Ethnicity and Irish residential distribution

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ABSTRACT
The link between residential and social differentiation remains an acknowledged ‘research gap’. This paper uses the empirical study of recent Irish settlement in Luton, England, to elucidate the processes leading to residential clustering and relate them to ethnic identity. This settlement must be seen in the context of labour migration, in which the Irish were formerly a ‘racialized’ fraction of the British working class. Census data highlight substantial Irish clusters at the core and in specific suburbs of the town. However, these cannot be explained in terms of choice/constraint mechanisms. Instead they are the by-product of cultural characteristics, notably Catholic Church affiliation. The Irish in Luton remain a socially distinct sub-group within the working class, but neighbourhood appears to play little part in the retention of ‘Irishness’.

KEY WORDS: Irish, Ethnicity, Residential segregation, Labour migration, ‘Racialization’, Catholic, Social differentiation, Identity, Neighbourhood, Housing histories

The links between residential segregation and social stratification are notoriously elusive. Phenomena presumed to be related have frequently been shown to co-exist, but the processes which connect them have not been satisfactorily explained. Ironically the most recent attempts at clarification have been by historians and historical geographers, who are additionally handicapped by their dealings with long-dead actors whose attitudes and individual activities can no longer be recovered in any detail (Cannadine, 1982; Pooley, 1984). In this paper an attempt is made to fill part of the ‘research gap’ identified by Harris (1984) using a culturally-defined sub-set of the working class, the Irish-born in contemporary Britain. The aim is to document as fully as possible the mechanisms producing residential clusters in a medium-sized English town, Luton, and to identify the contribution of, and effects on, social differentiation. Within an overall structural framework, emphasis is given to experiences recounted by the residents themselves.

In the last century the majority of Irish people in Britain were segregated both socially and residually to a marked degree, and there is considerable circumstantial evidence to connect the two (Walter, 1979). The ‘Rookeries’ and ‘Little Irelands’ of cities and large towns are well-documented examples of Irish ‘ghettos’ (e.g. Hickey, 1959; Lawton, 1955; Lees, 1979; Lobban, 1971; Lowe, 1974; Richardson, 1968; Treble, 1968). In Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and London, for example, many of the poorest areas were occupied almost exclusively by migrants from Ireland living in overcrowded, unhealthy, slum conditions. Accompanying this was ‘racialization’—the attribution of negative qualities on phenotypical or genetic grounds—and hostility which frequently erupted into violence. According to Miles (1982), the Irish-born in mid-nineteenth-century Britain constituted a distinct fraction within the working class, with clear parallels to the social position of black migrants today.

Although densities are far lower, recent censuses continue to record definite clusters of Irish-born people in parts of British cities and towns. In view of the similarities in both causes and effects between nineteenth-century Irish and twentieth-century New Commonwealth labour migration streams (Rose et al., 1969; Miles, 1982), a study of the development of Irish residential patterns and their social concomitants, if any, may provide useful insights into the longer-term consequences of labour migration. Before changes in ‘shapes on the ground’ and ‘shapes...
in society' can be related, however, it is necessary to examine some features of the structural background to labour migration between Ireland and Britain.

**STRUCTURAL BACKGROUND**

In broadest outline, the growth of industrial capitalism in Britain gave rise to an increasing, though fluctuating, demand for labour. This was met in a number of ways including the continued tapping of rural areas and the inclusion in the workforce of additional age and gender groups. The Irish could be included in these categories but they were also attributed the more specialized role of a reserve army of labour.

Throughout the nineteenth century and until after the Second World War the Irish were the principal source of unskilled migrant labour in Britain, their numbers fluctuating according to major trends in the economy. This situation remained substantially unaltered until the 1950s when, despite the addition of over 500 000 Irish migrants between 1951 and 1961 (Johnson, 1963), labour shortages remained and recruitment was extended to more distant ex-colonial 'peripheries'.

Whereas the Irish migrants retained some of their flexibility as a labour source, however, the 'racialization' of New Commonwealth migrants withdrew this valuable feature of their employment. In the 1970s a high rate of return migration to Ireland was recorded, coinciding with the deepening recession in Britain and a short-lived upturn in the Irish economy. But the 'racist' ideology used to explain the subordinate economic position of black migrants had resulted in immigration controls after 1962 which removed the freedom of black labour migrants to respond to changes in demand, and encouraged the permanent settlement of families (Castles and Kosack, 1973).

While the general mechanism of labour migration continued to explain the exchange of population between Ireland and Britain, the specific historical context of settlement changed. In a number of important ways, post-1939 'second wave' migrants had a different experience from their 'first wave' predecessors, thus residential clustering may require different explanations. First, the profitable areas for capital in the mid-nineteenth century were those specializing in the labour-intensive heavy manufacturing sector. In the second half of the twentieth century such regions were in decline but in need of labour to replace indigenous workers who were able to select more attractive working conditions in lighter manufacturing industry. To some extent the Irish, who maintained strong links with the construction industry at both periods, simply followed these developments from older to newer industrial regions (Walter, 1980) and were thus associated with growth rather than acting as a 'replacement population' as in the case of West Indian and Asian migrants (Peach, 1968; Jones, 1978). A second important contrast, therefore, is the accumulation of economic and social consequences from earlier migration. The Irish-born benefited from economic ties with particular trades, including new contacts with expanding light manufacturing forged during the Second World War (Jackson, 1963), as well as reduced friction through intermarriage and religious diffusion in the longer-settled areas (Walter, 1984). Thirdly, the political significance of Catholicism had changed. In the mid-nineteenth century anti-Catholicism was rampant, leading to a fusion of racial and religious discrimination against the Irish. By the mid-twentieth century religious affiliation was no longer a significant political force. Finally, despite larger numbers in the post-war period the Irish-born had become a smaller part of the total migrant labour force. Although still the largest group from any single country of origin, they were the most familiar of a greatly augmented group including Italian, Polish, Maltese and Cypriot, as well as the more conspicuous New Commonwealth, newcomers.

As migrant labour, the Irish-born entered the British working class. During the nineteenth century they constituted a distinct fraction of that class, identified as 'radically' inferior and politically subversive. In the second half of the twentieth century their position is harder to define. Some writers assert that the Irish have been completely absorbed. As Rose et al. (1969) put it:

> With their religion gaining acceptance and their political involvement reduced to a (none the less highly significant) reinforcement of the Labour vote, which symbolizes neatly the 'fit' achieved in class terms, the Irish were by the Second World War largely accepted.

Although Castles and Kosack (1973) agree that the Irish did in time become integrated into the British working class, they also show that the Irish were 'intermediate' between the English and 'coloured' immigrants in respect to overcrowded and shared accommodation: 'Whatever aspect of the
TABLE I. Percentage age distribution for total and Irish-born populations Great Britain, Irish Republic, and N. Ireland 1951–81

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<tr>
<td>0–14</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>n.i.</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–44</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>n.i.</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–64</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>n.i.</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>n.i.</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1981 pensionable age given


housing situation one chooses to look at, it is evident that coloured and Irish immigrants have far worse conditions than the English population'. This could, of course, represent a temporary situation in which new arrivals experience specific problems which are overcome with time, but it might also reflect the additional ethnic, or cultural, dimension of 'Irishness' capable of surviving the loss of migrant status and even of transference to subsequent generations.

Historical specificity should also be applied to the structure of the second wave itself, in terms both of economic and political context and the characteristics of the Irish community. Deepening recession in Britain has affected all labour migrant groups and unemployment amongst workers in the construction industry, which accounted for 28.0 per cent of all male Irish-born workers in 1971, has been particularly high (24.0 per cent in 1981). Increased violence in Northern Ireland since 1969 has affected Irish people in Britain by a generalized association, rising to 'backlash' reactions identified by the media following incidents such as the Birmingham pub bombing in November 1974. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, introduced shortly afterwards, further emphasized the 'guilt by association' which can be visited on Irish people in Britain without legal protection. Many members of the Irish community believe that the Act was designed to muzzle criticism of British policy, and its effect has been to increase levels of anxiety and resentment (GLC Report on the Prevention of Terrorism Act in London, 1984).

Because the 1950s was the period of maximum immigration from Ireland, the Irish-born population is an ageing one (Table I). The proportion of Irish-Republic-born people in the younger working-age group (15–44) fell sharply from 41.4 per cent in 1961 to 39.8 per cent in 1981, reflecting both decline in immigration and the return movement to Ireland. Proportions in the older working-age group rose slightly, but the greatest increase was amongst those of pensionable age. The overall decline in Irish-born numbers after 1971 was accompanied by an expanding second generation. Indeed, the highest total of Irish-born people in Britain (1971: 957 830) was closely followed by a new peak of British-born children entering the labour market. An apparent decrease in endogamy during the period 1971–76 may reflect this changing ratio of first to second generation rather than marital, and therefore structural, assimilation (Caulfield and Bhat, 1981). Together with people of more distant Irish origin and descent, who retain an awareness of Irish identity, these form the present-day Irish community (GLC Policy Report on the Irish Community, 1984).

This paper, therefore, aims to uncover the nature of 'Irishness' in contemporary Britain and the extent to which it contributes to, and is affected by, residential clustering. The significance of such an identify for social stratification will also be assessed.

METHODS

Residential patterns are examined in Luton, a medium-sized industrial town within the South-East region, which exhibits many of the characteristics of 'second wave' Irish settlement in Britain. Like other towns in the Midlands and South East, Luton had very little previous experience of Irish immigration. In 1861, 57 Irish-born people were recorded in the
census, and there were only 169 in 1921. Between 1951 and 1981 however the growth in numbers echoed changes at the national level (Table II).

Two types of analysis were undertaken. At the macro-scale, evidence from the censuses of 1961–81 was used to examine social and residential characteristics of the Irish population. Boundary changes were compensated for by a redistribution of the totals to a 0.77 sq km grid, constructed to minimize divisions and emphasize the neighbourhood scale. For preceding years, Catholic parish records indicate the general trends in growth and distribution of the Irish community. Names show that the great majority of Catholics were of Irish origin. Further indicators of social attitudes concerning Irish people were derived from content analysis of the weekly *Luton News* for the census years 1961 and 1971.

At the micro-scale, the migration and housing histories of a sample of 86 Irish households interviewed between 1973 and 1975 were used to clarify and illustrate processes identified. The dating of the survey provides a useful reference point during the period of change measured by 1971–81 census comparisons, while recording previous moves extends behavioural explanations into the previous decade.

**RESIDENTIAL PATTERNS**

**Household structure**

Information on age-structure by birthplace for Irish-headed households in Luton, available in the 1981 census, provides indicators of the composition of the Irish community (Table III). This summarizes the development of processes during the survey in the preceding decade for the town as a whole. Since 82.9 per cent of the total Irish-born population was included in this category, a clustering at the household level is immediately apparent. Those excluded are Irish-born women, children and lodgers in non-Irish headed households, as well as people living in hostels and institutions.

An indication of the size and location of the second-generation element of the community is also given. A total of 12,119 people, 7.5 per cent of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Irish Rep.</th>
<th>N. Ireland</th>
<th>Total*</th>
<th>All births</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>68,523</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1409</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>110,381</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>5,655</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>7,236</td>
<td>131,583</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>6,570</td>
<td>1,670</td>
<td>9,340</td>
<td>161,405</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>6,591</td>
<td>1,398</td>
<td>7,989</td>
<td>163,209</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(including Ireland, part not stated)*

**Table II. Growth of Irish-born and total population 1931–81**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All births</th>
<th>Total Irish-born</th>
<th>Great Britain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931–51</td>
<td>+61.1</td>
<td>+525.6</td>
<td>+39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–61</td>
<td>+19.2</td>
<td>+275.5</td>
<td>+25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–71</td>
<td>+22.7</td>
<td>+29.1</td>
<td>+10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–81</td>
<td>+1.1</td>
<td>-14.5</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Census of England and Wales, 1931, General Tables, Table 30; 1951, County Reports, Table 19; County Reports, Table 8; Census of Great Britain, 1971, Country of Birth Tables, Table 3, County Reports, Table 14; 1981 County Reports, Table 14*
TABLE III. Age and birthplace of residents in private households in Luton, 1981

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irish-headed households</th>
<th>UK-headed households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Born in UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>5–15</td>
<td>41.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>16–29</td>
<td>34.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>30–44</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–pension age</td>
<td>4.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pensionable age</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6654</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Irish Republic including Ireland, part not stated

Source: Census of Great Britain, 1981. County Report, Bedfordshire, Part I, Table II

The population of Luton were living in Irish-headed households, nearly twice the recorded Irish-born population in the town (6591). The age groups confirm the generational links. Those born in the United Kingdom (54.9 per cent of the total) were concentrated in the younger groups (86.6 per cent under 30, compared with 44.9 per cent for United Kingdom-born households). An almost equal proportion (86.5 per cent) of those born outside the United Kingdom, and thus presumably Irish, were over 30. The proportions in pensionable age groups were relatively small, 5.5 per cent in Irish-headed households compared with 16.4 per cent in those with United Kingdom-born heads. The Luton Irish community was therefore dominated by the cohort of young people arriving in the 1950s and early 1960s, whose children were entering working-age groups by 1981. The high proportion of United Kingdom-born household members aged 16–29 (78 per cent) suggests that by 1981 separate second-generation households had also been formed.

**Distribution in Luton**

The pattern of Irish settlement before 1961 may be deduced from Catholic records giving parish foundation dates and annual totals of both priests and church members (Fig. 1). The first church was established in 1884 close to the town centre where the small number of Irish-born people recorded in the 1861 census had lived. One priest administered the parish until 1939. In 1937, however, a second church, St Joseph's, was built in Gardenia Avenue, Limbury, a north-western suburb of the expanding town. During the 1950s additional suburban churches were added, though the earlier pre-eminence of St Joseph's was maintained. Two further trends appeared in the 1960s. In addition to expansion into the most recent housing areas in the north-west fringes, a 'Centre for Irish Immigrants' was inaugurated in the central part of the town. By the 1970s about one-third of the total Catholic population was served by the two central parishes, a further quarter by St Joseph's and the remainder split fairly evenly between the remaining suburban parishes. In the 1980s two new permanent churches replaced temporary accommodation in the expanding north-west suburbs.

This pattern of outward expansion and central consolidation is confirmed by the small area census data 1961–81 (Figs 2 and 3), in which three clear elements can be distinguished (Fig. 4):

1 A group of grid squares close to the town centre (17) which consistently recorded the densest contiguous area of Irish settlement though both absolute and relative totals declined sharply over the period. In 1961, 46 per cent of the Irish-born population lived in the nine grid squares centring on H7, but by 1981 only 26 per cent did so. This can be termed the core area reflecting its location and initial high concentration;

2 a marked extension to the north-west, centering on F4, the location of St Joseph's church. Increasingly detached from the core, this maintained both density (1961, 7.2 per cent; 1982, 7.7 per cent) and share (1961, 3.6 per cent; 1981, 3.2 per cent) of the total Irish-born population. It will be referred to as the secondary area of Irish settlement;
3 the remainder of the north-west sector which experienced a steady increase in the size of its Irish-born population so that E2 exceeded F4 in absolute numbers of Irish-born by 1981, though the percentage concentration was slightly lower (6.2 per cent). It can be regarded as a tertiary area of settlement.

A number of possible explanations for this pattern and its evolution may be considered. First, the distribution of the Irish-born may coincide with ecological characteristics of the town, such as housing tenure and social class, supporting Jones's (1967) conclusions concerning Irish settlement in Birmingham:

the assimilation of the Irish immigrant is merely a matter of time, and the segregation which exists now, and may well persist, is one of socio-economic status. As long as the Irish immigrants occupy a disproportionate share of the unskilled and insecure jobs, then we shall expect to find a disproportionately high percentage of Irish living in the poorer areas of the city.

A second, related, process is dispersal accompanying assimilation, according to the classical Chicago model (e.g., Cressy, 1938). It has been argued that contemporary Irish settlement in Bradford follows this pattern. Apart from clusters related to rehousing policies, 'the Irish ethnic group is in process of being dispersed voluntarily as people move up the social scale' (Richardson, 1976). In this case, longer-established immigrants would be found in the outer areas while newer arrivals settled at the centre. The core area would thus act as an 'urban village' reception area, re-distributing those willing and able to leave its support. Both explanations accord with the view that the Irish have become integrated into the working class and no longer represent a distinct fraction of it. Alternatives are that the pattern has been brought about by the displacement of the Irish by other migrant groups, as occurred dramatically to the Welsh community in Utica (Jones and Eyles, 1977), or that increasing numbers necessitated physical expansion despite a
FIGURE 2. The Irish-born population in Luton as a percentage of the total population, 1961, 1971, 1981
Source: Census

preference for ethnic clustering as occurred among the Glasgow Asian population (Kearsley and Srivastava, 1974). In the latter case recent arrivals would be found in outer areas but re concentrating could be expected. These situations would cast more doubt on the full absorption of the Irish-born into the British working class.

CLUSTERING PROCESSES: AGGREGATE LEVEL

Ecological relationships
It is not possible to interpret the degree of clustering observed simply by reference to statistical correlations. A number of social class and migrant status variables can be drawn from the small area census data, but none provides a satisfactory explanation for the pattern. Although there is an overall similarity in the social class distribution of the Irish-born and social areas of Luton (Timms, 1963; Census of Great Britain, 1966) the Irish seemed to be disproportionately concentrated into areas with an above average overall representation of social classes IV and V. Moreover within these areas, marked concentrations of Irish-born were found. Three of the thirteen enumeration districts with above average concentrations of the total population in these classes in 1966 contained 40 per cent of the total Irish-born population in such areas. Similarly housing tenure distribution does not provide associations sufficiently strong to explain the observed concentrations. Although the Irish-born were slightly overrepresented in council housing, the proportions in owner-occupied housing approached those of the total population.

The arrival of other migrant groups in the town may have influenced the distribution of the Irish-born either through replacement or avoidance. While both Asian and West Indian migrants settled in or close to the Irish core area during the 1960s, the low correlation between areas of absolute decline in Irish numbers and increased totals of these groups make replacement a more likely process, especially when Irish moves into higher status areas are considered.

Finally, period of arrival in the town may clarify the extent to which expansion into other areas represented re-distribution from an ‘urban village’ or simply the overflow of later arrivals. The 1971 census records numbers arriving before and after 1960, and shows that more recent immigrants were relatively more numerous in areas with the greatest density of Irish-born people, reinforcing the existing pattern and avoiding areas with few other Irish people. Longer-established immigrants had moved closer to the total population distribution in 1971, except in the secondary area where they were more concentrated than either newcomers or the total population. Since over-representation of arrivals was greatest in the central area, while in the outer areas longer-established settlers predominated slightly, this pattern could reflect the operation of several processes, including chain migration, preference for Irish neighbours and the availability of rented accommodation. In order to examine these possibilities further it is necessary to turn to the behavioural level of investigation.

The main finding at the aggregate ecological level, therefore, is a dynamic pattern which could have arisen in several ways. Clustering was at a higher level than would be predicted by socio-economic factors alone, though longer established migrants were generally dispersed. This suggests that migrant or ethnic status, or both, had influenced the distribution. To identify more precisely the processes at work, the attitudes towards the group of both ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ must be assessed.

Group attitudes
The ‘outsiders’ most frequently encountered as neighbours by Irish people in Luton are the majority white British-born population. Their views are considered indirectly here since Irish people were the focus of the interview survey. A few studies have attempted to measure white majority attitudes towards Irish people and have faced the common methodological difficulties (Bagley, 1970). Their findings have differed considerably. A pilot study in the East Midlands used a social distance scale to compare the acceptability in various roles of five ethnic groups (Ellis, 1969). The Irish were given a mean overall acceptability score of 84 per cent (Jews 63 per cent, West Indians 51 per cent, Indians 48 per cent, Pakistanis 43 per cent). However, subsequent work by Stanton (1972) and Verma and Bagley (1975), using bipolar adjectival scales, categorized the Irish as the most rejected group after Pakistanis. By contrast, recent replication of Verma and Bagley’s work with secondary school children in Nottingham displayed the Irish in a much more positive light. The only widely agreed negative stereotype was ‘violent’, thought to reflect the association with Northern Ireland ‘troubles’ rather
than personal aggression. In fact the Irish were credited with being particularly ‘cheerful’ (Thomas, 1984). Although conclusions are hard to draw it may be noted that the favourable results were recorded in areas which also experienced large-scale ‘second wave’ Irish settlement.

Two sources relevant to residential location were explored further in Luton. Access to housing, investigated through interviews with allocative ‘gatekeepers’ and recipient respondents could not be positively associated with Irish birthplace. Although some degree of deliberate dispersal of black tenants was practised in the early 1970s, local authority housing officials claimed that the only selection of Irish tenants occurred where particular requests for proximity to a Catholic school could be met.

Informal neighbourhood pressures could lead to clustering, though Goldthorpe et al. (1968) believed that the highly developed awareness of sub-cultural differences they observed in Luton was reflected in ‘privatized’ behaviour within more heterogeneous residential areas. Newspaper content for the years 1961 and 1971 was analyzed to gain an impression of local attitudes towards different ethnic and regional groupings within the town. The most striking finding was the invisibility of the Irish. Although more than one-tenth of the total population in 1961 was Irish-born or of immediate Irish descent, only 30 items in the weekly Luton News throughout the year included the words ‘Ireland’ or ‘Irish’. One-third of these drew attention to the association between Irish origin and a minor legal offence such as drunkenness. One case, however, reflected more generally on the Irish community and its impact on a particular neighbourhood. This was a civil action brought by residents in Gardenia Avenue, at the heart of the secondary area (F4), who complained about noise created at St Joseph’s Catholic Church on Sundays when loudspeakers relayed the service to an overspill congregation standing outside, and about dances in the hall attended by three or four hundred people. ‘It is mostly Irish people who attend these dances and Irish dances tend to be very noisy’ (Luton News, 12 January 1961). The Bench dismissed the case, but the perception of nuisance may have reinforced the image of ‘noisy Irish’ and possibly led to residential avoidance of such community facilities. The issue of separate Catholic schooling also produced a heated debate in the correspondence columns over a three month period. Even fewer mentions of the words ‘Scotland’ or ‘Scottish’ were found, a total of six. By contrast Asian and West Indian settlement in the town was frequently and fully discussed.

In 1971 the number of local Irish mentions had fallen, but wider coverage of events in Northern Ireland was included and may have reinforced the stereotype reported in Verma and Bagley’s survey of Nottingham schoolchildren. The low profile of the Irish-born in the town could be explained in several ways. On the one hand the Irish-born, like the Scots, could be regarded as simply a regional group, a view advanced in a report focusing on migrant communities in the town (Luton News, 6 June 1963). Alternatively, the exclusion of Irish news, notably Catholic Church events, may be a measure of the separation of these migrants from the interests of the mainstream of white British society. Activities taking place entirely within the group could reflect a high degree of plurality rather than assimilation.

If outsiders seemed generally to ignore the presence of the Irish, forces for clustering may have existed between ‘insiders’ the Irish community in Luton. One such is a preference, common among rural-urban migrants, for property ownership. Indeed, the rise in house prices in the early 1970s is thought to have financed return migration (Irish Post, 9 December 1972). In addition, preference for Catholic schooling placed particular strain on such provision in the decade following greatest immigration. In 1961, St Joseph’s Catholic primary school was compelled to turn away children living at a distance from the school and for whom other Catholic schools were planned. This policy had a powerful effect on parents’ residential choice. One mother wrote to the Luton News in support of school expansion:

‘...speaking for Catholic parents (being one myself), our first thought when we have a child is, where’s the nearest Catholic school? Our eyes become focused on it, and be it ever so overcrowded, when the time comes we prefer to send our child there, even if an almost empty school were next door. It is a long desire we have, because the faith comes first (Luton News, 30 March 1961).'

From this evidence, therefore, the strongest clustering forces were those operating within the Irish group. Negative attitudes openly expressed by members of the majority society were probably those of a small number. Religious affiliation was the most important distinguishing characteristic of the group and appeared have observable effects on residential behaviour.
CLUSTERING PROCESSES: HOUSING HISTORIES

In order to examine the alternative processes suggested by aggregate analyses, a sample survey of the residential history and choices of 86 Irish households was carried out in four areas. Two core areas (Areas I and II), at the centre and fringe respectively, were chosen, with additional secondary (Area III) and tertiary (Area IV) locations (Fig. 4).

Pattern of movement
The household histories described show that a considerable amount of relocation had taken place during respondents’ residence in Luton. Only about one quarter still lived in the same area of the town where they had first settled. Although more of those first settling in the core area remained there, they had changed addresses more frequently than respondents in the outer areas of the town. The lower proportion of first moves into the secondary and tertiary areas tends to confirm the earlier suggestion that these housed relocated migrants rather than initial settlers. However, the relatively low proportions in the outer areas who had moved first into the core area conflicts with the simple ecological model of outward expansion from a central reception area. Moreover, despite the decline in overall numbers of Irish-born in the core area recorded in the census, the proportion of respondents living there had actually increased over time. In all, 26 per cent of those interviewed in the core area had initially lived elsewhere in the town. Far from presenting a pattern of outward dispersal, therefore, the relationship of first to current location indicated a complex exchange of population both within the outer areas of the town and between core and outer areas.

Differences between the core and outer areas are again apparent in the pattern of subsequent moves. Most moves outside the core by core area residents represented the initial shift to independent accommodation from a temporary arrangement with friends or relatives. Far greater stability was shown by outer area respondents, despite longer residence
in the town. Very few in the secondary area had ever lived in the core though a substantial number had moved in from other suburban areas.

The distinctive features of the pattern of the Irish-born population thus appear to correspond with separate processes operating at the household level, both tending to reinforce the degree of clustering observed. Residents in the core area remained there at successive life cycle stages whilst those already living in the suburbs, and homeowners moving into the town, selected secondary or tertiary areas. The extent to which these processes, which had the effect of physically segregating the Irish-born, are associated with social differences may be clarified by a more detailed consideration of respondents' own comments.

Personal accounts of last moves

The circumstances of the move to their current home were fully discussed with respondents. Although reasons for the choice were sometimes complex, it was usually possible to identify the principal factors influencing choice within the price-limited range available.

The four areas offered markedly different factors in housing choice. In the central core area (Area I) by far the most important category was personal contacts, with a relative or a friend providing or supplying information about accommodation. In four cases, siblings handed on their housing when they left Luton.

My sister lived here. She and her husband went back to Sligo to farm and we bought it off them.

My brother and his girlfriend used to live here. I was lodging a few streets away. He went home so I took his flat over. I wanted to be on my own. There's no privacy in lodgings.

Other contacts passed on news of available rented accommodation, sometimes through extended Irish information chains.

My cousin in the next road knew a lady [Irish] in this house who said the flat above was vacant.

In other cases known Irish landlords were approached.

This landlord is from my home area in Ireland. He has three or four houses. I met him in a pub and said I wanted to move into this area. I wanted this area because there are more Irish and it's friendly.

A second category of moves, exclusively confined to this part of the town, was those arising from initial familiarity with the area. These respondents chose to adjust their needs within a short distance, according with mobility patterns observed in a wide range of cities (Knox, 1982).

This was a better house. I like the area. My friends are here.

About two-thirds of respondents gave reasons which helped to explain the perpetuation of Irish settlement in the central core area. The remainder stressed the convenience of a central location and cheapness of large houses following a decline in social status. In the fringe of the core (Area II), however, availability of rented or cheap owner-occupied housing was paramount.

The estate agent gave me a list. I was only concerned with price, not area. I knew nothing about it.

I came twelve years ago. I wanted Ashburnham Road [Area I] but the deposits were too high. The estate agent put me on to this one quick because a coloured man wanted it.

Most respondents had moved directly into this area and used impersonal information sources. This concentration of Irish-born people reflected their socio-economic position rather than ethnic networks. Johnston (1969) similarly found Irish immigrants occupying cheap housing in the western sector of the inner city in London.

An even more striking contrast was presented in Area III, selected by most respondents because of the Catholic primary school attached to St Joseph's Church. A number of families who had first established themselves in other suburban areas, moved in when the children reached school age.

We bought a house through an estate agent when we first came [D6]. Just one that was available. But the children's school bus fares were expensive and they got cold waiting for the bus, so we moved nearer to the school.

We rented a house in Dunstable Road and saved the deposit so that we could buy a house near the church and the school.

The small number of respondents in Area IV gave a variety of reasons for choosing the area, though none mentioned personal contacts, and only one was concerned with proximity to a Catholic school.
Two were first-time house-buyers who liked the area, and two mentioned ease of access to work. The area seemed to offer the same advantages of home ownership as Area III, but without the strong attraction of church and school.

The marked clustering of Irish-born population in Areas I and III could not be ascribed to a preference for living in an ethnic enclave. Only one respondent, a young single female, mentioned this and the remainder rejected the suggestion when it was put to them in conversation. When asked for the area of origin of their immediate neighbours, all stressed that even where Irish people were already established, this had not influenced their decision to move in. Two processes, related to both the migrant and ethnic status of the Irish-born had bought about the higher concentrations in particular areas. First was the availability of rented and cheap private housing, which was in some areas retained within the community through local information networks. Chain migration concentrated kin and friends and in some cases replaced them in the same houses. Secondly, when children reached primary school age and proximity to Catholic schools was valued highly, the time-lag in school provision contributed to the intense demand for housing in the older suburb of Limbury. Most of the families interviewed there still had at least one child of primary school age and the location continued to meet their needs. With the establishment of four further churches and schools after the mid-1960s, pressure on this area had been reduced, but there were no positive reasons to move out as children progressed to secondary schools. Continued clustering may reflect this inertia, shown to be a significant modification to family status segregation models (Morgan, 1976).

Even if such ethnic clustering was not initially sought, chain migration and subsequent information flows between people from the same home area might lead to grouping by region of origin, which could then prove resistant to change, as in the case of other rural-urban migrants (Duocastella, 1970; Ogden and Winchester, 1975). A journalistic investigation of Irish settlement in Luton in 1971 claimed that this was indeed the case (O’Connor, 1972).

In some areas of the town, whole streets are not only Irish, but are occupied by immigrants from particular towns in Ireland, so that an intensely clannish air pervades these areas to the extent that, as one resident put it, ‘If someone comes over from the west of Ireland looking for a job, he only has to mention what town he comes from and I’ll know what street to direct him to’.

This assertion is impossible to verify without a full house-to-house survey of the Irish-born. Respondents asked whether they thought it was accurate, mostly dismissed the idea. Some of those concerned with Irish organizations, however, believed that they could identify such distributions. Most frequently mentioned were emigrants from Counties Leitrim and Donegal in Area I and from County Monaghan in Area III, though Counties Mayo, Galway, Sligo and Cavan were also believed to be well represented. The author’s survey showed that households originating in Counties Donegal (5) and Sligo (4) were best represented in Area I, Counties Leitrim (4) and Dublin (4) in Area II, while in Area III only County Monaghan (4) had more than two households. At street level there was no evidence of clustering, but if counties are grouped into regions, clearer differences emerge. However, it is difficult to ascribe particular significance to the results and there is certainly no parallel to the clustering by island of origin of West Indians in London (Peach, 1984; Philpott, 1977).

Even at a national ‘Irish’ definition of ethnic origin, shown to be significant in the wider context of Britain (Fox, 1975), benefits from living in an Irish neighbourhood may have been derived and acted as a brake on subsequent dispersal. When attempting to account for the degree of satisfaction they felt with their own neighbourhood, however, only one quarter of respondents mentioned neighbours positively. Asked further to name preferred residential areas of Luton half elected their present location but only 15 per cent gave attachment to kin or friends as the main reason. Some of the remainder mentioned the outskirts of Luton or an adjacent village, perhaps reflecting their rural background (Hyland, 1970) and a number acknowledged a cultural preference for bungalows. One-third of the sample, all but one living in Area I, was unable to give an answer, either because the question appeared irrelevant to lodgers or because of very limited mental maps of the town.

Residential clustering was not, therefore, consciously desired or actively pursued. Given fuller information, perfect mobility and wide availability of schools and churches, householders would apparently tend to allocate themselves according to the physical and locational qualities of residential area. In this they appear to conform to typical intra-urban search procedures (Brown and Moore, 1970) and show no signs of the preference to ‘community centrality’ reported for Asian communities (Robinson, 1981) and West Indians in Brixton (Lee,
1977). In practice, however, the urban ‘fabric’ exerted a friction effect so that patterns resulting from migrant and ethnic group characteristics persisted.

SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

The weakness of links between attitudes and clustering does not preclude the existence of a close-knit community based on interaction rather than proximity. It has been argued elsewhere that the Irish-born in Luton are socially integrated on plural lines, rather than assimilated into the predominantly white society (Walter, 1984). Their close friendships frequently remain within the migrant core and intermarriage between Irish people has been high. However, friends and kin, including married children, were scattered throughout the town, confirming the low priority accorded to local contacts in the reports on neighbourhood satisfaction. Further evidence of social activity within the boundaries of the ethnic group was the high attendance rates at Irish clubs in the town and support for the two successful Gaelic football teams. Respondents also reported frequent visits to Irish cultural and social events in London and the Midlands. The car and telephone seem to provide the frequent personal contact needed to sustain a working class community without the physical proximity essential in the past (Jakle and Wheeler, 1969).

A far stronger influence on social segregation was the church, confirming the importance of ‘institutional completeness’ for ethnic survival (Breton, 1964; Driedger and Church, 1974). In Luton the Catholic church provided both a physical focus and strong cultural and emotional reinforcement for Irish values and customs. Apart from the religious content of church services and teaching, which gave continuity to a major aspect of community life in Ireland, the parish provided a pervasive welfare service and a variety of leisure activities for all age and gender groups. The majority of Irish respondents met each regularly on Sundays, 64 per cent claiming that they attended church every week and 89 per cent at least twice a month. News of forthcoming events was announced and, as in Ireland, informal contacts renewed and gossip exchanged outside the church after the service (Brody, 1973). Halls attached to the church buildings were used as meeting places for the numerous associated activities.

Particularly important was the emphasis on retaining children within the fold of the church. Parents responded, as has been shown, by selecting housing in the catchment areas of Catholic schools. There was also strong pressure for families to participate in religious activities and the 96 per cent reported Sunday attendance rate among respondents’ children testifies to its success. The reproduction of social relations is therefore institutionally rather than residually based. The rural background of the Luton sample may account for the particularly strong ties noted here, 61 per cent coming from farms or small villages and only 23 per cent from towns of over 5000 people. Hynes (1982) has shown that in Birmingham the strength of attachment was such that rural migrants often identified their street by the name of the parish rather than the suburb. Urban migrants on the other hand felt marginalized by their poverty from an institution which emphasized achievement and respectability. Yet for both groups ‘to be Irish meant to be Catholic, the Catholic and Irish identities were seen as synonymous’.

Secular forces must not be underestimated, however. For a partially overlapping, exclusively male, subset of the Irish population ‘Irish pubs’ also served as meeting places where information was exchanged and common values reinforced. Some respondents had secured rented accommodation in this way and the pub’s legendary role as a labour exchange for workers ‘on the buildings’ was amply illustrated (World’s apart: a Connemara family, 1981). In London, moreover, it is claimed that priests have lost their role as community leaders and had been replaced by secular figures (GLC Policy Report on the Irish Community, 1984). The growth of cultural and political organizations catering for the interests of the Irish in Britain has certainly been recorded in the weekly newspaper The Irish Post since the late 1970s but their impact is as yet geographically fragmented and associated with individual initiative among certain sections of the community. Nevertheless, this secularization has accompanied the increasing maturity of the second generation ‘second wave’ Irish community and represents a new form of social identity. Its concomitance with the period of operation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act may also be significant. Thus institutional religious support, although important, is not essential to the continuing experience and expression of ‘Irishness’.

It is clear that the Irish-born in Luton can no longer be regarded as a distinct fraction of the working class. The level of material discrimination against the majority of Irish people in Britain is much reduced, directly contrasting with nineteenth-century Irish
and twentieth-century black experience. However, as Castles (1984) points out, class position and minority status must be considered as separate, though interlocking, facets of labour migrants’ experience. ‘Racialization’ persists in the stereotype of the Irish as ‘a stupid, drunken, fractious and violent race’ constantly reaffirmed in Irish jokes and the media coverage of the Northern Ireland ‘troubles’ (GLC Policy Report on the Irish Community, 1984). These images co-exist with strong pressures to assimilate illustrated by Irish invisibility in many areas of life which frequently obscures the nature of the nexus with British society. Further support is therefore given for the contextual and ideological definition of ‘race’, its significance altering markedly over time.

CONCLUSION

Residential clustering of Irish-born people in Luton arose as a by-product of a distinctive cultural background rather than through the choice/constraint mechanisms attributed to black segregation in Britain (Simmons, 1981). Yet social differences although qualitatively different from those experienced by ‘first wave’ migrants from Ireland, remained clearly identifiable in a number of spheres. The most obvious outcome was the enhancement of Irish people’s ‘sense of place’ based on their country of origin. Interviews brought out strongly the feelings of identity and security provided by this association, amply illustrating Relph’s (1976) view that:

A deep relationship with places is as necessary, and perhaps as unavoidable, as close relationships with people: without such relationships human existence, while possible, is bereft of much of its significance.

Such feelings were also communicated to many of the second generation whose personal experience of Ireland was more limited. However, the ‘myth of return’ was not strongly expressed by respondents. Only 21 per cent stated their intention to go back to live in Ireland and 16 per cent were uncertain about their feelings in this respect. It was clearly possible to maintain the connection by temporary visits and group solidarity in Britain.

The retention of an Irish social identity within the English working class has a number of functions, which relate to labour migration. For the Irish community it provides status and meaning in a society where their ‘racialization’ is real if muted. More radically, cultural strength provides a permissible form of resistance to co-option by the dominating ‘core area’. Benefits to the Catholic church of conserving its numerical strength far more successfully than other religious denominations in late twentieth-century Britain (Spencer, 1982) must also be recognized. Finally, the needs of capitalism continue to be served by a mobile labour supply which retains significant ties in places both of origin and destination.

‘Irishness’ has been shown to persist in a town with a large ‘second wave’ Irish population. But extensive fieldwork did not uncover any significant ways in which residential clustering contributed to it. Although clustering resulted from ethnic differences, there was no evidence to support Boal’s (1976) assertion that

The spatial patterns of ethnic groups in cities appear to be closely related to the degree and nature of the assimilation process.

Further weight is given to Lee’s (1977) conclusion that the low correlation between West Indian dispersal and social integration creates

... an even more pressing need to re-evaluate the relationship between social processes and spatial patterns—a relationship which currently, and misleadingly, equates residential dispersal with assimilation.

In the case of the Irish in Luton, at least for first-generation residents and their households, social separation and residential segregation were parallel, but not interconnected, processes. Distinctive ‘shapes on the ground’ and ‘shapes in society’ could be identified but they were linked by a common origin in the labour migration process rather than a reciprocal relationship.

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NOTES

1. Employment Gazette, 1982: 90.1. Tables 1.2 and 2.9
March/September average
2. Numbers of Protestant Irish-born were too small and scattered to invalidate the totals.

3. The sample was drawn randomly from a list of Irish households in four enumeration districts, selected as those with the highest census totals of Irish-born population and with a range of social and demographic characteristics corresponding with those of the total Irish population.

4. The interview areas are enumeration districts and thus overlap the super-imposed grid system.

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