



# The Protestant Orphan Society and its social significance in Ireland 1828-1940

*Cooper June*

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Spanning more than a century, this study provides a comprehensive account of the ground breaking work and social influence of one of the most significant yet under documented nineteenth-century Irish Protestant charities and features in-depth case history analysis which gives many crucial insights into the lives of the widows and children it aimed to assist. It makes valuable contributions to social history particularly the growing field of children's studies, child welfare, foster care, the family, social welfare, as well as the study of Irish Protestantism.

This book examines the charity's origins, its boarding-out and apprenticeship schemes, its progressive policies, the role that women assumed in its management, the development of local Protestant Orphan Societies across the country, and opposition to its work. It argues that the pioneering system, which promoted children's health, education, and eventual independence, represented a private outdoor poor relief measure that predated state-sponsored boarding out by more than thirty years and became the basis for concepts of 'modern boarding out'. It uncovers the distinguished figures who lent their support such as the first President of Ireland, Douglas Hyde, and Dr Ella Webb and charts its gradual decline in the south from the early twentieth century onwards. It also focuses considerable attention on the experiences of the children whilst boarded out and apprenticed and the circumstances which led widows to become dependent on the charity, including the sister of Irish playwright, Sean O'Casey, identifying the challenges they faced as they endeavored to provide for their families alone.

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