‘Please pardon me for taking the liberty’: poverty letters as negotiating spaces in 1920s and 1930s Belfast and Dublin

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‘Please Pardon Me for Taking the Liberty’: Poverty Letters as Negotiating Spaces in 1920s and 1930s Belfast and Dublin

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ABSTRACT

After the partition of Ireland and the foundation of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State, Belfast and Dublin had become capital cities of two new states. For those struggling on the margins, however, this new-found statehood held little practical value. Through a close reading of ‘poverty letters’ written to political and religious leaders, this article explores how people articulated their need as they sought assistance *and* tried to define their understanding of poverty and its impact. By employing a comparative lens, it approaches these letters as social spaces in which people drew on wider cultural and political anxieties and motifs to perform belonging and identity.

KEYWORDS

Shame; respectability; deserving; undeserving; poverty letters; charity; twentieth-century Ireland; Belfast; Dublin; Protestant; Catholic

Introduction

After the foundation of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State on the island of Ireland in 1921[1] and 1922,[2] respectively, Belfast and Dublin became the capitals of two hostile states in which political and religious identities became markers of difference and defiance. Belfast was the industrialised seat of the new Unionist state and a devolved region of the United Kingdom, while Dublin was the significantly less industrialised home to the new Irish parliament. Both states were effectively ‘monopoly religious contexts’[3]: the Irish Free State was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, while Northern Ireland was predominantly Protestant.[4] Historical comparisons of twentieth-century Belfast and Dublin are rarely made largely because the history of the island has not been sought in its cities or its people, chiefly because urban life, poverty and everyday survival have generated less historical excitement than ideas and politics and the conflict they generate.[5] Thus, little is known of the quotidian contours of change for those living on the island after 1921–2. Irrespective of the political upheaval in the creation of two new polities, Belfast and Dublin continued to shelter many for whom the drawing of a new border made little material difference to their day-to-day lives, which was still shaped by the exhausting rigours of simply getting by. This article seeks to explore these lives through a detailed examination of their ‘poverty letters’. We use the term ‘poverty letters’, rather than begging or charity letters, because we consider these letters to be exercises in the narration of poverty. These reluctant authors composed their poverty in a bid to seek assistance *and* define their version of poverty

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and the toll it took on their lives. We are concerned with these letters as part of a process of agency and social negotiation, essential to survival for so many people on the margins before the development of a comprehensive welfare state.

The article draws on letter collections which represent the experience of poverty in the radically different political contexts of Belfast and Dublin in the 1920s and 30s. We explore the impact of the different socio-cultural dynamics at work in the two cities by using letter collections which share important characteristics and significant differences. The Dublin collection comprises over 4000 letters written to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Edward J. Byrne, between 1920 and 1940.[6] While the collection is archived as 'Charity Cases', and many did seek financial assistance, not all letters entail requests for charity, and the collection is certainly not characterised by a begging tone.[7] The two smaller sets of letters from Belfast writers are found in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.[8] The first collection of letters were written to Belfast's Unionist Lord Mayor, Sir Crawford McCullagh, or to his wife, Lady Margaret, who had been active in raising funds for wounded servicemen and their families during the First World War. The collection contains several dozen letters written between 1931 and 1934. Both this collection and the Dublin one were generally hand-written by women, on quite poor-quality note paper with varying levels of literacy. The second, smaller, collection is part of the official correspondence of Northern Ireland's prime minister, Lord Craigavon. These letters are generally more formal in style, more likely to be typed and written by men and refer mainly to unemployment. Collectively, these northern and southern letters amount to a robust social critique of the new states' treatment of the vulnerable.

The exploration of the letters of the poor has developed considerably in the last decade in the pursuit of a 'new history from below', which centres the voices of the least powerful in the writing of social history to offer a more nuanced understanding of power and its negotiation.[9] This article includes the four elements of this new history identified by Martyn Lyons: it re-evaluates individual experience, privileges the 'voices of ordinary people', explores how 'dominant discourses were actually consumed', and considers how the poor attempted to shape 'their own lives and cultures'.[10] Crucially, this article studies the 'textuality' of these letters, employing careful discourse analysis to further our understanding of the power relations that underpinned the ostensibly very different communities that generated them.[11] By employing a comparative approach, we highlight how the awareness of the specific political context and broader social reality in both parts of the island is legible in the letters, but so too is a broadly shared sense of entitlement and of poverty as an inherent injustice.

Thomas Sokoll's pioneering study of Essex pauper letters from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries informs our treatment of these letters as both literal and symbolic expressions of poverty. Hence, we argue that these letters were 'strategic pieces of writing', but also in essence truthful scripts of experience.[12] While we cannot verify the factual accuracy of each letter, our research confirms the general truth of their depictions of poverty, the relief system, and the extent to which the poor had bargaining power.[13] Our analysis contributes to the growing tendency to regard these sources as both social and cultural or, as Steven King argues, as evidence of the 'socio-cultural experience of

poverty'.[14] We consider these letters as arenas in which experience was used as evidence of the human cost of the 'economy of makeshifts',[15] a sense of identity and belonging was articulated, and the poor asserted their claim to 'deservingness' and entitlement.

Text and context: Belfast and Dublin

The 1920s and 30s were decades of major political and social upheaval and readjustment in both parts of Ireland as each polity sought to establish its statehood against a backdrop of world recession, soaring unemployment, and continued and increasing poverty. Both states, in a way, represented failure for the main players on each side.[16] Nationalists throughout the island hoped partition would be temporary and viewed it as a tragedy, while unionists in this new southern, truncated, state were rendered a tiny minority cut off from the kingdom with which they had so closely identified and to which they remained inextricably intertwined through dense webs of professional, friendship and family ties. In Northern Ireland, a substantial Catholic minority found itself denied the dream of living in an independent Ireland, compounded by the fact that they were now subject to a regional, unionist-dominated government in Belfast. However, the northern state was also a disappointment for many unionists, delivering to them the very 'Home Rule' government against which they had fought so long and hard.[17] The Presbyterian minister and political campaigner, Rev. James Armour,[18] surely echoed the sentiments of many when he dubbed it 'a form of Home Rule that the devil himself could never have imagined'.[19]

The creation of these two states resulted in what that bastion of Anglo-Ireland, the *Irish Times*, referred to as 'an almost bewildering moment of transition', but tellingly the same piece went on to observe 'there was nothing to mark the change from the old to the new'.[20] This almost perfectly conjures the paradox: things were politically made anew, accompanied by violence, uncertainty and disruption, but in real terms little had changed for the most vulnerable in either state. While both jurisdictions faced considerable and immediate social and economic challenges, there was no socio-economic revolution; if anything, there was retrenchment. Born of violence, the nascent Free State continued to battle a civil war for its legitimacy until May 1923. The bid for independence was also a costly venture in terms of damage and lost revenue: the new Irish Free State had to make it alone in a cold international financial climate. The work of various charitable organisations collectively provides a vivid sense of the deterioration in the quality of life for those already teetering on the brink.[21] The new government focused on cutting spending with a view to reducing income tax *and* welfare spending. While it reduced income tax from 25% to 15%,[22] it also cut the most valuable welfare benefit inherited from the British regime, the Old Age Pension.[23] Wages were cut, while the cost of living rose. As early as February 1924, the state faced a situation where 31,250 people had neither work nor benefit; indeed, the civil servant in charge of knowing such things estimated the true figure was probably closer to 80,000.[24] All the markers of distress increased: unemployment, overcrowding and infant mortality. The latter, a clear barometer of social inequality, mapped closely to the geography of class: the 1926 census revealed that Dublin city had an infant mortality rate of 170 per 1,000 births compared to the affluent Dublin suburb of Howth at 79 per 1,000.[25] In 1931, the largest Catholic charity in the country reflected on the previous decade as one when

> the condition of those who are normally near the border-line of want had gradually become worse; unemployment insurance, which was intended to tide families over short spells of idleness, had in many cases lapsed altogether, and whole families were faced with practical starvation.[26]

The situation in Northern Ireland was no better as the new state struggled to establish itself. The first election to the new Belfast parliament, held on 24 May 1921, resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Ulster Unionist Party which took 40 out of 52 seats and would remain the party of government for the next 50 years.[27] Not only was the new government preoccupied with issues of internal and external security, it also found itself in the unenviable position of having been given responsibility but little power.[28] Its ability to act was hampered fiscally by the nature of its relationship with the imperial parliament, as it found itself with no control over taxation and hardly any over spending. This impotence was, as K.T. Hoppen has observed, most clearly demonstrated in the government's inability to halt the collapse of the two staple industries – linen and shipbuilding – on which Belfast's extraordinary economic growth and physical expansion had depended.[29] The collapse of these industries, and the heavy engineering industry that supported them, had devastating consequences for the people of Belfast and its hinterland. As the 1930s witnessed escalating unemployment and severe hardship across the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland's unemployment levels soared. In 1932, 22% of Britain's workforce, around 3 million people, were out of work[30]; that same year Northern Ireland's unemployment levels sat at 27%.[31] The shipbuilding and engineering sectors were particularly badly affected with 57% of the workforce being made redundant, and having no prospect of future employment.[32] The production of linen also ground to a halt. In October 1932, as the numbers out of work rose towards 80,000, the *Belfast Newsletter* reported that

> the church clergy, heads of church missions, lay social workers and others state that at no time within their experience were there such poverty and need as exists at present. We are told that those on Outdoor Relief are on the verge of starvation; unless something is done and quickly, conditions will become tragically worse.[33]

The dominant welfare system in both jurisdictions remained the workhouse and its attendant outdoor relief, although the Irish Free State renamed these 'county homes' and 'home assistance', respectively. In fact, in both Dublin and Belfast, Boards of Guardians administered the workhouses and poor relief/home assistance into the 1930s.[34] Reluctance, suspicion and parsimoniousness continued to inform the spirit of official welfare in both parts of the island with a dogged determination to facilitate only temporary assistance to those deemed to be the 'respectable poor'. For the working classes of both jurisdictions, this was a time of growing economic precarity, the line between 'respectable' poverty and destitution became alarmingly fine. In both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State, a small proportion of the 'able-bodied' unemployed was entitled to benefit through the National Insurance Act, 1911, payable to insured workers for a maximum of 26 weeks after they were made redundant.[35] In Belfast, tens of thousands of former shipyard workers, factory workers and labourers were forced to seek assistance on the outdoor relief works. Where that was not available, the workhouse remained a desperate last resort. In both jurisdictions, many people continued to supplement either their incomes or benefits with charity; in fact, in both states this was

the intention. Neither state believed that benefits should be enough to prevent the poor from employing the skills of negotiation. Idleness and its attendant associations with evil was a much bigger ideological fear than degradation or hunger. Furthermore, working-class society tended to be divided along sectarian lines, not just in Belfast where this division was particularly entrenched but across the entire island. Indeed, both states used religion to define their identities. There was, therefore, little space for class solidarity in an all-island sense; rather, the othering which has formed such a fundamental part of Irish society sealed the poor of Belfast and Dublin in the bubble of each state while utterly failing to empower them to see their fate as part of a system that had nothing to do with their cultural or political identity.[36] The letters we analyse here, therefore, document and are documents of the lived experience of poverty in both states.

'This indeed is a shame for me': shaming power

Poverty and social shame have long gone hand in hand, and indeed the stigmatising of those who sought aid was arguably a foundational principle of many relief systems. As Steve Hindle has shown, the badging used by authorities in early modern England had a profound influence on how supplicants were viewed, the intention was to frame being 'on the parish' as a source of humiliation.[37] By the mid-nineteenth century, this association of destitution with shame had become institutionalised in the form of the workhouse, the stigma of pauperism becoming an underlying principle of welfare provision in England and Ireland under the 1834 and 1838 poor laws, respectively.[38] While the writers of these letters in 1920s and 1930s Ireland expressed a clear sense of entitlement to some form of relief, the weight of shame also burdened their letters. The stigma of seeking relief that was cultivated by the Irish Poor Law remained deeply embedded in the consciousness of those experiencing poverty in both parts of the island well into the twentieth century.

While we can only judge their motives and emotions by what they have left on the page, it is possible to trace a number of patterns in how these writers articulated the shame of their need and the stigma of their poverty. It is also clear, however, that by communicating this sense of shame, they were reasserting the values they shared with their reader, demonstrating a keen understanding of how important respectability was to Irish society in both parts of the island. Naill Ó Ciosáin and Virginia Crossman argue that notions of 'deserving and undeserving' were embedded in Irish popular culture before the introduction of the Irish poor law in the 1830s.[39] While the definition of what constituted 'deserving' was subjective and often inconsistently applied, there was a broad understanding that the deserving were 'innocent' of their poverty, willing to work or unable to do so, deferential to authority and aware of their place.[40] This moral hierarchy was also closely associated with notions of respectability, the relationship was complex but at a most basic level it meant buying into a certain sense of 'civilised' behaviour. The trap for the poor was that in order to be considered a member of the 'respectable poor' – an essential prerequisite to receiving assistance – one had to implicitly accept the idea that there were guilty and innocent poor people. However, the Irish poor deployed notions of shame to both shore up their innocence and respectability *and* to redirect blame or culpability on to those that oversaw a system in which poverty was almost inevitable.

There was a sense in many letters that being forced to feel shame was itself a penalty of poverty that was unfair. In 1922, for example, William P.M., informing the Dublin archbishop that he had had to send his children to live with his brother and send his wife out to work, declared that 'this indeed is a shame for me, yet I can assure your Grace I am quite helpless for want of Employment'.[41] This was a price he was forced to pay through no fault of his own. While 10 years later in 1932, Michael K., a resident in the Catholic Morning Star Hostel,[42] run by the Legion of Mary in inner-city Dublin for homeless men, offered a visceral articulation of his sense of shame, which he framed as visited upon the son of respectable people due to the cruelties of poverty:

> I am not used to this degrading life of poverty. I am a farmer's son, born of decent parents, God-fearing, and respectable. I was always used to plenty, including good food and a good bed. Often, I do feel inclined to throw myself into the River when I do not succeed in begging the price of my bed.[43]

He had registered at the Labour Exchange and spent every day looking for work but with no success. He made it clear that he had already exhausted most of his options: he had used up all of his unemployment insurance money, was not eligible for what he described as 'Poor Law', and had been unsuccessful in his appeal to St Vincent de Paul Society, the largest and most pro-active Catholic charity in the state. Michael made it clear that desperation drove him to contact the archbishop, and that it pained him to have to do so. However, he explicitly tied his sense of degradation to his own church's failings. When explaining that he had been forced to sup with 'the Salvation Army, a Protestant Society' rather than starve, he noted: 'It is very tempting offer to a destitute person, but I would not like to deny my religion, and so I am trying hard to resist their offer. It is most degrading for a Catholic to have to go to such people for help'.[44] While the Salvation Army offered assistance to people irrespective of faith, in the religious universe, Michael was negotiating there was no space for neutrality; he would have been aware of this and of the shivers down the hierarchical spine that his reference to this organisation would have prompted.[45]

Others found less direct ways to express the shame asking for help induced. Frances L., for example, whose husband was in the Richmond Lunatic Asylum in Dublin as a result of a gas attack while serving in the Great War, wrote to Archbishop Byrne asking for assistance for herself and her three young children.[46] She stressed that she was not asking for money but needed someone of 'influence' to help her get what she might be entitled to: 'I do not want charity from anyone if possible but I do want someone to use their influence with Pension Committee and see if I am not intitled to some more consideration'.[47] A discomfort at seeking assistance was a key way of implying honourable shame, but also in differentiating oneself from all the others in need. The idea that those who needed charity might face suspicion as either disingenuous, lazy or 'habitual beggars' was not challenged by these writers, rather they sought to put clear blue moral water between themselves and 'the poor' who we always represented as an indistinguishable mass. Thus, Mrs M., a convert to the Catholic faith, whose husband was in Pigeon House Sanatorium in Dublin,[48] framed her plea both as a hardship in and of itself *and* as only necessary because her religious conversion had isolated her from 'her own people': 'I find it very hard now as I can not ask any help of my own people and hate to be always begging charity'.[49] Likewise, in Belfast, James McC., a 32-year-old gardener who got little

work during the winter months and who had a sick wife and two small children, made evident his embarrassment at having to write to Belfast's mayoress in 1932. He was also eager to underscore that he was not the type to ask for help, 'I am not one who is always looking for help from every source so I do hope you will be able to do something for me'.[50] Robert B., also from the new Northern Ireland, felt the loss of his status keenly. He had been Secretary of Ulster Ex-Service Men's Association and proprietor of small property business in Belfast and had lost everything with the collapse of his business. He had attempted to soldier on but had reached 'the end of [his] resources' when he wrote to the Mayoress of Belfast to explain his predicament. He wished to avoid the poor relief system and hoped that he might qualify for a small amount of money through the ex-servicemen's fund: 'There are I know, funds for the relief of such cases as mine but I cannot take the step to make application through those channels and would rather go without, this I have done but can't exist as at present any longer'.[51]

In view of the long-shared history on the island of Ireland, it is little wonder that those in need in the 1920s and 30s in both jurisdictions had the same concept of social shame, despite their different religious affiliations which framed spiritual shame in different ways.[52] The framing of need in such a way as to minimise shame or establish oneself as a reluctant supplicant was almost universal. Likewise, the welfare system in both jurisdictions continued to be held together by an economy of makeshifts. These writers, whether they were in Dublin or Belfast, needed to be savvy enough to read the charity market and operate within it in a strategic way which both improved their chances of assistance and enabled them to live with the psychological burden of begging.

'Very deserving, though wretchedly poor': exploring deservingness

In 1923, Mrs Annie D., a widow working as a housekeeper for a family in Parnell Street, Dublin, wrote to Archbishop Byrne asking for some help for herself and her eight-year-old daughter. Her letter began, as did many others, 'I am taking the liberty of asking you for a little assistance when I explain my case you will know it is a deserving one'.[53] An understanding of what constituted a 'deserving case', has been central to the relationship between those who sought relief and those who granted it for centuries.[54] The central principle that the supplicant must demonstrate characteristics of 'deservingness' continued to underpin negotiations of relief and charity in both parts of Ireland well into the twentieth century. The writings of the poor reveal their immersion in contemporary concepts which underpinned the rationale of the social *status quo*, thus they often employed the language of deservingness. In this respect, their letters functioned as spaces of encounter in which they articulated and also 'performed' their poverty often with, as Peter Mandler noted, an underlying anxiety to strike the appropriate balance between entitlement and supplication.[55] This is not to suggest that the writers were engaged in deception but rather that they borrowed strategically from the contemporary lexicon of relief, elements of which appear as repeated motifs throughout their letters.

The concept of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' as a binary may have served to assist supplicants in situating their own personal requests in an acceptable space – a negative other could be useful in a world that offered people few means of distinguishing themselves. Similarly, advocating for someone as deserving could provide an implicit character reference, thus many writers, such as Mary P. of Palestine Street,

Belfast, writing on behalf of an elderly neighbour, stressed that 'this is a very deserving case'.[56] Similarly, Hettie G. of Norwood Tower, Strandtown, when seeking help for her brother-in-law, concluded: 'I beg of you to do what you can for young T[. . .]. He is very respectable'.[57] In March 1926, Father Patrick D., writing to Archbishop Byrne, noted of his parishioner: 'I have known James H[. . .] for many years and can certify that he is a thoroughly deserving person', concluding 'I know the family to be very deserving, though wretchedly poor'.[58] Deservingness was rarely explicitly defined and many, like Mrs S. K. of Conway Street, Belfast, laid much store by its simple assertion and repetition, she concluded her letter, 'I will trust in your kindness to me as I am a most deserving case … Wishing you, Dear Lady Mayoress, a Merry Xmas. From a deserving case'.[59] There is, of course, a power in language and simply insisting one was deserving was a way of indicating your engagement with that system of judgement: you understood and respected *because* you were respectable. A crucial part of this narrative was a demonstration of your understanding of the moral economy that confined you.

In this respect, writers often used narrative to establish moral deservingness; biography, or one's life story, was offered up as proof of innocence. Writing in 1932 from a new Dublin suburb, Edmund D. articulated the values that the middle classes had long sought to instil in the labouring poor. His anger remains crisp on the page as he outlined the impossibility of social mobility in the new Free State. He had 'lived in the slum of Dublin' for most of his married life, during which time 'God sent along five children', desperate to give his children a better chance in life, he had 'worked hard, struggled + saved + in the end … succeeded in getting a decent House + Building up a Catholic Christian Home'. Now, having been 'thrown out of employment', he was forced to take his children back to the slums and abandon his dreams of giving them a good education in a Christian Brothers School.[60] He wrote now because: 'I now feel disappointed + ashamed that I cannot keep them up to the Standard & give them the chance I intended'.[61] Thus, Edmund claimed entitlement to relief with a clear message: I aspire to respectability, I have done all that society expects of me, but society has let me down. However, he was able to move beyond a general claim to respectability by providing an incisive critique of what he regarded as a core hypocrisy of the new southern State: 'I must be denied the right to earn a living in such a callous manner and by people who call themselves Christian & hoist the Flags of Christianity during congress'.[62] Referring to the thirty-first Eucharistic Congress, hosted in Dublin between 21 and 26 June 1932, which was regarded by the Irish Free State as an opportunity to assert its Catholicity, he made a powerful moral point.[63]

While few were as eloquent as Edmund D., the same sense of having been let down by society, or the state, permeates many of the letters from both sides of the Irish border. In December 1932, Elizabeth G. told Belfast's Lady Mayoress that she had

> no support for myself husband & family but 15/- per week sick benefit due to one through my husband's illness. He is now discharged from sick benefit leaving me no support whatever coming into my home, I might have to wait a period of six or nine weeks before he would be eligible for benefit through labour exchange I have four children & am paying a weekly rent of 11/6 weekly I am now four weeks in arrears & expect to be summonsed & be put out of my home with my four children.[64]

These letters speak to the lengths men and women went to retain some dignity and provide for themselves and their families, but crucially, they also document that narrating their need, providing a coherent story of poverty, was an essential part of the process of proving entitlement *and* deservingness. Collectively, they articulate the weary frustration the 'system' induced. Even when people were informed and patient navigators of its procedures, gaps and contradictions, they seemed so often to find themselves on the wrong side of its capricious ways. Mrs L. M., of Malvern Street, in the Shankill Road area of Belfast, offered a standard example of this narrative:

> Dear Madam, Please pardon me for taking the liberty of writing to you as I am in very poor circumstances I would be ever so thankful to you if you could assist me in any way My husband is unemployed & getting no Bureau or Benefit of any kind I was working in the Mill myself until last Saturday when the mill closed down till further notice we had a very poor exmas. I might explain my Husband is signing every week for work but he is so long out that I have almost given up hope, he is an exservice man but has no pension & we cant get any assistance out of any of the funds & we did miss the exservicemens exmas parcel I will now be a few weeks without money putting in a claim for Bureau. If I get it or else the outdoor relief. there is my Husband & my little boy aged twelve & myself to be fed & clothed, but where is it coming from we are terribly badly off for Bedclothes etc please don't think I am imposing on you But it was my last resource as I am very badly off indeed.[65]

The very rhythm of Mrs L. M.'s appeal dramatises the energy and patience required to survive without work: her husband had no benefits, she lost her job at the mill, Christmas was bleak, her husband was out of work so long that there was no more benefit, no more ex-service man's Christmas parcel, no more food, no more bedclothes, the Bureau might oblige, outdoor relief might be an option, but then there was still food, clothing and bedding to worry about and back again to the beginning.

Mary P., writing on behalf of her elderly widowed neighbour, stated that 'This is a case of private starvation, out of this family there is none of her married sons able to do anything for their mother as they are not working'.[66] In April 1922, Mary K. opened her letter to Archbishop Byrne by stating that 'I am a poor woman with 5 little children age from 13 years to one year whos Husband is out of employment for a long time and we are on the verge of starvation'.[67] These frequent references to hunger and/or starvation served to emphasise both the moral entitlement of the supplicant to assistance, particularly where it concerned the need to feed children, *and* the extent and depth of their need. References to hunger are a reminder of the immediacy of the level of need in 1930s Ireland when life often meant malnutrition.[68] Doctors were beginning to provide evidence that this malnutrition was causing not just ill health and, what James Deeny, a doctor in County Armagh in 1930s Northern Ireland, referred to as 'a condition of sub-optimal health'.[69] Deeny had studied men and women like Mrs L. M. who depended on the linen industry for survival. He noted that the male wage, when it was available, was never enough requiring mothers to work at the mill to supplement the wage. This reality encouraged mills to pay women very low wages, regarding them as top ups to the breadwinner's income. Deeny also pointed out that male 'unemployment pay' was not 'sufficient to provide for their needs'.[70] Thus, Mrs L. M. was not just documenting unemployment and a lack of benefits, but the long-term consequences of insufficiency even when work, benefits, and ex-servicemen parcels were available. This meant there was no flesh on the bones of Mrs L. M.'s family's reserves, they came to unemployment

already undermined by an economic system that was structured to fail them. Starkly, Deeny divided women in the linen industry into two groups: 'Those who do not overcome poverty and so suffer from malnutrition; and those who do at the expense of their health'.[71]

Similarly, Steven King argues that clothing 'like death and starving children, represented a negotiating space in which economy, moral and customary obligation, legal rights and duties, and the deportment of the poor intermixed in the decision over eligibility'.[72] There is ample evidence from both Dublin and Belfast that a lack of clothing, bedding and footwear was a very real issue for many in Ireland. There were countless references to the dearth of clothing and bedding in charitable organisation reports throughout Ireland well into the 1950s. However, the want of these two basic ingredients of survival and respectability could simultaneously serve as rhetorical devices to demonstrate extreme want *and* to subtly remind the reader that feeding and clothing the naked was a moral responsibility, a divine command.[73] As Peter Jones contends, when supplicants stressed hunger and lack of clothing, 'they were clearly aware, not only of their wide cultural usage, but also of the moral weight they carried'.[74] Henry O'C's 1932 letter is a good example of this knowledge in action, writing from Elizabeth St., Belfast, he explained: 'I am a Disabled exserviceman with no Pension, and has a wife and eight small children to support, so I am Down and out and me and my children are Naked and with very little food'.[75] In this case, the shame evoked was not that of the supplicant but of the powers that be for whom he had fought and lost so much.

Nakedness was also a powerful symbol of how poverty stripped its victims both figuratively and literally. This was underscored by the fact that what clothing there was often formed a crucial part of the economy of poverty, surrendered on a weekly basis to the pawn. Thus, when writing to the Catholic archbishop, people repeatedly stressed how the need to surrender their clothing to the pawn meant they could not fulfil their religious duties. In 1932, Mr and Mrs C. succinctly explained how poverty prevented the practice of their faith: 'Being a Roman Catholic I must confess to you that I cannot go to mass on a Sunday owning *[owing]* to having no clothes the same applies to my wife, our only rags we have are in the pawn',[76] while in 1923, Frances L. explained how nakedness had prevented her from working and her child from receiving an education: 'In arrears of rent and I am unable to take up any position as I have not clothes to do so with neither can my little girl go to school as she is in a like position'.[77] She would have been keenly aware that the primary duty of a Catholic mother was to ensure her children were educated in the faith; thus, her appeal was also about being prevented from mothering as she should, while, Hugh G. of Inchicore, south Dublin, presented poverty as forcing him to choose between being a good husband or a good Catholic, explaining that he 'had even to come so low as to have to pawn my clothes to take my missus home from Hospital which leaves me unfit as a christian to attend Mass'.[78] It is clear too that the claims that one could not attend mass due to nakedness was also a negotiating position. Some were more subtle than others, but the fact that so many writers to the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin used this as an implied or explicit threat of religious defection, while it is largely absent from the Belfast writers to political leaders underscores its strategic import. In 1935, Mrs B. offered a less than subtle example of this kind of deployment of nakedness; however, as a mother of nine children, one can understand why exasperation and exhaustion sharpened her tone:

> It is hard to look at your own Children Half starved and naked and to know that in such distress Case that your own Religion could help. Well Rev. Fr what am I to do put them into schools for the sake of trying to pleas the people who by the word of God is placed in a position to help their Flock.[79]

'I am a soldiers wife': articulating entitlement

Narrating belonging and entitlement was closely related to ensuring one was seen as 'deserving'; the balance between assertion and supplication was a delicate and risky one for those in need. The politics of belonging were particularly heightened in both states on the island of Ireland during this period precisely because these legal entities were new and defined largely by who did and did not belong. It is little wonder then that those struggling on the economic margins felt compelled and anxious to assert their place in this new cosmos. In Belfast, supplicants to the Unionist Lord Mayor or the prime minister sought to demonstrate their entitlement to relief by stressing service to the king and country either in the First World War or in unionist resistance to Irish Home Rule. In November 1932, three small boys, Bobby, Tom, and Billie, in one of the number of letters sent by children to the Lord Mayor, wrote that their 'daddy is in the hospital over a year now and he only wants a pipe and some plug he was a soldier at the war'.[80] Older writers likewise declared their entitlement to relief with phrases such 'as an disabled ex-soldier who is at present down and out'; 'I have went through the South African War and the Great War and now I am on Out Door Relief'; 'I served in the 36th Ulster Division during the War and was awarded the Military Medal'.[81] In Dublin, meanwhile, writers to the archbishop let him know what good Catholics they were: 'I was a constant member of the Sodality of the Sacred Heart all during your Graces reign as head of same in Marlboro St.'; 'I was educated at the Catholic University Dublin by Catholic clergymen'; 'I am a young woman married with four children, your Grace was always my Confessor in Marlborough St Church'.[82] Of course, the different reference points in these letter collections had as much to do with location as audience: the letters from Belfast addressed the civic and political leaders of Unionism, while those in Dublin addressed the head of the largest and most powerful church in that state. In both cases, the writers employed the language of greatest relevance to their correspondent and wider society, transforming their requests into declarations of belonging and loyalty.

These narratives of poverty and of belonging were often sophisticated tales in which family history was interwoven with the political turbulence and the social instability of the period, albeit with very different emphasises in each state. In December 1932, Mary R. wrote to Lady McCullagh requesting assistance in maintaining her siblings. Both of her parents were deceased and, despite having a family of her own, Mary was determined to keep her siblings with her as she could not 'let them go to the workhouse'. Mary's trump card, her claim to political purchase in the conflicted landscape of early 1930s Belfast, was her familial ties to the conflict: 'My father', she concluded 'was all through the war and he was an Ulster Voulenteer [sic] Force please I am telling you the truth in everything for lies are not in my line'.[83] For Mary, and she presumably hoped for the 'grand lady', this required no fleshing out; her father had fought to secure the fate and faith of Ulster Unionism at the Front in World War and in the voluntary Unionist militia established to defeat Home Rule.[84] What kind of a community would see Mary's siblings interned in the

workhouse when their father had risked everything to secure its existence? Some questions did not need to be asked, they were implicit in the social contract. One hopes Mrs Mary R. believed that this contract had been honoured in the reply she received, which informed her that a copy of her letter had been sent to the Belfast Council of Social Welfare and to the Protestant Churches Relief Committee.[85]

The centrality of service in the Great War to contemporary British understandings of worthiness is underscored in Hettie G.'s letter of 14 December 1932. She wrote on behalf of her impoverished brother-in-law and her first (complex) sentence outlines her family's relationship with the war effort and the politics of entitlement:

> Please My Lady, I have a brother in law who is in a great need to clothes and as he is not an ex soldier he is not trying to get things he is only 25 so he was not the age to join up but my only brother is an ex soldier of course he is working but my brother in law has a wife & two children his name is Robert T. & he is in [receipt?] of 24/ outdoor relief 9/ of this has to go for rent & I help them what I can.[86]

In Hettie's assessment of the *realpolitik* of 1930s Northern Ireland, service in the Great War was a prerequisite not just in getting things, but in even 'trying to get things': her brother-in-law (who would have been approximately 11 years of age when the war ended) was not asking for anything above and beyond his paltry outdoor relief payment. However, Hettie could reassure the Mayoress that her brother had been in the right place at the right time and did have military service in his credentials and, thus, by proxy she hoped that her wider family's *bona fides* could be assumed. While she was painfully aware that the Mayoress's 'hands are full just at present trying to help the deserving poor', she was so distressed with worry. In conclusion, Hettie drew God and kin around the community that she and the Lady Mayoress shared hoping 'God will reward you for all your kindness. I knew an old cook you had once, Rose M., & she told me you were the kindest Lady she ever served'. There were social boundaries – Hettie was not explicitly questioning them – she only hoped the Mayoress might 'know some gentry who would take [her brother-in-law] on sometime'.[87]

Countless others noted that they or their husbands, brothers and fathers had been servicemen, although many lamented the absence of any kind of decent pension and how little the service had bought them in the post-war world.[88] Captain C. had many strings to his social bow being 'both orange and Freemason', but still he had 'only left the Hospital with Rheumatism and Pains through the War' and he was 'almost Starving a sick wife'.[89] Despite his service and consequent physical suffering, he was unable to keep a sick wife from hunger. Similarly, Mr Hugh B. lamented in 1932:

> Sir, as an ex-soldier having served in the late European War, as you can see by enclosed papers, I have been unemployed for the past 3 years and it has been a hard and very bitter struggle to live and at the same time to keep a wife and six children.[90]

While he was discharged from the British Army 'in a very weak state of health suffering from neurasthenia and shell', the small pension of 11/6d had himself, his wife and six children living in a small parlour, 'the rent of which is 10/- weekly so we have 1/6d left to try and eke out a miserable existence'. Unfortunately for Mr B, his case was forwarded to Soldiers & Sailors Families Association and Belfast Council of Social Welfare, the latter responding with a slim but devastating assessment:

> the character of this man is unsatisfactory and unworthy of assistance. He is well known to the British Legion and Relieving Officers of this town and everyone is unanimous in their opinion. I may say that he is also known to the NSPCC.[91]

A few things should be said about this précis of someone's life: the basis of his lack of worthiness was not elaborated upon, nor did there seem to be any requirement for evidence or even elucidation. It was on slight sentences such as these that the lives of those living on the financial margins often hung: character assassination could be a swift and efficient business. Nor was there any consideration of the impact of the war upon this man's mental state, of which the reference to the NSPCC [National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children] may very well have been a clue.[92] Even if it were not, families were often 'known' by the NSPCC by virtue of their poverty: 'neglect' manifesting itself as hunger and want. Mr Hugh B's case is also a reminder that while service in the Great War was many of these writers' strongest claim to belonging in this new northern state, it was not enough to compensate for failing the illusive 'worthiness' test.

Those who wrote to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin were less likely to frame their pleas in terms of military service because their letters addressed the head of their church *and* because service in the First World War was considerably more problematic in the Irish Free State.[93] Thus, while many men did refer to their record in various armies, the Great War was more likely to be mentioned in passing, for example, Mr Patrick J. H. writing in 1928 explained: 'I have Served in grate War and all so in Free state army as you can sea by my Paper'.[94] Similarly, dependents described their husband's or son's role in the war as part of their story of social descent: Mrs Frances L. framed her narrative in this way: 'I am a soldiers wife whose husband is present in Richmond Asylum also an invalid from consumption caused by gas poison contracted on active service during European war'.[95] Others lamented the choices they made in the heat of revolution, which cost them subsequent pension rights as Mr Peter C. explained to the archbishop:

> I deserted the British army to Serve the I.R.A. & National Army, and lost my War Gratuity Service Pay & Pension through same. As I served all Through the European War in France & Mesopotamia and I Cannot even Claim help from the British Legion, and I have only been able to obtain 9 days Work in the Post office Within the Past 12 Months.[96]

The Irish National Army was established upon the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 (often referred to as the Free State Army), provided employment for many, but undertook extensive demobilisation throughout 1924, reducing its numbers from 50,000 to 20,000; by 1932 it had under 6,000 men.[97] For Mr J. K. demobilisation had felt like abandonment by the new state; he explained to the archbishop: 'I am sorry to say that I was badly treated I was one of the First to open there [their] mess in Beggars Bush Barracks after all my faithful work during the troublesome times working day + night my compensation was discharge' and poverty.[98] Beggars Bush barracks had a special place in the new state's story as it was the first barracks the new army had taken control of from the British army in 1922. In mentioning this location, Mr J. K. was undoubtedly underscoring how his own life intertwined with that of this new state, a state that had now left him all but naked.

Conclusion

The partition of Ireland and the context within which the two new states were created represented a seismic political upheaval across the island; the aftershocks would continue to ripple out for decades. However, for ordinary men and women, many of whom had sacrificed much for the nascent state in which they now found themselves, the challenges of just getting by remained unchanged. As Fearghal McGarry has noted, political events often represent 'the backdrop to peoples' lives, whereas the forces which impact most on society transcend the dramatic conflicts and political ruptures with which historians are often preoccupied'.[99] Indeed, for many of those who now found themselves struggling on the margins, the reality may well have appeared to have fallen far short of the promise. Those who found themselves living in each of the new states were impacted, not by new systems of government or by trappings of statehood, but by ill health, the birth of yet another child, the death of a breadwinner, the loss of work. Regardless of which side of the border people found themselves on, or the political or religious gulf that apparently divided them, they were much more united in their experience of poverty, their struggles to survive, and in how they imagined and articulated their sense of where they were and what had brought them to that point. Through some of the letters that they have left behind, it is possible to trace the lived experience of these ordinary people, the pragmatic decision-making that shaped their everyday existence, the options and choices, however limited, they faced and made.

Poverty-stricken and often socially marginalised, the writers of these letters might well be considered utterly powerless; some of them certainly seem to have experienced denial and rejection at every turn. A close reading of these letters reveals that they were far from passive and exercised what John Arnold describes as 'a degree of agency constructed within these discourses'.[100] In the words they put to paper, these people actively performed and asserted their belonging, their deservingness and their entitlement to relief. These letters were fundamentally acts of storytelling in which the authors narrated their place in an essentially hierarchical society, in a bid to reshape that world just a fraction in their favour. These letters are also texts of identity assertion and formation in which the authors fashioned 'epistolary selves' worthy of assistance.[101] For many of these writers, it was the exigencies of poverty and need that required them to write directly to the sources of power and authority while striking a balance between conformity and protest, loyalty and threat, poverty and deservingness. The aim was often more than to secure assistance, essential as this was, many also wrote to assert (possibly reassure themselves of) their belonging. These letters do not just represent community but are also a process in and of themselves, in which community was redefined.[102] By considering these letters as forms of social practice which both document and define the experience of poverty in early years of both states on the island of Ireland, this article placed the ostensibly 'powerless' at the centre of the narrative.

Notes

1. The Government of Ireland Act (1920) partitioned Ireland, creating the Northern Irish state which constituted six of the nine counties of Ulster, the most north easterly province of Ireland.

2. Following the War of Independence/Anglo Irish War (1919–1921), the remaining 26 counties of the island gained dominion status creating the Irish Free State in 1922, the present-day Republic of Ireland.
3. Michelle Dillon, 'Cultural Differences in Abortion Discourse of the Catholic Church: Evidence from Four Countries', *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (Spring, 1996): 25–36, 27.
4. The first census of the Irish Free State recorded a population of 2,971,992 of which 2,751,269 was Roman Catholic. Northern Ireland's census was held on the same day in 1926 and recorded a total population of 1,256,561 of which 653,029 belonged to one of the main protestant faiths and 420,428 to the Roman Catholic church. See, Dept. of Industry and Commerce, *Soarstát Éireann, Census of Population, 1926, Volume III: Part 1 Religions* (Dublin, 1926), 1 and Table 27: Religious Professions, *Census 1926: Northern Ireland, General Report* (Belfast: HMSO, 1926), 57, respectively.
5. This is being addressed, although there remains little in terms of comparative work – see Erika Hanna and Richard Butler, 'Irish Urban History: An Agenda', *Urban History* 46, no. 1 (2019): 2–9; David Dickson, 'Town and City' in Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E. Daly, eds., *The Cambridge Social History of Modern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Georgina Laragy, Jonathan Jeffery Wright and Olwen Purdue, eds., *Urban Spaces in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018); David Dickson, *Dublin: The Making of a Capital City* (London: Profile Books, 2014); Sean J. Connolly, ed., *Belfast 400: People, Place and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), and Olwen Purdue, ed., *Belfast, the Emerging City: 1850–1914* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012).
6. Thomas J. Morrissey, *Edward J. Byrne 1872-1941: The Forgotten Archbishop of Dublin* (Dublin: Colomba, 2010).
7. Dublin Diocesan Archives, Archbishop Byrne Papers, AB7, Charity Cases boxes 1 to 7. While the collection is uncatalogued, by the author's count, there are 4,343 letters of which 1,747 (40.4 per cent) were written by women, 1,365 (31.5 percent) by men, and 15 (0.3 per cent) signed by a husband and wife. Almost a quarter of letters were written by priests in support or otherwise of request.

   In this article, first names of those who applied for charity have been fictionalised, the initials have been maintained and surnames have been reduced to initials. Addresses have been retained but identifiable features such as the house/flat number or house name have been removed.
8. Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), Belfast Corporation papers, Lord Mayor's correspondence 1931–34, LA/7/3; Papers of the Department of the Prime Minister, Prime Minister's correspondence, 2nd series, PM/2. The original forenames have been used, but surnames have been replaced by their initial letter.
9. See, Tim Hitchcock, 'A New History from Below', *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 294–298.
10. Martyn Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c. 1860–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 252–255.
11. Katherine Arens, 'Discourse Analysis as Critical Historiography: A Sémanalyse of Mystic Speech', *Rethinking History* 2, no. 1 (1998): 23–50, 45.
12. Thomas Sokoll, 'Negotiating a Living: Essex Pauper Letters from London, 1800–1834', *International Review of Social History* 45, Supplement 8 (2000): 19–46, 29.
13. Thomas Sokoll, *Essex Pauper Letters 1731–1837* (Oxford, 2006), 67–71.
14. Steven King, 'Negotiating the Law of Poor Relief in England, 1800–1840', *History* 96 (2011): 410–35, 410; Joanne Bailey, '"Think Wot a Mother Must Feel": Parenting in English Pauper Letters', *Family & Community History* 13 (2010): 5–19, 5.
15. Olwen Hufton, *The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750–1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
16. This sense is reflected in the two most recent essays on the foundations of both states. See, Anne Dolan, 'Politics, Economy and Society in the Irish Free State 1922–39', in Thomas Bartlett, ed., *The Cambridge History of Ireland: 1800 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 323–348. Susannah Riordan, 'Politics, Economy, Society: Northern Ireland, 1920–1939', in Bartlett (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, 296–322.

17. The Home Rule campaign, which emerged in the 1870s, sought a devolved parliament in Dublin. Irish Unionists wanted Ireland to remain fully within the United Kingdom with political representation at Westminster.
18. Linde Lunney, 'Armour, James Brown', in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds, *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a0212 [accessed 7 October 2020].
19. K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 205.
20. *Irish Times*, 6 December 1922, cited in Fearghal McGarry, 'Southern Ireland, 1922–32: A Free State?' in Alvin Jackson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Oxford, 2014), 647–669, 647.
21. 'Distress and Unemployment in Saorstát Generally', Department of an Taoiseach, S4278A, NAI.
22. Fred W. Powell, *The Politics of Irish Social Policy, 1600–1990* (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 166.
23. Mel Cousins, *The Birth of Welfare in Ireland, 1922–1952* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 31–32.
24. 'Memo on the Unemployment Position', S4278A.
25. Chapter 5: 'Housing', *Census of Population, General Report, Volume X, 1926*, 70.
26. 'Supplement of Irish Conference, April 1931', *Bulletin of the Society of St Vincent de Paul*, 96 (April 1931), 2.
27. The two main anti-partition parties, Sinn Féin and the Irish Nationalist Party, refused to take the six seats they won, while Labour did not contest the election. Only in 1926 did nationalist members begin to take their seats, but they would always remain a minority along with various independents.
28. Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992), 514.
29. Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800*, 206.
30. Frederic Miller, 'The British Unemployment Assistance Crisis of 1935', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, no. 2 (Apr. 1979): 331.
31. John Lynch, 'Labour and Society 1780–1945', in Liam Kennedy and Phillip Ollerenshaw, eds., *Ulster since 1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 208; Miller, 'The British Unemployment Assistance Crisis of 1935': 331.
32. Ibid.
33. *Belfast Newsletter*, 2 October 1932.
34. This was anomalous in both cases: in the rest of the Irish Free State the boards of guardians were replaced in 1925 by county boards of health and public assistance, while in the UK boards of guardians had been abolished under the Local Government Act of 1929 but remained operation in Northern Ireland.
35. Michael Heller, 'The National Insurance Acts 1911–1947', *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 1–28; For how this applied to Ireland, when first passed, see William Dudley Edwards, 'The National Insurance Act, 1911, (Part 1) as Applying to Ireland', *Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 12, no. 92 (1911–12): 569–582. It was not until the Unemployment Assistance Act of 1933 in the Free State and the Unemployment Act of 1934 in Northern Ireland that unemployment benefit was available to those who could prove they could not get work.
36. There were some attempts made to bridge this divide, for example, the Irish Unemployed Workers'Movement (est. 1932) attempted to organise across the border and were actively blocked by the authorities. For example, in 1933 a planned meeting in Belfast, which was to include members from Dublin, was banned by the Northern Irish Ministry of Home Affairs. See, 'The meeting banned', Strabane Chronicle, 14 October 1933.
37. Steve Hindle, 'Dependency, Shame and Belonging: Badging the Deserving Poor *c.* 1550–1750', *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004): 6–35, 10.

38. Margaret Anne Crowther, *The Workhouse System: The History of an English Social Institution* (London; Batsford Academic and Educational, 1981), 193–221; Anne Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth-Century England and Wales* (London: The Historical Association, 1982), 14–18; Dympna McLoughlin, 'Workhouses', in Angela Bourke *et al.*, eds, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing. Vol. V, Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2006), 722–726.
39. Niall Ó Ciosáin, 'Boccoughs and God's Poor: Deserving and Undeserving Poor in Irish Popular Culture', Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 93–99; Virginia Crossman, *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 3.
40. Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Letters of the Catholic Poor: Poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 27–32.
41. William P. M. X Summerhill, Dublin to Archbishop Byrne, 10 March 1922. Charity Cases, Box 1: 1922–1926.
42. Founded in 1921, the Legion of Mary was a lay Catholic organisation which, among other activities, ran several hostels. The Morning Star Hostel opened in 1927. See, Finola Kennedy, *Frank Duff: A Life Story* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 86–99.
43. Michael K., 'Morning Star' Hostel, North Brunswick St., Dublin to Archbishop Byrne, 27 September 1932. Charity Cases, Box 3: 1929–32.
44. Ibid.
45. The Salvation Army, a Protestant organisation, came to Dublin city in 1888. Joseph V O'Brien *Dear, Dirty Dublin: A City in Distress, 1899–1916* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), p. 168.
46. Richmond District Lunatic Asylum (Hospital) was opened in 1815 in Grangegorman, North Dublin, and has operated continuously as a facility for mental health care.
47. Frances L. X Lennox St., Dublin to Archbishop Byrne, 12 February 1923. Charity Cases Box 1: 1921–1926.
48. St Catherine's Hospital on Pigeon House Road, Dublin, often referred to as Pigeon House Sanatorium opened in 1907 to treat people with tuberculosis. See, O'Brien, *Dear, Dirty Dublin*, 113–114.
49. Mrs M. to Archbishop Byrne, n.d. Charity Cases Box 3: 1929–32.
50. James McC. to Lady McCullagh, 8 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
51. Robert B. to Lady McCullagh, 6 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
52. Han Zhao, 'Holy shame shall warm my heart': Shame and Protestant Emotions in Early Modern Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 18: 1 (2021), 1–21.
53. Annie D. to Archbishop Byrne, 17 December 1923. Charity Cases Box 1: 1921–1926.
54. John Murphy, 'Suffering, Vice and Justice: Religious Imaginaries and Welfare Agencies in Postwar Melbourne', *Journal of Religious History* 31 (2007): 287–304.
55. Peter Mandler, 'Poverty and Charity: An Introduction', in Peter Mandler, ed., *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 15.
56. Mary P. to Lady McCullagh, 21 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
57. Hettie G. to Lady McCullagh, 14 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
58. Fr. Patrick Dargan, Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, Dublin, 22 March 1926. Charity Cases, Box 1: 1922–1926.
59. S.K. to Lady McCullagh, 20 November 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
60. The Christian Brothers were the main educators in Ireland of poor boys since the early nineteenth century.
61. Mr Edmund D., X Oak Rd., Donnycarney, to Archbishop Byrne, 9 October 1932. Charity Cases Box 4: 1932–1935.

62. Ibid.
63. The Irish Free State hosted the thirty-first Eucharistic Congress between 21–26 June 1932 and regarded it as an opportunity to assert its Catholicity. See, *Handbook of the Eucharistic Congress: International Congress* (Dublin, 1932); Rory O'Dwyer, *The Eucharistic Congress Dublin 1932* (Dublin: THP Ireland, c. 2009).
64. Elizabeth G. to Lady McCullagh, 29 Dec.1932, Belfast Corporation files, PRONI, LA/7/3A/6.
65. Mrs L.M., Malvern St.,Belfast, to Lady McCullagh, n.d. *c.* 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
66. Mary P. to Lady McCullagh, 21 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
67. Mary K., X North Great Charles St, [Dublin city] to Archbishop Byrne, 27 April 1922. Charity Cases, Box 1: 1922–1926.
68. In 1938, one doctor referred to it as a national problem. W. R. Fearon, 'The National Problem of Nutrition', *Studies* 27, no. 105 (Mar. 1938): 12–23.
69. James Deeny, 'Poverty as a Cause of Ill-Health', *Journal the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland* 16, no. 3 (1939–40): 75–89, 75.
70. Ibid. 89, 84.
71. Ibid., 84.
72. Steven King, '"I Fear You Will Think Me Too Presumptuous in My Demands but Necessity has No Law": Clothing in English Pauper Letters, 1800–1834.' *International Review of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2009): 207–236, 235.
73. Gospel of Matthew, ch. 25, vv. 35–45.
74. Peter Jones, '"I Cannot Keep My Place Without Being Deascent": Pauper Letters, Parish Clothing and Pragmatism in the South of England, 1750–1830', *Rural History*, 20 (2009): 31–49, 41.
75. Henry O'C. to Lady McCullagh, 19 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6.
76. Joseph C. & Wife, X Shamrock Cottages, North Strand (northside of Dublin), 14 December 1938. Charity Cases Box 7: May 1937-December 1939.
77. Frances L., 12 February 1923.
78. Hugh G. , X Keogh Square, Dublin, n.d., Charity Cases Box 3: 1929–32.
79. Mrs J. B., X Ferns Rd., Kimmage, Dublin, 6 December 1935. Charity Cases Box 5: 1933–1935.
80. Bobby, Tom and Billie to Sir Crawford McCullagh, Nov. 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files, LG/7/3a/6.
81. No name to Sir Crawford McCullagh, 18 November 1932; Watterson to Lady McCullagh, 21 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/6; John W. to Lord Craigavon, 21 December 1932, Cabinet papers, PRONI, Prime Minister's letters, PM/2/3/100/2; James McC. to Lady McCullagh, 8 December 1933, PRONI, Belfast Corporation files, LA/7/3A/10.
82. William P.M. to Byrne, 10 March 1922; Mrs K., X Upper Sherrard St Off Gardiner St Dublin to Byrne, 25 January 1922; Frances L. to Byrne, 12 February 1923.
83. Mrs Mary R., 146 Silvio Street, to Lady McCullagh, Dec. 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files, LA/7/3A/6.
84. The Ulster Volunteer Force was established in 1913 to defend Ulster and the Union from any attempts by the British government to impose a Home Rule government.
85. John McKinstry to Mrs Mary R., 14 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files, LA/7/3A/6.
86. Hettie G., The Farmyard, Norwood Tower, Strandtown, to Lady McCullagh, 14 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files, LA/7/3A/6.
87. Ibid.
88. See, for example, letters from Mrs L M., Malvern St, Belfast, n.d.; Mrs S K., 96 Conway St, Belfast, 20 November 1932; Private J. B., 57 Charles St South, Belfast, 6 December 1932; Joseph B., 39 Tobergill St, Belfast, 16 December 1932.

89. from 34 Girdlers Road, Brook Green, London, 18 November 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files LA/7/3A/6
90. 12 Dec.1932, from 81 Gt St Georges St., PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files LA/7/3A/6.
91. Belfast Council of Social Welfare to John McKinstry, 21 December 1932, PRONI, Belfast Corporation Files LA/7/3A/6.
92. NSPCC was established in Ireland 1889. See Sarah-Anne Buckley, "The NSPCC in Ireland, 1889-1939 – A Case Study, *Saothar* 33 (2008): 59–70.
93. The Catholic church had formed part of the opposition to the war effort. See, Jerome Aan de Wiel, 'Archbishop Walsh and Monsignor Curran's Opposition to the British War Effort in Dublin, 1914–1918', *Irish Sword* 22 (2000): 193–204; John Horne, ed., *Our War: Ireland and the Great War* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2008).
94. Patrick H., X Mary's Terrace, Off Mountjoy St., [Dublin city] to Archbishop Byrne, 4 June 1928. Charity Cases Box 6: July 1935 – May 1937.
95. She received £2. Frances L., 12 February 1923.
96. Peter received 10/-. Peter C., X Gardiner Street, [Dublin] to Archbishop Byrne, 5 March 1928. DDA, Byrne papers, Charity cases Box 2: 1926–1929. Serving in various forces, as Peter did, was not unusual in Ireland.
97. Sean J. Connolly, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29.
98. Mr J. K., X Lower Mount Street, Dublin to Archbishop Byrne, 29 October 1924. Charity Cases, Box 1: 1922–1926.
99. McGarry, 'Southern Ireland, 1922–1932', 664.
100. John H. Arnold, 'The Historian as Inquisitor: The Ethics of Interrogating Subaltern Voices', *Rethinking History* 2, no. 3 (1998): 379–386, 385.
101. Rachel Earle, 'Introduction: letters, writers and the historian', in R. Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers,1600–1945* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 1999), 1–12.
102. Arens, 'Discourse Analysis as Critical Historiography', 27.

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