

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CELEBRATIONS OF IRISHNESS IN BRITAIN: SECOND-GENERATION EXPERIENCES OF ST PATRICK'S DAY

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Introduction

St Patrick's Day has been celebrated with far greater enthusiasm and lavish display outside Ireland than within the national territory. This is a measure of the huge significance of the diaspora to expressions of Irishness. For the last one hundred and fifty years parades in New York and other major US cities have been on a scale only recently being "brought home" to Dublin.¹

The ongoing importance of the diaspora to this newfound national pride was expressed by President Mary McAleese's St Patrick's Day message on 17 March 2006, when she specifically linked not only those claiming Irish identities inside and outside the territory, but incorporated the "honorary Irish" who joined in the celebrations overseas.

I wish to send warm greetings on this St Patrick's Day to Irish people at home and abroad, and to Ireland's friends around the globe. Today is a day of celebration in Ireland and for all our global family throughout the world.²

Thus investigating the meanings of the most iconic of Irish festivals inevitably takes us outside Ireland, which is where the vast majority of those claiming an Irish identity live. According to the statistics used by President Mary Robinson, who played a major role in realigning definitions of the Irish nation to include those living elsewhere who claim

¹ Cronin and Adair, *Wearing*, 241-47.

² <http://www.president.ie/index.php?section=1&lang=eng>.

Irish descent, the total is in the region of 70 million, of whom only 5 million live on the island itself.³

National pride is the fundamental message of St Patrick's Day, as President McAleese's message suggested. This accords with the definition offered by Cronin and Adair, authors of the most comprehensive history to date of the phenomenon. They view the rituals as first and foremost national and ethnic in character.

St Patrick's Day is fundamentally about the Irish: their sense of self, their place in the world, their views of the past and their claims to the future.⁴

However, as in other European Catholic countries, patron saints are also strongly connected with the religious calendar. The religious content of the national celebrations therefore needs to be examined and unravelled, especially in the light of deep-rooted disputed links between religious and national identities in Ireland.

This chapter explores a very specific aspect of the phenomenon, experiences of St Patrick's Day celebrations amongst what is often a hidden part of the Irish diaspora, those born in Britain to one or two Irish-born parents, known technically as the "second generation". In particular it examines what adult second-generation Irish people's memories of, and reflections on, St Patrick's Day celebrations in their families and neighbourhoods can tell us about their relationships to Ireland and their ability to express their senses of Irish identities in Britain.

The "bulge" of children born in England to the 1950s generation of Irish emigrants is now in middle adulthood.⁵ They grew up during the height of open conflict in Northern Ireland when Irish identities were unwelcome in Britain and could produce a violent reaction. This chapter explores the accounts of the Irish 2 Project⁶ interviewees of their memories of celebrating St Patrick's Day both privately within the family and publicly at school and possibly on the street. What was apparently a "festive" occasion was also tinged with "tragic" components when it collided with, or had to be hidden from, the majority society for whom it

³ McQuillan, *Mary Robinson*, 2.

⁴ Cronin and Adair, *Wearing*, xv.

⁵ Hickman, Morgan and Walter, *Second generation Irish*, 17-18.

⁶ This was an ESRC-funded project (2000-2). The co-applicants were Professor Bronwen Walter, Anglia Ruskin University, Professor Mary J. Hickman, London Metropolitan University and Dr Joseph M. Bradley, University of Stirling. Dr Sarah Morgan was Research Fellow. The website, which includes newsletters and a discussion of the methodology, is at <http://web.apu.ac.uk/geography/progress/irish2/>.

signalled a political threat.⁷ These difficult and challenged public expressions of Irish identities in Britain contrast with the apparently easy and ethnically inclusive displays in large US cities.

Second-generation Irish populations in Britain

The findings are drawn from qualitative research with a sample of second-generation Irish people in Britain, which included detailed discussions in 13 focus group and 116 individual interviews. The sample was selected to reflect as far as possible key characteristics of the known structure of the population, which outnumbers the Irish-born by about three to one and includes between 1.5 and 2 million people.⁸ This large increase in the second generation reflects a high degree of apparent out-marriage, so that three-quarters of the total have only one Irish-born parent. However an unknown but sizeable proportion of non-Irish-born parents are of Irish descent. This is especially true in Scotland, where high levels of intermarriage within the Catholic population have been retained and indeed senses of strong Irish identities persist into at least the third generation.⁹

Although there has been some inter-generational geographical redistribution, most second-generation Irish people have continued to live in regions with large Irish populations in the post-War period.¹⁰ In England these include London and the South East, the Midlands and North West and our choice of research sites reflects this (London, Coventry, Banbury and Manchester). In Scotland, where the intergenerational persistence of “Irish” towns and neighbourhoods is even more marked, our location was the Strathclyde conurbation in the west.¹¹

The inclusion of both English and Scottish dimensions to research on the Irish in Britain is an unusual feature of this project. A striking aspect of the research, which came to light when we returned later to share our findings with participants and invite their responses, was the lack of awareness amongst Irish migrants and their families in England of the degree of sectarian discrimination and exclusion against their compatriots who settled in Scotland. Described as “Scotland’s hidden shame”, this is

⁷ Walter, Morgan, Hickman and Bradley, *Family Stories*, 208-12.

⁸ Hickman, Morgan and Walter, *op. cit.* 10-13.

⁹ Bradley, *Celtic minded*, 65.

¹⁰ Hickman, Morgan and Walter, *op. cit.*, 18-20.

¹¹ Boyle, *Edifying*, 174.

only recently being opened up as a topic for debate¹² and remains very strongly contested by supporters of the status quo.¹³

We specifically raised the question of memories of St Patrick's Day celebrations with participants in several contexts. One was private—family traditions—and another was semi-public—schools' acknowledgement of the Irish part of their pupils' heritage. Clearly the two are connected, with emblems from home being worn at school and public paths being taken between the two. We also asked about their public participation in street activities, such as parades, on St Patrick's Day. There were opportunities for these different experiences to be reinforced in an uncomplicated way, but also for mismatch and confrontation.

Private domains: homes

The strongest childhood memories of St Patrick's Day amongst the participants were of receiving objects—shamrocks, medals, badges and cards—from relatives in Ireland. They described the little boxes and envelopes containing items intended for them to wear to school. The regular arrival of these symbols contained the very clear message that second-generation children were part of the national Irish family and revealed a taken-for-granted assumption that they would accept this identity and be prepared to proclaim it publicly in Britain. These assumptions are an interesting contrast to the uncomfortable challenges issued to the second generation in other situations that they are inauthentic Irish people, who lack an Irish birthplace and an Irish accent, and are therefore “plastic Paddies”.¹⁴

A gendered response to these gifts from Ireland can be discerned. The objects largely took the form of bodily adornments which may have been more appealing to girls than boys. Girls spoke of being dressed up with green ribbons in their hair so that they would have been more conspicuous than their brothers who had only shamrocks and possibly badges. Moira,¹⁵ who lived in Oxford as a child, spoke about continuities with the experiences of her own children:

We would have St Patrick's Day parades in Cowley. We would go to school with green ribbons in our hair, green badges. I did do that to James

¹² See Devine, *Scotland's shame*; Walls and Williams, *Sectarianism*, Walls and Williams, *Religious discrimination*.

¹³ Scotland on Sunday, *Bigotry experts*; Bruce *et al.*, *Religious discrimination*.

¹⁴ Hickman, Morgan, Walter and Bradley, *Limitations*, 175-6.

¹⁵ Pseudonyms are given to all participants.

[her son] when he started school, I didn't put ribbons in his hair, but my parents always send over badges. Then they get to an age where they are embarrassed to do it. The girls, I would put green ribbons in their hair when it was St Patrick's Day.¹⁶

Thus not all children welcomed or understood these displays, with boys more prominent amongst reluctant recipients. In some cases surprise and incomprehension about the strange ritual suggests that parents could also be ambivalent about perpetuating it. Brought up in London, with two Irish-born parents, Desmond said:

As a child we were sent a shamrock from Ireland. We'd wear it to school, it was very important with a great big safety pin, that was it. I didn't know who St Patrick was, but we got rid of that as quickly as possible.¹⁷

Nicholas, also a London resident, had an English father and Irish-born mother. When asked whether St Patrick's Day had been important to him in the past, he replied:

Not really, that was the day when the little grey box of shamrocks came through the post, and we weren't sure what we were supposed to do with it, but it came anyway. There was never any celebration of it, nor is there still anywhere in my family that I can think of.¹⁸

Aidan, now living in Banbury, also had an English father and Irish-born mother. He mentioned the danger of wearing the emblems outside the home in the very "English" town of Lincoln in the 1950s.

The first portion of my life, this was at primary school in Lincoln, especially on St Patrick's Day when all of a sudden this sprig of shamrock arrived. I wouldn't know what day it was, but this huge safety pin would be rammed through my T-shirt [...] I was always mortified to be sent out to walk along the road, as I didn't want to stick out. I wasn't aware that I was different from anybody else, apart from going to a Catholic school [...]. On St Patrick's Day you stood out like a sore thumb [...] I wasn't very keen. If you are the minority, you keep your head down.¹⁹

A Londoner, Maeve, added a further dimension to these fears which grew stronger following the escalation of the "Troubles":

¹⁶ Banbury Discussion Group 1.

¹⁷ London Discussion Group 2.

¹⁸ London discussion Group 4.

¹⁹ Banbury interview.

That was a big thing at school with badges and shamrocks sent over in the post in an envelope [...] then the Troubles in Northern Ireland, not wearing a badge then. There was a time when mum was sent shamrock and she kept the shamrock if we went out to dance, we'd do Irish dancing at the St Patrick's things, we'd wear it there. But she would be reluctant to send us down the road to school wearing it, as she thought it might start things off.²⁰

Jane, who grew up in London with an Italian father and Irish-born mother, elaborated on reasons for this absence of celebration:

No, we never got sent the shamrock. I think there were other kids in our year who would be more Irish influenced at that time, I wouldn't have felt the need to shout it from the roof. I knew my mum was Irish, but I don't think our family were ever encouraged to come out and shout about it [...] I think it is something you innately pick up on as a child, there are some things you don't talk about. When there have been all the problems with the bombings in London, you consciously wouldn't talk about it with people, you'd fear you might get into an argument. We come from a fiery background, and we thought that would get us into trouble, we might have the police thinking the family might have connections with the IRA, all sorts. I guess we wouldn't talk about it and pretend it wasn't happening.²¹

By contrast many participants in Manchester and Coventry remembered St Patrick's Day with pleasure. In Scotland, especially, all participants showed a strong sense of welcoming the symbols from Ireland. One participant, who was named Patrick, said

It was always a significant day here, obviously because my father was Patrick, I'm Patrick, we're Irish, our relatives used to send loads of cards over with shamrocks on them and that was pinned, I would go to school with that pinned on me next day, for St Patrick's Day, the shamrock.²²

Several strongly rejected any suggestion that their parents had ever tried to hide their Irish identities:

Pauline: They never, if anything they tried to promote it. As I said, when it was St Patrick's Day they always had their shamrocks. We always wore our green, white and gold badges, they always tried to promote it.²³

²⁰ London interviewee.

²¹ Scottish interviewee.

²² Manchester interviewee.

²³ Scottish interviewee.

Peadar: I wouldn't say I was aware of it, no. Actually I'd say my father was at the other end of the spectrum. When it came to things like St Patrick's Day he would make sure you put on an extra big spread of shamrock and things like that. He would actually go out his way to let people know he was Irish.²⁴

Parents created home traditions of St Patrick's Day in varied ways, in part reflecting their assessment of the consequences of proclaiming Irish identities. Those in London were particularly wary of exposing their children to identification, probably reflecting the focus of IRA activity in the British capital. In Scotland, on the other hand, where Protestant/Catholic divisions were most deepseated, St Patrick's Day was an occasion when Irishness was defiantly asserted within both the family and the wider Irish community.

Semi-public domains: schools

Outside the home, the spaces in which most time was spent on St Patrick's Day by Irish children were schools, which represented particularly revealing sites for the demonstration of official attitudes. The majority attended Catholic schools where the range of responses illustrates the ambivalence of the Catholic church towards the Irishness of the second generation. Mary J. Hickman has argued that the Catholic church was instrumental in "denationalising" the Irish in the nineteenth century and substituting Catholic for Irish identities amongst the second generation.²⁵ For many teachers this would have meant downplaying the celebration of Irish national and ethnic difference.

The impact of this strategy was borne out by participants' reports of experiences in English Catholic schools where few gave formal recognition to St Patrick's Day. Frank, in London, was asked:

S: What about how the schools were run, did they do anything Irish in the curriculum, or celebrate St Patrick's Day?

Frank: Not at all.

²⁴ Scottish interviewee.

²⁵ Hickman, Religion, 12-13.

S: Even though pretty much all the kids were of Irish descent?
 Frank: No they did nothing at all like that. We knew from home that St Patrick's Day was the 17th March, it was not an issue at school.²⁶

The presence of large numbers of second-generation Irish children effectively turned many schools into Irish spaces, even if the day was not specifically celebrated. Several people spoke of being “allowed”, rather than encouraged, to wear shamrocks. Asked about St Patrick's Day events at school, Ian, a Banbury participant, said

I think it was being on the bandwagon when you are at school, when St Patrick's Day came around, all of us would celebrate that day. You felt like you were in a club at school, people with both English parents didn't understand it, and we all bonded together.²⁷

Marion, in Coventry, confirmed the sense of community provided by wearing these symbols:

Marion: All the children wore a badge that were from Irish descent, or a shamrock, and we wore it with pride. It did define us as to where we were coming from.

S: That was the majority was it?

Marion: I don't know if it was the majority, but it was everyone in my circle of friends. I don't know if it were a majority but a good fifty per cent. If mum didn't have a spare badge for us to wear, we'd be ever so downhearted.²⁸

The most enthusiastic comments were made by women, reinforcing the notion that St Patrick's Day decorations were enjoyed particularly by girls. Grace, from Banbury, had lived near London as a child and felt her school had positively supported the celebrations.

B: The school recognised St Patrick's Day?

Grace: Yes, the school would recognise it, a third of the nuns were Irish, it was a big day for them.

B: How did that show itself?

²⁶ London interviewee.

²⁷ Banbury Discussion Group 2.

²⁸ Coventry interviewee.

Grace: I can't remember, I think everyone was dripping with shamrocks.²⁹

The phrase “dripping with shamrocks”, which probably refers to the physical flimsiness as well as the exuberant size of the sprays, was also used by Marie, a Banbury resident who had also been to school in London. She had no close family left in Ireland to continue the supply of shamrocks.

Marie: I felt we were different, mum had come over quite young [...] we didn't have anybody over in Ireland [...] I remember on St Patrick's Day when they all had these great wodes of flowers, feeling really jealous. They'd have these naff harps with green ribbons and gold, and I always really envied them.

S: So your mum didn't put your hair up in green ribbons?

Marie: No, perhaps it didn't mean a lot to her, I don't know [...] They'd have it dripping off them at school, and we didn't have any.³⁰

Joanne from Coventry who had an Irish-born mother and English father, had also felt that the supply of shamrocks from Ireland was a sign of authenticity.

I can remember St Patrick's Day so well, all the Irish children came in with shamrocks, and gold harps and things. The bigger the shamrock the better, you were a real Irish person if your family in Ireland had sent you shamrock.³¹

By contrast children educated in the state school system found no such recognition or even acceptance. Two participants in Coventry said they would have been bullied for wearing shamrocks.

Patrick: I went to a normal state school, there were times like St Patrick's Day when I was sent to school with a rosette on, and some of the kids might want to pick on you.³²

Maria: No. I'd have been beaten up if I had done [worn a shamrock to school]. That is probably putting it strongly, but it would have drawn

²⁹ Banbury interviewee.

³⁰ Banbury interviewee.

³¹ Coventry interviewee.

³² Coventry interviewee.

attention to my difference, and after a while I didn't want to do that any more. Mum and dad didn't do anything like that either.³³

Again reports from Scotland were quite different from those in England. There was strong polarisation between schools where St Patrick's Day was celebrated officially and marked by a Mass and a day of holiday activities, and those where it was never mentioned.

Rosaleen: (Jumps in) Oh my God, the best day of the school year. And I of course, because I was musical I ended up playing at mass, then run up the road and play at the concert then singing. It was absolutely brilliant. I loved it. It was the best celebrated day of the year.³⁴

However in other schools the day was ignored, presumably for fear that its celebration would fuel complaints that Catholicism represented sectarianism.

Mary: [...] In the school, no, I don't remember it being mentioned.

J: Would you have went to Mass for St Patrick's Day?

Mary: We would have but, I mean especially later on, you would have went maybe because of the family or because of your own personal beliefs, not so much the school. I can't remember if we actually went to do with the school. Maybe in Primary, but I can't remember anything in Secondary.³⁵

Peadar, a teacher, believed children themselves were ashamed of the association of Irishness with low social status and preferred to play down events which drew attention to their association with it, especially as they grew older and could make their own choices.

I think there's a thing nowadays that people want to assimilate, people want to be the same. I think the television makes everybody want to be the same. I think society makes them want to be the same. I think even within Catholic, I think it's the Church [...] I notice even when you're in the class with children, you talk about St Patrick, if you ask them for a Saint, a lot of them will mention St Patrick, a lot of them will mention things to do with Ireland, but that'll be knocked out of them before they're much older. I think it's to do with affluence. Catholics have been getting on in life and the Irish have been getting on and the Irish thing is seen as an

³³ Coventry interviewee.

³⁴ Scottish Discussion Group 2.

³⁵ Scottish interviewee.

embarrassment. I also think, I suppose the Troubles being on for those thirty years had a big part to play in it.³⁶

Potentially dangerous links made by “mainstream” society between Irish ethnic identities and anti-British political sympathies are revealed by these accounts. This was particularly relevant to displays outside the relative safety of sympathetic “Irish” homes and schools. They underline the very different contexts of Irish people’s lives in Britain and the USA.³⁷

Public domains: street parades

The largely privatised activity of wearing shamrocks, badges and ribbons symbolised the inclusion of the second generation within the wider Irish community. It contrasts with the exclusion of public St Patrick’s Day festivities from British streets, especially during the years of heightened conflict in Northern Ireland after 1968. This is in very striking contrast to the public pageantry on March 17 on many US city streets.

Although they had taken place since the beginning of the nineteenth century, parades in Britain had never been on such a lavish scale, reflecting the contested position of the Irish ethnic minority. They had largely been confined to northern English cities such as Manchester and represented a statement of Catholic pride and solidarity rather than an inclusive community-wide “day out”.³⁸ In a few cities such as Liverpool where Orange/Nationalist hostility was present they could be fiercely contested events where Protestant police forces supported those seeking to disrupt the proceedings.³⁹ Such contestations continued throughout the twentieth century, reported only in the local press.

Parades ceased altogether during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁰ Aidan’s fears, reported above, of walking down English streets wearing shamrocks as a child in the 1950s was echoed more strongly in the subsequent period. However the gradual move towards a peace agreement in Northern Ireland was accompanied by the re-establishment of parades in England. In 1990 the Manchester Parade was one of the earliest to be re-instated. This was followed by other large towns and cities, joined finally by one of the last big cities with a significant Irish population, Birmingham, in 1997.⁴¹ The

³⁶ Scottish interviewee.

³⁷ Walter, *Outsiders*, 25-6.

³⁸ Cronin and Adair, *Wearing*, 60-4.

³⁹ Neal, *Sectarian*, 117.

⁴⁰ Cronin and Adair, *op. cit.*, 196.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 198.

Birmingham Irish community had suffered the most severe English backlash to the IRA pub bombings in 1974 and its Irish population had “kept their heads down” in public for longer than in other places.⁴²

The most elaborate St Patrick’s Day was re-launched in London 2002 in the form of a Festival, which steadily grew in size thereafter. This had more in common with the US style of celebration, planned as a multi-cultural, city-wide display, funded centrally by the Mayor of London’s Office.⁴³ In 2006 the fountains in Trafalgar Square were dyed green, echoing the New York and Chicago river rituals. It was supported by a wide range of cultural activities—Irish classical, traditional and popular music, art exhibitions, food markets, street theatre and floats representing Irish and London organisations.⁴⁴ These activities fit closely with Cronin and Adair’s definition linking St Patrick’s Day to culture and national identity, with no significant religious content. However it could also be argued that the commodification of the event once again denied to the second generation access to the specifically “ethnic” value of the event, as it became available to all Londoners, perhaps especially the English.⁴⁵

The easy transition from negative stereotypes of the Irish as potential terrorists to popular ones as fun-loving, sociable, musical and artistic people characterised the rapid adoption of St Patrick’s Day parades in England. However in Scotland there was no parallel change and parades remained inadmissible. One small, but significant exception illustrates the continuing linkage in the public mind between Catholicism and “sectarianism”. In 2003 Irish community members in the Catholic town of Coatbridge, 30 miles south of Glasgow, proposed a week of Irish-related, but non-religious, activities around St Patrick’s Day. This produced an outpouring of letters to the local press from objectors, one of whom castigated the organisers for contributing to “the cancer of sectarianism which still blights our society”.⁴⁶ Nevertheless the Festival Committee, respected members of the Irish community in the town, persisted in providing a week of Irish culture, including art exhibitions, Gaelic football, music, plays, films and fancy dress parades.

Many Scottish participants spoke of difficulties they had experienced in expressing their Irish identities. When asked a more general question, John immediately linked his memories with St. Patrick’s Day.

⁴² Hickman and Walter, *Discrimination*, 204-7.

⁴³ Nagle, *Everybody*, 563-5.

⁴⁴ *Guardian* 13.3.06, 7; *Irish Post*, 18.3.06, 1-3, 15-24.

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Séan Campbell, Anglia Ruskin University for making this telling point.

⁴⁶ Bradley, *Celtic minded*, 54.

I can remember one time as a boy of ten or eleven, going along Alexander Parade with my mother [...] and it was a St Patrick's Day and we were walking along and this man spat passing us. My mother turned round and shouted something at him you know. That's the only occasion I've had.⁴⁷

Mary drew her own contrasts between the US and Scotland when she responded to the question "Do you celebrate St Patrick's Day?" by saying

I do, not as much probably as I've wanted to, and I've always had this kind of nagging thing about St Patrick's Day. I thoroughly enjoyed it when I was in New York. I just felt as though you could be Irish and not have to suppress it. It is difficult to enjoy St Patrick's Day in Glasgow. If you go to maybe a good night and it's all working for you, uh huh, you can have a good St Patrick's Night. But it's difficult to go out and actually enjoy it as a day. Men can maybe go from pub to pub and have a rare old time on St Patrick's Day, if that's the way they want to celebrate it. But what do you do? It could be mid-week and there's nothing on, so how do you celebrate it?⁴⁸

This account provides another gendered dimension to St Patrick's Day celebrations. Their association with pub culture gives the activities a more strongly masculine flavour, especially in societies where pubs remain male territory.

Other Scottish participants also spoke of making special trips to take part in St Patrick's Day parades in the USA. This was never mentioned in England, suggesting that there was no need to do so. Noleen contrasted the high and low key celebrations available in the two locations, New York and Glasgow.

J: Do you celebrate St Patrick's Day in any way?

Noleen: I've done it by going to New York. Here maybe you'd go out to a pub but that's about it.⁴⁹

When she was asked at the end of the interview what recognition she would like to see for people of Irish descent in Scotland she used St Patrick's Day as a symbol of the difficulties now faced.

I don't know how. Well, let us maybe even enjoy St Patrick's Day in peace and let us maybe have parades like they do in New York. I mean there's

⁴⁷ Scottish interviewee.

⁴⁸ Scottish interviewee.

⁴⁹ Scottish interviewee.

everything there, isn't there. They let them fire away and they're all.... you know.⁵⁰

The misidentification of St Patrick's Day in Scotland as simply a manifestation of "sectarianism" was brought into sharp relief by a Protestant participant. Colin, from a Protestant background, was questioned about the interview theme. The careful choice of words of the interviewer reflected an anxiety not to offend religious sensitivities and the expectation that there would be a negative response.

J: There'd be no mention of St Patrick's Day or anything like that, that wouldn't be significant? I've got to ask.

Colin: No. Because my family and this community have roots, right. St Patrick as a saint is not just for Catholics. St Patrick is the Patron Saint of all of Ireland, North and South. The problem being, it's been hijacked somewhere along the line to think it's only for one identity and St Patrick's night was sometimes celebrated in a different sphere if it landed at the weekends, I've got to say that. I remember having going to parties as a young child and it was St Patrick's night but it was maybe a different way of celebrating St Patrick's night.

J: So, it would be very little to do with shamrocks, greenery... anything like that.

Colin: No, it was nothing to do with shamrocks and greenery, no.

J: It would be an Orange celebration?

Colin: It would probably be an Orange celebration. I've got to say one of the local boozers, I don't go to the pub, but one of the local boozers certainly always gets the Guinness people in to do, you know, a promotion that day. He always does that and he is an Orangeman as well may I say, but he always does that.⁵¹

Conclusions

St Patrick's Day offers a focus for feelings of belonging to an Irish community, especially for those outside Ireland. These feelings are reinforced at a number of levels—by inclusion within extended Irish families who send emblems to their "missing" members, by socialisation at Catholic schools amongst peers with similar national/ethnic

⁵⁰ Scottish interviewee.

⁵¹ Scottish interviewee.

backgrounds and sometimes supportive ambience, and as adults by sharing events which link them to other members of the Irish “community”, offering a sense of solidarity and support in proclaiming their Irish allegiances to a non-Irish population.

These different domains provided varying levels of safety for expressing a potentially unwelcome identity. The home was generally a safe place where family members shared or supported a similar background. But setting foot outside could expose individuals to dangerous recognition and invite hostility. Schools might be extensions of the sympathetic environment of the home, but even Catholic schools could also take the opposite route of disassociating themselves from nationalistic expressions of Irishness and aligning themselves with British traditions.

What emerged most strikingly from the personal accounts of the project participants was the ongoing difference between English and Scottish societies in their attitudes to Irish cultural and political difference. In the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement of 1998 which shifted the Northern Ireland Peace Process into a new phase, coinciding as it did with the growth of the Celtic Tiger economy in the Republic, more positive attitudes towards the Irish became apparent in England. However the Scottish state, and its established Presbyterian Church, have persisted in representing Irish difference in religious terms as threateningly “sectarian”, refusing to acknowledge the distinctive ethnicity of one third of its inhabitants. Whereas in England St Patrick’s Day is moving towards an increasingly inclusive “festive” event, in Scotland the “tragic” elements appear to remain deeply entrenched.

Acknowledgements

The *Irish 2 Project* (2000-02) was funded by Research Grant R000238367 from the Economic and Social Research Council. I am grateful to Séan Campbell, Anglia Ruskin University, for very helpful comments on this chapter.

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