

**FAITH-BASED CHARITY AND PROFESSIONAL AMBITION IN
THE LIFE OF CHARLES GORDON O'NEILL (1828-1900)**

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**A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (where required) or a relevant safety committee if the matter is referred to such a committee.

(signed) Stephen Utick

Date: 14 August 2012

ABSTRACT

This translocational biography provides an interpretation of the life of Catholic philanthropist, colonial parliamentarian and civil engineer Charles Gordon O'Neill (1828-1900). Focusing on the two most significant elements in his life, commitment to faith-based charity and professional ambition in pursuit of an empire career in civil engineering, it also examines the balance between O'Neill's Irish Catholic and British identities. Covering O'Neill's life in Victorian Scotland (1828-1863), colonial New Zealand (1864-1880) and pre-Federation New South Wales (1881-1900), the biography traces the sequence and patterns of these two respective elements through a broadly chronological theme-based historiography.

This biography analyses O'Neill's greatest professional achievements, particularly in New Zealand in such endeavours as town planning, and railways and tramways development. It also reveals his prescient environmental concerns, through his promotion of forest conservation and the advocacy of global forest-climate connection in the New Zealand Parliament between 1868 and 1874. Of more enduring memory was O'Neill's commitment to faith-based charity through his pioneering of the St Vincent de Paul Society in all three societies. The defining moment of his life was to embrace a faith-based mission to the Australian colonies beginning in 1880, leading to the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales. The growth of the Society's outdoor relief for the poor in Sydney owed much to the expertise O'Neill gained previously in Glasgow and Wellington. The thesis explains the Catholic religious influences that transformed O'Neill into a pioneer of non-intrusive charity during the 1880s. A key theme, examining three cycles of the vicissitudes of O'Neill's life, reveals the pattern of fusion and fragmentation of the two elements of commitment to faith-based charity and professional ambition. The thesis concludes with a brief thanatography and analysis of subsequent hagiographic interpretations of O'Neill's life that had ended with a final submission in faith.

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BIBLICAL REFERENCES

This thesis is a historical thesis but has incorporated some biblical and other theological references conducive to further understanding of the topic.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Archives (other than those not abbreviated)

ATL - Alexander Turnbull Library (Wellington, New Zealand)

D.S.A. - Dictionary of Scottish Architects (online, University of St Andrews, Scotland)

ICEArchives – Institution of Engineers Archives, London.

MArchHH - Marist Archives, Hunters Hill (Hunters Hill, New South Wales)

Marist Archives – Marist Archives (Wellington, New Zealand)

SAA - Sydney (Catholic) Archdiocesan Archives (St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, New South Wales)

ScottishCathArchives - Scottish Catholic Archives (Edinburgh, Scotland)

SVDPA - St Vincent de Paul Society Archives, Sydney (Lewisham), New South Wales)

NSWRegBD&M - New South Wales Register of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Sydney, New South Wales)

NZArchives - New Zealand Archives (Wellington, New Zealand)

WCArchives – Wellington City Archives (Wellington, New Zealand)

CoManual - Manual of the Society of St Vincent De Paul, with Subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O' Neill (possibly published in Dublin, 1877).

General References

anon - anonymous (usually author or journalist)

Government (other than those not abbreviated)

MHA - Member of the House of Assembly (i.e. New Zealand Parliament)

MLA - Member of the Legislative Assembly (including in the New South Wales Parliament)

MLC - Member of the Legislative Council (including in the New South Wales Parliament)

NZG - New Zealand Gazette

NZGG - New Zealand Government Gazette

NZPD - New Zealand Parliamentary Debates

Journals and Magazines

These are not abbreviated. Titles have been provided in full.

Newspapers

AS - Australian Star (Sydney, New South Wales)

AuckStar - Auckland Star (Auckland, New Zealand)

BH - Bruce Herald (Otago, New Zealand)

CathPress - Catholic Press (Sydney, New South Wales)

CathW - Catholic Weekly (Sydney, New South Wales)

DSC - Daily Southern Cross (Auckland, New Zealand)

DT - Dunstan Times (Dunstan, New Zealand)

DTel - Daily Telegraph (Sydney, New South Wales)

DumH - Dumbarton Herald (Dumbarton, Britain)

EdG - Edinburgh Gazette (Edinburgh, Britain)

EP - The Evening Post (Wellington, New Zealand)

FJ - Freeman's Journal (Sydney, New South Wales)

GFP - Glasgow Free Press (Glasgow, Britain)

GRA - Grey River Argus (West Coast, New Zealand)

HBHerald - Hawke's Bay Herald (Hawkes Bay, New Zealand)
MMH - Melbourne Morning Herald (Melbourne, Victoria)
NelE - Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle (Nelson, New Zealand)
NMH&MA - Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate (Newcastle, New South Wales)
NST&MP - North Shore Times and Manly Press (North Sydney, New South Wales)
NthOtT - North Otago Times (North Otago, New Zealand)
NZH - New Zealand Herald (Auckland, New Zealand)
NZT - New Zealand Tablet (National New Zealand)
OamaruT - Oamaru Times (North Otago, New Zealand)
Observer - Observer (Auckland, New Zealand)
ODT - Otago Daily Times (Otago, New Zealand)
OW - Otago Witness (Otago, New Zealand)
PortG&NGA - Portland Gazette and Normanby General Advertiser (Portland, Victoria)
SCr - Southern Cross (Sydney, New South Wales)
SilverA - The Silver Age (Silverton, New South Wales)
SMH - Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, New South Wales)
SouthlandT - Southland Times (Otago, New Zealand)
Star - Star (Canterbury, New Zealand)
ThA - Thames Advertiser (Thames, New Zealand)
TimH - Timaru Herald (Canterbury, New Zealand)
TaranH - Taranaki Herald (Taranaki, New Zealand)
TuapekaT - Tuapeka Times (Otago, New Zealand)
WangHer - Wanganui Herald (Manawatu-Wanganui, New Zealand)
WCTimes - West Coast Times (West Coast, New Zealand)
WI - Wellington Independent (Wellington, New Zealand)

Organisations (other than those not abbreviated)

COS(Melbourne) - Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne

EngAssNSW - Engineering Association of New South Wales

H.A.C.B.S. - Hibernian-Australian Catholic Benefit Society

HolyNameParishCHComm - Holy Name Parish Centenary History
Committee (Rydalmere, Sydney)

I.C.E. - Institution of Civil Engineers, London

SVDP - St Vincent de Paul Society

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement of Authorship and Sources	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Biblical References	v
Abbreviations and Acronyms	vi
Table of Contents	x
 Chapter One: Introduction	 1
<i>Biographical Framework.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Theme-based Historiography</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Literature Review and Earlier Research.....</i>	<i>8</i>
 Chapter Two: Irish Identity and Formation in Catholic Charity	 21
<i>The O'Neill Family</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Early Identification with Irish Catholicism and Irish Causes</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Church Architect</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Commitment to Catholic Charity through the</i> <i>St Vincent de Paul Society.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>From Sectarianism to Leadership in Charity.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Tensions in Charitable Action</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Irish Connections in New Zealand</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>O'Neill's Position on Divorce and Education</i>	<i>66</i>
<i>A Catholic Layperson of Wellington, 1876-1880</i>	<i>73</i>

Chapter Three: An Engineer of Empire

- Professional and Political Ambition	78
<i>The Young Engineer</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>The Lanarkshire Regiment and Loyalty to the Crown</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>A Career on the Colonial Frontier</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Initiating a Political Career</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Political Patronage and the Thames</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Pursuit of Wealth</i>	<i>116</i>

Chapter Four: A Civil Engineer and Social Progress

<i>Belief in Economic and Technological Progress</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Advocate for Forest Conservation and the</i>	
<i>Forest-Climate Connection, 1868-1874</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>Industrial Safety and Public Health</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Town Planning</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>Urban Transport, Tramways and Railways</i>	<i>148</i>
<i>Climax of O'Neill's Professional Career</i>	<i>155</i>
<i>Conclusion: The Application of Civil Engineering to Social Progress....</i>	<i>157</i>

Chapter Five: The Faith-based Charitable Mission

to New South Wales	161
<i>Initiation of the Mission, its Context and Key Challenges</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>Initial Lack of Success, 1880</i>	<i>171</i>
<i>Key Factors in the Acceptance of O'Neill's Mission</i>	
<i>by the Catholic Church in Sydney</i>	<i>175</i>
<i>Support of the Society of Mary (Marists)</i>	<i>177</i>
<i>Support of the Hierarchy</i>	<i>183</i>
<i>Successful Recruitment among the Catholic Laity in New South Wales..</i>	<i>191</i>

<i>O'Neill and the Challenge of Sectarianism</i>	201
<i>Philanthropic Context of O'Neill's Mission</i>	210
<i>Growing Public Acceptance and Impact of the Society's Philanthropy</i> ..	216
<i>The Flair for Fund Raising</i>	223
<i>Paying the Rents</i>	228
<i>O'Neill's Catholic Evangelical Mission for Charity</i>	234
<i>The Practical Realities of Charity in the Slums</i>	247
<i>St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank</i>	251
<i>O'Neill's Accomplished Mission</i>	253
<i>O'Neill's Irish Identity and the Charitable Mission</i>	261
Chapter Six: Facing the Vicissitudes	264
<i>Significance of the Vicissitudes</i>	264
<i>O'Neill's Bachelor Life and his Attitudes to Women</i>	266
<i>The First Cycle: Thwarted Ambition and Bankruptcy,</i> <i>Glasgow, 1863</i>	273
<i>The Vicissitudes of Political Life in New Zealand</i>	277
<i>The Second Cycle: The Souring of Prospects, Wellington, 1876-1880</i> ...	288
<i>The Third Cycle: The Final Flame of Ambition, 1889-1891</i>	293
<i>Public Humiliation and the Northumberland Banking Company Case</i> ...	303
<i>Consequences of O'Neill's departure from the leadership of the</i> <i>St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales</i>	311
<i>Facing the Vicissitudes: the Evidence from the CoManual</i>	317

Chapter Seven: The Aura of the Pauper's Grave and Conclusions	324
<i>Thanatography: O'Neill's Death and its Aftermath</i>	<i>324</i>
<i>Some Religious and Spiritual Themes in appraisal of</i>	
<i>O'Neill's Lay Vocation.....</i>	<i>328</i>
<i>Conclusions: Sequence and Pattern of Faith-based Charity and</i>	
<i>Professional Ambition</i>	<i>331</i>
Appendix: O'Neill Family Tree.....	340
Illustrations:	
1a-1e.: Charles O'Neill Photographs and Portrait Image	341
2: District Map Montage of The Rocks.....	343
3: CoManual Cover and Series of Fifteen Insertions by O'Neill	
including Fourteen Maxims extracted from a Roman Catholic	
Liturgical Calendar and a Fifteenth from the <i>Daily Telegraph</i>	344
Tables:	
A: Growth of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW (1881-1900) ..	346
B: Charitable Outcomes of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW	
(under O'Neill's Leadership), 1881-1891.....	350
C: Comparison of Outdoor Relief Assistance between the St Vincent	
de Paul Society in NSW (SVDP) and Benevolent Society of NSW	
(BSNSW), 1884, 1888 and 1893.....	351
Bibliography:	352
Primary Resources: Correspondence.....	352
Primary Resources: Manuscripts including Government Reports..	354
Primary Resources: Newspapers	362

Primary Resources: Paintings and Photographs	369
Secondary Resources: Articles (Internet)	370
Secondary Resources: Articles (Printed)	373
Secondary Resources: Books and Monographs	376
Secondary Resources: Theses	385

Chapter One: Introduction

Biographical Framework

The discovery of gold and early prosperity of the boom years created wealth for some Australasian colonial pioneers, but subsequent economic busts ruined many.¹ Unfortunately for Charles Gordon, christened Charles Bryson, O'Neill (1828-1900), civil engineer, colonial politician and pioneer of charity, the outcome was the latter. He was once presented to Queen Victoria as a Captain in the volunteer 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment in 1859, and elected in 1866 as one of the first miners' representatives to the New Zealand Parliament, from which he proudly announced the gold discoveries of the Australian and New Zealand colonies. High among many achievements of his professional career, he was later proclaimed by New Zealand Premier Julius Vogel as the 'the father of the tramways' in that colony. Despite these successes, O'Neill would end his final years in destitute circumstances in a shabby lodging house at 200 Cumberland Street in The Rocks district of Sydney.

O'Neill's personal history is entwined with two characteristics of the Victorian era, rampant capitalist endeavour combined with philanthropy guided by Christian, or specifically in O'Neill's case, Catholic charitable principles. O'Neill made a mark in civil engineering and urban improvement, particularly in New Zealand, and a minor one in early nineteenth century Scottish Catholic Church architecture. However, any memory of O'Neill might have disappeared entirely had it not been for the extraordinary faith-based charity mission which he embarked on in 1880, which ultimately achieved success with the establishment and consolidation of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales.

The contrast between the professional and philanthropic lives of O'Neill, culminating in this mission for the sake of the poor, raises a central question: why

¹ G. Serle, *The Golden Age – The History of the Colony of Victoria 1851-1861* (Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1968); J. Martin, "Speech Notes for the Launch of *Captain Charles, Engineer of Charity*," (Wellington: Delivered at Alexander Turnbull Library, 2008).

this outcome? It might be very simple to categorise him as another victim of the boom and bust pre-Federation story. However, this thesis, while avoiding psychological enquiry, will seek to establish that O'Neill's quest for the sake of the poor of Australia arose as a result of a tension between a passionate commitment to the ideals of faith-based Catholic charity and frustrated professional ambition. The origins and outcomes of this tension are uncovered through this translocational biography, including his life in Scotland (1828-1863), New Zealand (1864-1880) and New South Wales (1881-1900). This thesis will also take into account the extent to which the respective Victorian British and colonial societies with which he engaged, shaped his beliefs and actions; and during what phases, within the sphere of his own limitations, O'Neill was attempting to shape theirs. Significantly, each one of these three societies was itself in a state of transition in terms of national and cultural identity.

A useful paradigm for examining O'Neill's life can be gained from Patrick Joyce's studies of Victorian popular culture, from which he derives political identity as 'a fusion of loyalties'.² Joyce's concept is that simultaneous loyalty to particular associations, individuals and causes may be seen as indicative of adherence to a distinctive worldview. Scots historian Terence McBride, in his work on the social identity of nineteenth century Irish in Glasgow, recognises the usefulness of this fusion concept.³ It allows for the possibility that groups and individuals could have acted out of loyalty to an amalgam of ideas which were ostensibly wholly contradictory to each other and yet strongly and regularly expressed as components of a unified world view. In O'Neill's case, his life history and actions reveal two defining elements that at times were amalgamated or (according to the Joyce terminology) 'fused', the first being commitment to faith-based charity, the second being the pursuit of professional ambition.

The roots of the former element derived from his sense of Irish Catholic identity, based on his family's Irish heritage and sympathies. This found expression in a

² P. Joyce, *Visions of the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12.

³ T. McBride, "Irishness in Glasgow, 1863-70," *Immigrants & Minorities* 24, no. 1 (2006): 2.

strong Catholic faith expressed as a deep devotional commitment to Christian charity and, to a lesser extent, architectural expression.

The roots of the latter element, pursuit of professional ambition, derived from O'Neill's infusion also of a British identity with Scottish cultural influence, reinforced by professional training and early career development in Glasgow, the 'second city of Empire'. The primary focus of this ambition was to succeed in an empire career in civil engineering. It also found expression in his involvement in colonial politics and the pursuit of wealth. Yet much of O'Neill's professional and parliamentary life also reveals liberal principles and the ideals of social and civic progress.

These above elements were not necessarily contradictory during the Victorian era. Devout Catholicism, for example, proved no impediment to those fortunate enough among the Irish Catholic diaspora to build fortunes in the Americas and Australia through gold, pastoral interests or industry. However, by the 1890s, some prominent voices were urging the necessity of social reform, among the most notable of these being that of Salvation Army leader, William Booth. Booth, convinced that poverty was itself a grave impediment to religious salvation, was by then preaching a scheme for social salvation through his book *In Darkest England and the Way Out*.⁴ O'Neill would have an opportunity to listen to Booth in Melbourne in 1891 but, by this time, his own public philanthropic efforts were coming to an end.

For O'Neill, any tension between the acquisition of wealth and philanthropic endeavor was confined to the personal domain, and therefore makes an interesting subject for biographical enquiry. O'Neill's spiritual attitude to the poor, influenced as it was by the religious teachings of the Catholic saints St Vincent de Paul and St Francis of Assisi, reflected particular strains of Catholicism. The depth of this devotional attachment is likely to have driven him further towards a commitment to faith-based charity that became more pronounced during the later stages of his life.

⁴ K. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1963), 194-195.

Aside from his numerous professional achievements in colonial civil engineering, O'Neill's role in introducing the St Vincent de Paul Society to New South Wales prior to the 1890s Depression and the Federation era is of relevance to both Australian Catholic history and the history of philanthropy in Australia more broadly. O'Neill's establishment of a lay Catholic 'outdoor relief' in New South Wales was a turning point insofar as it advanced Catholic charity beyond its earlier exclusive colonial association with the figure of the priest.⁵ It also provided another source of financial support for many of the institutions run by Catholic religious orders.⁶ The St Vincent de Paul Society's charitable endeavours benefited the poor of Sydney in an era before aged pensions and unemployment relief, by providing an alternative source of support from that of other public charities such as the Benevolent Society of New South Wales and evangelical missions such as Sydney City Mission, both of which were guided by a Protestant ethos. A distinguishing feature of many of these latter missions was the belief that poverty and distress was due to innate evil in the human heart, and that individual and social change could only be achieved by reforming the poor person.⁷ While O'Neill would have appreciated such matters in driving his Catholic charitable mission, this thesis will reveal that it was guided by a less judgmental criterion aimed primarily at alleviating the needs of the poor rather than attempting to reform them.

O'Neill's charitable mission can be understood as part of the broader religious impulse of colonial charity in New South Wales.⁸ While his mission pre-dated Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, O'Neill must have been among the first to circulate some information about the social ideals of Frédéric Ozanam in New South Wales and perhaps throughout the Australian colonies.

This thesis will define a better measure of Charles Gordon O'Neill both in terms of his professional achievements as well as his charitable ones. With respect to the

⁵ This association is noted by A. O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy," *Sydney Journal* 1, no. 3 (2008). http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ojs/index/sydney_journal/index [accessed 10 February 2010].

⁶ S. Utick, *Captain Charles, Engineer of Charity, the Remarkable Life of Charles Gordon O' Neill* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 2008), 183, 196.

⁷ A. O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 190.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

latter, it will examine his prophetic vision for a non-intrusive approach to philanthropy.

Theme-based Historiography

This thesis will also apply a theme-based historiography in interpreting O'Neill's life. Six themes are developed that enable an analysis of O'Neill's personal situation in relation to respective historical context. While these themes are set out in broadly chronological order, they also enable the consideration of episodes from across the whole of O'Neill's life to enhance interpretation.

The first of these themes, *Irish Identity and Formation in Catholic Charity* (Chapter Two), examines how O'Neill's formation in and commitment to Catholic charity was forged through an early identification with Irish Catholicism and Irish causes. O'Neill's contribution to Catholic Church architecture is also examined. The theme traces how this commitment to Catholic charity was expressed through membership of the St Vincent de Paul Society, his gradual moving away from sectarianism to leadership of charity in Glasgow, and tensions within the Catholic Church in Scotland experienced by O'Neill prior to his departure for New Zealand in 1863. The theme continues by examining O'Neill's Irish connections in New Zealand and his support of the Catholic positions on divorce and education in the New Zealand Parliament. It concludes with O'Neill's resumption in Wellington, between 1876 and 1880, of his earlier pattern of Catholic lay commitment.

A second theme, *An Engineer of Empire: Professional and Political Ambition* (Chapter Three) explores in detail the counterpoint element to O'Neill's commitment to faith-based charity. As noted, through his training as a young engineer and some public exposure of his professional talent, O'Neill also embraced something of a British identity (which included Scottish cultural influence). O'Neill's membership of the volunteer 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment was a symbol of loyalty to empire. This theme examines O'Neill's subsequent career in the rugged gold mining frontier of New Zealand and how this provided a springboard for initiating a political career in 1866 as MHA for Otago Goldfields. In order to continue this political career, he courted political patronage in the lead-

up to his election to the New Zealand Parliament as MHA for the Thames in 1871. This theme also examines the means through which he pursued the acquisition of wealth during his presence in colonial New Zealand.

A third theme, *A Civil Engineer and Social Progress* (Chapter Four), examines the most significant professional achievements of O'Neill, many of which entailed the application of civil engineering to social progress. O'Neill's belief in economic and technological progress is well documented. However, he was critical of untrammelled development, as recent extensive research on O'Neill's advocacy of forest conservation and the forest-climate connection in the New Zealand Parliament can now demonstrate. Chapter Four examines his advocacy of industrial safety, public health and two other areas where both in parliament and in his professional career he made his most significant professional contributions. These latter were town planning, and improvements to urban transport, tramways and railways. Chapter Four also examines how the climax of O'Neill's professional career coincided with his decision to embark on a faith-based mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies.

The fourth, a major theme, *The Faith-based Charitable Mission to New South Wales* (Chapter Five), examines this mission in detail. This mission, initiated in response to the request of St Vincent de Paul Society Secretary-General Adolphe Baudon in 1877, is analysed in context identifying key challenges. Despite an initial lack of success during 1880, Chapter Five identifies the key factors in the acceptance of O'Neill's mission by the Catholic Church in Sydney. These factors were the support of the Catholic religious order, the Society of Mary (or Marist Fathers), of the hierarchy (including Archbishops Vaughan and Moran) and successful recruitment among the Catholic laity. Chapter Five also identifies the challenge of sectarianism as well as the more subtle challenge given the philanthropic context that faced O'Neill's mission within the Australian colonies.

This fourth theme traces the growing public acceptance of the Society's philanthropy in New South Wales and, with it, an increasing impact in providing outdoor relief. The success of O'Neill's flair for fund raising and the early initiative of paying the rents of Sydney's poor are examined in detail. Using a

comparison with a contemporary evangelical slum mission conducted in The Rocks by the Sydney City Mission, Chapter Five provides a deeper insight into the nature of O'Neill's own Catholic evangelical mission to the poor. Such comparisons enable an understanding of the practical realities of providing charity in the slums. One later charity initiative, the St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank, is also examined.

Chapter Five concludes with an overview of how O'Neill accomplished his mission in 1891 just as New South Wales and other Australian colonies experienced the onslaught of economic depression. Finally, O'Neill's Irish identity was reinforced by the faith-based mission and other Catholic associations, as well as political and religious influences between 1881 and 1891.

The fifth theme, *Facing the Vicissitudes* (Chapter Six), examines the impact of three cycles of misfortune in O'Neill's life, and their impact on the two defining elements of O'Neill's life, commitment to faith-based charity and personal ambition. Any reference to 'vicissitudes' would have had deep personal significance to O'Neill. On the right hand frontispiece of a *Manual of the St Vincent de Paul Society* published in 1877 (hereafter known as the *COManual*), a spiritual aide that O'Neill had acquired before departing permanently for the Australian colonies in 1880, an anonymous personal inscription read: 'May the lessons of heavenly wisdom contained in this little book comfort, strengthen and guide you in all the *vicissitudes* of your exile.'⁹

'Vicissitude' provides a fertile theme in many a biographical study and is particularly relevant to the life of O'Neill. The contemporary meaning of 'vicissitude' implies a change or variation with respect to a life. It does have a bittersweet connotation, and it has traditionally implied something outside the subject's control such as a twist of fate, fortune or in O'Neill's case, belief in Divine Providence.¹⁰ It implies also a succession of disappointments, failures or

⁹ SVDP (annotated C. O' Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent De Paul, with Subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O' Neill* (possibly Dublin: 1877) (otherwise referred to as the *CoManual*).

¹⁰ Whether such a thing as a 'vicissitude' concerns such things, is a metaphysical issue outside the scope of historical studies, but the fact that a person believes that there is such element at work is of interest to biographical study.

hardships reflecting changing circumstances that demand patience and fortitude in the person who encounters them during a life's journey. Detailed examination of the vicissitudes of O'Neill's life reveals the role that these played in fragmenting any previous fusion of the (above) two elements of commitment to faith-based charity and professional ambition. Chapter Six also examines O'Neill's bachelor status (including his attitudes to women) and how this circumstance provided him with the scope to pursue his chosen objectives freely.

The first identified cycle of misfortune was of thwarted ambition and subsequent bankruptcy in Glasgow in 1863. The vicissitudes of O'Neill's political career in New Zealand need also to be taken into account. The second identified cycle was of the souring of prospects in Wellington between 1876 and 1880. Finally, the third identified cycle commenced with the final flame of ambition exhibited by O'Neill between 1889 and 1891. This final cycle ended with O'Neill's public humiliation as a result of his involvement in the Northumberland Banking Company case in 1892. Chapter Six also examines the consequences of O'Neill's departure for the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales. The Chapter concludes by examining O'Neill's final actions informed by evidence in the *CoManual*. This evidence suggests that O'Neill sought solace in the midst of the vicissitudes by submission to a religious faith that promised an everlasting hope.

The sixth and final theme, *The Aura of the Pauper's Grave and Conclusions* (Chapter Seven), begins with a short thanatography which outlines others' hagiographic interpretations of O'Neill's life.¹¹ Chapter Seven provides brief commentary on some religious and spiritual themes in appraisal of O'Neill's lay vocation. A concluding summary outlines the sequence of O'Neill's commitment to the two defining elements in that life, faith based charity and professional ambition, and their patterns of initial fusion, fragmentation during three cycles of the vicissitudes, ending in submission in faith to Divine Providence.

¹¹ In this usage, the term 'thanatography' means an account, usually written, of the death of a person (see <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/thanatography>). Such accounts are very useful in the field of historical biography, as outlined during the *Using Lives* Conference held in Canberra in September 2010 and sponsored by the Australian National University and the National Museum of Australia.

Literature Review and Earlier Research

Any enquiry about O'Neill is limited by the fact that remaining personal correspondence is scarce, although a wide selection of primary source material provides much of the record of his public life and charitable activities. While O'Neill had close ties with at least two of his siblings and with many acquaintances in public life, he was engaged in the active life of the Australasian colonial frontier. As a professional engineer, he was probably consumed by the development of his plans and reports, and many of these provide useful sources for examining his professional career.

The achievements of O'Neill need to be placed in the context of three societies: Western Scotland in the aftermath of the Irish potato famine, post Land-War colonial New Zealand, and pre-Federation New South Wales. Because the profile of his endeavours varied among these three societies, the differing emphases on social, religious, political and engineering historical background reflect this. In Australia, as elsewhere, historical research is beginning to acknowledge the significance of transnational and translocational biographies.¹² O'Neill's professional life in civil engineering would be yet another example of the wide range of British colonial careers identified more broadly by D. Lambert and A. Lester.¹³

The first extensive analysis of religious and social upheaval in Scotland, in the wake of the influx of Irish escaping the potato famine, was undertaken by J. Handley.¹⁴ Some historical accounts, for example T. Johnstone, tended not to appreciate the complexities of the Irish experience in Western Scotland in assessing

¹² Recent biographical research in Australia is beginning to appreciate the transnational dimension of lives; the following are indicative of this: A. Curthoys and M. Lake, eds., *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2005); D. Deacon, P. Russell, and A. Woollacott eds., *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present*, Palgrave Macmillan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); D. Deacon, P. Russell, and A. Woollacott, eds., *Transnational Ties: Australian Lives in the World*, ANU Lives (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2008).

¹³ D. Lambert and A. Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ J. Handley, *The Irish in Scotland, 1798-1845* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1945); J. Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland* (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, Ltd., 1947).

working class conditions during the period.¹⁵ B. Aspinwall's research has added considerable understanding to the social and economic impact of the Irish in Scotland, the chaotic state of the Catholic Church in Scotland prior to the appointment of Archbishop Charles Eyre in 1869, Irish and Scottish tensions over ecclesiastical appointments, the anti-popery campaigns and the early development of the St Vincent de Paul Society in nineteenth century Scotland.¹⁶ Aspinwall provides some information about O'Neill's predecessor as President of the Society's Western Districts, James Walsh, whose own sectarian tract, the *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, included this period.¹⁷ A mounting body of academic work has analysed the impact of the Great Irish Famine in Scottish history and on Glasgow in particular. B. Collins, T. Devine, T. Gallagher, M. Mitchell and W. Sloan have each contributed to the depth of understanding of the immigration impact and social development of the Irish community in nineteenth century Scotland.¹⁸ S. Gilley gives a broader understanding of the impact of the Irish diaspora on the Catholic Church during the nineteenth century.¹⁹ J. Burrowes

¹⁵ T. Johnston, *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland* (Glasgow: Unity Publishing Co. Ltd, 1946).

¹⁶ B. Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," *The Innes Review* 33 (1982); B. Aspinwall, "A Glasgow Pastoral Plan 1855-1860: Social and Spiritual Renewal," *The Innes Review* 25, no. 1 (1984); B. Aspinwall, "Popery in Scotland: Image and Reality, 1820-1920," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 22 Part 3 (1986); B. Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," *Studies in Church History* 23 (1986); B. Aspinwall, "The Catholic Irish and Wealth in Glasgow," in *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-90.*, ed. T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1991); B. Aspinwall, "Scots and Irish Clergy Ministering to Immigrants, 1830-1878," *The Innes Review* 47, no. 1 (1996); B. Aspinwall, "The Formation of a British Identity within Scottish Catholicism, 1830-1914," in *Religion and National Identity: Wales and Scotland, C.1700-2000*, ed. R. Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001); B. Aspinwall, "Catholic Devotion in Victorian Scotland," in *New Perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, ed. M. Mitchell (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008).

¹⁷ J. Walsh, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland: From the Introduction of Christianity to the Present Time* (Glasgow: Hugh Margey, 1874).

¹⁸ B. Collins, "The Origins of Irish Immigration to Scotland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-90*, ed. T. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1991); T. Devine, "The Great Irish Famine and Scottish History," in *New Perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, ed. M. Mitchell (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008); T. Gallagher, "The Catholic Irish in Scotland: In Search of Identity," in *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1989-90*, ed. T. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1991); M. Mitchell, "Irish Catholics in the West of Scotland in the Nineteenth Century: Despised by Scottish Workers and Controlled by the Church?," in *New Perspectives on the Irish in Scotland*, ed. M. Mitchell (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2008); W. Sloan, "Religious Affiliation and the Immigrant Experience: Catholic Irish and Protestant Highlanders in Glasgow, 1830-1850," in *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. T. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1991).

¹⁹ S. Gilley, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Nineteenth Century Irish Diaspora," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35, no. 2 (1984).

provides a recent interpretation of Glasgow social history from the potato famine period to the twentieth century.²⁰ Of specific relevance to O'Neill's military interests, an early work by J. Grierson and a later one by L. Westlake include some detailed background on the volunteer 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment.²¹

P. Misner provides a broader context of the development of 19th century Catholic social conscience, including the influence of Ozanam.²² J. Schall's biography of Adolphe Baudon (in French) remains the major source on a key figure who exercised profound influence on O'Neill's life.²³

Some New Zealand regional histories contribute contextual background. A. McLintock's history of Otago was once considered the major secondary source on the history of old colonial Otago (O'Neill was mentioned in one footnote).²⁴ More recent work such as that by E. Olssen provides an updated treatment with better sources.²⁵ Some useful information on the Cromwell district, which encompassed most of O'Neill's mining constituency of Otago Goldfields, may be found in a local history by C. Parcell.²⁶ The background material on the Thames Goldfields, O'Neill's second constituency, is not as detailed as that on Otago and relies on non-academic sources. Nevertheless, A. Isdale's 1952 monograph on the Thames Gold Mines and the Thames district is a source of useful information, as is T. Nolan's work on the historical Coromandel Gold Trails.²⁷ G. Byrnes has examined the crucial position that land surveying occupied at the forefront of British settlement

²⁰ J. Burrowes, *Irish, the Remarkable Saga of a Nation and a City* (Edinburgh and London, United Kingdom: Mainstream Publishing, 2004).

²¹ J. Grierson, *Records of the Scottish Volunteer Force* (London:, United Kingdom: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1909; reprint, 1972); L. Westlake, *The Rifle Volunteers* (Chippenham, Wiltshire, United Kingdom: Picton Publishing, 1982).

²² P. Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe; from the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

²³ J. Schall, *Adolphe Baudon, 1819-1888 (1897)*, 2010 ed. (Whitefish, Montana, USA: Kessinger Publishing, 2010).

²⁴ A. McLintock, *The History of Otago, the Origins and Growth of a Wakefield Class Settlement* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Otago Centennial Publications, 1949; reprint, by Capper Press, 1975).

²⁵ E. Olssen, *A History of Otago* (Dunedin, New Zealand: John McIndoe Ltd, 1984).

²⁶ C. Parcell, *Heart of the Desert, a History of the Cromwell and Bannockburn Districts of Central Otago* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Whitcoulls Ltd, reprint 1976).

²⁷ A. Isdale, *Thames Gold Mines with Maps, Outline History of Thames and History of the Principal Claims* (Thames, New Zealand: 1952); T. Nolan, *Historic Gold Trails of the Coromandel* (Wellington, New Zealand: A.W. Reed, 1997).

in New Zealand, preparing the way for common law property ownership, and representing (literally as well as figuratively) the cutting edge of New Zealand colonisation.²⁸

New Zealand political histories and biographies, given their relative national importance, provide better depth of research information in relation to the political developments. J. Martin has produced an excellent overview of New Zealand's early parliamentary life, including the colonial elections and the short-lived miners' constituencies.²⁹ H. Laracy has researched the religious education debates of the early 1870s, in which O'Neill briefly participated.³⁰

The biographies of key colonial statesmen provide the best insights into the political developments in which O'Neill found himself a minor player between 1866 and 1875. E. Bohan's biographies of Edward Stafford and Sir George Grey are useful.³¹ R. Burdon and R. Dalziel have produced biographies of Sir Julius Vogel that provide valuable background given O'Neill's support of Vogel's administration.³² R. Fargher's biographical treatment of Sir Donald McLean, O'Neill's political patron, can be added to this list although, as with all the above, there is no reference to O'Neill himself.³³ The *New Zealand Dictionary of Biography* has published entries on Stafford, Grey, Vogel, McLean, Auckland

²⁸ G. Byrnes, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001).

²⁹ J. Martin, *The House: New Zealand's House of Representatives 1854-2004* (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press in association with Parliamentary Service, Office of the Clerk and The History Group, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2004).

³⁰ H. Laracy, "Bishop Moran: Irish Politics and Catholic Education in New Zealand." *The Journal of Religious History* 6, no. 1 (1970); H. Laracy, "Paranoid Popery: Bishop Moran and Catholic Education in New Zealand." *New Zealand Journal of History* 10, no. 1 (1976).

³¹ E. Bohan, *Edward Stafford: New Zealand's First Statesman* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1994); E. Bohan, *To Be a Hero: Sir George Grey 1812-1898* (Auckland, New Zealand: Harper Collins Publishers (New Zealand) Limited, 1998).

³² R.M. Burdon, *The Life and Times of Sir Julius Vogel* (Christchurch, New Zealand: The Caxton Press, 1948); Raewyn Dalziel, *Julius Vogel, Business Politician* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press: Oxford University Press, 1986).

³³ R. Fargher, *The Best Man Who Ever Served the Crown? A Life of Donald Mclean* (Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press, 2007).

Superintendents John Williamson and Thomas Gillies, and Wellington Catholic Bishop Francis Redwood sm (in addition to one on O'Neill himself).³⁴

New South Wales contextual history primarily focuses on civic and religious elements in pre-Federation Sydney. G. Karskens and M. Kelly have written extensively on the social and urban history of The Rocks district.³⁵ Comprehensive analyses of the pre-Federation problems of inner city slums and Sydney's transport system have been undertaken by M. Kelly and A. Roberts respectively.³⁶ These provide an understanding of some of the challenges then faced by New South Wales politicians and taken up by civil engineers such as O'Neill. Kelly has also been prominent among those who have documented the degree of urban decay culminating in the outbreak of bubonic plague in 1900 in The Rocks.³⁷ P. Curson and K. McCracken provide a detailed account of plague outbreak itself.³⁸

The pastoral work of the Marist community of St Patrick's Church Hill (including that of the Reverends Pierre Le Rennetel sm and Peter Piquet sm) has been recorded by J. Hosie.³⁹ Le Rennetel and Piquet have entries in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, as do a number of New South Wales political identities

³⁴ E. Bohan, "Stafford, Edward William 1891-1901," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>; John V. Broadbent, "Redwood, Francis William 1839-1935," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 20 March 2009]; R. Dalziel, "Vogel, Julius 1835-1899," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>. [accessed 20 March 2009]; H. Rennie, "Gillies, Thomas Bannatyne," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 21 March 2009]; A. Ward, "Mc Lean, Donald 1820-1877," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 21 March 2009]; D. B. Waterson, "Williamson, John 1815-1875," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 21 March 2009].

³⁵ G. Karskens, *The Rocks, Life in Early Sydney* (Carlton South, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1997); M. Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks, Sydney* (Sydney, Australia: Sydney Cove Authority, 1997).

³⁶ M. Kelly, "Picturesque and Pestilential: The Sydney Slum Observed 1860-1900," in *Nineteen-Century Sydney, Essays in Urban History*, ed. M. Kelly (Sydney, New South Wales: Sydney University Press in association with The Sydney History Group, 1978); A. Roberts, "Planning Sydney's Transport 1875-1900," in *Nineteen-Century Sydney, Essays in Urban History*, ed. M. Kelly (Sydney: Sydney University Press in association with The Sydney History Group, 1978).

³⁷ M. Kelly, *A Certain Sydney 1900, a Photographic Introduction to Hidden Sydney* (Sydney, New South Wales: Doak Press, 1977).

³⁸ P. Curson and K. McCracken, *Plague in Sydney: Anatomy of an Epidemic* (Kensington, New South Wales: University of NSW Press, 1989).

³⁹ J. Hosie, *Challenge: The Marists in Colonial Australia* (Sydney, New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1987); J. Hosie, *St. Patrick's 150 Years. The Sesquicentenary of 'Everyone's Special Church' St Patrick's Church Hill, Sydney 1844-1994.* (Sydney, New South Wales: Society of Mary, Blue Gum Printing, 1994).

who feature prominently in O'Neill's later years, including Premier Sir George Dibbs, Louis Heydon and Thomas Slattery.⁴⁰

P. O'Farrell's work on the history of the Irish in Australia provides excellent background on the assimilation of the Irish into Australian colonial society, including the role of the early temperance movements which O'Neill supported.⁴¹

J. Molony has noted the link between the emerging social consciousness of pre-Federation Australia and the influence of Catholic social teaching (including that of Ozanam) through the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.⁴²

B. Dickey and J. Murphy have examined the consequences of a colonial welfare which eschewed the English Poor Law and sought to discourage pauperism.⁴³

Dickey, S. Garton, S. Macintyre and A. O'Brien have examined the role of charities and benevolent societies in the early development of Australian social welfare.⁴⁴

The contemporary outdoor relief in The Rocks district conducted by the Sydney City Mission provides for useful comparisons.⁴⁵ James Mathers' journals of

⁴⁰ J. Bennett and M. Rutledge, "Heydon, Louis Francis (1848 - 1918)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090701b.htm> [accessed 21 March 2009]; J. Hosie, "Le Rennelet, Pierre François (1851 - 1904)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100072b.htm> [accessed 21 March 2009]; B. Mansfield, "Dibbs, Sir George Richard (1834 - 1904)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/history/A040063h.htm> [accessed 21 March 2009]; P. McMurrich, "Piquet, Jean Pierre (1853 - 1936)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110241b.htm> [accessed 21 March 2009]; B. Nairn, "Slattery, Thomas Michael (1844 - 1920)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110649b.htm> [accessed 21 March 2009].

⁴¹ P. O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1985); P. O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Kensington, New South Wales: University of New South Wales, 1987).

⁴² J. Molony, *The Worker Question, a New Historical Perspective on Rerum Novarum* (North Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove, 1991).

⁴³ B. Dickey, "Why Were There No Poor Laws in Australia?," *Journal of Policy History* 4, no. 2 (1992); J. Murphy, "The Other Welfare State, Non-Government Agencies and the Mixed Economy of Welfare in Australia," *History Australia* 3, no. 2 (December 2006). <http://www.epress.monash.edu.au/doi/full/10.2104/ha060044> [accessed 10 February 2010].

⁴⁴ B. Dickey, *No Charity There. A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia* (Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1987 edition); S. Garton, *Out of Luck, Poor Australians and Social Welfare* (North Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1990); S. MacIntyre, *Winners and Losers, the Pursuit of Social Justice in Australian History* (North Sydney, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1985); A. O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*.

⁴⁵ J. Owen, *The Heart of the City, the First 125 Years of the Sydney City Mission* (Kenthurst, NSW: Kangaroo Press, 1987).

mission work among the poor (1897-1911) are primary resources which permit comparison between this kind of evangelical slum mission with the kind of organisation that O'Neill established.⁴⁶ M. Prentis uncovered tensions between the Mission and the Catholic Church during the Federation period.⁴⁷ For useful comparisons with contemporary charity work elsewhere in colonial Australia, S. Swain has published comparative case studies of the poor in Melbourne and the responses of charity organisers during the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸

With respect to primary source material, nineteenth century newspaper records provide a rich source of reports about O'Neill's own activities (and in some cases information about his family). In Scotland, the *Glasgow Free Press* is the most prominent source. In colonial New Zealand, the *New Zealand Tablet*, the *Wellington Independent*, Wellington's *Evening Post*, and Auckland's *Daily Southern Cross* are the most prominent examples among many. In New South Wales, the *Freeman's Journal*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* provide the source of a number of articles, the latter two with respect to the Northumberland Banking Company case. The richest primary resource material can be derived from the *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* between 1866 and 1875 that record O'Neill's sometimes lengthy parliamentary addresses. The second richest resource material lies in the St Vincent de Paul Society's *Reports of the Particular Council of Sydney*, particularly between 1881 and 1892. These officially record the operations of the charity organisation over which he presided. The *Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity, held in Melbourne from 17th to 21st November 1891*, records O'Neill's views on a few social issues of the period.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ J. Mathers, *Journals of Mission Work among the Poor in Sydney, 1897-1911*, Mitchell Library Collection, Sydney, New South Wales.

⁴⁷ M. Prentis, "City of God, City of Man: Images of the Slum 1897-1911," in *Gritty Cities: Images of the Urban*, ed. Lynette Finch and Chris McConville (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1999), 97-115.

⁴⁸ S. Swain, "The Poor People of Melbourne," in *The Outcasts of Melbourne*, ed. G. Davison, C. McConville, and D. Dunstan (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 91-112; S. Swain, "Destitute and Dependent: Case Studies in Poverty in Melbourne, 1890-1902," *Australian Historical Studies* 19, no. 74 (1980).

⁴⁹ COS(Melbourne), "Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne from 17th to 21st November 1891," in *Second Australasian Conference on Charity* (Melbourne, Victoria: Robert S. Brain, Government Printer, 1892).

It was almost seventy years after the death of O'Neill before any serious attempt was made to evaluate or reflect upon his life or legacy. Before the early research undertaken by C. Foley during the 1960s, the only record of any substance remained a hagiographic obituary published in the *Freeman's Journal* in July 1902.⁵⁰

Interest in O'Neill was rekindled in the 1960s, after his remains were re-interred in 1961 in a paupers' section of Rookwood cemetery. Foley, a St Vincent de Paul Society volunteer, published an article in the Society's *Record* in 1967, which collated some fragments of O'Neill's life.⁵¹ The article formed the basis of a later Society pamphlet.⁵²

Senior NSW judge J. McClemens provided a more analytical treatment of O'Neill's charitable activities in NSW.⁵³ McClemens was informed by the cuttings and notations made by O'Neill in the *CoManual* and commented sympathetically on O'Neill's position as a defendant in the 1892 Northumberland Banking Company Case. Both Foley and McClemens were handicapped by having only a few details of O'Neill's earlier life in Scotland and New Zealand, while the biographical information covering the New South Wales period was itself incomplete and fragmented. Their claims that O'Neill was the founder of the Society in Australia were made before the activities of the Reverend Gerald Ward in Melbourne between 1854 and 1858 became more widely known.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ anon., "The Late Charles O' Neill, Founder of the St Vincent De Paul Society in Australia and New Zealand, Unveiling a Monument at Rookwood," *FJ*, 12 July 1902.

⁵¹ C. J. Foley, "Charles Gordon O' Neill: Engineer and Apostle. Founder of Our Society in Australia.," *St Vincent de Paul Record* January 1967.

⁵² C. J. Foley, *Charles Gordon O' Neill, Engineer and Apostle. Founder of the Society of St Vincent De Paul in Australia & New Zealand* (Sydney, NSW: St Vincent de Paul Society through James Maloney Press, 1996 re-print). This pamphlet was produced with support of Society National President T. Bacon

⁵³ J. H. McClemens, "Charles Gordon O' Neill, the Founder of the St Vincent De Paul Society in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 3, no. 3 (1971).

⁵⁴ Kevin Slattery, *An Enduring Legacy, Fr Gerald Ward, Founder of the St Vincent De Paul Society in Australia* (Box Hill, Victoria: St Vincent de Paul Society, Victoria, 2004).

Foley subsequently completed an entry on O'Neill in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, originally published in 1974.⁵⁵ Given O'Neill's involvement in early New Zealand colonial government and engineering, it was not surprising that an entry later appeared in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.⁵⁶ These entries were broadly complementary with emphases on O'Neill's charitable activities in New South Wales in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, and on his political, surveying and engineering exploits in the New Zealand one.

Independently, a retired British engineer, P. Bardell, made some investigations about O'Neill's professional training, followed a few years later by V. Dever, a retired Australian engineer, and V. Quayle, a research assistant at the Australian Catholic University.⁵⁷

Historical fragments and individual vignettes dealing with O'Neill's architectural, surveying and engineering exploits can be drawn from a variety of sources.

Aspinwall notes O'Neill as an example of a new Catholic professional class of architect in Scotland.⁵⁸ F. Wordsall featured some of O'Neill's Glasgow architectural work in a pictorial study of Victorian Glasgow architecture.⁵⁹ The Archdiocese of Wellington has acknowledged O'Neill's architectural design of the still standing Sacred Heart Catholic Church at Reefton.⁶⁰ His architectural contribution to the original church at Holy Name of Mary Parish in Rydalmere, New South Wales has also been recognised.⁶¹

⁵⁵ C. J. Foley, "O' Neill, Charles Gordon (1828-1900)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A050421b.htm> [accessed 10 January 2009].

⁵⁶ F.N. Stace., "O' Neill, Charles Gordon 1827/1828?-1900," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). UTL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 10 January 2009].

⁵⁷ P. Bardell, "The Early Days of Charles Gordon O' Neill," *The Record* 1999; Utick, ix-x.

⁵⁸ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland."

⁵⁹ F. Wordsall, *Victorian City: A Selection of Glasgow Architecture* (United Kingdom: Richard Drew Publishing, 1982).

⁶⁰ Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington, *To Commemorate the Centennial Celebrations of the Sacred Heart Parish, Reefton, 1874-1974*. (Hokitika, New Zealand: Richards and Meyer Ltd, 1974).

⁶¹ HolyNameParishCHComm, *Holy Name of Mary Parish Rydalmere, Centenary 1889-1989* (Sydney, New South Wales: W.B. Bright & Sons, 1989).

O'Neill's professional work is listed in both F. Fukert's listing of New Zealand engineers and C. Lawn's listing of pioneer New Zealand land surveyors.⁶² D. Sumpter and J. Lewis mention his surveying work for Milton in the Tokomairiro region of New Zealand.⁶³ J. Welch provides a summary of the Wellington Steam Tramway.⁶⁴ G. Stewart in his pictorial coverage of New Zealand tramways history features both O'Neill's involvement in the celebrated mottled kauri carriage incident in the Thames in 1870, and the Wellington Steam Tramway.⁶⁵ A somewhat less flattering treatment of O'Neill's contribution to the early Rimutakas railway surveying was made by W. Cameron, although for reasons that remain obscure.⁶⁶ J. Bremner has recorded O'Neill's contribution to the Kaiwarra Powder Magazine in Wellington.⁶⁷ In New South Wales, R. Raxworthy's biography of engineer J. Bradfield briefly mentions the proposal by O'Neill and F. Gipps to construct railway and passenger tunnels under Sydney Harbour in the mid-1880s.⁶⁸

O'Neill's parliamentary contribution has received scant attention until recently. Two Thames historical pamphlets, published through the *Thames Star* newspaper, mention O'Neill in his capacity as the first MHA for Thames.⁶⁹ D. Young made brief comment on O'Neill's parliamentary support of New Zealand forest conservation.⁷⁰ O'Neill's key role in the initiation of debates about deforestation

⁶² F. Furkert, *Early New Zealand Engineers*, W. Newnham ed. (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1953); C. Lawn, *The Pioneer Land Surveyors of New Zealand* (Auckland, New Zealand: New Zealand Institute of Surveyors, 1977).

⁶³ D. Sumpter and J. Lewis, *Faith and Toil: The Story of Tokomairiro* (New Zealand: Centennial Publications, 1949).

⁶⁴ J. W. F. Welch, "Municipal Transport Engineering in Wellington," *New Zealand Engineering* 4, no. 12 (1949).

⁶⁵ Graham Stewart, *The End of the Penny Section* (Wellington, New Zealand: Grantham House Publishing, 1993 edition).

⁶⁶ W. Cameron, *A Line of Railway: Railway Conquest of the Rimutakas* (Wellington, New Zealand: The New Zealand Railway and Locomotive Society Inc., 1976).

⁶⁷ J. Bremner, "Kaiwarra Powder Magazine," *The Onslow Historian* 14, no. 3 (1984).

⁶⁸ R. Raxworthy, *The Unreasonable Man, the Life and Works of J.J.C. Bradfield* (Sydney, New South Wales: Hale and Ironmonger, 1989), 26.

⁶⁹ L.P. O'Neill, *Thames Borough Centenary 1873* (Thames, New Zealand: compiled by Thames Star, 1973); F. Weston, *Thames Goldfields. A History from Pre-Proclamation Times to 1927*. (Thames, New Zealand: Office of the Thames Star, 1927).

⁷⁰ D. Young, *Our Islands, Our Selves, History of Conservation in New Zealand* (Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2004), 81.

and climate has recently been acknowledged by environmental historians in New Zealand, including J. Beattie and T. Brooking.⁷¹

Comparatively more comment has been recorded about O'Neill's role in the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New Zealand and New South Wales. D. Ryan noted O'Neill's role in the consolidation and aggregation of the Society in Wellington, as did M. O'Meehan in his history of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington.⁷² O'Neill's leading role in the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales has been noted by Society writers other than Foley, including S. Egan and V. Pedemont.⁷³ The successful establishment by O'Neill of the first New South Wales Conference at St Patrick's Church Hill in Sydney in 1881 has been recognised by both Dickie and O'Brien as one milestone in the introduction of faith-based charity into Australia.⁷⁴ Swain has noted the establishment of the Society in New South Wales within the broader context of religious charitable organisations, including foundation in other states.⁷⁵ E. Campion enhanced hagiographic comment by denoting him as 'a candidate for canonisation.'⁷⁶ In 2006, A. Kelly completed a reflective analysis of O'Neill's spirituality through examination of the *COManual* at the request of the New South Wales St Vincent de Paul Society.⁷⁷

⁷¹ J. Beattie, "Climate Change, Forest Conservation and Science: A Case Study of New Zealand, 1860s-1920," *History of Meteorology* 5 (2009): 4-6; T. Brooking, "'Green Scots and Golden Irish': The Environmental Impact of Scottish and Irish Settlers in New Zealand - Some Preliminary Ruminations," *Journal of Irish and Scottish Studies* 3 (2010): 57.

⁷² D. Ryan, *The Society of St Vincent De Paul in New Zealand* (Wellington, New Zealand: Society of St Vincent de Paul, New Zealand 2002); M. O'Meehan, *Steadfast in Hope, the Story of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington 1850-2000* (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press, 2003), 119.

⁷³ S.F. Egan, *The Society of Saint Vincent De Paul in Australia - 1854-1954 – the First 100 Years* (Sydney, NSW: St Vincent de Paul Society through James Maloney Press, 1981); V. Pedemont, "The St Vincent De Paul Society in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 15 (1993).

⁷⁴ Dickey, *No Charity There. A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia*, 66; O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, 189.

⁷⁵ S. Swain, *The Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia* (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), s.v. "Welfare Work and Charitable Organisations." However, the entry incorrectly dates that foundation as 1880.

⁷⁶ Edmund Campion, *Great Australian Catholics* (Richmond, Victoria: David Lovell Publishing, 1997), 47-49.

⁷⁷ A. Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O'Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," (Sydney: SVDPA, 2006).

More recently, O'Brien has noted O'Neill's contribution to Sydney philanthropy, particularly through religious or faith-based charity.⁷⁸ M. Prentis has raised the identity issue with respect to O'Neill, observing both O'Neill's Irish roots and perhaps some degree of Scottish assimilation, while noting his involvement in Irish affairs in New South Wales.⁷⁹ Prentis subsequently included a brief summary about O'Neill in *The Scots in Australia*.⁸⁰

Finally, a detailed chronological narrative account of O'Neill's life, *Captain Charles, Engineer of Charity: The remarkable life of Charles Gordon O'Neill* by S. Utick, provided substantial historical context.⁸¹ This account also puts the significance of O'Neill's achievement in the context of earlier attempts to establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies during the nineteenth century, including those of Ward in Melbourne and John Gorman in Perth.⁸² However, that biography did not attempt a theme-based interpretation of his life, which is now possible aided by new insights from (among other fields) Glasgow Irish studies, wider Victorian studies, early New Zealand colonial and environmental histories, Australasian colonial welfare history and theology, all informed by an extensive, additional layer of research.

⁷⁸ O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

⁷⁹ M. Prentis, "Scottish Roman Catholics in Nineteenth-Century Australia," *The Innes Review* 33 (1982): 65.

⁸⁰ M. Prentis, *The Scots in Australia* (Sydney, New South Wales: UNSW Press, 2008), 191.

⁸¹ Utick.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 148-155.

Chapter Two: Irish Identity and Formation in Catholic Charity

The O'Neill Family

Well before the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s, the immigration of Irish people to Scotland, both Protestant and Catholic, had been growing steadily. The earliest relevant census to record birthplace, taken in 1841, revealed that over 126,000 Irish-born resided in Scotland.¹ The industrial revolution had already forced many away from peasant farming and hand loom linen weaving to wage labour. These early Irish immigrants to Scotland were not from the most destitute areas.² Traditionally most had come from Protestant Ulster.³ Those with lump sum wages from farm service, weaving or sale of a lease, could save sufficient funds to leave Ireland permanently. By the early 1820s, steam boats began routes from Derry and Belfast to Glasgow, adding to the passage provided by traditional coastal trade.⁴ County Sligo on Ireland's north-west coast was not very distant from these points of departure, and it was from this region that the father of Charles O'Neill, John Ogle O'Neill (born 1798) came and most likely the mother Mary Gallocher (also Gallaher or Gallagher, born 1803).⁵ The parents, both Catholic, married on the 22 November 1819, the banns proclaimed both in the established church and at St Andrew's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Glasgow.⁶

John Ogle O'Neill, a spirits merchant and storekeeper by trade, was modestly prosperous and operated a mixed business called 'John O'Neill and Co.' in Main Street, Inverary, Argyllshire during the 1830s and 1840s.⁷ The business employed

¹ Devine, 21.

² Collins, 8-9.

³ Devine, 22.

⁴ Collins.

⁵ Utick, 8. There are inaccuracies in early Census and Church records during this period of the nineteenth century. John Ogle O'Neill's birthplace appears almost certainly to have been County Sligo; the 1851 census records Mary Gallocher's birthplace as Glasgow, but in the St Andrew's Cathedral Marriage Registry entry of 1819, it is recorded as Sligo.

⁶ Scottish Catholic Archives, "Register of Marriages from St Andrew's Cathedral Glasgow, July 1818 - December 1834, Reference Mp/62/7, p. 22, Edinburgh.

⁷ Pigot and Co., *National Commercial Directory* (London, UK: 1837), 226; Utick, 8.

servants, and a certain Daniel Gallocher, possibly his father-in-law, resided there.⁸ Very little is known about his wife, other than that she gave birth to eleven, perhaps twelve, children.⁹ There was a pattern of a birth within two years, over a period of twenty years between 1820 and 1840, and a gap in recorded births between 1822 and 1826 may suggest a stillbirth during that period (see Appendix for O'Neill Family Tree, page 340). Mary O'Neill died in Glasgow on 15 April 1856.

Charles O'Neill, the fourth of their children, was born on 23 March 1828 and baptised on 2 April 1828.¹⁰ The first sibling, Daniel (born 1820) seems not to have survived beyond infancy and the second, Louisa Carolina (born 1822) also died before 1851. The third, John James O'Neill (born on 1 May 1826 and baptised on 9 May 1826) was Charles O'Neill's immediate older brother. Charles O'Neill's younger brothers and sisters included Mary Ann (born 1830), Bridget Stewart (born 1831), Jean Macdonald (born 1833), Andrew Scott (born 1835), William Campbell (born 1836), Catherine Anne (born 1838) and Maria Gordon (born 1840).¹¹ The relatively early death of some siblings probably continued, as there is no record of either Mary Ann or Jean Macdonald surviving to adulthood.

The parents seemed to have a practice of naming some children after relatives or prominent Glasgow citizens, including clergy. Daniel, the first son, was probably named after his maternal grandfather. Andrew Scott was probably named after the Scottish priest (and later bishop), the Reverend Andrew Scott who had officiated at the marriage of John and Mary O'Neill at St Andrew's Cathedral in Glasgow.¹² A Reverend William Gordon, another Scottish priest who served as pastor of Greenock may have been the Gordon so honoured in the name of Maria Gordon O'Neill.¹³ Charles O'Neill would eventually adopt the middle name Gordon in

⁸ Parish of Inverary, "Census for 1841 Covering the Parish of Inverary and Glenary, 1841."

⁹ Utick, 45.

¹⁰ Parish of Inverary, "Baptism Register for Parish of Inverary, Scotland, Entry for 1833.

¹¹ Burgh of Dumbarton, "Census Return for the Burgh of Dumbarton, 30 March 1851."; Inverary, "Census for 1841 Covering the Parish of Inverary and Glenary; Utick, 8.

¹² Andrew Scott (1772-1846) from Chapelford, Enzie, Banffshire, rose to become Vicar Apostolic of the Western districts of Scotland in 1832. See James Darragh, *The Catholic Hierarchy of Scotland* (Glasgow: John S. Burns, 1986), 19-20.

¹³ Also there were many influential Gordons who were sympathetic to Catholicism such as Sir Charles Gordon. See Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 47.

affectionate memory of his sister, but there was an added connection back to this Reverend William Gordon, a founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Glasgow. At the opening of St Andrew's New Schools Glasgow in 1856, Gordon as presiding chair introduced its architect Charles O'Neill 'as my dear young friend'.¹⁴ By later adopting the middle name Gordon, that same Charles may have honoured a priest friend from his younger days as well as a beloved sister.

The baptismal name of Charles *Bryson* O'Neill is also illuminating.¹⁵ James Bryson, a solicitor friend of the Reverend William Gordon, was also involved in the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Glasgow.¹⁶ However, the most likely source of this name is the Glasgow merchant Charles Bryson, and one of the many editors of the pro-Irish Catholic weekly paper, *The Glasgow Free Press*.¹⁷ Charles O'Neill did not use this original middle name in later life.

The above naming patterns did not seem to reinforce exclusively either an Irish or a Scottish identity, as individuals so honoured come from both cultures. For example Andrew Scott was a very traditional Banffshire priest, while Charles Bryson was prominent in the kind of Irish business circles within which John Ogle O'Neill moved. The naming patterns suggested that the family was seeking to identify with local leading citizens whom it respected. It might also have been a sign of upward mobility; the ownership of a spirits business being itself a small step up the social ladder.

Even though the O'Neill family was not directly affected by the Great Irish Famine, it would reflect the kind of demographic pattern of the many Irish families in the Famine's wake. The first was a trend towards permanent celibacy or at least remaining in a single state.¹⁸ Among siblings that survived into adulthood, Charles and his older brother John James remained bachelors, Maria Gordon remained a

¹⁴ anon., "Progress of Catholic Education in Glasgow, Splendid Soiree in St Andrew's New Schools," *GFP*, 5 July 1856, 3.

¹⁵ Parish of Inverary, "Baptism Register for Parish of Inverary, Scotland, Entry for 1833."

¹⁶ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 445; Utick, 25.

¹⁷ Charles Bryson is noted in Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 62; McBride: 3.

¹⁸ Collins, 13.

spinster while Catherine Ann formalised her state through entering a Franciscan convent in 1854.¹⁹ Charles O'Neill's relationships with his brother John James and his sister Maria Gordon would become very important to him later in life (see Chapter Six).

Only two of O'Neill's siblings are known to have married (the state of Andrew Scott remains uncertain), demonstrating another demographic trend, delayed marriage. Bridget Stewart was married in Glasgow at the age of 29, William Campbell in New Zealand at the age of 42. The family patriarch John Ogle O'Neill embraced the marriage state much more enthusiastically than most of his children, taking a second wife in Auckland at the ripe old age of 72.²⁰

In September 1849, John Ogle O'Neill succeeded in his bid for the lease of the Elephant Inn from the Burgh of Dumbarton with a yearly rent of £96.²¹ This must at first have seemed a good prospect as this establishment was located in a much larger town with a growing Irish presence, located on the banks of the Clyde. His large family would also benefit from an established Catholic parish in Dumbarton, rather than have to rely on itinerant priests. Dumbarton Catholic Chapel had become a strong centre of Catholic devotion with about 3000 people attending *Missa cantata* and Benediction at its opening in 1832.²² After being admitted first as a 'Burgess' of the Burgh, he was elected as a Town Councillor in November 1850 having sworn an oath of allegiance to Queen Victoria.²³

However, the Burgh's previous failure in finding a tenant for the premises might have been a portent of the problems ahead. John Ogle O'Neill soon experienced business difficulties, as in May 1851 there was an announcement of temporary dispossession of his goods to meet creditors' demands.²⁴ The Burgh's Property

¹⁹ Utick, 29.

²⁰ Ibid., 86.

²¹ Burgh of Dumbarton, "Town Council Minutes, 21 September 1849," Dumbarton.

²² Aspinwall, "Catholic Devotion in Victorian Scotland," 32.

²³ Burgh of Dumbarton, "Town Council Minutes, 5 November 1850," Dumbarton; Burgh of Dumbarton, "Town Council Minutes, 7 November 1850," Dumbarton.

²⁴ anon., *GFP*, 17 May 1851.

Committee ended the lease in February 1853, by which time he had to sell off the furnishings and effects to pay the arrears in rent.²⁵ He subsequently moved to Glasgow, possibly setting up a wine merchant store in Saltmarket Street.²⁶ The details of his son Charles O'Neill's first 21 years in Inverary, including his childhood and early non-professional education, remain unknown (education records were not well kept during that early period). Later public addresses given by Charles O'Neill, would reflect a classical education in addition to a professional one.²⁷ In these addresses, he often quoted poetry to emphasise a point.²⁸ Although Inverary was a relatively small town of little more than 1000 people during the early 1840s, there were schools in that part of Argyllshire that could furnish a good education such as the Inverary Grammar School.²⁹ Opportunities for a formal Catholic education were limited; in 1840, there were only five Catholic churches throughout Western Scotland.³⁰

Also from the age of thirteen, much of Charles O'Neill's life was spent in Glasgow itself. His six year civil engineering apprenticeship served with Messrs Foreman and Cameron, and later George Martin of Glasgow would have commenced no later than 1841, given that his professional employment with the City of Glasgow commenced in 1847.³¹ The cost of such an apprenticeship (which could range from £100 to £200 pounds per annum) is testimony again to the prosperity of his father during the Inverary years. As his son began to receive a professional income, there may have been an expectation of repayment. It was an early example of a pattern whereby enterprising tradespeople and shopkeepers would finance their children through a profession, before moving out of an immigrant neighbourhood.³²

²⁵ Burgh of Dumbarton, "Town Council Minutes, 18 February 1853," Dumbarton.

²⁶ anon., *GFP*, 28 March 1857, 3.

²⁷ anon., "Progress of Catholic Education in Glasgow, Splendid Soiree in St Andrew's New Schools."

²⁸ Utick, 17, 102. O'Neill is on the record as quoting from William Wordsworth as well as John Dryden.

²⁹ A. Fraser, *The Royal Burgh of Inverary* (UK: St Andrews Press, 1977), 193-224.

³⁰ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 44-45.

³¹ Bardell; Utick, 13-14.

³² Gallagher, 22.

As young adults, Charles and his older brother John James demonstrated a commitment to Christian values, which were marked at a farewell evening dinner in their honour in Dumbarton in October 1852. The *Glasgow Free Press* reported the celebrations and the comments by a family friend Thomas McFadyen:

McFadyen proposed the 'health, long life, and prosperity of Messrs J. and C. O'Neill.' In doing so, he passed a high and well merited eulogium on the young gentlemen for their talent, industry and truly Christian conduct since they came to Dumbarton, and fervently trusted that a continuance of such conduct would soon place their names high in the ranks of their respective professions.³³

The 'Christian conduct' referred to by McFadyen probably included their volunteer work of visiting the poor as members of the Dumbarton Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society. The two brothers had most likely joined early in 1851.³⁴ Charles O'Neill held the position of Secretary from August 1851.³⁵

Charles O'Neill remained a bachelor. He was also to assume a guiding role of the leading son within the family, and was perhaps fortunate that he had secured permanent employment before his father's business declined after the latter's difficulties in servicing the lease of the Elephant Inn in 1851.³⁶

Within Scotland, the family moved after perhaps thirty years residence in Inverary, first to Dumbarton in 1849, and subsequently to Glasgow in 1853. The emigrating status of the O'Neill family was also evident. In this, they would exhibit the same pattern as many Scots and Irish leaving their homelands for better opportunities overseas. Over time, John Ogle O'Neill, his sons Charles, John James, William Campbell, Andrew Scott, and daughter Maria Gordon all made their way to New Zealand. Charles (hereafter referred to as O'Neill), John James and Maria Gordon made the additional step of emigrating from New Zealand to New South Wales.

³³ anon., *GFP*, 23 October 1852, 2.

³⁴ C. O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881, 1881," Sydney.

³⁵ anon., "Presentation to Charles O' Neill," *FJ*, 25 July 1891, 15.

³⁶ Utick, 8.

Early Identification with Irish Catholicism and Irish Causes

The O'Neill family's move to Dumbarton on the Clyde would have brought it in even closer contact with a tidal wave of human misery sweeping through Western Scotland from across the Irish Sea. The infestation of the potato blight, caused by the fungus *phytophthora infestans*, triggered a series of starvation crises: in 1845 and 1846, another in 1848, and more following a series of shortfalls in the potato crop until 1852.³⁷ The crofting parishes of the Scottish Highlands were also impacted by the blight which further fuelled a mass exodus of the desperate and starving to the industrial cities of Scotland such as Glasgow and Dundee.³⁸

By 1851, the proportion of Irish-born in Scotland had risen to over 207,000, or 7.2 per cent of the population in Scotland compared with 4.8 per cent in 1841.³⁹ Outbreaks of typhus, dysentery and later cholera followed in the wake of the concentration of starving Irish in the cities.⁴⁰ The misery was also compounded by an economic recession in Western Scotland between 1847 and 1848, although conditions improved after 1849.⁴¹

Western Scotland became an initial refuge for tens of thousands of paupers, prompting the *Glasgow Herald* to report on 22 March 1847 that: 'the enormous number of Irish vagrants poured in upon us by steamer that arrives in the Clyde, threatens to eat us up'.⁴² As there was also a five-year residence restriction on settlement claims, many destitute Irish immigrants were shipped back to Ireland to prevent them from becoming a charge.⁴³ Others would ultimately languish in the Scottish poorhouses.⁴⁴ The more enterprising Irish would, like the Scots, make their

³⁷ Devine, 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 21-22.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

⁴² Ibid., 25.

⁴³ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 449.

⁴⁴ Aspinwall, "Catholic Devotion in Victorian Scotland," 35. Aspinwall notes the report of 29 July 1855 by Rev Eugene Small that some 500 Catholics were resident to two Glasgow poorhouses.

way from the Clyde ports to the Americas or the British colonies including Australia and New Zealand.⁴⁵ For many, Scotland was merely a temporary stopping point before emigration to other places.⁴⁶ However, the bulk of the able-bodied would provide the unskilled labour of Western Scotland, particularly in industrial Glasgow, the 'Second City of Empire', working as dock labourers, coal heavers, railway labourers, farm labourers, and textile and chemical workers.⁴⁷

The human catastrophe of the Great Irish Famine had a dramatic impact on the small Catholic Church in Western Scotland, led mostly by clergy from the Highlands and particularly from the Enzie region in Banffshire. Bishop John Murdoch, who had been consecrated bishop in 1833 was, like his predecessor Andrew Scott, a native of that region.⁴⁸ During the late 1840s, Murdoch voiced the apocalyptic despair of the time of the famine period, commenting in April 1847 that 'The starving Irish are flocking into Glasgow, by every boat and are literally ruining us. This is going to be a terrible year in the West'.⁴⁹ That year he suffered the loss of four of his priests to typhus while ministering to the sick poor.⁵⁰ In 1848, perhaps with a nervous eye to Protestant antipathy, he voiced the strongest opposition to agitation by Irish nationalists.⁵¹

However, the impact of such a large influx of destitute Catholic Irish would transform the Catholic Church in Scotland, then still nervous about the reaction from a hostile Protestant community a mere seventeen years after the passage of the *Catholic Emancipation Act*. Across the whole of Scotland, the Church would grow from 83 priests, 52 chapels, a convent serving 150,000 nominal faithful in 1838, to 131 priests, about 100 chapels, four convents, and numerous Sunday and day schools serving some 200,000 faithful in 1855.⁵²

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Collins, 12.

⁴⁷ Gallagher, 21.

⁴⁸ Walsh, 571-572.

⁴⁹ Devine, 21; Bishop Murdoch, "Correspondence to Donald Carmichael, 4 January 1847, 1847," Edinburgh.

⁵⁰ Devine, 23.

⁵¹ Bishop Murdoch, "Correspondence to Rev. Dr Kyle, 21 April and 20 August 1848, 1848," Edinburgh.

⁵² Aspinwall, "Catholic Devotion in Victorian Scotland," 35.

However until 1868 (four years after the departure of O'Neill to New Zealand), the Catholic Church in Western Scotland was also marked by internal turmoil. The new immigrants sought to express an Irish Catholic identity within an institution that was itself seeking to create a new Scottish Catholic identity within Britain.⁵³ The more demonstrative expression of Catholic faith of the newcomers clashed with the reserved nature of the Highland clergy. More broadly, with the combined impact of the industrial revolution and demographic changes, the old Scottish identity was itself under challenge.⁵⁴

Fortunately for the Scottish Catholic Church, an elite core of new converts from Oxford Movement and from wealthy families began to bestow their patronage. Some, like John Patrick Crichton-Stuart (3rd Marquess of Bute) and the Duchess of Hamilton were from aristocratic lineage.⁵⁵ Others, like Robert Monteith and David Urquhart, came from a more liberal background and provided a new voice of Catholic social thought in Scotland.⁵⁶ The influence and support of this group eventually provided the stability that consolidated the Scottish Catholic Church in Western Scotland leading up to the appointment of Archbishop Charles Eyre. At the parish level, worship in the Scottish Catholic Church in time developed a strong ultramontane character.⁵⁷

The O'Neill family would have witnessed both the personal tragedies of the refugees from the Great Irish Famine, and some of the religious and racial discord which followed during the early 1850s. The Loyal Orange Lodge in Scotland was galvanised by an influx of loyalist Protestant Irish who could point to the increasing Catholic presence in what had been a bulwark of the Reformation. The Protestant Reformation Society commenced a major anti-Popery program in Edinburgh in December 1850, eventually campaigning throughout Scotland.⁵⁸ Anti-Catholic riots

⁵³ Mitchell, 1-2.

⁵⁴ Gallagher, 20.

⁵⁵ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 44-45.

⁵⁶ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 448.

⁵⁷ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 54.

⁵⁸ Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 94.

spread to towns along the Clyde, most notably through the rabble-rousing activities of the 'Angel Gabriel' John Sayers Orr commencing in Greenock and Gourock in July 1851.⁵⁹ Such disturbances continued until January 1853, until the Government suspended the local magistrates. Orr returned to Greenock in February 1855 where his arrest for breach of the peace ignited further anti-Catholic rioting.⁶⁰ Public lectures, including one in Glasgow City Hall by the Italian anti-papal campaigner and ex-monk Alessandro Gavazzi, further added to an atmosphere of religious hysteria.⁶¹ By contrast the Protestant Irish were welcomed and accepted.

Such disturbances served mostly to reinforce a sense of Irish Catholic identity among those against whom they were aimed.⁶² The consensus among historians of the Catholic Irish in Glasgow and Western Scotland has been that the religious intolerance, sectarian hate and petty bigotry merely seemed to confirm them as a separate and isolated community, often in ghettos.⁶³ They remained unassimilated, maintaining their identity particularly through the Catholic Church and later in football clubs and social associations. Catholicism and Irishness reinforced one another, and assimilation into mainstream Scottish society would take several generations. However as the Scottish Catholic Church strengthened, it also adopted many of the experiential characteristics of Scottish Protestantism, notably thrift, encouragement of hard work, advancement by individual endeavour and sobriety.⁶⁴ In response to petty bigotry, the Scottish Catholic Church supported a drive for respectability and success among its members within Scottish society. This was probably influenced by being part of a society influenced greatly by the values of Presbyterianism and the other Protestant

⁵⁹ Ibid., 95.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁶¹ Ibid., 97.

⁶² Mitchell, 1.

⁶³ Aspinwall, "Popery in Scotland: Image and Reality, 1820-1920," 243; Michael Fry, *Patronage and Principle: A Political History of Modern Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1991), 106; Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow, the Uneasy Peace: Religious Tension in Modern Scotland, 1819-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 32; C. Harvie and G. Walker, "Community and Culture," in *People and Society in Scotland Volume 2, 1830-1914*, ed. W. Hamish Fraser and R. J. Morris (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), 342.

⁶⁴ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 50.

churches as much as any innate Scottish culture.⁶⁵ These characteristics would over time engrain themselves in O'Neill's character as well.

Soon the sheer size of the Irish-born population, accounting for over eighteen per cent of Glasgow's citizens by 1851, provided opportunities for wealth and social mobility for many individuals.⁶⁶ In time, popular associations provided an outlet for political and social activity, including trade unionism, the O'Connell Catholic Emancipation and Repeal campaigns, Ribbonism, Chartism and temperance.⁶⁷ There is no evidence of the young O'Neill actively engaging in political activity in Glasgow.

A revealing window into his views and activities remains in a series of items reported in the *Glasgow Free Press* between 1852 and 1863.⁶⁸ Over the course of that decade, such reports would increasingly focus first on O'Neill's architectural achievements and later his charitable activities for Glasgow's destitute. Practically all the reports about O'Neill in the paper were glowing, giving the reader the impression of a rising, talented Irish Catholic.

The *Glasgow Free Press* not only countered the propaganda from the anti-popery campaigns, but actively supported Irish Catholic identity. However, it was not long before it directed its attention to the internal affairs within the Catholic Church in Western Scotland. The newspaper became an embarrassment to Bishop Murdoch by giving space to allegations that the hierarchy was directing all business and important offices into the hands of native-born Scottish clergy or 'Hielan' clique'.⁶⁹ The newspaper had a stormy seventeen year history, until

⁶⁵ Ibid.: 46.

⁶⁶ Charles Withers, "The Demographic History of the City, 1831-1911," in *Glasgow: Volume 2*, ed. W. H. Fraser and I. Maver (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 149.

⁶⁷ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 449; McBride: 2.

⁶⁸ Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 48-49. James Donnelly was the first proprietor of the *Glasgow Free Press* and a Mr Hamill served as its first editor.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 62. The slogan 'Paddy pays and Sandy owns and that's the way the money goes' became a common catchphrase within its columns, possibly coined by Augustus Henry Keane, a sub-editor and later editor.

February 1868 when it was denounced by Catholic hierarchy and quickly killed off after the subsequent pressure.⁷⁰

O'Neill's father became a strong supporter of *Glasgow Free Press*, at least until July 1855, when he attended a dinner in honour of its owner James Donnelly at the Star Hotel in Glasgow.⁷¹ Whether the O'Neill family supported the criticisms of the Scots-born Catholic hierarchy made by the newspaper is unknown. Given O'Neill's own friendship with the Scottish priest, the Reverend William Gordon of Greenock, this seems unlikely. However, the family was sympathetic to the position of one Reverend T. Cody who was moved from Dumbarton parish in July 1852. Cody along with a number of Irish priests was, according to the *Glasgow Free Press*, given unfavourable treatment by the hierarchy by being moved from his parish.⁷²

A farewell function at the Elephant Inn for Cody provided an opportunity for O'Neill to identify with Irish causes. In one of his earliest recorded public addresses, he made a romantic comparison between Irish members of the British Parliament who were fighting for Home Rule and the Irish Brigade, a military unit that had fought for France during most of the eighteenth century:

The Irish Brigade. The title itself placed the band in a great and glorious position – it recalled to their memories the valour, and the deeds and the achievements won by the resolute few who fled to a foreign country for that safety which relentless Saxon persecution denied them at home. They fled with hearts all glowing with the pride, honour and daring of independent Irishmen. Their prodigies of valour astounded Europe. This was the picture that the 'Parliamentary Brigade' were copying, although their warfare was of a different character.⁷³

⁷⁰ Ibid., 85-87.

⁷¹ anon., *GFP*, 16 July 1855.

⁷² Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 62.

⁷³ anon. *GFP*, 3 July 1852, 1.

Perhaps because of his religious background and a desire for professional advancement, O'Neill demonstrated no support for the secular nationalist movement of Fenianism which appeared in 1858.

Catholic temperance, a mainly middle class movement for promoting sobriety among the Irish community, became another cause popular with O'Neill.⁷⁴ A Glasgow Catholic Abstinence Association appeared as early as 1839, promoted by the merchant Charles Bryson.⁷⁵ O'Neill's own support for temperance may have been initiated by Irish Catholic temperance campaigner, the Reverend Theobald Mathew during the latter's visit to Glasgow in 1842.

O'Neill and his older brother John James made clear their support of Irish community associations and causes at St Patrick's Day dinners, soirees and gatherings in hotels and trades halls. For example, at a St Patrick's Day dinner held in the Tontine Hotel Glasgow in March 1853, John James O'Neill proclaimed his concern about the general state of education, and particularly as it applied to the destitute Irish children of the city:

Scotland, which had formerly stood first on the educational scale, was now completely distanced by every country on the continent. This was a humiliating fact, already acknowledged by those partly to blame for that state of things, and who in a neighbouring city, had refused all co-operation for educational purposes unless they could subsidise the general effort to the promotion of their own theological views.⁷⁶

The comments by O'Neill's older brother also reflected the fear in the Irish Catholic community in Glasgow that their children would be subject to proselytising by the Protestant establishment. In September that year, O'Neill made his own concerns known about this issue at a public Catholic meeting of the

⁷⁴ Utick, 190.

⁷⁵ McBride: 3.

⁷⁶ anon., *GFP*, 19 March, 26 March 1853, 2. This is (to date) the only known reported public address by John James O'Neill.

Brotherhood of St Vincent de Paul (as the St Vincent de Paul Society was then known) at the Glasgow Trades Hall:

The Catholics of Glasgow must be aware that there is going on in this city a constant system of attempted proselytism – every effort is made to rob the poor of their faith, and to pervert the guileless innocence of unsuspecting youth.⁷⁷

This concern may have been the motivation for the young O'Neill's active engagement in the architectural design of churches and schools in Glasgow and surrounding districts throughout the 1850s. By this time, education had become a major concern for the Catholic Church in Scotland; it was not only a matter of warding off attempts to convert youth to Protestantism or radical movements such as Chartism. Providing basic literacy in the Catholic community, training a new middle class for professions and leadership, and providing moral training in the midst of the appalling conditions of the Glasgow slums had all become urgent priorities.⁷⁸

More broadly, the plight of the poor in the wake of the Great Irish Famine may well have been the motivation for O'Neill's increasing commitment to the St Vincent de Paul Society. At a meeting in August 1857 of the 'Friends of the Irish Poor' at the Bells Temperance Hotel, he publically praised the work of a certain Captain McBride of Belfast who had made great efforts to alleviate conditions of the poor in that city.⁷⁹ In March 1858, he and his brother John James were appointed to a committee to raise subscriptions for the relief of the poor of Donegal in Ireland.⁸⁰

In addition to charitable endeavours, church architecture would become another expression of O'Neill's commitment as a Catholic layman, although his

⁷⁷anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow," *GFP*, 24 September 1853, 2.

⁷⁸Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 46.

⁷⁹anon., *GFP*, 22 August 1857, 2.

⁸⁰anon., *GFP*, 13 March 1858, 2.

contribution to this latter was substantially greater in Glasgow than in the Australasian colonies.

Church Architect

The large influx of Irish Catholic immigrants into the west of Scotland overwhelmed the reserved Scottish Catholic hierarchy and their inadequate ecclesiastical structure, and placed considerable demand on the Scottish Catholic community to build new institutional structures. The most pressing of these were buildings, including churches, schools, orphanages, seminaries and religious houses.⁸¹

The small collections for poor parishioners were insufficient for such constructions, although there was some support from sympathetic Protestant businessmen. However, the new wealthy converts to Catholicism were extremely generous.⁸² Religious art and architecture would play an important role in supporting the new ultramontane vision of the Scottish Catholic Church, with embellishments of church buildings conveying the images of a European Catholic faith. The impact of these also provided poor Irish congregations with a uplifting spiritual vision in contrast to the harsh reality of the Glasgow slums.

By the late 1840s, the construction of churches proceeded rapidly across Glasgow. Aspinwall, in his extensive examination of the development of this community, has identified O'Neill as an example of a new professional class of Catholic architect who gained expertise as a result of this building program.⁸³ O'Neill's architectural work began after gaining the position of Assistant Superintendent of Streets, Roads, Buildings and Sewerage in Glasgow.⁸⁴ He would have received permission to undertake this private work for the Roman

⁸¹ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 44-45.

⁸² Ibid.: 47. One benefactor, Robert Montieth, probably brought ten tons of religious statues into Lanarkshire.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ I.C.E., "Circular Submitted Prior to Election of Members, 1880," 5, London; Utick, 14-15.

Catholic community.⁸⁵ The architectural designs for St Mary Immaculate Pollokshaws (1849), St Paul's Shettleston (1850) and St Mary's Maryhill (1851) are likely to have been O'Neill's work, although further archival evidence is needed for confirmation.⁸⁶ Confirmed O'Neill designs include the refurbished St Alphonsus' Glasgow (1846) - formerly a Church of Scotland building, the East Wing of St Aloysius' Chapel, Springburn (1855-56), St Peter's Partick (now St Simon's, 1858) and St Paul's Eastmuir (1858-1859).⁸⁷

After the dedication of East Wing of St Aloysius' Chapel on 22 June 1856, the *Glasgow Free Press* report generously praised O'Neill's professional work, in this particular case a Gothic design: 'Among the many splendid edifices designed by the able architect, Charles O'Neill, Esq, C.E., this new church especially reflects the highest lustre upon his professional ability.'⁸⁸ By this time, O'Neill's work was being noticed by the wider community; the same report observed that some 'very respectable Protestants' were in attendance at the dedication ceremony.⁸⁹

O'Neill used the Gothic style freely (perhaps following the style's revival in medieval design led by the Victorian Catholic architect Edward Pugin) and extended it to schools. His design for St Patrick's Schools Dumbarton (1854) proved popular among the Irish Catholic community:

everyone admires it – the massive and beautiful doorway is striking – the windows are divided by mullions and glazed with diamond shaped glass. Over the windows are labels resting, some upon well-carved heads, others on a variety of Gothic bosses.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ D.S.A. Architect Biography Report: Charles Gordon O' Neill, ed. Dictionary of Scottish Architects, in the Dictionary of Scottish Architects, <http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/index.php> [accessed 16 May 2010].

⁸⁶ Ibid.ed. See also E-mail correspondence from Paul McCormick of Jordanhill Glasgow, based on the research of the late Father Patrick Tierney, former archivist of the Archdiocese of Glasgow, 15 September 2002, SVDPA Folder No 65.

⁸⁷ Ibid.; Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 46-47, 55.

⁸⁸ anon., *GFP*, 28 June 1856, 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

A two-storied primary school for St Andrew's Parish in Greendyke Street Glasgow, constructed between 1854 and 1855, featured two decorated gables each one topped with a Celtic Cross at the apex. The building incorporated a Tudor style window on one gable with sculptured ornamentations including a globe, books and a ship (symbolising the world, learning and commerce respectively), with a shield marked by a bold Latin inscription *Religioni et Bonis Artibus* ('For Religion and the Liberal Arts').⁹¹ O'Neill's work on this school also received praise; in January 1856, a local Irish priest the Reverend Francis Danahar proclaimed it as 'an ornament to the city of Glasgow'.⁹²

Following the opening of St Peter's Church Partick in May 1858, the *Glasgow Free Press* made an extraordinary claim about O'Neill's architectural talents:

Both internally and externally the building bespeaks admiration, and reflects infinite credit on its accomplished architect, Mr Charles O'Neill, to whose genius, and taste, we owe so many beautiful Catholic structures, and whose architectural talents have won him the same place among the Catholics of Scotland as that of J.J. McCarthy in Ireland and Edward Pugin in England.⁹³

How far the *Glasgow Free Press* was exaggerating the extent of O'Neill's talents in the cause of cultural promotion is uncertain.⁹⁴

Another accolade came in February 1860, when O'Neill received the cheers of the crowd celebrating the opening of St John's New Schools buildings in Warwick Place, these constructed in the Byzantine style. His recorded address confirms a penchant for ornamentation which, although popular, was seen by some to be excessive:

⁹¹ See Utick, 16. More detailed information on this imaginative design may also be found in Wordsall.

⁹² anon., "Report on the General Meeting in the Trades Hall Last Saturday," *GFP*, 5 January 1856, 2.

⁹³ anon., *GFP*, 8 May 1858, 2.

⁹⁴ As most of O'Neill's church and school architectural work has disappeared over the course of time, critical comparison is no longer possible.

he expressed his gratitude for the kindness shown him, and in his remarks said that some were inclined to think that he had perhaps made the buildings too ornamental or too fine, but he assured them that it had been his endeavour all along to raise a building worthy of the congregation.⁹⁵

Detailed ornamentation would later appear on some of his engineering creations as well.⁹⁶

One earlier key address, delivered in June 1856 by O'Neill at a social evening celebrating the opening of St Andrew's New Schools, revealed that he had a deep appreciation of the importance of architecture and the arts to religion:

The Fine Arts have always presented to us innumerable subjects connected with religion, calculated in the nicest manner to raise our minds from earthly to spiritual things. At one time we are filled with the thoughts of the most sublime at the contemplation of the Transfiguration, at another we are struck with fear at the awful appearance and tremendous fall of the Rebel Angel; again a wonderful emotion seizes our minds, while we gaze between hope and fear when the Day of Judgment is shown to us – we see on one side the sublime and tranquil beauty of the blessed while on the other we see the horror and despair, and agony of the wicked.⁹⁷

O'Neill also intimated that the revival of such religious art (eschewed in Scotland since the Reformation) would play an important role in any Catholic revival in nineteenth century Scotland. The sentiments he expressed also reflected a romantic view of a glorious past when compared with the squalor of the industrial revolution.

⁹⁵ anon., *GFP*, 2 and 9 June 1860, 2. The precise nature of these objections about the degree of ornamentation is unknown; they may derive from a Scottish reserve reinforced by the centuries of reaction against such religious art following the Reformation. There is no evidence that such criticisms were directed at spending money that could otherwise be used for charitable purposes; O'Neill himself understood that these artistic works would provide spiritual consolation for the Irish poor of Glasgow.

⁹⁶ For example, the mottled kauri tramway carriage completed in 1870 to carry the Governor of New Zealand and his wife (see Chapter Four)

⁹⁷ anon., "Progress of Catholic Education in Glasgow, Splendid Soiree in St Andrew's New Schools."

An example of O'Neill's penchant for poetry can be found in his address given at St Andrew's New Schools in 1856. The address contained an extract from William Wordsworth's *Devotional Incitements* penned in 1832, as follows:

England, Ireland and Scotland were at one time studded with glorious examples of Catholic architecture; but a blight came over the land, and
'Priest from their altars thrust,
Temples are levelled in the dust,
And solemn rises and awful form,
Founder amid fanatic storm.'⁹⁸

This kind of sentiment strongly indicated the influence of James Walsh, who was then one of Glasgow's leading Catholic figures. Walsh served at this time as President of the Provincial Council of St Vincent de Paul Society in the Western Districts of Scotland, under whom O'Neill served as Secretary.⁹⁹ A Catholic bookseller, Walsh founded Glasgow's Catholic Temperance Society, Christian Doctrine Society, St John's Catholic Library and served as Director of the Orphan Institute.¹⁰⁰ The idea that pre-Reformation Scotland exhibited a superior civilisation to the Scotland of the nineteenth century featured in Walsh's own tract, *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, published later in 1874.¹⁰¹

O'Neill, in the above 1856 address, referred to the ruins of a Catholic past in Britain:

But the ruins stand still, in noble defiance of decay, showing forth their Catholicity in language most telling – still bearing the object marks of six hundred years; and perhaps as on the sculptures of Phidias and Praxiteles in the Parthenon, travellers may with wonder and delight gaze upon the ruined abbeys and cathedrals of this country.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Utick, 20-21.

¹⁰⁰ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 47.

¹⁰¹ Walsh.

¹⁰² anon., "Progress of Catholic Education in Glasgow, Splendid Soiree in St Andrew's New Schools."

The imagery in this paragraph reflects another sentiment on the longevity of the Roman Catholic Church, perhaps sourced from the writings of Victorian liberal historian and essayist Thomas Macaulay.¹⁰³ It was a popular theme of Victorian Catholic revivalism. Notwithstanding his devout Catholicism, O'Neill left behind this rhetoric of triumphalism after his departure from Scotland. Within a decade, O'Neill's public addresses would focus much less on the imagery of classical Greece and Rome and more on the wonders of technological and industrial progress.

Commitment to Catholic Charity through the St Vincent de Paul Society

O'Neill's early commitment to the poor through the St Vincent de Paul Society would have been reinforced by the spectacle of the Glasgow slums, where so many of the destitute, Scots as well as Irish, would find themselves. Thousands were now crammed into a city with a population density of 5000 per acre, sometimes living twenty to a room in some of the worst slums in Europe.¹⁰⁴ A report by Special Commissioners from Britain's *Daily Mail*, made during the 1860s, revealed the reality of life in tenements of Glasgow's District 14, located in the Bridgegate area:

The floor is covered with men, women and children huddled up promiscuously in corners of the room on tressed beds or no beds at all or closet beds with doors which, if you enter, were carefully shut to exclude even a suspicion of fresh air, if such a thing were possible here. Rags, scraps of clothing and old clothing, grey with dirt and crawling with vermin, are wound in frowsy coils around the limbs of little children and grown-up men and women.¹⁰⁵

In these conditions, struggling workers, Protestant and Catholic, eked out a fierce struggle for existence where their only social outlet to be found was in the saloon

¹⁰³ Macaulay, in a famous review of Leopold von Ranke's *History of the Popes*, pointed to the longevity of the Roman Catholic Church 'back to the times when the smoke of sacrifice rose from the Pantheon'.

¹⁰⁴ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 449.

¹⁰⁵ This *Daily Mail* report is cited in Burrowes, 91.

bar or on the street. These conditions lay in stark contrast to the growing commercial prosperity of industrial Glasgow.

O'Neill's personal encounters with the destitute of Glasgow in the course of his voluntary charitable work may have been a factor in reinforcing what would become a lifelong commitment to alleviating poverty. In September 1853, James Walsh publicly recounted examples of such encounters, which the young O'Neill would have been only too familiar with as he accompanied other members (or Brothers) of the St Vincent de Paul Society to witness experiences such this:

they find in a miserable cellar, destitute of furniture, bedding or food, a widow and her two daughters – her husband had been dead eight years. This poor woman had almost no means of support... Here is a poor girl dying of consumption, pining away without suitable nourishment from day to day, week to week, and from month to month, when her mother goes out to wash, her only companion is her little sister, there sitting on a block of wood in a miserable hovel, without a drink, except water to wet her parched lips.¹⁰⁶

The poor of Glasgow resided under a strict regime of public relief, as prescribed by an Act for *The Amendment and Better Administration of the Laws Relating to the Relief of the Poor in Scotland*, which had come into effect in 1845.¹⁰⁷ This law organised relief along lines of Scotland's 880 parishes, and gradually shifted assistance away from voluntary fund raising toward an assessment system. In contrast to the workhouses of England and Wales, the operation of the Scottish poorhouses was voluntary, and poor relief could be given in the form of cash or in-kind. The able-bodied received no support.¹⁰⁸ This regime sought to inculcate the 'right' ethos while containing potential challenges to the social order through an alliance of evangelical religion and political economy.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Peter G. Higginbotham, "The Workhouse in Scotland" <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/scotland.html> (accessed 17 May 2010).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. (accessed).

¹⁰⁹ B. Aspinwall, "Catholic Realities and Pastoral Strategies: Another Look at the Historiography of Scottish Catholicism, 1878-1920," *The Innes Review* 59, no. 1 (2008): 79.

According to the Scottish Protestant minister, the Reverend Thomas Chalmers, such systems had the advantage of preventing irresponsible benevolence.¹¹⁰ Chalmers was among those early nineteenth century evangelicals who, while they inveighed against official relief, believed fervently in the obligation of the rich to give to the poor privately. Such evangelicals also insisted that each act of charity, besides discriminating between deserving and undeserving recipients (which the Poor Law regime might not do properly), should be (in Chalmer's own words) heartfelt, 'spontaneous and individual' on the part of the giver, and be a 'free-will' offering.¹¹¹ Chalmer's suspicions about state systems of relief derived from his belief that such systems transformed the tenderness and delicacy of philanthropy into a matter of complex legal rights between rich and poor.¹¹²

However, not all Scottish evangelicals supported the philosophy promoted by Chalmers. Samuel Brewster, for example, advocated 'moral force' Chartism and compulsory poor relief in his tract *The Seven Chartist and Military Discourses*, published in Paisley in 1853.¹¹³ Brewster was convinced that natural calamities were caused by inequality of wealth and by corporate rather than individual sin.

There is no evidence that O'Neill himself was influenced by these evangelical approaches to charity or debates despite his Scottish background. Nevertheless, Catholic charitable initiatives, such as those promoted by St Vincent de Paul Society and enthusiastically adopted by O'Neill, would always operate under the shadow of Protestant ethos in charitable works within the British Empire, although the Australian colonies eschewed the adoption of any Poor Law.

Within Glasgow, Poor Law administration was focused on four poorhouses, the Glasgow City parish poorhouse in Parliamentary Road, one at Barnhill within the

¹¹⁰ Chalmers is cited in B. Wilson, *The Making of Victorian Values: Decency and Dissent in Britain 1789-1837* (London: Penguin Press HC, 2007). Chalmers was a well-known innovator in providing voluntary relief at St John's Glasgow during the 1820s.

¹¹¹ B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement, The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 100-101

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

Barony, and two others in Govan and Gorbals respectively.¹¹⁴ St Andrew's Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society, of which O'Neill was a member and later President, undertook its work in the same district as the Parliamentary Road poorhouse. This grim institution housed 1500 inmates under conditions akin to an open prison.¹¹⁵

By tradition, much of responsibility for care of the poor had been the responsibility of the established Church of Scotland. However, in 1843, this Church was financially crippled in the split known as 'The Great Disruption' when over 400 ministers left it in protest to form the Free Church of Scotland, over the principle of spiritual independence of the Church.¹¹⁶ Yet in Glasgow as across much of Western Europe, a number of Christian social reformers, Protestant and Catholic, had been challenged to action by the appalling social conditions of the industrial revolution. With respect to Glasgow, in addition to work of Chalmers, in 1826 the evangelical minister David Naismith began his City Mission movement aimed at alleviating the suffering of the urban poor, later spreading across Britain, and overseas to the United States, Canada and Australia.¹¹⁷ Such missionary outreaches against poverty were founded in the belief that the poor could rise above the misery of their lives if they accepted the truth of Jesus Christ, acknowledged as personal saviour. Over time, such evangelicals learned the futility of preaching to the poor without first providing some basic relief.

Some church groups and individuals established soup kitchens or 'souper establishments' as they also became known. Many of these practiced an intrusive proselytism, by pressing conversion on the destitute in return for a meagre soup portion. Others had more noble methods. For example, a Glasgow journalist Peter Mackenzie launched a campaign for Sunday soup kitchens during the 1860s, having been inspired by the actions of a police sergeant John Walker in trying

¹¹⁴ Aspinwall, "Catholic Realities and Pastoral Strategies: Another Look at the Historiography of Scottish Catholicism, 1878-1920," 80.

¹¹⁵ Higginbotham, (accessed).

¹¹⁶ Burrowes, 106-107.

¹¹⁷ Owen, 16.

unsuccessfully to save the life of an Irish mother and her child dying of starvation. Mackenzie succeeded in establishing the Clyde Street Soup Kitchen, an institution serving both Irish and Scottish poor and which thrived in the face of taunts by those who complained that such work ‘desecrated the Sabbath’. ¹¹⁸

More broadly however, the charitable enterprises established by the Scottish middle class failed significantly to address real social problems and only reinforced class and ethnic differences. ¹¹⁹ Walsh, speaking in his capacity as President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Western Districts of Scotland, was a stringent critic. According to Walsh, Glasgow had ‘meetings for every purpose - to oppose Popery – to preserve the Sabbath – to give testimonials’, yet little substantial progress had been made in the actual education and relief of the destitute. ¹²⁰

While Protestants and Catholics differed in terms of approaches to charitable practice towards the deserving poor (and there were variations within each), both shared a common tradition in accepting the Gospel commandments to practice charity, including practices such as almsgiving. ¹²¹ Charity and justice for humankind were central to the sacred scriptures of Judaism and Christianity, including the teaching of the prophets and the Wisdom tradition writings such as Proverbs. ¹²² For Christians, these culminated in the New Testament teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly through the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20-26 and Matthew 5:1-12), the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), and the commandment of love expressed in the Gospel of John (John 13:34-35). ¹²³ While charity should not be condescending, neither could it be

¹¹⁸ Burrowes, 99-100.

¹¹⁹ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 447.

¹²⁰ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

¹²¹ Brian Pullan, "Catholics, Protestants and the Poor in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXXV, no. 3 (2005): 456.

¹²² The themes of struggle against oppression, both political and economic, can be found in such early books as Exodus, and particularly in the later (Post-Exile) prophets such as *Hosea* and *Amos*. See A. R. Ceresko, *Introduction to the New Testament: A Liberation Perspective* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001).

¹²³ Scriptural references drawn from Catholic Bible Press, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1993 edition).

confused with indulgence (such as supporting idle beggars) or sentimentality.¹²⁴ Protestant criticism of Catholic poor relief was precisely that it could be sentimental or based on a self-regarding spirituality and, at worst, foster a class of professional beggars.¹²⁵ By contrast, Catholic practice in almsgiving was prepared to tolerate a lesser evil for the sake of the greater good.¹²⁶

For Catholics in particular, a virtue derived from charity, namely mercy, was profoundly important. Mercy was also drawn from the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:7).¹²⁷ This was because acts of mercy were believed to provide reparation for sin after death. An account of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46) and the parable which reveals the eternal punishment of the rich individual for ignoring the beggar at the gate (Luke 16: 19-31) provided warnings to the devout not to neglect the poor. To do so was to neglect God.¹²⁸ Six acts of mercy figured in the Last Judgment story: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing drink to the thirsty, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, and providing hospitality to strangers. St Thomas Aquinas had added a seventh to the list of traditional corporal acts of mercy, that of burial of the dead.¹²⁹ By contrast Protestants, in emphasising salvation through faith rather than works, tended not to believe that an act of mercy might store up merit beyond the grave, although a faith without works was deemed to be a dead faith.¹³⁰

O'Neill believed strongly in the virtue of mercy. In September 1853, while promoting the cause of the St Vincent de Paul Society at the Glasgow Trades Hall, he publically stated:

The smallest donation for the poor will be thankfully received, and distributed among the most deserving and the most destitute. However

¹²⁴ Pullan: 443.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 447. See also Lee Palmer Wandell, *Always among Us: Images of the Poor in Zwingli's Zurich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 60-62.

¹²⁶ Pullan: 456.

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 443.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.: 443-444.

¹³⁰ Ibid.: 447, 456.

trifling it may be, it will assist in relieving their pressing wants – it may change a house of sorrow and long suffering into an abode of cheerfulness, industry, and peace; and it cannot fail to obtain for the giver a reward from Him, who, while on earth, pronounced those sublime and beautiful words: ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.’¹³¹

To impress the Glasgow audience, O’Neill here was careful to also emphasise the ‘most deserving’ as recipients; for him, all the poor of the Glasgow slums clearly qualified as the poor of Christ.

Among the Catholic religious communities and traditions that had identified very strongly with the poor were the Franciscans and the Vincentians (the latter including the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity). As revealed by cuttings pasted years later by O’Neill in his *COManual*, the spirituality of the respective founders St Francis of Assisi and St Vincent de Paul would provide religious solace to him particularly in his later years.¹³² O’Neill expressed a specific devotion to St Francis of Assisi much later in life. By contrast, he was most likely introduced in his early twenties to the ideals of St Vincent de Paul through his membership of the St Vincent de Paul Society.¹³³

This Society (then comprising only of lay Catholic men) had been formed in May 1833 by M. J. Emmanuel Bailly, a retired philosophy teacher, a brilliant young law student Frédéric Ozanam, and five others who visited the poor of Paris in their hovels and garrets, providing food, wood, clothing and words of spiritual encouragement.¹³⁴ Their Conference of Charity adopted the name of St Vincent de Paul, through the influence and guidance of a Daughter of Charity, Sister Rosalie Rendu who herself later won renown for her work on behalf of the poor of Paris.¹³⁵ Society members, organised within parish-based conferences, would

¹³¹ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

¹³² Utick, 230-234.

¹³³ The Congregation of the Mission (Vincentian priests) did not arrive in Glasgow until 1859. See Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 49.

¹³⁴ A. Fagan, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Frederic Ozanam* (Sydney: St Paul's Publications, 1991), 69-72.

¹³⁵ In 1624, Vincent de Paul had founded an order of priests called the Congregation of the Mission as a missionary order particularly to the rural poor. Together with a widow, Louis de Marillac, he had founded the

visit the poor in their homes. This they would do in pairs, not merely for mutual support but to also reflect the example of Christ in sending out his seventy followers in pairs to towns he wished to visit (Luke 10:1).

The Vincentian spiritual approach, as with the Franciscan, tended to err in favour of sympathy with the poor without any emphasis on judgment of worthiness. For example, in the seventeenth century, Vincent de Paul had expressed belief in the incarnational presence of Christ in the poor:

I should not judge poor peasants, men and women, by their exterior nor by their apparent mental capabilities. All the more is this so since very frequently they scarcely seem to have the appearance of reasonable beings, so gross and offensive they are. But turn the medal and you will see by the light of faith that the Son of God, whose will it was to be poor, is represented to us by these people.¹³⁶

Vincent de Paul had urged his followers to serve the poor as their ‘masters’.¹³⁷ This spiritual approach could emphasise that providing relief to the poor *per se* was to honour Christ. In his 1853 address, the young O’Neill, drawing from the promise of Christ in Mark 9:41 and Matthew 10:42 through reference to the ‘cup of cold water’, stated his belief that the Society itself was an instrument through which God’s blessings might be sought:

As our Blessed Redeemer has declared that even a cup of cold water given in his name shall not go without a reward; may not members of this Society, then, confidently trust as they most assuredly pray, that the choicest of blessings of Heaven may be poured down on those Charitable

both the Ladies’ Association of Charity for laywomen and the Daughters of Charity themselves, the latter in 1633. The Daughters or Sisters of Charity were approved by Rome in 1668, well after Vincent de Paul’s death on 27 September 1660. The women’s lay movement, the Ladies Association of Charity, finally received Papal approval in 1695. See L. von Matt and L. Cognet, *St Vincent De Paul*, English Translation ed. (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 149-151, 165-167.

¹³⁶ This is translated from the *Documents of St Vincent de Paul*, Volume 11, 32. See Thomas McKenna, *Praying with Vincent De Paul*, Companions for the Journey (Winona, Minnesota: St Mary’s Press, 1994), 59.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

and generous-hearted Christians who contributed to the funds of the Society...and enabled them to relieve the wants of their fellow creatures.¹³⁸

As noted previously, O'Neill's membership of the Society began with membership of the Dumbarton Conference in 1851. During that year, the Society's most influential spiritual guide, the brilliant lawyer and intellectual Dr Frédéric Ozanam gazed upon the new technological wonders in London's Crystal Palace Exhibition. The industrial progress that Ozanam viewed there with apprehension, would be in time become the same development passionately embraced by O'Neill.¹³⁹ O'Neill almost certainly never met Ozanam, who died in 1853, the same year that O'Neill made his Society promotional address at the Glasgow Trades Hall. In Paris alone, the Society had a membership of 2000 members visiting some 5000 families on a regular basis.¹⁴⁰ It spread across Europe as well as the British Isles, having gained approval by Pope Gregory XVI in 1845.¹⁴¹

By 1851, the Society had only been established for seven years in London and Dublin, five years in Edinburgh, and three years in Glasgow.¹⁴² Establishment in Glasgow was not merely an Irish phenomenon; O'Neill's friend, the Reverend William Gordon, provided active spiritual guidance to the first Glasgow Conference established by solicitor James Bryson. The Society had the consent of Bishop Murdoch and the active support of his successors. The first Glasgow members were solidly middle class, including three businessmen, a coal merchant, a commission agent, an ironmonger, a painter, an artisan, a shopkeeper, a former teacher and a religious repository keeper.¹⁴³

Facing the slums of Glasgow was a daunting task for Society volunteers. As supporter Colonel Gerard stated at the September 1853 gathering of the Society:

¹³⁸ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

¹³⁹ Utick, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Fagan, 141.

¹⁴¹ Utick, 24.

¹⁴² Ibid., 25.

¹⁴³ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 446.

No doubt there is much to discourage those engaged in the work in a city and neighbourhood like this, where such fearful corruption abounds; where vice is looked upon as a sort of necessary evil that must be sullenly submitted to; and where religious bigotry and rancour so universally prevail.¹⁴⁴

From Sectarianism to Leadership in Charity

The broad ideals of the Society were, as outlined by Walsh, 'a universal association of Christian charity, as it knows no difference of creed, of colour, or of country, in the distribution of charity.'¹⁴⁵ Yet the Society in Glasgow also emerged as a religious-political organisation, rather than solely a religious one, assisted by 'Intelligence Reports' from the Society in Dublin. One Protestant commentator, a Reverend Dr Duff of Edinburgh, at a great protest meeting in Glasgow in 1874, grudgingly gave the Society its due:

It has local, central and general councils; quarterly meetings, conferences, fetes, pilgrimages; it has passports and circular letters to its members. It adapts itself to all classes and conditions – addresses itself to the scholar, the soldier, the mechanic, the apprentice, the labourer – to the mother and the daughter, for all of whom it issues a suitable publication.¹⁴⁶

The Society in Scotland soon gained a record of defending Irish folk culture and accent.¹⁴⁷ It offered laypeople roles as spiritual guides and social organisers. It also served as a social safety net by providing assistance at critical points in life, including birth, sickness, education, finding work and death.¹⁴⁸ Against the

¹⁴⁴ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 445. Aspinwall cites Rev Dr Duff of Edinburgh from *Ultramontaniam: A Full Report of the Great Public Meeting in the interests of Civil and Religious Freedom, Glasgow*, 7 October 1874.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.: 447.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.: 448.

aggressive capitalism of the day, it offered a source of moral regeneration to the Irish immigrant by inculcating values of community support.¹⁴⁹

The strength of the Society's organisation also provided a vital bulwark preserving the Catholic body against the activities of the evangelical 'rabble-rousers', as evidenced by O'Neill's comments at the September 1853 meeting in Glasgow Trades Hall:

In one parish it was said that these men were successful in their proselytising efforts, and that they got some of the Catholic children to attend their schools. The clergyman in charge of the parish being resolved to lose no time in chasing these wolves from his flock, applied to the Brotherhood for assistance. The members of the conference established in the parish alluded to, took up the case with alacrity – they divided the parish into districts, and, in the course of one week, they visited every Catholic house.¹⁵⁰

Walsh went further at the same meeting by launching a public criticism of what he believed was the moral failure of Protestantism:

Selfishness is the great principle of Protestantism – make fortunes, become rich, outdo your neighbours by competition, become a millionaire and retire from business. The precepts of Him who was born in a stable, laid in a manger, associated with the poor, and who declared that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, are entirely lost sight of by Protestantism.¹⁵¹

Walsh's polemic, delivered with O'Neill beside him as Secretary, may have been well received by the predominantly poor, Irish Catholic audience. But that sentiment (driven by the injunction of Christ in Matthew 6:24 that one cannot serve God and wealth) may well expose a tension that would haunt O'Neill

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

throughout his later professional life. If the practice of making fortunes could be equated with Protestant selfishness, under what circumstances could Catholics (including the new affluent converts to Catholicism such as Monteith) ‘make a fortune’ and ‘become rich’ without displaying selfishness themselves? This ambiguous situation may have sown the seeds of guilt in O’Neill after he later gave his own ambition free reign. From the mid-1850s onwards, there was no further record of sectarian comment by O’Neill who, by then, was further advancing his professional career.

While sectarianism continued in Glasgow, some of the worse aspects of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic agitation abated by the beginning of the 1860s. Throughout Britain, liberal concerns about the reactionary tendencies of European Catholicism faded away in public debate. Victorian Britain had by then also conceded the rights of individual consciences in religious practice.¹⁵² Although Catholicism was treated with suspicion by many in the Victorian establishment, the *Emancipation Act* now enabled British Catholics to be fully accepted as British subjects within an Empire that included many faiths. By 1860, the Society in Glasgow was also building better relationships with the Protestant authorities, as Walsh himself indicated in one of his final reports, the authorities in question being an inspector and governor of a poorhouse:

At the annual picnic in August, for the younger part of the congregation and Sunday school, it has been the practice of the Brotherhood to invite not only the Catholic but the Protestant poorhouse children. This has been found to produce much good feeling, and the inspector and governor of the poorhouse were also invited, and entered into the spirit of the recreations and games.¹⁵³

In early December 1859, O’Neill replaced Walsh as President of the Provincial Council of the Society in the Western Districts of Scotland, following a

¹⁵² Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 447.

¹⁵³ Society of St Vincent de Paul Ireland, "Scotch Intelligence, April 1860," *Society of St Vincent de Paul (Irish) Bulletin* 1860, 264.

unanimous vote. John James O'Neill took on his younger brother's former role as Secretary. During 1859 and 1863, the two brothers most likely consolidated the bond (first formed in Dumbarton) of supporting each other in charitable work, and they shared accommodation at 40 Abbotsford Place, Glasgow.¹⁵⁴

The Society statistics reveal how successful O'Neill was in presiding over the organisation he inherited from Walsh and his predecessors. In 1858, the Society in the Western Districts of Scotland had 131 active members of fourteen Conferences.¹⁵⁵ By 1860, twelve years after its arrival in Glasgow, the Society had distributed over £6000 and had made 100,000 visits to the poor.¹⁵⁶ Between 1859 and 1861, Society income rose to over £1100 per annum, practically all of which was disbursed to the poor.¹⁵⁷ In 1861, membership had doubled to 268 active members and 136 honorary members, with eighteen Conferences providing relief for 21,710 individuals with 12,783 visits to the needy in their homes.¹⁵⁸

O'Neill's organisation was providing much more than the soup establishments. In 1862, for example, 188 poor children were kept in school, 166 unemployed were helped to gain work, 282 were assisted into self-employment, 352 sick and dying were assisted, 58 poor were sent to friends, 25 sent to an infirmary, six given free passages to friends in the colonies and five given a proper burial.¹⁵⁹ Reflecting the Society's concern for religious and general education, some 1186 books were lent by the Society's librarian.¹⁶⁰

Bishop Murdoch's coadjutor Bishop John Gray (a nephew of Bishop Scott) proved a strong supporter of the Society's charitable work.¹⁶¹ The support of the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid; Utick, 38.

¹⁵⁵ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 446.

¹⁵⁶ "Scotch Intelligence, April 1860" in *Society of St Vincent de Paul (Irish) Bulletin* (1860), p.267.

¹⁵⁷ anon., "Report of the Proceedings of the Society of St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland, During the Years 1861 and 1862," *GFP*, 28 March 1863, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. This report acknowledges the support of Bishop Gray.

clergy was vital as a source of income, particularly through the charity sermon. Sermons or lectures in support of the Society raised over £284 throughout parishes in 1862, approximately a quarter of the Society's total yearly income in Glasgow.¹⁶² Fund raising sermons by 'star' charity preachers became popular parish events, and were often the focus of Scottish and Irish ethnic rivalry.¹⁶³

O'Neill also learned much about encouraging charity entertainments. An annual concert held in the Glasgow City Hall raised £133 and £147 in 1861 and 1862 respectively.¹⁶⁴ He also presided over social evenings for Society members, honorary members and their families; one such, a '*Conversazione*', was held at the Bells Temperance Hotel in January 1863.¹⁶⁵

The activities of O'Neill and his immediate predecessors in Glasgow were pioneering ones in terms of scale and scope of faith-based outdoor relief. Such relief predated that provided by William and Catherine Booth through a Christian mission (the precursor to the Salvation Army) in London's East End that commenced with an evangelical meeting held on 2 July 1865.¹⁶⁶

In addition to voluntarily managing the organisation of charity, O'Neill was introduced to the practicalities and advantages of the Society operating as an international confederation. In the mid-nineteenth century, this was a relatively new development for charitable enterprises. In 1853, Walsh had referred to it as a 'confederation of benevolence', whereby the Head Council in Paris could be 'alive to any affliction that may happen in any city or country of the world.'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 451.

¹⁶⁴ anon., "Report of the Proceedings of the Society of St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland, During the Years 1861 and 1862.", "Report of the Proceedings of the Society of St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland, During the Years 1861 and 1862.'

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ William Booth, ed. Salvation Army International Heritage Centre, http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki_ihc.nsf/vw-sublinks/B90F3C9656858E038025704D004E293A?openDocument [accessed 24 May 2010]; Lowell Tarling, *Thank God for the Salvos* (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1980).

¹⁶⁷ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

Within Scotland, O'Neill's Provincial Council, like another in Edinburgh, had direct contact with the Society's Paris headquarters.

The most influential Society contact for O'Neill was Adolphe Baudon (1819-1888), who had become the Society's third President-General in 1847 and would fill this post until 1886.¹⁶⁸ Baudon wrote to O'Neill on 13 March 1860:

We have heard with satisfaction that the Presidency of the Provincial Council of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, for the Western District of Scotland, has devolved upon you, by the unanimous vote of the Conferences; and that the offer was not long vacant. An extra charge has thus been given you by our good Lord rather than an honour, and it is this spirit that ought to sway a true member of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. We have confidence in the unanimity of our Brothers who elected you, and which will be to you a powerful pillar of support.¹⁶⁹

O'Neill's respect for Baudon was forged during this brief period, as was an appreciation of how such a charitable confederation could operate and sustain its activities across national boundaries. O'Neill observed the predicament that Baudon and the Society faced under the administration of the French Emperor Napoleon III. This administration, through Minister of the Interior, Jean-Gilbert-Victor Fialin, Duc de Persigny (a sympathiser with freemasonry), had become suspicious that the Society might become a source of political opposition. In March 1863, O'Neill sent a letter to all conferences under his leadership, explaining the situation:

the French Government...would consent to the existence of the Society in France, if the members allowed themselves to be placed under an authority nominated by the Emperor. This, the Council-General refused to do – the

¹⁶⁸ C. Murphy, *The Spirit of the St Vincent De Paul Society* (Dublin: St Vincent de Paul Society of Ireland, 1944), 22.

¹⁶⁹ anon., "The Brotherhood of St Vincent De Paul: Meeting of the Catholics of Glasgow."

consequence of which was the total suppression of all the Councils of the Society in France.¹⁷⁰

Under the pretext that the Society was operating as a secret society, Fialin issued a circular of 16 October 1861 which aimed at government registration of all Society conferences in France, while suppressing its Council-General and Provincial Councils. The oppressive measure failed, as only 88 Society conferences in France approved the Government's proposal to nominate the Society's President-General, compared with 766 that rejected it.¹⁷¹ O'Neill was impressed with the dexterity with which Baudon handled the crisis:

The President-General of the Society, in such an emergency, turned his attention to the placing of the Society on the most firm basis that the circumstances would admit of. In the event, therefore, of any matter taking place to prevent his freedom of action, he delegated his powers to three Presidents of the Society – those of Brussels, Cologne and the Hague, whose jurisdiction was beyond the French boundaries. In the meantime, he still continues to govern the Society out of France, with the same authority and in the same manner as formerly.¹⁷²

O'Neill was convinced that the Society would prosper and could not be suppressed by treachery and oppression.¹⁷³ It was not long however before he would encounter serious problems within his own charitable bailiwick.

Tensions in Charitable Action

There was no question that O'Neill embraced a strong Catholic faith, the practice of which included passionate commitment to charitable action. While an Irish

¹⁷⁰ C. O'Neill, "Letter from the President of the St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland to the Presidents of Conferences," *GFP*, 28 March 1863, 13.

¹⁷¹ Murphy, *The Spirit of the St Vincent De Paul Society*, 23-25.

¹⁷² O'Neill, "Letter from the President of the St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland to the Presidents of Conferences."

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

identity may have served as nurturing such a faith, O'Neill's addresses on charity reflected a broader, indeed 'Catholic', understanding of charity and mercy. True, the Irish immigrant in Glasgow may have suffered desperate poverty, but O'Neill understood that poverty was a universal concern.

Importantly, O'Neill confined his charitable actions within the existing social order, something which the traditional Scottish hierarchy would have strongly approved. This was in contrast to many of Irish background in Glasgow, who sought more radical solutions to the Irish woes (such as the Fenian brotherhood, founded in Ireland on St Patrick's Day 1858).¹⁷⁴ However, despite the substantial growth of the Society in the Western Districts of Scotland, O'Neill encountered difficulties with leadership between 1862 and 1863. This period also corresponded with failure in his private business affairs, culminating in bankruptcy on 16 July 1863 (examined later in Chapter Six).¹⁷⁵ O'Neill's predicament may have been more than coincidence. There is some evidence that he recognised (perhaps too late) the price of overzealous commitment to charitable affairs. He revealed his frustration in a letter to the Conference Presidents under his leadership in a letter sent in November 1862:

From the position I held as President of the 'Provincial Council' of the District, and of the 'Central Council' of Glasgow; and also, as President of St Andrew's Conference, I often found one duty interfering with the other. I therefore intimated to the Vice-President and Secretary of St Andrew's Conference, in the early part of the present year, my intention of resigning my office as President of St Andrew's Conference, in order to give my attention to all the eighteen conferences alike. I was prevailed upon to delay this resolution, but I still intend to put it into execution; after which, I hope to have the pleasure of seeing oftener, the members of the other conferences of the District.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ A more radical approach of representing secular Irishness in Glasgow is noted by McBride. See McBride: 15.

¹⁷⁵ Utick, 45-47.

¹⁷⁶ O'Neill, "Letter from the President of the St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland to the Presidents of Conferences."

This unhappy period for O'Neill exposed two difficulties for his lay activism in Catholic charity.

The first derived from the idiosyncrasies of O'Neill's own independent character and forceful decision-making capacity that could generate opposition. O'Neill himself was quite atypical of most of the faithful comprising the Catholic Church in Scotland. The young professional, then building his career among his mainly Protestant peers, was not a reserved Banffshire cleric, a romantic aristocrat or antiquarian, or a destitute Irish battler in a Glasgow slum. O'Neill's position of leadership in a domain that had, by tradition, been the province of a priest, would most likely have been questioned by many Irish faithful during the early 1860s.

A commentary by a sympathetic *Glasgow Free Press* in July 1863 revealed something of O'Neill's predicament:

For many years this gentlemen has taken a leading part in the Catholic affairs of this city, and the universal esteem in which he has ever been held was proved by his appointment some time ago to the Presidency of the Saint Vincent de Paul in the Western Districts of Scotland. Under his zealous and prudent management this important body has gone on, prospered and, developing itself year by year, till there is now scarcely a congregation of any note in which a branch conference has not been established.¹⁷⁷

But the commentary also made this qualification:

In this capacity, however, he did not fail to make enemies, and to meet with opposition, at times carried to unseemly lengths, even where he had a right to look rather for approval and encouragement...this is the fate which, owing to the chaotic state of Catholic society here, seems inevitably to await all who may be induced by their social standing to put themselves prominently forward, and take an active part in our political and religious

¹⁷⁷ anon., "The Appointment of Mr Charles O' Neill," *GFP*, 18 July 1863, 9.

concerns. Their zeal and energy are attributed to covert ambitious designs or even to unworthy motives, while their subsequent indifference and disgust are set down to incapacity and neglect.¹⁷⁸

The *Glasgow Free Press*, by emphasising ‘the state of Catholic society’ in Glasgow (something which it had itself played a part in destabilising through its attacks on the Scottish hierarchy) not only highlighted the first problem, but threw some light on a second tension within O’Neill. This latter was the ambiguity surrounding O’Neill’s own sense of ‘Irishness’, particularly given the public image that the newspaper had conveyed about him and his family for over a decade as successful Irish Catholics. Ironically, the *Glasgow Free Press*’ own activities may have itself unwittingly triggered an incident which in the end, would cause acute embarrassment for O’Neill.

St Vincent de Paul Society members in Glasgow often complained about lack of support from priests who were themselves overworked.¹⁷⁹ However, at a broad level, the Society received enthusiastic support from the Scottish hierarchy, including from Bishop Gray, and had avoided being embroiled in the disputes between that hierarchy and the pro-Irish *Glasgow Free Press*.

That altered early in 1863 when the Society was dragged into the middle of a contentious argument over ecclesiastical authority. Ironically, in a gesture of loyalty to that authority, the *Glasgow Free Press* had organised a defence fund to pay the court expenses of the Reverend Patrick McLaughlin, a priest of Eastmuir, who had been committed to contempt of court for failing to reveal a confidence by an unrevealed parishioner who had committed an act of embezzlement. This priest was ultimately released on bail, fourteen days after sentence.¹⁸⁰

The dispute arose when the newspaper’s defence fund committee, after paying the priest’s expenses, allocated the surplus to charities including the sum of £5 to the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Aspinwall, "The Welfare State within the State: The St Vincent De Paul Society in Glasgow, 1848-1920," 450.

¹⁸⁰ Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 67.

St Andrew's Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society. This infuriated Gray, the Society's spiritual adviser. Gray wrote to the members of the St Andrew's Conference threatening that if they accepted a shilling, he would dissolve it, as he would consider them in league with those considered in opposition to ecclesiastical authority in the Western Districts of Scotland. Gray was concerned that the subscribers to the defence fund should have been consulted before the fund committee allocated the funds. Gray did not suggest how the funds should have been disbursed; his main concern was the bypassing of ecclesiastical authority.¹⁸¹

The dispute rekindled the antagonism between the hierarchy and the newspaper which responded by campaigning even more forcefully for retention of Irish interests within the Scottish Catholic Church.¹⁸² O'Neill, as head of the Society in Glasgow, was now in an embarrassing situation irrespective of whether or not he was a member of the defence fund committee (which is uncertain).¹⁸³ His family's association with the *Glasgow Free Press* might also have been misconstrued by the hierarchy. However, whatever his Irish sympathies, he could not be drafted into the cause of promoting an exclusive Irish form of Catholicism.

In time, following appointment by Rome of the English Charles Eyre to fill the position of Administrator-Apostolic to the Western Districts of Scotland in 1869, Scottish Catholicism began to develop its own British identity.¹⁸⁴ O'Neill had the misfortune to become enmeshed in the cultural tensions within the Scottish Catholic Church during a period before such tensions had been resolved. The Society in Glasgow, with the continued support of the clergy, continued to strengthen throughout the nineteenth century. Yet it also maintained a strong Irish cultural focus given the ethnic origins of the majority of its volunteers. All this would not be an issue after O'Neill's departure in September 1863 for Otago, New Zealand, one of the least Catholic of Britain's Australasian colonies.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Aspinwall has also suggested that O'Neill may have been caught up in the controversies of the *Glasgow Free Press*, see Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 55.

¹⁸⁴ Aspinwall, "The Formation of a British Identity within Scottish Catholicism, 1830-1914," 269-270.

However, this departure was primarily driven by his need to seek better career opportunities following bankruptcy in Glasgow.¹⁸⁵ O'Neill's bankruptcy occurred as a result of business failure in July 1863, a few years after he left employment with the City of Glasgow and established himself in private practice in West Regent Street. He was unable to service debts in excess of £833; although the circumstances leading up to this business failure were unclear. Nonetheless, his professional talents provided him with an opportunity to subsequently pursue an empire career in civil engineering and surveying in Otago Province, in the colony of New Zealand, dealt with in detail in Chapter Three. Further details on O'Neill's bankruptcy, the first cycle in a series of vicissitudes, is examined in Chapter Six.

Irish Connections in New Zealand

O'Neill's sense of Irishness became less apparent during his first ten years in New Zealand, as other aspects of his character became more prominent. Where it was a factor, it became relevant in certain political situations.

Between 1864 and 1866, O'Neill's surveying exploits in Otago and across remote regions of New Zealand's 'Middle Island' (or South Island as it became known), precluded him from engagement with any substantial Catholic community. Members of the Free Church of Scotland had founded a new home in Otago, a Wakefield-type settlement, some two decades previously.¹⁸⁶ Free Church settlers, led by Captain William Cargill, had arrived on the ships *John Wickliffe* and the *Philip Laing* in 1848. They and the thousands who followed them were for the most part farmers, petty merchants and tradesmen who had, according to Cargill, the 'principles and habits of Scotch piety [*sic*]'.¹⁸⁷

Irish miners flooded into the New Zealand following discoveries of gold in Otago on the South Island in March 1861 and later with the opening of the Thames

¹⁸⁵ Utick, 45-46.

¹⁸⁶ Burdon, 14-15.

¹⁸⁷ Olssen, 33-34.

Goldfield in 1867, many from the Australian goldfields such as Ballarat.¹⁸⁸ This contributed to a significant jump in the number of Roman Catholics in Presbyterian Otago, up from a tiny community of only 140 in 1858 to 7500 in 1864.¹⁸⁹ These Catholics were ministered to by a handful of French Marist priests who also had responsibility for missions to the Polynesian islands.¹⁹⁰ O'Neill is on record as having made paid church dues to one of these Marist pioneers, the Reverend D. Moreau, with donations of £1 each in April and September 1864 respectively.¹⁹¹

O'Neill's surveying work across the rugged terrain of Otago brought him into contact with many of these Irish miners or 'diggers' as they would be known. A number of the electors led by a miner Thomas Shanley, who nominated O'Neill for the seat of Otago Goldfields in the general election of 1866, had Irish names.¹⁹² However, O'Neill's political success on 26 February 1866 appeared to have been primarily based on his reputation as a pioneering surveyor in the Otago region.¹⁹³ O'Neill's mixed Irish and Scottish background would probably have played well among the mining constituents more broadly.

Irish issues occasionally surfaced during O'Neill's tenure in the New Zealand Parliament. At the request of Britain's Colonial Secretary, the Stafford Government brought forward a *Treason Felony Bill* in July 1868. This was four months after the failed assassination attempt on the Duke of Edinburgh in New South Wales. The *Treason Felony Bill* was the colonial government's response to clamp down on dissent on any Fenians active in the New Zealand colonies promoting independence for Ireland, as well as Maori taking arms. In parliament, O'Neill attacked the measure as being too heavy-handed and an intrusion on

¹⁸⁸ Utick, 49.

¹⁸⁹ H. Laracy, "Bishop Moran: Irish Politics and Catholic Education in New Zealand," *The Journal of Religious History* 6, no. 1 (1970): 63.

¹⁹⁰ Sumptor and Lewis, 62.

¹⁹¹ D. Moreau, "Ledger, 1861-71," p. 33, 41, Wellington.

¹⁹² T. Shanley, "Election Notice: Goldfields Election to Charles O' Neill, Esq," *DT*, 10 February 1866; Utick, 63.

¹⁹³ anon., "Editorial," *DT*, 24 March 1866.

liberty.¹⁹⁴ In June 1869, in response to a memorandum suggesting that there might be a presence of Irish Fenian agitators on the Thames goldfield, O'Neill joined others in debunking the rumour:

They all knew that the diggers were a hard-working, honest, generous class of men, who tried to do their best to make money by constant and excessive toil, and who never turned their backs upon poor comrades, or passed by suffering unheeded.¹⁹⁵

The Irish connection proved critical for O'Neill in the general election in 1871, when a community of Irish miners on the Coromandel peninsula delivered sufficient votes for O'Neill to win the seat of the Thames on 10 February.¹⁹⁶ It was short-lived; these voters abandoned O'Neill in the election of 1876.¹⁹⁷ O'Neill's major religious activity in the Thames was to promote temperance, presenting a petition of well over a thousand signatures urging that public houses be closed on Sundays.¹⁹⁸ Such activity would have been approved widely by many in Protestant denominations as well as the temperance wing of the Catholic Church.

Coromandel was also the final home of O'Neill's father, who had recovered his fortunes sufficiently to live a comfortable retirement in New Zealand, settling down as a loyal parishioner of St Colman's Coromandel, after marrying a widow Elizabeth Holloway in 1870.¹⁹⁹ The fact that his son had been appointed as Chief Engineer of the Thames Goldfields, and subsequently become his local MHA, must have been a source of pride. The father died at Kapenga on 20 October

¹⁹⁴ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 2, 21 July. 65-66; Utick, 73-74.

¹⁹⁵ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1869. Vol. 5, 16 June. 128.

¹⁹⁶ Utick, 91. O'Neill won the seat of the Thames with the support of 'Irish party', see anon., "Weak Candidates," *TimH*, 11 December 1893, 4.

¹⁹⁷ Utick, 114-116.

¹⁹⁸ anon., "House of Representatives: Sunday Grog Selling," *DSC*, 25 August 1875, 3.

¹⁹⁹ NZArchives, "Marriage Certificate for John O' Neill and Elizabeth Holloway, 1870," Auckland.

1874, unfortunately at a time when O'Neill was abroad in the Australian colonies.²⁰⁰

John Ogle O'Neill remained attached to his Irish Catholic roots. After providing for his surviving second wife and other family members, a codicil in his will made a £5 annual legacy for the charitable work of his local parish priest, the Reverend Patrick O'Reilly, who ministered to a small, mainly Irish congregation.²⁰¹ O'Neill himself, while a joint executor of the will, was not a financial beneficiary. Being overseas, he missed his father's funeral, but his brothers John James, William Campbell and Andrew Scott were among the main mourners at St Colman's Church four days after the father's death.²⁰²

Andrew Scott O'Neill's subsequent whereabouts remain uncertain. However, William Campbell O'Neill had a distinguished career as surveyor in his own right, eventually becoming a foundation member of the New Zealand Institute of Surveyors.²⁰³ In 1876, after having served in the Waikato Engineer Corps, William moved to Whangaroa, a town situated north-west of the Bay of Islands and, after a short partnership, established his own practice in the Northland coastal town of Mangonui.²⁰⁴ In 1876, William married a Miss Celia Shaw but they had no children.²⁰⁵ He died in 1913.²⁰⁶

O'Neill's Irish connections became somewhat more prominent from 1876, by which time he had become an active member of the Catholic community in Diocese of Wellington. The Diocese then totalled 23 districts, among them Wellington, Hutt, Masterton, Napier, New Plymouth, Patea, Wanganui, Feilding and Meeanee on the North Island.²⁰⁷ It also included the northern portion of the

²⁰⁰ anon., "Death Notices," *NZH*, 21 October 1874, 2; anon., "Deaths," *DSC*, 29 October 1874, 3.

²⁰¹ J. O'Neill, "Last Will and Testament, 1874," Auckland.

²⁰² anon., *NZH*, 26 October 1874, 3.

²⁰³ Lawn, 443.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Utick, 110-111.

²⁰⁶ Lawn, 443.

²⁰⁷ O'Meeghan, 116-117.

South Island including Nelson, Blenheim, Picton, Westport, Greymouth, Reefton, Hokitika, and Kumara. Until 1887, it further included Christchurch, Lyttelton, Lincoln, Rangiora, Temuka and Timaru. This Diocese was administered by the Society of Mary (Marists), an order of priests founded in France in 1816 and approved by Rome in 1846. By 1878 the overwhelming majority of about 25,000 European Catholic adherents in the Diocese were Irish (a further 1000 were Maori converts).²⁰⁸

During the 1870s, Dr Isaac Featherston (a former Wellington province Superintendent and an acquaintance of O'Neill) served in Britain as New Zealand's Agent General. Featherston supervised immigration offices in Dublin and Belfast, opening the way for some 25,000 Irish immigrants to come to New Zealand.²⁰⁹ The resulting Irish Catholic settlers often found it difficult to settle in a colony where fervent Protestantism and freemasonry had popular appeal. Occasionally, anti-popery, Orange Lodge and anti-Fenian campaigns could erupt. For example, clashes between Irish Hibernians and Orangemen, such as those in Christchurch and Timaru on Boxing Day 1879, represented brief but violent episodes in colonial life.²¹⁰

Despite O'Neill's involvement in some rowdy political incidents in Thames during the early 1870s, he avoided involvement in sectarian clashes. His public reputation during the late 1870s as a City of Wellington engineer was a useful one for Wellington's small Catholic minority seeking community acceptance. In June 1876, O'Neill was one of two laypersons invited to welcome the Marist Brothers to Wellington, where they were to run a Catholic boys' school in Boulcott Street.²¹¹ At the official welcome function at St Mary's Cathedral in Hill Street Thorndon, presided over by Bishop Francis Redwood sm, O'Neill gave a welcome address which was reported by the *New Zealand Tablet*:

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 109.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Utick, 124.

He felt sure there were none who would give them a more hearty welcome – a *caed mille failte* – than those who hailed from Ireland, a people who always clung fondly round their clergy – their *soggarth aroon [sic]*.²¹²

While O'Neill had not himself directly 'hailed from Ireland', the public statement signified his identification with the Irish Catholic community. His use of Gaelic phrases suggests a familiarity with the language; however there is little if any other evidence remaining of his proficiency in it. Four years later, in 1880, O'Neill was a member of Wellington City's General Committee of the Irish Famine Relief Fund, chaired by the Mayor.²¹³

There was a correspondingly strong Irish presence in two small St Vincent de Paul conferences then operating in New Zealand. One conference was in Christchurch (operating between 1867 and 1874 and later between 1875 and 1880) founded by a Marist pioneer, the Reverend Jean-Baptiste Chataigner sm, and another in Wellington founded by the Reverend Jean-Baptiste Petitjean sm in 1875.²¹⁴ O'Neill may also (albeit briefly) have been a founding member of the Christchurch Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society founded by Chataigner in 1867.²¹⁵

Most of those whom these conferences assisted were poor Irish settlers who arrived in desperate circumstances; many sick, incapacitated and too ill to labour after a long sea voyage. However, the Society in these cities did not respond exclusively to the needs of Catholics alone, but occasionally assisted Protestants as well.²¹⁶

O'Neill's motives in promoting himself among the Irish Catholic community were sometimes viewed with scepticism. O'Neill made political connections within Wellington Province and the City of Wellington throughout the 1870s,

²¹² anon., "Catholic Schools and Education in Wellington," *NZT*, 30 June 1876, 14.

²¹³ anon., "Irish Famine Relief Fund," *EP*, 25 February 1880, 2.

²¹⁴ Utick, 127-129.

²¹⁵ Ryan, 9-10.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4; Utick, 127-128.

initially in a search to gain permanent employment with the City as an engineer.²¹⁷ One of these was William Hutchison, at one time a member of Wellington's Provincial Council, Mayoral candidate and ironically an Orangeman. A letter to the editor in Wellington's *Evening Post* edition of 16 November 1878, under the anonymous *nom-de-plume* 'Cheque-Mate', reflected on O'Neill's attempts to cajole the Catholic vote in Wellington:

If Mr Hutchinson, through his friend Mr Charles O'Neill, C.E., thinks he can manage this body of our citizens, he is mistaken. What has Charles O'Neill ever done for the Catholics in this city that he should set himself up their leader? Will they be led by him to support any one who, while he palavers them to-day, would tomorrow rob them of their just rights in the education of their children?²¹⁸

This anonymous correspondent's criticism of O'Neill was unwarranted. By 1878, O'Neill had done much for the Catholics of Wellington and seven years before in parliament had vigorously supported the Catholic position on religious education in schools.²¹⁹ Later in 1879, he made an unsuccessful attempt to rebuild his political career by standing for the seat of Wellington Country Districts, which some interpreted as being 'in the Catholic interest'.²²⁰ However, O'Neill's failure to take a sectarian path, his Liberal politics, associations with the Protestant political establishment and possibly a Scots accent did not endear him to those who expected a clearer distinction between Catholic and Protestant affiliation.

O'Neill's Position on Divorce and Education

O'Neill's own profession of Catholicism did not surface as a political issue during his parliamentary career; Catholics had already served in the New Zealand Parliament, including notably the Parliament's first speaker Sir Charles

²¹⁷ Utick, 117-119.

²¹⁸ "Cheque-Mate", "What Are Mr Hutchison's Claims?," *EP*, 16 November 1878, 2.

²¹⁹ Utick, 95-97.

²²⁰ anon., "General Elections, Election News," *TaranH*, 19 August 1879, 2.

Clifford.²²¹ A Catholic convert Thomas Bracken, elected as member for Dunedin Central in 1881 soon after O'Neill left for Australia, penned the poem *God Defend New Zealand*, which ultimately became the New Zealand national hymn.²²²

During the period between 1866 and 1875 when O'Neill served as an MHA, two contentious political issues of considerable relevance to Catholic teaching emerged. These were divorce and public financial support for denominational education. In both cases, O'Neill, in defending the Catholic position, found himself on the losing side of the debate. The two issues were also linked; contemporary Catholic thinking was that 'godless' secular education was a cause of immorality including divorce. This position also pointed to secular education in the United States being a contributor to its exploding divorce rate.²²³

The first of these issues, provision for divorce, was debated in September 1867. O'Neill pleaded that the views of the Catholic minority be taken into account:

As far as he could learn, they numbered 80,000, which was a large proportion of the whole of the Colony, amounting as it did, to about 220,000 (Europeans), and he did not think it was proper that they should introduce a law which would have an effect on so large a portion of the people.²²⁴

Appealing to those with Scottish sentiment or background, he drew from an old Scots proverb: 'Many blame the wife for their own thriftless life', to suggest that divorce might work against the interests of women.²²⁵ O'Neill probably appreciated that since men were the sole breadwinners, their wives were

²²¹ John Askew Scott, "New Zealand," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 11 (1911). URL: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11040a.htm> [accessed 11 September 2010].

²²² W. S. Broughton, "Bracken, Thomas 1843 - 1989," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 7 April 2006). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 20 March 2009].

²²³ Philip Ayres, *Prince of the Church, Patrick Francis Moran, 1830-1911* (Carlton, Victoria: The Miegunyah Press, 2007), 138.

²²⁴ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1867. Vol. 1, Part 2, 23 September. 1044.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

extremely vulnerable if their husbands deserted them and this could be a particular problem in the colonies.

O'Neill took such a position quoting the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 19:11): 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, and shall marry another, committed adultery.'²²⁶ O'Neill followed this with an anecdote from classical history:

When divorce laws were most frequent among the Romans, marriages were most rare; insomuch that Augustus was obliged by penal laws, to force men of fashion into the married state, a circumstance which is scarcely found in any other age or nation.²²⁷

This kind of argument exposed a personal contradiction in one who was himself a bachelor. O'Neill (perhaps conveniently) made no reference to Scots law on the matter of divorce and, apart from the above classical anecdote, put forward a standard Catholic objection. In any case, his argument made no sense to another parliamentary colleague, who responded that the House should 'seriously think of what was being done in their own day, and not refer back to the days of the Romans.'²²⁸

During his second parliamentary second term, O'Neill attacked a proposed *Deceased Wife's Sister Bill*, as strongly as he had attacked the *Divorce Bill* during his first term.²²⁹ The *Deceased Wife's Sister Bill*, a measure promoted in 1872 by William Stewart the MHA for Waitaki, would allow a man to marry the sister of a deceased wife. This was something then frowned upon by the main Christian denominations including many Presbyterian adherents. Given that New Zealand now had a divorce law in place; O'Neill saw this new measure as the thin edge of the wedge, potentially allowing a man to marry a whole family one after another. In August 1872, he could not resist the observation:

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 12, 2 August. 261.

It seemed to him that divorce could now be obtained in this Colony just about as easily as it was said it could be in Chicago, where, when the great American railway stopped, they could hear shouted out “There’s ten minutes for divorce, and twenty minutes for refreshments.”²³⁰

O’Neill had already gained a reputation as a parliamentary comic.²³¹ However, injection of humour into such debates may not have helped much in promoting his causes, perhaps only serving to trivialise his arguments in the eyes of his opponents.

His participation in the education debate was more substantial. Education issues surfaced soon after Dr Patrick Moran, who had been appointed as the first Catholic Bishop of Dunedin arrived in February 1871; although well after O’Neill’s departure from Otago.²³² Moran was soon engaged in an important battle over support for denominational education; one fought strongly against the existing provincial education scheme in Otago.²³³ Otago’s education policy, overseen by its Provincial Council, not only refused to support denominational schools, but had allowed textbooks, particularly in history, which were anti-Catholic in nature.²³⁴

By that time the dual system of public and denominational education had proved unsatisfactory, and Anglicans in particular saw no reason to pay for education when it could be provided free.²³⁵ In mid-1871, a national government led by William Fox attempted to introduce amendments to an *Education Bill* that would have provided support for denominational schools (including Catholic schools)

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ anon., "Political Squib: What Is a Statesman Made Of?," *NeE*, 20 August 1868, 2.

²³² This Moran is not to be confused with Patrick *Francis* Moran who was appointed Archbishop of Sydney fourteen years later.

²³³ Laracy: 65.

²³⁴ McLintock, 519.

²³⁵ Ian Breward, *Godless Schools? A Study in Protestant Reactions to the Education Act of 1877* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1967), 5.

without any restricting clause about the quality of teachers and the standards of textbooks.²³⁶

During the subsequent debate, O'Neill spoke out strongly in favour of the denominational system of education. He also pointed to the inconsistency of the Otago system of education, because its use of anti-Catholic history textbooks injected a sectarian tone into what was purported to be public, non-sectarian education.²³⁷ He further repeated *verbatim* an argument that Moran had made to a Select Committee in Dunedin:

The principle is this: the education proposed to be given is, as far as Catholics are concerned, a purely secular education, such as all denominations might accept. The Catholic principle of education is this: education is for a man's entire life, here and hereafter; it should therefore be both religious and secular, and as the religious is the more important, and the only one that can establish a real sanction for man's moral conduct, the secular should necessarily be built up upon the religious and subordinated to it. The Church therefore deprecates the separation of those two as unnatural and injurious to society as well as religion.²³⁸

O'Neill also opposed any compulsory clauses in education legislation, which might take away the natural rights of parents.²³⁹ This would, according to him, force children to break the fourth of the Ten Commandments in the Bible: 'Honour thy father and thy mother'.

O'Neill ridiculed attempts at indiscriminate reading of the Bible in schools, without proper understanding, irrespective of what version of the Bible (Protestant or Catholic) was used.²⁴⁰ His response was an example of one of his more humorous quips:

²³⁶ McLintock, 518-519.

²³⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 10, 7 September. 327.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ As a Catholic, O'Neill would have most likely used a Douay-Rheims Bible (as revised by English Catholic Bishop Richard Challoner in the 18th century).

he would give them an instance as to how it had been interpreted by a Maori, - and the Maoris were keen and cunning reasoners. He was asked how many wives he had, and he answered in a very melancholy tone, he had only four. The clergyman of the district, remonstrating with him, told him how wrong it was to have four wives, - that the Bible taught them to have only one wife. "Why," said the Maori, "didn't you give me the Bible?" "Yes", answered the clergyman. "Well," said the Maori, "I find in that book that Solomon was the wisest man in the world, and I also find that Solomon had three hundred wives. Kapai, Solomon!"²⁴¹

Despite the humour, O'Neill viewed the issue of religious education seriously. Such education should neither be skewed towards a narrow Bible-based fundamentalism nor excluded entirely as many secularists might argue. In his response to the latter position, he strictly followed formal papal teaching. At that time, Catholics were required to be guided by the Syllabus of Errors issued by Pius IX in 1864, which condemned the proposition that a secular education was adequate in itself.²⁴²

O'Neill reminded the New Zealand Parliament that the results of 'Godless' education could be seen in France, which had not heeded the words of Jean-Etienne Portalis, once Minister for Instruction under the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. O'Neill quoted Portalis: 'There is no instruction without education; no proper education without morality and dogma'.²⁴³ According to O'Neill, the results could be seen in the activities of the revolutionary Paris Commune which assumed control of Paris between March and May 1871, following France's defeat by Prussia in 1870. He saw the violent outcome as alarming:

A few months ago one-third of Paris was burned; Notre Dame, one of the finest cathedrals in the world was fired; the Archbishop of Paris was apprehended on the charge of being the "servant of a man called God", and

²⁴¹ Ibid. 328.

²⁴² H. Laracy, "Paranoid Popery: Bishop Moran and Catholic Education in New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of History* 10, no. 1 (1976): 56.

²⁴³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 10, 7 September. 330.

was cruelly murdered in cold blood while still a hostage; - all the effects of education without religion, and of infidelity.²⁴⁴

These dire warnings fell on deaf ears in a parliament half a world away from Europe. The New Zealand Government was forced to drop the proposed bill as its Otago supporters did not wish to interfere with the Otago Provincial Government's education policies which catered to the 'Bible in schools' approach.²⁴⁵

Five years later, in June 1876, as New Zealand was about to introduce a fully secular *Education Bill*, O'Neill (by then out of parliament) repeated his concerns about 'Godless' education at the welcome address to the Marist Brothers in Wellington.²⁴⁶ However, O'Neill's position ran counter to the secularist tide of New Zealand public education. The secularist position was pragmatic rather than doctrinaire, with influential proponents such as Alfred Domett, editor of the *Nelson Examiner*. By 1873, sectarian rivalry had unwittingly contributed to abolition of grants to denominational schools and the end of Bible reading in public schools.²⁴⁷ New legislation, originally moved by Charles Bowen, MHA for Kaiapoi, applied a secular approach of excluding religious education as a means of avoiding conflict among Christian denominational teaching.²⁴⁸ Moran's education campaign, which O'Neill had so loyally supported, also failed. New Zealand Catholics, like all other denominations, would have to pay for their own education system. With even rudimentary Bible teaching excluded from schools, the new education system made less provision for religion than might otherwise have been.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ McLintock, 520.

²⁴⁶ anon., "Catholic Schools and Education in Wellington," 14.

²⁴⁷ Breward, 5.

²⁴⁸ Laracy, "Paranoid Popery: Bishop Moran and Catholic Education in New Zealand," 55.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

A Catholic Layperson of Wellington, 1876 -1880

O'Neill's public position on education would have been approved by the new Catholic Bishop of Wellington, Francis Redwood sm, a young English theologian who had been ordained through the Marist order.²⁵⁰ Born in Staffordshire England and raised locally in Waimea near Nelson, Redwood assumed control of the Wellington Diocese in November 1874, at which time O'Neill was still MHA for Thames.²⁵¹ Redwood's teaching experience in Ireland had given him a deep appreciation of the piety of the Irish in the face of hardship.²⁵² One common ground shared with O'Neill, was Redwood's maintenance of an often uneasy balance between the Irish sympathies of the bulk of the New Zealand flock, and loyalty to the Crown.²⁵³ The relatively small Catholic Church in New Zealand, as elsewhere across the English speaking world, was a beneficiary of the devotional commitment and zeal of many among the Irish diaspora. Redwood also demonstrated strong loyalty to the Papacy; something from which O'Neill himself never deviated.²⁵⁴

Another common ground between Redwood and O'Neill was concern to provide adequate Catholic education, a cause with which the latter had already demonstrated his sympathies previously in Glasgow. In 1874, there were 34 Catholic schools in Wellington Diocese (which then included Christchurch and Canterbury Plains), while the secular education system in Wellington was defective, with extremely low percentages of attendance by school age children.²⁵⁵ In his *Lenten Pastoral* of 1876, Redwood attacked the secularist control of education, claiming that such a system would lead to an extinction of morality.²⁵⁶ In response, Redwood and the Catholic community sought a fair

²⁵⁰ O'Meeghan, 99-100.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Nicholas Simmons, "Archbishop Francis Redwood: His Contribution to Catholicism in New Zealand" (Massey, 1981), 25.

²⁵³ Broadbent.

²⁵⁴ Simmons, 25.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 66.

share of the taxes Catholics contributed to the New Zealand Government to cover the costs of secular instruction imparted in schools.

O'Neill's speeches on the perils of the Paris Commune, first delivered to an uninterested parliament in 1871, found a more receptive audience in the small Wellington Catholic community in 1876. Until 1880, he figured prominently as lay Catholic representative at meetings and events in Wellington, often presided over by Redwood.

One such example was a welcome home to Mother Mary Cecilia Benbow, the Assistant Superioress of the Convent of Mercy in Wellington who, two years previously, had gone to Europe to bring back sisters who would be willing to serve the cause of religious education for New Zealand girls. Bishop Redwood had provided her with letters of introduction, including to Pope Pius IX.²⁵⁷ Mother Mary Cecilia was successful, and had arrived back with Mother Mary Clare and nine other nuns from Ireland, as a first influx to staff a foundation convent at Hokitika on the West Coast of the South Island. At a ceremony at Wellington's Convent of Mercy on 4 October 1878, O'Neill gave the welcoming address on behalf of Wellington's laity.²⁵⁸

O'Neill retained Redwood's friendship. He formed part of a deputation who made a presentation to Redwood as the latter departed for Rome at the end of March 1880.²⁵⁹ As late as 1897, O'Neill was among a party of Redwood's friends who wished him farewell from Sydney after a visit to Australia.²⁶⁰

In addition to Redwood, several prominent Catholic lay figures formed part of O'Neill's circle. One of these was Dr M. Grace, in 1880 the chairperson of the Wellington Tramways Company that managed the steam tramway designed by O'Neill's team.²⁶¹ Another was a lawyer and later resident magistrate Lowther

²⁵⁷ O'Meeghan, 105.

²⁵⁸ anon., "St Mary's Convent, Wellington," *NZT*, 18 October 1878, 17.

²⁵⁹ anon., "Departure of the Bishop of Wellington," *NZT*, 2 April 1880, 15.

²⁶⁰ anon., *NZT*, 10 December 1897.

²⁶¹ See mention of Grace in Simmons, 30; Stewart, 14.

Broad. Broad, a Catholic convert, was the younger brother of Charles Broad, an Otago Goldfields magistrate and later a community leader active in Anglican Church affairs.²⁶² O'Neill would have met the Broad brothers on his arrival in Otago, as early as 1864.²⁶³ Lowther Broad had served as a manager of the McIsaac's Extended Gold Mining Company at the Thames, in which O'Neill became an investor.²⁶⁴ In a testimonial delivered in Sydney in 1891, Broad intimated that O'Neill had a role in what would become one of Redwood's key projects. This was the St Mary's Industrial School in Nelson which had begun as a Catholic orphanage in 1872. When in 1881, the orphanage was officially gazetted as an Industrial School, it provided a place for magistrates such as Broad to send Catholic orphans.²⁶⁵

Church projects became part of O'Neill's architectural activities during his time in Wellington. The most significant design was that of a timber church for the Catholic parish of Sacred Heart at Reefton on the South Island. The parish itself was founded in 1874 and construction of the church took place between 1878 and 1879 at a cost of £2400.²⁶⁶ A contemporary report noted that:

the site of the building is most eligible and central and will be the first object that will catch the traveller's eye, no matter from what direction he arrives in Reefton.²⁶⁷

In addition to Sacred Heart Church Reefton, O'Neill designed the Sister of Mercy Convent and School at Hokitika (completed July 1878) and their Convent Schools in Dixon Street Wellington (completed July 1879).²⁶⁸ O'Neill coordinated a charity bazaar for the latter in September 1879; his lay activities

²⁶² A. Hutchison, "Broad, Charles 1828-1879," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007). URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> [accessed 20 March 2009].

²⁶³ See Judge Lowther Broad's testimonial to O'Neill in SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1891* (Sydney, 1892), 9.

²⁶⁴ Auckland Provincial Government, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1869. pt. August. 53, 698.

²⁶⁵ Simmons, 79.

²⁶⁶ Utick, 121. The Church of the Sacred Heart in Reefton still stands today. A plaque in the Church commemorates its construction, noting Chas O'Neill as architect.

²⁶⁷ Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington, 6, anon., "Reefton," *NZT*, 8 February 1878, 15.

²⁶⁸ anon., "Convent Schools Wellington," *NZT*, 4 July 1879, 19.

had expanded to include fund raising for the education and charitable works of religious orders.²⁶⁹

Wellington's St Mary's Cathedral in Hill Street Thorndon, had originally been constructed during the late 1860s as an imposing stone and timber Gothic building complete with buttresses.²⁷⁰ O'Neill's contribution came with two significant refurbishments of its interior. The first was the marble altar completed in December 1879 and second, an organ gallery completed in March 1880. The altar steps had 'their fronts sculptured with floral arrangements, conspicuous amongst which is the shamrock'.²⁷¹ This choice of ornamentation may well have been a reflection of O'Neill's own re-emphasis on his Irish identity, as well as that of the congregation. Unfortunately, like much of O'Neill's legacy of church architecture, time would erase it. The original St Mary's Cathedral was destroyed by fire in 1898.²⁷²

The old St Mary's Cathedral was at the heart of O'Neill's community life in the late 1870s, and was close to leased premises in the Wellington terraces where he and John James then resided.²⁷³ At a Pontifical High Mass for the consecration of the altar on 7 December 1879, Maria Gordon O'Neill, who had by then joined her brother in New Zealand, sang the offertory.²⁷⁴

It was too here at St Mary's that O'Neill had already assumed the role of President of the fledgling Conference of the St Vincent de Paul, soon after the death of its Marist founder Petitjean in September 1876.²⁷⁵ There were now thirty active members in all and it was meeting fortnightly in a comfortable room in the presbytery, ornamented with some beautiful engravings, representing religious scenes, conspicuous among them being 'Saint Vincent de Paul engaged in his

²⁶⁹ C. O'Neill, "Preliminary Announcement," *EP*, 25 July 1879, 3.

²⁷⁰ O'Meeghan, 97.

²⁷¹ anon., "Consecration of New Marble Altar, St Mary's Cathedral," *NZT*, 26 December 1879, 7.

²⁷² O'Meeghan, 172-174.

²⁷³ Wellington Province, *Electoral Roll 1876-77*, 1876. 24.

²⁷⁴ anon., "Consecration of New Marble Altar, St Mary's Cathedral," 7.

²⁷⁵ Utick, 129.

great mission of charity'.²⁷⁶ A report of one of these meetings was published in the *New Zealand Tablet* in June 1878:

The Conference is opened with the recital by the President of the prayer, *Veni sancte spiritus* (Come Holy Spirit) followed by an invocation to Saint Vincent de Paul. The Secretary having read the minutes of the last meeting, the members report the progress of the 'cases in their care during the interval'.²⁷⁷

In the face of the sadness in handling cases of destitution in Wellington, O'Neill seemed to encourage a sense of camaraderie among the members. This *New Zealand Tablet* report also suggests that his natural sense of humour was put to work in a new context:

As the aim of the Society, apart from its charitable nature, is to encourage a spirit of Christian good-fellowship among its members, and to make the Conference popular, the members, having disposed of the charitable task, engage in readings and cheerful and instructive conversation for an hour. Many humorous anecdotes are related in this room by the members connected to their various visits to the poor in their out-of-the-way dwellings.²⁷⁸

By this time, the previous pattern of O'Neill's active Catholic commitment through architecture and the charitable work of the St Vincent de Paul Society had returned. However, by that time he was over fifty years old, and for much of the previous fifteen years of his life had been actively engaged in the pursuit of a professional engineering career in addition to a political one. O'Neill's Irish connections, re-kindled in Wellington, would prove invaluable three years later when he began the task of establishing and consolidating the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales; these aspects are examined in Chapter Five.

²⁷⁶ anon., "Wellington," *NZT*, 14 June 1878, 11.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter Three: An Engineer of Empire - Professional and Political Ambition

The Young Engineer

O'Neill's Catholic devotional piety and activism in charitable affairs were initially drawn from his Irish Catholic family roots although, over time, these moved far beyond Irish associations. In addition, O'Neill acquired something that made him very atypical of a Catholic during this period, a civil engineering profession. He had completed his apprenticeship in this profession during the first half of the 1840s. This was a time when the Church, under the pontificate of Gregory XVI, had represented the most reactionary sentiment including rejection of much technological innovation and railways in particular.¹ What might have then been condemned in the Papal States, were seen as powerful symbols of progress in Protestant Britain.

Although of Irish family background, O'Neill himself had been born in Scotland. This was a Scotland whose pride then lay in the industrial revolution, in new wealth created by capitalist endeavour, and in the British Crown and Empire.

Western Scotland had been an industrial centre since the late eighteenth century; by the 1840s, Glasgow had become the Empire's workshop.² British engineering as a profession was developing rapidly; enhanced considerably by the shipbuilding industry along the Clyde. As much as the young O'Neill was influenced by Irish Catholicism, his training in the midst of such dynamic enterprises shaped another aspect of his identity. O'Neill's lifelong commitment to the engineering profession was formed between 1840 and 1846.

Victorian Britain had adopted an empirical approach to mechanical engineering, leaving accreditation to independent professional engineering bodies. Technical training for young British engineers began with apprenticeships. The young

¹ Gregory XIV's pontificate lasted from 1831 to 1846. His condemnation and refusal to allow the construction of railways in the Papal States has received considerable comment by historians. See for example *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism* (New York, USA: HarperSanFrancisco: HarperCollinsPublishing, 1995), s.v. "Gregory XVI."

² M. Moss and J. Hume, *Workshop of the British Empire* (London and Edinburgh: Heineman, 1977), 3-5.

O'Neill benefited from such an apprenticeship, most likely funded by his father (and possibly other benefactors). As noted in Chapter Two, the kind of training that he received during six years of apprenticeship in the Glasgow offices of civil engineers Messrs Foreman and Cameron, and later George Martin, required substantial financial support.³

Importantly, he gained access to valuable training by scientific experts, something not easily available to British Catholics in a profession dominated by the Protestant establishment and freemasons. Despite the *Catholic Emancipation Act* of 1829, Catholics would have faced difficult difficulties and barriers to studying at any British university during that period, and there is no record of him being enrolled as a student at the University of Glasgow. However, either as part of his apprenticeship training or on his own initiative, he attended lectures given by leading engineering and science academics including Professor Lewis Gordon, appointed first Professor of Civil Engineering and Mechanics at Glasgow University from 1840.⁴ O'Neill may have attended these directly at Glasgow University, or through a series of lectures offered by Gordon and a chemist Dr R. Thompson at the Glasgow Mechanical Institute, an offshoot of the 'Andersonian'.⁵ The Mechanical Institute lectures were sponsored by the Glasgow Philosophical Society at a cost of a shilling or two per lecture.⁶

O'Neill followed the then traditional path of his profession, in an era before Britain developed university training in engineering. Membership of engineering institutes at that time required five years professional experience, demonstrated professional competence, achieving a position of responsibility and being older than 25 years of age.⁷

³ Bardell, 9.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The institute ultimately became part of the Strathclyde University's Faculty of Engineering.

⁶ Utick, 13. O'Neill is recorded as having studied under both Gordon and Thompson when he was finally elected to the London Institution of Civil Engineers in 1880, see I.C.E., "Circular Submitted Prior to Election of Members, 1880," 5, London.

⁷ Bardell, 9.

By 1847, his training completed, O'Neill acquired the position of Assistant Superintendent of Streets, Roads, Buildings and Sewerage, under the supervision of the Master of Public Works for the City of Glasgow, John Carrick.⁸ O'Neill was to hold this position for fourteen years, and was occasionally called upon to provide professional advice to the Glasgow Dean of Guild Court.

As noted earlier, O'Neill moved permanently from Dumbarton to lodgings in Glasgow in October 1852. By 1856 he had moved from South Portland Street to the tenement at 40 Abbotsford Place.⁹ His final known address in Glasgow, during the early 1860s when he moved into private practice, was 113 West Regent Street.¹⁰

His professional training must have included architectural drafting, given his skills as an architect. In contrast to the foul slums he knew so well in his charitable work, there was much in the city of Glasgow to inspire him. Argyll Street, Glasgow's main thoroughfare, was then to be counted as the one of the most spacious in Europe. The magnificent architectural work of David Hamilton, undertaken during the 1820s and 1830s, was exemplified by such works as Glasgow's Theatre Royal, the Royal Exchange in Queen Street and the rebuilt palace of the Duke of Hamilton.¹¹

O'Neill's own architectural contribution in Glasgow was comparatively very modest. In addition to his church architecture, examples of his public work included the ornate Roman Corinthian columns supporting the St Andrew's Suspension Bridge in McNeill Street constructed between 1855 and 1856, and an Italianate design police station constructed in the suburb of Hillhead in 1860.¹²

⁸ I.C.E., 5.

⁹ Utick, 18. The information was drawn from *Glasgow Post Office Directory 1856-57*.

¹⁰ Aspinwall, "The Formation of the Catholic Community in the West of Scotland," 55. The information was drawn from *Glasgow Post Office Directory 1863-64*.

¹¹ Utick, 14.

¹² Ibid., 31, 35.

The Hillhead Police Station opening was complete with a march by a newly formed volunteer militia that O'Neill had recently joined, the 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment. The regiment's Lieutenant Colonel, David Dreghorn gave this testimonial to O'Neill before the latter's departure for New Zealand three years later:

At a meeting of the Commissioners of Supply in the County of Lanark - Lord Belhaven in the chair – it was proposed to erect a model police station for the county at Hillhead, near this city. The chairman had formed so high an opinion of Mr O'Neill's abilities as had induced him at once to propose that [Mr O'Neill] should be employed to prepare the necessary plans, which were carried out, and the building stands as a perfect model for the purpose intended.¹³

As it was intended to be model for others, the design of the police station had been approved by the Right Hon. Sir George Cornwell-Lewis, then Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department.¹⁴

While O'Neill's main interests lay in civil engineering and architecture, he also acquired skills in railway engineering and surveying. Railway construction had commenced in the West of Scotland as early as 1820s, although locomotive production developed at a much slower rate and remained the preserve of private companies.¹⁵ Much of O'Neill's professional reputation was built on his capacity to survey railway lines in rugged terrain. This was acknowledged later in an 1871 editorial in New Zealand's *Wellington Independent*, when referring to the prospect of O'Neill's surveying the rugged Rimutaka ranges to the east of Wellington Harbour:

¹³ anon., "Testimonial to Mr Charles O' Neill," *GFP*, 3 October 1863, 12.

¹⁴ anon, *GFP*, 9 June 1860, 2.

¹⁵ Moss and Hume, 42-45.

one who has been successful, as he has been, in laying of lines of railways through the Highlands of Scotland may face even the redoubtable Rimutaka with some hope of a similar success.¹⁶

A number of incidents in O'Neill's early professional life may have made a lasting impact on him, encouraging pursuit of an active public life. O'Neill's service as an expert witness at the Dean of Guild Court led to his engagement as a professional witness in two of Victorian Scotland's most celebrated murder cases.

The first, in July 1857, occurred in the Edinburgh trial of Madeleine Smith, granddaughter of architect David Hamilton, who had been accused of poisoning her French lover Pierre Emile L'Angelier. A brilliant defence by lawyer John Inglis resulted in the jury returning the uniquely Scottish verdict 'not proven'.¹⁷ O'Neill was employed by the public authorities to make a plan of 7 Blythswood Square in Glasgow, the home of Madeleine's father James Smith. O'Neill's testimony on day three of the trial involved professional advice on the design of Madeleine's bedroom, including access from the bedroom window to an outside pavement.¹⁸

Five years later in September 1862, O'Neill returned, performing a similar function as Crown witness in the trial of Jessie McLachlan for the murder by forty blows with a cleaver of Jess McPherson at 17 Sandyford Place Glasgow in July 1862.¹⁹ Jessie McLachlan was not as lucky as Madeleine Smith; McLachlan was found guilty by the judge Lord Deas and sentenced to hang. After a public petition by about 50,000 Glaswegians, there was a public investigation and a reprieve for McLachlan, although she still ended up spending fifteen years in prison. O'Neill once again produced plans of the house for the trial.²⁰

¹⁶ anon., "Editorial," *WI*, 1 June 1871.

¹⁷ A. Duncan Smith, *Trial of Madeleine Smith*, ed. William Hodge and Co. (Glasgow and Edinburgh: 1905), Third Day – Thursday 2nd July 1857.

¹⁸ Jimmy Powdrell Campbell, "A Most Curious Murder the Madeleine Smith Story", Masonhost Web Design <http://www.amostcuriousmurder.com/WitnessList.htm> (accessed 5 July 2010).

¹⁹ Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, "The Strange Case of Jessie Mc Lachlan" <http://www.copfs.gov.uk/News/Historical/JessMach> (accessed 7 July 2010).

²⁰ anon., "Trial of Jessie Mc Lachlan," *DumH*, 20 September 1862.

While O'Neill's testimony did not resolve any matters relating to these cases, the public spotlight on his professional capabilities must have been a source of personal satisfaction. It also demonstrated recognition by the public authorities of his skills, irrespective of his denominational affiliation.

Another source of self-satisfaction for O'Neill was that he was capable of appraising what were, for the Victorian era, the frontiers of engineering. One outstanding example of this was his role in the reconstruction of the Townsend Chimney, then the tallest chimney in the world, located at a chemical works in Glasgow's Crawford Street. The chimney, over 138 metres high from ground to summit, had begun to sway after gale damage when close to completion. In 1859, the Dean of Guild Court appointed O'Neill and another expert civil engineer Professor Macquarie Rankin to inspect and report on the necessary correction.²¹

The opening of the Hillhead police station noted previously was symbolic of another background factor in O'Neill's professional life, the influence of freemasonry. This building was opened in May 1860 by Sir Archibald Alison, Sheriff of Lanarkshire and a prominent lawyer known for the public addresses including pointed attacks on 'popery'. Alison, in his capacity as Provincial Grand Master of the Western Counties, performed the opening ceremony with due masonic ritual.²²

Becoming a freemason would then bring advantages in promotion within the professions. For young Scots in particular, Scottish lodges retained a great attraction despite the opposition to its practices among the Christian churches, Catholic and Protestant.²³ Although British freemasonry was more deistic in its sympathies compared with its European counterparts, Catholics were forbidden to

²¹ anon., "A Tall Chimney," *NthOtT*, 22 March 1876, 2.

²² Utick, 34-35. More background on Alison may be found on "The Provincial Grand Lodge of Glasgow, Historical Sketch" URL: <http://www.mastermason.com/pglglasgow/pglghist.html> [accessed 24 May 2009]

²³ Utick, 34. One should note for example Scottish poet Robert Burns' praise of freemasonry in *The Master's Apron* (1786).

join after the papal encyclical *In eminenti* by Clement XII in 1738, followed up by the papal bull *Providas* by Benedict XIV in 1751.²⁴

O'Neill was therefore precluded for religious reasons from becoming a freemason. There is no evidence that he ever became a freemason, was approached for recruitment, or that his advancement was blocked because of his religious convictions. Nevertheless, the influence of individual freemasons remained as part of the background of his professional and political life. As noted in Chapter Five, the need to counter the expanding influence of freemasons in charitable works in the Australian colonies was one of the reasons given by Baudon to persuade O'Neill to undertake the quest to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society there.²⁵ This suggests that, by the late 1870s, O'Neill was profoundly unsympathetic to the aims of freemasonry even if he had ever harboured sympathies before.

None of this would exclude him from ultimately gaining membership of professional bodies, such as the Institution of Engineers in Scotland in 1857, and Fellowship of the Architectural Institute.²⁶ The role of the professional engineer had become an essential part of his identity.

Unfortunately for O'Neill, despite growing recognition of skills by authorities, he did not advance beyond his modest position. In May 1855, O'Neill applied for a vacant and more senior appointment of Superintendent of Streets and Buildings in Edinburgh.²⁷ He received a glowing reference from Glasgow's Municipal Police Committee, but was ultimately unsuccessful. Six years later, in 1861, he went into private practice.

²⁴ R. Lomas, *Freemasonry and the Birth of Modern Science* (Gloucester, Massachusetts, USA: Fair Winds Press, 2002), 271; *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1968), s.v. "Freemasonry 4: Freemasonry and the Catholic Church.", 364.

²⁵ A. Baudon, "The Society of St Vincent De Paul," *NZT*, 11 January 1878, 15.

²⁶ I.C.E.; Utick, 139.

²⁷ anon., *GFP*, 19 May 1855, 4.

The Lanarkshire Regiment and Loyalty to the Crown

An important part of his British identity was membership of a volunteer military corps. Three years after the end of the Crimean War, military posturing by Napoleon III of France generated an invasion scare among the populace. After public agitation in April 1859 at St Martin's Long Acre, an initially sceptical British Government authorised the Lords Lieutenant to raise volunteer corps under legislation passed in 1804.²⁸ Glasgow responded at a public meeting in the Albion Hotel in Argyll Street and agreement was reached to form a volunteer corps.²⁹ O'Neill was among the early volunteer recruits, and in early October 1859 joined the 10th Glasgow Corps which soon became the 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment (also Rifles).³⁰ In February 1861, he was promoted to the rank of captain (fifth in seniority). His older brother John James reached the rank of lieutenant.³¹

The 3rd Lanarkshire as a rifle volunteer corps was quite distinct from the regular army. A volunteer corps such as this was sufficiently trained to act as an auxiliary unit for army and militia forces, but it was not intended to serve in any front line.³² Individual volunteers had to pay subscriptions and raise their own money for uniforms and equipment, and O'Neill may well have used his fund raising skills for such purposes. O'Neill appeared at a public promotional meeting for his regiment at Glasgow City Hall in November 1859.³³

O'Neill spent four years as a volunteer member of the 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment. The experience provided him with a number of useful attributes that would serve him well when participating in public life during the Victorian era. These were the wearing of a military uniform complete with a designated rank (therefore

²⁸ I. F. Beckett, *Riflemen Form: A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement, 1859-1908* (Aldershot, UK: Ogilby Trusts, 1982), 19-20.

²⁹ Grierson.

³⁰ anon., "Testimonial to Mr Charles O' Neill."

³¹ N. Dickton, ed., *The Queen's Guard of Honour, Loch Katrine, 1859, a Memorial Record* (Glasgow, UK: N. Mac Phail, Stationer to Her Majesty, 1885), 39.

³² Utick, 43.

³³ anon., *GFP*, 26 November 1859, 1.

having the demeanour of ‘a Soldier of the Queen’), a social affinity with military personnel, and an opportunity to demonstrate innovative skills of benefit to the Empire. It would also provide a demonstration of his loyalty to the British Crown, significantly at a time when those of a more radical disposition among the Irish in Glasgow were attracted to Fenianism.

A record of the volunteer corps provided a description of the kind of uniform worn by O’Neill:

The uniform ... was dark grey, without facings and with black braid, black piping on the trousers, dark grey caps with black braid, and black pouch and waist belts. The badges were a lion rampant on the cap and pouch belt, and the arms of Glasgow on the clasp of the waist-belt.³⁴

Two mementos capture O’Neill aged in his early thirties and dressed in this uniform. The first of these (Illustration 1a, page 341) was an early black and white photograph, taken at some moment between 1861 and 1863.³⁵ The photograph captured strong features of his face - a prominent nose, piercing eyes, ruffled hair, and a rounded cropped beard fully covering the chin from ear to ear. One affectation was a pointed waxed moustache supporting the strap of his military cap. The second memento (Illustration 1b, page 341) was O’Neill’s depiction in the background of a painting by a Victorian artist Thomas Robertson entitled *The Glasgow Volunteers 1861-1866* celebrating the visit of Queen Victoria to Glasgow.³⁶ O’Neill’s personal features and uniform, as captured in Robertson’s painting, matched the black and white photographic record very closely.³⁷

³⁴ Grierson, 231-232.

³⁵ K.R.A. Gibb Collection, *Captain Charles O’Neill* Photograph, 1860, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, UK.

³⁶ Thomas Robertson W.S.A., *The Glasgow Volunteers 1861-66* Painting, 1861-66, Glasgow Museums Collection, Glasgow UK.

³⁷ Utick, 45. The Robertson painting also depicted O’Neill’s hair as auburn, something that the photograph could not capture.

The military drill experience left a positive impression on O'Neill. In September 1867, as MHA for Otago Goldfields in New Zealand, he stressed the value of military drill in public schools:

he knew boys at home who were bent and round-shouldered, but who, after getting three months' drill, walked straight and erect, with chest well forward; in fact, showing strong evidence of improved strength and health.³⁸

O'Neill's own practice of military drill may well have contributed to the physical stamina required by him to survey the rugged New Zealand interior during the late 1860s and early 1870s.

He was a popular member of the regiment, as conveyed at the testimonial dinner in his honour at the Clarence Hotel in George Square on a Saturday afternoon in September 1863.³⁹ Dreghorn presided over this function at which O'Neill's former employer George Martin served as the 'croupier' (assistant chairman). As part of the testimonial, O'Neill received gifts prior to his departure for New Zealand:

a costly and handsome case of professional instruments, and a purse of sovereigns, together with a superb colonial saddle and bridle, holsters etc. the special gift of Major William Smith Dixon, of Govan and Calderbank.⁴⁰

Given the circumstances of O'Neill's declared bankruptcy during the previous month, such gifts were not only invaluable to him but revealed the high respect of his superiors. Dreghorn, in praising O'Neill, 'found him to be one of the most valuable and intelligent officers in the service'.⁴¹

³⁸ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1867. Vol. 1, Part 2, 25 September. 1089.

³⁹ anon., "Testimonial to Mr Charles O' Neill."

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

O'Neill's talent of invention shone through with his contribution to the 'Wimbledon', a new system of rifle scoring.⁴² Rifle shooting was a new skill, and Great Britain's National Rifle Association was then faced with the task of drawing up rules and regulations. The type of rifles to be used, the form of target at which to fire, the best way to count the number of shots, the proper position at which to shoot, and system under which scoring should be conducted, all had to be worked out.⁴³ Glasgow newspapers, commenting on O'Neill's imminent departure to New Zealand, reported:

Among other services to the volunteer cause, he discovered a defect in rifle scoring, which he proposed to Lord Elcho to rectify. His lordship brought the matter before the National Rifle Association, and it was at once adopted.⁴⁴

Rifle shooting, a popular bush activity in colonial days, remained one of O'Neill's interests in New Zealand. Shooting competitions such as one in Grahamstown at the Thames, in February 1875, provided him with opportunities to mix socially with military personnel.⁴⁵ In October 1875, he unsuccessfully sought financial support for New Zealand representatives to enter an International Rifle Match in Philadelphia to coincide with that city's 1876 exhibition.⁴⁶

Most importantly, O'Neill's membership of the regiment provided a unique opportunity for him to demonstrate loyalty to the Crown. Within ten days of O'Neill joining the regiment, Queen Victoria arrived at Loch Katrine to open a new waterworks which would benefit Glasgow and Western Scotland. The regiment, including O'Neill and his brother John James, formed a guard of

⁴² anon., "The Appointment of Mr Charles O' Neill." This *Glasgow Free Press* article was extracted from the *Glasgow Daily Mail*, 14 July 1863,

⁴³ David Minshall, "Wimbledon and the Volunteers," (2005). URL: <http://www.researchpress.co.uk/volunteers/shooting/wimbledon04.htm> [accessed 11 September 2010].

⁴⁴ anon., "The Appointment of Mr Charles O' Neill." Lord Elcho, 10th Earl of Wemyss, formed the London Scottish Regiment in 1859.

⁴⁵ anon., "Colonial Rifle Firing: Presentation of the Prizes," *DSC*, 9 February 1875, 3.

⁴⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 18, 8 October. 324.

honour to welcome the Sovereign on 14 October 1859.⁴⁷ It was not the only occasion that O'Neill would find himself welcoming a royal representative; in May 1869, he was a member of an Auckland welcoming party boarding the man-of-war *Galatea* to greet the Duke of Edinburgh.⁴⁸ O'Neill may well have enjoyed the pomp and ceremony of official celebrations; in October 1871, he supervised the decorations in Government House for a ball celebrating the Queen's Birthday.⁴⁹

O'Neill's association with, and support of, the military featured in certain aspects of his public life in New Zealand. In October 1868, he sought parliamentary support for better pay for the colony's Armed Constabulary Force.⁵⁰ Civil defence was one of O'Neill's many interests during his decade in parliament, further stimulated by membership of the Colonial Defence Select Committee.⁵¹ O'Neill maintained close contacts with colonial military personnel. In March 1879, although by then out of parliament, he successfully led a deputation to the Minister for Defence seeking an amalgamation of seamen and land pioneer brigades to form a new Naval Brigade.⁵²

O'Neill's civil engineering and architectural work included military facilities. As Auckland Provincial Engineer, he superintended the construction of the Mt Eden powder magazine in Auckland.⁵³ Between 1879 and 1880, he designed a powder magazine at Kaiwarra (later Ngaio Gorge, Kaiwharawhara) to safely store explosives for use by the local military.⁵⁴

O'Neill was clearly proud of his colonial military associations. His commission in the 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment resurfaced as an important matter for him, much

⁴⁷ Dickton, ed.

⁴⁸ anon., "The Arrival of the Duke of Edinburgh at Auckland," *EP* 1869, 2.

⁴⁹ anon., "The General Assembly Ball," *WI*, 28 October 1871, 2.

⁵⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 4, 13 October. 295.

⁵¹ Utick, 103, 138.

⁵² anon., *EP*, 24 March 1879, 2.

⁵³ Bremner.J.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

later in his life in New South Wales. In 1892, as he faced the Newcastle District Courthouse during the Northumberland Banking Company case, his commission was prominent among the character references brought before the court by his Defence Counsel Thomas Slattery.⁵⁵ O'Neill's commission was a matter of personal honour as well as a public symbol of loyalty to the Crown and Empire.

A Career on the Colonial Frontier

Britain's Empire provided a global stage on which many resourceful individuals could pursue careers throughout the nineteenth century.⁵⁶ The Scots were particularly adept at this. O'Neill's life was another such example and, although not as eventful as some with careers in the military or mercantile world, was eventful nonetheless. The colonial frontier provided many of them with opportunities not available in Britain and, like O'Neill, many would not return to their homeland. O'Neill's professional skills were in civil engineering, architecture and surveying, all of which were in considerable demand in one of the farthest outposts, New Zealand's Province of Otago. O'Neill's skills were applicable to road construction, town planning and mining in a province that was experiencing a gold rush of a magnitude that, only a decade before, had been seen in Ballarat and Bendigo on the Victorian goldfields. The Otago Provincial Government was ambitious and many of its politicians had designs on Dunedin becoming the commercial and administrative capital of New Zealand.

In late September 1863, as O'Neill boarded the *Brechin Castle*, a clipper owned by Patrick Henderson and Co, the population of Otago Province jumped to over 60,000, with over 21,000 living within the newly proclaimed goldfields boundaries.⁵⁷

O'Neill's professional reputation and accreditation undoubtedly helped him gain a position of provincial surveyor for the Otago Provincial Government, within

⁵⁵ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Company Cases," *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6; Utick, 219.

⁵⁶ Lambert and Lester, eds.

⁵⁷ McLintock, 466.

months after the failure of his Glasgow private business and subsequent bankruptcy. Recommendation for this appointment came from a certain Mr Stevenson of Edinburgh, a Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers who served as an engineer for the Otago Provincial Government.⁵⁸

From one perspective, O'Neill's devout Catholicism might have been a problem for him in the Free Church Presbyterian stronghold of Otago. However, the influx of 'new identities' into the province, including Irish, other European, and Chinese prospectors had created a new social dynamic in this gold mining frontier.⁵⁹ In this environment, two characteristics of O'Neill played to his advantage. First, O'Neill's Scottish background and accent, as distinct from his Irish family roots, would have struck a sympathetic chord with the colonial establishment and the settlers engaged in commerce and broader social discourse. Second, pragmatism ruled in the face of skills demand and O'Neill's fitness and stamina, reinforced by military training, enabled him to undertake the physical work required to survey the gold-rich but extremely rugged mountains and valleys of Otago.

Two photographs of O'Neill taken during the 1860s portray a short but sturdy individual (see Illustrations 1a, page 339 and 1c, page 340). The first (noted previously) was the photograph of him soon after he became a Captain in the Lanarkshire Regiment. This image conveys a toughness of bearing with a traditional military pose.⁶⁰ The second, a photograph taken as an MHA for Otago Goldfields in Wellington around 1868, reveals a more polished O'Neill sporting a full beard and retaining this sturdy appearance.⁶¹

O'Neill's fitness can be deduced by his readiness to embark on surveying work almost immediately after a long sea voyage. The *Brechin Castle* departed from the Clyde on 1 October 1863. It arrived at Port Chalmers, the seaport on the shores of Otago Harbour some 13 kilometres to the northeast of Dunedin, on 24

⁵⁸ I.C.E., p. 5.

⁵⁹ Utick, 59.

⁶⁰ K.R.A. Gibb Collection, *Captain Charles O' Neill* Photograph, 1860.

⁶¹ anon. "Charles Gordon O'Neill (c. 1868)", ATL, Wellington, Photograph, 1868.

January 1864.⁶² The journey lasted almost four months, including the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope.

O'Neill would not return to Scotland but his subsequent professional and political activities would involve many sea voyages. These included travelling to and from Wellington for parliamentary sittings between 1866 and 1875, between Auckland and the Thames Goldfields between 1870 and 1876, and across the Tasman between New Zealand and the Australian colonies during the early 1870s.⁶³

Much inland travel was also necessary with O'Neill surveying on horseback some of the most rugged terrain in New Zealand. Such terrain included the Molyneaux (now Clutha) and tributary river valleys in Otago between 1864 and 1866 while stationed in the town of Cromwell. Later, during 1871, he surveyed the Rimutakas mountain range which separates Wellington and the Hutt Valley from the eastern side of the North Island.⁶⁴

O'Neill's days in Otago would have been spent overseeing the gruelling work of civil construction among the steep gorges. His early work included the construction of bridges, possibly across the Kawarau and the Roaring Meg and Gentle Annie Creeks.⁶⁵ He also developed schemes for the supply of water to the goldfields.⁶⁶

Such activity was not without considerable hazard and risk. Poor conditions and bad weather hampered progress.⁶⁷ During the month of April 1865, O'Neill was lost while surveying a practical route from Lake Wanaka to the West Coast of the

⁶² anon., "Port Chalmers – January 24th," *ODT* 1864, 4.

⁶³ Utick, 62, 78, 98-99.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 60-61, 117-119.

⁶⁵ Foley, *Charles Gordon O'Neill, Engineer and Apostle. Founder of the Society of St Vincent De Paul in Australia & New Zealand*, 6. A. Burke, "Correspondence to C. Foley, 8 June 1962," Sydney, SVDPA Folder 18. This early construction work has long disappeared.

⁶⁶ Findings according to O'Neill's evidence some 23 years later before New South Wales Parliament; see NSW Parliament, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly 1887-88*, 1888. Vol. 2. 877.

⁶⁷ Byrnes, 24-26.

South Island. His report was later reproduced in the *Bruce Herald*, and was by way of a direct comment to the Engineer of Roads and Works in Dunedin:

I went to the summit of a range, saw the Haast River, and the Maori Pass saddle, when we were forced to retreat. Met tremendous rains and a flooded river, and frightful thunder and lightning for five days and nights. Our provisions were done, our blankets thoroughly wet, we were much exhausted, another day would have prevented our return.⁶⁸

Even as a MHA, O'Neill continued with his surveying exploits for both professional and financial reasons. In 1870, he chaired a meeting of the Surveyors' Association in Auckland.⁶⁹ This kind of survey work pre-dated the introduction, in 1876, of a coordinated colony-wide survey system.⁷⁰

In 1867, a public meeting was held in Wellington to consider the feasibility of a railway through the Rimutakas.⁷¹ Robert Stokes, a Legislative Councillor for Hawkes Bay and editor of the *New Zealand Spectator*, had proposed this as early as 1858.⁷² A public committee subsequently urged that a preliminary survey be undertaken and engaged. O'Neill, a supporter of then Wellington Superintendent Dr Isaac Featherston, was commissioned to undertake this work together with a Wairarapa settler, Thomas Kempton. This initial survey was completed and a report submitted to Featherstone in January 1868.⁷³

Between 1870 and 1871, the New Zealand Ministry of Public Works and the Wellington Provincial Government employed surveyors to carry out surveys over the Rimutakas. O'Neill, directed by Superintendent William Fitzherbert to undertake the survey on behalf of Wellington Province, completed it between

⁶⁸ C. O'Neill, "Route to the West Coast," *BH*, 8 June 1865, 4.

⁶⁹ anon., "Surveyors' Association," *DSC*, 26 November 1870, 3.

⁷⁰ Byrnes, 32.

⁷¹ L. Ward, *Early Wellington* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Capper Press, reprint 1975).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 294.

⁷³ Cameron, 25. Cameron comments that O'Neill was 'obsequious in the presence of his superiors'. Allowing for the Victorian era practice deference to superiors, this may be too harsh; nonetheless, the episode demonstrates that O'Neill knew how to ingratiate himself with political figures to promote his plans.

May and July 1871.⁷⁴ His subsequent report, dated 20 July 1871, was published in the *Wellington Independent* four days later. In his report, O'Neill proposed a railway system between Pakuratahi on the Wellington side of the ranges to the settlement of Featherston on the Wairarapa side, with the key feature being a 130 chain (2.6 kilometres) brick-lined tunnel which (he claimed) would cost £85,800.⁷⁵

However, O'Neill's plan had competition from a cheaper plan by John Rochfort, an outstanding surveyor contracted by the National Public Works Department. Rochfort's plan had the support of John Carruthers, the colony's newly appointed Engineer-in Chief.⁷⁶ O'Neill pressed on with his own plans in March 1872, when he rode with a party of officials including Carruthers and, for part of the way, the Minister for Public Works, on an inspection tour across the route.⁷⁷ In the end, Rochfort's survey plans won out, possibly because of the uncertainties in constructing the long tunnel that the O'Neill plan required.⁷⁸

O'Neill's involvement in the Rimutakas surveys reveal his understanding that political association might gain him access to major construction projects in New Zealand. A correspondent from the *Otago Witness* astutely observed that:

Mr O'Neill has been engaged to make this survey – a duty for which his high professional ability is not his only qualification, his possession of a seat in the Assembly being generally regarded as an additional one of no slight weight in the matter.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁵ C. O'Neill, "Wellington and Wairarapa Railway, Report, 20th July 1871," *WI*, 24 July 1871, 3.

⁷⁶ Cameron, 33-39; G. Mullenger, "Carruthers, John - Biography," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 1 September 2010). URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2c11/1> [accessed 4 April 2011].

⁷⁷ Cameron.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁹ anon., "Wellington (from Our Own Correspondent)," *OW*, 24 June 1871, 6.

Being a member of New Zealand's General Assembly, while providing only a modest remuneration in the form of an honorarium (then £1 a day during sittings), could also open other doors to professional advancement.

It also enabled O'Neill to gain an appreciation of the New Zealand wilderness. Between 1872 and early 1873, he joined a geographical survey expedition on board the government ship *Luna* exploring the far southwest coast of the South Island. In February 1873, he was credited with first sighting a lake on (Great) Petrel Island in Dusky Sound, which was duly christened at the time as Lake O'Neill.⁸⁰

In keeping with such exploits, he seemed to delight in portraying a bushman image in Parliament. One political correspondent described him as: 'A member who manifestly hails from the diggings district, and who wears a dilapidated felt hat during the debates.'⁸¹

Furthermore, O'Neill demonstrated professional talent that was initially appreciated in the goldmining district where he worked between 1864 and 1866. In its editorial of 24 March 1866, *The Dunstan Times* welcomed O'Neill's election in February as a Member for Otago Goldfields:

The latter gentleman's experience on the goldfields does not extend over a long period, but the exercise of his profession as a civil engineer, and the opportunities afforded him while in charge of the roads in the goldmining districts, ought to make him a very desirable member.⁸²

The role that surveyors such as O'Neill played in the British colonisation of New Zealand was vital, preparing the country physically and psychologically for British settlement.⁸³ Previous British guarantees of Maori land rights under the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi were gradually rolled back as the pressure from British

⁸⁰ anon., "A Lake Discovery," *OW*, 15 February 1873, 2.

⁸¹ anon., "News of the Week," *OW*, 7 October 1871, 14.

⁸² anon., "Editorial," *DT*, 24 March 1866.

⁸³ Byrnes.

settlers increased. In contrast to Maori conceptions of land, land in New Zealand could now be prepared and developed for commercial profit. Preparation included forest clearance, demarcation of crown land boundaries, determining place names and, significantly in O'Neill's case, the laying out of town plans.

Initiating a Political Career

O'Neill's election in February 1866 to New Zealand's National Parliament as MHA for the new mining electorate of Otago Goldfields, represented a rapid rise up the social ladder in the colony in the space of only two years.⁸⁴

As the Land Wars with Maori came to an end, the New Zealand authorities welcomed the influx of adventurers who were (overwhelmingly) British and European prospectors. With this influx nonetheless came several concerns. One of these was the transient nature of this population. Many of the newcomers would not settle down, often leaving the colonies after the success or failure of their endeavours.⁸⁵ Another concern of New Zealand's colonial leaders was any repeat of the kind of rebellion as had been experienced in Ballarat, Victoria with the Eureka Stockade in 1854.

As early as 1858, a Parliamentary Select Committee had recommended that provision be made for parliamentary representation of the gold digging population.⁸⁶ The colonial authorities in New Zealand quickly learned lessons from the Eureka Stockade and extended voting rights to miners. In 1862, with the outbreak of the Otago gold rushes, a *Miners Representation Act* and *Representation Amendment Act* provided miners with a share of political power.⁸⁷ Two new members of parliament were to be elected across the whole province of Otago representing the miners. Any adult male who had held a miner's licence for

⁸⁴ Utick, 63.

⁸⁵ McLintock, 480.

⁸⁶ N. Atkinson, *Adventures in Democracy: A History of the Vote in New Zealand* (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press in association with the NZ Electoral Commission, 2003), 44-45.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

six months could vote, without previous registration.⁸⁸ Voting rights were soon extended to holders of goldfield business licences. Miners with other voting qualifications were also eligible to vote in other electorates. These changes were finalised by an electoral redistribution in 1865, in which New Zealand's South Island gained an additional fifteen parliamentary seats in time for an election the following year.⁸⁹

The elections for seventy seats in New Zealand's fourth parliament took place between 12 February and 6 April 1866, involving a national total of just over 29,000 registered electors.⁹⁰ New Zealand had not yet introduced a secret ballot.⁹¹ It was also a time when influence and patronage could easily sway the decisions of the small number of voters, although the evidence suggests that O'Neill had genuinely gained sufficient local support. O'Neill himself did not have to rely on a miner's licence to participate; he qualified as a voter being a British male subject over 21 years old and with an income above the requisite £50 per annum.⁹² The nomination letter by miner Thomas Shanley with its 69 signatories, published in *The Dunstan Times*, testified to O'Neill's familiarity with the miners or 'diggers', his keenness to advance the goldfields interests and his thorough knowledge of the district.⁹³

Only two candidates nominated for the two parliamentary vacancies in the new Otago Goldfields electorate. Both were duly elected from the floor of the Clyde Court House on Monday 26 February 1866.⁹⁴ O'Neill was proposed by a Mr Wells and a Mr Judge, both miners. The other successful candidate, proposed by a Mr Cope and a Mr Elliot, was Julius Vogel, one of New Zealand's leading politicians whose election was but another stepping stone in an ambitious

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 244.

⁹¹ By then however five Australian colonies had done so.

⁹² Utick, 57.

⁹³ T. Shanley, "Election Notice: Goldfields Election to Charles O' Neill, Esq," *DT*, 10 February 1866.

⁹⁴ anon., "Dunstan - the Nominations," *ODT*, 5 March 1866, 5.

career.⁹⁵ When the returning officer declared Vogel and O'Neill elected, the result was received with loud cheers from the crowd in the Court House.⁹⁶

This early acquaintance with Vogel might have brought some medium term political benefit. Although O'Neill and Vogel would initially part ways on issues relating to provincial government powers, within the space of one parliamentary term Vogel would find in O'Neill a (perhaps too uncritical) supporter of his national investment plans.⁹⁷

The absence of other candidates standing for Otago Goldfields was hardly surprising. In an era before political parties and the public apparatus of constituency offices, those seeking public office had to rely on patrons or their own resources to rally support. While the parliamentary honorarium might cover expenses during sessions in Wellington, in effect such members had to be of independent means. O'Neill therefore still had to pursue professional employment while undertaking the duties of a parliamentary representative. Furthermore, it was not an attractive proposition to be so far away from one's own business for months at a time, usually between the months of June and October.⁹⁸

Representing a rugged mining electorate such as Otago Goldfields presented challenges on its own. Travel was an additional expense met by parliamentarians; for example during 1872, O'Neill noted the cost of meeting all his trans-Tasman tour expenses during the early 1870s.⁹⁹

O'Neill's critics would often use the issue of being an absentee representative as political point, although Vogel and many others were subject to the same criticism.¹⁰⁰ With the centre of colonial administration located in Wellington, and O'Neill's professional employment soon to move to Auckland, he would find

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Utick, 80-81.

⁹⁸ The 1866 session of Parliament was between June and October (including sitting of the Legislative Council), although in some later years it was between June and September. See *NZPD Hansard* series between 1866 and 1870.

⁹⁹ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Hon Frederick Whitaker, 2 September 1880," Wellington.

¹⁰⁰ anon., *DSC*, 10 March 1870, 3.

himself lacking the time to conduct the visits across Otago Goldfields electorate while representing it in parliament.

This still leaves open the question as to why O'Neill bothered to stand for Otago Goldfields in the face of such difficulties. His political platform provides only a partial answer to this. This platform included extending legislative and administrative powers to country districts, relieving taxes on miners through reduction of the gold duty, making the Otago port the main route for departure by Panama steamships, and for financial and legal separation of the 'Middle Island' (South Island) from New Zealand's North Island.¹⁰¹ These were all popular causes in Otago at the time, but the last of these would cause acute political problems within six months of his arrival in parliament. O'Neill had stated in his election platform:

I am an advocate for Separation from the Northern Island – financial and legislative – and forever freeing the Middle Island from any further liability in Native affairs, and thus secure for the Province of Otago, the control over and benefit of her own revenues, subject to the existing liabilities of the colony, and her equitable contribution to the current expenses of the General Government.¹⁰²

The platform reveals that O'Neill was initially attuned to local provincial resentment of the powers of New Zealand's General Assembly.

Under the guidance of its Governor Sir George Grey, New Zealand with Westminster's approval had established a part-federal system of government.¹⁰³ The Constitution had provided for a General Assembly with a Crown-appointed Legislative Council and a directly elected House of Assembly. The constitution allowed for the establishment of Provincial Governments with directly-elected Superintendents and Provincial Councils.

¹⁰¹ C. O'Neill, "To the Electors of the Goldfields Boroughs," *DT*, 3 March 1866.

¹⁰² Ibid. "To the Electors of the Goldfields Boroughs, From Charles O'Neill", *DT*, 3 March 1866.

¹⁰³ Friends of the Hocken Collections, "New Zealand's Nine Provinces (1853-76)," *Bulletin, Hocken Library* no. 31 (March 2000).

At the time of the 1866 General Assembly elections, the number of provincial administrations had grown to eight. Four of these, Auckland, Taranaki (originally New Plymouth), Wellington, and Hawkes Bay were located in the North Island. The four in the South Island were Nelson, Marlborough, Canterbury and Otago. The North Island provinces floundered financially as a result of the Land Wars, while the South Island provinces of Canterbury and Otago prospered, the latter in particular given the scale of the gold discoveries there. The settlers and politicians of New Zealand's south had little desire to finance Governor Grey's military campaigns.

With the seat of government now shifted from Auckland to Wellington, the issue of separation of provinces came to head in the parliamentary session of July 1866. Frederick Whitaker, then also Auckland Province Superintendent, introduced a proposal to strengthen provincial government in Auckland.¹⁰⁴

Seizing the opportunity, the Otago Superintendent Thomas Dick, an extreme advocate of separation, sought to amend the motion in such a way as to establish full financial separation of the 'Middle Island' provinces.¹⁰⁵ Dick's amendment failed dismally, rejected by forty-two votes to twenty-four. Five Otago representatives, including O'Neill, voted against it.¹⁰⁶ Vogel, who had supported the amendment, became something of a local hero.¹⁰⁷ O'Neill's failure to support the extreme separation cause brought him the ire of Dunedin's provincialists. O'Neill's effigy was among five thrown off Dunedin jetty and into Otago Harbour by an angry mob on 11 October 1866.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ McLintock, 565-566.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid; W. Reynolds, "Mr Reynolds and Mr Dick," *ODT*, 19 October 1866, 4.

¹⁰⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD 1864-66*, 1867. 808. The vote was taken on 24 July 1866.

¹⁰⁷ anon., "Return of the Otago Members from the Assembly, a Great Public Demonstration," *OW*, 13 October 1866; Utick, 66.

¹⁰⁸ anon., "Return of Otago Members from the Assembly. A Great Public Demonstration," *ODT*, 12 October 1866, 4.

Since his election, something had drastically changed O'Neill's position on the role of provincial government. Later speeches indicate how much he had hardened his opposition to provincialism:

...if we examine... the workings of the provincial institutions, we find they have not been successful. Progress has been made no doubt, great progress as has almost ruined Southland; such progress as has distinguished Wellington by unfinished wharves, an unbuilt Wanganui bridge, and an untouched patent slip. Otago has made great progress, but that great progress was forced upon it by the gold fields.¹⁰⁹

O'Neill was particularly critical of the land development policies of the Otago Provincial Government. He claimed that land in the Clyde district of his own electorate was being promoted by that administration for development, despite the fact that it was unsuitable for cultivation.¹¹⁰

In August 1866, the New Zealand Premier Edward Stafford was able to form a new ministry free from the influence of the provincialists. Stafford's new ministry was able to stay in power until June 1869.¹¹¹ Provincialism was now finished as a parliamentary force and Vogel, who had thrown his weight behind the provincial separation cause, stayed in opposition until then.¹¹² A decade later (as examined in Chapter Six), the abolition of the provinces became one political factor that brought O'Neill's political career to an abrupt end.¹¹³

In the interim, O'Neill was to experience the instability of early New Zealand colonial politics from the parliamentary benches, particularly on goldfields issues. He was also to learn the power of the vote of an individual MHA. For example, in 1867, the issue of who really controlled the Otago Goldfields, the General

¹⁰⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 2, 7 August. 366.

¹¹⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 3, 18 September. 459.

¹¹¹ Bohan, "Stafford, Edward William 1891-1901."

¹¹² Dalziel, *Julius Vogel, Business Politician*, 70.

¹¹³ Utick, 114.

Assembly in Wellington or the Otago Superintendent and the Provincial Government, came to a head.

The trigger was the re-election of James Macandrew as Superintendent for Otago in February 1867 despite having been dismissed seven years before for financial mismanagement and serving time in jail for debt.¹¹⁴ Macandrew's re-election came as a major embarrassment for Premier Stafford who had been responsible for originally removing Macandrew from the position in the first place.¹¹⁵ The management of the Otago Goldfields had, until then, been devolved to the Superintendent and the Provincial Government. Stafford's response was to appoint James Bradshaw, a government supporter, who had won the seat of Goldfields Boroughs by only a handful of votes, to assume control of the Otago Goldfields.¹¹⁶

Vogel now sensed an opportunity to damage his political opponent Stafford and used his political power base in the Otago Provincial Government to create havoc for over two months, while both the national government and provincial authorities attempted to exercise their authority over the goldfields.¹¹⁷ Despite their reservations about Macandrew's character, the bulk of the Otago members opposed the national government's heavy-handed treatment of the province. O'Neill joined on the side of Vogel in the House to oppose the measure, and was among the 24 votes cast against the Stafford Government's move on 17 July 1867.¹¹⁸ The result was close with only 28 votes in favour. The Stafford Government had its way in placing the Otago Goldfields under its full control, but its position was weakened.

O'Neill maintained a genuine commitment to representing the interests of miners and the mining districts. This would later play to his political advantage when standing for the electorate of the Thames in 1871. He defended the contribution

¹¹⁴ Burdon, 44-45.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 46-47.

¹¹⁸ Utick, 70.

that the miners were making to the Australasian colonies, in the face of the concerns they were only an itinerant workforce that would not settle permanently. Speaking in the House in 1868, in response to a disparaging comment about the long term contribution of the miners, he commented:

the works of the digger have given New Zealand a prominent place in the southern hemisphere, and the result of the diggers' work will always be prominent as the parent of Commerce in New Zealand.¹¹⁹

O'Neill believed that miners could become less migratory and settle down, if they could get land easily for a fair price.¹²⁰ Demonstrating a flair for facts and figures, he cited the example of the Australian colony of Victoria, as providing an example of what the miners could contribute:

in 1857, the mining population was 125,000, and in 1867 they were about 60,000; still they had not left that Colony, but had built cities, wharves, docks, bridges, railways, and all kinds of public works – in fact, they made Victoria a wonderful country.'¹²¹

Reducing the gold duty would help the miner further. In August 1868, he seconded a motion by another Otago MHA, Charles Haughton, to reduce this duty for the Otago Goldfields by sixpence per ounce per year until it was abolished.¹²²

In the face of acute financial pressure on the government, the motion to reduce the duty failed, but by only two votes.¹²³ Later, in October 1868, O'Neill spoke in favour of a bill to reduce duty on the goldfields of Auckland Province, including those newly discovered on the Coromandel Peninsula, and he hoped that: 'the

¹¹⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 2, 7 August. 366.

¹²⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 2, 18 September. 459.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 2, 6 August. 28.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 30.

time would soon come when they would abolish the duty on gold altogether, as he looked upon it as a very great hardship for the digger.’¹²⁴

He also proposed the establishment of Mining Boards for the goldfields districts in New Zealand, claiming that they had benefited the Victorian goldfields.¹²⁵ This motion failed as well, this time by eight votes. As early as July 1866, he served on a Parliamentary Select Committee that had the objective of consolidating New Zealand’s goldfields legislation.¹²⁶

In his parliamentary speeches, O’Neill presented the latest statistics, including geological and surveying reports from both New Zealand and the Australian colonies. The content of such speeches reveal that he was developing a trans-Tasman perspective with respect to colonial economic development. O’Neill’s political views were those of enlightened Christian liberalism, with enthusiastic support for capitalist endeavour. As noted in Chapter Two, he opposed the *Treason Felony Bill* which the Stafford Government had introduced in July 1868. In September 1868, he voiced his opposition to the ‘shepherd kings’ who ruled the Otago Provincial Government and promoted pastoral tenancy to the exclusion of other forms of development:

it might just as well be argued that benefits would accrue to England or any other great European countries if they were turned into sheep-walks. We have only the two alternatives before us, of a country enclosed in by wire fences and converted into sheep pastures, or a country inhabited by God’s image in the shape of men, women and children employed in beautifying and fructifying the earth.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 4, 15 October. 345. The legislation before the House this time was the *Auckland Gold Duty Bill*.

¹²⁵ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 4, 8 October. 228.

¹²⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *Journal New Zealand House of Representatives, Select Committees*, 1866. xix.

¹²⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868, Vol. 3, 18 September. 459. O’Neill’s sentiments also resonate with opposition to the Highland Clearances in Scotland.

Despite this romantic agrarian vision, much of O'Neill's promotion of progress was also influenced by prevailing Victorian liberal thinking. For example, in his parliamentary defence of the patent system in July 1870, he used a quote, attributed to John Stuart Mill, that attempts to undermine patents 'would make men of brains still more than at present the needy retainers and dependents of men of money bags'¹²⁸

In a number of his early parliamentary speeches, O'Neill also infused quotes that seemed calculated to project his Scottish background. The Scots proverb used in the divorce debates was but one of these. Accusing the Otago provincialists of being blind to the welfare of New Zealand, he compared their insular attitudes with those the old Highland Clans:

Is it, as Lord Colonsay said of the Clan Chattan, "a thing in the blood, or what is it," what causes some to be so bound to provincialism as to close their eyes to anything that may be advanced for the welfare of the people?¹²⁹

A debate on a *Ballot Bill* in June 1870, in the wake of a violent political clash in Shortland between supporters of the two rival contenders of the Auckland Superintendency, had O'Neill reminiscing on his Inverary roots:

Nothing had taken place at all like was witnessed in England, in Ireland, or in the Highlands of Scotland, where once 600 electors would not be allowed to land from the steamer at Inverary Quay, and any person offering to receive or fasten the steamer's ropes was immediately tossed aside or knocked down.¹³⁰

On one occasion, O'Neill's sense of Scottish cultural affinity extended to theatrical endorsements. In January 1873, O'Neill was among seventeen others

¹²⁸ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 8, 22 July. 55.

¹²⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868, Vol. 2, 7 August. 365. O'Neill credits the saying to Lord Colonsay (1793-1874), a famed Scottish judge and Lord Chief Justice from 1852-1867. The Clan Chattan was a powerful grouping of clans in the Scottish Highlands, dating back to the 13th Century.

¹³⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 7, 22 June. 59.

who requested a public farewell performance to a certain Miss Aikten at the Odd Fellows' Hall in Wellington: 'being desirous of testifying to you our high appreciation of your exalted talents as a famous delineator of Scottish character, as drawn by our greatest authors...' ¹³¹

His profession of liberal views and his Scottish background seemed to pay no political dividend at election time, although it may have impressed more senior political figures. Much of this could be attributed to fact that he was not skilled in political rhetoric and was deemed a poor campaigner. This was exposed later in the election of 1871, in his campaign for the Thames against a skilled talker and sitting MHA, William Swan. According to one account published many years later in the *Timaru Herald*, O'Neill's first public appearance:

was a lamentable breakdown...Mr O'Neill was quite innocent of politics, and had scarcely a tongue in his head when he appeared in public. A counsel of his friends was called, and it was determined that something must be done. ¹³²

By this account, O'Neill's campaign was saved by his friends persuading the Auckland Superintendent to order O'Neill to undertake a railway survey, and so making him appear a martyr to officialdom. How true this anecdote was is uncertain, but O'Neill's poor campaigning performance relative to Swan was also commented on by a political correspondent of the *New Zealand Herald* during the campaign of February 1871. ¹³³

Later, a correspondent of Canterbury-based newspaper, *Star*, in a poetic pen sketch of the parliament of 1871, picks up some of this public reticence by describing him of 'hesitating speech', though adding that he was a 'sound well meaning' man. ¹³⁴ This was a change from an earlier public perception of O'Neill being a parliamentary comic.

¹³¹ J. Dransfield et al., "To Miss Aikten," *WI*, 20 January 1873, 3.

¹³² anon., "Weak Candidates", *TimH*, 11 December 1893, 4.

¹³³ anon., "Election News," *NZH*, 8 February 1871, 2.

¹³⁴ J.A., "The Parliament of 1871," *Star*, 18 November 1871, 2.

Nonetheless, as the *Star* correspondent also implied, O'Neill also was sincere and genuinely committed to his causes, even if, like reduction in the gold duty, they failed to gain sufficient support. The *Grey River Argus*, in September 1873, praised O'Neill for another gallant but unsuccessful attempt to effect a reduction in the gold duty.¹³⁵

However, O'Neill's public prestige in New Zealand grew as a result of his professional engineering achievements rather than his political ones. As will be examined in Chapter Four, on those occasions where his motions did meet with majority support on the floor of Parliament, it was on issues where his reputation as a civil engineer carried some weight such as patents and town planning.

Political Patronage and the Thames

O'Neill's shift of political focus from Otago to the Thames, reveals that whatever political ambition he may have held, his primary ambitions were directed towards his professional domain in civil engineering and the opportunities for wealth that this might also bring. Part of this also came from the view of politics being seen as a gentleman's pursuit. Nonetheless, an individual parliamentarian such as O'Neill could also exercise influence without the restraint of a party system. The problem was that political candidates also had to spend increasing funds on cajoling, rallying and transporting voters.¹³⁶ Political parties did not emerge in Australasian colonial politics until free trade and protectionist groups appeared at the New South Wales election of 1889; and in New Zealand the complete democratisation of New Zealand's electoral franchise (at least for males) was not in place until 1893.¹³⁷

The value of being an MHA was to provide entry to an elite circle of powerful colonial figures. Many of these figures held office both at the provincial level as

¹³⁵ anon., *GRA*, 20 September 1873, 2. Nonetheless, a reduction in the gold duty to two shillings had been passed by Parliament in August 1872. O'Neill did not move but strongly supported this motion, see anon., "Parliamentary News," *DSC*, 9 August 1872, 5.

¹³⁶ Atkinson, 102 (coinciding also with female suffrage).

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

well as in the New Zealand General Assembly. Their particular value to O'Neill was that they could make senior engineering appointments. In addition, his advice was sought after by many senior colonial figures, including John Ormond, Minister for Public Works between 1871 and 1872 and Hawkes Bay Superintendent, on district engineering appointments and on the Rimutakas survey.¹³⁸ O'Neill's association with Wellington Superintendent Featherston has already been noted. Another more important figure for O'Neill was John Williamson, who served as Auckland Superintendent for three successive periods (between 1856 and 1862, 1867 and 1869, and 1873 and 1875 respectively), as well as serving as MHA for Auckland City West between 1861 and 1875.¹³⁹ Williamson, from Newry in Ireland, was a Wesleyan and probably shared O'Neill's strong temperance views. It was Williamson who, as Superintendent, gave O'Neill his most senior engineering promotions.

O'Neill's advancement came within a year of the proclamation of the Thames Goldfields in July 1867 by the then Superintendent Dr Daniel Pollen.¹⁴⁰ O'Neill first gained the appointment of mining surveyor for the Thames district, an appointment made by the Deputy Superintendent of Auckland Province in August 1868.¹⁴¹ In January 1869, Williamson, again in the position of Superintendent, appointed O'Neill as Provincial Engineer and Chief Surveyor of the Thames Goldfield.¹⁴² The position included the responsibilities of Thames' Engineer-in-Chief of Railways, Tramways and Wharves, and was lucrative, carrying an annual salary of £400.¹⁴³ O'Neill was also appointed by the Governor as a Justice of the Peace in March 1869.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Furkert, 236; Utick, 118. For example, in January 1871, O'Neill was mentioned along with E. H. Bold, the Engineer-in-Charge of the East Coast, as recommending an appointment of a man to after to look after road works in from Rotorua to Taupo on the North Island.

¹³⁹ Waterson.

¹⁴⁰ Weston, 23.

¹⁴¹ Auckland Provincial Government, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1868. pt. August. 41, 354.

¹⁴² Ibid, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1869. pt. January. 4, 65.

¹⁴³ Auckland Provincial Government, *Return of Officers in the Review of the Provincial Government from 1 January to 30 September 1870, Showing the Amount of Salary Commission and Allowances Received by Each (Session Xxvi)*

1870. pt. 25 November, 7.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1869. pt. March. 158.

Broader ambition as much as public spirit was a likely factor behind O'Neill's political pursuits. O'Neill would later learn a hard lesson about the problems accompanying such appointments. In the short term however, he benefited from political patronage and, as noted previously, learned the value of an individual member's vote in an unstable parliament.

The period between 1868 and 1869 was one of significant political turmoil at the end of which O'Neill manoeuvred himself into the role of being a government supporter. Such a role would have given him greater access to senior ministers.

Under pressure from the British Government, Governor Grey was forced to resign in February 1868, to be replaced by the more ceremonial figurehead, Sir George Bowen.¹⁴⁵ Stafford's political opponent William Fox returned to New Zealand and regained his place in the Parliament.¹⁴⁶ The first Maori representatives made their way into the Parliament as well, elected between April and May 1868, following the 1867 *Maori Representation Act*, introduced by Hawkes Bay Superintendent and MHA for Napier, Donald McLean.

By the middle of 1868, the Stafford government faced a growing crisis following renewed upsurge of Maori unrest on the North Island. An uprising supported by Titokowaru, a Maori chief in May 1868, was soon followed by an escape of a resistance leader Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki and his followers imprisoned on the Chatham Islands.¹⁴⁷ After landing in Poverty Bay, north of Hawkes Bay, on a seized schooner *Rifleman* on 10 July, Te Kooti launched major attacks on European settlers on the east coast of the North Island.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Bohan, *To Be a Hero: Sir George Grey 1812-1898*, 238-239.

¹⁴⁶ J. Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1998). Burdon, 45.

¹⁴⁷ Belich; Burdon, 49-50.

¹⁴⁸ New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, "Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki" <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/people/te-kooti-arikirangi-te-turuki> [accessed 18 November 2010].

The Stafford Government made a fatal mistake of moving an armed constabulary force of fifty-seven men away from Hawke's Bay on the east coast.¹⁴⁹ The Government feared attacks by Maori on colonial settlements around the South Taranaki Bight on the west coast, including the fortified coastal town of Wanganui. As a result, Stafford lost the support of McLean, alarmed at the consequent vulnerability of Hawkes Bay to Te Kooti's raids.

O'Neill supported the Stafford Ministry during its initial handling of the crisis, given the threat by the Hauhaus to the Taranaki settlements on the North Island's west coast. The Hauhaus or Pai Marire, against whom Te Kooti himself had fought, was a fanatical religious movement with mixed pagan and Old Testament beliefs.¹⁵⁰ After referring to a previous speech by Mete Kingi, one of the new Maori MHAs, O'Neill voiced his own concerns about the potential threat to the colonial settlers of Wanganui:

At a time when the wives and children of the settlers had been sent into Wanganui as a place of temporary safety, and when it was rumoured that armed natives were within ten miles of that town, it was no time to talk of withdrawing the troops. They had to look to the lives of the people, and that was a matter of more importance than anything else.'¹⁵¹

However, the fears of McLean about the threat on the east coast were to be proven correct. In November 1868, thirty-three European settlers, including men, women and children, were massacred in Poverty Bay.¹⁵² Confidence in the government ebbed away in the first half of 1869 and, on 29 June, Stafford's opponent William Fox succeeded in passing a vote of no confidence. O'Neill too had changed his mind and his vote counted among the 40 that toppled Stafford's government.

¹⁴⁹ Burdon, 51.

¹⁵⁰ New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, "Pai Marire" <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/pai-marire/pai-marire-intro> [accessed 18 November 2010].

¹⁵¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 3, 18 September. 460.

¹⁵² Burdon, 51-52.

Despite the colonial frontier mentality, O'Neill also encouraged fairness in dealings with Maori. In August 1869, he successfully moved a motion that Maori be fully informed of the amount of revenue received on their behalf from the miner's rights: 'because some natives expressed dissatisfaction at the distribution of the revenue obtained from the miners' rights on that gold field.'¹⁵³

The political dynamic shifted again with a new government led by Premier Fox, although its prospects did not seem bright as it was backed by an unstable coalition of interests. In addition, the Land Wars and their aftermath had drained the colony financially. Meanwhile, the respected McLean returned to the post of Native Affairs Minister, and Vogel had risen to the post of Colonial Treasurer.¹⁵⁴

In June 1870, Vogel launched a public works and immigration program that would become a milestone in the colonial development of New Zealand. The centrepiece of the public works plan was a major program of railway construction in both North and South Islands. This was to be financed by a combination of borrowings, land payments and returns to contractors.¹⁵⁵ It was to be accompanied by an ambitious immigration scheme providing opportunities for the industrious. However, Vogel's immigration scheme could also discriminate against the neediest, who might seek an escape from wretched conditions in Britain and Europe.¹⁵⁶ O'Neill remained critical of the discriminatory aspects of this immigration plan, gently reminding parliament in July 1870:

they were not in nearly so bad a state as many other countries, although there had been a good deal of commercial depression. San Francisco, by a late account, had a large number of people out of employment, while New York had been had about 40,000 idle, and London, Glasgow, Liverpool and Manchester had considerable numbers of the unemployed...¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1869. Vol. 6, 12 August. 427.

¹⁵⁴ Fargher, 301.

¹⁵⁵ Burdon, 58-59.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 7, 15 July. 493.

By contrast, his speeches in favour of railways development from the middle of 1870 indicate that Vogel had no greater champion for promotion of the public works component of the plan.¹⁵⁸ The enthusiasm of O'Neill was unabashed. He became a safe vote for the government party and tied his political fortunes to the Vogel schemes and its attendant public borrowings.

With his employment centred on the Thames goldfields, O'Neill needed a new political base. Like Vogel, he shifted his political aspirations from the South Island to the North Island. However, following the narrow defeat in November 1869 of his patron Williamson to Thomas Gillies for the Superintendency of Auckland Province, O'Neill's position of Provincial Engineer became tenuous.¹⁵⁹ This election, held before the introduction of the secret ballot, had (as noted previously) been the scene of a violent political clash in Shortland at the Thames. The trouble had begun when Williamson's supporters were said to have tried to impede entry of Gillies' supporters into the courthouse. When the results for the Thames booth were announced, the pro-Williamson mob ran amok, breaking the windows of the Gillies election committee rooms, smashing the windows of the Bendigo Hotel, and attacking the offices of the local newspaper *The Thames Advertiser*.¹⁶⁰

There may have been some Irish digger support for the Newry-born Williamson, that later transferred itself to O'Neill in the election battle for the Thames constituency in 1871.¹⁶¹ Williamson's opponent Gillies was a Scot born in Rothesay on the Isle of Bute.¹⁶²

O'Neill's comment on the *Ballot Bill* of 1870 revealed that he remained an apologist for the Williamson camp as well as a firm supporter for the introduction

¹⁵⁸ Utick, 81-82.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 88.

¹⁶⁰ Weston, 202-203.

¹⁶¹ This connection is implied by later comment a few years later by the correspondent for the *New Zealand Herald*. See anon., "Election News", NZH, 8 February 1871, 2.

¹⁶² Rennie.

of a secret ballot.¹⁶³ As further indication of his liberal sympathies, O'Neill understood the abuses without such a reform:

The ballot system would be the means of equalising the poor man with the rich man; it would snatch away the power, which the rich had by their wealth, of carrying on with the most pernicious affects those strong systems of bribery and corruption which had been so marked in England.¹⁶⁴

With successful parliamentary reform, the approaching General Assembly elections of 1871 were by secret ballot.

The Fox Government was in need of good parliamentary supporters approaching that election. The administration had also been strengthened by an alliance between Vogel and McLean, both outsiders in terms of ethnic background and education from most of the Cabinet.¹⁶⁵ From the perspective of political pragmatism, the figure of O'Neill who, like both of them did not have the establishment background of English public schools and universities, seemed worthy of support. Vogel was of Jewish background, while McLean was a Scot educated only to the level of the parish school.¹⁶⁶ The shared Scottish background between O'Neill and McLean, both from Argyllshire, might have been grounds enough for a social bond. The fact that McLean emerged as one the most senior freemasons in colonial New Zealand seems not to have impeded such an association.¹⁶⁷

O'Neill seems to have demonstrated a reliance on McLean for political support and advancement. Writing from the Engineer's Office in Auckland to McLean in October 1870, O'Neill revealed his disappointment at not gaining a senior appointment:

¹⁶³ Utick, 85.

¹⁶⁴ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 7, 22 June. 59.

¹⁶⁵ Fargher, 301.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ C. White, C. Toxward, and T. Mountain, "Installation of Sir Donald Mc Lean, K.C.M.G., as District Grandmaster," *EP*, 5 June 1876, 3.

Now I did think that my services would have been wanted by this Colonial Government... You know how slender are the ties that bind me to the Provincial Government here, and how suddenly they may be broken. I therefore cannot but feel disappointed that I have been so totally ignored. I thought perhaps your kind references would have been used on my behalf.¹⁶⁸

O'Neill continued to correspond with McLean as 1870s progressed. Such correspondence included the usual representations on behalf of constituents, requests for help with obtaining jobs, and expedition of payments.¹⁶⁹ What assistance McLean might have rendered O'Neill in the lead up to the 1871 election, which took place between 14 January and 23 February, remains unknown.¹⁷⁰ The number of New Zealand voters had grown by then to over 41,500 electing a parliament of 78 MHAs, including those for the four reserved Maori seats.¹⁷¹

The election in the new seat of the Thames emerged as a relatively close contest between O'Neill and William Swan, previously MHA for Franklin, who combined a non-conformist Baptist background with an education in classics and mathematics.¹⁷² Despite O'Neill's comparatively poor campaigning skills, there were two factors which played to his political favour. One was that Swan had proclaimed himself a disbeliever in Vogel's public works borrowings, and hence made himself a target for pro-government supporters.¹⁷³ The second was the partisan support of O'Neill by a group of boisterous miners. With respect to the latter, the *New Zealand Herald* correspondent made the following observation during the campaign:

¹⁶⁸ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Hon Sir Donald Mc Lean, Minister for Native Affairs, 20 October 1870, 1870," *ATL*, Wellington.

¹⁶⁹ Utick, 88.

¹⁷⁰ Atkinson, 244; C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Hon Sir Donald Mc Lean, Minister for Native Affairs, 15 March 1871," *ATL*, Wellington.

¹⁷¹ Atkinson.

¹⁷² anon., "Response of Hawkes Bay Herald to Report of Death of W.T. Swan," *DSC*, 31 March 1875, 2.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

the attitude of several pugnacious individuals, supporters of Mr O'Neill, who at Mr Swan's meeting, ...made themselves very prominent in their gesticulations, and an attempt at setting a 'striking' example.¹⁷⁴

Until the votes from Coromandel had been counted, O'Neill had gained only 487 votes to Swan's 503. The miner's vote from Coromandel gave O'Neill a final, modest majority of 171 votes.¹⁷⁵

O'Neill's win in the Thames on 10 February 1871 would give him a further five years in the New Zealand Parliament, but from then on his political fortunes waned. He witnessed a series of administrations, including those led by Fox (until September 1872), a short term *interregnum* by Stafford, followed successively by those of George Waterhouse (from October 1872), Julius Vogel (from March 1873) and finally, during 1875, by Dr Daniel Pollen.¹⁷⁶ During this time, O'Neill also served on a wide range of House Select Committees including those dealing with Gold-Fields Bills and Petitions (1871), Otago Waste Lands Administration Improvement (1872), the Submarine Electric Telegraph (1872), a Royal Mint (1872), an *Auckland Improvement Bill* (1872), Colonial Defence (1872 and 1873), Public Works and Immigration (1872 and 1873), Gold Fields (1873 and 1875), Waste Lands (1875) and the House Committee (1873 and 1875).¹⁷⁷

Outside of parliament however, O'Neill paid increasing attention to the pursuit of personal wealth.

¹⁷⁴ anon., "Election News," *NZH*, 8 February 1871, 2.

¹⁷⁵ anon., "Thames Election," *NZH*, 11 February 1871, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Utick, 101.

¹⁷⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *Journal New Zealand House of Representatives, Select Committees*, 1871. xxxv; New Zealand Parliament, *Journal New Zealand House of Representatives, Select Committees*, 1872. xxxvii-xxviii; New Zealand Parliament, *Journal New Zealand House of Representatives, Select Committees*, 1873. xxiv-xxv; New Zealand Parliament, *Journal New Zealand House of Representatives, Select Committees*, 1875. xxii-xxiii.

Pursuit of Wealth

By the early 1870s, O'Neill had emerged as a liberal capitalist entrepreneur in the British Victorian mould. While embracing an entrepreneurial role might not have been essential to O'Neill's sense of British identity, his professional training and the political patronage he sought had become keys to pursuing business opportunities that the gold rush and public works development might bring. Part of this might have been the recovery of professional pride following the humiliation of his bankruptcy in Glasgow in 1863.

There were at least three routes by which O'Neill strove to build his fortune involving either investment or invention, or a combination of both. The first was by direct investment in gold mines and other mining ventures. The second was through patents for specific inventions of benefit to goldfields infrastructure. A third was through the development of tramways, railways and urban infrastructure.

O'Neill began investing in mines in a modest way as early as 1866, during his surveying days in the Otago town of Cromwell. His earliest known investment was as a £25 shareholder in the Skipper's Quartz Mining Company.¹⁷⁸ This would have been over a third of his then annual salary. In July 1869, he expanded his portfolio with a £10 shareholding in the Hard Working Gold Mining Company with offices in Wellington's Lambton Quay.¹⁷⁹

In August 1869, now working as the Thames Engineer-in-Chief, O'Neill made what was then a huge investment; he was named as one of ten shareholders of a newly registered McIsaac's Extended Gold Mining Company.¹⁸⁰ The company's claim was located on Karaka Creek between Shortland and Grahamstown, with its headquarters at Grahamstown's Royal Exchange. This investment was £1500, five times his then annual salary, for 750 of the Company's 9000 shares.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ New Zealand Government, *NZG*, 1866. 148.

¹⁷⁹ L. Levy, "The Hard Working Gold Mining Company Registered," *WI*, 15 July 1869, 5.

¹⁸⁰ Auckland Provincial Government, *Auckland Provincial Government Gazette*, 1869, pt. August. 53, 698.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Whatever qualms he might have had in his youth about the 'making of fortunes' (once derided by his Glasgow mentor James Walsh) were long gone. The magnitude of the investment in the McIsaac's Extended Gold Mining Company also suggests that either O'Neill already had a considerable windfall from his previous investments or had borrowed a portion of the capital.

Further, the prospects of the Thames gold discoveries in Auckland Province had captured O'Neill's attention for some time. In September 1868, he observed:

Auckland is rising rapidly; the gold discoveries of the Thames will be the means of making it yet wealthy, and the 500 square miles of auriferous country within its boundaries, will force the importance of Auckland upon the inhabitants of the southern hemisphere.¹⁸²

O'Neill clearly understood that investing in gold mines might be the means of making himself wealthy. Even as O'Neill's financial situation waned during the late 1870s, he still maintained an interest; in February 1878 for example, he invested £20 in the Golden Point Gold-Mining Company operating near Marlborough.¹⁸³

His position as both MHA and Auckland Provincial Engineer provided him with further opportunities in examining and reporting on new or proposed mining developments across colonial New Zealand. In October 1871, for example, O'Neill provided a professional inspection report to Directors of the Never Despair Goldmine near Wellington, adjacent to the Hard Working Company's claim, although in that case he was not an investor himself.¹⁸⁴

By the early 1870s, O'Neill looked further afield to other kinds of mines for investment purposes. In February 1873, he had become a Provisional Director of a newly-formed New Zealand company that aimed to develop the West Coast

¹⁸² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 2, 7 August. 366.

¹⁸³ New Zealand Government, *NZGG*, 1878. pt. 20 June, 906-907.

¹⁸⁴ anon., "The Never Despair Company," *WI*, 3 October 1871, 3.

coal fields on the South Islands. A seat as a Director required a commitment of at least 50 shares, notionally worth £500.¹⁸⁵ During 1874, he was reported as engaged in negotiations with businessmen in Sydney with a view to forming a company which would mine sulphur on New Zealand's White Island. Praising O'Neill's efforts, Wellington's *Evening Post* commented: 'we only wonder that such a speculation has never before occurred to some of our own capitalists.'¹⁸⁶

Patents for inventions provided another potential source of income. O'Neill strongly and successfully argued for the promotion of patents and the patent system, but his speech in July 1870 could be read as promoting self-interest as well:

For his own part, he thought that patents ought to be continued, and that the inventor and patentee was quite as much entitled to all the protection that could be given to him as a labourer was to his hire. Inventors, as a class, had conferred inestimable benefits upon mankind. He looked upon inventors as the very aristocracy and brain of industry, and they ought to be protected.¹⁸⁷

At the time O'Neill made this address, he had already at least two patents under development, both involving inventions of relevance to the goldfields. The first patent, applied for in 1869 together with civil engineer Benjamin Smith, was for a process of extraction of gold and other metals from quartz or other metal bearing substances.¹⁸⁸ The second, in partnership with another civil engineer Daniel Simpson gained more prominence, and was subsequently granted by the Governor in November 1871.¹⁸⁹ This latter patent was:

¹⁸⁵ anon., "The New Zealand Coal Company (Limited)," *EP*, 25 March 1873, 3.

¹⁸⁶ anon., *EP*, 13 July 1874, 2.

¹⁸⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 8, 22 July. 55.

¹⁸⁸ Hart & Buckley, "Notice," *WI*, 2 September 1869, 7.

¹⁸⁹ anon., *DSC*, 20 November 1871, 2.

for the exclusive use within the colony of New Zealand of an invention in the means of using fixed wire and other ropes, chains, bars, or other materials for carrying loads from one point to another by gravitation or any known motive power.¹⁹⁰

O'Neill continued to patent his inventions including the Caithness flagging for urban footpaths initiated by late 1877.¹⁹¹

The public works program provided further business opportunities, particularly in railway and other transport development, both areas of professional interest to O'Neill. In an address in July 1870, he pointed out how little progress had been made in New Zealand compared with other parts of the world.¹⁹² The following month, during debate on a *Railway Gauge Bill*, he argued for adoption of a three foot six inch railway gauge which was then being adopted widely across the world.¹⁹³

Within two years, the New Zealand Government had made contracts with the blacksmithing works of John Brogden and Sons of Wellington, worth an estimated one million pounds, for the construction of railways.¹⁹⁴ In an era before conflict of interest considerations for parliamentarians, O'Neill had begun business associations with the iron magnate Brogden, the earliest recorded being in March 1872, when O'Neill was promoting his Rimutakas railway plans.¹⁹⁵

In June 1872, O'Neill acted as a representative for Brogden's firm during a visit to Adelaide, and had an interview with the South Australian Chief Secretary over a proposed South Australian Transcontinental Railway.¹⁹⁶ In September 1872,

¹⁹⁰ New Zealand Government, *NZGG*, 1870. pt. 26 August, 410.

¹⁹¹ Utick, 137.

¹⁹² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 7, 15 July. 49.

¹⁹³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 8, 31 August. 447. This 'narrow' three foot six inch rail gauge would become New Zealand's standard. It was adopted by Queensland but not New South Wales and Victoria.

¹⁹⁴ anon., "Parliament," *WI*, 6 September 1872, 2.

¹⁹⁵ anon., "Local and General News," *WI*, 12 March 1872, 2.

¹⁹⁶ anon., *WCTimes*, 5 July 1872, 2.

O'Neill defended both the government's associations with Brogden's firm and the firm's record in meeting the construction contracts.¹⁹⁷ By the end of 1872, he had acquired a sub-contract himself from Brogden's firm for the construction of a portion of the Waikato railway.¹⁹⁸

It was through his connections with Brogden's enterprises that O'Neill probably made the acquaintance of another prominent engineer, John Henderson.¹⁹⁹ A business partnership between O'Neill and Henderson bore fruit some three years later, when in 1875 Wellington City Council granted them (in association with an accountant Thomas Kennedy MacDonald) a ten year monopoly for the construction of its city tramways.²⁰⁰

More broadly, O'Neill's association with Brogden's enterprises would have also brought with it considerable prestige. In December 1871, a *Wellington Independent* editorial praised Brogden as one of three representative men, who 'represent in themselves three grand constituent elements of that characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race – colonisation.'²⁰¹ In Brogden's case, the editorial noted that he was a 'representative of the Iron Age' who 'offers us the railway and the locomotive, those mighty instruments of human power and advancement.'

O'Neill's continued association with the Brogden business empire was demonstration enough that he shared much of these same ideals. In this way, O'Neill's business activities, as well as his professional and political life, aligned very closely with the objectives of British Empire colonisation.

¹⁹⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 13, 4 September. 80-81.

¹⁹⁸ anon., "Telegrams," *OW*, 14 December 1872, 14.

¹⁹⁹ The association of Brogden, O'Neill and Henderson was noted in reports on the survey of the Wellington to Wairarapa Railway in 1872. See anon., "Local and General News," *WI*, 12 March 1872, 2.

²⁰⁰ anon., *GRA*, 29 November 1875, 2.

²⁰¹ anon., "Editorial," *WI*, 23 December 1871, 2.

As will be examined further in Chapter Six, whatever wealth O'Neill made or planned to make for himself was practically dissipated by 1877.²⁰² Yet his professional reputation continued to grow even as fortune eluded him.

²⁰² Utick, 137.

Chapter Four: A Civil Engineer and Social Progress

Belief in Economic and Technological Progress

O'Neill's statement to the New Zealand Parliament in July 1870 that inventors could confer 'inestimable benefits upon mankind' reflected much more than professional self-interest. Between 1871 and 1875, he became a proponent of economic and technological progress.¹ In this, he was very much expressing the confidence of the Victorian era in such progress, that had for example seen railways and steamships alter dramatically the way that people lived and worked within the British Empire, the United States of America and much of Europe. From the earliest stages of the industrial revolution in Britain, development of the steam engine became closely linked with commercial engineering.²

Civil engineering in Britain, although not initially linked to formal university training, became a profession as early as 1818 with the foundation of the Institution of Civil Engineers.³ Furthermore, as the nineteenth century progressed, engineering science began to develop in British universities as it had already done in Europe, led significantly by the University of Glasgow.⁴ O'Neill had not formally attended the university, but (as noted in Chapter Three) his training had included studies under the civil engineering academic Lewis Gordon. Much of O'Neill's enthusiasm for technological development may have been instilled during those early years.

Publicly, engineering had been embraced as an indispensable tool of Empire; it was an idea that O'Neill enthusiastically shared. Colonial New Zealand, with its preoccupation with the Land Wars, lagged behind much technological development elsewhere. For O'Neill, Vogel's public works program was overdue. However, as early as 1872, there were signs that the program was too ambitious and insufficient progress was being made, particularly after the collapse of the Fox administration

¹ Utick, 81-82, 93.

² A. Wilson, *The Engineer in History* (Melbourne: Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies, RMIT, 1991), 3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ R. Buchanan, "The Rise of Scientific Engineering in Britain," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 18, Part 2, no. 59 (1985): 222-224.

in September.⁵ Nevertheless, O'Neill continued to provide parliamentary support for the national public works program.

In his parliamentary speeches, O'Neill delivered numerous statistics on such subjects as gold production and exportation, railways, growth of European settlement and other aspects of economic development. For example, in August 1871, in support of yet another motion to reduce the gold duty, he provided a six monthly report of gold production for seven of New Zealand's gold producing provinces. He also linked the role of gold production in the growth of the colony, noting that from April 1857 to June 1871, New Zealand had exported some 5,897,909 ounces of gold, worth some £22,918,177 while its European population had grown from around 60,000 in 1859 to over 250,000 in 1870.⁶

O'Neill's position was not promotion of wealth for wealth's sake, but rather that immigration and settlement would provide a better life for people who would be 'employed in beautifying and fructifying the earth'.⁷ This kind of sentiment seemed to be popular in the colony. A correspondent in the *Evening Post*, writing in August 1868, while disagreeing with O'Neill's strict views on divorce, nonetheless viewed most favourably O'Neill's advocacy of 'presenting every child in the colony with a few acres of land'.⁸ However O'Neill's land settlement views went no further than promoting an agrarian myth. It would take over two decades before a liberal land settlement policy was introduced in New Zealand, under the guidance of the Rosshire-born John McKenzie serving as Minister for Lands in the Liberal cabinet of 1891-1900.⁹

O'Neill, with his background in philanthropy, also understood the need to provide better opportunities for the unemployed. He had his own memories of the unhappy economic struggle in Glasgow, the direct experience of the plight of the victims of

⁵ Utick, 101.

⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 10, 30 August. 169.

⁷ Utick, 68.

⁸ anon., "House of Representatives," *EP* 1868, 2.

⁹ T. Brooking, "Mckenzie, John - Biography," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 1 September 2010). URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2m17/1> [accessed 7 April 2011].

the Great Irish Famine and probably an appreciation of the impact of the Highland Clearances on the rural Scots. He also had some practical experience as Engineer-in-Chief under instruction from the Auckland Superintendent in supervising work for several thousands of destitute miners.¹⁰ Despite the wealth of the Thames goldfields, failures of mines would often mean precarious employment. O'Neill's interests in settlement of the working poor surfaced again after his departure from parliament. In April 1880, he chaired public lectures in Wellington given by promoter R. E. Evenden. These lectures were aimed at encouraging working men to purchase by deferred payment, land settlements in excess of 200,000 acres which the government had released, many close to employment opportunities.¹¹

O'Neill's most enthusiastic interests were, however, in aspects of technological development, and in this he was aided by access to statistics and reports that enabled him to compare colonial New Zealand with gold mining economies such as those of colonial Victoria and the United States of America.¹² Much of this information must have been avidly sourced from a newly established Wellington Parliamentary Library, which had issued its first full catalogue in 1867.¹³ Four years later, he advocated that New Zealand construct its own National Library.¹⁴

He supplemented such information with findings gained during his travels to the Australian colonies in the first half of 1872.¹⁵ In so doing, he adopted a trans-Tasman perspective of colonial economic development, informed by discussions with colonial officials and politicians.

O'Neill began his parliamentary campaign for technological progress during the August session of 1870. Perhaps reflecting his growing interest in forestry, he supported a motion to provide government funding for a newly established

¹⁰ anon., "The Unemployed Miners at the Thames," *WI*, 1 March 1879, 2.

¹¹ R. Evenden, "To the Working Men," *EP*, 29 April 1880, 3.

¹² Utick, 71, 93.

¹³ Martin, "Speech Notes for the Launch of *Captain Charles, Engineer of Charity*," 2.

¹⁴ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 11, 31 October. 671.

¹⁵ Utick, 98-99.

botanical garden in Wellington.¹⁶ He also urged that the new public works program include funding of £150,000 for the construction of a waterworks.¹⁷

It was an era when overseas telegraph communication was being established by submarine cable. Given progress already made with Britain and the Australian colonies, he believed that New Zealand should connect to Australia, probably through Sydney:

in 1866 communication was had between England and Australia, through India, in thirty days, and it would be a great advantage to have communication from Australia to New Zealand in a few minutes.¹⁸

O'Neill's interest in submarine telegraph probably resulted in his chairmanship, two years later, of the Parliamentary Select Committee dealing with the matter. Unfortunately, there was no quick outcome; one of O'Neill's final parliamentary questions, in late 1875, was to enquire about progress on submarine telegraph cables to Australia.¹⁹

The Australian colonies also provided examples of the establishment of mints, with branches of the Royal Mint then established in Victoria and New South Wales. Following his 1872 visits to Australia, O'Neill was convinced that to support its own developing gold-mining industry, New Zealand needed to follow suit. In July 1872, as Chair of Select Committee on the Royal Mint, he reminded the House of progress made in this area by the United States:

Honorable members knew that in America mints had been formed wherever gold was abundant. In San Francisco, a mint was established four years after gold was discovered in California; but then, no doubt, America was quick and wise in her action in these matters, as in the construction of

¹⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 9, 31 August. 435; Utick, 83. The New Zealand Institute had formally established the Gardens in 1868.

¹⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 9, 16 August. 16.

¹⁸ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 9, 23 August. 192.

¹⁹ Utick, 116.

railways and other works, while England and her colonies were slower in their movements.²⁰

O'Neill remained in awe of the technological capability exhibited by the United States in the area of patents administration. He urged the government to follow the American example of having proper facilities for the display of railway plans, models and other patent specifications, rather than just depositing them in the Wellington Customs House.²¹ In October 1872, he provided a glimpse of what colonial New Zealand could emulate:

They would do well to take a leaf out of the book of America, where the Patent Office at Washington was one of the greatest institutions in the United States – in fact it was one of the National Museums of America...Models of every machine in the States were to be seen there. People went from all parts of America to consult books which could only be found at the Patent Office, and the collection is one of the best technical libraries in the world.²²

This kind of vision was too ambitious for a relatively small British colony that had just emerged from the Land Wars. Nonetheless, O'Neill did manage to secure a few symbolic successes. While in Melbourne in 1872, he had the advantage of examining 'the beautiful process of photolithography' at the Victorian Crown Lands Office.²³ Photolithography had developed in the nineteenth century as a means of transferring photographic images onto stone or lithographic plates for printing. He pointed out that, for a mere £60, New Zealand could buy the technology and that it could then be used to illustrate drawings of patents. In October 1872, he managed to persuade parliament of its merits, so that abstracts of patent specifications could be illustrated by copies from the original drawings and presented to parliament each year.²⁴

²⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 12, 26 July. 140.

²¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 19, 15 September. 466.

²² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 13, 16 October. 722.

²³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 13, 23 October. 921.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

O'Neill's interest in scientific and technological progress continued well after his departure from parliament. In 1877, he was elected to the Wellington Philosophical Society (a precursor to the Royal Society of New Zealand), remaining an active member for at least two years.²⁵ O'Neill was emerging as a polymath; had he remained in New Zealand, he might have expanded his eclectic range of scientific interests. For example, in early 1880, he discussed in the *Tuapeka Times* whether an astronomical phenomenon witnessed in New Zealand skies was a comet or not.²⁶ By then, he had also acquired a reputation as a colonial expert on forest timbers and at the Melbourne Exhibition in early 1881 was appointed by Colonel Sir Herbert Sandford, the official representative of the British Royal Commissioners, to act as a juror on behalf of Britain in a section dealing with forest products and associated trades. O'Neill shared this role with the distinguished botanist Baron Sir Ferdinand Von Mueller.²⁷ O'Neill's reputation in this field had already been established through many years of advocating forest conservation, commencing in 1868.

Advocate for Forest Conservation and the Forest-Climate Connection, 1868-1874

Indiscriminate burning and clearing of native forests followed in the wake of British settlement of colonial New Zealand, despite attempts at forest management as early as 1849. Insufficient surveillance of reserves and the behaviour of licence holders meant that great waste and destruction of bushland continued without restraint, including economically valuable timber stocks.²⁸ In 1868, the loss of valuable timber resources did not go unnoticed in the New Zealand Parliament. In early October, Thomas Henry Potts, MHA for Mt Herbert in Canterbury Province sought information about the state of the forest resources

²⁵ anon., *EP*, 23 July 1877; Royal Society of New Zealand, *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand 1868-1961, Meetings Wellington Philosophical Society 21 July 1877 and Appendix, Ordinary Members of the Wellington Philosophical Society*, vol. 10 (1877), xxx.

²⁶ anon., "Local and General Intelligence," *TuapekaT* 1880, 2.

²⁷ anon., *EP*, 21 January 1881, 2.

²⁸ G. Wynn, "Destruction under the Guise of Improvement? The Forest, 1840-1920," in *Environmental Histories of New Zealand*, ed. Eric Pawson and Tom Brooking (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 113.

in the colony, noting: ‘the rapidity with which the woods were destroyed would make them disappear in a short time, and work a great change in the prospects of the settlers.’²⁹ Potts, who is credited with initiating the conservation debate in parliament, noted that the loss of economically valuable forests elsewhere had received the attention of legislators in Victoria and the United States.³⁰

O’Neill was prominent among those supporting Potts’ motion to seek information about the state of forest reserves and, in so doing, added his own observations:

settlers, where little timber existed, were impressed from the first with the idea of planting trees; whereas when settlers found themselves in the middle of a forest, the primary idea with them was to destroy the timber. There were difficulties in every way with regard to this subject; the varying land laws, the objects for which forests were to be preserved, whether for purposes of utility – in which case the course to take would be merely to guard against undue waste – or for climatic purposes, in which case, of course, destruction of timber must be prohibited for any purpose.³¹

His comments reflected the structure of the debate of 1868 and others in later years. He was not alone in acknowledging some kind of linkage between climate and preservation of forests; scientist and politician William Travers (MHA for Christchurch City) and former Premier Stafford demonstrated their own appreciation of this issue. For O’Neill, it was the beginning of an intermittent parliamentary campaign for forest conservation that would last six years.

Potts’ interest in the activities of the Victorian legislature in forest conservation was also shared by O’Neill, who noted the activities of a Board in Victoria, appointed in August 1867 ‘to report on the best means of securing the permanency of the State Forests of that colony’.³² The subsequent report of this Board had shown how much money was spent on importing timber because of

²⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 4, October 7. 188.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.* 190.

³² P. Star, “T.H. Potts and the Origins of Conservation in New Zealand, 1850-1890” (Otago, 1991), 75-76.

local waste, listed the use of Australian timbers, expressed an interest in the planting of non-indigenous timbers and reaffirmed an influence of climate on forests. O'Neill raised the findings of the Victorian report later again in the New Zealand Parliament in October 1873.³³ Waste of resources was a primary concern, and he could contrast the situation in Otago Goldfields in the South Island (where timber was not plentiful owing to pre-European deforestation) with that of the Thames in the North Island (where timber in the Coromandel Peninsula was in abundance but being destroyed without purpose).³⁴

The forest-climate connection became a subject about which O'Neill issued dire warnings in subsequent years.³⁵ While such a connection had been spoken of in ancient times, and was a well-grounded consideration in contemporary European forestry, the environmental damage in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand gave legislators cause for reflection. Potts identified one of the scholarly influences of the day in his October 1868 address, the American expert on physical geography George Perkins Marsh, whose book *Man and Nature* had been published in 1864.³⁶ Marsh, while admitting the inferential nature of conclusions of physicists, suggested that the destruction of forests would have undesirable meteorological and climatic impacts.³⁷ O'Neill's addresses suggest that he too was drawing on material such as this.

Articles on the forest-climate connection also appeared in the New Zealand press, most notably in the *Otago Daily Times*, which ran articles in both October and September 1869; these could have also influenced O'Neill's views.³⁸ Further, both O'Neill and Potts were able to draw directly on the dire warnings of a German naturalist, geologist and geographer, Ferdinand von Hochstetter (1829-1884) who had arrived in New Zealand as part of a ten month scientific

³³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 1 October. 1545.

³⁴ Beattie: 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 4-5; Utick, 106.

³⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1868. Vol. 4, 7 October, 188. See Star, 75.

³⁷ David Lowenthal, ed., *Man and Nature by George Perkins Marsh* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 122-126.

³⁸ J. Beattie, "Environmental Anxiety in New Zealand, 1850-1920: Settlers, Climate, Conservation, Health, Environment" (Otago, 2005), 165.

expedition in 1859. Hochstetter later published his geography of New Zealand in German in 1863, translated into English in 1867.³⁹ Hochstetters' own concerns about the burning and destruction of the kauri forests were cited directly by Potts and O'Neill during the 1868 parliamentary debate.⁴⁰

Following Potts' departure from parliament, O'Neill continued his own campaign promoting forest conservation. Speaking in September 1871 in support of a *Canterbury Forest Trees Bill* (that ultimately passed into legislation as *The Forest Trees Planting Encouragement Act*), he warned:

In other countries where timber had been recklessly removed, great droughts had set in ruining the country and scattering the population, as had often happened in France, where they were now planting trees to avoid a repetition of such occurrences.⁴¹

By then he observed that Wellington Province had itself experienced the 'evil effects' of denuding the countryside of trees, including floods and landslides:

on one side of the Rimutaka hill, they had been burnt away for the purpose of constructing roads there; and the result was that there had been such floods as had been never known there before, clearing away culverts, bridges and everything before them. The same thing had occurred in the Hutt Valley.⁴²

O'Neill was now at the forefront of those in parliament who argued that tree planting legislation would bring climatic benefits, particularly in the comparatively treeless Canterbury and Otago Provinces.⁴³ Elsewhere in New Zealand, little had been achieved to forest conservation apart from collection of

³⁹ J. Beattie, *Empire and Environmental Anxiety: Health, Science, Art and Conservation in South Asia and Australasia, 1800-1920* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 144-145.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 10, 15 September. 459.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Beattie, "Environmental Anxiety in New Zealand, 1850-1920: Settlers, Climate, Conservation, Health, Environment", 167.

statistics of timber reserves, the value of which were limited because of inaccurate surveying. In addition, much of the debris from this early deliberate burning and waste would provide the fuel for major wildfires across New Zealand a decade later.⁴⁴

By 1873, O'Neill was acknowledged by Minister Donald McLean as one of the main proponents in parliament for forest conservation.⁴⁵ On 1 October that year, O'Neill warned that New Zealand would pay a heavy price should it squander a resource so necessary for the construction of railways, bridges, piers, jetties and houses.⁴⁶ This position was no doubt reinforced by witnessing the loss of potentially valuable timber during his term as Engineer-in-Chief of Auckland Province. O'Neill graphically described his own impressions during that period:

I was able to observe from my windows, during an entire fortnight, dense clouds of smoke whirling up, which arose from an enormous and destructive conflagration of the woods nearest to the town. When the fire had subsided, a large, beautiful tract of forest lay there in ashes.⁴⁷

This scene appears also to have affronted his sense of aesthetics; with his background as an architect of churches, the smoke and conflagration were perhaps reminiscent of the images of hell that he could recall from Catholic art.

A further insight into O'Neill's social liberalism can be gleaned from an additional comment in which he warned that the poor would pay a heavy price for squandering such a valuable resource:

It affected the poor man more than the rich, for a time would come when timber would become so scarce and valuable, that houses would cost more

⁴⁴ R. Arnold, *New Zealand's Burning - the Settler's World in the Mid 1880s* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1994).

⁴⁵ Utick, 105.

⁴⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 1 October. 1546.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1545.

to erect, and rents would become higher, which the poor man would feel more than the rich.⁴⁸

O'Neill did not directly refer to his Christian convictions in his public statements on the forests and the environment. However his concerns about the economic consequences of forest destruction for the poor reflect biblical tenets about social justice, in addition to broader values such as proper stewardship of God's creation shared by other Christian environmentalists.⁴⁹ Many of O'Neill's warnings about the impacts of deforestation and climate resembled Biblical injunctions.⁵⁰ In a Christian colonial New Zealand, development could uphold Biblical notions of making land productive; conversely degradation of New Zealand's lands was just as sinful as wasting resources.⁵¹ O'Neill's interest in nature may well have been a signpost to his embrace fifteen years later of Catholic Franciscan spirituality, with its characteristic emphasis on respect for Divine creation in nature.

O'Neill's above comments made in October 1873 were to press his motion that sought to introduce a *Conservation of Forests Bill*. He warned that:

My Conservation of Forests Bill requires careful consideration both by the House and the Government, so that history might not be able to relate that they received a fertile country, but by a criminal want of foresight, transmitted to posterity a desert.⁵²

He also argued that continued deforestation would lead to timber famine, drought and flooding, decreasing rainfall, soil erosion and bring wider ruin to the colony.⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1546.

⁴⁹ The Post-Exile prophets *Hosea* and *Amos* were both critical of the social injustices perpetrated on the poor of Israel, including denying of fair share of the fruits of agricultural labour. See Ceresko, 203-205.

⁵⁰ J. Beattie and P. Starr, "Global Influences and Local Environments: Forestry and Forest Conservation in New Zealand, 1850s-1925," *British Scholar* III, no. 2 (2010): 208-209.

⁵¹ J. Beattie and J. Stenhouse, "Empire, Environment and Religion: God and Nature in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand," *Environment and History* 13, no. 4 (2007): 413-446.

⁵² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 1 October. 1545-1546.

⁵³ Beattie, "Climate Change, Forest Conservation and Science: A Case Study of New Zealand, 1860s-1920," 4-5.

O'Neill's motion received some supportive comment from McLean (who recognised the damage in Auckland Province), and parliament subsequently requested information from the land commissioners about deforestation rates and whether they considered timber loss caused climatic alteration.⁵⁴ However, the subsequent finding of the commissioners was that climate change through deforestation had not taken place.⁵⁵ The problem with the forest-climate connection as then espoused by O'Neill was that the evidence given was only anecdotal, such as: 'Ali Pacha burnt down the forests ... and then came famine and drought; the Russians changed the Caucasus' climate, and the land became barren, drought ensued'.⁵⁶ Many natural scientists of the mid nineteenth century shared such concerns but the connection still remained scientifically unproven.⁵⁷

By the early 1870s, a better appreciation of the scientific approach to empire forestry had reached New Zealand from British India. Forest administrators in British India had linked forest cover to climate change as early as the 1850s.⁵⁸ In 1873, Vogel became Premier and sponsored reports on the state of forestry to a Parliamentary Committee on Colonial Industries. A report by Captain Inches Campbell Walker of the Indian forest service proved sufficiently influential to make its way into the recommendations of a *New Zealand Forests Act*, passed in August 1874, which sought 'the establishment of state forests and... the application of revenues derivable'.⁵⁹ This *Act* made provision for protection measures, although these were weakened two years later. In addition, Campbell Walker was subsequently appointed as New Zealand's first Conservator of State Forests.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Ibid; M. Roche, *History of Forestry* (Wellington: Government Print, 1990), 84.

⁵⁵ New Zealand Parliament, *Papers Relating to State Forests, Their Conservation, Planting, Management, &C., Appendices and Journals to the House of Representatives, H-5*, 1874. Vol. 2. 18, 30-32.

⁵⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 1 October. 1545.

⁵⁷ Beattie, "Environmental Anxiety in New Zealand, 1850-1920: Settlers, Climate, Conservation, Health, Environment", 167.

⁵⁸ G. A. Barton, *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38-39.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁰ Wynn, 113.

In late July 1874, in the debate leading up to the passing of the *New Zealand Forests Act*, O'Neill's summary address in support of Vogel's legislation demonstrated how advanced he was in his approach to conservation by contemporary standards.

Certain elements in this particular speech require further consideration. O'Neill commented on the approximate estimates of forest loss provided to Vogel by Dr James Hector of the Colonial Museum, with percentage forest cover in New Zealand being reduced from over thirty per cent in 1830, to twenty-three per cent in 1868 to eighteen per cent in 1873.⁶¹ O'Neill's follow up comment was not to point to loss of an economically valuable resource, but rather to state:

We know that, by the destruction of forests, climate is most seriously altered. We know quite well that, in other countries, plains which were once filled with forest have had their climate much changed by the destruction of those forests by fires which have desolated miles upon miles of country.⁶²

O'Neill was reflecting the emerging understanding of that era, rather than any early twenty-first century comprehension of global climate change. O'Neill also appreciated a new scientific approach to forestry then being adopted by German states such as Prussia and Bavaria.⁶³ That understanding, informed too by empire forestry and the anecdotes of environmental destruction across the world, was that the clearing of forests did affect detrimentally those areas where it was rampant, leading to higher local temperatures that damaged agricultural productivity. O'Neill used this understanding to make the point that New Zealand might witness the same kind of environmental disasters that had already been experienced in the Rhone Valley in France, Egypt, along the Mississippi River in North America, India and South America. However (allowing for the benefit of hindsight), without the scientific basis for establishing the climate-forest

⁶¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 31 July. 356.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

connection, O'Neill was not strictly correct in stating that this knowledge was so well grounded at that period in time.

The prescience demonstrated by O'Neill in this particular speech lies not so much in the claim that the forest-climate connection actually existed.⁶⁴ Rather it lay in O'Neill's understanding that if such a connection did exist, failure to appreciate it could create a problem on a global scale. It should be added that O'Neill's pessimism about this matter stood in marked contrast to the positive approach to progress and development he otherwise expressed in the New Zealand Parliament.

In this particular 1874 address, O'Neill also cited an extract from a report by Campbell Walker on scientific forestry in Germany and an exhortation by Dr Joshua Hooker, director of Kew Gardens, urging that colonial governments recognize the 'duty of conserving natural resources of the colonies for the benefit of future generations, whilst encouraging a fair use of them by the present [generation].'⁶⁵ It was only towards the end of this speech that O'Neill dealt with proper economic harvesting, noting that wood harvested out of season would be prone to attack by dry rot.⁶⁶

Like Potts and practically all environmentalist contemporaries in America and Australia, O'Neill understood forest conservation as wise use of resources rather than total environmental preservation.⁶⁷ In August 1874 for example, he urged parliament to consider a more scientific approach to the development of New Zealand native timbers, including the kauri, totara, rata and the manuka or ti tree. To support his position, he presented a report by Captain E. Ward, a Royal Engineer at the Sydney Mint, who had undertaken trials on the strengths of these timbers as early as 1856.⁶⁸ However, as revealed by O'Neill's parliamentary

⁶⁴ There would remain much scepticism about such climate theories for the best part of a century, and some would even claim that such change would be beneficial.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 357; Hooker's position influenced the New Zealand Government as well as colonial administration in British India.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Star, 76.

⁶⁸ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 24 August. 879.

campaign between 1868 and 1874, saving timber represented only part of his concerns.

Almost half a century later, a New Zealand Director of Forestry would comment that forestry concerns arose from 'the virile acorn-seed of staunch English [*sic*] Victorianism...planted in the virgin soil of New Zealand social liberalism.'⁶⁹ O'Neill's contribution to this social liberal ideal has only been recognised in recent years. New Zealand environmental historian Brooking has since acknowledged O'Neill as a kind of 'eco-hero', a green Irishman acting as an honorary green Scot.⁷⁰

The contribution that O'Neill made to earn such a posthumous accolade would have to rest on the shouldering of the forest conservation cause in the New Zealand after Potts' departure from parliament, including the debates of 1874 which led to the passing of a *New Zealand Forests Act*. But it is also enhanced by O'Neill's alarm that failure to appreciate the forest-climate connection could have deleterious global effects.

There were several reasons for O'Neill's concerns about the conservation of forests and for recognition of the forest-climate connection. As a senior provincial engineer, conservation of resources and the avoidance of waste through scientific management were matters of professional concern. His professional training was influenced by belief in the human potential to transform the world and that such transformation could be harmful as well as beneficial.

In this respect, he was among the more enlightened offspring of the nineteenth century Age of Progress. His 1873 comments on images of destruction are suggestive that environmental degradation affronted O'Neill's sense of aesthetics, an aspect which may have been influenced by his interest in classical arts.

⁶⁹ L. MacIntosh Ellis, "The Progress of Forestry in New Zealand," in *Sixteenth Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science* (Wellington: 1922), 6.

⁷⁰ T. Brooking, "Keynote Address: 'Green Scots and Golden Irish: Reflections on the Environmental Impact of Scottish and Irish Settlers in New Zealand,'" in *Centre of Irish and Scottish Studies seminar on environmental history and Irish and Scottish Migrants* (University of Aberdeen: 2008); Brooking, "'Green Scots and Golden Irish': The Environmental Impact of Scottish and Irish Settlers in New Zealand - Some Preliminary Ruminations," 57.

O'Neill's concern about the economic impact of forest destruction on the poor was yet another manifestation of social liberalism which, in turn, was influenced by a passion for Christian social action to assist the destitute.

Industrial Safety and Public Health

O'Neill's socially liberal views were reflected in his approach to other issues brought before the New Zealand Parliament, notably industrial safety and public health. These views too may have been influenced by his Christian convictions, although again he did not explicitly refer to these in his parliamentary speeches on these issues. O'Neill's three year term as Engineer-in-Chief of the Thames Goldfields between 1869 and 1871 would have provided him with direct experience of mining disasters and fatalities on the goldfields, where mining conditions were primitive. During his final two years in parliament, he voiced concerns about the need to tighten industrial safety legislation and regulations,

During an 1873 parliamentary debate on a *Coal Mines Regulation Bill*, O'Neill was critical of the conditions of miners employed in the Bay of Islands, Whangarei, Waikato in the North Island, and Nelson, Canterbury and Otago in the South. He urged tightening of legislation to ensure proper regard of safety conditions:

he did not think the Bill was too stringent, and if it went into Committee, he would like to make it far more so, especially in respect to making managers of mines and companies responsible for all accidents in the working of them. Such a measure could not be too soon put into force, and the legislature ought not to delay making a law on this subject until accidents had taken place.⁷¹

Within a year, O'Neill was directly involved in the aftermath of an industrial accident in his own constituency. In January 1874, an explosion of one of two steam boilers supplying the engines of the Kurunui Gold Battery, one of the

⁷¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 3 September. 874.

biggest on the Thames goldfield, resulted in the deaths of three men.⁷² In February, the Governor Sir James Fergusson appointed O'Neill as one of three Commissioners to investigate the causes of the accident and to report on other machinery and boilers on the goldfields. The use of bad water in the boiler, in this case sea water which had corroded it, was identified as one of the main causes of the accident.⁷³ The report by O'Neill and his fellow Commissioners, James Stewart and Joseph Nancarrow, was presented to parliament in April 1874. Among other improvements, the report recommended an improved system of boiler inspection and tests for engineers, as well as certification of boiler attendants.⁷⁴ This work paved the way for a new administration requiring inspection of machinery.

In addition to safer management of steam boilers, better ventilation in mines had become another safety issue. In July 1874, during debate on a *Regulation of Mines Bill*, O'Neill urged immediate rectification:

In looking over the Bill, he observed that provision was made for an adequate amount of ventilation to be constantly produced in every mine; but what was an adequate amount?...A specified number of cubic feet of pure air should be given to every man or boy working in a mine, and care should be taken to see that pure air only was supplied, and that all intake air should travel free from all stagnant water, stables and old workings.⁷⁵

He argued that any legislation should compel the owner or manager of the mine to see that pure air was carried to all the mine workings as they proceeded.⁷⁶

O'Neill's frequent sea voyages enabled him to comment on marine safety as well. In August 1875, he complained about the poor state of maritime equipment that

⁷² New Zealand Parliament, *Royal Commission to Inquire into the Boiler Accident at the Kurunui Battery, Thames Gold Field (and into the Machinery and Boilers on the Field Generally)*, 1874. pt. 24 April, 1.

⁷³ Ibid. 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 5-6.

⁷⁵ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 14 July. 68.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

he had encountered during his extensive travels both around the coast of New Zealand, and between the New Zealand and Australian colonies:

In nearly every case where he had been at sea he had found that the boats were not properly equipped, and were in such a state that they could not have been lowered at a moment's notice if any accident had occurred. One boat on the starboard would be destitute of oars and sails; one on the port side would probably be without a plug, or partly filled with lumber, and the other unfit for immediate use.⁷⁷

He pressed for New Zealand's steam navigation regulations to be tightened up. Among his recommendations were that masters and owners should be subject to heavy penalties for not providing sufficient lifeboats on board their vessels.⁷⁸ He also suggested a more uniform system of inspection of vessels across all the ports in the colony.⁷⁹

Ultimately, legislation such as the *Regulation of Mines Bill* and the *Inspection of Machinery Bill* successfully passed through the New Zealand Parliament. However, O'Neill remained concerned that full implementation through the colony was being hindered by the provincial administrations. In September 1875, he urged the preparation of a yearly report on all mining accidents in New Zealand, including the verdicts at inquests, details of casualties and the impact on their dependent families.⁸⁰

O'Neill's support for improving public health had begun during his first spell in parliament. In August 1869, he urged support for a *Public Health Bill*.

he believed that all social improvement must have root in cleanliness. Town sewers and house drains were absolutely necessary to human progress.

⁷⁷New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 17, 4 August. 181.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 182.

⁸⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 18, 15 September. 352-353.

Philanthropy and benevolence worked in vain, surrounded by subsoil and surface filth and foul air.’⁸¹

Some of this may also be testimony to a healthy sense of smell on O’Neill’s part. Conditions in the original Wellington Provincial Council chambers, which then served as the National Parliament building, were primitive. Smelly oil lamps, poor drainage, and stench from the refuse of the kitchen of the parliamentary dining room ‘Bellamy’s’ would have been a constant irritation.⁸² Given O’Neill’s background in urban engineering and sewerage construction in Glasgow, it was not surprising that he commented on public sanitary conditions, particularly in Wellington. In October 1868, he went as far as to recommend to that the House of Representatives move its next session to Christchurch, and that the ‘odours’ of Wellington were sufficient reason for the shift.⁸³ He also claimed that the defective drainage of the town made it the dirtiest in New Zealand.⁸⁴ The town, with a population then exceeding 7,500, still remained without an adequate sewerage system.⁸⁵ By the second half of the nineteenth century, sewage treatment had advanced considerably, and was the subject of popular debate not only in scientific and engineering journals but in magazines and newspapers.⁸⁶ The colonial cities of Australasia had their own challenges; for example in 1877, the Sydney Sewage and Health Board decided that city and southern suburbs sewage should be channelled to a farm on the edge of Botany Bay.⁸⁷ By comparison, sewage treatment in Wellington was in an even more primitive state.

With lack of public sanitation came the risk of epidemics. In October 1871, O’Neill urged Premier Fox to reintroduce public health legislation, which had previously been stymied by provincial administrations fearful of ceding their legislative powers:

⁸¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1869. Vol. 6, 13 August. 471.

⁸² Martin, "Speech Notes for the Launch of *Captain Charles, Engineer of Charity*," 2.

⁸³ anon., *EP*, 15 October 1868, 2.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Utick, 94.

⁸⁶ S. Beder, "From Sewage Farms to Septic Tanks: Trials and Tribulations in Sydney," *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 79, Parts 1 and 2 (1993): 72-95.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

They did not know the moment that an epidemic might break out in the Colony, and there was no provision to meet such a terrible contingency. He thought the Government should really take the matter into their serious consideration and, if necessary, they should have no hesitation in appointing a health officer, who would carry out the preliminaries requisite in the event of any epidemic occurring.⁸⁸

Auckland too had its sanitary problems. In February 1870, as Engineer -in-Chief of Auckland Province, he was engaged in recommending sewerage and sanitary improvements in Auckland's Queen Street.⁸⁹ A year after his involvement in the Select Committee on an *Auckland Improvement Bill*, he claimed that 'they had at present a city (Auckland) without water or sufficient drainage'.⁹⁰ Public health legislation came into effect in 1872, although O'Neill was still making the case for better implementation in August 1874. By this time he was also pleading for better building standards, quoting a report by a certain Dr Bakewell (delivered to the Otago Institute in Dunedin) that had claimed that living conditions in much of Dunedin were worse than the lowest lodging houses in the lowest slums of London.⁹¹

Rapid colonial development had resulted in many ramshackle towns and cities across colonial Australasia. These conditions inspired O'Neill to use his professional expertise to make advances in civic and urban development. It would lead to his two greatest professional achievements, introducing the first town planning legislation in New Zealand and pioneering new urban transport systems, particularly in Wellington and Sydney.

Town Planning

O'Neill applied his professional skills in surveying to town planning relatively soon after his arrival in New Zealand. Colonial surveyors were employed in

⁸⁸ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 11, 17 October. 356.

⁸⁹ anon., *DSC*, 19 February 1870, 3.

⁹⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 28 August. 687.

⁹¹ Utick, 107.

laying out new towns and settlements, and in such a way as to reproduce the elements of urban design familiar to Britain and parts of Europe to the new lands.⁹² Such designs were aimed at providing new settlers with a sense of familiarity and convenience.

A major influence on town planning in this early colonial era was the grid plan system, whereby the open spaces could reflect the liberal values of the settlements such as areas devoted to commerce and civic buildings. Sometimes as under the Canterbury Association's plan for Christchurch, for example, there would be provision for open spaces and green belt.⁹³ In this case, the influence of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the effective 'architect' of the New Zealand Company guiding such settlements, was manifest, as it was in South Australia.⁹⁴ Grid plans introduced right angled allotments, right-angled streets and squares in parallel lines. The grid plans were popular with town planners for commercial reasons as land could be divided into numbered blocks and sold to purchasers in London who might never have to reside in the new settlement.⁹⁵ However, grid plans came with obvious problems as the topographical landscape did not always conform to the rectangular and square blocks produced on the maps. For example, surveyors would often run lines up and over hills and other more challenging topographical obstacles.⁹⁶ In addition, some found straight streets as uninspiring and without character.⁹⁷

This kind of urban vision came under challenge with the influx of goldminers to regions such as Otago and later the Thames, as shanties and haphazard constructions appeared in the wake of gold mining. O'Neill would have been witness to this on his arrival in Otago in 1864, and between 1869 and 1871 while serving as Provincial Engineer and Chief Surveyor of the Thames Goldfield.

⁹² Byrnes, 51.

⁹³ Ibid., 56.

⁹⁴ E. Olssen, "Mr Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice," *New Zealand Journal of History* 31 (1997).

⁹⁵ Byrnes, 57.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

O'Neill's first known town planning venture was the agricultural town of Milton some sixty kilometres to the southwest of Dunedin on the banks of the Tokomairiro River, in the middle of the Tokomairiro Plain. It was originally called 'Milltown' after a flourmill built there in 1857, but later was proclaimed Milton in April 1866.⁹⁸ He was appointed its engineer on a daily salary of thirty shillings between September and December 1866, including layout of the town plan.⁹⁹ It was not so far from his inland surveying base at Cromwell, and Milton Borough Council retained his services as a consulting engineer without regular salary.¹⁰⁰

O'Neill advocated wide and regular streets as distinct from narrow lanes. One key reason, apart from improving the conditions of poor residents, was public health. Glasgow provided a good example of the way forward, as he noted in November 1871:

In one instance, a city with which he was well acquainted – Glasgow – had expended one million sterling in two or three years in purchasing old properties for the purpose of widening the streets, in order to improve the health of the people.¹⁰¹

Another reason why O'Neill was promoting wide streets was to reduce fire risk, particularly for what was overwhelmingly timber building construction. In August 1870, he seconded a motion in favour of town boards or borough councils, with the consent of ratepayers, having the power to levy householders for the establishment of fire brigades, noting that:

⁹⁸ A. McLintock (edited), "Milton," *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 22-Apr-09* (1966). <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/milton/1> [accessed 16 January 2011].

⁹⁹ Sumptor and Lewis, 127-128.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1871. Vol. 11, 6 November. 840-841.

the greatest advantage to the goldfields towns, where the houses were mostly built of timber, and, if a fire broke out at one end of the town, it would rapidly consume the whole of the town.¹⁰²

His concerns about this were vindicated two years later, when fire destroyed the centre of Shortland, a key town in his Thames constituency.¹⁰³ In September 1873, he again urged action on urban planning:

already in Glasgow, some millions had been expended in widening and improving the streets and the locations of the poorer classes. It was necessary that when wooden houses were built in towns, as there were in this Colony, the streets should be made very wide as to avoid the dangers which would arise from fire.¹⁰⁴

O'Neill's pursuit of a *Plans of Towns Regulations Bill* was persistent enough; he attempted to introduce legislation every year from 1871 to 1875.¹⁰⁵ His first attempt in 1871 almost succeeded. This early legislation went as far as passing through the House of Representatives, but was thrown out during a second reading in the Legislative Council, and then only on the casting vote of the Speaker.¹⁰⁶

Support of the government proved helpful. During the second half of 1872, his political colleague McLean chaired a Select Committee on the bill that reported in October.¹⁰⁷ The Committee came out strongly in favour of the principles outlined in the previous bill and urged that another one be drafted, and that plans for new towns be shelved until such legislation came into effect.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, the bill failed to get sufficient momentum in 1873, and it was thrown out at a second

¹⁰² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 8, 4 August. 316.

¹⁰³ Isdale, 10.

¹⁰⁴ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1873. Vol. 15, 11 September. 1052.

¹⁰⁵ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 17, 4 August. 191.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 190.

¹⁰⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *Journal New Zealand House of Representatives, Select Committees*. 1872. xxix.

¹⁰⁸ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 17, 4 August. 190.

reading in 1874.¹⁰⁹ Success finally came when the new bill was committed to the Legislative Council in August 1875.¹¹⁰ It passed through parliament on 12 October and came into effect the following year.¹¹¹

The *Plans of Towns Regulations Act* required that the plans of all towns be approved by the Governor prior to sale.¹¹² The levels of streets needed to be clearly indicated on plans to avoid planning disasters, such as street lines running through perpendicular rocks. Adequate provisions were made for recreational reserves, proper sites for cemeteries, suitable access in streets for rubbish and sewage disposal, and land reserves outside town settlements for quarries and rubbish dumps.¹¹³ As with such early reform, there were compromises. Street widths in town and cities were set at a 99 feet (30.2 metre) standard, rather than O'Neill's preference of two chains (40.2 metres).¹¹⁴ Another concession was that the legislation applied only to Crown, but not private, land.

O'Neill's campaign for better town planning also reflected a trans-Tasman perspective, as he drew lessons from deficiencies in street widths in George Street, Sydney.¹¹⁵ In 1878, three years after his departure from parliament, he continued to press for proper implementation of this town planning measure, when the National Government proposed to hand over reclaimed land in the inner Wellington suburb of Thorndon to Wellington City Corporation.¹¹⁶

O'Neill's employment and contract work for Wellington City Corporation, during the late 1870s, provided him an opportunity to contribute to town planning in a more direct way. Wellington had a town plan as early as 1840, undertaken by William Mein Smith, then a government district surveyor, although it was drawn

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Lawn, 443.

¹¹² Utick, 108.

¹¹³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 17, 4 August. 190.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Utick, 107.

¹¹⁶ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Minister for Public Works, 22 August 1878, 1878," Wellington.

up in London and did not take sufficient account of local topography.¹¹⁷ Significantly, the Wellington foreshore and harbour had also changed dramatically after an earthquake in 1855.

O'Neill's own efforts in mapping Wellington, completed in 1879, received much local acclaim. In that year, he completed a major survey labelled 'City of Wellington & Town Belt', published by Lyon and Blair, Steam Lithographers of Wellington.¹¹⁸ The survey included the city around Wellington Harbour to a radius of 3 miles (or 4.8 kilometres) to the north.¹¹⁹ The map was presented that same year to the Governor Sir Hercules Robinson and included 100 new streets. O'Neill's town plan, showing Wellington's development by the late 1870s, reveals that the previously unremitting grid system was beginning to reflect and adjust better to the contours of the land, including the altered harbour foreshore.¹²⁰

Growing colonial cities and towns also needed more durable and attractive pavement. By this time, O'Neill was also trying to promote his Caithness pavement flagging that first appeared on Wellington's streets between 1878 and 1879. In April 1878, Wellington City Corporation paid for the licence valued at £250 to use his patent.¹²¹ His patent involved application of concrete slabs to the pavement process, although the final product was similar in style to some pavements in Britain.¹²² As one reporter in the *Timaru Herald* noted, 'It is very smooth, clean and pleasant and, and has none of the unsightliness, meltiness [*sic*], or smelliness of asphalt'.¹²³ News of the innovation spread wider and within a year a specimen was laid in Pitt Street Sydney, where it was inspected by city

¹¹⁷ Byrnes, 61.

¹¹⁸ C. O'Neill, "Map of Wellington and Town Belt," (Wellington, ATL, Map Collection 832.4799a, Acc.16121: Lyon and Blair, Steam Lithographers, 1879).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ C. O'Neill, "To the Corporation of Wellington, Licences to Use Patent No 25, 545, 8 April 1878, 1878," Wellington.

¹²² anon., "Concrete Pavements," *SouthlandT*, 30 November 1877, 2.

¹²³ anon., "Notes," *TimH*, 8 April 1878, 3.

aldermen, the city architect and surveyor and members of the engineering profession.¹²⁴

O'Neill's town planning achievements were noted by a few commentators after his permanent departure from New Zealand in 1880. These picked up on the desirable social aspects of his legislative approach to towns and streets that were by then being ignored by private land speculators.¹²⁵ One commentator, in 1883, made a scathing criticism of O'Neill's wealthy land-owning opponents in the New Zealand Legislative Council, noting that 'it mattered not to them that, in after generations, thousands of people might perish like scabby sheep in pestiferous lanes and alleys.'¹²⁶ That insight ironically threw some light on O'Neill's inner motivations for, by that time, he was engaged in his charitable work in Sydney's lanes and alleys.

Although the resulting legislation was much diluted from what O'Neill had originally desired, having town planning placed within any kind of legislative framework was nonetheless an important first step for New Zealand to adopt. By comparison, legislation explicitly dealing with town planning only appeared in the Australian states well after Federation; the first two being a *Town Planning and Development Act (1920)* in South Australia, and the more comprehensive *Town Planning and Development Act (1928)* in Western Australia.¹²⁷

Streets and alleys were not the only focus of O'Neill's civic improvements. His lauded 'City of Wellington & Town Belt' survey of 1879 included the route of a city tramway line that O'Neill and his business partners had constructed a year earlier.¹²⁸ Transport in the colonial era was also changing and the pursuit of these would win him great professional acclaim.

¹²⁴ anon., *EP*, 6 July 1880, 2.

¹²⁵ anon., "Our Auckland Letter," *OW*, 27 May 1882, 11.

¹²⁶ anon., *Observer*, 22 September 1883, 3.

¹²⁷ J. Chaney, "Welcome Address for Town Planning Conference, Justice John Chaney, 16 November," (2009). http://www.sat.justice.wa.gov.au/_files/2_Welcome_by_Hon_Justice_Chaney.pdf [accessed 8 April 2011].

¹²⁸ Utick, 120.

Urban Transport, Tramways and Railways

As with his interests in improving town planning, O'Neill's enthusiasm for railway transport clearly had its genesis in the industrial powerhouse of Glasgow. During a parliamentary address in July 1870, he demonstrated his fervour for such progress:

The first locomotive which was ever seen in America was imported from Mr Stephenson's locomotive engine factory at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in 1829, and was for some time exhibited as a curiosity in New York; shortly after that the time the railroads began to be formed, and were carried on with that fearless determination peculiar to the Americans, so that at the commencement of the present year, America had 48,869 miles of railways...¹²⁹

Despite such enthusiasm, O'Neill had to be content with more modest advances in a colonial society still serviced exclusively by horse and carriage. In addition, tramways, rather than railways, became his principal interest in New Zealand. As early as November 1867, O'Neill and another civil engineer associate Ben Smith proposed a tramway from Wellington to Masterton.¹³⁰

Acquiring the position of Engineer-in-Chief of Railways, Tramways and Wharves at the Thames provided him with the opportunity to oversee tramway development there. In May 1869, his political patron, Auckland Superintendent Williamson turned the first sod for the construction of a tramway from Grahamstown to Tararu Point.¹³¹ A ceremonial wooden wheelbarrow designed for the occasion was carved with O'Neill's name as Engineer-in-Chief.¹³² Prior to a visit by Governor Bowen and his wife to the Thames goldfield in January 1870, O'Neill designed and commissioned the construction of an ornate carriage complete with mottled kauri panels for the purpose of conveying the vice-regal

¹²⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 7, 15 July. 493.

¹³⁰ anon., "Wairarapa Tramway," *HBHerald*, 9 November 1867, 2.

¹³¹ anon., "Turning the First Sod of the Tararu Tramway," *DSC*, 24 May 1869, 3.

¹³² Utick, 88.

couple to the Tararu Creek mineworks.¹³³ The expense of the horse-drawn carriage, over £166, and its lavish fittings provide yet another example of O'Neill's love of embellishment. Unfortunately, the carriage was derailed and overturned in a trial run on the morning prior to the Vice-Regal visit, after colliding with a fallen tree branch.¹³⁴

This embarrassing incident did nothing to discourage his commitment to further extension of tramways in the Thames. The Thames Goldfields were increasingly serviced by a network of major tramways meeting up with wire cable conveyances (of the kind that O'Neill himself had patented) transporting ore from the rugged terrain.¹³⁵ As parliament commenced debate on a *Tramways Act* in 1872, O'Neill announced that a steam engine tramway operated by Grahamstown and Tararu Tramway Company had opened in December 1871.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, his celebrated mottled kauri carriage had a second service life on this line until the tramway closed in November 1874.¹³⁷

After the successful passage of the *Tramways Act*, O'Neill quickly pursued his plans to introduce a major steam tramway into New Zealand cities. Auckland Province received his initial attention, and he agitated for the establishment of a system of street tramways in Auckland city and at the Thames.¹³⁸ In July 1873, he made application himself to lay down street tramways within the City of Auckland.¹³⁹ In October 1875, in a note to Sir George Grey, he endorsed a request by another company Dewar and Co. to construct a tramway from Thames to the goldfields.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Stewart, 9.

¹³⁴ Utick, 87.

¹³⁵ For a description of the complexity of tramways and supporting branch line conveyances at the Thames, see anon., "The Tramways," *DSC*, 11 January 1869, 3.

¹³⁶ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 12. 132.

¹³⁷ Utick, 87.

¹³⁸ anon., "Miscellaneous," *DSC*, 13 May 1875, 7.

¹³⁹ C. O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to the Mayor and City Council of Auckland, 3 February 1873," Wellington.

¹⁴⁰ C. O'Neill, "Note to Sir George Grey (Attachment), 25 August 1875, 1875," Wellington.

Nonetheless Wellington, increasingly the centre of his professional activities, became the focal point for these ambitions. Together with a contractor with surname Thomas, he gave notice of an application to the Wellington Superintendent to build a tramway in the city in July 1873.¹⁴¹ He made a further application in December 1875 with route modifications.¹⁴²

O'Neill's professional association with the civil engineer Henderson and the accountant MacDonald is likely to have been the turning point in these endeavours, with the advantage of having a ten year monopoly on tramways development for Wellington. The team, with headquarters in Temple Chambers, Wellington, had ambitions for other cities including for example Dunedin, whose Public Works Committee considered their proposal for city tramways in April 1876.¹⁴³ The Dunedin proposal did not progress, and it was left to land speculator David Proudfoot to introduce steam and horse drawn services in Dunedin in 1879.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, O'Neill and Henderson began planning on a Wellington steam tramway as early as February 1876.¹⁴⁵ Approval for the venture was given on 29 June, and construction continued for two years at a cost of £40,000.¹⁴⁶ After the Wellington City Tramways Company Limited issued a prospectus, the trio began public promotion during late 1876.¹⁴⁷

The final tramway route ran from Wellington's Pipitea Point, where the railway station connected with the Wellington to Masterton railway. From there, the route proceeded along Thorndon and Lambton Quays to Willis Street, and then to Manners, Cuba, Ingestre, and Vivian Streets, Cambridge Terrace Roadway and Sussex Square. From Sussex Square, it would progress along Adelaide Road, to

¹⁴¹ New Zealand Government, *NZGG*, 1873. pt. 17 July, 436.

¹⁴² New Zealand Government, *NZGG*, 1875. pt. 2 December, 770.

¹⁴³ anon., "Otago," *Star*, 7 April 1876, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Stewart, 15.

¹⁴⁵ anon., "Telegrams," *OW*, 5 February 1876, 14.

¹⁴⁶ Welch: 1075.

¹⁴⁷ Wellington City Tramways Company Ltd, *Deed of Consent, Contracts, Specifications, Prospectus, Plans Etc, Etc*, (Wellington, 1876), 1-2.

nearby Drummond Street. It further included a branch line operating from Grey Street and finally from Lambton Quay to the east side of Customs House Quay.¹⁴⁸

The tramway's most significant innovation was that it would be driven by steam engines rather than horses, travelling at six miles (9.6 kilometres) an hour, something that would become a first in Australasia and perhaps the Southern Hemisphere.

O'Neill continued his business associations with the Wellington City Tramways Company until October 1877, when Henderson acquired the interests of the other two partners.¹⁴⁹ Despite this, O'Neill was a celebrated guest at the opening luncheon banquet with 200 guests including the Mayor, politicians and civic dignitaries.¹⁵⁰ The Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, in opening the tramway on 24 August 1878, also had the pleasure of riding in the first of five gaily decorated passenger cars pulled by the steam engine *Zealandia*.¹⁵¹

In contrast to the apparent success of the opening, it was not long before the system ran into trouble as the steam engines with their brightly coloured carriages alarmed the horses, disrupting Wellington's streets.¹⁵² A local correspondent of the *Evening Post* had earlier identified the source of the problem, in that 'what startled the horses was not the engine, but the car which most foolishly had been painted a glaring scarlet picked out in gold.'¹⁵³ Wellington's cabbies soon blocked the tracks causing abrupt stoppages. They even petitioned the Governor urging that the engines be replaced by horse power.¹⁵⁴ Apart from the impact of the gaudy carriages on the horses, the Wellington City Tramways Company underestimated the impact of the engines in a city system with narrow thoroughfares.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ anon., "City Council," *EP* 1877, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Stewart, 11.

¹⁵¹ Welch: 1075.

¹⁵² Stewart, 12-14.

¹⁵³ anon., "First Passenger Trip on the Tramway," *EP*, 22 August 1878, 2.

¹⁵⁴ Stewart, 14.

Within two years, the company ran into financial difficulty and it was sold to a Wellington businessman E. W. Mills at price of £20,000, half the construction cost. The tramway switched to horse traction and the engines were sold, ultimately spending their days on the Sanson to Foxton railway (to the west of Palmerston North).¹⁵⁵

O'Neill would not have suffered financially as a result the ultimate commercial failure of the Wellington City Tramway as, by then, his interest had been bought out by Henderson. As will be examined in Chapter Six, the embarrassment associated with the outcome may have compounded other problems surrounding his business interests. Nevertheless, what the innovation had done was to place in the public spotlight on O'Neill's professional brilliance as a civil engineer. Sir Julius Vogel would dub him 'the father of tramways of the colony', a tribute picked up in the press.¹⁵⁶

The urban transport challenges of Wellington, with its population of less than 10,000, were on a much smaller scale than those in growing colonial cities such as Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney for example had grown to over 200,000 inhabitants. Within four years of his permanent settlement in Sydney for his faith-based charitable mission, O'Neill turned his professional focus back onto railway systems.

In 1880, the New South Wales Government had introduced a system of city and suburban tramways.¹⁵⁷ While popular with the public, trams did not solve the growing transport congestion problem. In addition, transport across Sydney Harbour provided a challenge to all means of public transport. Merchants were dissatisfied and agitated for an extension to the city railway to service Sydney's wharves, including those at Circular Quay, Woolloomooloo and Darling Harbour.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Welch: 1075.

¹⁵⁶ Stewart, 12; Utick, 136.

¹⁵⁷ Roberts, 26.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 27.

There was a social as well as a commercial dimension to colonial Sydney's transport problems. Workers' families were crammed into the inner city suburbs close to the city's factories and wharves, paying rents for poor accommodation. O'Neill must have also understood this problem well; in 1881 he had gained approval soon after the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Sydney to pay the rents of those families vulnerable to eviction (see Chapter Five).¹⁵⁹

Apart from ferry crossings, there were two other feasible ways by which public transport could cross Sydney Harbour. One of these was by bridge, the other by tunnel. In 1883, a new administration run by Premier Alexander Stuart and Colonial Treasurer George Dibbs began looking at tunnels under the city as a means of expanding the railway system.

O'Neill began professional planning on city railway extensions probably as early as 1883, working from offices at 24 O'Connell Street, and a succession of addresses in Elizabeth Street, including a 'Harbour Tunnels Office' at 86 Elizabeth Street. O'Neill's proposed city railway extension would have run from Union Street in Pyrmont, and continued obliquely across Darling Harbour to King Street, and from King Street by tunnel to Circular Quay.¹⁶⁰

Working in conjunction with civil engineer F. B. Gipps, O'Neill was among the first to propose tunnels under Sydney Harbour for rail and passenger traffic. They submitted plans to Treasurer Dibbs in January 1885. The plan was also discussed by a parliamentary delegation to William John Lyne, the Minister of Public Works, in November 1886.¹⁶¹

The O'Neill and Gipps plan proposed two tunnels. One would connect Bennelong Point to Beulah Street, North Sydney. The other would connect Dawes Point at the northern tip of The Rocks to Milson's Point, North Sydney. Both would meet up with existing tramways at the north and south sides of Sydney Harbour. The

¹⁵⁹ Utick, 174.

¹⁶⁰ New South Wales Royal Commission on City and Suburban Railways, *Progress Report on the Extension of the Railway into the City and the North Shore Bridge Connection* (Sydney, New South Wales: G. S. Chapman Acting Government Printer, 1891), 51.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

tunnels would have been supported by cast-iron cylindrical rings in segments, using tunnel construction techniques then used for tunnels under the Thames in London.¹⁶²

In March 1887, another delegation met with Sir Henry Parkes, back again as Premier, submitting a two-year construction plan. The proposed length of the tunnels would be one and a half miles (2.4 kilometres) to be constructed at an estimated cost of £450,000.¹⁶³ Parkes' initial view was positive and, according to O'Neill's account, stated:

that it will be my duty to bring the matter before the notice of the Government at an early date, and I will add now that no one can say anything against the public usefulness of the work.¹⁶⁴

In 1887, O'Neill and Gipps commissioned underwater soundings and borings of the Sydney Harbour bottom. The *Freeman's Journal* reported with some anticipation that:

The tunnel scheme proposed by Mr Charles O'Neill M.I.C.E and Mr F. B. Gipps, C.E., for connecting the North Shore with Sydney is assuming something like practical shape. The tunnels company are now, we understand, employing divers to examine the bottom of the harbour. Armstrong's patent marine telescope, with electric lights, will be used.¹⁶⁵

The comment reveals that O'Neill retained his interest in using the most advanced technological processes of the Victorian era. The 1887 sounding and borings revealed substantial layers of silt on the harbour floor which forced alterations to the construction plans. O'Neill later discussed such construction details as well as

¹⁶² Ibid. 52.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ anon., *FJ*, 30 July 1887, 16.

his wider plans at a New South Wales Royal Commission on City and Suburban Railways in 1890.¹⁶⁶

During subsequent years, the O'Neill and Gipps proposal was among those before the New South Wales Parliament for consideration. The Royal Commissioners later unanimously rejected tunnels in favour of a high level bridge when it became expedient to proceed with a harbour crossing.¹⁶⁷ However, in retrospect, the harbor tunnel proposals represent something more than a curiosity in the pre-Bradfield era of public engineering in New South Wales. They also demonstrated foresight in addressing an engineering challenge that would ultimately have to be met. As with O'Neill's proposals to build railway tunnels through the Rimutakas, such plans were set aside as too ambitious at the time. In both cases, O'Neill had astutely identified that tunnels would eventually have to be constructed. In the case of Sydney Harbour, tunnels for traffic were completed a century after the Royal Commissioners' rejection of the concept.

Given however that the Sydney Harbour tunnel proposals were not adopted, O'Neill's reputation as a pioneer in colonial urban transport rests more on his achievements in New Zealand.

Climax of O'Neill's Professional Career

The beginning of 1880 marked the high point in professional recognition of O'Neill's abilities. On 13 January, at a meeting in Great George Street, Westminster, in London, he was unanimously elected a Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers.¹⁶⁸ New Zealand's Chief Engineer Carruthers had recommended him for election on 19 November 1878.¹⁶⁹ Both shared a Scots background, and Carruthers must have been impressed about O'Neill's professional capabilities. O'Neill could thereafter proudly write the professional

¹⁶⁶ New South Wales Royal Commission on City and Suburban Railways, 37.

¹⁶⁷ Raxworthy, 26.

¹⁶⁸ anon., *EP*, 17 March 1880, 2.

¹⁶⁹ I.C.E., "4517 Form A:56, the Institution of Civil Engineers, Application Signed by John Carruthers, M.I.C.E. On 19th November 1879, 1880," London.

accreditation ‘M.I.C.E.’, to add to membership of the Institution of Engineers in Scotland, and Fellowship of the Architectural Institute.¹⁷⁰ At the time, Wellington’s *Evening Post* briefly noted the achievement: ‘The body is one of the highest class in the professional world of England, and we congratulate our townsman on the recognition that the honour conveys.’¹⁷¹

From a perspective of pursuing an empire career, O’Neill’s professional work was being acknowledged in other ways. His Caithness flagging pavement won a first class award of merit at the Sydney International Exhibition, held at Sydney’s Garden Palace between September 1879 and April 1880.¹⁷² The flagging paved the Exhibition’s western entrance, and was commented on in the press as showing ‘an equality of wear and durability under friction to be found in very few natural paving stones’.¹⁷³ He followed this up by winning a second order of merit for his Caithness flagging and a fifth order of merit for his town map of Wellington at the Melbourne International Exhibition, held at Carlton Gardens between September 1880 and April 1881.¹⁷⁴ The flagging later won a bronze award at an exhibition in Calcutta in 1884.¹⁷⁵

There may have been more than a coincidence between the climax in 1880 of O’Neill’s professional career and his embarking on the faith-based mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies. Returning to McBride’s use of the concept of fusion of loyalties as applied to O’Neill’s circumstances, while professional ambition and pursuit of wealth might potentially conflict with the personal sacrifice required to undertake a faith-based mission, his professional achievements and social ideals did not preclude it.

¹⁷⁰ Utick, 139.

¹⁷¹ anon., *EP*, 17 March 1880, 2.

¹⁷² Sydney International Exhibition, *Official Record of the Sydney International Exhibition, 1879, 1880*. 142. The Garden Palace, constructed in Sydney’s Botanical Gardens along the lines of London’s Crystal Palace, was destroyed by fire in 1882.

¹⁷³ anon., *EP*, 6 July 1880, 2.

¹⁷⁴ Melbourne International Exhibition, *Official Awards, Melbourne International Exhibition 1880, 1880*. 384-386.

¹⁷⁵ anon., "Fluctuation in New Zealand Industries," *EP*, 26 February 1884, 2.

There were two reasons why this might have been the case. The first was that O'Neill's liberal ideals of social progress complemented his devout commitment to Catholic charity. Evidence for this would come later in the following decade with O'Neill's application of professional techniques and skills to the establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales.

The second, more pragmatic, consideration was that the rise in O'Neill's professional standing could provide a basis for re-establishing himself in the Australian colonies. In this way, he would be able to support himself financially as he conducted the faith-based charitable mission. For example, the International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne provided him with an opportunity to showcase his range of skills. O'Neill actively promoted his Caithness flagging to Sydney City Council at the time of Sydney International Exhibition with obvious plans for setting up the kind of business venture he had undertaken with Wellington City Council. In writing to New Zealand's Attorney-General, Frederick Whitaker in September 1880, he sought consideration for appointment as an acting or assistant commissioner for Melbourne's International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, Agricultural and Industrial Products, particularly in view of his past public office.¹⁷⁶

It was a demonstration of the loyalty of O'Neill's commitment to his newly found charitable mission that he did not abandon it when such efforts were unsuccessful.¹⁷⁷ Subsequently, O'Neill's professional activities were overshadowed by his charitable ones.

Conclusion: The Application of Civil Engineering to Social Progress

Engineering linked to commercial application was proving an indispensable tool for the prosperity of Britain's Empire and O'Neill's professional training in Glasgow instilled in him a commitment to applying his civil engineering skills to social progress. Much of O'Neill's social liberalism was influenced by a belief in

¹⁷⁶ O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Hon Frederick Whitaker, 2 September 1880."

¹⁷⁷ Utick, 138, 156.

economic and technological progress in generating employment and prosperity. His parliamentary addresses, particularly between 1871 and 1872, focused primarily on the promotion of New Zealand's technological capacity, and most emphatically in support of the patents system. He continued his technological and scientific interests after his parliamentary career ended, emerging as a polymath and becoming member of the Wellington Philosophical Society between 1877 and 1879.

Forest conservation and the forest-climate connection became causes for O'Neill in Parliament between 1868 and 1874, following the lead given by fellow parliamentarian Thomas Henry Potts in October 1868. O'Neill's concerns about the destruction of New Zealand forests including the kauri reserves in Auckland Province extended far beyond the long term economic costs. He comprehended the then scientific approaches to forestry emerging elsewhere within the British Empire and elsewhere, including how rampant destruction of forests could lead to a broader deterioration of the environment, including deleterious impacts on climate. He also drew attention to the social cost to the poor of the loss of timber resources.

O'Neill's Christian convictions may have been a factor in identifying the social costs of forest destruction, as well as promotion of industrial safety and public health. During the early 1870s, he called for more stringent safety conditions in mines and for maritime safety. Improving public health became another cause for O'Neill with his support for a *Public Health Bill* beginning in 1869. He publically stated his belief that social improvement needed to have a root in cleanliness, in so doing reflecting one of the great concerns of Victorian progress. His public health concerns were but part of a wider commitment to better planned towns and cities.

O'Neill's first town planning venture in New Zealand was to lay out the Otago town of Milton in 1866; in 1879, he completed an award-winning survey of the city of Wellington. His desire to improve the haphazard planning of towns was driven by concern for the conditions of the poor, by public health concerns and risk of fire. In parliament, he campaigned for a legislative base for town planning

every year from 1871 to 1875. Success finally came with a *Plans of Towns Regulations Act* after legislation passed through parliament in 1875, although it was not as far reaching as he had sought. It remained his most important parliamentary achievement given that town planning in New Zealand was incorporated into a legislative framework for the first time.

O'Neill's interest in urban transport, tramways and railways led to the second of his greatest professional achievements. As Engineer-in-Chief of Railways, Tramways and Wharves at the Thames between 1869 and 1871, he promoted the development of tramways and railways on the Thames Goldfields. Following the introduction of a *Tramways Act*, he pursued plans to introduce a major steam tramway into New Zealand cities. This promotion climaxed with the construction, in association with Henderson and MacDonald, of the Wellington Steam Tramway between 1876 and 1877. O'Neill continued his professional work on urban transport development soon after his re-settlement in Sydney, most notably the proposed railway plans that included the construction of tunnels under Sydney Harbour developed jointly with Gipps from 1885. Although not adopted by the New South Wales Government, these Sydney railway plans remained under consideration for some time and did identify engineering challenges that would have to be met far into the future.

The climax of O'Neill's professional career came in 1880 with election to the prestigious Institution of Civil Engineers in London. By this time, he had demonstrated the remarkable breadth of his professional interests, and he had achieved what would become his two greatest professional achievements, the passage of town planning legislation and the promotion of tramways in New Zealand.

In the case of the former, the *Plans of Towns Regulations Act* marked an acceptance of the need to legislate for better surveying and planning standards into towns for the public benefit. In the latter case, tramways would improve transport for town workers and, when applied to goldfields, would lead to more efficient transport of ores. Although the former was ultimately limited by political compromise and the latter by resistance from traditional providers of transport or

by geographical limitations, both represented landmarks in progress aimed at economic, social or technological development. Both could also be interpreted as signs of encouragement for New Zealand, then a colonial backwater emerging from disputes between *Pakeha* and Maori.

When combined with Victorian liberal ideals these, as well as others among O'Neill's initiatives, reflected a concerted application of civil engineering to social progress. Some of these initiatives may have been influenced by motives such as ambition and professional advancement, yet they also complemented his faith-based charitable principles relating to another aspect of social progress, providing support for the poor.

Chapter Five: The Faith-based Charitable Mission to New South Wales

Initiation of the Mission, its Context and Key Challenges

By January 1880 at the latest, O'Neill had commenced his mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies.¹ This effectively marked another turning point, perhaps the most defining one, in his life's journey. As noted in Chapter Four, this mission coincided with a high point in his own professional career which perhaps gave him sufficient confidence in his own capacity to succeed. The International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne at least offered the prospect of professional opportunities that might support his re-settlement in the Australian colonies; his active participation in both may be further evidence that he had already made the decision to undertake the mission sometime during 1878.

His undertaking of at least nine steamer trips across the Tasman Sea between January 1880 and July 1881, passing through the ports of Wellington, Melbourne and Sydney, was also indicative of his commitment to this task as much as it was of his stamina.²

Importantly, O'Neill's positive response to an invitation in 1877 by Society President-General Adolphe Baudon to undertake this mission was primarily driven by his faith, which had already led him to return to the charitable work of the St Vincent de Paul Society that he had embraced as a young adult. He had recommitted himself to the Society's work in Wellington no later than 1877. Nonetheless, the most revealing primary evidence for the faith-based nature of the mission lies in the way that O'Neill attributed his own success or lack thereof to the will of God, a characteristic trait of Christian piety. His interpretation of developments on leading two conferences in Sydney at St Patrick's Church Hill and St Francis' Haymarket in quick succession in July 1881, was captured in the minutes of the latter conference:

¹ Utick., 143.

² Ibid.

it appeared to be an inspiration from Divine Providence that caused them to form this Society here in Sydney and the most wonderful part of it was that they in St Patrick's had actually formed a similar society on the same day. In this he considered that God had shown his great concern for the poor in Sydney. He ventured to predict that although at present the numbers were few there was a great future for the Society.'³

The attribution of his circumstances to Divine Will can also be found in correspondence from O'Neill to Baudon written a few months later on 6 October 1881. In this letter, O'Neill referred to his own contrasting lack of success in re-establishing the Society in Melbourne, despite gaining the support of its Catholic Archbishop James Goold. O'Neill noted that 'no doubt all of these disappointments and trials are God's most holy will – and I feel sure that the Society will yet flourish in Melbourne and other cities in Victoria.'⁴ O'Neill's sense of mission as being guided by God is further evident through the prayers and pious excerpts inserted in the *CoManual* over the course of this mission.

This mission to re-establish the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies was initiated by a specific request by Baudon in correspondence written to O'Neill on 4 September 1877, subsequently reproduced in the *New Zealand Tablet* of 11 January 1878. The timing of the letter's release by O'Neill may have been a strategic decision and is further evidence that, by 1878 at the latest, he had agreed to undertake such a mission.

Baudon's request came in response to an earlier (as yet uncovered) letter by O'Neill that had informed the Society's headquarters in Paris of the establishment of a Society conference in Wellington and seeking its formal aggregation with the Society. The aggregation process involved an application by a newly-formed conference seeking approval of its institution and affiliation with the body of the Society. Conferences so approved by the Society's Secretariat in Paris subsequently would receive a certificate of aggregation with the date of approval.

³ T. Dwyer, "St Francis' Conference Haymarket Minute Book, St Vincent De Paul Society, Minutes 1 August, 1881," Sydney.

⁴ O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881."

Baudon's response requires some detailed examination, for it revealed much of the context of the proposed mission including the organisational view of the situation in the Australasian colonies, beginning as follows:

I am extremely happy to be able to renew with you the correspondence opened up by you in Glasgow, but too soon broken off; and it is with greatest pleasure that I learn from you that you have founded a Conference of Saint Vincent de Paul in Wellington. It is the first that has existed in that distant land, and our Council is overjoyed at the happy news of its foundation.⁵

Baudon's reference to the Glasgow correspondence related to the period of O'Neill's presidency of the Society in the Western Districts of Scotland during the early 1860s; but it also suggests that they never met in person. In addition, O'Neill had initiated the aggregation of the Wellington Conference, but not its foundation. A preliminary meeting of this conference had been chaired by Reverend John-Baptiste Petitjean as early as May 1875 in a schoolroom in Hill Street, Thorndon. A certain Mr Gardiner had then been elected as first President of Wellington Conference in May 1875 and it is not known whether O'Neill was among the first 25 members enrolled. Petitjean's death in September 1876 would have been a setback for the newly formed conference. However O'Neill, with his parliamentary commitments behind him, had taken over as Wellington Conference President by 1877.

Baudon was unaware of the activities of an unaggregated conference established by Sergeant Major John Gorman in 1865 in Perth, in the colony of Western Australia; an unaggregated Christchurch Conference established by the Chataigner as early as 1867; or of a further one in the Victorian coastal town of Portland that operated (at least) between 1869 and 1873.⁶ An ongoing problem was matching the 'bottom up' establishment of conferences with the 'top down'

⁵ A. Baudon, "The Society of St Vincent de Paul," *NZT*, 11 January 1878, 15.

⁶ anon., *PortG&NGA*, 17 May 1869, 2; anon., "St. Vincent De Paul Society," *PortG&NGA*, 5 and 12 August, 2 September 1873; J. Gorman, *Perth Gazette and Western Australian Times* 1865. pt. 1 September, 2; Utick, 127, 155.

Society administration in Paris, a situation then exacerbated by the colonial tyranny of distance.

Baudon next instructed O'Neill as to the manner of conduct for the Wellington Conference:

Knowing your zeal, I need not recommend to you to make every effort to advance the new conference conformably to rule – to meet every week, to visit the poor frequently, to celebrate the Feasts of the Society in a suitable manner, to read from time to time the rule as well as the monthly report of our association, of which an English edition is published in Dublin. Write often to us and we shall feel grateful to you.⁷

O'Neill subsequently carried out the instructions to obtain the English edition of the monthly report and to correspond frequently with Baudon, as revealed later during his mission in New South Wales. Society headquarters in Paris and Dublin became key centres assisting O'Neill as part of the Society's international confederation of charity.

Baudon continued his letter by commenting on the situation in the Australian colonies: 'Some time ago, a Conference was formed in Melbourne, but we fear it is broken up.'⁸ The conference to which Baudon referred was one that had been established by Reverend Gerald Ward, a priest at St Francis' Church Melbourne, as early as the 5 March 1854.⁹ It was the first such conference in the Australian colonies and the Society in Paris had officially approved or aggregated it on 2 October 1854.¹⁰ Unfortunately Ward had died prematurely in January 1858.¹¹ The Society in Paris had subsequently received no news from Melbourne for over seventeen years. After a few brief items in the local press, including the *Melbourne Morning Herald*, reports on the activities of the St Vincent de Paul

⁷ Baudon.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Slattery, 15-16.

¹⁰ Ibid., 18.

¹¹ anon., "Funeral of the Rev. G. Ward," *MMH*, 18 January 1858, 5.

Society in Melbourne disappeared soon after the establishment of a St Vincent de Paul Orphanage at Emerald Hill which opened in March 1857.¹²

Baudon finally proceeded with his main request to O'Neill:

Could you not, with the assistance of the good Marist Fathers, re-establish it; and found new Conferences in Sydney and the other chief cities of Australia? It is much to be feared that the Masonic lodges are very numerous in those cities. Why should Catholics always allow these lodges to surpass them in zeal and energy?¹³

Baudon would have known of the missionary activities of the Society of Mary (or Marists), a French religious order founded in 1816 and officially approved of by Rome in 1836. While comparatively small compared with other Catholic orders, the Society of Mary had been active in New Zealand, the French colonial possessions of the South Pacific and other Pacific islands.¹⁴ O'Neill had probably informed Baudon of the support for the Society's activities by Bishop Redwood and other Marist priests in Wellington.¹⁵

Concern about the competition from freemasons and their charitable activities in Australian colonies deserves further examination, given that it was Baudon's expressed reason for urgency in re-establishing the St Vincent de Paul Society there. Baudon's comments need to be understood through a European Catholic perspective that had witnessed a kind of freemasonry more antithetical to Catholicism than that in the British Empire.¹⁶ Baudon clearly appreciated O'Neill's familiarity with freemasonry given the latter's Scottish background, but whether O'Neill ever revealed his professional associations with such a

¹² Slattery, 27.

¹³ Baudon.

¹⁴ Utick, 122.

¹⁵ See also comments by O'Meeghan, 119.

¹⁶ This would have included activities by the French Interior Minister Fialin in 1861 (examined previously in Chapter Two) directed at the Society itself, about which O'Neill himself was aware. See O'Neill, "Letter from the President of the St Vincent De Paul in the Western District of Scotland to the Presidents of Conferences." (also noted in Chapter Two).

prominent freemason as Sir Donald McLean is unknown. Later during his mission in New South Wales, O'Neill would address the freemasonry issue in a subtle way, but there is no record of him attacking freemasonry publicly. The lodges in the Australasian colonies were anti-Catholic, but did not pose anything like the threat imagined by Baudon. Importantly, the charitable activities of the freemasons were greatly overshadowed by the services of Protestant churches and the benevolent societies, which were not mentioned by Baudon at all in his correspondence.

Freemasonry spread widely throughout the British Empire, despite serious opposition from many in the mainstream Protestant establishment. Clandestine freemason activity is dated in New South Wales as early as 1803; however its history in the Australian colonies became a complicated series of foundations and splits between lodges drawn from English, Scottish and Irish constitutions throughout the colonies.¹⁷ Anti-Catholic and strongly deistic, such lodges in the Australia colonies did not merge until the 1880s; although in South Australia freemasonry seems to have obtained early strength and unity.¹⁸

In his letter Baudon gave grudging acknowledgement of the charitable endeavours of the Masonic lodges, but it is important to recognise that these were primarily focused on the benefits for the immediate families of active members. More broadly across the British Empire such benevolence included the Royal Masonic Institutions for Girls and Boys, and the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institutions for Widows and Aged.¹⁹ By contrast the Society's mission was primarily focused on providing outdoor relief as distinct from institutional care (see also page 167 for distinction between these). A decade later, this was something that Lord Carrington, then New South Wales Governor, was sufficiently impressed with as to make a £2 donation to the St Vincent de Paul Society, despite also being the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New South

¹⁷ W. Lamonby, *Some Notes on Freemasonry in Australasia, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Warrington & Co., 1906), 7-27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁹ E. Grundy, *An Address before the Grand Lodge of South Australia on Wednesday October 16 1901* (Adelaide: J.H. Sherring & Co, 1902), 15-16.

Wales.²⁰ The perceived competition by freemasonry needs to be considered within the broader context of sectarianism, which was but one challenge for O'Neill to meet in re-establishing the Society in the Australian colonies. In New South Wales in particular, anti-Irish, anti-Catholic sentiment had been actively promoted by Henry Parkes in the wake of the failed assassination attempt on the life of the Duke of Edinburgh by the Catholic Henry O'Farrell in March 1868.

There was however a more immediate hurdle understood by both O'Neill and Baudon. This was acceptance by the Catholic Church in the Australian colonies, both clergy and laity, of the kind of spiritual approach to charity offered by the St Vincent de Paul Society. Much more was required than approval by the Catholic hierarchy of the Society's operations for the Society to gain a permanent presence there.

Lay Catholic welfare work had already been pioneered in New South Wales and Victoria by Caroline Chisholm during the 1840s. The laity-based Conference initiated in Perth by Gorman in 1865 was another example on a smaller scale, although it failed to achieve any permanency. However, the Catholic communities in the colonies had yet to appreciate the lay-based mission of outdoor relief during an era when Catholic assistance to the poor had traditionally been associated with the figure of the priest. For example, the convict era in New South Wales had witnessed a 'sickbed, suffering, death and burial' ministry exemplified by that of the Reverend John Joseph Therry.²¹ The initial establishment of the Society in Melbourne in 1854 was itself the initiative of a priest, the Reverend Gerald Ward, generated out of concern for the plight of local Catholic orphans.²² Furthermore, Catholic religious orders including nuns and brothers caring for the poor were also increasing in numbers throughout the Australian colonies by the 1880s.²³ The ministry of the first religious sisters

²⁰ Lamonby, 27; SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888* (Sydney, 1889), 16.

²¹ O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

²² Slattery, 15.

²³ Anne O'Brien notes that there were 383 Catholic religious caring for the poor in 1886 in New South Wales; see O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, 190.

included visitation of the poor in their homes.²⁴ The Society was therefore not alone in proffering solace to the Catholic poor. In 1848 another priest of the Melbourne mission, the Reverend Patrick Geoghegan, had founded the Friendly Brothers in Melbourne, based on the Friendly Brothers of St Patrick in Ireland.²⁵ The aims of Friendly Brothers in Melbourne were to provide: 'relief to every deserving object of suffering humanity who might seek its aid or refuge, irrespective of any claim on the score of religion or country'.²⁶ It received significant support from a number of senior Catholic laymen, including foundation member John O'Shanassy, later Premier of Victoria.²⁷

Further, there was an even more subtle challenge for O'Neill to meet. This was establishing the Society's public charity credentials within a broader framework of colonial philanthropy then operating in the Australian colonies. As examined in greater depth later in this Chapter, this framework included eschewal of the Poor Law framework of Britain and was subject to the growing influence of Christian faith-based charity missions based on an evangelical Protestant ethos. Within this framework, both the benevolent societies supported by colonial administrations and those charities more directly associated with the Protestant denominations emphasised the distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor in the practice of charity (see pages 212-214 for further background).²⁸

This framework provided both institutional care and outdoor relief, supported by private philanthropy and volunteers. Institutional care came through the establishment of benevolent asylums and hospitals, orphanages, refuges for fallen women, ragged schools, industrial schools, and homes for the aged; while outdoor relief consisted of rations, goods or other help provided by the benevolent societies, or the evangelical charities such as (for example) the Ladies Melbourne

²⁴ E. Campion, *Australian Catholics: The contribution of Catholics to the development of Australian Society*. (Melbourne: Viking, 1987), 35; O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

²⁵ Slattery, 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

and Suburban City Mission in Victoria and the Sydney Dorcas Society, the Sydney Strangers' Friend Society and the Sydney City Mission in New South Wales.²⁹

The Benevolent Society of New South Wales, the most prominent charity in that state, was founded in 1813 and provided outdoor relief and managed an Asylum paid for by the government in 1821.³⁰ It attributed poverty to providence rather than personal fault and urged compassion.³¹

From the 1820s and 1830s, an evangelical approach of outdoor relief missions focused on individual conversion and moral improvement, in a social context that associated the poverty with vice.³² Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, acceptance of this association was entrenched as commentators and observers focused on the depraved morals of the slum inhabitants of the colonial cities of Sydney and Melbourne. Alexander Harris wrote of The Rocks of the 1840s as a den of criminals, ruffians and prostitutes where 'drunkenness, profanity and unchastity [*sic*] are the prevalent habits'; Frank Fowler described the Melbourne slums of 1859 'as bad in every vicious element' as the London slums of St Giles and as exhibiting the 'riot and debauchery... as vile as Whitechapel'.³³ The pioneer missionaries of the outreach that would become the Sydney City Mission could recount the depraved behaviour of some inhabitants of The Rocks, as in this incident recalled by Congregational clergyman Thomas Roseby:

Vice and crime of the worst type were rampant...Public houses were inordinately numerous and were often of the vilest character...One of the horrors that haunt the memories of my boyhood is that of a neighbouring inn, whose proprietor suddenly fell dead when serving at the bar; the

²⁹ Garton, 48-61. Garton uses the term 'out-door relief'. See also O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

³⁰ Dickey, *No Charity There. A Short History of Social Welfare in Australia*, 34. In 1862, the government assumed full responsibility for the aged and infirm.

³¹ O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

³² Ibid.

³³ A. Harris, *Settlers and Convicts* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1969 edition), 47-58. The Fowler observations are noted in G. Davison and D. Dunstan, "This Moral Pandemonium: Images of Low Life," in *The Outcasts of Melbourne: Essays in Social History*, ed. G. Davison, D. Dunstan, and C. McConville (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 30; M. Dixon, *The Real Matilda*, 2nd ed. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), 99.

drinking went on and at last the tipsy revellers laid bets with one another as to whether 'the old man' was really dead.³⁴

Such experiences served to confirm the prevailing moral and religious sentiment among the missionaries active in these places.

By contrast, the kind of charitable mission that O'Neill sought to implant in the Australian colonies was not primarily focused on decisions about 'deservingness' or on the vices of the poor. The challenge of establishing a different kind of charitable mission compared with others within this framework of colonial charity might not have been fully appreciated by O'Neill at the outset. This challenge cannot be interpreted simply as sectarian competition between Catholic and Protestant approaches to charity. Furthermore, certain aspects of this framework, particularly an emphasis on voluntarism in philanthropy combined with a heightening of the religious-based impulse for charity experienced by both sides of the sectarian divide during the 1880s and 1890s, may have actually worked to O'Neill's advantage.

Coping with sectarianism, gaining permanent support from the Catholic Church hierarchy and laity in the colonies, and finding broader public acceptance within the colonial framework of philanthropy were therefore all substantial challenges facing O'Neill on this mission that would finally settle in New South Wales and Sydney in particular.

O'Neill's mission to establish and permanently consolidate the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales would last until December 1891, when involvement in the scandal associated with the collapse of the Northumberland Banking Company forced his resignation. By this time, the Society in New South Wales had not only been permanently established, but consolidated with twenty active conferences served by 314 members. During 1890, for example, the Society in New South Wales disbursed over £1763 worth of assistance during the year

³⁴ Owen, 16. Thomas Roseby's recollections, as cited by Owen, were originally published in the *Sydney City Mission Herald* on 1 March 1919.

through 8861 visits to the poor in their homes.³⁵ O'Neill's long-standing leadership and central role in consolidating the Society in New South Wales over an entire decade is further evidence of his enduring commitment to this mission.

Initial Lack of Success, 1880

By the time that O'Neill commenced the task of re-establishing the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies, the Society had long spread across Europe and other parts of the world. The early formal approval of the Society by Pope Gregory XVI, in January 1845, had assisted the Society during this rapid growth phase. Baudon, the Society's third Secretary-General, had led the Society since 1847 and during his civic career was appointed to the Council of State as Receiver-General in Rouen in 1842.³⁶ An experienced and diplomatic administrator, Baudon had steered the Society through the crisis of 1861 when the French Government attempted to seize control of it, and the social upheaval of 1870 characterised by the violent anti-religious sentiment of the Paris Commune.³⁷

Baudon had gained an audience with Pope Pius IX in 1854, only thirteen months after Frédéric Ozanam's death. In his report to the Pontiff, Baudon pointed to the establishment of 1,532 conferences in the twenty-two years since the Society's foundation.³⁸ France, where the Society was founded, had 889 conferences; Germany had 160 and Italy 70. The British Isles (including Ireland) by then had 80 conferences, and the Melbourne Conference had been founded by Ward.

By 1880, the Society's formal reappearance in the Australian colonies was probably overdue. However, if a Society conference was initiated but not aggregated with Paris, as it was in Perth between 1865 and 1876, then there would have been little spiritual and other guidance available that would either

³⁵ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890* (Sydney, 1891), 19.

³⁶ *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*, s.v. "Adolphe Baudon."

³⁷ Utick, 130-131.

³⁸ Ibid., L. Baunard, *Ozanam in His Correspondence (English Translation)* (Dublin: Veritas, 1925), 412.

inform and or provide adequate formation for members. John Gorman's death in Perth in 1872, like that of Ward in Melbourne in 1858, deprived the members of motivating leadership.³⁹ In the earlier case of Ward and the Melbourne Conference, even successful aggregation could not prevent a short-lived false dawn.

Over two decades later, in September 1880, O'Neill was in Melbourne seeking the support of the Catholic hierarchy and influential laity to re-build the Society there.⁴⁰ It may not have been the first time O'Neill had attempted this; there is some evidence that he had canvassed support in Melbourne and Adelaide during his visit to the Australian colonies in 1873.⁴¹

One common feature in the short history of both the first Melbourne and Perth Conferences was an eventual focus on fund raising support for Catholic institutions (particularly orphanages) that would eventually become the responsibility of religious orders. Care of orphans had become a major priority throughout the Australasian colonies, as some immigrant parents did not survive the arduous sea voyage from the British Isles, including Ireland, or succumbed to the difficult conditions in the new colonies. As noted in Chapter Two, O'Neill himself had been involved in providing support for a Catholic orphanage in Nelson in New Zealand. It had also been a concern to Ward who, inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul in caring for the orphans of Paris, became the driving force for the establishment of the orphanage at Emerald Hill in Melbourne.⁴² The Sisters of Mercy gained visitation rights to the Emerald Hill orphanage in 1858.⁴³ Similarly, the Perth Conference became involved with the establishment of St Vincent's Orphanage for Boys at Subiaco until 1876.⁴⁴

³⁹ Utick, 155.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴¹ SVDP, *Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 19 July 1891* (Sydney: SVDPA Folder 12, 1891). Council Vice-President, W. J. Cracknell revealed that O'Neill had attempted this during his visits to the Australian colonies in 1873.

⁴² Slattery, 19-23.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁴ L. J. Goody, *Graver, Second Catholic Bishop of Perth (1814-1886)* (Perth: Vanguard Press, 1986), 65-66; Utick, 155.

The activities of the Friendly Brothers in Melbourne seems to have mitigated any need for another Catholic lay organisation serving the poor there up to the early 1880s. This situation remained until July 1885, when a Dublin-born Irishman Francis Healy gained support of the Reverend Thomas Donaghy, Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in Melbourne.⁴⁵ Given the long standing Catholic acceptance of clerical leadership in the provision of charitable outdoor relief in the Australian colonies, circumstances required a joint initiative of clergy and laity to establish the Society. Moreover, Victoria in particular had witnessed a tripling of the number of charities operating within that colony since the gold rushes, with 400 different societies operating in that colony by the 1870s.⁴⁶

One factor that ran in favour of O'Neill's mission was the positive disposition of the Catholic hierarchy in the Australian colonies to the permanent re-establishment of the Society. O'Neill was to report to Baudon later in October 1881:

I informed you that I was doing my utmost to accomplish your desires...and (I) communicated with the Archbishops of Melbourne and Sydney. Both these good Prelates were most favourable to the establishment of the good Society in their Dioceses.⁴⁷

O'Neill had received these initial responses early in 1880, and was able to report on them at an assembly of the Wellington Conference held on 2 March 1880 in the presbytery of Wellington's St Mary's Cathedral.

In January 1880, he had gained an interview with Archbishop Roger Bede Vaughan OSB, a Benedictine and successor to Polding. Vaughan was well disposed to the establishment of the Society for, according to O'Neill: 'he

⁴⁵ E. Bond, *Society of St Vincent De Paul, Victoria* (Melbourne, Victoria: St Vincent de Paul Society, Victoria, 1980), 48. In 1882, Healy also encountered resistance to the establishment of the Society in Melbourne, given the similar charitable activities then undertaken by the Friendly Brothers.

⁴⁶ Garton, 46.

⁴⁷ O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881."

received me most kindly and held out the most encouraging of hopes.’⁴⁸ At the Wellington meeting, O’Neill reported that Vaughan ‘at once gave permission and hearty approval for the establishment of a conference in New South Wales.’⁴⁹

On his arrival back in Sydney in May, however, O’Neill at first encountered the same lack of commitment among the local laity that he would subsequently experience in Melbourne.

Through the intervention of a Society admirer, Henry Austin, a meeting was called with twelve influential Sydney Catholics, in the presence of Vaughan.⁵⁰ O’Neill reported back to Baudon that he went to great pains at that meeting to explain the Society, its aims, objectives and the advantages that it would bring to the poor of New South Wales. However, even with the support of Vaughan, the May meeting was unsuccessful. O’Neill reported:

it was considered wiser or more advisable to delay further proceedings, consequently all action was suspended and the establishment of the Society delayed. I was much disappointed and aggrieved at the result...⁵¹

Archbishop Goold of Melbourne had also positively responded to O’Neill, replying that:

the establishment of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in Victoria is most desirable; and should a favourable opportunity offer for securing to this Archdiocese the very great advantages of the Conference referred to, I will, with God’s help, avail myself of it.⁵²

O’Neill was probably unaware that as far back as April 1854 Goold, then as Bishop, had presided as celebrant at a High Mass at St Francis’ Church

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ anon., "Wellington Diocese – Society of St Vincent De Paul."

⁵⁰ O’Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881."

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² anon., "Wellington Diocese – Society of St Vincent De Paul," *NZT*, 19 March 1880, 15.

Melbourne that had marked the inauguration of the first Melbourne Conference. Victoria had also seen the inauguration in 1875 of a Ladies Society of St Vincent de Paul at St Mary's Geelong by a local priest, the Reverend J. Hegarty, and some fifty local women parishioners. Such Ladies Societies then operated under an organisation separate from the male-only membership of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Ladies Societies of this kind were successively granted papal privileges in 1859 and 1875.⁵³

Yet despite this sympathetic background, O'Neill could not obtain sufficient support in Melbourne. He undertook a visit there in September 1880, probably to coincide with the opening of the Melbourne International Exhibition. In his report back to Baudon, O'Neill duly stated that he had:

met with several clergymen and influential gentlemen...and did all I could with the full approval of the Lord Archbishop to establish the Society, but I was not successful and I was again grieved at my want of success.⁵⁴

By the end of 1880, O'Neill had made no ground other than to gain the friendly disposition of the Archbishops of Sydney and Melbourne. Yet O'Neill's persistence continued with a firm decision to resettle in Sydney; and by mid-1881 his former business offices in Wellington were being advertised to let.⁵⁵

Key Factors in the Acceptance of O'Neill's Mission by the Catholic Church in Sydney

Three factors contributed to O'Neill's final success in seeking sufficient support from the Catholic Church in Sydney to establish the St Vincent de Paul Society permanently in New South Wales. The first two of these were engaging the local support of the Society of Mary and, as noted above, gaining acceptance by Vaughan and the New South Wales Catholic hierarchy. A third factor was

⁵³ Bond, 30.

⁵⁴ O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881."

⁵⁵ anon., "Advertisements," *EP*, 22 August 1881, 3.

recruiting a base of volunteers from among the male Catholic laity in Sydney who would remain permanently committed to the Society's mission.

High initial numbers of recruits gave no guarantee of permanent commitment, as the history of the first Melbourne and Perth Conferences had already demonstrated. Fifteen members had been initially admitted to the Melbourne Conference founded by Ward in 1854; the precise membership of the Perth Conference founded by John Gorman in 1865 is unknown but it had at one time 270 charity subscribers.⁵⁶ O'Neill was probably unaware of the activities of either conference. Nonetheless he soon proceeded to establish a base of several conferences rather than just one. The population of Sydney, like Melbourne, was growing with immigration and settlement, and the developing Catholic parishes in the city and suburbs offered fertile ground for recruitment.

Following the arrival of Archbishop, subsequently Cardinal, Patrick Moran, the Society experienced a further boost in membership. After his arrival, Moran promoted a solidly Irish Catholic Church in Australia.⁵⁷ To the extent that the Society in Sydney itself reflected an Irish image through the bulk of its membership, it too may well have benefited from Moran's wider project for the Catholic Church in New South Wales.

O'Neill became the central leadership figure of the expanding organisation and, when he himself did not directly recruit, he provided the administrative support for its recruiters. O'Neill's enthusiasm for this recruitment lasted for as long as he continued with Society leadership in New South Wales. The key role that O'Neill played in sustaining the support of the Society of Mary and the Catholic hierarchy and in promoting the Society to Catholic laity in New South Wales is now examined in detail.

⁵⁶ Utick, 155.

⁵⁷ Ayres, 127.

Support of the Society of Mary (Marists)

The Society of Mary, through its priests at the parish of Church Hill in Sydney's The Rocks District, was to be at the core of the recruitment for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Sydney, particularly in the decades before Federation. What the Marists and the St Vincent de Paul Society shared was a cultural and historical link to the French city of Lyon, which had been home both to the Marist order and the Society's intellectual guide, Frédéric Ozanam. As noted previously, Marist Fathers, in the persons of the Chataigner and Petitjean, had established St Vincent de Paul Society conferences in Christchurch in July 1867, and Wellington in May 1875 respectively. At the time, neither had sufficient knowledge of the Society to seek aggregation with the Society's headquarters in Paris, although O'Neill succeeded in having the Wellington Conference aggregated by September 1877.⁵⁸

O'Neill's close association with the Marist priests had been forged during the time that he had become an active Catholic layperson in Wellington in the late 1870s. His friendship there with the English-born Marist, Bishop Redwood, may have served to reinforce this association. Redwood chaired the assembly of the Wellington Conference held at the presbytery of St Mary's Cathedral in March 1880, where O'Neill reported on initial progress of the mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies. Redwood, rising to the cheers of the assembly, added his own support at the conclusion of that meeting:

He (Redwood) had always felt a deep interest in the Society, and this night's proceedings showed him clearly that the members had been most zealous in their endeavours to carry out the true spirit of the Society in all their labours.⁵⁹

Redwood, noting a reinvigorated Christchurch Conference, also expressed a wish for more than the two conferences then operating in New Zealand. Possibly with an eye to O'Neill's imminent departure, Redwood expressed the hope that:

⁵⁸ Utick, 131-132.

⁵⁹ anon., "Wellington Diocese – Society of St Vincent De Paul."

members would persevere in regular attendance at all their weekly meetings, for regular attendance always showed a business-like determination in the working of the conference which would always be attended with the richest benefit to themselves as well as to the poor under their charge.⁶⁰

Despite Redwood's hopes for the St Vincent de Paul Society in New Zealand, both conferences went into recess soon after O'Neill's departure; perhaps indicating (as in the cases of the earlier Melbourne and Perth Conferences) the necessity of strong and committed leadership to sustain permanency of the Society's presence. Yet Redwood's blessing at the assembly in March 1880 must have served as an encouragement to O'Neill.

The circumstances of the Marist priests in the parish of St Patrick's Church Hill were markedly different from those of their priestly fraternity in Wellington or in the missionary posts of the South Pacific. St Patrick's Church Hill, located in Grosvenor Street and flanked by Cumberland and Gloucester Streets, was situated in colonial Sydney's roughest district replete with opium dens, brothels, rough and dangerous taverns, razor gangs, larrikinism and probably the worst slums in the Australian colonies. The Rocks' wild reputation sometimes exceeded the reality, but there is no doubt that all the above could be found there.

The district also provided a first step up for those struggling to establish a business or trade in New South Wales. Nestled among the shabby terrace houses and converted warehouses providing accommodation for the wharfies, coal-lumpers, dock handlers and labourers making a living on Sydney's bustling waterfront, one could also find the mansion of a rich sea merchant or trader particularly in the more genteel Lower Fort Street.⁶¹

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the slums of The Rocks acquired a reputation of vice and dissoluteness, a place where criminals, ruffians and

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks, Sydney*, 64.

diseased prostitutes lived lives of drunkenness, profanity and fornication.⁶² Yet surrounded also by wharves and warehouses, it was also a place where the destitute and waifs could earn some income.⁶³ Such areas had, in addition to the Scottish and Irish immigrants, the highest proportion of the non-British population and half-castes. Apart from Germans and other Europeans, South Sea islanders and the locals of Aboriginal descent settled in the district, a sizeable Chinese community clustered near lower George, Queen and Little Essex Streets. Housing at The Rocks was cramped and mean, shocking even by the standards of the day. The experience of crowded accommodation must have reminded O'Neill of the conditions he had left behind in Glasgow decades before.⁶⁴ It contributed to the most appalling squalor and lack of sanitation. According to the Government Assayist, William Stanley Jevons:

Nowhere have I seen such a retreat for filth and vice as The Rocks of Sydney. Few places could be more healthily and delightfully situated but nowhere are the country and the beauty of nature so painfully contrasted with the misery and deformity which lie to the charge of man.⁶⁵

In The Rocks' more hideous corners, human excrement would pile up, while sewage could find its way into the household water supply. Families would cross narrow planks across open sewers. In the back lanes dominated by lines of washing, crowds of grubby barefooted children played in the gutters, crowded out of their cramped hovels.⁶⁶

The church of St Patrick's Church Hill stood very much at the gateway to The Rocks. The church's foundation stone was laid in 1840 and it was officially

⁶² Garton, 37.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Utick, 161.

⁶⁵ Jevons' observations are cited in Kelly, "Picturesque and Pestilential: The Sydney Slum Observed 1860-1900," 73. They are drawn from an original 1858 manuscript by Jevons 'Remarks upon the Social Map of Sydney' now held in the Mitchell Library in Sydney.

⁶⁶ Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks, Sydney*, 80-81.

opened in 1848.⁶⁷ The district had even then a long association with Catholic history dating back to the time of the Reverend Jeremiah O’Flynn, Australia’s first free Catholic priest. According to a tradition promoted at St Patrick’s, O’Flynn, before deportation by Governor Macquarie in 1818, had left the consecrated wafer of the Catholic Eucharist in the home of an Irish ex-convict William Davis in Grosvenor Street.⁶⁸

To a young French Marist priest, the Reverend Peter Piquet sm, born in 1852 in Lyons, and in 1881 only a year in the colony, such a place was hallowed ground.⁶⁹ Many years later he would preach sincerely, although with some exaggeration, about the site as being the birthplace of Australian Catholicism.⁷⁰ It was here also that the Reverend John McEncroe, its first parish priest, had helped establish early Catholic newspapers in Australia, culminating in the *Freeman’s Journal* which started in 1849 and would last for nearly a century.⁷¹

The Marists had taken charge of St Patrick’s in 1868 with McEncroe’s death, beginning with the parish priest, the Reverend Joseph Monnier sm.⁷² In the early years, their position had been tenuous. Sydney’s first Catholic Archbishop Polding, an English Benedictine and Vaughan’s predecessor, provided at best lukewarm support. Moreover, it was a small parish, there were problems over the division of the parish and with the viability of St Bridget’s Church-School, since 1835, Australia’s oldest Catholic Church, located in Kent Street near Argyll Square.⁷³ There were also disagreements over sale and disbursement of church

⁶⁷ Hosie, *St. Patrick’s 150 Years. The Sesquicentenary of ‘Everyone’s Special Church’ St Patrick’s Church Hill, Sydney 1844-1994.*, 1.

⁶⁸ P. O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church in Australia. A Short History 1788-1967* (Sydney, Australia: Thomas Nelson, 1968), 14-15. William Davis later donated the land on which St Patrick’s was built. Although some evidence suggest a different sequence of events; see possible variations to this tradition in J. Hosie, “Davis, Dempsey and the Leaving of the Blessed Sacrament – the Controversy and a Possible Solution,” *The Australasian Catholic Record*, January 1990.

⁶⁹ Society of Mary, *Life and Labours of the Rev Peter Piquet Sm* (Sydney, Australia: Society of Mary, Australia, 1937), 1-2.

⁷⁰ Hosie, *St. Patrick’s 150 Years. The Sesquicentenary of ‘Everyone’s Special Church’ St Patrick’s Church Hill, Sydney 1844-1994.*, 16.

⁷¹ O’Farrell, *The Catholic Church in Australia. A Short History 1788-1967*, 78.

⁷² Hosie, *Challenge: The Marists in Colonial Australia*, 231.

⁷³ J. Hosie, "Australia’s Oldest Catholic Church," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 11 (1989): 44.

properties, but most importantly the district was a very tough one for the priests. Many parishioners of The Rocks and Millers Point were not active churchgoers.⁷⁴ However, by 1880, the Marists had established a more solid foothold in the parish.

St Patrick's Church Hill became a haven of devotion for many Irish Catholic immigrants. The church itself impressed them with its ornate altar, stained glass windows, statuary, candlesticks, its organ made in London by Gray and Davidson, and its special devotions to Mary Mother of Jesus Christ, St Joseph and the other Catholic saints. In 1881, its parish priest was the Reverend Charles Heuzé sm who, while previously serving as a secular priest, had ministered at the siege of Vicksburg during the American Civil War.⁷⁵

Three new priests, soon to be known affectionately as the 'French Shamrocks', had also arrived by 1881, these being the Reverend Pierre Le Rennetel sm in 1879, Piquet and the Reverend Augustin Ginisty sm in 1881.⁷⁶ All three as well as another French Marist, a certain Reverend Father Coué sm, would soon play an important role in O'Neill's mission by referring desperate locals to the newly formed Society, particularly after Heuzé's death in 1883. 'Father O'Rennetel' as he was dubbed by parishioners, was of Breton birth but educated in Ireland, and was warm, intelligent and witty. As the immediate successor to Heuzé as parish priest of St Patrick's Church Hill, Le Rennetel played a key role in mobilising and promoting local parish support for O'Neill's charitable ventures, as well as (among other priests) preaching charity sermons for the work of individual conferences.⁷⁷ Piquet, who would ultimately become the spiritual advisor for the St Patrick's Conference as well as O'Neill's own spiritual mentor, was popular and demonstrated piety and evangelical poverty with zeal.⁷⁸ Illustration 2 (page

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 52-53.

⁷⁵ Heuze's health had also been a problem as early as 1869, although he took over St Patrick's in 1877. See Hosie, *Challenge: The Marists in Colonial Australia*, 241-242, 259.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 259.

⁷⁷ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 11-12.

⁷⁸ Hosie, *St. Patrick's 150 Years. The Sesquicentenary of 'Everyone's Special Church' St Patrick's Church Hill, Sydney 1844-1994.*, 12-15.

343) provides a district map montage of The Rocks featuring contemporary photos of O'Neill, Le Rennetel and Piquet.

Piquet, in his senior years, managed to recollect the circumstances surrounding O'Neill's earliest meetings with the Marists of Church Hill, in the lead up to a preliminary meeting of a St Patrick's Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society on Sunday evening 24 July 1881. Piquet recorded these in a letter to one William Davis, a Society member who thirty years previously had been given the *CoManual* by O'Neill himself.⁷⁹ That recollection is evidence enough that O'Neill had pointed to the shared French cultural roots of both the Marists and the St Vincent de Paul Society in seeking their support:

Being a French association (i.e., the St Vincent de Paul Society) it was obvious that Brother O'Neill addressed himself to the then French Priests of St Patrick's viz. Fr Heuzé sm, Fr Le Rennetel sm, Fr Coué sm and myself, and without any formal claim to priority, which after all is but a trifle...⁸⁰

O'Neill's approach was successful, the outcome being a close association between the Marists of Church Hill that lasted well past his resignation from the leadership of the Society in New South Wales in 1891.

The Marist association commenced with the above preliminary meeting on 24 July when the first gathering of local male parishioners interested in the St Vincent de Paul Society met in the St Patrick's presbytery in Harrington Street. It was formalised at a follow up meeting on 31 July 1881, when Heuzé as parish priest became spiritual advisor to the fledgling conference. The Marists probably had a hand in the promotion of the Society to some thirteen other parishioners who subsequently volunteered to join O'Neill.

The Marists at Church Hill benefited from the subsequent association with the St Vincent de Paul Society in two ways.

⁷⁹ Not to be confused of course with the original William Davis of the early nineteenth century (see also Chapter Six).

⁸⁰ P. Piquet, "Correspondence to W.J. Davis, 16 May 1930," Sydney.

Firstly, from the 1880s onwards, their parish now possessed an active arm for charitable assistance in a very challenging district; the local poor (whether active parishioners or not) could now receive help including that given through the Marists' own recommendations. In return, Marist support was of primary importance to the Society's launch of such welfare initiatives as the Penny Savings Bank which began at St Patrick's Church Hill parish in 1889.⁸¹ More importantly, the Marists provided the spiritual guidance for the Society that they had previously offered in New Zealand.

Secondly (and this may have been a sensitive issue for Le Rennetel being of French nationality), was that the active support of such a prominent layperson as O'Neill (an Empire loyalist) clearly helped in overcoming any colonial suspicion about the activities of French Marists. As will be examined later, the proximity of the parish to the docking of naval ships would create opportunities for O'Neill and the Marists for charitable work and ministry.⁸² Le Rennetel occasionally had to deal with discomfort by local church authorities well after the departure of the English Benedictine hierarchy. For example, as late as 1895, Le Rennetel had to write an explanatory letter to Cardinal Moran, rebutting a claim that the French flag had been flown up a flagpole, above the British one.⁸³

Support of the Hierarchy

As noted previously, it was O'Neill's good fortune to have the support of the local Catholic hierarchy from the outset of his mission. Unfortunately Goold's support in Melbourne was not accompanied by sufficient support from the Melbourne laity. Initially, in 1880, O'Neill faced a similar situation in Sydney. However Vaughan did not let the matter rest and may well have been encouraged in promoting the cause of establishing the St Vincent de Paul Society there by his Vicar-General, the Very Reverend Dean John Sheridan. The French background of the Society appears not to have been a problem for the English Vaughan; by

⁸¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 22.

⁸² Utick, 191.

⁸³ P. LeRennetel, "Correspondence to Cardinal Moran, Reference U2311/48, 1895," Sydney.

this time the papal blessing of the Society's work was over three decades old and a Society conference had been established in London as early as 1844.⁸⁴

Vaughan's positive disposition was demonstrated by prompt approval of the establishment of the St Patrick's Church Hill Conference, as much as it was testimony to O'Neill's skill in making representations on behalf of the Society. From his temporary lodgings in Tasman House, 1 Grosvenor Terrace, O'Neill wrote to Vaughan a day after the preliminary meeting of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference, as follows:

I have the great pleasure and honour to inform Your Grace, that yesterday the 24 Inst. (Sunday within the Octave of the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul), a meeting of Catholics interested in the establishment of a Conference of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, was held in St Patrick's school room. The Rev Father Heuzé sm in the Chair, after being introduced to the meeting by the Rev Chairman, I explained the objects, aim and end of the Society, and that I had been requested by the President-General (M. Baudon) in Paris, to endeavour to establish the good Society in Australia, and had received from your Grace, the best and wisest consent, for the formation of the Society in Sydney.⁸⁵

O'Neill followed up this report requesting Vaughan to give:

the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul your formal approval for the establishment in New South Wales, and your blessing to the present members and to all other future members, and to all benefactors of the Society.⁸⁶

Vaughan's formal reply, two days later on 27 July, gave the final seal of approval:

⁸⁴ Slattery, 31.

⁸⁵ C. O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Archbishop Roger Bede Vaughan, 25 July 1881, 1881," Sydney.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

I am very glad of this; and hereby approve of the establishment of the Society in the Archdiocese of Sydney; giving my Best Blessing for this holy work, and all who may join in it.⁸⁷

Vaughan's letter contained further good news:

I should be very glad if you would call on the V. Rev. Dean Sheridan, my Vicar-General, as he too, is anxious to promote the spread of the Society. I have told him that I would ask you to do so.⁸⁸

The approval letter gave O'Neill the sanction he required. With it, his mission had gained a foothold in New South Wales, and the (then male-only) Society was formally re-established within the Australian colonies.⁸⁹ Sheridan not only served as Vaughan's Vicar-General but also undertook pastoral duties focused on the parish of St Francis de Sales in the Haymarket. The Haymarket parish then served that part of the city prior to the construction of Sydney's Central Railway Station, its boundaries stretching down to Darling Harbour in the west, Harris Street Pyrmont to the south, and to the east, most of Surry Hills to Riley Street. Early Society volunteer, Thomas Dwyer would later recall that district, subsequently the focus of the work of St Francis' Haymarket Conference, to be:

one of the poorest in Sydney, but the residents were as a rule, a very decent lot, composed principally of respectable, hardworking people. But in later years, however, a most undesirable class came to reside in many parts of the district.⁹⁰

Sheridan's role in encouraging a preliminary gathering of the prospective volunteers of St Francis' Conference on the morning of 24 July 1881 at a pub in

⁸⁷ R. Vaughan, "Copy, Correspondence to Charles O' Neill, 27 July 1881, 1881," Sydney.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ The Ladies Society of St Vincent de Paul at St Mary's Geelong was in operation since June 1874, although separate from the male branch of the Society and not operating fully under the required processes. See Utick, 154.

⁹⁰ T. Dwyer, "Reminiscences of Old St. Francis' Church at the Haymarket (Unpublished), uncertain, post 1930," p. 3, Sydney. It was unclear as to exactly which 'later years' Dwyer's reference referred. However, it could have referred to the immediate period after the 1880s.

Elizabeth Street (prior to the preliminary meeting at St Patrick's Church Hill that same evening) is unknown, as is the outcome of any actual meeting between O'Neill and Sheridan as proposed by Vaughan. Nonetheless, the fact that St Francis' Conference came into the fold so quickly is evidence of Sheridan's strong support. Sheridan chaired a second meeting of a core of the St Francis' volunteers on the evening of 29 July, at which he conveyed Vaughan's enthusiasm for the establishment of the Society although he referred to St Francis' Conference 'as a proposed society' at that preliminary stage.⁹¹ Sheridan also chaired a follow up meeting of the St Francis' Conference on the evening of Monday 1 August, at which O'Neill himself was present. It was there that O'Neill spoke 'to bear witness to the benefits it (the Society) had conveyed on the poor and needy both in a material or spiritual way' and referred to the role of 'Divine Providence' (noted at the beginning of this Chapter).⁹²

Apart from the spiritual support provided to St Francis' Conference, Sheridan was named in early Society reports as 'a very warm friend of the Society', something that was particularly valuable during the first three years of its existence in New South Wales.⁹³ As Administrator of the Archdiocese of Sydney, Sheridan became spiritual advisor to the Particular Council of Sydney, formed in 1884 to coordinate the Society's activities in the city. Sheridan held this position until 1890.⁹⁴

As for Vaughan, O'Neill retained the high respect of the Archbishop during the remaining two years of his time in Sydney. On 17 April 1883, two days before his final departure from Sydney, Vaughan publicly paid tribute in front of an assembly of Society volunteers at St Mary's Cathedral to 'the immense amount of

⁹¹ T. Dwyer, "St Francis' Conference Haymarket Minute Book, St Vincent De Paul Society, Minutes 29 July, 1881," Sydney.

⁹² Dwyer, "St Francis' Conference Haymarket Minute Book, St Vincent De Paul Society, Minutes 1 August.

⁹³ SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883* (Sydney, 1884), 5.

⁹⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 5.

good that was done in relieving real distress' by the Society in Sydney.⁹⁵ Also reflecting the relative optimism of the 1880s, Vaughan commented:

although we were a very wealthy and prosperous community, still wherever there was a great deal of wealth and a great deal of prosperity, there was also to be found a great deal of trouble and there were many persons really in want, but would shrink from coming forward to beg.⁹⁶

O'Neill joined the gathering of dignitaries on board the steamer *City of New York* to farewell Vaughan on his way back to Rome, via the Americas. According to one account, O'Neill was one of the last to speak to the Archbishop, who told him 'to take care of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul'.⁹⁷

By the time Vaughan's replacement Archbishop Patrick Francis Moran arrived in September 1884, the establishment of the Society in New South Wales was firmly in place. By that year and under O'Neill's leadership, the Society had 65 members and 10 honorary members within its four conferences in addition to the presiding Particular Council of Sydney.⁹⁸ Within a few months, Moran demonstrated his own support by presiding over a meeting of the Council in November, followed by a Society general assembly in December 1884.⁹⁹ He demonstrated enthusiastic support for the Society with its overwhelmingly Irish Catholic membership, and made some personally symbolic gestures. The first was a personal donation of £10 made in late 1884; the second was for the proceeds of his printed lecture *The Civilization of Ireland before the Anglo-Norman Invasion* to go to the Society in April 1885.¹⁰⁰ While the initial proceeds of the latter totalled a modest £30 21s, Moran's public clear support for the Society was made

⁹⁵ anon., *FJ*, 21 April 1883, 16.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ SVDP, "Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 19 July, 1891," Sydney.

⁹⁸ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1884* (Sydney, 1885), 12.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

known throughout the Catholic Church in Sydney.¹⁰¹ The Society clearly benefited from the Moran era, as did the many other Catholic societies, guilds, associations, confraternities and devotions that provided the laity with many channels of participation in the Church.¹⁰²

The year 1885 marked a high point of Church support for the Society in New South Wales. One significant development came on 12 May, as Pope Leo XIII proclaimed St Vincent de Paul as the patron of all associations of charity throughout the Catholic world. This was a tremendous boost for the Society, which bore that saint's name, in promoting itself to Catholic laity more broadly. The spiritual significance of the proclamation did not escape O'Neill, who inserted a translation of a prayer to St Vincent, approved by Moran, into his *CoManual*.¹⁰³

Moran, created Australia's first cardinal in July, received a welcoming address by the New South Wales Society on his return to Sydney, from which he heard of the Society's growth during the year:

Your Eminence will be glad to learn that the progress of the Society has been most satisfactory during your absence from the Colony. When you took charge of the Archdiocese in September 1884, there were only four Conferences in existence in Sydney; now there are ten established, and others in the course of formation in Sydney and elsewhere, and the poor being assisted to the extent of about £1000 per annum. This success is

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰² Ayres, 147.

¹⁰³ The text of the prayer read: 'O Glorious Saint Vincent, heavenly patron of all the associations of Charity, and father of all the unfortunate, who during your life never rejected anyone who implored your assistance, look at the multitude of evils with which we are overwhelmed, and come to our assistance. Obtain from the Lord assistance for the poor, relief for the infirm, consolation for the afflicted, protection from the destitute, charity for the rich, conversion of sinners, zeal for priests, peace for the Church, tranquillity for the people, and salvation for all. Yes, may all feel the effects of your compassionate intercession; and that thus helped by you in the miseries of this life, we may be united to you in heaven where there will be neither sadness, tears nor grief, but eternal joy, bliss and beatitude. Amen.'

attributable to the blessings of Divine Providence, and the encouragements received from Your Eminence and the Clergy at large.¹⁰⁴

A Pastoral Letter of the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in Australia issued on 28 November 1885, signed by Moran, one archbishop and fifteen bishops, referred to the Society's work 'for the succour of the bodily and spiritually destitute'.¹⁰⁵ The Pastoral Letter exhorted parish priests to support Catholic associations such as the St Vincent de Paul Society, as part of their pastoral ministry:

We can hardly understand any week-day duty more suitable to a zealous priest than his working through the mass of parishioners by means of societies sanctioned by the Church for these purposes.¹⁰⁶

Much of this positive recognition for the Society rested on the efforts of O'Neill, including nurturing the support of Moran. At the time of the release of the Pastoral Letter, O'Neill presided over ten of the eleven existing Society conferences in the Australian colonies; a new Melbourne Conference had only been established by Francis Healy and the Reverend Dean Donaghy at St Patrick's Cathedral in July 1885.¹⁰⁷ The Society's New South Wales reports also indicate a strong respect for the spiritual leadership of the priest, and from the outset, the name of the priest (either diocesan or member of a religious order) who had formed each conference was clearly acknowledged.

With the support of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, the Society consolidated and grew further as parish priests sought to establish conferences within their

¹⁰⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1885* (Sydney, 1886), 11.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Bond, 48-49; SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1885*, 11.

parishes. By 1886, the Bishops of Maitland, Bathurst and Armidale were actively seeking the Society's support to establish a presence in their dioceses.¹⁰⁸

There is evidence that O'Neill retained a close acquaintance with Moran during the latter part of the 1880s. On 8 December 1885, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, Moran released a prayer invoking the intercession of the Virgin Mary on behalf of the poor and suffering; O'Neill dutifully inserted a copy in his *CoManual*.¹⁰⁹ Moran, in presiding over the annual meeting of the Society in Sydney on 20 July 1890, referred to O'Neill as 'their venerated President'.¹¹⁰ More importantly, in July 1891, Moran persuaded O'Neill to stay on as President of the Society's Particular Council of Sydney for at least four months longer than O'Neill had originally planned.¹¹¹ Both Moran and O'Neill also shared a close friendship with prominent New South Wales Catholic parliamentarian and Cabinet minister Thomas Slattery, who would later act as O'Neill's defence counsel in the Northumberland Banking Company trial in 1892.¹¹² As for the Society itself, Moran (no doubt) appreciated the strong Irish background of its membership, noting at the July 1890 meeting:

The Society he knew was composed of natives of the old country [i.e., Ireland] and worthy sons of this fair new land, and he felt confident, from the experiences of the past, that all would continue to work loyally and lovingly in their great work of charity.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1886* (Sydney, 1887), 7.

¹⁰⁹ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

¹¹⁰ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 10.

¹¹¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1891*, 12.

¹¹² Ayres, 147; Utick, 211, 219.

¹¹³ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 10.

By that time, O'Neill had presided over the recruitment of over 300 such volunteers, and in so doing had provided a base of support for the Society among the Catholic laity in New South Wales.

Successful Recruitment among the Catholic Laity in New South Wales

The third factor that contributed to the success of O'Neill's mission was recruitment of sufficient numbers of Catholic laymen not only to become members of the Society, but also to maintain a permanent weekly commitment to visit the poor in their residences. Such volunteers would further be needed to operate the fund raising activities and provide sufficient administrative support. O'Neill understood the necessity of building long-term commitment in his volunteers who, as laypeople, would have their own employment and family responsibilities.

Importantly, members of the Society gained a distinct identity within the Catholic Church at a time when Moran was intent on promoting religious guilds, associations and sodalities. The spiritual benefits Society members received included indulgences granted for attending masses, receiving Holy Communion and attendance at general meetings. Society reports listed the four 'Special Festivals' of the Society held during the year at which members were encouraged to attend masses. These were the First Sunday in Lent (for deceased members), the Second Sunday after Easter (anniversary of the translation [i.e., movement] of the relics of St Vincent de Paul), the Feast of St Vincent de Paul (19 July or one of the seven days following), and Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary (8 December or Sunday following).¹¹⁴ The *Freeman's Journal* gave an account of one of these in 1887:

The Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul was celebrated on the 24th of July by the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul at St Mary's Cathedral. Over 200 members and about twenty aspirant members met in St Mary's Hall, and wearing the badge of the Society – a small white rosette on which

¹¹⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1984*, 2.

rests a crucifix – marched two deep to the Cathedral where, in a body, they assisted at Holy Mass, celebrated by the Rev. Father Byrne, and received Holy Communion.¹¹⁵

O'Neill made a commitment first as President of the Conference formed at St Patrick's Church Hill from July 1881, then from November 1884, as head of the Society's Particular Council of Sydney to lead this mission. He held both positions until December 1891. Both his family dependents, his sister Maria Gordon and older brother John James O'Neill, were themselves supporters of the Society. Maria Gordon designed the Society rosettes referred to in the above *Freeman's Journal* account.¹¹⁶ John James became both a member of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference and served for a period (from 1886) as one of the two secretaries of the Particular Council of Sydney.¹¹⁷ This was the kind of model of Christian family service to the poor that the O'Neill family had practised in Glasgow during the 1850s. Such personal example was also vital for O'Neill to inspire his followers.

Table A (see page 346) tallies the growth of the Society in New South Wales under the leadership of O'Neill in terms of numbers of conferences and members during the period 1881 to 1891. Table A also includes a comparison with the situation in the later years of 1895 and 1900, demonstrating how the momentum for the Society's growth continued during the final years of O'Neill's life. The pattern of growth reveals that the establishment of individual conferences, rather than growth of membership within a conference, was the main source of overall Society growth. That O'Neill appreciated this is indicated by his annotation of the name and date of each additional conference founded between 1881 and 1891 in his *CoManual*, but not the total number of members. Between 1881 and 1884, the total number of members remained static at just over seventy members and honorary members across the original four conferences established in 1881, even after the formation of the Particular Council of Sydney. By 1891 with the

¹¹⁵ anon., *FJ*, 30 July 1887, 18.

¹¹⁶ C. O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 May 1883," Sydney.

¹¹⁷ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1885*, 15.

establishment of twenty Society conferences comprising over 300 members, each additional conference seems to have brought with it an average of fifteen or more members into the fold. Importantly too, O'Neill was assiduous in the aggregation of these conferences, with only one of the twenty conferences yet to be aggregated on his retirement from Society leadership in New South Wales.

Table A also provides some context to the growth of the Society in New South Wales between 1881 and 1891. The first phase, between July 1881 and December 1883, was characterised by the nurturing of the four Sydney conferences established in 1881, including St Patrick's Church Hill (24 July), St Francis's Haymarket (24 July to 1 August), St Mary's Cathedral (28 August) and St Benedict's Broadway (11 September). An indicator of this initial lay enthusiasm came when O'Neill addressed the inaugural meeting in a schoolroom at St Benedict's, where some 250 persons were present in the audience. He would attend many such inaugural meetings over the next decade, including those at Parramatta, Braidwood and North Sydney.¹¹⁸

As early as October 1881, O'Neill informed Baudon that: 'the necessity will soon arise for the formation of a Central or Special Council in Sydney, and I will take steps to soon organise a Council.'¹¹⁹

The process of forming that Council was completed over two years later at meeting held in the Inspector's Room at St Mary's Cathedral on 29 January 1884.¹²⁰ The meeting had a distinguished visitor from France, Dr Ernest Michel LL.D, lawyer, traveller and author with an interest in geography. Michel was both a member of the Society's General Council of Paris, and President of its Council in Nice. Michel's role was to inspect and report on the Society's operations overseas and, while in Sydney, he resided at the Villa Maria, the Marist estate at Hunters Hill.¹²¹ Michel's address (in English) to the Society at St Mary's

¹¹⁸ Utick, 188, 193-194.

¹¹⁹ O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881."

¹²⁰ SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*, 5.

¹²¹ E. Michel, *A Travers L'hémisphère Sud, Ou, Mon Seconde Voyage Autour Du Monde* (Trans. A. Solley, M. Nolan), vol. III (Paris: Victor Palme, 1890), 19.

Cathedral covered the expanding ‘confederation of benevolence’ in places as diverse as Northern Europe, Canada, the United States, Central America, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Asia, ‘Hindustan’, the Holy Land and Algiers.¹²² The Michel visit undoubtedly boosted the morale of the Society’s Sydney members, and was particularly successful so far as O’Neill was concerned, with a Particular Council of Sydney now approved with himself installed as its President.

The establishment of the Particular Council of Sydney appears not to have led to any immediate growth in membership. However its establishment was a prerequisite for supporting the further growth of the Society in New South Wales.

That period of growth occurred between May and September 1885, during which six conferences were established prior to the return to Australia of Cardinal Moran. The Society benefited from Moran’s blessing in November 1884, followed by the papal proclamation of St Vincent de Paul as patron of all Catholic charitable associations in May 1885. It was probably more than coincidence that the establishment of six conferences occurred soon after that proclamation including St Joseph’s Balmain (10 May), Our Lady of Mt Carmel Waterloo (7 June), St Joseph’s Newtown (14 June), St Patrick’s Parramatta (28 June), St Charles’s Waverley (19 July) and St Francis Xavier’s North Sydney (16 August). These establishments increased the membership (including honorary members) from over 70 to over 200 by the end of 1885. Despite the involvement of others including O’Neill himself, in each case the local parish priest was formally recorded as founder.¹²³

The year 1886 marked another phase of growth with an additional six conferences established including Sacred Heart Darlinghurst (1 March), St Thomas’ Petersham (11 April), St. James’ Forest Lodge (22 August), Our Lady of the Assumption Camperdown (12 September), St Bede’s Braidwood (26 September) and an Aspirant Conference of Our Lady of Mt Carmel Waterloo (17 October), this latter being for young members working under the guidance of the senior Waterloo Conference.

¹²² anon., *FJ*, 9 February 1884, 14.

¹²³ Utick, 188,193.

This phase of growth was probably assisted by the support of the Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church in November 1885, including the release of the Plenary Letter that endorsed the Society. Of the six conferences established in 1886, two lapsed within three years, these being Braidwood and the Aspirant Conference at Waterloo, resulting in a small drop in membership in 1887. Nonetheless, between 1887 and 1888, Society membership was consolidated with over 260 volunteers.

The Society in New South Wales experienced a further phase of conference growth during 1889, with St Bede's Pyrmont (11 August) and Our Lady of the Suburbs Macdonaldtown (29 September) rebuilding membership to the 1886 levels. The following year, 1890, was marked by strikes (including the Maritime Strike), and growing social unrest.¹²⁴ Three additional conferences formed in 1890, including St Fiacre's Leichhardt (9 March), St Brigid's Marrickville (16 May) and St Augustine's Balmain East (17 September). In 1891 with the onset of economic depression, another conference was established at St Vincent de Paul's Redfern (14 January). Significantly those conferences established between 1890 and 1891 were in inner Sydney suburbs with a high proportion of working class Catholic families.

Despite O'Neill's resignation from Society positions in December 1891, the Society continued to grow rapidly in New South Wales. Membership levels exceeded 400 across twenty-seven conferences in 1895; and 500 across thirty-one conferences in 1900, the year of O'Neill's death. O'Neill's earlier recruitment activities had established a considerable organisational base and generated sufficient momentum to enable the Society to grow throughout the depression years and in the lead-up to Federation.

The earliest evidence reveals that O'Neill was able to inspire and hold together his volunteer members from a wide cross-section of Catholic laymen.

Significantly, they were not all from a working class background. Those known to have been part of the original St Patrick's Church Hill Conference were the Heuzé (Spiritual Adviser), O'Neill (President), Michael Fay (Vice President), Joseph Spruson (Secretary), Jacques Carroll (Treasurer), Daniel Spillane and

¹²⁴ B. Kingston, *A History of New South Wales* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 90.

possibly John Casey. The names of another eight of the fourteen enrolled as members at a follow up meeting on that Sunday evening of 31 July are unknown.¹²⁵ Spruson was an assistant registrar of copyright from Princes Street and later a senior public servant; Fay was a customs officer from Kent Street; Jacques (James) Carroll, was a land agent with lodgings at Wentworth House, Church Hill.¹²⁶ By contrast, Casey was a 'poor sacristan' given a note of commendation by St Patrick's Conference in 1883 for the sake of a pilgrimage to the 'Holy Places'.¹²⁷

Of the above, Spruson, given his professional background, had shared interests with O'Neill particularly given the latter's own interest in patents. Spruson possessed a Diploma of the Institute of Patent Agents, London, and between 1879 and 1887 had indexed and classified fifteen volumes of patents held in New South Wales.¹²⁸ It is probable that O'Neill and Spruson would have worked together very effectively. Spruson soon became one of the two Secretaries of the Particular Council of Sydney. Spruson's example may have encouraged his son Wilfred, an engineer and one term MLA for Sydney - Gipps (Millers Point), to join the St Patrick's Church Hill Conference in 1899, a few years after the father's death in 1896.¹²⁹

O'Neill remained Conference President until December 1891. The earliest surviving St Patrick's Conference membership list, that dated 1885, contained some names worthy of note.¹³⁰ One was that of Francis MacDermott, a bank officer who then served as an early Treasurer of the Particular Council of Sydney, and later as first President of St Francis Xavier's Conference North Sydney. During 1885, MacDermott supported O'Neill in recruitment activities, speaking

¹²⁵ anon., *FJ*, 6 August 1881, 15; Utick, 166.

¹²⁶ Piquet; SVDPA, *Tableau Statistique, De La Conférence De St Patrick's, Archdiocèse De Sydney, New South Wales, Année 1881* (Paris: copy SVDPA Folder 59, 1882); Utick, 166.

¹²⁷ C. O'Neill, J. Spruson, and J. Carroll, "Copy, Certification for Mr John Casey, 30 March 1883, 1883," Sydney.

¹²⁸ B. Nairn, "Spruson, Wilfred Joseph (1870-1939)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120048b.htm>

¹²⁹ Utick, 227.

¹³⁰ SVDPA, "Attendance Roll of Saint Patrick's Conference, from 1st January 1885 to 1900, Sydney."

at the foundation of the St Patrick's Parramatta Conference on the evening of 28 June 1885, by claiming for the Society that: 'all classes, high and low, rich and poor, could unite in doing those noble works of God, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick.'¹³¹

Another name on the 1885 membership list was that of William (Bill) J. Coogan, a young draper, whose address in 1895 was recorded as 125 Harrington Street, The Rocks, which he shared with foundation member Spillane, a house agent. It was Coogan who, as Vice President of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference between 1890 and 1891, promoted the idea of establishing an institution in which orphan boys could learn trades and industries. His encouragement for the Society to work in this field, together with volunteers from the St Francis' Haymarket Conference, saw the development of residences for orphans that would, as they grew over time, lead finally to the establishment of a Boys' Home at Westmead in 1896.¹³² The 1885 membership lists also included the names of a number of other local community figures, such as Bartholomew Higgins, the local police sergeant, who resided in Gloucester Street North.¹³³ One of the most popular local figures who joined St Patrick's Church Hill Conference was Thomas J. (Stan) Dignan, the postmaster of Millers Point. Dignan joined in 1888, became Conference President in 1897 and was very close to O'Neill as the latter approached death.¹³⁴

Outside of the original St Patrick's Church Hill Conference, O'Neill led an even larger group of individuals to whom he provided leadership in Society matters. The volunteers of St Francis' Haymarket Conference had not been directly recruited by O'Neill himself, but proved enthusiastic and demonstrated initiative in providing charitable service. These were young men, led by Fred Cahill (President) and Thomas Dwyer (Secretary).¹³⁵ A teacher by profession, Dwyer

¹³¹ anon., "Society of St Vincent De Paul," *FJ*, 16 September 1886, 16.

¹³² Egan, 18; SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 11.

¹³³ SVDP, "Attendance Roll of Saint Patrick's Conference, from 1st January 1885 to 1900."

¹³⁴ anon., "The Late Mr Charles O' Neill M.I.C.E.," *FJ*, 17 November 1900, 12; Utick, 2.

¹³⁵ Dwyer, "St Francis' Conference Haymarket Minute Book, St Vincent De Paul Society, Minutes 1 August."

was later to prepare an address for O'Neill which was delivered at St Mary's Cathedral before Vaughan on 17 April 1883.¹³⁶ One member of St Francis' Haymarket Conference, a certain J. Brady, designed a poor box that Dwyer sketched in a makeshift minute book.¹³⁷ This would have been one of the earliest known Society poor boxes to appear in a Sydney Catholic church. Mention should be made also of Mr M. Murphy, owner of the Albion Hotel on the corner of Sydney's Campbell and Elizabeth Streets, where the preliminary meeting of the future members of St Francis' Conference was held on 24 July 1881. The publican Murphy became one of the first honorary members of the Society in New South Wales, subscribing £1 annually.¹³⁸

The new Presidents of the St Mary's Cathedral and St Benedict's Broadway Conferences, William Cracknell and John Bridge respectively, would serve as first Vice-Presidents of the Particular Council of Sydney.¹³⁹ Cracknell, from Palmer Street Woolloomooloo, proved a true friend to O'Neill and in 1891 defended O'Neill's reputation when the latter became embroiled in the aftermath of the collapse of the Northumberland Banking Company (see Chapter Six).¹⁴⁰

Soon after the formation of the Particular Council of Sydney, O'Neill succeeded in recruiting local political figures. Thomas M. Williamson was a state MLA for Redfern who, in June 1885, offered himself as President of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Conference, Waterloo.¹⁴¹ During 1886, Williamson joined O'Neill on a Society recruitment drive, much as MacDermott had done the year before. Williamson spoke at the formation of a Conference at Our Lady of the Assumption Camperdown school-church in Sydney's Missenden Road on 12

¹³⁶ anon., *FJ*, 21 April 1883, 16.

¹³⁷ Utick, 171.

¹³⁸ T. Dwyer, "St Francis' Conference Haymarket Minute Book, St Vincent De Paul Society, Minutes 26 August, 1881," Sydney.

¹³⁹ Both names are listed as Vice-Presidents of the Particular Council of Sydney, although little more is known of their respective occupations. See SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1984*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ SVDP, *Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 14 December 1891* (Sydney: SVDPA Folder 12, 1891).

¹⁴¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1885*, 7.

September 1886, and two weeks later on 26 September accompanied O'Neill to St Bede's Braidwood in Southern New South Wales where eleven new members signed up to join the St Vincent de Paul Society.¹⁴² Reverend M. D'Arcy, the local Braidwood priest, could not help making the observation at the inaugural Braidwood meeting 'that it was a curious coincidence that the first Conference established outside of Sydney and suburbs was in Braidwood, the chief town of the County of Saint Vincent.'¹⁴³ Braidwood, with its granite Catholic Church constructed in 1856, was then the centre of gold mining as well as wool and wheat but with experiences of floods and mining accidents. The district had a high proportion of Irish miners and settlers.¹⁴⁴ Within a year, Williamson was instrumental in establishing the Waterloo 'Aspirant' Conference for 26 youth aged between 12 and 17 years of age.¹⁴⁵

Another MLA, the mildly radical Hugh Taylor, was present at the inaugural meeting of the St Patrick's Conference in Parramatta on 28 June 1885, held in a schoolroom next to the original St Patrick's Church in Parramatta.¹⁴⁶ However, there is no evidence of Taylor's joining the Society.

Local government figures also began to join the Society from 1885 onwards. After his departure from state politics, Williamson became Mayor of Redfern and remained an active Society member including providing *pro bono* work by acting as 'solicitor for the poor'.¹⁴⁷ One local alderman Roger Kenniff became President of St Joseph's Conference Balmain when it began in May 1885.¹⁴⁸ Another local

¹⁴² Utick, 193-194.

¹⁴³ anon., *FJ*, 2 October 1886, 19.

¹⁴⁴ Utick, 194. The Irish membership of the St Bede's Braidwood Conference was evident from the names of its presidents, a certain Mr McMahon being elected president *pro-tem* in the *Freemans Journal* report of 2 October 1886, although a Mr. J. Maher is formally listed as president in *SVDP, Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1886*, 4. The conference lapsed within a few years but was re-established later.

¹⁴⁵ *SVDP, Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1886*, 4, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Utick, 193.

¹⁴⁷ *SVDP, Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ *SVDP, Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1884*, 17.

alderman, James Harrisky joined the Waterloo Conference. Unfortunately, both Kenniff and Harrisky died within a few years of their joining.¹⁴⁹ Of greater significance was Alderman W. J. Ferris of Parramatta, who began a long record of Society service beginning as first President of St Patrick's Parramatta Conference.¹⁵⁰

A number of charitable Ladies' Associations sprang up during this period and seemed to flourish in those areas where the Society was also most active, mainly serving as its auxiliaries.¹⁵¹ Le Rennelet established a Ladies' Association of St Anne at St Patrick's Church Hill, active in supplying clothing to the local needy of The Rocks; others were established at Woollahra, Waterloo and St Mary's Cathedral (this latter by Cardinal Moran).

By the beginning of the 1890s, the Society in New South Wales was assisted by a number of members offering professional services. James Carroll JP, a President of St Charles' Conference Waverley, was a city auditor and volunteered to manage the books of the Particular Council of Sydney.¹⁵² In its report for 1891, the Particular Council of Sydney thanked those providing medical services to the poor:

Who have so kindly given their aid... viz.: Dr Brownless, Dr Clune, Dr Ashwell, Dr. Patrick, Dr Thring, Dr Coote, and Dr Crago, and to Messrs. Dudgeon, Brereton, Bellamy and Short, chemists, for medicines supplied free of charge.¹⁵³

It is uncertain whether all these professionals providing free medical support to the Society's cases were themselves Catholic or whether Society volunteers had

¹⁴⁹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1885*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1884*, 17.

¹⁵¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1886*, 13.

¹⁵² SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1891*, 11.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

initially approached them, Brownless was most probably a son of Catholic convert Sir Anthony Colling Brownless, surgeon and Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, who supported the Society in Victoria.¹⁵⁴ Their example was nonetheless indicative of the wide cross section of volunteer support that the Society, under O'Neill's guidance, was attracting.

O'Neill's recruitment of the number and range of volunteers between 1881 and 1891, was one of the most significant achievements of his mission. Of significance too was the overwhelming proportion of Irish Catholics within the membership. For example, the Sprusons, who were so prominent in the parish of St Patrick's Church Hill, had family roots in County Wicklow.¹⁵⁵ The sectarian sentiment against the minority Irish Catholics had been whipped up in New South Wales many decades before O'Neill commenced his mission. Anti-Catholic, anti-Irish sentiment had been fostered by Dr John Dunmore Lang's attacks on 'popery' and 'Romish superstition', and later aggravated by Henry Parkes's campaign against further Irish immigration into New South Wales during the late 1860s and early 1870s.¹⁵⁶

O'Neill and the Challenge of Sectarianism

In 1881, there was no legal impediment to the establishment of a Catholic charitable association such as the St Vincent de Paul Society in the colony of New South Wales. Britain's *Catholic Emancipation Act* of 1829 had been adopted in the colony as early as 1830, and the Church of England was disestablished by 1836; henceforth all churches were on an equal footing to receive public funding.¹⁵⁷ Catholics such as John Hubert Plunkett had made their way into senior colonial administration (Plunkett serving as Solicitor-General as early as 1832).¹⁵⁸ By the 1870s, the Catholic lawyer and Legislative Councillor

¹⁵⁴ Utick, 197.

¹⁵⁵ Nairn, "Spruson, Wilfred Joseph (1870-1939)."

¹⁵⁶ R. Leane, *William Bede Dalley, Silver-Tongued Pride of Old Sydney* (Canberra: Ginninderra Press, 2007), 207; O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 113; Utick, 179.

¹⁵⁷ Kingston, 32.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

William Bede Dalley began making his mark in the New South Wales Colonial Parliament.¹⁵⁹ More broadly, many Catholic pioneers and immigrants were prospering well in the colony. Meanwhile, Catholicism was by then the nominal religious affiliation of over twenty per cent of the population of New South Wales, rising to over twenty-five per cent in that state by Federation.¹⁶⁰

Nonetheless, during a period when Home Rule for Ireland had become a consideration of Empire politics, suspicion of Irish Catholicism among many in the Protestant majority in New South Wales remained extremely high, well past Lang's death in 1878. This ill-feeling had been magnified by the unsuccessful assassination attempt on the Duke of Edinburgh at Clontarf in 1868, combined with the recognition that the overwhelming majority of Catholic adherents in the colony were Irish.

The woes of Ireland, including the memories of the Great Irish Famine and plight of the dispossessed tenants, would have made many among the Irish diaspora in New South Wales, as elsewhere in the Australian colonies, sympathetic to the kind of work undertaken by the Society. Such activities could be interpreted as part of a renewed commitment to the Catholic Church by many among this diaspora across the British Empire and the United States.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, a strong sense of Irish community identity had already emerged in the Australian colonies. For example, associations such as the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society had appeared in Victoria in 1871 and by the 1880s were spreading across Australia and New Zealand.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Lehané, 182-192.

¹⁶⁰ Kingston, 114.

¹⁶¹ Gilley, 188-189.

¹⁶² Hibernian-Australian Catholic Benefit Society, *Minutes of Proceedings of the Second Annual Moveable Meeting of the Hibernian-Australasian Historical Society - Held at the Catholic Library Ballarat on the 21st & 22nd February 1872* (Melbourne, 1872); Hibernian-Australian Catholic Benefit Society, *Report of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Sydney District Board No. 4, Held in St Benedict's School Room Sydney, Friday February 16 1883*. (Sydney, 1883). There is no record of O'Neill belonging to this organisation.

However in Sydney, it was probably beneficial to the Society, that some of the key players in its establishment in 1881 were *not* Irish. The Marist Fathers at St Patrick's were overwhelmingly French, while Vaughan was an English Benedictine. As for O'Neill himself, while he possessed an Irish family background, his public reputation following the International Exhibition in Sydney was that of a civil engineer with fresh professional accreditation by London's Institution of Engineers, who had also served in the New Zealand Parliament. Even given his support for Home Rule, which many Protestants also supported, this public image stood in stark contrast to most claiming allegiance to Irish causes.

The challenge that O'Neill faced was not that sectarian ill-will would impede the establishment of the Society in New South Wales, but rather that it could influence and perhaps distort its charitable ideals and operations. Despite the Catholic nature of the Society, the slogan from the Society's *Manuals* (including of course the *CoManual*) emphasised a vital principle: 'The title of the poor to our commiseration is their poverty itself; we are not to inquire to what party *or sect* they belong.'¹⁶³

This principle also conveyed a sense that such faith-based outdoor relief should stand *above sectarianism* as well. This would serve as a distinct alternative to certain contemporary philanthropic or evangelical approaches that vigorously pursued a religious and moral conversion in the recipient of charity. Much of the intrusiveness of colonial charity derived from an emphasis on using it as an instrument of moral reform to the inhabitants of the slums.¹⁶⁴ At its crudest form, some approaches entailed conversion as a condition of assistance. An account by a volunteer of the Ladies' Melbourne and Suburban City Mission in 1858 of her visit to a starving sick woman provides but one example of an attempt to proselytise in such a manner:

¹⁶³ This slogan appeared on the front cover of O'Neill's Society reports. See SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*.

¹⁶⁴ Garton, 52.

I was called on to visit one of those abodes of wretchedness and infamy in ... Lane. In this house, or hovel, lay one of those abandoned females suffering under the fearful consequences of her mode of life... I tried to fasten on to her mind the conviction that loathsome and polluted as was her poor sinking body, her soul was still more loathsome and polluted in the eyes of a just and holy God.¹⁶⁵

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, evangelical missionaries such as James Mathers of Sydney City Mission (whose charitable work will be examined further in this Chapter in comparison with that of O'Neill's) displayed a greater empathy with the needs of the poor, but retained religious conversion and moral reform as the main objective. This example, drawn from Mathers' journal of 29 July 1897, is indicative:

We next visited a gentleman who I understand is drinking himself to death and being informed that he knew the Bible & was somewhat argumentative having more than an ordinary intelligence, I was on my ground. We met him, dealt with him right away about his soul and pointed to his desperate need of a Saviour.¹⁶⁶

With respect to the Society, it should be noted that non-sectarianism was an ideal and given its undertaking during a deeply sectarian era, the likelihood that all its members practiced these ideals was remote. Catholic priests and devout laity would have been most desirous that the Catholic poor not be persuaded to join Protestant churches and missions, and the assistance from the St Vincent de Paul Society might be considered as a means of engaging with them to renew their Catholic allegiance. For example, there is evidence of sectarian crossfire over charitable activities in The Rocks (albeit gleaned from 1907) between the Marists and the Sydney City Mission (which was officially set up as a non-sectarian body).¹⁶⁷ There was some irony in this development after O'Neill's death, as both

¹⁶⁵ Committee of the Ladies Melbourne and Suburban City Mission, *Annual Report* (Melbourne, 1858), 12.

¹⁶⁶ Mathers, p. 29 July 1897, Volume 1.

¹⁶⁷ This was sparked over the right of the Mission to have a separate collection day, something opposed by the Catholic Church, as was the Mission's support for a poll on liquor licence restriction. Cardinal Moran's public

the Sydney City Mission and the St Vincent de Paul Society interpreted their respective missions as operating above sectarian considerations.

As for O'Neill, who had experienced much sectarian bitterness in Glasgow during the 1850s and early 1860s, there is no evidence that he engaged in any sectarian argument relating to religious adherence during the entire period of his charitable mission. His promotion of a high moral ground of a charity without reference to 'party or sect', was evident in 1880 when he served as President of the Wellington Conference and by which time he might have had the guidance of his *CoManual*.¹⁶⁸ Even without such guidance and well prior to this, the Marist Fathers in New Zealand seemingly respected this principle. When Christchurch Conference came out of recess in June 1875, the *New Zealand Tablet* found cause to note:

Although the Society has been in existence but a few weeks, it has not only commenced its good work, but has already made a great headway, and will undoubtedly prove a credit to the Catholics of Christchurch and a blessing to the poor, be they Catholic, Protestant or Jew.¹⁶⁹

The situation of the Society being an international confederation of charity possibly reinforced the perception by its membership that it acted above 'party or sect'. The earliest of O'Neill's reports of Society activities in New South Wales, that covering the period between July 1881 and December 1883, promoted this aspect of the Society as well as it being a Catholic association. It informed the reader that a Society *Bulletin* was issued monthly and published in seven languages, and that those nations where the Society received its greatest financial support were France, the United States of America, Belgium, Ireland (within the

attacks on Mission worker and Presbyterian James Mathers and his team as 'a gang of well paid wowzers', was followed up by ridicule in the Catholic press and a sermon against Mathers by the Rev A. Ginisty sm, then parish priest of St Patrick's Church Hill. However, there did not appear to be any involvement in these incidents (seven years after O'Neill's death) by St Vincent de Paul Society members. See *Ibid.*, p. 14 December, 29 December 1907, Volume 12; Owen, 63-64; Prentis, "City of God, City of Man: Images of the Slum 1897-1911," 108-109.

¹⁶⁸ Utick, 145.

¹⁶⁹ anon., "News of the Week," *NZT*, 16 July 1875, 11.

British Empire), the Netherlands, Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹⁷⁰ O'Neill also maintained strong contacts with the Society in Ireland through its President, the Catholic baronet Sir James Bradstreet.¹⁷¹ Bradstreet provided O'Neill with books, pamphlets, forms and manuals on Society and religious matters.¹⁷²

Moreover, the information that O'Neill gained directly from these *Bulletins* included insights into the practice of Christian charity that was much broader than that from within the British Empire. However, one piece of intelligence from within that Empire, in this case originally sourced from British India but possibly conveyed through either London or Dublin appears to have been put to use by O'Neill. Entitled *The Marquis of Ripon on the Society of St Vincent de Paul*, O'Neill selected it for inclusion into the extracts he pasted into the *CoManual*. The extract is useful in that it most likely provided O'Neill with something akin to 'soft' propaganda against freemasonry.

The Marquis of Ripon, the Viceroy of India, was a Catholic convert who at one time had been (according to the extract) 'Grand Master of the Masons in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland'. The extract further explained that Ripon had joined the St Vincent de Paul Society in Bombay 'while serving as Viceroy'. Lord Ripon, otherwise George Frederick Samuel Robinson, a peer and senior figure in Prime Minister Gladstone's Liberal Government, with Christian-Socialist sympathies, had converted from evangelical Protestantism and freemasonry to Catholicism in September 1874, causing a storm in some evangelical circles.¹⁷³ Although Ripon subsequently retired from public office, British Prime Minister Gladstone later found cause to appoint him to the Viceroyalty in 1880.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*, 4-5.

¹⁷¹ anon., "Society of St Vincent De Paul," *FJ*, 3 May 1891, 15.

¹⁷² SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 9.

¹⁷³ A. Denholm, *Lord Ripon, 1827-1909* (London, UK: Croom Helm Ltd, 1982), 118.

¹⁷⁴ S. Gopal, *The Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon 1880-1884* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1953), 2-3.

Moreover, the extract recorded an address given by Lord Ripon during his term of Viceroy, who spoke of the Society in glowing terms:

It is not only a society for the purpose of giving a certain number of rupees, or of sovereigns, or francs to the poor of any country; it is a society for the purpose of binding men together and of bringing to the homes of the poor that which is more valuable than money – a deep, earnest, loving Christian sympathy. But brethren, we are bound to say that it is not only for the sake of the poor that we do this; it is for our own sake also.¹⁷⁵

The reference made by Ripon to the provision of ‘a deep, earnest, loving Christian sympathy’ must have captured O’Neill’s attention. Here was someone who had previously been a Grand Master of Freemasonry in Great Britain and Ireland, pointing to a more genuine approach towards charitable practice from the St Vincent de Paul Society. It may also have struck a chord within O’Neill himself who had sought to put such practices into action. In a sectarian era, this account would have served as a boost to morale among his new volunteers.

However, it was not freemasonry but the growing campaign for Home Rule for Ireland, which had the potential to cause sectarian ill will against the Society, particularly given the passionate support for Home Rule by O’Neill himself. The campaign for Home Rule among the Irish sympathisers in New South Wales coincided with the early years of O’Neill’s charitable mission. In October 1881, he became a subscriber to an Irish Land League and other organisations set up to support the dispossessed from Ireland.¹⁷⁶ He was also elected to the Committee of the Irish National League of New South Wales when it held its first annual meeting at the Guild Hall on 13 February 1884.¹⁷⁷ The League had been promoted in Sydney following a visit by League leader John Redmond in February 1883. Redmond’s visit provoked an agitated response from the militant

¹⁷⁵ SVDP (annotated C. O’Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O’Neill (or CoManual)*.

¹⁷⁶ O’Neill is publicly listed as an early Sydney subscriber to the Land League Fund. See anon., "Land League Fund," *FJ*, 15 October 1881, 6.

¹⁷⁷ anon., "Annual Meeting of the Irish National League, Sydney," *FJ*, 23 September 1883, 8.

sectarians on the Protestant side. A meeting addressed by Henry Parkes at Sydney's Protestant Hall on 6 March 1883, sparked a militant confrontation with League supporters.¹⁷⁸ The extent of O'Neill's involvement (if any) in Home Rule agitation remains unknown.

The campaign for Home Rule reached a crescendo in 1886 when a *Home Rule Bill* failed to pass through the British Parliament, despite support from British Prime Minister Gladstone.¹⁷⁹ On one occasion in September that year, O'Neill strictly deviated from the above 'party or sect' principle in relation to Society promotion, although the issue could have been perceived as one of justice and the cause of Home Rule also received strong support from the *Freeman's Journal*. O'Neill had persuaded a barrister J. O'Ryan to give a Monday evening charity benefit lecture for St Patrick's Church Hill Conference on the topic of Home Rule for Ireland. The Marists Ginisty and Piquet, New South Wales Irish National League President F. Freehill, and President of the Shamrock Club J. McGuinness were all present at the function (ironically) held at a local Masonic Hall.¹⁸⁰ The sales of tickets were good. However, according to the account, 'attendance in the hall was not what it should have been', perhaps indicating that the locals were not so enthusiastic about this mixture of charity with Irish politics (or wary of entering the Masonic premises).¹⁸¹

What seemed to work much better for the Society was the public awareness and goodwill associated with charitable fund raising. This seems to have begun in earnest in 1882. For example, on 19 August 1882, O'Neill and Fred Cahill organised a public Charity Concert at Sydney's Garden Palace, under the patronage of the New South Wales Governor, Lord Augustus Loftus and his wife Lady Loftus.¹⁸² The prestigious guest list included prominent politicians such as Sir John Robertson and Sir Patrick Jennings as well as the Mayor of Sydney, and

¹⁷⁸ anon., "Mr Redmond's Mission," *SMH*, 7 March 1883, 5.

¹⁷⁹ O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 229.

¹⁸⁰ anon., "Mr. J.G. O' Ryan on Home Rule," *FJ*, 16 September 1886, 15.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² An original flyer for this event remains. See SVDP, "Flyer: Garden Palace, Saturday Afternoon, August 19, 1882, a Grand Charity Concert, 1882," Sydney. The event was before this venue was destroyed by fire.

programme included selected pieces by the New South Wales Artillery Band. As examined further in this Chapter, such events were popular among the colonial public in Sydney, and served the Society well by promoting its good works. The staging of such events was also an indicator of the rise in social respectability among the more prosperous Irish Catholics in New South Wales. For example, between 1886 and 1887, Jennings was the first Catholic to serve as Premier of New South Wales (although Dalley, also a Catholic, served as Acting Premier between 1884 and 1885).¹⁸³

Ultimately Irish sentiment within the Society became channelled into cultural activities that further assisted with fund raising and promoting goodwill. Perhaps the quaintest of these were artificial shamrock buttonholes sold on Saint Patrick's Day, 17 March 1887.¹⁸⁴ Members from St Patrick's Church Hill, St Mary's Cathedral, St Benedict's Broadway, Mt Carmel Waterloo and St Patrick's Parramatta Conferences participated in the promotion. These buttonholes, probably sold for a penny or so each outside churches, on street corners or in pubs, raised a total of £9 5s in profit, the money going towards teaching trades to boys at an Industrial Orphan School run by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan Convent at Manly.

By 1885, sectarianism could no longer be seen as a challenge to O'Neill's mission. As growth of the Society in New South Wales accelerated, anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sectarian feeling might not have dissipated entirely, but the public mood was shifting. An article in *North Shore Times and Manly Press* (possibly penned by its editor James Hobson), commenting in August that year on the establishment of the North Sydney Conference, reflected the new tolerance:

You can't convert a hungry man, but by ill-timed preaching you can make a hypocrite of him. Feed him first, teach him self-help or self-control. The speeches of Mr Charles O'Neill, Father Kelly, and Father Brennan and others who know the working of this unostentatious charity leave nothing to

¹⁸³ Kingston, 73.

¹⁸⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1886*, 10, 22.

be desired. About the religion of the projectors, none but sour fanatics have any need to say anything. Their work is a work of humanity, and that's all good men care about.¹⁸⁵

This kind of pragmatic view of the Society's work reflected a growing public respect for O'Neill's charitable work. Furthermore, the kind of sectarian religious fanaticism that O'Neill had experienced in Glasgow was becoming none too popular in Sydney. References to conversion, ill-timed preaching and turning the poor into hypocrites were indicative of a growing criticism about certain evangelical approaches to outdoor charitable relief. The perception that the Society was not ostentatious also worked in its favour as a public charity seeking financial support from the wider community in Sydney. Yet O'Neill's mission was also a faith-based one as well; something that had been intended to promote a better spiritual empathy between the giver and the recipient, or the 'deep, earnest, loving Christian sympathy' that had been identified by Lord Ripon.

Philanthropic Context of O'Neill's Mission

The slogan which emphasised that poverty itself was the sole 'title to commiseration', as well not enquiring into 'party or sect' of poor persons, also implied providing a less intrusive form of philanthropy to the poor.¹⁸⁶ Introducing this model would be a far more subtle challenge for O'Neill than anything sectarian ill-will could muster. The slogan implied that poverty itself rather than deservingness were the focus of commiseration; therefore, considerations of deservingness or otherwise might be given lesser weight in the provision of charity. Not enquiring into party or sect meant that the Society's charitable work had to respect a recipient's religious convictions.

By the time O'Neill set out on his mission in 1880, the dominant framework of colonial philanthropy in New South Wales had been in place for over seventy years. As with the other colonial settlements in Australia, the new settlers brought

¹⁸⁵ anon., "Charity Indeed," *NST&MP*, 29 August 1885, 3.

¹⁸⁶ The slogan appeared on front covers of Society Annual Reports in New South Wales beginning with *SVDP, Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*.

with them the social and political attitudes of nineteenth century Britain.¹⁸⁷ Revulsion against the Poor Laws of Britain had influenced attitudes to welfare and philanthropy in the Australian colonies.¹⁸⁸ The social environment in the Australasian colonies led to a questioning of the very necessity of government expenditure for the poor, because the colonies' growing prosperity would (it was believed) produce a new world without the necessity of collective welfare.¹⁸⁹

British reforms in 1834, extrapolated by a *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws*, made poverty relief in Britain even more punitive.¹⁹⁰ The traditional parish support for the poor, in place since Elizabethan times, was then seen as supplementing wages and discouraging the movement of labour. Thereafter 'outdoor relief' was seen to encourage 'pauperism' and dependence on charity, and this was replaced with the draconian workhouse (or poorhouses with which O'Neill would have been only too familiar in Glasgow). Towards the end of nineteenth century, public horror in the Australian colonies to the notions of 'pauper', 'poorhouse' and 'workhouse' was extremely high.¹⁹¹ Resistance to the Poor Law regime was shared by poor immigrants as well as the colonial establishment, although probably for different reasons. The poor sought a better life in the colonies without the threat of draconian institutions, whereas the colonial establishment and employers primarily sought a supply of labour.¹⁹² However, this overreaction created a problem insofar as in rejecting the Poor Law administration, the colonists also rejected any formal obligation to those who at last resort could not help themselves.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Murphy, "The Other Welfare State, Non-Government Agencies and the Mixed Economy of Welfare in Australia."

¹⁸⁸ Dickey, "Why Were There No Poor Laws in Australia?."

¹⁸⁹ Ibid; Murphy, "The Other Welfare State, Non-Government Agencies and the Mixed Economy of Welfare in Australia."; D. Thomson, *A World without Welfare: New Zealand's Colonial Experiment* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), 18.

¹⁹⁰ Murphy, "The Other Welfare State, Non-Government Agencies and the Mixed Economy of Welfare in Australia."

¹⁹¹ Observations by Victorian British commentator Sir Charles Dilke as cited by MacIntyre, 61.

¹⁹² Dickey, "Why Were There No Poor Laws in Australia?," 130. Dickey cites the observations of Timothy Coghlan in 1918.

¹⁹³ R. Mendelsohn, *The Condition of the People: Social Welfare in Australia 1900-1975* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 86.

Nonetheless, even in the earliest years of New South Wales, there was some appreciation of the plight of the ‘deserving’ poor. Philanthropists in the Australian colonies commonly defined these to include deserted and widowed mothers and their children, newly arrived immigrant families, the aged, and families of sick, injured or gaoled men.¹⁹⁴

As noted previously, the dominant charity of New South Wales was the Benevolent Society of New South Wales, itself influenced by broader Christian principles and guided by a Protestant ethos.¹⁹⁵ Charity in Sydney subsequently developed a hybrid form run by committees of citizens but heavily subsidised by colonial administrations.¹⁹⁶ This early environment did bequeath something that would be of benefit to O’Neill’s mission, the colonial appeal of voluntarism. Although some Catholics such the Reverend John McEncroe were involved in the committees of public charities, they were essentially run by Protestants.¹⁹⁷ The growing Catholic minority including many prosperous settlers had, until the advent of the Society, no similar volunteer role to play in the provision of such philanthropy except as an adjunct to those of the religious orders. This may explain O’Neill’s success in the recruitment of certain professional or semi-professional Sydney Catholics to the St Vincent de Paul Society throughout the 1880s.

The negative side of this colonial reliance on voluntarism was to build a framework of obligation and subservience of the recipient to charitable benefactor. This was magnified by concerns of charitable workers to prevent recipients becoming ‘pauperised’ or dependent on assistance, by discerning against anyone perceived as ‘undeserving’. This in turn expunged any idea of a right to assistance.¹⁹⁸ There is some evidence that the earliest colonial volunteers within the St Vincent de Paul Society were imbued with many of these same values. Initial research into the activities of the Ladies Society of St Vincent de

¹⁹⁴ Garton, 50.

¹⁹⁵ O’Brien, “Charity and Philanthropy.”

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Paul at St Mary's Geelong has suggested that their *modus operandi* was a Catholic version of the activities undertaken by the Ladies Melbourne and Suburban City Mission, including maintaining a focus on the deserving poor and division of charitable operations into districts.¹⁹⁹

Philanthropic voluntarism also came with the price of intrusion into the private lives of the poor. At the extreme edge of this was an emphasis by some philanthropists on charity as an instrument for Christian moral reform, and in this way evangelical fervour became the hard face of public charity.²⁰⁰ This emphasis would reach its peak as the evangelical slum missions and outreaches flourished during the 1880s and 1890s. Many volunteers, including those among the Sydney Protestant churches including those supporting the city mission movement, were infused with the same evangelical spirit that had emerged early during the nineteenth century in Britain.²⁰¹ The Scottish Presbyterian influence (among other denominations) was present within the Sydney City Mission, although how far the philanthropic approaches advocated by leading exponents such as Thomas Chalmers, had penetrated, is unknown.

Despite the religious ideals of the evangelical moral reformers including the pursuit of spontaneous 'free-will' offerings, this philanthropic regime created its own complexities at the face to face level. Philanthropists might have required a recipient of charity to become a moral citizen, but this recipient could also take advantage of the philanthropist's desire for the recipient to demonstrate deservingness or moral worth. This opened the door to either imposture or emotional manipulation by the recipient which such philanthropy seemed powerless to deal with, according to some informed practitioners.²⁰² A further complication was that while some poor were vociferous and forthcoming in their demands, others were not. There is evidence for example that, by the late nineteenth century, charity organisers in Melbourne were beginning to further

¹⁹⁹ K. Kurzak, "'Victorian Charity', the 'Undeserving' Poor, and the Society of St Vincent De Paul in Victoria 1880-1900 (Abstract)," in *Australasian Social Welfare History Workshop* (Sydney: 2010).

²⁰⁰ Garton, 52.

²⁰¹ See Hilton, 101, and earlier discussion in Chapter 2 (see page 42).

²⁰² *Ibid.*

divide recipients into the ‘clamorous indolent’ and those who ‘suffered in silence’.²⁰³ The problem identified here was that while the former were more likely to receive assistance, the latter were often the more deserving.

This was the kind of philanthropic context within which O’Neill sought to carry out his mission to establish and build the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales during the 1880s. It is doubtful that he would have had a complete comprehension of these features at the time he commenced the mission. However, his active charitable record in Glasgow and Wellington, together with a decade’s experience in the colonial New Zealand Parliament would have given him an understanding of Protestant philanthropic endeavour.

The objectives outlined by the Society were extremely broad, and stated forthrightly in its first Sydney report:

No form of charity is foreign to the spirit of the Society, but it chiefly employs itself in succouring the poor, and especially the bashful poor, and persons overwhelmed with sudden misfortune, whose cases require immediate and temporary relief.²⁰⁴

While the kind of cases described in these objectives might be recognised as ‘deserving’, the objectives as stated did not draw a distinction between ‘deserving’ or ‘not deserving’. The statement suggests that the St Vincent de Paul Society in Sydney was already aware of the ‘sufferers in silence’ problem through its reference to the ‘bashful poor’. In April 1883, Archbishop Vaughan recognised this quality in its work, noting that thanks to ‘the instrumentality of this Society’ and ‘the delicacy of persons belonging to it’ beneficiaries had been able to receive help ‘without being distressed by its reception’.²⁰⁵ Such observations also reflected the less intrusive nature of the Society’s approach to philanthropy. Furthermore, whatever cultural influence the Society sought to

²⁰³ Swain, “The Poor People of Melbourne.”

²⁰⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*, 5.

²⁰⁵ anon., *FJ*, 21 April 1883, 16.

introduce into New South Wales, its Catholic European roots meant that, at least at its official level, the Society's objectives were not influenced or guided by the debates about the Poor Laws in Protestant Britain. The French Catholic source of such material may be the main reason why the word 'deserving' did not appear in such literature; the deservedness distinction having been rather a focal point of discussion about philanthropy by British evangelical Protestants.²⁰⁶ At the very least, it allowed the Society in Sydney to promote an approach to charity that was not beholden to the evangelical approach.

What O'Neill succeeded in putting into place from 1881 onwards was the first major formalised Catholic outdoor relief program in New South Wales.²⁰⁷ It soon became the largest lay Catholic outdoor relief program then operating within the Australian colonies. While the scale and scope of its outcomes began modestly, within a decade these soon became substantial. A summary of charitable outcomes for the Society under O'Neill's leadership is given in Table B (page 350).

The effort was not entirely confined to outdoor relief; certain activities raised funds for the institutions managed by the Catholic Church through a number of religious orders. Beneficiaries included the Sisters of St Joseph (founded by St Mary MacKillop), the Little Sisters of the Poor and the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.²⁰⁸ The Society in New South Wales only commenced its own institutional relief in 1891 with the establishment of orphanage premises for boys that were progressively moved and finally consolidated into the Westmead Boys Home within four years.²⁰⁹ The Society in Melbourne, led by Francis Healy, moved much earlier than O'Neill in providing institutional care. A Society Night Shelter opened on 17 October 1887 in Fitzroy Street, Fitzroy providing night lodgings and breakfasts for the homeless of Melbourne.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ Hilton, 101.

²⁰⁷ O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

²⁰⁸ Utick, 183, 195-196.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²¹⁰ Bond, 53.

In summary, certain aspects of colonial philanthropy worked in favour of O'Neill's faith-based mission as a public philanthropic enterprise, but others could serve to deflect or dilute the spirituality that O'Neill was trying to promote. Given the strong base of Society operations in The Rocks and Sydney's inner city areas, O'Neill's mission also took on many of the aspects of the evangelical slum missions which were becoming more active during that era. However, before examining in depth the distinctive religious approach to charity that O'Neill was trying to introduce in New South Wales, it is necessary to examine the growing public acceptance and impact of the Society's philanthropic activities in New South Wales. These provide evidence of O'Neill's success in building his charitable mission while offering an alternative disposition to the poor compared to most others within the colonial framework of philanthropy.

Growing Public Acceptance and Impact of the Society's Philanthropy

Over time, there was a natural synergy between the levels of public acceptance of the Society in New South Wales and its philanthropic impact. Given the nature of the Society's work based on home visitation in pairs, such impact depended first upon the establishment of conferences which, in turn, built Society membership.

As noted previously, O'Neill's understanding of this strategy was the key to the successful growth of the Society in New South Wales between 1881 and 1891, by which time the momentum for future growth was set. More volunteers also meant a greater capacity for fund raising. This too was vital, given that the overwhelming majority of its volunteers were of modest means (if not entirely poor themselves) and could not provide the kind of resources proffered by some of the more prosperous benefactors to the benevolent societies. By contrast, some larger benevolent bodies had as many as 500 subscribers with many thousands of pounds of contributions and government subsidies per annum.²¹¹

The Society in New South Wales would have to rely on the much smaller levels of donations from a large base of less affluent contributors, overwhelmingly from

²¹¹ Garton, 46.

the Catholic community. It would therefore need to build support among that community first before establishing itself as a serious contributor to philanthropy in New South Wales.

As also previously noted, the support of the Marist Fathers and the Catholic hierarchy in New South Wales, the Papal proclamation in May 1885 of St Vincent de Paul as patron of all Catholic charitable associations, and a favourable endorsement of the Society in the Pastoral Letter of the Plenary Council of Australian Catholic Church in November 1885 were all factors that progressively enhanced the reputation of the Society among the Catholic laity. Significantly, for what might be construed as an indicator of public acceptance, the Society's charitable receipts for income also exceeded £1,000 per annum in 1885. Table B (page 350) presents the full record of charitable receipts over the period between 1881 and 1891 (noting the consolidated totals for the first three years between 1881 and 1883).

In 1888 another significant benchmark arrived; this was acknowledgement of the Society by the colonial authorities during the centenary of the arrival of the First Fleet in Port Jackson, the beginning of the colony of New South Wales. As part of these celebrations, the New South Wales Government arranged to give ten thousand rations to the 'deserving poor'. These 'Centennial Gifts' or charity rations consisted of:

2 loaves of bread, 2 lbs. (907 grams) White Sugar, ½ lb. (227 grams) Butter, 1 lb. (454 grams) Currants, 4 lbs. Flour, 1 tin of preserved Fish or Jam, 1 Joint of beef or mutton 6lbs. (2.7 kilograms) weight, ¼ lb. (227 grams) Tea, 1 lb. Cheese, 1 lb. Raisins, 1 Cake Tobacco and Pipe, 1 Quart (1137 millilitres) Milk, and 7lbs. (3.2 kilograms) Assorted Vegetables.²¹²

The New South Wales Government asked religious denominations to help with distribution of these rations. O'Neill was one of those approached to aid in distribution, and subsequently received the thanks of the Government Centennial

²¹² SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 26.

Celebration Commission for his service on the distribution committee.²¹³ It was the first sign that he was now recognised as one of the leading philanthropic figures in New South Wales and, in that year, the Society's charitable receipts for income had grown to over £1,700 per annum.

The next income benchmark, over £2,000 per annum, was reached in 1891. Perhaps because of the maritime strike and the dawning depression, income actually dropped slightly in 1890, only to grow again the following year. In 1891, the Society in New South Wales managed to provide support to an additional 500 families with much the same income as the previous year. This may have been an indication of how stretched the Society's resources were in New South Wales with the onslaught of economic depression. Yet, as already noted, the depression also galvanised an additional wave of volunteers who joined as O'Neill was contemplating retirement from Society leadership in New South Wales.

Nearly all monies received were expended on direct assistance to the poor, something that reinforced the unostentatious nature of the charity. At the same time, O'Neill, with the support of his Particular Council treasurers and conference presidents, ensured that the Society remained financially solvent by maintaining a small surplus each year. Of the £13,302 raised over the decade between 1881 and 1891, £12,327 (a small fortune by contemporary standards) came to the relief of the poor, mostly in Sydney. The final net surplus for the decade ensured that the Society could meet growing demands as the depression continued while enabling it to venture into the establishment of the orphanage for boys as then promoted by Coogan.

One statistic that continued to increase year by year was the number of home visits undertaken by Society volunteers. These more than quadrupled from 2,508 home visits in 1884 to 10,928 home visits in 1891 (see also Table B, page 350). This was approaching the annual home visitation levels that O'Neill had presided over in the Society in Glasgow during 1861. Naturally, with only a small pool of volunteers, the Society's early impact was a very modest one. However, within a decade, the impact

²¹³ Ibid., 27.

of the St Vincent de Paul Society became progressively more marked and, by 1893 at the height of the depression, could be counted as among the more significant charities in New South Wales.

To provide some measure of this, a comparison of the outdoor relief assistance provided by the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales, in 1884, 1888 and 1893 compared with the respective efforts of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales is provided at Table C (see page 351).

Any comparison needs to be qualified by recognising that outdoor relief was only a portion of the charitable efforts of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales which also managed asylums and other charitable activities. Furthermore, as noted in its annual reports, the St Vincent de Paul Society worked with the Benevolent Asylum by referring cases to it. Nonetheless, growth in the St Vincent de Paul Society's outdoor relief effort was impressive and relieved some of the pressure on other charities in New South Wales, including the Benevolent Society itself. Also, given the differences between the methods of recording statistics between the two organisations, direct comparisons can only be made at a very broad level. However, a comparison between total expenditure on outdoor relief does provide a useful measure.

In 1884, the St Vincent de Paul Society recorded that it was assisting only 56 families per week and spent £572 on outdoor relief. The Benevolent Society of New South Wales assisted 3,734 cases that same year and spent £3,052 on outdoor relief.²¹⁴ In 1888, St Vincent de Paul Society recorded that it had assisted 790 families or 2,301 individuals and spent £1,616 on outdoor relief, compared to 5,742 cases assisted and £4,966 spent by the Benevolent Society for this purpose.²¹⁵ In 1893, the St Vincent de Paul Society's contribution to the charitable efforts in New South Wales had risen further, in that year assisting 1,438 families or 5,807

²¹⁴ BSNSW, *Report of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales for the Year Ended 31 December 1884* (Sydney, 1885), 20.

²¹⁵ BSNSW, *Report of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales for the Year Ended 31 December 1888* (Sydney, 1889), 19.

individuals while spending £2,301 on outdoor relief.²¹⁶ By then, the Benevolent Society reported that it had assisted 7,601 cases, but despite its handling of almost 200 more cases than in 1888, its annual expenditure on outdoor relief had grown only modestly to £5,083.²¹⁷ Thus, only two years after O'Neill's departure from its leadership, the St Vincent de Paul Society's annual expenditure on outdoor relief in New South Wales had grown to almost half that of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales.

Much of this growing impact was sustained by continuing expansion of the membership base of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales, itself driven by the establishment of new conferences. The Catholic community in New South Wales may also have become more aware of the needs of the poorer citizenry particularly during an era before pensions or unemployment relief.

The charitable outcomes of the Society under O'Neill's leadership also included providing the poor with certain types of specialised assistance tailored to the specific needs of the colonial indigent. He would have learned much about providing a broad range of charitable assistance during his leadership of the Society in Glasgow two decades before.

Finding employment or assisting a person with a business became part of these services from the earliest years, and by the end of the 1880s the Society was assisting over 150 such cases per annum. During the first three years, the business support was recorded as 'assisted fruiterers and others to begin business' suggesting that the St Francis' Haymarket Conference may have been active supporting battlers to establish stalls at the old Sydney Markets located in that parish.²¹⁸

The Society also provided an allowance or other support to incapacitated or infirm individuals making their final destination to the benevolent asylums,

²¹⁶ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1893* (Sydney, 1894), 12.

²¹⁷ BSNSW, *Report of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales for the Year Ended 31 December 1893* (Sydney, 1894), 22.

²¹⁸ SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*, 8. See also background to the Haymarket district, attended serviced by St Francis' Haymarket Conference in Utick, 169.

including those located at Parramatta and Liverpool. St Patrick's Church Hill Conference recorded a number of cases of such individuals initially residing in cheap 'lodging house' accommodation for itinerant or poorer Sydney residents. The Model Lodging House in The Rocks was one source of these cases.²¹⁹ One temporary resident, William O'Connor, a worker with an injured hand, wrote in June 1885, thanking O'Neill and the Reverend Father Coué for the kindness shown to him just before his departure for the Liverpool Asylum. The letter sought further assistance in obtaining work but added poignantly: 'I think it would be better not to give any employer to understand of my being in the Liverpool Asylum, as it may prevent them from engaging me.'²²⁰ By 1888, the Society was dealing with over a hundred such cases per annum.

There were continuing requests with assistance for passage by ship or rail from those stranded in Sydney without means of support. One surviving begging letter, written in April 1882, came from a unemployed telegraphist written from the Kent Street Soup Kitchen in The Rocks. The writer, who had not been a frequent churchgoer, sought help to go to Queensland where he sought a new position:

I can do nothing as long as I am here without clothes or money. You will see now from the circumstances which I state unreservedly here the helpless and almost hapless state I am in. You know what this place is and can fancy my position. I have no friends or acquaintances.²²¹

By 1891, the Society was supporting almost fifty such cases a year. One of the last duties that O'Neill performed as President of the Particular Council of Sydney was to approval payment of fares worth £2 7s 6d to a destitute elderly couple who needed to return to the mid-west town of Orange by rail.²²²

²¹⁹ Utick, 175.

²²⁰ W. O'Connor, "Correspondence to Charles O' Neill, St Patrick's Conference, 25 June 1885, 1885," Sydney.

²²¹ Kent Street Soup Kitchen Visitor, "Correspondence to the Secretary, St Patrick's Conference, 20 April 1882, 1882," Sydney.

²²² SVDPA, *Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 14 September 1891* (Sydney: SVDPA Folder 12, 1891). O'Neill at first tried unsuccessfully to get a free railway pass for them.

The Society commenced providing funerals and burials of the poor from its beginnings in Sydney, growing to over twenty cases per year. This small but powerfully symbolic act of ‘corporal mercy’, namely to bury the dead, could be found in Catholic Catechisms.

As the 1880s progressed, annual demand for medical assistance, clothing and bedding grew steadily. With the support of the Society’s supporting team of doctors and pharmacists, 182 cases of medical assistance were recorded for 1891. Demands for clothing and bedding tapered off during 1889 and 1890, only to jump to 473 cases in 1891 as economic depression deepened. O’Neill understood that demand for blankets was urgent during the Sydney winters and, on 21 August 1888, wrote to the Under Secretary of the Colonial Secretary’s Department on the matter:

I have the honour to inform you that many poor people, and also men going to the interior to look for employment, have been very badly off for blankets especially during the present season. I have therefore respectfully to request your kind aid in obtaining from Government a moderate supply of blankets to enable this Society to give some comfort to such poor people as are really unable to provide blankets for themselves.²²³

In the letter, O’Neill emphasised that the St Vincent de Paul Society assisted ‘all poor without reference to party or sect’. What the outcomes of this particular request were is uncertain, although a bureaucratic annotation on the request noted that the matter was ‘Onhand 5 Dec. 88’.

Among the most pressing need faced by the Society in Sydney was assistance with temporary or overnight lodgings. From 1888 onwards, it dealt with well over 600 such cases per annum. It was a problem that would provide O’Neill with an early challenge, particularly given the shortage of accommodation in Sydney.

²²³ C. O’Neill, "Correspondence from St Vincent De Paul Society to Principal Undersecretary, Colonial Secretary's Department, August 21 1888."

The weight of this above administrative burden on O'Neill, who presided over this burgeoning organisation as a volunteer without remuneration, must have been immense. He was aided by his small but growing core of committed Catholic laymen. However, he also retained the onerous duties of being President of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference where he presided over its weekly meetings and gave guidance to its new volunteers. During 1884, for example, meetings of this conference were held every Friday night at 8.30 pm; while the Particular Council of Sydney met on the first Monday of every month at 8.00 pm.²²⁴ At the St Patrick's Church Hill meetings, he sat before a polished round, red cedar table, its thick central pedestal propped up by a base complete with legs carved to resemble the claws of some unknown beast.²²⁵ In his prime, O'Neill must have displayed a serious and authoritative demeanour. This was the same level of onerous responsibility that O'Neill had previously undertaken in Glasgow where he held the Presidencies of both St Andrew's Conference and the Council of the Western Districts of Scotland.

The Flair for Fund Raising

Fund raising initiatives helped fill the Society's coffers and built greater awareness and acceptance of the Society's mission among the colonial public in Sydney. With this in mind, O'Neill refined and expanded the charitable fund raising skills that he had acquired during his years in Glasgow. The aforementioned Charity Concert in Sydney's Garden Palace held in August 1882 and simple shamrock buttonholes sold in Sydney streets in March 1887, while markedly different initiatives in scale and character, were both indicative of a flair for charity fund raising that became a noted feature of O'Neill's mission. While many of the more novel events were clearly O'Neill's ideas, others such as the shamrock buttonholes came from ordinary Society members. O'Neill encouraged the practice of fund raising within the Society for good reason. In order to meet growing demands by the poor, the Society needed to generate many

²²⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1984*. See table at the rear of this report for meeting times.

²²⁵ Utick, 173.

small donations. As noted earlier, it was not blessed with the wealthy benefactors contributing to the benevolent societies.

By the 1880s he had probably learned much more about the fund raising practices by philanthropists during the Victorian era. Annual reports of the Society's Particular Council of Sydney recorded many such practices; and the charity receipts for the years 1884 and 1888 provide some informative comparisons.²²⁶

The humble poor box appeared in the churches in late 1881, beginning with one designed by J. Brady for St Francis de Sales' Church in the Haymarket. At St Patrick's Church Hill on the evening of 18 September, parish priest Heuzé appealed to his parishioners to 'deposit their alms in the Society's poor boxes at the Church doors'.²²⁷ In 1884, the total collection from such poor boxes was over £212; in 1888 these collections had more than doubled to £564 - in both years accounting for just over a third of the Society's income.

Income from secret collections (contributed by members at weekly meetings) grew as the numbers of conferences and members increased. In 1884, members contributed over £49 (eight per cent of annual receipts); in 1888, contributions from this source had jumped to over £248 (almost sixteen per cent of annual receipts).

Sometimes the Society members contributed to special funds for a specific charitable objective. During 1886, for example, Sydney conferences with the support of Mr Laurence Foley and a certain Mr McCarthy (a coachbuilder) raised over £70 for a horse and wagon, and floor repairs for Elswick House, a home for aged women and men operated by the Little Sisters of the Poor in Leichhardt.²²⁸ A year later, the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales donated £25 5s 1d to an overall total of the Society's world contribution of £4,800 or 120,000

²²⁶ For comparisons between 1884 and 1888 see tables SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1884*, 10; SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 12.

²²⁷ anon., "Society of St. Vincent De Paul," *FJ*, 24 September 1881, 15.

²²⁸ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1886*, 17.

francs to Pope Leo XIII's charitable works fund in celebration of a Papal Jubilee.²²⁹ O'Neill specifically made an annotation about this in his *CoManual*; it was clearly regarded by him as a milestone in the progress of his mission.

General donations and subscriptions grew incrementally through the years (e.g., £180 in 1884 compared with £256 in 1888), although declining as a proportion of total income (representing twenty-nine per cent of annual receipts in 1884 compared with sixteen per cent in 1888), although the Society benefited from other income sources. While the Society occasionally received a donation of £10 or more, ninety per cent of the donations by designated private individuals were within a range between £2 and 5 shillings.²³⁰ The Society promoted the making of donations through a will bequest from the beginning of operations in Sydney but such bequests were still rare during O'Neill's stewardship.²³¹

Charity sermons or edifying lectures, so well-known to O'Neill in Glasgow, also netted funds although these could vary from year to year. In 1884, total collection through these exceeded £53 (eight per cent of annual receipts); in 1888, these jumped to £195 with seven priests giving such sermons during that year (twelve per cent of annual receipts). When funds ran low, O'Neill would approach Le Rennetel to preach.²³²

Just how important the fund raising events and charity entertainments were in supporting the growing charitable efforts of the Society in New South Wales, is apparent by comparisons between the 1884 and 1888. In 1884, charity entertainment and fund raising raised £15 (only two per cent of annual receipts); in 1888, the sum raised from such sources was £247 (over fifteen per cent of annual receipts).

²²⁹ Utick, 196.

²³⁰ See for example the range of donations received in 1887, in SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 21. Totals of smaller amounts were consolidated in reports.

²³¹ SVDP, *Report of the Council of Sydney, New South Wales, 24 July, 1881, to 31 December, 1883*, 2.

²³² SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885, Minutes 26 June, 1885," Sydney.

O'Neill instigated fund raising events very soon after the establishment of the Society in Sydney. Two events in particular were indicative of his application of the latest Victorian techniques in raising funds for charity.

One, at the end of January 1882, was announced in the *Freeman's Journal* as 'a popular and scientific entertainment' in which 'a series of artistic dissolving views of the most magnificent scenery in Ireland, and other interesting subjects, will be exhibited by the Oxi-calcium light [*sic*].'²³³ Front seats for this 'magic lantern' show cost two shillings, back seats one shilling and children entered half-price. The beneficiary of this particular show, and a charity ball held previously at the old St Bridget's (later renamed St Brigit's) Hall, Millers Point in late 1881, was the St Joseph's Sisters' Providence Home for orphans and aged, destitute women in Cumberland Street. O'Neill subsequently reported back to Paris that £40 had been raised for the Home as a result of such efforts.²³⁴

A second function of such note occurred in April 1883, the proceeds from which the Providence Home also benefited. This was a Fancy Fair or Bazaar held at Tattersall's new buildings on the corner of Hunter and Castlereagh Streets. The Fair opened between 3 to 6 pm in the afternoon and 7 to 10 pm in the evening, with O'Neill and Joseph Spruson at the door selling one shilling entry tickets.²³⁵ A 'Magnificent Suite of Furniture' was raffled through the purchase of £1 tickets. There were performances by the Imperial Band, while artistes such as Signora Fabris, Madame Rosaly Merz and Herr Alpine sang to the accompaniment of pianos supplied by manufacturer Mr W. H. Paling. O'Neill appeared to have added his own touch by featuring technological novelties including such attractions as a concert room in which 'music is heard from a distance through the TELEPHONE' and a wonderful 'ILLUMINATED CHRISTMAS TREE'.²³⁶

²³³ anon, *FJ*, 28 January 1882, 11.

²³⁴ SVDP, *Tableau Statistique, De La Conférence De St Patrick's, Archdiocèse De Sydney, New South Wales, Année 1881*.

²³⁵ anon., *FJ*, 14 April 1883, 11.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

The above two events were not only innovative but indicative of O'Neill's understanding of the popular culture of the Victoria era. Such events were aimed both at raising funds and building popular support for his charitable mission.

The Society's charitable concerts featured a wide range of popular tastes from classical European to vaudeville, and continued throughout the 1880s. The programme of the 1882 Grand Charity Concert at the Garden featured vocal items composed by Rossini, Handel, Donizetti and Verdi, with a full orchestra conducted by John Delany, and selected pieces by the New South Wales Artillery Band. Delany, a Catholic composer and previously choirmaster at St Mary's Cathedral between 1874 and 1877, would have an outstanding career, including becoming Musical Director at the Cathedral in 1886 and a foundation member of the Sydney College of Music in 1894.²³⁷ A Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert, to help raise funds for a new Conference of Sacred Heart, Darlinghurst was performed in the New Oddfellows Hall in Elizabeth Street on 17 April 1888.²³⁸ The loyal Madame Merz, who had also appeared earlier at both the Garden Palace and the Tattersalls functions, appeared at this 1888 Concert programme.²³⁹ In May 1891, the Young Australia Minstrels provided an entertainment to benefit the Society's Marrickville Conference, with both O'Neill and his brother John James in the audience.²⁴⁰

The funds raised through such functions could sometimes exceed over £20. Other projects were comparatively modest by comparison; during 1887 an Art Union for a Model Yacht raised £13 while sale of photographs of the St Patrick's Church Hill parish priest Le Rennetel raised £3.²⁴¹

²³⁷ E. Lea-Scarlett, "Delany, John Albert (1852–1907)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* (updated continuously). <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/delany-john-albert-3389/text5133> [accessed 31 August 2011].

²³⁸ SVDP, "Flyer: A Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert, 1888," Sydney.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ anon, "Catholic Notes," *FJ*, 23 May 1891, 15.

²⁴¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 21.

However, even a few pounds could provide basic necessities for many families in the inner Sydney slums. For example, threepence halfpenny raised could buy a 2 pound (900 gram) loaf of bread, sixpence a 14 pound (6.5 kilogram) sack of potatoes, sixpence halfpenny a pound (450 grams) of cheese and 24 pence a pound of tea.²⁴² A steamship fare from Sydney to Melbourne by steerage cost about £1. A sum of three shillings could also pay the weekly rent for a family. This particular need, paying rents for accommodation, required O'Neill to act quickly in 1881.

Paying the Rents

Within a few months of O'Neill's initial establishment of the Society in Sydney, his band of Society volunteers faced urgent requests from needy families for financial assistance to pay rents, so that they might avoid eviction.²⁴³

Overcrowding had become a particular problem for inner suburbs of the port cities of Australia, including Melbourne and Adelaide as well as Sydney.²⁴⁴ This situation had been exacerbated in the wake of the gold rushes, as new immigrants and diggers returning unsuccessfully from the goldfields crammed into these inner areas. Seasonal labourers (delivering goods to Sydney) also required accommodation, usually in boarding houses, common lodging houses and hotels near the docks.

Working families in particular suffered from cramming into slums and terraces as the demand grew for accommodation near their places of employment. Without the conveniences of advanced city transport, workers had no choice but to live close to their place of work; the main Sydney railway station remained at Redfern until Central Station was completed just before Federation. Bad enough though it was in the Haymarket district, it was worse in places like The Rocks. There, housing stock which had been substandard in the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s, had

²⁴² W. Vamplew, ed., *Australian Historical Statistics* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon, 1987), 222.

²⁴³ Utick, 172-174.

²⁴⁴ Garton, 39.

degenerated into an even worse state of decay in the decades that followed.²⁴⁵ A *Royal Commission into the Conditions of the Working Classes of the Metropolis*, held in 1859, restated conclusions about substandard housing made a year earlier by Jevons.²⁴⁶ For example, up to seven or eight people could live in one small house often sharing inadequate and unhygienic toilets and washing facilities.²⁴⁷ The cramming was such that even young children would have to be put outside on mats into the street during the day.²⁴⁸ As warehouses were converted into cheap lodgings, absentee landlords took advantage of the demand by driving up rents and forcing working and poor families to share accommodation. These high rents only exacerbated the overcrowding. By 1890, almost all of the population of the City of Sydney (then over 106,000) was living in conditions more cramped than applied in any wider Sydney suburb.²⁴⁹

Within The Rocks, there were also different classes of accommodation dating from the earliest colonial times. ‘Boardings’ usually meant comfortable rooms with reasonable meals provided for short time visitors including sea captains, merchants and better-off overseas visitors. ‘Lodgings’ were for long-term tenants, often the only accommodation that city workers and their families could obtain.²⁵⁰ Some lodgings were reasonable for the period, providing clean beds with linen for a price. Most were not. The world of lodging houses and residentials, including the squalor of decaying, stale, smelly rooms, would become O’Neill’s own as he and his brother settled permanently at 200 Cumberland Street.²⁵¹ Up to one fifth of the Sydney adult population lived in lodging and boarding houses

²⁴⁵ Kelly, "Picturesque and Pestilential: The Sydney Slum Observed 1860-1900," 72.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁴⁷ Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks, Sydney*, 69.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 64. Kelly cites the recollection of Elsie Solomon of life in Caraher’s Lane off Cumberland Street – Caraher’s Lane was one of many streets in The Rocks where residents were visited by members of St Patrick’s Church Hill Conference.

²⁴⁹ Kelly, "Picturesque and Pestilential: The Sydney Slum Observed 1860-1900," in *Nineteen-Century Sydney, Essays in Urban History*, 72.

²⁵⁰ Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks, Sydney*, 54. Kelly draws from evidence of the Sydney Select Committee on Common Lodging Houses (1876).

²⁵¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1984*. O’Neill’s Cumberland Street address is among the contact addresses listed in a table at the end of this report.

during this era, and there were hundreds of such establishments clustered around the main thoroughfares of The Rocks.²⁵²

It is hardly surprising that O'Neill was deeply motivated to respond to this need, given his own experience in the Glasgow slums, and his championing of better town planning in the New Zealand Parliament. Furthermore, the first two conferences in Sydney, St Patrick's Church Hill and St Francis' Haymarket began visitations within some of the worst areas of the inner city.

The problem that O'Neill faced was that the Society rules disapproved of providing money directly to the poor. Such advice as there was, extracted from European practice, emphasised the provision of services or food such as this piece included in the *CoManual*:

For one farthing, the poor can have a footwarmer filled, which if properly conducted, will last from 8 in the morning till 10 at night...They reserve what wood may be provided by the Bureau de Bienfaisance and other committees of charity to cook their soup and warm their food.²⁵³

Provision of money to pay the rent was, however, another matter. At the beginning of October 1881, O'Neill appealed to Baudon in Paris to grant approval to give money for such purposes:

May I say generally in Australia, provisions are much more easily obtainable by the poor than can be obtained in Europe, while houses or lodgings are expensive here in Sydney - hence it has been found necessary to give relief in money with due precautions - for payments of house rents and lodgings - especially to recipients who could easily obtain sufficient food.²⁵⁴

²⁵² Kelly, *Anchored in a Small Cove: A History and Archaeology of the Rocks, Sydney*, 54.

²⁵³ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

²⁵⁴ O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 October 1881."

O'Neill and his volunteers may have anticipated a positive response from Paris. By October 1881, St Francis' Conference volunteers were already providing assistance to needy lodgers, although through payment to a lodging-house keeper, a certain Mrs Brown, rather than to the lodgers themselves. In this case, the conference agreed to pay her two shillings and sixpence per day for all lodgers sent 'except in the case where the person required more than a week's lodgings when the charge was to be 15 shillings a week'.²⁵⁵

Fortunately, on 29 November 1881, Baudon replied giving qualified approval for this payment of rent in 'exceptional' cases:

I comprehend the reasons that have led to our brothers to accord charity in money for payment of rent; but it is very desirable that charity of that nature should be exceptional, and that the poor should know that the customs and rule of our Society are not to give money except in very rare cases, and to make it a habit to ask other than our brothers to assist them in the payment of their rents.²⁵⁶

In his report back to Paris for the year 1881, O'Neill assured Baudon that St Patrick's Conference was:

fully alive to your constant expression of the danger of giving any money relief, and is now endeavouring to arrange that as little as possible relief in money will be given in future.²⁵⁷

Three years later, in November 1884, Baudon further clarified the Society's approach to the paying of rents and the practice of giving out loans:

²⁵⁵ T. Dwyer, "St Francis' Conference Haymarket Minute Book, St Vincent De Paul Society, Minutes 14 October, 1881," Sydney.

²⁵⁶ While the original of Baudon's correspondence to Charles O'Neill, 29 November 1881 has yet to be uncovered, the text was reproduced in SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1984*, 14-15.

²⁵⁷ SVDP, *Tableau Statistique, De La Conférence De St Patrick's, Archdiocèse De Sydney, New South Wales, Année 1881*.

in general our conferences abstain from paying this heavy expense...our members do not enforce this except in exceptional cases of misery...A conference would soon be ruined if it was to lend to the poor, but a certain amount might be lent to an intelligent man to put him in the way of honestly gaining a living.²⁵⁸

However, by 1885 at the earliest, evidence remains that whatever constraints promised by O'Neill in providing money for paying rent were not strictly adhered to. As recorded in a surviving St Patrick's Church Hill Conference casebook for that year, 'allowances' were provided to individuals and families throughout The Rocks, usually between two shillings and sixpence and five shillings each.²⁵⁹ The evidence points to these allowances being made in cash, and that they could be used to help pay a weekly rent (vouchers were introduced by the conference at a later period). Residents in Upper Fort, Prince, Cumberland, Gloucester, Harrington, Essex and Kent Streets, Caraher's and Gas Lanes were among the beneficiaries.²⁶⁰

More pertinently, the surviving minute records for St Patrick's Church Hill Conference from January to September 1885, reveal that payment of rents had become a regular form of assistance. The following minute entries were indicative:

27 March

Mrs Stack's case

Br Higgins reported – Mrs Stack ill with low fever, did not see him, as he was out, pays 6/6 rent, owes £2 rent ... landlord will raise rent to 13/6 next week and dismiss them in the following week if they do not pay up; 5 young children; very poor. 10/- cash voted for this week.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ A. Baudon, "Correspondence to C. O' Neill, 6 November 1884, 1884," Sydney.

²⁵⁹ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885, Minutes 2 January, 1885," Sydney.

²⁶⁰ Utick, 175.

²⁶¹ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885, Minutes 27 March, 1885," Sydney.

14th August

Mr Avery. New Case

An old man lives in Harrington Street...conference paid rent for this week.²⁶²

18th September:

Mrs Blackmore

Bro. McGluichey reported that she does (not) require anything in the way of food. It is only waste giving her an order in kind. She asks the conference to give her 3/- in cash to help pay the rent. Granted.²⁶³

The actual provision of support for paying rents was, in itself, not a new initiative so far as Sydney philanthropy was concerned. The Benevolent Society of New South Wales had long instituted the practice of assisting with the rents of certain 'deserving cases'; however, like the St Vincent de Paul Society, it experienced heavy demand for rental assistance about the same time that O'Neill was also faced with the responding to this need. For example, the Benevolent Society reported that its expenditure on rental assistance had jumped from £130 in 1881 to £373 in 1882, as average allowances increased from 2 shillings and sixpence to 5 shillings per week.²⁶⁴

The initiative introduced by O'Neill was to incorporate this kind of assistance into a regular outdoor relief visitation system. Having initially received Baudon's approval for the practice for exceptional cases only, O'Neill most likely continued to err on the side of charitable need, particularly as most of these cases involved widowed or deserted wives with dependent children.

An account by Dr Ernest Michel during his Sydney visit in 1884 is significant not only in that it illustrates the distress surrounding such cases, but is the only

²⁶² SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, Minutes 14 August, 1885," Sydney.

²⁶³ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, Minutes 18 September, 1885," Sydney.

²⁶⁴ BSNSW, *Report of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales for the Year Ended 31 December 1882* (Sydney, 1883), 16-17.

remaining eye witness account of O'Neill visiting the poor. The context was that Michel begged O'Neill to take him to visit 'some poor families', and Michel recorded the visit as follows:

he [O'Neill] takes me to see a widow who has rented a room from a working class family...To reduce the cost of the rent, the family has rented a room to the widow, who pays five shillings per week. The poor creature has two children, one aged seven months, in her arms, and the other aged ten years, who was seized by the police and placed in an orphanage.²⁶⁵

As will be examined in Chapter Six, such cases had become a source of great concern for the bachelor O'Neill.

O'Neill's Catholic Evangelical Mission for Charity

O'Neill's charitable mission operating from St Patrick's Church Hill, with its provenance within the slum district of The Rocks and the adjacent colonial Sydney docks, acquired some of the characteristics of the evangelical slum missions albeit with a Roman Catholic orientation. Yet he still faced the challenge of maintaining a fine balance between promoting his faith while preserving the objective of not enquiring into 'party or sect'.

Along with other cities within the British Empire, Sydney had not escaped the attention of the Protestant evangelical slum missionary and rescue movements. In 1849, Samuel Goold, a former city missionary in London, took up an appointment at the Pitt Street Congregational Church to work among the poor. A year later Nathaniel Pidgeon, a cabinet maker and lay preacher, commenced his full time missionary work for the Wesleyan Methodist Church. By the time that O'Neill settled in Sydney in 1881, the Sydney City Mission had been in operation for almost two decades. It had been established in 1862 by Benjamin Short, an insurance canvasser for the Australian Mutual Provident Society with the assistance of clerical and lay leaders from Sydney's Protestant churches, who

²⁶⁵ Michel, 30.

were united in supporting the Mission's work.²⁶⁶ The principal aim of Sydney City Mission (as with its counterpart in London) was 'to rescue perishing souls from sin and vice, ignorance and death, and to carry the living message of the gospel to the very poor, the sick, the vicious, the outcast and the fallen.'²⁶⁷ Although originally not supposed to provide material assistance, confronted by the destitution in the slums, they found themselves giving out food vouchers, clothing, coal and cash provided not by the Mission, but by benefactors.²⁶⁸ By 1882, the Salvation Army had also spread to New South Wales.

The work of the Sydney City Mission most closely resembled that of the St Vincent de Paul Society given that the former's missionaries were also visiting the poor in their homes and providing outdoor relief.²⁶⁹ While the Benevolent Society of New South Wales provided outdoor relief, this usually involved the poor visiting the Benevolent Asylum after referral in order to seek the assistance that they required.

Home visitations undertaken by the Sydney City Mission were not initially solicited by those that they visited, whereas in the case of the Society, visits were undertaken after a request by the persons themselves or by referral (this latter mostly by the clergy at St Patrick's Church Hill). Noting this background, a contrast between the two approaches provides a useful context for examining O'Neill's activities. This is possible by comparing the *CoManual* and surviving minutes of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference with the surviving journals of Sydney City Missionary James Mathers (1852-1911). Mathers, a Northern Irishman from Lurgan in Armagh also grew up in Glasgow, and was employed by Sydney City Mission between 1897 and 1910.²⁷⁰ As Mathers only commenced his work as O'Neill was in his final years, it is unlikely that they ever met in person.

²⁶⁶ Owen, 18-21.

²⁶⁷ W. Phillips, *Defending 'a Christian Country': Churchmen and Society in New South Wales in the 1880s and After* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1981), 97.

²⁶⁸ Prentis, "City of God, City of Man: Images of the Slum 1897-1911," 103.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. Missioners were also required to undertake at least thirty hours visitation work per week and to keep journals.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 104-106.

The first shared characteristic of both O'Neill and Mathers (who had joined the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales) was an evangelistic spirit, although O'Neill promoted a less intrusive method of charitable practice.

Evidence from the series of cuttings that O'Neill had extracted from a Roman Catholic liturgical calendar and pasted in the *CoManual*, indicated that he was guided by the following (unattributed) precept for the feast of St Barnabas: 'Oh! If you knew the joy you give to God when you devote yourself to the salvation of souls!' This is evidence that O'Neill understood his work as a way of working for the 'salvation of souls', the 'souls' in question possibly being the volunteers he led as well as the poor he served. However, he seemed by his actions to include the whole person and the circumstances of family and society in this. According to this spiritual approach, bringing solace to body and soul, would bring joy to God who, by inspiring charitable works in the giver, rejoices in the love that is shown and the thanks that is offered.²⁷¹ The *CoManual* also contained an extract from an unknown source, noting that Pope Leo XIII had addressed a letter to presidents and members of the Society of St Paul for the diffusion of Catholic books; it is evidence that O'Neill undertook the task of promoting such literature for the purposes of evangelism.²⁷²

By contrast the evangelistic spirit of Mathers was extremely devout, but also direct and confronting as exhibited on practically every page of his journals. While done so in a compassionate and sympathetic manner, in accordance with the aims of his mission Mathers sought to elicit a pledge or a confession of belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God first from every principal resident he visited, with questions about material needs a secondary consideration.²⁷³ For nearly every entry in his journals, he also recorded their nominal religious adherence.

²⁷¹ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

²⁷² Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O'Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 33.

²⁷³ Mathers.

Even though Sydney City Mission had been established as officially non-sectarian charity, Mathers exhibited sectarian attitudes toward religion where conversion was concerned, as in this case of a certain Mrs Brown whom he visited on 30 July 1897 and identified as a Greek Catholic (or Orthodox):

She was glad to see me & I read Is (Isaiah) 53 Chp & explained the word to her. I asked her if she was saved and she said no. I then brought her face to face with the word, and the spirit of God opened her eyes to the truth... I mean to follow up the case, and put some of the ministers on her track.²⁷⁴

By contrast, the surviving minutes of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference (the first half of 1885 and between 1892 and 1900) did not generally record a person's religious affiliation, except as an occasional background comment.²⁷⁵ There is no record of O'Neill having demonstrated such directness in any poor visitation or raising such religious matters as a pre-requisite for assistance.

Both Mathers and O'Neill were involved in the distribution of religious tracts in different ways, but while Mathers focused on open-air gatherings and indoor prayer meetings operated by the Mission, O'Neill was constrained to act as a layperson within the parish of St Patrick's Church Hill. However, with the growing resources of the Society at his disposal, O'Neill could assist St Patrick's Parish with its mission to seamen while promoting the Society. For example in January 1885, O'Neill wrote a letter of commendation to Michael Flynn, the Senior Boatswain of the Flagship HMS *Nelson*, noting that:

we trust you will join the conference of the Society wherever you may be stationed, and promote works of religion and charity with the same zeal in those places that we have witnessed during your stay in Sydney.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 30 July 1897, Volume 1.

²⁷⁵ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885, 1885," Sydney; SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, 1885," Sydney; SVDP, "Case Book of St Patrick's Conference Church Hill, 1892-1900, 1900."

²⁷⁶ C. O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Michael Flynn, 24 January 1885, 1885," Sydney.

In mid-1885, the Society's Particular Council of Sydney observed that many sailors and marines attending St Patrick's did not have prayer books when attending mass, and subsequently decided to act. The Council sought permission of all the various captains of the men-of-war in Sydney Harbour, including HMS *Nelson*, HMS *Miranda* and HMS *Harmer*. The Council received it and, on 16 August 1885, 75 officers and seamen from these vessels met with O'Neill in St Patrick's Hall after the morning mass where the books were distributed.²⁷⁷ Parish priest Le Rennetel, who had himself once been an officer in the French Army, gave a well-received talk on 'moral courage' in peace and war, and O'Neill followed this up with welcoming comments of his own.²⁷⁸ Such overt public displays of evangelical zeal were rare for O'Neill.

The differences between the Christian evangelical approaches of O'Neill and city missionaries such as Mathers, primarily reflected the differences between Catholic and Protestant theological approaches to the poor. Significantly though, O'Neill sought to infuse certain traditions from within Roman Catholicism into his charitable mission, through his embrace of the spiritual guides of St Vincent de Paul and St Francis of Assisi including their incarnational spirituality that emphasised the presence of Christ in the presence of the poor. Much of this is evidenced in the prayers and pious extracts pasted into the *CoManual*.²⁷⁹ The lives of these two Catholic saints were therefore central to the kind of charity that O'Neill was trying to practise.

The most important example for his mission was that of St Vincent de Paul, the Society's patron saint. One cutting, extracted from a Roman Catholic liturgical calendar, was prioritised by being inserted within the inside jacket cover of his *CoManual* far in advance of the other such extracts. This cutting for the Feast of St Vincent de Paul 24 July (year unknown), featured a saying attributed to St

²⁷⁷ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, Minutes 14 August." The date of this event was Sunday 16 August 1885; the minutes refer erroneously to 15 August.

²⁷⁸ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1885*, 12. The date is also wrongly recorded in this report as Sunday 12 August.

²⁷⁹ Utick, 225.

Vincent that ‘those who love the poor in life shall no fear of death.’²⁸⁰ Apart from distilling the pure message of the Gospel: ‘Just as you did it to one of these least of my brethren’ (Matthew 25:40); as noted in Chapter Six, this spiritual snippet would have profound influence on O’Neill as he approached his own death.

O’Neill inserted three formal prayers in his *CoManual* associated with St Vincent de Paul that indicate O’Neill found in this saint a striking embodiment of what it was to be a Christian. Two are examined in detail below, the third (one noted previously in this Chapter) was the prayer composed by Pope Leo XIII in 1885 on the occasion of this saint’s being named patron of all Catholic charitable associations.

The first prayer was an English translation of a more succinct Latin prayer as was found in a Roman missal of that era, and read:

O God, who in order to announce the gospel to the poor, to console the sick and afflicted, and to exult the dignity of the ecclesiastical state, has manifested thy divine Son’s spirit in the humility and apostolic charity of blessed Vincent de Paul, grant that by his intercession we may be delivered from our sins, and may render ourselves pleasing to thee by a faithful imitation of his charity and humility, through Jesus Christ our Lord, - Amen.²⁸¹

As O’Neill would have understood this prayer, the saint’s reaching out to the poor and his solidarity with them, modelled as it was on Christ’s own mission to the poor, set the example of a genuine Christian vocation. By praying through the intercession of St Vincent, a believer could be freed from the sins of selfishness and apathy, and be spiritually renewed through a compassion that was St Vincent’s special grace.²⁸² The reference ‘to exulting the dignity of the ecclesiastical state’ referred to the saint’s project in seventeenth century France to

²⁸⁰ SVDP (annotated C. O’Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O’Neill (or CoManual)*.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O' Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 12.

reform the Catholic clergy so that they would become more genuine witnesses to the Gospel, by becoming men of the poor themselves.²⁸³ This might also explain why O'Neill was careful to work with the clergy, bishop and priest, assuring them that laity would not usurp their authority, and allaying any tensions between parish priests and Society members.

The second prayer to St Vincent de Paul was composed in florid Gallic style on the occasion of the removal of the saint's remains to a Vincentian church shrine in Paris:

Great Saint, whose name is held in benediction by the afflicted, who, animated with humble piety and ardent zeal for the glory of God, has founded and established so many valuable institutions to relieve and comfort the suffering members of Jesus Christ – Glorious St Vincent de Paul! Whose charity must ever excite the admiration of impiety itself, deign to obtain for us from our divine Lord, grace to understand the vanity of the world, and the value of alms and good works, that, applying ourselves with persevering generosity to the imitation of thy heroic virtues, we may deserve at the hour of our death to be called to enjoy in thy society for all eternity the rewards promised to the faithful. Amen.²⁸⁴

This second prayer also provides some important insights extremely relevant to the O'Neill mission. The reference to the saint's 'establishment of institutions' must have inspired O'Neill to see himself acting in the same spirit as the Vincentian religious congregations for men and women.²⁸⁵ Most importantly, the prayer's description of the poor as 'suffering members of Jesus Christ' probably confirmed O'Neill's incarnational spirituality that emphasised recognition of the face of Christ in the face of the poor. In contrast to the attitudes of many colonial philanthropists who viewed such people as social unfortunates or outcasts, O'Neill elevated the status of a poor person to a more reverential one. The

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

²⁸⁵ This spiritual direction also influenced the Reverend Gerald Ward in his earlier work for Melbourne orphans.

reference to charity ‘exciting the imagination of impiety itself’ must have also inspired him to promote the Society’s work publically, even in among those social quarters where there was indifference to religion. The prayer’s reference to ‘the vanity of the world’ was only too well understood by a man who long experienced the sharp twists of fortune or ‘vicissitudes’ in politics and business (examined further in Chapter Six).

Two cuttings from the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar that were pasted in the *CoManual* further reinforce O’Neill’s devotion to the saints. One, taken from the feast day of St Rose of Lima, recited the words of the influential Oratorian preacher Reverend Father Faber: ‘The saints were men of few devotions, their power was their love, their touchstone their intention.’²⁸⁶ This may explain O’Neill’s choice of an active life of devotion to the poor through acts of charity and love, rather than a focus on devotional practices alone. As O’Neill would have understood it, such love is not a matter of cultivating emotional feelings; the ‘touchstone’ of the saints being the persistent intention to direct everything to God’s Divine Will.²⁸⁷

The second cutting, taken from the feast day of St Galla widow, references St Francis of Assisi: “‘My God and My all” S. Francis’ constant prayer, explains his poverty and his wealth.’²⁸⁸ This was very significant given O’Neill’s increasing devotion to St Francis culminating in his joining the Third Order of St Francis by the end of the 1880s. This medieval saint devoted his life to the service of ‘Lady Poverty’ with an intense experience of God. Here the spiritual connections for O’Neill were poverty, faith in God and the call of God to reach out to the suffering. Importantly the Franciscan order had subsequently elevated poverty to a sanctified state but in time its vow of poverty led it into conflict with a Vatican accumulating wealth and power.²⁸⁹ For O’Neill, the inclusion of this cutting

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O' Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 27-28.

²⁸⁸ SVDP (annotated C. O’Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O’Neill (or CoManual)*.

²⁸⁹ Garton, 4; M. Lambert, *Franciscan Poverty* (London: SPCK, 1961).

might be seen to expose his personal tensions between serving poverty and accumulating wealth (also examined in Chapter Six).

By contrast, city missionaries such as Mathers were the heirs to the movements within evangelical Protestantism which had in turn its roots in the eighteenth century revivalism. Mathers himself and two brothers had been converted during a Moody and Sankey evangelical mission in Glasgow in 1874.²⁹⁰ Much of this revivalism rejected poverty as any kind of sanctified state, while some preachers associated it with social evil that could be eradicated through moral reform.²⁹¹ Some evangelicals found themselves aligned with nineteenth century liberals and utilitarians, who believed that the free market or the state would bring a final end to poverty.²⁹² O'Neill's devotion to the saints would have been rejected as Romish superstition. Nonetheless, the evangelicals knew well that the demands of charity on a Christian possessed the full authority of scripture, from Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 25-37) to St Paul's elevation of love to the greatest of the three Christian virtues (1 Corinthians 13, 13).

What was shared by both O'Neill and his followers and the evangelical city missionaries was a core Christian doctrinal understanding that poverty existed as a consequence of the Fall of Man and the consequent innate evil in the human heart. Religion therefore had ameliorative power that could be used to address social problems and reform the individual.²⁹³ Rescuing the individual to curtail social evil became a primary drive for them, as much as it did for their contemporary missions such as the Salvation Army (spreading to Sydney in 1882), the Central Methodist Mission (founded in 1884), Baptist George Ardhill's Sydney Rescue Work Society (founded in 1890), and the Congregational Church's Sussex Street Mission (founded in 1896).²⁹⁴ However such attitudes could also lead to increased intrusion in the lives of the poor, as

²⁹⁰ Prentis, "City of God, City of Man: Images of the Slum 1897-1911," 104-105.

²⁹¹ Garton, 4.

²⁹² G. Himmelfarb, *The End of Poverty* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 23-144.

²⁹³ O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, 190.

²⁹⁴ O'Brien, "Charity and Philanthropy."

many missionaries could (as in the case of Mathers) provide charity through a lens of first salvaging them from their vices.

Apart from the examples of saints, what separated the St Vincent de Paul Society from many of the Protestant evangelical missions was an emphasis on a divine ordering of society in which the poor were close to God in their suffering, and that their misery formed part of an eternal plan of redemption incomprehensible to human understanding.²⁹⁵ There is no record of O'Neill articulating such precepts although it is hinted at in the address of the Marquis of Ripon, who spoke of the Society as being 'for the purpose of binding men together'. However, it was articulated by O'Neill's most prominent successor, the lawyer Louis Francis Heydon, who served as head of the Particular Council of Sydney between 1894 and 1897, and President of the Society's Superior Council of Australasia between 1895 and 1917. O'Neill had been an acquaintance of Heydon at least as early as 1884.²⁹⁶ In the Superior Council Annual Report for 1902, Heydon stated that:

Society could not be dissolved and class would never war against class while such exercises of charity existed. Providence would give the poor the gift of patience and would give the wealthy the gift of sympathy and practical benevolence. The poor would glorify Our Father, Who in his Divine Providence had arranged that in society, member would interest member and each member would be content in its own place and the union and co-operation of members would form a peaceful body, a harmonious society, just as in the physical body member did not despise member.'²⁹⁷

Whether such rigid views about the ordering of Divine Providence would have been shared by most Society members from the poorer inner suburbs of Sydney or by the then recently deceased O'Neill is highly doubtful.²⁹⁸ The Heydon

²⁹⁵ O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, 192.

²⁹⁶ Michel, 30. O'Neill's friendship with Heydon is mentioned in Michel's account of his visit to Sydney in 1884.

²⁹⁷ SVDP, *Annual Report, Superior Council of Australasia* (Sydney, 1902), 6.

²⁹⁸ O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison, the Poor in New South Wales 1880-1918*, 192.

address did not fully reflect the social justice precepts of *Rerum Novarum*, nor did it reflect the spiritual sentiments adopted by O'Neill towards the poor in his *CoManual*. Heydon later claimed that the primary purpose of the Society was sanctification of its members, with relief of the poor a lesser consideration.²⁹⁹ Nonetheless, even from the official view promulgated by Heydon, the poor could not be blamed for their situation, and compassion was demanded of those helping them.

Under Heydon's influence, the spiritual approach directed towards service of the poor that O'Neill had initially tried to promote to his followers during the 1880s was left behind with the latter's departure from Society leadership (see Chapter Six). Over time however, the Society in Australia would refocus on a simple incarnational spirituality.³⁰⁰

By contrast O'Neill, through his inserts into the *CoManual*, seemed to advocate what could be interpreted as a form of Christian humanism in dealings with the poor. While O'Neill believed in sanctification through acts of mercy, he also understood from the actions of the saints that compassion for the poor was more than merely a means to a spiritual end. Five exhortations extracted from the liturgical calendar included the manner in which the poor were to be approached (see Illustration 3 for the full series of fifteen, pages 344-345). In their totality, these five maxims suggest that O'Neill was attempting to introduce a model of philanthropy entirely different from that predicated on determining deservingness of cases.

A first maxim, taken from the Feast of Blessed Victor III, stated: 'Greet cheerfully the importunate person who visits you. God sends him to you.'³⁰¹ From this, O'Neill probably used this as an encouragement to become a 'cheerful giver' to the poor. Given the wider demands of his professional life and the

²⁹⁹ L. Heydon, "Society of St Vincent De Paul in Australia," *Australasian Catholic Record* (1907): 62.

³⁰⁰ See for example the examination of the Society's spiritual approach as outlined in J. Murphy, "Suffering, Vice and Justice: Religious Imaginaries and Welfare Agencies in Post-War Melbourne," *Journal of Religious History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 293.

³⁰¹ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

growing burden of the administration of charity, the immediate demands of a poor family were bound to be 'importunate', that is, an interruption to the schedule of a busy life.³⁰² The awkward arrival of the needy could also be interpreted as a sign of Divine Providence.

A second maxim, taken from the feasts of the apostles, Sts Simon and Jude, stated: 'Do not refuse an alms which is asked of you, and give to God by giving to the poor.'³⁰³ The main point of this injunction was that every approach from the poor called for a response, not (from the philanthropic context of the era) a judgmental assessment of worthiness. As this maxim implied, as Christ had so identified his lot with the poor, giving to the poor meant to give to Christ.³⁰⁴

A third maxim, taken from the feast of St Peter of Alcantara, stated 'if we but knew how to be kind, we would bring happiness everywhere with us.'³⁰⁵ With this maxim, one can sense O'Neill's own struggle to remain committed to a spirit of kindness despite the demands placed upon him.³⁰⁶ O'Neill must have also had a conviction that kindness to the poor was the medium through he could spread joy among those giving and those receiving.

A fourth maxim, this one from the Feast of Pope Siricius, stated: 'What a void in a life is a day without devotion, without some charitable action.'³⁰⁷ The maxim reflected O'Neill's desire to undertake prayerful devotion while filling his life with charitable endeavours, despite the other demands placed upon him. This maxim implied that that a charitable act itself could be seen as an act of devotion.

³⁰² Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O' Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 29.

³⁰³ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

³⁰⁴ Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O' Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 30.

³⁰⁵ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

³⁰⁶ Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O' Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 31.

³⁰⁷ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

A fifth and final of these kinds of maxims, taken from the feast of St Bridget of Sweden, reflects the nature of communication with the poor: ‘Good advice is more precious than gold, a kind word is still more precious than good advice.’³⁰⁸ It may also reflect a tension within O’Neill himself as a professional man familiar with the importance of providing good advice, yet admitting that a kind word spoken to the lowly poor was of far greater value.

The nature of these maxims of attitudes towards the poor (and others which will be examined in Chapter Six) together with their compilation as a series within the *CoManual*, suggest that these may have been selected by O’Neill to form part of a devotional ritual for examination of conscience. He could have deemed such examination of conscience as necessary to maintain the spiritual integrity of his evangelical mission of charity.

Whether these maxims were meant for O’Neill alone or as inspiration to followers as well is uncertain. However it is likely, given the formative nature of other material inserted into the *CoManual*, that these maxims were also meant to be shared. Examples of such formative material in the *CoManual* included the Marquis of Ripon address, and an extract from the Society’s international bulletin of September 1885 entitled ‘The Illustrious Ozanam’ that recorded laudatory remarks on Frédéric Ozanam by one Cardinal Laurenzi and reference to a book on Ozanam by Kathleen O’Meara.³⁰⁹ Both extracts would have been of particular value to O’Neill in instructing his new volunteers. Further, as he often led the spiritual readings while serving as President of St Patrick’s Church Hill Conference, he would have had many opportunities to draw on such material as was collated within the *CoManual*.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ SVDP, “St Patrick’s Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885.”

The Practical Realities of Charity in the Slums

Whatever differences there were in theological approach of O'Neill's Society volunteers and city missionaries such as James Mathers, all were faced with the practical realities of delivering charity in the slums amid the growing demand from destitute families. As observed from studies of the destitute and dependent in Melbourne over the period between 1890 and 1900, in colonial societies without provision for social security or welfare payments, any cessation of income inevitably brought destitution either in the shorter or longer term.³¹¹ Ill health, tuberculosis, accidents, or long term disabilities particularly in a breadwinner meant not only loss of income but extra expense in a family. Death, desertion or imprisonment of a breadwinner or his spouse meant that children needed to be supported over a longer period of time.³¹² Delinquencies and illegitimate pregnancies were frequent among adolescents; while the aged were entirely reliant on the monies that they had amassed during their lifetimes.³¹³

The pattern in Sydney was much the same. The surviving St Patrick's Church Hill Conference casebook records of 1885 reveal that the overwhelming number of persons supported in that year tended to be women with dependents, or single aged women or men.³¹⁴ In such circumstances, Society members and missionaries such as Mathers found no shortage of 'deserving' cases during their visits.

In the case of the Society records, the term 'deserving' does occasionally appear in the minutes and, in certain circumstances judgements did intrude, such as the following:

³¹¹ Swain, "Destitute and Dependent: Case Studies in Poverty in Melbourne, 1890-1902," 98-99.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885.

Mrs Darby's Case

Bro McGluickey visited the case and expressed the opinion that she was not worthy of assistance as she is a big strong woman quite capable of earning her living. Case struck off.³¹⁵

At the same time, St Patrick's Church Hill Conference was also advised on certain cases as had found their way to the Sydney Benevolent Asylum. The following minute entry referred to advice given to the conference by Sydney Maxted, then the bureaucrat in charge of the Asylum:

In re. White's Case. Bro Spruson read a letter from Mr Maxted stating that in addition to rations allowed from Benevolent Asylum, a small allowance in cash would also be given. The letter said that White was an *undeserving* character and that it was only for the sake of the wife and children that relief was given at all. For this week, 2/6 cash and 2/6 food given.³¹⁶

Importantly, neither the O'Neill-led St Patrick's Church Hill Conference nor Mathers formally adopted a process of designating 'deserving' or 'undeserving' cases, probably given the high proportion of 'deserving' cases in the slums. So far as the former was concerned, there is little of this kind of comment recorded at all in conference minutes. With respect to the latter, Mathers' judgments involved accepting a continuum between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' cases, while often erring on the side of charity even in certain 'undeserving' cases for the sake of providing spiritual counsel.³¹⁷

In the case of O'Neill's own beliefs, he was on record of strongly condemning publically only one type of person, this being a husband or breadwinner who abandoned their spouses or families. As noted in Chapter Two, he had voiced this concern in debates about divorce in the New Zealand Parliament, two decades

³¹⁵ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, Minutes 4 September, 1885," Sydney.

³¹⁶ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, Minutes 14 August."

³¹⁷ Prentis, "City of God, City of Man: Images of the Slum 1897-1911," 109-110.

earlier. His concerns were also revealed in public comments he later made at the second Australasian Conference on Charity held at the Melbourne Town Hall in November 1891. At that forum, O'Neill pointed out that colonial parliaments were not doing enough legally to enforce the responsibilities of husbands, and this applied to many well-to-do citizens who also deserted their families. O'Neill thought that all this 'revealed a melancholy and deplorable lack of family love'.³¹⁸ He further suggested that the Australian colonies should follow New Zealand's lead, by making it a misdemeanour for anyone to attempt to desert the colonies and abandon their dependents. Under New Zealand legislation in force at that time, family deserters could face up to twelve months prison.³¹⁹ The matter was a serious one for colonial charity. As early as 1859, a Sydney inquiry had established that, along with unemployed labourers and mechanics, women with children whose husbands had deserted them for the gold diggings made up a majority of those found in distressed circumstances.³²⁰

Faithful to the Society's tenets of not enquiring into 'party or sect', St Patrick's Church Hill Conference provided assistance to those of Protestant as well as Catholic persuasions, without raising the subject of religious difference. One such example, from March 1885, illustrates that the Society was willing to cooperate with ministers from other denominations:

Mrs Johnson's Case – Brother MacDermott reported she can only earn 6/- or so a week...She has 5 children – the eldest a boy 11 years of age...5/- to be voted till end of month. Her clergyman to be communicated with. 155 Denison St, Camperdown.³²¹

The Sydney City Mission, through Mathers' work, provided assistance to Catholics as well as Protestants. This was undertaken officially in a non-sectarian

³¹⁸ Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne, 55.

³¹⁹ Ibid. O'Neill noted *New Zealand's Destitute Persons Act* (1877) and the *Amending Act* (1887) as the relevant pieces of legislation.

³²⁰ Garton, 39.

³²¹ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885, 13 March, 1885," Sydney.

manner, although he did not refer Catholics back to the local priests at St Patrick's Church Hill for spiritual counsel.³²²

The main difference between the visitations to slum dwellers by St Patrick's Church Hill Conference and Mathers was the issue of the raising of religious belief as a core matter for investigation, which was (apparently) absent in the former but central to the latter. In Mathers' case, this meant preaching, praying and hymn singing with residents to forsake their vices including opium-smoking, alcohol, tobacco, gambling and prostitution.³²³ Some of Mathers' work focused on outreaches to the opium dens of The Rocks, and included visits with ministers and respectable citizens to awaken them to the activities of the denizens of this underworld. By contrast, there is but one account of O'Neill visiting such places given by Dr Ernest Michel during his visit to Sydney in early 1884. O'Neill and Michel (accompanied also by a detective hired by O'Neill perhaps as a precaution) conducted a visit through the Chinese quarter where gambling and opium smoking were taking place. Michel recorded the experience as follows:

At our approach, the (gaming) players hide their *sapeques* and our detective has to reassure them for them to agree to play in front of us. In another shop, we find the opium smokers bent over and deep in their dreams. Mr O'Neill had never seen opium smoked... In this establishment we see the numerous compartments where the Chinese people sleep; all the rooms, from the cellar to the attic, are full of shelves one on top of the other each being used as a bed for the children of the Celestial Empire; not surprising that just about all of them die, due to lack of air, of tuberculosis.³²⁴

The above account is informative as it demonstrates (through Michel's eyes admittedly), a focus by the visitors not on personal vices but on the social evil of the appalling living conditions endured by the Chinese. By contrast gambling, clearly not disapproved of by the French Catholic Michel, and the opium-

³²² Prentis, "City of God, City of Man: Images of the Slum 1897-1911," 108.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Michel, 164-165. 'Sapeques' are French Indochinese coins.

smoking was reported from a non-judgmental perspective. As for the children of the slums, while it was beyond O'Neill's power to do anything much to transform their living conditions, towards the end of his mission, he was able to introduce something extremely practical. This was the establishment of a children's penny bank.

St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank

On 7 September 1889, St Patrick's Conference under O'Neill's presidency instituted a bold new project with Le Rennelet's warm approval. This was the St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank that was established primarily for encouraging habits of thrift and economy in children, particularly in The Rocks and other inner Sydney suburbs.³²⁵ It was used by Catholic and non-Catholic depositors alike; parents also could be depositors. No limit was placed on the amount deposited.³²⁶

Penny banks had appeared in Britain during the 1850s, particularly encouraged by those of non-conformist background who wished to provide those with little money who had no direct access to banks, such as children and the poor, to save their earnings. They became popular and by 1860 there were around 200 such institutions across Britain.³²⁷ By the 1860s, they began to appear in the Australian colonies. A Wesleyan Sunday School Penny Bank was instituted in Launceston during the 1860s (associated with the merchant and churchman John Crookes MLA).³²⁸ A community penny bank was established in Kiama, New South Wales in May 1862 with Thomas Fuller its Honorary Treasurer and a committee that included the mayor and various local ministers of religion.³²⁹ The Kiama Penny Bank placed its deposits in the Kiama branch of the English, Scottish and Australian Chartered Bank.³³⁰

³²⁵ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 22.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ C. Arnold-Baker, *The Companion to British History* (Great Britain: Longcross Press, 1996), 993.

³²⁸ K. Von Stieglitz, "Crookes, John (1805-1870)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition* [accessed 23 July 2011].

³²⁹ Kiama Penny Bank, *The Kiama Penny Bank Passbook* (Kiama: Examiner Office Shoalhaven, 1862).

³³⁰ Ibid., 2.

By 1889 therefore, penny banks were not a new idea, but the St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank instituted under O'Neill's leadership did have a few distinct features, in addition to demonstrating his capacity to learn from other denominations. It was probably among the first Catholic ventures of this kind in the Australian colonies, although the bank's services were not restricted to Catholics. Furthermore, the location of the bank near St Patrick's Church Hill meant that it could be easily accessed by children from the inner slum districts.

Children queued with their parents between 7.00 and 8:30 pm every Saturday evening at Federation Hall in Grosvenor Place, Church Hill.³³¹ The number of depositors grew steadily from around 400 during its first year, rising to 650 in the mid-1890s.³³² Even as late as 1900, it supported about 471 depositors investing £1,200.³³³ During the 1890s, the Penny Savings Bank's own capital earned interest of three and half per cent, through investing in the Savings Bank of New South Wales. This financial buffer covered the interest of two and a half per cent that the Penny Savings Bank paid to its own poor depositors.³³⁴

Established just before Sydney was struck by economic turmoil and labour unrest, the St Patrick's Penny Bank survived, protecting the savings of children and vulnerable working families in Sydney's inner suburbs. The venture proved its worth during the Great Maritime Strike of 1890. From September 1889 to December 1890, the St Patrick's Penny Bank received £1,000 in deposits. Over the same period, £400 was withdrawn, including £225 over the period of the strike itself.³³⁵ A smaller penny bank was set up by the Darlinghurst Conference at the same time as the one at St Patrick's Church Hill.³³⁶ The survival of the

³³¹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 22.

³³² SVDP, "Case Book of St Patrick's Conference Church Hill, 1892-1900, p. The Bank, Report for the week ending 22 May 1897."

³³³ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, to the Superior Council of Australasia, for the Year 1900* (Sydney, 1901), 6.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1889 & 1890*, 22.

³³⁶ Ibid.

Savings Bank of New South Wales in the midst of the widespread banking failures of the 1890s ensured that these penny banks could continue.

O'Neill's Accomplished Mission

Between 1883 and 1885, O'Neill had substantially overcome many of the early challenges facing his charitable mission in New South Wales. The support of the Society of Mary and the Catholic hierarchy had provided the firm base for lay recruitment to the Society's ranks. Leo XIII's proclamation of St Vincent de Paul as the patron of Catholic charitable associations in May 1885, followed soon after by the support of the Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church in November 1885, provided the final impetus as a more confident Catholic (and particularly Irish Catholic) community in New South Wales began to identify with Catholic spiritual associations. O'Neill also managed to promote the non-sectarian orientation of the St Vincent de Paul Society's mission against the sectarian social background in New South Wales during the early 1880s. He was fortunate that his mission coincided at a time of growing prominence and influence of a more prosperous Catholic community in New South Wales.

However, his earlier lack of success in rekindling the Melbourne Conference in 1880 meant that O'Neill was unable to achieve all of Baudon's ambitions, including founding new conferences in the other chief cities of Australia. The Society in the other colonies subsequently had separate foundational histories. However, success in Sydney was a considerable achievement in its own right and during his leadership the substantial majority of conferences in the Australian colonies were in Sydney. From his position in Sydney, O'Neill assisted with establishment of the Society in South Australia, and in 1885 presented a Society *Manual* to a certain Mr Ahern, a member of a newly formed Adelaide Conference, to give to its President Dr James O'Connell.³³⁷ O'Neill followed this

³³⁷ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, from 1st January to 31st December 1884*, 7. In May 1884, an Englishman E. F. Troy had made representations to Adelaide Catholic Archbishop Reynolds to set a Conference there, and soon after, two others, Dr Frances MacCree R.N. and F. X. Duigan, helped with foundation. E. F. Troy served as Vice President. A Conference at St Frances Xavier's Cathedral was formally established on 1 February 1885, meeting in the Cathedral Hall Library. See Utick, 186.

by providing guidance to O'Connell on the proper aggregation procedures with Paris.

On 23 June 1888, O'Neill's Society counterpart in Melbourne, Francis Healy, was unanimously elected President of a Particular Council of Melbourne.³³⁸ By then, the Society in Melbourne had 36 active and 64 honorary members. Healy and O'Neill shared each other's reports and, in some cases, volunteers. For example, one of O'Neill's Secretaries, Henry Egan, became Secretary of the Particular Council of Melbourne after moving from Sydney to Melbourne.³³⁹

Another challenge facing O'Neill's mission, that of gaining significant public acceptance of the kind of charity provided by the St Vincent de Paul Society within the existing framework of colonial philanthropy, was overcome by endurance and positive public promotion over the decade of his leadership. His involvement in the distribution of charity during the 1888 Centenary celebrations might be interpreted as a milestone in this respect, but O'Neill's further pursuit of his mission well beyond that date is evidence that he understood that gaining public acceptance was a long term project.

His charitable mission soon faced the crisis of the 1891 economic depression. O'Neill himself understood the significance of such economic disasters, given his comment two decades previously in the New Zealand Parliament on cyclical nature of the 'waves of depression' experienced by economies.³⁴⁰

The St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales was, as with all the charities in the Australian colonies, overwhelmed by the need to cope with the rising tide of unemployment during an era before unemployment relief and pensions. Ironically, it was no longer a matter of pursuing public acceptance for charitable endeavour but rather trying to meet a wave of demand from newly unemployed

³³⁸ Egan, 10.

³³⁹ SVPD, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Years 1887 & 1888*, 10.

³⁴⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1870. Vol. 7, 15 July. 493.

workers and their families. By 1891, unemployment had superseded all previous issues associated with loss of income.³⁴¹

By July 1891, O'Neill finally decided to retire from his mission and step down from the leadership of the Particular Council of Sydney of the St Vincent de Paul Society.³⁴² However, at Moran's insistence, he continued on until almost the end of the year. His last year at the helm of the mission was marked by two events, one held at Sydney in July, the other at Melbourne in November.

The first of these, coinciding with the Feast of Saint Vincent de Paul on 19 July, was the Society's Annual General Meeting and Breakfast held in the School Hall at St Benedict's Broadway. This was only a few days short of the tenth anniversary of the first milestone of his mission, the establishment of the St Patrick's Church Hill Conference in 1881.

The nature of the event seemed to suggest that it was partly planned as a farewell function for O'Neill as well. About 250 members of the Society attended the Sunday Breakfast served up by the City Catering Company. Moran was represented by his Auxiliary Bishop Dr Joseph Higgins. Present also were a number of O'Neill's close friends and associates including the Catholic state minister and parliamentarian Thomas Slattery MLA, Judge Lowther Broad from New Zealand, Society Vice-Presidents Thomas Williamson and William Cracknell, and the Franciscan Reverend P. Kennedy ofm from Waverley parish.³⁴³

This farewell function recognised O'Neill's achievement of delivering £12,239 worth of assistance to the poor of New South Wales over a period of ten years.³⁴⁴ Bishop Higgins commenced by saying that he:

³⁴¹ Swain, "Destitute and Dependent: Case Studies in Poverty in Melbourne, 1890-1902," 98.

³⁴² SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1891*, 12.

³⁴³ anon., "A Noble Order, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, £10,000 in Charity," AS, 20 July 1891.

³⁴⁴ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1891*, 11.

recognised the great services rendered to charity by the young men who mainly conducted the organisation and...although he hoped not of an envious disposition...he really envied Mr Charles O'Neill and his splendid band of co-workers in what they had accomplished.³⁴⁵

Slattery followed by paying tribute to O'Neill's young volunteers:

who had been brought up in the school of self-denial, and out of their own pockets they had contributed sums which had shown such a glorious result as they had before them.³⁴⁶

Given O'Neill's impending retirement from Society leadership, Cracknell presented O'Neill with framed testimonial address (produced by John Sands and Company) together with a purse of gold sovereigns.³⁴⁷ The testimonial featured what would be the last known photograph of O'Neill, probably taken in July 1891 (see Illustration 1e, page 342). He was then aged sixty-three, bald, sporting a white walrus moustache and the remains of a close-cropped beard.³⁴⁸ Cracknell then revealed that O'Neill had tried to establish the Society in the colonies of Victoria and South Australia as early as in 1873.³⁴⁹ After providing a short history of the Society, O'Neill responded by thanking the assembled gathering for the tribute.³⁵⁰

Slattery and Broad in turn, followed up with their own testimonials, with Slattery noting the many years that O'Neill 'had been fighting poverty and wretchedness'. Slattery's comments identified the non-intrusive nature of the charitable mission, not only in terms of the nature of the charity provided to the poor, but O'Neill's own humility in pursuing it: 'this great work had been done in such a quiet and

³⁴⁵ anon., "Society of St Vincent De Paul," *SCR*, 15 August 1891.

³⁴⁶ anon., "A Noble Order, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, £10,000 in Charity."

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ anon., *Charles Gordon O' Neill [July 1891], Annotated 'to T.J.S. Dignan Esq from Charles O' Neill.'*, Photograph, 1891, SVDPA Folder 59, Sydney. Utick, 211.

³⁴⁹ SVDPA, *Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 19 July 1891.*

³⁵⁰ anon., "A Noble Order, Society of St. Vincent De Paul, £10,000 in Charity."

unobtrusive way that even he [Slattery] as an intimate friend of O'Neill had no idea of his work until that morning.³⁵¹ As to O'Neill's impending retirement, Slattery further commented that 'he regretted to hear that he (O'Neill) contemplated retiring from the high position of President which he held for so long and with such benefits to the community.'³⁵²

However, that retirement would be still four months away. O'Neill would remain in his position just long enough to attend a Second Australasian Conference on Charity hosted by the Charity Organisation Society, held at the Melbourne Town Hall between 17 and 21 November 1891.³⁵³ While there, he represented the combined charitable efforts of over three hundred volunteers, having the achievement behind him of having established what had then become the largest lay Catholic outdoor relief charity in the Australian colonies. The range of its activities had become very broad, including payment of board and lodgings, assistance in gaining employment, handling referrals to benevolent asylums, penny banks, burials of paupers, passages for travel, and providing medicines, clothing, and blankets as well as other basic necessities for the purposes of outdoor relief.

One impediment that O'Neill was spared in pursuing his mission was the more restrictive oversight of public charity that was emerging in Victoria. In May 1887, the Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne was founded under the leadership of Melbourne University academic Edward Morris. Morris championed the principle of 'scientific charity' that aimed at discouraging any charity that broke down self-reliance and encouraged pauperism.³⁵⁴

The functions of the Charity Organisation Society were to discourage mendicants by suppressing indiscriminate charity and promoting organised cooperation

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² anon., "Society of St Vincent De Paul."

³⁵³ COS(Melbourne), v-vii.

³⁵⁴ R. Kennedy, *Charity Warfare the Charity Organisation Society in Colonial Melbourne* (Melbourne Hyland House, 1985), 86.

among charitable workers.³⁵⁵ Among the objectives finally adopted by the Charity Organisation Society were direction of the stream of charity to the deserving, discouragement of indiscriminate giving, exposure of 'sturdy beggars', making adequate inquiry before relief, and compilation of records.³⁵⁶ This conservative, non-sympathetic approach might be considered as a direct counterpoint to O'Neill's faith-based principles that sought to sanctify the encounter between a charitable worker and the recipient. While drawing on scientific method in terms of empirical method, record keeping and sharing of information, Morris also publically claimed that 'St Paul and the early Christians were on the side of the charity reformer'.³⁵⁷ During 1890, the influence of Charity Organisation Society increased as the middle class of Melbourne feared the consequences of the economic crisis sweeping the city. The Charity Organisation Society also had the political support of Victorian Premier James Munro.³⁵⁸

A First Australasian Conference of Charity was held in Melbourne between 11 and 17 November 1890. The reason for O'Neill's attendance at the Second is uncertain, but it is possible that he might have been informed of its significance by Sydney Maxted, who might have wished to increase attendance from New South Wales (only seven delegates from New South Wales had attended the first). Over two hundred delegates attended the Second Conference in November 1891, representing 100 charitable societies, hospitals or institutions, including two New Zealand organisations. These latter included the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and non-religious public bodies such as the benevolent and friendly societies. Amid the growing unemployment crisis, this Second Conference sought 'receptivity towards new ideas, of intelligence yet sympathetic criticism of old methods, of recognition of the magnitude of existing problems, and of future perplexities and dangers.'³⁵⁹

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 88.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 89.

³⁵⁷ COS(Melbourne), "Proceedings of the First Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne from 11th to 17th November 1890," in *First Australasian Conference on Charity* (Melbourne: Robert S. Brain, Government Printer, 1891), 133.

³⁵⁸ Kennedy, 115-116.

³⁵⁹ COS(Melbourne), "Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne from 17th to 21st November 1891," v-vii.

The Conference delegates included the Salvation Army's William Booth who urged support for his 'Darkest England' Scheme, a plan to bring thousands of Britain's most desperate poor to farm Australia's rural lands. The South Australian reformer and feminist Catherine Spence was one of the more dominant voices, denying that relief pauperised the poor and outlining her vision of state or communal charity.³⁶⁰

O'Neill was not alone in representing the St Vincent de Paul Society at this conference. Also present were Mr C. Grondona from the Melbourne Particular Council, and two Bendigo Ladies Association members (Mrs J. Edwards and a certain Mrs Mahony).³⁶¹ None gave papers although Edwards briefly commented on how young ladies of Bendigo were supervised in visiting poor families. Grondona, a 'manufacturers agent' from the Chamber of Commerce also served on the Executive Committee of the Charity Organisation Society of Melbourne, although he had little use for it other than to serve as a platform for blaming the large number of destitute children in Melbourne as the fruits of a secular system of education.³⁶²

O'Neill made a few comments at this Conference himself. In one of the more significant of these, he demonstrated his sympathy for sufferers of tuberculosis who had been sent to the colonies, compared with Maxted's narrow attitude that dependent victims had been sent to Australia by their doctors merely to die. Rather, O'Neill believed 'that consumptives were not sent in order that they might die at sea, but to give them a chance of life and becoming strong and well in a new country.'³⁶³

O'Neill also supported a motion by John Roseby, then Vice President of the Sydney Benevolent Asylum, in urging public support for the boarding out of

³⁶⁰ Kennedy, 124.

³⁶¹ For list of delegates see COS(Melbourne), "Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne from 17th to 21st November 1891," 141-147.

³⁶² Kennedy, 93.

³⁶³ COS(Melbourne), "Proceedings of the Second Australasian Conference on Charity, Held in Melbourne from 17th to 21st November 1891," 75-76.

neglected children.³⁶⁴ O'Neill believed that 'it was wiser to err on the side of being too generous' on this issue.³⁶⁵ Such a position stood in stark contrast to that of Professor Morris, who believed that any situation where the state assumed responsibility for housing neglected children was outright communism.³⁶⁶

These, together with the urging of punitive measures against deserting husbands and fathers noted previously, marked the totality of O'Neill's contribution to the Second Australasian Conference on Charity. For one who had spent much of his energy and time during the previous decade on a mission for the sake of the poor, this outcome may have seemed at best an anticlimax, at worst, a disappointment. Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, or *On the Condition of the Working Classes*, defending the rights of workers, including just wages, rights of association through unions, and assistance in times of unemployment, sickness, and old age, had been only released in May that year. This encyclical's influence came too late for O'Neill as a guide for his charitable mission but, as will be noted in Chapter Six, O'Neill's example may have encouraged Moran to address the conditions of the slums and of working people more broadly.

With hindsight, it is likely that something else may well have been weighing on O'Neill's mind at this time. As the situation of the banks worsened with the outset of economic depression, O'Neill's own position had become extremely precarious since his becoming a Director of the Northumberland Banking Company of Newcastle a year previously. The irony was that within two weeks of this Conference, on 4 December 1891, O'Neill found himself arrested by detectives in King Street Sydney as a consequence on the bank's failure and on a charge of conspiracy to defraud.³⁶⁷ O'Neill might have successfully concluded his charitable mission, but the consequences of his professional activities now threatened him with humiliation and ruin.

³⁶⁴ John Roseby, a Wesleyan Methodist, was a brother of that Thomas Roseby quoted earlier in this chapter.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ anon., *SMH*, 5 December 1891, 9; Utick, 216.

O'Neill's Irish Identity and the Charitable Mission

One aspect of O'Neill's character that had been further enhanced during this mission between 1880 and 1891 was his sense of Irish identity. This had already been rekindled within O'Neill between 1876 and 1880 as a Catholic layman in Wellington, New Zealand, and found even more fertile ground in Sydney where there was a much higher proportion of Irish Catholics settlers. The most important factors reinforcing his Irish identity were sociological, but political and religious influences were also at work.

Firstly, O'Neill's core followers in his Catholic evangelical mission of charity were overwhelmingly Irish Catholic. Those among the male Catholic laity who committed themselves to this mission were for the most part first or second generation Irish settlers. Several were representative of a newly confident Catholic middle class, with aspirations to the kind of prosperity that O'Neill himself had shared. Furthermore, O'Neill's inner circle of volunteer colleagues themselves shared an even stronger connection with Ireland than O'Neill himself. This gave rise to the 'shamrock' cultural image presented by the Society to the general public, particularly in many of its fund raising initiatives. In this colonial era well before the full development of an Australian national identity, O'Neill would have felt only too comfortable with promoting an Irish persona particularly as the confidence of Sydney's Catholics grew.

One important element in these associations was a commitment to Catholic temperance, something about which O'Neill had long demonstrated a passion. Public drinking was a particularly sensitive problem for the Irish Catholic community, who made up so much of the poorer sections of colonial society. Many Irish were frowned upon by the strait-laced or by genteel snobs for their rowdy and boisterous celebrations in pubs, hotels and inns.³⁶⁸ The clergy, beginning with McEncroe in the 1840s, introduced Irish Catholic Temperance Societies; such activity was as a result of internal moral energy rather than public

³⁶⁸ Utick, 190.

pressure.³⁶⁹ O'Neill, who had many years earlier expressed his own concerns in the New Zealand Parliament about poor liquor and drunkenness, joined as a founding Central Council Member of a Catholic Total Abstinence Association in April 1885.³⁷⁰ Members were expected to set an example by not drinking in pubs on Sundays or Saturday evenings, and neither to give nor accept 'treats' (i.e. 'shouts') at the bar.

Furthermore, O'Neill, for years a temperance supporter, would have seen this as giving personal example for his faith-based mission. Drunken behaviour had become a major problem in New South Wales; in 1886 there were over 26,000 arrests for this within a population of just under a million.³⁷¹ While pubs had proliferated in inner Sydney, The Rocks had the rowdiest and wildest of them. In these, drinkers could be served with the fiery 'Nancy Whiskey' or adulterated liquor that would have a toxic effect on a battler.³⁷² Most importantly, for O'Neill, drunkenness lay as root cause behind parental neglect, abuse and desertion of families. The weekly cases coming before the St Patrick's Church Hill Conference would have only reinforced this view, for example:

the husband is in the same state as last week. The wife thinks of entering the Benevolent Asylum and leaving the children with St Joseph's Providence. The wife had promised to go to the Police Court to prosecute her husband, but she did not put in an appearance.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 168.

³⁷⁰ anon., "The First Public Meeting of the Total Abstinence Association," *FJ*, 25 April 1885, 15. This association had no direct links with Protestant temperance movements.

³⁷¹ NSW Parliament, *Report [First Part] of the Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission Together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, 1887, 45.

³⁷² *Ibid.* 37. The worst form of adulteration was with the toxic alcohol of 'fusel oil'. Drinkers would twitch and tremor after scoffing the liquor down the throat, and some would finish in a coma.

³⁷³ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, July-September 1885, Minutes 11 September, 1885," Sydney.

Many of the colony's larrikin children came from homes where one or more parent lived in drunken squalor. In time, such children would cram the Industrial or Reformatory Schools.³⁷⁴

Secondly, O'Neill's political sympathies for Irish Home Rule, leading up to the British parliamentary debates of mid 1880s, signified his growing identification with Irish causes. His support for the Irish Land League and membership of the Irish National League of New South Wales were other examples of his pro-Irish sympathies.

Thirdly, the religious influence of Moran particularly after 1884, in promoting an Irish Catholic Church in New South Wales must have further served to encourage O'Neill to express his Irish cultural identity. Moran was not only an enthusiast for the cause of the St Vincent de Paul Society but on friendly terms with O'Neill himself, including persuading O'Neill to continue in the Presidency of the Society's Particular Council of Sydney from July to December 1891.

O'Neill's Irish Catholic identity could have served his own professional ambitions very well, given his associations with a growing professional class of Irish Catholics in New South Wales. However, his overriding sympathies for the poor absorbed personal energy that he might otherwise have directed at building his own professional and business success.

³⁷⁴ NSW Parliament, *Report [First Part] of the Intoxicating Drink Inquiry Commission Together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices*, 1887. 44.

Chapter Six: Facing the Vicissitudes

Significance of the Vicissitudes

The two major elements that defined O'Neill's life were commitment to Catholic faith-based charity, nurtured originally by his Irish Catholic family, and the pursuit of professional ambition within the context of an empire career in civil engineering, politics and business. In 1863, he had set aside the former to more fully pursue the latter. In 1880, he was at the crossroads again as he embarked on a charitable mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies and, for the following decade, commitment to faith-based charity became the dominant element of his life. As he commenced this mission, his professional career reached its zenith with his election to the Institution of Civil Engineers in London in 1880. While he continued to pursue pioneering developmental work in civil engineering in New South Wales, his major plans did not come to fruition.

Consonant with McBride's observations about the fusion of contradictory ideals among the Irish of Glasgow, O'Neill's commitment to both Catholic faith-based charity and the pursuit of his own professional ambition need not necessarily have resulted in a tension between them. However, three cycles of decline in O'Neill's fortunes: in Glasgow in 1863, in New Zealand between 1876 and 1880, and in New South Wales between 1889 and 1892, reveal much about his shifting attitudes to poverty and wealth, and expose a growing tension over time. In 1880, at the end of the second cycle, this above fusion began to unravel as O'Neill interpreted his circumstances as now being guided by Divine Providence.

Much evidence in O'Neill's precious *CoManual* supports this interpretation, including that which reveals that he internalised this tension through a spiritual ritual focused on examination of conscience with respect to spiritual encounters with the poor. As already noted in Chapter One, a sense of the shift in O'Neill's fortunes was itself captured within the *CoManual's* inside cover by an anonymous personal inscription which read, 'May the lessons of heavenly wisdom contained in

this little book comfort, strengthen and guide you in all the vicissitudes of your exile.’¹

The sentiment of a then popular Irish ballad *The Exile of Erin* may lie behind the original reference to ‘exile’ in the above inscription.² In addition, given the cycles of fortune and misfortune that had already attended his own career ambitions, the reference to ‘vicissitude’ would have had a particular personal resonance for O’Neill. Possibly, both meanings were intended as spiritual comfort. The inscription was made after the original publication date of *CoManual* of 1877 (but before the insertion of O’Neill’s own entries and annotations) and its tone suggests that it was written prior to O’Neill’s departure from New Zealand during 1880. The identity of the inscriber is unknown.³ Importantly, the inscriber encouraged the reader to treat ‘lessons’, including the *CoManual* guidelines for charity and its prayers, as a guide for future action. O’Neill’s later actions in progressively adding his own annotations, selected prayers, extracts and a series of exhortations or maxims predominantly extracted from a Roman Catholic liturgical calendar reveal that he followed that instruction with diligence.

O’Neill’s entries into the *CoManual* commenced with the mission itself, as evidenced by his listing of the founding of individual conferences beginning in 1881, with the last entry made in 1891 (the final year of his mission). The final in the series of maxims pasted in the *CoManual*, an extract not from a liturgical calendar but from the Sydney newspaper *Daily Telegraph* dated 31 July 1886, indicates that the reflective ritual of examination of conscience may have been completed no earlier than late 1886. The newspaper extract is likely to have been inserted soon after its publication, and prior to the third cycle of O’Neill’s decline in fortunes between 1889 and 1892.

¹ SVDP (annotated C. O’Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O’Neill (or CoManual)*.

² Utick, 146.

³ One possibility is that the anonymous inscriber was Bishop Redwood because of his close friendship with O’Neill. This possibility suggests itself in that Redwood presided over a general meeting of St Mary’s Conference Wellington, New Zealand on 2 March 1880, during which O’Neill announced his mission to re-establish the Society in the Australian colonies. Research undertaken by McClemens established that this particular inscription was not made by O’Neill himself - see McClemens: 82.

Not all the vicissitudes of O'Neill's life entailed misfortune; his election to the New Zealand Parliament and his professional engineering achievements stand out as obvious counterpoints. However, this aspect of biographical inquiry will reveal how those 'vicissitudes' of O'Neill's life that entailed personal disappointment, poor business judgement and perhaps straightforward misfortune became catalysts ending each respective cycle. They also marked shifts in priority between the two main elements characterising his life. In the first two of these three cycles, the result was O'Neill's actual physical departure to New Zealand in 1863 and to the Australian colonies in 1880 respectively. Importantly, towards the very end of his life, he would interpret such misfortunes as lessons or 'sufferings' teaching him to submit to Divine Providence.⁴ Any interpretation of O'Neill's life as that of a romantic 'Celtic wanderer' would be wrong; his new directions during the course of life were driven by purpose, either in pursuing professional opportunities (as in 1863) or the cause of faith-based charity (as in 1880).

Before examining the impact of these vicissitudes in detail and the tensions between these two elements that such circumstances exposed, one further aspect of O'Neill's life requires examination. This was his lifelong bachelor status and because of his religious conviction, the celibacy that it implied, as well as his attitudes to women.

O'Neill's Bachelor Life and his Attitudes to Women

Among the enigmatic aspects of O'Neill's life were the underlying reasons behind his lifelong bachelor status. There may have been any number of personal reasons for this, but poverty was probably not one of them given the relative prosperity of his prime years. There remains the absence of any record of O'Neill's romantic association with a woman and nothing that would suggest that he was of homosexual orientation. With respect to the former, this situation was something that, particularly during his early life in Glasgow, seems surprising. As a young adult in his twenties, he possessed reasonable looks, a modest but solid income, and a reputation for virtue; this combination of qualities alone would

⁴ anon., "The Late Mr Charles O'Neill M.I.C.E.," *FJ*, 17 November 1900, 12.

have attracted a respectable wife particularly among the Irish Catholic community of Glasgow.

As noted in Chapter Two, O'Neill's bachelor status stood in contrast to the proclivity towards marriage of his father John Ogle O'Neill who, as a widower, married again at the age of seventy-two. Also noted previously was a tendency, as among many of the Irish diaspora, towards celibacy and delayed marriage among his siblings, most of whom did survive to a marriageable age. O'Neill perhaps just slipped into the role of the Irish-Scots bachelor and there were, of course, also many Scots bachelors pursuing work opportunities in the Australasian colonies.⁵ Once in the colonies, his prospects for marriage diminished given the disproportionate number of males on the goldfields.

Also of relevance to O'Neill's situation was celibacy. Celibacy was accepted among respectable classes of Victorian Britain, particularly if practiced for religious reasons and or as serving as a model of self-control in an era when promiscuity was deemed among the worst of sins. Celibacy was a characteristic of certain devout Christian laity of the Victorian era (including certain Protestant as well as Catholic adherents) for religious reasons founded in scripture.⁶ Such scriptural encouragements did not necessarily directly link celibacy to a priestly ministry.⁷

From a purely secular perspective, absence of immediate family responsibilities provided O'Neill with the freedom to pursue unimpeded any commitment either to charity or professional ambition. At the same time, O'Neill did not eschew all

⁵ An example of the latter was Andrew Goldie (1863-1890) who built up a successful business in Port Moresby trading in natural history specimens, after eleven years spent in Auckland as a nurseryman. Goldie, a Presbyterian, remained a single man on the colonial frontier and discouraged native women from loitering around his Port Moresby trading store. See S. Mullins, "More Than Sowing Empire: Andrew Goldie in New Zealand and New Guinea, 1863-1890 (Unpublished)," in *Past Tensions, Reflections on Making History* (University of Waikato, Hamilton: 2011).

⁶ The Christian scriptural foundations for celibacy were drawn on by both Protestant and Catholic, including Christ's saying about "becoming a eunuch" for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 19:10), leaving wife for the sake of the gospel (Mark 10:29) or for the sake of the reign of God (Luke 18:29), or that in the Resurrection there is no marriage (Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25), or the Pauline encouragements to celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7 and 7:32).

⁷ *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1968), s.v. "Celibacy."

family responsibilities, as his continued support for his older brother (and companion in bachelorhood) John James proved.

Being a bachelor was, of course, not the same as leading a celibate life. In reality, bachelorhood freed a man from the sexual constraints of marriage. Still, no evidence (even if it should exist) has been uncovered of any sexual transgression, adultery or fornication by O'Neill himself. There is also one piece of evidence that he personally placed a value on the attendant virtue that Christian celibacy sought to pursue, that of purity.

The first of the aggregated sequence of maxims extracted by O'Neill referred to the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar for the *CoManual*, which connected the 19th Sunday after Pentecost with the Feast of the Purity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It recorded: 'What the lily is amongst flowers, purity is among the virtues'.

The maxim's allusion to 'the lily' is a classical one, predating Christianity. As with the lotus in Eastern religion, the lily became a symbol of the spiritual.⁸ The white petals of the lily, combined with its translucent lustre, conveyed the impression of an unearthly substance. The flower became sacred in ancient Hellenic, Assyrian and Mesopotamian religions, and its symbolism was bequeathed to Judaism and ultimately to Christianity.⁹ In traditional Christian art, the lily was attached to the Virgin Mary as a symbol of purity, particularly in association with the Annunciation, emphasising her virginal innocence in conceiving Christ.¹⁰ The significance of such symbolism would be immediately recognised by O'Neill, given his own professional interest in religious architecture, art and design.

The inclusion of this particular maxim in the *CoManual* is evidence enough that O'Neill valued the spiritual virtues of purity and chastity. However, there is no evidence that O'Neill ever took any formal vow of chastity, unlike his younger

⁸ B. Lehane, *The Power of Plants* (Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 236.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

sister Catherine Anne who entered a Franciscan convent in 1854 (and who died in 1907). As but a devout member of the Catholic laity and, from 1890, a member of the lay Third Order of Franciscans, O'Neill need not have taken any such vow. However, he would have understood that his remaining a bachelor would also have required that he remain celibate as well. His enthusiasm in pursuing an engineering career may have been one factor in his not taking religious vows or profession of holy orders, although he may also have lacked the conviction that he possessed such a vocation.

It is possible that certain circumstances of O'Neill's life, his many years surveying the rugged frontiers of New Zealand, combined with the pressures of professional and political life, may have denied him the social opportunities to meet eligible women. The demanding yet solitary nature of this kind of life could have taken its toll on O'Neill in other ways; his total abstinence commitment may have been in response to a temptation to indulge. There is at least one piece of circumstantial evidence of this. In September 1866, a certain Charles O'Neill was fined five shillings for drunkenness by a Wellington magistrate.¹¹

As the years progressed, photographs revealed that the more dashing O'Neill of 1868 (see Illustration 1c, page 342) became the more portly and serious-minded figure of public life of 1874 (see Illustration 1d, page 342).¹² The sedentary nature of parliamentary sittings and the demands of professional life seemed also to have taken its toll. O'Neill's fixation on technical matters (so evident in his long parliamentary speeches) might, were this carried over in social conversation, be deemed as boring or at least distinctly unromantic. The *Star* parliamentary pen sketch of November 1871 as it humorously picked up on O'Neill's 'hesitating speech', might have also exposed his shyness during social occasions.¹³ For one or other combination of reasons, neither a recorded romance nor a possible marriage seems to have formed part of his life.

¹¹ anon., "Resident Magistrate's Court," *WI*, 4 September 1866, 5.

¹² For comparisons of photographs taken of O'Neill in 1868 and 1874, see respective discussions in Utick, 71, 110. Also see anon. "Charles Gordon O'Neill (c. 1868)", *ATL*, Wellington, Photograph, 1868.; compared with Wrigglesworth, J. "Charles Gordon O'Neill (27 July 1874)". *ATL*., Wellington, Photograph, 1874.

¹³ J.A., "The Parliament of 1871," *Star*, 18 November 1871, 2

Only two aspects of O'Neill's life throw any light on his attitude towards women. One was a close affection for his youngest sister Maria Gordon O'Neill (1840-1883), after whom O'Neill probably chose to adopt the middle name 'Gordon' as a mark of remembrance. The other can be derived from O'Neill's oft expressed concern for the plight of abandoned wives subsequently left in destitution to fend for themselves and their children.

O'Neill demonstrated considerable fondness for his youngest sister. Maria Gordon's reciprocal attachment to her brother is evidenced by her journey to join him first in Wellington and later in Sydney, where she lived with him for a while at Flagstaff Cottage, Birchgrove Road, Balmain.¹⁴

Maria Gordon's premature death on 23 February 1883 at the age of 42 left O'Neill heartbroken (her remains were buried in Old Petersham Cemetery).¹⁵ In correspondence to Baudon in May 1883, O'Neill described her affectionately as 'my darling sister...the only one in the colonies...I try to bear the sorrow but her loss to me has been great indeed' and 'much deep and great grief.'¹⁶ It is the only personal remark of affection for a woman made by O'Neill that has so far come to light. No record has yet been uncovered that reveals something about O'Neill's relationship with his mother, who had died in Glasgow on 9 April 1859.

Of Maria Gordon herself, little is known of this simple woman other than that she had a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary and would sing at church services, most prominently at the dedication of O'Neill's altar renovations in St Mary's Cathedral Wellington in 1879.¹⁷ As a single woman in that colonial era without the support of a breadwinner and with only domestic skills such as sewing, the presence and support of an older, professionally successful brother was something that she probably would have interpreted as a great blessing.

¹⁴ Utick, 176.

¹⁵ NSWRegBD&M, "Copy, Certified Death Certificate, Maria Gordon O' Neill, 1883," Sydney.

¹⁶ O'Neill, "Copy, Correspondence to Adolphe Baudon, 6 May 1883."

¹⁷ anon., "Consecration of New Marble Altar, St Mary's Cathedral," NZT, 26 December 1879, 7.

In return, she may have, during those two brief interludes of O'Neill's life (1879-1880 in Wellington and 1882-1883 in Sydney), provided him with the services of female domesticity, including housekeeping. There is no remaining evidence of this, but it is suggested by O'Neill's closeness for his sister Maria and the fact that she died at O'Neill's own residence at Balmain.¹⁸ The fifth counsel in the series of maxims in the *CoManual*, pasted by her favourite brother, could in fact reflect this sentiment. Associated with the feast of St Anselm, that counsel read: 'Do not depart from God; how pleasant it is to live always with those who love us!'.¹⁹ The direct religious import of this for O'Neill was that the peace and joy referred to resided exactly in the sense of being always irrevocably and unconditionally loved by God. The counsel reflects scripture in John 14:23, for those who love Jesus, keep His word, and his Father (i.e., God the Father) will love them, and both Father and Son will come to them and make their home with them.²⁰ This religious sentiment contrasts with the poignancy of O'Neill's very *fleeting* experience of living with one woman who actually loved O'Neill albeit in a sisterly way. While O'Neill still had his older brother beside him, his description of his state as 'heartbroken' at his youngest sister's death conveyed the magnitude of that loss.

As noted in Chapter Five, there is one other important role that Maria Gordon (as well as John James) performed. This was her loyal support for the active lay work that O'Neill undertook, despite her own poor circumstances. This model of the altruistic Christian family, its members working together with compassion and generosity, is something that resonates in this example of the O'Neill siblings' commitment to working for the poor, whether in Glasgow in the 1850s or in Sydney in the 1880s.²¹ Importantly, as understood by the bachelor O'Neill, such a

¹⁸ anon., "Deaths," *NZT*, 23 March 1883, 15.

¹⁹ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

²⁰ Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O'Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 26.

²¹ The example of the O'Neill family represents a model of the Christian family putting into practice the kind of social teaching that would be later promoted in the 1891 Encyclical of Leo XXII *Rerum Novarum*, and what John Paul II would describe in his 1988 Encyclical *On Social Concerns* as 'the preferential option for the poor', an emphasis originally articulated by Latin American liberation theology. For a contemporary exploration of this issue, see L. Sowle Cahill, *Family, a Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 86-89, 136.

commitment was something that transcended traditional gender roles within families themselves. Married or single, male or female, all could be united in the cause of charity.²² Commitment to charity by the single, widowed or childless was also one characteristic that O'Neill and his siblings shared with the evangelical Protestants, not just in Scotland but across Britain.²³

As also noted Chapter Five, O'Neill expressed strong sympathies with the plight of women, particularly with children, who were abandoned by their husbands. While socially liberal on economic and political matters, O'Neill vociferously upheld traditional Catholic values with respect to the sanctity of marriage that included the role of the woman as homemaker and the father as breadwinner. His opposition in the New Zealand Parliament to divorce and other liberal reforms to marriage can be understood with this background in mind. Therefore, abandonment of family responsibilities must have appeared to O'Neill to be even more heinous behaviour, resulting as it did in the kind of poverty that he had sought to alleviate for much of his life.

The emotional and perhaps spiritual consolation for a bachelor like O'Neill was that he could then devote his energy to defending such women and their families by visiting them in person and providing them with the assistance they required. There is no more telling evidence for this than the final of the series of maxims pasted in the *CoManual* by O'Neill. It departed from the rest of the series in that, rather than being an extract from a Roman Catholic liturgical calendar, it was one taken from the *Daily Telegraph* 31 July 1886. It contained a quote attributed to a British MP (and humanist) John Morley from Ireland:

²² This reflects too the Pauline teachings in Galatians 3:28 in which there is no division in Christ, including that of gender.

²³ See Hilton, 106 for an observation about this propensity among evangelicals, based on findings by David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660-1960* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965), 424..

What more Christlike than this sentiment of Mr John Morley's "I count that day basely passed in which no thought is given to the hard lot of garret and hovel, to forlorn children and trampled woman [*sic*]"²⁴

This particular counsel will be examined further towards the end of this Chapter, but at this point it is worth noting that this 'sentiment' reveals an emotional motivation for O'Neill's crusade to help these abandoned women. Visiting them with their children may have helped compensate him for the absence of wife and children of his own.

These small but significant insights suggest that the absence of a wife and children may well be counted among the 'vicissitudes' of O'Neill's life. However, they still do not explain why, during the course of a long life, he did not pursue the objective of marriage more vigorously. Furthermore, as this study delves further into the cycles of misfortune in O'Neill's life, it will become evident that what gave him greater cause for frustration came from an entirely different aspect of life. The first such cycle began in Glasgow during the early 1860s.

The First Cycle: Thwarted Ambition and Bankruptcy, Glasgow, 1863

Between 1847 and 1861, O'Neill worked diligently at his position of Assistant Superintendent of Streets, Roads, Buildings and Sewerage for the City of Glasgow. As time passed, he had the opportunity to demonstrate his talents and so advance his professional career. Unfortunately for him, no promotion or other advancement came his way.

Much of his work, particularly in architecture, was on public display which may have made his ambition more difficult to contain. The continuing accolades of the

²⁴ SVDP (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*. For origin of extract, see anon., *DTel*, 31 July 1886, 4.

Glasgow Free Press, praising O'Neill's achievements in the city, probably further fed his expectations.²⁵

O'Neill's penchant for elaborate Victorian adornment in design may have been one way of advertising his skill. As noted in Chapter Two, such adornment featured prominently in his architectural work during the mid-1850s, including for example St Andrew's Parish Primary School in Greendyke Street Glasgow. A more prominent example of this was O'Neill's contribution to a suspension footbridge across the Clyde linking the suburbs of Bridgton and Hutchesontown, constructed by the City Council between August 1854 and September 1855. Serving also as a tollway, this St Andrew's Suspension Bridge in McNeill Street, was 67 metres long with 7.3 metre pylons at each end to support the cables.²⁶ The pylons were made of cast-iron in classical form with fluted Roman Corinthian columns providing supporting arches. While the overall design of the bridge was by engineer Neil Robson, O'Neill had designed the striking columns. According to one account, at the opening of the bridge by the Lord Provost, Robson did sufficiently acknowledge O'Neill's contribution.²⁷

Episodes such as this followed by his unsuccessful application for the position of Superintendent of Streets and Buildings in Edinburgh in 1855 and a dearth of subsequent advancement opportunities probably increased O'Neill's sense of dissatisfaction.

Finally in 1861, when he set up in private practice himself as a civil engineer in Glasgow, he was overcommitted to charity work.²⁸ From December 1859, he had assumed the onerous responsibilities of President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Western Districts of Scotland, to add to membership of the volunteer 3rd

²⁵ For example, comparisons of his work with that of Victorian Catholic architect Pugin (whether justified or not), would have perhaps convinced O'Neill himself that he had talent as was worthy of greater recognition. This comparison by the *Glasgow Free Press* has already been discussed in Chapter Two. See anon., *GFP*, 8 May 1858, 2.

²⁶ Utick, 31.

²⁷ Wordsall, 122. Lord Provost is the Scottish term for Glasgow's Lord Mayor.

²⁸ Utick, 32, 46.

Lanarkshire Regiment. These earlier commitments would have made any additional task of running one's own business extremely difficult.

O'Neill's activities between 1860 and 1863 reveal a desire to pursue both elements of professional ambition and faith-based charity to maximum capacity. However the ruthless competition in industrial Glasgow and the then chaotic state of the Catholic Church in Western Scotland undermined O'Neill's efforts respectively. The outcomes for both kinds of pursuits worked out unsuccessfully for O'Neill himself, and his professional aspirations came to an abrupt end with business failure and bankruptcy in July 1863.

A notice placed by a certain M. Mackay, Agent, of 146 West George Street Glasgow, the *Edinburgh Gazette* of July 1863, provided the details of O'Neill's predicament:

The Estates of Charles O'Neill, Civil Engineer and Architect in Glasgow, and presently residing in West Regent Street there, were sequestrated on 16 July 1863, by the Sheriff of the County of Lanark. The first deliverance is dated 16 July 1863...A Warrant of Protection against Arrest or Imprisonment for Civil Debt has been granted to the Bankrupt until the meeting for election of Trustees.²⁹

The bankruptcy proceedings lasted through August with John Flint, an accountant in Glasgow elected Trustee.³⁰ In the Glasgow Bankruptcy Court of 8 August 1863, O'Neill's deposition as bankrupt read:

My assets, so far as ascertained, amount to £184 3s and 11d, but there are large claims due to me, on which I can at present put no value, the amount, if any, being dependent on the transactions being carried through. My losses

²⁹ anon., *EdG*, 17 July 1863, extract SVDPA Folder 1.

³⁰ anon., *EdG*, 4 August 1863, extract SVDPA Folder 1. O'Neill's creditors included a builder Thomas Brownlie, an ironmonger William Field and a music seller Joseph Harka De Monti.

amount to £899 and my ordinary debts are £833 15s 7p. The preference claims amount to £7.³¹

Whether the claims upon O'Neill were due to his own business inadequacies is unknown; difficulties in chasing down his own business claims would emerge as a persistent problem in later business life. At a subsequent meeting with creditors on 17 August, O'Neill offered to pay his creditors sixpence in the pound payable one month after his discharge, with security, and to pay both the sequestration costs and those of the Trustee.³² It was something of an irony that O'Neill, who had spent such a considerable portion of his own time and money helping the most destitute in Glasgow, should now find himself without a penny.

At the age of 35, and with his surveying skills in high demand overseas, O'Neill was able to pursue new employment opportunities. Other professionals in similar circumstances left Britain for the opportunities that its expanding Empire provided. In the face of this initial disaster, he took advantage of the offer by the Otago Provincial Government to pursue a new career as a surveyor in the New Zealand colonies.

O'Neill's bankruptcy in Glasgow in 1863 was the first indication of lack of business acumen, a problem that would bedevil him throughout the rest his life. It would also mark the 'vicissitude' involving business failure, emerging as a catalyst for major changes in O'Neill's directions in life. As previously examined in Chapter Three, this first cycle drove O'Neill more towards the pursuit of professional ambition, including a parliamentary career that would deliver additional prospects of advancement.

As examined in Chapter Two, his commitment to faith-based charity was also sorely tested early in 1863. O'Neill in his role as head of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Glasgow found himself caught between the argument between Bishop Gray and the *Glasgow Free Press* over the disbursement of funds. The O'Neill

³¹ anon., *EdG*, 8 August 1863, extract SVDPA Folder 1.

³² anon., *EdG*, 18 August 1863, extract SVDPA Folder 1.

family's close association with this newspaper had suddenly become a matter of acute embarrassment for O'Neill. More significantly, as revealed by the *Glasgow Free Press*, O'Neill's style of leadership in Catholic lay charity was not welcomed by many. His departure for Presbyterian Otago was symbolic of a decision to leave behind the commitment to Catholic faith-based charity he had so passionately embraced in his twenties. It would be almost fifteen years before he would resume it.

It is worth noting that the activities of *Glasgow Free Press* in pressing the Irish cause and so exacerbating the differences between Irish and native Scots within Catholic Church in Western Scotland, caused problems for another prominent Catholic who would later depart for Britain's Australian colonies. In June 1862, the Reverend Duncan McNab, a Scots priest (and a cousin to St Mary McKillop) then in charge of the Airdrie mission, received harsh criticism published in the *Glasgow Free Press* including a leader which highlighted McNab's alleged anti-Irish sentiment.³³ Some years after migrating to Australia, McNab finally fulfilled a lifelong desire to undertake missionary work among Australian Aborigines in the outback.³⁴ McNab also was sympathetic to the aims of the St Vincent de Paul Society, and assisted the work of the Portland Conference with a charity lecture in November 1870 while stationed in Victoria.³⁵

By contrast, missionary work would have been far from the thoughts of a recently bankrupted O'Neill, clearly desirous of restoring his professional fortunes following his own departure from Glasgow in September 1863.

The Vicissitudes of Political Life in New Zealand

While consistent failure in business affairs became the most serious obstacle to professional ambition, the waning of O'Neill's political fortunes after initial success in New Zealand did not help. As the circumstances leading up to his

³³ Handley, *The Irish in Modern Scotland*, 65.

³⁴ Campion, 35-37.

³⁵ anon., "Lecture," *PortG&NGA*, 24, 27 and 31 October 1870, 3.

electoral debacle in the New Zealand national election of 1876 reveal, O'Neill was neither a savvy nor successful politician. Nevertheless, his parliamentary service comprising almost a decade in the New Zealand House of Assembly, between 1866 and 1875, provided him with sufficient time to promote certain aspects of technological and social progress in colonial New Zealand. Apart from religious issues such as divorce and education, his main parliamentary interests were related to issues informed by his professional background as a civil engineer, architect and surveyor. As noted in Chapter Four, such political and professional interests, while driven by professional ambition, were also influenced by social liberalism and Christian ideals.

A number of factors contributed to O'Neill's final exit from parliamentary life in 1876. Persistent failure to meet his constituents in person and his inability to master public political meetings were among these. In addition, three developments beyond his control exposed either a political weakness or naivety about the harsh realities of political life.

O'Neill was consistently subject to criticism that he was absent to his constituents. An example of this was the following comment in Wellington's *Evening Post* in October 1868:

Mr. Charles O'Neill, the member for some portion of the Otago Gold Fields, who was returned for the district he represents by a mere accident, and never since visited his constituents...³⁶

The skills necessary to pursue civil engineering projects were not the same as those required to satisfy the constituents in frontier goldmining regions. Slow and arduous colonial modes of transport may not have helped. More significantly O'Neill was continually faced with the necessity of earning a living within a framework of provincial administration while serving as an MHA. For example, he relocated from Otago to Auckland Province in August 1868, and later sought employment in Wellington after 1871. By mid-1870, certain Otago Goldfields

³⁶ anon., *EP*, 15 October 1868, 2.

citizens were preparing a requisition seeking the resignation of both O'Neill and Julius Vogel for not being resident in their constituency.³⁷

O'Neill's situation was part of a broader problem experienced by those seeking parliamentary office in early colonial times. This was the need to provide for one's own income in supporting a political career and, in O'Neill's case, much of this work was provided by provincial governments. Apart from an honorarium for parliamentary sittings, there were no parliamentary salaries and colonial New Zealand parliamentarians had to meet the expenses of travel and service their constituencies from their own pocket. Candidates had often to spend considerable sums on even legitimate campaigning activities.³⁸ The perennial problem for O'Neill was that the nature of his work often carried him far away from the constituencies he represented.

At the time of his election to Otago Goldfields in 1866 and subsequently to the Thames in 1871, O'Neill had the advantage of local recognition being a district surveyor and a Provincial Engineer-in-Chief respectively. As O'Neill departed from these positions for whatever reasons, his local connections were weakened. During his second term, his predicament was compounded by the necessity of having to shift employment far south to the Province of Wellington. Despite being closer to the seat of national colonial government, he was no longer always on the ground where it mattered, in the Thames or the Coromandel Peninsula. A long absence touring the Australian colonies during 1872 and 1873 (including pursuing business objectives) did not endear O'Neill to his Thames constituents either. He maintained a residence in Princes Street Auckland until 1875, although this too was outside his constituency.³⁹

Another political weakness for O'Neill was his inability to master the skills of addressing large political gatherings. This is an irony considering that, as demonstrated in his charitable endeavours, he could be inspiring in small

³⁷ anon., *OamaruT*, 10 May 1870, 2.

³⁸ Atkinson, 102.

³⁹ Utick, 102.

gatherings. As noted previously in Chapter Three, this weakness, described by one observer as ‘a lamentable breakdown’ during the campaign, almost cost him what should have been a comfortable election for the Thames in 1871. This made O’Neill more politically vulnerable as the politics of the Thames, then the fastest growing constituency in colonial New Zealand, grew more demanding.

Throughout his second term, O’Neill argued forcefully in parliament to increase the parliamentary representation of the Thames, because of its wealth contribution to the colony and its rapidly increasing population. In August 1872, he urged that there be an additional member for the Thames district.⁴⁰ Two years later, he presented two petitions within a couple of days, one from 2,150 residents seeking an additional representative, another from 1,700 residents seeking an additional two.⁴¹ Ultimately, a *Representation Bill* in 1875 made provision for one additional member for the Thames.

However there was still anger in the Thames, by then with a population of over 14,000 and including 3,700 voters.⁴² There is no doubt that it was in O’Neill’s own interest to push for more representation, but he was also under some local pressure to deliver. In October 1875, he received a rather blunt telegram from Thames Mayor William Davies, which he read out in the House the following day. It read:

Public feeling of Thames very strong against Representation Bill. Opinion is that a great injustice will be done to Thames if only allowed two members. Speak strongly in the House to this effect.⁴³

Having failed to deliver sufficiently on this issue, O’Neill may have been initially reticent in recontesting the Thames in the approaching general elections. As late as December 1875, only one local candidate, William Rowe, had nominated for

⁴⁰ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1872. Vol. 12, 8 August. 363.

⁴¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 22 July. 175.

⁴² Utick, 115.

⁴³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 19, 4 October. 171.

the seat.⁴⁴ O'Neill's final decision to stand very late in the campaign exposed him to a subsequent massive electoral rebuff; this was made worse by three developments beyond his control.

One of these developments was that O'Neill, publicly counted as a government supporter, was hostage to government's delivery not only on parliamentary representation but broader development issues as well. Thus, as the fortunes of the Fox, Waterhouse, Vogel and Pollen Governments successively waned, so did O'Neill's re-election prospects.

As early as 1872, the Fox Government had lost considerable support across Auckland Province. Progress on the development of railways stalled and there had not been the expected influx of immigrants.⁴⁵ For much of the remainder of his term, O'Neill kept questioning ministers about these problems.

Locally, the failure to progress a waterworks in the Thames cost O'Neill dearly. Once again demonstrating a reticence to address the public directly, he avoided meeting with electors of the Thames district on return from his tour of the Australian colonies in July 1872. As a substitute, he provided a lengthy address published in the *Thames Advertiser* four days later. With reference to the waterworks, he reported:

The delay in carrying out the works is altogether inexplicable to me, and I shall certainly make it my business in the coming session, to urge upon the government the great importance of immediate action.⁴⁶

In this printed address, he pointed to much legislation relevant to Auckland Province passed during the previous session. However, there were other failures too, such as his unsuccessful attempts to reduce the miner's rights fee or the gold duty.⁴⁷ O'Neill stressed his support of the public works program, but noted:

⁴⁴ anon., *NZH*, 17 December 1875, 5.

⁴⁵ Dalziel, *Julius Vogel, Business Politician*, 146-147.

⁴⁶ C. O'Neill, "Notices: To the Electors of the Thames District, Auckland, 12 July 1872," *ThA*, 15 July 1872, 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Unfortunately, I cannot point to either vigour or earnestness in the prosecution of Public Works since the last session, although I am aware that some works are going on in the Colony.⁴⁸

By 1873, public anger at the failure to progress the waterworks was palpable and being directed at O'Neill personally. A well-attended public meeting in March 1873 held at Grahamstown's Theatre Royal became a forum for public dissatisfaction. One attendee thought:

...that Mr O'Neill, their representative, was equally apathetic to all matters relating to the welfare of the district he undertook to represent. He fully expected to have seen him at that meeting to have given some explanation on the subject with which he above all others should be conversant.⁴⁹

Another in the audience took an even less sympathetic view, scathingly referring to O'Neill as 'the fantocinni of the Vogel juggler'.⁵⁰

During the 1874 session, O'Neill begged Vogel to consider a submission by an Auckland deputation, which sought the construction of a railway between the Thames and the Waikato district.⁵¹ He urged the government to proceed with roads linking the Thames to Tauranga on the Bay of Plenty and to the inland settlement of Cambridge to the southwest.⁵² During the 1875 session, he queried the lack of progress in the construction of lighthouses off the coast of Auckland Province.⁵³ Ultimately, O'Neill proved politically impotent to progress such matters.

A second disastrous development was a series of calamities and setbacks striking the Thames itself. In May 1874, two years after fire had wiped out the old town of

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ anon., *DSC*, 17 March 1873, 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid. A 'fantocinni' is a puppet pulled by wires.

⁵¹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 16 July. 120.

⁵² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 12 August. 557.

⁵³ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1875. Vol. 17, 30 July. 123-124.

Shortland, Grahamstown was battered by a stormy high tide that wrecked much of the low lying town.⁵⁴ O'Neill soon found himself caught in a dispute between the Auckland Provincial and National Governments, as to whether the Grahamstown foreshore be handed over to the Thames Municipality.⁵⁵

Meanwhile gold production in the Thames dropped sharply between 1873 and 1876, although it would recover in the late 1870s.⁵⁶ The mood of the Thames was far less optimistic than it had been during the boom of 1871. O'Neill's business associations with Brogden also made him unpopular among many in the mining workforce.⁵⁷

If these two developments were not enough, the abolition of the New Zealand Provincial Governments resulted in a political backlash that swept away any remaining political support for O'Neill. The bell had finally tolled for the New Zealand Provinces as an *Abolition of Provinces Act* was passed by parliament in October 1875.⁵⁸ O'Neill had been among the most prominent in applauding the reform.

Provincialism had been the bane of O'Neill's political and professional ambition from the outset. Furthermore O'Neill remained convinced that provincial administrations diverted public works monies into the major towns and away from developing areas such as the gold fields.⁵⁹ He nonetheless appreciated the magnitude of the changes before the colony:

Doubtless, it is a very serious thing to rub out the old landmarks and territorial divisions of the provinces, and I cannot but admire those Superintendents who strive to uphold their rights on behalf of the

⁵⁴ Isdale, 10.

⁵⁵ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 20 August. 793.

⁵⁶ Isdale, 10-11.

⁵⁷ anon, *EP*, 10 June 1873, 2.

⁵⁸ Utick, 112.

⁵⁹ New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD*, 1874. Vol. 16, 20 August. 804.

Provinces. But this is an age of progress and the welfare of the people as a whole demands our first attention and consideration...⁶⁰

Some of O'Neill's financial difficulties arose because of poor administration in Auckland Province. In May 1875 he wrote to the Superintendent, requesting back-payments owed to him worth £68 7s dating back to 1869 when he was Auckland's Engineer-in-Chief.⁶¹ The Superintendent in question was none other than Sir George Grey, who had returned to the colony and come out of retirement from his retreat on Kawau Island.⁶²

As the architect behind the old provincial system established under the *Constitution Act* of 1852, Grey viewed the prospective abolition with dismay and fury. An Auckland anti-abolition delegation led by W. Wilson, editor of the *New Zealand Herald*, successfully persuaded Grey to lead the cause.⁶³

When Auckland Superintendent John Williamson died early in 1875, Grey seized the opportunity and was elected in March both to the Superintendency and Williamson's House of Representatives seat of Auckland City West.⁶⁴ During the 1875 parliamentary session, Grey campaigned vigorously although unsuccessfully against the progress of the *Abolition of Provinces Bill*.⁶⁵ The provinces were a lost cause, but he led a growing political revolt. Between 1874 and 1875, Grey mobilised a small army of local supporters to fight the abolition of the Auckland Province.

The looming New Zealand elections at the end of 1875 therefore took place in the context of the political rise of Grey.⁶⁶ Being a confirmed supporter of the provincial abolitionist cause and a Wellington centrist politician would have

⁶⁰ Ibid. 805.

⁶¹ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to Sir George Grey Kcb, Superintendent Auckland Province, 13 May 1875, 1875," Wellington.

⁶² Dalziel, *Julius Vogel, Business Politician*, 176.

⁶³ Bohan, *To Be a Hero: Sir George Grey 1812-1898*, 248.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 248-249.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 250-251.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 248-251.

probably damaged O'Neill's prospects, even without his other serious political weaknesses. Both Grey and Vogel, despite already standing in other seats, both decided to stand for the Thames as well. Vogel's candidacy drained away the votes of government supporters from O'Neill. Grey and Vogel were expected to win such a ballot. Only late in the campaign did O'Neill actually nominate; the only positive aspect was that there was no record of Grey launching any personal attack against him. In any case, the general consensus as drawn from the *New Zealand Herald* was that O'Neill's cause was a hopeless one. On 30 December, this newspaper cast its own judgment on him as follows:

The Thames has seemed fated hitherto to be unhappy politically, but is now abundantly blessed with candidatures both in number and quality. During the last Parliament, the constituency, by far the largest in the colony, was represented in the assembly by one who never appeared before the electors from the time he was returned, and who so completely cut himself away from them and their interests that apparently he has now less chance of being elected than any other man.⁶⁷

It continued, with further indirect criticism of O'Neill:

We believe that the best representatives of the Thames would be thoroughly independent local men, having full knowledge of the requirements of the district, and who could act independently of any party for the special interests of the place.⁶⁸

Polling for the seventh New Zealand election began on 20 December 1875. It continued until 29 January 1876, with over 56,000 electors choosing 88 parliamentarians.⁶⁹ There were finally seven candidates for the two Thames seats, including O'Neill. The results of the Thames were surprising, although the outcome was still a shocking one for O'Neill who attracted an embarrassing total

⁶⁷ anon., "Editorial," *NZH*, 30 December 1875, 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Atkinson, 244.

of only 24 votes.⁷⁰ Grey, already a victor in Auckland City West, won one of the two seats with a solid 975 votes. However Vogel lost with only 685 votes. The surprise winner of the second Thames seat was the local candidate William Rowe with 865 votes.⁷¹ Vogel had the consolation of being returned as one of the members for Wanganui and consequently served another term as Premier and Colonial Treasurer until he resigned in September 1876.⁷² Grey chose to remain MHA for the Thames, and resigned from his seat in Auckland City West.⁷³ O'Neill's political failures leading up to the debacle in 1876, returned to haunt him. A critic writing for the *Otago Witness* ridiculed O'Neill's pretensions and his wearing of a regiment uniform. Referring derisively to O'Neill's presentation to Queen Victoria at the Lake Katrine Waterworks, the critic commented:

Now I am quite sure there is no room for a man like Mr O'Neill in this colony. The man is too large altogether for his boots – not to say his uniform. He had better go and see the Queen again, and be happy.⁷⁴

O'Neill maintained an interest in public affairs after 1876, standing as a candidate in the New Zealand national election of September 1879 for Wellington Country Districts on a Liberal platform in support of Grey's administration.⁷⁵ Even with the support of Grey, O'Neill's campaign for Wellington Country Districts attracted this criticism by Wellington's *Evening Post*:

Neither the Otago miners nor those of the Thames showed any desire to re-elect Mr O'Neill, and if we remember aright he did not venture to solicit a renewal of their confidence. The country district electors had therefore better consider well before they commit their interests to the care of this Greyite candidate, who has been twice tried and found wanting.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ anon., "The General Elections: The Thames," *NZH*, 7 January 1876, 3. O'Neill may have gained a handful of extra votes in the final count, yet the outcome was essentially the same.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² New Zealand Parliament, *NZPD Legislature of New Zealand Summary*, 1876. Vol. 20-21.

⁷³ Bohan, *To Be a Hero: Sir George Grey 1812-1898*, 248.

⁷⁴ anon., "Flotsam and Jetsam," *OW*, 19 August 1876, 14.

⁷⁵ C. O'Neill, "Requisition to Charles O' Neill, Esq., C.E., J.P.," *EP*, 28 August 1879, 4.

⁷⁶ anon., "Country District Election," *EP*, 6 September 1879, 2.

The outcome in Wellington Country Districts reflected this reservation; O'Neill gained 129 votes, the lowest among the three candidates with the winning candidate over 110 votes ahead of him.⁷⁷

A decade later, O'Neill stood for the seat of Sturt centred on Broken Hill in the New South Wales election of 1889 as a protectionist supporting a George Dibbs administration.⁷⁸ As with the Wellington Country Districts result, O'Neill received a modest tally of votes but insufficient to win the contested seat. As will be examined later, memory of his previous failures haunted him even during the Sturt campaign.

Despite these disappointments, O'Neill's final gesture towards the domain of public office that he had known so well was a gracious one, also demonstrating a continuing warm acquaintance with Grey. On 11 March 1891, O'Neill chaired a gathering providing a welcome reception at Sydney Town Hall for Grey, who had arrived as one of three New Zealand delegates for the first Federation Convention.⁷⁹ Senior New South Wales politicians including Sir John Robertson and Sir George Dibbs were present. New Zealand subsequently showed little interest in Federation, although there was some support in the South Island.⁸⁰ New Zealand's Royal Commission on Federation, held between 1900 and 1901, effectively justified a decision not to federate.⁸¹ O'Neill's views on New Zealand and Federation remain unknown, but it is likely given his trans-Tasman perspective on the development of the Australasian colonies that he may well have been sympathetic towards it.

⁷⁷ anon., "Wellington Country Districts," *AuckStar*, 12 September 1879, 3.

⁷⁸ Utick, 202.

⁷⁹ anon., "The Federal Convention, Sir George Grey's Reception," *TuapekaT*, 1 April 1891, 6. The two other New Zealand delegates were Sir Harry Atkinson and Captain William Russell.

⁸⁰ P. Mein Smith, "New Zealand," in *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation*, ed. H. Irving (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 401; M. Moore, "New Zealand - a Federation Partner Then and Now," *The New Federalist, The Journal of Australian Federation History*, no. 1 (1998): 63-66.

⁸¹ Smith, "New Zealand," 401.

The Second Cycle: The Souring of Prospects, Wellington, 1876-1880

After O'Neill's parliamentary life ended abruptly in failure in 1876, he had more freedom to pursue his main objective of pursuing business opportunities that civil engineering talent might provide him with. As noted in Chapter Three, he had pursued wealth through investment in gold and other mining ventures, in patents for specific inventions, and through promotion of public works projects such as tramways and railways.

By 1876, however, he had already suffered financially through gold mine investment. The small fortune of £1,500 that O'Neill had invested in the McIsaacs' Mine was probably lost. Between 1868 and 1870, this mine yielded only 201 ounces of bullion, worth about £550.⁸²

Back payments of salary also created difficulties for both O'Neill and his older brother John James who had followed him to New Zealand. As noted previously, in 1875 O'Neill claimed that he was owed salary arrears by the Auckland Provincial Government. By comparison, the financial affairs of his older brother John James were parlous.

John James had taken up surveying work in Glasgow after discontinuing medical studies and, like his younger brother, sought new opportunities that the colony of New Zealand might bring. He was engaged in some pioneering survey work between 1871 and 1872 relating to the supply of water to the Thames goldfields.⁸³ In June 1872, he also undertook some railway survey work between Auckland and the town of Riverhead to the north.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, work for John James was intermittent, payment was often delayed, and there were probably long intervals during which his younger brother had to support him. The O'Neill brothers shared accommodation in Princes Street Auckland prior to 1876.⁸⁵

⁸² J. Downey, *Gold-Mines of the Hauraki District* (Christchurch: Cansonbury Publications, 1935, reprinted 2002), 135.

⁸³ Furkert, 236-237. For example, in October 1871, John James completed a survey that suggested using the Kauaeranga River at the Thames as a water source.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ O'Neill's correspondence to Sir Donald Mc Lean was addressed from 1 Princes Street Auckland.

Surviving correspondence by O'Neill to Native Affairs Minister Donald McLean reveals something of John James' circumstances. In both February and July 1872, O'Neill wrote to McLean asking his help in having John James' accounts paid.⁸⁶ In January 1875, O'Neill wrote again to McLean seeking his help in acquiring a position for John James as a district surveyor in Poverty Bay. Whether this request was successful or not remains unknown, and the letter reveals that if his brother obtained the appointment, 'a considerable burden would be taken off my shoulders'.⁸⁷ It did not augur well for the future. As the years progressed, John James became more dependent on his younger brother's support. Following his election defeat, the more prosperous younger O'Neill settled with his older brother in leased Wellington terraces.⁸⁸ With his extensive colonial contacts and professional skills, Charles O'Neill's prospects for business success in Wellington at first appeared very positive.

As noted in Chapter Four, the most significant of these prospects was with his partnership with civil engineer Henderson and the accountant Macdonald in planning the Wellington Steam Tramway, commencing in February 1876. In addition, with the end of provincial government, O'Neill managed to obtain employment as an acting city engineer for Wellington City Corporation in February 1877. This latter opportunity provided O'Neill with scope to pursue town planning and civic improvement projects, culminating in the 1879 'City of Wellington & Town Belt' survey which would, like his Caithness flagging, gain meritorious comment at the subsequent International Exhibitions across the Tasman. For most of this period, O'Neill's business office was located at Lambton Quay.⁸⁹

Despite this bright start for O'Neill's prospects, the year 1877 marked the beginning of their souring, observed through a series of incidents involving a mix

⁸⁶ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Hon Sir Donald Mc Lean, Minister for Native Affairs, 2 February 1872 and 27 July 1872," Wellington.

⁸⁷ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Hon Sir Donald Mc Lean, Minister for Native Affairs, 12 January 1875," Wellington.

⁸⁸ WellingtonProvince. 24.

⁸⁹ See for example advertisements such as C. O'Neill, "To Builders," *EP*, 3 September 1878, 3. O'Neill's Wellington Offices were opposite the Oddfellows' Hall.

of tragedy, personal controversy and business difficulties. In April 1877, a forty-six year old former employee in O'Neill's civil engineering firm, one Arthur Peterson, shot himself through the head at a house in Adelaide Road, Wellington. Peterson had a drinking problem and, according to his family, he had been discharged by his employers. The suicide was put down to the effects of liquor.⁹⁰

Another less tragic although more controversial incident came through O'Neill's service as a Justice of the Peace, which sometimes involved serving on panels of resident magistrates for more minor infringements. O'Neill had been appointed by the Governor as a Justice of the Peace on 24 March 1869.⁹¹ In one Auckland case before a magistrate panel comprising a certain Captain Daldy, Mr E. H. Isaacs and O'Neill, a wayward apprentice McManus was sentenced to one month's hard labour after arriving back late at his place of employment following a night at the theatre. The apparent severity of the sentence stood in contrast to that of the apprentice's companion, who was let off with twenty-four hours imprisonment for the same offence. O'Neill was on record as stating that McManus' harsher sentence was because he was a repeat offender. Subsequently the latter's mother, Honoria McManus, spent over £40 in a vain attempt to seek legal redress of what she believed was the harsh judgement of the magistrates.⁹² In September 1877, Wellington's *Evening Post* reported on the matter in a most unfavourable manner, suggesting that the magistrates concerned should be 'called upon to resign'.⁹³

Such incidents revealed the potential difficulties of someone like O'Neill trying to build a public reputation in a relatively small city such as Wellington during the late 1870s. The magistracy incident would have remained an embarrassment given that he still served as a Justice in the Resident Magistrates Court in Wellington until 1879.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ anon., "Horrible Suicide," *EP*, 9 April 1877, 2.

⁹¹ Utick, 78.

⁹² anon., *EP*, 4 September 1877, 2.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ See for example O'Neill presiding at cases as late as 1879, anon., "Resident Magistrates Court," *EP*, 21 October 1879, 2.

Business and employment setbacks would however prove more costly for O'Neill. In October 1877, the Wellington Steam Tramway Company partnership with Henderson broke up, with Henderson acquiring the interests of both O'Neill and the accountant McDonald.⁹⁵ Henderson may have been keen to rid himself of his partners as a result of their promises of ten per cent returns to investors.⁹⁶ O'Neill was a guest of honour at the opening but did not receive any further financial benefit from the venture.⁹⁷ However, his separation from the Company would have spared him from the financial difficulties experienced by the Wellington Steam Tramway within a few years of its opening.

There is evidence that, prior to the partnership dissolution, O'Neill's financial position had become increasingly precarious. His political mentor Sir Donald McLean had previously loaned him money to 'overcome certain difficulties'.⁹⁸ When McLean died in 1877, O'Neill wrote apologetically to McLean's son explaining why had been unable to pay his debts and that he was currently 'very poor indeed', conceding that:

I have been singularly unfortunate in business. The railway scheme in which I have taken so prominent a part is slowly going in now. I trust it will be a success soon, for the rails are in Wellington.⁹⁹

With Henderson presumably buying out O'Neill's interests in the tramway venture, O'Neill might have had funds to pay off the monies owed to the McLean family. On the bright side, O'Neill revealed in the letter to the younger McLean that he had:

⁹⁵ anon., "City Council," *EP*, 12 October 1877, 2.

⁹⁶ This was revealed in April 1880 at Supreme Court Sittings involving legal disputation by various parties over the Wellington Steam Tramway (this disputation did not involve O'Neill who had relinquished his interest to Henderson two years previously). See anon., "Supreme Court, Civil Sittings," *EP*, 23 April 1880, 2.

⁹⁷ Utick, 135-136.

⁹⁸ C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to Donald Mc Lean Jnr, 4 August 1877," Wellington.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

other business which I now look forward to. I am in hopes to be enabled to pay with gratitude, whereas I hope and ask you now to kindly bear with me until I get on a better business footing.¹⁰⁰

The 'other business' that O'Neill referred to positively was the Caithness flagstones which his business seemed increasingly to focus on after 1877. By 1878, he had to rely solely on his private civil engineering practice for he was not successful in obtaining the permanent position of Chief Engineer with the Wellington City Corporation. The *Hawke's Bay Herald* had its own view of the appointment process:

... it has been known that the final contest would lie between Mr Baird, the late provincial engineer, and Mr Charles O'Neill, the late city engineer...It was known that no one else, however good, had any chance whatever. Both men were supported by their respective parties, and both worked hard. Mr Baird, however, has been more intimately connected with the contractors, and beat Mr O'Neill.¹⁰¹

The *Hawkes Bay Herald* also judged the association of the Wellington City Corporation with the contractors as 'most scandalous'.¹⁰² O'Neill had his own business problems with contractors, but had a small legal win in January 1879 recovering £222 commission from a tramway contractor Samuel Brown.¹⁰³

From 1878, O'Neill's business prospects seemed to dwindle further. He seemed not to be able to raise sufficient capital or financial support to promote the Caithness flagstones venture any further. Although the Wellington City Corporation paid him £250 for the licence to use his patent for the flagstones in April 1878, the project later became bogged down in legal disputes with licensees.¹⁰⁴ These disputes involved not only Wellington City Corporation, but

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ anon., "Wellington," *HBHerald*, 28 February 1878, 2.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ anon., "Wellington," *Star*, 14 January 1879, 2.

¹⁰⁴ O'Neill, "To the Corporation of Wellington, Licences to Use Patent No 25, 545, 8 April 1878."

also the Borough Council of Wanganui.¹⁰⁵ O'Neill was able to claim some compensation, based upon the finding that his patent consisted not in the mix of materials (that had been in widespread use elsewhere) but in the application of this mix to pavestone flagging.¹⁰⁶ Despite some initial interest by Sydney City Council and the positive response to the flagging at the International Exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne between 1879 and 1880, the whole Caithness flagstones venture probably came to an end before he decided, either by financial necessity or sheer frustration, not to pay the patent renewal fee in 1881.¹⁰⁷

Combined with the failure to return to the New Zealand Parliament in the 1879 elections, the souring of O'Neill's business prospects between 1876 and 1880 represented the second cycle of the vicissitudes that drove O'Neill to pursue a new life, this time across the Tasman. The 1877 invitation by Baudon to O'Neill to commit to the mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia must have therefore seemed increasingly attractive.

However, unlike the circumstances of 1863, O'Neill's primary motivation was no longer professional ambition but the pursuit of faith-based charity, within which he saw himself as an instrument of Divine Will. In the face of the business frustration and dwindling opportunities, the pendulum had swung back to the religious ideals of his younger adulthood in Glasgow. He could also close the door on the sixteen years of his life in colonial New Zealand and pursue new business opportunities in New South Wales.

The Third Cycle: The Final Flame of Ambition, 1889-1891

During the first half of the decade of the 1880s, O'Neill's commitment to the faith-based charitable mission to establish and consolidate the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales very much overshadowed his professional work.

¹⁰⁵ See anon., *EP*, 10 January 1880, 2, and C. O'Neill, "Correspondence to the Mayor and City Councillors, Wellington, 13 June 1878," Wellington.

¹⁰⁶ anon., *WangHer*, 5 January 1880, 2.

¹⁰⁷ New Zealand Parliament, *Letters Patent and Letters of Registration, Appendix to the Journals of the New Zealand House of Representatives*, 1881. Vol. 2. H-3.

Despite the prestige of gaining membership of the Institution of Engineers, London, O'Neill needed some time to set up professional practice in Sydney, then a city four times larger in population than Wellington. He had left behind most of his important business connections in New Zealand (many of these being businessmen of Scottish, mainly Protestant, background).

From 1884 onwards, just after the death of his sister Maria Gordon, O'Neill moved from Flagstaff Cottage, Balmain to more permanent lodgings at 200 Cumberland St, The Rocks.¹⁰⁸ His new location was better situated for managing the Society's casework and administration. However, he was not living alone for long, as his older brother John James joined him in 1885, assisting him with his charitable work and possibly in his business as well.¹⁰⁹

O'Neill joined the Engineering Association of New South Wales in 1883.¹¹⁰ His first known business address in Sydney was 24 O'Connell Street in 1883, and followed by a succession of addresses in Elizabeth Street between 1885 and 1891. The 1888 address at 84 Elizabeth Street also bore the name of 'Harbour Tunnels Office', most likely signifying the work undertaken designing the proposed extensions to Sydney's inner city railway including the two tunnels underneath Sydney Harbour for rail and passenger traffic.¹¹¹ This work, noted previously in Chapter Four, had started as early as January 1885 with O'Neill working with his colleague F. B. Gipps in preparing initial plans that were submitted to the then New South Wales Colonial Treasurer George Dibbs.

As O'Neill's professional reputation grew in Sydney, his advice was later sought by New South Wales legislators on water supply plans for country New South

¹⁰⁸ O'Neill's home address is given as 200 Cumberland St in all St Vincent de Paul Society, Particular Council of Sydney Reports from 1884 onwards, and also SVDP, "Attendance Roll of Saint Patrick's Conference, from 1st January 1885 to 1900." address list for 1894.

¹⁰⁹ NSWRegBD&M, "Copy, Certified Death Certificate, John O' Neill, 1901," Sydney.

¹¹⁰ EngAssNSW, *Corporate Membership List, Proceedings of the Engineering Association of New South Wales* (Engineering Association of NSW, 1888-89).

¹¹¹ The O'Neill's Elizabeth Street business addresses were 225 Elizabeth Street (1885), 53 Wentworth Court, Elizabeth Street (1886), 84 Elizabeth Street (1884), "Harbour Tunnels Office" 86 Elizabeth Street, as listed in *Sand's Sydney Business Directory* between the years 1883 to 1901, and compiled by C. Baxter, *A Man for the Millennium: Charles O'Neill* (Sydney, New South Wales: Society of St Vincent de Paul, NSW/ACT, 1999), p.49.

Wales. The most significant contribution came in 1888 on a bill seeking to supply water for the far west town of Broken Hill, investigating the feasibility of pumping water from the Darling River.¹¹²

He would have benefited from any professional fees associated with such advisory work to the New South Wales government. O'Neill's Irish Catholic connections enabled him to obtain contract work in designing schools and other church buildings.¹¹³

His friendship with former MLA and St Vincent de Paul Society volunteer Thomas Williamson, was instrumental in obtaining one useful contract. Williamson, then in local government, played an important role in helping with establishment of a Catholic Church-School at Rydalmere in north-western Sydney between 1889 and 1890. It was probably with Williamson's support that O'Neill gained the contract for the architectural work for the Holy Name of Mary Church, Rydalmere, constructed at a cost of £600.¹¹⁴ The church, the final one designed by O'Neill, was opened by Cardinal Moran in late February 1890.¹¹⁵ The fate of that church, destroyed by fire in 1915, reflected that of much of his church architectural legacy. As already noted in Chapter Two, St Mary's Cathedral Wellington (containing O'Neill's designed altar) was itself destroyed by fire in 1898, and few of his remaining Glasgow works survived the ravages of time, including the blitz of World War II. One of the more ironic aspects of the vicissitudes of O'Neill's legacy was that his charitable endeavours proved more enduring than most of the architectural structures that he had also laboured on during the course of his life.

Works such as these, whether for government advisory purposes or for church building construction, would have kept O'Neill in business although the precise

¹¹² O'Neill also provided advice on water planning for Temora. See Foley, "O' Neill, Charles Gordon (1828-1900)." For Broken Hill advice see NSW Parliament, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly 1887-88*, 1888. Vol. 2. 877-878.

¹¹³ For example, in May 1887, O'Neill called for tenders for the erection of new school buildings on the Beaconsfield Estate, Botany Road. See C. O'Neill, *FJ*, 7 May 1887, 15.

¹¹⁴ HolyNameParishCHComm, 17.

¹¹⁵ anon., "School-Church at Rydalmere," *FJ*, 8 March 1890, 15.

state of his finances over that period remains unknown. Towards the end of the 1880s, O'Neill made two significant decisions that revealed the unfinished business of his professional ambition influenced perhaps by a realisation that life was now passing him by very quickly.

The first decision came at the beginning of 1889, with O'Neill re-entering colonial politics by standing as a candidate for the seat of Sturt in the New South Wales elections in February 1889. The second, in July 1890, was his decision to become a Director of the Northumberland Banking Company. The former resulted in minor political embarrassment for O'Neill; the latter led to the greatest disaster in his life.

O'Neill's final foray into politics may have come at the encouragement of his friend Thomas Michael Slattery, an Irish Catholic MLA. Slattery represented the strongly Irish Catholic country district of Boorowa in southern New South Wales and probably recognised in O'Neill a candidate who, if successful, would increase Catholic representation in the Legislative Assembly. Slattery was also a protectionist and supporter of Sir George Dibbs, who became Premier for a brief period between February and March 1889 and subsequently a longer period between 1891 and 1894. Slattery himself served as Minister for Justice in Dibbs' short-lived minority government of 1889, returning as Secretary for Mines and Agriculture in 1891.¹¹⁶ Slattery had a very close friendship with Cardinal Moran, and in 1892 acted as O'Neill's defence barrister in the Northumberland Banking Company trial in 1892. The friendship between O'Neill and Slattery may have begun as early as 1885, when both participated in the inauguration of the Catholic Total Abstinence Association in New South Wales.¹¹⁷

O'Neill announced his candidacy for Sturt on 30 January 1889, a month prior to the election.¹¹⁸ Sturt, centred on the mining towns of Broken Hill and Silverton, was the kind of mining electorate that he knew well. Having advised the New

¹¹⁶ Utick, 202.

¹¹⁷ See list of attendees in anon., "The First Public Meeting of The Total Abstinence Association," *FJ*, 25 April 1885, 15.

¹¹⁸ anon., "The Elections, Country Electorates, Sturt," *DTel*, 30 January 1889, 3.

South Wales Government on the Broken Hill water supply in June the previous year, he had understood the development issues in this far western region. In early February, he set up headquarters in the Cumming Exchange Hotel in Silverton.¹¹⁹

O'Neill's major problem with the campaign derived from confusion over candidacy. Another protectionist candidate, Wyman Brown, a popular local police magistrate had also nominated.¹²⁰ While it was not then uncommon for several protectionist candidates to contest the same seat; the problem for O'Neill was that he was initially and mistakenly recorded in the Sydney press as a free trader.¹²¹ On his arrival in Broken Hill on the 8 February, he received a telegram from Dibbs asking him to withdraw from the contest, as Wyman Brown was seen as the protectionist candidate with the best local connections.¹²²

O'Neill appeared willing to comply with Dibbs' request. At an opening address at Broken Hill's Theatre Royal on 9 February, he first outlined a number of his policies. These included water conservation on a large scale, the construction of light rail to the settlement at Menindie, a telegraph to Broken Hill, cheaper mineral leases with more secure tenure for smaller miners, and advocacy of a labourer's right to purchase cheap land up to 20 acres.¹²³ However, he concluded the address by revealing the Dibbs' request and announced his intention to withdraw. The announcement angered many of his supporters at the Theatre. One of them, a certain Mr Nolan, attacked the Dibbs' candidate as a being part of 'a clique of capitalists' and the forced withdrawal of O'Neill's candidacy as an insult.¹²⁴ O'Neill, changing his mind again, continued on with the campaign.

¹¹⁹ anon., "Sturt Electorate," *SilverA*, 12 February 1889, 2.

¹²⁰ anon., "The Elections, Country Electorates, Sturt."

¹²¹ anon., "List of Candidates," *DTel*, 1 February 1889, 5. The mistake was not corrected until the edition of 7 February 1889.

¹²² See anon., "Editorial," *SilverA*, 7 February 1889, 2.

¹²³ anon., "The Sturt Election. Mr O' Neill at Broken Hill," *SilverA*, 11 February 1889, 2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

The local candidate Wyman Brown won the seat of Sturt handsomely on 13 February with 644 votes compared to 246 for O'Neill.¹²⁵ As an outsider and given the confusion surrounding the nature of his candidacy, O'Neill's tally was moderately respectable. For O'Neill himself, the episode was yet another reminder of political failure. A few days before the election, an anonymous letter appeared in Broken Hill's *Silver Age*. The letter pointed out:

Mr Wyman Brown is by far the better known...Of Charles O'Neill, the other candidate, we know very little except what he tells us of himself. He talks very grandly of borrowing £20,000,000...for irrigating the western district. He tells us he was a colleague of Sir Julius Vogel in the palmy days when that statesman was piling up the public debt of New Zealand, the burden of which is so crippling now. It seems a pity that Mr O'Neill, after assisting to place that unfortunate country in the sorry plight she is now, did not stop there and do what he could to help her out of it.¹²⁶

O'Neill's past political record had followed him across the Tasman. It was the last time he would stand for any political office. Other than the embarrassment of the campaign however, the only negative outcome for O'Neill was a final realisation that his political days were over. It would an entirely different matter for another decision he made some eighteen months later.

Throughout a long empire career in civil engineering and associated business endeavours, O'Neill had previously not been involved in either bank management or bank investment. In September 1889, he had overseen the establishment of the St Patrick's Penny Savings Bank, which deposited its own funds into the Bank of New South Wales. This may have been an indicator of O'Neill's subsequent interest in banking ventures. By any measure, nineteenth century banks could be risky ventures; even more so as the economic depression of the 1890s would demonstrate.

¹²⁵ anon., "Sturt, Broken Hill," *SMH*, 20 February 1889, 8.

¹²⁶ anon., "To the Editor," *SilverA*, 11 February 1889, 2.

Given his own record of business failure noted previously, O'Neill should have been expected to exercise due caution. Furthermore, he was well aware of the consequences of the failure of banks. For example in January 1885, St Patrick's Conference chaired by O'Neill received a letter for assistance from an unemployed Scot, one Allan Macpherson, who claimed to be a member of old Catholic Jacobite family from Moidart, in Invernesshire.¹²⁷ After receiving an education at Edinburgh University, Macpherson entered the banking industry eventually gaining employment at the City of Glasgow Bank and, in this letter, gave an account of his subsequent misfortune:

Little over 12 months and the City of Glasgow Bank closed its doors, throwing about 400 of branch employees out of employment. I got unsettled – tho' [sic] I spent about a year in my brother's office after and came to the Colonies about 3 years ago, 2½ years of which were spent in the back blocks.¹²⁸

Despite his own previous business difficulties and awareness of sobering experiences such as that of Macpherson, O'Neill agreed to become a Director in the Northumberland Banking Company headquartered at 28 Hunter Street Newcastle in July 1890. The bank had several branches across Newcastle and the surrounding Hunter district, including West Maitland and Wallsend.¹²⁹ He continued his involvement despite the inconvenience of his main business interests being located in Sydney. The decision demonstrated that he was still not averse to risk taking, although on paper this particular risk did not appear at first very great; he had initially deposited only a few pounds in this bank in February 1890 just prior to its establishment.

The key figure in this transaction was the bank's Managing Director, George Samuel Hadfield, who had offered O'Neill 100 shares (nominally worth £100) in

¹²⁷ SVDP, "St Patrick's Conference Minute Book, January-June 1885, Minutes 23 January, 1885," Sydney.

¹²⁸ A. Macpherson, "Correspondence to St Patrick's Conference, January 1885, 1885," Sydney.

¹²⁹ anon., "Advertisement: Northumberland Banking Company," *NMH&MA*, 3 June 1891, 4.

the company and with whom O'Neill seemed to have no prior connection.¹³⁰ Hadfield had advertised a nominal capital of £50,000 for the Northumberland Banking Company in promoting investment.¹³¹ However, such promotion was deceptive as the bank never actually raised that level of capital and its failure to do so would prove fatal for its later operations. Hadfield had never himself paid for the 100 shares he offered to O'Neill as an inducement to join the company's board. This is perhaps one piece of evidence that O'Neill was initially duped by Hadfield. The reason why Hadfield offered this inducement was that he was also keen to trade on the good reputation of prominent, respected community figures; O'Neill's Catholic connections might have been an additional bonus. It was then common practice for companies starting up operations to offer such citizens a number of shares.¹³² A reason why O'Neill might have been so induced may well have been that the position of Director could give him access to a line of credit for his business activities (this aspect emerged during the Northumberland Banking Company trial two years later).

As was common practice in nineteenth century banking, the Company's Board of Directors seemed to adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude with respect to supervision of management. Hadfield continued to operate the bank with the assistance of a young accountant Charles Low, who served as its General Manager. Under its rules of association, Hadfield could run the Northumberland Banking Company as he wished.

O'Neill only attended one Directors' meeting in person on 31 October 1890, and there was no evidence that he was directly involved with the Company's management after that.¹³³ At the subsequent meetings of Directors, O'Neill only conveyed his vote by proxy, probably exercised by Hadfield himself.¹³⁴ His only

¹³⁰ anon., "Northumberland Banking Company," *NMH&MA*, 12 December 1891, 2. How O'Neill originally met Hadfield is unknown.

¹³¹ anon., "Northumberland Banking Company," *NMH&MA*, 11 December 1891, 6. As late as 14 February 1891, the Company had only 6550 shares taken up and only 1500 of these were fully paid for.

¹³² This appeared to be the practice according to Thomas Slattery who defended O'Neill in 1892 legal proceedings. See anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases," *NMH&MA*, 1 March 1892, 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ See evidence by Charles Low in anon., "Northumberland Banking Company", *NMH&MA*, 12 December 1891, 2.

other bank related activities, providing evidence that Hadfield was trading on O'Neill's good name, was to open several branches in Newcastle.¹³⁵ Critically, O'Neill had by then extended his vulnerability to the bank's performance by applying for an additional 250 shares on 27 October 1890; at the time of the application, his formal account there stood in debit at £39 7s 6d.¹³⁶

A year later, as the harsh winds of financial crisis struck the Australian colonies, there was a run on the bank by depositors that soon exposed the mismanagement of the bank. Many customers, mostly miners and small business people, were ruined. The order for winding up the Northumberland Banking Company was granted by the Equity Court on 5 October 1891, and Herbert Priestley, a clerk employed by the liquidator L. Lloyd, began to discover serious discrepancies in the books.¹³⁷ At the closure of the bank, O'Neill's bank overdraft had risen to £393 10s. At the end of this third cycle of business failure, the flame of O'Neill's business ambitions finally burnt out, with his own personal reputation now at grave risk given the likelihood of legal prosecution.

Any focus on O'Neill's activities between 1889 and 1891 should also take into account a decision of an entirely different kind. By March 1891, O'Neill had joined the secular Third Order of Franciscans and had become its Lay Head in New South Wales.¹³⁸ St Francis of Assisi's sacrifice of his own wealth to the poor, for the sake of Christ, remained a powerful religious ideal in Christian spirituality for centuries. Catholic laypeople who wished to follow the spiritual ideals of St Francis of Assisi could join the Secular Franciscans, or Third Order of St Francis. While not expected to follow the same level of renunciation practiced by this saint, members were expected to wear a scapular and cord, receive the Catholic sacraments regularly and to practice kindness and charity. O'Neill may have been encouraged to join by the Reverend P. Kennedy ofm, the Franciscan priest who was both a friend and supporter of O'Neill's charitable activities. O'Neill's interest in Franciscan spirituality probably long predated his

¹³⁵ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6.

¹³⁶ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 1 March 1892, 6.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Utick, 226.

charitable mission of the 1880s; as noted earlier, his sister Catherine Ann had entered a Franciscan convent. Further, O'Neill might have inspired by Franciscanism as part of his experiencing the revival of Catholicism in Scotland during his adolescent years. The Franciscans had once been a significant religious order in Scotland, given that Franciscan friars on both sides of the Irish Sea had a long history of involvement in the Scottish Wars of Independence and nativist causes many centuries before.¹³⁹

Such religious movements were popular in the late nineteenth century; there were 5,000 followers of the Third Order of St Francis across Australia and 1,500 in Sydney alone.¹⁴⁰ The focus of Franciscan worship in Sydney was at the Friary in Victoria Street Waverley, where the cornerstone was laid by Cardinal Moran on 1 March 1891 attended by a host of Sydney dignitaries and politicians, including Sir Patrick Jennings. The Friary itself was formally opened in March 1893.¹⁴¹

O'Neill's decision to embrace Franciscan spirituality while at the same time pursuing a business career (particularly in banking) was superficially a contradiction but not necessarily a profound one. Numerous wealthy philanthropists supported Christian religious movements during the late nineteenth century. However, any devout adherent actively pursuing accumulation of personal wealth, while professing devotion to a saint who had discarded wealth as a means of serving Christ, might have experienced the guilt associated with a self-admission of hypocrisy. What could have heightened this tension within O'Neill would have been the degree of fervour with which he embraced his religious and charitable convictions, as evidenced by his commitment to the faith-based charitable mission of the 1880s.

As noted in Chapter Five, O'Neill's devotion to two Catholic saints of the poor, Vincent de Paul and Francis of Assisi, was marked by cuttings inserted into his

¹³⁹ N. Gallagher, "The Franciscans and the Scottish Wars of Independence: An Irish Perspective," *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁴⁰ anon., "The Third Order of St Francis," *CathPress*, 25 April 1896, 22.

¹⁴¹ C. Kelly, *The Provincial Chronicle of the Holy Spirit Province Australia – New Zealand Calendar of Source Material and Chronological Epitome, Franciscan Community in Australia 1879-1905* (Sydney, 1953), 54.

CoManual that included maxims attributed to these saints. The maxim from the second cutting in the series used by O'Neill in any examination of conscience, cut across this tension through its reference to both poverty and wealth, namely: '“My God and My all” S. Francis' constant prayer, explains his poverty and his wealth.' If O'Neill chose to emulate St Francis of Assisi, who had eschewed wealth, he would have to choose the poverty of Christ rather than pursuit of personal wealth. Hence, any pursuit of wealth would become an obstacle to the spiritual path to which he had now been drawn. Such internal tension may also have distracted him or lessened his assiduousness in worldly matters, something for which he would now pay dearly.

Public Humiliation and the Northumberland Banking Company Case

O'Neill's public life and whatever remained of his ambitions came to a sad and abrupt end on 4 December 1891, when two Sydney detectives arrested him in King Street, Sydney.¹⁴² It was only one day after he had relinquished all the offices of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales, including that of President of St Patrick's Church Hill Conference. Also on 4 December, detectives arrested Hadfield, the Managing Director of the failed Northumberland Banking Company, in Sydney's Hyde Park, while the bank's General Manager Charles Low and another Director Walter Sidney were arrested in Newcastle.

In Sydney, both O'Neill and Hadfield appeared before a magistrate, one Captain Fisher, under the charge of conspiring (together with Low and Sidney) 'to cheat and defraud Joseph Smith and others of divers sum of monies.'¹⁴³ Joseph Smith, a rural fencer from Willow Tree in the New England district, had deposited a sum of £300 in the banking company's West Maitland Branch in April 1891. Four months later, in the middle of a run on the bank, the bank failed to honour an agreement to repay Smith.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² anon., *SMH*, 5 December 1891, 9.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ anon., "Northumberland Banking Company", *NMH&MA*, 16 December 1891, 7.

O'Neill now found himself a key figure implicated in a major business scandal. The Northumberland Banking Company Case, as it became known, received major coverage in both *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* first in December 1891 and later from the beginning of March 1892 up until the end of the trial.¹⁴⁵

O'Neill found himself in custody in Maitland jail along with Hadfield, Low and Sidney. The preliminary hearing in the Newcastle Police Courts was held over the week between 10 and 16 December 1891, during which only O'Neill lacked legal representation.

From the outset of court proceedings, the evidence of serious financial malpractice by Hadfield and Low began to mount. During the December hearings, the positions of the two Directors O'Neill and Sidney were recognised as somewhat different from that Hadfield and Low, but there appeared to be some incriminating evidence. First was O'Neill's outstanding overdraft at the bank. Second, was an incomplete promissory note for £294 16s 1d, with 'C. O'Neill' pencilled in the bottom although a witness did not think that the actual signature was that of O'Neill himself.¹⁴⁶

In the face of evidence before him, the Police Magistrate judged:

that Sidney and O'Neill certainly occupied a different position to either of the [other two] accused, but that they [the Bench] thought that all the defendants should be brought to trial. They did not agree with what had been said as to the injury that would be done to either Sidney or O'Neill by sending them for trial. In fact, their characters would stand better if they were tried before a judge and jury and acquitted on the charge, than if they were discharged at a preliminary hearing.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Utick, 216. In an era before official court transcripts (advice from New South Wales State Archives), these newspaper accounts remain the sole record of the Northumberland Banking Company trials.

¹⁴⁶ anon., "Northumberland Banking Company," *NMH&MA*, 11 December 1891, 6.

¹⁴⁷ anon., "Northumberland Banking Company," *NMH&MA*, 17 December 1891, 7.

As a result, all four accused were remanded to appear in the Newcastle District Court on 29 February 1892, although bail was allowed. O'Neill was released on a personal surety of £300, which he must have been either able to raise himself or call on with the assistance of friends.¹⁴⁸

The public humiliation of O'Neill continued the following year during a trial which received more than the usual public attention. The Newcastle Quarter Sessions opened with a special ceremony on 29 February 1892, with the Mayor and many civic dignitaries present. The City of Newcastle now had a brand new courthouse, where His Honour Judge Backhouse would preside over the first trial held there, the Northumberland Banking Case. The trial was one of conspiracy to cheat and defraud, this time 'Peter Norgard and other customers, shareholders and depositors of the Northumberland Banking Company.'¹⁴⁹ The trial would last for three days, during which O'Neill and the other accused would be under the glare of public officials and an angry Newcastle public.

The Crown Prosecution team Wilfred Blacket and Charles Gilbert Heydon had little difficulty in exposing the conspiracy to defraud by Hadfield and his accomplice Low. The accused pair's activities involved making false statements in balance sheets, the signing over of large sums of money to each other, depositing money into each other's accounts, then withdrawing it as 'Directors fees' to cover it up or speculating with the proceeds.¹⁵⁰ At least £14,000 was found to be missing.¹⁵¹ However, proving that the two Directors O'Neill and Sidney were part of such a conspiracy was another matter entirely.

O'Neill had the good fortune to be defended by his close friend Thomas Slattery who, given his status as a State Minister, may have conveyed an air of authority in the court. J. Want QC defended Sidney, and many of the points Want made in Sidney's defence would have also assisted O'Neill given that both Directors were

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 1 March 1892, 6.

¹⁵⁰ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6.

¹⁵¹ See Justice Backhouse's summary comments after sentencing in anon., "The Northumberland Banking Company's Case", *NMH&MA*, 4 March 1892, 7.

in a similar situation with respect to the management of the bank's affairs.¹⁵² One complication (as well as embarrassment) for O'Neill was that the prosecutor Heydon was actually the brother of his friend and member of the Catholic establishment, Louis Heydon.¹⁵³

A key point in the defence was that the Crown was unable to prove that certain promissory notes allegedly signed by either O'Neill and Sidney actually bore their signatures. The witness Alexander Low, brother of the accused Charles Low, confirmed that neither Director had examined the books nor signed the schedules.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the practice of Directors signing script in blank, leaving it to be filled in later by the Managing Director, was deemed as a common but improper practice rather than illegal one.¹⁵⁵ In summary, both Directors appeared to be disconnected directly from the affairs of bank management, particularly O'Neill who had not attended any meetings of Directors since one held in October 1890.

However, the real problem for O'Neill was explaining the big overdraft of over £393, despite Hadfield's obvious manipulation of the accounts. Prosecutor Heydon tried to mount a case that the big overdraft was evidence of O'Neill's complicity in the corrupt practices of the Northumberland Banking Company. Slattery's defence was to show that the responsibility for allowing overdrafts resided with Hadfield who, despite initial reservations, was only too willing to extend O'Neill's overdraft when he learned of O'Neill's connection with plans for the Broken Hill Water Supply Scheme.¹⁵⁶ As character references, Slattery piled on the table O'Neill's commission from the Lanarkshire Regiment and testimonials from prominent New Zealand political figures including William Fitzherbert, James Macandrew and John Williamson.¹⁵⁷ Use of the regiment

¹⁵² anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6. See Mr J.C. Want QC's address to the jury.

¹⁵³ Bennett and Rutledge.

¹⁵⁴ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* See Justice Backhouse's comments about such practices in a reply to Slattery's defence of O'Neill.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

commission again demonstrated how important was his membership of the Lanarkshire Regiment to O'Neill's own sense of honour. Possibly mindful of avoiding any embarrassment to the Catholic establishment, Slattery did not raise O'Neill's long-standing record of commitment to public benevolence and charity.

In what may have been an attempt to sully O'Neill's overall character, the prosecutor Heydon accused O'Neill of pocketing £100 on the pretext of standing for the Broken Hill seat of Sturt during the 1889 election and then not doing so.¹⁵⁸ This was an odd charge given that O'Neill's involvement in this election predated his involvement in the Northumberland Banking Company and the actual record of O'Neill's campaign seemed to count against that accusation. As already noted, O'Neill had been instructed by Dibbs to withdraw from the campaign yet, after reflection, had nevertheless continued to stand. Heydon may have sensed that the case against O'Neill was slipping away in making such a baseless accusation.

More pertinent was Heydon's caustic final shot at O'Neill in the courtroom:

the fact remained that that he owed the bank over £300 and had never lodged a shilling of security or paid any of it back. It would take a lot of commissions in the Lanarkshire Rifles to make the accused honest enough to see that for months he was closely identified with a bogus institution.¹⁵⁹

Importantly, Heydon's criticism of O'Neill was based on the fact he was 'closely identified' with a bogus institution, not that he ran it. The real question remained as to how much O'Neill knew about the bogus operations and when. As a consequence, the real cost for O'Neill would be his exposure as a foolish business incompetent rather than as a criminal.

The Jury delivered its verdict on Wednesday 2 March 1892. In summary, Hadfield and Low were found guilty, receiving prison sentences, while the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Directors O'Neill and Sydney were acquitted.¹⁶⁰ O'Neill might have been legally exonerated but at age approaching 64 (an advanced age for the era), he probably emerged from the trial a shaken and humiliated figure.

While only the newspaper reports of the evidence and outcomes of the trial remain, certain observations can be drawn from them about O'Neill's involvement in the Northumberland Banking Company. The trial did give O'Neill a legal clearance to his name; the court found no complicity by O'Neill in the actual mismanagement of the Company. Further, it was clear that Hadfield was grossly misusing his power over the Company by swindling investors and depositors while exercising complete control over the monies lent out as loans.

Hadfield's dealings with O'Neill require further elaboration. As noted previously, one piece of evidence that O'Neill was being duped was the original offer of 100 shares as an inducement to become a Director at a publically promoted value of £100. This offer was deceptively inflated by Hadfield, the actual worth being unknown. However, O'Neill did not have to pay for this original offer of shares.

The biggest mistake made by O'Neill was to make an application for an additional 250 shares in October 1890, as a result of which he foolishly agreed to become a significant debtor to the bank, for (as noted by Heydon in the prosecution) O'Neill never lodged any security for their acquisition. The cost to O'Neill was that this enabled Hadfield to record a loan worth £250 to O'Neill to gain shares worth nowhere near that amount. In such ways, Hadfield could pass the risk onto investors. It is possible that Hadfield had recognised a fatal weakness in O'Neill's business acumen. This was an inability to properly estimate the value of capital shareholdings, a flaw which had probably been the cause of the breakup of O'Neill's partnership with Henderson over the Wellington Steam Tramway Company. However, Hadfield would not have proceeded with such a loan had he not been convinced of O'Neill's capacity to repay. In the short term, Hadfield could trade on the name of a respected

¹⁶⁰ anon., "The Northumberland Banking Company's Case", *NMH&MA*, 3 March 1892, 7. Hadfield and Low would later be sentenced to seven year's hard labour in Parramatta gaol. See anon., "The Northumberland Banking Company's Case," *NMH&MA*, 4 March 1892, 7.

community figure, while O'Neill initially received a minor sum for management expenses.¹⁶¹

While O'Neill might not have been legally responsible for the management of the bank according to the business standards of the day, there remain at least two ethical issues which surround his involvement with the bank. The first was the degree of O'Neill's responsibility as a Director. The second was his use of the bank as an overdraft facility up to the period of the bank's collapse.

With respect to his responsibility as a Director, Slattery's defence maintained that O'Neill understood his role as a nominal one with no real power over a management of the bank. In an age of 'gentlemen's agreements', O'Neill had considered neither this, nor the risks involved in signing blank scripts for use by the bank's management, to be a problem. While this might appear unacceptable by contemporary corporate standards, they reflected the business arrangements of the nineteenth century. Further in his defence of O'Neill, Slattery also maintained that O'Neill had not sought re-election as a Director during 1891.¹⁶² In its editorial of 4 March 1892, *The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* could not resist the comment: 'This case, among other things, ought to show all those who consider that the position of a director of a bank is a more or less ornamental one, the absurdity and danger of their belief.'¹⁶³

This was a criticism not just of O'Neill but of the management of banks then under pressure across the Australian colonies with the onslaught of depression. In New South Wales, bank collapses would peak in 1893, forcing action by the Dibbs administration.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ See anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6. According to the evidence, O'Neill received £10 10s 'in three cheques from the bank, and the sums put down in management expenses'. Whether this represented three instalments of £10 10s each, or three instalments *totalling* £10 10s is unclear from the record. Either way, his income from this source was not great.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ anon., "Editorial", *NMH&MA*, 4 March 1892, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Mansfield. During the banking crisis of May 1893, the Dibbs administration gave the banks power to issue inconvertible paper money for a period.

Nonetheless, O'Neill's association with such a rotten institution would hang like an albatross round his neck. What must have been particularly galling for O'Neill, who had worked so hard for the poor throughout his life, was that this institution had contributed to the loss of the life savings of many hard working folk. Even if judged innocent in the courts and subject to financial loss, O'Neill might still be judged harshly in the court of public opinion.

The other ethical issue was the honesty of O'Neill in building up the overdraft at the bank while the enterprise was failing. Early in O'Neill's defence and despite emphasising Hadfield's sole responsibility for approving advances and loans, Slattery made the following concession: 'He [O'Neill] was still liable for the money, and would have to pay it, if he could, and he was no worse than those many others who got advances from Hadfield.'¹⁶⁵

The circumstances surrounding O'Neill's overdraft were complicated in that £250 of the £393 he owed the bank was for the unpaid shares he had applied for in October 1890, and mitigated by the flexibility that Hadfield had exercised over the terms of its repayment. One point made by defence counsel Want in his defence of Sidney, that was also relevant to O'Neill, was that sums these Directors received were very small in relation to their respective shareholdings.¹⁶⁶ As a consequence, had these Directors been complicit in the schemes of Hadfield, they would have been doing themselves harm by 'robbing the bank' and by so doing reducing the value of their shareholdings.

O'Neill, as with others who received advances and loans, had no control over the timing of the collapse of the bank, and as bad as the decision to take on such a debt proved from a business point of view, it was not (on the face of it) a dishonest one. Given the mismanagement of the financial accounts by Hadfield and Low, full details of the O'Neill transactions will probably never be uncovered. The penalty for O'Neill as with others who had made such poor decisions would have been the loss of business assets. However, unlike his

¹⁶⁵ For Slattery's comments of O'Neill's liability, see anon., "The Northumberland Banking Cases", *NMH&MA*, 2 March 1892, 6.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

circumstances in Glasgow in 1863, there is no record of his subsequently going bankrupt.¹⁶⁷ Given this, one might assume that he would have been in a position to meet any claims by creditors or debtors arising from this debacle.

Furthermore, he maintained his profession for a few years afterwards, practicing until 1897 at latest, although his membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers lapsed in 1895.¹⁶⁸ His last known professional advice was to a Royal Commission on the Sydney City Railway Extension on 13 April 1897. His plan was for a double line of railway from the Eveleigh Railway Yards in Redfern to Bridge Street in the City at a cost of £300,000, and a tunnel with railway line under Sydney Harbour from Bridge Street across to Lavender Bay to connect with Sydney's North Shore line, this latter costing £320,000.¹⁶⁹ Nothing came of this, and by this time his capacity to earn a living must have ceased.

Consequences of O'Neill's departure from the leadership of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales

O'Neill had already made his intention known to retire from the leadership of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales at an Annual General Meeting and Breakfast held at St Benedict's Broadway on 19 July 1891. This was at least three months before the collapse of the Northumberland Banking Company. That there was some difficulty in finding a replacement is suggested by Cardinal Moran's encouragement that he remain in the post for a further five months. Whether O'Neill had any inkling of the problems at the Northumberland Banking Company back in July is unknown. However, the fact that O'Neill resigned from all Society offices a day before his arrest clearly delivered the Society from any immediate public embarrassment. The breaking of the bank scandal merely brought the matter of his retirement from Society leadership to an inexorable conclusion.

¹⁶⁷ O'Neill is not listed on the Bankruptcy Index compiled by NSW State Records (covering the period 1888-1928).

¹⁶⁸ See Utick, 225. According to an email communication sent to the Society in Sydney 1999 from the Institution, O'Neill was erased from membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers between September 1894 and January 1895.

¹⁶⁹ NSW Parliament, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly 1897, Royal Commission on City Railway Extension – Minutes of Evidence*, 1898. Vol. 4. 105.

Within the Society, O'Neill received support from his loyal Vice President William Cracknell. On 14 December 1891, ten days after O'Neill faced charges in relation to the collapse of Northumberland Banking Company, Cracknell urged the Society's Sydney Particular Council at St Patrick's Church Hill to write O'Neill a letter of sympathy, commenting: 'he did not believe him to be guilty of the charge made against him and had no doubt his innocence would be proved satisfactorily after the investigation had taken place.'¹⁷⁰

O'Neill briefly visited the Council at a special meeting a week later. The minutes recorded the following response:

After the usual prayers, Brother O'Neill addressed the meeting and expressed his gratitude to the Council for its resolution of sympathy with him in his trouble and assured the Brothers that his constant prayer would be for the welfare of the Society - he then retired...¹⁷¹

O'Neill's resignation had two consequences for the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales. The first was that, initially, Moran assumed responsibility for its future until a more permanent replacement could be found for O'Neill. This fitted in well with Moran's emerging concerns about the rights of labour and the poor in the midst of the economic depression. The second was that it created a vacuum in Society leadership in New South Wales that was ultimately filled by Louis Heydon who ushered in a highly conservative approach to charity.

Moran's concern about the conditions of the poor also reflected developments within the Catholic Church in Europe. Belatedly, and possibly in response to the new dawn of an international socialist movement, the Catholic Church began to recognise the rights of workers in an age of unfettered capital. In May 1891, Pope Leo XIII released an encyclical, *On the Condition of the Working Classes* or *Rerum Novarum*, defending the rights of workers, including just wages, rights of association through unions, and assistance in times of unemployment, sickness,

¹⁷⁰ SVDP, *Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 14 December 1891*.

¹⁷¹ SVDP, *Minutes of the Particular Council of Sydney, General Meeting, 21 December 1891* (Sydney: SVDPA Folder 12, 1891).

and old age.¹⁷² The legacy and views of Ozanam and other nineteenth century progressive Christian thinkers were finally beginning to bear fruit. In Australia itself within a few decades, the Victorian industrial judge and politician Henry Bournes Higgins, of Protestant background, was influenced by such progressive Christian thinking in his development of legislation supporting minimum wages for labourers.¹⁷³

To what extent O'Neill's previous charitable mission for the sake of the poor in New South Wales might have influenced Moran is uncertain, although Moran's strong support for the St Vincent de Paul Society from the outset of his appointment as Archbishop of Sydney is clear. What was probably understood by Moran was the value to the Catholic Church of the active presence of O'Neill's charitable mission (including O'Neill himself) in the slums of The Rocks, in an era of evangelical slum missions.

In a *Public Lecture on the Rights and Duties of Labour* published in August 1891 (three months after *Rerum Novarum*), Moran made it quite clear that his sympathies lay with the labouring classes in the slums, concluding: 'Let no one imagine that religion and morality have nothing to say about the condition of these things.'¹⁷⁴

Scenes of misery could now be found in the inner Sydney suburbs. In 1892, the Society was called upon to assist in the distribution of monies from the 'Town Hall Fund' set up by the mayor, parliamentarians and prominent citizens, to help the unemployed and their families.¹⁷⁵ Between July and December, £331 was distributed from this Fund.¹⁷⁶ Three new conferences were also established that

¹⁷² Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter, Rerum Novarum or on the Condition of the Working Classes, 15 May 1891* (Boston, USA: Pauline Books and Media, 1991 reprint), 48-51.

¹⁷³ T. M. Kearney, "The Life and Times of Henry Bournes Higgins – Politician and Judge (1851-1929)," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 11 (1989).

¹⁷⁴ Cardinal Patrick Moran, *Lecture on the Rights and Duties of Labour, 17 August 1891* (Sydney: Finn & Brothers and Co., 1891), 15.

¹⁷⁵ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1892* (Sydney, 1893), 6.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

year, St Peter's Surry Hills (June 1892), Holy Name of Mary Hunter's Hill (June 1892) and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Randwick (October 1892).¹⁷⁷

Moran initially took Society affairs into his own hands, writing on 25 January 1892 to Baudon's successor as President-General of the Society in Paris, Antonin Pagès, informing him of the situation. Pagès reply to Moran was formal, portraying minimal sympathy for O'Neill's situation:

the General-Council and I have thanked God that Your Eminence has taken the interests of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in hand, as the arrest of its president could have proven to be a mortal blow. Mr O'Neill was only known to us by his services to our Society, first in Glasgow where he founded several Conferences, then in New Zealand and finally in Sydney. There was nothing that could make us doubt his honourable character and his dedication. If the Vice-Presidents of the Particular Council did not impose his resignation, they should have forewarned us. We would probably have intervened by asking Mr O'Neill to retire before the lawsuits started.¹⁷⁸

Pagès' letter seemed not to have taken into account O'Neill's decision to stay on at Moran's insistence until December 1891, before voluntarily retiring. From a French perspective admittedly, the letter also failed to acknowledge presumption of innocence under English law.

Later in 1892, with Moran's approval, the Society in New South Wales appointed an Englishman W. Synnott who filled the role of President until March 1893 when Synnott returned to Britain.¹⁷⁹ To his credit, Synnott, in writing to Pagès in May 1892 defended the behaviour of Vice President Cracknell:

¹⁷⁷ Egan, 5.

¹⁷⁸ A. Pagès, "Copy of Correspondence to Cardinal Patrick Moran, 15 March 1892, 1892," Louis Heydon Papers, Sydney. This extract has been translated from the French.

¹⁷⁹ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1891*, 12.

I think Bro. Cracknell did the best he could under the circumstances; he could hardly have seen that the arrest of Bro. Chas. O'Neill was pending. I think however that Bro. O'Neill should not have held on to the office of President so long; but he was wise enough to resign before his arrest so that no disgrace has been laid upon the Society.¹⁸⁰

Synnott proceeded by clearing the air about O'Neill:

Bro. O'Neill was, some time ago, acquitted by the jury of charges brought against him. He is now a free man, and has been of great assistance to me by his good advice since I took over this office. I sincerely think that it was high time there should have been a change in the Council Board.¹⁸¹

However, as Synnott's letter indicated, there was a desire within the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales to move on from the decade of O'Neill's charismatic leadership. It did not take long for the vacuum to be filled.

Louis Heydon, the new president of Hunters Hill Conference, by then had acquired a significant political and public reputation. He was a lawyer and parliamentarian, briefly Minister for Justice in the Robertson Ministry, Attorney-General in the Dibbs Ministry and a MLC from December 1893.¹⁸² As noted previously in Chapter Five, Heydon had at least a friendly acquaintance with O'Neill as early as 1884; and both had been members of the Catholic Total Abstinence Society.¹⁸³

Moran had little difficulty in persuading Heydon to accept the President's role after writing to him in May 1894:

I must ask you to acquiesce in what appears to be the wish of the Particular Council of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society that you should be President.

¹⁸⁰ W. Synnott, "Copy, Correspondence to Antonin Pagès, President-General, Society of St Vincent De Paul, 14 May 1892, 1892," St Vincent de Paul Society Records c.1891-1974, Sydney.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Bennett and Rutledge.

¹⁸³ See anon., "The First Public Meeting of The Total Abstinence Society," *FJ*, 25 April 1885, 15. Heydon and O'Neill were both listed as members.

A stranger coming in as President will not be acquainted with the routine of work and with the many great things that may be achieved by the Society.¹⁸⁴

Between July 1894 and July 1897, Heydon held the position of President of the Particular Council of Sydney, which operated from offices in Lyndhurst Chambers, 84 Elizabeth Street.¹⁸⁵ Heydon, in turn, was succeeded by Thomas Murphy, who had served as Secretary under O'Neill, with William Coogan serving as Vice President.¹⁸⁶

Given the strength of the Society's organisation in New South Wales, Heydon immediately sought approval from President-General Pagès in Paris for the setting up of a Superior Council of Australasia. In April 1895, Paris approved such a Council that was constituted in Sydney on 8 October 1895, and formally instituted by the Society's Council-General on 9 December 1895.¹⁸⁷ Heydon became its first President. This Council (the forerunner of the Society's National Council of Australia) brought together representatives of the Particular Council of Melbourne led by Frances Healy, and others from Adelaide, Brisbane, Wellington and Christchurch.

Also as noted in Chapter Five, Heydon promoted a very conservative approach to the provision of charity that interpreted the relations between the poor and the rich in terms of the ordering of human society according to Divine Providence, and the value of charity primarily in terms of the sanctification of Society members. Coming from a relatively privileged establishment background, Heydon did not reflect the new Catholic thinking underpinning *Rerum Novarum*. By contrast, Moran with his newly expressed concerns about the rights of labour, appeared to be the more progressive. The incarnational spirituality of the Christ of the poor, promoted by O'Neill during his faith-based charitable mission, faded

¹⁸⁴ Cardinal Patrick Moran, "Correspondence to Louis Heydon, 31 May 1894, 1894," Sydney..

¹⁸⁵ Egan, 13; Utick, 223.

¹⁸⁶ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales, to the Council-General in Paris for the Year 1897* (Westmead, Sydney, 1898), 3.

¹⁸⁷ Egan, 15; Utick, 223.

away with his wider influence within the New South Wales Society, although over time it would be partly recovered.

O'Neill's public fall had ultimately resulted in the New South Wales Society embracing a highly conservative leadership, perhaps in a desire to project an establishment image during a highly sectarian era. Despite inheriting the formidable administration founded by O'Neill and his previous acquaintance with him, Heydon is not on record as ever consulting him or making any public acknowledgement of the legacy. The possible influence of Heydon's brother, Charles Gilbert Heydon, who had prosecuted O'Neill during the Northumberland Banking Company case, cannot be discounted. Heydon's brother, despite failing to prove O'Neill's complicity in the scandal, had nonetheless publically exposed O'Neill as a business incompetent. It was therefore perhaps convenient for Louis Heydon that O'Neill withdraw into obscurity in the slums of The Rocks.

For his own part, O'Neill did not abandon the Society. A year after he had been exonerated, he re-joined St Patrick's Church Hill Conference in 1893 and, together with his brother John, remained on the list of active members attending meetings regularly until a few months before his death in November 1900.¹⁸⁸ His close friendship with local Society volunteers under successive Conference Presidents, Joseph Kelly (1893-1894), Joseph Carroll (1895-1896), and Thomas Dignan (1897 onwards) probably provided both the then elderly O'Neill brothers with social and well as spiritual support. The precise details of the O'Neill's brothers' charitable activities during these twilight years remain obscure although, as will be seen in Chapter Seven, they were not forgotten.

Facing the Vicissitudes: the Evidence from the CoManual

Each respective cycle of the vicissitudes was marked by an increased tension in O'Neill's life between commitment to faith-based Catholic charity on one hand, and on professional ambition on the other. At the end of each cycle, the fusion

¹⁸⁸ SVDP, "Attendance Roll of Saint Patrick's Conference, from 1st January 1885 to 1900, 1900," Sydney. The Attendance Roll contains details of successive Presidents, and the attendance of the O'Neill brothers at the conference meetings.

between these two defining elements of his life became fragmented. O'Neill shifted his priorities towards professional ambition in 1863 at the end of the first cycle of the vicissitudes and then committed much of his life to faith-based charity with the mission between 1880 and 1891 at the end of the second. The tragic circumstances of the third cycle, between 1889 and 1892, brought these matters to a head. One common feature of each of these three cycles, during 1863 in Glasgow, between 1876 and 1880 in Wellington, and between 1889 and 1892 in New South Wales, was that O'Neill's attention was deeply divided between faith-based charity and professional ambition, and this may have contributed to his business difficulties.

No surviving piece of correspondence remains which might shed any light on the final eight years of O'Neill's life. Only a bequest, and one reported statement, made while O'Neill was close to death, defines anything of significance to the understanding of his life during these twilight years.

The bequest was O'Neill's handing over to one William Davis, a young member of St Patrick's Conference, of his precious *CoManual* at some unknown time close to his death.¹⁸⁹ Given O'Neill's reduced circumstances and the significance of the *CoManual* to his faith and life commitment to charity, this gift would mark O'Neill's final great act of charity, his signature within the inside cover conveying a message to posterity. There may have been another level of meaning attached to this bequest to Davis. O'Neill would have been aware, particularly from the preaching of his Marist friend Piquet, of an earlier William Davis of The Rocks receiving custody of the Holy Eucharist wafer some eighty years previously after the deportation of the Reverend Jeremiah O'Flynn.¹⁹⁰

The symbolism of his handing over the *CoManual* informed by the earlier account, if such intention was present, would have therefore been a very sacred (indeed

¹⁸⁹ Utick, 3.

¹⁹⁰ For further about this William Davis episode see O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 14-16.

sacramental) act by O'Neill.¹⁹¹ However, in the absence of such an intention, having a recipient bear the same name would have only been a coincidence. Piquet's surviving letter of May 1930 to a then much older Davis provided information about O'Neill and the establishment of the St Patrick's Church Hill Conference of the St Vincent de Paul Society in 1881.¹⁹² Piquet's letter may have been in response to Davis' own enquiries about the matter, perhaps being unsure as to why he, Davis, might have been so honoured.

The reported statement by O'Neill was later published in a short obituary published in the *Freeman's Journal*, which appeared nine days after his death. That obituary noted of O'Neill, it was sufficient for him that his sufferings and trials were the will of the Almighty, and to that Divine Will 'he always bowed in submission'.¹⁹³ O'Neill's final reflections on his suffering and trials resonated with the anonymous 'vicissitudes' inscription in the frontispiece of the *CoManual* and, as this Chapter has explored, the three cycles of vicissitudes experienced by O'Neill over the course of his life.

O'Neill's sense of resignation in this reported statement may have included a recognition that his commitment to faith-based charity, driven as it was by an intense faith, had ultimately triumphed over professional ambition and that this too was a sign of God's will. In this way he had most likely come to make sense of the vicissitudes and, although he had not drawn from the stark Biblical injunction from the Gospel of Matthew that one 'cannot serve God and wealth', the implication was clear.¹⁹⁴ To a believer, this might be seen as a sign of humility, to an unbeliever, a delusionary comfort in the face of his misfortunes. At the end, and after experiencing the fleeting successes and subsequent failures that these vicissitudes entailed, O'Neill seems to have abandoned worldly judgements about success and failure that he might have applied two decades previously.

¹⁹¹ The sacramental nature that some still approach Society work has been observed in recent comments by John Murphy, see Murphy, "Suffering, Vice and Justice: Religious Imaginaries and Welfare Agencies in Post-War Melbourne," 293.

¹⁹² Piquet.

¹⁹³ anon., "The late Mr Charles O' Neill M.I.C.E.," *FJ*, 17 November 1900, 12.

¹⁹⁴ See Matthew 6:24.

The evidence of the *CoManual*, particularly the series of maxims (all bar one extracted from the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar), convey the depth of O'Neill's religious conviction and high level of commitment, particularly as these were likely serving as an instrument of examination of conscience. Some of these have been discussed either in this Chapter or Chapter Five; the full series is reproduced at Illustration 3 (see pages 344-345). Further examination of the remainder of these maxims reveals even more about O'Neill's spiritual concerns.

The first three maxims in the two page series of cuttings respectively exhort the reader to purity, prayer and poverty as witness to the gospel. It is likely that these became constants in O'Neill's religious practice. The significance of the first: 'What the lily is amongst flowers, purity is among virtues' and the third; 'My God and my all. S. Francis' constant prayer explains his poverty and his wealth' have been dealt with previously, but the latter deserves some further consideration. Given O'Neill's desire for professional ambition and business success, it was most likely this admonition that weighed most heavily on O'Neill. It is also relevant that Piquet, in the 1930 correspondence to Davis, noted in reference to O'Neill:

The funds at the start were very low, like the Founder [i.e. O'Neill] and his Brother John, very poor. But such was his unbounded trust in Divine Providence, and optimistic turn of mind, that I do not remember the little vigorous Conference, ever to have turned down a deserving case.¹⁹⁵

Piquet's comment is evidence that evangelical poverty was a characteristic of O'Neill even at the commencement of his faith-based charitable mission. However, what remains unknown is the extent to which his reputed poverty could be attributed more to personal sacrifice rather than personal misfortune. There is sufficient evidence that both were relevant to O'Neill's situation.

The second and fifth maxims in the series focused specifically on prayer, something to which O'Neill with his busy professional and charitable commitments, may have found a challenge to commit time. The second maxim,

¹⁹⁵ Piquet.

linked to the Feast of (then Blessed) St John Leonardi, posed a problem for the reader: 'If you knew but how to pray, and if you loved to pray, how good and faithful your life would be.' Specifically, O'Neill must have striven to place prayer at the centre of his intentions and was working toward the answers he required in order to cultivate what he believed would be a more fruitful relationship with God and with the poor. He seemed to have been inspired by the belief that this might result, if such prayer was less of a chore and more an involvement of the heart.¹⁹⁶ The fifth maxim, linked to the Feast of the Holy Redeemer, proclaimed; 'to pray is to hold in our hand the key to all heavenly treasure.' The sentiment reflected a thought from Luke 11:9, (i.e. 'ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you'). Through this sentiment, O'Neill was encouraged to believe that prayer was asking for the kind of gift from which all other gifts flow.¹⁹⁷ Its context for O'Neill's charitable work was that even though financial resources were limited, prayer would be a way of calling on the unstinted generosity of God.

The fourth maxim, linked to the Feast of St Columban, Abbot, appeared to address itself to an intensely active person; 'Remain always peaceful, calmly continuing your daily labour; even more than that "be joyful"'. The exhortation to remain peaceful, while calmly continuing one's labour, stands in stark contrast to the kind of experience promised by ambition. This sentiment also conveys O'Neill's longing for the kind of joy experienced by St Francis of Assisi, who believed that with God truly his 'All', one could become a 'channel of peace', as a calm heart communicated the peace of Christ to the world.¹⁹⁸ In dealing with the downcast and suffering, it would have been difficult to maintain a joyful spirit; the sentiment also conveys the point that only a God-centred joy could provide lasting hope in the midst of the world's evils. By contrast, any joys experienced during the vicissitudes of life were fleeting.

¹⁹⁶ Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O'Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 22-23.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 25.

The sentiments contained in the fifth maxim (linked to the Feast of St Anslem, Doctor), the seventh (linked to the Feast of St Rose of Lima), the eighth (linked to the Feast of St Barnabas, Apostle) as well as five other maxims of relevance to attitudes towards the poor, have also been examined in either this Chapter or in Chapter Five.

The order or sequence of the maxims may have had some meaning for O'Neill that has been subsequently lost. However, the final insertion, the extract from the *Daily Telegraph* of 31 July 1886, brings the series to an abrupt conclusion. Strikingly different from the other-worldly sentiments from the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar, particularly with its reference to 'hard lot of garret and hovel', the extract drags the reader in its finality to the reality of the slums. In addition to the potential emotional significance to O'Neill of the abandoned women and children discussed earlier in this chapter, there is also the image of an MP, in this case the Irish Liberal John Morley, campaigning on the conditions of the poor. The image may have ignited some residual guilt in O'Neill, given that during his ten years in the New Zealand Parliament, he had not pursued this issue to the same extent as other matters that were driven by his professional ambition. The reference to the garret echoes another by St Vincent de Paul Society founder Ozanam who referred to: 'climbing the stairs of the poor man's garret, sitting by his bedside, feeling the same cold that pierces him, sharing the secrets of his lonely heart and troubled mind.'¹⁹⁹ Thus, for O'Neill, the miserable world of the slums became the focal point of a practical Christian life, and the end of the spiritual journey until death.

The *CoManual* inserts contain two maxims that provide evidence that O'Neill had his own death in mind from the outset of his charitable mission. The first, already noted in Chapter Five, was that attributed to St Vincent de Paul, appearing as a separate pasting entry appearing on the bottom of the left hand frontispiece of the *CoManual*: 'Those who love the poor in life shall have no fear of death.' Given O'Neill's belief in the Catholic doctrine of mercy and the Gospel sentiment of Matthew 25:40 (i.e. 'just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'), his ministry of charity would provide an him with

¹⁹⁹ Baunard, 279.

hope that he would be granted salvation after death. A complimentary sentiment is contained in the eleventh extract in the later series. Linked to the Feast of St Marcellinus, Pope, it attributes to 'S. Phil. (probably St Philip Neri) the following: Words cannot express the beauty of a soul of a man who dies in the grace of God'. This would have served as a consolation to O'Neill, as he witnessed the ugliness and death surrounding the lives of poor, to contemplate an eternal spiritual beauty infused with the grace of God.²⁰⁰ There is little doubt that it was a goal that he himself was striving for.

The evidence of the *CoManual*, when taken together with his final recorded statement about the lessons of his trials and sufferings and submission to the Divine Will, reveal much about O'Neill's search for a permanent hope, beyond the false promises and subsequent travails he had experienced. He had taken to heart the need to sort out the 'lessons of heavenly wisdom' that the anonymous writer had pointed to in the frontispiece of the *CoManual*, and as an 'exile' seek a more permanent home in a heavenly realm. Thus did his life end by submission in faith to Divine Providence as a solace in the midst of the vicissitudes of life. Such faith promised an eternal life that would outlast any such temporal vicissitudes.

²⁰⁰ Kelly, "The Spirituality of Charles Gordon O' Neill (1828-1900). The Evidence of a Manual," 30.

Chapter Seven: The Aura of the Pauper's Grave and Conclusions

Thanatography: O'Neill's Death and its Aftermath

The circumstances of O'Neill's death were not remarkable, nor were they without some pain. He died in Saint Vincent's Hospital Sydney on 8 November 1900 aged 72 years, of complications caused by 'senile gangrene'.¹ During his final days in hospital, while 'mindful of the great charity work to the last', he was attended by his friend the Marist priest Piquet.² Alone and helpless, his older brother John James soon died in the Little Sisters of the Poor Home in Randwick on 13 June 1901. He had survived his younger brother by less than a year.³

By contrast, the months in the lead-up to his death had been traumatic for Sydney's The Rocks district and much of the city beyond. The foul conditions of Sydney's docksidcs and decaying inner slums became a perfect setting for the outbreak of bubonic plague in January 1900, its first victim being a van driver Arthur Payne of Ferry Lane, Millers Point. Between January and August 1900, some 303 Sydney residents became infected and 103 would die, although most of these came from outside The Rocks.⁴ The kind of slum poverty that O'Neill had spent much of his life trying to redress had become a social problem for the newly emerging nation, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne.

The circumstances of O'Neill's funeral and burial, two days after his death, were extremely modest. By any measure, it was a sign that any memory of his philanthropic legacy seemed likely to disappear quickly. A funeral cortège left Saint Vincent's Hospital at 1.30 pm for the Mortuary Station, Central Sydney, to accompany his remains to Rookwood Cemetery.⁵ A few of O'Neill's friends and fellow members from St Patrick's Church Hill Conference attended, including Thomas Dignan and William Davis. Only one senior Society figure, Thomas

¹ NSWRegBD&M, "Copy, Certified Death Certificate, Charles O' Neill, 1900," Sydney.

² Piquet.

³ NSWRegBD&M, "Copy, Certified Death Certificate, John O' Neill."

⁴ Kelly, *A Certain Sydney 1900, a Photographic Introduction to Hidden Sydney*, 6-8.

⁵ Utick, 2.

Murphy, a solicitor and then President of the Particular Council of Sydney, was among them. A Rookwood Catholic priest, the Reverend Peter O'Reilly, read the prayers over the gravesite.⁶

It was also something of a sign of O'Neill's actual poverty that no tombstone was erected at the time. The absence of one moved Murphy, who was probably instrumental in launching an appeal to the Society's Superior Council of Australasia.⁷

By mid-1902, a handsome monument of rough marble, capped by a white Carrara marble cross, was purchased by voluntary contributions and erected to mark O'Neill's remains and those of his brother. The cross was ornamented with scroll embellishments, its marble base ornamented also with a stencilled ivy wreath.⁸ On 6 July 1902, a large public pilgrimage led by the Marist priest Le Rennetel marked the dedication of the monument. Six days later, the *Freeman's Journal* published the following obituary:

⁶ anon., "The late Mr Charles O' Neill M.I.C.E.," *FJ*, 17 November 1900, 12.

⁷ SVDP, *Report of the Particular Council of Sydney, to the Superior Council of Australasia, for the Year 1900*, 7. The published appeal ran as follows: 'Brother O'Neill was the Founder of the Society in Australasia, and consequently has special claims on the prayers and esteem of members of the Society for which he did so much. His remains are interred in Rookwood cemetery, Sydney. The Council beg to suggest to you, as representing the whole of Australia, the desirability of erecting a suitable tombstone upon his grave, as tribute to his memory.'

⁸ Utick, 2, 233, 242. The 1902 monument was erected by J. McMurtrie and Co. of Orange, New South Wales above the O'Neill brothers' remains then located in Section N, No 705 within the Catholic section of the cemetery. The full inscription read as follows:

Of your Charity pray for the souls of
CHARLES O'NEILL
M. Inst. C. E.
Founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society
IN AUSTRALASIA
Who died in Sydney, Nov. 8 1900,
Aged 72 Years.
AND OF HIS BROTHER JOHN
Who died in Sydney, June 13 1901
AGED 74 YEARS
"Requiescant in pace" (May they rest in peace)

No two figures were better known in the streets of Sydney than those of Charles O'Neill and his brother John, who was his inseparable companion. A lengthy volume could be written concerning the attachment of the two brothers, and the many anecdotes of pathetic simplicity, mutual forbearance, and self-sacrifice of the two pious men who lived more in heaven than on earth.⁹

This obituary marked the first significant hagiographic comment about O'Neill. During this era, when the Australian public lauded the exemplary Christian or 'good' death, the particular example of piety of O'Neill seemed to have registered in the wider consciousness among the Sydney Catholic public.¹⁰ The obituary also paid posthumous tribute to the success of his faith-based charitable mission, while conceding his lack of 'worldly wisdom':

As in most undertakings that are destined to flourish, his efforts met with considerable opposition, many assuring him that there was no need for such an organisation in Australia. But with the eyes of charity he saw differently from others, who, though more worldly wise perhaps than he, had the interest of indigent humanity less at heart.¹¹

With the erection of the monument at Rookwood cemetery, a second distinguishable memento of O'Neill had been created. The first, the *CoManual*, a small book 14.5 centimetres long by 9.5 centimetres wide, remained in the keeping of William Davis until the early 1950s when Davis handed it to a certain Paul Flanagan, also a member of St Patrick's Conference. During the early 1960s, Flanagan gave the *CoManual* to the New South Wales St Vincent de Paul

⁹ anon., "The Late Charles O'Neill. Founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia and New Zealand. Unveiling a Monument at Rookwood," *FJ*, 12 July 1902, 25.

¹⁰ For an in-depth of the era of the good Christian death, see P. Jalland, *Australian Ways of Death, a Social and Cultural History 1840-1918* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51-68.

¹¹ anon., "The Late Charles O' Neill, Founder of the St Vincent De Paul Society in Australia and New Zealand, Unveiling a Monument at Rookwood."

Society.¹² Both the monument and the *CoManual* were instrumental in the revival of spiritual interest in O'Neill that subsequently followed.

The trigger for this revival occurred in 1961, at the time of celebrations connected with the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales. In the lead up to the anniversary, the Society decided to transfer the monument and any remains of the O'Neill brothers to a major plot that the Society had purchased as a resting place for the remains of Sydney's destitute.¹³ It was a symbolic gesture of posthumous recognition.

On 22 July 1961, another pilgrimage converged on this new site at Rookwood Necropolis, where the O'Neill brothers' remains and the 1902 tombstone monument had been relocated. On this occasion, the Very Reverend Monsignor F. Kerr delivered a panegyric reflecting the sense of growing reverence for O'Neill:

Lovely as this monument is to human eyes and pleasing as it must be to Almighty God, yet lovelier still and still more pleasing to Him is the monument of which Charles O'Neill with God's help, was the architect – the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Australasia.¹⁴

This event, combined with Society's acquisition of the *CoManual*, provided some context for the interest of three senior Catholic laypersons who, impressed by what they understood as the charity, humility and self-sacrifice of O'Neill, independently began to research aspects of his life. These three were Ted Bacon, who subsequently served as National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia; John Henry McClemens, a former New South Wales Supreme Court Judge; and Professor Bede Nairn, a historian at the Australian National University's *Australian Dictionary of Biography* project. Each in turn became

¹² SVPD (annotated C. O'Neill), *Manual of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, with subsequent Annotations and Pasted Cuttings by Charles O'Neill (or CoManual)*.

¹³ Foley, *Charles Gordon O'Neill, Engineer and Apostle. Founder of the Society of St Vincent De Paul in Australia & New Zealand*, 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40. (In addition, a photograph of Kerr appeared on the front page of the *CathW*, 27 July 1961)

convinced of O'Neill's sanctity from the fragments of historical detail that they independently uncovered during the 1960s and 1970s.

Bacon, who promoted research into O'Neill by the Society in New South Wales, proclaimed O'Neill as an 'Apostle of Charity'.¹⁵ McClemens, who was informed by the spiritual context provided by the *CoManual*, was moved personally to 'exonerate' O'Neill from the banking scandal and compare him with certain Catholic saints:

Candour compels me to say that the very nature of O'Neill's defence did not reveal a high degree of business acumen nor a prudent sense of responsibility. But one might also say that neither St. Francis nor St. Benedict nor St. Joseph Cupertino or many other saints would exhibit much business acumen either.¹⁶

McClemens, recognising something of the tensions within O'Neill's life, added that, 'the real Charles O'Neill rises transcendent with the Charles O'Neill in the criminal dock'. Finally, it was Nairn who proposed that O'Neill might be a candidate for canonisation, describing O'Neill's life of service to the Church and the poor as 'unobtrusive but resplendent and enduring'.¹⁷ Despite the humble circumstances of a pauper's grave, the memory of O'Neill had survived.

Some Religious and Spiritual Themes in appraisal of O'Neill's Lay Vocation

In November 2000, following a mass in St Mary's Cathedral Sydney marking the centenary of O'Neill's death, public comment surfaced similar to that made two decades before by Nairn about O'Neill's worthiness for canonisation.¹⁸ Even should O'Neill never be recognised by the Church as among 'the chosen ones in God's Kingdom', his life, influenced as it was by Vincentian and Franciscan spiritual ideals, represented a truly great lay commitment to the Christ of the poor

¹⁵ See Bacon's preface comments in *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ McClemens: 82.

¹⁷ Nairn quoted by Campion, 49.

¹⁸ J. Bennett, "A Second Saint for Australia?," *CathW*, 19 November 2000, 1.

during the nineteenth century. Biographical analysis, particularly in Chapters Two, Five and to a lesser extent Chapter Four, has provided considerable evidence to support Nairn's interpretation of O'Neill's life.

O'Neill's lay service to the Catholic Church might well be described as *resplendent* because of its scope and magnitude across the British Empire, in Glasgow between 1851 and 1863, in Wellington New Zealand between 1876 and 1880, and in New South Wales between 1881 and 1891. O'Neill's architectural design and construction of schools and churches could also be included within the scope of that service, in addition to his philanthropic commitments culminating the faith-based charitable mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. This mission was inspirational in that he encouraged a community of charity, with the collaboration of the hierarchy, priests and laypeople working together to visit and serve the poor within their respective cities, towns and suburbs.

Also, O'Neill championed of the dignity of the poor through the active promotion of *non-intrusive* charity, particularly through public promotion of the slogan: 'The title of the poor to our commiseration is their poverty itself; we are not to inquire about what party or sect they belong.' The evidence in the *CoManual* points to O'Neill's search for a more genuine Christian practice of charity. In an age of sectarian bigotry, his example was a prophetic reminder that charity was a universal Christian commandment, not to be blinded by prejudice or presumption about the deservingness of the recipient.

Further, the results of O'Neill's mission were *enduring* insofar as the Society conferences and benevolent infrastructure he founded, particularly in New South Wales, continued to flourish and provide the bases for charitable commitment of many later generations. Importantly, O'Neill interpreted this mission as following Divine Will. The role of the 'vicissitudes' in forging O'Neill's intense spiritual commitment has been examined in this study and reveals something about the nature of O'Neill's spiritual journey.¹⁹

¹⁹ One aspect of O'Neill's spiritual journey may be particularly relevant to contemporary appreciation of male spirituality and the psychology that attends it. This is particularly relevant given that this biographical

Like (for example) Caroline Chisholm, O'Neill demonstrated that Catholic laypeople in the Australian colonies could exercise an active ministry in the world, although O'Neill himself would probably not have expressed it in those terms.²⁰ O'Neill's understanding of the role of the laity was grounded in an earlier tradition, and his mission ended in the same year (1891) as Leo XIII issued *Rerum Novarum*. Acceptance that a layperson could have an ecclesial mission is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Catholic Church, emphasised in *Lumen Gentium* (1964) 33 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (1965) 2.²¹ Vatican II's position on this had been influenced by lay Catholic involvement in the Catholic Action Movement earlier in the twentieth century. O'Neill's life and mission is an example of what *Christifideles Laici* (1988) described as a vocation of holiness lived in the secular world, and importantly the perfection of charity.²² *Christifideles Laici* also emphasised promoting the dignity of the human person, which was exemplified in his commitment to promoting the dignity of the poor.²³ Important elements of his approach towards charity can also be found in *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) - recognising the immediacy of needs and circumstances, the independence from parties or ideologies, and a pure and generous love rather than proselytism.²⁴

analysis has examined the tension within O'Neill exposed through cycles of the less favourable 'vicissitudes' of life. This example is illustration enough that, as a man struggles with his own failures and limitations, he learns the truth of paradox. It is a matter of honestly accepting that life is a mixture of light and darkness, love and hate, hope and despair and the skill lies in holding such tensions together rather than necessarily excluding one or the other. Just as significant is the male psychology of knowing what his life is at the service of, and hence a desire for an odyssey, a quest of journey, on which he can lead others. In O'Neill's case, one can very easily recognise this spiritual characteristic in his charitable mission, and the desire to encourage others to join it. For further understanding of such issues see D. Ranson, "Maleness: A 'New' Context in Spirituality," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 79, no. July (2002): 306.

²⁰ S. Utick, "Charles O' Neill, the Engineer of Charity," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 88, no. 4 (2011): 446.

²¹ A. Hagstrom, *The Emerging Laity, Vocation, Mission and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 67. *Lumen Gentium* 33 describes the lay apostolate as a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 2 notes that the Church is a living body, and as such has no passive parts; as with all living bodies, so too, in the body of Christ, each member is called to make his or her proper contribution to its development.

²² John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici, on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, Australian Edition* (Homebush, Sydney: St Paul Publications, 1989), 39-45.

²³ *Ibid.*, 97-100.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter, Deus Caritas Est* (Strathfield, Australia: St Pauls Publications, 2006), 51-55. See also points made in N. Ormerod, "The Argument Has Vast Implications: Part II of *Deus Caritas Est*," in *Identity and Mission in Catholic Agencies*, ed. N. Ormerod (Strathfield, Australia: St Paul Publications, 2008).

As with the case of Caroline Chisholm, accepting holiness in O'Neill requires a better appreciation of the idea of the holiness or sanctity of a layperson. Unfortunately, this has yet to permeate the wider Australian religious consciousness particularly among Catholics.²⁵

Conclusions: Sequence and Pattern of Faith-based Charity and Professional Ambition

The contrast and tension between commitment to faith-based charity and professional ambition provide a framework for understanding the life of the philanthropist and civil engineer Charles Gordon O'Neill (1828-1900). That understanding is further informed through an interpretation of the social identity of the Irish in mid-nineteenth century Glasgow by historian Terence McBride, who identified the amalgam or fusion of conflicting ideals exhibited among that community as they adjusted to the circumstances within the 'second city of Empire'. A theme-based historiography enables a detailed examination of these two defining elements of O'Neill's life, their sequence within it, and the patterns of their fusion and fragmentation in the lead up to his final submission to Divine Providence.

The first theme, *Irish Identity and Formation in Catholic Charity* (Chapter Two), explored O'Neill's initial commitment to and formation in Catholic faith-based charity. This was nurtured as part of a broader Irish Catholic identity that characterised the O'Neill family. Initially during their residence in Dumbarton and later in Glasgow, the family was active in supporting the Irish poor arriving in Scotland in the wake of the Great Irish Famine.²⁶ The majority of O'Neill's ten siblings either died young or did not marry; his elder brother John James (1826-1901) and his youngest sister Maria Gordon (1840-1883) later followed him to New Zealand and New South Wales and supported him in his charitable endeavours. O'Neill's contribution to church architecture became another

²⁵ C. Geoghegan, "Caroline Chisholm - a Prophetic Voice in Church and Society," *The Australasian Catholic Record* 88, no. 4 (2011): 455.

²⁶ This is no evidence that they did this in Inverary, a much smaller town than Dumbarton (the latter also being closer to the Clyde where the Irish would have disembarked), although it is possible.

expression of his faith. More significant in the long term was O'Neill's commitment to the St Vincent de Paul Society influenced by his belief in the Catholic doctrine of mercy. This commenced in 1851 and reached its zenith in Glasgow during his term of President of the Society Council of Western Districts of Scotland between 1859 and 1863. Despite moving away from sectarianism, O'Neill was faced with difficulties in this work given the then chaotic nature of the Catholic Church in Scotland. The theme traced O'Neill's Irish connections in New Zealand. While in the New Zealand Parliament between 1866 and 1875, he defended the Catholic positions on divorce and education. Following his defeat in the 1876 New Zealand general elections, O'Neill settled down as a devout Catholic layperson in Wellington, between 1876 and 1880 resuming the roles of St Vincent de Paul Society pioneer and church architect.

As explored in the second theme, *An Engineer of Empire - Professional and Political Ambition* (Chapter Three), professional ambition also had its genesis during O'Neill's young adulthood in Glasgow. He was imbued with this through the British side of his identity (which included Scottish cultural influence), primarily through his professional apprenticeship and a series of achievements which gave public exposure to his talents during an early engineering career in Glasgow. Profession ambition became the driving influence behind his pursuit of an empire career in civil engineering. O'Neill's captaincy in the volunteer 3rd Lanarkshire Regiment was a demonstration of loyalty to the British Empire and a matter of personal honour.

Despite initial bankruptcy in 1863 in Glasgow, O'Neill was able to find new professional opportunities in colonial New Zealand beginning with life as a surveyor on the Otago goldfields. This was to prove a springboard for political ambition as well, with his election for the miners' constituency of Otago Goldfields in 1866. He was able to take advantage of political patronage, including being appointed Engineer-in-Chief and Chief Surveyor of the Thames Goldfields in 1869 and, during the subsequent election in 1871, achieving a modest win in the Thames constituency. Despite O'Neill's political activities, a far more significant manifestation of his ambitions came as a liberal capitalist entrepreneur in the

British Victorian mould. O'Neill's wealth pursuits included investments in mining ventures, patents for inventions, and colonial transport development.

As examined in the third theme, *A Civil Engineer and Social Progress* (Chapter Four), O'Neill's belief in economic and technological progress, combined with a social liberalism influenced by Christian ideals, led him to advocate such issues as industrial safety, health, town planning, and better transport through tramways and railways. While ambition may have influenced his pursuit of some of these initiatives; such initiatives also complemented his charitable ideals well. These two elements may have resulted in a fertile cross-current leading to O'Neill's finest achievements outside of faith-based charity.

His campaign in the New Zealand Parliament for the conservation of forests, between 1868 and 1874, provides an insight into his remarkable prescience on certain environmental issues including on both deforestation and the espousal of the connection between destruction of forests and climate. O'Neill, a polymath, must be counted as one of the earliest Australasian colonial politicians to draw attention to this latter issue in a parliament. Two of O'Neill's most significant professional achievements can also be understood through this desire to promote social progress. One was the introduction of New Zealand's first significant town planning legislation, the *Plans of Towns Regulation Act* in 1875. Another was the promotion of tramways in colonial New Zealand, leading up to the construction of the Wellington Steam Tramway completed in 1878. A Sydney Harbour Tunnels Scheme, promoted during the 1880s and 1890s, could have been an even greater achievement but it was never realised. The climax in his professional career coincided with a defining point in his life.

That defining point was to embrace a faith-based mission to re-establish the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Australian colonies that succeeded in New South Wales. This commitment, made at the request of the Society's President-General Adolphe Baudon, was examined under a fourth theme, *The Faith-based Charitable Mission to New South Wales* (Chapter Five). This mission's success led to the establishment and consolidation of the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales (and consequently the re-establishment of the Society in the Australian

colonies). Failure in Melbourne and initial failure in Sydney during 1880 did not deter him from that mission, a sign that faith-based charity had now become the predominant commitment of his life.

O'Neill's success came through gaining the acceptance of the Catholic Church in Sydney including the priests of the Society of Mary, the Catholic hierarchy including Archbishops Vaughan and (later Cardinal) Moran, and the laity including the growing Irish Catholic minority in New South Wales. Beginning with a Society conference founded at St Patrick's Church Hill in July 1881, and the incorporation of another at St Francis de Sales' Church Haymarket, O'Neill put in place the first major lay Catholic outdoor relief program in New South Wales. Leo XIII's proclamation of St Vincent de Paul as the patron of Catholic charitable associations in May 1885, followed soon after support of the Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church in November 1885, provided the final impetus for support by the clergy and laity in New South Wales for O'Neill's faith-based charitable mission.

However there were other challenges. Sectarianism, aggravated by anti-Irish sentiment, could have affected the St Vincent de Paul Society by distorting its charitable ideals and operations. Fortunately, promotion of the Society as an international confederation of charity providing assistance 'without reference to party or sect', adept use of 'Irish intelligence', and a rise in political influence and social respectability of prosperous Catholics during the early 1880s saw this potential problem recede quickly. A more subtle challenge for O'Neill was to find broader public acceptance of the Society's kind of charity within the colonial framework of philanthropy. This framework was influenced heavily by aversion to the Poor Laws of Britain and fear of creating dependent paupers, benevolent institutions that discriminated between the deserving and non-deserving poor and, in the case of the evangelical slum missions, using charity as an instrument of moral reform and proselytism.

The decade of the 1880s witnessed a growing public acceptance of the outdoor relief program offered by the St Vincent de Paul Society in New South Wales, with growth in numbers of volunteers, donations and impact. By 1891, O'Neill had presided over the foundation of twenty Society conferences in New South Wales. By

the early 1890s, the Society was providing almost half the level of expenditure on outdoor relief compared with that of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales. O'Neill's flair for charity fund raising served him well in Sydney. He also received approval from Baudon for the Society to provide rent relief by cash payment.

The theme examined closely the religious features of O'Neill's Catholic evangelical mission of charity. Evidence from the *CoManual* reveals that he was endeavouring to sanctify his encounters with the poor, an approach influenced greatly by the incarnational spirituality of St Vincent de Paul and St Francis of Assisi with respect to the poor. Comparisons were made with the kind of Protestant evangelical slum mission operated by Sydney City Mission in The Rocks (a few years later by its employed missionary James Mathers). Yet O'Neill's mission was also very practical, for example in setting up the St Patrick's Penny Bank for children in 1889.

O'Neill's mission was essentially accomplished by 1891, just as economic depression began. A month before he resigned as President of the Society in New South Wales in December 1891, he attended the Second Australasian Conference on Charity in Melbourne. O'Neill's Irish Catholic identity became reinforced through sociological factors such as heavy Irish Catholic support of his faith-based mission and Catholic temperance associations, through political associations in support of Irish Home Rule and the Irish Land League and, in the religious domain, Moran's promotion of an Irish Catholic Church within New South Wales.

Understanding the tensions between the two elements, commitments respectively to faith-based charity and to professional ambition in the life of O'Neill, also requires an understanding of the 'vicissitudes' or more specifically the more pronounced decline in fortunes during his life. Theme five, *Facing the Vicissitudes* (Chapter Six), revealed three cycles of decline in O'Neill's fortunes, the first in Glasgow during 1863, the second in New Zealand between 1876 and 1880, and a third, final cycle in New South Wales between 1889 and 1892. These provide the key to understanding how the fusion of these two elements fragmented at key turning points. Significantly during all three periods, O'Neill attempted to balance an intense commitment to both faith-based charity and professional ambition. O'Neill's bachelor status provided him with the scope to pursue each as far as possible.

Each cycle involved a business failure or crisis, although O'Neill also faced difficulties associated with his leadership of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Glasgow in 1863. One common feature of each of these three cycles was that O'Neill's dual commitment to both faith-based charity and professional ambition could not be sustained, and this may have contributed to his business difficulties.

O'Neill's response to the first two cycles of these vicissitudes included a break up or fragmentation of the two elements, as a precursor to complete commitment to one or the other element. In a symbolic way, this fragmentation was also manifested by his physical departure to another location in both 1863 and 1880. Following bankruptcy in 1863, O'Neill's primary motivation was to pursue professional ambition in New Zealand between 1864 and 1876. The vicissitudes of political life leading up to his electoral defeat in 1876 need also to be taken into account. Between 1876 and 1880, while in Wellington, O'Neill's commitment to faith-based charity began to re-emerge and the dual commitments fused again. O'Neill's frustrated business pursuits proved a precursor to his embrace of the charitable mission in New South Wales between 1881 and 1891.

O'Neill's political and business exploits between 1889 and 1891 reveal the unfinished business of O'Neill's professional ambition. His involvement as a Director of the corruptly-managed Northumberland Banking Company would prove his undoing. Although exonerated in court in 1892, he was nonetheless humiliated.

With his leadership in faith-based charity at an end and with his business reputation ruined, O'Neill was left with nothing during the twilight of his life but the consolation of his private devotional world and the simple practices of charity. A series of maxims in the *CoManual*, conveying a process of examination of conscience, provide an insight as to how he might have faced the vicissitudes of life. These maxims were communicated to posterity through the symbolic act of bequeathing the *CoManual* before his death, and expressing his interpretation of his misfortunes in terms of submission to Divine Will. They also suggest that O'Neill made a profound submission to Divine Providence as a means of seeking solace in the midst of these vicissitudes. This should not be

interpreted as surrender in the face of misfortune but rather, due to the depth of conviction demonstrated in the *CoManual*, confirmation of what he had believed from the beginning of his charitable mission.

This sixth and final theme, *The Aura of the Pauper's Grave and Conclusions* (Chapter Seven), briefly examined how the humble circumstances of O'Neill's death resulted in a chain of events that rescued his memory from oblivion. O'Neill's commitment during his life to faith-based charity had preserved memory of him after his death. Based on historian Bede Nairn's identification of three characteristics of O'Neill's life, i.e. resplendent lay service, unobtrusive (or non-intrusive) charity and achieving an enduring outcome; it is now possible to gain a deeper appreciation of the significance of O'Neill's lay vocation.

Biographical histories can reveal much, not only about the individual under investigation, but something of the subject's contemporaries, the societies in which they lived and the major challenges of the era. More broadly, faith-based charity and empire careers in engineering were but two among countless social developments during the Victorian age of progress within the British Empire. O'Neill's ideals and ambitions were shaped in Western Scotland and specifically the Glasgow of the 1850s and early 1860s. His actions reveal that he attempted to influence the emerging colonial societies of New Zealand between 1864 and 1880, and New South Wales between 1881 and 1891. Given the translocational nature of this biographical subject, its material is of relevance to several other historical specialisations. Apart from Victorian studies more broadly, the case of O'Neill's initial fusion of identity, as partly Irish Catholic and partly British Scot, would be of interest to Irish studies scholars.

This study covered the most significant aspects of O'Neill's life, including voluminous accounts of his philanthropic endeavours. A number of aspects of O'Neill's professional and public career could be worthy of further research. With respect to New Zealand colonial history, while the environmental history has been now well researched, there is further scope to research some second and third order political issues which engaged O'Neill during his two terms in the New Zealand Parliament. For example, O'Neill's political comments on mining issues throw

additional light on the early history of gold mining in New Zealand. Early New Zealand railways and tramways history might also benefit from an analysis of O'Neill's contribution to colonial transport development. Turning to the New South Wales section of the O'Neill biography, those with an expert knowledge of colonial legal and business practice might provide alternative interpretations of the Northumberland Banking Company case and of O'Neill's involvement in this disaster.

This study also cuts across a number of rich seams of pre-Federation life in the Australasian colonies. Further details of many politicians, business people and prospectors seeking their fortunes by moving to and fro across the Tasman might provide for revisions and new entries to the National Dictionaries of Biography of Australia and New Zealand. This study also throws light on the social and charitable activities of a wide cross section of the Irish Catholic minority of colonial Sydney, including clergy, a newly prospering professional class as well as the ordinary laypeople.

By far the richest seam derives from the early research and analyses of the historical records of the charities used in this biographical research. Further work on these can shed new perspectives on late colonial Australian welfare history, and Federation-era Australian social history, illustrated by two examples below.

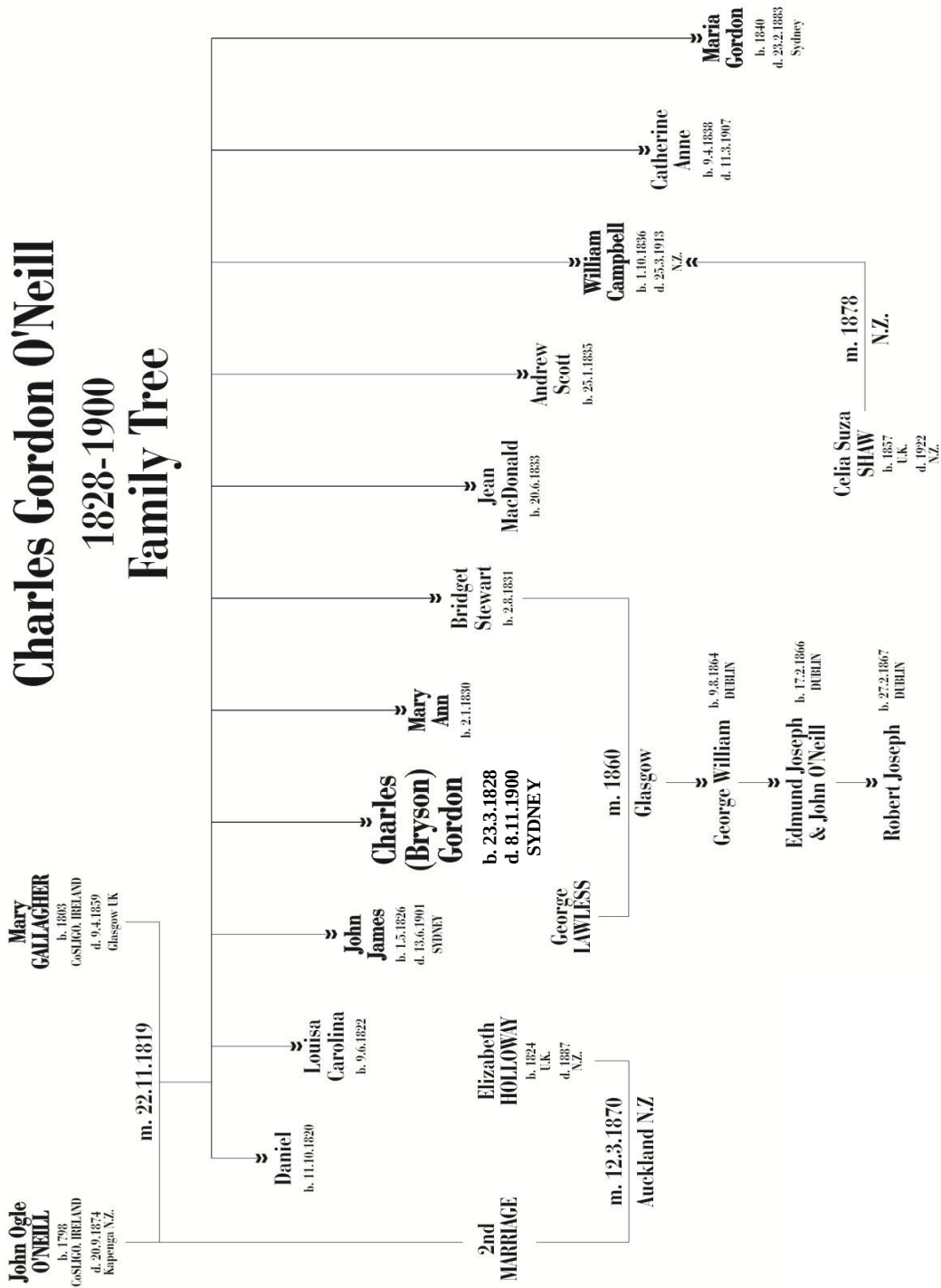
Firstly, the significance of transnational perspectives is beginning to be appreciated in Australasian welfare history as with other historical fields. The re-establishment of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australasia between 1877 and 1884 represents an interesting case of both transnational influence and exercise of power, given its direction by Paris-based President-General Adolphe Baudon. The 'French connection' including the local support provided to O'Neill by the Society of Mary, illustrated how such transnational charities could work within empires and expand operations between them, while overcoming the tyranny of distance. While such activities are taken for granted now, they were novel in the 1870s and 1880s. Importantly too, such charitable activity operated outside the dominant framework in which nineteenth century colonial philanthropy developed across Britain's colonies in Australasia. The new settlers brought with

them the social and political attitudes of nineteenth century Britain including aversion to the Poor Law and the evangelical slum missions focused on saving the poor from the consequences of vice. By contrast, the O'Neill mission guided by Paris, emphasised more the social evil of poverty and less the issue of deservingness of the poor through the slogan: 'The title of the poor to our commiseration *is their poverty itself*'. Armed with this kind of operating principle, and fervently seeking a more genuine Christian approach to outdoor relief, O'Neill subsequently became a pioneer of non-intrusive charity in the Sydney slums.

Secondly, the records of the charities in inner pre-Federation Sydney consulted in this research, particularly those of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Mathers journals recording Sydney City Mission work, provide not only information about the charities but the simple poor that they served. The records of their visits providing outdoor relief reveal much about the social circumstances and beliefs of the pre-Federation and Federation Sydney poor that could be used to construct an informative prosopography of the citizens of inner Sydney of that era. The potential value to Australian social history derived from these primary sources could be substantial, given that one could construct, from such a proposography, 'a census of the soul' at the dawn of nationhood.

Finally, it is fitting to provide some concluding remarks about Charles Gordon O'Neill himself and the broader significance of his achievements. While O'Neill's professional contributions to colonial civil engineering were substantial, the remembrance of O'Neill as a pioneer of non-intrusive charity has proved the more lasting. Yet now is also uncovered the voice of O'Neill warning from the floor of the New Zealand Parliament during the 1870s that the destruction of the forests would globally harm climate, and that the poor would pay the price for subsequent diminished resources. This claim resonates with the concerns of the twenty-first century, and so becomes another prophetic insight from one who was laid in a pauper's grave in Rookwood Necropolis in 1900, and reverently reburied there among the remains of Sydney's paupers in 1961.

Appendix: O'Neill Family Tree (landscape view)
Compiled by Vince Dever in consultation with Stephen Utick



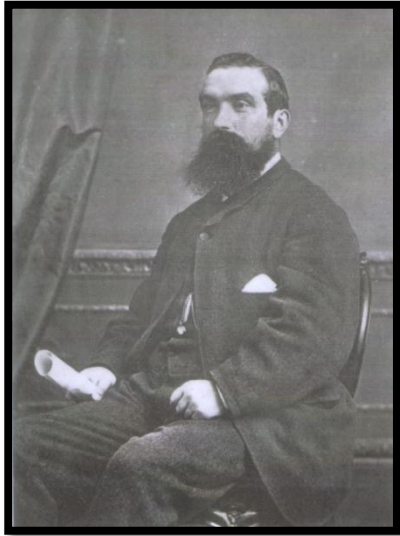
Illustrations 1a-1e: Charles O'Neill Photographs and Portrait Image



1a (above): Captain Charles O'Neill (c. 1860)
Courtesy K.R.A. Gibb Collection, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow



1b (above): Portrait Image of Captain Charles O'Neill as captured in *The Glasgow Volunteers 1861-1866* by Thomas Robertson
Courtesy Glasgow Museums Collection, Registration 11-13



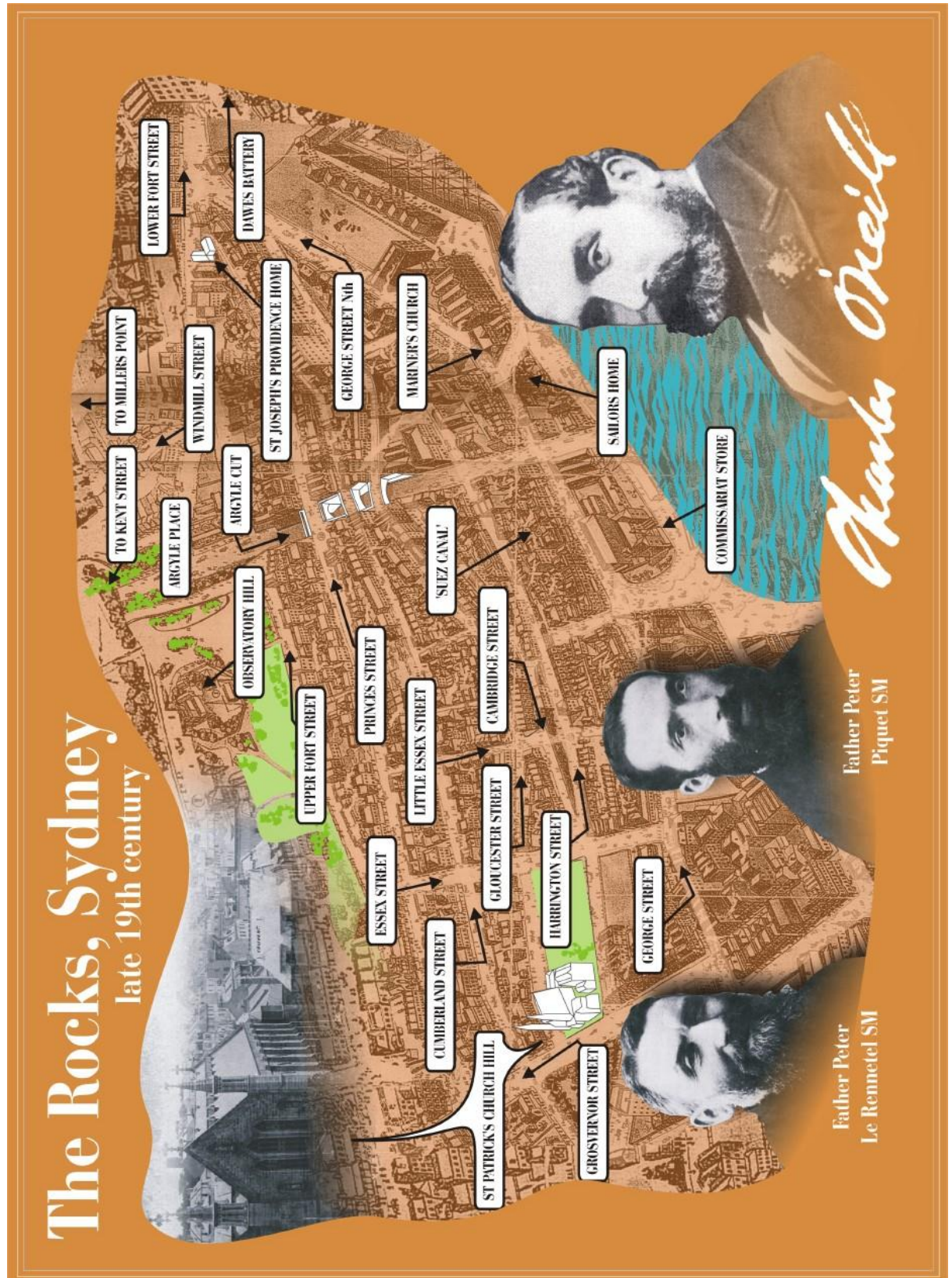
1c (left): Charles Gordon O'Neill (c. 1868)
*Courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library,
 Wellington NZ, PAColl-4558-001*

**1d (right): Charles Gordon O'Neill
 (c. 1874).**
**Facsimile of original photograph by
 J. D. Wigglesworth**
*Courtesy Alexander Turnbull Library,
 Wellington NZ, PA2-1971*



**1e (left): Charles Gordon O'Neill
 (1891)**
Courtesy Dignan Family, NSW

Illustration 2: District Map Montage of The Rocks (featuring Rev Peter Le Rennetel sm, Rev Peter Piquet sm and Charles O'Neill) (landscape view)
Background Bird's Eye View of The Rocks (c. 1900), courtesy State Reference Library, State Library of New South Wales. Graphic overlay by Nathan Ahearne, on advice by Stephen Utick.



MANUAL
OF THE
SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY
JAMES STREET, 11, AND 2ND
AND 3RD STREETS, 6.
DUBLIN
MURRAY ARBER STREET, 36,
NEW-YORK
BURLINGTON STREET, 206.

1877

PAIRS
NEW YORK: PUBLISHED BY
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DUBLIN
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NEW-YORK
BURLINGTON STREET, 206.

END SERIES HERE

BEGIN SERIES HERE

Sun. 20-19TH AFTER PENT. PURITY OF THE B. V. MARY. “What the lily is amongst flowers, purity is among virtues.”

Sat. 12 – B. John Leonard. “If you but knew how to pray, and if you loved to pray, how good and fruitful your life would be.”

Sat. 5 – S. Galla, Widow. “My God and my all, S. Francis’ constant prayer, explains his poverty and his wealth.”

Tu. 29 – S. Columban, Abbot. “Remain always peaceful, calmly continuing your daily labour; even more than that be joyful.”

W. 30 – S. Anselmus, Doctor. “Do not depart from God; how pleasant it is to live always with those who love us !”

W. 23 – THE MOST HOLY REDEEMER. “To pray is to hold in our hand the key of all heavenly treasures.”

Fr. 12 – S. Rose of Lima. “The saints were men of few devotions, their power was their love, their touchstone their intention.” Faber.

Th 22 S. BARNABAS, APOSTLE. “Oh! if you knew the joy you give to God when you devote yourself to the salvation of souls!”

Mon 21 – B. Victor III. Pope. “Greet cheer-fully the importunate person who visits you. God sends him to you.”

Mon 28 – SS. SIMON AND JUDE, APOSTLES. “Do not refuse an alms which is asked of you, and give to God by giving to the poor.”

Mon 7 – S. Marc, Pope. “Words cannot express the beauty of a soul of a man who dies in the grace of God.” S. Phil.

Sat. 19 – S. Peter of Alcantara. “If we but knew how to be kind, we would bring happi-ness everywhere with us.”

Th. 31 – Fast. S. Siricius, Pope. “What a void in a life is a day without devotion, without some charitable action.”

Tu. 8 – S. Bridget of Sweden. “Good advice is more precious than gold, a kind word is still more precious than good advice.”

... What more Christlike than this sentiment of Mr. JOHN MORLEY’S, ‘I count that day basely passed in which no thought is given to the hard lot of garret and hovel, to forlorn children and trampled woman?’
(written annotation reads *Telegraph* 31st July 1886)

Table A: Growth of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW (1881-1900)

Significant Context	Years	No. of Conferences	Members & Hon Members	Conferences established under O'Neill's Leadership (date, clerical founder) M - annotated in CoManual	Conference aggregation dates with Society in Paris
Initial establishment phase with support of Marists and Archbishop Vaughan	(July) 1881 to 1883	4	61 & 12 (end 1883)	St Patrick's Church Hill (24 July 1881, Rev. C. Heuzé sm) M St Francis's Haymarket (24 July-1 August 1881*), Very Rev. Dean J. Sheridan V.G.) M St Mary's Cathedral (28 August 1881, Rev. M. Ryan) M St Benedict's Broadway (11 September 1881, Very Rev Dean O'Brien) M *a preliminary meeting of St Francis' Haymarket occurred on 24 July but did not receive the full sanction of Dean J. Sheridan until 1 August.	Church Hill and Haymarket Conferences aggregated on 21 November 1881 Cathedral and Broadway Conferences aggregated on 3 February 1882
Particular Council of Sydney (January 1884) Moran's blessing (November 1884)	1884	4	65 & 10		

St Vincent de Paul proclaimed patron of all associations of charity by Leo XIII (May 1885) Moran appointed as Australia's first Cardinal (returns in November 1885) Pastoral Letter of Plenary Council of Australian Catholic Church (November 1885)	1885	10	195 & 38	St Joseph's Balmain (10 May 1885, Rev. O'Reilly) M Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Waterloo (7 June 1885, Rev. Collins) M St Joseph's Newtown (14 June 1885, Rev J.C. Fitzpatrick) M St Patrick's Parramatta (28 June 1885, Ven. Archdeacon Rigney) M St Charles's Waverley (19 July 1885, Very Rev J. Hanrahan osf) M St Francis Xavier's North Shore (16 August 1885, Rev. M. Kelly sj) M	
	1886	16	290 & 24	Sacred Heart, Darlinghurst (1 March 1886, Very Rev. Dr Carroll V.G.) M St Thomas's Petersham (11 April 1886, Rev.T. Long) M St James's Forest Lodge (22 August 1886, Rev B. Callachor osb) M	All six conferences established in 1885, aggregated on 8 February 1886

	1886 (cont)			Our Lady of the Assumption, Camperdown (12 September 1886, Rev P.M. Ryan) M St Bede's Braidwood (26 September 1886, Rev. M. Darcy) M Aspirant Conference of Our Lady of Mt Carmel Waterloo (17 October 1886)	
	1887	16	261 & 7		
Centenary of Foundation of NSW (O'Neill involved in distribution of charity) Death of Adolphe Baudon	1888	16	261 & 4		Forest Lodge and Camperdown Conferences aggregated on 16 January 1888 Darlinghurst, and Petersham Conferences aggregated on 17 September 1888
Penny Banks established (September 1889)	1889	16	283 & 4	Braidwood and Waterloo Aspirant Conferences lapse St Bede's Pyrmont (11 August 1889, Rev. Furlong) M Our Lady of the Suburbs, Macdonaldtown (29 September 1889, Rev. E. O'Callaghan) M	

Maritime strike paralyses colonial waterfronts (labour and social unrest)	1890	19	314 & 8	St Fiacre's Leichhardt (9 March 1890, Rev. Coonan) M	
Economic depression begins in Australian colonies				St Brigid's Marrickville (16 May 1890, Rev. A. O'Neill cp) M	
				St Augustine's Balmain East (17 September 1890, Rev. A. Boyle cm) M	
O'Neill attends 2 nd Australasian Conference on Charity in Melbourne (November 1891)	1891	20	308 & 8	St Vincent de Paul's Redfern (14 January 1891, Rev. G. Tuckwell) M	Pymont Conference aggregated on 15 January 1891
O'Neill resigns as President of the Particular Council of Sydney (December 1891)					McDonalddtown, Leichhardt and Marrickville Conferences aggregated on 12 October 1891
Superior Council of Australasia instituted by Paris (December 1895)	1895	27	409 & 12	O'Neill departed from leadership (4 years)	
Death of O'Neill (November 1900)	1900	31	534 & 16	O'Neill departed from leadership (9 years)	

The above Table A compiled from data extracted from the *CoManual*; the *Report of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Council of Sydney, New South Wales 24 July 1881 to 31 December 1883*; and annual *Reports of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales* (to the Council-General in Paris) for the years 1884, 1885, 1886, 1887-1888, 1890, 1891, 1895 and 1900.

Table B: Charitable Outcomes of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW (under O'Neill's Leadership), 1881-1891 (*landscape view*)

Years	Receipts (nearest £)	Expenditure (nearest £)	Hone visits	Families assisted	Total assisted	Employ- ment found & business assisted to obtain a living	Hospital/ Benevolent Asylum cases	Assistance with ship or rail passage	Assistance with lodgings including one night lodgings	Poor Burials/ Funerals	Clothing, Footwear, Bedding etc.	Medicines/ Medical Assistance
1881- 1883	1004	978	4893	Not reported	Not reported	101 & 23	69	37	Not reported	12	Not reported	Not reported
1884	641	577	2508	56 per week*	Not reported	18 & 4	14	9	37	4	44	6
1885	1115	959	3283	483	Not reported	21 & 8	23	15	158	11	31	17
1886	1398	1319	4858	593	1500	57 & 17	54	27	526	18	146	45
1887	1397	1321	6128	690	2310	93 & 29	95	25	206	14	239	96
1888	1746	1616	7340	790	2301	92 & 22	102	22	689	21	348	91
1889	1991	1898	8545	843	2934	99 & 29	123	25	744	24	156	116
1890	1960	1763	8861	865	2523	123 & 58	110	41	635	29	283	128
1891	2050	1896	10924	1368	3860	114 & 49	104	48	666	23	473	182
Totals	13302	12327	57340	No record ⁿ	No record ⁿ	718 & 239	694	249	3661	156	1720	681

The above Table B compiled from data extracted from the *Report of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Council of Sydney, New South Wales 24 July 1881 to 31 December 1883*; and annual *Reports of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales* (to the Council-General in Paris) for the years 1884, 1885, 1886, 1887-1888, 1890, 1891, 1895 and 1900. * Overall total of families assisted were not reported. ⁿ Reports do not record families and individuals receiving assistance for more than one year.

Table C: Comparison of Outdoor Relief Assistance between the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW (SVDP) and Benevolent Society of NSW (BSNSW), 1884, 1888 and 1893

Year	Historical Context	SVDP Cases Relieved*	BSNSW Cases Relieved*	SVDP Outdoor Relief Expenditure (nearest £)	BSNSW Outdoor Relief Expenditure (nearest £)
1884	SVDP Particular Council of Sydney established	56 families per week	3734	572	3052
1888	Centenary of New South Wales	790 families or 2301 individuals	5742	1616	4966
1893	Height of 1890s Depression	1438 families or 5807 individuals	7601	2301	5083

The above Table C compiled from data extracted from the annual *Reports of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, Particular Council of Sydney, New South Wales* (to the Council-General in Paris) for the years 1884, 1887-1888, and 1893, and the *Reports of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales* For the Years ended 31 December 1884, 1881 and 1893. *Due to different methods of statistical collection, comparisons can only be made at the broadest level.

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