

## CONCLUSION

*The one duty we owe to history is to re-write it.*

Oscar Wilde

This thesis commenced with a survey of Jewish life in the Russian empire, before shifting its focus to the interactions of ‘East’ and ‘West’ in times of crisis such as pogroms and ‘blood libels’. A particular concern was to examine the reaction of acculturated western Jewries to the arrival of hordes of impoverished east European co-religionists at a time when their own position within broader European society remained unresolved. One strategy that was employed in response to mass emigration was to use charity as a means of social control, with limited success. This had the intention of reducing Jewish visibility and reinforcing the programme of western Jewish acculturation that was already in progress, so as to safeguard the social, economic and political gains that had been achieved by western Jews.

In order to investigate these issues with relation to Ireland, it was first necessary to delve into communal history. On surveying the secondary literature it became evident that there were serious flaws in the existing Irish Jewish historiography that would have to be addressed before an examination or reconstruction of any aspect of communal history would be possible. A critical analysis of Irish Jewish history thus became one main pillar of this work. The problems with the historiography made it apparent that other aspects of communal life besides its philanthropic and charitable elements would also need to be re-examined and, in some cases, documented from scratch. The second pillar of the thesis was, consequently, a detailed re-examination of communal life with a focus on the social and cultural issues that were presented by the phenomenon of mass emigration in general. These were acculturation, Jewish interactions with the host culture and internal Jewish politics.

As was noted in Chapter Two, there is a tremendous amount of secondary literature on Irish Jewry given the size and marginality of the community in terms of the broader Jewish world. Much of this material is of a poor quality, falling under the remit of communal narrative, which will be discussed below. Primary sources in contrast are patchy, especially for the period under consideration. This has created a widespread misperception that, because the sources are far from abundant, there is

little to be said about Irish Jewry in its foundation period and that what there is to say has already been exhausted by other, more knowledgeable scholars and communal chroniclers. The result has been a process of mysticisation which has allowed myth to become institutionalised as so-called ‘history’.

Minutebooks, correspondence books and memoirs have formed the basis of this research, including one very important example of a late nineteenth-century minutebook belonging to a *hevra*. Various other historians, professional and amateur, have looked at some or all of these materials without appreciating their significance. However, an analysis of these records that refers back to their proper historical context and employs the techniques of contemporary Jewish historiography conclusively demonstrates their relevance, and allows for alternative reconstructions of communal life. Perhaps the most important source of all for the mass emigration period is the *Jewish Chronicle*. As has been noted, this fills in many of the gaps in other communal records and represents the only source of information on many organisations, events and happenings. Aside from a few articles which have been endlessly regurgitated in the secondary literature, the *Chronicle* has been totally disregarded by communal historians until now. It is hoped that this fresh history of the Irish community will help to pave the way for a new, up-to-date and objective historiography going forward, and one that pays due attention to the range of sources that is available.

The methodology of this dissertation was completely straightforward: to apply the analytical techniques of contemporary Jewish historiography to the Irish context. This approach, while blatantly obvious, appears nevertheless to have been overlooked by the majority of other scholars and chroniclers of Irish Jewry. A major concern throughout has been to avoid the tendency within the existing secondary literature of presenting speculation or assumption as hard historical fact.

Notwithstanding the advances that have been achieved, like any other work this thesis has certain limitations. The absence of any theoretical grounding in oral historiography for my analysis of Irish Jewish communal narrative is one weakness that is freely acknowledged. Other shortfalls and omissions are noted as they arise below, and will be addressed in my future research.

Chapter One sets out the broader historical context for the dissertation which, it is argued, has a threefold basis in the Russian empire, the British empire and the mass Jewish emigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This

chapter sketches out current thinking on Russian Jewish historiography, with a focus on dispelling many of the popular myths that are cherished by Jews in Ireland and elsewhere with regard to antisemitism, pogroms, conscription and the like. This laid the groundwork for a more comprehensive examination of this aspect of the Irish Jewish communal narrative than has hitherto been possible, in Chapter Two. The chapter then provided an overview of western Jewry and its activism during the mass emigration period. This set out the principles upon which this was based and concluded that it was as much – if not more – about the needs of western Jews than about the objects of their activism. Section 1.4 found that this was as much the case for Zionism as for other contemporary forms of Jewish activism. Chapter One concludes with an outline of the most immediate context of Ireland’s Jewish communities as satellites of the Anglo-Jewish ‘centre’ in London. This demonstrated that, although Anglo-Jews were keen to alleviate the burden of mass emigration by dispersing east European immigrants throughout the British Isles, the Jewish authorities in London were not quite so ready to provide the communities that they had created and expanded with the support they needed in order to establish themselves: whether spiritually, culturally or – especially – economically.

Chapter Two marks the switch to the Irish context, beginning with the issue of historiography. The main problem with the existing historiography can be summed up in the background of those who have chosen to write about the Irish community. They have either been insiders, hailing from within the community itself and having a conscious or unconscious stake in the narrative that was being presented, such as Ray Rivlin and Asher Benson. Or they have been outsiders: scholars who wished to deal with the subject in an objective manner but, in approaching it from outside the discipline of Jewish Studies, were impeded by a lack of expertise in Jewish historiography. Dermot Keogh and Cormac Ó Gráda come under this category. Such scholars have been insufficiently equipped to analyse and deconstruct the existing narrative by placing it within its proper Jewish context, so that traditional understandings of the community have unintentionally been buttressed by their work. This has lent these narratives an aura of authenticity, endowing them with a far greater authority than they deserve. In addition, there has been a general consensus that as Ireland is a small, parochial country with a correspondingly small, parochial Jewish community, it has very little of interest or relevance to offer to broader Jewish scholarship. As this thesis points out, the very idea of an Irish Jew is somewhat

comical to many people, academics included. The communal establishment is content unreflexively to exploit and perpetuate this condescending stereotype rather than dwell on other, less congenial aspects of Jewish interaction with Irish society. This relative avoidance of the negative and the uncomfortable has led to an exaggerated narrative of Irish tolerance towards minorities. Thus nobody has had any real interest or motivation in questioning existing presentations of communal history. As far as the 'official' community is concerned, the last word has been written by Keogh and Ó Gráda years ago and there is little more to say.

In re-examining the historiography of Irish Jewry, this thesis tackled a number of communal myths, especially those surrounding communal origins: the settlement of east European Jews in Ireland, tales of accidental arrival and the notion that the newcomers were fleeing persecution as opposed to economic hardship. It has been proven that, even though the primary sources are scant, once they are balanced with the information that is available on the processes of migration in general it is possible to make informed assumptions as to how and why east European Jews arrived and settled in Ireland. In doing so, arrival myths in general have been discounted, while a kernel of truth has been found in one of the Irish examples. I have argued that, owing to their widespread popularity, these anecdotes merit far more serious academic attention than they have received to date.

Another aspect of the historiography that has been deconstructed is the Jewish involvement with Irish nationalism, which has been found to be largely a matter of speculation. Contrary to what has been claimed in the past, there is little concrete evidence for any real engagement with militant nationalism beyond the activities of a handful of well-known Irish Jewish activists. It has been argued, rather, that this assumption equals an attempt to 'indigenise' Irish Jewry by writing it back into seminal events in Irish history, and into the national narrative that has become a focal point of contemporary Irish identity. It is clear from the sources that most Irish Jews were in fact British patriots. The *Jewish Chronicle* archives suggest that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the majority subscribed to a mild, constitutional form of nationalism that was then in vogue in Ireland and fully compatible with loyalty to the British Crown. Then, as now, Irish Jews took their lead from mainstream political opinion.

The final major historiographical issue that was considered in Chapter Two was antisemitism in the Irish context, if that is indeed the appropriate term. As was

demonstrated, current thinking on the subject of anti-Jewish prejudice in Ireland is extremely polarised. A thorough and contextual examination of this topic that is grounded in contemporary analytical frameworks is desperately required in order to extrapolate a balanced set of principles and an appropriate terminology for researchers to work with. Chapter Two showed that Irish communal narrative, in common with Jewish communal narrative elsewhere, minimises and relativises the presence of antisemitism. The evidence shows that the situation is in fact otherwise: that tensions have always existed and continue to persist between Jews and the non-Jewish majority, and that this has been expressed in a variety of ways. I have contended that this largely unacknowledged reality has had a deep impact on the Jewish self-understanding in Ireland, and on the way in which Irish Jewish history has traditionally been constructed. It must be stated emphatically that the aim of this analysis is not to fuel the current debate by exaggerating the extent of anti-Jewish prejudice in Ireland, but rather to argue against denial and in favour of a forthright and objective debate on the topic.

To this end, Section 2.3 represents what I believe to be the only critical analysis of the historical narratives of the Limerick Boycott to date. This is not, however, complete but would be well supplemented in the future by a socio-economic analysis of the circumstances of the Boycott in Limerick, together with a comparative study of analogous Irish cities. This would allow us to see whether it is possible to determine more precisely why the Boycott occurred in the place and at the time in which it occurred. This level of investigation was unfortunately beyond the scope of the dissertation. Instead, it has focused on the questions of why these events are popularly remembered as a ‘pogrom’, and why they evoke equally strong emotions in those who would wish to deny the Boycott as in those who insist upon a melodramatic portrayal of its events. It has been found that the notion of a ‘pogrom’ is, ironically, strongest in the place where it is most contentious: Limerick. It was also argued that the Boycott is not some kind of ‘aberration’ in an otherwise perfect relationship between Jews and the Irish majority, as is claimed by Ireland’s communal establishment.

Building on this examination of the flaws in the existing Irish Jewish historical narrative and the demonstration of how a contemporary, analytical approach that is grounded in Jewish historiography can enhance our understanding of Irish Jewish history, Chapters Three and Four applied these principles to an examination of

Ireland's Jewish community during the mass emigration period. As stated above, this period had hitherto received no significant attention from historians and chroniclers of Irish Jewry due to the scarcity of the sources and the mysticisation and mythologisation of this era in communal narrative.

Chapters Three and Four challenged a number of pre-existing assumptions:

- That the sources are not sufficient to enable a reasonable reconstruction of the character and inner life of Ireland's Jewish community during the mass emigration period.
- That the so-called 'native' community that predated east European immigration was a straightforward replica of its Anglo-Jewish counterpart.
- That relations between 'natives' and 'immigrants' therefore automatically followed the same patterns that are associated with the major English communities.
- That the history of Irish Jewry is largely irrelevant beyond the island of Ireland.

Another intention of this thesis was to present an alternative view of communal history, in line with the contention in Chapter Two that this has become essentially a one-sided narrative that has been driven by the Litvak majority. To this end, I have sought to write the 'natives' back into communal history and to detail their considerable contribution to the construction of the modern Irish community. This leads on to another important element of this work: to avoid insofar as was possible the reductive presuppositions of its predecessors. The case has thus been argued for the internal diversity of Irish Jewry in its early years, and the notion that Dublin has somehow been normative for the rest of Ireland has categorically been rejected.

Chapter Three opened with a survey of Dublin's original community, the DHC, before examining the congregation's reaction to mass immigration Irish-style. This revealed a highly complex relationship between immigrant and 'native' contingents. The chapter found that the DHC followed the cultural and religious inclinations of its Anglo-Jewish counterparts and that it likewise implemented a cultural programme in order to encourage anglicisation among the immigrant community. Nevertheless, the Irish 'natives' had a far more flexible and compassionate attitude towards the newcomers than that of the Anglo-Jewish leadership. This was partly because they were circumscribed by their numbers, so

that separation and enforcement were simply not an option. Nevertheless, the leaders of the DHC seemed genuinely to care for the welfare of the immigrants and to wish to help them to improve their lot.

It was also possible to examine the immigrant side of the story. The most interesting finding in this respect was the level of voluntary acculturation among the newcomers. This ties in with observations that have been made with regard to British immigrant Jews, that acculturation was an inevitable process. I have added to the evidence that acculturation was not necessarily a passive, gradual and involuntary phenomenon, but could also be an element of the cultural agenda of immigrants themselves. This is especially noteworthy in communities such as Cork, where there was no 'native' party to lead or encourage the process of anglicisation.

Chapter Three continued by investigating the gradual integration of immigrants and immigrant organisations into mainstream communal life in Dublin. It was found that, despite major differences in context, Bill Williams' model for the evolution of Manchester's Jewish leadership is extremely useful in interpreting this process. I believe that the sources support my assertion that Williams' model helps to explain the transition in communal leadership in Dublin from 'native' to immigrant hands. In addition, I have suggested that Dublin's immigrant leaders craved legitimation from the Anglo-Jewish authorities and recognition for the services that they had performed for the communal good.

The Manchester model cannot necessarily be applied to Belfast as, by the 1890s, Belfast's 'native' contingent had all but disappeared and there is no evidence for the kind of gradual transition that Williams delineates and which is visible in Dublin in this period. The accession of immigrants to leadership positions within the Belfast community does not therefore seem to have represented the same aspiration to supplant and replace the 'native' communal establishment as it did in Dublin as, within a short time, there simply was no 'native' establishment left to overthrow. Records are scarcer still for Cork but it is still evident that, even though the community was composed almost entirely of recent immigrants, it had its own programme of acculturation as well as a direct relationship with the Anglo-Jewish authorities. This latter point reminds us that, under British rule, London as opposed to Dublin was the central point of leadership for each of Ireland's Jewish communities. This is another reason for rejecting the view that Dublin can or should be normative for the Jewish experience in Ireland. As virtually no records have survived from the

Limerick community for this period, it was not possible to include the LHC in this element of the analysis.

One final interesting point to note was the apparent communal consensus with regard to Jewish nationalism which, it was suggested, was due to the fact that this did not pose a threat to the position of the 'native' community. In the period under consideration, Zionism had the potential for being acceptable to Anglo-Protestant philosemites and Irish Catholic nationalists alike.

The second part of Chapter Three focused on the immigrant community in its own right. This began by deconstructing some of the speculation that has grown up around the occupational patterns and the general outlook of the immigrants, in particular the notion that they were unduly materialistic. Links were found to universal images of Jewish moneylending and acquisitiveness. It was argued that negative stereotyping by non-Jews and the Anglo-Jewish establishment has influenced the Irish community's self-image over the years, and that this has impacted on its ability to engage objectively with these uncomfortable and, indeed, largely unfounded assumptions. The remainder of the chapter comprised a detailed examination of intracommunal dispute, which was demonstrated to be an important and completely underrated means of analysing both the long- and short-term development of the Irish community. The view was put forward that this aspect of communal relations deserves more serious attention from Jewish historians than it has hitherto received.

One of the most important findings of this dissertation was that Ireland's immigrant and 'native' communities gradually met in the middle to form a series of culturally hybrid institutions and organisations. This point was particularly relevant to the examination in Chapter Four of charity in the Dublin context. This chapter opened with a survey of the forms of relief that were available from the DHC and, subsequently, from other synagogaes. The changes in these provisions since the publication of the DHC's *Laws* in 1839 illustrate the evolution in the congregational response to growing need within the community. Congregational records showed that, contrary to communal narrative, the DHC continued to provide relief to needy individuals long after the establishment of more formalised relief mechanisms within the community, as well as providing regular financial support for external forms of assistance.



The most significant charity to be examined was the immigrant-led DJBG, whose minutebooks show the range of relief that was provided as well as illustrating the Board's guiding principles. Its actions were found to be motivated to a large extent by expedience, for example in wishing to 'export' needy individuals to other jurisdictions and in attempting to avoid unnecessary and/or long-term 'burdens' on its funds. The DJBG was found ultimately to be, like the synagogues, a culturally hybrid organisation that combined fashionable Victorian thinking with traditional Jewish *mores* and small-town communal politics. It was driven by a degree of pragmatism and assisted in its decision-making process by close personal knowledge of many of the applicants and of the immigrant community in general.

The HBS was likewise found to be a cultural hybrid, in this case a traditional Jewish organisation that aspired to present itself in an anglicised fashion. In Chapter Three it is argued that this tendency within the immigrant community was a feature of the immigrant leaders' claim to Anglo-Jewish recognition and legitimation. In its early years Dublin's HBS constantly wavered between this and more traditionally Jewish forms of expression.

Chapter Four also investigated the outlook of Dublin's Jewish women's charities. Although the records are again scant, they nonetheless indicate that women's charities followed the same basic patterns as their male counterparts. For example, the immigrant-led Ladies' Society appears, like the Board of Guardians, to have developed notions of 'deservingness' in assessing its applicants. The Ladies' Synagogue and Dorcas Association, which was based in the DHC, also followed the conventions of its Anglo-Jewish counterparts, especially in adopting the Christian designation 'Dorcas' in order to equate itself with contemporary Christian women's charities. Brides' Aid was the most difficult to evaluate, having left behind no written records or accounts from its early years. However, it appears to indicate that as time went on Dublin's Jewish charities gradually moved away from fashionable 'English' conventions in favour of more traditional Jewish values of discretion and sensitivity towards the recipients of charity. This evolution may correspond with a growing sense of acculturation, whereby it was no longer felt necessary to take the lead from the prevailing external values and attitudes. This contention would tend to be supported by the DJBG's present sense of discretion, as exemplified by its careful stewardship of its records.

To summarise, it can be said that the cultural traits and power struggles that were identified in Chapter Three are borne out by the survey of philanthropy within Dublin's Jewish community in Chapter Four. Unfortunately little could be said about the activities of the other major Irish communities owing to the lack of records.

Chapter Four concluded with a survey of Ireland's Jewish friendly societies. These were found to be an important means of gauging the community's economic situation as well as the values that drove it, given that most of the friendly societies that operated in Ireland were strongly Zionist in orientation. I am of the view that Jewish friendly societies are another area of immigrant communal life that merits closer attention from Jewish historians in general.

The overall concern of this study to introduce a more general Jewish context to the historiography of the Irish community, has unfortunately come at the expense of a detailed examination of its more immediate British and local Irish settings. These are, of course, vital omissions which will require close attention in my future research.

In conclusion, this thesis applied the methodology of contemporary Jewish historiography to the appraisal of a wide range of primary and secondary materials on Irish Jewry. This enabled the deconstruction of existing narratives and the advancement of fresh alternative perspectives, centred on the themes of community and charity. It has been proven that the nature and extent of the sources do not preclude a thorough and nuanced historiography, when coupled with a strong focus on context. Finally, I have demonstrated the relevance of Irish history to the history of mass emigration in general and to the evolution of modern Anglo-Jewry in particular. This is in keeping with the current move towards recovering the history of smaller British Jewries and according them their rightful place within broader Anglo-Jewish and, indeed, European Jewish history.