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**Ireland and Insurrection: Fenianism and the  
Irish Diaspora in Central and East London  
from 1865-1886**



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**Ireland and Insurrection: Fenianism and the Irish Diaspora  
in Central and East London from 1865-1886.**



Figure 1: 'The Fenian Guy Fawkes,' *Punch*, 28 December 1867, <https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultList> (Accessed: 16 April 2026)

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# Introduction

“It is hoped that the people of Irish parentage and descent need not be reminded of their duty in this solemn hour of their country’s cause.”<sup>1</sup>

- P.J. Downing in a letter to John O’Mahony (1866).

This statement by two Fenian leaders, calling on ‘people of Irish parentage and descent,’ highlights the importance of diasporic support to Fenianism, a transnational revolutionary Irish Nationalist movement, that aimed to establish an Ireland Independent of British rule.<sup>2</sup> The Fenian Brotherhood in America and the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) in Ireland were simultaneously established in 1858 by John O’Mahony and James Stephens, respectively. Downing’s emphasis on ‘duty’ to Ireland reflects a broader Irish nationalist sentiment emerging during this period, underpinning the rise of Fenianism and Home Rule constitutional nationalism.<sup>3</sup> By 1861, the Irish-born population in London was 107,000, the largest in the country; the wider Irish ethnic communities were likely much larger.<sup>4</sup> Memories of the famine as English manufactured remained strong, transmitted so powerfully that second-generation Irish nationalism was often fiercer than that of their parents.<sup>5</sup>

With fear of Fenianism gripping the press, authorities, and public alike, why has there been little consideration of Fenianism within the London Irish diaspora? This dissertation will examine the role of members of the London Irish diaspora in the revolutionary Irish struggle, moving away from historiographical trends of seeing the diaspora as disengaged with Fenianism. Thus, it repositions London, which has often been subordinated in favour of America, Ireland, and the North of England, as a significant place for Fenian activity,

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<sup>1</sup> Fenian Brotherhood Collection, Clipping Entitled Important Letters from John Mitchel and James Stephens, P.J. Downing et al, 20 February 1866, <https://www.jstor.org/action/doBasicSearch?Query=Clipping+Entitled+Important+Letters+from+John+Mitchel+and+James+Stephens&scope=eyJpZCI6IClZODcwOTI4MSIsICJwYWdlTmFtZSI6ICJGZW5pYW4qbnJvdGhlcmhvb2QgQ29sbGVjdGlvbiliICJwYWdlVXJsIjogIi9zaXRIL2NhdGhvbiGjIjLXVuaXZlcnNpdHkvaXJpc2gtZGZdG9yeS9mZW5pYW5icm90aGVyaG9vZGNvbGxIY3Rpb24tMzg3MDkyODEvliwglInR5cGUiOiAiY29udGFpbmVylwiwglInBvcnRhbnE5hbWUiOiAiQ2F0aG9saWMgVW5pdmVyc2l0eSBvZiBBbWVyaWNhliwglInBvcnRhbnFVybCI6IClvc2l0ZS9jYXRpb2xpYy11bml2ZXJzaXR5LyIsICJib2xsZWNOaW9uTmFtZSI6ICJjcmIzaCBlaXN0b3J5IiwglImNvbGxIY3Rpb25VUkwIiOiAiL3NpdGUvY2F0aG9saWMtdW5pdmVyc2l0eS9pcmlzaC1oaXN0b3J5LyIsICJib21waWxhdGlvbIRpdGxlc1VSTHMiOiB7fX0%3D&so=rel> (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; This definition is discussed at length in my methodology.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London*, (Manchester University Press, 1979) p.19.

<sup>5</sup> Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World 1867-1900*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp.211-215.

departing from the methodological tendency of solipsism within Irish historiography.<sup>6</sup> More broadly, it calls for a deeper examination of diasporas in histories of nationalism, as they can provide insight into the durability of nationalism across borders.

This dissertation argues that members of the London Irish Diaspora were politically engaged with Fenianism and were important players, examining not only how they *engaged* in but also *enabled* Fenianism and Fenian support in Central and East London in 1865-1886. This dissertation will adopt an empirically based structure, exploring three ways that the diaspora was involved in Fenianism: their role in London Fenian networks, their involvement in peaceful mobilisation, and their part in political violence. While factors such as gender, religion, and Home Rule politics shaped diaspora engagement with Fenianism, these lie outside of the scope of this dissertation.

In accordance with scholarship, Fenianism will be used as an umbrella term that encompasses the IRB and other Irish Revolutionary Nationalist organisations. The Irish in Central and East London were predominantly working-class, so this will be the group focused on.<sup>7</sup> The Diaspora will be interpreted as a multi-generational group with historical roots that lie outside the host nation.<sup>8</sup> The geographical scope of this study is Central and East London, due to Hollen Lees' statistical analysis of London areas, highlighting that in 1851, 10% of Whitechapel, 8-9.9% of St George in the East, and 6-7.9% of Stepney and Poplar's citizens were Irish-born.<sup>9</sup> It begins in 1865 to allow for an examination of networks before the 1867 Clerkenwell bombing, while 1886 marks the end of the Fenian Dynamite Campaign.<sup>10</sup> This dissertation will not be a chronological account of the development of diasporic Fenianism in London, but rather will examine a moment in Irish nationalist history.

## Literature Review

This dissertation is situated in the emerging field of diaspora studies within the international turn of Irish nationalist historiography.<sup>11</sup> This literature review highlights the need for

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<sup>6</sup> Alvin Jackson, 'Widening the Fight for Ireland's Freedom: Revolutionary Nationalism in its Global Contexts', *Victorian Studies*, 54 (2011), p.106; Examples include, Patrick Stewart & Bryan P McGovern, *The Fenians: Irish rebellion in the North Atlantic World, 1858-1876* (University of Tennessee Press, 2013); R.V. Comerford, *The Fenians in Context: Irish Politics and Society, 1848-82*, (Wolfhound, 1984), W.J. Lowe, 'Lancashire Fenianism 1864-71', *Irish Economic and Social History*, 2 (1975) pp.156-185.

<sup>7</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.53.

<sup>8</sup> Mary J Hickman, 'Locating the Irish Diaspora', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 11 (2002), p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.57.

<sup>10</sup> 1885 marked the final systematic wave of bombings, while activity tapered off in 1886.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, 'Widening the Fight,' p.106.

analysis on the London Irish diaspora and Fenianism in the late Victorian period, focusing on wider studies of the Irish in England before examining scholarship on Fenianism in London.

The presence of the Fenian threat in England has been subject to heated discussion. R.V. Comerford described Fenianism as an 'insignificant threat', while Kirkland states the IRB had 'very few members' in London.<sup>12</sup> These conclusions overlook that Fenianism led the British to conduct the first extensive covert intelligence operations amongst Irish communities. This dissertation supports John Newsinger's thesis that Fenianism was 'one of the most important revolutionary movements' to infiltrate and challenge the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup>

Scholarship may have failed to address Irish London Fenianism effectively due to the predominance of constitutional politics in the same period, potentially reflecting a preference for peaceful nationalism amid fears of endorsing state violence pre-1998.<sup>14</sup> Alan O'Day delivers a chapter on the 'English Irish and Irish Nationalism,' examining how Parnell increased cultural nationalist pride for the London Irish, yet he hardly mentions the Fenians despite the increasing connection between the two movements.<sup>15</sup> In his analysis of Irish migrant politics in Britain, Donald MacRaild foregrounds Home Rule, supported by substantial evidence of migrant participation, while only briefly mentioning Fenianism within the framework of public opinion.<sup>16</sup>

There have been several successful studies of the Irish in England, although London is often overlooked in favour of Liverpool and Manchester, likely due to their proportionally larger Irish populations.<sup>17</sup> Notable Irish historians such as Roger Swift and M.A.G. O'Tuathaigh primarily examine the diaspora through a social history lens, largely examining nationalism within the context of anti-Irish prejudice.<sup>18</sup> Swift only devotes seven pages of his book to

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<sup>12</sup> Comerford, *The Fenians in Context*; Richard Kirkland, *Irish London: A Cultural History, 1850-1916*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), p.31.

<sup>13</sup> John Newsinger, *Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, (Pluto Press, 1994), p.1.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, 'Widening the Fight,' p.97.

<sup>15</sup> Alan O'Day, *The English Face of Irish Nationalism: Parnellite Involvement in British Politics 1880-86*, (Macmillan, 1977), pp.108-126.

<sup>16</sup> Donald MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain 1750-1922*, (St Martin's Press, 1999), pp.138-150.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Swift, *Irish Migrants in Britain, 1815-1914*, (Cork University Press, 2002), p.35. Liverpool's Irish population was 22.3% and Manchester's was 13.1% compared to London's 4.6%.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Swift, 'The Outcast Irish in the British Victorian City: problems and perspectives,' *Irish Historical Studies*, 99 (1987), pp.264-276; M.A.G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain: Problems of Integration,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 31 (1981) p.149.

Fenianism, and they are entirely focused on Chester and Manchester.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Richard Kirkland's recent study on the cultural revival in Irish London primarily addresses Fenianism through its role in increased anti-Irish prejudice.<sup>20</sup> However, his combined framework of cultural history with urban migration history is exemplary, and we are yet to see a similar study that combines political history with urban migration history.<sup>21</sup> Lynn Hollen Lees' *Exiles of Erin* is the principal study of London Irish migrants, and her analysis of the economic, political, and social geography of Irish London deeply informed this dissertation.<sup>22</sup>

Scholarship on Fenianism in London, such as Shane Kenna's and K.R.M. Short's, focuses on specific events such as the Dynamite Campaign of 1881-1885.<sup>23</sup> This transnational analysis has led to an under examination of the diaspora's role, as dynamiters are analysed as outsiders to Irish London and government response is often foregrounded. More broadly, Kirkland claims that Fenians moved outside of London Irish society and that Irish politics and London Irish politics were 'scarcely coterminous'.<sup>24</sup> I seek to challenge that claim, arguing that the two were interconnected.

Exceptions where studies have promisingly started to examine the role of the London Irish Diaspora in Fenianism include Lees's comprehensive investigation of diasporic secret revolutionary societies in London from the 1790s onwards.<sup>25</sup> However, her overreliance on the *Northern Star* paper rather than local London newspapers leads to sparse information on London-specific Fenianism, resulting in only a few pages of analysis.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it provides a starting point for expansion. Although, excellent studies of the diaspora and Fenianism have been conducted elsewhere, such as Lowe's and Ó Catháin's studies on Lancashire and Scotland respectively, one has yet to be conducted on London, which this dissertation will seek to rectify.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Swift, *Irish Migrants*, pp.181-188.

<sup>20</sup> Kirkland, *Irish London*.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin*.

<sup>23</sup> Shane Kenna, *War in the Shadows: the Irish-American Fenians who bombed Victorian Britain* (Merrion, 2014); K.R.M. Short, *The Dynamite War: Irish-American Bombers in Victorian Britain* (Gill and Macmillan, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Kirkland, *Irish London*, pp.81-109.

<sup>25</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, pp.232-235.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Lowe, 'Lancashire Fenianism'; Máirtín S. Ó Catháin, *Irish Republicanism in Scotland 1858-1916: Fenians in Exile*, (Irish Academic Press, 2008).

In summary, this study will depart from previous emphasis on the Irish in America and the North of England and will be the first to examine Fenianism amongst the Irish London diaspora in 1865-1886, bridging Fenianism and Irish migration scholarship.

## Methodology

### Fenianism

This dissertation defines nationalism as a political movement rooted in Irish identity, where individuals engage in collective struggle to secure political power in Ireland for the Irish people.<sup>28</sup> Fenianism can be understood as a specific revolutionary form of Irish nationalism, and a working definition is essential for a clear framework for analysis. Kirkland, Stewart, and McGovern regard Fenianism's 'unconditional adherence' to physical force as its distinguishing feature.<sup>29</sup> Contrastingly, Kelly and English define Fenianism as an attitude and adherence to Irish nationalist ideals, alongside being a coherent movement.<sup>30</sup> Defining Fenianism through physical force overlooks the versatility required in a politically volatile period and Fenianism's complex relationship with constitutional nationalism, but definitions of Fenianism as an 'attitude' are broad and risk a lack of precision. Therefore, Fenianism will be defined as a revolutionary nationalist Irish movement, seeking to overthrow the British government of Ireland, **primarily but not solely** through armed means.

How we analyse Fenianism has been subject to intense discussion and is a fundamental methodological underpinning to this dissertation. Revisionist R.V. Comerford famously argued we must analyse Fenianism as a 'loose, undisciplined social organisation,' that provided a 'pastime' for lower classes.<sup>31</sup> Post-revisionist Newsinger critiques ignorance of the undeniably revolutionary nature of Fenianism, suggesting it causes poor historical analysis.<sup>32</sup> However, the binary distinction between pastime and revolutionism is reductive, as the two concepts are intertwined. Therefore, sources were analysed with attention to public houses, social relations, lectures, and other 'pastimes' as a potential means for revolutionism.

### Source Base

<sup>28</sup> This draws on Richard English's conceptualisation of nationalism in *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland*, (Macmillan, 2006), p.12 and Nina Glick Schiller's 'Long-Distance Nationalism' in *Encyclopaedia of Diasporas*, ed by Melvin Ember (Yale University, 2005), pp.570-580.

<sup>29</sup> Kirkland, *Irish London*, pp.31-32; Stewart and McGovern, *The Fenians*, p.7.

<sup>30</sup> English, *Irish Freedom*, p.187; Matthew Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal and Irish Nationalism* (Boydell, 2006), p.5.

<sup>31</sup> Comerford, *The Fenians in Context*, p.127.

<sup>32</sup> Newsinger, *Fenianism*, p.88.

The secretive nature of Fenianism and the scope of this dissertation required four source types, Newspapers, National Archives, Memoirs, and Old Bailey trials, to provide the range of perspectives required for an analysis primarily from below.<sup>33</sup> During my research, I conducted four visits to the London National Archives to examine Home Office and Police Files, which included letters, enclosed posters, and surveillance reports, amongst other items. The archive was constructed by colonial actors and operates as an instrument of power, so techniques of reading both along and against the grain were employed for critical engagement.<sup>34</sup> Beginning with Stoler's 'reading along the grain' was crucial, as examining the 'epistemological and political anxiety' present reveals the topics, places, people, and activities of Fenianism that the authorities were most concerned about.<sup>35</sup> Reading against the grain was then employed to interrogate British colonial assumptions surrounding 'Irishness' and conceive how authorities' reports contained implicit information on Fenian activities.

The Social History Archive, British Library Newspapers, and ProQuest Historical Newspapers were searched by trialling different permutations to both narrow down and expand results. Local newspapers, such as the Hackney Standard, provide rich detail on ordinary people's lives and localised Fenian activities, and were combined with national newspapers such as the Irish Times for balance with wider national perspectives on Fenian issues.<sup>36</sup> With the rise of investigative journalism in the mid-1800s, journalists increasingly attempted to uncover information on Fenian activities, providing us with another facet for understanding local diasporic Fenianism.<sup>37</sup> Concerns over the reliability of newspapers stem from their 'sensationalised reporting' and bias towards rare and scandalous events.<sup>38</sup> Coverage may have exaggerated the threat of the 'dangerous Irishman', so sources were read against the predominant English narratives of Irish criminality and moral inferiority, and events were cross-referenced in multiple newspapers.

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<sup>33</sup> For more on this approach, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, 'History from Below,' *Social Scientist*, 11 (1983), pp.3-20.

<sup>34</sup> Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2009) p.62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.36.

<sup>36</sup> Denise Bates, *Historical Research using British Newspapers* (Pen & Sword History, 2016) p.17.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.68.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.47.

This dissertation uses two Fenian works, Dr Mark Ryan's posthumous memoir *Fenian Memories* (1945) and John Denvir's contemporary semi-autobiographical study, *The Irish in Britain* (1892), which provide rare internal knowledge of London Fenian networks.<sup>39</sup>

Memoirs receive criticism for their narrative style, but this is not inherently problematic, as this freedom can reveal how they retrospectively understood networks and mobilisation from within the movement.<sup>40</sup> However, due to their political predisposition, they were read with close attention to persuasive and nationalist language and used heavily in conjunction with other sources. Two trials from the Old Bailey Online were utilised to understand the processes that led up to violent events in close to the Fenians' own words, but the proceedings are not a direct account of what transpired in court, nor can testimonies be interpreted as completely truthful, so comparison with archival statements was employed for a broader picture.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, the diasporic focus of this study shifts analytical attention away from Ireland by examining the existence of national consciousness outside the nation-state. While these source bases have been used by other Victorian Irish historians, this study will be the first to utilise these sources combined with a precise concept of Fenianism to reveal how diasporic networks in the colonial metropole sustained the movement.

## Chapter 1: The Diaspora and Fenian Networks

"There are no less than 10,000 armed traitors lurking in our midst."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mark Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, (M.H. Gill & Son, 1945); John Denvir, *The Irish in Britain*, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1892).

<sup>40</sup> Kayla M Stanton, 'Analysing Memoirs, Gone but Not Forgotten' in *Sources for Studying the Holocaust*, ed. By Paul R. Bartrop (Routledge, 2023), p.45.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Shoemaker, 'The Value of the Proceedings as a Historical Source', DHI, 4 March 2022, [The Value of the Proceedings as a Historical Source | The Old Bailey Proceedings Online](https://www.dhi.ac.uk/the-value-of-the-proceedings-as-a-historical-source/) (Accessed: 19 February 2026).

<sup>42</sup> 'MISCELLANEOUS NEWS,' *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 11 Jan 1868, [https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=1333e662-dfee-4df1-8232-4fcdf1bb350a&hitCount=2&gtmSearchId=4f0a3935-f1b5-45d8-9873-41811302724f&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CDX1900316979&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZCEO-MOD1&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CDX1900316979&searchId=R1&inPS=true&u=univbri&p=NCUK&aty=ip](https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=1333e662-dfee-4df1-8232-4fcdf1bb350a&hitCount=2&gtmSearchId=4f0a3935-f1b5-45d8-9873-41811302724f&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CDX1900316979&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZCEO-MOD1&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CDX1900316979&searchId=R1&inPS=true&u=univbri&p=NCUK&aty=ip) (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

In parts of Central and East London in the 1860s, Irish households could rise to over 75% of the local population.<sup>43</sup> These 'Irish colonies' provided opportunities for the formation of nationalist networks, yet historiography has paid little attention to them, focusing more heavily on the activities of Irish-American leaders in London.<sup>44</sup> This chapter argues that the Irish London diaspora had a significant presence and role in Fenian networks, providing a community embedded within the imperial metropole, aiding the organisation and maintenance of clandestine activity. It will investigate this through examining the diaspora as a recruitment base, their social relations, and their provision of spaces. In this chapter, networks will be defined as groups of interdependent actors and their relationships that contribute to and influence the Fenian movement.

Fenian networks were structured by a unique cell system, where they were divided into circles and led by one individual, known as A or 'a Centre'.<sup>45</sup> A then had the support of 9 B's who were Captains, who were followed by 9 C's and then 9 D's.<sup>46</sup> None of the C's and D's knew the identity of the Centre in their circle, though this was not always adhered to.<sup>47</sup> Men had to be sworn into the organisation by a superior, taking an oath pledging 'true allegiance to the Irish Republic'.<sup>48</sup> Naturally, this made research for this chapter complex, hence much of the evidence comes from senior Fenians, as they had knowledge about those below them.

London appears outwardly significant for Fenianism due to notable events such as the 1867 Clerkenwell bombing and the 1881-1885 Dynamite Campaign. However, its significance for the internal Fenian organisation needs to be established before network analysis. Denvir admitted 1865 was one of the most active years for the Brotherhood in London, while in 1867, Fenian informers had affirmed London as 'headquarters,' suggesting the significant presence of Fenians operating in the city.<sup>49</sup> This continued into the 1880s with discussions of a central Fenian policing body and secret agents reflecting the continuous threat and presence of Fenianism in London.<sup>50</sup> Kirkland even admits there were 'few Irish organisations

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<sup>43</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.56.

<sup>44</sup> Examples include Kenna, *War in the Shadows* and Stewart & McGovern, *The Fenians*, pp.185-196.

<sup>45</sup> Kenna, *War in the Shadows*, p.15.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Denvir, *The Irish in Britain*, p.183.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.203; London, The National Archives (TNA), Home Office, HO45/779, f.240, Dublin Police Report to the Home Office on Fenian Conspiracy, 8 October 1867.

<sup>50</sup> TNA HO144/721/110757, Memorandum by E.G. Jenkinson, 22 June 1885.

with no IRB infiltration in London', which contradicts his own argument that membership was insignificant.<sup>51</sup>

Firstly, the diaspora enabled the operation of Fenian networks by providing a continuous recruitment base for Fenianism. Evidence comes from self-proclaimed Fenian James Vaughan and turned informer Patrick Mullany in their statements, and the trial of the 1867 Clerkenwell prison bombing.<sup>52</sup> Both Mullany and Vaughan were recruited in London, in Teetotal Hall, Hanover Square (1866) and Golden Square, Carnaby Street (1865) respectively.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, Mullany states that he was not a Fenian in Ireland but began to sympathise with the movement after mixing with Fenians after moving to London in 1861, eventually being sworn in around '15-16 months' prior to the Clerkenwell trials.<sup>54</sup> The cramped urban spaces of Irish London facilitated the exposure to and development of nationalist sentiments, possibly in a way rural Ireland could not. Vaughan even admitted that 'there are plenty of us who do not know each other here in the Fenian society, it is so large.'<sup>55</sup> This undermines Kirkland's claim that London Fenians were a minute section of London Irish society, as the reported size of the organisation in London suggests extensive recruitment and organisation.<sup>56</sup>

The diaspora as a recruitment base continued into the 1880s, suggesting the movement in London was structured around requiring diaspora involvement over two decades. Dr Mark Ryan, a Fenian Supreme Council member who grew up in Lancashire and moved to London in 1882, was part of a widespread network of Irishmen and involved in nearly every Irish organisation in the city.<sup>57</sup> Ryan states that in Fenian meetings, they discussed how to recruit from the London diaspora and successfully recruited 'several intelligent young Irishmen,' including famed Irish nationalists Frank Hugh O'Donnell and T.W. Rolleston.<sup>58</sup> Ryan acknowledged the constraints placed on diasporic recruitment during the Dynamite Campaign, as the authorities increased their surveillance, and any person they approached

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<sup>51</sup> Kirkland, *Irish London*, p.31.

<sup>52</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings, (t18680406-412), April 1868, Trial of William Desmond (38), Timothy Desmond (46), Nicholas English (46), John O'Keefe, (25), Michael Barrett (27), alias Jackson, Anne Justice (22). <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t18680406-412> (Accessed: 4 March 2026).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid; See Appendix for map.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Kirkland, *Irish London*, p.32.

<sup>57</sup> Ryan, *Fenian Memories*.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.61.

'would be shadowed', with their address and workplace noted.<sup>59</sup> This vigilance reflects fear over the diaspora as a continuous recruitment base rooted in London. Despite surveillance, the diaspora continually provided an abundant recruitment base for Fenian networks.

Secondly, the diaspora enabled Fenian networks by providing the social relations in which nationalism could develop through groups such as the London Irish volunteers, facilitating further recruitment, covert organisation, and planning. A letter written by a Mr Connolly to the authorities about his experiences of Fenianism and the men involved reveals fascinating information regarding Fenian recruitment strategies.<sup>60</sup> Connolly was on a trip to Southend from London with other Irishmen when two members of the Irish London Volunteers, Peter Moghan and Hennessy, asked him what he thought of the 'Fenians in America.'<sup>61</sup> Once back in London, the men met with Connolly several times with other Fenians, when Moghan then asked Connolly to introduce them to more Irishmen so he could 'make them Fenians.'<sup>62</sup> Connolly also went with a 'Ryan' in Whitechapel to meet some Irish-American officers near Charing Cross, highlighting how the movement was not dominated by the Americans, but rather the diaspora's knowledge of London was essential in shaping how the two groups interacted and utilised one another.<sup>63</sup> The movement was relying on recruits being embedded in the Irish community. Connolly was only exposed to Fenianism due to his involvement with other London Irishmen, who could integrate him into the movement before harnessing his relationships with other Irishmen to recruit and expand the organisation further. London networks visibly had their own recruitment strategies that relied on grassroots organisation, not Irish-American officers.

Social relations formed in Irish workplaces were also key for agitating national feeling and continuing recruitment for Fenianism. Mullany, Vaughan, and Nicholas English all worked as tailors in the East End, and Mullany admits he was exposed to Fenianism through his profession as 'a good many of the Fenians were tailors,' listing other Fenian tailors such as 'Hennessey, ' 'Ryan' and 'Collins'.<sup>64</sup> The late Victorian East End was known for the 'sweated

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.136.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, Metropolitan Police, MEPO 3070, Mr Connolly, Letter from Airborn Hill Prison, March 1867.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Trial of Desmond, Desmond, English, Williams, O'Keefe and Justice; TNA MEPO 3/1788, Constabulary statement by Patrick Mullany, 10 January 1868; Voluntary Statement by Patrick Mullany, 14 January 1868; Constabulary statement of Nicholas English, 3 February 1868.

trade,' and the Irish were a central part of the 'East End Slop Trade,' as they provided cheap labour from the 1850s.<sup>65</sup> The social nature of tailoring, combined with cramped workshops and shared housing being predominantly Irishmen, provided a fertile environment for discussions on Fenianism. Relationships formed in the industry were vital to recruitment, as Mullany admits he expressed a wish to join to colleagues before officially being sworn in.<sup>66</sup> Relationships were also essential to operations. Mullany regularly described meeting the other tailors at their houses to discuss Fenian matters and even hosted a Fenian meeting at his own workshop, where sending help to Ireland was discussed.<sup>67</sup> Workplaces provided a space for Fenian organisation and planning, while the close relationships formed enabled Irishmen to be covertly introduced into the movement.

Localised diaspora leaders played a significant role in Fenian networks, as they were embedded in the social relations of the Irish community, ensuring that men worked for people they knew and trusted. Denvir highlights the London Centres 'John Byrne and James Doyle', describing Byrne as 'of London', suggesting he was likely either born there or had lived there for an extensive time.<sup>68</sup> In 1868, Mullany also lists several other Centres such as 'Clancy, Keefe, Donnegan, Murphy, Hayes, Hennessy, Blake, Cook, Lynch,' just to name a few, while in the 1880s, Mark Ryan mentions John Ryan, the head London Centre, who had emigrated from Tipperary.<sup>69</sup> Many of these men interacted regularly, and their integration into Irish networks was advantageous in recruiting for the movement, evidenced by Donnegan swearing in four London Irishmen in 1867.<sup>70</sup> Evidently, Fenianism required members of the diaspora to play these senior roles, as an in-depth knowledge of the community and their spaces within Central and East London was essential to recruit, protect, and plot on behalf of Fenianism. Irish-American Fenians could not possibly have the knowledge and integration needed. The number of Centres in London also reveals the extensive reach of Fenian networks, as there would have been several layers beneath them.

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<sup>65</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Verso, 2013), p.147.

<sup>66</sup> Trial of Desmond, Desmond, English, Williams, O'Keefe and Justice.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Denvir, *Irish in Britain*, p.205.

<sup>69</sup> TNA MEPO 3/1788, Revised Statement by Patrick Mullany, 17 January 1868; Continued Statement by Patrick Mullany, 18 January 1868; Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p.61.

<sup>70</sup> TNA MEPO 3/1788, Voluntary Statement of Patrick Mullany, 24 January 1868.

Finally, Fenian networks relied on physical spaces provided by the diaspora to carry out clandestine Fenian activities. When planning the Clerkenwell escape, for example, Mullany states he used to meet all the tailors 'at their houses,' as many lived together, listing locations such as 'Little Queen's' 'Pollan Street', 'Golden Square', while English affirmed Brotherhood meetings were held at 'Ryan's house' and 'Desmond's'.<sup>71</sup> Recruitment occurred in houses alongside the more illegal aspects of operations, such as arms dealing.<sup>72</sup> After Clerkenwell, houses became even more important for private meetings, as they provided a safe space away from the potential surveillance of the authorities, as local Fenian public houses were being watched. There were police reports of Fenian councils being held frequently in a private house in Millwall, likely belonging to a Fenian.<sup>73</sup> Detectives were planning on apprehending those involved by blocking bridges from the Isle of Dogs to Limehouse and Poplar.<sup>74</sup> However, their presence alarmed the Fenians, and subsequently, no councils were held.<sup>75</sup> The diaspora was clearly engaged and committed to Fenianism, as they were willing to provide their own houses for Fenian operations, despite increasing surveillance. Only Londoners could provide these residences that were essential to secretive operations, and without them, it would have been difficult for Fenianism to function in London.

Public houses were integrated into the fabric of Irish London, and were a central part of Central and East London life, as they provided a space for a range of business and social activities, particularly for the poorer in society.<sup>76</sup> For the Fenians, the public house not only provided a social space for the cultivation of networks but also a political space for meeting and planning attacks. In Mullany's various testimonies, the pub 'Cavanagh's' is mentioned frequently as a place the men liked to go to drink, discuss, and plan, with Mullany stating he went there 'nearly every night'.<sup>77</sup> Cavanagh's was described as an Irish tailor's pub by Constable Bunce, who stated he had seen all the accused, alongside other Fenians, in

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<sup>71</sup> Trial of Desmond, Desmond, English, Williams, O'Keefe and Justice; MEPO 3/1788, Constabulary Statement of Nicholas English.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> 'Discovery of a Fenian Council in London,' *Irish Times*, 27 December 1867, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpirishtimes/docview/518604803/627D6A515ED34F98PQ/25?accountid=9730&sourcetype=Newspapers> (Accessed: 6 March 2026).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Clarke, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200-1830* (Longman, 1983), p.321.

<sup>77</sup> Trial of Desmond, Desmond, English, Williams, O'Keefe and Justice.

Cavanagh's multiple times before the explosion.<sup>78</sup> Cavanagh's is an Irish name, and it was situated off Hanover Street, near St Giles in the Field, the most notorious Irish colony in 19<sup>th</sup> century London; the Fenians likely deemed it safe due to Cavanagh's integration into Irish London.<sup>79</sup> Even the most senior American Fenians, such as Colonel Burke, would meet their London counterparts in public houses, such as one on Dudley Street, where he appointed Nicholas English to raise money for arms.<sup>80</sup> Fenianism clearly relied on the social spaces of the diaspora for political operations to be conducted, questioning the usefulness of preeminent distinctions in scholarship between 'pastime' and 'revolutionism', as for London Fenians, the two were interconnected. The public house enabled nationalism to be integrated into the Irish people's everyday activities.

The diaspora played an integral role in Fenian networks, participating in the maintenance and organisation of the movement. This chapter has departed from an examination of Irish-Americans movement in London networks and challenged claims about the insignificance of Fenianism in London Irish society, centring the diaspora. Fenianism necessitated grassroots organisation in the metropole to survive, and the diaspora provided the key recruitment base. Networks relied on the social relations within the Irish London community to continue recruitment, organise operations, and ensure the success of localised leadership. Finally, diasporic houses and public houses were crucial in enabling planning and operations, providing nuance to the 'pastime' 'revolutionism' debate. These networks provided the foundation for more overt forms of peaceful mobilisation to develop, which will be explored in the following chapter.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Lees, *Exiles of Erin*, p.65.

<sup>80</sup> TNA MEPO 3/1788, Voluntary Statement of Patrick Mullany, 24 January 1868.

# Chapter 2: Diasporic Peaceful

## Mobilisation

Definitions and analyses of Fenianism tend to centralise violence, assuming peaceful mobilisation was primarily the work of constitutional nationalism rather than Fenianism. Consequently, the role of the diaspora in the amnesty campaign has rarely been analysed within the framework of the Fenian movement.<sup>81</sup> The Fenian Amnesty Campaign ran from 1868 and pushed for the release of the Fenian prisoners from English jails, where many were subject to horrific abuse.<sup>82</sup> This chapter will argue that the diaspora were active political actors who engaged with Fenianism peacefully during the campaign, providing support for the movement. This will be explored by examining diasporic attendance at amnesty demonstrations, their presence at lectures, and their donning of symbols at these events. Peaceful mobilisation will be defined as political actions that are not directed towards inflicting physical violence to peoples or property and do not utilise physical force, in line with my wider definition of Fenianism as operating not **solely** through armed means.<sup>83</sup> I support McConville's description of the prison as a 'theatre' of Irish revolutionary war, seeing the amnesty campaign as integral to Fenianism's importance.<sup>84</sup>

The Fenian Amnesty Campaign was a place of overlap between Fenianism and the Home Rule League, which grew increasingly intertwined after the 1873 'New Departure'.<sup>85</sup> Kelly utilises the campaign to argue against a binary distinction between constitutional and revolutionary nationalism, highlighting separatism's continuous importance.<sup>86</sup> However, his scope is post 1890s and top-down, focusing on Fenian and parliamentary leaders, which

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<sup>81</sup> Sean McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners 1848-1922: Theatres of War* (Taylor & Francis, 2005); Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal*.

<sup>82</sup> McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, pp.270-280; 'The Fenian Convict O'Donovan Rossa,' *The Times*, 10 March 1870, [https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=3c08ef9f-5456-403e-96ad-86a5db9e21b2&hitCount=1&gtmSearchId=80d7bc6b-b936-458e-8c92-2b995c61f705&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCS84716138&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS84716138&searchId=R1&userGroupName=univbri&inPS=true](https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=3c08ef9f-5456-403e-96ad-86a5db9e21b2&hitCount=1&gtmSearchId=80d7bc6b-b936-458e-8c92-2b995c61f705&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCS84716138&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS84716138&searchId=R1&userGroupName=univbri&inPS=true) (Accessed: 6 April 2026).

<sup>83</sup> This definition draws on discussions of violence in Sonny Shiu-Hing Lo et al, *Dynamics of Peaceful and Violent Protests in Hong Kong*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp.17-19.

<sup>84</sup> McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, pp.140-218.

<sup>85</sup> The New Departure refers to the bridging alliance between the Fenians and Irish Constitutional Party to push for the Home Rule Agenda.

<sup>86</sup> Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal*.

bypasses the Amnesty campaign as a key facet for grassroots political expression.<sup>87</sup>

McConville contends constitutional nationalism utilised the amnesty campaign to undermine Fenianism's methods while appropriating their 'fervour and drama', yet he neglects how grassroots Irish politics shaped its momentum, focusing instead on the campaign's effect on Irish debates in parliament.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, both historians' geographical scope is Ireland, neglecting the English facet of the movement.<sup>89</sup>

Firstly, the diaspora's attendance at peaceful amnesty demonstrations throughout 1865-1886 and engagement in individual forms of protest highlighted their active involvement in current Fenian issues. Amnesty campaigns were ideologically powerful, present across centuries of Irish republicanism and representing wider ideas of Irish freedom and mistreatment of the Irish. In 1869, the Fenian Amnesty committee conducted a procession starting at Finsbury Square, which had around '2000 people in attendance' made up of mostly 'Irish artisans and labourers', of 'Fenian character', suggesting diasporic involvement from the early stages of the movement.<sup>90</sup> Attendance only increased, as in March 1873, a 15,000 strong amnesty procession of mainly Irish people, involving the Fenian Amnesty association, marched from different centres towards Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park.<sup>91</sup> Mr Peter O'Leary delivered a speech declaring that the detention of prisoners was a 'grievance to the whole Irish race.'<sup>92</sup> O'Leary was a London Irish trade unionist, and his seniority as a speaker demonstrates how the diaspora could rise through the ranks of the movement.<sup>93</sup> Having diasporic speakers was crucial as the audience could resonate with O'Leary, engaging them with the Fenian struggle.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.77.

<sup>88</sup> McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners*, p.215.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid; Kelly, *The Fenian Ideal*.

<sup>90</sup> 'Demonstration of the London Fenians,' *East London Observer*, 10 July 1869, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000442%2F18690710&page=5&article=025&stringtohighlight=fenian+demonstration> (Accessed: 14 March 2026).

<sup>91</sup> 'Home Rule Demonstration in Hyde-Park,' *Morning Post*, 17 March 1873, [https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=ff427c0c-731f-4bee-af11-c02b0cee7f44&hitCount=55&gtmSearchId=a3e6dfa6-a2e9-42a4-bfd2-26ed3a7d257a&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=8&docId=GALE%7CR3213551792&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLD-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CR3213551792&searchId=R4&userGroupName=univbri&inPS=true](https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=ff427c0c-731f-4bee-af11-c02b0cee7f44&hitCount=55&gtmSearchId=a3e6dfa6-a2e9-42a4-bfd2-26ed3a7d257a&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=8&docId=GALE%7CR3213551792&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLD-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CR3213551792&searchId=R4&userGroupName=univbri&inPS=true) (Accessed: 14 March 2026).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Niall Whelehan, *Changing Land: Diaspora Activism and the Irish Land War* (NYU Press, 2021), pp.15-17.

O'Leary spoke again at a Fenian Amnesty meeting in March 1874, with around '20,000 Irishmen and Irishwomen,' with the reporter noting the 'silent and orderly' nature of the crowd.<sup>94</sup> These attendance numbers suggest widespread commitment, as the diaspora likely had to sacrifice work or limited leisure to join. Significant numbers on English soil were crucial for presenting amnesty as an internal issue and establishing the presence of an Irish collective. The orderly nature of the crowd is also important, contrasting narratives of the Irish as disorderly and highlighting the diaspora's deep respect for the struggles of the prisoners and Ireland.<sup>95</sup> Speaker Mr Clapham declared there were 'millions of Irishmen who would exchange places with the prisoners' to 'show their love for Ireland', and this was met with 'prolonged cheering'.<sup>96</sup> Their cheering showcases the depth of diasporic commitment, as many appeared willing to sacrifice their own freedom for Fenianism.

Members of the diaspora also engaged in individual acts of protest, highlighting that commitment existed beyond the collective level. Police reported a J Collins and C Ryan, shoemakers and residents at 131 Bethnal Green Road, who enquired about visiting Fenian prisoners Edward Cordon and Michael Davitt.<sup>97</sup> The police rejected their application but determined the visit was 'at the wish of members of Irishmen in London who sympathise with the causes.'<sup>98</sup> This supports the existence of strong individual and collective commitment amongst the diaspora, with Collins and Ryan likely being directed by wider London Fenian society, possibly to convey information to the prisoners. Evidently, Fenian leaders and the diaspora did not operate separately, but rather were intertwined, with Irish Fenians relying on London Fenians to assist them in local situations.

Secondly, the diaspora mobilised peacefully on behalf of Fenianism by attending lectures that discussed the amnesty campaign and Irish freedom. Lectures provided communal spaces for education and intellectual engagement with Fenianism. Prominent Fenian Dr Denis Mulcahy delivered a series of lectures on Fenian amnesty around the London Wall in Summer 1876, reported by plainclothes policemen sent to observe. Reports claim around

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<sup>94</sup> 'Great Fenian Amesty Meeting in Hyde Park,' *Morning Advertiser*, 16 March 1874, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0001427%2F18740316&page=3&article=027&stringtohighlight=fenian+amnesty> (Accessed: 14 March 2026).

<sup>95</sup> Swift, 'Outcast Irish', p.268.

<sup>96</sup> 'Great Fenian Amnesty,' *Morning Advertiser*.

<sup>97</sup> TNA MEPO 3070, Detective Special Report to Scotland Yard, 28 June 1876.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

300 people attended Mulcahy's lectures, primarily being Irish labourers.<sup>99</sup> The audience being primarily labourers is significant to understanding the lecture as a political act. They were not intellectuals who had the freedom to attend lectures for educational purposes, but likely worked long hours, having to sacrifice work or leisure for education on Fenianism. Mulcahy's June 1876 discussion was entitled 'What must we do to gain the Freedom and National Independence of Ireland,' while during his August lecture, he stated he was proud that 'such a large number of his countrymen and countrywomen took an interest in their native land.'<sup>100</sup> The collective language present highlights that the Fenians saw the diaspora as agents that shaped Fenianism's direction.<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, covert police attendance suggests the state saw the diaspora as legitimate political actors that required monitoring. Undercover operations went against dominant 'liberal' policing methods, suggesting that, despite being peaceful, Fenian lectures were seen by the British state as a threatening and subversive political activity, as the diaspora's exposure to libellous and inflammatory content could disseminate and encourage involvement in more violent mobilisation. Additionally, Mulcahy was a radical Fenian who opposed cooperation with the Irish parliamentary party, yet he saw spoken 'word' as the most important way for Irish people to get their rights.<sup>102</sup> These points reinforce the need for an analysis of Fenianism that moves beyond focusing solely on physical force.

As sources discussing direct diasporic reception of speeches are scarce, an analysis of repeated topics across lectures and subsequent responses can reveal what the diaspora considered significant. The notions of downtrodden Ireland and tyrannical England were utilised to incorporate the diaspora into the Irish nationalist tradition that legitimised Fenianism. At an 1869 Trafalgar Square amnesty meeting, Mr Moore, M.P. for County Mayo, declared England 'exists with the blood of twenty generations of dead Irishmen,' portraying the Fenian prisoners as victims of continued English tyranny.<sup>103</sup> The audience reportedly

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<sup>99</sup> TNA MEPO3070, Police Letter to the Home Office, 12 June 1876.

<sup>100</sup> TNA HO45 9329/19461, 'Denis Dowling Mulcahy's Lecture in London,' *The Irishman*, 2 June 1876; TNA MEPO3070, 'Dr Mulcahy's Lectures', *The Irishman*, 26 August 1876.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid; Bridget Hourican, 'Mulcahy, Denis Dowling,' Dictionary of Irish Biography, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/mulcahy-denis-dowling-a6025> (Accessed: 6 April 2026).

<sup>103</sup> 'The Great Meeting in Trafalgar Square on behalf of the Fenian prisoners,' *Reynold's Newspaper*, 19 September 1869, [https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=f12dd7c9-b20a-4ad4-aa24-c5459305ebef&hitCount=231&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=39&docId=GALE](https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=f12dd7c9-b20a-4ad4-aa24-c5459305ebef&hitCount=231&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=39&docId=GALE)

engaged in 'prolonged cheering' during Moore's speech, suggesting this historical inclusion evoked strong Irish national consciousness.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Mulcahy highlighted the unjust nature of English rule, beginning with Cromwell's massacre at Waterford and ending with the Manchester Martyrs.<sup>105</sup> The audience responded with 'bursts of enthusiastic applause'.<sup>106</sup> The recurrence of these topics and audience response suggests history was a key mechanism for Fenian diasporic mobilisation, incorporating the diaspora into a 'homogenous national past', which shaped Irish London identity.<sup>107</sup> Fenianism could position itself as a path to freedom from Ireland's colonial past.

Finally, the diaspora mobilised peacefully by their adoption of Irish nationalist symbols during Fenian Amnesty events. Symbols worn linked the diaspora with their homeland, constructing them as a part of the Irish nation and nationalist struggle.<sup>108</sup> Peter Alter states Irish nationalist symbols often originated from the 'spontaneous reaction of people in a revolutionary situation,' highlighting their usefulness in revealing grassroots political engagement.<sup>109</sup> While Alter primarily focuses on constitutional Irish nationalism, I will extend this argument to an analysis of symbols during Fenian Amnesty Protests, seeing them as an outward expression of Irish nationalism, despite markers of 'Irishness' potentially attracting suspicion from the authorities and public.<sup>110</sup>

The colour green was present throughout Fenian Amnesty demonstrations, from 1869-1874, with reports of people wearing 'green rosettes', 'green ties and ribbons', and 'green

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[%7CY3200551925&searchId=R15&userGroupName=univbri&inPS=true](#) (Accessed: 11 March 2026); 'The Fenian Prisoners,' *Daily News*, 21 September 1869, [https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=246f72ff-72be-46c3-a473-5012f04b28ae&hitCount=45&gtmSearchId=568d7ace-f509-48b7-89bb-868b1615f35b&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=19&docId=GALE](https://go-gale-com.bris.idm.oclc.org/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=246f72ff-72be-46c3-a473-5012f04b28ae&hitCount=45&gtmSearchId=568d7ace-f509-48b7-89bb-868b1615f35b&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=19&docId=GALE)

[%7CY3203030092&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZBLC-MOD1&prodId=BNCN&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE](#)

[%7CY3203030092&searchId=R1&userGroupName=univbri&inPS=true](#) (Accessed: 11 March 2026); Moore reportedly desired an alliance with the Fenians and tried to join the organisation in 1864, Owen McGee, 'Moore, George Henry', October 2009, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/moore-george-henry-a5931> (Accessed: 11 March 2026).

<sup>104</sup> 'The Fenian Prisoners,' *Daily News*.

<sup>105</sup> TNA HO45 9329/19461, Mulcahy's Lecture in London.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Whelehan, *The Dynamiters*, p.213.

<sup>108</sup> Lauren Brancz-McCartan, 'From the Courtroom to the Marketplace: The Shamrock as a Marker of Irishness,' *Études Irlandaises*, 50 (2025), p.151.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Alter, 'Symbols of Irish Nationalism,' *Studia Hibernica*, 14 (1974), p.105.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

scarves', which were understood as 'emblems of Irish nationality'.<sup>111</sup> Green has been associated with Ireland for centuries, thought to be connected to the landscape of the 'Emerald Isle', Ireland's female personification, 'Erin', and medieval Irish kingship, highlighting its usefulness as a symbol of Irish sovereignty and independence.<sup>112</sup> It has been symbolic in Irish nationalist movements from the 1790s United Irishmen to modern day Sinn Féin.<sup>113</sup> Reports of the occasional 'green Phrygian cap,' historically symbolising liberty, further highlight how members of the diaspora intertwined ideas of Irish nationalism with legacies of fights for freedom and republicanism, such as the American and French revolutions.<sup>114</sup> For the amnesty protesters, green symbols were a commitment to Irish freedom and identity.

Flags and banners 'embroidered' with 'harps' and 'shamrocks' were present at nearly every amnesty campaign.<sup>115</sup> The 1790s United Irishmen utilised the harp's connection to the ancient Irish Bardic Tradition to transform it into a nationalist symbol that could be 'strung to the tune of liberty'.<sup>116</sup> Henceforth, it became an 'open space of opposition' to British colonial rule.<sup>117</sup> In the context of amnesty, this is particularly significant, as the Fenians campaigned to free those in oppressive British prisons, hence its presence. The shamrock also became a nationalist symbol with the United Irishmen movement, as they wore it as a sign of defiance.<sup>118</sup> The shamrock's presence at the campaigns is especially significant, as during the famine, Irish migrants 're-imagined' its meaning overseas, transforming it into a representation of diasporic heritage and resilience, as well as Irishness.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> 'The Monster Amnesty Demonstration in London,' *Reynolds Newspaper*, 31 October 1869, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000101%2F18691031&page=3&article=017&stringtohighlight=THE+MONSTER+AMNESTY+DEMONSTRATION+IN+LONDON>. (Accessed: 16 March 2026); 'Demonstration of the London Fenians', *East London Observer*; 'Home Rule Demonstration,' *Morning Post*; 'Great Fenian Amesty Meeting', *Morning Advertiser*.

<sup>112</sup> Brian Ó Cuív, 'The Wearing of the Green,' *Studia Hibernica* 18, (1978), pp.113-114.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> 'Home Rule Demonstration,' *Morning Post*.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*; 'The Monster Amnesty Demonstration in London,' *Reynolds Newspaper*; 'Demonstration of the London Fenians,' *East London Observer*.

<sup>116</sup> Mary Louise O'Donnell 'A Driving Image of Revolution: The Irish Harp and its Utopian Space in the Eighteenth Century,' *Utopian Studies*, 21 (2010), pp.252-273; Barra Boydell, 'The Female Harp: The Irish Harp in 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romantic Nationalism,' *RCMI Newsletter*, 20 (1995), p11.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Nissa Moonstar, 'The Shamrock: Ireland's Legendary Symbol of Faith, Folklore and Fortune,' *Enchanted Chronicle*, <https://www.enchanted-chronicles.com/shamrock-history-ireland/> (Accessed: 31 March 2026).

<sup>119</sup> Brancz-McCartan, 'From the Courtroom,' p.159.

Banners read various slogans such as 'God save Ireland,' 'Ireland a nation,' 'Resurrection of Ireland.'<sup>120</sup> 'God Save Ireland' was a distinctive Fenian revolutionary cry, originating from the 1867 Manchester Martyrs shouting it defiantly at the scaffold. Thereafter, its presence represents an undying commitment to Fenianism and admiration for revolutionary sacrifice. When lacking substantial textual evidence of diasporic opinions, an examination of symbols is a useful method for analysing diasporic engagement with Fenian amnesty. Overlooking this visual show of national support and pride within a Fenian context is a pitfall of current historiography.

This chapter has provided a bottom-up analysis of diasporic involvement in the Fenian Amnesty campaign, exemplifying their active political engagement in peaceful Fenian mobilisation, which enabled the momentum of the movement on English soil. Audience numbers at amnesty campaigns emphasize diasporic solidarity with incarcerated Fenians, while attendance at lectures was a political act and a pathway to education on Fenianism. Finally, symbols showcase the diaspora's identification with the Irish collective and their outward commitment to Fenianism, despite potential discrimination from authorities. Analysing the amnesty campaign from a diasporic perspective is crucial to understanding how peaceful mobilisation was versatile and constitutive of Fenianism and Fenian support in London.

## **Chapter 3: Diasporic Political Violence**

"If it is murderous to love Ireland dearer than I love my life, then it is true, I am a murderer."<sup>121</sup>

Michael Barrett's monumental speech from the dock after being sentenced to death for the Clerkenwell bombing remains a powerful reminder of the depth of commitment to the

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<sup>120</sup> 'Home Rule Demonstration,' *Morning Post*.

<sup>121</sup> William Montagu, *Leaves of Life: being the reminiscences of Montagu Williams Q.C.*, (Macmillan, 1890), pp.202-203.

Fenian struggle. This chapter will argue that Fenianism relied on the Irish London Diaspora to conduct and support political violence throughout 1865-1886. It will examine their role in providing arms, the bombing campaign, and their rare involvement in political assassinations. Scholarship on Fenian violence is considerable but often focuses on key moments such as the Clerkenwell bombing and the Dynamite Campaign of 1881-1885.<sup>122</sup> While these events will be referenced, this chapter will decentre them by centralising the diaspora in an examination of the functioning of violent Fenianism across the period. Due to the characterization of Fenian violence as organised violence aimed at overturning the state, political violence will be defined as the use of violent acts to effect a change in the current political norm.<sup>123</sup>

Fenian violence has often been situated within the field of terrorism history, with Brian Jenkins and Lindsay Cutterbank examining how Fenianism shaped the 'liberal state's' counterterrorism strategies.<sup>124</sup> This focus on 'liberal' response overlooks the imperial context of Fenianism and the Irish struggle in the metropole.<sup>125</sup> Kenna deemed the terrorism label 'pejorative' and analysed the Fenian Dynamite Campaign as a nationalist Irish-American phenomenon.<sup>126</sup> However, he only briefly acknowledged London diasporic Fenians, despite his analysis alluding to their importance.<sup>127</sup> This chapter does not dispute the campaign's Irish-American origins but rather sheds light on how a minority of the diaspora facilitated this violence.

Fenian views on violence were extremely divisive, as many leaders saw armed struggle as only acceptable against the oppressor's armies, not civilians. In 1875, O'Donovan Rossa established the Skirmishing Fund in the USA, aimed at raising money to conduct bombing campaigns.<sup>128</sup> While some may have sympathised with the actions, few fundamentally condoned them, with IRB founder James Stephens describing it as the most 'wicked conception of the national movement.'<sup>129</sup> Despite various suborganisations, the British saw

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<sup>122</sup> Kenna, *War in the Shadows*; Short, *The Dynamite War*.

<sup>123</sup> This definition utilises discussions in Marie Breen-Smyth, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Violence* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), pp.44-49.

<sup>124</sup> Lindsay Cutterbank, 'Countering the Irish Republican Terrorism in Britain: Its Origin as a Police Function,' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18 (2006), pp.95-118; Brian Jenkins, *The Fenian Problem: Insurgency and Terrorism in a Liberal State, 1858-1874*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Kenna, *War in the Shadows*, p.37.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p.45.

<sup>129</sup> James Stephens letter book, 1876-1879, Davitt papers, TCD MS 9659d/325 cited in Ibid, p.46.

the campaign as part of the Fenian conspiracy, and this is the preeminent way it is discussed in literature, which this dissertation will maintain.

The Irish London diaspora was essential in transporting, hiding, and dealing arms that were required for violent Fenian attacks in both Ireland and England. Before the Clerkenwell bombing, Fenian member Murphy met several Fenians at 'O'Donnell's' house to request funds for gunpowder and received around 10-20 shillings each, highlighting that the diaspora were financially contributing to Fenian violence.<sup>130</sup> The powder was sent down Gray's Inn Road in a barrel towards the prison, with the truck wheeled by a man named John Taylor, a diasporic engineer, suggesting an explicit role in transporting material and carrying out violent attacks.<sup>131</sup>

The Irish London Volunteers not only provided a place for recruitment but also for acquiring arms. Farrel and Pillssmont, members of the volunteers, reportedly planned and discussed sending their arms to Ireland, while Denvir highlighted the increased police protection surrounding volunteer armouries, reflecting how diasporic membership of the volunteers was deemed threatening.<sup>132</sup> The volunteers enabled the transportation of arms, which was especially important for the March 1867 uprising and for the Fenian ideal of armed insurrection.

East End diaspora houses were consistently used to store arms for Ireland. According to Nicholas English, around 1865, there was a significant number of firearms being stacked up in Whitechapel by a man named Moohan, to be sent to Dublin.<sup>133</sup> The same year, London Centres John Byrne and James Doyle were arrested following a police raid directed to finding arms hidden at 123 James Street.<sup>134</sup> In 1882, there was a seizure of Fenian Arms from 99 St. John's Road, Clerkenwell, where Thomas Walsh, a Fenian partner of Dr Mark Ryan, was storing around 1000 weapons, suggesting diasporic arms storage was present throughout the period.<sup>135</sup> Many of Walsh's weapons were stamped with shamrocks,

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<sup>130</sup> TNA MEPO 3/1788, Voluntary Statement of Patrick Mullany, 24 January 1868.

<sup>131</sup> TNA MEPO 3/1788, Statement of Patrick Mullany, 10 January 1868.

<sup>132</sup> Denvir, *Irish in Britain*, p.213; TNA MEPO 3070, Letter from Airborn Hill Prison, March 1867; Metropolitan Police Report, 7 February 1881; 'The Fenian Alarm in London,' *The Irish Times*, 22 October 1867, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpirishtimes/docview/518581982/627D6A515ED34F98PQ/17?accountid=9730&sourcetype=Newspapers> (Accessed: 22 March 2026).

<sup>133</sup> TNA MEPO 3/1788, Constabulary statement of Nicholas English, 3 February 1868.

<sup>134</sup> Denvir, *Irish in Britain*, p.205.

<sup>135</sup> Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p.108.

reinforcing their connection to Fenianism.<sup>136</sup> Fenianism needed the London diaspora, as they were engaged in spaces and organisations that gave them access to arms, something non-Londoners did not have.

Furthermore, the diaspora's involvement in Fenian violence is evident during the Dynamite Campaign of 1881-1885, which was a systematic bombing of British buildings and transport networks. Describing the Dynamite Campaign as a solely 'Irish-American' phenomenon is slightly reductive and misleading, as Irish-American dynamiters still relied on Irish London spaces and support.<sup>137</sup> Focusing on James Gilbert Cunningham and Harry Burton, the dynamiters who conducted attacks against Victoria Station, Gower Street Tube, and the Tower of London in 1884-1885, demonstrates that London was not just a transactional place for the dynamiters, but rather, they moved within London Irish society.<sup>138</sup> Burton worked at 'Herman's Cabinet making factory' in Limehouse from May to September 1884, a key East End industry frequently worked by Irish migrants.<sup>139</sup> A sustained job suggests Burton was integrated into the fabric of London, relying on work to provide him with money, disguise, and safety. Cunningham lodged with Winifred Cannon in Whitechapel.<sup>140</sup> It is unconfirmed if Cannon was Irish, but it is an Irish surname, and she reports that she was a Roman Catholic and sold Irish newspapers such as the *Shamrock* with a Miss O'Brien.<sup>141</sup> This suggests Cunningham was living within London Irish society, as he lived in Whitechapel and reported socialising with O'Brien and other lodgers.<sup>142</sup> Intentionally or unintentionally, the diaspora shaped the success of transatlanticism by providing integration, safety, and resources for the Irish-American dynamiters, making them active, not passive agents in shaping how the sides of the Atlantic interacted.

Authorities' activities support the dynamiters receiving assistance from Irish-London. Police Inspector Sweeney describes searching 'slums, markets, bridges, wharves and public houses' and 'tailing and searching suspects' across the East End because of reports about Fenians

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Kenna, *War in the Shadows*, p.417.

<sup>138</sup> Old Bailey Proceedings, (t18850420-532), April 1885, Trial of James George Gilbert, alias James Gilbert Cunningham (22), Harry Burton (30), <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/record/t18850420-532?text=Fenian> (Accessed: 25 March 2026).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid; 'British and Irish Furniture Makers Online,' *The Furniture History Society*, 30 November 2023, <https://bifmo.furniturehistorysociety.org/about/project> (Accessed: 25 March 2026).

<sup>140</sup> Trial of Cunningham and Burton.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

plotting in 'Whitechapel or the Bowery.'<sup>143</sup> The extent of surveillance suggests the East End was important to the dynamiters, and the threat was at least partly credible. Furthermore, intimidation of Fenian sympathisers produced very little, possibly suggesting refusals to reveal information to the police.<sup>144</sup>

The diaspora had a significant presence in workplaces such as the docks and gas works, which were key targets for dynamiters. Irish-dominated workplaces were fertile recruitment grounds for Fenianism. Gasworks provided heat and light to London and were central to Victorian urban life.<sup>145</sup> In the 1860s, gasworks began hiring Irishmen, with the South Metropolitan Gas Company even forcing Irish employees to sign an address expressing disapproval of Fenian acts.<sup>146</sup> With dynamite attacks on Glaswegian gasworks, authorities suspected Fenians would utilise Irish workers to target gasworks in London to plunge the city into darkness, causing widespread chaos. The police checked gas companies' provisions, bridges, and pipes for any weaknesses that could be exploited, while officials requested more funding for the 'few gasometers' in London due to the 'Fenian agitation' and Irish employees being 'liable to be influenced by their countrymen.'<sup>147</sup> There were several incidents involving Haggerston gasworks, leading to increased police protection due to the 'number of Irish employees'.<sup>148</sup> The extent of reconnaissance and surveillance reflects intense apprehension over the Fenian enemy within and suggests police intelligence implied Irish gas workers' involvement in Fenianism.

The docks employed a significant number of Irishmen, having a 'Hibernian closed shop recruitment,' which made it a focal point of intense fear and suspicion throughout the period.<sup>149</sup> By the 1880s, many 'Irish-Cockneys' were pushed out of skilled trades into the

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<sup>143</sup> John Sweeny and Francis Richards, *At Scotland Yard: being the experiences during twenty-seven years' service of John Sweeney*, (Grant Richards, 1904).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Geoff Marshall, *London's Industrial Heritage* (History Press, 2013), pp.27-29.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p.34.

<sup>147</sup> TNA MEPO3070, Metropolitan Police Report, 7 February 1881; Letter from London and Northwestern Railway Secretary's Office, 1 July 1881.

<sup>148</sup> 'The Fenian Scare,' *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*, 21 March 1883, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000942%2F18830321&page=3&article=073&stringtohighlight=fenian> (Accessed: 1 April 2026); 'Fenian Scares,' *Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*, 11 April 1883, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000942%2F18830411&page=3&article=055&stringtohighlight=fenian> (Accessed: 1 April 2026).

<sup>149</sup> Ó'Tuathaigh, 'The Irish in Nineteenth Century Britain', p.158.

casual labour market of the docks.<sup>150</sup> Suspicion of the docks then surged during the campaign. Police surveillance increased to 600 men who watched the 'waterway and shipping areas', alongside a 'military guard' throughout the night due to intelligence gathered that a chief Fenian plot was to blow up the dock tunnel with dynamite.<sup>151</sup> Fears of Fenian hijackings of gunpowder barges around Bow Creek led to demands for them to be 'towed right away to their destination,' and for police to report anything suspicious 'immediately', as dockworkers knew the wind determined the barges' direction.<sup>152</sup> This reflected intelligence gathered on dockworkers plotting attacks and the likely reality that tough dock work provided a space for poor and frustrated Irishmen to have Fenian discussions.<sup>153</sup> Attacks involving workplaces could only be possible with extensive diasporic knowledge.

In rare instances, diasporic Fenians were involved in explicit political violence against individuals. A case arose of violent threats against an official in 1880; James Donovan, a self-proclaimed Fenian, originally a 'Tipperary man' and footman in Jermyn Street, sent several menacing letters to Lord Oranmore, an Irish representative peer.<sup>154</sup> His letters called Oranmore a 'protestant villain' and threatened that there were '15,000 Irishmen thirsting for your blood,' and 'that orange tongue of yours shall be given to the dogs'.<sup>155</sup> Donovan signed off one of his letters, 'one who hopes to be your murderer. God Save Ireland', clearly aligning himself with Fenianism by his use of the slogan.<sup>156</sup> This is an extreme case of violent threats, as Donovan explicitly laid out his desire to murder Oranmore and his motivations behind it. Nevertheless, it showcases that violent rage on behalf of Fenianism did exist amongst some members of the diaspora, and they did act on it.

Diasporic Fenians were occasionally involved in assassinations, typically against Fenian informers. In 1867, a bandsman named Edwin M'Donnell was mistaken for Mr Furber, the

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p.148. Irish-Cockney refers to the children of Irish migrants who were born and raised in London, (specifically East London).

<sup>151</sup> 'Fenian Alarms in London,' *The Irish Times*, 28 March 1882, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpirishtimes/docview/513396534/2C656E83938C48E2PQ/62?accountid=9730&sourcetype=Newspapers> (Accessed: 4 March 2026); TNA MEPO3070, Metropolitan Police Report on Military Guard in Dockland, 28 January 1881.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid; TNA MEPO 3070, Metropolitan Police Letter, 29 January 1881.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> 'Threatening an Irish Landlord in London,' *Hackney Standard*, 28 August 1880, <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0007436%2F18800828&page=3&article=031&stringtohighlight=fenian> (Accessed: 24 March 2026).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

person who informed on Colonel Kelly and Deasy, and was followed by some 'Pro Fenian' gentlemen and shot near Bloomsbury by Fenian and London Irish Volunteer, John Groves.<sup>157</sup> The infamous Fenian informer, John Croydon, who was a key witness in both Colonel Burke's and the Clerkenwell bombing trials, reported that there were 'four men in London determined to take his life'.<sup>158</sup> These men were likely vengeful Fenians, instructed by the organisation to assassinate him. In 1868, Mr Bird, a milkman who gave evidence against the Clerkenwell bombers, was shot through the neck in a street in Clerkenwell by a Fenian named Needle.<sup>159</sup> Evidently, some London Fenians engaged with the movement by murdering or injuring, likely following orders from Fenian leaders. These actions warned wider Irish and East End communities against betraying the Fenians. The willingness to commit a violent crime and potentially sacrifice their lives is significant, as the Fenians knew, if caught, they would likely be sentenced to penal servitude, a sentence that some Fenians deemed worse than death.

The London Irish diaspora was politically engaged with Fenianism by enabling and conducting political violence, undermining the dominant view of violent operations being primarily organised by Irish-Americans with occasional passive diasporic support. The diaspora stored, secured, and transported arms on behalf of Fenianism, shaping where attacks took place. They facilitated the dynamite campaign by having strongholds in key workplaces and provided spaces for the dynamiters, undermining the assumption that dynamiters operated entirely outside London-Irish society. Finally, some were committed enough to murder, injure, and die for the sake of Fenianism. A re-examination of diasporic violence can shed light on the more continuous, overlooked aspects of Fenian violence, providing nuance to the historiographical focus on specific uprisings and attacks.

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<sup>157</sup> 'The Fenian Guerillas have apparently reached London,' *The Spectator*, 5 October 1867 <https://www.proquest.com/pao/docview/1295245737/fulltextPDF/8B26BBEF9FE459CPQ/1?accountid=9730&sourcetype=Magazines> (Accessed: 24 March 2026), 'The Alleged Fenian Murder in London,' *The Irish Times*, 16 October 1867 <https://www.proquest.com/hnpirishtimes/docview/518565941/627D6A515ED34F98PQ/23?accountid=9730&sourcetype=Newspapers> (Accessed: 24 March 2026); Colonel Kelly and Deasy were two Fenian leaders who were arrested for their role in the Fenian Rising of 1867.

<sup>158</sup> Chief Sec. Off. Reg. Papers, 1867/14459 cited in Leon O'Brien, *Fenian Fever: An Anglo-American Dilemma*, (Chatto & Windus, 1971), p.191.

<sup>159</sup> 'Attempted Fenian Murder in London,' 6 February 1868, *The Irish Times*, <https://www.proquest.com/hnpirishtimes/docview/518618256/2C656E83938C48E2PQ/61?accountid=9730&sourcetype=Newspapers> (Accessed: 24 March 2026).

## Conclusion

This is the first study to demonstrate that members of the London Irish diaspora were active and integral political participants who sustained the existence of Fenianism in Central and East London throughout 1865-1886. Although conducting a history from below of a secret organisation is a methodologically complex task, utilising multiple source types and employing critical engagement with colonial archives provides access to previously marginalised voices. Combined with an understanding of Fenianism that departs from binary distinctions, this reveals that the nature of Fenianism in London was more permeable, localised, and grassroots based than previously thought.

Examining the three chapters together reveals the versatility of routes by which the diaspora was involved in Fenianism, often taking both covert and overt forms. Fenianism relied on being embedded into the fabric of Irish London as the diaspora provided the structures and relationships that would maintain the movement. Diasporic commitment to Fenianism was varied, rather than uniform. The diaspora attended peaceful amnesty events and showcased their Fenian allegiance through symbols, while others murdered and died for the sake of the movement. This variation and fluidity not only explain the pervasiveness of London Fenianism throughout 1865-1886 but highlight the need for an updated working definition and analytical framework of Fenianism that extends beyond armed insurrection and does not assume a binary distinction between 'pastime' and 'revolutionism'.

Considered together, these findings reaffirm the diaspora as a constitutive part of Fenianism in London and force a revaluation of Kirkland's spurious claim that Irish and London Irish politics were 'scarcely coterminous'.<sup>160</sup> Departure from scholarship's previous omission of the London diaspora has revealed London's role as a third facet in the transatlantic struggle, undermining claims that Fenianism was an insignificant threat, as support existed inside the metropole, not just abroad. Conducting a bottom-up analysis has provided new insights into how London diasporic communities were vital to sustaining Fenianism in a hostile environment throughout the peaks and troughs of activity. This calls for a re-examination of our top-down perception of the nature of Fenianism, instigated by Irish-American leaders; instead, it was the diaspora that enabled the movement's survival in London over multiple

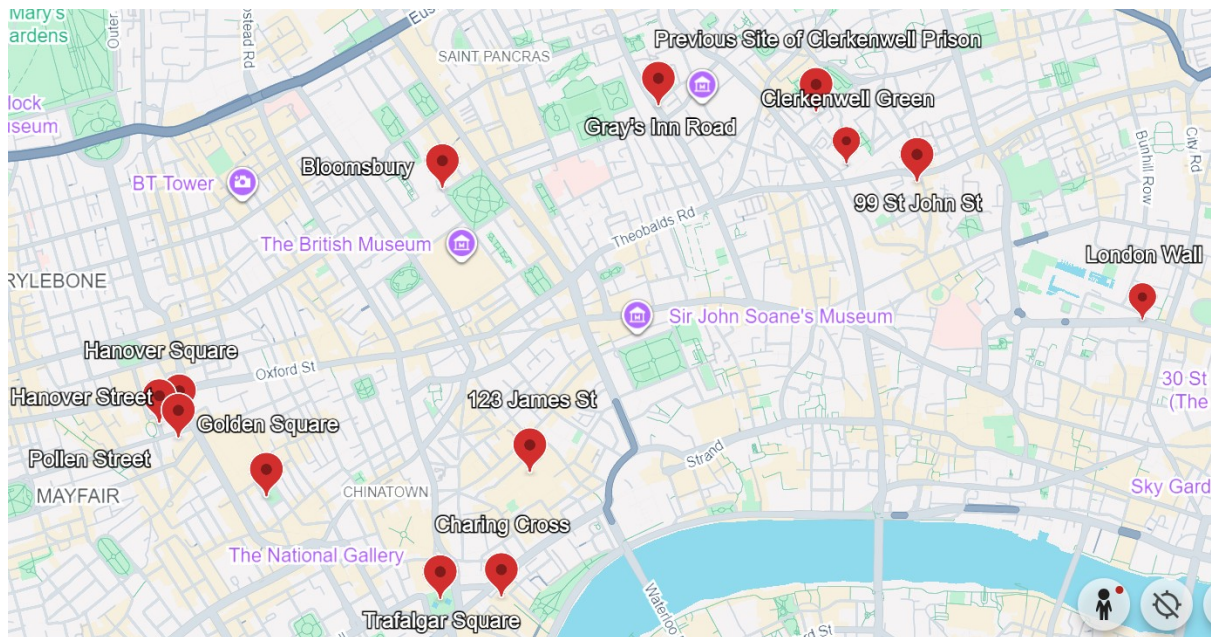
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<sup>160</sup> Kirkland, *Irish London*, p.109.

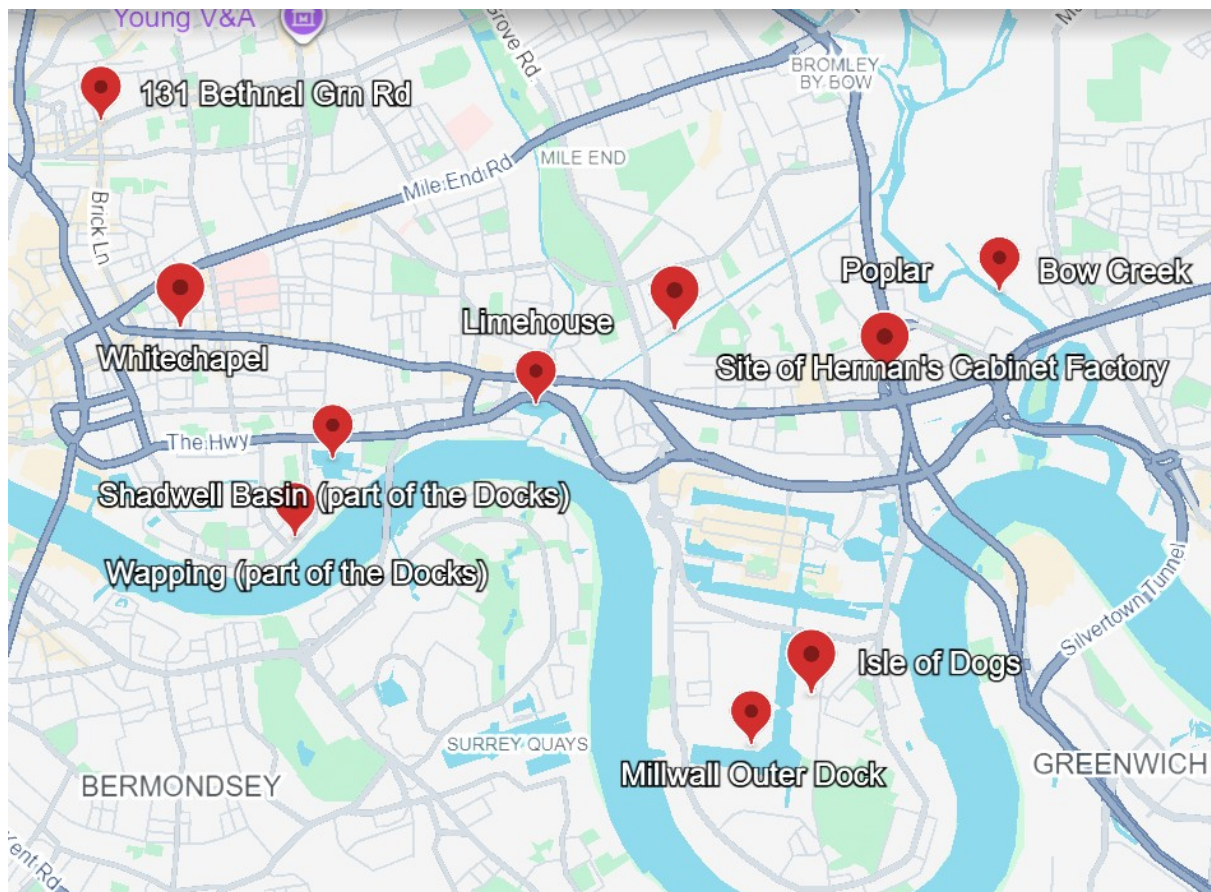
decades. More broadly, diasporic studies should be conducted on other nationalist and anticolonial movements to understand the durability of nationalism across borders.

While this dissertation has sought to illustrate the power of a localised diasporic focus, further avenues for research exist elsewhere. Within Fenian historiography, other English cities, such as Bristol and Southend, and even parts of London, would benefit from similar analysis. This would certainly be possible with detailed local archives and newspapers and would provide insight into the character of Fenianism in England, and how it may compare to that of Ireland and America. Given women's underrepresentation in the archives, their role in diasporic Fenianism remains underexamined, and research could increase analysis on the varied ways the Irish sustained localised Fenianism. Overall, the role of the London Irish diaspora serves as a powerful reminder of how nationalist movements are often sustained by the actions and choices of ordinary people.

## Appendix



Appendix A: Relevant Fenian locations in Central London (2026 Google Map).



Appendix B: Relevant Fenian Locations in East London.

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