Did British use Cromwell model in Australia?

Wayne Atkinson, Yorta Yorta elder

To Dublin on a double mission

What does it mean to be Irish Australian?

Cathy Guinness, brewer's descendant
Yorta Yorta elder and Guinness descendant take a trip to Ireland

A recent trip to Ireland by Dr Wayne Atkinson, one of the principal claimants in the historic Yorta Yorta Native Title claim, and his partner, Cathy Guinness, a descendant of the founder of the legendary Guinness brewery, has opened up new angles on Irish-Indigenous relations.

Wayne Atkinson is an elder of the Yorta Yorta people and lecturer in political science at the University of Melbourne. From March to May this year he visited Ireland including Dublin, Galway, Cork, Dingle, Sligo and Belfast.

Both Wayne and Cathy have written reflections on their visit. First, Wayne Atkinson outlines the background to their trip.

This story about the Irish connection begins with my personal journey as a Koori lad growing up in Echuca in north-central Victoria, a town perhaps better known for its paddle steamers and the popular TV series, All The Rivers Run. There a relationship with two Irish mates by the names of Paddy Malone and Simon O'Toole began.

When the occasion arises for me to tell this story, as it often does, it may sound more like a folk tale than a narrative about a relationship that would have a lasting impact on my future directions in life.

People may ask how come a young Koori became soul mates with two Irishfellas whose names and lineages are more commonly associated with, counties Wicklow, Wexford, Dublin and Down in Ireland, rather than with a town nestled on the banks of the Murray and Campaspe rivers.

Growing up with Malone and O'Toole

I went to school with Paddy Malone, and later Simon O'Toole who migrated to Australia from Dublin with his family and settled in Echuca in the 1960s. Paddy and Simon were to become close mates and companions in a relationship that transcends many social and cultural boundaries.

If one's back was against the wall, as it often is for Kooris growing up in regional Australia, you could always count on Simon and Paddy to be there shoulder to shoulder with you.

This was an important chapter in my Irish-Indigenous connection and one that laid the foundations for other significant journeys. I must also acknowledge here in respect of the O'Toole family, that Simon has since been called back to his dreaming. His memory certainly lingers on in old Echuca.

Another Irish-Indigenous connection left an indelible impression on me: the names of some of my other schoolmates, names like Kellys, Lynches, O’Neills, O’Connors, O’Reillys, Ahearns, Barrys and O’Briens. I have since discovered that these names would ring loud and clear across the length and breadth of Ireland.

An occasional visit to a cemetery or a local history centre in Ireland gives you an immediate sense of a common set of names and a sort of melancholic feeling of being in Ireland and at home in Echuca at the same time.

Indigenous with Irish surnames

In many Indigenous communities in the Riverine and Murray region one does not have to delve too deep to find an Irish ring in the names of families today like the Kellys, Morgans, Pattes, Walshes, Pettits, Rigneyes and O’Laughlins.

Indeed, Indigenous and Irish people share similar cultural characteristics and traits that spring from their comparative connections with the land and their shared experiences of colonisation. Perhaps the most significant of these is the ability to be able to stand outside of oneself in trying times and to be able to make a joke about one’s predicament whatever it may be. A good old hearty laugh and a capacity to see the funny side of things that otherwise may seem rather obscure to those outside the circle are characteristics that are the essence of an Indigenous-Irish connection.

Whether these are natural attributes or have evolved from a common experience is academic, but on the whole they are undeniably common and indeed formidable traits. A mistrust of officialdom, a suspicion of government-driven policies, and a dislike for what has become a discourse of putdown cultural language are other attributes that give rise to a commonality of shared experience.

Connections with land and the relationship between land and identity bear witness to an Indigenous-Irish connection. Notions of individual land ownership and property rights were imported into Ireland and Australia by the British. The closer knit tribal groupings of kinship, communal ownership and a spiritual as well as economic relationship with the land is known to have cultivated the rich Indigenous and Irish oral traditions that have been and continue to be transmitted over the millennia. It has been through the process of story, song, dance and art that a unifying force has been created.

Indigenous music and Irish music have become both an expression of culture as well as a tool of individual and community empowerment. From the “Fields of Athenry” to a call by popular Indigenous songwriter and artist Lou Bennett, to “Knock Down the walls that Divide Us”, are songs of humanity that spring from the heart and the soul of Indigenous and Irish artists.

At present, with opportunities to express more freely the diversity of Indigenous culture and traditions in Australia, we have witnessed a flowering of Indigenous artists, writers and performers of national and international acclaim.

Land rights in Ireland and Australia

The recognition of land rights in Ireland by the British under the import- ed common law opens up another connection. The famous 1608 Case of Tanistry provided a legal precedent for the way Indigenous lands were to be treated by the British when they colonized other countries during the heyday...
Our free entry to the Guinness brewery courtesy of Cath's connections with her ancestor Arthur and a couple of free pints at the end of our visit were most rewarding. My friends Simon O'Toole and Paddy Malone were not wrong when they used to tell me in most graphic detail that the only way to enjoy a Guinness at its best was to drink it in Ireland.

Not to suggest that our coming together in Adelaide was all about that part of the famous Guinness connection but it is a name, as any traveller to Ireland and one that is synonymous with Ireland and one that is steeped in rich Irish history and tradition. Cathy will enjoy elaborating more on this side of the story. The Yorta Yorta-Guinness relationship of over three decades has obviously led to many other interesting and exciting revelations.

Questions started at Cummeragunja

Coming from an Indigenous family whose ancestors were confined to the outskirts of the local town on a Government administered reserve known as Cummeragunja (1888-2006), my search to find answers about origins, and the mindset of this particular scheme of things, became an obsession.

At the time I never thought that my search for answers to these questions would eventually illuminate the Irish Connection. After completing my studies in Adelaide I was successful in achieving an overseas study award which allowed me to travel to North

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Oliver Cromwell and Ireland

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) was an English military leader, politician, and dictator, and one of only two commoners ever to have been the English Head of State (from 1653-1658; the other being his son Richard Cromwell from 1658-1659). He rose to command the army and to impose his rule on England, Scotland, and Ireland as Lord Protector, from December 1653 until his death, which is believed to have been of malaria. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 his body was exhumed and hung in chains at Tyburn (Wikipedia).

Cromwell was in Ireland from August 1649 until May 1650 with an army of 20,000 plus powerful artillery and a navy; and, for the following years, was also in command of the subsequent transfer of land from Catholic land-owners to adventurers, soldiers and Old English Protestant settlers.

His military campaign included massacres at Drogheda and Wexford. In the latter town his army suffered serious casualties when trapped by forces led by Hugh Dubh O’Neill.

The Cromwellian land settlement is often recalled in the phrase “To Hell or Connaught” which refers to the choice offered to those opposed to British rule: execution, transportation to Barbados or go west to the less fertile lands of Connaught. Cromwell’s map-maker, William Petty, estimated that 11 million of Ireland’s 20 million acres were confiscated by the invaders under Cromwell.

The pattern of dispossession and the policy of forced removal to reserve lands and the control of residents’ lives and movements both on and off the reserve were the focus of my enquiries.

While the comparative land justice issue was important it was obvious that the policy of removing the original occupants and placing them on reserves as a means of dispossession and as a scheme for opening up the land for settler society usage had been around long before it reached Australia. Indeed it was a well rounded policy based as it was on a great deal of prior experience.

Using the American vernacular to describe this part of the story it became a question of “if the goddam reserves were here, where the goddam hell did they come from before they got here?”

An open-ended question but one that produced results when I received some vital assistance. Professor Henry Dobins, a scholar in the Newberry Library, Chicago, enlightened me on the origins and the practice of reserves and in doing so was able to point me to a reference that linked the reserve system in the United States with that practised by the British before and during the Cromwellian Colonisation of Ireland 1654-1658.

Detailed discussion of an Irish connection that links Indigenous Australia and the United States to policies of forced removal, segregation and control and land dispossession by the British needs fuller treatment on another occasion. For now, let us take a couple of steps down that road.

Cromwell precedent of native reserves

The idea of separating Indigenous people and placing them on reserves was well-established British policy. At least two centuries before Australia was colonised, reserves were used to dispossess and to replant traditional Irish groups. This was officially carried out by the infamous Oliver Cromwell under the Act of Settlement of Ireland, 1652.

The Cromwellian colonisation of Ireland has left a legacy of brutality that is still uppermost in many Irish people’s narrative of history. “To Hell or Connaught” was the choice given to Irish land owners which graphically described the mindset of British colonisers of the time.

This slogan meant that if you did not “transplant” yourself, which was another way of saying that if you did not remove yourself to the reserved lands of the province of Connaught and Clare into which the Irish were ordered to move, the alternative would be hell.

Those who did not leave their fertile fields and travel to the poor land west of the Shannon would be put the sword and Puritans believed that the destination of these souls was hell. Malacht Chromail, the curse of Cromwell, is a phrase still in use in some parts of Ireland.

Irish writer Breandan O hÉithir describes Cromwell’s mission to Ireland: “Because he typified the militaristic mixture of religion and the lust for Irish land, spilling much Irish blood in the process, Cromwell found his permanent place in the folk-memory of hate. Stories of the massacre of men, women and children in their hundreds after the siege of Drogheda (north of Dublin) helped to perpetuate his reputation. The stark reality was that by the time the Cromwellian war had ended the population had been reduced by famine and plague as well as systematic butchery.”

This policy of forced removal, isolation and control, dressed up in all its colonial trappings, had become a potent and lethal force even before it reached Australia and the USA.

The reserve system as a tool of colonisation was developed in the United States under the Indian Removal Act, 1830. There are major differences in the recognition of American Indian land rights and Indigenous Australians, but the main objectives of the reserves system were consistent.

While the primary aim of the colonisers was to relocate Indigenous people away from their traditional lands, the reserves nonetheless became enclaves of Indigenous political resistance and survival.

Indeed those reserves that were established within the traditional lands, as can be demonstrated in the Yorta Yorta case, were skillfully manipulated by Indigenous elders to provide for the cultivation of the Indigenous political struggle.

In a later issue I will outline more details of my research on the Cromwell precedent and its ramifications for Yorta Yorta and other Indigenous claims.

Dr Wayne Atkinson teaches Yorta Yorta history and politics in “On country learning: Indigenous studies” at the University of Melbourne. He is at waynera@unimelb.edu.au. •

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Táin Sept-Nov 2006
Coming to terms with ggggrandfather
Arthur Guinness, famous brewer

Cathy Guinness visited Ireland with Wayne Atkinson. Sharing with Wayne a concern for human rights, Cathy nonetheless has a different story to tell. In this second part of the report on their dual mission to Dublin she offers some intriguing reflections on being a descendant of a famous Guinness family.

I’m an English and Irish Australian who was born in England but emigrated to Australia when I was seven.

However, I need to explain that Arthur Guinness (1725-1803) who founded the Guinness Brewery was my great-great-great-grandfather.

Dad was Rev Dr Howard Guinness and his father, Dr Harry Grattan Guinness, was born in England of Irish parents. My mother, Barbara Green, is English with a Portuguese grandmother but no Irish ancestry that I know of.

I’ve always been ambivalent about my Irishness, not because of any shame about the idea of being Irish, quite the contrary, but because I was not sure of what sort of Irish my Guinness ancestors were. They were Protestants. I had this idea that they were Anglo-Irish whatever that meant and was not at all sure what their politics were. My sympathies were with the Catholic underdog.

So I often wondered what sort of welcome would I receive in Ireland as a Guinness. What did being Irish mean to me? I went to Ireland to find out.

Dad’s Fitzgerald, Frith and Guinness links

Before telling you some of what I found out let me tell you some details about my father’s ancestry. These details are from Michelle Guinness, The Guinness Spirit: Brewers and Bankers, Ministers and Missionaries.

Dad’s grandmother on his father’s side, Fanny Fitzgerald, was Irish but was left an orphan and was raised in England by a Quaker family. Fitzgerald incidentally is a Norman family name, so they would have been in Ireland from the 12th century when Maurice Fitz Gerald accompanied Strongbow to Ireland.

Dad’s grandfather Henry Grattan Guinness was born in Ireland and lived in Dublin and England as a child. His parents were both from Dublin: Captain John Grattan Guinness and Jane Lucretia Desterre. Jane was a Desterre by marriage, and became a widow when Daniel O’Connell, the Liberator, killed her husband in a duel.

Dad’s father was Richard Guinness (1690-1766), Arthur’s father and the earliest Guinness we can trace with no doubts. I am happy that he was landless so not born privileged, but unhappy that he became part of the oppressive Protestant Ascendancy by working as an agent for Rev Arthur Price of the Church of Ireland.

The Protestant Ascendancy was the land-owning Protestant ruling class which dominated the Catholics until partial Irish independence was won from the British in 1922.

Richard Guinness was the land agent for Rev Price, who Derrick Wilson describes as “an establishment man through and through”. As such Richard was at the sharp end of English Protestant oppression of Catholic Irishmen. He would have overseen the

Good and bad news about the Guinesses

Going back to Richard Guinness (1690-1766), Arthur’s father and the earliest Guinness we can trace with no doubts, I have some good news and some bad. I am happy that he was landless so not born privileged, but unhappy that he became part of the oppressive Protestant Ascendancy by working as an agent for Rev Arthur Price of the Church of Ireland.

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Cathy Guinness in front of a portrait of her ancestor Arthur Guinness, founder of the brewery

Selection of Guinness Family Tree

Richard Guinness of Celbridge married Elizabeth Read
Their son Arthur Guinness (founder of the brewery) married Olivia Whitmore
Their youngest child John Grattan Guinness married Jane Lucretia Desterre
Their sixth child Rev Henry Grattan Guinness married Fanny Fitzgerald
Their eldest son Dr Harry Grattan Guinness married Annie Reed
Their ninth child Rev Dr Howard Guinness married Barbara Green
Their second child is Catherine (Cathy) Guinness

was Arthur's wife's cousin.

The name Guinness could have come from Magennis of County Down but it also occurs in English records centuries ago in Devonshire. Whatever, Arthur claimed the Magennis of County Down connection when he married Olivia Whitmore. That will do me. By doing this he claimed an Irish heritage that was Catholic and that had supported James II against William of Orange.

Claiming 12th century link

In claiming Irishness in this way Arthur was making a public statement of where his sympathies lay. That this was not simply a cynical action giving him two bob each way is shown by his later stand with Henry Grattan for Catholic emancipation. Henry Grattan was Arthur's wife's cousin.

So I, with Arthur Guinness, claim to be descended from the Magennis clan of County Down. From the 12th century, Magennis were principal territorial lords of Iveagh, Co Down. This clan that Arthur chose to associate himself with was not only Catholic, it was officially regarded among Dublin’s elite as traitorous. They, along with the great O’Neill clan, supported James II against William of Orange and went into exile.

The humble part of the Magennis clan which Richard claimed was far removed from the earldom, and they may have dropped the Mac around 1690 to avoid penal laws against the Catholics. Who can judge this too harshly when you consider how unjust and cruel these laws were. Others suggest the Mac and O were dropped in many Irish families because of the inferiority complex accompanying them.

Arthur Guinness claimed Catholic descent but was very much a Protestant. As he became more and more successful in the brewery business, Arthur was welcomed into the ruling class of a Dublin society that systematically excluded Catholics. Arthur married into the establishment, took his place on the City Council, and so on.

What did they do with what they got?

What use did these early Guinesses make of their influence and wealth? What were their politics? What was their commitment to human rights? These are my personal questions coming from my own perspective on the world and important to my sense of heritage and identity.

The first Arthur was widely regarded as a good man. I can be proud of his efforts to contribute to society. He was treasurer and later governor of the Meath Charity Hospital. He supported St Patrick’s Cathedral (Church of Ireland) with money for schools. He was involved in penal reform. He was an enlightened employer, treating his Catholic workforce with dignity and respect. More unusual, he publicly supported the Catholic majority in their struggle for equality, including full emancipation, as long as they went the way of non-violence.

Arthur’s son, Arthur II, continued the civic and philanthropic work, serving on charitable committees during the economic depression and crops failures of the late 1810s. He also assisted Daniel O’Connell, the first Catholic to sit in the Westminster Parliament, to win a by-election in County Clare in 1828. This is the same O’Connell who killed Jane Desterre’s husband, the Jane who John, Arthur’s brother, married.

In 1839 at the age of 71 Arthur II retired and handed the business to his son Benjamen Lee. When the potato blight and the Great Famine struck in the late 1840s Arthur urged Benjamen to use his wealth to relieve the sufferings of the poor, but Benjamen Lee like the rest of his class chose to turn a blind eye and leave the problem to the Government.

Only Arthur II’s older son Arthur Lee used his resources to save lives. He was a live-in landlord at Stillorgan Park outside Dublin and thus in contact with tenant farmers at first hand. An obelisk was presented to him inscribed by his tenants to mark his generosity as a compassionate landlord during the famine in 1847.

Arthur II, at this stage, had his big estates in Wicklow and Wexford handled by agents who removed unproductive tenants and replaced them with selected farmers able to absorb new methods. He converted land to pasture for beef and dairy. He thus became party to the clearances, a dilemma he resolved by being as generous as possible to the departing tenants.

The success of the Guinness Brewery was such that Benjamin Lee became a millionaire. Like the Quakers, he was a benevolent employer, providing job security, pensions, decent housing and amenities. Wages were higher than at any other company.

I have photos of the Guinness housing and the Guinness baths in the Liberties area near the Brewery. The family home at 81 St Stephen’s Green was donated by the family to the nation in 1939 and renamed Iveagh House.

Benjamen Lee’s Ashford Estate at Cong on the shore of Lough Corrib in Connemara created much employment and greatly improved living standards in this famine-scoured area.

There is no need to go further with the brewing Guinesses, as you have by now a picture of my direct ancestor Arthur and of the son and grandson that succeeded him. The business has recently passed out of Guinness hands and our legacy may fade, but let’s remember it as it was.

So how was I, a Guinness, received? There were two conversations I want to mention. In the Brazenhead Pub Dublin on Easter Sunday 2006 there was a
crowded house celebrating the anniversary of the Easter Uprising of 1916. We were listening to some great traditional music. Next to me was an Irishman of about 30. When we exchanged information and I told him I was a Guinness, he was excited and told me that his father had worked for Guinness for 30 years. Guinness were great employers and he mentioned housing, medical care and pay.

“Brilliant” to be employed by Guinness

In the Dublin library where we did some research, Wayne made friends with Leo Magee, a reformed Guinness alcoholic. He said Guinness were “brilliant” employers because they had built lots of housing around the Liberties area where he grew up and still lives, the Iveagh Baths with hot water for people who had no baths, a medical centre and gardens.

As a result of Leo’s comments I walked around the Liberties and found the Guinness buildings near the Brewery. The photos are there for you all to see.

You will see in photos at the brewery that Arthur is celebrated as a brewer only. There is none of the history of corporate citizenship that is so important to me. This was extremely disappointing and may point to the changes to come under a multinational company.

Living with contradictions

Back from Ireland, I am gathering my thoughts about my Irishness, a work in progress like all questions of identity. I have been able to affirm those aspects of me that resonate with Irish sensibilities, and have experienced again and most forcefully the English/Irish struggle within. This is an important aspect of my life and its contradictions.

Human rights and political behaviour are my particular interests, and of course each of us would be interested in a different angle. I have focused on those facets of the first three generations of the Dublin Guinesses.

As I have explored these things, I have also learned about the context of their lives, the political history of Ireland. The multiple identities of Irish people include questions about which ethnic groups they are descended from, Celtic people, Vikings, Normans, Scottish, English and so on; what religion, Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, or other; what class, landed Protestant Ascendancy, landed Catholic, or landless; what educational and employment status; and what side they fought on in the endless battles.

I am pleased that these Guinesses identified with Catholic forebears and stood up for Catholic interests when this was not a popular stance within their class. I am pleased that they used their considerable business success to serve the workers’ interests in a way that is still respected in Dublin today.

I am pleased that they participated in the city politics of their day and contributed on the City Council, on hospital boards, and on the committees of charities. They also were philanthropists who gave away to these causes considerable sums of money. Of these things I can be justifiably proud.

I am aware also that these actions fell short of revolutionary. They and their class did not bring about Irish independence, which was only achieved through rebellion and the Republic.

The Arthurs, father and son, were reformers, who sought to make peaceful change through constitutional means. The business interests, the religious commitments and the voracious appetite of a large and unevenly solvent cast of relatives resulted in them focusing on business, family and Christian living rather than radical politics.

So I am ashamed that Benjamin Lee went along with his class in dismissing the urgency of the Great Famine and failing to take action to prevent the appalling suffering that resulted. He had the opportunity to stand up and make a difference.

Then there is the failure of generation after generation of English rulers to relate honorably to the Irish. The history of English perfidy, greed and brutality, their double standards and appalling use of power against a race of people, that is a shame that I too have to bear, because I am mostly English and because I am part of the privileged classes.

Now I have faced up to my Irish heritage and explored it a bit, now I have opened up to the pride and the shame, the dark and the light, and I am glad to be able to share honestly in the great heritage the Irish value so highly. Accepting what happened in Ireland, the powerful, cruel and deep divisions between Catholic and Protestant, Irish and English, is important as a precursor to understanding what is happening in other divided nations around the world.

Joyfully, being Irish is being part of a fascinating family, most marvellous musical tradition, a country of storytellers and powerful imagination, and a land of ancient and mysterious beauty. It is a great privilege and great fun to be Irish.