

**THE IDEAL SOCIETY**

**AND**

**ITS ENEMIES**



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# 1. Miles Fairburn's Ideal Society and its Enemies as an Approach to Pakeha Settler Society by Graeme Dunstall

Miles Fairburn The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundation of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1890 Auckland University Press, 1989

This book will probably shape thinking on the New Zealand section of the year 13 Programme. For that reason, and for wide discussion it has aroused, we are reproducing some informal notes taken at a talk given by Graeme Dunstall, Canterbury History Department and extracts from some reviews.

## The Argument

Essentially Fairburn makes two claims:

- (i) that Pakeha society was an '**atomised**' society: as he puts it (p11) 'NZ's social organisation was gravely deficient. Community structures were few and weak and the forces of social isolation were many and powerful. Bondlessness was central to colonial life...' Fairburn speaks of the colonists' 'extreme individualism' (p13)

## So what is community structure?

### Bondlessness?

### Extreme individualism?

- (ii) Fairburn argues that this social atomisation can 'account for a large cluster of the traits and trends which characterise the colonial social pattern.' Many of these were (in his words) pathological, others benign and healthy. The deficient framework of association produced appalling social problems of a predictable kind - loneliness, drunkenness, violence. The same lack of interpersonal ties, however, also helped to prevent collective protest and disorder - and so assisted in maintaining political stability.

### Pathological?

### Benign?

**Atomisation** is also seen as contributing to:

- the colony's powerful attachment to family life;
- the rapid growth of state institutions - both repressive and beneficent (police and public works)
- the development of deeply self-repressed personality: that is settlers were driven to cultivate the work ethic not merely by the rewards of acquiring property, but also by anxieties about deviating from this norm: (here he focuses on what he sees as the 'moral panic' or 'phobia' concerning vagrancy or 'loafers': as he puts it (p. 250): 'No one wanted to be thought of as a vagrant: people had good cause to feel anxious. They struggled vigorously to distance themselves from this awful possibility'.)

- The high level of material independence and prosperity in settler society. As he puts it: it ensured that "Jack and Jill were as good as their master and mistress and led to the prevalence of the "Jack and Jill of all trades". In other words atomisation was associated with great occupational mobility, a high level of property ownership, and a strong sense of (or aspiration for) social equality.

By emphasising atomisation Fairburn is seeking to account for what he sees as the distinctive characteristics of settler society: he recognises that his claims for an atomised society run against the 'received wisdom' and so he seeks to refute four alternative views, before developing his argument on atomisation.

*This is really what makes the book so interesting because he sets aside current wisdom by explaining FOUR views before he gives his view. Structurally most historians might present their own views first and in their entirety on the assumption that readers were familiar with the other views. Fairburn paraphrases the other views first then after critiquing them. Presents his view/argument.*

**The first alternative interpretation** is what he calls the '**insider**' view of New Zealand's social organisation - he seeks to reconstruct the idealised picture that European Colonists had of their own society. His main sources are handbooks on New Zealand, written to promote migration to the colony, as well as memoirs, reminiscences, letters back to Britain and public statements by politicians. Notice that the writers are essentially male, generally middle-class and emphasising male centred themes.

From his texts, Fairburn identifies **four themes** which together form a coherent vision of the country from the 'insider's' perspective:

- (i) That New Zealand was a country of **natural abundance** - richly endowed with what were called its 'natural advantages': climate, soil, plenty of land, proximity to trading routes, good harbours, luxuriant forest, ample minerals; and to these advantages, the human hand had called forth even more (or could do): a cornucopia of introduced animals and crops: peaches and pigs. In NZ, indeed nature could be improved; there was the chance for material growth or 'progress'.

### **Cornucopia?**

- (ii) New Zealand provided ample opportunities for labouring people to win an 'Independency' (in the 19th century phrase), that is, move out of total dependence on a wage by coming to live off property or self employment. In the idealised view then, New Zealand as a '**labourer's paradise**' offered the chance for labourers to escape from the paternalistic, dependent relationships of the Old World. The labourer, by his own efforts, could become the master of his own destiny (in this male centred view). Fairburn argues (and his evidence is rather thin here) that, in the insider's view, the conditions for material success in New Zealand were imagined to operate 'outside a social framework'. Winning a competency did not depend on collaboration, mutuality, or collective arrangement - except for the family. All that was required was the work ethic, or personal qualities rather than social organisation (pp.50-51) Hence Fairburn argues (and this is an important part of his argument) that the insider's view of the ideal society was of one that was minimally organised

### **Paternalistic?**

## Competency?

### minimally organised?

Meshing in with these two themes of '**natural abundance**' and '**labourer's paradise**' were two others which appealed to the propertied - the '**middle class paradise**'

- (iii) New Zealand was a **naturally tranquil Society**; there was a high level of order in settler society. Lives and property were safe. There was security from working class crime and protest. Again Fairburn sees this idealised vision as being 'described as if it were based on a minimal social organisation' (p.63). That the pursuit of economic self interest did not produce conflict because of the natural abundance; and the goodwill displayed by colonists towards each other came from the open social structure

### naturally tranquil society?

### Open social structure?

- (iv) The simple life of the settlers' society guaranteed middle class people **freedom from status anxiety** - absent in the colony were the stresses and strains of keeping up appearances that were to be found in England. In the colony, according to the insiders' view, the indignity of economic failure was removed,, so too was the need for extravagant expenditure to maintain status; also removed was the Old World taboo on physical labour.

### status anxiety?

### Keeping up appearances?

### Indignity of economic failure?

### Old World taboo?

Altogether then, Fairburn argues that the insider's idealised picture conforms to a particular type of ideal society, that he terms an **Arcadia**: a 'natural society' where natural abundance and the innately moderate behaviour of its inhabitants has abolished the necessity for social organisation.

This idealised view Fairburn sees as being attacked by modern historical writing in three alternative views that all share the same basic premise: **that settler society was a highly organised one, and not minimally organised** - as the insider's view would have it.

*In establishing his own thesis that settler society was atomised, **Fairburn seeks to refute three alternative views**, and in each case he has particular historians in his sights.*

(I) **The first alternative** (to the insider's view) is that **hierarchy** was a major aspect of colonial New Zealand. Here, as in each of the alternative views that he refutes, Fairburn defines the terms of the debate (in such a way, perhaps, that he can't lose). Hierarchy he defines in terms of the existence of paternalism where a substantial number of people are not independent individuals but under the authority of masters of mistresses: in other words, a model of **vertical bonding**. He obviously has **Stevan Eldred-Grigg** and his book on the Southern Gentry in view (and pessimists like W.B. Sutch). Fairburn concedes that the distribution of resources in settler society was 'extremely unequal'; but he does not see the other attributes which he claims as necessary to sustain a case for a hierarchically organised society: mass deprivation, blocked mobility, under-employment, over-population. Fairburn sees 'the whole social environment' working against hierarchy'; especially:

- the myth of the labourer's paradise
- the high rate of landownership
- the resourcefulness of wage earners, and their transience.

### **Hierarchy?**

#### **vertical bonding?**

Fairburn's argument and detail regarding the accessibility of land ownership and the use of land by 'working class' owners is very effective. He makes a strong case that the colonial working class and the small-holders were 'master-less men', essentially because the insiders' view of natural abundance was correct.

(2) If hierarchy (as Fairburn defines it) did not prevail in colonial New Zealand, what about a second alternative, class divisions? Fairburn offers three possible meanings of class division:

- (i) the uneven sharing of resources - this he virtually concedes exists, but he doesn't find it useful, since it is a characteristic of all societies
- (ii) domination in society of exclusive mixing and meeting patterns thereby forming a class based community.
- (iii) where certain members of communities gain a greater portion of economic resources at the expense of others

### **class divisions?**

#### **exclusive mixing and meeting patterns?**

Essentially Fairburn defines class-divisions in terms of the existence of **horizontal bonding**. Fairburn does not dispute that the great estate owners formed a class in his terms: and this must qualify the 'insider's' view of settler society. What he does dispute is that the manual workers formed a class as he defines it. He has two historians in his sights. Erik Olssen and Jock Phillips: Erik Olssen has written on class formation in a number of articles; Fairburn focuses on Olssen's account of working class formation in Dunedin from the 1880s (in his History of Otago)

Fairburn denies the significance of residential differentiation in the largest towns, and also questions the existence of an urban working-class subculture. He argues that while NZ was not totally free from class-division, the insiders' view was substantially

correct: the bonds between manual workers were insubstantial. Here he emphasises the significance of transience amongst other things) in accounting for the lack of class consciousness (and collective action) by urban manual workers.

### **horizontal bonding?**

### **residential differentiation?**

### **Transience?**

### **class consciousness?**

(3) Then Fairburn turns to Jock Phillips and his interpretation of **mateship in settler 'rural' society**. 'Man alone' was more prevalent than mateship. Pair-bonding amongst males was insubstantial - necessarily so, because of their transience.

### **Pair-bonding?**

If settler society's social organisation was not shaped by hierarchy or class there is still a third alternative: **communities**. Here Fairburn argues that historians like Jim Gardner and Erik Olssen see colonial New Zealand as organised into a '**vast collection of local communities**'. Social cohesion was locally based, most of the colonial population were in tight interlocking webs of propinquity and mutuality

### **Propinquity?**

### **Mutuality?**

There was intense meeting and mixing of people across boundaries of wealth and income. Communities were culturally egalitarian but they created the status anxieties of conformity (pp. 158-160). Inherently then, Fairburn sees the emphasis on communities by historians as a challenge to the 'insider's view' (as, he sees it) of minimal social organisation, free from status anxieties.

### **status anxieties?**

Again Fairburn seeks to refute the received opinion, arguing that the means of association at the local level were thin, and a large proportion of people had nothing to do with them. Thus the concept of cohesive local communities is illusory. Individuals did not have to worry about winning community approval, or needing to avoid community sanctions. Essentially he attempts to show the great weakness of four kinds of associational frameworks: **community festivals, kinship, neighbourhood, and voluntary institutions.**

### **Associational frameworks?**

## Kinship?

### neighbourhood, and voluntary institutions?

It's here, in his denial of community, that Fairburn will prove to be at his most controversial because what follows from his position is the affirmation of the 'insider's' view that settler society was minimally organised: it was socially atomised. Although (as Fairburn puts it) 'some people lived close to others and interacted with them, **social isolation** was the prevailing tendency; much more so before 1880, however, than after'.

**Why?** - Because of:

- a tide of migrants, most of whom were bondless individuals
- the rapid expansion of the frontier which pushed most colonists into new areas where they were strangers to one another
- footloose colonists formed only fleeting relationships; and many settlers were physically isolated from one another
- economic prosperity 'converted practically every male and female breadwinner into a masterless man or woman'
- in addition (Fairburn asserts) the colony's ruling ideology of extreme individualism inhibited the growth of institutions below the state level.

Fairburn does develop his argument further since he is trying to show: firstly. the insider's view of the ideal society was indeed flawed - by loneliness, drunkenness and violence; and secondly, there were mechanisms which placed limits on the 'chaos of the minimally organised society': the role of the state, self-repression, the emergence of institutions of association. From the 1880s. in Fairburn's view, communities did start to develop. Indeed, in conceding that there were limits on 'frontier chaos' Fairburn himself opens the way for a critical appraisal of his powerful thesis.

### Some critical appraisals

(i) **G.C. Dunstall:** How atomised was settler society at any particular time? Some of his evidence can I think be differently construed. It is not clear for example that the 'insiders' he cites did have an image of a minimally organised society: the role of the state (or its equivalent for a short while - the New Zealand Company) was an expected feature from the outset. In his evidence of minimal association, Fairburn focuses essentially on institutions of leisure; in fact the work experience and its discipline is the crucial experience. Even from Fairburn's own evidence it seems that most males in settler society probably did not work alone, but in teams or partnerships - requiring trust, cooperation, mutuality. however transient. It is notable that by the 1870s at least (and these are the earliest figures Fairburn cites) a majority of the population were apparently not physically remote from one another. Even if we concede a degree of social atomisation, it is not clear that this automatically excludes the alternative views that he refutes: hierarchy, class divisions, community. A more complex picture is possible, perhaps from a regional focus. His perspective on social organisation is a partial one. The nature of colonial elites, for example, is not examined. His perspective, with its emphasis on the bondless male, is essentially a male centred one: his perspective does not really encompass the experience of women.

(ii) **Raewyn Dalziel:** (NZ Listener 22 Jan 1990) 'One of the book's weaknesses is its inability to come to terms with the family as a component of social organisation. Fairburn admits that the family, along with the 'man alone. was the 'core unit in the



simple society of Arcadia' and notes that the insiders saw its 'economic and other functions either facilitating or indispensable to the rise of the novice settler'. This message, however, is never fully absorbed into the argument. The family, indeed women, are not major players.

This is despite the fact that Fairburn's own evidence demonstrates the central importance of the family. In a section which argues that the footloose males who drifted from job to job were 'atomised', he cites the case of J W Reed. Reed emigrated to Auckland in 1887. He could not find work and travelled from job to job for a year before settling for 20 years on the one farm. Surely the real conclusion to be drawn is that Reed, who was married and had four children was so anxious to support the family he was responsible for and entrenched within that he was prepared to leave them temporarily to earn enough to settle them on the land. Far from being atomised, he had the strongest of social bonds.

The reason for emphasising the 'man alone' is largely demographic. It is certainly true that during the 19th century men outnumbered women and significant numbers of men never married. At any one time, however, the overwhelming majority of Pakeha New Zealanders were members of families. By the 1874 census the majority of men over 20 were married or widowed and many who were then enumerated as single would marry in the future. In addition, many of the men who did not marry, even among the new immigrants, had kin in New Zealand. It is simply incorrect to equate single with kinless in 19th-century New Zealand.'

(iii) **John E. Martin:** (People's History, Newsletter, Historical Branch, Internal Affairs, March 1990). 'Difficulties arise when Fairburn looks at change. In the latter part of the book it becomes apparent that the period of considerable atomisation was the thirty years from the 1850s to the 1870s. This could have been introduced earlier. He also remarks briefly at the end that from the 1900s onwards our society became highly organised. This is a surprising development given the strength of previous atomisation. The origins of such a high degree of organisation by the twentieth century must go back into the nineteenth century. At present the subtitle of the book is rather odd since it suggests that atomisation was the 'foundation' of modern New Zealand society whereas in fact it is only when the atomising tendencies of the frontier are overcome that a modern strongly-bonded society emerged.

In the light of this some of the statistical series really begin too late for the atomised period. Perhaps the collection of statistics is itself a reflection of increasing organisation! Fairburn looks at freehold land from 1882 (other data not used goes back only to 1874). Fairburn uses the statistics to indicate the wide spread of land-ownership, but apart from this can say little more than there was little long-term change over the 1880s and 1890s. He by-passes the fact that the statistics show a considerable concentration of landholding in the hands of a few that did not decline over time. In the view of some, this concentration was an important part of rural social organisation and has to be taken account of. The combined broad spread and concentration of landholding were indeed related, with smallholders and farmers' sons providing labour for large runholders and estate owners in the regions where concentration of land was a feature.

While conceding that atomisation has largely been ignored and is an important dimension that runs through New Zealand society. I remain unconvinced that it was the single 'governing category' or 'master variable' in Fairburn's words. The issue is whether we have to characterise New Zealand society in terms of a single principle. Is it either atomisation, or hierarchy or class or community, or can we see elements of all these dimensions combined, perhaps found to a greater or lesser extent in particular parts of the country. in different contexts and at different times? Fairburn's atomisation model seems to apply best to the more isolated pioneering backblocks areas in the early years of settlement. while Eldred-Grigg's fits lowland Canterbury in the late nineteenth century, for example.'

(iv) **Tom Brooking:** 'Another problem is Fairburn's tendency to ignore research which runs counter to his own findings. He fails to mention Terry Hearn's work on gold miners, which suggests widespread existence of partnership based on kin and ethnic lines. Studies which demonstrate that community structures developed with remarkable speed in areas as wildly frontier as Lawrence, Woodville or Pahiatua are neglected, as is Trevor Burnard's demolition of the Eldred-Grigg 'gentry' thesis and Erik Olssen's work on the Red Feds. The reader is left with the sneaking suspicion that Fairburn has set out to find precisely what he is looking for.

Finally, Fairburn's neglect of Maori and women is worrying. Surely traditional Maori were one of the major enemies of the ideal society because their communally based culture and system of land ownership was the very antithesis of the Arcadian ideal. Many settler leaders complained that the Maori were "communists and predicted that they would never progress until they became individualists." There were also a host of other enemies, human, animal and botanical, visible and invisible, whom Fairburn neglects. Chinese, Japanese, Indians. monopolists, rabbits, blackberry, anthrax. pleuro-pneumonia and foot-rot all threatened the ideal society in real or imagined ways.

Fairburn gives the reader little sense of either what part women were expected to play in the ideal society or what role they actually adopted in colonial New Zealand. Even if the new 'Arcadia was 'a man's country'. women won advances within it that made them the envy of the old world.'

#### **How then might teachers and students use Fairburn?**

(i) Given the vigour and all-encompassing nature of his argument (slaying all about him), he can be well used to introduce historiographical debate - juxtaposing his arguments (for example) with those of Stevan Eldred-Grigg or Rollo Arnold.

(ii) He can be used (along with Eldred-Grigg) to stimulate topics for local research. Here again the issue of leisure springs to mind: what do the local histories (say of Rangiora, Ashburton. Hamilton, Palmerston North, or Cromwell) reveal about the timing and type of institutions of leisure?

(iii) Family history - the migration. mobility, land holdings. leisure and life chances of one's ancestors provide also another means to assess Fairburn.

#### **Some Issues to think about:**

##### **The Concepts**

How useful are Fairburn's definitions of 'hierarchy' and class?

Is atomisation a necessary or the best explanation for the characteristics of settler society that he seeks to explain?

Is a colony-wide analysis appropriate?

How unique, in relation to 'atomisation', was New Zealand?

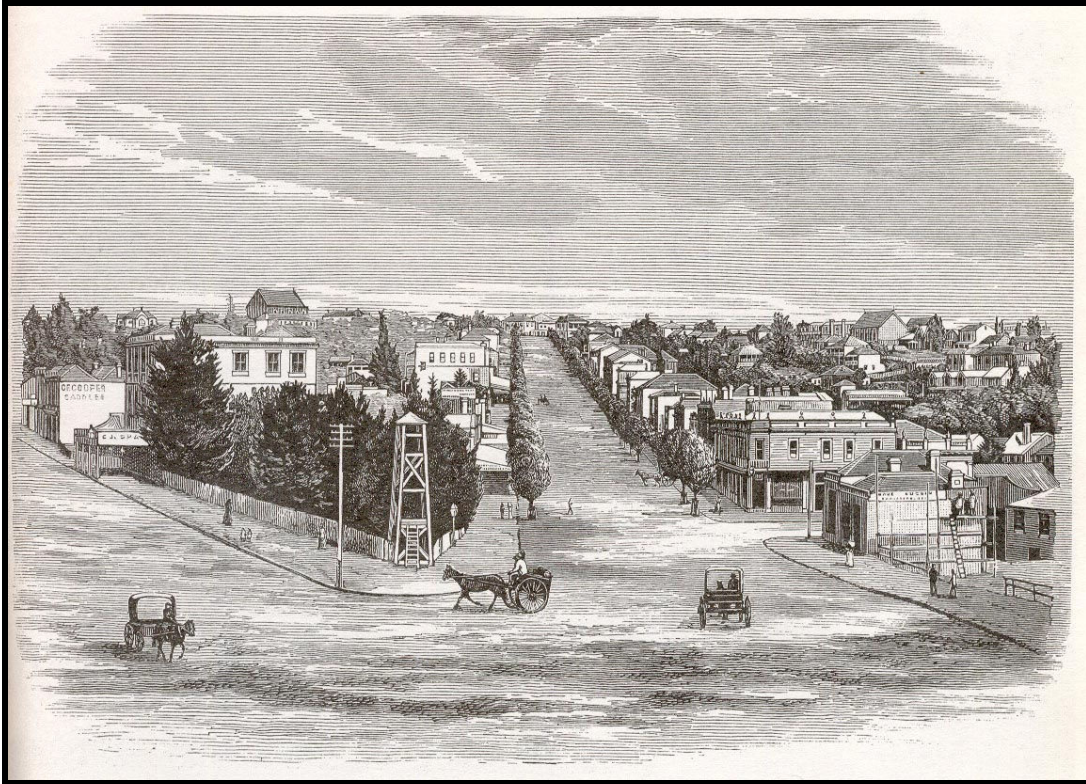
Are Fairburn's tests of the degree of association (or lack of community) too strict?

#### **The Sources and evidence**

Do they convey the idea of minimal organization (or is its existence taken for granted)?

Was there perhaps evidence of a coercive/beneficent state from the outset?

How sound is his evidence for denying local communities, weak kinship ties and lack of neighbourhood bonding?



Intersection of Grey's Ave and Queen St

## 2. THE IDEAL SOCIETY AND ITS ENEMIES By Miles Fairburn - Mr Pipe's notes)

**ARCADIA** = Ideal region of rustic contentment (actually mountainous district in the Peloponnese - the domain of PAN, the Shepherd's God).

### 1. Unconventional book

- a) doesn't divide into the usual neat categories eg
  - **demography**
  - **women's history**
  - **family history**
  - **rival history etc**
- b) doesn't follow the usual formula of looking at overseas models and then seeing how they compare with NZ.
- c) Doesn't have a normal governing category selected from -  
**gender / ethnicity / region / class / religion**
- d) Doesn't follow a chronological sequence

### 2. Storyline

What his book uses as governing category is **SOCIAL ORGANISATION** - the fabric of interpersonal relationships, the ties that people formed, the settings and institutions which bonded them together and thru which they interacted.

### FAIRBURN'S CLAIMS

1. NZ's **social organisation** was **gravely deficient**.
  - community structures were few and weak
  - forces of social isolation were many and powerful
  - Bondlessness was central to colonial life therefore typical colonist was a socially independent individual.
2. He uses the term Atomisation to explain and account for a large cluster of the traits and trends which characterize the colonial settler pattern

### FAIRBURN'S ARGUMENT

<b>Social Isolation</b>	<b>Bondlessness</b>	<b>Extreme Individualism</b>	<b>Man Alone</b>
<b>Atomised Society</b>	<b>Masterless Breadwinner</b>		

**Atomisation** contributed to

- 1) Colony's powerful attachment to family life
- 2) Rapid growth of state institutions
- 3) Development of deeply repressed personality- work ethic cultivated to phobic level
- 4) High level of material independence and prosperity "Jack and Jill of all trades"
- 5) Great occupational mobility
- 6) High level of property ownership
- 7) Strong sense of social equality

His evidence is based upon a system of **analysing several communities** across N.Z. and comparing what he calls the **Rates of Persistence of Heads of Households over 10 year periods.**

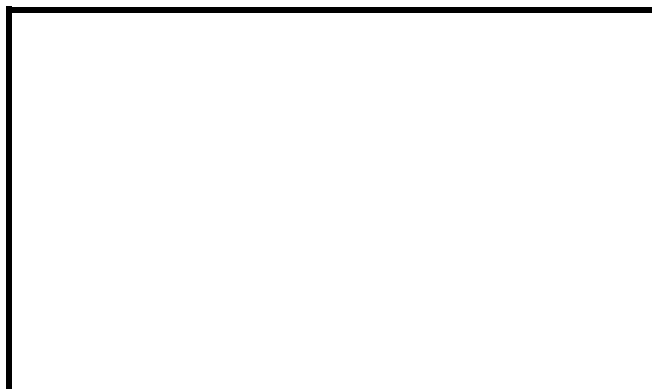
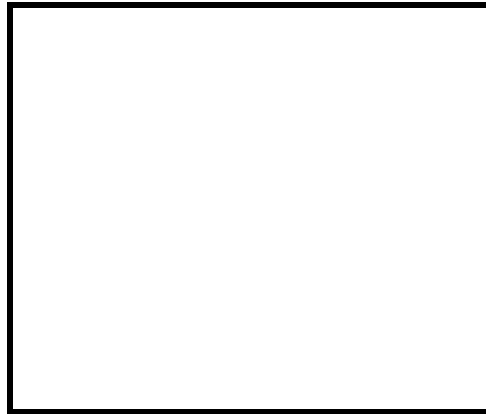
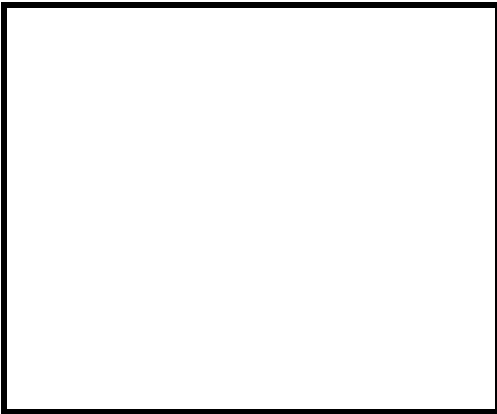
- Persister.** =
- 1) Someone whose name and address is the same at the beginning and end of the period
  - 2) Whose name is the same but address in the locality is different
  - 3) Whose surname and address are the same but whose Christian name and/or gender are different
  - 4) Whose surname and address are the same but who has one initial one year ,followed by 2 or more in another.

**Transients are those who do not fit into the above categories.**



Does the incidence of fire prove or disprove Fairburn?

### 3. Some diagrams to illustrate the arguments



## **The enemies of the Ideal society**



**A Hierarchical society**

**A Class-divided society**



**A Society of cohesive  
local communities**

**ATOMISED SOCIETY**

#### **4. Rollo Arnold. Community in Rural Victorian New Zealand. NZJH**

This article/essay is defending the argument that 19th century settler society was a world of localised communities.

- Family kin and neighbours worked together
- Pooling of talent often needed
- Community resources eg school, church, cemetery, public hall obtained by pooling labour, materials and talent.

Just as Fairburn summarises the above arguments called by Fairburn the "Gardner-Oliver Legend" in turn, Arnold summarises Fairburn's argument viz

- N.Z society offered a world in which rapid frontier expansion scattered settlers as transient strangers, isolated by atrocious communications
- Public occasions produced only fleeting and superficial relationships
- Truancy prevents schools from socializing the young
- Rural service townships devastated by high transience rates
- NZ society atomized

Arnold argues that studies of the small farmer worlds of N.Z, Ireland, Canada and the U.S.A. have found ample evidence of farmer reciprocity.

##### **Reciprocity?**

Turns to several farming diaries and analyses what sort of local ties and social interaction they indulged in to refute Fairburn's argument of an "atomised society".

Mr Pipe believes that Arnold is on weak ground with these examples because Fairburn is generalising from a far wider evidence base .ie I don't believe that these examples- thorough as they are in themselves , refute Fairburn. But to be fair to both they are using a different evidence type.

Arnold is on firmer critical ground when he applies his analysis to Fairburn's own examples of rural towns with the highest transience rates eg Normanby 1878 – 89 (the ten year period)

##### **Normanby (according to Rollo Arnold)**

1. Fairburn's method is faulty:

- a) If we study the 42 household heads in Normanby in 1878 we find surnames repeated six times suggesting that kinship ties may be stronger than Fairburn suggests
- b) Some names on the list are unreal ie non-existent on any other source of information.

2) Fairburn's statistics and argument deny extensive community life

- A Small Farm Association set up to negotiate for a block of 20000 acres of forest land
- a group of Normanby citizens promoted an ambitious Town Hall which by 1883
- hosted a highly successful sports day.
- a Horticultural Society set up
- Swiss cheese maker set up a cheese factory

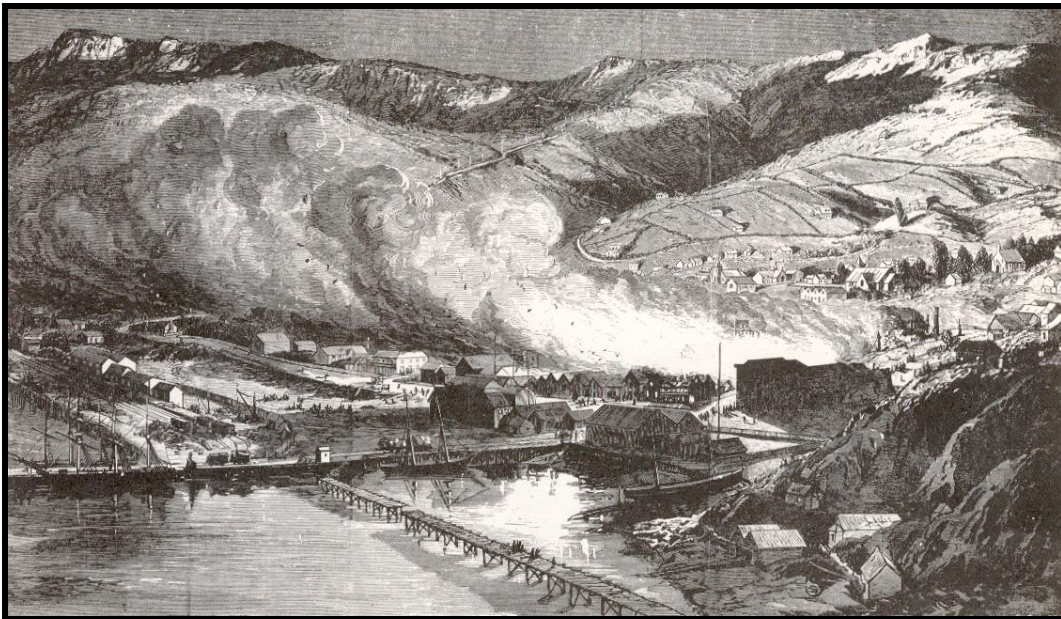
3. Arnold paints a picture of continual relationships even though some do leave the settlement to move to nearby Hawera and environs
4. Arnold estimates Normanby's transience rate at 64% not Fairburns 74%.

### **Marton**

1. Argues that the sources are in error. They just do not hang together. The test used are unreliable
2. Argues that from his evidence many new arrivals were settled warmly and quickly into their new community, ie not atomised.
3. We do not yet have statistics on which to deduce conclusions that are reliable.

### **Conclusion**

- 1 .Undoubtedly there was much population movement but to claim that it atomised society is leaping in the face of evidence.
- 2 .We can better advance our understanding of social history by acknowledging richly varied human relations in evidence.
3. Makes good horse-sense to stick with the Gardiner/Oliver legend



**A Great fire**

**How can we integrate these arguments into our essays?**

## **5. Loneliness versus community - an historical debate**

### **In Glimpses of New Zealand in the nineteenth century**

#### **by Graham Hucker, P121, 122**

We never refused food and shelter to respectable men going from station to station in change of work.

Martha Adams. early Marlborough settler

The study of historiography (historical writing) is an important process in understanding the past. It is a branch of history that deals with how historians have interpreted the past. Historiography stimulates debate amongst historians which often opens the way for different interpretations and understandings of history than had been previously accepted. New Zealand historiography is relatively young, but it is not without debate. In 1989 historian Miles Fairburn wrote *The Ideal Society and its Enemies The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* which challenged the traditional beliefs surrounding European settler society and has provided a major debate amongst New Zealand historians

Fairburn's work on European settler society tries to find out what was different about that society and its experience. In doing so Fairburn has altered the base of modern New Zealand. Fairburn argues that when the emigrants left England for New Zealand they were full of an Arcadian or Utopian vision of what they would find in New Zealand - an ideally happy, innocent country life where they would be free of the entanglements and unpleasantness of the old world, such as poverty and class distinctions. They would also be independent and own land. For some that vision of Arcadia came true but at the expense of community. Fairburn argues that 'rapid frontier expansion scatters settlers who are transient strangers. Relationships between people are only superficial and fleeting. High transience rates - the movement of people in and out of an area devastate any notion of community' As a result, according to Fairburn, European settler society became a bondless, atomised, isolated society that focused extreme individualism.

Running counter to Fairburn's vision is the traditional view of European Society put forward by historians W J Gardner and W H Oliver that communities of co-operative settlers worked and interacted with each other in a society that was relatively free of divisiveness and violence. Fairburn labels this view the 'Gardner/Oliver legend'. Fairburn's ideas have produced an inevitable response of Opposition and support. Firstly, the opposition. Rollo Arnold argues that European settler society was co-operative and that a sense of community existed. Arnold adds further that '... much of a community's needs were met from local resources, in face-to-face transactions.' To Arnold, friendship and interaction with relations and neighbours did exist, but to claim, as Fairburn does, that European settler society was an '... "atomised" society is to leap blindly in the face of the evidence.' To support his own argument Arnold uses examples of the horse and transport as means which enabled the settler to regularly come into contact with the local community. 'When he went riding, driving, or carting he used the products of local craftsmen - saddlers, harness makers, wheelwrights, cartwrights, farriers. For horsepower, vehicles and fuel he was involved in neighbourly face-to-face transactions far more complex and intimate than those of our motorized world.' Other historians, namely Tom Brooking, Raewyn Dalziel and Graeme Dunstall, are critical over gender perspectives. Dunstall says '... his perspective, with its emphasis on the bondless male. Is essentially a male centred one; his perspective does not really encompass the experience of women.' Dalziel goes further and says '... one of the books weaknesses is its inability to come to terms with the family as a Component of social organisation. Brooking feels that '... Fairburn's neglect of Maori and women is worrying. Surely traditional Maori and women were one of the major enemies of the ideal society because their communally based culture and system of land ownership was the very antithesis of the arcadian ideal. The key to the middle ground is perhaps held by John F Martin where he concedes that '... Fairburn's

atomisation model seems to apply best to the more isolated pioneering backblocks areas in the early years of the settlement ....'

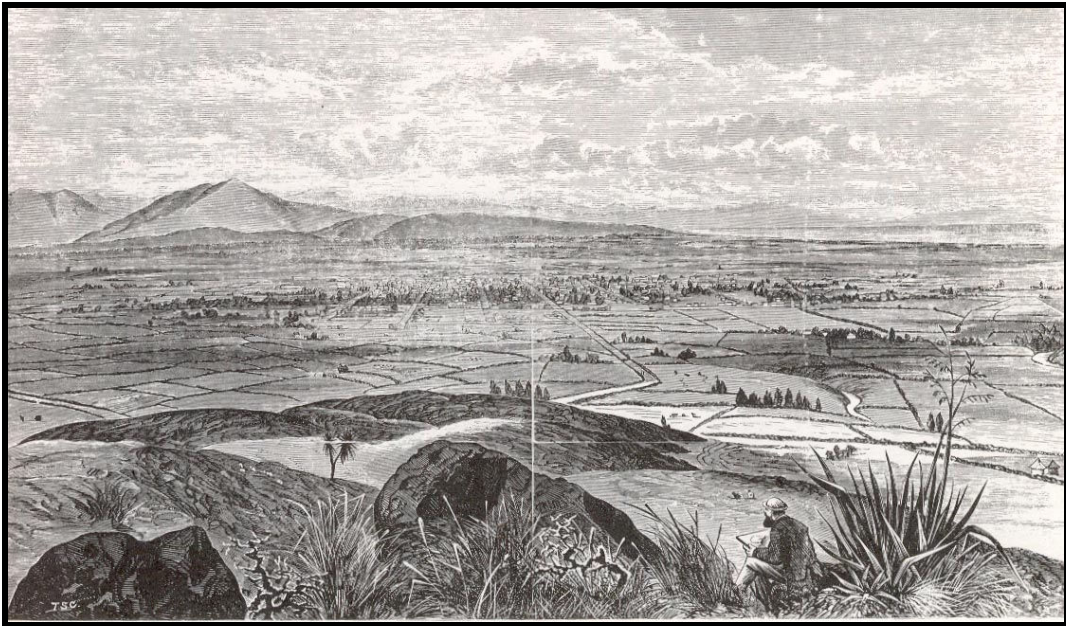
Fairburn is not without supporters. Historian Alan Ward writes 'This is one of the most important historical works written in New Zealand this century.' A similar view is echoed by historian Colin Davis Davis when he wrote, one of the most important and exciting books of New Zealand social history.' Davis helps answer some of Fairburn's critics on the issues of neglecting Maori and women. Davis writes, 'Maori societies stood in antithesis to the social atomisation of pakeha society. It is hard to see how its study could contribute to an understanding of European bondlessness.' He adds that '... women do feature recurrently in the analysis and Fairburn has constructive things to say about single women and the work force, women and the virtuous family deserted wives, violence against women, wives as household managers, the absence of women in kinship groups, women and associational networks, women and loneliness, women and alcohol and gender ratios and social disorder. It is hardly a neglected subject.'

'Undoubtedly, it took nerve to write,' wrote Davis about The Ideal Society. Ward believes that '... the New Zealand people, as a thinking, political community in the wider sense, might well be grateful to Fairburn for providing fresh standpoints for self awareness, evaluation and choice.' You may choose to accept Fairburn's ideas of atomisation, loneliness and bondlessness. Rollo Arnold will tell you that '... it makes good horse sense to stick with the "Gardner/Oliver legend".'

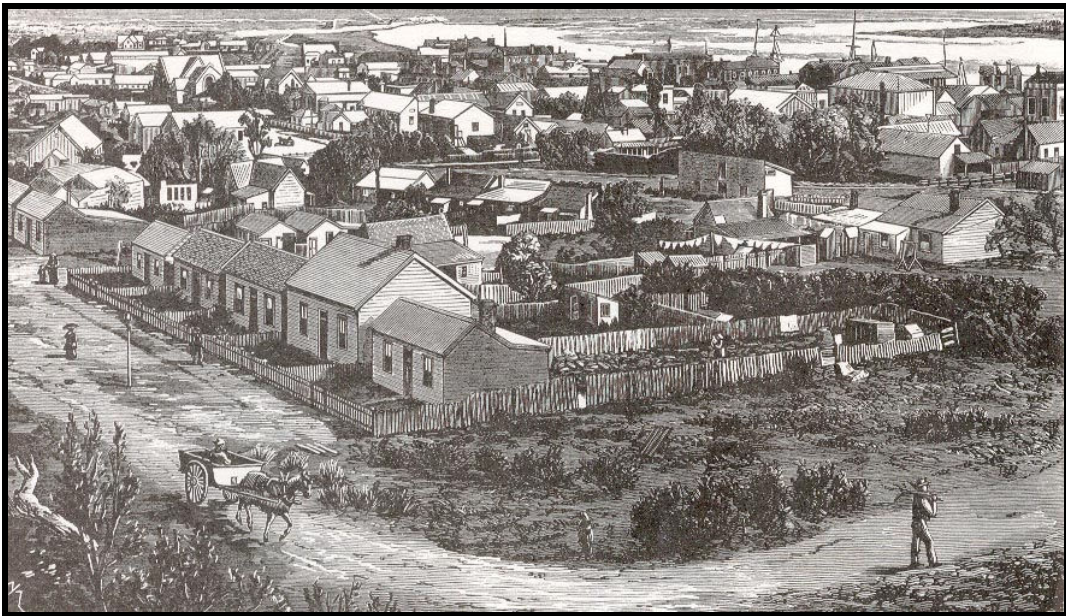
This summary is an overview of the arguments that adds some value to the previous articles.

How can we integrate these arguments into our understanding of nineteenth century New Zealand?





**Christchurch**



**Greymouth**



