

The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mīhinare ki Aotearoa*

Canterbury Pilgrims not all Church of England

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Abstract:

Emigrants who came to Canterbury in the First Four Ships in 1850 were known as the Canterbury Pilgrims. Most, but certainly not all, claimed to be members of the Church of England.



It has often been stated incorrectly that Canterbury was a Church of England settlement. While it is true that the Archbishop of Canterbury of the time was the nominal president of the Canterbury Association and that many prominent clergy were among its members, it was not a body that was organised by the Church of England. However, there can be little doubt that when the privately organised Canterbury Association was established in London in March 1848, it intended to found a settlement in New Zealand for Church of England members only. In its first publication outlining its plans it stated: 'Selection of Emigrants ... The Association retain, and will carefully exercise, a power of selection among all those who may apply for permission to emigrate to their settlement, either as purchasers, or as emigrants requiring assistance. They will do so with a view to insuring, as far as possible that none but persons of good character, as well as members of the Church of England, shall form part of the population, at

least in its first stage; so that the settlement may begin its existence in a healthy moral atmosphere.'¹

Even at this early stage the Association may have realised that its plan for an exclusively Church of England settlement might not be possible.

The finance for the proposed settlement was to come from the sale of land in Canterbury. Land sales began in mid-January 1850 and during the first three months only seven persons applied to buy land in Canterbury.² The Committee of Management may have wondered if the requirement for all emigrants to be members of the Church of England was discouraging prospective land purchasers. This view may have been reinforced when they received a letter written by Edward Ward on 21 April 1850.

Ward came from County Down in Northern Ireland. Between April and June 1850, he applied in London to purchase 200 acres of Canterbury land and became an important member of the committee of the Society of Canterbury Colonists which was composed of land purchasers. In his letter to the Association's secretary, H. F. Alston, he suggested that there were Presbyterian farmers in Co Down who were willing to become members of the Church of England, to purchase Canterbury land and to emigrate to the proposed settlement. He asked if this would be acceptable to the Association, and if so, whether this could apply not only to land purchasers, but also to labourers receiving assisted passages.³

Alston in reply indicated that the Committee of Management would accept all land purchasers who were prepared to contribute £1 per acre to educational and ecclesiastical purposes, and also would accept any labourers nominated by them. The land purchasers were permitted to use part of their purchase money to pay for the passages of their nominated labourers. However, the Committee was not willing to extend this concession to other labourers who were not nominated by land purchasers and who wanted assisted passages.⁴ A resolution by the Committee passed on 14th May 1850 made it clear that labourers receiving assisted passages must be bona fide members of the Church of England.⁵

Information about the Canterbury settlement was published in a series of pamphlets named Canterbury Papers. It is surprising therefore to find that there is no mention of a Church of England membership requirement either in the Regulations for Selection of Emigrants, or in the section of the application form to be signed by the minister of the applicant's parish.⁶ Perhaps the Committee assumed that Church of England ministers would not sign unless the applicants were members of their denomination.

Canterbury Papers No 3 contain a lengthy article denying that Canterbury would favour any particular faction within the Church of England. It states that the Church would have no connection with the State and 'clergymen no power whatever over laymen, save only that moral influence which ministers of all denominations will be equally free to acquire by the moral means of persuasion and example.'⁷ Did the Committee think that there might be denominations other than Church of England in Canterbury?

The reasoning behind the Committee's concession to land purchasers who were not members of the Church of England is set out in the same article: 'The very foundation of the

religious arrangements, that is, the contribution of £1 per acre in the price of land, towards the purpose of religion and education according to the tenets of the Church of England is agreeable to the voluntary principle that of voluntary endowment. None but those who buy land will contribute to the endowment; and those, of course, who object to the endowment will not buy land: if they want land in New Zealand, they will buy it in some other settlement.'⁸

The Committee's position was clearly stated in the next issue of Canterbury Papers as part of a page of questions and answers: 'Is it intended to exact any test of Churchmanship? An understood approval of, and allegiance to, the general principles of the Association's scheme, and the willingness to pay £1 an acre towards the support of the religious and educational establishments proposed, will be regarded generally as sufficient evidence of the purchaser being attached to the Church of England, and being an eligible colonist. However, as far as labourers are concerned, and all who will obtain free or assisted passages from the Association, the strictest investigations into the moral and religious character of each will be instituted, and evidence of churchmanship required. See Emigration Regulations.'⁹

But as noted previously, there is no mention of membership of Church of England in those regulations.

Although Ward was confident that County Down farmers would flock to Canterbury if the 'exclusive principle' were removed, in fact only four of the 243 purchasers of Canterbury Association land between 1850-52 came from Ireland.¹⁰ It is doubtful whether the original Church of England membership requirement had been the reason for poor land sales. It is possible that some may have decided purely on commercial grounds that they did not want to contribute the £1 per acre for any educational and religious purposes. But it seems more likely that the real reason for poor land sales was that

New Zealand was not a particularly attractive place in which to invest. It was a long way from Britain and from markets other than Australia, and was not known to have large natural resources, and investing capital in Canterbury could be risky.

Poor land sales meant that few labourers were nominated for passages. By 5 August 1850, James Edward FitzGerald, the Association's Emigration Officer, realised that there was a crisis because of a lack of steerage emigrants. He reported to the Committee of Management that nearly 300 out of the 575 steerage berths in the First Four Ships due to sail early in September, were still empty. On the same day the Committee resolved that their Land Sales Agent, Felix Wakefield, be allowed to recruit steerage emigrants '... with liberty under special circumstances, to relax the existing regulations, except as to character and religion'¹¹ FitzGerald in a letter to Lord Lyttelton, who was chairman of the Committee of Management, noted, 'The rules as to money [for passages] were relaxed and we are to try what is to be done that way.'¹²

Initially the Association had set the price of a steerage passage at £15 per adult. In addition, steerage emigrants had to come equipped with specified quantities of clothing, blankets, sheets, toilet gear and eating utensils. Many potential steerage emigrants would have been unable to find the necessary money to meet these requirements. It was for that reason that the Canterbury Association decided to offer assisted passages. Despite the relaxation of passage money requirements, it is clear that by 20 August there were still many steerage berths unfilled. On that day a member of the Committee of Management approached Mrs Caroline Chisholm of the Family Colonisation Loan Society to ask her to fill the empty berths. In a letter she wrote to Sidney Herbert who was a member of her society's committee and also a member of the Canterbury Association, she said that she was willing to do so providing the religious

requirement was discarded. She wrote: 'The offer was made to take a party from us just as they stood on our books, to make no stiff enquiry. I really believe we have more good members of their church on the books of the Loan Society than they have themselves.'¹³ Only four days after this, Henry Sewell, deputy chairman of the Association, reported to Lord Lyttelton: 'You will be glad to hear that our ships are filled, with considerable surplus for the next ship which will sail on the 17th.'¹⁴ It is highly probable that most of these much-needed emigrants came from Caroline Chisholm's Society. The First Four Ships with their full complement of settlers sailed on time early in September 1850.

Initially the Canterbury Association planned that all its emigrants would be members of the Church of England but faced with land sales well below expectation and small numbers of steerage passengers willing to emigrate, it had to make concessions. First it lifted the churchmanship requirement for land purchasers who were willing to donate £1 per acre for religious and educational purposes, then it decided not to apply the churchmanship test to labourers who were nominated by land purchasers. It still hoped that all other emigrants who would receive assisted passages would be members of the Church of England. Finally, in order to fill the First Four Ships, the Committee seems to have turned a blind eye to the acceptance of emigrants without enquiring into their religious affiliations. Failure to fill the empty berths would almost certainly have resulted in the collapse of the Association's plan to establish the Canterbury settlement. Prudent practice overcame principle and ensured that the settlement went ahead.

A census was taken in Canterbury in November 1851, which was just under a year after the arrival of the first Canterbury Association immigrants. It showed that within the Canterbury Block, which was bounded on the

north by the Waipara River, on the south by the Ashburton River, on the west by the Southern Alps and on the east by the sea, there was a total of 3064 persons; 2253 claimed to be members of the Church of England and the remainder belonged to 20 different denominations. There were 138 Wesleyans, 92 Presbyterians and 135 Catholics most of whom were probably French settlers living at Akaroa.¹⁵

During his visit to Christchurch in February 1868, Lord Lyttelton denied that the Canterbury Association had tried to establish an exclusively Church of England settlement. He asserted that the idea of establishing such a settlement was subordinate to it becoming self-governing.

Lyttelton admitted that: 'The early promoters of the settlement knew very well that its foundation would attract persons of all opinions and all sects from England and other parts of the world; and were they to suppose that the Church of England or any other body should hold special privileges?'¹⁶

If Lord Lyttelton's comments made in 1868 reflected accurately the 1849-50 views of the Canterbury Association, then it may be claimed that the Association had achieved its objective by founding a settlement whose settlers were predominantly, if not exclusively, Church of England members.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Peter Savage for drawing my attention to the Canterbury Association correspondence about the religious requirement for emigrants.

Endnotes

¹ Plan of the Canterbury Association for founding the settlement of Canterbury in New Zealand, (Publisher J. W. Parker, London 1848) p.16.

² C1I290, item 6, Sales of Rural Land by the Canterbury Association, Archives NZ, Christchurch Regional Office.

³ CII290, 6/2, item 177(1), 21.4.1850, E.R. Ward to H.F. Alston, Archives NZ, Christchurch Regional Office.

⁴ CH290, 6/2, item 177(3), 25.4.1850, H.F. Alston to E.R. Ward. Archives NZ, Christchurch Regional Office.

⁵ CH290, 6/2, item 177(4), 5.6.1850, Extract from minutes of Committee of Management dated 14.5.1850

⁶ Canterbury Papers, No 3, pp. 62-68.

⁷ Canterbury Papers, No 3, pp. 68-76.

⁸ Canterbury Papers, No 3, p.71.

⁹ Canterbury Papers, No 4, p.120.

¹⁰ Chapman R.A., Canterbury Association land purchasers, Records of the Canterbury Museum, Vol. 14, p.28, 2000.

¹¹ Minutes of the Management Committee of the Canterbury Association, 5.8.1850, Anglican Archives, Christchurch.

¹² J.E. Fitzgerald to Lord Lyttelton, 7.8.1850, The Lord Lyttelton Papers, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch

¹³ Caroline Chisholm to Sidney Herbert, 20.8.1850, The Herbert Papers, Wiltshire County Record Office, Trowbridge.

¹⁴ Henry Sewell to Lord Lyttelton, 24.8.1850, The Lord Lyttelton Papers, Canterbury Museum,

Christchurch.

¹⁵ James Hight & C.R. Straubel, A History of Canterbury, Vol. 1, Appendix VI (Canterbury Centennial Committee, 1957)

¹⁶ Lyttelton Times, 6 Feb 1868.