

An Ungodly Generation

The Irish National Schools Era
in Colonial Australia 1848–1866

by Max Waugh

An Ungodly Generation is a fascinating history of the impact on the great educational debates of England, and in particular, Ireland in early Australia, and of how the educational decisions of Bourke and Gipps, formed by the Old World experience, resonated within the Australian context. This is a fine piece of research.

—Tom Keneally, October, 2017

Most observers of the history of schooling tend to believe that public education was first introduced to Australia under the ‘free, compulsory and secular’ provisions of the Victorian Education Act of 1872. However, this research argues that an earlier form of ‘state’ education was commenced simultaneously in New South Wales and the Port Phillip District (later known as the Colony of Victoria) as early as 1848, a scheme modelled almost exclusively on the fledgling ‘National Schools System’ current in Ireland at the time.

This book investigates the origins of National Schooling in Ireland, and how and why this unique model of education found its way to colonial Australia. Additional aspects of the system like school architecture, furnishings and equipment, government regulations, administration, the curriculum, methods of instruction, school inspection, and the accompanying teacher training are also revealed.

The part that chance and dogged determination played will also be explored. Having the newly appointed Governor Richard Bourke with a lifelong passion for public education and a working knowledge of the new National system of education in his native Ireland, along with the desire to introduce it here against the vehement opposition of the Protestant clergy, greatly enhances the story. Although Bourke never witnessed the fruits of his initiative, he was undoubtedly the catalyst for the system of National Schooling which was introduced in New South Wales, some eleven years after his untimely departure in 1837. Fortunately Bourke’s battle for public education through the means of National Schools intensified here

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after his departure, through the efforts of his daughter Ann and her husband (later Colonial Secretary) Edward Deas Thomson, and legislators like Roger Therry, John Plunkett, and Robert Lowe.

The undoubted success of this system proved a major precursor for Victoria’s landmark ‘free, compulsory and secular’ Education Act of 1872, which not only paved the way for the provision of public education in Australia, but also for much of the then western world.

The Author

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His previous book: *Soldier Boys: The Militarisation of Australian and New Zealand Schools for World War I* was published by Melbourne Books in 2014.