

# ‘Saver of the children’: the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in Ireland, 1889–1921

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The Society differs in its aim from all other Societies seeking the welfare of unhappy children, in that, whilst others seek to house and provide for the wanderer, homeless, destitute, it seeks to punish those worthless parents who make children wanderers, homeless and destitute, and to render other provision than their own home less necessary.<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation, taken from the first report of what was to become the first branch of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the Dublin Aid Committee, is an apt illustration of the Society’s focus in its early years. Parental responsibility, the vulnerability of children, derogatory and punitive language – these themes marked the early years as parents became the focus of the NSPCC and the State. This essay will look at the period from 1889 to 1921 in particular, to assess the early years of the Society, from its alumni and supporters to the number of branches opened. This examination will extend to an analysis of child neglect cases, the sentencing of mothers to inebriate reformatories and the transferral of children to industrial schools. Throughout, the importance of class and gender in cases will be addressed, as will the impact of the Society on the children it was protecting.

## THE SOCIETY’S BEGINNINGS IN IRELAND

The Dublin Aid Committee, the first branch of the NSPCC in Ireland, was elected at a meeting in the lecture theatre of the Royal Dublin Society on 12 June 1889. In September, it began its work in Dublin and in 1890 became known formally as the NSPCC. Therefore, while the Dublin committee did not hold the title NSPCC until 1890, it was the same organization renamed. Following the opening of branches in Cork and Belfast in 1891,<sup>2</sup> Waterford in 1893, Derry in 1896, Kilkenny and Carlow

<sup>1</sup> Annual Report of the Dublin Aid Committee (hereafter AR Dublin Aid Committee), 1889–90 (Dublin, 1890), p. 9. <sup>2</sup> The fourteen branches are as follows: Clonmel and District Branch; Cork District Branch; Dublin District and County Branches; Kerry Branch;

in 1897, Clonmel in 1899 and Athlone and Wexford in 1901, the branches reached fourteen in number by 1904. Yet, interestingly, it was not until 1956 that the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC) gained autonomy from the NSPCC and took control of the assets and responsibilities of the Society in the Republic. It is this author's contention that the transfer was a result of changes within the British NSPCC as opposed to pressure from the Irish branches. In 1953, the Liverpool SPCC became the last branch to integrate itself into the national group, and it appears in this period that the NSPCC was reorganizing and reinventing, hence the need to give autonomy to the ISPCC. Yet what is certain is that the connections between the Irish and British branches are critical throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but particularly in the earlier period.

By 1890, the year in which the first Irish branch of the NSPCC was founded, there were 34 SPCCs in the United States and 15 elsewhere. The movement had emerged in New York in 1874 after a landmark case in which a lawyer successfully used cruelty to animal legislation in a case of ill-treatment of a young girl.<sup>3</sup> Linda Gordon and other scholars have demonstrated the ferocity of the campaigns that ensued, emerging as they did from existing philanthropic endeavours. Following a visit to New York in 1881, Liverpool-based banker Thomas Agnew began lobbying for a British SPCC.<sup>4</sup> While the first President of the NSPCC, Reverend Benjamin Waugh, is synonymous with the Society's beginnings, it was Agnew who first proposed the setting up of the Liverpool branch.<sup>5</sup> With regard to Waugh's influence and the Society's beginnings Christine Anne Sherrington states that 'although the title of founder has been generally attributed to Waugh ... it masks the coming together of different strands, the number of individuals involved, the coincidences and opportunism within the context of concern for the poor'.<sup>6</sup> One such individual was the social commentator Samuel Smith. Upon his return from America in 1881, Agnew told Smith of the NYSPCC, to which Smith replied: 'this is the very lever we want, the lever for which we have been waiting'.<sup>7</sup> In 1883, the Liverpool SPCC branch was opened.

The ethos of the Liverpool Society and its members is exemplified in a comment by Smith in 1883: 'no relief is to be found in any remedy which does not aim at

Kilkenny/Carlow/Queen's Co. Branch; Galway District Branch; Limerick/Clare District Branch; Mayo County Branch; Meath District Branch; North Louth/Monaghan/Cavan Branch; Waterford and District Branch; Westmeath/Kings Co./Offaly/Midland Counties District Branch; Wexford Branch up to 1950. There were changes in the period to some branches which had to be amalgamated due to financial concerns. **3** The connection between cruelty to animals and cruelty to children has been mentioned by a number of writers, see, for example, Harry Hendrick, *Child welfare: historical dimensions, contemporary debate* (Bristol, 2003) and Maria Luddy, 'The beginnings of the NSPCC in Ireland', *Éire-Ireland*, 44, 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2009). **4** For a history of the British NSPCC, see Christine Anne Sherrington, 'The NSPCC in transition, 1884-1983: a study of organizational survival' (PhD, University of London, 1984). **5** The Liverpool SPCC was the first branch opened and would remain autonomous from the NSPCC until 1953. **6** Sherrington, 'The NSPCC in transition', p. 64. **7** *Ibid.*, p. 65.

producing individual virtue with independence; the proletariat may strangle us unless we teach it the same virtues which have elevated the other classes in society'.<sup>8</sup> It is also critical with regard to the set-up in Ireland as the ethos of the British branches was echoed. Throughout the 1880s, Smith wrote frequently about the poor in Liverpool, arguing that while Britain had sent men overseas to reform 'savages', they had not set their domestic scene in order. His references to the 'impulse of humanity' and responsibility were also mixed with indignation that middle-class gains secured by business and trade were now threatened by economic depression and could be further eroded by the 'thriflessness and moral incapacity of the poor'.<sup>9</sup> Smith was not alone in his sentiments and for many in the middle and upper classes in the late nineteenth century the emergence of the SPCCs and the child-saving movement was seen as a long-awaited opportunity to reform the poor and attempt to inculcate middle-class principles in those who were amenable.<sup>10</sup> While there were still a minority of reformers who became involved in the NSPCC and comparable organizations to improve the lives of children and families, most appeared to be primarily motivated by a need to organize and regulate the lives of the poor, encouraging class-biased legislation and enquiries (for example the enquiries into the conditions of the working-classes) as a means of inculcating 'a sense of responsibility' in the working class.<sup>11</sup>

In nineteenth-century Ireland children, and in particular poor children, had come to the attention of religious organizations and the State under the auspices of education, health and welfare. Much of this attention was related to fears of proselytizing, the nationalist movement's recognition of the usefulness of children in its struggle and the fears prevalent in Britain surrounding the health and success of the British Empire. Childhood had been redefined and children had become a principal focus of State and voluntary efforts, through, for example, the introduction of compulsory schooling, changes to child labour laws and the focus on infant mortality. In Britain, continued emphasis on children as 'assets' and the 'children of the nation' related directly to fears for the Empire and population. Religion and proselytizing were crucial to the manner in which many educational and punitive institutions developed and expanded, as the battle to 'save the souls' of children caused divisions in philanthropic societies and political movements. These divisions would affect the development of feminism, and more crucially the actual care of children as Maria Luddy's work has shown.<sup>12</sup> The speed with which institutions and schools for children opened can be attributed to religious concerns as well as social need, as Catholic

8 Cited in Christine Anne Sherrington, 'The NSPCC', p. 61. 9 Ibid. 10 For a discussion of class and child neglect in Britain, see Hendrick, *Child welfare*. 11 Mary Tarbour, a British journal writer in the late nineteenth century, was a strong advocate of legislation to 'control' the working class. For a discussion of the motivations of those involved in the child protection movement at the end of the nineteenth century in Britain, see Sherrington, 'The NSPCC in Transition, 1884–1983', p. 63. 12 Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995). Also Oonagh Walsh, *Anglican women in Dublin: philanthropy, politics and education in the early twentieth century* (Dublin, 2005).

orders established orphanages and schools to counteract what they saw as the proselytizing fervour of Protestant institutions. The fear of proselytism could be seen in many areas, such as the debates on the setting up of reformatories for young offenders in 1858, during which the Catholic hierarchy demanded that all boys and girls be sent to schools of their own denomination. Yet the fears worked both ways, as during debates on the formation of industrial schools, Ulster Protestants expressed fears that working-class Protestant children could be ill-treated or stigmatized if they were ever placed in Catholic industrial schools. Throughout the century, orphanages, 'ragged schools', industrial schools and reformatories were set up to cater for orphaned and deserted children, and, later, for neglected children. One of the key elements in debates on the care of orphaned and neglected children revolved around the position of children in workhouses. For a variety of reasons, there was opposition by groups and individuals to the placement of children in workhouses, most critically the high mortality rates, lack of education and degrading conditions. Virginia Crossman and, more recently, Anna Clark have examined the problems and control of children under the Irish poor law. Both have demonstrated that institutionalization remained the primary choice for poor law guardians and the State by the end of the nineteenth century, despite opposition.<sup>13</sup> While attempts had been made to increase outdoor relief and boarding out, the easier workhouse option was chosen in the majority of cases. From 1889, the NSPCC would advocate helping children within the home through the threat of parental prosecution. Its role should therefore be placed in the context of other child welfare reforms and initiatives occurring throughout the nineteenth century.

#### PRINCIPAL CHILD PROTECTION AGENCY IN IRELAND

From its foundation, the Society was the principal child-protection agency operating in Ireland. Child protection moved past previous attempts at reform and relief (the operation of orphanages and 'ragged schools', for example), towards active lobbying for legislative change. In short, the NSPCC utilized legislation to effect change within the home. It becomes clear that throughout the nineteenth century, and especially from the 1880s, there was a shift in child welfare reform from a concern over

<sup>13</sup> Virginia Crossman, "'Cribbed, contained and confined?': the care of children under the Irish poor law', *Éire-Ireland*, 44:1&2 (Spring/Summer 2009), pp 37–61; Anna Clark, 'Orphans and the poor law: rage against the machine', in Peter Gray and Virginia Crossman (eds), *Poverty and welfare in Ireland, 1838–1948* (Dublin, 2011), pp 97–114. See also Anna Clark, 'Irish orphans and the politics of domestic authority' in Lucy Delap, Benn Griffin and Abigail Wills (eds), *The politics of domestic authority in Britain* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp 61–83, Joseph Robins, *The lost children: a study of charity children in Ireland, 1700–1900* (Dublin, 1980), Caroline Skehill, 'The origins of child welfare under the poor law and the emergence of the institutional versus family care debate' in Gray and Crossman (eds), *Poverty and welfare in Ireland, 1838–1948*, pp 115–26.

the rescue and reclamation of children through philanthropy to the active involvement of philanthropists and the State in moulding children and families through education, social and health work. As part of an international 'child-saving movement', the Society's role is crucial to understanding the changing treatment of children and families by the State and its agencies. Harry Ferguson argues that it was between 1880 and 1914 that 'the modern concept of "child abuse" was constructed',<sup>14</sup> and the NSPCC was at the forefront of this construction. Although the poor law had restricted and questioned parental power (particularly that of fathers) from the 1830s, the NSPCC deliberately advanced legislative reforms that increasingly involved the State in the private lives of families. As the opening quotation elucidates, unlike 'other societies', the Society was focused on reforming parents through the threat of prosecution, and as charity work took on a greater class consciousness and class fear in the nineteenth century, the children of the poor became a primary focus.

An analysis of those involved in the early years is important in establishing how and why the Society expanded so swiftly in Ireland. It is also integral to the issue of the connection between the British and Irish branches, although at times this relationship was ambiguous, and it is impossible to ascertain why particular measures were adopted and others were ignored. Emerging from the Dublin Aid Committee, the Society was made up mostly of members of the Dublin elite. The first president was the duke of Abercorn, and over the coming years the prominence of members of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy would be the norm in most branches, at least as figureheads. The extent to which they were involved on a regular basis in activities outside of fundraising cannot be ascertained here. The chairman of the Dublin Aid Committee was T.W. Grimshaw, who would remain chairman of the Dublin branch until his death in 1915.<sup>15</sup> Other members included the president of the Royal College of Surgeons at the time, as this changed annually. All were influential figures in Dublin at the time, and it appears from the subscription and membership lists that support for the Society was in vogue in Ascendancy circles over the next twenty years. In the first report of the Dublin Aid Committee, the following was included:

Be it known that by the recent Act of Parliament for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, every person –

Who illtreats, neglects, abandons or exposes a child

Who sends a child out to beg, though professedly to sell or perform

<sup>14</sup> Harry Ferguson, 'Cleveland in history: the abused child and child protection, 1880–1914' in R. Cooter (ed.), *In the name of the child: health and welfare, 1880–1940* (London, 1992), pp 148–9. <sup>15</sup> Cecil Thomas Wrigley Grimshaw remained as chairman of the Dublin branch until his death. He was born in Ireland, was a medical doctor and served in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers during the Boer War, during which time he kept a diary. The diary recounts his experiences as a prisoner of war in Pretoria at the same time as Winston Churchill. Later, he fought in the First World War, again with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers in the Gallipoli campaign. He was killed in action there on 26 Apr. 1915. He had previously served as Registrar General for Ireland.

Who sends one out under ten years old to hawk anything  
 Who sends one out to hawk after ten o'clock at night  
 Who employs a child under ten to publicly perform

IS LIABLE to three months' imprisonment with hard labour and £25 fine. After this notice proceedings will be taken against all such persons by the NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN.

All information was to be sent to the secretary, Mr Hamilton Leslie, 62 Dawson-Street, Dublin. At the end, it noted: 'The informant's name will be kept strictly private'. The inclusion of this section of the 1889 Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act was significant, as were later references to people's ignorance of the Act. It was a landmark piece of legislation, one driven by the Society in Britain, and its significance in the history of child protection is such that it was known by the NSPCC and other bodies as the 'Children's Charter'. The report also stated that 'one example made of those who commit a gross offence against a child reforms a neighbourhood'.<sup>16</sup> In clarifying the role of the society, the authors stated: 'It differs from the work of the Police ... It differs from the aims of the Public Prosecutor ... It does not seek the removal of children from their parents' into ideal circumstances ... It does not seek merely to punish'.<sup>17</sup> For many families over the coming years these differences would not be as clear-cut.

While the motives of individual members cannot be fully ascertained, qualifications for membership of the Society were purely financial: for patrons, a once-off payment of not less than £500; for a 'life councillor' a once-off payment of at least £100; for a 'life member', a once-off payment of not less than £10; for an annual member, a yearly subscription of at least £1; and for an associate member, a yearly subscription of not less than 5s. As was the norm for charitable and voluntary organizations, names and amounts of donations and subscriptions were printed in the annual reports. By March 1890, the committee had received £223 19s. 6d. in subscriptions and donations. £35 4s. 3d. of this was spent on advertising, indicating the importance of the press to the Society in the early days, and an inspector's salary is recorded as £55 5s. 9d.<sup>18</sup> By the 1930s and 1940s, this sum would range from between £250 and £350 per annum depending on the branch.<sup>19</sup> Not only did the Society thank the press at the end of most reports, in 1897 the Cork branch report contained a supplement with extracts from the *Cork Examiner*, *Evening Herald*, *Cork Herald*, *Cork Constitution*, and *Skibbereen Eagle* all praising the Society's work.

By 1911, the Society had 146 local 'organizations'. These were not all functioning branches but fund-raising groups and branches of the Children's League of Pity, which was principally a means of getting middle-class children involved in

<sup>16</sup> AR Dublin Aid Committee, 1889–90, p. 9. <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 6–7. <sup>18</sup> Mr Francis Murphy was the first NSPCC inspector in Dublin, AR Dublin Branch NSPCC (ISPCC, Limerick).

<sup>19</sup> In 2008, £300 in 1930 is calculated as £83,800.00, [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com)

fundraising. The 'Lady Collectors' were also critical to raising funds up to the 1940s, but while flower days and other fundraising activities increased awareness of the Society's work, the bulk of the money in the early years came from subscriptions and bequests. In 1903, for example, contributions to the Dublin branch totalled £2,458, with £1,000 coming from a bequest left by the late Richard Hawkins Beauchamp.<sup>20</sup> Bequests were encouraged in the annual reports, but could not exceed £5,000 in cases of private property.

The expansion of the Society from 1889 to 1914 was notable, as measured in the number of new branches opened, the number of inspectors hired, the amount of money raised and the number of families investigated. In 1899, for example, the Dublin branch dealt with 2,067 children. In the following year this figure was 4,027, and by 1909 the branch had dealt with 18,450 cases. These had resulted in 1,435 prosecutions, 15,951 warnings, 736 otherwise dealt with, and 328 dropped. At this time, there is no question that many families were living in poverty and children were suffering neglect as a result. However, the question must be posed – to what extent did the Society merely punish parents for that poverty?

The earliest file in the NSPCC archive in Ireland dates from 1919. In the context of this discussion, it is necessary to look at the details it recorded. The following were all addressed on the investigation form which became standard practice in inspectors case-work – the child(ren)'s name(s), age(s), the address, the religious persuasion, the relationship to the accused, whether or not the child(ren) was illegitimate, whether or not the child(ren) was insured and for how much, were the parents living, where was the child(ren). Under the allegation section, the nature of the offence, the time of the offence and the locality were recorded. Following this, details of the accused and witnesses were recorded. Finally, the action taken, the result and how the child(ren) was dealt with were addressed. This first recorded case in one of the inspector's notebooks (as opposed to the generic file used) involved a 'neglect to provide' allegation. The father of two children was accused of deserting his family. The inspector recorded: 'it is alleged that he parted from his wife on good terms and promised to write and send money weekly for their support, but since then it is alleged that he has not written or sent any money'.<sup>21</sup> The file included a statement from his wife: 'his people were not satisfied to keep me and our children without payment and I came back to \*\*\* to live and reported my case to the inspector of the NSPCC Society who has since been endeavouring to trace my husband . . . I hope you can get my husband arrested and dealt with for his cruel neglect.' The language of the woman is quite formal, almost as if she had been instructed on what terms to use. It appears to be in her own handwriting, as it is different from the inspector's

<sup>20</sup> AR Dublin Branch NSPCC, 1903, p.7. In 1903, £1000 was worth the equivalent of £428,943.07 in 2008 using average earnings on [www.measuringworth.com](http://www.measuringworth.com). Richard Hawkins Beauchamp was the nephew of William Hawkins Ball and Julia Ball. Most of the Ball estate was in the parish of Kilchreest, barony of Clonderalaw, County Clare, but they also held a townland in the parish of Kilmihil. Upon their death, as they had no children, they left the estate to Richard, who bequeathed this sum to the NSPCC. <sup>21</sup> Ibid.

entry, but she may have been told what to write and sign off on. The files in the 1920s and 1930s contain many desertion cases, as emigration resulted in many husbands not returning home. The Society would become a place for these women to use the British connections to track their husbands for maintenance.

Apart from the case-files, the inspectors' books (small notebooks kept to record case details) contain entries from 1920–1 which deal primarily with different 'types' of neglect, the placement of children in industrial schools, separation wives (wives of soldiers, often referred to as 'on the strength' because of their eligibility for state payments) and illegitimacy. In May 1920, a small card was sent by the Mother Superior in St Aidan's industrial school to the Wexford NSPCC Inspector:

Dear Mr Sullivan,

Many thanks for kind letter. I am happy to say the two children arrived today. The Police were busy. Thanking you most sincerely for your kindness to us. If you have any more children you won't forget St Aidan's.

I would argue that this quotation relates to both the acquisition of money and of a soul. The continuation of the capitation grant for industrial schools encouraged institutions to remain full.

How did the inspectors view their role? The *Inspectors' Quarterly* was a newsletter for officers of the NSPCC set up in 1913, and contained details on British and Irish branches. In its first edition, it advertised a meeting for officers in Ireland to be held in Cork. The newsletter included 'Hints' for officers, for example, the keeping and forwarding of all news cuttings from local papers on matters concerning children to the Central Office. In the second edition it stated that 'care should be exercised in calling a doctor to a case ... no child should be allowed to suffer, but an Inspector must exercise wide discretion and consult his Honorary Secretary in times of doubt, before incurring expense'. It also discussed a case in which 'inattention to instructions' led to a situation in which an inspector entered a child's religion as Protestant. The child was removed to an institution, but soon afterwards fell ill and was removed to a hospital where it was discovered that the child was a Catholic. It stated that the child had therefore been 'improperly placed in the wrong Home', demonstrating the importance of religious affiliation and fears of proselytism. The same volume recorded the retirement of Inspector Maher of Kilkenny, who had worked for sixteen years as an inspector. It stated that 'his best work has been done in warning neglectful parents, and he had only lost one case in court during the whole period he has been an inspector'.

The role of women in the NSPCC, and the gender bias of inspectors and those being investigated is worthy of further discussion here. Women did not act as inspectors in Britain until the First World War and in Ireland until the 1920s. This was perhaps due to the perception that inspectors needed to be viewed as strong, powerful and authoritarian – qualities not attributed to women generally in this period. These qualities were listed in the *Inspector's Directory*, as has been noted by

Maria Luddy in her article on the Society's beginnings in Ireland. What it demonstrates is that the inspectors were not benign figures, or even the equivalent of today's social workers; families were wary of the inspector, particularly in working-class areas.

#### CLASSLESS?

Numerous scholars have demonstrated how, in the early years, child protection workers viewed the mistreatment of children through their own cultural lenses, as demonstrated by the focus on drunkenness, cleanliness and children working and playing in the streets. As will be demonstrated, this focus did not expand to include investigations of institutions (State and voluntary/charitable), child prostitution, child abuse and neglect in upper-class homes (and in most instances middle-class homes) and excessive corporal punishment in schools. The middle-class ideal of domesticity that was highlighted through the emphasis on child neglect was impossible to achieve for many families. Neglect and poverty were not the same, but many neglect cases were as a result of poverty. This was particularly the case in Dublin city, where one-fifth of the population of Ireland resided and the slums were described as the worst in Europe. While previous child savers had focused on 'dependent' children, in particular orphans and illegitimate children, the NSPCC was claiming the right to intervene in all families and all homes.

George Behlmer argues that its 'interconnected roles as national pressure group and local watchdog of parental conduct gave the NSPCC a philanthropic cachet that fuelled spectacular growth'. Even though this is a fair assessment of the Society's expansion, Harry Hendrick and Christine Anne Sherrington rightly criticize Behlmer's later assertion of the Society as classless. Although correctly maintaining that US reformers viewed cruelty to children 'as a vice of the inferior classes and cultures which needed correction and "raising-up" to an "American" standard', Behlmer's contention that 'no similar impulse coloured English child protection efforts' is questionable. Maria Luddy's article on the Society's beginnings in Ireland also addresses this issue with regard to the Society's official policy on investigations. She states: 'the Society made it clear that cruelty to children was a classless crime, and the Irish branch of the Society echoed this belief.' While this was the official stance and the NSPCC occasionally asserted its status as saver of all children, there is an obvious gulf between the Society's rhetoric and actions. In the sample cases and notes up to 1921, almost all cases involved working-class or poor families. Also, in its focus on the family rather than institutions, prisons or schools, the Society was consciously deciding not to address corporal punishment, whipping of children for minor offences or industrial and reformatory-school abuse. And in its shift from an emphasis on cruelty to children to child neglect, the Society was, it appears, making a decision to address only certain aspects of child welfare. As Hendrick points out, as the Society gained experience, its early character and emphases changed and cruelty remained an issue 'only within limited parameters'. The existence of cruelty to

children in society as a whole was a reality but it raised more questions than reformers felt they could contend with, since it spread beyond the behaviour of the poor. These and many other aspects of the NSPCC's policies make it difficult to view it as classless. Maybe the question should be why would the Society have been concerned with middle and upper-class families? Perhaps this had much to do with middle-class inspectors being uncomfortable with condemning parents of their own class? Had they initially focused on child neglect, the bulk of the work later on, perhaps the emphasis on working-class and poor families would be justifiable. Yet they had not – they had stated their focus was on cruelty to children, severe cruelty to children, in all homes. This makes it difficult not to view their work as class-based. There are also problems with regard to reporting. While Luddy claims that most cases were reported by the 'general public', this could very well be a small number of 'concerned citizens' in a community. It is highly unlikely that other families in a similar situation would report neighbours, unless fearing for the children's lives or to settle a rift or vendetta. In my opinion, the bulk of reporting was from those in the middle classes, as well as visits by the inspector to the same families. Most files demonstrate that the families were being visited from eight to fifteen times. Once they came to the attention of the inspector, they remained there. It is my contention that the work was undoubtedly a practice in class control.

#### INTEMPERANCE, POVERTY AND 'BEING A HABITUAL DRUNKARD'

The sharing of statistical information was not the only connection between the Irish and British Societies. Both financially and with regard to policy, the official reports demonstrate that the British ethos and model was influential in most Irish branches, especially the Dublin branch. Having examined British and Irish reports in the period, both the language and the offences being investigated are similar. A key difference was the greater focus on intemperance by the Irish Society. In the early years, discussions by the Society and most prosecutions were centred on 'drunkenness' or situations emerging from poverty. At a Dublin branch meeting in 1902 the chairman specifically addressed the connections between poverty and drink, arguing that 'poverty frequently engenders drink, and drink aggravates poverty'. In the first fifteen years of the Society, almost all sample cases cited in the surviving branch reports involved one or two parents who were 'addicted to drink'. Poverty in Dublin was also frequently discussed, with the Dublin branch in 1904 'driven to the conclusion that at least 100,000 of the people of Dublin are living in abject poverty, insufficiently supplied with even the barest necessities of life'.<sup>22</sup> Yet intemperance was used to differentiate the deserving from the undeserving poor. Intemperate mothers were seen as the most unnatural of mothers, pawning their children's clothes for drink, neglecting to maintain their homes and not caring adequately for their

22 AR Dublin Branch NSPCC, 1904 (ISPCC, Limerick), p. 14.

husbands. In 1903, two equally revealing and disapproving captions were contained in the Dublin report: 'INTEMPERANCE THE CHIEF CAUSE OF SUFFERING ... OFFENDING MOSTLY WAGE-EARNERS', while the 1904 report highlighted that 'the average wage of those offenders in work was 21/6'.<sup>23</sup> To spend money on drink when earning a wage was the most frowned-upon form of child neglect, and it was child neglect that became the focus of the Society from this period on.

In response to the issue of drunkenness, and the drinking habits of working-class parents in particular, temperance campaigners and the NSPCC in Britain succeeded in forcing legislation to deal with the 'habitual drunkard'. The result was the passing of the 1898 Inebriates Act and the opening of inebriate reformatories throughout Britain and to a much smaller extent Ireland. With regard to the reformatories, it is perhaps best to situate them in the discussion of other institutions at the time – from prisons, to reformatories and industrial schools, as institutionalization was used as a way to take care of any perceived social problem. The idea that the 'drunkard' could be rehabilitated and brought back to the middle-class ideal of a temperate, pious mother/father by being incarcerated for three years is interesting. Three years was a standard sentence in many of the cases investigated, and must have been seen as an appropriate period for reformation. That women constituted the greatest numbers sent to the reformatories is also worthy of further investigation. The use of the reformatories tied into the NSPCC's agenda, and its role in the placement of mothers in particular was significant as their absence would affect the entire family dramatically. Although in comparison to Scotland<sup>24</sup> and England removals in Ireland was on a much smaller scale, an examination of the reformatories is critical to this study as many of the women and some of the men placed there had been convicted of cruelty to or neglect of their children as well as for being an habitual drunkard. George Bretherton alludes to this connection and in particular a report from the governor at Ennis State Reformatory in 1914 which highlighted that in all these cases, such child neglect 'was a material factor leading to their trial and incarceration'.<sup>25</sup> While it is not possible to discuss the reformatories in detail here, the connection between them and the NSPCC is noteworthy, as in Ireland, the inspector's urging of a mother's placement often swayed the judge.

In Britain, support for the 1898 Act came from various groups including temperance advocates, local governing bodies (in particular poor law guardians) and members of the clerical and medical professions. Yet the temperance movement and support for the reformatories in Ireland never received the level of support the British movement did. Why? Was it that, as with other philanthropic campaigns in the period, religious sectarianism and the Catholic Church's fears of proselytism

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. <sup>24</sup> In his article on the Irish inebriate reformatories, George Bretherton cites a paper delivered by Patrick McLaughlin, 'Inebriate reformatories in Scotland, 1902-1: an institutional history', presented at the Social History of Alcohol conference, Berkley, CA, 4 Jan. 1984. <sup>25</sup> George Bretherton, 'Irish Inebriate reformatories, 1899-1920' in I. O'Donnell and F. McAuley (eds) *Criminal justice history: themes and controversies from pre-independence Ireland* (Dublin, 2003).

suppressed support? In Britain, many of the reformatories were set up and run by religious orders. In Ireland, aside from the St John of God order in Waterford, religious orders from both the Protestant and Catholic denominations did not support the initiative. From 1899 to 1920 four institutions opened in Ireland – a Retreat in Belfast called ‘The Lodge’, the State Inebriate Reformatory, St Patrick’s Reformatory in Wexford, and St Brigid’s Reformatory in Waterford. ‘The Lodge’ was opened by the Irish Women’s Temperance Union in 1902 and accepted ‘only Protestant women of the better working-classes’; the State Reformatory was opened in Ennis in 1899; St Patrick’s opened in 1906 and admitted only men; and St Brigid’s opened in 1908 and admitted only women. Ironically, as Bretherton points out, the State Inebriate Reformatory in Ennis was the least restrictive and prison-like. On average, in the sample of cases of those sent for being an habitual drunkard as well as offences of cruelty to children, the sentence was two years. Three years appears to have been the maximum and was opted for in more severe cases.

In 1904, a woman was convicted of the wilful neglect of her two children by the Recorder of Dublin. She was also convicted of being an habitual drunkard and received a sentence of eighteen calendar months in Ennis State Inebriate Reformatory. In her memorial, her character is described as ‘indifferent’. The file contains a deposition from Inspector Thomas O’Reilly of the NSPCC and her husband. The inspector’s deposition states:

Since 15th Dec 1903 I have had this lease under observation. Deft wasn’t at home. I went to George’s Quay to look for her and next morning she called to the offices and I arranged to meet her in her husband’s place on the 17th Dec. I told her her husband’s complaint against her and she said she wasn’t as bad as he said. She was under Notice to Riot on account of her drunken misconduct. On 4th January 1904 I visited her at Cross Kevin St and found her under the influence of drink. The younger child was lying on the bed. On the 21st January 1904 I visited at 7p.m. and found the child in bed. Deft was absent and didn’t know where his wife was. Later on in the month 22nd January 1904, I found her again under the influence of drink. I spoke to her several times tasked her to take the pledge. She said she would but didn’t do so. The little boy is in a very helpless state and requires constant attendance which of course he doesn’t get, he is now in hospital.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, her husband gave evidence supporting the inspector’s observations:

Deft is my wife. She has two children living to me under 16 year’s age. I have been 20 years in Guinness’s and earn £1-6-0 per week out of which I give her £1-3-0. My wife is of very drunken habits and has been so for the past

<sup>26</sup> The deposition of Thomas O’Reilly, NSPCC, 20 Molesworth Street, Dublin City, taken 22/01/1904 at Kevin Street, cited in CRF/1905/D8 (NAI, Dublin).

six or seven years. She took the pledge once and kept it for a day. Latterly she is drunk almost every day in the week. I have had to wash my own clothes many a time. She had taken away the Children's Clothes and the furniture and bedding and pawned them for drink. I have often had to cook dinner both for myself and the children. On the 9th Dec 1903 I found my little boy with her in George's Quay and I had to take him to the hospital. On the 21st January I came home at 6p.m. and found her drunk. She had been drunk all the previous week. She has neglected the children badly. I have washed the little fellow who is unable to walk. The children often told me they were hungry when I came home in the evening. My wife is unfit from her drunken habits to look after my house and my children.<sup>27</sup>

In the reports from the reformatory in Ennis, it was argued that it would be better to leave her for longer than the eighteen months, as 'she is not reformed enough and does not have the willpower to not drink'.<sup>28</sup> The fact that the courts and the system in general actually believed there was a time period for 'reformation' was probably based on observations of other institutions. .

In June 1909, a 47-year-old woman from Belfast was released a year early on licence to her husband. In 1907 she had received a conviction of three years in the reformatory from the Belfast Recorder for neglect of her three children and for being an habitual drunkard. The licence was granted due mostly to a letter from the NSPCC inspector involved in the case:

I would say that upon your strong recommendation of the conduct of this woman and having satisfied myself she is likely to receive real encouragement in her home, then I think this a case which may be dealt with by licensing without placing this woman's future in unnecessary jeopardy . . . I presume, of course, provision is made for her immediate return to the Reformatory should she in the slightest degree begin to take intoxicating liquor.<sup>29</sup>

What this demonstrates is that the inspector could influence both the committal and release of prisoners. In a similar case in Dublin in 1906, a woman was convicted of neglecting her three children and being an habitual drunkard and was sentenced to eighteen months in Ennis. Her character was described as 'indifferent'. The file states she had been 'addicted to drink since her marriage and for the year before her committal . . . She took the clothes of the children and pawned them for drink'.<sup>30</sup> The report goes on to state that 'chiefly owing to her drunken habits her family are in poor circumstances. She has served but nine months of her sentence which is too short a time to eradicate the drink craving'.<sup>31</sup> As these cases demonstrate, sociological or psychological explanations were not considered.

27 Ibid. 28 Ibid. 29 CRF/1909/M35 (NAI, Dublin). 30 CRF/1907/B3 (NAI, Dublin). 31 Ibid.

In some cases, the reformatory was used as a last resort. In a case before the Recorder of Cork in 1914, the judge looked 'very unfavourably' on the defendant's previous convictions, of which she had forty-four for larceny, assault, drunkenness, malicious damage and obscene language. She was given two years in Ennis. The reformatory's report stated the woman was: 'bad ... married about 19 years ago, she commenced to drink 2 years later through bad companionship and gradually drifted until she became a confirmed drunkard. Thirteen years ago she commenced an immoral course and has since led a deplorable life ... she is a mischief maker.'<sup>32</sup> All memorials were unsuccessful and the file does not state what happened to the woman after her release.

Aside from the NSPCC, the focus on women and drunkenness was also a concern of the poor law guardians. In Cork city during the First World War, numerous articles were published in the local press regarding the drunken habits of separation women,<sup>33</sup> and a brief look at the Circuit Court indexes for Cork from 1914 to 1920 does demonstrate an unusually large number of cases of neglect and cruelty to children. In 1914, Margaret Healy was sentenced to two years in Ennis Reformatory for the neglect of her four children and being an habitual drunkard; in 1915, Anne Creedon was also committed to Ennis for one year for neglect of one child; in 1916 there were numerous cases of neglect in the Cork borough, many resulting in transfers to Ennis and, finally, in a case in 1917, Hannah Walsh received eighteen months with hard labour for the neglect of her eight children. Yet in 1914 the RIC issued a report after an investigation into the 'Misuse of Separation Allowance to Wives of Soldiers', stating that 'there are no grounds for thinking that any marked increase has recently taken place in the drinking habits of wives of soldiers'.<sup>34</sup> For Cork East the report states: 'No increase in drinking habits. On the contrary the women and children are better clothed and fed and many are saving money'. Similarly, in relation to Cork West the report states: 'Generally the money is spent wisely. One case of drunkenness was adjourned by Magistrates and the woman is now saving money'.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the period, Belfast also had a very high number of committals to Ennis. In 1901, a woman pleaded guilty to ill-treatment and being an habitual drunkard and was sentenced to twelve months by the Recorder. The file states that she had three previous convictions for 'threatening her husband', 'drunken habits' and 'cruelty to children'. She is described as the wife of an ex-RIC constable with a pension of £42 a year. The file also contains a note stating that one of her brothers 'had for some years past been a religious maniac in Mullingar Asylum', while another was a clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Australia. The charge was initially brought after the NSPCC inspector called to the house and found her drunk. Interestingly, the file contains a letter from her husband asking for her release

<sup>32</sup> CRF/1916/H16 (NAI, Dublin). <sup>33</sup> See CSORP/1914/22394 on the 'Misuse of Separation Allowances to Wives of Soldiers' (NAI, Dublin). <sup>34</sup> 'Misuse of Separation Allowances to Wives of Soldiers', 17 Dec. 1914, CSORP/1914/22394 (NAI, Dublin). <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

'on the ground that if he did not do so, she would make matters unpleasant for him on expiration of her sentence'.<sup>36</sup>

What were individual inspector's opinions on the reformatories? In a chapter entitled 'A Habitual Drunkard' in *The cruelty man*, Robert Parr tells the story of a mother 'who sold and pawned everything the family had'. She was sent to an inebriate reformatory for three years after a conviction of child neglect and for being an habitual drunkard. He describes the circumstances for the family as he saw them, and perhaps gives an insight into why the Society felt it preferable to send mothers to the reformatories, as they would usually not be the principal wage-earners in the home:

It is not within my knowledge how the experiment of reforming the inebriate acted in this particular case, but I am concerned to point out that the removal of this, for the time being, useless and dangerous element from the Roy family group brought about an immediate change for the better. The money the woman had hitherto wasted could now be spent on food and clothing; the home, under kind and helpful supervision, became a place of moderate comfort; and the children, the chief concern of the Society, although bereft of 'parent' were, for the three years at least, allowed to live a tolerable existence.<sup>37</sup>

However, this mentality did not last long and the process of coercive 'reformation and rehabilitation' in the reformatories was set aside during the First World War in Britain, probably due to the fact that women were needed in the home and at work. In Ireland, the last reformatory closed in 1920. This is a significant marker in the context of the NSPCC in Ireland, as from this period onwards the Society attempted to adjust its role in post-independence Ireland and the issue of intemperance was replaced with other concerns.

#### CHILDREN'S SHELTERS AND THE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL QUESTION

One of the few pictures published in the annual reports of the Irish branches in the early years was a photograph of a group of children in the Society's shelter in Dublin in 1894. This photograph was taken by a M. Glover, who appears to have taken all of the Irish Society's photographs in the early period. The shelter, at 20 Molesworth Street, was utilized by the Society in the early years, and also contained the offices of the Dublin branch. Interestingly, 19 Molesworth Street contained the offices of the Inspector of Industrial and Reformatory Schools, Dublin Castle. The shelter appears to have taken in, on average, 40 children per year. In 1896, for example, 44 children passed through the shelter and 29 were recorded as being sent to industrial schools.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> CRF/1901/D66 (NAI, Dublin). <sup>37</sup> Robert J. Parr, *Cruelty man* (NSPCC, 1912), p. 45.

<sup>38</sup> In the same year, of the 368 serious cases, seventy-seven persons were convicted for

Although much more research is needed, in Britain it appears that shelters opened across the country's major cities, yet this was not the case in Ireland. Why? From the documentation it is not possible to provide a definitive answer, but a few observations and speculations can be made.

Initially the Society did attempt to develop the Dublin shelter and open shelters in other cities. The following appeal was included in the first report of the Dublin Aid Committee:

The great drawback to the working of this Society in Dublin is the want of a Shelter. Shelters are not Homes, but places of safety. They provide temporary relief for the children of parents who are charged, pending trial, under the clauses of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1889. They are to meet the requirements of the magistrates under this New Law, which provides for the keeping of injured and neglected children, until such time as their cases are determined, out of the custody of those who injured, ill-treated, or neglected them; and to shelter children, when one or both parents are sent for short periods to prison for offences committed against them . . . At the Inaugural Meeting of this Society in Dublin, the necessity for such a Shelter was recognized. The Committee now appeal for such funds . . . The cost of the house, fittings, etc., would be about £800, towards which your valuable assistance is desired.

In the first subscription list, £47 3s. 2d. was collected. However, although collections continued over the coming years, the shelter was never opened. It is probable that the system would have been in conflict with industrial and reformatory schools, orphanages and mother-and-baby homes, all now run principally by the Catholic Church. This issue appears to be the first of many compromises and concessions made by the Society when it came to potential conflict with the religious orders, as can be seen more prominently after 1922. Although the relationship between the industrial schools and the NSPCC cannot be fully addressed here, it is worth noting that in its early years the Society was completely opposed to their operation. However, it was forced to roll back on this once it became apparent that the shelters would not be supported, and if it was going to prosecute parents who could then be imprisoned, children would need to be placed. Aside from the conflict with other institutions, shelters would need to have been staffed and maintained around the clock, and perhaps in areas outside of Dublin the resources, both financial and voluntary, were not available. Either way, the fact that they did not develop is significant, as to have had a temporary facility for children that was not the workhouse or an industrial school would have been a considerable achievement. Internationally, crit-

offences against children, amounting to nineteen years imprisonment cumulatively. As the report recorded, four months per case was the average sentence, as opposed to two months in the previous year.

icisms of institutions had mounted in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the result that specialist homes and fostering were increasingly chosen. In 1886, W.P. Letchworth in the United States referred to children becoming 'institutionalized',<sup>39</sup> yet in Ireland this option would be repeatedly chosen. The NSPCC's inability to set up the shelters, therefore, represented a missed opportunity.

#### CONCLUSION: 'SAVER OF THE CHILDREN'

The NSPCC undoubtedly holds a prominent place in the history of child protection in Ireland. In contrast to religiously motivated philanthropic and charitable organizations, the NSPCC, as the first established, secular, child-protection agency, suffered less from the effects of sectarianism and fears of proselytizing forces than other groups. In this sense it thrived in a period of instability for other philanthropic societies. With connections to a highly motivated, upper-middle-class British organization, and broader connections with an international 'child-saving' movement, the Society in Ireland gained support from the Ascendancy and other influential members of Irish society. This can be seen in its rapid expansion, increasing financial returns and in the number of children and families investigated by inspectors. From its foundation, the Society's inspectors entered the homes of thousands of working-class and poor families, identifying intemperate mothers, fathers failing to provide for their families, children on the streets and not in schools, and others who fell short of meeting the ideals of the middle-class home. The Society was part of a distinctive social movement, one in which children were the focal point, and the family the means to nurture the future citizens of Britain, Ireland, the United States and many other western societies. Its objective was the prevention of cruelty to children and the creation of safer environments in which childhood could be nurtured. However, its methods often had a detrimental effect. Where parents are being threatened with prosecutions, fines, imprisonment or institutionalization, the environment for children rarely improves.

<sup>39</sup> Robert H. Bremner, *Children and youth in America, 1866-1932*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA, 1971), p. 296.