

# SILENT IMPACT

## The Irish Inheritance in Richmond and the Coal River Valley, Tasmania.

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Tasmania is a state not traditionally remembered as having an Irish influence. Lloyd Robson's *History of Tasmania* has no reference to Ireland or the Irish in its index. The number of convents located around the island - at Richmond, Cygnet, Deloraine and Burnie in addition to Hobart and Launceston - and a study of colonial and church records reveals a different picture. W.T. Southerwood was the first to note that the Richmond district contained the largest Catholic and Irish community outside the two centres of Hobart and Launceston. At Westbury (west of Launceston) - another Irish settlement - John Mitchell, Young Irishman, found Gaelic spoken in the 1850s when he was sheltered there by Irish sympathisers.

Apart from Port Arthur, one of the most popular images of Tasmania is St John's Catholic Church built on a rise above the Richmond Bridge. The oldest Catholic church in Australia it is claimed, yet there is little in the town to immediately give a sense of an old Irish community. But within living memory, the 'suburb' near the Church was called 'Irish Town'. Indeed, a strong Catholic tradition survives today. The former convent school still operates, attracting pupils from the district as the church traditionally attracted its flock.

A church suggests a community to support the buildings; this is borne out by evidence which reveals that by 1825 (11 years before the Catholic Church was built) the Richmond district had the largest Catholic population outside Hobart and Launceston. From its erection in 1837 until 1850, St John's Richmond was the only Catholic Church in rural Tasmania.<sup>2</sup> As indicated later, Catholicism equated to Irish settlement. The Richmond district was in reality the only 'heavily' settled area in the new colony, and thus Irish Catholics were the predominant religious group in the interior. With the spread of settlement, the Irish Catholic community in the Richmond district became linked historically with other rural Catholic communities in Tasmania.

Archival and genealogical research in the Richmond and Westbury districts reveals a strong pattern of interlinked kinship ties based on Irish ancestry, with fellow transportees and their families marrying each other's children, witnessing each other's baptisms, weddings and funerals and naming children for each other. A similar pattern has been noted at Cygnet,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a residence and study of the Richmond district over 30 years. The author acknowledges the assistance of Heather Sushames and Janine Hunt with genealogical information used in this article.

<sup>2</sup> W.T. Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania; the Country Parishes* Hobart 1977 p. 12.

another centre of Irish settlement, where emancipists from the *Hyderabad* (1850) also developed communal inter-relationships.<sup>3</sup> How long these links survived, and their influence and uniqueness are yet to be determined. In the Richmond district, the intermarriage pattern has been noticed among the first arrivals post-1818, and among the last of Irish transportees in the 1850s.<sup>4</sup>

Why there was a predominance of Irish around the Richmond and Coal River/Pittwater area of Tasmania remains to be explained. With the recent overlay of tourism, understanding the historical origins of Richmond village is not easy. The *Bridge Inn*, once the 'Catholic pub' and scene of many a fight, is now renovated as the '*Bridge Inn Mews*', a series of boutiques, with the former bar – where a fight was easy to come by – now an ice cream parlour. One of the principal reasons for the development of an Irish character was due to the area's relative isolation imposed by the Derwent Estuary and Pittwater, allowing a subculture to develop away from Hobart Town.

My interest in the district arose from moving there in 1973, where I met the late Alf King, born in 1894. Until 1900, when Alf King was 6 years old, there were many former convicts still living. These included the grandparents of the Kings. He recalled memories of his grandfather, Dennis King, transported from Galway on the *London* in 1851. The King family brought the social history of the district alive. These oral traditions were coupled with archival research. While most Tasmanians were unable to admit to convict relatives, Alf King recalled:

Grandfather came from Galway, and Grandmother came from Kilkenny.  
Grandfather Levi came from Lancashire I think, and Grandmother Levi  
came from Killarney.<sup>5</sup>

Another relative remembered:

He (Dennis King) landed here in 1851, and my mother was born in 1879,  
and she was the second-last of twelve children, and one died, and there  
were one lot of twins. She said, 'Father landed in St Patrick's Day, 1851, and  
she was born in 1879.' She (i.e. her mother) was only 36 when she died.<sup>6</sup>

Bateson records the arrival at the Derwent of the *London* on 19 March 1851, with 285 men, very near St Patrick's Day.<sup>7</sup> On board with Dennis King was his brother John, and Roger

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<sup>3</sup> Personal Communication, L. and T. Rainbird 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Peter H. MacFie 'At That Time o' Day' – A Social History of the Richmond District, Tasmania' unpublished manuscript 1995

<sup>5</sup> Alf King, 21 Mar 1977

<sup>6</sup> Eileen Batt née King, 9 Jul 1978

<sup>7</sup> C. Bateson *The Convict Ship. s 1787-1868* Glasgow 1956 p. 370

and John Keane. The record states that the Kings were sentenced for: 'Stealing two sheep, property of Thomas Grady, Co Mayo. Tried with my brother on board and the two Keanes.'<sup>8</sup>

Roger Keane moved to Dulcot in the Richmond district near Dennis King, and the two were lifelong friends. The Kings were natives of County Galway, while the Keanes were from neighbouring Mayo. All were unmarried farm labourers. In 1856 Dennis King married a 15 year old girl who was 'transported' with her mother from Tipperary although their home was Limerick.<sup>9</sup> His maternal grandmother Bridget O'Sullivan was from County Cork, transported in 1845 for stealing a 'coat and cloak' with an 8 year career as a prostitute. On board the *Lloyd* she was very industrious, making 27 shirts on the voyage out.<sup>10</sup>

Longer traditions existed behind the village that Alf knew but which I struggled for years to understand, and it finally explained to me the withdrawn, almost hostile nature of the town. As a Catholic and third generation local, Alf was admitted, but even he was from outside the village. At Richmond, Richard Reid alerted me to the lack of Irish 'sign-posts' so typical of mainland Irish towns of Victoria and New South Wales, such as Boorowa. There the assertiveness of Irish national identity proclaims itself in headstones, listing the deceased's home – County Kildare, Wicklow etc., and in an obvious inherited sense of identity, reflected in symbols such as the *Boorowa News*. By contrast, the headstones at St John's Church Richmond are plain, with no reference to origins, while only the women are honoured with a stone, none of the men. Why was this?

Richmond experienced two main periods of Irish transportation; 1818 to 1824, and the 1840s Famine. The first group appear to have mostly migrated to other parts, particularly Westbury-Deloraine. The families I met locally were mainly descendants of the second group. Richmond is located around the Coal River, the life-blood for the district. Until the start of piped water in 1952, people still watered livestock at the river next to the Bridge. The district's Catholic/Irish supporters were scattered around the foothills of the valley, alienated from the valuable river flats which were first claimed by the new establishment, including the first Lieutenant Governors. Large land grants were allocated to those with capital and influence including more ambitious emancipists such as James Lord. Dennis King, his sons and grandsons worked as shearers and labourers on farms such as *Craigow* which was granted to Dr James Murdoch in 1823 and held by the family until 1949. The Richmond marriage and birth register records the 'Fringe Farmers' – as I classified them – small-holders and landless labourers living around the foothills of the large grants. In northern Tasmania a similar pattern developed, with cashless Irish settlers renting land on larger estates. Near Westbury and Deloraine, local communities also became known as Irish

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<sup>8</sup> CON 33/99, AOT

<sup>9</sup> MacFie p. 97

<sup>10</sup> CON 41/7

Town and Paddy's Scrub.<sup>11</sup> Another group settled in the Elizabeth Town/Moltema area where the Griffins became large land holders. Here children attended school this century to taunts of 'dirty Irish.'<sup>12</sup>

The town of Richmond was hemmed in by large land grants made to wealthy or influential immigrants or emancipists, mostly English. In the town there was no allowance for commons or parklands. Tradesmen and labourers occupied small brick and timber cottages of which few survive. (Labourers' cottages were rated poorly under the National Trust management plan, resulting in demolition of many.) The Courthouse and Gaol, flanked by military barracks with adjacent St Luke's Anglican Church and school, were the first public buildings erected.

By the mid-1820s Richmond had an Irish community, so much so that Father Conolly, the first permanently-based priest in Tasmania, argued that to be a successful prelate in Van Diemen's Land, the Irish tongue was essential. In 1824 he wrote:

Among the curates in Ireland on county parishes is the most likely chance to find them ... I certainly would not recommend any friend of mine to leave his country and comfort and a virtuous people behind him, to toil and labour here as I have done in my station, for a perverse and wicked generation ... I would humbly recommends that no one be admitted to any of the places who do not speak the Irish language. The necessity for a priest to know Irish here is very great indeed; and I am at a loss to know how I could hear confession without knowing that language.<sup>13</sup>

A list of Catholics in the Richmond district supplied by Conolly in an effort to argue the need of a priest indicates the strong Irish community.. Apart from the Cassidys, the list includes publicans Simon and Ann McCulloch and Lawrence and Sarah Cotham, plus stonemason (and Norfolk Islander) Roger and Bridget Gavin, and names like Hannan, Cain, Mulligan, Sharkey, O'Mara, McMahon, McCall, McCann, O'Brien, Fitzgerald and McGowan.

Richard and Margaret Troy and family plus their partners in cattle running, James and Sarah Stynes, are also included in Connolly's, list.<sup>14</sup> (Transportees from the *Minerva* (1818) were assigned to Stynes and Troy – not always amicably as John Nelson from County Sligo received 25 lashes and 3 months hard labour for assaulting and beating Richard Troy in December 1819.<sup>15</sup>) The foothills may have been to the liking of the Irish, as there they could retain their identity, and some could continue nefarious practices, indulging in sheep and

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<sup>11</sup> M. Bennett *Shamrock in the Clover* Launceston 1987 p. 7

<sup>12</sup> Bennett *Shamrock in the Clover* p. 9

<sup>13</sup> HRA vol III iv p. 562-3, 2 Jun 1824

<sup>14</sup> 2 Aug 1838: Therry Papers MSS 1810/62, ML

<sup>15</sup> PRO HO 10/43

cattle theft, a habit James Stynes and Richard Troy brought out from Ireland. They continued the tradition in New South Wales where they were convicted of stock theft and on-sale to Mr Holt while at Cox's farm at Parramatta.<sup>16</sup> All three were from County Kildare.<sup>17</sup>

In Van Diemen's Land few Catholics became large land holders, but where they became established, they exerted a lasting influence on the make-up of a community. Through their patronage, Catholic emancipists also became established. Near Oatlands there was Thomas Anstey, along with Francis McShane at Brighton and Bartholomew Reardon at Sorell. At Richmond, two stand out: John Cassidy and his son Hugh. Prisoners assigned to them intermarried and formed the basis of the Irish community at Richmond. Further out from the village Richard Troy and James Stynes performed a similar function.

John Cassidy, a Catholic and discharged soldier, had the greatest impact on the Richmond district. After a number of shrewd purchases and a lot of hard work, he acquired *Woodburn* on the banks of the Coal River, Richmond in 1833. Three years later he donated the land on which St John's now stands for the church. Cassidy senior had served in the 23rd Fusiliers, then the 4th Veterans Battalion, and through the 102nd, 73rd, and 46th regiments,. His recommendation from Governor Macquarie resulted in his initial land grant. He also ran cattle on the Macquarie River, becoming wealthy in the process.

The Catholic community which survives to this day is evident from St John's Church being the first and only country Catholic Church in Tasmania until the 1850s. Most of the parishioners were Irish. When a church was requested, Lieutenant Governor Arthur referred to 'the population of that neighbourhood (and) Sorell (where) the many families of that persuasion ... settled there at the period of the first establishment of the Colony, (having ) few opportunities of receiving instruction and ... drunkenness and its attendant vices are therefore comparatively prevalent.'<sup>18</sup>

The Richmond Catholic community was centred around John Cassidy's *Woodburn* estate. In the homestead in 1835, Bishop Polding celebrated Mass and blessed the site of the future church. Father Conolly, started fund-raising and raised £700. He was pushed aside by Fr Cotham who supervised the contractor, while the Church was opened on the last day of 1837. Later the old *Woodburn* house became the convent occupied by the Presentation Sisters in 1868.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser 25 May 1806, p2 Bench of Magistrates.

<sup>17</sup> C. Canteri, 'The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in VDL, 1805-1818' thesis TL p. 162

<sup>18</sup> E. Jones *Richmond, a Crossing Place* Hobart 1973 p. 43

<sup>19</sup> M.R. MacGinley *Roads to Sion: Presentation Sisters Look Back 1866-1966*, Melbourne, 1977

Over 70 people including his and six other households were living on Cassidy's farm according to the 1842 census. These were wooden houses occupied by James Cunningham (7), James McGowan (4), Robert Hawkes (4), Michael Cain (8), Thomas Cruse (9), and Martin McGowan (9). In addition, Cassidy owned two houses in St Giles, also wooden, and occupied by James Priest and John Spence. The Cassidys 'built up a fortune in property and liberally supported the establishment of St John's Church, presbytery and school'.<sup>20</sup> Lieutenant Governor Arthur agreed to the request for a church, believing it would lessen drunkenness and 'improve the moral state' of the community. *Woodburn* was later purchased by another Catholic family, the Cosgroves, whose son became Premier of Tasmania.

A list of pew rentals at St John's in the 1840s lists most of the families who were living on Cassidy's *Woodburn*, and is indicative of the hierarchy in the community.

#### 1840

- No 1 John Cassidy & Lawrence Cotham
- 2. Mrs Troy and James Stynes
- 3. Richard Troy & Simon McCulloch.
- 4. James Cunningham and John McGowan
- 5. Michael Cane & Mrs Hannan
- 6. Henry Paice & Mrs Standard

#### 1842

- 1. Cassidy-Cotham
- 2. Mrs Troy and James Stynes
- 3. Simon McCulloch, James McGowan and D. Murphy
- 4. Cunningham, John McGowan, Wm Worledge, Atkinson
- 5. CaneMrs Hannan, Mrs Moran and Miss Hannan, Shaunessy
- 6. Jno Byrne and Majors servant, Wilks and Doyle, Mrs McGowan and Mrs Neil

The same names – and others – appear in a subscription list for the 'Scotch and Irish Destitute, March 20th 1846' aimed at the famines in those countries. Contributors include people from areas within the Richmond parish: Pittwater (i.e. Sorell), Jerusalem (Colebrook), Green Ponds, (Kempton), and Runnymede. Over £125 was donated.<sup>21</sup>

Genealogical records reveal that the families on the two lists – many of whom were transported on the *Minerva* (1818) – intermarried, witnessed their children's baptisms and reported each others' deaths. These social networks continued at least to the third

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<sup>20</sup> W.T. Southerwood *The Convict's Friend*, Bishop. Willson, George Town Tasmania 1989 p. . 238.

<sup>21</sup> Richmond Records, Catholic Archives, North Hobart.

generation, even after moves to the Westbury district.<sup>22</sup> Many of the first group had been transported on the *Minerva* (1818). James McGowan, County Mayo, was transported for life for robbery and murder. He was later joined by two relations John and Martin McGowan, possibly his brothers. Three spouses and their children came to join transported husbands, all from County Mayo. Margaret McGowan and children joined their father at Port Dalrymple, Van Diemen's Land, in July 1823 aboard the *Nereus*, along with Bridget McNamara (joining Thady McNamara) and Ann McAndrew (joining Andrew McAndrew).

Martin McGowan had arrived in Hobart in March 1823.<sup>23</sup> James and Martin were living in cottages on Cassidy's *Woodburn*, Richmond, in 1842. James had married Mary McAndrew in the late 1820's.

James McGowan's children are typical of the intermarriage within the *Minerva* 'clan.' Martin married Bridget McNamara – with whom he had sailed – John married Mary, daughter of Francis Cunningham, another *Minerva* man, Mary McGowan married Patrick Murphy, and James jnr – Richmond tanner – married Sarah Ann Troy in 1850. John McGowan became a Richmond hotelier. Simon McCulloch married Johanna, the daughter of Francis Cunningham, both *Minerva* men. Many of the second and third generation families moved interstate.<sup>24</sup>

Later, John Cassidy and his son Hugh were friends of the reformist English-born Catholic Bishop Willson who lobbied effectively to moderate the excesses of the convict system. Cassidy also sponsored Irish emigrants such as John Gaynor, a 22 year old tall and stout ploughman from County Meath.

Tenders for the Church were called in 1835, the successful contractor being (Henry?) Buscombe. The *True Colonist* reported:

Nothing could equal the surprise of the audience at finding a most efficient choir contributing to the solemnity of the scene. The well-played clarionet of that professor of music, Mr Reichenburg, aided by the skill on the piano of a talented young gentleman, a son of Francis Smith Esq, with the delicate taste of a lady who accompanied that instrument in incomparable style, and also the skill of Mr Solicitor Wynne from Hobart Town ... It was a delightful to witness practical Christianity so fully exemplified.

The Catholic Church at Richmond was the centre of a wide community ranging from Sorell-Pittwater to Brighton, Jerusalem, and part of the east coast. In addition, Father Dunne and later clergy visited prisoners in Richmond gaol, Jerusalem station and the various convict road gangs.

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<sup>22</sup> Personal communication, Sushames, 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Correspondence File, Archives Office of Tasmania.

<sup>24</sup> Sushames, 1994.

Despite the far-flung district, 70% of marriages occurred at St John's, indicating the importance of the church to its parishioners. The baptism records for St John's indicate that 27% of the Catholics lived at Richmond, 17% at Jerusalem (now Colebrook), and 18% in the Tea Tree area, with 8% at Pittwater (near Sorell).<sup>25</sup> Only 41% of those married in the early 1850s were free and only 45% literate; 70% of marriages were performed at Richmond, with the remainder at Colebrook, (9%) Spring Bay, (6%) and Sorell (5%). Of 51 marriages from 1855 to 1865, 25% of the men were labourers, while 36% of the women were servants; only 13% were farmers and 5% dressmakers. The remainder included a schoolmaster, and tradesmen – a cooper, groom and a carpenter.<sup>26</sup> A Sunday collection in June 1842 reaped as little as 1/2d.

The church prospered with the help of leading laymen Cassidy and Simon McCulloch, publican. Cassidy offered to sell his home, built in 1838 and described as 'a brick dwelling of two storeys above the basement, containing six rooms, about 15 ft square each' as a presbytery. There was still no presbytery in 1850.<sup>27</sup> However, the district's Catholicism was reflected in the purchase in May 1838 of a large painting, 'The Adoration of the Magi'. This still hangs in St John's.<sup>28</sup>

A new 'respectable' convert, Lieutenant Charles Wilmot, military officer and son of the former governor, toasted the new church at a feast in the school-room. Wilmot lent added status to the Catholic community, making a success of the Richmond Races in 1857, at which Lieutenant Governor Young was present, through his unwearied and sportsman-like exertions.' A Catholic Reading Room and Library was opened under the guidance of Wilmot and Cassidy.<sup>29</sup> The subscribers included 15 families, but only a few of the poorer and labouring classes for whose special benefit the library had been established had become members. Wilmot suggested lowering the entrance fee by half to encourage the poor. He had also donated 50 volumes while 360 volumes were borrowed, and another 230 were religious and doctrinal works.

Distinctive additions were made to St Johns Church in 1859, altering the simple box shape to the outline familiar today. Designed by convict architect Frederick Thomas, the additions included a sacristy, entrance porch and bell-tower with winding stone staircase. On the bell was inscribed 'St John's Church, Richmond, Tasmania', 'The Harp of Erin' and J. Murphy, Founder, Dublin, 1858'. However, a bell existed before this, as one was used to raise the alarm when the haystacks of Robert Espie caught fire, a mile out of the township. (A 40-ton stack was lost but residents saved others, carrying away another 20 tons as 'all the

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<sup>25</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p.. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p.. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *St John's Church, Richmond Tasmania* n.d. (c1970) p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Hobart Town Advertiser* 16 Jun 1857 p. 3.



inhabitants worked away with a hearty good will'.<sup>30</sup>) In 1893 the church spire was replaced; and the copper spire today was put in place in 1972.

In the late 1820s Father Conolly,, Tasmania's first Catholic priest, set up a school with 30 pupils run by a convict teacher and funded by the colonial government.<sup>31</sup> When a Protestant teacher made Catholic students read from the Protestant Bible, concern led to the establishment of a Catholic schoolroom behind St John's in 1843. By 1846, 30 children attended, although fees were inadequate for the teacher, Laurence Wallace, an ex-convict, and the government was lobbied for a salaried position. By 1853 there were more Catholic children attending school than those of any other denomination.<sup>32</sup> Michael O'Keefe who arrived around 1843 was a teacher for a number of years following the erection of the schoolroom. He and his brother married into the *Minerva* 'clan' before moving to the Westbury district where he and his brother sheltered the runaway John Mitchell.

The district's zealousness resulted in Richmond being the only Church to send an address of loyalty to Bishop Willson on his departure in 1846.<sup>33</sup> The names listed on the address include the Cassidys, four Richmond hoteliers, Michael and David O'Keefe, the Stynes, plus John Ryan, William Cullen, Michael Cunningham, plus Worledge, McNamara, Bennett and Morans. By 1858, the O'Keefes had joined the Westbury Irish community.. Michael O'Keefe's home was visited before 1858 by John Mitchell, where he witnessed a 'regular wake' at the death of his mother, 'and experienced crones raised a true coine [caoín] over the corpse, startling the cockatoos with their wild and unwanted *ululu*'.<sup>34</sup>

Bigotry was evenly shared by the major divisions; Rev Aislabie, Anglican parson, decried mixed marriages, describing as 'wretched malice' the birth of children to 'add to the Roman Catholic population of the colony'.<sup>35</sup> The hostility between the Catholics and the ultra conservatives is shown in a court case in which the Butchers, proprietors of *Lowlands*, tried to prevent the marriage of one of their Catholic servants. Magistrate Schaw, who was related by marriage to the Butchers, refused to leave the Court and insisted in sitting on the Bench to preside over the case. Mary Farrell, who was charged under the Master and Servants Act, had initially been given permission to marry, but had chosen a time which did not suit the Butchers. From *Lowlands*, a distance of a mile, her employers saw the couple through a telescope, with the Rev Dunne on the steps of St John's Church. At the hearing few of the townsfolk were absent, including the town's Catholic leaders, Rev Dunne, Hugh Cassidy, and publicans Daniel Murphy; McCullough, McGowan, Guy and Burgess plus

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<sup>30</sup> *Hobart Town Advertiser* 7 Mar 1857 p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Southerwood *Lonely Shepherd in Van Diemen's Isle; Father Philip. Connolly*, George Town, 1988 p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Southerwood *The Convict's Friend* p. 256.

<sup>33</sup> Southerwood *The Convict's Friend* p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> J. Mitchell *Jail Journal* Dublin 1940 p. 321.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchell *Jail Journal* p. 339.

Delaney and Housego. Lawyer Knight told the packed Court House that Schaw's action was injurious to emigration, and was obnoxious to all right thinking colonists and had no right here, 'not even for convicts'.<sup>36</sup> During the address the young woman (Farrell) fell down on the floor of the Court in a fainting fit, and had to sit on the ground several times, as 'there was not quite humanity enough for both side to be accommodated with chairs'.

The arrival of the Kings (grandparents of my elderly friend) in 1850 reflected the last phase of the transportation system, which transported the greatest number of Irish prisoners. Dennis King and his fellow sheep thief, Roger Keane, became friends and intermarried with yet other transportees including Michael Cash from County Tipperary, another sheep stealer. Keane and Cash married two daughters of a local English small-holder and former soldier/shoemaker.

Richmond's wider place in Australian and Irish history is due to the presence among the community of two of the leaders of the Young Ireland Movement – Thomas Francis Meagher and William Smith O'Brien. The district's sympathetic Irish/Catholic population were directed by Father Dunne, a politically active priest appointed by Bishop Willson. In 1852, pregnant following her marriage to Meagher, Catherine Bennett moved to Richmond to stay with relations, the Murphys; her father, Bryan Bennett, was also a *Minerva* man of 1818. Meagher meanwhile escaped to America. In June that year their 5 month old son, Henry Emmett Fitzgerald, died of influenza. In the 1950s the infant's grave, threatened by river bank erosion, was moved to its present location near the church entrance, and given a new headstone. Rededicated by Monsignor J. Cullen in 1948, it is now next to the entrance to St John's. While at Richmond, Catherine O'Meagher sponsored the baptism of Francis Murphy, the son of the *Bridge Inn* publican, Daniel and Bridget Murphy nee Binnitt.<sup>37</sup>

In April 1854, William Smith O'Brien moved from New Norfolk to Richmond, where he accepted the offer by Robert Espie, local farmer, of two rooms in a cottage on his property, *Nugent*. The presence of 'his dear friend Father Dunne', the Catholic priest and Irish nationalist was an incentive to move to the area.<sup>38</sup> *Nugent* was described as a farm of 1170 acres with 150 cultivated, plus a 6-roomed commodious cottage with detached kitchen, stables and barn.<sup>39</sup> An Anglican, but an Irish patriot above all else, O'Brien's stay near Richmond was short-lived, as in May he heard of pardons for himself, Martin and O'Doherty. In private hands, old *Nugent* homestead with its gothic windows, lies two kilometres north of Richmond. The roofed dwelling is in view of St Johns but now stands derelict, without heritage status, used merely as storage, its doors open to the weather.

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<sup>36</sup> *Hobart Town Advertiser* 8 Aug 1855 p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Born 23 Dec 1851, Baptism 11 Jan 1852; Sponsors: Rev Chas Woods and Catherine O'Meagher

<sup>38</sup> Touhill, Blanche *William Smith O'Brien and his Irish Revolutionary Companions in Penal Exile*, Missouri, 1981.

<sup>39</sup> *Hobart Town Advertiser* 27 April 1860 p. 3.

A further indication of the strong Irish affiliation in the district, and the general respect roused by O'Brien's plight, is shown by the 50 locals, including Catholics, who signed a published address to O'Brien when leaving Tasmania. The petition lists names from other settlements with Irish sympathisers; Richmond district supporters are the most numerous. A number of 1818 *Minerva* transportees signed the O'Brien petition, including James, and John McGowan, Simon McCullagh, Michael McGuire, Michael Hatton, and Bernard Fox. Tradesmen - Protestant and Catholic - from the Richmond district also signed. Others included the three clergy – Gellibrand (C. of E.), Dunne (R.C.), and D'Emden (Independent). All the village's seven publicans – Catholic and Protestant – signed, plus estate owners David Ogilvy, Villeneuve Smith, Robert Espie, Hugh Cassidy, Bassett Dickson, George Burn, plus Dr Coverdale J.P., shop-keepers Thomas Gaby, J.H. Nichols, and W. Watkins, builder W.S. Wilkins and stone-mason Thomas Herbert.<sup>40</sup>

The probation period of transportation in the 1840s saw greater numbers of Irish transported to Van Diemen's Land. Nearly a third of the 36,000 prisoners transported over the following 13 years were Irish. From 1846 to 1849 Irish prisoners were nearly half of all convicts sent; from 1850 to 1853 they were over two fifths of the total.<sup>41</sup> For many, their first point of contact was the Catholic community at Richmond where an attitude of interdependence and paternal responsibility in subtle defiance of authority was absorbed. The St John's community reflected this impact. In the period 1852-55, 59% were bond. Only 45% were literate. Occupations at the time of marriage are mainly labourers (25%), while 36% worked as servants, domestic and agricultural. Only 13% described themselves as farmers while 5% were dressmakers. Other occupations included coalminer, cooper, schoolmaster, shipwright, police clerk, groom, boatman and carpenter.<sup>42</sup> The importance of St John's in the life of the community is indicated by 70% of marriages being held there.<sup>43</sup>

Following the death of John Cassidy, the Cassidy empire collapsed in 1857 due to the neglect and extravagance of his son Hugh, and the family were apparently 'entirely destitute'.<sup>44</sup> The impact on the rest of the community has not been analysed, but was probably severe. Fr Dunne wrote of the mournful scene when the family departed, and began a collection to assist them. Father Dunne had 'never seen such a heart-rending spectacle as the departure of the poor Cassidy family'. Father Dunne and the Catholic community raised a subscription to allow them to purchase a farm and to 'enable them to live without being a burden on others'.<sup>45</sup> In April 1861 Cassidy sold off all his livestock and agricultural implements including 11 quiet well-bred milch cows, 4 heavy cart horses plus

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<sup>40</sup> *Hobart Mercury* 12 Jul 1854.

<sup>41</sup> Williams, John *Ordered to the Island* Darlinghurst 1994 p. p. 101-2.

<sup>42</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Southerwood *The Convict's Friend* p. 238.

<sup>45</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p. 19.

other farm equipment.<sup>46</sup> However McGowan's account books record that Hugh Cassidy continued to run up considerable bills at the local store, butchery and their hotel, the *Prince of Wales*, into the mid-1860s.<sup>47</sup> Other old figures were dying also; James Stynes in 1846, Richard Troy in 1848 and Reardon in 1849.<sup>48</sup>

The Presentation Sisters had been temporarily at Richmond in 1866-8, which put Richmond 'on the map as a principal centre of Catholic life'.<sup>49</sup> Not till 1899 did the St Joseph's Sisters take over the staffing of the school from lay teachers.<sup>50</sup> This practice has only been reversed in the last 10 years. The Richmond convent school also defended its practice to Rome of accepting non-Catholic pupils and allowing boys and girls to mix in class.

Richmond's six hotels were the centre of the village life. The high number of hotels is explained by the Catholic/and Irish community., which also explains the hostility toward the teetotaling aims of the Congregationalists. Four of Richmond's six hotels were operated by Irish Catholics. All but one of Richmond's original hotels are still standing; the *Richmond Arms* replaced the *Lennox Hotel* in 1888 after a fire. Supporters of St John's Church and the hotels are interlocked. Lawrence Cotham, brother of Father Cotham the local Catholic priest, had the licence for the *Richmond Hotel* from the 1830s to 1845. His wife was Sarah Cassidy, one of John Cassidy's daughters. His father-in-law owned the property, and the two men rented the No 1 pew at St John's.

In 1840 Lawrence Cotham, publican, and Hugh Cassidy, land holder, were on the committee of Richmond Catholic Institute.<sup>51</sup>

Over in 'Irish Town' near St John's church, Simon McCulloch, the longest running licensed victualler, was hotelier at the *Union Hotel* from 1826 to 1863. As noted he was a leading layman in the Church. Simon McCulloch (formerly McCullo) – another *Minerva* man – received a pardon for the apprehension of a murderer. At the time he was a shepherd working sheep at St Paul's River on land belonging to Simeon Lord.<sup>52</sup>

Other long-serving publicans were Daniel Murphy at the Bridge Inn from 1842 to 1865, and John and James McGowan – *Minerva* men – who ran the Prince of Wales Inn during the 1860s.

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<sup>46</sup> *Hobart Mercury* 16 April 1861, p. 4 c 3.

<sup>47</sup> NS 86/23-5, McGowan's Account Books. Archives Office of Tasmania.

<sup>48</sup> Burial Register St John's, 1842-66, Catholic Archives, 8/11.

<sup>49</sup> John Cullen *The Sisters of Presentation Look Back, 1866-1966* 1967(?) p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Southerwood *Planting a Faith in Tasmania* p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> McKay, Anne (ed) *Journal of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-8* Hobart 1982 p. 68.

A transported Irish soldier was Richard Plummer from County Limerick. Stationed in India with the 62nd Regiment, he was sent to Van Diemen's Land in 1848 for forging a cheque. After serving as a constable for nearly 20 years, aged 70 he became a teacher at the school house at Dulcot, where he taught night and finally day school. Among his pupils were the parents and family of Dennis King.

After marrying Joanna Beston, the 15 year old daughter of a female convict, Dennis King reared a family of 10 children before she died ages 36. With others, these labourers and their families congregated in a small community at Dulcot, 4 miles south of Richmond where an Irish flavour was recalled by their grandchildren.

The late arrivals intermarried, passing on their Catholicism. Relying on a cash economy, they gradually purchased small holdings near the foothills of the Meehan Ranges. With small orchards, and a few pigs and a cow, their lives and the buildings replicated Irish small holdings according to Eileen King who visited Ireland in the 1950s. Alf King spoke of Roger Keane carrying a shillelagh of 'real blackthorn' who swore profoundly at children who raided his orchard – 'ye thunderin' bloody dogs'. The men were 'built for strength' according to Alf King, able to carry a 200 pound bag of wheat or flour with ease.

The Irish flavour flourished best out of the township of Richmond, away from moderating influences. The Irish character came across in simple bush architecture, where quarrelling and a strong sense of conviviality and yarning were invented and retold – the sheer enjoyment of talking and leg -pulling – something the Kings were noted for, where ghost stories were a part of the byways and each bend in the road had a story to tell. Stories about the ghost of Jinglin Johnny, the Turkey and the Crow and the Twin Lambs.<sup>53</sup>

The divisions within the small community came to a head during the hotly contested elections of the 1850s. On Election Day, following a close result, rival supporters began to brawl outside the *Lennox Arms* in Richmond's main street. '.... the fighting became general and serious. From the balcony the scenes below presented all the worst features of a Tipperary row'.<sup>54</sup>

Another indicator of the Irishness of the district are references to horse racing and football matches, especially those held on St Patrick's Day. 'Nothing is talked of here but the forthcoming match of football.' A match two to three weeks ago against Jerusalem for £10 a side was not decided, and another match after harvest was discussed at the Richmond

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<sup>53</sup> Peter H. MacFie 'Oral History and the Demise of Folk Culture in the Richmond District, Tasmania,' Tasmanian Historical Research Association, September 1982 p. p. 93-107 at p. 102.

<sup>54</sup> *Tasmanian Daily News* 22 August 1856, p. 2.

Races.<sup>55</sup> On St Patrick's Day, the races were held on the Saturday. The match was spoilt by the ball being broken and the game was unfinished.<sup>56</sup>

Among the Protestant Irish, who are harder to trace, the Kearneys were notable for the love of horse-racing and alcohol. With a County Mayo convict ancestor, the children of Kate Kearney prospered after leaving Norfolk Island, and her son built a two storeyed sandstone homestead, *Laburnum Park*, 3 miles north of Richmond. Like the Cassidys, they were eventually forced to sell the farm due to debts.

Festivities to farewell a priest in 1869 reveal the on-going Irish influence. Reverends Sheehy and Fitzgerald sang an Italian duet 'Canta Canta'. Father Sheehy and Mrs Isles sang 'What are the Wild Waves Saying', then the four sang 'The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls'. The arrival of the Bishop was welcomed in the School-room decorated with evergreens, floral devices and appropriate mottos. The outer part of the porch presented a pleasing aspect; a floral cross was placed in the centre of an arch made of branches of the native cherry, almost midway in which was placed 'Cead Mille Failthe', in Roman and Italic letters formed of flowers on a white background bordered with honeysuckle leaves.<sup>57</sup>

After the granting of limited self-government in 1854, increased surveillance of those with convict ancestry, reinforced by visible vendettas against the geriatric paupers, most settlers and their families chose to retreat into their homes, adopt a secretive silence or migrated to other colonies. The experience of the Irish descendants of the 'Fringe Farmers' indicates that these Irish contacts remained until at least the 1930s. The paupers, tracker-men and tracker-women, were remembered by Alf King. One such pauper and tracker woman was Kitty Dixon, who smoked a clay pipe with Alf King's grandmother. Kitty was part of the folklore of Richmond. With six aliases, Kitty was originally from County Sligo, transported in 1847, and often drunk in Richmond with her female companions or male partner.<sup>58</sup>

Why didn't a distinctive sense of Irish culture survive? Why didn't a distinctive Tasmanian Culture develop? The crushing effect of Governor George Arthur's rigid pervasive bureaucracy ensured the suppression of all cultural activities. The violin and harp and dancing were banned in public houses. The dominant role of mid-Victorian culture – the first popular culture – led to the denial of the past of all emigrants until resurrected several generations later. Characteristics which did last in the district were a sense of fairness, of tall

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<sup>55</sup> *Hobart Town Advertiser* 4 Mar 1861 p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Hobart Town Advertiser* 26 Mar 1861 p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Tasmanian Catholic Standard* x Dec 1870.

<sup>58</sup> CON 41/11, Archives Office of Tasmania.

stories and ‘no man is my master’. Others which survive are bickering among neighbours. The widowed and childless are persuaded to bequeath property to the church.

Richmond’s main character grew from the unadmitted Catholic self-centredness of the village. While St John’s Church is admired and photographed behind the Richmond Bridge today, it wasn’t built for the aesthetics of tourists, but to serve the spiritual needs of the largest Catholic community in Tasmania outside Hobart and Launceston. But, unlike later Irish settlement in other parts of Australia, the Catholic predominance occurred at a time when Catholics, especially Irish Catholics, learnt how to keep their heads down and avoid public attention. Instead, in Old Ireland, pre-O’Connell traditions of quietly organising one’s life with family and friends, never mind the strangers or the managers or the town Council, went on regardless of change (until recently). The priest and a few key leaders would see to that.

By 1860, land settlement and industry, especially mining, attracted old and new settlers to northern Tasmania. Richmond lacked the post-1850s wave of free Irish immigration, the impact of the new confidence brought by the generation reared under Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847). In northern Tasmania his name was revered; around Richmond, it was ignored or unknown. Hence the muted headstones in St John’s cemetery Richmond.

Long term influences suggest that Richmond was the crucible for later active interest by descendants in politics. Two of Michael O’Keefe’s – the Catholic school teacher – grandsons became ALP members of parliament, representing West Coast miners in state and Federal politics.<sup>59</sup> Michael became Speaker in Tasmania in the Lyons government of 1926; David, a journalist, miner and businessman became a Senator. In 1921 he was a representative on the Self Determination for Ireland League Conference held in Melbourne. The *Woodburn* property became the home in late 1800s of the Catholic Cosgroves, whose son Robert became ALP Premier of Tasmania in the 1940s.

Richmond’s World War I Honour Roll is noticeable for the purely alphabetical – rather than rank – listing of men who served. This is perhaps the most obvious example of the sense of democracy that existed in the district. This may of course not be related to its Irish origins. Very few Irish names are among those who enlisted. There is a wider story to be unravelled, as Richmond was one of the municipalities which voted against conscription. The Richmond Municipality has been absorbed by the Clarence Council nearer Hobart and, apart from occasional community meetings, the Court House/Council Chamber is silent after 130 years. Side rooms are used as an online centre.

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<sup>59</sup> Bennett and Bennett *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* Canberra 1980 p. 128.

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The hills and valleys of the 'Fringe Farmers' are now being subdivided into 5-10 hectare commuter blocks with elaborate houses for escapees from urban life. New arrivals drive past without the courtesy of a wave or a care for their neighbours. Irrigation schemes green a once drought-prone valley. The new tourist-driven Richmond is nothing like the quiet village remembered by locals and is shunned by them. Tourism smacks of a new subservience. The past is obscured by a concocted 'heritage.'

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