

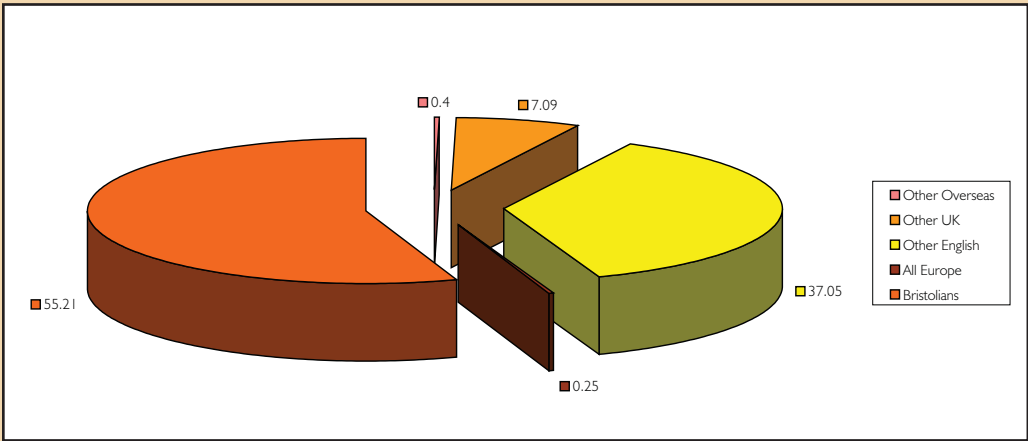
The 1851 census

In 1851, nearly half of Bristol's 137,000 residents, some 45 per cent, are estimated to have come from outside the city boundaries. Nearly a third (30 per cent) of these newcomers were West Country people, from the bordering counties of Somerset (11.5 per cent), Gloucestershire (10 per cent), Devon (4.5 per cent) and the remaining 5 per cent from Wiltshire and Dorset. Unsurprisingly, the largest groups from outside England's borders were the Irish, Welsh and the Scots, in that order, as the diagram below shows. In sharp contrast to the more economically dynamic cities of Manchester, Glasgow or Liverpool, where Irish migrants made up between 13 to 22 per cent of the inhabitants, Bristol's Irish-born population comprised just 3.4 per cent, the Welsh just 3.2 per cent and the Scots a minuscule 0.5 per cent. Even allowing for under-reporting, the numbers of Irish, Welsh and Scots immigrants are surprisingly small, only about 9,000 people out of the total population. By 1891, the Irish, still Bristol's largest foreign-born group, had declined in both absolute and relative terms to a mere 1.1 per cent of the population.

But compared with that, the proportion of truly foreign-born immigrants was even smaller. Just over 700 seem to have been born outside the United Kingdom in 1851. The largest category of foreign-born residents was the Germans, who will be discussed below.

The 1851 census can help us to identify parishes inhabited by first-generation immigrants. It tells us their place of birth and enables us to see that, as in the late 20th century, Bristol immigrants were often more widely distributed throughout the city than popularly supposed. Some may have been noticeably clustered in certain streets or within certain parishes, but there was no large ghetto of foreign-born migrants. What the Census of 1851 cannot tell us is whether ethnically mixed households or second-generation immigrant families identified themselves as being part of an ethnically distinct neighbourhood. Take, for example, Lawford's Gate, an area in what had been the parish of Sts Philip and Jacob. According to the 1851 Census, there were few Irish-born there. Yet the priest of the adjacent new church of St Nicholas de Tolentino saw his 1,000 Catholic parishioners as largely Irish. This implies that he included second- and possibly third-generation Irish in his estimate and that Lawford's Gate had a bigger 'Irish neighbourhood' than the Census figures alone would indicate.

Temple parish still retained its reputation as a 'Jewish' area, but this was hardly warranted by the actual numbers of foreign-born and native Jews there in 1851, with just over one per cent of the parish's residents coming from Central or Eastern Europe, not all of whom would have been Jews. Its association with Jews derives from the fact that the



Bristol's population in 1851 (actual and factored).

city's synagogue at the Old Weavers' Hall was in that parish, joined briefly in 1825 by a short-lived rival synagogue. By 1842 the surviving synagogue had been moved from the Old Weavers' Hall to the larger Quakers' Meeting House in the same parish. Temple still remained an initial point of arrival for most of the city's new Jewish migrants. Only 260 Jews were formally affiliated to the synagogue, and the more affluent had already moved into St Paul's and a few even to Clifton. Not all Jews were synagogue members and some must have assimilated into the wider population through inter-marriage. Some, like the Huguenots before them, anglicised their names, thereby obscuring their ethnic origins.

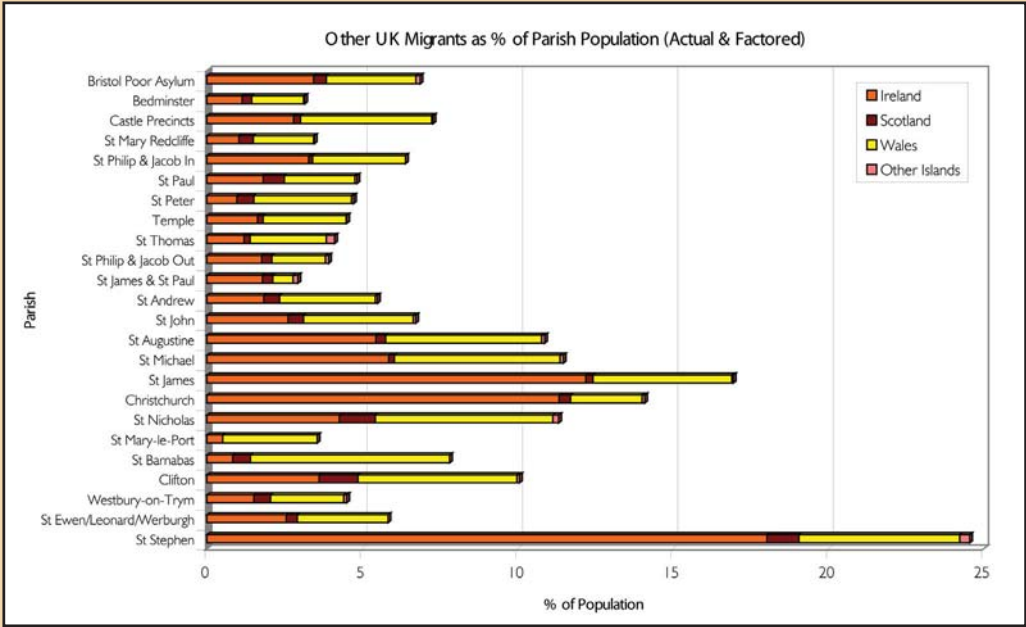
Outside the 'old city' of Bristol, new suburbs like Bedminster were rapidly springing into existence. Still partly rural, the composition of its largely working-class population is noticeably less ethnically diverse than both Bristol as a whole and the quayside parishes of the old city. But even a parish-by-parish breakdown of immigrant populations can be misleading. Such findings for a parish can mask concentrations of ethnic groups in

particular streets and courts. Thus we have some virtually all-Irish streets and courts in St Stephen's parish, yet very few Irish in other locations within that same parish. The 1851 census is therefore a valuable but limited tool. We cannot assume that everyone surveyed told the enumerators the truth or that its questions adequately probed the working lives of the population (for example, it under-reports female employment). Nevertheless, it affords us a valuable snapshot of where people were born, where in the city they settled, with whom they lived and, to some extent, what they did for a living.

References

Swift, 12; Meller, 19-33; Large (1985), 38. Samuel, 70-72; Adler, Schlesinger & Emanuel, 10-11. Pooley, 73; BRO, 38460 R 3(a).

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UK migrants in Bristol, 1851.