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A Town of Immigrants: Histories of Migration

by Tosh Warwick

New Mappings of Europe | 2019

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Middlesbrough Institute of Mordern Art

Introduction

This slim publication is one of four produced as part of New Mappings of Europe. A partnership between four art and education institutions, New Mappings of Europe charts and brings to attention stories of migration that make up our cities and inform cultural organisations. Through it, MIMA has aimed to embed overlooked narratives and voices into the public spaces and collections of Middlesbrough. The programme at MIMA, through 2018 and 2019, took the shape of an exhibition highlighting the long histories of migration that have formed our context, and a public programme of discussions and workshops through which diverse people found points of commonality.

This book focuses on the importance of migration in Middlesbrough's recent history. Through an essay by historian Tosh Warwick we discover some of the tragic moments of tension that have arisen locally from national and international contexts of conflict and economic turmoil. The title of this book is a quotation from a timeline of the area's history made collectively at public events at MIMA in 2015. In 2017, MIMA organised an event of the same title and invited Tosh to develop a paper which formed the foundation for the essay published here. We are grateful to Tosh for this ongoing collaboration and for sharing his research in such succinct terms.

This publication was made possible through a fruitful and thoughtful partnership with Akademie der bildenden Künste, Austria; Moderna galerija MG+MSUM, Slovenia and Museum of Yugoslavia, Serbia and with funding from the European Commission. This cross-European endeavour has formed an important intellectual space for us at a time of political change. MIMA is made up of contributions by a range of constituents and we'd like to thank those who were part of this programme. We are grateful to the team at MIMA and associate artists, facilitators and practitioners who bring our programmes into being. As ever, designer Joanna Deans is key to making this publication and I have had the pleasure of working with researcher and curator Ashleigh Barice as co-editor to make this series of books a reality.

Elinor Morgan, Senior Curator, MIMA

Middlesbrough: A Town of Immigrants

Dr Tosh Warwick

Henry Bolckow (W.G. Reid, Middlesbrough and its Jubilee, 1881)

Middlesbrough has long been a town defined by immigration. Amidst the wider backdrop of austerity, Brexit, and discourses of 'terror', debates around immigration play an important role in today's political discourse. This study adopts a historical approach in seeking to understand the relationship between wider local, national and international attitudes to migrants in the town from the Victorian era through to the 1960s.

The 'Ironopolis' emerged as a major urban centre in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of industrialisation and the subsequent rapid, 'gold rush' like immigration as people sought opportunities in the 'Infant Hercules'.[1] From a population of 25 in 1801 (although there were other settlements in what encompassed by today's town) Middlesbrough boasted 91,302 inhabitants a century later.[2]

Asa Briggs detailed the 'growth of the new community' of Middlesbrough in his influential Victorian Cities, with workers coming from all parts of the country and further afield including from Europe, Ireland and British Colonies. Briggs argued that it seemed fitting that Mecklenburg-born ironmaster Heinrich Bölckow (Henry Bolckow) should be one of the driving forces in the boom of the Ironopolis,[3] one of a number of industrialists including Hamburg-born Sir Bernhard Samuelson and Swede John Gjers who headed to the banks of the Tees seeking their fortune.

[1] T. Warwick, *Central Middlesbrough Through Time* (Stroud, 2013)

[2] W. Lillie, *The History of Middlesbrough: An Illustration of the Evolution of English Industry* (Middlesbrough, 1968)

[3] A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Watford, 1963), pp.247-249

Just as immigration was a key facet in industrial Middlesbrough's early days, so too were challenges and problems associated with a shifting and diverse population. Problems connected with the perception of those arriving as outsiders and foreigners outsiders and foreigners can be traced back to the town's early decades. David Taylor has pointed to the 1840 Middlesbrough Dock riot as a spectacular early example of hostility and anti-immigrant violence, with Irish labourers requiring protection from the Stockton and Darlington Railway's police when travelling from the railway station to the dock.[4]

A crowd of some 400 men threatened the Irish labourers who had been brought in to complete the work at a lower rate of pay than previously employed Lancashire men. After a struggle to maintain order that necessitated the use of reinforcements from outside the town, the ringleaders, some 18 in total, were arrested and sent for trial at Northallerton.[5]

Irish migration would go on to play an important role in the evolution of the town's communities and thousands of locals today can proudly trace their ancestry and religion to the Emerald Isle.

[4] D. Taylor, 'The Middlesbrough Race Riot of 1961: A Comment', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 18, No.1 (January 1993), 73-79

[5] D. Taylor, 'Conquering the British Ballarat: The Policing of Victorian Middlesbrough', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Spring 2004), 755-771

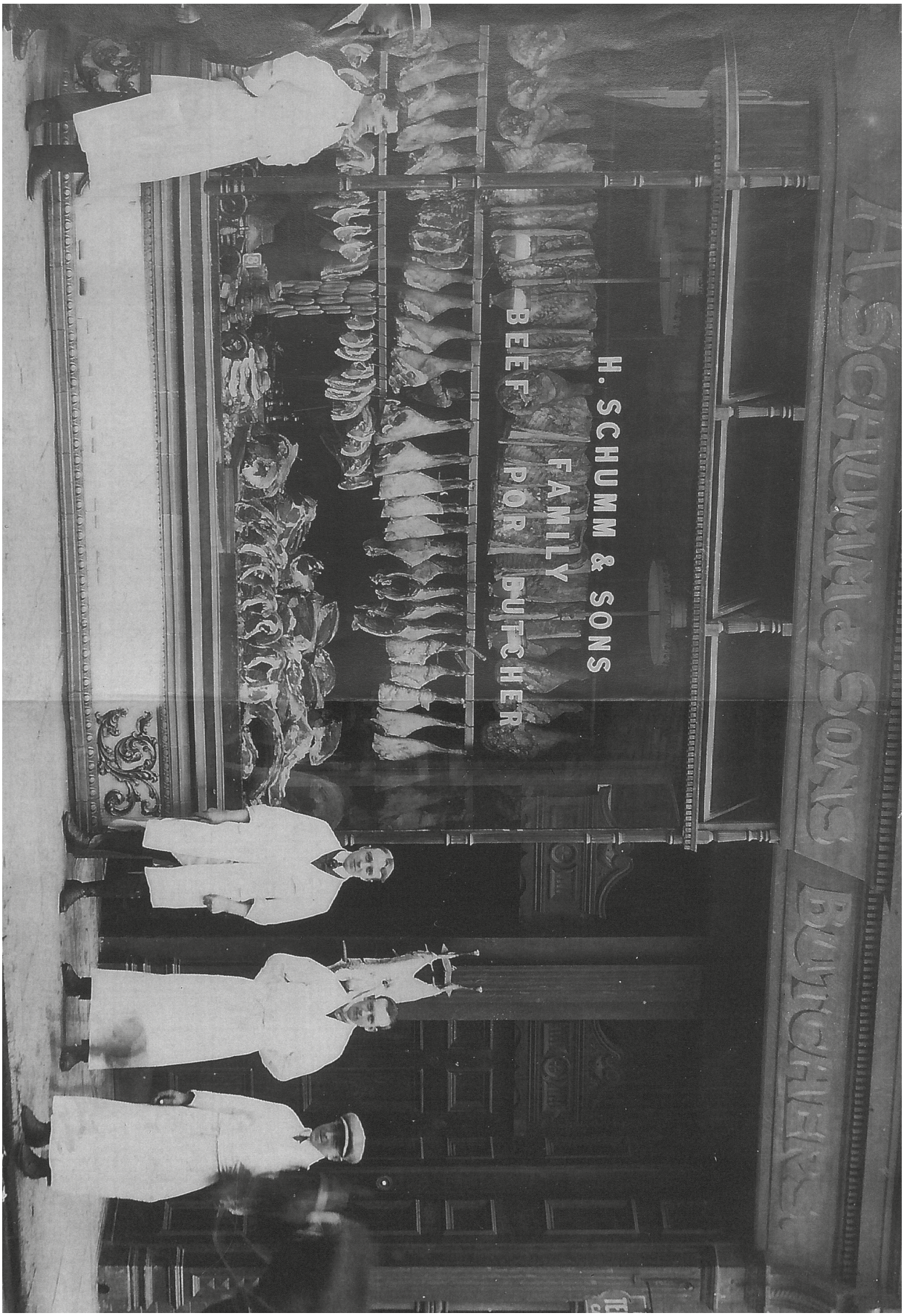
[6] Middlesbrough Watch Committee (Special), 27th October 1914, 1384

Henry Bolckow Statue (W.G. Reid, Middlesbrough and its Jubilee, 1881)

Celebrating Henry Bolckow's Statue to attacking Henry Schumm's butchers: The First World War and anti-German sentiment

THE BOLCKOW STATUE.
UNVEILED OCTOBER 6, 1881.

On 6th October 1881 crowds gathered as Middlesbrough celebrated its Jubilee centred around the unveiling of a statue of Henry Bolckow, the town's first mayor, MP and donor of Albert Park, with the great and good hailing the progress of the town and the contribution of the deceased ironmaster. 33 years later in August 1914 amidst the outbreak of the First World War the German 'Aliens' in Middlesbrough, who had up to that point been a key part of the community, were arrested and held under heavy guard in Middlesbrough Town Hall's Crypt as a threat to the nation's security. By the end of October 1914 the Chief Constable reported that most of the 'alien enemies eligible for Naval or Military service have now been interned in the various Military Camps' whilst resident Germans, Austrians and Hungarians who had become naturalised remained under suspicion.[6]



Henry Schumm & Sons Butchers on Newport Road in 1911 before the extensive damage caused by anti-German attacks in 1914 (Middlesbrough Libraries)

The previous month, after the departure of military recruits from Middlesbrough Railway Station, a number of the remaining naturalised citizens felt the wrath of anti-German sentiment in the town. According to the Middlesbrough Watch Committee, a 'large crowd consisting of mainly women and youth congregated on Cannon Street…and later on broke the window in the shop of Mr P. Kraus, Locksmith, carrying on business in Cannon Street.'[7] The mob then moved on to the butchers of Henry Schumm, a naturalised British citizen, and caused extensive damage to the shop.[8]

The impact of international relations on local attitudes to immigrants is evident in the vastly different treatment of Belgian Refugees in 1914. Users of the Middlesbrough Winter Garden welcomed them to the venue, the local population supported fundraising efforts for displaced Belgians and the municipality even provided free gas to the refugees.[9] Clearly, little of the hostility directed at those of German origins in the town was caused by the individuals themselves and instead can be explained by the wider national and international situation well beyond their control. Excluding small sporadic occurrences, the people of Middlesbrough followed the North Eastern Daily Gazette's call to rise 'above the passions of the hour' so that innocent people did not feel that anger 'which the cruel deeds of a merciless military system provoked.'

[7] Middlesbrough Watch Committee (Special) meeting, 5th September 1914, 2210

[8] P. Menzies, *Great War Britain: Middlesbrough, Remembering 1914-1918* (Stroud, 2014), p.85

[9] Middlesbrough Gas and Electricity Committee (Special), 27th October 1914

Second World War: From neighbours to Italian enemies

Unfortunately, the Great War proved not to be 'the war to end all wars' and two decades later perceived enemies within Middlesbrough's communities were the subject of attacks, hostility and tragedy in the furore and misguided patriotism brought by the Second World War. As well as those of German heritage, Italians were the subject of anti-immigrant sentiment across England.[10] As with the North East's other major towns, by the beginning of the twentieth century Middlesbrough had a small Italian community, centred around St Hilda's Suffield Street and expanding into the working-class Cannon Street area, characterised by cheap rents and poor housing quality.[11] Famed names associated with ice cream emerged including early proprietor Francesco Scappaticci, Martino, Ranaldi and, most famously, the Rea ice cream dynasty. Later, one of the family's offspring, musician Chris Rea, would enjoy global fame with hits such as Driving Home For Christmas and Road to Hell.

The crisis brought by Italy's 1940 entry into the Second World War turned some in Middlesbrough against neighbours and friends. The North Eastern Gazette on 11th June reported that 'police picketed several Italian-owned ice-cream parlours which bore signs

[10] H. Shankland, *Out of Italy: The Story of Italians in North East England* (Leicester, 2014), pp.171-258

[11] Shankland, *Out of Italy*, p.99

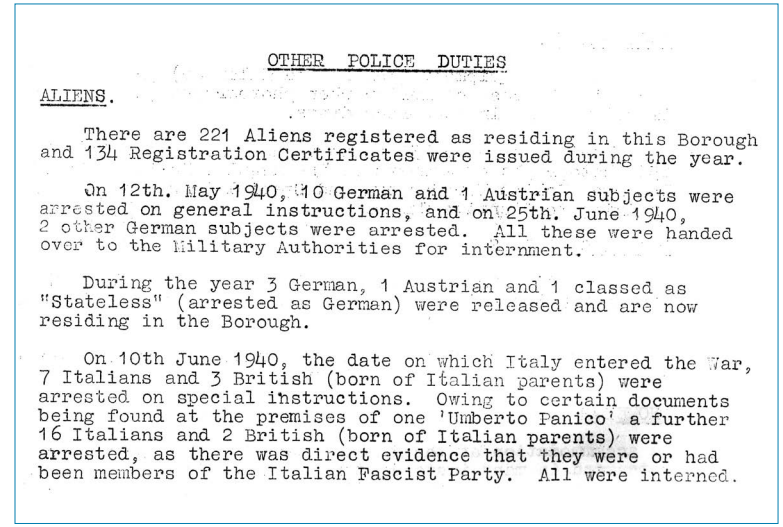
Constantino's Ice Cream Parlour on Newport Road following Anti-Italian Disturbances after Italy declared war against the Allies, 10th June 1940 (Evening Gazette)

of damage inflicted late last night by a large mob'. Those affected included Constantino's ice cream parlour and Rea's premises.[12] Despite hostility others rallied behind the Italians, with Camy Rea of the famed ice cream dynasty recalling that 'Italians were well respected in Middlesbrough' and that many in the community 'came and stood on my father's doorstep to stop [the mob]'.[13]

As in 1914, local Italian citizen 'enemies' were incarcerated by the local police before internment near Bury. Tragically, in rounding up Middlesbrough's Italian citizens the authorities had unintentionally sentenced some to death at sea. On 2nd July 1940, The SS Arandora Star, a cruise liner converted into a prison ship, was torpedoed by a German U-Boat en route to Canada, killing around half of those on board including 13 men from Italian families who lived and worked in Middlesbrough and the surrounding area.[14] On 2nd July 2009 a memorial was unveiled at Middlesbrough Town Hall in memory of those from the local Italian community lost in the sinking.[15]

[12] *North Eastern Gazette*, 11th June 1940
[13] Shankland, *Out of Italy*, p.214
[14] Shankland, *Out Of Italy*, p.214
[15] 'Unveiling of Commemorative Plaque: In memory of those in the local Italian community lost in the sinking of SS Arandora Star', Teesside Archives, U/S 2422
[16] Teesside Archives, OA/486
[17] Canny, here, is used in the north east colloquial sense, meaning sweet or good.
[18] Teesside Archives, OA/486
[19] Teesside Archives, OA/615

An extract from the Chief Constable's Annual Report 1940-1941 (Teesside Archives)



OTHER POLICE DUTIES

ALIENS.

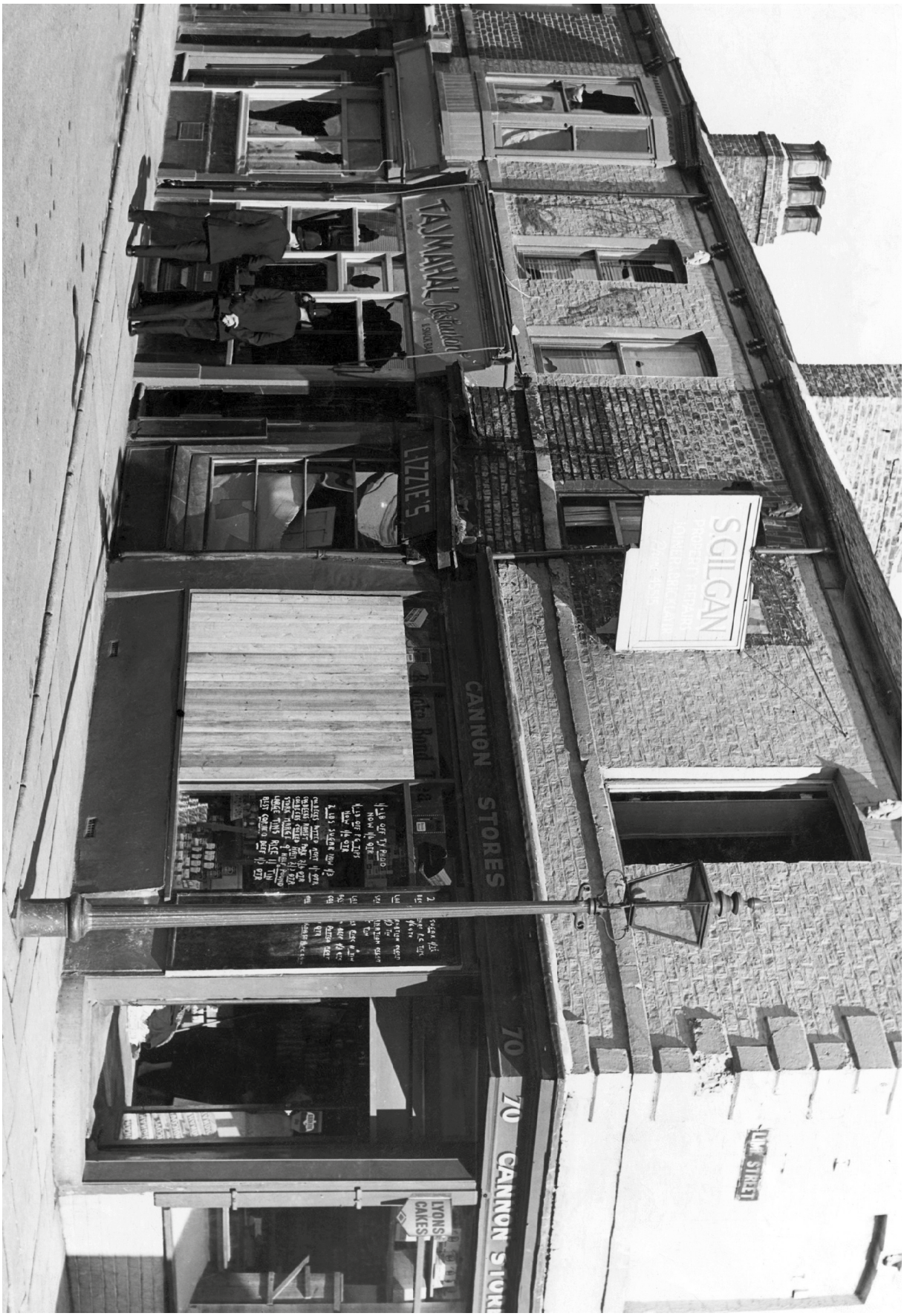
There are 221 Aliens registered as residing in this Borough and 134 Registration Certificates were issued during the year.

On 12th. May 1940, 10 German and 1 Austrian subjects were arrested on general instructions, and on 25th. June 1940, 2 other German subjects were arrested. All these were handed over to the Military Authorities for internment.

During the year 3 German, 1 Austrian and 1 classed as "Stateless" (arrested as German) were released and are now residing in the Borough.

On 10th June 1940, the date on which Italy entered the War, 7 Italians and 3 British (born of Italian parents) were arrested on special instructions. Owing to certain documents being found at the premises of one 'Umberto Panico' a further 16 Italians and 2 British (born of Italian parents) were arrested, as there was direct evidence that they were or had been members of the Italian Fascist Party. All were interned.

Oral history recordings held at Teesside Archives reveal memories of the treatment of Italians in the town. Martha Ruff, born in North Ormesby in 1916, revealed that 'suddenly from being friends, neighbours, ice-cream men, the people we knew, they suddenly became Italians and they were our enemies…and they were whipped away'.[16] Ruff recalled attacks on Sandy Rea's shop with windows smashed and the police taking away an elderly Mrs Rea, 'a canny[17] old soul she didn't know what was happening… she didn't know where she was going…the police took her you see we all cheered'.[18] Another recording of a former Middlesbrough police officer described taking a deeply upset, elderly member of the Rea family into police custody and described the family as 'well known Italians who were part of Middlesbrough'.[19]



The damaged Taj Mahal is inspected by police (Evening Gazette)

Post war migration and the 'race riots' at Cannon Street

Perhaps the most notorious of conflicts involving migrant communities in Middlesbrough are the so-called Cannon Street Riots of August 1961. The stabbing and murder of white teenager John Hunt and the subsequent arrest of the later acquitted Hussain Said proved the catalyst for some of the town's people turning against Asian residents.

The Taj Mahal at 64 Cannon Street bore the brunt of attacks by a mob ahead of a weekend of attacks on Asian businesses and homes as Middlesbrough became the focus of the national and international press. The Daily Mirror front page headline screamed 'POLICE FIGHT MOB OF 500 IN RACE RIOT TOWN',[20] Middlesbrough was dubbed as 'Little Harlem' in newspapers in the USA and the disturbances were featured in the Indian, Pakistani and Russian press.[21]

In the days following the chaos a number of prosecutions were handed out and the extent to which the disturbances were a race riot called into question, with one former police officer describing the events as 'solely and simply an idea for the wrong doers, the criminals and the no-goods, to get their own back on the police'.[22] The Guardian described the hostilities as a 'newfound hatred' as 'artificially engendered by hotheads the worse for drink'[23] and Khadim Hussain's Going for a Curry social history text too has pointed to integrated immigrant communities in Middlesbrough that have played a strong, positive role in local society.[24]

A Daily Mirror front page coverage of the Cannon Street Riots, 21 August 1961 (Daily Mirror)

Daily Mirror

3d. Monday, August 21, 1961 No. 17,939

Thirty-three arrests in a weekend of fury

POLICE FIGHT MOB OF 500 IN RACE RIOT TOWN

Baton charge at night—five Pc's are injured

By RUPERT MORTERS and PHIL DAVIES

POLICE charged shoulder to shoulder with batons drawn in a race-riot town late last night and broke up angry, shouting crowds of white people.

Several people were hurt in scuffles — in sleazy Cannon-street, Middlesbrough, Yorks — and five policemen were taken to hospital. One of the police-constables had been kicked on the head.

Four times the police charged and finally the crowds broke and fled.

Some were pushed over in the mad scramble, others scattered down side streets.

And the reckoning came as police cars and vans came to collect the people who had been arrested.

The road was littered with bricks and broken bottles.

Earlier yesterday every available policeman in Middlesbrough was called up for duty after a running battle between a squad of police and a yelling, 500-strong mob of white men and women. Again the scene was Cannon-street.

Bottles

Men in the mob armed themselves with sticks, stones, shoes and broken bottles as the police formed lines to prevent a stampede of destruction.

As more than thirty police officers fought desperately in pouring rain, many people in the crowd hurled stones and bottles at them.

Windows and fittings of shops run by coloured people were smashed during the battle. Homes of coloured people, too, were targets for the mob's fury.

The afternoon battle was the ugliest incident in two days of violence in Middlesbrough's coloured quarter.

Trouble flared within a few yards of the spot in Cannon-street where an eighteen-year-old white youth was stabbed to death on Friday. A coloured man was charged with his murder.

Late on Saturday night at least four policemen were hurt in disturbances. Twelve men were arrested.

And yesterday the crowd of 500 gathered in Cannon-street . . .

Nine policemen stood shoulder to shoulder to beat back a charge against one shop as stones and bottles flew at them.

Turned

The mob turned away—and it became a race with the police to the store of Mr. Abdullah Abdul, a British citizen.

His English wife, Elsie, too, was inside with her

Continued on Back Page

Crowds in the riot street yesterday after the battle with police.

Police close in to make an arrest during the height of the trouble yesterday.

'Like pack of wolves' says wife

The soldier dropped in —through her roof . .

MIDDLE-AGED Mrs. Nellie Warren was reading her Sunday newspaper yesterday when Gordon Ogilvie dropped in . . . FEET FIRST . . . THROUGH THE ROOF . . . BY PARACHUTE.

When she heard the crash, Mrs. Warren thought the chimney had blown down. She dashed into the garden and saw Gordon.

Dangling

Gordon—Corporal G. Ogilvie, 28, of the 5th Independent Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers, Gibraltar Barracks, Aldershot—had stepped out of the hole in the roof and was dangling from the guttering by his parachute straps.

It was the end of his fortieth parachute jump. He had volunteered to jump with the Southdown Sky Divers 2,000ft. over Shoreham Airport, Sussex.

But strong winds carried him half a mile off target and on to the roof of Mrs. Warren's house in Adur-avenue, Shoreham.

Officials of the Sky Divers' Club raced to the house and helped Gordon down. He was unhurt.

COLIN BACK FOR ENGLAND

CRICKET star Colin Cowdrey will be at the Oval today ready to bat for England.

Colin ended the weekend "will-he-or-won't-he-bat?" puzzle with this dramatic message from his Kent home —where he has been recovering from a throat infection: "I am feeling much better and my temperature is back to normal.

"I SHALL CERTAINLY BE THERE TOMORROW AND HAVE A GO."

News of his intention to bat delighted his England colleagues, who are struggling to avoid defeat in the fifth and final Test against Australia.

● Britain lost the Wightman Cup when eighteen-year-old Justina Bricka beat Wimbledon champion Angela Mortimer 10—8, 4—6, 6—3 in Chicago yesterday.

See BRIAN CHAPMAN and PETER WILSON — Page 19.

[20] *Daily Mirror*, 21st August 1961

[21] *The Observer*, 27th August 1961

[22] Teesside Archives, OA/235; P. Panayi, Middlesbrough 1961: a British race riot in the 1960s, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 16, No.2 (May 1991), 139-153

[23] *The Guardian*, 22nd August 1961

[24] K. Hussain, *Going for a Curry: A Social and Culinary History* (Middlesbrough, 2006)

Crowds gather during the Cannon Street Riots (Evening Gazette)

Conclusion

The case studies discussed here highlight how immigrant communities are often singled out for hostility and used as scapegoats at times of national social and economic instability and during international conflict. Yet, in each of the examples, prior to conflict, each immigrant community had been (and returned to be) part of Middlesbrough's wider cultural, economic and social life. Throughout history most have embraced the positive elements of immigration in championing Irish family heritage, protecting the Italian ice cream parlours, frequenting local Asian-owned restaurants, attending the annual Mela celebration of South Asian culture, recalling the town's love affair with North Korea's footballers of 1966, and proudly parading the Parmo as the culinary symbol of the Boro. At a time when Britain has been divided by Brexit and Middlesbrough faces economic and social challenges, by learning from history the town can continue to celebrate the positives of immigration and avoid outbreaks of hostility which, historically, have emerged as a result of external factors far removed from the immigrant communities that have settled within and shaped modern Middlesbrough.

Dr Tosh Warwick is an historian and heritage consultant. He is currently Research Associate (Impact) in the History Research Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Contributors: Tosh Warwick
Editors: Ashleigh Barice & Elinor Morgan
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New Mappings of Europe

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OUR HERITAGE: WHERE THE PAST MEETS THE FUTURE

2018 EUROPEAN YEAR OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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