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‘Dying Irish’: eulogising the Irish in Scotland in *Glasgow Observer* obituaries

Abstract: The *Glasgow Observer* newspaper, founded in 1885 by and for the Irish community in Scotland regularly published both lengthy and brief funeral and elegiac obituaries of the Irish in Scotland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They marshal an impressive, emotive and oftentimes contradictory body of evidence and anecdote of immigrant lives of the kind utilised, and as often passed over, by historians of the Irish in Britain. They contain, however, a unique perspective on the march of a migrant people bespoke of their experiences and, perhaps more importantly, the perception of their experiences in passage, in the host society and ultimately in death. Moreover, the changing sense of Victorian sensibilities over the solemnity, purpose and ritual of death into the Edwardian era finds a moot reflection in the key staples of Irish immigrant obsequies with their stress on thrift, endeavour, piety, charity and gratitude.

This article explores *Glasgow Observer* obituaries from the 1880s to the 1920s to see what they say about the immigrants, their lives, work and culture, the Scots, migration itself, the wider relations between Britain and Ireland, and the place where Irish and British attitudes to death meet in this period. It does so by drawing upon recent sociological perspectives on obituaries and their relationship with the formation and articulation of collective memory.

Key words: Obituaries; Irish; immigrants; *Glasgow Observer*; memory.

Readers of the *Glasgow Observer* newspaper on Saturday 7 July 1906 would have found that morning a small and unobtrusive obituary penned by an unknown author on the death of a man in Leith named Edward McKay.¹ Few may have known the man and fewer still would have known of his lifetime connection to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, his closeness to the Scottish leader of that underground Irish nationalist

¹ I am grateful to Dr S. Karly Kehoe for her invitation to take part in the 18th Conference of the Scottish Catholic Historical Association and the Scottish Catholic Archives at New College, Edinburgh in June 2009, where an earlier draft of this paper was presented, and to the anonymous reviewer. My thanks are also extended to Professor Don MacRaid of Northumbria University, who kindly commented on an earlier draft of this paper.

revolutionary group, and his involvement in its various activities over the years in Glasgow. The *Observer* itself was coy, referring only obliquely to McKay being remembered as ‘an Irishman holding advanced views’, and focusing instead on the greatest esteem in which he was held by the parishioners of St Mary’s cathedral, where he initiated the parish’s Catholic Club and was a member of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart.² Whether this was an editorial or obituarist’s decision is lost to us, but the cumulative evidence of the newspaper’s obituaries suggests certain enduring, if contingent, priorities in eulogising the Irish community in Scotland. Moreover, they point to the formation and/or expression of some sense of collective identity.

In recent years, and despite the publication of new scholarship, some historians have suggested that little or nothing can be said about the Irish in Scotland. Such a view is premised on the relative lack of a body of immigrant narratives in the form of existent diaries or correspondence. Besides the impressionistic nature of this judgement and the admitted narrow utility of such testimony, it neglects the importance of other contemporary media and most centrally the immigrant newspaper, the *Glasgow Observer*, which is a key ‘voice’, albeit formally moderated, of the Irish in Scotland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³ Here is a voluminous repository of the immigrant experience and perceptions that attempted to convey in the formulaic pattern of the nineteenth-century newspaper the essence of a collective *mentalité*. A crucial component of that, and arguably, à les historiens des Annales, of most formative group, community and social *identity* collectivisations is the production of an historical narrative.⁴ Obituaries provided an early form of historical narrative and were in some regards a ‘first account’ before newspapers began to produce ‘historical’ ephemera – excerpts of historical works, commentaries on past events and ‘on this day’ segments from older copy. Moreover, as the recent work of Bridget Fowler among others has demonstrated, the obituary is central to the expression, if not in some senses the production, of collective memory.⁵ This paper will attempt to find evidence for this interpretation with regard to obituaries of the Irish in Scotland from the pages of the *Glasgow Observer* newspaper

² *Glasgow Observer*, 7 July 1906.

³ *New Perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, ed. Martin J. Mitchell (Edinburgh, 2008). At the first ever symposium on the Irish in Scotland at the AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies in Aberdeen University in 2002, the seminal modern Irish historian David Fitzpatrick suggested rather disconcertingly for those present, that little or nothing could be said about the Irish in Scotland.

⁴ Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (New York, 1953), 4–5.

⁵ Bridget Fowler, *The Obituary as Collective Memory* (London, 2007). I am grateful to Bridget Fowler for her help and the donation of research articles in draft form for this paper.

from the 1880s to the 1920s. This will be primarily qualitative in its approach and is largely a tentative exploratory paper that forms part of ongoing research into Irish migrant obituaries across the diaspora.

In spite of recent research into the history of death and even some excellent representative work by Elaine McFarland in relation to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Scotland, the subject of obituaries particularly in historical context is still a relatively neglected field. Even amongst scholars of newspaper history, obituaries have merited no especial focus thus far, and while utilised regularly by most historians they are rarely studied in their own right.⁶ There are, however, some strong analyses that have appeared in recent years that explore obituaries from the perspective of the cultural historian and journalism studies expert, which have added greatly to our understanding of the contemporary ‘place’ of the newspaper obituary.⁷ It is in the work, though, of Bridget Fowler that the social meaning and role of the obituary has had perhaps its most thorough and original analysis to date. Drawing on the varied writings of Bergson, Halbwachs and Benjamin relating to typologies of memory, though owing a considerable debt to Bourdieu’s work on the representation of public memory, Fowler examines the constituent parts of memory as a lead-in to a discussion on the obituary as ‘a form of collective memory within modernity’.⁸ While obituaries have traditionally and until very recently focused overwhelmingly on the elite, or ‘dominants’ as the sociologist Fowler describes them, and express part of a wider social need to pay homage to the ‘important’ dead, they are also ‘part of a lingering desire for community, *gemeinschaft*’.⁹ Moreover, obituaries occasionally have the power to open up a social world, particularly when viewed through the prism of Halbwach’s ‘occupational

⁶ Elaine McFarland, ‘Researching death, mourning and commemoration in modern Scotland’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 24 (2004), 20–44; Julie-Marie Strange, ‘“Tho’ lost to sight, to memory dear”: pragmatism, sentimentality and working class attitudes towards the grave, c.1875–1914’, *Mortality* 8 (2003), 144–59; Mary Elizabeth Hotz, *Literary Remains: Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (New York, 2009); Eleanor Agnew, ‘The romantic rhetoric of 19th century obituaries: “She Gave A Few Faint Gasps and Died”’, paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Washington DC, 23–25 March 1995, http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/14/4c/0e.pdf (accessed 11 March 2009).

⁷ Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Jackson, 2000); Nigel Starck, ‘Posthumous parallel and parallax: the obituary revival on three continents’, *Journalism Studies* 6 (2005), 267–83, and his *Life After Death* (Melbourne, 2006).

⁸ Bridget Fowler, ‘Collective memory and forgetting: components for a study of obituaries’, unpaginated draft paper supplied to the author courtesy of Dr Bridget Fowler, University of Glasgow, 2009, [12].

⁹ Fowler, *The Obituary*, 243.

memory' categorisation, hitherto unseen by historians either because of a purely utilitarian approach to obituaries or due to concerns over the mode of presentation.¹⁰ It is possible to say more definitively, however, that obituaries are in fact key to the recovery of social networks with which a great deal of modern historiography has been focused upon in recent years. The vantage point of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century newspaper is pristine in this regard and permits us not only to say something about the representation of collective memory, which may be quite unique with regards to the Irish immigrant community, but also to ascertain the contours and character of the historical 'circuitry' of that community.

The obituaries from which this paper draws its sample appeared from almost the first number of the *Glasgow Observer*, which in itself still awaits its historian, though some solid, if idiosyncratic, groundwork has been done by Owen Dudley Edwards building on the earlier research of Monsignor McRoberts. The *Glasgow Observer* was absented from the recent *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century British Journalism* (though Dr Joan Allen at the University of Newcastle contributed on Charles Diamond and is currently working on a critical biography of this pioneering editor and owner of the paper). Diamond, from Maghera in County Derry, was born in 1858 and after a brief sojourn in Newcastle upon Tyne made his way to Glasgow and his connection with the newspaper that was to launch his career as a major Catholic press baron, though admittedly a title for which there was little competition.¹¹ The paper was founded in April 1885 as 'an Irish National and Catholic newspaper in Scotland', a designation and purpose Dudley Edwards adjudges 'Irish chauvinistic', if not at times anti-Scottish. This, however, neglects the directness of the core founding statement of the paper which declared it to be, like the classic ascetic 'in the world, but not of it'.¹² Of course, the context of a partisan and Ireland-focused paper re-forming the battle lines of the *Glasgow Free Press* controversy and conflict of the 1850s and 1860s does give some force to Dudley Edwards' interpretation of a ghettoised and aggressive newspaper but is overly dismissive of the popularity and community cohesive attributes of the *Glasgow Observer*. This ostensible ethnic singularity also mitigates slightly against the identification of the newspaper with the particular propagation of a singular collective memory, but it can be argued that

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹¹ Owen Dudley Edwards, 'The Catholic press in Scotland since the restoration of the hierarchy', in *Modern Scottish Catholicism, 1878–1978*, ed. David McRoberts (Glasgow, 1979), 156–82; *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century British Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (London, 2009).

¹² Edwards, 'Catholic press', 168.

there is a clear difference between the subjective identity of the *Observer* and the objective evidence of the obituaries.

Taking departure from the work of Hume which views obituaries as the collective memory of modern heroes or contemporary mythologies which serve to nurture the nation, Bridget Fowler's approach to obituaries seeks a more nuanced approach in which four distinct subgenres emerge. These break down into the traditional positive (and as an adjunct, the untraditional positive), the negative, the tragic and the ironic obituary.¹³ While instructive, and Fowler admits that the first category dominates contemporary obituaries with, as a recent development, the untraditional positive beginning to make an appearance, these subgenres are less applicable to the *Glasgow Observer* obituaries. This paper has tended, therefore, to adopt a thematic approach instead which actually draws out its own subgenres as well as supporting those of Fowler to a degree. These relate to the concepts of exile, struggle and acceptance, though doubtless better terms could have been found to describe what were dynamic processes.

Recent historiography of the Irish in Scotland has tended to emphasise a mixture of themes, formerly marginal groups and experiences, and an altogether more nuanced view of the immigrants and their descendants. As part of this move away from what might be seen as homogeneous conceptions, the Catholic Irish have also had monolithic depictions of them deconstructed. Mitchell and Aspinwall in their different concerns and approaches have certainly pioneered these interpretations,¹⁴ while McBride, Meredith and McFarland have added completely fresh perceptions of neglected or under-studied aspects, subjects and individuals.¹⁵ Even as atypical an example as the leading Scottish communist, Willie Gallacher, born into a Paisley

¹³ Fowler, 'Collective memory', [16–19].

¹⁴ Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797–1848: Trade Unions, Strikes and Political Movements* (Edinburgh, 1998); *idem*, 'Irish Catholics in the west of Scotland in the nineteenth century: despised by Scottish workers and controlled by the Church?', in *New Perspectives*, ed. *idem*, 1–19; Bernard Aspinwall, 'Catholic realities and pastoral strategies: another look at the historiography of Scottish Catholicism, 1879–1920', *IR* 59 (2008), 77–112. This is not to neglect the equally important analyses of S. Karly Kehoe, 'Irish migrants and the recruitment of Catholic Sisters in Glasgow, 1847–1878' and Amy O'Reilly, '“All Irishmen of good character”: the Hibernian Society of Glasgow, 1792–1824', both in *Ireland and Scotland in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Frank Ferguson and James McConnel (Dublin, 2009), 35–47 and 147–59.

¹⁵ Terence McBride, *The Experience of Irish Migrants to Glasgow, Scotland, 1863–1891: a New Way of Being Irish* (New York, 2007); Ian Meredith, 'Irish migrants in the Scottish Episcopal Church in the nineteenth century' and Elaine W. McFarland, '“Our Country's Heroes”: Irish Catholics in Scotland and the Great War', both in *New Perspectives*, ed. Mitchell, 44–64 and 127–44; E. W. McFarland, *John Ferguson 1836–1906: Irish Issues in Scottish Politics* (East Linton, 2003).

Irish community, serves as a reminder of the complexity of the Irish in Scotland. Gallacher was the product of an Irish Catholic father and a Highland Protestant mother, attended Catholic and non-Catholic schools, had good relations with ‘Orange’ families and found social outlets in the perhaps unlikely surroundings of the Good Templars, Christopher North Cricket team and choir of the Mission Hall of Free Middle Church.¹⁶ While the exception may not prove the rule, there has been a greater engagement with the variety of experiences, situations and identities of the Irish in Scotland over recent years. This in no way negates the impressive magisterial work of Handley which marshalled a large number of sources, set a lasting benchmark for other scholars and drew the original contours of the history of the Irish community in Scotland.¹⁷ What has emerged is a discussion that explores the fraternity as well as the fault lines of host-migrant relations in Scotland, the emergence and consolidation of social class identities and identifications, the singular and unexceptional in Irish Protestant experiences and the regional variance and similarity in immigrant communities. A study of obituaries from a newspaper with a pronounced ethnic profile may be expected to provide evidence for a singular and exceptional identity, and to submerge or subdue all contrary or conflictual images, but this short study aims to support contemporary historiography in providing a more heterogeneous picture of the Irish in Scotland as well as admitting the emergence and articulation of a collective identity. This may appear a postmodern exercise in some respects but it is one that chimes with current research and interpretative methodologies that seek to problematise and deconstruct traditional narratives.

The *Glasgow Observer* of the 1880s was slow to include obituaries. They note death in passing (prefiguring Yeats’ epitaph) with Victor Hugo’s appearing amongst the very first, painted in what would serve as the paper’s archetypal colours of patriotism and piety (one serving as sufficient when the other could not be summoned).¹⁸ The paper had gone through two Irish editors and some financial instability in the 1880s before receiving support from the Scoto-Irish publishing house Cameron and Ferguson and a long-term editor in Charles Diamond. It was Diamond who really overhauled the newspaper’s presentation and

¹⁶ William Gallacher, *The Last Memoirs of William Gallacher* (London, 1966), 9–10, 24–6.

¹⁷ James E. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland, 1798–1845*, 2nd edn (Cork, 1945) and his *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, 1947).

¹⁸ Examples include *Glasgow Observer*, 13 March 1915 (Patrick Colgan), 17 June 1911 (John Stewart), 11 December 1909 (John Dornan), all notable nationalists minus the Catholic piety and the reverse for 21 March 1908 (Mrs Michael Dannagher), 24 October 1914 (John Duffy) and 16 January 1915 (John Gallagher).

fortunes after he gained a controlling interest in 1894 and began to adapt some of the modern methods of reportage, layout and features associated with the burgeoning yellow press to the *Observer*. A regular obituary column, though it also regularly moved pages, then became a fixture.¹⁹ The first obituary, as opposed to a simple death notice, appeared in the 13 June 1885 issue of the *Observer* for a stalwart of St Mungo's parish named Michael Magee. Of greatest note in the relatively terse notice was Magee's decade-long contribution as treasurer then secretary to the Catholic Benefit Society in the city's east end, working 'Sunday after Sunday making up the books of the collectors, and receiving their cash'.²⁰ Also a member of the St Vincent de Paul Society, Magee's contribution was clearly measured in relation to his parish associational life and there is no allusion to political activity or his nativity, though in common with newspapers of the time it was felt necessary to underline his twelve days' suffering of inflammation of the lungs and his being ministered to 'in the last moments' by a Catholic priest. Such detail fitted, of course, with the melodramatic Victorian appetite for a melancholic end but it also echoed a Catholic devotional focus on a Christ-like suffering and release—elements that would continue to suffuse *Observer* obituaries in following years, though more ethnically and politically fixed. The immigrant narrative of exile, suffering and redemption neatly encapsulated biblical precedents that sat well with otherwise increasingly temporal lives.

If the Irish immigrant experience and/or identity does not come to the fore with the Magee obituary, it ironically features in the November 1885 obituary for Scottish Catholic prelate, Canon John Shaw of Rutherglen. In a long column-and-a-half obituary replete with a sketched portrait of Rev. Shaw and followed probably not inconsequentially by an obituary of 'a firm and uncompromising Nationalist', the Rev. Dr Dorrin, bishop of Down and Connor who had died on the same day, the Shaw entry dwelled almost exclusively on his ministrations during the late 1840s to disease-ridden famine immigrants in Glasgow. The Banff-born parish priest was remembered:

haunting the most infected of districts, prowling around closes in which cholera reigned supreme, accompanying to the grave the remains of those who had become victims of a fell disease, he seemed to stand almost alone in the general panic, and to have even dared death in its worst of forms.

It recorded that Shaw himself had contracted the disease and yet continued to work, 'the cholera patient administering spiritual comforts

¹⁹ Edwards, 'Catholic press', 169–72; McFarland, *John Ferguson*, 275.

²⁰ *Glasgow Observer*, 13 June 1885.

to the cholera patient', and quoted favourably in support from the Rev. Dr Gordon's biography of Bishop Murdoch, though all three might have been remembered in another context as adversaries of the Irish clerical interest during the *Free Press* controversy years before.²¹ Peppering the account with adjectives such as 'horror' and 'plague' in reference to the conditions of the Irish immigrants, the obituary uses Shaw to narrate a history of almost unimaginable deprivation and reminds its readers of the trials their community has passed through as witnessed by a Scots pastor. In this regard, Shaw himself appears to be little more than a means, though importantly a non-Irish one, of highlighting the tribulations of the Irish in Scotland.

The obituaries we have of the 1880s are fairly tentative. This may be as much a result of a perception that even after a century the immigrants had not yet really established themselves in Scotland as it may be a reflection of the *Observer's* own precarious early development. The 1890s, by contrast, was a stronger decade for the newspaper and though a divided time in Irish politics at home and abroad since the Parnell schism, it was a time when cultural concerns including the prevailing Victorian or fin de siècle concerns over the meaning and representation of mortality increasingly took hold and gave greater form and substance to the newspaper obituary. The 'dominants' – the clergy and pump politicians – still prevailed, of course, but as with the relatively anonymous figure of Michael Magee in the 1880s, the 1890s also occasionally produced obituaries for people as humble as pious elderly parishioners such as Hugh Kilpatrick who died in Greenock in May 1898.²²

Central as they often were to the Irish immigrant community (or more accurately, that portion of it that was Catholic), the obituaries of Irish priests are illustrative of the evolving concerns and self-imaged narrative of that community. Many foundational prelates such as Keane, Condon and Danaher exhibit this strongly as do many minor clerics in the early twentieth century, but the 1890s in particular appear also to give examples of little or no ethnic or cultural distinctiveness.²³ Without a thorough statistical analysis it is difficult to be conclusive, but it does seem that a minority of 1890s obituaries, especially for clergy, omit mention of any indicators of a wider collective memory. At least some of this, however, may be down to the relatively tragic circumstances surrounding some of these deaths which subjugate all other characteristics to the melancholic relation of premature death. Less difficulty surrounds

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7 November 1885.

²² *Ibid.*, 21 May 1898.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7 January, 17 June and 16 September 1893 contain examples of clerical obituaries with little communal significance.

the obituary, for example, of Father Jeremiah Buckley, the chargehand of St Alphonsus' parish in Glasgow, which spoke of 'the poverty and the misery of Ireland . . . driving from the country's shores thousands of Irishmen . . . exiles' who found themselves in Glasgow.²⁴ Added to this exile theme we have examples of struggle whether against anti-Catholic street preachers or the hostile Scottish authorities amid the attempts of priest and people to raise up churches and schools against a backdrop of suspicion, hostility and at times outright bigotry.²⁵ Ultimately, of course, and it is as Fowler has indicated in the nature of obituary accounts, especially those relating to immigrants, a general Whiggish history progression comes out at the close of an individual's life.²⁶ For the Irish in Scotland, mediated through the priestly obituary from this time onwards, we hear the bells of Protestant churches ringing out in recognition of the moral rectitude and almost Calvinist work ethic evinced in the migrants as a result of the labours of individual priests and the testament of Scottish contemporaries to the pride and contribution made by their Irish guests.²⁷ This does indicate that perhaps by the century's end, the Irish immigrant community was to an extent beginning to feel itself accepted and that a Scottish and Protestant appreciation of Irish priests, as focused upon in some *Observer* obituaries from this period, gives expression to this perception. There is, however, more than a possibility that this notion of 'acceptance' was actually or partly aspirational and that the newspaper was addressing itself not only to the Irish and Catholic readership in an attempt to form or perpetuate a particular collective memory, but to the wider Scottish society behind or external to that readership. The need to be exemplars that issues forth from the pages of the newspaper obituaries through a process of struggle while maintaining a sense of pride in Irishness and Catholicity was a message to be conveyed not solely to the immigrants but to their hosts as well. Herein lay the hope that the Scottish Protestant community would adjudge as their representatives in the obituaries had in the wake of an Irish Catholic death, and learn in the process that the Irish were certainly here to stay.

The dawning of the twentieth century really sees the *Glasgow Observer* obituaries come into their own and articulate much more clearly some sense of a collective *mentalité*. The Edwardian period is generally the time when we see most sharply the really defined sense of a homogeneous bloc take shape among the Irish in Scotland, mainly as

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20 October 1894.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 February 1898 (Fr James Glancy), 4 May 1895 (Fr Patrick McLaughlin), 23 September 1899 (Fr James McNamara), and 3 April 1897 (Fr Walter Dixon-Swan).

²⁶ Fowler, 'Collective memory', [13, 15].

²⁷ *Glasgow Observer*, 29 April 1893 (Fr Michael O'Keeffe) and 27 June 1891 (Canon Edward Hannan).

a result not merely of generational fruition and reflection but partly due to the rising political expectancy of Irish nationalism. While it is clear that social memory is not derived from subjective perception but is able to meet the ‘test of externality, that is, they must be adequate to the object that is perceived’, the force of newspaper preoccupations must always be admitted and borne in mind.²⁸

In recording the lives of the Irish political representatives the *Observer* was, from the 1890s onwards, keen also to marry external patriotism to internal civic duty. Pollokshaws burgh councillor, Samuel Conolly, and Edinburgh town councillor, Michael Flannigan, who both died in 1893, are good early examples of this trend. Conolly, who had made a substantial fortune in mercantile business, had spent most of his adult life in Glasgow since leaving his home in Antrim and was a noted member of the Irish National League and Irish National Foresters, as well as the St Vincent de Paul Society. The focus, however, was placed on his ten years on the burgh council where he ‘won universal respect’ and his thirty years as ‘a sympathetic friend of the poor’ on the local parish board.²⁹ Flannigan, from near Carrickmacross in County Monaghan came to Edinburgh, it was recorded, ‘when he was little more than a lad’ but with

a considerable amount of natural and acquired ability, he soon made a position for himself, and for the last forty years he was in business as a pawnbroker, first in the Cowgate and latterly in the South Bridge.

The obituary made much of his facility in ‘assisting to his utmost the National cause’ and his presidency of the John Dillon branch of the Irish National League of Great Britain, which he was also instrumental in forming. It began, however, with an appreciation of his local role as a councillor for the St Giles’ ward for which his re-election campaign had been underway at the time of his sudden demise.³⁰ Twenty years later, this format was very similar in remembering the lives of Denis Higgins from Newry who served as a parish councillor for nine years in Port Glasgow as well as being active in Irish nationalist bodies for forty years, and Robert Conway of Govanhill in Glasgow who still merited an obituary, like some other step migrants, though settled in Darlington for seven years.³¹ Even those with more than a whiff of cordite

²⁸ Fowler, ‘Collective memory’, [2–3].

²⁹ *Glasgow Observer*, 7 January 1893.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 November 1893.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15 and 22 February 1913. Other obituaries for past members of the Irish in Scotland community include Fenians, John Francis Kearney (New York), 13 May 1905

about their political involvement, such as Sam Kilpatrick of Greenock, whose family had harboured escaped Fenians after the shooting dead of a Manchester policeman in 1867, or Fenian dynamiter and ex-convict Henry McCann who died in the genteel hands of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Glasgow in 1911, were re-habilitated in death.³² Not only were the days of the 1860s insurrectionism and the bombings of the 1880s a safe distance away and the constitutional nationalist movement firmly in the ascendant, making such obituaries possible again, it was (in a manner that conforms to Fowler's modern-day 'ironic obituary' category) set against the backdrop of largely 'reformed' lives. Some of the obituaries of political figures, as of others from the pages of the *Observer*, feature the sons of Irish immigrants who had broken through into a public service their parents had never made or perhaps sought. Whether serving as a justice of the peace, like John Dornan (a noted friend of Glasgow's lord provost), a bailie in Dumbarton, like James Kirk (after serving his time as a ship's carpenter and, it was noted, sailing twice round the world), or like William McKillop from Dalry where he worked like his father in the iron mining industry before a business and political career that culminated in his election to Westminster in 1900, all these men were also esteemed 'Irish' nationalists.³³ Even successful businessmen whose obituaries are completely free from political connections, be they Irish or Scottish, are not in their social connections portrayed as other than patriotic and devout. William McKillop's brother John, for example, who died in 1914 and had no political linkages being devoted to his restaurant business, Celtic Football Club directorship and Lethamhill Golf Club was, like businessmen before and after, noted for his Irish roots and links to lay and religious fraternities such as the St Vincent de Paul and the Franciscans.³⁴ These latter connections in the business obituaries serve also a more utilitarian purpose in sketching out the social networks on which much business and commerce among the immigrants probably depended. Not only do they permit us to see the predictable social mobility beloved of obituarists, but they highlight the coordinates by which that passage may well have been made and maintained and which has become particularly significant for historians of the social networks behind business, empire and diaspora in recent years.³⁵ An example may be James Feeney from

and Michael McLaughlin (San Jose, California), 28 April 1906 and Home Rulers Owen Kiernan (Leeds), 2 February 1907 and John McAreavey (Belfast), April 1903.

³² *Ibid.*, 31 October 1908 and 25 November 1911.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11 December 1909, 19 March 1910 and 28 August 1909.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 December 1914; other examples in 6 February 1897 (Charles McGuire and Francis Broderick), 4 May 1907 (James Lindsay), and 3 February 1912 (Arthur Connell).

³⁵ Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester, 2005); Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, 2001); *A Global*

Comber-Claudy in County Derry who died in 1906. His obituary recorded his birth in 1839, early employment with Derry City shirtmakers Tillie and Henderson (itself partly a Scottish company), which facilitated his initial links with Scotland, and eventual transfer to another shirtmakers, Arthur and Co., in Glasgow. After a short time Feeney began in business for himself as a draper in 1883, maintained links to his native place through leadership of the Derry Reunion Committee and was active in charitable and temperance movements. He eventually made the move out to the suburbs serving his time on school and parish boards and was succeeded in business by the surviving seven of his fourteen sons.³⁶

The obituaries of workers and less ‘dominant’ individuals which mark the pages of the *Glasgow Observer* are also very useful in helping us plot the maps and routes of worlds long lost to us in which we can almost follow the footsteps of ordinary people as they navigated their way through the perils and opportunities of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Scotland. Moreover, the uniqueness of these obituaries when contemporary society is only beginning in a limited way to recount the lives of the humble and mediocre does demonstrate possibly that ethnic community newspapers, whether the *Observer*, one of Diamond’s *Catholic Herald* titles or Jewish, Italian or Lithuanian papers, in recording immigrant lives did not only include the dominants but also pioneered this ‘new’ type of obituary.³⁷ That for Dominic McCreadie was a case in point. Born at Coole, three miles from Milford in County Donegal in 1828, one of three daughters and three sons, he came to Scotland as a *spailpín* or migratory farm labourer in the middle of ‘Black ’47’ and the hardships of the potato famine and avoided, the obituary noted, the fate of his brother who was drowned with fifteen other harvesters when their

Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identity Since the Eighteenth Century, ed. Angela McCarthy (London, 2006); Roy Foster’s waspish ‘Micks on the make’ section in his *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London, 1993), also has some useful insights into the nature of elite Irish immigrant networks.

³⁶ *Glasgow Observer*, 21 July 1906. This particular business and emigration link in the textiles industry has already been explored very competently in relation to two Scottish towns by Brenda Collins, ‘Irish emigration to Dundee and Paisley during the first half of the nineteenth century’, in *Irish Population, Economy and Society*, ed. G. M. Goldstrom and L. A. Clarkson (Oxford, 1981), 195–212, at 205–10.

³⁷ Fowler, ‘Collective memory’, [13, 15]. I make no case for Irish exceptionalism: these other migrant groups also produced their own newspapers and interpretations of themselves and their hosts, see Nathan Abrams, *Caledonian Jews: a Study of Seven Small Communities in Scotland* (Jefferson, NC, 2009), 52; Mary Edward, *Who Belongs to Glasgow: 200 Years of Migration* (Glasgow, 1993), 73–4, 91–2; James D. White, ‘Scottish Lithuanians and the Russian revolution’, *Journal of Baltic Studies* 6 (1975), 1–8.

ship, the *Falcon*, went down off Merville. It continued:

he traveled all over Scotland and England working as a labourer from place to place. Potato picking for a shilling a day at where Alexandra Park now stands, quarrying, road-making and loading pig iron were the sort of jobs he did, on returning, for good to Glasgow.³⁸

The *Observer* recorded similar working lives – of blacksmiths like George Conway from Sligo, tunnellers and miners like Owen Keenan, who only retired from the pits of Lanarkshire aged seventy-four, steelworkers and trade unionists like John Cronin and Hugh McCann, or even slightly less ordinary occupations for the Irish such as James McNamee from Trillick in County Tyrone who spent twenty years as cashier in the Glasgow Corporation Foreign Animals Wharf at Monklands.³⁹ Women, whether lay or religious, were also given substantial representation in the obituaries over the years and their lives feature regularly stressing their native origins and devotionism, occasionally their occupational contribution, especially if in teaching, but most often their connection to a more well known man.⁴⁰ Thus we have the 1897 obituary for Mrs John Colgan, which largely reiterates the sorrowful earlier demise of her influential husband and generous patron of Catholic educational endeavours, while mentioning she was ‘like her husband... very charitable to the poor’.⁴¹ A similar sense of reflected glory but poorly applied attaches to the obituary of Mrs Mary Donegan Gallacher, who is at least granted her first and maiden names, and whose post-natal ‘complications’ and death merit inclusion largely, it seems, as a result of her husband being Patsy Gallacher, ‘the famous ex-Celtic football player’.⁴²

The assumption of cultural figures into obituaries more readily associated with today’s newspapers, was also a feature of the *Observer*

³⁸ *Glasgow Observer*, 1 May 1909. A sort of pre-obituary in the 18 February 1905 edition noted McCreadie’s long and at times arduous life adding that he eventually moved into fishmongering, then machine dealing and eventually purchased ‘Charlie Cairney’s pub in the Saltmarket’. This slight social mobility towards the end of his life may have warranted the obituary, though he had no noted political, social or religious associations and the focus was clearly on his long working life.

³⁹ *Glasgow Observer*, 11 October 1913, 15 April 1905, 29 September 1906, 29 April 1916 and 21 September 1912.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1906 (Madame McElhaw), 4 April 1908 (Mrs McGaughrin), 23 October 1920 (Mrs Corcoran), 19 January 1929 (Mrs Mary McCluskie, Mrs Ferns and Miss Alice O’Brien), 19 October 1929 (Mrs Mary Darroch) and 7 December 1929 (Mrs Bridget Dunnion).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29 May 1897.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6 July 1929.

obituaries, and while few, if any, of the individuals featured ‘represent an important stage of cultural canonization, winnowing out those with greater recognition from their competitors’, they were nonetheless important points in an immigrant constellation that did acknowledge popular artistic talent.⁴³ Part of this may be a response to the wider Irish cultural revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that re-conceptualised and celebrated peasant, plebeian and primitive art and culture and which seeped into the consciousness of the Irish in Britain. Without it, there could have been little of note in the lives of popular Irish Catholic nationalist doggerel poets such as George Murray or Dan Bradley from Derry, who died in 1901 and had excerpts of his poetry published in the *Observer*, waxing lyrical on the trauma of exile, struggle and resurgence despite his overlapping societal loyalties.⁴⁴ The ‘Partick poet’, Tom Burns, received a guest obituarist in the form of his colleague, Sylvester MacNamara, who did not neglect Burns’ working life in a foundry, paper mill, coal mine and shipbuilding yard, and his associations with the Miners’ Federation and Boilermakers’ Society in outlining his life as a poet, singer, playwright and actor.⁴⁵ Even the lowly street musicians were not ignored, with the *Observer* not only giving an ample obituary to men such as Greenock’s uilleann piper, Michael O’Rourke, and Glasgow’s blind piper, Peter Kelly, but also supporting calls to help Kelly in the illness suffered before his death.⁴⁶ As with all of these obituaries the occupational profile remains an important component such as with Lochgelly pawnbroker, Thomas Mulligan, who hailed originally from Drunkerran, County Leitrim where he had won early fame for single-handedly wrestling a bull from a field in a celebrated feat of strength before hundreds of spectators. This early Herculean show probably paved the way somewhat for his subsequent career as a bare knuckle boxer, and the obituary recorded his training under ‘Bendigo’, a famous English boxer in the 1860s, before taking the Scottish heavyweight championship in later years, the purse from which may well have enabled him to set up in the pawnbrokerage business.⁴⁷ Equally dramatic, and probably as equally unknown to the readership of 1916 as Mulligan’s exploits, was the life of John Gallagher who served as a Papal Zouave in the 1860s against the army of the Garibaldians along with two other ‘local’ men, Taig McCahill and Patrick Kenny, before returning to the relative humdrum of Milton of Campsie.⁴⁸ Less exciting lives could be found

⁴³ Fowler, ‘Collective memory’, [21–2].

⁴⁴ *Glasgow Observer*, 29 May 1897 and 1 June 1901.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 February 1914.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 June 1907; 9 and 16 February 1907.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 June 1915.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 January 1915, and 2 January 1904 for the obituary of another papal volunteer, John Hamilton.

in the obituaries of the eponymous ‘Old Morrison’ and ‘Wee Alick’, men like the aforementioned uilleann pipers, recorded less for the drama of their lives than the place that they occupied in the cultural and physical geography of the Irish immigrant world in Scotland. The former, James Morrison, was described rather unflatteringly in the *Observer* as ‘a droll-looking, shrunken figure, recalling impressions of a creation of Dickens’, whose ‘fame’ rested overwhelmingly on moving the adoption of the minutes at Sunday meetings of the premier Home Rule branch in Glasgow, though it was noted, rather sardonically, that he also on occasion put some very pertinent questions to the speakers.⁴⁹ This notoriety, like that of Patrick Jackson whose obituary noted enthusiastically that his principal boast was attendance at the city’s first ever Home Rule march, was based largely on an acknowledgement of time served, however humbly, in the nationalist movement nearing its zenith in the pre-third Home Rule Bill days. ‘Wee Alick’s’ contribution as a blind tea hawker with no service in the ‘cause’ obviously stands outside this communal acknowledgement, but Alexander Paterson was also a noted feature on the streets of Glasgow and had the additional benefit of a membership of the Third Order of St Francis.⁵⁰

These obituaries tell many tales and generally support the recent work of Bernard Aspinwall on the complexity of Catholicism in Scotland, but they do also speak to the primacy, arguably, of the ethnic marker of Irishness.⁵¹ It was no mere casual ordering of words that announced the *Observer*’s arrival in 1885 as ‘an Irish National and Catholic’ newspaper, and its role in the formulation, interpretation and dissemination of notions of ‘Irishness’ is certainly as important, if not more so, than the role played by the associational culture unpicked most recently by Terry McBride for an earlier period.⁵² There is also no counter-memory at work here as Fowler has outlined for more contemporary obituaries; most of these individuals were not portrayed badly in other papers, they were simply not portrayed. The *Observer* quite possibly stands alone amongst national newspapers in Scotland in admitting into its pantheon of the great and the good, a considerable number of the ordinary and mundane in a time when such was far from commonplace, if not totally unknown. It may, however, qualify for Fowler’s ‘memory struggle’ category, because we could be seeing in the obituaries and in the ultimate tripartite coda of exile, struggle and acceptance articulated therein a contest in some respects against a

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 March 1899.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2 March 1912 and 10 February 1906.

⁵¹ Aspinwall, ‘Catholic realities and pastoral strategies’.

⁵² Terence McBride, ‘Irishness in Glasgow, 1863–70’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 24 (2006), 1–21.

community re-defining itself in the early dissonant years of the twentieth century driven by a Santayanesque determination not to be condemned to a future based on an ignorance of their past.⁵³

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⁵³ Bridget Fowler, 'Collective memory', [9–12].