

# 'What would people say if I became a policeman?': the Irish policeman abroad<sup>1</sup>

ELIZABETH MALCOLM

It is well known that the Irish were disproportionately represented in all ranks of the British army throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> As most regiments were posted abroad, often for decades, joining the army could be interpreted as a form of emigration. But enlistment as a soldier was not the only way virtually to guarantee migration. Many Irish doctors and nurses emigrated, as did large numbers of priests and nuns, and also lawyers, teachers and civil servants.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, joining some professional groups in Ireland carried with it the strong possibility of migration; and perhaps a career abroad was one of the attractions of certain jobs. The literature on male emigrants' occupations has tended to be dominated by discussions of rural labourers. They formed the majority, but this focus on labourers has tended to obscure the fact that a diverse group left Ireland, and even those who left classified as labourers sometimes pursued very different careers overseas.<sup>4</sup> This article will look at another occupational group who were also noted for their propensity to emigrate – policemen.

In order to create a context for some of the following discussion, consideration needs to be given to the existing historiography of Irish policing abroad. This is not plentiful and tends to be fragmented and amateurish; nevertheless, there have been some valuable studies. Sir Charles Jeffries, in his influential general history of British colonial policing, published in 1952, identified the Royal Irish Constabulary

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Economic and Social Research Council, which helped fund this study, and also Mark Radford and Dr Dianne Hall for their research assistance. <sup>2</sup> E.M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army, 1868–1902* (Manchester, 1992), pp. 98, 131–2; K. Jeffery, 'The Irish Military Tradition and the British Empire' in K. Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 94–122. <sup>3</sup> L.M. Geary, 'Australia Felix: Irish Doctors in Nineteenth-Century Victoria' in Patrick O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity. Volume Two. The Irish in the New Communities* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 162–79; Edmund Hogan, *The Irish Missionary Movement* (Dublin, 1992); S.B. Cook, 'The Irish Raj: Social Origins and Careers of Irishmen in the Indian Civil Service, 1855–1914', *Journal of Social History*, 20 (1987), pp. 507–29. <sup>4</sup> More work is needed on Irish professionals abroad, but, for some useful general comments, see D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: a Primer* (Belfast, 1993), p. 124 and A. Bielenberg, 'Irish Emigration to the British Empire, 1700–1914' in A. Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora* (Harlow, 2000), pp. 225–6. For links between British professions and colonialism, see T. Johnson, 'The State and the Professions: Peculiarities of the British' in A. Giddens and G. MacKenzie (eds), *Social Class and the Division of Labour* (Cambridge, 1982) pp. 196–206.

(RIC) as 'the really effective influence upon the development of colonial forces during the nineteenth century'.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation was reinforced in 1988 by Stanley Palmer in his massive study of the origins of modern policing in England and Ireland. Palmer specifically argued that, while the London Metropolitan Police (the Met) was the model for urban policing throughout the empire, 'Ireland's constabulary was the more valuable because, by using it as their enforcing agent, British civil authorities could mould large, loosely governed areas into centrally administered colonies'.<sup>6</sup>

The theory that Ireland provided a model for British colonial policing has – perhaps inevitably – been challenged. In 1987 Mike Brogden argued that to characterise the influence of English, or indeed Irish, forces on colonial policing as a one-way process was misleading, since colonial experience had parallels to the metropolitan situation and exerted effects upon it.<sup>7</sup> He went on also to challenge the dichotomy usually set up between the RIC and the Met, pointing out that many colonial forces had combined elements of both models. The 'differences between mainland British police work and colonial and Irish policing practices were ones of degree rather than absolutes', Brogden suggested.<sup>8</sup>

The most influential critique of the so-called 'Irish model', however, was offered in 1991, in an article written by Richard Hawkins. Looking primarily at organisation and regulation, Hawkins identified the main characteristics of the Irish model as an armed, paramilitary force, housed in barracks and centrally controlled, with rigorously standardised procedures. But examining various nineteenth-century police forces in the empire – from Canada to the Caribbean, from the Sudan to the Cape, from India to Australia and New Zealand – Hawkins argued strongly that none of them exactly replicated the organisation of the RIC. He certainly did not deny that Irish police practices had been influential. They offered important 'precedents' he claimed, and especially so after 1907 when a colonial police training school was established at the RIC headquarters in Phoenix Park, Dublin. From then on, Hawkins conceded, 'the RIC undoubtedly held primacy among the police forces of the empire'.<sup>9</sup> Hawkins' essential argument that no British colonial police force was exactly the same as the RIC is undoubtedly true. But his approach to the issue was a rather narrow one. He only looked at struc-

5 C. Jeffries, *The Colonial Police* (London, 1952), p. 30. 6 S.H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 542. 7 This was certainly true of Ireland, where at times of crisis, as for instance during the Land War and the Anglo-Irish War, police officers with colonial experience were imported to bolster the RIC. For the career of one such policeman, see M. Silvestri, "'An Irishman is Specially Suited to be a Policeman": Sir Charles Tegart and Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal', *History Ireland*, 8 (2000), pp. 40–4. 8 M. Brogden, 'An Act to Colonise the Internal Lands of the Island: Empire and the Origins of the Professional Police', *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 15 (1987), pp. 181, 187, 199. 9 R. Hawkins, 'The "Irish Model" and the Empire: a Case for Reassessment' in D.M. Anderson and D. Killingray (eds), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830–1940* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 24, 19.

tures, at the way forces were organised and controlled. He did not address how forces were composed, how they functioned and how composition may have influenced function. He did not examine why Irishmen joined the police, in what numbers, how they viewed this job, and how they in turn were viewed by the Irish immigrant communities that they policed. Nor did he deal with the experience of Irish-born policemen outside of the British colonial territories, although many men served in England<sup>10</sup> itself and also in the United States.

In this article I want to focus on composition: on the Irishmen who joined police forces abroad. And I want to make a basic point, but one I think that needs to be made in light of the fact that, due to Hawkins' article, the current trend seems to be towards downplaying Irish influence on policing abroad.<sup>11</sup> The point is just how many Irishmen we are talking about and, related to that, how widespread and lengthy was their influence. I also want to give some preliminary consideration to why Irishmen were so prone to join the police and to how they were viewed by their compatriots abroad. Irish policemen abroad fall into two major groups. There were serving policemen and ex-policemen, some of whom were recruited in Ireland by various English and colonial authorities, and others who emigrated in search of better pay and working conditions. In addition there were Irish immigrants, with no previous experience and who left Ireland classed mainly as rural labourers, but who joined police forces overseas. Both these groups will be considered, among others.

## I

Irish policemen were not only found throughout the empire, but also in England itself to an extent that has not been fully appreciated. Not nearly enough study has been done of the recruitment of Irishmen and ex-RIC men into English forces and of their influence upon them. Yet we are talking about substantial numbers at all levels. For instance, of forty-seven English county chief constables appointed between 1856 and 1880, eleven or approximately one-quarter had previously served in Ireland.<sup>12</sup>

The Irish involvement in the setting up of the London Metropolitan Police in 1829 and of Special Branch in the early 1880s is fairly well known. The first two long-serving and influential commissioners of the Met were both Irishmen,<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Fewer Irish appear to have served in Scottish forces, but for the memoirs of an Irish-born policeman stationed in Edinburgh for some thirty years from 1830, see J. McLevy, *The Casebook of a Victorian Detective*, ed. G. Scott-Moncrieff (Edinburgh, 1975). <sup>11</sup> See, for example, the introduction to Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'?*, pp. 10–11. <sup>12</sup> C. Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: the Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856–80* (London, 1984), p. 48. <sup>13</sup> Colonel Sir Charles Rowan (c.1782–1852) was a Co. Antrim army officer who served as Met commissioner from 1829 to 1850; Sir Richard Mayne (1796–1868) was a Dublin barrister who served as commissioner from 1829 to 1868. D.

while Special Branch was established in response to Fenian bombings in England and initially contained a number of Irish officers<sup>14</sup>. Less well known, however, is the fact that many county and borough constabularies seem to have looked particularly to Ireland. Some are perhaps predictable, but others are not. Constabularies in Lancashire, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Hull and London had significant Irish involvement, at senior, as well as rank-and-file, level. But Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire and Staffordshire, for instance, all had substantial Irish contingents. During the 1850s and 1860s some 8 to 10 per cent of the Buckinghamshire Constabulary were Irish born and most had served in the RIC. Interestingly, while Buckinghamshire's Irish policemen were largely catholic, those of Staffordshire were largely protestant. Why this was so is not altogether clear.<sup>15</sup> Gloucestershire's first chief constable, appointed in 1839, had served twenty years in Ireland and 'laid out his force on the Irish model'. Staffordshire's first chief constable, appointed in 1842, had served seventeen years in Ireland. His deputy, who eventually succeeded him in 1857, was also an Irishman, as were nearly half the officers of the force and over a quarter of constables. Of these constables, nearly half had served in the Irish constabulary.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, this Irish representation was not just confined to the mid and late 19th century. It began earlier and lasted well into the twentieth century. Hull had an Irish-born chief constable from 1836 right through until 1866. When the Lancashire Constabulary was first recruiting in 1840-1, 28 per cent of those who joined were Irish born. Before the Famine influx of Irish into Lancashire, this figure was disproportionate.<sup>17</sup> Liverpool's first chief constable, appointed as early as 1836 was Irish born and, interestingly, was a journalist.<sup>18</sup> Palmer argued that Irish chief constables were appointed in Lancashire during the 1830s and 1840s as their paramilitary training was valued in the campaign to suppress Chartism.<sup>19</sup> But the Irish influence long outlasted Chartism. In the late 1860s still some 18 per cent of the Lancashire force were Irish born.<sup>20</sup> From 1881 to 1911 the Liverpool

Ascoli, *The Queen's Peace: the Origins and Development of the Metropolitan Police, 1829-1979* (London, 1979). **14** B. Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: a History of Political Espionage in Britain, 1790-1988* (London, 1989), pp. 96-113; R. Allason, *The Branch: a History of the Metropolitan Police Special Branch, 1883-1983* (London, 1983). **15** Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community*, pp 73-5, 78-9, 83. Nottingham had an Irish-born chief constable, Major William Pontz, through most of the 1870s, who went on to serve in a similar capacity in Essex through most of the 1880s. J. Woodgate, *The Essex Police* (Lavenham, 1985), pp. 49-52. A sampling of local histories of county and borough forces suggests that the Irish were ubiquitous; and yet they have been virtually ignored by academic English police historians. Even Steedman, who recorded their substantial presence in her statistical tables, made no attempt to discuss their influence. **16** Palmer, who reported this information, used it somewhat perversely to argue that the Irish did not in fact have a strong influence on early English constabularies. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland*, pp. 451-2. **17** B. Dobson, *Policing in Lancashire, 1839-1989* (Blackpool, 1991), pp. 52-3. **18** W.R. Cockcroft, *From Cutlasses to Computers: the Police Force in Liverpool, 1836-1989* (Market Drayton, 1991), pp. 52-3. **19** Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland*, pp. 452-3. **20** W.J. Lowe,



Constabulary was headed by two Englishmen, both of whom went on to more senior positions and served into the 1920s and 1930s: one in charge of the City of London police and the other as His Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary. Both had joined the police in Ireland and served there for a number of years before their English appointments.<sup>21</sup> A somewhat similar picture emerges as regards Birmingham and extends even later. The city's two chief constables between 1899 and 1941 were both Irishmen who had trained and served approximately sixteen years each in the RIC before their English appointments<sup>22</sup>.

The example of Liverpool points up the fact that, as well as Irish policemen who emigrated and Irish emigrants who served as policemen abroad, we should not overlook non-Irish policemen who trained and served in Ireland before returning to their home countries. Well before the establishment of the international training school at the Phoenix Park depot and also long before the advent of the Black and Tans, significant numbers of Englishmen had joined the RIC, and some of these men took what they had learnt back to police forces in Britain. Brogden, in stressing the continuities between English, Irish and colonial policing, refers to the fact that English officers especially sometimes trained in Ireland and served in England, or vice versa, before moving on to serve in the empire.<sup>23</sup>

A number of historians – Roger Swift most prominently in terms of England<sup>24</sup> – have written about the Irish and crime. But this is clearly only one half of the equation. The topic of the Irish in the police, especially with regard to England, has largely been ignored. Also, if Irish-born and Irish-trained, and even English-born and Irish-trained, officers and men were influential in English forces, then the usual dichotomy recognised between the English-style of civil, de-centralised policing and the Irish-style of paramilitary, centralised policing starts to look a lot less clear cut. Brogden's somewhat cautious stress on continuities rather than discontinuities between the two is undoubtedly well placed.<sup>25</sup>

## II

Some of the British colonies too offer interesting insights, not only into policing, but also into colonial attitudes and immigrant strategies. A striking example of the use of RIC men in the colonies is provided by Trinidad, for which some fifty RIC

'The Lancashire Constabulary, 1845–70: the Social and Occupational Function of a Victorian Police Force', *Criminal Justice History*, 4 (1983), p.46. **21** Cockcroft, *From Cutlasses to Computers*, pp. 59–65. **22** J.W. Reilly, *Policing Birmingham: an Account of 150 Years of Police in Birmingham* (Birmingham, [1989]), pp. 40, 90, 104. **23** Brogden, 'An Act to Colonise the Internal Lands of the Island', p.198. **24** Among a number of articles, see R. Swift, 'Crime and the Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in R. Swift and S. Gilley (eds), *The Irish in Britain, 1815–1939* (London, 1989), pp. 163–82. I would like to thank Dr Swift for providing me with copies of some of his articles. **25** Brogden, 'An Act to Colonise the Internal Lands of the Island', p. 187.

men were recruited in the early 1880s, when there was a high resignation rate from the RIC due to the pressures of policing the Land War. The fact that the colony's governor, Sir Henry Blake, was a former RIC officer also doubtless had something to do with the recruitment of Irish policemen at this time. By 1885 the Trinidad police force had a little over 400 members. The two senior officers were English; the two sergeant majors next in seniority were Irish; of five sergeant superintendents four were Irish; of nearly fifty sergeants and corporals most were white, probably Irish, although there were some blacks; of 350 constables all were black and the vast majority were from Barbados. Barbadians were considered to make good policemen, unlike Trinidadians.<sup>26</sup> So the Irish police were slotted into the middle ranks, controlled by Englishman, but themselves in control of black policemen. Most of these black policemen, however, were also externally recruited. This reflects the widespread belief at the time that certain groups were better fitted to military or police service than others. The Irish, like the Barbadians, were considered to make 'good policemen', just as they were considered to make good soldiers. But, as Joanna Bourke has pointed out in her recent, controversial book on modern warfare, while viewed as aggressive and brave, Irish soldiers were also seen as reckless and unreliable, and thus in need of strong, that is English, leadership.<sup>27</sup> The personnel structure of the Trinidad Police suggests that, in some colonies at least, a similar attitude was taken to Irish policemen serving abroad.

Irish policemen were also particularly well represented in Australia in the late nineteenth century: in New South Wales (NSW), Queensland, Western Australia and, most especially, in Victoria.<sup>28</sup> In the mid 1860s 67 per cent of the recruits joining the NSW police were Irish born, as were 22 per cent of the officers and 62 per cent of the sergeants. Some 45 per cent of recruits in 1865 had previously served in a police force, the vast majority in the RIC. As NSW training at the time was perfunctory, while RIC training was lengthy and rigorous, whatever the regulations laid down, ex-RIC men must have drawn heavily upon their Irish experi-

26 H. Johnson, 'Patterns of Policing in the Post-emancipation British Caribbean, 1835-95' in Anderson and Killingray (eds), *Policing the Empire*, pp. 83-4. Policing by strangers was a common colonial strategy: thus Sikhs, perceived as a 'martial race', were used to police Ceylon, Hong Kong, Singapore and even Rhodesia; Indians and Somalis, as well as the Irish, were employed in Kenya; while in the Gold Coast, not only the Irish, but also Nigerians and Sierra Leonians were used. Brogden, 'An Act to Colonise the Internal Lands of the Island', pp. 196-7. 27 J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (London, 1999), p. 127. 28 For the substantial Irish involvement in New Zealand policing, see R.S. Hill, *Policing the Colonial Frontier: the Theory and Practice of Coercive Social Control in New Zealand, 1767-1867* (Wellington, 1986) and *idem*, 'The Policing of Colonial New Zealand: from Informal to Formal Control, 1840-1907' in Anderson and Killingray (eds), *Policing the Empire*, pp. 56, 59-61; for Canada, see W.R. Morrison, 'Imposing the British Way: the Canadian Mounted Police and the Klondike Gold Rush' in *ibid.*, p. 94; and for South Africa, where the Irish were also much in evidence, see B. Nasson, 'Bobbies to Boers: Police, People and Social Control in Cape Town' in *ibid.*, pp. 240-1, 247-9 and D.P. McCracken, 'Odd Man Out: the South African Experience' in Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, pp. 258, 260, 262-3.

ence. In 1871 the whole force was 60 per cent Irish and about a third of these were protestants. So police service attracted significant numbers of protestant, as well as catholic, Irish. By 1889, however, the Irish proportion had declined to 29 per cent in the face of a deliberate attempt to boost non-Irish recruitment. In 1882 the force's non-Irish commander had complained to the colonial secretary that 'newly arrived Irish apply, but no others' and had wished for thirty or forty recruits from the London Met.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, during the third quarter of the nineteenth century the NSW police were nearly two-thirds Irish born, and about half of these Irishmen had previously served in the RIC. The way the force was organised was certainly not exactly the same as the RIC, although contemporary critics worried that NSW had followed too closely the Irish model. In fact, the NSW case gives support to Palmer's suggestion that the RIC model was more influential in rural areas. In rural NSW police were armed and lived in barracks, while in urban NSW they lived in the community and were not ordinarily armed before the 1890s. The force wore English-style uniforms, officers were promoted from the ranks after 1864 and the regulations emphasised that this was a civil not a military body. Nevertheless, like the RIC, they were a 'national' force and were commanded by an inspector general.

Western Australia and Queensland also had strongly Irish police forces. In the early 1870s some 30 per cent of the West Australian force were Irish born, while in 1897 a Perth magazine bluntly defined a policeman as 'a man with a uniform, a brogue, and a big free thirst'.<sup>30</sup> In the mid 1860s 84 per cent of the Queensland police were Irish born, with 44 per cent having previously served in the RIC. However these proportions fell rapidly and were down to 23 per cent and 1 per cent respectively by the early 1890s.<sup>31</sup> The situation in Victoria was perhaps even more striking: although commanded by an Englishman, in 1874 fully 82 per cent of the Victorian police force were Irish born. At the time only 12 per cent of the male population of the colony were from Ireland. Furthermore, 46 per cent of the force had seen previous service in the RIC.<sup>32</sup> So nearly half the force had been trained in Ireland and undoubtedly brought their Irish experience to bear, particularly as, like NSW, there was little police training on offer in the colony. Another third, although not serving as policemen in Ireland, were Irish born. I think it is fair to say that Victoria had an Irish police force, in almost all but name, during the

29 R. Walker, 'The New South Wales Police Force, 1862-1900', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 15 (1984), pp. 30-1. 30 R. Haldane, *The People's Force: a History of the Victorian Police* (Melbourne, 1986), pp. 81-2. 31 Yet, even after 1900, the force was still relying on RIC manuals and in 1911 was considering recruiting men from the Belfast RIC. W.R. Johnston, *The Long Blue Line: a History of the Queensland Police Force* (Brisbane, 1992), pp. 25-6, 104, 115. 32 Haldane, *The People's Force*, pp. 81-2; J. McQuilton, 'Police in Rural Victoria: a Regional Example' in M. Finnane (ed.), *Policing in Australia: Historical Perspectives* (Sydney, 1987), pp. 40-1. For the vivid autobiography of a senior Irish-born policeman of this period, see J. Sadleir, *Recollections of a Victorian Police Officer* (Melbourne, 1913; reprinted, London, 1973).

mid and late nineteenth century. The force may not have followed RIC regulations to the letter, as Hawkins noted, but its composition and the training of its members must surely have had a substantial impact upon its practices. To downplay RIC influence in these circumstances is not credible. In addition, from the early 1870s, when imperial troops were withdrawn from the colony, the Victorian police also had a role in external defence, which must have reinforced their military character along RIC paramilitary lines.

One of the leading historians of the Kelly gang, John McQuilton, has argued that the heavy-handed policing of small farmers in north-east Victoria by an unrepresentative force employing RIC tactics, including intensive surveillance, spying and intimidation, helped contribute to an upsurge in bushranging that occurred in the late 1870s, culminating in the exploits of Ned Kelly. It is frequently remarked that Kelly was of Irish parentage; less often remembered is that most of the policemen he killed and most of those who pursued him were Irish born, as indeed was the judge who sentenced him to death.<sup>33</sup> The Kelly outbreak could well be interpreted as a clash between different groups of Irish, on opposite sides of English law. This incident was well documented at the time and has been closely studied since, but in England and the United States, as well as Australia, other less well-known conflicts between police and working-class communities during the nineteenth century and later must have essentially pitted Irish against Irish.

Kelly himself certainly recognised that he was up against, not just policemen, but specifically Irish policemen. His contempt for authority was undoubtedly fuelled by the fact that so many of those he perceived as oppressors were in fact fellow Irishmen. In his personal manifesto, the so-called 'Jerilderie Letter', he reserved his harshest rhetoric for Irish policemen whom he saw, not just as persecuting his family and friends, but as betraying their country. They were, he ranted, 'brutal and cowardly', 'lazy' and 'loafing', 'big ugly fat-necked wombat headed', 'magpie legged', 'splay-footed sons of Irish bailiffs or English landlords'. They had 'deserted the shamrock, the emblem of true wit and beauty to serve under the flag' of the country that had 'murdered their fore-fathers', transported large numbers of their countrymen to Van Diemen's Land 'to pine their young lives away in starvation and misery' and driven many others to America, although there they would 'bloom again another day'. It would appear that when he was younger the police had actually sought to recruit Kelly himself. Now he flung this back at them. 'What would people say if I became a policeman' he asked, 'and took an oath to arrest my brothers and sisters and relations and convict them by fair or foul means . . . Would they say I was a decent gentleman?' Labelling Irish policemen as gorillas and

33 McQuilton in Finnane (ed.), *Policing in Australia*, pp 42, 50, 52. The official enquiry into the Kelly outbreak, chaired by an Irish-born politician, was very critical of the police; their English chief commissioner was replaced by an Irishman who occupied the position until 1902, when he was succeeded by a man of Irish parentage. Haldane, *The People's Force*, pp 93, 95-6, 122-4.

baboons, Kelly commented sarcastically that 'the Queen must surely be proud of such heroic men . . .'<sup>34</sup>

When Kelly dictated this letter, he was an outlaw on the run, attempting to justify to his community the fact that he had recently shot to death three Irish policemen. Thus he had to blacken their reputations, and indeed the reputations of all Irish policemen who made up the majority of the force then pursuing him. Kelly's hostility to Irish policemen is doubtless an extreme case. Nevertheless, it is probable that at times of tension and crisis Irish communities in different countries also railed against the Irishmen employed in such large numbers to police them. From Ireland to England to the Australian colonies and, as we shall see, also the United States, governments relied upon the Irish to police the Irish. That some Irish despised such men as traitors is understandable. Unfortunately, it is much less clear how Irish policemen perceived their native communities abroad, especially when they came into violent conflict with them.<sup>35</sup>

### III

Why did Irish policemen emigrate? I have already indicated that at times of discontent within the RIC, as for instance in the early 1880s when duties were onerous and pay was low, resignations mounted. The 1850s and 1860s were also years of discontent over pay. In addition, they were the decades in which many English, Australian and American forces were being established and were actively recruiting. Thus it is perhaps not surprising that Irish involvement in policing abroad reached heights during these decades. Chain migration was also a factor. It would seem that officers who had worked in the RIC, when appointed to senior positions abroad, looked to Ireland for staff. Constables who had emigrated wrote to former colleagues and to relatives – and many Irish families had a tradition of police service – encouraging them to follow their example. The surgeon of the RIC, giving evidence before a select committee in 1872 in support of demands for higher pay, noted that the men often received letters from friends and family abroad enticing them to leave with information on the better pay and working conditions available for policemen outside of Ireland.<sup>36</sup> And in Australia certainly pay and conditions were in many respects superior to Ireland. Marriage, for

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in I. Jones and G. Tomasetti, 'Kelly – the Folk-Hero' in Manning Clark et al., *Ned Kelly: Man and Myth* (Melbourne, 1968), pp. 77–8. <sup>35</sup> Gordon, in his study of the major Irish riots that occurred in New York in 1870–1, noted in passing that some Irish policemen were dismissed for refusing 'to fight fellow Irishmen'. But, while he discussed the attitudes and actions of the rioters in some detail, he did not pay similar attention to the police involved. M.A. Gordon, *The Orange Riots: Irish Political Violence in New York City, 1870 and 1871* (Ithaca, 1993), p. 101. <sup>36</sup> *Report of the Commissioner . . . to Enquire into the Condition of the Civil Service in Ireland on the Royal Irish Constabulary . . .* [C-831] H.C., 1873, xxii, pp.

instance, was much easier. In the RIC men usually had to serve at least seven years before they were permitted to marry, and even then permission might not be forthcoming. In Victoria a superior's permission was required, but this was usually given freely.<sup>37</sup>

That a family history of police service could be a determining factor in an immigrant's choice of career abroad is especially clear in the case of Detective Inspector Jeremiah Lynch (1889–1953). Lynch was an Irish speaker from Co. Kerry, who trained as a teacher in Dublin, but emigrated to England in 1912 where he joined the Met. He served in Special Branch and retired in 1937 as deputy head of the Flying Squad. Lynch is an interesting example of an Irishman who became a senior London policeman during the early twentieth century. However, there is more to his story than this. Although he did not train and serve in the RIC, a glance at his family tree shows that it is full of men who did, related both by blood and marriage. Indeed, Lynch's older brother served in the RIC from about 1908 until disbandment in 1922, when, like many ex-RIC men, he left Ireland for a time fearing retribution. He contemplated joining the Kenyan or Rhodesian police forces, before finally opting for a job as a security guard in the House of Commons and resuming life on the family farm in Kerry at the end of the decade. Lynch came from a policing family background which doubtless influenced his choice of career abroad.<sup>38</sup>

But what of men who had not trained or served as policemen in Ireland and who lacked family policing connections: why did large numbers of them too join various overseas police forces? Government service, whether as a policeman, a soldier, a fireman, a clerk or a teacher, did offer secure, reasonably paid, pensionable employment for young, literate, male immigrants, who aspired to more than labouring or factory work. One young Irishman arriving in Brisbane, Queensland, in the early 1880s noted down the various work opportunities available, presumably advised by fellow travellers:

Apply for employment at the undermentioned places. Surveyor general's office, commissioner of water works, commissioner of public works, commissioner of police. At Brisbane all these resides [*sic*]. Make separate applications. Doant [*sic*] make it known at one place that you applied at another.<sup>39</sup>

Obviously this young immigrant had concluded that some sort of government employment was his best option. And police service had strong attractions. When

<sup>37</sup> Haldane, *The People's Force*, pp. 85–6. <sup>38</sup> I would like to thank Dr Donal Lowry of Oxford Brookes University for providing me with information on the career of Inspector Lynch who was his great uncle. Lynch apparently took early retirement in 1937 because he was unhappy with the influence of the freemasons in the Met, whom he believed were blocking his chances of further promotion. <sup>39</sup> Quoted in M. Finnane, *Police and Government: Histories of Policing in Australia* (Melbourne, 1994), p. 137.

Victoria decided to expand its force by fifty men in 1888, over 500 applications were received for these positions. Generally recruits were not in short supply, with at least ten men applying for every vacancy even after 1900.<sup>40</sup> How many of these applicants were Irish immigrants is unclear, but it is probable that many were. Being English speaking and literate, though unskilled, the Irish were well suited for work as policemen.

For the immigrant police service offered, over and above security, a degree of status and power. A recent historian of the Irish in New York has characterised Irish policemen as an 'elite' among their fellow immigrants.<sup>41</sup> It is probable that the camaraderie of working with and for fellow Irishmen generated a sense of solidarity and pride. Perhaps also the concept of a 'critical mass' is relevant here. Once enough Irishmen had joined a police force, something like a 'chain reaction' was initiated. Studies of the Victorian police and also of some American forces certainly suggest that police service became identified with the Irish. Irish immigrants looked to the police because they knew that so many of their fellow Irishmen were serving and, in turn, the police authorities, often Irish themselves, looked favourably upon Irish applicants for police jobs.

Finnane has claimed that in the eastern Australian colonies during the 1860s and 1870s immigrants from Britain and Ireland with military or police backgrounds were actively recruited for the police.<sup>42</sup> This was especially evident in Victoria where there was an explicit policy of favouring ex-RIC men in particular and Irishmen in general for police service. Sir John O'Shanassy, an Irishman, was the government minister in charge of the police during the late 1850s and early 1860s, and under his administration Irishmen were put on a fast track to police appointment.<sup>43</sup> Similarly in New York, from the 1840s large numbers of Irishmen began to join the police force. By the mid 1850s, when nearly a quarter of the city's population were Irish born, it has been estimated that perhaps as many as half of all policemen were of Irish birth or descent.<sup>44</sup> Again, as in Victoria, police appointments were highly politicised and, as the Irish became increasingly powerful in Democratic politics in New York, so their control of the police department tightened.<sup>45</sup> And, again, one is struck by how long this lasted, for it was not until perhaps the last quarter of the twentieth century that Irish control of New York policing largely came to an end.

But the politicisation of policing could cut two ways: while it could lead to a favouring of the Irish, it could also lead to their exclusion. We have already seen

40 G. Davison, J.W. McCarty and A. McLeary (eds), *Australians, 1888* (Sydney, 1987), p. 240; Haldane, *The People's Force*, p. 122. 41 H.R. Diner, "'The Most Irish City in the Union': the Era of the Great Migration, 1844-77" in R.H. Bayor and T.J. Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore, 1996), p. 97. 42 Finnane, *Police and Government*, p. 136. 43 McQuilton in Finnane (ed.), *Policing in Australia*, p. 39. 44 For the debate over the exact numbers of Irish in the New York police during the 1850s, see J.E. Richardson, *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (New York, 1970), pp. 70-1. 45 Diner in Bayor and Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish*, p. 97.

that the NSW authorities sought successfully to reduce the numbers of Irish policemen in the 1880s. An even more striking example of a deliberate policy of removing the Irish from the police is provided by New Orleans. The first Irish policeman seems to have been appointed there in 1830. Just twenty years later, in 1850, 32 per cent of the force were Irish born, while the Irish made up only 20 per cent of the white adult male population. Yet, by 1860, when the Irish had risen to about a quarter of the male population, they comprised just 11 per cent of the police. This dramatic decline in the numbers of Irish policemen had occurred in 1855 when the nativist party, popularly called the 'Know Nothings', gained control of the city and reorganised policing with the specific intention of getting rid of immigrants. However, the decline of the Know Nothings and the revival of the Democratic Party saw the Irish reassert themselves: by 1870, 37 per cent of New Orleans' policemen were Irish born, while the Irish made up only 14 per cent of the white adult male population.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV

Any student of the Irish abroad is inevitably struck by how large a topic this is and by how much of it remains to be explored. This is hardly surprising when we are talking about millions of people who spread themselves throughout the world over a considerable period of time. The Irish historian, used to dealing with a small country and a small population, can find the diaspora somewhat intimidating. Understandably, there has been a tendency to focus on certain groups and certain places, which has generated a dramatic, though somewhat one-dimensional, portrait of the typical Irish immigrant. But the diaspora was, and is, enormously varied. In recent years research has extended to unlikely places and to unlikely occupations; and this has shown that Irish experience and influence were far more complex and widespread than earlier historians often realised. A study of Irish policemen abroad fits into this new migration historiography. It challenges the traditional view of the Irish migrant as a misfit and an outcast, prone to drunkenness and crime, discriminated against and struggling to survive at the very bottom of society. Doubtless this was the experience of many, but far from all. Irishmen were considered to make good policemen, not only by British and British colonial authorities, but by American ones as well. The RIC was widely regarded as a

<sup>46</sup> While Irish involvement in policing in New York and Boston is generally well known, Irish involvement in the south has been largely overlooked. Yet there were other southern cities with even more Irish policemen than New Orleans. In 1860, for instance, 62 per cent of the Savannah, Georgia, police were Irish born, 58 per cent of those of Charleston, South Carolina, 41 per cent of those of St Louis, Missouri, and 34 per cent of those of Mobile, Alabama. In 1880 some eleven large southern cities had police forces that were at least a quarter Irish; and four of these had forces that were around a half Irish. D.C. Rousey, *Policing the Southern City: New Orleans, 1805–89* (Baton Rouge, 1996), pp. 58–9, 72–5, 145–6.



highly-trained and extremely effective force. Thus when, in the mid-nineteenth century, governments in various English-speaking countries and colonies were seeking to extend and consolidate their power through the establishment of police forces, it is not surprising that many turned to the Irish – especially as, in some instances, those perceived as their most unruly and lawless citizens were Irish immigrants.<sup>47</sup> Why the Irish were thought to make good policemen and why the Irish were often employed to police the Irish are issues that demand further research.

British colonial forces certainly did not adhere rigidly to an 'Irish model' of policing, but this should not detract from the fact that Irish-born and Irish-trained men formed large groups, sometimes even the majority, in police forces throughout the world. How their Irish backgrounds and training informed their policing is still little understood. On occasion Irish policemen found themselves in the front line confronting their fellow Irish. How they negotiated their complex and sometimes conflicting roles and identities awaits further study. Ned Kelly may have laughed at the idea of becoming a policeman, but tens of thousands of Irishmen followed this career abroad. If many Irish ended up behind bars or, like Kelly, on the scaffold, equally large numbers of Irish were responsible for putting some of them there.<sup>48</sup> These numbers alone should command far more serious attention than they have so far received.

<sup>47</sup> The influence of the RIC abroad did not end with the force's disbandment in 1922, as, in addition to joining the Garda Síochána in the south and the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the north, hundreds of men took up further service overseas. The Palestine police, for instance, actively recruited ex-RIC men and they remained influential within the force into the 1940s. E. Horne, *A Job Well Done: a History of the Palestine Police Force, 1920–48* (Tiptree, 1982), pp. 76–9, 90–2. <sup>48</sup> The complexities of Irish policemen dealing with Irish criminals has been illustrated graphically in a recent scandal in Boston, where the two chose to cooperate. Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill, *Black Mass: the Irish Mob, the FBI and a Devil's Deal* (New York, 2000).