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

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The Protestant Orphan Society supplied a great want in their benevolent and charitable institutions and he felt they could not get on without them.¹

Introduction

Given the relatively significant decline in the Protestant population, the creation of the Free State, the growing authority of the Roman Catholic church as evidenced by its extensive network of convents, orphanages and schools, and the 1937 constitution, it stood to reason that PO Societies in the south would lose some, if not all, of the social influence built up in the nineteenth century. Yet, despite these changes as well as the removal of restrictions on outdoor relief or ‘Home Assistance’ and the introduction of the Widows’ Pension in 1925 in Northern Ireland and in 1935 in the Free State, PO Societies endured. The final chapter examines the social service carried out by Dublin POS committee members and Church of Ireland women and identifies the distinguished figures from Douglas Hyde to Dr Ella Webb who lent the Society their support. It argues that in a rapidly changing Ireland PO Societies represented a link to the past that bound together heterogeneous elements in the Church of Ireland in the north and south of the country into the twentieth century.

Social reform

Women were at the forefront of social service provision and the driving force behind social reform in Ireland. Founded in 1897, the Philanthropic Reform Association, with leading members such as Rosa Barrett, sought workhouse reforms and initiated the Police Aided Children’s Clothing Society.² The Alexandra Guild followed Octavia Hill’s lead in terms of social work and formed the Tenement Company
in 1897. Alexandra College offered courses in social work and its trainees obtained work placements in the Jacob’s factory. Owned by Quakers, the working conditions were unrivalled: a welfare department catered for all the employees’ medical needs and promoted their good health.³

In addition to its foundation of mother and baby clubs and its successful TB prevention campaign discussed in chapter 7, the Women’s National Health Association (WNHA) promoted women’s and children’s health in a number of other ways, for example, free school meals, children’s dental clinics, maintenance of district nurses, playgrounds and school gardens. The WNHA contributed significantly to the professionalisation of social work in Ireland.⁴ Susanne Rouvier Day was appointed a Poor Law Guardian in Cork in 1911 and later became convinced of the flaws in the Poor Law system particularly with respect to women and children.

Maud Gonne and Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, along with Stephen Gwynn, advocated a state funded free meals initiative (a scheme previously opposed by the Roman Catholic church), which led to the Education (Provision of Meals) (Ireland) Act, 1914.⁵ Lady Aberdeen, WNHA, also played a leading role in the Irish Home Industries Association, founded 1886, and the Civics Institute formed in 1914,⁶ which promoted public health and housing reform. The Congested District Board and other departments offered classes in cookery and hygiene from the 1890s⁷ and the Dublin Corporation worked with the Civics Institute on specific projects related to tenement housing.⁸

The Joint Committee of Women’s Societies and Women Social Workers was founded in 1935 and represented the Irish Country Women’s Association (originally the United Irishwomen), Irish Housewives Association, the Irish Women Citizens’ Association, Saor an Leanbh, the Irish Women’s Workers Union and the Mothers’ Union.⁹ In Belfast, the Council of Social Welfare was formed, voluntary hospitals built and charitable initiatives for the disabled founded.¹⁰

Nuns assumed a pivotal role in Catholic voluntary activism through their tireless work in orphanages, hospitals and schools and attempts were made to organise the Catholic laity to counteract the influence of socialism.¹¹ St Vincent De Paul’s membership increased steadily during the early twentieth century and laymen such as Professor O’Rahilly set up the Catholic Social League in 1917 in Cork.¹² Later in the century, Catholic lay women were involved in the Catholic Social Service Conference and the Legion of Mary.¹³
Women and PO Societies

Church of Ireland women contributed consistently, generously and unobtrusively to PO Societies in their vital roles as nurses and matrons, collectors and fundraisers. In 1919 the level of parish work undertaken by Church of Ireland women was emphasised in a petition submitted to the General Synod by Archbishop Gregg to support the restoration of women’s rights to hold vestry office.14

Women continued to collect and fundraise on behalf of PO Societies in the twentieth century. Though perhaps not as well attended as in former years, bazaars were often utilised to clear outstanding debts.15 The Sunnyside local ladies’ committees arranged ‘Pound Days’ at which attendees were invited to donate 1 lb of household provisions. It also organised Gift Days at Sunnyside and Gift Services at local churches, ‘to keep the children well supplied with toys’.16 There were also ‘Protestant Orphan Days’ when sermons were preached on behalf of the charity in every Church of Ireland parish.17

Women also continued to hold concerts to raise funds for the Societies, which, for example, contributed to children’s excursions to the seaside during the summer. Women were also adept at raising the Society’s profile among prominent businesses in order to encourage donations: Moët and Crosse & Blackwell were two of the more well known businesses. The Monkstown POS committee stated in 1914 that ‘the lady collectors had proved the Society’s main reliance’.18

Apart from their more traditional roles as nurses and fundraisers, women gradually became involved in other important duties. In the nineteenth century the DPOS employed men as clerks and secretaries; however, the position of assistant secretary was filled by a woman in 1909.19 It was a key role which involved direct correspondence with bereaved families and required a high level of organisational skills. (By 1914, approximately 8,000 women were employed as office clerks in Ireland.20) While clergymen’s wives and daughters had assisted in overseeing boarded-out children in the nineteenth century, their later more official role proved an immense asset to the Society: members of the visiting committee could identify more easily with the widows’ trials and could therefore provide those who had the charge of their own children with the assistance they needed.

Women gained valuable experience from their time spent with the Society, which stood them in good stead to find other related voluntary work; for example, a member of the ladies’ visiting committee was offered a position as assistant to the Church of Ireland Temperance Society in 1915, which she duly accepted.21 In 1919 the DPOS employed
a lady inspector to carry out inspections of every orphan on the Society roll. Initially envisaged as a temporary role, the woman’s work was so impressive it was made a permanent position.\textsuperscript{22}

Miss Charlotte Burroughs and Miss Neville, who founded cottage homes in association with the DPOS in the late nineteenth century, contributed enormously to the overall management of the DPOS. On 14 April 1917 their endeavours were commended publicly: ‘to both these ladies the Protestant Orphan Society owed a debt which could never be discharged’.\textsuperscript{23} These lay women consistently contributed to social service in connection with their church. Charlotte Burroughs, who died in China in January 1929 and who left Sunnyside to the Society, and bequeathed a large sum towards its future management, was the sister of Revd W. E. Burroughs. Revd Burroughs had been a friend of both the PORS in the 1880s and later the Cottage Home, Kingstown. He praised his sister’s efforts on behalf of Protestant orphans in September 1916 in an entry in the home’s visitors’ book.

Visited Sunnyside after some time and found that while some had come, and some had gone in the interval, there was no change in the spirit and tone of the home or its management. It is still a home rather than a house … I cannot but add my conviction that the departure of my sister – founder and ceaseless friend of Sunnyside will be an almost irreparable loss only to be met by the continued services of Mrs Harris, who so thoroughly knows and values the rules and principles laid down from its commencement and never departed from. May Sunnyside for years to come send with its bright supply of happy, pure and god fearing young lives to serve god and their generation by his will.\textsuperscript{24}

Both Miss Neville and Miss Charlotte Burroughs were single women who had dedicated most of their lives to the care and support of Protestant orphans.

Apart from the direct care of the children, the names of lady doctors featured on the annual reports of the DPOS as medical officers for the first time in the 1930s. Dr Dorothy McEntire Bennett became a medical adviser for the DPOS in 1936 and remained so until 1944.\textsuperscript{25} It is likely that Bennett was sympathetic to the needs of the Society as she herself had been widowed less than a year before. Dorothy McEntire was the daughter of Alexander Knox McEntire and widow of Captain Frank Bennett, the son of the late William Massy Bennett of Glenesy, County Tipperary.\textsuperscript{26}
Women and local PO Societies

Although women had become members of visiting committees, for example, in the cases of Limerick and Cork PO Societies from the 1840s and late 1850s, respectively, in other cases, women were not invited to become members of POS managing committees until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Armagh POS, for example, formally recognised women as members of the committee in 1898. A motion was passed which read that, ‘the Rules be altered to admit of ladies being elected on the Committee of the Armagh Protestant Orphan Society’, and subsequently, on 21 June 1898, at the meeting held in the Diocesan Rooms, Armagh, there was ‘an expression of heartfelt self congratulation on the part of the Committee at the presence of Ladies for the first time at their meeting’.

In February 1917 the honorary secretary of the Meath POS, the Revd R. J. Merrin, died: ‘The wife of the Reverend Lancelot Coulter of Ardbrahan was appointed in his stead. At the annual meeting, the same year, ladies were for the first time elected members of the committee’. Women tended to pave the way for other women to join the committees. In Monaghan, women were not recorded as members of the managing committee in the late nineteenth century; however, by the early twentieth century four women had been appointed. The Ferns POS welcomed women in 1920, one year after vestry rights were restored: ‘his Lordship expressed pleasure at the introduction of ladies to the Committee of the society’; four women were appointed committee members, one of whom was Revd Wilkinson’s daughter, and another was the Countess of Courtown.

Dublin POS (DPOS) committee members and social service

In the post-disestablishment era, Church of Ireland clergymen could participate in social service in a way not previously possible; for example, they founded the highly successful Dublin Hospital Sunday Fund in 1874 to raise funds for Dublin hospitals. The fund enabled investigations into hospital management which identified the problem of inadequate nurse training.

In the late nineteenth century, Church of Ireland clergymen in Dublin took part in several other social service initiatives. Revd Paterson Smyth, who was mentioned in the DPOS minutes of committee meetings as an attendee, and a committee member of the Monkstown POS, founded the Church of Ireland Social Service Union in 1898. Smyth viewed poverty as a social problem rather than a personal one based on morals alone.
The overcrowding of the Dublin slums and the immorality associated with multiple families living in one house or of people of all ages and both sexes living in the same room were identified as particularly pressing problems in proposals for the Church of Ireland Social Service Union. Miss Rosa Barrett, and other speakers including Dr Paterson Smyth, delivered lectures on the theme of ‘Work in the Slums’ at a meeting of the union in 1898 and a year later the Union highlighted the fact that children of ‘tender years’ were being ‘employed as messengers for intoxicating liquor’. Professor Brougham Leech, TCD, Mr Ernest Swifte, Divisional Police Magistrate, and Revd J. C. Irwin, also a DPOS committee member, became members of the Dublin Central Committee of the Church of Ireland Social Service Union in December of that year. Alderman Healy, an inspector for the DPOS, was also a member of the Clontarf branch of the Social Service Union.

Revd Maurice Day became a DPOS committee member in the 1890s, supported the Clergy Widows’ and Orphans’ Society, and became chairman of the St Matthias branch of the Social Service Union. In 1899 he reiterated the Union’s aims, ‘to rouse the Christian conscience of the country; to assert Christ’s claim; and to teach Christ’s will in dealing with social problems’. Day stressed that the Church of Ireland was but one branch of the Social Service Union, which he claimed should ‘appeal to Christian men and women of every denomination. There are Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, and Irish Churchmen whose hearts are sore at the social evils which lie around them and which could be largely remedied if a sufficiently strong public opinion were brought to bear upon them’. Revd Day’s son, the Most Revd Canon John Godfrey Day, later primate of Ireland, also supported the DPOS in subsequent years. Moreover, his uncle Maurice Fitzgerald Day had been a prominent evangelical clergymen and incumbent of St Matthias parish in the 1860s, and served as vice-patron of the DPOS in 1867.

By the late nineteenth century, a number of Church of Ireland clergymen had given generously of their time in the wider field of social service as well as to the care of Protestant orphans. In 1901 the Archbishop of Dublin, Joseph Peacocke, then aged sixty-five, proudly reflected on the extensive social service carried out by the Dublin POS.

He was very glad to find that at the opening of the twentieth century this social service was being taken up and pushed forward. And yet it ought to be borne in mind that social service work had been done by the Protestant Orphan Society for the last seventy years. The work of the society had
been to make provision for the orphans of their poor Protestant people, to throw some protection around them, and to prevent them from falling down to paths of degradation, and possibly crime. The society felt that prevention was better than cure.\textsuperscript{43} 

There were two types of charity identified in the early twentieth century – preventative and those that dealt specifically with urgent need.\textsuperscript{44}

**Clergymen’s daughters, PO Societies and social service**

Miss Catherine Drew, daughter of Revd Dr Drew, supporter of the Belfast auxiliary to the DPOS in the 1840s, endorsed a similar system for the bereaved families in her own field. An authoress and journalist, Miss Drew was a generous contributor to the Institute of the Journalists’ Orphan Fund, from its foundation in Dublin in 1891.\textsuperscript{45} The idea for an orphan fund was in fact proposed by Drew in that year.\textsuperscript{46} She was also a co-founder of the Ladies’ Press Association.

Kathleen Lynn, daughter of Revd Robert Young Lynn, a Church of Ireland clergymen, was born in Mayo in 1874. Revd Lynn was secretary to the Mayo POS in the late 1870s. Among numerous other achievements, Kathleen Lynn was one of the founders of the Irish Citizens’ Army,\textsuperscript{47} and established St Ultan’s Hospital for Infants in 1919. Archbishop Edward Byrne opposed a proposal to merge St Ultan’s, a multi-denominational hospital, with the Children’s Hospital, Harcourt Street, a Catholic hospital, in 1935. Byrne opposed the scheme unwaveringly on the basis that he believed Catholic children would be at risk of Protestant proselytising.\textsuperscript{48}

Like Dr Kathleen Lynn, and Catherine Drew, Dr Ella Webb was also the daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman, Revd Charles Thomas Ovenden, Dean of St Patrick’s.

In July 1908, Webb visited Sunnyside Home, the DPOS affiliated cottage home in Kilternan, and that day left a message in the visitors’ book:

I have been greatly pleased by the appearance of the children. Their healthy looks and pretty manners leave nothing to be desired. I consider the house excellently situated the number of children not too great for the air space, and the sanitary arrangements perfect. The general management and diet of the children seems to be admirable.\textsuperscript{49}

Webb was likely to have been influenced by much of the work carried out by ladies such as Miss Charlotte Burroughs, Sunnyside, and Rosa Barrett, Cottage Home for Little Children. Webb opened a dispensary for children in the Adelaide Hospital in 1918\textsuperscript{50} and in 1925 founded the Children’s Sunshine Home for Convalescents, Stillorgan, County
Dublin, a Catholic home also called the Sunshine Home was established ten years later; she became a close associate of Kathleen Lynn at St Ultan’s. In 1935 Webb praised the work of the DPOS, noting ‘that it did one good to see the pleasure which mothers experienced when they were told the children would be provided for after the death of the bread-winner. The Society was carrying on a great work in that direction, and deserved every support’. Her words echoed her father’s earlier sentiments. Based in Fermanagh for a time, Revd Ovenden, when rector of Enniskillen, spoke in favour of the County Fermanagh POS, stating in 1893 at an annual meeting ‘that the society deserves the warmest and heartiest support of every member of the Church of Ireland in this country’.

Miss Emily Hyde, daughter of Revd A. Hyde, contributed extensively to the Leitrim POS in the nineteenth century and her nephew Douglas Hyde, the first President of Ireland, carried on the tradition. Hyde’s vision of de-anglicising Ireland and the importance he placed on the Irish language won him wide acclaim. The Leitrim POS reported in June 1939, ‘His Excellency the President of Éire, if in the district, has signified his intention of being present, for his grandfather, the Revd A. Hyde, was one of the Society’s early secretaries, and Miss Emily Hyde acted for some time as lady secretary’.

Dr Dorothy Stopford Price, daughter of Jemmett and Constance Stopford (whose father was Evory Kennedy, master of the Rotunda Lying In Hospital), also supported the DPOS. At a DPOS meeting in 1935, a ‘resolution expressing the thankfulness of the Society to the contributors and collectors was proposed by Dr Dorothy Stopford Price’. Price brought the vaccination for TB to St Ultan’s, which was the first hospital to introduce the BCG vaccine in Ireland or Great Britain. Price was extremely well connected and her extended family were also keen supporters of PO Societies. For example, Price’s grand-uncle, Archdeacon Edward Alderly Stopford of Meath, who liaised with Gladstone to formulate the Church Act, was also a member of the Meath POS committee. Archdeacon Stopford’s daughter was Alice Stopford, historian and nationalist.

This sense of tradition and support, which stretched over time and across generations, was mirrored by the bereaved families assisted by PO Societies and general subscribers. The same families subscribed to the DPOS in the twentieth century as had done in the nineteenth. Orphans who had passed through the POS system frequently donated to its funds as adults. Moreover, in a number of cases, orphans who had been helped by the Society reached adulthood and married, and tragically became dependent on the Society themselves. For example, the DPOS admitted
a nine-year-old boy and paid his aunt an allowance to cover his upkeep. When he was twelve he applied to the British Army (boys’ service); he failed the medical examination. Three years later the Society provided him with apprentice fees which paid for his entry to Gravesend Sea School, one of the premier training facilities under the management of the Shipping Federation, which was established in 1918 to train boys for the Merchant Navy. He subsequently joined the British Navy and married at the age of twenty-two. Eight years later he died while on active service and within a year his son had been elected to the Society roll.\textsuperscript{57}

**Religious rivalry**

Despite Parnell’s and Isaac Butt’s prominence in the Home Rule Movement in the nineteenth century, home rule was opposed by most members of the Church of Ireland.\textsuperscript{58} Amid intense religious rivalry and against the backdrop of the Home Rule Movement, proselytism remained an inflammable issue. During Queen Victoria’s visit to Ireland, a ‘Children’s Day’ was held in the Phoenix Park on 9 April 1900. The DPOS was also closed ‘on the occasion of Her Majesty’s visit to Dublin’,\textsuperscript{59} and a member of the committee noted ‘with satisfaction the large assemblage of children recently in the Phoenix Park’.\textsuperscript{60} Nationalists regarded Children’s Day as a ‘scheme to use the Queen’s visit for making loyal little Britons of the sons and daughters of Irish Nationalists’ and an ‘act of political souperism and possibly religious souperism’.\textsuperscript{61} The ladies’ committee refuted the claims, assuring the objectors that its only aim was to ensure that all poor children would be properly fed on that day.

Maud Gonne, founder of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann (1900), and a leading voice in the anti-conscription campaign, organised the ‘Patriotic Children’s Treat’ in Clonturk Park, Drumcondra on 1 July 1900 as a nationalist display of defiance against the earlier ‘Children’s Day’ event. Gonne regarded it as ‘most encouraging’ that so many children ‘had the firmness and courage to refuse to attend the Queen’s treat’, pointing out that ‘only 5,000 allowed themselves to be used for a Unionist demonstration, and these 5,000 were chiefly from the Masonic, industrial and workhouse schools’.\textsuperscript{62} A DPOS committee member noted that Protestant orphans were among the children who attended.\textsuperscript{63}

On the occasion of the 1902 coronation other events arranged by a ladies’ committee, which aimed to ‘entertain the poor children of Dublin’,\textsuperscript{64} also aroused suspicion.

From the vivid language of certain resolutions passed by some branches of a well-known association that need not be named, it might be thought
that this notion of giving the children of Dublin a happy day at the seaside or in the country was a deep plot to turn little Roman Catholics into little Protestants. A glance at the list of the ladies forming the committee will be sufficient to dispel any such ridiculous idea, for they include a considerable proportion of Roman Catholics.65

During the hardship caused by the trade union strikes in Dublin, Mrs Dora Montefiore proposed the evacuation of children from Dublin to stay with trade unionist families in England.66 Larkin, who had founded the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union in 1908, supported the proposal; however, despite Montefiore’s assurances that the scheme had been successful elsewhere and that the children would be sent to Catholic families, Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh (1885–1921) opposed it on the basis that the children would be in danger of proselytism.67 The main aim of the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland was the prevention of proselytism.68 It regularly questioned the motives of the numerous Protestant children’s homes in Dublin given the relatively small Protestant population. Canon A. E. Hughes stated with respect to the DPOS that ‘the society was in no sense a proselytising organisation’.69

**Ne Temere**

The *Ne Temere* decree, which was issued in 1907 and came into force on Easter Sunday 1908, threw the spotlight on the issue of intermarriage.70 The decree stated that both parties had to sign an agreement to baptise their children in the Roman Catholic church and the Roman Catholic partner was pressured into converting the other party.71 While Canon Gregg, Blackrock, Cork, admitted in 1911 that, ‘if a certain mixed marriage had not taken place in County Clare three generations ago, I should not be here to-night’, he disagreed with these unions in principle:

> Our general synod did very rightly in protesting against its publication, at its meeting in 1908, the earliest opportunity that presented itself. I myself raised my voice on the subject on December 31st, 1908, in the cathedral; and I am glad to know that the warning I gave has not been altogether without effect. I flatly contradict a statement made by a public man in Cork a few weeks ago to the effect that nothing was heard about the Decree among us till the Belfast case of Mrs McCann came on. Our people had been duly put on their guard, but, when the inevitable fruits of the Decree began to manifest themselves, a more vigorous type of action was called for. A case of actual wrong and outrage inflicted upon a Protestant through
the ruthless working of the law called for a strong protest, which we would have been less than human if we had not made, but which was not called for by the mere threatening of danger.\textsuperscript{72}

The McCann case in Belfast had provoked widespread condemnation of the decree, rioting in Belfast, and vehement opposition from the Presbyterian church on 8 June 1911. In the same year St John G. Ervine’s ‘Mixed Marriage’ was performed at the Abbey Theatre Dublin.

In both the 1901 and the 1911 census, more than fourteen per cent of Protestant men in Dublin were returned as married to Catholic women.\textsuperscript{73} Contemporary press reports also indicate that in a number of intermarriage cases Protestant women, who had changed their religion and baptised their children Catholic, returned to their own church when the marriages ended through death or desertion. For example, a Protestant woman was received into the Roman Catholic church before her marriage in 1931. In later years, her husband, while a patient in St Vincent’s Hospital, claimed that his wife had attempted to ‘interfere’ with their children’s religion, wishing to raise them Protestants. The husband’s sister stated that she could care for the children after his death until arrangements could be made to send them to Catholic institutions. The judge concluded that the children be committed to their aunt’s care, and they ‘were then transferred to the custody of Miss – amid tearful scenes, the younger children having to be separated from their mother, to whom they clung, while the elder boys tried to protect them’.\textsuperscript{74} The often difficult outcomes in cases of this kind, particularly for the children, served to reinforce already vehement opposition to intermarriages.

Divisions within Protestantism also emerged in the context of \textit{Ne Temere}.

The whole question was rendered more serious in Ireland in light of the persistent demand that was being made by the Nationalist party for legislative separation. If some sort of Home Rule were granted, what guarantee could be given that some such edict as the \textit{Ne Temere} would not become the law of the land? Not one word of disapproval regarding it had fallen from the lips of any Nationalist member of Parliament. On the other hand, many of them had tried to justify its existence and the so-called Protestant members, on the whole had been discreetly silent.\textsuperscript{75}

Numerous autobiographies and biographies also contain references to the \textit{Ne Temere} decree and refer to Catholic opposition to intermarriage.\textsuperscript{76} Ultan Macken documents the case of Tom Kenny, a member of the Church of Ireland, who wished to marry a wealthy Catholic farmer’s daughter; however, in order to do so, he had to convert to Catholicism
and sign the decree. Others such as Phyllis Harrison Browne refer to the paucity of eligible bachelors for Protestant girls in the 1930s which further elucidates the marginalising effects of the decree: men and women, regardless of class, were left with few choices – to marry outside their church, to migrate, emigrate or to passively accept a life of bachelor and spinsterhood.

**PO Societies and the orphans of mixed marriage**

The committee members of various PO Societies regarded themselves as the children’s guide, a father to the fatherless, and it was their responsibility to ensure the children did not stray from the Church of Ireland. The DPOS had finally agreed to its amalgamation with the Protestant Orphan Refuge Society, formerly the Charitable Protestant Orphan Union, with effect from 1 November 1898. The amalgamated charity operated under the name the Protestant Orphan Society, and, consequently, it admitted ‘destitute orphans, one, or both of whose parents was or were, a Protestant, or Protestants’. While other PO Societies had admitted the Protestant orphans of mixed marriages since their foundation, the DPOS had only accepted children of strictly Protestant parentage. In 1901 Captain Wade Thompson, member of both the DPOS and the Adelaide Hospital committees, remarked that

Protestants, who were in the minority in Ireland, should be most particular in seeing that children of their faith who were left without father or mother, or without either, were properly looked after and preserved in the religion of their parents. On the present occasion they were dealing with the Amalgamated Society, composed of the Protestant Orphan Society and the Protestant Orphan Refuge Society. The committee could now deal with the offspring of mixed marriages, and that was a branch of the work to which he attached great importance.

Supporters had always maintained that PO Societies linked Protestants together: ‘their Protestant Orphan Societies had been an immense blessing to the country. They had kept the Protestant people together to a large extent, and their existence had been a great source of comfort and consolation to their people when they were dying, because they had the knowledge that their children would be properly cared for’. The DPOS dealt with a certain number of mixed marriages applications. One application was made for the admission of a young girl by her aunt, a Protestant. The child’s mother was Catholic, her deceased husband a Protestant, who, in his will, asked that his children be raised Protestant. The DPOS responded to the recommender of the case:
The committee notice that on the form of application it is stated that the two eldest children are in institutions and they wish to know what institutions they are in. They have an idea that they may be in Roman Catholic institutions. They also note that the form is not signed by the mother as the person who applies for the children, but by an aunt (it should be signed by the mother). They wish to know why this is. They say that it will be necessary for the mother to attend here on the election day, to give her consent to the children being taken on by us.\textsuperscript{82}

The chairman concluded that, ‘if it were the wish of the mother, he would do what he could to set the child into some home or institution of her own religious persuasion’.\textsuperscript{83} The case demonstrates the thorough manner in which the Society dealt with applications, particularly with regard to parental consent.

At a meeting of the DPOS in 1924, Archbishop Gregg stated that ‘they were trying to avert what was a very serious loss to their church: that was mixed marriages. Their marriage portion fund was doing something in that direction’.\textsuperscript{84} He also wished to make it clear that the Church of Ireland objected to these unions. In 1926 he again referred to the ‘evils’ of mixed marriages, which he described as a menace to the church; the future of the Church of Ireland, he asserted, was ‘bound up, in the most serious way, with the next generation’.\textsuperscript{85} The Catholic church in England, he claimed, had complained bitterly of serious ‘leakages’ from its flock due to such marriages.\textsuperscript{86}

\textbf{Dwindling Protestants and amalgamation}

The dwindling Protestant population had many knock-on effects for a charity such as the DPOS, one of which was the decline in funding. There was a common belief that the ‘Protestant Orphan Society was supposed to be a rich Society, and did not need funds’.\textsuperscript{87} A clergyman assured the DPOS in January 1898 that he would try to obtain some further subscriptions for the Society, but informed the committee, ‘that it has been represented in this neighbourhood that your Society is too well off and there is a schism in favour of Miss Carr’s’.\textsuperscript{88} The committee reported in 1900 that this was not the case and appealed for funds. It was the beginning of a steady decline; ‘it is unhappily true that the Protestant Orphan Society has not of late occupied the prominent place among the Diocesan charities which its importance deserves’.\textsuperscript{89} The foundation of new charities such as Miss Carr’s Homes naturally resulted in a fall off in DPOS funding as donations were evenly dispersed among the new as well as the old good causes.
The Church of Ireland population in the Irish Free State was 249,535 in 1911 and 164,215 in 1928. Losses from World War I, emigration and intermarriages contributed to the decline. The figures also included the departure of the crown forces in significant numbers post 1921. The Irish Independent covered the subject of Protestant emigration in 1910. The article entitled ‘Dwindling Protestants’ outlined the grounds for Protestant emigration and suggested that artisans ‘were finding themselves gradually elbowed out and unable to make a living in many localities’. In its 1910 annual report, the DPOS reflected on emigration in a commentary which was strikingly similar to its reports from the early 1830s.

Their Protestant population in Ireland was diminishing, like the whole of the population of the country, and there was a fear that in the not very distant future it might diminish still more. The Protestant Orphan Society in a small way tended to keep their people together, and prevent them from emigrating to other lands, where, possibly, they would do better than they were doing here. At all events, they were bound to do their best to keep their Protestant orphans here as a source of strength to their Church and their religion.

Protestant migration north during the period from 1920 to 1925 reduced the Protestant population in the south by twenty four thousand; for example, over two thousand Protestants – ex-policemen, ex-Royal Irish Constabulary, shopkeepers, teachers, farmers, blacksmiths, servants, labourers – left Wicklow, Cavan, Monaghan, Dublin, Leitrim, Galway, Longford for Fermanagh. In 1909 the Antrim and Down POS reported that it had 999 orphans on its roll and that ‘they were bound to see that every child was given the chance of leading a good and honest life’. It reported in 1924 that, unlike other local PO Societies in southern Ireland, which had in some cases been forced to reduce nurses’ wages, it was in a position to maintain the fixed rate.

As table 8.1 clearly illustrates, the number of children being cared for by PO Societies was relatively few in counties such as Waterford and Clare when compared with Antrim and Down POS, a reflection of the reduced Protestant presence in the future southern Ireland. The Armagh POS noted in 1914 that there were thirty four PO Societies caring for 2,500 children, ‘in spite of their diminishing population’. The majority of these children were assisted by the Antrim and Down POS. In total, 19,000 orphans (which included children with a surviving parent and children whose fathers were alive but incapacitated bodily or mentally) had been assisted through the combined efforts of all the PO Societies in Ireland from 1828 to 1914.
Given the general decline in population, the possible amalgamation of PO Societies was discussed in 1917 and again in 1919. PO Societies were organised, in most cases, as one separate Society for each county. The 1917 report suggested that this separateness which had ‘endured for the greater part of a century’ was justification enough to reject the proposal for amalgamation: ‘The county is the unit for local government and administration ... and the people of each county have usually more knowledge of, and interest in, each other than in those of other counties. The county, would, therefore, seem to be prima facie a suitable unit for the organisation of the Protestant Orphan Societies’. After careful consideration, those who compiled the reports concluded that despite

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<td>Antrim &amp; Down</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derry</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donegal</td>
<td>1918</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferns</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galway</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings Co.</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leitrim</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisburn</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
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<td>Longford</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louth</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayo</td>
<td>1918</td>
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<td>Meath</td>
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<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monaghan</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Monkstown</td>
<td>1917</td>
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<td>Queen’s co.</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>1917</td>
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<td>Sligo</td>
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<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipperary</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterford</td>
<td>1914</td>
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*Source: Report relative to the amalgamation of PO Societies, 1919.*
the relatively low number of children cared for in certain parishes, amalgamation would reduce local support for the Society. In 1928, on the occasion of the DPOS centenary, the issue of amalgamation was raised again: ‘It was of tremendous importance that they should endeavour to link up all Protestant Orphan Societies, in order that the money collected and administered might be put to the best advantage of those who were beneficiaries of the Protestant Orphan Society’. In 1929 a Youth Conference was organised by the Church of Ireland to attract the attention of the younger generation.

In addition to the decline in Protestant numbers, the gradual changes to the structure of public poor relief also diminished the need for private charity. The Widows and Orphans Pensions act was passed in Northern Ireland in 1925 and the Poor Law retained until 1939. (Outdoor relief was provided though not extensively.) Poor Law Guardians did not generally board out children and consequently many were under the care of charities. The Belfast Charitable Organisation Society was founded in 1906 and the Northern Ireland Council for Social Service in 1938.

A link to the past and to the future

The closure of local PO Societies would have proven a considerable blow to Protestant voluntary service networks in the south, and to some extent weakened the sense of Protestant community, purpose and cultural identity. There were a number of important social events associated with PO Societies such as annual meetings, fundraising events – bazaars, ‘pound days’, ‘home days’ – and local committee meetings for the cottage homes. While there was perhaps a less ‘lively interest’ in the charity, many subscribers still retained fond memories of bygone years. In 1901 Archbishop Peacocke recalled his childhood memories of the Queen’s County POS, noting that few meetings were held in the country apart from those of the Society which were ‘looked upon as the one great event of the year’. He described the ‘crowded rooms’ and the ‘immense display of enthusiasm’. The same sentiment was expressed again in 1912 at a DPOS annual meeting when it was remarked that the ‘meetings were not like they used to be in days gone by, when they were held in the Round Room of the Rotunda, which was filled end to end’. Other voluntary associations such as the YMCA and the Mothers’ Union were equally important social outlets for the Protestant community, particularly in smaller rural areas.

Archbishop Gregg commented on the decline of the Protestant population in 1930: ‘he could not but feel a certain amount of sadness, in the continued decline in the number of orphans coming on to the roll
of the Society. From one point of view they ought to be glad, because there were fewer orphans, but he took it that the cause of it was that the constituency from which the orphans came was gradually getting smaller’. The ‘shrinkage’ of voluntary contributions was considered a matter of grave concern. He also expressed disappointment that former orphans no longer seemed to ‘acknowledge in some ways their connection with it and the benefits that they received from it’. A constant promoter of the charity, the archbishop stated the following year that despite waning support, it was ‘one of the finest pieces of constructive work in the Church of Ireland’. The first half of the twentieth century witnessed the deaths of many of the Society’s most faithful supporters. Eugene O’Meara, who had been clerical secretary to the DPOS for thirty-five years, died in 1913. Charles H. Gick, secretary of the Irish Medical Association, the DPOS and the Institute for the Deaf and Dumb, died in 1932.

In 1937 Gregg rebuked the ‘rising generation’ for their ‘failure to shoulder the burden’ of ‘the community to which they belonged’. Archbishop Gregg stressed again in 1946 that ‘a church “which

Figure 8.1 DPOS committee members, 1937.
cannot count on a younger generation is doomed to early extinction”.  

Annabel Goff’s autobiography, *Walled Garden: Scenes from an Anglo-Irish Childhood*, documents the gradual decay of her class.  

Metaphors used by PO Societies, often naval in origin, included that the charity represented a ‘lifeboat for poor Protestants’. Another commonly used metaphor for ‘the Anglo Irish’, was that of an ‘orphan’ who had been forsaken by its parent, England.  

The Protestant Orphan Society of Ireland was a symbol of Protestant vitality and resilience that bound together ‘all sorts and conditions’ with one common goal – preservation.

**Conclusion**

Social service in the first half of the twentieth century took many forms and Church of Ireland clergymen in Dublin were involved in a number of these good causes in addition to their work among Protestant orphans, which in many respects gave them greater insights into the lives of the bereaved families they aimed to assist. Women had shaped the character of PO Societies in the nineteenth century, and they continued to exert their influence on the charity’s policies in the twentieth. Local PO Societies, once a defining feature of church life, had a distinctive character which was a reflection of the individuality of the county and of the committee members. Prominent Protestant families throughout Ireland had been associated with the charity over generations. The gradual decline of the Protestant population in southern Ireland is plain to see through the lens of PO Societies – the corresponding diminution in financial support, consequent public appeals, and less well attended annual meetings. Yet, in spite of these losses, and the somewhat haunting predictions of further decline, PO Societies remained committed to the preservation of Protestant orphans, of Protestant posterity, and the Church of Ireland.

**Notes**

1. Archbishop of Dublin speaking at the DPOS annual meeting held in the Gregg Memorial Hall, Dawson Street; press cutting, *Irish Times* (15 April 1898) found in minute book, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/14.
Decline and resilience, 1898–1940


10 Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, *Two Paths, One Purpose*, p. 25.


15 See DPOS annual reports, for example 1903, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.

16 DPOS annual report, 1928, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/95–114, p. 46.

17 *Irish Times* (14 November 1915).


19 Minutes executive subcommittee, 1901–30, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/7/1.


21 Minutes executive subcommittee, 24 Sept. 1915, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/7/1, p. 351.

22 DPOS annual report, 1920, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.

23 *Irish Times* (17 April 1917).


26 ‘Obituary of Captain Frank Bennett’, *Irish Times* (5 August 1935).


29 Annual reports, 1871–1930, RCBL, MPOS papers, PRIV MS 692.6.


33 Minutes, 10 Mar. 1899, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/14, p. 60.
34 M. Maguire, ‘The Church of Ireland and the problem of the Protestant working-class, 1870s – 1930s’, in Ford, McGuire and Milne (eds), As by Law Established, pp. 195–203, p. 201.
36 Irish Times (24 October 1898).
37 Ibid.
38 Irish Times (13 December 1899).
40 Irish Times (2 November 1899).
41 Irish Times (10 November 1899).
42 Ibid.
43 DPOS annual report, 1901, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.
44 Skehill, The Nature of Social Work in Ireland, p. 68.
45 Irish Times (29 August 1910).
47 See P. Comerford, ‘A decade in which anarchy was loosed upon the world, a terrible beauty was born’, Church Review, Dublin & Glendalough Diocesan Magazine (January 2012), pp. 4–5.
49 Sunnyside visitors’ book, NAI, POS papers, 1045/13/3.
52 Irish Times (9 May 1935).
53 Belfast News-letter (5 October 1893).
54 Belfast News-letter (8 June 1939).
55 Belfast News-letter (10 May 1934).
56 M. Ó’hÓgartaigh, ‘Dorothy Stopford Price’, Dictionary of Irish Biography.
57 Register orphan histories, 1918, NAI, POS papers, 1045/5/1/9.
59 Minutes, 30 Mar. 1900, NAI, POS papers, 1045/2/1/14, p. 134.
60 Irish Times (21 April 1900).
62 Pamphlet advertising and seeking donations for the Patriotic Children’s Treat circulated by members of the ladies’ committee: Maud Gonne, Alice
Decline and resilience, 1898–1940

Furlong, May O’Leary Curtis, Judith Rooney, Nora Egan, Sarah White. ‘Patriotic Children’s Treat’, 1900, NLI.

63 DPOS annual report, 1901, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.
64 Irish Times (17 June 1902).
65 Ibid.
68 Skehill, ‘Child protection and welfare social work’, p. 137.
69 Irish Times (4 May 1933).
74 Ibid., 4 Apr. 1931.
75 Revd John Crawford Irwin, Irish Times (13 March 1911).
79 General information attached to application form, NAI, POS papers, 1045/5/3.
81 DPOS annual report, 1898, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93.
83 Ibid.
84 Irish Times (24 April 1924).
85 Irish Times (10 November 1926).
86 Irish Times (13 November 1926).
87 DPOS annual report, 1900, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93, p. 11.
88 Bound volume of incoming letters, 1898, NAI, POS papers, 1045/3/1/25.
89 DPOS annual report, 1900, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/66–93, p. 11.
92 *Irish Independent* (9 April 1910).
93 *Irish Times* (2 April 1910).
95 *Irish Independent* (13 May 1909).
96 *Irish Times* (25 April 1924).
97 ‘Armagh POS: address by the primate’, *Irish Times* (22 May 1914).
99 Note on proposed amalgamation of PO Societies, 1917, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/2/6.
100 Report relative to the amalgamation of PO Societies throughout Ireland with the DPOS, 1919, NAI, POS papers, 1045/6/2/5.
101 *Irish Times* (29 November 1928).
102 Maguire, “‘Our People’”, p. 294.
103 Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, *Two Paths, One Purpose*, p. 30.
108 Press cutting, 1912, *ibid.*
109 See Maguire, “‘Our People’”, and Deignan, ‘The importance of fraternities and social clubs’.
111 DPOS annual report, 1937, NAI, POS papers, 1045/1/1/95–114, p. 11.
114 *Irish Independent* (2 April 1932).
117 O’Byrne, ‘Last of their line: the disappearing Anglo-Irish’.