

The Occupation of Baker's Flat: A Study of
Irishness and Power in Nineteenth Century South Australia

by

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Glossary and abbreviations

Anglo-Irish	Born or resident in Ireland of English descent, a privileged social class that was part of the so-called Protestant Ascendancy which made up the ruling class in Ireland from the seventeenth to the twentieth century
Britain	The island that includes England, Scotland and Wales. It excludes Ireland
Co.	County
Great Famine	Period in Ireland when the potato crop failed in successive years between 1845 and 1850, causing mass starvation, disease and emigration. Also known as <i>An Gorta Mór</i> (The Great Hunger) and the Irish Famine
GRG	Government Record Group. Used by State Records of South Australia to denote any records created by a South Australian government agency
Ireland	The entire island of Ireland

Abstract

This research investigates Irish social identity ('Irishness') in the nineteenth century, centring on a substantial and long-lived Irish settlement known as Baker's Flat, in the mid-north of South Australia. The research questions focus on the concepts of identity and power, specifically, how these Irish expressed their identity through material culture, and what this tells us about the community and its power relations.

The occupation of Baker's Flat began in 1854, when many Irish families came to labour at the nearby Kapunda copper mine, and squatted rent-free on the Baker's Flat land. The settlement persisted until at least the 1920s, set apart from the broader community. Although hundreds of Irish people lived there, the written histories document little about the community, and if mentioned at all, the narrative tends to be a stereotypical one based on the widespread perception of the Irish as dirty, wild, drunken and lawless. In large part this negative narrative was probably stimulated by the refusal of the residents to pay rent or allow outsiders into the community, and their resistance to the landowners' attempts to remove them.

Analysis of a metal artefact collection and site survey have enabled a more complex interpretation of Baker's Flat, with Irishness evident through several material realms. Many of the artefacts conform to general Victorian trends, and align with a people endeavouring to conform to the ideal of respectability. Catholicism, a key marker of Irishness, is evident through artefactual and historical evidence, and appears as both a cultural way of life and a spiritual belief system. The Catholic Church's tolerance for folk practices may have allowed a folk tradition practice to continue here alongside traditional religious practice, as it did elsewhere. At a site-wide scale, the Irishness of this community is expressed through the spatial layout of the settlement, and historical evidence of the lack of fencing and unrestrained stock, all of which indicate the continuation of a traditional Irish 'clachan' and 'rundale' settlement pattern constructed around clustered kin-linked housing and communal farming methods. This resulted in a close-knit community based around mutual obligation which enabled this group to stand united against the dominant power of the landowners through an extended court case.

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