The Protestant Orphan Society and its social significance in Ireland 1828–1940

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It is to such Institutions as the present that we shall be indebted for the preservation of Protestantism.¹

Introduction

Evangelicalism inspired renewed religious purpose, individualism, a missionary impulse and moral and social reform through philanthropy and education. It drew considerable support from all classes in Dublin,² a broad appeal which threatened the authority of the established church as well as Catholic and dissenting churches. The ensuing religious rivalry brought the issue of child welfare to the fore. While Protestant philanthropy was already extensive, real concerns were not expressed for the future of Protestant orphans, the rising Protestant generation, until 1828 amid growing Catholic middle-class confidence on the eve of emancipation and during a period of considerable economic distress among the Protestant artisan class in Dublin. The first chapter identifies the people behind the DPOS, both lay and religious, and examines the source of the founders’ motivation given the broader social, religious and political milieu. It highlights the challenge to secure adequate funding and uncovers unanticipated divisions between committee members of the fledgling charity.

Religious revival

The essence of the evangelical message was individualism and the importance of the bible as a direct link to God, ideas which challenged the authority of mainstream churches.³ The evangelist John Cennick preached in Dublin in 1746 until the arrival of John and Charles Wesley, key figures in the progress of the Methodist movement in Ireland.⁴ John Wesley visited Ireland twenty-one times during the years between 1747 and 1789 and Methodist missionary stations
were established and Irish speaking missionaries enlisted to spread the gospel. Wesleyan Methodists seceded from the Church of Ireland in 1816 while Primitive Wesleyan Methodists remained within the margins of the established church. These two elements of Methodism did not unite until 1878 when the Methodist church was formally founded. Wesleyan Methodism had a particular appeal for artisans seeking advancement in society.

Members of the Church of Ireland who wished to experience and embrace the vibrancy of revival preaching without seceding attended the Bethesda Chapel in Dorset Street, ‘known as the Cathedral of Methodism’ and founded in 1784. Revd Benjamin Mathias was a central figure in its success while prominent laymen such as Arthur Guinness and Lord Roden were among its many enthusiastic supporters. In the early nineteenth century, ministers of the evangelical wing of the Church of Ireland preached in ordinary Dublin parishes and in ‘free churches’ or proprietary chapels. Revd Thomas Kelly left the established church, formed a sect called the Separatists and founded chapels at Maryborough and Blackrock in Dublin. Revd John Walker, a former minister at the Bethesda, set up the Walker’s Society on Calvinist principles in 1804.

There was also a high church revival in the Church of Ireland espoused by, among others, Archbishop Brodrick, John Jebb, Alexander Knox and Archbishop William Magee. Evangelicals were criticised by the church establishment; however, Archbishop William Magee managed to overcome many of these differences by officiating at the Bethesda in 1825 and other proprietary chapels. As J. R. Hill suggests, Magee ‘did not so much give evangelicals a strategy, rather he sought to harness the rising evangelical impulse under the control and authority of the established church’. The common thread which united the lay founders and clerical supporters of the DPOS was a commitment to evangelicalism.

The evangelical revival, the promotion of Christian morality following the 1798 rebellion, and intense criticism of the church from the 1780s, which included the charge of clerical neglect (in certain cases Protestants lapsed into Roman Catholicism as a matter of necessity), brought about the ‘age of graceful reform’ of the Church of Ireland. (Under the terms of the Act of Union, Ireland, 1800, the Church of Ireland and the Church of England were united.) The period was characterised by episcopal reform, church building and rebuilding funded by the Board of First Fruits, and a growing evangelical spirit within the church as demonstrated by Revd Peter Roe, for example. Moral reform agencies included the Association for Discountenancing Vice and Promoting the Practice of Christian Religion, known as the
Dublin Association, founded in 1792; the Hibernian Bible Society in 1806 and the Sunday School Society for Ireland in 1809. The Society for Promoting Education of the Poor in Ireland, or the Kildare Place Society, was formed in December 1811 with the firm aim of providing education without religious interference. The Religious Tract and Book Society was founded in 1817; the Irish Society in 1818; the Scripture Society in 1822 and the Established Church Home Mission Society in 1828.

Religious polarisation

Apart from restrictions on lease lengths and property rights, which were removed in 1778 and 1782 respectively, Catholics were free to engage in commercial industry which led to the rise of a Catholic middle class. There was further relaxation of the penal laws in 1793, which among other concessions enabled Catholics to bear arms, parliamentary franchise equal to Protestants, and guild and corporation membership (though membership remained limited). Caitriona Clear documents the rise of nuns in Ireland and identifies the upper middle-class profile of many of the women who founded religious orders and of those who funded the establishment of a growing network of convents during the Catholic revival amid growing religious rivalry. Nano Nagle established the Sisters of the Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1776. Other orders included the Presentation nuns (1805), the Brigidines (1807), the Daughters of Charity (1810), the Irish Sisters of Charity (1815), and Catherine McAuley founded the religious congregation, the Sisters of Mercy, in 1831. In 1800 there were 120 nuns in Ireland and by 1851 there were ninety-one convents and 1,500 nuns.

James Warren Doyle, who served as Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin (JKL, James Kildare and Leighlin) from 1819 (at the age of thirty-three) until 1834, built churches, including the Carlow Cathedral, schools, formed confraternities and condemned the unjust treatment of Catholics. Bishop Doyle responded forcefully to the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee’s charge delivered at St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin, 22 October 1822, which was regarded ‘as a declaration of religious war’ (alternative interpretations suggest that the issue of tithes and other criticisms of the church as well as mounting pressure from evangelical reformers were foremost in his mind). Catholic bishops were urged to curb the progress of the Bible Society as controversial sermons and the increased involvement of the established church in the bible movement were no longer tolerated. Bishop Doyle and Bishop John MacHale (Mariona 1825–43 and Tuam 1834–81) challenged the
popular bible movement and worked closely with Daniel O’Connell on the emancipation campaign.

Despite initial support for the Kildare Place Society (KPS), O’Connell, along with other Catholic patrons, withdrew his support over the issue of reading the bible without note or comment, and alleged, though unproven, proselytism, raised in letters written by Bishop MacHale over a period of three years from 1820 to 1823. The Education Inquiry of 1825 concluded that, despite its many achievements, the KPS did not meet the needs of the majority of people.

From 1822 the folk version of the Pastorini Prophecies, which predicted the extirpation of Protestants from Ireland in 1825, became increasingly well known and caused considerable alarm, remaining a ‘constant anxiety’ for Protestants. The prophecies were circulated in tracts and through word of mouth by travellers and pedlars and dismissed by Catholic clergy and the middle-class laity who were eager to achieve emancipation. The prophecies were particularly popular among the Catholic lower orders even after 1825.

Despite assurances from O’Connell to the contrary, Conservative Protestants predicted that if Catholic emancipation were granted an outright Catholic revolution would ensue, that the union was therefore under potential threat, and that a Catholic ascendancy would follow. The Duke of Richmond referred to the ‘intimidation of Protestants’, claiming that ‘they bully and threaten the Protestants to sign their petitions, whilst many of the Protestants allow themselves to be bullied and none try to stop the current’. However, there were liberal Protestant supporters of emancipation, Arthur Guinness, for example. The Roman Catholic Relief Act was carried in April 1829, after which the inevitability of Protestant decline and Catholic ascendancy was again noted by Archbishop Beresford.

**Orphans in Dublin**

The Incorporated Society for Promoting English Protestant Schools in Ireland was founded in February 1733. The Charter Schools were intended for the education of poor Roman Catholics and ‘the meanest Protestants’ in ‘useful skills and habits of industry’ with the aim of both social and religious reformation. However, the Commissioners of Education presented troubling accounts of the schools in their 1825 report which called an eventual halt to once large parliamentary grants. Houses of Industry provided for the aged, the sick, lunatics and orphans and in 1817 there were approximately 900 children in the Dublin House of Industry. Following a rise in admissions due to fever...
epidemics, conditions deteriorated rapidly and it was no longer considered fit for children, who were subsequently apprenticed or sent to Charter Schools. The new admission restrictions inevitably meant that more children were sent to its associated penitentiaries or left to wander the streets. The Mendicity Association, founded in 1818, gave employment to adult beggars in order to keep them off the streets during the day. It also provided orphans with day time care in the institution and paid women beggars employed by the institution, who had their own homes, a small allowance to keep the children at night.

By the 1820s a number of Protestant charities had been founded specifically for orphans. The Bethesda Orphan School was founded shortly after the Bethesda Chapel in 1786; Margaret Este and Mrs Edward Tighe established the Female Orphan House in 1790, which was funded by voluntary subscriptions, donations and a parliamentary grant and in 1807 there were 140 children under its care; the Masonic Female Orphan School, Jervis Street, a boarding school for the daughters of deceased freemasons was established in 1792; the Methodist Female Orphan School, White-frair Street, was founded in association with the Church of Ireland in 1804; and Pleasants’ Asylum, 75 Camden Street, was founded in 1818. Many of these orphanages catered for relatively small numbers, operated age restriction policies, admitted only full orphans and in the case of the Methodist Female Orphan School and the Female Orphan House admitted only girls.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Patrician Orphan Society was founded in Dublin to serve the Catholic poor as a substitute for the foundling hospitals. Catholic tradesmen founded the St Joseph’s female orphanage in 1770. In addition, laymen founded Catholic orphan societies in Dublin as well as Cork and Waterford. Nine Catholic orphan societies were established in Dublin from 1822 to 1829 and due to restrictions on Catholic charity were not organised on a large scale. A number were aimed at young children with age limits of four and five. Three of the societies admitted a total of 480 children from 1817 to 1840. By 1834 twenty-four Catholic orphan societies existed in Dublin providing for 800 orphans. Children were sent to farmers near Dublin and in counties Wicklow and Carlow. (Fosterage was an ancient Irish custom.) In 1834 Thomas Osler, Assistant Commissioner, reported that the Catholic orphan societies were ‘strictly Lay Associations’ and that the Roman Catholic clergy were relatively unfamiliar with them and ‘did not interfere, unless their advice was specifically requested’. St Bonaventure’s Charitable Institution and Orphanage was founded in 1820, and like many of the other Catholic orphan societies sought to prevent Protestant agencies
receiving Catholic children’. Nuns carried out widespread work among the poor and managed orphanages from convents by the early nineteenth century.

**Founding fathers**

At the beginning of the long eighteenth century, Protestants were a majority in Dublin; however, following rapid urban population growth, by the early nineteenth century they had become a distinct minority. In 1836 the Protestant population of inner city parishes comprised, for example, ‘2,700 (St. Michan’s), 2,380 (St. Paul’s), 2,808 (St. George’s) and 6,946 (St. Thomas’s)’. The three founding fathers of the Protestant Orphan Society were Protestant tradesmen named James Kelly, a hosier, Cathedral lane, St Peter’s parish; Joseph Williams, a tape weaver, Meeting-house Yard, Mullinahack, St Catherine’s parish, and John Stanton, a glover from Ellis Quay, which extended from Queen Street to Silver Street in the parish of St Paul.

Weaving in the Liberties had once been a flourishing trade, employing high numbers because of the labour intensiveness of the work. (The Meath Hospital was founded in 1753 to provide medical care for Protestant weavers among other deserving cases. Labourers, tradesmen and servants were among the most frequently treated for fever according to the records of Dr Steeven’s Hospital from 1816 to 1817. In 1792, there were 60 master clothiers, 400 broad cloth looms, and 100 looms in the Liberties with employment for approximately five thousand people. Given that import tariffs protected their share of the home market, Dublin manufacturers were not in favour of the Union which would expose them to unwanted English competition. Nevertheless, under the terms of the Act of Union, 1800, these tariffs were retained until 1808 and then gradually reduced. On 28 June 1822 a petition was sent to the Lord Lieutenant on behalf of the unemployed weavers of the city and Liberties of Dublin, who had endured hardship due to the ‘decaying trade’. The petition was also sent to the Dublin Society, Linen Board and Mendicity Association, and was signed by ‘upwards of 2,000 members of the trade’. John Brady, Secretary to the Linen Memorial, reported that there were 5,000 of both sexes who ‘are at present idle and starving’.

From the eighteenth century, there were downturns in the silk trade, established by Huguenots in the Liberties, Dublin, and Spittlefields in London. The silk trade declined further after 1824 and the act to repeal the aforementioned import tariffs which had once protected silk, wool and cotton manufacturers from English competition; production
and employment decreased by more than fifty per cent. In 1824 a number of silk weavers sought employment in Spittlefields, London, while other tradesmen emigrated to North America.

In 1826 James Forrest, British, Irish, and Foreign Silk Mercery and Lace Warehouse, 28 Grafton Street, advertised ‘All Irish goods he will dispose of at First Cost Price for ready money. He trusts a liberal and patriotic public will appreciate his motives in making sales without any profit, whatsoever, during this time of public distress’. In the same year the Committee for the Relief of Distressed Manufacturers was formed. Severe unemployment pushed weavers on to the streets to protest in July 1826. Shortly after, fever epidemics hit cities, Dublin, Cork and Belfast. The broad silk weavers of Dublin submitted a petition in 1828 to the House of Commons as they were ‘reduced to the most deplorable state of destitution and misery, through want of sufficient employment’. The Dublin linen hall was no longer used as a market after 1828. Related trades such as hosiery were also in a perilous state. As a result of the decline in employment and wages, which had been reduced from £1 5s in 1800 to 10s per week in 1836, a number of hosiers sought work in Nottingham; by 1836 there were no more than 200 hosiers in employment. It was observed that ‘the long credit which the English capitalists can afford to give, causes excessive importation, and the manufacturers here therefore cannot compete with them’.

In 1810 the glovers’ guild had supported proposals for repeal of the union in light of the non-materialisation of expected benefits and the saturation of the Irish market with English goods. At the same time, an Irish parliament was considered imperative to Irish interests. Anti-union sentiment was expressed by Protestants and also by Catholics, who had not yet been granted emancipation. According to Select Reports on the Irish poor, two operatives reported in 1816 that there had been 1,500 men, women and children employed in the thriving glove trade. Some years back, gloves were made for the regiments stationed here; all now are sent from England. There are about 200 hands employed, 30 men, with no regular employment, the rest women and children. Some occasionally get a day’s work, and are in a trifling degree supported by their wives; the generality of them are in a most deplorable state.

William Stanley provided an account of trades in Dublin in the 1830s; referring to the inadequate supply of skilled tradesmen and the importation of gloves, he claimed, ‘few can be found who know how to sew and finish gloves, and still fewer who can cut them out’. Stanley believed that the deficiency of training schools for young women and the rules regarding apprentices lay at the root of the problem. He commented...
further on the ‘poverty of the mass of the people’ in Meath, Kildare and Wicklow and the effects on other trades including shoemaking, tailoring, and brass and tin working.

Due to a combination of mechanisation, the reduction of tariffs on imports which opened up the home market to cheaper English products, the ‘de-gentrification’ of Dublin, the ‘major bank crisis in England’, and the organisation of trade societies particularly of journeymen and silk weavers, once comfortable tradesmen and their families found themselves in sharply reduced circumstances. In 1827 the Mendicity Association reported that, ‘The shops are idle, the trades people unemployed and the mass of the population suffering from privation’. It also stated that the ‘unprecedented’ number of ‘736 trades people (and their families)’ had sought relief.

**Initial years**

According to the DPOS’s first annual report, the founders had learned at a funeral of a mutual acquaintance that his widow felt compelled from the effects of poverty to give up her children to a Roman Catholic orphan society, as she had been unable to secure relief from a Protestant source. The ‘Protestant Orphan Society’ was founded on 30 November 1828 and each founding member ‘put down a penny in the churchyard of St. Catherine’s’. (Arthur Guinness was a parishioner of St Catherine’s and in this parish gathered support for Catholic emancipation.) The objective was ‘to support a society formed for the laudable purpose of keeping from Poverty, Misery and Vice the orphans of our poorer fellow Protestants’. The founders viewed the establishment of the DPOS as a solution to the destitution they had witnessed in their own community.

That in communion with our fellow Protestants of the city of Dublin and called upon at a period when poverty and distress surround the dwellings of widows and finding it necessary as far as in our power to promote their comfort, deeply impressed with their exigencies; we in conformity with the true spirit of our religion deem it expedient to come forward to use every effort to effect a measure (hitherto unheeded and unthought of) and to render every exertion and assistance to alleviate their sufferings.

The founders were described in subsequent years as ‘three poor men, themselves alive to the blessings of a scriptural discipline’. They aimed to offer relief to the most destitute of Protestant orphans under the age of eight years, and to offer them ‘blessings of a moral and religious education and afford them such pecuniary means of relief as the funds of
the society might with safety permit’. The orphans were boarded out to Protestant families and later apprenticed to Protestant masters.

On 4 January 1829 the original committee members assembled at the Tailors Hall, Back Lane, to set the rules of the newly formed society. (Tailor’s Hall dates back to 1706 and was one of the largest guild halls in Dublin also used by hosiers, saddlers and tanners and as a meeting place for Methodists and the Grand Lodge of the Freemasons.) Members of the first DPOS committee, which included Joshua Tate, Thomas Elward, Samuel Rea, Abel Mcintosh, John Stanton and John Britain, met again at Tailor’s Hall on 24 May 1829. It was decided at this meeting that a further twenty-four members would be appointed to collect on behalf of the committee. Other committee members included William Wilson, a boot and shoemaker, William Gore, a skinner, Edward Drew, a foreign fruit merchant, and Samuel Stead, a tailor.

The DPOS committee members met every Tuesday evening at eight o’clock. Initially, they collected penny-a-week subscriptions in the ‘atmosphere of small sums collected in the West end of the City of Dublin’ but soon moved into ‘the guinea atmosphere of the East end of the city round about the Rotunda’. The founders hoped that holding its first annual meeting at the Rotunda would attract the attention of influential Protestants. The meeting was a success in this respect as Protestant clergymen and ‘highly respectable laymen attached themselves to the society and in the most efficient manner have zealously exercised their influence on its behalf’. Among the prominent lay committee members were George Boileau Esq. of Huguenot descent and Robert Lanigan Esq., a magistrate, committee member of the Mendicity Society, and a trustee of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor in Ireland. The meeting was also attended by a ‘great number of the lower classes, men with frize coats, and women with decent but very humble dress; I see also not a few who are orphans themselves, reared in Protestant Charter Schools’. Other former Charter School boys were identified at the meeting as ‘devoted members of the Protestant Orphan Society’. In the months that followed, sufficient funds were raised by voluntary subscription to admit nine orphans. The DPOS elected children from all over Ireland until separate local PO Societies were founded. A further nineteen children were admitted in the initial year. The first annual report and a public appeal were printed and circulated in early 1830.

The DPOS was a specific type of child welfare, one that served the respectable poor, artisan and middle-class widows in reduced circumstances. Almost a century after its foundation, the Archbishop of Dublin noted that the DPOS had always represented a ‘kind of insurance for the poor’. The Guardian Assurance Company, ‘for assurance on
lives and survivorships Endowments for children’, was established in 1821. It had offices in London and Moore Street, Dublin. The Clerical, Medical and General Life Assurance Society, which claimed that it was the first to extend ‘the benefit of life assurance to persons not in a sound state of health’, was situated at No. 1 Eden Quay, Sackville Street, Dublin. It too granted annuities and endowments for children; however, these safeguards were out of reach for most. A Society such as the DPOS afforded the artisans the opportunity to contribute to a fund which would pay out after their deaths. It was all the more significant because artisans had founded the Society. It was essentially a family strategy designed to maintain the respectability of Protestant widows and orphans.

It was also envisaged that the Society would act as a shield to preserve children’s Protestantism. The urban Protestant poor were generally neglected apart from in specific areas such as the Liberties. In 1828 Henry Richard Dawson, then aged thirty-six, was installed Dean of St Patricks, after which he had a census made of the Protestants of the Dean’s liberties which brought to light their ‘great ignorance and misery’ and that they were ‘much more numerous than had been anticipated’. The Dean founded schools for adults, children and infants in the area and became involved with other ‘benevolent institutions’. Such work was thought to have prevented Protestants from lapsing into Roman Catholicism as a result of clerical neglect.

Fears that Protestants would be subsumed into Roman Catholicism through such clerical neglect were also expressed in the first DPOS annual report, 1830, which referred to the number of Catholic orphan societies in Dublin (seven Catholic orphan societies were founded in Dublin between 1825 and 1828) and reported that poor Protestant families subscribed to them. DPOS minutes of committee meetings also provide similar evidence: ‘the above child was recommended by a lady to a Roman Catholic school but his sister would not agree to it, none of the family on either side having been Roman Catholics’. In later years, the Limerick POS reflected on the foundation of the DPOS: ‘their hearts sank within them when they outdid one another in recounting the numerous cases in which poor Protestant orphans had been entrapped by nuns into the nineteen Romish Orphan Asylums of Dublin’. Although suspicions of Catholic orphan societies appear overstated in certain instances, there was a firm basis for concerns that Protestant orphans were being neglected by their own church.

An article written about the self-supporting institutions in Dublin referred to reports made by Thomas Osler, Assistant Commissioner, which stated that ‘the orphan societies are mostly Roman Catholic, as
in Dublin the poorest classes are almost universally of that religion; but they are not necessarily confined to any particular sect, and one case occurred of an orphan of Protestant parents being put under the care of a Protestant family by a Roman Catholic Society. While this cannot be judged as proselytism, it does explain the founders’ ‘reproachful indignation at the non existence amongst the Protestant community of an asylum for the relief of destitute Protestant orphanage’. J. R. Hill suggests that Fr Cornelius Nary had considered ways to bring about the conversion of Protestants in the early eighteenth century in the context of dwindling Protestants numbers in the rest of Europe.

In 1831 the *Christian Examiner and Church of Ireland Magazine* referred to the foundation of the DPOS.

The Protestant Orphan Society is a most interesting one. It was founded by a few Protestant tradesmen, who were induced to do it, by perceiving, that as Government, in accordance with the views of the Romish party, had closed the doors to the Foundling Hospital, the Charter Schools, and all similar establishments, and that the activity of the monks, Jesuits, Scapularians, Confraternities, Sisters of Charity, and the whole swarm of Romans that are now in Dublin was in proportion to their numbers, resolved, as far as in them lay, to preserve Protestant orphans from being carried away to swell the numbers and the triumph of the Romanists.

Florence Davenport Hill noted in the 1860s that the DPOS had been founded to assist Protestant orphans who ‘until that period ... had frequently found refuge in the numerous institutions established by benevolent Roman Catholics; but in these, not unnaturally, conversion to the creed of their benefactors became, if not absolutely a condition, generally a consequence of the children’s admittance’. Protestants viewed the closure of the Charter Schools, the foundation of Catholic orphan societies, and convents funded by a confident and united Catholic middle class as unsettling signs of encroachment.

**The established church and the DPOS**

Although evangelicalism was not fully embraced by the Church of Ireland until after disestablishment, it had by then influenced the church in a number of profound ways: observance of the Sabbath, domestic discipline, respectability, individualism, piety and philanthropy. St Catherine’s vestry minutes contain references to the enlistment of the laity as overseers to maintain observance of the Sabbath: ‘the laity overseers hitherto appointed to prevent the breach of the Sabbath day, the same continues to be shamefully profaned in this parish by the
publicans, obstinately continuing to sell spirituous and other liquors to
the lower classes of society at hours prohibited by which means poor
families are deprived of their earnings’. This suggests that the founda-
tion of the DPOS was but an extension of the church-related work being
carried out by laymen.

Twenty-seven laymen, mainly Protestant artisans, formed a collect-
ors’ committee of the DPOS, one of whom acted as assistant secretary.
Clergymen and prominent laymen formed a second committee which
comprised fifteen clergymen and six gentlemen, a secretary and treas-
urer. In 1830, vice presidents of the DPOS included the provost of
Trinity College and the Dean of St Patrick’s. Clergymen and laymen
met every Friday at three o’clock at Mr Watson’s, No. 7, Capel Street.
The collectors’ committee met at the Tailor’s Hall, Back Lane, every
Tuesday evening at eight o’clock and collected subscriptions of one
penny per week or upwards. Committee members stressed the point
that the DPOS’s management structure contrasted with that of other
leading charities: ‘it differs from every other charitable association in
this country, as the government of the society is not as in other societies
confined to the wealthier classes of subscribers. All classes poor as well
as rich are eligible and by existing laws a certain number of both must
annually be elected’. The system was intended to bridge the social gap
of ‘class extremes’ within the Church of Ireland. Evangelicals valued the
individual regardless of rank, an idea which gradually permeated the
Church of Ireland and was clearly reflected in the management structure
and general ethos of the DPOS.

Both committees shared the same powers and one committee could
not make a final decision on any matter without the other’s consent:

The general committee is divided into two branches; or rather the business
of the society is conducted by two committees one composed of clergy and
the other composed exclusively of operative mechanics and other respect-
able individuals of inferior station. These two committees have equal
powers, have exactly the same duties to perform and no act of one is valid
until sanctioned by the other.

In subsequent years, the above system became unworkable mainly
because of differing opinions and miscommunication which led to
delays in the decision making process. The collectors did not retain
their own committee. However, for example, James Shaw, who was
listed as a member of the original collectors’ committee was named as a
member of the managing committee in the 1840s. From the late 1830s,
a committee of clergymen and laymen managed the Society. The DPOS
office was located at 16 Upper Sackville Street.
The Archbishop of Dublin, William Magee, lent his name as first patron (initially, the Society had approached the Primate of Armagh): ‘Your committee have further to state that a manuscript copy of the rules having been laid before his grace the Archbishop of Dublin he kindly consented to become our patron and liberally contributed towards our funds’. Magee most probably viewed the Society as a worthy cause – however, one that should continue to operate within the boundaries of the church. He referred to the DPOS as a mechanism to counteract the perceived Catholic threat: ‘we are not kidnappers; our object is but to hinder our people from being kidnapped’. Much of the language used in the first annual report was characteristically evangelical, particularly its references to being part of Christ’s army – warriors and soldiers of Christ were other terms used by evangelicals.

In its early annual reports, a number of prominent evangelical clergymen were listed as DPOS committee members. Caesar Otway founded the Christian Examiner with Revd Joseph Henderson Singer in 1825. He was also literary editor of the Dublin Penny Journal which was in circulation from 1832 to 1836 and wrote under the pseudonym ‘Terence O’Toole’. Otway was a trustee of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor in Ireland and assistant chaplain at the Magdalen Chapel, Leeson Street, Dublin. One of the original DPOS committee members, he was subsequently appointed Honorary Secretary of the Charitable Protestant Orphan Union and referred to as an ‘invaluable friend and supporter’.

Born in County Dublin in 1786, Joseph Henderson Singer co-founded the Established Church Home Mission and was a leading voice of the evangelical party in the Church of Ireland. An entry in a register of incoming letters to the DPOS, dated 10 May 1833, referred to Singer’s association with the charity and recorded that, ‘he expressed a desire that his name might be removed from the list of the committee’. There is no reason given for his request. Singer was chaplain of the Magdalen Asylum and appointed Bishop of Meath in September 1852. He died on 16 July 1866.

The aforementioned Dean of St Patrick’s was assisted in his work in the Liberties by several clergymen. Among them were Hastings from St James’s, Kingston from St Catherine’s, Halahan from St Nicholas’s, Burroughs, rector from St Luke’s. The Very Revd the Dean of St Patrick’s became the first Vice President of the DPOS, and Revds Halahan, Burroughs and Kingston became DPOS committee members.

Revd Arthur Thomas Burroughs was curate of St James’s parish in the 1820s and a committee member of the Hibernian Church Missionary Society. He also sought support for the parochial school
of Saint Nicholas Without, a charitable school for the poor; ‘the benevolent attendance or generous benefaction of the public is earnestly entreated to preserve from decay and debt the charitable school of a parish equally populous and poor, which is unable to support its own establishment without the aid of the benevolent inhabitants of other parishes’. Prior to his death, aged thirty-seven, he served as rector of St Luke’s parish.

Born in 1791, George Blacker, a Trinity graduate, served for several years as curate of St Andrew’s; he was also chaplain of the city corporation. Revd Blacker became vicar of Maynooth in 1840 where he continued to live until his death in 1871. He wrote local histories such as the *Castle of Maynooth* in 1853. Revd Blacker served on the DPOS committee from its earliest years.

John Richard Darley was born in 1799 and later served as Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh. Darley had been a schoolmaster for many years in Dundalk. He married William Conyngham Plunket’s sister in 1851 and ‘sought to reunite the Primitive Methodists in Ireland with the Church of Ireland’. He died in Cavan in 1884.

Additional committee members included Revd Robert Stevelly, DPOS treasurer, and a Hibernian Temperance Society committee member; Revd J. A. Bermingham, the secretary for the DPOS from its earliest years, and later the chairman of the Mendicity Institution; Revd George Kelly curate of St Mary’s parish; Revd James Gregory, later Dean of St Bridget’s Cathedral, Kildare; Revd Michael Boote who co-founded the North Strand Sunday and Daily Schools in 1837.

While many of the clergymen and laymen mentioned in the first annual report played relatively insignificant roles in the Society’s actual management, Revd Thomas Robert Shore was a notably active supporter. Shore served as curate of St Michan’s parish and chaplain to the Smithfield Penitentiary; he was appointed Honorary Secretary of the Society for the Relief of Indigent Roomkeepers in the 1830s and later chaplain to the Newgate Prison and the House of Industry. Through his many public roles, he gained extensive and invaluable experience of poverty and destitution which proved particularly useful in his work with the DPOS.

**The Charitable Protestant Orphan Union**

The governing rules of the DPOS were officially introduced on 12 January 1830 and stated that only children of Protestant parentage were admissible; however, not all committee members agreed with this policy. Following the receipt of several urgent applications from mixed marriage families in February 1830, certain committee members
suggested a review of the terms of eligibility. Others dismissed the idea, contending that to do so would violate the Society’s original principles. In the first year only four mixed marriage cases were elected; the others were ‘invariably rejected because one parent was Roman Catholic’. On this basis, on 16 March 1830, the committee reconfirmed its ruling to receive only children whose parents were both Protestant. ‘In order therefore that this question might be set at rest forever a motion was submitted to this effect that the orphans of Roman Catholics either on the father’s or mother’s side be and are inadmissible’. There were twenty-nine votes for and nine against. Two of the original founders voted in favour and one voted against. With only limited funds at their disposal, the DPOS was forced to refuse several applications from Protestant families. Moreover, the charity was founded for the specific purpose of assisting respectable Protestant families. The committee remained divided on the issue, and after a resolution was passed which stated that ‘none but the orphans of Protestant parents be admissible’, it was reported that ‘several of the committee have taken offence at the same and have resigned up their collection books and places on the committee’. A subsequent resolution requested the formal resignation of those who objected to the rule with immediate effect.

The committee members who left the DPOS founded a separate orphan society which they named the Charitable Protestant Orphan Union. Soon after, the DPOS committee noted that they had heard ‘with upset that more seceding members have endeavoured to establish a society in opposition to this exclusively Protestant institution by the illegitimate and degrading means of impugning the principles and maligning the character of its friends’. Representatives of the charities remained on acrimonious terms for seven months until the DPOS committee members recommended on 9 November 1830 that all Protestants should maintain a degree of unity. Nevertheless, the two charities continued to work separately until 1898.

**Conclusion**

During economically turbulent times and inspired by the spirit of evangelicalism, three artisans came together to affect change in their own community. The inevitability of Catholic emancipation, the increased number of convents and religious orders, and looming fears of the unknown brought home Protestant artisans’ weakened position and prepared the ground for the foundation of the DPOS. A number of the committee members were or had been members of other poor relief and moral reform agencies which gave them first-hand experience of
poverty. Divisions within the charity in its initial years prompted the foundation of the CPOU amid soured relations between once unified committee members; it was made clear at this juncture that only children of Protestant parentage were eligible to the DPOS. The Society was a lay parish charity aimed at respectable bereaved Protestant families who had fallen on hard times; however, it did not remain so for long. The next chapter examines the foundation of auxiliaries and local PO Societies throughout Ireland against the backdrop of cholera epidemics and the Great Famine.

Notes

1 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 22.
5 Whelan, Bible War, p. 87.
6 Ibid., p. 11
10 Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 157.
13 Hill, Patriots to Unionists, p. 335.
14 Acheson, History of the Church of Ireland, p. 109; see also Bowen, Protestant Crusade, p. 61.
15 Acheson, History of the Church of Ireland, p. 121; see also, Whelan, Bible War, pp. 52–5, p. 55.
17 Acheson, History of the Church of Ireland, p. 133.
18 Whelan, *Bible War*, p. 84.
27 Acheson, *History of the Church of Ireland*, p. 162.
36 10 Geo. IV, c. 7 (13 Apr. 1829).
45 *The Dublin Almanac and Register of Ireland for 1847* (Dublin: Pettigrew and Oulton, 1847), p. 939.


63 *Freeman’s Journal* (1 July 1822).

64 *Ibid*.

65 *Ibid*.

66 Hill, *Patriots to Unionists* p. 201.


70 *Freeman’s Journal* (13 May 1826).
72 *Journal of the House of Commons*, 83 (1828), p. 221.
74 *Third Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, 1836*, p. 27, HC 1836 (43), vol. xxx.
75 Hill, *Patriots to Unionists*, p. 266.
76 Ibid., p. 279.
77 Appendix to First Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, Appendix (C) – Parts I and II – Part I: Reports on the State of the Poor, and on the Charitable Institutions in some of the Principal Towns, with supplement containing answers to queries, p. 24c, HC 1836 (35), vol. xxx; Part II: Report on the City of Dublin, and supplement, containing answers to queries, p. 25c, HC 1836 (35), vol. xxx.
79 Dickson, ‘Death of a capital?’, p. 127.
81 Dickson, ‘Death of a capital?’, p. 127.
82 *Freeman’s Journal* (7 May 1827).
83 Freeman’s Journal (14 May 1827).
84 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 2.
86 ‘Constitution and rules of a proposed Protestant Orphan Society submitted by committee to general meeting; with amendments as passed in 1828’, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/2/1.
87 Ibid.
89 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 8.
90 ‘Constitution and rules of a proposed Protestant Orphan Society submitted by committee to general meeting; with amendments as passed in 1828’, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/2/1.
93 DPOS annual report, 1831, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 7.
95 Freeman’s Journal (14 May 1827).
97 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 39.
98 Ibid.
99 See retrospective look at the POS management in minutes general committee, 1856–61, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/6, pp. 286–8.
100 ‘Protestant Orphan Society’, Irish Times (9 April 1921).
101 The Treble Almanack (1830), pp. 206–7.
102 Comerford, ‘An innovative people’.
104 Ibid.
107 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 2.
108 Minutes, 6 Sept. 1829, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/1.
111 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 2.
114 Ibid.
117 St Catherine’s vestry minutes, 27 Sept. 1830, RCBL, p. 312.
118 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 11.
119 Whelan, Bible War, p. 68.
120 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 11.
121 Ibid., 1834, p. 13.
122 Ibid., p. 9.
123 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7, p. 40.
124 Whelan, Bible War, p. 61.
126 CPOU annual report, 1842, p. 15, RIA
127 Bowen, Protestant Crusade, p. 67.
129 Register incoming letters, 10 May 1833, NAI, POS papers, 1045/3/1/1.
131 The Treble Almanack (1832), p. 172.
132 Freeman’s Journal (20 May 1826).
133 Freeman’s Journal (12 October 1854).
135 DPOS annual report, 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/1–7.
137 DPOS annual report, 7 July 1842, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/11–17.
138 Ibid., p. 204.
139 ‘Constitution and rules of a proposed Protestant Orphan Society submitted by committee to general meeting; with amendments as passed in 1828’, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/2/1; see also a retrospective view of the foundation of the CPOU found in the minutes of the DPOS committee, 16 Sept. 1859, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/6, pp. 286–8, p. 287.
140 Minutes, 9 Feb. 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/1.
141 A retrospective view of the foundation of the CPOU found in the minutes of the DPOS committee, 16 Sept. 1859, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/6, pp. 286–8.
142 Minutes, 30 Mar. 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/1, p. 35.
143 Retrospective view of earlier meetings discussed 16 Sept. 1859, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/6, pp. 286–8.
144 Minutes, 30 Mar. 1830, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/1, p. 35.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid., 9 Nov. 1830, p. 40.