Irish emigrants and family history: a new approach

ALLEGED MANSLAUGHTER BY AN IRISHMAN.
An inquest was held on the death of Patrick Mannion, 61, who died from injuries received in a disturbance in his house in Snow’s Yard on Saturday night. Shortly before midnight his son, John Mannion, and a labourer, Patrick Power, who was lodging there, had a quarrel. Patrick Mannion went upstairs to quieten them. Power struck him in the face and knocked him down. Mrs Mannion fell downstairs and hurt her face badly. A youth, Henry Ferneyhough, saw Power kick Patrick Mannion in the stomach in the back kitchen. Power then put on his boots and left the house ... John Raftery, living in Greyfriars, said Power aroused him early on Sunday morning ... Power said ‘Jack, I’ve done it – I’ve crippled old Mannion. I’ve crushed his bones for him.’ The witness told him it was not creditable to hurt an old man who had reared a big family.¹

DEATH OF MR BARTHOLOMEW CORCORAN.
Mr Corcoran died on Wednesday at 24 North Street where only two days previously he had taken up residence. He was 77 years of age. Mr Corcoran came to Stafford about 50 years ago and carried on a business as a plumber and decorator for about 30 years in Foregate Street, retiring about ten years ago. Mr Corcoran took a keen interest in public affairs and served as a member of the Town Council from 1894 to 1903, whilst from April 1895 to 1901 he represented the East Ward on the Board of Guardians. As a member of the Catholic community, the deceased was a liberal benefactor to St Patrick’s Church and Schools, and as a memorial to his first wife he presented the Stations of the Cross to St Patrick’s Church. He was manager of the day schools and for many years was president of the St Vincent de Paul Society. The deceased, who was twice married, has eight children living.²

Patrick Mannion and Bartholomew Corcoran were Irish. They had left Ireland in the 1850s and settled in Stafford, a small town in the English West Midlands. They were just two individuals in the great wave of
emigration that by 1900 meant more Irish people lived outside Ireland than in the country itself. Irish emigrants and their descendants were to be found in most parts of Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South America, South Africa and elsewhere.

Patrick Mannion was killed in 1899 whilst Bartholomew Corcoran died in 1908. Mannion died in Snow’s Yard, one of Stafford’s slum courts. Its squalid circumstances illustrate a common image of Irish immigrants struggling to survive in poverty, insecurity, drink and violence. His story could be repeated almost anywhere the Irish settled in Britain. Bartholomew Corcoran’s life shows a different side of the Irish experience. He started off in another Stafford slum, Plant’s Square, but died a prosperous and respected man. His success demonstrates how the paths of Irish immigrants could diverge from the common picture of misery and suffering. Corcoran’s story could also be replicated amongst the Irish in other towns and cities.

A family-history approach to Irish emigrants

The press reports about Patrick Mannion and Bartholomew Corcoran contain some other evidence of a type generally ignored by historians of the Irish. These men were not isolated individuals. Both stories mention the family relationships of the deceased. They were, in other words, members of wider families. During their lives they had lived in various sorts of family situation and their actions had been influenced by other people, both related and unrelated. These simple facts define the target of this book. It tests a new approach to the study of Irish migrants by focusing on their families and on what happened to them. It charts the history of a representative sample of families and individuals settled in Stafford. It documents the lives they led and what happened to their descendants, and shows the ways by which many families, though by no means all, became integrated into English society. The aim is to show what their lives were like in a small town during the Industrial Revolution, and to extend our understanding of the variety and complexity of the Irish experience in nineteenth-century England.

The family is a core social institution. Sociologists debate the precise definition and significance of the family as a social phenomenon, but earlier research on Stafford demonstrated in practical terms both the importance and the persistence of family units amongst its Irish population.  This might seem a statement of the blindingly obvious, yet very few historians have looked at the family dimension to Irish immigration. Lynn Hollen Lees’ study of the Irish in London discusses families generally both before and after migration, but she only occasionally mentions the experiences of specific families.  Bruce Elliott’s book on Protestant Irish
Irish emigrants and family history: a new approach

Irish emigrants and family history: a new approach

families in Canada was a pioneering work that includes some genealogies and limited family histories, but its approach is more diffuse than this book since it tracks families from their origin in Ireland to a multiplicity of places in Canada. His work has not been emulated for Britain.⁵

Some historians have documented family ties across the Irish diaspora using the evidence of letters and other sources. David Fitzpatrick’s book of personal accounts of Irish migration to Australia offers fascinating insights, as does Kerby Miller and partners’ work on early Irish immigrants to America. The letters of the Reynolds family in Manchester are rare evidence of life in a migrant family spread between Britain and America. There are a number of studies of localities in Ireland that trace emigrant families into the Irish diaspora.⁶ These works provide some evidence of family structures and forces. Even so, their sources are inherently scattered in geographical terms and they do not record the long-term history of a sample of families in a specific location. They also deal almost exclusively with the perceptions of the emigrants themselves, not those of succeeding generations. Furthermore, we learn nothing of ‘ordinary’ families who left no documentary material.

Most historians of the Irish in Britain have ignored or glossed over the family dimension. There has been some work on family structures that includes the Irish. In 1971 Michael Anderson published his book on family structure in nineteenth-century Preston. This remains a seminal work that incidentally has a lot to say about the Irish. In 1994 Marguerite Dupree looked at a similar topic in the Staffordshire Potteries, an area close to, but very different from, Stafford town. She unfortunately had little to say about the Irish. Neither author looked at the long-term trajectories of specific families, however.⁷ Carl Chinn’s study of the Irish in Birmingham has selected family information and reminiscence but is not a comprehensive study of Irish families in the city.⁸ Studies that document Irish households in the census enumeration returns have the problem that the census just provides a snapshot at one moment. Unless individuals and families are traced from one census to the next such studies cannot follow peoples’ lives and experiences over time. They are forced to paint an aggregate picture of change in the Irish population, a process that can produce crude generalisations. It cannot document the variation in the immigrants’ life trajectories and, more particularly, those of succeeding generations. As a result, the majority of long-term studies of the Irish in Britain tend to rely on associational evidence of people in workplaces, churches, political organisations, clubs and so on, or on instances of petty criminality and conflict documented by the State and in the press. Such an approach sees the Irish either as individuals operating in various social contexts or as a mass with a range of assumed identities and loyalties. Both fail to encapsulate the variations to be found in the total Irish population and do not reveal the family, kin
and social connections they may have had over time. This book originated, therefore, in dissatisfaction with these conventional approaches to Irish immigrants.

No previous attempt has been made to explore how the evidence provided by family history can be used to explore the story of Irish migrants in Britain. This book intends to do that. It argues that a focus on families rather than on individuals or the mass offers a fruitful and sensitive way of understanding the Irish experience. The picture that emerges is complex. It challenges simplistic interpretations of the relationship between the Irish and the host population, and particularly the notion that there was inherent tension or conflict between them. It shows the ways, often problematic, by which Irish immigrants and their descendants became integrated into the evolving society of England. In doing this it is a counterweight to the common view of Irish emigration with its emphasis on exile and victimhood. The processes of identity formation and social interaction bound up with family life in practice led to many different outcomes.

The Irish experience and family history

By focusing on families this book provides new evidence on seven issues concerning the Irish migrant experience. The first is that of timescale. It is important to take the long-term view of a migrant population and its descendants. Popular perceptions of the Irish naturally focus on the Famine and the massive emigration it provoked. The process of emigration and settlement was inevitably stressful, and there is copious evidence of the uncertainties and sufferings that the migrant generation had to endure. Modern research has increasingly tried to take a longer view, however. What happened to the Irish and their descendants in the decades up to and beyond the Great War? The answers to this question are often rather generalised or focus on those people whose Irishness was still identifiable. The Irish inevitably fanned out in different directions, however, as generation succeeded generation. The family-history approach can track this process. Family trajectories could change radically over time through both generational succession and a changing environment. The time of immigration and settlement was profoundly important, but study of an extended period can reveal how its significance decayed.

The second issue is the basic one of defining who ‘the Irish’ were – the question of ethnicity. Catholic and arguably ‘Celtic’ Irish people formed the largest group of Irish emigrants in the nineteenth century. Many studies have concentrated on these people and their experiences. The fact is, however, that by the nineteenth century the population of Ireland was a complex mix of ethnic groups resulting from centuries of
social, political, economic and religious action in the geographical space of the country. The ethnic identities of those groups were partly defined by their conflict with ‘others’ but they were also dynamic and subject to change. The family-history approach has to define specific individuals and families as ‘Irish’, not just deal with a generalised body of people. The way this is done is discussed later. Studies of defined ethnic groups such as the Irish also run the risk of assuming that ethnicity was the dominant factor determining peoples’ identity and life chances. This cannot be taken for granted. A focus on family history can show whether ethnicity was truly dominant or not.

Consideration of the family inevitably raises a third issue, that of gender. Traditional work on the public face of Irish migrants inherently tended to highlight men’s activities. In 1979 Lees considered changes to the woman’s role in the family economy of migrants in London, but her discussion was at a high level of generality. Since then there has been some continuing interest in Irish women but work has tended to focus on specific issues in the public role of women, for example women and the Catholic Church, women in (paid) employment or the public role of women in running networks of mutual aid. Paul O’Leary has more sensitively identified the interdependence between public and private life in discussing the significance of gender roles in the cult of Victorian respectability amongst the Irish. This link is important, and what is needed is more evidence about the ‘private’ role of women. Adopting a family approach inherently highlights these more private gender relationships and roles whilst not ignoring the public interactions of both sexes. It considers the extent to which women as well as men contributed to family income generation but also whether women essentially defined the nature of the family and home environment. Was their role the prime determinant of how families developed over the long term? A study of family history also exposes the impact of domination by, or absence of, significant male or female individuals. This tests the extent to which, across different families, ‘traditional’ gender roles were entrenched, or in practice were more fluid.

The fourth issue, the identity or identities of Irish migrants and their descendants, has been discussed in many studies. Earlier work often argued that the ‘Irish’, again, normally the Catholic Celtic Irish, retained their identity as a defence against the hostile society into which they had moved. This involved some vision of their collective identity. Research over the past twenty years has produced a more nuanced picture but it still tends to focus on groups of Irish and their leaders rather than on ordinary individuals and their families. The key problem is the interplay amongst individual, family and collective identities. Individual identity was affected by a person’s diverse circumstances and the policies and practices of institutions with which he or she came into contact.
The family was one of those institutions. Family relationships were the main conduit down which memories, legends, attitudes and identity were transmitted. The family was, in other words, a key force moulding the impact of Irish collective identity on individuals. If, on the one hand, the ethnic group continued to be defined by reference to a hostile ‘other’ society, then its collective identity would continue to be formed by a struggle that had meaning to families and individuals. If, on the other hand, families and individuals perceived little value in adhering to the collective vision and took steps to engage with the ‘other’, the collective identity would tend to fade away. It has been suggested that the Irish in fact demonstrated ‘mutative ethnicity’ depending on the circumstances of the places where they settled. Ethnic identity could only be maintained as an active force when it continued to distribute meaningful benefits such as employment or housing through ethnically structured channels. If these failed to exist because the numbers of Irish were too few or if intermarriage diluted ethnic distinctiveness and segregation, then ethnic identity would decline as a social force.

Writers on the Irish have to account for the apparent mutation of identities over time, but almost all discussion of this phenomenon is at a general level, illustrated by evidence of ethnic associations and examples of specific individuals. The role of the family in the process of identity formation has been almost totally ignored. This study of Stafford will investigate the phenomenon. It will question whether ethnic identity trumped other factors in determining how people saw themselves and the outside world. It will look at the working-class Catholic and Celtic Irish but also at the higher-status and Protestant families who have been less studied but generally seen as less problematic. It will consider the significance or otherwise of religion and spirituality, both Catholic and Protestant, in moulding the ethos and identity of families. This involves considering the nature of the religious beliefs they brought from Ireland, the influence of organised religion in England, and the extent to which there was ‘leakage’ from the churches over time and down the generations.

The fifth issue revolves around the origins and attitudes of the emigrant Irish and how these affected their lives overseas. This arises particularly in relation to the ‘Catholic Celtic’ Irish. Many writers implicitly assume that this group formed an ‘ethnie’ – that they were defined by a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, a common culture, links with the homeland and a sense of solidarity. In 1985 Kerby Miller articulated this perspective in emphasising that the migrant Irish were victims of exile and banishment. This ‘exile motif’ was the result of the culture and politics of Ireland itself as well as of the immigrants’ appalling experiences in the slums of urban America. Miller argued that:

millions of Irishmen and [Irish]-women, whatever their objective reasons for emigration, approached their departures and their experiences
Irish emigrants and family history: a new approach

in North America with an outlook which characterized emigration as exile. Rooted in ancient culture and tradition, shaped by historical circumstances, and adapted to ‘explain’ the impersonal workings of the market economy, the Irish worldview crossed the ocean to confront the most modern of all societies. From the standpoint of the emigrants’ ability to adjust and prosper overseas, the consequent tensions between past and present, ideology and reality, may have had mixed results. However, both the exile motif and the worldview that sustained it ensured the survival of Irish identity and nationalism in the New World. 18

Miller’s perspective has been very influential. It is, however, uncertain to what degree the exile motif is applicable to the Irish who settled in Britain. On the one hand it can be argued that many of those who settled in the land of the colonial oppressor were people, particularly amongst the Famine refugees, who were forced to take the cheapest, easiest option, whatever its economic and cultural drawbacks. From this perspective Britain remained a hated place of exile, and Irish identity, culture and memories would be transmitted to the succeeding generation(s). On the other hand, it can be suggested that settlement in Britain was adopted by those less burdened by a baggage of Irish cultural, religious and political identities. Their prime objective was to achieve individual and family advancement in the new society.

Donald Akenson has argued, indeed, that the exile motif and what he calls the ‘Gaelic-Catholic disability variable’ present a misleading paradigm for explaining the actual Irish emigrant experience down the generations. He suggests it was the specific nature of the environment facing the Irish immigrants that affected their success or otherwise. 19 The implication of this is that, whatever the traumatic circumstances surrounding an emigrant’s departure from Ireland, a more fruitful perspective for investigating the Irish immigrant’s experience is to see them as potential opportunists, entrepreneurs and colonisers rather than as helpless exiles and victims. This perspective has received powerful, though much criticised, support from Malcolm Campbell’s more recent comparative study of the Irish in the USA and Australia. 20 Little attempt has been made, however, to explore the long-term history of specific Irish immigrants and families in Britain to see whether exile and banishment or settlement and opportunity – or a mixture of the two forces – left the greater permanent imprint on their attitudes, behaviour and relationships. The family-history approach can be used to show the range of trajectories followed by the Irish and the extent to which they might support the ‘exile’ or ‘opportunist’ explanations of the migrant experience.

This question is in turn affected by a sixth issue, namely how the immigrants’ actual experiences were influenced by the specific localities in which they lived. It cannot be gainsaid that the migrants had to endure
a change that was inherently traumatic. Most, though not all, had to cross a frontier that was not merely geographic but could involve a shift from rural to urban living within an environment that might be hostile in cultural, religious and social terms. Immigrants and their families therefore had to make a new start in circumstances that were only partly of their own choosing. The extent to which they experienced prejudice and hostility has been widely documented, particularly in Britain and America. The problem is that anti-Irish hostility and violence, by their nature, leave evidence in the form of newspaper reports, pamphlets, court proceedings and the like. Indifference to or acceptance of the Irish were more passive forms of behaviour that are harder to document. Furthermore, the environment within which relationships between the Irish and the various fractions of the host society developed was itself dynamic. Political relationships between Britain and Ireland, between the State and the Catholic Church, as well as the politics of class and social reform, changed substantially during the nineteenth century. These changes influenced the behaviour and identity of the immigrants, their descendants and the host society, but they were always mediated by the character of the specific places where the Irish settled. The local environment of an area of settlement might be either a constraining or an enabling influence on the Irish. There have been many local studies of the Irish but the vast majority conceptualise the key relationship as that between the individual, the mass and the place mediated by various forms of association or power brokers. Family history can, however, reveal much about how groups experienced and responded to a locality over time and down the generations. Were Irish families and individuals ‘outcasts’ and did they remain so?

The final issue relates to the Irish Diaspora. Irish emigrants were part of a worldwide pattern of movement. Their identities could therefore be influenced by wider geographical consciousness as well as by the local environment. The term ‘diaspora’ has been applied increasingly to this scattering of the Irish. In recent years the term ‘transnational’ has become popular to emphasise active, on-going linkages amongst dispersed diasporic communities. Cohen suggests that diasporic peoples will normally exhibit a number of features. They will have suffered traumatic dispersal and have a collective memory, myth and idealisation about the homeland which sustains a strong ethnic consciousness over a long period of time, with a shared sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries. This may result in a troubled relationship with the host society although the migrants’ distinctive culture may also enrich life in tolerant host countries. Historians of Irish migration would mostly agree that these features apply to the Irish Diaspora. The problem is that such criteria are often seen as applying generally to people throughout the Diaspora whereas Cohen’s criteria could be used at the local level to test the actual significance of diasporic consciousness amongst migrants
and their descendant families. There was inevitably tension between a possible diasporic identity and the experience of life in a specific place of settlement. Family attitudes were a key mediating force influencing inter-marriage and dilution of ethnic purity down the generations, as well as the socialisation or incorporation processes of Church, school, State and other institutions. Family histories can throw some light on the changing balance amongst diasporic consciousness, transnational links and the forces undermining them. Differences amongst families in terms of long-term transience or permanent settlement may well have reflected variations in the continuing strength of transnational links.

Questions and concepts

This study of Irish families in Stafford seeks to throw light on the seven issues just outlined. This process requires a conceptual framework to help understand the workings of migrant families within their new environment. The ‘family’ is a problematic concept. Much early research on the family was concerned with the supposed rise of the nuclear family in industrial society – a unit composed merely of parents and their resident children. Such an obsolete perspective would be of little use in studying the Irish. Modern approaches have steadily widened the definition of the ‘family’ to include all manner of kin, a process undoubtedly bolstered by the growth of popular genealogy. There is also recognition of the significance of other ‘quasi-familial’ relationships. The definition of a ‘family’ for this study is therefore broad, but it centres on distinct individuals or groupings of kin identifiable partly by a common name or names but also by their revealed relationships.

Analysis of the history of Stafford’s Irish families requires answers to three interrelated questions:

1. How did the families operate and evolve as social entities? This question explores the nature of their day-to-day life.
2. How was family life affected by the specific experience of emigration and settlement? This question explores the impact of migration.
3. How did the families interact with the wider social and economic environment? This question deals with the family in its context.

Answering these questions requires the use of concepts of family behaviour not normally within the purview of specialist historians of the Irish. Sociologists, historians and others have nevertheless developed concepts of the ‘family’ as a human phenomenon that can be used to investigate the Irish family experience in Stafford.

Each of the three questions can be enlightened by a specific body of theory, and this means the conceptual approach adopted here is rather
Divergent paths

eclectic. Some theories focus on the *actual behaviour* of families and the individuals within them. They are essentially ‘bottom-up’ perspectives that are particularly useful in dealing with the first question, that of how Stafford’s Irish families operated and evolved. Other approaches are concerned with the family’s role as an *institution* within the wider social and economic system. These ‘top-down’ theories start with the social and economic system and locate families within it. They offer some help in answering the third question, family interaction with the wider social and economic environment. The second research question, the impact of migration on families, is more specific and can be informed by modern work on population movement and settlement. The following discussion outlines these concepts in more detail.

Day-to-day life

A substantial body of literature has examined the internal behaviour of families, but there are three distinct perspectives. These can be summarised as the ‘individualisation’, ‘family strategy’ and ‘relationships’ approaches. The first emphasises the relationship between the individual and the family. It sees family members as actors who use their family instrumentally in pursuit of their individual goals, primarily those of economic survival and security. Anderson’s study of Preston exemplifies this approach. His basic premise is that the individual lives his or her life in pursuit of personal goals within an environment where the options are likely to be limited. The pursuit of these goals will be influenced by society’s values and norms, presumably inculcated partly through family upbringing, but the individual will essentially seek to use the family and its members to assist in the solving of life’s problems. In doing this reciprocal support may be offered to others, but the individual actor will seek a ‘psychic profit’ in the outcome of instrumental relationships.\(^{23}\)

Anderson’s approach does focus on the detailed lives of individuals and their families and it can reveal some of the variation of response in a particular population. Even so, his view that family life was dominated by a ‘short-run instrumental orientation to kin’ offers a very one-dimensional view of human existence and the family.\(^{24}\) It was not supported in the interview evidence collected by Tamara Hareven in her study of French-Canadian families in Manchester, New Hampshire.\(^{25}\) The history of families in Stafford does not sustain the perspective either, and it is rejected for this study.

The family group could itself be seen to act as if it were an individual, maximising its security and economic or social returns through mutual support and the setting of goals for its members. In other words, a family might adopt an identifiable ‘family strategy’ and this is the second
behavioural approach to family life. The strategy would be determined by the circumstances in which the family found itself and foresaw in the future. Any historical analysis of a particular family’s strategy therefore has to place it within its wider economic and social context. This is a strength of the concept in that it avoids the danger of the seeing the family purely as an island of internal relationships independent of its environment.

The idea of family strategy is particularly appropriate to the history of migrants. In Ireland they were faced with major problems, above all the Famine, that provoked decisions to emigrate. Those who ended up in places like Stafford then had to make a new start in a difficult, potentially hostile, environment where economic and social survival would be precarious. Families that could hold together and adopt attainable goals would maximise their prospects for success in their new situation. They could, for example, seek advantageous marriages for their children, either in terms of strengthening their links in the Irish ‘community’ or, conversely, by ‘marrying out’ into aspirant and secure families from the host community.

The concept of family strategy is, nevertheless, problematic and needs to be used critically. Explicit evidence on a family’s goals is usually sketchy, and the historian is forced to infer them from observed patterns of behaviour. Such outcomes might either reflect a lack of strategy or be the result of conflicting or inconsistent strategies. The objectives of family strategy might be primarily economic – ensuring a family’s economic survival and security. They could, however, encompass wider values concerning lifestyle, morality, belief and identity. From this perspective a family strategy might be more a system of implicit principles that were felt, understood and used by family members in their debates about strategic and tactical decisions.

If evidence suggests a distinct family strategy there is the question of how, and by whom, that strategy was formulated. Some critics argue that in practice Victorian ‘family strategies’ were largely determined by the dominant male(s) and reinforced the subordinate position of women within families. Such a proposition is, however, amenable to empirical investigation. Given the common male breadwinner role, women were often left to control or dominate the home, the base of family life. In doing so they could profoundly influence the ethos and even the objectives of the family. Elizabeth Roberts has stressed the significance of women as both the financial managers and moral guides of working-class families.

In the 1960s and 1970s the so-called ‘sentiments school’ developed a fundamentally different approach to the family. It was more concerned to explore the affective world of the nuclear family and whether modern assumptions about the importance of feelings and emotions had played a
significant role in the past. This ‘relational’ approach inherently involves research into the meaning of family life as it was perceived by historical actors, a problematic enterprise because of the lack of sources on ordinary peoples’ feelings and motivations. Nevertheless, by seeing the family as a process – a lived system of relationships, this approach stimulates the researcher to explore the actual workings of families and networks. Such an approach has great potential value in examining the experience of Irish families in Stafford and is the one mainly used to structure the family histories in this book.

The relationships approach emphasises the need to be aware of the flexibility and variability of family, kinship and ‘quasi-family’ relationships. Family boundaries were porous. Groups of blood-related individuals might change over time as individuals and sub-groups entered or left active involvement in a geographically dispersed kinship network. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century many related individuals lived in households containing other unrelated people – friends, landlords, lodgers, servants and ‘visitors’, as well as the families and associates of these people. There was not necessarily a clear distinction between the ‘family’ and the ‘household’ since the latter might function in a quasi-familial way and not be a set of purely mercenary bargains. Associations beyond the immediate physical space of a family and household extended and complicated the pattern of personal relationships. They might even form a kind of ‘home away from home’. The division commonly drawn between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ sphere might in practice be blurred. Functioning families were also not necessarily restricted to geographical proximity. Improvements in transport and communications meant that meaningful family and quasi-family relationships could occur on a national or transnational basis, a feature clearly demonstrated by the diasporic Irish. Above all, from this perspective relationships were more than a set of interpersonal bargains aimed at ensuring individual support and survival. Emotions such as love, hate, anxiety, jealousy, distrust and so on were central to personal and family life, and the researcher has to explore how they influenced attitudes and behaviour.

In their book The Family Story Leonora Davidoff and her co-workers suggest that the concepts of blood, contract and intimacy can illuminate the meaning and significance of relationships. The concept of blood forces a consideration of the significance or otherwise of both blood and non-blood relationships (like marriage partners) in the family. The concept of contract carries echoes of individualisation thesis in highlighting the significance of contractual arrangements and financial reciprocity that may underlie many familial and quasi-familial activities. The concept of intimacy provides a countervailing insight into the ‘private physical, sexual and emotional aspects of relationships, based on trust and loyalty. It also incorporates the seemingly oppositional characteristics of
Irish emigrants and family history: a new approach

power and control. These ideas form a powerful set of criteria by which to consider the multi-layered ties that influenced immigrant families.

Davidoff and her colleagues also suggest a second set of concepts to structure the actual investigation of the history of a family. These are self, kinship, home/household and identity. This structure can be used to build a multi-dimensional picture of the Irish experience and it is necessary to examine the four concepts in a little more depth. Self covers the consciousness of the individual and how this affected his or her relationship with the family and other social networks, as well as politics and the economy. An individual’s potential capacity to act was motivated by their own objectives, but also by the meanings they attached to the world and their part in it. These will have been influenced by their upbringing and their family context. In the case of most Irish-born immigrants, their sense of self will have been determined largely by the social and family environment they had experienced in Ireland. The influence, or otherwise, of Christianity – both Catholic and Protestant – may have been an influence on an individual’s beliefs, self-awareness and conduct, but its role is likely to have been enhanced or diminished by the family’s spiritual ethos or the lack of it. The individual will also have been profoundly influenced by gender assumptions and roles, themselves partly determined by Christianity but also by legal institutions and common assumptions of gender superiority and inferiority. Roles in the family were influenced partly by how men and women defined both themselves and others in gender terms. Experiences in childhood were seminal in determining an individual’s sense of self, but so too were experiences in later life. In practice, the personal boundaries of self might be blurred by perceived links to the family group and ancestors.

A family can be seen as an amalgam of genetic position and cultural construct. The notion of kinship emphasises the potential significance of meaningful blood ties between related individuals. Clearly, individuals in complex societies such as Ireland and Britain had a multiplicity of blood ties (both collateral and amongst predecessors). The modern craze for genealogy exposes the breadth and complexity of such links. Whether these ties were significant for individuals and families in the past depended partly on ethnicity, partly on social traditions or culture, but also on the specific circumstances in which particular groups of related individuals found themselves. The notion of kinship reinforces the need to look beyond the nuclear family or household when considering meaningful family relationships. Sibling and cousin relationships were significant amongst the migrant Irish for the support, companionship and even marriage opportunities they might offer in a potentially hostile world. More generally, kinship could impose obligations to offer accommodation, financial support or practical support to kin. These obligations
could be derived from family norms but also from legal requirements, for example from the Poor Laws. The extent to which such obligations were honoured, and reciprocal help delivered, determined the value or otherwise of kinship relations.46

People lived their lives in a local spatial world in which a focal point was the place or places they used for eating, sleeping and other domestic activities. The household was not just an economic unit but also a focus of meaningful family and social relationships. It could be home, a word that carried, and carries, a whole baggage of meanings. It has been argued that the Victorians invented the idea of ‘making’ a home.47 John Gillis suggests that home came to have a sacred quality, an attempt to make a little heaven on earth. The same writer also asserted that ‘Catholics were somewhat slower to attribute a sacred quality to domestic space … the presence of pictures of the Blessed Mary and souvenirs of pilgrimages taken in the name of the faith were meant to remind them that true sanctity lay elsewhere.’48 Stafford’s Catholic migrants offer an opportunity to test this somewhat tendentious comment. The meaning they attached to ‘home’ could be complicated by whether ‘home’ still meant the place where they grew up and where family connections probably still remained.

In practice, many of the migrant Irish were too poor to have much chance of making the idealised Victorian ‘home’ in the squalid and overcrowded slums in which they had to live. Even so, the first thing most people with some security did was to find somewhere better. For some this was bound up with a search for respectability, evidence for which may survive in their social, political and religious activities as well as the quality of the neighbourhood in which they lived. Conversely, such evidence can indicate families and households demonstrably in the ‘rough’ category or experiencing status decline, as well as those somewhere in between. Historians have tended to neglect the home as a social phenomenon, and feminists argue this is also to neglect the primary role of women as home-makers.49 Home was the centre of family power relations. The classic view is that women did the housework and organised the family space but husbands or other men were the ‘masters of the house’. Family-history evidence can, however, suggest more varied and ambiguous gender roles.

Davidoff’s final concept is identity. The importance of identity in Irish migrant studies has been discussed already, but here we emphasise that the family was crucial to the formation of individual and group identity.50 The values and norms present in the family – immediate and extended – would carry major messages about desirable identity that would influence the individual. That person’s response was not, however, pre-determined. It might be complete acceptance, total rejection or, more likely, something in between. Furthermore, the cultural environment of the family was itself always in a process of flux, particularly for migrant families. On the one hand the family was the repository of its own cultural heritage.
transmitted through memories, myths and naming practices as well as by more concrete traditions such as religion or political affiliation. On the other hand, the children had to be prepared for the future. They had to be offered a workable accommodation with the world in which they were actually growing up.

In this study, the core of that world was Stafford. We have to consider its culture and meaning as a place to the social groups who lived there. Continuing strongly expressed ethnic identity might be functional in this environment but, equally, it might be valueless or even dangerous. Children could not be out of place in the world they were entering. They might have to move across cultural boundaries and make fundamental changes to their identity. Their lives would always be in tension between their imposed cultural heritage and the practical choices to be made in the real world.\textsuperscript{51} It was not an ‘all or nothing’ decision. People could have multiple identities, each expressed in response to the different worlds in which they operated. The descendants of Irish immigrants, even those from ethnically ‘mixed’ marriages, might still have a proud heritage of family connections and identify with their place (or places) of origin. This did not mean, however, that they necessarily expressed ‘Irishness’ in terms of adherence to nationalist causes, social activities or even the Catholic (or Protestant) religion.\textsuperscript{52} Finally, we must always question how conscious people were of their identity when, for many, the simple struggle for existence dominated their lives.

\textbf{The impact of migration}

The concepts of self, kinship, home/household and identity will be used to structure the analysis of the history of Stafford’s Irish families, but evidence for distinct family strategies will also assessed where it appears relevant. By definition, all Stafford’s Irish families were united by at least one member’s life-course event of emigration from Ireland and settlement in a strange town in a different country. The number of people directly affected could vary. At one extreme whole family units and extended groups moved en bloc or through a process of chain migration. All these Irish-born people directly experienced the effects of emigration. At the other extreme single individuals emigrated and either remained within the Irish milieu or entered relationships with British people. The families of the latter were immediately ‘mixed’ in ethnic terms, and the impact of migration and settlement will have been more restricted. Whatever the variation, we need to look for ways in which subsequent family life may have been affected by the specific experience of migration.

The rapid growth of international migration in the late twentieth century has provoked research into its impact on families. These insights provide some guidance on what to look for amongst Stafford’s Irish families.
There are four interrelated themes. The first is the psychological stress, confusion and trauma caused by migration. Here it must be remembered that people’s existing stressful conditions may themselves have provoked them to leave.\textsuperscript{53} Emigration was a drastic way to escape existing stress and it could impose new burdens. Individuals and families could suffer disorientation and isolation when they settled in a new and unfamiliar place. Peoples’ day-to-day outlook might be confused over whether the move was permanent or temporary. A generational conflict might develop between parents and children, the parents perhaps clinging to the belief their move was temporary – the myth of return – whilst the children became committed to the place where they were growing up. This conflict could be expressed in identity differences over time and between generations. More family stress would result from the economic insecurity and squalid living conditions that were the lot of many immigrants. For men, being forced to take any job could provoke a loss of self-worth and status in the family. For women, the poverty and drudgery of menial paid jobs, housework and child-rearing in foreign surroundings could equally bring them to the end of their tether. These problems would be exacerbated if drink was the short-term antidote to misery.\textsuperscript{54} Previous studies of poor Irish immigrants have often documented the symptoms of these problems, but a family approach allows some estimate to be made of how widespread they were, what variations existed and why.

We also have to consider whether some people, particularly during and after the Famine, suffered not just stress but genuine trauma with on-going effects. In the past thirty years post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been identified as a specific emotional reaction that may be experienced by people exposed to an event causing loss of physical integrity, or risk of serious injury or death to self or others. The response involves intense fear, horror or helplessness and over the longer term may produce symptoms such as sleep disorders, anger or hyper-vigilance with significant impairment of ability in social relations or work.\textsuperscript{55} It is doubtful whether day-to-day suffering during the Famine, bad as it was, would have been the event – the ‘bolt from the blue’ – that would trigger PTSD.\textsuperscript{56} This is not, however, to deny that particular individuals experienced sudden and powerful events during the Famine that were trauma-inducing: for example, violent eviction, gruesome death, exposure to violence and squalor, or terrible conditions on the voyage to Britain.\textsuperscript{57} The physical suffering of the Famine immigrants to Britain has been widely documented, but we cannot discount the possibility that some of them were also suffering symptoms that would now be diagnosed as PTSD. The violence, drunkenness and alienated behaviour frequently observed amongst the Irish could, in some individuals, be the only record we now have of deeper trauma. It would, of course, have had a direct and long-term impact on other family members and associates.
Secondly, migration could disrupt life-course events. Families could be broken apart by death or by dispersal. Marriages were deferred or abandoned because of uncertainty. Existing marriages became stressed or were even sundered by insecurity and poverty. Children could be orphaned or left with just one overworked parent. But migration could also be constructive. Settlement in a new place offered opportunities to meet new partners and form new family units. The immediate result might be a wave of births. New kinship contacts and obligations might be stimulated.

Thirdly, migration might have an impact on a family’s power relations. Modern critics debate whether or not migration reinforces male dominance in the family by bolstering men’s control of employment and income. In this view women are ‘tied migrants’, ‘trailing’ behind their partners. They are forced to take any paid job, or to carry out unpaid housework, in an unfavourable location not of their choosing. This issue links to the wider question of who takes the decision to move and the choices or constraints of migrants. The Irish have traditionally been seen as enforced emigrants with little choice, but whatever the ‘push’ forces, people had to decide where to settle. Historians have shown little interest in why Irish people settled in particular places – the causes are assumed to be self-evident. When a family’s history is examined the actual choices made have to be analysed. The relative roles of men and women as dominant forces in this family decision-making can then be assessed through patterns of revealed behaviour.

Finally, there is the impact of migration on children and their role within the family. The results might be negative. Children were ripped from the only social world they had known back home and dumped in what might be a lonely and hostile environment. Their parents might also be struggling to cope and consequently neglect their children or give them little emotional support. Such children could grow up shy, angry, alienated and unable to integrate into the host society. By contrast, the results could be positive. Children are potentially resilient and flexible – they learn and adapt. They may be less bound by existing family and social rules. Migration might open up opportunities and the path to integration might be easier than for their parents. Indeed, it has been suggested that migrant children can play an essential role as ‘culture brokers’, demonstrating practically the workings of the host society to their parents and helping the family integration process.

The family in context

A criticism of the approaches discussed so far is that they can over-emphasise internal family relationships and neglect the external forces
acting on families. It is important to counterbalance these tendencies by locating families within their wider context and being aware of changes in that context. There are two aspects to this. The first is how the family related to the wider ‘community’ and the second is how it was affected by, and responded to, the structural forces of the economic and political system.

The fact that the families examined in this book all originated with people born in Ireland does not imply they necessarily formed a ‘community’ of people united by their place of birth. Similarly, focus on the geographical entity of Stafford does not necessarily imply the town formed a simple ‘community’ of which the Irish needed to become members. Sociologists and historians have debated the nature of ‘community’ extensively, but we can identify some of its defining features. They are, firstly, obligations – that people should have a network of active commitments to each other and they should also have organisation – a more or less formal system of institutions that express the commitments. The institutions and groups of individuals should perform actions that support each other and therefore express communal life actively. There is likely to be a network of relationships enfolding people generally and these are likely to be helped by geographical closeness in a defined location. Simple geographical proximity might, however, be replaced partly by networks running across a wider or transnational realm defined by ethnic or class identity, professional status and so on. A community should exhibit some stability in order to build up its obligations and institutions but the process of community definition is also dynamic. It develops in response to changes in the wider environment and the impact of other communities. Its cohesion will be partly defined by its relation to authority, particularly through conflict, and with powerful ‘others’ in society. This process will generate symbols and a rhetoric used consciously to identify the community and include or exclude members. Members of a community should have a consciously shared identity and a sense of belonging. Even so, they may not be members of just one community but of a number composed of competing forces. Such ideas are particularly appropriate in looking at the Irish during their settlement in nineteenth-century Britain.

The tide of Irish emigration in the nineteenth century took place during industrial capitalism’s transformation of the world economy. Indeed, that emigration was substantially a consequence of the uneven development of international capitalism and the laissez-faire ideology of its ruling class in Britain. The cyclical boom-and-depression pattern of development in the British economy demanded a reserve army of mobile and flexible labour, not just from the labouring poor but also from the trades and professions as well. The underdevelopment and deindustrialisation of Ireland provided such a reserve of labour. It is essential, therefore, to see the fate of Irish families in Britain within this overall structural context.
They shaped their own family histories but in circumstances usually not of their own choosing and to which they had to react.

Structural-functionalists and Marxists developed complementary perspectives on the family. The functionalists accepted the inevitability of industrial capitalism and argued that it had needed the ‘modernisation’ of the family, particularly through the supposed emergence of the nuclear family. This institution was socially and geographically mobile and able to respond to the needs of a capitalist economy. It ensured that members of society were socialised into the values, norms and disciplines essential to sustain an orderly but competitive free enterprise system. The older extended family typified by the rural Irish was seen as suffused by pre-industrial values. Migrants from such backgrounds had to adopt the new structures in order to compete effectively. It was assumed that a rigid division emerged between home and work, the former a predominantly male environment, the latter predominantly female. From a hostile perspective, Marx also saw the family as moulded by capitalism’s requirements but with the result that family ties were torn and children transformed into articles of commerce and instruments of labour. Engels argued that, in the transitional industrial capitalist state, the family had replicated the system’s class relationships, with the husband as the bourgeoisie and the wife as the exploited proletariat.

The functionalist and Marxist perspectives emphasise the need to consider how industrial and finance capitalism and, in particular, its class and gender conflicts, impacted on families. Building on this, Marxist feminists argue that the ‘family’ has to be seen as an ideological construct whose historical role was to keep people functioning despite the stresses caused by outside economic processes. It was a key element in the process of social reproduction, but it also had contradictions. Families were always being threatened with disruption and break-up by the market system but they also might be the foci of resistance to pure market relationships and be the instigators of collective rather than individualistic values. This approach emphasises the need to see a family’s members within their various household contexts operating in the local economy. It suggests the importance of examining gender and class roles, as well as the changing position of people of various ages within the family and household.

**Why study Stafford?**

Concepts of the family and family life therefore offer a tool to investigate the experiences of the migrant Irish in the town of Stafford. It is, however, necessary at this point to pose the question: Why study Stafford? Many other places could have been picked for this study, and Stafford
might at first sight seem an idiosyncratic choice. The author admits that
the town was not selected after a review of possible places guided by
rigorous research criteria. The real answer is that his mother and her
family came from Stafford and initial interest in its Irish inhabitants was
provoked by research into the author’s genealogy. There seemed to be
an Irish ancestor – Mary Corcoran from Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. In
1866 she married the author’s great-great-grandfather, James Clewlow.

It was apparent that Mary Corcoran was not alone in Stafford. The cen-
sus enumeration returns for 1851 and 1861 revealed a striking number of
Irish-born people living there. Until then the writer had tacitly accepted
the common view that the Irish had settled mainly in the industrial areas
and big city slums, especially Liverpool. Yet here were significant num-
bers living in this obscure town in the west Midlands. It seemed to be
worth looking at these people in more depth to find out when and why
they had arrived in Stafford and what their experiences were in the town.
Early work therefore concentrated on the Famine and its aftermath, and
was a modest addition to the numerous studies covering that period that
appeared in the late twentieth century.

Despite the serendipitous origin of its selection, Stafford’s value as a
case-study location became more apparent as time went on. Its advan-
tages are its location, economy, social character and size. These com-
bine to offer an environment that contrasts with many of the previously
studied locations whilst having features common to other locations.
Stafford was a small town. In 1871 its population was 16,082 and Irish-
born people numbered just 403, or 2.55 per cent of the total. This was a
proportion very close to that in England and Wales as a whole. At that
time the towns and cities of northern England had the largest concen-
trations of Irish but only a small number of places had more than 10 per
cent Irish-born. Many more had between 4 and 10 per cent and most
were again in the north. It is important to emphasise, therefore, that
the Irish-born were a minority even in the areas of densest settlement.
Stafford fell within a large group of settlements having between 2 and
4 per cent of Irish-born. These were geographically widely distributed
and included London and a range of both large and small towns. The
absolute number of Irish people in a settlement influenced their ability
to form a definable ‘community’, and the possibilities in Stafford were
different from those, for example, in Birmingham, which had almost the
same proportion of Irish as Stafford but over 9,000 actual people. Even
so, Stafford’s position within this middling band of towns means it can
be used to study phenomena inherently more difficult to examine in the
larger settlements. It is feasible to cover the whole of the Irish popula-
tion in detail and to trace the lives of its families down the generations.
It also allows more light to be thrown on the Irish who did settle in the
smaller towns, a neglected group in the literature. Over 7 per cent of the
Irish settlers in towns with a population under 30,000 (Table 1.1). They are directly comparable with Stafford. Furthermore, over one-third of the Irish lived in various types of non-municipal settlement. These included small towns and villages in rural districts, unincorporated settlements in industrial areas and suburbs beyond the boundaries of bigger towns and cities. Many of these places may have been analogous to Stafford but more local studies are needed to complete a comprehensive picture of the varied experiences of the Irish. Malcolm Smith and Don MacRaild have suggested that ‘Herson’s Stafford becomes more important as an example of a common experience as the Irish scattered into similar small towns (a process which was well in train by the 1870s), but even then, the small size of the Irish populace in that town still raises a question about typicality.’ This double-edged comment assumes there was a ‘typical’ environment that the majority of Irish people experienced. Similar thinking imbues the main writer on Liverpool’s Irish when he emphasises that city’s ‘exceptionalism.’ But were Stafford and Liverpool ‘exceptional’ to some vision of the ‘typical’? What place was ‘typical’? This author believes every settlement had its ‘exceptional’ or specific aspects. Stafford’s specific character will be described in Chapter 2. The task of the historical researcher is to identify the special circumstances that affected people’s lives, but above all to make well-founded generalisations that others can test in comparative studies elsewhere. That is a major aim of this study of Stafford’s Irish families.

Table 1.1 Estimated distribution of Irish-born in different types of settlement, England and Wales, 1871

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement type</th>
<th>Estimated Irish-born</th>
<th>% of total Irish-born</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London boroughs</td>
<td>78,422</td>
<td>13.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td>76,761</td>
<td>13.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>34,066</td>
<td>6.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other cities (&gt; 100,000) (11)</td>
<td>62,639</td>
<td>11.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large towns (50,000–99,999) (20)</td>
<td>48,576</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium towns (30,000–49,999) (33)</td>
<td>33,705</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small towns (&lt; 30,000) (189)</td>
<td>42,178</td>
<td>7.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-municipal settlements</td>
<td>190,193</td>
<td>33.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>566,540</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: see n. 68.*
The method

This study of ordinary families works in the tradition of ‘history from below’ or ‘public history’.\textsuperscript{71} It identifies the total population of settled Irish families and examines in depth a representative selection. The analysis is structured by the concepts of the family discussed earlier. The overall method can best be described as collective family biography or ‘family prosopography’. The potential of this approach has been acknowledged in Irish migration studies, but the work done so far has been limited and almost none relates to the Irish in Britain.\textsuperscript{72} Collective biography, or prosopography, investigates the characteristics of groups of historical actors by generalising from individual biographies of their lives.\textsuperscript{73} The approach has normally been used to investigate individuals united by some common characteristic, for example Members of Parliament, but it is also appropriate to use collective biography to study the behaviour of families with apparently common characteristics. The strength of the prosopographic method is that it not only gives detailed information about individual cases but provides strong impressionistic evidence of the mass of ordinary people in their time and place. This is something that has often proved difficult in Irish migrant studies.

Chapter 3 describes the types of Irish families who settled in Stafford in the nineteenth century. Three definitions are needed to identify them. What defines a ‘family’, what was an ‘Irish family’ and what was a ‘settled’ family? Earlier discussion in this chapter has defined a ‘family’ as a distinct group of kin identifiable by a common name or names and a pattern of revealed relationships. Families could range from apparently lone individuals through nuclear units to groupings including all manner of kin. They were not, of course, isolated units but had overlapping boundaries and interconnections with other families. Even so, it was possible to identify distinct families over long periods of time.

What defined an ‘Irish family’? The answer was any identifiable family that contained an ‘Irish’ person, meaning an individual born in Ireland. This study looks, therefore, at all the people and their families who claimed birth in Ireland, whatever their apparent background in that country. It exposes the full ethnic mix of the emigrants and the range of social structures in which they lived. There is no other way to encompass the range of ‘Irish’ people and avoid stereotypes of Irish ethnicity.\textsuperscript{74}

What was a ‘settled’ family? The term ‘settling down’ is used commonly to imply a degree of long-term stability and commitment to a place. The extent to which people and families ever ‘settle down’ is affected by both circumstances and attitudes. Some families never ‘settle’ even after many years in a place, whereas others can show apparently deep stability and commitment after a short period of time. Nevertheless, the study had to
Irish emigrants and family history: a new approach

Adopt a practical and objective definition of 'settlement,' and it was when a family was present for at least ten years – that is, it was identifiable in at least two censuses or there was evidence from other sources that indicated a similar time span.

These criteria identified 206 settled Irish families living in Stafford between the 1820s and 1901. The research documents their histories to around 1920. This cut-off date was chosen because it brings the narrative beyond the Great War and tests the nature of their commitment to living in British society by the early twentieth century. It also avoids discussing the adult behaviour of people who might still be alive today. The main chapters of the book present the histories of the selected families and discuss the factors that determined the character and fate of each. They provide insights into the lives of ordinary families and document the diversity of family outcomes. This provides a more subtle picture of the experience of migrant families in the long term and avoids the dangers of ethnic generalisation and stereotyping.

Academic historians have tended to underestimate the potential for cross-fertilisation between genealogy and professional social history. The family histories presented here attempt to fuse profitably the sources and techniques of traditional ‘academic’ historians with those of digital historians and genealogists. The research would have been impossible without digital information technology. At its heart lies a Microsoft Access® relational database of material about Stafford’s Irish families. This initially just captured from the census returns details of every household in Stafford containing at least one Irish-born person (or known descendants) between 1841 and 1901. The process of family identification was not always straightforward since there were many data discrepancies such as in the spelling of surnames, the use of forenames and the estimated ages of individuals. Families sometimes emerged through a fog of uncertain data, a fact demonstrating that the effective use of historical sources needs to combine information technology and critical human judgement. Despite this, the overall reliability and value of the census returns as a source was manifest. They are a tribute to the conscientiousness and, indeed, bravery of the enumerators in performing their task amidst the rookeries of Victorian towns and cities.

The database was later expanded to include linked classificatory tables on the nature of households and dwellings, together with data from burial records, marriage registers, poll books, Poor Law records, military information and other sources. Searching the database continually threw up evidence of meaningful connections that not only helped clarify the structure and interrelations of families but also suggested likely character, motivations and identities. It also enabled a picture to emerge of where families lived over time, of their neighbours and associates, and the neighbourhoods they and their descendants frequented.
The local newspaper, the *Staffordshire Advertiser*, was trawled from 1826 to 1922 for evidence concerning identifiable Irish people and also on the wider economic, social and political context. The original copies of the newspaper could be used in the William Salt Library, Stafford – a huge advantage over digital copies (not in any case available) in that evidence could be picked out easily in its context rather than by using pre-determined word searches or scanning the text on a microfiche reader. It is another example of the benefits of marrying traditional with digital historical methods. A summary of each ‘incident’ was added to the database, classified by its type and date, and, where possible, cross-referenced to individuals from the census returns. This emphasises how databases not only aggregate large amounts of data but can also be used to identify individual cases and unexpected connections amidst a superficially inchoate mass of information. They help the researcher produce ‘history with a human face’. 

Information from descendants of the Stafford Irish was solicited by means of a newspaper article in Stafford itself, but mainly through a website, *Diaspora Connections*. This brought 180 responses from around the world, of which 93 provided useful information on 60 distinct Stafford families. During the 2000s the work was increasingly aided by the explosion of online data such as digitised newspapers, family history sites like *Ancestry* and other sources. Such digitised data are, however, far from perfect, and use of the genealogy sites revealed numerous cases of mistranscribed names and missing records. These instances reinforce the need to adopt a critical approach to the digital record and, indeed, to avoid total reliance on it.

The process of writing each family’s history began by reconstructing its genealogy using the census data from 1841 to 1911 and other sources. This provided the skeleton on which to hang the family’s history. Other data were then added to explore its evolving character using the conceptual frameworks discussed above. Many types of evidence were used in this process. The most priceless would have been surviving testimony in the shape of letters, diaries and publicly reported statements. Historians of the Irish in Australia and the USA have used such sources profitably, but historians in Britain have had a leaner time of it. This study is no exception. No surviving letters, diaries or similar sources came to light from the Stafford Irish and their descendants. There were a modest number of photographs and a reasonable number of reported statements in the press. That was all.

The second-best source for attitudes and identities was the knowledge that has come down to descendants. Here the picture was better. Through contacts by post, email and the website, information was offered by descendants on the past history and character of some families. This evidence was followed up by interviews with twenty of the descendants.
Even so, the work inevitably had to use surviving documentary sources to build up a coherent picture. Information suggesting both life experiences and possible identities came in many forms. Apparent attitudes to Irish origins could be expressed in overt pride, associational activity or, on the other hand, behaviour suggesting a desire to obscure Irishness, such as changing a surname or place of birth. More generally, evidence could document behaviour and experiences: religious adherence or the lack of it, social involvements, pubs frequented, voting patterns, political activity, work-related activities, living conditions and dealings with public agencies. All of these could suggest attitudes and possible identities. Such information could, however, only intermittently and imperfectly pick up evidence of transnational links. This mainly occurred when members of a family emigrated from Britain. Lack of surviving correspondence and oral history data meant that the diasporic world of the families, both at ‘home’ in Ireland and elsewhere overseas, often remained obscure or unknown.

Enda Delaney has used oral history to present the ‘inner history’ of the post-war Irish in Britain. He cautions against over-reliance on traditional documentary sources that may tend to emphasise the Irish as a ‘problem’ and give little insight into how the Irish saw things themselves. The historian of the nineteenth-century Irish is forced to use such sources – albeit critically – linking them, where possible, to the knowledge and opinions of descendants alive today. In the Stafford case the amount of data was never enough to write day-by-day family chronologies except in relation to specific reported incidents. This book does not try to pad out the historical record by writing fiction or even ‘faction’, but confines itself to presenting the known historical facts and discussing what can reasonably be inferred from them. Even so, across each family and over time evidence of its behaviour became available that enabled a plausible picture of its character and ethos to be painted. Information that specifically demonstrated family relationships and attitudes was inevitably more nuanced but not negligible. Evidence of domestic interactions between husbands and wives, parents and children or with other relatives and associates could suggest whether family relations were close, loving and supportive; or negligent, hostile and abusive; or somewhere in between. In some cases obituaries and death reports in the press could provide priceless evidence about the lives, careers, attitudes and family circumstances of individuals and of how they were regarded in the host community, though such reports were inevitably biased towards those who had either achieved some local prestige or whose death was particularly tragic or notorious. The trajectories of children in terms of their school experiences and record, the jobs they took and the degree of social mobility they demonstrated suggested the attitudes and aspirations present in the family and even whether there was a ‘family strategy’.
The totality of this evidence offers new perspectives on how immigrant families developed in the long term.

Notes

1 Staffordshire Advertiser (SA), 22 July 1899.
2 Ibid., 6 June 1908.
24 Ibid., Chapter 12 (quotation on p. 177).
31 P. Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1962); L. Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage in England,
Divergent paths


35 Hareven, Family Time and Industrial Time, pp. 114–16.


40 Ibid., pp. 52–5.

41 Ibid., pp. 53–76.


43 Davidoff, Thicker than Water, p. 4.

44 Parkin, Kinship, pp. 3–12.


47 Gillis, World of Their Own Making, pp. 109–29.

48 Ibid., p. 126.

49 Davidoff et al., Family Story, pp. 83–7; Smart, Personal Life, pp. 159–66.

50 Davidoff et al., Family Story, p. 90.

51 Smart, Personal Life, pp. 80–107.

52 See also J. D. Herson, ‘Family history and memory in Irish immigrant families’ in K. Burrell and P. Panayi (eds), Histories and Memories: Migrants and Their History in Britain (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), pp. 210–33.


55 Definition in American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (Text Revision), 4th edn (Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Publishing, 2011) (normally abbreviated to DSM-IV-TR), which is often taken for medical and legal purposes as the agreed formulation of symptoms. The validity and reliability of the DSM approach to diagnoses is subject to criticism, an issue beyond the scope of this book.


62 For an outline discussion of theories of the family, see Davidoff et al., Family Story, Chapter 2. The most influential attempt to apply structural-functionalist ideas to a historical issue was N. Smelser, Social Change in the Industrial Revolution: An Application of Theory in the Lancashire Cotton Industry, 1770–1840 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959).

Divergent paths


66 Subsequent research in fact disproved the link because Mary Corcoran was James Clewlow’s second wife. The author is descended from Clara Clewlow, the final child of James’s first wife, Mary Hodge, who died in 1864. Clara did, nevertheless, grow up with her stepmother, Mary Corcoran.


68 The 1871 Census only gives birthplace data for a limited number of towns. Table 1.1 estimates the distribution of Irish-born by using data for the ‘principal towns’ for which birthplace evidence is given. The known proportion of Irish-born in the towns of various size categories was then projected on to all towns in the same category listed in General Table VIII (*Census, 1871: Tables of Birthplaces of the People in Principal Towns in England and Wales. General Table VIII: Population of Cities and Boroughs Having Defined Municipal or Parliamentary Limits*). This allows an estimate to be made of the total Irish-born in each category (middle column of Table 1.1) and thence the distribution of Irish-born in different sizes and types of settlement. The residue of Irish-born not accounted for in this way therefore comprised those living in various types of non-municipal settlement.


77 www.staff.ljmu.ac.uk/socjhers/stafford/index.html.


79 The 1911 enumeration returns only became available during the final stage of this work, too late to be included in the database. Data from 1911 were, however, used in the reconstruction of specific Irish families.

80 The nature of this evidence is discussed in Herson, ‘Family history and memory’.
