

Richard Kirkland, *Irish London: A Cultural History 1850–1916*. London: Bloomsbury, 2022. 223pp. 10 illustrations. £90.00 hbk. £28.99 pbk.
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Richard Kirkland's study of the Irish in London takes readers on a journey through nineteenth- and early twentieth-century London and the Irish people who built their lives there. *Irish London* is ultimately a book about how the Irish communities in London perceived themselves, how they were perceived by others and how the tensions between these two views emerged as an, often self-conscious, performance of being Irish in Britain between 1850 and 1916. Throughout, Kirkland weaves together material culture, literary and artistic representations and personal recollections to unite individual experiences with collective articulations of identity. While familiar figures like W.B. Yeats and P.S. O'Hegarty are dwelt upon, Kirkland shines a light on the experiences of women like Catherine Rae and Bessie Bellwood, in addition to the lives of those whose names we do not know.

Kirkland is at his best when focusing on one specific geographical area, particularly the St Giles Rookery. Chapter 1 conjures the Rookery as both an imagined web of crime and deviance for observers, and a place of kinship and belonging for those to whom it was their reality. As Kirkland notes, 'the Rookery became a state of mind and a powerful metaphor for Irish social and cultural survival in London' (p. 33) from the mid-nineteenth century until its demolition. The hospitality, kinship bonds and the communal need and desire to endure for those who escaped the traumas of the Famine left a deep impact on the historical memory of the London Irish, even after the spokespeople for the Irish in London began to benefit from upward social mobility.

The quest for a 'respectable' but authentic 'Irish' multigenerational community in London is a frequent consideration throughout *Irish London*. Kirkland expertly explores shifting articulations of what it meant to be 'Irish' and how different generations engaged with these ideas. The apparent threat to Irish coherence posed by the so-called 'cockney Irish', the London-raised children of Irish immigrants, provides a useful window into these generational tensions. These children of immigrants were raised between the Irish traditions of the Rookery and the excitement of a rapidly growing modern city. The Rookery's persistence as a home of Irish speakers added an extra layer to tensions regarding 'progress'.

This concern with communal memory, identity and performance is returned to in Chapters 3 and 5 which focus on Irish exhibitions and music halls. In Chapter 5, Kirkland considers how the ways in which music performance was an expression of Irish emigrant memory. This performance did not just concern Irish, or London Irish, audiences and performers. Instead, the music halls provided opportunities for performers to move between identities, benefiting from the flexibility of Irish and Londoner. Kirkland highlights the role of the material culture of Irish music, not just in promoting and sustaining Irish communal identity but also in becoming multi-generational heirlooms for those with very little to pass on. Musical instruments became symbols of wider traditions of hospitality, of kinship and of community performance.

A study of the Irish in London in this time period could not avoid a focus on nationalism. While this theme is returned to throughout the book, three chapters focus explicitly on engagement with different forms of nationalism. Chapter 2 explores the 1880s and the Irish–American Dynamite Campaign, particularly the bombings, organizing and backlash against the Irish living in the capital. Chapter 4 conversely considers cultural nationalism, particularly the literary societies

established as part of the Gaelic Revival in the 1890s and 1900s. While the efforts of Yeats, Wilde and O'Brien are considered in detail, Kirkland takes the time to examine the behind the scenes work of women in organizing cultural activities, particularly those which primarily focused on passing Irish culture and language on to London-born Irish children. Without these efforts, the vibrant and bustling Irish London world that existed in the early twentieth century, a world which Michael Collins and his compatriots were able to immerse themselves in, would have looked very different.

London as a site of vicarious revolution, with Irish people living in close proximity to 'the primary enemy of Irish freedom' (p. 152), is the focus of Chapter 6: 'The road to 1916'. While Kirkland engages with the spatial aspects of Irish London in other chapters, he is slightly hampered by the parochial nature of associational organizing during the nineteenth century, with associations reflecting the class allegiances of their organizers. These organizations were locally rooted, with the Southwark (Junior) Irish Literary Club, for example, providing a case-study of how the neighbourly ties of the Rookery were recreated in new locales. In his final chapter, Kirkland returns to consider how the shifts in political organizing changed the ways that the city as an imaged whole was engaged with. Defined 'Irish' areas in London had become increasingly blurry and the growth of Irish organizing across multiple social classes had fragmented any sense of a coherent 'Irish London'. This was reflected in a widening gap between different elements of associational culture as literary societies became increasingly subdued and concerned with maintaining class, and gendered, identities and Gaelic Athletic Association clubs moved out of the city centre in order to find suitable playing grounds.

There has been a marked absence of scholarship focusing on the Irish in London, Roger Swift's and Lynn Hollen Lees' work being the primary exceptions. This book, therefore, is a welcome addition to Irish diaspora history and London's social history. In studying the transitions of Irish community life across seven decades, a period where to be 'Irish' meant wildly different things despite continuities in anti-Irish prejudice, *Irish London* allows for the consideration of multigenerational identities and all the tensions and challenges that accompanies such a study. Kirkland's consideration of place, real and imagined, alongside a focus on material culture and literary representations, allows him to really position this book as an important piece of urban social history.

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Carl Abbott, *Suburbs. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. 140pp. 10 b/w images. Ppk £8.99.
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It was about time Oxford University Press included the subject of suburbs in its popular series of Very Short Introductions. Depending, of course, on how suburbs are defined, the majority of people in prosperous nations now live in such places. That may even be true of more urbanized countries in the less-prosperous parts of the