

Household Structure and Overcrowding Among the Lancashire Irish

1851-1871

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An important measure of living standards is the quality of housing.¹ Crowded housing is an index of the impoverishment of the individual household or the community, as a result of an inadequate supply of inexpensive working-class housing. It represents a depreciation of the quality of the domestic environment. One of the most persistent and noticeable problems of industrial England throughout the nineteenth century was the insufficient supply and inferior quality of urban housing for working people.² The principal indicator of the working-class housing problem was overcrowding — both the spatial overcrowding of dwelling houses and the overcrowding within individual houses, which is our main concern here. During the mid-nineteenth century Lancashire was one of the most urbanised and most overcrowded regions of England. Lancashire also contained the largest Irish immigrant population at this time. In this crowded part of England, data drawn from census enumerators' books³ show that overcrowding was greatest among the Irish. Though some change occurred during 1851-71, by 1871 Lancashire towns were still characterised by crowded working-class housing, particularly for the Irish.

In this paper we shall attempt to isolate the chief determinants and components of the heavy, though changing, overcrowding in Irish households. We shall first identify and evaluate some of the various interrelated social and economic conditions underlying the stark figures of Table I, the determinants of overcrowding.

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¹ This paper derives from a preliminary discussion of household, and occupational data in W.J. LOWE, 'The Irish in Lancashire, 1846-71: A social history' (Unpubl. Ph. D dissertation, University of Dublin, 1974), pp 69-139, which examines census enumerators' books, for seven sample towns in the census years 1851, 1861, 1871. We wish to acknowledge the computing help given by the Statistics and Operations Research Laboratory, University of Dublin. In particular, we should mention the technical assistance and advice of June Ryan, Barré Carroll, Dr. Dierdre Haslett and Dr. Michael Stuart.

² ENID GUALDIE, *Cruel habitations: A history of working-class housing, 1780-1918* (London: 1974), p. 101.

³ The samples for the urban Irish and non-Irish communities were obtained from the census enumerators' books of Liverpool, Manchester-Salford, Oldham, Preston, St. Helens and Widnes. They were obtained by a random sample of households throughout the towns, based on synthetic households created for this purpose by dividing the total populations of the Irish and non-Irish communities by the average number of persons per inhabited house in each town. 5% of these households were sampled from the Irish, and 1% for the non-Irish. The Irish sample for Widnes represents 100% of Irish households there. A household is considered Irish if the household head was born in Ireland.

Table I: MEAN NUMBER OF PERSONS PER HOUSE, 1851-71

	1851	1861	1871
England and Wales	5.5	5.4	5.3
Lancashire	5.8	5.5	5.3
Lancs. urban non-Irish	6.7	6.3	6.0
Lancs. urban Irish	8.8	7.4	7.0

Sources: England and Wales, Lancashire, 1851-71: *Census of England and Wales*, Population Tables, 1851, 1861, 1871. Great Britain. Parliamentary Papers, 1852-3 [1632], LXXXVI, 1; 1862 [3056], 58; 1872 [C. 676], LXVI, part ii, 38. Lancashire urban non-Irish and urban Irish were taken from sample.

Secondly, we consider the components of the population in houses and households and repeat the analysis. Raw census data makes this analysis possible and reveals a great deal about how the immigrant Irish accommodated themselves to urban-industrial life.

I

Before analyzing overcrowding among the Irish in Lancashire, we must consider the larger question of working-class housing in nineteenth-century England. During the 1850s-70s it appears that living standards for the English working-class were generally improving, especially when contrasted with the 1830s and 1840s.⁴ But the problem of housing, especially overcrowding, remained intractable. At a time when the population of English towns continued to grow, the supply of inexpensive dwellings for the working-class (costing a rent of about £12 per annum or less, or roughly 2s. 4p. per week⁵) grew much more slowly. A primary source of crowded housing in English towns was the movement of rural immigrants (including those from Ireland) into industrial districts during the first half of the nineteenth century. Lancashire's factories attracted great numbers of these migrants. Though the search for new employment brought people to the towns, this movement necessarily entailed a search for new homes.⁶ It appears that, at least for the first four decades of the nineteenth century, an attempt was made by builders to meet the new demand for inexpensive housing. Since the rents had to be low to attract occupants, builders and speculators economised on spatial and structural quality to ensure a return on their initial investment. The results were the terraces of 'back-to-backs' and court dwellings thrown up in great density on available urban acreage.⁷ But towards mid-century the numbers of

⁴ E.J. HOBSBAWM, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth: 1969), pp. 159-67; GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁵ J.H. Treble, "Liverpool working-class housing, 1801-1851," in S.D. CHAPMAN (ed.), *The history of working-class housing* (Newton Abbot: 1971), pp. 171, 193.

⁶ GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁷ See I.C. TAYLOR, "The court and cellar dwellings: The eighteenth-century origin of the Liverpool slum," in *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, CXII (1970), pp. 67-90, for an account of how speculative builders accommodated Liverpool's rapidly-growing working-class population during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

new houses erected with low-paid tenants in mind fell further behind the continuing demand. It was difficult to make a profit even from poorly-built, densely-packed, overcrowded houses and investment went in directions promising a more reliable return.⁸ Investment in new working-class housing in Liverpool, one of the fastest growing English towns, showed a marked decline in the late 1830s,⁹ at a time when the town was already known as one of the most unhealthy spots in the country. So as the town population continued to swell with the arrival of new immigrants and the rise of urban-born generations, the stock of available cheap housing was rapidly shrinking.

The 'state' of working-class England increasingly attracted the critical notice of middle-class observers during the 1830s and 1840s. The diseases arising from the filthy, crowded slums were class-blind and respectable town dwellers knew, even with the defective medical knowledge then available, that workers' diseases could kill at a distance. A vigorous campaign to cleanse the towns was undertaken by individuals, local 'sanitary' groups and the reformed borough corporations. The target was dirt, to hinder the progress of disease-bearing 'miasmas.'¹⁰ As the century progressed the streets of English towns became cleaner and better drained, but the problem of overcrowded, debilitating housing remained because the energy of reform had been thrown into the removal of filth rather than the provision of more houses.¹¹ In many cases the public health campaign actually diminished the amount of housing available to the working class. Tougher local ordinances and the application of the national public health acts closed up some of the worst housing (without prior arrangement for alternative dwellings for the former inhabitants) and increased building costs, which further limited new buildings.¹² In crowded Liverpool, for example, in 1847 the newly-appointed Medical Officer of Health began a campaign to close the thousands of cellar-dwellings under the town and to enforce stricter building regulations. The result was thousands of homeless from the cellars (many of them Irish) crowding into other houses and a further curtailment of working-class house-building.¹³ The industrious, evidence-gathering public health campaigners saw only afterwards that their work, however necessary, had done little to alter the living conditions of most working-class people. Even if the cleaner streets inspired some working men to want a better dwelling, two obstacles to improvement remained. First, there was simply not enough low-priced housing for everyone who needed it. The reason for the lack of supply was that too many working people were too poor to be able to afford to rent the kind of houses that were commercially attractive to investors and builders. In 1871 there were nearly 800,000 'surplus families' throughout England and Wales: 800,000 families more than the

⁸ GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-4.

⁹ TREBLE, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

¹⁰ GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 177.

¹³ Treble, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-5.

number of houses available.¹⁴ So there was a demand for housing that investors were not inclined to satisfy.

Overcrowding, which we shall examine in detail in this paper, was certainly the most obvious manifestation of the poverty of many working-class tenants. But its existence was confirmed in other ways. Though there was great variation in the amount and quality of furnishings in working-class homes, the great dearth of interior furniture (even beds and chairs) was often remarked on. Though some things had disappeared into the pawnshop, the wages of many workers did not permit their acquisition in the first place; not that there would have been much space for furnishings in the confined, crowded rooms.¹⁵ Another indication of widespread poverty was the large portion of house-seekers who were not considered reliable rentpayers, because of the casual nature of their work that could leave them wageless for extended periods.¹⁶ But for most owners of housing let to working people arrears were accepted 'as a way of life.'¹⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century the British working-class head of household spent, on average, about one-fifth of his weekly income on rent. But those spending at a proportion above the average were most often the lowest-paid labourers. Though there was a gradual rise in incomes during the second half of the nineteenth century, the steady rise in rents for working-class housing, caused by the pressure of demand and the desire of owners for a good return on their property, was certain to absorb these gains and prevent expenditure on better food, clothing or other amenities.¹⁸ As we shall see, the different conceptions of living standards among rural immigrants can also be considered as contributing to the overall impoverishment of the urban environment.

It appears, then, that the housing crisis in nineteenth century England was one of overcrowding caused by the general poverty of the working class. Of course, not all workers experienced the worst of its effects. But the large numbers of unskilled workers, many moving to industrial towns from rural areas, were those most likely to catch the full force of the problem. One such group was the Irish community of urban-industrial Lancashire, a largely unskilled, low-paid labour force entering a region already experiencing severe housing problems. They were among the poorest members of the English working class during the mid-nineteenth century; and an examination of their responses to the shortage of inexpensive housing provides a good profile of the housing problem generally.

This study of the Lancashire Irish focuses on Liverpool, Manchester-Salford, Oldham, Preston, St. Helens and Widnes, which, together, contained about two-thirds of the Irish-born residents of Lancashire during 1851-71. Liverpool, England's second port, was the principal entry point

¹⁴ In 1911 there were still over 3,000,000 people living in overcrowded conditions; GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 145, 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 164-5.

for emigrants from Ireland, who arrived on an unprecedented scale during 1846-51. This left many destitute immigrants in bad conditions while they tried to settle in or as they prepared to leave the town for America or other English towns. As we shall see, overcrowding was usually most severe in Liverpool, especially in 1851¹⁹ Widnes and, to a lesser extent, St. Helens²⁰ also experienced conspicuous overcrowding problems. Both towns were expanding industrial areas and attracted large numbers of unskilled workers. A very important element in the rapid industrial and demographic expansion of Widnes at this time was Irish immigration, which came with the opening of the first alkali plants in the late 1840s. During the 1850s population outpaced house construction, but the pressure eased by 1861. But the housing shortage intensified again during the 1860s, when town population more than doubled (as did the Irish-born population). Those worst-housed were the newcomers, a large proportion of whom were Irish. Though Manchester-Salford, Oldham and Preston, all important cotton-textile centres, did not expand at the rate of Liverpool or Widnes, their factories and services continued to attract workers, which maintained pressure on their house stocks.^{20a} So geographical location and differing rates of industrialisation should be remembered when marked variations in degree of over-crowding appear between towns.

II

Before examining the determinants of overcrowding among the Lancashire Irish during 1851-71, we must define our criteria for overcrowding and see to what extent it effected the individual towns in our survey. According to 'expert' opinion in the nineteenth century, 300 cu. ft., per person was the minimum desirable for healthy housing.²¹ Room sizes varied greatly in working-class accommodation, but "something like 8 feet by 10 feet seems to have been, if not average, at least very common."²² Assuming an average ceiling of 7 feet, there was about 560 cu. ft., per room. In Liverpool, 'spec-houses' usually had a 12 foot frontage and a depth of perhaps 13½ feet (occupying 18 square yards of land) with a

¹⁹ A particular Liverpool housing problem was that caused by the inexpensive but very confined dwellings in narrow courts. The Irish were more likely to be found in courts than the non-Irish (see, LOWE, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-9). Cellar habitations were another problem, but they do not enter into this analysis because they are not specified in the census enumerators' returns.

²⁰ It seems that in the 1850s a shortage of housing in St. Helens caused serious overcrowding, T.C. BAKER and J.R. HARRIS, *A Merseyside town in the industrial revolution: St. Helens, 1750-1900* (London: 1959), pp. 397-9, 415.

The problem of short supply of working-class housing and overcrowding in Lancashire is emphasized by the fact that the industrial north was characterized by 'high wages and long term prosperity'. E.H. HUNT, *Regional wage variations in Britain, 1850-1914* (Oxford: 1973), pp. 37, 39.

²¹ GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

cellar, a ground floor room and two smaller rooms upstairs.²³ In the textile districts, working-class cottages were often of two rooms, one above and one below, but sometimes these rooms were partitioned into smaller chambers. It would seem therefore that such houses might, by the above criterion, be suitable for perhaps four or five persons.

It is apparent from the data in Table I that there was considerable overcrowding throughout England and Wales, but especially among urban populations of counties like Lancashire. In this both the Irish and non-Irish shared, though it was particularly acute among the Irish element. It is also obvious from the same Table that the general problem decreased between the 1851 and 1871 censuses, and that the gap between the two communities closed. There was considerable variation from town to town, as Table II shows. Yet in no town nor in any census year does the mean for the non-Irish exceed that for the Irish. Another way to view the overcrowding is to determine the relative numbers of households with at least some critical number (say eight persons, or four to each floor) under the one roof. We then find that in Widnes, for example, more than 70% of Irish households were overcrowded in 1851, whereas the figure for the non-Irish was only 12%; in 1861 and 1871 the figures were 37% and 47% for the Irish, and 15% and 26% for the non-Irish, respectively. Similar figures are available for the other towns.

But what is the reason for this relative overcrowding? Overcrowding has been aptly termed an "alternative form of impoverishment."²⁴ In other words, if the wages coming into a household (principally in the wages of the household head) were insufficient to maintain even a minimum of comfort, there had to be compromises on living standards to stretch resources. It seems, for example, that working-class families found the purchase of food a more immediate concern than using more of their income on spacious housing. The choice (if selecting among 'alternative impoverishment' can be called a choice) of living in an overcrowded house emerges as one of the most significant indices of how such families adapted to near subsistence-level earning power.²⁵ An expert from a Preston newspaper illustrates how such decisions affected working people during the recession of 1847.

The pressure of the times is beginning to tell powerfully upon the occupation of the cottages and payment of rents. Families who occupied two houses are now trying to save rent by joining at one. Sons and sons-in law, fathers and mothers, are now pressing in with their respective relatives, and the consequence is that what we have been long unaccustomed to in Preston —

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 93-5; a Liverpool court house usually had three stories of two 10 x 11 square foot rooms and a garret, sometimes with the addition of a cellar, see TREBLE, *op. cit.*, p. 176. Unfortunately, the number of rooms per house is not returned in census data until 1891.

²⁴ John FOSTER, *Class struggle and the industrial revolution*, (London, 1974), p. 96.

²⁵ GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 144, 165; another compromise might involve wives and young children being sent to work, but it was not very common for wives or children under the age of 15 to work among the Irish or non-Irish, which increases the importance of overcrowding as a way of economising. See LOWE, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-9.

empty cottages — is coming round again. One of the largest collectors of rent in Preston assures us that some time ago he had not the key to a single empty house, whereas at present his stock is fast accumulating.²⁶

Table II: MEAN NUMBER OF PERSONS PER HOUSE, BY TOWN, 1851-71

	1851		1861		1871	
	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish
Liverpool	9.4	7.2	8.6	7.7	7.6	7.3
Manchester	8.2	6.6	6.8	5.8	5.8	5.4
Salford	6.7	6.0	6.0	5.2	5.4	5.4
Oldham	9.0	5.4	6.2	5.2	5.5	5.0
Preston	8.1	6.5	7.5	5.5	6.4	5.2
St. Helens	9.0	7.4	6.4	5.8	6.1	6.0
Widnes	10.0	5.3	6.7	5.4	7.5	6.1

Table IIb.: SAMPLE SIZE, 1851-71

	1851		1861		1871	
	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish
Liverpool	589	422	610	525	525	604
Manchester	354	428	403	524	278	619
Salford	63	101	85	173	89	222
Oldham	26	94	61	123	36	161
Preston	42	106	63	135	45	155
St. Helens	21	36	36	57	39	71
Widnes	51	25	261	55	723	102

As the Irish community stands out in Lancashire for its generally more crowded living conditions, it seems that, as a group, they were in a more impoverished state than other working-class persons. Is it the case, then, that the overcrowding figures are to be explained simply by the relative economic position of the Irish in the urban-industrial community?

A very general survey indicates that, lacking industrial skills and urban experience, the Irish were on lower occupational levels than their Lancashire neighbours.²⁷ By far the largest occupational category among members of the Irish community were men returning themselves simply as "Labourers:" that is, having no particular occupation or being employed generally on a casual basis. Labourers were the lowest paid workers and could find themselves underemployed or unemployed for a large part of the year, particularly during the winter months, when there was much less 'spade' work.²⁸ Since they were in a weaker position, in both wages and job security, than most other workers, it seems obvious that their living standards were among the lowest in the industrial community.

²⁶ *Preston Guardian*, 16 Jan. 1847.

²⁷ See LOWE, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-38.

²⁸ We should note that practically no household heads were returned as 'unemployed', though many casual labourers certainly found themselves under-or unemployed for long periods.

Table III: PERCENTAGES OF HOUSEHOLD HEADS RETURNED AS "LABOURERS"

	1851		1861		1871	
	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish
Liverpool	29.6	15.4	30.1	15.4	20.0	16.2
Manchester	16.1	9.8	16.0	7.1	15.1	8.9
Salford	11.1	4.0	15.3	12.6	12.4	5.4
Oldham	34.6	5.3	14.8	6.5	13.9	10.0
Preston	11.9	9.4	14.3	6.7	20.0	9.0
St. Helens	80.1	27.8	50.0	19.3	61.5	31.0
Widnes	58.8	20.0	72.1	30.9	74.7	39.2

It is possible to refine this general picture of the casual labourers. Overall in 1851, 25% of all Irish household heads in the seven towns were returned as labourers, while the figure for the non-Irish is only 12%. In fact these overall figures remain remarkably stable, being 24% for the Irish in both 1861 and 1871, and correspondingly 12% and 13% for the non-Irish. Table III shows that these proportions vary markedly from town to town. There was heavy concentration of both communities in labouring at St. Helens and Widnes because the character of the industries in these towns (glass-making, smelting, and alkali at St. Helens; alkali at Widnes) required large numbers of unskilled labourers, but the work was usually much less casual than other labouring jobs, not being very susceptible to seasonal fluctuations. Many casuals were also required throughout the town and port of Liverpool. But perhaps most importantly the proportion of Irish household heads returning themselves as labourers exceeds that for the non-Irish community in every town and census year, and clearly indicates their relative economic vulnerability. Moreover the differences between the communities do not decrease markedly over the period 1851-71 (cf. Table IV).

Table IV below lists the mean number of persons per house, given now by the occupation of the household head. Though the issue.

Table IV: MEAN NUMBER OF PERSONS PER HOUSE BY OCCUPATION²⁹

	1851		1861		1871	
	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish	Irish	non-Irish
Labourer	9.7	7.3	7.8	7.1	7.6	6.5
Artisan	8.4	6.8	7.8	6.6	6.8	5.8
Small Business	7.8	6.2	7.3	5.8	5.5	5.4
Transport	8.2	6.7	7.5	6.4	7.6	7.2
Factory Work	7.9	6.4	6.7	5.6	5.5	5.2
General	8.6	6.6	7.1	6.0	6.5	5.8

²⁹ The first five occupational categories account among them for more than 64% of the sampled households; the 'general' category is the rest. Even apart from this last category, the others represent catch-all classifications that obscure many differences between workers in the same categories; they are, however, useful for producing a broad picture. Artisans are those workers with some skill, transport workers include drivers and others on roads, as well as railwaymen, warehousemen and porters.

Though the issue is still somewhat complicated by the fact that the occupations are not equally distributed within each of the seven towns,³⁰ the picture becomes clearer. As anticipated, labourers do live in more crowded houses than, for example, those describing their occupation as 'small business'. Transport workers, who compared favourably with labourers in 1851, have lost their relative position by 1871, which is consistent with the fact that, particularly along the docks in Liverpool, general transport workers were being increasingly casualised, with a consequent decline in their general living standards. But what emerges quite clearly is that even when variation due to occupation is accounted for, Irish people still lived in more crowded houses than their non-Irish neighbours, though Irish small businessmen and factory workers experienced significant relative improvement.

It is possible that even within what might appear to be a fairly homogenous occupational grouping such as general casual labourers, the Irish were at somewhat of a disadvantage. Their immigrant status might suggest that it took them some time to find out how casual work was obtained; and that, being newcomers, they would be among the last to be hired until they had made enough of the right contacts and gained some experience. But Table IV strongly indicates that, even allowing for the fact that the Irish needed some time to find their feet and become known, simple occupational and wage differentials are not the whole explanation for Irish over-crowding.

But what other factors, besides relative poverty, could influence an Irish family's decision to accept overcrowded living conditions? We have seen that overcrowding was at its worst in the community at large, and especially among the Irish in 1851. The residual effects of economic hardship during the 1840s were part of the reason for poor housing conditions in 1851. But overcrowding among the Irish also reflects dislocation among that group. Many thousands of destitute families had arrived in Lancashire during the previous five years. Their straitened circumstances and unfamiliarity with urban-industrial life made at least some time for adjustment necessary. During that period shortage of cash for rent, as well as the endemic shortage of cheap housing, might easily have compelled them to live in crowded conditions to economise.

Though working-class Lancashire remained generally overcrowded during 1851-71, a slight improvement was perceptible. But Irish conditions continued to lag behind. Since the famine immigration and its severe problems had passed, occupational and wage differentials do not explain fully why the Irish continued to live in more crowded conditions. It seems we must supplement our analysis with a non-quantifiable, cultural factor. The Irish were probably accustomed to different, and more crowded, housing conditions in Ireland, which increased their tolerance for populous

³⁰ It is apparent from Table IIa that whereas more than 50% of the Irish sample was resident in Liverpool, only about 30% of the non-Irish households lived there. Since Liverpool has already been seen (Table IIa) to have bad overcrowding problems, interpretation such as this must be made with caution.

dwellings in urban Lancashire.³¹ There are indications that households in Ireland were larger and more complex structurally than urban English households during the first half of the nineteenth century.³² But in rural Ireland the physical inconvenience and the possible health dangers of a large household were not as acute as they were in a densely-populated Lancashire town. So it seems probable that the combined effects of a generally weaker wage-earning position and different domestic standards were among the more important determinants of an Irish family's decision to live in a house that was relatively overcrowded.

Certain cultural differences may have increased their tolerance for overcrowding, but by 1871 a large proportion of the Irish community would have been removed from Ireland for some time, increasing their susceptibility to the domestic standards of their Lancashire neighbours. Though they might still be found in rather menial occupations, we might anticipate that they would more and more resemble the non-Irish in equivalent positions. By a formal statistical analysis, the details of which we are reporting elsewhere,³³ allow us to identify separate, but cumulative factors underlying the figures for overcrowding. Stated briefly they are (i) Irish people were more often to be found in Liverpool, a city which has markedly more crowding than the other towns considered in all three census years; (ii) Irish people were in lower paid jobs and there is a significant relationship between occupation and average numbers per house, an effect which does not change significantly over the period in question; (iii) a further, very marked *residual* tendency to live in overcrowded accommodation, an effect which is subject to marked change in 1851-71. The magnitude of such differences can be given by the following examples: Liverpool, appears to have had houses more crowded than, for example, Manchester by about one person per house in 1851, rising to nearly two persons per house in 1871; labourers appear to have had somewhat less than one extra person per house, on average, when compared to non-labourers in otherwise equivalent positions (i.e. same town and community), an effect which barely changes during 1851-71, falling from 0.8 to 0.6 persons; and finally the mean differences between otherwise equivalent Irish and non-Irish households falls dramatically from about 1.7 persons in 1851 to about 0.3 extra persons per house in 1871. Effects such as these have combined to produce the figures presented in Table I.

³¹ For more information on the living standards of rural immigration see GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 54, 63. Friedrich Engels observed in 1844 that in Ireland the Irishman lived in a single-room mud cabin, and that in England they seemed to require no more than one room for all domestic activities. See *The condition of the working class in England*, with an introduction by E.J. HOBBSAWM (Frogmore: 1969), p. 124.

³² General figures for the numbers of persons per house in Ireland for the census years 1841 and 1851 show that Irish houses contained (with regional variations) on average, 6.5 and 6.3 persons respectively, which is markedly higher than the 1851 figure of 5.5 for England and Wales. *Abstract of the Census of Ireland, 1841*, (Brit. Parl. Paper, 1843 [459], LI) 319; *Census of Ireland, 1851; General report* (Brit. Parl. Papers. 1856 [2134], XXXI) 15, 27. Other support for this derives from preliminary population studies carried out by F.J. Carney, Dept. of Economics, Trinity College, Dublin.

³³ "Household structure and overcrowding among the Lancashire Irish during the mid-nineteenth century — a statistical analysis of census enumerators' books." by John HASLETT and W.J. LOWE (to be published).

III

Up to this point we have simply looked at the possible reasons why the Irish in Lancashire lived in relatively overcrowded housing. We now turn to the components of crowded housing among the Irish, for these might yield more insight into the actual decisions and compromises that families made about their living standards.

The central component of a household is, of course, the nuclear family. But there might also be present extended family, actually related to the household head, and/or lodgers who are not direct relatives. These, together with any others, comprise the household.³⁴ But the house itself may well be multi-occupied; hence the index of overcrowding that we have been using up to now: the total number per house.

We have seen that Irish people tended to live in conditions of greater overcrowding than the non-Irish, even when account is taken of the fact that they were often in lower paid jobs. What is the source of this overcrowding, this *residual* distinctiveness? Does it perhaps lie in larger families, nuclear or extended? Or is it perhaps that they were more likely to take in lodgers than equally impoverished non-Irish neighbours?³⁵

We approach such questions in an attempt firstly to assess the importance of the changing effects of town occupation and community differences in explaining the variation in the data. Table V summarises the 'Analysis of Variance'³⁶ performed on each of the five components comprising the total number in the house. The analysis of the total number in the house is also presented for completeness, although already discussed informally at the end of section II.

The picture now becomes somewhat clearer. There are appreciable differences between the towns on all of these components, although the relative differences between towns only change significantly over 1851-71 for the total number in a house and the number of households in a house. There are also appreciable differences associated with the occupation of the household head, again on all components. However, no components appear to change markedly in relation to job categories over the period 1851-71. Finally, there are appreciable differences between the communities on all but the family size variables, and all these differences change significantly during 1851-71.

Let us examine in more detail the magnitude of this variation. Below are given the estimated differences between Irish and non-Irish households (that are otherwise equivalent in terms of town and occupation) for the four important variables: total house numbers, number in household, number of households per house and number of lodgers.

³⁴ A very few households also employed servants who are not included in the analysis. See "The Irish in Lancashire" p. 93.

³⁵ It was very common throughout the textile districts of Lancashire for working-class families to take in lodgers to diminish the burden of rent, which increased the pressure on space within houses. See GAULDIE, *op. cit.*, p. 91; Michael ANDERSON, *Family structure in nineteenth-century Lancashire* (Cambridge: 1971), pp. 45-46.

³⁶ See note 33.

Table V: ANALYSES OF VARIANCE FOR COMPONENTS

Variation due to	Total Number in House	Number in Household	Number of Households per House	Number of Lodgers	Number in Nuclear Family	Number in Extended Family
Relative Change Over Census Years	Town Occupation Communities Census Year	Very Important Very Important Very Important Very Important	Important Important Important Important	Very Important Important Very Important Very Important	Important Important Very Important Not Important	Important Important Not Important Not Important
	Towns Occupations Communities	Important Less Important Very Important	Not Important Not Important Important	Important Not Important Important	Not Important Not Important Not Important	Not Important Not Important Not Important

Table VI: ESTIMATED MEAN DIFFERENCE (IRISH MINUS NON-IRISH)
BETWEEN OTHERWISE EQUIVALENT HOUSEHOLDS

	1851	1861	1871
Total Number in House	1.7	1.0	0.3
Number in Household	0.5	0.3	0.0
Number of Households/House	0.3	0.2	0.1
Number of Lodgers	0.5	0.3	0.1

Thus the excess in household size (about 0.5 persons per household in 1851) is associated with an excess in lodgers. The excess in total house numbers arises as a result of this and the fact that the house was more likely to be multi-occupied. All these effects diminish relatively rapidly over the three census years. This then is the composition of the peculiarly Irish aspect of overcrowding.

But, as we have seen, overcrowding among the Irish was exacerbated by the indirect effect of being in lowly paid jobs — often casual labouring. And this was itself associated with overcrowding, when compared with all other jobs. In Table VII we compare labourers with non-labourers throughout Lancashire, for all components. Households headed by labourers were often in more overcrowded conditions, even compared to other working-class groups. This also appears to be associated with a slightly greater tendency to take in lodgers, as well as to have slightly larger nuclear families.

Table VII: ESTIMATED MEAN DIFFERENCES (LABOURERS MINUS NON-LABOURERS) FOR
OTHERWISE EQUIVALENT HOUSEHOLDS

	1851	1861	1871
Total number in House	0.8	0.7	0.6
Number in Household	0.3	0.3	0.3
Number of Households in House	0.0	0.0	0.1
Number of Lodgers	0.2	0.1	0.0
Number in Nuclear Family	0.3	0.4	0.5
Number in Extended Family	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1

Households headed by labourers were often in more overcrowded conditions, even compared to other working-class groups. This also appears to be associated with a slightly greater tendency to take in lodgers, as well as to have slightly larger nuclear families.

IV

The purpose of this study has been to isolate and examine the chief determinants and components of Irish overcrowding in mid-nineteenth-century Lancashire. Two main features emerge; one transitory and another of longer duration. The latter is the more easily explained. The Irish, as a community, were more heavily concentrated at the bottom of the working

class. Also they were relatively more concentrated in Liverpool, a city of notorious housing problems. They were often casually-employed, badly-paid labourers, who would most often find themselves forced to choose inferior housing conditions (such as sharing a house or taking in lodgers) to supplement incomes to reduce the proportion of income spent on rent to prevent their domestic living standards from falling below subsistence level. But the other effect, the Irish *residual* distinctiveness (the 'Irishness') is not only much more marked than this indirect effect, but rapidly diminishes over the two decades from 1851. This effect was manifest in a particularly strong tendency to take in lodgers and live in multi-occupied dwellings, and not in larger families (nuclear or extended). So, in 1871 overcrowding among the Lancashire Irish is almost on the same level as that of the poorer, overcrowded working class generally. But in 1851 it is clear that the Irish were considerably more likely to live in overcrowded houses than even English persons of similar occupational status. What accounts for such a change?

The reason must lie in the special circumstances of 1851. In that year Lancashire, and Liverpool in particular, was still experiencing the results of the dislocation of thousands of immigrant Irish families. For the most part very poor, and strangers in urban Lancashire, they often opted for dreadfully substandard housing rather than utter destitution and homelessness. But during 1851-71 the effects of the dislocation of the 1840s and early 1850s were steadily overcome by the Irish. As they settled into urban-industrial life they were better able to consolidate their occupational/financial and housing position. With their additional experience and probably somewhat more dependable employment situation, they found it less often necessary to compromise on their living standards by sharing houses or taking in lodgers. This implies that gradually over 1851-71 the immigrant Irish were adopting the somewhat less crowded English working-class housing standards, and it appears that this change occurred for reasons other than upward mobility through the occupational categories of Table IV. Perhaps the reason lies in relatively improved earning power *within* these categories; alternatively it may be a sign of assimilation into the larger community by adoption of new domestic standards. Whatever the reason, we find that by 1871, differences of housing standards between the Irish and the non-Irish had diminished to such a degree that the Irish were virtually indistinguishable from the poorer members of the English working-class.