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'Green Scots and Golden Irish': The Environmental Impact of Scottish and Irish Settlers in New Zealand – Some Preliminary Ruminations

Tom Brooking

The impact of Scottish and Irish settlers upon New Zealand's environmental history, whether in its pioneer or more settled stage, has not been studied in any depth. Historian of the New Zealand environmental movement David Young, building on the work of Richard Grove in relation to 'green imperialism', has recently speculated that because some prominent Scots-born politicians, naturalists, scientists and activists played a leading role in early efforts at conservation and preservation, Scots led the slow greening of New Zealand. Drawing on Erik Olssen's work on New Zealand as a 'post-enlightenment' experiment, Young also tries to establish some rather tenuous links between the Scottish Enlightenment and New Zealand environmentalism.[1] Environmental historian James Beattie and historian of science and religion, John Stenhouse, in their discussion of 'dominion theology' (or the notion that God's injunction to establish 'dominion' over the earth also contained the obligation of guardianship of the earth's resources) have added some support to Young's hypothesis.[2] Otherwise, apart from a little work on gardening and farming discussed later in this article, few scholars have bothered to investigate the topic. The neglect is even more serious for Irish settlers.

What follows, therefore, is a very preliminary set of observations that will need to be subjected to more rigorous examination by scholars from various disciplines. This set of ruminations will hopefully assist that endeavour by doing five things: first, explaining the relative neglect of the topic by discussing the trajectory of New Zealand historiography; second, rehearsing the 'green Scots' hypothesis; third, critiquing that hypothesis

[1] David Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves: A History of Conservation in New Zealand* (Dunedin, 2004), 68–72; Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge, 1995); Erik Olssen, 'Mr Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 31 (1997), 197–218.

[2] James Beattie and John Stenhouse, 'Empire, Environment and Religion: God and the Natural World in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *Environment and History*, 13 (2007), 413–46.

by demonstrating that Scots were as enthusiastic transformers of the New Zealand environment as everyone else; fourth, examining the Irish contribution along similar critical lines while conceding that their impact was probably more modest due to their smaller numbers; and, fifth, suggesting some ways in which we might resolve this unsatisfactory state of affairs through collaborative and trans-disciplinary research involving New Zealand, Scottish, Irish *and* English historians.

I Why the Neglect?

The lack of investigation into the nature and extent of the environmental impact of Scottish and Irish settlers, let alone differences in that impact, results in part from the way in which the study of history has developed in New Zealand. Initially, the writing and teaching of New Zealand history emerged as a nationalist enterprise in the 1960s when Keith Sinclair and others at the University of Auckland replaced the old dull red Imperial model with a shiny new, if rather lightweight, New Zealand First model.[3] The New Zealand-born Sinclair – a man who strenuously refused to have anything to do with his Caithness and Orcadian origins – adopted an essentially Turnerian approach by arguing that the European, and particularly the British, encounter with the indigenous people and environment of New Zealand shaped the country's history far more than background British cultural, social and political influences. Having rejected Louis Hartz's vision of settler societies as transplanted 'fragments' of their European homelands, Sinclair then turned his back on the important environmental part of Turner's influential theory with its emphasis upon the capacity of the American environment to reshape inherited European institutions and patterns of social organisation. Instead, Sinclair wrote his story in such a way that once Maori encountered the outside world culture apparently subsumed nature. The environmental dimension, which received so much coverage in the pre-historical part of his narrative, disappeared as permanent settlers replaced highly transitory sealers and whalers.[4] Despite being the biographer of William Pember

[3] See Erik Olssen, 'Where To From Here? Reflections on the Twentieth-Century Historiography of Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 26 (1992), 54–77.

[4] Keith Pickens, 'The Writing of New Zealand History: A Kuhnian Perspective', *Historical Studies*, 17 (1977), 384–98; Graeme Wynn, 'Reflections on the Writing of New Zealand History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 18 (1984), 104–16.

Reeves–New Zealand's leading Fabian socialist, architect of compulsory industrial conciliation and arbitration, poet and historian–Sinclair rejected the attention to environmental transformation which graces the first part of Reeves' highly influential popular history, *The Long White Cloud*, first published in 1898.[5]

The environment then largely disappeared from view in most subsequent general histories, Guy Scholefield's *New Zealand in Evolution* (1909) excepted, until the publication of *Environmental Histories of New Zealand* in 2002.[6] Only visiting North American academics seemed to notice that environmental factors remained important long after British settlers began to arrive in increasing numbers from 1840.[7] Michael King then picked up on these insights and incorporated key findings from the *Environmental Histories* collection into his popular *Penguin History of New Zealand* published in 2003.[8]

My former professor W.H. Oliver, writing from Anglo-centric Christchurch rather than Auckland, provided a Hartzian challenge to Sinclair in his *Story of New Zealand*, published in 1960. Oliver suggested that the timing of the settlement of New Zealand held vital keys to understanding the colony's development and attributed major influence to British background and mindsets.[9] Yet Oxford-trained Oliver treated the British as a largely homogenous whole. It took the full, frontal assault of an outsider like Donald Akenson, surprised by the homogenisation of New Zealand society into two undifferentiated lumps labelled 'Maori' and 'Pakeha', to break down such thinking. As an authority on the Irish diaspora, Akenson found that such lumping had both disguised ethnic difference and distorted New Zealanders' understanding of their European heritage.[10] At the same time as Maori historians turned their attention to tribal history rather than writing about a mythic, pan-Maori New Zealand, social historians had to admit that they too had overdone homogenisation.[11] James

[5] Keith Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian* (Oxford, 1965); W.P. Reeves, *The Long White Cloud* (1898; Auckland, 1950), 25–46.

[6] Guy Scholefield, *New Zealand in Evolution* (London, 1909); Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories of New Zealand* (Melbourne, 2002).

[7] For the contributions of leading North American historical geographers and historians Andrew Clark, Alfred W. Crosby, Stephen Pyne and Tom Dunlap see Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories*, 4–5.

[8] Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland, 2003), 24–5, 194–7, 435–40.

[9] W.H. Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand* (London, 1960).

[10] Donald Harman Akenson, *Half the World from Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand 1860–1950* (Wellington, 1990).

[11] Joe Pere, 'Hitori Maori' in Colin Davis and Peter Lineham (eds), *The Future of the Past:*

Belich, in 1996 and again in 2001, for example, paid far more attention to distinctive Scottish contributions than had writers of earlier general histories, while several specialist collections of essays on the Irish and Scots began to appear from the late 1990s.[12] Modern New Zealand's increasing diversity has heightened awareness of the need to acknowledge diversity within the Pakeha world as well as within the rapidly expanding Polynesian and Asian communities.

At the same time as New Zealand historians began to rethink the evolution of their society some, influenced by Fernand Braudel, and also by visiting North American scholars and the so called 'new western' history, also realised that the role of the environment had been neglected for too long.[13] This realisation pushed them into a more meaningful conversation with historical geographers, ecologists, botanists, agricultural scientists, anthropologists, academic lawyers and others concerned with environmental matters. The outcome of these developments has been the transformation of a rather introverted nationalist history into more of a transnational enterprise, as well as the incorporation of human relationships with the natural world back into major historical narratives. A chapter in the *New Oxford History of New Zealand* by Paul Star on environmental history and a short piece by myself in the *Dictionary of Transnational History*, both published in 2009, stress this point.[14]

Themes in New Zealand History (Palmerston North, 1991), 29–48; Danny Keenan, 'Predicting the Past: Some Directions in Recent Maori Historiography', *Te Pouhere Korero*, 1 (1999), 24–35.

[12] James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland, 1996), 315–9 and idem, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland, 2001), 219–23. On Scots see Tom Brooking and Jennie Coleman (eds), *The Heather and the Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement* (Dunedin, 2003). On the Irish see Lyndon Fraser (ed.), *A Distant Shore: Irish Migration and New Zealand Settlement* (Dunedin, 2000); Brad Patterson (ed.), *The Irish in New Zealand: Historical Contexts and Perspectives* (Wellington, 2002); idem (ed.), *From Ulster to New Ulster: The 2003 Ulster-New Zealand Lectures* (Wellington, 2004); and idem (ed.), *Ulster-New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers* (Dublin, 2006).

[13] See Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories*, xii–xiii, 1–5.

[14] Paul Star, 'Humans and the Environment in New Zealand, 1800–2000' in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (Auckland, 2009), 47–70; and Tom Brooking, 'Acclimatization in New Zealand' in Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (New York, 2009), 8–10.

II Green Scots?

The 'green Scots' hypothesis, modelled on the work of Richard Grove and John MacKenzie, emerged out of the reconsideration discussed above. Following Grove's and MacKenzie's revision of the 'declensionist' or apocalyptic model of destructive colonialism,[15] David Young focuses on the special contribution made by several major players in the early conservationist movement who happened to be Scots born. In combination they constitute a diverse group of farmers, explorers, scientists and politicians from various parts of the spectrum.

Young starts with the Deans family, who settled in Canterbury before the major English group of 'pilgrims' arrived in 1850, and who saved an important remnant of native forest or 'bush' from the ravages of both rural and suburban development. John Deans and his wife Jane McIlraith, both from Ayrshire, and their descendants ensured this reserve's survival against the grasping avarice of generations of short-sighted speculators. Today the reserve is highly prized by ecologists and botanists for its rare plants and trees.[16]

Young also singles out Sir Thomas Mackenzie, the son of an Edinburgh gardener who went on to explore Fiordland and champion its conversion into a national park, for special mention. Even though Fiordland National Park did not come into being until 1953, long after his death, Mackenzie promoted the special qualities of the area well before tourist operators discovered the appeal of its wildness. Like other early surveyors and explorers Mackenzie developed a deep appreciation of the special qualities of the remnant, ancient areas of New Zealand that had not been transformed by farming. The dominant developmental ethos in New Zealand kept governments of both pinkish and bluish hue interested in the hydro-electric power potential of this wild, remote region.[17] This did not deter Mackenzie, a centrist politician, from championing

[15] Environmental history can be very gloomy and judgemental, offering no hope for the future and ruling out any possibility of finding solutions to environmental problems. John M. MacKenzie and Richard Grove have challenged this propensity. See MacKenzie, 'Assurance and Anxiety: The Imperial Condition' in idem, *Empires of Nature and the Nature of Empires: Imperialism, Scotland and the Environment* (East Linton, 1997), 31–58; and Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

[16] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 68–9; Gordon Ogilvie, *Pioneers of the Plains: The Canterbury Deans* (Christchurch, 1996), 245.

[17] Aaron Fox, *The Power Game: The Development of the Manapouri-Tiwai Point Electro-Industrial Complex, 1904–1969* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2001).

its preservation from development, while also helping to establish the Native Bird Protection Society after World War I.[18]

Sir James Wilson, a great estate owner of some 6,848 acres at Bulls in the southern part of the North Island, born in Hawick, Roxburghshire, joins the select group because he founded the New Zealand Forestry League in 1916 and advocated the replanting of native forests. It is noteworthy that he promoted long-term preservationist strategies despite his prominence as a farmer-politician who served as foundation president of the New Zealand Farmers' Union. He differs from the others in that he held views typical of many substantial British land owners in wanting to plant both exotic and native trees for the enjoyment of far distant generations, especially his own family whom he presumed would still own the same property.[19]

George Malcolm Thomson, Indian born and Edinburgh educated, earned his livelihood as a high school science teacher, but is remembered as a kind of 'proto-ecologist' because he provided damning criticism of Darwin's displacement theory through careful observation of the natural world over many years. Thomson retains a special place in the history of New Zealand ecology for producing his classic study *The Naturalisation of Plants and Animals in New Zealand* (1922). This timely book forced a dramatic change to acclimatisation practice which had until this time been predicated upon a rather naïve attempt to remake New Zealand as a kind of newer Britain. Some authors also attribute his environmental sensibility to his committed Presbyterianism.[20]

Yet another member of the House of Representatives, this time a conservative like Wilson, bearing the iconic name of Robert Bruce, joins the select band. The Kelso-born seafarer and farmer from the southern Wairarapa left a bequest to establish a native bird sanctuary near his home farm, which survives until this day.[21] The Peebles-born Alexander Bathgate, a rather utopian figure who founded the Dunedin Amenities Society (based on Edinburgh models) to protect areas of forest and vegetation through the

[18] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 102, 105, 116–8; Tom Brooking, 'Sir Thomas Mackenzie' in Claudia Orange (ed.), *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 3 (Wellington, 1996), 303–4.

[19] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 114–5; L.J. Wild, *The Life and Times of Sir James Wilson of Bulls* (Christchurch, 1953); Tom Brooking, 'James Glenny Wilson' in Orange (ed.), *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 2, 585–6.

[20] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 72, 113, 120; Ross Galbreath, *Scholars and Gentlemen Both: G.M. & Allan Thomson in New Zealand Science and Education* (Wellington, 2002).

[21] 'Robert Cunningham Bruce' in Guy Scholefield, *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 1 (Wellington, 1940), 107.

creation of reserves, also receives mention.[22] Somewhat dubiously, Young adds Perrine Moncrieff – born in London, niece of the famous English naturalist J.G. Millais, and founder of the Abel Tasman National Park in 1942 – as a kind of honorary Scot. Moncrieff, who also assumed a high profile within the Native Bird Protection society from 1914, and the Forest and Bird Protection Society from 1933, is only included in the Scottish camp because she developed her love for nature during childhood holidays in the Scottish Highlands![23]

An earlier Scottish leader can be added to Young's motley crew. Captain William Cargill, civilian leader of the Otago settlement in 1848, developed a fear of the consequences of rapid deforestation from his time as a soldier in India and insisted on timber preservation in Dunedin. The town belt, which still curls through the hill suburbs, resulted from this concern.[24] Cargill also clashed with the self-consciously Anglo-centric settlement of Canterbury to the north over boundaries, fearing the loss of vital timber resources in the western corner of his large province.[25]

The problem with such listings, as Young himself concedes, is that other important early conservationists, including liberal politicians Harry Ell and William Pember Reeves, were locally born, while others such as T.H. Potts were English naturalists deeply imbued with the need to maintain Vicar of Selborne type traditions.[26] The famous botanist and English-born pioneer ecologist Leonard Cockayne, who won an international reputation for his work on the importance of habitat, shared many similar ideals with Potts.[27]

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[22] Jennifer Henderson, *Far South Fancies: Alexander Bathgate and His Ideal Society* (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 2007).

[23] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 121–2; Robin Hodge, *Nature's Trustee: Perrine Moncrieff and Nature Conservation in New Zealand, 1920–1950* (Ph.D. thesis, Massey University, 1999).

[24] Neil Clayton, *Settlers, Politicians and Scientists: Environmental Anxiety in a New Zealand Colony* (Post-Graduate Diploma in Arts thesis, University of Otago, 1998); Albert Green, *A Necklace of Jade: The Dunedin Town Belt, 1848–1903* (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 2003).

[25] Tom Brooking, 'The Historical Background to the Otago/Canterbury Regional Council Boundary Dispute', unpublished report commissioned by the Otago Regional Council (Dunedin, 1998).

[26] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 107–8. On Ell see Eric Pawson, 'Henry George Ell' in Orange (ed.), *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 3, 149–50; on Potts see Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 75–7; Paul Star, *T.H. Potts and the Origins of Conservation in New Zealand, 1850–1890* (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 1991).

[27] Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 102, 113, 118, 120, 126–7; A.D. Thomson, 'Leonard Cockayne' in Orange (ed.), *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 3, 107–9.

Then there is the problem of how to categorise the early New Zealand environmentalist who is best-known internationally, Herbert Guthrie-Smith. His classic study of environmental change, *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (1921), won international accolades from the likes of William Cronon and Richard White, both of whom concede that this book more than any other persuaded them to become environmental historians.[28] Yet Guthrie-Smith was a hybrid – half Scots and also Irish and English. He expressed this sense of multiple heritage – or was it rather schizophrenia? – by comparing his Irish side to the little lady on a Victorian 'barometrical device' who comes out of her 'Swiss rustic home' when the sun shines, and contrasting it with his Scottish ancestry, represented by the heavily-coated man who appears when it rains. In the masterful piece of writing that prefaced the 1953 edition of *Tutira*, Herbert Guthrie-Smith put it this way:

> A grandmother from South Ireland has been invaluable to me. A resilience that could only emanate from County Cork especially crops up in dealing with solemn, almost holy things – balance sheets, banks and station accounts … Overdrafts have ever seemed natural to the dear lady. Her bright spirit has never quailed at impecuniosity, never been dashed by lack of credit … To such Celtic levity do the author's Lowland Scots ancestors listen with dour distrust. Sad, grim in grain from age-long struggle with unpropitious soils and weeping skies, far otherwise breathe forth the voices of his Stirlingshire progenitors … 'Heed not the Irishwoman's call. A man's first duty is to the soil, the station must be first and foremost, consideration of its flocks and herds; there is bracken to be destroyed, undergrowth to be cleared, pastures to be renovated, weed growth to be eradicated.'[29]

Such delectable ambiguity not only challenges stereotypes but renders Young's hypothesis problematic, as does the inconsistent approach to the environment of New Zealand's most prominent northern Briton and longest serving Prime Minister, Richard John Seddon. This masterful politician, who frequently claimed that 'every tree felled meant the improvement of the public estate of the country', also passed a Scenery Preservation Act in 1903 which set out to protect highly scenic areas of old New Zealand, fast disappearing

[28] Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories*, 4.

[29] Herbert Guthrie-Smith, *Tutira: The Story of a New Zealand Sheep Station* (1921; Auckland and Seattle, 1999), xxi–xxii.

before fire and axe. Such seemingly contradictory action has bamboozled most commentators, but may be explained not only by his boyhood wanderings around the great estates of the earls of Derby, who were famous for their large menageries, but also by his engagement with the poetry of Robert Burns – instilled into him by his Scottish mother – with its powerful call for humans to engage in a more organic relationship with the natural world.[30]

III Transformers in Trousers rather than Kilted Conservationists?

The 'green Scots' hypothesis is all very romantic, but is brought into further question by Jim McAloon's analysis of *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, a six-volume work containing subscribed biographies of the 'great and the good' which was published between 1897 and 1908. McAloon shows that the Scots staring contentedly at the camera on page after page were heavily overrepresented amongst successful farmers, the group engaged most directly in the great transformation of New Zealand. Scottish farmers had a particularly significant impact in Otago/Southland, the Otago Peninsula, the Rangitikei district in the southwest of the North Island, and in Hawke's Bay further east, although Scandinavians – mainly Danes – and English agricultural labourers also played a key role in removing the so-called 'Great Bush' of southern Hawke's Bay and Taranaki.[31]

This contribution seems consistent with the role played in the development of early Otago by the settlement's religious leader and nephew of Robbie, the Reverend Thomas Burns. Burns wanted more rapid development so that workers could earn a living wage, and acted as a dynamic and progressive farmer set upon transforming the heavily forested hills around Dunedin into

[30] Richard John Seddon, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 86 (1894), 86, 191. On the Scenery Preservation Act see Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves*, 84–5, 106–7; Geoff Park, *Theatre Country: Essays on Landscape and Whenua* (Wellington, 2006), 125, 133–4. The rest is based on Tom Brooking, *The People's Servant? A Biography of Richard John Seddon*, in progress.

[31] Rollo Arnold, *The Opening of the Great Bush, 1861–1881: A Social History of the Bush Settlements of Taranaki, Hawke's Bay and Wellington* (Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1971). See also Jim McAloon, 'The Scottish Diaspora and the Colonial Middle Class', paper given to 'Nations, Diasporas, Identities' conference, Victoria University of Wellington, 29 March 2008; Jonathan West, *An Environmental History of the Otago Peninsula to 1900* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2008); M.D.N Campbell, *The Evolution of Hawke's Bay Landed Society, 1850–1914* (Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1972).

farms typical of Lowland Scotland. His enthusiasm for such development brought about many clashes with the more conservation-minded Captain Cargill and tension between the two set in motion a dialectic which still lies at the heart of Otago history. Burns' typically nineteenth-century commitment to improvement though was tempered by the notion that thriving, bucolic agricultural settlements would prevent the emergence of large, heavily industrialised cities.[32]

As important seed merchants, Scots likewise had a major impact on the landscapes of New Zealand. By importing English grass seeds and supplying them to farmers to sow in the warm ash of the smouldering forests, these merchants played a direct role in the transformation of one of the world's greatest rain forests into a giant, grassland farm. The seeds may have been English, and seed merchants undoubtedly came from a variety of backgrounds: Arthur Yates in Auckland, for example, was English, while Adolf Moritzon in Dunedin was Danish. Nevertheless, Glaswegian-born Robert Nimmo and John Blair, Seed Merchants of Dunedin, acted as part of this imperial web of plant exchange, importing grass seeds from England and re-exporting them to Britain, Australia and the rest of the South Island. They thereby made a very significant contribution to converting the forests, swamps and tussocks of Otago, Canterbury and Nelson into British-style pasture lands.[33]

Scots were also overrepresented amongst the agricultural machinery manufacturers who developed heavier and tougher ploughs to turn over the rough soils and matted vegetation of Otago, Southland and Canterbury for wheat and oat growing. Manufacturers like Reid and Gray of Dunedin developed horse-drawn labour saving machinery to open up vast areas of

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[32] Tom Brooking, 'The Great Escape: Wakefield and the Scottish Settlement of Otago' in Friends of the Turnbull Library (eds), *Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the Colonial Dream: A Reconsideration* (Wellington, 1997), 123–34.

[33] On Arthur Yates from Manchester see 'Yates: New Zealand's Leading Gardening Company Celebrates 125 Years', http://www.garden-nz.co.nz/latest-news/news/yates-celebrates-125-years.html, accessed 14 November 2008. On Robert Nimmo, John Blair and Adolf Moritzon see *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Volume IV: Otago/Southland* (Christchurch, 1905), 351–2. On grass seed merchants in general see Eric Pawson, 'Plants, Mobilities and Landscapes: Environmental Histories of Botanical Exchange', *Geography Compass*, 2 (2008), 1464–77; idem, 'Biotic Exchange in an Imperial World: Developments in the Grass Seed Trade' in Christina Stringer and Richard Le Heron (eds), *Agri-food Commodity Chains and Globalising Networks* (Aldershot, 2008), 229–39; and Vaughan Wood and Eric Pawson, 'The Banks Peninsula Forests and Akaroa Cocksfoot: Explaining a New Zealand Forest Transition', *Environment and History*, 14 (2008), 449–68.

plains and downland for stock faming.[34] Furthermore, land development companies and stock and station agencies with strong links to Scottish banks, shippers and woollen mills provided much of the capital for this extraordinary transformation. The Glasgow-based New Zealand and Australian Land Company played the leading role in developing the frozen meat industry, with William Soltau Davidson to the fore as its general manager and John MacFarlane Ritchie as its attorney. The Reverend Thomas Burns' son Arthur also contributed to the advance of this ground-breaking industry, as well as promoting woollen milling by establishing a large factory at Mosgiel near Dunedin.[35]

Robert Peden, in a recent prize winning Ph.D. thesis, has shown that high country farming methods from the Highlands and borders of Scotland, as well as the moors and high country of Lancashire, Cheviot and Yorkshire, shaped early sheep farming much more than techniques brought in from arid Australia. The Romney and Lincolnshire sheep may have been as English as the rye grasses, cocksfoot, white and red clover, and timothy, but many of the shepherds and managers were Scots. Scots were also overrepresented within the ranks of the 'runholders' who operated high country leasehold properties. This overrepresentation increased in the early twentieth century as Scottish shepherds and managers climbed up the agricultural ladder to run properties of their own, often replacing English families who were vacating the high country under the combined attack of rabbits, bad weather, low prices and government attempts at subdivision.[36]

In short, Scots played critical roles in the great transformation, whether in the high mountainous country of the South Island or in the more heavily forested areas in both islands. Under the combined onslaught of Scots, Irish and English settlers, with some assistance from Scandinavians and Maori, forests by the 1930s covered only half the area they had done at the time of European arrival. Even more spectacularly, over 85 per cent of swamps – highly prized

[34] B.L. Evans, *A History of Farm Implements and Implement Firms in New Zealand* (Feilding, 1956).

[35] Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840–1914* (Dunedin, 2002), 61, 64, 134–8, 140; Mervyn Palmer, *The New Zealand and Australian Land Company in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 1971). On Arthur J. Burns, see *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Volume IV*, 335.

[36] Robert Peden, *Pastoralism and the Transformation of the Rangelands of the South Island of New Zealand, 1841 to 1912: Mt Peel Station, A Case Study* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2007); Ross Scrivener, *Runholding in the Wakatipu Basin, 1900–1950* (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 2007); Robert Pinney, *Early North Otago Runs* (Auckland, 1981); and idem, *Early South Canterbury Runs* (Wellington, 1971).

by Maori for their rich food sources – had been drained by the 1970s, probably the highest rate of drainage on earth. The grassland farms and fields covered in oats and wheat that replaced forests and wetlands looked little different from those of Lowland Scotland or England.[37]

Scots burned, drained and sowed pasture and planted crops as enthusiastically as anyone else. An examination of the letters and reminiscences of Scottish settlers shows that they paid more attention to the environment on a day-to-day basis than anything else, concentrating on the most immediate aspects of their encounter with a new land: the weather, the mud, the search for warm and comfortable housing materials, and sorting out which land was best suited to British-style farming.[38] As farmers, the Scots seem to have fared slightly better than their English counterparts, in part because of their willingness to pay attention to Maori environmental learning. A few early Dunedin settlers, for example, copied the local Kai Tahu people in planting their potatoes in Maori style atop little raised mounds.[39] Likewise, Scots settlers around Clutha, fifty miles south of Dunedin, concluded that land covered in fern was not sour as in Scotland, having observed Maori cultivators using it after burning and digging out the fern roots.[40] In contrast, English settlers elsewhere in New Zealand tended to reject fern land until much later.[41] The only obvious reason for this difference was that Scots, having come from a harsher environment, were more attuned to paying close attention to which practices worked and which should be jettisoned.

The other notable Scottish contribution to the great transformation occurred through their skills in developing both suburban and botanical gardens. George Matthews and his son Henry from Aberdeenshire became Dunedin's most successful nurserymen, along with William Martin from

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[37] Tom Brooking, Robin Hodge and Vaughan Wood, 'The Grasslands Revolution Reconsidered' in Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories,* 169–82; Geoff Park, '"Swamps which might doubtless easily be drained": Swamp Drainage and its Impact on the Indigenous' in Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories*, 151–69; Janet Hunt, *Wetlands of New Zealand: A Bitter-Sweet Story* (Auckland, 2007).

[38] Tom Brooking, 'Weaving the Tartan into the Flax: Networks, Identities and Scottish Migration to Nineteenth-Century Otago, New Zealand' in Angela McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006), 183–202.

[39] Edmund Smith, *Early Adventures in Otago*, edited by W.D. Stewart (Dunedin, 1940), 52.

[40] Anthony Lynch, *The Garden of Otago: A History of Small-Scale Farming in the Clutha Area 1848–1870* (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 1989).

[41] Vaughan Wood, *Soil Fertility Management in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand Agriculture* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2003), 53–5, 155–60.

Lanarkshire and James Gebbie (whose precise Scottish origins are unknown). George Matthews, the son of a farmer, spent nine years in County Dublin as the head gardener at Knockmaroon Lodge – the home of the Reverend Thomas Burns' younger brother Gilbert – before migrating to New Zealand in 1850 and establishing what was to become Dunedin's leading nursery.[42] Following a similar trajectory, William Martin served his apprenticeship in the Edinburgh Horticultural and Botanical Gardens prior to sailing for Otago in 1847. James Gebbie, who trained in modern Scottish nurseries such as Dickson and Sons before migrating to Dunedin in 1849, began to lay out the city's botanical gardens in the 1860s. Following in his father's footsteps, James Gebbie Jr embarked on the creation of the Oamaru Public Gardens in 1889. Meanwhile, Andrew Duncan, who had been born in the west of Scotland, played an equally important part in the development of Christchurch's fine examples of both private suburban gardens and civic botanical gardens, while his son James headed north to Taranaki to form Duncan and Davies, one of New Zealand's largest nursery operations.[43] In Dunedin, Alexander Campbell Begg from Edinburgh and David Tannock, son of an Ayrshire ploughman, who had trained at Kew gardens in London, built upon the earlier work of Martin and Gebbie and leading scientist James Hector of Edinburgh to develop Dunedin's gardens along the lines of many other botanical gardens around the British Empire featuring all kinds of exotics mixed with indigenous plants.[44] New Zealand may have lacked large deposits of fertile soils, but Scots – used to even harsher environmental conditions – soon learned how to cover the new land with both familiar and exotic trees, shrubs, flowers and pasture.

Some historians though have argued that not all Scots migrants wanted to transform and improve the New Zealand environment as quickly as possible. James Beattie, for example, has shown that many Scottish settlers actually liked

[42] Allan Hale, *Pioneer Nurserymen of New Zealand* (Wellington, 1955), 71.

[43] On Duncan and Davies see Thelma Strongman, *The Gardens of Canterbury: A History* (Wellington, 1984), 53 and Hale, *Pioneer Nurserymen*, 107–11. On George and Henry Matthews see Hale, *Pioneer Nurserymen*, 71. On James Gebbie Senior and Junior see Hale, *Pioneer Nurserymen*, 82–3. On all these nurserymen and their contribution to horticulture in Dunedin see Lousie Shaw, *Southern Gardening: A History of the Dunedin Horticulture Society* (Dunedin, 2000), 17–47.

[44] Alison Evans, 'David Tannock' in Orange (ed.), *New Zealand Dictionary of Biography,* vol. 3, 497–8; Grove, *Green Imperialism*, passim; John M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and the Ecological Apocalypse: The Historiography of the Imperial Environment' in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds), *Ecological Imperialism: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Edinburgh, 1997), 215–28.

the indigenous forest and birds and deeply regretted their passing.[45] A poem by John Blair, 'the lesser Burns' of early Otago, entitled 'New Zealand for Me', neatly catches this somewhat mixed response to the New Zealand environment:

> I love Bonnie Scotland and England's blest shore
> But I love the new land of the Maori more,
> Where labour's a blessing, and freedom's supreme,
> And peace and contentment endears every scene.
> With its flax, and its fern, and rare cabbage tree,
> Its freedoms, its blessings – New Zealand for me.[46]

Subtle gender differences also appear in these responses because women, who generally had less direct contact with the bush, tended to most regret its passing, seemingly because they found forested hills more aesthetically appealing than burnt over paddocks or underdeveloped farms.[47]

Furthermore, Scots played a critical role in beautifying cities through their establishment of Suburban Reserves Conservation Societies (later renamed Amenities Societies) and maintenance of town belts.[48] Paul Star's work on acclimatisation shows that Scottish Otago's introductions tended to be more practical than those of English Canterbury with Otago concentrating on trout and salmon rather than tiny game birds such as partridge.[49]

The Orcadian builders of dry stonewalls also left this attractive reminder of their origins amidst the remnant of luxuriant forest atop the craggy and steep Otago peninsula.[50] The famous Edward Immyns Abbot painting of early Dunedin labelled 'Little Paisley', with its bucolic representation of an orderly and improved version of Lowland Scotland, suggests that the early Scots settlers strove to achieve some kind of harmonious relationship with their new world, even if the painter removed forest two decades before it

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[45] James Beattie, *Lusting After a Lost Arcadia: European Environmental Perception in the Dunedin Area, 1840–1860* (B.A. Hons thesis, University of Otago, 2000), 50–2, 115–8.

[46] James Barr, *The Old Identities: Being Sketches and Reminiscences During the First Decade of the Province of Otago* (Dunedin, 1879), 363.

[47] Beattie, *Lusting After a Lost Arcadia*, 50–2, 117.

[48] Geoffrey Vine, *Doing a Good Work: The Origins and History of the Dunedin and Suburban Reserves Conservation Society, 1888–1915* (B.A. Hons thesis, University of Otago, 1983); Lynn Lochhead and Paul Star, 'Children of the Burnt Bush: New Zealanders and the Indigenous Remnant' in Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories*, 123–7.

[49] Paul Star, *Acclimatisation to Preservation: Colonists and the Natural World in Southern New Zealand, 1860–1894* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 1997), 82–90.

[50] West, *An Environmental History of the Otago Peninsula*, passim.

actually happened.[51] Yet, despite Beattie's and Young's sympathetic efforts, it seems that the great majority of Scottish settlers were set upon transforming New Zealand's environment to be more like Scotland whether through making farms, establishing gardens, building stone walls, introducing salmon or beautifying cities.

IV The Golden Irish Stereotype?

Little attention has been paid to Irish settlers and environmental transformation because they were not as prominent either as conservationists or as leading farmers. Whatever stereotype attaches to this group in relation to environmental impact is, therefore, rather fuzzy. Given their pronounced role in the extractive activity of gold mining, their dominance of rail and road building gangs, and their relative lack of formal education they are generally associated more with 'quarrying' rather than transformation or conservation of the new colony. We know that Irish were overrepresented amongst goldminers and that the environmental disturbance caused by goldminers in New Zealand was particularly severe because of the country's permissive mining legislation. Generally debris could be dumped anywhere once a river had been declared a sludge channel.[52] This is why I manufactured the title of 'Golden Irish' as a kind of hypothesis to be tested. Straight away the hypothesis is challenged by the fact that gold miners were also English, Cornish, Scottish, Welsh, Scandinavian and Chinese, especially in the Otago and Thames fields.[53] It is only on the West Coast of the South Island, where the Irish made up as much as a quarter of the population, that we can single them out for removing bush, building endless wooden sluices and tram tracks, and dumping large amounts of debris from dredges – probably a New Zealand invention – into the Teremakau, Arahura, Ross and Grey rivers. They continued to act in this environmentally cavalier manner down to the 1940s.[54]

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[51] Tom Brooking, *And Captain of their Souls: Cargill and the Otago Colonists* (Dunedin, 1984), 148.

[52] Lyndon Fraser, *Castles of Gold: A History of New Zealand's West Coast Irish* (Dunedin, 2007), 53–78; Terry Hearn, 'Mining the Quarry' in Pawson and Brooking (eds), *Environmental Histories*, 86–8.

[53] J.H.M. Salmon, *A History of Gold Mining in New Zealand* (Wellington, 1963).

[54] Phillip Ross May, *The West Coast Goldrushes* (Christchurch, 1967); Jock Phillips and Terry Hearn, *Settlers: New Zealand Immigrants from England, Ireland & Scotland, 1800–1945* (Auckland, 2008), 38–9, 121, 135, 155–8.

We also know that the Irish were overrepresented amongst the Brogden navvies (although they were recruited in England) who built railways all over Britain's formal and informal empires. The North Island Main Trunk line, in particular, involved many spectacular engineering feats including the erection of large viaducts across precipitous gorges and the building of an impressive spiral to enable trains to negotiate the steep grade at Raurimu. Irish manual labourers also seem to have been heavily overrepresented in cooperative work gangs used by Seddon and the Liberal government to build many of the country's roads and bridges in the 1890s and early 1900s.[55]

Yet Irish settlers, like their Scots counterparts, wanted to be more than mere labourers. Many, in fact, became modern-style capitalist farmers by taking advantage of the various leasehold schemes trialled by both provincial and central governments, or else by committing themselves to paying off large mortgages. Sean Brosnahan's and Basil Poff's research on the large Southern Irish knot of closely-related families that constituted Canterbury's Kerrytown community, makes it clear that they were little different from Scots or English settlers in this respect.[56] Irish migrants rejected any notion of becoming a peasantry. Some may have had to subsist during the establishment period of farms, or the hard years of the 1880s, but so too did many smaller farmers of Scottish and English origins. Once the New Zealand economy recovered from 1896 onwards they behaved pretty much the same as all other would-be farmer groups. After all, the man who provided them with the capital to carry out the great transformation, Sir Joseph Ward, was of Irish Catholic ancestry.[57] It seems too that Irish Catholics, who provided a key element of Seddon's support, agreed with his government's rejection of mini-fundia and supported its commitment to farms large enough to be viable in terms of capitalist agriculture.[58]

Mention must also be made of that great Anglo-Irish acclimatiser–Sir George Grey–who introduced all kinds of strange exotic animals to New

[55] P.J. Gibbons, 'Some New Zealand Navvies. Co-operative Workers, 1891–1912', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 11 (April 1977), 54–75; Rollo Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land: English Villagers, New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s* (Wellington, 1981), 4–5, 80–1.

[56] Basil Poff, 'The Farthest Promised Mortgage: Peasant Immigration and Capital Accumulation in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', unpublished family history; Sean Brosnahan, 'No hea matou: Questions of Belonging, Issues of Identity for Irish New Zealanders', paper presented to 'Nations, Diasporas, Identities' conference, Victoria University of Wellington, 28 March 2008.

[57] Michael Bassett, *Sir Joseph Ward: A Political Biography* (Auckland, 1993).

[58] Tom Brooking, *Lands for the People? The Highland Clearances and the Colonisation of New Zealand. A Biography of John McKenzie* (Dunedin, 1996), 79–130, 231–67.

Zealand including possums, wallabies and ostriches. At the same time he recorded much about the natural history of New Zealand, knowledge that he shared with Charles Darwin and Joseph Hooker at Kew. Grey, the most famous of New Zealand's governors and collectors, also introduced several exotic plants including grapefruit and olives and promoted seri-culture because he hated extensive sheep farming and wanted New Zealand to become a colony which used its land intensively. He presented this Mediterranean vision of a land covered in citrus orchards, olive groves, vineyards and silk farms as an alternative to the development of New Zealand as a giant grassland farm. He would, no doubt, be delighted if he returned to New Zealand today to see such Mediterranean-style diversification of land use, especially in warmer parts of the country.[59]

Although less prominent amongst the early New Zealand conservationists there were a few 'green' Irish, most noticeably one eco-hero in the form of Charles O'Neill. The founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, he supported T.H. Potts and Julius Vogel in their efforts to establish large reserves of native forest in the 1870s, acting as a kind of honorary green Scot.[60] No doubt more of his ilk will be found when historians examine groups of local conservationists more carefully.

No one has yet trawled through the poetry, short stories and novels written by New Zealanders of Irish extraction, but such research is certain to reveal considerable interchange with and reaction to the strangeness of the remnants of ancient New Zealand. Julian Kuzma's doctoral research has shown that much colonial literature can be read as environmental text which comments on both the great transformation and the 'pristine' areas. This claim seems likely to apply as much to Irish or English writers as to Scottish-born writers like Alexander Bathgate, who waxed lyrical about the beauties of unspoilt

[59] Keith Sinclair, 'George Grey' in W.H.Oliver (ed.), *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, vol. 1 (Wellington, 1990), 160–4. Sinclair and all the other historians mentioned in this footnote agree that Grey was the most successful and famous of New Zealand's nineteenth-century governors as well as an enthusiastic acclimatiser. See Ned Bohan, *To Be a Hero: A Biography of Sir George Grey* (Auckland, 1998); Susannah Grant, *God's Governor: George Grey and Racial Amalgamation in New Zealand 1845–1853* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2006); *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 42 (1882), 6–8 for Grey's clearest statement of his Mediterranean vision. On his collecting see Donald Kerr, *Amassing Treasures for All Times: Sir George Grey, Colonial Bookman and Collector* (Dunedin, 2006).

[60] Stephen Utick, *Captain Charles, Engineer of Charity: The Remarkable Life of Charles Gordon O'Neill* (Crows Nest, NSW, 2008).

New Zealand in both his novels and poetry.[61] Certainly the novels of Dan Davin, analysed so successfully by Donald Akenson with regard to their sense of history, could be re-examined for their references to the bush settlements of Southland in which they are set.[62]

V Conclusions and Future Research Strategies

To advance our understanding of the Scottish and Irish environmental impacts in New Zealand historians need to do several things. First, they must pay much closer attention to Scots and Irish farming practice as well as to their contributions to the development of gardening in both town and country. Second, historians need to undertake more detailed studies of the places and regions of New Zealand with particularly strong Scottish and Irish associations. While the Otago Peninsula has received extensive coverage in Jonathan West's recent doctoral dissertation, back country and downland farming areas of Southland in which there were heavy concentrations of Scots, including Catholic Highlanders, and Irish Catholics demand urgent attention.[63] So too does South Canterbury and the Waikato (home of New Zealand's horse racing and dairy industries) in the case of the Irish. Third, scholars need to interrogate the 'green Scots' hypothesis more systematically and examine Scots and Irish, as well as Presbyterian and Catholic, variations on 'dominion theology'. Such examination should also extend to the analysis of literary texts. Kirstine Moffat's work on Scottish-born novelists such as Alexander Bathgate will help in this respect because Julian Kuzma in focusing on environmental comment paid little attention to the subtleties of ethnic variation.[64] Fourth, all investigations must develop more English controls for the simple reason that the English constituted the single biggest grouping of Britons in New Zealand at around 55 per cent of nineteenth-

[61] Julian Kuzma, *Landscape, Literature and Identity: New Zealand Late Colonial Literature as Environmental Text, 1890–1921* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Otago, 2003); Jennifer Henderson, *Far South Fancies: Alexander Bathgate and His Ideal Society* (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 2007).

[62] Such an exercise would add to Donald Akenson's fascinating analysis of Davin as Celtic story-teller and historian. See Akenson, *Half the World from Home*, 89–122.

[63] West, *An Environmental History of the Otago Peninsula.*

[64] Kirstine Moffat, 'The Kirk, the Land and a Longing for Home: The Poetry and Fiction of Scottish Settlers', paper presented to 'The Scots Abroad: The New Zealand Scots in International Perspective' conference, Victoria University of Wellington, 8 July 2006.

century immigrants.[65] Fifth, scholars have to examine Maori responses to the environmental change brought about by Scottish, Irish and English settlers. After all, although Maori had prized the swamps and forests so altered by the new arrivals, they also helped carry through the great transformation by digging ditches, clearing bush, erecting fences and sowing grass.

Finally, New Zealand historians cannot accomplish a proper assessment by themselves so I end by challenging Scottish and Irish historians to learn more about the environmental attitudes and practices of the Scots and Irish 'at home'. What was distinctive about their practice as farmers, builders, city improvers and manufacturers and how did their attitudes towards the environment change over time? T.C. Smout and others at St Andrews and Stirling universities in particular must be thanked for starting such investigations, but we need a lot more research in relation to farming practice and city life.[66] Cabbage trees proliferating on the west coast of the Highlands suggest that some New Zealand plants flowed back to Scotland and produced a kind of reverse impact, but such matters require more systematic investigation.

The project emerging out of the University of Stirling on the environmental impact of Scottish settlers in Canada and New Zealand represents a useful start, as does Liam McIvanney's project on the 'imagining of the diaspora' to be carried out from the University of Otago. Somehow we need to find the energy to broaden and sustain transdisciplinary research on a topic that has much to reveal about both the two-way project of British colonisation and the relentlessly advancing processes of globalisation. Moving past romantic but rather facile generalisations about 'green Scots' and 'golden Irish' is vital if this endeavour is to succeed. Then, and only then, can we begin to answer the call of John Pocock and John MacKenzie to develop a truly four-nations approach to the study of 'British' history and of 'British' settler societies overseas.[67]

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[65] Phillips and Hearn, *Settlers*, 68–106.

[66] T.C. Smout, *Nature Contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (Edinburgh, 2000); idem (ed.), *Nature, Landscape and People since the Second World War* (St Andrews and Stirling, 2001); idem (ed.), *People and Woods in Scotland: A History* (Edinburgh, 2003); idem, *Exploring Environmental History: Selected Essays* (Edinburgh, 2009); and Ian G. Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain: From 10,000 Years Ago to the Present* (Edinburgh, 2001).

[67] John Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', *New Zealand Journal of History,* 8 (April 1974), 3–21; John M. MacKenzie, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire', *History Compass*, 6 (2008), 1244–63; Phillips and Hearn, *Settlers*, 54.