New opportunities for Irish women? Employment in Britain during the Second World War

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Abstract
This article examines the World War II experiences in Britain of a number of Irish women. It is based on extracts from a series of oral history interviews conducted as part of a research project into the impact of the Second World War on women in Belfast and Dublin. The women who are quoted in the paper came from a variety of family backgrounds and economic circumstances and they worked in a number of different occupations, from the armed forces to munitions work to nursing. Some of them remained in Britain after the war and made their lives there, although it had not been their intention to emigrate permanently when they left Ireland in the first place.
Although Éire (as the Republic of Ireland was known at that time) was neutral during the war, Northern Ireland was a belligerent state, by virtue of its inclusion in the United Kingdom. However, conscription was not applied in Northern Ireland, so that women from both parts of Ireland who took up war work in Britain, or joined the armed forces, did so by choice. In Britain and other allied states, the linking of war work and increased opportunities was used as an incentive in national recruitment campaigns to encourage women to volunteer for the armed forces or for civilian war work, rather than waiting to be conscripted. This paper will consider the extent to which such opportunities acted as an incentive for Irish women to go to Britain. It will also question whether the women felt they had benefited from their wartime experiences, either financially, in terms of personal development or both.
Key words: oral history, Irish history, World War II, women's employment, emigration.

The twentieth century was a time of progress for women in the West, commencing with the liberation supposedly brought about by women's involvement in war work during the First World War, and continuing with the extension of the franchise to women in most Western countries, through to the opening up of formerly male-only employment during the Second World War.[1] This paper is based on extracts from the stories of some Irish women[2] who travelled to Britain during the Second World War years to take up jobs in war industry and the armed forces. The women's experiences will be considered in light of the findings of some of the research[3] into women's recollections of the Second World War in Britain and other Allied states. The identification of women with the domestic sphere and the impact of a familial ideology on women's employment outside the home had to be reconciled by the Allied governments with the need to recruit women into the mainstream labour force. In Britain and other belligerent nations, governments desperately needed women to do war work but were hampered by a reluctance to force women (particularly married women) to leave their 'traditional' place in the home. These competing political priorities inspired some very complex manoeuvring to overcome the potential conflict between the urgent need for female labour and the recognition that after the war it would probably be desirable to persuade women to relinquish their place in the workforce.

Éire's neutrality meant that there was no governmental compulsion on women to work outside the home, and in fact, women had been actively discouraged from doing so throughout the 1930s.[4] However, the war conditions in Britain created opportunities for Irish women to get jobs there and enabled some of them to fulfil ambitions or to develop personally in ways that would not have been possible before the war started. Northern Ireland was exempted from conscription during World War II and efforts to recruit women to war industries in the province or to join the armed forces were based on appeals to civic conscience or to self-interest, as illustrated by the following extract from a Ministry of Labour advertisement that was placed in Belfast's daily newspapers on 6th October 1941.

> In the hour of the Country's need, the women of Ulster have always responded, unselfishly and courageously, to the call of service. The hour of need is upon us NOW. … At a Government Training Centre you will be taught a trade essential to the war effort. You will be paid well during the training period of four months and afterwards you will be placed in WELL PAID ESSENTIAL EMPLOYMENT.[5]

Male and female emigrants from Ireland seem to have been motivated primarily by economic incentives and the majority of them sought employment in Britain's industrial areas, in the inter-war years as well as during the war.[6] At the commencement of the Second World War, both the Éire and the British governments introduced regulatory controls on emigration, which were abandoned after 1945. Passengers to Britain from Éire were required to obtain travel permits and these were not issued to anyone who already had a job in Éire or who had left their employment voluntarily. Appendix II shows the number of travel permits issued to males and females travelling to work in Britain from 1940 to 1946, indicating that throughout the war years, there were consistently more workers leaving from Dublin than the rest of Éire. The city was also hardest hit by the shortage of raw materials for industry. Restrictions were placed on persons with skills considered essential for the Irish state. They had to supply a certificate from the Department of Social Welfare, which stated that they were exempt from emigration restrictions and their application had to be accompanied by a written offer of employment in Britain.[7] Intending emigrants also had to apply for travel identity cards through the Garda Síochána.[8]

Despite Éire's neutrality, between 1939 and 1944[9] the British Ministry of Labour was allowed to put up posters in the local Labour Exchanges advertising work opportunities in Britain but also urging Irish women to enlist in the armed forces. In Northern Ireland, various arguments were used to encourage women to join the auxiliary branches of the armed forces during the war. Rallies and military parades were held during recruitment campaigns and also at regular intervals throughout the war years and the women's services were usually represented at general military parades. In the absence of conscription in Northern Ireland, the armed services had to rely on persuasion rather than coercion to get women to join, but some of the entry requirements revealed the

contradictory ideology inherent in their aims even more starkly. Parents had to give their consent to their daughters' recruitment while married women had to have their husband's written permission.

The Westminster government maintained records relating to wartime travel to and from Northern Ireland and they did not differentiate between Northern and Southern Irish passengers. It is therefore not possible to ascertain exact figures for Northern Irish women who emigrated during the war, although John Blake[10] maintained that more than 7,500 Northern Irish women transferred to war work in mainland Britain and the peak year for transfer of women appears to have been 1942, when there were 2,536 work placements in Britain.[11] The Northern Irish Ministry of Commerce questioned the policy of encouraging women to leave home for training in Britain for fear that they would not return to Northern Ireland and that the new industries developing there would be left short of workers.

Female emigration from Éire was strictly controlled and limited throughout the war years, according to the Department of External Affairs.[12] As employment opportunities decreased in Éire, mainly due to the rationing of raw materials for industry, greater numbers of workers, both male and female, went to Northern Ireland and Britain to take advantage of the need for personnel to service the war industries. Both Frances O. and Letty were working in sewing factories in Dublin when the war started. They had left school aged fourteen and their families needed the money that they earned. Not long after the commencement of the war, shortages of raw materials[13] meant they were let go from their jobs and neither of them felt they could afford to live on the meagre social welfare payment, as Letty explained:

> I went with a couple of other girls I was working with. I think a whole lot of us, like we were only in our twenties when we went. And we said there's no sign of this war being over so we had better go and do something, you know? There was no work and you only had about 12s. a week coming off the Labour - that was the money at the time. And my goodness, sure you'd give that up to your mother so you'd no money left, like, you know? And so I decided to sign up and some others, you know the way the word goes round, and they took our names and so we were signed on.

Frances O. and Letty were both deployed in munitions factories. Neither woman was concerned about the dangerous nature of their work, which involved packing explosive powder into shells. They both remembered being billeted very close to the factories where they were working, despite the risk during air raids.

Frances S. was sent to England during the war because her mother had decided that she needed discipline and she would be better off in a job than at school. Frances's mother answered an advertisement in one of the Catholic newspapers[14] looking for domestic help

and she arranged to send Frances to Birmingham to work in a convent school, despite her young age:

> I was fifteen on the 1st August and I came to England on the 1st September and I didn't even have to have a passport, because I wasn't sixteen. My birth certificate was stamped at the emigration entry at Holyhead.

In an extract from a Department of External Affairs memorandum written in 1944, it was noted that there was 'deep public uneasiness at the number of young girls in the late teens and early twenties who are being allowed to leave the country'.[15] The same memorandum noted that the rate of emigration was heavier in women aged less than twenty-two years of age than over it:

> We have had cases of Irish girls being sent back to this country by the British police on the ground that they were too young and immature to be away from home! The taking of employment in Britain by young girls of 18 and 19 may be justifiable on other grounds, but it is certainly not good for the girls themselves and, in many cases, it is very humiliating for the country.[16]

The only money Frances had with her was five shillings that her father had given her and which he told her much later in life he had obtained by breaking open the gas meter in the family home. The cousin deputed to meet her in Birmingham failed to materialise and she had to make her own way to the convent school. Frances's mother's failure to ensure that her young daughter would be safe in another country, especially one in a state of war, reflected the attitude of the Irish government to the welfare of female emigrants. Despite the repeatedly expressed alarm concerning the moral dangers for female emigrants, the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau was given no state aid by the Irish government to support their work in Britain.[17]

In wartime, the nursing profession allowed women to get close to the action without arousing any misgivings about their suitability as combatants. Nursing training in Ireland had to be paid for by the applicants or their families, and this forced many women from both parts of Ireland to go to Britain, where they would be paid while they were training. There was a shortage of trainee nurses in Britain from the late 1930s onwards and young Irish women were welcomed.[18] Nancy's parents had sent her to a secretarial college when she finished her secondary education, but she did not want to pursue a career in administration:

> Well, my mother was absolutely appalled when I went home and said that I wasn't going back, nobody had ever said anything like that in our house before, and she said well I'll have to speak to your father. … She came back and she said

> he said you can go and do the nursing and you can go to England, if you want, which I thought was very good of her.

Nancy's mother wanted her to train in a Catholic hospital and so she applied to several in London. After waiting some weeks, the only response she had received was a suggestion that she wait until the war was over. Not being willing to wait indefinitely, she applied to the Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham and in the summer of 1943, she was accepted there as a student nurse. More than half her class came from Ireland.

Olive trained to be a nurse in a Dublin hospital and she got engaged to be married shortly after she qualified in 1943. The couple could not afford to buy a home so they decided to postpone their wedding for a year or two. If Olive had got married straight away, the only work available to her would have been private nursing[19] because there was a marriage bar on hospital nurses at the time. She decided to go to England where she could get specialist training that was not available in Ireland:

> Anyway, I went off to England to an RAF hospital to do plastic surgery, down in Sussex[20], and I had a great time there for a year and a half. They had all these RAF pilots who'd been terribly badly burned and wonderful plastic surgery. At that time, there was no plastic surgery in Ireland. … But I was terrified going there. I went on my own. I was supposed to go with a friend and she discovered she couldn't leave her boyfriend so I had to sally off to the unknown over there … of course, the *Nursing Times* then was that thick with 'jobs vacant', you could pick and choose wherever you wanted to go, they were all dying for us.[21]

A New Zealander, Sir Archibold McIndoe[22], ran the hospital, the Queen Victoria in East Grinstead in Sussex, but the American and the Canadian governments had also contributed new wards and this emphasised the cosmopolitan nature of the operation. Olive was chastened by the numbers of men who were still in need of the major surgical treatment that was being developed in the hospital, even as late as 1946 and 1947 but she welcomed the opportunity to meet people from a wide variety of nationalities and backgrounds.

In addition to the financial and educational incentives that persuaded Irish women to travel to Britain in wartime, some motives related to the war itself and the forces involved in it, as Ethel explained:

> I saw a picture in the Sunday paper – you know the way everybody goes through the papers on Sunday – and I saw a soldier being attended to by medical staff. They were attending the soldier and I thought: you know, I could do that, and he could be away fighting. Innocently, you know, I always thought all soldiers fought. I never thought of the other jobs

> that had to be done, such as cooks and office staff and that. I just said to my mother I'm going to join up. She just said don't be silly, nobody would expect you to do that. Being the youngest, I was very demanding, and I suppose I was used to arguing, but for once, I just kept quiet and I thought I'll be twenty one in February and there's nothing they can do to stop me.

She waited until a few months after her twenty-first birthday and she travelled from Dublin to Belfast and enlisted in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (W.A.A.F.). [23] Ethel's family followed the progress of the war on the radio, listening to broadcasts from the BBC, because Radio Éireann, the national radio station was prohibited from referring to the war under the Emergency Powers Act 1939.[24] She was one of the first women to be trained as an electrician, working first on Whitley and Wellington aircraft and later on Spitfires and eventually she was promoted to Leading Aircraft Woman. Despite her mother's initial refusal to let her enlist, once Ethel had joined up her family supported her decision:

> But once I went, once I was in, it was Monty and our Ethel won the war [laughs]. So there was no problem with that. My father's brother was in the last war, he was in the first war as well, both wars, so the history was there and another brother was in the army too.

Her neighbours welcomed her home on leave and she does not remember ever having any difficulty about wearing her uniform in Dublin, despite Éire's neutrality.

The employment situation in Britain was certainly better than that in Éire, largely due to the extra opportunities created by the demands of the war. Although Northern Ireland was at war and employment did increase as a result of that, women's employment did not increase to the same extent that it did in Britain.[25] Pay and conditions depended very much on the job that was being done although even so-called 'traditional' women's jobs, like domestic service, were generally better paid in England, so much so that the emigration rate during the war resulted in a shortage of domestic workers in Ireland.[26] The table in Appendix III gives a general comparison between the wage rates and cost of living in Éire and the United Kingdom between 1939 and 1945. The figures from the Westminster Ministry of Labour included the wage rates and cost of living index for Northern Ireland. For each year of the war, the wage rates were higher in the United Kingdom than in Éire and from 1942 to 1945, the wage rates were higher than the cost of living, the reverse of the trend in Éire.

By any standards, the job in domestic service that Frances S. was sent to do in the convent boarding school was very tough and the accommodation provided by the nuns who ran the school was primitive, although she believed that the food was much better than she had been getting at home and that this compensated for the other conditions that she had to endure:

> We worked very hard at the school, there were no dishwashers then and everything was done by hand … I'd be put down in the laundry to stand up on a stool with these big massive tubs with these big paddles to stir the clothes. There were long corridors to scrub – no wonder I've arthritis in my knees. Mass every morning and polish the church and one thing and another. They had a Montessori school there and that had to be polished and when the girls went on holidays we used to clean all the paintwork and the curtains in the dormitories. But the food was very good and there was no shortage because the nuns cooked all their own food. … So we were quite safe there. There were three of us girls who lived in the convent. We were up in the attic. There was no electricity and we had candles for light.

An Assistant Welfare Officer who participated in a Mass-Observation investigation[27] believed that very few of the Irish women who came to England did so because they wanted to assist in the war effort, although she did not hold this against them. She thought they were good workers and she was constantly frustrated by the failure of the Ministry of Labour to spell out the conditions that the women would be working in before they left Ireland. She was also bothered by the refusal of the Wages Department in the factory where she was based to explain exactly how each woman's exact wage was arrived at and she spent a lot of time dealing with grumbles from the women because their pay varied from week to week, because they were paid by piece rates. In that factory women made up twenty-five per cent of the workforce, compared to fifteen per cent before the war. The single largest group of women came from Ireland.

All of the women who were interviewed believed that they had been better paid by going to Britain than they would have been if they had stayed in Ireland, even if pay was not their primary reason for going. When Kathleen was living with her mother-in-law in Cookham, she gave her ten shillings per week towards her keep. She would have been happy to pay more but her mother-in-law said that because she had all the family's ration books she was able to manage better and she did not need any more. This allowed Kathleen and her husband to save for their own home. She got an allowance from the army while her husband was away and she saved that and lived on her own pay. The factory where she worked provided a subsidised canteen for the employees so that she had a very good meal there during the day and if the staff had to work late, the canteen stayed open for them. Kathleen felt it was easier to save during the war because there was not much to spend money on.

Nancy was paid from the beginning of her nursing training, as well as getting full board and lodging:

> Well, it would be more or less pocket money because you see, we had three meals a day, we had full board and lodging. You

> know bedding, the whole lot, plus our education, plus everything else. I think it was about £3 something a month that I got, when I first started.

Nancy thought her conditions were particularly good because the City of Birmingham funded the hospital at Sellyoak where she was doing her training and nurses who were training in voluntary hospitals would not have been as well off. The Rushcliffe Committee on the Pay of Nurses[28] (for England and Wales) undertook a major review of salaries and conditions in 1940 and 1941. This was following representations from a variety of organisations concerned about the huge discrepancies in pay rates for nursing staff in different areas of the health service, particularly between public and private institutions.

During Ethel's interview for the W.A.A.F. she was asked what her best subjects were in school and she explained that she loved Science, Mathematics, English and Mechanical Drawing. She thought her answer was why the Recruiting Officer suggested she should be trained as an electrician. She 'sailed through the exams' because she found the subject so interesting. In addition to the satisfaction of being one of the first women to pass the training, Ethel was pleased to be given a pay rise which gave her about five shillings extra per week on top of the two shillings per day she had been paid during her training. Food and board were gratis, which significantly enhanced the value of the pay. When Pat joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service (A.T.S.) and was sent to Scotland for training she was paid the same as Ethel, also with food and board provided, but initially she had misgivings about her decision to enlist:

> It was a dreadful time. We all thought we were crazy for volunteering because to go from comfortable homes to chalets, yes, wooden chalets. You'd all go into the ladies room ([laughs] and there'd be all the hand basins and you'd to get on and get washed. Oh, we often cried at night because you couldn't do anything. The last weekend, I think, we went to Edinburgh and that was the highlight.

The recruits had come from different backgrounds and areas and part of the challenge for Pat was getting along with women with whom she had little in common. Being sent to the R.A.F. station at Farnborough at the end of her training period was a huge relief to her because she was billeted with about thirty other young women in an 'old rambling house with grounds and a couple of cooks'. She was paid about twenty-five shillings per week for working as secretary to the second in command of the Farnborough base, again with full board and lodging.

Pat remembered that at the end of the war, some of the older women who had been promoted were quite sad at having to leave 'because they would have no authority in civilian life, like they had in the army'. This observation is consistent with Dorothy Sheridan's research[29] into the memories of women who joined the A.T.S. and became both a part of the military machine but at the same time remained separate from it, mainly

because it was clear that it was a temporary role they were playing. Their dissatisfaction with relegation to the domestic sphere after the war did not manifest itself in any particular form of protest but may well have contributed to the gradual changes in social attitudes to women that eventually emerged in Britain. There is little evidence that women's role in the military had a major impact on challenging prescribed ideals about women's place in society. When military needs dictated that women enter spheres previously inhabited only by men, the terms were clearly dictated. They were there for the duration of the war only, and even then strict limits were placed on the extent of their involvement in these 'masculine' activities. Without conscription and therefore smaller numbers of women being mobilised, the impact of women's involvement in the military was even more muted in Northern Ireland than it was in Britain.

Towards the end of the war, there was no further need for the aircraft equipment that was made in the company where Kathleen worked and the contract ended:

> The contract was finished then but I was still eligible to go to work and they were going to put me on the buses as a conductor, but anyway, I said no to that and then they put me up to Slough, which was the nearest town. … I didn't like it much because it was a different class [pause] I'm not a snob but it was a different class of people up there, they were more factory people.

Kathleen was not unusual in her reluctance to mix with 'factory people'. One of the biggest difficulties that had to be overcome by the Ministry of Labour was persuading middle class women into war industry because of class bias against factory work, rather than the practical problems associated with the combination of domestic responsibilities and employment outside the home. All of the middle class women (and some of the women from working class backgrounds) who contributed to this research, betrayed a number of prejudices against certain kinds of work that were based on snobbery. In the munitions factory where Frances O. worked, there was no fraternising between the local women working there and the Irish women who had started with her:

> I don't know what it was but it was like there was segregation. I don't know why they did that but a lot of them, they were sort of snobby.

While there is no space in this paper to discuss the issue, it certainly warrants further investigation. Frances O. believes that the 'segregation' was due only to class prejudice and nothing to do with her nationality.

While none of the women remembered any hostility to them because of Éire's neutrality, some Irish women appear to have expected discrimination against them because of their nationality. Nancy remembered an incident concerning some fellow nursing trainees that resembled other stories about Irish people in Britain:

> Well, you see, people could make trouble for themselves by trying to be Irish, in a sense. For instance, we couldn't go to Mass every Sunday so that what happened was Sunday morning you got to go to Mass once in three weeks, when you were junior, every three weeks because one Sunday morning off, one Sunday afternoon off and one Sunday evening off. We had to take it in turns because somebody had to be in the hospital. But they felt that they should go to Mass every Sunday. They'd go to the Matron, and she said I have quite a number of staff here who feel they should go to church on a Sunday morning. She said I can't possibly let them all off. … But they would make trouble for themselves by feeling that they were against the Irish, which was not true.

One of Sharon Lambert's interviewees was annoyed that people in Lancashire automatically assumed that because she was Irish, she must be Catholic when in fact she was a Protestant. Lambert noted that the whole group who contributed to her research identified themselves as Irish emigrant women who lived in England.[30] The only resentment noted by her interviewees was that felt by family members who had remained in Ireland and who seemed to think they had missed out on 'a great life', even though many of her interviewees had originally emigrated in wartime.

Pat enjoyed her time away with the A.T.S. although she was aware that her parents were not very enthusiastic about it:

> If I was to be quite honest, it was a chance to get away from home [laughs]. Spread my wings [laughs]. They were quite worried. That I would be caught out, maybe in an air raid and be killed, that was the thing.

One of the benefits of being away from home, from her point of view, was that it enabled her to meet people of many different nationalities. At the air force base, there were Danes, Poles, and French men who had joined up and were identifiable by the shoulder band on their uniforms indicating their home countries. Olive also remembered that many of the kitchen staff were refugees from the war in Europe.

Before being released from the A.T.S. at the end of the war, Pat was offered the opportunity to sign up again and to travel abroad:

> … my junior commander, she asked me would I like to go to Washington. Washington where? I said [both laugh]. Washington DC. So I said I'd have to ring my parents so I rang home that night and my mother said this is very short notice. I just knew she didn't want me to go so I went back the next day and I told the junior commander. I've often wondered

> what would have happened if I had gone there. It would have been very nice.

Although Pat has often thought of how her life would have been if she had insisted on going to Washington, she does not regret her decision to leave the A.T.S. as soon as the war was over.

The research on the status of women in belligerent Western states during the Second World War[31] referred to at the beginning of this paper suggested that the potentially liberating aspects of the war situation for women were offset by the extra work that was generated for them by the expectation that they should continue to fulfil their traditional domestic function, in addition to taking up war work. Although women were being recruited to so-called 'male' jobs, for the most part they did not benefit from equal rates of pay. The principle of equal pay for equal work was discussed in Britain but it was only in the United States that it was formally conceded and even then many individual employers ignored the government's recommendation on the issue.[32] No fundamental changes in women's public status resulted from their involvement in war work in the Allied states, although in the long term, their emergence into the workplace in large numbers contributed to the undermining of institutional gender based discrimination.

The Irish women whose stories have been quoted in this paper had a choice about whether to travel to Britain or not, but for most of them their reasons for going were a consequence of a lack of other choices that were in turn related to a combination of their family's economic circumstances and the women's gender. The women who had been made redundant in Éire because of the wartime conditions certainly appreciated being able to earn decent wages at a time of hardship at home. Others were grateful for the opportunity to avail of access to professional training that they could not get at home or even just the chance to 'spread their wings' for a while. Looking back on their time in Britain during the Second World War they recall it as being synonymous with adventure and independence, which they remember with a sense of accomplishment and pleasure.

Appendix I: Short biographical notes on the women quoted in this paper

Ethel was born in Dublin and educated there. She enlisted in the W.A.A.F. in 1943 and re-enlisted when the war ended. Although she had been trained as an electrician, at the end of the war she was assigned to the W.A.A.F. marching band and she travelled throughout Europe taking part in victory parades and recruitment drives until she left the forces in 1949.

Frances O. left Dublin and travelled to England in 1940 and she worked in a number of munitions factories until the war ended. She enjoyed her time in England and she had an English boyfriend who took her on trips around the countryside in the sidecar of his motorcycle. He wanted to marry her but at the time she did not feel ready to settle down. She married a Dublin man after she returned home but she was widowed relatively early in their marriage and she raised their children by herself.

Frances S. moved from Birmingham to Grantham and later to Boston, Lincolnshire where she trained to be a nurse. She remained in England until 1949, when she became ill and returned to Dublin. She later married a Dublin man and the couple moved to London. When her husband died in the late 1960s, Frances decided to remain in London with her two sons because she felt that she would be happier in England's 'open society'.

Kathleen was born in Portstewart and educated there. She met her husband when she was working in a Women's Volunteer Service canteen for servicemen and after their marriage she moved to England to live with his parents while he was away with the army. After the war they remained in England until her husband's death in the 1980s. She returned to Portstewart when her brother was also widowed and she agreed to nurse him through a serious illness. Although her brother subsequently died, she decided to remain in Northern Ireland but she remains in contact with friends in England.

Letty could have moved back to Dublin before the end of the war because the sewing factory where she had worked got a contract to supply uniforms to the Irish Defence Forces. She chose to stay in England until the end of her contract in the munitions factory because she could earn more money doing that work. She returned home when the war ended and married a Dubliner. They moved into Letty's family home and remained there throughout their married life.

Nancy returned to Dublin after the war ended and she had completed her nursing training. She spent two years in the city's fever hospital doing specialist training in combating communicable diseases before joining the World Health Organisation. She travelled around the world in the course of her subsequent career before retiring to Dublin in the late 1980s.

Olive was born in a small town near the border between Éire and Northern Ireland. She remained at the Queen Victoria Hospital until 1947 when she returned to Dublin. 'But then I came home and that was the end of my nursing career. I got married and settled down [laughs]. That was that.' Her daughter trained as a nurse in the same hospital in Dublin where Olive had qualified.

Pat came back to Ireland after the war, even though her parents were living in Liverpool. She told them she preferred it here but in fact she wanted to get together with the young

man she had met during her school years and whom she later married. The couple moved to Dublin and still live in the city. Like Olive, Pat did not work outside the home after her marriage.

Appendix II: Travel permits issued for employment in Britain, classified by sex 1940 – 1946

Year	Dublin Males	Dublin Females	Total Dublin	Éire Males	Éire Females	Total Éire	Dublin total : Éire total
1940	6,094	1,564	7,658	17,080	8,884	25,964	29.5:100
As % of Total	**79.58**	**20.42**	**100.00**	**65.78**	**34.22**	**100.00**	
1941	10,576	1,068	11,644	31,860	3,272	35,132	33.1:100
As % of Total	**90.83**	**9.17**	**100.00**	**90.69**	**9.31**	**100.00**	
1942	10,525	4,201	14,726	37,263	14,448	51,711	28.5:100
As % of Total	**71.47**	**28.53**	**100.00**	**72.06**	**27.94**	**100.00**	
1943	6,111	4,344	10,455	29,321	19,003	48,324	21.6:100
As % of Total	**58.45**	**41.55**	**100.00**	**60.68**	**39.32**	**100.00**	
1944	2,013	1,011	3,024	7,723	5,890	13,613	22.2:100
As % of Total	**66.57**	**34.43**	**100.00**	**56.73**	**43.27**	**100.00**	
1945	2,305	1,373	3,678	13,185	6,094	19,279	19.1:100
As % of Total	**62.67**	**37.33**	**100.00**	**68.39**	**31.61**	**100.00**	
1946	1,246	2,352	3,598	10,829	19,205	30,034	12.0:100
As % of Total	**34.63**	**65.37**	**100.00**	**36.06**	**63.94**	**100.00**	

Source: *Ireland Statistical Abstract 1947-48*, p.21.

Appendix III: A comparison between the wage rates and cost of living in Éire and the United Kingdom (including Northern Ireland) from 1939 to 1945

United Kingdom	Wage Rates Sept. 1939 = 100	Official Cost of Living Index Sept. 1939 = 100
1939	104	104
1940	113-14	121
1941	122	128
1942	131-2	129
1943	136-7	129
1944	143-4	130
1945	150-1	133.5

Éire	Wage Rates 1 January 1939 = 100	Official Cost of Living Index September 1939 =100
1940	100.6	118
1941	105.4	130
1942	106.9	144
1943	109.8	162
1944	118.1	170
1945	121.6	169

Source: Mitchell, B.R. *British Historical Statistics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; Department of Industry and Commerce, *Some Statistics of Wages and Hours of Work in 1946 with Comparative Figures for Certain Previous Years* (November, 1946) and *Report of Ministry of Labour 1939-46*, pp. 304-5 quoted in Gerard Fee, *The Effects of World War II on Dublin's Low Income Families*, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University College Dublin, 1996, p. 65.

Endnotes

[1] Arthur Marwick was one of the foremost proponents of the claim that the total wars of the first half of the twentieth century were agents of social change, particularly for women, but recent research has challenged his view, particularly the work of Penny Summerfield. Marwick, A., *The Deluge. British Society and the First World War*. The Bodley Head, London, 1965; *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*. Macmillan, London, 1974; Smith, H., *Britain in the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, 1966; Smith, H., 'The effect of the war on the status of women' in Smith, H. (Ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War*, Manchester University Press, 1986; Summerfield, P., *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict*, Croon Helm, London, 1984; Braybon, G. and Summerfield, P., *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*. Pandora Press, London, 1987.

[2] Oral history interviews were conducted with more than thirty women from Belfast and Dublin and the evidence from the interviews was compared with contemporary observations from a variety of sources to analyse the impact of the Second World War on women in the two cities. (Muldowney M., *The Impact of the Second World War on Women in Belfast and Dublin: An Oral History.* Ph.D. dissertation, Trinity College Dublin, 2005.) In this paper it will be possible only to consider the experiences of a few of the women with whom oral history interviews were conducted. The extracts have been selected to illustrate the general discussion and with one exception they are limited to women who travelled from Éire to Britain. Brief biographical notes on the women quoted in the paper can be seen in Appendix I.

[3] The following works were particularly useful: Summerfield, P., *'My dress for an Army Uniform': Gender Instabilities in the Two World Wars*. An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Lancaster on 30th April 1997; Sheridan, D., 'Ambivalent Memories: Women in the 1939-45 War in Britain' in *Oral History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1990, pp. 32-39; Lang, C., *Keep Smiling Through. Women in the Second World War.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; Hartmann, S., *The Home Front and Beyond. American Women in the 1940s*. Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1982; Anderson, K., *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the status of women during World War II*. Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1981; Nicholson, M., *What did you do in the war, Mummy? Women in World War II*. Chatto and Windus, London, 1995.

[4] These efforts culminated with the passing of the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act which severely curtailed women's access to paid employment. Section 16 of the Act gave the Minister for Industry and Commerce the power to prohibit women from industrial work or to fix a proportion of women workers in industrial employment, 'after consultation with representatives of employers interested in such forms of industrial work and with representatives of workers so interested'.

[5] Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (P.R.O.N.I.), Ministry of Commerce files, COM.6113/649, 'Training of Women for War Work'.

[6] Delaney, E, *Demography, State and Society. Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*. (Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000) and Lambert, S., *Irish Women in Lancashire 1922-1960: Their Story.* (Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster, 2001).

[7] Connolly, T., 'Irish Workers in Britain during World War Two' in Girvin, B. and Roberts, G., (Eds.), *Ireland and the Second World War. Politics, Society and Remembrance*. (Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2000), pp. 121-132

[8] This is the name of the police force in the Republic of Ireland (known as Éire from 1937 to 1948).

[9] The recruitment campaigns were curtailed as the need for war workers diminished. In 1942, the activities of recruitment agents for British employers were restricted because their methods were causing some public outcry. The Censor was instructed to ensure that no advertisements that offered employment outside the country appeared in the national press. (Delaney, *Demography, State and Society*, p. 120.)

[10] In 1956 John Blake was commissioned to write the official history of Northern Ireland's involvement in the Second World War and he was given free access to many confidential files not made generally available until several decades later.

[11] Blake, J., *Northern Ireland in the Second World War*. (HMSO, Belfast, 1956), p. 340.

[12] Connolly, 'Irish Workers in Britain during World War Two' in *Ireland and the Second World War.* pp. 121-132.

[13] This was at a time when the number of merchant ships registered in Ireland was at its lowest point for some years. The British government reacted to the Southern Irish government's refusal to make the so-called 'Treaty ports' available to the British Navy by denying access to British-registered vessels to Irish

exporters. In order to maintain his government's position on neutrality, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Eamon de Valera decided that Éire would have to manage for a time without ready access to sea transport for imported supplies. While this situation was remedied in the course of the war, in 1939 it led to a disastrous shortage of raw material for industry.

[14] Frances's mother was very religious and although she was sending her away in wartime, she was concerned that her daughter's religious practices should be observed. Consequently, she only looked in the Catholic newspapers for job advertisements. Frances thought it was *The Universe* where her mother found the notice that a woman living in Dublin would be interviewing for the position in Birmingham. *The Universe* was a weekly Catholic newspaper, which came out on Sundays. It had been founded in 1860 and in the 1940s it was distributed from the publishers' premises in Manchester

[15] Department of External Affairs memorandum on new proposals regarding restrictions on travel permit issues to workers [9th May 1944], p. 4 (written by J.P. Walshe, Secretary of the Department) quoted in Delaney, *Demography, State and Society*, p. 134 and in Earner-Byrne, L., 'The Boat to England: An Analysis of the Official Reactions to the Emigration of Single Expectant Irishwomen to Britain, 1022-1972' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, (Vol. XXX, 2003), pp. 52-70.

[16] *Earner-Byrne*, 'The Boat to England.'

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 65.

[18] Delaney, *Demography, State and Society*, p. 135.

[19] This meant working as a temporary nurse for a nursing agency. Olive could have found herself nursing just one patient or being moved around on a regular basis, neither being a prospect that appealed to her, not least because agencies at that time demanded very long working hours from their employees.

[20] This was the Queen Victoria Hospital, at East Grinstead in Sussex.

[21] The *Nursing Times* was published in London and was distributed throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. Prior to 1941 it was known as the *Nursing Mirror and Midwives Journal.*

[22] Sir Archibald McIndoe (1900-1960) was born in Dunedin, New Zealand. He was appointed by the Emergency Medical Service in September 1939 to set up the burns unit in the Queen Victoria Hospital. He was renowned for the innovative methods of plastic surgery that were developed in the unit, particularly in the aftermath of the Battle of Britain. (Crystal, D., *Cambridge Biographical Encyclopaedia* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, Second Edition), p. 601.)

[23] Citizens of Éire had to go to Northern Ireland or to mainland Britain if they wanted to join the armed forces. (Hill, M., *Women in Ireland. A Century of Change*. (The Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 2003), p.117.)

[24] On 2nd September 1939, Article 28 of the Irish Constitution (Bunracht na hÉireann) was amended by the First Amendment of the Constitution Act 1939 to include a state of emergency in the provisions for wartime governance. Having allowed for the concept of an Emergency, which would have a similar impact on the state in many ways as if Éire were not neutral, on 3rd September the Oireachtas (the government) passed the Emergency Powers Act 1939, to 'make provision for securing the public safety and the preservation of the State in time of war and, in particular, to make provision for the maintenance of public order and for the provision and control of supplies and services essential to the life of the community'. This was the most wide-ranging of the wartime laws, in that it was used as the basis for the control of virtually every aspect of civilian life during the Emergency period, from censorship to food rationing to transport regulation to wage rises.

[25] The 1937 Census of Northern Ireland was very restricted in the range of enumeration and there is no analysis under the headings of 'Occupation' or 'Industrial status'. It had been intended in 1937 to launch a complete enumeration in 1941 in conjunction with the rest of the United Kingdom, but the war made a Census impracticable in that year. The reports of the 1937 Census were also restricted by the shortage of paper and the fact that wartime conditions affected the resources available to conduct a thorough analysis of the data. By the time the next Census was taken in 1951, the extraordinary conditions of wartime were no longer likely to be influential and there are no records to facilitate a reliable calculation of the extent to which women workers became involved in traditionally male dominated industry during the war years. In general, it would seem that the war accelerated existing trends in female employment patterns in Northern Ireland, with the rise of the service sector absorbing some of the decline in the manufacturing sector. Because of the general unreliability of the Ministry of Labour statistics, however, it is difficult to gauge the exact timing and extent of changes.

[26] Delaney, *Demography, State and Society*, p. 136.

[27] Sheridan, D. (Ed.), *Wartime Women. A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-45*. (Phoenix Press, London, 1990).
[28] Lord Rushcliffe was nominated to head the Committee by the British Hospitals Association, in consultation with the King Edward's Hospital Fund for London and the Nuffield Trust. (*Nursing Mirror and Midwives' Journal*, (Vol. LXXIV, No. 1917, December 1920), p. 163.)
[29] Sheridan, D., 'Ambivalent Memories: Women and the 1939-45 War in Britain' in *Oral History*, (Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1990), pp. 32-39.
[30] Lambert, *Irish Women in Lancashire*, pp. 96-97.
[31] Lang, *Keep Smiling Through. Women in the Second World War.*; Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond. American Women in the 1940s*.; Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations and the status of women during World War II*.
[32] International Labour Organisation, *The War and Women's Employment. The Experience of the United Kingdom and the United States*. (I.L.O., Montreal, 1946).