

# Worlds apart: the Anglo-Irish gentry migrant experience in Australia

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Throughout all Australia, there is a sympathy for the ideal of a gentleman. This gives a moral aristocracy. Sustain it by showing a store set on integrity, honour and civilised manners; not by preferences of birth, which belong to old countries.<sup>1</sup>

The continuing interest in the role of Irish migration in the historical construction of an Australian identity (or, as scholars would more recently have it, identities), has produced a wide-ranging and extensive literature. However, until recently, this has been dominated by discussion of the Catholic majority within the Irish migrant stream thus marginalizing other religious groups such as presbyterians, methodists and anglicans.<sup>2</sup> As this implies, religion continues to be accepted as an adequate surrogate for ethnicity in Irish-Australian studies while considerations of class as another factor determining the nature of Irish experience in colonial Australia have only rarely been considered.<sup>3</sup> On both counts, one group which has largely been ignored in chronicles of Irish migration and settlement is the Anglo-Irish gentry. In terms of the English gentry, Bolton has argued that despite the fact that they wielded a dominant share of social and political power in Great Britain, at least until the early years of the twentieth century, their younger sons did not migrate in sufficient numbers to have a direct influence on the structure and development of any colonial society within the Empire.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he argues that even where significant numbers of gentry did migrate, the distinctions between them and other classes tended to become blurred and shaded following their arrival overseas. In Australia this view is disputed. Forth and Kiddle, for example, both suggest that there was a *marked* distinction between 'ordinary' assisted migrants and the minority of gentry migrants to colonial Australia in terms of their instrumental role within society.<sup>5</sup> Although these divisions were not always immediately obvious at

1 Letter from Edward Lytton, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to Sir George Bowen, the governor-elect for Queensland, 29 April 1859 in S. Lane-Poole *Thirty Years of Colonial Government: a selection from the dispatches and letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir George Ferguson Bowen, G.Co.M.G., &c'* (London, 1889), p. 62. 2 D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora* (Belfast, 1996), pp. 91-122. 3 P. de Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 13-34. 4 G. Co. Bolton, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', in *Historical Studies*, University of Melbourne 13: 51 (Melbourne, 1968), p. 307. 5 G. Forth, 'No Petty People: the Anglo-Irish Identity in

first glance, they may be argued to have had a profound effect on the whole nature of colonial Australian society throughout its development.

Many gentry migrants exhibited both social and political leadership in the colony and were prominent through their work as government officials, businessmen, industrialists, politicians and pastoralists. Similarly, although the Anglo-Irish gentry constituted a very small minority when viewed within the context of the entire Irish migrant stream, they also enjoyed a prominence within Australian colonial society beyond that which their minority status would have suggested. This distinction was partly attributable to the wealth and economic power wielded by these migrants as well as to their superior educational background. Through this power base they obtained prominent roles in Australian society and, as a result, the legacies of many are still visible throughout the Australian landscape. To assist in the examination of the Anglo-Irish gentry migrant's role in colonial Australia we must first determine who the Anglo-Irish gentry were, the number who came to Australia, their contribution to the development of Australia's nationhood and the extent of the relationship between their cultural identities and the surrounding cultural landscape.

In terms of definition, the phrase 'Anglo-Irish gentry' is highly subjective. The majority of Anglo-Irish gentry migrants were defined by their social class, wealth or landholding. However, although many statistics are available for assisted migrants to Australia between 1840 and 1900, there are virtually none which relate specifically to gentry migrants. The main reason for this is that most of the gentry migrants paid for their own passage to Australia while assisted migrants relied on some sort of financial aid either from the imperial or colonial government or from their landlord. Consequently, fairly meticulous, though not unproblematic, government records are available to ascertain the developing nature and context of the assisted schemes. The gentry, on the other hand, had barely more than their name recorded on a ship's passenger list and, upon arrival in Australia, their name listed as an arrival in the colony – itself a standard procedure for all arrivals of every class. Although the gentry were unassisted migrants, they were not synonymous with these, as there were other 'ordinary' migrants who also arrived in Australia unassisted. Moreover, due to the subjectivity of the definition of the Anglo-Irish gentry it should be remembered that any emigration statistics that do exist for gentry migrants tend to be fairly speculative and are often predominantly based on land ownership records, as a large number of these migrants established pastoral runs across the Australian countryside.

## I

Upon arrival in Australia, Anglo-Irish gentry migrants gravitated towards various social and cultural milieux and occupational 'worlds'. At one extreme there were squatters, men like Mervyn Archdale, originally from Castle Archdale in Co. Fermanagh and James Moore from Dublin, who took up land with Charles James Griffith from Co. Kildare. Others included Hugh Glass from Portaferry in Co. Down and Charles Augustus Von Stieglitz from Co. Tyrone. These men took up leases of many thousands of acres of land and ran extensive pastoral enterprises. At the other extreme, some gentry entered the colonial bureaucracy and established themselves in public life as lawyers, barristers, or politicians. For example, migrants like Thomas Strettel Clibborn from Co. Westmeath was secretary of the Australian Jockey Club (c.1873), while Sir William Foster Stawell from Co. Cork, was chief justice of Victoria from 1857 and Sir Robert Molesworth from Dublin was a prominent judge. Others dwelt in both domains combining life as pastoralists with work in the public sphere as bureaucrats. In some cases, such as that of Thomas Budds Payne from Co. Carlow, the transition from pastoralist to lawyer was part of on-going career progression, while some gentry members such as Acheson French from Co. Galway maintained their pastoral interests, also undertaking employment in the colonial bureaucracy, becoming, in his case, a local police magistrate.

According to De Serville, property was the economic prop of gentility and thus pastoralism – 'squatting' – attracted men from all ranks of society in both Britain and the other colonies. These well-to-do economic migrants included younger sons of the aristocracy and gentry, army and navy officers, clergymen, lawyers and doctors as well as young men with capital but no occupation.<sup>6</sup> Indeed the whole concept of squatters ran deep in the Australian psyche as many regarded them as the essence of colonial Australia and the embodiment of the colonial experience. Along with other iconic figures such as bushmen and diggers, squatters were seen as the quintessential colonial Australian. Even in the words of Australia's de facto national song, 'Waltzing Matilda', the squatter denoted property, style and prosperity:

Up rode a squatter, mounted on his throughbred;  
Down came the troopers, one, two, three . . .

Thus, not only did squatters span the history of 'White' Australia from the arrival of the first sheep to the emergence of the modern developed country in the twentieth century, but they have also figured in public constructions of Australia's past as heroic and romantic figures who 'discovered' the land, settled it through some danger to their own lives and regularly experienced hardships such as drought and bushfires, all to produce enduring and renewable wealth. However, in the 1860s public sentiment turned against them when anti-squatting feeling found expres-

<sup>6</sup> De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, p. 82.

sion in the Land Selection Acts passed by Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia between 1861 and 1869. These represented an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to create a class of agricultural smallholders, as much in response to the perceived inequalities of the developing monopoly of landownership as any realistic appraisal of the agricultural potential of the land itself.

Amongst the squatters themselves, however, there were deep and still frequently unrecognised social divisions. These were highlighted by Captain Foster Fyans, a military officer originally from Dublin who was appointed Crown Lands Commissioner in 1840.<sup>7</sup> His classification of the squatters is revealing. First, there were the gentlemen squatters, then the 'shopboys' who were rich and successful men but who lived in primitive squalor with little or no regard for comfort and status; and finally shepherds and other servants who had grown rich over time, and were eventually able to buy out their masters. However, Fyans himself was a member of the Irish landed gentry and his opinion on the matter was undoubtedly biased. Of all these groups only the gentlemen squatters earned his respect. In his view, 'many of the squatters are gentlemen, worthy and excellent men, of undoubted character and well connected at home.'<sup>8</sup>

For other Anglo-Irish gentry migrants, the colonial bureaucracy offered an alternative form of employment. For some such as Sir Robert Molesworth (1806–90) and George Higinbotham (1826–92), their careers in Australia as judge and chief justice were a natural progression from their previous employment in Ireland. Molesworth had been called to the Irish Bar in 1828 and Higinbotham to the English Bar in 1853. Whether such men migrated to Australia purely in order to increase their prospects in life is uncertain, but it is reported that Higinbotham migrated because he felt that as a barrister at home he saw 'little reason to hope for advancement in his profession, or even for any work at all in it.'<sup>9</sup> Like many of his contemporaries in the 1850s, Higinbotham's original intention had been to make his way to the gold fields to seek his fortune but once he landed in Melbourne, work at the Bar offered itself in abundance and his previous aim was forgotten.<sup>10</sup>

## II

Lowenthal and Bender<sup>11</sup> have argued that in many settler societies, ideological notions of landscape and identity inherited from the 'mother country' were quickly discarded as migrants sought to establish a new ideological basis for the cultural landscapes being created in the 'new' country. For example, Lowenthal argues that newly independent Americans (of European descent) gloried in their felt lack of

<sup>7</sup> Foster Fyans Papers 1844–1870, MS.10594, MSB.616, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. <sup>8</sup> De Serville, *Port Phillip Gentlemen*, p. 84. <sup>9</sup> E.E. Morris, 'A Memoir of George Higinbotham', (London, 1895), p. 29. <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. <sup>11</sup> B. Bender (ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives* (Oxford, 1993).



history and, seeing Europeans burdened by the past, rejoiced in their own supposed freedom from its shackles.<sup>12</sup> In Australia, similar conceptions have been addressed by O'Farrell, who argues that many early migrants also aspired to independence from Britain and shared the view that the new 'pristine' country they had arrived in was suitable for the construction of a new identity and landscape.<sup>13</sup> Arguably, the fact that many migrants may have aspired to create an identity and landscape separate to that of the Old World which they had left was a result of the circumstances surrounding their departure. Many had been transported and it is understandable that they may have felt a degree of resentment towards the motherland. Others who were voluntary migrants may also have felt that the very action of migration involved a new beginning and a new landscape. McCalman argues that for many 'ordinary' nineteenth-century migrants, emigration involved a deliberate and self-conscious act of 'erasure' as they sought to escape their 'embattled, impoverished or otherwise negative' experiences in the 'homeland'.<sup>14</sup>

It is thus debatable whether the intentions and expectations of ordinary migrants had very much in common with those of the gentry. Many of the latter, perhaps more familiar with the heritage of the Old World, seemed quite unprepared for the apparent lack of 'human' history in the Australian landscape. Some at least appear to have actively searched for significance in the landscape to connect them with the world they had left. As Morphy argues, they brought with them an 'old' past in the form of the distant landscapes they had experienced elsewhere and which influenced their conceptualisation of and attitude towards the 'new' land. That this was so is demonstrated by gentry migrants such as Charles James Griffiths (1840–63) who felt mixed emotions about the new country. On 23 November 1840 he wrote in his diary:

The aspect of this country gave me I don't know why something the idea of the Co. of Meath everything about this country is done so much in the English style that I sometimes find it difficult to believe that I am in a foreign country. This I merely mention incidentally the hand of man being nowhere visible on these plains . . .<sup>15</sup>

This theme continues in his book *The Present State and Prospects of the Port Phillip District of New South Wales*, published in 1845. In the chapter dedicated to practical tips and hints for prospective migrants to Australia he wrote:

12 D. Lowenthal and M. Bowden, *Geographies of the Mind* (Oxford, 1976), p. 89. 13 P. O'Farrell, *Vanished Kingdoms: The Irish in Australia and New Zealand* (New South Wales, 1990), pp. 1–21. 14 J. McCalman, 'The Originality of Ordinary Lives', in W. Hudson and G. Bolton (eds), *Creating Australia* (St Leonards, 1997), p. 87. 15 Diary of Charles James Griffiths 1840–1841, MS 9393, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

It was the custom amongst the ancient Greeks and Romans to carry with them, when they migrated, their household gods, their Lares and Penates, not more as the objects of religious observance, than as memorials of their former homes, and symbols of their national identity; and thus, in the spirit of this beautiful emblem, the old world customs and the polished usages of English civilization should be cherished round the hearth of the Australian settler, as momentos of the home of his fathers, and to identify his children with the race from which they are sprung.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, as with America, so too, Australia appeared to be a new land, unburdened by history and unhampered by forebears. To the European settlers the landscape was a blank canvas on which they could begin to build their nation. However, their 'white' landscape ideology was consciously ignorant of the fact that the land they were populating was already imprinted with the cultural landscapes of the indigenous population. The aboriginal population was neither white nor settled and as the landscape bore no marks of an agrarian society or an industrial order, consequently many of the early European settlers took it upon themselves to rid the land of the indigenous peoples in order to make the land profitable. Even though it has been estimated by Short that the total pre-contact Aboriginal population of Australia was between 200,000 and 600,000, the arrival of the European marked the end of their way of life as the white European invasion led to the loss of their land, the destruction of their culture and the superimposition of white economic and cultural power.<sup>17</sup> In the early decades of European settlement in Australia the aboriginal community was often used as a measuring stick against which the settler community could compliment their own achievements and their civility compared to the native 'savages'. However, it has only been in more recent decades that the aboriginal population has been given full recognition as a legitimate culture. With this gradual acceptance has come a substantial range of books and articles focusing on the history and culture of the indigenous community. Perhaps it is somewhat ironic that scholars are now suggesting that the discourse of the aboriginal community should no longer be narrated by others and instead should only be narrated by the aboriginal community themselves.

Yet for all this, compared with Europe, the new colonists found Australia a country untamed, a land which was scarcely lived in and a landscape which conveyed little sense of historical depth. Initially, mediated through its experience of Empire, Australia deployed British notions of culture, politics, nature and society as it began the process of nation-building but gradually these became blurred and hybridized as the relationship between the Australian state and the Imperial power took on a new and increasingly independent tenor.

<sup>16</sup> Co. Griffiths, *The Present State and Prospects of the Port Phillip district of New South Wales* (Dublin, 1845), p. 132. <sup>17</sup> J.R. Short, *Imagined Country* (London, 1991), p. 127.

## III

If, as suggested by Lewis, we accept that vernacular landscapes provide strong evidence of the kind of people we are, were, and are in the process of becoming, what can be said about the landscape surrounding the early colonial gentry settlers to Australia? Using Samuels biography of landscape as a basis, it is possible to argue that there is a strong bond between landscape and its authors. This 'biography of landscape' has as its central concern the role of individuals – authors – in the making of landscape. Its central geographical task is to follow through on Hartshorne's complaint that geographers, including those engaged in the study of 'decision making processes', have underestimated the importance of key individuals and thousands of lesser figures who have left the mark of their leadership on the geography of every country, even if their names are no longer known. This is probably the case for many of the early gentry settlers in Australia as either most of their records and traces have gone or else we are as yet unaware of the role they played in colonial society. However, the records of a substantial number *are* available and in many cases it is easy to see their roles at local and national level. One such man was William Rutledge (1829–76), originally of Co. Cavan who, although his influence was largely on a local scale, became something of a legend in the Western District of Victoria.

Little is known about Rutledge's activities in Australia between his arrival in 1829 and his visit in 1843 to the coastal town of Port Fairy, two hundred miles west of Melbourne. During this visit Rutledge bought a local merchant firm and acquired a Special Survey in the area. Special Surveys were introduced by the Colonial Office in London in 1840 as a means of opening up Australian land. Any person who paid the sum of £5120 into the Treasury could thereupon obtain an order to be given as many acres, or eight square miles in the colony. The main enterprise of Rutledge's new firm was shipping wool, tallow and, later, gold direct to London and importing all the necessities and luxuries required by the settlers. According to Irish gentry migrant and leading Australian politician Charles Gavan Duffy, Rutledge was a leading member of a 'Syndicate of Irish Gentry' and at one stage owned approximately 6,367 acres around Port Fairy. Regarded as a considerable landlord due to his provision of rations, seeds and implements for his tenants, it is likely that Rutledge either brought out families from Ireland to work as tenants on his farms or at least encouraged Irish men to rent them, as local maps show many of his tenant families had Irish names.<sup>18</sup> Most of these farms ranged in size from 150–200 acres. Rutledge's influence around Port Fairy was considerable and it was through his constant petitioning of the government that the land within a ten-mile radius of Port Fairy was declared a settled zone and a new county. Such petitions were frequent with Rutledge who bombarded government departments with letters complaining about the state of the roads, delays in the mail and peo-

<sup>18</sup> M. Rutledge, 'An Australian Pioneer', in *Victorian Historical Magazine*, 36: 3., p. 110.

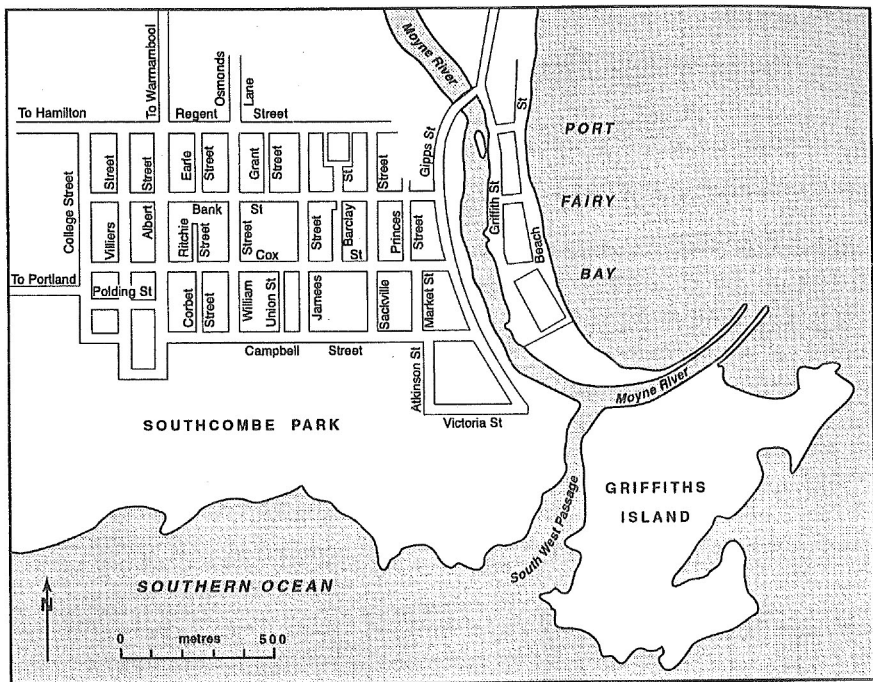


Figure 1. Map of Port Fairy

ple unlawfully occupying his land. His constant petitioning demonstrates the difficulties experienced by early governors in trying to rule from a distance men who, during their struggle against a harsh environment during the 1830s and 40s, were a law unto themselves.

With James Atkinson from Co. Armagh as a business partner, Rutledge decided to attempt to increase the size, wealth and importance of Port Fairy by improving its harbour, thus allowing the easy export of agricultural goods from the surrounding area. As Port Fairy was the only worthwhile port between Melbourne and Portland, and as the area around Portland was already dominated by the Henty family, Rutledge and Atkinson invested heavily. The local volcanic soils were very fertile and, in addition to this, the existing natural harbour was already suitable for trade with the whole of the western district of Victoria. The proposed township was laid out on a rectangular plan typical of colonial town planning in Australia, with streets running due east, west, north and south to form blocks of equal size. Rutledge and Atkinson renamed the settlement 'Belfast' after the city in their native Ireland. Visualising the town as a place of importance, with all the trappings of civilization, Rutledge and Atkinson granted land for churches and other buildings including a hospital, a cemetery, a town hall and several banks.<sup>19</sup> Town

<sup>19</sup> J.W. Powling, 'Port Fairy: The First Fifty Years', (Melbourne, 1980), p. 49.

promotion would not have been altogether unfamiliar to men of Rutledge and Atkinson's background as similar activities had been undertaken by members of the gentry in Ireland throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rutledge and Atkinson had hoped to encourage widespread emigration to the area but this never materialised on the scale they had proposed, and although the town experienced some success as a port it remained relatively small. The two local newspapers, the *Banner of Belfast* and the *Belfast Gazette*, were opposed to Rutledge and Atkinson's plans from the start and represented both men as members of the Irish Ascendancy who were primarily interested in looking after their own interests rather than those of the town's inhabitants. Both papers complained that Rutledge and Atkinson's ownership of the town inhibited both government investment – and its growth.

Rutledge and Atkinson's actions at Port Fairy would have reflected similar activities undertaken by other Anglo-Irish gentry members back in Ireland where the landowning minority frequently planned the creation of new settlements and the replacement of buildings or streets – for example, John D'Arcy's foundation of Clifden, Co. Galway, between 1815 and 1835. Although directly controlled by the landlords, the development costs of such estate towns were spread, as long-term building leases with low ground rent were often offered to many of the tenants on condition they bore the cost of constructing the property. The primary motivation behind such ventures was the reproduction of the prevailing economic system. As long as landlords continued to delegate property rights to their tenants they ensured the tenants' continuing interest in reproducing the existing economic formation as it validated the tenants' possession of their property. Moreover, the tenurial structures inherent within it validated the tenants' retention of any additional benefits which might accrue from an increase in their property's value.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the planning of Port Fairy would not have been an entirely new enterprise for men of Rutledge and Atkinson's calibre.

If Rutledge and Atkinson's activities at Port Fairy mirrored the urban improvements carried out by Anglo-Irish gentry in Ireland, those of another Anglo-Irish family, the Ffrenches, mirrored the Irish gentry's equally widespread interest in landscaping in Ireland. The Ffrenchs were seated at Monivea in Co. Galway, and were one of the 'Galway Tribes' in that their ancestry traced back to the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman colonisation of Galway city. These mainly Catholic merchant families invested heavily in land, buying out the impoverished Gaelic proprietors in its hinterland and over time established a social and economic dominance over Galway and into Mayo. The Ffrench family had a large network of estates with over twenty houses in Co. Galway alone and others in Roscommon

<sup>20</sup> L.J. Proudfoot and B.J. Graham, 'The Nature and Extent of Urban and Village Foundation and Improvement in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Ireland', *Planning Perspectives*, 8 (1993), pp. 259–81.

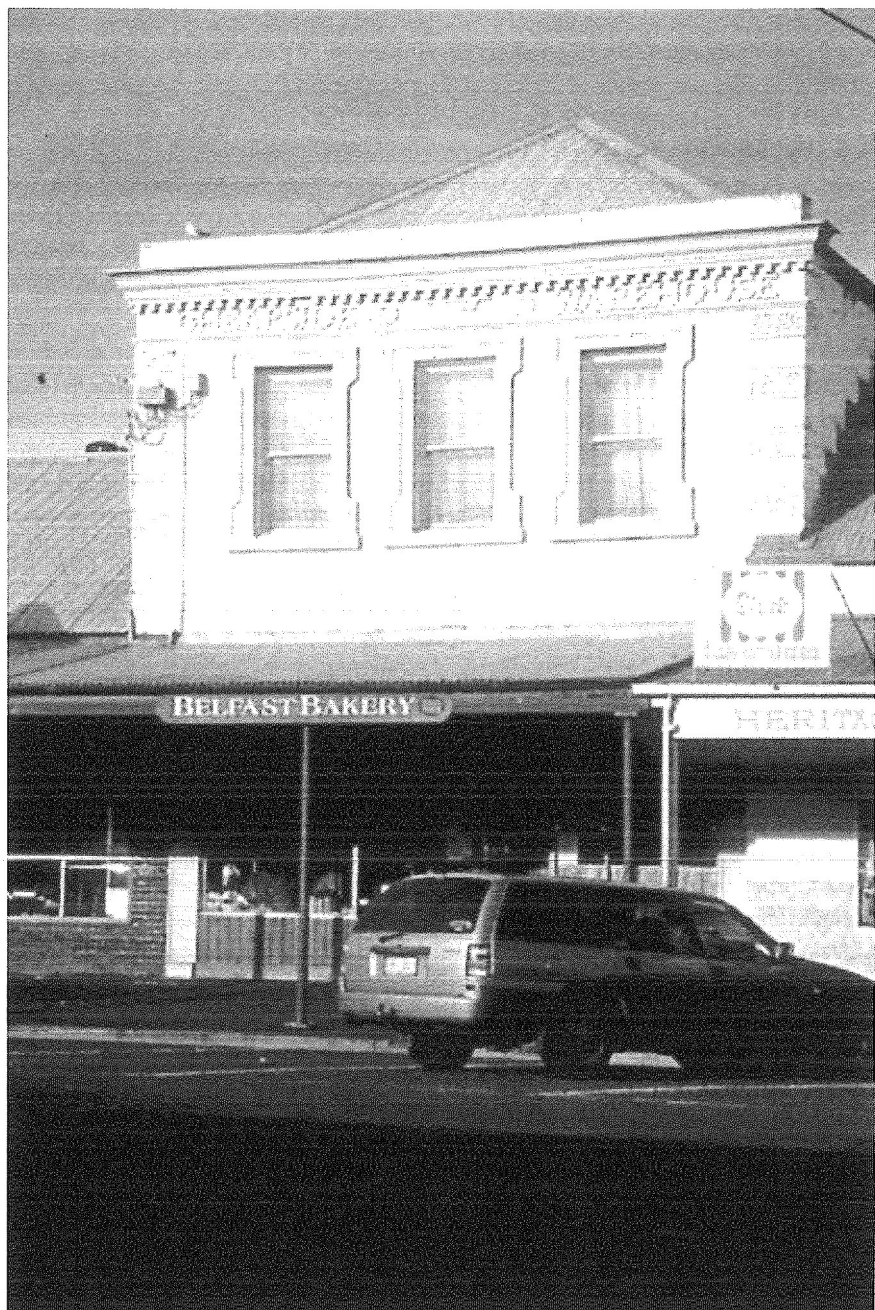


Figure 2. Belfast Bakery

and Mayo. Their three major estates were Tyrone, (50,000 acres), Monivea, (10,000 acres), and Castlefrench of (5,000 acres), all located in Co. Galway.

Patrick Ffrench, father of Robert Ffrench, had spent time in London training to enter the legal profession. Upon his return to Dublin in 1707, an act was passed requiring all barristers to attend communion with the established Church of Ireland. Having invested considerable time and effort in his training, Patrick vaulted the barrier which would have excluded him from a lucrative career by conforming to Protestantism. It was this decision which facilitated the Ffrench family's social and professional ascent and started a process of assimilation which was completed within the family well before the century had ended.

The conversion to Protestant ideals, values and traditions was clearly shown in Patrick's son, Robert who inherited the family's landholdings. He can be looked upon as an example of a 'broker' figure who mediated between his locality and the wider world. Robert travelled widely throughout Europe and also spent some time, almost every month, in England where he often marvelled at the widespread use of steam engines. The ease and regularity with which the Irish aristocracy, gentry and professionals, such as the Ffrenches, travelled to and fitted into England spoke more of a provincial rather than a colonial relationship. Britain simply lengthened and strengthened the networks which had already spread throughout Ireland and along which commodities, as diverse as roots and saplings for the garden, geological curiosities and political patronage, were distributed. Although familiar with the country, Ffrench neither lived nor owned property in England and was rarely away from his native Galway for any considerable period of time. Happy with his inheritance in Ireland, he did not need to build a career elsewhere.

It was Robert Ffrench's son, Acheson Jeremy Sydney Ffrench, who eventually migrated to Australia in 1840. In his letter book Acheson French tells how, while still living in Ireland, he had a difference of opinion with the archbishop of Tuam concerning his own belief that the bible should be abolished as a text book in schools. French believed that by its abolishment and the amalgamation of youth of different persuasions the wounds of his unhappy country would be healed and the prejudices smoothed. He continued:

As I could not coincide with his Grace's view of this subject I suddenly found all my prearranged plans of life frustrated; I was obliged tho' with many a heart's pang to tear myself from a people and tenantry who were endeared to me, and amongst whom I had hoped to use what influence or talent I might have possessed for their amelioration. Accordingly a few weeks after . . . saw me on the seas for Australia.

In French's own words he became an *Exile from Erin*.<sup>21</sup>

Upon arrival in the colony he modified the spelling of his surname so that it only had one 'F' and after approximately a year, took out a licence for land at a

21 Acheson French Letterbook, MS 10053 1298/1, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

place named 'The Grange' which he proceeded to re-register as Monivae. He was also appointed Stipendary Magistrate for the New South Wales Government in order to maintain the peace between the aborigines and the white settlers of the district.

At this time the area around Monivae was newly settled and disturbances between the indigenous aboriginal population and the settlers were frequent. In his capacity as police magistrate French regularly reported such incidents to the state's Governor Charles La Trobe. Although he was regarded as an extremely honest and fair man, there are several occasions when French is shown to have taken the side of the settlers during various disputes with the aborigines. This may have been due both to his wish to keep on moderate terms with his closest neighbours in the area and to the circumstances surrounding many of the incidents where, in his view, the settlers were having a difficult time as they were under regular attack from the aborigines. On one occasion a neighbouring settler and acquaintance, Mr McKenzie, was murdered by the aborigines and his 700 sheep taken. According to French, Mr McKenzie had 'behaved with kindness to the natives frequently feeding them with flour and meat.'<sup>22</sup>

The realm in which Acheson French lived and moved in was, in many ways, similar to that which he had left back in Ireland years before. Most obvious were the similarities between physical objects such as his homestead and the layout of the surrounding land. Not only did he name his residence Monivae after the family home in Galway (although he changed the spelling from v-e-a to v-a-e) but the layout of home was reported to have closely resembled the original house with a long sweeping drive up to the front of it and two lines of non-native English oak trees running either side to the bottom of the property. In Ireland, the construction of similar houses by the wealthy landowning elite and the subsequent landscape ornamentation of the surrounding lands would have been relatively common throughout the nineteenth century. Such spatial organisation was to be found across the country and not only did this landscape transformation reflect social and economic axes of difference between the gentry and the 'ordinary' Irish, but they also acquired additional ethnic and colonial meanings.<sup>23</sup>

While many newly settled areas in Australia were named after places back in Ireland, for example the towns of Killarney and Coleraine, the fact that French altered the spelling of Monivea slightly suggests that perhaps he too had a desire to weaken ties with the Old World he had left yet at the same time he didn't wish to let go of them completely. At this time people with money living in Australia imported many goods and Acheson French was no different, importing many pre-fabricated pieces of ornate iron from England with which to build his house. The

22 Ibid. 23 L.J. Proudfoot, 'Hybrid Space? Self and Other in Narratives of Landownership in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26: 2 (2000), pp. 203-21.



new Monivae consisted of sixteen rooms with detached servants quarters as well as stables, harness room and coach house.

Socially, French was extremely well respected within the local community and was the driving force behind many of the changes initiated within it. These included the construction of a new school for which he was the main benefactor, as well as the main contributor to the Benevolent Institute at Hamilton. In 1845 he also set up a local book club which he ran from his house and which had about ten regular subscribers who all lived in the local area. In his diary he lists the members names and their purchases throughout the year. Many of the subscribers were also gentry members and their purchases were wide-ranging from Mr Cameron's purchase of a volume entitled 'Highland Sports' to Mr Thomson's order for a volume of the 'London News' as well as two volumes named 'Memoirs of a Physician'.<sup>24</sup> The purchases alone illustrate the type of people French associated with: they were well educated and from a similar background to French himself. The books gentry migrants purchased also show how their new worlds in Victoria still revolved to a certain degree around the homeland: they frequently bought literature that would keep them informed about life back in Ireland and England.

Many of French's friends and close companions in Australia were gentry migrants like himself who originated from Ireland. When he married Anna Watton in 1842 he held a joint wedding with a close acquaintance, James Moore, whose father George was a political representative of the city of Dublin.<sup>25</sup> Other associates included Cuthbert Featherstonhaugh from Westmeath and Charles James Griffith from Kildare. In his autobiography Featherstonhaugh writes that he became great friends with the French family and describes Acheson as the 'well bred Irish gentleman, a most delightful man, none more hospitable, and full of Irish humour.' 'At Monivae' he wrote, 'you got a real Irish welcome.'<sup>26</sup>

Although relatively little work has been undertaken into the role of the gentry class as a whole in Australia, much of the research that *has* been carried out often makes the assumption that the gentry were a homogenous class. This is debatable. As French himself makes clear, in his opinion a widespread prejudice existed in Australia against the Irish as a nation and in particular against those who had migrated, and this extended to the gentry and included many of his friends and colleagues. He cites as one reason for this the tone taken by the Australian press which he considered to be quite anti-Irish. His belief stemmed from a series of articles and editorial comments printed in the *Argus* newspaper which had launched scathing attacks on the Colonial Secretary and some of his government officials purely because they were of Irish origin. In one incident French responds to the Scottish editor of the newspaper by reminding him that at the end of the day *all* government officials had been appointed by one of his own fellow coun-

<sup>24</sup> Acheson French Diary, MS 10053 1298/2, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.

<sup>25</sup> *Port Phillip Patriot*, 10 February 1842, Marriage Notice, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne. <sup>26</sup> Co. Fetherstonhaugh, *After Many Days* (Melbourne, 1917), p. 62.

trymen who was at the head of the English government.<sup>27</sup> He concludes that 'If the officials are not to this Editor's taste because *they are Irishmen* he should vent his bile on his own Countrymen and not presume to sow the seed of division amongst a mixed people.' This feeling of prejudice against gentry from an Irish background is mentioned by other migrants such as George Higinbotham and George Belcher who also make reference to the same underlying sentiment. As each of these gentry members varied in their religious views it is unlikely that the prejudice was a result of religious differences but rather as a result of perceived ethnicity or political opinion.

The French family archives provide an overwhelming sense that one of the reasons why Acheson French came to Australia was to make a fresh start following ideological disagreement with Church and state in Ireland. He felt that the new nation of Australia could learn from the past histories of the Old World and not make the same mistakes again. However, as the nature of his letters and diaries show, it is obvious that he was restrained to some degree by the baggage of his past. That his past was in many ways replicated in Australia is easy to see but it must be remembered that this replication was a result of French's own actions.

#### IV

Irish overseas migration, has, and is likely to continue to be, an important facet of the global topic of migration studies. Although considerable work has been undertaken on Irish migrants to a range of destination countries, there is still considerable scope for work to be undertaken. Arguably, it has only been over the last decade that academics have begun to recognise the true complexity of the Irish migrant stream and to comprehend the variety of discourses and narratives this involved. Members of the Anglo-Irish gentry who migrated to Australia represent only one strand in this intricate stream, and even then, were internally diverse as the migrants themselves represented a broad spectrum of occupations and family backgrounds. In addition, each was driven by his or her own reasons and motivations for leaving Ireland and migrating to Australia. Upon arrival, many were assimilated into colonial life with relative ease and undertook leadership and professional roles, some of which they had previously experienced in Ireland. Others followed entirely new pursuits. Many migrants, consciously or unconsciously, recreated similar lives to those they had left in Ireland as it was often the case that their social networks and landscapes in Australia closely mirrored those in which they had once interacted whilst living in Ireland. As well as illustrating how a substantial number of gentry migrants became important members of both local community and wider community, the examples of Rutledge and French also show how their

<sup>27</sup> Acheson French Letterbook, c. June 1854, Letter to Editor of *Argus*, MS 10053 1298/3, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne.



Figure 3. Current dwelling at the site of Monivae



Figure 4. One of the lines of non-native English Oak trees running along the boundary of French's land

own landscapes in Australia closely replicated those back in Co. Cavan and Co. Galway respectively. It is the enduring legacy of Anglo-Irish gentry migrants in the cultural landscapes of Australia which this chapter has attempted to address in an endeavour to uncover some aspects of the detail of the Anglo-Irish gentry migrant experience in Australia.