

RESEARCH REPORT

IRISH WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA AND IRISH-AUSTRALIAN

WOMEN:

A SURVEY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Survey

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1. Introduction

The Irish were the largest group of settlers to colonise Australia after the English. Perhaps as many as 400,000 arrived between the 1790s and the 1920s, nearly three-quarters of whom were Catholics.¹ At the peak of their numbers in 1891, some 227,000 Irish-born women and men were living in the six Australian colonies.² A decade later,

¹ David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia*, Cork: Cork University Press, 1994, pp. 6–19.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Historical Population Statistics, Population, Sex and Country of Birth, 1846–91, Tables 8.1–8.6. Note that Table 8.2 on the ABS website

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when the colonies joined together in a federation, the Catholic Irish and their Australian-born descendants comprised nearly 23 per cent of the total non-Indigenous population.³

Throughout most of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, however, there was one important difference between the Irish and all other immigrants, whether the latter had arrived from Britain, Europe, the United States or China. Amongst the Irish, women formed a majority or near majority at an early date, although women did not come to outnumber men in the Australian population as a whole until the 1980s.⁴ Settler-colonial Australia was in most respects a man's world. Males dominated convict transportation during the period 1788 to 1868 and, from the 1830s, they also dominated free and assisted migration, despite concerted government attempts to attract more female immigrants. In the late 1850s, after tens of thousands of men had flocked to eastern Australia in search of gold, women comprised only between 32 and 36 per cent of the English-born living in the three most populous colonies of New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Queensland. But, in those same colonies, women ranged from 46 up to 52 per cent of the Irish-born.⁵ By 1871, women made up exactly half the total Irish-born population of Australia: from a low of 45 per cent among the Queensland Irish, they reached a high of 56 per cent among the South Australian Irish. At the time of federation in 1901, the Irish-born were the only immigrant community in the country in which women outnumbered men.⁶

Yet, readers of books published before the 1980s about the history of the Irish in Australia would never have been aware of this unique female majority. The early works were all written by men and all concentrated on celebrating male achievements.

2. *Women Religious*

In 1887, the journalist J.F. Hogan published the first history entitled *The Irish in Australia*. It was a book from which Irish women were almost wholly excluded. The only woman discussed at any length was the English-born Catholic philanthropist Caroline Chisholm, who during the 1840s and 1850s had helped 'unprotected' Irish immigrant girls find employment or a husband on their arrival in the colonies. Otherwise, Hogan largely offered a catalogue of male political and economic success stories. In his chapter on the Catholic Church, he failed to mention the Irish female

is incorrect when it gives the Irish-born population of Victoria as only 45,041 in 1891. From 86,733 in 1881, the number of Irish people living in Victoria fell to 85,307 in 1891 and then to 61,512 in 1901. See *Victorian Year-Book*, 1890–91, p. 492, and 1902, p. 32: abs.gov.au, accessed 15 February 2022.

³ Wray Vamplew (ed.), *Australians: Historical Statistics*, Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987, pp. 9, 421–6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵ In 1856–7, women made up 52 per cent of the Irish in NSW, 51 per cent in Queensland and 46 per cent in Victoria. All other ethnic groups in these colonies, including Chinese, Americans, French, Germans, Scots and others, had large male majorities—most exceeding the English proportion of around two-thirds male. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13; David Fitzpatrick, 'The Unimportance of Gender in Explaining Post-Famine Irish Emigration', in Eric Richards (ed.), *Visible Women: Female Immigrants in Colonial Australia*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1995, p. 158.

religious who at the time were developing networks of Catholic schools, hospitals and other institutions throughout the colonies. The book's chapters on Melbourne and Sydney did refer to the work of the Irish Sisters of Mercy and of Charity, as well as the Good Shepherd Sisters, a French order whose Australian nuns were mostly Irish, but these references were brief.⁷

In his discussion of the church Hogan devoted a paragraph to an order that originated in Australia during the 1860s, the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. The founder and leader of this order for over 40 years, Mary MacKillop, the daughter of Scottish immigrants, was canonised a saint in 2010. Initially, though, she had clashed bitterly with clergy in Adelaide, including Irish-born Bishop Laurence Sheil, who responded in 1871 by excommunicating her and suspending her order. But, in Hogan's telling, the Sisters of St Joseph, many of whose members were Irish, had been established by an English priest and, when their activities attracted criticism, the bishop had wisely decided to temporarily disband them. MacKillop's name was not mentioned.⁸ English-born Fr Julian Tenison-Woods did help MacKillop establish the order in 1866, but the two fell out over new rules in 1873 and, thereafter, Tenison-Woods played no part in the sisters' affairs. Thus, contrary to the impression given by Hogan, the driving force behind the order was a woman, not a man.

Histories of the Catholic Church have also demonstrated a marked tendency to ignore women religious, and lay women as well. In his monumental *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, published in 1896, Cardinal Patrick Moran of Sydney chose to devote a chapter to nuns, but it was the very last chapter in a long book that runs to over 1,000 pages. Admitting that he was in a 'hurry' to get through his information, Moran offered brief accounts of the female orders sent from Ireland to work in colonial Australia, while at the same time placing considerable emphasis on the role of the hierarchy, himself included, in guiding and directing their endeavours. The bishops were thus awarded much of the credit for the nuns' achievements. The chapter is illustrated with pictures of nine men and only one nun. The Sisters of St Joseph receive a paragraph, but they are presented as under the control of the bishop of Adelaide. As with Hogan's book, Mary MacKillop's name does not appear.⁹ When Moran published his history in the mid 1890s, MacKillop was still superior of the order she had founded 30 years earlier; in 1909, Moran would preside over her funeral mass in Sydney. Yet the first major study of Australia's Catholic Church, written by its then Irish-born leader, who must have known MacKillop, managed to ignore this woman who would eventually become the country's first Catholic saint.

Moran's book remained a standard history until Patrick O'Farrell published the first edition of his *The Catholic Church in Australia* in 1968. O'Farrell was critical of Moran for seeking 'edification' from history and thus 'omitting anything he did not like'.¹⁰ Yet O'Farrell followed in the cardinal's footsteps by also paying very little

⁷ J.F. Hogan, *The Irish in Australia*, London: Ward & Downey, 1887, pp. 42–3, 130–42, 171.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁹ P.F. Moran, *History of the Catholic Church in Australasia*, 2 vols, Sydney: Oceanic Publishing, [1896], ii, 979, 991.

¹⁰ Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church in Australia. A Short History: 1788–1967*, Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1968, p. 186.

attention to women religious. He did discuss MacKillop's clash with Bishop Sheil, but this reflected his practice of only mentioning female orders when there was some controversy surrounding them that involved the male hierarchy.¹¹ In a revised edition of the book, published in 1977 and with the word 'Community' now added to the title, O'Farrell had more to say about the laity, including women. A new section, entitled 'The woman question' and focused on the early twentieth century, concluded by claiming that devout Catholic lay women were 'passively deferential to hierarchical and clerical authority' and that most women meekly accepted the church's teachings that confined them to the domestic sphere.¹² As for female religious, O'Farrell had nothing further to add to what little he had said about them in his 1968 book and, consequently, this revised volume remains in essence a study of male church personalities, politics and power.

Largely ignored in accounts of the Australian church written by male journalists, clergy and historians, it is not surprising that the nuns took on the task of producing their own histories.¹³ Initially, these consisted mainly of chronicles of the work of particular orders, as well as biographies—often hagiographies—of the founders or leaders of those orders. From the 1970s onwards, however, scholarly theses researching female orders started being written at a number of Australian universities. Some were produced by women religious studying for higher degrees, and they reflected the then growing interest in women's history. But a comprehensive overview of the role that Irish nuns had played in the development of Australia's education, hospital and welfare systems was still lacking, even though such overviews were beginning to appear in Ireland and North America.¹⁴

A turning point came in 1997 with the publication of M.E.R. (Sister Rosa) MacGinley's *A Dynamic of Hope*, which was a general and scholarly history of female Catholic orders in Australia.¹⁵ Memoirs written by prominent nuns have also proved informative in recent decades, with Sister Angela Mary Doyle, for example, highlighting the role of her order, the Sisters of Mercy, in late twentieth-century controversies such as the HIV/AIDS health crisis in Queensland. As the bibliography below shows, the sisters' involvement in Indigenous missions has also begun to attract considerable and sometimes critical interest. Since 1988, the holding of regular international conferences on the history of women religious has helped introduce a valuable transnational and comparative dimension to research.¹⁶

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91–2, 97, 119–21.

¹² Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History*, Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1977, pp. 254–61.

¹³ See Val Noone, 'Bibliographies of Female Religious in Australia: An Interim Research Report', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, vol. 42, 2021, pp. 90–98.

¹⁴ See, for example, Catriona Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987; Eileen Mary Brewer, *Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women, 1860–1920*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987; Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840–1920*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987.

¹⁵ For details of publications by authors named in this survey, see the relevant section of the attached bibliography.

¹⁶ See, for example, Yvonne McKenna, *Made Holy: Irish Women Religious at Home and Abroad*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006.

This development has been reflected in books such as Siobhan Nelson's 2001 study of nursing nuns in Australia, Britain and America and Ann Power's 2018 study of the Brigidine Order in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and America.¹⁷

3. *Convicts and Workhouse Immigrants*

Over the last three or four decades, a substantial and diverse body of literature examining the lives and influence of Irish and Irish-Australian women from a variety of perspectives has accumulated. Some of this work has concentrated on female convicts, amongst whom the Irish were substantially over-represented. During the 1980s and 1990s, important studies of women transported to NSW were published by Portia Robinson for the years 1788–1828 and by Deborah Oxley for the years 1826–40. Robinson estimated that 40 per cent of female convicts during her period were sent directly from Ireland, with another 10 per cent of those despatched from England being of Irish birth; Oxley gave a figure of around 56 per cent Irish-born for the female convicts of the late 1820s and 1830s.¹⁸ By contrast, slightly less than 30 per cent of all male convicts were Irish. Both historians agreed that Irish convict women, who were widely regarded by British officials as particularly dangerous and degraded, were mostly young, illiterate, Catholic farm and domestic servants. The majority were first-time offenders, serving seven-year sentences for the theft of property, usually in the form of clothes, fabrics, food or animals. In addition to transported women, Perry McIntyre has shown that free Irish women and their children were sometimes allowed by the British government to join their convict husbands in the Australian colonies, while some free men followed their convict wives.

Historians interested in the health of the pre-Famine Irish population and its living standards have analysed data on women transported to NSW during the 1820s and 1830s, in particular their heights as recorded in their convict indents. Studies published by Deborah Oxley, Stephen Nicholas and Richard Steckel have argued that, before 1845, the physical health of Irish female convicts, who were predominantly from rural areas, was generally superior to that of their English counterparts, who were more urbanised. But there were significant regional variations within Ireland, Ulster women being in the main taller and better nourished than those from the west or south.

In recent times, pioneered by the work of John Williams, Irish convict studies have shifted to focus more on Van Diemen's Land (VDL) and to consider the women transported during the Great Famine. Including those convicted outside Ireland, Williams calculated that around 14,500 Irish-born people were sent to VDL between

¹⁷ See also the website of the History of Women Religious of Britain and Ireland network, which contains substantial bibliographies covering numerous countries, including Australia: historyofwomenreligious.org, accessed 21 September 2021.

¹⁸ It should be noted that different historians give quite different statistics on the numbers and percentages of Irish female convicts. This is in part because records are incomplete, but also because a significant proportion of the women born in Ireland were convicted in and transported from England. The best we can do in such circumstances is to cite figures that appear in works written by the current leading authorities in the field.

1803 and 1853, of whom 32 per cent were women. But the percentage of women amongst convicts coming directly from Ireland increased significantly over time: from being 25 per cent in 1803–45, women jumped to be 41 per cent in 1846–53. In other words, proportionately more women were transported from Ireland during the Famine. Studies have demonstrated that the vast majority of these women came from rural areas, and many had been tried for offences that were likely to have been famine-related. Moreover, Dianne Snowden and other researchers have discovered that women occasionally committed crimes during the late 1840s—notably arson—with the deliberate intention of having themselves sent away from their famine-ravaged homeland.

According to the figures given by Williams, of the roughly 3,700 women sent directly from Ireland to VDL during 1803–53, around 30 per cent had been convicted in courts located in western seaboard counties and in the province of Connacht. Before and during the Famine such areas were heavily Irish-speaking. Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of the women who came from Ireland were illiterate in English compared to only a third of Irish male convicts. This would suggest that Irish men had been more exposed to English-language culture, whereas VDL's female Irish convicts contained a larger proportion of Irish-speakers. Unfortunately, little research has been done on these women in terms of their linguistic and social backgrounds. But a study of family history by Patrick Howard has revealed that Irish-speaking lay female Catholic catechists were appointed during the late 1840s in some VDL convict establishments to conduct daily prayer meetings and instruct the women in the tenets of their faith. The church was struggling in the colony at the time, and this is probably why lay women were used in roles that might otherwise have been filled by nuns or priests.¹⁹ Aside from providing an unusual example of Catholic lay women being paid by Protestant authorities to teach their faith, the employment of these catechists is further evidence that among VDL's female convict population there existed a significant Irish-speaking minority.

As well as investigating the previous lives and crimes of VDL's convict women, Janet McCalman and other historians have researched their later lives and also the lives of their children, not only in Tasmania but in the other colonies to which many moved when freed—clearly hoping they could bury their convict pasts. This large project, which began in 2007, has resulted in a searchable online database entitled 'VDL Founders and Survivors Convicts, 1803–53'. It contains personal information on some 73,000 largely British and Irish convicts, including around 13,000 women.²⁰ In addition, the Convict Women's Press based in Hobart has in recent years been publishing a series of books about female convict institutions in VDL and the stories of the women confined in them, many of whom were Irish. Not solely based on convict records, some of these

¹⁹ During the 1830s and 1840s, there was a shortage of Catholic clergy in VDL and disputes among the few priests working there. A bishop was not appointed until 1844, and the Sisters of Charity did not arrive until 1847. For details of these difficulties, see O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia*, pp. 6, 10, 32–3, 38–9, 71–5.

²⁰ The 'Founders and Survivors' online database contains information on all people who arrived in or were born in VDL/Tasmania between 1803 and 1900, not just convicts. So free Irish-born immigrants and their offspring also appear in it. See 'Founders and Survivors': foundersandsurvivors.com, accessed 8 March 2022.

stories have been written by descendants and enhanced by family recollections and photographs of convict ancestors.

Another female group arriving from Ireland during and shortly after the Famine were thousands of teenage ‘orphan’ girls, despatched by the British government from overcrowded Irish workhouses. They have become the subject of a great deal of study over the last 30 years. But, as an article and bibliography listing and discussing the extensive literature on the Earl Grey Famine orphan scheme (1848–50) appeared in the 2020 volume of this journal, that body of work has largely been excluded from the current bibliography.²¹

But, since 2020, study of the Earl Grey scheme has been on-going. Trevor McClaughlin’s seminal 1991 text, *Barefoot and Pregnant?*, has become available as an e-book, while McClaughlin continues to blog about the orphans, providing information on their later lives, as well as addressing important broader issues, such as the ethical dilemmas involved in telling tragic stories, the relationship between family history and public history, and how orphan family history can best be written.²² In 2021, Perry McIntyre and Richard Reid published a guide for those wishing to research orphan ancestry.

Despite all the work done, important questions around the origins of the Earl Grey scheme and its premature termination still remain unanswered. The role, for instance, of Caroline Chisholm in the scheme’s instigation continues to be far from clear. According to her biographer, Margaret Kiddle, Chisholm was alarmed at the ‘frightful disparity of the sexes’ in the Australian colonies, which she believed bred much ‘misery and crime’ and was contributing to the ‘gradual but certain extermination’ of the Indigenous population as white men sexually exploited black women. For Chisholm, white women had an essential role to play as what she called ‘God’s police’: that is as the moral guardians of settler society. But critics of the Earl Grey scheme saw in it a sectarian plot by Chisholm, a Catholic, to promote ‘mixed marriages’, with the aim of ensuring that future generations of Australians would be raised as Catholics. Chisholm refuted such allegations by pointing out that, although she was helping Irish Catholic girls immigrate to the colonies, many of those she had assisted were British and Protestant.

Leading the attack against the Irish workhouse orphan scheme in NSW was the Scottish-born Presbyterian clergyman, John Dunmore Lang. While acknowledging that Chisholm was a ‘truly benevolent lady’, who was performing ‘valuable services’ for immigrants, Lang nonetheless also characterised her as an ‘artful female Jesuit’, who had attached Grey, the colonial secretary, ‘to her apron string’. In addition to being intensely anti-Catholic, according to Kiddle, Lang was jealous of Chisholm for the praise and government support that her non-denominational immigrant welfare programmes had received. His own attempts to organise immigration from Britain were much less successful, partly because they were restricted to staunch Protestants. In 1847, due to the Famine, Chisholm had lobbied Earl Grey and the British government to provide additional funding for Irish female migration and, in 1849, she publicly

²¹ See Val Noone and Elizabeth Malcolm, ‘Forgetting and Remembering the Irish Famine Orphans: A Critical Survey’, *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies*, vol. 20, 2020, pp. 139–68.

²² Trevor McClaughlin, ‘Trevor’s Irish Famine Orphans’: earlgreysfamineorphans.wordpress.com, accessed 28 March 2022.

defended the orphan scheme against Lang's attacks. But it seems doubtful that she was as powerful in shaping government policy as Lang imagined, although further research into the extent of her involvement with the Famine orphans would be worthwhile.

In line with growing interest in the long-term physical and mental health impacts of the Famine, historians of medicine, poverty and crime, such as Janet McCalman, Trevor McClaughlin, Elizabeth Malcolm, Tanya Evans and Dianne Snowden, have highlighted the problems that some female survivors of the Famine, including both former convicts and workhouse girls, faced in Australia during the course of their new colonial lives.²³ These problems could include difficulties in giving birth, instances of alcoholism, suicide and family violence, or breakdowns resulting in committal to a lunatic asylum.

4. Assisted Immigrants

As well as forced migration involving transported convicts and workhouse orphans, large numbers of free Irish female immigrants began arriving in the colonies during the 1830s. Many were helped to make the long and expensive voyage to Australia by government assistance schemes funded largely by the sale of colonial land and specifically aimed to encourage the emigration of women from Britain as well as Ireland. Caroline Chisholm played a significant role in supporting these women on their arrival in the colonies by providing them with accommodation in female immigrants' homes and by organising employment for them.

As with convict women, the Irish were disproportionately represented among the subsidised female immigrants of the 1830s and early 1840s. In the year 1841, for example, Deborah Oxley and Eric Richards have shown that fully 70 per cent of all assisted women immigrants to NSW came from Ireland. And, like the convicts, most were young, single, unskilled and from small farming families, particularly in Munster. They differed somewhat from Irish female convicts in that more originated from Ulster and more were literate in English. Elizabeth (Liz) Rushen has written extensively about these women during the pre-Famine period when they were known as 'bounty' immigrants, but many Irish women continued to arrive in Australia on assisted passages throughout the gold-rush decade of the 1850s and well beyond. In addition to government aid, some were also helped by relatives, often sisters, already working in the colonies who supplied them with pre-paid tickets. Female chain migration was thus a notable phenomenon.

Historians of Irish migration, including David Fitzpatrick, Patrick O'Farrell, Robin Haines and Richard Reid, have all highlighted the key role that state-subsidised travel played in allowing women with limited resources to make the complex and costly voyage from Ireland to Australia. National figures on the numbers and proportions

²³ For a major project underway in Ireland aimed at assessing the long-term health impacts of the Famine, see Eoin McLaughlin, C.L. Colvin and Matthias Blum, 'Anthropometric History: Revisiting what's in it for Ireland', *Irish Economic and Social History*, vol. xlvi, 2021, pp. 3–26.

of such women are not readily available, but Reid has shown that, as regards NSW, during 1848–56 about 65 per cent of Irish assisted immigrants were women, falling to 48 per cent during 1857–70. This decline reflected a change in official policy and a deliberate attempt to reduce the numbers of Irish women reaching the colony. Jan Gothard and also Melanie Burkett have drawn attention to the fact that, by the 1840s, male colonists of Protestant British birth or descent, led by the Reverend J.D. Lang, were increasingly complaining about the substantial numbers of Catholic Irish women among assisted immigrants. In the mid 1850s, the then newly self-governing colony of NSW responded to this public outcry by giving priority to British female immigrants over Irish ones.

Yet, despite attempts to limit their numbers, it was mainly because young Irish women were so keen to take advantage of various assisted migration schemes between the 1830s and the 1880s that the Irish immigrant community in nineteenth-century Australia contained such an unusually large proportion of women.

5. *Marriage, Families and Life Struggles*

In the decades before 1820, when for the first time the British authorities allowed Catholic clergy to minister freely in the Australian colonies, we know little about how Catholic Irish women formed their families. The majority were convicts or ex-convicts, and many appear to have lived in *de facto* relationships. In her studies of early Sydney, Grace Karskens has speculated that these women may have preferred the greater freedom afforded them by an informal partnership in contrast to the more constrained—albeit more respectable—status of a wife. But a number probably already had husbands back in Ireland. According to Perry McIntyre, the authorities sometimes refused convict women permission to marry if it was suspected that the proposed marriage might be bigamous. Karskens noted that many convicts and ex-convicts, including the Irish, showed little interest in religion. Yet Catholic women with strong beliefs may have objected to being married by the Church of England, although others did undoubtedly contract Protestant marriages. As Portia Robinson pointed out, one incentive to marry was the fact that any resulting children would be recognised as legitimate and thus legally entitled to inherit parental property. For those ex-convict women and men who were eager to better themselves economically by establishing family farms or businesses, having legitimate heirs must have been an important consideration.

During the 1820s, Cork-born businesswoman Catherine Miles, who had been transported from England in 1806, fought a drawn-out legal battle to establish her property rights against her wealthy estranged husband, William Davis, a transported 1798 rebel. He is revered in early colonial Catholic historiography due to his funding of Sydney's first Catholic chapels, although his wife who also donated generously to the church is not similarly remembered. Studies of the couple by Anne-Maree Whitaker and Grace Karskens, as well as an on-going investigation by Damian Gleeson, make clear that Catherine Miles and William Davis went to remarkable lengths to ensure they

had family heirs. When they failed to produce any children of their own, Miles returned to Ireland in 1824 where she arranged the marriage of her daughter from a previous relationship to Davis's nephew. She then brought the newly-weds back to Sydney with her and was rewarded with at least three grandchildren during the following decade.

Catherine Miles and her daughter were married in the Catholic Church, but to what extent the Catholic women who married in the Anglican Church in NSW before 1820 chose Catholic spouses, or raised their children as Catholics, remains unknown because these marriages have been so little studied.

Despite many uncertainties, one thing does seem clear though: because of the marked overall gender imbalance in the colonies, Irish women would have had little trouble in finding either partners or husbands. Marriage for free immigrants often occurred relatively soon after their arrival. Research, especially by Chris McConville and Pauline Rule on Victoria, has suggested that during the period from the mid 1850s into the early 1870s around half of Catholic Irish women married non-Irish husbands and, indeed, sometimes non-Catholic ones. Whether the same pattern prevailed in other colonies and at other times has not as yet been determined, although James Waldersee noticed that, as early as 1828, Catholic women in NSW were much more likely to enter into mixed marriages than Catholic men. Presumably the imbalance of the sexes was empowering for Irish women, allowing them to seek for desirable husbands beyond their own ethno-religious community. Many family histories tell of working compromises that may well have facilitated these marriages whereby girls were raised in their mother's church and boys in their father's. However, during the early twentieth century, as the Catholic Church became increasingly hostile to mixed marriages, such unions could exacerbate sectarian tensions, as well as creating painful family rifts, as Siobhán McHugh has demonstrated. In Victoria during the 1850s and 1860s, most non-Irish husbands were English, but some Irish women also married Chinese diggers, while in other colonies Irish-Indigenous marriages occurred later, although these remain little studied.

There was often intense hostility among the majority Protestant British settler population to the arrival of large numbers of Catholic Irish immigrants—and especially young, single, working-class women. This hostility, mentioned above in the context of NSW, was evident in all colonies. It was grounded in ethnic, racial and religious prejudice. Critics of the Irish were convinced that they were an inferior people, predisposed to poverty, crime, drunkenness, violence and insanity. Fears about racial degeneration were expressed when it became apparent that many British-born or -descended men were taking Irish wives; Irish-Chinese marriages created even more alarm. Claims that the Catholic Irish were overrepresented amongst criminals and lunatics seemed to be borne out by official statistics. But, since the 1990s, research by historians, including Mark Finnane, Trevor McClaughlin and Elizabeth Malcolm, has challenged such claims. Their work paints a more nuanced picture that problematises colonial statistics and recognises that Irish Catholics as a predominantly working-class community suffered disproportionately under harsh public order laws that criminalised poverty, unemployment, homelessness, vagrancy, lunacy, public drunkenness and prostitution.

Criticisms of the influence of the Irish on Australian life did not end in 1901.

During the 1970s, for instance, Miriam Dixon, in an influential feminist history of Australian women, claimed that the cult of mateship among working-class Australian men was rooted in the ‘clannishness’ of male Irish immigrants, their tendency to avoid social intercourse with women and their preference for bonding in men-only settings over the consumption of alcohol. The status of women in Catholic Irish rural society was extremely low, Dixon went on, and this contributed in turn to seriously problematic gender relations in Australia, which had begun during the colonial period and continued into the late twentieth century. Dixon, who characterised all Australian women as ‘pretty close to top ranking as the “Doormats of the Western World”’, dealt in sweeping, ill-informed generalisations about Irish women and men. The ‘outsider’ status of women in Australia, she believed, had a ‘faintly non-Western flavour (maybe because of the role of the Irish)’, who were a ‘pre-modern’ and ‘primitive’ people. As Martha Bruton Macintyre and other critics have pointed out, Dixon’s thesis was based on questionable ‘psychoanalytical analogies’ and led her to conclusions that were overly politically pessimistic. This current survey and the attached bibliography offer much evidence of Irish-born and Irish-Australian women who had not internalised the inferior self-image that Dixon so vividly described.

6. *Employment*

Even though female Irish immigrants generally married quickly, most usually did work for some period after their initial arrival, the money they earned often helping to subsidise the passages of sisters and female cousins or friends. Domestic service was the commonest form of employment. This mainly entailed work in private homes, although many servants also found jobs in shops and businesses, in institutions housing orphans, paupers or the elderly, and on outback sheep and cattle stations. But recent research by Dianne Hall and Elizabeth Malcolm has suggested that Irish women may have encountered obstacles in their search for work due to anti-Irish prejudice. Advertisements for servants of the ‘No Irish Need Apply’ variety appeared in many Australian newspapers throughout much of the nineteenth century and even into the early twentieth century.

Notwithstanding this discrimination in employment, it is important to note that Irish women, once they had married and set up households of their own, often employed servants themselves, some of whom were Irish. In regional and outback areas, other servants working for Irish families were Indigenous. The relations between Irish women and Indigenous women and men is an issue that has attracted some attention from scholars, including Bob Reece, Ann McGrath, Ciara Smart, Trevor McCaughlin and Libby Connors, but it would certainly benefit from more research.

Irish women were more likely than Irish men to settle in urban centres because these offered better female employment opportunities. David Fitzpatrick noted that the Irish-born living in Sydney in 1871 were 61 per cent female, whereas elsewhere in NSW they were only 44 per cent female. In Victoria in the same year a similar pattern was evident: the Irish were 58 per cent female in Melbourne and 47.5 per cent female

in other parts of the colony. Archaeological digs in inner-city areas, such as The Rocks in Sydney and Little Lonsdale Street in Melbourne, conducted since the mid 1990s by Penny Crook and Tim Murray, have thrown much light on the living and employment conditions of Irish women and their families in nineteenth-century urban settings.

Yet Irish women also worked the land as members of rural households headed by men, while some leased or owned farms and pastoral properties in their own right. They remain little studied in such roles, although they do feature in many family histories. We also sometimes catch glimpses of them and their daughters in works devoted to prominent landed families, such as Malcolm Campbell's study of the Ryans of Galong, NSW, and Mary Durack's chronicle of her family's pastoral empire in Queensland and Western Australia. Small farmers and selectors have attracted less attention, but family and local histories often document the hardships of women's lives in rural and outback Australia during the nineteenth century. The many books about Ned Kelly's family illustrate women's important role in the tight-knit community of poor selectors in north-east Victoria that supported the Kelly gang during the late 1870s. Fiction by Irish-Australian writers like Rosa Praed, Barbara Baynton, Miles Franklin and Ruth Park can also offer insights into the significant challenges women faced in the country's male-dominated rural society before 1950.²⁴

Female employment opportunities diversified over time, especially for the daughters of immigrants, even if this development has not as yet been much explored. Entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* show that a significant number of both Irish and Irish-Australian women found employment in journalism, with a handful becoming newspaper editors or proprietors. Research on liquor retailing by Diane Kirkby and Clare Wright has demonstrated that many female publicans and barmaids during the period 1850 to 1950 were of Irish birth or descent. Others took up jobs in factories, both large and small, in the clothing and printing industries, and as shop assistants, prison warders, asylum attendants and sex workers. Nursing too seems to have attracted Irish women, especially after the establishment of many Catholic hospitals run by nuns, while teaching opportunities opened up for lay women in the Catholic school system.

As early as the 1880s, the daughters of immigrants were beginning to enter universities. The first woman to graduate from an Australian university was Bella Guerin in 1883, whose parents were both Irish-born. By the early 1890s, Irish-Australian women were also among the first female graduates in medicine. In a very different area of employment, but one dominated by Irish men during the late nineteenth century, the first female police detective was a Waterford-born woman, appointed in Melbourne in 1916. It would be interesting to know if other Irish or Irish-Australian women followed her example by joining state police forces.

²⁴ Ruth Park's *Harp in the South* trilogy of novels paints a vivid picture of Irish-Australian working-class life in rural NSW during the 1920s and in inner Sydney during the 1940s. Although from a Catholic working-class family and married to an Irish-Australian writer, Park, who was born in New Zealand, does not seem to have been of Irish descent herself. Nonetheless, her popular and influential works offer a valuable perspective on the lives of Catholic Irish-Australian women during the first half of the twentieth century, and so they have been included in the bibliography.

7. Trade Unionism and Politics

While groups of Irish immigrants and their descendants prospered in farming, small business, skilled trades, the public service and the professions, up until the 1940s the Irish-Australian community in general remained a predominantly working-class one, as historical research by Chris McConville and the novels of Ruth Park amply demonstrate. For this reason, when we come to consider women's involvement in politics, we find that many supported the trade union movement, left-wing political parties and progressive causes. A number were active in the campaigns for female suffrage; others became union members or organisers; after 1900 many voted for and sometimes joined the Australian Labor Party (ALP); and a few moved further left, supporting early socialist and later communist parties.

In a study of female trade union leaders before 1939, Raelene Frances highlighted Irish-Australian over-representation when she noted that 19 of the 33 prominent women listed in the *ADB* (58 per cent) were of Irish parentage, the majority coming from Catholic family backgrounds. Among the most influential were Mary Lee, Ellen Mulcahy, Kate Dwyer, Jean Daly, Maude O'Connell, Muriel Heagney, May Brodney and Lesbia Harford. Frances did not include in her study the novelist Miles Franklin, who was of Protestant Irish descent and had spent most of the period between 1906 and 1915 working with the women's trade union movement in Chicago.

In terms of politics, Irish and Irish-Australian women achieved some notable breakthroughs, even if substantive change was often slow to follow. In 1894, for example, South Australia became the first Australian colony to give women the right to vote. This was in large part the result of a campaign led by Monaghan-born Mary Lee, who was secretary of the colony's women's suffrage league. During 1916–17, Victorian socialists, like the teacher Bella Guerin and the poet and trade unionist Lesbia Harford (née Keogh), played leading roles in successful campaigns to stop the introduction of conscription for overseas military service. In 1903, Vida Goldstein, a feminist, social reformer and opponent of the White Australia Policy, had been one of the first women to stand for the federal senate. She campaigned, unsuccessfully, as an independent—a federal electorate in Melbourne was named after her in 1984. It was not until 40 years after Goldstein's candidature, in 1943, that the ALP's Dorothy Tangney from Western Australia, who had an Irish-Australian family background, was elected as the country's first female senator—a federal electorate in Perth was named after her in 1974. The first woman to hold a cabinet-level ministerial portfolio was Belfast-born Liberal senator Margaret Guilfoyle, who served in the Fraser government during 1975–83. When the Labor Party returned to power in 1983, Senator Susan Ryan, an Irish-Australian representing the Australian Capital Territory, was appointed the first female ALP federal cabinet minister.

It should not be assumed, however, that all such women came from Catholic Irish backgrounds because, in fact, a number of notable political activists were of Protestant descent. These include Mary Lee, Mary Gilmore, Vida Goldstein, who also had Irish Jewish ancestry, Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Margaret Guilfoyle, as well as Nettie Palmer and her daughter Aileen Palmer. The latter, a member of the

Australian Communist Party, worked as a nurse with the international brigades during the Spanish Civil War in 1936–8. Prichard, a novelist, who was a close friend of both Palmers, also belonged to the Communist Party. Having joined when the party was founded in 1920, she remained a member until her death in 1969. Prichard's mother's family had Irish connections, and she married a man who was the son of a Protestant immigrant from County Cork. Miles Franklin, another novelist, continued active in left-wing political causes following her return to Australia in 1927 after nearly 20 years overseas. Like Nettie Palmer, Franklin visited Ireland during the 1920s and, as a consequence, she became increasingly aware of her Irish roots: an awareness reflected in her 1936 novel, *All That Swagger*, which charts the lives of several generations of an Irish-Australian rural settler family from the 1830s up to the 1930s and is based on Franklin's father's family history.

Support for the Irish nationalist cause among Irish-born and -descended women has been examined by the historians Anne-Maree Whitaker and Dianne Hall. But the story of these women's activism and radicalism in terms of Australian politics, and how this may have been informed by their Irish background, remains largely unexplored. Similarly, we know very little about Irish-Australian women's involvement in the activities of the Orange Order and other Protestant political, social and religious groups, although Dianne Hall's work on Orangeism in regional NSW has highlighted female participation in sectarian rioting.

8. Immigration after 1945

Women continued to migrate to Australia from both the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland after 1945, even if their numbers were relatively small in comparison to female immigrants coming from other parts of Europe during the post-war period and later from Asia.

As the bibliography shows, there has been some study of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century Irish migration by researchers such as Seamus Grimes on Sydney, Patricia O'Connor and Kevin Molloy on Melbourne, Jean Chetkovich and Paula Magee on Western Australia and Fidelma Breen on South Australia, but there is doubtless room for much more. Some of this work contains revealing interviews with different generations of Irish female immigrants.

9. Finding the Writers

Study of the large body of literature produced by women in Australia has advanced hugely during the last half century. In this survey and bibliography, we cannot possibly consider or list all the many novels and other works written by women of Irish birth and of Irish-settler or Irish-Indigenous ancestry. However, we can at least draw attention to a selection of these publications, while also exploring how the *ADB*, the country's principal biographical resource, first chose to ignore and then ultimately to

acknowledge the significant contribution to Australian culture made by women of Irish birth or descent.

The first volumes of the *ADB*, which were published during the 1960s and early 1970s, had major deficiencies in their coverage of women in general, and of Irish women in particular. In volumes one and two, which were devoted to the period 1788–1850 and contained over 1,100 entries, only one Irish-born woman appeared: the poet Eliza Hamilton Dunlop. The following three volumes on the years 1851–1890 had six entries on Irish women: three were Catholic nuns and the other three were entertainers. Two of the latter—Lola Montez and Catherine Hayes—were visitors, both having toured the eastern Australian goldfields during the mid 1850s performing for audiences of diggers. Thus, for the whole of the first 100 years of Australia’s colonial history, the *ADB*’s then editor, Douglas Pike, could find only seven Irish women he considered of note, two of whom were not residents of the country. Moreover, it appears that Irish women deemed significant were being type-caste as either nuns, that is as celibate women serving the Catholic Church, or singers and dancers, that is as women entertaining men.²⁵

Later *ADB* volumes, published since the 1970s and including a 2005 supplementary volume of ‘missing persons’, have expanded the dictionary’s female content substantially. These later volumes demonstrate that there were significant numbers of Irish-born and Irish-Australian female novelists, poets, short-story writers, journalists and newspaper editors working in all the Australian colonies before 1901, and in the states thereafter. Furthermore, among this group are some of the country’s best-known women writers. They range from Rosa Praed beginning in the late nineteenth century, through early and mid-twentieth-century writers, such as Barbara Baynton, Miles Franklin, Henry Handel Richardson (the penname of Ethel Florence Richardson), Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark and Dymphna Cusack, to late twentieth-century popular novelists, such as Irish-born Catherine Gaskin (1929–2009) and Irish-Australian Colleen McCullough (1937–2015). Of the 37 women writers whose work appeared in the influential 1988 *Penguin Anthology of Australian Women’s Writing*, published to mark the bicentenary of colonisation, at least a quarter were of Irish birth or descent—not that the anthology’s editor seemed aware of this fact. After 2000, we have writers such as the Melbourne children’s novelist Kirsty Murray, who includes Irish and Irish-Australian characters in some of her works, and the Perth crime novelist Dervla McTiernan, who is Irish-born and whose books are mostly set in Ireland.

A number of these writers have attracted biographies, some of which are included in the bibliography below. But there has been little attempt to assess what was distinctive about their collective contribution to Australian literature from an ethnic perspective in the way that studies have begun to explore Chinese, Vietnamese, Greek, Jewish or Middle Eastern writing in Australia. By contrast, in the United States and Britain, the writings of Irish immigrants and their descendants, whether fiction or memoir, have

²⁵ The editor of the *ADB*’s first five volumes, Douglas Pike, was a former Protestant clergyman who trained as a historian in Adelaide. See Bede Nairn, ‘Pike, Douglas Henry (Doug) (1908–1974)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/pike-douglas-henry-doug-818/text20359, published first in vol. 16, 2002, accessed 15 September 2021.

for many years attracted a great deal of study.²⁶ Most Australian scholars lump Irish writing together with British writing under the heading ‘Anglo-Celtic mainstream literature’ and set this apart from what is generally termed ‘multicultural literature’.²⁷ Yet this crude and reductionist dichotomy fails to do justice to the diversity apparent in either group.

As the section on writers and artists in the bibliography reveals, there have only been a couple of attempts to compare twentieth-century women writers who were of Irish descent or who wrote about Irish Australia.²⁸ In 2004, Frank Molloy produced an article examining Irish-Australian female characters in the novels of Ruth Park, Criena Rohan (the penname of Deirdre Cash) and Ann Clancy, while Brenda Niall discussed the lives and works of Irish-Australian writers Barbara Baynton, Nettie Palmer, Henry Handel Richardson and also Louise Mack in her 2020 collective biography, *Friends and Rivals*.²⁹ Molloy argued that his three writers were primarily storytellers, and all were particularly interested in young, single, working-class women on the ‘threshold of life, whose Irish origins shape their responses to the world around them’. Thus, in part, these were autobiographical works. Niall, on the other hand, made no attempt to consider how their Irish family backgrounds might have coloured the works of her selected writers. Except for the English-born children’s author Ethel Turner, all those Niall discussed had Protestant parents who had been born in Ireland. In the cases of Richardson and Mack, Niall did not mention their Irish antecedents. Yet Richardson’s entry in the *ADB* tells us that she ‘laid great stress on her Irish origins and often said she was Australian by accident’.³⁰ In a 1986 article, Colm Kiernan highlighted Richardson’s decision, although studying in Germany at the time, to marry in Dublin in 1895, the city in which her father had been born and where she still had relatives living. He went on to argue that divergent understandings of Irishness are central to her greatest novel *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, which is based on her father’s life.

²⁶ See, for example, Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2000; Margaret Hallissy, *Reading Irish-American Fiction: The Hyphenated Self*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006; Liam Harte, *The Literature of the Irish in Britain: Autobiography and Memoir, 1725–2001*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

²⁷ See various articles in Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer (eds), *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900*, Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2007. For a critique of the concept of Australian ‘Anglo-Celtic literature’, see Val Noone, ‘Bibliographic Notes on Selected Irish-Australian Writers’, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2021, special issue, doi: 10.20314/als.81233b0eb7.

²⁸ For a discussion of some of the broader problems involved in defining Irish-Australian literature, whether written by women or men, see Frances Devlin-Glass, ‘Defining the Field of Irish-Australian Literature: Challenges and Conundrums’, *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2021, special issue: www.australianliterarystudies.com.au/articles/defining-the-field-of-irish-australian-literature-challenges-and-conundrums.

²⁹ Niall discussed the Irish-Australian Louise Mack at some length but, presumably because Mack is considered by scholars a much less significant writer than the others, Niall did not include her among the four writers named in the book’s subtitle: the Irish-Australians Baynton, Palmer and Richardson and the English-born Turner.

³⁰ Dorothy Green, ‘Richardson, Ethel Florence (Henry Handel) (1870–1946)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/richardson-ethel-florence-henry-handel-8202/text14349, published first in vol. 11, 1988, accessed 15 September 2021.

In addition to well-known mainly twentieth-century Irish-Australian novelists, the *ADB* also now contains entries on lesser-known but pioneering nineteenth-century Irish-born writers, such as Anna Maria Bunn, Ellen Davitt and Mary Fortune, as well as Eliza Hamilton Dunlop. Born in County Armagh, Dunlop is best known for her poem ‘The Aboriginal Mother’, a lament for the Indigenous women and children killed in the 1838 Myall Creek massacre in northern NSW. In the same year, Bunn from Limerick produced the first novel written by a woman in Australia. Entitled *The Guardian*, it consists of letters exchanged between women living in Ireland and England. According to one leading literary critic, the book was the first novel ever to be printed in Sydney, although whether it was sold commercially or not remains uncertain.³¹ Davitt, a teacher from Dublin, after whom today’s main prize for Australian female crime fiction is named, published the country’s first murder mystery novel in 1865. Fortune, a prolific journalist from Belfast, who often used the penname ‘Waif Wander’ or ‘WW’, began writing Australia’s first detective stories in the late 1860s. All are significant writers—Davitt and Fortune especially due to their pioneering crime fiction—and yet today they remain little known with much of their work out-of-print.³² This is in part because study of their lives and work has been limited, although a welcome collection of articles about Dunlop edited by Anna Johnston and Elizabeth Webby was published in 2021. How their Irishness might have informed their innovative work, with its gothic focus on violence, crime and oppression, has not even begun to be considered.

One especially interesting feature of Irish and Irish-Australian women’s writing is its engagement with Indigenous Australia. Beginning with Dunlop’s 1838 poem and continuing through the works of Rosa Praed, Barbara Baynton, Daisy Bates, Mary Gilmore, Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark, Dymphna Cusack and Mary Durack, these writers have consistently reflected upon the lives and struggles of Indigenous peoples. Their approach, though often distorted by contemporary values, has generally been sympathetic, but many preferred to deal with Indigenous men rather than women. The literary critic Susan Sheridan, writing during the 1980s, complained that white women writers in general tended to ignore Indigenous women, representing them ‘as objects or as symbols’ rather than as fully formed characters.³³

Although most of her main Indigenous characters were male, the novelist Eleanor Dark (née O’Reilly) was unusual among female writers of her generation for her insightful handling of Indigenous themes. Her 1941 book, *The Timeless Land*, which deals with first contact between Aboriginal communities and the British during the 1780s and 1790s, has recently been hailed by the historian Tom Griffiths ‘not only as a great novel but also as a path-breaking work of the historical imagination’. According to him, while writing the book, Dark discussed it with a network of women friends,

³¹ Elizabeth Webby, ‘Writers, Printers, Readers: The Production of Australian Literature before 1855’, in Laurie Hergenhan (ed.), *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1988, pp. 116–17.

³² Launched in 2020, ‘Untapped: The Australian Literary Heritage Project’ aims to digitalise out-of-print works of Australian fiction and non-fiction so they can be purchased as e-books from booksellers or borrowed from public libraries. Currently 161 books published between 1926 and 2015 are available, but further works will be added to the collection in the future. See: untapped.org.au, accessed 13 August 2022.

³³ Susan Sheridan, ‘Women Writers’, in *ibid.*, pp. 327–35.

many of whom came from Irish-Australian backgrounds and were, like her, supporters of socialism. They included the critic Nettie Palmer, the historian Dorothy Fitzpatrick and the novelists Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanny, while Dark also drew upon the anthropological research of both Daisy Bates and Mary Gilmore.³⁴ What the Irish family backgrounds of Dark and many in her circle might have contributed to her interpretation of the Indigenous experience is an interesting question, but one that has thus far gone unanswered.

Yet there is evidence that a shared Irish background could help forge connections between white female authors in the context of writing about Indigenous topics. The anthropologist, Daisy Bates (née Margaret O'Dwyer), who was born in Tipperary in 1859—not in 1863 as claimed in the *ADB*—first came to Australia in her early twenties. She spent most of the period from around 1900 until 1945 living with Aboriginal communities in both Western and South Australia and, in 1938, she published her best-known book, *The Passing of the Aborigines*. Many of Bates's theories about Indigenous society and culture have been discredited, but they were very influential during the early and mid-twentieth century. Bates was convinced that the Aborigines and the Irish shared basic characteristics as peoples. Being Irish, she therefore believed that she enjoyed a unique insight into Indigenous life. Bates's 1938 book was made possible by the help and support she received from the young travel writer and journalist Ernestine Hill, whom she had met in 1932. On the basis of textual analysis, Eleanor Hogan claimed in a 2021 study that Hill actually wrote substantial sections of Bates's book. Hogan also suggested that a shared Irish background was a significant feature of the bond between the two women—and not just a general Irish background, but a specifically Tipperary one, because Hill's mother's family were, like Bates, from County Tipperary.³⁵

It was not until the late twentieth century that women with both Irish and Indigenous ancestry began writing fiction or memoirs in order to interrogate their own identities and experiences. Among them are the poets Margaret Brusnahan (known as Lompalampil) from South Australia and Melanie Munungurr-Williams from the Northern Territory, plus the short story writer Yaritji Green, born in Perth but based in Adelaide. The award-winning north Queensland novelist Alexis Wright, who has Chinese as well as Indigenous ancestry, has not only acknowledged Irish literary influences on her work, but has also at times alluded to an Irish family background.³⁶ In a recent article attempting to conceptualise Irish-Indigenous writing and discussing Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria*, Maggie Nolan has suggested that 'exploring an Irish

³⁴ Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and their Craft*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2016, pp. 20, 24, 38, 41.

³⁵ Bates was by no means always truthful about her Irish origins. She claimed her family was wealthy, Protestant and Anglo-Irish, whereas, in fact, her father was a Catholic shopkeeper who abandoned his children when his wife died in 1864 and then died himself soon after. As a result, Bates and her siblings were brought up by a succession of relatives, most of whom were Catholic small tenant farmers. But it appears that Hill uncritically accepted Bates's fictitious stories of Protestant upper-class ancestry, as does Bates's 1979 entry in the *ADB*. Bob Reece, *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert*, Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2007, pp. 13–16.

³⁶ For information on these and other Irish-Indigenous women writers, see the website: austlit.edu.au. We would like to thank Associate Professor Frances Devlin-Glass for sharing some of her work on Irish-Indigenous writers with us.

seam in Australian Indigenous literature may help us to reimagine the possibilities for solidarity, resistance and liberation’.

10. Entertainers

Irish and Irish-Australian women’s contribution to the entertainment industry went far beyond the visits of Irish artists like Montez and Hayes during the 1850s, which were noted in the first volumes of the *ADB*. As the bibliography shows in its section on popular culture, the *ADB* now lists a significant number of Irish-born and Irish-Australian female actors, musicians, singers and dancers. They range from stage actors who were enormously popular with Australian audiences during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, if largely forgotten today, such as Nellie Stewart, to women who won acclaim overseas during the twentieth century, such as the concert pianist Eileen Joyce, whose early life in Kalgoorlie was made into a film, and the singer Molly Narelle, who toured the United States with the famous Irish tenor John McCormack. Whereas the Irish contribution to the Australian stage still awaits its historian, studies of the development and influence of Irish dancing, music and songs have begun to appear.

11. Conclusion

Until now, most of this new work on Irish and Irish-Australian women has been widely dispersed, scattered through a variety of fields of study that include history, literature, politics, religion, archaeology, music, cultural studies, women’s studies and also general Irish studies. This diverse body of scholarship has not previously been collected together under the heading of ‘Irish-born and Irish-Australian women’. Indeed, despite the unusually large numbers of Irish-born women who came to the Australian colonies during the nineteenth century, study of them and their female descendants does not currently exist as a recognised field of Australian scholarship. Although much research has established that the experience of the Irish in Australia, and especially the Catholic Irish, was different from that of the Protestant British, the logical corollary that Irish women’s experience was also distinctive—different from that not just of Irish men but of British women as well—has not been pursued at all systematically. The question of how gender combined with ethnic difference impacted Irish lives in Australia is only just beginning to be acknowledged as a legitimate topic for study.

We hope that the bibliography below will assist future readers and researchers interested in investigating the female Irish-Australian experience. Our lists of published works and also of individuals appearing in the *ADB* are large, but they are far from exhaustive. There is, for instance, much information about Irish women and their female descendants in works of Australian family and local history. However, that literature is simply too extensive and diffuse for us to be able to include it here. But anyone seeking information about the lives of Irish and Irish-Australian women in

rural or urban settings across the last 235 years should not overlook the valuable body of current work devoted to exploring genealogy and the history of local communities.³⁷

Bibliography

Contents

1. General Works 2. Irish-Australian Periodicals 3. Websites 4. Convict Women and Transportation. 5. Migration and Settlement 6. Marriage and Families 7. Political Activism, Female Suffrage and Trade Unionism 8. Employment 9. Philanthropy, Lay Women and the Churches 10. Catholic Religious Orders 11. Writers, Artists and Scholars 12. Selected Novels and Other Writings 13. Entertainers and Popular Culture 14. Poverty, Crime and Institutions

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Daisy Bates (1863–1951), anthropologist; Alicia Mary Kelly (c.1885–1942), World War 1 nurse awarded the Military Medal in 1917; Madge Irene Connor (c.1874–1952), appointed Melbourne’s first female detective in 1916; Bridget Partridge (1890–1966), a nun who caused a scandal by fleeing her NSW convent in 1920, aka ‘Sister Mary Liguori’.

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