Rutherford Waddell: an Ulster radical in Otago’s Scottish Kirk

Rutherford Waddell is one of the outstanding personalities of nineteenth century Otago. A Presbyterian Minister at Dunedin’s inner city parish of St Andrews for forty years, his influence was profound within the Church but reached far beyond it. His status, in the Presbyterian Church and in Dunedin and New Zealand society, was hard-won. As an Ulsterman he came from outside the dominant Presbyterian tradition in a colonial settlement that had begun as a Scottish Free Church enterprise. Scottish cultural and religious mores remained a pervasive influence in Otago well into the twentieth century. He was moreover a figure associated with radical social thought in a place and time where conservative values were pre-dominant. Waddell’s rise to eminence is thus noteworthy on several counts. It invites reflection - in the context of this conference/collection of essays - on his Ulster background. This paper offers an exploration of Waddell’s ministry, teasing out the challenges and opportunities for an Irish ‘outsider’ in New Zealand’s southern Scottish Kirk.

Waddell was born at Ballyroney, Co Down, circa 1850 and grew up in rural Antrim and Down, the traditional strongholds of Irish Presbyterianism. He inherited a notable Presbyterian pedigree, descended from (and named for) the celebrated seventeenth century Scottish theologian Samuel Rutherford. Numerous forbears on both sides of the family had been ministers in Ulster, his maternal grandfather serving as senior clerk to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Waddell’s own father was also a minister, as was his older brother Hugh who pioneered the Irish Presbyterian mission to China. But there was another less orthodox strain to the pedigree, epitomized by his maternal uncle the novelist Mayne Reid. Reid had been educated for the church but instead went to America in search of excitement. This he found in abundance, roving across the western states and serving in the 1846-48 war with Mexico in which he was severely wounded. Settling in England he turned these American adventures into ‘wild west’ stories that brought him fame and fortune as a writer and became

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2 Rutherford was one of the Scottish Divines who drew up the Westminster Confession of Faith and Cathecisms. His 1644 treatise on relations between church and state Lex Rex and his published letters were major works in the canon of the Reformed tradition.

3 Hugh was one of two Irish Presbyterian missionaries who went to China in 1869. Later he removed to Japan where he remained for a lifetime of notable missionary work.
a staple of British juvenile fiction. Something of a celebrity oddball in his later years, this famous uncle described himself as having “all the talents of the Maynes and all the devilry of the Rutherfords”.

Despite the impressive roll call of clerical ancestors Waddell’s own religious formation was far from assured. He did not enjoy a happy childhood. His mother died when he was a small child while his father is noticeably absent from a brief autobiographical account of his coming to faith. Rather it was the influence of an aunt, his surrogate mother, who he acknowledged as saving him from potential ruin as a boy. “I never can see wrecked lives today without a profound sense of humiliation, without keenly realizing that, had my environment been different, I might have been such as they.”

Difficulties at home were aggravated by a distressing experience of education. Subject to the cruelties of an abusive master in a one-room schoolhouse, Waddell became a frequent truant and bore the scars of the experience throughout his life. “I was so crushed by his cruelty that I lost all originality and initiative … I have been battling against it all my life ever since.” In spite of the tyrannies of the schoolhouse Waddell developed a love for reading, finding in literature both solace and an alternative route to learning. He left school at fourteen and became a draper’s apprentice in Banbridge.

For his first eighteen years Waddell evinced no great religious commitment. Drifting toward adulthood in “self-pleasing and enjoyment” he then underwent a conversion. This was not a sudden or emotional event, in contrast to the conversion experiences of many northern Irish Presbyterians in the years after Ulster’s great surge of evangelical revivalism in 1859. For

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4 He built an exotic hacienda ‘Ranche’ near London and in his later years moved around the city in his bathchair. [Data from Princess Grace Irish Library online. Url: www.pgil-eirdata.org/html/pgil
datasets/authors/r/Reid,M/life.htm] The literary strain also flowed through the paternal line: his brother Hugh’s children included the Oxford academic and writer Helen Waddell ‘the darling of Ulster’, and Samuel Waddell who, as ‘Rutherford Mayne’, was a leading Ulster actor and playwright of early 20th century.
6 Ibid. *
7 Ibid.
8 Its advocates called the Great Revival of 1859 “the Year of Grace” but to its opponents it was “the Year of Delusion”. It was characterized by mass conversions and displays of religious hysteria that sharply divided the Ulster Church. Its biblical fundamentalism was essentially anti-intellectual. It led on the one hand to the founding of the Keswick Convention Movement (to which Waddell was not favourably disposed – see Outlook April-May 1896) and on the other to Ulster becoming “the happy hunting ground for American evangelists”. R G Crawford Loyal to King Billy: a portrait of the Ulster Protestants, 1987, p52.
Waddell the road to faith was a gradual process toward reasoned conviction.\(^9\) His autobiographical account pegged two major influences: one a sermon by an unremembered preacher in a country church; the other the example of his older brother. The earnestness of the sermon impressed upon him a sense of having coming to a fork in life’s road and the need to choose his path in life. His older brother’s example laid out a humane and robust Presbyterianism as an authentic option. Hugh Waddell, already a missionary in China, was “the bravest, the blithest, and, on the whole, the best man I have ever known … His religion did not seem to be inconsistent with his humour and love of fun and mischief, and all combined to make a winsome manhood.”\(^10\)

Following his conversion Waddell further emulated his brother by entering training for the ministry, graduating from Queens University in 1875 and the Presbyterian Theological College in Belfast in 1876. He recalled this period of theological training as a time of great intellectual challenge for “a callow youth from the country” when the established tenets of Christianity were under assault, notably from the implications of Darwinism and scientific materialism. “I do not think that the faith has ever had so great a fight for its existence as when I was a student … The Ark of God seemed to many to be toppling into the dust.”\(^11\) Waddell’s faith endured, developing a profound attachment to the person of Christ and an acceptance of his claims to divinity and messianic salvation.\(^12\) Characteristically he followed his own path through his studies, frankly acknowledging that he “always got more help from heretical writers than from the exponents of orthodoxy.”\(^13\)

A passion for literature was a key facet of Waddell’s intellectual development. He was a prodigious reader throughout his life, reading widely in theology, economics, sociology and contemporary fiction.\(^14\) Nor was his reading matter constrained by notions of Presbyterian conventionality. He avowed later that his faith derived more enlightenment in this period from the novelist George Elliott than the theologian Charles

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\(^9\) “The turning came – seemed to come – as gradually as dawn melts into day.” Waddell, 1920, p6.
\(^12\) He dallied long with Unitarian notions but ultimately concluded that Christ was who and what he claimed to be. “I had not solved everything – far from it. I have not even done that yet. Many a question I have had to lay aside.” Ibid, p20.
\(^13\) Collie, pp34-35.
\(^14\) He is reputed to have read for 8 hours a day in the early years of his ministry and careful preparation was a hallmark of his sermons. Collie, p71.
This wide reading and sympathetic appreciation of modern thought became a distinctive element of Waddell’s public ministry. He developed a capacity to draw on a huge diversity of literary sources to present a faith rooted in the contemporary yet soundly anchored in traditional Presbyterian orthodoxy. His empathy for the doubts and questions facing many believers, especially young people, would be a major source of his popularity in Dunedin.

The move to New Zealand followed a double failure at home. Following Waddell’s licensing and ordination in 1876 he applied to become a missionary to Syria. He was rejected. He then tried for a calling at Six Road Ends in Bangor. Ironically in view of his later fame as a preacher the congregation rejected him, certain his impressive trial sermon was a Spurgeon knock-off. Like many other ‘failed’ British clerics a colonial career beckoned as a fall-back option. Waddell was recruited for ministry in New Zealand by the Canterbury Presbyterian Association at £200 per annum and took passage for Lyttelton with his new wife on the Piako in May 1877. Soon after his arrival the minister of St Paul’s, Christchurch’s central city Presbyterian congregation, fell ill and Waddell supplied for him for three months. This was his first experience of a ministerial charge yet he coped with its considerable challenges with aplomb. He was rewarded with induction to the small country charge of Lincoln-Prebbleton later in the year. Prophetically his first sermon took for its text Matthew 10:34, “I came not to bring peace but a sword.”

Lincoln was a very modest parish, its congregation struggling to pay the minister’s stipend and suffered frequent turnover of ministers as a result. Waddell was there less than two years when an opportunity for advancement arose in Dunedin. But in making the move south he did far more than

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15 His favourite work of literature was Elliott’s Adam Bede. Charles Hodge was the Princeton-based Presbyterian theologian who was considered the leading exponent of orthodox Calvinism of his time. He once boasted that in his fifty years at Princeton Seminary no new idea ever originated there. [Geraldine Coats, “Rutherford Waddell: Christian Socialist”, 1995.] While most Presbyterian ministers in Dunedin looked upon Hodge as their key reference work Waddell dismissed him as “a humbug”. Collie, p32.

16 His early struggle to come to terms with the nature of Christ were, according to Collie, “the secret of much of the great influence he exerted in after days as a preacher and teacher of Christian truth. He understood the difficulties of men, especially young men, in days when old beliefs are shaken, and was able to make luminous to them the central certainty of Christ.” Collie, p37.

17 Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist was the most famous English preacher of the nineteenth century. Sixty-three volumes of his sermons were published and very widely disseminated but Rutherford Waddell had never read Spurgeon at the time of his failure at Bangor. The story was recounted by a fellow minister from Ulster the Rev R McCully. Collie, p48.
relocate to a larger and more prosperous parish. Crossing from Canterbury to Otago involved moving from one Presbyterian body to another. Until 1901 New Zealand Presbyterianism was effectively divided in two by the Waitaki River. The earliest foundation was the northern church, established in Wellington in 1840 and subsequently evolving from a number of separately established charges into the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. This was a diverse body with roots in all the British Presbyterian bodies as well as other Protestant groupings that had come under the Presbyterian banner in New Zealand. Throughout the nineteenth century it received (modest) financial support and recruited its ministers from the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, as well as the United Presbyterians and the Free Church in Scotland. Calls might be sent to either Scotland or Ireland depending on the origin of the majority of settlers in any given district.

South of the Waitaki River was the Presbyterian Church of Otago (and Southland). It was accurately described by contemporaries as the “Scotch church” and until 1854 was actually under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Scottish Free Church. Otago had been founded as a Scottish Free Church settlement, with a proportion of the proceeds of early land sales devoted to religious and educational purposes under the direction of the colony’s Free Church leadership. Even though many settlers, including Presbyterians, came from other than Free Church backgrounds, the Otago Church began as a transplanted fragment of Scottish religion and culture. Its ministers were overwhelmingly recruited from the Scottish Free Church until the 1860s when paucity of supply forced recourse to the other Presbyterian bodies in Britain as well. Irish ministers remained a rarity. When Rutherford Waddell ventured south in 1879 he was only the third Irish Presbyterian to serve in the Otago Church. His predecessors had fared poorly. Rev A.D. Glasgow, the first, was retired from missionary work in India when he came to Otago in 1861. He began the central city ministry to miners that was the beginning of St Andrews parish but his health broke down before he was ever inducted and he died in 1863. Rev Charles Connor, the second Irishman, arrived from Scotland that same year. He held parishes first in Oamaru and later in Popotunoa but in both cases eventually fell out with his congregations and resigned.

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18 Up to 1899 the northern Church had recruited 32 Presbyterian Church of Ireland ministers as opposed to 104 from the Free Church. Data from John Dickson, History of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, Dunedin, 1899.
The Scottish cultural caste of the Otago Church was in many ways one of its strengths. It provided a cohesiveness lacking from the northern Church, which was regularly disturbed by congregational cleavages along lines of national origin or ecclesiastical tradition. The northern body had always to recognize a greater diversity of approach. Many in the south viewed this necessary tolerance of difference with suspicion. The easy acceptance of hymns and organ music in the north for example contrasted with bitter congregational battles over their introduction in the south. Southern conservatism on such issues became a byword in the north. Donald McNaughton Stuart the liberal foundation minister of Dunedin’s Knox Church, who had previously worked in the English Presbyterian Church, railed in vain against the obduracy of his fellow Scots. “There was nothing in Presbyterianism that should make all men Scotchmen before they became Presbyterians.”

This cultural distinction was coupled with southern provincialism and possessiveness over the Otago Church’s endowment funds to defeat a bid for union of the two bodies in 1866. A minority of southern diehards successfully resisted unification for another 35 years. Yet the churches were not in schism. Territorially distinct they remained in ‘fraternal communion’ with free movement of ministers between the two.

Waddell’s Dunedin ministry began as temporary supply. St Andrew’s previous minister had disgraced himself with drink and the congregation resolved to seek an exemplary candidate by sending a call to Scotland. In the meantime various ministers were to fill in for a month at a time. Waddell came on the recommendation of Christchurch’s Dr John Elmslie, the minister of St Paul’s for whom he had performed a similar role on his arrival from Ireland. He made an immediate impact from the first sermon he preached. Years later a parishioner recalled the congregation’s excited reaction. “I well remember the meeting on the footpath outside the Church door in Melville Street where excited groups of earnest men and women discussed the sermon, and it was then and there decided he would do for St Andrew’s, and nobody else need apply.”

It was to prove an ideal match. St Andrews was Dunedin’s third largest congregation and the most economically diverse. It had begun literally as a

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20 Collie, p50. This provides an interesting contrast with the reception at Six Road Ends.
21 St Andrews had approximately 300 members on its roll. First Church and Knox were the city’s two larger congregations.
canvas church, with ministers from First Church and Knox preaching on the street, and then in a tent, to the miners and others who occupied the hillsides to the southeast of High Street. This inner city area had been quickly overrun by squatters in the sudden influx of humanity drawn to Dunedin by the 1860’s goldrushes. Substandard housing filled the gullies. At its core was the ‘Devil’s Half Acre’, an area notorious for its prostitutes and Chinese opium dens. Meanwhile on the more elevated sections prosperous middle class homes and even mansions overlooked the slums and sleaze below. By the time that Waddell arrived in 1879 the neighbourhood’s reputation for poverty and delinquency was entrenched but worse was to come as New Zealand entered a long depression. Unemployment rose sharply in the 1880s and the social problems of Dunedin’s poor increased.

As minister of St Andrews Waddell was thus confronted by some of the worst examples of poverty, slum housing and unemployment in Dunedin. Such problems were however becoming severe city-wide yet their existence is not much evident in contemporary Presbyterian records at parish, Synod or Presbytery level.\(^22\) The Church’s strong focus on individual morality seemed to compromise its capacity to confront social issues. The root cause of poverty was considered to be weakness of individual character rather than a product of social phenomenon.\(^23\) Drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking and legislation permitting marriage to a deceased wife’s sister were the big issues in the Otago Church’s consideration of public questions in these years. Knox’s Dr Stuart lamented that many of his fellow church members were “people who would weep over a heroine in a novel but would not cross the road to take a child out of the mud. There was just a tendency to hoist the banner so high in the church of Otago that sometimes the people could scarcely see it.”\(^24\)

Moving to Dunedin in mid-1879 Waddell threw himself immediately into parish life, reinvigorating St Andrews after its hiatus without a minister. By the end of 1880 the debt on the church property had been halved, the Session strengthened and the Deacon’s Court totally reorganized. A moribund

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\(^22\) “Concern over poverty and unemployment was voiced mainly in the Christian Outlook. Indeed were it not for this paper one would not know from examining church records that the problems even existed.” Alana F Birchall, “Onward Christian soldiers: moral and social issues in the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland, 1894-1901”, Thesis (Post Grad. Dip.) University of Otago, Dunedin, 1981, p35. The Outlook was established by Waddell in 1894 and edited by him until 1902.


\(^24\) McKean, p109.
Ladies Association was restructured, later renamed as the Friendly Aid Society, and charged with taking food, clothing, coal and blankets into the homes of the poor. In 1901, realizing the limitations of such voluntary efforts by well-meaning middle class women, he suggested the introduction of a Deaconess into the parish. He recruited the first Deaconess, Christabel Duncan, from Melbourne where such a programme was already in place, and overcame his Deacons Court’s wariness by personally funding her salary for the first year. Sister Christabel proved so successful that other Dunedin parishes followed suit and the Presbyterian Deaconess movement quickly spread throughout New Zealand providing dedicated women who were effectively fulltime parish social workers.  

From the outset Waddell demonstrated a wider view of social issues than most Presbyterians. Visiting the homes of the poor he realized that poverty was not simply due to lack of thrift or alcohol abuse. He found women in his parish working long hours for negligible pay “and what he saw led him to inquire further into the conditions that made such things possible.” In the spring of 1888 he preached the famous sermon on “the sin of cheapness” that was to establish his national reputation. Waddell’s sermon focused largely on the way that ordinary consumers’ obsession with bargain prices helped drive down workers’ wages below subsistence levels. But the furore that followed, when the Dunedin newspaper the Otago Daily Times followed up with its own investigation, drew attention to the role of Dunedin employers, some of them prominent and well-respected Presbyterians, in creating “sweating” conditions among the city’s female textile workers.

Waddell moved forward, taking note of what had been revealed, revising his position and maintaining pressure on the issue through the press. He proposed a range of measures to improve the position of working women, including a Royal Commission into their conditions of work and the

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25 This innovation, inspired by the work being done by committed women – nuns, religious sisters or deaconesses - in the Methodist, Anglican and Catholic churches, is credited as the first step in the development of professional social work in the church and led ultimately to the Presbyterian Social Support Agency and its successors. After the death of his first wife Waddell subsequently married Sister Christabel.
26 Collie, p93.
27 Over 16% of New Zealand factory workers were then based in Dunedin and faced slum conditions and rising rents. ‘Sweating’ was a contemporary preoccupation following the exposure of horrific working conditions in London’s East End. Colonists were highly sensitive to notions that such ‘Old World’ evils might take root in their new society. Waddell had insights into the phenomenon from his own experiences in Banbridge as a draper’s assistant working long hours for no pay. A good account of the controversy is provided by D.R.Grant “God’s Intention – Church in Tension” in Theological Review (Knox College), 1970.
establishment of a trade union to advance their interests collectively. When no other body took up the cause he organised a public meeting in January 1889 that appointed a committee – with Waddell as convenor – to investigate further how to counter the development of ‘sweating’ conditions in Dunedin. The committee’s efforts to negotiate an agreement with the textile manufacturers failed. At a further public meeting in June, attended by leading Dunedin politicians and businessmen, feelings ran high. The outcome was a unanimous motion that led to the establishment of the Tailoresses Union of New Zealand – the country’s first female trade union. In a highly symbolic act Waddell accepted the position of chairman of the new organisation.

At the beginning of the controversy Waddell had sought the support of his Church at its annual Synod meeting. The response was underwhelming. Many Synod members resented the issue being raised at all. Some pointed to drunken, unemployed husbands as the root cause of the women’s difficulties and avowed that individual moral reform was the Church’s proper sphere. Waddell was blunt: the Church was only preaching half the Gospel when it failed to engage with social injustice – the laws of Christ applied equally to the world of business. One of his few supporters, the union politician William Hutchison, tersely suggested that the working classes did not attend Presbyterian churches because at worship they would find “a large number of capitalists who prayed for them on Sundays and preyed upon them during the other six days of the week.” The end result was a half-hearted motion deploring the existence of the sweating system and enjoining all ministers and office bearers to discourage it “by every means in their power”. No specific action followed. Waddell’s characteristic tenacity did bear fruit however. In 1890 the Atkinson Government acted on his suggestion that a Commission investigate ‘sweating’ in New Zealand and appointed Waddell as its sole clerical member. Its findings are acknowledged as contributing to the labour legislation passed by Liberal Governments in the 1890s.

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28 He resigned three months later having served “just long enough to make clear his sympathy with it.” Collie, p104. His position was uncharacteristic of Presbyterians “who were often suspicious of trade unions.” Ian Breward, “1871–1901: Clamant Needs, Determined Battlers” in Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840–1990, Wellington, 1990, p63 [Hereafter PIA].
29 McKean, 1994, p111. Hutchison was one of Dunedin’s first labour parliamentarians [1890–96] and was a lone voice in the Synod pushing for Presbyterian support for the labour movement.
30 Grant p11. One of the employers publicly identified by Waddell in the sweating scandal was Robert Glendining, a prominent elder of Knox Church. Birchall, p36.
31 It is less often noted that Waddell, with two other Commission members, issued a dissenting addendum to the Commission’s main report. They took issue with the Commission’s finding that systematic
Waddell never recoiled from his radical disposition as he aged. He has been described as a socialist “who every year moved one step to the left.” He met with leading English socialists while on furlough in 1886 and attended their meetings. As editor of the Presbyterian weekly newspaper he was a determined opponent of the Boer War in 1899, drawing the ire of his clerical colleagues. In 1916 he allowed his supportive testimonial to the new Labour Party to be used in its election campaign. He quietly supported fellow ministers who took unpopular positions, such as J.D. Salmond’s positive comments on the Soviet experiment after a trip to the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. While he was quite unrepresentative of New Zealand Presbyterians during his own lifetime his approach to the social causes of poverty and injustice was emulated by a new generation of Presbyterian socialists. They played a key role in developing the health, education and social welfare programmes of the First Labour Government from 1935.

It would be misleading to emphasise the political dimension of Waddell’s ministry unduly. In reality he had little taste for politics – secular or ecclesiastical – but simply followed his instincts wherever they led. As his biographer noted, “he was “constitutionally unfitted to be a child of the status quo.” His primary focus was always St Andrews. Under his leadership it became one of the most dynamic churches in Dunedin, with levels of activity in worship, education, philanthropy and missionary endeavour that became exemplars for Presbyterianism nationally. When the Salvation Army arrived in Dunedin in 1883 the St Andrew’s Session co-operated with the new movement to provide social services to its neighbourhood. A Mission Hall was built in 1886 to provide a venue for

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1’sweating’ on the London model did not exist in New Zealand. In their view the Commission had seen “abundant evidence of its existence”. Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives 1890: H5.


33 A motion of regret at Waddell’s published statements was passed at the 1899 Synod although it was accepted that Waddell had been scrupulous in providing full coverage of views in opposition to his own. Unconvinced by the Imperial case for war he was irritated by many New Zealanders’ evident appetite for Imperial jingoism. “We are not ‘Little Englanders’” he wrote. Outlook, 7 October, 1899.

34 Barber, p 14.

35 Likewise he sent a letter of support to his friend Rev James Gibb during the latter’s anti-war activities in 1920. Gibb later wrote that the letter was “like a draught of clear hill water to a thirsty soul.” Collie, p3.

36 Arnold Nordmeyer, Gervan and Ethel McMillan and Andrew Davidson, see entries in DNZB.

37 Collie, p54.
these outreach activities. New Zealand’s first free kindergarten began there in 1889 to cater for neglected children in the parish. In 1905 St Andrews became the first Presbyterian parish to support its own overseas missionary and by 1913 it had three missionaries in the field.

Waddell’s influence was greatly extended by the reputation he won as a preacher and through his writing. He is acknowledged as one of the most renowned Presbyterian preachers of his generation and an influential public lecturer on literature and social questions. Several collections of his sermons and lectures were published by popular demand. His regular lecture series were widely attended and raised funds that were crucial to many of his parish’s innovative undertakings. As already noted he was the founding editor in 1894 of the Presbyterian newspaper the Christian Outlook. In his hands this was a religious journal of outstanding quality, marked by a vigorous openness to all shades of Presbyterian opinion. Indeed he was much more popular in the wider Dunedin community than with his fellow ministers. Those who knew him only from without were distinctly suspicious of him. He tended to be regarded by his fellow Presbyterian ministers as a radical, a heretic, and a dreamer, though he earned their respect in time for his broad humanity. It was the next

38 An application for funding to the Church Extension Committee of the Dunedin Presbytery was turned down. St Andrews built it anyway using money raised by Waddell from public lectures and a bazaar. The Hall was the centre of active Christian effort “until the clearing out of most of the poorer quarters about Walker Street so reduced the population of the district that it was found necessary to give up most of the work.” St Andrew’s Presbyterian Church Dunedin: Jubilee Souvenir 1863-1913 [SAJS], p32.
39 The idea came from Waddell and was his response (rooted no doubt in his own memories of childhood) to the waifs and strays he passed in the streets around his church. URL www.nzkindergarten.org.nz/history
40 SAJS.
41 Waddell’s published output was very popular in his day but is not very accessible to the modern reader perhaps because it was so steeped in contemporary sources that are no longer familiar to us.
42 His prowess as a preacher certainly marked him out in the New Zealand Church where preaching abilities were generally rather modest among the first generation of ministers. Peter Matheson, “1840-1870: The Settler Church” in PIA, p34. He put great emphasis on his presentation – “It seems to me now that it does not so much matter comparatively what you say as much as how you say it…” [Waddell, 1920, p*] and took every opportunity to observe the leading preachers of his day, whatever their denominational affiliation.
43 The St Andrew’s Deacons Court for example agreed to the one-year trial of Sister Christabel on the proviso that Waddell underwrote her £90 salary from the proceeds of a lecture series. “Waddell’s personal contribution to the employment of the deaconess emphasizes the pivotal role he played in both initiating and implementing this position.” Karyn-Marie Piercy, “Presbyterian pioneers : the Deaconess Movement, Dunedin, 1900-1920.” Thesis, B.A. (Hons.) University of Otago, 2000, p16.
44 Waddell once replied to a minister who heard him preach and complimented him, “so you think I am not so great a heretic after all.” Collie, p57.
45 Following his death in 1932 his widow Christabel Waddell wrote to the Rev James Gibb that, “He told me more than once, how he never had a friend in the ministry in Dunedin until you arrived at First Church.
generation of ministers who came under the sway of his personality and for many of whom he became a friend and mentor.

The isolation experienced by Waddell in his early years in Dunedin is a reminder that he began as an ‘outsider’ to its Presbyterian establishment. Some of this was due to his Irish background.\textsuperscript{46} Much was due to his personality, though naturally the two were inextricably linked.\textsuperscript{47} Unfortunately Waddell had an antipathy to biography and destroyed his personal papers.\textsuperscript{48} This compromises the sources available to evaluate many aspects of his personal life not least his attitude to his place of birth. This places a disproportionate weight on the account of his life by his friend and fellow minister John Collie, published the year after Waddell’s death. Collie certainly emphasized Waddell’s Irish characteristics, which suggests that these were an important part of how he was perceived by Otago’s Presbyterians. His text draws repeatedly on contemporary stereotypes of ‘Irishness’ (particularizing them to Ulster), attributing positive qualities to Waddell and disassociating him from negative aspects – “He had the North of Ireland background without the North of Ireland rigidity of statement.”\textsuperscript{49}

Despite the positive spin, Collie still believed that appointing an Irishman would have been a dangerous innovation in the staid Dunedin Presbytery of 1880s, especially one “who gave so much time to literature and … took such an uncomfortable interest in social reforms.”\textsuperscript{50} He refers to Waddell’s “soft Irish accent”, his inexhaustible stock of “good stories” and suggests that, “being a Christian never changed him from being an Irishman, with all the

\textsuperscript{46} This was in marked contrast to the experience of the New Zealand Catholic clergy for whom ‘Irishness’ provided a platform for the development of a communal identity along ethnic lines. See Lyndon Fraser for a discussion of Irish Catholic identity formation in Christchurch. To Tara via Holyhead: Irish Catholic Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Christchurch, AUP, 1997.
\textsuperscript{47} He possibly offended his older colleagues by the carefree attitude to ministerial dignity he displayed by playing cricket and taking part in athletics.
\textsuperscript{48} His biographer refers to Waddell’s “fixed belief in purification by fire” to explain the lack of surviving personal papers. Collie, p10. Waddell disapproved of biographical construction from surviving written material asking his readers in one of his parish publications, “… would any of us like to be judged by the letters which we have written during our life? … a shadow of our real selves should emerge from them.” St Andrews Church Monthly\textsuperscript{[SACM]}, September 1885. This paucity of sources probably accounts for the lack of any substantial modern biography of a figure of such widely acknowledged seminal influence.
\textsuperscript{49} Collie, p86.
\textsuperscript{50} Collie, pp57 -58. Collie recounts an anecdote about an “old Scotch woman who, at the close of a public meeting was overheard speaking about ‘that nesty little body Waddell’” and suggests that she would have had a good number of sympathizers at one time. Ibid, p58.
felicity and none of the perversity of his race”.\textsuperscript{51} Waddell’s approach to the Bible was also seen as unorthodox. “The Bible is my quarter-acre freehold, not my leasehold,” he said. “I can use it as I like.” This irreverent approach he justified, according to Collie, “as only an Irishman could.”\textsuperscript{52} The exuberance of his presentation, the warmth of his approach and his easy reference to contemporary literary sources were all at odds with the prevailing Dunedin tone of stern Scottish Calvinism. This misled many, particularly among his ministerial confreres, to suspect him of unsound theology. In fact, while decidedly liberal in his approach to social questions, Waddell was notably orthodox in matters of faith, reflecting the conservative Calvinist traditions of his Ulster birthplace.\textsuperscript{53}

As far as can be adduced from his literary output Waddell wore his ‘Irishness’ lightly. The Ulster background had not developed in him the spiky antipathy to Rome so evident in some of his Presbyterian countrymen.\textsuperscript{54} He was a firm adherent of the Reformed tradition’s theological objections to the Catholic Church – as unscriptural and superstitious – but he had no hostility to Catholicism as an institution or to its members.\textsuperscript{55} He displayed a gentle interest in people of all religious persuasions, comparing notes on clerical life for example with a pair of Australian priests who were his fellow passengers on a passage to Britain in 1886.\textsuperscript{56} He stood out from the pervasive anti-Catholicism of the New Zealand Presbyterian communion, condemning sectarian incidents and expressing admiration for the Catholic community’s commitment to its own causes.\textsuperscript{57} He was a great admirer of Cardinal Newman – an enthusiasm he shared with his readers on a number of occasions – and even wrote an appreciative obituary of Bishop Moran, the archenemy of Otago

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p148.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p80.
\textsuperscript{53} “His faith was in all essentials the faith in which he was brought up, accepted loyally when he was satisfied that nothing that was true in modern thought was in any real contradiction to it.” Collie, p38.
\textsuperscript{54} Rev John Dickson of Co Antrim, who wrote the 1899 history of the northern Church, provides a counter example. His work is sprinkled with anxiety at what he saw as ‘Romeward’ tendencies in the New Zealand Church. “In these days of ritualism and Romeward movement on the part of many, we cannot afford to toy with strange fire from off the Romish altar.” Dickson, 1899, p115.
\textsuperscript{55} Waddell’s attitude to the Catholic Church is set out in his comments on Bishop Verdon’s consecration, Outlook 9 May 1896.
\textsuperscript{56} SACM July 1886, p5.
\textsuperscript{57} In 1894 he condemned the sectarian discrimination that saw a school mistress at Moa Creek not appointed by the local school board because she was a Catholic. It was he wrote, not an isolated incident. Outlook 27 October 1894.
Presbyterianism. In 1895 he went so far as to express his support for the Catholic bishops’ request for state inspections of their schools affirming that law and justice were on their side.

His disposition on Irish political issues is more difficult to evaluate. Fleeting references in the press provide a poor substitute to what his own personal accounts might have revealed. Newspaper reports reveal that in 1881 an apology from Waddell was read out at an Irish Land League meeting in Dunedin and that eight years later he was on the platform (alongside Bishop Moran) to welcome John Dillon and his Irish Parliamentary Party delegates to the city. But Waddell is not mentioned in a similar way in reports of later Irish ‘nationalist’ visits to Dunedin nor does he appear to have had any involvement in the centennial commemorations of the 1798 Rising. Even Michael Davitt’s Otago lectures in 1895 received no coverage in Waddell’s Outlook. Given the latter’s sympathy for socialist thought this might be considered a surprising omission. Yet it is important not to argue simply from the absence of evidence. It can only be said that Waddell’s attitude to Irish political developments remains unclear.

The same problem with sources may explain the hagiographic quality of many assessments of Waddell. While he was clearly an outstanding personality there were also shadows in his life, over which he drew a discrete veil. One such was his wife, Kathleen, who was a chronic invalid for many years and died in Seacliff Mental Hospital the year after he retired. He had health problems of his own. A slight figure, he drove himself relentlessly, frequently to the point of over-exertion. He suffered several major collapses, requiring extended periods of recuperation away from his parish. These crises sometimes required the intervention of his

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58 The compliment was not repaid. The Dunedin-based Catholic weekly The New Zealand Tablet took no notice of Waddell’s passing in 1932.
59 Outlook, 2 February 1895.
60 Waddell’s prodigious literary output included published collections of sermons and essays, his 1894-1902 tenure as editor of the Outlook and over twenty-seven years as a weekly columnist ‘Ror’ for the Evening Star newspaper. It has not been possible to survey the latter for the purposes of this paper. A scrapbook of newspaper cuttings suggests that, as in his books, Waddell seldom gave much away about himself. Presbyterian Archives Dunedin, DC7/2, 3/133 Waddell, Rutherford, Scrapbook.
61 Had Waddell been a Catholic he would undoubtedly be a prime candidate for canonization on a par with nineteenth century Australasian equivalents like Mary McKillop, Suzanne Aubert et al.
62 In his foreword to the Collie biography Waddell’s close friend Rev James Gibb refers to the trials of Waddell’s life “of which he had his full share, indeed a larger share than comes to most men” –but little is revealed about them. Collie, p4.
63 Waddell’s subsequent marriage to Sister Christabel Duncan was welcomed by his friends as a richly deserved blessing for his final years.
friends and supporters. In 1901 for example, an unrelenting build-up of work in his parish, coupled with editorial work for his weekly newspaper and fortnightly public lectures on literary subjects, “had begun to tell upon his nervous organisation and the Office-bearers were compelled, in his interest, as well as in the interest of the Congregation, to urge him to take a rest.”64 A six-month sabbatical followed and Waddell subsequently gave up the editorship of the *Outlook*. He also suffered increasingly from deafness, to the extent that he could not hear his own voice, and this ultimately compromised his performance in the pulpit. While he suffered this disability with apparent good cheer – and turned it to his own account – it must have been a sore trial for someone so passionate about preaching.65

It is also important to acknowledge his relationship with the St Andrews parish community. His enduring success relied heavily on their continuing support over forty years. Presbyterian congregations frequently fell out with their ministers, even men of merit and ability. It has been suggested that the colonial taste in ministers placed greater weight on personal qualities like friendliness and flexibility than their learning or even their prowess as preachers.66 Waddell of course had all these qualities in spades.67 At the parish’s annual social meeting in 1885 he received a remarkable public tribute to this effect from a parishioner, “We all love you, we love you as a man, and rejoice to meet you in friendly intercourse, and we honour you as a minister of Christ …”68 Even conservative members of his congregation, of which they were a solid phalanx, felt the charm of his character and the evangelical power of his preaching. Along with tenacity he had a gift for working through opposition, inspiring others to go beyond their own boundaries. On numerous issues - like the Deaconess, the Mission Hall or overseas missionaries - the parish was prepared to support him when convinced. He always led the way, fund-raising with lecture monies to make his schemes possible.

Rutherford Waddell was unique. In southern Presbyterian history he ranks alongside Otago’s founding patriarch the Rev Thomas Burns, and the hugely

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64 *SAJS*.

65 There are numerous stories about Waddell’s skilful use of his speaking trumpet to “not hear” when it suited his purposes. He enjoyed telling of one of his elders once said to him, “There are lots of things I would bring up in Session if you were not so deaf.” Collie, p86.

66 Matheson, *PIA*, p34.

67 Collie’s description of him suggests something of the influence of his Uncle Mayne – “He was like a cheerful schoolboy, loving sport and adventures and good stories.” Collie, p145.

68 *SACM*, May 1886.
Esteemed founder of Knox Church Rev Donald McNaughton Stuart, but in national terms he is probably of wider significance than either of them. He possessed a beguiling personality, allied to a passionate faith and a trenchant commitment to improving the world. He was able to draw people in to his vision and motivate them to action across a wide front. Beloved by his own congregation at St Andrews he was tremendously influential in Presbyterianism nationally and widely respected in Otago. Though clearly marked as an ‘outsider’ by his Irish accent and by personal qualities that his contemporaries perceived as characteristically ‘Irish’, he ultimately won a place in the bosom of the Otago Scottish Kirk. Whatever we make of his Irishness, he must be accounted one of Ulster’s great nineteenth century contributions to New Zealand.

Seán G Brosnahan, Otago Settlers Museum, Dunedin.

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69 He was also honoured by his alma mater, receiving an honorary doctorate in Divinity from the Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland in 1897.