

*Unpacking the Kists: The Scots in New Zealand*

By Brad Patterson, Tom Brooking, and Jim McAloon

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Reviewed by Trevor Burnard

It's always the way. You wait for ever for one bus and then two come along one after the other. Two years after Angela McCarthy's *Scottishness and Irishness in New Zealand Since 1840* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), we get this book. Despite its title (though to use kists as a word in the title was a silly choice as it is a very esoteric term) this book is more narrowly focused than McCarthy's. It deals with the Scottish diaspora up to roughly World War One and does not, like McCarthy, deal with Scots until the present day. It also does not make an explicit comparison with the other major European ethnic minority involved in the settlement of New Zealand – the Irish. The authors, disappointingly, acknowledge but don't deal with McCarthy's book, perhaps because it came out quite recently. That is a shame because the circumstances of this project, in which McCarthy was a participant before going her own way, suggest there were some differences of opinion between McCarthy and these three authors (and two co-authors who, puzzlingly, get no space on the front cover despite having apparently having written nearly a third of the text). Given the commendable emphasis on placing this work within the still relatively small corpus of work on nineteenth century New Zealand, the lack of an explicit comparison between these two important books is a shame.

So what are the differences between this book and McCarthy's? *Unpacking the Kists* is more narrowly focused than McCarthy's work but is also much richer in its depth of analysis and range of interests. It has a welcome old-fashioned air, at least for those raised in the traditions of the now old "new" social history of the 1970s and 1980s. The authors use multiple primary sources, such as the ever faithful *Cyclopaedia*, a listing of New Zealand worthies in the late nineteenth century, and marriage and land data, in order to create some fascinating tables, providing a wealth of information about where Scots lived when they came to New Zealand, how they fared economically, what cultural customs they maintained and invented when in New Zealand, and what influence Scots had on New Zealand politics, culture, religion and demography. The authors work from this ample primary data to make conclusions quite different from McCarthy and conclusions that are unexpected in their conventionality. The main finding that arises from the extensive research done into Scottish migration, settlement, and demographic patterns is that the Scots in New Zealand had few of the characteristics that we would expect from a minority. They were successful on arrival, faced virtually no discrimination, integrated remarkably quickly and well into dominant European culture, and in most respects left most of Scotland behind. The story of Scots in New Zealand is one of remarkably effective creolization. The Scots were so successful in adapting themselves to a developing Pakeha culture and so influential in shaping that culture around the values and assumptions that they brought to New Zealand that their story is not the conventional story of a minority finding its way in a new world but that of a privileged group quickly and effectively adjusting itself to a majority culture. In short, the Scots do not resemble the Irish, let alone Jews or Chinese and certainly not Maori. They resemble the group that is seldom studied separately in New Zealand – the English.

Two things are interesting about this easy acclimatization of Scots to New Zealand. First, it suggests that the tendency of Scots to mingle with each other, to do business with each other, and to favour other Scots over other people in most social interactions – clannishness, in short – seems to have declined over time. It was a feature of Scottish migration that was very

evident in the eighteenth century in places like the Caribbean, as analysed by Alan Karras and Douglas Hamilton; in British India, as Andrew McKillop has discussed; and in North America in the years immediately before the American Revolution, as Bernard Bailyn has meticulously detailed for Scots and which Patrick Griffin has studied for Ulster Scots. None of these works are referenced in the very comprehensive bibliography, which is a pity. This study would be richer if it explained why the Scottish migration and business patterns of the first British Empire did not pass over into the second British Empire of the nineteenth century.

Why and when did Scots stop become clannish? It has little to do with the geographical origins of Scottish migrants. Scottish migrants to New Zealand, as is explained in an especially useful chapter, came from all parts of Scotland with the percentage of migrants from each Scottish region roughly replicating the percentage of the Scottish population in these regions who stayed behind. Most Scottish migrants to New Zealand came from the Lowlands because that is where most Scots lived in the nineteenth century. But that was also the case in the eighteenth century, except for a brief period during the late eighteenth century when Highland clearances led to an overrepresentation of Highlanders in the North American Scottish migrant population. Yet Scots in the eighteenth century felt much more Scottish than New Zealand Scottish-born people seem to have done. Moreover, they were a much more conspicuous and distinct ethnic minority than later on. The authors make very useful comparisons across space, showing that New Zealand was slightly more Scottish in the composition of its population and considerably more Scottish than Australia and the United States. But there is no comparison of Scottish migration over time in this book. That diminishes the book's considerable empirical and conceptual framework.

Second, the success of Scots in becoming New Zealanders, often within a generation of arriving, had a very odd result. Scottishness quickly declined in importance until by the turn of the twentieth century it was no more than a liminal presence. A lot of weight is given to the establishment of Caledonian Games as a characteristic yet peculiar manifestation of Scottish cultural pride. Nevertheless, these sporting and cultural occasions were not very Scottish. The participants included every member of local communities, with Scots hardly overrepresented. As the authors astutely argue, these games were "a celebration shaped by the desire of many Scots to integrate into their new home rather than to maintain exclusive cultural enclaves." (p.189) New Zealanders were interested in Scottish culture but the aspects of Scottish culture they chose to emphasise were the invented Highland traditions of odd sports, even odder Highland clothes, a smattering of Robert Burns and Walter Scott, and an idealized vision of a rural Scotland that hardly existed anymore. The type of Scotland that Scottish New Zealanders favoured was the kind of Scotland that Queen Victoria (descendant of Scots) made popular in Victorian Britain.

Scots in New Zealand were thus typical Victorian Britons rather than transplanted Scottish migrants wanting to recreate Scotland in the antipodes. The greatest weakness of this otherwise excellent book is that it refuses to investigate what is blindingly obvious, which is that by the mid-nineteenth century Scots had become so successfully incorporated into Britain (a Britain that was mostly an amalgam of both English and Scottish culture, with a touch of Welshness thrown in) that they really should be thought of as British rather than Scottish. If Scottish migrants as thought of as Britons, then the puzzle of why so few Scottish migrants married other Scots, why even fewer Scots thought it important to seek out other Scots and why Scottish cultural retentions were so particularistic, idiosyncratic and inconsequential is solved. Jamie Belich claims, rather grandiloquently, that New Zealand was "*the* neo-Scotland." But he is wrong, according to the copious evidence presented here showing how easily Scots became New Zealanders. New Zealand was not neo-Scotland but a neo-Britain, with slightly more Scottish influence than elsewhere. The clue to the dominance of British values other

Scottish influences is in religion. Presbyterianism was an established religion with little differences intellectually and institutionally to Anglicanism. The authors of this book don't ignore Presbyterianism but they mainly, and significantly, treat it in cultural and political terms, showing that there were some residual influences of Presbyterianism in nineteenth century politics and in a small area of social reform. They don't deal with Presbyterianism as a religion per se, let alone a religion (like Catholicism) whose practice differentiated adherents from the dominant members of the community. To be a Presbyterian was little different from being an Anglican, because both Scots and the English were Britons with the shared advantages of belonging to a privileged social group. They mixed together, married together, and formed the basis of Pakeha culture in the late nineteenth century. That Otago and Southland started off as Scottish enclaves and Canterbury and the Hawkes' Bay as full of English people made in the end no difference. Both Scots and the English were engaged in the same process – transforming New Zealand into a British place.