

# 4

## The Lawyers

This chapter charts the establishment of two legal families, those of Julia and Frederick Wilding in Christchurch and Henry and Mary Alice Higgins in Melbourne. The process differs in its emphases from that observed within the academic families of the previous chapter and unfolds within markedly different individual circumstances. The Wildings arrived in Christchurch in 1879 as a professional couple, with clearly developed notions of the family, needing only to satisfy the none too onerous qualifying conditions of the New Zealand legal system before commencing practice. The tale of their establishment thus emphasises the manner in which they attached themselves to the city's professional elite, integrated themselves into a range of social and cultural activities and developed networks of friends and acquaintances. By contrast, the establishment of Henry Higgins is intimately bound into the migration story of his Irish parents. Eighteen years of age in 1869 when he arrived in Melbourne with his mother and siblings, his passage to the legal profession and marriage spreads over 16 years. The passage was negotiated through ethnic and religious networks, engendered a sharp awareness of the realities of social class and consolidated the central place of family in his thinking. Ultimately, Henry's intellectual abilities and talents allowed them to flourish within the colonial society.

## Julia and Frederick Wilding: 'We certainly transplant very well'<sup>1</sup>

Unlike their academic contemporaries heading for the University of Melbourne and Canterbury College safe in the knowledge that a salaried position awaited them, 26-year-old solicitor Frederick Wilding and his wife Julia faced greater uncertainty and risk as they set sail for New Zealand shortly after their marriage late in June 1879. Julia was in the early stages of pregnancy when they first set foot in New Zealand in September 1879. They entered a debt-ridden country moving into a lengthy period of economic stagnation. The 'long depression' as it was once called by historians lasted arguably until 1895.<sup>2</sup> Though the Wildings came armed with some capital to tide them over the early establishment period and the promise of further family financial support, their success in New Zealand was largely dependent upon Frederick's ability to negotiate the hard economic times to establish himself as a barrister and build a successful legal practice.

Within three years of settling in Christchurch they had become a recognisable couple within the community. Their 'arrival' can be measured in a succession of milestones: Frederick's admittance to the New Zealand Bar as a barrister and solicitor in 1880; the establishment of a legal practice in 1881; Frederick's inclusion in the Canterbury cricket team in 1881; the purchase, in 1883, of Fownhope in Opawa, on the fringe of suburban Christchurch, which remained the family home for 65 years; membership of the prestigious Canterbury Club; and, in 1884, the hosting of a garden party at Fownhope for 200 guests that marked their acceptance within the city.<sup>3</sup> We shall see that the speed and relative ease with which the Wildings established themselves owes much to their personal talents and interests. It was also made possible by the timing of their arrival and by the nature of the Christchurch

1 Frederick Wilding, 'Life in New Zealand', *HT*, 17 July 1880.

2 W. J. Gardner, 'A Colonial Economy', in Geoffrey W. Rice (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1992, pp. 75, 614 n. 48; Jim McAloon, 'The New Zealand Economy, 1792–1914', in Giselle Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2009, p. 213; Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, p. 93.

3 Julia Wilding's Events Diary (JWED) 1879–1908, WFP, box 11/54/54: 8 June 1880, 1 September 1881, 21 April 1883; Julia Wilding's Household Diary (JWHD) 1883, WFP, box 1/5/5: Household Diary Expenditure Summary for 1883; 6 February 1884, JWHD 1884, WFP, box 2/6/6.

society they entered. As a predominantly English city, a couple from Hereford could more easily make their way in Christchurch, and there remained, as the 1880s began, enough fluidity and flexibility to accommodate newcomers within its developing professional urban culture.

Indirectly, these markers of the Wildings' 'arrival' tell also something of the commitment that infused the act of migration and the family experiment that was at its centre. Julia and Frederick were 'joiners', enthusiasts with a wide range of interests and talents, who, almost as soon as they arrived, became involved in a range of societies and clubs that signalled an enthusiastic engagement with their new community. These included the Debating Club, the Glee Society, the Library Society, the Lancaster Park Cricket Club, the Canterbury Cricket Club, the County Athletic Club, the Cranmer Square Tennis Club, the Christchurch Musical Society and the Philosophical Society.<sup>4</sup> If Julia's presence seems at first less prominent than that of her husband, this reflected the fact that the material and public manifestations of building a new home are more easily measured. The human dimension of the family experiment upon which the Wildings embarked proceeded at its own pace. Their first child, a son who they named Frederick Archibald, died in December 1880 of dysentery when nine months old. By October 1883 Julia had given birth to a daughter and another son and the family experiment was ready to begin.<sup>5</sup>

There can be no doubt that the attraction of New Zealand for Frederick and Julia Wilding lay in what they believed to be its 'Englishness'. It was this perception that had led them to favour migration to New Zealand rather than one of the Australian colonies. Stopovers in Adelaide and Melbourne during the voyage to New Zealand provided an opportunity to test this judgement.<sup>6</sup> Frederick found his confirmation in what he perceived to be an emergent Australian national type, as distasteful as it was distinctive:

4 These societies and clubs are first mentioned in JWHD 1880, JWHD 1881, JWHD 1883, WFP, box 1/2/2, 1/3/3, 1/5/5 expenditure entries for the following dates respectively: 11 March 1880, 7 May 1880, 3 July 1880, 11 August 1880, 17 September 1880, 14 October 1880, 8 June 1881, 5 July 1881, 23 October 1883.

5 Frederick Archibald Wilding, 10 March 1880 – 30 December 1880; Gladys Julia Wilding, b. 1 November 1881; Frederick Anthony Wilding, b. 31 October 1883.

6 Frederick Wilding, 'Jottings of a Voyage to the Antipodes', *HT*, 22 November 1879.

though 'corn stalks', as the young Australians are called, are athletically and mentally up to the average of English youth [they possessed] bad, sallow complexions. An Englishman is struck by their lounging, loafing air, their proneness to strange uncouth slang and a nasal accent, not so pronounced as the American drawl, but most unmusical to susceptible ears.<sup>7</sup>

New Zealand, supposedly, did not possess such a type, and, in Christchurch, he observed, newcomers from England continued to be as 'anxious as the old settlers to perpetuate in the colony all that is best in English life'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Englishness had undergone 'no perceptible alteration' among the first settlers.<sup>9</sup> In a column contributed to the *Hereford Times*, he conceded that the 'the wrench of leaving one's friends and associations is sharper' than he had anticipated, but suggested that the transplant from England to New Zealand was 'little more, in many respects, than a change from Northumberland to Devonshire'.<sup>10</sup> At first glance, Christchurch, and indeed New Zealand as a whole, appeared to be a better Britain, where there was more social freedom, fewer and more relaxed social conventions and less pressure towards conspicuous consumption; a place where perceived British characteristics were maintained but in a more relaxed form.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the very different conditions that existed in the colony had allowed English political institutions to be adapted in ways that provided 'almost perfect political freedom'.<sup>12</sup> Such was the initial judgement of a young lawyer sufficiently confident in his Englishness to proclaim enthusiastically to readers of the *Hereford Times* that 'we certainly transplant very well'.<sup>13</sup>

There was much that Wilding thought comforting and English about Christchurch. He was struck by 'the home-like look of everything and everybody' and suggested to readers of the *Hereford Times* that the city's 'beautiful public gardens, museums, theatres, steam trams and host of cabs [were] faintly, very faintly suggestive of London'.<sup>14</sup> The quest for such reassuring signs came naturally

7 Frederick Wilding, 'Life in New Zealand', *HT*, 17 July 1880.

8 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

9 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

10 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 22 May 1880.

11 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 29 November 1879, 27 December 1879, 22 May 1880, 17 July 1880.

12 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

13 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

14 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

enough to migrants, but some historians seem as keen to diminish the Englishness of the city's past as Julia and Frederick Wilding were to welcome it. By describing the city's 22 February 2011 earthquake as a 'postcolonial moment' that would, by its destruction of monuments and buildings, provide a natural break from the city's English past, historian Katie Pickles has given this tendency its most controversial airing.<sup>15</sup> Historians have generally been more circumspect in their discussion of the city's Englishness. Most stress that its urban form was 'more recognisable as a colonial and New World town', and that its culture was no more English than Wellington's, but allow that its flatness enabled settlers to construct a more English-looking town than proved possible anywhere else in New Zealand.<sup>16</sup> The topography allowed for more brick and stone constructions, enclosed spaces and public gardens, and lacked Wellington's 'vistas of bush and wild hills'. Whatever Englishness it possessed in 1879, Christchurch appealed to the Wildings and seemed a good place not to replicate England, but rather to help in the construction of a better one.

Would the 'better England' allow the realisation of idealised aspirations that the young couple attached to migration? Middle-class professionals did not escape the general belt-tightening that accompanied the prolonged recession marking the 1870s and 1880s. Male newcomers at the lower end of the professional ladder now competed in a contracting job market against a growing number of colonial-born sons for a diminishing number of clerkships and secretaryships. 'Local influence' and 'private friendship', Wilding believed, determined such appointments in much the same way as it did at 'Home'.<sup>17</sup> Legal clerks and solicitors were finding their paths blocked by the sons of wealthy and influential families, who now dominated the field. Several longstanding firms of solicitors dating back to the 1850s and 1860s had garnered the shrinking volume of legal work. The situation was more promising for migrant barristers

15 Katie Pickles, 'A Natural Break from our Colonial Past', Perspective, *Christchurch Press*, 8 April 2011 (A15). For reactions to Pickles's article, see 'Past Present', *Press* editorial, 11 April 2011 (A12); Letters to the Editor, *Press*, 11 April 2011; Lorraine North, 'Victorian Legacy', Perspective, *Press*, 13 April 2011 (A19). See also Pickles's recently published book: *Christchurch Ruptures*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2016.

16 John Cookson, 'Pilgrims' Progress—Image, Identity and Myth in Christchurch', in Cookson and Dunstall (eds), *Southern Capital*, pp. 13, 28–32. See also Lyndon Fraser and Angela McCarthy, *Far from Home: The English in New Zealand*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2012.

17 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 22 May 1880.

and especially, in Wilding's view, for qualified English medical men.<sup>18</sup> Those with capital could, he believed, buy into a practice on 'easier terms' than in England.<sup>19</sup> He was optimistic that, despite the temporary downturn, Christchurch would continue to be a 'rapidly increasing community' and offer fewer obstacles to establishing a new practice than Hereford, the 'stationary town' he had left behind.<sup>20</sup> In his view, professional men may have been 'badly paid', but most seemed 'to make pretty good livings'.<sup>21</sup>

Wilding's analysis of the city's legal scene was an accurate one and is largely endorsed by Daniel Duman's study, *The English and Colonial Bars in the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>22</sup> Duman's survey of the movement of English legal professionals to the colonies dismisses the commonplace assumption that the colonies served as a refuge for the failures of the English legal world and shows that Englishness did not guarantee a successful colonial career. Most colonial lawyers in his random sample of the colonial bars in 1885 were colonial-born and trained. Very few of the migrant English practitioners to establish themselves in colonial settings had practised before migrating, and thus possessed no form.<sup>23</sup> The attraction of the colonies for aspiring lawyers, in Duman's view, was that they offered alternative careers for 'less ambitious and competitive English, Scots and Irish lawyers'.<sup>24</sup> Frederick Wilding was neither a failed nor an unambitious lawyer, but an impatient one with different goals. A qualified and practising solicitor with his own legal practice in Hereford, he had some experience of advocacy work. He had, as we have seen earlier, undergone the required five-year solicitor's apprenticeship and was admitted to the English Bar as a solicitor in 1874. He had subsequently decided to qualify as a barrister, and had entered counsel's chambers for this purpose. The cost of the three years further study involved thwarted his desire

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18 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 22 May 1880. Wilding noted that this was particularly the case for British-trained medical newcomers, who were able to establish practices in Christchurch in a few short years. Similarly, he understood that 'parsons of all denominations' were in 'fair request' and 'freethought lecturers drew good crowds on Saturday afternoons'.

19 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 22 May 1880.

20 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 22 May 1880.

21 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 22 May 1880.

22 Duman, *The English and Colonial Bars*.

23 Duman, *The English and Colonial Bars*, pp. 121–23, 137–38.

24 Duman, *The English and Colonial Bars*, p. 138.

to earn a living that would enable him to marry.<sup>25</sup> In New Zealand, the training of barristers and solicitors was less distinct. Within six months of arriving in Christchurch, Wilding had passed the New Zealand Law and Practice Exam, and was admitted to the Bar as a barrister and solicitor in June 1880.<sup>26</sup>

Progress within the legal profession was speedy, despite the fluctuating economic environment. Within a year of arrival in the city, at a cost of £150, Wilding formed a partnership with fellow Englishman Dr Charles Foster, a part-time law lecturer at Canterbury College, who had helped him prepare for his bar examinations.<sup>27</sup> Within a year the partnership was dissolved and Wilding established his own firm in Hereford Street at the heart of the city's commercial district.<sup>28</sup> Over the next 30 years, during which it underwent a variety of permutations, the practice provided an income that placed the family amongst what Jim McAloon has characterised as the third tier of urban wealth—the 'lesser rich' as opposed to those in the tier above with 'very large urban fortunes' of between £40,000 and £99,000.<sup>29</sup> The income it generated provided the bulk of family income and sustained a comfortable, yet unpretentious lifestyle that offered a pathway into the profession for the two eldest sons. One measure of the success of Frederick Wilding's transplant to the colonies, and the recognition afforded the family practice, was his appointment in 1913 as King's Counsel.

However important the practice of law was to be in the accumulation of wealth, its role in securing the family's place in late nineteenth-century Christchurch should not be seen in isolation from the experiment of which it was an important, but not the defining, part.

25 Press cutting, WFP, box 42/3. For an explanation of the English system of legal education and qualifications, see Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 59–60; and Reader, *Professional Men*, pp. 21–31, 43–56, 118–21, 134.

26 JWED, 15 March 1880, 8 June 1880, WFP, box 11/54/54. Like most law students in New Zealand, he had studied privately, most likely with Englishman Dr Charles Foster, a practising lawyer and part-time law lecturer at Canterbury College (1873–80). Lectures in Jurisprudence had been offered at Canterbury College from the university's inception and the LLB degree offered from 1877. See Gardner, 'The Formative Years', p. 97; Jeremy Finn, *Educating for the Profession: Law at Canterbury 1873–1973*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2010, pp. 17–21.

27 JWED, 6 September 1880, 10 August 1880, WFP, box 11/54/54.

28 JWED, 1 September 1881, WFP, box 11/54/54.

29 Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840–1914*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2002, pp. 55–62; Probate records of Frederick Wilding, Probate Register: Christchurch 2406/1945, National Archives, Christchurch. By his death in 1945 Frederick Wilding left behind him an estate worth £29,490, accumulated over 65 years, despite considerable expenditure on their children during that time (Julia had predeceased him in 1936).

The idealism with which migration had been infused was a shared one that, in theory at least, rejected the separate spheres of the new urban order. It did so by asserting the centrality of the family as an instrument of social betterment. Viewed from this perspective, the legal profession was a potentially noble occupation and a worthy family enterprise in its own right.<sup>30</sup> This sense of joint commitment sustained Julia and Frederick in efforts to find a place within the legal community. They rented a house with land and created a small farmlet, on which they produced vegetables for their own consumption, fattened livestock, milked dairy cows, churned butter, kept hens and sold produce at the gate to generate an income that would help them negotiate the years before the legal practice paid its own way. Despite an annual remittance of £200 from Julia's father and the investment of some of their capital in property, which they rented out before selling at profit, it was two years before their income exceeded expenses.<sup>31</sup> As a side interest, Frederick also quickly became involved in the apple-growing business, forming a partnership with another Herefordshire man in the Styx Mill Apple Company, though he was to find it unprofitable in a country where fruit was abundant and cheaply available.<sup>32</sup>

The speed with which the Wildings established a place for themselves within Christchurch society owes much to the fact that they were 'joiners' and keen to participate in community activities. Nowhere was this more evident than in the sporting sphere. Frederick Wilding's reputation for sporting prowess had not quite preceded him, but this was quickly discovered by his neighbour, the radical lawyer-journalist and aspiring politician, William Pember Reeves.<sup>33</sup> Reeves recruited him to play for the United Cricket team largely made up of young city professionals. The speed with which Wilding emerged from within this coterie of youthful cricketers to become arguably the most versatile of the city's sporting fraternity owes much to talent, but his arrival could not have been more timely. Greg Ryan argues that

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30 Collini, *Public Moralists*, pp. 251, 284–85. Collini argues that the English legal system's initial emphasis on humanism gave it a moral tone and distinguished it from its European counterpart.

31 JWHD 1880: 31 March 1880, JWHD 1881: 13 September 1881, WFP, box 1/2/2, 1/3/3.

32 See JWHDs for quantities of fruit sold; 'Fruit Growers' Association', *Star*, 11 February 1886; 'Apple Culture in Canterbury', newspaper cutting, c. June 1910, 'Apples for Sale. Trade to Argentine. Canterbury Supplies Available', newspaper cutting, c. April 1912, WFP, box 42/3.

33 Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves*; Fry, *Maud and Amber*.



'Between 1850 and 1930 Christchurch developed' New Zealand's 'most distinctive sporting culture'.<sup>34</sup> He has offered a convincing explanation for the city's sporting pre-eminence: the existence of ample flat land on which to play, as well as the presence of a disproportionately large number of English public school and university graduates in the city, fresh from the revolution in games and leisure, who were imbued with a genuine interest in sport and a desire to foster sport and the values it was thought to inculcate.<sup>35</sup> When Wilding arrived in Christchurch in 1879, the rhythm of sporting life and the formation of the institutions that supported it were still in their formative stage, and he found himself in the midst of something of a sporting boom that produced club, provincial and international dimensions.

Cricket and tennis were obsessions, but Wilding's enthusiasm for sport knew few bounds. By the beginning of the twentieth century he was commonly placed among the leading pioneers of the city's sporting fraternity and lauded as the 'father of lawn tennis in the province'.<sup>36</sup> His New Zealand sporting career began in 1880 playing cricket for the United Club, one of four beginning to take shape in the city. To increase competition in Christchurch, he helped establish the Lancaster Park Cricket Club in 1881, became its inaugural captain, and continued to play for its senior side until he retired from the game in 1909, aged 56. He first represented the Canterbury province during the 1881/82 season, and was to captain the side for over 20 years, scoring 1,000 runs and taking 100 wickets before being displaced by his son, Anthony, in 1902.<sup>37</sup> During his first summer in the city, he was among the founders of one of the city's earliest tennis clubs at Cranmer

34 Greg Ryan, 'Sport in Christchurch', in Cookson and Dunstall (eds), *Southern Capital Christchurch*, p. 325.

35 Greg Ryan, 'Sport in Christchurch', pp. 325–47.

36 'Birthday Greetings to Stalwart of Cricket. Prominent in Tennis too', 20 November 1942, newspaper cutting, WFP, box 42/3, p. 10; L. and S. Richardson, *Anthony Wilding*, pp. 21–22, 25, 27, 29–30; Shelley A. Richardson, "'Striving After Better Things": Julia Wilding and the Making of a "New Woman" and a "Noble Gentleman"', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1997, pp. 85–92.

37 'Prominent Men in Canterbury Cricket', newspaper cutting, WFP, box 42/3, p. 102; 'Early Cricket in Canterbury', *Press*, 25 March 1912, newspaper cutting, WFP, box 42/3, p. 114; 'A Quarter-Century of Cricket. Doyen of Canterbury Sportsmen. Frederick Wilding', newspaper cutting, 3 October 1925, WFP, box 43/3, pp. 167–68; T. W. Reese, *New Zealand Cricket, 1841–1914*, Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch, 1927, p. 326; D. O. and P. W. Neely, *The Summer Game: The Illustrated History of New Zealand Cricket*, Moa Beckett, Auckland, 1994, p. 31; Matthew Appleby, *Canterbury Cricket: 100 Greats*, Reed, Auckland, 2002, pp. 275–77; Lynn McConnell and Ian Smith, *The Shell New Zealand Cricket Encyclopedia*, Moa Beckett, Auckland, 1993, p. 167; Greg Ryan, *The Making of New Zealand Cricket 1832–1914*, Frank Cass, London, 2004.

Square, having first played the relatively new game on his wedding day in Hereford.<sup>38</sup> In 1882 he won the singles of the club's first-ever championship, known as the Canterbury Championship, and, with R. D. Harman, was to win the New Zealand doubles title five times before successfully partnering his son in the 1909 Championships.<sup>39</sup>

These sporting achievements arguably established a place for Wilding within the community more speedily than his endeavours within the legal and commercial world. The combination of talent and enthusiasm saw him emerge as one of a small fraternity of sports advocates, who became the sustaining force in the province. In 1880 the city possessed a single sports ground, Hagley Park. Local by-laws prohibited sporting clubs using the 500-acre public reserve from charging entrance fees. Wilding and the small cluster of young professionals and neighbours would walk to Hagley Park from the city after work for daily cricket practice, and then trudge home to Opawa, 'too hard up', as Wilding recalls, 'to catch a cab'.<sup>40</sup> On one of these excursions, they conceived the idea of a fee-charging ground near to their homes where a variety of sports could be played and the gate money used to encourage a wide range of sports. They formed the Canterbury Cricket and Athletics Company Ltd (later known as the Lancaster Park Company), purchased land, surrounded it with a seven-foot-high fence, and in 1881 Lancaster Park was opened as a cricket and athletics ground. Over the next 20 years cinder and grass tennis courts, a croquet lawn, bowling green, cycle track and swimming pool were added. These developments were sometimes controversial and the finances often precarious, but Lancaster Park

38 'Civic Reception to Visitors', newspaper clipping c. 1932, WFP, box 42/2.

39 'I Remember Early Canterbury Tennis. Interview With Frederick Wilding', c. 1911, newspaper cutting, WFP, box 42/3, p. 112; *100 Years Canterbury Lawn Tennis Association 1890–1990*, Canterbury Lawn Tennis Association, Christchurch, c. 1990; Canterbury Lawn Tennis Association Minute Books, vol. 1–4, April 1881 – 3 October 1888, Canterbury Museum Documentary Research Centre (CMDRC), Christchurch; Paul Elenio, *Centrecourt: A Century of New Zealand Tennis 1886–1996*, New Zealand Lawn Tennis Association, Wellington, 1986, pp. 14–16.

40 Script of a radio broadcast given by Frederick Wilding about William Pember Reeves, 29 November 1937, WFP, box 43/194/61 A.

became the focal point of the city's sporting life.<sup>41</sup> As one of Lancaster Park's most persistent advocates and as a talented sportsman in his own right, Wilding assumed an increasingly prominent place within the sporting fraternity nationally.<sup>42</sup>

Frederick Wilding's sporting talent found expression in the public arena, but this does not mean that he saw sport as a separate and male activity. It was, as subsequent chapters show, an integral part of family life, central to Wilding's conception of the balanced lifestyle. Julia's talents lay elsewhere, but her role in the sporting sphere was not a passive one. She came from a cricket-mad family, and her enthusiasm for it saw her attend every game Frederick and, later, son Anthony played, maintaining a scorebook with such efficiency that officials frequently verified their scores against hers. She was also active in fundraising for individual sports, took part in concerts to raise money for improvements to Lancaster Park and won public accolades as a popular patron of tennis. In 1900 the Lancaster Park Cricket Club recognised her consistent and energetic support by electing her a vice-president of the club, alluding, as they did so, to her known support of feminist causes with the comment that the club 'ought to be up-to-date'.<sup>43</sup>

It was in music and not sport that Julia was to make her most telling contribution to the family's integration into visible civic community. Her European musical training and skills were quickly recognised by Christchurch's small, but musically accomplished group of English immigrants. Gardner has described late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canterbury as 'perhaps the strongest musical centre of the colony', and one dominated by amateurs under professional leadership.<sup>44</sup> As John Thomson points out, it was also a musical scene

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41 Such was Wilding's belief in the efficacy of sport that when he was unable to convince his fellow directors that they should purchase what became the South ground (known as the 'frog pond'), he purchased the land himself and rented it to them until they finally purchased it in 1900. See Gordon Slatter, *Great Days at Lancaster Park*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1974, pp. 17–24; Ryan, 'Sport in Christchurch', pp. 336–39; Fiona Hall, 'Wilding, Frederick (1852–1945)', *DNZB*, vol. 2, pp. 576–97; A. T. Donnelly, 'The Late Mr. Frederick Wilding, K.C., Broadcast Tribute, Given from 3YA, Christchurch, on the 13 July, 1945', pp. 1–7, WFP, box 43/193/56.

42 He became president of the New Zealand Amateur Athletic Association in the 1890s, served as president of the Canterbury Cricket Association, 1903–23, and was three times president of the New Zealand Cricket Council.

43 Newspaper cuttings, WFP, box 41/1, p. 26.

44 The quote is from Gardner, 'The Formative Years', p. 99.

that, when Julia arrived in the city in 1879, was already exhibiting 'a capacity to form rival societies in similar fields, which waged internecine war against each other'.<sup>45</sup> This capacity was, he believed, to become a uniquely Christchurch phenomenon.<sup>46</sup>

Despite its fractiousness, the Christchurch musical community offered space to newcomers, and it did so for women in ways that were familiar to Julia. She was well acquainted with the inconsistencies in Victorian thought that had long limited women's participation in the paid world of musical performance by combining an 'ardent admiration of [women's] artistic talent' with a 'simultaneous denigration of those who made their living from it'.<sup>47</sup> In Hereford, as in Christchurch, those with a serious commitment to music developed ways of blurring the interface of private and public performance: they formed clubs that met and performed in domestic settings, and performed in the more socially acceptable context provided by philanthropic activity.<sup>48</sup> For Julia, this meant becoming a founding member of a musical club that met monthly in members' homes. The club displayed a high level of organisation; performances were prearranged and programs printed.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, within months of arriving in the city, she performed piano solos at an array of charitable events and fundraising occasions that included hospital concerts, rose shows and the sporting club fetes.<sup>50</sup>

Like many of her Victorian contemporaries, Julia looked upon music, to employ Gillett's phrase, 'as a unique and potent moral influence' and her own performance as a 'striving after better things'.<sup>51</sup> Her sense of personal and social earnestness, matched by a talent as a pianist, won appreciation and attracted opportunities for more public performances. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s Julia played regularly in the Christchurch Musical Society's subscription concerts.

45 John M. Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1991, p. 45.

46 Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music*, pp. 45–46.

47 Gillett, *Musical Women in England, 1870–1914*, p. 6. Concerns about the respectability of performing music in public under the male gaze added another layer of consideration for women musicians.

48 Gillett, *Musical Women in England*, pp. 33–62.

49 See WFP, box 12/58–61. The club consisted of both men and women; the fact that they met privately is also perhaps an indicator of their enthusiasm and genuine musical interest.

50 JWED, 11/54–55.

51 Gillett, *Musical Women*, p. 36, 'Note by Julia Wilding about her music', ms, January 1924, WFP, box 12/61/142.

In the winter of 1893 she was asked by the society's conductor, Frank MacKenzie Wallace, to be part of a series of Chamber Concerts that would 'produce a class of music seldom heard in Christchurch'.<sup>52</sup> Acceptance of an invitation to perform for composer Alfred Hill (1870–1969) in a concert of his own work, held in the city in 1893, is testimony to a willingness to involve herself in colonial musical innovation. Endorsement from Hill, regarded as 'the most significant of the first-wave of composers in New Zealand and Australia', marked her growing status within the city's musical community.<sup>53</sup> In 1901 she accepted an invitation to play a solo piece at a reception held for the Duke and Duchess of York. Such was her lifelong commitment to music that, on 4 December 1931, some 50 years after she and Frederick had settled in the city, and despite the onset of arthritis, she performed live on radio.<sup>54</sup>

In their persistence and achievements on the different performance platforms of sport and music, the Wildings had placed themselves firmly within what we might term a community of talent. As joiners and enthusiasts, they had successfully attached themselves to and helped define what one historian has described as an essentially English transplanted culture.<sup>55</sup> That they saw themselves as contributing to the making of an improved version of their parent society was to invest their colonial experiment with a sense of moral purpose. This sense of purpose, which saw the family unit and individual self-betterment as fundamental to a humanist quest for social progress, makes the Wildings the most ideologically explicit of our migrant couples. Their departure from Hereford was based on a rejection of the political and economic environment of mid-Victorian England. That rejection came after active involvement in Hereford's political life. For Frederick, this had meant membership of the town's Liberal Association and, in Julia's

52 Frank Wallace to Julia Wilding, 1 June 1893, WFP, box 12/61/143. Frank MacKenzie Wallace (1852–1908), cousin of the English composer Sir Alexander Wallace, studied the violin in Leipzig and spent 10 years as first violinist in the Philharmonic and Crystal Palace orchestras in London, before settling in Christchurch as a violin teacher. He was appointed conductor of the Christchurch Musical Society in 1881. See Gardner (ed.), *A History of Canterbury*, vol. II, pp. 440–56; Thomson, *Oxford History of New Zealand Music*, p. 45.

53 John Mansfield Thomson, 'Hill, Alfred Francis (1870–1960)', *DNZB*, vol. 2, pp. 213–15; John M. Thomson, *Distant Music: The Life and Times of Alfred Hill, 1870–1960*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1980, pp. 95–104; Alfred Hill to Julia Wilding, 21 June 1896, WFP, box 12/61/138.

54 Radio 3YA, 4 December 1931, 8.00 pm, WFP, box 12/61/144.

55 Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, 'The High Arts in a Regional Culture—From Englishness to Self-Reliance', in Cookson and Dunstall (eds), *Southern Capital*, p. 299.

case, participation in the newspaper debates that surrounded the issue of women's suffrage. It remains to assess whether their engagement in public political debate was transplanted to the colonies.

Migration to the new world was conceived by the Wildings as a means of throwing off the dead hand of custom and tradition, which they believed impeded social progress and defied democratic reform. The New Zealand they encountered was an English colony where:

there is no overgrown state church rank with time-honoured abuses, where the law of primogeniture and a host of other feudal absurdities which still disgrace the English jurisprudence have been swept away; and where land is abundant and cheaply and expeditiously transferred.<sup>56</sup>

In such an environment, Frederick Wilding explained to readers of the *Hereford Times*, 'political warfare must be carried on different lines ... Men and not measures furnish the watchwords at elections'.<sup>57</sup> His first impressions of colonial politics confirmed the expectations: 'Outwardly, nearly everyone professes Liberal opinions, and the only well-defined division of political parties, is that all important one between the "ins" and the "outs"'.<sup>58</sup>

Thereafter, the Wildings gravitated naturally and without deliberation towards the company of a cluster of young professionals led by William Pember Reeves, a near neighbour and cricketing companion, around whom a progressive urban political party was beginning to emerge in the city.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the 1880s, as the economic climate worsened and class-based political groups, which were later to carry the labels Conservative and Liberal, took clearer shape, the Wildings moved politically closer to Reeves. Now the defining voice of the city's Liberals and courting the support of the city's nascent labour movement, dominated by the skilled artisans, Reeves was later to test the Wildings' capacity for radical change.<sup>60</sup> What drew the Wildings to

56 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

57 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

58 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

59 Script of a radio broadcast given by Frederick Wilding on William Pember Reeves, 29 November 1937, WFP, box 43/194/61 A, p. 4; 'Early Cricket in Canterbury', *Press*, 25 March 1912, WFP, box 42/3, p. 114; Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves*, pp. 46–58.

60 'Too 'advanced' in his 'political opinions' for most of his own social class, 'only a few of his cricketing friends who knew him best, supported him', Frederick Wilding, radio broadcast on William Pember Reeves, 29 November 1937.

Reeves was his advocacy of an increased role for the state as a promoter of a series of strategic experiments to unlock land, reform labour relations and create a more civilised society that facilitated the 'family ideal of land and home ownership'.<sup>61</sup> Inasmuch as these goals were the cornerstone of the Liberal Party philosophy, then the Wildings sat comfortably within its ranks.

By 1890, the Wildings had aligned themselves with the political ideology that dominated New Zealand politics arguably for the next 50 years. Among its earliest legislative achievements was the enfranchisement of women in 1893. The campaign that preceded its enactment had gathered pace shortly after the Wildings arrived, though there is no evidence that Julia became involved in its public activities. There is, however, evidence that within the overlapping and essentially English communities that she moved—sporting, musical and neighbourhood—she encouraged discussion of the 'woman question'. She pressed her brother's book, *The Social and Political Dependence of Women*, upon Maud Reeves, who later acknowledged Julia's role in stimulating her to become involved in working for women's rights in New Zealand and in Britain.<sup>62</sup> Above all else, as the following chapters on the education of her children reveal, her feminism was most in evidence as she sought to create well-educated, civically minded sons and daughters, whose talents would make a useful and equal contribution to the betterment of society. In her hands the family thus became the crucible in which the personal became the political.

In late 1893, as the Wildings looked out from the large and comfortable, rather than stylish wooden house that they had named Fownhope, they could justifiably have felt they had successfully established themselves within Christchurch's professional community and put in place a home that would enable them to achieve the idealised family

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61 The quote comes from Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, p. 100. On Reeves, and the political and economic situation of the 1880s and 1890s more generally, see, for example: Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, pp. 93–105, 108; Sinclair, *Reeves*, ch. 5–15; McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch', pp. 162, 166–70; McAloon, 'The Christchurch Elite', pp. 198–99, 206; Cookson, 'Pilgrim's Progress', pp. 22, 25–26; Raewyn Dalziel, 'The Politics of Settlement', in Rice (ed.), *Oxford History of New Zealand*, pp. 107–11; Len Richardson, 'Parties and Political Change', in Rice (ed.), *Oxford History of New Zealand*, pp. 202–11; Tony Ballantyne, 'The State Politics and Power 1769–1893', in Byrnes (ed.), *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, pp. 99–124; Fry, *Maud and Amber*, pp. 1–27.

62 Maud Reeves to Cora Wilding, 30 January 1938, WFP, box 43/194/60.

life they had envisaged. Set in the midst of a four-and-a-half-acre farmlet that sloped down to a small stream, possessing a picturesque, park-like garden with an extensive orchard, it was also a sporting paradise. With two tennis courts—grass and cinder, a cricket pitch, croquet lawn and possibly the first swimming pool in Christchurch, they had created an environment that expressed their aspirations.<sup>63</sup> An extant visitor's book reveals that already a wide cross-section of the city's sporting, cultural, intellectual and professional communities made their way to Fownhope. Collectively they formed what Wilding liked to call a 'community of tastes, habits and manners', and he prized the 'bond of union' that he believed united the large and often lively gatherings, rather than 'equality of wealth'.<sup>64</sup> Bohemian in a slightly mannered sort of way and determinedly devoid of conspicuous display, Sunday afternoon gatherings, where the injunction against play on the Sabbath was openly flouted, provided a setting in which the Wildings were accepted on their own terms as members of a new urban society that they were at the same time helping to shape.<sup>65</sup>

**'We talked over the matter fully, and have come to the conclusion that we must, as a family, make a combined effort'**<sup>66</sup>

The story of Henry Bournes Higgins and his family charts the fortunes of a somewhat different slice of professional family migration, namely that of Ireland's Protestant, genteel, educated and struggling middle class. The decision to migrate, unlike that of the Wildings, was born of desperation

63 F. M. B. Fisher describes Fownhope and the social gatherings that took place there in A. Wallis Myers, *Captain Anthony Wilding*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1916, pp. 11–13. The Wilding home was named after a village on the Wye near Hereford.

64 Frederick Wilding, *HT*, 17 July 1880.

65 The term 'Bohemian' changed and broadened out over time. Emerging in early nineteenth-century France, the term was initially confined to artists, writers, musicians and roving gypsies living alternative and unconventional lives of free love and frugality. In the American context, during the 1870s, the term underwent a redefinition, as respectable family men and pillars of the community sought to shape their own form of Bohemianism to include people like themselves: sportsmen and appreciators of fine art leading simple lifestyles. See Kate Sheppard, 'A Noble Bohemianism', *White Ribbon*, February 1897, pp. 7–8 (Reprinted in Margaret Lovell-Smith (ed.), *The Woman Question: Writings by the Women Who Won the Vote*, New Women's Press, Auckland, 1992, pp. 122–23); Lovell-Smith, *Plain Living High Thinking*, pp. 46–54, *passim*.

66 John Higgins [senior] to Mr [Robert] Acres, 11 April 1873, Henry Bournes Higgins Papers (HBHP), NLA, MS 1057, box 6, series 2/2444.



and sustained by the conviction that their combined resources as a family would ensure a successful outcome. The hard-headed realism and optimistic faith in the family as a collective entity came naturally from a context in which the 'cohesive force' of the family as an integral part of social and economic structures was highly developed.<sup>67</sup> In the view of Patrick O'Farrell, this united Irish family was to exercise 'particular power in atomised colonial Australia [and] to hold its members together in coherence against the world'.<sup>68</sup> Whatever importance we attach to 'Irishness' in defining the nature of the Higgins family, there can be no doubt that Henry Higgins—an 18-year-old of indifferent health, possessed of a schoolboy's classical liberal education, with limited work experience in the commercial world of Dublin—became both the chief beneficiary of the family enterprise and, as John Rickard has pointed out, 'the architect of his family's fortunes'.<sup>69</sup> If the phrase has been seen by some as limiting the individual initiatives of other Higginses, it is nonetheless one which directs attention to what distinguishes the Higgins family experience from the other case studies examined in this book, namely, that in Australia they constructed the middle-class professional family that in Ireland had remained a thwarted aspiration.<sup>70</sup>

Nothing marks the transition in the history of the Higgins family more starkly than the initial separation that migration to Australia involved. Anne Higgins, eldest son Henry (18), and four of his five siblings (George, 13; Samuel, 11; Georgina, 10, and Anna, 8) arrived in Melbourne on Saturday 11 February 1870 after 88 days on board the *Eurynome*. The youngest child, Charlie (born 1864) had died two days earlier of diphtheria and was buried at sea. Both John Higgins senior and junior remained behind in Ireland to complete work commitments and earn enough money to support the family in Australia until the eldest boys found work. Anne had a small sum of money for emergencies, to which she hoped to add such remittances as her husband could send her.<sup>71</sup> It was to be nine months before the

67 O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia 1788 to the Present*, p. 16.

68 O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia 1788 to the Present*, p. 16.

69 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 126.

70 Deborah Jordan writes that 'H. B. Higgins has been painted as the founder of the Higgins' fortunes in Australia, but other members also made substantial contributions to the family finances'. See Deborah Jordan, *Nettie Palmer: Search for an Aesthetic*, History Department, University of Melbourne, Carlton, Victoria, 1999, p. 20.

71 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins, ms, HBHP, box 7, series 3, p. 56.

family was reunited in Melbourne; this critical period in the evolution of the family confirmed the matriarchal influence and required Henry to assume greater levels of responsibility.

Irish and Methodist connections were pursued from the start, with varying degrees of success. John (senior) had alerted Reverend James Waugh, an Irishman and president of Wesley College, to his family's impending arrival.<sup>72</sup> They were met by Reverend Martin Dyson, local resident Wesleyan minister at Sandridge, and enveloped by a web of Wesleyan/Methodist kindness and practical assistance. There were offers of financial aid, advice about breaking into the Melbourne labour market and, critically, help finding accommodation. Within three days of their arrival, with the help of Waugh, Anne and Henry had located a suitable rental property: a humble detached cottage in Henry Street, Windsor, a train-ride away from town, for nine shillings per week.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, such was the extent of the Methodist community's involvement in the family's settling-in period, that the young Henry formed the impression that Methodism was 'the most numerous denomination in Australia'.<sup>74</sup>

Anne Higgins played a pivotal role in establishing the family in Melbourne from the earliest days of their arrival, employing a mixture of cunning and pragmatism. She diligently pursued all the Irish connections John had provided and took special care to dress the family in what she described as the more fashionable Melbourne style in order to fit in.<sup>75</sup> But as the 'most "Irish" of Australian colonies', Victoria perhaps presented the new migrants with fewer assimilation problems, and, within four months, Anne admitted that while 'at first we felt very friendless ... now that we are known ... we have many

72 John Higgins senior to Anne Higgins, n.d. (c. March 1870), HBHP, box 5, series 2/2412.

73 Diary of Henry Bournes Higgins 1869–1870, (typescript), HBHP, box 7, series 3, pp. 47–53.

74 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 26 March 1870, HBHP, box 4, series 2/2409; H. R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860–1930*, Allen and Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1987, pp. 104–5. Melbourne seems to have had more active practitioners of Methodism than any other denomination.

75 Anne Higgins to John Higgins senior, c. 14 April 1870 – 22 April 1870, 13 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2418.

[friends] ... but I worked until I found them'.<sup>76</sup> To her husband she confided that 'the chief thing you will want here is a bold exterior, maintaining your own dignity, and then others will admire you—in this respect Henry is vastly improved'.<sup>77</sup>

Finding work for the two boys proved more difficult. Melbourne's population had now reached 207,000—a result of an influx of goldminers in search of employment, sponsored and unassisted immigration and natural increase, and the city struggled to provide employment for the newcomers.<sup>78</sup> Henry and George had arrived with the intention of seeking work in the commercial world, of which Henry at least had some experience in Ireland. They were advised by their father to take, in the first instance, 'any lawful, healthful employment, while continuing to 'look for something better'; 'do not fret ... Get health first'.<sup>79</sup>

It was several months before George secured employment, at seven shillings a week, in a wholesale stationery store, after the recommendation of an old Irish friend of the family.<sup>80</sup> Henry's quest for employment was at first more chequered. After a week's work in the hosiery department of a warehouse, he was deemed unsuitable and promptly dismissed.<sup>81</sup> Despite having 'applied for everything' and the efforts of 'influential people' on his behalf, he was unable to break into either the commercial world, or a public service currently in retrenching mode.<sup>82</sup> Henry's analysis of Melbourne's labour market in letters to his father accurately described the problem that

76 The first quote is from O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, p. 148; the second is from Anne Higgins's letter to John Higgins senior, c. 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417. Don Garden, *Victoria: A History*, Thomas Nelson, Australia, Melbourne, 1985, p. 80, places the Irish-born in Victoria as the third largest ethnic group in 1861 (16.3 per cent), after English and Welsh-born (31.39 per cent), and Victorian-born (25.55 per cent). Scots made up 11.23 per cent of Victoria's population, Chinese-born 4.58 per cent and Germans 1.93 per cent by 1861. Though, unlike Alexander Leeper, the Higgins family were not part of the Anglo-Irish professional elite on arrival, the fact that they were well-educated, genteel middle-class Protestants made them well able to fit into the dominant English culture. See, for example, O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, p. 100.

77 Anne Higgins to John Higgins senior, 14 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417.

78 Garden, *Victoria*, pp. 74–75, 79–80, 124–35, 172.

79 Letter from John Higgins senior to George Higgins, 20 January 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2395; Letter from John Higgins senior to Henry Higgins, Melbourne, 18 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2419.

80 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2413.

81 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 26 March 1870, HBHP, box 4, series 2/2409; Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), p. 56, HBHP.

82 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 26 March 1870, HBHP, box 4, series 2/2409.

confronted him: unemployment, though lower than in other colonies, was high in Melbourne; business was 'slack'; competition for jobs was acute; wages were depressed; and 'there is not sufficient employment for the thousands of immigrants continually arriving'.<sup>83</sup> In particular, he noted, there were a limited number of positions for those seeking clerical work, but 'that class will avail themselves of the emigrant ships'.<sup>84</sup> The problem embraced 'colonial people' who were 'find[ing] it very difficult to get their sons into suitable openings'.<sup>85</sup> Conversely, those with specialist knowledge and experience were in demand and well remunerated.<sup>86</sup>

After three months of fruitlessly searching for a job in Melbourne's business sector, the Irish and Wesleyan connections helped him draw the obvious conclusion that his old world, liberal education would allow him to negotiate a path into teaching and university study.<sup>87</sup> Through James Waugh and James Corrigan, respectively president and headmaster of Wesley College—arguably Melbourne's most successful boys' boarding school, Henry was made familiar with the opportunities that were on offer for well-educated young men.<sup>88</sup> By 1870, Corrigan was the dominant voice on the Victorian Board of Education, and about to become its chairman, and was well placed to sketch out the peculiarities of the city's educational needs. The numerous and prosperous gold-rush generation of immigrants, now parents in their 50s and 60s, were anxious to provide the solid secondary education for their sons that would allow them to find

83 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 26 March 1870, 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2409, 2413.

84 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 14 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417.

85 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 14 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417.

86 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 14 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417.

87 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 22 April 1870, 14 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2413, 2417.

88 James Swanton Waugh (1822–1898), a Wesleyan minister, was born in Newtownbarry, County Wexford, Ireland. After working on Dublin circuits in the 1840s, he migrated to Victoria, where he worked as a Wesleyan minister. In 1865 Waugh was elected president of the Australasian Conference and in the following year appointed president of the newly established Wesley College, Melbourne, a position he retained until 1883. His close friend, James Corrigan (1823–1871), also Irish, was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin (MA, LLB, 1861; LLD, 1864), mathematician and teacher. He was appointed headmaster of Wesley College, Melbourne, in 1866. See Peter Gill, 'Corrigan, James (1823–1871)', *ADB*, vol. 3, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1969, pp. 464–65; G. Blainey, James Morrissey and S. E. K. Hulme, *Wesley College: The First Hundred Years*, The President and Council Wesley College, in association with Robertson and Mullins, Melbourne, 1867, pp. 14–41; Andrew Lemon, *A Great Australian School: Wesley College Examined*, Helicon Press, 2004.

a place in a tightening labour market.<sup>89</sup> Melbourne was, as journalist Marcus Clarke put it, 'boiling with boys'.<sup>90</sup> Demand for teachers in private schools for boys modelled on English public schools was such that the expanding profession had become an increasingly lucrative one and headmasters were reportedly earning between £500 and £600 per year.<sup>91</sup> Most headmasters were recent recruits from England, Scotland and Ireland, and they were inclined to favour young men whose educational backgrounds they understood and trusted. After explaining these elements of the city's educational system, Corrigan suggested Henry could seek an assistant teacher's position in the city and prove his merit by studying for the Board of Education teaching certificate and the University of Melbourne matriculation exams to be held in July and November respectively.<sup>92</sup>

One month later, in May 1870, Higgins successfully applied for a position as teaching assistant at Turret House Academy, Victoria Street, Fitzroy, run by James Scott. He was surprised to find teaching at the school to his liking and spent the evenings working on his own studies.<sup>93</sup> In this way he hoped to find a way into academic study, which had been denied him in Ireland. That this aspiration had been a parental as well as an individual one is clear in the delighted tones in which Anne Higgins relays the development to husband John in Ireland:

I wished for him something in the literary way for I believe there he will excel ... Well Providence points [to teaching and a university education] ... & he can get nothing desirable in business ... [I am] glad he is turning to what he loves ... his face lights up when he speaks of it [the University of Melbourne] and the fees are small here,

89 Davison has pointed to Melbourne's 'kinked age structure'—the 'bunching' of gold-rush immigrants and their children, coming of age in the 1880s. Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, pp. 2–3, 131.

90 Marcus Clarke, 'What To Do with Our Boys' (*Australasian*, 5 March 1870), in L. T. Hergenhan (ed.), *A Colonial City: High and Low Life. Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1972, p. 73.

91 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2413; Anne Higgins to John Higgins senior, 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417. Such schools would later struggle through the economic depression of the 1890s.

92 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2413, 2417.

93 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 14 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2413. Henry had previously expressed his 'very great aversion to teaching of any kind' to his father.

£2 entrance only ... all say he has got a splendid education, he can make well of it here, and afterwards he may rise to eminence—I know you regretted his giving up his studies.<sup>94</sup>

Henry's assessment of the family's prospects after three months in Melbourne, written in the afterglow of his own achievements, is similarly optimistic:

I do not think we shall ever regret our coming out here. Things were very dark at first but, taking the family as a whole, I am confident that, with God's help we will gain health and many other things ... I feel happy to be able to say we are all well and hopeful.<sup>95</sup>

The teaching position at Turret House Academy was a turning point for Henry Higgins. Principal James Scott, a former student at the University of Glasgow and graduate of Melbourne University (BA), reignited Henry's intellectual interests by granting access to his library, discussing Carlyle's ideas with him and listening as Henry read Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* aloud to help him overcome his stutter. In July, he sat the common schools' teaching examination, passing in all subjects except writing, as he had misunderstood the instructions for the latter. In November, he distinguished himself in the university matriculation examination, passing with credit, and, a few months later, won the University of Melbourne Classical Exhibition for 1871.<sup>96</sup>

Between 1871 and 1875 Henry Higgins attended the University of Melbourne, at a time when annual fees were approximately £30 per year.<sup>97</sup> It was a critical experience that shaped his future and consolidated in a number of ways the importance he was to attach to family. Higgins lived at home while studying at university and paid his way, contributing to the family funds, by winning further academic prizes, as well as working, firstly, as a tutor at Alexander Morrison's Scotch College, where he supervised boarders' evening studies and taught scripture lessons. This was followed by a period teaching at Melbourne South Grammar School (1872–73), and later giving private instruction to the Carlton-based sons of squatter Andrew Chirnside, for which he earned a lucrative £20 per month.

94 Anne Higgins to John Higgins senior, 22 April 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417.

95 Henry Higgins to John Higgins senior, 14 May 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2417.

96 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 56–58, HBHP. Henry remarked that 'The standard at our schools in Ireland was much higher than matriculation standard' (p. 57).

97 Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 95.

University study in 1870s Melbourne remained a minority experience, limited to a comparatively small number of young, middle-class males. In 1871, when the population of Melbourne, Australia's largest city, had reached 207,000, the university had a total of 116 matriculated students (51 in arts, 42 in law, 13 in engineering, and 29 in medicine).<sup>98</sup> But while he was surrounded by the first generation of Australian-born sons of the Victoria's landed, mercantile and professional elite, there were others like himself from more middling economic positions (most notable amongst them Alfred Deakin, also paying his way through) and hoping for professional careers.<sup>99</sup>

The university experience would seem at first glance to mark out an essential difference between Higgins and Frederick Wilding, who came, as it were, as a finished item resplendent with old world credentials. The LLB, introduced at the University of Melbourne in 1860 in the hope of increasing student numbers and improving the status of the colony's lawyers, was a four-year course combining the traditional classical liberal education of an arts degree with that of a law degree. It was intended as a professional degree for those who would have to earn their living, rather than being merely a part of a gentleman's education. In this sense it was, as Selleck has pointed out, less like the ancient universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Trinity College Dublin, and more in line with the universities of Germany and Scotland.<sup>100</sup> Higgins's university education introduced him to the same strands of liberal thought that had shaped the Wildings' world view. The outlines of contemporary intellectual thought presented at Melbourne University were delivered in the old world voices of professors from Cambridge, Oxford and Trinity College Dublin and took the more systematic form of the lecture room, rather than

98 Garden, *Victoria: A History*, p. 172; Selleck, *The Shop*, p. 112.

99 Henry Higgins's closest friends at the University of Melbourne were: Alfred Deakin (1856–1919), Alexander Sutherland (1852–1902) and Richard Hodgson (1855–1905). Sutherland (BA, 1874; MA, 1875), son of a draftsman, commercial artist and art teacher, migrated from Scotland at the age of 12 with his family and later became a journalist, schoolmaster, English professor and then registrar at the University of Melbourne from 1902. Richard Hodgson, Melbourne-born son of a Wesleyan Methodist importer and mining speculator (BA, 1874; MA, 1876; LLD, 1878), later became a 'psychical researcher'. Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 58.

100 Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 58–65. See Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, ch. 4, for a discussion of the state of Melbourne's legal profession in the 1880s and 1890s.

independent study. But it was part of the same discourse with which the Wildings had engaged, within the more leisured world of private reading and public discussion.<sup>101</sup>

The Anglo-Irish voice of Professor William E. Hearn at the University of Melbourne introduced the young Higgins to the central tenets of liberal thought, through the works of John Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and George Grote. He also presented the great intellectual issues of the day that centred upon religion, science and evolution.<sup>102</sup> A clergyman's son, member of the Irish Bar (1849), graduate of Trinity College Dublin (1853), and 'advocate of laissez-faire economics', Hearn was no mere transmitter of the public discourse, but a participant in it, and his published works have been judged 'remarkable books to have emerged from a colonial society'.<sup>103</sup> His perspective has been characterised as conservative in its Australian context, but Rickard has argued that Hearn, as a supporter of free trade, might be better characterised as a liberal in the 'English sense'.<sup>104</sup> Higgins thought him a 'most interesting and stimulating teacher', and Hearn's ideas and teachings precipitated in Henry something of a religious crisis, common to his generation, as he began to question the validity of long-held religious beliefs and the concepts of hell and eternal punishment.<sup>105</sup>

These questionings later provided a point of tension within the Higgins family and complicated Henry's relationship with his parents. Of more immediate concern to the family was Henry's induction into the legal profession. His decision to specialise in law was born of necessity, rather than any long-held ambition to pursue a career in law. A law degree would enable him to earn a comfortable living

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101 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 59–60, 59–65; see Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 31–42, 118–19, 187, for information about the foundational professors of Melbourne's university.

102 William Hearn (1826–1888), professor of Modern History and Literature, Political Economy and Logic, as well as Latin and Greek in 1871, until appointed Dean of Law in 1873. See Selleck, *The Shop*, pp. 37, 84–85; Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 47–48; Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 59–60.

103 The first quotation comes from Selleck, *The Shop*, p. 39, the second from J. A. La Nauze's *ADB* entry on Hearn, *ADB*, vol. 4, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, 1972, pp. 371–72. Hearn wrote four books in Australia: *Plutology or the Theory of the Efforts to Satisfy Human Wants* (Melbourne 1863, London 1864); *The Government of England* (1867); *The Aryan Household* (1878) and *The Theory of Legal Duties and Rights* (1883).

104 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 48.

105 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 59–60, 64–65.



and provide greater family security, as well as requiring him to overcome his stutter. He aimed nonetheless for the more lucrative role of barrister rather than that of solicitor. Higgins emerged from the University of Melbourne with an LLB (1874) and MA (1876) after winning several prizes. He had taken elocution lessons and worked hard with the assistance of his mother to improve his speech, with only a trace of a stammer remaining.<sup>106</sup> The job market for lawyers was contracting in similar fashion to that of the old world, and patronage, social connections and networks had become increasingly important. Colonial-born sons from established legal families in Melbourne, or with connections to them, had a distinct advantage over newcomers. Those with enough money were also able to weather the typically lean early years of the young barrister.<sup>107</sup>

A young man of proven merit, however, supported by old world connections, might also find a pathway into the profession. Higgins was right to recall in his autobiography that 'No one knew me' in Melbourne, outside the city's academic circles.<sup>108</sup> His admission to the Bar was readily facilitated by obtaining the endorsement of his law lecturer, Frank Dobson (1835–1895), and his mother's own social connections within the Irish community secured the support of George Higginbotham, the city's leading Anglo-Irish barrister and radical liberal and politician.<sup>109</sup> With the support of these two sponsors, Henry was called to the Bar on 14 September 1876 and chose to pursue a career in Equity 'rather than common law', as he later explained, 'because I might succeed in laborious work, but [I felt] that I could hardly succeed in addressing jurors'.<sup>110</sup>

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106 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 65–66.

107 Duman, *The English and Colonial Bars*, pp. 122–23; Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, pp. 95–96.

108 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), p. 66.

109 Frank Dobson was an Australian-born, Cambridge-educated and English-trained barrister (common law), and politician. For the connection with Higginbotham, see Henry Higgins's autobiography, p. 66.

110 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 66–68; the quote is from p. 68. After being called to the Bar Henry read in the chambers of Edward Holroyd (1828–1916), an English-born, Cambridge-educated equity lawyer, whom he assisted with briefs. He also acted as junior counsel for Thomas à Beckett. The early years of his legal career were, according to Henry, financially lean ones. In his first year at the Bar he earned 24 guineas, in his second 13 guineas, and in his third year 10 guineas. Between 1876 and 1879 he supplemented his legal income by tutoring the sons of David Symes, editor and proprietor of the *Age*. Nevertheless, in 1877, he was able to purchase a 20-acre block of land in Gippsland.

Henry's achievements, considerable as they undoubtedly were, never took primacy over the welfare of the Higgins family unit. A sense of reciprocity within the family had been evident in his father's response to intimations that his prospects in Australia as a Methodist minister were not assured:

you know I did not build on that ... I hardly expected to be placed in favourable circumstances in that respect. We made up our minds to make a large sacrifice for the good of our beloved children ... and I trust that they will do well and prosper.<sup>111</sup>

During Henry's years of university study and the early phase of his legal career, Henry had lived with his family in a series of rented homes in Windsor, Fitzroy and Carlton.<sup>112</sup> It soon became clear that there was little if any chance of circumventing the Methodist Conference's decision to implement their own form of 'colonial protectionism' and give preference to locally trained men.<sup>113</sup> When John's application to join the Australasian Methodist Conference was declined, he was forced to take up casual work for the Presbyterians in rural areas. His frequent and lengthy absences from the family during the 1870s and 1880s meant that the fortunes of the family fell increasingly on Henry as the eldest son, and it was his rising earning capacity that allowed the gradual improvement in rented accommodation.

If the novelist Ada Cambridge was correct in her assertion that 'money is the gauge of social consequence in Melbourne', Henry Higgins had 'arrived' and brought his family with him.<sup>114</sup> The most tangible marker of his arrival was the purchase of one-and-a-half acres of land on

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111 John Higgins senior to Anne Higgins, c. March 1870, HBHP, box 5, series 2/2412.

112 The Higgins family lived, firstly, in a detached cottage in Henry St, Windsor, then moved to 40 Rose St, Fitzroy, and moved again in 1877 to a two-storey home in Rathdowne St, Carlton, listed variously under Henry or his father's name in the Melbourne *Directory*, and then, in 1880, to a similar home in Sydney Road (173 Royal Parade) in the more fashionable Royal Park area in Carlton. Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 55.

113 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 41, 48–49. The Australasian Methodist Conference had passed a resolution in 1867 that discouraged ministers from other countries seeking positions within the Australian Methodist Church, for they had more than enough of their own locally produced ministers. A Provisional Theological (Training) Institution had been established at Wesley College in 1867, with James Waugh as its theological tutor. Furthermore, says Rickard, the numbers of Methodists in Victoria decreased as the gold rush petered out. See here also O'Farrell, *The Irish In Australia*, p. 105; Renate Howe, 'The Wesleyan Church in Victoria, 1855–1901', MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1965, pp. 30, 167.

114 Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia*, London, 1903, quoted by Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 190.

Glenferrie Road, Malvern, for £1,200.<sup>115</sup> The opening of the Gippsland railway-line, beginning in 1879, stimulated an influx of middle-class professionals to the area, and, amongst their ‘stucco “Italian palaces,” with domes and colonnades’, Higgins commissioned the construction of an architecturally designed, two-storeyed, red-brick house consisting of 14 rooms, including a billiard room, set in landscaped grounds and resplendent with croquet lawn.<sup>116</sup> Henry named the estate Doona after a castle his mother had seen on the coast of County Mayo, Ireland, and it was to function more as a family home rather than as the gentleman’s residence of an unmarried barrister. For the first time in their lives, the Higgins family had a permanent base from which its individual members might come and go as circumstances dictated.

If Doona marked Henry’s arrival, the income that made its realisation possible provided the foundation for subsequent family achievement. Precisely how much money Henry Higgins was earning by the mid-1880s is difficult to calculate. By Davison’s assessment, most Melbourne professionals in the 1880s belonged on the second rung of the city’s ladder of wealth below the business class, and a few joined them on the top rung. At a time when the lowest earners, semiskilled and unskilled manual workers, could hope to earn £90 to £105 pounds per annum, leading barristers were earning ‘as much as’ £1,500 a year, or about three times as much as a solicitor.<sup>117</sup> Whatever Higgins’s income, Rickard has rightly pointed out that his career illustrates ‘the speed with which a young member of the profession, in those days before income tax, could gather around him the perquisites of wealth and position’.<sup>118</sup>

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115 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), p. 84.

116 In 1888 the house was valued at £1,800 and the land at £1,500. Stonnington History Centre Catalogue, MP 12540; auction notice for Doona Estate, 1929, Stonnington History Centre Catalogue, MP 353. See Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, pp. 158–59, for a discussion of railway-led suburban growth. The quotation is from Nettie Palmer’s biography of her uncle, *Henry Bournes Higgins: A Memoir*, p. 103. Doona was designed by architect William Salway, who had previously, according to Palmer, won prizes for the designs of two Melbourne railway-station buildings.

117 Davison, *Marvellous Melbourne*, pp. 191–93.

118 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 56–57. T. à Beckett, as leader of the equity bar, had earned £5,000 in one year and, in 1886, led Higgins to expect similar amounts in the future.

Doona increasingly became the hub of family life and the base to which Henry's younger siblings could retreat, as they sought the training that would enable them to establish professional careers. By the turn of the century, the Higgins family had found a place in a wide range of professions, both ancient and more modern: the church, law and medicine, accountancy, engineering, journalism and landscape design. We will follow Henry's relationship with his siblings in a later chapter but it is sufficient for the moment to make two observations. Firstly, while each was to establish an independent career path, their futures were more disrupted by the ebb and flow of economic and personal circumstance, and both Henry and Doona provided stability at difficult times.<sup>119</sup> Secondly, in this patriarchal role, Henry's influence extended beyond his siblings to their children, whose education he supported and careers he fostered.

The process of Henry Higgins becoming an established member of the Australasian professional middle class encompassed marriage, as it did for John Macmillan Brown. In August 1885, a year after Doona had been completed, Higgins (then 34) became engaged to Mary Alice Morrison, some nine years his junior, and they were married on 19 December 1885. Mary Alice was the daughter of George Morrison, the staunchly Presbyterian Principal of Geelong College. They met while Henry was working briefly at Scotch College, where her uncles Alexander and Robert Morrison were principal and president respectively. Mary Alice had grown up at Geelong College with her younger sisters, Hilda and Violet, and five brothers. Her education, conducted by a governess and supervised closely by her father, had been a conventional one. Before the announcement of Henry's

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119 John Higgins junior qualified as an accountant in the 1880s and was moderately successful. He pursued opportunities presented by the quartz mining boom in Bendigo in the 1880s, returning with its decline to Melbourne, where he set himself up as an independent accountant, and required financial assistance from his family at various times throughout his life. George Higgins qualified as a civil engineer and worked in railway construction outside New South Wales in the 1880s, before returning to work in Melbourne. In 1904 he was appointed lecturer in engineering at the University of Melbourne and became Dean of Engineering. Samuel Higgins (1858–1887) studied medicine at the University of Melbourne's medical school (1875–80), worked at Melbourne Hospital, as a surgeon at Tenterfield, New South Wales, and as a locum at Geelong, 1883–84, before returning to Melbourne with tuberculosis. He died in 1887. Ina Higgins, a foundational student of Presbyterian Ladies' College Melbourne (PLC) in 1875, was amongst the first females to study landscape gardening and design at Burnley Horticultural School, Melbourne, and worked intermittently as a landscape designer. Anna, the youngest surviving sibling, attended PLC with Ina, graduated from the University of Melbourne with an MA, and became a journalist.

engagement, the Higgins family knew only that the future mistress of Doona was 'tall, well-built, strong and a good tennis player'. They learned in time that her commitment to the Protestant ethic and highly developed sense of duty rivalled and perhaps exceeded that of her husband. It was to be a year or more before the family confronted the practical implications of Henry's marriage upon the household. Such was Henry's confidence in the future that almost immediately after his marriage he hung a notice on the door of his legal practice: 'Back on or about the 15 Jan. 1887' and embarked on a year-long European tour with his wife.

The absence of the newly-weds provided a useful transition period and prefigured a transformation of the extended Higgins family.<sup>120</sup> While in Ireland, Henry ensured that a useful inheritance—land valued at £1,200 and the rental from various buildings on the property—found its way to his father. It was sufficient to enable his parents to buy a piece of land a short walk from Doona, and to build a 'comfortable home' they were to call Killenna in 1888.<sup>121</sup> That made the transition at Doona a smooth one. When Mary Alice was installed as mistress of the household and provided with three servants, Henry Higgins's parents and siblings moved to temporary accommodation until Killenna was completed.<sup>122</sup> Thereafter, Killenna and Doona became the joint axis of a network of extended kinship ties that stands in sharp contrast to the nuclear model traditionally ascribed to the urban middle class of this period.<sup>123</sup> In this sense, Henry's marriage, like those of his siblings John and George, widened the Higgins family sphere, and placed them within the ambit of prominent Victorian family groupings. Moreover, as Mary Alice and Henry had only one child, Mervyn (born 1887),

120 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), p. 84.

121 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), p. 84; Jordan, *Nettie Palmer: Search for an Aesthetic*, p. 20.

122 Although Marnie Bassett (née Masson) remembered two domestic maids at Doona, there would also have been a nursemaid when Mervyn was an infant. A French governess, Mademoiselle Dumont, was later employed for Mervyn. The services of a gardener and odd jobs man would also have been employed. (Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 55–60, 127, 323–24). Davison, in *Marvellous Melbourne*, p. 202, estimates that a Melbourne family with an income of £800–1,000 would have been able to afford two female domestic servants and a man servant, though the continual servant shortage and high wages rates commanded by servants in Australia could make this number difficult to achieve.

123 Jordan, *Nettie Palmer: Search for an Aesthetic*, p. 14, notes that 'the Higgins were not the simple model of the nuclear family'.

their wealth and social position encouraged them to embrace even more readily the obligations and pleasures of the wider family network of nieces and nephews.

The establishment of this Higgins family within Melbourne's professional class thus provides an opportunity to observe the ways in which old world practices are reproduced within the circumstances of the new. The migratory experience in the Higgins's case, encased within a Methodist and Irish framework, provided mechanisms and connections that allowed the negotiation of local circumstance in ways that permitted an improvement in the collective family condition. As the eldest of the children, Henry was both beneficiary and architect of this transformation. His role within the Higgins family was rooted firmly in a professional career that continued to flourish. In 1903, the year he was created a King's Counsel, he purchased for £1,100 a 'country residence', Heronswood, in Dromana, set amidst 35 acres. The seaside property was intended as a summer retreat from the heat for his wife, son, parents, siblings and friends.<sup>124</sup> If the purchase of Heronswood has prompted Deborah Jordan to describe the Higgins lifestyle as 'aristocratic', others have been more generous.<sup>125</sup> To an architectural historian, Heronswood was an early expression of the 'Australian bungalow' style and stood 'midway between the grandeur of the Victorian mansions and the mean working man's cottages of the time'.<sup>126</sup> This description sits comfortably alongside John Rickard's observation that Henry Higgins 'neither flaunted nor apologised for the trappings of success'.<sup>127</sup> He was comfortable as a successful professional man, who enjoyed fulfilling the obligations borne of a family enterprise, and framed by Irish circumstance and Melbourne's opportunities.

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124 Autobiography of Henry Bournes Higgins (ms), pp. 120–21; Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, pp. 127–28. As Rickard notes, Nettie Palmer described Heronswood as her uncle's 'country residence' in *Henry Bournes Higgins: A Memoir*, opposite p. 184.

125 Jordan, *Nettie Palmer: Search for an Aesthetic*, p. 18.

126 Neil Clerehan, *Historic Houses of Australia*, Australian Council of National Trusts, Cassell Australia, North Melbourne, 1974, p. 180; Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 128.

127 Rickard, *H.B. Higgins*, p. 129.

This text is taken from *Family Experiments: Middle-class, professional families in Australia and New Zealand c. 1880–1920*, by Shelley Richardson, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.