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A microhistory of Port Glasgow c.1841 with particular reference to the economic and social role of Irish migrants.

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## Abstract

The purpose of this microhistory is to identify if interrogation of Census data (1841) can contribute meaningfully to a greater understanding of the experiences of pre-famine Irish migrants in Scotland. This is achieved by examining the economic and social circumstances of Irish migrants in the small town of Port Glasgow, on the west coast of Scotland, in the period immediately preceding the famine in Ireland c.1845. The detailed interrogation of Census data (1841) undertaken in this research, whilst recognising limitations inherent in such data, demonstrates the number of Irish people who were present in Port Glasgow in 1841, and reveals the 'layers' of their lives as individuals, family members, workers, friends, and neighbours. By consulting relevant primary and secondary sources and legislation pertaining to housing, employment, education, and Poor Law provision this microhistory offers a fuller appreciation of some aspects of the lives and work of Irish people in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century. Where appropriate perceptions of Irish people as being 'alien' or 'the other' have been qualified.

Detailed scrutiny of a sample comprising three Enumeration Districts in Census returns pertaining to Port Glasgow (1841), has contributed to an understanding of the number of, mainly working class, first and second generation Irish people who were present in these areas of Port Glasgow at that time. Appropriate comparisons between Greenock, Paisley, Dundee, and Port Glasgow have been employed to consider the effects, if any, of location, place of birth, gender, age, and/or generational differences. The important economic contribution made by Irish men, boys, women, and girls in the textile industries of Port Glasgow has been explored in detail and the notion that Irish male workers were predominately labourers has been contested.

This microhistory has highlighted the importance of local research, such as this, which qualifies generalisation which may be found in studies of large urban conurbations due to the volume of data. Only by looking beyond 'the numbers' can the lives and work of Irish people in Scotland in the nineteenth century be more fully appreciated.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely the product of my own work, except where otherwise indicated, and has not been submitted by myself or any other person for any degree at this or any other university or college.

(Signed) Janice Mary Burns.

17 January 2025.

## Abbreviations

E. D. - Enumeration District

## Chapter 1 Introduction

It is essential to recognise that whilst Census records (1841), the primary focus of this research, are an invaluable resource there are inherent strengths and limitations therein. Despite the constraints of possible transcription errors, omissions and difficulties which may occur in interpretation it is possible to identify, in the records (1841), persons by name, country of birth, residence and occupation. Unfortunately, town or village of birth was not included at this time nor was marital status or relation to head of household and there was no recognition of second generation Irish people.<sup>1</sup> In addition a system of rounding down of ages was employed therefore identifying the specific age of workers over fifteen years of age is not possible.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless Census records (1841) proved to be a valuable resource in this research and strengths and limitations of these records are explored further in this dissertation.

Port Glasgow, a small town on the west coast of Scotland, was chosen as the subject of this research as it provides fresh opportunities to ask important questions about the economic and social contribution made by Irish migrants who moved there before the humanitarian disaster of the potato famine in Ireland c.1845. This microhistory will bring new perspectives by examining, in detail, the population of Port Glasgow in 1841 and the circumstances of a sample of first and second generation Irish people. The presence of segregation or integration in workplaces or residential locations will also be investigated. The experiences of the sample of Irish men, women, and children will be explored to identify the effects, if any, of birthplace, gender, or age on access to education, employment, or the availability of housing. In this way a new understanding of the lives of Irish migrants in this small Scottish town before the famine will be achieved. It is important to note, in this dissertation, the term host community is considered to be persons who formed a 'community' by reason of being in Port Glasgow at that time albeit that within that host community there would have been people of diverse backgrounds including varied political and religious views, beliefs and affiliations, in effect diverse

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<sup>1</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk) [accessed various dates 2018/2019].

<sup>2</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers, 496, Preface, image 7, p. 3.

communities within the host community. Similarly, when the phrase Irish communities or varied Irish communities is employed that includes Irish people of varied backgrounds, political and religious views and beliefs. It is recognised that tensions may have occurred within the host community and also within the Irish communities and between these communities. Arguably within the host community there would have been conventions, social norms and life styles which brought a form of cohesion to it. Harmony and cohesion which the presence of Irish people may have threatened or disrupted despite the contribution which their labour made to the economy and prosperity of the host community.<sup>3</sup> Also within Port Glasgow society there would have existed organisational structures connected to poor relief, provision of education and healthcare which could have inhibited expectations and possibly placed Irish people at a disadvantage.<sup>4</sup> Whilst not the primary focus of this dissertation these issues are recognised directly and indirectly.

It was proposed by T. M. Devine in *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (1991) that the emigration of Irish people had profound effects on the demography of some places in Scotland for example, Glasgow, Greenock, and Dundee.<sup>5</sup> In this book, edited by Devine, the

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<sup>3</sup> Of 1,200 employees at a handloom weaving factory and bleaching premises in Port Glasgow the majority were Irish, only about fifty were Scots. *Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission*, 1842, Appendix, p. 60 cited in James Edmund Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1945), p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> A legal entitlement to Relief from 1836-1841 inclusive included generally all poor persons who acquired a settlement by three years industrial residence in the parish 'who, by reason of the infirmity of age or immaturity of years, by reason of physical imbecility or disease, are incapable of earning subsistence by labour.' *Return of Number of Population and Amount of Poor Relief in each Parish of Scotland, 1836-41*. House of Commons Papers, Paper Number 361, Column 8, image 4 p. 4.

It was recorded that there was a Catholic school in Port Glasgow, for the education of Catholic children there which was funded by scholars' fees and voluntary contribution by Catholics. In 1836, 30 male and 20 female students were recorded and in 1837, 34 male and 26 female. students notably fewer than in the other two schools described at this time *Abstracts of Answers by Schoolmasters in Scotland to Queries circulated in 1838, by Order of Select Committee on Education in Scotland*. House of Commons Papers, Paper Number 64, image 685, p. 682, image 684 p. 681.

However, it is important to recognise that these 'raw' figures provide no indication of the proportion of Catholic children who were in education compared to other children. Voluntary and denominational schools were transferred to local authorities under provision of the *Education (Scotland). A bill to make further provision with respect to education in Scotland and for purposes connected therewith*. Bills and Acts, Paper Number 115, Parliament of 1917-1918, image 16 p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> T. M. Devine, 'Introduction', in *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*: proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-1990, ed. T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1991), p. v.

focus was generally on the post-famine period. In contrast detailed analysis of Port Glasgow's pre-famine census records enables new conclusions to emerge related to Irish people who were located in a far smaller town in the mid-nineteenth century. Comparisons will be made where appropriate between Port Glasgow, Paisley, and Dundee due to the importance of textile production in these three locations and also between Port Glasgow and Greenock, owing to the riverside proximity of these two places which is illustrated in Map 2.1.<sup>6</sup> To a greater or lesser extent Irish people were present in all of these locations. Port Glasgow, Greenock and Paisley were situated within Renfrewshire in the west of Scotland whereas Dundee was within Forfarshire in the East.<sup>7</sup>

Tensions and stereotypical imagery associated with Irish migrants in the nineteenth century on occasions superseded recognition of the varied contributions made by some Irish people in Scotland before, during and after the famine. Remarks in the *Glasgow Herald* (1853) demonstrate some of the complex issues being aired at that time which may have contributed to unfavourable opinions being circulated about Irish migrants in certain parts of Scotland:

We fully admit that Glasgow maintains the highest number of drunken Irishmen of any city in the United Kingdom... They are landed by thousands, we may say, since the Irish famine by tens of thousands, at the Broomielaw... We have thus to bear the expense of supporting the lives of perhaps the most improvident, intemperate and unreasonable beings that exist on the face of the earth, who infest us in shoals and beg our charity because the land of their birth either cannot or will not support them. Our hospitals are filled with them, our police are overwrought by them, our people are robbed and murdered by them. We have endured this affliction simply because we could not avoid it.<sup>8</sup>

Articles such as this may well have added to the promotion of adverse beliefs in relation to some Irish people in Scotland after the famine. Arguably examination of the experiences of Irish migrants in Scotland before 1845 will redress some of this negativity at least in the historiography.

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<sup>6</sup> The proximity of Greenock parish on the boundary of Port Glasgow is illustrated on Map 2.1 p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> *Population Tables, 1851, Part I. Number of inhabitants in 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 Volume II. England and Wales, VIII-XI; Scotland; Appendix.* Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18, image 360, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> *Glasgow Herald* (14 March 1853), pp. 4, 5. *The British Newspaper Archive*. <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [accessed 12 December 2022].

Many varied studies relating to the movement of Irish people from their homeland have been undertaken<sup>9</sup> but detailed analyses of small towns such as Port Glasgow are limited. In 1989 John Herson suggested that there was a need for more small-town studies, he noted: ‘the nineteenth-century Irish... did not *all* live in the big cities...’<sup>10</sup> Herson partially addressed this omission himself in *Divergent Paths: family history of Irish emigrants in Britain 1820-1920* (2015) in which he focused on the experiences of Irish families in the town of Stafford in the West Midlands.<sup>11</sup> Earlier in ‘Irish migration and settlement in Victorian Britain: a small town perspective’ (1989) Herson described Stafford as being ‘not the type of town normally associated with Irish settlement in Britain in the nineteenth century... it was a relatively small market town whose only manufacturing industry was shoe making.’<sup>12</sup> Herson’s work contributes to an understanding of the experiences of Irish families in a location which was not typical and provides the potential for comparisons with other studies. Herson’s support for further research is in part reaffirmed by Martin J. Mitchell’s suggestion in: *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland* (2008) that more local studies of Catholic Irish people are needed in order to understand, more fully, the experiences of Irish Catholics and host communities in the west of Scotland during the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The comments above reaffirm the importance of seeking new paths in research other than those previously well-trodden.

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<sup>9</sup> For example please see: E. Margaret Crawford ed., *The hungry stream: essays on emigration and famine*; foreword by Sir Peter Froggatt (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1997); T. M. Devine ed., *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*: proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-1990, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1991); James Edmund Handley *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1945); Martin J. Mitchell *The Irish in the west of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1998); Martin J Mitchell ed., *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> John Herson, ‘Irish migration and settlement in Victorian Britain: a small town perspective’ in *The Irish in Britain: 1815-1939*, eds. Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (London: Pinter, 1989), pp. 96, 97.

<sup>11</sup> John Herson, *Divergent Paths : Family Histories of Irish Emigrants in Britain, 1820-1920*, (Manchester University Press, 2015 *ProQuest eBook Central*).  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=4311933>.

<sup>12</sup> Herson, ‘Irish migration and settlement in Victorian Britain: a small town perspective’, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Martin J. Mitchell, ‘Irish Catholics in the west of Scotland in the nineteenth century: despised by Scottish workers and controlled by the Church?’, in *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, ed. Martin J. Mitchell (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008), p. 19.

The importance of local studies is further supported by Giovanni Levi's endorsement of micro historical perspectives: 'Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by altering the scale of the observations.'<sup>14</sup> The need for and value of the detail which may be found in a microhistory was also alluded to by Maxine Berg and Pat Hudson in 'Rehabilitating the Industrial Revolution' (1992):

The industrial revolution was an economic and social process which added up to much more than the sum of its measurable parts. The period saw the sectoral specialization of regions and the growth of regionally integrated economies some of which were clearly experiencing an industrial and social revolution, no matter how this is defined, while others deindustrialized.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly time and place exerted important influences, demands, and tensions. Berg and Hudson suggested there should be a move away from the macro accounting framework and stressed the importance of new research at regional and local level. They stated a broader concept of innovation was required alongside a heightened awareness of female and child labour, and recognition that 'the economic, social, and cultural foundations of an industrial capitalist order rests on much more than conventional measures of industrial, or economic performance.'<sup>16</sup> Although, in this article, Berg and Hudson confined their discussion to England they recognised its relevance for Scotland and Wales.<sup>17</sup>

Small scale studies facilitate more in depth analysis thereby qualifying possible generalisations which may occur in larger studies due to the volume of data. By focussing on the individuality, economic and social lives of Irish migrants in Port Glasgow this microhistory enables new and wider perspectives to develop. Detailed examination of relevant primary source material in the mid-nineteenth century facilitates this. Census records (1841) referred only to first-generation migrants for example: those who were enumerated as having been born in Ireland. This neglects the presence of and possible influence of second and third

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<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Levi, 'On microhistory', in *New perspectives on historical writing*, ed. P. Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Maxine Berg & Pat Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the industrial revolution' in *The economic history review*, New series, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Feb.1992), p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> Berg & Hudson, 'Rehabilitating the industrial revolution', p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24, footnote 1.

generation Irish people in establishing Irish culture and/or communities.<sup>18</sup> In this study of Port Glasgow persons who can reasonably be considered to have had parents of whom one or both were born in Ireland will hereafter be considered to be of Irish heritage.<sup>19</sup> It is argued that each person comprises of far more than the interaction of his or her religious and/or political affiliations and ethnic background but is influenced by his/her role as a family member, worker, neighbour or friend, and any tensions which may be inherent in or between these roles. The scale of this study of Port Glasgow allows new questions to be asked, in relation to the effects of birthplace, gender, age, household composition and location, with the realistic expectation of meaningful answers.

Important elements when considering responses by and to migrants in host communities is context and familiarity as this may influence the likelihood of segregation or integration. Port Glasgow had long associations with Ireland and based on surnames, early settlement by Irish people is evident. William Forrest Macarthur noted in *History of Port Glasgow* (1932):

From a very early period, gabarts from Ireland came in to Newark Bay with food stuffs, and judging by some of the names in the Poll Tax Roll, such as Robert McNeilly, Pat. McInch, Patrick Procudie, and Alan McKorkell, they must have left some of their passengers behind them.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, Irish people arriving in Port Glasgow in the nineteenth century may well have had kinship or friendship connections which could have had economic and social implications. The interaction between economic and social circumstances will be considered as this provides a broader overview of the experiences of Irish people in Port Glasgow and the effects on the host community. The opportunity and ability to secure employment or income fundamentally influences anyone's ability to obtain those things considered essential to sustain daily life and thereafter other aspirations.

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<sup>18</sup> Colin G. Pooley, 'Segregation or integration? The residential experience of the Irish in mid-Victorian Britain', in *The Irish in Britain: 1815-1939*, eds. Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley (London: Pinter, 1989), pp. 61, 63.

<sup>19</sup> Please see: Methodology p. 35, which illustrates how this will be achieved.

<sup>20</sup> William Forrest Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow* (Glasgow: Jackson, Wylie & Co., publishers to the university 1932), p. 155.

In order to achieve a greater understanding of changes which occurred in mid-nineteenth century Scotland the importance of time, place and context should not be underestimated. Port Glasgow was considered to have experienced minimal change between the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries. It was reported by the local church minister the Rev. James Barr in *The New Statistical Account of Scotland* (1836)<sup>21</sup> that in the intervening period since the earlier *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1791-99) and the report by the Rev. Mr John Forrest<sup>22</sup> possibly there was no town of equal size which had experienced fewer changes to its character and circumstances than Port Glasgow. It was suggested by Barr (1836) that had recent improvements to the harbour been undertaken twenty years earlier the town may have progressed more rapidly in extent and status.<sup>23</sup> It was also stated in the report (1836) that the manufacture of rope and sail-cloth by the Gourock Ropework Company was well established, ship building was a significant industry and Port Glasgow was the main port on the River Clyde importing North American timber.<sup>24</sup> Integration between these industrial activities is clear and it is reasonable to suggest they were generally interdependent and this would have influenced the availability of suitable employment and decisions taken by incomers. The population of Port Glasgow in 1841 was recorded as 7,007 and in 1851 as 7,017<sup>25</sup> therefore appears, at least superficially, to have been virtually static. However, in Port Glasgow, in 1846 there was a high death rate which 'probably partly accounted to for the small rise in population.'<sup>26</sup> This will be discussed later in Chapter 2 Port Glasgow: An Overview. By comparison the population of Scotland increased by 268,558 (approximately 10.0%) between 1841 and 1851<sup>27</sup> although this is an estimate as figures in the source document are somewhat unclear. Nonetheless, during this

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<sup>21</sup> The Rev. James Barr, D. D. Minister, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, in *The new statistical account of Scotland* by Society for the Benefit of the Sons and Daughters of the Clergy; London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Port Glasgow, Renfrew, Vol. 7 1845. eBook.

<sup>22</sup> The Rev. Mr John Forrest, Parish of New Port-Glasgow, (County of Renfrew), *The statistical account of Scotland, 1791-1799. Vol. VII., Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire*, ed. Sir John Sinclair; with a new introduction by J. B. S. Gilfillan, (Wakefield: EP Publishing Ltd., 1973).

<sup>23</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p.74.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 188.

<sup>27</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 302, p. 2.

period considerable population growth in Scotland is apparent involving varying levels of economic and social change.

It is only by considering the concept of society that a wider insight can be achieved into the experiences of Irish migrants to Port Glasgow and the effects on the host community. It is argued that the term 'society' often fails to convey the complex nature of any given culture at a specific time. The use of the label 'Scottish' or 'Irish' society, for example, may at times evoke stereotypical images which can neglect the fluidity, diversity and changing nature of social groups generally. Any 'society' can be as varied as the individuals who are part of it and migrants, be they Scottish, Irish or Highland Scots are often routinely labelled and judged as a group, neglecting the economic and social roles and uniqueness of each person. The wide range of contributions made by Irish people in Port Glasgow will be demonstrated in this study. The attributes of the population of Port Glasgow were described in some detail by Barr (1836) and this provides valuable insight into the, at times, complex 'character' of the people of this small town. Barr described the inhabitants as mainly being well-informed, conscientious in business, generous in charity and as attending Church.<sup>28</sup> The reduction in the number of public houses in 1835 compared to 1790, Barr proposed, did not appear to have lessened intemperance in the lower classes by the same measure. Generally, he noted the working classes were well employed, in receipt of good wages and mainly all ranks of society could be described as enjoying to a greater level the means of a comfortable existence. However, Barr also remarked: 'were they all as provident as they are industrious, the evils of pauperism would be confined within very narrow and manageable limits indeed.'<sup>29</sup> It is worthy of note that Barr in his report made no specific reference to Irish people, so the economic and social importance of Irish people in Port Glasgow in 1836 was unrecorded in that context.

The argument will be advanced that Irish people who came to Port Glasgow, from the late eighteenth century until 1841 formed an integral part of the town. They and other migrants contributed to the development of the industry and economy of Port Glasgow and thereby formed important elements of the social

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<sup>28</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 67.

milieu. The significant presence of Irish people in Port Glasgow is illustrated in the Census records (1841); out of a population of 6,983 there were 3,644 persons recorded as having been born in Renfrewshire, 1,185 in Scotland, 86 in England, 1,993 in Ireland, 15 as foreign and 60 persons whose place of birth was not known.<sup>30</sup> To date pre-famine Irish migrants who came to small towns, such as Port Glasgow, are an under represented group in the historiography. In a study of the nearby larger town of Greenock after the famine R. D. Lobban proposed:

The experience of the Irish migrants in Greenock of course might have been different from that of Irish settlers in other towns and districts, but if similar data could be secured for a number of other towns and cities, then a more complete picture of Irish settlements in Great Britain could be built up.<sup>31</sup>

This study of Port Glasgow by focussing on the period immediately prior to the famine in Ireland provides an opportunity for comparisons between Port Glasgow and Greenock from which a greater understanding of the economic and social experiences of Irish people in Scotland is achieved.

## 1.1 Literature Review

This literature review will initially discuss general themes relating to the migration of people from Ireland, followed by consideration, in chronological order, of some aspects of the historiography associated with Port Glasgow and thereafter aspects of the historiography connected with the migration of Irish people to Scotland.

### 1.1.1 General Themes

The movement of Irish people into Scotland from the late eighteenth century comprises one of the most important themes of modern Scottish history,<sup>32</sup> involving a myriad of interpretations and descriptions. In some official documents Irish people were labelled as ‘alien’. In 1871, albeit long after the

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<sup>30</sup> Calculated from analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), [www.scotlandspopulation.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspopulation.gov.uk) [accessed various dates 2018/2019].

<sup>31</sup> R. D. Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, in *Irish Geography: bulletin of the geographical society of Ireland Vol. 6, 1969-73*, ed. Gordon L. Davies (Dublin, The Geographical Society of Ireland, printed by John English & Co. Ltd., Wexford, Ireland), p. 281.

<sup>32</sup> Devine, ‘Introduction’, in *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, p. v.

famine, it was reported that 'The Irish are the most numerous aliens in Scotland, amounting to 207,770 persons, or 6.184 per cent. of the total inhabitants.'<sup>33</sup>

Geraldine Vaughan in: *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*

(2013) raised salient points relating to this stating that:

Defining the nature of Irish migration remains a delicate task. Were the Irish *migrants* or *immigrants* into Scottish society? ... From this perspective, since the Irish were subjects of the United Kingdom, moving from their native land to Scotland can be considered as a simple migration, unless Scotland is considered a (stateless) nation. From a legal standpoint, the Irish were British subjects (1800 Act of Union) and were not submitted to the Registration of Aliens Act (1836).<sup>34</sup>

In this study of Port Glasgow, it is considered that Irish people coming to Scotland, or any other part of Britain after 1800 were migrants, therefore were no different from any other British citizen moving to or around Scotland. A migrant or immigrant as is generally understood is someone or a group of people relocating from one place to another in search of employment, better living conditions or self-fulfilment. However, after the humanitarian disaster of the famine some Irish people came to Britain as refugees in crisis. Therefore, in some places Irish migrants may have been perceived as being different and may also have been made to feel different. M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh in 'The Irish in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Problems of Integration' (1985) commented that 'in their own perception of themselves and in the way the natives of the host society perceived them, the immigrant Irish were undoubtedly a minority of some kind.'<sup>35</sup> Ó Tuathaigh stated the presence of Irish immigrants in Victorian Britain had not gone unnoticed and during the nineteenth century their activities had not escaped the attention of 'an army of social investigators, philanthropists, clergymen, royal commissions and parliamentary committees' who recorded their activities in great detail with an emphasis on misdeeds.<sup>36</sup> Undoubtedly, perceptions held by Irish people and host communities, together

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<sup>33</sup> *Eighth decennial census of the population of Scotland* taken 3d April 1871, with report. Vol. II. Command Papers c. 841, image 34, p. xxxiv.

<sup>34</sup> Geraldine Vaughan, *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Pivot, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in nineteenth-century Britain: problems of integration', in *The Irish in the Victorian City*, eds. Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

with the scrutiny described above, influenced the experiences and opportunities which were afforded Irish people in the nineteenth century.

It was noted by Ó Tuathaigh (1985) that: ‘the scholarly analysis of the data has only begun in earnest during the last two decades, and especially in the last few years.’<sup>37</sup> He welcomed this interest and hoped for more local studies, proposing that national figures concealed important regional variations and commented that by 1851 more than 80% of Irish-born people in Britain resided in towns with a population of more than 10,000.<sup>38</sup> This microhistory of the small town of Port Glasgow<sup>39</sup> will offer a fresh understanding which allows Irish people to be ‘seen’ as individuals and will illustrate the economic and social roles of a meaningful sample of Irish migrants and those of Irish heritage. It is argued that while numbers of migrants contribute to understanding the presence of Irish people data must be employed to search for individuality whenever this is feasible.

If migration was or is reduced to an exercise in numbers, it may add to a perception of migrants or immigrants as ‘the other’. In this dissertation ‘the other’ will be considered to mean different from me/us. Arguably, due to the influence of ethnicity, gender, age, or disability experiences of being perceived as ‘the other’ may have differed. This invites the questions: to what extent was the concept of being seen as ‘alien’ or ‘the other’ and described as ‘the Irish’ a historical construct which is open to challenge? E. Margaret Crawford in *The hungry stream: essays on emigration and famine* (1997) stated:

The words we choose to discuss emigration are crucial, for language does more than describe merely events; it also conveys meaning and is loaded with value judgements.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> M. A. G. Ó Tuathaigh, ‘The Irish in nineteenth-century Britain: problems of integration’, in *The Irish in the Victorian City*, eds. Roger Swift & Sheridan Gilley, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14,15, 16.

<sup>39</sup> The population in 1841 was 7,007, *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, image 607, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> E. Margaret Crawford, ‘Introduction: Ireland’s Haemorrhage’, in *The hungry stream: essays on emigration and famine*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford; foreword by Sir Peter Froggatt ([Belfast]: Institute of Irish Studies. Queen’s University of Belfast, 1997), p. 1.

In some studies, for example work by; James Edmund Handley (1945),<sup>41</sup> Brenda Collins (1989-1990),<sup>42</sup> and Martin J. Mitchell (1998)<sup>43</sup> Irish people have been referred to, perhaps understandably, as ‘the Irish’. It is proposed that use of the term ‘the Irish’ may negate individuality and suggest exclusion not inclusion. The prefix ‘the’ when used to describe a group of people may dehumanise and objectify members of that group. Use of such terminology has not been confined to the past and Irish people. In recent times phrases such as ‘the elderly’, ‘the vulnerable’ have been apparent in common usage implying descriptions of this type may be associated with marginalised groups of people. Whether or not marginalisation applied to Irish people in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century will be examined, and the question will be asked as to what extent Irish people exercised agency. It is clear from the above that interpretations of how Irish people were seen and portrayed is complex. Working-class Irish-born people, especially women, living in a small Scottish town in the mid-nineteenth century may have had limited opportunities, or possibly desire, to express and leave a record of how they viewed themselves. Therefore, the personal feelings or perceptions of Irish migrants in Scotland may never be appreciated fully due to a lack of primary source material.

### 1.1.2 Aspects of the History of Port Glasgow

Macarthur proposed in *History of Port Glasgow* (1932) that the ‘History of Port Glasgow has some historical value due to its old and close connection with Glasgow, which can be traced back to an early period.’<sup>44</sup> The timeline of 1469-1932 in Macarthur’s relatively short study comprising of 235 pages inhibits a comprehensive in depth analysis although he does offer an impression of industrial and social change in Port Glasgow with particular reference to shipping on the Clyde and ship building. Macarthur stated it was not until the

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<sup>41</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*.

<sup>42</sup> Brenda Collins, ‘The origins of Irish immigration to Scotland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’, in *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-1990*, ed. T. M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1991). ‘In this chapter the movement of the Irish to Scotland over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is viewed as part of overall Irish emigration.’ p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Martin J. Mitchell, *The Irish in the west of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1998), pp. 1-18.

<sup>44</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, Preface.

1860s that ‘what is spoken of as the industrial revolution struck Port Glasgow’ with the same adverse effect as marked its arrival elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> Although, he also noted that due to the increasing demand for labour since the late eighteenth century migration from Ireland to the Clyde area had grown significantly. It was suggested by Macarthur that when Irish migrants, many of whom were from rural areas, suddenly received higher wages and experienced different surroundings this resulted in ‘the formation of slums and degradation’.<sup>46</sup> But, in Port Glasgow there was no housing to accommodate the large increase in population, existing houses were overcrowded and sub-let whilst old stores were divided by wooden partitions. Gradually spaces behind the eighteenth century houses were replaced by tenements of the most wretched design which blocked light and air from the existing houses and ‘With this migration came typhus fever. The death rate in 1864 is said to have been double that of 1894.’<sup>47</sup>

However, an important contributory factor to the lack of accommodation in Port Glasgow at that time was the landscape which limited the availability of land suitable for building.<sup>48</sup> Macarthur referred to this in Chapter XIII noting, ‘The great disability is that too many are huddled together on the narrow, somewhat damp stretch of foreshore upon which Port Glasgow is built. Probably nature only intended it to be a nesting place for seabirds.’<sup>49</sup> The landscape of Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century in some respects also inhibited the expansion and diversity of industrial enterprises.<sup>50</sup> Macarthur made only a brief reference to the long history of the Gourock Ropework Company in Port Glasgow.<sup>51</sup> This company was originally established in Gourock around 1776 and acquired a ropemaking interest in Port Glasgow in 1797.<sup>52</sup> The new enterprise

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<sup>45</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 119.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 63.

<sup>49</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 197.

<sup>50</sup> Please see the maps on pages 40 and 41 which provide an illustration of the topography of Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>51</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 161. Unfortunately, Macarthur’s description does not convey the significance of this company as an employer in the mid-nineteenth century and this will be discussed later.

<sup>52</sup> George Blake, *‘The Gourock’* (Port Glasgow, Scotland: Gourock Ropework Co., 1963 printed by Pillans and Wilson Ltd., Glasgow and Edinburgh). p. 11.

developed and expanded to establish a wide market and global connections by 1932.<sup>53</sup> The importance of the company was referred to in *The Port-Glasgow Express and Observer* (1907) where it was noted: 'The Gourrock Ropework Company is the only firm whose industry has remained with us and prospered, except shipbuilding.'<sup>54</sup> The economy and industries of Port Glasgow will be considered later in Chapter 3 Port Glasgow: Economy and Industry in the mid-nineteenth Century.

Although Macarthur's study of Port Glasgow published ninety years ago, provides an overview of the history of this small town his consideration of the economic and social contribution made by Irish-born people and those of Irish heritage is limited, generally focuses on undesirable aspects, and mainly relates to the post-famine period. Macarthur's approach and the long timeline involved does not convey an appreciation of the economic importance, social presence, diversity, and individuality of people of Irish heritage in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century, however he does provide an overview of the historic importance and history of the town.

Further insight, albeit brief, into the history of Port Glasgow and the part which the town and its people played in the development of the west of Scotland is provided by Anthony Slaven in *The Development of the West of Scotland: 1750-1960* (1975).<sup>55</sup> Slaven described the important role Port Glasgow played in the eighteenth century as an out-port of Glasgow during the expansion of tobacco imports.<sup>56</sup> However, by the late eighteenth century the status of Port Glasgow as the leading out-port of Glasgow had been lost and by the 1840's the Clyde had been deepened sufficiently to allow the passage of ships to Glasgow harbour at the centre of the new industrial area.<sup>57</sup> References by Slaven to Irish people in the west of Scotland are very limited and do not specifically include Port Glasgow. Nevertheless, Slaven stated:

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<sup>53</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 161.

<sup>54</sup> 'Old Port-Glasgow. Reprinted from Greenock Telegraph, Port Glasgow industries. *The Port-Glasgow express and observer*, (Friday 8 March 1907), p. 3. *The British Newspaper Archive*, <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [accessed 9 February 2023].

<sup>55</sup> Anthony Slaven, *The development of the west of Scotland: 1750-1960*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

<sup>56</sup> Slaven, *The development of the west of Scotland: 1750-1960*, p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27.

Until 1840 the Irish coming to the west of Scotland have been described as 'self-improvers', emigrating to better their condition. But thereafter the flow was dominated by the hungry and the destitute, who brought the standards of peasant Ireland to urban Scotland. They occupied the poorest housing and formed the backbone of the workforce in the least skilled occupations. The women dominated employment in the cotton mills. The men monopolised the work of the general labourer...<sup>58</sup>

These comments are indicative of changing perceptions regarding the conditions and lifestyles of Irish people before and after the famine in Ireland. Yet, while Slaven addresses key events and processes he presents only a limited sense of the experiences of working-class individuals, particularly working-class Irish people. Certainly, Slaven did not claim to offer an exhaustive account but to convey a sense of change and major elements at particular times.<sup>59</sup>

Undoubtedly, he achieved this in his consideration of developments in the west of Scotland.

Some sense of the life and work of Port Glasgow inhabitants in the past is effectively conveyed in the short, illustrated work by Joy Monteith *Old PORT GLASGOW* (2003). The use of photographs demonstrates important changes and developments to the fabric of the town but also much which may be familiar to anyone with a current knowledge of Port Glasgow. This brief - primarily photographic - record illustrates important elements of the history of the town and refers to economic and social changes which influenced the daily lives of people in Port Glasgow especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>60</sup> But, there is much more which remains to be done in order to understand the history of this small town and the people who lived and worked there in the nineteenth century.

### 1.1.3 The Gourock Ropework Company Ltd.

The history of the Gourock Ropework Company was described by George Blake in '*The Gourock*' (1963).<sup>61</sup> H. E. Semple, Chairman and Managing Director of the

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<sup>58</sup> Slaven, *The development of the west of Scotland: 1750-1960*, p. 144.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>60</sup> Joy Monteith, *Old PORT GLASGOW* (United Kingdom: Stenlake Publishing Ltd., 2003).

<sup>61</sup> George Blake, '*The Gourock*' (Port Glasgow, Scotland: Gourock Ropework Co., 1963 printed by Pillans and Wilson Ltd., Glasgow and Edinburgh).

company noted 'This is, I regret to say, the last book George Blake was to write as, unfortunately, he died when he had practically completed it and we shall not see any more of his interesting books and novels dealing with Glasgow and its environs.'<sup>62</sup> Blake was an prolific writer who contributed to a range of varied topics involving Scottish working class people.<sup>63</sup> In '*The Gourock*' Blake provides insight into the background and development of the company and its place in the history of Gourock and Port Glasgow, although Semple made the valid suggestion that it was 'as much the history of the Birkmyres as of The Gourock - as our Company is probably more generally known...'<sup>64</sup> In the book no recognition of the role of Irish workers in the mid-nineteenth century has been discerned therefore their 'voices' remain 'silent'. However, in Chapter V, 'On the Human Side'<sup>65</sup> there is later commentary on clearly gendered roles for men and women accompanied by the comment 'But the spinning frames and looms need the nimble-fingered, patient girls to serve them, and it is in Port Glasgow as in the cotton towns of Lancashire; the mill-girl has been for long the queen of the local labour market.'<sup>66</sup> Arguably this dated comment referring to nimble-fingered patient girls is indicative of the time in which Blake was writing and such terminology would be less likely to occur now. Nonetheless, his identification of gendered roles is important. Blake also remarked that daughters would be likely to follow mothers to work 'in the mill' for succeeding generations.<sup>67</sup> Blake also included the recollections of some retired workers from a body of work which he stated demonstrated 'the nature of labouring life within the Mill as far back as 1880.'<sup>68</sup> One of the valuable illustrations in the book is a photograph of the apparently cramped living conditions in Old Black Bull Close in the late nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Although this book was written almost 60 years ago, which

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<sup>62</sup> H. E. Semple, chairman and managing director, Foreword in '*The Gourock*', George Blake, (Port Glasgow: Gourock Ropework Co., 1963).

<sup>63</sup> For example, *The press and the public*, (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1930); *The shipbuilders*, (London: Faber, 1935); *The five arches*, (London: Collins, 1947); *Clyde lighthouses: a short history of the Clyde Lighthouses Trust 1756-1956*, (Glasgow: Jackson, 1956); *The last fling*, (London: Collins, 1957).

<sup>64</sup> Semple, Foreword in '*The Gourock*'.

<sup>65</sup> Blake, '*The Gourock*', pp. 59-74.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

at times is evident from the style of writing, it provides useful insights into the development of the company, its global connections, the lives of the owners and some of the workers.

The discussion above of ‘Aspects of the History of Port Glasgow’ provides some understanding of the people and history of the town although little is apparent in relation to the history of first and second generation Irish people which highlights the value of this microhistory. In the following ‘Aspects of Migration’ works relating to the migration of Irish people more generally will be considered in chronological order offering insights into changing historiographical priorities.

#### 1.1.4 Aspects of Migration

Writing in the *Innes Review* (1971)<sup>70</sup> James Darragh proposed that James Edmund Handley’s twentieth century studies had contributed substantially to the economic history of eighteenth and nineteenth century Scotland.<sup>71</sup> Darragh commented that in this field Handley had published five important books, two of which *The Irish in Scotland, 1798-1845* (1945) and *The Irish in Modern Scotland 1845-1945* (1947) had become standard works unlikely to be supplanted. Darragh continued by suggesting Handley’s treatment of his subject was encyclopaedic and demonstrated ‘remarkable powers of assembling, digesting, and presenting material, often of a quite intractable kind.’<sup>72</sup> In *The Irish in Scotland, 1798-1845* (1945) Handley adopted a thematic approach and the range of significant detail he offers provide unique insights into the mechanics of migration and its effects.<sup>73</sup> In 1945 Handley contributed meaningfully to an understanding of the movement of Irish people from their homeland. However, Irish people are regularly portrayed by Handley as a group and in isolation from host communities. There is also outdated terminology employed as can be seen

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<sup>70</sup> James Darragh, ‘James Edmund Handley 1900-1971’, in *The Innes review*, by Scottish Catholic Historical Association, The Innes review eJournal, Volume 22 Issue 1, (Spring 1971), pp. 2-5.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, Contents; Seasonal Migration pp. 21-56; Irish Migratory Labourers pp. 57-79; Permanent Immigration pp. 80-140; Reaction to Immigration, pp. 141-168; The Destitute Irish Immigrant pp. 169-219; The Social, Economic and Moral Condition of the Immigrant pp. 220-286; Native Attitude towards the Immigrant pp. 287-323.

Handley's allusions to immigration rather than migration and his reference to 'the Irishman' instead of Irish people.<sup>74</sup>

Handley demonstrated various economic and social factors which could, and did, affect Irish people in their homeland and as Irish migrants in Scotland. In his consideration of Greenock Handley noted, referring to a *Report on the state of the Irish poor in Great Britain*, (1835): 'Out of 400 persons employed in the sugar factories, at least 350 were Irish. The natives could not endure the conditions of work there. Only the Irish could stand the heat.'<sup>75</sup> Arguably for some Irish people this endurance may have been rooted in necessity rather than choice. Handley also stated that in a Port Glasgow bleaching and hand-loom weaving premises approximately 50 of the 1,200 workers were Scottish and the remainder were Irish.<sup>76</sup> In his consideration of railway workers Handley suggested that a *Report from the Select Committee on Railway Labourers*, 1846 demonstrated the vexatious system of paying wages which was in use.<sup>77</sup> It appears from this Select Committee Report that this was a method through which workers could find themselves in recurring debt to their employers.<sup>78</sup> Arguably akin to a 'trap' of dependence between worker and employer and such processes illustrate some of the interaction between economic and social circumstances.

Through the use of primary source material and the level of detail in *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845* (1945)<sup>79</sup> Handley provides the reader with an awareness of types and processes involved in migration. Whilst there is a clear sense of the number of Irish migrants and various factors which influenced their working and social lives, the portrayal of Irish people generally can be described as not conveying the importance of the economic and social contributions made by them. There is limited appreciation of the diversity of Irish migrants as

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<sup>74</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, Contents; 'the Irishman', p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>76</sup> *Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission*, 1842, Appendix, p. 60 cited in Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, p. 105.

<sup>77</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Railway Labourers*, 1846 pp. iv, v cited in Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, p. 68.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

<sup>79</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*.

individuals: as men, women, and children many of whom made meaningful economic and social contributions to life in Scotland, in effect their ‘voices’ are generally ‘silent’. Few references to Port Glasgow are included by Handley<sup>80</sup> and none successfully illustrate the distinct and meaningful presence of Irish people in Port Glasgow during the mid-nineteenth century. However, more recently some writers<sup>81</sup> have tended to place a greater emphasis on considering the experiences and contributions of Irish migrants to Scotland in a more individual way.

A sense of the individuality of Irish migrants is achieved to a limited extent in a study by Lobban: ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’ (1969-73). In this thesis Lobban examines elements of the economic and social lives of Irish people there in the nineteenth century. He described the port of Greenock as one of the main reception areas for ‘Irish immigrants into Scotland’ in the nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup> He considered in detail a range of topics including occupational choice, employment of female migrants, occupational and social status, the distribution of Irish migrants and social mobility.<sup>83</sup> This list is suggestive of a gender inclusive approach by Lobban and his consideration of possible connections between economic and social status. Irish migrants in Greenock had a significant presence in the town’s labour force, in 1851 and 1891 male Irish workers were employed in considerable numbers in all of the main industries in the town. Whilst Irish migrants had varied occupations in Greenock, particular industries for example sugar refining, textiles, the gas industry, and paper mills were most attractive and provided the majority of opportunities for them.<sup>84</sup> In conclusion Lobban stated reasonably confidently that Irish migrants in Greenock formed a genuine community with distinct life and work models. Although Irish people adjusted personally to their new situation it was the case

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<sup>80</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, pp. 98, 104, 255, 282, 310, 312.

<sup>81</sup> R. D. Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, in *Irish Geography* 6, 1969-73, ed. Gordon L. Davies (Dublin: The Geographical Society of Ireland, printed by John English & Co. Ltd., Wexford, Ireland); Geraldine Vaughan, *The ‘local’ Irish in the West of Scotland 1851-1921*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Pivot, 2013); John Herson, *Divergent Paths : Family Histories of Irish Emigrants in Britain, 1820-1920*, (Manchester University Press, 2015 ProQuest eBook Central).  
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/gla/detail.action?docID=4311933>.

<sup>82</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 270.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-281.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

that in their occupations, occupational status, housing conditions, place of residence and marriage patterns ‘the Irish communities considered as collective units had a distinctive range of experiences that were quite different from any other group in the town...’<sup>85</sup> Lobban proposed that if similar information could be collated for other towns and cities a greater understanding of Irish communities in Great Britain could be established.<sup>86</sup>

This study by Lobban is clearly a valuable resource in both content and structure but in common with some other studies of Irish migrants the primary focus is after the famine. The proximity of Greenock to Port Glasgow provides a useful opportunity to compare some of Lobban’s post-famine research with findings in this microhistory of Port Glasgow before the famine. Examination of a sample of first and second generation Irish people in Port Glasgow in 1841 contributes to a wider understanding of employment opportunities available to Irish people, their residential and social circumstances and possible effects of ethnicity, gender, age, and important ‘clustering’ of people and skills within certain areas.

In this microhistory the politics and religion of Irish people in Port Glasgow are not being discussed in any detail, however undoubtedly these were important, potentially contentious, elements of nineteenth century life. Therefore, Martin J. Mitchell’s monograph, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements* (1998)<sup>87</sup> has been included to provide a sense of context and disparate opinions. Although Mitchell’s focus involved trade unions, strikes and political movements he generally imparted a sense of wider tensions affecting the lives of Irish people in the west of Scotland throughout the period of his study which primarily consisted of the years before the famine. Underlying issues, particularly efforts to repeal the Act of Union 1800 are especially apparent in Chapter 7 ‘Chartism, Repeal and Complete Suffragism in Glasgow, 1841-42’<sup>88</sup> although Mitchell did comment: ‘It is regrettable that the

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<sup>85</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 281

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Martin J Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1998).

<sup>88</sup> Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, pp. 211-230.

discussion will be concerned only with developments in Glasgow...'<sup>89</sup> In the Introduction to his study diverse aspects influencing the lives of Irish people before and after the famine become apparent<sup>90</sup> although there is a limited sense of social aspects pertaining to the time and the voices of women remain mainly 'silent'.

Mitchell identified contrasting views proposed by a number of historians<sup>91</sup> referring to the political or religious affiliations, or lack thereof, which have been attributed to some Irish people and the supposed opinions held by some members of host communities. A number of the opinions, which Mitchell described, generally impart a sense of Irish people being portrayed as a group, rather than as individuals.<sup>92</sup> Handley, for example, suggested that:

it was not until a generation of Irish, born in Scotland, had grown up to manhood that identification with the political aims of their co-workers - as, for example, during the Chartist movement of the forties - became a normal line of action.<sup>93</sup>

Whilst Tom Gallagher proposed that in nineteenth century Scotland 'the Catholic Irish... were despised because of their religion and because they worked for lower rates of pay.'<sup>94</sup> Gallagher stated:

Finding religious intolerance and sectarian hate in many areas of nineteenth century Scottish life, immigrants preferred to remain expatriate Irish rather than strive to make common cause with Scots in their midst.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 211.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1-18.

<sup>91</sup> Leslie C. Wright, *Scottish Chartism*, (Edinburgh: 1953) p. 19; Norman Murray, *Scottish handloom weavers, 1790-1850: a social history* (Edinburgh: 1978) p. 233, cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, pp. 5-11.

<sup>93</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, p. 313 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow: the uneasy peace: religious tensions in modern Scotland*, (Manchester, 1987), Chapter 1 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Gallagher, *Glasgow: the uneasy peace: religious tensions in modern Scotland*, p.32 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 6.

Although these are two brief examples of opinions advanced by Handley and Gallagher<sup>96</sup> Mitchell (1998) illustrated a wide range of views relating to the experiences of Irish people in nineteenth century Scotland and the tensions which were present in some sectors or locations are clearly demonstrated.

Mitchell challenged perceptions that Irish workers were apart from their Scottish counterparts stating: 'The Irish in the west of Scotland were not isolated from economic forces and, like Scottish workers, many of them acted to protect wages, conditions and living standards as best they could by collective action.'<sup>97</sup> It was also stated by Mitchell that probably most of the examples which illustrate 'Irish' men or women took part in strikes or trade unions do not refer solely to Catholic or to Protestant workers. 'Protestant immigrants did not come to Scotland to join trade unions or strikes. They, like Catholic workers came over to escape poverty and find employment.'<sup>98</sup> Although Mitchell's study was concerned primarily with male workers, he also recognised the effects of context and individuality arguing that whilst at the outset some Irish workers may have been engaged as strike-breakers, others and even some blacklegs may have joined unions or taken part in strikes after they were established in the workforce. Mitchell proposed: 'Individual circumstances determined whether an Irish worker, or indeed a Scottish worker, became a union member, a striker or a blackleg.'<sup>99</sup> The proposals by Mitchell which clearly demonstrate the importance of individuality and on occasions changing circumstances chimes with the argument in this microhistory that individuality, time, place, and context should not be overlooked but are defining factors in any consideration of the experiences of Irish people in Scotland, or for that matter anyone else. Although Mitchell's study is undoubtedly a valuable resource it does not address the effect of trade unions, strikes and political movements in small towns such as Port Glasgow, the role of women or the social aspects of life for Irish people.

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<sup>96</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, p. 313 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848*, p. 5; Gallagher, *Glasgow: the uneasy peace: religious tensions in modern Scotland*, p. 13 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848, trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 50.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

A later study edited by Martin J. Mitchell *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland* (2008)<sup>100</sup> contributes significantly to an understanding of the experiences of Irish people in Scotland from differing perspectives. This work imparts some sense of the influences and tensions which were apparent at that time which enables a greater awareness of the lives of Irish migrants in the west of Scotland. Generally, the focus of this work relates to the period after 1845 and covers a comprehensive range of topics. Nonetheless, Mitchell proposed:

Some areas need more research than others. For example, little is known of the experience of Irish women, ... Detailed local studies of Irish communities are essential for a fuller understanding of immigrant life, as a comparison can then be made to determine if the Irish experience was uniform throughout Scotland, or differed according to the social and economic context of individual towns and villages. Finally, comparisons need to be made with Irish immigrant communities throughout the world, in order to place the Irish in Scotland firmly in the context of the study of the Irish Diaspora.<sup>101</sup>

These comments by Mitchell emphasise the importance of seeking individuality and context when considering the movement of Irish people from their homeland. Whilst this is an important edited collection the general focus after the famine renders it less useful to *pre-famine* studies other than as a point of comparison.

In a more recent study by Geraldine Vaughan: *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland 1851-1921* (2013) she stated:

This book thus revisits issues concerning the religion and politics of the Irish immigrants in a local context. Its ultimate ambition is to shed new light on local political identities by focusing on a group long neglected, namely Irish urban élites in small Scottish towns. By exploring Irish lives in a local context, the purpose is not to narrow down the investigation but rather to demonstrate how these Irish connected to larger national and British issues.<sup>102</sup>

This study by Vaughan focusing on the period 1851-1921 and Irish urban élites is undoubtedly important and makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of the lives of Irish migrants in Scotland after the famine in Ireland. Its relevance

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<sup>100</sup> Martin J. Mitchell, *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, ed. Martin J. Mitchell (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008).

<sup>101</sup> Mitchell, ed., *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland* Preface, p. viii.

<sup>102</sup> Vaughan, *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*, p. 10.

to *pre*-famine studies of working-class Irish people in Scotland however is limited.

Clearly perceptions of Irish migrants were complex before and after the famine and no doubt this influenced how Irish people perceived themselves. The devastating events of the famine acted as a catalyst which fundamentally changed or ended the lives of a great many Irish men, women, and children. In an earlier work 'A Midrash on 'Galut', 'Exile' and 'Diaspora' Rhetoric' Donald Harman Akenson (1997) commented on a proliferation of studies relating to the Great Famine which he described as emerging from a 'virtual scholarly vacuum'.<sup>103</sup> A significant number of studies of Irish migrants in Scotland have been written since 1990 and the focus of many of these has been on religious or political topics or primarily or solely on the period after the famine in Ireland. Some examples of these are by Mitchell (1998 and 2008), McBride (2006), and Vaughan (2013).<sup>104</sup> However, based on this literature review, it is reasonable to assert that whilst there are a wealth of studies relating to Irish people which advance different views on a variety of topics there are few studies which focus on Irish migrants in small towns, especially in the period before 1845. As has been suggested by Mitchell (2008), Swift (2002), and Lobban (1969-73)<sup>105</sup> further local studies could bring a greater understanding to the experiences of Irish people in Britain in the nineteenth century. This microhistory of Port Glasgow by focussing on the period immediately prior to the famine contributes to a new understanding of the lives of Irish people in this small Scottish town in the mid-nineteenth century thereby facilitating an appreciation of Irish people as individuals, not as 'aliens' 'the other' or 'the Irish'.

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<sup>103</sup> Donald Harman Akenson, 'A midrash on 'galut', 'exile' and 'diaspora' rhetoric', in *The hungry stream: essays on emigration and famine*, ed. E. Margaret Crawford foreword by Sir Peter Froggatt (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies. Queen's University of Belfast, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Mitchell, ed., *New perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*; Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*; Terence McBride; with a preface by W. Hamish Fraser, *The experience of Irish Migrants to Glasgow, Scotland, 1863-1891: A new way of being Irish*, (Lewiston, N.Y.; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006); Vaughan, *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*.

<sup>105</sup> Mitchell, ed., *New Perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, p. 19; Swift, *Irish migrants in Britain, 1815-1914, A documentary history*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002 p. xviii; Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', p. 281.

## 1.2 Methodology

The parameters of this microhistory of Port Glasgow comprise the period directly preceding the devastating potato famine which occurred in Ireland c.1845. The conclusions posited in this dissertation are founded on analysis of relevant primary sources<sup>106</sup> and consideration of appropriate secondary sources.<sup>107</sup> Interrogation of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841)<sup>108</sup> has been fundamental to this research. Data has been examined in detail relating to each of the three Enumeration Districts [E. D.s]<sup>109</sup> which demonstrated the highest percentages of Irish-born people in Port Glasgow: 574/4, 49.6%, 574/3, 45.9% and 574/2, 45.6%.<sup>110</sup> This research has identified, within the constraints of the census records, the economic and social circumstances of a sample of men, women and children recorded as having been born in Ireland and enumerated in Port Glasgow in the Census of 7 June 1841.<sup>111</sup> A number of second generation Irish people have also been identified in the sample and likewise their circumstances have been examined.<sup>112</sup> The sample, of the three E. D.s,<sup>113</sup> represents a 23.5% sample of all persons enumerated in Port Glasgow (1,642) and a 38.9% sample of persons recorded as having been born in Ireland (777).<sup>114</sup> The purpose of this analysis is to recognise the inherent distinctiveness of the Irish people who were present in this sample on a more individual basis within the constraints of extant sources. The extent to which birthplace, gender or age influenced the economic or social circumstances and opportunities of people born in Ireland, and those

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<sup>106</sup> Primary sources consulted include a wide range of Census records, Parliamentary Papers/reports, business archives and newspaper reports.

<sup>107</sup> Consideration of secondary sources includes those which pertain to: Britain, Scotland, Ireland, and Port Glasgow.

<sup>108</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow, (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>109</sup> Hereafter Enumeration Districts will be referred to as E. D.s, and by number where appropriate.

<sup>110</sup> E. D.s 574/4, 574/3 and 574/2 were all in the Parish of Port Glasgow. Percentage figures were calculated following analysis of the Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)> [accessed various dates 2018-2019].

<sup>111</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Paper 496. Preface, image 5 p. 1.

<sup>112</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow, (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>113</sup> Enumeration Districts 574/4, 574/3 and 574/2 were selected to form this sample as they were calculated as having the highest percentage of persons recorded as having been born in Ireland, Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)> [accessed various dates 2018-2019].

<sup>114</sup> Figures calculated from analysis of the Census of Port Glasgow, 1841. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

assumed to be of Irish heritage will be addressed. Consideration will also be given to the question: did the perceptions held by, and about Irish people, and therefore their experiences, change over time and place?

It is important to note no census records of Port Glasgow have been identified, in this research, which specifically record the *total* number of Irish-born people enumerated in Port Glasgow in 1841. Although, the *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, Scotland, 1841)* did record the number of male and female persons born in Ireland who were present in various counties in 1841.<sup>115</sup> In the County of Renfrew in 1841, of 155,072 persons, 20,417 (13.6%) were Irish-born, of these 9,894 were male and 10,523 female.<sup>116</sup> In the pages of the Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) it was the case that in each E. D. the details of individuals were recorded stating that if they were born in Scotland whether or not it was in this county. The other options were to record whether foreigner, born in England or Ireland. In a relatively few cases this section was blank.<sup>117</sup> An overview of the population of Port Glasgow has been achieved by analysing the 1841 census data. This clearly demonstrated a high proportion of persons were recorded as having been born in Ireland<sup>118</sup> and on further examination there are others who, as stated earlier, may be assumed to be of Irish heritage, that is one or both parents were born in Ireland. Conclusions in this respect are based on examination of household composition, names, place of birth and age. Distinct patterns of housing and employment are also apparent, and these factors will be discussed in Chapter 2 Port Glasgow: An Overview which examines data from the three sample E. D.s.

It is prudent, at this juncture, to consider some complexities which are inherent in census records due to the methodology evolving and being refined over time. An article by Paul Dobraszcyk: 'Give in your account': Using and Abusing

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<sup>115</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, Scotland, 1841)*. Command Papers 498.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, image 65, p. 65. Percentage figure calculated from this source.

<sup>117</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow, 1841. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>118</sup> In Census returns of Port Glasgow, (1841); 3,644 persons were recorded as having been born in Renfrewshire, 1,185 in Scotland, 86 in England, 1,993 in Ireland, 15 foreign and 60 persons place of birth no known. Compiled from analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow, (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

Victorian Census Forms (2009) 'examines for the first time the central importance of forms in an historical context by focusing on the development of census schedules in the nineteenth century.'<sup>119</sup> In 1841 enumerators and heads of public institutions were given schedules in which the actual descriptions of persons who slept within dwellings on the night preceding 7 June 1841 were to be entered. This contrasted with the procedures of 1831 when a set of pre-determined questions applicable to divisions were required to be answered.<sup>120</sup> In effect the census of 1841 instituted the introduction of procedures which collated more personalised information, and this harvesting of personal details has further developed over time.<sup>121</sup> The recording of each persons' age, in the 1841 returns, comprised of a rounding down method by which if a person was 15 years old but under the age of 20 his/her age was recorded as being 15. This may have 'distorted' general perceptions of the number of workers aged 15, resulting in an overestimate of employees who were aged 15 since a number of them would have been aged between 15 and 19. This rounding down system applied throughout the age ranges although the age of those under the age of 15 was to be recorded accurately. Another example where questions may arise occurs in the recording of dwellings. In 1841 the description 'house' was considered to mean dwelling-house, that is 'every building in which a person habitually sleeps must be considered as a dwelling house...'<sup>122</sup> Thus, inhabited flats were recorded as dwellings, however, in the census of 1851 inhabited flats were not recorded as houses, 'The considerable apparent decrease in the number of houses since 1841, is explained by the different principle of computation adopted at the Census of 1851; flats not having been then reckoned *houses* as was generally the case in 1841.'<sup>123</sup> This change can in some locations, as was the case in Port Glasgow, result in perceived anomalies in relation to the number of inhabited houses recorded. In Port Glasgow 1,388 inhabited houses

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Dobraszczyk, 'Give in your account': Using and Abusing Victorian Census Forms, *Journal of Victorian Culture*: JVC Volume 14, Issue 1, (01/2009), p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> *Population of Great Britain 1841 enumeration & age abstract Scotland*, (London: printed by W. Clowes and sons, Stamford Street, for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1843), Preface: p. 2, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Dobraszczyk, 'Give in your account': Using and Abusing Victorian Census Forms, pp. 11-16.

<sup>122</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 496, Preface, image 7, p. 3.

<sup>123</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 318 p. 18, image 319, p. 19.

were recorded in 1841 however in 1851 the number was 423.<sup>124</sup> This highlights the number of flatted dwellings in Port Glasgow in 1841 and suggests overcrowding in some areas. Aspects of housing in Port Glasgow in 1841 will be discussed in Chapter 4, 'Society'.

Changes of the type described above and issues involving possibly inaccurate or misleading responses and transcription errors constitute abiding problems when consulting census data.<sup>125</sup> Notwithstanding this the census records of 1841 and earlier have provided a valuable foundation to this research and the resulting conclusions. A study undertaken by Oliver Duke-Williams poses apposite questions in: 'The role of questions about migration in UK censuses: A simple matter of counting, or a means of exerting power?' (2011).<sup>126</sup> In this study Duke-Williams 'explores the history of questions that have been included in censuses in the UK that directly or indirectly pose the question "where do you come from?"'<sup>127</sup> The subtle undertones of this question had relevance not only for the Irish people who migrated to Port Glasgow c.1841 but for their forebears and other migrants generally. The significance of the question 'where do you come from' whether in a formal document or in a conversation had implications, undoubtedly the way Irish migrants perceived themselves, were perceived by others and therefore were received or not into host communities influenced their economic and social standing.

In this dissertation, it is argued, that the effects of the long established links between Ireland and Port Glasgow should not be underestimated. It was noted by Bill Osgerby (1998) when discussing youth culture before 1945 that: 'consummate breaks in history are rare...'<sup>128</sup> This concept resonates with a process of evolutionary rather than revolutionary change occurring not only in youth culture but in processes of change more generally. This holds true in relation to Port Glasgow due to the longstanding constraints imposed by the landscape and the natural resources of which access to the river Clyde was

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<sup>124</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18.

<sup>125</sup> Dobraszczyk, 'Give in your account': Using and Abusing Victorian Census Forms, pp. 16-18.

<sup>126</sup> Oliver Duke-Williams, 'The role of questions about migration in UK censuses: A simple matter of counting, or a means of exerting power?' in *Geoforum*, Volume 42, Issue 5, (September 2011).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 615.

<sup>128</sup> Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), p. 5.

paramount. By focussing on the years immediately prior to the famine in Ireland and examining the economic and social role of Irish men, women and children, the influence of ethnicity, gender, and age this microhistory will bring new perspectives to the contributions made by and experiences of first and second generation Irish people in this small Scottish town *before* the famine. The conclusions which have been reached will be presented in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2 Port Glasgow: An Overview

Port Glasgow, initially a small village known as Newark,<sup>1</sup> grew to have economic importance on the river Clyde between 1668 and 1774 as it was the pendicle of Glasgow and most of the early developments of Clyde shipping took place in the Bay of Newark.<sup>2</sup> By 1795 Port Glasgow, once a specialist tobacco port, had been surpassed as Glasgow's major out-port and trade had diminished.<sup>3</sup> This decline in the importance of Port Glasgow trade was closely associated with the emergence of a new era in Glasgow. Thus, clearly the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was a time of economic and thereby social adjustment for the inhabitants of Port Glasgow and other areas on the river.

The ways in which the people of Port Glasgow responded to change and managed their available resources were in some respects limited. In the nineteenth century the expansion of industry and housing was confined within the limits of the geography of Port Glasgow as is demonstrated in Map 2.1 and Map 2.2 on Pages 40 and 41. The extent of the parish was described by the Rev. Mr John Forrest, in the *Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799*, as being almost an English mile square and the land as 'partly flat and partly mountainous.'<sup>4</sup> The existence and productivity of garden ground adjacent to the river and the barren nature of the soil on the farms was remarked upon by Forrest.<sup>5</sup> He identified that in the late eighteenth century inhabitants relied on neighbouring parishes and Dumfries-shire for all kind of provisions but mainly on Ireland, almost every type of provision came to Port Glasgow from Ireland.<sup>6</sup> In January 1836 a similar assessment of the landscape of Port Glasgow was proposed by the Rev. James Barr in *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, (1845).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Forrest, Parish of New Port-Glasgow, (County of Renfrew), p. 678.

<sup>2</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, Preface.

<sup>3</sup> Slaven, *The development of the west of Scotland: 1750-1960*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Forrest, Parish of New Port-Glasgow, (County of Renfrew), p. 679.

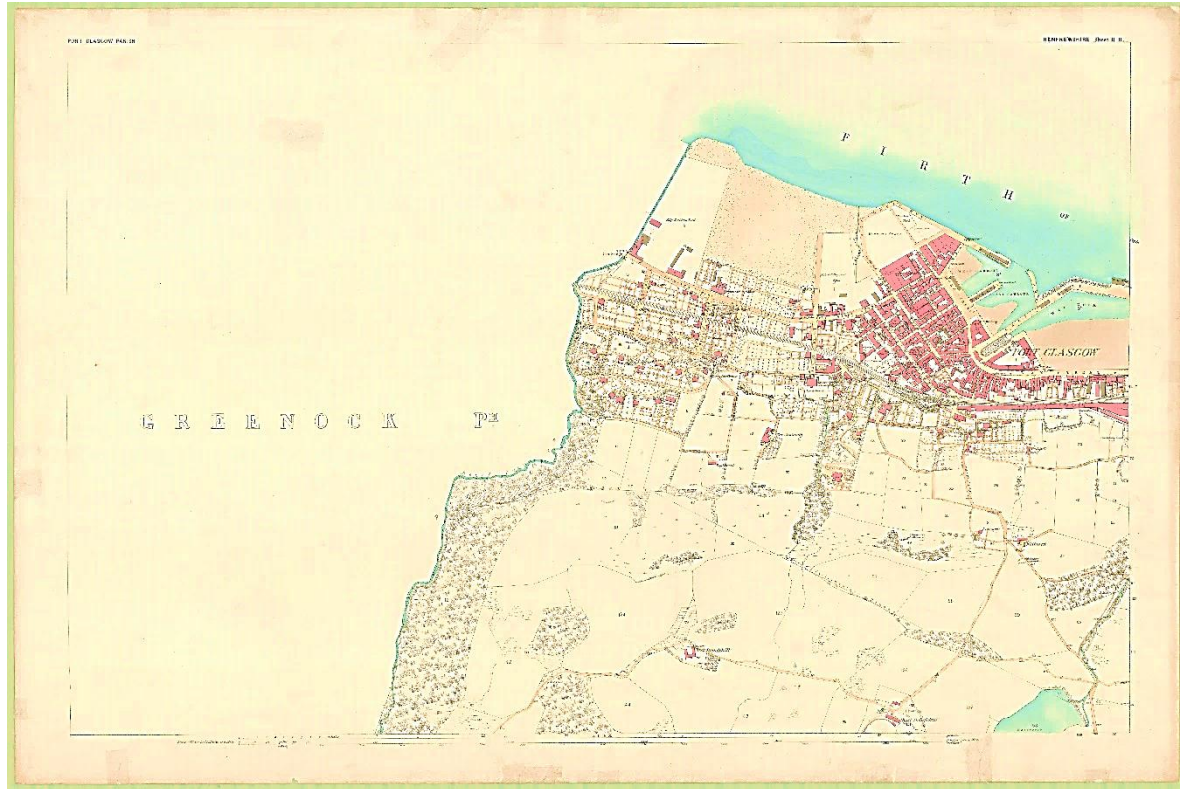
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 684, 685.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 63.

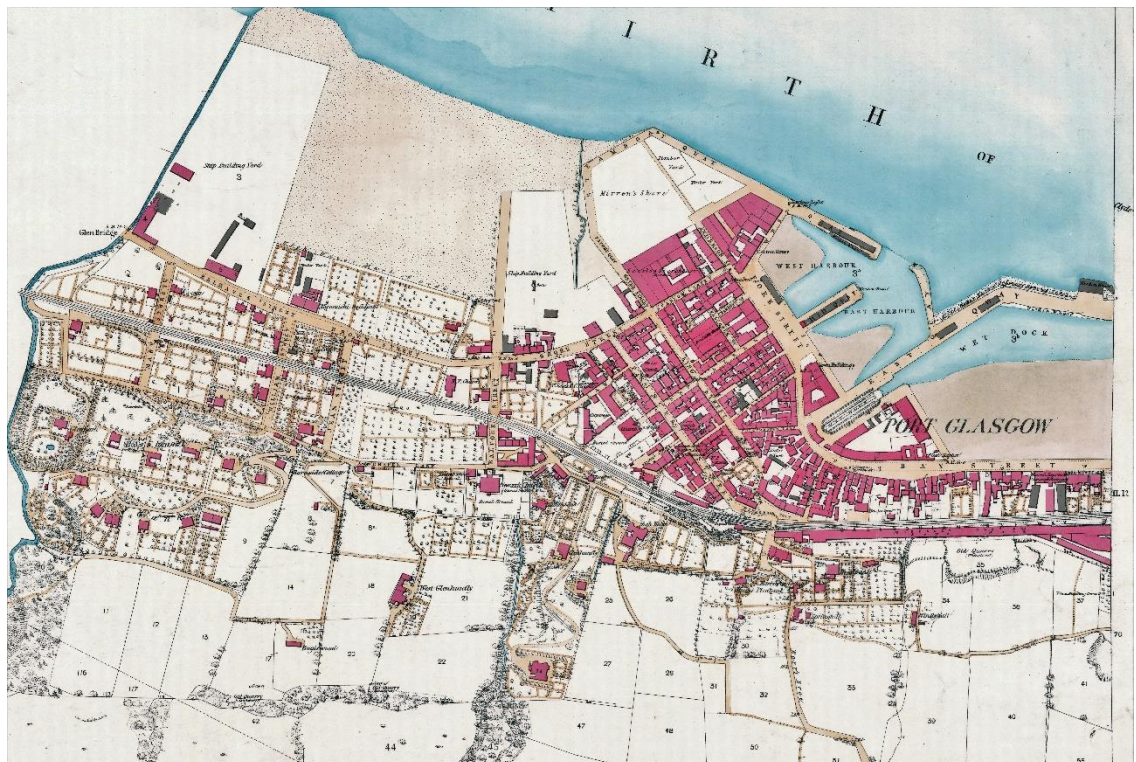
A detailed historical map of Port Glasgow, Scotland, showing the River Clyde, surrounding parishes (Greenock, Port Glasgow, Kilmacolm), and various landmarks like Knockair Hill, White Groat, and the Ardenlock. The map includes a scale of 6 inches to 1 mile and a north arrow.

[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://nls.uk). This map has been enhanced to aid clarity. Highlighted in green from east to west are a mill, rope-work, and Mr Wood's shipbuilding.

**MAP 2.2: Renfrewshire II.11 (Port Glasgow) Survey Date: 1856, Publication Date: 1859.**

“Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.”

[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk) This map has been enhanced to aid clarity.

**MAP 2.2a: Renfrewshire II.11 (Port Glasgow) Survey Date: 1856, Publication Date: 1859.**

“Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.”

[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk) This map has been cropped, enlarged, and enhanced to aid clarity.

Clearly the geography of Port Glasgow exerted longstanding limitations but undoubtedly closeness to the river Clyde provided opportunities for people to adapt and utilise resources and pre-existing skills, although there may also have been elements of restricted choice and economic necessity for some people. The discussion above illustrates that whilst the nineteenth century was a time in which the people and industries of Port Glasgow experienced change, levels of economic continuity related to the town's proximity to the river and some developments are clear. Long standing connections to Ireland and Irish people are also apparent,<sup>8</sup> and it is reasonable to suggest these links may have influenced some actions and perceptions of and held by Irish people in Port Glasgow in the nineteenth century.

Initially, this chapter will consider the description by Barr (1836)<sup>9</sup> of the industries and the employment opportunities present in Port Glasgow. Thereafter, migration, possible motives, choices, and limitations are discussed. Migration by Irish people was not a static process but involved various reasons, tensions, and effects before and after the famine. The fluidity of any 'society' and presence of stereotypical descriptions and perceptions which influenced the reception of Irish migrants in some parts of Scotland is discussed. This is followed by an analysis of the Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) which demonstrates some of the complexity of census records and the significant presence of Irish people in Port Glasgow in 1841.

## 2.1 Industries and Employment in Port Glasgow

The report by Barr (1836) provides some insight into the scope of manufacturing and employment in Port Glasgow in the early nineteenth century. Rope and 'sail-cloth' were being produced by the 'Gourock Rope-work Company'<sup>10</sup> and the Port Glasgow branch of this enterprise employed 474 workers, including men, boys, women, and girls. Two unnamed companies were noted by Barr to be engaged in sugar-refining, and regularly employing approximately 50 men.<sup>11</sup> Matthew Brown and James McLean were

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<sup>8</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>10</sup> 'sail-cloth' and 'Gourock Rope-work Company' was the spelling used in the report.

<sup>11</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, pp. 67.

described as sugar refiners in Port Glasgow in *Fowler's Commercial Directory* (1829-42).<sup>12</sup> It was also reported by Barr that almost 200 men were engaged in ship building, and carpenters were mainly involved in the construction of 'steam-boats', some of which were of the largest class and he suggested all benefitted from superior workmanship. Barr noted that despite difficulties, trade in Port Glasgow was in the process of a sustained although not rapid increase involving a variety of imports and exports.<sup>13</sup> To some extent the 'difficulties' experienced in Port Glasgow can be described as being related to the economic growth of Glasgow and the expansion of trade in nearby Greenock. It was stated by Slaven that: 'Increasing trade and industry involved Port Glasgow, Greenock and Glasgow in a century of conflict and competition for ascendancy on the Clyde...'<sup>14</sup> Although, generally over time, levels of specialisation occurred in Clyde ports for example almost all raw sugar imports were landed at Greenock in 1870.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, some contemporary commentators have outlined continuities and industrial change, but the experiences and contributions of the people of Port Glasgow, many of whom were Irish migrants, thus far have not been recognised. The following short discussion of migration and migrants portrays some aspects of possible motives for migration and a number of related complex factors, for example, the importance of time, place and context, the opportunities which were available to Irish migrants and the effects of perceptions held by Irish people and those of host communities.

## 2.2 Migration

To appreciate the economic and social contribution made by migrants to Port Glasgow before the famine in Ireland, it is important to briefly consider migration and possible effects more broadly. Migration in the United Kingdom was considered by E. G. Ravenstein in his work: *The Laws of Migration* (1885). Generally, migration may be described as a purposeful relocation

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<sup>12</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 385, p. 155, image 392, p. 162. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>13</sup> Barr, *Parish of Port-Glasgow*, January 1836, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Slaven, *The development of the west of Scotland: 1750-1960*, p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

motivated by a variety of aspirations.<sup>16</sup> Evidence suggests that the decisions made by migrants was, to varying degrees, influenced by complex choices, time, place, and opportunity. Kerby A. Miller in his study *Emigrants and Exiles Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, (1985)<sup>17</sup> when discussing 'The Pre-Famine Exodus 1815-1844' suggested that:

In its size, composition, and character, pre-Famine emigration differed significantly from earlier movements and anticipated the massive flight which followed the potato crop failures of the late 1840s. Thanks to Ireland's prolonged postwar economic crisis, the "contagion" of emigration spread far beyond Ulster and affected nearly all groups in Irish society.<sup>18</sup>

Miller proposed that, in the immediate postwar years, typical emigrants still comprised of relatively prosperous Protestant farmers and artisans from the northern provinces, but 'by the early 1840s a majority were comparatively poor Catholic subtenants, farmers' sons, and labourers from the three southern provinces.' It was also suggested by Miller, that the size, direction, and type of Irish emigration between 1815 and 1844 altered distinctly as a result of 'British legislation, transatlantic trade patterns, and economic conditions in both the Old World and the New.'<sup>19</sup> Although Miller was considering the emigration of Irish people to north America, much of what he has described is relevant to the movement of Irish people to other locations, before and after the famine, and the choices which they made in the process.

*The Hungry Stream Essays on Emigration and Famine*, (1997) edited by E. Margaret Crawford<sup>20</sup> demonstrated the complexity of the decisions which were made by Irish people, the processes influencing, and the effects of emigration on Irish people. These in turn had far-reaching consequences for host communities. The humanitarian disaster of the famine not only prompted many thousands of Irish people, some of whom were refugees in crisis, to leave their homeland, it also redefined reasons for migration and

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<sup>16</sup> E. G. Ravenstein, 'The laws of migration' in *Journal of the statistical society of London*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Jun. 1885), (Published by Wiley for the Royal Statistical Society). [www.jstor.org/stable/2979181](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2979181).

<sup>17</sup> Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Crawford, *The hungry stream: essays on emigration and famine*.

how some migrants were understood by others. *The Glasgow Courier*, (1827), recognised perceived difficulties relating to migration to Britain by Irish people but advocated understanding and support.<sup>21</sup> Contrastingly, the *Glasgow Herald* (1853), *after* the famine, described at length the suggested burden which was placed on the host communities.<sup>22</sup> Clearly migration by Irish people was a complex process which elicited varied experiences, opinions, and effects.

Arguably whether migrants embarked on their journey as individuals, members of a migrating family or friendship group regardless of origin or destination each Irish migrant had motives, expectations, and experiences which were unique, and some may also have encountered pre-conceived negative perceptions within a host community. The term 'society' often fails to convey the complex nature of a given culture at a specific time. Use of the label 'Scottish' or 'Irish' society may evoke stereotypical images failing to demonstrate the fluidity and diversity present to varying degrees over time. Migrants: Scottish, Irish or Highland Scots are often routinely labelled and judged as a group, which ignores individuality. Terminology can have important outcomes for individual or group identity and tensions around identity were not confined to migrant groups. O. D. Edwards (1993) proposed that whilst the history of Irish people in Scotland was significant it was not an especially pleasant one for themselves or people with whom they came into contact. Edwards remarked that if Irish people and their hosts cooperated in forming barriers between them:

the Irish can claim to have posed the problem of a culturally pluralistic society anew in Scotland... It might seem incredible to the warring bands of Irish and Highland navvies, yet the Irish invasion of the nineteenth century gave new heart to the cause of preserving the Highland and Island identities.<sup>23</sup>

These remarks by Edwards convey a sense of the complexity associated with identity and diversity during a period of significant economic and social

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<sup>21</sup> *The Glasgow Courier*, 11 November 1827. Cited in *Irish migrants in Britain, 1815-1914, a documentary history*, ed. Roger Swift (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002). Doc.7 1 pp. 35, 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Glasgow Herald* 14 March 1853, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>23</sup> O. Dudley Edwards, 'The Irish in Scotland', in *The new companion to Scottish culture*, ed. David Daiches (Edinburgh: Polygon 1993), p. 160. First published under the title *A companion to Scottish culture in 1981* by Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd.

change which may have resulted in some members of society, particularly working class people, feeling ‘threatened’. In Edwards’ reference to ‘ghetto walls’ and ‘warring bands of navvies’<sup>24</sup> the possible presence of collaboration in pursuit of ‘common cause’ is absent. Examples of cooperation and ‘common cause’ are supported by Mitchell’s proposal that Irish workers in the west of Scotland were not remote from economic forces but like Scottish workers, many ‘acted to protect wages, conditions and living standards to the best of their ability by collective action.’<sup>25</sup> These interpretations by Edwards and Mitchell highlight important themes in this microhistory, namely context and individuality, which can have implications not only for Irish people but how they and their experiences were/are understood. It is proposed in this study that use of terminology such as ‘the Irish’ may fail to convey a sense of Irish people as individuals and this will be explored in the following consideration of perceptions.

## 2.3 Perceptions

This microhistory imparts a sense of individualised migrant experiences and those of the host community. Arguably use of the terms ‘the Irish’ and ‘aliens’ especially in relation to poor people,<sup>26</sup> imparts a sense of group identity opposed to individuality and implies exclusion, from the host community, not inclusion. It is also worthy of comment that Edwards, an Irish writer in Scotland, referred to ‘the Irish’ and conveyed a sense of separation, from host communities, alongside a feeling of cohesion amongst Irish people.<sup>27</sup> In her discussion of post famine emigration Crawford (1997) stated the words which are selected to discuss emigration are critical since language explains much more than events, it imparts significance and is filled with value judgements.<sup>28</sup> Salient points regarding migration have also been suggested by Vaughan (2013) who noted that characterising the shape of Irish

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<sup>24</sup> Edwards, ‘The Irish in Scotland’, p. 160

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> PP, Eight decennial census of the population of Scotland taken April 3d 1871 with report, p. XXXIV: AC, 28 June 1872, cited in Vaughan, *The ‘local’ Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, ‘The Irish in Scotland’, p. 160.

<sup>28</sup> Crawford, *The hungry stream: essays on emigration and famine*, p. 1.

migration was a sensitive undertaking. Whether Irish people moving to Scotland should be seen as migrants or immigrants was discussed by Vaughan who concluded that Irish people relocating in the United Kingdom were migrants.<sup>29</sup> It is considered, in this microhistory, that Irish people moving to Scotland were migrants and as such were entitled to move freely within any part of the United Kingdom. Consideration of whether Irish migrants in Port Glasgow before the famine in Ireland were perceived as being 'alien' or as valued members of the wider community is discussed later in this study.

Migration, if it is reduced to an exercise in counting can contribute to a perception of migrants or immigrants as 'the other'; meaning different from me/us or 'alien' a description which was used in some official nineteenth century documents.<sup>30</sup> It is proposed that experiences of 'otherness' could be influenced by birthplace, gender, age, or disability and on occasions a very visible presence within any community, for example cities or large towns where a significant number of migrants, possibly refugees in crisis, arrived after the famine. Between 1845 and 1851 'at least one and a half million people left Ireland'<sup>31</sup> and whilst it is important to recognise the scale of migration it is crucial within the scope of extant sources to recognise individuality and the effects on a host community in detail whenever this is feasible.

## 2.4 Analysis of the Population of Port Glasgow in 1841

Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841)<sup>32</sup> demonstrates the complexity of pre-famine migration to this small town in the mid-nineteenth century. Within the limitations of census material an insight is provided into people who migrated to Port Glasgow from Ireland, other parts of Scotland and elsewhere. But this raw data fails to convey the significance or social implications of the census question asking: 'Where Born'<sup>33</sup> The subtle

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<sup>29</sup> Vaughan, *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> PP, Eight decennial census of the population of Scotland taken April 3d 1871 with report, p. XXXIV: Ac, 28 June 1872, cited in Vaughan, *The local Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Swift, *Irish migrants in Britain, 1815-1914, A documentary history*, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>33</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

undertones of the question: ‘where do you come from?’ were discussed by Duke-Williams<sup>34</sup> and have some relevance for Irish people in Port Glasgow in 1841 and their forebears. Doreen Massey proposed that:

a ‘place’ is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location. And the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location (nowhere else does this precise mixture occur) and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location (their partly happenstance juxtaposition) will in turn produce new social effects... and this is the really important point, a proportion of the social interrelations will be wider than and go beyond the area being referred to in any particular context as a place. Second the identities of places are inevitably unfixed.<sup>35</sup>

Massey’s suggestion is in keeping with the argument being advanced in this microhistory, namely the importance of time, place, context, and individuality. The familiarity of the longstanding economic and social connections which Port Glasgow had with Ireland and Irish people long before the famine,<sup>36</sup> and the established presence of Irish people in the town in 1841,<sup>37</sup> arguably lent a mainly conversational tone to the question ‘where do you come from’ if it was asked at all in daily life. In Port Glasgow Irish people were not only present they were also instrumental in forming the economy and society of Port Glasgow before the famine.

## 2.5 Who Migrated to Port Glasgow?

An overview of the population of Port Glasgow has been achieved by interrogating 1841 census records.<sup>38</sup> This has provided a general understanding of ‘where people came from’, but the absence of detailed place of birth information has inhibited comprehensive conclusions. Census recording methods were complex, in the *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract,*

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<sup>34</sup> Duke-Williams, ‘The role of questions about migration in UK censuses: A simple matter of counting, or a means of exerting power?’ p. 615.

<sup>35</sup> Doreen Massey, ‘A place called home ?’ *New formations a journal of culture/theory/politics* (17) (1992), pp. 12, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 155

<sup>37</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

*Scotland, 1841*) place of birth was classed as ‘Persons Born’ and then in one of two columns either ‘In this County’ or ‘Elsewhere’. In total in Port Glasgow Town and Parish 3,665 persons were recorded as born ‘In this County’ and 3,342 as born ‘Elsewhere’.<sup>39</sup> However, individual pages of each enumeration district<sup>40</sup> of Port Glasgow (1841) recorded more specific birthplace details, initially under the heading of ‘Where Born’ followed by an entry in one of two columns. Someone born in Scotland was required to state yes if born in the current county or no if born elsewhere in Scotland. Persons not born in Scotland were to state if born in England, Ireland or Foreign, in some cases no information was recorded in either column.<sup>41</sup> It must also be recognised that analysis is dependent on accurate responses, transcription, and interpretation by researchers. Detailed analysis in this microhistory has demonstrated that 28.5 per cent of people enumerated in Port Glasgow in 1841 were born in Ireland.<sup>42</sup> Therefore first generation Irish people constituted a *sizeable* minority in Port Glasgow. Further examination indicates many others were of Irish heritage, that is: one or both parents were recorded as having been born in Ireland. Table 2.1 provides an analysis of birthplace information as enumerated in Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841); however, these figures do not include second generation Irish people. The significant number of second generation Irish people in Port Glasgow is discussed in Chapter 3, which also highlights variations within the E. D.s.

In 1841 the population of ‘Port Glasgow Town and Parish’ was recorded as being 7,007.<sup>43</sup> There are 6,983 people identified in Table 2.1, which is 24 fewer. The figure of 7,007 appears to include 24 persons who were on boats as noted in *Population of Great Britain 1841 Enumeration & Age Abstracts - Scotland*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, Scotland, 1841)*. Command Papers 498, image 63, p. 63.

<sup>40</sup> Hereafter known as E. D.s.

<sup>41</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>42</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>43</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, image 607, p. 107.

<sup>44</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, Scotland, 1841)*. Command Papers 498. Image 63, p. 63.

**Table 2.1:**  
**Port Glasgow Sample of Census returns (1841), Identifying Place of Birth**

| Place of Birth | Renfrewshire  | Scotland but not in Renfrewshire | England | Ireland | Foreign | Not Known | Total number born outside of county |
|----------------|---|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Number         | 3,644   | 1,185                            | 86      | 1,993   | 15      | 60        | 3,279                               |
| %              | 52.2%   | 17.0%                            | 1.2%    | 28.5%   | 0.21%   | 0.86%     | 47.0%                               |
| %              | Therefore, of people recorded as born outside of Renfrewshire 60.7% were Irish. |                                  |         |         |         |           |                                     |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

As shown in Table 2.1 almost half of the people enumerated in Port Glasgow in 1841 were not born in Renfrewshire, of those 28.5 per cent were born in Ireland and of people born outside Renfrewshire 60.7 per cent were Irish.<sup>45</sup> A useful comparison has been achieved by calculating and comparing the presence of Irish-born people in Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock, and Port Glasgow in the census of 1851 as this was the first census after the famine in Ireland. A degree of caution is required when considering the results due to the markedly different population sizes in these places.

**Table 2.2:**  
**Compiled from Census of 1851: Persons Born in Ireland enumerated in Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock, and Port Glasgow**

| Location                                    | 1851 Census Percentage of Persons born in Ireland | Number of Irish Persons |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| Dundee (Burgh) within Parliamentary Limits  | 18.93%  | 14,889 of 78,631        |
| Glasgow ( City) within Parliamentary Limits | 18.17%  | 59,801 of 329,117       |
| Greenock* West, Middle and East Parishes    | 14.61%  | 5,488 of 37,551         |
| Port Glasgow* Parish                        | 30.19%  | 2,108 of 6,982          |

Source: Calculated from the *Population Tables, 1851, Part II. Ages and Occupations Volume II. England and Wales, VII.-XI.; Scotland*. Command Paper 169I-II, image 516, p. 1041. <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.ezproxy2.lib.gla.ac.uk/parlipapers/search/basic/hcppbasicsearch> [accessed 17 November 2021].

Greenock\* and Port Glasgow\* source Figures from dropdown menu search: 1851, Scotland, Variables, Renfrew, Greenock, Port Glasgow, Country of Birth, Ireland. Percentages were calculated from the results.

K. Schurer, Higgs, E. (2020). *Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM), 1851-1911*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 7481, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-2. <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-2> [accessed 18 November 2021].

<sup>45</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

The percentage figures and numbers in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2, illustrate the difficulties which may arise when making comparisons. The higher proportion of Irish born people in Port Glasgow *before* and *after* the famine relates to a smaller population than the other places identified. It is also worth noting that in 1841 the number of Irish people in Scotland was 126,000, which was 5 per cent of the population.<sup>46</sup> This, and the figures above, suggests there were ‘clusters’ of Irish people in various locations in Scotland. The findings in this study of Port Glasgow support Levi’s proposal that by altering the scale of observations new meanings may emerge.<sup>47</sup> It is demonstrated in this microhistory that, prior to the famine in Ireland, there was a significant presence of Irish-born people, and many others of Irish heritage in Port Glasgow. In his study of Greenock after the famine Lobban (1969-73) suggested that whilst the experiences of Irish migrants in Greenock may have differed from those of Irish settlers in other places, if similar information was obtained for some other towns and cities a more comprehensive picture of Irish people in Great Britain could emerge.<sup>48</sup> Crucially this microhistory provides some contrast to Lobban’s study of nearby Greenock which focussed on the years after the famine. As will be apparent in what follows completely new economic and social meanings have emerged which demonstrate that Irish people in Port Glasgow had varied occupational profiles and formed established communities before the famine in Ireland.

## 2.6 Aspects of the Population of Port Glasgow in 1841

The population of Port Glasgow appears to have been virtually static between 1841 and 1851<sup>49</sup> and it was suggested by Macarthur that ‘Between 1840-60 the place went more or less to sleep. Young men found no outlet for their activities. Many went to sea, and others abroad and to England.’<sup>50</sup> But he also noted that in 1846, due to the contamination of wells in the town, ‘there was a dreadful cholera outbreak, when many died... This high death rate probably

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<sup>46</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 496, image 17 p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Levi ‘On microhistory’, p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 281.

<sup>49</sup> *Population tables. 1851*. Command Papers 1632, Port Glasgow, images 318 p.18.

<sup>50</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 188.

partly accounted for the small increase in the population.’<sup>51</sup> Clearly population numbers if considered in isolation may conceal important underlying factors such as this. Changes in the population of Dundee, Glasgow, and Greenock between 1841 and 1851 were as follows:

**Table 2.3:**  
**Population changes in Dundee, Glasgow, and Greenock between 1841 & 1851**

|  | 1841    | 1851    | Change  | Percentage Change |
|--|---------|---------|---------|-------------------|
| Dundee (Entire Parish)                 | 62,794  | 62,545  | -249    | -0.39%            |
| Glasgow (City and Suburbs)             | 274,324 | 344,986 | +70,662 | +25.7%            |
| Greenock (East, Middle, West Parishes) | 36,936  | 37,436  | +500    | +1.35%            |
| Port Glasgow (Entire Parish)           | 7,007   | 7,017   | +10     | +0.01%            |

Source: Calculated from *Population Tables, 1851, Part I. Number of inhabitants in 1801, 1811, 1821, 1831, 1841 and 1851 Volume II. England and Wales, VIII-XI; Scotland; Appendix Command Papers 1632*. Dundee, image 360 p.60, Glasgow, image 322 p. 22, Greenock, image 318, p. 18, Port Glasgow, image 318, p. 18.

Closer examination of the areas of Dundee, Glasgow, Greenock, and Port Glasgow which are identified above indicate that the highest population growth in all of these places between 1801 and 1851 occurred between 1831 and 1841<sup>52</sup> therefore before the famine in Ireland. Although the ‘Entire Parish of Dundee’ between 1841 and 1851 experienced a population decrease of 249 it is worthy of note that in the same period Dundee District experienced a population increase of 15,341<sup>53</sup> which is indicative of changes not only within areas but the influence of boundaries when assessing larger defined areas. Clearly population growth and urbanisation in the early to mid-nineteenth century had many facets and thereby conclusions reached are very dependent on the scale, type of enquiry, the comparators deployed, and generalisations may conceal important information. Whilst there was growing urbanisation during the nineteenth century within that there were significant differences some of which are described above and assist in situating the changes in Port Glasgow in context.

As highlighted earlier Macarthur (1932) referred to Port Glasgow as having long associations with Ireland. In 1898 James Murray identified that in the

<sup>51</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 188.

<sup>52</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, Port Glasgow, Greenock, images 318, 319 pp. 18,19, Dundee, image 360 p.60, Glasgow, image 322 p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*. Dundee, image 360 p.60.

Poll-Tax Roll (1695), Kilmacomb Parochine, 'List of the Bay' there was a merchant named Robert McNeillie, his wife and two daughters, a married gabartman Patt. McInch, and a married 'carpinter' Pattrick Procudie. a workman Allan McKorkell and Catherine Procudie married to Robert McNair.<sup>54</sup> A record has also been identified, in this microhistory, referring to a marriage at the Bay on May 6 1696 which appears to include a man who from his surname was Irish.<sup>55</sup> On the basis of these surnames, it is reasonable to conclude Irish people formed a diverse part of the community of the 'Bay' as early as the late seventeenth century and judging by the surnames of spouses<sup>56</sup> marriages took place between Irish people and members of the host community. These established family and friendship links would have encouraged/influenced migration levels both before and after the famine. However, population growth in Port Glasgow was clearly inhibited which may have been partly due to the inability to increase the geographic spread of housing, manufacturing, and other amenities in the town. In 1861 there were 7,214 people enumerated in Port Glasgow<sup>57</sup> meaning that between 1841 and 1861 the population increased by 207. This raw data however takes no account of births, deaths, outward or inward migration, notwithstanding this during and after the famine no clear evidence has been identified which suggests there was a meaningful influx of famine refugees which contrasts starkly with other places in Scotland.<sup>58</sup>

## 2.7 Enumeration Districts

In 1841 there were fourteen E. D.s in Port Glasgow and analysis of each of these imparts a different 'story' relating to the gender, age, place of birth

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<sup>54</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, p. 155; James Murray, *Kilmalcolm a parish history 1100-1898*, (Paisley: Alexander Gardner publisher and bookseller to Her Majesty the Queen, 1898), pp. 113, 114, 115. The library of the University of California Los Angeles. [Full text of "Kilmalcolm; a parish history, 1100-1898" \(archive.org\)](#)> [accessed 24 February 2023].

<sup>55</sup> Church of Scotland (Old Parish Registers Marriages 569/Kilmalcolm), p. 376. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](#)> [accessed 25 February 2023].

<sup>56</sup> Murray, *Kilmalcolm a parish history 1100-1898*, pp. 113, 114, 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Return of Population of Counties, Cities and Boroughs in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, 1821, 1831, 1841, 1851 and 1861; Number of Representatives returned to Parliament*. House of Commons, Paper 409, image 15 p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> 'in 1841, the Irish-born represented 4.8 per cent of the Scottish population. By 1851, the Irish population reached its peak at 207,367 corresponding to 7.2 per cent of Scotland's inhabitants.' Vaughan, *The 'local' Irish in the West of Scotland, 1851-1921*, p. 2.

and occupations of people enumerated.<sup>59</sup> Distinct clusters of people are evident which relate to birthplace, and this is illustrated later in Table 2.4 on Pages 60 and 61. As described earlier, in 1841, 28.5 per cent of the population of Port Glasgow were recorded as having been born in Ireland, and most of these Irish people were in three specific areas of the town, generally close to their place of work<sup>60</sup> and this will be discussed later in detail. The three E. D.s with the highest percentage of Irish born people are illustrated below on the following page.

**574/2 Port Glasgow - 45.69%,**

which included:

Robert Street, Blackstons, Campbell Street, Bay Street, Clarke's Close.

These areas, except Clarke's Close can be seen on Map 2.3 and Map 2.3a, Page 55.

**573/3 Port Glasgow - 45.93%,**

which included:

Bay Street, Whiteside's Close, Guthrie's Close, Salmond's Close, Boyd's Close, Well Close, Clarke's Close.

These areas can be seen on Map 2.4 and Map 2.4a, Page 56.

**547/4 Port Glasgow - 49.46%,**

which included:

Ropework Lane, Bay Street, Black Bull Close, Sinclair's Close, Whiteside's Close.<sup>61</sup>

These areas can be seen on Map 2.5 and Map 5a, Page 57. Bay Street is only partially visible.

These three districts, which were situated in the eastern areas of the town, have been interrogated in detail and the locations listed above give some indication of the overlapping of street and close names which could occur between E. D.s. Maps illustrating locations in the three E. D.s are provided on the following pages.

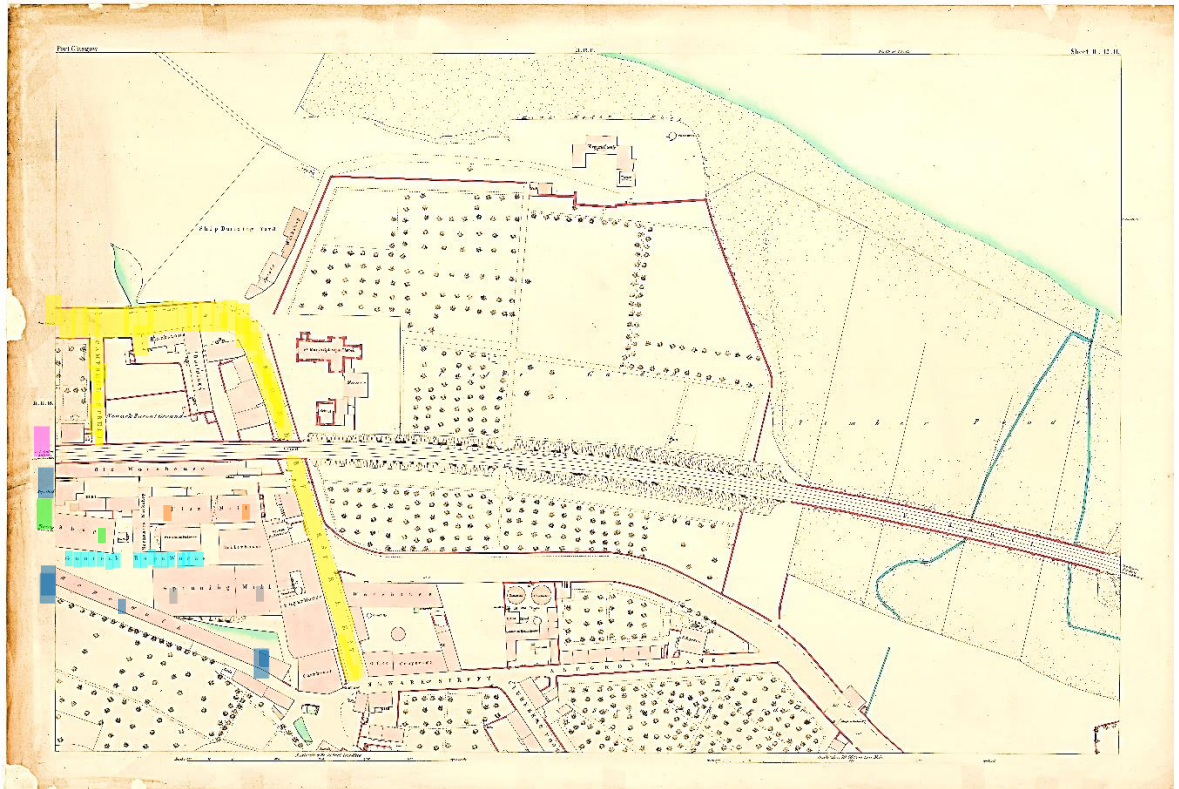
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<sup>59</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

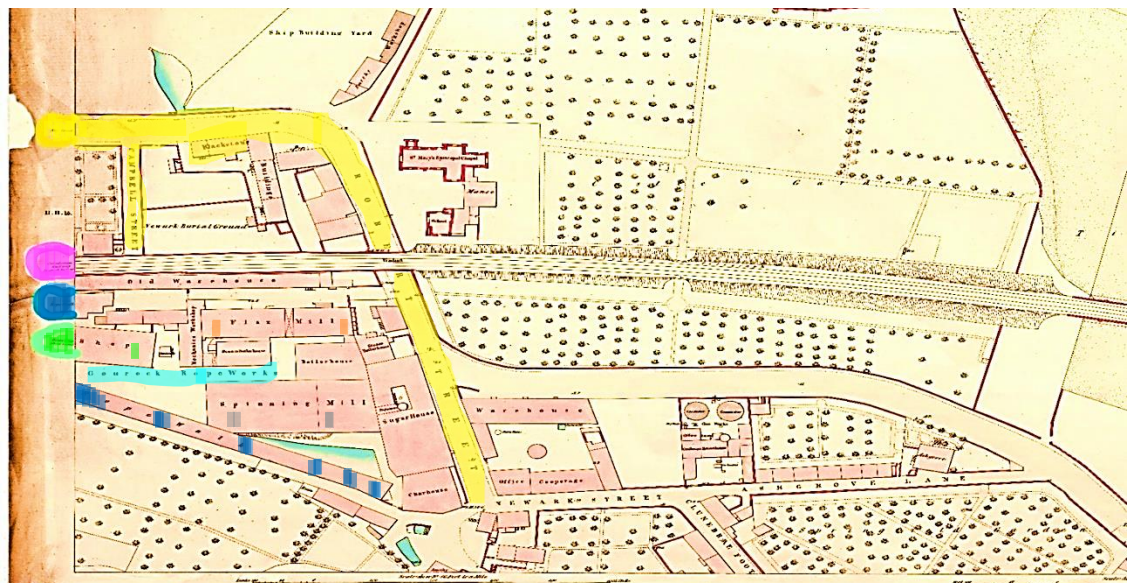
**MAP 2.3: Port Glasgow - Sheet II.12.11. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
**A reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/2 and Gourrock Ropeworks but excluding Clarke's Close.**



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[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk). This map has been enhanced to aid clarity.

**MAP 2.3a: Port Glasgow - Sheet II.12.11. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
**A reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/2 and Gourrock Ropeworks but excluding Clarke's Close.**

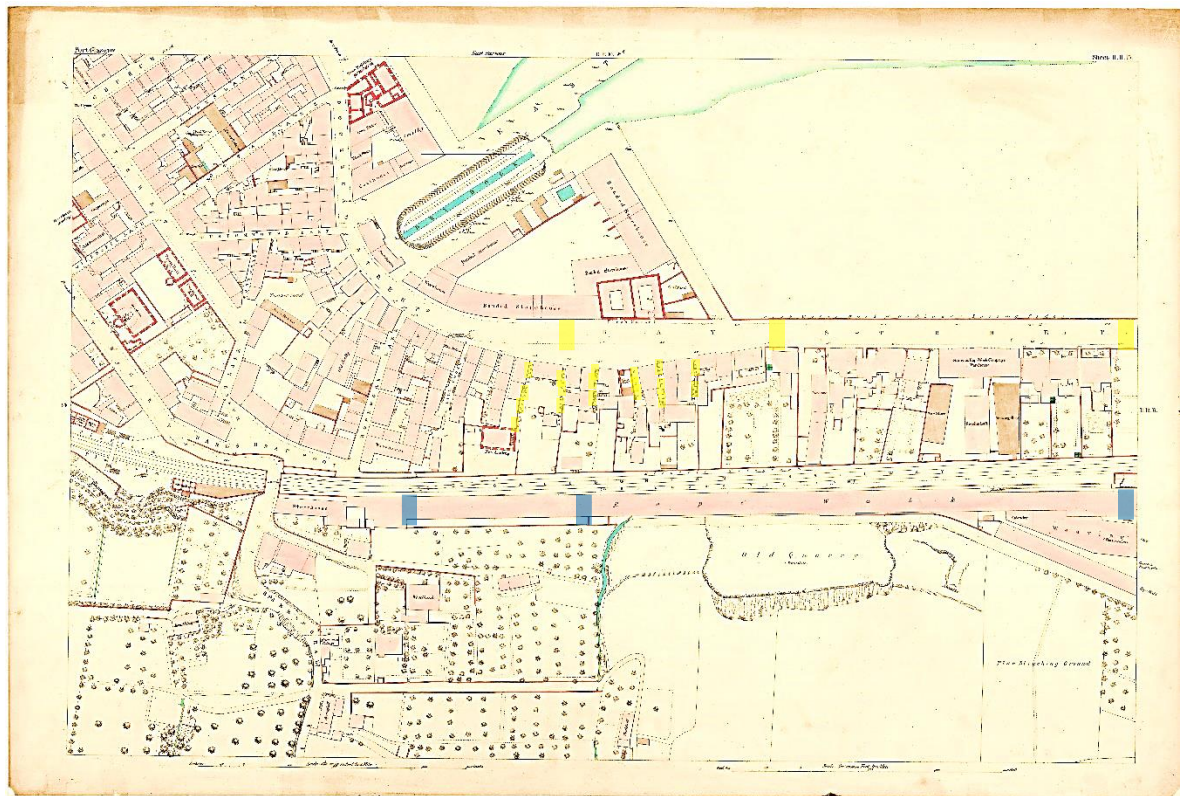


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Map 3a is a cropped, enlarged, and enhanced section of Map 3. Highlighted areas are: Aqua = Gourrock Rope Work, Pink = Caledonian Railway (Greenock Section), Blue = Rope Walk, Green = Weaving Shop, Orange = Flax Mill, Grey = Spinning Mill. Yellow = E. D. locations.

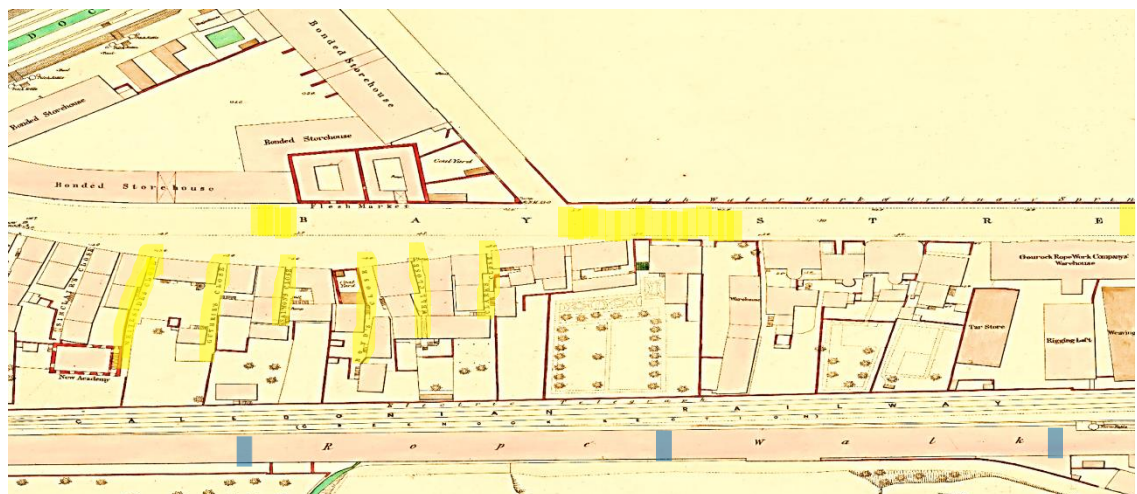
**MAP 2.4: Port Glasgow - Sheet II.11.15. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
**A reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/3.**



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**Map 2.4a: Port Glasgow - Sheet II.11.15. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
**A reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/3.**

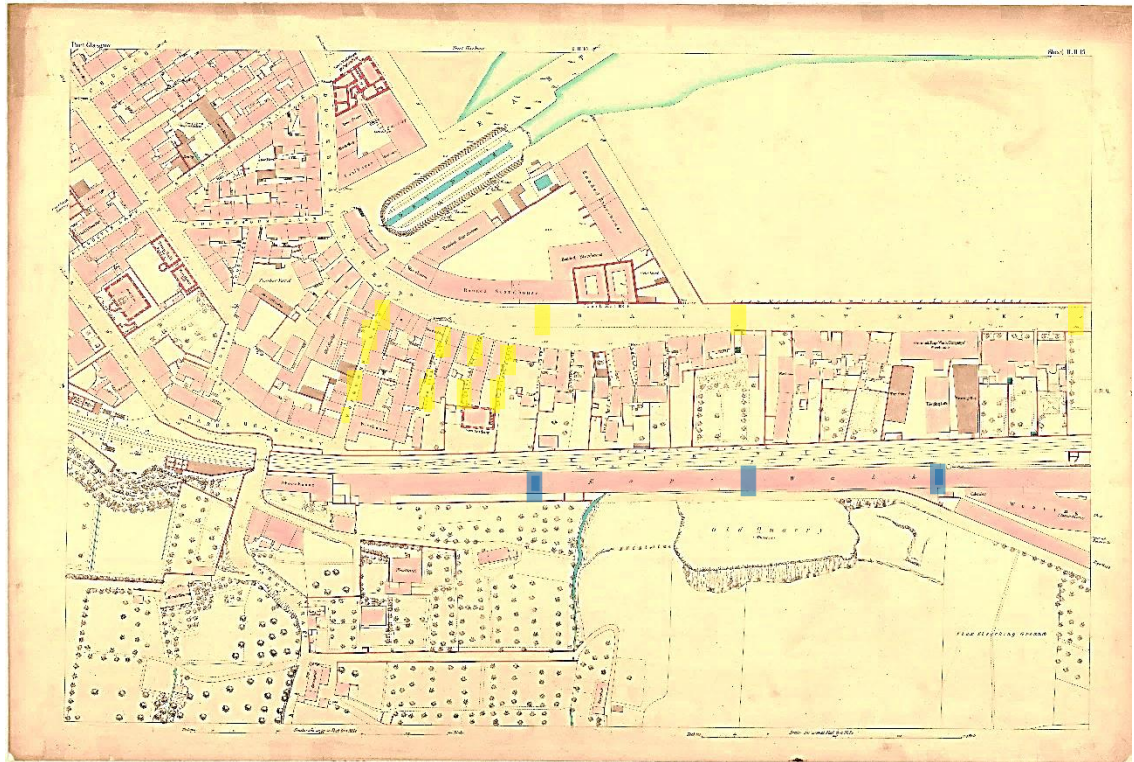


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Map 4a is a cropped, enlarged, and enhanced section of Map 4. Highlighted areas are Blue = Rope Walk and Yellow = E. D. locations.

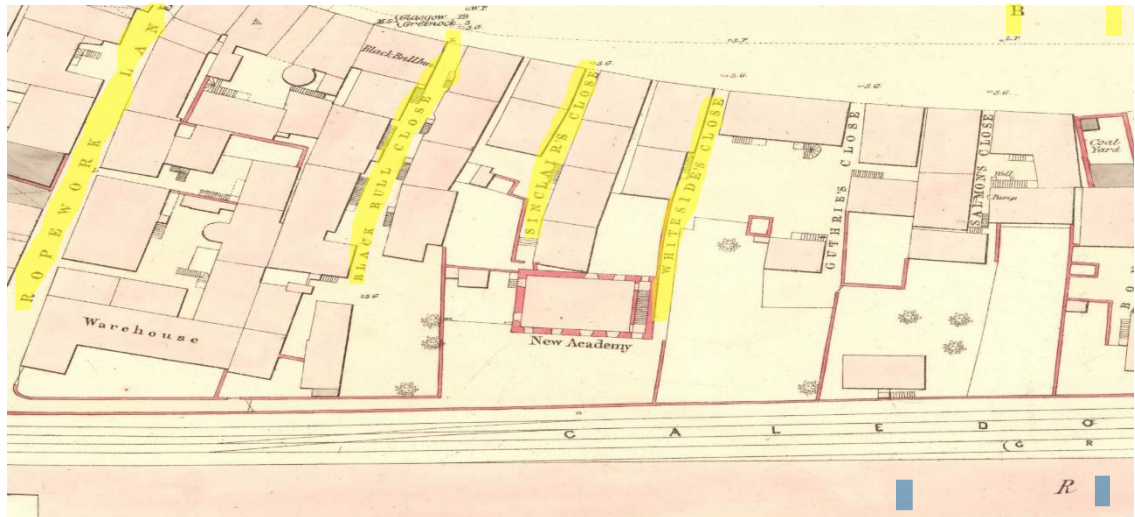
**MAP 2.5: Port Glasgow - Sheet II.11.15. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
**A reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/4.**



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**Map 2.5a: : Port Glasgow - Sheet II.11.15. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
**A reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/4.**



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Map 5a is a cropped, enlarged, and enhanced section of Map 5. Highlighted areas are Blue = Rope Walk and Yellow = E. D. locations.

Other than the three sample districts above and the Gaol in all of the remaining ten districts of Port Glasgow the number of Irish-born people varied between 5.88 and 33.00 per cent. The proportion of other groups of people identified by birthplace and the number of E. D.s in which they were present is demonstrated below. Clearly there were meaningful levels of integration by all groups of people in Port Glasgow and Irish-born people were present in all of the fourteen E. D.s:

| <b>Place of Birth</b> | <b>Number of Districts</b> | <b>Percentage Range</b>       |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Renfrewshire          | 13                         | 37.82% to 67.64%              |
| Scotland              | 14                         | 1.68% to 29.15%               |
| England               | 12                         | 0.37% to 2.12%                |
| Foreign               | 7                          | 0.21% to 0.93%                |
| Not Known             | 10                         | 0.38% to 2.75%. <sup>62</sup> |

As described earlier, in 1841, 3,279 of 6,983 people in Port Glasgow were born outside of the county and of these people 1,993 (60.7 per cent) were born in Ireland. Therefore, whilst there was a diverse population in Port Glasgow most of the migrants coming to the town at that time were Irish. However, lack of detail in census data prevents the identification of place of birth in terms of city, town, or village of birth of any of the migrants in 1841, or for that matter anyone else,<sup>63</sup> arguably within the Renfrewshire born cohort a number of people were of Irish heritage.

On Pages 60 and 61, Table 2.4 illustrates in detail the nature of the population of Port Glasgow in 1841 and the significant presence of Irish people. However, this does not convey the geographic location of Irish people within the limited landscape of the town. The maps on the preceding three pages identify where Irish people in the sample E. D.s were located but since the maps have been cropped and enhanced to aid clarity no sense of the density of population in these areas is conveyed, an indication of this is illustrated in Map 2.2 and Map 2.2a on Page 41. The density of population and levels of overcrowding in Port Glasgow were recognised by Macarthur<sup>64</sup> and

<sup>62</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, pp. 119, 197.

was remarked on by Joy Monteith writing in *Old Port Glasgow*, (2003) when she noted of a later period:

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Medical Officer of health drew attention to the large number of slum properties in the Bay Street area of the town... and suggested that action should be taken under the Housing of the Working Classes Act. Within the four and a half acres described as an 'insanitary warren' there were 438 houses with a population of 2,007 persons.<sup>65</sup>

A network of closes which included Sinclair's Close, Whiteside's Close, Guthrie's Close, Salmond's Close, Boyd's Close and Well Close existed within the 'insanitary warren' of the Bay area. Black Bull Close, part of the original village of Newark, was one of the best known and had been in existence for over two hundred years at the time of the report by the Medical Officer. Monteith noted: 'As the town developed the whole area became congested with many 'backland' developments of houses of poor design being built and subdivided during the nineteenth century.'<sup>66</sup> Clearly the limited habitable area of Port Glasgow, in the nineteenth century, had serious implications for the availability of housing and health. It is important to note that the areas and closes referred to by Monteith feature in Maps 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5 which highlight the location of the sample E. D.s and therefore where a significant number of Irish people were in Port Glasgow in 1841. It is reasonable to conclude that 'insanitary' conditions were likely to have existed in these areas due to the density of population in 1841.

This analysis of the population of Port Glasgow in 1841 has not only demonstrated in detail the composition of the population it has illustrated 'clusters' of Irish people in certain locations and revealed that Irish people were present to varying degrees in all areas of the town. It is reasonable to propose that in a number of areas, for example in the lanes and closes some levels of overcrowding would have been present in 1841 and this will be discussed later in Chapter 4 Society of Port Glasgow in 1841.

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<sup>65</sup> Monteith, *Old Port Glasgow*, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

**Table 2.4:**  
**Port Glasgow: Enumeration Districts, Identifying Place of Birth**

| Place<br>Of<br>Birth  | 574/10<br>Newark |              | 574/11<br>Newark |              | 574/12<br>Newark<br>Port<br>Glasgow |              | 574/13<br>Newark |              | 574/1<br>Port<br>Glasgow |              | 574/2<br>Port<br>Glasgow |              | 574/3<br>Port<br>Glasgow |              | 574/4<br>Port<br>Glasgow |              |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|
|                       | Total 690        |              | Total 555        |              | Total 565                           |              | Total 639        |              | Total 482                |              | Total 534                |              | Total 455                |              | Total 653                |              |
|                       | Number           | %            | Number           | %            | Number                              | %            | Number           | %            | Number                   | %            | Number                   | %            | Number                   | %            | Number                   | %            |
| Renfrewshire          | 351              | 50.86        | 350              | 63.06        | 315                                 | 55.75        | 336              | 52.58        | 277                      | 57.46        | 202                      | 37.82        | 181                      | 39.78        | 291                      | 44.56        |
| Scotland              | 126              | 18.26        | 118              | 21.26        | 124                                 | 21.94        | 168              | 26.29        | 62                       | 12.86        | 81                       | 15.16        | 54                       | 11.86        | 11                       | 1.68         |
| England               | 13               | 1.88         | 7                | 1.26         | 12                                  | 2.12         | 11               | 1.72         | 5                        | 1.03         | 2                        | 0.37         | 3                        | 0.65         | 8                        | 1.22         |
| Ireland               | 195              | 28.26        | 74               | 13.33        | 110                                 | 19.46        | 119              | 18.62        | 134                      | 27.80        | 244                      | 45.69        | 209                      | 45.93        | 324                      | 49.61        |
| Foreign               | 2                | 0.28         | 0                | 0            | 0                                   | 0            | 2                | 0.31         | 2                        | 0.41         | 5                        | 0.93         | 0                        | 0            | 1                        | 0.15         |
| Not known             | 3                | 0.43         | 6                | 1.08         | 4                                   | 0.70         | 3                | 0.46         | 2                        | 0.41         | 0                        | 0            | 8                        | 1.75         | 18                       | 2.75         |
| Outside<br>the county | 336              | <b>48.69</b> | 199              | <b>35.85</b> | 246                                 | <b>43.53</b> | 300              | <b>46.94</b> | 203                      | <b>42.11</b> | 332                      | <b>62.17</b> | 266                      | <b>58.46</b> | 344                      | <b>52.67</b> |

**Table 2.4:**  
**Port Glasgow: Enumeration Districts, Identifying Place of Birth continued**

| Place<br>Of<br>Birth             | 574/5<br>Port Glasgow |       | 574/6<br>Port Glasgow |       | 574/7<br>Port Glasgow<br>part of |       | 574/8<br>Port Glasgow |       | 574/9<br>Gaol |        | 574/14<br>Port Glasgow |       | OVERALL<br>TOTALS |       |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|---------------|--------|------------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
|                                  | Total 789             |       | Total 606             |       | Total 512                        |       | Total 463             |       | Total 6       |        | Total 34               |       | Total 6983        |       |
|                                  | Number                | %     | Number                | %     | Number                           | %     | Number                | %     | Number        | %      | Number                 | %     | Number            | %     |
| <b>Renfrewshire</b>              | 451                   | 57.16 | 302                   | 49.83 | 284                              | 55.46 | 281                   | 60.69 | 0             | 0      | 23                     | 67.64 | 3644              | 52.18 |
| <b>Scotland</b>                  | 86                    | 10.89 | 96                    | 15.84 | 112                              | 21.87 | 135                   | 29.15 | 3             | 50.00  | 9                      | 26.40 | 1185              | 16.96 |
| <b>England</b>                   | 9                     | 1.14  | 3                     | 0.49  | 6                                | 1.17  | 6                     | 1.29  | 0             | 0      | 0                      | 0     | 86                | 1.23  |
| <b>Ireland</b>                   | 238                   | 30.16 | 200                   | 33.00 | 110                              | 21.48 | 32                    | 6.91  | 3             | 50.00  | 2                      | 5.88  | 1993              | 28.54 |
| <b>Foreign</b>                   | 2                     | 0.25  | 0                     | 0     | 0                                | 0     | 1                     | 0.21  | 0             | 0      | 0                      | 0     | 15                | 0.21  |
| <b>Not known</b>                 | 3                     | 0.38  | 5                     | 0.82  | 0                                | 0     | 8                     | 1.72  | 0             | 0      | 0                      | 0     | 60                | 0.87  |
| <b>Outside<br/>of the county</b> | 335                   | 42.45 | 299                   | 49.33 | 228                              | 44.53 | 174                   | 37.58 | 6             | 100.00 | 11                     | 32.35 | 3,279             | 46.95 |

Source: Table compiled from analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

## 2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter Port Glasgow has been broadly located within the wider economic and social changes which occurred during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Economic and therefore social change took place in Port Glasgow, but underlying levels of continuity in industrial activities based on the proximity of the town to Clyde are also apparent.<sup>1</sup> Undeniably Irish people who migrated to Port Glasgow from the late eighteenth century until 1841 formed important elements of the population and long standing connections of Irish people to Port Glasgow have been demonstrated as far back as 1695.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the region of Ireland which Irish migrants came from cannot be identified in the 1841 census records. Similarly, people who migrated from specific areas of Scotland cannot be identified.<sup>3</sup> Without doubt the significant number of Irish migrants recorded in the Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841)<sup>4</sup> had profound effects on the town and host community and as proposed earlier Irish people were not only present in Port Glasgow long before the famine but were also involved in forming the economy and society of Port Glasgow.

It has been demonstrated in this chapter that the percentage of Irish-born people in Port Glasgow before the famine in Ireland was proportionately higher than that of Scotland generally.<sup>5</sup> Analysis of the sample E. D.s highlights the location and ‘clustering’ of a significant number of Irish people in some areas and instances of overcrowding appear to have been well established over time.<sup>6</sup> By exploring the number of migrants in this small Scottish town before the famine it is clear that not all Irish migrants came to Scotland as refugees in crisis after the famine. It is demonstrated in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2 that there were marked similarities between the number of first generation Irish people in Port

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<sup>1</sup> Barr, *Parish of Port-Glasgow*, January 1836, pp. 67, 68, 74.

<sup>2</sup> Murray, *Kilmalcolm a parish history 1100-1898*, pp. 113, 114, 115.

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 496, image 17 p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). Macarthur, *History of Port Glasgow*, pp. 119, 197.

Glasgow in 1841 and 1851.<sup>7</sup> Irish migrants in Port Glasgow in 1841 had formed established communities long before the famine and not many ‘new’ migrants appear to have arrived between 1841 and 1851. Each E. D. in Port Glasgow had a different ‘story’ to tell and in the following chapters the three sample E. D.s will be discussed exploring the economic and social experiences and opportunities which may have been available to the many Irish migrants who came to Port Glasgow before the famine. Through detailed examination of location, household composition, gender, age, and employment new understandings have emerged which demonstrate that Irish men, boys, women, and girls were individuals who had distinct occupations and contributed to the formation and history of this small Scottish town on the west coast of Scotland.

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<sup>7</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). Port Glasgow. Figures from dropdown menu search: 1851, Scotland, Variables, Renfrew, Port Glasgow, Country of Birth, Ireland. Percentages were calculated from the results. K. Schurer, Higgs, E. (2020). *Integrated Census Microdata (I-CeM), 1851-1911*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. SN: 7481, DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-2. <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-7481-2> [accessed 18 November 2021].

## **Chapter 3     Port Glasgow: Economy and Industry in the mid-nineteenth Century**

This chapter will examine in detail the opportunities which were available to Irish workers in the industries of Port Glasgow, in 1841, and the economic impact which this had there before the famine in Ireland. It will be demonstrated that Irish people enumerated in the Census of Port Glasgow (1841) had diverse occupational profiles and formed established communities. As noted earlier, 3,279 (46.9 per cent)<sup>1</sup> of people enumerated in Port Glasgow in 1841 were not born Renfrewshire.

Initially, the contribution made by Irish workers in the industries of shipbuilding, sugar refining and trade Port Glasgow will be considered. However, in 1841 Irish workers in Port Glasgow were mainly involved in textile manufacturing activities and interrogation of the range of employment in these industries has revealed the crucial role of Irish men, boys, women, and girls in this sector. Examination of the location of textile employees' residences highlights that generally textile workers lived close to their place of work, which would in part have been influenced by the restricted landscape of Port Glasgow discussed earlier, although there were also variations in the three sample E. D.s which will be discussed later. Whilst there is evidence of 'Little Irelands', if that is assumed to mean an area in which a significant number of Irish people resided, there are also credible indications of integration, in workplaces, residential locations and some households. By systematically examining Port Glasgow census records the important economic and social contribution of Irish people before the famine has become clear.

### **3.1 A Summary of Ship Building, Sugar Refining and Trade in Port Glasgow**

As noted earlier the three sample E. D.s were selected due to the comparatively high percentage of Irish born people recorded in each of these locations in 1841.<sup>2</sup> However, only a few Irish people in these districts were recorded as being

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<sup>1</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>2</sup> Calculated from analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

employed in ship building, sugar refining and trade at that time. Barr (1836) stated that excluding apprentices almost 200 men were employed in ship building.<sup>3</sup> But, in the sample (1841) there is limited evidence of Irish people being involved in ship building activities although several Renfrewshire-born and Scottish men appear to have been engaged in a variety of associated tasks.<sup>4</sup> According to Barr (1836) there were two premises in Port Glasgow involved in sugar-refining, one was a small enterprise which used older processes whereas the larger one utilised a newer method involving steam. Approximately 50 men were employed 'within doors'<sup>5</sup> which may imply they were engaged in refining activities rather than dock work. In the sample (1841) three Irish men, one English and one foreign man were recorded as working in sugar refining processes<sup>6</sup> therefore, at that time, Irish men had a limited presence in this sector in Port Glasgow.

This situation in Port Glasgow before the famine contrast with Lobban's work related to sugar production, in nearby Greenock, primarily after the famine. He stated that as migration from Ireland continued to increase the percentage of Irish workers in particular industries 'such as sugar refining became ever larger until they came almost to dominate them.'<sup>7</sup> Lobban described connections between occupational dominance and occupational choice as family and friendship links could lead to introductions resulting in employment for new immigrants. However, he suggested elements of personal preference and financial considerations may also have been present in these situations. No evidence has been found relating to Port Glasgow, just along the coast from Greenock, that Irish migrants after 1845 Irish were able to rely on similar introductions to employers in sugar refineries. Although, factors similar to those in Greenock relating to occupational dominance and choice were present in the textile industries of Port Glasgow in 1841 and this will be discussed later

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<sup>3</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s. 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>5</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s. 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>7</sup> Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', p. 274.

alongside a consideration of wages in textile manufacturing. Lobban asserted that there was little evidence of the wages which were being paid in Greenock during the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> However, in this microhistory records of some of the wages being paid by the Gourock Ropework Company, in Port Glasgow, in 1841 will be discussed. When these records were cross-referenced with census data (1841) an understanding of wage structures, payments, and factors relating to gender and age emerged.<sup>9</sup>

By 1836 trade in Port Glasgow, a previously important outport, had been adversely affected by navigational improvements in the Clyde and Barr stated revenue which had previously been collected in the town decreased owing to the loss of tobacco dues.<sup>10</sup> But, Barr also described that in spite of disadvantages trade was in a course of steady albeit not rapid increase: 'British manufactures of every description are shipped here in large quantities; and in return all the ordinary articles of foreign produce are imported...'<sup>11</sup> Previously Port Glasgow trade had been almost entirely carried on in ships owned by Glasgow merchants, but Barr noted: 'Of late years however, the people of Port-Glasgow have become ship-owners to a considerable extent; and at present one-fourth of the whole, or above 7000 tons of shipping, belong to individuals resident in the town.'<sup>12</sup> A sample of four ship-owners have been identified in Port Glasgow in the 1830s<sup>13</sup> and this type of enterprise by some residents suggests an ability to respond to opportunities. However, there is limited evidence of Irish people being involved in activities related to trade. In the sample (1841) one Scottish customs official

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<sup>8</sup> Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd, rope makers and textile manufacturers*, Port Glasgow, Inverclyde, Scotland. GB 248 UGD 042. Wages book 1841, GB 248 UGD 042/5/7, 'New shop', 'Sugar House' and 'Garden', Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s. 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>10</sup> Barr, Parish of Port Glasgow, January 1836. Revenue amounted to L. 243,349 3 1 in 1830, L. 185,426 18 6 1/2 in 1832 and L. 140,282 8 10 in 1834, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> David Gilkison, ship-owner, Glenhuntly; Robert Gilkison, ship-owner, Barr's Brae, image 387 p. 157; Matthew King, agent and ship-owner, Fore Street, image 389 p. 159; James Martin, ship-owner, Bay Street, image 390 p. 160. *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (389) [85222398] (Port Glasgow)> <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

was enumerated and most of the men employed in this sector were born in Renfrewshire,<sup>14</sup> although further investigation may conclude some members of this group were of Irish heritage. In the sample E. D.s in terms of domestic trade for example, bakers, fleshers, grocers, publicans, shoemakers, and spirit dealers, those involved were born in a variety of places. The one accountant and the only bookseller, in the sample, were Irish men<sup>15</sup> who arguably held relatively prestigious positions; there was also one female Irish spirit dealer identified in the sample. Clearly Irish people in the three sample E. D.s had limited presence in ship building, sugar refining and trade in Port Glasgow in 1841.<sup>16</sup> Later in this chapter a detailed breakdown of the occupation and birthplace of persons in the sample E. D.s is discussed and supporting evidence is provided in Appendix 1.

### 3.2 Port Glasgow Textile Industries, a Brief History

The Port Glasgow Rope and Duck Company was set up in 1736 by a group of Glasgow merchants including Lawrence Dinwiddie, a future Provost of Glasgow.<sup>17</sup> At that time, in Ireland, there was a large rope and sail cloth industry which had been founded mostly by Huguenot refugees.<sup>18</sup> It was suggested in 1853 by Charles Nicholas de la Cherois Purdon that:

Among the various immigrations which have so diversified the population of Ireland, there is none that has been attended with more important results than that of the French Huguenots, which took place at the close of the 17<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup>... The chief localities of the colonies in Ireland were Lisburn (then called Lisnagarvey), Dundalk, Dublin, Portarlington, Youghal and Cork.<sup>19</sup>

A letter was sent, in 1741, by the Port Glasgow Rope and Duck Company to William & Parr Thomsons merchants in Cork proposing that an operative would be borrowed from the Irish firm, and he would come to Port Glasgow to

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<sup>14</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s. 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Blake, 'The Gourock', p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Nicholas de la Cherois Purdon, 'The French Settlers in Ireland. No. 1. The Huguenot Colony at Lisburn, County of Antrim.' *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* First series, Vol, 1 (1853), pp. 209, 211. [www.jstor.org/stable/20563463](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20563463).

demonstrate the craft of weaving canvas. The necessary machinery was to be sourced and supplied by the Irish firm and a decent house was to be found for the demonstrator who was to be paid £40 annually.<sup>20</sup> Plainly, textile manufacturers in Port Glasgow had early links to Ireland and a desire to improve production.

In 1797 the Port Glasgow Rope and Duck company sold the ropewalk and mills which they had set up near Newark Castle, in Port Glasgow, to the Gourock Ropework Company. This rival enterprise had been established in Gourock by a group of merchants, mainly from Greenock, around 1776. This merger resulted in the Gourock company having ropewalks and mills in two locations six miles apart, in effect spanning established harbours and shipyards on this part of the river Clyde.<sup>21</sup> It was reported by the *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report of the Commissioners, Trade and Manufactures*, (1843) that in the West of Scotland the manufacturing of sail-cloth, a branch of hand-loom weaving, was only being undertaken in Greenock and Port Glasgow.<sup>22</sup> Textile production and ship building were located close to each other in Port Glasgow<sup>23</sup> which arguably meant operational and financial benefits for these organisations and opportunities for workers possessing the relevant skills. Employees mainly lived close to their place of work<sup>24</sup> possibly involving a degree of convenience although since there was no scope in the town to expand housing provision further afield into dormitory areas<sup>25</sup> availability, choice and cost must have been contributing factors.

In January 1836, Barr wrote that the canvas factory had been recently expanded and employed around 200 men, 81 boys, 71 women and 67 girls. In addition, several boys assisted 45 men employed in the rope-work department. He

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<sup>20</sup> Blake, 'The Gourock', p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Children's Employment Commission, second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*. (London: printed by William Clowes and sons, Stamford Street for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1843). Command Papers 430, 431, 432, image 1198, p. 148.

<sup>23</sup> Renfrewshire II.11 (Port Glasgow) Survey Date: 1856, Publication Date: 1859. The National Library of Scotland. [Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](http://map.images-nls.uk).

<sup>24</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>25</sup> The parish was described by the Rev Mr John Forrest as being almost an English mile square. Forrest, Parish of New Port-Glasgow, (County of Renfrew), p. 679.

concluded that in total there were 474 workers.<sup>26</sup> Seven years later the Commissioners' report (1843) referred to the company stating: 'In the flax-mill (where the yarn is spun), the factories, and the rope-walks there are about 1200 people... The hands are principally Irish, perhaps not above 50 Scotch in the whole work.'<sup>27</sup> Clearly the number of employees in this company had increased between 1836 and 1843 and there was a reliance on Irish workers when the report was written. For the purposes of this research textile workers who were *not* labourers are being classed as skilled workers since many of these occupations involved an apprenticeship or varying levels of specific training. The findings of this research demonstrate that skilled Irish workers dominated textile manufacturing in Port Glasgow in 1841. Table 3.2, Page 71 shows that in all of the E. D.s in Port Glasgow there were 713 skilled textile workers of whom 76.4 per cent were Irish, which takes no account of second generation Irish workers or Irish labourers in this sector.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.2.1 Employment in Textile Manufacturing

Interrogation of the 14 E. D.s which were recorded in the Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) demonstrate that the E. D.s varied in size from 789 people to the smallest with 34 which was a rural/farming district. The Gaol has not been included, as there were only six persons enumerated, and their status is unclear. Due to the differing geographic spread of the E. D.s and the overlapping of the names of streets or lanes into more than one E. D. a necessary degree of caution has been employed in comparing and reaching conclusions. E. D. 574/5 had the highest population and was located centrally in the town. In this E. D. there were 789 people and of them 57.16 per cent were recorded as having been born in Renfrewshire. It is likely a number of the Renfrewshire-born people were of Irish heritage as proportionally this area had the fifth highest number of people born in Ireland (30.16 per cent). To varying degrees Irish-born people

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<sup>26</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> *Children's Employment Commission, second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures.* Command Papers 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>28</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

were recorded in each of the 14 E. D.s and the presence of Irish textile workers in 12 of the E. D.s<sup>29</sup> is demonstrated in Table 3.1.

The three districts with the highest proportion of Irish born people are highlighted in Table 3.1. However, part of the following analysis due to the scale of the textile industries includes detailed interrogation of every E. D. This is to achieve a clearer understanding of the contribution made by and opportunities available to the significant number of Irish people involved in the complex textile manufacturing processes. The percentage of Irish-born people in each district and number of textile workers is illustrated in Table 3.1. There were 713 textile workers identified in Port Glasgow in 1841 which does not include those who described themselves in the census as labourers. It is also important to recognise that generally the description labourer did not indicate in which sector the person was employed nor were they exclusively male.<sup>30</sup> Also, as can be seen in Appendix 1, Irish men in Port Glasgow were not predominately labourers which is distinctly different from portrayals of male Irish workers at that time.

**Table 3.1:**  
**Percentage of Irish-Born People in each E. D. and number of Male and Female Textile Workers**

| E. D.                           | 574 /1 | 574 /2 | 574 /3 | 574 /4 | 574 /5 | 574 /6 | 574 /7 | 574 /8 | 574 /9      | 574 /10 | 574 /11 | 574 /12 | 574 /13 | 574 /14* |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| Percentage of Irish-born people | % 27.8 | % 45.6 | % 45.9 | % 49.6 | % 30.1 | % 33.0 | % 21.4 | % 6.9  | % 50.0 of 6 | % 28.2  | % 13.3  | % 19.4  | % 18.6  | % 5.8    |
| Total Number of Textile Workers | 61     | 103    | 98     | 91     | 94     | 64     | 63     | 9      | Gaol 0      | 46      | 8       | 34      | 42      | 0        |
| Male Workers                    | 44     | 48     | 52     | 61     | 47     | 31     | 46     | 9      | 0           | 39      | 7       | 28      | 32      | 0        |
| Female Workers                  | 17     | 55     | 46     | 30     | 47     | 33     | 17     | 0      | 0           | 7       | 1       | 6       | 10      | 0        |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). Textile workers in Table 3.1 do not include those who described themselves in the census as labourers. Dark blue highlighting indicates the three sample E. D.s used elsewhere in this study, 574/9 was the Gaol, 574/14\* indicates a rural area of Port Glasgow.<sup>31</sup>

Table 3.1 demonstrates that it should not be assumed that a high proportion of Irish-born people in a district necessarily equates with a high number of textile

<sup>29</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Nine male mill wrights and one fireman in a flax factory are included in the figures in Table 3.1. Analysis of the Census of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

workers.<sup>32</sup> Of the three sample E. D.s 574/2 and 574/3 have a high percentage of Irish-born people and high numbers of textile workers, but 574/4 had the highest percentage of Irish-born people but of the three districts the lowest number of textile workers. Plainly other factors were in play possibly related to birthplace, location, availability/cost of housing, gender, types of employment and/or skills. It is important to note that E. D. 574/5 had the highest population of the E. D.s, and the third highest number of textile workers but only 30.1 per cent of people were born in Ireland. The interaction of these factors is explored later. At present it is sufficient to say that these initial assertions demonstrate regardless of its size Port Glasgow had districts in which the experiences of Irish workers would have been very different.

### 3.2.2 Place of Birth and Gender

A comparison of the number of male and female textile workers in Port Glasgow who were born in Ireland or Renfrewshire is illustrated in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2:**  
**Number and percentage of Textile Workers in Port Glasgow in 1841 who were born in Ireland or Renfrewshire**

| Place of Birth | Total | Male | Percentage Male | Female | Percentage Female | Overall Percentage of Total 713 Workers |
|----------------|-------|------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|---|
| <b>Total</b>   | 667   | 411  | 57.9            | 256    | 36.0              | 93.5                                    |
| Ireland        | 545   | 322  | 45.1            | 223    | 31.2              | 76.4                                    |
| Renfrewshire*  | 122   | 89   | 12.4            | 33     | 4.6               | 17.1                                    |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

\*It is reasonable to propose that some Renfrewshire-born people in this group were of Irish heritage. 46 of the 713 workers were not included in Table 3.2, They were mostly male and 32 were born in Scotland, 11 in England and 3 workers had no place of birth recorded.

Clearly skilled male and female textile workers in Port Glasgow in 1841 were predominately Irish. This supports the reliance on Irish textile workers shown in the *Children's Employment Commission* (1843) although the report does not appear to refer to a detailed breakdown of the number of male and female workers as has been done above in Table 3.2.<sup>33</sup> Whilst labourers have not been

<sup>32</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

<sup>33</sup> *Children's Employment Commission, second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*. Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.  
Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

included in the figures thus far it is important to note some labourers employed in textile manufacturing may have been skilled workers who were engaged in that type of work not from choice but from financial necessity.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate that in Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) employment details were recorded for a significant number of male *and* female textile workers.<sup>34</sup> This has enabled new perspectives to emerge in this microhistory in relation to the role played by not only women but Irish women in particular, a factor which is especially important since a suggested under-recording of women's work in the Victorian era has been the subject of some debate.<sup>35</sup> Thus far, persons of Irish heritage have not been identified in this discussion and this aspect will be addressed later since it is an important, and arguably at times neglected feature of the history of Irish people in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century.

### 3.2.3 Categories of Work and Wages

Whilst the preceding tables have established the number, birthplace, and gender of textile workers in Port Glasgow in 1841 they do not demonstrate the occupational activities in which workers were engaged. The descriptions of occupation given by respondents and recorded by enumerators in the Census of Port Glasgow (1841) were varied, and on occasions compounded by unclear writing and differences which can occur more generally in census records, for example in the spelling of names. Nonetheless, in terms of occupations which were recorded some weavers described themselves simply as a 'weaver' others as 'canvas h/l weaver', 'flax h/l weaver' 'linen h/l weaver' or 'sailcloth h/l weaver'<sup>36</sup> This may have reflected not only how some weavers perceived themselves, but aspects of status, the skills required and subsequent rates of pay. Approximately 195 (27.3 per cent) of the 713 textile workers appear to be

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<sup>34</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>35</sup> Edward Higgs, Amanda Wilkinson, 'Women, Occupations and Work in the Victorian Censuses Revisited', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 81, Issue 1 (2016), pp. 17-38.

<sup>36</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). It is reasonable to conclude that h/l refers to hand loom. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

listed in the 1841 wage records of the Gourock Ropework Company<sup>37</sup> however, other textile workers within this cohort may also have been employed by this company but were not present in these lists. Unquestionably this data is a snapshot due to the fragmented nature of the surviving wage records which cover brief periods, in various locations of the works for some dates in April and May 1841.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, by cross-referencing these records with census data it has been possible to achieve insight into the rates of pay, the gender and age of some workers employed by this company in 1841.

The details of textile production by activity and enumeration district, illustrated in Table 3.3, Page 75, contributes to a greater understanding of the different occupational profiles of textile workers in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century. Due to the complexity of data in Table 3.3 there has been a grouping of workers under specific categories. However, to enable a more comprehensive illustration of the hidden sub-categories the following list has been included:

**FLAX:**

F. spinner, Flax carder, Flax mill, Flax dresser, Tenter flax mill, Flax tenter, Fireman flax mill, Labourer flax mill, Flax throwster, Flax heckler, Mill.

**ROPE:**

R. spinner, Rope maker, Rope manufacturer dealer, Rope maker J.

**WEAVING:**

Weaver, Canvas h/l weaver, Hand/l weaver, Duck h/l weaver, Linen h/l weaver, HLW, Flax h/l weaver.

**SAIL MAKING:**

Sailmaker, Sailmaker app.

**HEMP:**

Hemp reeler, Hemp cleaner.

**WARPER:**

Canvas warper.<sup>39</sup>

In Table 3.3 it has been demonstrated that flax workers were enumerated in ten of the twelve E. D.s whilst weavers were located in each of the twelve. It is important to recognise that neither of these two types of textile work was exclusively male or female. Of the 713 skilled workers 444 (62.2 per cent) were

<sup>37</sup> *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd. Rope makers and textile manufactures. Wages book 1841, GB 248 UGD 042/5/7.*

<sup>38</sup> 'New shop', 'Sugar House' and 'Garden'. *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd. Rope makers and textile manufactures. Wages book 1841, GB 248 UGD 042/5/7.*

<sup>39</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

male and 269 (37.7 per cent) were female<sup>40</sup> which provides some appreciation of gender ratios in this sector. Twenty female workers have been identified in one location and one wage cycle of the Gourock Ropeworks wage lists. As far as can be determined male and female wages appear comparable as piece work seems to have been involved and wage rates varied generally depending on the type of work being undertaken, for example four qualities of sail cloth with varying degrees of fineness were being manufactured. This suggests that what was being done rather than who was doing it was the defining factor in determining rates of pay.<sup>41</sup> Workers in the wage lists who were also identified in the census (1841) described themselves as being weavers albeit of various types with one exception, a female worker whose occupation was recorded as being 'flax mill'.<sup>42</sup>

The predominance of workers in flax, weaving and rope production is clearly identified in Table 3.3 which also highlights gender differences. Clearly flax workers were mainly female, rope workers and weavers male, but not exclusively so. Other textile workers have also been included in the final total figures shown in Table 3.3, these comprised of 76 workers engaged in minority occupations, nevertheless they had important roles to play in textile production. The Gourock Ropework Company, located to the east of the town, was undoubtedly a significant source of employment in textile manufacturing in Port Glasgow and its premises in E. D. 574/2 are illustrated in the map provided on Page 77.

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<sup>40</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>41</sup> Sugar House 27 April to 11 May 1841, *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd. Rope makers and textile manufactures*. Wages book 1841 GB 248 UGD 042/5/7, *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*. Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>42</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk), *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd. Rope makers and textile manufactures*. Wages book 1841 GB 248 UGD 042/5/7.

**Table 3.3:**  
**Textile Production by Activity and Enumeration District, excluding 'labourers' and two E. D.s where there were no Textile Workers**

| E. D. Number and Parish    | Flax |        | Rope |        | Weaving |        | Total in each E. D. |        |       |      |
|----------------------------|------|--------|------|--------|---------|--------|---------------------|--------|-------|------|
|                            | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male    | Female | Male                | Female | Total |      |
| 574/1<br>Port Glasgow      | 4    | 12     | 5    | 2      | 32      | 0      | 41                  | 14     | 55    | *61  |
| 574/2<br>Port Glasgow      | 0    | 37     | 2    | 0      | 42      | 0      | 44                  | 37     | 81    | *103 |
| 574/3<br>Port Glasgow      | 4    | 36     | 1    | 3      | 43      | 0      | 48                  | 39     | 87    | *98  |
| 574/4<br>Port Glasgow      | 3    | 28     | 1    | 0      | 56      | 2      | 60                  | 30     | 90    | *91  |
| 574/5<br>Port Glasgow      | 1    | 33     | 7    | 2      | 35      | 3      | 43                  | 38     | 81    | *94  |
| 574/6<br>Port Glasgow      | 3    | 27     | 1    | 2      | 24      | 1      | 28                  | 30     | 58    | *64  |
| 574/7<br>Port Glasgow      | 0    | 0      | 6    | 0      | 34      | 17     | 40                  | 17     | 57    | *63  |
| 574/8<br>Port Glasgow      | 0    | 0      | 2    | 0      | 6       | 0      | 8                   | 0      | 8     | *9   |
| 574/10<br>Newark           | 0    | 1      | 1    | 3      | 37      | 1      | 38                  | 5      | 43    | *46  |
| 574/11<br>Newark           | 1    | 0      | 0    | 1      | 5       | 0      | 6                   | 1      | 7     | *8   |
| 574/12<br>Newark           | 0    | 5      | 3    | 0      | 21      | 1      | 24                  | 6      | 30    | *34  |
| 574/13<br>Newark           | 0    | 1      | 3    | 4      | 27      | 5      | 30                  | 10     | 40    | *42  |
| <b>Total in all E. D.s</b> | 16   | 180    | 32   | 17     | 362     | 30     | 410                 | 227    | 637   | 713  |

Total figures marked \* include other textile workers from different categories of whom there were 76 throughout these E. D.s. These categories included: 'sail making, bleacher, cotton framer, spinner, hemp, linen dresser, m/wright, warper, duck manufacturer, heckler rope/canvas manufacturer.'<sup>43</sup>

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

Whilst there were clearly gendered roles, as can be seen above, a misleading impression of the location of textile workers throughout Port Glasgow could be created by the sole use of the data in Table 3.3. The Parish of Port Glasgow was located towards the east of the town and the Parish of Newark to the west. In total in the Parish of Port Glasgow there were 583 textile workers and in the Parish of Newark 130. The configuration of Port Glasgow E. D.s and the sub-division of some streets or lanes was complex, in total sixteen streets or lanes have been identified which when sub-divided appeared in more than one E. D.

<sup>43</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

For example, after sub-division, areas of King Street were included in 6 different E. D.s and some parts of the street were in the Parish of Port Glasgow and others in the Parish of Newark. Interrogation of E. D.s 574/5, 574/6, 574/7, 574/11 and 574/12, which were not included in the sample, shows that in these E. D.s there were 263 textile workers, of these 39 (14.8%) were enumerated in King Street, of whom 30 were male and 9 female.<sup>44</sup> Although this example generally supports conclusions reached in the sample E. D.s in relation to gendered roles it also clearly highlights the complex nature of Port Glasgow census data in 1841.

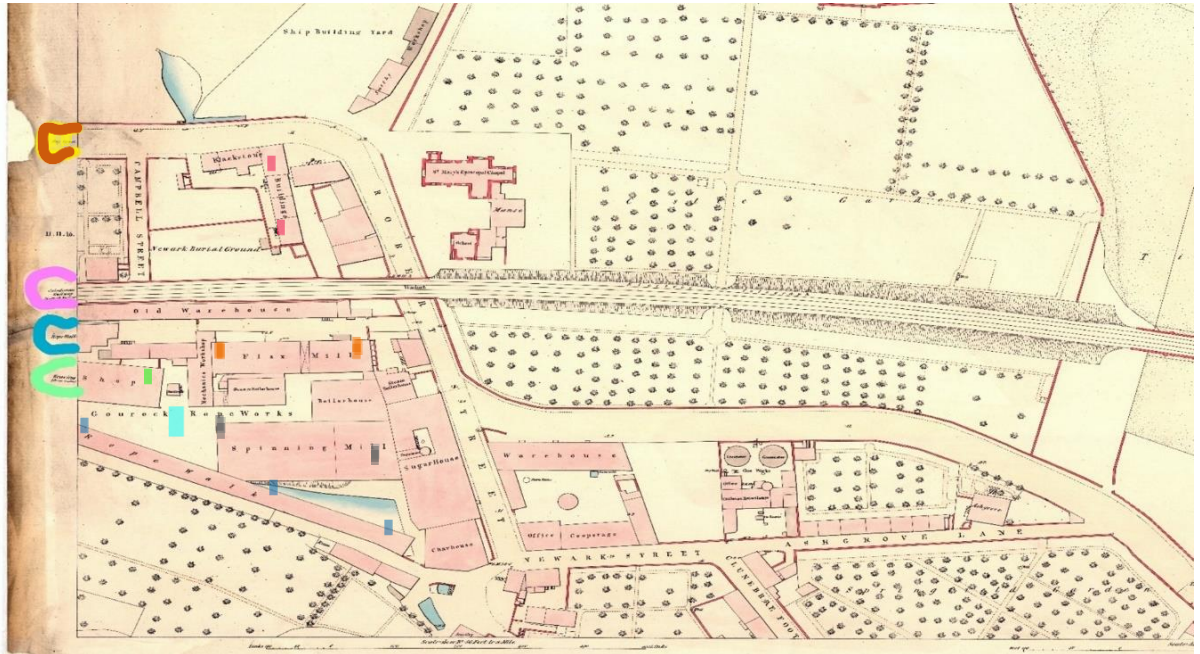
The discussion above has demonstrated the importance of looking beyond ‘the numbers’ and considering the formatting of census data, which in this instance was crucial. It has been shown in Table 3.3 that if ‘numbers’ are taken at face value misleading impressions may result. Interrogation of the composition of enumeration districts in Port Glasgow, and King Street in particular, has demonstrated the effects of overlapping Parishes, streets, and lanes. The distribution of textile workers in Port Glasgow, in 1841, was influenced by various factors for example the restricted geography of Port Glasgow resulted in ‘clustering’ within some E. D.s, and gender, age, and household composition also influenced the location of male and female textile workers at that time.<sup>45</sup> In order to understand more fully the experiences of Irish people in Scotland in the nineteenth century much more remains to be done when employing census data and ‘the numbers’.

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<sup>44</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

**Map 3.1: Port Glasgow Sheet II.12.11. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].  
A Partial Reproduction of the map illustrating the location of the Gourrock Ropework Company in E. D. 574/2.**



“Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.”

[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk).

This map has been cropped, enlarged, and enhanced to aid clarity.

Highlighted: Aqua = Gourrock Ropework, Blue = Rope Walk, Green = Weaving Shop, Orange = Flax Mill, Grey = Spinning Mill, Brown = Bay Street, Pink = Caledonian Railway (Greenock Section), Red = Blackstone Buildings.

### 3.3 Textile Employees' Residences

A sense of the extent to which Irish people were either integrated into the community of Port Glasgow or lived in 'Little Irelands' has been achieved by interrogating Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) and examining relevant maps. An understanding of the lives, and by implication experiences, of Irish textile workers in Port Glasgow at that time has been reached through detailed examination of each of the three sample E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.<sup>46</sup> The Port Glasgow premises of the Gourock Ropework Company were, as noted previously, located to the east of the town within E. D. 574/2.<sup>47</sup> However, it is important to recognise that due to availability maps used in this study are either earlier or later than 1841 so some changes are likely to have occurred within the timeframe. Nevertheless, the degree of continuity of street names within the maps, which date from 1832, 1858 and 1859, and the census of 1841 supports the usefulness of these maps for the purposes of this research.

#### 3.3.1 Enumeration District 574/2

E. D. 574/2, in which the Gourock Ropework Company was located,<sup>48</sup> had of the three sample districts the lowest percentage of Irish-born people but the highest number of textile workers which suggests proximity to workplace and availability of housing could have been important factors in determining choices and opportunities. Of 534 persons who were enumerated in this district 244 were recorded as having been born in Ireland. Other than 2 people in Robert Street and 16 in Bay Street all other 226 Irish-born people were in Blackstons,<sup>49</sup> it is reasonable to propose Blackstons was the Blackstone Buildings highlighted in red on Map 3.1, on the previous page. Of the people recorded as having been born in Renfrewshire, based on birthplace, surname, age and household, 53 (26.2 per cent) of 202 Renfrewshire-born people can reasonably be deemed to be of Irish

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<sup>46</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>47</sup> Port Glasgow Sheet II.12.11. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858], [Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](http://Map-images-National-Library-of-Scotland-nls.uk).  
Analysis of the Census of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

heritage. Four of those people were in Robert Street and 49 in Blackstons.<sup>50</sup> Therefore of 534 people in this sample district 297 (55.6 per cent) were Irish-born or of Irish heritage. But, in Blackstons which had a population of 332 there were 275 people (82.8 per cent) who were Irish-born or of Irish heritage. Clearly in this district in which primary calculations demonstrated that 45.6 per cent of people were born in Ireland there was a significant presence of second generation Irish people and an area primarily populated by Irish people.<sup>51</sup> There is also evidence based on the age of some people of Irish heritage that the 'family' groups involved may have been established in Port Glasgow for many years, in some cases even 20 years. The presence of such 'family' groups is suggestive of a continuation of productive family groups similar to those in rural Ireland where production was initially household based<sup>52</sup> rather than factory based as in Port Glasgow. The detailed calculations employed in this study highlight the importance of identifying second generation Irish people in Scotland. This is a facet which was neglected in the 1841 census of Scotland as Handley stated: 'The census is concerned only with Irish-born immigrants and takes no account of the Scottish-born children.'<sup>53</sup> This neglect has to some extent continued in more recent research however, this microhistory has brought new perspectives to understanding the number of first and second generation Irish people in this area of Port Glasgow in 1841. Based on the premise that a significant number of Irish people in a specific area constitutes a 'Little Ireland' there can be no doubt that in 1841 Blackstons in Port Glasgow was a 'Little Ireland'.

Important patterns of birthplace, occupation and location have been identified in E. D. 574/2. The range of birthplaces recorded amongst 103 textile workers in E. D. 574/2<sup>54</sup> invites consideration of comments made by Lobban relating to Greenock. He stated: 'As the tide of migration from Ireland rose... the proportion of Irish workers in certain industries such as sugar refining became even larger

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<sup>50</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Brenda Collins, 'The origins of Irish immigration to Scotland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', pp. 7, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, p. 90.

<sup>54</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

until they came almost to dominate them.’<sup>55</sup> Lobban noted that a Greenock sugar refinery was known as ‘Bille Conn’s sugar hoose’<sup>56</sup>:

A new Irish immigrant landing in the town would often have been given instructions to ask for Bille Conn’s sugar house, and when at length he arrived there and was able to proclaim his proper origins and religious affiliations, he would be given employment if there was any work available.<sup>57</sup>

The extent to which such recruitment practices occurred in Port Glasgow in 1841 are thus far unconfirmed, but it is reasonable to suggest, based on the discussion above, that family or friendship links may have led to employment in textile production in Port Glasgow *before* the famine. But it is also important to recognise that Lobban’s detailed study of occupations and comments relate to Greenock in 1851 and 1891<sup>58</sup> therefore after the famine and may be less relevant to Port Glasgow before the famine although some comparisons are enabled by this research. It is argued in this dissertation that a migrant seeking a new life or employment, before or after the famine, would be influenced by the industries which were predominant in a specific location, the opportunities which were afforded to them in view of their skills or expertise, any existing family or friendship links or crucially in some cases financial necessity.

Based on the following evidence it is clear that in this part of Port Glasgow in 1841 textile workers were predominately Irish.<sup>59</sup> Of 55 female textile workers 53 women or girls were Irish-born or of Irish heritage, 51 were recorded in Blackstons and two in Bay Street.<sup>60</sup> Similar patterns were identified in relation to 48 male textile workers. Of 42 weavers, 41 were enumerated in Blackstons, 33 of them were Irish-born, one was of Irish heritage, of the others five were Renfrewshire-born, one was Scottish and one English. The remaining Irish weaver was recorded as being in Bay Street. In Blackstons there were also two

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<sup>55</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 274.

<sup>56</sup> Oral evidence : a descendant of the said Billie Conn, and other workers in sugar refineries.’ p. 281. Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 274.

<sup>57</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 274.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 271-276.

<sup>59</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>60</sup> Two Renfrewshire-born flax spinners were also enumerated in Blackstons. Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

ropemakers and three sailmakers who were Renfrewshire-born and another of Irish heritage.<sup>61</sup> In Port Glasgow and Greenock albeit at different times family and friendship ties are very likely to have influenced occupational opportunities and choices. Although Greenock and Port Glasgow were close geographically pre and post famine attitudes and the length of pre-existing connections may have been important factors in the variety of options available to Irish people and for that matter other incomers. The opportunities and choices which were available to people in Port Glasgow and Greenock were unavoidably influenced by the industrial specialisation present in these places, leading to a clustering of people with specific abilities as is alluded to in the discussion above.

### 3.3.2 Analysis of the Age of Textile Employees in E. D. 574/2

The following comparison of the age at which textile workers were employed in this E. D. provides an illustration of the wide range of ages involved, although it is important to remember that the census of 1841 was the first in which such detailed information related to age and employment were recorded,<sup>62</sup> therefore it is a snapshot of circumstances on *one* night. Male Irish weavers were aged between 12-62 years, other weavers were aged between 17-40 years therefore some Irish weavers appear to have started working at a younger age and worked for longer. However, this was probably the type of employment in which the commitment to an apprenticeship and the skills accrued over time encouraged a long term career, particularly if weaving was a 'family tradition' and the physical demands of the work enabled continuing into older life. It is also possible an unidentified number of weavers may have established themselves in Port Glasgow before 1841 having migrated to the town as weavers when they were much younger. This proposal is supported by the earlier comments relating to established family groups.

The age range of female Irish flax workers was between 12-40 years. Seventeen other women or girls in this district were engaged in other textile production

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<sup>61</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>62</sup> *Population of Great Britain 1841 enumeration & age abstract Scotland*, (London: printed by W. Clowes and sons, Stamford Street, for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1843), Preface: p. 2, 3.

activities.<sup>63</sup> They were recorded as being between the ages of 15 and 25 years, all were Irish-born or of Irish heritage and in Blackstons.<sup>64</sup> However, this description of ages indicates trends rather than fact due to the rounding down of ages in the 1841 census which meant someone aged 27 years old was recorded as being 25 although the age of anyone under 15 years was meant to be recorded accurately.<sup>65</sup> In this sample district based on birthplace, surname, age, and household there is clear evidence of the presence of incoming established Irish family groups.<sup>66</sup> There is also evidence of one household in which there were six female Irish flax spinners, except for two women who had the same surname, and may have been related, all others had different surnames suggesting this was a household with no male presence and was one of 'independent' female Irish textile workers. It is essential to remember that any census pertains to one night in one year in a ten year cycle, nevertheless it is important to consider that this was a household established by women for women. There is also credible evidence that the working life of Irish people in this sample started earlier and lasted longer than other textile workers. The reasons for this may be related to occupational practices in the case of children who acquired skills early within the family, a lack of educational opportunities, bereavement, or financial necessity, particularly in cases where access to poor relief was limited or denied. No evidence has been identified in the sample E. D.s which indicated that women continued to work after marriage. Port Glasgow census data in 1841 did not identify 'Relation to Head of Family' as was the case in 1851<sup>67</sup> therefore any conclusion relating to status in 1841, for example head, wife, son, or daughter, can only be based on careful scrutiny, possible cross referencing with Church Registers<sup>68</sup> and the balance of probability. It is worthy of mention that Joan W. Scott and Louise A. Tilly (1975) noted: 'Only 25 percent of female

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<sup>63</sup> Bleacher (2), Spinner (4), Hemp (3), Warper (3), Heckler (4), Winder (1). Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>64</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>65</sup> *Population of Great Britain 1841 enumeration & age abstract Scotland*, (London: printed by W. Clowes and sons, Stamford Street, for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1843), Preface: p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>67</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow, 1841, 1851. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>68</sup> Information re marriage or birth may be found in Church Registers. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

cotton workers were married in the Lancashire districts in 1841.’<sup>69</sup> However, it is likely that a number of married women in Port Glasgow assisted in their husband’s business activities<sup>70</sup> in an ‘informal’ way which was not recorded in the census.

### 3.3.3 Importance of Irish Textile Workers in E. D. 574/2

The level of detail achieved in sample E. D. 574/2 which had the highest number of skilled textile workers has clearly demonstrated the economic importance of Irish workers to the textile industries in this area of Port Glasgow in 1841. Whilst the concentration of Irish people in this district has undoubtedly been illustrated, the individuality of first and second generation Irish people is also clear, and the varied contributions made by Irish people and opportunities available to them are apparent. Within this E. D. there were also 28 male labourers who were primarily Irish and aged between 15 and 55. However, it is not possible to establish where they worked but they may have contributed to textile production. In this E. D. it has been demonstrated that whilst Irish people were primarily in specific locations there is important evidence of the integration of people of different birthplaces in workplaces, locations in this district<sup>71</sup> and based on the census recording of inhabited houses within some households.<sup>72</sup>

This very detailed analysis of E. D. 574/2 in Port Glasgow in 1841 has illustrated the importance and individuality of Irish people in this small Scottish town before the famine and provided comparative research to that of Lobban after

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<sup>69</sup> Joan W. Scott, and Louise A. Tilly. “Women’s Work and the Family in Nineteenth-Century Europe.” p. 40 in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178370>.

<sup>70</sup> ‘In the period prior to the Industrial Revolution, therefore, while the majority of married women in the agricultural and industrial classes shared the activities of their husbands and had fairly stable employment in their homes, the position of many single women and those who were thrown on their own resources was often one of extreme difficulty.’ Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850*, (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1969), pp. 3, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Inhabited houses, p. 23.

the famine.<sup>73</sup> The proposition that ‘In Renfrewshire Irish male workers were chiefly labourers...’<sup>74</sup> has been qualified and also by utilising the clear evidence of the recording of women’s work in Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841)<sup>75</sup> the role of some Irish women at that time has been revealed. Whilst there is evidence of a ‘Little Ireland’ in Blackstons there is also evidence of integration in workplaces, locations, and households within this E. D.

### 3.3.4 Enumeration District 574/3

The earlier proposal that location and gender may be factors in the availability or choice of employment is supported by the following analysis and although the approach for this E. D. is slightly different it also confirms that the majority of weavers were male, and flax workers were typically female. As discussed earlier, frequently there was an overlapping of street names between E. D.s in Port Glasgow in 1841. This happened in sample E. D.s 574/2 and 574/3 involving Bay Street and Clarke’s Close. Similar birthplace and occupational patterns are apparent in these two E. D.s. Of 455 people in E. D. 574/3 45.9 per cent were born in Ireland; this is marginally higher than in E. D. 574/2 where of 534 people the percentage was 45.6.<sup>76</sup> In E. D. 574/3 there were 98 textile workers, five fewer than in 574/2, but the gender balance of workers differed between these two E. D.s. The Gourock Ropeworks was in E. D. 574/2 and there were 55 female workers and 48 male workers. In 574/3 which was further from the flax mill there were 46 female and 52 male workers.<sup>77</sup> Tables 3.4 and 3.5 demonstrate the range of occupations in E. D.s 574/3 and 574/2 and the clustering of similar workers in specific locations within the E.Ds. The total number of workers in

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<sup>73</sup> ‘The experience of the Irish migrants in Greenock of course might have been different from that of Irish settlers in other towns and districts, but if similar data could be secured for a number of other towns and cities, then a more complete picture of Irish settlements in Great Britain could be built up.’ Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 281.

<sup>74</sup> PP, 1836, (40), XXXIV, *Report on the state of the Irish poor in Great Britain*, pp. 131-3, 139-41 in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1948: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>76</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/3 and E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

each sector is provided which illustrates how many workers were not within a cluster.

**Table 3.4:**  
**Location and Textile Occupations in E. D. 574/3**

| Location             | Flax |    | Rope |   | Weaver |   | Bleacher |   | Mill Wright |   | Heckler |   | Winder |   |
|----------------------|------|----|------|---|--------|---|----------|---|-------------|---|---------|---|--------|---|
| Gender               | M    | F  | M    | F | M      | F | M        | F | M           | F | M       | F | M      | F |
| Guthrie's Close      | 1    | 4  |      |   | 10     |   |          |   | 1           |   |         |   |        | 1 |
| Salmond's Close      | 1    | 4  |      | 3 | 9      |   |          | 3 |             |   |         |   |        |   |
| Boyd's Close         |      | 15 |      |   | 11     |   |          |   | 2           |   |         | 1 |        |   |
| Well Close           | 1    | 5  |      |   | 3      |   |          | 1 |             |   |         |   |        |   |
| Total not in cluster | 1    | 8  | 1    |   | 10     |   |          | 1 |             |   | 1       |   |        |   |
| Total                | 4    | 36 | 1    | 3 | 43     |   |          | 5 | 3           |   | 1       | 1 |        | 1 |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/3.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

**Table 3.5:**  
**Location and Textile Occupations in E. D. 574/2**

| Location             | Flax |    | Rope |   | Weaver |   | Bleacher |   | Heckler |   | Winder |   | Hemp |   | Sail making |   | Spinner |   | Warper |   |
|----------------------|------|----|------|---|--------|---|----------|---|---------|---|--------|---|------|---|-------------|---|---------|---|--------|---|
| Gender               | M    | F  | M    | F | M      | F | M        | F | M       | F | M      | F | M    | F | M           | F | M       | F | M      | F |
| Blackstons           |      | 35 | 2    |   | 41     |   |          | 2 |         | 4 |        | 1 |      | 3 | 3           |   |         | 5 |        | 3 |
| Total not in cluster |      | 2  |      |   | 1      |   |          |   |         |   |        |   |      |   |             |   |         |   |        |   |
| Total                |      | 37 | 2    |   | 42     |   |          | 2 |         | 4 |        | 1 |      | 3 | 4           |   |         | 5 |        | 3 |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

The range of textile production activities and gender ratios identified in these two districts is clear, in both areas all weavers were male and in E. D. 574/3 only four men were involved in flax production. But some caution is required in interpreting 1841 census data and reaching conclusions, whilst these four men have been categorised in Table 3.4 as being involved in flax production, they had quite distinct roles.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, trends are apparent. It is clear from Table 3.4 that in 574/3 the location of textile workers was more varied within the district, whereas in 574/2 as is illustrated in Table 3.5 they were primarily located in Blackstons, although this may have been due to the availability of suitable employment, housing or possibly costs associated with rent. The recording of inhabited houses therefore distinct households in E. D. 574/3 is less

<sup>78</sup> For example, of the four male flax workers in E. D. 574/3 Table 3.4, in the census one was described as labourer f mill, one as lab flax mill, one as flax mill and the other as fireman f mill. Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/3. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

clear than in 574/2 so conclusions are more tentative. Based on surnames there is evidence of family groups, some people of Irish heritage and a group of female Irish flax workers who had a variety of surnames. But it is uncertain if households existed which comprised of 'independent' Irish women, that is a household where there was no male presence, and it was managed by women for women. On basis of surnames, birthplaces, and age there appears to be a trend within this E. D. that incoming Irish family groups arrived in Port Glasgow more recently than in E. D. 574/2. This supports the argument in this microhistory that each E. D. tells its own 'story'. This is illustrated by evidence suggesting in E. D. 574/3 there were 38 (20.9 per cent) of 181 Renfrewshire-born people who can be deemed to be of Irish heritage whereas in 574/2 this was 53 (26.2 per cent). Therefore of 455 people in this sample district 247 (54.2 per cent) were Irish-born or of Irish heritage. A small number of incoming Irish family groups in this district appear to have moved to Port Glasgow from other parts of Scotland or England.<sup>79</sup> In this E. D. as in 574/2 labourers have not been included in the figures however, in this district 22 male and two female labourers have been identified. Most of these labourers, including the two female labourers were Irish. The opportunities and experiences afforded first and second generation Irish people and 'newly' arrived Irish family groups must have varied in terms of opportunities for employment, education, and financial stability although in the absence of primary source data it is impossible to be more specific. The range of details collated thus far demonstrates the significant presence of Irish people in these areas of Port Glasgow in 1841 and illustrates the importance of recognising the individuality of Irish people in terms of occupation and residential patterns.

An illustration of locations in E. D. 574/3 of Port Glasgow is provided in Map 3.2, Page 88. Red highlighting shows Bay Street in the upper half of the map and moving from east to west Clarke's Close, Well Close, Boyd's Close, Salmond's Close, Guthrie's Close, and finally Whiteside's Close. A rope walk is highlighted in blue as is the Gourock Ropework Company's warehouse. This imparts some sense of the landscape of Port Glasgow, however since this map has been cropped and enhanced to aid clarity the density of housing and proximity of

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<sup>79</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2, and E. D. 574/3. [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

workplaces to each other and consequently the closeness of people to each other in E. D. 574/3 is not apparent. Some sense of this can be seen in Map 2.2a, Page 41 where the cramped housing conditions in the lanes close to the industrial buildings in the east of the town are more noticeable. Although the detail of this analysis of E. D. 574/3 differs slightly from that of 574/2 and allowing for any possible errors clear trends are apparent which continue to demonstrate the economic importance of Irish migrants to the textile industries of Port Glasgow in 1841. The varied residential patterns in these two districts can be associated with not only with occupation but, by implication birthplace and household composition, each of these districts has a distinct 'story'. There were clearly miniature and discrete 'Little Irelands' such as Blackstons within a larger 'Little Ireland'. In Blackstons there were a significant number of second generation Irish people and also more female than male textile workers which arguably was related to the proximity of the flax mill to Blackstone Buildings which is demonstrated in Map 3.1, Page 77. Household composition and age were also factors in the 'story' of Blackstons whilst there were a few households comprising of solely female workers there were also more diverse households when name, gender, and those under 15 years of age were considered. In E. D. 574/3 the gender balance of workers was reversed in so far as there were more male than female workers and the number of people of Irish heritage was fewer than in 574/2. This was probably due to the fact that some family groups had arrived in E. D. 574/3 not long before 1841 compared to some groups in E. D. 574/2 and some family groups had come from other parts of Scotland or England so their migratory journey must have been different from other migrants in E. D. 574.2. Thus, while both of these E. D.s had a high proportion of Irish people their experiences as individuals differed and therefore so did the 'stories' of these two E. D.s.

**Map 3.2: Port Glasgow - Sheet II.11.15. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].  
A Partial Reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/3.**



“Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland”.

[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk). This map has been cropped, enlarged, and enhanced to aid clarity. Highlighted: Blue = Rope Walk and Gourock Rope Work Company's Warehouse, Red = E. D. locations.

### 3.3.5 Enumeration District 574/4

The last of the three sample districts to be discussed is E. D. 574/4. Again, there was an overlapping of street names with earlier sample districts as in the case of Bay Street and Whitesides Close. It is important to recognise that only part of Ropework Lane was included in E. D. 574/4 and therefore it is only partially analysed in the following table which illustrates where textile workers were located in this district.

**Table 3.6:**  
**Location and Textile Occupations in E. D. 574/4**

| Location         | Flax |    | Rope |   | Weaver |   | Bleacher |   |
|------------------|------|----|------|---|--------|---|----------|---|
| Gender           | M    | F  | M    | F | M      | F | M        | F |
| Ropework Lane    | 2    | 5  |      |   | 6      |   |          |   |
| Black Bull Close |      | 7  | 1    |   | 23     | 1 | 1        |   |
| Sinclairs Close  |      | 18 |      |   | 26     | 1 |          |   |
| Total            | 2    | 30 | 1    |   | 55     | 2 | 1        |   |

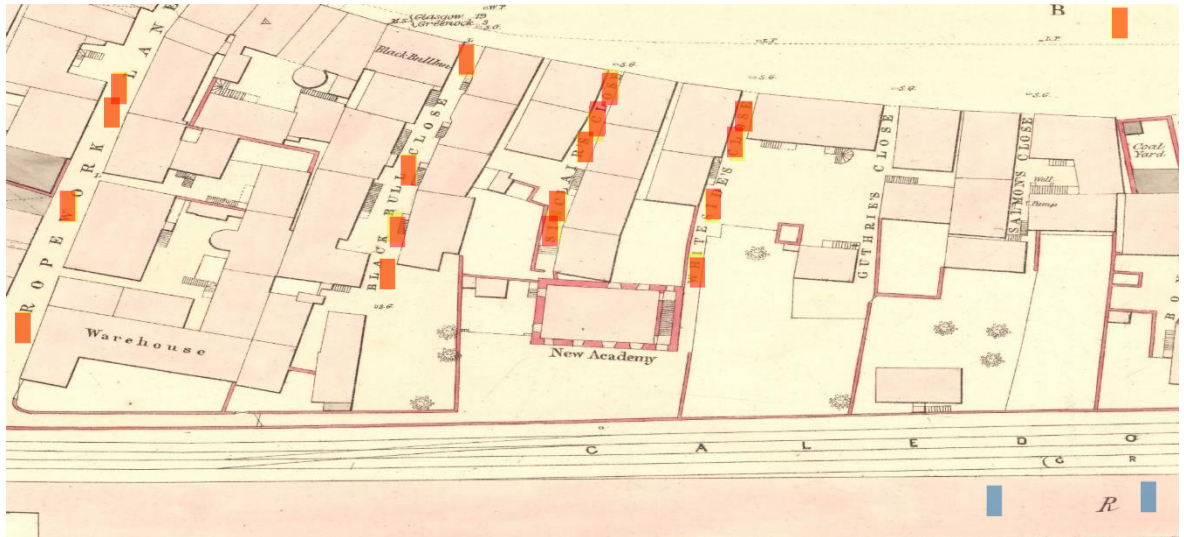
Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

The range of textile activities included in Table 3.6 is clearly not as varied as in the other sample districts, which may be attributable to this district being the furthest from the flax mill and spinning mill, although the gender balance is broadly the same. No skilled textile workers were identified in any of the areas of Bay Street included in this district, which again may be related to the distance from the works and different employment opportunities in this E. D. In common with the other sample districts most of the textile workers were Irish and there appear to have been several incoming Irish family groups. Of the people recorded as having been born in Renfrewshire, based on birthplace, surname, age and household, 44 (15.0 per cent) of 292 Renfrewshire-born people can reasonably be deemed to be of Irish heritage. Therefore of 653 people in this sample 367 (56.2 per cent) were Irish-born or of Irish heritage. This district which had the highest percentage of Irish-born people (49.4 per cent) also had the highest percentage of Irish people when persons of Irish heritage are included (56.2 per cent) but of the sample districts the least diverse and lowest number of textile workers.<sup>80</sup> A map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/4 is

<sup>80</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

provided below, Bay Street, Ropework Lane, Black Bull Close, Sinclair's Close and Whiteside's Close are highlighted in red, the rope walk is highlighted in blue.

**Map 3.3: Port Glasgow Sheet II.11.15. Surveyed: [1856], Published: [1858].**  
A Partial Reproduction of the map illustrating locations in E. D. 574/4.



“Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland”.

[Map images - National Library of Scotland \(nls.uk\)](https://www.nls.uk).

This map has been cropped, enlarged, and enhanced to aid clarity.

In this the last of the sample districts the employment profiles of Irish workers differed somewhat from the other sample E. D.s. Analysis of this district shows that there was a high number of Irish labourers which may be explained by the fact that Ropework Lane was close to the west end of the rope walk. This supports the proposal that workers were mainly located close to their place of work. Although labourers have not been included in tables thus far a comparison of the number of labourers in each of the sample districts is provided in Table 3.7.<sup>81</sup> There is evidence based on surname, age and household composition that male and female members of the same ‘family’ worked as labourers, and on occasions across generations in the part of Ropework Lane located in E. D. 574/4. In the other two sample districts the only example found within a ‘family’ was in E. D. 574/3 where what appears to have been a mother and son were both labourers.<sup>82</sup>

**Table 3.7:**  
**Number and Location of Labourers in E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4 in 1841**

| Location     | Ireland   |          | Renfrewshire |          | Scotland |   | England  |   | Not Known |   | Total by E. D. |          |
|--------------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------|----------|---|----------|---|-----------|---|----------------|----------|
|              | M         | F        | M            | F        | M        | F | M        | F | M         | F | M              | F        |
| E. D. 574/2  | 23        |          | 1            |          | 4        |   | 1        |   |           |   | 29             |          |
| E. D. 574/3  | 11        | 2        | 9            |          | 2        |   |          |   |           |   | 22             | 2        |
| E. D. 574/4  | 58        | 4        | 4            | 3        |          |   |          |   | 2         |   | 64             | 7        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>92</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>14</b>    | <b>3</b> | <b>6</b> |   | <b>1</b> |   | <b>2</b>  |   | <b>115</b>     | <b>9</b> |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

Undoubtedly most of the labourers identified in the three sample districts were male, Irish, and located in E. D. 574/4. Whilst it is uncertain where they worked it is probable that some of them were involved in textile production in a variety of ways. Of 713 skilled workers involved in textile production 292 (40.9 percent) of them were located within the sample E. D.s. as is illustrated in Table 3.8. In the sample districts there were also instances of textile workers from the same ‘family’ being employed in similar occupations and across generations as was the case with labourers described above.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 3.8:**  
**Number and Location of Textile Workers in E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4 in 1841**

|              | Ireland    |            | Renfrewshire |           | Scotland |          | England  |          | Not Known |          | Total by E. D. |            |
|--------------|------------|------------|--------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------------|------------|
| Location     | M          | F          | M            | F         | M        | F        | M        | F        | M         | F        | M              | F          |
| E. D. 574/2  | 34         | 51         | 12           | 4         | 1        |          | 1        |          |           |          | 48             | 55         |
| E. D. 574/3  | 44         | 33         | 4            | 8         | 2        | 4        | 1        |          | 1         | 1        | 52             | 46         |
| E. D. 574/4  | 50         | 25         | 8            | 4         | 2        |          | 1        | 1        |           |          | 61             | 30         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>128</b> | <b>109</b> | <b>24</b>    | <b>16</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b>  | <b>1</b> | <b>161</b>     | <b>131</b> |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

The figures in Table 3.8 do not identify people of Irish heritage therefore must be an underestimate of Irish workers. Nonetheless, this research has demonstrated the importance of recognising the individuality, employment, and residential patterns of Irish people in this small Scottish town before the famine. The employment of Irish working-class migrants in industrial Scotland began long *before* the famine in Ireland and clearly many were skilled or semi-skilled workers.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.4 Diversity

The above discussion has provided valuable detail relating to the economic activities of male and female workers in the three sample districts of Port Glasgow in 1841, however Table 3.9 also establishes that there were a greater number of Irish people in employment or receiving an income than any other group of people in the sample therefore Irish people were contributing significantly directly or indirectly to the economy of Port Glasgow. It is demonstrated in detail in Appendix 1 that in the three sample districts of Port Glasgow there were 682 people, 79 types of male occupation or means of income and 35 female types of occupation or means of income therefore employment opportunities were varied and a number of people of independent

<sup>84</sup> *Poor inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (C.)--Parts I. and II. Part I. Reports on the state of the poor, and on the charitable institutions in some of the principal towns; with supplement containing answers to queries. Part II. Report on the city of Dublin, and supplement containing answers to queries; with addenda to appendix (A.), and communications.* Command Papers 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, images 3007, 3008, 3009, pp. 131-133; images 3015, 3016, 3017, pp. 139-141; image 3033, p. 157.

means were present. The following table gives a brief overview and includes those of independent means.

**Table 3.9:**  
**Economic Details and Birthplace of People in E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4 in 1841**

|                                   | Renfrewshire |     | Ireland |      | Scotland |     | England |     | Foreign |   | Not Known |     |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-----|---------|------|----------|-----|---------|-----|---------|---|-----------|-----|
|                                   | M            | F   | M       | F    | M        | F   | M       | F   | M       | F | M         | F   |
| <b>Types of Occupation/Income</b> | 52           | 17  | 35      | 27   | 29       | 9   | 6       | 1   | 2       | 0 | 4         | 2   |
| <b>Total people</b>               | 126          | 66  | 264     | 127  | 52       | 29  | 8       | 1   | 2       | 0 | 5         | 2   |
| <b>Percentage of 685</b>          | 18.4         | 9.6 | 38.7    | 18.6 | 7.6      | 4.2 | 1.1     | 0.1 | 0.2     |   | 0.7       | 0.2 |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

Although Renfrewshire males appear to be involved in a greater number of occupation types or means of income it is probable that this figure includes second generation Irish males who have not been identified in this table. Persons recorded as being of independent means were probably not working-class, they were primarily female, Renfrewshire-born or Scottish but not exclusively so and were likely to have been widows. There were nine Irish women in this group, two Irish men and one Scottish man. Female servants were primarily Renfrewshire-born or Scottish although there were two Irish female servants. Of housekeepers identified four were Renfrewshire-born, three Irish-born and three Scottish.<sup>85</sup> These details confirm the distinct economic importance of Irish people in Port Glasgow before the famine and challenge blanket descriptions of ‘the Irish’ which neglect to recognise individuality. The discussion above has illustrated the importance of first and some second generation Irish men, boys, women, and girls to textile production in Port Glasgow and as is demonstrated in Appendix 1 the presence of Irish workers in other types of employment.

In Appendix 1 the place of birth and occupation of all persons enumerated in the three sample E. D.s is compared, this illustrates that people in the sample were born in variety of places and had differing economic circumstances. The presence of Irish workers across a broad range of occupations is clearly demonstrated. Where any uncertainty exists in relation to circumstances a number has been put in the ? column of these tables. The overall number so

<sup>85</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

recorded is six therefore they are not included in the calculations. Allowing for any errors of interpretation clear trends are apparent in this study. Irish people had varied economic circumstances and contributed in many ways to the economy of Port Glasgow in 1841. The total number of male and female Irish people identified in the sample E. D.s and shown in Table 3.9 is 391 more than double the 192 total of Renfrewshire-born people.<sup>86</sup> But the number of Renfrewshire-born people is likely to include some second generation Irish people so 391 is likely to be an underestimate of people of Irish heritage. Further research into the experiences of first and second generation Irish people in Port Glasgow before the famine can only enhance the understanding of contribution made by Irish people in the west of Scotland.

A statement by Slaven (1975) suggested Irish migrants to the West of Scotland, until 1840, were described as 'self-improvers' who were 'emigrating to better their condition'.<sup>87</sup> This supports a proposal by Miller (1985) that before the famine Ulster Protestants and Anglo Catholic migrants were striving for independence and 'upward social mobility in the free market economy'.<sup>88</sup> It was noted by Mitchell (1998):

In Renfrewshire Irish male workers were chiefly labourers. In Paisley and surrounding towns and villages they cut canals, deepened rivers and served tradesmen in the building industry; in Greenock they constituted most of those employed as labourers in the sugar houses and in the building industry, and probably the majority of those who worked at the docks.<sup>89</sup>

The evidence presented in this microhistory qualifies these generally applicable descriptions by considering Irish people as individuals whenever this is possible. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to propose that the comments by Slaven, Miller and Mitchell, referred to above, are compatible in so far as someone migrating to improve their condition and someone seeking independence may well have

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<sup>86</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

<sup>87</sup> Slaven, *The development of the west of Scotland: 1750-1960*, p. 144.

<sup>88</sup> Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America*, pp. 267-80. Cited in *Irish migrants in Britain, 1815-1914, A documentary history*, ed. Roger Swift, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> PP, 1836, (40), XXXIV, *Report on the state of the Irish poor in Great Britain*, pp. 131-3, 139-41 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 3.

envisaged these aims as being achieved by employment cutting canals or in the sugar houses of Greenock where there were opportunities for employment. Findings in this microhistory highlight the importance of considering context, time, place, and the relevance of scale. Generalisations which may appear in large scale studies, as a consequence of the volume of data, can prevent Irish people being portrayed as individuals with different experiences and aspirations. By analysing, in detail, Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) and cross referencing the outcome with other extant sources new perspectives have emerged which enable a greater understanding of Irish people as individuals in Port Glasgow. A more detailed understanding of the history of Port Glasgow has also emerged and it is proposed that further research may identify that there were many other areas with similar characteristics to Port Glasgow concealed within concentrations of Irish people in larger towns and cities.

In Port Glasgow in 1841 Irish people constituted an important part of the community as is illustrated in Table 3.10 which places the presence of Irish people within the context of a community in which 3,279 (46.9 per cent) of 6,983 people were born outside of the county of Renfrewshire.

**Table 3.10:**  
**Breakdown of the Population of Port Glasgow in 1841**

| Birthplace                | Number | Percentage of Total | Percentage of those born outside county |
|---------------------------|--------|---------------------|---|
| Renfrewshire              | 3,644  | 52.1                |   |
| Scotland                  | 1,185  | 16.9                | 36.1                                    |
| England                   | 86     | 1.2                 | 2.6                                     |
| Ireland                   | 1,993  | 28.5                | 60.7                                    |
| Foreign                   | 15     | 0.21                | 0.21                                    |
| Not Known                 | 60     | 0.85                |   |
| Total born outside County | 3,279  | 46.9                |   |
| Total Persons in Sample   | 1,642  | 23.5                |   |

Source: Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

The above demonstrates the complex nature of society in Port Glasgow in 1841 and highlights the importance of small studies which place the presence and importance of Irish people within a broader context. The discussion above has highlighted the differences between the sample E. D.s and the overlapping of some streets and lanes within them. This prompts the question since each E. D. had its own story would further research reveal that most individual streets and

lanes in Port Glasgow also had their own story to tell? Clearly a comparatively high number of Irish people within an area does not necessarily mean they were all in similar employment, although in some instances this was the case for example for textile workers in Blackstons and labourers in the part of Ropework Lane discussed earlier. In E. D. 574/4 which had the highest percentage of Irish people there were fewer textile workers than in any of the other sample E. D.s<sup>90</sup> undoubtedly other factors were in play.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The detailed analysis in this chapter has reinforced the need for and importance of studies such as this which focus on the experiences of Irish migrants in Scotland before the famine in Ireland. The occupational dominance of Irish workers in the textile industries of Port Glasgow before the famine has been clearly demonstrated and comparisons have been made with occupational patterns in Greenock where male Irish workers dominated in the sugar houses after the famine. The contrasts between the riverside towns of Greenock and Port Glasgow are striking considering they were geographically so close to each other. In both towns there were industries which were dominated by Irish workers, but these industries were markedly different in what was produced and, in the skills, required by workers. The gender and generational factors explored in this chapter affords a new understanding to employment generally in mid-nineteenth century Scotland. The presence of more established family groups has been identified alongside recognition of those who arrived shortly before 1841 and families who came from other parts of Scotland or England. Examples have been offered of households occupied by a group of 'independent' women employed in textile production in Port Glasgow. By rigorously seeking individuality fresh perspectives have emerged in relation to the experiences and contributions made by first and second generation Irish people in Scotland.

It has been demonstrated that in the three sample districts, in 1841, the number of Irish-born people and those of Irish heritage exceeded 50.0 per cent in each of these. It has been demonstrated some areas of Port Glasgow were 'Little

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<sup>90</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s. 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

Irelands' and within some of these a further 'Little Ireland' was present. This is based solely on the premise that a 'Little Ireland' comprises of an area in which a significant number of Irish people lived<sup>91</sup> not one based on segregation by choice or 'influence' from within a host community. No evidence of segregation has been detected in this microhistory and Irish people and other migrants were present in various areas throughout the town and formed part of a large diverse community. There is evidence of the integration of people of different birthplaces in the workplace, locations within the E. D.s and within some households. In Port Glasgow evidence of migrating Irish family groups and individuals has been detected which would have had differing effects on the generational dynamics of the town probably involving demands on housing, schooling and in some cases charitable support, however arguably this also contributed to the prosperity of the town by potentially providing more workers. The long term connections to Ireland and Irish people arguably had a positive influence as can be seen in the number of Irish people who were employed in the Gourrock Ropeworks<sup>92</sup> which normalised the presence of Irish people rather than creating a perception of Irish migrants as being 'alien'. Arguably this brought some level of economic and social stability to Port Glasgow.

Irish workers dominated the textile industries of Port Glasgow in 1841 although it has also been shown that Irish people had diverse occupational profiles. The proposal that Irish men in the West of Scotland were mainly labourers<sup>93</sup> has been disputed as it neglects to recognise the effects of 'clustering' and the important and varied economic contribution made by Irish men, boys, women, and girls in this small town in the West of Scotland. Whilst diverse occupational profiles have been demonstrated there is also evidence of residential patterns associated with types of employment. Generally, people lived close to their place of work although the restricted area of Port Glasgow would have had a limiting effect on

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<sup>91</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s. 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>92</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk), *Children's Employment Commission, second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*. Command Papers 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>93</sup> PP, 1836, (40), XXXIV, *Report on the state of the Irish poor in Great Britain*, pp. 131-3, 139-41 cited in Mitchell, *The Irish in the West of Scotland 1797-1848: trade unions, strikes and political movements*, p. 3.

availability and choice as would financial considerations in relation to rent. The industries of Port Glasgow at that time were dependent on the town's proximity to the river Clyde and were to a greater or lesser extent symbiotic. Irish men, boys, women, and girls formed a crucial element of the industrial processes. Without doubt, in the mid-nineteenth century, skilled and semi-skilled workers were important contributors to the industrial developments which took place in Scotland.<sup>94</sup> It has been demonstrated in this chapter that Irish people formed an integral part of the diverse community which lived and worked in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century.

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<sup>94</sup> W. W. Knox, *Industrial nation, work, culture and society in Scotland 1800-present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 36, 37.

## Chapter 4 Society of Port Glasgow in 1841

This chapter will demonstrate the close relationship between economic status and social experiences and build on the foundations of the research in relation to industry and employment established in Chapter 3. The importance of time, place and scale of enquiry will be illustrated as it pertains to Irish people in Port Glasgow in 1841 and a wider understanding of Irish migrants in Scotland. Aspects of Port Glasgow society relating to location, occupational choice, and the effects, if any, of gender and or age will be considered. A number of relevant comparisons will be made to Greenock and Dundee and studies by Lobban (1969-73) and Collins (1978).<sup>1</sup> The role played by women and children will be explored and relevant legislation which affected employment in factories and education identified. To facilitate more balanced conclusions social diversity will be investigated by examining, albeit to a lesser extent, E. D. 574/8, the E. D. which had the fewest number of Irish migrants in Port Glasgow in 1841.<sup>2</sup> Institutions and amenities in Port Glasgow will be discussed as will Poor Law provision. The experiences of employment and community life associated with education, churches and welfare had many common features for the population of Port Glasgow in 1841 regardless of birthplace, although ethnicity, on occasions, did shape some boundaries for example access to education or housing.

### 4.1 Port Glasgow Society

In Port Glasgow the proportion of female to male persons replicated demographic trends in England and Scotland where there were more females than males. However, the percentage of females in Port Glasgow was higher than England and Scotland generally as is demonstrated below. Closer examination shows patterns of ‘clustering’ in the towns which have been selected for the purposes of this research, arguably this ‘clustering’ was associated with gendered occupational opportunities. However, in some cases

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<sup>1</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’; Brenda Collins ‘Aspects of Irish Immigration into two Scottish towns’ (M.Phil. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1978) in *Irish economic and social history*: 6(1) (1979).  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1177/033248937900600106>.

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

this may also have been related to long standing patterns of migration and/or financial necessity rather than choice.

|                              |                             |                     |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| England:                     | Males 48.8%, Females 51.1%  | (Image 377 p. 373). |
| Scotland:                    | Males 47.3%, Females 52.6%  | (Image 641 p. 141). |
| County of Forfar:            | Males 46.5%, Females 53.4%, | (Image 639 p. 139). |
| Dundee, Burgh & Parish:      | Males 46.0%, Females 53.9%, | (Image 551 p. 51).  |
| County of Renfrew:           | Males 46.9%, Females 53.0%, | (Image 641 p. 141). |
| Greenock, Burgh & Parish:    | Males 48.8%, Females 51.1%, | (Image 605 p. 105). |
| Paisley, Town & Parish:      | Males 46.1%, Females 53.8%, | (Image 607 p. 107). |
| Port Glasgow, Town & Parish: | Males 45.2%, Females 54.7%, | (Image 607 p. 107). |

Source: Calculated from *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain* (Age Abstract, 1841). Command Papers 497.

The findings above suggest in towns, such as Dundee, Paisley, and Port Glasgow, where textile industries were significant sources of employment the female population was subsequently higher than that of males. It is reasonable to conclude the higher percentage of females in Port Glasgow was a result of the predominance of textile production, comparatively limited alternative employment opportunities and the fact that Port Glasgow was a port with the likelihood that a proportion of the male population was at sea. In 1843, it was stated by 'Mr Robert Freeland Treasurer for the Poor in Port-Glasgow'<sup>3</sup> that:

Pauperism has increased within the last six years. In 1838 the number was 195, and it has increased gradually to 245 in the present year. This increase may partly be attributed to the decay of trade in the town. It is likewise owing, however, in no small degree to an unusual number of deaths at Demerara of seamen belonging to the port. I have no doubt that within the last two years from twelve to twenty widows with young children have, in that time, become a burden on our funds.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly there were sailors 'belonging to' Port Glasgow and this influenced not only the demographic of the town but demands on Poor Law provision and at times may have created an imperative for some women to seek employment. In the three sample E. D.s, excluding those of independent means, 34 different female occupations were identified the majority of which were related to textile

<sup>3</sup> Robert Freeland, *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, image 492, p. 482.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

production.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, textile related activities provided a number of sources of employment for some women in Port Glasgow in 1841.

By implication Greenock only about three miles along the banks of the Clyde from Port Glasgow attracted more incoming male than female workers, the female population in Greenock was proportionately smaller than that of Dundee, Paisley, and Port Glasgow.<sup>6</sup> Lobban's study examining data from 1851 and 1891 indicated the industrial base in Greenock was varied, and provided many opportunities for male workers, especially in sugar refining where male workers on occasion followed their fathers into this employment and dock work where male Irish workers were prevalent. Nonetheless, in Greenock Irish men were also present in skilled occupations, for example as shoemakers and tailors.<sup>7</sup> In relation to occupational choices Collins noted: 'Irish settlement reflected the pull of job opportunities at least as much as the push of home circumstances... The peak of Irish settlement in Greenock was in the late 1880s and was male dominated.'<sup>8</sup> Clearly migration was influenced by complex choices in relation to gender, employment opportunities and financial necessity with associated implications for migrants and host communities generally. It is important to recognise that of the four towns which have been discussed the population of Port Glasgow was the smallest<sup>9</sup> therefore the high percentage of females shown above relates to a smaller population.

The significant female presence in Port Glasgow Town and Parish, described above merits further consideration, women of all ages numbered 3,833, (54.7 per cent) and men of all ages 3,174, (45.2 per cent). There were proportionately more females than males, in all of the age ranges, except in the five and under

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<sup>5</sup> Calculated from Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>6</sup> Calculated from *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, Dundee Burgh & Parish, image 551 p. 51, Greenock Burgh & Parish, image 605 p. 105, Paisley Town & Parish, image 607 p. 107, Port Glasgow, Town & Parish image 607 p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', pp. 271-274.

<sup>8</sup> Collins, 'The origins of Irish immigration to Scotland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' in *Irish immigrants and Scottish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Calculated from *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, Dundee Burgh & Parish, image 551 p. 51, Greenock Burgh & Parish, image 605 p. 105, Paisley Town & Parish, image 607 p. 107, Port Glasgow, Town & Parish image 607 p. 107.

ten age group where the difference was marginal. In the 15 and under 60 years age range 56.6 per cent of this group were female. The age range of 15 and under 60 years was the cohort most likely to have an occupation and therefore making a financial contributing to the economy of Port Glasgow.<sup>10</sup> The proportion of male and female workers across all sectors in the three sample districts and persons of independent means are illustrated in Appendix 1. In the three sample E. D.s excluding those of independent means, which comprised of 3 men (0.5 per cent) and 47 women (2.8 per cent), there were 454 male and 178 female workers.<sup>11</sup> Therefore in the sample 225 (5.8 per cent) of the female population and 457 (14.3 per cent) of the male population of Port Glasgow were recorded as having an occupation or having independent means. Such detail is relevant as it illustrates levels of employment or those who had independent means in the sample districts where the proportion of Irish people was significant. A further perspective is achieved by considering the total number of skilled textile workers, excluding labourers, in Port Glasgow in 1841. Overall, there were 713 textile workers the majority of whom were Irish, 444 (62.2%) were male and 269 (37.7%) were female.<sup>12</sup> Arguably, the occupational profile of Irish women and girls in Scotland before the famine is a line of enquiry which would benefit from further investigation. The need for an appreciation of the individuality of the experiences of Irish women has been expressed by Mary E. Daly.<sup>13</sup> A greater understanding, of women as workers, may be achieved through re-examination of the conventional distinction which separated home and work and affords appropriate status to the complex role of women as workers in domestic and formal economic settings in the early nineteenth century. It was proposed by Alice J. Albert (1990) that 'Home-workers for whom this separation

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<sup>10</sup> Calculated from *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, image 606 p. 106, image 607 p.107.

<sup>11</sup> Calculated from Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E.Ds 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>12</sup> Calculated from Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841) [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>13</sup> Mary E. Daly 'Irish women and the diaspora: why they matter', p. 21 in *Women and the Irish diaspora identities Theories, concepts and new perspectives*, eds., D. A. J. MacPherson and Mary J. Hickman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

did not apply, have remained an obscure subject for study.<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly this is an area which would benefit from further scrutiny.

The 'story' of Irish people in Port Glasgow is far more complex than identifying the number of migrants who were there in 1841. A greater understanding of the dynamics of Port Glasgow society has been achieved by considering the gender and age ratios which have been identified in this research. The economic and social importance and individuality of Irish people who lived there has emerged alongside a sense of the opportunities which were available to them and some of the constraints which they faced. In Port Glasgow in 1841 more than half of the population was aged between 15 and 59 years old.<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, in the three sample E. D.s regardless of birthplace most of the people who were recorded as having an occupation were within this age range.

## 4.2 Proportion of First and Second Generation Irish People in the Sample Districts of Port Glasgow in 1841

Although, in this study, there already has been some discussion of second generation Irish people this aspect of Port Glasgow society will now be examined further. In Scotland identification of second generation Irish people was neglected in the 1841 census<sup>16</sup> but interrogation of census returns enables some conclusions to be mooted. The three sample E. D.s comprise of 1,642 people, which was 23.5 per cent of the population of Port Glasgow. There were 776 people who were born in Ireland and based on surname, birthplace, and age a further 135 people who can be deemed to be of Irish heritage, that is one or both parents were born in Ireland. Therefore, in this sample of 23.5 per cent of the population of Port Glasgow there were 911 people (55.4 per cent) who were born in Ireland or of Irish heritage. This identification of first and second generation Irish people in the three sample E. D.s<sup>17</sup> has illustrated the significant

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<sup>14</sup> Alice J. Albert 'Fit work for women: sweated home-workers in Glasgow, c1875-1914.' p.158, in *The world is ill divided women's work in Scotland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*, eds., Eleanor Gordon and Esther Breitenbach (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Calculated from *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, image 606 p. 106, image 607, p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> Handley, *The Irish in Scotland 1798-1845*, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

presence of Irish people as members of the wider society in this small town. The sample, albeit modest, has reinforced the importance of, as Ó Tuathaigh suggested, identifying people of Irish heritage in mid-nineteenth century Scotland.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, identifying second generation Irish people more generally in Port Glasgow would contribute meaningfully to an understanding of the experiences of Irish people in Scotland before the famine.

In this study of Port Glasgow aspects of migration have been considered by examining patterns of relocation. Motives for migration whether by an individual or a group differed and had an effect on not only migrants themselves but on the host community regardless of whether they settled temporarily or permanently. Based on analysis of name, birthplace, age, and occupation some Irish 'families' migrated to Port Glasgow before 1841, as a 'productive family group'. Children and adolescents in those families contributed to the household income by working, often in occupations which were similar to those of older family members or siblings.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 3, different patterns, and timescales of migration by Irish people to Port Glasgow before the famine were identified within the three sample E. D.s. Nonetheless, pre and post famine migratory patterns of Irish people to Scotland are apparent.

Collins (1979) in her study of the integration of Irish communities in Paisley and Dundee examined 1851 census data and commented 'The characteristics of the Dundee Irish replicated those of the household production in Ireland, with young adult sons and daughters being employed in weaving and yarn production.'<sup>20</sup> Whilst there are broadly similar occupational features when comparing families in Dundee and Port Glasgow the study by Collins is after the famine and of a much larger population. The findings in this research differ in some respects from the proposal by Collins<sup>21</sup> and this will be discussed later. In his detailed study of Greenock Lobban consulted 1851 and 1891 census data, but he did not comment on the presence of incoming Irish 'productive family groups'. Although,

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<sup>18</sup> Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in nineteenth-century Britain: problems of integration', p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.  
[www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>20</sup> Collins, 'Aspects of immigration into two Scottish towns', in *Irish economic and social history*. p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

he did note 'many of the local-born workers employed in the sugar refineries were the sons of earlier Irish immigrants.'<sup>22</sup> Therefore trends are apparent in these places which indicate a similarity of occupational tendencies within families, however this may have been more closely related to the industrial sectors which were active and the opportunities which were available in them rather than to individual choice or agency which highlights the crucial nature of context.

Despite the significant presence of Irish people in the sample E. D.s there is limited evidence of second generation Irish people engaging in occupations the same as their parents, but this may have been influenced by location, changing industrial processes or by the age of some young people of Irish heritage in 1841. A number were too young to join the labour market at the time of the census and examination of the 1851 census may identify trends similar to those detected by Lobban in Greenock. However, these proposals must be viewed within the context that the formatting of census data in 1841 and 1851 differed, in 1841 'Relation to Head of Family' was not included and there was a rounding down of ages.<sup>23</sup> Therefore conclusion reached in this dissertation pertaining to family groups and occupations in 1841 have been founded on rigorous scrutiny and the balance of probability. Nonetheless, Irish people were a significant presence in Port Glasgow at that time and the existence of productive family groups within the varied established Irish communities may have lent a degree of cohesion to Port Glasgow society. The analysis above has demonstrated some of the distinct factors which were present in patterns of Irish migration and has offered new perspectives in relation to the presence of second generation Irish people in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century.

### 4.3 Employment and Society in Port Glasgow in 1841

The varied economic importance of Irish people in Port Glasgow in 1841 was demonstrated in Chapter 3 and by returning to consider aspects of employment again the social experiences of Irish people become more apparent and the

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<sup>22</sup> Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', p. 271.

<sup>23</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow, 1841, 1851. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk), *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 496, Preface, image 7, p. 3.

economic and social circumstances of women in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century are explored. In Port Glasgow in 1841 Irish people contributed substantially to the economy as workers and by implication to differing degrees as consumers. Excluding those of independent means, the occupational profiles of individuals in the sample districts clearly demonstrates the predominance of male and female Irish workers and the variety of roles which they occupied. A total of 454 male workers were identified, of these 264 (58.1 per cent) were Irish, 78 male occupations were found, and Irish workers were engaged in 35 of these. Renfrewshire-born males of whom there were 124 (27.3 per cent) were engaged in 51 of the occupations, only eight of which appear to have been related to textile production and involved 23 male workers. Clearly there were significantly more Irish male workers, but they were involved in fewer occupations than Renfrewshire-born males, although the presence of Irish male workers in textile manufacturing was substantial. But, the above may be an under-estimate of Irish workers since second generation Irish males in the Renfrewshire or Scotland numbers have not been identified. Of Irish male workers 100 (37.4 per cent) were recorded as labourers, and 120 (45.4 per cent) including apprentices were weavers of various types.<sup>24</sup> Supported by the analysis in Appendix 1, in this sample of Port Glasgow in 1841, Irish male workers were not predominately labourers. Excluding those of independent means in the sample districts 178 female workers were identified, of these 118 (66.4 per cent) were Irish, and of the 34 female occupations Irish workers were involved in 26, albeit there was a predominance in work associated with flax. There were 41 (23.0 per cent) Renfrewshire-born female workers involved in 16 of the 34 occupations, seven of which were related to textile production. Therefore, a smaller number of Renfrewshire-born women were involved in fewer occupations than Irish-born women and Renfrewshire-born women had a limited presence in textile production. This may be an underestimate of Irish workers due to second generation Irish females not having been identified in the Renfrewshire or Scottish group.

By building on research by Collins some similarities have been identified between Dundee and Port Glasgow. Collins, utilising 1851 Census data, proposed

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<sup>24</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1840). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

that in Dundee significant differences existed between Irish and Scots migrants, specifically in the occupational patterns of men, women, and children as a result of the predominance of Irish workers in the linen textile industry.<sup>25</sup> In the Port Glasgow sample, excluding those of independent means, there were 51 Scottish male workers involved in 28 varied occupations but only 5 workers were engaged in textile related activities, compared to 264 Irish-born male workers who were involved in 35 different occupations. Likewise of 17 Scottish-born female workers engaged in 8 different occupations only 5 were involved in textile related activities. Therefore, in the sample there were far fewer Scottish-born women who had an occupation than the 118 Irish-born women who were engaged in 26 different occupations. The number and occupational profiles of Scottish and Irish migrants in this sample of Port Glasgow in 1841 were demonstrably different<sup>26</sup> which bears similarities to Collins' findings in Dundee where Scots were 'only marginally involved in the textile industry.'<sup>27</sup> Differences in financial profiles are also apparent in Port Glasgow. Men and women of independent means, of whom there were 50 in total, were primarily born in Renfrewshire or Scotland, nine Irish women but no Irish men have been identified in this research.<sup>28</sup> Clearly people in Port Glasgow experienced significant variations in economic and social circumstances some of which may have been influenced by place of birth.

The contribution made by people in the sample to the industries and economy of Port Glasgow *before* the famine is illustrated in Appendix 1 which includes everyone who was recorded as having an occupation, or being of independent means.<sup>29</sup> The disparate economic contribution demonstrated by so many Irish people contrasts with the adverse portrayal of Irish migrants after the famine in

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<sup>25</sup> Collins, 'Aspects of immigration into two Scottish towns', in *Irish economic and social history*. p. 72.

<sup>26</sup> This is demonstrated further in Appendix 1.

<sup>27</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk), Collins, 'Aspects of immigration into two Scottish towns', in *Irish economic and social history*. p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

the *Glasgow Herald* (1853)<sup>30</sup> referred to earlier. Divergent interpretations such as these, whilst relating to different places and population sizes and which are not comparing like for like illustrate the importance of context when considering the history of Irish people in Scotland. On the premise an individual's economic and social circumstance are inherently linked, a perception which was explored and supported by Lobban in relation to Greenock,<sup>31</sup> the significant economic contribution made by Irish people in Port Glasgow before the famine may have favourably influenced the social standing of some Irish people who were enumerated in Port Glasgow in 1841. Clearly the Gourrock Ropework Company relied on Irish workers in 1843<sup>32</sup> and this research has shown that in 1841 the majority of the skilled workers were Irish.<sup>33</sup> As has been illustrated in Table 3.3, 637 of the 713 skilled textile workers were involved in either flax, rope making or weaving and comprised of 410 (64.3 per cent) male workers, and 227 (35.6 per cent) female workers.<sup>34</sup> Therefore male and female Irish workers contributed substantially in a variety of ways to the economy of Port Glasgow in 1841.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.4 The Economic Role of Women and Children

Maxine Berg (1991) questioned if assessment of the Industrial Revolution would change if the employment and income earning activities of not only men, but also of women and children were examined. This is supported by Christopher A. Whatley's (1994) statement:

Whatever we may suspect, therefore, currently we have a less than adequate idea of the part played by females in the Scottish economy prior to the Victorian era...While the main purpose of this essay has been to enhance our understanding of the process of Scottish industrialisation, in a much more modest way it serves too to emphasise the value of regional studies as a means of better comprehending the course and nature of European industrialisation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 14 March, 1853, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', pp. 274-275.

<sup>32</sup> *Children's Employment Commission, second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*. Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>33</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>34</sup> Please see Table 3.3, p. 75. Calculated from Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>35</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>36</sup> Christopher A. Whatley, 'Women and the economic transformation of Scotland c. 1740-1830', in *Scottish economic & social history*, Volume 14, Issue 1, May 1994, pp. 19, 35, 36.

This microhistory of Port Glasgow contributes not only to an understanding of the role of women and children, but Irish women and children, in the mid-nineteenth century. Berg noted that by the mid-nineteenth century labour conditions which had historically been particular to the Industrial Revolution had changed.<sup>37</sup> This invites the question to what extent was industrial change in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century a matter of evolution rather than revolution? Time and place exerted important influences, demands, and tensions. Industrialisation at one time was considered a revolutionary process but following the influence of new economic history became to be perceived as evolutionary in nature.<sup>38</sup>

In the three sample E. D.s Irish women played a significant role in the flax industries of Port Glasgow as illustrated in Appendix 1. There were nine female workers under the age of 15 in the sample. This included five Irish-born flax workers, the youngest of whom was aged 11, and one Renfrewshire-born flax worker aged 10. All other female flax workers were between 15 and 59 years old. Therefore, in this sample only 6 (3.3 per cent) female flax workers were under the age of 15. The remaining three young female workers in the sample E. D.s were born in Renfrewshire, two were female servants the youngest of whom was eight and the third worker a labourer was aged 12. Yet whilst Irish people in this sample of Port Glasgow in 1841 had distinct occupational profiles<sup>39</sup> the extent to which this replicated their employment in Ireland cannot, in the absence of primary source evidence, be determined although it is likely a number of them would have had some experience of textile production.

In his consideration of child labour, it was proposed by Douglas A. Galbi in 'Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills' that:

The division of tasks promoted the division of laborers: the factory manager could assign to each task the lowest type of worker - man woman, or child - able to perform that task.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Maxine Berg, 'Women's work and the industrial revolution', *Refresh*, 12, spring 1991, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>38</sup> D McCloskey, 'The industrial revolution, 1780-1860: a survey' in *The economic history of Britain since 1700, Vol. 1, 1700-1860*, eds., R. Floud and D. McCloskey (Cambridge, 1981), cited in W. W. Knox, *Industrial nation: work, culture and society in Scotland, 1800-present*, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>40</sup> Douglas A. Galbi, 'Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills' in *Journal of population economics*, Volume 10, Issue 4 (10/1997). p. 358.

Galbi also described that, in 1835, a survey of 982 mills in England and Scotland 'before the Factory Act of 1833 had fully taken effect, indicated that 43% of the workforce was under 18 (Factory Reports 1835).'<sup>41</sup> Although he also noted that in Manchester cotton mill workers under 18 had reduced from 47% in 1816-1819 to 39% in 1835.<sup>42</sup> Therefore based on the discussion above, it is reasonable to suggest that in Port Glasgow in 1841, fewer young persons were engaged in textile manufacturing processes than in some cotton mills 1835, albeit there were some differences in the age ranges employed<sup>43</sup> and in the overall numbers involved. Findings by Collins in her examination of the occupation of boys and girls aged between 10 and 14 years old in Dundee and Paisley in 1851 has value as a comparison in relation to Port Glasgow in 1841 despite the differences in scale of enquiry and timing. The availability or lack of unregulated employment for boys and girls in these locations was arguably an important factor which encouraged or inhibited the employment of young persons. Collins noted that in Dundee and Paisley within this age group more than 40 per cent of boys and 40 per cent of girls were in employment, the majority of them in textiles, but non weaving.<sup>44</sup> This differs from the sample of Port Glasgow where of males in employment 31 (11.7%) were young boys and of females in employment 9 (7.0%) were young girls. Although the age range used in this chapter, referring to Port Glasgow was of those less than 15 years old<sup>45</sup> this does not detract from the significance of these findings. Factors which were also in play, include the differing number of young people in this age range potentially in employment in Dundee, Paisley, and the sample of Port Glasgow. The availability of work suitable for children and young people was influenced by industrial processes, opportunities in each of the three towns, the preferences of parents, employers, and legislation. In Port Glasgow a number of young girls were engaged in filling pirns for the weavers in a factory and in common rope works boys could be

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<sup>41</sup> Douglas A. Galbi, 'Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills' in *Journal of population economics*, Volume 10, Issue 4 (10/1997). p. 358.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Galbi 'Child labor and the division of labor in the early English cotton mills', p. 358, Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>44</sup> Collins, *Aspects of Irish immigration into two Scottish towns (Dundee and Paisley) during the mid-nineteenth century*, (MPhil. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1978), pp. 150, 151. <https://era.ed.ac.uk/>.

<sup>45</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

employed turning a wheel which twisted the fibres of the hemp together.<sup>46</sup> Similarly in Paisley and Dundee children under the age of eleven were employed in filling pirns or bobbins for the weavers or manufacturers.<sup>47</sup> Collins commented that it was clear from her discussion that ‘most of the textile employment of this age group in Dundee and Paisley took place other than in regulated spinning mills...’<sup>48</sup> The extent to which legislation influenced the employment of children and young people in Port Glasgow in 1841 is discussed later in this chapter. Clearly any comparison with Collins’ findings in Dundee and Paisley and this research has to be considered in the context of the above discussion.

Further insight into the employment of young people in this sample is achieved by considering male workers in Port Glasgow who were less than 15 years old. There were 31 male workers under the age of 15, who had differing occupations and birthplaces. Of these 15 male textile workers, most of whom were Irish and weavers, were identified. Several of these workers were aged 10. There is evidence some workers in this age group were part of productive family groups particularly those who were weavers.<sup>49</sup> This has some similarity to Collins’ findings related to productive Irish family groups in Dundee.<sup>50</sup> Ten male weaver under the age of 15 have been identified in the wage lists of The Gourrock Ropeworks Company. All of these young people were born in Ireland, except one who was born in Renfrewshire. Within the constraints of at times unclear writing, matching names with census data and wage lists and occupational activities which included the manufacture of four qualities of sail-cloth, Russia duck, filtering-cloths for sugar boiling, packsheets and sacking<sup>51</sup> the wages of the

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<sup>46</sup> *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures.* Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1197 p. l 47, image 1198 p. l 48.

<sup>47</sup> Collins, *Aspects of Irish Immigration into two Scottish towns (Dundee and Paisley) during the mid-nineteenth century*, pp. 151, 152. <https://era.ed.ac.uk/>

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>49</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>50</sup> Collins, ‘Aspects of immigration into two Scottish towns’, in *Irish economic and social history* p. 72.

<sup>51</sup> *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*, Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

weavers under 15 years of age appear to have been comparable to that of other older workers.<sup>52</sup>

It is important to situate the above interpretation in a wider context. In Port Glasgow in 1841 of 713 skilled textile workers there were 53 under the age of 15, which included 13 female workers. These figures take no account of unskilled workers or labourers involved in textile production therefore is likely to be an underestimate of workers under the age of 15. In the sample there were some workers under the age of 15 engaged in occupations other than textile production. The extent to which this is a true reflection of employment practices throughout Port Glasgow in 1841 it is impossible to say based solely the sample. Nonetheless, it is clear that in 1841 Port Glasgow society included a not insignificant number of male workers and some female workers under the age of 15. In the absence of specific primary source material, it remains unclear if the employment of young people, some of whom were children, was motivated by custom, parental preference, necessity, or a combination of these factors. It was not uncommon in the mid-nineteenth century for children and young persons to be employed in factories and this was subject to regulation.<sup>53</sup>

Some of the general issues involved in parts of Scotland are illustrated in the report by Leonard Horner in *Reports of Inspectors of Factories to Secretary of State for Home Dept., 1835*:

There were several instances where the registers of workers and the time books were not so regularly kept as they ought to have been, and the certificates of age of the children and young persons were very often found without the counter-signature of a magistrate; but in so far as regards the non-employment of children under nine years of age, the restriction of children under 12 years of age to nine hours a day, or 48 hours of weekly labour ; the restriction of young persons under 18 years of age to 12 hours daily, and 69 hours of weekly labour; and the restrictions against working in the night; the Act has been very generally observed.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd. Rope makers and textile manufactures*. GB 248 UGD 042/5/7, Census of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4. [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

<sup>53</sup> *Reports of Inspectors of Factories to Secretary of State for Home Dept., 1835*. House of Commons, Paper Number 78.

<sup>54</sup> Report by Leonard Horner Esq. 17 August 1835. *Reports of Inspectors of Factories to Secretary of State for Home Dept., 1835*. House of Commons, Paper Number 78, image 4, p. 4.

Evidence of possible economic necessity which involved the borrowing of money from an employer against a child's labour has not been found in relation to Port Glasgow, although this appears to have been relatively common in some parts of England, 'In some few districts it is a common practice for parents to borrow money of the employers, and to repay the loan out of their Children's labour. This is particularly the case in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and Warrington...'<sup>55</sup> Clearly in the mid-nineteenth century the work undertaken by women and children was significant, multi-faceted and situated within complex economic circumstances, practices, constraints, and opportunities as the findings in this study of Port Glasgow and the work by Collins<sup>56</sup> in relation to Dundee and Paisley has illustrated.

It is argued in this dissertation that it is insufficient to merely recognise the number of male or female workers, their respective ages and in which sector they worked. What did employment mean for the workers involved? The following discussion provides insight into the experiences of men, boys, women and girls. In a report by T. Tancred (1843) relating to the Minor Branches of Industry in the West of Scotland it was stated: 'of rope and sail works the chief are at Glasgow and Greenock.'<sup>57</sup> He noted that generally, boys in common rope-works were mainly engaged in turning a wheel which twisted the fibres of the hemp together as they were loosened from the spinner's hands. Boys would also use a device called a fiddle to keep the threads even and regular as they were twisted together into yarn. On entering the works boys earned between 2s. and 2s. 6d per week which could have risen to 6s. by the time they were 17 years old. This report also enables a wider understanding female employment and the specific work in which some women were engaged. In the works of Messrs. Baine and Co. proprietors of a large rope-work and sail-cloth manufactory in Port Glasgow a particular type of rope known as Manilla cordage was made. This was lighter, more durable, and commanded a higher price than that made from common Russian hemp and was being made entirely by female workers in a long

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<sup>55</sup> *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures.* Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 42, p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> Collins, *Aspects of Irish Immigration into two Scottish towns (Dundee and Paisley) during the mid-nineteenth century.* <https://era.ed.ac.uk/>.

<sup>57</sup> T. Tancred, *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures.* Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1197, p. 147.

apartment above stairs. Young girls aged from 10 to 12 years earned 2 shillings a week. This was for splicing yarn together after it had been spun the length of the shed. Spinners earned from 4s. 6d. to 5s. 6d. and were paid by the piece. In this report 'rope-making' was not considered to adversely affect a worker's health provided work was not excessively prolonged as it involved varied exercise in fresh air protected from the weather. However, some concerns were mooted by Tancred in relation young workers' education and moral values. It appears generally at that time employment was conducted primarily as a financial transaction between employer and employee. The concerns expressed by Tancred seem to have been general in nature and did not specifically apply to rope-works, where he noted few children were employed and there were opportunities for masters to oversee the conduct of younger workers <sup>58</sup> The extent to which Tancred's concerns influenced or changed society in Port Glasgow or elsewhere is unclear.

In the West of Scotland, the manufacturing of 'sail-cloth' a branch of hand-loom weaving was only undertaken in Greenock and Port Glasgow. Tancred stated that the Port Glasgow works employed around 400 looms in a large factory. A number of these looms were operated by women, but the majority were worked by males who were not under 15 years of age. Between 80 to 100 girls mainly over 9 years of age filled pirns for the weavers.<sup>59</sup> Pirns have been described as being the same as bobbins,<sup>60</sup> and generally girls went from filling pirns to the mill.<sup>61</sup> It is reasonable to suggest that the progression from filling pirns to the mill may have been associated with the apparently low skilled repetitive task involved and possible effects of a consequential lack of schooling. Tancred referring to evidence which appeared later in his report<sup>62</sup> commented: 'most of these being Irish are exceedingly illiterate.'<sup>63</sup> The use of such terminology which appears to associate 'being Irish' with illiteracy at least by implication resonates with negative stereotypical imagery provoked by references to 'aliens' and 'the

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<sup>58</sup> *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures.* Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1197 p. l 47, image 1198, p. l 48.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, image 1197 p. l 47.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, image 1580, p. n 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, Image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, image 1197 p. l 47, image 1198 p. l 48.

Irish'. It is clear Irish workers were from a young age economically important to the prosperity of Port Glasgow and therefore were significant members of society regardless of individual levels of literacy. In some cases, it may have been their importance as workers and productive family members which prevented or limited their access to education.

Differing opinions have been offered in relation to schooling and access to education. Helen Corr noted in 'An Exploration into Scottish Education' (2022) that a report related to Scottish millworkers (1833) showed that 96 per cent of them could read and 53 per cent could write compared with figures of 86 per cent and 43 per cent for England.<sup>64</sup> However, Corr also referred to George Lewis who 'found that only 1 in 12 of the population attended day schools, and in this Scotland was lagging behind Prussia, France and part of the United States.'<sup>65</sup> Constraints on entry into education may have been widespread in the mid-nineteenth century as the education of children was not compulsory until 1872 when it was stated in the Education (Scotland) Bill<sup>66</sup>:

It shall be the duty of every parent to provide elementary education in reading, writing, and arithmetic for his children, between five and thirteen years of age, and if unable from poverty to pay therefor, to apply to the parochial board of the parish or burgh in which he resides...<sup>67</sup>

Before the Act of 1872 the provision of opportunities for education did not necessarily mean that children attended school. Financial pressures may have resulted in some children having to work from a young age. Although, in Port Glasgow, some measure of possible financial stability is demonstrated in the following. It was suggested that Archibald Baine should be remembered as 'one of the founding fathers of the Gourock Ropework Company.'<sup>68</sup> This Company was established in Port Glasgow since 1797 when it acquired the Port Glasgow Rope

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<sup>64</sup> Helen Corr, 'An exploration into Scottish education' in *People and society in Scotland 1830-1914*, W. Hamish Fraser and R. J. Morris, eBook 2022. p. 378.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Education (Scotland). A bill [as amended in committee, on re-commitment, and on consideration as amended] to amend and extend the provisions of the law of Scotland on the subject of education, 1872.* Paper Number 210, image 1, p. i.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, image 32, p. 28.

<sup>68</sup> Blake, 'The Gourock', p. 32.

and Duck Company.<sup>69</sup> Mr Baine, a nominal partner, was manager of the Company from the early 1780s when it was located in Gourock. Mr Baine's signature disappeared from the company minutes of 1843.<sup>70</sup> The level of continuity and opportunities for employment in Port Glasgow within this enterprise must have resulted in some degree of economic and social stability in the town.

It was reported by Tancred that the Gourock Rope and Sail Manufactory of Baine and Company in Port Glasgow employed a Henry Crawford as overseer of the hand-loom weaving factory and bleaching. Tancred noted in the flax-mill, the factories, and the rope-walks, there were approximately 1200 people of whom not more than 50 were 'Scotch'. Young people who worked filling pirns for the weavers were primarily girls aged from nine years and upward and they worked from around six in the morning to seven in the evening which was the mill hours. Generally, following this type of employment girls went to work in the mill and boys often got a loom. In the evidence it was also stated that six or seven years previously the weft had been sent to be pirned in homes, however, to prevent pilfering the process had been brought into the factory. The extent to which any pilfering existed was not made clear, but it was noted that if the Factory Act was extended to include girls who filled the pirns, they would be sent to wind at home again.<sup>71</sup> This implies production issues or costs played an important part in decisions, a balancing of possible pilfering or the expense of complying with legislation.

In 1833 a Bill was enacted 'To regulate the Labour of Children and young Persons in the Mills and Factories of the United Kingdom.' The purpose of this Bill was to curtail the number of hours and times at which children and young people were expected to work and control the conditions in which they worked<sup>72</sup> which had implications for factory owners and influenced their decisions. Tancred also noted that a school had been established, primarily by the proprietors, to teach girls sewing and reading after work. He commented as it was payday when he

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<sup>69</sup> Blake, *'The Gourock'*, p. 26

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 25, 32.

<sup>71</sup> *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures.* Command Papers, 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>72</sup> *Bill to regulate Labour of Children and Young Persons in Mills and Factories of United Kingdom, 1833.* Paper Number 48, image 1, p. 1.

visited not many of the 60 to 80 pirn winders were present. However, when he enquired as to their schooling 'of eight, from 13 to 15 years old... only *one* could do more than read very imperfectly, and she not much better.'<sup>73</sup> It is argued in this study of Port Glasgow that based on length of a young person's working day in this employment comprising of repetitive tasks that it was not necessarily a lack of ability but basically tiredness which inhibited learning. It is likely due to the inclusion of sewing lessons for female workers that an expectation existed that they would have domestic responsibilities. Clearly in the textile industries of Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century women and children made an important economic contribution and there is at least a hint of opportunities for continuing employment for male and female employees although elements of negative attitudes are also apparent towards employees. The majority of textile worker in Port Glasgow in 1843 were Irish<sup>74</sup> and undoubtedly the contribution made by them to the prosperity of the town during the mid-nineteenth century was considerable, and at that time they formed an integral part of society. The discussion above illustrates that by cross-referencing data, as in this microhistory, previously unrecognised sources and information can emerge. The *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures* not only described the circumstances of child labour more generally, but opportunities or lack thereof affecting Irish children.<sup>75</sup>

## 4.5 Education and Society

Education and society in Port Glasgow in 1841 are best considered within the framework of legislation and society more generally. R. D. Anderson noted in the 1830s in Paisley, Greenock, Glasgow, and Dundee the proportion of pupils to population was considered to be one in twelve to thirteen and evidence such as this alongside a general sense of urban crisis prompted campaigns for sessional schools and state subsidies.<sup>76</sup> Anderson noted from a Parliamentary Return that

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<sup>73</sup> *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures*. Command Papers 430, 431, 432, image 1280, p. i 60.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> A search of: Irish, in the *Children's Employment Commission. Second report of the commissioners. Trades and manufactures* produces 57 results which provide further insight into the lives of Irish people Britain.

<sup>76</sup> R. D. Anderson, 'Literacy and school attendance', in *Education and the Scottish people 1750-1918*, eBook (Oxford University Press Online: October 2011), p. 132

in 1833-4 nationally there were 236,325 pupils, that was 100 pupils per 1,000 of population, girls as a percentage of boys were 70 per cent.<sup>77</sup> Listed in Port Glasgow in 1833-4 there was one Parochial School with one instructor and seven Other Schools with seven instructors. The population of Port-Glasgow Parish was described as being 5,192, there were 38 children under the age of five being taught to read, comprising of 22 males and 16 females. There were 945 persons included in the 5-15 age range that is 630 males and 315 females of those being taught to write there were 340 males and 169 females, in total 509 individuals.<sup>78</sup> At the Parochial School tuition was given in English reading and grammar, Latin, Greek and French. At the Other Schools English reading and grammar, writing, arithmetic, Latin, Greek, French, geography, navigation, and other subjects were taught.<sup>79</sup> In Fowler's Commercial Directory (1831-32) in Port Glasgow Public Schools were listed as a Grammar School, a Parochial School, and Beaton's Charity School, no reference was made to the provision of Catholic education.<sup>80</sup> Clearly tuition, in a variety of subjects, was being provided in Port Glasgow however tensions may have existed for some young people between the need to work in a factory and education.

R. J. Saunders remarked in his Report to the Secretary of State in the *Half Yearly Reports of Inspectors of Factories* (1835) that additional restrictions on the labour of young people aged between 11 and 12 years came into force on 1 March 1835.<sup>81</sup> This also had implications for the education of children and young people, in the report by Leonard Horner it was stated that a union of factory employment and education would only be achieved through a scheme of relays of children. Generally, there was resistance to this system by masters, parents, and adults with whom the children were working. Horner continued by stating nothing had changed his conviction that there was a: 'paramount necessity of

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<sup>77</sup> R. D. Anderson, 'Literacy and school attendance', in *Education and the Scottish people 1750-1918*, eBook (Oxford University Press Online: October 2011), p. 104.

<sup>78</sup> *Abstract of answers and returns relative to education inquiry (Scotland)*. Paper Number 133, image 636, p. 632.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, image 637, p. 633.

<sup>80</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 398, p. 168. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>81</sup> R. J. Saunders, *Reports of inspectors of factories to secretary of state for home dept.*, 1835. image 1, p. 155.

Legislative interference to prevent the children in factories from growing up in a state of barbarous ignorance... the tendency of improvements in machinery is more and more to substitute infant for adult labour... consequently the temptation to parents to neglect the education of their children is daily on the increase.’<sup>82</sup> However, Horner also commented that rules relating to school attendances had in some instances been closely complied with and there many admirable occasions where neither effort or expense was spared to achieve that great goal. Although in other examples children between the ages of 9 and 12 years had simply been dismissed by their employers.<sup>83</sup> It was not until 1872 the requirements for the education of children were formalised to a greater extent in the *Bill to amend and extend provisions of Law of Scotland on Education (as amended in Committee)* which plainly stated the legislative and parental responsibilities, which were to ‘provide elementary education in reading, writing and arithmetic for his children, between five and thirteen years of age...’<sup>84</sup> This removed earlier aspects of parental choice involving some young people working and which may have inhibited their access to education. Undoubtedly the provision of education in the nineteenth century, particularly for working-class children, was at times fraught with levels of uncertainty and conflicting priorities. It is also worthy of note that in terms of parental responsibilities the legislation refers to ‘his children’. This is indicative of the patriarchal attitudes which pertained at that time.

Limited data has been identified in relation to education in Port Glasgow in 1841 and no school rolls appear to be extant relating to that period which inhibits identifying how many Irish children were being educated. Nevertheless, a *Report of the Gourock Rope-work Company’s Flax-mill at Port Glasgow* dated June 1833<sup>85</sup> provides some insight. William Birkmyre the manager of the flax spinning mill stated that there was a school to which ‘the workers have access gratis; ... that no corporal punishment is allowed... that there are eighteen children here

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<sup>82</sup> Leonard Horner, *Reports of inspectors of factories to secretary of state for home dept.*, 1835, image 4, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Bill to amend and extend provisions of Law of Scotland on Education (as amended in Committee)*. Paper Number 204, image 32, p. 28.

<sup>85</sup> *Royal Com. on Employment of Children in Factories. First Report, Minutes of Evidence, App; Reports of District Coms.* Paper 450, image 218, p. 118.

below twelve years of age; that the workers are subject to no complaint so far as he knows...'<sup>86</sup> Three female workers were interviewed, the youngest of whom was 16 and the oldest more than 30 years old. All reported they had been in the mill for some years and complained of the adverse effects of the amount of dust which was present resulting in coughs, hoarseness, and pain to varying degrees. These comments by the workers are supported by Mr Stuart's criticism: 'I now transmit for the Central Board the Report respecting the Gourrock Rope-work Company's Flax-mill at Port Glasgow, which is not in a creditable state so far as respects the boxing off the machinery, ventilation, or cleanliness.'<sup>87</sup> The overseer of one of the preparing-rooms reported there was a good quantity of dust, but he had not seen any of the children or workers hoarse or cough. He also noted on occasions he used a taws or a strap, but never severely. The youngest of the workers interviewed said at first the overseer had touched her with the taws but not to hurt her badly. All of the workers interviewed stated they were unable to write and whether or not this was due to being unable to access the free school when they were younger is unknown. Varying perceptions of working conditions and wellbeing related to this flax-mill are demonstrated above and the extent to which the free school was utilised is unclear.<sup>88</sup> It is likely tensions existed between economic necessity and education which inhibited school attendance. This was also suggested in a Royal Commissioners Report of 1839: 'As long, however, as the weaver's bread depends on the labour of the young children of his family, no facilities of education, however great, will in any sufficient degree avail them.'<sup>89</sup> Collins when discussing the labour market in Dundee and Paisley in 1851 argued: 'for families' life chances even at the most general level are constrained by the availability of employment for all individual members.'<sup>90</sup> Clearly economic tensions in the nineteenth century were not confined to weavers or to Port Glasgow as in Britain generally this was a time of widespread economic and social change. However, it is reasonable to propose that some

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<sup>86</sup> *Royal Com. on Employment of Children in Factories. First Report, Minutes of Evidence, App; Reports of District Coms.* Paper 450, image 218, p. 118.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Royal Com. on Hand-Loom Weavers. Assistant Coms.' Reports (on Scotland, etc.).* Paper Number 159, image 52 p. 48.

<sup>90</sup> Collins, *Aspects of Irish Immigration into two Scottish towns (Dundee and Paisley) during the mid-nineteenth century*, p. 130. <https://era.ed.ac.uk/>.

children in Port Glasgow, especially second generation Irish children, were educationally disadvantaged, particularly before the introduction of Education (Scotland) Bill (1872)<sup>91</sup> which restricted their ability to progress economically and socially. This proposal is supported by Barr's comment (1843): 'I have observed most distinctly that those who have received the best education at school have been the most active and industrious in after life, and were most successful in pushing their way in the world.'<sup>92</sup>

## 4.6 Social Diversity in 1841

The focus thus far has been primarily on the three sample E. D.s but to provide a more balanced interpretation of Port Glasgow society before the famine E. D. 547/8 which had the lowest number of Irish migrants and textile workers has been examined, albeit not in the level of detail afforded to the sample districts. This E. D., located towards the west of the town was one of the least densely populated E. D.s, and commercial interests and many occupations were associated with shipping and ship building.<sup>93</sup> There were 463 people, of whom 281 (60.9 per cent) were born in Renfrewshire, 135 (29.1 per cent) in Scotland, and 32 (6.9 per cent) in Ireland. These figures do not include second generation Irish people. There were nine male textile workers, six were born in Ireland, two in Renfrewshire and one in Scotland. Within this group of people compared to the sample districts the marked difference is in the number of people who were financially independent, and the significant number of female servants. Financially independent persons were primarily female, and the majority were born in Renfrewshire. Servants, with one exception were female and other than one who was born in Ireland they were born in either Renfrewshire or Scotland.<sup>94</sup> This identification of the birthplace of female servants is broadly similar to

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<sup>91</sup> *Education (Scotland). A bill [as amended in committee, on re-commitment, and on consideration as amended] to amend and extend the provisions of the law of Scotland on the subject of education, 1872.* Paper Number 210.

<sup>92</sup> Barr, *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, image 487, p 477.

<sup>93</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); Please see MAP 2.2: Renfrewshire II.11 (Port Glasgow) Survey Date: 1856, Publication Date: 1859 and MAP 2.2a: Renfrewshire II.11 (Port Glasgow) Survey Date: 1856, Publication Date: 1859. p. 41.

<sup>94</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3, 574/4 and 574/8. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

Lobban's conclusions related to Greenock in 1851<sup>95</sup> and suggests there were similar occupational trends in domestic service to those identified in this study within textile production.<sup>96</sup>

In E. D. 547/8 a number of those who were recorded as having an occupation were in relatively prestigious positions such as: accountant, clergyman, merchant, ship builder, ship owner, surgeon, or teacher, all persons who held these positions were male.<sup>97</sup> Arguably gender, birthplace, location, custom and financial considerations were likely to have been defining factors which influenced the opportunities available to men and women. This highlights the need for new studies focussing on gender and generational differences which can influence opportunities not only economically but socially. A further indication of differences in society which were present in Port Glasgow in 1841 can be seen in the recording of number of persons and distinct families within E. D.s. In this context distinct families were distinct households. In E. D. 574/8 where 6.9 per cent of people were born in Ireland, 463 persons and 98 distinct families were recorded suggesting there may have been 4.7 people in each household. Whereas in E. D. 574/4 where 49.4 per cent of people were Irish there were 650 persons and 115 distinct families recorded which suggests there were 5.6 persons in each household. Recording methods used in the 1841 Census do not enable identifying how many persons inhabited each room and whilst the calculation employed above is crude it does provide some information. It appears that generally there was greater occupancy per household in the E. D. 574/4 with the proportionately higher number of Irish people and within this E. D. the majority of people resided in lanes or closes which is also indicative of people living in close proximity to each other.<sup>98</sup> Clearly, in Port Glasgow within the limited geographic area which was described as being almost an English mile square<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Lobban, 'The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century', p. 272.

<sup>96</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3, 574/4 and 574/8. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>97</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D. 574/8. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

<sup>98</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3, 574/4 and 574/8. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>99</sup> Forrest, Parish of New Port-Glasgow, (County of Renfrew), p. 679.

and the comparatively small population in 1841<sup>100</sup> very wide-ranging economic and social circumstances existed which influenced attitudes, opportunities, and the fabric of daily life. It has been demonstrated that for the inhabitants of Port Glasgow in 1841 there existed shared economic and social circumstances however there were contrasts related to ethnicity which advanced or inhibited opportunities and affected life experiences. Whilst it is possible to generalise and propose Irish people were disadvantaged it is more subtle and requires consideration of individual circumstances as far as possible. The comparisons above clearly illustrate that within the limited geographic area and small population<sup>101</sup> of Port Glasgow very different life experiences co-existed therefore generalisations relating to large urban centres may hide important differences.

## 4.7 Institutions and Amenities

The Institutions and amenities in Port Glasgow were very varied and many were well established. Evidence has not been identified which illustrates how Churches, societies, or banks, of which there were several, were used by individuals. However, *Fowler's Commercial Directory 1831-32* provides some insight into the infrastructure of Port Glasgow<sup>102</sup> much of which no longer exists and some aspects of life there in the mid-nineteenth century. A list of the Magistrates of Port Glasgow and Newark, Councillors and Office Bearers was included, followed by details relating to Town and Harbour Police, Justices of the Peace, timings of the Justice of the Peace Small Debt Court, Burgh Court, and location of the Gaol.<sup>103</sup> It appears at that time these aspects of life were provided for and dealt with locally in Port Glasgow. In the Census of Port Glasgow (1841), there were two prisoners in the Gaol both of whom were female

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<sup>100</sup> *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain* (Age Abstract, 1841). Command Paper 497, image 607, p. 107.

<sup>101</sup> Forrest, Parish of New Port-Glasgow, (County of Renfrew), p. 679; Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>102</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow). <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>103</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 396, p. 166, image 397, p. 167. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

and Irish, although it has not been discovered why or how long they had been there.

Four Churches were listed in *Fowler's Directory*; the Parish Church where the Minister James Barr, D. D. had been appointed by the Magistrates and Town Council of Glasgow, the Chapel of Ease where John Parker appears to have been appointed by the proprietors, United Secession Church where David Inglis was appointed by the Congregation and the Unitarian Chapel where the post was vacant. Clearly there were varied methods by which Ministers were chosen.<sup>104</sup> At that time there was no Roman Catholic Church in Port Glasgow, and the congregation was served by St. Mary's Mission in Greenock.<sup>105</sup> The Parish of St. John the Baptist in Port Glasgow was initially founded as a mission in 1846, and building of the Church commenced in 1853 to meet the needs Catholics who had come to the area many of whom were noted to have come from Ireland.<sup>106</sup> It was stated by Collins that: 'late nineteenth century urban Scotland had an infrastructure of schools, churches and associations geared to the cultural identity of Catholic Irishness which had been totally lacking in the mid-nineteenth century.'<sup>107</sup> Although it seems from the discussion above that there was some, albeit limited, provision in Greenock and Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century.

It appears there were a significant number of societies in Port Glasgow which included for example the Port-Glasgow Bible Society instituted in 1807, Port-Glasgow and Newark Female Benevolent Society instituted June 1812, Port-Glasgow Sabbath School Society instituted December 1814, which reportedly had approximately 500 scholars and a library containing 600 volumes, and Port-Glasgow Female Gaelic School Society instituted 1829. These figures are

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<sup>104</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 399, p. 169. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>105</sup> 'St Mary's Greenock- The Story of a Community', Extract from Chapter four 'The Greenock Mission.' History, Parish book. [St Mary's RC Church Website \(stmarysgreenock.org\)](http://stmarysgreenock.org).

<sup>106</sup> *St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church*, Our Church. [Our Church | St. John the Baptist \(rcpaisley.org.uk\)](http://rcpaisley.org.uk) > [accessed 15 January 2025], please see Bibliography.

<sup>107</sup> Collins, 'The origins of Irish immigration to Scotland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' p. 15.

indicative of working-class engagement with religion in Port Glasgow in the nineteenth century. Callum G. Brown (2009) noted in his study that:

This evidence is of its nature piecemeal, but it is very significant. Every major study based on social-composition analysis of churchgoers or members shows for every part of Britain from the late eighteenth to late twentieth centuries, for every denomination, that the working classes were in the majority.<sup>108</sup>

This interpretation chimes with the comment by Barr (1836) that people in Port Glasgow ‘may be characterized also as Church going people.’<sup>109</sup>

In Port Glasgow there is evidence, (1831-1832) that the influence and economic contribution of women also extended to their role as proprietors of furnished lodgings. Sixteen of these establishments were listed in Port Glasgow and all, except one, appear to have been run by women, only one of whom was unmarried although some or all of the others may have been widows. No evidence has been identified in this dissertation which indicates the birthplace of these proprietors. That said, eleven of these furnished lodgings were located in various lanes in Port Glasgow,<sup>110</sup> areas in which Irish people were situated to a greater or lesser extent in 1841.<sup>111</sup> It is important to note that in 1841, within the three sample E. D.s there was only one lodging-house keeper identified and she was Irish.<sup>112</sup> Irish women in the sample E. D.s may well have had lodgers on a more ‘informal’ basis which was not recorded in the census. Lobban noted in his study of Greenock that Irish women were prominent as lodging-house keepers in 1851<sup>113</sup> and a further study including all E. D.s in Port Glasgow may identify other Irish lodging-house keepers in 1841. It is important to recognise that the

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<sup>108</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The death of Christian Britain, understanding secularisation 1800-2000*, second edition. (Routledge: 26/01/2009). eBook, p. 155.

<sup>109</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 66.

<sup>110</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 400, p. 170, image 401, p. 171.  
<https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>111</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3. 574/4 and 574/8.  
[www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

<sup>112</sup> Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). Analysis of E. D.s 574/2, 574/3. 574/4.  
[www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

<sup>113</sup> Lobban, ‘The Irish community in Greenock in the nineteenth century’, p. 272.

interaction between lodgers or boarders, however they were described,<sup>114</sup> and their landlady, or for that matter landlord, was not only a financial transaction but also a social and cultural exchange.<sup>115</sup> The above discussion indicates some of the complexity of the roles which women undertook in domestic and formal economic settings, in the nineteenth century, and the possible under-recording of women's work. Arguably, not all the activities which women were engaged in before, during and after the Industrial Revolution were necessarily perceived as being work which was worthy of recording, and further research into the experiences of women at this time can only enhance the understanding of the complexity of the contribution made by women.

A large number of societies affiliated to various organisation or causes existed in Port Glasgow and included a Poor Man's Friend Society, Master Tailor's Society, Port-Glasgow and Newark Friendly, Funeral and Mortsafe Society and a Temperance Society. The extent to which Irish people were involved in organising or benefitting from these organisations thus far has not been identified. Other facilities in the town included a library which had approximately 50 subscribers, and an Adult School Society.<sup>116</sup> In relation to philanthropy it was stated by Shani D'Cruze that:

The tremendous energy with which the Victorian middle classes pursued philanthropic agendas depended on identification of deserving recipients of aid. If the market required the labouring poor to labour, they would be better inclined to do so if they could be persuaded or coerced to values of sobriety, thrift and diligence through an interest in the material and moral well-being of family dependents.<sup>117</sup>

Undoubtedly the society of Port Glasgow before the famine was diverse and multifaceted and British society generally experienced various economic and

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<sup>114</sup> Vicky Holmes, (2014) 'Accommodating the lodger: The domestic arrangements of lodgers in working-class dwellings in a Victorian provincial town', p. 314 in *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 19(3), pp. 314-331. doi:10.1080/13555502.2014.947181.

<sup>115</sup> Gillian Williamson, (2021) 'The Georgian landlady: surrogate mother, love interest or hard-nosed businesswoman? pp.383-386 in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44:383-403. <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1111/1754-0208.12805>.

<sup>116</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 398, p. 168, image 399 p. 169, image 400 p. 170. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>117</sup> Shani D'Cruze 'The Family' in *A companion to nineteenth century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Malden: Blackwell Publishing) 2007, p. 269.

social tensions some of which were related to class. However, in Port Glasgow it is likely that some Irish people may have been recipients of charity whilst others may have been benefactors, as Barr (1836) reported: 'The inhabitants of this place are generally well informed, diligent in business and liberal in charity.'<sup>118</sup> It is worth also considering Irish 'benefactors' may have been people within the wider community who although unable to provide monetary assistance helped by other 'informal acts of kindness', an example of informal acts was recorded in the report of visits to paupers (1843) where: 'The old man is unable to work, but he receives aid from some families in the town.'<sup>119</sup> This old man did not appear to live alone but the start of this record was mostly illegible and it is not recorded which families were providing aid.

## 4.8 Poor Law Provision

The Rev. William Gordon, resident priest of Greenock and Port Glasgow calculated in a census taken in 1833 that the Catholic population of Port Glasgow was 369 souls all of whom were Irish as far as he was aware. No information was provided in relation to any paupers in Port Glasgow or any relief which they may have received.<sup>120</sup>

The Parish of Port Glasgow, the part of Port Glasgow society affiliated to the Church, had a population of 4,928 in 1841 and was therefore smaller than Port Glasgow Town and Parish referred to in the census.<sup>121</sup> The number of paupers assisted in 1842 was 274, with a sum of £781 being distributed between them. The Rev. James Barr D. D., Minister of Port Glasgow reported in 1843 that he had been the minister of Port-Glasgow for twenty years and during the last four years there had been a legal assessment in the parish brought about by an

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<sup>118</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 66.

<sup>119</sup> Notes of cases of paupers visited, Port-Glasgow 18 Nov. 1843. *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, Record 17, image 497, p. 487.

<sup>120</sup> The Rev. William Gordon, *Poor inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (C.)-Parts I. and II. Part I. Reports on the state of the poor, and on the charitable institutions in some of the principal towns; with supplement containing answers to queries. Part II. Report on the city of Dublin, and supplement containing answers to queries; with addenda to appendix (A.), and communications*. Command Papers, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42. (Report on State of Irish Poor in Great Britain); Appendix H, image 3015, p. 139.

<sup>121</sup> Census of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

increase in pauperism. Barr attributed this to trade in the port being significantly reduced and to the establishment in the parish of a *quoad sacra* church which resulted in all of the church collections of those who attended it being lost. The typical allowances paid to old men who were beyond work but not bed-ridden were 2s. 6d. and 3s. a fortnight. On some occasions their rents were similarly paid. A widow who had four children under ten years of age would receive 4s. a fortnight, and sometimes her rent would also be paid. Around 2s. a week was allowed for the board of orphans. Some orphans were boarded in the town, others in neighbouring rural parishes with respectable people. Particular attention was paid to the education of orphans and generally clothing was provided. The treasurer may have occasionally paid a visit to them or sometimes they were brought to be seen by officials by the people with whom they boarded. Barr commented that he thought all lunatics on the Roll were in the asylum.

Barr also stated that he could not go into the circumstances of paupers on the Roll but considered that generally they were comparatively well provided for. He noted that in the parish there were a considerable number of people with such strong feelings of independence that they would not apply for parochial relief unless in extreme distress.<sup>122</sup> A number of paupers on the Roll were visited on Saturday 18 November 1843, of the 25 visited the majority were widows and most had differing levels of responsibility for children or in some cases older relatives. The women were of varying ages, some were very old and there were differing degrees of cleanliness and comfort described in their homes. Three men were visited who were in varied states of health, the youngest was 75 and the oldest 88 years old none of them lived alone. In the reports of these visits there were no Irish people identified so the extent to which they were reliant on poor relief is unknown.<sup>123</sup> However, as noted earlier there were also 'informal' systems in operation. Barr (1843) reported: 'When the poor are sick we do not provide nutritious diet from the poor funds. We leave anything of this kind,

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<sup>122</sup> Barr, *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, image 486 p.476 image 487, p. 477.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, image 496 p. 486, image 497, p. 487.

which may be required, to the charity of others.’<sup>124</sup> Clearly in Port Glasgow there was a system in place to afford some level of assistance to people in difficult circumstances. Importantly reform of the Poor Laws in Scotland was informed by the *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland*. In which it was stated: ‘a diligent and full Inquiry should be forthwith made into the Practical Operation of the Laws which provide Relief of the Poor in Scotland.’<sup>125</sup>

## 4.9 Conclusion

The composition of any society is constantly fluid and altering as people change, a child becomes an adult, some adults become parents, some people move away, and newcomers may arrive. Time and place were and are important factors in any society and to the interactions which occur within it. Whilst sharing some similarities the social dynamics of a village, a small town or a city are very different. This was particularly true in relation to Irish migrants before and after the devastating famine in Ireland. Studies such as this of a small town enables a focus not only on numbers of migrants but on people and their unique experiences. As has been demonstrated in this study statistically the population of Port Glasgow was virtually static between 1841 and 1851<sup>126</sup> and there is no evidence of Irish migrants arriving in Port Glasgow *after* the famine as refugees in crisis. Irish men, women and children contributed positively to the economy and prosperity of Port Glasgow.

More than half of the population of Port Glasgow were between the ages of 15 and 59 and the majority of people in sample who were in employment were within this age range.<sup>127</sup> There were fewer men than women in the population and women and children played important economic roles particularly in the

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<sup>124</sup> Barr, *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, image 487, p. 477.

<sup>125</sup> *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland. Report*. Command Papers 557, image 3.

<sup>126</sup> *Population tables*, 1851. Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18.

<sup>127</sup> Calculated from *Abstract Return Pursuant to Act for taking Account of the Population of Great Britain (Age Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 497, image 606 p. 106, image 607, p. 107. Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow, 1841. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk)

textile industries.<sup>128</sup> The patterns of migration were such that there was a significant number of productive family groups who were engaged in similar types of employment, particularly weaving.<sup>129</sup> Child labour was evident in Port Glasgow which was in keeping with employment practices elsewhere and whilst there were opportunities for education this may have been inhibited by cost or the necessity for a child to work. A range of legal institutions functioned locally in Port Glasgow and several Churches were established although there was no Roman Catholic Church until a Mission was established in the town in 1846.<sup>130</sup> Several religious societies, friendly societies of various types and a number of schools existed and there were also opportunities to study languages.<sup>131</sup>

The proportion of people who received poor relief appears to have been small in 1843 and there existed a perception that there was a considerable number of people who were very independent and would only seek assistance if they were in extreme circumstances.<sup>132</sup> The society of Port Glasgow in 1841 experienced varying levels of prosperity and arguably gender, birthplace, location, and custom were contributing factors in shaping the opportunities which were available to people in Scotland, particularly for Irish people. This chapter has built on the foundations established in Chapter 3 and demonstrated the undeniable link between economic status and social experiences where gender and ethnicity were important factors defining life experiences for people in Port Glasgow, but for first and second generation Irish people in particular. By examining the experiences of Irish people as individuals, families, and members of the wider community the 'layers' of their lives as men, boys, women, girls, workers, friends, neighbours, and family groups within host communities can

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<sup>128</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow, 1841. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 396, p. 166, image 399, p. 169. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>; *St Mary's Greenock- The Story of a Community*, Extract from Chapter four 'The Greenock Mission.' History, Parish Book. [St Mary's RC Church Website \(stmarysgreenock.org\)](http://stmarysgreenock.org).

<sup>131</sup> *Scottish Post Office Directories > Counties > Renfrewshire > 1829-1842 - Fowler's commercial directory of the principal towns and villages in the upper ward of Renfrewshire > 1831-1832*, (384) [85222338] (Port Glasgow), image 398, p. 168, image 399 p. 169, image 400 p. 170. <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

<sup>132</sup> Barr, *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, image 486 p.476 image 487, p. 477.

emerge and a more complete understanding of the lives of Irish people in Scotland may develop. This microhistory of Port Glasgow contributes to that understanding by bringing new insight into the history of Irish men, women, and young people in mid-nineteenth century Scotland.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

This research has identified a number of the strengths and limitations which are inherent in Census records (1841), and this discussion continues on the following page. Nonetheless it is proposed further consideration of such data (1841) has the potential to bring about a greater understanding of the experiences of Irish people in Scotland at that time. It is also suggested that comparisons with Census records (1851) provides an opportunity to appreciate the experiences of some pre-famine Irish migrants in the longer term. This microhistory has demonstrated the importance of small town studies which examine the economic and social circumstances of first and second generation Irish people in Scotland before the famine in Ireland. A new understanding of the experiences of mainly working-class Irish people has been achieved by considering the significant economic and social presence of Irish people in this small town on the west coast of Scotland in 1841. It has been shown clearly that Irish people were not only an established presence in Port Glasgow since the eighteenth century, but first and second generation Irish men, boys, women, and girls formed an integral part of the development and therefore the economic and social history of Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century. The frequently adverse stereotypical imagery pertaining to Irish migrants after the famine has been qualified by findings in this research which considers the period before the famine. As far as possible, within the limitations of extant primary sources, a sample of Irish people have been recognised as individuals who experienced not only opportunities in employment, but constraints associated with access to education or suitable housing which on occasions were related to gender, age, place of birth or location. Undoubtedly, in the nineteenth century, the restricted geographic area of Port Glasgow<sup>1</sup> to varying degrees inhibited population growth, industrial expansion and diversification, and the availability of suitable housing. Between 1841 and 1851 the population of Port Glasgow was stable<sup>2</sup> and the factors described above may have contributed, to some extent, to the apparent lack of an influx of Irish migrants to Port Glasgow during and

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<sup>1</sup> Barr, Parish of Port-Glasgow, January 1836, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18.

after the famine. On the basis of the available figures<sup>3</sup> Port Glasgow was by-passed by famine refugees, however that does not mean that it has no Irish 'story'. Quite the contrary: one important finding of this research is that at least until 1841 no evidence has been discerned which suggests that Irish people in Port Glasgow were perceived as being 'alien' or the 'other'. The situation was far more complex.

The methodological approach employed in this microhistory has illustrated the value of utilising 1841 census data but has also highlighted some of the limitations which can be present and the need for rigorous scrutiny and cross-referencing whenever possible. In 1841 the rounding down of ages, the absence of information identifying 'Relation to Head of Family', the composition of Enumeration Districts in Port Glasgow and changes to what constituted a 'dwelling house' in 1851<sup>4</sup> are all factors which had to be considered when reaching conclusions in this research and arguably in any research which may follow. Nevertheless, allowing for unclear writing, and transcription, and interpretation errors, census data from 1841, the first in which persons were identified by name and location,<sup>5</sup> has proved to be an invaluable primary source on which the findings in this research relating to first and second generation Irish people in Port Glasgow are principally based. Further local research utilising 1841 data would add immeasurably to an understanding of the experiences of Irish people in Scotland before the famine as when census data is examined looking beyond the 'raw numbers' greater knowledge of the economic and social lives of Irish people as family members, friends, neighbours, and workers emerges.

Whilst a great deal has been written about Irish migrants in large conurbations in Scotland after the famine little has been written relating to the presence of Irish people in small towns such as Port Glasgow where their presence was significant before the famine. This microhistory due to the scale of enquiry has qualified

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<sup>3</sup> *Population tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Abstract Return pursuant to Act for taking Account of Population of Great Britain (Enumeration Abstract, 1841)*. Command Papers 496, Preface, image 7, p. 3. [accessed 19 December 2022]. Census returns of Port Glasgow, 1841, 1851. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk); *Population Tables, 1851*. Command Papers 1632, image 318, p. 18, image 319, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Population of Great Britain 1841 enumeration & age abstract Scotland*, (London: printed by W. Clowes and sons, Stamford Street, for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1843), Preface: p. 2, 3.

more general accounts of the experiences of Irish people and those studies which focus on Irish migrants in large urban centres. It is argued that further detailed research of specific places within large urban centres where there were large numbers of Irish people may uncover areas where the experiences and patterns of migration of Irish people were not dissimilar to those found in Port Glasgow. Comparisons which have been made in this dissertation between Port Glasgow before the famine and nearby Greenock after the famine have demonstrated that geographic proximity may not necessarily mean the economic and social experiences of Irish people were necessarily similar. Also, by considering employment in textile production in Paisley and Dundee compared to Port Glasgow, differences relating to gender and age have been identified which contribute to a greater understanding of the importance of female and child labour in the mid-nineteenth century. These comparisons have supported the proposal in this microhistory that time, place, and context are crucial.

The long standing links to Ireland and Irish people which have been described must have influenced the relationships between Irish migrants and the host community in Port Glasgow in the nineteenth century. Neither migration or the processes involved in it were static, nor can any society be described as being unchanging. The fluid nature of both have been illustrated and similarly the differences between individual E. D.s in Port Glasgow have been recognised. Each E. D. had its own 'story' and Irish people were present to a greater or lesser extent in all of them. By examining the number, gender, age, and place of birth of textile workers, excluding labourers, in Port Glasgow in 1841 the importance of skilled Irish workers has been demonstrated. No evidence of segregation in workplaces or residential locations has been identified following detailed examination of workers' place of birth, location, and household composition. Arguably the large number of Irish people in a particular E. D.s was related to proximity to place of work, household composition, kinship, and/or friendship groups. A greater appreciation of the lives of Irish people and the ways in which Irish 'communities' in Scotland were formed can only be achieved by looking beyond the census numbers and appearances conveyed by consulting maps. There are many research paths as yet untrodden.

The Gourock Ropework Company which was established in Port Glasgow in the late eighteenth century<sup>6</sup> was located to the east of the town and the sample E. D.s were also primarily to the east. In the sample it has been shown that Irish people had varied occupations, although men clustered mainly in weaving and textiles and women in flax, but not exclusively so. Irish male workers within the sample cohort were not predominately labourers which is distinctly different from general descriptions of male Irish workers at that time. The occupational dominance of Irish workers in the textile industries of Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century is clear. Nonetheless, it has also been illustrated that Irish people in the sample had varied occupations, as is shown in Appendix 1. Whilst there were clearly gendered roles, conclusions in relation to occupation and location within the E. D.s in Port Glasgow should be reached with a degree of caution. The overlapping of streets, closes, and lanes into more than one E. D. and/or Parish can potentially create a false impression relating to the possible integration or segregation of male and female workers if the composition of E. D.s is not considered. Further research which focuses on each individual street or lane in Port Glasgow may be worthwhile in order to explore the possible segregation or integration of workers more fully, and appreciate ideas of ‘community’ in more nuanced ways. In 1841, on the basis of evidence from the Gourock Ropework Company records and Census returns workers were mostly located close to their place of work and the wages of male and female workers who were engaged in piece work were comparable.<sup>7</sup> This suggest that wages were based on what was being done rather than who was carrying out the work. The close relationship between economic status and social experience has been examined and the important economic role played by women and children has been demonstrated within the context of prevailing workplace conditions, relevant legislation regarding employment in factories and access to education. Social conditions were influenced by the availability of suitable housing and detailed analysis of Census returns demonstrated clearly that there were ‘Little Irelands’ in Port Glasgow and within some a further discrete ‘Little Ireland’ was

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<sup>6</sup> Blake, ‘*The Gourock*’, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Sugar House 27 April to 11 May 1841, *Records of Gourock Ropeworks Co Ltd. Rope makers and textile manufactures*. GB 248 UGD 042/5/7.  
Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk).

present, for example in E. D. 574/2 within it there was Blackstons where 82.8 per cent of people were Irish-born or of Irish heritage.<sup>8</sup>

The varied evidence which has been presented relating to gender, generational factors, migrating family groups and individuals has afforded a new understanding of employment patterns and household composition in Port Glasgow and has implications for further research. Patterns of migration to Port Glasgow have been identified which resulted in there being a number of productive family groups who were engaged in similar types of employment, particularly weaving. In Port Glasgow in 1841 there were more women than men enumerated and in the sample the majority of people who were in employment were aged between 15 and 59 years old<sup>9</sup>. Clearly men, women, and young people contributed to the economic and social life of Port Glasgow as workers but also as consumers. This microhistory has contributed to a greater understanding of the role workers generally in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century, but also importantly to the economic and social role of Irish men, boys, women, and girls and some of the legislation which influenced the conditions under which they worked and lived.

The wide-ranging economic and social circumstances which were present in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century and affected attitudes, opportunities, and daily life generally have been demonstrated. Whilst the institutions and amenities in Port Glasgow were varied and a number had been established for some time this dissertation does not claim to evidence how they were used by individuals, or the varied Irish communities more generally. Although there were various religious societies and several Churches in Port Glasgow there was no Roman Catholic Church. A Mission was founded in Port Glasgow in 1846, and until then Catholics were served by St Mary's Mission in Greenock.<sup>10</sup> There were Friendly societies of various types, a number of schools and libraries in Port

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<sup>8</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841), E. D. 574/2. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>9</sup> Analysis of Census returns of Port Glasgow (1841). [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk).

<sup>10</sup> St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church, Our Church.

[www.stjohnthebaptist.rcpaisley.org.uk/church/](http://www.stjohnthebaptist.rcpaisley.org.uk/church/).

'St Mary's Greenock- The Story of a Community', Extract from Chapter four 'The Greenock Mission.' History, Parish book. [St Mary's RC Church Website \(stmarysgreenock.org\)](http://StMarysRCChurchWebsite(stmarysgreenock.org))

Glasgow and also opportunities to study languages,<sup>11</sup> however no evidence as to how Irish people used these facilities has been discerned in this research. In terms of Poor Law provision, it was stated by Barr that he considered generally paupers were comparatively well provided for, but there were a large number of people who were so independent that they would not seek parochial help unless in extreme distress.<sup>12</sup> No information was provided by Gordon in the *Poor inquiry (Ireland)* in relation to the number of paupers in Port Glasgow or any assistance they may have received<sup>13</sup>. Clearly economic and social life in Port Glasgow in the mid-nineteenth century was multi-faceted. It awaits a thorough history.

This microhistory has contributed to a more complete understanding of the lives of Irish people in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century by focussing on the economic and social contribution made by a sample of first and second generation Irish people in Port Glasgow before the famine in Ireland. As a result of examining the experiences of Irish people as families and individuals the ‘layers’ of their lives as men, boys, women, girls, workers, friends, neighbours, and family groups within the host community has emerged. Irish people in Port Glasgow were not only a part of the community they helped to shape it both economically and socially.

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<sup>11</sup> *Fowler's commercial directory of the lower ward of Renfrewshire, for 1831-32*, image 398, p. 168, image 399, p. 169, image 400 p. 170.

<sup>12</sup> Barr, *Royal Com. for inquiring into Administration and Practical Operation of Poor Laws in Scotland: Appendix Part III. (Minutes of Evidence, Lowland Counties, etc.)*. Command Papers 565, image 486 p. 476, image 487, p. 477.

<sup>13</sup> The Rev. William Gordon, *Poor inquiry (Ireland). Appendix (C.)-Parts I. and II. Part I. Reports on the state of the poor, and on the charitable institutions in some of the principal towns; with supplement containing answers to queries. Part II. Report on the city of Dublin, and supplement containing answers to queries; with addenda to appendix (A.), and communications*. Command Papers 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42. (Report on State of Irish Poor in Great Britain); Appendix H, image 3015, p. 139.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1.

**Table 1:**

Port Glasgow, 1841, Census Enumeration Districts 574/4, 574/3 and 574/2.  
A Comparison of the Place of Birth and Occupation of Male Inhabitants who were recorded in the Census as having a Profession, Trade, Employment or of having Independent Means. (Occupations A to H).

| Place of Birth       | Renfrewshire | Ireland   | Scotland  | England  | Foreign | Unknown  |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------|----------|
| Occupation           | ?            | ?         | ?         | ?        | ?       | ?        |
| Accountant           |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Ap.                  | 1            | 2         |           |          |         |          |
| Ap. Baker            |              |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Ap. Blacksmith       | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Ap. Carpenter        | 4            |           | 5         |          |         |          |
| Ap. Joiner           | 2            | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Ap. Sailmaker        | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Ap. Smith            | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Ap. Weaver           |              | 4         |           |          |         |          |
| Army                 | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Baker                | 1            |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Blacksmith           | 4            | 1         | 2         |          |         | 1        |
| Bleacher             |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| B. Maker             |              |           |           | 1        |         |          |
| Block Maker          | 3            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Bookseller           |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Brass Founder        |              |           |           | 2        |         |          |
| Cabinet Maker        | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Canvas Weaver        | 8            | 67        | 1         | 1        |         | 1        |
| Carman               | 2            |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Carpenter            | 6            |           | 8         |          |         |          |
| Carpenter J          | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Carpenter Ship       | 2            |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Carpenter Ship Ap    |              |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Carrier              | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Carter               | 6            | 1         | 1         |          |         |          |
| Clerk                |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Cooper               | 2            | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Customs              |              |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Fisherman            | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Flax Mill            |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Flesher              | 3            |           |           |          |         |          |
| F?                   |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Gardner              |              |           | 1         |          |         |          |
| Grocer               | 5            | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Grocer Ap            | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| Hackler/Heckler      |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Hammerman            |              | 1         |           |          |         |          |
| Hater?               | 1            |           |           |          |         |          |
| <b>Total Persons</b> | <b>59</b>    | <b>86</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>4</b> |         | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Occupations</b>   | <b>24</b>    | <b>16</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>3</b> |         | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Total Workers</b> | <b>59</b>    | <b>86</b> | <b>24</b> | <b>4</b> |         | <b>2</b> |

## Appendix 1 continued.

**Table 1:** continued.

Port Glasgow, 1841, Census Enumeration Districts 574/4, 574/3 and 574/2.  
A Comparison of the Place of Birth, and Occupation of Male Inhabitants who were recorded in the Census as having a Profession, Trade, Employment or of having Independent Means. (Occupations I to W).

| Place of Birth               | Renfrewshire | Ireland | Scotland | England | Foreign | Unknown |
|------------------------------|--------------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Occupation                   | ?            | ?       | ?        | ?       | ?       | ?       |
| Independent                  | 2            |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Joiner                       | 3            | 3       | 1        |         |         |         |
| Labourer                     | 10           | 97      | 6        | 1       |         | 2       |
| Labourer Flax Mill           | 1            | 1       |          |         |         |         |
| Labourer Ag                  |              | 2       |          |         |         |         |
| Mariner                      | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Mason                        | 2            | 8       | 2        |         |         |         |
| Merchant                     |              |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Merchant/Ship owner          | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Mill Work                    |              | 1       |          |         |         |         |
| Mill Wright                  | 1            | 2       |          |         |         |         |
| Nailer                       | 2            | 1       |          |         |         |         |
| P?                           | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Painter                      | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Police Officer               |              |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Rafter                       | 2            | 1       |          |         |         |         |
| Ropemaker                    | 3            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Rope Spinner Ap              | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Sail Cloth Weaver            |              | 4       | 1        |         |         |         |
| Sailmaker                    | 2            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Sailmaker Ap                 | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Sailor                       | 1            |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Sailor Ap                    | 2            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Sawer/Sawyer                 | 2            | 2       | 3        |         |         |         |
| Seaman                       | 7            | 1       |          |         | 1       |         |
| Ship Carpenter               | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Shipmaster                   | 2            |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Ship Wright                  |              |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Shoemaker                    | 3            | 3       | 3        |         |         | 1       |
| Smith                        | 1            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Spirit Dealer                |              | 1       |          |         |         |         |
| Sugar Baker                  |              | 1       |          | 1       | 1       |         |
| Sugar Boiler                 |              | 3       |          |         |         |         |
| Tailor                       | 2            | 1       | 1        |         |         |         |
| Tailor Ap                    | 1            | 1       |          |         |         |         |
| Tea Dealer                   |              |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Tenter in Flax Mill          |              |         | 1        | 1       |         |         |
| Timekeeper                   |              |         | 1        |         |         |         |
| Tinsmith                     | 5            |         |          |         |         |         |
| Weaver                       | 6            | 45      | 2        | 2       |         |         |
| <b>Total Persons</b>         | 67           | 178     | 28       | 4       | 2       | 3       |
| <b>Occupations this page</b> | 27           | 19      | 16       | 3       | 2       | 2       |
| <b>Total Occupations*</b>    | 51           | 35      | 29       | 6       | 2       | 4       |
| <b>Total Independent</b>     | 2            | 0       | 1        | 0       | 0       | 0       |
| <b>Total Persons</b>         | 126          | 264     | 52       | 8       | 2       | 5       |
| <b>Total Workers</b>         | 124          | 264     | 51       | 8       | 2       | 5       |

## Appendix 1 continued.

**Table 1.2:**

Port Glasgow, 1841, Census Enumeration Districts 574/4, 574/3 and 574/2.  
A Comparison of the Place of Birth, and Occupation of Female Inhabitants who were recorded in the Census as having a Profession, Trade, Employment or of having Independent Means.

| Place of Birth            | Renfrewshire | Ireland | Scotland | England | Unknown |
|---------------------------|--------------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| Occupation                | ?            | ?       | ?        | ?       | ?       |
| Ap. Weaver                |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Bleacher                  |              | 7       |          |         |         |
| Canvas Weaver             |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Carder                    |              | 2       |          |         |         |
| Dressmaker                | 1            | 1       |          |         |         |
| Female Servant            | 10           | 2       | 6        |         |         |
| Flax Carder               |              | 2       |          |         |         |
| Flax Dresser              |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Flax Hackler              | 1            | 1       |          |         |         |
| Flax Mill                 | 5            | 29 1    | 1        |         |         |
| Flax Spinner              | 5            | 34      |          |         |         |
| Flax Throwster            |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Grocer                    | 1            |         |          |         |         |
| Hackler/Heckler           | 1 3          | 4       |          |         |         |
| Hand Sewing               | 2            |         |          |         |         |
| Hemp Spinner              |              | 3       |          |         |         |
| House Keeper              | 4            | 3       | 3        |         |         |
| Independent               | 25 1         | 9       | 12       |         | 1       |
| Labourer                  | 3            | 5       |          |         |         |
| Lodging House             |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Midwife                   | 1            |         |          |         |         |
| Mill                      |              | 4       | 3        |         |         |
| Mill Work                 |              | 5       |          | 1       |         |
| Publican                  | 1            |         | 1        |         |         |
| Rope Spinner              |              | 2       | 1        |         |         |
| Ship Chandler             | 1            |         |          |         |         |
| Shopkeeper                |              |         | 1        |         |         |
| Spinner                   | 1            | 4       |          |         |         |
| Spinner F Mill            | 2            | 1       |          |         |         |
| Spirit Dealer             |              | 1       | 1        |         |         |
| Warper                    | 2            |         |          |         |         |
| Washer Woman              |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Winder                    |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Winder Mill               |              | 1       |          |         |         |
| Yarn Winder               |              |         |          |         | 1       |
| <b>Total Persons</b>      | 66 4         | 127 1   | 29       | 1       | 2       |
| <b>Total Occupations*</b> | 16           | 26      | 8        | 1       | 1       |
| <b>Total Independent</b>  | 25           | 9       | 12       | 0       | 1       |
| <b>Total Workers</b>      | 41           | 118     | 17       | 1       | 1       |

\* In all cases Total Occupations in all does not include those of independent means.

Source: Analysis of Census returns Port Glasgow (1841), Enumeration Districts 574/2, 574/3 and 574/4.Scotlandspeople. [www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk). [accessed 23 April 2020].

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