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**Attitudes and responses to the influx of ethnic immigrants into the
East End of London 1840 to 1905: A local study of Irish and Jewish
immigration into the East London districts of Whitechapel and St
George-in-the-East.**

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ABSTRACT

The two East London districts of Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East experienced very high levels of both Irish and Jewish immigration, with huge influxes of Irish immigrants in the late 1840s and 1850s and of East European Jews from 1881 until 1905. This study considers the attitudes and responses of local officials, social commentators and newspapers to these waves of immigration. This study sets out to test whether concerns about immigration were expressed using derogatory language linking perceived social and economic problems with particular racial characteristics. It also aims to show that those local officials and charities who had close contact with the immigrants did not consider that immigration posed any major concerns and that they provided positive support to help improve their conditions.

Much of the historiography of both Irish and Jewish immigration has focused on the social and economic apartness of the immigrant communities and whether this contributed to concerns about immigration being expressed in prejudicial language, linking problems with racial characteristics. However, in relation to Irish immigration, a number of local studies outside London have demonstrated that the response to Irish immigrants varied significantly from region to region. There has also been debate about the extent to which local officials and charities provided positive support to the immigrant communities.

This study concludes that the use of derogatory and racial language was used not only by newspapers and periodicals but also, on occasion, by officials, residents' groups and politicians. However, it also concludes that, although the local officials and social commentators who examined the Irish and Jewish immigrants confirmed the very harsh conditions in which they lived and worked, they generally did not attribute blame to the immigrant communities. There were also many examples of local officials and charities providing support to the immigrant communities with the objective of improving their condition. However, there was also an element of ambivalence in their response.

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PERSONAL STATEMENT

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided, work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution. Parts of this dissertation are built on work I submitted for assessment as part of A825.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The key historical argument which this dissertation engages with is the extent to which immigrant communities in Victorian England were considered to be a 'race apart' and a source of social and economic problems. The two districts in the East End of London which I have examined, Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East, had very high levels of both Irish and Jewish immigration, with huge influxes of Irish immigrants in the late 1840s and 1850s and of East European Jews from 1881. A key consideration is therefore the attitudes and responses of local officials, social commentators and newspapers to these waves of immigration. What was the nature of the concerns raised about ethnic immigration and how were these concerns expressed? To what extent were these concerns justified by the condition and behaviour of the immigrant communities? Finally, how did local officials and charities respond to the immigrant communities?

The economic and social concerns about immigrant communities have been examined under four general themes, each of which is dealt with in a separate chapter. The first relates to the overcrowded and insanitary conditions in which the immigrants lived and worked. This includes the perceived increased threat of contagious diseases. The second relates to the perceived criminality of the immigrants and the association of specific types of criminal behaviour with their racial characteristics. The third relates to the effect of large-scale immigration on local employment and the concerns that cheap casual labour would drive down wages and create unemployment. The fourth relates to the burden which the impoverished immigrants had on the local poor law authorities and local charities and how the authorities and charities responded.

The hypothesis which this dissertation sets out to test is that concerns about immigration were frequently expressed in derogatory terms which linked perceived social and economic problems with particular racial characteristics. However, it also aims to show that those local officials, charities and social investigators who had close contact with the immigrants did not consider that immigration posed any major concerns. Finally, it aims to demonstrate that the response of local officials

and charities was often positive with a genuine attempt to help improve their conditions.

Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East were local administrative districts in the County of Middlesex, within the metropolis of London, immediately to the east of the City of London and north of the river Thames. Whitechapel bordered the City of London and its proximity to the City and to the London ports meant that it had a significant foreign population, including both Irish and Jewish settlers, long before the nineteenth century.¹ St George-in-the-East was immediately to the east of Whitechapel, bordering the London docks, and, as such, was a convenient location for the large number of casual dock labourers who needed to live close to their place of work. Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East became Poor Law Unions in 1836, under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Whitechapel Union comprised nine parishes including the large parishes of Christ Church Spitalfields and St Mary's Whitechapel.² St George-in-the-East became a single parish Poor Law Union.³ Many of the local administrative functions of the expanding metropolis, including roads, sewage and sanitation, remained the responsibility of the individual parishes within the counties which bordered the City of London until 1855 when the Metropolitan Board of Works assumed overall responsibility for functions such as sanitation, sewage and roads in much of the metropolis. In 1889, the County of London was created providing the inner districts of the metropolis with a unified directly elected administrative body for the first time. At the same time, the districts of Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East joined with other local districts to become the London Borough of Stepney, which took over local responsibilities for housing and sanitation.⁴ Both districts were in the parliamentary constituency of Tower

¹ Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (New York: Cornhill University Press, 1979), p.68.

² Poor Law Commissioners: *Third Annual Report* (1836), p.9.

³ Poor Law Commissioners: *Second Annual Report* (1837), p.13.

⁴ John Davis, 'London Governments 1850-1920: The Metropolitan Board of Works and the London County Council', *The London Journal*, 26:1 (2001), 47-56, p.48.

Hamlets until 1885 when they each became parliamentary constituencies in their own right.⁵

Irish immigration into Britain had been increasing progressively in the first half of the nineteenth century, facilitated by the cheap and regular steamboat connections between Irish and British seaports.⁶ Many of the immigrants were seasonal workers who would return to Ireland each year but those who remained tended to settle in the larger towns where there was a demand for unskilled labour and where there was a supply of relatively cheap housing. In the decade after 1845, in the wake of the widespread famine in Ireland, the numbers increased significantly and many of the immigrants who arrived were profoundly destitute. As a percentage of the resident population, the cities which experienced the greatest impact from this wave of immigration were Glasgow and Dundee in Scotland and Liverpool and Manchester in England. However, in absolute terms, the highest number of Irish immigrants settled in London with 108,548 recorded in the 1851 census, an increase of 34,000 in the decade since the previous census.⁷ Although this represented only 4.6% of the population of London, the tendency of the immigrants to concentrate in areas which had existing Irish communities meant that there was a significant impact on certain districts.

In Whitechapel as a whole, the Irish-born population exceeded 10% in 1851 and, in St George-in-the-East, it amounted to between 8% and 10%. However, in specific districts, the percentages were much higher. In the area on the south side of Rosemary Lane, in Whitechapel, the myriad of small courts and alleys housed an Irish population of between 60% and 74%. These were not ghettos in the sense that the Irish immigrants were socially segregated but they were distinctly Irish districts.⁸

⁵ Redistribution of Seats Act (1885) Constituencies, *Return to the House of Commons*, p.13.

⁶ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.33.

⁷ Colin Pooley, 'Segregation or Integration? The Residential Experience of the Irish in Mid-Victorian Britain' in *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939*, ed. by Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (London: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1989) p.66.

⁸ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, pp.56-68.

By 1851 there was already a significant Jewish community in Whitechapel and the eastern wards of the City of London and immigration from Holland and Germany over the next thirty years, increased the number to just over 30,000. From 1881, however, there was a significant influx of Jewish Immigrants from Russia and Poland who were predominantly destitute on arrival and culturally very different from the existing Jewish communities. The actual number of Russian and Polish Jews arriving from Eastern Europe were much less than the alarmist claims of many contemporary politicians and journalists but, because they concentrated in specific streets in Whitechapel, St George-in-the-East and the surrounding districts, they were very visible.⁹

Based on Board of Trade figures, annual immigration of Russian and Polish Jews amounted to between 5,000 and 6,000 from 1881 to 1883, in response to pogroms against the Jewish population in Russia. For the following fifteen years the annual rate of immigration was between 2,000 and 3,000 with the exception of 1891 when it amounted to 7,000 as the Jews in Russia were forced into the pale by administrative order. From 1899 to 1905, however, the annual rate trebled as a result of famine and the intensification of the pogroms.¹⁰ In due course a large number of these immigrants would be persuaded to continue on to America and South Africa or to return to their homeland and the total who settled permanently in London was far less. The number of Russian and Polish Jews in Whitechapel increased from 5,293 to 20,882 in the twenty years from 1881 to 1901 at which point they represented 27% of the resident population. In St George-in-the-East, during the same period, the numbers increased from 566 to 11,827 at which point they represented 24% of the resident population. A further 11,003 were in adjoining districts.¹¹

⁹ David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.167.

¹⁰ Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972), p.3.

¹¹ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, p.170.

As part of a wider historical debate about Irish 'apartness', there has been debate about the nature and scale of prejudice against the Irish community. The first aspect of this debate concerns the extent to which the prejudice was racial in its nature or simply an aspect of general antagonism against the poor, of which the Irish were, of course, a significant element. Historians such as L. Perry Curtis consider that the nature of anti-Irish coverage in periodicals and newspapers, including the way the Irish were caricatured, was evidence of overtly racist attitudes whilst other historians, such as Sheridan Gilley, consider that the stereotyping was not racially motivated and that antagonism against the Irish, when it occurred, was short term and specific to actual social concerns.¹² A second aspect of the debate has concerned the extent to which the major influx of Irish immigrants presented serious social and economic problems for the local communities where they settled. This debate has included discussions about the interpretation of data. For example, in relation to crime, Roger Swift has argued that the Irish were not necessarily overrepresented in criminal statistics when it is considered that they were primarily located in those poorer districts which were often a target of the police.¹³ A third aspect of the debate has concerned the varying experience of the Irish in different localities. Local studies have indicated that there were significantly different responses to the influx of Irish immigrants depending on a number of factors, including the extent of their impoverishment, the nature of the local economy and the extent to which they formed Irish ghettos. Graham Davis has compared a number of local studies and noted surprising contrasts.¹⁴

In relation to Jewish immigration, a key historical debate has been the extent to which the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, with their radically different customs and appearance, were considered to be a 'race apart'. Fishman noted that hostility to the Jewish immigrants was exacerbated by their tendency to congregate

¹² M.A.G. O'Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain: Problems of Integration', *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, 31 (1981), 149-173, (p.160).

¹³ Roger Swift, 'The Irish Crime and Disorder in Victorian England', *Albion Journal*, 29 (3) (1997), 399-421.

¹⁴ Graham Davis, 'Little Irelands', in *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939*, ed. by Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (London: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1989) pp.104-134.

in unhygienic, overcrowded conditions, where they practiced very different social customs and led insular economic lives.¹⁵ Lloyd Gartner emphasised their social 'apartness' noting that 'viewing the social life of the Jewish immigrant community as a whole, one is struck by its self-centredness, its utter autonomy from the rest of the population'.¹⁶ David Feldman has noted, however, that recent research has challenged the focus on the tensions between the Jewish and indigenous communities by highlighting the inter-relationships the Jewish immigrants had with their English neighbours and firmly placing the Jewish experience as part of the history of the working class.¹⁷ Linked to the debate about 'apartness' is the extent to which the social and economic distinctiveness of the Jewish immigrants was expressed in racial terms. David Englander has argued that the contemporary social scientist Charles Booth and his assistants had preconceptions about Jewish racial characteristics which influenced their analysis of the Jewish attitude to work.¹⁸ Paul Knepper noted that, in relation to the perceived threats from the influx of Jewish immigrants, criminal characteristics were often expressed in racial terms.¹⁹ Feldman has argued that the focus amongst politicians and social commentators on notions of national identity and what it meant to be a citizen heightened the perception of the Jewish immigrants as a separate race with characteristics which represented a threat to British society.²⁰

A second area of historical discussion has concerned the response of the existing Jewish population, the Anglo-Jewish community, to the mass immigration of their impoverished fellow Jews. The Anglo-Jewish community, particularly through the operation of a number of charities, provided a major source of support for the impoverished Jewish immigrants. However, the prevailing historical argument is

¹⁵ William J. Fishman, *East End Jewish Radicals: 1875-1914* (London: Duckworth, 1975) pp.41-57.

¹⁶ Gartner, Lloyd. P., *The Jewish Immigrant in England 1870-1914* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001) p.186.

¹⁷ David Feldman, 'Mr Lewin goes to Parliament: Rethinking the History and Historiography of Jewish Immigration', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 47:2-3 (2017), 134-149.

¹⁸ David Englander, 'Booth's Jews: The Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Life and Labour of the People in London', *Victorian Studies*, 32 (4) (1989), 551-571.

¹⁹ Knepper, Paul, 'British Jews and the Racialisation of Crime in the Age of Empire', *British Journal of Criminology*, 47 (2007), 61-79.

²⁰ Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, pp.263-264.

that this support was framed by an inherent conflict between, on the one hand, a desire not to do anything which might encourage further immigration and, on the other, a wish to improve the social and economic position of the poorest immigrants in order to mitigate the social and economic problems which they presented. William Fishman noted that the alien Jews represented 'a source of fear and embarrassment' and that the attitudes of the Anglo-Jewish community 'fluctuated between a kind of patronising hospitality and cold neglect'.²¹ Feldman noted the increasing anxiety of the Anglo-Jewish community as the issue of Jewish immigration became a national political question.²² Gartner noted that 'English Jewry steered a sometimes unclear middle course, neither welcoming nor repelling immigrants'.²³

The attitudes and responses of those local officials and charities which dealt directly with Irish and Jewish immigrants have been derived from two main sources. Firstly the minutes of the Board of Guardians of the Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East Poor Law Unions and the Annual Reports of frontline Jewish Charities are available at the London Metropolitan Archives. The minutes of the Poor Law Unions are particularly detailed including copies of all significant correspondence. The Annual Reports of the Jewish charities provide not only statistical information but also an insight into their objectives and concerns and the narrative they wished to portray to their wider readership. Secondly, there were a large number of parliamentary and government reports during the period either directly or indirectly concerned with immigration which include detailed evidence from local officials.

The reports and records of social investigators, many of which are available on-line or in printed books, also provide valuable insights into the lives of the Irish and Jewish immigrants in these East London districts. These include Henry Mayhew and William Pollard-Urquhart in relation to Irish immigration and Charles Booth for Jewish immigration. The Jewish notebooks prepared by Booth's team provided

²¹ Fishman, pp.64-65.

²² Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews*, pp.382-383.

²³ Gartner, p.56.

testimony from many newly arrived immigrants. More general attitudes to immigration, which were often expressed in derogatory and racial language, were derived from a review of both local and national newspapers and periodicals. Parliamentary debates, as recorded in Hansard and national newspapers, have also been reviewed to provide an insight into periods in which local concerns became national issues.

CHAPTER 2: HOUSING

Overcrowded housing conditions and poor sanitation were the most visible indicators of the presence of impoverished Irish and Jewish immigrants in the streets and alleys of Whitechapel and St-George-in-the-East. Their natural tendency to live in close proximity to their fellow immigrants resulted in very high concentrations in specific areas and a key question is the nature and extent of concerns raised about the housing conditions in these areas, including the risk of outbreaks of cholera which was prevalent during both periods of immigration. In relation to Irish immigration, local studies have indicated that the response of local communities to the influx of impoverished Irish immigrants and the poor housing conditions in which they lived varied significantly from region to region. Graham Davis has compared a number of local studies and noted surprising differences as to whether Irish immigrants were blamed for outbreaks of cholera in similar circumstances.²⁴ In relation to Jewish immigration, William Fishman considered that hostility to the overcrowded and insanitary conditions of the Jewish immigrants was exacerbated by their insular lives and their social apartness.²⁵ This dissertation considers whether the concerns which were raised were expressed using derogatory language and the extent to which blame for poor conditions was attributed to the immigrants. It also considers the actual conditions in which the immigrants lived and whether there were attempts by local officials, or local charities in the case of the Jewish immigrants, to bring about improvements.

The major influx of Irish immigrants into urban areas in the late 1840s and 1850s occurred at a time when concerns were generally being raised about the state of poor living conditions in the rapidly expanding urban districts. Outbreaks of cholera in 1848 and 1849 further increased these concerns. An influential pamphlet, written by Dr James Kay, had portrayed the Irish as uncivilised, referring to their

²⁴ Davis, 'Little Irelands', pp.104-134.

²⁵ Fishman, pp.41-57.

'barbarous habits' and their pernicious effects on the English implying that their poor living conditions was contributing to the outbreaks of disease.²⁶

Newspapers and periodicals reported on the very poor housing and insanitary conditions in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East and these concerns were often expressed using derogatory language. Common lodging houses were a particular cause of concern with some of the worst kept by Irish who would rent a house or even a room and then sublet to Irish tenants resulting in astonishing levels of overcrowding. The *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* stated that: 'the very worst cases of filth, indecency and riot abound in the houses peopled by the low Irish'.²⁷ The *Examiner*, reporting a case of serious overcrowding in an Irish lodging house brought before Thames Police Court in 1852, referred to the defendant as 'a wretched looking object, whose person was particularly dirty and offensive' and it parodied his Irish accent.²⁸ The *Ragged School Union Magazine*, took its readers on a tour of the lodging houses in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East and it noted some appalling examples, the worst of which had eighteen people sleeping in one room.²⁹

The use of derogatory language in relation to the Irish immigrants was not restricted to newspapers and periodicals. In 1848 the Whitechapel Association was formed by local residents whose objectives were to improve the condition of some of the poorest areas through regular visits by their appointed agent. At its first annual meeting, when explaining the extremely poor state of housing and sanitation and the measures taken to persuade residents to effect improvements, one of the members spoke in disparaging terms about the Irish.³⁰ The Annual Report of the Association included a specific section on the Irish immigrants which stated that 'the excessive overcrowding in some districts is caused by the immigration of numerous hordes of uneducated Irish, inured to filth, lost to all sense of independence, prone to begging, and possessing the lowest possible

²⁶ James Phillips Kay, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Industry in Manchester*, (1832), 'Bristol Selected Pamphlets'.

²⁷ *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 18 June 1853.

²⁸ *Examiner*, 23 October 1832.

²⁹ *Ragged School Union Magazine*, 3:25, January 1851.

³⁰ *Daily News*, 17th October 1850.

standard of comfort, together with their peculiar habits of herding together in the smallest possible space'.³¹

However, the reports of social scientists and social commentators who visited the areas indicated that the condition of Irish housing was not necessarily worse than the general condition of housing in the poorest areas of the district and, in some cases, their reports were actually complimentary about the Irish living conditions. The exception appears to be common lodging houses kept by the Irish, many of which were generally of the very lowest condition. In 1848, the Statistical Society of London made a specific investigation of the poorer classes in St George-in-the-East which, it reported, was approximately 9% Irish with a further 6% from 'foreign parts'. It provided details of the low standard of housing and the prevalence of poverty throughout the district. However, there is no reference in the report to these poor conditions being attributable to the Irish or other ethnic communities.³² Henry Mayhew, writing about the condition of some of the houses which he visited in the Irish areas of Whitechapel, noted that 'in all the houses that I entered were traces of household care and neatness that I little expected to have seen'.³³ He also visited a number of Irish lodging houses in Rosemary Lane and noted that 'the better class of Irish lodging-houses almost startle one by the comfort and cleanliness of the rooms'. By contrast he found ten people living in one small room in one of the worst class of lodging houses.³⁴ William Pollard-Urquhart agreed with Mayhew that the housing conditions were often unexpectedly of a reasonable standard. Following his inspection of the housing of Irish labourers in Whitechapel, he concluded that, although they generally occupied only one room, he could see 'no appearance of misery, or even of dirt or of untidiness in their habitations'.³⁵

³¹ *The Morning Post*, 27th December 1850.

³² Statistical Society of London, Committee of Fellows, 'An investigation into the State of the Poorer Classes in St. George's in the East', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 11 (3) (1848), 193-249.

³³ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour & the London Poor* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2008), p.101.

³⁴ Mayhew, pp.104-105.

³⁵ William Pollard-Urquhart, 'Transactions of the Condition of the Irish Labourers in the East of London', *Transaction of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences* (1862), 744-750 (p.747).

During the period when Irish immigration was at its height there were a number of reports from local and government officials with responsibilities for aspects of public health, sanitation and housing which confirmed the very poor standard of housing and excessive overcrowding, particularly in relation to the common lodging houses. However, there was generally no attempt to attribute blame to the Irish immigrants and, where conditions were directly associated with the Irish immigrants, the response was often to build trust with the community as a means to improve conditions. In relation to the common lodging houses, there was certainly harsh action taken against the Irish landlords but an official policy of support for their Irish tenants.

In 1848, the Metropolitan sanitary Commission issued a report which included reference to the poor sanitary conditions in Rosemary Lane but there was no attempt in the report to attribute any blame to Irish immigrants.³⁶ In the same year, the Medical Officer for Whitechapel Poor Law Union was so incensed with the poor condition of the Irish immigrants in the Rosemary Lane area that he wrote to *The Times*, giving graphic details about the appalling conditions of the housing and the insanitary conditions. The letter does not, however, attribute any blame to the Irish immigrants.³⁷ In 1850, the General Board of Health issued a report on the recent cholera epidemic of 1848 and 1849. This extensive report included evidence and documentation from Poor Law Union medical officers, including those of Whitechapel. One of the buildings in Rosemary Lane was referred to as 'one of the dirtiest places human beings have visited' and there was general reference to the overcrowded living conditions of Irish immigrants but no direct criticism of the Irish community.³⁸ Finally, the report of the Registrar-General on deaths in 1853 noted the large number of cholera cases in London and referred to a number of individual cases in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East. Although the districts referred to

³⁶ Metropolitan Sanitary Commission: *Third Report of the Commissioners Appointed to inquire whether any and what Special means may be requisite for the Improvement of the Health of the Metropolis* (1848).

³⁷ *The Times*, 16th December 1848.

³⁸ General Board of Health: *Report on the Epidemic Cholera of 1848 & 1849* (1850).

were predominantly Irish, it is noteworthy that the Irish community were not referred to.³⁹

The minutes of the Poor Law Guardians in Whitechapel confirmed the appalling housing and sanitary conditions of the Irish neighbourhoods but they appeared to want to respect Irish customs and build trust with the Irish community. During the second half of 1846 and early 1847 there was consideration of a number of Medical Officer Reports expressing concern about the overcrowded conditions in Rosemary Lane and the fact that fever prevailed there.⁴⁰ During 1848, following renewed concerns about the outbreak of Cholera in Rosemary Lane and Blue Anchor Yard, an inspection of the district was carried out which noted the very poor condition of housing and confirmed that the overcrowding was caused by the Irish immigrants. Reference was also made to the risk of the spread of disease arising from the custom of Irish funeral wakes where the diseased body was laid out in an overcrowded room. However, it was agreed that the medical officers should not interfere with these customs.⁴¹ Furthermore, in early 1849, there was concern expressed that the Irish did not have confidence in the Union medical officers and, as a result, the clerk was instructed to write to Roman Catholic clergy in the district requesting them to impress on the minds of the poor that the steps which were being undertaken were intended only for their benefit.⁴²

The type of housing causing the most concern in the late 1840s and 1850s was the common lodging houses and, because they were regulated for the first time in the metropolis from 1851, the regulatory reports provide a further insight into attitudes to the Irish community. What comes across from the reports is that, although there was harsh criticism of those Irish landlords responsible for the overcrowding, there was sympathy and even help for the Irish suffering the poor conditions. A report by the Metropolitan Police Commissioners in 1853 referred to common lodging houses as 'hotbeds of crime and moral depravity' and it was noted that the majority of

³⁹ *The Examiner*, 5 November 1853.

⁴⁰ STBG/WH: *Board Minutes, Whitechapel Board of Guardians* 18th August 1846 and 16th March 1847, London Metropolitan Archives.

⁴¹ *Whitechapel Board of Guardians*, 14th December 1848.

⁴² *Whitechapel Board of Guardians*, 23rd January 1849.

summonses had been issued in districts where the Irish are located.⁴³ The superintendent with responsibility for registration stated that the worst cases had occurred in houses kept by Irish landlords and many of the examples he gave of the worst conditions were located in Whitechapel involving individuals with Irish surnames. In one lodging house in Rosemary Lane the inspectors found thirty seven adults and two children living and sleeping in four rooms.⁴⁴ Each non-compliant landlord was summoned to the Thames Police Court and those who did not avoid further action by giving up their rooms were fined.

However, the attitude to those suffering the overcrowded conditions was markedly different. The report noted one case where the inspecting sergeant of a lodging house in Whitechapel came across an Irish woman with two young children, who appeared to be seriously ill. The sergeant arranged for immediate medical relief and he then personally sprinkled the room with a solution of lime.⁴⁵ The report stated that the inspecting officers are required to 'act in a temperate and considerate manner and as friends to the poor'.

Charles Booth, in a report to the statistical society in 1887, noted the recent influx of Russian Jews into Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East where they tended to concentrate in the predominantly Jewish districts where the language and culture were familiar. He stated that the result was the 'aggravation of every evil' and that the 'the conditions of the houses become indescribable'.⁴⁶ When discussing their concerns about the housing conditions in these Jewish districts, officials and politicians frequently resorted to derogatory language with some racial overtones. In evidence to the Royal Commission on Housing in 1885, a member of the Local Board of Works stated that the Jewish immigrants arrive in 'waggon loads' from the

⁴³ Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police: *Report on the operation of the Common Lodging Houses Act within the Metropolitan Police District* (1853), p.3.

⁴⁴ Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, *Common Lodging Houses*, p.7.

⁴⁵ Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, *Common Lodging Houses*, p.2.

⁴⁶ Charles Booth, *Conditions and Occupations of the People of the Tower Hamlets*, (London: Edward Stanford, 1887; repr.), p.47.

docks late at night and that they live in 'a state of degradation and dirt'.⁴⁷ In a report to the Board of Trade in the following year, the Whitechapel Board of Guardians referred to localities in Whitechapel as being 'invaded' by foreigners and 'abandoned' by English and it referred to the Jewish immigrants as a 'class of foreign poor who seem hitherto to have existed in the mere border of civilization'.⁴⁸ In 1892, as concerns were raised about the risk of cholera, a journalist went with a sanitary inspector to visit Jewish homes in the Bell Lane area of Whitechapel and he described the overcrowded and insanitary conditions in a report with the derogatory title 'Some plague spots in East London'.⁴⁹ In a debate in the House of Commons in 1893, an MP argued for a bill to restrict immigration and, speaking about the insanitary conditions of the Jewish districts he noted that 'their dwellings were of the most foul and loathsome character; they were huddled together in numbers and conditions which happily did not prevail in these days among the home-born population of this country'.⁵⁰ In 1901, Stepney Borough Council debated whether overcrowding was primarily caused by immigration and an alderman spoke of the immigrants being "a mighty roaring torrent, entirely submerging the native population of Whitechapel, raging over the greater part of St George-in-the-East".⁵¹

The practical concerns most frequently expressed in relation to housing were that the Jewish immigrants were forcing up rents through their willingness to sub-let and live in overcrowded houses, thereby driving out English residents, and that the use of their homes as unregulated workshops was exacerbating the unhealthy living conditions. These concerns were heightened by the perceived risk of an outbreak of cholera. In the fifteen years from 1888 to 1903 there were a number of select committees and a royal commission which specifically focused on the effects of Jewish immigration and the evidence presented to them confirmed the extremely high levels of overcrowding, particularly in the Spitalfields area of Whitechapel, and

⁴⁷ Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes: *Summary of the First Report* (1885), p.164.

⁴⁸ *Whitechapel Board of Guardians*, 1st November 1887.

⁴⁹ *East London Observer*, 3 September 1892.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 13th February 1893.

⁵¹ *East London Observer*, 9 March 1901.

the increasing levels of rents. However, although Jewish immigration was considered to be a contributory cause, it was recognised that other factors such as the demolition of dwellings to make way for factories, schools and railways were also significant.⁵² Also, there was recognition that, over time, the Jewish districts steadily improved and that, to the puzzlement of local health officials, there was no incidence of contagious diseases amongst the Jewish immigrants.⁵³

Concerned about the risk of contagious disease, the Whitechapel Board of Guardians set up a committee, in 1887, to look into foreign immigration and they sought responses from medical practitioners in the Union. They noted the overcrowded living conditions, the poor sanitation and the general dirt but reported that there was no evidence of any epidemics which they found surprising.⁵⁴ In evidence to the Select Committee on immigration, in 1889, the relieving officers of the Whitechapel Union noted that the sanitary conditions of the Jewish immigrants were generally poor with families occupying a single room, but that their health was generally good.⁵⁵ Evidence to the same committee from the Headmaster of a local Board School referred to the very insanitary conditions when they first arrived but he noted that they quickly improved.⁵⁶ In a report to the Select Committee on the Sweating System in 1888, a journalist for the boot and shoe industry gave evidence of extreme overcrowding. In one room which he visited, ten people were working and a family of eight were sleeping making a total of eighteen people in the room at night.⁵⁷ The Select Committee on the Sweating System also gave a voice to some of the recently arrived immigrants. One witness reported that he paid 2s per week for lodgings which comprised a room which he shared with four other people and he slept on the floor.⁵⁸

⁵² Report of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, Vol I (1903), pp.22-27.

⁵³ Gartner, pp.156-160.

⁵⁴ *Whitechapel Board of Guardians*, 1st November 1887.

⁵⁵ Select Committee of the House of Commons: *Report on Emigration and Immigration (Foreigners)* (1889), pp.59-61.

⁵⁶ Select Committee: *Emigration and Immigration*, pp.70-71.

⁵⁷ First Report of the Select Committee on the Sweating System pp.94-95.

⁵⁸ Select Committee: *Sweating*, First Report pp.63-64.

Concerns about the risk of cholera were at their height in 1892 when there were outbreaks of the disease at German ports and the recently formed London County Council met to discuss the incidence of cholera in the Jewish immigrant community.⁵⁹ In the same year, the Port Sanitary Committee also began inspecting all ships arriving in London.⁶⁰ However, there was a recognition that there was no evidence to link Jewish immigration with the incidence of contagious disease. A Board of Trade report on immigration in the following year, whilst noting the severe overcrowding, concluded that recent inspections had indicated improvements with less incidence of living accommodation being used as workshops.⁶¹

The Rector of Spitalfields informed the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration that he had recently prepared a report for a conference on overcrowding organised by the Whitechapel Union which confirmed the extremely high rents and extensive sub-letting and he estimated that the population density of Spitalfields was nearly six times greater than the average for London. He also considered that there was considerable antagonism against the Jews amongst those English workers forced to remain in the area to be close to work.⁶² The medical officer of Health for Whitechapel District also gave evidence to the Commission on the extreme overcrowding. In the worst of the buildings such as the Booth Street Buildings, ten or eleven people could occupy a room at night and the rooms were used as workshops as well as living accommodation.⁶³

Housing conditions of the newly arrived Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland were a significant concern for the Anglo-Jewish community and they responded to public criticism of the insanitary conditions of their fellow Jews by taking measures to encourage improvements. It was the Lancet report in 1884 which highlighted for the wider public the very poor condition of the Jewish working and living conditions. The investigation by the Lancet was focused on the Whitechapel area

⁵⁹ *Evening Standard*, 10 September 1894.

⁶⁰ *East London Observer*, 3 September 1892.

⁶¹ Board of Trade: *Reports on the volumes and effects of Recent Immigration from Eastern Europe into the United Kingdom* (1894), pp.56-60.

⁶² Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration* Vol II pp.317-324.

⁶³ Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration* Vol II pp.150-157.

and the key issue arising was the overcrowded sweatshop working conditions of those involved in the tailoring trade and the consequential effects on the health of the workers. The tone of the report was critical but it was not in any way derogatory as it recognised the limited employment opportunities of the immigrants. It was a call for support to be given to the immigrants rather than for action to be taken against them⁶⁴.

The United Synagogue set up a visiting committee to inspect Jewish homes and workshops in the most overcrowded streets in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East and guidance was provided to visitors on how they should conduct their visits including a detailed list of sanitary matters to be investigated. The visitors were requested to refer cases of destitution to the Jewish Board of Guardians and cases of sickness to the Ladies conjoint visiting committee.⁶⁵ The Jewish Board of Guardians employed sanitary inspectors and its sanitary committee prepared regular reports. In 1893, 5,209 visits were made by their sanitary inspectors to 1,746 dwellings. Of these, more than half were found to be below the standard of the local authority, but, within a year, the majority of the defects were remedied.⁶⁶ The most ambitious response of the Anglo-Jewish community was, however, the building of model dwellings to house the Jewish immigrants. The most prominent example was the 4% Dwellings Company, set up by prominent Jews, which developed what became known as the Rothschild Buildings from 1885.⁶⁷ A contemporary article on these new buildings noted that 'both people and rooms were scrupulously clean, one could not have found fault had one desired to do so'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ David Englander, ed. *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 85-90.

⁶⁵ LSE Charles Booth's London: *Jewish Notebooks* <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/notebooks>, Booth/A/19.

⁶⁶ Board of Trade: *Reports on Immigration*, pp.59-60.

⁶⁷ David Feldman, 'Historiographical Review: There was an Englishman, an Irishman and a Jew...Immigrants and Minorities in Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 26,1 (1983), 185-199 (pp.189-190).

⁶⁸ *The Sunday at Home*, 29th August 1891.

CHAPTER 3: CRIME

Although, by nature, the Irish and Jewish immigrants appeared to be very different, both were considered to have criminal characteristics which represented a threat to a law-abiding society. The two areas of criminality most associated with the Irish community were disorderly behaviour, associated with drunkenness, and juvenile delinquency. Disreputable lodging houses were also considered to be the centres of criminal activity. Referring to the studies in various northern towns, including York, Manchester and Liverpool, Roger Swift considered that there was widespread belief in England that the Irish were inherently criminal and that this was a key element in 'the negative side of the Irish stereotype'.⁶⁹ Clive Emsley noted that, as an ethnic group, the Irish community became associated with crime, particularly in relation to disorderly behaviour.⁷⁰ The debate has also recognised that there were variations in time and place with many districts in London not having the same experience as those towns in the north of England.⁷¹ The two areas of criminality associated with the Jewish immigrants were prostitution, including organised sex slave trafficking, and anarchism. A key debate has been about the extent to which politicians and social commentators deliberately linked certain types of criminality with the particular characteristics of the Jewish immigrant community in what Paul Knepper has referred to as the 'racialisation of crime'. He noted that it involved those campaigning against immigration using language which involved 'blending racial identity with criminality'.⁷² This dissertation considers the extent to which concerns about criminality in the Irish and Jewish immigrant communities were expressed in derogatory and racial language. It also considers the extent to which the criminal activities of the immigrant communities in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East posed any genuine concerns for local officials and social investigators.

This dissertation does not attempt to analyse criminal statistics as a basis for assessing concerns about criminality. There have been several local studies of Irish

⁶⁹ Roger Swift, 'Crime and the Irish in nineteenth-century Britain', in *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939*, ed. by Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley (London: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1989), p.163.

⁷⁰ Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England: 1750-1900* (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), p.95.

⁷¹ Swift, 'Crime and the Irish', pp.163-182.

⁷² Knepper, 'British Jews', p.61.

communities in nineteenth century England which have concluded that the Irish born population were proportionately more likely to be prosecuted and convicted than the English population. Much of the debate, however, has centred on the need to be cautious with the quantitative data on arrests and prosecutions. Their offenses were usually of a relatively minor nature, relating to drunkenness, public disorder and common assaults and the relatively high incidence of criminality was likely to reflect the fact that they represented a disproportionately high percentage of the poorest elements of the large towns and cities which were naturally a focus for the recently formed regional police forces.⁷³

The 1836 report on the state of the Irish Poor in Great Britain painted a picture of the Irish as being proportionally more criminal, particularly in relation to drunkenness and violent behaviour.⁷⁴ Following the major influx of Irish from 1847, the criminality of the Irish became a major issue for newspapers and periodicals and there are numerous examples of journalists and writers referring to the criminality of the Irish in the metropolis, and Whitechapel in particular, in derogatory terms. The *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* was particularly harsh in its denigration of Irish immigrants and it referred to Irish pauper vagrants as an 'inexhaustible fountain of misery permitted to pour forth its polluting streams over the land' with their 'half beggar, half criminal children'.⁷⁵ In a later article, it refers to the lodging houses in Whitechapel where 'the very worst instances of filth, indecency, and riot abound in the houses peopled by low Irish' many of which it considered to contain mainly thieves.⁷⁶ For Charles Dickens, Whitechapel was an intriguing and mysterious place as described in his 'Walk around Whitechapel' article for his *Household Words* magazine. In the article, he refers to the Irish there as a rowdy and poor class and describes an incident where Irish labourers are

⁷³ Swift, 'Crime and the Irish', p.164-165.

⁷⁴ Roger Swift, ed., *Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815-1914: A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), p.101.

⁷⁵ *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 7 October 1848.

⁷⁶ *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 18 June 1853.

physically ejected from a public house.⁷⁷ An article in the *Ragged School Union Magazine* on juvenile mendicancy in the metropolis considered that the problem was exacerbated by the vast immigration of Irish who have brought with them 'their rags, their filth, their squalid indolence and, with these, also a low cunning'.⁷⁸ An article in *Ainsworth's* magazine entitled the 'Dens of London' referred to the violence of the Irish in the metropolis noting that 'bred in violence and ignorance, the children grow up hardened and vicious'.⁷⁹

Juvenile delinquency was considered to be a significant problem at the time of the major influx of Irish immigrants and it was recognised that Irish children featured heavily in the statistics. However, much of the evidence, at least in relation to the East End of London, indicates that, whilst the level of Irish juvenile delinquency was high, Irish children were not considered to be inherently criminal but rather a product of their social environment. Henry Mayhew noted that a very large proportion of the juvenile prisoners were the children of Irish parents but he recognised that that they were affected by the social conditions in which they lived. He stated that they are 'left to gambol in the streets and courts without parental control' and that they acquire 'furtive tendencies from association with the young thieves located in the neighbourhood'.⁸⁰ The select committee of 1852, which looked into the causes of delinquency, made it clear from the nature of its questions that there was an underlying assumption that Irish children were a significant cause of the problem. Committee witnesses from Manchester and Leeds confirmed their view that a majority of delinquents were Irish and some of their language was quite derogatory. A witness from Preston, for example, stated his view that the Irish in the low parts of the town systematically sent their children out to beg and pilfer.⁸¹ However, in the follow up select committee report of the following year, officials reporting on Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East, whilst

⁷⁷ *Household Words*, 1 November 1851.

⁷⁸ *Ragged School Union Magazine*, January 1854, p.165.

⁷⁹ *Ainsworth's Magazine*, July 1853, No 24, p.175.

⁸⁰ Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain*, p.111.

⁸¹ Select Committee of the House of Commons: *Criminal and Destitute Juveniles together with minutes of evidence* (1852), p.183.

noting the scale of Irish juvenile delinquency, did not consider that they were inherently criminal. Captain Hay, a metropolitan police commissioner, confirmed the position for London stating that, of 4,000 children taken into custody in the metropolis, approximately half were Irish. Although he refers to the Irish as a low set, he did not consider that they represented a criminal underclass and he refuted evidence provided by the inspector of prisons that some Irish lodging houses were specifically set up to house criminal juveniles.⁸² In his evidence, Captain Hay appeared to recognise that the high level of Irish delinquency was a reflection of their poverty rather than their criminality at a time when begging on the streets was considered to be the act of a delinquent criminal. The issue was raised in parliament in 1848 when the London City Mission published statistics about juvenile delinquents. Lord Ashley noted that there were approximately 30,000 delinquent children in the metropolis, describing them as 'naked, filthy, deserted, lawless children'. However, throughout his speech, although he quoted various other sources, including a clergyman in Whitechapel, it is notable that at no point was there any reference to the Irish being a particular cause of the problem.⁸³

In relation to drunkenness and disorderly behaviour, two select committees considered the desirability of placing restrictions on the opening hours of public houses and many of the witnesses, such as those from Manchester and Lancaster, associated increases in drunkenness in their localities with Irish immigrants.⁸⁴ However, although one witness, who had carried out inspections of Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East for the Statistical Society, referred to the large public houses there being linked to immorality, there was no specific reference to the Irish community. In fact, in reference to St George-in-the-East, he attributed drunkenness more to the higher wage earners than to the labourers.⁸⁵ This appears to bear out the conclusions of Roger Swift that most Irish immigrants could not afford to drink on a regular basis.⁸⁶ The conclusions of the Select Committee

⁸² Select Committee of the House of Commons: *Criminal and Destitute Children* (1853), pp. 315-319.

⁸³ *Times*, 7 June 1848.

⁸⁴ Select Committee of House of Commons: *Report on Public Houses* (1854).

⁸⁵ Select Committee, *Public Houses*, pp.68-70.

⁸⁶ Swift, 'Crime and the Irish', p.167.

referred to the high level of drunkenness in London, including specifically Whitechapel, but no reference was made to the large Irish community being an underlying cause. In a follow up Select Committee report a year later, the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan police provided statistics on convictions for drunkenness. One of the areas where there had been no decrease since the restrictions on opening hours was Whitechapel which he referred to as having a low and considerable population. The reason he gave, however, was the large number of sailors around the docks area and he made no reference to the Irish.⁸⁷ Even the Chambers Edinburgh Journal which had published many anti-Irish articles was forced to modify its stance when it carried out a survey of the trades of the metropolis and the range of nationalities carrying them out. It noted that the bricklayers' labourers appeared to be almost exclusively Irish and that the Irish who were formerly 'a wild and untameable set - the tyrants of the street at night and the habitants of the drunk and disorderly cells at the stations had undergone a considerable reform'.⁸⁸

The Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland who began to settle in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East in large numbers thirty year later had very different social characteristics to the Irish immigrants who had preceded them. In evidence to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration, the Rector of Spitalfields, in Whitechapel, noted that 'they were not found in public houses, they were extremely thrifty, good citizens, law-abiding, good husbands and good fathers, extremely clean, paid their own way, and showed a spirit of independence'.⁸⁹ This was a typical description of the Jewish immigrant from officials and social commentators and even those pressing for restrictions on immigration did not question that they were peaceable and law-abiding. The chaplain to the casual ward of Whitechapel Poor Law Union wrote that 'one thing is certain: the casual observer will note that, however

⁸⁷ Select Committee of House of Commons: *Report on Sale of Beer Act* (1855), p.77.

⁸⁸ *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, 17 December 1853.

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 9th December 1902.

poverty-stricken the Jews may be, they are sober, thrifty and moral'.⁹⁰ Charles Booth spoke of the 'meek and patient endurance with which they live their hard lives, and their ready obedience to the law'.⁹¹

The reports of government officials indicate that the general impression of the peaceable and law-abiding nature of the Jewish immigrants was borne out by the facts. The Board of Trade Report on Immigration noted that the proportion of Russian and Polish Jewish immigrants in prison was relatively lower than the English population.⁹² In his report to the Select Committee on immigration, the superintendent of the police in Whitechapel division noted that, although the numbers of foreigners charged with crimes had gone up in the seven years from 1881 to 1888, the increase was actually lower than would have been expected from the increased foreign population. He went on to state that most crimes were of a relatively minor nature.⁹³ The relieving Officer of the Board of Guardians in North Whitechapel reported to the same select committee that he considered that the Jewish immigrants were peaceable and industrious and that previously crime ridden streets occupied by English were replaced by peaceful streets of Jews.⁹⁴ A key explanation for the relatively peaceable nature of the Jewish population was considered to be their sobriety. Charles Booth had asked the School Board visitors, who had assisted him with his survey of the East End of London, to record their assessment of the causes of poverty based on their knowledge of individual families. It was notable that, in the Jewish area of Whitechapel, drunkenness was the least common cause.⁹⁵

However, this was not the full picture. There were two types of criminal activity which were closely associated with Jewish immigration: prostitution, including organised sex slave trafficking, and anarchism. The propensity for Jewish

⁹⁰ *The Leisure Hour*, 'The Jewish Poor of London', July 1897, pp.602-605.

⁹¹ Booth, *Conditions and Occupations of the People of the Tower Hamlets*, p.48.

⁹² Board of Trade: *Reports*, pp.60-62.

⁹³ Select Committee: *Emigration and Immigration*, pp.43-45.

⁹⁴ Select Committee: *Emigration and Immigration*, pp.59-61.

⁹⁵ Charles Booth, 'Conditions and Occupations of the People of East London and Hackney', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 51 (2) (1888), p.296.

immigrants to be involved in these categories of criminal behaviour was a particular focus of the Royal Commission on Immigration in 1903.⁹⁶ Its final report noted that offences committed by aliens had increased both absolutely and relatively and it also referred to incidences of prostitution, gambling and illegal distilling, painting a picture of criminality which appeared to be out of proportion to the evidence.

The linking of Jewish immigrants with anarchists had been a frequent argument of those proposing a restriction on immigration. In 1894 when an early bill to restrict immigration was being debated, Lord Salisbury linked the two issues and spoke of 'aliens of the anarchist type'.⁹⁷ The impression given in the debate was that Jewish anarchists in London were providing support to active anarchists on the continent and this argument was reflected in several contemporary periodicals including the account of one writer's clandestine visit to a meeting of Jewish anarchists.⁹⁸ The editor of the *St James's Gazette* referred to the Jewish immigrants as being 'saturated with anarchist ideas'.⁹⁹ The *Evening Standard* referred to anarchist colonies in the East End of London where there were clubs filled with Russo-Jewish anarchists.¹⁰⁰ However, the evidence presented to the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration was very limited and the Secretary to the Jewish Board of Deputies asserted that 'a Jewish anarchist is virtually unknown'.¹⁰¹

In relation to prostitution and the international sex trade, both politicians and writers linked the Jewish immigrant with immoral behaviour. During the debate on the second reading of the Aliens Bill, one MP referred to 'immoral foreign women and their vile male hangers on'.¹⁰² Major Evans-Gordon, a leading proponent of restrictions on immigration, warned of the 'systematic incursion of criminal and vicious persons for purposes of criminality and vice'.¹⁰³ However, in relation to prostitution on the streets of Whitechapel, the Chief Superintendent of Police in

⁹⁶ Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration*, p.12.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 18th July 1894..

⁹⁸ *Good Words*, 'Among the Anarchists', December 1895 (35) pp.124-129.

⁹⁹ *East London Observer*, 16 April 1887.

¹⁰⁰ *Evening Standard*, 14 September 1901.

¹⁰¹ Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration*, p.601.

¹⁰² *Evening Standard*, 3 May 1905.

¹⁰³ *London Daily News*, 24 September 1903.

Whitechapel division, in evidence to the Royal Commission, considered that, although the majority of prostitutes in the area were now foreign, these had merely replaced the previous English prostitutes.¹⁰⁴ The potential threats to the morality of young Jewish immigrant women was a matter of concern to the Anglo-Jewish community which considered that this represented a real risk to the reputation of the wider Jewish community. The Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women was established which arranged to meet the ships arriving in the London ports and arranged for vulnerable women to be temporarily housed. Paul Knepper has argued that, by recognising the problem and demonstrating that it was being dealt with, the Anglo-Jewish community hoped to defuse much of the anti-Jewish sentiment.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration*, p.280.

¹⁰⁵ Knepper, Paul, "'Jewish Trafficking' and London Jews in the Age of Migration', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 6:3 (2007), 239-256.

CHAPTER 4: EMPLOYMENT

The influx of impoverished Irish and Jewish immigrants resulted in a significant increase in the availability of cheap labour in the districts where they settled and this led to concerns about the displacement of English workers and the lowering of wages. In relation to Irish immigration, Graham Davis has argued that there were different responses to Irish settlement depending upon the nature of the local labour market in particular regions and he contrasts recent studies of York and Bristol.¹⁰⁶ There has also been debate about whether Irish immigrants were able to improve their position over time.¹⁰⁷ In relation to Jewish immigration, it was considered that the racial characteristics of the Jewish immigrants enabled them to work longer hours and to live on lower wages than English workers and therefore compete unfairly in the labour market.¹⁰⁸ This dissertation considers the extent to which concerns were raised about the effect of Irish and Jewish immigrants on the labour market and whether these concerns were expressed using racial language. It also considers the actual working conditions of the immigrants and the extent to which there was hostility from the English workforce. Finally, it considers whether there were opportunities for the Irish and Jewish immigrants to improve their economic positions over time.

In the decade before the mass influx of Irish immigrants, contemporary social commentators such as Thomas Carlyle and Frederick Engels considered that Irish immigrants represented a threat to the English worker, taking their jobs and lowering wages, and the language used was often derogatory. Engels referred to the Irish immigrant as 'having grown up without civilisation', 'bringing all their brutal habits with them' and he considered that 'the English working man has to struggle with a competitor upon the lowest plane possible in a civilized country'.¹⁰⁹ Carlyle wrote that 'in his rags and laughing savagery, he is there to undertake all

¹⁰⁶ Davis, 'Little Irelands', p.116.

¹⁰⁷ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.116-118.

¹⁰⁸ Gartner, pp.64-65.

¹⁰⁹ Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain*, p.38.

work that can be done be mere strength of hand and back' and that 'the Saxon man, if he cannot work on these terms, finds no work'.¹¹⁰ However, in relation to the metropolis, the newspapers and periodicals of the period did not raise any concerns that the influx of cheap Irish labour was threatening English jobs or wage rates. The lack of concern over the effect of cheap Irish labour may be explained by George Coode, a former Poor Law Commission secretary. In a report to the Poor Law Board in 1851, he stated that 'In no case do the Irish contend with the English for employment. Everywhere the English labourer chooses his employment, and only that which he rejects, or which there is no English to undertake, is left to the Irish'.¹¹¹

Lynn Hollen-Lees noted that the employment prospects for Irish immigrants in the mid nineteenth century metropolis were bleak. Unlike the urban centres of the north of England, there were few large industries taking on unskilled employees. The majority of the population in the metropolis were employed in the service sector and factories were generally small, producing finished and semi-finished articles such as clothing and furniture which required some level of skill. In 1851, 95% of all industrial firms in the metropolis employed less than 20 employees.¹¹² A significant proportion of Irish immigrants worked as casual labourers, principally at the docks, where employment was precarious.

An insight into the standard of living of a dock labourer in the mid-1840s is provided by a detailed investigation by the Statistical Society of a particularly poor area of St George-in-the-East in 1845 where 9% of the families were Irish. It reported that the head of almost 20% of the families which it investigated worked as a labourer, predominantly at the docks, and that the average weekly earnings were just over 15 shillings. When the earnings of other members of the family were taken into account, average earnings increased to just over 19 shillings. The average rent paid by labourers was 3 shillings and 3 pence, which was considered excessively high, and the investigator noted the poor living conditions including poor nutrition and

¹¹⁰ Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain*, p.37.

¹¹¹ Report to the Poor Law Board by George Coode: *Law of Settlement and Removal of the Poor* (1851, p.176.

¹¹² Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.89.

cramped living space. The report noted that 'The casual dock labourers appear to be in the lowest condition, in proportion even to their low means'.¹¹³ Nearly twenty years later, wage rates had not improved. In 1862, Pollard-Urquhart noted that, although the basic wage for dock labourers continued to be about 15 shillings per week, it was more likely to average 10 to 12 shillings for casual workers. Permanent workers could earn up to 18 shillings per week and those working for the ballast companies could earn as much as 26 shillings, although their working lives were often short.¹¹⁴

The Irish immigrants appeared to join the ranks of casual dock labourers without too much hostility from English workers. Pollard-Urquhart made a study of Irish labourers in the East End of London and walked around the streets of Whitechapel with a guide speaking to poor Irish families. He concluded that, although there may have been some hostility to the Irish immigrants when they first arrived from fellow English labourers because of competition for work, there was very little evidence of this now with Irish labourers dominating some of the hardest work such as unloading ballast.¹¹⁵

The report by the Statistical Society noted that wives and children earned over 20% of the family income and it contrasted the position in the metropolis with the northern manufacturing towns noting that female earnings were generally much lower in the metropolis than male earnings. Lynn Hollen Lees noted that, in her sample of Irish families living in the metropolis, 57% of co-residing sons and 41% of co-residing daughters above the age of ten had an occupation listed in the 1851 census. Traditional female occupations, such as needle work were often beyond the tailoring skills of many Irish women. Whilst young single Irish women often became domestic servants, for married women the most common occupations were the taking in of lodgers and street selling. Mayhew estimated that there were upwards of 3,000 Irish women and children involved in street selling in the early 1850s

¹¹³ Statistical Society of London, Committee of Fellows, 'An investigation into the State of the Poorer Classes in St. George's in the East', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 11 (3) (1848), 193-249 (p.215).

¹¹⁴ Pollard-Urquhart, p.746.

¹¹⁵ Pollard-Urquhart, p.746.

specialising in the selling of oranges, apples and nuts. Often, however, they would be reduced to selling low quality, damaged fruit, rejected by the English costermongers. Mayhew also noted that they were frequently in competition with, and provoked considerable resentment from, English costermongers.¹¹⁶

There is some evidence which indicates that the Irish had opportunities to improve their economic position. Pollard-Urquhart observed that many Irish labourers had succeeded in becoming permanent workers, even moving into supervisory roles. He noted: 'Enrolment in the staff of permanent labourers and promotion to the rank of superintendent seem to be given without any regard to country of origin or creed, and may be looked on as being within the reach of every sober, orderly and well-conducted labourer possessing of the requisite degree of education'.¹¹⁷ There is also evidence of some upward mobility into more skilled and better remunerated occupations. Lynn Hollen Lees compared the 1851 and 1861 census data and noted that there was a decrease in labourers and an increase in white collar workers, although this increase was less than for English workers. In 1851, 30.8% of Irish males were recorded in the census as being general labourers. That percentage had fallen to 17.8% by 1861.¹¹⁸

Another indication that the Irish population in Whitechapel were gradually able to better themselves economically was their ability and propensity to save. The *Quiver* magazine took their readers on a tour of Whitechapel in 1865, focusing on the diverse nationalities and occupations. Referring to the penny banks it noted: 'Some of our most curious depositors are people from the very poorest neighbourhood. They are generally Irish, and are our largest, though most irregular, depositors'.¹¹⁹ Many no doubt saved as a precaution against periods of unemployment or to remit money overseas to relatives in Ireland. However, Pollard-Urquhart noted that some Irish families saved sufficiently to purchase houses for renting out and also to purchase small retail shops.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Mayhew, p.87.

¹¹⁷ Pollard-Urquhart, p.746.

¹¹⁸ Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, pp.118-119.

¹¹⁹ *Quiver*, December 1865, 1:14, p.218.

¹²⁰ Pollard-Urquhart, p.747.

The Jewish immigrants, when they found work, were primarily engaged in tailoring, boot-making and, to a lesser extent, cabinet-making. Concentrated in a distinct district of East London, they came to dominate these trades in this area, working for other Jews either at home or in small cramped workshops in what became known as the sweating system.¹²¹ It was their way of working and the supposed effect it had on English workers which gave rise to the most severe criticism of the Jewish immigrants.

The focus on racial characteristics when discussing the problems of Jewish immigration had two key elements. Firstly Jews were considered to have particular racial characteristics which enabled them to rise and sink according to the vagaries of the prevailing employment situation without becoming discouraged or pauperised and, when necessary, to survive on a standard of living well below the minimum level required by an English worker. Secondly, the Jewish immigrants became associated with the sweating system to the extent that this derided system of working and Jewish immigration became, for many, a related problem.

Charles Booth considered that the sweating system 'has its base in the character of those who are incapable of the disciplined factory system'.¹²² This type of language led the historian, David Englander, to the view that Booth and his assistants had preconceptions about Jewish racial characteristics which defined their attitudes to employment.¹²³ A small number of politicians and journalists, including Earl Dunraven, Arnold White and W.H Wilkins were particularly vocal in their criticism. Wilkins, in an article about the effect of immigrants on employment refers to them as 'invading hordes of destitute Jews who 'reduce the price of labour below a level upon which an Englishman can with decency exist'.¹²⁴ Earl Dunraven, the politician who chaired the House of Lords Committee on the Sweating System, wrote in

¹²¹ Board of Trade: *Reports*.

¹²² Booth, *Conditions and Occupations of the People of the Tower Hamlets*, p.49.

¹²³ Englander, 'Booth's Jews', pp.551-571.

¹²⁴ *The National Review*, 'The immigration of Destitute Foreigners', September 1890, 16:91, pp.113-124.

scathing terms about the immigrants. He noted that 'they will work for hours impossible for an Englishman to endure and for a wage insufficient to keep his body and soul together' and that 'they are a lower form of humanity and occupy a lower level of existence'.¹²⁵ The derogatory criticism was not limited to this vocal group. The eminent economist, E.C.K Gonner, argued that the Jewish immigrant community was 'undesirable in its character' comprising 'lower types' who were displacing English workers and facilitating the sweating system.¹²⁶ In a debate in the House of Lords on Jewish immigration, the Earl of Meath stated that they were a 'class that are dragging down our own working class population physically, and I may say myself morally' and that 'they are accustomed to a lower standard of life than our countrymen'.¹²⁷

The extent to which the Jewish immigrants actually undermined English workers was a significant element of the debate on whether immigration should be restricted. The report of the Select Committee on Sweating in 1888 concluded that, although some trades were undoubtedly affected, 'undue stress had been laid on the injurious effect on wages caused by foreign immigration'¹²⁸ However, the report also noted that the Jewish immigrants could live on what would be starvation wages to an Englishman and that they worked for a number of hours almost incredible in length.¹²⁹ A subsequent Board of Trade report of 1894 considered, in particular, the boot and shoe trade and concluded that the impact of Jewish immigration was marginal. Not only were the numbers of Jewish immigrants inconsequential when compared with the total numbers employed in the trade, the type of work undertaken by the immigrants was usually of a nature which couldn't readily be mechanised in factories and, in any event, the shoes being produced by the immigrants were virtually a new type of product, increasing demand at home and exports overseas.¹³⁰ The report did recognise, however, that the Jewish

¹²⁵ *The Nineteenth Century*, 'The Invasion of Destitute Aliens', June 1892, pp.985-1000.

¹²⁶ *Fortnightly Review*, 'The Foreigner in England', June 1889 (45), p.835.

¹²⁷ *Hansard*, Vol 346, 3 July 1890.

¹²⁸ Select Committee: *Sweating*, Fifth Report, p.xliii.

¹²⁹ Select Committee: *Sweating*, Fifth Report, p.xliii.

¹³⁰ Board of Trade: *Reports*, pp.63-95.

workers would often lower their rates to below subsistence levels.¹³¹ The Royal Commission on Alien Immigration concluded in 1903 that the evidence that Jewish immigration had an adverse effect on the tailoring and boot making trades was inconclusive.¹³²

Charles Booth's Jewish notebooks provide an insight into the working conditions of the sweating system and help explain why the system was so heavily criticised. A series of interviews with Jewish tailors noted that a full day's work was never less than fourteen hours, sometimes fifteen and occasionally eighteen. Often there would be no work for days and then a rush of work at the end of the week would require exceptionally long hours without any additional overtime payment.¹³³ However, Charles Booth concluded that the prevalent idea that the sweating system represented the exploitation of cheap Jewish labour by middlemen was an inaccurate depiction. The middleman, who received the contracts from the factories and wholesalers, was usually a skilled Jewish tailor or bootmaker, who would work under similar conditions in the workshop, employing less skilled Jewish workers to carry out the less complex tasks and often earning only slightly more than his employees.¹³⁴ Evidence presented to the Sweating Committee confirmed the harsh conditions of the sweating system. One witness who worked in the boot trade worked from 6am to 12pm and he earned nothing in the first month whilst he learned the trade. Another witness worked from 6am to 10pm and even longer on certain days for 8s per week.¹³⁵

However, although the impact of Jewish immigrants on English workers may have been marginal, there was local resentment against them and a perception that they were the cause of unemployment at a time of economic recession. This comes across clearly in evidence given by local officials to the Select Committee on Immigration. The superintendent of Police in the Whitechapel district reported that there was a great deal of hostility towards the foreigners in the area because of the

¹³¹ Board of Trade: *Reports*, p.43.

¹³² Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration*, Vol 1 1903 p.20.

¹³³ LSE Charles Booth's London: *Jewish Notebooks* <https://booth.lse.ac.uk/notebooks>, Booth/B/197.

¹³⁴ Booth, *Conditions and Occupations of the People of the Tower Hamlets*, p.49.

¹³⁵ Select Committee: *Sweating*, First Report, pp.61-64.

perception that they were taking their jobs. Similar evidence was given by a church vicar in Whitechapel and by the agent of the Whitechapel Committee of the Charity Organisation Society.¹³⁶ There was also local resentment that local English shop workers were being driven away from the area because the Jewish immigrants would not give them their custom. In 1892, a meeting organised by the Boot and Shoe Operatives Association met in Hackney Town Hall to call for restrictions on immigration.¹³⁷ In 1894, the Trades Union Congress passed a resolution in favour of restricting immigration which prompted a mass meeting of Jewish workers to protest.¹³⁸

Opportunities to improve the working conditions of Jewish immigrants were provided by Jewish charities whose response was twofold. Firstly, there were concerted efforts to improve the conditions in the small workshops through visits by sanitary inspectors. Secondly, they promoted employment through finding work for newly arrived immigrants, organising apprenticeships for their children and, most controversially, providing loans to workers to facilitate the purchase of sewing machines and stock and the setting up of small workshops.¹³⁹ In 1901 the Jewish Board of Guardians had 721 apprentices on its books.¹⁴⁰ The provision of loans by the Jewish Board of Guardians reflected their desire that the Jewish immigrants should become self-reliant and improve their position, but it led to the accusation that they were perpetuating the sweating system. The Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Board of Guardians in his evidence to the Select Committee on the Sweating System denied that they encouraged immigration by enabling Jewish Immigrants to enter employments where skills are easily acquired, thereby enabling them to compete with English workers and he emphasised that they were opposed to unwarranted immigration.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Select Committee: *Emigration and Immigration*, pp. 43-75.

¹³⁷ *East London Observer*, 15 September 1892.

¹³⁸ *Evening Standard*, 10 September 1894.

¹³⁹ Board of Trade: *Reports*, pp.45-56.

¹⁴⁰ Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration*, Vol II p.533.

¹⁴¹ Select Committee: *Sweating*, First Report, p.527.

CHAPTER 5: POOR RELIEF

The influx of large numbers of impoverished Irish and Jewish immigrants gave rise to concerns about the extent to which they would become a burden on the system of poor relief which had been introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, challenging resources and increasing costs for ratepayers. The Irish immigrants, it was widely believed, had no fear of the workhouse. Lynn Hollen Lees noted that it is difficult to determine the extent to which Irish immigrants became a heavy burden on the poor law system. However, she has argued that Irish immigrants were treated harshly by the poor law authorities noting that 'the rules of the poor law game allowed many of them to be shunted aside or removed to Ireland'.¹⁴² Despite the extreme poverty of many of the Jewish immigrants when they first arrived at the London ports, very few presented themselves to the poor law authorities. As a result, with the exception of occasional medical relief, they did not represent a cost to the ratepayers of Whitechapel or St George-in-the-East.¹⁴³ Poor relief was primarily provided by a range of Jewish charities, including the long established Jewish Board of Guardians, but this did not prevent significant concerns being expressed about the poverty of the Jewish community. There were two aspects to these concerns. Firstly, there was concern that the poor relief provided by the Jewish charities would encourage further immigration. Secondly, there was concern that the Jewish immigrants, through their willingness to work for lower wages, were creating unemployment amongst English workers and therefore indirectly increasing the cost of the local poor law.

This dissertation considers whether poor law authorities and other officials and politicians expressed concerns about the impact of impoverished Irish and Jewish immigrants in derogatory or racial terms. It also considers the extent to which the immigrants became a significant burden for the poor law authorities or for the Jewish charities and whether there is any evidence that the Poor Law Unions or the Jewish charities treated the immigrants particularly harshly.

¹⁴² Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.217.

¹⁴³ Select Committee: *Emigration and Immigration*, pp.59-61.

Poor Law commissioners often expressed concerns about Irish immigrants in derogatory terms. In 1847, the Assistant Commissioner for the Metropolitan district of the Poor Law Board stated that the power of removing the Irish should be retained and that they should be treated differently from English paupers. He noted that 'they are arriving now in numbers in London by river and by land, and they are bringing with them disease'.¹⁴⁴ Another Assistant Commissioner, George Coode, considered that the Irish should be subject to removal given the 'serious addition they supply to our poor disorderly and criminal population' and their tendency to 'practice vagrancy and mendacity'.¹⁴⁵ Poor Law officials at a local level also expressed antipathy for Irish immigrants.

Reports and statistics provided by both Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East Poor Law Unions indicate that a significantly high number of Irish were being provided with relief and both Unions had concerns about costs. There is also evidence that Whitechapel Union provided outdoor relief to underemployed Irish labourers, contrary to Poor Law Board policy, and that St George-in-the-East provided long term indoor relief to vulnerable Irish paupers which it could have removed. By 1851, the Whitechapel Union was becoming increasingly concerned about the large numbers of destitute Irish being brought to the London ports by the steamship companies. The Union wrote to the Poor Law Board complaining that, on arrival, they would present themselves to the poor law authorities to get immediate relief and, following investigation, either had to be admitted to the workhouse or removed back to Ireland at great expense. They wanted action taken to address this 'serious and increasing evil'.¹⁴⁶

The very large numbers of casual Irish paupers being relieved by Whitechapel is provided by the figures produced by the Union for 1850 and 1851 (Table A).

¹⁴⁴ Select Committee of the House of Commons: *Report on Settlement and Poor Removal* (1847), p. 296.

¹⁴⁵ Report to the Poor Law Board by George Coode: *Law of Settlement and Removal of the Poor* (1851), p.170.

¹⁴⁶ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 8 April 1851.

Table A: Number of Irish paupers in Whitechapel receiving relief in 1850 and 1851¹⁴⁷

Irish Paupers	1850		1851	
	Indoor Relief	Outdoor Relief	Indoor Relief	Outdoor Relief
Chargeable to Parishes (settled poor)	107	381	179	339
Chargeable to Common Fund (casual poor)	110	874	200	1246
Total	217	1255	379	1585

The figures indicate not only the relatively high number of casual poor being relieved but also the very high numbers receiving outdoor relief. The Poor Law Board sent out a general letter to Poor Law Unions in 1851 reminding them of the provisions of the Poor Law Amendment Act and the need to reduce the numbers being given outdoor relief. The Whitechapel Union wrote back insisting that they needed discretion in this area and gave the example of dock labourers, many of whom would have been Irish, who earned irregular wages and needed support when temporarily unemployed. The alternative was to admit them to the workhouse which could result in long term dependence on the poor law. The Poor Law Board's response was predictably that ratepayers should not be subsidising wages. The exchange of correspondence does indicate, however, that the Whitechapel Union was providing outdoor relief to large numbers of casual labourers many of whom would have been Irish.¹⁴⁸

St George-in-the-East was also providing relief to a large number of Irish paupers. An insight into the policy of St George-in-the-East is provided in evidence given by a relieving officer to a select committee on Irish removals. He emphasised that Irish paupers were treated in the same way as English paupers and that the workhouse contained a number of Irish children and elderly who, despite being removable, were being granted relief because of their vulnerability. The figures he provided to the Committee, as summarised in Table B below, showed that the number of Irish

¹⁴⁷ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 17 April 1852.

¹⁴⁸ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 26 October 1852.

receiving relief in 1854 was proportionately higher than the percentage of Irish in the population.¹⁴⁹

Table B: Number of Irish paupers receiving relief in St George-in-the-East in 1854

	Total	Irish	% Irish
Population	50,000 (Est)	5,000 (Est)	10%
Numbers Receiving Outdoor Relief	1,201	285	24%
Numbers Receiving Indoor Relief	1,044	200	19%

He went on to say that the figures for the Irish in the workhouse were often much higher at certain times of the year.

However, there is also evidence that the Poor Law Unions, particularly Whitechapel, treated some Irish immigrants particularly harshly. Lynn Hollen Lees has argued that Poor Law officials took advantage of ambiguities in the legislation to remove Irish Poor in situations where they would not have removed English poor. She also suggests that Irish immigrants were often being removed illegally in large numbers.¹⁵⁰

The evidence indicates that Whitechapel had a far harsher policy in relation to removals than St George-in-the-East despite both Unions having similar levels of Irish poor. This may reflect the very large number of casual Irish immigrants who had not settled in Whitechapel and is consistent with the very high numbers of casual Irish immigrants receiving both indoor and outdoor relief in this Union. Figures provided to the House of Commons by the Poor Law Board on paupers removed to Ireland demonstrated this significant contrast between the two Unions. As can be seen from Table C below, which have been compiled from the report, in the six years from 1849 to 1854, Whitechapel was responsible for, on average, 19%

¹⁴⁹ Select Committee of the House of Commons: *Report on Poor Removal*, (1854), p 672.

¹⁵⁰ Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers*, pp.218-220.

of the total Irish removals from the metropolis. By contrast, St George-in-the-East, which had a similarly high Irish population, was removing just 2%.¹⁵¹

Table C: Numbers of Irish paupers removed back to Ireland

	1849	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854	Average
Whitechapel	260	272	262	400	296	327	303
St George-in-the-East	28	21	2	19	19	57	24
Metropolis Total (38 Unions)	2,163	2,107	897	1,223	1,252	1,693	1,556
Percentage removed from Whitechapel	12%	13%	29%	33%	24%	19%	19%
Percentage removed from St George-in-the-East	1%	1%	<1%	2%	2%	3%	2%

This sharp contrast between Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East is supported by a separate report on the number of removal orders to Ireland for 1853.¹⁵² The Whitechapel Union was also keen to clarify the extent of its powers to remove Irish families. In 1850, it wrote to the Poor Law Board requesting confirmation that children, over sixteen years of age, could be removed to Ireland with their parents even though they were born in England.¹⁵³

The harsh removals policy of Whitechapel Union is further demonstrated by its involvement in some of the most notorious cases of the time. The Select Committee on Removals in 1854 heard evidence from the Clerk of the Cork Union in Southern Ireland, which was the principal port to which Irish from the metropolis were removed. Based on statements made to magistrates in Cork, he provided details of a number of particularly harsh cases, several of which related to Whitechapel Union. One such case related to Ann Holland who stated that she was forcibly removed to Ireland with her three children. She had resided in a parish in

¹⁵¹ Statistical Return to the House of Commons: *Return of Paupers removed to Ireland from Parishes or Unions within the Metropolitan District* (1849 to 1854).

¹⁵² Statistical Return to the House of Commons: *Return of Poor Law (Orders of Removal)* (1853).

¹⁵³ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 30 April 1850.

Whitechapel for twenty years and all her children were born in Whitechapel but, following the death of her husband, she had relied intermittingly on relief from the parish for four years before being removed. Another case related to Catharine Horgan, a young girl of seventeen, who alleged that, having become ill and hospitalised in Whitechapel, she was refused discharge and forcibly shipped to Ireland because she was of Irish extraction.¹⁵⁴ The contractor with responsibility for the removal of the Irish from most of the Middlesex parishes north of the Thames described the harsh treatment of removed Irish. On arrival at Cork, they would be left on the quayside, often in a destitute condition. There was no formal handover to the Cork poor law authorities, and the paupers, the majority of whom were women and children, were left to roam the streets.¹⁵⁵

Concern was also raised in the House of Commons about the very harsh policies on Irish removals adopted by some Unions and many of the same individual cases, including those relating to Whitechapel Union, were highlighted.¹⁵⁶ The Whitechapel Union was aware of the publicity being given to these cases and the Board Minutes in February 1854 referred to cases being made public both in the House of Commons and in *The Times* newspaper and the need to investigate the facts.¹⁵⁷ In its formal reply to the Select Committee, the Whitechapel Union denied any knowledge of most of the cases insisting that they had no record of the individuals concerned. They did, however, acknowledge the case of Anne Holland which they insisted was a legal removal.¹⁵⁸

Although the number of Irish removals from St George-in-the-East were much lower, the Union was nevertheless concerned about costs. In 1852, it wrote to its neighbouring Whitechapel Union expressing concern about proposed new regulations which would have required an official to accompany removed Irish immigrants all the way to Cork. It intended to object to the Poor Law Board and

¹⁵⁴ Select Committee, Report on Poor Removal (1854), pp.74-88.

¹⁵⁵ Select Committee, *Poor Removal*, pp. 545-554.

¹⁵⁶ Hansard Vol 130 cc 1256-1264, 24 February 1854.

¹⁵⁷ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 28 February 1854.

¹⁵⁸ Select Committee, *Poor Removal*, p.583.

requested that Whitechapel do the same.¹⁵⁹ Four years later, in 1856, the Board proposed a petition against the Irish and Scotch removal bill which would have brought the process of Irish removals into line with English removals whereby they would have to be returned to their actual parish in Ireland following notification to that parish.¹⁶⁰

Concerns about the impact of impoverished Jewish immigrants were often expressed in terms which emphasised racial characteristics. Charles Booth noted that 'all round these people have the characteristics of their race, good and bad; laborious and frugal to a fault; well-schooled in the science of how to live on next to nothing'.¹⁶¹ The Board of Trade report on Immigration concluded that an observer might consider them to be 'a persistent and tenacious race which can thrive whilst others cannot live – not “paupers” but the cause of pauperism in others'.¹⁶² The Board of Trade report also attempted to explain the very different attitude which the Jewish immigrants had to poor relief compared to the English poor. It noted that whilst the English pauper may be stigmatised and demoralised by their dependence on poor relief, the Jewish immigrant was able to cope with a certain 'elasticity' in his standard of living.¹⁶³ W.H Wilkins, a prominent proponent of anti-immigration laws, referred to the Jewish immigrants as 'parasitic' forcing English workers out of their employment and increasing pauperism in an indirect way.¹⁶⁴ Another, the Earl of Dunraven, complained that they were used to a lower standard of living than English workers and that 'they are a lower form of humanity, and occupy a lower grade of existence'.¹⁶⁵

The argument that the Jewish immigrants were forcing displaced English workers to seek poor relief may have been persuasive, but it does not appear to be borne out

¹⁵⁹ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 1 June 1852.

¹⁶⁰ STBG/STG, Board Minutes, *St George-in-the-East Board of Guardian*, 25 April 1856, London Metropolitan Archives.

¹⁶¹ Booth, *Conditions and Occupations of the People of the Tower Hamlets*, p.48.

¹⁶² Board of Trade: *Reports*, p.43.

¹⁶³ Board of Trade: *Reports*, p.55.

¹⁶⁴ *The National Observer*, 'The Alien Invasion', 2nd February 1855, pp.314-315.

¹⁶⁵ *The Nineteenth Century*, 'The Invasion of Destitute Aliens', June 1852, 31, p.988.

by the facts. In response to an enquiry from the Local Government Board, the Whitechapel Board of Guardians gathered together statistics on the effect of Jewish immigration on the cost of relief under the poor law. As expected, the direct effect was negligible. Of the 785 individuals who were either in the workhouse or receiving medical relief, as at June 1887, only 25 were Polish or Russian Jewish immigrants. What was surprising, however, even to the Secretary who prepared the statistics, was that the numbers receiving relief who were employed in the predominantly immigrant trades of tailoring, shoe making and cabinet making, was only 28, which certainly did not indicate a large number of displaced English workers.¹⁶⁶ In the following years the percentage of Polish and Russian Jews receiving relief did not increase. The subject of foreign immigration was discussed at the Conference of Metropolitan Boards of Guardians in 1891 and the Secretary to the Whitechapel Union noted that the percentage of pauperism remained very small.¹⁶⁷ In a debate on immigration in the House of Commons in 1893, figures from the Whitechapel Union which had been requested by the Board of Trade were quoted showing that the total of foreign immigrants receiving relief in both 1887 and 1892 was between 2% and 3% which was far less than their proportion of the population.¹⁶⁸ The following year, during a debate in the House of Commons, the President of the Board of Trade remarked that 'the term "pauper aliens" was a misnomer' and 'the remarkable fact was that they never became paupers'.¹⁶⁹ The position was confirmed by the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration which reported that in both 1901 and 1902 the total percentage of the alien population in the London Borough of Stepney receiving relief was between 2% and 3% and, excluding medical relief, the percentage for both years was less than 1%.¹⁷⁰

The principal reason why the Jewish immigrants seldom presented themselves to the poor law authorities, except for medical relief, was because of the support provided by Jewish charities. The response of the Anglo-Jewish community, and the

¹⁶⁶ Whitechapel Board of Guardians, 1st November 1887.

¹⁶⁷ *East London Observer*, 16 May 1891.

¹⁶⁸ *Evening Standard*, 13 February 1893.

¹⁶⁹ Hansard, Vol 22, 12 March 1894.

¹⁷⁰ Royal Commission: *Alien Immigration*, Vol I, pp.16-17.

charities through whom they worked, to the mass influx of impoverished fellow Jews from Eastern Europe was both reluctant and considerable. On the one hand, there was a desire to improve the condition of the immigrants, to assist them to prosper and assimilate. On the other hand, they wished to do nothing which might encourage further immigration. The Jewish Board of Guardians, which was the predominant Jewish charity, provided a wide range of support and relief which included loans and the organisation of apprenticeships. It also provided out-relief but this was restricted to those who had been in the country for at least six months. Another Jewish charity, the Russo-Jewish Committee, assisted Russian Jews to find work. There were two Jewish charities, however, working in the heart of Whitechapel, which provided direct relief to newly arrived immigrants and they were therefore open to the criticism that they were encouraging immigration. Both charities were sensitive to this criticism and the way they responded provides an insight into the ambivalent attitude of the Anglo-Jewish community towards their impoverished fellow Jews.

The Jews' Temporary Shelter provided temporary accommodation to primarily East European immigrants arriving at the London ports. Their agent would meet all ships arriving from Hamburg with the objective of preventing newly arrived Jews falling into the hands of the 'sharks' and 'crimps' who 'infested the riverside and preyed on the ignorance and helplessness of the newcomers'.¹⁷¹ It was clear from the charity's annual reports that the charity was concerned not to be seen to be encouraging immigration. It emphasised that its primary role was to prevent the pauperisation of newly arrived immigrants when they were at their most vulnerable and, under its rules, the immigrants could stay in the temporary accommodation for a maximum of fourteen days. The circumstances of every resident were investigated by a superintendent and those who had means were required to make a contribution to the costs. The charity measured its success by the numbers it encouraged to return to their homelands or for whom it found work and it reported with satisfaction that very few immigrants stayed in the accommodation for the maximum fourteen days.

¹⁷¹ LMA/4184/02: *Jews' Temporary Shelter, Administration, Annual Reports 1885-1904*, 17th Report 1901/02.

Nevertheless, the charity was subject to criticism from the Anglo-Jewish community and it struggled with funding as the number of immigrants it assisted annually increased from just over 1,000 in 1885 to almost 5,000 ten years later.¹⁷²

The second charity was The Soup Kitchen for the Jewish Poor. Based in Spitalfields, it opened several nights a week in winter providing hot meals. However, as noted in its annual reports of 1895 and 1897, it found itself subject to criticism from various sources, including national newspapers, for encouraging pauperism amongst immigrants. The charity explained in its reports that it had no intention of providing a dole to supplement low wages but rather intended to help those suffering from transient poverty and those stricken with sickness. A rule was implemented that no one should get relief continuously for two years without special investigation and in 1902 it reported that it had put an end to those seeking regular recourse to the charity. It worked with the Jewish Board of Guardians to investigate all applicants, who were then given tickets entitling them to relief, and its investigating and distributing sub-committee was given the authority to stop relief if the investigating officer considered the recipient undeserving.¹⁷³ The extent to which these front line charities struggled for funds and felt under pressure to justify their actions demonstrates clearly the ambivalent attitude of the Anglo-Jewish community.

¹⁷² LMA/4184/02: *Jews' Temporary Shelter, Administration, Annual Reports 1885-1904.*

¹⁷³ ACC/2942/003: *Soup Kitchen for the Jewish Poor, General Committee: Annual General Meeting of Donors and Subscribers 1890-1905.*

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Concerns raised about the impact of Irish and Jewish immigration were often expressed in derogatory language which associated social and economic problems with the immigrants' racial characteristics. This form of language was used not only by newspapers and periodicals but also, on occasion, by officials, residents' groups and politicians. However, although the local officials and social commentators who examined the condition of the Irish and Jewish immigrants in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East confirmed the very harsh conditions in which they lived and worked, they did not raise particular concerns and generally did not attribute blame to the immigrant communities. There were also many examples of local officials and charities providing support to the immigrant communities with the objective of improving their condition.

The use of derogatory and racial language was evident in each social and economic area examined. In the case of housing, the overcrowded and insanitary conditions were often attributed to the immigrants' uncivilised habits. In relation to crime, Irish and Jewish immigrants were considered to have a natural propensity to be involved in specific types of criminality because of their racial characteristics. Jewish immigrants were considered to be able to compete unfairly in the employment market because of their innate ability to work longer hours for a lower wage than an English worker and in relation to poor relief, the Irish immigrants were considered to represent a potential heavy burden because they had no fear of the workhouse.

In relation to housing, the area around Rosemary Lane in Whitechapel, which was a predominantly Irish area, had some of the poorest housing conditions imaginable. However, with the exception of the common lodging houses, the overcrowded and insanitary housing conditions were not seen as particularly an Irish problem. This seems to reflect a degree of assimilation of the Irish with their poor English neighbours in these districts so that the problems were associated with poverty and sanitation rather than race or culture. The various official enquiries which reported on the housing conditions of the Jewish immigrants confirmed the extensive

overcrowding and the increasing rents but they also noted that housing conditions improved over time and that there were no incidences of contagious diseases breaking out in these areas. Overall, immigration was seen as only one of several factors contributing to the overcrowded housing conditions.

In relation to crime, the Irish community, both adults and children, undoubtedly featured heavily in the statistics but this was considered by local officials to be a natural reflection of their extreme poverty and social environment. Whilst officials in northern towns were vocal in their condemnation of Irish criminals, the language was much more measured in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East. This may reflect the fact that, in these areas of East London, the Irish immigrants were more easily assimilated into an already diverse and impoverished community. Although there was an attempt by campaigners against immigration to associate Jewish immigrants with certain types of criminal behaviour, local officials in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East did not raise any concerns in relation to the criminality of the Jewish immigrant and they generally confirmed their peaceable and law abiding nature.

In relation to employment, the Irish immigrants who settled in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East joined an existing population of English workers on the bottom rung of the social scale. The relatively low earnings of the adult males, who relied on intermittent casual work, predominantly in the docks, were supplemented by the earnings of their wives and children and in this local economic environment there appeared to be little hostility to the Irish apart from, on occasion, the costermongers. The effect of Jewish immigration on local wages and employment was the major concern of those politicians and journalists who campaigned for restrictions to alien immigration and there is evidence that English workers resented what they considered to be unfair competition. Contemporary accounts of the sweating system certainly described an immigrant workforce working extraordinarily long hours for relatively low wages. However, the parliamentary and government reports did not conclude that there was any significant effect on wages and employment.

In relation to poor relief, the overall response from the Poor Law officials in Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East appears to have been to provide support over and above what was required by law and often in direct contravention of Poor Law Board instructions. However, both Unions expressed concerns about costs and Whitechapel Union appeared to adopt a very harsh policy in relation to removals. Despite the criticism from poor law officials and politicians that the influx of impoverished Jewish immigrants would have an impact on the system of poor relief, even if only indirectly, there is no evidence that this was the case. The majority of support in the form of poor relief was provided by a number of Jewish charities. However, the ambivalent attitude of the Anglo-Jewish community meant that actions which might encourage immigration were discouraged and the focus was on assisting settled Jewish immigrants to improve their position and gradually assimilate into the community.

Given the scale of the influx of impoverished Irish and Jewish immigrants, over a period of fifty years, into Whitechapel and St George-in-the-East, the above analysis does raise the questions why, at a local level, more serious concerns were not raised by officials and why there was such limited hostility from the local English community. The answer may be that these areas already had diverse communities, well before the major influxes of immigration in the second half of the nineteenth century, and that a significant percentage of the indigenous population, many of whom were casual labourers, were on the bottom rung of the social scale. As such, the immigrants more easily assimilated into the existing communities and the economic and social problems which they presented were not seen as specifically immigrant problems.

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