Place Names:  
a tool for finding the Irish in South Australia

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My research into Irish place names in South Australia is a by-product of my research into the Irish language in Australia. Although collecting these place names over the years has been satisfying and rewarding, I now find their historical background becoming more and more intriguing, especially as little of the Irish South Australian story has been available in the public domain. Even in historical circles, research into Irish South Australia has been sparse, and mostly concentrated on post-Famine times: especially the arrival of the Irish orphan girls in the late 1840s and the 1850s. A study of place names in South Australia, however, reveals the presence of the Irish from the beginning. For example, Myponga Hill was once known as ‘Clarke’s Hill’, after Killarney-born John Clarke who arrived on the Tam O’Shanter in 1836. He was one of those early arrivals who headed for the rich farming areas south of Adelaide. A strong Irish presence was soon apparent in the south. This culminated in the opening in 1846 of St Mary’s, the first purpose-built Catholic church in the province. It still stands on South Road at Morphett Vale. Another southern place name, ‘Carrickalinga’, evokes the Northern Ireland town of ‘Carrickalina’. It is likely that an ethnic presence brought changes to the earlier ‘Curry-kalina’. By 1860 this was written as ‘Curracalinga’. Here we can see Irish (or Scottish) settler influence in a prefix that echoes Irish and Scots Gaelic arraigh, ‘a rock’. Irish place names in South Australia can be seen as an area of social and cultural capital that enriched the migrant experience for colonial Irish-born: a people who have always had a strong sense of place. The Irish attachment to place (the word duchas reflects this meaning) was recognised as something to address when both Derry-born Colonel Robert Torrens and his Cork-born son Robert Richard suggested the names ‘Loughrea’, ‘New Erin’ or ‘St Patrick’s Land’ as prospective names for Irish settler places in South Australia. An Irish place name in the New World could enhance the migrant experience and diminish the effects of displacement if it evoked home, and the familial and social comforts of home. Although none of Torrens’ suggested place names eventuated, Irish colonists in South Australia often expressed their ethnicity through place naming. A focus on such naming could open up a new area of research for genealogy and local history, especially when other avenues have been exhausted. Place names are increasingly in the public domain through Internet search tools, and Geoffrey Manning’s comprehensive research is now available online as well as in hard copy. Place names are a useful new research tool for finding out more about Irish individuals or the Irish as a group: Irish-born people constituted about 15 per cent of the population at the 1861 census, and that figure had been growing for twenty-five years.

Edward Burton Gleeson (known as ‘Paddy’) arrived in 1838, on the Emerald Isle from Calcutta with money to buy land. He was to become known as the Father of Clare in South Australia. Although the area had fewer than one hundred people in 1842, the town grew out of ‘Gleeson’s Village’, and was known as ‘Clare’ from 1846. Gleeson’s own house ‘Inchiquin’ was named after a locality and lake in County Clare. Rodney Cockburn suggests it was his ‘youthful abode’. Gleeson encouraged newly-arrived immigrants ‘to go boldly into the country at once’ and many other Irish were to settle successfully in Clare and nearby districts in the nineteenth century. It is probable that Gleeson’s own promotion, the natural effects of chain migration, and the arrival of the Irish orphan girls accounted for almost 15 per cent of Irish-born in the Mid North later in the nineteenth century, rather than the place name itself. The place name ‘Clare’ in South Australia, nevertheless, reflects its Irish background, as do the other nearby names of Armagh and Donnybrook. It is highly likely that these names increased early Irish settlers’ sense of belonging and that the community built on this social and cultural capital. Until the mid twentieth century Clare celebrated its Irish heritage frequently. Even though the Irish story in Clare is less well known now, the Irish place names remain as signifiers of that historical presence.

But an Irish place name in South Australia is not necessarily a reflection of significant Irish settlement. The township ‘Dublin’ is testament to that. The name ‘Dublin’ as a proposed place name appeared in the Register as early as 1840 (3 October), but it would be fifteen years before a place in SA was officially named Dublin. The 1840 proposed ‘Dublin’ or ‘Little Dublin’ in Morphett Vale did not eventuate as an official name, but Dublin, 16 km west of Mallala and the later Hundred of Dublin were named in 1856 for Dublin-born Governor Sir Richard MacDonnell. The local population of this Dublin, South Australia, while not having an Irish background, has made cultural capital of their place name over the years. For instance, the centenary celebration of the Dublin Progress Association in 1970 was opened by the Irish Ambassador to Australia, and the group has made exchange visits to Adelaide’s ‘Dubliners and Friends’ social group based at the Irish-Australian Association clubrooms in Carrington Street.

Irish place names in South Australia are a useful prism through which to view attitudes towards the Irish. They can reveal a certain world-view such as the unofficial naming of lower north east North Adelaide as ‘Irishtown’ for over thirty years. It is unclear whether the Irish labourers, servants, and their families who lived here were any more numerous than at any other place, yet it acquired this unofficial name ‘Irishtown’ (the name was even used in the 1870s by the Catholic Church as an address for its primary school in Lower North Adelaide). The name ‘Irishtown’ is a derogatory term of varying degrees. In today’s Ireland, the ‘Irishtowns’ are anachronistic; these names, dating from the twelfth century, marked places to where the native Irish were banished, usually following a military defeat. Towns named ‘Irishtown’ in Ireland were typically outside the English-controlled towns and cities and were often walled off from them. In nineteenth century North Adelaide the labouring classes in the small cottages in the lower east side were not walled off from those in the Big Houses, but the name ‘Irishtown’ served the same purpose of naming the undesired.

This cottage in lower north east North Adelaide was constructed around the time the area was known as ‘Irishtown’ (from the 1840s to the 1870s). The North Adelaide ‘Irishtown’ was an exception as most ‘Irishtowns’ in Australia were close to mines, for example at Wallaroo. (Dymphna Lonergan August 2008)
The nickname ‘Paddy’ is another Irish marker that varies from being a term of endearment to one of derision. E.B. Gleeson’s nickname is clearly one of endearment, and it is a nickname shared with Sir George Strickland Kingston. The River Torrens was once known as ‘Paddy’s river’ in reference to its discovery by Kingston and his party.\textsuperscript{13} Not so endearing was the term ‘Paddy’s Town’ that was attached to Macclesfield village at one time, reflecting the sudden and significant arrival of Irish domestics following the establishment of a depot for Irish orphans in nearby Mount Barker.\textsuperscript{14} For similar reasons, the site of Mount Barker’s first Catholic cemetery was known as ‘Paddy’s Hill’. This naming was short-lived, representing as it does a spontaneous response to a sudden increase in population of a distinctive group of people. As many of the orphan girls married into the surrounding communities, the ‘Paddy’ nickname did not last as long as North Adelaide’s ‘Irishstown’.

Too often in our history we rely on the public documents that tend to obscure the more personal and private aspects of our colonial forbearers. And too often Irish immigration is seen solely through a religious prism. George Kingston was not a Catholic and was not of the same social background as the majority of Irish Catholics in South Australia, but he was an Irishman.\textsuperscript{15} While religion in colonial South Australia played a significant role, it was not necessarily a complete divide. The Catholic bishop of Adelaide employed the Anglican George Kingston to design some church buildings. A common ethnicity or a sharing of nationality could bridge a religious divide, especially around a national day such as St Patrick’s Day on 17 March. We can see this in the name Kingston gave to an 1840 social group he founded to celebrate the day: the Sons of Erin.\textsuperscript{16} Group names as well as place names may point to a shared ethnicity: consider the St Patrick’s Society. At its founding in 1849 the committee comprised Thomas Shouldham O’Halloran (president) and his brother William (vice-president) who were from a Limerick family, Captain Bagot (vice-president), a Congregationalist from Kildare, Dr Thomas Young Cotter (Cork), Bandon-born and raised George Strickland Kingston (vice-president), Charles Burton Newenham (vice-president), from Dublin and Sheriff of Adelaide; and ordinary committee members that included Arthur Fox (Dublin) (Catholic), E.B. Gleeson, who was born in Nenagh, Tipperary (Church of England), John Hope of Derry (Methodist), the Catholic vicar-general Father Michael Ryan (Galway), and Henry Seymour, Church of England (Dublin or Cork).\textsuperscript{17} In 1856, the Sons of Erin group also included Alexander Anderson (a Presbyterian from Northern Ireland), Edward McEllister (a Catholic from Kerry), Hugh Quin (Newry, County Tyrone) and R.R. Torrens (Cork).\textsuperscript{18} Nicknames and names and membership of social and cultural groups reveal an Irish ethnic identity as playing a role in colonial life for these South Australian colonists beyond religious or social divisions, although membership of such societies was probably confined to those who had a certain amount of economic and social capital.

Other naming that often displays Irish ethnicity are names given to property. Captain Charles Hervey Bagot named his house after his family home in Kildare. ‘Nurney House’ still stands in Stanley Street, North Adelaide (almost opposite, the Catholic church sign refers to a school that opened ‘here in Irishtown in 1870’). The name ‘Nurney House’ is from the Irish An Úirne (the oratory). In the 1840s, Captain William

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\textbf{The grey and imposing Kingston Villas, Bandon, Co. Cork is where G.S. Kingston grew up. (Dymphna Lonergan October 2008)}
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O’Halloran named his farm and later his mansion on the corner of Goodwood Road and Daws Road ‘Clanfeagul’ (Fergal’s family) after the name on the O’Halloran family crest.79 His brother, Thomas Shouldham O’Halloran named ‘Lizard Lodge’ in O’Halloran Hill after the animal represented on the O’Halloran family crest. A pioneer pastoral family, the Cudmores from Limerick, named their mansion at Victor Harbor ‘Adare’ after a village in County Limerick. Farmer Michael Kenny from Clare, Ireland, named his property in the Hundred of Colton ‘Balla McKenny’. This use of an Irish language word baile ‘home’ in the house title suggests that Michael Kenny may have been an Irish-speaker. The Reid family, the first settlers in Gawler, named their property ‘Clonlea’ after their home in Newry, County Down, and, finally, John O’Dea from Glandore, County Cork, named this suburb south of Adelaide.

When researching ancestry and local history we pay great attention to official records that document people’s names in birth, marriage, and death certificates, religious affiliation, and the names of ships that document arrivals. We may find extra clues if we also take notice of nicknames and place names, and if we consider that for some ethnic groups, and certainly for the Irish, ‘the spirit of nationality’ can sometimes bridge religious and class divisions.29 The task of finding the colonial Irish in South Australia is made easier when the focus is less on religion and more on ethnicity and national sentiment.

The sign at the entrance to Glandore village in southwest Cork. The Irish name Cuan Dor mean ‘harbour of the oaks’. Glandore, the suburb south of Adelaide, was named by John O’Dea for his home town in Co. Cork. (Dymphna Lonergan October 2008)

Endnotes
2. Personal correspondence in the form of a ‘resume’ written by James Clarke, son of John Clarke.
3. Register, 27 May 1843, p.3a.
5. I have in mind the theory of capital as espoused by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, who argued that an individual may have other kinds of wealth besides economic wealth.
9. Geoffrey Manning, Manning’s Place Names of South Australia from Aaron Place to Zion Hill, Gould, Adelaide, 2006; and the Manning Index of South Australia History at the State Library of South Australia: <http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/manning>
16. Register, 21 Mar 1840.
17. Adelaide Observer (supplement), 14 Jul 1849.
20. R.R. Torrens’ address to the South Australian St Patrick’s Society, supplement to the Register, 14 Jul 1849.