



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

Research Commons

<http://waikato.researchgateway.ac.nz/>

## Research Commons at the University of Waikato

### Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

**‘IT WAS HARD TO  
DIE FRAE HAME’:  
DEATH, GRIEF AND MOURNING  
AMONG SCOTTISH MIGRANTS  
TO NEW ZEALAND,  
1840 - 1890.**

BY

DEBRA POWELL

A Thesis

Submitted to the University of Waikato  
in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in History



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

**2007**

# ABSTRACT

James McGeoch's headstone, which can be seen at the Presbyterian Cemetery in Symonds Street, Auckland, carries a simple sentiment in the Scottish dialect that resonates with first generation migrants everywhere: 'It was hard to die frae hame'.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is an investigation into the experiences of death and mourning among nineteenth century Scottish migrants to New Zealand. It considers the ways in which death, and the framework of social conventions through which it is interpreted and dealt with, might provide evidence for the persistence or renegotiation of cultural behaviours among migrant communities. The focus of this study is on the working classes and in particular those who resided in, and emigrated from, Scotland's larger cities and towns. A complex of ideas and customs informed cultural practices regarding death among the working classes. This thesis highlights the multiple challenges that the process of migration posed to these cultural practices. The ongoing renegotiation of such ideas and customs were important components in the formulation of cultural and religious identities in New Zealand.

This thesis is simultaneously an investigation of deathways, a migration study, a consideration of the working class experience, and a tentative venture into the history of emotion. Using a diverse range of sources, including New Zealand coroners' reports, gravestone inscriptions, and personal autobiographical accounts as written in journals, diaries and letters, this study highlights the complexity and variety of migrants' experiences of death and attempts to uncover the multiple meanings of these experiences.

---

<sup>1</sup> Translation: 'It was hard to die from home'.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been undertaken without funding support received from the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women, the University of Waikato Scholarships board, and the Marsden funded team headed by Dr. Brad Patterson of the Irish and Scottish Studies program at the Stout Centre, Victoria University. I am indebted to these groups for their generous assistance.

My supervisors, Dr. Rosalind McClean and Dr. Rowland Weston, have been a pleasure to work with. I would like to express my deep appreciation for their expertise and encouragement, and consistently excellent advice.

I am grateful to Kathryn Parsons from the New Zealand Room in the University of Waikato Library for her generous assistance in accessing archival resources. I would also like to thank fellow Marsden scholar Rebecca Lenihan from Victoria University who has shown interest in my study and been keen to share her research findings. Special thanks go also to Emma Spooner for her proof-reading expertise and her friendship during my years of graduate study; and to Big Jim Fulton for being my best friend and support, and for sending the hundreds of emails that provided such a welcome distraction from the real business of thesis writing.

The staff and graduates of the History Department have been a joy to work alongside. Thanks for the madness and the general hilarity. Who would have thought that a year researching and writing about death could prove to be such great fun?

And lastly, thanks, to my delightful little family of teenage boys and unruly dogs, for being such thoroughly agreeable folk.

# CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: <i>Deathways Among the Scottish Working Classes, 1840-50</i>	12
Chapter Two: <i>'And Down She Sank to a Sailor's Grave': Death at Sea, 1840-1890</i>	34
Chapter Three: <i>'Baith Bleart an' Blin' Wi' Tears': Death and Bereavement in the New World, 1840-1890</i>	61
Conclusion	96
Bibliography	100

# INTRODUCTION

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1840 John Hemery, Captain of the *Bengal Merchant*, wrote the following entry in his journal:

I witnessed a curious scene in a native village the other day, it was a kind of wake for the Chief who was killed, the whole tribe was collected making the most dreadful noise I ever heard, such as making the most horrid faces, sticking their tongues out of their mouths and barking and growling like wolves. The most awful performances were the women who kept cutting their faces and bodies with shrieks. Some of them were one mass of blood all over the body, and I don't think there were four inches of them without a deep gash which they had inflicted with a sharp part of a shell. The sight was most dreadful.<sup>1</sup>

This scene was one of the first witnessed by the English captain on his arrival in New Zealand. His reaction to this 'most dreadful' display of open and unrestrained mourning is revealing testimony. Only two weeks earlier Hemery had presided over the sea burial of a Scottish infant, and commented dryly on the family's 'cool' response to the death of their baby:

[We] found the mother quite composed laying the baby out, surrounded by several other women who suggested several curious ways of clothing it ready for burial, among other things they put a half-penny over each of its eyes! They then asked me what I thought was the best way of doing it and I told them to put a white cap on its head and a nightgown on its body, which they did. After all was done they begged of me to give them a bottle of rum.<sup>2</sup>

The baby's body was then placed into a wine cask and put over the side of the ship while the family got quietly drunk.

---

<sup>1</sup> Journal of John Hemery reproduced in Ian McIlroy, *The Voyage of the Emigrant Ship Bengal Merchant from Scotland to New Zealand, October 1839 to February 1840* (Christchurch: I. McIlroy, 2002), pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Hemery Diary, entry for 16 February, p. 34. The texts of journals, diaries, and letters throughout this thesis have been slightly edited to improve readability. Editing consists mainly of inserting punctuation. Spelling and the use of upper case for emphasis remains the same as in the original or as in the text from which it has been cited.

The stark contrast between these two accounts of mourning highlights the complexity of cultural responses to death and grief. This thesis considers death and its subsequent practices as key cultural texts, and argues that these can be read to reveal nuanced understandings of grief and mourning. The experience of dying, and responses to death, are central to human experience and, as such, are at the core of social history. Studying histories of death and grief, and the framework of social conventions through which they are interpreted and dealt with, can offer a rich resource for the understanding of society.

Elaine McFarland, in her discussion on the rapidly expanding field of death history, laments that scholars of Scottish history have been slow to contribute to this important field. Scotland, she argues, 'has remained relatively untouched by this thanatological revolution'.<sup>3</sup> McFarland aims to uncover new lines of enquiry for historians, yet to be examined in the Scottish context. She presents an agenda for research into death and mourning, urging historians to take the Scottish experience into broader research themes. While the subject of death in New Zealand society is beginning to be addressed by a small number of historians and scholars, it still remains for historians of New Zealand culture to make this a focus of their research.<sup>4</sup> New Zealand historians such as Jock Phillips have been calling for scholars to fill in the gaps in New Zealand's cultural history since 1990. Phillips identified the need for histories which, as he says, 'can recover, in loving detail the diversity of cultures that once settled here, and the process whereby those diverse

---

<sup>3</sup> Elaine McFarland, 'Researching Death, Mourning and Commemoration in Modern Scotland' in *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 24:1 (2004), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Frances Porter and Charlotte MacDonald's *My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996) includes a section on death and mourning as portrayed in nineteenth century women's diaries and letters. This is one of only a few published works that reflects on death in a considered way. Local cemetery histories are another obvious exception. There have been several unpublished theses in the field of death history. These include Stephen Deed's 'Unearthly Landscapes: The Development of the Cemetery in Nineteenth Century New Zealand' (MA thesis, University of Otago, 2004); Philip Cleaver's 'Dealing with Death: The Pakeha Treatment of Death 1850-1910' (MA thesis, Victoria University, 1996); David Madle's 'Patterns of Death by Accident, Suicide and Homicide in New Zealand 1860-1960' (PhD thesis, Victoria University, 1996; and Peter Luke's, 'Suicide in Auckland 1848-1939' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1982).

cultures were given a New Zealand content'.<sup>5</sup> This thesis takes up the challenges laid down by McFarland and Phillips. Taking Scotland as a vantage point, it asks the central question: what effect did the process of migration have on beliefs and practices surrounding death and mourning?<sup>6</sup>

David Hackett Fischer's cultural history, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, offers a useful model for investigating the persistence of regional cultures in the wake of migration, and over time. He argues that distinct regional cultures in the United States have their origins in folkways that were 'planted in the American colonies more than two centuries ago' by four different groups of British settlers.<sup>7</sup> He defines the term folkways as 'the normative structure of values, customs and meanings that exist in any culture. This complex is not many things but one thing, with many interlocking parts'.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, Hackett Fischer argues that folkways are not static, but rather are 'constantly in process of creation, even in our own time.'<sup>9</sup> Fluidity and hybridity are important themes in cultural studies of migration, and to be useful in this study Hackett Fischer's complex must be considered as a system of cultural customs and meanings, rather than a rigid structure. 'Deathways' are listed among Hackett Fischer's categories of folkways which have left their mark on American society. A further consideration of this thesis is to test Hackett Fischer's hypothesis in the context of settler migration to this country. This includes a reflection on how the study of deathways might provide evidence for the persistence or renegotiation of cultural behaviours, and a tentative consideration of the ways that the origins and folkways of this country's early migrant communities might have contributed to a New Zealand culture.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jock Phillips, 'Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon' in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24:2, (October 1990), p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> This study has been undertaken as part of a larger project on the Scottish experience of migration to New Zealand currently being carried out by a team of historians headed by Dr Brad Patterson (Victoria University). The Scots were disproportionate numerically amongst migrants to New Zealand making them valuable subjects for a cross cultural study of this kind.

<sup>7</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Hackett Fischer, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Hackett Fischer, p. 8.

The subject of death as a historical study has received increasing attention in the past twenty-five years, with death studies now an important and influential field of historical enquiry. French historians have acted as pioneers in many areas of social and cultural history, and this is certainly the case regarding the history of death. The leading French historian Philippe Aries was among the first to focus on death and dying in a historical sense. In his seminal work, *The Hour of Our Death*, which was translated into English in 1981, Aries provided a model of five stages of death that moved chronologically from the middle ages to the end of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> His model has been much debated, and has permeated the work of later death historians, as well as other scholars working within an historical frame. According to Aries, Romanticism transformed death from an event regarded with fear and trepidation to an experience of beauty that was positively anticipated. This Romantic influence produced a model, coined by Aries as ‘the beautiful death’, which became the formulaic view of death and dying for nineteenth century Europeans. This was eventually replaced in the twentieth century by the ‘invisible death’, where increasing secularism, and the events of two world wars led to a denial of death and the dying process. The applicability of his model has been questioned by more recent scholars. Pat Jalland argues that Aries’ emphasis on the experience of Catholic France limits his study for scholars of other areas.<sup>11</sup> Phillip Cleaver, in his unpublished study of Pakeha attitudes toward death in nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealand, agrees, suggesting a presumptuousness on Aries’ part in considering his conclusions are relevant to all Christian cultures in the West. Nevertheless, Cleaver convincingly applies Aries’s model of death to the New Zealand context.<sup>12</sup> His research argues that the shift in attitude which Aries claims to have taken place around the turn of the twentieth century can be seen to have occurred in Pakeha New Zealand society.

---

<sup>10</sup> Phillippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, second edition (New York: Random House, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Phillip Cleaver ‘Dealing With Death: The Pakeha Treatment of Death 1850-1910’ (MA thesis, Victoria University, 1996)

In her book *Death in the Victorian Family*, Jalland questions the applicability of the ‘beautiful death’ model for nineteenth-century Britons. Her research into the experience of middle and upper-class families suggests that the Evangelical ‘good death’ fitted more closely with the British experience. Unlike Aries’ model, the ‘good death’ as an ideal had its focus on the dying person’s readiness to face God, and though it was frequently romanticised in literature, in reality was less likely to be greeted with positive anticipation.<sup>13</sup> However, as Jalland points out, there are ‘multiple modes of death’.<sup>14</sup> The diversity of experiences surrounding death and mourning mean that no single model is appropriate.

Rather than attempting to find a model, or models, of a predominant cultural norm associated with Western death, the focus of this study is to consider the deathways of the working classes, particularly among those who resided in Scotland’s larger cities and towns. This thesis argues that Scottish society in the nineteenth century was one in which the lower classes suffered immensely under class constraints and unequal opportunity. Within those constraints though, individual agency and strong social networks thrived. Teasing out the various threads of interweaving beliefs and mores is a methodological challenge. Rational thought and new theological understandings emerging from the Enlightenment, intercept, contradict and work alongside popular belief. Further complexities arise with distinctions of class, region, and religious affiliation. For the higher classes in Britain, by the mid-decades of the nineteenth century, funerary and mourning rituals had become highly complex and extravagant, and the working classes strove hard to emulate them. Even the lowest working classes in Scotland had a consuming interest in the gradations of social position, and death within the family served as a prime means of expressing, and defining that social placing. An amalgam of these ideas, and others informed by folklore and religion, guided the accepted cultural practices among the working classes. For the immigrant, these customs were essential

---

<sup>13</sup> Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 2.

components in the formulation of cultural and religious identities in colonial New Zealand.

In Britain, recent studies have highlighted the experience of death among the underclasses.<sup>15</sup> Julie Marie Strange's, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain 1870-1914* provides an impressive overview of the experience of death among the British poor. In considering the dichotomous stereotypes of the respectable funeral and the pauper's grave, Strange contends that a shift is required 'in the analytical gaze away from materialist paradigms and dichotomies between respectable and pauper funerals to consider flexible definitions of grief and mutable notions of respectability.'<sup>16</sup> With this in mind, she attempts to reframe the working-class narrative by looking for the fluid meanings behind public rituals of mourning and emphasising the complex nature of people's responses to death. The resignation towards death seemingly displayed by the working classes is a misrepresentation, according to Strange. As she says: 'Poverty necessitated pragmatism, but that did not necessarily compromise the sentimental and emotional underpinnings of family life.'<sup>17</sup> This idea is strongly reinforced in the reading of personal journals and letters written by working class Scottish migrants to New Zealand.

The migrants whose lives provide the organising principle of this study effectively moved across three worlds, each overlapping and correlated, but nevertheless distinct in terms of physical reality. For migrants, Scotland could be seen to embody an Old World paradigm of deep-rooted cultural mores, while the settler communities of New Zealand came to represent the New World, where every aspect of their lives required renegotiation. Between the two came the experience of the sea-voyage. The three to five month journey from Scotland to New Zealand

---

<sup>15</sup> These include Thomas Laqueur's, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals' in *Representations* 1:1, (February 1983), pp. 109-131; Ruth Richardson's *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and 'Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?', published in *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, edited by R. Houlbrooke (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Julie Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Strange, p. 14.

represented a separate sphere where, for a time, a new community was forged around the exigencies of life at sea. While this was the cultural understanding of the migrant and settler experience, in reality there was much movement between the Old and the New Worlds and networks between them were retained.

As a cross-cultural study this thesis attempts to span these three interrelated worlds, necessarily drawing on distinct bodies of source material to frame its investigation. It analyses a range of materials within multiple frames of enquiry. This thesis is simultaneously an investigation of deathways, a migration study, a consideration of the working class experience, and a tentative venture into the history of emotion. As a corollary, source material has been wide-ranging and diverse, moving from nineteenth century cultural texts and recent theorisations on the Scottish working class experience, to government reports, statistical data, and the inscriptions on gravestones. While quantitative evidence has been used selectively to seek an understanding of collective patterns, my methodological approach is primarily qualitative. Of particular significance to this study is the testimony of the migrants themselves as evidenced in their diaries, journals, and letters. This thesis highlights the variety of migrants' experiences of death in all their complexity. Primarily though, its aim is to uncover ways that these experiences were interpreted and acted upon.

Despite attempts to conceptualise migration in ways that recognise its centrality in global histories, theories surrounding the 'push or pull' effect on migration continually resurface.<sup>18</sup> Recent historians of British migration, such as Marjory Harper who writes about the Scottish experience, contend that migrants to Australia and New Zealand were more likely to have been adventurers rather than exiles.<sup>19</sup> The first chapter of this thesis, which looks at aspects of life and death in working class Scotland in the 1840s, provides evidence for caution against too ready an

---

<sup>18</sup> An example of the former is Dirk Hoerder's, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002)

<sup>19</sup> Marjory Harper, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London: Profile, 2004)

acceptance of Harper's thesis. This chapter considers a most important facet of the push factor, namely, the very real fear of downward mobility. New Zealand scholars argue that the vast majority of those immigrating to New Zealand were individuals and families belonging to the labouring classes, though they were not necessarily those from the most depressed social groups.<sup>20</sup> For the lower middle and 'comfortable' working-classes, the widespread existence of the abject poor contributed directly to fears of slipping further down the ranks into the underclass. All who occupied the working classes held an economic status that could only ever be described as fragile. The very real possibilities of accident and illness, unemployment, widowhood or old age meant that these people lived daily with the possibility of falling into pauperdom and the ultimate fear of the pauper's grave. In Glasgow in the 1840s, over a quarter of all burials were 'on the parish', the euphemistic term for a pauper's burial.<sup>21</sup> These generally involved mass interments into pits which were covered in quicklime to speed up decomposition. There was neither ceremony nor memorial to mark the place of burial. A funeral on the parish was the 'ultimate degradation for the individual and the ultimate disgrace for a Victorian worker's family'.<sup>22</sup> It is a contention of this thesis that anxiety about downward mobility acted as a powerful inducement to migration.<sup>23</sup> I argue that the spectre of the pauper's grave was one of a complex of motivating factors prompting the movement to countries and colonies where, it was believed, there was a real possibility of 'doing better'.

Chapter Two considers the sea voyage from Scotland to New Zealand. It contends that this voyage represented a liminal zone where death and burial at sea presented migrants with their first major challenge to traditional ideas and practices. The harsh and often callous reality of death at sea forced many migrants to confront the severing of familiar death practices and rituals. This chapter draws on shipboard

---

<sup>20</sup> Tony Simpson, *The Immigrants: The Great Migration from Britain to New Zealand, 1830-1890* (Auckland: Godwit, 1997), p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> *The Report on the Mortality Bills for the City of Glasgow 1851*, cited in McFarland, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Strange, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> R.S. Neale has explored this idea with reference to the 'middling' class in his *History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983)

diaries, private letters, and autobiographical accounts as its main primary sources. These are extremely rich sources for an investigation into the private experiences of grief and mourning. While the majority of archived diaries and letters are written by paying passengers who travelled by cabin class, and who were a distinct minority among migrants travelling to New Zealand, widespread literacy among all classes of Britons in the nineteenth century means that the words of working class migrants travelling in steerage can also be found.<sup>24</sup> The archival evidence used here is complemented by a range of primary and secondary published sources including government reports, quantitative studies and ship surgeons' log books.

Unlike her earlier book, Pat Jalland's later work, *Australian Ways of Death*, moves across class and spatial boundaries making it more closely aligned with the concerns of this thesis. Because of the similarities between the New Zealand and Australian experiences, particularly during the sea-voyage, Jalland's study provides a useful model for my own research into death at sea. The experiences of British migrants during the passage to the Australasian colonies have been carefully researched and presented by historians such as Don Charlwood and David Hastings.<sup>25</sup> Robin Haines provides an interesting overview in the Australian context, drawing on both her own work on ship surgeons and her collaborative efforts with quantitative researchers on shipboard mortality. My own findings test Haines' celebratory view of the work of health professionals and officials, using the autobiographical testimony of passengers to offer an alternative reading.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> The Waikato University Library houses a comprehensive collection of nineteenth-century autobiographical material. This collection of primary sources, which includes ship diaries, journals, and personal letters, has been compiled by Kathryn Parsons from repositories around New Zealand.

<sup>25</sup> Don Charlwood, *The Long Farewell* (Victoria: Allen Lane, 1981); David Hastings, *Over the Mountains of the Sea: Life on the Migrant Ships 1870-1885* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Robin Haines, *Doctors at Sea: Emigrant Voyages to Colonial Australia* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) and Robin Haines and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Deaths of Babies Born on Government-Assisted Emigrant Voyages to South Australia in the Nineteenth Century', in *Health and History*, 6:1 (2004).

Chapter Three considers death practices, grief and mourning among Scottish migrants after their arrival in New Zealand, with a special focus on the settlers who moved into the Old Auckland Province from 1840-1890.<sup>27</sup> Gerdien Jonker notes that rites associated with the life cycle acquire extra meaning when performed in a migrant context: they permit the expression of a former national identity while teaching younger generations about the customs and beliefs of their homeland.<sup>28</sup> As a study of Scots migrants, the focus, by necessity, remains upon immigrant New Zealanders. The cross-cultural transmission of deathways between Maori and Pakeha would constitute a separate study of its own and unfortunately lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Maori burial customs were subject to a great deal of regional variation and differed from iwi to iwi and hapu to hapu. Nevertheless, accounts of *tangihanga* ritual, such as that written by Captain John Hemery, offer a tantalising indication of the potential richness of such a study.

This thesis considers key themes important to the context of this period in New Zealand. Alcohol consumption, violence, suicide and disease were, in varying degrees, facets of working class experience. In chapter three, mortality figures and disease and crime statistics are used to suggest patterns, which are then scrutinised for meaning.<sup>29</sup> Letters and journals show gendered differences in every aspect of the death experience, while the ethnic dimension of cultural praxis is far less clear. The chapter includes an exploration into the division of gender roles in death practice, and gendered societal expectations in regards to mourning and grieving. Also included is a preliminary investigation into the colonial graveyard, with a special focus on Auckland's Symonds Street Cemetery. Stephen Deed has ably investigated the material culture of New Zealand cemeteries in his unpublished thesis, and my own study draws on his findings. His research demonstrates the ways that gravestones can be read to gain understandings of society, indicating such

---

<sup>27</sup> A paucity of official source material in New Zealand before the 1870s required that the scope be widened to include the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> G. Jonker, 'Death, Gender and Memory' in *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*, D. Field, J. Hockey and N. Small, eds, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 187-201.

factors as the importance of ethnicity. ‘The houses of the dead, like the houses of the living’, Deed argues, ‘were a perfect expression of the reality, hopes, dreams, beliefs, and ideals of nineteenth century New Zealand’.<sup>30</sup>

This thesis concludes with an exploration into the world of personal grief, taking as its source the journal of a migrant who used diary writing as a way to work through his personal mourning experience. Peter Stearns has insisted that ‘aspects of emotional experience are legitimate subjects for historical enquiry’ that can help to push social history in new directions.<sup>31</sup> Chris Hilliard writes: ‘There is more to life than material life, but New Zealand historians have tended to keep their distance from research on emotion, self-presentation and self-understanding, the quotidian habits of thought and belief.’<sup>32</sup> This thesis reflects upon the emotional struggles experienced by grieving families and individuals, with awareness of the flexible and fluid definitions of grief and mourning. It is a study concerned with both the act, and the practical aftermath of death, as well as the ‘anatomy of private grief’.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Difficulty in disaggregating official figures by place of origin has proved a methodological problem. While the Irish are more often subcategorised in official statistics, the Scots are invariably grouped with the English as ‘British’ migrants.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Deed, ‘Unearthly Landscapes: The Development of the Cemetery in Nineteenth Century New Zealand’ (MA thesis, University of Otago, 2004), p. 59.

<sup>31</sup> P.N. Stearns and C.Z. Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards’, in *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), p. 814.

<sup>32</sup> Chris Hilliard ‘Colonial Colonization and National Identity’ in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36:1 (April 2002), p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> McFarland, p. 44.

# CHAPTER ONE

## DEATHWAYS AMONG THE SCOTTISH WORKING CLASSES, 1840-50

This chapter explores aspects of life and death among the Scottish working classes, with a focus on the urban communities from which large numbers of settlers to New Zealand hailed.<sup>1</sup> The chapter begins with an examination of the poor living conditions among the lower classes which led to disproportionately high mortality rates for endemic and epidemic disease. Patterns of life expectation and death are first surveyed, and then investigated for meaning. Key topics for focus are child mortality and the burial club schemes which were a form of life insurance that developed among the Scottish poor, and were often the only thing keeping families from a pauper's grave. The issue of human dissection relates directly to the experience of the lower classes and it will be argued that the practice of supplying the medical schools with the bodies of paupers for dissection contributed to the complex of push factors for migration. This chapter also aims to uncover customs relating to death practices in nineteenth century Scotland that might be translated into the colonial context. Aspects of the diverse pre-migration death practices among Scottish communities are investigated, with a focus on the waking tradition. Scotland underwent vast economic and social changes during the course of the nineteenth century, and attitudes to death and burial changed with them. The rapid increase in urbanisation meant that death became a 'problem' to be dealt with by town planners and city officials, rather than a natural process managed by families and communities. This chapter concludes with a discussion on burial reform and the movement away from the traditional kirkyard burial grounds, to managed, landscaped cemeteries.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of the early period of settlement. A considerable number of migrants to New Zealand in the 1840s had first experienced internal migration within Britain and Ireland, and in particular from rural to urban areas.

In her book *Death in the Victorian Family*, Pat Jalland examines Christian mourning customs and ideas among the upper-middle classes in Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century. She identifies the concept of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths which came to be collectively understood among Christian denominations.<sup>2</sup> A ‘good’ death was slow and protracted, where the dying had time to make peace with God. It required piety and the courageous acceptance of physical pain and suffering. Ideally the ‘good’ death would take place in the presence of a Christian family and conclude with significant and moving final words.<sup>3</sup> Jalland notes that few deaths fitted into this idealised model in practice. Nevertheless, the concept of a ‘good’ death was widely employed to allay the fear of dying and to provide solace for the bereaved. On the other side of this dichotomised model was the ‘bad’ death. Death which was sudden, or preceded by insensibility, was often consigned to this category. Such a death provided no time for the unbeliever to repent and turn to God, and left the believer to meet their maker with the stain of sin still upon them.<sup>4</sup> Until the late Victorian period the belief that death was divinely ordained was strong, and for many, submission to God’s will was an unquestionable ordinance. Allied to such beliefs was the conviction that divine judgement at death was absolute, and the mid-century Victorians of Jalland’s study thought earnestly about such matters. Jalland’s intentional focus is upon the predominantly Anglican upper-middle classes, and specifically ‘the educated and literate part of the population’.<sup>5</sup> Her model becomes increasingly problematic though when applied to the working classes, who made up the majority of the Scottish population in 1840. Indeed, Jalland concedes that cultures of death in Victorian Britain were class-bound and warns against an assumption that the behaviour and beliefs about death among the middle and upper classes ‘automatically filtered down to the working classes’.<sup>6</sup> Among the many who occupied the lower classes, abject poverty and deprivation, and dangerous working environments, made death a constant

---

<sup>2</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Jalland, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Jalland, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Jalland, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jalland, p. 1.

reality.<sup>7</sup> Familiarity with the sickness and death so prevalent in the crowded and squalid industrial cities and smaller towns led to a different blend of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours among the labouring classes. The raw intensity of grief and mourning may have been experienced similarly but the intricate formalities of the upper-middle classes were a far cry from the actualities of death among the Scottish poor. Jalland's model is useful for historians of working class culture nonetheless, and needs to be understood in order to read against the grain of the middle-class texts that attempt to codify and explain ideal cultural expectations and attitudes to death for dissemination among the lower classes.

The cramped conditions of a working-class home, of necessity, meant living with both the dying and the dead. A certain demystification of the dying process would be inevitable at this proximity, and the stark reality of sharing a home with one dying without the benefit of pain relieving drugs would hardly be conducive to any romanticising of the process. Moreover, the practice of retaining the corpse in the home for the period of a wake could well give rise to 'pungent odours and visible signs of festering'.<sup>8</sup> A common result of attempts by families to raise funeral expenses was that bodies were sometimes kept unburied for lengthy periods. Sunday funerals became an expedient among the working classes who could little afford to lose a working day. In 1842 the *Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns* alleged that:

At present the poor bury almost entirely on the Sunday, and frequently if a person dies on the Wednesday, if they have not time to make the arrangements prior to the Sunday following, they keep that body perhaps till the Sunday next proceeding. I have frequently known a body kept on the table or the bed in a poor man's room; perhaps he is living in that room, sleeping there, and performing all the usual and necessary offices of the family with his wife and five or six children. I have often wished for an absolute power to compel the burying of those bodies.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Endemic and epidemic disease, inadequate diet, poor housing, and workplace accidents among men, women and children working in the mines, factories, and workshops contributed to the disproportionately high mortality rate among the Scottish working classes.

<sup>8</sup> Julie Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Health of Towns*, June 1842, cited in J. Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 26.

A writer for *The Lancet* estimated in 1895 that during summer a fresh corpse would begin to smell rancid after only twelve hours.<sup>10</sup> Such a situation may well have led to a pragmatic and unsentimental culture of grief, at least in the immediate stages after a death. Yet, while conceding that poverty necessitated a certain degree of practicality and pragmatism when dealing with death in the family, Julie Marie Strange argues convincingly that ‘the apparent candour and resignation of the working classes’ should not be viewed as indifference.<sup>11</sup> Contemporary accounts written by middle and upper class Victorians suggest that working class attitudes to the dead were frequently viewed by social commentators in a negative light. In 1843 ‘a benevolent clergyman’ reported disparagingly to Edwin Chadwick that while within the upper classes a corpse generated feelings of awe and respect, in the lower classes, ‘it is often treated with as little respect as the carcass in a butcher’s shop.’ Household items were rested on it, and children ‘pulled it about’, resulting in the removal of the ‘wholesome fear of death which is the last hold upon a hardened conscience.’<sup>12</sup> This earthy, unromantic approach to the corpse reflected a different world view that proved difficult for upper and middle class commentators to comprehend.

*The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, compiled by Edwin Chadwick in 1842, suggests that life for a member of a working-class family in Scotland was bleak, vulnerable, and often extremely short.<sup>13</sup> The Bill of Mortality for Glasgow for 1838 shows that from a total population of 263,000 there were 6,932 deaths in that year. Of these, 1,347 died within the first year of life, and 3,135 (almost half the total number) died before the age of five.<sup>14</sup> The previous year, Dr Robert Cowan, who was Professor of Medicine at Glasgow University and acted as an advisor to Chadwick on the state of the Scottish labouring classes, commented that the mortality bill for 1837 exhibited ‘a rate of mortality inferring an intensity of

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Lancet*, cited in Strange, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Strange, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Edwin Chadwick, *Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns 1843*, cited in Morley, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Edwin Chadwick, *The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, edited by M.W. Flinn, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965)

<sup>14</sup> T. Ferguson, ‘Public Health in Britain in the Climate of the Nineteenth Century’, in *Population Studies*, 17:3 (March 1964), p. 214.

misery and suffering unequalled in Britain, and not surpassed in any towns we are acquainted with on the Continent of Europe.’<sup>15</sup> Indeed, after thorough investigation, Chadwick himself concluded that, ‘on the whole, it appeared to us that both the structural arrangements and the condition of the population in Glasgow was the worst of any we had seen in any part of Great Britain.’<sup>16</sup> It must be remembered that Glasgow had a combination of problems. It was a centre of the textile trade, which was in deep depression in the 1840s, and like so many of the towns in the western Lowlands, it was host to migrants from both Ireland and parts of the Highlands, areas which were among the poorest in the British Isles. Sixteen per cent of Glasgow’s population in 1841, were actually Irish-born, though if those of Irish extraction were included, the number of the city’s inhabitants of Irish descent would probably equal close to one in three.<sup>17</sup> The presence of recent migrants inevitably increased pressure on the already overcrowded slum areas, and added to Glasgow’s notoriety as the unhealthiest city in Britain.<sup>18</sup>

T.C. Smout’s in-depth study of the Scottish working-classes shows that an unskilled labourer’s wage, across Scotland, could frequently fall to less than half that of an artisan: ‘[I]n north Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and Dunbartonshire in 1843 the “lowest class of labourer” was earning about 6s. 6d. a week, in an area where the average farm labourer earned about 10s., and colliers and artisans 15s.’<sup>19</sup> Even the jobs of skilled workers and artisans were never secure, and in fact these groups suffered intensely during the periodic trade depressions. Great numbers of families in the industrial towns of Scotland existed close to the margins of destitution, a situation aggravated by the fact that the Scottish Poor Law denied the able-bodied unemployed any legal right to relief. Where seasonal unemployment was standard, a sufficiency of food was generally lacking. Even in times of employment it was customary for the men of the

---

<sup>15</sup> Robert Cowan, *Vital Statistics of Glasgow, 1838*, p. 45, cited in Michael Flinn, ed, *Scottish Population History: From the Seventeenth Century to the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 372.

<sup>16</sup> Chadwick, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> T.M. Devine, ‘Urbanisation’, in *People in Society, Volume 1: 1760-1830*, edited by T.M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> Devine, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 22.

household to be given any meat and the largest portions in general, while mothers and daughters shared out the scraps between them.<sup>20</sup> Undernourishment drastically reduced the body's defences against infection, and in the deteriorating health conditions of this era, unemployment could well be a death sentence. Families of labourers and artisans alike would be enlisted to work in the domestic trades, and young children sent out to work in factories or workshops to top up the man's basic wage. Smout concludes:

Unskilled workers and their families, therefore, saved little, accumulated little in their homes, led a domestic life fractured by the treadmill of toiling for a subsistence, and tended to be comparatively illiterate. Their house was in a slum area, their food mainly potatoes and meal unless scrag ends of meat had to be purchased for the man to keep up his strength during a navvying job. Their future was depressing, and pointed downwards to a pauper's grave as their physical energy gave out.<sup>21</sup>

A continual focus of public concern was on the circumstances of those occupying the great industrial towns. Glasgow was by far the largest of these, its population, at 275,000 in 1841, was twelve times as large as it had been in 1775, and between 1831 and 1841 it grew by more than one-third.<sup>22</sup> The *Reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Scotland*, produced under the direction of Edwin Chadwick as a companion to his *British Reports*, brought to light the realities of life in the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Dr Alexander Miller, a gynaecologist attached to the Royal Dispensary in central Edinburgh, spoke to Chadwick and his investigators on housing conditions among the 'poorer class'. He reported:

The dwellings of the poor are generally very filthy. ... Those of the lowest grade often consist only of one small apartment, always ill-ventilated, both from the nature of its construction and from the densely peopled and confined locality in which it is situated. Many of them, besides, are damp and partly underground. ... A few of the lowest poor have a bedstead, but by far the larger portion have none; these make up a kind of bed on the

---

<sup>20</sup> Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1983), p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Smout, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Smout, p. 8.

floor with straw, on which a whole family are huddled together, some naked and the others in the same clothes they have worn during the day.<sup>23</sup>

The shocking rates of death by disease were directly related to living conditions in Chadwick's view. He writes:

The old part of the town was built long before the importance of drainage was understood in Britain, and in the unchanged parts there is none but by the open channels in the streets, wynds, and closes or courts. ... Another defect is the great size and height of the houses (some of them exceeding ten stories), with common stairs, sometimes as filthy as the streets or wynds to which they open. By this construction the chance of cleanliness is lessened, the labour of carrying up necessaries, and particularly water for the purposes of purifying is increased; and if any malaria or contagion exist in the house, the probability of its passing from dwelling to dwelling on the same stair is much greater than if there were no communication but through the open air. ... The facts here referred to go far to explain why fatal fever has been more common in Edinburgh than from other circumstances would have been anticipated.<sup>24</sup>

The sense of crisis surrounding the industrial towns and cities was fuelled by outbreaks of cholera in 1832, 1848 and 1853, and typhus, which reached epidemic proportions in 1837 and 1847.<sup>25</sup> The first of the typhus epidemics pushed mortality figures in Glasgow sixty per cent above normal levels, while the second, in 1847, temporarily doubled the mortality rate.<sup>26</sup> While conclusive data were not available at the time of Chadwick's *Report*, he nevertheless considered that he had enough evidence to surmise that 'the mortality from fever is greater in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee than in the most crowded towns in England.'<sup>27</sup> Mass graves were a depressing feature of these epidemics. The *New Statistical Account* for the town of Dumfries describes the common graves made there during the 1832 cholera epidemic, showing that high death tolls from disease were not confined to the largest cities.<sup>28</sup> Two rows of large pits were

---

<sup>23</sup> *Reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Scotland* (House of Lords Papers, 1842, Vol. 28), p. 156, cited in Smout, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Chadwick, pp. 98-99.

<sup>25</sup> Smout, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> M. Anderson and D.J. Morse, 'The People' in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 2, 1830-1914*, edited by W. Hamish Fraser and R.J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Chadwick, p. 78. Returns of the Registrar-General for Scotland were not in fact published until 1855.

<sup>28</sup> Dumfries was particularly hard hit in this epidemic, losing, in just 88 days, twice as many from cholera as they could expect to lose from all other causes in a year. Flinn et al, *Scottish Population History*, p. 370.

dug in an unoccupied part of the churchyard, into which coffins were stacked, each one being covered with a layer of quicklime. When the coffins reached about two feet of the surface, each pit was filled with lime and earth.<sup>29</sup> A memorial, erected at a later date, lists some four hundred and twenty bodies interred there.<sup>30</sup>

Chadwick was not slow to pick up on the sense of recklessness that appeared to be a feature of urban dwellers living under such conditions:

The familiarity with the sickness and death constantly present in the crowded and unwholesome districts appears to re-act as another concurrent cause in aggravation of the wretchedness and vice in which they are plunged. ... All the districts I visited, where the rate of sickness and mortality was high, presented, as might be expected, a proportionate amount of severe cases of destitute orphanage and widowhood; and the same places were marked by excessive recklessness of the labouring population ... If we might rely on the inquiries made of working-men when Dr. Arnott and I went through the wynds of Edinburgh, their consumption of spirits bore almost the like proportion to the consumption of wholesome food.<sup>31</sup>

While the majority (sixty five per cent) of the Scottish population did not live in the larger towns and cities, housing conditions in small towns, industrial villages, and rural parts of Scotland could be equally dire. As Smout reports:

The decaying black houses of the Hebrides, the damp earth-floored cottages on a Lowland estate, and the open sewers between the rows of one-roomed brick houses in the rural coal-fields were as characteristic of Scottish working-class homes as the single-end in the Gorbals.<sup>32</sup>

The 'black houses' in particular, became notorious nesting places for tuberculosis when migrant workers returned home after labouring in the cities and towns.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> *New Statistical Account, Dumfries*, cited in Ann Gordon, *Death is for the Living* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1984), p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, p. 121.

<sup>31</sup> Chadwick, p. 198.

<sup>32</sup> Smout, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> T.C. Smout, *The Social Condition of Scotland in the 1840s: The Dow Lecture* (Dundee: University of Dundee, 1981), p. 6. See also Michael Flinn et al, *Scottish Population History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 414.

Infant and child mortality rates were an important impetus for reformers of the early Victorian period. Of particular interest was the number of children dying who were under ten years of age. In 1861 this cohort made up fifty-four per cent of all deaths in Glasgow.<sup>34</sup> Figures collected for the years 1861 to 1870 show that tuberculosis, whooping cough, and diarrhoea and dysentery accounted for the highest number of child deaths.<sup>35</sup> In his report to Chadwick, Glasgow's Medical Officer of Health, Dr J.B. Russell, showed concern for the families of young children whose deaths were so numerous in this environment. He said:

[t]heir little bodies are laid on a table or on a dresser so as to be somewhat out of the way of their brothers and sisters, who play and sleep and eat in their ghastly company. From beginning to rapid-ending, the lives of these children are short ... One in every five of all who are born there never see the end of their first year.<sup>36</sup>

However, children had more to contend with than the very real threat of 'fever'. Respiratory disease and accidents were rife among those working in the mills, mines and factories. For vast numbers of Scottish children, their working life began early indeed. Althorp's Act of 1833 had set down a minimum age of nine years for the employment of children in cotton mills. In Scotland though, the effects of this Act were seriously undermined by the absence of civil registration of births before 1855. Families of unskilled labourers could not afford to keep their children from working if there was work available, and until civil registration it was impossible to prove the age of a child if it ever came into question. It has been suggested that despite further legislation, namely the Mines Act of 1842 and the Factory Act of 1863, child labour may well have increased in the third quarter of the century as industry itself increased.<sup>37</sup>

Where work was not readily available, infanticide seems to have been an expedient in desperate situations. Strange contends that in Britain the issue of infanticide, along with fears about white slavery, was a recurrent moral panic

---

<sup>34</sup> Flinn et al, table 5.5.4, p. 379.

<sup>35</sup> Flinn et al, Table 5.6.7, pp. 404-05.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in T. Ferguson, *Scottish Social Welfare, 1864-1975* (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 104, cited in Smout, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Smout, p. 95.

during the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the 1840s both the popular and medical press gave extended coverage to the issue. By the following decade infanticide was decried as ‘the great social evil of our day’ and, notably, was said to be ‘alarmingly prevalent’ in Scotland.<sup>39</sup> Figures for infanticide are notoriously difficult to obtain. Official figures suggest that the most common characteristic among female protagonists was an unmarried status, however, the figures almost certainly distort the reality. Writing about the practice in an earlier period, J.A. Sharpe argues that infanticide within marriage was prevalent, though difficult to detect. The unmarried mother might have to conceal pregnancy and labour, and do away with her child immediately, in order to avoid suspicion. Within a family though, an extra child dying through wilful neglect could be more easily covered up.<sup>40</sup>

The issue of burial insurance for children was often associated with infanticide by contemporary writers. If a child was deemed to have died of natural causes at least three months after a policy was taken out, that policy could pay up to three times the cost of the most basic of burials. Contemporary commentators held that families would insure their children in several clubs to increase benefits.<sup>41</sup> R. Sauer quotes a minister who certainly held this view. He reported: ‘the very fact of a child being in one of these burial clubs, so publicly known is the practice, gave sufficient evidence of its early demise to the neighbours; “Aye, aye, that child will not live, it is in the burial club!” was a common and heartless expression.’<sup>42</sup>

The working classes, both urban and rural, responded to their circumstances in a variety of ways. The shared experience of economic insecurity fostered

---

<sup>38</sup> Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain*, p. 230.

<sup>39</sup> J.A. Easton, *Contributions to Legal Medicine: Being Observations on the Medical Jurisprudence of Infanticide* (Edinburgh, 1852), p. 3, cited in R. Sauer, ‘Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth Century Britain’, in *Population Studies*, 32:1 (March 1978), p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London and New York: Longman, 1974) p. 109.

<sup>41</sup> Sauer, p. 87. Sauer contends that one child was supposedly enrolled in 19 different insurance groups.

<sup>42</sup> William Burke Ryan, *Infanticide: Its Laws, Prevention, and History* (London, 1862), p. 21, cited in Sauer, p. 88. For further discussion on this topic see L. Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain, 1800-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) p. 148; T.Ferguson, ‘Public Health in the Nineteenth Century’, p. 221; and Strange, p. 235-8.

networks of mutual aid among communities. The burial clubs and friendly societies were an important part of these networks, becoming increasingly popular from the 1830s. In addition to the registered societies, such as the Scottish branches of the 'Oddfellows', or the 'Free Gardeners', there were 'many thousand' small unregistered burial clubs and collection societies. By 1874 the total membership of friendly societies throughout Scotland was between 250,000 and 400,000.<sup>43</sup> As Thomas Lacqueur writes: 'If the Victorian working class saved for anything, it saved for death'.<sup>44</sup> Premiums of a few pence per head were paid to collectors going from door to door. Depending on the policy, this might ensure not only financial and medical help during periods of sickness, and a pension in old age, but crucially, it would cover the cost of a respectable funeral and burial.

*The Report on the Mortality Bills for the City of Glasgow 1851* suggests that the number of pauper burials rose in the 1840s, reaching twenty-six per cent of total burials in 1849.<sup>45</sup> The ability to save money for a private grave 'became the locus of enormous anxiety', according to Lacqueur, because the economy of the pauper burial condemned an individual to 'dying bereft of the final signs of communal membership'.<sup>46</sup> In this way the pauper funeral became the 'final stamp of failure'.<sup>47</sup> Not only was a burial 'on the parish' held to lack dignity and respect for the dead; it also ensured that the entire family was tarnished with the social degradation of their pauper status.

The deep antipathy towards pauper burial was linked to fluid notions of respectability. Certain of these ideas were fuelled by the scandals relating to body-snatching which had culminated in the passage of the Anatomy Act 1832. This controversial piece of legislation allowed the bodies of paupers, who were unclaimed by family, to be sent to the anatomy schools for use in training

---

<sup>43</sup> Margaret Bennett, *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), p. 283.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Lacqueur, 'Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals' in *Representations*, 1:1 (February 1983), p. 110.

<sup>45</sup> Elaine McFarland, 'Researching Death, Mourning and Commemoration in Modern Scotland' in *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 24:1 (2004), p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> Lacqueur, p. 117.

<sup>47</sup> Lacqueur, p. 120.

surgeons in the art of dissection. Ruth Richardson's research into the Anatomy Act uncovers the intensity of the fear of pauperism among the British working classes.<sup>48</sup> From the early 1700s, and reaching a peak in the early nineteenth century, as medicine began to be professionalised, the trade in human body parts became an increasingly pervasive and lucrative activity. Richardson writes:

Corpses were bought and sold, they were touted, priced, haggled over, negotiated for, discussed in terms of supply and demand, delivered, imported, exported, transported. Human bodies were compressed into boxes, packed in sawdust, packed in hay, trussed up in sacks, roped up like hams, sewn in canvas, packed in cases, casks, barrels, crates and hampers; salted, pickled or injected with preservative. They were carried in carts and wagons, in barrows and steam-boats; manhandled, damaged in transit, and hidden under loads of vegetables. They were stored in cellars and on quays. Human bodies were dismembered and sold in pieces, or measured and sold by the inch.<sup>49</sup>

The only legal source of corpses for dissection, until the passage of the Anatomy Act, had been the gallows - a supply which was unable to keep up with the demand from the expanding numbers of anatomy schools.<sup>50</sup> In London, for example, in 1831, the number of cadavers made legally available amounted to eleven, this, in a year when over nine hundred men were studying anatomy in the city.<sup>51</sup> The aristocracy and the very wealthy ensured that their dead were buried in vaults and private chapels, in lead-lined coffins, with paid guardians to watch over their remains. The bodies of the poor, on the other hand, were particularly vulnerable to 'body snatching' in their flimsy coffins and unguarded graves. Furthermore, the vulnerability of the poorest in society rendered them most at risk of being murdered for the money that their corpses could fetch from a largely unquestioning medical fraternity.

In Scotland, for those who could afford it, a 'mortsafe' was often built around the grave site to discourage grave robbery. This contraption consisted of an iron

---

<sup>48</sup> Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

<sup>49</sup> Richardson, p. 72.

<sup>50</sup> Ruth Richardson, 'Why Was Death So Big in Victorian Britain?', in *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, edited by Ralph Houlbrooke (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 106.

<sup>51</sup> Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), p. 11.

grid or cage which encased the coffin, or was set in mortar above ground. Several of these still remain in Greyfriars churchyard in the centre of Edinburgh.<sup>52</sup> Parish dead-houses also became a feature at this time, where for a fee, coffins were stored under guard for long enough that putrefaction would render their corpses unfit for dissection.<sup>53</sup> Those without recourse to such protection did their best to ensure their dead remained where they had been laid to rest, even if this meant simply mixing straw and sticks into the earth returned to the grave, making it difficult to dig into.<sup>54</sup>

The pervasiveness of fears surrounding grave robbery is made evident in the memoirs of William Smith who spent most of his adult life gold mining in colonial New Zealand. A significant memory of his nineteenth-century Scottish childhood in the village of Darvel in Ayrshire, centred on the fear of body snatching. He writes:

I remember the children and even grown-up people were very much terrified through the reports of body-snatching, which was supposed to be a common practice. ... To safeguard the cemeteries from these depredations, night-watch was taken by the people, and consequently great stories got abroad, in many cases based on imagination. I remember we youngsters would not go out after dark for fear of meeting the body-snatchers, who, we were told went through the town with horse and cart, with rubber shoes and rubber tyres, so that they could not be heard.<sup>55</sup>

Ostensibly enacted to counter the illegal trade in body parts, the Anatomy Act sanctioned the dissection of any corpse that remained unclaimed by friends or family. The vast majority of such bodies were collected from poor houses throughout Britain. In many cases the corpses of paupers remained unclaimed not because they were without family, but simply because their families were destitute themselves and were unable to cover the expense of burying them. Over the course of the first century of the Anatomy Act's application, 57,000

---

<sup>52</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p.81.

<sup>53</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 82

<sup>54</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> William Smith, 'Reminiscences of a Long and Active Life by an Old Colonist', Number 23, p. 1, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 2, Numbers 20-24.

bodies were dissected in the London Anatomy schools alone.<sup>56</sup> The Act had provided the anatomists with a plentiful new source of material for dissection, but in so doing ‘transferred a centuries-old feared and hated punishment for the crime of murder, to that of poverty’.<sup>57</sup>

An unmarked burial in a pit with twenty or more others was an indication of social failure, but the idea of dissection added another level of horror to the idea of pauperism. Though legal requirements provided that after dissection and dismemberment all body parts were to be labelled and buried under a basic Christian service, lay belief held that those who were not buried with their bodies whole, could not rise from the grave whole on the Day of Judgement. Such convictions acted as a powerful momentum to protests that took place *en masse* in conjunction with high-profile cases of body-snatching, such as that of Burke and Hare’s trial in Edinburgh, and later after the passage of the Act itself.<sup>58</sup> The strength of feeling evident in these large scale protests belies the notion that the very poor were unmoved by death.

Nevertheless, contemporaries surveying the working classes approached their subject from a preconceived idea that poverty and high mortality rates dulled the capacity for grief and early historians tended to share this position. Bertram Puckle’s investigation of early British funeral customs, written in 1926, adheres strongly to the popular view that the poorer classes held concerns about ‘respectability’ over those of genuine grief or concern for the dead. He writes:

It is in the highest, and again the lowest grades of the social scale (always the last to be touched by the tide of progress) that mourning is insisted on with a rigour which is simply fanatical. In the case of the poor one is left wondering where the money comes from to pay for the luxury of grief. When the cold hand of death is laid on the small wage-earner whose family has subsisted from week to week on his slender takings, often enough the last shilling in the house has been gone to provide some urgent necessity during his illness. Hardly is the toil-worn body cold when the whole family as if by some miracle, appear in new black dresses, and the

---

<sup>56</sup> Richardson, ‘Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain’, p. 117.

<sup>57</sup> Richardson, ‘Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain’, p. 114.

<sup>58</sup> The demand for body parts inevitably led some to murder for the money that could be obtained from the bodies. In 1829 William Burke and William Hare committed 16 murders and delivered the victims’ corpses to the Edinburgh anatomist Dr Robert Knox for payment. After execution, the dissection of Burke’s body was made open to public exhibition.

widow is swathed in the customary crape. How is it done, we ask in astonishment, in view of the fact, that to refit any one member of the family in ordinary circumstances at a short notice would be considered as a financial problem quite outside the scope of their resources. Well, it *is* done, *somehow*. You may see the “impossible” performed a hundred times a year in any poor neighbourhood.<sup>59</sup>

The fashion for mourning dress or ‘mournin’s’ had developed into a burgeoning industry throughout Britain in the 1840s, spawning a new trade dedicated to the manufacture of mourning paraphernalia. Ann Gordon cites an 1839 inventory of funeral equipment held at Edinburgh’s St Cuthbert’s Church which records the range of items considered essential for a city funeral and available for hire. It included:

A large press for holding ‘Batonmen’s Hates and Mutes’ Mountings and Batons, 16 Batons with green baize covers, 2 Poles with black silk mountings for Mutes, 2 cloaks, 2 cocked and 2 flat hats, 12 velvet caps, a band box containing 12 white linen bands for Hats, 2 white silk rosettes, 4 white silk knots, 4 crape knots and 2 linen cravats. A box containing seven sets of black silk ribbons, 9 in each set; and 3 old sets. 5 sets of white silk ribbons, 9 in each set; and one set narrow ribbons, 9 in it, and 2 odd ones, and one set narrow ribbons, 8 in it.’<sup>60</sup>

Central to this market was the undertaker, or ‘Dismal Trader’, as he became known. The latter title is suggestive of the negative light in which the undertaker was cast by his contemporaries. Perhaps characteristically, Bertram Puckle writes:

A foolish display of wealth to uphold the family honour is a very old human failing, particularly at the time of death. What is merely a vulgarity in the rich is apt to have serious consequences when indulged in by the needy, whose natural love of ostentation and display is carefully nurtured by the ‘Dismal Trade’.<sup>61</sup>

The ‘decent’ nineteenth-century Scottish funeral was what Richardson refers to as ‘a composite ritual’.<sup>62</sup> Other than the ceremonial accoutrements, as described above, and the religious service if there was to be one, most of its components

---

<sup>59</sup> Bertram Puckle, *Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1926), p. 95.

<sup>60</sup> Ann Gordon, *Death is for the Living* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1984), p. 74-75.

<sup>61</sup> Puckle, p. 87.

were provided for within the community. Secular rituals included the ‘laying out’ of the corpse, watching, waking and visiting. While the undertaker’s work was concerned primarily with funerary display, the practical work of dealing with the dead was carried out by the ‘howdy’, the local woman who specialised in birth and death. In areas where no howdy was available, the job fell to the women of the household.<sup>63</sup> The preparation of the corpse for the grave was generally referred to as ‘laying-out’ or ‘streeking’. It involved closing the eyes and mouth, washing the corpse, sealing its orifices (often with herbs), straightening the limbs, and dressing in the ‘dead cla’es’ which could be a nightgown, a ‘winding sheet’, or a shroud. These rituals were a complex of practical and spiritual concerns. Closing of the eyelids was the first task to be attended to, ostensibly to avoid the omen in which a corpse’s stare presents a risk to its kin. On a practical level, the eyelids are generally the first parts of a body to set in *rigor mortis*, just before the jaw, about three or four hours after death.<sup>64</sup> The eyelids were closed with pads of wet cotton wool, and sometimes weighted shut with pennies.<sup>65</sup> Following this, the mouth would be closed using a bandage or handkerchief which was passed under the chin and tied at the top of the head. On occasions a Bible propped against the chin is said to have served the same purpose. Men were usually shaved, hair was combed, and nails were cleaned before the corpse was dressed for the wake.<sup>66</sup> A female corpse was positioned with the hands crossed over the breast; the arms of a male were extended at the sides.<sup>67</sup>

Ann Gordon describes the waking tradition among rural Scottish communities in this way:

A lyke was an unburied corpse and the lykewake or late watch was the constant watch over it until burial. ... Originally intended to ward off evil spirits, it was meant to be a solemn decorous occasion, with more emphasis on watching at night than during the day. For ordinary people a lykewake was held each of the two or three nights before the corpse was buried. In the case of the poor, the funeral was held just as soon as the

---

<sup>62</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Gordon, p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Strange, p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Bennett, *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave*, p. 230.

carpenter could make the coffin and such lykewake as they had might be nothing more than a couple of women guarding the corpse from rats and cats.<sup>68</sup>

The lykewake was an opportunity to pay respect to the corpse and to reinforce communal ties for the family. The community might provide extra chairs for the 'watchers' and extra peat to help heat the house through the 'dead days' of the wake.<sup>69</sup> The body was usually laid flat or propped up on the bed or kitchen table. In some regions visitors were expected to touch the corpse on the forehead or the hands, with their left hand, an action which was popularly believed to prevent the guest from being visited in dreams by the deceased.<sup>70</sup>

By all accounts Highland lykewakes were particularly lively affairs, and continued to be so until well into the nineteenth century. The editor of the Records of Inverness and Dingwall Presbytery, writing in 1896, reported: 'They were more boisterous than weddings, the chamber of the dead being filled night after night with jest, song and story, music of the fiddle and the pipe, and the shout and clatter of the Highland reel'.<sup>71</sup> Religious opposition to the customary funeral wake was more effective in the Lowlands where, in the nineteenth century, traditional boisterousness gave way to religious fervour. Historical accounts of Lowland wakes suggest that these were more restrained affairs, with alcohol kept to a minimum and much reading of the Bible. Nonetheless, as Ann Gordon points out, steps taken all around the country to control behaviour at lykewakes throughout the nineteenth century, show that unruly conduct was not just a Northern problem.<sup>72</sup>

Superstition was much in evidence during the traditional waking vigil. Nights were often passed with the exchange of ghost stories and elaborate practical jokes in which the corpse might be animated or even hidden away. The practice of imitating the voice of the deceased was also recorded.<sup>73</sup> Aspects of these waking traditions continued to be carried out in the industrial towns and cities,

---

<sup>68</sup> Gordon, p. 24.

<sup>69</sup> Scottish Funeral Customs, available online at <http://www.fife.50megs.com/scottish-funeral-customs.htm>, accessed 31 March 2006.

<sup>70</sup> Bennett, p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> Gordon, p. 26.

<sup>72</sup> Gordon, p. 26.

as far as finances and physical space might permit, providing an environment where ‘the gamut of human reactions to death’ might, as Richardson suggests, have ‘legitimate expression’. The atmosphere of heightened emotion and ‘cathartic expression’ at a wake may well have ‘aided necessary adjustment to loss, and provided a healthy basis for the social acceptance of bereavement’.<sup>74</sup>

The performance of the ‘kisting’ or ‘chesting’ service was usually the final event of the lykewake. This communal ritual consisted of prayers and the singing of psalms while the body was placed into the coffin. The Kirk had withdrawn from death practice in post-reformation times, when the reformed religion reclassified funerals and burials as purely secular acts. From the sixteenth century, ‘Popish practices’ such as prayers for the dead had been strongly opposed.<sup>75</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century however, the kisting service began again to involve the presence of the local minister, though only in the home and not at the graveside itself.<sup>76</sup> Ecclesiastical involvement was not always approved, Rev. Andrew Edgar, writing in 1886, had this to say:

The coffining of a corpse is no more a religious service than is the washing or dressing of it; and the presence of a minister or elder is not a thing that the law of the church or the nature of the operation requires. It seems to me that ceremonial coffinings, when no practical object is served by them, is an unnecessary stimulant to grief, and though they include a prayer, they might with no disadvantage be abandoned.<sup>77</sup>

The kisting itself was usually performed by relatives, or increasingly by the mid-nineteenth century, by the undertaker. The body was lifted to the coffin supported on ‘death sheets’ kept especially for that purpose. If no such sheets were available, a plank of wood was used to the same purpose.<sup>78</sup> In most areas of Scotland, on leaving the home, the corpse ceased to come under the care of the female members of the family. The ‘lifting’ from the house to the burial

---

<sup>73</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> McFarland, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> The reintroduction of the minister at this ritual began as a direct result of the Scots Linen Act 1686. The presence of an official (often the minister) was required to ensure that the corpse was clothed in the Scots linen required by law. The ecclesiastical dimension slowly developed over the next century. McFarland, p. 26.

<sup>77</sup> Gordon, p. 30.

ground (or to the hearse) was usually carried out by the nearest male relatives. The closest of these was positioned to the left of the head of the coffin, with the next closest of kin on his right hand side.<sup>79</sup> This arrangement varied somewhat in some parts of the Highlands where the chief male mourner walked in front of the coffin and the next closest positioned himself behind it.<sup>80</sup> Gordon writes of an alternative ritual which is highly suggestive of the diversity of regional customs. In 'some parts of north-east Scotland' she says, 'the women carried the corpse the first seventy-eighty yards, then handed over to the men to continue the journey to the graveyard, while they returned to the house for an excellent tea.'<sup>81</sup> Generally, women spent this time at home preparing the after funeral feast or 'dregie', which traditionally included cakes and whisky. Margaret Bennett describes another variant of pall-bearing practice which was carried out in fishing villages throughout Scotland. When a girl or unmarried young woman died, bearers were chosen from among female friends and relatives of her own age. The girls, dressed all in white, would carry the coffin to the grave site.<sup>82</sup>

The drinking of 'the dram' was a custom associated with all parts of the communal mourning process. Alcohol was interwoven into the fabric of Scottish society and was an essential component of the lykewake. The largest quantities though, were reserved for the kisting ceremony and funeral. A dram taken during the funeral procession was referred to as 'taking the breath of the deceased', and there are more than a few reports of inebriated pall bearers falling over and dropping coffins as a result of the ritual.<sup>83</sup> The distribution of the dram was so important to the idea of the 'decent' burial that in some areas Kirk Sessions included a bottle of whisky for the grave diggers as one of the basic provisions for a pauper's burial, along with a coffin and the digging of the grave.<sup>84</sup> Unsurprisingly, contemporary observers had much to say about the

---

<sup>78</sup> Gordon, p. 30.

<sup>79</sup> In some parts of Scotland the tradition was for eight women to take the 'first lift' through the house to the men waiting outside. Scottish Funeral Customs, available online at <http://www.fife.50megs.com/scottish-funeral-customs.htm>, accessed 31 March 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Gordon, p. 60.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon, p. 44.

<sup>82</sup> Bennett, *Scottish Customs*, p. 224.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon, p. 62.

<sup>84</sup> Gordon, p. 42.

cost of such extravagant drinking rituals. In 1840, for example, *The New Statistical Account* for Tiree reported:

It is quite melancholy to consider what sums are thrown away in this manner. There are instances of poor families parting with their last horse or cow to furnish an entertainment of this kind. They reckon it a point of honour to do so; and ... what might have contributed to their support for a twelve-month is wasted in a day to keep up a savage and disgusting custom.<sup>85</sup>

In Scotland, as in England, the graveside funeral and burial are assumed to have been essentially male affairs. However, Gordon's catalogue of Scottish death practices shows this was not necessarily the case. She quotes a report written in the 1840s, in *The New Statistical Account* for the parish of Cross and Burness in Orkney, which 'tells of a graveyard custom peculiar to that parish and not found in other parishes in Orkney', where the next of kin was expected to throw the first spadeful of earth into the grave. She states: 'It is regarded as a sacred duty and is not declined even by the most afflicted widow'.<sup>86</sup> This comment suggests that in some regions at least, women were far from being proscribed, and moreover, took on important roles in the burial of their kin. An 1870 edition of *Cassell's Household Guide* made mention of the tendency among the poorer classes for female relatives to attend the funeral ceremony. It declared:

This custom is by no means to be recommended, since in these cases it but too frequently happens that, being unable to restrain their emotions they interrupt and destroy the solemnity of the ceremony with their sobs, and even by fainting.<sup>87</sup>

Since the early decades of the nineteenth century, the annual increase in the number of corpses to be accommodated put pressure on traditional burial grounds. By mid-century graveyard overcrowding constituted a major public health problem particularly in the larger towns and cities. Drinking water was frequently polluted by cemetery run-off and, according to contemporary theories regarding contagion, the air was being polluted with dangerous miasmas.

---

<sup>85</sup> Gordon, p. 41.

<sup>86</sup> Gordon, p. 99.

<sup>87</sup> Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 221.

Various methods of 'cemetery management' were employed to deal with the numbers of corpses. These included the trenching of graveyards, a practice which involved the exhumation of bodies every few years, and the re-consignment of remains to bone houses or burning grounds. The sale of second-hand coffin furniture became a profitable sideline of such practices.<sup>88</sup>

The habit of interring members of the same family, generation after generation, in the same grave-space meant that despite legislation, graves became increasingly shallow. As a result, those attending funerals were often subjected to the sight of human bones that had been cast up in the process of grave-digging. Gordon quotes a minister of Duthil, Invernesshire, who in the 1870s reported in the Court of Session that he had 'seen in his own parish churchyard piles of coffins and heaps of human bones, sometimes with flesh on them, and that he had witnessed dogs bounding over the fence with some of these flesh-covered bones in their mouths'.<sup>89</sup> The revulsion aroused by the state of urban kirkyards stimulated a cemetery reform movement which led to the setting out of new cemeteries beyond the city boundaries. The Glasgow Necropolis was established in 1832, coinciding with the first of the great cholera epidemics, and less than a year after the publication of John Strang's *Necropolis Glasguensis with Osbervations* [sic] *on Ancient and Modern Tombs and Sepulture* (1831). Firmly influenced by the French necropolis in Pere-Lachaise, Strang called for ornamental cemeteries which could embrace 'economy, security, and picturesque effect'.<sup>90</sup> He felt strongly that the garden cemetery and its 'monumental decoration' would have an uplifting effect on the lower classes. Such things, he held, 'are not only beneficial to public morals, to the improvement of manners, but are likewise calculated to extend virtuous and generous feelings'.<sup>91</sup> His ideas were enthusiastically taken up by civil authorities who described Strang himself as a 'brilliant super-orthodox luminary burning in a dense cloud of Scotch prejudice and Glasgow smoke'.<sup>92</sup> The

---

<sup>88</sup> Jennifer Leaney, 'Ashes to Ashes: Cremation and the Celebration of Death in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in Houlbrooke, p. 119.

<sup>89</sup> Gordon, p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> James Curl, *A Celebration of Death* (London: Constable, 1980), p. 210.

<sup>91</sup> John Strang, *Necropolis Glasguensis with Osbervations* (sic) *on Ancient and Modern Tombs and Sepulture* (Glasgow, 1831), cited in Curl, p. 244.

<sup>92</sup> *Edinburgh Observer*, cited in Curl, p.210.

construction of the Southern Necropolis followed in 1841 and over the next few decades landscaped cemeteries were built near large towns and cities across Britain.

This ‘picturesque landscaping of death’ was championed by Lanarkshire man, John Claudius Loudon, whose treatise *On the Laying Out, Planting and Management of Cemeteries* was published in 1843.<sup>93</sup> The main objective of a burial ground, according to Loudon was of course, ‘the disposal of the remains of the dead in such a manner that their decomposition and return to the earth shall not prove injurious to the living, either by affecting health or by shocking feelings, opinions, or prejudices’. Echoing Strang’s sentiments, he pointed to a secondary objective which was ‘the improvement of the moral sentiments and general taste of all classes and more especially of the great masses of society’.<sup>94</sup>

Whether or not the ‘great masses of society’ were influenced or ‘improved’ by the new landscaped cemeteries is debateable. In a decade which saw the worst vagaries of trade depression, unseasonable weather, crop failure and epidemic, those among the working and artisan classes who looked to ‘improvement’ turned to emigration. For those in the lower classes the act of emigration signalled distinction from the great mass of society. Their entry into passenger lists and emigration records meant that in new ways individuals became named, collated, and inscribed into the historical record. In this way their lived experience became an historical presence.

---

<sup>93</sup> This work was said to have ‘shamelessly plagiarized’ Strang’s *Necropolis Glasguensis*.

<sup>94</sup> J.C. Loudon, *The Gardener’s Magazine*, 1843, p. 93, cited in Curl, p. 245.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ‘AND DOWN SHE SANK TO A SAILOR’S GRAVE’: DEATH AT SEA, 1840-1890<sup>1</sup>

We can never no never forget  
That sad and eventful morn,  
When on the good ship *Clarence* we went  
And carried our youngest born.

How the little one laughed and crowed  
And clapped his hands in glee  
At the cruel waves that proved his shroud  
For we buried our babe at sea.

Midway on the restless deep  
No vessel or land in sight  
We saw from his eyes – fade out and die,  
Their beautiful loving light.

Instead of the churchyard green,  
To the billows deep and wild  
We gave creased in canvas coarse,  
The form of our darling child.

And although no power on Earth  
Our dear little boy could save,  
It’s hard to know that we ne’er can stand  
By his quiet silent grave.

We can never plant bright flowers  
To blossom sweet and free –  
And cover his silent resting place  
For we buried our babe at sea.

William John Paul Fairhead 1874<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Emigrant Thomas Heath wrote a memoir of his voyage from Gravesend to Wellington, New Zealand, in verse. There were many deaths from scarlet fever during the journey, and Heath writes in detail of the first burial which was for ‘one of the single girls, the fairest of them there’. The phrase used in the chapter title refers to this young woman’s sea burial. Thomas Heath, ‘The 1875 Voyage to Wellington, New Zealand, in the Clipper *Collingwood*’, reproduced in Bob Molesworth, ed, *The Voyage of the Collingwood 1875, Told by a Ship’s Apprentice and an Emigrant* (Auckland: Polygraphia, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> William John Paul Fairhead, Poem written on death of son aboard ship, 1874, MS – Papers-5490, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Baby Fairhead, one year old, died of malnutrition during the journey from Britain to New Zealand in 1874. A note archived with the poem written by his grieving father records that there were twenty-seven deaths from scarlet fever on board the ship. Coupled with the outbreak of fever, food became scarce and there was 'no milk or water'. The child's mother came dangerously close to death herself, so close in fact that 'sailors brought up canvas to sew her up but she started singing *A Few More Years Shall Roll*. As extraordinary as it seems, the note records that this outburst of song saved her life. The doctor 'allowed her some Brandy' and she duly recovered.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter considers aspects of death and burial at sea from 1840 to 1890, through the analysis of 35 shipboard diaries.<sup>4</sup> Diaries, almost without exception, record the incidences of deaths at sea even when these occurred with monotonous frequency. On occasion though, they do more than record and collate, affording the reader a glimpse of the range of emotional responses of those who witnessed or who otherwise had to deal with death at sea. The diaries are written by men and women, cabin passengers and crew, and those travelling in steerage. It was common practice for emigrants to keep diaries of their journey, often in the form of an open letter addressed to family members left behind. The diaries acted to strengthen links with home and family, as well as alleviating long hours of boredom and loneliness for the writer. The act of writing itself could strengthen an individual's sense of purpose and facilitate a search for meaning.

The ocean voyage between Scotland and New Zealand could take anywhere from three to five months. These months represented a transitional period for individuals and families, and acted as a liminal zone between the old life and the new. Migrants' experiences of death at sea were an important part of this transition, as traditional ideas and practices were challenged by the exigencies of sea burials. Of necessity, the time between death and disposal of the body was

---

<sup>3</sup> Postscript to poem written by William Fairhead, 1874, MS – Papers – 5490, Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>4</sup> I have elected to include the diaries of English as well as Scottish migrants to New Zealand and Australia, both for what they reveal about perceptions of 'Scottishness', and because of the obvious commonalities in both experiences and responses to death at sea.

short. In the case of stillborn infants, and when infectious diseases were aboard, this may have been as little as one hour.<sup>5</sup> The complex traditions of waking and kisting which had served to facilitate the mourning process among Scots in their home communities had to be dispensed with in the cramped space aboard ship. Moreover, many adult patients spent their last days quarantined in the ship's 'hospital' being cared for by a matron and the ship's surgeon rather than their own kin, as they would have been at home. This removal from the dying process often left families with little to comfort them through the difficult process of mourning. There were several modes of reaction to the disruption of the grief process through death at sea. Aside from the negation of traditionally held customs and observances, sea burial provided the family with no fixed place of interment, effectively denying them the comfort of future visits to the graveside. Furthermore, the body of the deceased could never lie in the family grave sites that were to become a feature of colonial graveyards in New Zealand, as they were in Britain and Ireland. On a religious or superstitious level, many migrants still held onto fears concerning resurrection. People witnessed the bodies of the deceased dropped into water teeming with sea-life, protected by nothing but a weighted canvas shroud. Residual beliefs concerning the resurrection of the body and its dependence on corporeal integrity at death, meant that the fear of burial at sea resonated with that of dissection in many minds.

Alfred Lawrence left London for Canterbury, New Zealand in 1874 sailing aboard the *S.S. Atrato*. Thirty-three deaths occurred during the nearly five-month journey. Thirty-two of those were young children who succumbed to outbreaks of croup and measles. Alfred's own child died in the barracks at Plymouth where the family were lodged before embarkation. Witnessing the children of his fellow passengers die, he voiced his thoughts in his diary. His words display a rationality associated with post-Enlightenment sentiments, while acknowledging a deeper human repulsion:

Of course it does not matter where the body is buried whether in the quiet churchyard under a spreading oak tree or beneath the wild sea waves, but

---

<sup>5</sup> Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History 1840-1918* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 24.

still I am always glad [our] dear baby was buried on land as there is something repulsive to the mind of us landsmen in being buried at sea.<sup>6</sup>

Jessie Campbell, sailing aboard the *Blenheim* in 1840, did not have the same consolation when her own child died after two months at sea:

My dear little lamb ... expired this morning at 8 o'clock; she resigned her breath as quietly as if she were going to sleep without the slightest struggle. What would I give to be on shore with her dear little body, the idea of committing it to the deep distresses me very much.<sup>7</sup>

Official aggregates from ships surgeons' reports reinforce the impression of diaries that few immigrant ships arrived in New Zealand waters with their original complement of passengers. Infectious diseases, chronic illness, accidents at sea, dysentery and diarrhoea, and the debilitating effects of constant seasickness on pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers, all took a toll on passenger numbers. Migrants were not unaware of the risks involved. The loss of babies and infants was considered an inevitable consequence of long seaboard journeys. William Usherwood on board the *Beejapore* to Sydney in 1853 expressed a common sentiment when he wrote: 'The ... adults are all in good health, we have lost several children but this was quite expected, being always the case'.<sup>8</sup>

In their quantitative assessment of nineteenth century child mortality on immigrant voyages to Australia, McDonald and Shlomowitz found that the child death rate at sea remained much higher than the land-based rate throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> 'On a typical three-and-a-half month sailing voyage', according to McDonald and Shlomowitz, 'nearly one-quarter of the infants embarked or born on the voyage would have died.'<sup>10</sup> Adult death rates, they

---

<sup>6</sup> A. Lawrence, *Alfred's Diary: Chronicle of a Voyage from Plymouth to NZ Beginning April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1874* (Christchurch: Griffin Press, 1974), diary entry for Sunday 26 April, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Diary of Jessie Campbell reproduced in B. Greenhill and A. Giffard, *Women Under Sail* (Devon: Redwood Press, 1970), p. 59, diary entry for Friday 23 October 1840.

<sup>8</sup> William Usherwood, cited in Robin Haines, *Doctors at Sea: Emigrant Voyages to Colonial Australia* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> John McDonald and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to Australia in the 19th Century' in *Explorations in Economic History Review*, 27 (1990), p. 86.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph Shlomowitz and John McDonald, 'Babies at Risk on Immigrant Voyages to Australia in the Nineteenth Century', in *Economic History Review*, XLIV:1 (1991), p. 86.

argue, were steadily on the decrease, and by the mid-1850s, mortality among adults was no higher at sea than it was on land. For both adults and children, rates of mortality were most strongly connected to length of voyage and degree of crowding.<sup>11</sup> The tonnage of the vessel was an additional factor in infant mortality with more babies and children dying on the bigger ships.<sup>12</sup> Infants faced particular risks from the infectious diseases that were sometimes brought aboard ship, and unsurprisingly these risks were greatly increased if sanitary conditions on the vessel were inadequate.

If the communities on board these ships can be seen as a microcosm of British society, as historians such as Don Charlwood have argued, they were in some aspects at least, an unrepresentative sample.<sup>13</sup> To varying extents, depending on destination and origin and the timing of departures, the age and gender structure and the class base of emigrant populations showed both similarities and differences to sending societies. Emigration processes selected out particular groups of the population, favouring young adults. Medical screening on registration and before departure meant that migrants were often a healthier group than that of the general population and, as Pat Jalland points out, 'few aristocrats or gentry chose to emigrate, and the poorest were actively excluded'.<sup>14</sup> When considered as a select group, mortality rates among adult shipboard populations show themselves to be more significant than McDonald and Shlomowitz argue, as the land-based population with which they are compared naturally included extremely vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the mentally and physically unwell, and the abject poor.

That people chose to emigrate, despite the risks, is an indication not only of their desperation to escape the fear of downward mobility and determination to improve their lives, but also the strength of their hopes for a new future. Approximately two million Scots left their homeland for North America, South

---

<sup>11</sup> McDonald and Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to Australia', Table 7, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> McDonald and Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to Australia', p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Don Charlwood, *The Long Farewell* (Victoria: Allen Lane, 1981)

<sup>14</sup> Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 17.

Africa, Australia and New Zealand between 1830 and 1914.<sup>15</sup> Those who emigrated were, in the main, not those reduced to the lowest state of destitution, but those who feared they might share the fate of the most unfortunate. Emigration, as Marjory Harper suggests, could be ‘either an escape route for the poor and persecuted or an avenue of advancement for the ambitious and adventurous’, though usually ‘a complex fusion of both’.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century there was a plethora of emigration societies set up to assist Scots to find new homes abroad. In 1839, for example, a society was formed among the weaving community of Fenwick in Ayrshire. The society oversaw a ‘constant flow’ of departures to immigrant destinations including Australia and New Zealand. Its constitution reflected a sense of impending crisis and was unequivocal in its expression of the conviction that ‘ordinary folk’ should have the means to improvement, and an escape from the prospect of unemployment, pauperism and starvation. It states:

A fearful gloom is fast thickening over the horizon of our country. Every prospect of comfort to the working man is daily becoming darker and more dreary. Trade and manufacturers are rapidly leaving our shores and, to all appearance, a crisis is at hand in which the sufferings of the working class will form a prominent feature.<sup>17</sup>

While the United States and Canada were the destinations of choice for the majority of Scots migrants, New Zealand was aggressively promoted, and by the 1870s the New Zealand government had 73 immigration agents at work in Scotland.<sup>18</sup> While Scots made up roughly ten per cent of Britain’s population, the percentage of Scots among British migrants to New Zealand was perhaps as high as twenty-five per cent.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> M. Anderson and D.J. Morse, ‘The People’ in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 2 1830-1914*, edited by W. Hamish Fraser and R. J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Marjory Harper, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London: Profile, 2004), p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Jim Hewitson, *Far off in Sunlit Places: Stories of the Scots in Australia and New Zealand* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1998), p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Hewitson, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> Rosalind McClean ‘Scottish Emigrants to New Zealand, 1840-1880: Motives, Means and Background’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1990), abstract.

No one passage can stand as a typical experience. The vagaries of weather, the competence of those in charge, and the social makeup of emigrants varied from ship to ship and significantly influenced migrants' experiences of the journey. Shipboard populations varied enormously in their social dynamics. Most diaries reveal strong hierarchical divisions aboard ship, while a few relate relatively liberal attitudes in regard to class compared to most British cities and towns. George Hepburn, travelling in steerage in 1840, found the former to be the case aboard the *Poictiers*:

I shall give you some account of the passengers. First, the captain seems quite a gentleman, walks with his gloves, very haughty, and never speaks to us. The other officers seem very agreeable, but distant. The cabin or poop passengers are gentry, and have no intercourse with any other. The second cabin passengers are also would-be gentlemen, and wish no communication with us steerage passengers, though only separated by a sparred partition.<sup>20</sup>

Alfred Fell, travelling first-class, described similar conditions aboard the *Lord Auckland* en route to Wellington in 1841:

There are one or two of our fellow [first-class] passengers who will go amongst the emigrants and make themselves familiar with them. The captain is very much annoyed at it, as it tends to lower our dignity by familiarity, and, of course, lower the dignity of the ship. ... It is very foolish of them, as we have no business to come in contact with them at all, living in different parts of the ship. I have never spoken to one of them yet.<sup>21</sup>

First and second cabin passengers were accommodated in the upper deck, while assisted passengers in steerage, who generally made up about eighty-five per cent of the whole, were housed dormitory-style in the lower deck immediately above the cargo hold. In 1854, *The Times* published a highly emotive first-hand account of the experience of steerage passengers on emigration ships:

The emigrant is shown a berth, a shelf of coarse pinewood in a noisome dungeon, airless and lightless, in which several hundred persons of both

---

<sup>20</sup> Journal of George Hepburn reproduced in, William Downie Stewart, *The Journal of George Hepburn on His Voyage from Scotland to Otago in 1850* (Dunedin: A.H. Reed, 1934), p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Fell, *A Colonist's Voyage to New Zealand Under Sail in the "Early Forties"* (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1973), pp. 32-33.

sexes and all ages are stowed away, on shelves two feet one inch above each other, three feet wide and six feet long, still reeking from the ineradicable stench left by the emigrants on the last voyage ... After a few days have been spent in the pestilential atmosphere created by the festering mass of squalid humanity imprisoned between the damp and steaming decks, the scourge bursts out, and to the miseries of filth, foul air and darkness, is added the cholera. Amid hundreds of men, women and children, dressing and undressing, washing, quarrelling, fighting, cooking and drinking, one hears the groans and screams of a patient in the last agonies of this plague.<sup>22</sup>

While this is not the only report of its kind, the diaries of those who made the steerage decks their home for the three to five months of the journey seldom contain serious complaints regarding their living conditions. Their own writings generally display a stoic optimism and dark humour. The privileges of cabin passengers were in marked contrast to the privation suffered by those fated to see out the journey in steerage. The experience of those travelling first-class was a world away from the majority in terms of the availability and range of food, privacy, and space. Mortality figures bear witness to the fact that passengers suffered differentially according to class of passage, as well as gender and age. In her research into mortality patterns aboard nineteenth-century immigrant ships to Queensland, Australia, Helen Woolcock calculated that the overall mortality in steerage between 1860 and 1900 was more than three times that for cabin passengers.<sup>23</sup> She also discerns clear differences in the mortality pattern along lines of gender. The actuary of the Scottish Equitable Life Assurance Society noted in 1875 that on government-assisted voyages ‘the extra risk attaching to the voyage is much greater for women than for men’.<sup>24</sup> Woolcock’s evidence shows that married women had ‘consistently higher’ mortality rates than the married men.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, the death rate among married women was four times the rate of that of the single women, who had the lowest mortality rate of any group aboard ship.<sup>26</sup> Almost certainly the added demands of

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, cited in John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969), p.197.

<sup>23</sup> Helen Woolcock, *Rites of Passage: Emigration to Australia in the Nineteenth Century*, (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986), Table 9.2, p. 274.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Haines and Schlomowitz, ‘Explaining the Modern Mortality Decline’, in *Social History of Medicine*, 11:1(1998), p. 6; cited also in Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> Woolcock, p. 277.

<sup>26</sup> Woolcock, p. 274. Single women were a carefully controlled and protected group, and kept apart from other passengers and crew throughout the journey.

pregnancy, childbearing, breastfeeding, and nursing sick children, took a toll on the health of married women travelling with their families.

For some, the journey from the old homeland to the new was an exhilarating adventure. Travelling in the relative luxury of his first-class cabin, Alfred Fell opined that, 'by attending to a few little comforts ... (such as extra linen, candles and personal supplies of water) and living in harmony with each other, the voyage to New Zealand, although a long one, nevertheless to a young person may be rendered a very agreeable period of existence.'<sup>27</sup> On most voyages there was dancing and entertainment, although these were not universally appreciated. John Askew good-naturedly recorded the reaction of other passengers to a group of lively Scots aboard the *Anna* in 1852:

During the evenings, several young Scotchmen used to sing in the steerage, for amusement. The songs they sung were principally those of Burns, Tannahill, or Hogg. And the "Banks and braes of bonny Doon," "Jessie the flower of Dunblane," and, 'Meet a bonny lassie when the kye come hame;' were so often sung in such an execrable manner, and without any regard to either time or tune, that they soon became a complete nuisance, and were at last put a stop to by groans and hisses, rattling on water tins and pannikins, till the voices of the serenaders were drowned by the din.<sup>28</sup>

For a few passengers, on well-organised and well-run passages, the quality and quantity of food on board proved to be better than the diet at home. Cabin passengers dined well. Live animals carried on board the ship were destined for their table, and stewards cooked and served their meals. Alfred Fell expressed concern on several occasions that the 'salt-pork in New Zealand' might come as a shock 'after the sumptuous dinners we have on board'.<sup>29</sup> Dining at the Captain's table on a Sunday, he enjoyed:

[A] salmon preserved and as fine as ever I tasted, soup (and sailors make capital soups), a roast goose, a saddle of mutton, a couple of fowls with curry and a Westphalia ham, plum pudding and apple tarts, cheese and bottled porter, champagne and sherry, with dessert consisting of apples, nuts, almonds, raisins, &c.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Alfred Fell, diary entry for Monday 31 January 1842, p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> John Askew, *A Voyage to Australia and New Zealand* (Christchurch: Kiwi, 1999), p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Alfred Fell, diary entry Sunday 24 October 1841, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Fell, diary entry Sunday 31 October 1841, pp. 31-2.

Although a precise dietary scale was laid down for emigrants aboard government-assisted ships, the quality of rations varied considerably from one voyage to another. In more than a few cases, supplies were put aside by dishonest officials to be sold on either before the journey or after arrival in New Zealand. The *Ann Wilson* arrived in Wellington in 1857 after 120 days at sea. There had been eighteen deaths among the 222 emigrants on board, and one further passenger died on landing. The subsequent inquest heard angry complaints about the quantity of food and water, and concluded that mortality had been increased by insufficient and badly cooked food, as well as poor ventilation and a lack of medical comforts.<sup>31</sup> Forty-four disgruntled passengers who had travelled aboard the *Lady Nugent* to Port Nicholson in 1841 wrote a letter of complaint to Colonial William Wakefield of the New Zealand Company, accusing the ship's captain of 'stealing 40 or 50 tons of food ... hidden away to be sold at premium prices when the ship reached port'.<sup>32</sup> This kind of unscrupulous behaviour was probably behind the remarkably high death toll aboard the *Lloyds* which sailed to Nelson in 1841-2. Along with nine cabin passengers, the ship carried 73 adults and 142 children as assisted passengers. Primarily these were the wives and children of men who were surveying and opening up the region for settlers. On the five months of the journey 67 children died of disease and malnutrition. Comparing the New Zealand Company's list of provisions with what actually went on board the *Lloyds*, Barry Buckley highlights some 'large discrepancies':

[A] quarter of the Oatmeal, three-quarters of the Arrowroot, all of the Scotch Barley, and half of the Tinned Milk, as well as all the Sago and Ground Rice, and all of the Preserved Meal was either not placed on board or made available to the emigrants. The tragic thing is that these were all the types of food that would be specifically required for the children and mothers, particularly later on when sickness and death raged through the ship. Even the Stout, which was to be provided in particular for the nursing mothers, and there was upward of 45 of them, had only one eighth of the scheduled amount put onboard.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Henry Brett, *White Wings: Immigrant Ships in New Zealand 1840-1902*, second edition (Wellington: Reid, 1984), p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> Barry Buckley, *Sails of Suffering: The Story of the 'Lloyds' an Original Emigrant Ship to Nelson 1841-1842* (Nelson: Self published, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Buckley, pp. 29-30.

Even when steerage passengers were not given short provisions, the rations, on all but the very best run passages, left much to be desired. When supplies of fresh food ran out, meat rations consisted primarily of salt beef and preserved pork. Excessively salty or mouldy beef was sometimes towed astern in order to 'clean it up', though it was noted in diaries that even sharks were seen to 'swerve away after smelling it'.<sup>34</sup> It was not uncommon for water supplies to be compromised in rough weather when containers were upset, or when there was a shortage of fresh rain water. The drinking water that remained after several months at sea was brackish and foul smelling. While cabin passengers often took a range of cordials with them to make the water palatable, those in steerage had to make do with their weekly ration of lime juice.<sup>35</sup> Steerage passengers also found that the infamous 'ships biscuit' was to feature prominently in their diet. These were reported to be four inches square and at least an inch thick, baked very hard, presumably as a form of preservation, and almost impossible to bite.<sup>36</sup> For some Scots and Irish families who had subsisted on oatmeal and potatoes, the abrupt change in diet to ship's fare caused particular problems. While the victuals were a common subject of complaint among those occupying the lower decks, cases such as the *Lloyds* and the *Ann Wilson* show that the situation could be serious indeed. Infants and children fared poorly when there was simply nothing provided that their digestive systems could cope with. The enforced weaning of infants due to maternal sickness could be fatal in these circumstances.

A complex set of relationships existed between passengers, officers, and crew on each ship. The experience of passengers owed much to the calibre and attitude of the ship's captain. However, the most critical role in ensuring emigrant welfare fell to the ship's surgeon. In her book *Doctors at Sea*, Robin Haines highlights the effectiveness of the 'combined forces of government and medical officers' in reducing mortality upon the government chartered ships that carried immigrants to Australia between 1831 and 1900. Her investigations

---

<sup>34</sup> Gainor W. Jackson, *Settlement by Sail: Nineteenth Century Immigration to New Zealand* (Auckland: GP Publications, 1991), p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> Captain S.B. Sandford, 'Salt-beef and biscuits' in *Nautical Magazine*, Glasgow, 222:1 (July 1979), cited in Don Charlwood, *The Long Farewell* (Victoria: Allen Lane, 1981), p. 194.

suggest that ‘in many ways’ these ships were ‘models of good hygiene and effective health regulation’.<sup>37</sup> While in the main, ship surgeons did their best under extreme circumstances, there were many occasions when these men proved to be inexperienced or simply incompetent. Charlotte MacDonald argues that positions on emigrant ships to New Zealand rated among the least desirable, with low pay and no guarantee of a return ticket. Apart from the few trained medical professionals boarding with the intention of settling in New Zealand, most of those who served as ship surgeons were either on their very first job, or unable to maintain a position elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> John Anderson, travelling in steerage in 1864, considered the surgeon aboard the *City of Dunedin* ‘a very useless fellow, not worth calling doctor’.<sup>39</sup> John’s wife’s sickness was met with little concern or medical attention. He noted in his diary:

Barbara has been very bad today. She is very thin and weak. She has been vomiting a good deal today. I spoke to the doctor about her. He gave her a powder but it did her no good .... I wanted some porter for her but can’t get it without paying one shilling per bottle. There is porter on board for medical stores but it is never seen except in the cabin.<sup>40</sup>

Later, when a number of passengers were in the ship’s hospital suffering from a mysterious ‘affliction of the brain’, the passengers caused ‘a row ... because there was not proper attendance on the patients’.<sup>41</sup> Anderson wrote bitterly in his diary:

The door [to the hospital] is not locked and the doctor orders nobody to attend on them. ... The doctor and captain came down at 10 o’clock and spoke to them, then went on deck again. Never asked if any one was going to attend them or anything. That is the treatment you get on board, if you live you live, and if you die yonder it is all over to them.<sup>42</sup>

The ship surgeon’s first task was to oversee the medical inspection of passengers on embarkation. Such inspections were crucial, yet many diaries show that the surgeon’s examination of emigrants was often cursory, with

---

<sup>37</sup> Robin Haines, *Doctors at Sea*, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Charlotte MacDonald, *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> John Anderson, *Diary of a Passage from Glasgow to Otago, 25 June – 25 September 1864*, transcribed by Marsha Donaldson, 2001, Original at Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-2534, Diary entry for Friday 15 July 1864.

<sup>40</sup> John Anderson, diary entry for Friday 15 July 1864.

<sup>41</sup> John Anderson, diary entry for Thursday 15 September 1864.

<sup>42</sup> John Anderson, diary entry for Tuesday 13 September 1864.

passengers simply required to file past a doctor in a continuous stream. It was at this point that those with observable maladies or deformities were refused passage. Diseases in their incubation period proved more difficult to detect. Haines shows how emigrants flooding into the ports of departure found themselves, often for the first time, in large urban environments where their immune systems were put to the test. Children from remote rural areas were especially susceptible to the infections endemic in large ports, such as measles, whooping cough, and scarlet fever.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as Jeanine Graham suggests, parents might deliberately conceal knowledge of their children's medical condition in order to retain their hard won positions on board.<sup>44</sup>

Those with pulmonary tuberculosis, or consumption as it was commonly termed, were not prevented from boarding, nor indeed were they isolated from other passengers, as the medical aetiology of the day considered consumption to be a generational trait rather than a highly infectious disease. A sea voyage was believed to be of benefit to the consumptive patient - a supposition that was based in part on the idea that the constant purging caused by sea sickness had an advantageous effect.<sup>45</sup>

The ship's surgeon was in charge of matters of routine and discipline. It was his task to enforce the hours of rising, dining and retiring, compulsory bathing, the washing of clothes, and the daily airing of bedding in good weather. The berths below decks were fumigated when necessary with harsh chemical fumigants made from sulphur powder or nitrate of potash, and chloride of lime was used liberally to scrub and scrape out the 'tween decks.

Despite the best efforts of doctors, standards of hygiene were primitive. The passengers' reluctance to use the water closets was heightened by a lack of planning. These were often fitted incorrectly or positioned impractically, and on ships where the only water closets were on the main deck, as on the *Forfarshire*

---

<sup>43</sup> Haines, *Doctors at Sea*, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Jeanine Graham, 'Juvenile Emigration: The Nineteenth Century Experience' in *Proceedings of the 1987 Conference of the New Zealand Genealogists: Immigration* (Wellington, 1987) p. 24. David Hastings cites an example of this in his book *Over the Mountains of the Sea: Life on the Migrant Ships 1870-1885* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006), pp. 212-213.

<sup>45</sup> Haines, *Doctors at Sea*, p. 42.

in 1874, women were left in ‘serious dread’ of having to approach the conveniences in full view of the crew.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, many in steerage were unfamiliar with their use. Jessie Campbell, herself a Scot, was shocked at the actions of a group of Highlanders travelling in steerage. She wrote:

Captain Grey and the doctor complaining woefully of the filth of Highland emigrants, they say they could not have believed it possible for human beings to be so dirty in their habits, only fancy their using the dishes they have for their food for certain other purposes at night, the Dr seems much afraid of fever breaking out among them, this would really be a judgement on us, poor as I am no consideration on earth would tempt me to trust my little family in a ship with Highland emigrants if I still had the voyage before me.<sup>47</sup>

Don Charlwood, in his book *The Long Farewell* quotes another cabin passenger, travelling to Australia in 1849 who expressed similar disgust on witnessing a Scottish woman combing the lice from her hair onto her dinner plate. The sight prompted him to put his feelings to verse:

For what purpose I cannot say,  
But such gigantic crawling prey;  
In numbers fell, from out their Lay  
And came spilling into the tray.

From Scotland this person came  
It seems the custom of the claim  
Dirty, filthy wretched creatures  
Worse than all countries put together.<sup>48</sup>

Lice, like cockroaches and rats, found an ideal breeding ground in the close confines of the ship. Intestinal worms also spread with ease. While their efforts at enforcing hygiene often presented surgeons with an uphill battle, many were faced with similar reluctance on the part of steerage passengers when it came to administering medicine. The Irish and Highland Scots were reported in

---

<sup>46</sup> Commissioners’ Report on *Forfarshire*, 1873, cited in David Hastings, *Over the Mountains of the Sea*, p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> Diary of Jessie Campbell, reproduced in Greenhill and Giffard, *Women Under Sail*, p. 55, diary entry for Saturday 12 September 1840.

<sup>48</sup> Edward Stamp, ‘London towards Port Phillip’, Diary on *Tasman*, 1849, MS 29, National Library of Australia, Canberra, cited in Charlwood, *The Long Farewell*, pp. 199-200.

surgeons' reports to be particularly disinclined to any form of medical treatment for themselves and their children.<sup>49</sup>

Surgeons dispensed medicine for a range of common complaints using remedies such as Epsom salts for constipation, mercury for syphilis and skin complaints, and concoctions made from chalk and opium for diarrhoea. Blistering and blood letting were still popular treatments, and the medical cabinets of many ship surgeons included a supply of *Hirudino Orientalis*, or leeches.<sup>50</sup> Surgeons acted as obstetricians and paediatricians, and were often called upon to set the limbs of passengers or crew who had broken bones in accidents and falls. They sutured wounds, performed operations, and occasionally amputations. A few surgeons even carried out autopsies, though at times these efforts were thwarted by strong opposition from the emigrants. The schoolmaster aboard the *Timandra* sailing to New Plymouth in 1841, noted in his diary on 1 November 1841:

Parson's child died after an illness of a few days only. Dr Forbes consulted me on the following subject. The instructions from the Company to him were that he should make a post-mortem examination in all such cases as that which took place last night. To this, the parents would not give their consent. Considering it would increase the dissatisfaction spreading amongst the free emigrants and steerage passengers were this regulation to be insisted on without obtaining the consent of the parents, I suggested that they should be seen again by the Doctor, accompanied by the Captain, and that should they still continue obstinate, such examination to be omitted. The result was that the parents resisted all the persuasions of the Doctor and the Captain, and the Child was thrown overboard without such examination. Dr. Forbes stated that he could not say that the child died of any contagious disease, but expected it to have arisen either from exposure to the sun or from lying on the damp decks.<sup>51</sup>

Six weeks later, on the death of another passenger, things appeared to come to a head aboard the *Timandra*:

About 3pm Norman's wife (from Bridgeport) died. Dr. Forbes wished to open the body. Norman objected to it. The Captain, with the Doctor, then informed him that the instructions given the Doctor being peremptory, he

---

<sup>49</sup> Charlwood, p. 186.

<sup>50</sup> Dr George Bush of the *Lloyds* replenished his supply of leeches when the ship docked at Capetown in December 1841. Buckley, *Sails of Suffering*, p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> 'Shipboard Diary', Number 13, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 10-14, diary entry for Monday 1 November 1841.

was under the necessity of attending to them in this case. The emigrants then came aft in a body and in a violent manner stated their determination to prevent its being done. The Captain stating to the Doctor that he had not sufficient power to enable the Doctor to proceed successfully with the opening of the body. The latter was obliged to succumb to the excited feelings of the emigrants. About 7 p.m. the body was brought on deck. Prout, at the request of some of the emigrants, read the burial service over it, when it was thrown overboard.<sup>52</sup>

While few voyages suffered the high infant mortality rate of the *Lloyds*, or of the *Ganges* which recorded 54 child deaths during its passage to New Zealand in 1864-5, the deaths of children and infants were regular and expected. The *Lancashire Witch* lost 23 children during its passage in 1863; the *Rangitiki* in 1873-4, lost 26. Less than a year later, 21 children were lost aboard the *Berar*.<sup>53</sup> Among infants and older children diarrhoeal disease, measles, scarlet fever, and whooping cough appear to have been the main causes of seaboard mortality.<sup>54</sup> Contributing to the high incidence of diarrhoea was the problem of dealing with nappies on board ship. Families were advised to bring with them a supply of old sheeting and calico for this purpose, with the proviso that they should be disposed of overboard when soiled.<sup>55</sup> With the cramped luggage space in steerage, linen supplies were kept to a minimum. It is likely that nappies were changed infrequently, exacerbating the discomfort and ill health of infants and toddlers. As supplies dwindled, and during bad weather when washing days were sporadic, soiled nappies must have been stored on board for days - a situation carrying a high potential for cross infection.

Haines and Shlomowitz's investigations into surgeons' reports of causes of neo-natal death show that the neo-natal or perinatal health of babies born at sea was seriously compromised by the health of their mothers, 'who mediated the intra-uterine and early life experience of their infants'.<sup>56</sup> Women in the advanced

---

<sup>52</sup> Shipboard Diary, Number 13, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters etc*, diary entry for Wednesday 15 December 1841.

<sup>53</sup> Graham, 'Juvenile Emigration', p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> McDonald and Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to Australia', p. 97.

<sup>55</sup> Haines, *Doctors at Sea*, p. 53, and Haines, 'Medical Superintendence and Child Health on Government-Assisted Voyages to South Australia in the Nineteenth Century', in *Health and History*, 3:2 (2001), p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> Robin Haines and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Deaths of Babies Born on Government-Assisted Emigrant Voyages to South Australia in the Nineteenth Century', in *Health and History*, 6:1 (2004), p. 117.

stages of pregnancy had to contend with the hazards of narrow passageways, ladders, and wet, slippery surfaces both above and below decks. Miscarriages and premature births frequently occurred during storms at sea. Moreover, the stress of migration, the living conditions aboard ship, and maternal seasickness all contributed to premature births and low birth weight infants. The already tenuous lives of these tiny babies were further compromised if their mothers were unable to breastfeed them. The medical journal belonging to John Lancaster, surgeon superintendent on board the *Sir Robert Sale* is testimony to this. After Mrs MacDonald, aged 36, gave birth to her daughter prematurely the doctor recorded:

7 August 1847. Mrs Macdonald was seized with labour pains on the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> August and after a somewhat lingering labour was delivered of a female child at 3pm today. The child is exceedingly small and delicate, being not larger than a 7 months child. Mrs MacDonald has been a constant and serious sufferer from seasickness since she embarked at Gravesend on the 12<sup>th</sup> June, until the time of delivery.<sup>57</sup>

Lancaster's journal records the child's death at 12.30 in the afternoon, nine days later. Enforced weaning could compromise the lives of older babies as well. Dr Purdie, the surgeon aboard the *Mooltan* attributed the death of six-month old Agnes Kirkland to 'decline' caused by a 'change of diet' following the death by cholera of her mother, six days earlier.<sup>58</sup> Poorly ventilated living quarters also played a part in intensifying the vulnerability of babies already in danger of suffocation or overlay while sleeping in their parent's berth in a rolling vessel.

Haines points to the prevalence of tuberculosis among the emigrant population as another possible cause of infant deaths. She states:

Many of the deaths of low birth weight and premature babies who failed to thrive on board may have been linked to their intra-uterine and neonatal experience as the offspring of pregnant and nursing mothers whose health and nutritional status were impaired by tubercular infection, exacerbated by seasickness early in the voyage.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> J. J. Lancaster and S.E. Kendall, *Medical and Surgical Journal of the Freight Ship 'Sir Robert Sale', 10<sup>th</sup> of June to 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1847* (Taihape: Self published by S.E. Kendall, 1994), diary entry for 7 August 1847, case number 8: 'Captain MacDonald's Infant', p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> John MacGibbon, *Going Abroad* (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 1997), p. 106.

<sup>59</sup> Robin Haines, *Doctors at Sea* p. 43

Congenital weakness may also have played a part. In working-class Scotland, economic conditions meant that with the scarcity of food, many girls entered puberty with severe nutritional deficiencies resulting in compromised bone growth. This may well have led to complications during late pregnancy and labour, especially for those having their first child while en route to New Zealand.

The deaths of stillborn or newborn babies did not appear, at least on the surface of written accounts, to carry much emotional weight among emigrants not immediately connected with the bereaved family. Funerals were not required and there is no mention, in the writings of diarists, of the solemnity that often accompanied the sea burials of adults and older children. Jalland quotes incidences on immigrant ships to Australia where the bodies of babies and infants were thrown overboard less than half an hour after their deaths.<sup>60</sup> In some such cases, the parents' consent was considered unnecessary. A diarist en route to Australia, writing in 1863, recorded that:

On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> a child eleven days old died about an hour after we were all sitting at breakfast when we saw the sail maker pass with a large bundle in his arms, it was taken on deck & thrown over board without even the parents being acquainted with what they were about to do.<sup>61</sup>

Alfred Lawrence's tender account of a sea burial stands as testimony for the standard proceedings following a death at sea. On Sunday, 26 April 1874, he wrote in his diary:

It is my painful duty to record another death which makes nine, all children. A funeral at sea is indeed a painful and solemn spectacle and as you have never witnessed one I will endeavour to briefly describe as far as is in my power lies the sad sight. The corpse is wrapped in a canvas hammock and which when sewn up is carried to the gangway situated in the after part of the ship and the little bundle of human clay laid on a grating and held over the rail by two men. The Captain reads a short

---

<sup>60</sup> Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death*, p. 32.

<sup>61</sup> Jalland, p. 31.

service and the body is consigned to the measureless deep, one dull little plunge and the rewardless waves close over the being who was a few hours ago one of God's handywork [sic] but now is lifeless and cold in death.<sup>62</sup>

The centrality of religious concerns among the Victorian middle-classes is made manifest in the diaries of cabin passengers and can also be seen, although less frequently, in the writing of steerage passengers such as Alfred Lawrence. A sea burial posed the opportunity for reflection on faith, morality and the unpredictability of life and death. Lawrence continues:

[The body] is consigned to the depths of the sea until that day when the sea shall give her dead. On this calm Sabbath morning with the sun shining on us as we witness the melancholy scene, I can't help thinking of the Sabbath morn when the Saviour arose triumphant out of the grave and led me to thinking of the uncertainty of life we who are now in the vigour and flower of life and enjoying in all manly attainments the attribution of our God. Know not the moment we may be cut off without warning and plunged into the interminable depth of the ocean that rolls and tosses in all its unconscious splendour over the common grave of thousands of the human race, the wind will whistle o'er the watery tomb as it were breathing a solemn dirge and the waves sigh as they receive all that is left of a noble work, even the handywork of God.<sup>63</sup>

An anonymous female writer travelling first class to New Plymouth in 1849 recounted the first funeral aboard the *Mariner* in equally reflective terms:

[I] must relate a most painful circumstance that occurred soon after we were out at sea, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April took place the burial of a woman who had occupied a Steerage Cabin; she was a widow with three children. She was a very stout woman and the sea sickness brought on inflation of the stomach, and she expired after a night of delirium, about eleven o'clock in the morning. ... It certainly was a great shock to us: indeed it cast a gloom over all in the Ship. The funeral took place between six and seven. Bright, beautiful and calm, was that evening, never to be forgotten by us. The porpoises, were gambling around the ship in shoals, springing out of the water in every direction, and the soft rays of the declining sun was [sic] reflected on the peaceful ocean, that was so soon to receive the earthly remains of a fellow traveller.

Number of the people with heads uncover'd on both decks awaited the solemn scene with saddened countenances; and ourselves lying on our

---

<sup>62</sup> Alfred Lawrence, *Alfred's Diary*, diary entry for April 20, 1874, p. 11.

<sup>63</sup> Alfred Lawrence, *Alfred's Diary*, diary entry for April 26, 1874, p. 11-12.

lowly beds, just spared from the same fate; looking on each other with hearts lifted up with gratitude to Our Father of Mercies.

The body being properly sewn up, heavy shot being placed at the feet, and the last stitch passed through the nose according to the custom of the sailors, a plank was held by two men in the main chains outside the ship, the corpse was brought up on deck upon one of the hatches covered with the ensign, and rested on the gangway. Another passenger, a Clergyman, read the Burial Service of the Church of England in a solemn and impressive manner, and at the words, “We therefore commit her body to the deep” it was lowered to the 2 men on the plank who, unrolling the Flag in which it was enveloped, it fell with a loud splash into the unfathomable wave: as I lay that night in my bed listening to the sea as it washed the ship’s side I thought of the poor woman and the porpoises (but I believe they do not devour dead bodies like the shark) and reflected much on the recent probability of the same scene being enacted over one of my own Dear Children; although at the time it seemed almost inevitable, I some times felt a calm resignation to the Divine Will, if I only had strength given me to sooth [sic] their last moments, being confident I should not have long survived them and be quickly united to them again for ever, then my thoughts reverted to my poor Husband what a poor lonely man it would have made him; nor, was he without his sufferings, for his nerves were very much shaken both from the weather and our ill state, but praised be the most High, He brought him also through it all.<sup>64</sup>

While the first burial at sea often made a deep impression on fellow passengers, this was not always the case. Four days into the journey aboard the *James Nicol Fleming*, George Robertson recorded the first death in his diary. A steerage passenger who was ‘far gone in consumption’ (the same disease that would eventually claim Robertson himself) died leaving his wife and eleven children to continue on alone.<sup>65</sup> The following morning his remains were consigned to the deep with the Captain reading the service. Robertson notes pointedly: ‘[I]t is astonishing how little feeling is shewn [sic] about it. Poor fellow, he did not have a very long voyage.’<sup>66</sup> T.P Judkins, sailing in 1874, remarked on a sea burial that took place aboard the *Assaye*. While the short ceremony was one of ‘deep solemnity’, ‘the people returned to their jocular habits, “like the sow that

---

<sup>64</sup> The Homeyer Journal, ‘The Narrative of a Voyage in an Emigrant Ship From London to New Zealand in 1849’, Long letter to ‘My Very Dear Relations and Friends’, Number 11, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 10-14, pp. 10-11.

<sup>65</sup> George Robertson, *Journal of Voyage Aboard ‘James Nicol Fleming’* (Wellington: N. Cowie, date unknown), diary entry for Wednesday 3 August.

<sup>66</sup> George Robertson, diary entry for Sunday 7 August.

was washed, to her wallowing in the mire”’. He noted that, ‘surely if they were true to their [Christian] name, they would not, in two minutes after the burial ceremony was over, have jested and laughed at the top of their voice about the fortunate circumstances of the parents of the deceased, namely, that they had no burial fees to pay.’<sup>67</sup>

Typically, on ships where such burials became commonplace, few passengers found the reserves to attend the makeshift funerals of others. Francis Pillans, travelling aboard the *Mooltan* in 1849 wrote in his diary:

We have all heard and read of the solemnity of a burial at sea. This may be the case when it occurs seldom, and in the usual way, but when the human carcasses come to be thrown over the ship’s side like dead dogs, the case is very different.<sup>68</sup>

By June 1874, sickness aboard the *S.S. Atrato* was taking a tragic toll, Alfred Lawrence reported:

I went and saw the funeral of Mr Venour’s child this morning, it took place about 8 o’clock, both the children were sewed up in sail cloth in the usual manner and the two little bundles lashed together, I cannot help thinking they looked like a bundle of washing. The Doctor read the service as the Captain was unwell, it looked very much like a man taking home his work. Mr and Mrs V. are much cut up at the loss of their first and only child. The little things were lowered gently down to the water and sank in the deep blue sea quick out of sight. I and Mr V. and the father of the other child were the only persons there, at one time we used to have a crowd of people there, but it has now become no unusual thing to have one or two children to bury in the morning. ... I am sorry to say two more children died today, they nearly all died of the same complaint, inflammation and congestion of the lungs, these will be buried at 8 o’clock tomorrow morning.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, diaries show that a death among the crew was an occasion for mourning among the whole of the ship’s community. George Robertson on the *James Nicol Fleming*, compared the lack of regard shown for the earlier death of

---

<sup>67</sup> T.P. Judkins, *Copy of His Journal Containing an Account of his Journey from Towchester, Northamptonshire, England, to Auckland, New Zealand, on the Sailing Ship ‘Assaye’ in 1874* Photocopied typescript, Canterbury Public Library, NRAM number A86, p. 2, diary entry for 7 September 1874.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Pillans Diary, entry for Wednesday 10 October, cited in MacGibbon, *Going Abroad*, p. 83.

<sup>69</sup> Alfred Lawrence, diary entry for Saturday 6 June, p. 31.

a steerage passenger, with the accidental death of a sailor two months later: ‘this [death] is the more felt, being so sudden, whereas in the case of the man Aberethy [sic], he came on board knowing that he was dying’. The sailor’s death prompted a special prayer meeting, followed by a formal funeral with ‘a good many of the passengers’ attending, and even inspired Robertson to write a poem in three stanzas. It begins heroically:

There is in the lone, lone sea  
A spot unmark’d but holy  
For there the gallant and the free  
In his ocean bed lies lowly.  
Down, down beneath the deep,  
That oft in triumph bore him,  
He sleeps a sound and peaceful sleep  
With the salt waves dashing o’er him.<sup>70</sup>

Like funerals for the crew, burial services for cabin passengers were usually dignified affairs, and coffins were sometimes fashioned by the ship’s carpenter in order to placate the feelings of first-class passengers whose family members had died. Outbreaks of typhoid and scarlet fever occurred aboard the clipper ship *Collingwood* on its journey to New Zealand in 1875. Passenger Thomas Heath wrote about the experience in verse, describing just such a situation which took place after the death of a child travelling in the cabin class:

Again death has been here today about noon,  
And took the one child from out the saloon.  
Amongst the passengers there he was a great pet,  
And those passengers have not got over it yet.  
His mother had horror of canvas for a shroud  
And wanted her boy to be sent away proud  
In a coffin that the carpenter would be asked now to make  
So a watery grave would not be his lot, for her own sake.  
It would be watertight so the coffin would float.  
“Yes,” said she, ‘and then it could be picked up by a boat,  
Who would take him to land and bury him there.’  
And so put an end to her terrible scare.

So the Captain gave orders to the carpenter brave  
To make up a coffin and these were the orders he carefully gave,  
The coffin to be made and with sailcloth be covered,  
The bottom as well as the rest, lest it be discovered

---

<sup>70</sup> George Robertson, diary entry for Saturday 8 October 1870, p. 38.

That holes had been bored in the bottom therein  
To let in the water, and that was no sin.  
At sunset it was launched well on the wave,  
And it floated and comfort to the mother it gave,  
When the water got in sometime in the night,  
It sank to the bottom and was soon lost to sight.<sup>71</sup>

Accidents on board sometimes accounted for deaths at sea. Seamen sustained serious and often fatal injuries after falling from the rigging; emigrants too, died from falls during heavy weather, as well as succumbing to food poisoning, choking, scalding or medical misadventure. Suicides occasionally took place on board ship. The concept of God's will provided a certain comfort to many diary writers and some attempted to make sense of individual deaths and epidemics on board by attributing them to a higher purpose. The emotional experience of emigrants was filtered by the prevailing 'emotionology', which contended that such exigencies were for moral instruction and acted as a useful reminder of the transience of life.<sup>72</sup> After a sea burial aboard the *Arima* in 1863, Mary Brown wrote in her diary:

A daughter of Mrs Brown is dead with whooping cough. May the Lord strengthen her. Poor woman. First her husband, now her child. It was put over at 7 this morning. And another warning today. At 11 o'clock a young man about 18 years of age died of consumption. ... Hear what solemn warnings to us to prepare, for we know not how soon we will get the call and God grant we may be ready.<sup>73</sup>

While unexpected or accidental deaths were often met with shock and disbelief, emotional responses to fatal accidents at sea were as likely to be discursively constructed by middle-class conventions. During the passage of the *Hermione* in 1881, a ten year old boy fell overboard and was lost at sea. William Runciman, a Glaswegian, travelling in steerage with his family to Auckland, recorded the incident with careful detail in his diary:

---

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Heath, in Bob Molesworth, *The Voyage of the Collingwood 1875*, p. 48-9.

<sup>72</sup> P.N. and C.Z Stearn, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', in *American Historical Review* 90:1 (October 1985), pp. 813-36. Stearn and Stearn give the definition of the term as: 'The attitudes or standards that a society, or a definable group within a society, maintains toward basic emotions and their appropriate expression'. (p. 813).

<sup>73</sup> Mary Brown, *Coming Out: The Incredible Journey of Mary Brown* (Wellington: John Paul Productions Ltd, 1978), p. 27, diary entry for 2 March 1863. Despite sharing the same surname there is no indication that the two women were related.

Today, Friday 17<sup>th</sup> June has been the saddest since we left, for soon after breakfast, the cry resounded of a man overboard. ... It turned out to be a little boy of ten years, the oldest boy out of a family of six, there is a sister older, the Father, Mother with family are from Liverpool. At the first shout everybody thought it was their child, and the parents who have what they know well as venturesome boys thought it would be their child and several parents were thrown into great anxiety until they saw all their own safe on Deck, but alas it was someone's boy and when the Father knew it was his, up he flew on the Poop endeavouring to get a sight of his boy but alas only a few saw the form once or twice and then out of sight it vanished. The Father and Mother were thrown into a great state and indeed the whole of the females were weeping and making great lamentations, waiting for the safe return of the body, dead or alive, but alas nothing was found but his little hat. ...

[T]he second mate asserted there was a whole lot of sharks, and of course the body was no doubt readily devoured. ... [O]ne of the second class passengers, a lad of 24 was going to jump after the boy but his Father being present held him back he didn't see that his son should sacrifice himself when there was so little hope of saving the lad. The parent whose name is Jones told me that he would have gone over had he witnessed the fall and run the risk of sharks devouring him, but how would he have acted had it been another man's child, at any rate he is convinced his boy could have been saved and is therefore on that account feeling the loss more, but there is none aboard who has his opinion.<sup>74</sup>

Deeply pious himself, Runciman questions the parents' lack of acceptance in the face of prevailing religious thought. Indeed, he expresses the hope that this harsh lesson 'will not lose its effect' on the boy's father, but rather:

[W]ill be the means of leading him to The Creator and Preserver of all on sea or land and to that Spiritual Rock whose only comfort and consolation can be obtained may he realise somewhat the truth of Solomon's statement 'That the day of one's death is more a cause of rejoicing than [sic] the day of one's birth' and it is no doubt a hard saying and one which few believe, but unquestionably there must be a sense in which it is true, and if we take the bright side of even this sad and sorrowful event we must see that it is better for such as happens to the boy now when he is not in a measure responsible for the deeds done in the body, then [sic] that he should have been spared and as quick a death to have overtaken him when he would have been responsible and he not in a state fitted for such happening. I have not had a chat with the Father yet as he seems so overwhelmed with grief that he cannot speak and therefor [sic] I do not know the state of mind he is in or what he thinks of it in this light. Davie

---

<sup>74</sup> William Runciman, 'Diary of William Runciman: Voyage to New Zealand 1881', Number 9, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 1-9, diary entry for Friday 17 June 1881, p.10.

has been down two or three times with him but the father said ‘don’t talk to me about the Lord as a Saviour, he didn’t save my Boy’.<sup>75</sup>

The sentiment that held that death in childhood would ensure salvation was a common one. This consolation affirmed that an early demise would send a child to God in a state of grace, safely before they might be compromised by any sinful ‘deeds done in the body’. The family’s ‘desolate state’ is accounted for in Runciman’s mind by a later revelation that they belonged to a Church, ‘with Unitarian principles’.<sup>76</sup> Runciman’s diary gives a rare insight into the depths of familial grief, particularly in its silences. The following day he writes:

Today Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June. The gloom has partly gone from all and things move on in the same routine. The Parents have not gained much composure and seem as much stricken as they were yesterday. They speak to no one and if any inquiry is made an answer hardly audible is obtained. It will affect the delicate mother very much I fear. If she could but realise the force of Paul’s words, ‘Sorrow not as those who have no hope’ but perhaps she has not yet reached that step where Faith can give comfort and relief to an aching heart.<sup>77</sup>

The parents’ retreat into silence reveals something of the bereavement experience, as does Runciman’s comment a week later that ‘Mr and Mrs Jones are still the most dejected and careworn like in appearance and they still feel very much their great loss. ... the Doctor has not yet even paid them the attention he ought to have done considering how weak they both are’. Significantly, a forgotten sibling comes briefly into view as Runciman adds in an aside:

Numbers of Hats have been thrown overboard by children, and one of the little Jones’ who lost his brother has thrown over five or six to him.<sup>78</sup>

\*\*\*

---

<sup>75</sup> William Runciman, diary entry for Friday 17 June 1881, p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> William Runciman, diary entry for Saturday 18 June 1881, p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> William Runciman, diary entry for Saturday 18 June 1881, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> William Runciman, [no date], p. 14.

Death at sea, as with death on land, provoked a range of individual emotional responses that were inextricably tied to societal attitudes and understandings. Emigrants boarded with a particular set of expectations, and for some the death of a child may have been a tragic, but not altogether unexpected consequence of a calculated risk. Such a death might be justified as a necessary sacrifice for the greater good. Death by accident or misadventure was rarely greeted with the same resignation. Here, anger and the need to apportion blame could take precedence in the grieving process, though notably this was expected only as a masculine response, confined to fathers and husbands. Religion remained the chief source of comfort for many, and the promise of a future reconciliation in the afterlife was a persistent source of hope. This sentiment is expressively conveyed in the words that Priscilla Gash chose to include in her husband Walter's obituary after his death in 1895:

Though the ocean is his grave  
And I know not where he lies,  
I am living in the hope  
To meet him in the skies.<sup>79</sup>

The deaths of others produced strong religious sentiment among some passengers, providing them with a sense of the miraculous. They were left with a sage reminder of the fragility of life and perhaps a deep gratitude for their own family's survival. Those without religious conviction often turned to black humour and stark pragmatism. One or more deaths within a tight-knit family group could induce extremes of reaction, forcing people to either abandon, or hold on ever more tightly to circumscribed beliefs. Sometimes human anguish found no solace in religious faith or rational thought: when despair and a sense of hopelessness gained the upper hand for a 'Lincolnshire shepherd' aboard the *Collingwood* in 1875, he simply climbed onto the rail of the ship and jumped into the sea to the 'one or two awaiting sharks'.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> *Otago Witness*, 21 November 1895, p. 33, cited in 'British BDMs and Burials at Sea' <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com> (13.09.06)

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Heath, in Bob Molesworth, *The Voyage of the Collingwood 1875*, p. 64-65.

Death at sea can be seen as a metaphor for the extremes of separation that were part and parcel of the migrant experience. The bodies of those who died during the liminal period of the sea journey remained in that liminal zone. Their bodies would reside neither in the communal graves of family in Scotland, nor in the family gravesites that would be established in the new country.

# CHAPTER THREE

## ‘BAITH BLEART AN’ BLIN’ WI’ TEARS’: DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT IN THE NEW WORLD, 1840-1890<sup>1</sup>

When nine-year old Barbara Macgregor died in the Matarawa Valley near Wanganui in 1863, the Reverend Richard Taylor recorded the details of her funeral in his diary:

I rode to Matarawa valley to attend the funeral of a child of Alex Macgregor who died yesterday of diphtheria. I went to Mr Macwilliams and walked with him to Mr Macgregor’s house, or rather hovel. I found a considerable number of the neighbours assembled in a small detached building where there was a table in the centre with bottles of spirits and glasses on it and with seats round which just filled up the room. Mr Hogg the Presbyterian minr. was standing up at one end of the table with all the others standing round it with their backs turned to him, he was giving a prayer [or] rather a prayerful address. I remained until it was concluded. ... I then went and spoke to Mrs Macgregor on her loss. I found the room she was in likewise filled with female neighbours. Mr Hogg came in and told me it was their custom to give a prayer before the corpse was taken away and wished me to do it. ... I agreed and when all the guests had assembled in number nearly 60, I summoned them outside and pulling out my pr. book I read the 39<sup>th</sup> psl. and then invited them to pray. ... The coffin was then placed in a spring cart and conveyed up the hill to a corner of a field. ... The coffin was simply let down into the grave and the earth thrown in without any further ceremony, the father told me he hated all popish ceremonies!<sup>2</sup>

The Reverend’s account describes a scene which could have taken place in any working class community in the Scottish Lowlands. The community gathered for the kisting ceremony showed their support by joining in the traditional prayers before the body was taken from the home. The men gathered to drink

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Francis, ‘We’re No Deid Yet’, cited in Alan Riach, ‘Heather and Fern: The Burns Effect in New Zealand Verse’, in *The Heather and The Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, edited by Tom Brooking and Jennie Coleman (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), p. 163. (Translation: ‘Both bleary-eyed and blind with tears’).

<sup>2</sup> Reverend Richard Taylor, diary entry for 6 June 1863, cited in Philip Cleaver, ‘Dealing with Death: The Pakeha Treatment of Death, 1850-1910’ (MA thesis, Victoria University, 1996), p. 63.

the dram, and the women drew closely together in support. The Reverend noted the simplicity of the burial, and the family's aversion to prayers at the graveside. As in Scotland, the presence of the local minister was appreciated in the home but strongly discouraged at the graveside itself. Barbara's funeral was Scottish in all but at least one respect – rather than being put to rest in a garden cemetery or local kirkyard, her body was conveyed to a makeshift grave, 'to a corner of a field'. It is likely that a picket fence would have been erected around the gravesite to protect it from animals. A simple wooden headstone might have been fashioned by someone in the community and placed at the head of the girl's grave. In time, other family members would be buried alongside. The site would be one of many private family burial plots dotting the colonial New Zealand landscape.

This chapter is concerned with death in the context of colonial New Zealand, from 1840, when organised settlement of the colony's towns and cities began, to the 1890s. It considers death practices, grief, and mourning among Scottish migrants after their arrival in New Zealand, and investigates ways in which the practical aspects of dealing with the dead were renegotiated in the colonial setting. The focus remains on the experience of the working classes. Many assisted migrants who had escaped the degradation and uncertainty of working class life in Scotland found themselves living in conditions similar to those they had left behind. Slum housing quickly developed in the main centres, with all the problems of overcrowding and disease that accompanied it. The related issues of alcohol abuse, violent death, and suicide are given consideration here as part of the working class experience of life and death. This chapter also investigates the significance of gendered differences in colonial deathways. These differences are manifested in the causes of death, and the division of roles in death practices, as well as gendered expectations surrounding grief and mourning. In order to gain a more detailed understanding, research has been loosely focused on one nineteenth-century colonial settlement, that of Auckland, which returned consistently high rates for crime and mortality from accidents and disease.

Peter Gibbons has shown that the process of migration is an inherently destabilising one. 'Settler societies' he says, 'are composed initially of very unsettled people, migrants who have, by the very process of migration, left behind much of what gives the world meaning for human beings, including kin, community and their accustomed landscape'.<sup>3</sup> Death and burial were important components of the disorientation felt by new migrants. Leaving the remains of their loved ones buried in Scottish soil served to amplify the feeling that home lay across the other side of the world. The tyranny of distance meant that migrants were unable to care for dying relatives or attend the funerals of friends and family back in the home country. For many new migrants it was the act of burying their dead in New Zealand soil that confirmed for them a feeling of identity with the new land and established a sense of belonging.

Useful statistical data on death rates in New Zealand are available from the 1870s, although one demographer claims that '[I]t seems likely that the average life expectancy at birth in New Zealand has been the highest in the world from as early as the 1840s'.<sup>4</sup> This, of course, disregards the disproportionately high mortality rate among the indigenous population.<sup>5</sup> The infectious diseases that were endemic in the highly populated areas of Britain and Ireland inevitably travelled with the migrants themselves, although, on the whole, they were less problematic among the settler populations in the colonies than they were among the sending societies. Isolated epidemics did break out sporadically: scarlet fever, for example, reached epidemic proportions in Auckland in 1848.<sup>6</sup> In 1861, typhoid swept through the North Island from January to July, and the annual report of the Colonial Hospital reported some cases 'rivalling in intensity

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter Gibbons, 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36:1 (April 2002), pp. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell Gibson 'Demographic History of New Zealand' (PhD thesis, University of California, 1972), p.156. The recording of births and deaths was made compulsory by the Registration Act of 1858, although deficiencies in registration mean that the data are not sufficiently complete to show meaningful trends until the 1870s.

<sup>5</sup> Mortality rates for the New Zealand colony did not include Maori until 1925. Vital statistics relating to Maori are scant until the twentieth century, although Ian Pool suggests that Maori life expectation at birth may have been as low as 20 years during the mid-nineteenth century. Ian Pool, *The Maori Population of New Zealand 1769-1977* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977), Table 5.5, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup> J. Phillips, 'Social History of Auckland 1840-53' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1966), p. 147.

the worst usually met with in the crowded cities in the Old Country'.<sup>7</sup> While intensely overcrowded housing conditions largely remained a problem of the Old World, migrants settling in urban centres quickly began to replicate practices of poor sanitation, resulting in death rates from so-called 'filth' diseases that at times exceeded those of Britain.<sup>8</sup> Seepage from cesspits into waterways already coping with raw sewage, household waste, and the run-off from animal processing works such as slaughterhouses, tanneries and tallow works, exacerbated health problems, and increased mortality rates in all urban centres.<sup>9</sup>

Of particular significance was the high incidence of deaths from 'violence' in the colony. This mortality category included all deaths from accident, homicide, suicide and execution. In the year 1873, accidental and violent deaths accounted for just over one quarter of male deaths in the 25 to 44 year old age group.<sup>10</sup> Of these, suicide was in the third highest category. Drowning fatalities followed closely behind the highest category, which was death occurring as the result of 'fractures, etcetera'. This signified the fatal breaking or shattering of bodies in work, home, or transport related accidents. Decades later the figures were still extremely high. Accident and suicide among young adult males accounted for sixteen per cent of New Zealand male deaths between 1885-90, compared to fourteen per cent in New South Wales, and only six per cent in England and Wales.<sup>11</sup> The high rate of suicide among men is especially significant when the

---

<sup>7</sup> Laurie Gluckman, *Touching on Deaths: A Medical History of Early Auckland Based on the First 384 Inquests* (Auckland: doppelganger, 2000), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> 'Filth' diseases included diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid and scarlet fever. These were particularly prevalent in Christchurch which had been built on swamp land and suffered serious drainage problems throughout the nineteenth century. In 1879 the mortality rate from these diseases reached 4.4 per 1000 compared to Britain's rate of 3.4 per 1000. Christchurch Drainage Board Archives, 5/1: Board of Health, Volume 3, cited in Geoffrey Rice, 'Public Health in Christchurch 1875-1910' in *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand*, edited by Linda Bryder (Wellington: Bridget Williams, 1991), p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> Pamela Wood discusses these problems in the city of Dunedin in *Filth, Dirt, and Decay: A New World Arcadia* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005). The situation in Christchurch is covered by Rice, 'Public Health in Christchurch 1875-1910', and Duncan Anderson focuses on Auckland in "'Armed with power for preventing the spread of infectious disease": the making of the Public Health Act 1872 and its implementation in Auckland Province, 1870-1876' (Honours dissertation, University of Waikato, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Gibson, Table 44 'Mortality Rates By Age, Sex, and Cause, 1873-1874, p. 162. Totals of accidental and violent deaths were published in the annual *Statistics of New Zealand* from 1860 onwards. However, there was no detailed breakdown by cause supplied until 1872.

<sup>11</sup> W. D. Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australasia: A Demographic History 1788-1988* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1994), Table 7.5: Proportions Per Cent of Deaths

extreme conservatism of official statistics is taken into account. Only clear cut cases, where the intention for self harm was unmistakably demonstrated, were registered as suicide. In any case where there was a measure of doubt, death was attributed to other causes, or a verdict was returned which stated simply: 'cause of death unknown'.

Childbirth remained a risk for adult women throughout the nineteenth century. Puerperal fever (or metria) was an important cause of maternal mortality. Thirty per cent of maternal deaths were attributed to this cause in 1885, although this figure was considerably lower than the English rate of fifty-four per cent. On the other hand, the British Parliamentary Sessions for that year show that in New Zealand, maternal deaths resulting from a lack of 'care and medical advice' were 'proportionately twice as numerous as in England'.<sup>12</sup> Death from complications in childbirth claimed high numbers of women in the 15 to 45 year age group, although higher numbers of women continued to die from pulmonary tuberculosis or heart disease throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Infant mortality peaked to over 125 per 1000 live births during the 1870s.<sup>14</sup> This figure was only slightly below that of the larger Scottish cities, and considerably higher than areas in rural Scotland.<sup>15</sup> 'Filth' diseases, fevers, and respiratory diseases had a significant impact on the mortality of New Zealand children.<sup>16</sup> In July

---

from Each Cause, New Zealand, New South Wales and England and Wales from 1885-90, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers (Colonies of New Zealand)*, Volume 17, Sessions 1883-96, Number 5, New Zealand Report by the Registrar-General on the Statistics of the Colony for 1886, p. 212. Maternal death rates in New Zealand reached a peak in 1885 when it was calculated that one mother died to every 137 children born alive. This figure compared unfavorably to England's rate for the same year when one mother died for every 201 children born. (These figures do not include Maori).

<sup>13</sup> *Statistics of New Zealand, 1872*, Part I, Number 5A. In 1872, 35 maternal deaths were recorded. In comparison, 93 adult women died from pulmonary tuberculosis (phthisis) and 45 died from heart disease. There were also 41 deaths from diphtheria in that year among adult females.

<sup>14</sup> David Thorns and Charles Sedgewick, *Understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand: Historical Statistics* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997), Table 2.4, p. 40. (These figures do not include stillbirths or miscarriages. Maori are not included in these figures).

<sup>15</sup> C.H. Lee, 'Regional Inequalities in Infant Mortality in Britain, 1861-1971: Patterns and Hypotheses' in *Population Studies*, 45 (1991), Table 1: Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 Live Births, p. 57. Figures for 1871 show infant mortality for Lothian (which includes Edinburgh, Haddington and Linlithgow) at 139 per 1000 live births. Strathclyde, Dumfries and Galloway, Grampian and Highland, all returned figures between 86-95 per 1000 live births.

<sup>16</sup> Diarrhoea, measles, whooping cough, and scarlet fever were among the most common causes of death in children. *Statistics of New Zealand 1872*, Part I, Number 5, and Part I, Number 5A.

1854 Sarah Greenwood scripted a letter to her mother to inform her of the death of thirteen-year old Agnes, one of her thirteen children. She wrote:

My dear Mother,

Three weeks back I finished a letter to Ann telling her of all our anxieties about our children, their suffering from the fever which may be called the complaint of this country; I am still writing at the same table by the same bed-side, but it has pleased God to take our dear, dear Agnes to Himself.<sup>17</sup>

The infant mortality rate among non-Maori did not begin to fall below 100 per 1000 live births until late in the 1880s.<sup>18</sup> Newborn children were especially vulnerable. The inference that New Zealand was a dangerous place for the very young is echoed in a letter written by Lady Barker after the death of her ten-week old son in 1866. She comments: '[O]ur loss is one too common out here, I am told: Infants born in Christchurch during the Autumn very often die.'<sup>19</sup> Lady Barker's remark is backed up by the mortality figures. Christchurch's reputation as a 'damp, fever ridden swamp' became entrenched in the 1870s after figures returned the highest death rates in the colony for typhoid fever and diphtheria.<sup>20</sup> Christchurch's general death rate in 1875 was almost double the national figure, and the infant mortality rate for that year reached 184 per 1000 live births.<sup>21</sup> But there were high rates of typhoid in Auckland and Wellington too, and these could not so easily be blamed on 'swampy land'. By 1886, Auckland could claim forty-five per cent of the national figure for typhoid deaths. In that year, proportionate to the population, mortality from typhoid was six times greater in Auckland, than in the Nelson district where the rate was lowest.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Greenwood, Letters, MS-Papers-0098-11, cited in Charlotte MacDonald, ed, *Women Writing Home 1700-1920: Female Correspondence Across the British Empire*, Volume Five: New Zealand, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), p. 157. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>18</sup> Jeanine Graham, 'Settler Society' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, second edition, (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 126.

<sup>19</sup> Lady Barker, quoted in Robert C. Lamb, *From the Banks of the Avon: The Story of a River* (Wellington: Reed, 1981), p. 71, cited in Stephen Deed, 'Unearthly Landscapes: The Development of the Cemetery in Nineteenth Century New Zealand' (MA thesis, University of Otago, 2004), p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> Rice, 'Public Health in Christchurch', p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Christchurch Board of Health, Medical Officer's Annual Report, 22 February 1882, cited in Rice, p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers, (Colonies of New Zealand)*, Volume 17, Sessions 1883-96, Number 5, New Zealand Report by the Registrar-General on the Statistics of the Colony for 1886, pp. 208/22.

On October 1842 the *Duchess of Argyle* and the *Jane Gifford* sailed into Auckland's Waitemata Harbour carrying New Zealand's first assisted immigrants sponsored by the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission in Britain. Among them were 514 Scottish migrants, many of whom had left Paisley, near Glasgow, following acute unemployment among the handloom weavers of that city. The Paisley New Zealand Emigration Society, with the help of the British Emigration Commission, targeted families from areas of the Scottish Lowlands to boost the labour force in Auckland. The new township had been established only two years previously as a 'purpose built capital' in a joint venture between Hobson's new government, Sydney merchants, and local Maori.<sup>23</sup> The Scottish families from the *Duchess of Argyle* and the *Jane Gifford* joined the 'medley of humanity' arriving from Sydney and Van Dieman's Land who were setting up businesses as storekeepers, speculators and labourers.<sup>24</sup> On arrival they found a frontier town where, among the Pakeha population at least, women were in a distinct minority. Statistical data for the year 1842 show that females over the age of 21 accounted for only eighteen per cent of Auckland's population.<sup>25</sup>

The great number of drinking establishments impressed itself on migrant Robert Graham from the moment he left the *Jane Gifford* on 12 October 1842. In his journal he wrote:

Shortland Crescent seems to be the principle street. In the meantime the first stop is a grog shop, the next is Mr McLennan's the store, the next a shoemakers, the next a bakers, then a grog shop and then a Pork stand and

---

<sup>23</sup> James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 188.

<sup>24</sup> J. Cowan, 'The Story of Auckland', typescript of articles in the *Auckland Star*, (Auckland Public Library), 24 July 1928 – 8 January 1929, p. 13, cited in Phillips, p. 68.

<sup>25</sup> Martin McLean, *Auckland 1842-1845: A demographic and housing study of the city's earliest European settlement*, Science and Research Internal Report, Number 33 (Unpublished), Department of Conservation, p. 5. Auckland's status as a garrison town and military base contributed to the gender imbalance. When fighting broke out between British troops and Northland Maori in the mid-1840s, Auckland's Albert Barracks served as headquarters for the Imperial Army. By 1851 military men made up nearly thirty per cent of the Auckland population. Phillips, p. 72.

a grog shop &c. &c. I should say that upon an average there is one grog shop for every 3 of all other trades put together.<sup>26</sup>

It is tempting to assume, as Miles Fairburn does, that high alcohol consumption and a correspondingly high incidence of alcohol related accidents and violence in the Auckland Province might be one result of atomising influences on the largely single male population.<sup>27</sup> It might also be tempting to suggest that the influx of families from the artisanal classes of Scotland would have enacted a civilising influence of some kind over this society. However, it seems more likely that both individuals and family groups were products of the societies that they came from. Drunken and violent behaviour was not the preserve of atomised men responding to social isolation and bondlessness. Such behaviour was firmly entrenched in the culture of the working classes all over Britain and Ireland. Robert Graham's journal written during the journey aboard the *Jane Gifford* tells of domestic violence, theft, constant fighting among the emigrants, including incidences of 'fisticuffs', and even the threat of a duel being fought between the ship surgeon and one of the cabin passengers. Violent behaviour was not solely a male problem. On 6 June Graham wrote:

There was a battle betwixt two married women to day in the hold, they were turned up on deck to fight it out but one [was] not so bold as the other and [it] ended up after an hours scoulding [sic], not of the most refined discription [sic] ... there are some of them the filthiest class of people I ever beheld.<sup>28</sup>

When William Fox, principle agent for the New Zealand Company, visited Auckland in 1849, he was unimpressed with what he found there. Included in his writings are criminal statistics for the year ending December 1847. These show 857 convictions by the Resident Magistrate, and tellingly, 529 for drunkenness. One in six of the population of Auckland had been convicted of some type of crime, and one in eight for drunkenness. These figures compare unfavourably with those of Wellington and Nelson, which at that time showed

---

<sup>26</sup>Robert Graham, *Journal of a Passage from Greenock to Auckland on Board the 'Jane Gifford'*, entry for 12 October 1842, p. 100, NZMS-1018, Manuscripts Room, Auckland Public Library. Robert Graham eventually became Superintendent of Auckland Province.

<sup>27</sup> Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989), pp. 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Graham, Journal entry for 6 July, p. 22.

the figure for drunkenness as one in 40, and one in 79 respectively.<sup>29</sup> By 1845 there were well over 20 hotels in Auckland and its surrounding suburbs. This was an especially large number compared with the population, working out at one drinking establishment for approximately every 200 people.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the hotels, the distilling of illicit liquor was popular and made for a lucrative trade. Self-styled ‘emigrant’, Albin Martin, declared in 1851, ‘Drunkenness is the prevailing vice of the colony, the upper classes as well as the lower give way to it’.<sup>31</sup>

Alcohol was consumed in equally large quantities in nineteenth-century Scotland and Ireland.<sup>32</sup> In Scotland in the 1830s, those aged fifteen and over were reported to be drinking, on average, upwards of one pint of whisky a week.<sup>33</sup> As in the colonies, legally brewed alcohol was supplemented by large quantities of illicit ‘poteen’, which was ‘distilled in the cellar and up the chimney of many a tall urban tenement as well as on the misty shielings of a Highland glen’.<sup>34</sup>

Robert Graham’s surprise at the number of ‘grog shops’ along Auckland’s main street is interesting, considering the pervasiveness of alcohol consumption in Scottish cities. Edwin Chadwick’s *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain 1842*, which details the number of whisky-shops in Edinburgh, makes Auckland seem comparatively conservative:

I was led to ask the provost what number of bakers’ shops there were? ‘Twelve,’ was his answer. And what number of whisky-shops may the town possess? ‘Seventy-nine’ was the reply. If we might rely on the inquiries made of working-men when Dr. Arnott and I went through the wynds of Edinburgh, their consumption of spirits bore almost the like proportion to the consumption of wholesome food.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> W. Fox, *The Six Colonies of New Zealand* (London: J.W. Parker, 1851), cited in Gluckman, *Touching on Deaths*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> McLean, *Auckland 1842-1845*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Albin Martin, *Journal of an Emigrant*, p. 33, cited in Phillips, *Social History of Auckland*, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> Auckland’s population included a high proportion of Irish migrants compared to the rest of the country. The Irish made up 31.3 per cent of the civil population of Auckland by 1851, while the Scots accounted for 15.1 per cent. Phillips, pp. 74-75.

<sup>33</sup> Smout, p. 133.

<sup>34</sup> Smout, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Edwin Chadwick, M. W. Flinn, et al., eds, *The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965), p. 198.

Of the first 384 inquests held in Auckland from its settlement in 1840, 91 showed alcohol consumption as a factor. Twenty-two of these alcohol related deaths were considered accidental.<sup>36</sup> The transcripts of these first inquests show that post-mortems were a frequent practice in the case of violent or unnatural death. The City Gaol, situated on the outskirts of town, directly behind the Court House and the Armed Police Office, was the most likely location of the first mortuary or 'Dead House'. The Colonial Hospital (later called the Provincial Hospital) which opened in 1847 also included a detached mortuary building.<sup>37</sup> However, many of the earliest post-mortems were performed wherever the corpse happened to be accommodated. Frequently, autopsies were ordered by the coroner's jury after sighting the body in the local hotel. Inquests were generally concluded on the same day in the presence of the body. It is likely, therefore, that the procedure was performed on the premises.<sup>38</sup> Inquests were carried out in hotels and inns throughout the country. As late as 1884, Otago's *Evening Star* was decrying the practice of holding inquests at a Dunedin hotel, 'for which the landlord was not remunerated'. The old dead house, described as 'a small dilapidated room belonging to the Supreme Court' had become unfit for the purpose and so the hotel was used until public pressure forced the building of a new morgue with an attached coroner's court.<sup>39</sup>

The coroner's findings on the death of William Kenney in Auckland in September 1845 were typical of many alcohol related deaths. After an autopsy, performed at the military hospital by Dr William McAndrew, the verdict pronounced: 'Deceased, very much intoxicated, lay down on a floor and died from the excessive drinking of alcoholic spirits and not by violence.'<sup>40</sup> Violence, however, was very much in evidence in other inquests. John McGlathery was kicked and 'jumped upon' by 'four strangers' in December

---

<sup>36</sup> Gluckman, *Touching on Deaths*, p. 100.

<sup>37</sup> Gluckman, p. 24. Dead Houses with facilities for autopsy were also located at the military hospital in the Albert Barracks, and the Auckland Lunatic Asylum which was opened in 1867. The term 'morgue' did not begin to be used until the 1890s.

<sup>38</sup> Gluckman, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Morgue: From Inquests to Life Saving', in *Otago Settlers News*, Issue 90 (September 2006), p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 37, p. 133.

1845, and died three days later from inflammation of the peritoneum. Despite McGlathery's naming of his killers, no record exists of them ever being brought to account for his death.<sup>41</sup> The *Statistics of New Zealand, 1872*, suggests little improvement on the situation thirty years later. Thirty persons across New Zealand were charged with the offences of murder, attempted murder, manslaughter or shooting, stabbing and wounding in 1872. Of the thirty men and women charged with these offences, only half were convicted and sentenced.<sup>42</sup> Domestic violence was also clearly in evidence in the 1840s, with alcohol being a factor in almost every case. Frequently beaten by her husband John, Isabella King died in November 1846 from knife wounds to her throat. Neighbours testified to hearing the words 'murder, murder'. On investigation, Isabella was found lying on the floor in her husband's arms in 'a large pool of blood'. The investigating officer noted that he thought John King 'had been drinking'.<sup>43</sup>

Early Auckland inquests show that children were often the victims of accidental or violent death. Of the first 384 inquests, twenty of these were conducted on children who had drowned in wells. Douglas Taylor was one of the many children who died this way. In December 1844, Douglas' little body was found in a well near his home, 'his head and trunk in the water, the feet sticking up'.<sup>44</sup> Open drains and stagnant pools held a fascinating but dangerous allure for young children. In 1864 the editor of the *New Zealand Herald* reported on the 'dreadful state of filth' in private yards in Auckland, where, even in the most respectable and frequented parts of town, little children amused themselves 'playing about cesspools' and gutters 'stopped up day after day'.<sup>45</sup> The more immediate danger of drowning was possibly no more than the risk of infectious diseases that might be picked up from these filth-laden gutters and cesspools. Burning and scalding were also high on the list of childhood fatalities. The deaths of children like three-year old Anne Murray, who received fatal burns after her clothes caught fire 'on a windy and boisterous day' in September 1841,

---

<sup>41</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 41, p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> *Statistics of New Zealand, 1872*, Part V, Number 10.

<sup>43</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 48, pp. 144-45.

<sup>44</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 30, p. 131.

<sup>45</sup> Wood, *Filth, Dirt and Decay*, p. 6.

were all too common.<sup>46</sup> An account of her death was published in the *New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette* under the heading ‘Caution to Mothers’.<sup>47</sup> When parental supervision was compromised through alcohol, the combination of children and water, or children and fire could have tragic consequences. Mary Hughes, described only as ‘a little girl’, ran from her house in flames in January 1854. A neighbour carried her to the hospital ‘in a handbarrow’. She was reported to be ‘fearfully burned’ especially over the face, and her sight was said to be ‘destroyed’. Before her death six hours later, she told the doctor that she had called to her father and mother for help but both were too drunk to be of any assistance. Neighbours reported that the father had staggered out at one point with an empty bucket but had fallen over ‘through intoxication’. The mother, meanwhile, lay ‘very intoxicated on the floor of the house’.<sup>48</sup>

The deaths of children as a result of family violence did not appear to be uncommon. According to the records, the inquest on the death of twelve-month old Nora Handley was only the second to be held in Auckland. The coroner, Dr Johnson, concluded that Nora was ‘feloniously kill[ed] and [slain]’ by one John Hopwood, her step-father. The tent that Hopwood and Nora’s mother were using as temporary accommodation had caught fire and Hopwood claimed, in his defence, that the child had been stepped on in his attempt to extinguish the flames. Nora’s mother told a different story. Hopwood, she claimed, had ‘been drinking’ and ‘struck Nora with a fire stick’ while she was in her mother’s arms. He then set fire to the bedclothes and beat Nora’s mother until ‘insensible’. When she came to, she found her child dead. A jury later convicted John Hopwood of manslaughter, and sentenced him to three years imprisonment with hard labour.<sup>49</sup> Fanny McDonald’s mother had held her sickly ‘two to three year old’ daughter by the ankles and shaken her. The child died after a night of ‘violent convulsions’. At the inquest held at ‘The Masons’ Home’ in February 1857, Fanny’s father admitted that ‘[h]is wife was not sober when she shook the

---

<sup>46</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 4, p. 119.

<sup>47</sup> *New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette*, 11 September 1841, cited in Gluckman, p. 119.

<sup>48</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 131, p. 184.

<sup>49</sup> Gluckman, Book 1: Inquest 2, p. 117.

child'. Despite this evidence, the coroner's verdict on the death of Fanny McDonald was 'natural causes'.<sup>50</sup>

Lynley Hood's list of excerpts from southern New Zealand newspapers shows that infanticide was a matter for public concern.<sup>51</sup> A news item in the *Southland Times* in March 1889 reported that:

Yesterday forenoon a boy ... was searching for birds' nests along the bank of the old Puni creek ... when he observed a bundle floating in the water. Natural curiosity prompted him to drag it out, then untie a string, and unwind a towel and piece of calico which formed the covering, when there was disclosed the body of a male child.<sup>52</sup>

Later in the same month the *Otago Daily Times* reported that:

Sergeant Devine ... arrested a young unmarried woman named Margaret Fitzgerald and her sister, a Mrs May Curtis, on a charge of wilful murder of an infant. A second charge of concealment of birth was also laid against them.<sup>53</sup>

Seven months later, in October, the body of a 'newborn infant' was found in a garden. The *Southland Times* reported that a medical examination 'prove[d]' that the child had been born alive.<sup>54</sup> Less than a year later Lily Ella Patten was charged with concealment of birth when the dead body of her male child was found abandoned.<sup>55</sup>

There were 130 deaths by drowning among the list of early Auckland inquests – just over a third of the total. Death by drowning was so common in the early period of settlement that it came to be called the 'New Zealand Death'.<sup>56</sup> James Wilson commented in 1873: 'Nobody dies here they say except of old age and

---

<sup>50</sup> Gluckman, Book 2: Inquest 194, p. 216.

<sup>51</sup> Lynley Hood, *Minnie Dean: Her Life and Crimes* (Auckland: Penguin, 1994), pp. 81-88.

<sup>52</sup> *Southland Times*, 4 March 1889, cited in Hood, p. 82.

<sup>53</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 15 March 1889, cited in Hood, p. 82.

<sup>54</sup> *Southland Times*, 19 October 1889, cited in Hood, p. 83.

<sup>55</sup> *The Press*, 27 September 1890, cited in Hood, p. 83.

<sup>56</sup> Jim Hewitson, *Far off in Sunlit Places: Stories of the Scots in Australia and New Zealand*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1998), p. 256.

drowning, which is considered a natural death'.<sup>57</sup> David Madle's PhD research into accidental and violent death in New Zealand shows that in 1863 river drowning rates for the South Island were more than double those of the North, with the highest rates occurring in the Provinces of Otago and Southland.<sup>58</sup> Unsurprisingly, New Zealand's overall rates for death by drowning were almost four times that of Scotland.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, as Madle points out, deaths were seriously underreported. Inquests occurred only when there was a body, and many men and women were 'simply swept away'.<sup>60</sup> Comparisons with newspaper reports confirm that many deaths were never included in official reports. '[S]uch omissions' says Madle, 'emphasise the under-reporting of tragic deaths in this era, and accentuate the high level of drownings that existed.'<sup>61</sup> The list of New Zealand inquests held during the year 1886 suggests that the situation was showing no sign of improvement into the later part of the nineteenth century. The Report by the Registrar-General on the Statistics of the Colony for that year states:

Inquests were held during the year on the bodies of 514 males and 175 females, a total of 689; of these, the deaths of 281 males and 70 females were attributed to accidental causes. The largest number of deaths from any one cause was 130 from drowning, viz., of 95 males and of 35 females.<sup>62</sup>

That a significant number of drownings were the result of suicide was well recognised, albeit unofficially. Since there was often little evidence of how the body came to be in the water, and in law sudden death was presumed accidental until proven otherwise, a suicide verdict was easily overlooked or avoided. The

---

<sup>57</sup> James G. Wilson 1873, quoted in David Victor Madle, 'Patterns of Death by Accident, Suicide and Homicide in New Zealand 1860-1960, Interpretation and Comparisons' (PhD thesis, Victoria University, 1996), p. 36.

<sup>58</sup> 31 of the 38 drowning deaths on the record were associated with gold mining. See William Smith's diary for many accounts of dangerous river crossings and work in swollen rivers under extreme conditions. William Smith, 'Reminiscences of a Long and Active Life by an Old Colonist', number 23, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, volume 2, numbers 20-24.

<sup>59</sup> Madle, 'Patterns of Death', p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Madle, p. 53.

<sup>61</sup> Madle, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> *British Parliamentary Papers (Colonies of New Zealand)*, Volume 17, Sessions 1883-96, Number 5, New Zealand Report by the Registrar-General on the Statistics of the Colony for 1886, pp. 248/62. Madle suggests that death by drowning did not decline in New Zealand until the beginning of the twentieth century.

coroner's verdict on the death of the soldier Joseph Hamilton was simply 'accidental death'. The examining surgeon, Dr Richard Matthews concluded: 'From the evidence I have heard I am of opinion that the deceased being in a state of intoxication was seized with apoplexy when in the act of swimming and that his death was caused thereby'. Nevertheless, part of this evidence included the statement from a Corporal Thompson who held that Hamilton had attempted suicide with a musket two years previously. Furthermore, he had 'several times' requested others to stay near him at night, 'that he might not destroy himself'.<sup>63</sup>

Peter Luke, in his research into suicide in the Auckland region from 1848-1939, found that certain social groups were over-represented in the statistical figures. These groups include males, the middle-aged, the unmarried and widows, and also recent immigrants.<sup>64</sup> Alcohol abuse combined with isolation or loneliness, especially in unmarried men of middle age or later years, were common denominators in suicides of this period. The hardened culture among those working in the gold fields, in the bush, or on the land, led some to depression, madness and suicidal behaviour. Sarah Courage's picture of a land worker's life in the 1860s vividly describes the effects of atomisation on such men:

A shepherd's life is a terribly lonely one, especially if he is in an isolate position. A shepherd told me that men go mad with such a life. ... They feel themselves simply an atom of life in a lifeless world, and they have no hope or ambition. I have read that men living such lives become gloomy and superstitious, and fancy that people visit them in their whares at night. A man we ourselves had in the early days used to tell Fred and I that he was visited twice a week by a lady and her two daughters and after a while they would go away. 'Where to?' said Fred. 'Up the hill', he replied, 'Always up the hill'. Of course it was imagination.<sup>65</sup>

Suicide figures suggest that those living in urban areas were equally affected by loneliness and desperation. Health problems, economic pressures and personal expectations also had their part to play. Luke's research shows that urban-dwellers and those with high occupational status rated highly in suicide

---

<sup>63</sup> Gluckman, Book 2: Inquest 145, p. 193.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Luke, 'Suicide in Auckland 1848-1939' (MA thesis, Auckland University, 1982), p. i.

<sup>65</sup> Sarah Courage, cited in Julia Millen, *Colonial Tears and Sweat: The Working Class in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand* (Wellington: Reed, 1984), p. 47.

statistics.<sup>66</sup> While women appear to have resorted to suicide in far fewer numbers than men, successful suicide attempts among women are not underrepresented among the first Auckland inquests. Women slashed their throats with razors, and poisoned themselves with rat bait.<sup>67</sup> A police report of December 1866 recorded that ‘a woman named Sarah Ann Tilney ran into the surf and was drowned at an early hour this morning’. It was noted that Mrs Tilney’s husband had left her many years previously and that she had no relatives in the colony.<sup>68</sup> The trauma of being a new immigrant and the loneliness and separation that it entailed could prove to be defeating for both men and women. In 1874, thirty year old Agnes Mouat was taken on as a maid at a property in Tai Tapu, near Christchurch, after arriving from Shetland only a few days earlier. Her homesickness and despair must have been absolute when she drowned herself in a tub of water during her first night with her new employers.<sup>69</sup>

Attitudes to suicide in New Zealand varied enormously over the nineteenth century. Traditionally, suicide was regarded as the antithesis of the good Christian death where suffering was to be faced with fortitude and a willing spirit. To commit self-murder was an offence against God and the law. At an official level, the act of self-murder was regarded with some understanding. While attempted suicide was treated as a criminal act, cases that came before the court were seldom prosecuted with great severity.<sup>70</sup> Coroners’ juries were reluctant to declare suicide cases as *felo de se* (self-murder), returning the verdict of *non compos mentis* (temporary insanity) in the majority of cases. In 1873, the *Herald* took a compassionate secular view in its response to a high profile case where an Anglican minister refused to perform burial rites over a suicide. It claimed:

---

<sup>66</sup> Luke, p. i.

<sup>67</sup> Gluckman, Book 2: Inquest 143, Catherine McKee, p. 190-192; Book 1: Inquest 7, Jane Rayner, p. 120; Book 2: Inquest 157, Elizabeth McBride, p. 199. The majority of female suicides in the years 1877-86 were as a result of taking poison, followed closely by drowning and hanging. The main methods employed by males were hanging and shooting. *British Parliamentary Papers (Colonies of New Zealand)*, Volume 17, Sessions 1883-96, Number 5, New Zealand Report by the Registrar-General on the Statistics of the Colony for 1886, pp. 212/26.

<sup>68</sup> Millen, *Colonial Tears and Sweat*, p. 118.

<sup>69</sup> Madle, ‘Patterns of Death’, p. 108.

<sup>70</sup> Luke, ‘Suicide in Auckland’, p. 212.

If the ancient superstitions associated with the self-destruction of human life were blotted out of the statute books ... the Church would be saved from many bitter reflections on it. ... Intelligent men and women know and feel that such customs are an outrage upon common sense and the era in which we are living.<sup>71</sup>

The actions of the city folk themselves suggest a less enlightened attitude. The case in question involved a seventy-two year old widow, Ann Fawkes, whose husband was interred at the Anglican cemetery at Howick. When she was discovered hanging by a rope, a policeman and doctor were summoned. As the local store owner she must have been well known to her neighbours, yet she was left hanging for 32 hours with 'nearly 100 men, women and children' going to view the scene.<sup>72</sup> Ann's 'very decomposed' body was cut down only after a jury had been summoned and a verdict was reached. No-one from the community was prepared to help the two policemen with the work of removing the corpse. Not only was Ann buried without funeral rites, as a *felo de se* suicide she was denied the right to be buried alongside her husband, and was interred 'between the hours of nine p.m. and midnight' in a 'certain part of the burial ground ... reserved for persons dying under similar circumstances'.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the high numbers of accidental and violent deaths in the colony, most people, of course, did not die a violent or sudden death. In New Zealand, as in Britain, the dying process was essentially one that was managed and presided over in the home. In all but rare circumstances it was women who nursed the sick and the dying, but it was also women who were more likely to be nursed. Mortality figures for women show that the majority succumbed to chronic illnesses such as pulmonary tuberculosis and heart disease. In Christchurch and Otago, high numbers of women died from respiratory diseases such as bronchitis and pneumonia. Moreover, women of childbearing age throughout the country had to contend with the complications of pregnancy and childbirth which often proved fatal.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> *Herald*, Monday 10 March 1873, p. 2, cited in Luke, p. 210.

<sup>72</sup> *Herald*, Thursday 6 March 1873, p 2, cited in Luke p. 209.

<sup>73</sup> Luke, pp. 207, 209.

<sup>74</sup> *Statistics of New Zealand, 1872-75*.

A significant proportion of all deaths did occur in institutions. Most of these institutional deaths took place in hospitals, with the remainder occurring in Benevolent Homes and lunatic asylums.<sup>75</sup> An ageing population of atomised males who had ‘failed to contract ... substantial social bonds’ inflated the numbers of those dying in institutional care.<sup>76</sup> Of the hospital deaths, a sizeable portion would have occurred in hospitals located near the Otago or West Coast goldfields which had been set up to treat the frequent and often severe mining accidents in the area.<sup>77</sup> Cleaver’s figures show that in the years 1875 and 1880, about twenty-two per cent of the deaths of males aged five years or over occurred in the hospital setting. The equivalent statistic for females is around nine percent.<sup>78</sup> Early hospitals had accommodation for men only and as late as 1882 there were still at least three hospitals in the country, namely Charleston, Coromandel and Ross, which allowed no admissions for women.<sup>79</sup> Eighty per cent of the existing 37 hospitals submitted returns for the 1882 year which showed the ratio of female to male patients to be less than twenty per cent.<sup>80</sup>

Professional nurses and home help were available but in most working class homes the dying relied on the availability of female relations. Chronic illness often led to painful and lingering deaths, and caring for the terminally ill when few palliatives were available required a strong emotional reserve. In her book *Inside the Victorian Home*, Judith Flanders includes a particularly evocative description of the effect of breast cancer at a time when the treatment was ‘not much better’ than the disease itself. She quotes Sherwin Nuland who writes:

This cancer killed, and in a particularly devastating way, almost every woman who fell victim to it ....Most patients died only after years of enduring the presence of an expanding ulcer where the breast had been, painfully eroding its way through the underlying muscle of the chest wall

---

<sup>75</sup> Philip Cleaver, ‘Dealing with Death: The Pakeha Treatment of Death, 1850-1910’ (MA thesis, Victoria University, 1996), p. 11. *Statistics of New Zealand* show that from at least 1867, when the first relevant figures were given, until 1900, an average of about eleven per cent of the people who died in New Zealand did so in public hospitals. Cleaver, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup> Cleaver, p. 11. See also Derek Dow, ‘Springs of Charity’ in *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams, 1991)

<sup>77</sup> Dow, pp. 46-47.

<sup>78</sup> Cleaver, Figure 1.9, p.21.

<sup>79</sup> Dow, p. 49.

<sup>80</sup> Dow, p. 49.

and in time even the ribs beneath, all the while exuding the stench of foul fluid that oozed constantly from its ever-widening circumference.<sup>81</sup>

A number of pain relieving drugs were discovered in the early part of the century, including morphine and codeine but it is not clear how often these remedies were used among the working class population in New Zealand. Towards the end of the century, in 1895, Mary Shove reports a doctor in Wanganui giving morphia to a dying patient, and comments, 'what a blessing to be able to do that'. The patient, Mrs Hurst, had spent a considerable time in 'most dreadful pain'. Mary wrote: 'Her screams were most awful and the look on her face was enough to frighten anybody. Mrs Glasgow showed me her feet and they were nearly as big as buckets, I don't think I will ever forget the sight as long as I live'.<sup>82</sup> Inquest reports from the 1840s to the 1860s attest to doctors' reliance on traditional treatments such as bleeding, blistering and the use of mustard poultices on terminally ill patients. For the most part female family members who took on the unenviable role of nurse were reduced to bathing, soothing, watching and waiting.

After a death, the work of preparing the corpse for burial was to be done. In New Zealand there is very little evidence in regards to the work of specialists in this field, although presumably women who worked as midwives or 'howdies' in the Scottish homelands carried on their traditions after settling in the colonies. In isolated rural areas, or where no howdy was available, the job of cleaning, dressing and 'streaking' the body fell to the women of the household. When sixty-year old Scottish colonist James Allen died at home in 1891, surrounded by his large family, his body was dressed, and laid out in the parlour by his two sisters.<sup>83</sup> The Scottish practice of visiting and viewing the corpse in the home remained an important tradition even throughout the hot New Zealand summers. This convention was adhered to in the case of accidents and even if the process

---

<sup>81</sup> Sherwin Nuland, quoted in Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004), p. 349.

<sup>82</sup> Mary Shove, *Diaries compiled and transcribed by Randall and June Springer* (1998), entry for Wednesday 21 March 1895, p. 324.

<sup>83</sup> Alison Clarke, 'Tinged with Christian Sentiment': Popular Religion and the Otago Colonists, 1850-1900', in *Christianity, Modernity and Culture*, edited by John Stenhouse (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), p. 125.

of decay was reasonably well advanced.<sup>84</sup> Glimpses of these traditional rituals can be seen in the diaries and letters of nineteenth-century women. After the death of Mrs Flood, Mary Shove recorded in her diary that ‘Betsy went up with Joan and Maggie Simpson’ to visit the body. Betsy reported that the corpse ‘looked beautiful’.<sup>85</sup> When Elizabeth Holman’s sixteen-year old daughter drowned at Whangarei, twelve young girls from the community ‘all in white dresses’ carried her coffin to the graveside. This practice was carried out in fishing villages in Scotland when a young unmarried woman died.<sup>86</sup>

As in Britain, traditions that involved the presence of women and children at the graveside appear to have been minimal. The reportage of Edward Game’s funeral, which appeared in the *Evening Post* in January 1880, noted with interest that there were ‘two lady mourners’ among those who were kept waiting at the graveside while attempts were made to locate a Presbyterian clergyman to read the burial service.<sup>87</sup> Mary Shove’s diaries list the frequent deaths of friends and neighbours, yet she appears to have attended the graveside funerals of only two of them. As a sixteen year old Mary joined a crowd of children who tried to attend the funeral of a popular school teacher, Mr Rattaray. She wrote: ‘Sarah Rodgers, Ruth Baily, Jessie and Maggie Edmonstin and I went to the cemetery to see the funeral’, though they arrived too late for the ceremony.<sup>88</sup> Years later, as a woman in her thirties, Mary attended the funeral of Mrs Flood. She proclaimed it ‘such a poor funeral’, but refrained from elaborating any further on the subject.<sup>89</sup> The majority of British emigrant women, like Sarah Greenwood, bowed to convention and remained at home while the men folk conveyed the coffin to the grave. In a letter to her mother, Sarah wrote: ‘Our dear child was buried this afternoon, when several of our neighbours kindly came unasked to assist in bearing the coffin and to follow it. During their

---

<sup>84</sup> Cleaver, p. 1. The practice of embalming did not appear in New Zealand until the beginning of the twentieth century.

<sup>85</sup> Mary Shove, Diary entry 4 January 1886, p. 250.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Holman, ‘Reminiscences’, MS-Papers 3881, cited in Porter and MacDonald, p. 467. This tradition is mentioned in Revd Walter Gregor’s 1874 account of Scottish burial customs in Margaret Bennett, *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), p. 224.

<sup>87</sup> *Evening Post*, p. 2, cited in Cleaver, p. 52. This report is suggestive of changing attitudes over time to the ‘popish’ practice of prayers at the graveside.

<sup>88</sup> Mary Shove, diary entry for Sunday July 26, 1874, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Shove, diary entry for Wednesday January 6, 1886, p. 251.

absence we read the beautiful service at home'.<sup>90</sup> Rhoda Coote's diary tells how her husband's coffin was taken to the grave by 'the gentlemen of Wellington', while she waited at home for Bishop Abraham to 'return and read part of the funeral service to her'.<sup>91</sup>

Accounts such as that of Barbara Macgregor's burial in the Matarawa Valley and Elizabeth Holman's funeral procession in Whangarei show how settlers transferred traditional customs, modifying them according to the new environment. Traditional forms of memorialisation were translated into available materials, and familiar practices were adapted to colonial conditions. In the early period of settlement Pakeha burial grounds were characterised by severe practicality. Hand-carved wooden headstones were improvised in the absence of granite or stone and in the dearth of masons to work it. Often graves were marked only by wooden picket fences. These wooden grave surrounds, regularly painted white, became the practiced convention in New Zealand from the 1840s to the 1880s, and stood out as the most significant feature distinguishing cemeteries of the Old World from the New.<sup>92</sup> Often situated in isolated spots on a stark landscape, such gravesites could serve to reinforce a migrant's sense of loneliness and separation during the time of mourning. Eliza Maundrell's husband became ill during the voyage from England to New Zealand and died three weeks after their arrival at Lyttleton in 1854. She wrote desperately to her sister professing to have lost the will to live. She added: 'I have seen my darling's grave today. It is indeed a dismal looking place. I am so anxious to do something for it. He was so anxious to go home to die and be buried in England, it makes me so miserable to see him lying there'.<sup>93</sup> She had already tried to improve the situation, as indicated by a letter written five days earlier:

---

<sup>90</sup> Sarah Greenwood, Letters (MS-Papers-0098-11), cited in MacDonald p. 158.

<sup>91</sup> Frances Porter and Charlotte MacDonald, *My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates: The unsettled lives of nineteenth century women in New Zealand as revealed to sisters, family and friends* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), p. 453.

<sup>92</sup> Deed, 'Unearthly Landscapes', p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> Eliza Maundrell, Letter to her sister Charlotte, 6 October 1854, cited in Porter and MacDonald, p. 463.

[D]ear Charlotte, I wish you and Robert to see about getting a handsome tombstone and iron railings for his grave as I cannot get them here and I wish to put flowers over it that will flower summer and winter.<sup>94</sup>

By the 1850s and 1860s imported headstones became available for those who could afford them. Slate was imported from England, and sandstone from Sydney; these came as blanks to be later inscribed in New Zealand. Oamaru stone, worked in the South Island of New Zealand also began to be transported throughout the country for use in memorialisation.<sup>95</sup>

There were early attempts at replicating the traditional English churchyard burial grounds and Scottish Kirkyards. The Anglican graveyard at Christ Church, Kororaraka appears to have been the first of these.<sup>96</sup> However, burial in public cemeteries became established from the earliest period of settlement in New Zealand. When John Askew visited Auckland in 1852 he wrote a detailed account of what he found there. Included in his observations were the whereabouts and features of the burial grounds. He noted:

To the south, are the cemeteries of the city. That of the Roman Catholics is distinguished by a large wooden cross, painted white. There was neither grass nor soil upon any of the graves. The soil was a stiff wet clay, destitute of vegetation, and enclosed within a low wall of scoria. It had a most dreary aspect. On the other side of the road is the burial place of the Protestants, of all denominations. All the graves were covered with long grass and fern. The ground had a gentle slope towards a winding brook which murmured sweetly past. There were several neat monuments, with marble tablets. Altogether, the place had a solemn and melancholy air, which much reminded me of the peaceful resting-place of the Friends in the old country.<sup>97</sup>

An earlier anonymous account from 1848 confirms Askew's observations:

[A]lthough the inhabitants are liberal in their religious ideas, yet we find the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Wesleyans, the Jews and the Roman Catholics, have each their separate cemeteries ... the Church of England had the largest graveyard, picturesquely situated in a ravine. On the opposite side of the public road, unenclosed with about twenty wooden tombstones, if I may use the term, stand the cemetery of

---

<sup>94</sup>Eliza Maundrell, Letter to her sister Charlotte, 1 October 1854, cited in Porter and MacDonald, pp. 462-3.

<sup>95</sup>Deed, p. 103.

<sup>96</sup>Deed, p. 56.

<sup>97</sup>John Askew, *A Voyage to Australia and New Zealand* (Christchurch: Kiwi, 1999), p. 336.

the Scotch and the Wesleyans, close to the last, but carefully enclosed, is that of the Jews; a short distance apart from all, is the resting place of the Roman Catholics, distinguished from the other by a large wooden cross.<sup>98</sup>

This same account suggests that the separation of the grounds according to different denominations had not always been the case:

[T]he present Episcopalian burying ground was at one time common, and intended for all the inhabitants, and used by all the inhabitants as a burying ground; that after being so used, it was during the time of the late Governor Hobson, made over to the Church of England and consecrated by the Bishop. The ground on the opposite side of the road was allotted to the Roman Catholics; some of the Presbyterians were displeased with the ground allotted to them, perhaps they did not like the situation ... they had a quarrel with the Surveyor General; the Presbyterians were in consequence for a time without any place to bury their dead'.<sup>99</sup>

The cemetery, situated on Symonds Street, was officially opened by Auckland's first Governor, Captain William Hobson in 1842.<sup>100</sup> However, as the above account suggests, the site was being used as a burial ground for some time before official allocation.

Headstone inscriptions that emphasise a Scottish heritage evince the importance of familial ties to the homeland and a desire to assert ethnic identity. More occasionally these markers appear in grave symbology with the Scottish thistle used in the decoration of headstones or grave surrounds.<sup>101</sup> When John Crosbie died on the Thames goldfields without family to bury him, he was not forgotten. James Gillan erected a headstone for his friend three years later. Such evidence for 'colonial mateship', and what Jock Phillips refers to as the 'warm ties of manly sympathy', are not uncommon, particularly in the predominantly male communities of the goldfields.<sup>102</sup> Gillan was careful to ensure that his friend's

---

<sup>98</sup> Auckland – A History of the Symonds Street Cemeteries, available online at <http://www.aucklandcitylibraries.com/general.aspx?id=472>, accessed 19 May 2006.

<sup>99</sup> Auckland – A History of the Symonds Street Cemeteries, online.

<sup>100</sup> Shaun Higgins, 'Reflections After Life: The Social Dimensions in Colonial Auckland's Symonds Street Cemetery' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1998), p. 6. Shaun Higgins found graves dated to 1841. The cemetery remained, in practice, a collection of separate sectarian cemeteries, managed by denominational boards of trustees.

<sup>101</sup> Deed. Figure 72, p. 130.

<sup>102</sup> Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History*, Revised edition (Auckland: Penguin, 1996), pp. 26 & 38.

Scottishness be memorialised, and added, in parentheses, an acknowledgement of his New Zealand identity. The headstone reads:

Sacred to the memory of  
JOHN CROSBIE  
of Glenloch, Ayrshire, Scotland  
and (Thames Goldfield, New Zealand)  
died 6<sup>th</sup> February 1872  
aged 31 years  
Erected by James Gillan of Grahamstown 1875<sup>103</sup>

The significance of family connections is made evident in the number of communal family plots occurring among the Presbyterian Scots. In his study of Symonds Street Cemetery Shaun Higgins found that burial in family plots was practised most often by those presenting as Presbyterian. He found that generally '[t]hey are grouped with immediate families and seldom have separate plots for children'.<sup>104</sup> Higgins found that numbers of Presbyterian males were buried alone in plots, while females 'almost always accompany males'.<sup>105</sup> Headstones may list up to ten or twelve individuals interred within the same grave space. The kinship role is reinforced in the inscriptions on grave markers by the association of the deceased with his or her kinship role in life. The headstone which marks the grave of three generations of the Chalmers family illustrates this point:

Sacred to the memory of  
JOHN CHALMERS  
of Ardrossan, Ayrshire, Scotland  
who died 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1889  
aged 80 years  
Also FLORA  
wife of the above  
who died 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1872  
aged 72 years  
also ANN CHALMERS  
daughter of above died October 20, 1922  
aged 89 years  
and grandchildren of the above

---

<sup>103</sup> Shirley Kendall, *Presbyterian and Catholic Cemeteries Symonds Street Auckland*, (Taihape: S.E. Kendall, 1997), gravesite T 175, p. 12.

<sup>104</sup> Higgins, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Higgins, p. 43.

CATHERINE CRAWFORD GOLDIE, aged 11 days  
DAVID CLARK, aged 10 months  
Also JAMES GOLDIE  
born 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1841  
died 12<sup>th</sup> November 1918<sup>106</sup>

At times family members lose their singular identity by being interred under the collective name of the patriarch. Four Stuart children, for example, are memorialised here simply by virtue of their kin relationship to their father:

In memory of  
ALEXANDER STUART  
born at Fort George, Scotland 6<sup>th</sup> January 1806  
died at Auckland, N.Z. 24<sup>th</sup> March 1858  
Also his four children.<sup>107</sup>

It seems that the bodies of family members were not necessarily required to be interred in a family plot in order to be memorialised on the communal headstone or monument. Generations of the McKimmie family were careful to ensure that they remained together, if only for the record. The headstone reads:

In loving memory of  
DAVID McKIMMIE  
died October 18<sup>th</sup> 1873, aged 44 years  
Also his son  
DAVID McKIMMIE  
And grandson  
DAVID McKIMMIE  
who died November 10<sup>th</sup> 1906, aged 27 and a half years  
Interred in the Manor Park Cemetery, London  
*Thy will be done*  
Also AGNES McKIMMIE  
died at Nelson Street 14<sup>th</sup> December 1910, aged 85 years  
Also JAMES McKIMMIE  
died at sea 24<sup>th</sup> July 1911, aged 55 years<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> Kendall, gravesite T 132, p. 15.

<sup>107</sup> Kendall, gravesite S 34, p. 83.

<sup>108</sup> Kendall, gravesite T 147, p. 56.

Fears about the dangers of cemeteries situated within towns spread from Britain and Ireland to the New Zealand colonies. In 1852 the *New Zealander* spoke of the threat of pollution from ‘morbific matter’ in relation to the Symonds Street cemeteries, commenting that it would have been better ‘had these cemeteries been placed at a greater distance from the town’.<sup>109</sup> A decade later such fears were still being fuelled by popular media, and gained support from those within the medical fraternity who championed miasmatic theories of disease causation. However, there were those who strongly disagreed. Auckland medical man, Dr Philson, argued in his evidence to the Select Committee on Burial Grounds 1862, that ‘the supposition of poisoning the atmosphere by noxious gases was carried too far.’<sup>110</sup> He offered as evidence the healthiness of the family of the grave-digger who resided in the cemetery, despite the fact that the ‘noxious fumes from the decomposing cadavers could be noticed as far afield as Khyber Pass’.<sup>111</sup> Many of the larger nineteenth-century cemeteries appointed sextons, who worked as grave-diggers and otherwise presided over the upkeep of the land. Occasionally these men and their families were provided with their own residence within the grounds, as was the case at the Symonds Street cemetery. Importantly, the presence of these men acted as a guard against desecration.<sup>112</sup> This aspect of their work may have had more to do with assuaging the ingrained fear of body-snatching which settlers had brought with them from the Old Country, than any practical application. After two decades of public complaint regarding the Symonds Street cemetery, central government passed an Act to Regulate Burials near the City of Auckland, for the protection of public health. This Act imposed a limitation on the numbers of burials at Symonds Street Cemetery and allowed for the establishment of new burial grounds.<sup>113</sup> When the Auckland City Council established the Waikumete Cemetery in 1886, eleven miles from Auckland township, it was quick to put an end to the practice of burials within the city. All five sections of the Symonds Street cemetery were closed as from 3 March that same year.<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> *New Zealander* 28 February 1852, p. 3, cited in Deed, p. 101.

<sup>110</sup> Gluckman, *Touching on Deaths*, p. 29.

<sup>111</sup> Deed, p. 91.

<sup>112</sup> Deed, p. 91.

<sup>113</sup> *Statutes of New Zealand, 1871*, The Auckland Burial Grounds Act 1871, number 27, p. 120.

<sup>114</sup> Auckland – A history of the Symonds Street Cemeteries’, available online at <http://www.aucklandcitylibraries.com/general.aspx?id=472>, accessed 19 May 2006.

The Cemeteries Act 1882 was perhaps the most significant piece of legislation relating to burial grounds passed in New Zealand in the nineteenth century. It was introduced in an effort to bring about uniformity in burial practices throughout New Zealand, and to ensure that the problems of the Old World cemeteries were not continued in the colonial context. Following the British example, the Act maintained that no new cemeteries would be established within the limits of any town or borough.<sup>115</sup> The Act also made provision for the burial of 'poor persons'. It ensured the interment, free of charge, of those unable to pay for their own funeral, including those from gaols, hospitals, and lunatic asylums. Careful checks were to be first undertaken to ensure that the person left no funds, nor had family or friends capable of paying.<sup>116</sup> Margaret Tennant suggests that these funerals, funded by charitable aid, were a system of last resort. Case books of the Otago Benevolent Trustees show that in many cases elderly people, 'destitute and malnourished', had still managed to hold onto enough savings for a 'decent' burial.<sup>117</sup>

\*\*\*

After the practical aspects of burial preparation, funeral and interment had been carried out, friends and family were left to cope with their grief. The ritual of mourning was all important. For those in a supportive community surrounded by family, the proper rituals could bring comfort and a sense of shared loss. For new migrants whose strongest connections were on the other side of the world, distance and isolation compounded their grief. The time taken for letters to arrive must have seemed agonisingly slow and could only sharpen the sense of being cut off from old friends and extended family. Letters of condolence, written on black-bordered stationery, carried familiar messages of religious consolation and heavenly reconciliation. When Katie Jack died in Edinburgh in 1883, her grieving parents received these small black-rimmed cards from family in New Zealand as well as Scotland. A family friend Ronald Hunter wrote:

---

<sup>115</sup> *Statutes of New Zealand, 1882*, The Cemeteries Act 1882, p. 530.

<sup>116</sup> *Statutes of New Zealand, 1882*, The Cemeteries Act 1882, p. 525.

<sup>117</sup> Margaret Tennant, *Paupers and Providers: Charitable Aid in New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p. 81.

My Dear John,

It was with deep regret and heartfelt sympathy for you all, I read your note acquainting me with your last surviving daughter's premature end. My recollections of Katie was that of a rosey faced, strong, romping girl, giving promise of a long and bright life, but alas how often are those early promises so rudely broken. I feel doubly for your wife – Katie's loss is quite unreparable to her, and her only consolation is in knowing that the separation is only temporary and that Katie has only gone to join the other family circle in their final home.<sup>118</sup>

Jessie Hodgson's condolence note to the Jack family echoes the popular sentiment that a child in heaven serves as a blessing for the remaining family.

Her note reads:

You have the greatest comfort those left behind can know – that your dear one has joined her sister in that better land and that tho' her eyes have been closed to earthly sights, they have seen the King in his beauty and she is safe for ever more – asleep in Jesus – and you too have laid up more treasure in Heaven.<sup>119</sup>

While historians such as Fairburn argue against the significance of class and of hierarchy in New Zealand, Pakeha New Zealanders were not free from status anxiety. A decent appearance in death, for both the recently deceased and the bereaved family, was imperative. Mourning clothes were as important in the colonies as they were in the home country. The complex mourning dress code applied far more strictly to women than men, with widows required to wear full black paramatta and crape for the first year of deep mourning, followed by six months of dull black silk. For the next six months thereafter, half-mourning in grey with touches of lavender was allowed. During the first year of mourning a widow was not expected to accept formal invitations, go visiting or enter a public place, in this way the wearing of mourning dress signalled a temporary isolation from society. These proscriptions did not apply of course to men, who signalled their mourning simply by wearing black gloves and hatbands.<sup>120</sup> Etiquette books advised on mourning costume, stressing that convention and the

---

<sup>118</sup> Letters of Condolence, Jack Family Papers, (MS-Group-0977), Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>119</sup> Letters of Condolence, Jack Family Papers, (MS-Group-0977), Alexander Turnbull Library.

<sup>120</sup> Pat Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History 1840-1918* (South Melbourne, Victoria: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 131. The wearing of full mourning began to wane by the 1880s. Thereafter, younger women simply wore a black bonnet or sewed black trimming onto their clothes.

right style was a necessity, not a luxury. Drapers in the four main centres were quick to stock all the necessary equipment in the latest styles. S. & J.R. Vaile, Drapers, situated at the Corner of Queen and Wyndham streets, Auckland, advertised:

Mourning goods, Boxed Dresses in Grenadine, Single and Double Barages, Mohairs, Camlets, Alpaccas, French Twills, French Merinos, Crape cloths, Baratheas, Paramattas &c &c &c Crapes of every description, Crape Sets, Trimmings &c &c &c.<sup>121</sup>

Newspaper advertisements show that the panoply of funerals was required in all parts of the country. The Undertakers Spicer and Murray who served the West Coast and Otago gold-digging communities, included the sale of velvet palls and ostrich plumes in their 1866 advertisement.<sup>122</sup>

When Elizabeth Caldwell suffered a stroke in the 1860s, she felt certain that she would not live long (though she did in fact survive). As soon as her paralysis had passed she moved to ensure that her six children would be properly attired after her death. She wrote in her reminiscences:

I did not get up but found I could sew occasionally ... I directed my eldest girl who was six years old to get out from my trunks some black things as I had mourning for a sister put away. 'What for Mama?' 'To make you a black frock dear', I said. 'Oh you are so white Mama, do you think you will die?' 'I am afraid of it my pet', I said. 'So you would want a black frock for Papa would have to take you back to Scotland, so get me out the stuff'. So as I felt able to sit up I made the frocks to be ready.<sup>123</sup>

External symbols of remembrance such as photographs, portraits or drawings of the dead, keepsakes, and locks of hair, brought comfort to the bereaved family. The improvements in photography in the 1870s made the nineteenth-century practice of post-mortem photography accessible to most people. Commonly, the deceased was featured lying on a bed or sofa with sheets and pillows in an arrangement suggesting sleep, though often the corpse was already fitted into the coffin. Babies and children were the most common subjects for post-mortem

---

<sup>121</sup> *Herald*, Auckland, Tuesday 4 January 1870.

<sup>122</sup> Wood, p. 33.

<sup>123</sup> Washbourn family papers 1850-1960s (MS-Papers-1771-04), cited in Porter and MacDonald, p. 466.

photography and in many cases this was the only likeness of them that existed. Photographic likenesses of the deceased, whether taken after death or recently before it, could play an important part in the mourning process. For overseas friends and relatives it could serve as tangible evidence of a distant bereavement, and facilitate a sense of closure. For those closest, it could act as a constant source of comfort and an aid to memory.

Prescribed differences in the expression of feelings on bereavement meant that men were expected to be restrained in their grief and women more emotional. Brief comments in the diaries of Mary Shove demonstrate that such expectations were far from reasonable. When Alick, George and Danny McKenzie drowned in Wanganui, Mary witnessed the boys' father 'cry[ing] like a child, for he was very fond of Danny'.<sup>124</sup> After three days of searching for the boys' bodies, two men, Bill and Jim, were said to have 'looked years older and ... when they played the Dead March [at the funeral] Bill cried [sic] like a child and Jim tryed [sic] to keep it back but the tears rolled down his cheeks'.<sup>125</sup> Social conditioning regarding the required characteristics of men and women meant that women were more active than men in writing about their grief and memorialising the death of a loved one. As a result the individual histories of men's experiences of grieving remain largely hidden from history. Glimpses into the world of grief among nineteenth-century men can be found occasionally in their archived letters and journals. The diaries of the highlander Neil McLeod are testimony to this. Offering more than a glimpse, the diary written in the year of his wife's death is a remarkable study on the anatomy of grief and mourning. McLeod's grief is intensely experienced, and powerfully and copiously expressed in his writings.

A migrant from Invernesshire, Neil McLeod arrived in New Zealand aboard the *Viscount Canning* in 1865 as a twenty-five year old. He spent his life in New Zealand working around the North Island as a member of the Armed Constabulary. By the 1880s he was living near Warkworth, married, with four

---

<sup>124</sup> Mary Shove, diary entry for Wednesday 15 October 1879, p. 131.

<sup>125</sup> Mary Shove, diary entry for Wednesday 15 October 1879, p. 131.

small children, and declaring himself ‘both temporally and spiritually happy’.<sup>126</sup> Then early in 1886, Neil’s wife Rebecca, then ‘seven or eight months advanced in pregnancy’, began to bleed from the womb. The diary entry for 19<sup>th</sup> January 1886 reads:

The Doctor, with Mrs Tovey’s assistance took a tumour away and used chloroform, and after this told me she had labour pains and that there would be a confinement in a few hours.<sup>127</sup>

In the early hours of the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, despite the ministrations of the Doctor and neighbour, Rebecca died. Three months later, when he felt able to write, Neil used his diary to chronicle the last days of his wife’s illness and record every detail of her death. Interestingly, the diary disregards any mention of the dead child. Apart from the above acknowledgment of labour pains and a confinement, the diary remains silent on the birth or death of this child, and the disposal of its remains. The death of his beloved wife appears to have subsumed all other considerations. There is an element of composure in Neil’s description of the moment of her death. He is careful to note his wife’s loving look and peaceful smile; important indicators of a good Christian death that showed resignation and a willing acceptance on the part of the dying:

January 20<sup>th</sup> 1886, Wednesday 2.30 a.m.

About this time or a few minutes previous to it, the Doctor told me to come in and try and ruse her up a little, I ran into the room at once, she was lying on her left side in the bed, I lifted her in my arms in a sitting position, she was three parts facing me, the power of her limbs were gone completely, she could not speak; it was then and there only that the real state of her case came on me like a clap of thunder; she was leaving me, and going to an endless Eternity, all this darted through my brain like lightning, so far as I remember I spoke to her and asked her to speak to me and not to leave me, but she did all in her power, the poor darling, she turned her eyes full on me and gave me one loving piercing gaze the expression of which I shall never forget, and died away without any struggle or even nervous twitchings of any kind, no pain or struggle, and with a peaceful smile all over her sweet face.<sup>128</sup>

Keeping a diary record of his own mourning helped to create some kind of order out of emotional chaos. There is almost a sense of catharsis in the writing

---

<sup>126</sup> Neil McLeod, *Diary 1886-87*, Auckland War Memorial Museum Library (MS 182), p. 7.

<sup>127</sup> Neil McLeod, p. 15.

<sup>128</sup> Neil McLeod, p. 16.

process as Neil describes the depth of his grief at the moment of Rebecca's death:

Oh! That awful night, I will not attempt to describe it, I could not believe she was gone, and to ascertain the truth had a look at her poor, pale, peaceful face with its innocent smile, even in death, it was stamped with the marks of purity of peace and of love to her God and fellow creatures.

I could not hold my tongue and found some relief in the wildest exclamations, but I could not find English expressive enough, I tried my mother tongue, Gaelic suited me, its sympathizing words and expressiveness in some measure relieved the awful load with which I was burdened, but in my ravings I went so far as to say '*Beurla an Donn*' more than once.<sup>129</sup>

In grief, the significance of homeland identity became fundamental. The expressive language of Gaelic, both in its spoken and written form, was able to bring a measure of comfort. A friend arriving in the early hours of the morning offered his condolence in the Gaelic tongue:

Mr Thomson's appearance at daylight somewhat relieved me in a few Gaelic words, he was kind enough to take two telegrams for me to be sent to [Rev?] Warren and father. Father's was in Gaelic.<sup>130</sup>

The following day, male friends and relatives arrived to support and console the family. Neil's father, uncles, and friends called upon their shared Scottish identity when it was most needed. A friend proved particularly attentive prompting Neil to praise him as 'indeed ... a real and true hearted Highlander'.<sup>131</sup> But the belief that his marriage had been unusually blessed, made it difficult for him to accept the consolations of others:

I received I don't know how many letters and telegrams of the sincerest sympathy and condolence but oh! No one can condole with me except so far as they can imagine and feel it themselves, which is no comparison at all with what is staring me in the face, no one can have any idea of it but those who had the great calamity of experiencing it themselves, and I am quite sure that many have lost life partners who did not feel the blow so heavy as I have, for the simple reason that many, in such cases, lived

---

<sup>129</sup> Neil McLeod, p. 17. Here, McLeod curses the English language. The Gaelic translates roughly to 'English is worthless/wretched'. Alexander McBain, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (Glasgow: Gairm Publications, 1982)

<sup>130</sup> McLeod, p. 18.

<sup>131</sup> McLeod, p. 18.

unhappy lives while I on the other hand was one of the happiest men in the world.<sup>132</sup>

Earlier diaries show that Neil McLeod had suffered a crisis of faith on several occasions. Although a Master Mason and a member of Auckland's St Columba Church, he had at one stage 'developed a most bitter hatred to all that was Masonic or Presbyterian'.<sup>133</sup> His marriage to the extremely devout Rebecca had restored his religious faith, though her death tested it severely. When writing of Rebecca's funeral, a hint of irony is apparent as Neil attempts to employ the formulaic religious response: God must be blessed for his mercies, but where is the mercy when someone is taken just as the rewards of life are about to be realised?

She was interred just about noon of Friday the twenty second day of January one thousand eight hundred and eighty six at the early age of thirty four years just as she was about to reap the benefit of all her toil, first of all she put her trust in the Lord and I have no doubt at all that she is now with Him in glory, 'not lost but gone before', blessed be God for His great mercies, it will be but a short while at the most until we will meet to part no more; every thing we required in furniture and other necessaries we had, the children were growing sensible and she could get about easier, but oh! in the middle of all she was called home.<sup>134</sup>

He goes on:

One by one my friends left me ... then I had the grim satisfaction of looking at her Photo, her clothing, Rings and other jewellery, her hair, and then in the dark, dark night roll about in her bed and stare at her empty pillow. Thinking, and such thoughts, praying and groaning, I hope the Lord has forgiven all my sinful thoughts in connexion [sic] with the matter.<sup>135</sup>

The practicalities of life were still to be contended with. The death of a mother was often the catalyst for the break-up of colonial families. Institutional care for small children, or simple desertion, were sometimes the only alternatives left to a father who was without a network of relatives nearby.<sup>136</sup> Strong community

---

<sup>132</sup> McLeod, p. 19.

<sup>133</sup> McLeod, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> McLeod, pp. 19-20.

<sup>135</sup> McLeod, p. 20.

<sup>136</sup> Graham, 'Settler Society', p. 126.

ties are evident in this case, with Mrs Tovey, who nursed Rebecca before her death, volunteering her services as housekeeper. Despite offers from friends who ‘asked me to let them have some of the children’, Neil felt a strong responsibility to keep his family together. He writes:

I could not part with one of them; I believe I have the double duty laid on me by God himself of acting both father and mother to them. I agreed to give Mrs Tovey 10 [shillings] per week and she is to have her youngest daughter Tilly with her; she understands the children, is very kind to them and is very trustworthy.<sup>137</sup>

His police work in the Northland district and the work of caring for his family did little to distract Neil from his mourning. Two months later he noted how the grief had taken a toll on him both emotionally and bodily:

25 March 1886,

I sat up with the Doctor the whole of last night for the poor fellow fell from his horse. I will do him a good turn if I can, he did all he could for me in my troubles: troubles indeed, this awful vacancy staring me in the face, just as if I was standing on a bare rock in the middle of a wide ocean; Warkworth was always a pretty place to be, it looks dismal enough now; last December the 20<sup>th</sup> I was 14 stone weight, now I am 12 stone 10lb, I find my sight failing me lately; and when writing I make some terrible mistakes.<sup>138</sup>

The remainder of the diary is punctuated with memorial poetry, passages of regret, and descriptions of his own grief as it moved through inevitable stages:

Sunday 4th April 1886,

On to bed, but oh! the torture of my mind in that bed. I would not wish it to my bitterest enemy, what cannot be cured must be endured, there is no signs [sic] of this being cured and if I am to suffer this torture it is awful.<sup>139</sup>

Monday 5<sup>th</sup> April,

I have a lot of work, such as cutting firewood, digging in the garden and clothes for the children, but I cannot bring myself to do anything, a few tears would give me relief but I cannot get them.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> McLeod, p. 20.

<sup>138</sup> McLeod, p. 27.

<sup>139</sup> McLeod, p. 27.

<sup>140</sup> McLeod, p. 28.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1890, four years after Rebecca's death, Constable Neil McLeod was shot dead while with his family on board the steamer *Minnie Casey*. He was the first police officer in New Zealand to have been killed in the line of duty.<sup>141</sup> The diaries of Neil McLeod, and other sources like them, provide a fascinating window into the world of grief and mourning in nineteenth century New Zealand. McLeod was unusual in his ability to articulate his feelings expressively and openly through his writing. A more repressed response to death was perhaps more characteristic of nineteenth-century men. While strong gender delineations were at work in practices and customs surrounding death, and in the ways men and women were expected to mourn, McLeod's writings suggest that men were no less affected by the pain engendered by the death of a loved one, nor were they immune to the deep melancholia of ongoing grief.

---

<sup>141</sup> Owen J. Cherret, *Without Fear or Favour: 150 Years Policing Auckland 1840-1990* (Auckland: New Zealand Police, 1989), p. 319. McLeod's assailant, Henry Funcke, was later arrested and acquitted on grounds of insanity.

## CONCLUSION

The Scottish migrants who came to New Zealand throughout the nineteenth century brought with them a rich heritage of rituals and practices surrounding death and mourning. Traditions, already shifting with the vast social and economic changes in the home country, became tenuous indeed when subjected to the rigours of the shipboard passage and relocation to the furthestmost colonies. Yet, among the first generation of settlers at least, traditions did endure. In death, familiar ethnic practices, words, and customs, brought comfort, and these were employed where practicable, often being modified to fit colonial conditions. For the new migrant, deaths of family and friends in the Scottish homelands often compounded feelings of isolation and fragmentation from extended kin and the old communities. Not only was it hard to die 'frae hame', it was equally hard to mourn away from the familiarity and comfort of the home country. Conversely, the act of burying a family member in New Zealand soil could be the catalyst for establishing a tie to the new land and instilling a sense of belonging.

The lure of adventure and enterprise were important pull factors influencing migrants' decisions to travel to the other side of the world; however, this thesis argues that in the case of working class Scots, the push factors were far more compelling. The fragile economics of the labouring and artisan classes placed them in a precarious state, and the fear of downward mobility was very real. This anxiety came to be ultimately represented by the pauper's funeral; an object of dread and loathing which symbolised, for many, the final and absolute rejection from society.

That migrants would embark on the three to five month sea journey to New Zealand with knowledge of the risks involved, demonstrates their strength of purpose. Sensational reportage regarding storms at sea, shipwrecks, and outbreaks of disease pervaded contemporary print media, and migrants were unlikely to have been ignorant of the possible hazards of the long shipboard passage. This thesis has drawn upon the rich archival evidence of migrants' journals, diaries, and letters to

gain an understanding of the liminal period spent aboard ship, and specifically, to uncover what death at sea meant for members of this temporary community. Diaries reveal fluid understandings of death and grief. Divergence occurs most obviously between class, degree of religiosity, gender, and age. Children's deaths, being an expected consequence of the voyage, seldom carried as much emotional weight as those of adults. The evidence suggests that the younger the child, the less importance its death was deemed to hold. While religious belief was immensely important to many passengers, diaries reveal that some rejected religious consolation outright when faced with the death of loved ones. Whatever the reaction, a death at sea provided migrants with their first major challenge to traditional regional and familial practices.

On arrival in New Zealand, individuals and families found themselves in a settler world, though those within it were by no means settled. For such communities, the customs and beliefs of their homelands could take on a new and deeper meaning. For Scottish migrant families and individuals alike, these customs and beliefs provided a way to make their unsettled world more 'normal'. Furthermore, a sense of Scottish identity and involvement in Scottish networks helped migrants cope with the problems of atomisation, which particularly affected the large number of transient single men who moved up and down the country in the quest for paid employment. That the atomisation of large numbers of individuals in the colony was a problem is difficult to dispute. However, the family, both in nuclear and extended form, represented a crucial component of society. Historians of Scottish migration have demonstrated that the decision to emigrate was usually made as part of a family strategy involving both those who would leave and those who stayed behind.<sup>1</sup> James Belich contends that nuclear families made up seventy-five per cent of Pakeha New Zealand by 1874.<sup>2</sup> The presence of private family burial grounds and the number of family graves in this country's historic cemeteries reflect this.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rosalind McClean, 'Scottish Emigrants to New Zealand, 1840-1880: Motives, Means and Background' (PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), p. 417.

The material culture of cemeteries, and in particular the scripts on nineteenth century headstones show that kinship ties and family identity remained important in the colonial context.

As in Scotland, roles and expectations differed markedly between genders. As most people died within the home, the tasks of caring for the sick and tending the body after death usually fell to the women of the household. Once the body left the threshold of the home, men took control, transporting the coffin to the graveside and attending the burial. Women, as chief mourners, were expected to prescribe to a strict protocol in regards to their grieving, while men were given far less scope for the expression of their feelings of grief and despair. Some nineteenth-century individuals used the written word to explore expressions of emotion that could not have been possible in any other arena. Neil McLeod's diary adds an interesting layer to existing accounts of colonial men which suggest that the atomised, 'man-alone', who expressed little emotion, was the dominant model.<sup>3</sup> Miles Fairburn's depiction of settler society as atomised and discordant, dominated by estranged and lonely men has been challenged by historians wanting to suggest 'something multi-faceted, more ambiguous and more variable'.<sup>4</sup> This thesis contributes to the historiographical discussion by exploring the intensely personal and hidden world of male grief.

The study of social and cultural responses to death in New Zealand has received little attention from historians, yet it offers important insights into many aspects of colonial life. Death history can expand and enrich our understandings about a range of aspects of social and cultural history, in particular social class, gender roles, religious belief, familial relations, medical care and the importance of ethnicity. Clearly there remains a full and interesting agenda for further research. In

---

<sup>3</sup> Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989) and *Nearly Out of Heart and Hope: The Puzzle of a Colonial Labourer's Diary* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995)

<sup>4</sup> Frances Porter and Charlotte MacDonald, *My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996), p. 7.

identifying and investigating some key aspects of the experience of death among Scottish migrants, this study opens up new lines of inquiry that have yet to be examined. In the New Zealand context, the possibilities are numerous. Cross-cultural and regional studies could prove to be particularly fruitful areas for historical investigation. This country's burial reform movement, and the cremation debate have yet to be given serious scholarly attention, and the role of the undertaker in New Zealand society remains to be explored. Peter Luke has shown the topic of suicide, so often hidden or ignored in society, to be an extremely profitable area of historical enquiry. Other 'hidden' subjects in the history of death such as still-birth and perinatal death still await researchers and historians who seek to further understand how participants make sense of their world and the events that occur in it.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

This list of sources is set out under the following headings:

*Primary Sources:*

- I. Official Publications
- II. Autobiographical Diaries, Journals and Letters
- III. Miscellaneous Published Collections and Contemporary Sources

*Secondary Sources:*

- I. Books
- II. Book Chapters
- III. Articles
- IV. Theses
- V. Secondary Literature and Reference Material
- VI. Internet Sources

## Primary Sources

### **I. Official Publications:**

*British Parliamentary Papers, (Colonies of New Zealand), Volume 6, Sessions 1847-50, Further Papers Relative to the Affairs of New Zealand, 1850*

*British Parliamentary Papers, (Colonies of New Zealand), Volume 17, Sessions 1883-96, Number 5, New Zealand Report by the Registrar-General on the Statistics of the Colony for 1886*

Martin McLean, *Auckland 1842-1845: A Demographic and Housing Study of the City's Earliest European Settlement*, Science and Research Internal Report, Number 33 (Unpublished), Department of Conservation

*Statistics of New Zealand for the Crown Colony Period, 1840-52*

*Statistics of New Zealand, 1853-56, Reports on the Health of the Troops Stationed in New Zealand, Appendix A, pp. 1-5*

*Statistics of New Zealand, 1872-75*

*Statutes of New Zealand, 1871, The Auckland Burial Grounds Act 1871, Number 27, pp. 119-22*

*Statutes of New Zealand, 1882, The Cemeteries Act 1882, Number 39, pp. 521-36*

## II. Autobiographical Diaries, Journals and Letters:

Adair, A. *Diary of Andrew Adair, Passenger on Willis Gann and Company's Ship 'Zealandia' from London to Littleton, 1865*, Photocopied typescript held in Waikato University Library, Original typescript at Canterbury Public Library, NRAM Number 840

Anderson, John, *Diary of a passage from Glasgow to Otago, 25 June – 25 September 1864*, transcribed by Marsha Donaldson, 2001, Original at Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Papers-2534

Askew, John, *A Voyage to Australia and New Zealand* (Christchurch: Kiwi, 1999)

Barker, A.C. 'Mrs A.C. Barker's Journal, 1850', Number 10, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 10-14, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Boyes, A. and G. Blackman, *Diary of Andrew Boyes on a Voyage from Edinburgh to Dunedin, 1849* (Dunedin: self published by G. Blackman, 1999)

Brown, Mary, *Coming Out: The Incredible Journey of Mary Brown* (Wellington: John Paul Productions Ltd, 1978)

Brown, H.J. Robert, *The Voyage of the Barque "Rajah" London, England – Otago, New Zealand 1853: Told through the Journals of Two Passengers Miss Jane McGlashan and Mr James Brugh* (Auckland: self published, 2003)

Campbell, Jessie, Diary reproduced in its entirety in B. Greenhill and A. Giffard, *Women Under Sail* (Devon: Redwood Press, 1970)

Dobie, B. M. Dobie, et al. *The Voyage of the "May Queen", October 1877 - January 1878* (Braunton, United Kingdom: Merlin, 1992)

Fairhead, William John Paul, 'Poem written on death of son aboard ship, 1874', MS – Papers- 5490, Alexander Turnbull Library.

Fell, Alfred, *A Colonist's Voyage to New Zealand Under Sail in the "Early Forties"* (Christchurch: Capper Press, 1973)

Graham, Robert, *Journal of a Passage from Greenock to Auckland on board the 'Jane Gifford'*, NZMS-1018, Manuscripts Room, Auckland Public Library

Gundry, J.S. *Dr Gundry's Diary* (Christchurch: Nag's Head Press, 1983)

Hargreaves, F.A. *From London to Dunedin in 1881: Diary of Frederick Ashby Hargreaves on his Trip to New Zealand*, Typescript, Original at Hocken Library, Dunedin

Harper, George S. *Diary from England to Lyttelton, Port of Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand: Commenced December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1864, Finished March 27, 1865* (Wellington: P.C.A. Booth, 1988)

Heath, Thomas, 'The 1875 Voyage to Wellington, New Zealand, in the Clipper *Collingwood*', reproduced in Bob Molesworth, ed, *The Voyage of the Collingwood 1875, Told by a Ship's Apprentice and an Emigrant* (Auckland: Polygraphia, 2000)

Hemery, John and Ian McIlroy, *The Voyage of the Emigrant Ship Bengal Merchant from Scotland to New Zealand, October 1839 to February 1840* (Christchurch: self published by I. McIlroy, 2002)

Hepburn, G. and W. D. Stewart, *The Journal of George Hepburn: On his Voyage from Scotland to Otago in 1850, with Extracts from his Letters Written from Otago, Dunedin, N.Z.* (Dunedin: A.H. Reed, 1934)

The Homeyer Journal, 'The Narrative of a Voyage in an Emigrant Ship From London to New Zealand in 1849', Long letter to 'My Very Dear Relations and Friends', Number 11, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 10-14, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Judkins, T.P. *Copy of his Journal Containing an Account of his Journey from Towchester, Northamptonshire, England, to Auckland, New Zealand, on the Sailing Ship 'Assaye' in 1874*, Photocopied typescript held in Waikato University Library, Original typescript held Canterbury Public Library, NRAM number A86

Kennaway, W. and L. *Biscuit and Butter, A Colonist's Shipboard Fare: The Journal of William and Laurence Kennaway on the Emigrant Ship 'Canterbury', London to Lyttelton, NZ, 1851*, edited by Lamb, R.C. and R.S. Gormack (The Nag's Head Press, 1973)

Lancaster, J.J. and S.E. Kendall, *Medical and Surgical Journal of the Freight Ship 'Sir Robert Sale' 10th of June to 22nd of November 1847* (Taihape: self published by S.E. Kendall, 1994)

Lawrence, A. *Alfred's Diary: Chronicle of a Voyage from Plymouth to NZ, Beginning April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1874* (Christchurch: Griffin Press, 1974)

Letters of Condolence, 1883, Jack Family Papers, MS-Papers-7028-06, Alexander Turnbull Library.

MacDonald, Charlotte, ed, *Women Writing Home 1700-1920: Female Correspondence Across the British Empire, Volume 5: New Zealand*, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006)

MacGibbon, John, *Going Abroad* (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 1997)

McLeod, Neil, Diary 1886-87, MS-182, Auckland War Memorial Museum Library

*Maraval Jackdaw: Ships Newspaper*, Number 15, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 2, Numbers 15-19, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Maskell, William, 'Extracts from the Journal of William Maskell, 1860-61', Number 7, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 1-9, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Moore, William, 'William More's Log Book', Number 22, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 2, Numbers 20-24, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Motherwell, J.R. et al, *Voyage of the Barque Birman: Gravesend -Wellington, 13 October 1841 - 1 March 1842: Including diary of the ship's surgeon, letters from passengers, passenger list, talk by Prof. Raewyn Dalziel, other items* (Te Awamutu: Bruce Crowther, 1992)

Pond, J.A. *Voyage to New Zealand: Diary of James Alexander Pond, 1865*, Typescript held at Waikato University Library

Robertson, George, *Journal of Voyage Aboard 'James Nicol Fleming'* (Wellington: N. Cowie, date unknown)

Runciman, William, 'Diary of William Runciman: Voyage to New Zealand 1881', Number 9, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 1-9, photocopied for Waikato University Library

'Shipboard Diary', Number 13, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 1, Numbers 10-14, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Shove, Mary, Diaries compiled and transcribed by Randall and June Springer (1998)

Smith, William, 'Reminiscences of a Long and Active Life by an Old Colonist', Number 23, p. 1, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 2, Numbers 20-24, photocopied for Waikato University Library

Sowry, Joseph, *An Account of Joseph Sowry's Voyage (sic) to Canterbury New Zealand in the Ship 'Zealandia'* (Lower Hutt: C.V. Sowry, 1987)

Walker, J.G. 'Letters Home, Chiefly from the Otago Goldfields, 1862-63', Number 20, *Nineteenth Century Diaries, Letters, Journals, Recollections and Reminiscences*, Volume 2, Numbers 20-24, photocopied for Waikato University Library

### **III. Miscellaneous Published Collections and Contemporary Sources:**

Chadwick, Edwin, *The Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, edited by M.W. Flinn, et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965)

*Documents Relating to the Jane Gifford and Duchess of Argyle, 1842-1992* (Auckland: Jane Gifford and Duchess of Argyle 150th Anniversary Committee, 1992)

Kendall, Shirley, *Presbyterian and Catholic Cemeteries Symonds Street Auckland: Additional details pertaining to families buried in the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Cemeteries, Symonds Street; Symonds Street Roman Catholic Cemetery* (Taihape: self published, 1997)

## Secondary Sources

### **I. Books:**

Aitchison, P. and A. Cassell, *The Lowland Clearances: Scotland's Silent Revolution, 1760-1830* (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2003)

Anderson, Olive, *Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987)

Aries, Phillipe, *The Hour of Our Death*, second edition (New York: Random House, 1981)

Avery, Gillian, and Kimberley Reynolds, *Representations of Childhood Death* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000)

Belich, James, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001)

Bennett, Margaret, *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004)

Bloomfield, G.T. *A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co. 1984)

- Bonnell, Victoria E. and Lynn Hunt, eds, *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture* (London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999)
- Borrie, W. D. *The European Peopling of Australasia: A Demographic History 1788-1988* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1994)
- Brett, Henry, *White Wings: Immigrant Ships in New Zealand 1840-1902*, second edition (Wellington: Reid, 1984)
- Brooking, T. and J. Coleman, eds, *The Heather and the Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003)
- Buckley, Barry, *Sails of Suffering: The Story of the 'Lloyds', An Original Emigrant Ship to Nelson 1841-1842* (Nelson: Self published, 1990)
- Carter, I. *Farm Life in Northeast Scotland 1840-1914: The Poor Man's Country* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2003)
- Charlwood, Don, *The Long Farewell* (Victoria: Allen Lane, 1981)
- Charmaz, K. G. Howarth, et al. *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain, and the USA* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1997)
- Cherret, Owen J. *Without Fear or Favour: 150 Years Policing Auckland 1840-1990* (Auckland: New Zealand Police, 1989)
- Curl, James, *A Celebration of Death* (London: Constable, 1980)
- Dalley, Bronwyn and Bronwyn Labrum, eds, *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000)
- Daley, Caroline and Deborah Montgomerie, eds, *The Gendered Kiwi* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999)
- Devine, T.M. *The Scottish Nation 1700-2000* (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Fairburn, Miles, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989)
- Fairburn, Miles, *Nearly Out of Heart and Hope: The Puzzle of a Colonial Labourer's Diary* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995)
- Flanders, Judith, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2004)
- Flinn, Michael, ed, *Scottish Population History: From the Seventeenth Century to the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

- Gluckman, Laurie, *Touching on Deaths: A Medical History of Early Auckland Based on the First 384 Inquests* (Auckland: doppelganger, 2000)
- Gordon, Ann, *Death is for the Living* (Edinburgh: Paul Harris, 1984)
- Greenhill, B. and A. Giffard, *Women Under Sail* (Devon: Redwood Press, 1970)
- Hackett Fischer, David, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989)
- Haines, Robin, *Doctors at Sea: Emigrant Voyages to Colonial Australia* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)
- Haines, Robin, *Life and Death in the Age of Sail: The Passage to Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003)
- Harper, Marjory, *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* (London: Profile, 2004)
- Hassam, Andrew, *Sailing to Australia: Shipboard Diaries by Nineteenth-Century British Emigrants* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994)
- Hastings, David, *Over the Mountains of the Sea: Life on the Migrant Ships 1870-1885* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006)
- Hewitson, Jim, *Far Off in Sunlit Places: Stories of the Scots in Australia and New Zealand* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 1998)
- Hill, R. S. *Policing the Colonial Frontier: The Theory and Practice of Coercive Social and Racial Control in New Zealand, 1767-1867* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch Dept. of Internal Affairs; Government Printer, 1986)
- Hill, R. S. *The Colonial Frontier Tamed: New Zealand Policing in Transition, 1867-1886* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch Dept. of Internal Affairs; Government Printer, 1989)
- Hoerder, Dirk, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millenium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002)
- Hood, Lynley, *Minnie Dean: Her Life and Crimes* (Auckland: Penguin, 1994)
- Houlbrooke, Ralph, ed, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989)
- Hunt, Lynn, ed, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989)

Jackson, Gaior W. *Settlement by Sail: Nineteenth Century Immigration to New Zealand* (Auckland: GP Publications, 1991)

Jalland, Pat, *Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Jalland, Pat, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999)

Jupp, P.C, ed, *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997)

Jupp, Peter, and Claire Gittings, eds, *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1999)

King, M. *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2004)

Lamont-Brown, R. *Scottish Folklore* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1996).

Litten, J. *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 2002)

MacDonald, Charlotte, *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990)

MacDonald, Charlotte, ed, *Women Writing Home 1700-1920: Female Correspondence Across the British Empire, Volume 5: New Zealand*, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006)

MacDonald, Helen, *Human Remains: Episodes in Human Dissection* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005)

MacDonald, Michael, and Terence R Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

Millen, Julia, *Colonial Tears and Sweat: The Working Class in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand* (Wellington: Reed, 1984)

Mitchison, R. *Life in Scotland* (London: Batsford, 1978)

Morley, J. *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London: Studio Vista, 1971)

Neale, R. S. *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Boston: Routledge, 1972)

Neale, R. S. *History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1983)

O'Leary, M. *Gone West: Waikumete Cemetery* (Auckland: Parks and Recreation Dept. Auckland City Council, 1984)

Pearce, G. L. *The Scots of New Zealand* (Auckland: Collins, 1976)

Phillips, Jock, *A Man's Country: The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History*, revised edition (Auckland: Penguin, 1996)

Platts, U. *The Lively Capital, Auckland 1840-1865* (Christchurch: Avon Fine Prints, 1971)

Pool, Ian, *The Maori Population of New Zealand 1769-1977* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1977)

Porter, Frances, and Charlotte MacDonald, *My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates: The Unsettled Lives of Nineteenth Century Women in New Zealand as Revealed to Sisters, Family and Friends* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996)

John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969)

Puckle, Bertram, *Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1926)

Reddy, W. *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Rice, Geoffrey, ed, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, second edition (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Richardson, Ruth, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Rose, L. *The Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Britain, 1800-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986)

Ross, A. *The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands* (London: Batsford, 1976)

Sharpe, J. A. *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London and New York: Longman, 1974)

Simpson, Tony, *The Immigrants: The Great Migration from Britain to New Zealand, 1830-1890* (Auckland: Godwit, 1997)

Smout, T.C. *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986)

Smout, T.C. *The Social Condition of Scotland in the 1840s: The Dow Lecture* (Dundee: University of Dundee, 1981)

Strange, Julie Marie, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Tennant, Margaret, *Paupers and Providers: Charitable Aid in New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1990)

Thorns, David, and Charles Sedgewick, *Understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand: Historical Statistics* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997)

Whaley, J. *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London: Europa, 1981)

Wohl, Anthony S. *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1983)

Wood, June A. *Victorian New Zealanders* (Wellington: A.H. Reed, 1974)

Wood, Pamela, *Filth, Dirt, and Decay: A New World Arcadia* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005)

Woolcock, Helen, *Rites of Passage: Emigration to Australia in the Nineteenth Century*, (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986)

## **II. Book Chapters:**

Akenson, Donald Harman, 'What Did New Zealand Do to Scotland and Ireland?' in *The Irish in New Zealand*, edited by Brad Patterson and Cathy O'Shea-Miles (Wellington: Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2002), pp. 185-200

Anderson, M. and D.J. Morse, 'The People' in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 2, 1830-1914*, edited by W. Hamish Fraser and R.J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), pp. 8-45

Arnold, Rollo, 'Assisted Emigration and the Peopling of Colonial New Zealand: The Characters in the Play', in *Proceedings of the 1987 Conference of the New Zealand Genealogists: Immigration* (Wellington, 1987), pp. 13-22

Brooking, Tom, 'Weaving the Tartan into the Flax', in *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities Since the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Angela McCarthy (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), pp. 183-202

Alison Clarke, 'Tinged with Christian Sentiment': Popular Religion and the Otago Colonists, 1850-1900', in *Christianity, Modernity and Culture*, edited by John Stenhouse (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), pp. 103-32

Crowther, M.A. 'Poverty, Health, and Welfare' in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 2, 1830-1914*, edited by W. Hamish Fraser and R.J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), pp. 265-89

- Devine, T.M. 'Urbanisation' in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 1: 1760-1830*, edited by T.M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), pp. 27-52
- Dow, Derek, 'Springs of Charity?: The Development of the New Zealand Hospital System, 1876-1910', in *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams, 1991), pp. 44-64
- Eldred-Grigg, Stevan, 'Rude Awakenings? Migrants in Colonial New Zealand', in *Proceedings of the 1987 Conference of the New Zealand Genealogists: Immigration* (Wellington, 1987), pp. 1-12
- Graham, Jeanine, 'Juvenile Emigration: The Nineteenth Century Experience', in *Proceedings of the 1987 Conference of the New Zealand Genealogists: Immigration* (Wellington, 1987), pp. 23-33
- Graham, Jeanine, 'Settler Society' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, second edition, edited by Geoffrey Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 112-40
- Jonker, G. 'Death, Gender and Memory' in *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*, edited by D. Field, J. Hockey and N. Small (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 187-201
- Mitchison, Rosalind, 'The Poor Law', in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 1: 1760-1830*, edited by T.M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), pp. 252-88
- Morris, R.J. 'Urbanisation and Scotland', in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 2, 1830-1914*, edited by W. Hamish Fraser and R.J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), pp. 73-102
- Riach, Alan, 'Heather and Fern: The Burns effect in New Zealand verse', in *The Heather and The Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement*, edited by Tom Brooking and Jennie Coleman (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), p. 153-72
- Rice, Geoffrey, 'Public Health in Christchurch 1875-1910' in *A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand*, edited by Linda Bryder (Wellington: Bridget Williams, 1991), pp.85-108
- Richardson, Ruth, 'Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain', in *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, edited by R. Houlbrooke (London and New York: Routledge, 1989)
- Thompson, Neil, 'Masculinity and Loss', in *Death, Gender and Ethnicity*, edited by D. Field, J. Hockey and N. Small (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 76-88

Treble, J.H. 'The Standard of Living of the Working Class', in *People and Society in Scotland, Volume 1: 1760-1830*, edited by T.M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1988), pp. 188-226

### III. Articles:

Arnold, Rollo, 'Community in Rural Victorian New Zealand', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24:1 (April 1990), pp. 3-21

Conley, C. A. 'Homicide in Late Victorian Ireland and Scotland', in *New Hibernia Review*, 5:3 (2001), pp. 66-86

Daley, Caroline, 'Taradale Meets the Ideal Society and Its Enemies', in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 25:2 (October 1991), pp. 129-46

Dalziel, Raewyn, 'Emigration and Kinship: Migrants to New Plymouth 1840-1843', in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 25:2 (October 1991), pp. 112-28

Fairburn, Miles, 'A Discourse on Critical Method', in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 25:2 (October 1991), pp. 158-77

Ferguson, T. 'Public Health in Britain in the Climate of the Nineteenth Century', in *Population Studies*, 17:3 (March 1964), pp. 213-24

Peter Gibbons, 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36:1 (April 2002), pp. 5-17

Haines, Robin, 'Medical Superintendence and Child Health on Government-Assisted Voyages to South Australia in the Nineteenth Century', in *Health and History*, 3:2 (2001), pp.1-29

Haines and Schlomowitz, 'Explaining the Modern Mortality Decline', in *Social History of Medicine*, 11:1 (1998), pp. 15-48

Hilliard, Chris, 'Colonial Colonization and National Identity', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 36:1 (April 2002), pp. 82-97

Kelly, Sarah, 'Historic Graves', in *New Zealand Historic Places*, 53 (May 1995) p. 12-13

McFarland, Elaine, 'Researching Death, Mourning and Commemoration in Modern Scotland' in *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 24.1 (2004), pp. 20-44

Mackay, Duncan, 'The Orderly Frontier: The World of the Kauri Bushmen 1860-1925', in *The New Zealand Journal of History*, 25:2 (October 1991), pp. 147-57

Laqueur, Thomas, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals', in *Representations* I:1, (February 1983), pp. 109-31

McDonald, John, and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to Australia in the 19th Century', in *Explorations in Economic History Review*, 27 (1990), pp. 84- 113

Lee, C.H. 'Regional Inequalities in Infant Mortality in Britain, 1861-1971: Patterns and Hypotheses', in *Population Studies*, 45 (1991), pp. 55-65

Phillips, Jock, 'Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon' in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24:2, (October 1990), pp. 118-34

Sauer, R. 'Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth Century Britain' in *Population Studies*, 32:1 (March 1978), pp. 81-93

Shlomowitz, Ralph, and John McDonald, 'Babies at Risk on Immigrant Voyages to Australia in the Nineteenth Century', in *Economic History Review*, XLIV: 1 (1991), pp. 86-101

Stannard, Bruce, 'Outward Bound' in *Scots: Celebrating our Scottish Heritage*, 4 (May 1999), p. 32-37

Stearns, P.N. and C.Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', in *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), pp. 813-36

#### **IV. Theses:**

Anderson, Duncan, "'Armed with Power for Preventing the Spread of Infectious Disease": The making of the Public Health Act 1872 and its implementation in Auckland Province, 1870-1876' (Honours dissertation, University of Waikato, 2002)

Beaton, Leigh, 'Westralian Scots: Scottish Settlement and Identity in Western Australia, Arrivals 1829-1850' (PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 2004)

Cleaver, Philip, 'Dealing with Death: The Pakeha Treatment of Death 1850-1910' (MA thesis, Victoria University, 1996)

Deed, Stephen, 'Unearthly Landscapes: The Development of the Cemetery in Nineteenth Century New Zealand' (MA thesis, University of Otago, 2004)

Gibson, Campbell, 'Demographic History of New Zealand' (PhD thesis, University of California, 1972)

Higgins, Shaun, 'Reflections After Life: The Social Dimensions in Colonial Auckland's Symonds Street Cemetery' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1998)

Lawrence, Victoria, 'Grave Doubts: An Anatomy of Funeral Rituals in a New Zealand Context' (MA thesis, University of Otago, 1995)

Luke, Peter, 'Suicide in Auckland 1848-1939' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1982)

McClean, Rosalind 'Scottish Emigrants to New Zealand, 1840-1880: Motives, Means and Background' (unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1990)

Madle, David Victor, 'Patterns of Death by Accident, Suicide and Homicide in New Zealand 1860-1960, Interpretation and Comparisons' (PhD thesis, Victoria University, 1996)

Phillips, J.R. 'Social History of Auckland 1840-53' (MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1966)

## **V. Secondary Literature and Reference Material**

Loughlin, Sue, and Carolyn Morris, *Womanscripts: A Guide to Manuscripts in the Auckland Institute and Museum Library Relating to Women* (Auckland: Auckland Institute and Museum, 1995)

McBain, Alexander, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* (Glasgow: Gairm Publications, 1982)

## **VI. Internet Sources and Other Media.**

Auckland – A history of the Symonds Street Cemeteries, available online at <http://www.aucklandcitylibraries.com>, accessed 19 May 2006

British BDMs and Burials at Sea, available online at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com>, accessed 13 September 2006

Donaldson, Marsha, 'A guide to firsthand shipboard accounts for voyages to New Zealand, 1840-1900 (microform) (Auckland: New Zealand Society of Genealogists, 1998)

Jock Phillips, 'History of Immigration', Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, available online at <http://www.teara.govt.nz/NewZealanders/NewZealandPeoples/HistoryOfImmigration>, accessed 18 September 2006

Scottish Funeral Customs, available online at <http://www.fife.50megs.com/scottish-funeral-customs.htm>, accessed 31 March 2006