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AUSTRALIA’S IRISH PLACE NAMES

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Introduction

In Ireland, the society might immediately purchase 100,000 acres of land [in South Australia]; call it ‘New Dublin’, ‘St Patrick’s Land’, or any other patronymic, and locate on it such surplus of their tenantry as would cultivate their new country...

‘Australian Emigration Society’, *Dublin University Magazine*, 1839

If the Blarney stone stood out on Sidney [sic] Harbo[u]r
And Dublin Town to Melbourne came to stay
If the Shannon River joined the Brisbane Waters
And Killarney’s lakes flowed into Botany Bay

If the Shandon Bells rang out in old Fremantle
And County Cork in Adelaide did appear
Erin’s sons would never roam all the boys would stay at home
If we only had old Ireland over here

‘If We Only Had Old Ireland Over Here’, 1963

Some 125 years after the *Dublin University Magazine*’s article on the new colony of South Australia appeared in 1839, American country singer Hank Locklin (1918–2009) reminded us of the importance of place and place names to the Irish emigrant. For Locklin, ‘Old Ireland’ is above all a place that is at the same time many places that are in turn distinguished by names. He implies that ‘Erin’s sons’ in moving to a new country would settle in better if they could hold on to the old place. This attachment to place was recognised in 1839 by the promoters of Irish immigration to South Australia, who knew that naming was an important part of ensuring that the ‘superabundant population’ of ‘unhappy’ Ireland, would live in ‘comfort and opulence’ in their new land of Australia. Given this, it is curious that toponymy has not figured to any noticeable extent in Irish Diaspora Studies. To collect and write about Irish geographical names in Australia is a way of exploring the Irish-Australian experience, and it raises questions, such as: what motivates someone to give an Irish name to their homestead in the Australian bush? How is life different there as a result? Is it only the

outsider or the visitor who sees meaning in a geographical feature with an Irish name? At what point, for example, does the Shannon River in Tasmania lose its Irish connotations? Many of these questions may not as yet be answerable, but taking a look at this aspect of the Irish-Australian experience is still warranted.

The study on which this article is based has found over 500 different Irish names in use in Australia, many appearing more than once. The names of 25 of the 32 counties of Ireland are represented. Those counties not represented are: Down, Laois, Leitrim, Meath, Westmeath, Offaly, and Sligo. Is there something of interest here? A comment in the Dublin University Magazine article, quoted above, draws a clear line between the laborious, temperate, well-informed, and correct people of the county of Down ... and ... the idle, drunken, ignorant and savage peasantry of the county of Tipperary. However, further study may be all that is needed to unearth representations of those county names not found in this research.

This is a collection of Irish names for populated places and single homesteads and a range of geographical features. Names replicate Irish towns or counties, geographical features or historical events. Some such as Bourke are eponymous. Others such as Mystic River have been chosen because they were named by an Irish person. The questions we may ask of such a collection include: what are the most popular names in use, and whether certain features or areas are more likely than others to result in Irish naming. For, as Yi-Fu Tuan says, naming adds character beyond a geographical or physical description:

To call a feature in the landscape a ‘mount’ is already to impart to it a certain character, but to call it ‘Mount Misery’ is to significantly enhance its distinctiveness, making it stand out from other rises less imaginatively called.

Few of the Irish who immigrated to Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would have had the opportunity to name other than their own house, or to have a place named after them. While it is impossible to know how many of the Irish born in Australia were involved in early European place naming, it is reasonably safe to assume that an Irish place name would be among the first thoughts of an Irish person faced with the opportunity to retain in some way the familiarity that ‘protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world’.

Place naming is part of the Irish migrant experience in Australia and is in turn part of the larger pattern of colonisation and settlement. We must mourn the loss of Indigenous Australian place names that were
obliterated by new naming, while at the same time seeing the colonisers’ place naming as a simple response and derived from ignorance or the mores of the time. These new place names cannot replicate the native ones because:

The native ... has a complex attitude derived from his experience in the totality of his environment. The visitor’s viewpoint, being simple, is easily stated. Confrontation with novelty may also prompt him to express himself.9

While some Irish immigrants to Australia appreciated the existing native or Indigenous name and had respect enough for that history to retain it, others expressed their hopes for attachment to new places by simply appropriating the name of their Irish townland, county, or favourite holiday spot. This naming at the expense of an Indigenous name is a colonising tool, but attachment to place names is also a human response to change. As Tuan notes:

Natural environment and world view are closely related: world view, unless it is derived from an alien culture, is necessarily constructed out of the salient elements of a people’s social and physical setting.10

The Irish arrived in Australia with their own world view developed from their natural environment in Ireland. Attachment to the physical setting of the new place can begin the long process of assimilation and the transformation of world view. Place naming is particularly developed in Irish culture, evidenced in the term *dimseanchas*, meaning the historical collection of place names usually involving legend or lore. They are to be found as early as the twelfth century in manuscripts such as the Book of Leinster.11

The 2006 Australian national census revealed Irish origins as being the third most frequently cited after Australian and English.12 The migration experience involves leaving one’s homeland for an often unknown place. The process of settlement and assimilation includes a gradual adaptation to new ways and the shedding of old paradigms. This process may always be partial for some or almost complete for others at the end of the migratory life. For most, however, old ways and times can always be evoked through language. Old names can serve as anchor points in a new life and for a new world view. Such may be the role played by naming homesteads in Australia, in particular, with names from the ‘old country’. Place naming also provides, what Paul Carter calls in a slightly different context, ‘a place from which to speak’ for those who are privileged to name.13
Public naming is a discrete occupation. We can freely name our children, pets, homes and other private possessions, but we are not free to name the street we live in, our suburb, town or city, or any larger geographical body. Public naming is not usually left to individuals. Public ownership carries with it a need for care in naming, so as not to offend, in keeping with tradition, with due deference to people and so on. Those who name public property come to that task along a defined route: they may be in politics, or have acquired wealth enough to gain social status. People whose names are used in a place name are likely to be people of some note. Place names, therefore, can tell many stories. Place names that originate in another country point not only to the place of origin, but also to the new place and the connections between both. Examining Irish place names in Australia provides another insight into the Irish-Australian experience in considering how an aspect of the Old World is made to fit an aspect of the New World.

Common Irish Place Names

The most frequently occurring Irish place names across Australia’s states and territories are: Armagh (Ir. Árd Mhacha ‘Macha’s Height’); Athlone (Ir. (Baile) Átha Luain ‘town of the ford of Luain’); Cavan (Ir. An Cabhán ‘the hollow’); Clontarf (Ir. Cluain Tarbh ‘the meadow of the bulls’); Connemara (Ir. Cuain na Mara ‘harbours of the sea’); Coolangatta (Ir. Cúl an Gheata ‘the back of the gate’); Currahd (Ir. An Currach ‘the moor’); Dunmore (Ir. Dún Mór ‘big fort’); Erin (from the name Eriu, a Celtic goddess); Innis (Ir. Inis ‘island’); Kells (Ir. na Cealla ‘the cells’); Kerry (Ir. Ciarrat ‘descendents of Ciar’); Kilkenney (Ir. Cill Chaimnígh ‘St. Ceannach’s church’); Killarney (Ir. Cill Aircne ‘church of the slopes’); Monaghan (Ir. Muineacháin ‘place of little thickets’); Newry (Ir. An tUír ‘the yew tree’); Ovens (Ir. na Uamhanna ‘the caves’); Tara (Ir. Teamhair ‘assembly hill’); Tully (Ir. tulla ‘hillock’); and Vinegar Hill (Ir. Cnoc Fiodh na gCaor ‘hill of the wood of berries’).

Around 50 per cent of Irish place names in Australia are the names of Irish counties. The names Connemara, Currah, Innis and Tully refer to smaller areas, such as regions, parishes and townlands. The names Erin and Tara are associated with Irish mythology, and Vinegar Hill was a famous battle site in County Wexford during the 1798 Irish Rebellion, after which many rebels were transported to New South Wales. The name Vinegar Hill was given, after the event, to the place where a convict rebellion led by the Irish occurred at Castle Hill, west of Sydney, in 1804, and it was also used as a password during the Eureka Stockade miners’ rebellion at Ballarat, Victoria, in 1854. Coolangatta is a townland in County Kerry and the name is also found
in County Tipperary. The name *Cúl an geata* means ‘back of the gate’. Although the Queensland town of Coolangatta, just north of the border with New South Wales, is said to owe its name to a ship called the *Coolangatta*, that was wrecked there in 1846, it has been suggested that the ship’s name came in turn from the Indigenous-named Coolangatta Mountain in New South Wales. But the name Coolangatta also occurs in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, so an Irish connection is plausible for the Queensland town.

**Irish place names in Australian populated places**

**New South Wales**

**Queensland**
Achill, Adare, Athenry, Avoca, Avoca Vale, Ballyhooey, Ballymore, Burketown, Cashel, Cavan, Charleville, Clogheen, Cloncurry, Clonmel, Clontarf, Clontarf Beach, Coolangatta, Cork, Derry, Derrymore, Donnybrook, Dunmore, Durack, Dysart, Enniskillen, Foyleview, Glanmire, Innisfail, Kenmare, Kerry, Kerrydale, Killarney, Kincora, Leinster, Limerick, Listowel, Lurgan, Mallow, Maynooth, Naas, Port Newry, Rathdowney, Rathmore, Roscommon, Rostrevor, Stradbally, Tara, Templemore, Tralee, Tramore, Tully, Tully Heads, Vinegar Hill, Waterford, Wicklow, Youghal

**Victoria**
Adare, Ardmona, Athlone, Auburn, Avoca, Ballan, Balnarring, Belfast (Port Fairy), Black Rock, Castlemaine, Coleraine, Crossley, Donnybrook, Dromana, Dunmore, Dysart, Emerald Hill, Irishtown (Preston), Kenmare, Killarney, Kilmore, Lalor, Londonderry, Londrigan, Longford, Monea, Mornington, Mystic Park, Newry, Ovens, Portarlington, Shelbourne, Sorrento, Stawell, Taradale, Tullyvea, Waterford, Waterford Park

**Tasmania**
Avoca, Dysart, Fingal, Howth, Irishtown, Killora, Liffey, Longford, Shannon

South Australia
Armagh, Auburn, Avoca Dell, Cavan, Clare, Dalkey, Donnybrook, Dublin, Erindale, Farrell Flat, Ferns, Glandore, Irishtown, Kildare, Kilkenny, Killarney, Kingston, Moculta, Navan, Port MacDonnell, Rostrevor, Tarlee (Trawlee), Torrens, Torrens, Virginia

Western Australia
Ardagh, Blessington, Connorville, Donnybrook, Glendalough, Irishtown, Kenmare, Killarney, Leinster, Liffey, Londonderry, O'Connor, Shannon, Shannon Vale, Tipperary, Wicklow Hill

Northern Territory
Daly River, Daly Waters, Durack, Tipperary Waters

Australian Capital Territory
Duffy, Erindale Centre, Torrens

Homesteads with Irish names

Achill West (NSW); Adare (QLD, SA); Antrim (NSW, QLD); Armagh (QLD, VIC, SA); Ardmona (NSW); Artimor (SA); Athlone (QLD, VIC, WA); Auburn (NSW, QLD); Auborn Hills (VIC); Avoca (NSW); Ballygar (QLD); Ballyglodin West (VIC); Ballyholoey (NSW); Ballymena (NSW, QLD); Ballymore (NSW); Ballynahinch House (SA); Baltimore (NSW); Bandon (NSW, QLD); Belfast (QLD, TAS); Belmore (NSW); Blarney (NSW); Buncrana (NSW); Carlow (QLD); Carrigaline (WA); Carrigan (VIC); Cashel (NSW); Cashel Vale (QLD); Cavan (NSW, QLD, VIC); Cavandale (SA); Clare (SA); Clonard (NSW, VIC); Clonagh (SA); Clonard (QLD); Clonmel (NSW, QLD); Clontarf (NSW, QLD); Coleraine (NSW, QLD); Connemara (QLD, VIC, SA); Coolangatta (VIC, SA, WA); Coolangatta Farm (WA); Cork (QLD); Crossmaglen (NSW); The Curragh (NSW, QLD); Curramore (TAS); Curraghmore (NSW, SA); Currah (NSW); Derrymore (NSW, SA); Donegal (SA); Donnybrook (SA); Dunganvan (NSW); Dunmore (NSW, VIC, SA, WA); Dunmore North (VIC); Dysart (NSW, VIC); Ennisclaire (QLD); Ennisdale (NSW); Ennisfree (SA); Ennismore (NSW); Ennis View (NSW, QLD); Enniskillen Downs (QLD); Erin Dale (VIC); Erin Park (VIC); Fermanagh (NSW); Fermoy (NSW, QLD); Fermoy Estate (WA); Fermoyne (VIC); Foyleview (QLD); Galway (NSW, SA); Galway Downs (QLD); Garrymore (SA); Glandore (QLD);
Glanmire (NSW); Glencree (NSW); Glendalough (NSW, QLD, VIC); Glenroe (SA); Gortmore (SA); Granuaile (NSW); Gurteen (NSW); Innisfail (NSW, VIC, SA); Innisfail Downs (QLD); Innisfree (TAS); Innisvale (NSW, VIC); Kenmare (QLD); Kerry (NSW); Kerry Brook (QLD); Kerry Cabin (TAS); Kerry Downs (NSW); Kildare (NSW, QLD, VIC, SA); Kilkenny (NSW); Killarney (NSW, QLD, VIC, TAS, SA, WA, NT); Killarney Park (SA); Killeen (QLD); Kilrush (QLD); Kincora (QLD); Kinsale (QLD); Knockalong (QLD); Knockshegowna (NSW); Leinster (QLD); Leinster Downs (QLD, WA); Leinster West (QLD); Limerick (NSW); Listowel Valley (QLD); Louth (VIC); Malahide (TAS); Mallow (TAS); Mayo (NSW); Mount Leinster (VIC); Mount Shannon (NSW); Mount Tara (NSW, SA); Navan (SA, WA); New Kerry (WA); Newry (TAS, SA); Newry Meadows (VIC); Old Erin (NSW); Oranmore (NSW); Patrick’s Day (VIC); Rathgar (NSW); Raheen (NSW, WA); Raheen Stud (QLD); Rathcool (QLD); Rathfarnham (VIC); Rathmore (QLD, TAS); Rathmoy (QLD); Roscommon (NSW, VIC, TAS, SA); Rathnally (WA); Roscrea (NSW, SA); Roscrea Hill (SA); Rostrevor (NSW, SA); Rostrevor House (TAS); Shamrock (WA); Shandon Vale (QLD); Shannon (NSW, TAS); Shannon (NT); Shannon Down (NT); Tara (QLD, TAS, SA, WA, NT); Tipperary (SA, NT); Tír-nan-óg (SA); Tralee (VIC, WA); Tullamore (QLD, SA); Tyrone (QLD) Ulsterville (VIC); Waterford (NSW, QLD); Wexford (NSW, VIC, SA); Wicklow (NSW, SA); Wicklow Farm (WA)

Irish-named banks, bores, brooks, creeks, dams, falls, lakes, ponds, rivers, rivulets, springs, swamps, waterholes, wells

Armagh Creek (SA); Artimor Creek (SA); Auburn River (QLD); Avoca River (VIC); Bagot Creek (QLD); Bagot Well (SA); Balfie Creek (QLD); Belfast Creek (QLD); Belfast Lough (VIC); Belmore River (NSW); Big Pat’s Creek (VIC); Blarney Creek (NSW); Burke River (QLD); Castlemaine Well (WA); Cloncurry River (QLD); Clonmel Banks (VIC); Clontarf Creek (QLD); Coglin Creek (SA); Cork Creek (QLD, WA); Croppy Creek (NSW); Cross Keys Well (NT); Curragh Creek (NSW); Daly River (NT); Derry Bore (SA, WA); Donegal Dam (NSW); Donnybrook Creek (QLD); Dublin Creek (TAS); Dunmore Creek (QLD); Dunmore Well (WA); Durack Gap Creek (QLD); Durack River (WA); Dysart Creek (TAS); Edenderry Falls (NSW); Erin Creek (QLD); Fenian Creek (QLD); Ferns Creek (NSW); Fitzgerald River (WA); Foyle Creek (QLD); Ireland Creek (NSW); Irish Creek (NSW, VIC); Irishtown Creek (VIC); Kells Bore (WA); Kells Creek (NSW, QLD); Kells Dam (SA);
Kenmare Bore (NSW); Kerry Creek (QLD); Kildare Well (WA); Kilkenny Creek (VIC, WA); Kilkenny Well (WA); Kilkenny Well Bore (WA); Killala Creek (QLD); Killarney Chain of Ponds (NSW); Killarney Creek (NSW, QLD, VIC); Killarney Dam (SA); Killarney Falls (QLD); Killarney Gap (QLD); Killarney Lake (VIC); Killarney Swamp (NSW); Knockbreak Creek (QLD, WA); Lake Newry (SA); Leinster Bore (WA); Liffey Creek (QLD); Liffey Falls (TAS); Liffey River (TAS, WA); Limerick Creek (NSW); Limerick Well (WA); Listowel Creek (QLD); Little Curragh Creek (NSW); Londonderry Creek (TAS); Longford Creek (QLD); Maid of Erin Creek (TAS); McCarthy’s Lake (SA); Monaghan Bore (SA); Monaghan Creek (NSW); Monaghan Waterhole (QLD); Monaghan Well (WA); Mount Leinster Creek (VIC); Mulligan River (QLD); Naas Creek (NT); Newry Creek (VIC); Old Newry Bore (NT); Ovens Creek (NSW, TAS); Patricks River (NSW); River Barrow (VIC); Rostrevor Rivulet (TAS); Shannon Bore (NT); Shannon Brook (NSW); Shannon Creek (NSW, QLD); Shannon Dam (SA); Shannon Lagoon (TAS); Shannon River (TAS, WA); Slaney Creek (SA); St Patrick’s Creek (VIC); St Patrick’s River (WA); Tara Creek (QLD); Tipperary Creek (NSW, QLD, TAS); Tipperary Dam (SA, WA); Tipperary Falls (NSW); Tipperary Spring (VIC); Tipperary Well (WA); Torrens Creek (SA); Torrens Lake (SA); Torrens River (SA); Tralee Creek (QLD); Tully Falls (QLD); Tully River (QLD, VIC); Tyrone Bore (QLD); Vinegar Hill Creek (NSW, QLD); Wexford Creek (QLD)

Irish-named caves, entrances, flats, gaps, gullies, mines, plains, valleys

Ballyholly Gully (QLD); Belfast Gully (VIC); Carey Gully (SA); Cudmore Valley (QLD); Currah Plain (NSW); Galteeemore Mine (WA); Hannans Star Mine (WA); Kate Kearney Entrance (VIC); Kilkenny Soak (WA); Killarney Gap (NSW, QLD); Longford Plains (QLD); Monaghan Flat (NSW); Monaghan Gully (NSW); Tipperary Gully (NSW, QLD, VIC); Durack Gap (QLD); Irishman Gully (QLD); Leinster Mines (WA); Patrick’s Plains (NSW); Phil Ma Cool Mine (SA); Shannon Valley (VIC); The Ovens (VIC, TAS); Tipperary Gully (NSW, QLD, VIC)

Irish-named hills, lookouts, mountains, ranges, tiers

Avoca Mount (VIC); Bagot Range (SA); Baltimore Hill (NSW); Belfast Hill (VIC); Blarney Mount (QLD); Castlemaine Hill (NT); Cork Hill (SA); Cudmore Hill (SA); Daisy Bates Mountain (WA);
Donnybrook Mount (QLD); Dublin Hill (WA); Enniskillen Mount (QLD, WA); Enniskillen Range (QLD); Erin Mount (NSW, WA); Granuaille Mountain (NSW); Irishman Range (NSW); Kerry Mountain (NSW, QLD); Kildare Mount (WA); Killarney Hill (NSW); Kilkenny Mount (WA); Killaloe Mountain (WA); Knocklofty (TAS); Leinster Mount (VIC); Limerick Hill (WA); MacDonnell Range (NT); Mount Doolittle (WA); Mount Mulligan (QLD); Mount O’Halloran (SA); Mount Tara (VIC); Mount Tully (QLD); Raheen Lookout (NSW); Shannon Tier (TAS); Tipperary Hill (VIC); Tralee Hills (NSW); Tully Range (QLD); Vinegar Hill (QLD, TAS, VIC); Wicklow Hill (VIC)

*Irish-named bays, beaches, bluffs, capes, causeways, heads, inlets, points, reefs, rocks, sands*

Ardagh Rocks (WA); Carrickfergus Bay (TAS); Cashel Rock (WA); Clare Bay (SA); Clonmel Sands (VIC); Clontarf Bay (WA); Clontarf Beach (NSW); Clontarf Point (QLD); Croppies Point (TAS); Donnybrook Bay (NSW); Fingal Bay (NSW) Fingal Head (NSW); Fingal Point (NSW); Galway Bay (SA); Giants Causeway (WA); Irish Bay (NSW); Kells Rock (WA); Kate Kearney Entrance (VIC); Killarney Bay (NSW); Killarney Beach (VIC); Killarney Point (NSW); Liffey Bluff (TAS); Londonderry Cape (WA); Monaghan Bluff (NSW); Munster Bay (WA); Omagh Reef (TAS); Ovens Head (QLD); St Patrick’s Head (WA); Phelan Bluff (VIC); Tully Heads (QLD); Tully Inlet (QLD)

*Irish-named islands*

Bourke Island (QLD); Clonmel Island (VIC); Innis Island (QLD); Newry Island (NSW); Slaney Island (SA)

Irish place names occur most commonly in populated places and then as names for individual homesteads, although there may be a myriad of other homesteads whose names have not been captured on maps or databases. Of the geographical features it is perhaps not surprising that banks, bores, brooks, creeks, dams, falls, lakes, ponds, rivers, rivulets, springs, swamps, waterholes, and wells are more likely to carry Irish names than other features, reflecting Irish involvement in the mining history of the country. Also, acquiring land affords the new owner the opportunity to name a bore or creek, waterhole or swamp that runs through the property. What is most interesting in this transference of place names is that the original names were almost always developed from an entirely different social and cultural setting. A place with the
prefix ‘kill’ has its origin in Irish *coill* (‘wood’); a place beginning with ‘tra’ has as its origin the word *trá* (‘a beach’). These geographical features in the place name may no longer exist, but the name itself carries other connotations that are useful in the settlement process: place names, along with Irish stories, songs, myths and history, are above all portable and ultimately visible cultural artefacts.

But are Irish place names any more than optional extras in terms of Irish-Australian research? At one level, the Irish ‘wrote out their memory geographically’, and therefore the study of names can be a useful research tool. The following discussion about South Australia shows how a focus on house names, nicknames and society names has provided new insights into the story of Irish settlement in that colony.

**Place names: a tool for finding the Irish in South Australia**

Research into the Irish in South Australia has been relatively sparse to date, and much of it has concentrated on the single women who arrived in significant numbers during the late 1840s and mid 1850s. A study of place names in South Australia, however, reveals the presence of the Irish from the beginnings of white settlement. For example, Myponga Hill, about 30 kilometres south of Adelaide, was once known as Clarke’s Hill, after Killarney-born John Clarke who arrived on the *Tam O’Shanter* in 1836, the year the colony was founded. He was one of the early arrivals who headed south to this rich farming area. A strong Irish presence developed over the next ten years, culminating in the establishment in 1846 of St. Marys, the first purpose-built Catholic church in the colony. It still stands on South Road at Morphett Vale. Another southern place name, Carrickalinga, evokes the Ulster town of Carrickalina. It is likely that the growing non-Indigenous presence brought changes to the place name recorded earlier as Curry-kalina. By 1860 the name was being written as Currajalinga. Here we see Irish (or Scottish) settler influence in a prefix that echoes the Irish and Scots Gaelic word *carrig* (‘a rock’).

Irish place names in South Australia can be seen as a form of social and cultural capital that enriched the migrant experience for the colonial Irish born: a people who have always had a strong sense of place. The Irish attachment to place was recognised as something to address when both Derry-born Colonel Robert Torrens and his Cork-born son, Robert Richard, suggested Loughrea, New Erin or St. Patrick’s Land as prospective names for Irish settlements 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 the Torrens’s suggested place names eventuated, Irish colonists in South
Australia often expressed their ethnicity through place naming. Investigation of 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 engines, and they offer a useful new research tool for finding out more about Irish individuals or the Irish as a group. And, as a group, the Irish were a significant community in the colony. The number of Irish-born people in South Australia had jumped from only 1,800 in 1846 to 12,800 by 1861, when they constituted around 10 per cent of the colony’s population; while Catholics, who would have included the Australian-born children of Irish-born settlers, numbered 28,668 by 1871 and constituted 15 per cent of the population.27

Edward Burton Gleeson (known as Paddy) arrived in 1838 on the *Emerald Isle* from Calcutta, with money to buy land.28 He was to become known as the ‘King of Clare’, a town north of Adelaide now noted for its vineyards, which has been called the ‘most Irish place in South Australia’.29 Although the area had fewer than 100 people in 1842, the town grew out of ‘Gleeson’s Village’ and was known as Clare by 1846.30 Gleeson’s own house, Inchiquin, was named after a locality and lough near Corrofin in County Clare, which may have been, Rodney Cockburn suggests, Gleeson’s ‘youthful abode’.31 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 during the nineteenth century.32 It is probable that Gleeson’s own promotion, the natural effects of chain migration, and the arrival of large numbers of assisted single female immigrants accounted for the 11 per cent of the region’s population who were Irish born as late as 1881, rather than the place name itself.33 The name Clare nevertheless reflects the town’s 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. Thus, until the late twentieth century, Clare celebrated its Irish heritage frequently.34 Even though the Irish story in Clare is less well known now, 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 of Dublin is testament to that.

Dublin as a proposed place name was reported in the Adelaide newspaper, the *Register*, as early as October 1840,35 but it would be many years before any place in South Australia was officially named Dublin. The 1840 proposed Dublin or Little Dublin in Morphett Vale did not eventuate as an official name, but Dublin, north of Adelaide and 16 kilometres west of Mallala, and the later Hundred of Dublin were named in 1856 for the colony’s then Dublin-born governor, Sir Richard
MacDonnell. The local population of this Dublin, while not having an Irish background, have made cultural capital out 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 organised exchange visits with Adelaide’s Dubliners and Friends social group, which is 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 worldview, such as the unofficial naming of the lower north east section of North Adelaide as Irishtown for over 30 years. It is unclear whether the families of Irish labourers and domestic servants who lived here were any more numerous than in 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 the area. Irishtown is to some extent a derogatory term. 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. Areas named Irishtown in Ireland were typically outside the English-controlled towns and were often walled off from them. In late nineteenth-century North Adelaide the labouring classes in their small cottages were not walled off from those living in big houses, but the name Irishtown served the same purpose of naming the undesired.

The nickname Paddy is another Irish marker, but it varies from being a term of endearment to one of derision. E.B. Gleeson’s nickname was clearly one of endearment, and it is a nickname he shared with Sir George Strickland Kingston from County Cork. The river Torrens, which flows through Adelaide, was once known as Paddy’s River, in reference to its discovery by a party led by Kingston. Not so endearing was the term Paddy’s Town, which was attached for a time to Macelesfield, a town south east of Adelaide. This reflected the sudden arrival of many Irish working women, following the establishment in 1855 of a depot for Irish female immigrants at nearby Mount Barker. For similar reasons, the site of Mount Barker’s first Catholic church and cemetery was known as Paddy’s Hill. This naming was short-lived, representing as it did a spontaneous response to a sudden increase in the population of a distinctive group of people. As many of the Irish women married into the surrounding communities, the Paddy nickname did not last as long as North Adelaide’s Irishtown.

Too often in our history we rely on 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 Strickland 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. While religion in colonial South Australia played a significant role, the divide between Catholic and Protestant was not necessarily complete. The Irish Catholic bishop of Adelaide, for example, employed the Irish Anglican Kingston to design 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.  

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 Shuldham O’Halloran (president) and his brother William (vice-president), who were from a Limerick family; with the other vice-presidents being Captain Charles Bagot, a Congregationalist from Kildare; Dr Thomas Young Cotter from Cork; Bandon-born and raised George Strickland Kingston; and Charles Burton Newenham, a Church of England clergyman from Dublin and sheriff of Adelaide. Ordinary committee members included: Arthur Fox from Dublin (Catholic); E.B. Gleeson, who was probably born in County Clare (Church of England); John Hope of Derry (Methodist); the Catholic vicar general, Father Michael Ryan from Galway; and Henry Seymour from Dublin or Cork (Church of England). In 1856 the society of the Sons of Erin included: Alexander Anderson from Ulster (Presbyterian); Edward McEllister from Kerry (Catholic); Hugh Quin from Newry, County Tyrone; and R.R. Torrens from Cork. Nicknames and the membership of groups with patriotic and non-sectarian Irish names suggest that an Irish ethnic identity played a significant role in the lives of these South Australian colonists, beyond religious divisions. Membership of such societies was probably, however, confined to those who enjoyed a certain amount of economic and social capital.

Another form of naming that often displays Irish ethnicity relates to houses and property. Captain Charles Hervey Bagot, who arrived on the Birman in 1840, supervising 224 immigrants from County Clare, named his house after his family home in County Kildare.  

Nurney House still stands in Stanley Street, North Adelaide—almost opposite is a sign at St Mary’s Catholic Church referring to a school that opened ‘here in Irishtown in 1870’. The name Nurney derives from the Irish An Úirne (‘the oratory’). In the 1840s, Captain William O’Halloran named his farm and later his mansion, on the corner of Goodwood Road and Daws Road, Clanfeargal (‘Fergal’s family’), after the name on the O’Halloran family crest. His brother, Thomas Shuldham O’Halloran, the colony’s first police commissioner, named Lizard Lodge on O’Halloran Hill after the animal represented on the same family crest.
A pioneer pastoral family, the Cudmores from Limerick, named their Victor Harbor mansion Adare, after a village in County Limerick. Farmer Michael Kenny from County Clare 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 during the late 1830s in the Gawler district, north east of Adelaide, named their property Clonlea after their home in Rostrevor, County Down. Finally, John O’Dea from Glandore, County Cork, named the eponymous suburb south of Adelaide.

Conclusion

When researching ancestry and local history, we pay great attention to official records that document people’s names on birth, marriage and death certificates, their religious affiliations, and the names of the ships on which they arrived. 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. The task of finding the colonial Irish in South Australia—and Australia more broadly—is made easier when the focus is less on religion and more on ethnicity and national sentiment.

Finally, more research is required in order to reveal the historical contexts of many of the names mentioned here. Places named Irishtown around the country warrant their own focus. Some clearly reflect the ‘othering’ of the Irish when they gathered in significant numbers, while some appear to have been named for commercial reasons. Most importantly, although this collection of names largely includes populated areas, it has not examined these at a micro level. Irish names are also part of the streetscape of most urban areas, revealed in the names on street signs and on individual homes, and research into such usages may reveal even more cultural capital on the street where you live.

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Australian Conference, July 1990, Melbourne: La Trobe University, 1991, pp. 103–19


3 ‘Australian Emigration Society’.

4 The names Laois and Offaly were only introduced after independence in the 1920s, these counties being known from the sixteenth century as Queen’s and King’s respectively.

5 ‘Australian Emigration Society’.

6 A placename has been included in these lists on the basis of three criteria: if it occurs in Ireland; if the place was named by an Irish-born person; or if the place was named in honour of an Irish-born person.


9 Ibid., p. 63.

10 Ibid., p. 79.


Around 620 Irish girls and young women arrived in Adelaide on four ships in 1848–9. They were part of a British government scheme to send female 'orphans' from Irish workhouses to the Australian colonies. In 1853 the colony sought more single women to balance its disproportionately male population, and as a result around 4,000 Irish women arrived in 1854–5. Richards and Herraman estimate that in all 6,000 single Irish women immigrated to South Australia between the late 1840s and the mid 1850s. Trevor McLaughlin, *Barefoot and Pregnant? Irish Famine Orphans in Australia*, Melbourne: Genealogical Society of Victoria, 1991, pp. 225–9; Eric Richards and Ann Herraman, "If she was to be hard up she would sooner be hard up in a strange land than where she would be known": Irish Women in Colonial South Australia', in Trevor McLaughlin (ed.), *Irish Women in Colonial Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998, pp. 82–104.

John Cormack to author, n.d., containing a ‘resume’ written by James Clarke, son of John Clarke.

22 Register (Adelaide), 27 May 1843, p. 3a.


25 *South Australian*, 2 April 1840, p. 6.


28 Richards, ‘The Importance of Being Irish in Colonial South Australia’, p. 84.

29 Ibid., p. 101, note 68.


32 Adelaide Times, 28 March 1851.
34 Recently Clare resurrected plans, first initiated in 1986, to twin the town with County Clare in Ireland. Irish Echo (Sydney), 4–17 November 2009, p. 6.
35 Register (Adelaide), 3 October 1840.
36 Many place-name publications, websites, local and family histories, newspapers and pamphlets have informed my collection of Irish placenames, but the most comprehensive source has been: Geoffrey Manning, Manning’s Place Names of South Australia from Aaron Place to Zion Hill, Adelaide: Gould Publishers, 2006.
43 Register (Adelaide), 21 March 1840.
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