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

June Cooper

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Child training or child labour? 1850–98

It is nobler far to set the beacon over the sunken rock as a warning to the vessel that she may not be shipwrecked, than to send out the life-boat when the vessel is shattered to pieces, and to save perhaps the struggling mariner. Make the children independent, and they would be blessed themselves as well as blessings to others.¹

Introduction

PO Societies regarded the term of apprenticeship as a key stage of the growing-up process, one that if successfully completed drastically reduced the incidence of juvenile delinquency and the likelihood of associated adult criminality, and produced hard working, law-abiding citizens. The escalating problem of juvenile delinquency among homeless children in the post-famine years and the idea that workhouse children, numbering 104,000 in 1850,² had few prospects added weight to the Society’s argument in favour of a preventative approach. The DPOS laid the foundations of an apprenticeship system in the first half of the nineteenth century; this chapter examines its progress in the second. Despite the Society’s best intentions, the provision of effective training was not always possible; therefore, the main consideration is whether Protestant orphans were bound out as cheap labour or provided with valuable apprenticeships. The chapter also focuses on employers’ treatment of apprentices and the increasing role assumed by surviving parents and elder siblings in shaping the children’s futures.

Juvenile delinquency

The POS apprenticeship scheme was viewed as a means of reducing juvenile delinquency; ‘they [subscribers] should support an institution such as the Protestant Orphan Society, which takes under its care those children who are otherwise likely to become vagrants and
criminals’. There was a considerable rise in orphanhood, associated vagrancy and juvenile delinquency in the post-famine years. Children up to the age of seven were viewed as adults and punished accordingly. Harvey Pim reported in 1852 that a quarter of the prisoners in the Richmond Bridewell, Dublin, were juveniles – 315 children under ten years of age and 1,874 children under fifteen years of age were committed for vagrancy and criminal offences. He also claimed that there were high reoffending rates particularly among orphans, abandoned children and runaways. The Metropolitan Police revealed that it had taken into custody 1,679 children under ten and 3,259 juveniles aged between ten and fifteen years of age. In 1853, the Committee of the House of Commons on juvenile delinquency reported that in Cork some of the children tried for serious offences were ‘so small that a turnkey was obliged to hold them up in the dock in order that he might see them’, while others as young as six were imprisoned for begging.

Social reformers and Quakers, John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, initially informed public debate on the issue of child imprisonment in adult gaols; however, Mary Carpenter, who highlighted the issue in 1851, is credited with bringing about reforms in England. The Youthful Offenders (Reformatory Schools) Act, 1854 was extended to Ireland in 1858. In the succeeding decades, reformatory schools were opened throughout Ireland. Nevertheless, the imprisonment of children in gaols continued in certain parts of the country throughout the 1870s. Despite being sentenced to reformatory schools, in some cases due to overcrowding children were instead sent to gaol. Sir John Lentaigne stated that in one such case a boy committed suicide in his cell. Revd Benjamin Waugh, founder of the London branch of the NSPCC, wrote *The Gaol Cradle, Who Rocks It?* in 1873, which focused on the urgent need for juvenile courts.

Revd T. R. Shore, former General Superintendent of the DPOS, assisted in the foundation of the Protestant Reformatory School for Boys at Rehoboth Place, South Circular Road, Dublin, which was certified on 18 November 1859 and had charge of eighteen inmates. A Protestant Reformatory for girls was also founded, in Cork Street, Dublin, in the same year. By 1865 ten reformatory schools had been established in Ireland and by 1870 there were 740 child inmates. The schools were subject to inspection and the children’s maintenance was publicly funded. In 1875 there were 101 Protestant boys detained in schools, 3 in prison, and 20 Protestant girls in reformatory schools. Orphans and juvenile offenders were otherwise housed in workhouses or maintained by private charity.
After the reformatory schools act and the later Industrial Schools (Ireland) Act, 1868, fewer children were placed in workhouses and gaols. Industrial schools were state funded, operated along denominational lines, and were mainly intended ‘for the little waif or arab whose relatives or associates are vicious or criminal; that is to say, children who appear to have no chance in life but that of growing up corner-boys or disreputable women’. Protestants in the north objected to the scheme on the grounds that proselytism was likely to become an issue. Catholic industrial schools included St Joseph’s, which was founded in 1862 and accommodated 145 boys, and the Artane Industrial School established in 1870 with accommodation for 830 boys. Protestant industrial schools included the Training Home Industrial School for Protestant girls, Union-quay, Cork (1870); the Meath Industrial School for Protestant boys, Blackrock, Dublin (1871); and the Cork Industrial School for Protestant boys (1892).

The Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act, 1878 extended education to secondary level and by 1901 35,306 children attended 500 schools. Technical schools were opened throughout Ireland following the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 and the Roman Catholic church warned against any ‘Protestant interference’, forbidding Catholics to attend residential homes which Protestants attended. By the end of the nineteenth century the number of industrial schools had increased to seventy-one, nine of which were Protestant. The NSPCC reported that from 1885 to 1888 2,621 children under the age of fifteen years were committed for offences in the Dublin Metropolitan Police District. In 1896, out of the 451 children taken from Dublin Police courts to the schools, it was found that only eight cases were on the basis of ‘criminal surroundings’; the remainder were identified as ‘non-criminal destitute poor’. Many of these children were ‘orphans or children of disabled parents, and with no one able or willing to take care of them’. As discussed in chapter 3, PO Societies admitted children whose fathers were alive but ‘incapacitated bodily or mentally’.

**PO Societies and child labour**

While industrialisation in the north placed new demands on child workers, in other parts of the country employment was agriculturally based. According to the 1851 census, 23,356 children were employed in labouring and domestic service. Agricultural training was considered an effective means of reducing the high number of workhouse children (68,402 in 1852); however, as many of the children had ophthalmia and ‘sore heads’, employers were reluctant to give them work. Moreover,
as the children could not be apprenticed, Poor Law Guardians were powerless to assist those who were sent to ‘unsuitable masters’. The 1861 census recorded that 35,000 boys worked as farm labourers while girls were highly represented in domestic service and textiles in the same year. Though model farms had been a major training initiative, the scheme gradually declined from 1870 to 1900. There were a number of training colleges such as the Munster Model Farm and the Albert National Agricultural Training College, Glesnevin; there were also farms attached to national schools, nineteen out of 228 of which were regarded as model agricultural schools.

In a number of cases presented to the DPOS, the elder siblings of the admission candidates were the sole earners in their families. Women in labouring families who had had to work in order to supplement their husbands’ wages, and artisan and middle-class widows in reduced circumstances, often became trapped by the dependency of their young children, relying on their elder children as their primary support networks. Maria Luddy suggests that ‘children often worked, not to support themselves alone but often to support their families’. The available evidence, primarily DPOS application files, confirms that elder siblings as well as widows benefited from the admission of younger dependents: after the admission of younger dependents, widows could seek out employment thereby reducing the burden of responsibility on their eldest children.

T. P. employed by the Claremount Institution as a shoemaker earned a comfortable subsistence. His son (16) trained in father’s business is now employed to the Committee of Claremont Institution as a shoemaker. His mother attends to the gate of the institution but does not seem to be able to earn sufficient to support so large a family and thus their entire support is thrown almost entirely on the young lad.

Revd Gibson Black, DPOS secretary, referred to a similar case in 1852: ‘she is in a state of complete destitution wholly unable to support either of these orphans. She has another son of about twelve who minds some cattle on the land where she is at present allowed to live, a miserable house scarcely habitable but the boy receives no wages, food or clothing or anything else’. In other cases, girls worked for a pittance to supplement their widowed mothers’ meagre wages and elder sisters were frequently called upon by their mothers to watch their younger siblings.

In 1892 Rosa Barrett drew attention to cases of child mistreatment in London where it was found that despite making significant contributions to the family economy, child workers were neglected and assaulted by their parents: ‘a coroner in Whitechapel stated that out of 216
children under ten years of age who died in six months, 118 (more than half of the total number – nearly 55 per cent) brought money to those who let them die; in 84 other cases of children who died of neglect or suspected violence, 49 (over 58 per cent) brought in money’. In 1896 Barrett raised the issue again referring this time to a case in Dublin, in which ‘a boy of 11 was the chief support of the family’. In the cycle of poverty endured by labouring families and single women – widows with dependents – the impact on elder siblings was significant. Often it was they who had experienced the greatest hardship because they had to forgo their own futures in order to provide for their families.

**PO Societies and the Industrial Schools Act, 1868**

Despite the introduction of a comparable public measure such as the Industrial Schools Act, the charity’s subscribers argued in favour of maintaining PO Societies as they had done after the Poor Law was extended to Ireland. The Cork POS was adamant that it should continue its work among Protestant orphans:

> While we are sensible of the benefits conferred on certain classes of children by the operation of the Industrial Schools Act, at the same time we believe that the destitute children of our Protestant brethren, though coming within the provisions of this act, retain, nevertheless, their peculiar claim upon our Christian sympathy and charity and are still to be considered destitute orphans such as it is the object of the Protestant Orphan Society to provide for.

The DPOS observed that while the industrial schools were doing ‘a splendid job’, they did not ‘take the place of the orphan society’, for through its ‘peculiar’ system, ‘an opportunity was given for the children to be brought up as it would have been had the father lived and remained in prosperous circumstances’. In the 1870s, Mrs O’Connell, who advocated the reform of English pauper schools, proposed that boarding out should be combined with institutional training. William Neilson Hancock, secretary of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, observed in 1879, ‘Mrs. O’Connell’s proposition has in favour of it the experience of half of a century of the largest Protestant Orphan Society’.

**POS training homes**

DPOS orphans attended classes at Percy Place and remained there until they began their apprenticeships. Percy Place was managed by a matron and a warden, generally a married couple. Mrs Jepps, the DPOS
secretary’s wife, resigned from her position as matron of the home in October 1857:

with extreme regret we accept the resignation of the matron of our House Percy Place – a regret increased by the fact that impaired health has induced Mrs Jepps to give up a post which for more than sixteen years she has filled to the entire satisfaction of the committee, during which time she has invariably enjoyed the most perfect confidence and esteem of every committee to which has been entrusted the management of the Protestant Orphan Society. The ability, the assiduous and maternal sympathy displayed by Mrs Jepps has been most beneficial to the children under her care – to many of whom she appears to have greatly endeared herself. We trust that, relieved from the arduous duties and anxieties of her position as matron, her health may be so far restored as to enable her to pursue her career of usefulness in her own family.\(^42\)

A year after Mrs Jepps’s resignation, the Commissioners of Education in Ireland gave a less than satisfactory account of Percy Place. It stated that despite the ‘eminent success’ of the DPOS boarding-out system, there were problems at the training home. The accommodation was considered overcrowded; a gender imbalance in terms of instruction was also identified: ‘the attention of the girls is not sufficiently directed to the attainment of knowledge and mental discipline’.\(^43\) Girls were educated in housework and needlework ‘with a view to making them as proficient as possible in the business of servants to which most of them will be apprenticed’.\(^44\) (Children from orphanages, industrial schools and reformatories were also typically placed in service.\(^45\)) The quality of instruction for the boys and the girls was deemed of ‘inferior quality’.\(^46\) The report recommended that the Society’s funding would be better spent on the extension of its impressive boarding-out scheme rather than on the training home, which required updating.\(^47\) In light of the report the committee catalogued the existing Percy Place library collection and recommended the addition of new volumes.\(^48\)

PO Societies throughout Ireland followed Dublin’s lead and founded associated training homes to offer the orphans further training in preparation for their apprenticeships. The Tipperary POS managed two training schools: the Abbey Training School for girls and the Clonbeg Training School for boys.\(^49\) From the 1870s onwards, the Monaghan POS sent girls for training to Mrs J. G. Taylor, The Servant’s Training Home, 76 Pakenham Place, Belfast.\(^50\) The Westmeath POS sent the majority of its orphans to Wilson’s Hospital School, a boarding school in Mullingar which was aimed at poor Protestant boys.\(^51\) The admission age was between eight and eleven and children remained in the school for five years, after which they were apprenticed to trades.
Wilson’s reported a fine record of educational achievement with a substantial number of its pupils passing the Intermediate Examination in the 1880s. In 1888 sixty-six pupils received free education and board.

The Farra School provided boarding, clothing and apprenticeships for up to a hundred children. Competitive examinations were held annually and four to five children were awarded scholarships – free education and board – for four years. Boys between the ages of twelve and sixteen from Meath and Westmeath could sit the examinations. Boys who had completed the four years could extend their education at the training institution at Santry. Intermediate Examination results for the Farra pupils were also ‘very favourable’. The Westmeath POS typically sent
girls to domestic service. Girls from the Dublin POS and other local PO Societies were trained for domestic service in the Providence Home.

**Health in the training homes**

The maintenance of children’s health and their access to medical care while in Percy Place appears to have been satisfactory. It was imperative that the children remain in good health in order to secure apprenticeships. In March 1859, it came to the DPOS committee’s attention that one of the children of the newly appointed matron of Percy Place had become ill with scarlatina. The master of the house was implored
by the committee to remove his child, ‘lest the infection be communicated to the children’. As the annual meeting was fast approaching, committee members feared that all the children due to arrive with their nurses would contract the illness. In order to prevent an outbreak, and at considerable inconvenience, they managed to secure St Mark’s school rooms in Westland Row as an alternative location. The apprentices who had been in contact with the matron’s child were unable to attend the meeting.

Typhoid fever broke out in Percy Place in the 1870s. The committee reported on 2 December 1878 that two orphans had been ill for days. Dr Harley had diagnosed them with typhoid fever, and ordered their transferral to Baggot Street Hospital. He also reported ‘that – is now ill with the same disease and that she be removed to hospital without delay’. The committee resolved that ‘parents of the above named children be at once informed of their state’. Children were occasionally taken on holidays primarily for health reasons. In 1878, the committee resolved that the orphans should be given a holiday on Whit Monday and directed the manager of the home to take them to the country.

Dr Hobart, dispensary doctor and Cork POS medical officer, identified problems at the Cork POS training home in February 1869. He reported the ‘dilapidated, dark cheerless condition of the kitchen scullery in which a considerable portion of the working time is spent and also the cheerless state of the room in which the meals are served; the insufficiency of food; the dabbling in hot and cold, exposure to getting wet feet and carrying heavy weights’. He concluded by stating it was ‘at present a disgrace to the Society’. He recommended that if the Society wished to continue with the home, it should be made ‘really comfortable, with suitable furniture as the girls are brought there to make them servants not washerwomen; I would give up all washing except that of the home and oblige them to keep all parts of the house and furniture in order and scrupulously clean’. He also recommended the formation of a ‘ladies’ committee’ to assist the matron in the management of the home, which was duly formed, the appointment of a gentleman to inspect and, finally, improved diet – with meat served three to four times a week.

The Working Boys’ Home

The Dublin Working Boys’ Home and Harding Technical School was founded in 1876 and originally located in Denzille Street and later Lord Edward Street. In the late 1880s, Miss Anna Middleton Harding left a bequest to fund the establishment of a technical school. The 1896 annual report for the Working Boys’ Home stated:
The object of the Home is to provide a safe and comfortable residence for Orphans and other Boys, who are earning small wages as Apprentices or otherwise in Dublin, and who are, from any cause, without a suitable home in the city. The object of the School is to give a general elementary education to the Boys residing in the home, and others of the same class, and to afford instruction in Handicrafts, Experimental Science, Drawing, Shorthand, Book-keeping, and such other technical or commercial subjects as would help to advance the Boys in life. Religious instruction is provided for each boy in the home and in the school upon biblical and Protestant principles. Each boy, on admission to the Home or School, must produce a certificate of good character from a clergyman, from his employer, or from some other person worthy of credit. The age for admission is 12 to 16 years; but, under special circumstances, the limit of age may be extended to 18 years.69

By 1896 the home had sufficient accommodation for sixty-three boys and boasted a swimming club, gymnasium, cricket club and bell-ringing club among other ‘healthy amusements’.70 For a moderate fee, the boys had the option of attending evening classes after work. The report also recommended the foundation of a ‘Supplement Home’ for the admission of older boys.71 The goal of these homes was to ensure that impressionable young boys progressed in their education, maintained good health, and did not succumb to the temptations of city life. The home’s motto was ‘prevention is better than cure’.72 Thomas Spunner, former secretary of the Protestant Orphan Refuge Society, previously known as the Charitable Protestant Orphan Union, was superintendent of the Working Boys’ Home from 1879 to 1896.

**Industrial school ships**

The Hibernian Marine Society was co-founded by the Lord Mayor, the Archbishop of Dublin in 1774. It was aimed at the orphans of seafarers in the Merchant and Royal Navy and was supported by voluntary subscription. With subsequent parliamentary grants the Society established a nursery and school which was situated at Rogerson’s Quay.73 In England children had been sent to sea as a form of punishment from the seventeenth century.74 Disciplinary action was considered a necessary response to juvenile delinquency. Poor Law reformers in the nineteenth century such as Edwin Chadwick, James Kay, and Edward Tufnell endorsed military training for pauper children.75 They promoted naval training in response to poor military performance during the Crimean War. Children’s early training was viewed as essential to future military success.76
School ships began to be commissioned in the 1850s following the introduction of reformation and industrial schools legislation. The *Akbar*, the *Cornwall* and the *Clarence* were reformation school ships while, for example, the *Havannah*, the *Endeavour* and the *Cumberland* were industrial school ships. The school ships were envisioned as a means of reducing ‘juvenile delinquency’ by providing better prospects for young boys who ‘through poverty, parental neglect, or being orphans, are left destitute and homeless, and in danger of being contaminated by association with vice and crime’. Generally, boys trained on industrial school ships were recruited into the merchant navy rather than the Royal service which required stronger, healthier boys. Industrial school ship trainees, many of whom had experienced hardship early in life, were considered at a distinct disadvantage in this respect. Barnardo’s had attempted to establish a training ship in the 1870s but did not secure funding to do so until 1901.

In 1875 the *Clio*, an industrial school ship, was certified under the provisions of the Industrial Schools Act, 1866, and moored off Bangor in the Menai Straits, north Wales. It was intended to serve Liverpool, Manchester and other Lancashire towns with a view to training the children as sailors for the mercantile navy. Voluntary subscriptions

*Figure 6.3 Clio training ship.*
provided the funds to fit out the ship. There were also voluntary training ships in England which catered for boys whose apprenticeships had fallen through, ‘the sons of poor widows unable to cope with large families’, and workhouse children.

Despite a strict admission age limit of twelve years, in the early 1880s it was not uncommon for charities and workhouses, which were under pressure to place homeless children, to seek the admission of eleven-year-old boys; however, officials considered it unwise: ‘I think this should be declined both on the ground that a child under twelve is not well fitted for an industrial school ship and on the ground that the whole question of industrial schools is about to be considered by a Royal Commission.

Figure 6.4 Captain Moger, *Clio* training ship.
Child training or child labour? 1850–98

Figure 6.5 Clio boys, compass instruction.

Figure 6.6 Clio boys on deck.
and therefore it is inexpedient to make any considerable change, especially by way of extension’. DPOS orphans were sent to the training ship in Bangor for three main reasons: first, as a form of punishment and a means of reform and discipline; second, for health purposes; and, third, as a path to seamanship. The DPOS committee could not send the children to the Clio without the consent of a surviving parent. The DPOS committee asserted that boys who repeatedly ran away from their nurses or apprenticeships would benefit from the disciplined regime on board the Clio; however, only a relatively small number of children were sent. It was also used as a threat of punishment: ‘Miss Routledge told her brother was “wild” and needed rigid discipline before their trip to New Zealand. Miss Routledge given advice on how to handle him and Assistant Secretary warned the boy that if he was unruly he would be at once taken from his sister and put on a training ship. He promised not to act out’. 

There were nineteen orphans on board the Clio when DPOS inspectors visited the ship in 1889: ‘They were greatly pleased with all they saw, and consider that the discipline, cleanliness and general management of the ship reflect great credit upon Captain Moger’. Inspectors dismissed the fact that the boys did not wear shoes or hats: ‘regarding their clothing we have been informed that they are shoeless and bare-headed. We consider this to be a great advantage to them instead of injury; they seemed nothing the worse for it, but all the better, while it should be remembered that in winter, they are supplied with boots and caps’. They concluded that they could see no need for additional resources for the children, that the stores, hospital and bathroom were sufficient for ‘growing lads’. The ship was viewed as an excellent means of ‘turning out industrious and strong men’. No mention was made of the cramped living quarters or that the same covered deck was used as a dining hall, dormitory and school room.

While the health benefits were observed, ‘the locality is most healthy, the ship anchored as it is between Bangor and Beaumaris’, there had been health problems on board in previous years. One boy had died from pneumonia and another developed rheumatism because the ship was positioned in an unsheltered spot exposed to battering winds and rain. Captain Moger had raised concerns for the children’s well-being and recommended the ship’s relocation to a more sheltered area. Widows in some cases objected to their children’s placement on the ship. For example, an orphan was sent to the Clio when he was thirteen and remained there for over a year. He returned home in 1888 to lodge with his mother and was apprenticed to a printer for six years. Significantly, months later when the DPOS committee advised that it should send his
younger brother to the *Clio*, his mother refused to allow it, after which the Society 'gave him up to his mother'.

By 1890 a great deal had changed on board the ship: the deck had been covered to protect the boys while at play; they were able to leave the ship to go on land more after a playing field was obtained for their use; they could visit the newly opened swimming baths in Bangor; the boys played in the *Clio* band which performed at local events; they attended a summer camp every summer a ‘for a change of air’; parents could write to the boys and visit them once every two months. Medical officers also visited the ship twice a week.

While it was officially recommended that ‘as far as possible such boys were only to be sent to ships who were

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**Figure 6.7** *Clio* boys, DPOS orphans (brothers).
stout and robust in health’, the DPOS committee expressed confidence that the sea air would improve the children’s health. In 1890 the DPOS sent a boy to the Clio for this very reason, ‘this course being considered necessary by the doctor’.

Summary convictions, which were held at Anglesey County Record Office, detail some of the offences for which the Clio boys were punished. A fifteen-year-old boy who coerced another to bring tobacco on board and to steal biscuits was ‘imprisoned at H.M.P. Carnarvon for one month hard labour, thereafter detained at a Reformatory for four years’. Nevertheless, there was a relatively high success rate among the discharged boys: over eighty out of 120 went to sea. Twin brothers, farmer’s sons, who had been boarded out together in Carnew County Wicklow by the DPOS were sent to the Clio. On 16 April 1888, having completed his training, one of the brothers was ‘shipped in a vessel called the General Lee of Dublin Coasting Service’; the berth was found by the Clio authorities. Two days later, on 18 April 1888, his twin brother was ‘provided with a berth in a ship “Paladia” trading to the Brazils’; the berth was also secured by the Clio managers.

**Isolation and exploitation**

By the 1850s, the DPOS had become familiar with the legal status of both the apprentice and the Society, knowledge which proved vital in legal wrangles over indentures; however, while legally binding indentures were always used as a means of protection for the orphans, inspections were also absolutely crucial. It was highly likely, if not inevitable, that even with formal indentures, in some cases children would be mistreated by their masters and mistresses.

As discussed in chapter 3, the DPOS introduced forward-thinking measures to prevent children’s mistreatment such as the careful selection of employers and maintaining close contact with the apprentices through social events. Inspectors endeavoured to speak to the apprentices privately away from their masters in order to allow them to speak freely. A young apprentice shoemaker complained of his master’s ‘severity’; the inspector interviewed the master who claimed the apprentice was ‘idle and insolent’ and ‘hard to manage’. In this case, the inspector recommended that the boy ‘talk to him directly’ with any further problems. There is evidence that apprentices having difficulties with their employers called upon elder siblings for assistance. In 1863 an elder sister wrote to the DPOS committee on her brother’s behalf and provided him with warm clothes after he deserted his master who had mistreated him.
Generally, PO Societies sent girls to domestic service where they were subservient to their master and mistress, and, therefore, most vulnerable to mistreatment. Local clergymen were expected to visit the orphans regularly and report on their progress. In August 1860, the Senior Curate of Armagh expressed concern that a DPOS orphan girl who had been placed in service in his parish was being isolated by her master. He reported that her master preferred his servants to attend church with him as he was a member of the cathedral choir. Consequently, the girl no longer attended Sunday School and was ‘very much withdrawn from the notice of the parochial clerk’. Although her master ‘complained a little of want of cleanliness and uneven temper on the part of the girl’ and did not seem ‘altogether satisfied with her’, the curate concluded that in his opinion there ‘may well be faults on both sides’. Despite the overall effectiveness of inspections, there were reports that girls had been overworked, treated cruelly, denied adequate training and exploited as cheap labour. For example, a fourteen-year-old children’s maid employed in Dublin was prevented from writing to the Society or to her mother, and was subjected to great cruelty at the hands of her mistress, which went undetected by the Society until she ran home to her mother who alerted the authorities.

The following case concerns two boys apprenticed by the DPOS to the same master and mistress. The DPOS inspector reported that the first boy, who had only recently been placed there, stated he ‘had little to complain of’, but ‘when master and mistress fought they felt the tension’. In contrast, the second boy provided a detailed list of the mistreatment he had suffered at the hands of his mistress:

1. His letters were intercepted.
2. His food has been withheld and his bread sometimes soaked in cold water.
3. His indenture destroyed.
4. His clothes have been torn and part of his outfit destroyed.
5. He received personal violence.
6. He has frequently and publicly been addressed as a rogue and bastard. (The mistress admitted that she had referred to her apprentice in these terms but later retracted the statement that he was dishonest.)

The committee members took his allegations seriously and began an ‘intensive investigation’, in the course of which the mistress admitted the boy’s indenture had been ‘destroyed by fire’; however, although the committee believed that ‘she was the doer’, she refused to accept
responsibility. In light of the inspector’s findings, both boys were removed.

In 1894 inspectors found that the apprentices were giving ‘every satisfaction as reported by their respective masters’ and that ‘further to enquiries made to the apprentices themselves as to how they were taught their trades, the committee or the secretary learned that the apprentices were duly instructed in the particular trade to which they had been bound’. In the same year the committee reported only two unsuitable apprentice placements and in both cases it decided against sending children to either master again. Thus, in much the same way as it had done with respect to ‘good’ nurses, over time the DPOS committees came to depend on ‘good’ masters and mistresses.

‘Good’ and ‘bad’ apprentices

The level of progress made during the period of apprenticeship depended on two factors: the Society’s commitment to the children’s welfare and the apprentices’ determination to succeed, a point which is well illustrated in the following two case histories. In the first case an orphan was apprenticed as a general draper outfitter for five years in 1894. Shortly after he started his apprenticeship, the DPOS committee received a letter from his master regarding the boy’s ‘aversion to general drapery’ and his desire to work instead as a baker.

The master stated, ‘you may remember me speaking about –’s wishes to be a baker and how I could not keep him from the bake house; he is still inclined to stick to this trade and take it in preference to any other’. He went on to say that he hoped – would receive the committee’s consent to ‘have him transferred to my brother’s care and business in Main Street. I greatly fear now that he has developed a taste for this trade that if compelled it would be with the greatest reluctance he would work at any other business’. The boy wrote to the committee to plead his case, ‘I would rather be a baker than serve my time to do anything else’. Four years later, the committee received a letter from the boy’s new master who stated, ‘I am glad to say – turned out a first class baker’.

In the second case the associated problems of curbing juvenile delinquency are explored. A young apprentice found himself in trouble with the managers of the aforementioned Dublin Working Boys’ Home and Harding Technical School in July 1898:

endless lies, not paying for his board – we cannot inflict any punishment of the ordinary on such a character and there appears to be nothing in – to
appeal to him morally in order to arouse his sense of responsibility, he appears to have no idea of what it is to speak truthfully or act straightforwardly. Unless some arrangements can be made to act differently we would be much better without him in the home.\textsuperscript{119}

In October 1898, the DPOS was informed by his employer that, ‘I am very sorry to say I had to send back – as I could get no good of him, he went to the races nine miles away in the night without getting permission or leave from anyone in the house and when he returned he stopped out in the town and no good work either’.\textsuperscript{120} Five days later the DPOS received another letter this time from the apprentice: ‘will you be so kind as to ask Mr – to take me back I would like very much to learn my trade. I am very sorry for doing wrong and will in future obey my master’s commands. And serve my full term that is on my indentures now’.\textsuperscript{121} The master, Mr –, wrote a second letter stating ‘cannot keep – from associating with corner boys … He is really unmanageable there is no use of me striving to get good of him’.\textsuperscript{122} Eventually, despite his misgivings, Mr – agreed to take the boy back: ‘will give him another chance even though he ran away as he has been good for a while’.\textsuperscript{123} However in November, the employer informed the committee that if the boy returned he would have him arrested.\textsuperscript{124}

The boy was spotted in Dublin weeks later: ‘I thought it hard to see him wandering about the streets and got him something to eat and a bed for the night’,\textsuperscript{125} however, the Working Boys’ Home refused to take him back. The DPOS committee stated on the 18 November 1898, ‘Couldn’t put him in industrial school. Decide to threaten him with reformatory school because he is an absconding apprentice which may keep him at his work. I judge he is rather a weak boy than positively bad’.\textsuperscript{126} In December 1898 he was, by direction of the committee, ‘brought before a magistrate and sentenced to five years in Malone Protestant Reformatory in Belfast’.\textsuperscript{127} The case illustrates most clearly the boy’s downward spiral into eventual destitution. Evidently a well-liked boy, there is little doubt that committee members went to extraordinary lengths in order to guide and protect him.

\textbf{Emigration}

Children were sent to Canada and Australia throughout the nineteenth century under the aegis of a number of emigration schemes, the most influential of which was the Barnardo Homes. PO Societies did not support the emigration of its orphans except when absolutely necessary as, in many cases, the children’s mothers were still alive. Thomas
Spunner, secretary to the PORS, who had spent time with Mrs Rye in Canada, advocated orphan emigration. On 22 November 1882, the secretary to the county Monaghan POS publicly opposed Spunner’s idea: ‘The real question for benevolent people to consider in the matter is not the advisability of emigration in general, nor the possible advantages American domestic servants enjoy over Irish; but is it necessary to send out into the world, with, at best, but scant superintendence a number of young children’. 128 Revd Digby Cooke, who was a member of the Female Orphan House committee, also rejected his proposal. ‘I cannot think it desirable to send out to a distant colony a number of children of tender age separating them from all ties of kindred possibly from a respectable mother’. 129 According to its 1884 annual report, only one orphan was assisted to emigrate by the Tipperary POS. 130

In the majority of cases examined in the course of this study, young orphans emigrated with surviving parents and extended kin (often subsidised by the DPOS) rather than through emigration schemes. In numerous cases, elder siblings wrote to the DPOS committee requesting their permission to take their younger sisters and brothers with them when they emigrated. 131 A minor number of orphans aged under eighteen were sent to the Liverpool Sheltering Home, which was founded by Louisa Birt in 1872. 132 The LSH provided chaperones and a degree of protection for the youngsters on their voyage to Canada. While many children found stability and good homes, the lack of supervision provided for the children after they arrived led to cases of exploitation. 133 Other Protestant homes, such as Miss Carr’s Homes, the Cottage Home for Little Children and the Ragged Schools, sent a small number of children from Ireland to Canada through the MacPherson and Birt schemes. 134

Extended family and children’s futures

Widows, siblings and extended kin assisted their young relatives who were beginning their working lives in a number of ways; first, if necessary, they objected to unsuitable apprenticeships arranged by the DPOS committee; 135 second, they drew the committee’s attention to suitable placements or arranged apprenticeships themselves with the Society’s permission; and, third, they monitored the children during their apprenticeships. Lydia Murdoch argues that, ‘like histories of child philanthropy, studies of poor law institutions often ignore parents’ roles in finding external aid for their children’. 136 The DPOS regularly apprenticed the orphans to their extended relatives in the first half of
the nineteenth century, if the opportunity arose; the same was true to a greater extent in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, in some of these cases, widows in service found employment for their daughters in the same house.

Generally speaking, the committee was most accommodating and agreed to any suggestion which would prove beneficial to the children. It also appears to have done its utmost to assist the widows and children in every way possible; for example, in 1883 the committee ‘made the girl a present of a sewing machine as the mother intends having her instructed in dressmaking’. In a second case, a widow, whose husband had been a government clerk, informed the committee in 1887 that she could secure a situation for her fourteen-year-old son. The committee agreed to return the child to his mother. In another case, a widow proposed apprenticing her daughter to a dressmaker ‘if the committee agree’. The committee approached the recommended dressmaker. The lady stated, ‘I would gladly take one of your girls as an apprentice to dressmaking but your fee is much under my fee’. In fact it was five times that of the ordinary apprentice fee given for orphans; however, given the child’s poor circumstances she charitably agreed to lower her normal rate. It was also common for elder siblings to arrange further training for their younger brothers and sisters.

The DPOS raised its admission age limit to thirteen in 1898, after which applications increased: ‘many children who were formerly sent to industrial schools would now come to that society’. The flexibility with which the DPOS dealt with surviving parents and extended families when compared to the industrial schools, which did not permit any interference, along with other changes to its general management were additional reasons for renewed public support.

By the late nineteenth century, the orphans were allowed greater freedom to make their own decisions and encouraged to be assertive, which is demonstrated in the following extract from a letter written to the DPOS committee by a young apprentice.

I beg of you to reconsider your decision as I have no taste for printing and as it is such an unhealthy trade I do not think I would get on at it. Besides I hear from a boy who was there that it was not a good place to be in. I am quite willing to work at anything but I should like to get into a nice place. I am answering all advertisements I can see. I hope you will reconsider this and that I shall soon get settled into a good place … Mr. Day is perfect right by saying that no boy ought to be put to anything against his will and this is a very unhealthy trade.
For some orphans, the transition from apprentice to independent adult proved challenging; however, the DPOS maintained an interest in their well-being. ‘One of the great objects that a parent has in view in general is to get children comfortably settled in life – to make provision for them. The society, in regard to those children whom it brings up to man’s and woman’s estate, really does stand in the place of a parent, and not only with regard to the girls but also with regard to the boys’.\textsuperscript{147} There is evidence to support claims that the ‘committee endeavour as far as possible, to keep in sight the orphans even after they have served their apprenticeships’.\textsuperscript{148} The following cases attest to the Society’s continued support of the orphans long after the removal of their names from the Society roll. One young man wrote to the Society on 7 January 1898:

I, a boy reared by the Protestant Orphan Society, just come up lately to Dublin and having no one to get lodging for me shortly before Christmas I took sick and not till then did I learn what kind of house I was in. Of course being sick I got into debt, I therefore ask if the committee would lend me one pound. I would pay it back in instalments fit for any young man. It would take a good time with what I am charged for my lodging to get out of the house. I would gladly pay it back if the committee would consent to give it to me, as I would like to get respectable lodgings as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{149}

The curate of St Thomas’s described him as a very respectable young man, suggesting, ‘I think as he is one of our children the committee would be right in helping him it would be in every best interest for him to enter into the boy’s home Lord Edward Street but he has obligations at his present lodgings at 54 Lower Gloucester Street’.\textsuperscript{150} The Working Boys’ Home, Lord Edward Street, also founded the ‘Rutland Club’, which was based in Rutland Square for the benefit of elder boys, typically eighteen or nineteen years of age without accommodation. The Home’s committee noted in 1896, ‘we feel the gravity of such a responsibility, and how necessary it is for us to try to know them individually, so as to be able to help or advise them in case of difficulty or distress. Most of them are orphans and have no one else to look to for sympathy and guidance’.\textsuperscript{151} Canon Francis B. Ormsby was Honorary Secretary of the Rutland Club and also a member of the DPOS committee.

Another former orphan, who approached the committee for assistance in 1898, informed the secretary that he had applied to the navy but had been rejected on account of his small build and ‘stoppage in his speech’.\textsuperscript{152} His apprenticeship to a farmer had left him with limited training and no savings:
It is a hard thing on a fellow to be brought up as a Protestant orphan and then thrown to the waves of the world without any one to look up to or down at. I might get work in a busy time and then I might starve afterwards. I would be thankful if they would send me to New Zealand or Australia where I could get something for my time. I conclude by thanking you for your kindness to me and trusting that you will help me.\textsuperscript{153}

The feelings of loneliness expressed in the letter reflects the social reality of independence for the orphans, particularly those without any extended relatives. The letter also suggests that for many young people emigration was a sought-after survival strategy.

Annual reports from the 1890s reflect educational advances and a growing emphasis on the importance of quality training:

Your committee, fully aware of the influence of education, religious and secular on the future welfare of the young, devoted special attendance of this important branch of their work. The orphans are periodically examined in the different schools they attend and as a result, fees are granted to the teachers according to the progress made by the children during the year. They also aim at a higher class education for as many of their orphans as they can afford with a view of gratifying them for such positions as teachers, clerks, type writers; at present they have 16 girls in training at schools in the city, they have 2 boys at the Morgan school Castleknock and four boys at the Swords Borough School. From this latter school it might be mentioned one of the orphans at a competitive examination last year obtained an exhibition which entitled him free board and education for three years at the Farra Endowed school. From the same school another orphan won quite recently an exhibition of £20 with free board and education.\textsuperscript{154}

The Morgan Endowed School, Castleknock, Dublin, a Protestant school endowed by Richard Morgan, was taken over by the King’s Hospital in 1957. Revd J. C. Irwin was a governor of the school and also a member of the DPOS committee. Many of the boys who attended Morgan’s passed the Intermediate Examination and pursued further training.

The main objective of PO Societies was to give children a good start in life. The Meath POS reported that it had apprenticed boys to the following trades: ‘painter, tailor, saddler, gardener, shoemaker, carpenter, weaver, printer, baker, blacksmith, iron-moulder, grocer, watch and clock maker’.\textsuperscript{155} Others joined the navy or army. As in Dublin, the mainstay for girls was domestic service and dressmaking. Girls were also apprenticed ‘to grocers, chemists and confectioners’ and became nurses, teachers and clerks.\textsuperscript{156}
### Table 6.1 Cavan POS orphans, 1850–63

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How provided for</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Average age</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Average age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootmaker</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confectioner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dressmaker</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Printer</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Returned to friends</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Tailor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken by mothers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be apprenticed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be sent to service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Other homes

- Female Orphan House: 1, 15
- Providence Home: 2, 14
- Wilson’s Hospital: 1, 10

#### Emigration/migration

- America: 3, 12
- Australia: 1, 15
- Canada: 2, 11
- England: 1, 14
- Dublin: 1, 15
- Scotland: 1, 14

*Source: Cavan POS annual reports, 1850–63, NLI.*

### Conclusion

By 1895, PO Societies in Ireland had apprenticed or ‘otherwise provided for’ approximately 18,525 children (‘otherwise provided for’ referred to children who might have returned home to their mothers or extended kin, emigrated, or secured employment). From its foundation in 1828 to 1899, the DPOS provided apprenticeships for 1,769 of the 4,122 orphans admitted. The Society appears to have made every effort to
arrange suitable apprenticeships. It generally only accepted applications for apprentices from respectable employers; however, it claimed to stand in the place of a parent and had to make difficult decisions during periods of hardship just as parents did: when funds were low and apprenticeships scarce, orphans were sent to less than ideal situations. In certain cases masters did not train their apprentices adequately, treated them harshly and viewed them only in terms of cheap labour. Nevertheless, the apprentices were inspected and removed if necessary. They were also given practical guidance during and after apprenticeship which helped them to become independent and productive adults.
Notes

1 ‘Address to the British public on behalf of the Protestant Orphan Society for Ireland’, p. 334.
3 Publicity material, 1866, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/2.
5 Pim, ‘On the importance of reformatory establishments’, p. 5.
8 21 & 22 Vic., c. 103 (2 Aug. 1858).
15 *Inspector of Reformatory Schools of Ireland: fifteenth report*, p. 94 [C 1821], HC 1877, vol. xlii.
16 30 & 31 Vic., c. 25 (May 1868).
20 41 & 42 Vic., c. 66.
23 O’Mahony, *Criminal Justice in Ireland*, p. 201.
24 NSPCC annual report, 1890, p. 21, NLI.
29 *Ibid*.
33 Registered application files, Feb. 1855, NAI, POS papers, 1045/5/3.
38 Minutes, 27 Nov. 1871, RCBL, CPOS papers, PRIV MS 519.1.
39 DPOS annual report, 1868, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.
40 M. A. Bianconi, daughter of C. Bianconi of Longfield House, Cashel, was born 16 Sept. 1840 and died in 1908. She wrote her father’s biography and married M. J. O’Connell, a lawyer.
41 W. N. Hancock, ‘Statistics on points raised by Mrs. O’Connell’s and Miss Smedley’s papers’, *JSSISI*, 8:40 (1879), pp. 38–41, p. 38.
42 Minutes, 2 Oct. 1857, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/6, p. 123.
44 *Ibid*.
46 *Report of her Majesty’s Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Endowments*, p. 173.
48 Minutes, 29 Oct. 1858, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/6, p. 206.
49 *Ibid*.
50 Minutes, 4 Nov. 1886, RCBL, MPOS, PRIV MS 619.1.
51 *Irish Times* (9 October 1888).
52 *Ibid*.
53 *Irish Times* (18 June 1869).
54 *Irish Times* (9 October 1888).
55 Westmeath POS annual reports, RIA.
56 Minutes Percy Place Home inspection committee, 1877, NAI, POS papers, 1045/16/4.
58 *Ibid*.
59 *Ibid*.
61 Minutes Percy Place Home, 1877–78, NAI, POS papers, 1045/16/4.
63 *Ibid*.
64 Minutes, 22 Feb. 1869, RCBL, CPOS papers, PRIV MS 519.1.1.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

The Tenth Report of the Commissioners enquiring into the State of all Schools on Public or Charitable Foundations in Ireland, p. 249, HC 1810 (243), vol. x.
Murdoch, Imagined Orphans, p. 121.
Ibid., p. 134.
Ibid.
Ibid., p. 69.
Freeman’s Journal (23 October 1876).
Clio papers, Kew National Archives, HO45 9553 65394.
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Minutes, March 1882, NAI, DPOS papers, 1045/2/1/10, pp. 369–70.
DPOS annual report, 1889, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/55–60.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.

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Ibid.
Roberts, The ‘Clio’, p. 70.
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Minutes subcommittee nurses and education, 1890, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/3.
6 Sept. 1886, Kew National Archives, WQ/S/1886/M435.
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Ibid.

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Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


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Book of press cuttings, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/3.

Clonmel Chronicle (17 May 1884) in scrapbooks, 1849–84, RCBL, CPOS papers, PRIV MS 519.16.1.

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143 Ibid.
144 Irish Times (8 April 1899).
145 Duckworth, Fagin’s Children, p. 222.
146 Bound volume of incoming letters, 1898, NAI, POS papers, 1045/3/1/25.
147 DPOS annual report, 1880, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/50–54, p. 12.
148 DPOS annual report, 1890, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/61–65.
149 Bound volume of incoming letters, 1898, NAI, POS papers, 1045/3/1/25.
150 Ibid.
152 Bound volume of incoming letters, 1898, NAI, POS papers, 1045/3/1/25.
153 Ibid.
154 DPOS annual report, 1895, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.
156 Ibid.