway Hurdle Chase at Galway Races in 1948 and was led-in proudly by M.J. Gleeson himself, described in the newspaper reports as 'a Galway sportsman'.¹¹



Figure 3 – Newspaper artist's impression of new Manor Cinema building at the Manor Estate in Sheffield constructed by M.J. Gleeson in 1927. (Source: Sheffield Daily Telegraph, 12 December, 1927, p.4.)

Gleeson maintained a number of other links with his homeplace, including, in the late 1930s, his company's conversion of a well-known Galway City landmark The Four Corners building at 1, Shop Street, which had been purchased by Michael's younger brother, Patrick, who ran a highly successful drapery and clothing business from the early 1920s until the mid-

⁹ See obituary in *Sheffield Independent*, 16 November, 1933, p.8.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Galway City Tribune*, 10 March, 1989, p.7., *Connacht Tribune*, July 31, 1948, p.15.

1970s with his wife, Nora, who was a sister of Andrew Donnellan, Michael's father-in-law and first business partner.¹² The Gleeson family bought the Four Corners building in 1933 and M.J. Gleeson Contractors undertook the conversion works on behalf of Patrick. Gleeson also successfully completed the construction of the Galway Technical School in Father Griffin Road in Galway, now the Galway Technical Institute, in 1938.¹³ Seemingly entrepreneurial flair ran in the Gleeson and Donnellan families and in many ways the Gleeson story epitomises one of the misnomers of the stock stereotyping of the Irish diaspora, that of the Irish entrepreneurial adventurer, the '*rags-to-riches*, poverty-stricken farmers made-good' story which pervades much of the narrative of the Irish builder in Britain. In actuality, as this thesis demonstrates, most of the entrepreneurial class of Irish contractors who *made it big* in Britain did so not from a foundation of deep impoverishment, but rather of middling farmer bourgeois respectability – by no means rich – but often of the more middle-class status within rural Irish society. Indeed Dermot Gleeson, the last generation of the family to run M.J. Gleeson, remarked himself almost a century after Michael founded the company that the Gleeson family in the mid-twentieth century were 'a circle of Irish doctors, dentists and priests', which tends to dispel the archetypal poor-Irish-made-good narrative, as does the link with Patrick Gleeson's successful haberdashery business.¹⁴

To start with, M.J. Gleeson's building activities focused predominantly on housebuilding – Figure 2 lists the extensive housing estates the company had built by the late 1920s - but as the company grew Michael sought diversification operationally into other areas of civil engineering and public infrastructural projects and geographically northwards to Newcastle and Scotland, and more importantly for the future success of the enterprise, south to London.¹⁵ Gleeson's purchase of the considerable Nonsuch Park Estate in suburban Cheam in Surrey was the turning-point in the company's expansion into the London and south-eastern region of England. Suburban expansion and the relocation of London's burgeoning population was the catalyst for the housing boom in the 1930s, which 'came about through a partnership between local speculative builders, who put up the houses, and the newly electrified rail companies, who provided the only realistic means by which their new residents could get to

¹² 1901 Census of Ireland, Galway County, District Electoral Division (DED) Carrownagur, Cloonmore, unpaginated, household no. 3, Donnellan family, National Archives of Ireland, "Census of Ireland 1901/1911" (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie> : accessed 16 May, 2018).

¹³ *Galway City Tribune*, 10 March, 1989, p.7., *Connacht Tribune*, July 31, 1948, p.15.

¹⁴ Simon Gunn, Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl*, (London, 2003), p.71.

¹⁵ See M.J. Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

work each morning in central London'.¹⁶ One of the major zones of development was Epsom in Surrey, south-west of what was then metropolitan London, whose population had risen by 27,000 in the preceding years. Around 1936-1937, Gleeson was developing residential houses on the Nonsuch Park Estate which ranged in price from £980 to £1365 and were marketed as 'of very superior character' and close to railway links to London.¹⁷ One of their marketing brochures for their commercial housing developments in the 1930s claimed that Gleeson were building 500 properties per year by the mid-30s.¹⁸ As a result of this highly lucrative development spree, Gleeson's London office was established in Worcester Park, north Cheam, then part of rural Surrey.¹⁹

The opening of the London base for Gleeson's southern operations coincided with the award of the company's first major infrastructural civil engineering project in early 1939, a section of the new London to Fishguard Trunk Road (now the A40/M40 Motorway) which included the construction of a viaduct and two bridges.²⁰ With the increased workload and diversification of the company as a whole, doubtless Michael - by now in his late 50s - knew he would need to think about succession planning and dependable senior management he could rely upon in the long term. Patrilineal inheritance and succession being the custom in Britain and Ireland throughout the early twentieth-century, and given the overwhelming maleness of the construction industry throughout this period, the absence of a son meant Michael had to turn to the wider family. Michael's older brother, James, back in Cloonmore had a son born in 1910 named John Patrick,²¹ known as Jack, who migrated to England to join his uncle's business and who, by the late 1930s, was sufficiently advanced as a contracts manager that Michael dispatched him to run the new London operation.²²

¹⁶ Museum Curator, 'When the Railway came to Epsom and Ewell.' In Epsom and Ewell Local and Family History Centre Newsletter, Issue No.23, (January, 2010), p.1. available at

<http://www.epsomandewellhistoryexplorer.org.uk/NewsletterJan2010Web.pdf> (accessed 18 May, 2018)

¹⁷ Museum Curator, 'When the Railway came to Epsom and Ewell.', p.2.

¹⁸ Wellings, *British Housebuilders*, p.45.

¹⁹ See M.J.Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

²⁰ *West London Observer*, 24 February, 1939, p.8 ; M.J.Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

²¹ 1911 Census of Ireland, Galway County, District Electoral Division (DED) Carrownagur, Cloonmore, unpaginated, household no. 7, Gleeson family, National Archives of Ireland, "Census of Ireland 1901/1911" (<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie> : accessed 16 May, 2018).

²² M.J.Gleeson corporate website, available at <http://www.mjgleeson.com/aboutus/history> [accessed March, 2015].

As might be expected the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939 meant that Gleeson's activities were, for most of the war, diverted to essential war works, 'building airfields, military camps and hospitals throughout the country, which expanded and diversified the company's business yet further.' And no doubt enhanced the reputation of this already considerable enterprise.²³ A measure both of the degree of acceptance Gleeson had achieved as a respected business within the British construction industry and of the growth it had achieved by the 1940s can be seen in Gleeson's inclusion in the list of major contracting organisations and businesses permitted by the Home Office Aliens Department to issue Leave Certificates to Irish-born employees for travel to and from Ireland for Christmas/ New year in 1941;²⁴ Gleeson was the sole ethnically Irish company on this list, which included all the major British construction companies operating in Britain at the time. This inclusion also demonstrates that Gleeson continued to recruit significant numbers of male manual operatives from Ireland. It is not known whether the company participated in the widespread British practice of recruiting via agents in Ireland often operating through the auspices of such organisations as the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors, or if Gleeson retained sufficient links to its own internal networks of kin and friendship to recruit directly; in all probability they probably used both methods of recruitment.

By the start of the 1950s M.J. Gleeson was an uncontested member of the well-established list of British major contractors. They were engaged in the construction of major power stations in the Manchester region for which they sought to recruit permanent staff for site agent, quantity surveyor, sub-agent and foreman positions on projects or phases valued at £500,000; these were major contracts by any objective standard.²⁵ Another advertisement in April 1952 had them recruiting site agents and management in the London area for major works of reinforced concrete construction and deep basement excavation.²⁶ They were also highly successful bidding for hydro-electrical dam projects, the *bread-and-butter* work for Irish migrant labour since the early twentieth-century. Michael retired in 1950 – he was nearly seventy years old – and Jack Gleeson, who had been groomed for leadership of the now considerable enterprise since joining it in the early 1930s, took over as Chief Executive.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ NAUK, Doc Ref: Lab 8/535 – Communique ref: Gen.203/6/390 dated 21st November, 1941.

²⁵ *The Scotsman* – 2 March, 1950, p.10.

²⁶ *Contract Journal*, 2 Apr, 1952, p.1660.



Figure 4 - Senator Edward Kennedy being shown the plans for the new John F Kennedy Memorial Hall at the Irish Centre in Camden Town by Jack Gleeson, CEO of M. J. Gleeson Contractors, June 1964

(Source: Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A History of the London Irish Centre, 1954-2004*, (London, 2004), p.60)

By January 1981, despite a difficult trading environment generally across the construction market, when the Annual General Meeting was chaired by Jack Gleeson at the head office in Cheam, MJ Gleeson (Contractors) plc were generating profit of over £1million, an increase of £130,000 that year despite a drop in group turnover – attributable largely to improved rental performance of the group’s property portfolio, and confidently proposed changing the company name to MJ Gleeson Group plc to reflect the widening operational diversity of their activities.²⁷ The 1990s saw difficult trading conditions for Gleeson initially with turnover at £199 million in 1991 but dropping substantially to £174 million in 1994. By the close of the era of the post-war Irish builder in 1995, the group turnover increased by 10% on the year to just under £192 million whilst profitability fell to £8.5 million in what were considered difficult trading conditions.²⁸ By this stage Gleeson employed 1589 direct and administrative employees, although it is unlikely a large proportion of these were any longer Irish nationals or newly-arrived Irish migrant labourers, given the extent to which migration was, by then, reversing and to which Gleeson as a corporate entity and as a family concern had assimilated into British business culture.²⁹

²⁷ *Irish Independent Newspaper*, 28 January, 1982, p.6

²⁸ MJ Gleeson Group PLC Annual Report and Accounts 1994/95, UK Companies House BETA Database available online at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00479529/filing-history?page=14> (accessed 16 May, 2016), p.3, 30.

²⁹ MJ Gleeson Group PLC Annual Report and Accounts 1994/95, UK Companies House BETA Database available online at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00479529/filing-history?page=14> (accessed 16 May, 2016), p.20.

M.J. Gleeson was the first of the 20th-century migrant Irish builders to firmly establish a dynastic construction enterprise within the British construction industry and, if one defines success by reference to longevity and profitability, it remains arguably the most successful corporate venture by an Irish-rooted business in Britain. That said, it would be hard to recognise any elements of cultural Irishness or Irish connectivity in the business as it exists today; true the chairman of the Board of Directors is a Gleeson, albeit the sole remaining connection with the family of smallholding farmers who came from Cloonmore. Dermot Gleeson is the grand-nephew of Michael Joseph Gleeson. Born in London in 1949, Dermot is the son of Jack Gleeson's younger brother Patrick – who migrated to London in the 1930s or 40s around the time his brother began working for their uncle and probably also worked for the family firm. Dermot was raised on the Nonsuch Park Estate, between Stoneleigh, North Cheam, Cheam, and Ewell on the boundaries of the borough of Epsom and Ewell in Surrey; the solidly respectably middle-class English estate built by his uncle and grand-uncle in the mid-1930s.³⁰ Indeed it is in all likelihood the success of that speculative housebuilding venture which provided such a property for his family. He was educated at Cambridge University, worked for the Conservative Party Research Department and the European Commission in Brussels before becoming a director of M.J. Gleeson in 1975. He was appointed Chief Executive in 1988 and Chairman in 1994. He is, at the time of writing, a non-executive director of GB Group Holdings Limited (the parent company of GB Building Solutions Limited, previously Gleeson Building Limited). Also previously a trustee of the British Broadcasting Corporation, chairman of the Major Contractors Group, a board member of the Housing Corporation, a director of the Construction Industry Training Board and a trustee of the Institute of Cancer Research.

Plainly the familial lineage associated with the Gleeson corporate entity is, in terms of culture and social mobility, far removed from the rural small-holding roots of the founder of the Gleeson empire.³¹ As we shall see, such social mobility is indeed a feature of Irish entrepreneurial activity in the post-war construction industry.

³⁰ See p.19 *supra*.

³¹ *MJ Gleeson PLC Report and Accounts 2017*, p.39 available at http://issuu.com/complete-design/docs/_2006__gleeson_r_a_2017?e=19616011/54795013, (accessed 18 May, 2018); World Biographical Encyclopedia, Inc., *Dermot James Gleeson, Construction company executive, online biography*, available at https://prabook.com/web/dermot_james.gleeson/481650, (accessed 18 May, 2018).

FITZPATRICK & SONS LTD (Founded 1921)

Patrick Fitzpatrick, from County Cork, travelled, as a young man, to London around 1883 to undertake work as a street mason. Little is known about the early details of the business, save that Patrick’s son, John Martin, followed to London sometime just after World War One ended. The company was registered in London by John - described as a dynamic self-starter - as Fitzpatrick & Sons Ltd in 1921. Like many Irish migrant builders John focused his efforts on the capital and established an office and works yard at 455, Old Ford Road, E3 in the then poorer Bow area of east London; “In the early days, much of the work took place in London, and Fitzpatrick & Sons built a formidable reputation through several high profile projects, including the reconstruction of Parliament Square and repaving the forecourt of Buckingham Palace.”³²



Figure 5 - Fitzpatrick labour – mostly Irish migrants - reconstructing Parliament Square, London, probably c.1930s.
(Photo source: Volker-Fitzpatrick PLC)

A specialist concrete paving division was set up by John Fitzpatrick in the early 1930s

³² See Volker Fitzpatrick PLC website, available at <http://www.volkerfitzpatrick.co.uk/en/aboutus/storysofar> [accessed March, 2015].

and this seems to have enhanced the Fitzpatrick name further, ‘By 1930 they are acknowledged specialists in concrete paving with a reputation for innovation.’³³ Although there are no public records available it seems that John married and had at least three children, two sons and a daughter and it would appear that they all took some hand in the running of the family business when old enough.

The transformative entrepreneurial leadership that was to turn Fitzpatrick into a major player in the construction and civil engineering industry would come later, however, from Pat Fitzpatrick - John’s son - born in 1927 and a grandson of the original migrant, and that direction was also focused on the capital. Pat was born and educated in London and completed a degree in civil engineering at the University of London in the late 1940s and, after adding post-graduate specialisations in highway and airfield construction he joined the family business. Fitzpatrick & Sons Ltd was, by the time Pat joined the family firm in the early 1950s, undertaking concrete paving contracts on American airbases in East Anglia and it was on one such contract that Pat’s sister met and married a major in the US Airforce and emigrated to the US. This coincided with a fall-out between Pat and his father, John, which resulted in Pat following his sister out to the United States and working for a year for the Southern California Gas Company; gaining invaluable international experience that would come to serve Fitzpatrick & Sons later. He was tempted back to the family business by an odd deal involving a company car of particular specification and by the mid-1950s had made his peace with his father.³⁴ Fitzpatrick’s gradual expansion of their activities began to accelerate from this point onwards. In 1954, the London Electricity Board, itself a relatively new nationalised public-sector utility company under the post-war Atlee government’s Electricity Act of 1947,³⁵ built a new headquarters at Fleet Lane, in the centre of London and Fitzpatrick & Sons were, if not the main contractor, a major subcontractor.³⁶

³³ ‘Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap’ in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001, unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

³⁴ ‘Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap’ in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001, unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

³⁵ Institution of Electrical Engineers, *Electronics and Power*, Vol 13, (1967), p.203.

³⁶ ‘Work Being Done’ in *Civil and Structural Engineer’s Review*, Vol 8, No 5, (May, 1954), p.187-188



Figure 6 - Fitzpatrick & Sons Ltd - refurbishment of Parliament Square, London, c1930s
 (photo: courtesy of Volker-Fitzpatrick PLC)

By the mid-1950s Fitzpatrick were firmly established as a reliable highways and civil engineering business in the London Metropolitan Area. For example in the first half of 1955 Fitzpatrick were successfully involved in a number of small highways projects as can be seen from table 4. This type of work was what might be colloquially called ‘bread and butter’ work for aspirational Irish migrant companies of the post-war era. It was the type of work which was labour-intensive, low capital investment and short-turnaround / high return work which swiftly enabled capital accumulation for an SME at the time. It should be emphasised that this is an illustrative extract of contract awards reported in the construction press of the time; it is in all probability a mere fraction of the volume of work a well-established contractor of the likes of Fitzpatrick would be undertaking. Nonetheless it serves to illustrate the kinds of work Fitzpatrick and other Irish-founded contractors were undertaking in the 1950s in and around London.

Table 4 - Fitzpatrick & Sons - Reported Contracts Awarded Jan-Jun 1955

Year	Month	Project	Estimated value	Project details	Sources
1955	February	North Circular Road, Golders Green-Southbourne Crescent for LCC	£18,021	Reconstruction of northern carriageway of North Circular Road	<i>Contract Journal</i> , Feb 3rd, 1955, pp.550-575

Year	Month	Project	Estimated value	Project details	Sources
1955	February	James Hawkey Hall / Blake Hall Road, Wanstead & Woodford, Essex for TC	£19,071	Construction of car park and reconstruction of regional carriageways	<i>Contract Journal</i> , Feb 3rd, 1955, pp.550-575
1955	May	Lillie Road (South) Area, Fulham for BC	£16,713	Construction of infrastructures roads and sewers in BC Housing Estates	<i>Contract Journal</i> , May 5th, 1955, pp.511-527
1955	May	Blackheath Hill Housing Estate, for Greenwich BC	£5,750	Construction of infrastructures roads and sewers in BC Housing Estates	<i>Contract Journal</i> , May 5th, 1955, pp.511-527
1955	May	Post Office term contract	> £500	Term maintenance contracts	<i>Contract Journal</i> , May 5th, 1955, pp.511-527
1955	June	Cromwell Road Extension Project for LCC (London County Council)	£58,267	Construction of 3no pedestrian subways under dual carriageway sections	<i>Civil and Structural Engineer's Review</i> , Vol. 9, No 6, June, 1955, p.263
1955	June	Hillcroft Housing Estate, Loughton, Chigwell, Essex for UDC	£12,113	1600 sq yds concrete carriageway, 1500 sq yds tarpaved footpath, 270lm kerbs/edging/borders , sewers etc	<i>Contract Journal</i> , June 2nd, 1955, pp.1010-1021

By contrast to the typical small-to-medium sized road projects shown above, Fitzpatrick were by the late 1950s also beginning to break into the major works sector of the civil engineering market. In June 1958 the *Contract Journal* reported that in joint-venture with Holland, Hannon & Cubitts – another major British contractor known for employing significant amounts of Irish labour – Fitzpatrick had been awarded a substantial contract for the improvement works to the Blackwall Tunnel Northern Approach, a major arterial road tunnel in east London, for the sum of £600,000, a major contract by Fitzpatrick standards of the time.³⁷ The final account papers for this project show that the joint-venture company was known as

³⁷ *Contract Journal*, 20 March, 1958, p.1415.

Cubitt-Fitzpatrick and the project was run from the Old Ford Rd office in Bow. Substantial completion of this project was achieved on July 20th 1960.³⁸

As can also be seen with almost all the prominent post-war Irish entrepreneurial contractors, Fitzpatrick took care to diversify their business interests into a number of areas including plant hire (see Figure 8 and Figure 7) – which was a substantial area of profit-generation particularly in the burgeoning era of mechanisation which the construction and civil



Figure 7- Fitzpatrick & Sons Plant Hire advert, 1958. (Source: *Contract Journal*, 2nd January, 1958, p.15)



Figure 8- Fitzpatrick & Sons Plant Hire advert, 1955. (Source: *Contract Journal*, 3 February, 1955, p.590)

engineering industries underwent in the 1950s and 1960s– and property development and real estate activities.

By the end of the 1950s Pat Fitzpatrick had, it seems, settled in London and was instrumental in building the thriving enterprise which Fitzpatrick was, by then, becoming. In 1959, Pat’s daughter Penny was born; she would ultimately join the business in 1991, after studying Zoology at King’s College in London and subsequently obtaining an MBA in Paris.³⁹

By the mid-1960s Fitzpatrick were established enough to win paving contracts from the London County Council, the City of London Corporation⁴⁰ and various suburban borough

³⁸ LMA, Doc Ref: LCC/CE/CON/02/3860, London County Council Contracts, original unpaginated, digitised pdf version 47 pages, pp.20-24.

³⁹ ‘Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap’ in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001, unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

⁴⁰ *Contract Journal*, 27 February, 1964, p.1089.

councils including Barking, Essex⁴¹ and were engaged in a campaign of expansion into larger motorway works⁴² including the extension of the M1 motorway from Berrygrove to Brockley Hill in Hertfordshire, a substantial road project which required a large on-site team of project managers, agents, quantity surveyors, foremen and gangers.⁴³ In addition they were contracted by the Ministry of Aviation to construct the north perimeter road and bridge works at Heathrow Airport.⁴⁴ In 1965 the company had a new head office located in Lea Road, Waltham Abbey, which was then semi-rural suburban Essex and had diversified into gravel pit extraction for use as aggregates in building and civil engineering operations, successfully applying for an extraction licence for up to 11, 000 gallons of water to wash excavated gravel deposits per day at the former Rushey Mead Nursery in nearby Nazeing in Essex.⁴⁵ This also indicated a recognition that the business was by then of a magnitude that was capable of extracting and processing its own raw materials, rather than relying upon conglomerate suppliers.

Indeed such was the magnitude of the Fitzpatrick construction empire by the late 1960s that Pat Fitzpatrick is listed as director of nine separate divisional companies of the group, including Fitzpatrick & Sons (Contractors) Ltd – the original company founded by John Fitzpatrick in 1921, Fitzpatrick & Son (Engineering) Co. Ltd, Fitzpatrick Developments Ltd, Fitzpatrick Investments Ltd, Fitzpatrick Construction Ltd, Fitzpatrick (Overseas) Ltd, Harrison Plant Ltd and Napier Construction Co. Ltd. These various companies also meant the group had various regional offices including George Street, Croydon (then suburban Surrey/south London) and Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1 in addition to its original works in Old Ford Road in east London.⁴⁶

Fitzpatrick & Sons remained a family-run business until 1967 when against Pat's wishes, but with one other son consenting, the business was sold to Limmer & Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company, a road surfacing rival company of Fitzpatrick, who indeed had been undertaking road surfacing and repair works in the capital longer than Fitzpatrick and undertook resurfacing

⁴¹ *Contract Journal*, 6 February, 1964, p.685.

⁴² Advertisement for professional management and commercial staff in *Contract Journal*, 6 February, 1964, p.730 expressly refers to a 'planned expansion programme' for motorways, trunk roads, bridges and heavy civil engineering.

⁴³ *Contract Journal*, 30 April, 1964, p.1121 & 1171.

⁴⁴ *Contract Journal*, 5 March 1964, p.52.

⁴⁵ *The London Gazette*, 10th August, 1965, p.7582.

⁴⁶ NAUK, Doc Ref. BT 31/44078 – *Companies House Registration of Fitzpatrick & Son (Engineering) Co Ltd.*, 12 unpaginated pages in total, see pages 2 & 12.

works at Parliament Square as early as 1900, some two decades before Fitzpatrick were formed.⁴⁷ Pat Fitzpatrick commented about this takeover in 2001, stating ‘I didn't want to sell but my brother did. I stayed on the board for two years. There were 11 men on that board and none had been on a contract site in their life. They put up with me for two years and then they fired me.’⁴⁸ Limmer & Trinidad was then sold on again to Tarmac Group in 1971,⁴⁹ but Pat managed to acquire the goodwill and the Fitzpatrick name around the same time.⁵⁰ During this time Pat Fitzpatrick set up a new, smaller, but equally successful business called Fitzpatrick & Nicholls, helping with financing and tendering for road and civil engineering works, but after the company was established Pat realised there was not really a suitable role that fitted his skillsets adequately and consequently left to work abroad again; this time in Zaire (Republic of Congo) on a rail project near Stanley Falls.

As a subsidiary of Tarmac for ten years the Fitzpatrick brand continued to grow and prosper; evidence of property acquisition related to office locations shows purchases in Totteridge, Hertfordshire in 1973,⁵¹ an asphalt plant operation in Thurrock, Essex and eventually a new head office in Hoddesdon, some 8 miles north of the old headquarters in Waltham Abbey.⁵² Much of the company’s plant and office locations were peripheral to the north-east corner of the LMA, around the Hertfordshire/Essex borders, a significant radial settlement area of Irish migrant population in areas such as Enfield, Barnet, Tottenham, Wood Green, Haringey, Winchmore Hill and Southgate.

Returning again to the UK, Pat subsequently bought the Fitzpatrick business back in total in 1981 – at the bottom of a recessionary construction market – for a fraction of the price he had previously sold it, forming Fitzpatrick PLC during the acquisition process. In 1989 the business underwent a restructuring which saw the various individual companies brought under

⁴⁷ Berrie Ritchie, *The Story of Tarmac*, (London, 1999), p.17.

⁴⁸ ‘Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap’ in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001,unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

⁴⁹ See Volker Fitzpatrick PLC website, available at <http://www.volkerfitzpatrick.co.uk/en/aboutus/storysofar> [accessed 17, March, 2015]. See also Berrie Ritchie, *The Story of Tarmac*, (London, 1999), p.17.

⁵⁰ ‘Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap’ in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001,unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

⁵¹ *The London Gazette*, 31st July, 1973, p.9048.

⁵² ‘Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap’ in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001,unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

the umbrella of Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd, in the process acquiring the businesses of R.J. Adams Ltd and Fitzpatrick & Sons (Contractors) Ltd. At this time there were at least 3 members of the Fitzpatrick family listed as individual directors: P.A. Fitzpatrick (Pat), S.J. Fitzpatrick and B. Fitzpatrick, shortly to be joined by Pat's daughter Penny in 1991.⁵³ Therefore at this stage of the company's redevelopment there was still a strong family involvement, albeit Pat and all the family born after Pat were essentially British-born integrated London-Irish rather than mailboat migrants as their ancestors had been. One notable legacy of Fitzpatrick's Irish business roots was in their attitude to business culture, which was less adversarial and litigious than UK-founded businesses generally. At the time of the company reorganisation in 1989, Pat Fitzpatrick summed-up this –archetypally Irish – approach to doing business in the construction industry in his Chairman's remarks: 'Co-operation and negotiation, not prevarication and claims, will continue to be our policy. The message to our clients is change but no change as we move into the new decade'.⁵⁴ It would seem that, like many of their Irish-founded counterpart companies, Fitzpatrick did adhere to this policy insofar as possible. It is difficult to find case reports of Fitzpatrick in litigation or arbitration over this period.

The restructuring at the start of the 1990s certainly produced dividends in terms of the growth and consolidation of Fitzpatrick's reputation as a major contractor. One of Pat Fitzpatrick's first acts under the new structure was to re-appoint Sir William Francis, former president of the Institution of Civil Engineers as chairman. Formerly vice chairman of Tarmac and a director of Trafalgar House, Sir William had also been chairman of Fitzpatrick in the 1970s when the company was acquired by Tarmac.⁵⁵ His influence as an established leader in the wider construction and civil engineering market of the UK boosted Fitzpatrick's tender invitations, particularly in regards to civil engineering works. Between February 1990 and October 1992 the *Contract Journal* reported Fitzpatrick securing £88 million of predominantly motorway and dual carriageway road construction work, including major works on the A1/M1 link road in Kettering, Northamptonshire, which facilitated a further regional office in the east Midlands region of England.⁵⁶ Similarly the period from 1992-1995 saw Fitzpatrick PLC

⁵³ Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd Annual Statement and Accounts, 1989, Chairman's Statement available at Companies House Great Britain, Beta Service available online at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/FC013538/officers>. (accessed 17 July, 2018), p.3.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Contract Journal online, 'CNPlus', 12th April 1990, unpaginated, available at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/searcharticles?qsearch=1&keywords=Fitzpatrick> (accessed 3 July, 2018)

⁵⁶ Contract Journal online, CNPlus, search report dated 3 July, 2018, various dates, see M Mulvey pdf document entitled *Fitzpatrick articles 1990-92 - CN abstract.pdf*, pp.1-18, pp.8-9.

continue to secure a wide variety of substantial contracts for road construction, airport runway and apron construction and general civil engineering works to the value of some £116 million which included major joint-venture projects with such eminent British contractors as Mowlem (on the M25 upgrade project) and, internationally, Fitzpatrick International scooped a £30million hospital job in Kazakhstan in November 1994.⁵⁷ By 1994 group turnover had peaked at over £69 million and by 1995 – the end of this survey period – had fallen again to just under £50 million in the wake of the difficult trading conditions affecting the UK construction industry in the post-Thatcherite era.⁵⁸ However as a mark of the operational strength of the business re-structured by Pat Fitzpatrick, turnover doubled to £100 million by the end of the century.

In 1991, Pat Fitzpatrick was appointed deputy chairman of the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors ('FCEC'). A mere year later, within a year of joining her father's business as a director, Penny Lauzel-Fitzpatrick was co-opted as a member of the executive committee of the London and South Eastern Section of the FCEC. It was the first time in the history of the federation that a woman was chosen to represent a member firm on any of its section or national committees. Pat was also elected as chairman of the Concrete Paving Association in the UK in May 1993.⁵⁹ There is a certain sense of circularity in these achievements given that the FCEC was the primary body responsible for recruiting Irish migrant labour into civil engineering works during and after World War Two. Pat's highest accolade in terms of Fitzpatrick's legacy was probably the award of a CBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours list in 1994 for services to the Engineering Industry.⁶⁰ Patrick Fitzpatrick (junior) lived to the age of 90, passing away in December 2017, some eight years short of his target age of 98 which he jokingly predicted in an interview in 2001.⁶¹ His grandfather, Patrick, who came to London in the 1880s to undertake street-paving could hardly have foreseen that

⁵⁷ Contract Journal online, CNPlus, search report dated 3 July, 2018, various dates, see M Mulvey pdf document entitled *Fitzpatrick articles 1992-95 - CN abstract.pdf*, pp.1-12.

⁵⁸ Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd Annual Statement and Accounts, 1994, Chairman's Statement available at Companies House Great Britain, Beta Service available online at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/FC013538/officers>. (accessed 17 July, 2018), pp.1-5.

⁵⁹ Ibid. & Contract Journal online, CNPlus, 3rd June, 1993, see M Mulvey pdf document entitled *Fitzpatrick articles 1992-95 - CN abstract.pdf*, pp.1-12, p2.

⁶⁰ *The London Gazette*, United Kingdom list: "No. 53527". (1st supplement), 31 December 1993, pp. 1–32.

⁶¹ VolkerWessels PLC Annual Review, 2017, *Chief Executive's Review*, available at <http://www.volkerwessels.co.uk/annualreview2017/CEO%20STATEMENT.pdf> (accessed 17 July, 2018), p.11 & 'Fitzpatrick Narrows the Generation Gap' in *Construction News*, 17 May, 2001, unpaginated. Available online at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

his grandson would turn the Fitzpatrick name into one of the giants of British construction history in the post-war period and in the process provide yet another long-term source of employment for the thousands of mailboat-generation post-war Irish builders who flocked to London in search of the good life.

GALLAGHER GROUP/ ABBEY GROUP

(Founded 1938)

Matt, James and Charles Gallagher built one of the earliest and the largest dynasties of housebuilding, plant-hire and property development companies throughout Britain and Ireland from the late 1930s onwards. Throughout the 1960s to 1980s they exerted considerable political ‘clout’ on the Fianna Fáil administrations of Lemass and Haughey, as shown in chapter 3.4. They are the template for the stereotypical Irish construction dynasty. Their origins, like other pioneering Irish building companies are difficult to trace. Matthew Gallagher (Snr) and his wife Margaret, lived and owned a smallholding in Cashel, County Sligo in Ireland. The couple reared a large family, having fourteen children, all of whom were born in Ireland throughout the early and mid-20th century. Within the Gallagher family, those who were primarily involved within the founding of Abbey PLC were sons Matt, James, Dan, Joe and Hubert and, latterly, Charles.

Born in 1915, Matt Gallagher was the first to leave for England as a spáilpín in 1932, to improve upon a meagre wage of £17/month in Ireland. Matt’s first work was as a farm labourer, he worked hard alongside his brothers and he advanced with time, beginning employment on building sites in 1934. He returned to Cashel occasionally and provided part of his wage to his parents and family. James, five years Matt’s junior, left home at 14 as he was too meagre to work on the family farm and instead worked as an apprentice grocer in Ballagherreen in County Roscommon. He also worked at a wholesale bottlers firm in Enniskillen in Fermanagh where he faced anti-Catholic prejudice – an experience which shaped his later attitudes to Britishness. He emigrated to England and began working as a clerk on a building site. James eventually realised that he could earn more money by doing physical building work and joined his other brothers in a fledgling haulage business, Abbey, first founded in England, in 1938.

The four brothers invested their earnings from labouring in vehicles to transport materials that were needed for building air raid shelters, runways and factories throughout WWII: ‘War prompted Matt and his brothers Joe, Dan and Hubert, soon joined by James, to use their savings to make a down payment on two old trucks and begin transporting materials needed for building air raid shelters, runways and factories’.⁶² When Luftwaffe bombings began, they relocated to Lancashire, where they hauled landfill to various bombsites around England. As the business progressed James’ work experience and administrative background benefited him and he became deputy of the family business, below Matt as Chief Executive.

By 1944 the brothers had one hundred trucks, they made the decision to migrate again, wanting to be nearer to the conflict of the war in central London. By the end of the war in 1945, the Gallagher’s were well-placed to capitalise on the post-war housing boom. They completed one of the first private developments after the war at St. Albans, although when the labour party blocked all private house developments, the brothers focused on public building projects. In 1946, Matt and James both married, Matt married Patricia Sheeran and James married Mona Gallagher, the brothers and their wives all lived together in Tottenham. The economic crisis of 1947 resulted in a temporary embargo on construction work in England; as an alternative the brothers entered and focused on the Irish housing market. Dan Gallagher passed away and therefore the workload was managed and shared by the remaining brothers. Hubert, Joe and Charles. Matt commuted between both Dublin and London, and finally, James took over the management of the business in Dublin. They began with small local housing contracts in Dublin with their first private development in Santry. Irish business continued to be successful as other Irish competitors began to be undercut. James had an excellent work ethic; he improved Irish house building standards and developed better building techniques. ‘Performing all the paperwork and purchasing, also pitching in as a glazier, James began with some small local-authority housing contracts in Dublin, before undertaking a private development at Santry, significantly undercutting competitors.’⁶³

Gradually, Matt and James began to expand the types of projects that they engaged with.

⁶² Terry Clavin, , ‘Biography of Matt Gallagher’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., Online, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridgeorg.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9609> (accessed 3 March, 2017), pp.1-2.

⁶³ Terry Clavin, , ‘Biography of James Gallagher’ in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., Online, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridgeorg.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9609> (accessed 3 March, 2017), p.1.

In 1950, they established a joinery company ‘Gowna Wood Industries’ in their home town, Tubbercurry County Sligo. This was soon followed by the founding of a plumbing and heating firm ‘P.J. Matthews Ltd’ in Dublin in 1952. Finally, the brothers created factories, that focused on the production of builder’s hardware in Tubbercurry County Sligo. ‘In 1955 Basta Industries was established by the Gallagher Brothers of Cashel and this breathed a whole breath of fresh air into employment opportunities locally. James, Matt and Bert Gallagher were the main drivers of this industrial revolution in Tubbercurry’.⁶⁴ In 1957 Matt surprised his brothers by selling his share of the family business for £250,000 - deciding to take early retirement, living in a mansion with a large farm. He returned back to work in 1958, taking over Paramount Building Ltd and resumed building houses, focusing on the suburbs and catering to the middle classes.

Their success in the construction industry, afforded both James and Matt close contact with politicians, in particular Fianna Fail minister Sean Lemass. It was under Lemass’s influence that James began his political career, in which he served four terms as a Fianna Fail TD. ‘He unsuccessfully contested the Fianna Fáil nomination for the four-seat Sligo–Leitrim constituency in 1957 and thereafter dedicated himself to becoming a TD, being well served by his garrulous and ingratiating manner. With his employees and their families providing ample ballot fodder, in 1961 he won both the party nomination for Sligo–Leitrim and a Dáil seat in the general election’. James’ political involvement and obsession with politics fostered a symbiotic (and many argued unhealthy) relationship between the Fianna Fail party and the Gallagher’s various businesses and factories. James donated generously to Fianna Fail campaigns, and in return, the Fianna Fail party supported the construction industry by providing financial schemes and grants. ‘The grateful ruling party made sure that his manufacturing and trading interests were underpinned by state grants and contracts, while his building activities were abetted by financial aids for homeowners’.⁶⁵

Matt also had an interest in politics, although he did not have the patience to pursue a confident political career. ‘Matt ran unsuccessfully as a Fianna Fáil candidate in the 1965 senate elections, but was too impatient for the time-consuming cultivation of grassroots supporters incumbent on an Irish political career. Instead, Matt focused on donating steadily and

⁶⁴ History of Tubbercurry, Tubbercurry Golf Club, available at <http://tubbercurrygolfclub.ie/tubbercurry> [Accessed 09/06/2020].

⁶⁵ Clavin, ‘Biography of James Gallagher’, p.2.

abundantly to the Fianna Fail party'.⁶⁶ Matt had a close friendship with Charles Haughey, they were part of a drinking group together alongside other Irish political figures. 'Gallagher formed a boisterous drinking circle with Haughey, another rising Fianna Fáil politician, Donogh O'Malley, and the influential, Fianna Fáil-aligned journalist John Healy; they dined at the Gresham before retiring to the bar at Groom's Hotel'.⁶⁷ Matt's political alliances benefited the Gallagher company: 'The accountancy firm in which Haughey served as a sleeping partner, Haughey Boland, handled the accounts for all the Gallagher Group companies'.⁶⁸ Business Partnerships were also derived from Matt's political associations, 'Gallagher was part of a clique of property developers, also including John Byrne and P. V. Doyle, that orbited Haughey and employed Des Traynor as financial adviser'.⁶⁹ Des Traynor acted as the Gallagher group director, he advised Matt on the company's business and finance and helped to make important economic decisions. 'As Gallagher Group director, Traynor advised him on the establishment in 1961 and subsequent operation of a car hire-purchase business called Merchant Banking Limited, which evolved into a bank for small depositors'.⁷⁰ The funding from Matt and Traynor's bank helped Matt to focus on the progression of the Gallagher business.

In the early 1960's there was a change in government policy when Fianna Fail sought to relieve a housing crisis. They did this by building council houses and by increasing the development of private sites. In 1964 Matt provided a new type of housing stock for the middle classes who were previously priced out of property. 'A key instrument of Fianna Fáil's new housing strategy, Gallagher had a knack for buying undeveloped sites and arranging their residential zoning, which enabled him to become the wealthiest and most powerful homebuilder in Dublin'.⁷¹ In 1966 Matt helped establish 'Taca' a Fianna Fail fund raising organisation that allowed businessmen to have access to leading party figures in return for a high annual subscription fee. Matt was a large 'Taca' contributor and was involved with its administration, devoting one day a month. Matt also cultivated corruption amongst Dublin Corporation planners, for example, George Redmond. Redmond advised Gallagher on his planning applications and appeals in the mid 1960's. Redmond received £10,000 to £15,000 per annum from Matt and the Gallagher brothers, He also revealed that the Gallagher group paid for his

⁶⁶ Clavin, 'Biography of Matt Gallagher', p.2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Clavin, 'Biography of Matt Gallagher', p.2.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

family holidays and built his home.⁷²

Whilst Matt focused on Taca and building contracts linked with Fianna Fail, the Gallagher industry then grew into a shared dynasty. James dealt with Dublin home building operations and the Bray hotel. Patrick managed the builders providers firm and Charles managed English home building and plant hire operations. After a long housing boom in the UK and Ireland the Abbey group profits of the company rose £150,000 in 1963 to £2 million in 1973. Abbey employed 1,400 workers, had a £17 million turnover and was developing 650 homes in the UK and 450 homes in Ireland on an annual basis. ‘Abbey was one of the biggest housebuilding firms operating in Dublin's fast-growing suburbs, and a medium-sized English building operation, concentrating its activities on London's vast hinterland and developing shopping centres on the larger English housing estates.’⁷³ As a result of the considerable investment in factories throughout Tubbercurry, in 1970, the Abbey company found difficulty locating land in Dublin as the building market boomed. ‘Irish building profits faltered, whereas those in England nearly quadrupled during 1968–72’.⁷⁴

The exposure of Redmond’s admissions of Gallagher payments, gave rise to serious suspicions of corrupt practices associated with the Abbey Group. TD’s victimised James throughout debates in the Dáil as rumours of business between the Gallagher’s and Fianna Fail emerged: ‘Redmond was hardly the sole recipient of their covert benefaction’.⁷⁵ In the 1970’s many Abbey group projects ‘were subject to lengthy delays as preservationists and residents of Dublin's increasingly congested suburbs mounted more determined and organised opposition to developments’.⁷⁶ James agitated further trouble as he participated in the redevelopment of Dublin’s city centre. From 1967-1972 he ignored the opinions of preservationists, demolishing Victorian buildings and neglected historical buildings on Lesson Street. Matt’s business was achieving high turnover; construction work expanded within a private housing boom in Dublin city centre. As the business grew, Matt became more dependant on large banks and their money. A 1966 credit freeze left the Gallagher group in crisis. Matt’s employees worked hard in return for a good wage. ‘He worked his men hard, but he paid them generously, his gruff, earthy

⁷² Clavin, ‘Biography of Matt Gallagher’, p.2.

⁷³ Clavin, ‘Biography of James Gallagher’, p.2.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

persona and hearty virility commanding their respect and loyalty'.⁷⁷ Despite the builder's hard work, the estates that they worked on were not well-built from a residential perspective. Matt refused to include amenities such as playgrounds and trees on the sites that he developed.

Mountjoy Square was his most controversial build 'a once sublime Georgian square that had declined into squalid tenements'.⁷⁸ Throughout 1963 and 1964, Matt purchased twenty properties on the square including half of the south side. Gallagher planned to alter the base structure of the buildings and that necessitated evictions of elderly women and families that lived on the square: 'Those proving obdurate were liable to have a sack of starving rats released into their attic'.⁷⁹ Such actions brought anger and protest from local residents and wealthy preservationists including Mariga Guinness who branded Matt 'an uncouth peasant'.⁸⁰ In 1967 'Seven Days' an RTE current affairs programme broadcasted an investigation on Gallagher's construction on Mountjoy Square. Under intense political pressure Gallagher finally sold Mountjoy Square in 1969, although his construction had altered the site completely. 'Mountjoy Square remained in a disfigured state until the mid-1980s'.⁸¹ In the late 1960s Matt Gallagher attempted to redeem his corrupt reputation within the construction industry. He began to donate to charities; he gave £10,000 towards a new administration building for Meath hospital. He also got involved in the construction of a gallery and headquarters for the Royal Hibernian Academy: 'Far from being a heartless speculator, Matt Gallagher is a very generous man who has donated land for three churches in Dublin, a Georgian property for mentally handicapped children, and recently has offered to build at a cost to himself about £450,000 the new Royal Hibernian Academy in Ely place'.⁸²

Matt Gallagher, as one of the most successful private builders in Ireland, maintained his relationships with Fianna Fail leadership even after Haughey's exit in 1970. Matt continued construction, building a shopping centre in Donaghmede, and new housing estates nationwide; borrowing heavily to buy sites. The 1973-1974 oil crisis was followed by a property market crash, leaving Gallagher Developments in critical debt. The central bank reduced its investments and further borrowing was refused. In 1973, Matt Gallagher sold a number of his

⁷⁷ Clavin, 'Biography of Matt Gallagher', p.2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Sunday Independent*, 'Meet the Property Kings, 1970'. (Accessed 24/06/2020).

Dublin pubs - saving the Gallagher business - but the financial stress took mental and physical toll on Matt, who died in January 1974. He was succeeded as head of the Gallagher Group by his second son, Patrick.⁸³ In 1973 James also began to notice the effect of business stress on his health and, following advice from a doctor, James retired from business and politics on a temporary basis. After Matt's resignation as Abbey chairman in December, the group was impacted by a decline in business in the UK and Ireland. This crisis resulted in tension between James and Charles who was Abbey UK's managing director.

Charles was born in Cashel in 1927. His brothers paid for his education in St. Nathy's college whilst they focused on building and developing the Gallagher businesses: 'Charles Gallagher coming at the end of the family line got it much softer than the rest. He was sent to college on the money earned by the big brothers in Britain.'⁸⁴ After college he joined the family conglomerate, focusing on operations in England. Based in London, he became a well-known figure in the London-Irish migrant business community; for example being elected chairman of the management committee of the London Irish Centre in 1971.⁸⁵ His operations in the UK boasted 31% of profits compared to the Irish business equivalent of 9.1%. Therefore, Charles saw England and its housing market as Abbey's best option. Despite Charles' position as managing director, he still had to contend with James, Hubert and Patrick, who owned 50% of the company between them. They ignored Charles's advice to focus on business in England and tension continued to grow between the brothers, 'One dispute culminating in a brawl whereby Charles knocked his brother Patrick unconscious'.⁸⁶ Charles was angered by James' refusal to transfer resources from Ireland. In 1974, Charles resigned as managing director of the Abbey group, intending to continue managing the English business but 'supported by Hubert and Patrick, in July 1974 James dismissed Charles from all his positions in Abbey'.⁸⁷ Abbey's UK home building operations became more neglected with Charles' dismissal. Charles was angered by his brothers scheming, in 1975 'Charles Gallagher, one of the four brothers, failed to gain control of the company and left in 1975 to start his own company, Matthew Homes'.⁸⁸ Charles focused on his own business, and Matthew Homes triumphed above Abbey in the housing

⁸³ Clavin, 'Biography of Matt Gallagher', p.4.

⁸⁴ *Irish Times, A Tycoon at The Irish Centre*, (Accessed 24/06/20)

⁸⁵ *Sligo Champion*, 9 July, 1971, p.16.

⁸⁶ Terry Clavin, 'Biography of Charles Gallagher' in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish biography*, online ed., Online, (Dublin/Cambridge, 2009) available at <https://dib-cambridgeorg.jproxy.nuim.ie/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9609> (accessed 3 March, 2017), p.1.

⁸⁷ Clavin, 'Biography of James Gallagher', pp.2-3.

⁸⁸ Fred Wellings, *British Housebuilders: History & Analysis*, (Oxford,2006), p.199.

market in south-east England. By the mid 1980's Charles' company was generating profit of £3-4 million per year.

James Gallagher passed away In 1983, the *Sligo Champion* eulogising that 'the late Mr. James Gallagher, former Fianna Fail T.D. for Sligo/Leitrim would be remembered as a great industrialist, politician and republican, it was stated at Sligo Co. Council, where members adjourned a special meeting as a mark of respect'.⁸⁹ Everything changed for Charles, he once again became chairman of the Abbey group:

At Abbey he stopped dividends, forced out executives and amputated mercilessly: the Irish manufacturing and trading subsidiaries were either closed or sold off, and Abbey exited the depressed Irish building trade, selling what it could of its land holdings. He let his sons manage Matthew Homes. Irish manufacturing and trading prospects were either closed, or sold off.⁹⁰

By 1984, staff numbers had decreased from 1,000 to 555. Abbey had essentially become an English home building company. Seamus Gallagher, James' son was extremely unhappy with Charles sudden actions within the Abbey group. He conspired with his uncle Patrick and brother Donal, to seek revenge against Charles, revealing that they had thrown their share holdings behind a bid for Abbey from French Kier, a major UK company: 'It was anticipated that the existence of a large bloc of Gallagher shares seeking a buyer and the renewed family infighting would scare investors into accepting French Keir's opportunistic offer. However, having finally imposed his will on Abbey, Charles was not about to have it sold from under him, and a ferocious tussle ensued, involving exchanges of legal writs, allegations of share price manipulation, and a bonanza for Dublin's stockbrokers'.⁹¹ Charles spent £534,000 in efforts to prove that Abbeys shares were valuable against other building companies in south-east England. These efforts earned the attention of London institutions and the shares were eventually bought: 'Instead Charles Gallagher Senior, who controlled just under 30pc of Abbey, staged a triumphant comeback. He was elected chairman in October 1983 and against all the odds he saw off the French Keir bid'.⁹²

Charles began to make amends with his disgruntled family, the feud concluded with

⁸⁹ *Sligo Champion*, 'Many Tributes of the Late Mr. James Gallagher', 1983.

⁹⁰ Clavin, 'Biography of Charles Gallagher', p.2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Irish Independent*, A Return to Family Ways, 2012, p.2.

Charles and his family being satisfied. Abbey's ownership settled in England after Charles transferred the company's headquarters there from Ireland. Abbey home building was a great success as annual output rose: 'The financial institutions stayed with Charles Gallagher, who since he became chairman two years ago, has streamlined the group and given it a new image'.⁹³ Charles was recognised as one of Ireland's wealthiest men with his shareholding being worth around £43 million. There were minor concerns regarding Charles' ownership of Matthew Homes and Abbey. These doubts proved largely unnecessary as the two firms avoided competing with one another. Unfortunately, between 1987 and 1991, Abbey's shares plunged. Its crisis peaked in 1990 as Charles attempted to save the company by updating his management team. By 1992 Abbey's turnover had halved from its 1980's peak. With Charles as chief executive, he enforced drastic price cutting and Abbey cleared its debts and had 17.5 billion in the bank. Matthew Homes also managed to survive, though on a smaller scale than Abbey. Charles died in 1993 in England, he was succeeded by his son Charles junior who managed Abbey and Matthew Homes. With Charles junior managing Abbey, it re-entered the Irish market in the mid 1990's. Abbey was one of few Irish construction companies that survived the 2007-2008 crash in Ireland:

Unlike most of the other Irish construction dynasties such as the McInerny's, the McNamara's and indeed most of the other branches of the Gallagher family, Charles Gallagher and his father before him have successfully navigated the volatile housebuilding cycle for well over half a century. With over €77m cash and government bonds on its books and no bank debt, Abbey has one of the strongest balance sheets of any British or Irish housebuilder. Now that the company is being taken private it will be the Gallagher family who will benefit exclusively from the Mr Gallagher's cautious and prudent management.⁹⁴

At the time of writing, the UK-registered arm of Abbey PLC which is registered as a branch office of the Irish-registered PLC has 17 directors, of whom 8 are Irish-born. This includes two Gallagher brothers, Charles and David, who are sons of Charles Gallagher senior, youngest brother of the original founding generation.⁹⁵

⁹³ *Irish Post*, Abbey Fights Off Takeover, 1985.

⁹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 'Return to Family Ways', 2012, p.3.

⁹⁵ See Companies House Great Britain, Beta Service available online at <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/FC013538/officers> (accessed 24 Dec. 16).

BILL FULLER [CASTLE ROCK LTD]

(Founded 1943/1960)

Bill (William Joseph) Fuller was born in Glenoe, County Kerry on May 6th, 1917,⁹⁶ although according to the UK Companies House records, he was born in May 1924.⁹⁷ Oddly enough a similar age discrepancy occurs on the same Companies House records in respect of Fuller's fellow Kerryman John Murphy. By the early 1960s, as well as having established the Buffalo Club as one of the defining social outlets of the Irish community in London, Fuller had built a property development empire and construction business to rival any of his contemporaries. In addition he was an impresario of growing renown and helped forge such legendary creative acts as the Chieftains, an early manifestation of which played at Fuller's Old Sheiling Hotel in Raheny, Dublin at the start of the 1960s.⁹⁸

Fuller's property empire reached transatlantic proportions and amongst his more notorious deals was the acquisition of the legendary Fillmore West venue in San Francisco – which through the 1940s and 1950s had seen performers such as James Brown, Bobby 'Blue' Bland and Ike & Tina Turner perform.⁹⁹ Later in the early 1960s he sold the Fillmore on to rock promoter Bill Graham,¹⁰⁰ hastening its reputation as one of the key cultural locations of the 1960s west-coast Beat, hipster and later Hippie movements. He also owned extensive club interests in New York, including the Bronx,¹⁰¹ and ended his days as a substantial investor in gold mining in Nevada. Indeed shortly before his death, Fuller's business address was listed with UK Companies House records as 'Prieta Sonora, Mexico'.¹⁰² Fuller was quite obviously a man of extensive business and cultural acumen and his career goes very far to disproving the stereotypical view of the Irish builder in London.

⁹⁶ *The Guardian Newspaper*, September 9, 2008, digital copy available at <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/sep/09/popandrock.musicindustry> (accessed March 8, 2015).

⁹⁷ See Gov.uk Companies House Service Beta trial Service, specific reference <https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/00656814/officers> (accessed February 1, 2017).

⁹⁸ John Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, (New York, 1997), p.51-52.

⁹⁹ 'About the Fillmore', Official Website, available at <http://thefillmore.com/about/> (accessed 24 Dec. 16).

¹⁰⁰ John Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, (New York, 1997), p.51-52.

¹⁰¹ John Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, (New York, 1997), p.70.

¹⁰² See: https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/officers/pnHsZ_c6H9cAs39AF-dB7FLhiKY/appointments (accessed 24 Dec. 16).

MCWEENEY & SMALLMAN

(Founded 1957)

McWeeney & Smallman were established in 1957 in London by Bernard McWeeney, from Hartley, Carrick-on-Shannon, in County Leitrim, who formed a very successful business partnership with a Mrs Smallman from Dublin – who was believed to be a wealthy widow of Jewish extraction and provided the initial capital for the business venture. They were best known as demolition contractors, although they also undertook earthworks and site clearance.¹⁰³ The company ceased trading and appointed liquidators in 1984.¹⁰⁴ Shortly afterwards, in the late 1980s Bernard McWeeney died, bringing the business venture to an inevitable close.



Foden tbd McWeeney Smallman Marble Arch 18/8/1980

Figure 9 - McWeeney & Smallman demolition wagon at Marble Arch, London, c.1980 (Photo courtesy NA3T)

‘After I spent many happy years in Auto Services, I left and went to work in England in London and I went into long distance lorry driving for an Irish company, McWeeney, Smallman and Company. Mrs Smallman was from Dublin and he was Leitrim man and they were good people, he was a great man’.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Incorporation details available at <https://www.duedil.com/company/gb/00589975/mcweeney-smallman-and-co-limited>, (accessed 4 May, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ The London Gazette, 6 Nov, 1984, p.14999.

¹⁰⁵ Recollection of Alec Orr, a Derry man who spent time in London in the 1960s, as published in ‘Derry Now’,



Figure 10 - Lee House, London Wall, c.1962. This building was later demolished by McWeeney & Smallman in 1980
 (Source: John Maltby / RIBA Collections)

From initial start-up as a demolition specialist, the company diversified into structural steel erection, where it achieved notable growth in business including securing and executing the sub-contract from Holland, Hannon and Cubitts Ltd (Main Contractors) for the erection of structural steel for the world's first ever aircraft hangar for the Boeing 747 Jumbo Jet, commissioned by BOAC in 1967 and finally completed in March 1970. McWeeney & Smallman erected some 2700 tons of structural steel, including 1200 tons of tubular roof construction in what was then one of the largest aircraft maintenance hangars in the world.¹⁰⁶

McWeeney & Smallman were well-known amongst the young Irish males of the west of Ireland right through the 1960s-1990s as a source of ready – if usually temporary – employment in London and were a particularly avid recruiter of young male students during summer leave from college or university. One such experience is documented in an interview with the well-known Irish MEP, Luke ‘Ming’ Flanagan from County Roscommon, who worked for the company in 1989, ‘For the summer of 1989 I worked for McWeeney Smallman on a demolition site and old post office site across from Buckingham Palace. I was there for four months.’ He goes on to explain how easy he found the migrant process as a result of existing chains of migration to London, ‘We had it handy because friends of a friend of mine got a house and a job. I walked straight into a job. I found the cost of living high relative to wages.’¹⁰⁷

available online at <https://www.derrynow.com/features/down-memory-lane-alec-orr-looks-back-at-four-decades-of-a-family-business-built-up-from-love-and-hard-work/129884> (accessed 4 May, 2017)

¹⁰⁶ Ian Anderson, *Heathrow: From Tents to Terminal Five*, (Gloucester, 2014), (digital ed.) p.16.6.1-6.16.14

¹⁰⁷ Robert Mulhern, *The Irish Post Newspaper*, 4 July, 2014, p.12.

In 1989-90, McWeeney & Smallman also undertook the demolition of Lee House, a 16-storey podium block at 125 London Wall, in the heart of the City of London under a subcontract from Mowlem, who were the main contractor for the redevelopment of the site, then known as Alban Gate.¹⁰⁸ Lee House was one of the six office towers constructed between 1957 and 1976 which, together with the Museum of London, formed the western flank of the London Wall development, a development which almost certainly employed a significant swathe of Irish direct and subcontracted labour in its construction. There is a certain irony in the realisation that Irish migrant labour was almost certainly heavily engaged in both the creation and destruction of Lee House, thereby witnessing both the birth and death of the ‘Brutalist’ phase of post-modern British architecture. Alban Gate is now known as 125 London Wall.¹⁰⁹

MARTIN GRANT (HOLDINGS) LIMITED

Founded 1963/1974

Martin Grant was born at Dualla nr. Cashel in Tipperary in 1927. His wife Catherine was born in Holycross, nr Thurles in Tipperary in 1929 and the family still have a holiday home at Holycross which was built in 2002. Neither of them carried on school past the basic national school and Noel Grant, Martin’s son, who was also born in Ireland but raised mainly in Britain, recalls that his father talked of working by the time he was 14 years old.

Martin and Catherine came to England in 1957 with 5 children, 3 more arrived after they settled in South London. Martin was a skilled carpenter and worked on building projects in London eventually becoming a carpenter foreman for a large English Contractor but it is not known which one. He ventured out on his own, starting a contracting business, Martin Grant & Co, in or about 1963. Starting as a labour-only sub-contractor and later as a materials-and-labour subcontractor, once capital permitted such risk, Martin Grant Carpentry built concrete structures on many prime London sites and also sites in the Home Counties. He was involved in building the concrete structures at the Hayward Gallery on the Southbank, Kings College Hospital in The Strand, St Thomas’s Hospital on the Southbank, parts of the London Wall and

¹⁰⁸ Ian M. Grice, ‘Demolition of Lee House’ in *Structural Survey*, Vol. 7 Issue: 1, (1989), pp.38-44

¹⁰⁹ Refer to RIBApix Image Information Library, available at <https://www.architecture.com/image-library/ribapix/image-information/poster/lee-house-125-london-wall-city-of-london/posterid/RIBA55177.html>, (Accessed 4 May, 2017).

the Barbican site, seven tower blocks at Worlds End Chelsea, Flats at Stevenage Walk Fulham, The Diamond centre in Hatton Garden, plus many more. At times he would have had 300 men employed on six or eight projects simultaneously. The Grant's office was at Norwood Road in Herne Hill where Martin ran the business from 1964 until 1978 when the office moved to Crystal Palace.

At that time he started a new housebuilding company in Guildford, running parallel to Martin Grant & Co. The new company, Martin Grant Homes Ltd still exists today building houses mainly in the South East of England (see www.martingranthomes.co.uk). The original formwork company founded in 1963 continued alongside another partnership company called Whelan & Grant (www.whelanandgrant.co.uk) which is jointly owned with the Whelan family, another Irish migrant enterprise, started by John P Whelan, an Offaly man.¹¹⁰ This company still trades today building concrete frames for various main contractors and also has a metal fabrication business working (as of 2017) at sites such as London Bridge Station and Chiswick Park. Whelan & Grant was part of the team that won the Sterling Prize in 2015 for the Sainsbury Laboratory in Cambridge and built the concrete structure that is the new Papworth Hospital in Cambridge for Skanska and The Judge Business School in central Cambridge.

During the late 70's Martin Grant bought farms and investment buildings in Ireland and the UK and continued to accumulate property portfolio into the 80's and 90's while at the same time building up Martin Grant Homes to become a well-established housebuilder. Martin Grant died in February 2000 but his businesses are still privately owned by the Grant family today and run by Martin's son, Noel. This company is a subsidiary of the family's main Holding Company Martin Grant (Holdings) Ltd. The company has approximately 80 direct employees at Martin Grant Homes, the site workers are self-employed so are not included in this number. At Whelan & Grant there can be as many as 250 people directly employed in the summer months including the metal fabrication business where about 65 people work in or from the factory in Waltham Cross.

The family have not retained specific records from the early days as they were extensive and difficult to store and retain and there are very few people remaining from the early days who would have any proper memories of the London contracting jobs. Noel Grant's comments

¹¹⁰ See Table 1, firm # 37/38 above.

are his own personal memories of these times when he was growing up and visited the sites with his father as a youngster. Noel also worked on some of the jobs from 1969 onwards from the age of 16. Martin Grant and his counterparts were all very good examples of the Irish community that arrived in England to find work and some of them prospered well as a result of starting their own companies. Other obvious examples would be the Whelans, the Careys, the Clancys and the Murphys who all became, and are still today, involved in large building contracts in the South east of England.

SCANMOOR LTD

Founded 1995

Scanmoor Ltd ¹¹¹ fall at the very end of the timeframe of this research and are included simply as an example of the continuing tradition of entrepreneurialism amongst the ‘Ryanair wave’ of migrant Irish to London even whilst the Celtic Tiger was attracting large numbers of return migrants back to Ireland.

The company was founded in 1995 by two Irish migrants, Tom Scanlon and Jim Moore. Moore – the driving force behind the company’s success - emigrated from Westmeath around 1987 and settled in Ealing, another popular location for Irish migrants in the late 80s and early 90s. Scanmoor was based in Harrow, in north-west London, also a well-established outcrop of the London-Irish enclave. Their main areas of operation were civil engineering, reinforced concrete work and external works, rail construction and building, and refurbishment and by far the bulk of their work was carried out within the London Metropolitan Area. The company undertook all aspects of project management for the rail construction environment. Unlike earlier manifestations of the Irish building entrepreneur, Scanmoor was formed by, and employed, professionally trained construction staff in a predominantly management contracting function and, spanning the millennial transition, they became heavily involved in rail infrastructure regeneration, and maintenance.

¹¹¹ Sources: Tara GAA Advertising article, 2003, available at <http://www.hoganstand.com/common/ads/uk/scanmoor.htm> (accessed 19 May, 2017) ; *Building Magazine Online*, Issue 15, 2007, available at <http://www.building.co.uk/scanmoor-collapses-after-over-expansion/3084891.article> (accessed 19 May, 2017).

Scanmoor Group won large civil engineering contracts in their relatively early years. These included a £27.5m contract to construct the Western Ticket Hall at King’s Cross station from 2001 to 2004; a £9.9m civil and structural works with Multiplex at Wembley stadium from 2004 to 2005; and a £6.6m contract with Taylor Woodrow, which involved the demolition, construction and refurbishment of bridges on the East London line. By September 2005 the firm boasted a turnover of £73.8m, up from £36.9m the previous year, a remarkable growth rate. However, the pre-tax profit margin was thin at £1.2m and Scanmoor’s subsequent expansion into the North of England and Romania seems to have stretched the firm too far. As a result, the group dramatically collapsed in 2007 after 12 years of somewhat over-zealous expansion.



Scanmoor’s contribution to Irish cultural life in London centred upon their sponsorship and promotion of GAA sports and in particular Jim Moore’s strong association with Tara GAA Club, based in Willesden – another long-established north London Irish stronghold. Born in the football stronghold of Dunmore, Co. Galway, Moore is from a well-known GAA family in Mullingar. His brother Ned captained Mullingar Shamrocks to four consecutive Westmeath senior championship successes between 1992 and ‘95. Another brother, John, is highly respected in New York GAA circles. Jim served as Chairman of Tara GAA for two terms in the years 1998-2003 and as such, used the business as a vehicle for club sponsorship of various kinds and for recruitment of construction management staff and skilled /unskilled labour, as can be seen by the typical online advertisement from 2003 (Figure 11, above) which was used shortly before the firm’s sudden demise.

**Appendix C. Supplemental general tables,
figures, graphs and statistical data**

GENERAL MIGRATION STATISTICS IRELAND-BRITAIN 1926-2000

Irish-born residents in Britain, 1931-1981

Census of Population, Britain

Census Year	Born in ROI	Born in NI	Total
1931	367,424	137,961	505,385
1941		WW2	
1951	537,709	178,319	716,028
1961	726,121	224,857	950,978
1971 *	709,235	248,595	957,830
1981	607,428	242,969	850,397
1991	608,836	228,628	837,464

* Peak of Post-War migration

Sources: 1931-1981: P.J. Drury [Ed.], *Irish Studies 5: Ireland and Britain since 1922*, (Cambridge, 1986), Table 6.3, Irish-born residents in Britain, 1931-1981, p.114

1991: Patrick J. Bracken & Patrick O'Sullivan (2001) The Invisibility of Irish Migrants in *British Health Research, Irish Studies Review*, 9:1, 41-51 citing Mary Hickman and Bronwen Walter, *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* (Commission for Racial Equality, June 1997), pp. 18, 20

Travel Permit Analysis

Analysis of Wartime Travel Permits, 1942-1945, (by stated occupation)

Occupation	Dataset A [p1-8]		Dataset B [p9-18]		Totals	
	Male	Total	Male	Total	Male	Total
<i>Construction/Engineering-related</i>						
Bricklayer / BL Mate	25	25	99	99	124	124
Builder/Builder's Lab	37	37	177	177	214	214
Carpenter	20	20	117	117	137	137
Carpenter/Joiner	5	5	33	33	38	38
Dumper/Tractor/Machine driver	19	19	79	79	98	98
Electrician [inc Apprentice]	9	9	33	33	42	42
Engineer [All types]	9	9	96	96	105	105
Foreman / Supervisor	22	22	106	106	128	128
Ganger	14	14	45	45	59	59
Joiner	24	24	84	84	108	108
General/Unskilled Labourer	371	371	2399	2399	2770	2770
Skilled Labourer	20	20	124	124	144	144
Labourer [Migratory]	1	1	2	2	3	3
Navvy	2	2	13	13	15	15
Painter & Decorator	9	9	54	54	63	63
Plasterer	12	12	46	46	58	58
Plumber / mate	4	4	14	14	18	18
Railway worker	23	23	142	142	165	165
Scaffolder	1	1	17	17	18	18
Tunnel Miner	2	2	11	11	13	13
Sub-totals	629	629	3691	3691	4320	4320
					0	0
<i>Other occupations</i>	636	636	4097	4097	4733	4733
Totals	1265	1265	7788	7788	9053	9053
chk	1265	1265	7788	7788	9053	9053
					100%	100%

(Sources: Adapted from data derived from analysis of uncategorised records in NAI, originally researched by Dr. Jennifer Redmond as part of Travel Permit Analysis, 1940-1951. See also Jennifer Redmond, *Moving Histories*, Table 1.5, p.29)

(Included by permission of Dr. Jennifer Redmond)

Corrected Cohort Estimate
1951 Census of England Wales - Builders as % of All Irish Migrants by categorised by Occupation

Occupation Group	Total Irish Males	Estimated % related to B&CE	Corrected total Males in B&CE	Basis for Adjustment
Mining / Quarrying	5,903	30%	1,771	Tunnel miners / Plant/machinery operators in quarrying / aggregate lorry-drivers
Ceramics / Cement	919	10%	92	Cement batchers/delivery drivers
Engineering	35,335	50%	17,668	Civil engineering / structural engineering / steel fabricators and architectural metalwork
Building & Contracting	46,080	100%	46,080	
Painting/Decorating	7,048	100%	7,048	Normally categorised as part of building industry
Transport	22,598	10%	2,260	Allowance for haulage/muck-away/coach/logistics drivers
Unskilled	35,583	75%	26,687	Majority of unskilled Irish manual workers were construction operatives
			101,605	
	Total Males in 1951 census		258,196	
	Therefore B&CE =		39%	

Notes:

1. This table is adapted from data in 'Table 11: Occupations of persons resident in England and Wales, April 1951, but born in Northern Ireland or the Irish Republic, by sex and occupation group' in A.E.C.W.Spencer, Mary. E. Daly (Ed.), *Arrangements for the Integration of Irish Immigrants in England and Wales*, (Dublin, 2012), p.39.

2. Basis of adaption is the suspected spillage / cross-categorisation of occupational categorisations in the census data, where categories include manual labour nominally outside 'Building and Civil Engineering work' ('B&CE') as defined within research parameters

Ethnic Population Distribution across London (adapted from 1981 Census)

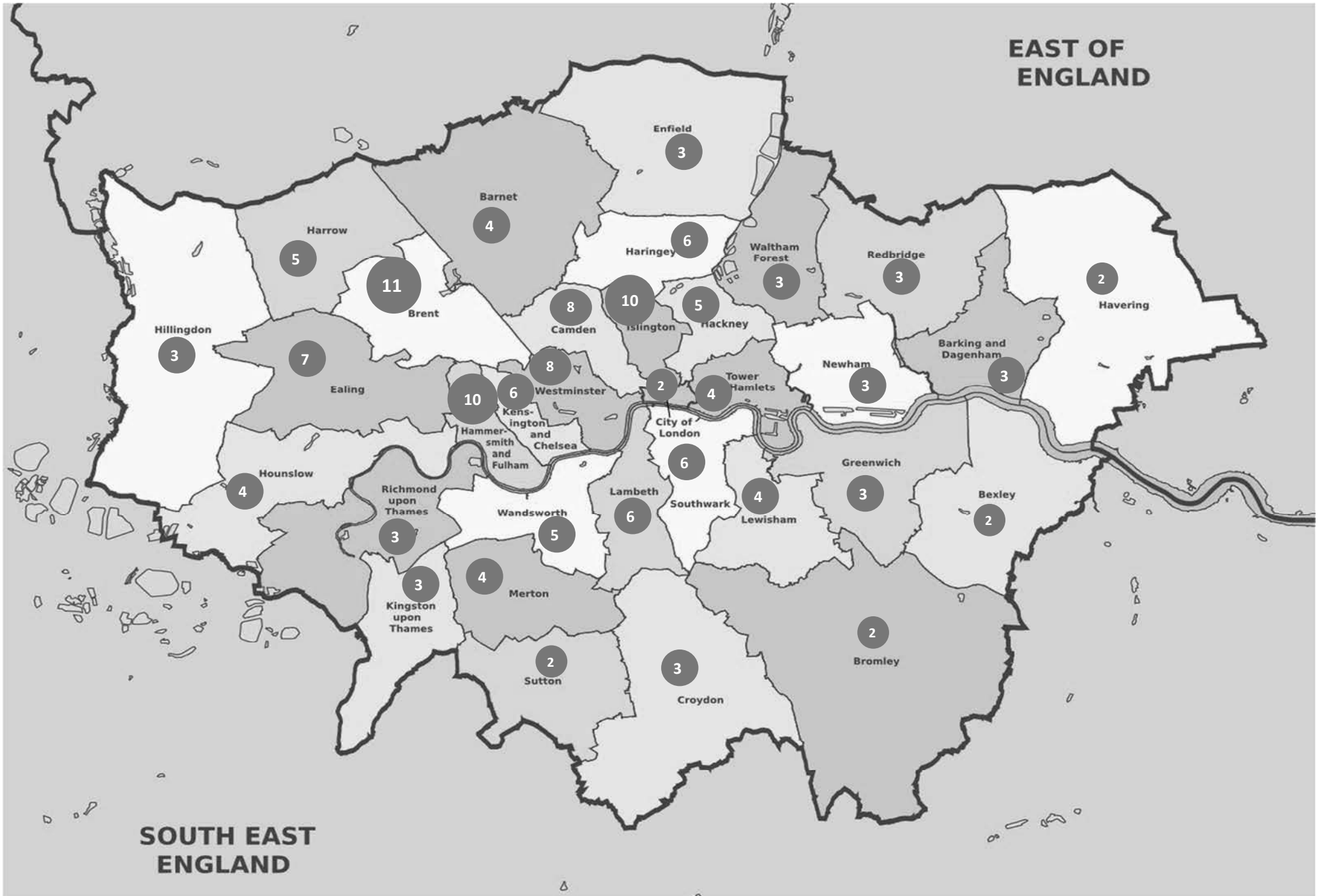
Borough	UK-Born	Irish Republic-born	NCWP	Rest of World	Total	Irish as % of total pop.	Borough as % of total Irish pop.
City of London	3,197	90	177	445	3,909	2%	0.03%
Camden	97,524	12,781	16,303	24,699	151,307	8%	4.25%
Kensington & Chelsea	67,075	6,526	11,161	32,374	117,136	6%	2.17%
Westminster	87,168	11,878	18,891	33,567	151,504	8%	3.95%
<i>Central London Boroughs</i>	254,964	31,275	46,532	91,085	423,856	7%	10.40%
Hackney	102,902	9,332	49,417	15,025	176,676	5%	3.10%
Hammersmith & Fulham	88,489	14,129	21,441	16,298	140,357	10%	4.70%
Haringey	111,674	12,616	59,632	16,325	200,247	6%	4.20%
Islington	99,272	15,648	26,044	13,173	154,137	10%	5.21%
Lambeth	150,284	14,771	56,071	17,728	238,854	6%	4.91%
Lewisham	176,341	9,232	34,463	7,919	227,955	4%	3.07%
Newham	142,877	5,611	55,334	4,153	207,975	3%	1.87%
Southwark	152,625	11,989	33,990	7,561	206,165	6%	3.99%
Tower Hamlets	99,082	5,040	27,657	4,644	136,423	4%	1.68%
Wandsworth	169,741	13,606	49,490	16,837	249,674	5%	4.53%
<i>Inner London Boroughs</i>	1,293,287	111,974	413,539	119,663	1,938,463	6%	37.25%
Barking & Dagenham	136,032	4,390	6,063	1,490	147,975	3%	1.46%
Barnet	201,742	12,774	36,465	33,338	284,319	4%	4.25%
Bexley	197,110	3,500	8,931	3,757	213,298	2%	1.16%
Brent	114,562	28,141	83,023	22,366	248,092	11%	9.36%
Bromley	265,776	5,261	10,477	9,727	291,241	2%	1.75%
Croydon	251,723	9,117	37,520	13,144	311,504	3%	3.03%
Ealing	163,423	19,385	69,755	21,985	274,548	7%	6.45%
Enfield	199,577	7,660	35,788	11,878	254,903	3%	2.55%
Greenwich	178,626	7,232	16,519	4,860	207,237	3%	2.41%
Harrow	145,339	9,900	29,761	9,718	194,718	5%	3.29%
Havering	224,363	5,009	5,662	3,213	238,247	2%	1.67%
Hillingdon	193,430	7,390	14,790	7,048	222,658	3%	2.46%
Hounslow	145,129	7,558	33,609	10,474	196,770	4%	2.51%
Kingston-upon-Thames	111,768	3,627	6,986	7,314	129,695	3%	1.21%
Merton	130,980	5,954	17,472	9,442	163,848	4%	1.98%
Redbridge	182,931	6,950	24,819	6,599	221,299	3%	2.31%
Richmond-upon-Thames	132,507	4,123	7,026	11,505	155,161	3%	1.37%
Sutton	149,960	3,752	6,289	5,411	165,412	2%	1.25%
Waltham Forest	164,675	5,649	37,122	4,952	212,398	3%	1.88%
<i>Outer Boroughs</i>	3,289,653	157,372	488,077	198,221	4,133,323	4%	52.35%
Greater London	4,837,904	300,621	948,148	408,969	6,495,642	5%	100.00%

NCWP = New Commonwealth & Pakistan (inc. Carribean/Indian/Bangladeshi/Pakistani/East African/Mediterranean/others)

% Total - Central London	5%	10%	5%	22%	7%
% Total - Inner London	27%	37%	44%	29%	30%
% Total - Outer London	68%	52%	51%	48%	64%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(Source: Maryse Hodgson, 'London's Ethnic Population' in *Census Statistics from the 1981 Census*, GLC Statistical Series nr 44, (Greater London Council, 1985), Adapted from Table 1, p.6.

Ethnic Irish Population Distribution across London (adapted from 1981 Census)



UK Construction Industry Accidents - Aggregated Data - 1940-1995

Year	All Industries						Building/Construction			Civil Engineering			Construction Totals <i>(B & CE combined in Construction after 1980)</i>						% of construction fatalities to industry totals	% of construction Accidents to industry totals	GRAND Total reported
	Fatalities			All Accidents			Fatalities			All Accidents			Fatalities			All Accidents					
	Employed	Self-employed	Total	Employed	Self-employed	Total	Fatalities	All Accidents	Total reported	Fatalities	All Accidents	Total reported	Employed	Self-employed	Total	Employed	Self-employed	Total			
1940			1,372			230,607													0%	0%	0
1941			1,646			269,652													0%	0%	0
1942			1,363			313,267													0%	0%	0
1943			1,221			309,924													0%	0%	0
1944			1,003			281,578													0%	0%	0
1945			851			239,802	125	3,779	3,904	22	3,534	3,556			147			7,313	17%	3%	7,460
1946			826			207,587	180	6,373	6,553	26	766	792			206			7,139	25%	3%	7,345
1947			839			185,757	218	10,235	10,453	35	942	977			253			11,177	30%	6%	11,430
1948			861			201,086	257	10,337	10,594	42	846	888			299			11,183	35%	6%	11,482
1949			772			192,982	183	11,594	11,777	48	2,106	2,154	n.a	n.a	231	n.a	n.a	13,700	30%	7%	13,931
1950			799			193,059	191	13,111	13,302	47	2,227	2,274	n.a	n.a	238	n.a	n.a	15,338	30%	8%	15,576
1951			828			183,444	213	12,127	12,340	37	2,079	2,116	n.a	n.a	250	n.a	n.a	14,206	30%	8%	14,456
1952			792			177,510	207	12,495	12,702	54	2,325	2,379	n.a	n.a	261	n.a	n.a	14,820	33%	8%	15,081
1953			744			181,637	187	13,579	13,766	52	2,130	2,182	n.a	n.a	239	n.a	n.a	15,709	32%	9%	15,948
1954			708			185,167	172	13,731	13,903	42	2,130	2,172	n.a	n.a	214	n.a	n.a	15,861	30%	9%	16,075
1955			703			188,403	184	14,377	14,561	39	1,973	2,012	n.a	n.a	223	n.a	n.a	16,350	32%	9%	16,573
1956			687			184,785	186	14,634	14,820	38	1,953	1,991	n.a	n.a	224	n.a	n.a	16,587	33%	9%	16,811
1957			651			174,713	156	14,412	14,568	31	1,893	1,924	n.a	n.a	187	n.a	n.a	16,305	29%	9%	16,492
1958			665			167,697	207	15,017	15,224	51	1,973	2,024	n.a	n.a	258	n.a	n.a	16,990	39%	10%	17,248
1959			598			174,071	171	15,435	15,606	41	2,886	2,927	n.a	n.a	212	n.a	n.a	18,321	35%	11%	18,533
1960			675			190,266	217	16,934	17,151	60	3,650	3,710	n.a	n.a	277	n.a	n.a	20,584	41%	11%	20,861
1961			669			192,517	174	18,568	18,742	90	4,524	4,614	n.a	n.a	264	n.a	n.a	23,092	39%	12%	23,356
1962			668			190,158	193	19,793	19,986	88	5,264	5,352	n.a	n.a	281	n.a	n.a	25,057	42%	13%	25,338
1963			610			204,269	169	24,092	24,261	78	5,864	5,942	n.a	n.a	247	n.a	n.a	29,956	40%	15%	30,203
1964			655			268,648	271	40,941	41,212	5	1,926	1,931	n.a	n.a	276	n.a	n.a	42,867	42%	16%	43,143
1965			627			293,717	181	38,225	38,406	55	8,896	8,951	n.a	n.a	236	n.a	n.a	47,121	38%	16%	47,357
1966			701			296,610							n.a	n.a	292	n.a	n.a	48,577	42%	16%	48,869
1967			564			304,016							n.a	n.a	197	n.a	n.a	46,475	35%	15%	46,672
1968			359			254,454							n.a	n.a	238	n.a	n.a	46,569	66%	18%	46,807
1969			649			322,390							n.a	n.a	277	n.a	n.a	48,924	43%	15%	49,201
1970			556			304,595							n.a	n.a	214	n.a	n.a	46,944	38%	15%	47,158
1971			525			268,832							n.a	n.a	213	n.a	n.a	40,652	41%	15%	40,865
1972			468			258,137	132			72		72	n.a	n.a	204	n.a	n.a	40,885	44%	16%	41,089
1973			549			272,518	148			94		94	n.a	n.a	242	n.a	n.a	41,258	44%	15%	41,500
1974			651	336,722	n.a	336,722						0	n.a	n.a	166	n.a	n.a	34,432	25%	10%	34,598
1975			620	327,757	n.a	327,757						0	n.a	n.a	182	n.a	n.a	35,397	29%	11%	35,579
1976			586	323,465	n.a	323,465						0	n.a	n.a	156	n.a	n.a	35,983	27%	11%	36,139
1977			524	326,785	n.a	326,785						0	n.a	n.a	130	n.a	n.a	32,685	25%	10%	32,815
1978			499	328,001	n.a	328,001						0	n.a	n.a	121	n.a	n.a	33,679	24%	10%	33,800
1979			492	299,209	n.a	299,209						0	n.a	n.a	119	n.a	n.a	31,681	24%	11%	31,800
1980			440	253,266	n.a	253,266						0	n.a	n.a	128	n.a	n.a	29,372	29%	12%	29,500
1981	441	54	495	12,316	91	12,407						0	105	11	116	1,690	40	1,730	23%	14%	1,846
1982	472	48	520	12,286	127	12,413						0	100	18	118	1,950	51	2,001	23%	16%	2,119
1983	448	65	513	12,453	114	12,567						0	118	22	140	2,178	57	2,235	27%	18%	2,375
1984	438	60	498	12,494	144	12,638						0	100	17	117	2,288	70	2,358	23%	19%	2,475
1985	400	71	471	13,175	206	13,381						0	104	22	126	2,239	113	2,352	27%	18%	2,478
1986	355	52	407	179,706	1,719	181,425						0	99	26	125	19,204	1,147	20,351	31%	11%	20,476
1987	361	84	445	179,909	2,036	181,945						0	103	40	143	19,389	1,324	20,713	32%	11%	20,856
1988	529	80	609	183,063	2,655	185,718						0	101	36	137	19,504	1,722	21,226	22%	11%	21,363
1989	370	105	475	185,640	3,175	188,815						0	100	54	154	20,357	2,237	22,594	32%	12%	22,748
1990	346	87	433	180,707	3,403	184,110						0	96	28	124	19,596	2,485	22,081	29%	12%	22,205

UK Construction Industry Accidents - Aggregated Data - 1940-1995

Year	All Industries						Building/Construction			Civil Engineering			Construction Totals <i>(B & CE combined in Construction after 1980)</i>						% of construction fatalities to industry totals	% of construction Accidents to industry totals	GRAND Total reported
	Fatalities			All Accidents			Fatalities	All Accidents	Total reported	Fatalities			All Accidents								
	Employed	Self-employed	Total	Employed	Self-employed	Total				Employed	Self-employed	Total	Employed	Self-employed	Total						
1991	297	71	368	170,103	2,933	173,036				0	83	17	100	17,581	1,960	19,541	27%	11%	19,641		
1992	276	63	339	158,085	3,251	161,336				0	70	26	96	13,489	1,975	15,464	28%	10%	15,560		
1993	245	51	296	151,633	3,805	155,438				0	75	16	91	11,303	2,344	13,647	31%	9%	13,738		
1994	191	81	272	156,390	4,182	160,572				0	58	25	83	11,514	2,287	13,801	31%	9%	13,884		
1995	209	49	258	147,150	3,560	150,710				0	62	17	79	10,111	2,061	12,172	31%	8%	12,251		

Decennial Averages

1940s	1,075		243,224						227		10,102	14%	3%	5165
1950s	718	33.28%	181,049	25.56%					231		16,049	32%	9%	16279
1960s	618	13.91%	251,705	-39.03%					259		37,922	43%	15%	38181
1970s	547	11.45%	304,602	-21.02%					175		37,360	32%	12%	37534
1980s	487	10.91%	105,458	65.38%					130		12,493	27%	14%	12624
1990s	328	32.76%	164,200	-55.70%					96		16,118	29%	10%	16213

Sources: 1940-73, Annual Reports of the Chief Inspector of Factories for 1946-1973, (Chief Inspector of Factories),136, [Cmd. 7299], H.C. 1947-48, XII.1, 12, 78. (Years 1941-73 referenced *mutatis mutandis*), Proquest U.K. Parliamentary Papers, available online at <http://parlipapers.proquest.com> (accessed various dates Jun, 2017 to June, 2020)

1956-7 *Contract Journal*, Feb 13, 1958, p.1013.

1958-9 *National Builder*, April, 1960, p.321.

1962-3 *Contract Journal*, March 5, 1964, p.35

1964, *Construction News*, Sep 16, 1965

1974-1995, Extrapolated from RIDHIST Table, downloadable from UK Health and Safety Executive, *Historical picture: Trends in work-related injuries and ill health in Great Britain since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work act, 1974*, available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/history/index.htm> (accessed 21 Jun, 2016)

Irish Migrant Work Accidents

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Accident Type</u>	<u>Circumstances/Description</u>	<u>Sources</u>
40s	1948	Apr	Robert McGregor	39	n.k.	Fatality	Run down by train; no lookout positioned with gang. Sub-ganger was Morrison, Gang of 4, 3 survived	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , April 23rd , 1948, p.3
40s	1949	Sep	John McNicholas (Brother to Thomas)	32	Mayo	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>Western People</i> , Saturday, Sept 03, 1949, p.5
40s	1942	n.k.	Thomas McNicholas (Brother to John)	n.k.	Mayo	Fatality	Killed working during Blitz	<i>Western People</i> , Saturday, Sept 03, 1949, p.5
40s	1949	Nov	Michael Devitt	28	Mayo	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>Western People</i> , Saturday, Nov 26, 1949, p.4
40s	1947	April	Michael McNicholas	26	Mayo	Fatality	Workplace accident - details not stated	<i>Western People</i> , Saturday, May 03, 1947, p.2
50s	1952	Jan	Edward Delaney	25	Mayo	Serious Injury	Trench collapse - victim rescued after several hours	<i>The Times</i> , 3 Jan, 1952, p.2 & <i>Hartlepool Mail</i> , 2 Jan, 1952, p.6
50s	1953	Jun	Patrick Glynne	19	n.k.	n.k.	Mains cable strike	<i>Dundee Courier</i> , 30 Jun, 1953
50s	1953	May	Thomas Costelloe	25	Limerick	Fatality	Struck by crane	<i>IEN</i> , 11 May, 1953, p.6
50s	1955	May	Ernest Ingram	18	n.k.	Fatality	Struck by concrete lampost	<i>The Times</i> , 14 May, 1955, p.6
50s	1955	n.k.	----- Hyland	19	Galway	Fatality	Struck by steel beam falling into shaft	LN#3 -Kevin - Galway- Appendix A
50s	1957	Apr	Thomas Burke	36	n.k.	Fatality	Building collapse during demolition	<i>The Times</i> , 6 Apr, 1957, p.4
50s	1957	Apr	Unidentified #1	n.k.	n.k.	Serious Injury	Building collapse during demolition	<i>The Times</i> , 6 Apr, 1957, p.4
50s	1957	Apr	Unidentified #2	n.k.	n.k.	Serious Injury	Building collapse during demolition	<i>The Times</i> , 6 Apr, 1957, p.4
50s	1958	Nov	James Johnston	31	Mayo	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>The Leitrim Observer</i> , 29 Nov, 1958, p.6
60s	1960	n.k.	James Deignan	n.k.	Leitrim	Serious Injury	Building site accident	<i>The Leitrim Observer</i> , 11 Jun, 1960, p.1
60s	1961	Jul	Frank Cornyn	47	n.k.	Fatality	Fall from steel girder	<i>The Times</i> , 14 Jul, 1961, p.6
60s	1963	Jan	Patrick J Walsh	n.k.	Mayo	Fatality	Struck by crane	<i>IIN</i> , 21 Jan, 1963, p.5
60s	1965	n.k.	Unidentified #1	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Concrete slab collapse	LN#1 - Tom-Leitrim - Appendix A
60s	1965	n.k.	Unidentified #2	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Concrete slab collapse	LN#1 - Tom-Leitrim- Appendix A
60s	1965	n.k.	Unidentified #1	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Fell from Tower Crane onto concrete slab	Ol#18 - Patrick F, Appendix A, p.419.
60s	1967	May	Hughie Rooney	17	Leitrim	Fatality	Fell down tunnel shaft	<i>The Sligo Champion</i> , 9th June, 1967, p.3, <i>The Anglo-Celt</i> , 26th May, 1967, p.1, <i>The Leitrim Observer</i> , 27th May, 1967, p.5, 'An Godfather: Bryan Rooney' , Sonta/ TG4 television documentary (2014 -Dir:James Clenaghan).
60s	1967	n.k.	Daniel O'Shea	34	Kerry	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>The Kerryman</i> , 13 Mar, 1971, p.16
60s	1969	Oct	Thomas Burke	21	Kerry	Fatality	Building site accident	<i>The Kerryman</i> , 11 Sep, 1969, p.21
70s	1970	n.k.	Cornelius Roe	Middle-age	Leitrim	Serious Injury	Building collapse during demolition	<i>The Leitrim Observer</i> , 7 Aug, 1971, p.3 ; 23 Jan, 1971, p.6
70s	1970	Nov	Thomas Keville	Young	Leitrim	Serious Injury	Mains cable strike	<i>The Leitrim Observer</i> , 13 Mar, 1971, p.5
70s	1971	Jun	Bernard Colgan	n.k.	Westmeath	Fatality	Building site accident	<i>The Westmeath Examiner</i> , 12 Jun, 1971, p.12
70s	1974	Jul	Thomas Cunningham	22	Sligo	Permanent Paralysis	Building site accident	<i>The Sligo Champion</i> , 16 Jan, 1976, p.1
70s	1974	n.k.	Unidentified #1	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Concrete stair collapse	LN#4 -Patrick - Leitrim- Appendix A
70s	1974	n.k.	Unidentified #2	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Concrete stair collapse	LN#4 -Patrick - Leitrim- Appendix A
70s	1975	Oct	James Coughlan	40s	Tipperary	Fatality	Building site accident	<i>The Nenagh Guardian</i> , 18 Oct, 1975, p.13
70s	1976	Aug	Patrick Crotty	60	Cork	Fatality	Victim was crane driver in overturned crane	LMA/GLC-HE-R-36-WA Dawson fatal accident report ; <i>Irish Examiner</i> , 04-09-1976, Patrick Crotty Death Notice -
70s	1978	Nov	John Bierne	n.k.	Mayo	Fatality	Mains cable strike	<i>The Western People</i> , 25Nov, 1978, p16
80s	1982	Aug	Padraic Gallagher	30s	Mayo	Fatality	Building site accident	<i>The Mayo News</i> , 11 Aug, 1982, p.1
80s	1985	May	Noel Hayden	38	Wexford	Serious Injury	Mains cable strike	LN#4 -Patrick - Leitrim- Appendix A
80s	1987	Aug	Patrick Walsh	25	Kilkenny	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>The Kilkenny People</i> , 10 Jun, 1988, p.3

Irish Migrant Work Accidents

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Accident Type</u>	<u>Circumstances/Description</u>	<u>Sources</u>
80s	1989	n.k	Michael Brennan	n.k.	Kilkenny	Serious Injury	Fell from height.	<i>The Kilkenny People</i> , 20 Jul, 1990, p.12
90s	1990	May	Gerry Smithers	Middle-age	Dublin	Serious Injury	Fell from height.	<i>IPN</i> , 2 May, 1990, p.5
90s	1990	n.k	Maurice Griffin	54	Kerry	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>The Kerryman</i> , 10 Aug, 1990, p.1
90s	1990	Nov	Patrick Shea	24	Limerick	Fatality	Fell from height.	<i>The Limerick Leader</i> , 28 Nov & 1 Dec, 1990, p.1
90s	1990	May	Michael Costelloe	22	Limerick	Fatality	Building site accident	<i>The Limerick Leader</i> , 19 May, 1990, p.1
90s	1990	Jun	Anthony McFadden	61	Donegal	Fatality	Crushed in Jack-knifed crane	<i>SIN</i> , 24 Jun 1990, p.2
90s	1990	Mar	Danny Flanagan	45	Wicklow	Fatality	Building collapse during demolition	<i>IIN</i> , 6 Jun, 1990, p.11
90s	1990	Jul	John Penrose	32	Westmeath	Serious Injury	Building site accident	<i>The Westmeath Examiner</i> , 14 Jul,1990, p.20
90s	1993	n.k	James Mulvey	52	Leitrim	Fatality	Fell under tube train	LN#1 - Tom-Leitrim - Appendix A
90s	1998	Jan	Patrick Fraher	28	Waterford	Fatality	Concrete slab collapse	<i>IIN</i> , 26 Jun, 1999, p.6 & <i>The Munster Express</i> , 6 Feb, 1998, p.17
90s	1998	Jan	William Cummins	28	Cork	Fatality	Concrete slab collapse	<i>IIN</i> , 26 Jun, 1999, p.6
90s	2004	n.k	Patrick O'Sullivan	54	Cork	Fatality	Scaffold collapse	<i>IEN</i> , 10 Jul, 2009, p.10
90s	2004	n.k	Martin Carroll	n.k.	n.k.	Serious Injury	Scaffold collapse	<i>IEN</i> , 10 Jul, 2009, p.10
90s	1990	Mar	John Fitzpatrick	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Mains cable strike - working for McNicholas Engineering in east London	Construction Journal, online version CN Plus, March 8th , 1990, unpaginated, available at: https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/searcharticles?qsearch=1&key words=Fitzpatrick
90s	1995	Sep	Michael Foley	n.k.	n.k.	Fatality	Hit by out-of-control dumper truck	<i>Sunday Independent</i> , (11 February, 1996), unpaginated, available online at: https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/lifes-work-the-skins-their-boots-and-the-gangerman-1318374.html (Accessed 14 July, 2018).

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(Sources: Irish Newspaper archives - individual reports as stated above, Oral Interviews in Appendix A, various press sources as stated above)

Summary Data

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Accidents</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Accidents</u>
40s	5	n.k.	15
50s	9	Cork	3
60s	9	Donegal	1
70s	9	Dublin	1
80s	4	Galway	1
90s	14	Kerry	3
	<u>50</u>	Kilkenny	2
		Leitrim	5
Average	8	Limerick	3
		Mayo	9
		Sligo	1
		Tipperary	1
		Waterford	1
		Westmeath	2
		Wexford	1
		Wicklow	1
			<u>50</u>

Extract of Newspaper Articles
Irish Criminality in London 1940-1995

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Crime Type</u>	<u>Identified as:</u>	<u>Circumstances/Description</u>	<u>Sources</u>
1940s	1941	April	Albert Donnelly	n.s.		Theft	Irish labourer		<i>The Marylebone Mercury</i> , Saturday, 19 April, 1941, p.1
1940s	1941	April	Patrick McCann	n.s.	19	Theft	Irish labourer		<i>The Marylebone Mercury</i> , Saturday, 19 April, 1941, p.1
1940s	1946	August	Patrick Joseph Conlen	n.s.		Theft	Irish labourer	Bread coupons - 3 months hard labour	<i>The Daily Herald</i> , Friday, 02 August, 1946, p.3
1940s	1945	October	Gerard Anthony McVeigh	n.s.		Theft	Irish labourer	12 towels, value 30 /-, property of Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd, fined £1	<i>Middlesex Chronicle</i> - Saturday 13 October 1945
1940s	1943	January	James McKay	n.s.		Firearms possession	Irish labourer	Stole 3 firearms from employer - 6 months hard labour	<i>The Marylebone Mercury</i> , Saturday, 30 January, 1943, p.1
1940s	1940	August	Michael Hanlon	n.s.		Insulting words & behaviour	Irish labourer	Delighted when air-raid siren went off	<i>West London Observer</i> , Friday, 30 August 1940, p.2
1940s	1944	August	Cornelius Buckley	n.s.		Looting	Irish labourer	Stole from shop - 3 months hard labour	<i>The Daily Herald</i> , Friday, 11 August, 1944, p.3
1940s	1945	October	Patrick Joseph Flood	n.s.	19	Theft	Irish labourer	Stole overalls from a workmate	<i>Middlesex Chronicle</i> - Saturday 6 October 1945
1940s	1945	March	James O'Donovan	n.s.		Suspected Murder	Irish labourer	Wife of serving soldier found dead in Nottingham	<i>Daily Mirror</i> - Monday, 12 March, 1945
1940s	1945	February	Robert Joseph Norwood	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	28	Wilful Damage	Builder	Fracas at Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1. Fined 40s or one month hard labour	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 9th, 1945, p.2
1940s	1945	February	Patrick Hayden	n.s.		Dangerous Driving	Driver-Fitter	Driving lorry at 50-60 mph down Highgate Road - fined £3,10s, 6d	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 9th, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	February	John Lee	Hawley Road, London, N1		Employing unlicensed driver	Contractor	Employed Patrick Hayden to drive lorry without licence	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 9th, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	February	Joseph Dolan	n.s.	33	Brothel-keeping	Hotel-keeper	Guilford Street, WC1 - See detailed report - 2-3 months imprisonment + 25 guineas fine	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 16th, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	February	Mary Josephine Regan	n.s.	58	Failing to keep proper records	Hotel-keeper	Grenville Street, WC1- See detailed report - £50 + 25 guineas costs or 2 months imprisonment	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 16th, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	March	Aloysious Christopher Brady	Pemberton Gardens, N.19	35	Wilful Damage	Builder	Caused £15 damage at Eagle Pub, Camden Rd, NW1 after being refused drink as a result of excess alcohol.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 23rd, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	June	Joan DeHoog	n.s.	41	Brothel-keeping	Hotel-keeper	Argyll St, WC1 - Accused was noted as being born in Ireland. Was observed allowing 37 women to take 53 servicemen into premises in 3 days. Public prosecutor noted that if same rate of business was constant, accused would generate £7,000 p.a. income - fined £100 or 3 months imprisonment	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 22nd, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	June	John Hogan	Stockley Hall Hostel, Prince Albert Rd, NW8	27	Wilful obstruction of Police	Bricklayer	Police found 30 men outside hostel - noisy and obstructing public highway - endeavoured to move them along but accused obstructed attempts to clear	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 22nd, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	July	Francis Hancock	Upper Marsh St, SW1	36	All charged with 'Playing games to annoyance of inhabitants'	Labourer	Police inspector reported seeing 40 or 50 people playing 'pitch and toss' in a large circle at Mornington St on 10.20pm on Sunday. Each of the nine accused took part and were subsequently arrested. Police stated circle of men extended across the street and the pedestrians had to push their way through the crowd. Defendants fined 15s each.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , July 13th, 1945, p.2.
1940s	1945	July	John McNea	Mornington Terrace, NW1	23		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	John King	Itinerant	34		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	Michael Melvin	Mornington Terrace, NW1	26		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	Peter McDonagh	Itinerant	49		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	David Curley	Delancey St, NW1	47		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	Robert Canning	Mornington Terrace, NW1	38		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	Andrew Horan	Mornington Terrace, NW1	34		Labourer		
1940s	1945	July	Thomas Flynn	Arpley St, Penge	41		Labourer		
1940s	1945	August	Patrick O'Neill	Bartholomew Rd, NW5	27	Unlawful wounding	Irish labourer	Fought with fellow tenant, John O'Hara, over getting water from basement flat. Accused hit O'Hara with milk bottle. Both bound over to keep peace.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 3rd, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	August	Thomas Moriarty	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	60	Causing bodily harm	Labourer	Hit barman, Henry James Dean, in Haverstock Arms, Camden Town, with pint glass causing serious lacerations and eye injury, threw brick at policeman - remanded in custody awaiting sentence.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 17th, 1945, p.3 <i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 24th, 1945, p.4
1940s	1945	August	Edward McGovern	Caversham Road, NW5	35	Causing bodily harm	Barman	Fought with his brother-in-law, William Walsh at Caversham Road, NW5 and caused broken leg. Apologised to court, brother-in-law withdrew charge and charge dismissed	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 17th, 1945, p.3
1940s	1945	August	Matthew John Kelly	Itinerant	21	Wilful obstruction of Police	Labourer	PC saw accused in 'free fight' with each other in what police called a 'street melee' near coffee stall at Camden High St. Accused were Using house in Wharfdale Rd, N1 as brothel - property described as 'in a disgusting condition' - Sheehan had 16 previous convictions - sentenced to 3 months hard labour.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 17th, 1945, p.5
1940s	1945	August	Guy Bennett	Itinerant	24		Labourer		
1940s	1945	August	David George Sheehan	n.s.	57		Busker		
1940s	1945	August	Michael Kennedy	Greencroft Gardens, NW6	n.s.	Assault		Assaulted foreman, Francis Leese at Iverson Rd, NW6 site after returning drunk from lunch and being told to leave site - sentenced to 1 month's imprisonment.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 31st, 1945, p.4
1940s	1945	Dec	Charles Queen	Leighton Gardens, Kensal Rise, NW10	26	Assault	Slater	Fight on building site in Seymour St, W1 between Charles Queen (Chargehand) and Michael O'Hara. O'Hara sustained broken jaw from punch. Incident witnessed by John Casey, labourer.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , December 7th, 1945, p.5
1940s	1948	January	Albert Vosper	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	31	Assault	Welder	Assault by 3 residents at Rowton House, Arlington Rd, Camden. 3 named accused attacked David Moore, also resident, accusing him of informing on another un-named resident accused of theft. All	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 16th, 1948, p.3
1940s			John Fitzpatrick	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	22		Labourer		
1940s			William J Aitken	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	24		Steel erector		

Extract of Newspaper Articles
Irish Criminality in London 1940-1995

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Crime Type</u>	<u>Identified as:</u>	<u>Circumstances/Description</u>	<u>Sources</u>
1940s	1948	January	Charles Mahoney	n.s.	22	Breaking and entering	Electrical Engineer	Norfolk Crescent, W2 - fell while breaking in and smashed window. Accused admitted to being heavily intoxicated on the night in question.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 16th , 1948, p.2
1940s	1948	January	Joseph Needham	Onslow Sq, South Kensington, SW7 (Hostel)	49	Drunk & Disorderly (D&D)	Labourer	Incident at Hawley Arms pub, Castlehaven Rd, NW1. Accused found guilty of being drunk and disorderly, despite pleas of not-guilty. Damage caused to property of owner, James Vincent McDonnell. Barman & resident manager of pub were assaulted. Glasses thrown. Stafford Hotel Public House, Harrow Rd, W2 - broken windows - accused had been drinking - fined 40s and costs - uncle offered to pay but magistrate refused offer.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 30th , 1948, p.3
1940s	1948	January	Mary Noone	Albert St, NW1.	32	Assault / Bodily harm / D&D	Domestic		
1940s		January	John Connors	Delancey St, NW1	39	Assault / Bodily harm / D&D	Plasterer		
1940s		January	Michael Corry	Itinerant	48	Assault / Bodily harm / D&D	Labourer		
1940s	1948	February	John Hynes	n.s.	22	Criminal damage	Labourer		<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 13th , 1948, p.3
1940s	1948	March	Bernard Donleady	n.s.	29	Grievous bodily harm	Chef	"Following a fight between Irishmen on St. Patrick's Day" accused, a chef at Raglan Hotel, Bedford Way, WC1 assaulted David Anthony Connolly with a butcher's cleaver. Accused jailed for one month.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 26th , 1948, p.3
1940s	1948	April	Michael Conlon	Kentish Town Rd, NW1	33	Assault / Bodily harm / D&D	Joiner (Carpenter)	Accused jailed for 1 month for assaulting policeman and causing head injury after being stopped for drunk and disorderly.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , April 16th , 1948, p.3
1940s	1948	April	Timothy McKeown	Adelaide Rd, NW3	55	Brothel-keeping	n.s.	Police gave evidence of finding naked women and men when property at Morington Terrace, NW1 raided. Fined £50 + £5 costs	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , April 23rd , 1948, p.2
1940s	1948	May	Patrick Joseph Kearney	Pentonville Rd, N1	28	Assault / Bodily harm / D&D	Porter	Accused assaulted his domestic partner Nora Harte. One of several domestic violence incidents couple were involved in. Accused admitted to "drinking all day and all night". Jailed for 2 months.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , May 14th , 1948, p.2
1940s	1948	June	Edward O'Brien	Albert St, NW1.	31	Taking and driving away van/ driving uninsured / driving while disqualified	Builder	Accused had been drinking with friends. Worked on railway cottages construction and had 45 men working for him. Needed to get to Woodford and had no alternative means. Jailed for 2 months.	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 18th , 1948, p.3
1940s	1948	July	Alfred William Tully	Bourne Estate, EC1	37	Theft from building site	Carpenter	Caught stealing scaffolding poles from site in John St, WC1	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , July 2nd , 1948, p.3
1940s	1948	July	Michael Francis Murphy	Albany St, NW1	51	Illegal gambling	Storeman	Accused alleged to have ran illicit betting shop in Exmouth Arms pub in Starcross St, NW1. Police staked out premises and obtained evidence. Case adjourned. Public house was extensively patronised by	<i>St Pancras Chronicle</i> , July 16th , 1948, p.3
1940s			Charles McGinn	Drummond St, NW1	44		Polisher		
1940s			John-Joseph Donagher	Starcross St, NW1	n.s.		Pub Landlord		
1940s	1948	August	Dennis Butler	Goodinge Rd, N7	42	Illegal gambling	n.s.	Accused was seen 'loitering for betting' in Albany St, NW1 but pleaded he was only an agent. He got 1s in the £1 for telephoning bets to a bookmaker. Had been fined £7 for a similar offence a week earlier. Fined £10 or 2 months imprisonment.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 20th, 1948, p.5.
1940s	1948	August	James Doyle	Itinerant	21	Grievous bodily harm	Labourer	Both accused were itinerant and former residents of Rowton House, Arlington Rd, Camden. They were accused of brutally attacking the	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 27th, 1948, p.3.
1940s	1948	August	Patrick O'Brien	Itinerant	21		Labourer		
1940s	1948	August	Patrick O'Donnell	Fortress Rd, NW5 (Kentish Town)	34	Assault with intent to rob	Labourer	Both accused of attacking a Polish labourer and demanding money from him. Remanded pending trial.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , August 27th, 1948, p.5.
1940s	1948	August	Patrick Smith	Fortress Rd, NW5 (Kentish Town)	19		Labourer		
1940s	1948	September	Garnett Pierce	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	24	Stealing by finding	Labourer	Accused seen by policeman finding gold signet ring on pavement and told to hand it in to police station. Later PC concerned checked and found a different (inferior) ring had been produced. Pierce sentenced to 3 months imprisonment.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , September 24th, 1948, p.3.
1940s	1948	October	James Docherty	Itinerant	45	Drunk & Disorderly (D&D)	Labourer	Accused was itinerant. Was found by police outside King's Cross Station trying to fight any passers-by. When police told him to move along, he said, "I am not going anywhere until you take off your jacket and have a fight with me". Fined £1 or 14 days imprisonment. Had 4 previous D&D convictions.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , October 1st, 1948, p.3.
1940s	1948	October	James Boyle	Hamilton Park, N5	28		Painter	Alleged to have attacked Patrick Joseph McCabe, a noted boxer, and broken McCabe's jaw on August 2nd in Camden Rd in unprovoked attack after jumping out of lorry. McCabe and Boyle had been in a building business and McCabe had, Boyle alleged, been threatening to beat him up in numerous pubs in the vicinity.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , October 1st, 1948, p.5.
1940s	1948	October	John McDonald Scullion	Itinerant	37	Using violence	Labourer	Accused was itinerant. Entered Holmes Rd Police Station, NW5 (Kentish Town) seeking financial assistance. When police told him they could not help he became abusive and violent, kicking furniture and causing disturbance. Fined 20s or 7 days imprisonment.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , October 1st, 1948, p.5.
1940s	1948	October	John Gavin	Kentish Town Rd, NW1	33	Obstructing police	Labourer	Accused prevented police from arresting 2 other men in Kentish Town Rd, NW1 by obstructing and hassling police officers. Article of 29th expressly states incident occurred outside a dancehall in Kentish Town Rd patronised almost entirely by Irish people. This can safely	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , October 22nd, 1948, p.3.
1940s	1948	October	Thomas McLoughlin	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	30		Painter		
1940s	1948	October	James Byrne	Harberton Rd, N19	27		Railway worker		
1940s	1948	October	Patrick Collins	Morington Crescent, NW1	25		Kitchen hand		
1940s	1948	November	Michael Francis Murphy	Albany St, NW1	51	Illegal gambling	Storeman	Fined £10 for loitering for purposes of betting in Hampstead Rd, NW1. When arrested Murphy had £8 10s and 33 betting slips.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , November 5th, 1948, p.5.

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<u>Decade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Crime Type</u>	<u>Identified as:</u>	<u>Circumstances/Description</u>	<u>Sources</u>
1950s	1950	January	John Sullivan	Sheperdess Walk, N1	29	Assault / Bodily harm / D&D	n.s.	Earl Russell Public House, Pancras Rd, NW1. Accused was part of group of men who were allegedly drunk and disorderly and complained about taste of beer. Accused hit female proprietress and group began throwing glasses and smashing place up.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 13th, 1950, p.3.
1950s	1950	January	Patrick O'Shea	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	33	Robbery with violence	Plasterer	Accused admitted robbing a Custome and Excise officer of £43 10s and petrol coupons on Farringdon Rd, EC1. O'Shea had 6 previous convictions including a 4-year sentence for robbery with violence.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 13th, 1950, p.2.
1950s	1950	March	John McElroy	North Villas, Camden Sq, NW1	39	Drunk & Disorderly (D&D)	Labourer	Accused was employee of British Railways and was found drunk by PC. Resisted arrest and assaulted PC. Previous convictions for D&D. Fined 60s.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 17th, 1950, p.2.
1950s	1950	March	John Michael Ahearn	Chalk Farm Rd, NW1	39	Theft / D&D	Clerk	Stole 3 jumpers from store in Camden High St, was drunk. Fined £2 2s	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 17th, 1950, p.5.
1950s	1950	March	Desmond Dillon	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	19	Wilful damage / D&D	Labourer	Accused admitted to being very drunk on St. Patrick's day and damaged 2 windows at café in Inverness St, NW1	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 24th, 1950, p.3.
1950s	1950	March	Cornelius Murphy	Leybourne St, NW1	27	Assault / Bodily harm	Carpenter	Accused of wounding one Harry Fenton in Camden Gardens, NW1. Remanded on bail	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 24th, 1950, p.3.
1950s	1950	March	Samuel Burke	Itinerant	29	Assault / Bodily harm/resisting arrest	Labourer	Accused decribed as 'coloured labourer' was remanded on bail awaiting trial for assaulting his female partner and resisting arrest at Eversholt St, NW1. Magistrate at Clerkenwell court stated, "You have behaved like a perfect savage. It's a great pity you ever came to this country".	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 31st, 1950, p.5. <i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , April 7th 1950, p.2.
1950s	1950	April	John Mahoney	Downham Road, N1	32	Wilful damage / D&D	Labourer	Accused arrested for D&D and looked up in Kings Cross Police station where he subsequently broke a pane of glass in window out of boredom. Fined 18s 4d or 14 days imprisonment. 3 previous convictions for drunkenness.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , April 28th 1950, p.2.
1950s	1950	April	Liam McDonagh	Fielding Rd, W14	21	Drunk & Disorderly (D&D)	Labourer	3 accused were arrested while fighting with each other. Each fined 10s and one ordered to pay 25s towards medical costs for split lip.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , April 28th 1950, p.5.
1950s	1950		Thomas Henry	Sharples-Hall St, NW1	27		Driver-Fitter		
1950s	1950		Joseph Walker	Hurdwick Place, NW1	26		Labourer		
1950s	1950	June	John O'Neill	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	39	D&D/Theft	Labourer	Accused stole money and tobacco from fellow resident. Fined £3	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 2nd, 1950, p.3.
1950s	1950	June	Patrick O'Shea	Mornington Place, NW1	30	D&D/Bodily Harm	Excavator-driver	Accused was allegedly drunk and accosted customer in a pub in Chalk Farm Rd, NW5 stating "You don't like me, do you? I am an Irishman, I am a foreigner" then attacking the man with a beer-glass. Accused pleaded provocation on grounds that victim pushed him at bar. Magistrate fined £5 5s costs or 1 months imprisonment.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 9th, 1950, p.5.
1950s	1950	June	Coleman Hynes	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	28	Assault / Bodily Harm	Labourer	Accused stabbed another Irish Labourer, Coleman Joyce, of Polygon Rd, NW1 after pair had been seen arguing in Arlington Rd.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 9th, 1950, p.5.
1950s	1950	June	Edward Cairns	King's Cross Rd, WC1	49	Assault / Bodily Harm	Labourer	4 Irishmen convicted of assaulting a Ruebin Dabin on the lower deck of a London bus at 10.30 nighttime. Fight ensued over remarks made by plaintiff to a woman about her abusive language. Bottles used as weapons. Each fined 20s + £2 2s costs or 14 days imprisonment.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , June 9th, 1950, p.5.
1950s	1950	June	Daniel McFadden	Maple St, W1	49		Labourer		
1950s	1950	June	Daniel McFadden Jnr	Maple St, W1	25		Labourer		
1950s	1950	June	Frank McElhatton	Maple St, W1	22		Stoker		
1950s	1953	January	Daniel Murphy	Highgate Rd, NW5	51		D&D/Criminal damage / Assault		
1950s	1953	January	William Murphy	Highgate Rd, NW5	45	Assault	Welder	Accused was found by landlord's brother in cellar of Union Tavern public house, Lloyd-baker st, WC1 on Christmas morning. Accused pleaded he had fallen asleep in cellar toilets and found himself locked on. Magistrate acquitted, giving accused 'benefit of doubt'	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 2nd, 1953, p.3.
1950s	1953	January	Owen Murphy	Calthorpe St, WC1	21	D&D/Theft	Labourer	Accused stole purse of an Irish girl, Miss McGinley, in the Elephant's Head Pub, Camden High Rd, NW1. Case transferred to the London Sessions Court for trial.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 30th, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	January	Francis O'Rourke	Itinerant	45	Theft	Painter	Report headed: " FIGHTING - Crowd watched Irish Friends " - two accused fought each other outside Queen's Arms, Caledonia St, N1.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , January 30th, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	January	Patrick Broderick	York Way, N7	24	D&D/Fighting	Labourer	Two brothers recently arrived in London from Scotland, looking for work. Arrested after being seen trying several cars. Daniel had	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 6th, 1953, p.3.
1950s	1953	January	Patrick Purtill	King's Cross Rd, WC1	30		Labourer		
1950s	1953	February	Daniel McCormick	Lofting Rd, N1	25	Loitering with intent to commit	Labourer	Arrested after being seen trying several cars. Daniel had	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , February 6th, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	February	Edward McCormick	Lofting Rd, N1	19	felony	Labourer		
1950s	1953	February	John Clarke	Itinerant	26	Theft	Labourer	Clarke, an army deserter since preceding July, stole £17, a gold watch, a purse and a cheque book from two separate women at the Buffalo Club, Kentish Town Rd, NW1. He asked for 4 further offences committed in Ireland to be taken into account. Sentenced to 2 years imprisonment.	
1950s	1953	March	John Kelly	Camden Rd, N7	31	Theft	Labourer	Both accused were working on site in Fortress Rd, NW5 where	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , March 15th, 1953, p.2.
1950s	1953	March	James Sullivan	Eversholt St, NW1	34	Theft	Labourer	redundant steel tramlines were being taken up and were accused of	

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<u>Decade</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Crime Type</u>	<u>Identified as:</u>	<u>Circumstances/Description</u>	<u>Sources</u>
1950s	1953	October	Alexander Duffin	Ryland Rd, NW5	42	D&D/Theft	Handyman	Under report headed: " IRISHMEN WENT DRINKING: Adopted fighting attitude " - Both accused had drank nine pints of bitter and	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , October 2nd, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	October	Cornelius Shea	Rowton House, Arlington Road, Camden, NW1	34		Labourer		
1950s	1953	October	Patrick James McGowan	Adpar St, W2	31	D&D/Fighting	Labourer	Under report headed: " Drunken Brawl: Helped wife of man he injured ", McGowan, whose brother attested in court that they had been drinking large whiskies as well as other alcohol and had "had far too much" was accused of seriously injuring Thomas Ginty of Royal College St, NW1 at Black Cap pub in Camden High St, NW1. No motive or reason could be found for this brawl having broken out. Accused bound over to keep peace for 2 years.	<i>St. Pancras Chronicle</i> , October 23rd, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	March	Patrick McNally	Adpar St, W2	30	Wilful damage / D&D	Painter	Under report headed ' Glass-throwing in Pub ', McNally was convicted of drinking to excess and willfully breaking 6 glasses worth 7s at the Great Western Public House in Praed St, Paddington.	<i>The Kilburn Times</i> , March 27th, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	April	James Joseph Dunphy	Amberley Road, Paddington	37	D&D/Theft	Labourer	Under report headed ' Drinks on the Gas Co ', Dunphy was convicted of being drunk and disorderly and further admitted that the money on which he got drunk was obtained by robbing the gas meter in the flat in which he lodged of £3, 10s, 4d (This is the equivalent of £95 in 2017 money terms). Dunphy was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment.	<i>The Kilburn Times</i> , April 26th, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	August	Cornelius O'Sullivan	Salisbury Road, Kilburn	45	Assault / Bodily Harm	Labourer	Under report headed ' Alleged Blow with Broken Glass ', O'Sullivan was accused of hitting Patrick Lee, of Queen's Park with a broken glass and causing bodily harm in the Canterbury Arms pub, in Kilburn. O'Sullivan admitted fighting with Lee and a third man, James Gerard Quinn, also of Kilburn, was drinking with them. They were bound over to keep the peace for one year.	<i>The Kilburn Times</i> , August 14th, 1953, p.5.
1950s	1953	August	Thomas Kevin Mullen	Alexander Road, NW8	23	Wilful damage / D&D	Labourer	Under report headed ' Window Broken in Pub Fight: Irishman refused time to pay fines ' the accused were both accused of being	<i>The Kilburn Times</i> , August 21st, 1953, p.3.
1950s	1953	August	James Edward Reilly	Chevening Road, Kensal Rise	21	Wilful damage / D&D	Steel erector		

Irish Dance Halls 1945-95

#	Name	Address	Owners	Construction Industry links
1	The All-Ireland Social Club	The Stadium, Oaklands Road, Cricklewood	Maurice Leane (Kerry).	
2	The Aranmore	195 Balham High Road, Balham	Jim Conway (Cavan).	C Builder / Property Developer
3	The Banba	84a Kilburn High Road, Kilburn	Tom Melody (Mayo) then Johnny Muldoon (Sligo) then Mick Gannon (Tipperary).	
4	The Bat	Croydon	Tom McAvaddy (Mayo).	C Builder / Property Developer
5	The Blarney Club	31 Tottenham Court Road, West End	Mick & Eugene Gannon (Mayo).	C
6	The Boston Hotel	176 Junction Road, Tufnell Park	Johnny Green (Donegal).	Builder / Property Developer
7	The Buffalo / (a.k.a The Electric Ballroom / The All-Ireland Social and Dance Club)	11a Kentish Town Road, Camden Town	Bill Fuller (Kerry).	C Builder / Property Developer
8	Clan na hEireann	St. Olave's Church Hall, Manor House	Chris Forde (Galway), Michael Lowney (Cork), Jim O'Brien (London-Irish) & John Hallorhan.	
9	The Colmcille	Leytonstone	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo), later McPartland.	
10	The Colmcille	Tooting	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
11	The Emerald Club	Butterwick or Oriman Court, Hammersmith	Jim Conway (Cavan), Later Dick Bermingham & Dan & Frank Daly (Limerick).	C Builder / Property Developer
12	The Four Provinces	Canonbury Lane, Canonbury	Tim Brosnan (Limerick) & Jimmy Power,	
13	The Galtymore	192a Cricklewood Broadway, Cricklewood	John Byrnes (Kerry).	C Builder / Property Developer
14	The Galway Club	Greenland Street, Camden Town	Martin Moylan (Galway).	C Builder / Property Developer
15	The Galway Club	Stroud Green Road, Finsbury Park	Martin Moylan (Galway).	C Builder / Property Developer
16	The Garryowen	43 Brook Green Road, Hammersmith	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
17	The Glocamora	134 Clapham High Street, Clapham	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
18	The Glockamorra Club	Bayswater	<i>Not known</i>	
19	The Gresham Ballroom	643 Holloway Road, Holloway	Tom Gorman (Monaghan)	
20	The Hands Across the Sea Club	Burton's, The Angel, Islington	Paddy Casey & Dan Healy (both Kerry)	
21	The Harp	327b New Cross Road, Deptford	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo), later John Byrnes (Kerry).	
22	The Harp at Putney	90 Fulham High Street, Fulham	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
23	The Hibernian Club	472 Fulham Road, Fulham	John Byrnes (Kerry).	C Builder / Property Developer
24	The Hole in the Wall	The Angel, Islington	Casey & Healy (both Kerry)	
25	The Inisfree	The Broadway, Ealing	Paddy Casey (Kerry).	
26	The Inisfail	Clapham	Jim Conway (Cavan).	C Builder / Property Developer
27	The Inisfail Club	Leytonstone	<i>Not known</i>	
28	The Inisfallen	Ilford, Essex	John Neary (Mayo) & partner (Cork), later Paddy Lyons & Paddy Casey (Kerry).	
29	The Manor House	Manor House, Finsbury Park / Hackney	Chris Forde (Galway) & Michael Lowney (Cork)	
30	New Carlton Irish Club	308-310 Uxbridge Road, Shepherd's Bush	Butty Sugrue (Kerry).	C Builder / Property Developer
31	Pembroke Hall	Wellesley Road [?], Croydon.	<i>Not known</i>	
32	The Pride of Erin	31 Tottenham Court Road, West End	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
33	The Rainbow Club	Burton's, 162-168 Cricklewood Broadway	<i>Not known</i>	
34	The Regent	Tooting Broadway.	<i>Not known</i>	
35	The Round Tower	3 & 4 Holloway Arcade, Holloway Road	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
36	St. Patrick's, later The Glockamorra	79 Queens Road, Bayswater	Paddy Casey (Kerry).	
37	The Salon Bal	Harringay	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
38	The Shamrock	King's Hall, St. George's Market, The Elephant and Castle	Paddy Casey (Kerry).	
39	The Shamrock	Dagenham, Essex	Paddy Lyons.	
40	The Shandon	Romford, Essex	Paddy Lyons.	
41	The Shannon	Belsize Road, Kilburn	Johnny Muldoon (Sligo).	
42	The Shannon Centre	Seven Kings Broadway, Ilford, Essex	Tom Watson (Cork?)	C Groundworks Subcontractor
43	Spinning Wheel	Prince of Wales, Harrow Road.	<i>Not known</i>	
44	The Stadium	Burton's, 162-168 Cricklewood Broadway	Mick Dee (Clare)	
45	The Slievnamon	Burton's, 162-168 Cricklewood Broadway	Chris Forde (Galway) & Maurice Leane (Kerry).	
46	The Tara	Burton's, Streatham High Road	Frank Lee (London-Irish).	
47	The Tara Burton's [?],	Upper Tooting Road [?], Tooting	Frank Lee (London-Irish).	
48	Unidentified	267 The Broadway, Wimbledon	Coyne (Galway) & Flynn (Mayo).	
49	The Tara	267 The Broadway, Wimbledon	Chris Forde (Galway) & Michael Lowney (Cork).	
50	The 32 Club	120 High Street, Willesden	Tommy or Jim Fox & Bill Fuller, (Kerry)	C Builder / Property Developer
51	The 32 Club Harlesden	(possibly as above)	Tom Costello	C Builder / Property Developer
52	Unidentified	374 Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath, Croydon	Tom McAvaddy (Mayo) & O'Hara (Mayo).	
53	Unidentified	Pitlake Bridge, Croydon	Tom McAvaddy (Mayo) & O'Hara (Mayo).	
54	Unidentified	Purley, Surrey	Tom McAvaddy (Mayo).	
55	Unidentified	Crowndale Road, Harlesden	Maurice Leane (Kerry).	
56	Unidentified	Edgware Road	Power.	
57	Unidentified	Wimbledon	Flemming.	
58	Unidentified	Highbury	Chris Forde (Galway).	
59	Unidentified	Dagenham	Paddy Casey & John Byrnes (both Kerry)	C Builder / Property Developer
60	Unidentified	Woolwich	J. J. Hennessy.	
61	The Forum / Town & Country Club	Highgate Road, NW5	Owned by Folgate Estates (Development arm of John Murphy's corporation)	C Builder / Property Developer
62	Thatch / Town and Country 2	Holloway Road	Owned by Folgate Estates (Development arm of John Murphy's corporation)	C Builder / Property Developer
63	Mean Fiddler	16-24 High Street, Harlesden, NW10	Vince Power (Waterford)	

Sources: Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music : A History Of Irish Music And Dance In London, 1800-1980 & Beyond* , (London, 2016), pp.706-8. (unless otherwise stated)

60-61: Nicholas Faith, 'Bunhill: Rock in a hard place' in *The Independent Online* , 27 December 1992, unpaginated, available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/bunhill-rock-in-a-hard-place-1565591.html> (accessed 27 May, 2018)

#63 - Author's own knowledge

Irish Pubs in London 1948-1995

Additional Sources	Additional Sources
Acton Arms, 296, Kingsland Road, Dalston, E4	Hampton Court Palace, 21 Crampton Street, SE17
Admiral Duncan, 503 New Cross Road, Deptford, SE5	Harlesden Junction Arms, Ladbroke Grove [?]
Archway Tavern, 1 Archway Road, N19	Hop Poles, 17-19 King Street, W6.
Balloon Tavern, 114 Lots Road, Chelsea, SW10	Horse & Groom, 107 Garrett Lane, SW18
Bedford Arms, 204 Dawes Road, SW6	Kilkenny Tavern, 131 Merton High St, Merton, London SW19 1DE
Bedford Arms, 80 Arlington Road, Camden Town, NW1	King's Head Arms, 263 Kentish Town Road, NW5
Black Cap, 171 Camden High Street, Camden Town, NW1	King's Head, 115 Upper Street, N1
Black Horse, Holloway Road	King's Head, 4 Fulham High Street, SW6
Black Lion, 274 Kilburn High Road, NW6	King's Head, off Holloway Road
Black Prince, 6 Black Prince Road, SE11	Lamb Tavern, Bethnal Green, E2
Blackstock Tavern, Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, N4	Landor Hotel, 70 Landor Road, SSW9
Bohola Tavern, Bethnal Green Road, E2	Laurel Tree, 113 Bayham Street, NW1
Brecknock Arms, 227 Camden Road, NW1	Lion & Key, 475, High Road, E10
Brewery Tap, 54 Holloway Road, N7	Lion, 1 Junction Road, N19
Brighton, 111 Camden High Street, Camden Town, NW1	Little Red Bull, [not located], N1
Britannia, Mare Street, Hackney, E8	Lord Chancellor, 91/93, Frampton Street, NW8
British Prince, 77 Goldhawk Road, W12	Lord Nelson, 264 Old Street, EC1
British Queen, 434 Uxbridge Road, Shepherd's Bush, W12	Lord Nelson, Holloway Road, N1
Broadway Hotel, 141 The Broadway, SW19 [?]	Lord Nelson, Old Kent Road, SE1
Camden Stores, 25 Parkway, Camden Town, NW1	Loughborough Hotel, 39 Loughborough Road, SW9
Carnarvan Castle, 7/8 Chalk Farm Road, NW1	Mackworth Arms [Murphy's], Commercial Road, Stepney, E1
Case is Altered, 305 High Road, Willesden Green, NW10	Mail Coach, 28 Uxbridge Road, W12
Chevy Chase, Maryland, Stratford	Mooneys on the Strand, London, WC2
Cock Tavern, 596 Holloway Road, N7	Mooneys, Shamrock, Fetter Lane, EC1
College Park Hotel, 873 Harrow Road, NW10	Mooneys, The Bull and Butcher, 1277, High Rd, Whetstone
Constitution, 42 St. Pancras Way, NW1	Mornington Arms, 2 Mornington Street, NW1
Corrib Rest / The Aras na Gael centre, 76-78 Salusbury Road, NW6	Mother Red Cap, 665 Holloway Road, N19
Crown, 335/339 High Street, Willesden Green, NW10	Mulberry Tree, 161 St. Leonard's Street, E3
Dartmouth Castle. 26 Glenthorne Road, W6	Mulberry Tree, 536 Holloway Road, N19
Devonshire Arms, 33 Kentish Town Road, NW1	Nag's Head, 456 Holloway Road, N19
Dolphin, Mare Street, Hackney, E8	Norfolk Arms, 557, Holloway Road, N19
Dublin Castle, 94 Parkway, NW1	North London Hotel, 375, Kilburn High Road, NW6
Duke of Bedford, 204 Evershott Street, NW10	Old Bell, Kilburn Park [?]
Duke of Clarence, Rotherfield Street, N1	Old Horns, 214 Kennington Park, SE11[?]
Duke of Edinburgh, 20 Fonthill Road, N4	Old Queen's Head Tavern, 44 Essex Road, N1
Duke of Gloucester, 44 Gurney Street, SE17	Old Queen's Head, 131, Stockwell Road, SW9
Duke of Norfolk, 202-204, Westbourne Grove, London, W11	Oxford Arms, 265 Camden High Street, Camden Town, NW1
Duke of Wellington [near Seven Sisters Road?]	Plough, Harrow Road, W10.
Duke of Wellington, 119 Ball's Pond Road, N1	Powerhouse, Upper St, Islington, London N1
Dundee Arms, Cambridge Heath Road, E2	Powers, Kilburn High Road
Eagle, 102/104 Camden Road, NW1	Queen's Head, [not located]
Eaglet, 124 Seven Sister's Road, London, N7	Queen's Tavern, Edis Street, NW1
Earl of Beaconsfield, 30, Alpine House, London, SE16	Railway Tavern, South End Road, NW3
Earl of Derby, 75-76 Amberley Road, Maida Vale, W9 2JL	Ring, Blackfriars Road, SE1
Earl of Essex, Romford Road, Forest Gate, E7	Rising Sun, 138, Greenford Road, Sudbury Hill, Harrow
Earl Percy, 225 Ladbroke Grove, W10	Shakespeare, 579 Holloway Road, N19
Edinburgh Castle, 297 Caledonian Road, N1	Spotted Dog, 38 High Road, Willesden Green, NW10
Elephant's Head, 224 Camden High Street, NW1	Springfield Tavern, Kepler Road, London, SW4
Elgin Hotel, 96 Ladbroke Grove, W11	St. Andrew's Head, Salmon Lane, Limehouse, E1
Elm Tree, High Street, Harlesden, London, N10	Star, 44-48, Queensdale Road, W11
Enkle Arms, 34/36 Seven Sisters Road, N7	Station Hotel, 43/45 Camden Road, NW1
Falkland Arms, 66, Falkland Road, NW5	Swan, Stockwell Rd, SW9
Favourite, 7/13 Queensland Road, Holloway, N7	Tavistock Hotel, 41 Tavistock Crescent, W11
Finsbury Park Tavern, 263 Seven Sisters Road, N4	The Plimsoll / Auld Triangle, Thomas Street, Finsbury Park, N4
Flora, Harrow Road, Kensal Green, W10	Three Wheatsheafs, 56 Upper Street, N1
Forest Gate Hotel, 105 Godwin Rd, London E7 0LW	Twelve Pins, Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park, N4
George & Dragon, High Street, Southall	Victoria Tavern, Liverpool Road / Holloway Road, N7
Golden Lion, 88 Royal College St, Camden Town, London NW1 0TH	Victoria, 205 Kilburn High Road, NW6
Golden Lion, Archway Road, London, N19	Weavers' Arms, [near The Angel?]
Goldhawk Hotel, 122/124 Goldhawk Road, W12	Wentworth Arms, Mile End, E1
Grapes, 27 London Road, SE1.	White Hart (Murphys), 1 Mile End Rd, London E1 4TP
Grave Maurice, 18, St. Leonard's Road, E14	White Hart, 563 Fulham Road, SW11
Half Moon, Holloway Road	White Horse, Bishop's Way, Bethnal Green, E2
Halfway House, 104 Western Road, Southall	Willesden Junction Hotel, 47 Station Road, NW10
Halfway House, 142 The Broadway, West Ealing, W13	William IV, Harrow Road, Kensal Green, NW10
	World's End, 45 Newington Causeway, SE1

Sources: Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music : A History Of Irish Music And Dance In London, 1800-1980 & Beyond*, (London, 2016), pp.654-5. (unless otherwise stated); *Irish Post* newspaper, 1970-95, various editions

M25 Irish Labour Contribution

M	Length (km)	Contractor	Tender Price Millions
Dartford Tunnel Southern Approach	2.5	Laing/Birse	£15.90
Dartford to Swanley (J1 to J3)	5.3	Laing	£5.50
Swanley to Sevenoaks (J3 to J5)	12.9	Laing	£38.50
Sevenoaks Interchange (J5)	1.5	Cementation	£7.20
Sundridge Road to Westerham	6.3	Gleeson	£6.30
Westerham to Godstone (J6)	8.1	Bovis	£8.40
Godstone to Reigate (J6 to J8)	7.2	French	£10.40
Reigate to Leatherhead (J8 to J9)	7.2	Farr - Birse	£14.60
Leatherhead interchange (J9)	4.4	Balfour Beatty	£14.30
Leatherhead to Wisley	6.9	Fairclough(AMEC)	£17.20
Wisley to Chertsey (J10 to J11)	9.4	Balfour Beatty	£20.70
Advance bridges		Fairclough(AMEC), Balfour Beatty & Monk	£6.40
Chertsey to Thorpe (J11 to J12)	3.8	Bovis	£7.60
Thorpe to Egham (J12 to J13)	4	Bovis/Fairclough(AMEC)	£9.90
Egham to Yeoveney (J13 to J14)	1.5	Bovis/Fairclough(AMEC)	£9.90
Yeoveney to Airport spur	3.2	Balfour Beatty	£14.80
Airport spur to M4 (15)	3.3	Cementation	£44.50
M4 to Iver Heath (J15 to J16)	6.8	Wimpey	£25.30
M40 Interchange (J16)	2.6	Tarmac (now Carrilion Construction)	£21.10
M40 to Maple Cross (J16 to J17)	7.7	Laing	£20.00
Maple Cross to Hunton Bridge (J17 to J19)	9.6	Costain	£5.80
Micklefield to Bedmond Road (J19 to J20)	5.8	Sir A McAlpine/ Fairclough(AMEC) Cons'n	£26.80
Bedmond Road to Bricket Wood (J20 to J21A)	3.1	Balfour Beatty	£17.70
Bricket Wood to London Colney (J21A to J22)	6.6	Edmund Nuttall	£15.20
London Colney to South Mimms (J22 to J23)	6	Balfour Beatty	£21.50
South Mimms to Potters Bar (J23 to J24)	4.3	Balfour Beatty	£4.90
Potters Bar to Waltham Cross (J24 to J25)	8.5	Sir A McAlpine	£15.80
Waltham Cross (J25) to River Lee	2.9	Tarmac (now Carrilion Construction)	£28.60
River Lee to Upshire (J26)	3.2	Tarmac (now Carrilion Construction)	£13.10
Upshire to Theydon Garnon (J26 to J27)	6.6	Laing	£29.10
Theydon Garnon (J27) to Passingford Bridge	4.6	Costain	£21.20
Passingford Bridge to Brentwood (J28)	8.3	Laing	£19.90
Brentwood to North Ockendon (J28 to J29)	8.6	Costain	£31.10
North Ockendon(J29) to Stifford Road	4	Laing	£7.20
Stifford Road to Mar Dyke	2.2	Laing	£11.00
Dartford Tunnel North Approach	1.2		£11.10
Dartford Tunnel	2.2	Balfour Beatty	£33.40

192.3

£631.90 millions

Laing	47	24.45%	
Laing/Birse	3	1.30%	
Edmund Nuttall	7	3.43%	
Balfour Beatty	33	16.96%	
Costain	23	11.86%	
Tarmac (now Carrilion Construction)	9	4.53%	
Sir A McAlpine	9	4.42%	
Sir A McAlpine/ Fairclough(AMEC) Cons'n	6	3.02%	
Bovis	12	6.19%	
Bovis/Fairclough(AMEC)	6	2.86%	
Cementation	5	2.50%	
Gleeson	6	3.28%	
French	7	3.75%	
Farr - Birse	7	3.75%	
Fairclough(AMEC), Balfour Beatty & Monk	0	0.00%	
Wimpey	7	3.54%	
			Labour element = 631,900,000 x 47.5% £300,152,500
			Main construction period (May 1973-Oct 1986) 149 months

M25 Irish Labour Contribution

		Average monthly labour expenditure	£2,014,446 million
Unallocated	8 4.16%		
	<u>192</u>	Average monthly labour expenditure - Irish labour	£948,948.85
		(2,014,446 x 60% x 78.51%)	
Irish / Irish employers	78.51%	Average mid-point (1980) monthly wage level	£428.00 p.w.
(Nominal level of Irish labour within companies = 60%)			
		Average level of Irish labour per month	2,217

Original source data: 'M25 Contract Details', The Motorway Archive, available at <http://www.ukmotorwayarchive.org.uk/en/motorways/motorway-listing/m25-london-orbital-motorway/contract-details.cfm>
 Home > Motorways > Motorway Listing > M25 London Orbital Motorway > M25 Contract Details

Construction output price indices (OPIs) QMI,
 (file:///C:/Users/Michael/Downloads/Construction%20output%20price%20i
 ndices%20(OPIs)%20QMI.pdf)

Index	%		
	Labour	Materials	Plant
Housing	44.3	50.2	5.5
Infrastructure	47.5	40.4	12.1
Other Work	54.5	39.9	5.7
Housing R&M	60.6	35.8	3.6
Non Housing R&M	24.8	69	6.2

Source: Office for National Statistics

STREAMLINED ANALYSES

A24

NEW EARNINGS SURVEY 1980

Table 10 Age-groups

FULL-TIME MALES, whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence

APRIL 1980

Age-group	Average gross weekly earnings				Distribution of weekly earnings					Average hourly earnings excl. effect of over-time	Average weekly hours		Increase in average weekly earnings April 1979 to April 1980 including overtime pay	
	Total	of which			Percentage who earned under			10 per cent earned			Total incl. over-time	Over-time	Based on complete 1979 samples and 1980 (see note)	Based on matched 1979/80 samples (see note)
		Over-time pay	PBR etc pay	Shift etc premium pay	£60	£100	£140	less than amount below	more than amount below					
	£	£	£	£	per cent	per cent	per cent	£	£	pence	hours	hours	per cent	per cent
Full-time manual males														
Under 18	48.6	2.8	2.4	0.2	82.6	98.3	99.7	31.6	68.6	115.3	41.6	1.8	18.6	56.1
18 to 20	78.8	7.2	6.0	1.3	24.8	81.6	96.7	49.8	114.1	179.7	42.9	3.2	20.1	34.6
21 to 24	99.8	12.5	8.5	2.6	5.6	57.7	89.8	65.6	140.7	219.2	44.4	4.6	19.2	22.1
25 to 29	111.9	15.1	10.3	3.6	2.8	44.4	84.0	72.1	154.0	242.2	45.2	5.3	20.2	21.1
30 to 39	118.1	18.0	11.3	4.1	1.9	35.2	77.9	76.1	185.8	250.2	46.3	6.4	19.3	20.7
40 to 49	116.8	17.9	10.4	4.1	1.6	37.0	78.6	75.8	184.5	247.8	46.2	6.4	19.6	20.0
50 to 59	108.8	14.5	8.3	3.7	2.4	45.7	85.0	71.5	151.6	236.8	44.9	5.2	19.7	20.1
60 to 64	(102.4)	11.9	7.0	2.8	4.9	57.4	90.1	66.6	139.8	227.9	44.2	4.5	24.2	18.9
18 and over	109.3	15.2	9.5	3.6	4.5	46.1	83.7	68.4	154.6	236.0	45.2	5.5	20.0	21.1
21 and over	111.7	15.8	9.8	3.7	2.9	43.3	82.6	71.8	156.7	240.5	45.4	5.7	20.0	20.5
All ages	107.1	14.7	9.2	3.4	7.3	48.0	84.2	64.8	153.7	231.6	45.1	5.4	19.9	21.6

M25 Construction dates

Section	Construction started	Opened to traffic
Dartford Tunnel North Approach	Mar-57	Nov-63
South Mimms to Potters Bar (J23 to J24)	May-73	Sep-75
Godstone to Reigate (J6 to J8)	Jan-72	Feb-76
Maple Cross to Hunton Bridge (J17 to J19)	Oct-73	Feb-76
Thorpe to Egham (J12 to J13)	Jul-74	Dec-76
Dartford to Swanley (J1 to J3)	May-74	Apr-77
Chertsey link	Apr-76	Dec-77
Sundridge Road to Westerham	Dec-76	Nov-79
Westerham to Godstone (J6)	Jul-76	Nov-79
Dartford Tunnel	Jun-72	May-80
Dunton Green to Sundridge Road	Sep-77	Jul-80
Runnymede bridge	Jun-77	Jul-80
Advance bridges	Nov-78	Sep-80
Chertsey to Thorpe (J11 to J12)	Jul-78	Oct-80
Potters Bar to Waltham Cross (J24 to J25)	Jun-79	Jun-81
Egham to Yeoveney (J13)	Jan-79	Oct-81
Yeoveney to Airport spur (J13 to J14)	Sep-80	Aug-82
North Ockendon(J29) to Stifford Road	Sep-79	Dec-82
Stifford Road to Mar Dyke	Jan-79	Dec-82
Theydon Garnon(J27) to PassingfordBridge	Oct-80	Apr-83
Passingford Bridge to Brentwood(J28)	Jan-81	Apr-83
Brentwood to North Ockendon (J28 to J29)	Oct-80	Apr-83
Wisley to Chertsey (J11)	Sep-81	Dec-83
Waltham Cross(J25) to River Lee	Sep-80	Jan-84
River Lee to Upshire(J26)	Jul-81	Jan-84
Upshire to Theydon Garnon (J26 to J27)	Jun-81	Jan-84
M40 to Maple Cross (J16 to J17)	Jan-83	Jan-85
M4 to Iver Heath (J15 to J16)	Apr-83	Sep-85
M40 Interchange (J16)	Jul-82	Sep-85
Reigate to Leatherhead	May-83	Oct-85
Leatherhead interchange	Jul-82	Oct-85
Leatherhead to Wisley	Nov-82	Oct-85
Airport spur to M4 (J14 to J15)	Apr-83	Dec-85
Swanley to Dunton Green	Jan-84	Feb-86
Dartford Tunnel Southern Approach	Jan-85	Sep-86
Micklefield to South Mimms (J19 to J23)	Various	Oct-86

Source: www.ukmotorwayarchive.org.uk/en/motorways/motorway-listing/m25-london-orbital-motorway/dates.cfm 2/2

**Appendix D: Supplemental Information -
London Construction Industry, c.1920-1995.**

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Introduction

Part I of this appendix provides important supplemental information on the general structure, history and culture of the construction industry in London and the wider LMA. Although not specific to the lived experiences of the post-war Irish builders in London, this information is essential background to understanding the trajectory of those lived experiences. How Irish migrant builders, and in particular those who went on to become self-employed or incorporated sub- and main contractors, orienteered their working lives within the UK construction industry depended largely upon where they began that trajectory, and their intrinsic and garnered knowledge of its structures, cultures and history. This part of appendix D is intended to equip the reader with the requisite background information to properly comprehend the UK industry's influence on the lives of these men.

Part II of this appendix contains a survey of London's infrastructural, industrial, commercial and residential expansion throughout the relevant periods of the 20th century, together with broad details of those major projects upon which, it can be reasonably adduced, the post-war migrant Irish labour force were engaged from their point of arrival onwards. Given the vastness of London as a twentieth-century metropolis, the size and spread of the cohort of Irish migrant builders across it, and the paucity of definitive and precise information about

these individual migrants, it is impossible to attribute precise or even approximate quantitative and qualitative data on Irish migrant activity to specific projects. Certain definitive statements have been made throughout the main thesis – where evidence permits - based upon, for example, oral histories, but there is no reliable way in which it can be said with certainty that X numbers or cohort of Irish migrant workers were employed on any given project.

This lacuna is, to some extent, attenuated by this supplemental account of the redevelopment and reconstruction of London and its surrounds from the early 1920s until the close of the twentieth-century. It primarily highlights those major and notable projects which, records indicate, probably drew Irish migrant labour to work in London; consequently civil engineering works feature most prominently. For clarification, whilst it may seem counter-intuitive to include historical details of projects undertaken during the 1920s (ostensibly earlier than the chronological period this thesis deals with), inclusion of such material is merited because it explains, in part, how a hitherto itinerant class of migrant labourers began to settle in London from the early 1920s, and later in the lead-up to the Second World War. An uncertain (but probably substantial) proportion of this interwar Irish migrant labour force went on to settle permanently in London, merged with the wartime arrivals from 1940 onwards, and became the earliest of the ‘post-war migrant Irish builders’.

Appendix D is intended as supplemental material, providing additional depth and detail to the main thesis and is referred to therein where relevant.

Part I – London Construction Industry; Structure, History and Culture

Construction history in the broader sense goes back to ancient times and spans every epoch of human existence. However, the post-war Irish builders were part of the modern era of construction; the building of industrialised and commercial buildings and the infrastructural civil engineering which surrounds and supplies them. The modern construction industry is an invention of the age of Enlightenment and the concurrent Industrial Revolution. These periods have spurred veritable libraries of historical literature and, in the context of this work, do not require exposition beyond explaining that the combination of industrial technology and Enlightenment thinking brought about the modern construction process through separation of functions. Medieval and early-modern large-scale building combined design and construction in one organic process generally overseen superficially at a macro-level by those procuring such works. Church or state authorities and local feudal nobility paid for the work but essentially employed master carpenters and masons who used design-and-build methods carried out by under the auspices of the craft guild system, where ‘The master artisans worked it out amongst themselves and with the client as they went along, and with few, if any, written or drawn plans’.¹ The separation of the building process into discrete functions of design and construction probably began during the Enlightenment as rational science and engineering took on hegemonic status amongst the nascent class of professionals, merchants and industrialists. This was the era when Enlightenment notions of scientific rationalism developed architecture, engineering and surveying as distinct professions.

During the Industrial Revolution the physical landscape of what was then the ‘civilised’ world – first Britain, then Europe and later America and the wider world altered fundamentally and irreversibly, as indeed did the very fabric and framework of societies. But the change in British landscape and society was the earliest and by far the most profound. It is artfully encapsulated by William Blake’s now anthemic poem *Jerusalem* as the transition from ‘Green and pleasant land’ to ‘Dark satanic mills’. Similarly modernity, urbanisation and the technological innovation are features of British and - to a lesser and later extent – Irish society

¹ Thiel, *Builders*, pp.81-3 citing: L. Shelby, ‘The Role of the Master Mason in Mediaeval English Building’ in *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies*, XXXIX(3), (1964), pp.387-403 ; G Higgin, N Jessop, *Communications in the Building Industry: The Report of a Pilot Study*, (London, 1965), p.39 ; D Knoop, G.P. Jones, *The Medieval Mason*, (Manchester, 1967) ; M. Cooley, *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*, (London, 1987).

which are inextricably linked to industrialisation and which, combined with it, constituted the primary conditions for urban economic growth. Britain underwent significant urbanisation as a result of the great waves of movement from agriculture to industry throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The twentieth century saw greater explosions in urban population than in the nineteenth. By 1920, 50% of the UK population lived in towns and cities of over 100,000 people, with a further 14% occupying towns of over 20,000.² Even during the interwar years, when Britain contended with the financial effects of the Great Depression, the boom in suburban housing saw stock increase in England and Wales by 50% by 1939.³

Turning to the structural characteristics of the UK construction industry, Powell defined the industry as a ‘shambling giant’ of ‘labyrinthine complexity’.⁴ If anything that might be regarded as an understatement. To begin with the industry is enormous; it can be viewed in a number of ways: by sector, by region, by activity. It is both hierarchical and lateral in its scope. Some of the orthodox economic debates in chapter 1.5 revolved around the ‘backward’ character of the UK construction industry. This perception arises amongst economists because construction as a process is bespoke and does not lend itself easily to the efficiencies achieved via factory production and economies of scale under mature capitalism. The physical nature of construction work has always been unique and difficult to standardise in terms of components – although the late twentieth century saw a substantial shift in standardisation across the industry.⁵

The UK Government’s Department for Business, Innovation and Skills divides the industry into three sectors:⁶

Contracting – which includes: the construction of buildings; e.g. commercial, industrial, public and residential ; Civil engineering e.g. roads, tunnels, railways, bridges, and utilities; Specialised construction activities e.g. electrical and plumbing installation, demolition and site preparation, plastering, painting, roofing etc.

² See Table 8.1, ‘Urbanisation levels in European Countries, 1920-1980, in Béla Tomka, *A Social History of Twentieth- Century Europe*, (London, 2013), p.314.

³ Roy Coad, *Laing: The Biography of Sir John W Laing CBE*, (London, 1992), p.165.

⁴ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.177.

⁵ For further details on late 20th-century standardisation within UK Construction see: Ralph Morton, Andrew Ross, *Construction UK: introduction to the industry*, (London, 2008), pp.14-240; Gibb, A.G.F., *Standardisation in Construction (CRISP): A review of recent and current industry and research initiatives on standardisation and customisation in construction*, Report by Construction Research & Innovation Strategy Panel, (London, 2001).

⁶ This is an illustrative list and is non-exhaustive. See *UK Construction: An economic analysis of the sector*, published online by Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, (July, 2013), p.1.

Services – which includes: architectural & quantity surveying activities; Wholesale of wood, construction & materials ; Wholesale of hardware, plumbing & heating equipment ; Renting & leasing of construction equipment etc.

Products - which includes: manufacture of construction products & materials, e.g. bricks, tiles, cement, concrete products and plaster ; Metal structures, doors and windows of metal, carpentry and joinery etc. ; Wiring devices, electric lighting equipment etc.

Irish migrant construction labour was overwhelmingly engaged with the contracting sector (although some contractors also operated as Builders' Merchants and suppliers). An organisation chart of the UK Construction contracting sector (Figure 1 overleaf) provides further details of how the industry is delineated in terms of public and private works. The 'main contracting' system has been more-or-less universal in UK construction and civil engineering in the twentieth century, albeit with variants developed in the later part of the century, such as management-contracting, design-and-build and construction-management contracting.⁷

Contracting in the modern sense relies upon a hierarchical system of 'parcelled out' local site management teams which, dependent upon the size of the project, are predominantly site-based, reporting to (typically) regionally located management offices where senior management and administrative staff oversee operations at a regional level.⁸ These regional offices usually report in turn to a corporate headquarters. Company structures in major contracting organisations may also be arranged by sector, for example into separate companies or divisions for building construction, civil engineering, maintenance, building services engineering or specialised works etc. A myriad of different combinations of structure and hierarchy exist within the industry but the basic organisational structure of contracting remains unaltered and is typically depicted in Figure.2.

⁷ Alan Twort, Gordon Rees, *Civil Engineering Project Management*, (Oxford, 2004), pp.20-30; John Murdoch, Will Hughes, *Construction Contracts: Law and Management*, (London, 1992), pp.285-301.

⁸ Mike Bresnan, *Organising Construction: Project Organisation and Matrix Management*, (London, 1990), pp.24-30.

UK Construction Industry 1945-1995- Contracting Sector-organisation chart

	PUBLIC SECTOR	PRIVATE SECTOR
Building Construction & Refurbishment	Parliamentary estates, government buildings, municipal buildings, defence buildings - naval administration and accommodation blocks, army barracks & administration buildings, police stations, office and administration blocks, fire stations, hospitals, medical practices, universities, schools, museums, galleries.	Commercial office space, retail shopping space, museums & galleries, Wholesale distribution centres, laboratories, sports stadia, supermarket complexes, medical centres, hospitals.
Civil Engineering Construction	<p>National and regional infrastructure: (c.1945-1979)</p> <p>Power: Electricity - generation plants, hydro-electrical power plants, coal-fired generating plants, nuclear power plants, National Grid distribution cable networks construction & maintenance.</p> <p>Oil - processing and distribution plants, oil refineries, oil-carrying pipeline installations.</p> <p>Gas - natural and imported - refineries, processing plants, pipeline and distribution networks, urban gas holders</p> <p>Water: Reservoir construction, water salination plants, water collection & processing plants, sewage treatment plants, mains water supply and distribution networks, waste water and fecal waste collection and distribution networks, municipal mains and branch mains sewers and pipeline distribution networks.</p> <p>Transport: Road - motorway and regional A-road network construction & maintenance, tunnels, flyover, underpass, culvert and bridge constructions, associated drainage and lighting installations.</p> <p>Rail - Rail network construction and maintenance (overground / underground), railway and tube station constructions, ventilation tunnels and shafts, rail tunnels, maintenance tunnels.</p> <p>Aviation - commercial airline runway and public airport construction & maintenance</p> <p>Defence:</p> <p>Air - airfield repair & maintenance, RAF stations, munitions & ordnance factories, RADAR monitoring stations and network, USAF bases, Nuclear missile silos.</p> <p>Naval - Construction and maintenance of naval bases, docks, Mulberry harbours, nuclear submarine bases and naval dockyard construction.</p>	<p>(c.1979-1995)</p> <p>After privatisation era under Thatcher administration in 1980s much of the power, water and transport infrastructure was transferred to private sector and consequently all civil engineering construction and maintenance associated with this infrastructure was procured under deregulated private enterprise markets within the private sector. Organisation structures and methods of procurement became aligned with private sector requirements and EU procurement legislation.</p>
Housing and Residential Construction	High-rise and low-rise social housing, council housing estates, Housing Association properties & estate maintenance	Private housebuilding and apartment blocks
Building Services Engineering	Water, mains gas and electricity distribution and plumbing networks within buildings and estates, heating, air-conditioning, refrigeration, fire protection, power, lighting and data communication systems, climate control systems, telecommunications, environmental control systems, security and monitoring systems.	As for Public Sector.
Specialist Contracting	A hugely diverse market, constantly expanding and refreshing product ranges as technology unfolds. Primary areas include heritage and conservation work, curtain walling and glazing systems, proprietary roofing systems, architectural and structural metalwork, specialist coating and painting systems, artisan masonry, stonework, plastering and cornice work, specialist carpentry and joinery work	As for Public Sector.

Figure 1 - UK Construction Industry 1945-95 - Contracting Sector Organisation Chart

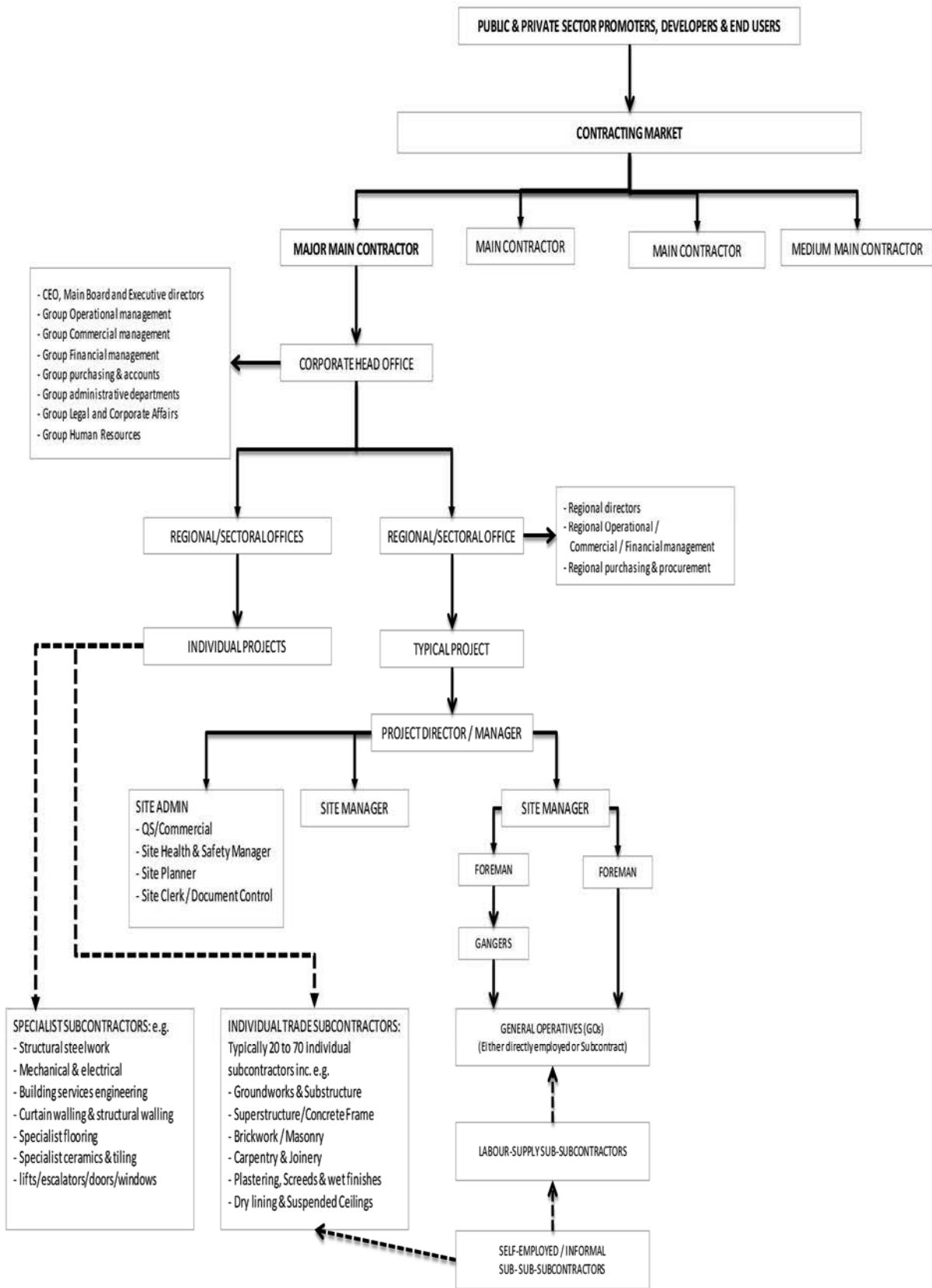


Figure.2 - UK Construction Main Contracting - typical organisation

Site-based management is critical to successful delivery of construction work, because of the very bespoke nature of the activities. Planning and forecasting of resource requirements and interdependent sequentialism defines the order of construction activities. Complex planning techniques, particularly ‘Critical Path Analysis’ in building and ‘Line of Balance’ in civil engineering are regularly implemented on major projects to manage tightly-sequenced interdependencies which mean that often multiple trades are dynamically integrated on site at any one time.⁹

The major contracting companies in the UK market – i.e. those founded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and economically and culturally embedded within the industry often carried substantial direct labour forces consisting of traditional craft trades such as groundworkers, bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers etc, but sub-let more specialist activities. Gradually, from the early 1950s this system of sub-letting work expanded to encompass more of the traditional trades and thus direct employment of building and civil engineering labour reduced substantially.¹⁰

In the post-war period, the resurgence of the subcontracting system has been the defining feature of UK construction, in particular the rise of self-employed subcontracting. By the mid-1980s self-employed subcontractors accounted for 38% of all manual labour and by the end of the century it had risen to 45% and continued rising into the 21st century.¹¹ By then, self-employment subcontracting was substantially greater in the UK at 45% of all employment compared to an average of 14% in the rest of Europe.¹² The UK construction industry generally classifies subcontractors both by reference to the kind of work undertaken and the method by which they are procured. Another important feature of the UK subcontracting system is the concept of contractual chain liability. It is not uncommon for construction work both in building and civil engineering to be packaged out and sublet repeatedly down a chain of liability consisting of up to four or five tiers (Table 1).¹³

⁹ Thiel, *Builders*, p.10; R. Oxley, J Poskitt, *Management Techniques Applied to the Construction Industry*, (Oxford, 1986), pp.1-171.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp.12-13; Linda Clarke, Christine Wall, ‘Findings: A Summary of Report entitled: Skills and the construction process: A comparative study of vocational training and quality’ in *Housing Research*, Issue 172, (March, 1996), pp.1-4.

¹¹ F. Behling M. Harvey, ‘The evolution of false self-employment in the British construction industry: a neo-Polanyian account of labour market formation’ in *Work, employment and society*, Vol 1, #20, [2015], p.6-8.

¹² Martin Loosemore, Andrew Dainty, Helen Lingard, *Human Resource Management in Construction Projects: Strategic and Operational Approaches*, (London, 2003), pp.8-9.

¹³ Murdoch, Hughes, *Construction Contracts*, p.244.

Table 1 - Contractual Matrix of UK Construction Industry

Tier	Contract Type	Contracting up to:	Sub-contracting down to:	Employing	
				c.1940-1965	c.1965-1995
1	Major				
	- Main Contractors	- Governments - Municipal Authorities	- Specialist nominated subcontractors	- Directors & management - Administrative Head Office staff	- Directors & management - Administrative Head Office staff
	- Prime Contractors	- Local Authorities	- Specialist Domestic trade subcontractors:	- Site management	- Site management
	- Housing Developers	- Major commercial employers	roofing, plastering, tiling and flooring	- Foremen - Gangers	- Small numbers of foremen
	- Management Contractors	- Developers	tiling and flooring - Labour-only subcontractors	- Substantial direct labour force of tradesman, concretors, machine drivers	- Skeleton direct labour force – some labourers and ‘jobbing’ carpenters.
2	Medium				
	- Main Contractors	- Municipal Authorities	- Specialist nominated subcontractors	- Directors & management - Administrative	- Directors & management - Administrative
	- House builders	- Local Authorities	- Specialist Domestic trade subcontractors:	- Site management	- Site management
	- Maintenance Contractors	- Small-scale commercial employers	roofing, plastering, tiling and flooring	- Foremen - Direct labour force of tradesman.	- Foremen - Skeleton labour force of tradesman,
	- ‘Jobbing’ builders	- Small developers	tiling and flooring - Labour-only subcontractors	- Foremen - Direct labour force of tradesman.	- Foremen - Skeleton labour force of tradesman,
	- Large specialist subcontractors	- Small developers	tiling and flooring - Labour-only subcontractors	- Foremen - Direct labour force of tradesman.	- Foremen - Skeleton labour force of tradesman,
3	- Small building contractors	- Small developers	- Labour-only subcontractors	- Skeleton management	- Skeleton management
	- Specialist & trade subcontractors	- Large/medium subcontractors		- Some permanent employees	- Some permanent employees

Tier	Contract Type	Contracting up to:	Sub-contracting down to:	Employing	
				c.1940-1965	c.1965-1995
4	- Labour-only subcontractors	- Tiers 1-2	None	Small numbers in this period	- Skeleton management - Some permanent employees - Mainly 'Casual' employees

For example, main contractor A building a new factory sublets the groundwork, excavation and substructure concreting work to a large subcontractor B on a 'labour, plant & materials' basis, who in turn further (2x) sub-lets the concrete placement & reinforcement work to smaller subcontractor C on a 'labour-only' basis and the excavation work to subcontractor D on a 'labour & plant' basis. Subcontractor C then further (3x) sub-lets the reinforcement fixing element of the concrete placement package to subcontractor E, who is, in fact, a self-employed, sole-trader steel-fixer. Subcontractor D then informally employs (sub-lets 4x) two friends of his that he met in the local pub as labourers, paying them in cash. Almost all migrant Irish builders of the mail-boat generation operated at tier 3 or 4 subcontract level of the contractual chain, and were subcontracted on a 'labour-only' basis. In fact for most of the post-war period, the majority of Irish migrant construction workers operated at the further hidden level of sub-letting (4x) which very often was procured informally with no written terms and conditions. This casualized form of self-employment was known as the Lump and is examined in greater depth in the next chapter. Sociologists have referred to this practice as 'false' or 'bogus' employment and it is a phenomenon which still plagues the construction industry, albeit in modified form, today.¹⁴

Cooney identified this resurgence in subcontracting as the transformative feature of twentieth-century contracting and closely aligned with the huge technological changes impacting methods and types of construction.¹⁵ Technological change and the complexities and sequentialism of modern construction meant that above all else, main contractors valued

¹⁴ M. Harvey, *Undermining Construction: The Corrosive Effects of False Self-employment*, Institute of Employment Rights, (London, 2001).

¹⁵ E W Cooney, *Construction History*, Vol. 9, (1993), p.73.

flexibility of resources – especially labour resource – as a major component of efficient and cost-effective trading. The system also allows employers and end users to deflect commercial and legal risk by creating privity of contract between main contractors and the various levels of subcontractors rather than entering into direct contractual relationships with specialists and trade subcontractors.¹⁶ Apart from the commercial imperative within contracting organisations themselves towards subcontracting, its use was strongly connected to national political economies as a matter of ideological policy.¹⁷ In UK contracting, particularly from the late 1970s onwards (during the Thatcherite era of privatisation) it was not uncommon for between 50% and 80% of workload on a given project to be subcontracted;¹⁸ indeed many main contractors during the 1980s employed a skeleton direct labour force but were essentially ‘hollowed-out’ contractors who had little fixed capital resources and essentially provided knowledge and management staff to orchestrate project delivery.¹⁹

There was a general (and wholly erroneous or deliberately obtuse) presumption by employers, local authorities and developers that main contractors employed general building tradesman directly as employees. But as the 1960s and 1970s unfolded, directly employed workforces – with all the associated overhead costs of employment; National Insurance contributions, public and personal liability insurances, tax obligations, health and safety regulations etc – came to be seen as an encumbrance to efficient management and profit-generation; this speaks to the issue of ‘hollowed-out’ contractors referred to above.

The practice of covertly sub-letting early-stage packages of general construction works – groundworks, substructure and superstructure concrete and formwork, demolition, external works, civil engineering and drainage packages – became common. Moreover it was also the case that the subcontract chain might descend several levels before a subcontractor actually employed his own labour force. Certainly until the early 1990s, it was common practice that below the level of main-contractor-to-subcontractor (level 1 sub-contract) there was probably no written contract – or at best the subcontractor would impose very rudimentary and onerous terms of trading on its sub-subcontractor. In 1957, by way of example, there were purportedly

¹⁶ Murdoch, Hughes, *Construction Contracts*, p.241.

¹⁷ Thiel, *Builders*, pp.12-13.

¹⁸ Ibid. See also

¹⁹ M. Harvey, 'The United Kingdom: Privatization, fragmentation and inflexible flexibilization in the UK construction industry.' In G Bosch, and P Philips, (eds.), *Building Chaos: An International Comparison of Deregulation in the Construction Industry*, (London, 2003), pp.188 - 209.

66,290 general building firms, of which only 25% employed more than 10 people. Working principals – in other words – sole traders, accounted for almost half the registered firms and there was a vast number of unregistered ‘Lumpers’ who fell outside the official statistics.²⁰ The effect of this chain subcontracting system was that the typical small-to-medium sized Irish migrant firm or unincorporated self-employed sole trader operating a small labour gang of less than ten men could often remain invisible, particularly on large projects.

Class is a also key determinant of hierarchical relationships within the construction industry and as inferred above this issue is closely linked with the subcontract system . There remains a lack of recognition, within the formal institutional histories of the construction and built environment industries, of certain kinds of manual labour, particularly where regarded as semi-skilled or unskilled. Irish migrant builders in the post-war era fell almost entirely within these arbitrarily-defined categories which developed as the Industrial Revolution unfolded and concrete, tarmacadam and steel developed as the primary materials of infrastructure and superstructure construction from the mid-1800s onwards.²¹ Those trades which occupy the early tasks of the modern construction process, often categorised as ‘rough’ or ‘heavy’ trades – demolition, groundworkers, drainlayers, concretors, shuttering carpenters, steelfixers, steel erectors, street masons and sometimes block layers – are often treated as somehow inferior, in the implicit class-bound hierarchy of skills, to the older artisan and newer technology-based crafts such as plastering, second-fix joiner-carpentry, plumbers, heating engineers and electricians. These ostensibly superior attitudes developed through the conflation of two distinct prejudices.

The first was the class-prejudice of the Victorian bourgeois professions which grew out of nineteenth-century industrialisation as explained earlier. It can, in some ways, be associated with the birth of social class stratification and the rise of professions and resulted, over time, in the symbolic relegation of manual tradesmen and labourers to mere ‘bodies’ that provide brute strength and mechanical skill, rather than any artistic or aesthetic contribution to the creative processes of construction.²² This is, of course, a gross under-representation of the skills and abilities which most builders developed both intuitively and by self-education. As the industrial revolution unfolded and the factory age of mass production dawned, the objectified exploitation

²⁰ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.168. Notably no original source is cited for these statistics.

²¹ Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, p.225-227.

²² Thiel, *Builders*, pp.82 citing M. Cooley, *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*, (London, 1987) ; G Day, *Class*, (London, 2001).

of human labour as mechanical bodies became a capitalist norm and the development – and gradual adoption by construction professionals - of Scientific Management by industrial pioneers such as Taylor, Gilbreth, Rowntree and Ford led to Work Study: a means of quantifying and measuring manual work as productive output, resulting in yet further objectification of the labouring man as a unit of production.²³ Quite apart from essentially depriving manual labour of its voice in the history of industrialised construction, research has shown that a more profound consequence of this process of objectification was the demeaning effects upon the human condition.²⁴ As much for self-aggrandisement and reputational enhancement as class prejudice,²⁵ when writing about the great infrastructure projects of their age, this new literate and learned class of professionals within construction and engineering tended to emphasise their own roles; that of engineer, architect, surveyor, supervisor and entrepreneur, making little - if any - mention of the labour which delivered their designs and instructions; as remains largely the case to this day.

The second prejudice was the intra-trade biases which were a legacy of the long-established craft-based building trades such as masonry, bricklaying, joiner-carpentry and plastering; rooted in the aforementioned artisan guilds system of pre-Industrial England and who regarded – with some justification it might be said - ‘new’ forms of semi-skilled and unskilled labour in unregulated and unqualified roles as another threat to their monopoly of building trades.²⁶ Consequently the makers of these new concrete cities of the modern age remain largely unexamined in terms of construction history.²⁷ Of course what these perspectives overlooked was the irreversible march of technological progress in the construction industry. From the nineteenth century onwards a host of new labour-saving construction materials, processes and techniques continually changed the nature of building and the skills-sets required of labour within it.²⁸ Amid the revolutionary changes in the class-bound structures of British society, a gradual equalization of skills emerged from the

²³ R.E. Calvert, *Introduction to Building Management*, (London, 1986), pp.3-10 ; Thiel, *Builders*., (London, 2012), pp.83, citing H. Beynon, *Working for Ford* (Middlesex, 1973) and D Collinson, *Managing the Shopfloor: Subjectivity, Masculinity and Workplace Culture*, (Berlin, 1992). See also p.50.

²⁴ Thiel, *Builders*, p.47 citing: R. Sennett and J. Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, (Cambridge, 1972); B. Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture*, (London, 2004); R Sennet, *The Craftsman*, (London, 2008).

²⁵ Harold Entwistle, *Class, Culture and Education*, (London, 2012), p.40.

²⁶ Forty, *Concrete and Culture: A Material History*, pp.226-234.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.230.

²⁸ More obvious examples are: Tarmacadam and Asphalt which created new skills such as asphalt roofing and roadlayers ; steel – both rolled steel joist construction and steel bar reinforcement, which revolutionised the speed of building construction ; lightweight concrete blocks as a cheap and durable replacement for bricks ; building services engineering, plumbing and drainage, all of which required new and bespoke labour skills. Some of these skills were acquired and practised by traditional tradesmen, so for example block laying became part of the bricklaying trade skills and asphalt is carried out by skilled roofers, usually also capable of undertaking slate, tile, lead and copper roofing.

recognition that these newly-developed trades were vital to the delivery of the post-war built environment.

In later decades, economic globalisation meant even greater technological advancements in construction materials and techniques, mechanical plant and tool innovation. Building services and environmental engineering assumed far more critical precedence in the construction process, along with architectural steel structuring, curtain walling and structural glazing facades. The later decades of the twentieth century saw significant improvements in standardisation and off-site factory fabrication and promoted higher levels of mass production in the built environment, all changes which came to challenge the dominant value of labour in the construction process in ways that industry could not have foreseen in the immediate post-war decades. The construction industry in London has always been a significant contributor to Gross National Product and in the post-war period British construction firms were also diversifying as global players in the construction market across the world.²⁹

²⁹ David Isaac, *Property Development: Appraisal and Finance*, (London, 1996), pp.18-23; Mark Mawhinney, *International Construction*, (Oxford, 2001), pp.2-12.

Part II – Notable Major Projects

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
Interwar Period					
<p>General note: The degree of redevelopment London underwent between the two world wars was quite astonishing; the city ‘witnessed the greatest amount of rebuilding all over the metropolis that has ever taken place within so short a time period since the Great Fire of London’.³⁰ The list of iconic buildings constructed in Central London during this period is extensive: government buildings, banks, corporate headquarters, insurance giants, newspapers and many more.</p>					
1920s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bank of England HQ - City of London - London City and Westminster Bank - Midland Bank, - National Provincial - Lloyds.³¹ 	Private / Commercial Banks / Offices	Major	Holloway Brothers John Laing	The rebuilt Bank of England HQ sat plumb in the middle of the City of London, surrounded by new headquarters for various other major financial institutions (<i>See also footnote 33</i>)
1920s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daily Express Building (Fleet Street), 	Private / Commercial Public / Government	Major	Holland, Hannon & Cubitts	The art-deco Daily Express Building (Fleet Street), County Hall (Thames Embankment), the headquarters of the Federation of British Industry (1926, John Laing’s first major commercial contract in London), ³² the University of London

³⁰ Harold Clunn, *The Face of London: The Record of a Century’s Changes and Developments*, (London, 1951), p.12 cited in White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.20.

³¹ The rebuilt Bank of England was one of the flagship London projects of the interwar period and ran from 1926-1939. The contractor was Holloway Brothers (See ‘Bank of England builder goes into administration’ in The Guardian Newspaper Online, 11th October, 2011, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2011/oct/11/bank-of-england-builder-in-administration> (accessed 24 May 2019), a major London-based contractor known to employ Irish labour in large numbers (See minutes of pre-contract meeting re: Phoenix Scheme, (Mulberry Harbour Constructions), dated 22 May, 1943, attended by Mr. Gowing of Holloway Brothers, note at p.5 regarding prohibition on employing ‘men from Eire’, NAUK Doc Ref: AVIA 22/1018). Holloway Brothers also built the Midland Bank HQ a short distance from the Bank of England, also on Threadneedle St. See also LTC Rolt, *Holloways of Millbank: The First Seventy-Five Years*, (London, 1958).

³² Coad, *Laing*, p.101.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1926	- Oxo Building (Thames Embankment) - County Hall (Thames Embankment), - Federation of British Industry HQ - University of London buildings including Senate House (Bloomsbury)			John Laing Construction Holland, Hannon & Cubitts	buildings including Senate House (Bloomsbury), and the Oxo Building (Thames Embankment) were all constructed or reconstructed in the interwar period. ³³
1924	Littleton reservoir - Metropolitan Water Board	Civil Engineering Infrastructure	Major	John Laing Construction	The traditionally Irish-dominated sector of heavy civil engineering work also boomed in interwar London, and migrant labour played a significant part in these works. In 1924, again, Laing was constructing Littleton pumping station; at the time the largest artificial reservoir in the world. ³⁴
1928	- Finsbury Circus, City of London	Private / Commercial Banks / Offices	Major		By the late 1920s the redevelopment of offices around in the City of London was so extensive as to be dubbed ‘the “new City”’.
1927	- Regents Street Remodelling	Private / Commercial / Retail / Residential	Major	Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons	Vast swathes of the west end of London, particularly Regents Street, also underwent significant redevelopment. ³⁵ The iconic Dorchester Hotel in London’s fashionable Park Lane was an early example of reinforced concrete superstructure

³³ County Hall and Senate House were both constructed by Holland, Hannon & Cubitts, the longest-established major London-based contractor known to employ Irish migrant labour during the Second World War. See p.133 *supra*. See also *Cubitts 1810 - 1975*, corporate author un-named, (London, 1975).

³⁴ Coad, *Laing*, pp.97-8.

³⁵ Harold Clunn, *London Rebuilt, 1897-1927*, (London, 1927), p.36 cited in White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.19.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
	- Dorchester Hotel				– one of the key forms of construction Irish labour was noted for – and was completed in less than a year, by Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons. ³⁶ It is highly probable that Irish migrant labour was employed to varying extents on these projects given the range of British contractors who built them.
1926-1929	Suburban private housing construction projects: Esher, Colindale, Sudbury, Golders Green and Woodford	Private & Public Residential	Major multiples	John Laing Construction	Even more important to the working lives of the newly-arrived Irish builders, who were beginning to cluster and settle mainly in these very suburbs, was the growth in suburban residential housing stock at this time. ³⁷ Between the wars the LCC and associated Metropolitan Borough Councils demolished over 180,000 inner London residential council properties and moved most of the tenants to the new outer suburbs. ³⁸ Middle-class suburbia grew exponentially; between 1919 and 1939 the footprint of London doubled in size with 860,000 new houses constructed. Between 1929 and 1936 at least one-quarter of all houses built in England and Wales were in London. ³⁹ The unprecedented land rush which was precipitated by the interwar growth of London peaked at 1,500 new houses in greater London by 1934. ⁴⁰ By far the most dramatic growth in new housing developments was in the north-west corner of the sprawling metropolis in Middlesex – close to where most Irish were clustered at the time. Another familiar employer of Irish migrant labour, John Laing Construction, was establishing their new London operational headquarters in Esher (1926), whilst simultaneously constructing massive suburban housing schemes in the north London periphery.
1930-1939	Suburban private housing	Private & Public Residential	Major multiples	John Laing Construction	By the 1930s, Laing were building huge new housing estates all across the north-west quadrant of suburban London and easily commutable from the

³⁶ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, p.257.

³⁷ Major Irish migrant settlement areas gradually grew in north London (Camden Town, Kentish Town, Holloway, Cricklewood, Kilburn, Paddington, Hornsey); further west (Sheperd's Bush, Fulham, Wembley, Kingsbury, Hayes, Acton, Ealing, Harrow and Ruislip); south London (New Cross, Elephant & Castle, Brixton, Croydon) and in the east (Hackney, Leyton, Ilford and Dagenham). See Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain*, pp.88-95.

³⁸ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.21-2.

³⁹ Coad, *Laing*, p.101.

⁴⁰ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.26-8.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
	construction projects: Borehamwood, Elstree, Edgware, Stanmore, Hatch End, Kingsbury, Slough, Luton , Watford			Taylor Woodrow George Wimpey	growing Irish settlement areas. By then one in every fifty new houses in London was a Laing home. ⁴¹ Between 1921 and 1939 some 800,000 people moved into north-west London. Harrow and Wembley grew by an average of 200% of previous population; Kingsbury doubled in size and Ruislip saw threefold expansion. Additionally other major British employers of Irish migrant labour grew substantially as a result of this interwar housing boom. Taylor Woodrow were building 2,500 houses per year – and Wimpey 1,000, mostly in the London suburbs. ⁴² The domino effect of this massive expansion saw outlying satellite towns like Slough, Luton and Watford (all of which, again, later became heavy Irish settlement areas in the 1960s-1980s) become industrial centres in their own right and commuter belt settlements. ⁴³
1925-1945	Public Power infrastructure	Civil Engineering Infrastructure	Major multiples	John Mowlem Sir Robert McAlpine John Laing	The growing demand for electrical energy saw massive coal-fired power stations built all along the Thames in Barking in the east (Station A, 1925 and station B, 1933), Deptford (1929), Battersea (John Mowlem & Co Ltd: Station A, 1933 and station B, 1944) and Bankside (Station A, 1938). Major upgrading works were also undertaken to Lots Road (Chelsea Creek) and Greenwich power stations in the 1930s. ⁴⁴
1920-1940	Road infrastructure	Civil Engineering Infrastructure	Major multiples		The relentless rise of motorized travel also saw the construction of a number of major traffic-relief roads schemes during the 1920s and 1930s: the Great West Road, the Great Cambridge Road, the Eastern Avenue and the Southend Road; the North Circular Road from Woodford in the east, curving around the elliptical arc of the northern half of the city to Ealing in

⁴¹ Coad, *Laing*, pp.101-11.

⁴² Fred Wellings, *Construction Equities: Evaluation and Trading*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp.15-6.

⁴³ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.29-30.

⁴⁴ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.210-17.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					the west; town-centre bypasses at Kingston (west), Barnet (north) and Croydon (south). ⁴⁵
1923-1942	Bridge crossings on River Thames	Civil Engineering Infrastructure	Major multiples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holloway Brothers - Dorman Long & Co - Cleveland Bridge - Peter Lind & Co 	Many of the major road bridges spanning the River Thames at strategic transport points around London were also built in the interwar period by contractors known for employing Irishmen: Reading (Holloway Brothers, 1923), Caversham (Holloway Brothers, 1924), ⁴⁶ Hampton Court (1931), Lambeth (Dorman Long & Co, 1932), Chiswick (Cleveland Bridge & Engineering, 1933), Twickenham (1933), Wandsworth (Holloway Brothers, 1940), Waterloo (Peter Lind & Co, 1942). ⁴⁷
1922-1936	Rail infrastructure	Civil Engineering Infrastructure			The transport revolution of 1900-1914 entered another phase when the growth of suburbia placed significant additional demands upon the underground and overground railway routes in the LMA, and the virtually continuous modernisation of the London Underground saw major extensions under the auspices of London Transport. Between 1922 and 1924 the early Edwardian City & South London Railway tunnels were completely rebuilt to standardised tube system dimensions and, as part of this work, in the heart of the new migrant Irish settlement, the Camden Town overground rail junctions were built to link the City & South to the Hampstead Line. ⁴⁸ The Northern Line tube was extended in 1923-4 as far north as Edgware, then in 1926 south from Clapham Common to the new suburbs of Merton and Morden. At the same time 6 ½ miles of underground mini-rail in 9ft diameter tunnels was built to serve the Post Office sorting system, linking Liverpool Street to Paddington. ⁴⁹ In Finsbury Park – which by the mid-1950s would become another stronghold of post-war Irish

⁴⁵ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.32.

⁴⁶ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.286-7.

⁴⁷ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.7, 29-30.

⁴⁸ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, p.184.

⁴⁹ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.184-5.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					settlement - the Piccadilly tube line was extended north, in 1932-3, as far as Cockfosters in Barnet. Similarly the District Line was extended east from Barking to Upminster in 1932, and the Bakerloo Line north-west from Wembley Park to Stanmore. ⁵⁰
1926-1936	Aviation infrastructure	Civil Engineering Infrastructure	Major		Civil air travel created significant construction employment opportunities as the (then) world's largest airport at Croydon was completed in 1928 and Gatwick as London's 2nd major airport in 1936. ⁵¹
1932-1937	Industrial and manufacturing infrastructure base	Private/Public Commercial infrastructure and superstructure	Various	- John Mowlem & Co - Various	Finally the interwar period also saw a corresponding growth in the industrial base of London which rendered the city a boom town by comparison to the depression-ridden northern cities. Between 1932 and 1937 there were 532 new factories constructed in London. ⁵² Again the north-west of the city – where the Irish clustered most - saw the greatest expansion: Park Royal, on the borders of Brent and Ealing saw an increase of over 230 new factories by 1939; the Great West Road saw fifteen new factories in 1931 – the worst year of Britain's economic depression – including iconic industrial names like the Hoover Building, Firestone Tyres and EMI Gramophones; but the 110 acre Ford Motors plant at Dagenham (Built by John Mowlem & Co, 1929-31), Edmonton and the Lea Valley in the east together with Woolwich, Erith and Crayford in the south also saw significant factory construction taking place. ⁵³ These were all major civil engineering projects in their own right and fuelled demand for experienced labour of the kind provided by the Irish migrant labouring men by then arriving in very significant numbers.

⁵⁰ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.30-32.

⁵¹ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.237-8.

⁵² White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.188-9.

⁵³ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.188-9.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>By the start of the Second World War London had again doubled in size by area with 860,000 houses built in the interwar period and, reaching its historic maximum, a population of 8,615,000; more than one in five of the population of England and Wales lived in London.⁵⁴ The general outlook for construction was, however, poor according to some experts. The economic depression of the 1930s had clearly taken its toll and the government had commandeered much of the industry's resources for the war effort. George Hicks, a prominent trade-unionist and MP for Woolwich and a former bricklayer himself, described the industry in 1940 as 'in a bad way [...] practically at a standstill'. He went on to pillory the stagnation caused by £200 million of suspended or cancelled contracts and 160,000 estimated unemployed in the industry.⁵⁵ Conversely the same paper, the <i>National Builder</i>, was in optimistic mood for the outcome of the war, recognizing that 'after the war building would be required more than any other industry'. The impending hostilities, it was said, would result in 'a considerable dearth of houses' and that this would provide the nucleus of industrial revival.⁵⁶</p>					
<h3>Second World War and Post-war period 1940-70</h3>					
<p>General note: As predicted the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 was to have a profound effect both on the national economy of Britain – which quickly became a war economy focused entirely on the national war effort – and on the fortunes of Irish migrant labour. Irish labour was recruited to Britain for war works initially on an ad-hoc basis but from 1941 onwards under a systematic British Government Group Recruitment Scheme, following detailed - essentially surreptitious - agreements between the Irish and British governments.⁵⁷ The most obvious and lasting effect of the War on London was the blanket bombing of the Blitz, which between 1940-41 reduced vast swathes of the city to rubble. In all some 1,900 acres of London – 2.5% of the total acreage of the then London County area - was declared as war damaged;⁵⁸ Almost 30% of pre-war lettable commercial property in the old City of London was flattened – most of it on one night, the infamous raids of 29-30 December 1940.⁵⁹ Approximately 113, 000 dwellings were completely destroyed; 47,314 of these in the eighteen London County Council boroughs of inner London⁶⁰ and a further 66,000 outside the centre. 288,000 dwellings were seriously damaged rendering them objectively uninhabitable, and some 2 million were slightly damaged.⁶¹ The infrastructural damage to the south-east of Britain – the wider conurbation of Greater London – was equally destructive. Süß contends that the damage to metropolitan London may have been even greater, stating that by late June 1944, when the Nazis began to deploy V1 and V2 rockets to London, some 337,000 houses had been seriously damaged and that with damage being daily sustained at a rate of somewhere</p>					

⁵⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.24-25.

⁵⁵ *National Builder*, February 1940, p.87.

⁵⁶ *National Builder*, February 1940, p.88.

⁵⁷ See main thesis, section 3.2.

⁵⁸ Interpolated from data in Peter J Larkham and David Adams, *The Post-War Reconstruction Planning Of London: A Wider Perspective*, Birmingham City University Centre for Environment and Society Research, Working Paper series no. 8, (Birmingham, 2011), p.7.

⁵⁹ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.39.

⁶⁰ Larkham and David Adams, *The Post-War Reconstruction Planning Of London*, p.7.

⁶¹ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.39.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>around 20,000 per day, this had risen to 443,000 a mere week later.⁶² Quite apart from the bomb damage repair programme in London, with which Irish migrant labour was heavily involved, the preparation for offensive war across southern Britain required massive construction infrastructure development centred on military depots, airfields, docks, ordnance factories, control centres, radar sites, fuel and munitions storage depots, military, naval and air force hospitals and similar projects.⁶³</p>					
1939-1945	U.K. Government Ministries - Admiralty - The Air Ministry - Ministry of War Transport - Ministry of Supply	War Works	Various	Various	Major building and civil engineering projects – dockyards, naval bases, deep water military ports, docks and harbours, underground storage depots, oil storage facilities, floating docks, a hundred miles of sea defences including sea forts in the Thames and Mersey estuaries, and a huge causeway at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys; War Office – military barracks including the £49.9m. (£1.6bn in current money) accommodation, hospitals and stores for the American forces (codenamed ‘Bolero’) and hundred miles of inland stop defences; The Air Ministry – new airfields, factories, repair yards;– Royal Ordnance factories; Ministry of War Transport - transport systems - roads, railways and bridges. ⁶⁴ Irish migrant labour was employed to build significant elements of this work, from early 1940 until the close of the war, particularly munitions factories.
1939-1945	- RAF - USAAF	War Works	Various	Various	465 airbases were constructed all over Britain. ⁶⁵ The Second World War airfields programme, according the Institute of Highway Engineers, required the manual construction of 175million square yards of concrete and tarmac paving – the equivalent of 4000 miles of six-lane motorway construction, ⁶⁶ a feat of constructional prowess which one author likened to the building of the first-generation of Victorian railways in the

⁶² Dietmar Süß, *Death from the Skies: How the British and Germans Survived Bombing in World War II*, (Oxford, 2014), p.94.

⁶³ For a detailed and informative summary of the huge programme of construction and civil engineering works undertaken by Britain in prosecution of the Second World War see, *inter alia*: Michael Stratton, Barrie Trinder, *Twentieth Century Industrial Archaeology*, (Abingdon, 2000), pp.93-122 ; Keith Potts, ‘Construction during World War II: Management and financial administration’ in Dainty, A. (Ed) *Procs 25th Annual ARCOM (Association of Researchers in Construction Management) Conference*, (7-9 September 2009), Nottingham, UK, pp.847-56.

⁶⁴ Potts, ‘Construction during World War II’, p.849.

⁶⁵ Michael Stratton, Barrie Trinder, *Twentieth Century Industrial Archaeology*, (Abingdon, 2000), p.112.

⁶⁶ R. Cox, Presidential Address at the Institute of Civil Engineers, London, 1982 cited in Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.118.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					mid-1800s. ⁶⁷
1943-1944	Operation Pheonix	War Works	Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sir Robert McAlpine - Sir Alfred McAlpine - John Laing - Taylor Woodrow - George Wimpey - Balfour Beatty - Edmund Nuttall Civil Engineering - John Mowlem - W & C French & Co. - Holland, Hannon & Cubitts - Richard Costain & Co. - Holloway Brothers - Bovis - Peter Lind & Co. 	In September 1943 confidential committee meetings began to be convened to plan what became known as the ‘Pheonix Scheme’ – the secret operation to construct the colossal Mulberry harbours required for Operation Overlord. ⁶⁸ A series of minutes from these meetings refers in various places to the major contractors who undertook the construction of these - now legendary - features of the D-Day landings. They also included mainly firms who, by 1943, already had an established track-record of employing Irish migrant builders. ⁶⁹ An estimated total labour force of some 15,000 men, mainly carpenters, steelfixers and labourers was required for the six to eight months which construction was planned to take. ⁷⁰
<p>IMMEDIATE POST-WAR:</p> <p>By the end of the Second World War, from a political and practical perspective, the immediate crisis facing London was the self-same as had faced it since the start of Nazi bombing in 1940, namely the need to clear bomb-damaged inner London, re-house homeless civilians and - once military victory over Germany had</p>					

⁶⁷ Stratton, Trinder, *Twentieth Century Industrial Archaeology*, p.112.

⁶⁸ NAUK, Doc Ref: AVIA 22/1018, pp.1-34.

⁶⁹ See Table 3.1, chapter 3 of main thesis and NAUK, Doc Ref: AVIA 22/1018, pp. 2, 7, 15, 20, 22, 23, 30. See also main thesis section 3.1.

⁷⁰ Ibid, Draft memorandum from Sir Geoffrey Burton, headed ‘Mulberry’ (22 October, 1943) comprising 4 pages, doc ref JWC/LC at p.4.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>been secured - to get the economic heart of the country moving again.⁷¹ In a talk at the London Rotary Club in May 1945, the then Chairman of the War Damage Commission, Sir Malcolm Eve, outlined its achievements up to that point: 2.5 million separate claims had been received for bomb damage and were still, at that late stage of the war being received at the rate of 7,000 to 8,000 per week. Over a million and a half cheques had been issued in settlement of bomb damage claims. But he also emphasised the gargantuan task remaining to tackle the housing crisis facing London, stating that the ‘vast preponderance of damage is to house property’ and that 700,000 houses had undergone rudimentary repairs to restore them to habitable states in 1944. By March 1945 that had risen to 800,000 but a further 200,000 remained in need of elementary repair. He went on to say, ‘Much good work has been done, but a vast job still lies ahead [...] The present state of London and of parts of Bomb Alley bears no comparison with the rest of the country [...] unless this war damage “hangover” in London continues to be tackled with vigour and speed for some time yet, it will and must prejudice our post-war building plans.’⁷²</p>					
<p>British government policy at this time was clearly aimed at emphasising the difficulties of rebuilding since shortly before Eve’s comments, in a speech in Wolverhampton on housing matters, Lord Woolton, the Minister for Reconstruction, had also emphasised that the housing crisis would become the most serious problem confronting Britain once the war had been won. He also outlined the labour situation. The average labour strength of the construction industry before the war had been around a million men. As a result of military commitments by the start of 1945 construction labour had fallen to 350,000. The government planned by ‘special releases from the Forces’ and by training schemes to increase the labour force to 500,000 by the end of the first year after hostilities and to 800,000 by the end of the second. The minister aimed to build 300,000 permanent houses within two years of victory and foreshadowed a decade of continuous work for the construction industry in rebuilding Britain.⁷³</p>					
<p>The immediate aftermath of the war saw something of a hiatus in rebuilding activity in London, as civilisation tried to return to some semblance of new normality. In practical terms London stopped growing for the last years of the 1940s and the City of London, for example, remained stagnant in terms of redevelopment until the mid-1950s.⁷⁴ The clear-up operation was the first, and most pressing job, and indeed clearing and redeveloping London’s bombed-out streets would take the best part of the remainder of the century, although in terms of accommodation and housing, which were the most pressing needs, the greater part of bomb-damage repairs to make houses habitable was complete by 1947.⁷⁵ The War Damage Commission continued the work of assessing and paying claims in respect of war damage, paying out sums of £105 million in 1949, £92 Million in 1950 and £72 million in 1951. Over three-quarters of the total compensation payments made in</p>					

⁷¹ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.42 citing C.M. Kohan, *Works and Buildings, (History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Series.)*, (London, 1952), pp. 225,233.

⁷² *The Builder*, May 4th, 1945, pp.358-359. See also White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.42 citing C.M. Kohan, *Works and Buildings, (History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Civil Series.)*, (London, 1952), pp. 225,233.

⁷³ *St. Pancras Chronicle*, Feb 2nd, 1945, p.2.

⁷⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.43. See also *The Civil and Structural Engineer’s Review*, Vol.8, No 8, (August, 1954), p.323.

⁷⁵ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.42.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>1951 were made for claims in Greater London.⁷⁶ Progress on all construction fronts was hampered, for example, by severe shortages of steel, which persisted until well into the 1950s.⁷⁷</p>					
<p>The revival in construction – when it came – was not solely the result of the Second World War, although the catastrophic war damage caused to much of London’s infrastructure was the final piece in the jigsaw; it tipped the balance and gave impetus to the new Labour administration of Clement Atlee to take decisive action. London had been the subject of extensive interwar redevelopment as shown earlier and had been expanding within and beyond its Victorian boundaries right throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Plans had been in progress before the war and even as the post-war social-democratic consensus began to revive Britain’s economic fortunes, the planning of post-war London took on the imprimatur of earlier obsessions: limiting the spread of London, whilst simultaneously decentralising the population clusters; maintaining the segregation of classes by separating industry and suburbia - middle-class and working class; and dealing with the exponential growth of vehicular traffic congestion which became inevitable as the post-war decades unfolded.⁷⁸</p>					
1943	The London County Plan (the Abercrombie Plan)	Cityscape construction and civil engineering infrastructure	Critical national infrastructure		The key document relating to post-war planning of the metropolis. This received initial LCC approval in July 1945 albeit the LCC had insufficient powers to fully implement the plan, being unable, for example, to fully control planning and land use regulation and requiring Exchequer assistance in terms of funding. Nonetheless the plan at this stage envisaged, for example, some £200 million of potential infrastructure expenditure in the following decade with immediate plans to spend £7 million on roads infrastructure and £15 million on building reconstruction including housing. ⁷⁹ On foot of this initial LCC approval the Railway (London Plan) Committee was set up in 1944, ‘To investigate and report upon the technical and operational aspects of [...] the main line and suburban railway system of London, both surface and underground’. ⁸⁰ In the event the multiple

⁷⁶ *Contract Journal*, Jan 23rd, 1952, p318.

⁷⁷ *Contract Journal*, 30 April, 1952, p.1665.

⁷⁸ Much research has been written about the ideologies underpinning the post-war planning of London. For a detailed understanding of these concepts, this work has relied on three sources in particular: Donlad .L. Foley, *Controlling London’s Growth: Planning the Great Wen, 1940-1960* (Cambridge, 1963); Peter J Larkham and David Adams, *The Post-War Reconstruction Planning Of London: A Wider Perspective*, Birmingham City University Centre for Environment and Society Research, Working Paper series no. 8, (Birmingham, 2011) ; and Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England, 1940-1980*, (London, 1981).

⁷⁹ *The Builder*, 20 July, 1945, p.51.

⁸⁰ *St. Pancras Chronicle*, 16 March, 1945, p.2. See also ‘London’s Railways – Planning For Peace’ at *A London Inheritance: A Private History of a Public City*, available at <https://alondoninheritance.com/london-transport/londons-railways-planning-for-peace/>, (accessed 8 May, 2018).

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					reports, high costs and the unfolding deterioration of the British economy in the late 1940s and early 1950s put on hold these far-reaching proposals; the development of transport within London followed a more bespoke project approach. Some of the 1946 proposals did get included in alternative projects, for example, the Brixton branch proposed in 1946 was eventually covered by the routing of the Victoria Line to Brixton in the late 1960s, a project undertaken largely by Irish tunnel miners. ⁸¹
1948-1957	LNG Gas Distribution Network	Energy Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	Nationwide	Various	The Atlee administration in the immediate post-war era nationalised the gas industry in 1948 in accordance with its radical economic policies described earlier in chapter 2 and between 1940 and 1950 the network of gas mains nationwide increased by 9,000 miles to 77,000 miles in 1949 then again by a further 13,000 miles, to 90,000 in 1957. ⁸² Before the discovery of North Sea Gas in 1959, Britain relied on the importation of liquefied natural gas ('LNG') to meet around 10% of its energy needs.

The construction industry itself was not fully nationalised under Atlee's post-war administration in the same entire sense as the infrastructural industries (water, gas, electricity, telecommunications, 'heavy industries'- steel, shipbuilding, coal - railways and aviation) although large swathes of construction activity were undertaken through the public sector and by Direct Labour Organisations within local authorities and county councils. The *National Builder's* forecast of 1940 proved, in time, to be broadly correct and despite the convulsions of the Second World War and the economic, political and social changes it brought about, construction activity in Britain accelerated from the mid-1950s onwards, driven by demand-led economic growth. Construction activity intensified in the decades following the war, with gross domestic product (GDP) per capita doubling from £52 in the mid-1930s to £82 in the mid-1950s and again to £98 in the mid-1960s. Simultaneously the proportion of gross national product (GNP) represented by the construction industry rose from its 1930s level of 4.1% to 5.7% in the 1950s.⁸³ The need to recover from the stock losses to war-damage described above was the main reason, together with greatly increased state intervention and public promotion of construction activity, particularly in relation to the urgent need for housing.

⁸¹ 'London's Railways – Planning For Peace' at *A London Inheritance: A Private History of a Public City*, available at <https://alondoninheritance.com/london-transport/londons-railways-planning-for-peace/>, (accessed 8 May, 2018).

⁸² Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry*, p.82, 119.

⁸³ Christopher Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800: An Economic History*, (London, 1996), p.140-141.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1947-1953	New Towns Development Corporations (The Housing Corporation from 1964). ⁸⁴ Basildon, Bracknell (1949), Harlow (1947), Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Milton Keynes and Stevenage (1946), Welwyn Garden City (1948) and Crawley. ⁸⁵	Suburban Residential Housing	Major		<p>State regulation of national resources for building and civil engineering led to the creation of a series of new quasi-autonomous agencies. Politics, as always, often interfered in the process of rebuilding and it was clear that, particularly in the south-east, where the New Towns Programme rapidly expanded the communal boundaries of pre-war London. ‘county and district authorities were jealous of the undemocratic Development Corporations, Quangos with an apparently unlimited call on the public purse’ and used national and local planning regulations to rein-in the development aspirations of post-war planners.⁸⁶ It was a derivative of the much earlier Garden Cities Movement of the early twentieth century, and under the auspices of the New Towns Act of 1946 and the Town and Country Planning Act , 1947 instigated the construction of eight new towns on the periphery of the LMA, some as far as 30 or 40 miles from central London in what had become known as the ‘commuter belt’.⁸⁷</p> <p>Development took place in three generations: the first generation set up in the late 1940s concentrated predominantly on housing development to re-house war damage homeless from inner London on greenbelt sites. Progress was slow to start, with only 37,600 new houses constructed in Greater London by 1948. By 1951 the Harlow, Stevenage, Hemel Hempstead and Welwyn Garden City new towns schemes were well under way, with each producing from 600-1000 dwellings per annum on average and forecast to improve these rates considerably in following years.⁸⁸ By April 1952 the Hemel Hempstead Development Corporation, for example, had unveiled its</p>

⁸⁴ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.141-142.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Lionel Esher, *A Broken Wave: The Rebuilding of England, 1940-1980*, (London, 1981), p.249.

⁸⁷ Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities*, (Abingdon, 2009), pp.20-40.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					1000th new home, and Bracknell new town was enlarged fivefold including 6,500 new homes and a massive new sewerage treatment plant, which was precisely the kind of civil engineering work which migrant Irish builders were renowned for - and the nationwide total had risen to over 1 million permanent new homes, ⁸⁹ with a further 17,500 being added to London's tally by 1953. ⁹⁰

c.1950-1970 General reconstruction period

The further demand created by post-war recovery underpinned the establishment of the Irish migrant ethnic enclave during this period. To understand this fully requires a grasp of how London was redeveloped in this period, since it was the astonishing volume of work available which provided employment and settlement opportunities for the hitherto nomadic Irish builders. Some fortuitous coincidences worked in their favour. Firstly the zeitgeist of the post-war era was modernism. The primary drivers of post-war redevelopment in London were the world-renowned LCC Architect's Department whose design vision was decidedly Modernist, Brutalist and functional - indeed Corbusian - in outlook, combining what they saw as avant garde architecture with a zealous technocratic approach to comprehensive redevelopment and radical new infrastructure.⁹¹ This meant, amongst other things, building upwards, and high; planners were emboldened by advances in construction technology which made it possible to build skyscrapers on the soft blue London clay to previously unseen heights. Secondly, reinforced concrete technology – both precast and insitu - was at the heart of these technological advancements, and these were construction techniques at which, as shown in chapter 3 of the thesis, the Irish builder had become highly adept earlier in the century and during the war.⁹² This was hard, heavy, manual – but also technically complex – work. Lastly this was a redevelopment aimed at achieving Abercrombie's vision of decentralization – and as White observed, it achieved just that, but more by luck than judgment.⁹³

The outward population drift which had started in the interwar era accelerated post-war. In round terms between 1951 and 1971 the population of London reduced by 745,000. This represented 9% of the total and 17% of those lived in inner London. Perhaps more extraordinary was that voluntary migration swamped the planners forecasted peaks continually such that essentially the complex web of New Towns, expanded towns and villages made the LMA into a 'an industrial suburban penumbra of limitless dimensions.'⁹⁴ Greater London's population fell by 7% in the 1960s, but the Outer Metropolitan Area saw 817,000 people arrive

⁸⁹ *Contract Journal*, 12 March, 1952, p.966; *Contract Journal*, 30 April, 1952, p.1665, 1670.

⁹⁰ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.42.

⁹¹ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.47, 52.

⁹² E. W Cooney, 'Innovation in the post war building industry: a historical review' in *Construction History: The International Journal of the Construction History Society*, Vol. 1 (1985), pp.52-9.

⁹³ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.59.

⁹⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.59-60.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>– an increase of 19%, and the south-east (excluding London) grew by 1.5 million by the early 1970s.⁹⁵ This gives some sense of the expansionary rate at which the city grew after the war; the boundaries between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ London merged. Infrastructure – particularly roads, water, power and transport - all expanded outwards substantially and considerably more opportunities for work, settlement, social mobility and entrepreneurial activity was created than would have been the case had the pre-war boundaries of London been maintained.</p>					
<p>The Irish migrant builders – positioned, as they were, on the geographic and social fault lines of the old city and the new suburbs – were ideally placed to capitalise on the boom that this decentralization fuelled. By the start of the 1960s; ‘Everything was getting bigger – roads, car parks, lorries, multiple stores, office buildings, airports, hospitals, telephone exchanges. By the mid-sixties both the context and the scale of the first generation new towns looked suburban’.⁹⁶ An editorial in the <i>Contract Journal</i> at the start of 1964 talked of a buoyant economy, bulging order books and concerns about severe shortages of skilled labour, strains on costs and profit-margins and above all, a lack of productivity.⁹⁷ Indeed Powell identified the problem of poor productivity as an endemic characteristic of the post-war recovery, citing Matthews as attributing it to full employment and the removal of the threat of unemployment which had persisted in the 1930s.⁹⁸ The first element needed to create this post-war Leviathan was infrastructure – energy and power, roads, rail, bridges, tunnels, water and sewerage services were all critical. These elements all involved heavy civil engineering work. The sheer scale of the rebuilding task is hard to comprehend but the following resumé of projects in which migrant Irish workers were participants gives an idea of why so many Irish migrants took to building work as the default mode of employment. Many of these projects, by necessity, were located well outside London, but merit inclusion as part of this chronology because their energy production was essential to the post-war recovery of the city and because the lucrative earnings available often drew Irish labour from London to work on these complex feats of engineering.</p>					
1947-1960	National Grid Upgrade (Grid powered by 238 power stations – some of the largest in London and the LMA and 433 sub-stations).	Energy Infrastructure	Nationwide		Power generation was a crucial part of the rebuilding programme and the pre-war development of the National Grid underwent nationalisation followed by virtually continuous upgrading and expansion of the 9,000 mile grid into a ‘supergrid’ with a capacity of 400kw, in the subsequent decades, to meet the growing demands of the major British conurbations – but particularly the LMA. ⁹⁹ Irish labour was heavily involved.

⁹⁵ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.60.

⁹⁶ Esher, *A Broken Wave*, p.57.

⁹⁷ ‘The Year Ahead’ in *Contract Journal*, 2 January, 1964, p.19.

⁹⁸ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.167, citing R.C.O Matthews et al, *British Economic Growth 1856-1973*, (London, 1982), pp.228-229, 236.

⁹⁹ David Parker, *The Official History of Privatisation, Vol. II: Popular Capitalism, 1987-97*, (London, 2012), pp.250-3.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1952-1971	New coal and oil-fired power stations (to supply upgraded National Grid)	Energy Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	Major	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deptford East (1957) - Battersea B-Station (John Mowlem & Co, 1951-3) - Bankside B-Station (George Wimpey & Co, 1952)¹⁰⁰ - Fawley (Mitchell Construction, 1965-71). 	Built mainly by British main contractors who employed substantial Irish migrant labour – for example, “Fawley was the fifth of thirteen huge power stations commissioned by the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) in the late 1960s. This vast expansion of generating power spread across semi-rural England demonstrating the pinnacle of nationalised industry in England.” ¹⁰¹
1954-1971	Atomic Power Station Programme	Energy Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	Nationwide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taylor Woodrow - Sir Robert McAlpine, - Balfour Beatty - Holland, Hannon & Cubitts - John Laing 	Atomic power to generate additional electricity for the new National Grid, which served all major cities including London, was also coming on-stream in the early 1950s, when Magnox reactors were developed to produce domestic electricity supply as well as serving the nascent British nuclear weapons programme. Obviously the construction of these technologically complex nuclear power stations first required established main contractors and specialist concrete and formwork subcontractors to execute the civil engineering and construction infrastructure. For example, in 1954, Taylor Woodrow were awarded the contract to construct Calder Hall (later, Sellafield) the first nuclear power station in the world to produce electricity for domestic use. This was typical of the kind of project that Irish migrant labour was utilised for – heavy civil engineering and mass reinforced

¹⁰⁰ *The Engineer*, (London, 1960), Vol. 209, p.101

¹⁰¹ Adam Smith, ‘Fawley Power Station’ at *Campaigning for Twentieth century architecture*, available at <https://c20society.org.uk/botm/fawley-power-station/> (accessed 10 September, 2018), and David Morrell, *Indictment: Power and Politics in the Construction Industry*, (London, 1987), pp.61-67.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					concrete construction - and Irish migrant labour who worked for the company was probably transferred north to work remotely on this project as a camp-based workforce. ¹⁰² Between 1956 and 1971 a further eleven Magnox nuclear power stations were constructed feeding electrical energy to the National Grid. These averaged costs-per-plant which exceeded conventional coal and oil power plants by some £360million – a colossal sum at this time. ¹⁰³ There were a number of corporate joint-venture consortia formed to build these stations which included well-established British major civil engineering contractors, again, most with Irish labour involved at construction level. ¹⁰⁴
1950-1970	Water engineering upgrade programme	Civil utilities Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	Regional	Various including: - J. Murphy & Sons (Green) - Murphy Cable Engineering (Grey) - McNicholas Construction - Lowery - RSK - MJ Clancy & Sons	Water engineering remained another major area of activity for Irish migrant builders. Since the Second World War, in line with the needs of London’s burgeoning population; 109,000 kilometres of sewer pipe, 1.2 million inspection chambers and 4,780 sewage pumping stations have been built in and around the Metropolitan London Area controlled by Thames Water. ¹⁰⁵ Usually at least 1.5m deep throughout, and often much deeper – too deep and confined for machine excavators - often the only means of connecting new properties into the existing waste water system was by manually excavating what are known as ‘headings’ – vertical shafts sunk to the required depth at intervals to enable horizontal underground tunnels to be constructed from the new or existing building periphery to the nearest mains sewer. ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *The Civil and Structural Engineer’s Review*, Vol.8, No 6, (June, 1954), p.227.

¹⁰³ Walter C Patterson, *Going Critical: An Unofficial History of British Nuclear Power*, (London, 1985), pp.10-11.

¹⁰⁴ Roger Williams, *The Nuclear Power Decisions: British Policies, 1953-78*, (London, 2019), Appendix 7 (unpaginated)

¹⁰⁵ Thames Water Website, Facts and Figures, available at <https://corporate.thameswater.co.uk/Media/Facts-and-figures> (accessed 15 June, 2018)

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed description of this type of work, see Interview with John H, (OI#17), County Wexford, (5 April. 2018), Appendix A, pp.394-6, pp.407-10.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1947-1960	Concrete reservoir and dam construction programme - Staines Reservoirs and Aqueduct (comp.1947) - William Girling reservoir (comp. 1951)	Civil utilities Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	Regional	- John Mowlem - John Mowlem	Concrete reservoir and dam construction was another major element of water-related civil engineering in which Irish labour had established a significant foothold in the interwar and post-war eras when the colossal Scottish hydro-electric plants were constructed. ¹⁰⁷ This reputation for water services engineering continued in the post-war period and followed the Irish to London. ¹⁰⁸ The Staines Reservoirs and Aqueduct in west London and the William Girling reservoir in the Lea Valley area of north suburban London (each with c.340 acres of excavation surface and supplying London with 3,500 million gallons of domestic water) were constructed by John Mowlem and completed in 1947 and 1951 respectively. ¹⁰⁹
1951-1960	Thames-Lea Valley Raw Water Tunnel	Civil utilities Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	Regional	- Kinnear, Moodie - Balfour Beatty	Both these reservoirs were then linked with technically-complex vertical pumping stations and nineteen miles of concrete-lined 2600mm diameter bored tunnel from Teddington in west London, across the northern arc of suburban London to Stoke Newington in the north-east, and then onto the Lea Valley reservoirs. This major tunnel project, known as the Thames-Lea Valley Raw Water Tunnel and costing £4.3million (1960s prices) ran from 1951-1960 and the primary tunnelling contractors were Kinnear, Moodie & Co and Balfour Beatty & Co. This alone indicates the high probability that a significant Irish labour force worked on the tunnel. ¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Scottish and Southern Energy plc, *Power from the Glens; Neart nan Gleann*, (Perth, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.169.

¹⁰⁹ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.70-1, 74.

¹¹⁰ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.72-73. See also *Contract Journal*, 2 January, 1958, p.38.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1962-1968	The Victoria Line	Civil transport Infrastructure/ Major Civil Engineering	Regional / Multiple Major	Various, including: - Edmund Nuttall Ltd - John Mowlem - Sir Robert McAlpine - Kinnear Moodie Ltd Cementation Ltd	<p>Railway tunnelling, particularly underground, was another area in which Irish civil engineering labour in London excelled. The Victoria Line was the first new deep-level tube railway to be constructed across London since before the First World War.¹¹¹ It was a mammoth feat of manual engineering, running from Victoria Station for ten and a half miles (16.9km) through London's West End to Walthamstow in the north-eastern suburbs. The average tunnel depth from ground surface to rail level is about 70 ft (21.3m). Again, sheer scale is the defining feature of such mega-projects. As Tupholme outlined:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Within three years from work starting on the first of the 21 shafts from which the running tunnels were driven, about 500,000 yd³ (382,280 m³) of earth was excavated from the 21 miles (33.8km) of 12 ft (3.66 m) diameter running tunnels alone. In addition, some 300,000 yd³ (229,360 m³) of earth has been removed during building of the 12 stations for the new line.¹¹²</p> <p>Most of the main tunnels were excavated with tunnelling machines specifically designed for the project, and indeed one of the main contractors, Edmund Nuttall Ltd, set a new world record for tunnelling progress.¹¹³ However, ancillary and secondary tunnels were largely excavated by hand, generally by Irish migrant builders from Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Leitrim and many other counties.</p>

¹¹¹ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, p.183; C.H.S Tupholme, 'Excavating for London's New Victoria Line' in *Ground Engineering*, (March, 1969), pp.24-33, at p.24.

¹¹² Tupholme, 'Excavating for London's New Victoria Line', p.24.

¹¹³ See also Tupholme, 'Excavating for London's New Victoria Line', p.24.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1950s	Defence and military infrastructure	Major Defence Civil Engineering	Multiple Major	Various including: - Fitzpatrick & Sons	Defence and military infrastructure was another area of construction in which the Irish thrived during the Cold War era. USAAF bases were upgraded and new bases built, funded by the US Government, with £11 million worth of contracts let to British contractors in 1954 alone. ¹¹⁴ Fitzpatrick & Sons became involved in paving works for these projects around this time. ¹¹⁵
1954-1956	Aviation infrastructure	Major Civil Engineering	Multiple Major	- George Wimpey - Taylor Woodrow - W.C French	Aviation was the emerging transportation revolution and in the first twelve-year phase of development at the ‘new’ London Airport (Heathrow), a series of well-established employers of Irish migrant labour carried out significant contracts including terminal facilities, outbuildings, runway extensions, tunnels and hangars and maintenance facilities. ¹¹⁶
1950s	Motorway, regional road and rail infrastructure	Civil transport Infrastructure/ Major Civil Engineering	Multiple Major	Various including: - Fitzpatrick & Sons - M.J. Gleeson	Major road and rail projects were also part of the staple diet of Irish construction workers - mainly because, as Smith observed ‘in the 1960s motorway building programme, reinforced concrete became a popular material’. ¹¹⁷ Irish migrants were, in substantial numbers, employees of major British contractors but also the well-established Irish contractors. In 1954-55 over £68million was earmarked by the UK treasury for critical road infrastructure, although parliamentary debates at the time highlighted that labour shortages remained an issue after the war – the available labour force for road construction was quoted as 81’000 versus a pre-war force of 126,000. ¹¹⁸ Undoubtedly the motorway network construction programme embarked upon in the late 1950s was key to London’s expansion as it provided commuter routes in and between the metropole and the satellites

¹¹⁴ *The Civil and Structural Engineer’s Review*, Vol.8, No 2, (February, 1954), p.93.

¹¹⁵ ‘Fitzpatrick narrows the generation gap’ in *Construction News* (online), (17 May, 2001), unpaginated, available at <https://www.constructionnews.co.uk/home/fitzpatrick-narrows-the-generation-gap/884062.article> (accessed 3 July, 2018).

¹¹⁶ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.239-40; *The Civil and Structural Engineer’s Review*, Vol.8, No 2, (February, 1954), pp.98-9.

¹¹⁷ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, p.133.

¹¹⁸ *The Civil and Structural Engineer’s Review*, Vol.8, No 2, (February, 1954), p.93.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					for the rapidly increasing car-owning population. By 1955 the government had announced a nationwide road-building programme of £147million – a significant investment at the time. ¹¹⁹
1958-1959	M1 Motorway (phase 1)	Civil transport Infrastructure/ Major Civil Engineering	National/ Regional infrastructure	- John Laing and Sons	The ‘flagship’ development in terms of the employment of Irish migrant labour at this time (see Figure 3). The first phase of the motorway was a 73 mile stretch from St Albans in Hertfordshire to Crick in Northamptonshire. ¹²⁰ As many as 19,000 operatives were employed on this phase, though never more than 4,200 at any one point. Many lived in temporary accommodation and camps dotted along the route. The speed of construction was remarkable, the project being completed in just 19 months, from March 1958 to October 1959; one mile every eight days. ¹²¹



Spreading the concrete at river Ouse viaduct. Source: John Laing archive

Figure 3 - Hand placement of concrete on bridge deck - M1 Motorway, (the men seen shovelling concrete here are almost certainly migrant Irish builders). (Source: John Laing Archive, cited in Linda Gray et al, ‘Building The M1 Motorway’, p.21)

¹¹⁹ *The Civil and Structural Engineer's Review*, Vol.9, No 3, (March, 1955), p.107, 109-110.

¹²⁰ *Contract Journal*, 23 January, 1958, p.389.

¹²¹ Linda Gray et al, ‘Building The M1 Motorway’, p.4.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1963-1968	M1 Motorway (phase 2)	Civil transport Infrastructure/ Major Civil Engineering	National/ Regional infrastructure	Various including: - John Laing and Sons - Sir Robert McAlpine - Tarmac - Wimpey - Costain - Holland, Hannen and Cubitts - Cementation - RM Douglas	The second phase of the M1 motorway project, which included an 87 mile stretch between Crick and Doncaster and a 35 mile one from Aston to Leeds, was not dominated by any one contractor, rather the eighteen separate contracts were won in competitive tender by a multitude of major firms - most employed Irish labour. ¹²²
1959-1973	North Sea Gas Distribution Networks	Energy Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	National/ Regional infrastructure	Various including: - J. Murphy & Sons (Green) - Murphy Cable Engineering (Grey) - McNicholas Construction - Lowery - RSK - Clancy Docwra - Avon, Lippiat & Hobbs	The advent of North Sea gas ¹²³ and later discovery of extensive oil fields from 1965 onwards created yet another colossal, long-term layer of sub-surface infrastructure installation and maintenance work in the form of a nationwide high-pressure mains distribution network across Britain, which largely consisted of deep-buried welded carbon-steel and concrete mains pipes – usually of at least 600mm diameter, which required highly specialised joint welding and high-tech weld x-ray testing on every buried section. Once again the huge expansion of London to the suburbs and beyond created a vast network of additional gas mains and sub-mains, all of which required cut-and-cover excavation, shuttering, concreting, backfilling and reinstatement works along major road, rail or land routes.

¹²² Linda Gray et al, 'Building The M1 Motorway', p.4.

¹²³ Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry*, pp.ix-xi

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					By 1965 the British nationwide gas main network had risen from 90,000 to 105,600 miles and by 1973 again to 127,000 miles. ¹²⁴ This gives some concept of the sheer enormity of this volume of work. Every mile of this mains installation was either cut and cover or open-cut trench excavation, and reinstatement work or tunnel construction, all of which were Irish civil engineering labour specialisms.
1962-1979	LNG Gas Distribution Networks	Energy Infrastructure/ Civil Engineering	National/ Regional infrastructure	Various including: - J. Murphy & Sons (Green) - Murphy Cable Engineering (Grey) - McNicholas Construction - Lowery - RSK - Clancy Docwra Avon, Lippiat & Hobbs	The expansion of a huge LNG refinery on Canvey Island in Kent in 1966 facilitated storage of up to 700,000 tons of gas annually, and this required a significant expansion of the gas main network. ¹²⁵ The national gas grid in the UK comprises three elements: the main ‘spine’ or ‘trunk’ network which carries high-pressure gas from the landing point onshore or refinery to the main cities – particularly London - at 1000psi; ¹²⁶ sub-mains are then teed off the main spine carrying gas to local areas at 350-450psi; domestic distribution into individual dwellings or commercial properties is then via low-pressure traditional steel or copper pipework dependant on energy requirements. ¹²⁷ Between 1962 and 1979 an entirely new trunk grid of high-pressure mains starting from Canvey Island and serving all the major cities of the UK was constructed (see Figure 4). It ran for over 3,000 miles and cost in the order of £270million. In Greater London a ring main was constructed which ran from Whitwell, through Slough and connecting to the main trunk at Horndon. ¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.225.

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp.143-6.

¹²⁶ ‘pounds per square inch’ – psi, was the imperial measurement of internal pipe pressure

¹²⁷ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, p.206.

¹²⁸ Williams, *A History of the British Gas Industry*, p.177.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
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Figure 4 - High-pressure gas mains installation being undertaken by J Murphy & Sons Ltd in 1960s.
 (Source: *60 Years of Defining Moments: A History of Murphy*, (London, 2011), p.16)

Post-war Irish builders also became involved in virtually all aspects of the reconstruction of London’s building stock, especially because of the ubiquitous use of reinforced concrete and the avant-garde fashion for high-rise building.¹²⁹ London’s 250-year-old skyline was about to change forever when, in November 1954, the government revoked the wartime system of building licensing, sparking a central London land rush that saw a commercial office boom lasting a decade.¹³⁰ The old trade markets of the City of London were swept away in a wave of modernist commercial high-rise development which, by as early as 1962, saw office floorspace increase by 15% compared to pre-war levels.¹³¹ High-rise building was, from the perspective of those who exercised the means of production, planners, developers and architects, a perfect solution. In the post-war zeitgeist for modernist architecture size and proportion was everything. LCC architects exhibited daring innovation by reaching for the skies, which suited the planners and developers in equal measure; the former negotiating new road layouts in London in

¹²⁹ See p.16 above
¹³⁰ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.48-53.
¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.48.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>return for permissions to build higher; the latter maximising rental yield on land per acreage.¹³² The migrant Irish builders – well down the ‘food-chain’ in this developmental hierarchy – nevertheless benefitted in terms of continued flows of manual work on these concrete-framed skyscrapers. To give some sense of the sheer scale of construction work that went on during the commercial office boom, between 1945 and 1966 the lettable areas of office space in central London increased by 100 million square feet, and by 1969 there were over 100 office blocks in excess of 100 feet high, and sixteen over 300 feet high.¹³³</p>					
1953-8	Bucklersbury House	Private Commercial Construction	Major	Humphreys Ltd	Bucklersbury House was the first commercial office block to exceed 30m high, but it opened the floodgates for the skyscraper era in London.
1953-8	Trades Union Congress headquarters	Private Commercial Construction	Major	- Sir Robert McAlpine	One of the first of the new wave of modernist Brutalist post-war monuments to reinforced concrete and structural glass (although in this case not high-rise) was the new Trades Union Congress headquarters in Great Russell Street, Fitzrovia, near the British Museum. Completed in March, 1958, it is somewhat ironic to consider that the bastion of British industrial trades unionism and collectivised labour-relations – which was at its zenith at the time - was built by the omnipresent Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons, probably using a significant quota of non-unionised Irish migrant labour. ¹³⁴
1957-62	Shell Centre	Private Commercial Construction	Major	- Sir Robert McAlpine	Located on the south bank of River Thames, McAlpine had Brian Behan jailed for militant union activities on this infamous project. The Times hailed it as a ‘colossus on the London skyline’; by then the largest office development in the UK with 186,000m ² of floor space in two complexes divided by the Hungerford railway bridge but linked by a series of passenger and service subways. Half the volume of the building was below ground, while the main 27-storey tower dwarfed previous towers in central London, rising more than 100m above pavement level.

¹³² Ibid., p.49.

¹³³ Ibid., pp.52-53.

¹³⁴ *Contract Journal*, 23 January, 1958, p.358.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1960-2	Stag Development	Private Mixed-use Commercial/Retail Construction	Major	- Sir Robert McAlpine	McAlpine also built the huge Stag Development featuring one of the first skyscrapers to ‘grace’ the London skyline, constructed on a five-acre site close to Victoria station. ¹³⁵
1967-70	Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks	Ministry of Defence high-rise construction	Major	- Sir Robert McAlpine	Comprised eight separate buildings including a 31-storey tower block. ¹³⁶
1958-76	London Wall	Public/Private Mixed-use Commercial/Retail/ Residential Construction	Civic infrastructure	- Sir Robert McAlpine	The colossal redevelopments of London Wall (1958-76) and The Barbican (1962-82) in the City, and the Elephant & Castle (1959-1965) in south London all, too, had significant representation of Irish migrant labour working for Sir Robert McAlpine, John Laing, Myton (a subsidiary of Taylor Woodrow) and Turriff Construction. ¹³⁷ Whether it is merely incidental to the presence of large Irish labour-forces, it is nonetheless a fact that all three of these vast redevelopment projects ran into planning problems, construction delays and industrial unrest.
1962-82	The Barbican (1962-82)			Various inc: - John Laing - Myton - Turriff Construction	
1959-65	Elephant & Castle				
1964-70	Euston Centre development	Public/Private Mixed-use Commercial/Retail/ Residential Construction	Civic infrastructure	Wimpey	Wimpey partnered with Levy’s Stock Conversion Co. to build one of the biggest – and most controversial ¹³⁸ - developments of twentieth-century London comprising offices, shops and luxury flats with twin towers of seventeen and thirty-four storeys respectively. ¹³⁹
1956-8	Notting Hill Bowater House	Public/Private Mixed-use Commercial/Retail/ Residential Construction		Taylor Woodrow	Similar enormous mixed-use developments combining public-sector road alterations with spectacular office space was also seen in Notting Hill and at Bowater House, Knightsbridge. ¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ *A Portrait of Achievement: Sir Robert McAlpine*, Corporate Brochure, (Hemel Hempstead, 2010), available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20160508151434/http://www.sir-robert-mcalpine.com/files/page/200/SRMBrochure2010_web1.pdf (Accessed 22 May, 2019), p.22.

¹³⁶ *A Portrait of Achievement: Sir Robert McAlpine*, p.24.

¹³⁷ Wall et al, *Building the Barbican 1962 – 1982*, pp.8-15 ; Peter Scott, *The Property Masters: A History of the British Commercial Property Sector*, (London, 1996), p.178.

¹³⁸ Esher, *A Broken Wave*, pp.139.

¹³⁹ Nick Wates, *The Battle for Tolmers Square*, (Abingdon, 2013),pp.33-40; White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.50-51.

¹⁴⁰ Bowater House consisted of three towers (one 17-storey) constructed by Taylor Woodrow, using a steel frame and concrete cast in situ, clad with polished granite, brick and glass, creating approximately 25,000 square metres (270,000 sq ft) of floor space – see: John Greenacombe ed., ‘Bowater House and Edinburgh Gate’ at *Survey of London: Volume 45, Knightsbridge*, (London, 2000), British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol45> [accessed 24 June 2019].

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>Although not the visual spectacle that commercial office property was, nonetheless the trend for high-rise and mammoth developments extended to social housing as well. The chronic shortage of social housing caused by the decayed slums which pre-dated the war, and, more acutely, those caused by war damage itself, combined with the acceleration in migrant inflows as the economy of London recovered left the LCC with a formidable reconstruction task after 1945. By the end of 1957, the LCC had demolished 8,966 slum houses and completed the reconstruction of 102,061 new properties since the end of the war.¹⁴¹ Approximately 201,000 new council homes were built in central London by the LCC and its successor the GLC between 1945 and 1970 together with a further 247,000 in outer London.¹⁴² The overwhelming majority of these comprised low-level ‘Le Corbusier’ style ‘slabs’ and high-level ‘towers’ built of prefabricated system-built or insitu reinforced concrete. During the 1960s, over a ten-year period, 384 residential tower blocks were built by British contractors - primarily Wates, Bernard Sunley & Co., Terson, Taylor Woodrow, Wimpey and John Laing - or were built by Local Authority Direct Labour Organisations (DLO), which were essentially publicly-funded council building departments.¹⁴³ All these organisations had Irish migrant labour employed either directly or via the subcontract system. In all, 68,500 flats were built in blocks of over ten storeys high across London before the trend began to fade with the tragic collapse at Ronan Point.¹⁴⁴</p>					
1955-9	Bentham Estate, Hackney	Public social housing	Major	Higgs and Hill	Constructed entirely of reinforced concrete.
1951-63	Alton Estate, Roehampton	Public social housing	Major	Wates Construction	Enormous ‘Le Corbusier’ style ‘slab’ building which housed 13,000 social-housed residents. ¹⁴⁵
1961-9	Warwick Estate	Public social housing	Major	Wates Construction	The worst of the pre-war Paddington slums, between the railway and the canal from Warwick Crescent to Clarendon Crescent, were transformed by the L.C.C. In 1957 it had bought 206 properties from the borough council and 266 from the Church Commissioners, and hoped to acquire 400 more. ¹⁴⁶ Under a scheme of 1958, for 44 a. and affecting 6,700 residents, half of the land was to be used for 1,127 dwellings, of which 946 were to be in new blocks and the others in renovated houses; the rest was to be used

¹⁴¹ *Contract Journal*, 13 March, 1958, p.1288.

¹⁴² White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.56.

¹⁴³ *Contract Journal*, March 11, 1965, p.182.

¹⁴⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.55-6 ; Phil Wearne, *Collapse: Why Buildings Fall Down*, (London, 2000), pp.142-8.

¹⁴⁵ Esher, *A Broken Wave*, pp.128,; ‘Bentham Road’ https://ukhousing.fandom.com/wiki/Bentham_Road (accessed 24 May, 2019) ; Alton, Putney Vale And Lennox Community Capacity Report (Wandsworth Council, 2018) available at <https://www.datawand.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Roehampton-Community-Capacity-Report-2018.pdf> (accessed 24 May, 2019), p.6 ; Alan Baxter Associates (Architects), *Allbrook House and Roehampton Library Assessment of Listability*, Report commissioned for Wandsworth Council, (August, 2015), p.13.

¹⁴⁶ British History Online, Victoria County History, A History of the County of Middlesex: Volume 9, Hampstead, Paddington: Westbourne Green (available at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol9/pp198-204>), (accessed 30 Dec, 2019), citing Marylebone library, p.138, cuttings.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					for shops, garages, schools and other institutions, and a canalside walk and 8 a. of badly needed open space. ¹⁴⁷ The Warwick estate, as it came to be called, was opened in 1962.
1962-4	Canada Estate,	Public social housing	Major	Terson	Southwark, south central London. ¹⁴⁸
1964-9	Pepys Estate,	Public social housing	Major	Terson	Lewisham (south London).
1966-7	St John's Road Estate	Public social housing	Major	Wimpey	Finsbury, (north central London).
1968-70	Devons Estate,	Public social housing	Major	Bernard Sunley	Bow, east central London.
1967-73	Thamesmead	Public social housing	New Town Status	Holland, Hannon & Cubitts.	The gargantuan 13,000 acre site at Thamesmead in south-east London, comprising 1,636 flats in 35 tower block of varying heights. ¹⁴⁹
1966-8	Ronan Point	Public social housing	Major	Taylor Woodrow	Canning Town, east London. Collapsed after a gas cooker explosion in one of upper-floor flats exposed the defective design/workmanship typical of the tower-block era of social housing.

Later Twentieth-century, c.1970-95

The sustained and deepening cyclical crises caused by the twentieth-century globalisation of capitalism perpetuated the now familiar cycle of boom-bust activity in UK construction. The initial slump in the immediate aftermath of the war had given way in the mid-1950s to a period of sustained growth in demand and full employment. In the early 1970s construction orders were beginning to fall away, particularly in housing, which in January 1970 reported a five-year low.¹⁵⁰ The collapse of the Bretton-Woods system in 1971 and the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 precipitated a global financial crisis which severely dented confidence in the construction industry, deterring promoters and developers in both public and private spheres.¹⁵¹ Rampant inflation peaking at 28% , political uncertainty and rising unemployment followed. The January edition of *Building* in 1975 ran the headline, 'Out of the Frying Pan... into 1975', a somewhat rueful summary of the perilous

¹⁴⁷ Paddington: Westbourne Green (available at <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol9/pp198-204>), citing G.L.C. *Home Sweet Home*, (1976), p.12, 62.

¹⁴⁸ 'Canada Estate' in *Southwark, Housing estates in London*, available at https://ukhousing.fandom.com/wiki/Canada_Estate (Accessed 25 June, 2019).

¹⁴⁹ Esher, *A Broken Wave*, pp.128-130; White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, pp.55-8; *Tower Block UK Archive*, University of Edinburgh, searchable at: <http://www.towerblock.eca.ed.ac.uk/development/warwick-crescent-site-blocks-2-3> (Accessed 25 June, 2019).

¹⁵⁰ *Contract Journal*, 20 January, 1970, p.424.

¹⁵¹ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, p.192.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>state of the industry, going on to confirm that construction output for the third quarter of 1974 had fallen 9.2% against the same quarter for 1973;¹⁵² a year that had seen a peak of construction activity since the 1950s with construction accounting for 7.6% of GDP. Construction activity then fell substantially throughout the 1970s and 1980s before recovering to a new peak in 1990. This was precipitated mainly as a result of renewed economic confidence in the Thatcher administration which assumed power in 1979 and peremptorily rejected the post-war consensus of Keynesian economic policy in favour of neo-liberal orthodoxy. Massive privatisation and denationalisation marked a total reversal of the preceding four decades of public spending on construction activity.¹⁵³ From 1990 until the end of this period of analysis in 1995, the construction industry in London again struggled with difficult trading conditions.</p> <p>The LCC/GLC's early post-war public housing policy of urban renewal and the creation of concrete mega-estates continued until the close of the 1970s despite most of the 'irredeemable' pre-war slums having been demolished before the end of the 1950s. Regeneration had become ideological and political; 70,000 more houses were demolished between 1967 and 1976, some by Labour councils deliberately to thwart the rise of middle-class owner-occupation.¹⁵⁴ Inner London reduced in population by 27% from 1961 to 1981 and those left were generally the poorest council tenants clustered in decaying concrete estates of the 1960s.¹⁵⁵ By 1977 <i>Building</i>, the lead journal for the construction industry was running condemnatory features about the 'Tower Block' era with headlines reading 'From Slabs to Slums', 'The Harder they Fall' and 'The End is Nigh'.¹⁵⁶ The period from 1951 to 1981 –the apotheosis of Irish migrant building activity which underpinned the formation of the ethnic enclave and the growth of the Irish contracting and subcontracting market – witnessed the start and finish of the post-war local authority new-build programme in London.¹⁵⁷</p>					
1974-84	Thames Flood Barrier	Marine/ Civil Engineering	Civic infrastructure	Costain and Tarmac in joint-venture with the Dutch contractor HBM. ¹⁵⁸	At the outset of this period, the Thames Flood Barrier, began construction in. The world's second-largest moveable flood barrier and one of the most significant civil-engineering infrastructure projects ever undertaken in London, it was built by the GLC, at a total cost of £537million (1984 prices). Costain's head of industrial relations for the project, Dudley Barratt, confirmed that at peak the labour-force was around 80% Irish, both

¹⁵² *Building*, 3 January, 1975, p.27.

¹⁵³ Powell, *The British Building Industry Since 1800*, pp.192-193.

¹⁵⁴ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.56

¹⁵⁵ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.73.

¹⁵⁶ *Building*, 11 March, 1977, pp.48-9; *Building*, 25 March, 1977, pp.52-3.

¹⁵⁷ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.73.

¹⁵⁸ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.12-14; OECD, Shardul Agrawala, Samuel Fankhauser (Eds.), *Economic Aspects of Adaptation to Climate Change Costs, Benefits and Policy*, (Paris, 2008), p.121.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					<p>first and second-generation, although few were thought to have been new arrivals. Rather, they were very experienced Irish migrant builders, some poached from rival companies such as Tarmac and Balfour Beatty.¹⁵⁹ Amongst other things the 520-metre dam across the River Thames at Woolwich involved erecting 31,000 tons of structural steel and placing some 214,000 cubic metres of concrete in the construction of the coffer-dams which make up the foundations; again most of this reinforced concrete work was carried out by Irish migrant builders.¹⁶⁰ The concrete pours on the Thames Barrier project were among the largest ever seen globally, with one continuous coffer-dam pour of 6,600 cubic metres lasting 3 days in total.</p>
1975-88	London Orbital Motorway (M25).	Civil transport Infrastructure/ Major Civil Engineering	National/ Regional infrastructure	Various (see Figure 7 below) including: - John Laing - Balfour Beatty - Costain - MJ Gleeson - Fairclough - Birse - Bovis	<p>By far the largest of the motorway schemes to impact upon the post-war conurbation of London. Until 1975 the M16 outer orbital in the north and the M25 in Kent and Surrey in the south were not joined. In November 1975 the then Minister of Transport, John Gilbert, announced that these would be subsumed into a single ring - the London Orbital Motorway (M25).¹⁶¹ At 192 kilometres long, and costing over £600million to construct, the M25 is the fifth longest motorway in Britain, and the only orbital one. It also includes the tunnel crossings of the Thames at Dartford, both highly complex and enormous engineering projects in their own right. It was constructed in thirty-seven separate phases with over 50% of it built by three major British contractors, employing large migrant Irish numbers either directly or through subcontractors.¹⁶² A crude but probative example of levels of Irish input to labour levels in London construction is shown in Figure 5 below. The analysis over its 13-year total duration implies that the</p>

¹⁵⁹ Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain*, pp.174-5, 211.

¹⁶⁰ 'Our history', Costain PLC, available at: <https://www.costain.com/about-us/our-history/> (accessed 16 May, 2017)

¹⁶¹ 'Origins of the M25' at The Motorway Archive, available online at <http://www.ukmotorwayarchive.org.uk/en/motorways/motorway-listing/m1> (accessed 6 June, 2019)

¹⁶² M25 Statistics/Dates available at <http://www.ukmotorwayarchive.org.uk/en/motorways/motorway-listing/m25-london-orbital-motorway/dates.cfm> (accessed 6 June, 2019), See also Fig. 5 overleaf.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
					average level of ethnically-Irish labour employed either directly by main contractors or as subcontractors may have averaged over 2,200 working days per month, which based on a 28-day working months equates to 70 men for the entire 13-year duration of the project.
1988-91	Queen Elizabeth II Bridge crossing	Bridge/Motorway interface and infrastructure	Regional infrastructure	Cementation Ltd	The Queen Elizabeth II Bridge crossing was a later, and enormously complex, addition to the M25, costing some £184million and again employing migrant Irish labour in the substructure concrete works executed by Cementation Ltd. ¹⁶³ Sean G (OI#14), recalls being recruited by an agent for Cementation in 1989 as a site engineer for this project along with other Irish graduates at the time. ¹⁶⁴ This reinforces the point that Irish migrant labour were not simply manual labourers or tradesmen within the post-war London construction market but also fulfilled managerial and supervisory roles.
<p>Tunnel work also remained one of the primary features of Irish migrant labour activities because the dominant UK tunnel contractors in the last decades of the century were all well-known for employing Irish migrant labour since the Second World War: ‘During the 1960’s & 1970’s five contractors dominated soft ground tunnelling in UK for about 20 years. These were Balfour Beatty, Brands (now Kiers) [who had developed from W.C French], Kinnear Moodie (absorbed in Tarmac), Nuttall and Mowlem.’¹⁶⁵ This meant that in addition to the developing sector of Irish-owned civil engineering contractors capable of undertaking tunnel works either as main contractors or as tier 2 subcontractors (M. J. Gleeson, J. Murphy & Sons, McNicholas Engineering, M. J. Clancy and later Joseph Gallagher), Irish migrant labour continued to be employed - via an increasing number of tier 3 or 4 subcontractors - by these large British contractors.</p>					
1972-80	Dartford Tunnel – 2 nd (southern) crossing under River Thames	Tunnel/Motorway interface and infrastructure	Regional infrastructure	Balfour Beatty	The project ran into financial difficulties in the mid-1970s which probably explains how the Thames Barrier project attracted Irish migrant labour away from Balfour Beatty, ¹⁶⁶ these men were notoriously fickle – their main priority was to remain working productively to keep earnings maximised. ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Charles T. Walker, Adrian J. Smith (eds.), *Privatized Infrastructure: The Build Operate Transfer Approach*, (London, 1999), pp.228-9.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Sean G, (OI#14), County Leitrim, (13 Dec. 2017), Appendix A, p.288.

¹⁶⁵ John King, ‘A century of tunnelling and where we go now’, *The 2000 Harding Lecture*, The British Tunnelling Society, (London, 2000), p.24.

¹⁶⁶ See p.D/25

¹⁶⁷ Cole, Whitelaw, ‘Balfour Beatty 1909 – 2009 in *New Civil Engineer*, p.8.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
<p>No account of the legacy of Irish migrants in reconstructing late twentieth-century London would be complete without reference to the enormous commercial redevelopments undertaken in the old City of London, and more importantly the regeneration of the old London Docklands in the 1980s-1990s after the demise of London's nineteenth-century dock industries. Technological advancement, in particular containerisation, signalled the end of the Port of London from 1967 onwards as shipping business moved downriver to Tilbury. It also marked the more general de-industrialisation of London as a metropolis, with the traditional manufacturing base of the East End also in terminal decline.¹⁶⁸ It would take a decade or more – and a radical change in political leadership in the form of Thatcherism - before the redevelopment of the old London Docklands began to take shape. The 1980s saw yet another decade of post-modern regeneration in London triggered to a large extent by the creation, in 1981, of the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) and its subsequent designation, a year later, of the Isle of Dogs – in the heart of London's old commercial port – as an Enterprise Zone. The unfettered tax and financial incentives offered by the LDDC – with Tory government sanction – induced investment capital to flow into Docklands from all corners of the world and, by the 1990s, the result was ‘a whirlwind of development producing a physical transformation that has been rapid and spectacular’¹⁶⁹</p>					
1969-73	St. Katherine's Dock	Public/Private Mixed-use Commercial/Retail/ Residential Construction	Civic infrastructure	Taylor Woodrow	Major redevelopment project which drew migrant building labour from the nearby clusters of Irish in Poplar, Bow, Whitechapel and Bethnal Green, as well as subcontractors from the Irish ethnic enclave embedded in various clusters around London. ¹⁷⁰
1985-91	Canary Wharf complex	Public/Private Mixed-use Commercial/Retail/ Residential Construction	Civic infrastructure	Olympia & York employed main contractors including: - Bovis - Sir Robert McAlpine - Balfour Beatty - John Laing	A key turning-point for post-war London was the crucial decision by a consortium of major North American developers, in 1985, to build the enormous £3 billion Canary Wharf complex comprising 8 million square feet of new commercial office space in over 30 new tower blocks of various design and layouts. ¹⁷¹ Once again, many of the iconic British employers of Irish labour –amongst them – had significant roles in constructing Canary Wharf over the late 1980s and into the twenty-first century, and such developments continued to be a source of virtually constant employment for migrant Irish builders.

¹⁶⁸ White, *London in the Twentieth Century*, p.75.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.78.

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1984-99	Docklands Light Railway, ('DLR')	Overhead Railway interface and infrastructure	Civic infrastructure	G.E.C./Mowlem	<p>Infrastructure for the regeneration of the London Docklands area was vital, and both road and rail projects undertaken as part of this vast enterprise featured Irish migrant labour in substantial numbers. In 1984 royal assent was given to the £77 million Docklands Light Railway Act, ("DLR") which authorised funding from the Departments of Transport and Environment for the construction of an overhead light railway system comprising 15 stations, with three termini connecting the financial district of the old City of London (via Tower Gateway) to, Stratford, Poplar and then onto the Isle of Dogs (Island Gardens).¹⁷² The design and build contract was awarded to a G.E.C./Mowlem consortium in 1984.¹⁷³ Mowlem - who, as has already been shown earlier, maintained a fairly constant post-war record of employing Irish labour both directly and via subcontractors – were entirely responsible for the civil engineering and construction aspects of the project. Tunnelling from Bank Underground station began in March 1988, and the extension from Tower Gateway to Bank was completed in 1991. The line was further extended to Beckton in 1994. The extension to Lewisham was first proposed in 1989 and completed in 1999. Each of the four 'legs' of the line pass through the Poplar junction, which has been extensively enlarged over the years. Again, it is highly likely that Irish migrant labour featured heavily in tunnelling and heavy engineering aspects of this project, drawn directly from clusters located nearby in east London and from subcontract labour resources utilising the ethnic enclave.</p>

¹⁷² Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.187-8.

¹⁷³ D Pilgrim, B P Pritchard, 'Docklands Light Railway And Subsequent Upgrading: Design And Construction Of Bridges And Viaducts' in *Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, Volume 88 Issue 4, (August 1990), pp. 619-638

Dates	Project	Type	Size	Specific Contractor / Developer	Notes
1993-99	Jubilee Line Extension ('JLE')	Underground Railway interface and infrastructure	Civic infrastructure	London Underground procured individual package contractors under an SPV management contracting form of contract. These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tarmac - Balfour Beatty - Taylor Woodrow - Amec - Costain - Wimpey - Sir Robert McAlpine - Mowlem - Laing - Trafalgar House 	Costing over £3.5 billion, the 'JLE' was one of the most expensive underground railway projects in the world, averaging out at over £4million per metre of its 16km length, of which over one-third, £1.4 billion comprised the tunnelling, earthworks, station structures and associated civil engineering and concrete works ¹⁷⁴ – most of which heavily involved Irish migrant labour, both first and second-generation. It ran from Green Park in central west London to Westminster, Waterloo and on eastwards through south central London to a new terminus at Stratford, crossing the Thames four times on its journey. ¹⁷⁵ The transport nodes on the line included eleven stations, nine of which were interchanges with other rail lines, either underground or national/DLR and six were brand new stations. This was a colossal engineering feat which overran the periodisation of this research by several years, however the bulk of the heavy engineering and structural works, which involved Irish migrant labour in various forms, was completed before 1995. The peak labour force was around 5,000 people and as with most of UK construction - even at this late stage of the twentieth-century - the vast majority of this labour force was male. ¹⁷⁶ There is significant anecdotal evidence of Irish migrant labour working on the front-end tunnelling and structural activities. ¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ 'Jubilee Line Extension (JLE), Project Profile', Report by the OMEGA Centre of Excellence work on Mega Urban Transport Projects, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, (Undated), available at: <http://www.omegacentre.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/publications/omega-case-studies/> (accessed 12 July 2017), p.9, pp.78-80.

¹⁷⁵ Smith (Ed.), *Civil Engineering Heritage: London and the Thames Valley*, pp.189-91.

¹⁷⁶ 'Jubilee Line Extension (JLE), Project Profile', p.25 ; Menaha Shanmugam *et al*, 'The Role of Women in Construction Industry Development: The UK Perspective' in *CIB World Building Congress*, Cape Town, South Africa, pp. 3233-3246. P.3236.

¹⁷⁷ 'Jubilee Line Extension (JLE), Project Profile', p.21.

SUMMARY OF TOTAL PRODUCTION ON M25 MOTORWAY, 1973-96

Contractor	km completed	% of total km
Laing	47	24.45%
Laing/Birse	3	1.30%
Edmund Nuttall	7	3.43%
Balfour Beatty	33	16.96%
Costain	23	11.86%
* Tarmac (now Carrilion Construction)	9	4.53%
Sir A McAlpine	9	4.42%
Sir A McAlpine/ Fairclough(AMEC) Cons'n	6	3.02%
* Bovis	12	6.19%
* Bovis/Fairclough(AMEC)	6	2.86%
Cementation	5	2.50%
Gleeson	6	3.28%
French	7	3.75%
* Farr - Birse	7	3.75%
* Fairclough(AMEC), Balfour Beatty & Monk	0	0.00%
Wimpey	7	3.54%
* <i>Not known to employ significant Irish labour force</i>		
Unallocated	8	4.16%
	192	100%

% of work completed by Contractors of Irish origin or employers of substantial Irish labour = 78.51%

(Nominal level of Irish labour employed by these companies (Approximation) = **60%**)

Labour element as proportion of total cost = £631,900,000 x 47.5% = £300,152,500
Based upon published Construction Industry New Earnings Survey for 1980 (see circled data below)

Main construction period (May 1973-Oct 1986 - *see attached table of dates*) 149 months

Therefore → Average total monthly labour expenditure = £2,014,446 million

Notional average monthly labour expenditure on Irish labour = (£2,014,446 x 60% x 78.51%) £948,948.85

Average mid-point (1980) monthly wage level = £107.00 p.w. x 4 = £428.00 p.c.m.

Based upon published Construction output price indices for 1980 (see circled % below)

Therefore → Average level of Irish labour per month (operative days) 2,217

Figure 5- M25 Orbital Motorway - Irish Labour Contribution (for sources see next page)

Construction output price indices (OPIs) QMI,
 (file:///C:/Users/Michael/Downloads/Construction%20output%20pr
 ice%20indices%20(OPIs)%20QMI.pdf)

Index	%		
	Labour	Materials	Plant
Housing	44.3	50.2	5.5
Infrastructure	47.5	40.4	12.1
Other Work	54.5	39.9	5.7
Housing R&M	60.6	35.8	3.6
Non Housing R&M	24.8	69	6.2

Source: Office for National Statistics

STREAMLINED ANALYSES

A24

NEW EARNINGS SURVEY 1980

Table 10 Age-groups

FULL-TIME MALES, whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence

APRIL 1980

Age-group	Average gross weekly earnings				Distribution of weekly earnings					Average hourly earnings excl. effect of over-time	Average weekly hours		Increase in average weekly earnings April 1979 to April 1980 including overtime pay	
	Total	of which			Percentage who earned under			10 per cent earned			Total incl. over-time	Over-time	Based on complete 1979 samples and 1980 (see note)	Based on matched 1979/80 samples (see note)
		Over-time pay	PBR etc pay	Shift etc premium pay	£60	£100	£140	less than amount below	more than amount below					
	£	£	£	£	per cent	per cent	per cent	£	£	pence	hours	hours	per cent	per cent
Full-time manual males	48.6	2.8	2.4	0.2	82.6	98.3	99.7	31.6	60.0	115.3	41.6	1.8	18.6	56.1
Under 18	78.6	7.2	6.0	1.3	24.8	81.6	96.7	49.8	114.1	179.7	42.9	3.2	20.1	34.6
18 to 20														
21 to 24	99.8	12.5	8.5	2.6	5.6	57.7	89.8	65.6	140.7	219.2	44.4	4.6	19.2	22.1
25 to 29	111.3	15.1	10.3	3.6	2.8	44.4	84.0	72.1	154.0	242.2	45.2	5.3	20.2	21.1
30 to 39	118.1	18.0	11.3	4.1	1.9	35.2	77.9	76.1	165.8	250.2	46.3	6.4	19.3	20.7
40 to 49	116.8	17.9	10.4	4.1	1.9	37.0	78.6	75.8	164.5	247.8	46.2	6.4	19.6	20.0
50 to 59	108.8	14.5	8.9	3.7	2.4	45.7	85.0	71.5	151.6	236.8	44.9	6.2	18.7	20.1
60 to 64	(102.4)	11.9	7.0	2.8	4.9	57.4	90.1	66.6	139.8	227.9	44.2	4.5	24.2	18.9
18 and over	109.3	15.2	9.5	3.5	4.5	46.1	83.7	68.4	154.6	236.0	45.2	5.5	20.0	21.1
21 and over	111.5	15.8	9.8	3.7	2.9	43.3	82.6	71.8	156.7	240.5	45.4	5.7	20.0	20.5
All ages	107.1	14.7	9.2	3.4	7.3	48.0	84.2	64.8	153.7	231.6	45.1	5.4	19.9	21.6

Figure 7 (cont.) - M25 Orbital Motorway - Irish Labour Contribution (Sources)

**Appendix E: Original Contextual
Interview OI#22 - Dr Reg Hall.**

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Name: Dr. Reg Hall

Date of Birth: 1933

Place of Birth: Gravesend, England

Date of Emigration to UK: N/A

Date of Interview: June 3rd, 2016.

Location of Interview: Dr Hall's house, Croydon.

Interviewer's Notes:

1. Born in 1933, Dr. Reg Hall has been a quietly important stalwart and historian of traditional Irish music for well over fifty years. Best known as a dance musician, Reg has had a long, personal involvement with traditional music-making and has played Irish traditional music and English country music with most of the finest traditional musicians. For many years he accompanied Michael Gorman and later Jimmy Power in London Irish pub sessions. Whilst holding down a day job as a probation officer, Reg managed to both participate in the music performance of Irish traditional music amongst the migrant builders and to document it in extraordinary detail. Reg's enthusiastic contribution and his pioneering work documenting and encouraging traditional music has, in recent years, been widely acknowledged in academic and cultural circles. His association with Topic Records began in 1963 and two years later he collaborated with Bill Leader on the seminal *Paddy in the Smoke* recording and has compiled and annotated many more significant recordings, culminating in *The Voice of the People* series in 1999. He was awarded the Gold Badge of the English Folk Dance and Song Society in 1987, a doctorate in history from Sussex University in 1994 and the Gradam Cheoil musician's award from the Gaelic television company TG4 early in 2009.
2. The author has known Reg Hall personally since early adolescence through their mutual involvement in the migrant Irish traditional music scene in London from the late 1970s onwards. Reg has always acted as something of a mentor in terms of the author's historical and ethno-cultural interests and as a result, agreed to discuss his own personal recollections of the arrival of Irish migrant builders after World War Two.
3. This interview was carried out in a debate format, where Reg and I sat together talking for a couple of hours. It is therefore more of a question and answer format than normal and a continual exchange of experiences, ideas and views; this is reflected in the interview transcript.

Recording Reg Hall#2

Interviewer: So we're just about to talk about the construction industry and Irish traditional music and the post-war migrants and all that sort of thing. So, Reg, you know my interest lies in establishing how and why the Irish came to dominate the post-war construction industry, certainly in our part of the world, London, in the decades after the War, which I'm pretty sure they did.

Reg: I'd have thought to a 97% extent...[pause]...(slightly ironic)

Interviewer: Well, I guess that's an easy place to start, then isn't it. I mean, obviously your own interaction with the Irish community was - shall we say *significantly* - through music, through their (the Irish) associational culture, if you like, but...[pause]...for instance, were there many musicians you knew (amongst the post-war Irish) that *weren't* in the construction industry?

Reg: No. I'd have thought they all were to start with. I mean, just, let's run through some basics and then you can pick me up on anything afterwards. We (Britain) had a labour shortage during the war, all our men went into the services, and the women were doing the jobs. We then had to prepare for D-Day and these huge bombing operations, and we still had to have farming

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

done, and we had to repair the Blitz. So there was a huge need for labour. There was a pattern of Irish immigrants coming over seasonally for farming, and there was also a steady flow of immigrants coming into Britain from the eighteenth century, boosted by the Famine, and then the War of Independence and after the war etc. So the patterns were laid down.

So immediately the war is over, we've got Irish workers here coming in from the English farms, where they've been working during the war...[pause]...people like Tommy Healy...[pause]...who came over here to work on farms for war-work and after a little while they're allowed to look for (other) work...

Interviewer: But were they following, by and large...[pause]...weren't they following the seasonal migrations?

Reg: Yeah, they were following the patterns of their parents; of their fathers and grandfathers. Not necessarily to the same places; so when Tommy Healy registered, however he did it, in Ireland, to come to England, he was following the same pattern that his dad would've done, but he (unlike his father, who was employed directly by certain farmers) would have been directed by the Ministry of Labour, here, and would have been picked up at the port where he came in and put on a train and taken to the farm where he was going to...[pause]...farm! Where he was going to do the labouring. And as he said himself, he came in the dark, and he went to bed in the dark, y'know? He didn't see anything apart from the work. Does that make sense?

Interviewer: It does, yeah. So he worked, more or less, from dawn until dusk?

Reg: Yeah, but then you've also got them drifting in and coming in from other sources and people like Edmund Murphy came in and-

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Did you write, or did I read somewhere that Edmund Murphy had worked on the Mulberry harbours?

Reg: Oh, I can't remember...[pause]...but I wouldn't be surprised...[pause]...I saw that as a child you see? I lived in Gravesend¹ and I'd see all the D-Day activity on the river on my way to school. I would've been ten or twelve...[pause]...around 1943, I suppose, and you could see these huge concrete towers of things being built which were going to be floated down the river and out to sea. We didn't know what they were, but we knew it was something big.

But immediately after the war I saw these old buses; they were obviously, y'know, municipal double-decker buses from...[pause]...Manchester and Swindon and places like that. They were very crudely painted to get rid of the livery and they were packed with these strange people.² They were all *paddies* going past our house and down to the Shell building project on the Isle of Sheppey. They'd be going down very early in the morning – I'd be doing the paper-round, perhaps six o'clock in the morning and there'd be dozens of them in convoy, all together. Then there'd be nothing for a while and then later another one and so on.

Interviewer: So what sort of year are we talking about now?

Reg: [pause]...(thinking)...1950ish?...[pause]... er...1948. We all knew where they were going, these long lines of buses; down to the Isle of Sheppey, to the shell oil refinery.

¹ Gravesend is an ancient town in northwest Kent, England, situated 21 miles east-southeast of Charing Cross on the south bank of the Thames Estuary and opposite Tilbury in Essex.

² See also photograph and descriptions in Ultan Cowley, *The Men Who Built Britain: A History of the Irish Navy*, (Dublin, 2001), p.165-168.

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Interviewer: You sure it wasn't the Isle of Grain? That's where the big British Petroleum refinery was built.

Reg: Sorry, yes, it was the Isle of Grain, not Sheppey, yes the Isle of Grain. Of course this was all new, we'd never had anything like that in the way of development, although everyone knew who they were and where they were all going...[pause]...



Figure 1 - Aerial view of Isle of Grain project in early 1950s. In foreground can be seen some of the fleets of buses Reg Hall recalls seeing as a boy. (Photo courtesy Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd / Ultan Cowley)

Interviewer: How did you know they were all Irish...[pause]...or mainly Irish?

Reg: Well, it was all sort of just generally known amongst people...[pause]...I mean they didn't stop or anything. I lived on the main road, which was the London Road, so we saw them all coming down that route...[pause]...I mean they were following the Thames because they had to get to the Thames estuary. I'd see them maybe at six in the morning and they'd come back at perhaps six, seven, eight or nine at night.

Interviewer: Right...[pause]...that's interesting because there was supposed to have been a big cohort of Irish labour that lived in the camps down on the Isle of Grain project.

Reg: Well, they might have done, but these men were travelling down and back every day.

Interviewer: See, in my opinion this notion of the itinerant or 'tramp' navy...[pause]...the kind of genuine itinerant navy that MacGill talks about...[pause]...I reckon they died out either around the time of the War or before it.

Reg: Oh I'd say it was before. They're gone by the War. The big thing – and you may well be aware of it – is Wembley Stadium, 1924. Ah well, Wembley Stadium is when you see...[pause]...that's why Camden Town (took off as an Irish hub)...[pause]...that's why they all lived in Camden Town...[pause]... – oh no! The reason they all went to Camden Town was because of the Craven A building.

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Interviewer: Well, you know there's this urban myth that the reason they all lived in Camden Town was 'cause ...[pause]...was it George Melly who said? it was the furthest an Irishman could walk with a case from Euston Stat-³

Reg: [Cutting-in] Bollocks! (laughter)...I hope that's on record...that's a good Irish word isn't it, bollix!...[pause]...No...look, Mornington Crescent...can you picture Mornington Crescent? The pub, the Mornington, on the corner...can you picture the factory building next to it? That was the Craven A building. ⁴ Craven A was a cigarette factory and you got a packet of twenty, with four for your friends. Well, that building went up in the 1920s and that took a huge amount of Irish labour and that's why they settled in Camden Town.

Interviewer: But *why* did it take a huge amount of Irish labour in the twenties?

Reg: Well, that's the way they were recruited. They were probably reliable, they probably did the work for a certain wage that the local English people didn't want. It may be that the contractor thought he'd get them in? ⁵ It may have been all the dosshouses and things nearby? It may have been an Irish contractor?

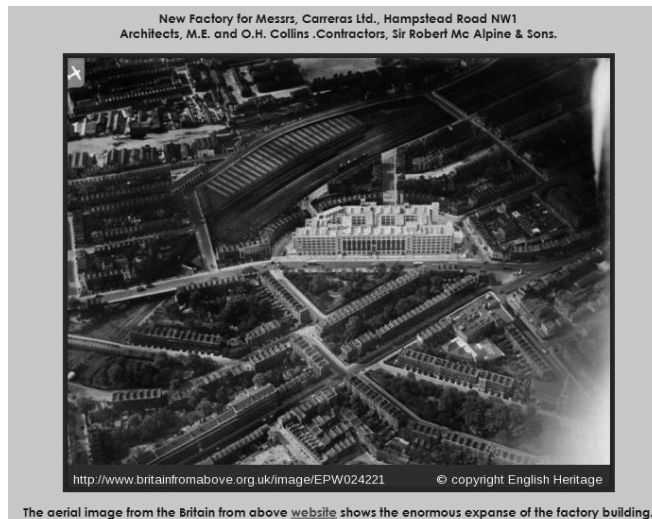


Figure 2 - Craven A Building aerial view (courtesy of English Heritage)

But it was Wembley Stadium, which opened in 1924 with the great Wembley Exhibition, which had considerable Irish labour there.⁶

³ Gerry Harrison, *The Scattering: A History of the London Irish Centre, 1954-2004*, (London, 2004), p.9.

⁴ The 'Craven A' building was a vernacular name for the Carreras Cigarette Factory, a large art deco building noted as a striking example of early 20th Century Egyptian Revival architecture. The building was erected in 1926-28 by the Carreras Tobacco Company owned by the Russian-Jewish inventor and philanthropist Bernhard Baron. It is 550 feet (168 metres) long, and is mainly white. Its distinctive Egyptian-style ornamentation originally included two gigantic effigies of black cats flanking the entrance and colourful painted details.

⁵ Further research established that the Craven A building was constructed by none other than Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd, who are generally regarded as the primary employer of Irish migrant labour throughout the twentieth century. See 'Modernist Britain: The Black Cat Factory' available at: http://www.jannaludlow.co.uk/Art_Deco/Black_Cat_Factory_info.html (accessed 27 Sep, 2017).

⁶ The original Wembley Stadium (now demolished) was one of several concrete structures built for the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, an event intended to boost national confidence after the losses of World War I (1914-18). The contractor for the project was, again, Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons, which tends to support the contention that a large contingent of Irish construction labour was employed on the project. Source: <http://www.engineering-timelines.com/scripts/engineeringitem.asp?id=394> (accessed 14 Dec, 2017).

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Interviewer: I didn't know that, now. I mean obviously there was Irish labour, one of the big problems is that because there was no real interest (historically) in ethnic background at that time, there's no actual way of tracing Irish migrants, y'know, during the interwar period or even after the Second World War; there's no definitive records of Irish migrants' entry -

Reg: Well, you've got - y'know, I've defined this - you've got the 'London-Irish' - it was a self-selective group of people, that's their name, "We are the London-Irish". They were all cockneys, they were all left-wingers; that was *their name for themselves* (emphasised point). So people like Patsy Goulding, Sheila Clerkin, people like that, their mums and dads would have all been London-Irish.

Interviewer: The only thing that strikes me about that - and I know we've never talked about this. I kind of agree with the two categories that you've got, if you like, the 'London-Irish' and the 'Irish-in-London', but then what happens...[pause]...because...[pause]...the Irish-in-London, *eventually*, will become the London-Irish, won't they? I've for a long time called myself London-Irish.

Reg: Well, of course, they are now calling themselves that. But in the context of my book, you have to differentiate them, but now, much later -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] But what I mean is you get this multi-generational thing that goes on, and you've got it in both groups, if you like? So you've got the 'London-Irish' as you define them, they are already multi-generational.

Reg: And they are constantly being topped up by Irish-born people. So within that London-Irish community are *loads* of Irish-born people. But there are also many of up to fifth-generation...[pause]...oh, and they're all Catholic.

Interviewer: But then do *we* (by which I meant my own London-born post-war Irish generation) get added to that group, or do we become something else?

Reg: No - you're something else - y'see the language alters...[pause]...I mean people are now talking about the London-Irish meaning something different. All I'm trying to pin down is that if we are talking about that period of time I'm dealing with, [i.e. 1950s and 1960s] they are *distinct* groups of people. So what are you, and Gary, and James and the Linnanes and all your friends?⁷

Interviewer: Well, exactly, what are we?

Reg: You're *IRISH!* Because you define yourselves as Irish. You happen to be a *Londoner* but you're *Irish*. But what are your kids?

Interviewer: Well, y'see now that's a bit different in my case, because my kids would see themselves as entirely Irish because they've been brought up in Ireland, even though they were born in London. My son, for example, would unquestionably define himself as Irish - even though he's not interested in the music as much as me, because of the football and culturally he would definitely call himself Irish.

Reg: So how does he justify that with the fact that he's got an English mother?

Interviewer: mmm - (thinking) - well, he doesn't! (laughing)

⁷ This refers to Mick Mulvey, Gary Connolly, James Carty and the Linnane family who are all part of a large contingent of first/second-generation London-born Irish traditional musicians and close friends who grew up in the 1970s-1990s playing together regularly in sessions in various pubs and Irish centres.

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Reg: No - I know! (laughing) - so it doesn't matter does it? See my great-grandmother, Anne O'Meeley, is a Catholic, Irish...[pause]...I think an Irish-speaker (although I'm not so sure about that). She marries an English bloke whose name is Stallion, which is Norman-French – so that's how long his bloody family has been here! A Street-trader. She is a Catholic. She has a son, my grandad, William, *he's* a Catholic but he's a cockney. He marries a Welsh immigrant from up-country and they have thirteen children. None of them are Catholic and they're all English, because the religion thing just doesn't matter as much to them. So you start with O'Meeley, then you get Stallion. So by the time these children are raised, although they've got an Irish grandmother, they've lost their Irish surname, and they're not Catholic. (So their Irish identity has disappeared through breeding and assimilation).

Interviewer: But there are probably *millions* of English people like that. My own wife's great-grandmother was from Cork and married an Englishman...

Reg: Of course! Exactly! And I'd guess half of them integrated – and they probably integrated by things like going to prison, becoming prostitutes, being thieves, losing their Catholicism, losing their accents...[pause]...I mean loads and loads of Irish fellas – you would know this - even in your dad's generation, would have come over and would have been lost; they'd have become alcoholics, they would have been...[pause]...sad.

Interviewer: Well, yeah, but when it comes to the construction industry and the Irish...[pause]...I mean, there's a great book that's just been published by a woman called Clair Wills – I've just been reading it today, actually – it's about representations of Irishness, Irish migrants, in the post-war period, but it's more literary representations, it's not pure history if you like.

Reg: Ok, so like a middle-class view of Irishness?

Interviewer: I guess so, maybe, in a way. But what she's interested in – and to some extent I'm also interested - is this idea of the 'forgotten Irish'

Reg: The ones who fall by the wayside!

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess so, the ones who fall through the gaps, if you like and that was obviously a serious social problem, but I think for me, what concerns me is that that has become like a stock formation for Irish labour; that has become kind of *THE* story.

Reg: What? - the drunken Irishman?

Interviewer: Yeah, the drunken, fighting *failure* of an Irishman. The guy who ends up as a lonely old man in the pub.

Reg: But they exist.

Interviewer: They DO exist, I'm not arguing they don't.

Reg: So stereotypes often DO exist.

Interviewer: I'm not arguing they don't exist; I guess what I'm arguing is that they are not *representative* (of the entire cohort of post-war Irish males). But I'd be interested to hear what *you've* got to say about that.

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Reg: My view, y'know, having been born English and all that, knowing there was a little bit of Irish in the background somewhere...[pause]...for example when I was young and I went to the cinema I didn't realise that Spencer Tracey, Tyrone Power, Pat O'Brien, James Cagney⁸ - I didn't realise they were Irish; they were stars of the movies. We had boys at school called Mick Maloney and Pat Moloney; it never occurred to me that they were Irish. We had a religious teacher called Mr. Boyle; never occurred to me he was Irish - because we didn't think in those terms, bearing in mind I was supposedly a thinking boy at grammar-school.

...[pause]...so I had a prejudiced view of Irishness; Cavan O'Connor, the old sentimental Irish singer was one; Old Mother Riley was another; but Irish people were: always late, always drunk and always fighting. And of course when I actually started *meeting* Irish people I realised that they were always on time, (**Interviewer interrupts:** well, except me - laughter!), they don't generally get drunk and they weren't fighting...I never saw fights in pubs. In all my fifty years of playing in the (Irish) pubs around London I saw two fights up until I started playing in the Auld Triangle!⁹

The two fights I saw...[pause]...one was in a pub in Camden Town, and it was "*hold me back, hold me back*" kinda stuff...and they were drunk and kept falling around so they didn't actually come to blows - but the landlord jumped over the counter and threw them out - so that was the end of that! And the other one was in a pub now called the Lamb, it wasn't called that then, in Holloway Road. Julia Clifford was playing there with a drummer - the fella with cross-eyes - and I was there playing the melodeon (I wasn't a paid musician; I just went in there for the tune). Anyway a fight broke out and Julia and I kinda jumped out of the way of the ruckus and went and hid in the gents, and when we came out three or four minutes later the pub was completely empty! I went out and looked down the street - a backstreet this pub was on - and that was completely empty too. That was all the fights I saw - OH! No, I've just thought ...[pause]...there was the one in the Bedford that I saw in the mirror...there was a big mirror on the wall and I was playing melodeon I think and looked up and saw in this big glass mirror this fist coming through the crowd like that (motions) and when I looked 'round to see what it was it was another "*hold me back, hold me back*" outcome and the landlord came over and stopped it.

Interviewer: Again, a lot of this has to do with the way in which you interpret information, if you like, but so how would you square your experiences with that of, say, Donal MacAmhlaigh, in his navy diary, who mentions several fights that went on and he talks about the priests giving out at Mass and what-have-you about Irishmen fighting in Cricklewood and Kilburn and that?

Reg: Well I suspect that if you were to talk to people like Brendan Mulkere,¹⁰ the music teacher, he's got a view on that. I think that there used to be fighting on certain streets like Kilburn High Road and Cricklewood where people came out of the dancehalls. The other one Eddie

⁸ Major male film stars of the 1930s and 1940s Hollywood era

⁹ A pub in Finsbury Park owned by Connemara family the Joyce brothers; one of the big pub-owning dynasties of the post-war era. The Auld Triangle became an established centre for the performance of traditional Irish music around the turn of the 21st-century, well after the first-generation post-war migrants had retired and it is mainly second-generation London-born Irish (including the interviewer) who play there.

¹⁰ Brendan Mulkere is from Crusheen in north County Clare and was one of the most influential teachers of traditional music and advocate of Irish cultural studies in London during the 1970s-1990s and still teaches classes in London. He taught the interviewer also.

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Hickey¹¹ told me that in the Galtymore¹² there would be the Connemaras and the Mayos would fight each other...[pause]...he said he'd be singing on stage with the Glenside and a fight would breakout and Byrnes (sic) would come up and say "keep singing - keep singing!" and it was dealt with, y'know?

Interviewer: Donal MacAmhlaigh actually mentions something about that... [pause]...he mentions the Connemara men and the Dublin men fighting each other.

Reg: Yeah, well the Connemaras had a reputation, although I've only picked that up since, I didn't know it at the time. And then of course the Buffalo, Bill Fuller's club, that was regarded as *very* rough and in the end, apparently, he policed it himself...[pause]...the police kept clear and he had the heavy blokes to deal with it and the police just didn't go there.

Interviewer: Yeah, well, y'see this is where I have a bit of an issue with the narrative. I mean don't we have to put these things into context? Fights in dancehalls - of any kind and ethnicity - were not that unusual.

Reg: Well, I was brought up in Gravesend - working-class - and there was nearby Northfleet and Swanscombe and all these places all within a conurbation. And every Saturday night there was dancing in a nearby hotel, a big park, two or three factory social-clubs; so that, as a young man, if you knew people you could have gone to probably five or six different dances on a Saturday night. There was one commercial dancehall – the Co-op hall – where the soldier-boys went, where the navy cadets went (because there was always a resident cadet-corps of the Navy because we were on the Thames) and all the working-class girls went. They'd sometimes come in on the train from a neighbouring town...[pause]...fights!...[pause]...in the other five or six dances they never heard of it - so it was all localised, and it was *class* (emphasised)...[pause]...these were the lower-end of the working-class population. It was friction – often – between a group of soldiers and a group of sailors. That's all it was.

Interviewer: Well, Clair Wills, from what I read this morning, now, she reckons it was ...[pause]...well, there's various particularly theories about why there was all this fighting (amongst the Irish men). But for starters, anyway, I'm not convinced that there *was* all this fighting. I think there were outbreaks of fighting the same as you'd get in any dancehall. Now it may have been worse in some places than others; like you say, the Buffalo had a reputation for being a '*rough-house*' if you like, and I'm sure it was. But again if you look at, for example, accounts of mining communities in the north of England, or steel foundry communities in the midlands...English workers...they have fights at nights out and weddings, nights out in the pub...y'know...working men they fight!

Reg: Well, my old mate - he'd be about 110 or 115 years old if he were still here! - the concertina player from Sussex, Scan Tester, he told me he'd often be asked to go to different places

¹¹ Eddie Hickey was the singer with the highly reputed Glenside Ceili Band, who were a London-based band of mixed Irish migrants and first-generation London-born Irish. They won the All-Ireland Ceili Band title at Fleadh Cheoil na h'Eireann in Boyle, Co. Roscommon in 1966, which catapulted them to relative fame on the Irish and London-Irish music scene. Born in Tipperary in 1940 and brought up in London with constant recourse to his rural roots, Eddie first sang in public – six verses of *Moonlight in Mayo* – at the age of three in a pub back home on fair day. During his teens he had been promoted as a pop singer with several single records to his credit, but by 1962 he had given that up and, when the McGowans hunted him down upon Sean O'Shea's recommendation, he was singing Irish material in the *Case is Altered* pub in Willesden. See Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, (London, 2016, online publication available at <http://www.topicrecords.co.uk/a-few-good-tunes/>), p.723.

¹² The most iconic of the post-war era Irish dancehalls, situated on Cricklewood Broadway, north-west London, owned by John Byrnes, from north Kerry.

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to play for a dance in a little village hall but that local people from the next village couldn't go, because if you were from that village and he was from this village, and three fellas from this village turned up for the dance *there*, there'd be a bust-up; "how dare they come and dance with our girls!" And of course the same bloody thing went on in Ireland!

Interviewer: And so when it came to England - or when the Irish came to England - all that ruckus just became a bigger row because you were in a tighter spot, in a bigger dancehall, in an urban centre as opposed to little villages; but the same customs and ways applied.

Reg: Of course you had the other thing...[pause]...if you think about people like Victor McLaglen, the Hollywood movie actor - the stereotype Irish sergeant and he's (John Wayne) the officer and the punch-up and all that stuff. The little leprechaun Barry Fitzgerald character...[pause]...they're all stage Irish. I made the point in my book and in my talk the other day that Irishmen on stage aren't stage-Irish; they're Irishmen on stage. All this stuff about stage Irish, take that Frank Carson¹³ bloke, I don't think he was stage-Irish, I think he was an Irishman taking the piss out of being Irish, being himself - that's not stage-Irish. If an *Englishman* did it...[pause]...that would be stage-Irish. So I think that if we're talking about stereotypes, well there are loads and loads of stereotypes in the media.

Interviewer: You see, I'm kind of interested because I do think that the relevance in the stereotyping thing lies in...[pause]...my research is trying to tell a more balanced version of what happened to the post-war Irish in the construction industry because I think the problem is - as soon as you mention er, y'know, Irish navvies...

Reg: [Cutting-in] But they're not navvies, are they?

Interviewer: Well, okay, they're not navvies for a start, but that's the term that's always used...

Reg: I mean, they came as hod-carriers and shuttering carpenters and...[pause]...what's interesting (and perhaps we're going off-script slightly) is that the musicians that we know, the Andy Boyle, the Tony Martin, Jimmy Power, Edmund Murphy - a number of them, most of them - I mean they were from farming backgrounds, agricultural labouring backgrounds and they come over here and they become carpenters. Well, English people at that time were having to serve their time to become a carpenter; you couldn't be a carpenter unless you had the book...the cards¹⁴ - so how did Jimmy Power¹⁵ ever become a carpenter? Well, he did it because he was bloody good at what he did! He was quick and efficient. See these were un-booked...or...un-schooled people - I mean Jimmy could do a nice letter and he had nice handwriting. I don't know if he ever read a book in his life, but he went to National School and left at fourteen and came from a very poor background. Yet he comes to London, having gone through Glasgow and Leeds and all the rest of it; poverty and living almost in the street; and yet he can become a carpenter - because he's bloody bright!...[pause]...because he's intelligent!

¹³ Frank Carson was a Northern Irish comedian of the 1970s whose act relied heavily on stereotypical 'Stage-Irish' jokes.

¹⁴ What Reg is referring to here is, for example, a City and Guilds Certificate, which would be regarded as evidence of having served a formal trade apprenticeship within the regulatory framework of the British construction industry.

¹⁵ Jimmy Power was one of the key post-war generation musicians in London throughout the 1950s-1990s and hosted the legendary music sessions at the Favourite pub, off Holloway Road until the late 1980s, then later played in the Victoria pub on Holloway Road. For a detailed and moving biography of Jimmy Power, see Reg Hall, *A Few Tunes of Good Music*, (London, 2016, online publication available at <http://www.topicrecords.co.uk/a-few-good-tunes/>), p.874-900.

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Interviewer: But I also think a lot of that generation, they were of course bright and intelligent, but they were also used to working in a certain way - they were used to agricultural work, y'know? So they *were* used to manual labour.

Reg: [Cutting-in] Absolutely!

Interviewer: So they were used to manual labour; they were physically conditioned to it, they were fit and healthy. Yet I don't like this mythology that surrounds them...[pause]...y'know this kind of Cuchullain myth that these Irishmen were all somehow superhuman. Some of them were very strong; you had to be physically strong to do that kind of work but they were young and fit and had come from farm-labouring backgrounds, that's why.

I think that's part of the reason that so many of these men headed for construction – and I can use my own father as an example of this – he told me that the first job he got when he headed to London was in a factory. But he *hated* working indoors because he wasn't used to working indoors; he was used to working out in the open, in a field where nobody would pester him, y'know? Now I think a lot of these lads, they couldn't get that kind of work in London - but the nearest thing you *could* get to it was digging trenches on the roads!

Reg: Even if you're working on a farm and you have to bring hay in, or dig potatoes or cut turf or whatever, you have the freedom to do it *your* way and in your own time, and sort of take the breaks, have a fag, look at the birds or whatever.

Interviewer: Exactly - and the nearest thing you could get to that was a building site (or utilities work) because you were outdoors, and you had an *element* of that freedom – not the *same* freedom, but close to it.

Reg: And the other issue is that everybody else around you is an Irishman. You got the factor that the money was good - big money.

Note: There is then an extended conversation about the legendary west Cork musician Finbarr Dwyer, who left secondary school teaching to work as a shuttering carpenter, earning three times his salary and eventually became a shuttering subcontractor with a reputation for scrupulous fairness and attention to detail.

Interviewer: What you do get a lot of is Irish workers saying that Irish subbies *weren't* straight with them though. There were a lot of...[pause]...y'know.

Reg: Well my interview with Frank Scanlon, which summed up a lot of things about the Irish in London...you remember him? He was a Tubbercurry bloke, used to be in the Favourite. He went to school with Tansey apparently. I think he lives in Brighton now, and I think he's got a little bit of property and he lets it out and what-have-you, so I think he's a little bit of an entrepreneur in his own way. But anyway, he told me that there'd be fellas that would be taken on to work and they'd be sacked just before pay-day, told to get off site. So they'd do a whole four and a half days work then get thrown off – in a threatening sort of way, “Don't come back here”. He knew fellas that didn't get paid, they'd be told come up to the office and as they climbed the iron stairs up to the office they'd be tumbled back down them! There were people who were taken on...I was told this about pre-war, but I think it happened after the war too...there'd be a road-gang, maybe six people digging trenches, and the foreman or contractor would say the worst one – the one who digs least – gets sacked tonight. So they're competing all the time with each other so they don't get the sack. The other one Scanlon told me was there'd be a bloke going 'round on a bike, going to all the sites this subbie had, he'd get off and do an hour or two's work and set the pace and then head off to the next job... he was like the pacemaker kind o-thing...

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Interviewer: [Cutting-in] Pacemakers, apparently were quite common...not...I've only ever heard from you about the pacemaker being on a bike, but I've heard from several of my own interviews that guys said you would have a pacemaker on a job, and he'd be, say the best digger for that company or that gang or site or whatever. He could be sent to one job one day and another place another day to kinda 'set the benchmark' if you like. Umm...I mean...y'know, whether you regard that as sharp practice or not, it's certainly...

Reg: Well the unions wouldn't like it, but then, as we both know, none of them were ever in a union! And why weren't they in unions? ... [pause]... (both answer simultaneously) *because it was all cash-in-hand!*...

Interviewer: [Cutting-in] Yep, and because if they brought the union in they'd have to do it formally, on the cards and what-have-you. I mean, this is...it brings us nicely onto that question of The Lump. Because, again, if you listen to people like Ultan Cowley, who wrote *The Men Who Built Britain*, although he doesn't clearly articulate it, he certainly suggests that The Lump was a purely exploitative system that was implemented by main contractors and subcontractors because it suited their pricing structures and because it enabled them to keep...to not have to pay National Insurance contributions, not have to pay Employer's Liability insurance or tax etc...to keep these men within this system of working that they then couldn't get out of. I think there's some truth in that, but I think it's an oversimplification, because a lot of the guys who worked on The Lump also did it because it suited *them* to work that way.

Reg: Ah yeah, but both those views could be right, couldn't they?...*you scratch my back and I scratch yours*, wasn't it?...[pause]...

Interviewer: Yeah, but it's not entirely one-sided exploitation, I guess that's what I'm driving at. There's an acquiescence on the part of the guys who are doing the work to stay in that system because they were getting more money. They were...and another thing is...I've got a guy in an interview who said this to me...that the main reason, certainly in the immediate post-war period, that most Irishmen wanted to work that way was that they were kept out of *officialdom* if you like, so they were kept out of the National Service net. I don't know if that's entirely true, but this guy reckons it was a big part of it.

Reg: Well, I went and did National Service in '52 and I think it went on another four or five years after that. So if you got a card number ¹⁶, you were at risk of...

Interviewer: [Cutting-in] yeah, well like I know when my father came in late '58 they'd done away with it by then. So when he first worked in that factory I mentioned, he was 'on the cards'

Reg: Well, you wouldn't have got a factory job without being registered for National Insurance...

Interviewer: No exactly, you couldn't. You had to be official...which, when you think about it, is probably *another* reason why Irishmen didn't want to work in factories or manufacturing jobs when they first came.

Reg: Yeah, so for example all the Irish nurses who came over (they were on tiny money) *they* were all paying tax, and the girls who worked in the little co-op shops and the Greggs¹⁷ and

¹⁶ I think Reg is referring to National Insurance Card numbers

¹⁷ Greggs plc is the largest bakery chain in the United Kingdom. The first Greggs was opened in 1951. Growing regionally from its North East base, Greggs began to acquire other regional bakery chains across the rest of the country from the 1970s onwards. See 'How Greggs conquered Britain: 'Nobody can quite believe how well it

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things, teashops, *they* were all paying tax...and the blokes are earning huge money and *not* paying tax.

Interviewer: Which is another bone of contention I have with the view - taken by Cowley - he seems to have a bee in his bonnet that somehow Irish construction workers paid the price in terms of the sacrifices they made to prop up the Irish economy through sending home remittances. Now you can get data on how much in total was remitted by Irish workers from Britain to Ireland for specific years in the '50s and '60s. You can't split that down into what those remitters were doing, and I would...

Reg: [Cutting-in] Nor can you split it down into whether construction work was the source; it could've been middle-class Irish people who were sending over money -

Interviewer: [Cutting-in] yeah ...and I would strongly suspect that the biggest amount of those remittances probably came from women in nursing rather than men in construction. I just think women would have been more inclined to do that, and most of the men that I've interviewed...and ok, they are probably later migrants from the late '50s or early '60s...but most of them didn't send *anything* back.

Reg: [Cutting-in] Well, if my wife is anything to do with it...Clare was sending home money to Jamaica when she was absolutely poverty-stricken. Jimmy Power, for example, never sent anything home.

Interviewer: Well certainly if they got married or had a partners or set up some sort of household in London then I think you could forget the idea of them sending money back home in those circumstances because they'd set up their own family unit and that took priority. So my gut feeling, although I've no evidence either way to support this, is that the bulk of remittances probably came either from - as you said, Reg - middle-class Irish with money or from nurses and other -

Reg: [Cutting-in] - Gregg's girls!...[pause]...You've heard these stories, have you?...[pause]...where they'd finish work on a Friday night, buy a new suit, shirt, socks, shoes. Go to the pub at eight or nine o'clock Friday, stay in the pub 'til Monday morning then go to work again.

Interviewer: [Cutting-in] But why?

Reg: Well because they had so much blinkin' money! So they'd work in the new clothes all week, wouldn't bother washing them or get them cleaned then the following Friday they'd go and buy a new outfit again and keep the previously new ones as workclothes. Tony Ledwith told me that! ... [pause]...every Friday, a new pair of trousers...why? [pause]...'cause they *could*!

Remember these men, they had nowhere to go home to; they were living in a room with other blokes. He (Tony Ledwith) said, for example, that at the World's End, not the one in Camden Town, but the one at the Elephant and Castle, which was Mrs. Murphy's pub. It's where all the members of the Glenside and all that lot used to hang out. It was a couple of hundred yards away from the Shamrock dancehall. They'd go there on a Friday night after work for a quick drink, tip off to the Shamrock to play for the Ceili dancing, then back to Mrs Murphys. Play all night there, sleep on the chairs, she'd do them breakfast, then they'd play at lunchtime and start drinking. That would be Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday night...and go to work Monday morning! He said many's the time they'd have done that.

has done', in *The Guardian*, 5 March, 2016, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2016/mar/05/greggs-conquered-britain-bakery-profit-sausage-rolls>.

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Interviewer: I mean that tends to suggest to me that...and this is one of my key points, if you like...that on the whole the experience of these guys was...was...was y'know...*successful*?...[pause]...I mean I'm not suggesting that they were all John Murphys, but they were doing okay.

Reg: [Cutting-in] They were surviving at a sort of level of relative comfort. Jimmy Power never had any real money. When I first met him he didn't have much, but over the years, well, he got by doing his job. See you've got your generation, there are musicians we both know...Andy, for example...who by modern standards are reputed to have a very highly paid job.

Interviewer: [Cutting-in] Yeah, well, the likes of Andy and myself; anyone who worked in the corporate world at a managerial level would be earning comparatively highly.

Reg: Yeah, well y'see back in the early post-war era working-class Irishmen didn't become *materially* wealthy unless they were a contractor or a subbie or ran a dancehall. There was the odd fella that maybe made money from horses, racing or gambling, that kind of thing, but they were rare.

Note: There is then an extended conversation about Irish contractors and subcontractors, their inception, number, origin, the phenomena of 'mushroom' subcontractors etc, the details of which are not relevant to this account.

Reg: What was it Danny Meehan said about it? That all you did was get an accountant and a lawyer and that it's easy going from there. Danny always worked on his own as far as I know – he was a one-man band really – couldn't work with a gang of fellas I'd have thought.

Note: There is then a short conversation about Danny Meehan and his music which is not relevant to this account.

Interviewer: But Danny is probably a good example of the kind of self-employed contractor I'm talking about, because as far as I can see, too, he's always worked for himself as a kind of one-man band.

Reg: [Cutting-in] – With a hidden identity, 'cause nobody knew where he lived...[pause]...not even his own mates. They could only contact him via his sister in Beckenham, I think. She must've had a phone, or certainly his address, so if you wanted to get hold of Danny for work, you had to contact this person.

Note: Further short conversation about Danny Meehan and his music which is not relevant to this account.

Reg: Now!...before I lose it, Johnny Hynes; pre-war fluteplayer; member of the Longford Ceili Band; great pal of Paddy Malynn¹⁸; deep into Comhaltas and one of the prime movers in Comhaltas in south London – a lovely bloke; an interesting and articulate man – a labourer...[pause]...street labourer, just dug the roads for the gas board. I went to his flat once and it was an empty room. He later had a room as big in Streatham...[pause]...he said, "You can't send me anything 'cause I'm not Hynes here". He said "I'm not Johnny Hynes anywhere". So, his entire working life in London was 'off-the-record'...[pause]...even to the extent that he'd given a false name at his rented room. Yet as Johnny Hynes, he was chairman of the London branch of Comhaltas at the time.

¹⁸ Paddy Malynn was an accordion player from Drumlish, Co. Longford who was one of the key post-war London-Irish musicians and also a migrant builder who immigrated to London around 1950.

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Interviewer: I think there were quite a lot of those arrangements going on in and around London on a, y'know, significant scale. To some extent it reinforces the point I was making that this was a mutually convenient arrangement that suited both parties; they (Irish builders) weren't compelled to work this way -

Reg: [cutting-in] Well it wasn't questioned it, was it? So it proves, y'know if your name was Paddy Murphy and all your friends (or workmates) called you Mick...[laughs] y'know, they're not interested are they?

Note: There is then an extended conversation about Irish traditional music, localism and class, the details of which are not relevant to this account.

Interviewer: I think there's a similar argument to be made about class in relation to migrants who came after the war from the west of Ireland. If you take...[pause]...I suppose my own family would be a reference point for my thinking on it. My dad would consider himself a common-or-garden working man yet his uncle was chief accountant of their county council back in Ireland.

Reg: [cutting-in] Well, the class system in Ireland was differently structured than in Britain

Interviewer: So do you think?...[pause]...'cause, I've an idea...[pause]...I think you're right that the two class structures are different, but I also think that there was...[pause]...that a good proportion of the migrants that came from Ireland who were better educated – and certainly more intelligent - than they were given credit for. Now whether they were better *formally* educated I don't know, but they had certainly picked up education from somewhere.

Reg: [cutting-in] Well, in England we talk about respectability. So if (in Ireland) you've got two farms; and there's one family there and one family there (indicating adjacent farms), they don't necessarily operate at the same level of competence. They may not have the same sort of land or...talents. And this family over here do very well and make the most of it, and this family over here, well they just survived. What happens when a son of one family wants to marry a daughter of the other?...[pause]...do they marry in those circumstances or do they go off somewhere, y'know?

Interviewer: I have an interviewee talking on tape about his grandparents, who married in the mid-1930s who came from the same village and locality; who's respective families were both farmers, yet the father of the groom (grandfather) was supposed to have said to the father of the bride (grandmother) "I never thought I'd see a daughter of yours marrying a son of mine" !

Reg: Meaning he didn't think she'd be good enough?

Interviewer: Well...he didn't go any further to explain it, but I daresay we can draw our own conclusions! And they were in the same village! That's exactly what you're talking about in terms of localised class distinctions.

Reg: My father grew up one of eleven children during the Great War; some of them went into military service and whereas before the war they'd been labourers and factory workers etc, when they came out of the military they went on the trams, then four of them became insurance agents. So they'd gone from working class to...[pause]...and all his customers were kids he'd gone to school with. So he'd help all these poor people write letters and what have you. Of course I didn't realise that until many years later. Then I had a younger uncle who went on to become the managing director of a sheet-metal firm of some sort, and he joins the Police Specials during the War, so he's respectable. I've got another uncle who's a carpenter – self-employed – but who becomes a fireman during the war, so he's respectable...[pause]...and I've got another uncle who was a gravedigger!

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Which in social terms was the lowest of the low, lower than a dustman, y'know, in those social terms... [pause]...so, how does that happen then?

Interviewer: Well...I guess in terms of class mobility, it's - .

Reg: [cutting-in] It's because some are bright and some aren't. Some take their opportunities and others don't...simple as that.

Interviewer: Well...I guess in terms of class mobility, it's - that's just the way life is; it's contingent. If you get an opportunity, you take it and you do something with it – and – well – or some people do – and some people don't.

Reg: [cutting-in] And some people don't (simultaneously). Some people can and some people CANT! (emphasises)

Interviewer: One thing that strikes me is that when people migrate to an urban environment it's...[pause]...it's almost like starting with a clean sheet, y'know? Your almost – y'know, as you said about Danny Meehan and the other chap you were talking about, it's almost like, y'know, they're invisible, if you want to be. If you don't, well then you can aspire to something else. But it strikes me that the Irish who came in the post-war era, y'know, many of them were perhaps more bourgeois and middle-class in *Ireland* than they pretended to be when they got to England

Reg: [cutting-in] Well they slumped it when they came over 'cause of the big money...you already talked about Finbarr Dwyer...

Before I lose the thought...Kilburn Times...(I went through the Kilburn Times from 1930-1970 or somewhereabouts)...weekly newspaper...in the British Library. So I found a little bit about Irish dancing and about Irish dance feises and I found a little bit about the Galtymore opening...everything else about the Irish was 'drunk on Saturday night' kind of stuff. The ONLY references to the Irish, apart from the bits about dancing and the Galty were about fights and disputes at dancehalls where the police were called, and about them getting drunk and appearing in court on Monday morning

Interviewer: [Cutting-in] Do you think that was a fair representation of -

Reg: Yeah...[pause]...well, I mean it was a fair representation of the Kilburn Times; it was a fair representation of local journalism at the time. But oh no it wasn't a fair representation of the Irish. It didn't talk about the wonderful music which was being played in the Black Lion; it wasn't talking about the hurling matches; it wasn't talking about the two thousand people who'd turn up at Quex Road for Mass...it wasn't saying any of those things.

Interviewer: So the Kilburn Times was displaying -

Reg: Prejudice

Interviewer: yeah...or chauvinism

Reg: yeah, and if you bought the Evening News, the Star or the Standard...which were the almost 'national' evening newspapers from London, you wouldn't have found ANYTHING about the Irish community in London except perhaps someone in a kilt playing the bagpipes at somebodys birthday party or...[pause]...I mean you could go through all those evening papers...take the Standard, for example, where were the Irish references...very few.

Interviewer: D'you remember some years ago there was a picture of Danny Meehan in the Standard? -

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Reg: Yeah, but not for being a fiddle-player -

Reg: Was that the one where he was wielding a big sledge-hammer over his head?- you sure that was the Standard, not the Irish post

Interviewer: yeah, that's the one – no, I'm not sure...but I'm sure it mentioned him playing the fiddle...no, I thought it was the Standard, 'cause I remember my dad showing me it.

Reg: Before I lose it, these funny old thoughts- 'Old Mother Riley'?¹⁹...I thought she was wonderful as a child. We went to all the Mother Riley films, 1938-39-40-41. I saw him on the Chatham stage maybe two, three or four times when I was young. And his daughter, Kitty, (impersonating) "Oh, mother, mother...I've met this lovely man, mother. He's coming to tea, now be nice to him, mother!"...y'know, this was Kitty, and that's a perfect representation of her mock accent, y'see (laughter). Well, ten, fifteen years ago I was watching TV and one of these films came on and I thought, oh I MUST watch this. Well of course she hadn't got a *glimmering* of an Irish accent; she was speaking pure English. I mean she had these Irish words and phrases, like "begorrah, begorrah" and all that...and you think WHAT THE!...(laughter)

Interviewer: yeah, well to some extent you're talking about stage *Oirish*.

When I think about that, now, I think of my wife's uncle, who was a lovely old man and a great friend of mine He had a massive heart attack sitting in his seat at West Ham – he was a real diehard Hammers fan, y'know...a real dyed-in-the-wool cockney. Anyway, his grandmother had come from Cork and married an English docker -

Reg: [cutting-in] It'd be interesting to know if he WAS English, or London-Irish!

Interviewer: Well, exactly, yeah. We'll never know now – but anyway, Bill grew up in Custom House,²⁰ right on Victoria Dock. But the only recollection Bill...the only thing Bill ever said about his grandmother, apart from the fact that she came from Cork, was that he could remember her fighting in the street with...whoever...that's all he ever said! (Laughter)

Reg: [cutting-in] that's all he ever remembered...

Interviewer: Well, I'm not sure he actually remembers it, or whether it was just passed down to him by somebody else, y'know?...but of all the things you could remember about being Irish, that's...again it becomes this reference point doesn't it?...it becomes this cliché.

Note: Break taken here and transcript changes to Recording Reg Hall # 3. First 10 minutes – general chatting about Bobby Casey.

¹⁹ Old Mother Riley was an Irish washerwoman and charwoman character, devised by Lucan (born Arthur Towle).[1][3] His wife Kitty McShane played Old Mother Riley's daughter, Kitty.[1] It was essentially a drag act but also a double act. The couple played music halls, theatres, and broadcast on radio and appeared in films. Lucan was voted sixth biggest British box-office star by the Motion Picture Herald in 1943.[4][5] Old Mother Riley was the first and arguably the most influential drag act on stage and screen. See Gifford, Denis (26 August 1997). "Obituary Roy Rolland". The Independent, 12 June 2011 (available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/obituary-roy-rolland-1247384.html>) (accessed 21 Nov. 17).

²⁰ Custom House is a district in the Canning Town area of the London Borough of Newham in east London, England. The area is named after the custom house of the Royal Victoria Dock alongside which the area runs.

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Interviewer: I was suggesting this grey or black market, if you like, that was going on with the Lump and all that. I'm thinking then later on, even when they outlawed the Lump, there was this whole culture of cheque clearing going on in pubs, y'know?

Reg: I might have told you the story of Paddy Coyne²¹...and I think the figure was £80,000...and I remember laying awake thinking hang on, it can't be eighty grand, I must have got that wrong...but I still think that's what he said; eighty thousand

Interviewer: This is what...a week?

Reg: ...a week.

Interviewer: yeah, that's serious money isn't it...how did he? –

Reg: He went to the bank *every* day; and I said “why did you go there every day” and he said, “To cash the cheques”; “what cheques?”; “oh, the ones that all the fellas brought in”. I said “what, every day?”, he said, “well, there was so much money, so much...”...and I think he said - ...[pause]...even if he'd said eight thousand it would still have been a lot of money!

Interviewer: It would...serious money – but I mean *eighty* thousand, well. That's not in your British Library archive?

Reg: No, I've got it here somewhere. I mean if you're desperate for it I'll look it up.

Interviewer: The figure is what it is...that does seem a stupendous figure but it wouldn't surprise me. I mean what...roughly...what year are we talking about?

Reg: Well, I suppose the eighties.... [Pause]...y'know, if somebody's got a cheque for two hundred quid, you've only got to have five of them and it's a thousand quid, but if it's a five hundred pound cheque...and you have ten of them, y'know, it doesn't take -

Interviewer: Well, if we're talking about the eighties, say the early eighties, the average weekly wage for a tradesman would have been around two to three hundred pounds-a-week...[pause]...or maybe actually, thinking about it, it would have been around seventy or eighty a shift, something around that, in those days...so maybe four hundred a week.

Reg: What I don't understand is why was he going to the bank every day of the week? Y'know, why would he need to go every day?

Interviewer: Y'know, I reckon he was spreading the cashflow around to even out the deposits, y'know, 'cause if you went into the bank of a Friday, with eighty grand...well...it would look like, “what the f...have you just robbed a bank or?”...so I reckon he was just spreading the cashflow, as it were. See you wouldn't get men being paid every day of the week; they'd all be paid on a Friday.

Reg: yeah, okay, that makes sense. So he was accumulating cash in his...building, pub, whatever -

Interviewer: He was taking a bit of a risk there, though, wasn't he, if you think about it. If you get a cheque...er, well, I dunno...say a hundred guys pass through the pub of a weekend...sometimes there might be blokes who don't need the cheque changed until next week,

²¹ Paddy Coyne was a publican who was a traditional music promoter and ran a large Irish pub in west London in the 1980s.

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cos they've got money in their pocket. So maybe they hand it in of a Sunday or whenever the next time they're in having a pint, y'know? But he'll end up with this collection of cheques...[pause]...the risk he could be taking is if he's got any 'bouncy' cheques, he's not gonna know that until he banks them next time round.

Reg: Well, he's gonna take that risk anyway, isn't he? – 'cause he was paying people out on the cheque rather than saying I'll borrow your cheque, take it to the bank, and when I've been paid out on it I'll give you your money...he wasn't doing that, he was in effect 'cashing' the cheques for the men, he was giving them the money upfront. A guy comes in and says, "Here's my cheque for two hundred" and he says "OK, I'll give you your two hundred..."

Interviewer: Less my commission...

Simultaneously: Tuppence in the pound

Interviewer: Yeah, or whatever it is. So for his two hundred quid cheque he gives him, say, a hundred-and-eighty cash, he takes the cheque -

Reg: And he holds onto it 'til he wants to take it to the bank (nods from both)

Interviewer: He runs the risk, then that if that's a dodgy cheque -

Reg: Yeah, but he can't do anything anyway, 'cause that guy's gone anyway! He won't know it's dodgy 'til he takes it to the bank

Interviewer: That's what I mean. But the only thing is, in reality, a lot of these blokes would've got their cheques changed there regularly, so he would know if there were bouncy ones going around, and that would be dealt with, y'know, there'd be ramifications for that, wouldn't there?

Reg: Well yeah, unless the guy was passing through and he never sees him again.

Interviewer: In which case, he probably wouldn't change his cheque in the first place, I'd suggest. I know in the pubs I recall in Bethnal Green, all the Irish guys, my dad included, they'd get their cheques changed in the same pub, with the same governor, week-in-week-out.

Reg: OK, fair enough. I don't know if you remember, but if I had a cheque, say, coming in from Manchester City Football Club, addressed to me, for whatever reason, I could sign on the back "Reg Hall" and give it to you, and you could pay it into your account. But they stopped that a few years ago.

Interviewer: yeah, that's right, yeah they stopped it. But they stopped it for precisely the reasons we're talking about. That's...this is, really, all classed as what would now be regarded as money-laundering, y'know, I think in the construction industry it was a very common practice...[irrelevant conversation]...and I think that's precisely why they stopped the practice of endorsing cheques, 'cause there was money being filtered all over the place. So anyway, who was Paddy Coyne? He ran a pub in Ealing didn't he?

Reg: The Halfway House...and I can never remember whether it was Ealing or Southall.

Interviewer: Was he in construction as well; I think he was, wasn't he?

Reg: Er...no...I don't know, I'm not sure. He worked every night in the Emerald dancehall for a pound-a-night.

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Interviewer: Was that the Caseys ran that? –

Reg: Could've been...[thinks]...oh no, no, no it wasn't the Caseys...no. Anyway it's in my book. He was from Connemara so I suppose he would have come over and done some labouring in the early days. He did that {The Emerald} moonlighting and he earned enough to buy his house; or perhaps to put a deposit on a house for a mortgage or whatever, so he became respectable very early on. And of course eventually he took a pub and what amazed me, he was running a pub with professional traditional performers nearly every night of the week: McMahon, Michael Gorman and Margaret Barry, all these people, and I had no idea it even existed. When his resident band with boxplayers and fluteplayers and what-have-you appeared in the Irish Post it didn't mean a thing to me. But when I went to interview him I thought Christ Almighty I've missed a huge chunk of musical activity over here. Finbarr (Dwyer) used to drink in there and...

Interviewer: But don't you think? – I suppose that's something we haven't really touched on yet, but that associational culture, the way the network worked in London, if you like, was...well...I think it was quite unique; I don't know if it does compare to other cultures?

Reg: Well, who've we got to compare it with? You've got the indigenous English; and we know that there are quite considerable differences, yeah? Attitude to work, attitude to money, housing, marriage, all those things. Who are the immigrants? Greek Cypriots... West Indians...

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess in that period (1950s/1960s) that was about it. You had small populations of Poles and eastern Europeans after the War.

Reg: Well, Yeah but they were insignificant in comparison. You had the Sikhs and the Pakistanis who came in later, but they didn't go in for building labour did they?

Interviewer: Well, no, not on the scale of the Irish or Caribbeans but even apart from the construction industry per se, but the actual way the networks of...of...[pause]... social outlets worked, if you like. The Cypriots, I suppose, might have some...[pause]...comparable basis to work on but like...say for example...the amount of Irish dancehalls...I mean there were, at one stage, what? Forty?

Reg: In my book I've listed forty, although of course, they weren't all around at the same time.

Interviewer: Then there were the Irish pubs. Every part of London I ever went to...I can't think of a part of London I ever visited (which is most of it) that didn't have at least one or two Irish pubs - now I use the term advisedly, but – how do you identify an Irish pub?...You don't, until you get in there.

Reg: I went with some friends – and this is forty years ago – one evening; it might have been a Saturday evening, although it might have been a Friday; to Abingdon in Oxfordshire, a little market town, and this was right in the middle of town and there was these lads all there, all together in a gang. We go into a pub there, and this pub is *filled* with Irish boys, Irish lads; there's a little band there, button-accordion and fiddle, playing *The Carraroe* and stuff like that -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] *Abingdon?* (surprise).

Reg: Abingdon...[pause]...it was packed, in a room about three times the size of this. And they were all wearing working clothes; that's what made me think it wasn't a Saturday.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Roughly what year we talking about?

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Reg: Maybe forty years ago...[pause]...no...maybe eighties...or 1975, something like that.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Can you recall was it an Irishman that ran the place?

Reg: I wouldn't know! We just stayed in there for a couple of drinks and went. I went and talked to them for a while.

Interviewer: That's another potential twist on the whole Irish pub thing because I would always assume that an Irish pub was run by an Irish governor...that may not have always been the case. Y'know, people recognise that there may have been a community of builders or, er, y'know

Reg: [cutting-in] Well if you're running a pub, and all of a sudden a project opens up nearby and -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] There's a hundred Irish builders suddenly now coming in every evening?

Reg: [cutting-in] Yep, building a road, or putting in the sewers or whatever, and now they're in your pub!

Interviewer: And if you put Irish music on they'll *keep* coming in to your pub...[pause]...that's what you're going to do, isn't it? I would've thought. But I'm just as interested in the way the networks of pubs around Kilburn and Camden Town and...[pause]...across north London really. I mean I remember going out with an Irish plastering subcontractor back in the early 80s; now it was a St. Patrick's day, so I suppose it was...[pause]...an unusually Irish day, if you like!...but we went out on the tear and we must've gone to a dozen pubs during that day and they were all *absolutely jammed* to the doors, they were all run by Irishmen. These pubs could've been in Ireland; apart from the fact that you looked out on the street and saw red buses, these pubs could've been in any town in Ireland -

Reg: [cutting-in] Except that they wouldn't, would they? Because the Irish pubs *didn't get* used in the same way there (in Ireland)...

Interviewer: Well, that's true, yeah. Well, except they might've done on St. Patrick's Day, y'know?

Reg: [cutting-in] Yeah, well, fair enough, they might have done alright.

Interviewer: But yeah, Reg, to some extent you're right. That pub *culture* didn't exist in Ireland the way it did in London, I don't think.

Reg: And another thing, before we lose it; ...[pause]...there was an Irish-born population over here (London) who were middle-class; and they worked at the Bank of Ireland, and the Embassy...or the High Commission or whatever it's called...[pause]...what'dya call them the ferry company, B&I Ferries and the Irish Tourist Board. These were the standard outlets for whole rafts of middle-class Irish people everywhere; they were a large group of Irish people. And most of them would've been townspeople and would have been educated to an extent...[pause]...and they *wouldn't have been seen dead* in the company of any of these construction workers or around Irish traditional music. So there was another group of Irish people...I'm only just getting this *out there* for the melting pot...so, like, people who frequented the Irish Club in Eaton Square, they were more middle-class; they were your solicitors and journalists and bank people -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] But they would not have hung around with - ?

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Reg: [cutting-in] I mean, well, no...I mean, I played in the Irish Club with Jimmy Power...[pause]...they didn't know what we were doing! We were booked -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Or perhaps they *did* know what you were doing but didn't want to be seen -

Reg: yeah, like they didn't want to seem to know – but we were booked to play for them at *their* event!

Interviewer: But like, y'know, how much of that...y'know, we've discussed this one before...I mean how much of that is to do with...y'know...Catholic conditioning, if you like, and the notion that this was, y'know...*peasant music*...and, y'know, that we've moved on from that?²² This is the *new* Ireland where -

Reg: [cutting-in] Well, I mean, that's another angle, but I think the *old* Ireland was like that – (laughter) I think the old Ireland was snobbish and middle-class too. Have I told you about Seamus Ennis's diary?²³ (Interviewer: No) Seamus Ennis has a published diary and I've got it somewhere. It came out about five or six years ago and it essentially is 1940-43, or something like that; so it's the war years. He had worked for the Irish Folklore Commission, and it was all on a shoestring...I mean he didn't have a car, he had a motorbike, or a bike of some sort, and he had to send for paper and ink to write stuff down and...you couldn't buy ink in the west of Ireland and, all this sort of thing, I don't know -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Well, I s'pose there *was a war on* (laughter) -

Reg: [cutting-in] Yeah, there was a war on, but...Anyway the thing is here is a man about whom the myth is that he knows everything about traditional Irish music and poetry and dancing and culture, about the sean-nos tradition and culture and what have you. But what's clear to me is that from this diary, he's only interested in very specific artists; people who've got a tune that he's never heard before. He's living in the west of Ireland²⁴ for all this time and he's writing in his diary this sort of "*They only want me to be there to play the pipes to them, I don't feel I can do that*"...all sorts of negative...loads and loads of negativity. Every now and then he raves about somebody like Colm Keane or somebody who's got loads of material but very clearly, he doesn't have that view of these country people that you and I have;y'know, that they danced last night and he'd say well that's the same dancing that I've seen before so often, y'know. But his social outlets – "*I had a picnic yesterday with the schoolteacher, the priest, the police officer and the doctor*"

Interviewer: [cutting-in] So you're suggesting that he's following those class divides?...

Reg: Well that's where he seems to have been having the good times...when he's with all these middle-class people

Interviewer: [cutting-in] So you're suggesting that he's following those class divisions as much as anybody else?...

Reg: Yeah. Which would account, perhaps, for his attitude to Irish traditional music in London.

²² In this context, Interviewer was suggesting 'we' as in the modern middle-class Irish.

²³ Seamus Ennis was one of the most influential musicologists, collectors and Uilleann pipers of the twentieth century. He was a founder member of Na Píobairí Uilleann, worked for the Irish Folklore Commission during the post-war period and eventually moved to the BBC, where his musical heritage contributions continued. He was, and is, a colossal figure in the history of Irish traditional music.

²⁴ Connemara was where Ennis was mainly based during this period.

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Interviewer: [cutting-in] What was his attitude to Irish traditional music in London?...I ask that in all ignorance!...

Reg: ...Well...(laughter)...I saw him, and I played in his company, in the Bedford

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Because, I mean his reputation is as something of a Godfather of traditional music...

Reg: ...Everybody turned up to play at his memorial service, but not many had a good word to say about him at the bar. He owed them all money was one thing it seemed (laughter)...He was...[pause]...d'ya want this on tape?

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Not unless you're happy putting it on tape. I probably won't use it unless it's very relevant anyway.

Reg: I'm happy putting it on tape, but yeah you probably won't need I but you might be able to pick up elements in it. He was headhunted by the BBC, by Brian George, and he came over and worked half-time. So he was a half-time field collector/recordist.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Was that to do recordings *in Ireland*?

Reg: No! For the BBC. Most of his recordings were in England and Scotland – he didn't do very much in Ireland. Like Peter Kennedy he had a free hand to record whatever he wanted. He didn't record *ANY* of the London contingent: Bobby Casey, Willie Clancy, Jimmy Power, Michael Gorman -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Who were *all* in London at this time?

Reg: All of whom were in London at that time; he knew them and he played with them all, oh yes.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] So why didn't he? -

Reg: He came into the Bedford Arms at least twice when I was there. He played the pipes once, he played the fiddle once – I heard him play *Bonnie Kate* and *Jenny's Chickens* on the fiddle and he played the tin whistle two or three times. But any other times I saw him he was either with the English Folk Music and Dance Society or Alan Lomax. Bob Copper, who was a pal of mine, a great folk singer from Sussex; he said that all Ennis did was boozing with the BBC crowd and the 'arty' lot, the C Day-Lewis's and that crowd, and that he was essentially lazy. That kind of blows your myth a bit doesn't it? I think he was a great raconteur, a great artist and performer.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] But that he wasn't really interested in music for music's sake? -

Reg: No...I think...no, he was interested in his image of himself. And you know that other story about when Willie Clancy had died and they had some sort of a memorial evening down in Miltown Malbay and y'know this way the Irish have of writing doggerel verses about the sun coming out and the sun setting on great artists and *will we ever hear the songs again* and that kind of thing, y'know what I mean. Anyway the line came up, "*Willie Clancy the greatest piper the world has ever known*" and according to accounts, Ennis gets up and walks out...(laughter). I mean, I've paraphrased it, but you get the jist.

I suppose what I'm trying to say is that the middle-class Irish, they didn't want to know about Irish music and it just occurs to me that perhaps Ennis and his like just thought that *the labouring men* were...well...*rough* and that maybe they didn't hold the culture. The fact that they *DID* was, perhaps beside the point.

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Interviewer: Well, I think there is...I mean...one thing I suppose you'd have to take into account is that...[pause]...I came out with this phrase that what really interested me about the post-war Irish builders was what I saw as '*the stereotyping of the Irish BY the Irish*' ...so I think a lot of these stereotypes that have been attributed to the *labouring Irish*, the Irish themselves invented them.

Reg: [cutting-in] And then lived them -

Interviewer: Well, and then used them for a variety of purposes. But one of the purposes is to differentiate the middle-class – or the better-off Irish, who stayed in Ireland, from that big labouring class that went to England, if you like. So what you might have there - and this goes back to when you talked about Seamus Ennis, and I don't think he's by far the only example of it, I think there's plenty of examples when you go and look in Ireland – of this slightly snobby attitude that the labouring classes were, as you say, rough, were uncouth, unlettered, illiterate, not very 'arty'

Reg: [cutting-in] Not very sanitary (laughter).

Interviewer: And there may well be truth in all of those things, but that wasn't the image that the Irish were trying to create about Ireland.

Reg: Before you go any further, that notion from the Gaelic League was that we have this integral...this essential Irish culture which is in the genes, which is in the spirit of Gaelicism and Comhaltas and all that stuff.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Which is falling off the trees down to us and all that (laughter) -

Reg: yeah, but every Irishman has it, if he can release it; so that if you're a Gael, a true Gael as opposed to a little Johnny, a Seaneen, a little Englishman...all that sort of total and utter romantic twaddle!...but...now why am I saying that?...oh yes, because they set the notion of the Irish culture, which is in every Irishman, but they don't want to be around the people who actually have it. And those same Gaelic Leaguers, for example, in the early 1900s said that the fiddle was not a traditional instrument. Seamus Ennis!...sends Peter Kennedy in...1953...to Donegal. He says, "Look out for Frank Cassidy. He's the best fiddle-player in Ireland"...hadn't he heard of Fred Finn or Pádraig O'Keefe or Lad O'Bierne?

Interviewer: But coming back to the links with the building industry here. All the traditional Irish musicians...certainly *most* of the ones I can think of, all worked in the construction industry at some point...at least they *started* that way (**Reg:** Yes) I mean they may have moved on and did other things later on.

Reg: Yes, I think there was a move to an easier life later. Jimmy Power worked more on his own and then with his son; Tony Ledwith goes into painting and decorating and then a cleaning firm.

Interviewer: What about people like Mick Masterson, the flute-player; he was a builder most of his days wasn't he? And Tommy Healy, wasn't he a builder most of his life?

Reg: No!...no...Tommy became a school caretaker...another good job. He had been in building...well in construction; he'd been laying railway track and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Tommy McCarthy?

Reg: Was a carpenter. Johnny Duffy?...a sheet-metal work business – on his own.

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Interviewer: Mmm...I think an awful lot of them probably did run their own businesses
(**Reg:** eventually)... eventually, yes.

Reg: But when a nice job came in...for example, Tommy Maguire, Tony Ledwith, I would guess Duffy, they became mobile; they could have a car or a van. And once you've got a van, you can...Tommy Maguire very early on around 1962, he had a van and he worked for a firm that were laying these kind of marbled floors like in shops.

Interviewer: yeah, I think they call that Terrazzo flooring.

Reg: yeah, well that's what Tommy was doing when I knew him. After I knew him. He had been labouring and whatever early on and that's what they did wasn't it?

Interviewer: yeah, they turned their hands to whatever was most promising. Again that's one of the things that intrigues me most, really, that this idea of the *navvying* classes – that all they were good for really was a shovel. I mean, these were men who, for the most part, actually *weren't on the shovel*. Most of them were either carpenters, plasterers...

Reg: [cutting-in] Well look at Liam Farrell...[pause]...he told me he never missed a day's work in his life. He retired and he still carried on working. He was a good man with a shovel, but he could lay out an entire field...I mean lay it out to line and level.²⁵ I mean, what does that tell you? He must have done maths and geometry and all at some stage. I don't know if he drove the machines or whatever, but he said "I can just lay out footings".

Interviewer: yeah, I'm sure he could, I'm sure he could. But this brings us to another aspect of my arguments, which is this notion that somehow labouring, and the labouring classes were *unskilled*. Anybody who's ever worked onsite would know that...Sean Gilrane was telling me about Andy Fleming...who was a drainlayer...and how much of a legend he was in the civil engineering world, especially at Clancys where he worked most of his life. To suggest that men like that are *unskilled* is just to completely misrepresent what they do.

Reg: I left school in '52 in July and I was called up at the end of September and all that time I worked. I worked for two little firms and for the last six weeks I was working at Gravesend Corporation as a navvy. As an ex-schoolboy...well, I was nineteen and I was put in with the navvies, and there were two of us. We were on six pounds a week because we were over eighteen so like everybody else we got six pounds a week. I laid tarmac, I dug roads – where we dug up the roads for gas and electric work, we put up big concrete lamp standards...[pause]...I can't think what else we did...but, the ganger – an old boy in his fifties – he had amazing skill. I mean I remember we had to fill a lorry with soil and the lorry driver came along...me and this other young lad as well, so two ex-schoolboys and we had to fill it up and he (the ganger) said, "Well, you start in this corner and then you grade the stuff across and...(physically shows what ganger was showing them). And I thought, "My God, look at the sheer skill he's got...with a bloody shovel!". And this man - the old boy – put up the lamp standards; there was a rope on one bit and another rope on another bit and he told us when to push and pull and turn ; all in the middle of Gravesend town centre...and it was all done by eye! Did the whole bloody thing by eye!

Interviewer: Yep...there was a friend of mine, a Wexford man John Hayden, who paved the back garden in our first house in Plaistow and I remember him and his buddy came and did it one Saturday. It wasn't a huge area but I guess it would be probably about the size of this floor, y'know? Dug it all up; it was all kind of overgrown bush. Dug it all up, wheeled the spoil out through the house, levelled it, rolled it, sand, blinding and concrete paving slabs. He never used a level!...[pause]...*never used a level*...[pause]...he could do it by eye, and I'd say the likes of Danny

²⁵ Probably referring to 'setting out' a field for construction or levelling for construction work.

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Meehan was the same. My dad had similar skills as a carpenter and I'd say James Carty would be very similar, y'know? They'd be able to cut a sheet of ply straight without actually having to draw a line on it... 'cause they just *know*... they've got a *good eye* for it, y'know? That's... [pause]... to call people like that *un-skilled* is... well... a travesty, I think.

Reg: Is this helpful? I mean is this what you were expecting? I'm not really telling you anything you don't already know... [pause]... I'm just sort of confirming a lot of things for you, really.

Interviewer: Yep... you are confirming a lot of things for me, but you are also telling me lots of new stuff. We talked a bit about the Irish dance halls earlier, but I meant to ask you... [pause]... do you remember that talk you did in Dublin recently that we met at? You mentioned a phrase that really stuck with me -

Reg: (smiles)... "The Irish Mafia"?....

Interviewer: Yep, that's the one! Do you remember that?... D'you want to tell me anything about that?

Reg: Well, that came from the Irish dance teacher... [pause]... whose name I can't think of, 'cause I'm bad with names at the moment... er... but he was one of the pre-war children whose mum and dad ran ceili bands before the war and then he came along after the war as a young lad and was teaching dancing right the way through the 1950s and 1960s... his name's in the book and he's quoted. He was deep into the 'modern' movement of Irish dancing, but he came from the pre-war London-Irish Gaelic-league sort of movement. And he talked about the Irish dancehalls - and specifically the Casey Brothers - as the Irish Mafia.

Interviewer: The Caseys... what do you know about them?

Reg: The Caseys were from Kerry. They came over in the thirties. But they were very, very successful athletes and... at one stage they were even supposed to be rowing for England in the Olympics, but because they'd also done some professional boxing and wrestling, they were disqualified. There were about three of them... and again, they're in the book, so you can look them up. One of them went to America and had sort of show-business success with the wrestling. They were all tough lads. Anyway when the (Irish) dancehall scene started in London round about 1933 with Frank Lee, they got in on the act.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Was Frank Lee the first one to?-

Reg: Yea, but he was Gaelic League background, I mean he was London-Irish by birth and was sort of Gaelic-League/IRA background, so he was '*respectable*'.

Interviewer: [cutting-in] As opposed to?-

Reg: As opposed to these rather bully-boy, flash musclemen with their entourage of heavies, who had show-business experience in America, who saw you could make a commercial killing out of Irish dancing. So the first one they ran the... in the mid-thirties... this is all documented in the book but just from memory... they opened up in Queensway, *St. Patrick's* I think they called it. That was weekends, and it was modern dancing with a bit of ceili. Then they opened up *The Shamrock* at the Elephant²⁶... [pause] and they put Byrnes in there as their manager.

²⁶ The Elephant and Castle is a major road junction in South London, England, in the London Borough of Southwark. The surrounding residential and commercial areas are known by the same name.

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Interviewer: [cutting-in] John Byrnes?-

Reg: John Byrnes²⁷

Interviewer: Right...[pause]...another Kerryman!

Reg: Was he Kerry?

Interviewer: I think he was...Finogue or Finuge or something²⁸

Reg: Anyway eventually Paddy Casey and Byrnes had a big fallout and one night at the dance – the public dance, apparently with all the dancers there and the band on stage and everything...I got this on good authority from someone who saw it...Byrnes' men lined up one side of the hall and Casey's men the other and they went at it.

Interviewer: you mean, like...a full-blown brawl? (**Reg:** Oh yeah). So by this time, then, Byrnes had his own...troops...his own posse, if you like?

Reg: Oh yeah...and he was managing the Shamrock Club for the Caseys

Interviewer: [cutting-in] That's funny now...sorry for interrupting, but just while I think of it I'd like to know what you make of this, but my dad always told me that Byrnes made his money initially out of clearing bomb sites during the war.

Reg: He might have done...I don't know. That may have been before he got involved in managing dancehalls. This (the big fight) would have been, er...around 1957²⁹...and, of course, off the back of that Byrnes is immediately sacked, or walks out. He's no longer the manager of the Shamrock dancehall, so he then gets the lease on the Galtymore, which I think was actually already operating as a dancehall, but I don't know who had it. Byrnes opens the Galtymore...and of course, you'd know more about this than me in many ways, as you've got very personal connections with the Galtymore...but the unique thing about the Galty is that it had the two halls – one for Ceili dancing and a larger ground floor one for modern dancing. In it's time this was a very clever thing to do business-wise. And then, of course, what you've got is your west-of-Ireland people following the Ceili stuff and the *Siege of Ennis* dances and then the east-coast and others following modern showband music.

Interviewer: Yeah...it's a *win-win* solution, isn't it? Well, I mean the success of the Galty speaks for itself, we needn't go any further than that! But I'm intrigued by... [pause]...I don't know if you've ever considered this... [pause]...If you look at some of the most successful entrepreneurs that came out of the post-war Irish migrant wave – we just mentioned two of them there...the Casey brothers were Kerry, John Byrne was Kerry, Bill Fuller went to school with John Byrne – did you know that? They were in the same class at National School; I got that from a newspaper article about them both. John and Joe Murphy came from Kerry -

²⁷ John Byrne (1919-2013) - almost always known as 'Byrnes' with an 's' in London - was one of the most influential impresarios, property developers and pioneer migrant builders on the London-Irish landscape. He developed and opened the legendary Galtymore Club in Cricklewood in 1953 and went on to become a highly successful commercial developer in Ireland and Britain.

²⁸ This turned out to be mis-remembered. John Byrne was actually from Kilflynn in north Kerry.

²⁹ Dr. Hall is out by a few years here. According to Ronan McGreevy in *The Irish Times*, 28 April, 2008, the Galtymore first opened its doors in 1952, which would put the date of the Casey/Byrnes feud earlier still.

Original Interview # 22 (Contextual)

Dr. Reg Hall

Reg: Are they the builders John and Joe? So is that, are you suggesting, because there's something indigenous in Kerry culture, or is it networking?

Interviewer: Good question...I was gonna ask YOU that Reg! (laughter). Is it networking, or is there some fundamental?... Well you can't...it doesn't stack up to argue it's something indigenous because there's also some hugely successful business stories from...[pause]...Sligo and Mayo, the McNicholas's, the Gallaghers.

Reg: I was told there were five millionaires thirty or forty years ago in Bohola!

Interviewer: Yep, that could well be the case...certainly the McNicholas's were all millionaires by that stage. The Gallagher brothers from Tubbercurry?...hugely successful...hugely...Abbey Homes; four of five brothers started that back in the thirties. Then there was the McInerneys down in Clare. So there's no identifiable geographic factor but there's something certainly going on in Kerry.

Reg: And another interesting thing would be to know what their social backgrounds were. Were they small farmers or were they *mountainy men* who actually...I also learnt from Denny Hickey...it was the *mountainy men* who didn't have any property in Ireland, who lived in the poor mountain districts, who came over here and did the moonlighting...did two jobs and built up the money.

Interviewer: My guess is it's more to do with the middling farmers.

(Interview interrupted by arrival of Reg's daughter, Debbie – short personal conversation follows)

Interviewer: Shall we stop now, or do you -

Reg: No...we'll carry on for a bit. STORIES! – John Neary, who was over before the war, he was in the Dagenham Irish Pipe Band – he worked at Dagenham³⁰ but he was a bit of an awkward so-and-so and they got rid of him, but anyway...he'd done a little bit of business in the showband scene, and he gets a lease of a hall in Romford³¹ with another friend of his and they open a dancehall. It's going well for about six weeks, then a gang of blokes come in and smash the place up. The next week it's run by the Caseys. Another story I was told – it's in the book, I can't remember the fellow's name but he opened a dancehall too. He's kneeling at Mass praying one morning when a fist comes from behind, hits him on the side of the head, and he's knocked out. Another story I got from John Neary about a dancehall owner who's leaving the club one night, gets picked up in taxi. A bag's put over his head and he's driven around for about three hours with two men telling him what they might do to him and which river he might end up in. Edmund Murphy,³² he didn't really play the dancehalls much, but he was playing this particular occasion at a dancehall in *The Angel*,³³ above some shop at the Angel crossroads there – he told me this

³⁰ Fords of Dagenham, the major motorcar manufacturer, which was the main employer in that part of Essex and east London.

³¹ Romford, a district of Essex on the borders of east London, just inside the confines of the modern M25 orbital motorway.

³² Edmund Murphy is mentioned elsewhere in this thesis; he was one of the early wartime/post-war migrants, a fiddleplayer from Tubbercurry, Co Sligo who went on to run a successful civil engineering subcontract business.

³³ The Angel, Islington is a historic landmark and a series of buildings that have stood on the corner of Islington High Street and Pentonville Road in Islington, London, England. The land originally belonged to the Clerkenwell Priory and has had various properties built on it since the 16th century. The site was bisected by the New Road, which opened in 1756, and properties on the site have been rebuilt several times up to the 20th century.

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himself – he was booked to play that night in the dancehall. When he comes in a whole gang of fellas come in and start looking around and talking about the place and how the bar shouldn't have re-opened and basically to run the place down to turn off any potential customers.

Interviewer: So there was some sort of cartel operating you think?

Reg: Yea...I'd say so. Y'know, the attitude was, "well, I'm not letting *you* open and take *my* trade.

Interviewer: Again, in fairness, really you wouldn't expect anything else. There was organised crime in London long before that to do with London dancehalls...y'know, like indigenous dancehalls. There was organised crime in Glasgow to do with ice-cream vans and stuff

Reg: I don't doubt it. But then again – I have mentioned it, but it's not actually in my book...horse-racing, gambling, betting shops, dog-tracks...I mean how far were Irish people involved?...*(jolts)* OH I KNOW WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY! I met a bloke and he said his dad worked in the *Galtymore*...no...he worked in the *Four Provinces Dancehall* and he reckoned that most of these smaller dancehalls were financed by dead-men's money. You know what dead-man's money is?

Interviewer: I do. You mean dead-men in relation to building sites? Men being booked on jobs but they weren't there.

Reg: yeah...and then building up their wages so that they take the wages for people that don't exist. In the end they've got three thousand quid and they can open a dancehall. He was saying that they were *ALL* financed that way.

Interviewer: Dead-men...I've got a chapter in my thesis called 'dead-men working'! *(laughs)*...that culture, when I was first in the industry, was still going on in the eighties. Not necessarily siphoning off money to do that (financing dancehalls) but I mean the culture of '*dead-men*'. I worked with a project-manager and...my God if I'd known I was going to be doing this research twenty years later I'd have taped him then and there! This guy was first-generation London-born Irish, his father had been from Connemara, his father had been a hardcase labourer around Camden Town and he'd grown up around the Irish in the building game. He talked about this English project manager he worked with for years, a right flash-Harry type with the dark glasses, flash suit and the gold jewellery dripping off him. He said the first thing this manager would ask on a job was, "How many dead-men are you booking here?"...and if you hadn't enough then he'd want more in, because he was getting his slice of the action as well, y'know? But, I mean that kind of graft was going on for ages...I mean...you only ever hear the anecdotal version, of course, because...well...for obvious reasons, really...But like, people who ran muckaway lorries³⁴ for example. There was HUGE rackets to be had there because, y'know, before jobs and dumps had weighbridges and accurate scales and volumisers and stuff, you could get away with lorries only being maybe half-loaded and they'd be getting paid for a full load for each lorry...50% mark-up being made on each load! All you needed was a bloke on the gate who was signing the dockets as full loads and...y'know...you're slipping him a few quid for his trouble. Did you ever hear of that kind of racket?

Reg: I've never come across that with anybody I know...I mean, I can well believe it. I've never really heard of muckaway.

The corner site gave its name to Angel tube station, opened in 1901, and the surrounding Angel area of London.

³⁴ 'Muckaway' is the construction vernacular for excavation or demolition spoil removal, an activity which usually forms a major part of the early sequence of any construction project.

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Interviewer: Muckaway is just a generic term...I mean anyone shifting spoil or rubbish is called muckaway...McGee's now, for example, would be vernacularly called 'muckaway'.

Reg: Yeah, well I mean we all know, for example, that builders are flytippers.³⁵ Because obviously it saves them paying tipping fees. Of course, at the moment that's a big racket.

Interviewer: To a certain extent we have to keep things in context; the construction industry has always been open to those kind of rackets...and probably always will be. It kind of links in with what you were talking about went on in the dancehalls; like, effectively you can see a big...like a network of money flowing around

Reg: But you see the reality is that the dancehalls were very cheap to rent. I knew, for example, that Burtons – the tailoring retail chain? Well they rented all their upstairs halls as dancehalls. There was Kilburn, Cricklewood, Clapham, Tooting, there was Brixton...all these small dancehalls above a shop. So anyway I got on to Burtons and sure enough they had an archivist, who was very willing to talk to me about it. He confirmed that all these shops were built around 1933-34 – which fits in nicely with Frank Lee's story. But all these shops followed a pattern of architecture; they all had a reinforced upper floor in order to rent out as either a dancehall or a billiards hall -

Interviewer: So they were designed that way?

Reg: Yes, they were designed that way, and anyway, so I asked him, "Well what about the price then?" And he said, "We'd let them out in the thirties probably for some silly price like four pound a night!"...and he said they were still letting them out for the same sort of rates in the fifties. So when you work it out, I mean I talk about all this in the book, but in rough terms they were probably paying maybe twenty quid a week to rent these halls, paying a band two pounds each a night, they might spend a few quid on a stage and a flag, they might insist on staff and the band wearing dinner suits or what-have-you...and it's all cash-in-hand. Then at midnight on Saturday or Sunday night they sweep up and they go home. And they come back the following Friday night. They never had to worry about cleaning the windows, putting the radiators on, cleaning out the lavatories? I don't know, but they were actually doing it on a shoestring.

Interviewer: Y'know, I've a picture of John Byrne in 1966 I think it was. He had a private plane in Kerry, used to go to all the big race meetings, he was a racehorse owner in Ireland...and this is another thing that gets me, because you can say the same thing about the Gallaghers from Tubbercurry and the Murphys – John Murphy to a lesser extent, Joe a bit more; there's several other of these big building tycoons...they go to Ireland, they're mixing it with all the high-society circles...all the 'right' people – politicians, the wealthy upper-class Irish. In London, they're raking in bags of money in the Galtymore and...

Reg: What's notable, and really it's just an extension of what you're saying is that their interest isn't in Irish culture or in that sense of Irish spirit which we talked about; they're not interested in the art, or in the value of dancing and socialising or of traditional music, it's just -

Interviewer: [cutting-in] Some of them might have had an interest in the music-

Reg: [cutting-in] You should hear what some of 'em used to say about the likes of Bobby Casey! We did a ceili at the Inishfree, the Four Courts Ceili Band, y'know, about a seven or eight-

³⁵ Flytipping is another vernacular term for the illegal dumping of rubbish or demolition/excavation spoil in unauthorised locations; commonly in quiet industrial roadside ditches or hedges, or country lanes or on farmers lands.

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piece band, Jimmy Power's band. In the Bedford we used to play quite slowly; but we could play fast. We could play all the old-time waltzes and all that. Anyway, we were to get twenty-three quid for the dance – for the whole band. I think we finished at about one and we went and had beers and stuff. Jimmy went to collect the money and they (the Caseys) said, "you're not worth twenty-three quid, here's eighteen". What can you do? Take it or leave it. The other one I was going to tell you, old Julia Clifford, she was Kerry, she was invited once to the Casey's house...and...I forget what her expression was...but she said they had lovely gardens and there were drinks and canapés and all that sort of stuff, but...they were all served by young girls in Bikinis! That all sounds rather suspect doesn't it? That might be in the book but I'm not sure. But doesn't that all fit in with that air of owning planes and racehorses and gangsters and all that...sort of a bit like those images of Playboy...

END

Appendix G: - Migrant Folksong & Verse.

Note: This appendix accompanies chapter 6 of the thesis. It is a selective bibliography of the most influential of the verses, recitations, working and commercial, folk-songs composed by various people, some working builders, most commercial recording artists over the period of the post-war folk revival from the mid-1950s onwards. I contend that the material reproduced here was instrumental in the process of mythologization and fetishization of Irish migrant manual labour, and was a significant factor in the culture of performative Irishness which pervaded the ethnic enclave from c.1950-1990.

POOR PADDY WORKS ON THE RAILWAY ¹

In eighteen hundred and forty-one,
My corduroy britches I put on,
My corduroy britches I put on
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway—poor Paddy works on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-two
From Hartlepool I moved to Crewe
And found m'self a job to do
Working on the railway.

Chorus on 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th verses:
I was wearing corduroy britches, digging ditches.
Pulling switches, dodging the hitches,
I was working on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-three
I broke my shovel across my knee
And went to work for the company
Of the Leeds and Selby Railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-four

¹ In *The American Songbag*, the writer Carl Sandburg claims that the song has been published in sheet music since the early 1850s, (see Carl T Sandburg, *The American Songbag*, (New York, 1927). The earliest confirmed date of publication is from 1864 from a manuscript magazine. Ernest Bourne recorded the first version, released in 1941, by Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress in 1938 [Roud 208 ; Ballad Index LxU076 ; Wiltshire 425 ; trad.], Ewan MacColl sang *Poor Paddy Works on the Railway* in 1951 on a Topic shellac record (TRC50). This track was included in 1954 on his, Isla Cameron's and the Topic Singers untitled album (TRL1). He also sang it on his and Peggy Seeger's 1957 Topic album of industrial folk ballads, *Shuttle and Cage*, most of which was included in 1964 on *Steam Whistle Ballads*. The liner notes commented: 'This song, long popular in the United States, was the product of Irish immigrant labourers, who moved west with the great railway expansions in the middle of the 19th century. A questionnaire (1952) circulated in a number of loco sheds in Northern England, produced five versions of this song.' In the past few years, British folksingers have tended to fuse two versions into a single song. Ewan MacColl sings a collation of a slow version from Liverpool and a fast version from Hellefield in Yorkshire. Louis Killen sang Paddy Works on the Railway in 1980 on his Collector album of songs of the British industrial revolution, *Gallant Lads Are We*. He noted: Different from the perhaps better known U.S. ballad [Roud 13611], it tells how the Irish labourers built the railways and transformed British economic and social history with muscle and shovel. It has been performed by numerous Irish folk singers, including Ewan MacColl, The Weavers, Luke Kelly of The Dubliners, The Wolfe Tones, The Tossers, The Kelly Family, Shane MacGowan and The Pogues, who recorded it on their 1984 album *Red Roses for Me*.

I landed on the Liverpool shore;
My belly was empty, my hands were sore
From working on the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway—poor Paddy works on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-five
When Dan O'Connell, he was alive;
Dan O'Connell he was alive
And working on the railway.
(Chorus: He was wearing, etc.)

In eighteen hundred and forty-six
I changed my trade from carrying bricks,
I changed my trade from carrying bricks
To working on the railway.

In eighteen hundred and forty-seven
Poor Paddy was thinking of going to heaven.
Poor Paddy was thinking of going to heaven
To work upon the railway, the railway,
I'm weary of the railway—poor Paddy works on the railway.

THE MEN O' '39 ²

Come all you Pincher Kiddies and all long distance men,
You may be over in this land, nine years or maybe ten,
You may have tramped this country o'er from Plymouth to the Tyne,
But there's not a word about the boys sir came in '39.

There's not a word about the lads from old Kinsale,
And took the road to Dublin; from Dun Laoghaire they did sail.
The man up in the Globe Hotel, he gave them the 'o'grand',
Saying, good luck upon you Paddy, with the passport in your hand.

Some of those Pincher Kiddies came when England needed men,
His catchword was to catch for the famous Darkie Finn.

² This song/recitation is attributed to **Martin Henry** by the well-known musician and singer Michael Falsey of Quilty, County Clare. It was originally written as a recitation poem. Martin Henry, came from Doocastle, very close to Cloontia in Co Mayo, and came from a noted family of traditional musicians. Martin Thomas Henry (17th Oct., 1918 - 10th March, 1987); he was 11 years older than his brother Kevin, who also went on to become a famous musician amongst the Chicago Irish community and lived until 2020. Martin emigrated to the UK in 1938 or '39 and worked as a spailpin for the remainder of his life. He worked all over England, down the coal mines of Wigan and Doncaster, in the summer months saving hay on the Lincolnshire farms, picking spuds and beet etc. He worked on construction in London, on and off with Murphy, McAlpine and his brother, Chris's subcontract business. He was himself one of the original *McAlpine's Fusiliers* He came home most years around Christmas for a few months to help on the his father's farm and drawing turf from the bog. It was during these times that Kevin learned the latest of Martin's poems while working with him on the bog. He was known as the village writer, relating local events through his poetic compositions, some of which were delivered through song. When he was a little older, Kevin joined Martin working as a spailpin in England for a few years and recalled hiring fairs in Bentham in North Yorkshire, where he and Martin were frequently hired for a few weeks at a time mainly bringing in hay if the weather was fine or , if not they were put mending ditches. (I am indebted to Richard Piggott, of Chicago and Galway for this information - see email 13 July, 2020).

To slave behind a mixer until your skin turned tanned,
And to say, good on you Paddy, with the passport in your hand.

We travelled up from Liverpool, down to sunny Cornwall;
We got off the bus and scampered when the bombs began to fall.
As Hitler, with his doodlebugs upon us all did land,
We tote the gun with their gas masks on and our passports in our hand.

We worked along the slipways, on the runways and the docks,
And the fourteen blue card numbers soon had us on the rocks.
We prayed to god in heaven above and for de Valera's band.
And we'll cast our vote and take the boat to Erin's lovely land.

Now all of you who stayed at home and never crossed the pond,
And didn't work for Wimpey, McAlpine or John Laing,
Or slave behind a mixer until your skin is tanned,
And to say goodbye to you Paddy, with your passport in your hand.

Now our six months is nearly up and we'll be going home.
We'll tell the welfare officer we never more will roam,
We'll say farewell to all the girls we met up in the Strand,
And we'll bid adieu and change at Crewe with our passports in our hand.

MacALPINE'S FUSILIERS (ORIGINAL VERSION) ³

Did your mother come from Ireland and what part of Donegal?,
You'll get rashers, eggs and bacon, if you get anything at all,
And for timbering and shuttering we'll give three ringing cheers,
For Dan McCann, he's a handy man in MacAlpine's Fusiliers.

Now, my lads, this famous regiment all came from Irish Fáil,
We drove the Mersey Tunnel and we sank at Abervale,
And it's for the FP headings we had plenty volunteers
We took the best and we sacked the rest in Mac Alpine's Fusiliers.

Of course, no doubt, you've heard about our foremost ganger men,
There is Timber-tack Roddy and the famous Darkie Finn,
And it's for one Joe McGeever we'll give three ringing cheers,
He's a regimental sergeant major in MacAlpine's Fusiliers.

And as you walk along the bank, sure you can plainly see,
The moleskin and the navy's knot, as we all look 'pinsirly',
When the graft is tough, we're all cat rough, we have no dread or fear,
And 'tis in the pub we'll drink the sub with MacAlpine's Fusiliers.

³ This song was also written by **Martin Henry** (see fn1); see also Batty Sherlock, Thomas .B. Ryan, Ceol agus Cantan as Dumha 'Chaisil, (Achadh Mór, Co. Mháigh Eo, 2007), p.63. Folklorist and musician Joe Byrne confirmed that Martin Henry, of Doocastle, very close to Cloontia in Co Mayo, who was himself one of McAlpine's Fusiliers and came from a noted family of traditional musicians, wrote the original version in 1942, which includes an additional reference to another Cloontia man, Joe McKeever - a cousin of Darkie Finn – being 'A regimental sergeant major in McAlpine's Fusiliers'.

We'll not forget the ould 'hay boys', with their fancy shirts and suits,
We'll make them don the moleskins with the yorks and navvie's boots,
We'll make them do the distance like the old pinchers did for years,
And we'll tear it out when we get the shout, in MacAlpine's Fusiliers.

And it came to pass, we should go to mass, on the Immaculate Conception,
The foreman met us at the gate, and gave us a terrible reception,
"Get down the sewers, ye Kerry hoors, and never mind your prayers"
For the only God is a well filled hod, With McAlpine's Fusiliers.⁴

Now, here's good luck as we dig that muck, for we're all long-distance men
Who've travelled down from Camden Town through Chorley and Bridge End,
And one day we'll tramp for Downing Street to see the Lords and Peers,
And it's on the map we'll fill the gap with MacAlpine's Fusiliers.

McALPINE'S FUSILIERS (COMMERCIAL VERSION)⁵

(Spoken:)

'Twas in the year of 'thirty-nine,
When the sky was full of lead,
When Hitler was heading for Poland,
And Paddy, for Holyhead,
Come all you pincher laddies,
And you long-distance men,
Don't ever work for McAlpine,
For Wimpey, or John Laing,
You'll stand behind a mixer,
And your skin is turned to tan,
And they'll say, Good on you, Paddy,
With your boat-fare in your hand.

The craic was good in Cricklewood,
And they wouldn't leave the Crown,
With glasses flying and Biddy's crying,
'Cause Paddy was going to town,
Oh mother dear, I'm over here,
And I'm never coming back,

⁴ This verse was not commonly sung except by some of the original old-timers of MacAlpine's Fusiliers. See John J. O'Connor, 'Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine's Fusiliers' in *Ireland's Own*, (17 Sep, 2018), available at <https://www.irelandsown.ie/mystery-of-the-man-who-wrote-mcalpines-fusiliers/> (accessed 23 Feb, 2019).

⁵ Dominic Behan, 'McAlpine's Fusiliers', song nr. 16 in Harte and Lunny - *There's Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*. The controversy over this anthem of Irish migrant work in Britain stems from the debate over authorship and royalties. John. J. O'Connor states that, 'For many years it has been an open secret among Irishmen who toiled in the construction trade in England that Dominic Behan did not write the words to *McAlpine's Fusiliers*. When the song was released by the Dubliners in 1965, [and later on their 'Live at the Albert Hall' album in 1968], Dominic was given credit for writing the words, and Essex Music International got the copyright.' As can be seen from the earlier version on p.3, Martin Henry was the original author. The song was passed around the sites and pubs of 1940s and 1950s London, and probably came to be known by Brian Behan, an elder brother of Dominic, who later accused him on an Irish national television talk show of stealing the words, adding that the nearest that Dominic had ever come to working on a building site was when he posed as a hod-carrier with a straw hat on his head. See John J. O'Connor, 'Mystery of the Man who Wrote McAlpine's Fusiliers' in *Ireland's Own*, (17 Sep, 2018), available at <https://www.irelandsown.ie/mystery-of-the-man-who-wrote-mcalpines-fusiliers/> (accessed 23 Feb, 2019).

What keeps me here is the rake o' beer,
The women and the craic,
I come from county Kerry,
The land of eggs and bacon,
And if you think I'll eat your fish 'n' chips,
Byjasus you're mistaken.

I remember the day on the hydro-dam,
when the concrete wall caved in,
We thought we lost the gangerman,
The poor old Darkie Flynn,
'Twas McAlpine blew the whistle,
And then he raised the shout,
Get the boys from County Mayo,
And we'll dig poor Darkie out.

Now McAlpine is in Miami,
And John Laing is in Amsterdam,
And Paddy's in King's Cross Station,
With his suitcase in his hand,
McAlpine he pours whiskey
And John Laing he pours champagne
But Paddy's still pouring concrete,
and he never stops for rain.

(Sung)
As down the glen came McAlpine's men,
With their shovels slung behind them,
'Twas in the pub they drank the sub,
And up in the spike you'll find them,

They sweated blood and they washed down mud,
With pints and quarts of beer,
And now we're on the road again,
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

I stripped to the skin with Darky Flynn,
Way down upon the Isle of Grain,
With the Horseface O'Toole, then I knew the rule,
No money if you stop for rain,

McAlpine's God was a well filled hod,
Your shoulders cut to bits and seared,
And woe to he who to looks for tea,
With McAlpine's fusiliers,

I remember the day that the Bear O'Shea,
Fell into a concrete stairs,
What the Horseface said, when he saw him dead,
Well, it wasn't what the rich call prayers,

I'm a navvy short was the one retort,
That reached unto my ears,
When the going is rough, well you must be tough,
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

I've worked 'till the sweat has had me bet,
With Russian, Czech and Pole,
On shuttering jams up in the hydro dams,
Or underneath the Thames in a hole,

I grafted hard and I've got me cards,
And many a ganger's fist across me ears,
If you pride your life, don't join by Christ,
With McAlpine's fusiliers.

CROOKED JACK ⁶

Come Irishmen both young and stern
With adventure in your soul,
There are other ways to spend your days
Than working down a hole,

CHORUS:

I was tall and true, all of six foot two
Till they broke me across the back,
By a name I'm known that's not my own
For they call me Crooked Jack.

The ganger's blue eyed pet I was,
Big Jack could do no wrong,
And the reason simply was because
I could work hard hours and long.

CHORUS:

I saw men old before their time,
Their faces drawn and grey,
I never thought so soon would mine,
Be lined the selfsame way.

CHORUS:

I cursed the day I went away,
To work on the hydro' dams,
Our sweat and tears, our hopes and fears,
Bound up in shuttering jamms.

⁶ Dominic Behan, (Coda Music Ltd, 1965). Written in the mid-1960s and referencing a friend of Behan's, Eamonn Smullen, of whom Behan wrote in the notes to the song's publication, 'he was a good Republican Socialist, worked on the Hydro-Electric scheme in Inverary, Scotland. He described conditions under which the men worked as appalling.' The Inverary hydro-electric scheme which Smullen worked on was built in the early 1950s as part of the massive Scottish Hydro-electric power generation schemes undertaken after the nationalisation of the electrical generation industry in 1948. These schemes employed thousands of migrants from various European countries but a significant proportion of which came from Ireland (Jim McLean, Discussion of navy folklore (Date: 22 Apr 05) concerning Crooked Jack on folksong forum Mudcat Café, available at: <http://www.mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=42369> [Accessed, 16 June, 2016]

CHORUS:

They'll say that honest toil is good
For the spirit and the soul,
But believe me boys it's for sweat and blood,
That they want you down that hole,

CHORUS

PADDY ON THE ROAD ⁷

I've won a hero's name with McAlpine and Costain
With Fitzpatrick, Murphy, Ashe and Wimpey's gang
I've been often on the road on my way to draw the dole
When there's nothing left to do for Sir John Laing
I used to think that God made the mixer pick and hod
So that Paddy might know hell above the ground
I've had gangers big and tough tell me tear it all out rough
When you're building up and tearing England down

In a tunnel underground a young Limerick man was found
He was built into the new Victoria Line
When the pouring gang had past sticking through the concrete cast
Was the face of little Charlie Joe Devine
And the ganger man McGurk big Paddy ate the work
When the gas main burst and he flew off the ground
Oh they swear he said "Don't slack, I'll not be here until I'm back"
Keep on building up and tearing England down

I remember Carrier Jack with his hod upon his back
How he swore he'd one day set the world on fire
But his face they've never seen since his shovel it cut clean
Through the middle of a big high tension wire
I saw auld Bald McGann from the big flyover fall
Into a concrete mixer spinning round
Although his life was spent he got a fine head of cement
As he was building up and tearing England down

I was on the hydro dam the day that Pat McCann
Got the better of his stammer in a week
He fell from the shuttering jam and that poor auld stuttering man
He was never ever more inclined to speak
No more like Robin Hood will he roam through Cricklewood
Or dance around the pubs of Camden Town

⁷ Dominic Behan, 'Building Up and Tearing England Down', song nr. 13 in Harte and Lunny - *There's Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour*. The late Frank Harte (1933-2005), a noted folklorist and song collector included this song in an earlier collection as 'Paddy on the Road' in *Songs of Dublin*, Gilbert Dalton (Dublin, 1978); Ossian Publications, (Cork, 1993). Written around 1968 by Dominic Behan and recorded by Christy Moore in 1969 on his debut album of the same name. The Dubliners recorded the song on their albums *Prodigal Sons* and *Live in Carré*, in 1983.

But let no man complain Paddy does not die in vain
When he's building up and tearing England down

So come all you navvies bold who think that English gold
Is just waiting to be taken from each sod
Or that the likes of you and me could ever get an OBE
Or an knighthood for good service to the hod
They've the concrete master race to keep you in your place
The ganger man to kick you to the ground
If you ever try to take part of what the bosses make
When they're building up and tearing England down

TUNNEL TIGERS ⁸

Hares run free on the Wicklow mountains,
Wild geese fly and foxes play;
Sporting Wicklow boys are working,
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

Chorus (after each verse):
Up with the shield and jack it! Ram it!
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

Below Armagh the wild ducks breeding,
Wild fowl gather on Lough Rea,
The sporting boys of Longford County
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

The Lough Derg trout grow fat and lazy,
Salmon sport in Cushla bay;
Fishermen of Connemara
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

The curragh rots on Achill Island,
Tourists walk on the Newport quay;
Mayo boys have all gone roving,
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

⁸ Ewan MacColl sang his own song *The Tunnel Tigers* in 1972 on his Argo album *Solo Flight*. The liner notes stated: Written by Ewan MacColl in 1966 for a BBC documentary film dealing with the building of the Victoria Underground Line in London. This song was written by Ewan MacColl for a B.B.C. documentary film *The Irishmen*, and can be found in the Oak Publication's song book *I'm a Freeborn Man*, featuring songs by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. For so many years the lot of the Irish labourer has been to come to England to seek work, and this very powerful, yet touching song gives expression to how so many must have felt about the experience. Danny Spooner and Duncan Brown returned to this song in 2016 on their CD of songs of the working life, *Labour and Toil*. The album's notes commented: Writer Ewan MacColl credits the tune as the traditional Wexford air William Taylor, with the chorus tune by MacColl himself. The song records the travails of the Irish labourers who worked on the original Dartford Tunnel under the River Thames. Very dangerous work indeed. The original tunnel was constructed in stages between 1936 and 1963. A second tunnel (1974 to 1986) was supplemented by a bridge—the Queen Elizabeth Bridge, opened on 1991. (Sources: As quoted above & 'Mainly Norfolk: English Folk and Other Good Music' available at: <https://mainlynorfolk.info/ewan.maccoll/songs/thetunneltigers.html> (accessed 11 September, 2019).

The Carlow girls are fine and handsome,
All decked out so neat and gay;
Carlow boys don't come to court 'em
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

Down in the dark are the tunnel tigers,
Far from the sun and the light of day;
Down in the land that the sea once buried,
Driving a tunnel through the London clay.

HOT ASPHALT⁹

Good evening, all my jolly lads, I'm glad to find you well
If you'll gather all around me, now, the story I will tell
For I've got a situation and begorra and begob
I can whisper all the weekly wage of nineteen bob
'Tis twelve months come October since I left me native home
After helping them Killarney boys to bring the harvest down
But now I wear the gansey and around me waist a belt
I'm the gaffer of the squad that makes the hot asphalt

(Chorus)

Well, we laid it in a hollows and we laid it in the flat
And if it doesn't last forever, sure I swear, I'll eat me hat
Well, I've wandered up and down the world and sure I never felt
Any surface that was equal to the hot asphalt

The other night a copper comes and he says to me, McGuire
Would you kindly let me light me pipe down at your boiler fire?
And he planks himself right down in front, with hobnails up, till late
And says I, me decent man, you'd better go and find your bait
He ups and yells, I'm down on you, I'm up to all yer pranks
Don't I know you for a traitor from the Tipperary ranks?
Boys, I hit straight from the shoulder and I gave him such a belt
That I knocked him into the boiler full of hot asphalt

(Chorus)

We quickly dragged him out again and we threw him in the tub
And with soap and warm water we began to rub and scrub
But devil the thing, it hardened and it turned him hard as stone
And with every other rub, sure you could hear the copper groan
I'm thinking, says O'Reilly, that he's lookin' like old Nick
And burn me if I am not inclined to claim him with me pick
Now, says I, it would be easier to boil him till he melts
And to stir him nice and easy in the hot asphalt

(Chorus)

⁹ Composed and sung by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger on Poetry And Song, Vol.1, (1967). Subsequently extensively recorded by MacColl himself, the Dubliners and many other Irish folk singers in following decades.

You may talk about yer sailor lads, ballad singers and the rest
Your shoemakers and your tailors but we please the ladies best
The only ones who know the way their flinty hearts to melt
Are the lads around the boiler making hot asphalt
With rubbing and with scrubbing, sure I caught me death of cold
For scientific purposes, me body it was sold
In the Kelvin grove museum, me boys, I'm hangin' in me pelt
As a monument to the Irish, making hot asphalt

(Chorus)

FROM CLARE TO HERE ¹⁰

There's four shares a room and we work hard for the crack
And sleeping late on Sundays I never get to Mass

(Chorus)

It's a long way from Clare to here
It's a long way from Clare to here
It's a long, long way, it grows further by the day
It's a long way from Clare to here

When Friday comes around Terry's only into fighting
My ma would like a letter home but I'm too tired for writing

(Chorus)

It almost breaks my heart when I think of Josephine
I told her I'd be coming home with my pockets full of green

(Chorus)

And the only time I feel alright is when I'm into drinking
It sort of eases the pain of it and levels out my thinking

It almost breaks my heart when I think of Josephine
I told her I'd be coming home with my pockets full of green

(Chorus)

I sometimes hear a fiddle play or maybe it's a notion
I dream I see white horses dance upon that other ocean

(Chorus)

¹⁰ Composed by Ralph McTell, released on his 1976 Album *Right Side Up*, the title of this song came from a chance remark of a fellow building labourer of McTell's on a site in London in 1963.

THE REASON I LEFT MULLINGAR ¹¹

I walk through this city a stranger
In a land I can never call home
And I curse the sad notion that caused me
In search of my fortune to roam
I'm weary of work and hard drinking
My weeks wages left in the bar
And God it's a shame, to use a friend's name
To beg for the price of a jar.

CHORUS

I remember that bright April morning
When I left home to travel afar
To work till your dead, for one room and a bed
It's not the reason I left Mullingar.

This London's a city of heartbreak
On Friday there's friends by the score
But when the pay's finished on Monday
A friend's not a friend anymore
For the working day seems never ending
From the shovel and pick there's no break
And when you're not working you're spending
The fortune you left home to make.

CHORUS

And for every man here that finds fortune
And comes home to tell of the tale
Each morning the Broadway is crowded
With many the thousands who fail
So young men of Ireland take warning
In London you never will find
The gold at the end of the rainbow
For you might just have left it behind.

COME, MY LITTLE SON ¹²

Come my little son and I will tell you what we'll do,
Undress yourself and get into bed and a tale I'll tell to you

¹¹ Pat Cooksey, *The Reason I Left Mullingar*, published by Banshee Music, (Dublin, 1979) available at http://www.patcooksey.com/lyric_mullingar.html, (Accessed 30 May, 2017). This became a popular early 1980s song for the Furey Brothers & Davey Arthur: Written in 1980, the song is intended as a paean to the thousands of Irish building workers who left home to find work in London in the mid 70's, and the homesickness created by the endless cycle of work and drinking.

¹² 'Come, My Little Son', from *Freeborn Man* (September, 1983), composed by Ewan MacColl & Peggy Seeger, available at: <https://ewanmaccoll.bandcamp.com/track/come-me-little-son> (accessed 11 September, 2019). The Dubliners also recorded this song much earlier, on their 1968 studio album, 'Drinkin' and Courtin', which reached nr. 5 in the Irish charts and nr. 31 in the UK Album charts for that year

It's all about your daddy, he's a man you seldom see,
For he had to roam, far away from home, away from me and you.

But remember laddie he's still your dad, though he's working far away,
In the cold and heat all the hours of the week, on England's motorway

When you fall and hurt yourself and get to feeling bad,
It isn't any good to go a-running for your dad,
For the only time since you were born that he had to spend with you,
He was out of a job and he hadn't a bob, he was signing on the brew,

But remember laddie he's still your dad, though he's working far away,
In the cold and heat all the hours of the week, on England's motorway

Sure we'd like your daddy here, yes sure it would be fine,
To have him working nearer home and with us all the time,
But beggars can't be choosers, still we have to bear our load,
For we need the money your daddy earns while working on the roads.

But remember laddie he's still your dad, and he'll soon come home to stay
In a week or two with me and you, when he's built the motorway

DON'T FORGET YOUR SHOVEL ¹³

Don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work.
Oh don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work.
Don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work
Or you'll end up where you came from like the rest of us
Diggin', diggin', diggin'

And don't forget your shoes and socks and shirt and tie and all.
Don't forget your shoes and socks and shirt and tie and all.
Mr Murphy's afraid you'll make a claim if you take a fall.
("How's it goin'" "not too bad")

And we want to go to heaven but we're always diggin' holes.
We want to go to heaven but we're always diggin' holes.
Yeah we want to go to heaven but we're always diggin' holes.
Well there's one thing you can say...we know where we are goin'...
("Any chance of a start?" "no" "okay")

And if you want to do it...don't you do it against the wall.
If you want to do it...don't you do it against the wall.
Never seen a toilet on a building site at all.

¹³ Written by Christie Hennessy in 1983, recorded by Christy Moore on the 1983 album *The Time Has Come*. The song is a humorous ode to the Irish navy in England inspired by Hennessy's own experiences of labouring on building sites in the United Kingdom. As a single, and it became Moore's first big hit, spending seven weeks in the Irish charts. It's success was partly due to the radio airplay it received from DJ Ronan Collins on his RTÉ Radio 2 breakfast show. (See <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2018/0710/977665-christy-moore-solo-single/> (accessed 11 September, 2019).

There's a shed up in the corner where they won't see you at all.
("Mind your sandwiches")

Enoch Powell will give us a job, diggin' our way to annascaul.
Enoch Powell will give us a job, diggin' our way to annascaul.
Enoch Powell will give us a job, diggin' our way to annascaul.
And when we're finished diggin' there they'll close the hole and all.

Now there's six thousand five hundred and fifty-nine paddies
Over there in london all trying to dig their way back to annascaul
And very few of them boys is going to get back at all...
I think that's terrible.

Don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work.
Don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work.
Oh, don't forget your shovel if you want to go to work.
Or you'll end up where you came from like the rest of us
Diggin', diggin', digging

MISSING YOU ¹⁴

In nineteen hundred and eighty six
There's not much for a chippie but swinging a pick
And you can't live on love, on love alone
So you sail cross the ocean, away cross the foam

To where you're a Paddy, a Biddy or a Mick
Good for nothing but stacking a brick
Your best mate's a spade and he carries a hod
Two work horses heavily shod

Oh I'm missing you
I'd give all for the price of a flight
Oh I'm missing you
Under Piccadilly's neon

Who did you murder, are you a spy?
I'm just fond of a drink helps me laugh, helps me cry
So I just drink red bidy for a permanent high
I laugh a lot less and I'll cry till I die

All ye young people now take my advice
Before crossing the ocean you'd better think twice
Cause you can't live without love, without love alone
The proof is round London in the nobody zone

Where the summer is fine, but the winter's a fridge

¹⁴ *Missing You* – song lyric. Composed by Jimmie McCarthy/Alex Huntley, released by Christie Moore on his 'Voyage' album in 1991. Songwriters: Alexander Paul Kapranos Huntley / Nicholas John McCarthy, Missing You lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group.

Wrapped up in old cardboard under Charing Cross Bridge
And I'll never go home now because of the shame
Of misfit's reflection in a shop window pane

MURPHY CAN NEVER GO HOME ¹⁵

It's a hell of an age, puts a man ill-at-ease
Sets his mind in a rage, makes him weak at the knees
When he sees things are changing and he's marking time
His work-mates all twenty, and he's past his prime
And he longs to go back home to Ireland
I've heard he's tired of the crack and the living is rough
And his twenty one years on the buildings have taught him
When you have got nothing then you've had enough

So he sits in the bar and he smokes his cigar
And he boasts how he's never alone
Ah, but I know he's lying, his big heart is breaking
Murphy can never go home

And he reads in the paper of the economic miracles
Brought by the Yanks and the men from Japan
Building the blocks of the 21st Century
What use have they for a labouring man
Once hard men were heroes but now they are fools
And all the old values, uprooted and gone
And when he woke up he found they had changed all the rules
Well, there's nothing to do but keep labouring on

So he sits in the bar and he smokes his cigar
And he boasts how he's never alone
Ah, but I know he's lying, his big heart is breaking
Murphy can never go home

And it's a hard, rocky road that first took him to Birmingham
Long in the making with no going back
He was writing no letters, nor words of his whereabouts
No family at all for to help him keep track
He can stay here all night in no hurry at all
Cause there's nobody waiting but old Father Time
And as the last rays of sun, they go down on the Brum.
A song from his childhood he quietly will rhyme

As he sits in the bar and he smokes his cigar
And he boasts how he's never alone
Ah, but I know he's lying, his big heart is breaking
Murphy can never go home

¹⁵ Mick Curry, 'Murphy Can Never Go Home', song nr. 19 in Frank Harte and Donal Lunny - There's Gangs of Them Digging - Songs of Irish labour, (Daisy DLCD022, 2005), available at The Living Tradition, CD Liner notes, (<http://www.folkmusic.net/htmlfiles/webrevs/dlcd022.htm> (accessed 18 March, 2015).

TRIP THROUGH HOLYHEAD ¹⁶

Fifty-three and the factory's closing, there's not enough work to go round,
My brother he stuck to the farming, and I headed out for London town,
So Camden and I'm in my lodgings, the room is both dirty and small,
But the landlady's simple and friendly, makes up for the damp on the wall,
Makes up for the damp on the wall.

Seven-thirty a.m. in the morning, myself and the lads on the road,
The noise of the dozers is deafening, and the work is a sight to behold,
And the sub is a gift sent from Heaven, it'll bide me until I get paid,
It'll pay for the rent and the drinking, and leave me a bit for to save,
and leave me a bit for to save.

Now I've worked for Laing and for Wimpey, I've been sent from Billy to
Jack,
I've worked till there's nothing left in me, and I've worked till I've broken
my back,
Come payday I'm out on the batter, there's not a lot else for to do,
I send a few bob to my parents, and the rest is for me and for you,
And the rest is for me and for you.

Come Christmas I'm standing in Euston, my brown leather suitcase in hand,
And the nine-thirty waiting to take me, back over to sweet Inis Meáin,
And it's out beyond Watford and Rugby, by Chester I've had my eighth beer,
Past Bangor and the cold Straits of Menai, and finally Holyhead Pier,
And finally Holyhead Pier.

You'd think the whole country of Erin, was waiting to get on the boat,
There are accents from Antrim to Kerry, from Westport to the high hills of
Howth,
And in no time we're into Dun Laoghaire, and the dawn rising clear in the
sky,
I'm on the last leg of my journey, it's hello to the fair Aran Isles,
Hello to the fair Aran Isles.

There's much jubilation and laughter, It's true that there's no place like
home,
Well, all of my friends and relations, for too soon I have to be gone,
There's not enough work in this country, there's not enough land to go round,
So thousands of others just like me, We're heading out for London town,
Heading out for London town.

¹⁶ Kieran Halpin, see: <http://www.kieranhalpin.com/index.php/lyrics>

LONDON TOWN ¹⁷

A bus leaving Sligo a long time ago
Brought Micheal away from his home
He'd heard there was work o'er in England
to the Dublin docks he did roam
On the Holyhead boat there were others like him
From Leitrim and Kerry and Down,
Sons and daughters from all over Ireland,
Bound for London Town.

He rambled the city in search of the start
Or maybe a room for the night
In his left hand a suitcase of leather and wood
And his grandfather's fiddle in his right
Through the streets of the bombed out buildings
Past the rubble that Hitler blew down
A strayaway child from the West of Ireland
Alone in London Town

He signed on with a ganger from Dublin
The cruelest little tyrant that ever you met
Had him sweating in trenches for 12 hours a day
It was hard work but all he could get
He'd take out his fiddle when the work was all done
When the shovels and picks were laid down
A tune for the broad-backed sons of Ireland
Come to rebuild London Town

Tw'as seven day weeks with n'er a break
Sligo was left far behind
When one of the boys says "pick yourself up
And come down the road for a pint"
When he opened the door Micheál thought he was home
O, what a glorious sound
Sons and daughter from all over Ireland
Playing music in London Town

There was Mairtin Byrnes from Galway,
McCarthy and Casey from Clare
McGlinchey, The Roger, Roland and Farrell
Seemed half of all Ireland was there
They bid him take out his fiddle
And they played til the lights went down
Raise a glass to the 33rd county
Right here in London Town

¹⁷ Kevin Burke, *London Town*, unpublished song co-written in collaboration with Cal Scott, see *inter alia*, 'A virtuoso with the soul of Ireland' in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 15, 2014, available at <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/a-virtuoso-with-the-soul-of-ireland-20140514-38a26.htm> (Date accessed: 05 April, 2016).

Now many's a year has passed and gone
But it seems just a fortnight ago.
Those sessions at the White Hart and the Favourite,
Fulham Broadway and Holloway Road
It's the music that carried his heart and his soul
It's the same way the whole world round
Whether you're living in New York or Donegal
Or here in London Town

It's the music that carries your heart and your soul
It's the same the whole world round
Whether you're living in New York or Donegal
Or here in London Town