Preface

O*ceans of Consolation*: REVERBERANT PHRASE OF A CLAREMAN IN rural New South Wales, thanking his father for writing him a letter and so bridging the gap created by migration. *Migration*: expected episode in the life-cycle of most men and women reared in nineteenth-century Ireland. *Australia*: remote colonies in the British Empire, notorious for their penal origins, yet a major destination for Irish emigrants in the second half of the century. *Personal accounts*: the words through which emigrants and their connections at home strove to maintain contact, influence each other, and find solace in their separation.

This book explores the personal correspondence of a few of those emigrants. It reproduces fourteen sequences of letters in both directions, mainly composed by writers with little education and less property. These 111 letters have been selected from a thousand or so that survive, out of the millions exchanged between Ireland and Australia in the nineteenth century. Each sequence has intrinsic interest as personal testimony, often expressed in popular idiom with scant regard for conventional spelling, grammar, or syntax. Every letter has been transcribed in full, without alteration except for the introduction of sentence and paragraph breaks. Clarifications are indicated [*thus*]; authentic oddities are represented thus; elements lost through mutilation appear th[u]s. The sequences, otherwise unadorned, make fascinating reading.

Yet they cannot truly 'speak for themselves'. In order to understand how an emigrant in Maitland or Rochester might have interpreted messages from Clare or Down, we must explore that emigrant's personal journey. We need to discover the relationships of those mentioned by name, the events to which allusions are made, the social and economic contexts in

both worlds. We need also to be alert to awkward silences and evasions, and to seek clues to their origins. Therefore, I have used the sources of genealogy, biography, and local history to reconstitute fourteen personal stories. The commentaries, shaped by the letters, should enable the reader to identify more confidently the private and semi-public spaces within which correspondence occurred. They invite you to overhear more than the words alone.

The letters in this book convey 'facts' and impressions on every imaginable subject (except sex), giving insight into the daily preoccupations of obscure men and women in both Ireland and Australia. These themes are analysed in chapters covering family politics, the organisation of migration, Irish origins, Australian outcomes, and cultural differences. Though fourteen sets of correspondents cannot 'represent' the interests and views of the lost thousands, they bring us closer to the experience of migration than any aggregate statistics could do. They also indicate certain common problems of discourse between separated kith and kin, from which elements of a common rhetoric emerge. The forms in which Irish-Australian correspondents sought or offered consolation and advice would repay linguistic analysis: here, I make only a beginning.

My strategy—combining full transcriptions and detailed commentaries with thematic analysis—is contentious. Some may be perplexed to find so elaborate an edifice built upon so few documents. Indeed, as the introduction indicates, no previous editor of emigrant correspondence has shared my approach. While increasing attention has been paid to fidelity of transcription and provision of background, editors have ignored the forms and functions of this discourse of the unlettered. Today, students of literature are losing faith in the 'canon', and identifying less familiar forms of rhetoric through sources such as popular fiction, balladry, and unpublished autobiography. Oddly, the personal letter is only now being recognised as a sub-literary form worth investigation in its own right. This book is a contribution to the study of popular culture, as well as the history of migration.

Oceans of Consolation is not the work of a team. I am directly responsible for every element of its composition, from the transcriptions to the thematic index. In the course of transcription and reiterated correction, I learned to recite each letter in my version of a regional accent until long passages lodged in my memory. When labouring over a microfilm reader in pursuit of family or local background, I shared the obsession of countless 'roots hunters' whose aim, like mine, was to reconstruct a living past from its desiccated fragments. When visiting a 'site' or selecting a picture, I reinforced that construction with visual imagery. When instructing my computer to sort and deliver extracts on innumerable themes, I found my impressions and generalisations undermined with disconcerting frequency.

My sense of what is possible, and justifiable, in the writing of history has been altered in the course of preparation—the excitement remains. I hope that I have found words for sharing that excitement with you.

I am indebted to the custodians of the following institutions for permitting me to reproduce documents and illustrations, as specified in the footnotes and captions: Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, Irish Architectural Archive, Liverpool Central Library (Record Office), National Library of Australia, National Library of Ireland, Newcastle Region Public Library, State Library of New South Wales (General Reference Library and Mitchell Collection), State Library of South Australia (Mortlock Collection), State Library of Tasmania (Launceston), State Library of Victoria (La Trobe Collection), and University of Melbourne Archives. I likewise thank Heron and Dobson (Solicitors, Banbridge, Co. Down), the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the Board of Trinity College, Dublin, and the trustees of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

Many other institutions have given me access to relevant books and documents, including the following: Australian National University Library, Armagh Central Library, Belfast Public Library, British Library and British Newspaper Library, Bolton Central Library (Archives), City of Adelaide Archives, Department of Irish Folklore Archives (UCD), Gilbert Library (Dublin), Irish Valuation Office (Dublin), Maitland City Library, Mallow Heritage Centre, Meath Heritage Centre (Trim), National Archives (Dublin), Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society (Tullamore), Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland (Belfast), Public Record Office (London), Public Record Office of South Australia, Public Record Office of Victoria, Queensland State Archives, Representative Church Body Library (Dublin), Royal Irish Academy (Dublin), Society of Australian Genealogists (Sydney), Society of Friends Library (Dublin), State Archives of New South Wales, State Library of Queensland (Oxley Collection), and University College Archives (Dublin). I am also grateful to the bishop of Maitland, and the parish priests of Aghada, Cappawhite, Golden, and Liscannor, for allowing me to examine Roman Catholic registers in their custody. Sr. Marie Thérèse Malone (Jamberoo, NSW), Sr. M. Callista Neagle (Adelaide), and Sr. Paul (Dublin) kindly consulted the archives of the Benedictine, Josephite, and Presentation orders on my behalf, as did the Victorian archivists of the Society of Jesus and the Loyal Orange Institution.

This book could not have been written without the generosity of those descended from the correspondents in this book. In addition to authorising me to reproduce private collections and associated documents, many relatives read drafts, sent painstaking comments, answered queries, and showed hospitality to an inquisitive outsider. I am grateful to Winifred Allen (Grovedale, Victoria), Jeanette Bakker (Greenvale, Victoria), the late Henry

Comber (Lahinch, Co. Clare), Michael Comber (Ennistymon, Co. Clare), Tom Comber (Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny), Gloria Creighton (Newtown, Co. Mayo), Margaret Dillon (Annaghdown, Co. Galway), Mavis Down (Warrnambool, Victoria), Tom Dunne (Navan, Co. Meath), Hon. Wallace Fife (Wagga Wagga, NSW), Bryan Hurley (Roma, Queensland), Terry Liggins (Hobart), Nancy Lynch and Joe Lynch (Tuam, Co. Galway), Joan McKay (Ottawa), Mary K. Normoyle (Derry, Co. Clare), A. D. Patton (Donaghadee, Co. Down), the late Maurice Quirk (Crocane, Co. Cork), Robin Wyly (Tasmania), and, most of all, Meta Truscott (Brisbane). My indebtedness extends far beyond this list, embracing all those who responded to my appeals by offering letters and documents that could not be included in this volume.

I have benefited from the specialist knowledge of various experts and fellow-scholars, including Marcus Bourke (Dublin), Tony Claffey (Tuam, Co. Galway), Eddie Dalton (Golden, Co. Tipperary), Robin Haines (Adelaide), Andrew Hassam (Wales), Harry Hughes (Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare), Elizabeth Kirwan (NLI), Bruce Knox (Melbourne), Don Liggins (Auckland, New Zealand), Noel McLachlan (Melbourne), Mavis Newcombe (Maitland, NSW), Chris O'Mahony (Limerick), Trevor Parkhill (PRONI), Graeme Powell (NLA), Mark Staniforth (Sydney), Esma Turner (Huntly, Victoria), and Susan Woodburn (Adelaide). Don Akenson (Queen's University, Ontario), Ruth-Ann Mellish Harris (Boston), Bob Reece (Murdoch University, Perth), and Paul de Serville (Melbourne) all offered valuable suggestions. For their courteous but often challenging comments on draft chapters and their strategic advice, I thank three outstanding interpreters of emigrant correspondence: Charlotte Erickson (Cambridge), Kerby Miller (University of Missouri, Columbia), and Patrick O'Farrell (University of NSW). Despite our differences of approach, I have been inspired by their examples and stimulated by their responses.

Equally important has been the generosity of colleagues in the two universities that enabled this book to be written. Trinity College Dublin provided excellent research facilities and a peaceful background, mysteriously unruffled by the bitter winds of 'enterprise' and 'review'. There I received support and advice from Louis Cullen, David Dickson, Jim Livesey, and Aidan Clarke. The Arts and Social Sciences Benefaction Fund helped pay for the illustrations. Trinity also allowed me extended leave, which I was fortunate enough to spend as a Fellow of the Research School of Social Sciences, at the Australian National University. I owe particular gratitude to Paul Bourke and the staff of the History Programme, with whom I passed two fruitful years. Ken Inglis, Allan Martin, and Barry Smith gave erudite comments on several draft chapters, inspiring me to follow tangents that were never blind alleys. Pat Jalland, Jim Jupp, and Iain McCalman were among those who offered encouragement at crucial stages. Many of

my ideas were forged in three workshops on Australian immigration, held in Canberra in 1989, 1990, and 1992, from which the series *Visible Immigrants* emerged. I thank Anthea Bundock for her careful handling of those volumes, and Marion Stell for transcribing or listing several sequences that have yet to be analysed. Richard Reid, then completing an important thesis at the ANU on secondment from the Australian War Memorial, was extraordinarily generous with documentary leads and abstruse information. I have learned much from his irresistible enthusiasm for the specific experience.

There are others whose support gave me the courage to complete what sometimes seemed an impossible assignment. Cormac Ó Gráda of UCD made sagacious comments on numerous chapters, providing salutary warnings as I lurched into excessive 'empathy'. Joanna Bourke of Birkbeck College (London) read my drafts, charted my drift from 'fact' to 'discourse', demanded overt discussion of gender, and provoked me to think beyond the limits that I had set myself. Eric Richards of Flinders University, with whom I have spent many happy hours on and off tennis courts in Adelaide, Sydney, and Canberra, somehow induced me to embark on this project. He has remained an appreciative but sceptical critic, gently undermining all my attempts to define and isolate 'Irishness'. Roger Haydon, my tolerant editor at Cornell University Press and himself an expert on emigrant correspondence, made authorship a pleasure. Sheila Fitzpatrick (Chicago) offered probing comments, parallels with other histories, and hospitality in the last days of revision. As always, the critical voice of my mother, Dorothy Fitzpatrick, was audible to me even when she was silent. Brian and Meg Fitzpatrick stoically endured their objectification as Irish-Australian migrants, and the consequent disruption of their schooling. Georgina Fitzpatrick tolerated my years of obsession with letters, commented on almost every chapter, and suggested the title.

This book invokes the memory of two historians who bequeathed me something of their passion—but, alas, only shadows of their conviction.

Charles Manning Hope Clark (1915–91)

Brian Charles Fitzpatrick (1905–65)

DAVID FITZPATRICK

Dublin