



AUSTRALASIAN PIONEERS' CLUB

Pioneer

September 2007





The Dunbar

Pioneer

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Cover image: *The Gap*, 1888
Etching from 1888, later
hand-coloured, framed dimensions
32 x 37 x 3cm. Subject is a mast of
the Dunbar protruding from water
at the Gap.

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Editorial

Welcome to the new look Pioneer.

This edition focuses on the tragedy of the Dunbar, on which 121 souls perished when the ship ran into the cliffs near the entrance to Sydney Harbour, 150 years ago on 20th August, 1857. The feature article is split into three parts. It tells the story behind a portrait of Marian Egan and two of her children, who perished in the wreck. It then gives an account of the aftermath of the tragedy by William Stanley Jevons, who told the story of Robert Hunt, who photographed the wreckage deposited ashore at Lavender Bay. Hunt's two sisters were on the Dunbar. The final part is about George Green, who purchased the wreckage of the Dunbar.

To round off this edition with a different twist, is a speech given by Patrick O'Neill (son of a former Northern Ireland Prime Minister) to the club at this year's Foundation Day function.

We hope you enjoy the Pioneer and welcome your comments and articles.

Bill O'Connell

THE DUNBAR



The Dunbar is considered one of Australia's most famous shipwrecks, having hit cliffs near the entrance to Sydney Harbour on 20th August 1857, with the loss of 63 passengers and 58 crew. There was only one survivor, James Johnson, a member of the crew. *(Pictured)*

Built in 1852, the three-masted Dunbar was built for Duncan Dunbar to carry passengers and cargo between England and Australia. The 1,167 ton ship was considered a

fine vessel, built of British oak and Indian teak and held together by copper fastenings and iron knees.

This was its second voyage to Australia. The weather on the night of the 20th August was bad, with a rising south easterly gale and poor visibility. As the Dunbar approached Sydney Harbour the sky was very dark and the land was almost invisible, except for glimpses of Macquarie Lighthouse between squalls.

Captain Green, a veteran of eight visits to Sydney, was confused by the squalls and thought the vessel was heading for North Head instead of through the heads. He ordered the helm hard to port and as a consequence, hit the cliffs just south of the Gap. The ship began to break up within a few minutes, preventing the 121 occupants from making a safe escape, except for James Johnson.

The tragedy had an enormous impact on Sydney. Thousands

watched the rescue of James Johnson and the newspapers ran graphic descriptions of the event for days afterwards. The wreckage and bodies were not confined to the area around the cliffs, with reports of findings in Port Jackson.

The dead were buried at Camperdown Cemetery in Newtown, and about 20,000 people lined the streets to witness the funeral procession.

The following article contains three 'human interest' stories associated with this historic event.



Further Reading: “The Melancholy Wreck of the Dunbar” by Kieran Hosty, curator of ship technology and maritime archaeology at the Australian National Maritime Museum. To obtain a copy, go to www.anmm.gov.au and type “Dunbar” in the search box, or call the museum on (02) 9298 3777.

Kieran Hosty was the guest speaker at our Dunbar function on 20th August 2007, the 150th anniversary of the sinking. His book, “Dunbar 1857 – disaster on our doorstep”, should be released by October 2007, published by the Australian National Maritime Museum.

Christian Garland is a member of the Australasian Pioneers' Club and a descendant of Mrs Marian Egan, who perished along with her children on the Dunbar. This is the story behind a rare painting of Mrs Egan and her children (featured on the inside cover), which was exhibited for the first time at the club's Dunbar luncheon on 20th August 2007, the 150th anniversary of the sinking.

THREE DUNBAR STORIES

The Egans

by Dr Christian Garland



The subjects in the painting are Mrs Marian Egan (38 years) in centre; with two children from her first marriage, Gertrude Evans (18 years) and Henry William (20 years), both with the surname Cuhnac (note

spellings of Cahuac and Cahnac are also recorded). They were well-to-do residents of Sydney, who had gone 'home' for a holiday in the UK. The painting was done in England (or possibly Scotland) and has

survived because it was unfinished when they sailed from Plymouth in May 1857 to return to Australia. It came out on the next ship.

Mrs Egan was married to the Hon. Daniel Egan MLC who later commemorated his drowned wife and step children in stained glass windows, originally installed in St Mary's Cathedral in 1860. The windows of the children survived the fire that destroyed the cathedral in 1865. These two side panels were moved to 'Subiaco', a house maintained in western Sydney by Benedictine monks and named after St Benedict's first monastery, at Subiaco, in Italy. The panels were later moved to the chapel of the Benedictine Monastery in Arcadia, near Dural (NSW), where they are now located.

The painting has been in my family's possession since the late 1850s. I grew up in NSW and first saw it at the home of my great grandmother (Grace Elizabeth Evans, nee O'Rourke, 1873-1966) in Manly when I was four, immediately falling in love with the romance and

tragedy of the Dunbar disaster. In something of a paradox, the husband of my great grandmother was the grandson of Capt. William Davies Evans who is credited with the invention of the safety system of tri-coloured light for shipping (green for starboard, red for port etc). I inherited the painting in 1968 and since then have been given or have purchased other memorabilia, books and art work about the Dunbar.

The painting of Mrs Egan and children was cleaned in the 1980s but the artist's signature has never been found. The frame was also restored including replacement of broken pieces. After cleaning, the painting came to life, especially the fresh skin tones, and a necklace appeared on Gertrude's neck! As it happened, not long after the cleaning and restoration I was repainting our lounge room in the family home in Hobart. I hung the painting in the centre of the main wall for a few days without re-hanging any other art work or moving any furniture back in – so the room became a gallery, in a sense, featuring Mrs

Egan, Gertrude and Henry. I never expected it but at that moment the people truly came back to life, their eyes followed me around the room and it spooked me to the point I had to withdraw from them. This unsettling feeling was not resolved until the 150th Dunbar Commemoration on Sunday 19th August 2007 at St Stephens, Newtown (Sydney). In light rain we stood around the tomb of Dunbar victims and read out their names one by one. It was exquisitely poignant as I finally felt I had put them to rest.

It was an absolute delight to be able to present the painting for public viewing for the first time at the Dunbar Commemoration at St Stephens, and on the following day at a Dunbar luncheon at the Australasian Pioneers Club, now located in the Union, University and Schools Club in Sydney. The tragedy of the Dunbar shipwreck has touched so many people's hearts and I think the painting of the Mrs Egan and children brought home strongly the sense that these were real

people whose lives were lost, not just names on a passenger list. In an unexpected sequel, one visitor to the St Stephens event commented that the style of painting resembled the work of Robert Hawker Dowling. Dowling was in England prior to when the Dunbar sailed from Plymouth and was related to the Waller family members who also drowned with Mrs Egan and her two children. The possibility that Dowling may have been the artist is currently being investigated.

In remembering the Dunbar shipwreck, we should also acknowledge the fundamental role of St Stephens Church, Newtown in preserving the social and spiritual values associated with the tragedy, and the changes to maritime safety that were implemented as a result. If the old church of St. Stephens and surrounding cemetery had been allowed to crumble and ceased to exist, we would not be remembering the Dunbar in 2007. Our old churches embody so much of Australian heritage and history that we must maintain them and

not let them deteriorate. The Dunbar Commemoration of 2007, and similar earlier events in 1934 and 1937 at St Stephens, highlight the responsibility we have for current and future generations across Australia to loudly inform our political leaders that our old churches must be restored if deteriorating. Otherwise

much of our social and spiritual heritage will be drowned in a silent wave of apathy and ignorance.

One last point. When it came to deciding how to freight the painting to Sydney from Tasmania for the Dunbar events, I had no hesitation in choosing air rather than sea – a little superstitious perhaps!

Acknowledgements: I thank Robin Hedditch, Rosemary Noonan and Kevin Condon for information and comments, and Marcelle and Rev. Peter Rodgers of St Stephens Church, Newtown for being able to participate in the 150th Dunbar Commemoration and their advice about the stained glass windows of Gertrude and Henry. Thanks also to John Lanser for allowing the paintings to currently hang in the Australasian Pioneers' Club for all to view and contemplate.

The recovered wreckage of the Dunbar was photographed by Robert Hunt, an early pioneer of photography in Australia, whose two sisters were on the Dunbar.

THREE DUNBAR STORIES

Robert Hunt

By John Lanser



This photo of the wreckage of the Dunbar reproduced above has been described as "probably Australia's first camera news-story." It was taken on 13 December 1857 by Robert Hunt (whose initials and the date have been partly cropped from the left hand side of the board on which

the photo is mounted). Hunt's personal involvement with the tragedy of the Dunbar is told in a letter written by his fellow assay worker at the Sydney Mint, William Stanley Jevons, to his own sister, Lucy, on the evening of 23 August 1857, three days after the disaster.

"Not to alarm you about myself personally, I will tell you at once that an awful shipwreck occurred the other night within a few miles of this, which, besides exciting a great sensation all over Sydney, has more particularly affected the circle of the mint from sympathy with one of the members. I have often mentioned to you Mr Hunt, of the mint ... he is a few months older than I am, but was appointed from the Government School of Mines in London, just the same as I was from the University College, London. Rather more than a year ago he received the news of his father's death in Paris, and his mother having been dead for some time, he had few relations left except two sisters of the ages of eighteen and twenty, who were then, I believe, in school at Bordeaux. After remaining there a short time it was arranged that they should come out to him here by ship on the Dunbar, and in the shipping intelligence by the last mail their names were duly inserted in the list of passengers. In Sydney, Hunt had long expected them with pleasure. Very lately he had been busy choosing a small house on the North Shore, furnishing it, and even engaging servants, and was only waiting for the telegraph to announce the arrival of the ship. He was continually coming into my room which commands a good view of the flagstaff, and when disappointed by the flags, always discovering that the ship was in reality not quite due yet. Last Thursday night a storm began, with heavy rain, black clouds, and very strong gales from the east. The next morning he was unusually watchful of the telegraph signals, but who has not known hundreds of people uneasy in such cases? Towards the middle of the day the rumour, however, crept rapidly through the mint that there was a large wreck somewhere outside the Heads. This was doubtless unpleasant intelligence, but no one saw any reason to believe it was the Dunbar, and the shipping list, when appealed to, contained a number of ships much more likely to arrive than the Dunbar."

"That afternoon I was detained unusually late by assays, and had no time to go out to the South Head, where close beneath the lighthouse the wreck was said to have occurred. But at daybreak the next morning (yesterday) I got up and started with O'Connell for the

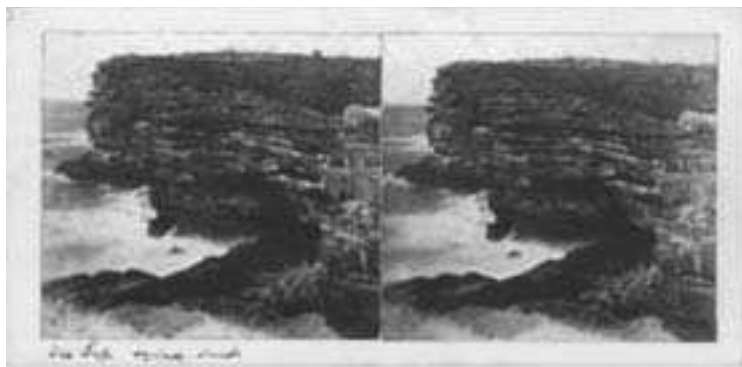
Heads. After a five-mile walk through mud and rain we reached the lighthouse, and soon made our way to a low part of the cliffs where a small number of persons, some from Sydney, by cabs and horses, the rest from the neighbourhood, were already collected. The place is called the Gap, being a partial break in the great line of cliffs opposite the part of the harbour called Watson's Bay, which, indeed, is produced by the same break. Here the cliffs fell to the height of less than 100 feet, and beneath was a slight recess where a flat shelf of rocks, just a little above the sea level, ran out to a short distance. On looking down with the rest nothing was at first sight apparent but the huge waves of the Pacific Ocean, regularly rolling in, and each time entirely covering the lower rocks with a boiling sea of pure white foam, or now and then striking the projecting shelf, with a loud bursting noise, and throwing out a dense misty spray almost as high as the cliffs upon which we stood. But soon there was evidence of the wreck: small fragments of wood mingled with the sea-weed; portions of spars, or pieces of large timber, already quite rounded off by grinding on the rocks; bits of clothing, some apparently of silk, also long pieces of sheeting or bedding torn into shreds, and other clothing apparently tied up in bundles, were now and then seen. All these things were carried up on the top of one wave, lodged on the shelf of rock and exposed to view for a few moments till the succeeding wave enveloped them again in foam, and thus invisibly removed them. But as you will anticipate, there was now and then mingled with them objects of yet more fearful appearances... But to leave descriptions perhaps of needless horror, we then walked along the cliff a few hundred yards to where the hull, or main part at least, of the vessel was yet supposed to lie, marked only by one or two fragments of spars yet attached by the rigging, or by loose rope ends now and then appearing at the surface. The ship appears to have run full on to the cliff almost below the lighthouse, some time during Thursday night, and to have gone to pieces and sunk almost immediately, unknown to any one on land, and possibly, we may hope, almost without the consciousness of any on board. The fragments of it had drifted with the wind and waves into the mouth of the harbour, and there gave the first indication of the wreck to a

coasting streamer entering the following morning. A few articles such as I have described were retained in the Gap by an eddy, and would there be out of reach till the waves subsided. You will now comprehend the utter destruction of the ship and all on board, and the mystery which for a whole day surrounded its very name."

It is recorded that Hunt wandered around the beaches and bays looking for traces of his sisters but only located a pillow, with the letters "SH" embroidered on it, which he kept, thinking it might have been his sister Sarah's.

Jevons returned to England in 1859 and later made his name as an economist but Hunt (1830-1892) remained in Australia to become a pioneer of Australian photography. Much of his early work is now held in the Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney, predominately albumen prints, many stereoscopic, but

the Museum also holds some of his original wet collodion negatives. Despite the trauma which the sea had brought to him he remained fascinated by the harbour and took hundreds of photographs of the yachts and boats which sailed around it. He used his camera to record the evidence of his own personal tragedy when he photographed the debris from the Dunbar accumulated at George Green's shipyard at Lavender Bay, and many years later produced this albumen stereo photo of the Gap, where so much of the wreckage collected.



References: *The Australasian Photo-Review*, volume 62, number 1, January 1955, pp 16-17.

John Lanser is the President of the Australian Pioneers' Club and the great-great-great grandson of George Green, who purchased the wreckage of the Dunbar.

THREE DUNBAR STORIES

The Greens

by John Lanser

As for George Green, whose shipyard Hunt photographed, it seems he had "purchased" the Dunbar wreckage in a deal the details of which came to light 50 years later. The announcement, in May 1907, of a life boat crew's claim to have discovered the Dunbar's anchors and chains at the base of Jacob's Ladder near the South Head signal station, stirred George Green's son, Richard (known as Dick), to question "how can they discover what has never been lost?" He claimed that "about the end of 1857 I, my father and Francis Mitchell in partnership purchased the remains of the Dunbar. I think the amount we paid was something like £150. The hull had been smashed up and the pieces scattered. The keel, ribs and forefoot were found on Beelby's Beach, Middle Harbour ... and other portions were recovered at Watsons Bay. We did all right out of the wreck. Some of the bolts, for instance, were 12 feet long and of pure copper. There were copper fastenings all through;

that's why we bought her. We also got the valuable teak and oak from the hull ..."

As for the anchors, Green lamented "the trouble was that with the poor appliances of those days we found it impossible to raise them. We could only get one diver, who went down and handled the chains as well as he could; but for work like that three divers are necessary. He couldn't manage it. The anchors were held fast in the rocks, and couldn't be moved ... for in addition to the fact that they were hard and fast in the rocks, another drawback we had against us was the undertow, which was so great that the diver couldn't keep his feet."

Dick Green speculated that the Dunbar's captain, James Green (no relation) took evasive action on the fateful night: "... when he found he was running ashore dropped his anchors to bring the ship around, for a gale was blowing from the eastward, and he thought he could check her and get her off the land."

This is an edited version of an address by Patrick O'Neill at this year's Foundation Day lunch. Patrick is the son of a former Northern Ireland Prime Minister

AUSTRALIA - THE IRISH COLONY

In 1971 shortly after I arrived in Australia and secured employment with the ABC, I was sent to record a school concert at a Hunter's Hill Girls School. At the time I worked for Children's Programmes and I was told this school was noted for its music.

Only a couple of months earlier, I had arrived from Belfast in Sydney: a Ten Pound Pom. Northern Ireland was in chaos, and I was seeking a new life out here. Given that my father had been Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and was widely blamed by the Protestants for triggering the troubles, a life in Northern Ireland (for me) was not really an option. I didn't want to live amongst bigoted, intransigents with a siege mentality, in a country rapidly descending into civil war. Ulster's anti-Catholic attitude, back then was little changed since the days of Oliver Cromwell and I had many Catholic friends.

The problem with living in a war zone is that you are forced to take sides. Loving as I did; traditional Irish music - and having been reprimanded by my father's political advisers for attending a (Catholic) Gaelic dance competition in my (Protestant) home town, I might have chosen the wrong side.

Neither was a career South of the border an option - certainly not in an Irish Republic still lost in it's Gaelic, anti-British miasma. While there may have been a more enlightened Government in 1971, Ireland was still Catholic and priest-ridden. Books were banned, as were divorce and contraception. Being a former British Army officer, I was considered British, from the 'black north' and a member of the turn-coat branch of the O'Neill family, which had switched religion to keep its lands. I'd definitely be on the wrong side there.

But back to the Hunter's Hill Girls School, which turned out to be a convent school.

When I had set up my microphones, I noticed a portrait of the Queen above the stage, draped with the Union Jack and the Australian flag. Then I noticed a row of nuns sitting in the front row. When the Mother-Superior came in, someone belted out the first bars of God Save the Queen on the piano and we all rose and sang it – even the nuns.

The lights were dimmed. The curtains parted and there on the stage was an Irish harp. The school choir filed in and sang songs in Gaelic. After the speeches the girls put on an excellent production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*.

This was the Ireland I wanted to live in.

I'd been warned that the bitterness of the Irish divide did exist in Australia and that there was still a high level of anti-Catholic prejudice but in 1971, even if I was viewing Australia through rose coloured glasses, the evidence, from my perspective was simply not there.

A couple of months after convent school concert, it was

the 12th of July, the day the Orangemen in Northern Ireland usually take to the streets. It's a day that usually ends in sectarian mayhem. By this time I was a trainee with TDT on ABC TV and I was sent out to cover the Orange parade in Sydney. A group of Orangemen ambled down the street following a man dressed as William of Orange mounted on a white horse. In Northern Ireland there would have been a crowd of 20,000. Here there weren't even 20.

But I was intrigued by the be-wigged man on the white horse, dressed as William of Orange. When I had a moment, I asked him what sort of person he thought the real William of Orange was. "Well I don't know but he must have been a Beauty!" he replied.

I later checked if he was a Protestant? "No, No" I was told. He was actually Jewish and they hired him because of his white horse. My replacement 'Ireland' was looking better and better.

But over the years as I travelled round Australia moving first to Tasmania, then Adelaide, then Perth, back to Adelaide and back to Sydney again, I was beginning to notice

that there was something more about Australia that made me feel at home. There was the national character, the sense of humour, the friendliness and the mild insolence and disrespect for authority, and Poms!

All reminded me of Ireland, even the Aussie accent with its softness and pronounced 'twang'.

What there didn't seem to be, was the hatred and bigotry I'd fled Ireland to get away from.

Of course the arid landscape was very different, the vegetation, the colours, the climate and so on, but it was amongst the people that I began to suspect that I had found my substitute Ireland. It was when I started reading up on the history of Australia, that more and more clues started to fall into place.

When I got to the period of the 1830s to the 1860s, I realised that this was when the Nation-building process actually started. This was the time when the Australian psyche started to be hard-wired into our thinking. And this was the time when there was massive Irish immigration.

So what is this Irishness? What sort of Ireland did these

early settlers come from and what influences moulded them? Why did they come here? What did they bring with them and more importantly what did they leave behind? Well of course, it depends.

The Ireland of 1788 was a very different country from the Ireland of 1798. Only 10 years later, after a decade of repression, a major rebellion and the shotgun union of the two kingdoms.

Ireland then changed again during the first two decades of the 19th century. There was a massive change 20 years later, about the time of the potato famine and yet another about the time of 1848, which was one of those watershed years of revolution in Europe.

And of course there has been no shortage of myth-making. We're always told that Australia has been the receptacle for Irish political prisoners and those down trodden by British oppression and those outrageous anti-Catholic penal laws. All of which was true, up to a point.

Much of Irish Australian mythology focuses on these rebels, particularly our national anti-hero, Ned Kelly, but try

as they might, the myth-makers couldn't turn him into a political refugee.

The Young Irishmen who took part in the failed rebellion of 1848 were definitely political prisoners sent to Van Diemen's Land. But not many stayed. William Smith O'Brien (a Protestant) returned to Ireland. Thomas Meagher (a Catholic) went to the United States where he became a General in the Civil War, as did Patrick O'Donohue and Terence McManus – all Civil War Generals on the Union side. John Mitchel (a Protestant) also went to the United States. For the record, he ended up supporting the Confederate side in the American Civil war!

Another prominent Young Irishman, Kevin O'Doherty and his wife the poet 'Eva of the Nation', went back to Ireland before returning to Brisbane, but they were more exceptions to the rule.

One of the more influential Young Irishmen to come out here was Sir Charles Gavin Duffy, former editor of the Nationalist Dublin Newspaper, the Nation. He was not transported. He came as a free

settler rising to become Premier of Victoria and speaker of the legislative assembly. But eventually, even he returned.

These were high profile Irishmen. Many were Protestant and because they were well-known agitators, writers and politicians, history loves to focus on them, but they weren't the norm.

I'm more interested in the non high profile Irish, who came out here to build the nation. At the top of the pile there were landed gentry, the second and third sons who were not going to inherit a big house, many of whom were educated and enlightened Empire men. At the bottom of the pile there were the cottiers, the labourers, the turf cutters and domestic servants.

So whether they came either in chains or on assisted passage, to find a new life for themselves, these were the Irish who stayed and in my opinion stayed at a crucial time when the very concept of 'Australian-ness' was being formulated, or hard-wired into our character. I'm talking about the period between the 1820s to the 1890s.

But let's start with the

convicts and let me give you some figures. In 1791 there were 159 Irish convicts transported to NSW. Actually there were probably more since many Irish were transported from England too. They may have been transported for stealing a slice of bread, but they were convicts never-the-less.

In 1799, the year after the 1798 rebellion, there were 1,239 Irish transportees, a fair number of those would have been rebels. But for the next 10 years the numbers of Irish convicts transported to the colonies tends to settle down to about 300 a year. It's not until the 1820s when we see a significant rise again.

In 1823, there were 1,153 Irish convicts transported, that figure steadily rises to 5,300 by 1832. Again many Irish would have been transported from English ports, and always it's more men than women.

Between 1791 and 1853 when transportation was terminated, except for Western Australia, about 30,000 Irishmen and 9,000 Irish women were transported directly from Ireland. If we include those Irish transported from Britain that

rises to 187,000 men and women, the vast majority men.

But during that period there were (again in round figures) another 300,000 Irish free settlers who also emigrated from Ireland to the Australian colonies. What we're seeing is a constantly rising immigration, the majority and by a huge margin not convicts, but free settlers. And the numbers increase exponentially as the 19th century progresses, the majority arriving during and after that cataclysmic event of 19th century Irish history, the potato famine.

The potato famine for the history books, and history books love dates; is usually set between 1845 and 1849. But in reality, the potato famine was on-going. The potato blight (*Phytopthera*) had struck Ireland even more disastrously in the previous century in 1782-1783, it's just it wasn't reported so widely.

The potato blight was starting to strike not just in Ireland but much of Europe in the 1820s. So it wasn't as if it was unexpected. At that time the Irish population stood at over 8 million. As a result of the mismanagement of the relief

process (the 'laissez-faire' economists were the neo-cons of that period and they were just as selfish, callous and socially irresponsible), about two million died and another three million emigrated, mostly to America. Ireland's population has never recovered from the potato famine, not even today.

So why isn't America the 'Irish Colony'? Certainly there are about 10 million Americans who claim Irish descent. Well at that time, the American character (certainly the white American character) was well and truly established.

Let me digress for a minute. At the time of the American revolutionary war, many of the people who fought for the revolution were protestant. One of the key 'agitation groups' in the American colonies were the 'Scots-Irish'. These were the back woodsmen. These were determined settlers determined to build new lives for themselves. These were the people who set the tone.

Many of their ancestors had also come from Ireland, but 100 years earlier. In Ireland, it wasn't just the Catholics who were persecuted; it was the

non-conformist Protestants too. These North American agitators were descended from Plantation colonists mostly from Ulster.

It's often forgotten that Ireland was itself a colony. The plantation of Ulster took place at the same time as the plantation of Virginia (1608). These 'Scots-Irish' had a strong Protestant work ethic and were not prepared to hang around in Ireland amongst a native population who hated them, being oppressed by an Anglican ascendancy who had double-crossed them after the Battle of the Boyne. So they left in their thousands for America.

It was their values, their attitudes and their standards that won the day after Lexington and Yorktown. And after the American revolutionary war, if you didn't go along with their way of thinking, you cleared out, most of them to Canada and the West Indies, many back to Britain and a few ended up out here.

So in a strange way, while most Americans of Irish descent claim ancestors who were fleeing the potato famine and British injustice, their children adopted the American mindset. They

were Irish Catholics who adopted the American protestant work ethic; some of it maybe, just maybe; handed down by their former Irish foes!

But back to Australia and the potato famine. This was the time of mass Irish emigration to Australia. They came here to get away from land dispossession, rack-renting, absentee land-lordism, but mostly to get away from hunger and to start a new life as far away from the British Isles as possible.

And by the 1850s there was another driver – the Gold Rush. The Irish have always been gamblers.

So what was going on in the Australian colonies at the time. It was a time when responsible Government was flourishing in NSW, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. It was also taking off in WA, but WA still accepted convicts. It was a time when land settlement was well underway and the Colonial governments had most of the basic infrastructure of state in place.

And these Irish immigrants were not the poorest of the poor – the really poor had either

stayed in Ireland, died or gone to America. Immigration to Australia was much more carefully controlled. These were Irish farmers, tradesmen or townsfolk who had a bit of education and who were prepared to work off their assisted passage and pay for other members of their family to come out. It was these people who arrived in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania at a crucial time for the cultural development of Australia.

These Irish settlers were also bitter. They could mostly read and to some extent had been politicised. They were anti-English in a way that prevailed at the time, but that didn't mean that they didn't disapprove of the Empire. Their political leaders wanted the same sort of governmental relationship with the British Empire for Ireland as already existed in the colonies they'd just emigrated to.

And they wanted land. Land they were given. There were several Irish land grant schemes like the Belfast settlement round Port Fairy in Victoria's Western district. Or the Irish settlement on the Darling Downs inspired by the Roman Catholic Bishop

Quinn, somewhat disparagingly referred to as 'Quinn'sland'! Kiama was actually a protestant 'Orange' settlement, and the Clare Valley in South Australia was another Irish settlement. Then there was Kelly Country and the Gold Rush.

By the 1860s and 1870s Charles Gavin Duffy had managed to introduce the Duffy Land Acts. This was land distribution legislation that he'd failed to get introduced into law back in Ireland, but was able to get for them in Victoria.

Many of these Irish land settlements were not very successful. Assumptions were made on the size of 'selections' based on soil type and climate conditions in Europe, criteria that seem naive by today's standards. Many selectors failed, in the case of Ned Kelly and his family disastrously so in Northern Victoria; though it had more to do with lax supervision and interpretation of the Act, than political persecution of a national hero, as the myth makers would have us believe.

Clearly most of the Irish wanted to be away from Ireland. They felt comfortable in Australia. More importantly,

they could understand the institutions in Australia, most of which were modelled on Irish institutions.

In the early 1830s Sir Richard Bourke became Governor of NSW. He was one of the most enlightened Irishmen (a Protestant) to come out here. He was well aware of the problems in Ireland and he took steps to ensure that the Churches would never be able to hijack the colonial secular state. He also founded the Irish National School system in NSW, an institution that had not yet come into being in Ireland. And he did this with heated opposition from the Churches. We must thank him for nipping religious bigotry in the bud.

He also built up the board of works, again an institution that didn't exist in England, but did in Ireland.

Another Irish institution that was translated to the colonies was the concept of a state police force. This was an institution that existed in Ireland but not in England, a land of county constabularies.

Perhaps that is why so many of the Irish immigrants joined

the police? It used to be referred to as the '3 Ps': Priests, Police, Prison warders. The better educated Irish became lawyers and judges. The police who arrested Ned Kelly were mostly Irish. The judge who sentenced him to death was also Irish, but the hangman was English!

And the myth of Ned Kelly is pure Irish. If we didn't think like Irishmen, there would have been no myth. Americans who admire success, could never conceive of making a national hero out of a 'loser' like Ned Kelly; and there are other clues about how Irish the Australian character is.

Every time you see the Australian cricket team yet again triumphant, we cheer, but we cheer our loudest when they beat the English.

When we take the piss out of someone we subject them to gentle ridicule but we reserve particular ridicule for poms, particularly upper-class poms. This is pure Irish!

The tall poppy syndrome – that's also pure Irish. The Irish came here as have-nots with a view to getting a small plot of land, a house and a job. Back in Ireland, the 'haves' were

intruders and usurpers who lived in the big houses: Anglo Irish ascendancy. The Irish only grudgingly admire success, it always being more important that someone does not do better than the rest of the gang. That is the difference between the US which admires success, and Australia, which makes fun of it. It's the tall poppy syndrome, and it is pure Irish.

An aristocracy doesn't create its own validity. It is not dependent on its self-assumed power to look down on the 'plebs', but more dependent on a mass of submissive 'plebs' looking up to it.

In Melbourne and Adelaide there's a 'sort-of' establishment which is 'sort-of' looked up to. But in the more Irish NSW, no one's really looking up to the Eastern Suburbs gentry. And when we hail a taxi in Australia, we 'Irishly' sit beside the taxi driver in the front seat, rather than 'Englishly' sit in the back. All of this gentle jocularity makes me feel at home – in Ireland.

But back to that formulative period, the end of the 19th century. The bitterness of the potato famine still remained.

Maybe that is why the Australian Colonies raised so much money to assist famine relief in Ireland. The Irish Australians were very generous in sending back money to Ireland, more so per capita than their Irish kith and kin in the USA. It is why the Redmond brothers, key members of the Home Rule movement and the Land League, came out to the Australian colonies to raise money. By 1883, they raised £25,000 to send back to Ireland. They'd also met two Australian girls who'd later become their wives.

The politics of Ireland definitely bedevilled the politics of the colonies. The Irish divisions were definitely played out in the press and spilled out onto the streets. There was a riot in the 1860s in Melbourne outside an Orange lodge on the 12th of July, when a boy was shot dead.

The Irish card was often played by Australian politicians too. Sir Henry Parkes was often beating the Orange Drum as he built up his political support base. Charles Gavin Duffy, a Catholic and Premier of Victoria was constantly having to fend off the barbs and insults from the

Orange order and bigoted Protestants.

And in many parts of Australia the Catholic Irish were definitely treated as second class citizens. Key outrageous 'Irish' events had a major impact on Australia's internal peace. One was the 1886 attempted shooting of Prince Alfred Duke of Edinburgh at Clontarf. After that event, membership of the Orange order rose to over 20,000 round Australia. The other was the 1882 Murder of Lord Fredrick Cavendish in Phoenix Park, Dublin, on the day he arrived to take up the position of Viceroy of Ireland, all of which served to enflame Irish Catholic-Protestant rivalry here in Australia.

But somehow it never developed to the extent that it did in Ireland, probably because Australia's Irish didn't have grievances here, certainly not in the way that they had them back home.

Probably the real reason was that the Australian Colonies had the sort of relationship with the Imperial Government that they wanted Ireland to have back home. They had their home rule, and for them it worked.

And this happened despite the efforts of political opportunists like Sir Henry Parkes and bitter old bigots like Cardinal Mannix.

The Vinegar Hill rebellion in the early days of the colony was really a fiasco. Compared with Irish rebellions, it was very small beer. As was the Eureka stockade, Lalor's brother in Ireland was a much bigger rebel than our rabble rouser out in the colonies. Even during the troubles of the early 20th century, Australia's Irish rebelliousness was very small.

Despite attempts to organise the Irish into traditional forms of Irish agitation, most of the Irish declined to take part. That's not to say that they may not have made sympathetic noises or lent moral support to their kith and kin back in Ireland. But when called to take up arms, they declined.

In 1918, when a small group of Australian Irish Republicans trained in the Blue Mountains in preparation to go over and join the Irish Republican Brotherhood after the Easter Rising, they were considered a joke. The closest they got to Ireland was Darlinghurst gaol.

The other important factor is that the Irish Catholics were 'watered down' by other Catholics from other parts of the world who didn't share the authoritarian Irish Catholic world-view of someone like Cardinal Mannix

Even today, if enough people were concerned about Irish divisions, Archbishop Jensen's puritanical crusade would be taken seriously and become the touchstone for classic Protestant Irish anti-Catholic agitation. He would have acquired the status of Ian Paisley. But he hasn't!

All of which shows that Australia's Irish, have largely put their historical differences behind them and moved on. Australia is proof-positive that it is possible for the Irish to live at peace with each other and do so in what has become one of the most politically stable countries on this earth. And it is a remarkably Irish country that we all live in: Australia, the Irish Colony.

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