

A CRIMINAL PROFILE OF THE LIVERPOOL IRISH¹

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I

The endemic anti-Catholicism of nineteenth-century Britain manifested itself in various ways, including physical attacks on Catholic churches, hostile criticism in books, newspapers and journals and a non-stop stream of aggressively anti-Catholic sermons from predominantly Anglican pulpits. Confusingly, the term 'Catholic' was used interchangeably with 'Irish' in much of the public comment concerned with religious controversy.² A further complicating factor in the nineteenth-century anti-Catholic debate arose from resentments based on political considerations. The Irish were seen as rebellious, wishing to overthrow British rule and hence, among other things, posing a threat to internal law and order and the cohesion of the Empire. As political malcontents, the Irish were suspected of colluding with Britain's enemies and were seen as 'disloyal'. At the time of the Fenian scares, particularly in 1867 and 1868, Catholic clergy went out of their way to stress the loyalty of Catholics to the British Crown.³ A prominent feature of the propaganda war between Anglicans and Roman Catholics was the use by Anglicans of criminal statistics regarding the Catholic population. The general thrust of attacks on Catholicism using such material was that the Roman Catholic population was more criminal in its behaviour than the rest of the community.⁴ Two strands of thought can be discerned in this onslaught on Catholicism. Some Anglicans took the view that it was not the fault of those Irish who fell

foul of the law; their problems were rooted in their religion — Catholicism robbed them of any morality. For example, in 1851, following serious Catholic–Orange riots in Liverpool, the *Liverpool Mail* of 19 July criticized the Liverpool Irish dockers involved in the fighting:

Popery has so polluted their mental faculties and debased the physical and moral habits of the Irish peasant that it is impossible to ameliorate his condition as a social animal. He does not think as the Englishman or Scotsman and Welshman does because he is so saturated with traditional falsehood . . .

Thus, the *Mail* did not attack the character of Celts, unlike many other commentators. Freed from Catholicism the Irishman could take his place in the civilized world. Contrast the above newspaper report with an earlier attack on the Irish in the Liberal *Liverpool Mercury* of 1 August 1848. In the course of a leader criticizing Irish loyalty to the Crown, the *Mercury* launched an attack on the character of the Celt:

No government, except by a very indirect and gradual process can change the idiosyncrasies of a slothful, improvident nation into a thrifty and peaceful people . . . There is a taint of inferiority in the character of the pure Celt which has more to do with his present degradation than Saxon domination.

Hence, the clear implication was that the Celt is racially inferior to the Anglo-Saxon and that this was the reason for the alleged anti-social behaviour of the Irish. Whichever viewpoint was adopted as a basis of criticism, i.e. Catholicism or race, there was general agreement among anti-Catholics that Catholics were more prone to criminal behaviour than the non-Catholic population. These attacks on the character of Catholicism were widespread, persistent and long-lasting. Forty years after the report in the *Mercury* quoted above, a prominent member of the Liverpool Conservative Party stated:

The influx of the Irish into Liverpool brought poverty, disease, dirt and misery; drunkenness and crime, in addition to a disturbance of the labour market, the cost to ratepayers of an enormous sum of money.

[A.B. Forwood, Liverpool Conservative Councillor, 1893]

The objective of this paper is to bring together the available evidence concerning the extent to which Catholics in Liverpool appeared in criminal statistics, the types of crime in which they were involved and to establish whether they represented a disproportionate element in such statistics. First, reference will be made to the existing literature on the topic of Irish crime in Britain. Then it will be argued that Liverpool was a special case with regard to Catholic involvement in crime. The second point made is that unless the crime rates in which Catholics appeared are related to the *population at risk* they will necessarily exaggerate the apparently disproportionate number of Catholic offenders. However, after making such allowances, it will be conceded that Catholics were disproportionately represented in the statistics and that this was a constant feature of nineteenth-century Liverpool. Against this, it will be claimed that the absolute numbers were relatively small and as such the statistics do not support the argument that Irish Catholics *in general* were peculiarly addicted to criminal behaviour.

II

The association of poverty with drink and brawling, often involving clashes with the police, is a feature of Irish immigrant life which most writers refer to in local studies of the nineteenth-century Irish communities in Britain. The most quoted of these are Richardson's study of mid-nineteenth century Bradford (1968); Dillon's paper on Leeds (1973); Lowe's unpublished Ph.D., 'The Irish in Lancashire 1846-71' (1975); Swift's study of Wolverhampton (1980); Jones's examination of Manchester and Merthyr Tydfil (1982) and Finnegan's work on York (1982). This literature, insofar as it refers to Irish crime in nineteenth-century Britain, has been surveyed by Roger Swift (1989) and David Fitzpatrick (1989).⁵ It needs to be kept in mind that the local studies referred to above, and surveyed by Swift and Fitzpatrick, did not set out to examine ethnic crime statistics specifically, with the exception of Swift's paper on Wolverhampton. The phenomenon of Irish involvement in crime in Britain awaits a detailed,

systematic study based on a large number of towns. For example, this writer is completing a detailed study of the Irish in the north east, which throws serious doubt on the contention that in that area the 'Irish generally lived in peace with their neighbours'.

However, the general picture which emerges from existing studies is that Irish-born persons consistently appeared in published statistics of arrests and imprisonment to a degree disproportionately higher than their numbers in the total population in which they lived. In particular, Irish offences were predominantly in the categories of petty offences, public order disturbances, drunkenness and assaults. There is little evidence, at present, that they were prominent in serious, organized crime. Swift, in his survey, draws attention to the distinction between the 'low Irish' and the 'respectable Irish' and suggests the former were influenced by the poverty-stricken environment in which they lived. Fitzpatrick, drawing attention to the fact that in 1861 Irish-born accounted for 25% of Lancashire's prisoners and 40% of all women committed, concludes: 'Irish drunkenness, violent behaviour and party fighting owed more to the harshness of life in urban Britain than to the cultural inheritance of rural Ireland'.

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to repeat the well-aided view that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to infer from criminal statistics either the cause or the full extent of crime within an area. This applies whether one is trying to draw comparisons over time with respect to a particular town, or comparing crime in two towns at the same period. The reasons are well known and need only be stated briefly. Most important, much crime goes undiscovered, with the result that criminal statistics do not measure the full extent of criminal activity. A difficulty in making inter-temporal comparisons arises from the fact that the passing of time saw new laws enacted and old ones removed from the statute book, with the consequence that the potential for law-breaking changed. As far as the nineteenth century is concerned, criminal statistics before 1856 need to be treated with special caution because the setting up of police forces throughout the country, following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, did not proceed

uniformly, so that the recording of crime was uneven. In addition, there were changes in prosecution and sentencing policies. Even within a town that possessed a police force, the practices followed by the police in enforcing the law and reporting crime differed over time. For example, the appointment of a new chief constable was often followed by a reshuffling of priorities, as is still the case. Thus, as a priority, *clamping down on prostitution* might give way to stopping after-hours drinking. A major problem in comparing crime rates between different towns for the same period arises for the same reason, namely that often different practices were followed. This is illustrated by the fact that in 1872, Major Greig, the head constable of Liverpool, told a Select Committee that when a man was arrested for drunkenness, and placed in Bridewell, he was never released before being taken before a magistrate and such cases were entered into the statistics of arrests for drunkenness.⁶ This was not the practice in Sheffield, Leeds, Glasgow and other places, where drunks were frequently discharged from the cells without appearing before a magistrate and so did not enter into the returns showing arrests for drunkenness.⁷ Thus, for example, the revelation in 1852 that the ratio of arrests for drunkenness to the population was 1 in 96 in Liverpool against 1 in 600 in Manchester, was open to the misinterpretation that there was six times as much drunkenness in Liverpool as compared with Manchester. Keeping in mind these and other difficulties when drawing inferences from criminal statistics, we are left to make the best use we can of the available data. However, it is particularly important to remember that, in looking at the views of indigenous populations concerning immigrants, it is not so much the truth that matters but what people *think* is the truth.

Liverpool's rapid growth during the nineteenth century was based on the expansion of the dock system and the rise of the port, which by 1851 was the largest seaport in the British possessions, if not the world. The growth of the population of the borough mirrored the growth of the port, rising from 77,000 in 1801 to 375,000 in 1851, making Liverpool the biggest town outside London. However, this rapid development was achieved at enormous social cost

and by 1845 Liverpool's housing was notorious and the town was officially labelled 'the unhealthiest town in England'.⁸ Unlike the inland, textile manufacturing towns, the work-force was employed mainly on casual work centred on the docks, involving the loading, unloading, moving and storage of commodities. This work was unskilled, physical and gave workers the opportunity to decide how many days they would work each week, a feature that seems to have been particularly attractive to the Irish. Liverpool's proximity to Ireland ensured that the town had an Irish colony long before most other English towns experienced an Irish presence, and the development of fast, relatively cheap steamers from 1820 onwards made it a lot easier for the Irish to cross over to Liverpool and other mainland ports. The famine years, 1846 to 1849, witnessed an exodus from Ireland on a massive scale, either to seek work or poor relief in England or to emigrate to America. This extraordinary influx from Ireland greatly increased the Irish-born population of many English towns and cities and, over the period 1846 to 1853, about 1½ million Irish landed at Liverpool. Of this total, approximately one-third were classified as paupers and the rest were mainly emigrants transshipping at Liverpool.⁹ Table I shows the numbers of Irish citizens in the four main areas of Irish settlement during the nineteenth century.

It can be seen that Liverpool had the largest concentration of Irish-born persons. When one takes into account the numbers of English-born children of Irish parents brought up in the Irish areas of Liverpool, then the numbers of 'Liverpool Irish' far exceeded the number of Irish-born. The term Liverpool Irish refers to Irish-born residents and English-born persons with at least one Irish parent. There is little evidence of any significant immigration of Irish Protestants into Liverpool, and so most Irish were Roman Catholic; as there were relatively few English Catholics in Liverpool, the estimates of Roman Catholics can be taken as a proxy for the number of Liverpool Irish. In 1851, the Catholic Institute estimated that there were 90,000 Catholics in the borough of Liverpool, some 24% of the population in general, but accounting for a higher proportion of the working classes. In 1870, Father James Nugent,

TABLE I *Irish-born Residents of Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester, Salford and London, 1841-91*

<i>Town</i>	<i>1841</i>	<i>1851</i>	<i>1861</i>	<i>1871</i>	<i>1891</i>
Liverpool (borough)					
Population	286,656	375,955	443,938	493,405	517,980
Number of Irish-born	49,639	83,813	83,949	76,761	66,071
Irish as % of population	17.3	22.3	18.9	15.6	12.8
Glasgow (burgh)					
Population	274,533	329,097		477,156	565,840
Number of Irish-born	44,345	59,801		68,330	60,182
Irish as % of population	16.2	18.2		14.3	10.6
Manchester and Salford (borough and town)					
Population	306,991	401,321	460,428	379,374	703,507
Number of Irish-born	33,490	52,504	52,076	34,066	32,270
Irish as % of population	10.9	13.1	11.3	9.0	4.6
London					
Population	1,873,676	2,362,236	2,803,989	3,254,260	4,211,743
Number of Irish-born	73,133	108,548	106,879	91,171	66,465
Irish as % of population	3.9	4.6	3.8	2.8	1.6

Source: Census Reports, England, Wales and Scotland.

Catholic chaplain to the borough gaol, estimated the Catholic population of Liverpool to be at least 150,000.¹⁰ In 1909, a government enquiry estimated that the number was 173,000, again 24% of the city's total population but representing a much higher proportion of the residents of the areas bordering the docks and stretching inland for half a mile.¹¹

III

In this section, we shall examine the available evidence concerning the proportion of those who were described as Irish or Catholic in the various criminal categories recorded

by the authorities, taking the evidence chronologically. At this stage, it should be pointed out that there was no established policy, on the part of the Liverpool police, of recording the birthplace of those appearing in police statistics. At the time of the influx of famine Irish, such a policy seems to have been implemented but it did not last long and so the source of data is necessarily eclectic.¹² Similarly, there was no consistency in using the terms 'Irish' and 'Catholic'. To start, we will examine the evidence concerning the number of arrests of persons described as Irish or Catholic. The earliest detailed information on the Irish in Britain is the Cornwall Lewis Report of 1836.¹³ In his evidence to the investigators, William Parlour, a superintendent in the Liverpool police, claimed that one-third of all people taken into custody were Irish, while, in his estimate, not more than 25% of the population of the town was Irish. To support his argument, he produced the figures in table II. The use of the term 'nationality' is strange to modern readers in that the Irish were, at this time, British. However, the habit of distinguishing between English, Irish, Scots and Welsh was common in the nineteenth century. In 1832, the Irish represented 31% of the total number arrested, while in 1833 the figure had risen to 33%. Parlour did not quote his sources but it seems reasonable to assume they were police returns. Of course, the fact that a person was arrested did not mean he or she was guilty of criminal behaviour but, in the debate over Irish immigration, such a distinction was not always clear.

TABLE II *The total number of persons apprehended in Liverpool in the years 1832 and 1833*¹⁴

Nationality	Year	
	1832	1833
Irish	4,258	5,217
Other	9,325	10,529
Total	13,583	15,746

Thirteen years later, a more authoritative statement of criminal statistics was contained in a letter from Edward Rushton to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, dated 21 April 1849. Rushton was the stipendiary magistrate at Liverpool and was one of the borough officials who had an intimate knowledge of the effects on Liverpool of the influx of famine Irish from December 1846 onwards.¹⁵ He pointed out that between 1846 and the end of 1848, the number of people brought before the borough magistrates had increased by 21%, from 18,171 to 22,036. Of these, the number committed for trial and summarily convicted for felony had increased from 3,889 during 1845 to 7,714 in 1848, a 98% increase. In his letter to the Home Secretary, Rushton stated that before 1848 he had not recorded the nationality of those appearing in the borough's criminal statistics, but for 1848 he released figures as shown in table III.

Among the males appearing before the magistrates, the Irish represented 37%, while in the case of females the corresponding figure was 46%. Of the total, the Irish accounted for 40%. At this time, the Irish, as a percentage of the borough population, represented 23% but, as an element in the working-class population, the Irish-born residents must have accounted for a much bigger proportion. No attempt was made by Rushton to relate the numbers to the relevant working-class population and so it is not clear that the 40% of 1848 court appearances represented an undue proportion on the part of the Irish. In addition, it is not clear

TABLE III *The number of persons brought before the Liverpool magistrates in 1848*¹⁶

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
English	7,438	3,650	11,088
Irish	5,280	3,514	8,794
Others	1,598	556	2,154
Total	14,316	7,720	22,036

whether these statistics refer to individuals or appearances. Many individuals made several appearances in court during a year, particularly with regard to offences involving drunkenness. To the extent that this occurred, it reduces the number of individuals who appeared before the magistrates and so weakens any inferences drawn about the criminal propensities of the Irish immigrant community as a whole. Counterbalancing this, however, is the fact that many of the English prisoners would be Liverpool Irish, the English-born children of Irish immigrants and predominantly Roman Catholic, so that *Catholics* as a percentage of the 22,036 appearances in court were almost certainly greater than 40%. (This argument would apply equally to the statistics quoted by William Parlour in 1836). Of the 8,794 Irish appearing in the magistrates courts, 4,661 (53%) were sent for trial by jury or summarily convicted of felony, i.e. were tried for serious crimes. Of the 13,242 non-Irish court appearances, 5,104 (39%) were in this category.¹⁷ A noteworthy feature of table III is the prominence of women among those making court appearances. This feature of criminal statistics in Liverpool continued throughout the nineteenth century and we shall return to this later. Five years after Rushton wrote his letter to the Home Secretary, the same picture of a disproportionate Irish presence in the criminal statistics still prevailed, as table IV shows.

In this instance, 'origin' was substituted for 'nationality'. Of the total arrests, the Irish represented 45%. The Irish also

TABLE IV *The number of persons taken into custody and the number committed on charges of felony in Liverpool borough 1853*¹⁸

<i>Origin</i>	<i>Taken into custody</i>	<i>Committed on felony charge</i>
Liverpudlians	1,730	759
Irish	2,599	1,138
Others	1,455	638
Total	5,784	2,535

accounted for 45% of those actually committed on felony charges. The point must again be made that among those who described themselves as Liverpool-born, there would be English-born children of Irish parents and so would almost certainly be Catholic in terms of religious labels, even if not in practice.

Leaving the issue of the numbers of people *arrested*, the statistics referring to the *prison population* in Liverpool reveal the same disproportionate presence of Irish-born persons. Father Vincent Glover, parish priest of St Peter's in Liverpool, stated in 1836 that nearly one half of all prisoners in the Kirkdale House of Correction were Irish.¹⁹ In his report for 1847, the governor of the borough gaol produced figures for the committal of adults to that establishment over the period 1842 to 1846, set out in table V.

In the years 1842/43, only 37% of the committals to the borough prison were born in Liverpool and in the years 1845/46, this had fallen to 31%. Unfortunately, the governor's report did not break down the category 'born elsewhere' into national groupings. However, it did state that of the 1,503 *increase* in total committals over the two periods, 44% were Irish-born. Also, over the same period, there was an increase of 143 in felony cases committed by adults from outside Liverpool and of this total, 56% were Irish. On the night of 27 April 1854, there were 666 prisoners in the borough gaol and this total broke down into the categories shown in table VI.

The 317 Irish represented 48% of the total prison population, while women as a whole accounted for 36% of

TABLE V *The number of adult persons committed to the borough gaol in Liverpool, 1842-1846*²⁰

Period	Number of Committals		Total
	Born in Liverpool	Born elsewhere	
1842/43	1,845	3,176	5,021
1845/46	2,030	4,494	6,524

TABLE VI *The population of Liverpool borough gaol on the night of 27 April 1854*²¹

<i>Category</i>	<i>Irish-born</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Irish-born as % of total</i>
Adult males	158	188	346	46
Adult females	97	111	208	47
Juvenile males	50	32	82	61
Juvenile females	12	18	30	40
Total	317	349	666	48

the total prisoners. The proportion of Irish female and juvenile prisoners was a source of particular concern to Father Nugent, the Catholic prison chaplain. James Nugent was a Liverpool Irishman and was prominent in Catholic affairs in Liverpool.²² As a much-loved parish priest, he had an intimate knowledge of the Irish community in Liverpool and became official Catholic chaplain to the borough gaol in 1863. Over the period 1864 to 1876, the situation in the borough gaol was as shown in table VII.

Again, it is important to keep in mind the fact that the number of committals cannot be equated with the number of individuals, because some people were committed more than once a year. The 9,310 Catholic committals in 1876 represent 710 individuals. For example, Mary W., aged 32 years, had been to prison 76 times, including four times in 1877. Mary W., another woman, had been to prison 128 times.²⁴ The outstanding feature of the figures is that, in each of the thirteen years, Catholics predominated and from 1867 to 1876, the proportion of Catholic committals increased from 60% to 70%. Even more noteworthy is the picture revealed in table VIII where the Catholic committals are broken down on the basis of sex.

In only one of the thirteen years did the proportion of female committals fall below 50% and over the whole period they averaged 54.1%. This was no temporary phenomenon. In 1881, the total number of committals was 19,185 and of

TABLE VII *The number of committals to Liverpool borough gaol, 1864 to 1876 inclusive*²³

Year	Number of non-Catholic committals	Number of Catholic committals	Total number of committals	Catholic committals as a % of the total
1864	4,127	5,786	9,913	58.4
1865	3,234	4,243	7,477	56.7
1866	3,371	4,375	7,746	56.5
1867	3,557	5,319	8,876	59.9
1868	3,378	5,531	8,909	62.1
1869	3,823	6,707	10,530	63.7
1870	4,328	8,391	12,719	66.0
1871	4,011	7,713	11,724	65.8
1872	4,700	9,023	13,723	65.8
1873	4,098	8,322	12,420	67.0
1874	4,217	9,022	13,239	68.1
1875	4,286	9,397	13,683	68.7
1876	4,003	9,310	13,313	69.9
Total	51,133	93,139	144,272	64.6

those 66% were Catholics. Of those Catholic committals, females accounted for 50%.²⁶ It is clear that the apparent over-representation of Catholics in the prison population of nineteenth-century Liverpool grew rather than diminished. Some idea of the position in Liverpool *vis-à-vis* other Lancashire prisons can be obtained from a return showing the prisoners held in various prisons on the night of 2 April 1868, shown in table IX.

The overall picture is clearly one in which, in general, the Catholic population appeared to be over-represented in the prison population, on the basis of their numbers relative to the *total* population. However, it must be stressed that as a proportion of the population 'at risk', i.e. the unskilled working classes, 41% probably reflects their relative size. The special position of Liverpool is striking, with 58% of its prison population Catholic, though this was relatively low by normal Liverpool standards. It is also noteworthy that

TABLE VIII *The number of Catholic committals to Liverpool borough gaol, 1864 to 1876 inclusive, distinguishing between male and female prisoners*²⁵

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of males</i>	<i>Number of females</i>	<i>Total number</i>	<i>Females as % of total</i>
1864	2,719	3,067	5,786	53.0
1865	2,099	2,144	4,243	50.5
1866	2,122	2,253	4,375	51.5
1867	2,757	2,562	5,319	48.2
1868	2,732	2,799	5,531	50.6
1869	3,129	3,578	6,707	53.3
1870	3,930	4,461	8,391	53.2
1871	3,387	4,326	7,713	56.1
1872	3,689	5,334	9,023	59.1
1873	3,580	4,742	8,322	57.0
1874	4,167	4,855	9,022	53.8
1875	4,227	5,170	9,397	55.0
1876	4,212	5,098	9,310	54.8
Total	42,750	50,389	93,139	54.1

TABLE IX *The number of persons held in Lancashire prisons on 2 April 1868, distinguishing between Roman Catholic prisoners and others*²⁷

<i>Name of Prison</i>	<i>Number of Prisoners</i>			<i>Catholics as % of total</i>
	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Non-Catholic</i>	<i>Total</i>	
Liverpool Borough	563	407	970	58
Kirkdale	157	232	389	40
Preston	141	251	392	36
Salford	185	374	559	33
Manchester	226	492	718	31
Lancaster	60	160	220	27
Total	1,332	1,916	3,248	41

the absolute number of Catholics in Liverpool borough gaol was 563, a very small proportion of the total Catholic population of Liverpool. The same point applies to Manchester and Salford.

IV

Despite the anecdotal and eclectic nature of some of the evidence referred to above, there can be no doubt that the disproportionately high representation of Catholics in the number of arrests and in the prison population was a well-established and continuing feature of Victorian Liverpool. The question arises as to what kind of offences committed by Catholics gave rise to these prison statistics. A criminal profile of the Liverpool Catholic community is difficult to identify with any high degree of accuracy and where the evidence drawn on is anecdotal, the probable prejudices of the commentator must be taken into account. For the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the Cornwall Lewis Report provides the most detailed evidence on immigrant criminality and those giving evidence included Catholic priests, policemen, poor law officers and businessmen. Not surprisingly, there is much contradiction in their opinions, but on some issues there is a great deal of consensus. In particular, there was wide agreement that heavy drinking was a common and disruptive feature of Irish life in Liverpool and this one factor was the main reason for the high incidence of Irish involvement in cases of physical assault, woundings and grievous bodily harm. Along with this assessment was the opinion that the Irish in Liverpool were rarely involved in premeditated murder or serious, organized crime. Such views were expressed by Superintendent William Parlour, an Englishman; Superintendent Michael James Whitty, a Catholic Irishman, later to become head constable of Liverpool; Father Vincent Glover, parish priest of St Peter's, Seel Street; Father Francis Murphy, parish priest of St Patrick's; and Dr Collins, a Catholic Irishman and medical man.²⁸ In 1846, on the eve of the influx of famine Irish, Matthew Dowling, head constable of Liverpool, gave evidence to a Select Committee

in which he stated that there was always widespread drunkenness and violence among the Irish in the north end of the town and that his men were in continual physical danger.²⁹ The area referred to by Dowling was the notorious triangle between Vauxhall Road, Great Crosshall Street and Scotland Road, which remained a difficult area to police throughout the century. For the first nine months of 1855, the total number of arrests in Liverpool borough was 19,336 (of which 42% were women). These arrests included 185 stabbing cases and, in this instance, the place of birth of the persons concerned was given (table X).

Irish-born persons represented 45% of the total of 185 but whether this was unusually high for this type of offence is not known, because the release of 'ethnic' crime statistics by the police was erratic. The number of Catholics among the 185 persons is also not known; clearly some of the Irish-born may have been Protestants and, more certainly, some of the Liverpool-born would have been Liverpool Irish and Catholic. These particular figures drew the comment from a Liberal member of the town council that they disproved the view that the use of the knife was a continental habit.³¹

Not surprisingly, an important category of criminal activity was those offences arising from prostitution. The fact that Liverpool was a major seaport guaranteed a high demand for prostitutes and this was the case until recent times. As early as 1836, a report of the borough council

TABLE X *The ethnic origin of 185 persons charged with stabbing offences in Liverpool borough, for 9 months ending 30 September 1855*³⁰

<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
Liverpool	40
England other than Liverpool	25
Ireland	83
Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man	8
Elsewhere	29
Total	185

estimated that there were 300 brothels and 4,200 prostitutes.³² In 1838, the Liverpool police estimated that of a total of £15,992's worth of stolen property, £4,403 was the result of prostitutes robbing individuals.³³ In 1839, the chaplain of the Preston House of Correction, in an article on criminal statistics, wrote:

It may be proper to make a few remarks connected with the great proportion of female criminals in Liverpool, originating no doubt, in the number of careless and drunken seafaring men who became the easy prey of these dissolute women – a class, it is to be feared, whose numbers must be increased and whose profligacy must be encouraged, by the facility and too often by the impunity with which their depredations are affected.

Thus, by the time of the Cornwall Lewis Report in 1836, prostitution was widespread in Liverpool and was closely connected with thieving.³⁴ Witnesses giving evidence in the Report were divided in their opinions regarding the involvement of Irish women in prostitution. George Forwood, assistant overseer of the parish of Liverpool, claimed that there were proportionately more Irish prostitutes than English, while Dr Duncan, Liverpool's medical officer of health, expressed the opinion that there was a 'great number' of Irish women among the lower class of prostitutes. However, Father Glover stated that there was 'not much' prostitution among the poor Irish, a view also shared by Father Murphy, who added that in the case of those Irish women who were prostitutes, they had been driven to it by want.³⁵ In August 1846, the police reported that there were 538 brothels in the town, compared with 200 in Manchester.³⁶ Harder evidence regarding Irish involvement in prostitution was provided by published statistics in 1853, set out in table XI.

The category 'others' refers to women born outside Liverpool (i.e. English, Welsh, Scots, Manx and non-British). The relatively high percentage of Irish women is not surprising, given the demand for prostitutes in a town where an estimated 30,000 sailors were ashore at any one time and who congregated along the docks, precisely where the Irish lived in large numbers. Whether 44% was relatively high is unknown, given the lack of similar information for

TABLE XI *Number of prostitutes taken into custody for being disorderly on the streets and summarily punished, borough of Liverpool*³⁷

<i>Place of Origin</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Ireland	497	44.3
Liverpool	295	26.3
Elsewhere	331	29.5
Total	1,123	100.1

other years, but again, as many of those labelled 'Liverpudlian' would be Catholics, the proportion of Catholics was almost certainly greater than 44%. For the latter half of the century, we have to rely on Father Nugent for clues to the possible involvement of Catholic women in prostitution. With reference to 1865, he comments that Catholic women in the borough gaol accounted for 62% of the total female prisoners 'with a considerable proportion committed for prostitution'.

In 1875, writing in his role as Catholic chaplain at the borough gaol, he stated:

The gaol is crowded by drunkenness and prostitution, the vices of prosperous labour and a large seaport. The same faces are constantly to be seen in the prison.³⁸

and:

I think Liverpool is the only prison in the world where females exceed the males; I have never found any other prison where that is the case.³⁹

In 1876, the 5,098 female committals of Catholic women to the borough gaol represented 705 individuals and Nugent said that they were 'chiefly' prostitutes.⁴⁰ In 1882, Nugent gave evidence to the Select Committee on the Law relating to the Protection of Young Girls. In this, he did not provide

any statistics regarding the numbers of Catholic girls among the ranks of prostitutes, but the tenor of his evidence suggests that it was a matter of some concern. In 1881, of the 6,353 Catholic female committals to the borough gaol, they were, he said, 'very largely composed of basket girls, women working in warehouses and prostitutes, chiefly committed for drunkenness'.⁴¹ He argued that few girls came to Liverpool from Ireland in order to take up prostitution. More usually, a girl became pregnant in Ireland and, because of social pressures, had to come to Liverpool to have her baby:

... she comes to Liverpool; sometimes her seducer may give her a pound or two and she comes to a strange country, homeless and friendless and burdened with a child; then she leads a life of prostitution ... the women who keep brothels in Ireland generally come to Liverpool for their women ... A great number of Irish girls do drift on to the streets; they come to England imagining they only have to come to England and there is bread for them directly; innocent girls come over expecting they can get situations immediately; they have no money and no friends and they fall into these houses; but I find few girls indeed come over from Ireland who have been prostitutes in Ireland.⁴²

Nugent was of the opinion that, in 1882, prostitution had greatly increased in Liverpool, including juvenile prostitution. With regard to the latter, it was estimated that as early as 1857 there were at least 200 regular prostitutes under 12 years of age on the streets of the port.⁴³

A peculiarly Irish type of offence, usually drink-related, was the ubiquitous 'row', which frequently ended with the participants being arrested and charged with assaulting the police. The row might be triggered off by an argument between Irishmen from different parts of Ireland, usually described as a 'faction' fight, or simply arise from drunken arguments. Whatever the cause, they occurred often and were widely reported in the press, adding to the legend of the 'Fighting Irishmen'. Such fighting is to be distinguished from Irish clashes with the English and, in particular, Catholic clashes with Orangemen, which in Liverpool were a more serious source of concern.⁴⁴ The relatively high incidence of Irish arrests for drunkenness and brawling was maintained throughout the century and was a major cause

for concern among the Catholic clergy. For the year ended 30 September 1871, the head constable of Liverpool revealed that of the 18,803 arrests, 37% were Irish-born and 35% Liverpool-born.⁴⁵ In 1877, Father Nugent claimed that 80% of all Catholic prisoners in Liverpool borough gaol were Irish-born or the children of Irish parents. He also made the assessment that 90% of their offences were drink-related and that 'a very great amount of poverty among the Irish in Liverpool was due to drink'.⁴⁶ Still later, in 1896, we find W. J. Stewart, the stipendiary magistrate, repeating the opinion that the Irish were more prone to drunkenness and assaults on the police than serious crime.⁴⁷

Throughout the nineteenth century, it was continually claimed that the Irish were over-represented among the ranks of beggars, and begging was an activity that gave rise to arrests under the Vagrancy Acts. Irish beggars fell into two distinct groups, those who were driven to begging by the threat of starvation and those who were professionals, well organized and ruthless. It is not possible to estimate the relative size of the two groups, although all the evidence points to the fact that the majority of Irish immigrants into England during the nineteenth century were either destitute and in need of immediate help or among the lowest income groups. In particular, the Irish arriving during the period 1846 to 1850 were especially poverty-stricken and in many instances were driven to begging out of desperation and often forced into criminal activity. This necessity was enhanced when, in June 1847, a change in the law regarding removals made it easier for English authorities to remove back to Ireland those claiming relief who had not been resident in England for five years.⁴⁸ To avoid removal, the destitute Irish stopped claiming relief and turned to begging, but given the appalling poverty of the famine Irish when they landed in England, it is not clear that many of those arrested for begging were 'criminal' in any meaningful sense of the word. Liverpool's stipendiary magistrate complained to the Home Secretary in 1849 that the Irish composed 25% of the borough population yet accounted for 50% of the 'criminals' in the borough gaol. Rushton told the Home Secretary that:

... I saw from day to day that the poor Irish population forced upon us in a state of wretchedness which cannot be described would, within 12 hours after they landed, be found among one of three classes; viz. paupers, vagrants or thieves.⁴⁹

Typical of many of these 'criminals' were those described by the *Liverpool Albion* on 18 June 1847:

On Saturday, several poor Irishmen were brought up on a charge of begging. It was pitiable to see their appearance, starvation being written on every feature.

For many immigrants during the famine years of 1846 to 1849, prison was a preferable alternative to living on the streets or in overcrowded cellars, and cases of deliberately breaking the law to get into prison during the winter were numerous.⁵⁰ Though the avoidance of starvation was undoubtedly the motive behind much Irish mendicity, it was equally true that there was a well-established tradition of professional begging. James Shaw, agent of the District Provident Society at Liverpool in 1836, expressed the opinion that:

The Irish are more addicted to begging than the English and there are more impostors among the Irish than the people of any other country. They sometimes hire bad cellars for the express purpose of being visited there, which they make look very miserable and live in another part of the town... I have never known cases of this kind among the English.⁵¹

Not only did they borrow rooms, they borrowed children. In one case in Liverpool, a policeman visited a cellar in the Vauxhall district, following up an enquiry. In a windowless back cellar, he found a pile of straw, occupied by a large dog and a skeletal three-year-old child. It was later claimed by a neighbour that the child's mother rented it out to professional beggars.⁵² There is, however, no reason to believe that such practices were exclusively Irish or Liverpoolian. For example, *The Times* of 3 January 1849 reported a case in Westminster, in which a professional beggar borrowed a child at a rate of 9d. per day. It has to be conceded that such English instances do not appear to have been common, while, by contrast, the contemporary Liverpool press fre-

quently reported cases in the magistrates court involving professional Irish beggars. Typical of these was a case in February 1849 when a group so described were brought before the bench and of the 50, 48 were Irish. Given the option of being shipped back to Ireland or going to gaol, the majority chose prison.⁵³

A matter of particular concern to the authorities in Liverpool was the high level of juvenile crime, and many children arrested for begging frequently stated that they were sent out by their parents. In 1836, Superintendent Parlour expressed the opinion that a large proportion of the juvenile thieves in Liverpool were Irish, having progressed from begging.⁵⁴ Press reporting of the professional begging was at its height during the famine years, but the tradition of begging became a firmly-established and continuing fact in Liverpool life. In 1896, the problem still concerned the authorities but, by this time, children did not need prompting from their parents. The stipendiary magistrate, giving evidence to the Reformatory and Industrial Schools Committee, was asked if a child found begging had always been sent out by its parents. He replied:

No, neither in begging nor in selling in Liverpool can you take it for granted that they have been put up to it by their parents. They have told me they beg in order to go to the theatre, they beg in order to buy cigarettes. There is one form of begging which is not very harmful; there is a road by which a great many of the labourers come from the dock at the north end, about half past five in the evening and the children stand there and get bread and crusts from these men.⁵⁵

Stewart was pressed harder to give an opinion as to whether or not children begging were doing so as a consequence of being sent out regularly by their parents. He thought not:

Children are very imitative and there are so many children begging in the streets of Liverpool, that a child running about at the age of five or six, soon learns to imitate his fellows.⁵⁶

There is no evidence that Catholic children predominated among the ranks of juvenile beggars, and Liverpool's long-standing juvenile crime problem seems to have reflected the Catholic:Protestant proportions in the city. For example,

children falling foul of the law would be sent to an Industrial School or Reformatory, depending on age and seriousness of crime. Over the years 1875 to 1879 inclusive, the number of juveniles passing through the Industrial Schools was 39,826, of whom 26% were Catholics. Over the same period, 23,826 individuals attended the Reformatories, of which total 25% were Catholic.⁵⁷ Indeed, this proportion could be regarded as relatively low. The significance of begging as an element in Irish criminal statistics in Liverpool was at its height in the mid-century and was an immediate consequence of the famine. However, Father Nugent was clear in his own mind that the second-generation Irish in Liverpool were making little progress up the social scale. He told the Select Committee on Intemperance on 8 June 1877 that when examining Liverpool's criminal profile:

You must consider the population that has been poured into our midst. We were not prepared for the exodus which came from Ireland, and now we are punished by the children of those parents who came from Ireland, who have grown up in ignorance and neglect.

V

Given the statistics in the preceding sections, we need to consider the specific urban setting in which they were generated. It will be argued that Liverpool was a special case and does not provide a suitable base for generalizations regarding the Irish in other towns in England. The incidence of crime is partly determined by the opportunities available to actual or potential lawbreakers and, from this standpoint, Liverpool was different because of the environment arising from its character as a major world seaport, which was also the main port of entry for the Irish. In considering whether Liverpool was a special case with regard to its crime profile, three factors are noteworthy. Firstly, for a long time during the nineteenth century, the quays at Liverpool were open to the public and so goods and materials were piled up on the dockside. These were easy pickings for thieves. In the 1840s, the construction of the system of dock walls began but, by this time, there was a

well-established local tradition of thieving. The docks at this time represented an Aladdin's cave and attracted large numbers of petty and professional criminals. A particularly common theft was that of raw cotton, which was sold to dealers in the Lancashire mill towns. Father Nugent, speaking in 1877, told the Select Committee on Intemperance that:

I might mention with regard to Liverpool, that we have a very large criminal population and my experience is, and I have not hesitated to state it, that 75 per cent of all the money that comes dishonestly is spent in drink; we have thieving in every form; we have thieving along the docks and we have cotton thieving to a very great extent . . . I find some of the very heaviest robberies in cotton (cotton is the great commodity with us) have been perpetrated simply for drink money . . .⁵⁸

The second factor to be considered was the lack of a manufacturing base to the local economy and an absence of factory jobs and the discipline imposed on a labour force by the factory system. This fact had some influence on the juvenile crime rate and the incidence of prostitution. John Clay, the chaplain of the Preston House of Correction, commenting in 1838 on the greater incidence of juvenile crime in Liverpool, compared with Manchester and Salford, said:

I can scarcely imagine that the young population of Manchester is, upon the whole, morally superior to that of Liverpool; but the ready means of employment in the former place and its great dissimilarity to that which can be found for young persons in Liverpool, will account for much of the discrepancy between the two places observable in the above table. There must, in fact, be many hundreds of unemployed and neglected children wandering about the Liverpool docks and elsewhere who, were they in Manchester, would obtain such an employment in the mills, as would permit no leisure for criminal practices.⁵⁹

In 1839, 709 juveniles were committed to prison in Liverpool, representing 22.33% of the total committals for that year. This compared with a corresponding figure of 13.75% for Salford and Manchester.⁶⁰ In 1841, the Inspector of Prisons of the Northern and Eastern Divisions gave his opinion on the high incidence of juvenile crime in Liverpool:

... various circumstances tend to give this numerical preponderance in juvenile delinquency over the other populous places in the vicinity. Among them may be stated the fluctuating variety and vicissitudes of the population of a great maritime town; the continued ingress of poor Irish; the absence of factory employment or other work for children; the number of destitute orphans from the deadly visitations of cholera and fever; the temptations afforded to want and idleness by the comparatively unguarded and careless exposure of valuable property in the markets, stores and about the docks.⁶¹

Fifty years later, the same point was being made. E. M. Hance, secretary to the school board of Liverpool, told an enquiry in 1896 that:

We have in Liverpool a wonderful amount of attraction to a child of a restless disposition, more so probably than exists in any other town. You know quite well that Robinson Crusoe is not a solitary example and we have shipping which exercises a fascination over a considerable number of our children. There are also the docks; there is sugar to be picked up and there is fruit.⁶²

The attractions of the docks to criminals, and the lack of factory work, were constantly recurring themes heard from various officials throughout the nineteenth century.⁶³ In 1853 Thomas Carter, the chaplain to the borough gaol, stated in his annual report the opinion that the crime rate in Liverpool reflected the fact that the port attracted 'destitute and criminal' boys from Ireland. He also expressed the view that the Irish children in Liverpool were very precocious, especially those from Dublin.⁶⁴ The impact of the port on Liverpool children in the dockland areas cannot be over-exaggerated. Liverpool children were 'streetwise' to an extent that was rare in many large towns. Father Nugent touched on this theme in 1865, when he argued that the policy adopted by Catholic Reformatories, of sending Liverpool children to the country, was a waste of time, reflected in the high rate of recommitments. Referring to the type of children in care, he said:

The class of boys committed to the reformatories have been accustomed to the streets of Liverpool from their childhood; they have their respective avocations, either begging, stealing or trading and though young, theirs has been a life of continuous excitement and

Liverpool's busy streets, quays, docks, ships and river are indelibly stamped upon their minds . . .⁶⁵

The argument propounded by Nugent was to the effect that a floating reformatory in the river would be more effective. A much stronger statement concerning the temptations of Liverpool and Irish criminality came from Nugent in 1877; when referring to the famine years he said:

. . . a very large population was poured into Liverpool from Ireland, that was not well to do, or a trader class, but the very poorest and most destitute; then again, the criminal class in Ireland, as Liverpool increased its docks and commerce, found a better market for crime there. The poverty of Ireland did not afford the same market and the same facilities for crime and public opinion is much stronger in Ireland as regards prostitution and that kind of crime than it is in England so I could mention small towns in Ireland in which a whole street has been driven out and they have come and settled in Liverpool. Owing to the tide of immigration from Ireland, Liverpool is an exceptional case as regards the criminal class of Catholic.⁶⁶

The consequences of the lack of social pressures on individual behaviour referred to by Nugent was true of all Irish communities in the large towns of Britain. In Liverpool, the character of the port and its sheer size, created an atmosphere in the dockland areas that presented particular temptations in terms of the scale of the opportunities for crime. It was not only stealing that provided easy money; the fact of a large, mobile seafaring population guaranteed plenty of opportunities for prostitution. In the mid-century, at any one time there would be some 30,000 sailors in the port. These men came ashore with their saved-up wages, in many cases ready to spend their money on women and drink. In 1876, 100,190 sailors were paid off in Liverpool. Around the Sailors' Home in Liverpool, there were forty-six public houses within a radius of 200 yards, all of them the haunts of prostitutes. In 1881, the corresponding figure of pay-offs was over 114,000 and during the year there were 4,586 arrests of prostitutes, representing 1,852 individual women.⁶⁷ Nugent claimed that a girl had no trouble earning between £2 and £3 per week and that many of them were only fifteen or sixteen years of age. These earnings compared with 10s. to be earned from home sewing.⁶⁸ Thus

any girl who, through poverty or inclination, needed to earn money, the demand for prostitutes ensured that she could do so. It is important to recognize that by contrast with Manchester, Salford and the Lancashire mill towns, there were few opportunities for female employment in Liverpool, outside domestic service. This third feature of the local economy was yet another factor which distinguished Liverpool from the rest of Lancashire.

The incidence of prostitution was closely related to the incidence of drunkenness and in the provision of drinking places, Liverpool appears to have had an abnormally large number of public houses and beer shops. In 1857, there were 1,493 public houses in the borough, one for every 279 in the population at large, and 897 beerhouses. In 1876, the corresponding figures were 1,919 and 334.⁶⁹ The significance of these figures is better appreciated if one considers the situation in 1874, when there were 1,900 public houses. In the whole of the northern police division, covering Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire and the English counties to the north, there was a total of only 9,022 public houses. In 1875, the population of the borough of Liverpool accounted for 2.5% of the total population of England and Wales but over 10% of all arrests for drunkenness.⁷⁰ The life-style of many sailors and the sheer numbers of them ashore at any one time injected a reckless element into Liverpool drinking habits. The constant arrival and departure of ships generated a continual air of excitement in the hundreds of dockland public houses as people engaged in drinking sessions to see off friends and relatives.⁷¹ In 1874, the proportion of those arrested for drunkenness to the total population was 1 in 24 in Liverpool, 1 in 34 in Manchester, 1 in 180 in Sheffield, 1 in 174 in Newcastle-on-Tyne.⁷² The amount of drunkenness was such that it became an issue in local politics in the late 1870s, and 'temperance' politicians stood in local elections. A vigilante committee was formed to exercise some degree of monitoring of police policy towards the conduct of public houses. The temperance campaign had a brief success, chiefly in achieving the election of two temperance councillors, but it quickly faded as a force for change.⁷³ As already noted, Father Nugent was convinced that 90% of all offences involving Catholics were drink related.

We are still left with the problem of interpreting the available evidence and assessing the proposition that Catholics were disproportionately represented among the criminal population. The firmest evidence we have examined relates to the number of Catholics in the local prisons. The claim that, by the 1870s and 1880s, between 60% and 70% of all prisoners were Catholics is well substantiated. As the Catholic population was about 25% of the total borough (and after 1881, the city) population, does this necessarily mean that Catholics were more prone to criminal behaviour than the non-Catholic population? The point has already been made that the proportion of 70% referred to must be related to the population *at risk*, i.e. that part of the population living in the environment in which criminal behaviour was more likely to occur, for all the reasons already given. As the overwhelming majority of Catholics in Liverpool were unskilled and uneducated during the period under review, they were to be found among the poorer sections of the working class. There is no way of estimating accurately the size of the working class as a whole, but it is clear that Catholics must have represented well over 25% of that category. For example, in 1841 John Finch showed that 45% of household heads in the Vauxhall ward were born in Ireland.⁷⁴ When account is taken of the English-born descendants of Irish immigrants, the conclusion must be that the Catholic population of the ward must have exceeded 50% of the population. In 1851, the Census revealed that in both the Vauxhall and Exchange wards, 50% of the population was Irish-born, so that on a conservative guess, the Catholic population was about 60% of the total population of these areas. On that basis, the appearance of Catholics in the criminal statistics has a less dramatic implication than is usually drawn. It is relevant to note the movement of population over the period 1835 to 1900. The older central areas of the city started to lose people to the suburbs from 1861 onwards. Over the ten years from 1861 to 1871, the population of these areas declined by nearly 12% and, in the next decade, the decline was of the same magnitude. Over the ten years 1881 to 1891, the decline was 25%. The significance of this move out from the inner town was that it consisted mainly of the better off, almost entirely

non-Catholic population. This meant that the *proportion* of Catholics in the dockland and adjacent areas must have increased dramatically.⁷⁵ Against this background, the percentage of prisoners in the borough gaol seems less significant in its implications. Further, the absolute numbers that are represented by the percentages should be kept in mind. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the 5,096 committals of Catholic females to the borough gaol in 1876 represented only 705 individual women, out of a Catholic population of probably 150,000 — of which at least one half would be female.⁷⁶ Similarly, the 563 Catholic prisoners in the Liverpool borough gaol on 2 April 1868 was a very small proportion of the Catholic population of the borough (see table IX).

The overwhelming majority of Catholics in Liverpool who fell foul of the law were from the poorest strata of Victorian working-class life. The poverty and degradation of the Irish immigrants was frequently referred to in the press and by contemporary observers of the social and economic scene and does not need to be reiterated. A large proportion of the immigrant Irish came from rural communities and were ill-equipped to cope with the pressures of living in England's urban slums. The removal of many of the social and psychological props which moulded behaviour at home was a traumatic experience for many. Commenting, in 1855, on the behaviour of the younger immigrants in Sheffield, a priest at St Vincent's said, 'they forgot their religion and learned to adapt to the ways of the surrounding infidels'; and, again, referring to the arrival of the order of St Vincent de Paul in Sheffield, he lamented, 'when we came they were seemingly lost to religion and beyond hope'.⁷⁷ In Liverpool, Father Nugent organized classes to show immigrant women how to cook, in particular how to make fish pies for Friday.⁷⁸ The men had few of the skills required in the Victorian economy other than muscle, and so movement up the income scale was difficult, though not impossible. Michael Whitty, Catholic Irishman and head constable of Liverpool, was a noted exception. In 1836, he expressed the view that:

Considering the vast Irish population of this town and the constant intercourse with Ireland, the number of Irish in affluent or easy circumstances is remarkably small.⁷⁹

TABLE XII *The employment categories of 7,500 Irishmen employed in the borough of Liverpool, 1834*⁸¹

<i>Job Description</i>	<i>Number Employed</i>
Mechanics of various sorts	780
Brickmakers	270
Sugar boilers	200
Masons' labourers	350
Bricklayers' labourers	850
Chemical works and soaperies	600
Sawyers	80
Labourers	340
Lumpers (dockers)	1,700
Porters in warehouses	1,900
Coal heavers and sundry employment	430
Total	7,500

At the same time, Father Vincent Glover claimed that 'nearly all of the lower orders of this town are Irish'.⁸⁰ Samuel Homes, a prominent builder in Liverpool, and eventually a leading member of the local Conservatives, examined the jobs of 7,500 of the 'lowest Irish' employed in Liverpool, with the results shown in table XII.

Mechanics represented the skilled workmen in this list and this group accounted for just over 10% of the workforce; the rest of the jobs were manual and overwhelmingly unskilled. For the year 1841, we have a very detailed picture of the conditions in the Vauxhall ward of Liverpool. John Finch organized a census of the ward and the results were published in 1842.⁸² The total number of families examined, was 5,973, representing 23,892 individuals. From a total of 4,387 families, 28% were without any visible means of support and only 31% of the labour force was fully employed (i.e. a six-day week). The average number of days worked by the total labour force was 2.8 days, while the average wage was 9s. 2d. for family heads. More significantly, the median wage was 8s. 3d. In both cases an average of four per family

can be assumed. Thus many families would have more than four members and so be in desperate straits. Finch identified 2,125 families as indigent and of these he estimated that 1,052 survived by charity, prostitution or pawning goods; 1,007 got by living off relations, credit or savings, while fifty-seven were supported by parish relief. He also claimed that 45% of all household heads were born in Ireland, and so the proportion of Catholic families would be even higher. Finch's investigation took place before the influx of famine Irish started in November 1846. Another survey was undertaken in 1842 by the Anti-Monopoly Association in respect of Chisenhale Street and the courts leading off it. These were in the Vauxhall district in the North End of Liverpool. The survey covered 147 heads of households representing 527 individuals; of these, 83% were labourers. The survey revealed that only thirty-three household heads were regularly employed; fifty-four were totally unemployed and forty-one were employed between one and four days per week.⁸³ In 1850, following the famine influx, the population of this same street and its courts was 1,539, of whom 1,269 or 82% were Irish-born. Of the Irish families, 103 spoke Irish.⁸⁴ A further indication of the position of the Irish in Liverpool society was revealed by a number of surveys carried out by Canon Abraham Hulme, a Liverpool Anglican priest, and a team of scripture readers. They concentrated their efforts on a sample of families of *settled* Irish, those who had been in Liverpool a while and had made a permanent home there. The first of their surveys took place in Vauxhall in 1847, six years after John Finch's pioneering work. The results are summarized in table XIII.

Just over 23% had regular work, while 43% were paupers or without means of support. Surprisingly, only eleven Irish families in Vauxhall had risen above the labourer class. In 1854, two similar surveys (see table XIV) were carried out in different parts of the town and revealed an even worse position. The two districts were the parishes of St Thomas and St James.

The situation was worse than in Vauxhall seven years previously. In St Thomas's, 66% of the family heads were absolute paupers or without visible means of support, compared with 43% in Vauxhall. In St James's, the position

TABLE XIII *The socio-economic status of settled Irish families in the Vauxhall district of Liverpool, 1847*⁸⁵

<i>Status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
Labourers in regular employment	133	23.4
Labourers in irregular employment	190	33.4
Absolute paupers	102	17.9
No visible means of support	144	25.3
Total	569	100.0

TABLE XIV *The socio-economic status of settled Irish families in the parishes of St Thomas (1847) and St James (1854), Liverpool*⁸⁶

<i>Status</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical District</i>					
	<i>St Thomas</i>		<i>St James</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
In regular employment	54	6.1	30	7.2	84	6.5
In irregular employment	250	28.3	264	63.8	514	39.6
Absolute paupers	200	22.6	50	12.1	250	19.3
Without visible support	380	43.0	70	16.9	450	34.7
Total	884	100.0	414	100.0	1,298	100.1

was rather better, but 29% were living in abject poverty. Thus, the Catholic population was at risk in that it was characterized by more poverty than the Protestant population at large and it resided in the dockland areas with their temptations to crime. There is no necessary logical connection between poverty and crime, but it needs little reflection to appreciate the fact that, in practice, law-breaking is likely to flourish when want and opportunities co-exist. In 1870, Father Nugent said that he came across only the third Catholic prisoner in six years who had had any significant education, whereas, in his experience, Protestant prisoners had more mechanics and tradesmen in their ranks.⁸⁷

VI

In conclusion, it is stressed that the Irish Catholics of Liverpool were predominantly unskilled, poor and uneducated. There is little evidence to support the argument of Durey (1982) that the Irish, in general, demonstrated a non-trivial upward occupational and social mobility before 1850, or indeed afterwards. The evidence he quotes regarding Liverpool refers to some 400 to 500 skilled or mercantile Irish. However, Liverpool, as the world's largest seaport, attracted merchants from Ireland who needed to be in such a commercial centre. The attraction of Liverpool for such men made Liverpool atypical of the Irish migrant experience. In addition, the body of evidence he refers to, the 1836 Report on the Irish Poor, contains much contradictory material.⁸⁸

Though in 1851 they represented 23% of the population of the borough, the Irish were a much greater proportion of the unskilled working class and this group as a whole was most at risk *vis-à-vis* law breaking. From this viewpoint, the claim that the Irish were over-represented in the criminal statistics is weakened though not discredited. However, even though the Irish were still a disproportionate number of those arrested and imprisoned, the absolute numbers of individuals involved were small compared to the size of the Liverpool Irish population in general. Thus, one cannot infer that Catholics, as a whole, were, in any significant way, disposed to criminal behaviour. The charge that Liverpool Irish Catholics in general were significantly more criminal in their behaviour than the rest of society is difficult to sustain based on the available evidence. The majority of Catholics featuring in these statistics were petty offenders and almost all were drink-related. The lengths of sentences were overwhelmingly short and the picture is one of a small proportion of the Catholic population, inadequate at the bottom of the social pile, unable to cope with the pressures of Victorian slum living in a desperately poor environment. This correlation between Catholicism, poverty and crime has not, however, disappeared from British society.

The Times of 3 October 1980 carried an article by its religious affairs correspondent, in which was reported the

view of Fr Terence Tanner concerning the probable reasons for the fact that Roman Catholics are over-represented in the country's prison population.⁸⁹ The Social Welfare Commission of the Roman Catholic Church had been aware of this situation for some time but when the *Times* article appeared, its secretary said he had no knowledge of any research that would satisfactorily explain the phenomenon. For example, the official statistics for 1979 showed that an average of 42,000 prisoners were in gaol at any one time and of these 9,000 were Roman Catholics, some 22% of the total. This percentage must be seen against a background in which most estimates of the size of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain postulate that it accounts for 10–12% of the population. The *Times* article triggered off a correspondence on the issue and many influential Roman Catholics were sufficiently disturbed to call a conference of all interested parties to discuss the phenomenon. This was held at Heythrop College on 11 April 1981, under the auspices of the Jesuit journal *The Month*, and though many people experienced in studying criminality attended, no firm conclusions were arrived at.⁹⁰

Two views seemed to attract most attention in the discussions at Heythrop. One was that it is the lower income groups, the disadvantaged, who most frequently fall foul of the law. In this context, we have noted that the Roman Catholic population of England and Wales is overwhelmingly of Irish descent and the Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century were to be found predominantly in the poorer sections of Victorian society; they were unskilled, uneducated and learning to cope with an alien culture. As with similar immigrant groups elsewhere and at other times, the majority of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants inhabited the worst housing, experienced the highest unemployment and the greatest pressures on the family structure as a result of living in what was frequently not only a poverty-stricken but also an unfamiliar and hostile environment. By contrast, there is the view of Fr Tanner that it is something in the nature of Roman Catholicism that causes Catholics to turn to certain types of deviant behaviour, *whether they be poor or middle class*. In other words, a failure of their religion rather than social and economic deprivation is the reason for the over-representation in the prison population. The debate goes on.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank the Simon (Social Sciences) Committee of the University of Manchester for the award of a Simon Senior Research Fellowship for the academic year 1990/91. This has enabled me to undertake a large-scale research project on the experience of the Famine Irish in Britain, 1847–1887.
- 2 For a detailed discussion of the association of 'Irish' with 'Catholic' see Connelly, G., 'Irish and Catholic: Myth or Reality', in Swift, R. and Gilley, S. (eds.), *The Irish in the Victorian City* (1985), pp. 225–254.
- 3 Typical of such sermons was that preached by Canon Walshaw at St Marie's in Sheffield. See *Sheffield Times* of 18 January 1868.
- 4 In tandem with allegations of the propensity for criminal behaviour of Catholics went the view that the Irish (Catholics) were a threat to the moral well-being of the English working class.
- 5 Dillon, T., 'The Irish in Leeds: 1831–1861', *Thoresby Society* (1973); Richardson, T., 'Irish Settlement in Mid-nineteenth Century Bradford', *Yorkshire Bulletin of Economic and Social Research*, Vol. 20, 1968; Swift, R., 'Crime and Ethnicity: The Irish in Early Victorian Wolverhampton', *West Midlands Studies*, Vol. 13, 1980; Lowe, W. J., 'The Irish in Lancashire 1846–71: A Social History', unpublished Ph.D., University of Dublin, 1974; Finnegan, F., *Poverty and Prejudice: A Study of Irish Immigrants in York 1840–75*, 1982; Jones, D. J. V., *Crime, Protest, Community and Police in 19th Century Britain*, 1982; Jones refers to the Irish in both Manchester and Merthyr Tydfil. Fitzpatrick, D., 'A Peculiar Tramping People: The Irish in Britain 1801–70', in *A New History of Ireland*, W. E. Vaughan (ed.), 1989; Swift, R., 'Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain', in *The Irish in Britain*, Swift, R. & Gilley, S. (eds.), 1989.
- 6 Major Grieg, *Select Committee on Habitual Drunkards 1872*, Minutes of Evidence, q. 2075. For a detailed discussion of the problems of recording and measuring crime, see Emsley, C., *Crime and Society in England 1750–1900*, 1987, Chapter I.
- 7 Major Grieg, *op. cit.*, qq. 2134–2140.
- 8 For a detailed treatment of the health and housing conditions in Liverpool during the nineteenth century, see Taylor, I.C., 'Black Spot on the Mersey', unpublished Ph.D., Liverpool Univ., 1976.
- 9 Neal, F., 'Liverpool, The Irish Steamship Companies and the Famine Irish', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 5, March 1986, No. 1, pp. 28–61.
- 10 Nugent, J., *Select Committee on Prisons and Prison Ministers Acts, 1870*, Minutes of Evidence, q. 4010.
- 11 *Report of Commissioner A. J. Ashton, K.C.*, March 1910. His investigation was set up under the Police (Liverpool Inquiry) Act 1909, to enquire into the disturbances in the city in June/July 1909.
- 12 Many official police reports have not survived and so the Liverpool newspapers are a major source of information, together with Select Committee reports on various topics such as juvenile crime, prostitution and drunkenness. The latter government publications often

- carry the data from official police documents now no longer accessible.
- 13 *Report on the state of the Irish Poor in Great Britain*, P.P., 1836, referred to hereafter as the *Cornwall Lewis Report*.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, Appendix G, No. 11, 'The State of the Irish Poor in Liverpool', p. 19.
 - 15 *Select Committee on Poor Removal*, 1854, Evidence of A. Campbell, qq. 4952-4954; Rushton's letter is reproduced in full.
 - 16 *Liverpool Albion*, 15 January 1849.
 - 17 *Ibid.*
 - 18 *Select Committee on Poor Removal*, 1854, Minutes of Evidence, A. Campbell, qq. 4993-4995. Campbell obtained his data from E. Rushton, the stipendiary magistrate.
 - 19 *Cornwall Lewis Report*, Appendix G, no. 11, p. 22.
 - 20 Report of the Governor of Liverpool Borough Gaol, 1847.
 - 21 *Select Committee on Poor Removal*, 1854, Evidence of A. Campbell, qq. 4993-4995.
 - 22 Fr Nugent was an important figure in the social life of Liverpool and prominent in Catholic affairs. He was the first Catholic prison chaplain in Liverpool, see Canon Bennett, *Father Nugent of Liverpool*, 1949.
 - 23 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, qq. 8194-8197. Also Appendix.
 - 24 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, qq. 8207-8211.
 - 25 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix 4. The figures were given by Fr Nugent.
 - 26 *Select Committee on Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls*, 1882, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 99.
 - 27 *Manchester Guardian*, 6 June 1868.
 - 28 *Cornwall Lewis Report*, Appendix G, no. 11.
 - 29 *Select Committee on Railway Labourers*, 1846, Minutes of Evidence, M. Dowling, qq. 3042-3067.
 - 30 Shimmin, H., *Liverpool Life*, 1857, Chapter 14, 'Police, Prisoners and Prison'. Figures taken from the Report of the Chaplain of Liverpool Borough Gaol.
 - 31 *Ibid.*
 - 32 First Report of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the Constabulary Force of England and Wales, 1839, p. 19, Appendix 7.
 - 33 *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, April 1839, pp. 182-184.
 - 34 *Ibid.* In Liverpool 25% of all property reported as stolen was taken by prostitutes. In the Metropolitan police area, for the same period, the corresponding figure was 4%.
 - 35 *Cornwall Lewis Report*, Appendix G, No. 11, Forwood p. 10; Glover p. 22; Duncan p. 18.
 - 36 *Liverpool Mercury*, 7 August 1846. In 1845, the number of brothels in Liverpool was stated to be 547, inhabited by 2,366 prostitutes.
 - 37 *Select Committee on Poor Removal*, 1854, Minutes of Evidence, A. Campbell, qq. 4993-4995.

- 38 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, q. 8211. He is quoting an earlier report he made to the magistrates in 1875.
- 39 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, q. 8337.
- 40 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, qq. 8197–8209.
- 41 *Select Committee on Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls*, 1882, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, q. 9.
- 42 *Ibid.*, Fr J. Nugent, q. 109.
- 43 *Report on Female Prostitution*, 1857 (Edinburgh), quoted in F. Finnegan, *Poverty and Prostitutes: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York*, p. 81.
- 44 For a detailed account of the Orange-Catholic conflict in Liverpool, see Neal, F., *Sectarian Violence: The Liverpool Experience 1819–1914*, 1989.
- 45 *Select Committee on Habitual Drunkards*, 1872, Minutes of Evidence, Major Grieg, q. 2090.
- 46 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Fr J. Nugent, q. 8198.
- 47 *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Committee*, 1896, Minutes of Evidence, W. J. Stewart, q. 27227.
- 48 For a detailed treatment of Irish removals see Neal, *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 5, March 1986, No. 1, pp. 47–55.
- 49 Edward Rushton to Home Secretary, 21 April 1849. Reproduced in *Select Committee on Poor Removals*, 1854, Minutes of Evidence, A. Campbell, qq. 4952–4954. Also reproduced in *Liverpool Albion*, 21 May 1849.
- 50 Rushton, *op. cit.*, also *Liverpool Chronicle*, 6 April 1850; *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 February 1848.
- 51 *Cornwall Lewis Report*, Appendix G, No. 11, p. 14.
- 52 *Manchester Guardian*, 21 July 1847.
- 53 *Liverpool Mercury*, 20 February 1849.
- 54 *Cornwall Lewis Report*, Evidence of W. Parlour.
- 55 *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Committee*, 1896, Minutes of Evidence, W. J. Stewart, q. 27138.
- 56 *Ibid.*, W. J. Stewart, q. 27140.
- 57 *Report of the Departmental Committee on Reformatory and Industrial Schools*, 1896, Appendix 12, pp. 292–293.
- 58 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 8256.
- 59 Rev. J. Clay, 'Criminal Statistics of Preston', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, March 1839, p. 90.
- 60 *Select Committee on Criminal and Destitute Juveniles 1852*, Appendix No. 2, Juvenile Delinquency Liverpool, p. 408.
- 61 *Ibid.*, Appendix No. 2, p. 407.
- 62 *Reformatory and Industrial Schools Committee*, 1896, Minutes of Evidence, E.M. Hance, q. 17076.
- 63 *Departmental Committee on Reformatory and Industrial Schools*, 1896, Minutes of Evidence, Thomas, A. C., Manager of Fr Berry's Homes. He agreed street traders were much involved in crime, 'one of the

- troubles we are labouring under in Liverpool is that we have no great industry, that is why we have so much street trading'.
- 64 *Select Committee on Destitute Children* 1853, Minutes of Evidence, Rev. T. Carter, Chaplain to Liverpool Borough Gaol.
- 65 For a description of Nugent's work in rescuing children off the streets, see Bennett, *Father Nugent*.
- 66 *Select Committee on Prisons and Prison Ministers Acts*, 1870, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 4036.
- 67 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent. Also *Select Committee on The Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls*, 1882, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 94.
- 68 *Select Committee on the Law Relating to the Protection of Young Girls*, 1882, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, qq. 102 and 132.
- 69 *Ibid.*, q. 102; also *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 8216.
- 70 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, Major Grieg, qq. 10–12.
- 71 *Select Committee on Drunkenness*, 1834, Minutes of Evidence, Rev. W. Scoresby, qq. 4473–74. Scoresby had been chaplain at the Episcopal Mariners Church in Liverpool.
- 72 These statistics are subject to the qualification that the police in different towns followed different practices in reporting drunks.
- 73 White, B.D., *A History of the Corporation of Liverpool 1835–1914*, 1951, Chapter 9.
- 74 J. Finch, *Statistics of the Vauxhall Ward, Liverpool*, Liverpool, 1842.
- 75 The replacement of Protestant families is referred to by Canon A. Hume in *The Ecclesiastical Districts in Liverpool*, 1879, p. 81. For the continued concentration of unskilled Irish in the dockland areas, see C. Pooley, 'Residential Segregation of Migrant Communities in Mid-Victorian Liverpool', in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1977.
- 76 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 8207.
- 77 I am grateful to Fr Corkery, formerly parish priest of St Vincent's, for allowing me to read the notebook of one of the missionary clergy.
- 78 *Select Committee on Intemperance*, 1877, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 8272.
- 79 *Cornwall Lewis Report*, 1836, Appendix G, No. 11, p. 21.
- 80 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 81 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 82 Finch, *Statistics of Vauxhall Ward*.
- 83 *Liverpool Mercury*, 21 January 1842.
- 84 Canon A. Hume, *Mission at Home*, 1850.
- 85 *Select Committee on Poor Removal*, 1854, Minutes of Evidence, A. Campbell, q. 5000–5002. Campbell had obtained his data from the Anglican Scripture Readers and Canon Hume, who carried out the survey in 1847. The survey of St Thomas's parish was carried out in 1854.
- 86 *Ibid.*

- 87 *Select Committee on Prisons and Prison Ministers Acts, 1870*, Minutes of Evidence, J. Nugent, q. 4016.
- 88 Durey, M., 'The Survival of an Irish Culture in Britain 1800-1845', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 20, April 1982.
- 89 Fr. Tanner's views are expanded at length in his book *The Church Now*, 1980.
- 90 'Catholics and Crime: Conference Report', *The Month*, September 1981.