

Fear of discrimination saw Paddys and Biddys decline

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The Durham and Northumbria Universities study, both based in the UK, suggests that a fear of prejudice made the Irish immigrants steer clear of giving their children Irish Catholic names, a trend also seen in today's society among other immigrant communities elsewhere in the world.

The study, which looked at over 30,000 records, found that the number of Irish Catholic names was dramatically lower among the second generation Irish in all seventeen counties studied, whilst the frequencies of English Protestant names went up.

In other studies, some from the modern day, similar trends have been found for the Turkish community in Germany, Indians in Australia, and Irish migrants in the United States, say the authors.

The researchers say the findings give further insight into the pressures faced by immigrants generally and what they do to try and integrate.

The study is published in the journal *Annals of Human Biology* and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

The researchers compared the frequency of first names among first and second generation Irish at the 1881 census of England and Wales of seventeen counties which were chosen for their substantial Irish-born populations.

Eleven per cent of first generation Irish immigrants were called Patrick

which had dropped to around two per cent among the second generation. The name Bridget was found among nine per cent of first generation immigrants which dropped to around one per cent in the second generation.

Conversely, the popularity of typical English Protestant names like George and William surged among the Irish immigrant communities. The frequency of George went up from just under one per cent to around five per cent, and William saw an increase from five to 11 per cent.

The Office for National Statistics shows William and George in 10th and 12th place respectively in the list for most popular baby names for 2008 whereas Patrick and Bridget do not appear in the top 100.

Lead author Dr Malcolm Smith, from Durham University's Anthropology Department, said: "We think that people chose to avoid traditional names to minimise prejudice rather than people simply being influenced by general or English names within their community and choosing those instead.

"In some of our other work, we have found that prejudice against the Irish immigrant community was quite common. At the time, there was a feeling among the British public that the Irish would come and take over their jobs and possibly even spread disease. This would explain why the Irish immigrants tried to take steps to hide their Irish identity to avoid discrimination."

The research shows how people react to a new environment, and can be applied to understanding dynamics of migrant identities and culture change in general, say the investigators.

Co-author and professor in history, Donald MacRaild from Northumbria

University added: "There is ample historical evidence of the difficult and often hostile situation which many Irish people faced in Britain as immigrants escaping the Great Famine.

"It is highly likely that the first Irish immigrants were an embattled enclave who decided against traditional Irish names for their children because of the prejudice those names drew down. Had their strategy been to assert their Irish identity, we would probably have seen a jump in traditional Irish names."

The authors say there is even evidence to suggest that some adults changed their first names to avoid discrimination.

Dr Smith said: "Where names connoted particular negative cultural associations, as in the classic, derogatory use of the 'Paddy' and 'Biddy' stereotypes, the pressure to change their names must have increased. There are examples in literature where people have said they felt the need to change their names out of fear of prejudice or improve their job prospects."

Gerard Delaney, Director of the Irish Family History Foundation in Ballinrobe, County Mayo, said: "Nineteenth century emigrants from Ireland to Britain and North America attempted to make their names appear as white, Anglo-Saxon and protestant as possible to increase their social standing, reduce the possibility of racial prejudice and generally disguise their Irish roots in the days when "No Irish Need Apply" was a familiar notice in job adverts.

"In Britain, there was a tendency for people to 'translate' their surnames into loosely corresponding English surnames and in the US it became common to drop the O or Mc prefix to make names appear more American."

Source: Durham University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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