

MARGINAL MICKS OR MAINSTREAM MEN AND WOMEN?

IRISHNESS AND BRITISHNESS IN NINETEENTH AND
EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

MALCOLM CAMPBELL

University of Auckland

Not long ago my family and I attended 'live day' at the Howick Historical Village in Auckland's eastern suburbs. These occur once a month, when local enthusiasts dress in nineteenth century costume to enliven visitors' experiences of the village (which, incidentally, is very good). We attended a church service, sat through a hilarious Victorian pantomime and saw the village blacksmith at work. The high point for me was the visit to the village school where an elderly school ma'am gruffly inspected our fingernails, endeavoured unsuccessfully to teach us to add and subtract pounds, shillings and pence, and instructed us in the history of the local community. Nineteenth century Howick possessed a large population of Irish Fencibles, we were told, ex-British army men and their families who were encouraged to settle on the land to provide a bulwark against troublesome Maori tribes and secure the Crown interest in the colony. Enlistment in the British Army went against the grain for these Fencibles, our teacher continued, because the Irish

disliked the English. Unfortunately for them, the harsh economic conditions in nineteenth century Ireland left people with little choice but to take what employment they could get.

This was a familiar narrative to me, one that will be recognisable to historians of the Irish in many other parts of the former British Empire. At its heart is the late-twentieth century observer's conundrum of Ireland's relationship with its neighbouring island: how and why was it that the peoples of a nation whose relationship with England was so tumultuous appear so often to be key collaborators in the establishment and perpetuation of the British Empire? It is a question that has received close scrutiny from historians of Ireland lately; as Nicholas Canny pointed out, 'the question of whether Irish people who participated in many of Britain's imperial projects were truly committed to the cause or were some type of fifth column is one that — like the 'gendering of Empire' — has been brought to the fore'.¹ While increasing attention has fo-

cussed on the Irish role in extending and maintaining empire in the Americas and Asia, the issues of Irish collaboration or resistance in the antipodean settler colonies, and whether the Irish can actually be considered in any sense 'British' in those contexts, have been less well scrutinised.

These lacunae have arisen for several reasons. One is the particular standpoint of Irish historians when examining Ireland's relationship with the British World. Their task, Kevin Kenny has written recently, 'is to make sense of this activity [by which he means Irish engagement within the empire] and what it means for Irish history'.² In addressing the imperial relationship, these historians have tended to grant utmost attention to developments in the Atlantic World for the evaluation of Ireland's engagement with the processes of empire. More globalising approaches have been rare. As Stephen Howe has written:

Thinking about Irish history in relation to the global reach of the British Empire, and indeed to other imperial systems in world history, evidently requires both a comparative and, more challengingly, an integrative historical awareness. As is often lamented, neither British ... nor Irish history-writing has in the past been strong in these qualities.³

But neither have historians in New Zealand (or Australia or Canada for that matter) afforded particularly high priority to understanding the local nuances of the Irish-imperial connection or the complexity of the Irish position in the founding of new societies. In each setting, attention has focussed more on Irish contributions

to colonial development and the national ethos than interrogating the complex interplay amongst European newcomers. Imperial connections and Britishness have (at least until the last five years or so) been seen as *passé*.

New Zealand's historiography in particular has been deficient in this respect. Notoriously complicit in the task of trying to establish the distinctiveness of the national identity, it has until very recently been remarkable for its homogenisation of nineteenth century newcomers from the United Kingdom. Nineteenth century immigrants to New Zealand, the canonical accounts seem uniformly to iterate, entered their new society as ready-made Britons — and 'Better Britons' at that — who passed on quickly and seamlessly to become Pakeha New Zealanders.

This tendency to write out the Irish, Scots, or even English in favour of an all-embracing 'Britishness' has been commented upon unfavourably by historians approaching New Zealand's past from the standpoint of Ireland and the Irish diaspora. In his path-breaking 1990 study of the Irish in New Zealand, *Half the World From Home*, the eminent Canadian historian Donald Akenson criticised harshly historians' homogenisation of New Zealand's nineteenth century European population into the singular group 'British'. The nation's historians were guilty, Akenson contended, of ignoring the diversity of their society's newcomers, and inventing instead an homogeneous proto-nationalist group that passed quickly and inexplicably from being Britons (and as many New Zealanders might still want to insist, 'Better Britons') to become Pakeha and New Zealanders. He expressed frustration that:

neither contemporary nineteenth and twentieth sources, nor the modern historical literature of New Zealand, has developed a vocabulary that facilitates one's thinking clearly about, and researching accurately into, the Irish. Or the Scots. Or the Welsh. Or, even, the English ... The Maori-Pakeha distinction that runs through most New Zealand historical writing indicates an admirable awareness of the integrity and perdurance of the aboriginal culture, but it leads to a lumping of all white settlers into a spurious unity.⁴

Akenson's book, the first significant monograph of the Irish in New Zealand for a generation, was received by the nation's history establishment with a deafening silence. It was not reviewed in the country's premier historical journal, so far as I am aware, and its appeal for a dismantling of the homogenising edifice of New Zealand's European origins received little attention for the better part of the 1990s. Indeed, as recently as 1997, Tony Simpson's *The Immigrants: The Great Migration from Britain to New Zealand 1830–1890* — a serious study, if not by an academic — managed to steer clear of any significant discussion of the Irish or Scots, reducing the great era of assisted migration in the 1870s (the Vogel Era) to little more than a story of the uniform flow of English rural labourers.⁵

However, promising signs exist of a new and more complex reading of New Zealand's colonial past, one that breaks free from an older nationalist imperative and explores more frankly the diversity of the nation's nineteenth century immig-

rants. Central to this revision has been new exploration of the Irish presence in New Zealand. As part of the consideration of the meaning of Britishness, this article explores the complex position of the Irish in New Zealand and in New Zealand historical writing in order to address two specific lines of inquiry: the validity of singular narratives of Britishness within the empire and whether or not (and if so, when) phenotypically-similar groups such as the Irish accessed the privileges of Britishness.

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Who were the Irish in New Zealand? Until recently, this question would not likely have been asked by historians, not because of the sparseness of Irish numbers, or the insignificance of their presence, but because the nation's historiography was rooted in a near-obsessive concern with an homogeneous (and homogenising) Britishness. James Belich has argued that in the period 1880–1920 New Zealand experienced a process that he terms 'recolonisation', where the colony's impetus towards independence was curtailed and a renewed sense of economic and cultural reliance on Britain developed. According to Belich, this process:

reshuffled and tightened links with Britain between the 1880s and the 1900s. It welded selected shards of the old regime together with fresh developments to form a new system in this period ... It transformed New Zealand's economy, technology, politics, conceptual geography, history and ideology, and penetrated directly or indirectly into almost every other sphere.⁶

The unusual strength of this era's connection to Britain profoundly influenced the next century of New Zealand historical writing. In the late-nineteenth century, 'recolonising' New Zealand — like other settler societies — was vigorously engaged in a process of making, re-making and understanding its colonial beginnings. Most celebrated was the legend of the heroic British pioneer. However, as Fiona Hamilton has written recently, the privileging of the pioneer in foundational narratives 'foreclosed other memories, such as disruption, loss and displacement of Maori'.⁷ To this list might also be added memories of New Zealand's Irish antecedents and the strong connections New Zealand maintained with Ireland. For the process Hamilton describes, occurring against the backdrop of recolonisation, bode poorly for any memory of such connections. It was homogeneous Britishness rather than United Kingdom regional identity(ies) that was to the fore. As Belich explained, 'The collective identity asserted New Zealandness and Britishness, with an assumption of compatibility so strong that it required no stating.'⁸ In this environment there was little impetus to recognise or celebrate the diversity of New Zealand's United Kingdom newcomers, nor for those of Irish origins to emphasise distinctiveness. Invisibility, New Zealand's assimilatory pulse, was a virtue.

Nor did the Irish see much light when, shortly after the Second World War, a staunchly-nationalist historiography emerged to free the shackles of Britain's hold. Seminal studies, including Sir Keith Sinclair's *History of New Zealand*, emphasised the commonality of the nation's Pakeha peoples, their shared ethnic inher-

itance, and the distinctiveness of their new national ethos. Irish and Scots migrants are noted briefly, but their post-arrival behaviour as Irish or Scots was not explored.⁹ Writing on the emergence of New Zealand language, for example, Sinclair stressed the importance of the rapid merging of regional dialects in a colonial melting pot: 'New Zealand was settled from every part of Great Britain, and all of the regional and class dialects were mixed up as they never had been in their homeland.' To be fair, Sinclair identified particular echoes of Essex phraseology and Australian twang in the local dialect, but the singular new product was the principal focus of his attention.¹⁰ Aggregation, not disaggregation, continued to dominate studies of national life in New Zealand, even as its distinctiveness from Britain was vigorously asserted.

However, from the 1980s disaggregation and diversity did begin to impact more significantly on the nation's historical writing. One impetus to this new inclusiveness was the diversification of New Zealand's immigrant intake, resulting in louder calls for the recognition of the nation's cultural diversity. Another, ironically, was the British decision to enter the European Common Market (ECM), a turn away from traditional relations with the settler dominions that deeply disturbed some New Zealanders. In a famous lecture at the University of Canterbury in 1973, delivered shortly before Britain's entry to the ECM, J.G.A. Pocock outlined a vision for a 'new subject', 'British history', independent of English history, which acknowledged the diversity and creativity of the peoples of what he termed the 'Atlantic archipelago'.¹¹ Pocock's proposed subject had clear implications for the practice of

History at home in the archipelago — and, despite a time-lag of more than a decade in its gaining traction, it is now alive and well there — but also explicitly for settler societies, including New Zealand. As Pocock stressed, his proposed new history was ‘not a task for those concerned to continue the main traditions of English or Irish historiography, but the rest of us — and I am thinking from the banks of the Mississippi as well as those of the Waimakariri’.¹²

Both the novelty and the merit of Pocock’s vision for a new historiography have been subject to debate, though the details of those disputes need not detain us here. What is critical to note at this point is that the agenda he outlined in 1973 necessarily implied a more rigorous interrogation of the origins and composition of New Zealand’s non-Maori population than had been commonplace to that time. As he explained more recently, ‘If the British were going to redefine themselves as European, which we neo-Britons were not, we needed a way — historically valid — of redefining British history as our own ... a merely Anglocentric history calling itself that of “Britain” was satisfactory neither in archipelagic nor in oceanic terms’.¹³ In this new century, Pocock’s call for broadening and the recognition of diversity has been embraced locally, at least implicitly. One consequence of its adoption has been to displace to a considerable degree the narrow purview of Britishness that so dominated the writing of New Zealand history.

As a result of this paradigm shift, it is now possible to assert with greater confidence just who the Irish in New Zealand were and to assess what their impact on colonial society was. Irish connections and

Irish influence are readily identifiable in the historical record, prominent from the outset as the European presence took root. When Queen Victoria signed the royal charter to create the colony of New Zealand in November 1840, liberating the newest crown acquisition from New South Wales, it was a Waterford-born naval officer, William Hobson, who was appointed the first governor. Hobson’s instructions were issued by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Normanby (Constantine Henry Phipps) who had returned only recently to London from his previous posting as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. As Lord Lieutenant, Normanby had won the warm praise of the leading political figure in Ireland at the time, Daniel O’Connell, as ‘an excellent man ... I tell you there cannot be a better’.¹⁴ It seems likely Normanby played a significant role in drafting the royal charter, which decreed that the infant colony should be divided into three provinces: New Ulster (the North Island), New Munster (the South Island), and New Leinster (Stewart Island).¹⁵

Though these ‘Irish’ provinces did not long endure, they provided a foretaste of Irish-New Zealand connections that intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century as the pace of immigration to the colony quickened. The high point for the Irish inflow was the Vogel Era of the 1870s when, attracted by the colonial government’s offer of assisted passages to recruit much-needed labour, more than 100,000 newcomers from the United Kingdom arrived to contribute to a wave of rapid economic expansion. The Irish-born constituted 22.4 per cent of the intake in the decade 1871–1880, and 27.5 per cent of those who received government assistance.¹⁶ By 1878, when the colony had a

non-Maori population of 414,000, some 43,758 of the population was Irish-born, nearly 11 per cent of the total.¹⁷ Thereafter the overall level of immigration to the colony declined. By the beginning of the twentieth century the Irish-born constituted only 5.6 per cent of the non-Maori population.

The Irish intake bore a distinctive imprint. David Fitzpatrick suggested more than twenty years ago that New Zealand's immigrant stream represented a hybrid of the larger Australian and Canadian intakes, one that drew extensively on Munster as well as the southern parts of Ulster.¹⁸ More recently, Terry Hearn's statistical analyses have confirmed the importance of these two provinces and Ulster in particular in New Zealand's Irish immigrant stream between 1853 and 1915. From the 1850s until the First World War, Ulster consistently outstripped each of the other Irish provinces in its supply of colonists to New Zealand, with its preponderance increasing towards century's end. This Ulster connection was strongly in evidence in Auckland Province, the top-half of the North Island, where the Irish-born constituted some 27.2 per cent of the UK born population in 1871. The concentration of Irish-born settlers there was surpassed only by the South Island's West Coast.¹⁹

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In light of the diverse backgrounds of New Zealand's nineteenth century immigrants — English, Scots, Irish, and others — can any singular narrative of Britishness hold true? The short answer is no. In fact, no singular narrative of one of these groups, the Irish, can be considered adequate, given the diversity within the stream of Irish-born newcomers who

entered New Zealand. The experience of the mid-nineteenth century Auckland businessman and philanthropist James Dilworth helps to exemplify this point. Born in Dunseark, County Tyrone in 1815, Dilworth was fostered out to a well-to-do cousin, Anne Dilworth, at the age of eight. Dilworth's biographer, Russell Stone, has demonstrated the consequences of Anne Dilworth's decision to adopt James as her heir. The youth was enrolled at the Royal School of Dungannon and subsequently found employment in the town's bank. However, as was the case for so many nineteenth century emigrants, James's future was determined within a wider familial context and in 1838, at the age of 23, he was sent to the antipodes 'to look about and ascertain where his capital could most profitably put into land'.²⁰ Travelling a path familiar to many of his compatriots who settled finally in New Zealand, James went first to Sydney but did not remain there long. He journeyed on to New Zealand in 1841, arriving in Auckland in the midst of a frenzy of land speculation. Dilworth initially took a post as a clerk to his recently-appointed compatriot, Governor William Hobson, before taking a position with the fledgling New Zealand Banking Company. However, James Dilworth's enterprise demanded wider challenges, and a collapse in property prices heralded his energetic entry into the Auckland property market. By 1844 James had spent over £200 purchasing land on the Auckland isthmus.²¹

James Dilworth prospered in Auckland, partly by virtue of his early arrival in the city. Shrewd seizure of opportunities built an estate that by the time of his death in 1894 was valued at £150,000. He was also a prominent figure in public af-

fairs, a member of the Auckland Provincial Council for eight years, a member of the Auckland University College Council for four years, a long-time trustee of the Auckland Savings Bank, and a supporter of numerous other community organisations. A large portion of his estate was directed to the Dilworth Ulster Institute Trust to facilitate the education of less-privileged boys, and the Dilworth School continues to bear his name and commemorate his achievements. Throughout James Dilworth's life his Ulster heritage was never far from the surface: he married an Ulster-born woman in New Zealand, Isabella Hall, and Ulstermen were prominent among his business associates.²² Russell Stone's excellent biography emphasises the centrality of Dilworth's Ulster origins to an understanding of the life of the historical actor:

In my quest for James Dilworth, I became more and more convinced that he had been misunderstood by past commentators because of a failure to put his life in the setting of his family background, and of his Irish experience. The most significant episodes in his life, the decision to leave Ireland and the extraordinary singleness of purpose with which he acquired and developed his landed estate shortly after he came to New Zealand can be understood only in the light of the changing circumstances of the Dilworth family back in County Tyrone during James's formative years before the age of twenty-four.²³

As Stone's book shows so compellingly, Dilworth's origins and experiences

circumscribed his associational life, setting it apart quite fundamentally from that of his non-Ulster compatriots in the colony.

In a fashion similar to James Dilworth, Irish Catholics in the colony developed their own networks and bonds of association that demarcated daily life within the colonial context. Hugh Coolahan, also a native of County Tyrone, was born in Strabane in 1800. He arrived in Auckland the same year as Dilworth, having traversed a similar path, travelling first to Sydney before crossing the Tasman Sea to Auckland. However, Coolahan's religious and cultural affiliations ensured that in New Zealand he moved in different — if sometimes overlapping — circles to his fellow Ulsterman. Coolahan established and maintained a bakery business in Auckland while gradually diversifying with investments in mining, finance, and railway construction. He was also energetically involved in wider community affairs, and like Dilworth, served on the Auckland Provincial Council. But with his different Ulster tradition, Coolahan was intensely active in the Roman Catholic Church in Auckland, serving as a financial advisor to Bishop Pompallier, and deeply enmeshed in the devotional life of its lay community.²⁴

These individual experiences are matched by examples on a wider group scale. Well-known is the case of George Vesey Stewart, born in 1832 in Brighton, Sussex to a County Tyrone family. Stewart commenced training as a civil engineer, and studied languages at Trinity College Dublin, before embarking on a career as a farmer and estate agent. Conscious of New Zealand's desire to recruit immigrants and the opportunities this presented, Stewart initiated a scheme to promote the settle-

ment of Ulster Protestant families in New Zealand and secure his financial future in the process.²⁵ He entered into complex negotiations with the New Zealand authorities to establish this settlement. A member of the Loyal Orange Order, Stewart found his fraternal ties invaluable and his scheme won the backing of the influential colonial politician J.M. Dargaville, Grand Master of the Lodge in Auckland. Eventually, on 24 June 1874 Stewart entered into an agreement with the New Zealand Government, whereby the Crown set aside 10,000 acres of land for occupation by Stewart's recruits. Stewart's settlers arrived in Auckland in September 1875. The migrants soon moved on to Katikati, in the Bay of Plenty, and quickly won praise for their industriousness. However, Stewart's ambitions as a land dealer and emigration sponsor were not fulfilled, and he was soon planning a second group settlement from Ulster.

Irish Catholic associational life was also a feature of colonial life, attested to most fully in Lyndon Fraser's comprehensive study of Christchurch's Irish population. Utilising a rich variety of sources including electoral rolls and probate records, Fraser shows how the newcomers to the city 'effected a transition to colonial life by creating and sustaining durable social networks based on ethnic ties which transcended pre-existing affiliations and represented a powerful means to domesticate a new environment'. These networks were reliant on kinsfolk and community, and, he maintains, fostered an increasing level of institutional completeness centred on the activities of the parish church'.²⁶ However, Christchurch was but part of a broader colonial canvas, and the strong nexus between one tradition of colonial

Irishness and Catholicism was resonant across large parts of rural and small-town New Zealand too.

In New Zealand, as elsewhere in the Irish Diaspora, religious affiliation was therefore one significant factor (but by no means the only one) in defining immigrants' social networks and life experiences. It also affected attitudes to political developments in Ireland, the empire, and their new society, if not universally or consistently so. This was well demonstrated in 1867, as the influence of Fenianism escalated in North America and Ireland. That year a new arrival on the South Island's West Coast, John Manning, founded a newspaper, the *New Zealand Celt*. Manning's journal was provocative and uncompromising in its demand for Ireland's political independence, and soon found a strong following among the large number of Catholic Irish immigrants on the region's goldfields. The substantial population of single Irish men present on the West Coast proved especially receptive to the *Celt's* enthusiastic promotion of Irish national consciousness. In line with the affirmation of that new and assertive Irish identity, on 8 March 1868 a group of Irish in Hokitika staged a mock funeral for the recently-executed Manchester martyrs. Led by a Roman Catholic priest, Father William Larkin, a funeral procession wound its way to the local cemetery where a Celtic cross was erected. This overt display by Irish gold miners caused consternation among local loyalists, and when news of the attempted assassination of Prince Alfred in Sydney by an alleged Fenian reached New Zealand soon after, hostility was further aroused. When Father Larkin inflamed passions with a provocative speech in which he expressed sympathy

with Fenianism, local authorities reacted. Manning and five others were arrested. The colony's Governor, Sir George Bowen, an Anglo-Irishman, product of a very different Irish tradition, felt little compunction in immediately dispatching troops to reinforce local volunteers in dealing with the local Irish menace.²⁷

Other examples of Irish Catholics' antagonism towards the British government, imperial policy, and New Zealand opponents can readily be identified in nineteenth and early-twentieth century New Zealand. For example, while numerous Irish soldiers served in army regiments to enforce colonial authority during the Maori wars, a small number of Irish deserters, overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, chose consciously to fight alongside Maori resisters during those wars.²⁸ Working class Irish rallied strongly in the face of opposition to support Irish nationalist delegates in the 1880s despite strident press criticism and apprehension from Unionist supporters about the prospect of Irish Home Rule.²⁹ Later still, the First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish War of Independence provided moments of intense anxiety that not only encouraged divisions between the Irish-born and those of Irish descent and their fellow New Zealanders, but even among the Irish themselves.³⁰ Given these divisions, the utility of any singular narrative of Britishness is difficult to acknowledge.

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I have argued that the reduction of New Zealand's colonial population to a generic group 'British' does a grave disservice to the historical record. Individuals' lives in the colony were certainly shaped by a series of common denominators that

transcended national origin, including time of arrival, class, and level of education. But regions of origin, cultural traditions and religious beliefs were also significant determinants of individuals' lives, patterns of association, and wider public attitudes. Aggregation into an homogeneous settler population elides these important distinctions. But what were the material consequences of different national or ethnic origins? Did such variation lead to groups we consider phenotypically-similar experiencing differential treatment in New Zealand?

A long tradition of historical writing on the Irish diaspora asserts that the Irish-born and those of Irish descent experienced grave disadvantage after their arrival in New World societies. In the United States, Oscar Handlin laid the foundation for this scholarly tradition in his celebrated book *Boston's Immigrants*, published in 1941. Handlin recognized that conditions in the new society were influential in shaping immigrant lives, but emphasized that the Irish were 'shabbily equipped to meet the multifarious problems imposed upon them by urban life'. In both Ireland and America, he believed, the Irish were 'victims of incalculable influences beyond their control', a people whose 'utter helplessness before the most elemental forces fostered an immense sadness, a deep-rooted pessimism about the world and man's role in it'.³¹ Subsequent writers magnified the impact of characteristics assumed to be peculiar to the immigrants to explain both Irish urbanization in the United States and the newcomers' subordination in American cities.

However, the last two decades have witnessed the emergence of a large body of new scholarship, much of it on Irish

immigrants in Australia, Canada, and South Africa, that contests the traditional American interpretation. This revisionist scholarship emphasizes not maladjustment or paralysis on the part of Irish immigrants in the face of modernization but their abundant adaptability and capability in both rural and urban landscapes.³² Recent studies on the Irish in New Zealand have tended similarly to emphasize a more fluid and less alienating pattern of adjustment to the new society than influential American accounts allowed.³³ As Donald Akenson contended, 'Irish immigrants and their descendants dispersed throughout New Zealand society and were to be found at every occupational level and in virtually every community'.³⁴

Akenson's study of New Zealand census data in the early-twentieth century firmly suggests that, across a range of measures, the Irish-born were mainstream players rather than marginal men or women. By the early-twentieth century, as most of the nineteenth century's first generation Irish passed through middle-age, the distribution of Irish-born across New Zealand's provinces was scarcely distinguishable from the pattern of the entire population. Likewise, in 1921 the Irish urban/rural split (55/45) mirrored extremely closely that of the nation as a whole (56/44).³⁵

Within the multi-generational Irish population some variations are discernable, particularly in the experiences of Roman Catholics. In 1916 Catholics were slightly overrepresented in major North Island regions of Auckland (29.0 per cent) and Wellington (20.7 per cent) when compared with those areas' share of the entire population (28.1 per cent and 20.4 per cent respectively).

Table 1: Occupational categories, males, 1921

<i>Occupational Group</i>	<i>Catholics (%)</i>	<i>Entire male population (%)</i>
Professional	4.72	4.78
Domestic Service	2.13	1.43
Commercial	6.94	9.39
Transport and Communications	9.97	8.45
Industrial	14.38	15.82
Primary Producers	22.01	22.9
Other	4.39	4.11
Dependent on others for livelihood (mostly children)	35.46	33.12
Total	100	100

Source: Akenson (1990:77).

Table 2: Occupational categories, females, 1921

<i>Occupational Group</i>	<i>Catholics (%)</i>	<i>Entire male population (%)</i>
Professional	4.78	3.71
Domestic Service	7.08	5.5
Commercial	3.46	3.46
Transport and Communications	0.69	0.45
Industrial	3.55	3.41
Primary Producers	1.57	1.54
Other	3.22	3.53
Dependants (housewives and children)	75.65	78.4
Total	100	100

Source: Akenson (1990:77).

In contrast, Catholics were underrepresented in Canterbury, Otago and Nelson. The differences were never so stark as to be indicative of American-style ghettos, nor are they reliable markers of Irish or Catholic marginalisation. Rather, the variations are most reflective of specific employment

patterns, visible in the occupational data for 1921.

As these tables demonstrate, Roman Catholics males — a cohort closely synonymous with the multi-generational Irish group — were slightly more likely than the entire male population to work in service or transport industries, and less likely to work in commercial occupations. Catholic women were a little more heavily concentrated in the professions and domestic service than women in general and less likely to be dependants. What is striking are not these differences, however, but the remarkable similarity of the Catholic profile to the nation-wide distribution. In residential and occupational terms, Irish immigrants by the end of the nineteenth century were by no means 'marginal micks'. Yet distinctions did exist. The Irish born did display a significantly higher level of illiteracy than other groups, a characteristic Akenson interprets principally as the result of educational disadvantage prior to emigration from Ireland. That interpretation is supported by the data on Irish performance in other new world settings. In eastern Australia, for example, at century's end the Irish occupational profile closely mirrored that of the colonial born at the same time as the group exhibited a higher level of illiteracy than other immigrants. In 1901, nearly 10 per cent of the Irish born in the state of New South Wales aged five years and over were reported to be unable to read, compared with 7 per cent of the Australian-born, 4.5 per cent of Germans, 3.6 per cent of the English-born and less than 2 per cent of Scots.³⁶

Statistical evidence is one measure of marginality or exclusion, but it is not the only one. Bigotry and discrimination oper-

ate at other levels, restricting access to political rights and economic opportunities. Irish Catholics entering colonial New Zealand did so as members of a group that historically had experienced differential treatment on account of their beliefs. Conquest and land confiscations, the lasting effects of the Penal Laws, and George III's refusal in 1801 to match the *Act of Union* with Catholic Emancipation contributed to the majority of Ireland's population experiencing discrimination on the grounds of religion, exclusion from public office, and economic subordination as Ireland was incorporated in the United Kingdom. The consequences of those policies were felt in Ireland and across the British empire for most of the nineteenth century. Even decades after Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic emancipation brought about the lifting of civil restrictions, the legacy of the long period of anti-Catholic discrimination remained evident. The Irish — and Irish Catholics in particular — were seen by many in Britain, the United States, and the settler colonies as undesirable, in large part because of religion, but also because religion became inextricably linked with pejorative ideas about the group's intelligence, economic incapacity, civil behaviour, ability to exercise appropriately political rights and responsibilities, and an array of other insidious stereotypes.

In New Zealand the consequences were clear when, in the 1870s, New Zealand embarked on a major programme of economic expansion. As the colonial government commenced large-scale assisted immigration, Ireland was not the preferred source for newcomers. Prevailing stereotypes, some drawn from Britain (particularly rooted in the repeal campaign of the

1840s), others originating in the mid century experience of Nativism in the United States, circulated throughout the Australasian colonies at the time. Irish immigrants were suspect on account of their alleged intellectual inferiority, impudence, and indolence. Adherence to the Roman Catholic Church was also a central factor.³⁷ In a sign of this antipathy to the Irish, in 1872, when the New Zealand Agent-General in London, Dr Isaac Featherston, placed recruitment advertisements in newspapers in the United Kingdom, only 15 of 124 were situated in the Irish press.³⁸

Given that religious bigotry was an underlying feature of nineteenth century New Zealand life it was not surprising that, whenever Ireland was discussed as a potential source of immigrants, Ulster was singled out as the most suitable site for any recruitment to occur. Sympathetic politicians, businessmen, and Presbyterian Church leaders were but some of the advocates for an increase in the numbers of immigrants coming from Ireland's north.³⁹ These calls apparently influenced New Zealand's attempts to recruit immigrants, as all Featherston's advertisements in Ireland were placed in newspapers in Ulster. This focus on Ulster and disregard for potential applicants in other Irish provinces eventually provoked a backlash in New Zealand, where the Minister for Immigration, George Morris O'Rorke, demanded action to provide fair access for Irish Catholic applicants. However, that favourable sentiment was not long maintained, and in 1879 the new Minister for Immigration, Robert Stout, chastised Featherston for the 'large number of applicants you are receiving from the south of Ireland'.⁴⁰

That sense that the Irish were undesirable immigrants, a threat to social cohe-

sion, was maintained in all of the Australasian colonies to at least the end of the nineteenth century. In 1881, the essayist A. M. Topp argued in the *Melbourne Review* that Ireland's Roman Catholic population was fundamentally different from that of other regions in the British Isles. Whereas the Welsh and Scots merged naturally with the English, he believed, the Irish were irreconcilably set apart: 'It is only with regard to them that the question of race becomes important. Only as to them can any doubt arise concerning the loyalty and benefit to the empire of any of the races that have acquired the English tongue.'⁴¹ Anti-Catholic, anti-Irish sentiments such as this survived well into the twentieth century. They soured relations between Catholics and non-Catholics, at least sporadically.

However, despite sectarian divisions, the Irish were for the most part very successful in accessing the privileges of Britishness and marking out positions as insiders in New Zealand life. In occupying positions of power in parliament and within the colonial bureaucracy to defend Irish and/or Catholic rights, through their enterprise and labour, and by their daily engagement within New Zealand life, the Irish proved adept at carving a niche in their new society. There were, indeed, 'marginal micks', just as there were marginal men and women of other ethnic backgrounds. But there were also a great many Irish men and women on the make, enterprising and resourceful, who excelled in making themselves mainstream. In replacing the homogenising signifier British we need to be careful to not too rigidly classify those who operated their own myriad agendas within the so-called British world.

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Where then for Britishness? Does it have a future applied to the settler societies? I would argue that it does, not as a replacement for Irish, English, or Scots identity, but as a complementary identity, a simultaneous identity. The case has been made persuasively by scholars including Benedict Anderson that exile (absence from homeland) acts as a well-spring for an awareness of and identification with nationalism.⁴² In other words, existence outside Ireland produced a heightened sense of Irish nationality — indeed, in some Irish-American communities it seems the crucible of the New World environment instilled a sense of being ‘Irish’ where no pronounced mind-set had existed before. However, colonial life — at some points in time, at least — provided a strong counterpoint, stripping away narrower identification with the homeland in favour of something new. A New Zealand poet published this verse in 1900:

Jack came from Cornwall, and Pat
from Donegal
'arry came from London, the first
place of all,
Sandy came from Aberdeen, and
Tom's native-born,
But they're all mates together in
the land of the morn.
Pulling, pulling on the rope
together,
Bringing up the future with a
golden tether,
Cousin Jack and Cockney,
Irishman and Scot,
And the native is a brother to the
whole blooming lot.

Tom Brooking, a leading historian of the Scots in New Zealand, identifies the

verse as capturing ‘the tension between clinging to older British associations [interestingly, all are local or regional] and the relentless drive to become homogenised New Zealanders’.⁴³ However, I am not as confident as Brooking in identifying this process as ‘relentless’. It was uneven, halting, and sporadic. It was interrupted by individual groups’ assertions of distinctive identity (local, regional, and national); by intermittent reinventions of ethnicity; and by colonial neighbours’ reactions to what were deemed unduly militant displays of difference. Britishness could — and did — stand as a convenient milestone along the road from Old World national or regional identities to New World nationalism. It warrants continuing investigation because of the position it occupies in this process. The challenge for us as historians is to historicise Britishness effectively, to recognise and interrogate Britishness in its colonial manifestations, and not afford it the standing of some irresistible, non-contingent identity that swept away all that had come before.

ENDNOTES

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³ Howe, Stephen, 2004, ‘Historiography’, in Kenny, Kevin (ed), 2004 *Ireland and the British Empire*, Oxford, p. 246.

⁴ Akenson, Donald Harman, 1990, *Half the World From Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand 1860–1950*, Wellington, p. 6.

⁵ Simpson, Tony, 1997, *The Immigrants: The Great Migration from Britain to New Zealand 1830–1890*, Auckland. See also Hearn, Terry, 2003, ‘Scots Miners in the Goldfields, 1861–70’, in Brooking, Tom and Coleman, Jennie (eds), 2003, *The Heather and the*

Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement, Dunedin, p. 68.

⁶ Belich, James, 2001, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000*, Auckland, p. 29.

⁷ Hamilton, Fiona, 2002, 'Pioneering History: Negotiating Pakeha Collective Memory in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *New Zealand Journal of History* 36 (1), p. 77.

⁸ Belich, James, 2001, *Paradise Reforged*, p. 78.

⁹ Sinclair, Keith, 1961, *A History of New Zealand*, London, p. 85.

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¹¹ Pocock, J.G.A., 1974, 'British History: a Plea for a New Subject', *New Zealand Journal of History* 8, p. 14.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 21.

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¹⁷ <http://www.teara.govt.nz/1966/N/National-Groups/NationalGroups/en> viewed 20 August 2005.

¹⁸ Fitzpatrick, David, 1980, 'Irish emigration in the later nineteenth century.' *Irish Historical Studies* 22, pp. 126–43.

¹⁹ Hearn, Terry, 2002, 'The Origins of New Zealand's Irish Settlers', in Patterson, Brad (ed), 2002, *The Irish in New Zealand: Historical Contexts and Perspectives*, Wellington, pp. 15–34; Immigration to New Zealand: online at <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/gallery/britnz/irish.htm> viewed 20 August 2005.

²⁰ Stone, R.C.J., 1995, *James Dilworth*, Auckland, p. 20.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 27–33.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.* p. 6.

²⁴ See Fortune, Gabrielle A., 1997, 'Hugh Coolahan and the Prosperous Irish: Auckland, 1840-1870', MA thesis, University of Auckland.

²⁵ Akenson, Donald Harman, 1990, *Half the world from home: perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand, 1860-1950*, Wellington; Gray, Arthur J., 1938, *An Ulster Plantation*, Dunedin; Lynch, Alitia, 1997, 'Drunken, dissipated and immoral': perceptions of Irish immigrants to New Zealand, 1868–1918, MA thesis, University of Auckland, pp. 90–5.

²⁶ Fraser, Lyndon, 1997, *To Tara via Holyhead: Irish Catholic Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Christchurch*, Auckland, p. 158.

²⁷ See Campbell, Malcolm, (forthcoming), *Ireland's New Worlds: Immigrants, Politics and Society in the United States and Australia, 1815–1922*, University of Wisconsin Press, Chapter 5; Davis, Richard P., 1974, *Irish Issues in New Zealand Politics 1868–1922*, Dunedin, pp. 11–17.

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²⁹ Campbell, Malcolm, 2001, 'John Redmond and the Irish National League in Australia and New Zealand, 1883', *History* 86, pp. 348–62,

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³¹ Handlin, Oscar, 1979, *Boston's Immigrants. A study in acculturation*, Cambridge Mass. pp. 86–7, 125–6. On the historiography of Irish America see, in particular, Akenson, Donald Harman, 1985, 'The Historiography of the Irish-Americans', in *Being Had: Historians, the Evidence and the Irish in North America*, Toronto, pp. 37–75; Burchell, Robert A., 1982, 'The Historiography of the American Irish', *Immigrants and Minorities* I, pp. 281–305.

³² The literature is very extensive. A selective list of recent studies on the Irish includes: (on South Africa) McCracken, Donal, 1992, 'Irish Identity and Settlement in South Africa Before 1910', *Irish Historical Studies* 28, pp. 134–49; McCracken, Donal (ed), 1992, *The Irish in Southern Africa*, Durban; Akenson, Donald Harman, 1991, *Occasional Papers on the Irish in South Africa*, Grahamstown; (on New Zealand) Patterson, Brad (ed), 2002, *The Irish in New Zealand: Historical Contexts and Perspectives*, Wellington; Fraser, Lyndon (ed), 2000, *A Distant Shore: Irish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, Dunedin; and O'Farrell, Patrick, 1990, *Vanished Kingdoms. Irish in Australia and New Zealand*, Sydney; (on Australia) O'Farrell, Patrick, 2000, *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the present*, Sydney, is the most important work and contains a substantial bibliography; Fitzpatrick,

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³⁶ Ibid. pp. 78-80; Coghlan, T.A., 1904, *Results of a Census of New South Wales (1901)*, Sydney, p. 272; Campbell, Malcolm, (forthcoming), *Ireland's New Worlds*, Chapter 7.

³⁷ Lynch, Alitia, 1997, 'Drunken, dissipated and immoral', pp. 51-4.

³⁸ Davis, Richard P, 1974, *Irish Issues in New Zealand and Politics, 1868-1922*, Dunedin, p. 31.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 50-5.

⁴⁰ Davis, Richard P, 1974, *Irish Issues in New Zealand and Politics*, p. 31.

⁴¹ Topp, A.M., 1881, 'English Institutions and the Irish Race', *Melbourne Review* VI (January), pp. 9-10.

⁴² Anderson, Benedict, 1994, 'Exodus', *Critical Inquiry* 20, pp. 314-28.

⁴³ Brooking, Tom, 2003, 'Sharing out the Haggis: The Special Scottish Contribution to New Zealand History', in Brooking, Tom and Coleman, Jennie (eds), 2003, *The Heather and the Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, Dunedin, p. 53.