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Since 1618

**HAMMERSMITH
UNITED
CHARITIES**

The Irish in Exile

Stories of Emigration

Ethnic Communities Oral History Project

Supporting the community since 1618

“If English is not your first and most fluent language, how do you share your life experiences with others, not familiar with yours... ‘ordinary people’s life histories deserve as wide a readership as possible.’”

Sav Kyriacou

Former project coordinator
The Ethnic Communities Oral History Project

Introduction

In the late 80s/early 90s, the Hammersmith and Fulham Ethnic Communities Oral History Project published a set of 12 memoirs chronicling the collective experiences of the communities that make up our very diverse borough through the specific stories of individual members of them.

“After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.”

Philip Pullman

Nearly a quarter of a century later, as part of our marking 400 years of bringing this community together, Hammersmith United Charities is republishing these stories. We will publish one a month, each launched at a special lunch held in a venue which also reflects the community in question. We can think of no better way of celebrating the depth and richness of the heritage of our Area of Benefit nor of showcasing the range of talents and experiences from which it benefits than through the republication of these stories.

“He who is different from meenriches me. Our unity is constituted in something higher than ourselves - in Man... For no man seeks to hear his own echo, or to find his reflection in the glass.”

(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)

This is the full list of publications, we hope you enjoy them as much as we have.

1. The Irish in Exile - Stories of Emigration
2. Passport to Exile - The Polish Way to London
3. In Exile - Iranian Recollections
4. The Motherland Calls - African-Caribbean Experiences
5. The Forgotten Lives - Gypsies and Travellers on the Westway Site
6. Xenia - Greek-Cypriots in London
7. Ship of Hope - The Basque Children
8. Aunt Esther’s Story (with Stephen Bourne)
9. Somali Sailors
10. Asian Voices - Life Stories from the Indian Sub-continent
11. Sailing on Two Boats - Second Generation Perspectives
12. Such a Long Story! - Chinese Voices in Britain

The Irish in Exile

Stories of Emigration

Although the level of emigration from Ireland is unequalled by that of any other country within Europe, very little is actually documented about the lives of the people involved. This booklet is a fairly eclectic collection of some of their stories. It does not attempt to be representative, in fact it hopes instead, to individualise, to escape from certain well established stereotypes and to give Irish people the chance to tell their own stories in their own words. A chance to tell of the Ireland they left behind and their impressions and experiences of the England to which they came.

This booklet 's main aim is to foster interest in the history of the Irish community. Although limited by space, the booklet aims to tell the emigrants story by using different aspects of their lives beginning with a child's perception of leaving. It illustrates many common themes, the experience of leaving, the journey, first impressions of England, looking for work, accommodation, and begins to explore the often complicated relationship between the English and Irish.

Anne Lynch

ELEANOR

Eleanor left Cork as a child in 1958 and remembers this move with the exceptional clarity of a child. Her experience illustrates the stark contrast between the security of her life in rural Cork and the isolation and limitations of life in urban Hammersmith.

We left Ireland in April 1958; when I was 8 years old, but my memories actually start the year before that, the year of my First Holy Communion. My grandmother had what we used to poshly call a bungalow, looking back on it it was really a shack. As you looked out from Crosshaven; there were steep cliffs down to the bay and the Inisfallen used to sail by, out into the open sea. My mother and father went over to London for a holiday. I remember standing on the cliff waving a big sheet with my aunt and uncle, saying goodbye to them. That was very traumatic, I mean they were going hundreds and hundreds of miles away and they had never left me before and I wasn't totally convinced that they were coming back.

They had a home, but very little else. There was a lot of unemployment in Ireland and they had three children to feed and clothe. They left first; but they only came for a holiday to see if my mum liked it. I don't know how long they stayed but I imagine it was probably the statutory two weeks. My mother must have been fairly impressed or thought it had more to offer than Cork because subsequently we left.

We left the very suburbs of Cork City from a fairly new council estate. There was one row of low rise bungalows directly behind us and the view over the top of those was of country fields. The only factory was the dairy and there was a pig farm down the road. The local school had only just been completed, we had to travel backwards and forwards to Turner's Cross School before that. There were lots of open spaces, everyone knew everybody, front doors were always open, lots of young children, lots of friends, we were free to play on the streets. Cars weren't around very often, in fact we used to come out to look at cars go by. There was no airport so we never saw an aeroplane go over the top at all.

In the April we came to London, we came across on the Inisfallen from Cork to Fishguard; as I remember, and on the train from Fishguard to Paddington

Station. I suppose as a child I was quite excited at the idea of going to London.

The boats were appalling, just like converted cattle ships. People slept wherever people could sleep, on the toilet floor, on the stairs, on the tables. They used to have bunking compartments that were all women in one and all men in another, so we had to split up on the boat. There were probably something like forty bunks head to toe all the way along the walls and up the walls as well. My father and brothers slept in the men's, myself and my mother slept in the women's.

It was fascinating watching the luggage going on. First the cars and big heavy articles in a massive net, rather like a fishing net but multiplied a hundred times, which hoisted them on with a crane and put them down into the hold. Then all the luggage was put in containers and hoisted on by the crane, and it all had to be reversed on the other side at Fishguard. You'd be got out of your bed at three or four o'clock in the morning if you were lucky enough to get a cabin or a berth or a bunk or a chair or whatever. You would then stand on the quayside in the middle of night absolutely freezing waiting for this luggage to come off, reclaim it and take it on the train. It was awful, really awful, you could be stood there for a couple of hours looking for your luggage, just to find it. I dread to think how many people never found their luggage, there seemed to be no controls whatsoever.

When we left Ireland we had my mother and father, me who was eight, Brian who was seven, Pat six and Dermot just born. There was no food, or if there was food it was too expensive for us to buy. So there were bags and bags of food to be taken to last us for a twenty four hour journey; that was what it took as I remember. We left late, sailing at six o'clock in the evening and we got to Fishguard in the wee small hours of the morning. We were then ferried, shuffled out of Fishguard. You had to claim all your own luggage and get it on the train to Paddington.

I remember arriving at Paddington, and the noise and the chaos of what seemed to me as a small child, thousands and thousands of people all over the place, and feeling excited but apprehensive, quite frightened about the whole thing. We had somewhere to live, so we got a taxi from Paddington to Westwick Gardens. My father's cousin lived in a semi basement of the house and we had the second floor flat as it was called; it was actually two rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. My mother and father used to sleep in a put-you-up and us as children used to sleep three of us in a double bed in the bedroom, so I don't suppose we were as badly off as some. We had a very small kitchen

and a very large very old bathroom which to me was a total waste of space. I remember going up the stairs of this very pokey little flat and feeling quite lonely for my friends and reluctant to go out. We weren't allowed to go out to play in the street because the traffic was too busy. I remember being excited at first seeing an aeroplane flying overhead. Then the first time seeing a television I couldn't understand why, when you turned it on, it wasn't at the beginning of a programme, Popeye was the first thing I saw halfway through. TV was much much later in Cork, you're talking about in the sixties, 1965 to 1970 before it even got to Cork.

The flat we moved into was furnished. Our furniture I would assume was probably circulated amongst the family or sold but I would imagine that it was given out. We were certainly considered to be; going back afterwards, the rich going to visit the poor. I mean, we were the ones that had a television and eventually really luxury items like a fridge and a washing machine. So we were actually considered to be affluent, we were not that by London standards, but by those at home. My mother used to go pretty well every week, if not every second week to jumble sales. She used to get big brown paper sacks from the vegetable shop and rip out the lining and fill them with everything she could buy and send them to clothe the family at home. I, to this day, have horrors of jumble sales. It was a family trip out, we were given a couple of pence and told to go and try on everything we could find, shoes especially. They used to have in the late sixties these dresses with these massively gathered skirts and if it was good material it could be made up again and remade. We used to go home in the summer and see all these clothes or dresses made out of these massive frocks on the kids at home. But the feeling of affluence about our family was caused by these massive parcels which arrived to my nan's; who then circulated them to the family and the cousins at home.

The other thing of my childhood I remember most clearly were long cold winters in London and long hot summers in Cork. We went home every summer for the full six weeks holiday. What seemed to happen as I recall is that the aunt and uncle who lived in the semi basement, they had two children and there were the three of us and either they would take us and my mother and father would fetch us back, or vice versa. Each year it seemed to be slightly different, but it was always by train. It was always by the most horrendous old steam train and listening to people romanticising about steam engines I wonder if they ever bloody travelled on them. I just remember the chug chug chuggins and I'm a very bad traveller at the best of times. I was eternally sick.

We eventually moved to Sinclair Gardens in Shepherds Bush which was in

a basement and they were very narrow deep basements. Directly in front of the window was the coal bunker of the old Victorian houses, the downstairs quarters for the staff. It was a much bigger flat. We had our good room there, I mean the room that nobody went into unless there were visitors or the priest, and it was so dark that the lights were on day and night. So to go home to Ballyphehane to these two storey council houses and wide roads and big greens and the countryside and then to come back to Sinclair Gardens which was a Victorian, tall four storey house, and to climb down into this deep basement, it was just horrid to me. It was absolutely awful. I can't tell anybody how appalling I used to feel coming back. My clearest memory was not just the first, but every time screaming and crying and being dragged on to the boat to come back. I never wanted to leave Cork, I hated London but in my earliest memories I wanted to be with my mum and dad. I hated school. I hated the lack of freedom because when I went home for six weeks I was out on bikes cycling, playing with friends in the streets, and then to come back and never be allowed out because there was nowhere to go.

There's no doubt about it at all that I romanticise it. The adventures we had in Ireland, blackberry picking and blackberry jam until we were sick, "schlopping" apples, catching bumblebees in jam jars to see who could get the most, very innocent things the games we used to play in the street. I suppose children over here played them, but where we lived was a very busy street and we weren't allowed out to play. I watched the telly mostly and did the housework. Our play space was Shepherds Bush Green. In the holidays other than the summer holidays we maybe would pack a picnic and go over to Shepherds Bush Green which is really only a traffic island and play there.

PAT

Pat also left Ireland somewhat reluctantly as a child. He left the port of Dun Laoghaire outside Dublin in 1946 to live in Kensington, ending up living in Lockton Street, near Latimer Road tube station. He was sent to school in Hammersmith with fairly dramatic results.

My father was pretty much over here during most of the war. He was in the Irish Army and he was discharged medically because he was slightly deaf Then he came over here to work. His family were big building contractors in Ireland and that was his trade. What made us come was my brothers, my eldest brother decided that he wanted to join the RAF and the next brother decided he wanted to join the Irish Merchant Navy and didn't get in. So they both decided they were coming to London one way or another. My mother then took the decision in 46 that if they were going to come over and my father was here anyway that we'd all come. So we came over.

I didn't want to come. I did not want to uproot and move. We had a nice place in Dun Laoghaire by then. I was in the local gaelic team, involved in everything with lots of friends. I just didn't want to leave. I kicked up stink, I never wanted to be here. I fought and rebelled about everything and gave my parents a hell of a bad time at home, I just didn't want to be here.

I don't remember so much the first journey over-well I do remember it because I used to play by the boat. When the Americans came in we used to get gum off them and go on the boat. When the boat was going out we'd run the length of the pier and back again. The siren of the boat was something I woke up to every morning, we were within walking distance of it. You could see the damn thing. It was part of my growing up as a kid, seeing the boat going out, I never thought I'd be on the bloody thing.

What I remember most vividly was we were only over here six weeks when my grandfather died so we went back and that was in the Christmas rush. It wasn't so much the going back for the funeral as coming back and that was one of the most appalling journeys. We were all in black, I had a bottle of whiskey hidden in my coat and I was caught but they let us off. I can remember the customs man at Holyhead wagging his finger at my mother, not at me, and saying 'you'd go inside for that except he saw we were all in black. He put a cross on my

coat. It was a terrible journey, we didn't come back till after Christmas, there were a lot of people emigrating. There were ructions, fighting on the boat and everything. We stood all the way on the train from Holyhead. We'd leave at six in the evening and we didn't get into Euston till eight or nine the next morning. The funny thing is that its much the same now, it hasn't improved.

We met up with a family who came and stayed with us in Holland Road that my father had simply met on the ship. He got chatting to them on the boat and they'd nowhere to go so he put them up. They stayed with us till we had to move out of Holland Road and we were ourselves homeless.

The family was three boys and a girl at that time. We all came over and came straight to Kensington. For whatever reason or how it happened, we came off the train at Euston and I'll never forget it. We walked round Euston Square and got on a tube. I do remember very vividly walking down Kensington High Street. We must have come out of Kensington tube station, turned left and were told that Holland Road was just down the road. But when you're carrying suitcases. ... I remember struggling down that road and it was bucketing down with rain. Every time I walk along that road I think of that first journey.

The deal was friends who had a house in Holland Road were going to America and we were to get the house. We would buy it off them, but they came back in four months for some reason or other which meant that we were almost straight away homeless. Even at that time we did have some money no doubt, because my grandfather had died and my father had sold the place in Ireland. It was very difficult to find anywhere and we moved up to a hotel in Swiss Cottage which was owned by friends of the family, and lived there three or four months or something till he bought this property in Lockton Street just by Latimer Road Station. I remember going to see it. It was literally a bombed out building; well, he and others worked on it and converted it and we moved down there.

When I came in '46, I was sent to school in Hammersmith, in Brook Green in fact. I only lasted there three and a half months at the most and was sent back to Ireland. The reason was that I was fighting the whole time, from the very first day at school. A lot of the children appeared to be Irish with Irish names, but not as Irish as me. I'll never forget the first day I arrived because I arrived in a short pair of black and white Irish tweed pants and what's called a blouson top with buttons and a cap to match. Even in those days it wasn't what you wore to school here. The very first class on the first day was an elocution class, and although I'd done bits of elocution before in Ireland, they got me Saying 'a

thatcher was thatching a thatch' and of course I said a 'tatcher was tatching a tatch'. The very first playground after that, almost the whole School was shouting at me 'a tatcher was tatching a tatch'. They really gave me a hard time. I lost my temper and I was fighting, but I never thought of it in a sense of being Irish, or having a go at me. I did years later though, I thought a lot about it, but at the time there was no doubt about it, I was set on. I often thought for a long time that it was my fault, I still do sometimes, but I don't think it was really. My clothes definitely had something to do with it and making a fool of myself with that "thatcher' didn't help. As a result of that bad relationships were set up, I was in trouble every day. About two months later, the headmaster recommended that I go back to Ireland which suited me down to the ground. So I did go back in 1946. I went and lived with my grandparents in Kildare and Went to school at Newbridge College and came back to London in my summer holidays.

My parents dragged me back to London in my last year. Funnily enough I ended up back in school at Hammersmith with the same headmaster in St. Edmunds. The funny thing was that when I had come back the second time to school many of the same youngsters that had been in primary school were in the secondary school and yet there was a totally different relationship altogether. The difference struck me immediately, I was prefect of that school within six months and yet I was a rogue. I think it was because although I had never played soccer as such, I took to it very quickly. I was a very good runner and represented the school. So I suppose that changed the whole relationship, I was really well in with them then. It's amazing the difference from what, nine or ten coming back at fifteen or sixteen. It was really amazing.

JOSEPHINE

Josephine was born in 1919 on a small farm, in Killaloe, County Clare. After school she trained at the School of Telegraphy in Limerick followed by a time as an unpaid apprentice at a local post office. Then she got a job as a clerk in a post office in Monkstown outside Dublin but found that there was little chance of promotion. Tired of waiting, she left Ireland in 1936 to become a nurse in London.

I would have stayed at home on the farm, but my father always said I prefer all of you to do something else because this farming is awful. This was during the economic war; he brought cattle to fairs and markets and so on, and brought them back again. This country England wouldn't buy Irish produce. He was keen for me to do something besides farming.

I was working in the post office in Monkstown near Dublin before I came over. It was very hard to get established then in the post office and I wanted to be appointed, I didn't want to work in a sub-post office all my life. I was seventeen then, over the age of doing the learner's exam. The other exams they had in Ireland for appointments were few and far between because they only had about three vacancies every two or three years. Competition would be so keen that you might as well leave it alone. At that time there was an exam for unemployment clerks and there were hundreds of vacancies; it was something new but I was too young for that, and that was a very good chance for most people in my walk of life. So I got tired of waiting I said to myself I must get up and go. I talked to my cousins; they said why not try nursing and that's precisely what I did.

I wrote to different hospitals. I wrote to Hammersmith, Ducane Road up here and University College. It was difficult to get in. They had so many people they weren't even putting people on the waiting list. You might say why didn't I try to get in in Ireland, but you had to pay a big fee. I thought I might as well be paid something rather than pay a fee, and I didn't have it anyway.

I came over in 1936. I remember there were some young student type fellows on the train and when we went in towards London and passed all these awful old places that you do coming into London, they looked out as we came towards Euston station and said 'civilisation at last' I thought to myself this is

anything but civilisation to see all these backs of places.

My cousins at Hendon were supposed to meet me. I was travelling in the daytime and got to Euston at 5.30 or whatever time the Irish mail came in then. There was no one to meet me at the station. This man I had seen on the boat came along to me, I mean, if it were now you'd run the other way. He asked me had I got anyone to meet me and I said that my cousins were supposed to meet me and that I couldn't understand why they hadn't turned up. He said he'd wait and see if they came. If so, well and good. If not, he said he might be able to help me. They didn't come, and I told him where I wanted to go. He said he was staying with his sister in Waterloo for the night. He was working in Dublin, which was a strange thing then for an Englishman, usually it was the other way round. So he said he'd take me, that he was going as far as Sloane Square and he'd tell me when it was time to get out. So when we got to Sloane Square he got out and he took me to the bus stop and said to me on the way, "I'd like you to send me a postcard, I'll give you my address. All I want to know is how you get on when you get to the hospital. He waited for the bus to come and asked the conductor to let me off at Sydney Street. He was such a nice man.

The first morning I arrived at the hospital, a nurse was detailed to take me to a ward. When I got to the ward, it was a TB ward and I didn't even know they had a TB wing at the hospital. At that time, this was a long time ago, TB was a killer disease and people were afraid of it like Aids or cancer. Very often in Ireland families were wiped out and we were always so afraid of it. I decided I'd get out as soon as I could that first morning. I had intended to do my nursing, you see, for three or four years whatever the course was then and then think about what to do after that. You might ask why did I stay so long? when I decided the first day to get out as soon as I could. First of all, my parents didn't know that I was coming to London; I was living in Dublin, you see. I decided I would 'give it a go' as you say nowadays. It was the last job they would have wanted me to do, especially to be here in London on my own and I didn't want them to say 'we told you so'.

After about 8 months I was at home on leave from the hospital and I was in Dublin. A friend of mine that I was at school with in Limerick had passed her exam here for the civil service and worked out at a sub-post office out at Pinner. She sent me a telegram to come back at once if I were interested in taking up her post at Pinner Green as I had the experience before in a Dublin sub post office, then I'd be eligible for the exam after two years. I did the exam at Burlington Gardens and got through. They used to have very few vacancies

even then because this is just before the war. During the war, you see, I'd have even been taken on in Ireland and have got established over there if I'd held on, but that was the way it was.

When I got my appointment, the war had broken out and my stepmother said 'you're not going back to that place again. I'd had a job getting my exam. It had been expensive because I went to a tutor for a while beforehand. I got my exam and was placed. There were only twenty vacancies in the whole of London and Greater London. I then had difficulty with the police in Dublin. When I went over on leave I didn't have a travel card or anything, it wasn't necessary. But while I was there they decided they wouldn't let anyone out of the country without a passport or a travel permit. You wouldn't be allowed into England so there was no point in leaving Ireland but I didn't know about that. When I got back to Dublin I was walking with my brother and we met a man we knew. I told him I was going back to London that night and he asked had I a passport or a travel document. I said no and he said they won't allow you to go, so I was devastated. You see, I had only passed my exam a short time before. I had only just got my appointment, only a few months. I thought 'oh dear, any excuse I make now they'll say its the Irish overstaying their leave' because so many people did that. It wasn't just the Irish, the Welsh and Scots and all very often when they went home decided not to comeback for another fortnight and they'd get a doctor's line. This man said I'd better go to the police at College Green, a station near Trinity College, and they said they couldn't do anything for me, I'd have to go up to Castle Yard.

It was Saturday afternoon which was the worst time. The chap who was in charge of these travel documents was at home and there was nobody to do anything. So they'd questioned me, I remember it so well, as if I was a criminal. In the end they sent for this man. I had to go to the aliens department, which was strange in Dublin. He came in and he looked at me as if he could kill me. But one of the detectives told this chap when he came in that this lady wants to get back to London, she has some relative ill and I didn't contradict him. I said, I was sorry and everything and I was almost on my knees. He gave me a letter signed by the Ministry of Defence. He had these letters locked up in a safe for somebody who had to get back to England urgently. So I had my letter so I sailed through without any difficulty.

I have always been a bit homesick in away. I think that's because when you are not born in a place, you never really settle down. If you marry and settle down and have a family, its different, but if you're a single person you never really settle down.

MARY ANNE

Mary Anne left County Kerry in 1946, after signing up for a job in Manchester at the labour exchange, her passage was arranged and paid for, she only had to provide herself with a travel permit. Once in England she had to report to the local police and stay in the job for at least six months to a year.

I was born in County Kerry, my father was a farmer. You left school at fourteen in them days, so I worked around the farm and that. Well that was it, there was nothing else to be done, there were no jobs. That's why all the Irish came over here, wasn't it, because the farms wouldn't keep them all, the farm was only for one and they all couldn't get the farm, could they?

Well I got fed up with home and I wanted to travel. I didn't see much of a future at home and everybody was coming to England, they were all going to the labour exchange, all signing on to come over here for jobs. So I decided to do it; and I came and I was sorry after!

I went to the labour exchange at home and signed on. That was for a job in England, and you had to take the job they gave you. They gave me housework, worse luck. It was in Cheshire, outside Stockport. Your fare was paid; the only thing you had to get was a permit. Well, you'd get your photograph taken and went to the police station. You had to stay in your job for so long, you couldn't leave when you came over here and you had report to the local police station with your travel permit.

I felt terrible, I had to leave so early that morning to get the train to Dublin. It was late when we got into Dublin, because when we got to Limerick City we had to wait there for about four or five hours to get a train up to Dublin. They didn't mix the men and the women the men came but they came at different times. There were a lot of girls, but they were still strange to me because they were all from different parts of Ireland. There was another girl who was meant to come with me, but she chickened out. I had to come on my own; which made it harder on me because I knew nobody.

When we got to Dublin, we were met there and taken to this hotel. I'll never forget that experience, it was terrible. The way they looked at you, we had to strip, take all our clothes off and they looked at every bit of us, at our hair and

everything, before they gave us a cup of tea even. Then we had to go and get a bed; it was hard to get a bed because there was such a crowd of us. It was something terrible, I'll never forget that night. You can imagine, after leaving home and travelling all day to get to Dublin, first time away from home. I tell you, if I'd known what would happen, I wouldn't have ventured coming over here I'd have stayed at home!

Then, the next morning we were taken to the boat and we were given a packed lunch. We were on the boat about four hours, then we had to get the train from Holyhead to Manchester. I got off in Manchester, this man was there with a car to meet me. I think I had to wear something; it was a flower, a rose so that he know who he was looking for. I went by car to Woodford which was outside Manchester. I did the housework there. Mind you, they were very nice people, I mean it was really home. They treated me wonderful and everything, used to take me out on picnics, and I went everywhere with them. They were very, very good. They used to pay me one pound seven and six a week. A room to myself and a half a day a week off. Well I stayed there for about twelve months, I think.

I met another Irish girl, she was doing housework as well and we decided we'd move to Macclesfield; we got a job in a hospital. I used to work in the nurse's mess, looking after the nurses, weighing out their tea and sugar. That was a smashing job in the hospital; it was really great there. Mind you, there was a lot of red tape, you had to get a pass when you were going out at night or if you were going away for a weekend. It was really good, I loved that job. There was lovely grounds and everything to it. It was all Irish nurses in the hospital, and I had a room the same as the nurses had. We used to go dancing a lot then with all the nurses and get a taxi coming home because there'd be a crowd of us.

Then I came to London. Well there was more in London wasn't there? All the Irish where here, in all the factories and there was plenty of entertainment, there was nothing in Stockport for the Irish. I didn't think I would have stayed long in England. But I mean once I'd left home I couldn't go back home and stay. It would be a disgrace, wouldn't it? Anyway I soon got fed up. So I had to stay, once I'd left home that was it! And there was no going back for me.

JEAN

Jean, who used to travel on the boat in the mid sixties, recounts her experiences.

I came by boat. It was awful. In the early stages I remember going from Liverpool once and I had a sleeping bag and wanted to find a comfortable position. I was awfully tired and I got this place on a long box; it was about the same size as me. I got on top of it and it seemed very comfortable, and this sailor came along and told me what I was lying on, I said 'go away with you' and fell asleep. The next morning I looked out of the boat and there were the mourners waiting for the box I'd been lying on. It was just lying out on the open deck.

The Liverpool boats were the cattle boats. The cattle were let out first, the cattle were treated better than the people. I used to find that very depressing. The cattle were down below in the hold, you could smell them. The passengers were just sort of up above on open decks, it was very primitive.

It was an overnight journey so it was exhausting as well. It started to change a bit after that and the car ferries came in in the mid sixties. I remember going home to get married in the mid sixties we had a little mini-van and it had to be hoisted on at Holyhead, but fairly soon after that, it was car ferries.

I used to still find those boats very depressing. You're so aware that you're an emigrating nation. Other people just wouldn't understand this experience of going across the water on that boat.

ARLETTE

Arlette was born in Newcastle, County Wicklow. After working in Ireland doing various jobs, one for a period of five years, she applied with her twin sister, for an LCC clerical job advertised in the Irish Press, their daily paper. With their jobs secured in advance the LCC also arranged their accommodation in a hostel.

We saw the jobs with the London County Council advertised in the Irish Press; my sister had seen it then she applied. I hadn't done much office work but she'd done a year up in Dublin. I'd been doing a mother's help job with this English family for about five years so I had very little experience of office work. I went and did a very quick course on typing. I don't seem to remember coming over for an interview, perhaps in those days they just took you on a basis of your education, I don't know. I don't seem to remember us coming over and going back home again. Anyway, they accepted us and we came and worked in a typing pool.

We came over together in October '53 on the boat from Dublin, seven hours on the boat, it was a terribly long crossing and we arrived in Euston. I don't think we bothered to get sleepers, we sat up, it was a new experience to us. The day we arrived was miserable, it was dreary and raining and foggy and I suppose we did feel kind of awesome, because we'd left living in the country. We did wonder whether we'd done the right thing or not, but I suppose maybe then we just accepted it. We were kind of young and we were resolved, we knew it was a big city. We were quite upset and missed home and missed our sister and dad but we had each other, so it wasn't quite as bad as if we'd come on our own. If we had, maybe we wouldn't have stayed as long. We might have just gone back home after a year or something, I don't know, I don't think we really thought about how long we were coming for.

We must have written to County Hall because we were both coming over to work for London County Council. They told us where we could stay when we came to London first and put us in touch with a hostel. So when we arrived over we stayed in an LCC Hostel in Eaton Square. It was a big old building, quite drab and dreary really, and we shared a room, a kind of a dormitory with about six or seven people. It was a cold place. I think we spent most of our weekends sitting in bed because we were so cold. It cost about £7 a week but

you got your meals. During the week you got your breakfast and an evening meal, then on Saturday and Sunday you got your breakfast, main dinner at lunch time, then tea in the evening time.

We weren't very long in this particular building and then they moved us to Chelsea which was a much nicer hostel, it was more modern and new. You still shared a room, I think we started off sharing a room with about six people. Eventually we asked could we move out when a room became vacant with one other person, and we shared with her for some time until we got our own bedsitter in Redcliffe Gardens.

The hostel was all girls. There was a men's hostel next door but we were segregated. You didn't have any mixing with them except maybe at Christmas or something when they might have been allowed to come in. We had one big communal television room, two dining rooms downstairs and then the dormitories and washrooms upstairs. It was quite a nice hostel but the food wasn't that marvellous, usual hostel food. But I think we all enjoyed it and made lots of friends. It was a mixed group Scottish, Irish and a lot of people from the north of England down to get jobs here.

We had quite a good Social life. We went out dancing on Saturdays if we could get a late pass. Normally you had to be in at about 10.30 but you could get a late pass for 11 o'clock, or maybe twelve, but that wasn't very often. You had to always ask for a late pass to get a key and they only seemed to have one or two so you had to book early. They would lock the door if you were late and wouldn't let you in, so we'd wander round all night or go to the clubs. I don't know if we went to the Irish clubs much, although we sometimes went to the Garryowen in Hammersmith. We went to the Hammersmith Palais an awful lot, when Joe Loss was playing there and Rose Brennan was singing, that was really nice. We'd go as a group and have a good laugh really. We went to the dances at the Lyceum on Saturday night, the Castle in Richmond and sometimes the Cafe de Paris in Leicester Square.

GERARD

Gerard came to England in the 1950s when there was a great demand for Irish labour. Having lived most of his adult life here he tells of the experience of being Irish in London and of his reasons for staying.

One Saturday night I was in Dublin and I went to a dance in O'Connell Street and ran into an old college friend of mine whom I'd known in college and we had been in digs together, he'd qualified and come to England. This was on Saturday night, we had a jolly good drink and I went back to the hotel with him and spent the night, went down to the North Walland I got the boat to England.

There was a big wave of emigration from Ireland in the fifties. I think it was partly because a sudden labour market opened up here. There was full employment, a socialist government had come in 1945 and the recovery from the war was still going on. When I came to Manchester clothes rationing, certainly food rationing, was still on, limited to some extent but there was still coupons for things like butter. I was here for the Coronation in 1953, I think they had lost the ration tickets at that time. There were a lot of Irish people coming over.

Permits had been temporarily introduced for the last year of the war, you had to get a travel permit to come to England, they were afraid for security reasons of the invasion of the country or something, I don't know. But after that they went back to square one you just got on a boat and came. You literally did that if you had five quid, you went down to the boat, bought a five quid ticket and came.

My first impressions were of the North, in Yorkshire, I remember still the sudden realisation that the pillar boxes were red instead of green. Also how small the policemen were in comparison to the guards who were six footers all, I couldn't believe that, even with their helmets on which exaggerate their height; they were tiny policemen. Another impression, even in Huddersfield which is the great industrial heart of West Yorkshire and the woollen industry and all that kind of thing, what had impressed me at the time was how careful they were to preserve their parks and open spaces and neat little enclaves of greenery, even in the middle of all the dirt.

I can still remember quite clearly the signs of the 'No Irish, no Blacks, no dogs' on the shop windows. Irish people really did have a hard time. I'm talking 1950, '51, '52 you know, when you still had the notices up, 'No Irish need apply.'

It was not overt prejudice to some extent. But I was aware that it existed against the Irish community and these overheard remarks became more frequent and more bitter after 1969, especially if you were on your own. You were aware what people thought of you and of public opinion. People made Irish jokes; there had always been Irish jokes but they really hadn't flowered to the full extent. They came into their own when the Northern Ireland problem developed then they began to make jokes in earnest as a way of hitting back at the Irish. It is curious throughout all countries, the people they make jokes about either they don't understand or they are afraid of them, it's a defence mechanism.

There was always a very strong Irish influence in our lives, most of our friends were Irish. Although our neighbours were English and we had an excellent relationship with them, our social life tended to be reserved to the Irish.

I wake in the morning and I'm conscious all the time of being Irish I don't know whether that's good or bad or indifferent but I am conscious of it. To say I have always felt an outsider since I came to England wouldn't be fair to the very kind English people that I have met and the English friends I have made. But I felt different in many ways.

We always knew we were different, we openly discussed it, it was taken for granted. We were the Irish, the invincible Irish, the indefatigable Irish. We were aware that we were thought to be inferior people, useful, likable in many ways. A lot of us were drunken louts, but we were on the whole intellectually inferior, we were stupid stupid people.

I did and I probably still have quite a few strong prejudices about the English. I didn't like their imperialism, their divine mission to conquer, their feeling that they were superior people. Their hypocrisy, their public hypocrisy was pretty bad.

I didn't intend to stay in England, my wife was more reconciled to staying than I was, but I think imperceptibly you put down roots, you have children, the children start going to school. You get yourself a job and you get to see that there are prospects of advancement and you want to advance because you have a family now that you are responsible for and you have to make provision

for their future. To uproot yourself and uproot your children, take them back home to Ireland say, maybe even if you've got a job there they will have to go back into different schools, start to learn Irish, interrupt their education, set them back maybe two or three years. That's a big factor. I think once the children go to school you've put anchors down that you can't very well drag. I can only talk for myself, I think that when you're involved, heavily involved with the struggle of every day life to rear a family, earn the money, give them a home, provide as far as you can for some kind of future for them you're whole energy is devoted to that.

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