

## STRIKING IT RICH IN THE SOUTH ISLAND GRASSLAND, 1848-1914

by  
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If you go to the churchyard at Croiek, in the Scottish Highland county of Ross, as well as the memorial to the evicted tenants of Glenealvie, you will, if you look, see a tombstone: "Erected by Donald Ross, Burkes Pass, New Zealand, in loving memory of his father and mother and also of his brothers. . . ." Donald Ross was born third son of thiscrofting family in 1848 and went to New Zealand, as the tombstone informs us, in 1879. Burkes Pass is in the inland central South Island plain known as the Maekenzie country, and Donald Ross was one of a number of sheep farmers there who left a substantial fortune. He died in 1926, and his estate was valued at £26464 which may not seem a great deal but was in the top 5%. I want to argue that in his passage from humble circumstances to some wealth Ross was far from unusual among those who prospered in the South Island grasslands.

This view differs from much writing on the upper class in the nineteenth century. K.C. McDonald wrote a long time ago that 'As a class, the runholders were rather different from the rank and the file of the colonists. They tended to be English rather than Scots. Many of them were men of birth and education. . . university men [who]. . . would have been classed in England as gentlemen'. Harry Scotter wrote in similar vein: 'nearly always a gentleman immigrant, a man of education, hospitable on his home station, a man of the world in his city club, a hard worker and a sportsman.'<sup>1</sup> Possibly reacting to such respectable views, Stevan Eldred-Grigg has portrayed the Southern Gentry as a truly idle rich.<sup>2</sup>

This study of wealthy farmers relies on a comprehensive list of all those who died leaving a fortune of more than £10000 up to 1918, £15000 for 1919-25, and £25000 for 1926-30. This accounts for something less than 7.5% of wealth. The arguments for using probate sources to define wealth need not be rehearsed here—suffice it to note there is little alternative if one is to be systematic.

When this rich list is analyzed it appears that over half of those who made a fortune in farming came from lower middle class backgrounds (defined

by a father's occupation). The gentry includes all substantial landed families, including the titled. The upper middle class is larger working farmers, manufacturers, merchants, and established professionals; the lower middle class includes self-employed artisans, smaller farmers, traders, farm managers, other professionals, and salaried clerical workers. The lower class are manual wage-earners. For about a quarter of rich farmers, where the father's occupation is not known, the first occupation engaged in the colonies is taken.

**Table 1: Origins and Wealth: Farmers**

	N	%
Gentry	9	3.3
Upper middle class	55	20.3
Lower middle class	164	60.5
Wage-earner	43	15.9
Total	271	

The desirability—perhaps inevitability—of sheep on these southern grasslands had been recognised in the mid and late 1840s. As the first Superintendent of Canterbury, James Edward Fitzgerald, put it:

the only way to make money here is by sheep farming. Money may be literally coined in that trade. And it is eminently the profession of a gentleman. The sheepfarmer may have his comfortable house and gardens and a little farm producing all he requires, but his personal task is to ride about the country inspecting his vast flocks and giving directions for their management.<sup>3</sup>

David Monro, a prominent settler in Nelson, had written in 1844 that

the resources of Port Cooper [i.e. Canterbury] will best be developed by persons of considerable capital - each having a range of a good many thousand acres and thus being able to combine the rearing of stock with tillage. Such persons should be able to wait for a time for their profits.<sup>4</sup>

In a sense both were right, but both were also wrong, for many without much capital prospered, both in pastoral farming and in agriculture.

Both Canterbury and Otago were organised European settlements, established according to Wakefield's theory of systematic colonisation. By that theory, labour and capital were to be kept in balance, with landowning settlers paying a relatively high price for land and being entitled to town and rural sections in a fixed proportion. Wakefield had called for concentrated agricultural settlements, believing these to represent a higher form of civilisation than pastoralism, but in the absence of reliable markets for agricultural produce pastoral woolgrowing formed the major export earner.

Both provinces were established by church-oriented Associations-Free Presbyterian Otago in 1848 and Anglican Canterbury in 1850. Land policy in both settlements followed Wakefield's dear land prescription, which meant that until 1853 pastoralism developed more rapidly outside the Canterbury and Otago blocks than inside them, because the leasing terms were more liberal. Higher land prices inside the Canterbury block—£3 per acre and pasturage at an annual rent of £1 per hundred acres—caused many pastoralists to look to the north or south. Inside the Canterbury block, a run for 20000 sheep would cost £200 pa in rent; outside, with 2000 sheep in the first year, the same land would cost £8 6s 8d, rising to £40 or so in five years when it was fully stocked.

Even so, by the end of 1852 much of the flat land north of the Waimakariri had been claimed, and the more remote areas of the Amuri and South Canterbury were also being stocked. The Amuri was administered from Nelson and stocked from the Wairau valley, in the northeast of the island; initially, therefore, its links with Canterbury were tenuous.

In South Canterbury 28 runs were applied for by September 1851 ranging in area from 16,000 to 75,000 acres. By June 1854 it was evident that many runs were unoccupied, and the provincial authorities cancelled and reallocated many licenses, while others were privately transferred. Thus an initial high speculative phase gave way to a period of consolidation by those who were actually prepared to run sheep.<sup>5</sup>

Only in 1853 with the establishment of representation provincial and colonial governments did land policy begin to become uniform across a province. In both Canterbury and Otago very cheap pastoral rents were allowed, in most cases not more than a penny an acre.<sup>6</sup> Sheepfarmers had taken out licenses for part of South Otago by 1852; North Otago was being stocked in 1853, as all the flatter land north of the Waitaki had been taken up, and

between 1856 and 1860 pastoralists were moving into the more rugged and colder Canterbury high country and Central Otago.

Setting up involved claiming a run—in a way analogous to pegging off a gold claim—by stating rough boundaries, paying a rental, and stocking it in the approved numbers. Many of the runs were of very large extent. In the province of Canterbury in 1879, there were 35 leasehold runs between 10000 and 20000 acres, 20 between 20000 and 30000 acres, and 33 over 30000 acres. In Otago there were 39 leaseholds between 10000 and 20000 acres, 23 of between 20000 and 30000 acres, and 77 over 30000 acres. Many of these runs were combined into a single concern.<sup>7</sup> Pastoral leases gave pre-emptive rights to purchase certain areas on basis of improvements. Pastoralists tended to freehold when they had to. Much of North Otago was proclaimed into hundreds for closer settlement in the mid 1860s; the pastoralists promptly bought most of it themselves.<sup>8</sup> In Canterbury freeholding proceeded piecemeal, with very large areas only being bought up in the late 1870s. This buy-up was prompted by a number of factors, particularly the expansion of state-built railways and bridges, and the widespread use of the double-furrowed plough and the mechanical reaper which, between them, ‘converted the level grassy plains, which a few years ago seemed destined for ever to graze sheep, into wheat fields for the London market.’ Something like three quarters of a million acres were sold by the Crown in Canterbury in the 18 months to the middle of 1879, and about 145000 acres in Otago—the Otago land being almost entirely grassy hill country for sheepfarming.<sup>9</sup>

Environmental modification was an integral part of pastoralism. When organised European settlement began, the plains were a mixture of grassland, scrub and swamp. Much of the coastal strip for about 50 miles north and south of Christchurch was in many places swampy, up to about 7 miles inland, with sandhills intervening. Swamps also predominated along considerable parts of mid and south Canterbury. South of Oamaru, plains gave way to rolling grassy hills, with area of coastal forest, and swamps around the estuaries. Grassland and scrub predominated further inland. The grassland was tussock, with snowgrass in some colder areas as well but it was usually interspersed with the native cabbage tree, with flax, and with the prickly scrub matagouri (wild Irishman) and the speargrass *taramea* (spaniard). Matagouri could grow very thick and high; spaniard also formed concentrations and is literally razor-sharp. Both these latter plants could make the land impassable to stock, and were consequently the target of sustained burning. The swamps also represented an

obstacle and were drained to a considerable extent. The wild livestock also represented a threat: since their introduction by Cook and other European voyagers from the 1770s pigs had become endemic. Wild dogs—crossed with the Maori kuri—were also plentiful and attacked sheep.<sup>10</sup>

Early accounts of pastoral practice stress burning, to the extent that the match-happy sheepfarmer has become something of a myth. Recently this myth has been questioned.<sup>11</sup> The truth of the matter remains difficult to discern. If most established pastoralists were prudent burners, operating with a clear strategy of environmental management, some were not. This was particularly true in the earliest phase of runholding, and may perhaps be attributed to some of those who did not prosper. In many drier parts of the country, grassland was interspersed with spaniard or matagouri and as one runholder noted fire was ‘of all instruments the best for clearing a road.’<sup>12</sup> Generally, until the harder tussock was burnt off with the accompanying scrub, only cattle could feed; thus, fire and cattle were the instruments of first pastoral settlement. By the 1860s it was realised that different types of country required different burning treatment, from very early spring for warm dry country to early summer in colder, wetter areas. But before this was realised, ‘Untold damage [had] been caused by ignorant people who do not realise the harm they are doing by using the firestick constantly and at any old time.’ Indiscriminate midsummer burning of sunny facings could strip the ground, leaving it for rabbits and frost to finish off.<sup>13</sup>

Pastoral exploration, however, was often accompanied by indiscriminate burning, many examples of which could be cited. In 1852 Joseph Pearson, his wife Sarah and Joseph Hawdon crossed the Torlesse range and burnt their way up the Craigieburn lakes, where Pearson claimed 80000 acres for Hawdon in what became Grasmere, Craigieburn and Riversdale stations.<sup>14</sup> Charles Torlesse described the Rakaia gorge as ‘romantic enough’—and lit big fires for two days walking down the river.<sup>15</sup>

If burning was done more carefully than often supposed, the sowing of exotic grasses was also commenced early. The Deans brothers were doing this by 1849; Charles Torlesse recorded sowing grass on his Rangoria property in 1851, and clover, hay and grass were all being sowed at the Orari station in the late 1850s. Even in the higher country, at Lake Coleridge, clover was sowed by 1865.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid 1860s many Canterbury runs were at capacity, and as stocking increased further the weight of sheep fell and fleeces lost condition. As long

as new runs were being opened, there was an outlet for surplus but from the late 1860s until the establishment of the frozen meat trade in the 1880s flocks had to be culled to remove the surplus. Cull sheep were either boiled down for tallow, or in some cases driven over cliffs or killed and buried. At Glenmark in 1870, 12000 wethers were slaughtered for boiling down.<sup>17</sup>

Fencing was only widespread from the mid-1860s. The earliest method of keeping a flock together was by employing shepherds or boundary-keepers. On the Orari station, as on many others, sheep were simply left to roam and checked every day by someone riding out. Initially fences were made of posts and rails cut from whatever bush was available, or of ditch and bank construction, topped with gorse. By the 1870s wire fencing was becoming widespread.<sup>18</sup> The obvious reason for fencing was to avoid mixing flocks. The disease scab made this particularly important; scab was spread by a mite and was highly contagious. Border controls in each province were only partly effective, and runholders were required to dip sheep, usually in tobacco water. Runholders were quick to complain if a scabby mob passed through, and occasionally neighbours got into vendettas over the alleged seabbiness of each others' flocks.<sup>19</sup>

Who, then, made money out on the South Island grasslands?

There was a very small group who had established themselves as farmers and whalers by direct negotiation with Ngai Tahu before the land purchases of 1844 and 1848-49. The best-known Otago example was John Jones of Waikouaiti, who was born in Sydney and who worked in sealing and whaling ships before buying shares in whaling ships and, in 1835, a share in a Fiordland whaling station. By 1840 he controlled much of the southern whaling trade. His pre-1840 operations translated into considerable landholdings along the East Otago coast, which he cropped and grazed, leasing to tenants and relations. At his death in 1869 he was worth nearly £60000.<sup>20</sup> In Canterbury the Rhodes family, sons of a Yorkshire tenant farmer, also owed their initial capital to the Australasian shipping trade. William Barnard Rhodes, the eldest brother, owned land and stock in New South Wales, invested in New Zealand whaling and land at Port Nicholson and Banks Peninsula, and sent his own brothers George and Robert to run the Peninsula farms. Robert Heaton Rhodes stayed at Purau, on the south side of Lyttelton harbour; George became the wealthiest Timaru squatter from 1851.<sup>21</sup>

The other well-known Canterbury example was the Deans brothers: William and John, sons of a moderately well-off Ayrshire lawyer, had bought

land through the New Zealand Company's Wellington scheme, but had been disappointed in the topography of that land. In 1843 they came south to the plains near Banks Peninsula and leased land by arrangement with the local Ngai Tahu. The Deans estate was converted to freehold of the Crown after 1850, and shortly after was added to by land much further out on the plains. The Deans story is notable for the family fortunes being in the hands of the widow Jane Deans for twenty years from 1853 until her son reached his majority. These individuals are well-known in the history of their respective provinces, which makes the point that there weren't many other pre-settlement arrivals who made any sort of fortune. All these pre-1848 settlers made substantial sums supplying dairy produce and potatoes to other parts of New Zealand, and to the new settlers of 1848 and 1850.

More common were those who came independently, either from the Australian colonies or directly from Britain, to establish themselves in sheepfarming. The Australian connection was essential, in supplying stock, capital and expertise. As William Deans noted in June 1851, there had recently arrived in Canterbury 'two or three gentlemen Scotchmen who were amongst the earliest settlement of Port Phillip [Victoria, Australia]. . . bringing with them some stock. . . These gentlemen having colonial experience and capital will make first rate settlers, and in a few years hence we will export large quantities of wool.'<sup>22</sup>

It may even be appropriate to speak of an Australian rush. The rapid movement of Australian-based pastoralists across the Tasman was prompted by a number of factors: the Australian pastoral industry had reached the end of the phase of first expansion, land tenure was becoming complicated, with the possibility of conflict with small farmers, environmental degradation was becoming apparent in some places, and New Zealand was less prone to drought and heat.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph Hawdon was a critical figure in trans-Tasman pastoralism. He had established the first cattle station in Victoria in 1836, had been instrumental in opening the Murray grasslands, had explored with Sir George Grey, and had pioneered the overland route to Adelaide. With his manager Joseph Pearson and some other squatters, he arrived in Canterbury early in 1851 with a shipload of sheep; Pearson selected land and Hawdon returned to Victoria. Hawdon's descriptions, combined with recurring drought and fire, attracted a number of Australians. One squatter, William Kaye of Castlemaine, went into partnership with his manager, Robert Chapman; Chapman brought 1200 sheep over,

stocked Springbank near Rangiora, and bought Kaye out two years later.<sup>24</sup> The Macdonald brothers—Allan, William, and Angus—were probably of comfortable family origins and had been in New South Wales since 1842. Encouraged by Robert Heaton Rhodes's accounts to come over, William Macdonald brought sheep to Canterbury early in 1851 with Joseph Hawdon and another squatter, John Aitken. The Macdonald brothers' first run was on relatively dry land thirty miles inland from Christchurch, but in 1853 they moved south to Orari station, stocking the new run from the north. The initial flock was fewer than 4000; by 1864 it had become 25000.<sup>25</sup>

Hugh Buchanan, son of a substantial tenant farmer in the southern Highlands, likely had some money before emigrating to Australia in 1848; three years later he fled the heat and took up Kinloch, a large run along the Banks Peninsula foothills. Buchanan stocked the run with Merinos, and over time freeholded 13000 acres and sowed it in grass, with 64 miles of fences.<sup>26</sup>

Pastoralists from Australia had typically worked as managers before squatting on large pastoral properties in that country. Typically, too, they were from the rural lower middle class in Scotland. George Rutherford, born in the Scottish border town of Jedburgh in 1815, was the son of a tenant farmer. He worked as a ploughman before emigrating in 1839 and as a station worker in Australia, becoming an overseer and then a squatter, eventually with a flock of 100,000 sheep. Like others from Australia, Rutherford chose New Zealand when he wanted more land and after hearing of its cooler climate. Rutherford's assets from pastoralism and stock dealing enabled him to buy substantial property outright in 1856.<sup>27</sup> His fortune of £160000 was surpassed by some of his sons.

The Australian connection involved gold as well as wool, for the Victorian goldrushes—which followed closely on the '49 in California—gave the start to a number of fortunes, such as that of the McLean brothers, John, Allan and Robertson, who migrated with their sister Alexandrina and their mother to Victoria from the Isle of Coll in 1840, following crop failure and the death of the father, who was a farmer and fisherman. The family, if not poor, was almost certainly not well off either. In Victoria the brothers worked as shepherds for several years before taking up runs; during the goldrushes there they were carriers, merchants, and goldbuyers. They came to New Zealand in 1852, holding runs in the upper Rakaia and the Ashburton districts in partnership with the Macdonalds, whom they had known in Australia. They heard of good Otago country from a shearer, and in 1856 took up Morven Hills.

By 1860 they had 18000 sheep; 32000 sheep by 1863, in 1870, 110000 sheep. The original area of the station was 365320 acres; in 1871-74 7000 acres of agricultural land was taken out of the runs, but a lot of it was freeholded by Morven Hills itself. In 1874 Morven Hills was sold –before the rabbits came–with 140000 sheep for £128000. The partnership was dissolved; Redcastle, on the south of the Waitake, went to John and Allan bought the very large Waikakahi property across the river.<sup>28</sup> John died in 1902 worth £213000; Allan left £596904 five years later. Their nephew, St John McLean Buckley, who was John's heir at Redcastle, left £166884 in 1915.

In Otago, the very large Waitaki valley operations of Robert Campbell also relied on an Australian fortune. Robert Campbell married into sheep, with Thomas Hawdon's daughter Emma, but Campbell himself, although born in England, inherited a fortune made out of gold-buying. Robert Campbell's grandfather was a nephew of the India and Australia trading Campbells who were based in Sydney at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; that young man went to Australia to work for his uncle in 1806, and made money trading gold dust; his son (this Robert's family) returned to England and bought an estate. Robert Campbell of Otekaieke was sent to New Zealand looking for land on behalf of his father–so the Otekaieke fortune was based on Australian gold but that had been facilitated by the family connection with India and whaling.<sup>29</sup>

Some came directly from Britain. Watson Shennan's father was a noted Lowland Scottish cattle breeder and small farmer, who owned about 200 acres. If the size of the father's farm made available a little spare cash, the eight surviving children in the family made emigration attractive. In 1857 Watson and one of his brothers, Alexander, arrived in Otago intending to run sheep and selected runs in central Otago. The brothers selected Galloway and Moutere stations, in the Manuherikia, a grassy and well-watered area, and were the first to stock the area with sheep rather than cattle, which they obtained from Anderson at Clutha and drove in in March 1858. The area was populated with wild dogs, which the runholders fought with staghounds, poison, and shooting. Alexander Shennan died in 1863; Galloway had become much less attractive after the Dunstan goldrush of 1862, and in 1868 Watson sold Puketoi and transferred to Puketoi station, over the ranges in the Maniototo. In 1910 he left £100000.<sup>30</sup>

Some pastoralists simply worked their way up. James Chapman Smith died in 1903 and left £86272. He arrived in Nelson in 1842, aged 15. He worked at various occupations in Nelson, saved £120, and in 1848 converted

his savings into the wherewithal for a bakery and went to Otago with his friend John Allen. The pair built a bakehouse in Dunedin and also traded produce between the two settlements and set up as storekeepers. In 1850 they went into partnership in a small farm on the Taieri; later, on his own, Smith went south, buying 50 acres at Tomomairiro and driving a bullock team. A successful wheat crop persuaded him to extend his farming operations, which he did piecemeal before taking up a pastoral lease from 1854. Then goldrushes lost him the run, but by selling food to miners and acting as a goldbuyer he made more money and had then taken up other runs between Tuapeka and Clutha. When the final run, Greenfield, was proclaimed into a hundred he bought most of it and converted it into a highly productive estate, in grain, wool and frozen meat.<sup>31</sup>

One important means for those without much capital was to start with sheep on terms. In South Canterbury, for instance, James King was on terms to George Rhodes leasing 2000 and paying Rhodes 45% of the annual increase of the flock and a fixed quantity of wool, about two pounds, per sheep annually. At the end of the lease King would return the original number of stock less 2.5% per annum for deaths. Thus, King kept all the extra wool and anything over 45% was lambing.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, at Rangiora bush Charles Torlesse's first stock in May 1851 was 1400 ewes, 500 dry sheep and 20 steers, mostly on thirds for the other owners—Torlesse kept one third of profits and the increase, and by 1857 he had his own flock of 9000 sheep.<sup>33</sup>

Many of those who made money sheepfarming had begun by working for more established settlers. In small society patronage could play an important role. Just two families accounted for ten cases of patronage: the Rhodes family (six) and the Deans family (four). One spectacular case of patronage was that of William Boag, who had been born into a Perthshire farming family in 1828, and arrived with his wife in New Zealand in 1851, apparently 'not burdened with much money.' This couple was quickly hired by the Deans brothers; William progressed from the position of a farm worker to that of a manager, buying stock for himself as he went. Boag's principal holding consisted of 1700 acres of drained swampland at Burnside. Proximity to Christchurch was a major element in the value of this land.<sup>34</sup>

William Birdling was born in Somersetshire in 1822, and brought up to farming. At the age of 20 he came to Wellington and then almost immediately to Banks Peninsula to work for the Rhodes brothers—likely he was recruited in Wellington by William Barnard Rhodes. For the first two years he was paid

£20 a year, but this increased and 'by great self-denial and hard work he had got together a considerable sum of money' and bought land, initially a small area of swamp and tussock, which was gradually cleared and drained, and expanded to 5000 acres. Again, a large family (seven sons and a daughter) must have been an asset. When he died in 1902, he left £53951.<sup>35</sup>

Robert Forrester, a shepherd from Stirlingshire, came to New Zealand in 1862 aged 21 and worked in the Amuri, spending 14 years as head shepherd for the Rutherfords. Since arriving in New Zealand he had bred Corriedale sheep—clearly squatters allowed shepherds time to do their own thing and did not impose restraint of trade clauses—and this gave him the capital to start on his own; Forrester left nearly £40000 in 1909.<sup>36</sup>

Another dimension of patronage was where a managing partner—whose input was skill and labour while other partners put in the money—progressed to a fortune. Some of the largest fortunes were made in this way. George Moore (d 1905, £253000) was the son of a Manx landowner, and arrived in 1853 as managing partner for his father-in-law Robert Quayle Kermode and another Quayle. Kermode was a Tasmanian runholder whose fortune went back to whaling at the very beginning of the century. Moore, acting as agent, bought 40,000 acres in North Canterbury for £17,000 and stocked the estate with 6000 Tasmanian merinos; Kermode put in the money, Moore supplied the sheep and management. Only in 1866 was Moore allowed to buy into the business, and he was managing partner until 1873 when he bought much of Kermode's share with a very large mortgage from the Union Bank of Australia.<sup>37</sup> Moore's daughter and sole heir, Annie Townend, left the largest fortune in the study, being worth three quarters of a million pounds when she died in 1914.

Another case of lucrative partnership was that of Duncan Cameron of Springfield, near Methven (d 1908, £209658). Born in Inverness-shire, he arrived in New Zealand in 1864 and took work as a station manager at Winchmore. By 1869 Cameron had saved £1700 and when George Gould, a leading Christchurch merchant, bought the Springfield estate as a speculative investment Cameron put his savings into the estate as managing partner. Irrigation, cropping, and sheep laid the foundations of Cameron's fortune; in 1889 he paid Gould's executor's £65000 for sole title.<sup>38</sup> Cameron and Moore relied on mortgagees for the money to enable them to make the transition to sole owner. Moore's mortgage of £90000 from the Union Bank of Australia was even larger than the £65000 Cameron borrowed from the AMP Society, an insurance company.<sup>39</sup>

The was also a small corporate sector which provided opportunities for managers. Admittedly this sector was dominated by one very large company, the New Zealand & Australian Land Company, which was founded to take over the properties of another company of the same name and of the Canterbury and Otago Association. William Soltau Davidson had worked as a shepherd and cadet on the Canterbury and Otago Association properties, and was then in charge of freeholding considerable areas. When the New Zealand and Australian Land Company was formed, Davidson became general manager and returned to Scotland. He retained considerable New Zealand property and exercised enormous influence in finance and marketing, particularly in concert with his colleague J M Ritchie of the National Mortgage and Agency Company<sup>40</sup> Davidson's lieutenant Thomas Brydone, who left £3700, was a Lowland Scots manager made good: his father was an estate steward in Pebbleshire. As well as superintending the vast operations of the NZ&A Land Company, he became a one quarter owner in a modest pastoral property, Teviot Station.<sup>41</sup>

The earlier Canterbury and Otago Association employed John Douglas as managing partner in New Zealand from 1862 until 1871 before he went buying and selling pastoral property on his own account, leaving two large properties. The main property was Mt Royal, near Palmerston: at Douglas's death it consisted of 23581 acres valued at £55669, and carried 20,000 sheep worth £12997. Waihao Downs was a smaller property of 3000 acres, on the drained swampland of South Canterbury. Much more intensively cultivated, the land was valued at £36483 and carried 15000 sheep as well as grain; it had extended to 10000 acres but Douglas had subdivided much of it for sale in smaller farms. Douglas's career as a speculator is indicated by the fact that his gross worth at death was £157101, but he owed £65168.<sup>42</sup>

Some large estate owners, and many smaller farmers, drained swamps with enthusiasm. (It is worth noting that the extensive drainage of the eastern South Island exactly paralleled developments in the Midwestern United States.<sup>43</sup>) The swamps were formed behind high shingle banks along the beach, and draining involved digging trenches to release natural springs—identifiable by heavier flax and raupo—to the sea; side drains leading to the deep ones joined into smaller springs up. Once the drains were cut, the rough growth was cleared off by hand or fire; grass or rape was surface-sowed and then cattle were turned onto the ground to level and harden it. Sometimes the land level fell so much new drains had to be dug. Drain-digging, needless to say, was

specialised and often lonely work<sup>44</sup>

The greatest drainer of them all was John Grigg, and it made him £90000. Son of a Cornwall yeoman, he sold his inheritance and came to Australia in 1854, and crossed over after six months, taking up land in Auckland and making money by a monopoly of potato and hay supply to government forces during the wars. His wife's sister was married to the founder of the Bank of New Zealand, Thomas Russell, which made a partnership for the purchase of Longbeach in 1864. By 1871 this estate was 30000 acres. The drained land included 5000 acres of wheat sown in the 1870s wheat boom; when the partnership was dissolved in 1882 Grigg bought back part of the Russell's share; the stock sale realised £35037.<sup>45</sup>

Most drainers were on much smaller scale. In Otago, the major area for swamp-draining was the Taieri plain, and William Heenan made money contracting and goldmining in Victoria, and with that he bought land in the Taieri swamps which he cleared and extended to 1000 acres. He owned a cheese factory besides.<sup>46</sup> In Canterbury several modest fortunes were made in the swamps around Christchurch. Peter Clinton left £35415 in 1901; he was born in West Meath, Ireland, 1834 and, evidently seeing little future in post-famine Ireland, emigrated to South Australia in 1849, moved to Victoria 1850, and to New Zealand 1858. He lived in Auckland to 1863, then bought a small block of swamp land at Lincoln-Greendale, which he worked up to 1000 acres and then traded for 7000 acres at Darfield in two properties.<sup>47</sup> Andrew Dawson and his wife Mary had worked as farm servants for various better-off farmers and leased various farms between 1846 and 1872. In the latter year they bought a 1460 acre property, mostly swamp, south of Ashburton and improved it to a value of £23000 in 1909.<sup>48</sup>

Wealthy farmers often owned more than one property. Pastoralists would often have a high country property and a smaller downland or plains estate; the lower property would be used as winter country or to finish stock for the market. Combinations of smaller farms could make significant wealth, particularly on the drained swamps of the eastern Canterbury Plains. Peter Doig, who began his career in New Zealand as a farm worker on Homebush, left £53200 in four cropping farms in the Chertsey area, of 3600 acres in total.<sup>49</sup> Andrew Anderson owned farms both at Leeston and Oamaru, with a combined value of £17000. He had bought his first land at Leeston and extended his holdings by draining swampland.<sup>50</sup> Joseph Buxton owned two farms in the Ashley area, 6000 acres near Waimate, and 600 acres in Southland, as well as

over 100 acres in and around the suburbs of Christchurch; this gave a combined value in 1898 of £30000.<sup>51</sup>

The extent of such landholding indicates a considerable talent at seizing opportunities for accumulation as they presented themselves, as well as very significant prosperity among a fraction of the landowning class who have usually been excluded from consideration as part of the 'gentry.' What is more important, however, is the reason for the accumulation of multiple holdings. Sometimes it was speculation, as with James Chapman Smith's thousands of acres in the central North Island. More often, however, the intention was to provide an inheritance for sons, and sometimes for daughters as well. This is made abundantly clear in the text of the wills of rich farmers.<sup>52</sup>

Farming was essentially a business proposition. Farmers saw themselves in this way, as being engaged in business. Charles Tripp advised one intending sheepfarmer to spend two years in the South Island before 'investing', one year of which should be spent as a cadet on a station, and the other in an office to get a sound business training.<sup>53</sup> Successful farmers and pastoralists did not disdain hard work. Tripp stressed that

a man to succeed must be prepared to give up the. . . servants he has to attend upon him in England & must rely on himself. We are all here practical people & know how to do every thing or know how it should be done. . .<sup>54</sup>

The virtues of hard work were enforced on Tripp's offspring: Mowbray Tripp was allowed a little more time on a North Island holiday by his father but was told to be back a week before shearing ' & I want you to be in the drafting yards all the time.'<sup>55</sup>

Sons of monied English families learnt the business of sheepfarming in the same way, as cadets. One of Tripp's cadets was a son of an English notable, Sir Alexander Hood. Hood received occasional reports on his son's progress from Tripp; in one, Tripp noted the youth having spent all day drafting and culling, and having attained a dipping figure of 1000 a day.

A E Peache, who was always conscious of his self-defined status as a gentleman, was as willing as Tripp to get his hands dirty. Peache's diaries note the daily work routine: one day in 1892 consisted of 'Williamson ½ day sundries. Roger - cleaning out shed &c. Self got in killing sheep a.m. and finished tracing no 1 a.m. and did all but painting of no 2 tracing p.m.' Peache

had considerable skills as a draughtsman and carpenter, and noted on one occasion having 'done a lot of carpentering work lately, making gates, wheelbarrows, dog kennels & a new pigsty.' He was careful to specifically bequeath his drawing equipment and carpentry tools to a son.<sup>56</sup>

## Financing

This is a topic on which much work remains to be done, and what follows may well be impressionistic, and is confined to capital cost and development, rather than running costs. Particularly, the financing of running costs by loans secured against the wool clip has not been sufficiently investigated.<sup>57</sup>

In many cases the establishment costs of a sheepfarming enterprise were financed by the runholder's family. The Rhodes fortune began with William Barnard Rhodes's seafaring; by 1831 he was, with the help of his mother's family, part-owner of an Australian-based trading vessel. Profits were reinvested in land, stock and shore-based whaling in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>58</sup> John Hall's quarter million pound fortune also had maritime origins. His father was a sea-captain and shipowner; the family had been merchants since the seventeenth century. Hall arrived in New Zealand in 1852 and with his brothers had soon taken up land (strategically located to ensure maximum control for minimum freeholding).<sup>59</sup> J B A Acland and Charles Tripp had family money, but a relatively small investment of £2000 each in 1855 generated super-profits. Tripp later claimed that when the partnership was dissolved and he re-established himself on his own account at Orari Gorge in 1865 he had £32000.<sup>60</sup>

Others had connections of marriage or business partnership to sources of capital. We have already noted John Grigg's extensive swamp draining and Grigg's marital connection to the founder of the Bank of New Zealand. Managing partners may be considered in this category too: G H Moore and Duncan Cameron have been noted as examples.

By the 1870s, landowners were beginning to subdivide large estates in order to raise capital for more intensive development of what remained. Selling off large parts of the Riccarton estate—for small farms and later for residential purposes—enabled the Deans family to freehold Homebush.<sup>61</sup> Longbeach had been reduced to half its original area of 30,000 acres by the time John Grigg became sole proprietor in 1882.

For some farmers, borrowing was a way to provide capital for

development and was relatively free of risk. J T M Hayhurst of Temuka borrowed £16000 when he inherited a South Canterbury estate from his father in 1889. Hayhurst increased this to £35000 in 1896, discharged his debts in 1913, and left £82000.<sup>62</sup> Borrowing for development could be risky. Henry Hoare, a banker living in London, ran up debts of £173000 between 1885 and 1891 on the Raincliff estate near Geraldine, where he lived for a time. Except for one of £12000, all these loans which included two from the Trust and Loan Company of £64000 each, resulted in mortgagee sales by 1898. Hoare's borrowing had, at least in part, been to finance development. In 1890, 'ploughing... had raised the carrying capacity to over 30,000 sheep'; as well, there was a substantial area in wheat. The 1880s had not, however been a good time in which to engage in such development.<sup>63</sup>

The Studholme family borrowed on a very large scale as their financial difficulties mounted. Much of their borrowing was within the family, but 16 of their 32 mortgages were outside the family. The records show frequent involvement of others in partnership with members of the family, and a high level of debt. As J M Ritchie had noted, the Studholmes were among the 'many old settlers [who] are getting cornered' by low produce prices during the 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>64</sup>

By the mid 1870s loan finance was becoming more institutional in its sources. More than half of all advances to Canterbury farmers of £5000 and over between 1855 and 1900 (226 of 492) were made by institutions—insurance companies, loan or merchant firms, banks, and, to a lesser extent, church and educational endowments. Banks themselves generally made advances through subsidiary companies, or indirectly by advancing money to other lenders rather than directly.<sup>65</sup> The biggest institutional lenders were the AMP Society, the Bank of New South Wales, The N Z Loan and Mercantile Agency Co, and the N Z Trust & Loan Co. Among them they lent 118 of the 266 institutional mortgages.

A very few of the richest pastoralists also lent widely on mortgage; G H Moore and Allan McLean were the most notable examples. Lawyers with pastoral connections lent as trustees; it is likely that much of the money lent by these lawyers came from overseas.<sup>66</sup> The large lending of these individuals indicated the importance of connections with such people. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of these loans were to other rich farmers; these men did not get rich by taking unnecessary risks.

If a very few families lent money as widely as did finance companies,

nearly half of these mortgages were still advanced by single individuals and informal partnerships, usually business associates or members of the same family. Of the 168 single individuals, 70 lent only once, often financing relations, or else by way of putting their savings into one large investment. Among the 334 individuals or informal partnerships making large mortgages, New Zealand residents predominated. Only 54 lenders (8%) appear to have lived outside the colony; 40 of these were in England, and 5 each in Scotland and Australia. In summary, then, even as the century ended the financing of farming was still to a considerable degree personalised.

An older school of historical writing emphasised the heavy debts carried by many pastoralists and estate owners. Keith Sinclair wrote of a rural elite 'falling apart in a wave of abscondences, defalcations and bankruptcies....'<sup>67</sup> A close examination does not support this picture. First, more than half of mortgages above £5000 were for sums under £10000, and only 64 of the 492 mortgages were for more than £20000.

Despite some dramatic and well-publicised cases, only 53 mortgages ended in foreclosure, and most of these were on smaller mortgages taken up before 1893. These figures would suggest that, while many farmers were heavily mortgaged in the late 1880s and 1890s, few actually defaulted. On the other hand, many of the mortgagors in the end left little net personal wealth. In terms of credit, there were in effect two sorts of large farmers: those who paid their way, and those who operated largely on borrowed money. The picture of gentry living a high life on borrowed funds is not accurate in most cases.

Certainly, when the government began its programme of land purchasing for closer settlement in the 1890s, some who sold land were heavily mortgaged. A sale could relieve the vendor's financial difficulties. Having the Government as a willing buyer must have been an attractive solution to such problems. A few examples will make the point. Michael Studholme's executors had to manage his mortgage liabilities of around £40000, and they received £5885 for 680 acres in South Canterbury and North Otago in 1893-94. The Studholmes made other sales to the government after 1900.<sup>68</sup> Also in 1901 the trustees of WS Peter sold 2209 acres at Hekeao, South Canterbury for £10545; the family were very heavily mortgaged at Anama. The heirs of Thomas John Tesehemaker received £28093 for 3863 acres at Otaio; this must have come as a considerable relief since the estate had been encumbered with mortgages of around £46000.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the prominence of such cases, they were apparently a minority of Land for Settlements sales, at least in Canterbury. (The discussion must be confined to that province, as the mortgage records for Otago are unavailable.) In only 14 of the 73 sales made to the government in Canterbury was the venter significantly mortgaged, that is, for a sum over £5000, and only eight of these were for £20000 or more.<sup>70</sup>

### Comparisons and conclusions

The richest farmers were overwhelmingly an immigrant group, and in fact benefitted considerably from very early arrival; arrival in the first five or ten years of organised European settlement was almost essential to the attainment of great farming wealth. While few enough of these rich people were well-off to start with, most had some modest resources when they arrived. For some, connections with other rich men can be assumed or shown to have been significant, while others were staked by their families or invested the proceeds of trade. Few of the very richest—those leaving £40000 or more—had begun as genuine labouring men, but there were perhaps just enough instances of shepherds becoming runholders to create something of a popular consciousness of unlimited prospects.

These richest sheepmen benefitted from many circumstances. In the South Island the indigenous Maori were few and, in Canterbury and Otago, made the mistake of believing the government's promises until it was too late. The other critical role for the state was, of course, in allowing cheap land tenure, although this was never as uncomplicated by a yeoman constituency as some pastoralists may have wished.

The environment helped. New Zealand had no indigenous mammals and although wild dogs were a severe nuisance they were gone by about 1865. Wild pigs—descended from the 1770s-1790s—were likewise numerous and were pushed back into the hills and reduced in numbers. Only in the 1870s did an introduced mammal—the rabbit—become a serious problem.

The land was, on the east coast, generally not heavily forested and although the mountains were rugged, river valleys and easier slopes gave pastoralism some space. The same rivers also made for numerous passes, which meant although travel was time consuming it was by no means particularly difficult. The climate was generally benign, although cold in Central Otago and in the high country in winter, and there were disastrous

snowfalls every 20 years or so. Until rabbits damaged much of the fragile interior, the only real pest was scab. The merino was ideal in that it was hardy, and thrived on native grasses while producing excellent fine wool.

The international and imperial context needs to be borne in mind. The demand of the British market for wool and the position of Australia - both pastoral Australia and maritime Australia - as a source of capital and of livestock were critical factors. As wool reached its limits - with runs stocked to capacity - the fortuitous development of refrigerated shipping gave a complementary crop to wool, which was again based on the demands of the British market. While refrigeration made possible the rise of the smaller farmer, the big operators were prominent in developing the industry, and were also enthusiastic subdividers when the market was right.

There are some similarities, duly adjusted for scale, between nineteenth century pastoralism in New Zealand and cattle and sheep grazing in the western United States. In both places those who got started early had a chance of large profits based on minimal infrastructure, open ranging, and considerable investment of loan finance by British or eastern US urban investors. The annual profits of 25-33% that graziers were said to make in the American west in the 1870s are of the same order as the well-known New Zealand example of Samuel Butler, who doubled his money in four years in the Canterbury high country. It may be that New Zealand pastoralists were more enthusiastic improvers of the grassland, but in both cases the role of British - especially Scottish - finance was vital. There is a direct parallel between the New Zealand and Australian Land Company and organisations such as the Swan Land and Cattle Company, incorporated in Edinburgh in 1883 and claiming vast areas in Wyoming, and the Matador Land and Cattle Company, incorporated in Dundee and operating in Northwest Texas.<sup>71</sup> Spanish sheepman and their Anglo successors in New Mexico and Texas allowed their sheep to run freely, watched by shepherds, and likewise leased stock on shares or, as we call it, terms, to those with less capital. California was the major western sheep area from the 1860s: as in New Zealand, the land was free or very cheap, flocks increased rapidly, and from the later 1870s there was a need to freehold in face of pressure from smaller farmers. California sheepman then exported stock to Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Nevada as sheepfarming took off there. In some parts of Montana and Wyoming sheep came to replace cattle.<sup>72</sup>

These international comparisons reinforce one important point. The history of wealth in New Zealand can only be enhanced by an understanding of

imperial and international context. Above all, the context of New Zealand as a settler society needs to be stressed, and can only be reinforced by such comparisons. The systematic approach, on which this study is based, may help in demonstrating that rural wealth is a far more complex affair than simple notions of gentleman pastoralists or southern gentry have usually suggested.

## NOTES

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6. Land policy is summarised in W R Jourdain, *Land Legislation and Settlement in New Zealand* Wellington: Government Printer, 1925.
7. Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR) 1879 C-3, 1877 C11A.
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9. AJHR 1878 C-1, p 1; 1879 C-5.
10. E C Studholme, *Te Waimate: Early station life in New Zealand* Dunedin: A H & A W Reed, 1940, ch 5.
11. By Tom Isern, among others.
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14. D N Hawkins, *Beyond the Waimakairi* Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1957, p 172.
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18. Orari Station diary, 1858-59, W K Macdonald papers, CML; Report of the Inspector of Pre-emptive rights, June 1874, CP 659b/2, NA/C.
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20. Dictionary of New Zealand Biography (DNZB) vol 1, 'John Jones'; Jones's will is

in National Archives Dunedin (NA/D).

21. DNZB vol 1, 'George Rhodes' and William Barnard Rhodes'

22. William Deans to John Deans sr and James Dean, 4 Jun 1851, Deans papers folder 4, CMU.

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24. Hawkins, *Beyond the Waimakariri*, pp 151-54, 171.

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26. Acland, *Early Canterbury Runs*, 1951 edn, p 432.

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33. Hawkins, *Beyond the Waimakariri*, p 34.

34. For Boag's details apart from his will, see *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand: vol 3, Canterbury*, p 356.

35. *Cyclopaedia, Canterbury*, p 667. NA/C 4432/1902

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37. DNZB, vol 1, 'G H Moore': Douglas Cresswell, *Squatter and Settler in the Waipara county*. Waikari, 1952, p 94.

38. *Cyclopaedia, Canterbury*, p 802; Acland, *Early Canterbury Runs*, 1951 edn, pp 122-5.

39. *Cyclopaedia, Canterbury*, p 802; Acland, *Early Canterbury Runs*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1975, pp 122-5. Discharged Mortgage 1890/26987, NA/C.

40. See DNZB, vol 2 'William Soltau Davidson': his will is in NA/D 9424/1924. I have written on Ritchie in my 'British finance, Scottish brokers and colonial development: John Macfarlane Ritchie and the National Mortgage and Agency

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  42. NA/D 4398/1903, *Cyclopedia, Otago*, p 445.
  43. Mary R McCorvie and Christopher L Lant 'Drainage District Formation and the Loss of Midwestern Wetlands, 1850-1930' *Agricultural History* 67, 4 (1993).
  44. Studholme, *Te Waimate*, ch 11, 21.
  45. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 855; see also DNZB vol 2 John Grigg.
  46. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 648.
  47. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 742.
  48. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 853; DNZB 2 'Mary Dawson'.
  49. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 805; probate 7680 (1912), NA/C.
  50. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 700; probate 8883 (1916), NA/C.
  51. Probate 3609 (1898), NA/C.
  52. I have written in more detail on this point in 'Family, Wealth and Inheritance in a settler society: the South Island of New Zealand c 1865-c. 1930' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25,2, 1999.
  53. C G Tripp to Pinckney, 6 Sep 1887, Tripp papers, CML.
  54. C G Tripp to Sir Alexander Hood, 27 Jun 1888, letterbook 16, Tripp papers, CML.
  55. C G Tripp to Mowbray Tripp, 23 Sep 1889, letterbook 17, Tripp papers, CML.
  56. A E Peache, diary, 4 Feb 1892; letter to Carrie Peache, 9 Jun 1895, letterbook no 5, Peache papers, CML; probate file 5546 (1906), NA/C.
  57. This discussion relies on an examination of all mortgages over £5000 in Canterbury registered between 1885 and 1900. After 1900 considerably fewer mortgages of this value were registered. The records are in NA/C.
  58. DNZB vol 1, 'George Rhodes'. William Barnard Rhodes'.
  59. DNZB, vol 1, 'John Hall'.
  60. *Cyclopedia, Canterbury*, p 87; Acland, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, p 156: Tripp to John McKenzie, 10 Feb 1896, to [illegible], 6 Mar 1896, Tripp no 25, CML.
  61. Acland, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, pp 43-45.
  62. Discharged Mortgage files 26266, 36640, NA/C.
  63. Discharged mortgages 20627, 27792, 29058, 29057, 29003, 29059, 25090, NA/C: Acland, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, pp 182-83; W H Scotter, *A History of Canterbury vol 3*, Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1965, p 96.
  64. Ritchie to W S Davidson, 20 Aug 1895, Pvt Outwards no 8, in National Mortgage & Agency Co papers, Hocken Library, Dunedin.
  65. See Scotter, *Canterbury*, vol 3, p 203, for some examples of the close link between finance companies and the runholding world.
  66. See Margaret Galt, 'Doing well for Bella: foreign mortgagees in the New Zealand financial system, 1885-1901' *New Zealand Journal of History*, 18, 1 (1984).
  67. Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, pp 166-69.

68. AJHR, 1894 C5; discharged mortgage files 1894/33560, 1897/38613, NA/C.

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70. These sums are of course the maximum amount of the mortgage. In many cases the debt would be part-paid.

71. These comparisons are suggested by Rodman Paul, *The Far West and the Great Plains in Transition 1859-1900* New York: Harper & Row, 1987, ch 9: see also W Turrentine Jackson, *The Enterprising Scot: Investors in the American West After 1873* Edinburgh University Press 1968, ch 3.

72. Paul, ch 10.