

Thomas Constable and the Irish in Otley

Background

Otley in late 1840s was a town of thatched cottages, cobbled streets, cattle drovers; covered wagons and evil smelling tanning yards; It was a small market/ industrial town with worsted mills; tanneries; malt kilns; a paper mill and a corn mill with people also working on the land or in small trades. In the 1841 Census the population was 3,400.

In that population were people of Irish background – a little over 2%. Three families from Ireland Conley (Connolly) family at 19 Gay Lane; the Laughey family at 3 Union St , and John and Jane Hughes at 57 Gay lane stand out in terms of continuity. One of the heads of household, Patrick Conley (Connolly), a baker who lived in Gay Lane. His wife Mary and his eldest son James were born in Ireland. James was 13 in 1851. John another son was 11 in 1851 but born in Otley so presumably the Connolly family moved to Otley sometime in 1839. We know Patrick was from Mayo in Ireland but there is no information on what part of Ireland the other Irish people in the town came from.

Also living in the town was Thomas Constable and Englishman and Catholic. He was born on 16th June 1805 at Allerthorpe near Pocklington, the son of Charles Constable Stanley by his second wife Mary McDonald. Thomas ' great great grandmother was a Constable and she married a William Haggerston but because of the benefits resulting from inheritance and matrimonial arrangements in Thomas' father's generation and earlier his uncle Marmaduke's surname was Constable Maxwell; his uncle William's was Middelton and his father's was Stanley. Amazing that the Constable surname survived!! The different branches of the family were recusants (a term denoting those who refused to attend services of the Church of England and thereby committed a statutory offence). An ancestor of Thomas Constable Sir Robert Constable was a leader in the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 which was an attempt to stem to the tide of the Reformation. He was arrested ,tried for treason and hung at Hull in 1538. The family suffered fines before, during and after the Civil War. Philip Constable Thomas' three greats grandfather was imprisoned in 1678, suspected of involvement in Popish plots that Titus Oakes said existed were in fact fictions. Even so after release Philip fled to the Continent with his father Marmaduke. Philip fled again after 1688 but returned to a life involving no public activity. The family managed however to keep their

land holdings and as a result of those matrimonial arrangements became large landowners in Yorkshire with holdings also in Lincolnshire and Scotland. William Middelton Thomas' uncle owned Myddleton Lodge above Ilkley and large amounts of land in and around that area.

Thomas had been educated at Ushaw College Durham and afterwards articled to a firm of Stockton solicitors. No great land holding for him!!! At the age of 28 in 1833 he came to reside in Otley where he took over the legal practice of a Mr Smith. He bought the Manor House in 1836. Constable by the late 1840s was established in the local community. He was estate agent for the Fawkes family at Farnley Hall; for the Darwin family of what is now Creskeld Hall in Bramhope as well as undertaking work for Crompton Standsfield MP of Esholt Hall; his relatives the Middeltons in Ilkley and the Maxwells in Dumfries. As a Catholic like the Middeltons, Thomas reportedly travelled on a Sunday to Myddleton Lodge to join his relatives for mass as there was no Catholic Church in Otley.

The Catholic community however in Otley was evidently increasing by the mid-1840s because on 28th July 1845 Thomas Constable had written to Bishop Briggs about '*building a chapel for the benefit of souls in the vicinity*'. He outlined his intention not to start building before the spring of 1846 but when he did so he intended to build it with decent simplicity in the Gothic style and endow it in a moderate way. The building did indeed commence and the Chapel of Our Lady and All Saints, next to the Manor House opened on 24th June 1851.

Between that letter of July 1845 and June 1851 events occurred which changed the population of Otley. In August 1845 a European wide potato blight caused by an attack of '*Phytophthora infestans*' played havoc with potato crops across Belgium, France and other countries. While the crisis produced excess mortality and suffering across Europe, particularly harshly affected were the Scottish Highlands and Ireland. Many people starved due to lack of access to other staple food sources and the failure of the authorities to intervene effectively. The situation in Ireland was particularly bad because the combined impact of the blight and the failure to sow the crop led to the yield being lower by three quarters in 1846 and 1847, with the blight returning in 1848 followed by failure in 1849

People who could were leaving from every port in Ireland after 1846 - some one quarter of a million Irish men, women and children left Ireland and this was to continue at that level and sometimes higher for the next four years.

Liverpool was one of the main ports of reception. Franks Neal in his study of *'Lancashire ,The Irish Famine and the Poor Law'* notes that in 1846 18,987 people were helped by private charities which were a prop to survival. In general Irish people had no settlement rights in England which meant they were ineligible for Poor Law relief. However an 1837 regulation required food and a night's shelter to be given to any destitute person in case of "sudden or urgent necessity " in return for them performing a task of work. There was some obligation on Poor Law Unions to give emergency relief. During 1847, Liverpool to stave off starvation amongst people arriving, introduced a coloured ticket system for obtaining food or relief. The Liverpool Guardians appealed to the Government for help to help pay for this but were refused. The costs were to be borne locally. As a measure of desperation the Guardians then asked the Government to stop the Irish coming across from Ireland. However under the Act of Union of 1800 Ireland was a part of Britain ruled from Westminster. Labour and capital was free to move wherever it wished. The Guardians therefore resorted to the Law of Removal. The 1847 the Poor Law Administration Act made it easier for them to do this as they no longer had to serve a summons. The increase in the use of removal orders had the effect of discouraging applications for relief and encouraged many to move inland.

Thousands of Irish set out inland from Liverpool to search for work, to find family or seek relief in a less harsh environment than Liverpool, often walking very long distances. Neal notes that central to their survival was the use of vagrant sheds, rudimentary short term accommodation provided by Poor Law Unions. Those making their way to Yorkshire would set out and aim to reach Prescott, as a convenient first night stop. Here they could claim relief and obtain shelter. In 1847 up to 9,000 Irish were 'relieved' at the Prescott vagrant shed. From there the next stop would be the Warrington vagrant shed and then on to Manchester up the A57. Presumably from then onwards they used packhorse routes as Turnpike roads charged.

Many Irish people at this time came to Bradford and Leeds. In Bradford over 9,000 were Irish born in 1851 some 9% of the population and in Leeds nearly 5% of the population were Irish born in the 1851 Census (over 8,500 Irish born).

Otley's Irish born population was small in comparison. By 1851 the Irish born population in Otley had reached 553 nearly 12% of an overall population something in the region of 4,750 in contrast to the 2% Irish born in 1841

In most migrations 'chain migration' is important. This involves moving to a place because their family or friends are there. Word of mouth or knowledge of their location is the key to the 'chain'. People try to go to family or friends. It is likely that that chain migration could well have been a factor in the movement to Otley as there were already Irish families in the town like the Laughey's; the Hughes's; and the Connelly's

What sources of evidence do we have about the arrival and settlement of Irish in the town after the Famine?

The main source aside from oral history is the evidence from the 1851 Census.

HANDOUT 1 : ARRIVAL DATES

Analysis of 1851 census by the date and place of children's birth shows that families could have arrived at different times after 1845.

In the 1851 Census there were six families who had children born in Ireland aged six; seven families who had children born in Ireland aged 5; eight families who had children born in Ireland aged 4; two families with children born in Ireland aged 3; five families with children born in Ireland aged 2. There are also the families who had children born in England/ Otley like the Longs and Joyce families who had children of four years old respectively or the Brogan; McClean; McKale and Ball families who had 3 year olds in 1851. So they could have been coming to Otley some time before 1847 and 1848 respectively.

What is noticeable is the fact that preponderance of similar family names in the Census and how often families are living with each other or near each other. Some Brennans could have been here before 1845 as could the Gyntys based on the analysis of children's date of birth in Ireland but certainly from

the evidence of dates of births of children the Burns; Brogan; Brennan; Campan; Dacey; Flinn; Grady; Gilling; Gynty; Joyce; Lofthouse; Lavell; Mc Ginnas; Murphy families came after 1845 and before the 1851 Census.

Where did they live?

In the town's oral history those fleeing the famine and evictions in Ireland first settled on 'Irish fields'. When I first arrived in Otley in 1984 this was the place people always mentioned when discussing the topic of the Irish in local history. But where actually were the fields?

A number of suggestions have been made over the years and a wide range of views have been offered regarding the actual site of 'Irish Fields'.

The general consensus is that that were located to the east of Otley in the area between East Busk Lane and Albion Street in the area of the 'Cambridges', but then known as 'Gooselands'. Possible options for location can be considered if the tithe map of 1845 in the Otley Museum and Archive and material from the Leeds Online Tithe Map Project are cross-referenced to the 1851 Ordnance Survey Map of Otley. Paul Wood former Keeper of Otley Museum very helpfully has given me information on key people who owned some of the fields.

HANDOUT 2: FIELDS SHEET

Township	Parish	Plot	Landowner(s)	Occupier(s)	Plot Name	Land Use	Acres	Roods	Perches	
Otley	Otley	242	William Busfield	John Atkinson	Bradleys	Arable	5	3	31	Map

William Busfield M.P owned field 242 (Bradleys) also known locally as 'the Heart Shaped Field'. Could he have allowed John Atkinson to let it be used by the homeless Irish? Is there any evidence from Hansard or any other sources that would indicate his attitudes to the plight of the Irish who came to Otley and make such a development likely?

Township	Parish	Plot	Landowner(s)	Occupier(s)	Plot Name	Land Use	Acres	Roods	Perches	
Otley	Otley	218	Oliver Ray	Richard Hodgson	Long & Little Rammers Ings	Grass	2	2	13	Map
Otley	Otley	233	Oliver Ray	Richard Hodgson	Bulmar Carrs	Grass	3	3	31	Map

Otley	Otley	232	Oliver Ray	Richard Hodgson	Helm Close, Middle Ing & Knapton Close, now in one	Grass	12	2	24	Map
Otley	Otley	243	Oliver Ray	Richard Hodgson	Low Ing	Grass	5	1	7	Map

In 1845 fields 218,233 232 and 243 were owned by Ann Ray of Grove House, Edmonton in Middlesex and Robert Edmond Oliver, Captain of Her Majesty's Regiment of Royal Horse Guards Blue. Ann Ray was the niece of Henry Barker, who was the son of Edmund Barker, the Steward of the Archbishop of York in Otley in the 17th century. She inherited the land in 1808. Mrs Ray was the widow of Robert Ray, a successful barrister in London, and at one time they lived at Montagu Place, Russell Square. Henry Belward Ray, their son, inherited the land when Ann died. According to the 1845 tithe map these fields were leased to Richard Hodgson and were listed as grass. Looking in more detail though they seemed to be marked as being very boggy.

Township	Parish	Plot	Landowner(s)	Occupier(s)	Plot Name	Land Use	Acres	Roods	Perches	
Otley	Otley	226	Christopher Jackson	William Daphny	Melshaw Field	Arable & Grass	2	2	16	Map

In Otley in the mid-1840s coal was distributed to the Otley poor by Christopher Jackson¹ a grocer and tobacco dealer. He owned field 226. Could his work with the poor have extended to give shelter to the homeless Irish? Is field 226 (Melshaw Field) a possibility?

Township	Parish	Plot	Landowner(s)	Occupier(s)	Plot Name	Land Use	Acres	Roods	Perches	
Otley	Otley	206	Miss Rhodes	John Robinson	Little Side Cops	Grass	3	0	0	Map
Otley	Otley	227	Miss Rhodes	Robert Lawson	Bulman Carr		1	2	21	Map
Otley	Otley	228	Miss Rhodes	Robert Lawson	Melshaw Field	Grass	1	0	28	Map

In 1845 a Miss Rhodes² owned fields 206 (Little Side Cops); 227 (Bulman Carr); and 228 (Melshaw Field). Is she a relative of Frederick Rhodes who in the

¹ Information provided by Paul Wood

² Information provided by Paul Wood

1860s under his will set up a charity as 'a dole for the Roman Catholics of Otley'? The charity had Thomas Constable as one of its Trustees. If so could she in the 1840s have pre-empted later charity work undertaken by the Rhodes Charity by helping homeless Irish find a place to stay in the late 1840s? So options and possibilities.

HANDOUT 3 : DATES OF DEATH

When Mary Morgan and the late Ruth Pickles researched the Parish records in preparation for the 150th celebration of the Our Lady and All Saints they applied for a number of death certificates for some of the people listed as Irish in the records. Admittedly it was a small sample of the fifty two people from Ireland who died in Otley between 1846 and 1854 but striking nevertheless.

Certificates for:

- Patrick Best 9th May 1847 – 3yrs inflammation of chest
- Catharine Quin- 30th May 1847 -7yrs Typhus Fever
- John McQuin –2nd July 1847-9 yrs natural death small pox
- William Lavel – 24th May 1847 -51 yrs typhus fever

had no address or location of place where they died noted on their death certificates. Could have died on Irish fields in 1847?

Whereas the certificate for Ann Mitchell did:

- Ann Mitchell -14th June 1847 –Gay Lane – aged 54 years asthma

In 1847 Joshua Hart the Vicar of Otley Joshua Hart wrote as follows' *A great famine in Ireland in 1845, England, especially Otley was inundated by poor starving Irish and a great number of children died*'.

Certainly according to information from the Otley Parish Register 1847 was a particularly bad year for deaths in Otley. Perhaps there a typhus epidemic as

was the case in Leeds in 1847. More work needs to be done to check that out but there was a big increase compared to the two previous years - 128 in 1847 as against 84 in 1846 and 78 deaths were recorded for 1845 .

In 1847 the Irish born deaths only related to 21% of total deaths in the town but whereas for those listed as '*from Otley*' only 38% were children: for those listed '*from Ireland*' the proportion of children who died was 85%.

Of the 18 family names on the 1847 list of deaths only eight of the family names are in the 1851 Census records: – Brogan, Connell, Gorman, Jordan, Lavel, McClean, McDonald; McHale or McKale (?) . So sad to have managed to escape a famine and still to suffer loss.

There has always been discussion of the role Thomas Constable had in helping the Irish who came to Otley. Certainly his family had a history of support of Irish people in need. The enumerator of the 1841 census John Kendall noted that there were in Middelton township seventeen Irish people who had slept in barns, sheds, tents or in the open air and '*that a great number of Irish usually attend Myddleton Lodge on a Sunday to receive alms from Mr Middelton*'. This would have been important for the destitute Irish because as mentioned earlier under Poor Law regulations Irish people had no right to relief in the England. Only in 1846 did the Poor Law Removal Act make it possible for anyone including the Irish who had been living in a parish for **five years** as a non 'settled' person to avoid removal if they claimed relief.

Did Thomas Constable pay the fares of 100 Irish families to come to Otley from Ireland? Certainly in the booklet '*The story of a Parish:150 Years of Praise*' published to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the parish of Our Lady and All Saints a statement to that effect is made. It seems to take further a comment made by Frederick Morrell writing in the 1960s about Irish migration to Otley who talks of them being 'brought to Otley' but unfortunately in both cases there are no sources to substantiate the claim. Perhaps evidence will emerge but to date none has.

In the oral history it was said that Thomas Constable took people who were ill into his house and that he had them nursed. Confirmation that this might have happened comes from a source in the Otley Museum and Archive collection.

HANDOUT 4: DEATH CERTIFICATE and DAWSON RECEIPT

An entry in the account book of William Dawson's shows that Thomas Constable paid for a deal coffin for a Catharine Quin referred **to above** at a cost of 8s6d on 31 May 1847. The record states *'The coffin being taken from a shed on Mr Constable's estate for burial as a pauper in Otley parish churchyard'*.

Amongst the group of parishioners who were in their late eighties when I meet them in 1984 there was no doubt that Constable had helped the Irish who had come to Otley. They felt that people wouldn't have been able to stay on Irish Fields without his support and influence with whoever leased or owned the fields. They quoted stories their parents had told them of kindness in assisting people who were ill; of finding people work and in supporting those out of work. Certainly there is concrete evidence of his support for education. Thomas Constable and his sister Mary were responsible for funding the building of St Joseph's school in Otley. Thomas Constable purchased the land in Crow Lane and had a two classroom school built on it which opened in 1861. In 1870 his sister Mary paid for an extension on the same site.

Their support and help would have important as it wouldn't have come from official sources. As I said earlier unless the Irish after 1846 had lived in a locality for 5 years they had no rights to benefits in that locality and in a worst case scenario those claiming could liable to be returned to Ireland. Many parishes sought to limit their financial responsibilities for any people who weren't from their locality and sought removal to another parish.

HANDOUT 5: JOHN McQUIN REPORT

The Leeds Mercury gives has examples of people removed as a result. One such removal in the Leeds Mercury on 10th July 1847 had local and regional and possibly national coverage. It concerned John Mc Quin who died in Otley on July 1847 from small pox. What sad reading. John Mc Quin is one of the names on the plaque on the wall of the Catholic Church.

So where did the Irish who came to Otley come from?

One of our parishioners Eric Connolly who died a few years ago was the great grandson Patrick Connolly who was the baker listed in the 1841 Census .Eric

therefore could show a direct link to a family that came to Otley from Ireland before the Great Famine.

We know from Eric's research that his ancestor came from Mayo. It is difficult to know how many people arriving in Otley between 1845 and 1851 came from Mayo. One of the difficulties with Census records is that 'Ireland' is often only given in answer to the question 'where *born country or town*' without any further detail on what part. In the 1851 Census for Otley there are nine people living at 126 Boroughgate and 136 Cross Green respectively that have a Mayo listing. These are members of the Burk family. Eighteen people are listed as coming from Sligo- members either of the Narry, Crolin or Carolin, Handley or Grady families. The Crolin or Carolins lived at 124 and 125 Boroughgate respectively; the Handleys at 127 Boroughgate and Gradys at 137 Cross Green. It is interesting to see the proximity of addresses in Boroughgate and Cross Green. There are a number of other more detailed listings of place - Mary Miles a widow with her two children John and Michael living at 11 Cross Green were from Co Carlow; Mary Gardner living at 98 Boroughgate was from Dublin as was Mary Ann Marshall whose father is listed as a Chelsea Pensioner. Mary Ann's son John was 8 in 1851 so she was in Otley before the famine of 1845.

Famine had not been the only problem people faced in Ireland. Evictions of tenants who couldn't pay their rents because of lack of work or inability to work was another. Mayo was focus of some of worst evictions in 1846/47. Lord Lucan who owned 60,570 acres of Mayo ordered his agents to evict 10,000 people in neighbourhood of Ballinrobe ; his men were called 'crow bar brigades' and village after village was blotted out. William Forster who along with William Fison owned Greenholme Mill at Burley in Wharfedale tried set up relief in Castlebar in Mayo in 1847 and noted severe suffering.

We know from the evidence of the migration of Irish people to Otley over later generations and from families in the area that there were strong links to Mayo centred on Kiltimagh from such places as Balla, Bohola, Kilkelly, Knock, Ballyhaunis and Claremorris.

Some within the Irish heritage community in Otley have suggested that it is possible to establish a link to Mayo through the incidence of the same names

in the 1851 Census in Otley with names on list of tenants evicted from the estate of Lord Lucan on the town lands of Upper and Lower Treenaglaragh. The names Jennings; Gallagher and Walsh occur in both. It is certainly interesting to note that the Walsh and the Jennings families in Otley shared accommodation at 39 Westgate Much more needs to be investigated and linked to any records that are still available in Ireland.

So what does the 1851 Census have to tell us about the demography of the Irish born community in the Otley?

There is no mention of such an Irish Fields location in the 1851 Census By then people were living in Westgate, Boroughgate, Cross Green, Sugar Street, Nelson Street, Gay Lane and Crow Lane.

553 names are listed on the 1851 Census as being born in Ireland of whom 49% were female. A majority of the female population (59%) were aged 24 or under compared to 48% of males.

50% of women over 14 had no work outside the home but of women aged over 50 over 30% were lodging housekeepers or washerwoman – the majority of them were widows. The oldest woman was Ann Long aged 78. She was living at 62 Gay Lane with her son in law Richard Mullan, a grocer and his family. Ann's son Thomas was living with his wife Martha and two children both born in Otley after 1845, Jane and John, at 12 Gay Lane. Thomas was a hawker draper.

Nearly 60% of men aged 14-50 were labourers or agricultural workers. Others were involved in a wide variety of occupations including as a baker, a tailor, a plasterer, a mechanic, a lawyer, a civil ordnance surveyor, a teacher of mathematics or boot makers and paper mill workers. The oldest man listed as working was Daniel Kelly aged 71 living at 123 Cambridge a road man labourer.

Nearly 90% of boys and over 70% of girls aged 9-13 worked in worsted mills as did 35 % of women aged 14-50. Over 25% men worked in the worsted wool /trade amongst the latter a number were woolcombers

Evidence from the wage book for William Ackroyd's Worsted Spinners Otley held at the Special Collection at the Brotherton Library cross references to families listed on the 1851 Census who were listed as working in worsted mills:

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- Brennan; Burke; Caine; Clarke; Duffy; Durkin; Dyer; Galligher; Hughes; Joyce; Kenny; Laughey; McConnell; Plunkett; Robinson; Rooney; Walsh; more research needed

Analysis of the 1851 Census shows the often close relationship between families from marriage; the Longs in Gay Lane linked to the Mullans also in Gay Lane; also there were a number of different family groups with the same family name such as Brogan; Brennan; Burke; Clark; Dacey; Gynty; Hughes; Joyce; Kenny; Lofthouse and Walsh often living in the same street;

Some people appeared not to be part of a family group like Rose Ann Lynch who it turned out was from Longford in Ireland and was working as servant in the household of Frances Hawksworth Fawkes whose wife Elizabeth Ann Fawkes nee Butler came from Kilkenny Ireland. Frances Hawksworth Fawkes was the only child of the Hon and Rev Pierce Butler and Maria Sophia nee Vernon and a niece of the Earl of Carrick.

So a diverse group in terms of background, age and occupation. The people who came in the 1840s settled down and made their lives here. Some moved away but a lot stayed. They became part of the history of Otley.

Thomas Constable died in 1891 and his sister Mary in 1870. Memories of them as I have said lived on. They were seen as people who didn't stand aside when others were in need. For me the most exciting piece of confirmatory written evidence of Thomas' active involvement with people from Ireland who came out of a terrible situation was his payment of a coffin for Catherine Quin who was taken from his shed a day after her death was registered in May 1847. This was evidence of someone closely involved with the trials and tribulations

of people forced out of their homes by combinations of famine, evictions and government inaction. Who are our Thomas Constables today?

The story of Thomas Constable and the story of the Irish who came to Otley were memorialised in a play 'The Hard Road' written by Lis Gustafson performed in June 2001 by members of the OLAS parish and wider town to commemorate 150 years since the Church was built. At the same time a memorial plaque listing the names of 53 people who came from Ireland at the time of Famine and who died in Otley during those famine years was put on the south wall of the Church and a memorial stone was placed in the Otley Parish Church yard where they were buried. In 2011 links were made with historians at the Jackie Clarke Collection in Ballina in Mayo which resulted in the publication of '*Memorial to the Irish in Otley, Yorkshire, England*'. If anyone wants to look at a copy copies are available.

There is still more to find out but I hope what you have heard has been of interest. Peter Wilkinson who is with us tonight has DVD copies of 'the Hard Road' production and if you would like to purchase one money received will go to the Thomas Constable statue fund.

Script of talk delivered by Chris Power MBE at the Manor House, Walkergate, Otley on 10th March 2016