5

The Mendicity Society Movement
and the Suppression of Begging

‘THE WAY TO MEND-A-CITY’

Of all the trades agoing now,
A begging it’s the worst, Sir,
Tho’ later it seemed in this good town,
To be the very first, Sir.
It throve so well in every street,
With other trades so blended,
That ’twas determined at the last,
The city should be mended.

Oh no! Mendicity’s the way to mend-a-city
Oh no! Mendicity’s the way, &c.

An Association then was formed,
Of Gentlemen of all ranks;
Who all the Beggars straightway warned,
That they should quit their old pranks.
They drove those objects from our streets,
To Rick Burke’s stores they sent them;
Where they will keep them with good will,
As long as they can rent them,

Oh no! Mendicity, &c.

The better part of all this scheme,
Is that the poor are well off;
They work all day, it is most true,
But when their work they sell off.
One half they get, with meat and drink,
In short they are quite frisky;
When in the evening home they hie,
To take their tea and whiskey
Oh no! Mendicity, &c.

Pale typhus no longer stalks,
At early day or later,
Nor will you in our public walks
Infected beggar mee, Sir,
Your Ladies may a-shopping go,
And whilst they purchase ____ pity,
And in a box a shilling drop,
’Twill help to Mend-the-city.
Oh no! Mendicity, &c.

It’s now you’ll meet in every street,
Good humour and the next Sir;
Whilst to effect good, so complete,
Your mite you won’t refuse, Sir.
And all is done, you can’t but see,
With an intent the best, Sir,
To make this town as it should be,
First city of the west, Sir.
Oh no! Mendicity, &c.

Galway Weekly Advertiser, 27 November 1824

Introduction

In March 1836, the Dublin Mendicity Society received two new applications for admission – Sarah Doody and her son James, and Biddy Loghlin and her five-month-old son, also named James. In both instances, the women’s husbands had been tailors who left their employment due to a strike (‘combination’). The minutes of the managing committee’s meeting at which these applications were considered record that Sarah Doody’s husband, Timothy, ‘in consequence of combination … has quit his work, of which he had enough, & went to England, where he remains’, presumably in search of alternative employment, while Biddy Loghlin’s husband, William, ‘is gone to England & that there is a turn out [i.e., a strike] among the tailors’. The committee then resolved to refuse admission to both these women and their young children.¹ For the managing committee of the

¹ Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 Mar. 1836.
city’s largest and most prominent charity, which catered for a category of paupers (‘common street beggars’) specifically excluded from the remit of other charities, some mendicants were still less deserving than others. The refusal of relief to these women and children arose from the actions of their husbands and reflected the biases of the members of the charity’s managing committee, comprising members of the city’s merchant and professional classes who had an economic interest in the suppression of industrial dissent and insubordination. A later report of the same charity attacked the ‘heart-hardening effects … of this unjust system of interference with the rights of labour’, calling for government intervention ‘to confer a lasting benefit upon the trade and manufactures of Ireland’. (The Methodist-run Strangers’ Friend Society also excluded men whose distress was caused by ‘combination’ from the benefits of its relief.) A historian of the Edinburgh Mendicity Society has similarly observed that its hierarchy of interests ‘included the protection of property, the discriminate distribution of resources, commercial prosperity and stable social relationships. They were congruent with the interests of property-owners, tax-payers and employers.’

The aforementioned Dublin instance illuminates the experiences of both those who used and those who operated Irish mendicity societies, charities that emerged in the early nineteenth century as voluntary organisations committed to the suppression of beggary. While the habitual recourse to beggary, regardless of the cause of such resort, usually sufficed as a requirement for admission to the mendicity asylums, the benevolence of managing committees did not extend to certain individuals whose distress was seen as being self-inflicted. This was seen most clearly in the cases of men who went on strike; as is evident in the case of Sarah Doody and Biddy Loghin, the partners and children of such men also suffered.

2 Jacqueline Hill writes that ‘combination’ was ‘the pejorative term used by employers and those hostile to the practice of journeymen combining to try to maintain or improve wage levels, or limit the number of apprentices’: Jacqueline Hill, ‘Artisans, sectarianism and politics in Dublin, 1829–48’ in Saothar, vii (1981), p. 17. ‘Combination’ was prohibited in Ireland under a statute of 1803, which was repealed in 1824. A number of middle-class deponents, such as clergymen and merchants, expressed their suspicion of ‘combination’ to the Poor Inquiry: PI, Appendix C, Part II, pp. 115–16. For ‘combination’ in early nineteenth-century Belfast, see S.J. Connolly and Gillian McIntosh, ‘Whose city? Belonging and exclusion in the nineteenth-century urban world’ in Connolly, Belfast 400, pp. 239, 244. See also Kelly, ‘Charitable societies’, p. 95; ‘Evidence on combination, taken in Dublin’, PI, Appendix C, Part II, pp. 1c–45c.

3 Nineteenth report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1836, p. 31.

4 PI, Appendix C, Part II, p. 18.

The emergence of mendicity societies throughout Ireland and Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century was symptomatic of the increased public concern towards the threat posed by mendicancy. Arising mainly in the immediate post-war period and, later, during the economic crisis of the mid-1820s, mendicity societies reflected middle-class zeal to tackle the ‘evil’ of street begging, which threatened to spread disease, encourage moral licentiousness among the labouring classes, and undermine the incentive to be industrious. The fundamental purpose of the mendicity societies was to suppress begging in a given town or city. This was not to be done simply by removing beggars from the street and confining them in a custodial institution. Instead, the mendicant poor were to be put to work at useful employment, where they would learn basic skills and ‘habits of industry’ which would assist them to gain employment and become independent. Child beggars in these institutions were provided with a rudimentary education, but one which instilled the virtues of industry, cleanliness, order and religion.

Charitable Societies and Associational Culture

The *modus operandi* of mendicity societies reflected the more general shift towards specialisation and discrimination in the provision of charity which emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century: mendicity societies were dedicated to the suppression of street begging. These charities were founded, run and supported largely by middle-class men, mostly from the professional and commercial classes and who were prominent members of their communities. By voluntarily serving their local mendicity society these individuals emphasised the virtue of civic duty which contributed to the formation of middle-class identity, while also contributing to the protection of their community from disease, idleness, intemperance and other moral evils typically associated with the lower classes.6 (Of course, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the role that self-interest played in philanthropy.)7

The public was assured that in the hands of such ‘respectable’ pillars of the community, their subscriptions and donations would be applied to the most truly ‘deserving’ cases. The publishing of comprehensive reports, full accounts of income and expenditure, statistical tables of the number of paupers relieved, and occasional vignettes of individual cases ‘provided the

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6 Laurence M. Geary, “‘The best relief the poor can receive is from themselves’: the Society for Promoting the Comforts of the Poor’ in Laurence M. Geary and Oonagh Walsh (eds), *Philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2015), p. 40.
public with a distinct impression of effectively targeted relief.\textsuperscript{8} Contrary to the workings of mendicity societies in the first half of the nineteenth century, earlier charities in Irish urban centres specifically excluded common beggars from the benefit of their benevolence, as these individuals were commonly dismissed as the deviant, idle poor who were ‘undeserving’ of the limited resources of charitable funds. Most charities in Ireland focused their efforts on the industrious poor, such as distressed artisans and manufacturers.\textsuperscript{9} Sturdy and refractory beggars were not considered to be fit objects for charity. In Dublin, the Charitable Association was formed in 1806, according to one historical account, ‘to afford relief to all but common beggars’, while it is evident from the title of the Society for the Relief of Industrious Poor, a largely Quaker entity founded in 1813, that the idle poor were excluded from its remit.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Houses of Industry: Precursors to the Mendicity Societies}

The publication in the 1760s of two influential pamphlets by the Church of Ireland Dean of Clogher, Richard Woodward, influenced the passing of legislation for the erection of Houses of Industry across Ireland, establishing a system of licensed begging and a place of detention and industry for unlicensed street beggars. The statute, described by R.B. McDowell as ‘the most important piece of social legislation enacted by the Irish parliament in the eighteenth century’,\textsuperscript{11} empowered, but did not compel, grand juries partially to fund these institutions, and additional income was to come from church collections and charity sermons.\textsuperscript{12} Twelve Houses of Industry (excluding the existing Belfast Charitable Society’s poor house) were established under this legislation and were largely concentrated in south Leinster/east Munster and Ulster.\textsuperscript{13} The Dublin House of Industry opened for the admission of beggars on 8 November 1773 and for nearly 50 years maintained its founding principles of apprehending street beggars through the employment of beadles and confining them in its premises off Channel

\textsuperscript{8} Kelly, ‘Charitable societies’, p. 105. See Morris, ‘Voluntary societies’ for a detailed discussion of some of these themes.
\textsuperscript{9} Kelly, ‘Charitable societies’.
\textsuperscript{10} Warburton \textit{et al.}, \textit{History of the city of Dublin}, ii, p. 901.
\textsuperscript{12} 11 & 12 Geo. III, c. 30 [Ire.] (2 June 1772).
In the early years of the nineteenth century, however, the House of Industry started admitting increasing amounts of the sick poor and its focus gradually shifted in this direction. An 1809 report into Dublin charitable institutions in receipt of parliamentary assistance found that the House of Industry had achieved limited success in its original object of suppressing street begging. Instead, the institution’s focus was on ‘the relief of the aged and infirm, and of those who laboured under temporary distress from want of employment’. This pattern crystallised in the 1816 direction from Chief Secretary Robert Peel, implementing a recommendation from the aforementioned 1809 report, that the House of Industry cease admitting beggars and vagrants and, instead, concentrate its resources on relieving varying categories of the sick and infirm poor in its multi-faceted institutional campus. The impact of Peel’s decision was significant. At a time of considerable social and economic distress and dislocation, caused by the post-war downturn, demobilisation of large swathes of the armed forces, and the prevalence of a typhus fever epidemic, the main institution in Dublin city with legal powers for the apprehension and confinement of street beggars was effectively stripped of this responsibility. This measure gave rise to a public campaign throughout 1817 and 1818 through which the city’s inhabitants demanded the formation of a new organisation for the suppression of street begging. In the absence of any action from the central state or the local grand jury, the initiative of local men, largely from the professional and merchant classes, came to the fore and resulted in the establishment of the Dublin Mendicity Society in January 1818, drawing on the precedent set by similar charitable societies in Hamburg, Munich, Bath, Belfast and Edinburgh, and aimed at suppressing ‘the disgusting and baleful influence of mendicity’. In London, too, the inaction of the state in enforcing anti-begging measures spurred

16 For the House of Industry, see ibid., pp. 13–40. The recommendation is ibid., p. 40.
17 Copy of letter from Robert Peel to the House of Industry governors. The institutions of the House of Industry, which Thackeray described as ‘a group of huge gloomy edifices’, comprised penitentiaries, hospitals and a lunatic asylum: Thackeray, *Irish sketchbook of 1842*, p. 316; (Ireland). Report of the commissioners appointed by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to inspect the House of Industry, and to report upon the management thereof, with a view to the introduction of such reforms and improvements, as would render it, not only less expensive, but more efficient for the purposes for which it was originally designed, pp. 13–15, 19–21, H.C. 1820 (84), viii, 289–91, 295–7.
18 Quoted in Woods, *Dublin outsiders*, p. 193. Useful accounts of the immediate background to the establishment of this society are given in: Anon., *Arguments in proof of the necessity of suppressing street begging; Observations on the House of Industry, Dublin; Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1818*. 
the middle-class founders of the city’s mendicity society into action in 1818; similarly, in Edinburgh, the impetus for policing reforms were closely linked to citizens’ desire for anti-begging measures, leading to the formation in 1813 of the city’s Society for Suppressing Begging.19

**The Emergence of the Mendicity Society Movement**

The poverty, social distress and demographic dislocation that arose following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 were direct causes of the emergence of mendicity societies. With occasional exceptions, such as the Bath and Belfast societies founded in 1805 and 1809 respectively, the early mendicity societies were established in the years immediately following the end of hostilities, when vagrancy levels rose sharply throughout Ireland and Britain. The evidence for Ireland supports M.J.D. Roberts’s research into the origins of the London Mendicity Society,20 with accounts attributing the emergence of these early societies to the peacetime downturn, the large-scale demobilisation of men and the consequent upsurge in beggary. The first report of the Dublin Mendicity Society asserted that the extent of mendicancy in the city, while always considerable, ‘was greatly increased by the effects of the termination of the war upon the trading and agricultural interests in this country – by the disbanding of large portions of the army and navy’, as well as two years of famine and disease epidemics.21

The mid- to late 1810s was a period of ‘almost unexampled scarcity’.22 The post-war demobilisation, together with a decline in agricultural prices, poor potato crops and a two-year nationwide fever epidemic resulted not only in alarming levels of mendicancy throughout Ireland, but, according to one account, ‘gave it a character, form, and virulence which appeared to place it beyond the reach of cure’. The same report, referring to Dublin, continued: ‘every asylum in the City being full, begging appeared not only excusable, but justifiable; every hand distributed alms, a great part of the disgrace of seeking charity being removed’.23 An observer, writing in 1816, painted a grim picture of Dublin city:


23 Ibid.
The City presented a spectacle, at once afflicting and disgusting to the feelings of its inhabitants; the doors of carriages and shops, to the interruption of business, were beset by crowds of unfortunate and clamorous beggars, exhibiting misery and decrepitude in a variety of forms, and frequently carrying about in their persons and garments the seeds of contagious disease; themselves the victims of idleness, their children were taught to depend on Begging, as affording the only means of future subsistence; every artifice was resorted to by the practised Beggar to extort alms, and refusal was frequently followed by imprecations and threats. The benevolent were imposed upon – the modest shocked – the reflecting grieved – the timid alarmed. In short, so distressing was the whole scene, and so intolerable was the nuisance, that its suppression became a matter of necessity.24

It was in this context that in villages, towns and cities across Ireland and Britain middle-class men came together to form voluntary associations with the primary aim of suppressing street begging in their locality.

The first of these societies to state its aim specifically as the suppression of street begging was, in fact, a pre-1815 entity. The Bath Mendicity Society was formed in 1805 and by 1818 similar associations had been established in Oxford, Edinburgh, Chester, Birmingham, Salisbury, Bristol, Liverpool, Coventry, Kendal, Kingston and Colchester.25 The Belfast House of Industry, formed in 1809, just weeks after an estimated 2,000 calico looms in the town ‘were struck idle’, was a mendicity society in all but name; it was a voluntarily funded charitable society whose founding principle was ‘not merely to check the growth of mendicity at present, but to cut it up by the roots, to come at the very source and spring of the evil that rankles in the vitals of every large town’, and, despite its name, is not to be confused with the twelve Houses of Industry established under the 1770s legislation.26 Mendicity societies drew inspiration from an initiative of a Hamburg institution, founded in 1788, under which a committee was formed, the town was divided into districts, house-to-house collection of subscriptions was undertaken, the

24 Ibid., pp. 2–3.
circumstances of the poor were investigated, and a spinning school was commenced for women and children.\textsuperscript{27}

Of the Irish mendicity societies, 52 have been identified to date, as shown in the Table 5.1. In mapping the geographical distribution of these societies, a number of points are to be made (see Figure 5.1). First, the concentration of the charities in Ulster is striking. Thirty-two of the 52 societies were located in the northern province and 11 societies were to be found in Leinster, with seven and two in Munster and Connaught respectively. The reason for the singular concentration of mendicity societies in Ulster may be explained as an Irish manifestation of the Scottish model of voluntary approaches to poor assistance, particularly given the fact that 96 per cent of Irish Presbyterians, who shared many cultural identities, theological world views and ecclesiastical structures with the Calvinist Church of Scotland, lived in Ulster.\textsuperscript{28} Just as Ulster Presbyterianism influenced social, cultural, political and economic practices in the northern province, so too did it shape poor relief initiatives.\textsuperscript{29} Just under two-fifths of all of the Irish mendicity societies were located in the two counties of Antrim and Down, largely in locations where Presbyterians constituted 50 per cent to 80 per cent of the population. Mendicity societies in Ulster differed from those elsewhere in Ireland not only in their geographic concentration but also in the fact that in many locations they were founded in relatively small towns and villages. The 20 societies located in Leinster, Munster and Connaught were established mostly in towns and cities with populations of more than 10,000. Yet, of the 32 Ulster societies, 23 were to be found in towns with populations smaller than 5,000. Indeed, the Stillorgan, Moate and Portarlington societies were the only non-Ulster societies located in towns with populations under 5,000. Another factor which certainly led to the concentration of mendicity societies in the north-east was the fall-out from the 1825–6 industrial downturn and commercial crisis, which severely impacted on textile manufacturers, such as

\textsuperscript{27} The importance of the Hamburg institution as a model for the later mendicity societies is to be found at: Account of the management of the poor in Hamburgh, since the year 1788. In a letter to some friends of the poor, in Great Britain (Dublin, 1796); Anon., ‘Management of the poor in Hamburgh’ in Belfast Monthly Magazine, iii, no. 13 (31 Aug. 1809), pp. 94–9; ‘Extract from the report of the establishments at Hamburgh, in 1799’, ibid., pp. 99–101; Leaflet advertising forthcoming publication of ‘an account of the management of the poor in Hamburgh since the year 1788’, 1 Sept. 1817 (NAI, CSOOP, CSO/OP483/31); Observations on the House of Industry, Dublin, pp. 3, 5; Hansard 1, xxxi, 689 (8 June 1815); Dalgleish, ‘Voluntary associations and the middle class in Edinburgh’, pp. 110–11. For the Hamburg institution’s influence in the USA, see Blanche D. Coll, ‘The Baltimore Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, 1820–1822’ in American Historical Review, lxi, no. 1 (Oct. 1955), p. 80.

\textsuperscript{28} S.J. Connolly, Religion and society in nineteenth-century Ireland (Dundalk, 1994), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{29} Gray, Making of the Irish Poor Law, pp. 116, 119.
Table 5.1  Irish cities, towns and villages where mendicity societies were founded, 1809–45 (arranged in descending order according to population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population in 1831 census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 20,000</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>232,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>107,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>66,554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>53,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>33,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>28,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>Kilkenny</td>
<td>23,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000–20,000</td>
<td>Derry</td>
<td>Londonderry</td>
<td>19,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drogheda</td>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>17,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>Sligo</td>
<td>15,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clonmel</td>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>15,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newry</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>13,065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>Wexford</td>
<td>10,673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dundalk</td>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>10,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000–10,000</td>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>9,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>Carlow</td>
<td>9,114</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Carrickfergus</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>8,706</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Ennis</td>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>7,711</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Wexford</td>
<td>7,523</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kinsale</td>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>7,312</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parsonstown</td>
<td>King’s County</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bushmills</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>6,869</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enniskillen</td>
<td>Fermanagh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Roscrea</td>
<td>Tipperary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lisburn</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt; 5,000</td>
<td>Downpatrick</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>4,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newtownards</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>4,442</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ballymena</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>4,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knockbreda</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>3,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>3,848</td>
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</table>
The effects of this downturn were not limited to the north-east. In the Liberties of Dublin, the capital’s textile hub lying to the south-west of the medieval city centre, it was estimated that as many as 20,000 people (newly unemployed workers and their dependants) were reduced to a state of near-starvation.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population in 1831 census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballyshannon</td>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>3,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dungannon</td>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>3,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkintiola</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>3,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portarlington</td>
<td>Queen’s County (Laois)</td>
<td>3,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrickmacross</td>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>2,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lurgan</td>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>2,842</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>2,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>2,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larne</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>2,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballymoney</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>2,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilwood</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>2,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omagh</td>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>2,211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portaferry</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>2,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moate</td>
<td>Westmeath</td>
<td>1,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballycastle</td>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>1,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough</td>
<td>Down</td>
<td>1,453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood</td>
<td>Down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caledon</td>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>1,079</td>
</tr>
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<td>Saintfield</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kilmore</td>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>937</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stillorgan</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Population, Ireland. Census of the population, 1831. Comparative abstract of the population in Ireland, as taken in 1821 and 1831, H.C. 1833 (23), xxxix, 3.
Figure 5.1  Map of mendicity societies in existence in Ireland, 1809–45

Compiled and drawn by Ciarán McCabe.
Just as the charitable fever hospital ‘movement’ spread through Britain and Ireland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,\textsuperscript{32} the contemporary proliferation of mendicity societies also represented a transnational ‘movement’, in that institutions with common objectives were formed under comparable conditions by persons from similar social backgrounds and driven by almost identical social and economic reasons. Furthermore, and crucially, these societies were not founded in an intellectual vacuum but in an environment where information regarding the work of like-minded charities was increasingly accessible and frequently exchanged. The founding literature of these charities, such as published statements and reports, typically made reference to earlier mendicity societies and the influence derived from these predecessors. Precedents established in Edinburgh and Gloucester influenced those who established the mendicity society in Belfast in 1809, while other Irish mendicity societies were also formed based on precedents set abroad.\textsuperscript{33} The efforts of societies in Belfast, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Munich and Hamburg, for instance, were known to the men who founded the Dublin Mendicity Society in January 1818 and who based their proposals for suppressing streetbegging on ‘the result of actual practice, crowned, in more instances than one, with the most complete success’.\textsuperscript{34} Similar language was used in a campaign to establish a mendicity asylum in Kilkenny, whose proponents consulted the published reports of earlier mendicity societies, ‘those valuable associations on the Continent, in Great Britain, also in Ireland’. The public were told: ‘The practicality of the measure has been proved by the best of all tests, experience, on the Continent and to different parts of the United Kingdom’.\textsuperscript{35} In considering the financial viability of the Newry Mendicity society, its managing committee contrasted its accounts with expenditure levels at the Dublin, Belfast, Derry and Edinburgh institutions.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, the 1821 report of the London Mendicity society, founded three years earlier, noted that similar initiatives had been undertaken throughout England in the previous three years and commended ‘the successful progress already made by many of these associations; and it has been observed, that upon the public roads

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Leinster Journal}, 19, 22 Apr. 1820.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{OSM}, iii, pp. 93–4.
contiguous to those towns which have Mendicity, or Vagrant Offices, not a
beggar is to be seen’. Baron Caspar von Voght, a founder of the precedent-
setting Hamburg poor scheme, personified the transnational nature of this
movement in the dissemination of his ideas across national borders – editions
of his pamphlet promoting his Hamburg scheme were published in Dublin,
London and Edinburgh – and through his travels across Europe as part of
the wave of ‘philanthropic tourism’.

Member societies of the movement were characterised as such by more than
merely knowledge of the workings of similar bodies. Instances of co-operation
between societies attest to the prevalence of a sense of belonging to a wider
movement, wherein shared experiences informed the workings of individual
organisations. Upon its establishment in 1821, the Waterford Mendicity
Society forwarded its resolutions to the Dublin society for its consideration,
thanking the latter for its co-operation and assisting in their labours. The
first report of the Waterford Mendicity Society made particular mention
of the Dublin association, which furnished the southern city’s body with
‘every information in their power’ and helped shape its ‘original principles’.
The Dublin members were also praised and thanked for being ‘most earnest
and assiduous in giving the instructions of their more enlarged practice to
the friends of the Mendicant Asylum in Waterford’. That same summer,
a Rev. Price, secretary to the Waterford society, was elected an honorary
associate of the Dublin committee. Members of societies were also known
to travel (sometimes long distances) to meet personally the founders of new
bodies and offer advice first-hand. A Mr Hunt, among the founders of the
Kinsale Mendicity Society, publicly offered to assist, through correspondence
or in person, the foundation of a similar institution in Cork city, while at an
early meeting of the Cork Mendicity Society, ‘a young Gentleman connected
with the Dublin Association, Mr. Hudson, kindly attended, and gave to the
Meeting information of a highly useful and interesting nature’. The example

37 The third report of the society for the suppression of mendicity, established in London, 1818
38 [Caspar von Voght], Account of the management of the poor in Hamburgh, since the year
1788: In a letter to some friends of the poor in Great Britain (Dublin, 1796).
39 Caspar von Voght to James Edward Smith, 3 May 1795 (Linnean Society Archives,
James Edward Smith papers, GB-110/JES/COR/10/57) accessed at Linnean Society
of London http://linnean-online.org/62487/ (accessed 21 Jan. 2016); Joanna Innes and
Arthur Burns, ‘Introduction’ in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds), Rethinking the
40 Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 May 1821.
41 First annual report, Waterford Mendicity Society, p. 11.
42 Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 22 June 1821.
43 Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier, 7 Nov. 1826.
44 Cork Mercantile Chronicle, 3 Nov. 1826.
of Irish mendicity societies supports Robert Morris’s argument that voluntary societies were influenced and driven by ‘the stimulus of action taken in other towns’, yet his implication that the lack of an overarching central body prevented any meaningful connection between different charities is challenged by the example of some of the Irish mendicity societies.\textsuperscript{45}

The proliferation of mendicity societies in Ireland at this time was such that in September 1820 the committee of the Dublin institution claimed in a memorial to the Lord Lieutenant that they had the satisfaction ‘to observe that benevolent persons in remote parts of Ireland had succeeded in establishing similar institutions in several towns, and with the view to send up persons, in some instances, to be instructed in the system at their establishment in Dublin, where from the spacious accommodation hitherto possessed, the working of it could be shewn to advantage’.\textsuperscript{46} The co-operation and exchange of information between the members of this movement transcended national boundaries, as seen in the London Mendicity Society’s 1821 letter to the Dublin society, enclosing two of the former’s reports and requesting any similar material published by the Dublin institution. In signing off, the London correspondent assured the Dublin committee of their guaranteed co-operation ‘in the promotion of our mutual object’.\textsuperscript{47} These instances support Jacinta Prunty’s description of an ‘urgent international debate’, wherein the ‘merits of Poor Law systems in Edinburgh, Bath, Hamburg, Munich, Amsterdam, Paris, New York and elsewhere [were] scrutinised and compared with the system proposed for or prevailing in Dublin’.\textsuperscript{48} Within England, too, there were connections between mendicity societies, in terms of both philosophy and personnel. Among the founding resolutions of the London Mendicity Society in 1818 was ‘to make application to the societies for the suppression of Mendicity already established in Edinburgh, Bath and other places for the purpose of obtaining their rules and regulations, and any other information likely to be useful to this Society’; the 1823 annual report noted that the society had corresponded with mendicity societies in at least 20 other locations throughout England.\textsuperscript{49} Matthew Martin, who undertook an investigation into street begging in London in the 1790s and appeared as an expert witness to the 1815–16 London Mendicity Committee, was an early supporter of the Bath society as well as serving as an officer of the London association, while a Rev. Francis Randolph also served on both the Bath and London mendicity society committees.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{45} Morris, ‘Voluntary societies and British urban elites’, pp. 98, 103.
\textsuperscript{46} Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 4 Sept. 1820 (NLI, DMSP, MS 32,599/1).
\textsuperscript{47} Dublin Mendicity Society minute book, 6 Feb. 1821.
\textsuperscript{48} Prunty, \textit{Dublin slums}, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{50} Roberts, ‘Reshaping the gift relationship’, pp. 206–7, 209.
Mendicity societies resembled other charities in sourcing their income largely from voluntary sources, distinguishing them from the Houses of Industry. In 1831, the Coleraine Mendicity Society’s income came from donations, subscriptions, cash received from the sale of broken stones (pulverised by male inmates), court fines and church collections.\(^{51}\) Voluntary income consistently constituted around 90 per cent of the Derry society’s total revenue, with other income coming from fines and the sale of sundry items.\(^{52}\) Evidence for the societies in Dublin, Armagh, Drogheda, Sligo, Carrickfergus and Waterford, among others, confirms this trend of near or total dependency on voluntary contributions.\(^{53}\) The Belfast House of Industry benefited on occasion from unorthodox sources of income: in 1817, £1 was donated by a group of travelling ‘Indian Jugglers’ who performed on the streets of Belfast, while in 1831 the institution received half of the proceeds of a ventriloquist show.\(^{54}\) In 1839, the institution received 10s. from a donor, ‘stopped from a servant’s wages, for intemperance, and absenting herself without leave’.\(^{55}\)

Financial uncertainty appears to have been the universal experience of mendicity societies, owing to their reliance on voluntary income. The charities were subject, therefore, to the shifting appetite of the public for addressing the problem of street begging. While the Galway mendicity asylum was described in 1825, shortly after its foundation, as ‘the only institution of the kind that does not appear to be upon the verge of ruin’\(^{56}\) – perhaps owing to initial enthusiasm for the institution being reflected in buoyant subscriptions – the asylum closed in 1829, due to indebtedness, and


\(^{52}\) *First report, Londonderry Mendicity Society*, p. 9; *The second report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825*; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year (Derry, 1827), p. 12; *The thirteenth report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, May 13, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the year ending July 31, 1838* (Derry, 1838), p. 8.

\(^{53}\) *Third report of evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland. Minutes of evidence: 8 June–7 July. With an appendix of documents and papers, and likewise a general index*, p. 660, H.C. 1830 (665), vii, 840; ibid., pp. 669, 691, 698, 711.

\(^{54}\) *BNL*, 17 June 1817; P. Frederick Gallaher [sic] to William Cunningham, 30 Dec. 1831 (PRONI, Cunningham and Clarke papers, D1108/A/28A). For the identification of ‘Gallaher’ as a ventriloquist, see P. Frederick Gallaher to William Cunningham, 29 Jan. 1833 (PRONI, Cunningham and Clarke papers, D1108/A/28B).

\(^{55}\) *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 16 Feb. 1839.

\(^{56}\) *Galway Weekly Advertiser*, 25 June 1825.
between its re-opening in April 1830 and its permanent closure seven years later, the society was plagued by constant financial pressures and came to depend on income from the labour of the paupers for its survival.\textsuperscript{57} In 1835, the Enniskillen society was required to be revived after its decline ‘from the reduction in the contributions, of some of the subscribers, and the total withdrawal of others’.\textsuperscript{58} Constant financial insecurity was also the experience of the Drogheda asylum, which operated between 1822 and 1838,\textsuperscript{59} while the Limerick mendicity society saw its income drop from just more than £600 in 1823 to little over £200 six years later.\textsuperscript{50} What is not clear is whether this sizeable decrease resulted from a waning of public support for the institution or the effects of the economic downturn of the mid-1820s, which would have negatively impacted on the society’s subscribers and donors. An 1838 trade directory described the Limerick Mendicity Society as follows: ‘Little can be said of this Society, as the charity is so badly supported that they cannot do much’.\textsuperscript{61} The failure of the Ballycastle Mendicity Society in County Antrim was attributed to the farmers and shopkeepers who, in ‘finding the mendicity [asylum] little or no relief, gave up their subscriptions for its support’.\textsuperscript{62} The number of street beggars in Armagh city typically increased ‘when the Mendicity Society [was] dissolved, which occasionally happens in consequence of funds being inadequate’, according to the Church of Ireland Primate of Ireland, Lord John Beresford.\textsuperscript{63} The main sources of income for the Caledon Mendicity Society, founded in 1829 by the Earl of Caledon and his wife for the purpose of giving relief to ‘objects of real charity and to detect impostors and strangers, who have no claim to our assistance’,\textsuperscript{64} comprised an annual contribution of £100 from Lord Caledon and subscriptions averaging around £172 per annum.\textsuperscript{65} The instance of Caledon is a unique example of an improving landlord – the earl erected stone-built houses and flour-mills in the town, and was described by Henry Inglis as being ‘all that could be desired – a really good resident country gentleman’\textsuperscript{66} – distributing relief to the poor of his community using the mendicity society model.

\textsuperscript{57} Cunningham, ‘A town tormented by the sea’, pp. 52–3.
\textsuperscript{58} Enniskillen Chronicle and Erne Packet, 10 Sept. 1835.
\textsuperscript{59} McHugh, Drogheda before the Famine, pp. 46–51.
\textsuperscript{60} PI, Appendix C, Part I, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{61} Deane’s Limerick almanack, directory and advertiser, 1838, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{62} PI, Appendix A, p. 726.
\textsuperscript{63} PI, Supplement to Appendix A, p. 294.
\textsuperscript{66} Inglis, Ireland in 1834, ii, p. 277. For Caledon’s improving policies on his estate, see Lewis, Topographical dictionary, i, pp. 243–4; OSM, xx, pp. 1–4.
The funding of mendicity societies through subscriptions and donations was not the reserve of the wealthier classes. The Dublin society regularly received sums of money from ‘tradesmen and labourers’ as well as prominent citizens’ servants, and these instances included either individual working men giving 10s. or a group of workers for a large company donating a cumulative sum. Employees at Guinness’s brewery donated £38 15s. 7d. in 1840. Given that the Guinness family had long connections with the mendicity society, it is to be wondered at how and why this particular charity was chosen for this communal donation. Were employees influenced, unduly or otherwise, by their employers’ connections to the charity or were they being pragmatic in supporting a cause which attracted the benevolence of their paymaster? These considerations tie in with John Cunningham’s analysis of the Galway Mendicity Society, which in 1824 expressed its ‘peculiar satisfaction’ at the donation of half a crown each by 46 of the town’s weavers. Cunningham correctly asserts that this donation is better understood when one considers that these weavers, who were employed in ‘the Hall of this town’, were subject to a committee whose membership overlapped with that of the Mendicity Society. Donating to the merchant-run charity may have been an act of self-interest by these working-class men, in terms of their future employment prospects, while the society’s public advertisement of the weavers’ collective donation also intended to embarrass wealthier inhabitants into contributing.

The Work of Mendicity Societies

Mendicity societies promised to citizens of Irish, British and European towns and cities, frustrated by the seemingly constant imposition of hordes of street beggars, a method of suppressing mendicancy which was relatively inexpensive and regulated by prominent members of the civil community. The key attraction of the societies was that they offered food and work for those who would probably resort to mendicancy for sustenance. These charities, therefore, removed the excuse for begging: with all the ‘deserving’ paupers receiving basic sustenance inside the mendicity asylum, those beggars who continued to solicit alms in the streets proved themselves to be ‘undeserving’ by the very fact of their public alms-seeking. Admission

67 Twenty-third annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1840 (Dublin, 1841), p. 44; Twenty-second report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1839, p. 72; An address to the mechanics, workmen, and servants, in the city of Dublin (Dublin, 1828), p. 10.
68 Cunningham, ‘A town tormented by the sea’, p. 46.
to the mendicity asylum was not unqualified. In Sligo, proof of residence in the town for the three years prior to application was required. In Dublin, a similar rule, requiring six months’ residence, was in place but reportedly not strictly enforced. The citizens of a given town or city were encouraged not to dole out alms to mendicants found begging in the streets but instead to refer alms-seekers to the mendicity society’s premises where their claim to destitution would be assessed. This had the effect of ensuring that citizens were not ‘double-taxed’.

The mendicity institutions differed from the Houses of Industry and the later Poor Law union workhouses in that paupers generally did not reside in the building. Exceptions to this rule were the Sligo Mendicity Society, which in 1828 was providing accommodation for 43 of the 66 paupers on its books, and the Clonmel society, which lodged 50 paupers at its premises. The general practice was that applicants were admitted in the morning, provided with food at stipulated times and discharged in the evening, when they returned to their places of residence or found shelter on the streets. During the day the able-bodied were put to labour, such as breaking stones or oyster shells, picking oakum and spinning, while the infirm and elderly were given succour and occasionally allocated basic work. The mendicity society in Derry raised income through the sale of items made by its paupers and among the articles for sale were ‘Spangles of yarn, Herring net, Garden nets, Small tow nets, Flax nets, Hemp nets, Flax, Linen yarn socks’. The Belfast House of Industry adhered to the general mendicity society model by providing only day accommodation for the poor – namely, ‘that class of poor who have no place of residence convenient for working in’. The institution encouraged industrious individuals to engage in employment, mostly the spinning of flax or wool (either on-site or at the paupers’ abode), knitting and picking oakum. One year after opening, 309 spinners of linen yarn were employed, as well as stocking knitters and oakum pickers.

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69 Ibid., p. 48.
70 *PI, Appendix C, Part II*, p. 35.
72 *Sligo Journal*, 13 May 1828; *PI, Appendix A*, p. 702.
73 The fourth report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year (Derry, 1829), p. 10.
poor were also incentivised away from mendicancy by the Belfast society’s provision of food, fuel and straw to deserving cases approved by visitors. Mendicity societies, particularly in large cities, were designed, in the words of the Dublin society’s officials, to ‘resemble as much as possible a factory’ as opposed to a prison.

The guiding principle of these institutions was similar to that used by the New Poor Law workhouses in England (and later in Ireland) from the 1830s – namely, ‘that the condition of persons within charitable institutions should not be raised above the level of the lower class of the working orders out of doors’. These charities did not wish to undermine the incentive and moral virtue of ‘honest’ and independent industry to the working classes. Those who entered these institutions were subject to strict discipline and order, and relief had to be earned, either through genuine distress or hard labour. Removing these individuals from the streets and from a state of idleness for a few hours each day decreased their chances of Resorting to alms-seeking. However, mendicity societies did not – and could not – completely prevent this eventuality. It was noted that many relieved at the Limerick Mendicity Society during the day would ‘take up the trade of begging on their return home each night, to the great annoyance of the shopkeepers’. In Dublin, a number of women, ‘notoriously prostitutes’, were reported as attending the institution during the day and being ‘on the streets at night’, while a police magistrate in the city told the Poor Inquiry commissioners that ‘Many of the beggars at night are persons who are in the Mendicity all day’. To these individuals the mendicity societies were clearly yet another survival option to be utilised. They could enter the asylums voluntarily and receive shelter and food during the day before returning to their habitual practices in the evening. The poor exerted agency and made decisions for themselves, drawing on their knowledge of the various welfare options available to them in the ‘economy of makeshifts’.

76 For the work of the Belfast asylum, see Cooke, Sermon preached in aid of the Belfast House of Industry.
77 FJ, 21 Feb. 1838.
78 Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830, p. 342.
79 Deane’s Limerick almanack, directory and advertiser, 1838, p. 37.
Lack of Legal Powers

The ability of mendicity societies to apprehend and confine street beggars varied from place to place, and in many cases the lack of powers physically to remove mendicants was the source of much debate and complaint by the managing committees and local householders, who were critical of this weakness. Some mendicity societies employed beadles to suppress mendicancy, but the exact nature of their work is difficult to ascertain. Did they physically man-handle beggars out of public streets or did they use persuasion, intimidation or threats to ward off mendicants? In 1831, the Coleraine Mendicity Society and poor house was paying its ‘bang-beggar’ an annual salary of £7 16s., while the following year, this figure increased substantially to £17 11s. 8d. for ‘persons to prevent street begging’.

More definitive information on the powers exercised by such individuals is available for the Belfast House of Industry, whose two constables apprehended and confined street beggars under authority deputed from the town’s Charitable Society, which had been granted such powers by a 1774 statute. Beggars were confined in a ‘miserable vault’ in the House of Industry for up to 24 hours before being released, while the most ‘incorrigible’ inmates were taken before a magistrate. The Londonderry Mendicity Society’s constables also possessed powers of apprehension: two, or sometimes three, officers called ‘bangbeggars’ were employed ‘to go round the City in every direction, and to apprehend any one they may find begging’, who were then confined in the city bridewell. After being sent away by the master ‘over the bridge’, the mendicants were allegedly discouraged from re-entering the town by the one penny toll on the bridge.

If caught a second time, the beggars were confined in a bridewell attached to the mendicity asylum.

81 OSM, xxxiii, p. 71; Municipal corporations (Ireland). Appendix to the first report of the commissioners. Part III. – Conclusion of the north-west circuit, pp. 1050–51, H.C. 1836 [C 26], xxiv, 50–1. It appears that this parliamentary report formed the basis of Maxwell Given’s presentation of the mendicity society’s accounts for the years 1831–2 in ‘Historical notes compiled by Maxwell Given’ 1906, pp. 1707–10.
82 13 & 14 Geo. III, c. 46 [Ire.] (2 June 1774).
83 PI, Appendix C, Part I, p. 12. In 1810 the House of Industry advertised for a ‘stout active man, to take up all persons found begging in the Streets of Belfast, and to keep the Streets free from Mendicants’: BNL, 28 Sept. 1810.
84 The third report of the general committee of the Mendicity Association, instituted in Londonderry, 13th May, 1825; with a statement of the accounts, and a list of the subscribers for the last year (Derry, 1828), p. 6.
Upon its foundation in 1818, the Dublin Mendicity Society employed inspectors to clear beggars from the city streets. The efficacy of this method was undermined, however, by the absence of legal powers for these inspectors to remove or detain mendicants. To overcome this problem the institution’s officers accompanied members of the Dublin police ‘on the beat’ and the former’s role was limited to ‘pointing out persons in the act of begging to the police’ who would subsequently arrest and detain the culprit. According to the Poor Inquiry commissioners, these weaknesses were such that the system which prevailed in Dublin ‘presents far less facilities for their [the beggars’] apprehension than that adopted in London’. M.J.D. Roberts has argued that the employment by the London Mendicity Society of its own constables resulted from the belief ‘that existing police agents in London were demonstrably uninterested in enforcing the begging provisions’ of the English vagrancy legislation. Just as the formation of the professional Metropolitan Police in 1829 led the London Mendicity Society to relinquish its policing duties regarding mendicants, it appears that the Dublin society waned in its deployment of street inspectors in the mid-1830s, around the time of the establishment of the Dublin Metropolitan Police along the lines of Robert Peel’s London force. Indeed, the 1830s witnessed the unusual phenomenon of private residents and businesses employing extra-legal street inspectors, who possessed no legal powers of any kind, for the sole purpose of removing beggars from outside their respective homes and places of business.

Inter-Denominational Appeal of Mendicity Societies

In a period marked by increasing sectarian tensions, and when public charity was closely linked to confessional identities, the establishment and management of mendicity societies provided opportunities for inter-denominational collaboration in the public sphere of philanthropy. Public figures who differed in their religious views co-operated through these charities, as the mendicity society model was agreeable to the doctrinal views of the different Irish churches and religious societies, as well as the social, economic and cultural outlook of the middle-class men who formed and ran the organisations. The 19-man committee of the Ballyshannon Mendicity Society, for example,

87 PI, Appendix C, Part II, Report upon vagrancy and mendicity in the City of Dublin, p. 33a*.
89 Ibid., p. 218.
comprised nine Catholics and ten Protestants. The cross-denominational nature of the management of mendicity societies can also be seen in the raising of income from collections in different churches and meeting houses. The Carrickfergus Mendicity Society was supported through collections in the local Church of Ireland church and Presbyterian meeting house, as well as by voluntary subscriptions, while the local Catholic priest in Ballymena collected subscriptions upon the establishment of the town’s society. The income for the Sligo society, the chairman of which was Presbyterian minister Rev. Heron, included donations collected at sermons preached at the town’s Anglican, Presbyterian and Independent places of worship. In 1837, ‘the few Jews residing in Dublin’ contributed £7 14s. to the city’s mendicity society.

These charities were secular in nature and embraced all denominations, in terms both of their serving members and those paupers relieved. The fact that the Antrim Mendicity Society relieved Catholics, who comprised ‘the least competent in means and numbers to contribute’ to the charity’s income, was hailed as a ‘practical illustration of disinterested benevolence’. As with most large secular charities in urban centres, Protestants formed a disproportionately large number of the members, reflecting the greater social and economic prominence of Protestants in nineteenth-century urban Ireland. But, the rising strength and confidence of the Catholic middle classes was also represented in the membership of the mendicity societies. Catholic priest, Poor Law advocate and member of the Dublin Mendicity Society managing committee, Rev. Thaddeus O’Malley pointed to the collaboration between clergy of all denominations in mendicity societies as evidence for the suitability of having priests and ministers serve on Poor Law boards of guardians. (The subsequent stipulation that clergymen could not serve as guardians was one of the features of the 1838 Irish Poor Law Act which distinguished it from the English act of four years previously.) Testifying to a parliamentary select committee, O’Malley asserted:

Now I have been acting for many Years on the Mendicity Committee in Dublin; we had Clergymen of the different Churches there; and

91 Third report, state of the poor select committee, 1830, Appendix, p. 698.  
92 PI, Appendix A, p. 718.  
93 Fionna Gallagher, The streets of Sligo: urban evolution over the course of seven centuries (Sligo, 2008), p. 169.  
95 Twentieth annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1837 (Dublin, 1838), p. 21.  
96 BNL, 14 June 1831.  
97 O’Malley, Poor Laws – Ireland, p. 67.  
98 1 & 2 Vict., c. 56, s. 19 (31 July 1838).
I never knew any thing approaching to an Unpleasantness to occur between them. I think it most desirable to bring the Clergy of both Churches together, and I do not know any more fitting Occasion than the administering [of] Poor Relief.\textsuperscript{99}

The evidence suggests that, notwithstanding a small number of instances where political and religious tensions found their way into the board rooms of managing committees,\textsuperscript{100} mendicity societies were successful in serving as cross-denominational forums wherein Catholics and Protestants could co-operate in the relief of poverty and suppression of mendicancy.

\textbf{Decline of the Mendicity Societies:}
\textbf{The 1838 Poor Law and ‘Double Taxation’}

In most cases, the mendicity societies ceased to operate in the late 1830s and early 1840s and this decline was directly related to the introduction of the 1838 Poor Law. The main supporters of the mendicity societies were the middle classes and petty bourgeois (such as small shopkeepers), who were also liable for the new poor rate. With the introduction of the new compulsory assessment, these ratepayers were more reluctant to subscribe to the mendicity societies, which catered for the same class of destitute poor now eligible for admission to the workhouses. The problem of perceived ‘double taxation’ impacted on other charities’ level of subscriptions and donations, as former supporters became more selective in how they distributed their disposable income in light of the new poor rate. Throughout the 1830s, while the Poor Law question was prominent in public discourse in Ireland and Britain, mendicity societies were conscious of the likely impact that the introduction of a poor rate would have on their voluntarily generated income. The threat of a compulsorily assessed Poor Law was regularly used with great effect by charitable societies to pressure the public into parting with some of their money. In the late 1820s, the Dublin Mendicity Society warned the city’s inhabitants that in the event that insufficient income was raised from the usual voluntary sources, the organisation would petition parliament to legislate for a compulsory rate for the support of the society. ‘That resolution’, managing committee member Anthony Richard Blake informed a parliamentary inquiry, ‘appeared to have a very beneficial effect;

\textsuperscript{99} Report from the select committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor, and into the operation of the medical charities in Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence taken before the said committee, p. 836, H.C. 1846 (694), xi, 872.
\textsuperscript{100} Binns, \textit{Miseries and beauties of Ireland}, ii, pp. 257–8; \textit{Sligo Journal}, 13, 30 May 1828.
subscriptions came in almost immediately upon it'. When asked for his opinion as to what would have been the effect on voluntary contributions had a compulsory rate been introduced, Blake replied that such sources of income would have ceased. The committee was told by Blake that in towns and cities where institutions such as mendicity societies existed and operated, people refused to give alms to beggars in the streets. His explanation was: ‘It results, from their feeling that they already contribute to the support of the poor, and partly from knowing that the distressed may be relieved through the mendicity establishment’.  

Blake’s assertion here that the existence of mendicity societies ended public alms-giving does not ring true, though, as it was the near-universal experience of these charities to criticise the continued practice of alms-giving to street beggars even after the mendicity asylum had been established. The period between the passing of the Poor Law in 1838 and the first admission of paupers into workhouses was an interval period marked by uncertainty, when the managers of charities urged the public to continue to contribute to their local mendicity society until such a time as the workhouse was open for the reception of paupers. In May 1840, in Downpatrick, the defunct mendicity society was revived ‘to relieve the poor of this district in their present distressed state’, by means of home-based assistance and badging. At this juncture, the poor rate valuator had been appointed (March 1840), yet the contracts for the construction of the workhouse would not be signed for another four months (September 1840). In spring 1842, the delay in opening the workhouse (the first paupers were not admitted until September 1842) required a final burst of publicity to seek continued donations to the mendicity fund which ‘ceases when the Workhouse opens’. In its final report, for the year ending July 1838, the Londonderry Mendicity Society expressed its support for the recently enacted Poor Law under which, it hoped, ‘apprehended abuses will

102 Sixth report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1823, p. 28; Galway Weekly Advertiser, 1 Jan. 1825; Third report, Londonderry Mendicity Association, p. 6; OSM, iii, p. 101. The London society hit out at this continued practice, asserting that ‘indiscriminate almsgiving is not charity. So long as this habit is indulged in, so long must all efforts to suppress Mendicity prove abortive’: London Mendicity Society minute book, 24 Feb. 1819.  
103 Downpatrick Recorder, 30 May 1840.  
104 Appendices, ninth annual report, Poor Law Commissioners, Appendix E, no. 10, p. 385, H.C. 1842 [C. 399], xix, 397; Appendices, ninth annual report, Poor Law Commissioners, Appendix C, no. 9, p. 286, H.C. 1843 [491], xxi, 294.  
105 Appendices, ninth annual report, Poor Law Commissioners, Appendix C, no. 9, p. 286.  
106 Downpatrick Recorder, 30 Apr. 1842.
be checked, the evils will be corrected, and the measure be attended with advantage to all’. Yet, noting that the Poor Law had yet to be enforced in the city, the society, acknowledging its own imminent demise, beseeched the public to continue their subscriptions and donations, and urged that the poor ‘must not be left to perish between the old and the new mode of relief’. In February 1840, it was reported that the workhouse was ‘considerably advanced and will, when completed, be a magnificent edifice. [T]he Mendicity establishment will be surrendered’. When the Derry workhouse opened in November 1840, ‘the inmates of the Mendicity and a few others’ were admitted into the new institution.

Most mendicity societies were dissolved around the time when people witnessed the most tangible evidence that the Poor Law was operating in their area – the collection of poor rates and the opening of the local workhouse. The Waterford society appears to have declined around 1840–1. A newspaper notice published in February 1840 referred to the continued difficulties in keeping the institution open, and announced a special public meeting to consider the urgent problem. When the Waterford city workhouse admitted its first 60 paupers in April 1841, 54 were inmates of the mendicity asylum. The decision to close the Belfast House of Industry was taken at a meeting on 31 May 1841, less than three weeks after the first paupers were admitted into the town’s workhouse, while in Limerick, city paupers from the Mendicity Society were among the first inmates of the workhouse in 1841. Two exceptions to this trend were the mendicity societies in Dublin and Ballymoney, the latter of which remained in existence until 1902, surviving on the proceeds of the bequest of £1,000 by Presbyterian woollen draper, Neal Kennedy, who died circa 1821.

The decline of the Irish mendicity societies manifested itself differently from that of the British anti-begging charities. From what little information that can be gathered on the fate of these latter institutions, there does not appear to have been much immediate impact from the introduction

107 Thirteenth report, Londonderry Mendicity Association, pp. 6–7. For similar sentiments in Newry, see Belfast Commercial Chronicle, 8 Oct. 1838.
108 Clare Journal, and Ennis Advertiser, 6 Feb. 1840.
110 The declarations of the first poor rate and the opening of the workhouses for the reception for paupers occurred almost invariably in the years 1841–2 in the country’s 130 Poor Law Unions: Appendices B. to F. to the eighth annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, appendix E, no. 10, pp. 384–6.
111 Ó Cearbhaill, ‘A memory that lived and a charity that died’, pp. 169–70.
112 Clare Journal, and Ennis Advertiser, 22 Apr. 1841.
113 Ibid., 31 May 1841.
of the 1834 New Poor Law in England and Wales. Given the existence of a rate-based Poor Law there for more than two centuries, the 1830s did not witness a sudden shift from the voluntary to compulsory mode of poor relief and the funding of this relief. The relatively rapid nationwide closure of charitable societies that was witnessed in Ireland following the introduction of the Poor Law was not replicated in the rest of Britain; on the contrary, in 1840, six years after the introduction of the New Poor Law, numerous new mendicity societies were established in English towns, most likely in response to the increased levels of poverty, destitution and beggary arising from the nationwide economic depression of 1839–42. Lionel Rose suggests that many provincial societies ceased operating by the late 1840s owing to continued alms-giving by the benevolent and pleas from fraudulent applicants. The formation of so-called mendicity societies experienced a revival in mid- to late Victorian Britain; however, these later charities ought to be regarded as part of the emerging Charitable Organisation Society movement, which pioneered the use of scientific methods of social casework to the investigation of poverty and charity, and in this regard differed from the rudimentary modus operandi of earlier mendicity societies. In certain cases, the decline of British mendicity societies was due to localised circumstances. The Edinburgh Mendicity Society (also known as the Society for Suppressing Begging) was merged into the city’s House of Refuge in 1836, owing to the mendicity society’s diminishing finances and the latter institution’s greater capacity to allocate resources towards the relief of destitution and suppression of street begging. The London society continued to operate throughout the Victorian period but its purpose was largely superseded by the establishment of the Charity Organisation Society in 1869 and the charity declined in significance and prominence until its dissolution in 1959.

Ireland’s Houses of Industry also ceased to exist following the introduction of the Poor Law, under which Houses of Industry and all associated assets

115 Coventry Herald, 10 Jan. 1840; Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser, 2 May 1840; Bucks Herald, 7 Mar. 1840.
118 Edinburgh Evening Courant, 24 Mar. 1836. I am grateful to Joseph Curran for this reference.
were to be vested in the newly appointed Poor Law Commissioners.\textsuperscript{120} In some instances, the new workhouses were established in the former Houses of Industry premises. Such measures made sense in locations where a large segregated institution designed for the poor already existed, thus avoiding the cost of acquiring a new site and building a workhouse. The North and South Dublin Union workhouses were established in the city’s House of Industry and Foundling Hospital respectively, and in Cork the former House of Industry was used for meetings of the board of guardians between June 1839 and December 1841, when the new purpose-built workhouse was opened.\textsuperscript{121}

Upon the opening of the Limerick union workhouse in 1841, the 489 inmates of the city’s House of Industry were transferred to the new institution.\textsuperscript{122} Interestingly, among the first purchases of the Limerick Board of Guardians were ‘tables and forms’ from the city’s Mendicity Society for £40.\textsuperscript{123} What also made sense in many cases was the appointment of staff from the recently dissolved institutions to positions in the new workhouses; for example, a Mr Riordan, previously master in the Clonmel House of Industry, was appointed to the same position in the town’s workhouse in late 1840.\textsuperscript{124}

A Poor Law Survivor: The Dublin Mendicity Society

The case of Dublin makes for fascinating reading. The Dublin Mendicity Society was almost unique in remaining in existence after the introduction of the workhouses – and indeed in outliving the Poor Law system.\textsuperscript{125} In seeking to explain this, one must consider the sheer size of the city and the number of destitute poor in this urban centre. In most other villages, towns and cities where mendicity societies were founded, these charities could not have been sustained alongside such a large institution as the local workhouse, in terms of both the ability of local ratepayers to support the two systems and the demand for the various institutions’ welfare services. The sprawling metropolis of Dublin, on the other hand, possessed both a large enough pool of prospective supporters to continue subscribing to charitable causes concurrent to paying their Poor Law rates and the constant flow of local and non-native poor. The key to the Dublin Mendicity Society’s

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} 1 & 2 Vict., c. 56, s. 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Michelle O’Mahony, \textit{Famine in Cork city: famine life at Cork union workhouse} (Cork, 2005), pp. 21–30.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Fleming and Logan, \textit{Pauper Limerick}, p. xv.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} \textit{Clare Journal, and Ennis Advertiser}, 30 Nov., 7 Dec. 1840.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 7 Dec. 1840.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} The Dublin Mendicity Society (Institution) remains in existence at the time of writing, celebrating its bicentenary in 2018. See www.mendicity.org (accessed 5 Jan. 2017).
\end{itemize}
survival and longevity was its ability to adapt to new circumstances, tailoring its services to provide for newly defined and focused categories of the city’s destitute poor. Following the opening of the city’s two workhouses, young children and infirm adults were no longer admitted into the mendicity institution, as these individuals were catered for in the Poor Law institutions. Tables 5.2 and 5.3 demonstrate the stark modification in the charity’s inmate base arising from the introduction of the Poor Law

126 Cousins, ‘Philanthropy and poor relief’, p. 36.
system. On 25 April 1840, infirm females comprised almost 42 per cent of the mendicity society’s 2,735 inmates, while just weeks later, following the opening of North and South Dublin Union workhouses, there were no infirm paupers (male or female) recorded in the institution. The able-bodied poor, while not gone completely, had diminished considerably in number, as had the child inmates; furthermore, there were no longer any ‘young children’ to be found on the charity’s books.\(^{127}\) Whereas the number of the mendicity society’s inmates dropped by around 2,000, there were just more than 2,000 inmates in the newly opened workhouses, and most of these individuals had been previously catered for in the Mendicity Institution.\(^{128}\) A clear connection can, thus, be established in the use of the city’s poorer classes of these respective welfare institutions.

The Dublin Mendicity Society’s long-held fears that a poor rate would impact detrimentally on its own income levels were borne out upon the introduction of the Poor Law system. Table 5.4 and Figure 5.2 (extrapolated from Table 5.4) demonstrate the rapid fall in income from both annual subscriptions and casual sources for the Society in these years. Subscriptions fell from £6,365 14s. 11d. in 1839 to £1,891 10s. 2d. just one year later, representing a drop of 70 per cent. In the following two years, the Society again witnessed a 70 per cent decrease in subscriptions, falling to £563 19s. 8d. in 1842. A brief surge in subscriptions was recorded during the early years of the Great Famine but by 1848 subscriptions had fallen to the relatively low amount of £708 4s. 8d. The drop in income around 1840 was caused by subscribers’ knowledge that the Society was looking after a considerably smaller number of paupers, who were now catered for in the workhouses. Nonetheless, the ‘double taxation’ factor was undoubtedly the main reason behind this substantial decrease.

In considering the decline of the mendicity societies, whose duties were largely superseded by the Poor Law workhouse system, a number of issues may be analysed – one being whether the same men who served on the mendicity societies’ managing committees became members of the workhouse boards of guardians upon the emergence of the new system. Clerics of all denominations, as noted above, frequently served as members of the managing committees of the mendicity charities: in its final year of operation, 12 of the Londonderry Mendicity Society’s committee of 42 men (28.6 per cent) were clergymen, while the two secretaries were also clerics.\(^{129}\) Under the 1838 Poor

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127 Twenty-second report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1839, p. 15. The total number of inmates is mistakenly given as 2,715 (ibid.).
128 Ibid.; Seventh annual report of the Poor Law Commissioners, with appendices, p. 44, H.C. 1841 Session I [C 327], xi, 342.
129 Thirteenth report, Londonderry Mendicity Association, 1838, p. 3.
Law, clergymen were specifically prohibited from serving as Poor Law union guardians, thereby excluding from boards of guardians a large number of individuals who had considerable first-hand experience of relieving the poor as well as valuable administrative skills. Of the members of an eight-person sub-committee from among the Londonderry Poor Law Union board of guardians in 1842, one (Sir Robert A. Ferguson) can be definitively identified as having been a member of the city’s mendicity society, while the names of two other Poor Law guardians (Messrs McClelland and Mehan) match those

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<th>Year</th>
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Source: Thirty-first annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1848 (Dublin, 1849), p. 21. Figures have been rounded to the nearest pound.
of two members of the earlier charity. In Belfast, a John Cunningham and a Charles Thomson served as directors of the House of Industry (the former as treasurer) in 1810, and three decades later, individuals of the same names were among the guardians of the Poor Law union. (A John Cunningham bequeathed £100 to the Belfast House of Industry but as it was dissolved by late 1842 this money was appropriated to the Surgical Hospital, with the sanction of the Commissioners for Charitable Bequests.) James McTier and John Knox were also two officials of the Belfast House of Industry who served among the town’s first Union guardians. In Dublin, in 1841, Sir John Kingston James Bart and John Mackay were members of the mendicity society managing committee at the same time as they served as elected

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130 Ibid.; Londonderry Union. Return to an order of the honourable House of Commons, dated 11 March 1842; – for, copies of the contracts entered into for the building of the Londonderry Union poor-house … p. 35, H.C. 1842 (189), xxxvi, 231.

131 BNL, 4 May 1810; Belfast Board of Guardians minute book, 4 Jan. 1842 (PRONI, Belfast Board of Guardians papers, BG7/A/1); Poor Law (Ireland). Copies of any communications, &c. by the Poor Law Commissioners to any boards of guardians in Ireland, in reference to 15th & 16th clauses of the amended Poor Law Act…., p. 27, H.C. 1844 (346), xl, 659; Farrell, The Poor Law and the workhouse in Belfast, p. 28.

132 BNL, 23 Dec. 1842.

133 For their involvement with the House of Industry, see BNL, 25 Dec. 1840. Their service as Poor Law guardians is recorded at: Belfast Board of Guardians minute book, 4 Jan. 1842 for John Knox; Farrell, The Poor Law and the workhouse in Belfast, p. 28 for James McTier.
guardians in the North and South Dublin Unions respectively. These cases appear, however, to have been merely a handful of instances where continuity in personnel can be identified and they must not necessarily be considered representative.

Perhaps most interesting of all is the case of the Dublin Mendicity Society’s honorary secretary, Joseph Burke, who ended his involvement with the charity when he was appointed as an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner in April 1839. Burke’s appointment to a state position followed on the heels of years of correspondence with (or perhaps canvassing of) senior political figures, both Tory and Whig, as well as a direct request to Lord Morpeth for a Poor Law appointment. To Burke, a member of the Irish Bar and clearly an ambitious man, a position with the new Poor Law administration was a natural progression from his employment with the Dublin Mendicity Society. Indeed, in his appeal to Morpeth, Burke specifically drew on his service to the mendicity society, ‘which has given me an experience as to the state of the numerous poor of this city, that I submit might prove useful in the working or carrying into effect any legislative measure for the amelioration of their present & very deplorable state.’ These examples suggest that some level of continuity existed between the mendicity societies, and the new Poor Law workhouses and Poor Law system, in terms of the individuals who were responsible in overseeing the administration of the new system. Of course, a key difference was that while the administrators possessed great independence in the mendicity societies, which operated as private entities, the manner in which the workhouses were run, and relief provided therein, was governed by legislation and guardians were accountable to the centralised Poor Law Commissioners in Dublin.

134 Twenty-fourth annual report of the managing committee of the Association for the Suppression of Mendicity in Dublin. For the year 1841 (Dublin, 1842), p. iii; Dublin Almanac, and general register of Ireland, 1841, pp. 815, 816.
136 Letter book of Joseph Burke, ff. 9–17. For the letter to Morpeth, dated 17 Jan. 1837, see ibid., ff. 17–18. A similar petition was sent to Irish MP Richard Lalor Sheil and the English Poor Law Commissioner George Nicholls: Joseph Burke to Richard Lalor Sheil, 5 June 1837, ibid., ff. 86–87; Joseph Burke to George Nicholls, 22 Mar. 1838 ibid., f 114–’.
How Effective Were Mendicity Societies?

The crucial question remains: how effective were mendicity societies in supressing beggary and relieving destitution in Irish towns and cities? In considering this matter one may turn to the views of contemporaries, but caution must be exercised: in many cases where a judgement of the efficacy of a mendicity society is to be found, it was the opinion of an individual directly associated with the charity and with, therefore, an obvious interest in presenting a distorted picture. According to Thomas Brodigan, treasurer and secretary of the Drogheda Mendicity Society, the institution ‘completely suppressed street begging, which was a great evil previous to the establishment of the asylum’. Yet, the little information available on the Drogheda mendicity asylum depicts an under-resourced institution failing to meet its foundational aim of ridding the town’s streets of beggars. The Poor Inquiry noted that while the society, founded in 1822, initially succeeded in mitigating the nuisance caused by mendicants, reduced subscriptions had limited the resources of the charity and limited its efficacy. The society was providing neither work for the able-bodied poor nor education for child inmates yet was still expending on average 1s. 9d. a week per pauper. ‘We visited this institution and it appeared to us to be so conducted that little good could be expected to be derived from it’, the report asserted, before opining that ‘notwithstanding this asylum, the streets of Drogheda are much infested with beggars’. This report presents a significantly different image of the Drogheda asylum from that provided just a few years earlier by Brodigan.

The society in Derry can be cited as a body which received praise beyond its own members. Londonderry MP George Hill claimed that ‘there is no such thing as street begging in the city of Derry’, attributing this to the work of the city’s mendicity society. Another observer identified noticeable decreases in street begging in a number of urban centres following the establishment of mendicity societies. ‘I found no begging, certainly, in the streets, neither in Dublin or Limerick, very little in Cork, and very little at Waterford: I mean actual mendicants pestering you in the streets, I did not find that’, the English magistrate, parochial overseer and Poor Law writer Frederick Page noted.

138 Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830, p. 376.
140 First report, state of the poor select committee, 1830, p. 172.
141 Second report, state of the poor select committee, 1830, p. 61.
complimentary towards these charities’ ability to provide for their poor on such marginal budgets.\textsuperscript{142}

The Dublin Mendicity Society was praised in the House of Commons by Henry Grattan (Junior) as alleviating the daily pressures and intimidation felt by shopkeepers by soliciting beggars:

He knew that, but for the exertions of a Mendicity Society, supported by voluntary contribution, in the city of Dublin, it would be impossible, at that very moment, for any shop-keeper to keep his door open for the purpose of carrying on business. But for the exertions of that Society, the doors would be besieged with mendicants, that all passage must be impossible.\textsuperscript{143}

The \textit{Freeman’s Journal} also extolled the benefits that accrued to the city traders from the mendicity society, ‘which has so amply relieved their doors from a nuisance which, in no small degree, impeded their business, and injured their interests’.\textsuperscript{144} In their survey of public institutions in late 1820s Ireland, the Quakers and social reformers, Elizabeth Fry and Joseph John Gurney, pointed to the mendicity asylums as appropriate models for the prevention of distress and starvation, and called on the government to facilitate some level of rated funding for these institutions through the grand juries. Mendicity societies were, they claimed, ‘too important for the order and comfort of the whole community of Ireland … to fall to the ground’.\textsuperscript{145}

Just as praise for the mendicity societies transcended religious and social boundaries, so did criticism. Three members of the Whately Poor Inquiry – the Church of Ireland dean of the royal chapel at Dublin Castle, Rev. Charles Vignoles; the Catholic peer Lord Killeen; and a Protestant Tory landed gentleman from County Meath, J.W.L. Naper – dissented from the commission’s recommendations for the direct provision of poor assistance through the encouragement of voluntary associations, and cited the insufficient financial support of mendicity societies across Ireland as among the reasons for their opposition.\textsuperscript{146} In the main body of the commission’s reports, the Clonmel Mendicity Society was described as having failed to suppress the increasing number of beggars in the town, estimated to total 150 in the mid-1830s.\textsuperscript{147} Roman Catholic bishop James Doyle told the 1830

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{142} Page, \textit{Observations on the state of the indigent poor in Ireland}, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Hansard} 2, xvi, 1090–1 (9 Mar. 1827).
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{FJ}, 15 Sept. 1818.
\textsuperscript{145} Elizabeth Fry and John Joseph Gurney, \textit{Report addressed to the Marquess Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland} (2nd edn, Dublin, 1827), pp. 46, 93.
\textsuperscript{146} \textit{PI}, Appendix \textit{H}, pp. 8–9.
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{PI}, Appendix \textit{A}, p. 699.
\end{footnotesize}
select committee on the poor in Ireland that a short-lived mendicity asylum in Carlow town, with which he was involved, failed due to the organisation’s lack of powers to apprehend and detain the mendicant poor. Doyle noted that contrary to the society’s founding principles its activities actually contributed to an increase in street beggars in the provincial town. The Quaker and Poor Law Assistant Commissioner Jonathan Binns painted a woeful picture of the Waterford Mendicity Society and its inmates, who were described as being sickly, wretched and largely idle. Yet, Binns perceived the mendicity society movement as a worthwhile cause, as shown in his lamenting that in Tralee, where pauperism prevailed to a great extent, there was no mendicity asylum, ‘that which almost every town in Ireland should possess, in the absence of some legislative provision for the poor’. In his account of visiting Dublin in 1834, Henry Inglis contrasted his negative impression of the mendicity society’s asylum with the House of Industry, the latter of which was ‘as fine an institution of the kind as I have any where seen’. In the mendicity society’s premises, on the other hand, a small number of paupers were at work while ‘hundreds, for whom no employment could be found, [were] lying and sitting in the court, waiting for the mess which had tempted them from their hovels, and the incertitude of mendicancy’. He noted the rudimentary education facilities for children and seemed to criticise the practice of sending children home to their abodes at the end of the day, thus returning them ‘to the hovels in which vice and misery are so often united’. A few years later, the editor of the Cambridge Independent Press felt it necessary to record his own dismissal of the utility of the Cambridge Mendicity Society, inserting the following opinion beneath a standard report of the charity’s 1852 annual meeting: ‘We state this as requested, but for ourselves we consider the Society calculated to increase mendicancy, favour the improvident, and in all respects do more harm than good: although its promoters are, no doubt, actuated by good motives’.

Conclusion

In his 1843 article, ‘Mendicancy in Ireland’, the influential English economist and Poor Law commentator Nassau Senior analysed in considerable detail the state of Irish mendicancy and whether its extent had fluctuated following

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149 Binns, Miseries and beauties of Ireland, ii, p. 257.
150 Ibid., ii, p. 370. See also Gray, Making of the Irish Poor Law, p. 15.
151 Inglis, Ireland in 1834, i, pp. 16–18.
the introduction of the Poor Law. It is significant that in the 20-page article Senior did not once mention mendicity societies, reflecting their disappearance from Ireland’s welfare landscape and the discourse of poor relief in the preceding five years.153

Mendicity societies were part of the middle classes’ embracing of an associational culture in approaching social and moral problems of the early nineteenth century. These charities differed from the earlier Houses of Industry in being voluntary-funded charities, not founded on foot of legislation and (typically) providing only daytime accommodation to mendicant inmates. It has been argued that these societies constituted part of a mendicity society movement, which spread across Ireland, Britain and parts of western Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Supporting Robert Morris’s argument that voluntary societies were stimulated by the example provided by earlier bodies, mendicity societies built upon the experience gained and precedents set by other societies, and all members of this movement shared mutual backgrounds, interests, objectives and methods of operation. Significantly, the members of these charities engaged in exchanges of information, reflecting the transnational discourse of social improvement in this period. Yet, while constituting a movement, mendicity societies did not answer to a central entity, and were established and supported through local initiatives.

The Irish entities within this movement shared many features with their international counterparts, yet, within Ireland, there were distinct regional features. Most notable was, first, the concentration of societies in Ulster and, secondly, the prevalence of mendicity charities in relatively small towns and villages in the northern province. It has been argued that a prime reason for this geographic concentration was the popularity of the Scotch model of poor assistance, wherein voluntarism and corporate minimalism were cherished. The distinctive Presbyterian feature of Ulster society, which shared many world views and ecclesiastical structures with the Calvinist Church of Scotland, is crucial to explaining this. Financial uncertainty marred the existence of all mendicity societies and their eventual decline, with the exceptions of the Dublin and Ballymoney societies, arose directly from the introduction of the Irish Poor Law and compulsory assessments for the support of the workhouse system, which catered for a similar class of the poor as the mendicity societies. Figures for Dublin reveal the direct transfer of inmates from the Mendicity Society to the city’s newly opened workhouses in 1840. The ethos of mendicity societies conformed with the middle classes’ desire for the promotion of industry and restraint among the poor, and their appeal transcended religious boundaries.

In assessing the efficacy of Irish mendicity societies, an important question relates to the resources – both material and legal – at these institutions’ disposal. What was it possible for these charities to do in terms of suppressing street begging? Financial uncertainty plagued mendicity societies throughout their relatively short existence. Some fluctuated between dissolution and re-establishment, while others experienced a constant struggle to make ends meet. Funded through voluntary and casual sources, mendicity societies were subject to the whim and appetite of the public for anti-mendicancy measures, and this appetite was tempered by the number of beggars seen on local streets at any given time. In this light, mendicity societies’ efforts were constantly guided by limited budgets.

These societies were innovative in catering specifically for that class of the poor who were prone or vulnerable to resorting to street begging for survival. The provision of relief, in the form of food, daytime shelter and occasional paid labour, resembled the widespread contemporary emphasis on the virtues of industry and the evils of unqualified assistance. Succour was to be earned, either through sweat or true suffering. This rudimentary system conformed to the distinction between the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. Paupers had the opportunity of learning skills, such as spinning, by which they could gain economic self-dependency, yet their in-house labour was such that it did not undercut the independent labouring classes. Children received a basic education in many mendicity societies, while the Dublin society in particular published reports of former child inmates who had secured respectable positions: in 1820, the charity reported that 42 of its children had been employed by shopkeepers, while 24 had entered domestic service. This is not to deny that conditions for paupers inside these institutions were difficult and strict. The able-bodied were put to ‘hard labour’ and inmates, at all times, were required to conform to moralising middle-class expectations; regrettably, as with most forms of charity and philanthropy, the perspectives of the recipients – that is, the beggars who sought relief from mendicity societies – are wholly absent from the available source material. As well as the provision of material and moral succour, mendicity societies also endeavoured to remove refractory beggars from the streets. The ability of the societies, in this regards, varied from place to place. The Belfast and Derry societies, for instance, employed constables who exerted legal powers, and the apprehension and confinement of mendicants appears to have been regular undertakings by these paid

154 Report, Dublin Mendicity Society, 1820, p. 16.
155 Laurence M. Geary has noted this important point in another context: “The best relief the poor can receive is from themselves”, p. 58.
officers. In Dublin, on the other hand, the lack of these powers prevented
the mendicity society from enacting similar policies.

In assessing the efficacy of mendicity societies, it is here argued that
this network of charities were innovative developments in a society devoid
of a statutory provision for the poor. Limited by uncertain sources of
income and the niggardliness of many potential subscribers, these charities
succeeded in putting large numbers of individuals, otherwise likely to resort
to mendicancy, to work and in education, however rudimentary. For the
urban middling classes who founded, supported and ran these charities,
street begging was not only a nuisance and a moral evil, but, as demonstrated
in Chapter 3, constituted a very real threat to the economic survival
of businesses, and was the means of disseminating contagious disease.
Emerging from the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and declining with
the introduction of the long-awaited Irish Poor Law, the mendicity society
movement constituted an important, yet overlooked, element in the welfare
landscape of pre-Famine Ireland.