Scottish Presbyterian Canterbury

Research

My research sought to assess the history of European Canterbury from a perspective which challenged the dominant English, Anglican narrative. As such, I chose to focus on the Scottish Presbyterians who settled in Banks Peninsula and on the Plains prior to the arrival of the first four Canterbury Association ships in 1850. Relying principally on the testimony of William and John Deans, formerly of Ayrshire, I was able to draw some conclusions about the manner in which the conceptualisation of Canterbury as an archetypal English settlement influenced the social networks and ethnic identity of the early Scottish migrants. Assessing the brothers' letters in conjunction with some of the official publications of the Canterbury Association and the personal letters of Charlotte Godley allowed for a more nuanced analysis of the manner in which the drive to ensure religious unity impacted the expression of Presbyterianism and the Scottish settlers more generally.[1]

Detailing the state of the Canterbury settlement in 1851, Charles Hursthouse declared that, in light of the compulsory contribution to Anglican institutions, dissenters were likely to favour other settlements where 'they were not compelled to pay so heavily for objects of which they actually disapproved.'[2] The effort to establish a Presbyterian church in the midst of the society boasting the most complete transplantation of English values, therefore, provides an interesting case study.[3] Such an assessment must begin with an analysis of the social networks which underpinned the development of this expression of ethnic identity. It is critical to note here that while there were upwards of 300 Presbyterians settled in Canterbury by the time the congregation had secured a land grant in 1855, not all of them were Scots.[4] Nonetheless, those born in Scotland, or to Scottish parents, certainly constituted the majority of the early community members. For the first core group of settlers, however, religion was not the common denominator which facilitated their connection. Informal networks of social

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1 John Deans, William Deans et al., *Pioneers of Canterbury: Deans Letters, 1840-1854*, (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1937); Charlotte Godley, *Letters from New Zealand 1850-1853*, (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1951); Society of Canterbury Colonists, *Brief Information about the Canterbury Settlement*, (London: John W. Parker, 1850); The Association for Founding the Settlement of Canterbury, *The Canterbury Papers*, (London: John W. Parker, 1850).

2 Charles Hursthouse, *New Zealand: The Emigration Field of 1851*, (Aberdeen: D. Chalmers and Company, 1851), pp.155-156.

3 Society of Canterbury Colonists, p.3; Graham Miller, *Centennial History of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Christchurch, New Zealand 1856-1956*, (Christchurch: J.W. Baty, 1956), p.5.

4 Enid E. Gray, *A History of Presbyterianism and the Presbyterian Church in Canterbury*, unpublished thesis, University of Canterbury, 1920, p.25.

support, as Tom Brooking has argued, often began prior to arrival.[5] The arduous journey from Britain served as a means of building social ties with fellow migrants.

Ebenezer Hay and Francis Sinclair, formerly of Ayrshire and Prestonpans respectively, had moved south from Wellington with their families early in 1843 and settled in Pigeon Bay in Banks Peninsula.[6] Meanwhile, William and John Deans had formulated a plan to settle on the Port Cooper plains where a previous settlement attempt, although failed, had highlighted the potential fertility of the land for grazing and cropping purposes.[7] The Deans brothers had connected with the Gebbie and Manson families, also of Ayrshire, on their voyage to New Zealand. Aided by the schooner of Sinclair, and the practical assistance of Hay, the group sailed to Port Cooper in mid-1843.[8] The two families worked for the Deans for a number of years before taking up land toward Lake Ellesmere. Employment relationships with fellow Scots were, therefore, apparent right from the beginning of Scottish settlement in Canterbury. The Deans' continued a number of employment-based relationships with Scotch migrants.[9]

The processes employed to ease the transition to colonial society have been studied by a number of scholars.[10] The influence of naming processes, as a means of retaining some connection with the British Isles were employed by some.[11] The Deans brothers, for example, named Riccarton after their home parish in Ayrshire, and the adjacent river, the Avon, after a stream on their grandfather's farm.[12] However, religious practices were a more concrete means by which such a sense of familiarity could be achieved. As Patterson and colleagues have pointed out, the establishment of Presbyterianism in settler societies was by no means

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5 Tom Brooking, 'Weaving the Tartan into the Flax', in Angela McCarthy (ed.) *A Global Clan*, (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), p.186.
6 Hannah Hay, *Annandale Past and Present 1839-1900*, (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1901), p.65.
7 John Deans, William Deans et al., p.60.
8 John Deans, William Deans et al., pp.66-67; Jane Deans, *Letters to my Grandchildren*, (Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 1995), p.7; Hay, p.126.
9 John Deans, William Deans et al., pp.255, 270. George Ranald Macdonald, 'William Boag', 1964, Macdonald Dictionary, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch; Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840-1914*, (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2002), p.37.
10 John M. MacKenzie, 'A Scottish Empire? The Scottish Diaspora and Interactive Identities', in Tom Brooking and Jennie Coleman (eds.) *The Heather and the Fern*, (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2003, pp.17-32; Angela McCarthy, 'Frugal and Thrifty, Hard-Working and Sober: Representations of Scottishness in New Zealand', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol.30, no.1, March 2012, pp.1-21; Maureen Molloy, 'No Inclination to Mix with Strangers: Marriage Patterns among Highland Scots Migrants to Cape Breton and New Zealand, 1800-1916', *Journal of Family History*, Vol.11, no.3, 1986, pp.221-243.
11 Barbara L. Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016), p.60.
12 Gray, p.15.

an exclusively Scottish endeavour.[13] Nonetheless, engagement with familiar Presbyterian rites and forms of worship was a critical form of cultural expression for many Scots.

The establishment of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Christchurch is all the more interesting, as an exhibition of cultural identity, for the comparatively small Scottish population which facilitated its construction. Scholars have touched on the extent to which Old World rivalries were carried by settlers.[14] Reflecting on the early days of the Otago settlement, for example, Alexander Bathgate noted that those English settlers who possessed the 'hardihood' to settle in the Scottish Free Church community were often referred to as 'the little enemy'.[15] McCarthy has argued that expressions of Scottishness were decidedly more cultural and positive than political and thereby defensive expressions of Irishness in New Zealand.[16] However, the influence of the position of the Presbyterian Scots in Canterbury as an explicitly unwanted minority, according to the terms of the settlement's establishment, deserves some attention.

Insurance of religious unity was intended to mitigate controversy over particular matters of organisation.[17] Construction of a Presbyterian Church and schoolhouse was, therefore, a significant diversion from the initial plan. Tension between the Anglican Church, established by law, and the dissenting population was inevitable, and this impacted the lives of parties on both sides of the debate. Jane Deans for example, reflected heavily upon the invasive nature of the Anglican dominance in determining the terms of the burial of her husband in 1854.[18] The process by which St Andrew's was established was also infused with internal tension. Discussion surrounding whether the church should adhere to the Established or Free Church of Scotland was particularly energetic.[19] When a Free Church Minister was selected and the church opened for worship in February 1857, the Scots solidified their place as a community. Given the conflict over possible eviction which had marred early

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[13] Brad Patterson, Tom Brooking and Jim McAloon, with Rebecca Lenihan and Tanja Bueltmann, *Unpacking the Kists: The Scots in New Zealand*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), p.125.
[14] Marjory Harper, 'Everything is English: Expectations, Experiences and Impacts of English Migrants to New Zealand, 1840-1970', in Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy (eds.), *Far From Home: The English in New Zealand*, (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), pp.56-58.
[15] Alexander Bathgate, *Colonial Experiences or Sketches of People and Places in the Province of Otago, New Zealand*, (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1874), p.31.
[16] Angela McCarthy, *Scottishness and Irishness in New Zealand Since 1840*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.3.
[17] Society of Canterbury Colonists, p.3; Miller, p.5.
[18] Jane Deans, pp.23-24.
[19] Patterson, Brooking, McAloon, Lenihan and Bueltmann, p.126; 'Scotch Church', *Lyttelton Times*, 4 February 1854, p.9, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LT18540204.2.12; 'Report', *Lyttelton Times*, 15 July 1854, p.10, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LT18540715.2.12.

interactions with the Anglican establishment, such an expression of ethnic distinction carried more than cultural connotations.[20]

Overall, the minority position of the Scots in Canterbury had an impact on the construction of social networks and expressions of ethnic identity. Having been denied a church of their own for so long, when one was finally established it became a prominent symbol of cultural distinction and, to some degree anyway, broader social acceptance for the Presbyterian population. As elsewhere, Scottish networks were not purely religious in nature. Indeed the founding settlers and those who followed them forged a number of social ties based on employment and familial connections as well. The Canterbury pocket of Scottish influence was, then, no less dynamic than those identified elsewhere, it was, as scholars have noted, simply a case of fewer numbers.[21] It is this fact, however, which serves to distinguish expressions of Scottishness in Canterbury from those elsewhere in New Zealand. On the whole, there were few places where Scots (or Presbyterian Scots to be exact) were a formally unwanted minority according to the premise of settlement. As such, expressions of Scottishness took on a more conscious tone in Canterbury than elsewhere.

Reflection

One of the greatest benefits of digital history more generally is increased accessibility. As Ekaterina Haskins has noted, the advance of the internet and digital methods has potential to dramatically alter the manner in which memory is both constructed and preserved.[22] Such developments inevitably influence the way in which history as a discipline is done. The process of preservation and the 'doing' of history has, previously, been perceptually reserved for particular occupations: scholars, curators, archivists, and other groups Haskins describes as the 'stewards of memory'.[23] With the development of digital archives and presentation techniques, history as an academic discipline becomes much more accessible and participatory.[24] Popular engagement is essential for the preservation of memory, and media which expands upon the traditional scholarly essay provides a vital step toward facilitating such engagement. The subsequent potential to decrease the perceived exclusivity of academic

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[20] 'St Andrew's Free Church of Scotland', *Lyttelton Times*, 7 February 1857, p.7, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LT18570207.2.10.
[21] Patterson, Brooking, McAloon, Lenihan and Bueltmann, p.74.
[22] Ekaterina Haskins, 'Between Archive and Participation: Public Memory in a Digital Age', *Rhetoric Society Quaterley*, Vol.37, no.1, 2007, p.401.
[23] Haskings, pp.401, 408.
[24] Haskins, pp.402-405; Cherly Mason Bolick, 'Digital Archives: Democratizing the Doing of History', *International Journal of Social Education*, Vol.21, no.1, 2006, p.122.

research is another benefit.[25] The ability to link directly to primary sources, which blog posts provide, is just one example of the manner in which digital outputs can work to facilitate this 'democratization' of history.[26]

In addition, as I found while producing the outputs for this assignment, such presentation methods require the researcher to utilise a range of skills which are not so well exercised when producing essays. It is easy, when doing research for a longer piece of work, to lose a bit of perspective about the crux of the research purpose as a whole. When the volume of sources available has to be used to efficiently convey the most interesting components in an economic manner, we have to be more judicious about what information is included. I found the blog post particularly challenging in this sense, but ultimately beneficial. There is a flip side to this argument in that while we gain the skills necessary to convey complex ideas succinctly we also potentially lose the ability to adequately expand on them. Presenting a sizeable amount of research in such a condensed form does carry with it the potential danger of over-simplification which is less of an issue in a lengthier academic essay.

Producing the visualisation was particularly interesting because it forced me to think about the quantitative and qualitative aspects of my research in a different way. I initially set out with the intention to produce some form of map which illustrated the existence of Scottish networks in Canterbury. With more research, however, I realised that most of my data was more qualitative than anything and it felt like a disservice to reduce that material into a semi-quantitative representation. Beginning with an idea about what sort of visualisation I wanted to produce was ultimately detrimental because it meant that I started out trying to find data which was conducive to producing that particular output. Once I let the data speak for itself a bit more, the process was much easier.

I decided that the establishment of the Presbyterian Church, and the extent to which it connected with the narrative of the Deans brothers, was something which might be explored further. I chose a storymap to present these findings because it provided a bit of flexibility to engage with components of both narratives and assess how they mapped onto one another. Placing the personal narrative within a broader framework of Presbyterian settlement in Canterbury was interesting, but I am not entirely sure how effective it was. Much of my research relied on correspondence, left by the brothers themselves, so certain perspectives

[25] Lara Putnam, 'The Transnational and the Text-Searchable – Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast', *American Historical Review*, April 2016, pp.379, 383.
[26] Bolick, p.122-134.

were necessarily excluded. As such, we are left with a fairly one-sided historical representation of Presbyterian Canterbury but it is valuable in its own right, as long as we acknowledge the inherent biases.

This research also focussed heavily on the experience of the male Presbyterian settlers. It would have been beneficial to include more of a female perspective. As such, it is unfortunate that it was not until later in the process that I located the published recollections of Jane Deans as this could have provided an analysis which challenged the narrative of Anglican Canterbury at a deeper level and a comparison with the experience of Charlotte Godley may have been more appropriate. In terms of the construction of the outputs themselves, it would have been beneficial if I had modified my research process a little. On the whole, I found it most challenging to settle on an engaging topic for a short blog post, as such my visualisation included more words than I might have liked but I hope that it was effective in communicating the two narratives anyway. It was ultimately challenging but worthwhile to experiment with different ways of 'doing history', particularly in terms of tailoring more academic arguments for a popular audience.

Such methods deserve more attention, as has been noted, because the ability to encourage a popular audience to both engage with and participate in the construction of history is incredibly valuable. Overall presenting historical research in digital forms like those required for this assignment has a great number of benefits, not least of which being the increased accessibility and decreased perceived exclusivity of history as an academic discipline. We do need to take care, however, that in attempting to produce outputs which are engaging that we seek first and foremost to preserve the integrity of the sources upon which they are based, and the arguments which we are attempting to convey.

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