Abstract
Between 1848 and 1850, about 188 Irish orphan girls from the edges of Ireland arrived in Moreton Bay, a six-year old northern outpost for free settlers at the remote end of the colony of New South Wales. After travelling across the seas to a destination as distant from Ireland as geographically was possible, these young famine victims were despatched to the very antipodes to start new lives. While welcomed by a great number of the local families as servants, the untrained girls, with little or no family support closer than 13,000 miles, often did not impress their new employers. Further the bush town in its remote dusty setting was rough and ready, hot and humid, unfamiliar and strange. How did they cope and what social supports did they use to make their lives bearable?

This paper will place the girls in the context of the current immigration influx to the district and seek emerging perceptions of their own self-exploration on the borders of a civilisation defined by a struggling society dominated by powerful males, most of them also newcomers. This examination focuses on just a small proportion of a particular group of Irish female pioneers existing in the small villages of Brisbane Town and Ipswich, over 600 miles from their recent friends - workhouse companions and fellow passengers. Former Irish linkages will be contrasted with their current Australian realities trying to establish how uprooted malleable teenagers were moulded to comply with uncompromising official government policies.

Jennifer Harrison is an honorary research adviser with the School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics at The University of Queensland. Throughout two decades and more she has published widely on the Irishness of Queensland and its population including convicts, migrants and native-born.