

# Sources for Researching the Protestant Working Class in the Archives of the Church of Ireland

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An institutional focus has traditionally dominated historical research into the Church of Ireland. Institutional research has worked from the Church of Ireland as a national church, to the diocesan and parish levels and down to individual churches and cathedrals. There is a long tradition of writing pamphlet-sized parish histories in the Church of Ireland and the Church of Ireland Representative Church Body (hereafter RCB) Library has a significant collection. Another dominant form of historical research has been into the relationship between the Church of Ireland and the Irish State. A further strand of research has been into the relationship between Irish Protestantism and the Irish Catholic Church. All of these forms of historical research have essentially been 'Church' histories.<sup>1</sup>

In more recent years, there has been a growing research interest that eschews institutional structures or relations with Catholic Ireland but instead looks inward, investigating the social and cultural life of the Church of Ireland community.<sup>2</sup> This research reflects the reality that for most people, their religious identity is dominated less by theology than by social and cultural practices. The growing interest in the social and cultural experience of Protestant Ireland has led to an appreciation that Protestant Ireland, despite the 'Big House' literary trope, is complex in its social composition and is predominantly an urban community of the middle and working classes. This in turn has emphasised the importance of class in understanding the Protestant experience. The working class origins of the playwright Sean O'Casey are well known but more recent autobiographies of working class and poor urban Protestants continue to disrupt the view of a homogenous community.<sup>3</sup> This article reflects two decades of research by this author into the complex social tensions within the Irish Protestant community revealed by a class perspective.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for example Alan Acheson, *A History of the Church of Ireland, 1691–1996* (Dublin, 1997); Kenneth Milne (ed), *Christ Church Cathedral Dublin. A History* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> See for example Miriam Moffitt, *The Church of Ireland Community of Killala and Achonry* (Dublin, 1999); John Crawford, *The Church of Ireland in Victorian Dublin* (Dublin, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Edith Newman Devlin, *Speaking Volumes: A Dublin Childhood* (Dublin, 2000); Derek Leinster, *Hannah's Shame: True Life Story* (2005); Robin Tobin, "'Tracing again the tiny snail track': Southern Protestant Memoir Since 1950' in *Yearbook of English Studies* (January 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Maguire, 'A socio-economic analysis of the Dublin Protestant working-class, 1870–1926' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, xx, (1993); idem, 'The organisation and activism of Dublin's Protestant working-class, 1883–1935' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no 113 (May 1994); idem, 'The Church of Ireland and the problem of the Protestant working-class of Dublin, 1870–1930' in Alan Ford, James McGuire and Kenneth Milne (eds), *As By Law Established: The Church of Ireland Since The Reformation* (Dublin, 1995); idem, 'The Dublin Protestant Working Class, 1870–1930: Economy Society & Politics' in Thomas Bartlett (ed), *Proceedings of the Lord Edward Fitzgerald Memorial Bursary* (Dublin, 1998); idem, "'Our People': the Church of Ireland in Dublin and the culture of community since Disestablishment' in WG Neely and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *All Sorts and Conditions: A History of the Laity in the Church of Ireland 1100–2000 AD* (Dublin 2002); idem, 'Churches and symbolic power in the Irish landscape' in *Landscapes*, vol 5, no 2 (Autumn 2004); idem, "'Remembering who we are": class and identity in Protestant Dublin' in Francis Devine, Fintan Lane and Niamh Purséil (eds), *Essays in Irish Labour History, A Festschrift in Honour of Elizabeth and John W Boyle* (Dublin, 2008); idem, 'The Church of Ireland parochial associations: a social and cultural analysis' in Colm Lennon (ed), *Confraternities and Sodalities in Ireland: Charity, Devotion and Sociability* (Dublin, 2012).

**CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.**  
Two Examples of the manner of filling up this Table are given on the other side.  
**FORM A.** No. of Form A. 10

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 2nd of APRIL, 1911.

NAME AND SURNAME.	RELIGION in that of Father.	MARRIAGE PROFESSION.	MARRIAGE.	AGE (See heading) and SEX.	RANK, PROFESSION, OR OCCUPATION.	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE.				MARRIAGE BOOK.	IRISH LANGUAGE.	IRISH and English Names of Surname of Father of Mother.
						State for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule the number of—	Children born alive to her since her marriage.	Children born alive to her since the 1st of January 1901.	Children born alive to her since the 1st of January 1901.			
1. David Caswell	Anglican	Single	Head of Family	46	Boilermaker	Anglican	21	11	9	—	—	—
2. Sarah Caswell	Anglican	Married	Wife of Head	40	—	Anglican	21	11	9	—	—	—
3. Sarah Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	20	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Rachael Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	16	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Thomas Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	12	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Charlotte Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	9	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. George Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	8	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
8. Annie Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	5	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
9. Martha Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	3	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
10. Ellen Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	1	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
11. George Caswell	Anglican	Single	Daughter of Head	20	—	Anglican	—	—	—	—	—	—
12. —	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
13. —	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
14. —	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
15. —	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

I hereby certify, as required by the Act 10 Edw. VII. and 1 Geo. V., cap. 13, that the foregoing Return is correct, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.

I believe the foregoing to be a true Return.

James Byrne *Signature of Enumerator.* David Caswell *Signature of Head of Family.*

Census enumerator return 1911 for the home of David Caswell, boilermaker, West Terrace, New Kilmainham, Dublin.  
 © National Archives of Ireland

**A guide through the sources**

Research into class and the Church of Ireland begins with the parish registers allied with the online 1901 and 1911 census returns in the National Archives. The 1901 and 1911 census returns are searchable by religion and occupation. Clusters of trades, occupations and religion are quickly identified and analysed. Dublin city is clearly segregated by class, not religion. On the other hand, both religion and class segregate Belfast. It would be interesting to test these models in other towns, cities and rural townlands. Comparison of the same area in 1901 and in 1911 reveals working-class mobility which can be related to specific trades. Poverty and unemployment led to rent falling into arrears, leading in turn to sudden 'flits'. Diligent searches online can track such movements and relocations.

1896 Marriage solemnized at St. Jude's Church in the parish of St. Jude in the County of Dublin in the City of Dublin.

No.	Wife Married	Name and Surname	Age	Qualification	Rank or Profession	Rank or Profession of the Father of the Bride	Rank or Profession of the Father of the Groom
23	1 June 1896	Sarah Caswell	22	Single	Boilermaker	Boilermaker	Boilermaker
24	19 Aug 1896	Martha Caswell	19	Single	Boilermaker	Boilermaker	Boilermaker

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Ireland, &c.

The Marriage was solemnized before us, James Byrne in the Presence of us, David Caswell James Byrne James Byrne James Byrne

1896 Marriage solemnized at St. Jude's Church in the parish of St. Jude in the County of Dublin in the City of Dublin.

No.	Wife Married	Name and Surname	Age	Qualification	Rank or Profession	Rank or Profession of the Father of the Bride	Rank or Profession of the Father of the Groom
24	19 Aug 1896	Joseph Whitehead	21	Single	Boilermaker	Boilermaker	Boilermaker
24	19 Aug 1896	Sarah Caswell	19	Single	Boilermaker	Boilermaker	Boilermaker

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Ireland, &c.

The Marriage was solemnized before us, James Byrne in the Presence of us, David Caswell James Byrne James Byrne James Byrne

Marriage entries for Sarah Caswell and her cousin Martha, recorded in the St Jude's Kilmainham marriage register, 22 June and 19 August 1896. RCBL, P278/3/4.

When the parish registers from the RCB Library are then brought to bear, the static information from the census dates begins to change through time. The patterns of marriage and family formation emerge. Marriage registers record a considerable amount of information on the class of both the bride and groom. These include the rank and profession of both, their age and addresses and also the rank and profession of the fathers of both bride and groom. A class and trade conservatism is evident, especially in the craft conscious areas of work. In some

Baptisms recorded in 1901, including Isabella, daughter of David and Sarah Caswell. St Jude's Kilmainham baptismal register, 1901, RCBL, P278/2/2.  
© Representative Church Body

cases this can mean the same trade or craft being shared by the fathers of the bride and groom and preserved through the groom.

Localism is also evident in the close neighbourhood proximity of the bride and groom, with evidence of marriages outside the immediate parishes being comparatively rare until the 1950s when leisure patterns altered greatly. Baptismal registers record the name, date of birth and baptism of the infant, along with the address and profession of the father. The pattern of family formation can be traced along with the developments in the father's trade status and progress. Where burial records survive, the lifespan can be added. A strong class conservatism emerges through the registers. Marriages up or down the classes are rare, the sons and daughters of the working class rarely marry up into the middle class. There is also a strong working-class conservatism where the sons and daughters of the skilled tradesman do not marry out into the unskilled. Class exclusiveness may well be more pronounced than denominational exclusiveness.

The marriage registers of the Church of Ireland parishes in Dublin reveal the enormous disruption to the Protestant working-class social relationships by the presence of the military barracks. A very significant number of marriages of the daughters of skilled workers to soldiers occurred, most of them of English or Scottish regiments on tours of duty in Ireland. These marriages led to a significant loss to the working class as the couple followed the army and moved from Ireland. The

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1902. Marriage solemnized at St. Jude's Church, in the Parish of St. Jude in the City of Dublin

No.	When Married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the Time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surname
27	December 20 <sup>th</sup> 1910	George Buckland v Lizzie Cleary	30 29	Bachelor Spinster	Private Royal Army Medical Corps	Richmond Barracks	George Buckland Patrick Cleary
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Ireland, by license of <u>the Bishop of Dublin</u>							
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>George Buckland</u> <u>Lizzie Cleary</u>	in the Presence of us,		<u>Alfred M. Linn</u> <u>Wm. Keenan</u>		
1911. Marriage solemnized at <u>St. Jude's Church, in the Parish of St. Jude</u> in the City of <u>Dublin</u>							
No.	When Married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the Time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surname
28	April 1 <sup>st</sup> 1911	Alfred Stanley Arkwright v Alice Harriet Williams	25 23	Bachelor Spinster	Private 1st Batt. Royal Dragoon	Warrington Barracks 61 Summit Rd	Abraham Arkwright James Williams
Married in the <u>Parish Church</u> according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Ireland, by license of <u>the Bishop of Dublin</u>							
This Marriage was solemnized between us,		<u>Alice Harriet Williams</u> <u>Alfred Stanley Arkwright</u>	in the Presence of us,		<u>Alfred M. Linn</u> <u>Wm. Keenan</u>		

\* This information should be given whether the father is living or dead and if the names, age, rank or profession, or if parties are unwilling to state them, a mark should be placed in the space.  
† "After Death" or "By License" etc. as the case may be.

St Jude's Kilmainham marriage register, 1910, RCBL, P278/3/6.  
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was not to determine the level of distress or the relief it warranted, but rather to determine the moral worthiness of the applicant: Questions included:

- How long is the applicant known to the recommender?
- Does applicant regularly attend divine service?
- Are the children sent regularly to weekday and Sunday school?
- Is applicant a member of any Scripture class, Temperance or Benefit Society?
- Is applicant in the habit of daily family prayer and reading the Holy Scripture?
- Is applicant of clearly sober and industrious habit?

The purpose of this depth of inquiry was to 'separate the indigent, incapable physically morally or mentally of self-support, who should go to the Poor Law, and the poor wage-earner in need of temporary help'. Thus charitable giving became deformed into a weapon for social control and was used to impose middle-class patterns of behaviour and discipline on the working class. Although the very substantial case records were unfortunately destroyed in the course of a move of premises, the ARDP annual reports provide a record of the impact of unemployment, recession and epidemic disease on the Protestant working class.

The RCB Library also holds records of a number of local charitable organisations, many of them proto-credit unions. These include the Thomastown Loan Fund to provide 'loans to industrious individuals living within five miles of Thomastown'; the Kilkenny Protestant Friendly Society; the Crone Charity for the Benefit of the Poor of the Parish of Ballingarry Co Limerick; the Youghal Protestant Relief Society and the Association for the Relief of the Sick and Indigent Protestants of Waterford.<sup>7</sup> As many of these records span the pre- and post-famine period, they are invaluable sources for understanding the experience of the rural and small town Protestant working class. There is a suggestion that through time and with shifts in the social profile, the focus of Protestant charity moved from the working class to the elderly, which may reflect the changes in the Protestant community or the development of the welfare state. From the perspective of both these contexts, the social history of Protestant charity in Dublin and in Belfast has begun to be written.<sup>8</sup> The resources of the RCB Library enable an investigation of the extent to which these findings are applicable to the smaller county towns and rural communities.

Another form of Protestant charity whose records survive in the RCB Library was structured to protect Protestant employment. The Protestant Shoemakers' Charitable Society was formed to protect a threatened trade whilst the Love's and Gardiner's Charitable Society was formed to ensure apprenticeships for young lads to tradesmen of the established church. These long running sources trace the decline of the old artisan trades and the struggle to maintain a viable future for the Protestant working class in these trades.<sup>9</sup>

In 1899, the Church of Ireland Labour Home and Yard was established in Ringsend.<sup>10</sup> Though it was organised by the Church's clergy in Dublin and was under church control, it was managed on

<sup>7</sup> RCBL, Ms 902, papers of the Thomastown Loan Fund, 1860–1899; RCBL, Ms 886, papers of the Kilkenny Protestant Friendly Society, 1840–1856; RCBL, Ms 822, papers of the Crone Charity, 1896–1995; RCBL, Ms 709, papers of the Youghal Protestant Relief Society, 1833–1927; RCBL, Ms 627, papers of the Association for the Relief of the Sick and Indigent Protestants of Waterford, 1835–1910.

<sup>8</sup> Oonagh Walsh, *Anglican Women in Dublin Philanthropy, Politics and Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Dublin, 2005); Alison Jordan, *Who Cared? Charity in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast* (Belfast, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> RCBL, Ms 776, papers of the Protestant Shoemakers Charitable Society, 1885–1928; RCBL, Ms 734, papers of Love's and Gardiner's Charitable Society, 1747–1997.

<sup>10</sup> RCBL, Ms 535, papers of the Church of Ireland Labour Home and Yard, 1899–1956.

a daily basis by the English evangelical organisation, the Church Army. The Church Army was founded in 1882 by the Reverend Wilson Carlile as a mission to the working class under the control of the Church of England, to rival the Salvation Army. By the later 1890s it had, under the title 'The Church Army Labour Homes for Criminals Inebriates Tramps and Deserving Unemployed', become a social rescue agency. The labour yard at Ringsend offered work to any man willing to undertake it and in return provided food, perhaps shelter and a pittance wage. The object of the Yard was 'to render impossible the complaint that any honest man is starving in the city owing to want of work'. The qualifying 'honest' reveals the coercive attitude becoming prevalent in a middle class frustrated by the persistence of poverty and by the apparent failure of the working class to respond to moral exhortations.

That the function of the Labour Home and Yard was to police the poor rather than relieve distress is apparent in both the principles on which the Home and Yard operated and of the Church Army who undertook the running of it. The Home and Yard was originally intended to be exclusively for men of the Church of Ireland but as men would 'undoubtedly declare themselves Protestant for the purpose of admission' it was decided that while it was primarily for members of the Church of Ireland, all men who were willing to attend daily prayer and Mission Service on Sunday would be eligible for admission to the Yard. From those in the Yard, 'suitable cases' would be selected for permanent accommodation in the Home. Those selected were not to associate with those in the Yard. At a fundraising event for the Yard, the Reverend Carlile spoke on the function of charity as dispensed by the Church Army:

In small communities the ne'er do well is known and marked. There is almost always someone to lend him a helping hand and if he rejects all efforts to raise him out of the depths of his own seeking there is at least no danger of his being kept alive by injudicious charity. If he will not work he must starve or go to the Workhouse. [but in the city] there is unfortunately a considerable number of persons who believe that they perform their duty to their neighbour by giving alms to every beggar who stops them with a whining tale. It is hardly too much to say that if the practice of indiscriminate almsgiving were abandoned the poverty and wretchedness in our great cities would be enormously diminished.<sup>11</sup>

Though the expectation was that the Labour Home and Yard would attract only those most desperate and therefore most amenable to evangelisation, it was soon apparent that in a city in which the opportunities for employment were dwindling year by year, the Home and Yard was being treated as just another source of casual employment. The records of the Home and Yard reveal that most of the workers were ordinary married men for whom the Yard was just another source of employment. The records of the Home and Yard are thus a valuable source on the development of structural poverty amongst the Protestant working class and the frustrations of middle-class reformers in confronting it during a period of Larkinite labour unrest.

With the extension of the franchise to the working class in the 1880s, the Protestant working class was organised in the 'City and County of Dublin Conservative Workingmen's Club' to mobilise 'Protestant working men of conservative and constitutional opinion'.<sup>12</sup> The club was part of the Conservative Party's organisational adaptation to mass politics. The political and social assumptions of the Protestant working class of Dublin and the efforts of the middle-class unionists

<sup>11</sup> *Dublin Evening Mail*, 15 January 1902.

<sup>12</sup> RCBL, Ms 486, papers of the City and County of Dublin Conservative Working Men's Club, 1883–1987.

to control it, emerge from the substantial and detailed records of the club which show a long-term tension between respectable middle-class unionism and working-class 'Protestant before Party' sectarianism. The club members were exuberantly Orange and their clubhouse located off St Stephen's Green was the focus for sustained rioting during the 1886 Home Rule crisis.

The political vision of the Protestant working-class members of the club was localist, Orange and confrontational rather than 'strictly constitutional'. The Protestant working class of Dublin supported the anti-ritualist controversialist Lindsay Crawford, opposed what they perceived as the middle-class 'sham Protestant' unionism of Horace Plunkett and formed the 'wild men' of the Southern Unionist Committee. The leisure role of the club also reveals a 'rough' working class, easily provoked into violence by any suggestions of dishonourable cheating and devoted to beer and billiards as the most rational form of leisure.

*The case of Messrs Mitchell and Tully were then gone into the House steward attended and stated that a quarrel had arisen at the Bar between the two members named and a mention of the name of Steward. Mr Mitchell being very much under the influence Mr Tully was called in and stated he was not very boisterous he was only in a singing humour it being the King's birthday. Mr Mitchell need not appeared and stated he was so far gone he really did not remember what had occurred. The committee having discussed the merits of the case gave instructions to the secretary to write Messrs Mitchell and Tully a letter of warning and advice as to their conduct in the future.*

City and County of Dublin Conservative Working Men's Club, Committee Minute Book, entry dealing with the boisterous behaviour of two members, Messrs Mitchell and Tully, in the context of drinking and related activities on the King's Birthday and how they were disciplined, 22 November 1901, RCBL, 486/3/1.

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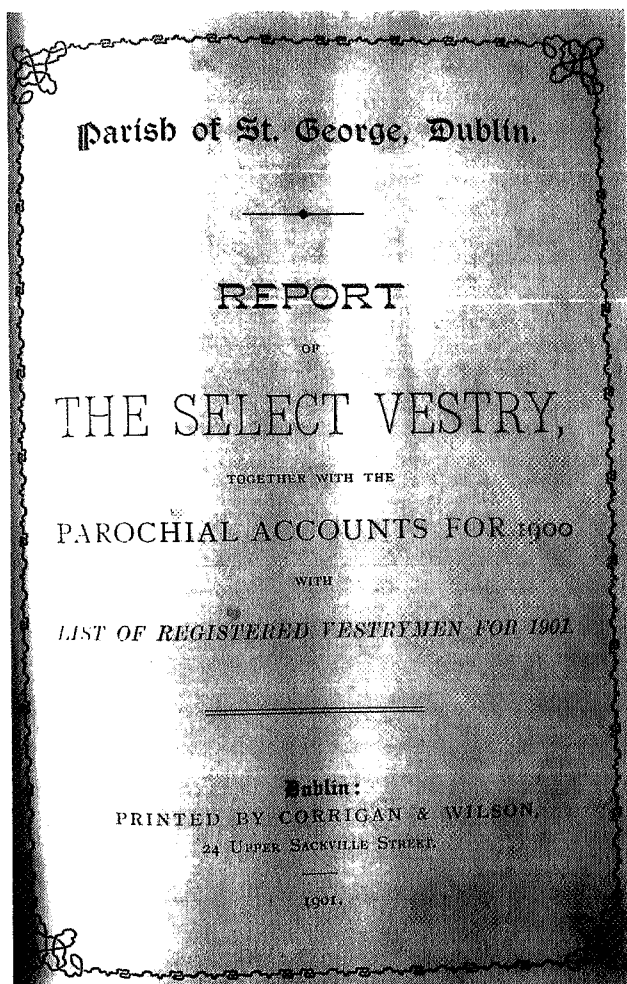
Working-class attitudes to religion presented a paradox. Religious practice could be lax or conducted in a rather indifferent and informal manner, yet religion was a staple of political conflict and a badge of political allegiance. Historically it has been the urban working class which has been the voice of militant and uncompromising Protestantism. The strength of the middle classes lay in a readiness to compromise when necessary, even on what were formerly fundamental issues. The strength of the working class, on the other hand, was found in its sense of solidarity and social cohesion. In this the Dublin Protestant working class of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shared a common culture with Belfast's Protestant working class.

Drink was the great symbol of degeneracy and the most sustained campaign amongst the Protestant working class was that of the Church of Ireland Temperance Society whose records are also in the RCB Library.<sup>13</sup> For the Temperance Society, the drunkenness and intemperance which it was thought was endemic amongst the working class, were seen as the cause of their poverty rather than as a response to poverty. Although the Temperance Society campaigned to evangelise the working class through Bible classes, it relied mainly on pressure on authorities to restrict working-class access to drink by campaigns on Sunday closing and by contesting licences for working-class clubs. The Temperance Society, as a middle-class organisation, believed that whereas

<sup>13</sup> RCBL, Ms 146, papers of the Church of Ireland Temperance Society, 1879–1975.

its own class was amenable to rational argument, the working class would only respond to coercion.

Returning to where we set out on this journey through the sources, the parish remains the foundation of the social and cultural experience of the Church of Ireland at local level and other resources within the parish collection such as parish newsletters and reports provide a key source for investigations. These parish publications of varying quality and size were considered ephemeral and so the collections that have survived for various urban and rural parishes now housed in the RCB Library, are invaluable sources for investigations into the class structures and interactions into the contemporary era.



Front cover of the Report of the Select Vestry and Parochial Accounts for 1900 with the List of Vestrymen, St George's Parish (Dublin, 1901), RCBL, P298/27.  
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These magazines were the messengers to the community, recording not only the cycle of the church year and the work of the parish organisations, but also the achievements of parish children in exams, prize winners in Sunday school, the movement in and out of the district of the parishioners, weddings, births and funerals and detailed listing of the parish contributors to parochial funds. Here is the local experience of the national organisations such as the Boys' Brigade (aimed principally at working-class boys) or the Young People's Society for Christian Endeavour whose national records are held at the RCB Library.<sup>14</sup> The decline of former wealthy parishes such as St George's in Dublin can be followed. Some of these parish magazines provide an informal census of the parish through lists of donations to sustenance funds or the names of members of committees and the select vestry. These lists may be analysed to reveal the changing balance of social classes in the parish up to the contemporary era when, arguably, generational and gender differences have proved more significant than class differences in shaping the Church of Ireland experience.

<sup>14</sup> RCBL, Ms 260, papers of the Young People's Society for Christian Endeavour, 1893–1965.