Littledene's Dominion:

Re-imagining Crawford and Gwen Somerset's Oxford Experiment

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in History

Massey University, New Zealand.

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2025

Abstract

Crawford Somerset's attractively written *Littledene* emerged from a distinct social experiment in rural community education during the interwar years. An early study of its kind in New Zealand, the location in Oxford, North Canterbury, remained undisclosed at the time, hence the pseudonym *Littledene.* Crawford's overall interpretation of the Oxford community is illuminated within his intellectual network which included his wife and educational collaborator Gwendolen Alley, academic supervisor James Shelley, and research associate Clarence Beeby. Influenced by ongoing debates in education and its place in social development, the group shared similar aspirations for education reform. As teachers at Oxford School Crawford and Gwen illustrated a sense of social dislocation from urban New Zealand and its greater society. Perceiving the Oxford farming community as detached from intellectual and cultural life, they creatively experimented with new ideas in community education. The Oxford experiment included an environmental approach shaped by the respective value Crawford and Gwen placed on fostering a sense of belonging within the Canterbury landscape. As a sophisticated blueprint demonstrating their ideas for wider social change, *Littledene* appears as a symbolic portrayal of the Oxford community. This thesis will demonstrate how far the Somerset's projection of Oxford was influenced by a palimpsest of ideas introduced to them via the movement of intellectuals between Europe and the Dominion during the early twentieth century. Alongside archival sources, this critique draws on autobiographical material from Victoria University and audio-visual material from Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision archive. The sources offer an understanding of the local and international forces that shaped Crawford and Gwen's intellectual histories from childhood. Importantly, the sources provide a vista of the intellectual culture that informed the Oxford experiment as the product of a rich intellectual history within the context of interwar studies in New Zealand.

Acknowledgments

I extend gratitude to the people and organisations whose efforts and insights have instilled depth and meaning in this thesis. I am indebted to my supervisor Emeritus Professor Michael Belgrave from Massey University; his erudition and invaluable advice truly anchored this study. I am also grateful to Associate Professor Geoffrey Watson at Massey University for his comprehensive knowledge, guidance, and sincere encouragement. I give special thanks to the Committee at Oxford Museum where a serendipitous flow of employment alongside intriguing Somerset archives magically appeared at just the right moments. The heart of this thesis arrived via the richness of the Somerset autobiographical notes located in the Beaglehole Room Archives at Victoria University. I give genuine thanks to the Beaglehole Room archivists for allowing me to use these valuable primary sources. I am grateful also to the team at Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision Archives where technical experts provided a fabulous array of high-quality digital broadcasting files. The real voices of Crawford and Gwen Somerset, alongside their intellectual circle, livened their written words and deepened my understanding of their personalities. My appreciation to the librarians at Massey University for their interest and support in locating rare books, journals and magazines, alongside instances of technical support. I am grateful for the comradeship of my Massey history cohort, particularly Ian Latham who kindly shared archival material from his own research based in the United States of America. Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents Roger and Voila, my daughter Emma and sons Lewis and Alexander for their unconditional love, support and encouragement during my academic endeavours.

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Introduction

Readers have treasured, and still do treasure, Crawford Somerset's *Littledene*.[1] James Shelley, described the book as a 'survey on education', he used the term 'enlightened subjectivity' suggesting that a broad understanding of reality existed in Crawford's methodology.[2] Ivan Sutherland's early review described it as 'a gospel on modern education' fashioned within Crawford's quaint literary style.[3] Sutherland saw *Littledene* as an 'impression of actuality', he questioned how far *Littledene* illustrated a 'typical' society within the broader sense of the Dominion.[4] Crawford's critique on farming successfully appealed to geographers. It was 'an excellent little book' wrote R O B in a contemporary review for *The Geographical Journal*.[5] James Strachan, then headmaster at Rangiora High, described *Littledene* as a 'thorough going' educational resource for schoolteachers engaged in new education.[6] Copies were accordingly sought-after throughout the Dominion.[7] Within a few short

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[1] James Shelley, "Foreword," in *Littledene: A New Zealand Rural Community*, ed. Hugh Crawford Dixon Somerset (Auckland and London: Whitcomb & Tombes Ltd, Oxford University Press, 1938), vi.

ROB, "Australasia and Pacific," review of Littledene: A New Zealand Rural Community, H. C. D. Somerset, *The Geographical Journal* 92, no. 6 (1938).

I L G Sutherland, "A Sociological Study," *Press*, 10 May 1938, 9.

Cyrano, "Littledene," *Auckland Star*, 4 June 1938, 3.

Tom L Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset," *New Zealand Magazine*, no. 20:6 (1941): 13-16.

J E Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, Educational Research Series No.9 (Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1938), 56.

J H Robb, "H C D Somerset, 1895-1968," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 4, no. 2 (1968): 160.

James Shelley, "Foreword [Two]," in *Littledene Patterns of Change*, Educational Research Series, No 51 (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1974), v-vi.

C E Beeby, "Introduction," ibid., xi-xxii.

John E Watson, "Foreword [1973]," ibid., (Wellington New Zealand Council for Educational Research), v-vi.

William R Catton, "Epilogue," ibid., 211-224.

Patricia Smart and Colin L. Knight, *Pathfinders in Education: Seven Canterbury Educators*, ed. Clarrie Ford (Canterbury Institute for Educational Research, 1985).

Christopher Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, AUP Studies in Cultural and Social History: 3 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006).

Chris Brickell, "Those 'Other Sociologists': Social Analysis before Sociology," *New Zealand Sociology* 22, no. 2 (2007).

Alison Loveridge, "Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion Planting?" *New Zealand Sociology*, 31, no. 3 (2016).

Rachael Bell, "Keeping It in the Country Modernity, Urban Drift and Adult Education in Rural New Zealand," in *New Zealand between the Wars*, ed. Rachael Bell (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2017).

[2] Shelley, "Foreword," v.

[3] Sutherland, "A Sociological Study," 9.

[4] Ibid., 9.

[5] ROB, "Australasia and Pacific," 557.

[6] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 56.

[7] "Books in Local Demand," *Auckland Star*, 11 June 1938, 14.

"The Public Library," *Ashburton Guardian*, 18 June 1938, 11.

"Leeston Library," *Ellesmere Guardian*, 9 September 1938, 2.

Cyrano, "A Country Woman's Calendar," *Auckland Star (Supplement)*, 29 July 1939, 3.

years, *Littledene* became the go-to 'Education Fellowship Book', popular as a literary classic, it was described as 'a collector's piece' by Tom Mills:

> This piece, written at the instance of the then Director of Educational Research, Dr. Beeby, contains the author's findings after years of child study and research, together with his theories, aims and general outlook regarding the District High School theory and practice. "Littledene" is a detailed human map of every small centre behind our towns and cities in New Zealand – an explicit diagram of what I call Local Spirit personified.[8]

The 'Local Spirit' of *Littledene* was well received in the United States of America. Columbia University sociologist, Edmund de Schweinitz Brunner, referenced *Littledene* as a veneer for Crawford's community education experiment in Oxford alongside the Workers Education Association (WEA).[9] Crawford applied to *Littledene* much of Brunner's sociological methodology.[10] Brunner too, had written a book with John Kolb from the University of Wisconsin.[11] Both knew Crawford in person through the New Education Fellowship (NEF). Kolb reputedly valued the 'thoroughness' of the *Littledene* study.[12] Crawford's 1924 WEA work was funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. *Littledene* came under the same Carnegie umbrella through the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) connected to the NEF by 1934.[13]

A decade after *Littledene*, the NZCER encouraged Crawford to 'revisit' Oxford and refresh the *Littledene* study, Crawford accepted the offer, then deployed an environmental scientist to help with fieldwork.[14] Two decades later their research remained unfinished. Then Crawford's passing in

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[8] Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset," 15.

[9] Edmund de S Brunner, "Education and Rural Life; Rural Trends the World around; the School and the Rural Community; the Rural School Curriculum " in *Australian Council for Educational Research: Education for Complete Living the Challenge of to-Day: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference*, ed. K S Cunningham and W C Radford (Melbourne, Australia Melbourne University Press; in association with Oxford University Press, 1937).

"Education and World Affairs; the Place of the School in Modern Society," in *Australian Council for Educational Research: Education for Complete Living the Challenge of to-Day: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference* ed. K S Radford Cunningham, WC (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press; in association with Oxford University Press, 1937).

"The Challenge of Adult Education," in *New Zealand Education Fellowship Conference*, ed. A E Campbell and C L Bailey (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Melbourne and Sydney: Whitcombe & Tombs LTD, 1937).

[10] Hugh Crawford Dixon Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, Educational Research Series No 5 (New Zealand and London: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, Oxford University Press, 1938), 99.

[11] John H Klob and Edmund de S Brunner, *A Study of Rural Society Its Organization and Changes*, ed. William F Obgburn (Boston, New York, Chicago, Dallas, Atlanta, San Francisco, Massachusetts, Cambridge: Houghten Mifflin Company and The Biberside Press, 1940 [1935]).

[12] "Rural Research," *New Zealand Herald*, 9 June 1938. 15.

[13] Loveridge, "Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion Planting?"

Kevin J Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," *Paedagogica Historica* 40:5-6 (2004).

[14] H C D Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*, ed. J E Watson, et al., First ed., Educational Research Series No 51 (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1974), 101-104. The

May 1968, rekindled a nostalgia for the earlier *Littledene* study.[15] Sociologist Jim Robb believed the early study was 'brilliantly perceptive', asserting 'Crawford Somerset can probably be regarded as the greatest of the "founding fathers" of sociology in New Zealand.'[16] Around that time Gwen Somerset agreed to the compilation of her late husband's research. Her support in harmonising the original *Littledene* with Crawford's unfinished manuscript was acknowledged by John Watson, then director for the NZCER.[17] To arrange the posthumous edition, Watson gathered important intellectuals.[18] With their shared knowledge of the earlier study, each illuminated something of the Oxford experiment behind *Littledene*. Those closest to Crawford, attributed the earlier popularity of *Littledene* to Crawford's sensitivity and wit, they highlighted his ability for research and writing, they emphasised the importance of the original study with its modern critique on education.[19] With the updated edition published in 1974, Crawford's quaint portrayal of the *Littledene* community continued to enchant readers at home and far away.

After the new millennium, academics from various disciplines debated the significance of *Littledene* as a classic work of social research; their findings created a new narrative. Sociologist Ian Carter argued that Littledene's 'founding character' had been overemphasised and that it sat within a 'mixed bag' of early social research produced in the Dominion.[20] Carter also implied that Crawford's motivation for the book was encouraged by American funding alongside NEF and WEA incentives.[21] Alison Loveridge endorsed Carter's argument suggesting that American influences shaped the *Littledene* study as a vehicle for social change, although she acknowledged it was a positive step forward for education.[22] From a sociological and historical perspective Chris Brickell noted that *Littledene* was a typical critique on education at a time when: 'Questions of youth and of "delinquency" occupied the minds and the research time of psychologists, educationalists and others'.[23] Importantly, Brickell highlighted some inconsistencies in Crawford's portrayal of the community, adding some weight to Sutherland's earlier critical review.[24] More recently, historian

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environmental scientist was Lancelot William McCaskill who specialised in soil conservation at Lincoln University, Christchurch.

[15] Watson, "Foreword [1973]," v-vi.

[16] Robb, "H C D Somerset, 1895-1968," 160.

[17] Watson, "Foreword [1973]," v-vi. Watson also mentions the participation of Anthony and David Somerset.

[18] Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*.

[19] Catton, "Epilogue," 211. Catton noted that 'the theoretical implications of Somerset's study remain valid and important.'

Beeby, "Introduction," xix.

[20] Ian Carter, "The Missing Link: Dietetics and Rural Sociology in Thirties New Zealand," *New Zealand Sociology* 19, no. 2 (2004): 204, 197.

[21] Ibid., 202.

[22] Loveridge, "Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion Planting?"

[23] Brickell, "Those 'Other Sociologists': Social Analysis before Sociology," 7, 21-22.

[24] Ibid., 8-9.

Sutherland, "A Sociological Study."

"The Microcosm of Rural Life," *Otago Daily Times*, 4 June 1938, 4.

Rachael Bell suggests that Crawford's *Littledene* was a 'positive interpretation of country life' through 'the gentle and self-effacing humour it unpacked' at a time when rural living was actually very difficult.[25] Bell emphasised how American urban influences shaped the study, however, not entirely disagreeing, as Carter had, that British ruralism also shaped Crawford's perspective.[26] The focus on American influences possibly meant academics missed the essence of *Littledene* as a study more strongly connected with European ruralism than initially thought. Overall, the dominant narrative perceives *Littledene* as a proto sociologic critique on community education funded and mainly influenced by American interests in education connected with the NEF. *Littledene* was a work of literary elegance complicated by the depression alongside a rapidly changing political context in educational and social research in the Dominion.

Littledene originally belonged to a series of three monographs on rural education, each written under the auspices of the NZCER, alongside WEA and NEF philosophies of the time.[27] The purpose of each monograph was to promote development in rural education in the Dominion.[28] The monographs shared a similar philosophical approach to engage whole communities in education and encourage curriculums based on the law of nature. Sutherland alluded to the NEF influence when he suggested that a modern educational philosophy was at the 'heart' of the *Littledene* study, his reference to the study as a 'gospel' is noted.[29] Importantly, international and local literature on NEF theory, suggests a strong theosophical ethos existed in early NEF circles in both Britain and New Zealand.[30] Helen May noted that Gwen's early teaching style in Oxford reflected similar theories

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[25] Bell, "Keeping It in the Country Modernity, Urban Drift and Adult Education in Rural New Zealand," 218, 220.

[26] Ibid., 218.

Carter, "The Missing Link: Dietetics and Rural Sociology in Thirties New Zealand," 200.

Shelley, "Foreword," v-vi.

[27] Watson, "Foreword [1973]," v.

Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*.

C L Gillies, "New Zealand Council for Educational Research: Rural Education in New Zealand (Post-Primary Level)," (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1938).

G W Parkyn, *The Consolidation of Rural Schools*, Educational Research Series No 32 (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1952). This later publication is relevant to the consolidation of schools during the Oxford experiment.

[28] "Education in Dominion," *Press*, 22 June 1938, 10.

[29] Sutherland, "A Sociological Study," 9.

[30] Celia M Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950" (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1989).

Jane Abbiss, "The 'New Education Fellowship' in New Zealand: Its Activity and Influence in the 1930s and 1940s," *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 33, no 1 (1998).

Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938." The late Kevin Brehony was Professor of Education at Roehampton University; he was influenced by Friedrich Frobel's system of education.

Sue Middleton, "Clare Soper's Hat: New Education Fellowship Correspondence between Bloomsbury and New Zealand, 1938-1946," *History of Education* 42, no. 1 (2013).

Paul Joseph Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937" (PhD Thesis, Massey University, 2013).

around open-air classrooms and the development of natural learning by 1921.[31] By then the Garden City Movement in London was well versed in new education, their ideas appealed to NEF and WEA circles in both the Dominions and United States of America.[32] Gwen's detailed account of the WEA experiment in Oxford with its close affiliation to the NEF through Brunner's work, indirectly connects *Littledene* to the British theosophical and Garden City Education movements.[33] More locally *Littledene* sat in context alongside Strachan's 'Organic Curriculum' at Rangiora High School, Colin L Gillies report on Rural Education and G W Parkyn's later publication *The Consolidation of Schools*.[34] Crawford and Gillies later became 'branch secretaries' for NEF networks in the Dominion noted by Sue Middleton.[35] The publications and report illustrate the likeliness of a shared theosophical/garden city/holistic community approach to education.

In illuminating something of the intellectual culture behind the Oxford experiment so far, this thesis suggests that Crawford may have symbolically portrayed *Littledene* to encourage developments in rural education. As a highly polished veneer of 'enlightened subjectivity' *Littledene* may not be an accurate representation of the wider Oxford community. One might even question how far *Littledene* can be seen as an 'imagined community' after Benedict Anderson's argument on the 'spread of nationalism'.[36] A deeper understanding of the Oxford experiment through the intellectual culture of those close to the experiment, will help to reveal the social context behind *Littledene*. It will highlight

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Sue C. Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," *History of Education Review* 46, no. 1 (2017).

[31] Helen May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand* (Auckland University Press, 1997).

[32] Robert S Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

Ron Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education,1897-1913," *History of Education* 21, no. 2 (1992).

Louise Beaumont, "Gardens of the 1920s and 1930s," in *A History of the Garden in New Zealand*, ed. Matthew Bradbury (New Zealand, England, United States, Australia, Canada: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995).

James Beattie. *Empire and Environmental Anxiety: Health, Science, Art and Conservation in South Asia and Australasia, 1800-1920.* London, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011. Beattie discusses the complexity of environmental relationships in settler societies. He suggests that 'European preconceptions' around health, wellbeing, and aesthetics shaped colonial environments through the imperialism of 'environmental anxiety'.

[33] Gwendolyn L Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, Arnold Hely Papers No. 4 (New Zealand: Wellington National Council of Adult Education, 1972), 1-22.

Brunner, "Education and Rural Life; Rural Trends the World around; the School and the Rural Community; the Rural School Curriculum."

"Adult and University Education."

[34] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*.

Gillies, "New Zealand Council for Educational Research: Rural Education in New Zealand (Post-Primary Level)."

Rebecca Lythe, Email message to author, 16 September 2024.

Parkyn, *The Consolidation of Rural Schools*.

[35] Middleton, "Clare Soper's Hat: New Education Fellowship Correspondence Between Bloomsbury and New Zealand, 1938-1946," 93.

[36] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed. (London. New York: Verso, 1991).

the significant contributions Gwen and Crawford made to education and social development in Oxford, through their ability to shape the 'Local Spirit' of the community. To begin, a brief introduction to Crawford's overall portrayal of the *Littledene* community will help to reveal the thinking behind the Oxford experiment. Then follows an assessment of the perspectives of those involved in the experiment. Then in more detail, Crawford's subjectivity, and Gwen's influence on Crawford's subjectivity will be discussed throughout the thesis.

Crawford's *Littledene* appeared as a critical attack on the materialism and egalitarianism found in contemporary New Zealand. Residing in the remote foothills of rural Canterbury, Crawford observed that 'Littledenians' had coalesced over time through their working relationships and material needs.[37] With his engaging sense of humour, he portrayed the community as an autonomous society fashioned by a hierarchy of good living citizens. He highlighted the bourgeois-like mentality of *Littledene's* farming community; their intellectual development allegedly broken by earlier efforts to cultivate the land, which, he claimed, left the whole community culturally and spiritually barren.[38] He noted remnants of a backward feudal system in his depiction of the squire-like run holders who chose not to support any form of local education that might empower the *Littledene* community.[39] Crawford equally distrusted the farm owners on average holdings, describing them as uneducated workaholics tight on spending time or money for education. Their overall ambivalence to the local school greatly annoyed him.[40]

Crawford blamed interdenominational forces for having created sectarianism in the community. He insisted that Victorianism encouraged a religious fundamentalism that negatively impacted the most vulnerable in the community.[41] With children and the elderly compromised by geographic isolation, Crawford assumed that a high level of insularity existed in *Littledene*.[42] Spiritually divided, rather than spiritual, 'Littledenians' work life flowed begrudgingly into leisure, their leisurely communications were steeped in farm-talk, their farm-talk lacked a cultured perspective, and their emotions were anywhere other than showing.[43] Crawford expected that 'Littledenians' would find 'a new social sense', he felt confident that modern education could unite the rural community, as a 'society' of spiritually connected 'fellows'.[44] His perspective was shared by British educationist Cyril Norwood during the Dominion's 1937 NEF conference.[45] Norwood assumed (with some scepticism) that the Dominion's 'sound, and fairly homogenous physical stock', had potential (alongside Australians), 'to create in this southern hemisphere a type of humanity which

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[37] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 37-51.
[38] Ibid., 25-26, 49, 51.
[39] Ibid., 97.
[40] Ibid., 97.
[41] Ibid., 47-51.
[42] Ibid., 37, Appendix 1.
[43] Ibid., 37-51, 52-66, 95-98.
[44] Ibid., 51.
[45] "New Education Fellowship Civic Welcome to Delegates," *Press*, 14 July 1937, 10.

will not be surpassed in the whole world.'[46] Crawford's academic supervisor James Shelley, presented a similar ethos, he described the *Littledene* study as 'social stock taking' at a national level.[47]

Theosophical thought might be implicitly evident in the way Crawford valued spirituality, he connected nature to natural learning akin with the farming environment in *Littledene*.[48] By then, the indigenous natural environment in Canterbury resembled something of the natural English homeland noted by Louise Beaumont:

> By the late 1930s, there was a growing realisation that gardens of a more 'national type', composed of New Zealand's fast-disappearing flora, were an important facet in the acquisition and assumption of a national character. While this was not greeted with mass acceptance, some individuals created gardens where native species were used in preference to, or combined with, the more traditional 'flower garden' plants of the motherland, creating unique and distinct gardens which are of historical interest to us today.[49]

These gardens were the 'peculiar conditions' contemplated by James Hight when he welcomed a group of European NEF educationists to Christchurch in 1937: "We hope that the soil here in Canterbury is not uncultivated for the seed you have to sow" said Hight modestly.[50] The following reply might have reassured him that his goals were reciprocated by the visitors:

> "We feel now that we have really reached home." Said Sir Percy Meadon. "It looks like home and it feels like home. Already we have realised how very keen you are on your educational work, and that you know that it should keep pace with the changing world."[51]

With their strong sense of duty and belonging to the British empire, the Dominion's natural indigenous world might have appeared to the group as the shadows in Plato's cave.[52] In much the same way, the indigenous world appeared on the periphery in Crawford's *Littledene*.[53] Similarly, theosophical ideas in new education, gave followers a sense they belonged to an international

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[46] Sir Cyril Norwood, "The New Conception of Physical Education," in *Australian Council for Educational Research: Education for Complete Living: The Challenge of to-Day: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference* ed. K S Cunningham and W C Radford (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press in association with Oxford University Press, 1937), 403, 416.

[47] Shelley, "Foreword," v-vi.

[48] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 67-94.

[49] Beaumont, "Gardens of the 1920s and 1930s," 136.

Katherine Raine, "1860s-1900 Victorian Gardens," in *A History of the Gardens in New Zealand*, ed. Matthew Bradbury (New Zealand, England, United States, Australia, Canada: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995).

"1900-1920 Early Twentieth-Century Gardens," in *A History of the Garden in New Zealand*, ed. Matthew Bradbury (New Zealand, England, United States, Australia, Canada: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995).

[50] "New Education Fellowship Civic Welcome to Delegates," 10.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1906), https://archive.org/details/republicplato00barkgoog/page/n178/mode/2up?q=Plato%27s+Cave. 154-177.

[53] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 2.

fellowship – in reality, they belonged to an English speaking minority.[54] The intellectual soils of Europe had by then proven fertile in exporting the 'seeds' that intrinsically connected the Garden City Movement in London to education in 1898, which influenced the educational branch of the Christchurch Beautifying Association established in 1897; the Open-Air Schools League (OASL) by 1925, and Christchurch Sunlight League (CSL) by 1931. As social movements these organisations were commonly tied through an appreciation of aesthetics, the natural space, natural learning, nature studies, soil, botanicals, health and sunlight. Everything Crawford valued for rural education in *Littledene*. The natural environment induced a sense of empire alongside belonging and social development which presents an important discussion in this thesis. Crawford's experiment appealed to an international audience of NEF educationists interested in the potential of the Dominion's education system for wider social development.

By then, European NEF educationists applied ancient Athenian ideas to their educational critiques. Having revived Plato's theory, they brought art, music and rhythmic dance into their classrooms in Britain and the USA.[55] Shelley supported similar themes in the Oxford experiment, his appreciation of Plato's educational philosophy was well received by Crawford.[56] "Shelley was something of Aristotle and Socrates rolled into one" claimed Crawford, who added that Shelley's ideas went down like "mental vitamins" at Canterbury College during the 1920s.[57] These comments suggest that the Oxford experiment was somewhat influenced by philosophical perspectives focused on new education. Today one might inquisitively wonder, who were the people behind the experiment, why was the experiment so important at the time, and what led to its later reputation as a study of national significance?

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[54] Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," 736.

May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 171.

Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," 50.

Rene Guenon, "Theosophism," *Introduction to The Study of The Hindu Doctrines* (London: Luzac & Co, 1945), https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.280367/mode/2up. 311-321.

Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 96-130.

[55] I L Kandel, "School and Society," in *New Zealand Education Fellowship Conference*, ed. A E Campbell and CL Bailey, Education in the Modern World (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Melbourne and Sydney: Whitcombe & Tombs LTD, 1937).

Sir Percy Meadon, "A Liberal Education," ibid., ed. A E Campbell and C L Bailey.

E Slater Davies, "Physical Education and the Universities," ibid.

Sir Cyril Norwood, "Science and Its Place in a General Education," ibid.

"Coming Changes in Education."

"Music and Its Place in Education."

F C Happold, "Music, Art and Drama in the School," in *Australian Council for Educational Research: Education for Complete Living the Challenge of to-Day: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference*, ed. K S Cunningham and W C Radford (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press in Association with Oxford University Press, 1937).

[56] *Tributes to Professor James Shelley*, (New Zealand Broadcasting, Post 1961), MP3 Audio File, 05:15:05. RNZ Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archives.

[57] Ibid., 00:20:31 - 00:42:46.

Of primary importance in the experiment was the voice of Gwen Alley, her close friendship with Crawford at Canterbury Teachers College, formed the beginning of their lasting personal and professional union. Clarence Beeby suggested:

> It is impossible to write about Somerset the man without reference to the woman who shared his work and his thinking for over 40 years. …She was a woman who could have carved out a separate career for herself but she chose for most of her life to work in tandem with him.[58]

After retirement from teaching in 1948, Gwen became the first president for the New Zealand Federation of Nursery Play Centres.[59] In 1965, Gwen was awarded an MBE for her contributions to childhood education. A decade later, she was recognised for her 'distinguished service to community education', there followed an honorary doctorate from Victoria University.[60] This thesis examines in detail Gwen's early intellectual life, and her important contribution to the Oxford experiment alongside Crawford.

As young teachers in the remote rural Oxford community, Crawford and Gwen kept in contact with Shelley.[61] "We looked to him as a prophet" claimed Gwen: "The people of Oxford looked upon him as somebody they could always turn to when they wanted to know what was right".[62] Those who knew Shelley described him as a modern Leonardo da Vinci - accomplished teacher, artist, actor, craftsman, art historian, a Cambridge scholar of modern languages...[63] Ian Carter, illustrated Shelley as an autocratic Englishman, buoyant in a deep reservoir of ideas – but something of a *Gadfly* who easily provoked others.[64] As Professor at Canterbury College from 1920 to 1935, Shelley promoted drama and social sciences, he later worked for New Zealand Broadcasting where he vitalised intellectual culture over the airways.[65] On retirement in 1949, Shelley received a knighthood for his services in broadcasting, education and drama. His work in New Zealand included the establishment

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[58] Beeby, "Introduction," xix.

[59] Gwendolen Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, ed. Naomi Morton, The Life of Gwendolen Lucy Somerset Born Gwendolen Alley in Springfield North Canterbury N.Z. in 1894 Sister of Eric, Rewi, Philip, Geoffrey, Kathleen and Joyce: Told by Herself (Auckland: New Zealand Playcentre Federation, 1988), 208.

[60] "Woman to Receive Honorary Degree," *Press*, 11 April 1975, 15.

[61] *Tributes to Professor James Shelley*.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

Ian Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley* (Auckland University Press in association with the Broadcasting History Trust, 1993), 53. Shelley received his MA at Manchester in 1914.

Beeby, "Introduction," xiv.

C. E. Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, ed. Paula Wagemaker, Educational Research Series: No. 69 (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1992), 46.

[64] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*.

[65] Ibid.

Colin McGeorge, "[Review] Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley. By Ian Carter.," *New Zealand Journal of History* 28:2 (1994): 236-237.

of the National Library Service, National Orchestra, Open Air School's League, and WEA Box scheme.[66]

As a humanist interested in social sciences, Shelley advanced the psychological unit at Canterbury College. In the space of a year he greatly influenced Clarence Beeby's post-graduate study.[67] Beeby went on to complete a doctorate in psychology at Manchester University.[68] While away Beeby met and shared ideas with Shelley's good friend, the 'radical' British educator Joseph John Findlay.[69] Returning to New Zealand in 1927, Beeby worked with Shelley in the psychology unit where they 'experimented in vocational guidance and industrial psychology'.[70] Beeby described the difficulties he and Shelley faced as they applied rudimentary 'psychoanalysis' to education:

> Psychology was so terribly new, and it was in some ways fairly woolly you know. Looking back, well I can think not with shame, but I blush a little at some of the things we said and did in the hopes that this great new science was going to revolutionise new hopes in the world.[71]

Beeby's interest in progressive education occupied him in genetic based psychology and mental testing for a time.[72] He later wrote: 'The curious thing is that, at that time, I saw no conflict between these different schools of thought as applied to education.'[73] Beeby's comment might have reflected an earlier distraction with eugenics.[74] Historians have debated the appeal of positive eugenics in the Christchurch Sunlight League, an organisation well known to both Shelley and Beeby by 1931.[75] It

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[66] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*.

[67] *Shelley Forum Part 1*, *TAL (Talks) Series* (New Zealand Broadcasting, 1986), Alley, Elizabeth (interviewer), Beeby Clarence Edward, (interviewee). MP3 Audio File, 19:17. RNZ Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archives. Beeby's early study with Shelley was from 1921-1922.

Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 52.

[68] *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 54-57, 66-82.

[69] Ibid., 66-67.

[70] Ibid., 307.

[71] Ibid.,70-72.

Beeby Discussing Experimental Psychology, (New Zealand Broadcasting, Post 1965), Alley, Elizabeth (interviewer), Beeby, Clarence (interviewee). MP3 Audio File, 04:38. Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archive.

[72] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 70, 64. 'Different schools of thought' included Joseph John Findlay, and Percy Nunn for liberal education reform, Cyril Burt for mental testing, and J C Flugel for psychotherapy 'as applied to education'. Beeby also looked to Terman's version of the Binet Simon intelligence tests.

"Psychological Research," *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 15 October 1929.

"("Star" Photograph.) Dr C.E. Beeby, Lecturer in Psychology, Tests a Student through the Chronoscope to Find the Speed of Re-Action of the Nervous System Control after a Given Signal. The Electrically Controlled Clock Records Thought Speed up to Thousandths of a Second," *Star (Christchurch)*, 5 October 1929, 30.

[73] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 71.

[74] Diane B. Paul, Hamish G. Spencer, and John Stenhouse, *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), https://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09011a&AN=mul.oai.edge.massey.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001086.c57d6a07.f325.502a.81ed.0f867caaca07&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306

http://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/Massey/detail.action?docID=5150748.

[75] Susan Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936" (An Extended Essay, Canterbury, 1980).

appears that as the interwar context advanced, some of the earlier 'woolly' ideas that influenced Shelley and Beeby fell away. In 1934, Beeby became the first director of the NZCER, where in 1938 he edited and published Crawford's *Littledene*.[76] That year the NZCER also published Strachan's 'organic curriculum', a spirited venture that emphasised the morals of natural law, soil and sunlight for social and educational development.[77] Strachan's educational philosophy greatly appealed to the group.[78] Beeby also directed Gillies unpublished report on Rural Education.[79] Using NEF ideas Gillies argued that classrooms, and books were material barriers in learning: 'education should be a lifelong process, including the body, the spirit, all the sensibilities, the entire organism.'[80] Historians describe the connections between this group and the international NEF.[81] While Beeby's interest in genetic based psychology had declined, he entered a government role in education. Promoted to Director General in 1940 he pioneered changes in child welfare and included psychology services in schools.[82] Having also worked extensively as an international consultant for UNESCO, Beeby received a plethora of honorary doctorates and prominent awards over his lifetime.[83] Shelley and Beeby were closely linked to the Oxford experiment, indeed they were arguably too close to be independently critical of *Littledene*. As experimental educators on the cutting edge of social science, they grappled with some intriguing and sometimes unconventional ideas. Their respective successes however, validated their deep understanding of *Littledene* as a blueprint of the then highly dynamic, experimental atmosphere in education. Beeby's reflection on *Littledene* concluded that: 'It was in some small measure the story of New Zealand', he maintained the early publication was highly valid

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Margaret Tennant, *Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps* (Wellington, New Zealand: Bridget Williams Books Limited and Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1994).

Caroline Daley, *Leisure & Pleasure: Reshaping & Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900-1960* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press, 2003).

Nadia Gush, "The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League," *New Zealand Journal of History* 43 (1) (2009).

[76] Carter, "The Missing Link: Dietetics and Rural Sociology in Thirties New Zealand," 201.

Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 85-111, 308.

[77] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*. Rangiora High School was geographically the closest to Oxford High School at the time.

[78] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 45-46.

Beeby, "Introduction," xiv.

[79] Gillies, "New Zealand Council for Educational Research: Rural Education in New Zealand (Post-Primary Level)."

[80] Ibid., 2.

[81] Abbiss, "The "New Education Fellowship" in New Zealand: Its Activity and Influence in the 1930s and 1940s."

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 408.

Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 103-107.

[82] *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 70-71, 117-201.

[83] Ibid., 257-309.

for its time.[84] Importantly, the Oxford experiment symbolised many of the changes Beeby later applied to state education.

Littledene was never intended as a social history of Oxford. Leading social histories written on Oxford have been in conjunction with jubilee or centennial initiatives.[85] Many historians have provided in-depth social histories on interwar New Zealand, including assessments of education.[86] The Oxford experiment with its educational philosophy based on nature, the arts, and social science, is long overdue for recognition as an important intellectual history behind the story of *Littledene*.

William Catton concluded 'Somerset was ahead of his time' in understanding the land and the bigger picture.[87] Gwen's similar composure was noted by Beeby, who described her 'dualistic feeling for town and the country, for ideas and for the soil':

> The most one can say with certainty is that there were a few men and women who now saw the need to examine society itself with the same care that the physical scientists were giving to the analysis of its soil, and that the depression and the accession of power of the first Labour Government revealed enough cracks in the social structure to give these people a handhold. [88]

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[84] Beeby, "Introduction," xxii.

[85] Lancelot Watson, *The Story of Oxford 1852-1932*, 2003 ed. (Christchurch: Cadsonbury Publications, 2003 (1932)).

Oliver A Gillespie, *Oxford the First 100 Years* (Cadsonbury Publications, 2001).

[86] Tony Ballantyne, "Thinking Local: Knowledge, Sociability and Community in Gores Intellectual Life, 1875-1914," *New Zealand Journal of History* 44, no. 2 (2010); Caroline Daley, "Family and Community," in *Girls & Women, Men & Boys: Gender in Taradale 1886-1930* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999); Erik Olssen, "Movement and Persistence: A Case Study of Southern Dunedin in Global Context," in *Dynamics of Residential Movement and Attachment in New Zealand: Collected Papers from the FRST-funded research programme Building Attachment in Families and Communities Affected by Transience and Residential Mobility.* (Dunedin: University of Otago, 2010).; Erik Olssen, *Building the New World, Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s-1920s* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press, 1995).; Bell, "Keeping It in the Country Modernity, Urban Drift and Adult Education in Rural New Zealand."; William Edward Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch," (Christchurch library, 1949).; Pauline Wood, *Kaiapoi a Search for Identity* (High Street, Rangiora: Waimakariri District Council, 1993).; Miles Fairburn, "The Farmers Take over (1912-1930)," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand*, ed. Keith Sinclair (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1993). 185-210.; A B Thompson, *Adult Education in New Zealand: A Critical & Historical Survey*, Educational Research Series: No. 22 (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1945).; David Hall, *New Zealand Adult Education*, Leeds Studies in Adult Education (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1970).; E P Malone, "The New Zealand School Journal and the Imperial Ideology," *New Zealand Journal of History* 7, no. 1 (1973).; Roger Boshier, *Towards a Learning Society: New Zealand Adult Education in Transition* (Vancouver: Learningpress Ltd, 1980).; Roy Shuker, *Educating the Workers?: A History of the Workers' Education [I.E. Educational] Association in New Zealand* (Dunmore, 1984).; Roger Openshaw, Gregory Douglas Lee, and Howard F. Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History* (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press, 1993).; Roger Openshaw, "New Zealand Primary Schools and the Growth of Internationalism and Anti-War Feeling 1929 - 1934," (New Zealand: Massey University, 1995).; May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*.; Ian Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015* (Canterbury University Press, 2015).; Roger Openshaw, "Contradiction and Contestation, Public Education in the Interwar Period," in *New Zealand between the Wars*, ed. Rachael Bell (Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University Press, 2017).

[87] Catton, "Epilogue," 211-224.

[88] Beeby, "Introduction," xv, xix.

Beeby's comment might suggest that *Littledene* is difficult to fully comprehend without knowing the political forces at play during the time the study was produced. Historians have commented on the Dominion's interwar political shift, economic depression and changing social welfare after 1935.[89] To maintain some cohesion in this thesis, the investigation of social 'cracks' Beeby alluded to remain focused within an educational context. In Benedict Anderson's understanding, individuals might imagine a community through their shared values and interests while overlooking the imbalances associated with (in)equality and opportunity.[90] This thesis suggests that the Oxford experiment did not purposely overlook social imbalances in the community, it argues that *Littledene* was tailored around the socio-political influences in education at the time.

Historians might still argue that *Littledene* was mainly inspired by American influences. Shelley's idea for the Oxford experiment originally sprang from American intellectual soil where a similar sociological study known as *Middletown* took place in Muncie, Indianna.[91] Analysing both studies, Ian Carter suggests that Crawford looked to 'urban America not to rural Britain.'[92] As stated earlier Crawford certainly borrowed his methodology from Edmund de S. Brunner, an advocate for nature studies in American schools alongside NEF principles.[93] During the *Littledene* timeframe, the Christchurch Beautifying Association looked to the USA for sociological models to integrate 'citizen education' with 'city beautification' noted by Beaumont.[94] Crawford and Gwen's 'country service' alongside their ideas in education, may have even epitomised what Columbia educator (and Englishman), Isaac Leon Kandel described as educationists against British industrialism.[95] Beeby greatly respected Kandel's philosophical approach to promote 'imaginative reforms' in education during the 1930s.[96] Americanised industrial gardens certainly flourished in Christchurch during this timeframe. Site owners apparently respected the competitive standards set out by the Christchurch

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[89] Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History* (University of Otago Press, 2004).

[90] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

[91] Robert Staughton Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc, 1929), https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.156473/page/n11/mode/2up?q=Middletown.

Shelley, "Foreword," v-vi.

[92] Carter, "The Missing Link: Dietetics and Rural Sociology in Thirties New Zealand," 200.

[93] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 27, 99.

Edmund de S Brunner, Surveying Your Community; a Handbook of Method for the Rural Church, (New York: George H. Doran Co, 1925), https://archive.org/details/surveyingyourcom0000brun/page/n1/mode/2up?q=Surveying+Your+Community%3B+a+Handbook+of+Method+for+the+Rural+Church.

Edmund de S Brunner, Gwendolyn S Huges, and Marjorie Patten, American Agricultural Villages, (New York, USA: George H. Doran Company, 1927), https://reader.library.cornell.edu/docviewer/digital?id=chla2936541#page/5/mode/1up.

Brunner, "Adult and University Education."

"Education and World Affairs; the Place of the School in Modern Society," 58-65.

[94] Beaumont, "Gardens of the 1920s and 1930s," 136.

[95] I L Kandel, "Introduction," in *Educational Yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College Columbia University 1940*, ed. I L Kandel (New York: Columbia University, 1940).

[96] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 107, 291.

Beautifying Association.[97] Among the most intriguing of these were the prize winning Edmonds factory gardens in Woolston. Indeed, the Edmonds family funded the construction of the neo-Georgian Christchurch Theosophical Society Hall in 1926.[98] The Theosophical Society formed in the USA in 1875 when European mystic Helena Blavatsky arrived in New York on a spiritual pilgrimage.[99] A similar pilgrimage connected British theosophical educationist Annie Besant to the Dominion in 1894.[100] Besant's visit to Christchurch will be discussed later. Logan Moss has indicated that 'the importation of American ideas [in education] by way of Great Britain has been extensive.'[101] Chris Hilliard links *Littledene* to American 'rural culture' yet describes literature in the Dominion from 1920 to the early 1930s as conditioned by 'anglophile' influences.[102] Either way, it does appear that American influences were highly relevant in *Littledene's* intellectual context. Further research could usefully be focused on these connections but is beyond the scope of this thesis. While American connections can be traced to the European 'homeland', this thesis will be guided by the latter noted by Shelley, and Gwen.[103] Importantly, the 'homeland' influences were intrinsic to Crawford and Gwen's sense of belonging in Canterbury.

This study carefully considers Crawford and Gwen's childhood environments to first gain an understanding of how their sense of community may have been shaped by cultural influences. Historians suggest that the natural indigenous environment in Canterbury triggered feelings of homesickness for immigrant families at odds with the concept of New Zealand as 'home'. Many immigrants imparted a sense of displacement to their New Zealand born descendants.[104] Unfortunately, much of the intellectual context of the early *Littledene* study appears shrouded alongside these important colonial narratives. Malcolm Campbell's observation that 'the intersection of the national *and* the colonial, the unspoken but understood, the colonial-not-having-to-be-

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[97] Beaumont, "Gardens of the 1920s and 1930s."

[98] Ibid., 140-141.

Andrew Paul Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand* (Massey University Press, 2023), 52-54.

"Theosophical Society Hall," (New Zealand: Christchurch City Libraries Website, 2024). Thomas and Jane Edmond's established the 'Sure to Rise' Edmond's factory and are noted as 'sympathetic to the Theosophical Society' having funded the construction of the Theosophical Society Hall.

[99] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 21-22.

[100] "From Nineveh to New Zealand a Brief History of Alternatives," in *Islands of the Dawn the Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).

[101] Logan Moss, "American Influences on New Zealand Education 1840-1945," in *The Impact of American Ideas on New Zealand's Educational Policy, Practice and Thinking*, ed. David Philips, Geoff Lealand, and Geraldine McDonald (NZ-US Educational Foundation and New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1989), 42.

[102] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, 10, 116.

[103] Shelley, "Foreword."

Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 176-180.

[104] Sarah Dwyer and Lyndon Fraser, "'We Are All Here Together Like So Many on the Cockle Beds': Towards a History of Ulster Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Canterbury," in *Ulster-New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers*, ed. Brad Patterson (Dublin, Ireland, Portland, North America: Four Courts Press Ltd, 2006), 129.

explained', helps to account for the enigmatic nature of intellectual context in the early study.[105] The overarching question is, how far did a post-colonial sense of belonging to the natural environment influence Crawford and Gwen's projection of Oxford? Today *Littledene* is at risk of misinterpretation without first locating the Oxford experiment within the intellectual and cultural context of the authors. Through intellectual discussions, this thesis will provide a critical analysis of the movement of people and ideas that influenced Crawford and Gwen. It will suggest that the Oxford experiment was the product of a rich intellectual history within the context of interwar New Zealand.

Chapter 1. The Nature of an Intellectual Society describes how the Oxford experiment developed from a series of debates around the nature of society. It suggests that early theosophical approaches influenced a shared understanding where modern social progression relied on maintaining a healthy somewhat spiritual relationship with the natural environment.

Chapter 2. Finding 'Home' 1894 to 1913, provides an assessment of Crawford and Gwen's autobiographical material as important primary source evidence. It evaluates their childhood environments, and their respective communities, assessing their sense of belonging in Canterbury as an extension of how they imagined the natural European 'homeland'. The chapter locates the early changes in education alongside key intellectuals keen to promote social development in Christchurch. Theosophical ideals in education and their connection to the uptake of nature studies in schools are discussed, particularly in relation to how these ideas influenced Crawford and Gwen's early education.

Chapter 3. Finding Oxford 1914 to 1923, focuses on the post-World War One intellectual environment in Christchurch. It considers how closer connections with Europe, created an atmosphere of heightened spirituality in the wake of war. It follows the development of Crawford and Gwen's educational philosophies as Shelley, and Dorothy Baster arrive in the Dominion from Britain, and settle in Christchurch with education reform in mind. It assesses Crawford and Gwen's experience of training college, the intellectuals they met with, their early publishing, emotional challenges, and the motives that led them to rural teaching positions at Oxford School. It also investigates how far the Oxford community welcomed their modern spiritual approaches in education.

Chapter 4. Finding Littledene 1924 to 1938, looks at the international, local, and political forces that prompted Crawford and Gwen's strong interest in community social development during their time in Oxford. It will explore how far their educational philosophies aligned with European ideals associated with the soil, sunshine, aesthetics, psychology and Theosophy for social development. It will provide further context around changes in thinking as the dominion prepared for another war.

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[105] Malcolm Campbell, "How Ulster Was New Zealand?" in *Ulster-New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers*, ed. Brad Patterson (Dublin, Ireland, Portland, North America: Four Courts Press Ltd, 2006), 30.

Chapter 5. Re-imagining Littledene, rewrites the story of *Littledene* perceived as a blueprint for the Oxford experiment. It details Crawford's vision for education and how he subjectively wove his vision into the story of *Littledene.*

In theory, this thesis borrows from two important intellectual histories. The first is Michael Belgrave's 1976 critique on the works and research of John Macmillan Brown and Edward Tregear.[106] Belgrave highlights the imperial motives behind utopian and European ways of thinking, seen as cutting edge, or even scientific during the early twentieth century.[107] Belgrave's research provides the main anchor for this thesis, particularly where the 'imperialism of ideas' appears through the seemingly disparate concepts behind the Oxford experiment.[108] The second is Chris Hilliard's 2006 history on the Dominion's leading book sellers and writers.[109] Hilliard suggests that cultural power bases informed, influenced and controlled literary networks during the interwar years.[110] He notes how intellectual culture in New Zealand can be studied by careful analysis of cultural infrastructure:

> The history of creative and intellectual activity is not just the history of great minds. It is also the story of the apparatus of cultural life: the people and the structures by which work gets supported or suppressed, promoted and challenged.[111]

Crawford and Gwen's 'creative and intellectual activity' was interdependent on a network of various organisations connected to the experiment's broader timeframe. These have already been identified as the NEF, WEA, OASL, NZCER and CSL. An assessment of NZCER and National Council of Adult Education (NCAE) publications produced by John (Jack) Condliffe, James Strachan, A B Thompson and the Somersets, will be assessed for educational philosophies relevant to social development akin with the WEA, OASL, and NEF.[112] A collection of newspaper articles from Papers Past, in association with these organisations, will be compiled into qualitative databases to show the chronological movement of people and ideas. Any overlapping patterns in thinking will be evaluated. Further to this, Crawford's autobiographical notes held in the Victoria University archives provided important material for a detailed transcription to be made.[113] As evidence of Crawford's early life and

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[106] Michael Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown." (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1979).

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950.*

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., 120.

[112] J. B. Condliffe, *The Beginnings of the W.E.A*, Arnold Hely Memorial Papers, No 1 (National Council of Adult Education, 1968).

Thompson, *Adult Education in New Zealand: A Critical & Historical Survey*.

Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*.

Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*.

[113] Hugh Crawford Dixon Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," in (J C Beaglehole Room Archive, Victoria University, 1946).

philosophical development, the material includes a fictional autobiographical short story written by Crawford in 1968.[114] Gwen Somerset's autobiography *Sunshine and Shadow* provides equally important evidence relating their professional and private lives.[115] These sources provide an understanding of the early intellectual connections, family relationships and ethics that influenced the Oxford experiment. Biographical material related to George Hogben, Clarence Beeby, James Shelley and Annie Besant will also be assessed for the way each contributed to developments in education via European trends.[116] Lastly, a collection of oral histories held in the Ngā Taonga Sound and Vision archives in Wellington, provides eight insightful hours of listening to the real voices behind the Oxford experiment.[117] The sound archives provide further evidence that a sense of empire, belonging and social development were important to the group. The sources will be assessed for how far British new education defined the Oxford experiment. Overall, the sources will help to evaluate patterns in the seemingly disparate parts or 'mechanisms' of 'cultural life' related to the experiment.

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[114] H C D Somerset, "No Flag for Tom," in *02/018* (Wellington J C Beaglehole Room Archive, Victoria University, 1965-66).

[115] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*.

[116] Herbert Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Series No. 33 (New Zealand, London: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd; Oxford University Press, 1952).

Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*.

Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*.

[117] *Edwards & Company - Pilot Episode*, (Television New Zealand, 1980), Edwards, Brian (interviewer). Bungay, Mike (interviewee). Somerset, Gwen (interviewee). Hunt, Sam (interviewee). MP4 File Moving Image, 56:40, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archives.

Shelley Forum Part 1.

Shelley Forum Part 2, *TAL (Talks) Series* (New Zealand Broadcasting, 1986), Alley, Elizabeth, (interviewer), Beeby, Clarence Edward, (interviewee). MP3 Audio File, 28:55. RNZ Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archive.

Shelley Forum Part 3, *TAL (Talks) Series* (New Zealand Broadcasting, 1986), Alley, Elizabeth, (interviewer), Beeby, Clarence Edward, (interviewee). MP3 Audio File, 26:54. RNZ Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archive.

H C D Somerset, *The New Zealander Goes to School*, *He's A New Zealander* (New Zealand Broadcasting, c1950s), Somerset, H C D. MP3 Audio File, 14:21. RNZ Collection, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision Archive.

Tributes to Professor James Shelley.

Beeby Discussing Experimental Psychology.

Chapter 1. The Nature of an Intellectual Society

A Victorian Sense of Social Development in Edwardian Education

Rachael Bell describes the 'great range of experiences' interwar families faced when traditional values overlapped with modernity:

> For many or most of us, New Zealand's interwar history is also our family history: the story of our parents or grandparents and, for some people reading this book, the story of their own lives too. Until very recently, the people who were born in or lived through the interwar years controlled many of our social institutions; their values are still the values to which we attribute or compare our current situation. They brought up the parents who raised us, set up the schools in which we were taught, ran our communities, operated our health and justice systems, and institutionalised through their conditioning and legislation what it meant to be a male or a female in New Zealand and what was expected of each.[1]

Similarly, Gwen and Crawford's lives were a generation in tune with some of Canterbury's older intellectuals who thought deeply about society and invested their time in some of the organisations described earlier. The Oxford experiment began in what Bell defines as the overlap between Victorianism and modernity. This chapter shows how the Oxford experiment grew from a series of rich intellectual debates around the nature of society during the early twentieth century.

Michael Belgrave describes the influence of Victorianism in New Zealand; his MA thesis looks closely at the early intellectual culture of John Macmillan Brown from the mid-1880s to 1920s.[2] Brown was an influential and familiar figure to Gwen and Crawford. Gwen's father Federick frequently attended Brown's lectures at Canterbury College.[3] Brown's social interests included The National Schools Defence League, The Empire Services League, The Society for Imperial Culture, WEA and CSL.[4] Importantly, Belgrave highlights the imperial and eugenicist approaches presented in Brown's 1903 utopian novel based on Brown's esoteric understanding of the environment and its controls.[5] Brown believed that social progression relied on quality education, rays of sunlight and positive thinking were important factors. Earlier, Herbert Roth noted that Brown appeared as an

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[1] Bell, "Introduction, a Nation on the Cusp," 13.

[2] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown."

[3] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 20.

[4] "Bible in Schools, Protest by National Schools' Defence League," *Lyttelton Times*, 15 February 1913, 2.
"Empire Service, Branch Formed in Christchurch," *Press*, 26 October 1917, 2.
"Sunlight League," *Star (Christchurch), (Supplement)*, 9 May 1931, 17.
Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 62-69.

[5] Godfrey Sweven, *Limanora the Island of Progress*, (New York, London: G P Putnam's Sons; The Knickerbocker Press, 1903), https://archive.org/details/limanoraislandof00swev/page/n3/mode/2up?view=theater.

intellectual alongside George Hogben, Director of Education (1899-1915). During the late 1800s both men belonged to the Educational Institute of North Canterbury.[6] The Institute was set up as a way for teachers and interested citizens to promote social change through the education system.[7] Such was the problem of truancy at the time, described as having the potential to 'spread its deadly roots deeper and deeper into society'.[8] By the early 1900s Brown keenly promoted nature studies in schools, he suggested that teachers in rural areas should be offered a suitable understanding of 'organic' teaching practices.[9] Brown and Hogben's ideas for education most likely supported the early 1900s 'social efficiency doctrine' described by Openshaw.[10] Brown's early influence on Crawford and Gwen appears indirect through the education system, highlighting Frederick's similar interests in spirituality and education.

The idea that the natural environment could act as a vehicle for positive social development quietly flickered within the Edwardian education system during Gwen and Crawford's school years. On rare occasions they sampled something of the 'natural' learning style in tune with Hogben's syllabus described by Roth.[11] Roth claimed that Hogben's vision for progressive education was largely ignored by overworked schoolteachers. Roger Openshaw, Greg Lee, and Howard Lee later confirmed Roth's understanding that schoolteachers did not easily engage with Hogben's new syllabus.[12] Roth also assumed that Hogben's educational philosophy, with its emphasis on 'natural' teaching away from the 'bookish' system, was distinct in the Dominion at the time:

> At Timaru Hogben introduced what he called the 'natural' method of teaching, which he claimed to have developed independently of such educationists as Gouin, Rossmann and Schmidt who popularized natural teaching in Europe.[13]

Beeby later wrote: 'my thinking on education owes more to Hogben than I ever imagined.'[14] Hogben's vision appeared alongside similar ideas developed through British progressive education. In 1992 Ron Brooks began tracing London's 'garden city education movement' linking it to pioneering schools in Britain. He associated both movements with liberal educationist Joseph John

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[6] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 27, 38-39, 103.
[7] "Town and Country [Teachers' Institute]," *Lyttelton Times*, 22 May 1882, 4.
"Educational Institute," *Globe*, 22 July 1882, 3.
[8] "The Education System," *Evening Star*, 11 July 1891, 1.
[9] Education Student, "Nature Study and the School Garden," *Otago Witness*, 27 September 1911, 9.
J Macmillan Brown, "Modern Education," *Lyttelton Times*, 15 February 1908, 13.
[10] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 100.
[11] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 57-58.
[12] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 99-100.
Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 102.
[13] *George Hogben a Biography*, 56, 57-58.
[14] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 108.

Findlay.[15] Findlay drafted a 'rational' school curriculum in London in 1897, a year later it was applied at King Alfred School in Hampstead, then Letchworth Garden City School in 1903.[16] Findlay's curriculum drew on Herbartian and Froebelian principles, it sought to free children from the confines of utilitarianism at the core of Victorian industrialism described by Brooks:

> Its emphasis on coeducation, self-expression, small classes and individual teaching, a more limited role for religious teaching than was found in many elementary schools, the need for using the environment as a learning aid, the involvement of parents in the educative process and on greater respect for the teacher and teaching profession, all helped to make the Findlay model the basis not only of the first Letchworth venture at 'The Sheds' but also of the Norton Road School when civic control was largely replaced by that of the County Council.[17]

In Canterbury, Findlay's curriculum somewhat resonated with Hogben's 1899 syllabus promoting 'open air teaching' and 'natural sciences':

> If our pupils are taught by direct observation of things, and if at the same time their constructive and creative activities are called into play, the different parts of their education are truly co-ordinated, because the various subjects of instruction are all, in a real sense, co-ordinated with nature. […] The principal of natural coordination is in reality an extension of the ideas of Froebel as exemplified in the best kindergartens.[18]

Hogben's syllabus contained Froebelian and Herbartian ideals noted in Findlay's curriculum then in use at Hampstead school.[19] Hogben's primary curriculum was officially formalised in the Dominion in 1904.[20] Hogben described 'New Education' in tune with Froebelian philosophy, he promoted a nature before books approach in support of 'the spirit, character, and method of the teaching in relation to its purpose of developing the child's powers.'[21] It appears highly possible that Hogben had

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[15] Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education,1897-1913," 161.

[16] Ibid., 164-178.

[17] Ibid., 178. See also: 164-168.

[18] AJHR, "Education: Twenty- Second Annual Report of the Minister of Education. [in Continuation of E-1, 1898.]" (1899), xvii-xviii.

Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 88.

[19] Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education,1897-1913," 169.

AJHR, "Education: Twenty- Second Annual Report of the Minister of Education. [in Continuation of E-1, 1898,] " xvii.

[20] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 52, 97-98. Described by Openshaw as the 'Hogben-Bird syllabus' after 'William Bird, inspector of native schools (1901-1916)'.

Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 101.

[21] AJHR, "Education: Conference of Inspectors of Schools and Teachers' Representatives, 1904. E-1c," (1904), 2.

knowledge of Findlay's experiments alongside the Garden City Education Council in London.[22] Brooks noted Findlay's authorship was not disclosed at the time, and while the 'rational' curriculum was deemed 'confidential', the experiment was well known within London's garden city education circle.[23] Hogben's early education in London, and later connections with the London School Board might suggest he was familiar with the garden cities movement education association.[24] In 1907 Hogben travelled extensively when a variety of education programs throughout the USA and Europe thoroughly interested him.[25] More recently Openshaw et al confirm Hogben had 'knowledge of international developments in primary schooling'.[26] Hogben also had access to British and American educational 'journals and magazines' set out by the Dominion's education department at the time.[27] Overall, Hogben's curriculum was essentially traditional, Roth maintained it reflected a 'Victorian pre-occupation with intellectual analysis to the neglect of emotional and aesthetic values'.[28] Similarly, Findlay's curriculum was a fusion of Victorian values with 'reformist influences' noted by Brooks.[29] These descriptions appear to echo the overlap between traditional and modern ideas described by Bell. It appears that traditional influences remained intact in the Edwardian education system in both Britain and New Zealand, both systems grappled with new ideas. Crawford and Gwen's primary educations were caught up in this gradual experimental change. Indeed, Hogben's Findlay-like curriculum appears very evident within the Oxford experiment.

Ian Carter suggests Shelley introduced Findlay's ideas to New Zealand post 1920, he notes the positive impact Findlay's educational philosophy had on Shelley while at Victoria University (Manchester).[30] Crawford, however, asserted that new ideas in education were already "in motion" prior to Shelley's arrival in Canterbury.[31] Crawford's comment draws attention to Hogben's earlier syllabus (1899) alongside the establishment of the Christchurch Beautifying Association (CBA) in 1897. The establishment of the CBA preceded the establishment of the Hampstead experiment in 1898, alongside the establishment of the garden city movement in London that same year.[32] In

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[22] Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education,1897-1913."

[23] Ibid., 169-171.

[24] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 16, 103.

[25] Moss, "American Influences on New Zealand Education 1840-1945," 37-38.

[26] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 98-99.

[27] AJHR, "Education: Twenty- Second Annual Report of the Minister of Education. [in Continuation of E-1, 1898,]" xvii-xviii.

[28] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 103.

[29] Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education, 1897-1913," 169.

[30] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 42-44.

[31] *Tributes to Professor James Shelley*.

[32] Ebenezer Howard, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, First ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co LTD, 1898). The movement was set out in Howard's book, later editions were titled *Garden Cities of Tomorrow.*

Canterbury the CBA included children as 'associates' in planting projects.[33] WEA incentives for social development by 1915 also connected with CBA initiatives. When CBA enthusiast Samuel Hurst Segar lectured on 'Town Planning' at Canterbury College in 1916, he presented lantern slides of 'Hampstead Heath' where Findlay's experiment had taken place, the lectures were supervised by Charles Chilton, then Director of the Canterbury WEA.[34] The Segar lectures were extremely popular in Christchurch.[35] Segar's marriage to Hester Connon (sister of Helen Connon) might also be noted, their union in 1887 identified Segar and Macmillan Brown as brothers-in-law.[36] These associations suggest that an early understanding of progressive education survived in the minds, if not the actions of well-known educationists during Gwen and Crawford's years at Canterbury College prior to Shelley's arrival.

Overall, Hogben's vision was very much in its infancy during Crawford and Gwen's primary and secondary schooling. Crawford described nature studies as rare but memorable moments in an otherwise dour school system.[37] Gwen's introduction through her father's progressive teaching style, was described as joyful memories in tension with the strict, rote learning sessions endured daily.[38] More recently Helen Dollery connects 'nature studies' to the egalitarian principles of the pioneering spirit of those 'who had shaped the landscape and their own [European] perceptions of themselves within it'.[39] Gwen and Crawford most likely felt a sense of 'home' through natural learning connected to the gardens that evoked the 'homeland'. They later fully immersed themselves in radical education reform through the intellectuals they associated with at Canterbury College alongside the wider WEA and NEF communities in Christchurch.

A Theosophical Approach

Left leaning perspectives appeared at the heart of the NEF movement in both Britain and New Zealand, Crawford and Gwen's interest in British new education indirectly engaged them in theosophical theory. An early branch of the English Theosophical Society established in Christchurch in 1894, it belonged to an international religious network based on the doctrine of Russian spiritualist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Blavatsky's student, Annie Besant, toured New Zealand in 1894 then again in 1908, she lectured in the main centres including Christchurch.[40] Of Irish descent, Besant

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[33] "Christchurch Beautifying Association," *Lyttelton Times*, 29 September 1897, 2.

[34] "General News," *Press*, 7 August 1916, 6.

[35] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 29.

[36] Ian J Lochead, "Seager, Samuel Hurst," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (2002).

[37] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 56-57.

[38] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 22-26.

[39] Helen Dollery, "From Wild Child to Future Citizen? Children and Youth in Interwar New Zealand.," in *New Zealand between the Wars*, ed. Rachael Bell (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2017), 245.

[40] "Mrs Annie Besant "the Dangers That Threaten Society," *Lyttelton Times*, 17 October 1894, 5.

supported Irish and Indian home-rule, and women's rights.[41] When Besant arrived in Christchurch, she was greeted by an enthusiastic audience interested in social reform, her popular lecture was reported in the *Lyttelton Times*:

> Looking on Society as a living organism, not as a mere machine, we could, said Mrs Besant, the more readily recognise the perils that menaced it. We could examine the history and condition of old societies, and compare them with those of our new ones, in order to see whether the germs which had produced the evils which afflicted the former were to be found here. …Another danger to society as at present constituted arose, she pointed out, from the education of the proletariat. The wants created by education – the desires for literature, music, pictures must be gratified. There was a danger of the ideal of Democracies being the low one of material prosperity or commercial success.[42]

Besant's outline for an ideal society later included theosophical theory in education, this mirrored something of Macmillan Brown's esoteric cosmology in maintaining an ideal society. The concept that humanity could be seen as a 'living organism', vulnerable to destructive 'germs' that might strike at any moment under the watchful eye of 'the old society', echoes the imperialism of Brown's 'eugenicism' described by Belgrave.[43] Similarly, Besant echoed something of the imperialism of theosophical ideology noted by René Guénon in 1945.[44] Robert Ellwood arrived at a similar conclusion in 1993, his religious studies perspective focused on Theosophy within the Dominion's post-colonial context.[45] Ellwood concluded that theosophical ideology 'encapsulates the New Zealand myth' in the following ways:

> (a) the one place where a radical, utopian social experiment is most likely to succeed, (b) the last redoubt of humanity after some global catastrophe, or (c) both together.[46]

James Belich later perceived the utopian myth as mainstream colonial aspirations for a national identity independent from the social problems experienced in Britain.[47] More recently Andrew Paul Wood links the myth to the Dominion's not so mainstream Theosophical understanding of national spirit:

"A Great Theosophist. Mrs Annie Besant in Christchurch. A Chat About India and the Indians," *Lyttelton Times*, 5 August 1908, 8.

[41] Annie Wood Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography*, (Cambridge University Press, 1893), https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09011a&AN=mul.oai.edge.massey.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001086.6ed2d1c5.ef94.5325.ad83.1b01a14938e9&site=eds-live&scope=site.

[42] "Mrs Annie Besant," *Lyttelton Times*, 17 October 1894, 5.

[43] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown," 86-115.

[44] Guenon, "Theosophism," 311-322.

[45] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 104.

[46] Ibid., 104.

[47] James Belich, *Paradise Reforged, a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, ed. Richard King (Australia: McPherson's Printing Group, 2001), 21.

> The exceptional receptivity to theosophy in late nineteenth-century no doubt had much to do with the colony's view of itself as a beacon of progress, and as a 'better Britain', something to which the New Zealand Section seemed to be attuned.[48]

Either way the utopian myth was challenged by World War One. Thus, in 1915 Besant set up an international fraternity for educators interested in theosophical theory, alongside the theosophical principle of 'universal brotherhood'.[49] The fraternity was later known as the NEF. In 1989 British sociologist Celia Jenkins connected the early fellowship with English educator Beatrice Ensor, theosophical theory was at the heart of the organisation's thinking.[50] Sue Middleton later recognised Ensor's contribution to the dissemination of theosophical education in the Dominion by 1917:

> New Zealand's first affiliated NEF group was set up by the principal of the Vasanta Gardens Theosophical School, Epsom, in 1933. She [Beatrice Ensor] was also involved in the New Zealand Section of the Theosophical Fraternity, which held conferences from 1917 to 1927. New Zealand's Fraternity and Theosophical Education Trust had close links with their counterparts in England and India. The setting up of New Zealand's first NEF group was enabled by networks created between Theosophists in New Zealand, India and England from the late nineteenth century.[51]

Importantly, Auckland's Vasanta Garden School established in 1919.[52] Its educational philosophy aligned with ideas from Italian Theosophist Maria Montessori.[53] Further communications arrived through the distribution of English theosophical print media outlined by Jenkins, the availability of a local supply of articles on educational theory is confirmed by Paul Adams.[54] Theosophical theory is

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[48] Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 70.

[49] Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," 736.

May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 171.

Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," 50.

[50] Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950," 74.

[51] Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," 42.

Abbiss, "The "New Education Fellowship" in New Zealand: Its Activity and Influence in the 1930s and 1940s," 5-6. Abbiss suggested that an interest in spiritual science peaked in education prior to the formalisation of a nation-wide curriculum during the 1930s.

[52] "Vasanta Garden School," https://vasantagardenschool.weebly.com/history.html.

[53] Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*. Wood suggests that Maria Montessori joined the NEF during the 1930s, however Montessori fostered a personal association with Theosophy from as early as 1899.

Garth John Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s" (MA Thesis, Massey University, 2013), 2, 7. Turbott notes the influence of Rudolf Steiner in the Dominion by 1933 if not earlier through early Anthroposophical circles in Christchurch, Wellington and Havelock North during the early 1900s.

[54] Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950."

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937."

evident in Crawford and Gwen's early teaching styles, they were comfortable with topics on sprites, fairies, reincarnation, hypnotism and precognition to be discussed in more detail later.

Historians agree that Theosophy empowered women, it influenced social development through early networks associated with the Labour political movement, it appealed to environmental and pacifist movements.[55] Alongside NEF principles it illuminated much of the thinking behind the Oxford experiment alluded to earlier by Sutherland. Helen May suggested that during the early 1920s Gwen was one of the first women in New Zealand to adopt NEF principles in her teaching style at Oxford.[56] Beeby suggested Shelley supported new education initiated by women in early childhood education by 1921.[57] Beeby's interest in NEF principles was popularly supported by the new Labour Government by 1935.[58] Jenkins suggested the NEF's early mission statement was to encourage social transformation at a global level, these ideals added Jenkins, gave way to a 'stand against fascism and defence of democracy' during the late 1930s.[59] Kevin Brehony confirmed that the NEFs theosophical foundation fell away as international unrest influenced world views, Brehony described the NEF as a movement 'committed to world peace'.[60] These ideals align with Crawford and Gwen's spiritual, environmental, humanitarian, and early pacifist views.

Crawford's idea to include a spiritual element in the Oxford experiment relates to Henry Morris's experiment at Sawston, Cambridgeshire between 1924 and 1929. Crawford modelled the Oxford experiment on Morris's vision for 'lifelong education' described by Neil Hopkins: 'He [Morris] had an almost mystical and messianic sense of the small market town, its surrounding hinterland and the presence of previous generations on the rural landscape.'[61] David Holbrook also described Morris as having 'a preoccupation' with spirituality.[62] Both the Oxford and Sawston experiments were NEF approved reasonably early, both were funded by the Carnegie Corporation in

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[55] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 126-127.
Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 365.
Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s."

[56] May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 176-177.

[57] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*.

[58] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEf Conference 1937."

[59] Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950," 111.

[60] Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," 754.

[61] Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)." (MA Thesis, Canterbury University College, 1931).
Neil Hopkins, "Creating Sites of Community Education and Democracy: Henry Morris and the Cambridgeshire Village Colleges. A Reflection 90 Years on from Their Inception," *British Educational Research Journal* 46, no. 5 (2020): 1101.

[62] D. Holbrook, "Henry Morris and the Village College Idea," *Higher Education Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1985): 333.

1933.[63] As recipients of the Carnegie travel fellowship in 1936, Crawford and Gwen included a visit to the Sawston Village College, their attendance at the NEF conference in Cheltenham is also well documented.[64] Adams details the Somerset's and Beeby's affiliation with Beatrice Ensor during the 1937 NEF conference held in New Zealand.[65] Sue Middleton detailed the Somerset's involvement with the NEF from 1938 to 1948, the exchange of letters between Crawford and theosophist Clare Soper (the international secretary) revealed close relations between the Somerset's and like-minded educators in Europe.[66]

Overall, the literature roughly maps out Crawford and Gwen's exposure to, and involvement in new education between 1921 and 1948. Gwen's early understanding of new education through her Christchurch kindergarten associations, will be discussed in detail later. The literature reflects changing attitudes as expansionist utopian ideology in NEF circles grappled with the meaning of universality in an authoritarian world growing with concerns around fascism. As an important social and spiritual movement outside mainstream thinking, theosophical theory in education during the 1920s and 30s appears intrinsic to the Oxford experiment. This thesis will assess how theosophical theory was used or developed in the experiment.

In Harmony with Nature

Andrew Wood relates the symbol of the rising sun to theosophical symbology.[67] The rising sun was crucial in Cora Wilding's Heliotherapy practice formalised by the Christchurch Sunlight League (CSL) in 1931. The CSL supported children's health during the recovery phase of the depression, it provided a local community in common with European health officials engaged in similar projects throughout Europe.[68] Affiliated with the Christchurch group was eugenics supporter Caleb Saleeby (founder of the British Sunlight League in 1924), Saleeby's intellectual connection with Truby King has been well documented by historians.[69] Aside from eugenics, the CSL attracted educationists

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[63] H. Ree, *Educator Extraordinary: The Life and Achievements of Henry Morris* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1973), 67, 50. Funding from Carnegie by 1934, also funded by the Spelman Fund, New York.
Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 100.

[64] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 18-19.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 176-177.

[65] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937."

[66] Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938."

[67] Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 54.

[68] Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936."

[69] Diane B Paul, "Truby King, Infant Welfare, and the Boundaries of Eugenics," in *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa*, ed. Diane B. Paul, Hamish G. Spencer, and John Stenhouse (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 248.
Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936," 24.
Tennant, *Children's Health, The Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps*, 103.
Daley, *Leisure & Pleasure: Reshaping & Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900-1960*, 132.

interested in promoting psychology, tramping, aesthetics and nature studies. Educationists included John Macmillan Brown, Frank Milner, James Hight, Clarence Beeby, James Strachan, and (much later) Ivan Sutherland, as long-standing supporters.[70] Other notable CSL members included Truby King and Christchurch's Bishop Churchill Julius (retired by then).[71] Under the auspices of the League, Crawford promoted nature studies and aesthetics, Shelley and Beeby promoted psychology.

CSL values were in harmony with Plunket and intrinsically connected with Shelley's Open-Air Schools League (OASL). The Oxford experiment supported the work of both Plunket and the OASL in the community.[72] Gwen described her role in Plunket as a 'Plunket mother and committee member', she described the Oxford Plunket nurse as a "child psychologist".[73] Ellwood, makes a philosophical connection between Plunket and Theosophy: 'The Plunket mentality in New Zealand helps interpret the success of movements like Theosophy, with their serious futurism and their inculcation of healthy self-discipline.'[74] The CSL might be added as a movement akin with both Plunket and Theosophical ways of thinking.

The CSL featured at the very edge of the Somerset's intellectual circle during the late 1930s, the main question is how far were CSL values supported in the Oxford experiment? Ideas around education, eugenics and health gradually changed over the timeframe of the Oxford Experiment. The 1925 Child Welfare Act, and the enactment of the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill in 1928 (minus the sterilisation clause) preceded the development of the CSL.[75] To date, historians have produced two main narratives in their assessment of the CSL. Through individual research based on health and

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[70] "The Sunlight League [First Meeting Held]," *Press*, 15 May 1931.
"Sunlight League [Meeting of Council, Health Camps and Training]," *Press*, 27 July 1931, 15.
"Value of Sunlight in Retaining Health: Sir Truby King Gives an Interesting Address," *Star (Christchurch)*, 17 June 1931, 10.
"Sunlight League [New Members Welcomed to Committee]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 30 June 1932, 8.
"Youth Hostel Scheme," *Press*, 17 May 1934, 19.
"Radio Programmes," *Evening Post*, 29 September 1936, 5.
"Radio Programme," *Hokitika Guardian*, 29 September 1936, 8. Strachan promoted physical education through the League.
"Sunlight League [Officers Elected]," *Press*, 16 June 1945, 2.
N. C. Phillips, "Sir James Hight: A Tribute," *Landfall* 12, no. 3 (1958). Describes Hight as a Liberal Catholic, which connects with Theosophy as outlined by Ellwood (1993) and Wood (2023).

[71] Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936."
"The Sunlight League [First Meeting Held]," 13.

[72] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 17. In *Friend of China – The Myth of Rewi Alley* (ed 2016) p10, Anne-Marie Brady suggests that 'Gwen became founding president of the Plunket Society', however this is not how Gwen described her role in Plunket.
Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*, 70. Crawford noted that Plunket officially reached the Oxford community in 1927.
"Canterbury Provincial Convention [Oxford]," *White Ribbon*, 19 October 1914, 14. The *White Ribbon* suggests that early Plunket lectures were held in Oxford in 1914.

[73] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 17.

[74] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 195.

[75] N Z Government, "Child Welfare Act of 1925, 16 Geo V, No. 22," ed. Child Welfare Branch of Education. New Zealand, (1925).
"Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928," Wellington, New Zealand, (1928).

welfare, Susan Wilson and Margaret Tennant formed the first.[76] Tennant concluded that the fundamental aim of the CSL was in fostering 'eugenic conscience' in the young through 'positive eugenics'.[77] Carolyn Daley's 2003 cultural history, *Leisure & Pleasure,* moved the main narrative away from 'the usual medical discourses' as noted by Nadia Gush in 2009.[78] Gush argued that the leading narrative overestimated the eugenic ideology in Wilding's Sunlight camps, she attributed this to gaps in cultural histories when the earlier studies were produced.[79] From an arts-based perspective Gush argued the strong humanistic and cultural elements fundamental to Cora Wilding's Sunlight health camps should not be overlooked.[80] 'What is less obvious', wrote Gush, 'is whether Wilding was alone in attempting to use camps as a means of applying aesthetics to children.'[81] It would appear Wilding was not alone, the Oxford experiment placed aesthetics as an important factor in child and community development. More recently Wilding's approach is described by Belgrave:

> Aligning herself with ideas of eugenics and the importance of inheritance, she wanted girls to experience nature, and to create female bodies which combined the aesthetics of beauty with fitness and good health. The wider health camp movement was also aimed at transforming bodies, turning weak and malnourished children into healthy bodies needed for healthy citizens.[82]

Crawford and Gwen appear to have fostered a Plunket-like 'eugenic conscience' in the Oxford experiment in support of social change through environmental measures associated with the CSL and OASL.

The Oxford Experiment

Set up in 1933 with funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) provided support for various research projects in New Zealand from 1933 to 1938.[83] Watson and Beeby spoke very highly of Crawford, both were experienced directors for the non-government NZCER group. To an extent Shelley implicitly suggested part of the incentive of the NZCER was to influence Government policy around funding for education in rural communities, sociologist Alison Loveridge takes the idea further.[84] Loveridge tentatively considers

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[76] Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936."
Tennant, *Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps*.
[77] *Children's Health, The Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps*, 103.
[78] Daley, *Leisure & Pleasure: Reshaping & Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900-1960*.
Gush, "The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League," 13, Footnote 5.
[79] "The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League," 2-6.
[80] Ibid., 1-2, 5.
[81] Ibid., 9.
[82] Michael Belgrave, *Becoming Aotearoa: A New History of New Zealand* (New Zealand: Massey University Press, 2024), 338.
[83] N Z Government, "Council for Educational Research," in *New Zealand Official Yearbook* (New Zealand 1940).
[84] Shelley, "Foreword [Two]," 3
Loveridge, "Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion Planting?" 209-210.

Crawford's important contribution to rural social science, expressing also the implicit nature of *Littledene's* political impact during the interwar period:

> The vision for adult education among Professor James Shelley's Canterbury circle was behind a rural programme alongside the urban Workers Education Association during the Depression. Two of New Zealand's most famous "other sociologists" were linked to this coalition. Crawford Somerset's *Littledene* (1938) and William Doig's *Standards of Life of New Zealand Dairy Farmers* (1940) did not contain explicit proposals for social change but clearly were intended to support it.[85]

The Oxford experiment fits in context within similar early studies in New Zealand. Beeby suggested innovative research by the 1940s tended towards family welfare in the rural sector as a result of the 1935 labour Government.[86] According to Loveridge the timely research drew attention to destitution within rural communities, she considers this was an uncomfortable reality for Fraser's Labour government.[87] Beeby suggested earlier that the discomfort was widely felt throughout small communities as citizens became distrusting of research pointing to less than ideal social structures.[88] This helps to explain Crawford's approach to the Oxford experiment through the 'enlightened subjectivity' in *Littledene*. More recently Rachael Bell considers the impact of urban drift during the Dominion's Great Depression, her research looks at the possible influence of an American movement to intellectualise agriculture to 'transform rural society'.[89] Bell suggests these ideas indirectly encouraged a new movement in the Dominion, one that was fundamentally represented by 'urban-based' perspectives, felt by rural communities as patronising.[90] As a blueprint of the Oxford experiment, *Littledene* appears to embody what Loveridge and later Bell have said regarding local suspicions around community research.

Catton suggested Crawford understood how outside pressures worked within the farming community.[91] The stoicism and insularity illustrated in *Littledene* appears compatible with what Tennant, and Dalley have described in other small communities. Tennant considered government interest in family welfare was somewhat animated from the early 1900s; adding that even under the Liberal frame, accountability for welfare began to move away from the duty of family as charitable aid developed.[92] Tennant adds this was a gradual process. Five years after Tennant's study, Dalley concluded that charitable organisations supported communities to an extent, whereby charities were

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[85] "Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion Planting?" 209-210.
[86] Beeby, "Introduction," xv.
[87] Loveridge, "Rural Sociology in New Zealand: Companion Planting?" 211.
[88] Beeby, "Introduction," xv-xvi.
[89] Bell, "Keeping It in the Country Modernity, Urban Drift and Adult Education in Rural New Zealand," 214-216.
[90] Ibid., 216.
[91] Catton, "Epilogue," 213-214.
[92] Margaret Tennant, "Indigence and Charitable Aid in New Zealand 1885-1920." (PhD Thesis, Massey University, 1981), 350.

often dysfunctional the community ultimately addressed the shortfall.[93] Dalley's thesis validates the Somerset's research put forward by Catton. Catton suggested the influence of economic depression, war and globalisation ('trans-local forces') encouraged an amount of autonomy within the interwar farming community.[94] With the added impact of local forces (such as extreme weather events, fire, and sickness), the geographically remote community relied heavily on community spirit.[95] Thus Crawford's explanations regarding the insularity of the Oxford community are not too far removed from what social historians have said so far regarding social welfare.

Brickell's critique of *Littledene* notes that conflicting statements appeared in Crawford's conclusions; methodologies in similar studies at the time were typically underdeveloped, and footnotes were not always a priority.[96] As already discussed, Crawford's methodology was described by Shelley as 'enlightened subjectivity'.[97] Sue Middleton noted that by the 1960s 'enlightened subjectivity' was seen by functionalist perspectives as an unfavourable methodology compared to the objectivity of scientific research.[98] Benedict Anderson similarly argued how communities can be very much 'imagined' in this way.[99] The issue of limited footnotes in Crawford's research was addressed by John E Watson, who explained that footnotes by L. W. McCaskill arrived in the later publication.[100] Watson concluded, 'Somerset's gifts sprang mainly from a simple love of companionship and informed communication.'[101] Anna Green identifies how oral histories are best understood from the context of the time they were written in, she highlights the difficulties associated with what might be seen as real, and what might be seen as imagined.[102] Green's perspective is complimentary to Shelley's earlier argument: 'Whether the objective or subjective approach to the understanding of society is more fruitful, depends probably upon the attitude of mind of the age in which the study is made.'[103] Inconsistencies within Somerset's conclusions may or may not be typically in line with the nuances associated with oral histories, however inconsistencies do need to be accounted for in the assessment of Somerset's judgement.

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[93] Bronwyn Dalley, "A Question of Responsibility: The Palmerston North Hospital Board and Charitable Relief, 1925-1938." (BA Honours, Massey University, 1985), 34-35, 53.

[94] Catton, "Epilogue," 212-213.

[95] Julie V Brown, "Fighting Fire in Oxford, a Brief History," (Oxford Museum, North Canterbury, New Zealand, 2023).

[96] Brickell, "Those 'Other Sociologists': Social Analysis before Sociology," 8-9, 21.

[97] Shelley, "Foreword [Two]," 3.

[98] Sue Middleton, "New Zealand Influences on New Zealand Sociology of Education 1950-1988," in *The Impact of American Ideas on New Zealand's Educational Policy, Practice and Thinking*, ed. David Philips, Geoff Lealand, and Geraldine McDonald (NZ-US Educational Foundation, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1989), 55.

[99] Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

[100] Watson, "Foreword [1973]," v-vi.

[101] Ibid., vi.

[102] Anna Green, "Unpacking the Stories," in *Remembering: Writing Oral History*, ed. Anna Green and Megan Hutching (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2004), 16-22.

[103] Shelley, "Foreword [Two]," 3.

When the *Geographical Journal* praised Somerset's study of Oxford as a commendable contribution to social history, the article considered how far *Littledene* complimented a collection of local geographical studies in Canterbury at the time.[104] Erik Olssen later asserted how various methodologies often overlap unsuccessfully within various scales of study.[105] However, it appears Crawford's study along with the geographic studies of the time, offered some commonalities as far as the working farm and farming family in Canterbury were understood. The review in the *Geographical Journal* concluded Somerset's *Littledene* community were uniquely urbanised, yet quintessentially rural.[106] This contrasts with Crawford's portrayal of the Oxford community as insular. Olssen's perspective is important when considering Crawford's research applied only to the farming sectors. The need for a deeper understanding of the social history of the Oxford community at the time of the Oxford experiment is evident.

Of interest is how the journal article contradicted Crawford's concept of Oxford when claiming, 'the village in the English sense does not exist' in *Littledene*.[107] From Crawford's account, organisations such as Plunket and the Benevolent League were local groups within the Englishness of the community.[108] English rituals certainly appeared within the social hub of *Littledene*.[109] Crawford insisted, 'Littledenians are more English than the New Zealanders'.[110] This reflected his aspiration for a Sawston-like demonstration school for Oxford.[111] Still, the cultural diversity of the Oxford community remains shrouded in *Littledene*. Political organisations such as Red Cross, Farmers' Union and the Women's Christian Temperance Union appear only briefly.[112] WEA supporters such as the 'Women's Division' and the 'Benevolent and Improvement League' feature in greater detail in keeping with Henry Morris's experiment at Sawston.[113] These gaps provide further evidence that *Littledene* was a blueprint for the Oxford experiment, rather than a social history of the community.

Overall, the literature suggests an amount of autonomy was most likely present in the Oxford farming community during the early to mid-interwar period. Education in the form of the WEA reached the wider Oxford community and was well received it appears. However, the acceptance of the Oxford experiment within the farming community will need careful assessment. More evident is the way the depression, war, and the global economy impacted the farming community. The various influences responsible for the stoic autonomy described by Crawford did not always include the important impact of local forces. With Olssen's argument considered, the assumption Oxford had

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[104] ROB, "Australasia and Pacific," 557.
[105] Olssen, "Movement and Persistence: A Case Study of Southern Dunedin in Global Context," 2.
[106] ROB, "Australasia and Pacific," 557.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*, 40-41, 83-84.
[109] Ibid., 25, 39, 40.
[110] Ibid., 52.
[111] Somerset, *Littledene*, 94. After Sawston in Cambridgeshire.
[112] Ibid., 38-39, 99.
[113] Somerset, *Littledene*, 63.

moved beyond the English-like village, needs careful investigation. European culture, or elements thereof, were undeniably present within the community, as noted by the many organisations and rituals described by Crawford. How far the community tailored English traditions to their individual needs requires understanding, as does Crawford's idea that men and women were emotionally distant from each other. The amount of known humanitarian organisation in the community, through various women's groups, alongside freemasonry, might suggest that men and women were not that emotionally distant from each other's needs. A study so finely focused on the farming sector alone, must reflect something of Anderson's 'imagined community'? In considering what social historians have said so far, this chapter asks, how far can recent social histories help to assess the Somerset's *Littledene* as an autonomous rural community during the interwar period? The Somerset's intellectual history is crucial in understanding *Littledene* within the wider context of the Oxford experiment.

Chapter 2. Finding ‘Home’ 1894 to 1913

Introduction

Crawford and Gwen’s childhood environments were shaped by Ulster Irish and English family traditions and perspectives. Brad Patterson’s compilation of essays from historians in both New Zealand and Ireland, illustrate the various networks and cultural assimilation of Ulster Irish migrant groups in New Zealand from 1840 to 1945.[1] Similarly Crawford and Gwen’s family narratives fit within these paradigms, their subjectivity, imagination and intellectuality most likely developed through inherited cultural transmissions. Crawford and Gwen affectionately described their Ulster Irish paternal grandmothers who frequently reminisced about their ‘homes’ in Ireland.[2] Gwen described her mother’s birthplace in England as ‘home’, she recalled childhood feelings of sadness when close family friends left the Dominion and returned ‘home for good’.[3] After the death of Crawford’s grandmother, similar feelings of ‘exile’ from the European homeland unsettled him during early childhood.[4] Patterson suggests that historical records too often overlook the cultural lives of Ulster protestants, he evokes the need for a much deeper understanding of these important narratives.[5] Malcolm Campbell agrees that Irish migrant narratives have a place in post-colonial and interwar studies as long as these remain outside Anglocentric or filiopietistic tendencies.[6] Both agree that new studies on Irish assimilation would fill some major gaps in New Zealand’s historical record. These perspectives provide important angles when considering Crawford and Gwen’s sense of belonging in the Dominion through traditional Irish and English family ties.

This chapter explores Crawford and Gwen’s childhood family ties associated with Ulster Irish and English ancestry. It considers how each developed a sense of belonging in Canterbury through their imagined European ‘homeland’. The influence of George Somerset’s egalitarianism largely shaped Crawford’s understanding of an ideal community. Similarly, the influence of Frederick Alley’s Victorianism shaped Gwen’s understanding. The chapter begins with an assessment of Crawford and Gwen’s autobiographical material. Then introduces the intellectual culture of Macmillan Brown, familiar to Frederick, Gwen and Crawford through educational circles.[7] Michael Belgrave highlights

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[1] Brad Patterson et al., *Ulster-New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers*, ed. Brad Patterson (Dublin, Ireland, and Portland, America: Four Courts Press Ltd, 2006).

[2] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*. 38.
Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."

[3] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 4-5, 11.

[4] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 27.

[5] Patterson, *Ulster-New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers*, 9-16.

[6] Campbell, "How Ulster Was New Zealand?" 28.

[7] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown."
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 20.

the imperial, Victorian, and eugenicist thinking presented in Brown's utopian novel *Limanora*.[8] Brown connected quality education with positive social development asserted through his esoteric understanding of the environment and its controls. Similar concepts were shared by Theosophists in Christchurch when in 1894 visiting educationist Annie Besant unpacked a theosophical narrative for social development. The theosophical influence in education will be discussed in Chapter three. Chapter two focuses on the influence of natural learning, and nature studies sparingly seeded in Crawford and Gwen's primary educations. It argues that Crawford and Gwen's childhood understanding of the natural environment in Canterbury, wrapped the wider European world tightly around them providing them with a sense of 'home'.

Through maternal relationships, Crawford and Gwen developed strong bonds to the Ulster Irish and English traditions where the concept of 'home' shrouded their understanding of the local Māori world. This further shaped the development of their imaginations. The chapter examines Gwen and Crawford's secondary education up to their training as pupil teachers. It looks at their early understanding of Canterbury influenced by European migration narratives, reinforced through state education, social ties and ideas for social change.

Summary of Autobiographical Sources

The following summary highlights three important autobiographical sources. The first was well underway by 1946, when Crawford, then 50, began to compile his 'autobiographical notes'.[9] The notes included recollections of his childhood from 1895 to 1906. Sometime after or close to Crawfords passing, Gwen added to the notes.[10] Respectfully, Gwen's perspective gave further insight to Crawford's family culture, spirituality, high school experiences, and tertiary education. Gwen's notes expand Crawford's time frame by a decade. Handwritten, unpublished, and unedited, the overall manuscript is of immense historical value. In 2006, at the discretion of Anthony Somerset, the 'Autobiographical Notes' were deposited by Hugh Price in the Victoria University Archives. Crawford's second 'autobiography' was a fictional autobiographical short story written for Education Magazine in 1965.[11] Crawford's 'autobiographies' are as dissimilar as apples and oranges.

The third important source is Gwen's autobiography illustrating their lives and work together. Incomplete at the time of Gwen's passing in 1988, the autobiography was edited by Naomi Norten, then published that same year.[12] Gwen's is a detailed, and chronological account of her early life and

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[8] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown."
Sweven, *Limanora the Island of Progress*.

[9] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 1.

[10] Gwen L Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," (J C Beaglehole Room Archive, Victoria University, ND). Six pages following page 127.

[11] Somerset, "No Flag for Tom."

[12] Geraldine McDonald, "Somerset, Gwendolen Lucy" in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (2000). Gwen was 94 years old when she passed away.

work from 1894 to 1970. Included are memories of her family, education, teaching career and life journey alongside Crawford. Gwen's strength of self was described by Beeby as an 'independence of mind and a toughness of fibre that were all her own'.[13] Roderick Alley, described his Aunt Gwen as 'an apostle of autonomy for others', he remembered Gwen as 'a formidable agenda setter in her own right.'[14] He suggested Gwen and her siblings belonged to 'a generation whose self-purpose bordered at times on the arrogant.'[15] In her autobiography, Gwen owned the intricacies of her personality, in the same way she accepted her family and the community.

Gwen's autobiography illustrates the wider intellectual culture distinct in their success as educationists, authors and scholars. The WEA, OASL and NEF are introduced. The autobiographies build an understanding of what enticed them to leave Christchurch for 'country service' in the Oxford community.[16] Sadie and Roy Willberg wrote, life in Oxford became 'richly rewarding' when Gwen and Crawford livened the community with WEA activities.[17] They described Gwen as 'a person of exceptional talent and character.'[18] In *Littledene*, Shelley described Crawford as a likeable character who had 'the rare association of calmness of mind and unquenchable enthusiasm which has long been the object of admiration to his friends'.[19] Writing as a humanist, social progressivist, and friend, Jack Shallcrass portrayed Gwen as an outstanding teacher deeply committed to the development of the community:

> Long before the holistic philosophers began to repair the ravages of the fragmented world we inherited, Gwen was practising practical learning and community development. Long before 'universal competence' 'equality of outcomes' and 'schools without failure' became fashionable Gwen was helping each child to find an individual method of working out problems, without competing with or feeling inferior to classmates.[20]

From these narratives, an important base network of people and ideas emerge. Both autobiographies introduce the English and Irish cultural ties at the heart of the Somerset and Alley family networks. Crawford's 'notes' included the oral histories passed down by his paternal Ulster Irish grandmother prior to her death in 1901.[21] Gwen too, recorded similar migration narratives from her paternal Irish Grandmother, and English mother.[22] Crawford's notes encompassed the family

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[13] Beeby, "Introduction," xix.
[14] Roderic Alley, "Gwen Somerset: Educationist, Apostle of Autonomy," *Press*, 7 January 1989, 18.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 127.
[17] Sadie Willberg and Roy Willberg, "Foreword," in *Sunshine and Shadow*, ed. Naomi Morton (Auckland: New Zealand Playcentre Federation, 1988), vii. Sadie (nee Ruddock).
[18] Ibid.
[19] Shelley, "Foreword [Two]," 3-4.
[20] Jack Shallcrass, "Introduction," in *Shunshine and Shadow*, ed. Naomi Morton (Auckland: New Zealand Playcentre Federation, 1988), ix.
[21] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[22] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 3-84.

networks and community industries akin with what he remembered as a comfortably European birthplace in Belfast, Canterbury. Included are anecdotes, lists of exotic European botanicals, garden maps, family trees, portraits, and memoirs of his primary school years in Belfast and Papanui. In his subjectivity Crawford presented his early life as a shared utopia, he conveyed a strong democratising element:

> As I look back on it, I see clearly what a great educational force is the ritual of secular practices in a well developed community. To show up through early childhood where values, beliefs, and social meaning are symbolized in everyday happenings – in a community small enough to see it whole – is a valuable education indeed.[23]

Two years after Crawford began his 'Autobiographical Notes', William Edward Brown compiled a brief history of Belfast, Canterbury.[24] Based in the Christchurch Lands and Deeds office, Brown was assigned the task of providing 'facts' on the history of his local hometown at the request of a city Councillor in Belfast, Ireland.[25] Like Crawford, Brown held strong family ties with Belfast, Canterbury. Brown's parents, William and Annie immigrated from Lancashire in 1879, they later established the local general store in Belfast.[26] Compared to Brown's history, Crawford's recollections of Belfast and Brown's family appear authentic.[27]

Crawford's second 'autobiography' is not so easy to authenticate, as a collage of sorts, it blends elements of non-fiction through characters and events from Crawford's past. Written as a treatise on pre-World War One education, it was carefully tailored to appeal to a public audience. The main theme centres around communication in education for social development.[28] Although Crawford noted some dour teaching methods from the early 1900s, he drew attention to contemporary creative teaching styles. Fundamentally the story is only semi-autobiographical, essentially it is 'largely autobiographical' wrote Crawford:

> I have written the enclosed short story with Education in mind: I have therefore brought it more closely into the school than I would otherwise have done. It is largely autobiographical I admit – but the theme is common to all schools. MacSwithin is a composite character made up of four teachers I knew well

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[23] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 110-111.
[24] Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch."
[25] Ibid. Author's Forward.
[26] "Brown, Mrs Annie," in *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand [Canterbury Provincial District]*, ed. New Zealand Electronic Text Collection (Christchurch: The Cyclopedia Company Limited, 1903).
Dennis Hills, Email to author, 12 October 2023.
[27] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 93-96.
Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch," 8.
[28] HCD Somerset, March-April 1965. Letter to Peter Bland.

> and worked with – all of them dead long ago. The schoolroom is real. My 'criticism' lesson fell out exactly as I have described it, and Tom Casey is drawn closely from life.[29]

The source illustrates the depth of Crawford's imagination, the only facets of reality are the characters, the 'schoolroom', the 'criticism lesson', and the memory of himself as a young pupil teacher.[30] However, the source risks the simultaneity of Crawford's lifelong experience in education. By rolling four characters into one ('MacSwithin'), Crawford cherry picked the finest teachers and condensed an otherwise lengthy timeframe into one spectacular school lesson.

The multifaceted 'MacSwithin' projected Crawford's ideal for quality education through strong and healthy teacher pupil relationships. In condensing this message, Crawford obscured the real location, time frame, and identity of each character. He sacrificed the autobiographical quality and credibility of the source. Further evidence is needed to untangle the characters from their pseudonyms. To free them from the limitations of a single time frame, and location may not be possible. In this way, the source is multidimensional rather than fictitious. This does not mean quality lessons did not play out in the way Crawford remembered them as a young pupil teacher. In his earlier autobiographical notes Crawford included positive childhood experiences at school, he implied that natural learning was often misunderstood.[31] However, his life experience as a teacher should not be underestimated when assessing these arguments.

Historians suggest that debates during the 1960s, on the quality of early 1900s education, were very much a reflection of continuing attitudes around imperialism, corporal punishment, creativity and mostly European influences in education.[32] In 1986, Beeby publicly apologised for the primarily European influences in education during the 1920s and 1930s.[33] Highlighting the unforeseen movement of Māori urbanisation during the time, teacher, broadcaster and Kaumatua, Wiremu Parker responded to Beeby's apology:

> Dr Beeby had your policies followed what Māori wanted themselves - they wanted formal education, the best type of education that would get their boys and girls into the world of the Pakeha. That was the immediate aspiration of my people from the turn of the century. I suppose, Hanna [Jackson] you

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[32] Malone, "The New Zealand School Journal and the Imperial Ideology."
Openshaw, "New Zealand Primary Schools and the Growth of Internationalism and Anti-War Feeling 1929 - 1934."
Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*.
Openshaw, "Contradiction and Contestation, Public Education in the Interwar Period."
May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*.
[33] *Shelley Forum Part 3*, 06:30.

> and your generation will never ever come to accept that the acquisition of English from the turn of the century was a major Māori aspiration.[34]

Parker predicted a future misunderstanding around European education for Māori from the early 1900s. This provides an important context when assessing Crawford and Gwen's understanding of the Māori world.

As suggested, Crawford's 'autobiographies' are like apples and oranges, the first is easily digested, unpeeled, while the other has a layer of highly polished zest to navigate. Either way, the three sources work nicely together. The first sheds light on how far Crawford's early environment shaped his imagination and the democratising elements within his subjectivity. The second is a testimony to the sophistication of his authorship, intellectuality and 'enlightened subjectivity'. The short story gives some insight to Crawford's early teaching career during the 1920s and 30s. Gwen's autobiography provides some chronological 'glue' and contextual 'gap filler.' It shows how far her childhood environment shaped her imagination and sense of belonging in the Dominion. It details her connection with Crawford, their educational values, and work in the Oxford community. Overall, the collection highlights their wide intellectual network dedicated to social development through education.

Frederick Alley

Gwendolen Lucy Alley, better known as Gwen, was born in 1894 at Springfield, Canterbury, she was the second child of seven to Clara Maria Buckingham (Alley) and Frederick Alley.[35] Frederick was a schoolteacher - a teetotal puritan with a temperamental edge, wrote Gwen.[36] Clara belonged to the First National Council of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), a group described by Gwen as 'wowsers'.[37] Her parent's restrictive puritan ideals later contrasted with her modern philosophies and values. From memories of childhood, Gwen illustrated her early life in Christchurch. In describing her parent's friends, Gwen includes some of the cities well known political and literary identities.[38] The network included John Macmillan Brown, Tommy Taylor, Leonard Isitt, Ettie Rout and Jessie Mackay.[39] These names suggest the Alley household was an intellectually engaged environment. Gwen most fondly remembered Jessie Mackay, having revised 'by heart', Mackay's poem, *Rona in the Moon*.[40]

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[34] Ibid., 23:40-26:42 for full speech.
[35] McDonald, "Somerset, Gwendolen Lucy ".
[36] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 16-22.
[37] Ibid., 40,46.
[38] Ibid., 20.
[39] Ibid., 5, 20, 44, 46.
[40] Ibid., 5.

Gwen's relationship with her father was not so easy: 'it took our maturity to appreciate our father's idealism and his efforts to come to terms with his conflicts'.[41] From the early age of seven, Gwen had mastered the art of carefully navigating her father's intense mood swings made somewhat predictable by their regularity.[42] Gwen illustrated Frederick's controlling influence. However, she also acknowledged his deep concern for her intellectual development, particularly around self-determination.[43] Albeit, this was a religious sort of self-determination based on Christianity, well away from Sunday school. It had been Frederick's wish for Gwen not to succumb to the 'dogma' of religious conditioning. Gwen fully recognised her father's moral disposition which included a 'universal God ordering life and evolution', alongside Christ 'as a leader of mankind'.[44] Frederick's belief system appears alongside the intellectual culture he affiliated with. As a part-time adult student studying Latin and English with MacMillan Brown, Frederick most likely found in his tutor a kindred spirit who fully supported religious self-determination.[45] Brown took active measures on The National School's Defence League, alongside Charles Chilton, (professor of biology at Canterbury College), to validate a 'free, secular and national system of education'.[46] As a way to respect inclusivity of various belief systems, their viewpoints appear somewhat in tune with Frederick's measures to refrain his children from attending Sunday School.[47]

Michael Belgrave highlights similar subliminal conflicts in Brown's ideology through the following analogy:

> On the Limanorans Brown projected his own elitist fear of the mob. These microbes from outer space were examples of myriads of simpler organisms ever attacking higher forms of existence. Even in so advanced a land as Limanora, individual atavism was such a threat to society that exile was essential. In addition, children were educated completely in isolation from their peers.[48]

The analogy illustrates what Belgrave describes as 'Brown's eugenicism', the personification of a 'Victorian social system' anxious to promote 'the nature and potential' of New Zealander's 'within the Empire'.[49] It appears highly possible Frederick's conflicts were similar if not identical to Brown's. Either way, Sunday school was out for the Alley kids, while regular teachings at home in 'exile' each

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[41] Ibid., 19.
[42] Ibid., 17.
[43] Ibid., 18.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 20.
[46] "Bible in Schools, Protest by National Schools' Defence League."
N Z Government, "Education Act of 1877, 41 Victoriae, No 21," Wellington: George Didsbury, Government Printer, (1877).
[47] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 18.
Daniel Herring, "The Meaning and Purpose of the Secular Clause in the Education Act 1877 " *Auckland University Law Review* 22 (2016).
[48] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown," 110, 86-115.
[49] Ibid., 108, 115.

day was ‘in’.[50] The broadening of their intellect, claimed Gwen, was not without lengthy revisions over philosophical and biblical manuscripts: ‘I am sure that these daily texts became a kind of springboard from which each child’s philosophy bounced.’[51]
Gwen had a way of bouncing back from difficult situations, turning them to her best advantage, a resilience that ensured her later success.

George Crawford Black Somerset

Hugh Crawford Dixon Somerset, better known as Crawford, was born in Belfast, New Zealand in 1895. He was the first of four children to Jane Dixon (Somerset) and George Crawford Black Somerset. Trained as a Blacksmith, George later took up engineering at Belfast Freezing Works where he yielded to long hours of shift work.[52] Jane kept house with an extensive garden to maintain. George’s mother, Georgina Smyth Blair Somerset, a highly educated woman lived with the family.[53] Extended family were important in Crawford’s early life. The memory of music from Georgina’s Haake piano prompted Crawford to write about social evenings held at home with singers, violinists, and flutists.[54] He also described various charity concerts held in the Belfast Town Hall.[55] ‘I remember identifying with the performers at a very early age’ wrote Crawford, ‘especially in the roles of reciter and actor.’[56] He learned and later recalled ‘by heart’ *The Grooms Song* by Arthur Conan Doyle.[57] These memories suggest the Somerset household was a cultured working class environment where Crawford felt supported by his parents and extended family.

Crawford saw his father George as a conservative Protestant, ‘a moderate drinker’, a strong, clever, and capable provider.[58] Unlike Frederick Alley, George allowed Crawford to go to Sunday school. Gwen however, later described George as a ‘grim father’ who constantly held Crawford back from making heart decisions.[59] Importantly Crawford’s recollection of George included childhood visits to various local industries in Belfast.[60] Industrial immersion at a very young age, triggered an amount of rumination in Crawford:

> I was a thoughtful introverted kind of youngster given to living and reliving every experience in a meditating, wondering kind of way. My mind seemed to be a quiet pool in which events floated gently

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[50] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 19.
[51] Ibid., 19.
[52] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[53] Ibid., 3.
[54] Ibid., 100-101.
[55] Ibid., 97.
[56] Ibid., 100.
[57] Ibid., 98-100.
Conan Doyle, "The Groom's Story," *Star (Christchurch)*, 20 January 1906, 4.
[58] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 82-90, 124-125, 127 ‘a moderate drinker’.
[59] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[60] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 82-83.

> at rest to be enjoyed at leisure because they never passed me by. I think my father had the same kind of mind, though I know he never talked about the way he saw it, or ever showed anything of the way he felt about the community as a whole.[61]

Crawford described his father's sense of belonging in the community as an unexplored version of his own thinking constantly stirred by curiosity regarding the community. This relates to the importance Crawford placed on critical thinking in the Oxford community.

Beeby suggested, Crawford was 'undivided' rather than 'integrated', Crawford saw the ideal community as a whole rather than unified parts.[62] The same idea of an 'egalitarian society' formed through 'social fluidity' where groups from Europe felt a strong sense of responsibility to look out for each other as described by Erik Olssen.[63] Miles Fairburn argues that physical and mental isolation stalled the process of egalitarianism within the colony:

> Colonists remained emotionally tied to the Old World because their atomised society could not satisfy the human need for gregariousness. They revered their imported cultural forms not for their own sake but because these represented social interactions that had once been enjoyed at 'Home' and that New Zealand took a long time to duplicate.[64]

James Belich saw egalitarianism as a mythical driving force behind sociocultural development in colonial New Zealand:

> No one system dominated, but there was some hierarchy, some class organisation, and some cohesive local community, reinforced by the stabilising and bonding effect of substantive land-ownership, despite some isolation in remote districts. The situation was not a triumph of boundlessness, but a dialectic between it and the various bonding agencies – growing islands of community in a diminishing sea of atomization.[65]

Something from each of these arguments is found in Crawford's perspective of *Littledene*, indeed he thought deeply about the meaning of egalitarianism. He recalled his father reciting lyrics from Robert Burn's (1795) *A Man's A Man For A' That* – a Scottish perspective Crawford associated with egalitarianism in New Zealand.[66] He vaguely suggested that his mother found the idea of social

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[61] Ibid., 103.
[62] Beeby, "Introduction," xviii.
[63] Olssen, "Movement and Persistence: A Case Study of Southern Dunedin in Global Context," 23.
[64] Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900.* (Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press, 1989).
[65] James Belich, "The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900 by Miles Fairburn," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (1991).
Making Peoples a History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century, 2001 ed. (New Zealand: Penguin Books, 1996), 328-332.
[66] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 103.

equality rather amusing, but did not develop this any further in his notes.[67] The topic of egalitarianism featured regularly in Crawford's early education:

> The long depression of the eighties had shown everybody that the bottom might drop out of the market at any time and that therefore differences in wealth didn't matter. That was drummed into us at home and at school too.[68]

Crawford sensed class inequalities were very real in his own family and at school but reflected that the Belfast community appeared 'well developed' and 'whole'.[69] He had been conditioned to see his social environment as a level playing field, so much so, even the most subtle class inequalities induced an uncomfortable feeling in him:

> I had been studying the buttonholes made for my Aunt Eva all through the year (my uncle Harry always wore a buttonhole when he was dressed up). So it wasn't really fair, I thought, and had some qualms about it afterwards – for years afterwards. I was completely indoctrinated by my father on the subject of the equality of man. But he had failed to tell me that we lived in a competitive world and that all strategies are fair in love, war and flower shows.[70]

The Development of Crawford's Imagination

'It was easily decided' said Crawford, 'that I would not go to school'.[71] Crawford was educated at home by his grandmother Georgina who carried the same tendency to ruminate on things. The development of Crawford's imagination appears as a recreation of Georgina's narrative until her death in 1901.[72] Georgina had been informally trained as a medical assistant by her father Dr John Blair of Limerick.[73] Sometime after her parents passed away, Georgina travelled to New Zealand with husband Hugh, their two children and Hugh's brother William.[74] Both Hugh and William had worked as farm labourers in County Antrim, having endured much hardship during the Irish famines of the 1840s.[75] Crawford suggested his Ulster ancestors originally farmed at Lisnasharragh in Northern

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 64, 104.
Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 4, 13.
[69] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 110-111.
[70] "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 110.
[71] Ibid., 12, 14.
[72] Ibid., 21.
[73] Ibid., 30-32.
[74] "Shipping Intelligence," *Lyttelton Times*, 8 January 1862, 4. Both Hugh and William are listed as farm labourers from County Antrim.
Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 29, 31. William James' arrival confirmed by Crawford.
[75] George Ranald Macdonald, "Somerset, Hugh (1828-?)" in *Macdonald Dictionary* (Macdonald Dictionary of Canterbury Biography Project, 1952-1964).
Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 30-32.

Ireland.[76] The family arrived in New Zealand in 1862, during the 'second wave' of Irish immigration, described by Geoffrey Rice as a seven-year flow coinciding with the southern gold rush.[77] Crawford did not explain what enticed the family to New Zealand, or the date of their settlement in Kaiapoi, but it seems their arrival was direct:

> I know my grandfather wanted to establish the family in a rural setting in the New World. At first he decided to go to America but the Civil war caused him to change his mind and he came to New Zealand instead. But in New Zealand he was never at home.[78]

Historians tend to typify the 'invisible' assimilation of Ulster Protestant's in anglicised settlements in Canterbury by the 1860s, particularly settlers reconnecting with family and friends.[79] Melanie Nolan highlights the influence of 'evangelical Protestantism' in Ulster assimilation.[80] Hugh and Georgina's narrative might fit within this frame, but their assimilation falls outside the concept of an effortless one. Crawford wondered if his grandparent's 'gloom' was to do with the economic depression between 1866 and 1895.[81] Further research on the push and pull factors around Ulster settlement in Canterbury is needed to better understand settlement patterns.[82] Georgina's narrative clearly influenced Crawford's sense of belonging in many ways, he perceived Canterbury as an extension of Ulster, a traditional European environment busy with people, animals, and botanicals. Importantly, Crawford saw himself as the custodian of Georgina's narrative, the 'old world' she described appeared very vivid his imagination:

> […] from the time I could walk my great delight was to slip into her room and hear stories of her youth in Scotland and Ireland. […] of Christmas in the snow, of robin redbreasts in the woods and of sloes in the hedges.[83] […] and of the great and learned ones who used to come to see her father […][84] It

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[76] "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 30.

[77] Geoffrey W Rice, "How Irish Was New Zealand's Ulster-Born Prime Minister Bill Massey?" in *Ulster - New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers*, ed. Brad Patterson (Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press Ltd, 2006), 244.

[78] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 32.

[79] Melanie Nolan, "Was There a Hidden 'Orange Mark' on the New Zealand Labour Movement?" in *Ulster-New Zealand Migration and Cultural Transfers*, ed. Brad Patterson (Dublin, Ireland and Portland, North America: Four Courts Press Ltd, 2006), 180-181.

Alasdair Galbraith, "The Invisible Irish? Re-Discovering Irish Protestant Traditions in Colonial New Zealand," ibid., 52-54.

Richard Davis and Marianne Davis, *Ulster Enterprise and Public Service in New Zealand and Victoria, 1864-1920: J.S.M. Thompson and G.V. Shannon* (Hobart: Sassafras Books, 2010 [2006]), viii.

[80] Nolan, "Was There a Hidden 'Orange Mark' on the New Zealand Labour Movement?" 180-181.

[81] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 111.

[82] Dwyer and Fraser, "'We Are All Here Together Like So Many on the Cockle Beds': Towards a History of Ulster Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Canterbury," 130.

[83] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 27.

[84] Ibid., 12.

> seemed as though she wanted all these things to be remembered and had no faith in my father's interest. I gathered that neither she nor my grandfather had ever felt at home in this New Zealand.[85]

Crawford's parents held natural birth rights in New Zealand, as busy young providers they had little time to engage in Georgina's reminiscences much to Crawford's bemusement.[86] They most likely found it difficult to engage in her narrative with the same creativity Crawford deployed. Encouraged by Georgina to keep the old world alive, Crawford naturally identified its various components at home in Belfast, Canterbury:

> Each flower had its long established place - like my grandmother, my parents, the pig and the cat. My mother would say "It's about time the daffodils were showing up." And we would run over to the part of the garden sacred to daffodils and look for the little silvery green spears thrusting up among last year's fallen leaves. So everything was in its place, the daffodils, violets, dahlias, peonies, London pride, Canterbury bells, snow-on-the-mountain, snapdragons, lady's pin cushion, tiger lilies, chrysanthemums and their flowering each year was an event as momentous as a visit from the gods.[87]

Georgina continued her dialogue months after a serious accident caused her health to decline. Ulster must have seemed like a fascinating and faraway place to Crawford. Understanding her young grandson's sensitivity, Georgina quietly prepared Crawford for her death. She believed an intermediary bird would appear to transport her departing soul home.[88] Crawford's mother talked of similar experiences, suggesting strong maternal traditions associated with spirituality.[89] When Georgina's intermediary bird appeared, Crawford recognised its significance:

> I woke up very early in the morning and went very quietly into my grandmother's room. Most of the bedclothes were gone from the bed, but I knew she was there quiet and at rest under the sheet that alone covered her. The window was open I heard a fluttering noise at the window and there was a bird pecking and flapping at the pane. I opened the window a bit wider for I knew it had a long, long way to go. It scrambled out and flew away over the macrocarpa fence far out of sight. I looked out. There were some lingering bits of snow in the corner by the raspberries, the violets were in full bloom and the primroses were just beginning to open.[90]

Georgina's death was a 'turning point' in Crawford's life, the essence of Ulster had departed, and Crawford experienced a loss that threatened his sense of belonging to the core:

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[85] Ibid., 23.
[86] Ibid., 27.
[87] Ibid., 17-18.
[88] Ibid., 24.
[89] Ibid., 2.
[90] Ibid., 24-25.

> Somehow I seemed to know that this was a tragedy for my father; his people were all dead now. He had only my mother and us; and I knew we didn't really belong; we didn't go back to the old days in the old land.[91] […] For me life had now changed. I had no more lessons until I went to school a year later. But a different quality had entered into things and I seemed to be very much alone. One thing had gone out of my life and that was the stories of "Home"![92]

Crawford tried to imagine home without Georgina, he was 'dimly conscious of the fact' that Canterbury seemed like a world of 'exile'. The transplanted components of Ulster in Canterbury were too incomplete for him to fully comprehend Ulster or to feel a full sense of belonging in Canterbury. So, he carried the imagined components from Ulster - the 'robin redbreast', 'sloes in the hedges' and 'bluebells' into adulthood.[93] Then in 1936 while away on a Carnegie Fellowship in Europe Crawford experienced those missing bits of the old world intrinsic to Georgina's narrative.[94] In a formal letter to Frederick Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation Crawford referred to the fellowship as a 'pilgrimage'.[95]

The Development of Gwen's Imagination

An English immigrant during her teens, Gwen's Mother Clara experienced a similar displaced sense of belonging in New Zealand. It was never questioned, wrote Gwen, Mother's 'home' was in England.[96] Clara's England appeared to Gwen as an 'enchanted Homeland', it was more 'real' than the Dominion, more 'proper' and 'not just fairy tales'.[97] In her revisionist history on the life of Gwen's brother Rewi, Ann-Marie Brady suggests Clara's strong ties to England alienated Rewi from his 'birth place' in New Zealand.[98] However, Rewi illustrated a strong sense of belonging through his love of the natural landscape and rivers in Amberly, even if through a European perspective.[99] Gwen too described picnics at the river, sometimes their grandmother Alley would join them.[100] Gwen remembered Grandmother Alley's Victorian outlook, stories of her grandmothers privileged life in Ireland before immigration to New Zealand during the 1850s fascinated her.[101] Clara's egalitarianism however, was often at odds with her mother in law's traditional Irish values wrote Gwen:

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[91] Ibid., 24.
[92] Ibid., 27.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] H C D Somerset, 11 November 1935. Letter from Crawford Somerset to Frederick Kepple.
[96] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 2, 32.
[97] Ibid., 3, 32.
[98] Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China - the Myth of Rewi Alley* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016 [2003]), 9.
[99] Rewi Alley, "Childhood Remembered," in *Sunshine and Shadow*, ed. Gwendolen L. Somerset and Naomi Morton (New Zealand: N.Z Playcentre Federation, 1977), 69-84.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 67.
[100] *Sunshine and Shadow*, 38.
[101] Ibid.

> Mother smiled her little smile whenever I told her of the old stories of Grandma's girlhood in Ireland. "That's all behind us and forgotten [said Mother]. There is no time and no place any longer for that kind of snobbery. We came out here for that very reason, so better forget it."[102]

By encouraging egalitarianism, Clara inadvertently discouraged Gwen from emotionally investing in Grandmother Alley's fascinating narrative:

> It all seemed to be part of an old fairy tale that had slipped down behind the newer books and been forgotten, just as New Zealand seemed to have slipped down into the Southern Seas away from the people who had been our own people and the old land where our grandmother still appeared to live.[103]

Gwen found her Grandmother's narrative a little old fashioned and remote, especially when set against Clara's modern ideas regarding social development and equality for women.[104] Clara encouraged Gwen to strive for health and fitness, these strong feminist values possibly reflected Clara's friendship with Ettie Rout.[105] Clara encouraged Gwen to develop her own sense of belonging in Canterbury, even so, Gwen was fundamentally influenced by Clara's Englishness.

Gwen's Peripheral Indigenous World

For Gwen the dominion had 'no places', it 'was where no one else had ever been.'[106] As a child Gwen did not easily associate her environment with the Māori world. Prompted by her brother Eric's perspective of Māori lifeways, Gwen disagreed that indigenous groups had 'long ago' lived in Amberly.[107] For Gwen and her brothers, the natural environment in Amberly provided space for imaginary play in the fresh air and sunshine. Gwen's brother Rewi recalled tracking native birds with arrows, they cooked trout on 'hot stones' and extracted the 'oil'.[108] Many of their childhood antics appear typical of children growing up in New Zealand during the late 1800s.[109] Through imaginary play, the Alley children explored their own version of the indigenous world encouraged by their Aunt Amy's narrative regarding her Māori relations.[110] Thus, Gwen was remotely connected to the Māori world through her imagination. Stories of old warriors were often shrouded by the European world, wrote Gwen:

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[102] Ibid., 38.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid., 44.
[106] Ibid., 4.
[107] Ibid., 4.
[108] Alley, "Childhood Remembered," 69.
[109] James Belich, "The Wild Child and Its Taming," in *Paradise Reforged, a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880's to the Year 2000.*, ed. Richard King (Australia: McPherson's Printing Group, 2001).
[110] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 13.

> Of course, Te Rauparaha had battled his way through the Kaiapoi Pa in distant days and the memory lingered. But the only murder we had ever known about was committed by a white person at a farmhouse near East Eyreton. We had never seen a Maori, not even in Christchurch.[111]

Indeed, Māori seemed invisible within the egalitarian society Gwen had been led to believe in. Gwen imagined the indigenous world in much the same way she imagined Grandmother Alley's girlhood in Ireland as 'an old fairy tale'.[112] For Gwen, both the Irish and Māori worlds were timeworn, remote, and somewhat forbidden, egalitarianism made them appear that way. Elements of the natural indigenous world blended with the new world in her memories of childhood play:

> We became Maori warriors tracking naked through the high cocksfoot grass in the top playground. […] We tested all plants for food, broom and gorse flowers, the inside leaves of cabbage trees; raw turnips from the paddocks were delicious. [...] But our true friends were the huge bluegum trees in the top playground, great friendly giants protecting our games. Their huge roots often rose above ground and we called the biggest ones 'lizards' because they seemed to be friendly prehistoric creatures.[113]

Gwen also remembered the delight of listening to the 'broom pods' as they 'popped in the sparkling sunshine while flax crackled in the swamp below'.[114] With both the Māori and Irish worlds somewhat shrouded, Gwen appeared unaware that a lasting conflict of interests existed between the two. Where Irish settlers in Canterbury drained the swamps, local Iwi relied on the natural landscape for customary Mahika kai.[115]

Crawford's Peripheral Indigenous World

Crawford too, was unable to fully comprehend the indigenous world. Memories of boyhood recalled how the soil at Belfast became 'waterlogged' and sometimes unsuitable for planting given the high-water table.[116] After immigrating to Christchurch in 1851 John Seager Gundry described the 'Papanui Wood' as swamplands, he found Christchurch to be 'without form and comeliness' with very little other than the 'wood' at Riccarton Bush to remind him of 'Old England.'[117] Historians have considered the difficult task of draining the swampy flax landscapes of Canterbury. Much of the

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[111] Ibid., 8.
[112] Ibid., 38.
[113] Ibid., 47-48.
[114] Ibid., 3.
[115] Dwyer and Fraser, "'We Are All Here Together Like So Many on the Cockle Beds': Towards a History of Ulster Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Canterbury."
[116] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 74.
[117] John Segar Gundry, *Dr Gundry's Diary, Commencing Practice in Christchurch June - October 1851*, ed. Margaret Cullen and Josie Laing, Limited edition of 300 copies ed., vol. 2 (Christchurch: The Nag's Head Press, 1983 [1851]), 17, 114.

swamp at Waihora (Ellesmere) had been developed by Irish settlers.[118] Brown suggested similar practices were applied in Belfast (Canterbury) around 1856, where sod lifted from the flax swamp provided fencing and early housing, the process eventually drained the area.[119] While traditional Irish swamp draining is located within a cultural framework, historians acknowledge the detrimental impact on Ngāi Tahu Mahika kai reserves.[120] In 1866 Walter Mantell described eel weirs at Waihora as 'an impediment to the drainage of the country', while Kemp maintained the weirs were to be reserved.[121] As a result of conflicting interests, Brown implicitly described the impact on Māori in Belfast as early as 1868, he cites a claim regarding the Kaputone eel weir (Reserve No.892).[122] Brown observed the indigenous world in Belfast through Māori placenames, alongside important traditional resources such as eel reserves.[123] Crawford could not dwell on the mysterious eels that lurked beneath the water, these monsters preyed on 'the young ducklings' that kindled a sense of 'home' in him.[124]

Like the mysterious eels, the indigenous world was very much shrouded by Crawford's greater need to maintain his connection to Georgina's European world. Thus, Crawford understood the Māori world in a peripheral sense. On few occasions the natural indigenous world co-existed with the new world. During wood cutting expeditions Crawford recalled the 'rabbits everywhere underfoot' and 'fantails overhead in the branches.'[125] In the garden he and George fought the 'armies of slugs, sparrows and blackbirds'.[126] He recalled his father's experience of 'the vast riverbed' with 'pheasants and [native] quail'.[127] At home a woven 'Maori Kit' was used for groceries...[128] However, kits could be purchased at the grocery store, while flax was traditionally used in a European milling context.[129] The 'Kit' may have appeared to Crawford as nothing unordinary.

It seems reasonable to suggest the egalitarian myth related to the pioneering spirit led Gwen and Crawford to believe the land, and resources were simply there to provide for everyone. This appears as an environmental desensitization at a very young age. While the natural environment provided a comforting reality, it was almost impossible for them to comprehend the magnitude of the

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[118] Dwyer and Fraser, "'We Are All Here Together Like So Many on the Cockle Beds': Towards a History of Ulster Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Canterbury," 126.

[119] Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch," 11.

[120] Dwyer and Fraser, "'We Are All Here Together Like So Many on the Cockle Beds': Towards a History of Ulster Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Canterbury," 126.

[121] "The Ngāi Tahu Report, Summary of Grievances, Findings and Recommendations, Wai 27," (Wellington, New Zealand: Waitangi Tribunal, 1991), 464-465, 489.

[122] Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch," 15.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 75.

[125] Ibid., 68.

[126] Ibid., 78

[127] Ibid., 34.

[128] Ibid., 94.

[129] "Page 2 Advertisements Column 1 [to Grocers, Hotel-Keepers, and Boarding-House Proprietors]," *Christchurch Star*, 13 April 1877, 2.

"Early Canterbury," *Lyttelton Times*, 17 February 1906, 10.

Māori world around them. It was now up to the education system to loosen the swaddles that held them in the European world.

Primary Education

The following section explores the influence of nature studies related to Gwen and Crawford's primary educations during the early 1900s. It assesses how far Crawford and Gwen engaged in Hogben's school curriculum by 1904, it includes their childhood acquaintance with each other around this time. Hogben's curriculum was designed with social development in mind, modelled on European ideas in tune with the garden city movement noted earlier.

When Georgina passed away in 1901, Crawford was only six years old, the following year he enrolled at Belfast primary school.[130] Prior to that Crawford needed to convince his parents school was a good idea, he initiated his own introduction to the Belfast schoolteacher when she walked past their house one day:

> Raising my peaked cap I asked the great lady if she would call and see my mother about my going to school. Somehow I felt that I would only be taken in by a very great favour and that only a conference on the highest level would suffice. The conference came off as I had planned it, and the next morning, 2nd September 1902 I set off for school.[131]

Crawford's excitement mellowed as boredom set in. The depth of Crawford's grief for the life and intellectuality enjoyed at home with his late grandmother is not easily measurable. Crawford found it difficult to express himself at school, he remembered feeling socially awkward. He often retreated into his imagination when things reached a certain level of mundaneness in the classroom. Gwen's early primary school experience at Amberly reached a similar level of boredom. Lessons focused on Victorian methods were described by Gwen as 'the tedium of repetition'.[132] Furthermore, Gwen was closely governed by Frederick's teaching position at Amberly school, he restricted her from socialising with her peers.[133] 'I was sent to get the mail at morning playtime and to mind the fowls off the garden at lunch time' she remarked indignantly.[134] It appears 'Brown's eugenicism' was at play here for both Gwen and her brothers who's social freedoms at school were closely monitored by Frederick.[135] Gwen however, reminisced on how she would secretly 'sneak over to school to play'.[136] Crawford on the other hand was not so restricted:

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[130] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 21, 42-43.
[131] Ibid., 43-44.
[132] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 23.
[133] Ibid., 22.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid., 54.
[136] Ibid., 53.

> …the [Belfast] community was a small one. It was large enough to have many kinds of people making their contribution to the life of the place but it was also small enough for a boy growing up in it to know it all pretty well, to know everyone at least by sight and to be free to go through anyone's gate without getting a rebuff. But that is by no means all. We were near enough to pioneering days for differences in class and status to be accepted unconditionally.[137]

Gwen recalled only ever being allowed to socialise with the local doctor's and lawyer's children.[138]

As Gwen recalled her father's classroom at Amberly school, Frederick's teaching methods appear to have resonated with Hogben's new curriculum.[139] Around this time Gwen began enjoying school, 'Sometime, just sometimes,' she wrote, 'a small spark glowed in a country boy's face, or perhaps an electric current seemed to make contact among the children in the schoolroom.'[140] Crawford vividly remembered similar moments, he recalled 'object lessons' with enthusiasm.[141] The 'object lessons' reflect Hogben's 'common objects' evident in schools from around 1890. Roth suggested the concept was similar to 'natural teaching' methods popular in Europe at that time.[142] The 'object lessons' described by Crawford however, included topics on 'the ostrich, and the 'Australian Jacana'![143] While Australian primary schools added nature studies to their curriculum by 1890, its New Zealand counterpart (developed by Hogben) was introduced by 1904.[144] That same year, George Thomson, an esteemed member of the New Zealand Institute publicly commented on the importance of nature studies in schools:

> We hear a good deal about Nature studies in education, but most knowledge of her treasures is sought and inculcated at second hand in books. But no books can teach like the facts themselves, and only a little encouragement and observation are needed to get the interest aroused in the young.[145]

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[137] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 103.
[138] *Edwards & Company - Pilot Episode*, 33:50.
[139] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 24-25.
Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*.
[140] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 25.
[141] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 54.
Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 57.
[142] *George Hogben a Biography*.
[143] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 43-44.
[144] Dorothy Kass, "Nature Study," *Dictionary of Educational History in Australia and New Zealand (DEHANZ)* (2014), https://dehanz.net.au/entries/nature-study/.
Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 98-100.
Freya Tearney, "Working Paper 2016/03, History of Education in New Zealand, Prepared to Accompany the Infographic: Timeline of Significant Events in the History of Education in New Zealand, 1867-2014," (2016), https://mcguinnessinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/20161213-Working-Paper-201603-History-of-education-in-New-Zealand.pdf.
[145] W B Benham, "[Obituary] George Malcolm Thomson (1848-1933)," *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 64 (1935), 413-421.
Geo. M Thomson, "A Naturalists' Calendar," *Otago Witness*, 4 May 1904, 10.

Thompson's article highlighted the joy of finding 'common objects' in nature, and while he mentioned 'lizards' and 'bats' the article did not portray New Zealand's natural world as anything too different from the European world. Thomson's later work included an extensive study of Acclimatisation Society records, he was also professionally associated with Charles Chilton.[146]
By that time Crawford progressed to 'Standard Two' at the 'Big School' in Belfast, he recalled an intriguing lesson delivered by teacher 'Ruby Voss':

> …she taught us new things - geography, for instance – with a sand tray, water and a butter-pat with which she made capes, bays, peninsulas, water-sheds, lakes, deltas, mountains and plains, she poured out rain from an old China teapot with a broken spout.[147]

Much to Crawford's disappointment Ruby Vos did not stay very long at the school, the 'sand tray' lessons ended in a 'water-shed' of the emotional kind for both Ruby and Crawford.[148] The 'sand tray' lesson appeared in tune with Hogben's 'new syllabus' influenced by his interest in earth sciences. Hogben promoted 'open-air teaching' away from 'the use of books' described by Roth.[149] It appears many educators had mixed feelings around the 'new syllabus', especially the amount of preparation required to deliver practical lessons in a structured way.[150] Crawford noted nature studies had been 'neglected' at Belfast Primary, the teachers at the 'Big School' continued with what they felt most comfortable teaching:

> […] the screws were really on us and we learned the greatest of all things were spelling and arithmetic, both of which came before playtime, arithmetic first, spelling after, and you could be strapped for both.[151]

Ruby Vos and Frederick Alley were most likely criticised for promoting any ideas too far removed from mainstream education at the time. Gwen noted her father's liberal methods did not impress the school inspectors, staff, or parents. Victorian methods preferred corporal punishment for the 'clodhoppers' as Frederick called them.[152] Crawford kept ahead of the 'clodhoppers', he gave just enough attention it seems to keep corporal punishment at bay. Some years later in *No Flag for Tom* Crawford explored the dilemmas of corporeal punishment for both the student and teacher.[153]

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[146] Benham, "[Obituary] George Malcolm Thomson (1848-1933)." See page 417 for Charles Chilton. See 419 for Tompson's book *The Naturalisation of Plants and Animals in New Zealand* published by Cambridge University Press in 1922.
[147] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 56-57.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 88, 118-119.
[150] Ibid., 102.
Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 99-100.
[151] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 58, 124-125.
[152] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 25.
[153] Somerset, "No Flag for Tom."

In 1906 Frederick became Headmaster of Wharenui school, he moved the family to Christchurch.[154] That very same year George Somerset took on a nightshift role at Christchurch Tramway's, he too decided to move his family closer to Christchurch for education.[155] George opted both Crawford and younger brother Edgar into secular education at Papanui Primary School.[156] Frederick opted Gwen into domestic duties where she looked after her younger siblings, and continued her primary education from home.[157] Around this time Gwen and Crawford were formally introduced to each other through family acquaintances.[158]

Gwen vividly recalled meeting Crawford and his brother Edgar while the two boys diligently tended the home garden at Papanui.[159] The garden was a sanctuary for Crawford, he held a special association with botanicals. Crawford even created a 'bee lecture' at Papanui School where Nature studies materialised by way of an enthusiastic teacher named 'Miss Taylor'.[160] By 1909 the School Journal provided illustrated nature cards. These included 32 cards on 'New Zealand flora', eight on 'New Zealand Geography', with a larger number it seems, on British imperial subjects.[161] The following year John Ewing outlined an expectation for schools to introduce nature studies in reading, geography and drawing.[162]

Crawford and Gwen's recollections appear as very early examples of the new syllabus as it struggled to implant itself in the dour education system. It is possible Frederick may have experimented prior its official uptake, given his connection with Macmillan Brown, and Brown's connection to Hogben discussed earlier.[163] Either way 'social efficiency' had a place within the education system by the time Crawford and Gwen entered secondary schooling. By this time, each sensed they belonged within a 'naturally' egalitarian European world. Even if that world was largely planned, acclimatised, measured, and maintained.

Crawford's World of Botanicals

The garden in Belfast was a year-round food basket designed with self-sufficiency, health, and wellbeing in mind.[164] It linked Crawford to British botanical perspectives and practices. While historians associate these practices with imperial expansion, the garden might also be seen as a

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[154] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 66.
[155] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 82.
[156] Ibid., 122-123.
[157] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 89-90.
[158] Ibid., 169.
Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 127-128.
[159] "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[160] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 113.
[161] AJHR, "Education: Primary Education," II, E-02 (1909), 8-9.
[162] Tearney, "Working Paper 2016/03, History of Education in New Zealand, Prepared to Accompany the Infographic: Timeline of Significant Events in the History of Education in New Zealand, 1867-2014," 20.
[163] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 27, 38.
[164] Ibid., 64.

spiritually healing space.[165] It is difficult to know how far the Somerset family garden reflected Georgina's medical knowledge associated with botanicals. Every flowering plant listed by Crawford had its origin somewhere in Europe, while almost all held medicinal properties used in folkloric medicine. Crawford's map of the early garden at Belfast illustrated an assortment of introduced fruit trees, vines and vegetable varieties along with extensive flower beds.[166]

Miles Fairburn suggests, 'loneliness' encouraged many early immigrants to connect with 'home' through seeds and plants from Europe.[167] However, Crawford's description of the garden and plants represented a deeply spiritual almost Anthroposophical connection.[168] It was the natural elements in Belfast such as the soil, and water that allowed the seeds from 'Old World' to germinate and nurture its people in the new world. Both George and Crawford saw botanicals as life-giving, right down to the richness of the 'jet black loam' described by Crawford as 'twinkling' with 'glowworms', and by George as 'the food of all living things'.[169] With a family history of 'diviners' from Ulster, Crawford did not forget to mention Belfast's high-water table.[170] Just below the soil was a voluminous water supply described by Crawford and confirmed by Brown as 'magnificent' and easily 'tapped anywhere'.[171] In many ways the Belfast soil, water and plant life connected the family to the old world through divination, providing a sense of familiarity, if not belonging in Canterbury. Crawfords' earlier 'watershed lesson' adapted from Hogben's curriculum, had its limitations in revealing how far the water held similar meaning for local Māori customs associated with Mahika kai.

Crawford's world was centred around European botanicals, he found them 'the most tremendous of all adventures'.[172] 'All my life I have been trying to recapture the joy I remember in seeing quite ordinary flowers for the first time.'[173] He described botanicals in a deeply transcendental way, the 'foxglove was as still as truth', and the aroma of violets 'like heaven', the daffodils were all 'smiling' when they appeared from their dormancy like trusted friends from home.[174] Fairburn describes how objects and gifts from 'home' held a special meaning for early immigrants and in many cases were overemphasised to compensate for 'loneliness'.[175] Crawford suggested the seasonal 'arrival' of European blooms in the garden were 'as momentous as a visit from the gods'.[176] His

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[165] Joanna Bishop, "The Role of Medicinal Plants in New Zealand's Settler Medical Culture, 1850s-1920s." (PhD Thesis, University of Waikato, 2014), 54.

[166] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 9.

[167] Miles Fairburn, "Frontier Chaos," in *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989), 202.

[168] Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s," 84-98.

[169] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 19, 77.

[170] Ibid., 29. Crawford noted that his ancestors on his paternal side (Georgina's line) were 'scholars and water diviners'.

[171] Ibid., 10.

Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch," 2.

[172] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 16.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid., 19, 16, 17.

[175] Fairburn, "Frontier Chaos." 202.

[176] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 18.

world intimately connected with nature. Even the lining of Georgina's casket was velvety 'like a broad bean pod', wrote Crawford. He recalled how the 'new coffin' radiated a 'solemn smell of linseed oil' staining forever the scent of her beautiful 'narcissi' flowers.[177] When his grandparent's derelict section was overtaken with gorse and broom, Crawford reflected on its 'golden bloom', and how the flammable gorse made firewood magical.[178] Everything was noticed, and processed, everything had a place. Including the 'bath full' of botanicals transplanted from Belfast to Papanui when the Somerset family moved there in 1906.[179] The 'meadowsweet' given to him by an uncle was later transplanted from house to house, before a 'sprig' made the journey across Cook Strait to Crawford's final home in Wellington.[180] He reminisced, 'I wonder what forgotten rustic poet in the swamp lands of England, before gardens were thought of first called it meadowsweet.'[181] It seems plausible Crawford's family experienced a sense of belonging through botanicals, a world Crawford felt most akin with:

> Any success I may have achieved as a teacher and sociologist had its roots, stem and flowering in Belfast.[182]

The 'Ambiguous Ache of Separation and Belonging'

It might be argued that Crawford's generation experienced some sort of environmental dislocation widely felt but not easily communicated. The ancient harakeke, matagouri, and swamp lands of Canterbury described by Sarah Dwyer and Lyndon Fraser had been almost drained by then.[183] So had the unfathomable swamps described in John Gundry's wallowing expeditions through early Christchurch.[184] Only remnants of that landscape remained in Crawford's family garden at Belfast. The toi tois and grasses noted on Crawford's Garden map appeared insignificant compared to the sheer volume of European plantings.[185] However, Brown described the abundance of native swampland shrubs, grasses and ti kouka in Belfast: 'Belfast was just a raupo swamp during all this time and its history was that of any other uninhabited spot on the plains.'[186]

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[177] Ibid., 25-26.
[178] Ibid., 33-34, 66-67.
[179] Ibid., 113.
[180] Ibid., 113-114.
[181] Ibid., 114.
[182] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 110-111.
[183] Dwyer and Fraser, "'We Are All Here Together Like So Many on the Cockle Beds': Towards a History of Ulster Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Canterbury," 125-126.
[184] Gundry, *Dr Gundry's Diary, Commencing Practice in Christchurch June - October 1851*, 2. Gundry found the swamplands difficult to navigate on foot, especially during the hours of darkness when called out to visit patients. His wife insisted they purchase a horse for safer travels.
[185] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 9.
[186] Brown, "A Short History of Belfast, Christchurch." 1, see also: Author's Forward.

The concept of 'uninhabited' rings the 'terra nullius' alarm bell described by Vincent O'Malley.[187] Like Brown, Crawford made similar assumptions regarding Canterbury, he was unable to establish any deep sense of the contemporary Māori world. Unlike Crawford, Ngaio Marsh integrated the two worlds together, she described 'toboggans' at Christmas time, 'that shot like greased lightening down glossy midsummer tussock' and 'the lovely smell of cabbage tree blossom…'.[188] Gwen described the natural world in Oxford as a magical place, not unlike the Shakespearean Forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a comfortable susurration:

> No need to give a 'Nature Study' lesson when the tui and the common sparrow sung to us, or the punga, supplejack and the old ragged cabbage tree spoke to us in their own language and whispered messages meant only for the very young.[189]

As a writer,Marsh found Oxford mystically inspiring, she recorded fond memories of camping with family and friends at Glentui bush. She referred to the landscape as "my country", but wondered how far she really belonged:

> […] so primordial was this landscape, that the sense of belonging to it was disturbed by a doubt that, for all our adoptive gestures, our presence here was no more than a cobweb across the hide of a monster, that in spite of our familiarity with its surface we had made no mark upon our country and were still newcomers. I do not know if other New Zealanders are visited by this contradictory feeling of belonging and not belonging but it came upon me very vividly when I first looked into the high-country from the top of blowhard and it has returned many times since then. It is a feeling that deepens rather than modifies one's attachments to New Zealand.[190]

Ngaio saw the landscape at Glentui as an antithesis of the ancient and contemporary worlds. During a later visit to Arthur's Pass, she similarly described an 'ambiguous ache of separation and belonging' while taking in the landscape.[191]

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[187] Vincent O'Malley, Electronic document "The Curious Case of Tiritiri Matangi Island," *Beyond the Imperial Frontier: The Contest for Colonial New Zealand* (Bridget Williams Books, 2014), https://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09011a&AN=mul.oai.edge.massey.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001086.cd21ae73.3029.529d.95d4.35ebafd18d52&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306
http://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=http://beyondimperialfrontier.bwb.co.nz/index.html.

[188] Ngaio Marsh, *Black Beech and Honeydew* (London: HarperCollins, 2002 [1981, 1966]), 58.

[189] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 173.

[190] Marsh, *Black Beech and Honeydew*, 86.

[191] Ibid., 95.

Secondary Education and Part-Time Work

By 1909 Crawford secured a junior free place to commence secondary schooling at Christchurch Boys' High, that same year Gwen entered Christchurch Girls' High School.[192] Gwen suggested Crawford undervalued his intellectuality at Boys' High to assimilate with his peers, particularly when his enrolment 'scholarship' positioned him as "one of those sorts".[193] However, in 1910 Crawford was awarded certificates in scripture and science.[194] Around this time he considered studying pharmaceuticals through a part-time role at Moritz Mark's Pharmacy in Papanui.[195] Crawford's decision might have delighted his late grandmother who's medical expertise would have included medicinal plants and their uses.[196] According to Gwen, the pharmacy work was 'a truly extending experience' for Crawford, he was in his element 'preparing pills and common medicines' [197] The idea of pharmaceuticals did not impress George, who preferred Crawford to stay home and tend the gardens.[198] The significance of the home garden may have some connection to Georgina's narrative around Irish famines, a reality Crawford recalled as a reason for his grandparents departure from Ireland.[199] Either way Crawford continued education and completed a Civil Service Examination securing a senior free place at Boys' High.[200] He was 16 years old when he began training as a 'pupil teacher', it appears he did not complete matriculation until later.[201]

Gwen had similar mixed feelings about Girls' High School, she disliked the 'claustrophobic atmosphere', she risked truancy to be with nature and relax in the sunshine by the Avon River.[202] Gwen excelled in English. When a tutor from Germany quietly asked Gwen to her help with translation, Gwen helped.[203] At eighteen years old Gwen left high school with matriculation, and an award 'for services to the school'.[204] Gwen soon contributed to the family income, she became a pupil teacher at Elmwood Primary School by 1913.[205] While at Elmwood Gwen secretly altered the programme, she allowed children to 'laugh, play, act' and make models while the infant mistress was

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[192] AJHR, "Education: Annual Examinations. Session 2, E-08 [in Continuation of E-1a, 1908]," (1909). 7, 12.

Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 93-98.

[193] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David." Page number not marked.

[194] "Prize Distributions, Boys High School," *Press*, 15 December 1910, 8.

"Boy's High School, Breaking up Ceremony," *Star (Christchurch)*, 15 December 1910, 1.

[195] "Page 1 Advertisements Column 6 [the Papanui Pharmacy]," *Christchurch Press*, 24 April 1911. Crawford started work here around 1909, the pharmacy was sold in 1911.

[196] Bishop, "The Role of Medicinal Plants in New Zealand's Settler Medical Culture, 1850s-1920s."

[197] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 128.

Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s," 84-97. The medicinal value of plants noted in the practice of Anthroposophy.

[198] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 128.

[199] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 31-32.

[200] "Candidates Passed," *Dominion*, 18 January 1912, 3.

[201] Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset," 16.

[202] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 93-97.

[203] Ibid., 95.

[204] Ibid., 97-98.

[205] Ibid., 101-107.

away in another part of the school![206] Crawford later wrote: 'Gwen seemed to succeed through some sensitive awareness of the feelings of others and of their needs.'[207]

Conclusion

Both the Somerset and Alley family networks appeared vigilant in their aspirations around egalitarianism, Gwen and Crawford reflected on how far the egalitarian myth impacted them at home and school. Where the egalitarian myth survived alongside puritanism in the Dominion, theosophists saw the community as a natural living organism to be carefully navigated. Gwen's social world was monitored by Frederick's similar puritan ideals to protect her from anything he considered malevolent enough to corrupt her intellectuality. Crawford's social world was slightly more liberal, he was free to mingle in the community as he wished. However, his intellectuality was not encouraged by George, in the same way Gwen's was encouraged by Frederick. For Crawford practical work at home took precedence. Maternal relationships appear to have entangled Crawford and Gwen in the 'ache of separation and belonging', each needed to work through a displaced sense of 'home' in Canterbury. Greatly influenced by the natural environment as an offshoot of the 'older', established European homeland, Crawford and Gwen were somewhat dislocated from the indigenous world. Shrouded in mystery, the Māori world seemed like a 'fairytale' to Gwen. To Crawford it was absorbed by his strong duty to keep Georgina's world alive through living botanicals. The significance of the soil as shared and 'life giving' is introduced here, it provided a physical and spiritual sense of 'home' and protection. Both the soil and aquifers of Belfast connected Crawford to an imagined sense of home, the natural elements in the environment seemed like a world of plenty for all to benefit from. State education had not shown him otherwise. Within the acclimatised Europeanised environment, nature studies in primary education continued to enforce Crawford and Gwen's understanding that 'home' in Canterbury was a mere reflection of the 'real' homeland. Thus, Crawford and Gwen's early sense of belonging in Canterbury was somewhere between the real but imagined Māori world, and the real but imagined European homeland. The egalitarian myth was fully realised in adulthood as something to strive towards rather than anything real to maintain.

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[206] Ibid., 107.
"Education Board," *Star (Christchurch)*, 20 January 1913, 4.
[207] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 49.

Chapter 3. Finding Oxford 1914 to 1923

Introduction

Having completed her Teacher's D certificates by 1914, Gwen attended 'Latin and Botany' classes at Canterbury College, this is most likely where she connected with Charles and Elizabeth Chilton.[1] Gwen later reflected on her naivety when in August that year the Dominion deployed young soldiers to Europe during World War One.[2] 'Lucky lads' she thought, *'A chance to prove your quality and allegiance to the Greatest Empire on Earth!'*[3] Gwen began training college in 1915, Crawford completed matriculation that year, then in 1916 he too began teacher training at the 'Normal School' as it was known then.[4] In April Crawford enlisted for army service.[5] His enrolment never eventuated, an ongoing battle with arthritis later reduced his mobility to crutches. Gwen described the life-changing challenge Crawford endured during their time at training college. The outcome, wrote Gwen, left Crawford permanently 'unable to obtain a teaching certificate'.[6] Gwen gained her certificate by 1916, then completed a 'Proficiency Certificate B.A. Standard' the following year.[7] In 1916 Gwen's brother Eric was killed in service overseas.[8] By 1917 she endured a difficult short-term placement at a 'city school' before joining the staff at East Christchurch School where she stayed until 1921.[9] In an endeavour to recover from poor health towards the close of 1921, Gwen chose a rural teaching pathway at Oxford School, she described this as her 'country service'.[10] By then Crawford worked part-time for Gilby's College in Christchurch, he tutored candidates for the 'Teacher's D exam', noted as highly valued.[11] For extra income, he produced short stories for the Christchurch newspapers.[12]

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[1] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 108.
[2] Ibid., 108.
[3] Ibid.
[4] "Matriculation Examination," *Press*, 27 January 1916, 7.
Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 75. 'Normal School'
[5] "Recruiting," *Sun (Christchruch)*, 29 April 1916, 2.
Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[6] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 152.
[7] "Teachers' Examinations," *Press*, 4 March 1914, 7. Gwen 'Passed in two subjects' for Class C.
"Teachers' Examinations [Class C]," *Press*, 6 March 1915, 3. Gwen 'Passed in five subjects' for Class C.
"New Zealand University List of Awards," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 30 May 1917, 11. Gwen passed 'Proficiency Certificates'.
[8] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 111.
[9] Ibid., 111-119.
[10] Ibid., 113-118
[11] "Page 15 Advertisements Column 4 [Teacher's "D" Examination]," *Press*, 28 May 1921, 15.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 152.
[12] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David." Crawford also went by the pseudonym 'Touchstone', it is difficult to establish exactly when the first articles appeared.

During their time at College Gwen and Crawford were known as 'boy and girl friends' noted by Mills.[13] Gwen described the relationship as 'a sort of intellectual give and take friendship (and our particularly intellectual circle).'[14] 'We seemed just to keep each other jollied along until we were ready to begin to live' wrote Gwen.[15] In finding Oxford by 1921, Gwen settled into her teaching role, she remained in contact with Crawford, then in 1923 he followed her steps to Oxford School. These years were fraught with personal challenges, the era coincided with what Robert Ellwood describes as the post war 'silver age of spiritualism'.[16] In this postwar milieu, spirituality could be seen as a natural science. Visiting spiritualist Arthur Conan Doyle, offered his Christchurch audience a sense of peaceful communication with loved soldiers lost in European battles on sea and soil.[17] Importantly, the spiritual and natural worlds found a place in education. From theosophical roots, Maria Montessori's educational philosophy motivated interest in the Dominion through Beatrice Ensor's promotional work encouraged by Annie Besant. Connected to Ensor's 'homeland' circle was Scottish educationist Alexander Sutherland Neill, an important role model for Crawford and Gwen by this time. With vested interests in social development, Charles and Elizabeth Chilton, Elizabeth Taylor, James Shelley, Noelene Bruce, Dorothy Baster, Gwen, and Crawford all appear to have shared an affiliation for new education. Never too far from their 'intellectual circle', Crawford and Gwen developed their ideas for new education in Oxford. Their shared interests in literature and drama were encouraged by Shelley and John Condliffe. Both men helped to organise the Dominion's first WEA Summer School in Oxford towards the close of 1920 to early 1921. This chapter looks at the themes that shaped the heart of their intellectual circle during the early to post war years as education developed around European ideas of spirituality.

Theosophy

Crawford and Gwen were part of a gradual movement of European ideas to the Dominion through educational philosophies associated with Theosophy. In 1915, while both attended teaching pathways in Christchurch, Annie Besant was in her fifth year of presidency with the Theosophical Society in Adyar, India.[18] That year Besant set up the Theosophical Education Trust (TET) in both India and Britain.[19] Prompted by World War One, she also set up an international forum for educationists

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[13] Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset," 16.
[14] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 112. In her autobiography Gwen shared a photograph taken in 1915 of Crawford alongside a group of students dressed in academic robes at the Training college.
[15] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[16] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 53.
[17] Ibid., 53-57.
[18] Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography*.
[19] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 25.

known as the Theosophical Fraternity in Education (TFE).[20] By 1921 the Fraternity were better known internationally as the New Education Fellowship (NEF), in some small way it existed in the Dominion by then.[21] Gwen described how these early intellectual exchanges were later integral to the NEF:

> When the "New Education" with its emphasis on self-expression, and less on rigid routines and formalism, became accepted among educationists, it was necessary to form discussion groups among teachers and parents to clarify their ideas. The New Education Fellowship was then a widely supported organisation for this purpose and had branches in the main cities in New Zealand.[22]

The TFE was promoted by British theosophist Beatrice Ensor (de Normann), Gwen and Crawford's later work with the fellowship eventually led to close ties with Ensor.[23] As director of Besant's earlier TET, Ensor established the Garden City Theosophical School at Letchworth in 1915.[24] Along similar theosophical principles under Ensor's guidance, The King Arthur School (Edinburgh) was established in 1918.[25] By 1919 the Vasanta Garden School established in Auckland.[26] With Ensor as a remote mentor, the TFE functioned in the Dominion through Vasanta and various theosophical societies by the close of 1919, if not earlier as noted by Middleton.[27] The early theosophical schools were based on open-air learning, nature studies, and arts-based topics based on Montessorian philosophy.[28]

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[20] Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," 736.

May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 171.

Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," 50.

[21] "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," 49-50.

[22] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 30-31.

[23] Abbiss, "The "New Education Fellowship" in New Zealand: Its Activity and Influence in the 1930s and 1940s."

Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 25.

[24] Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950," 72.

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 386-388.

Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938." 47. Letchworth and Brackenhill schools were affiliated with the NZ TET.

[25] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 386-388.

[26] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 115.

[27] "Ideals in Education [Theosophical Society's Aims]," *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 4 November 1919, 3.

Middleton, "New Zealand Theosophists in "New Education" Networks, 1880s-1938," 42.

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 71. Adams and Abbiss both suggest 1920s for earliest NEF group in New Zealand.

[28] "Theosophy World: Ts-Adyar Resource Site," (Adyar, India: The Theosophical Society International, 2024).

Importantly, Montessori's ideas reached Christchurch earlier, through the kindergarten and crèche system to be discussed in more detail shortly.

During the early 1900s, new education floated in an atmosphere of theosophical thought, theosophical theory in education was available locally through print literature as discussed earlier. Ensor's journal *Education for the New Era: an International Quarterly Journal for the Promotion of Reconstruction in Education*, became the *New Era* and main publication for the NEF co-edited with Alexander Neill.[29] Crawford and Gwen later contributed to *New Era*, Crawford edited the New Zealand edition for Ensor.[30] Prior to that, educationists in the Dominion could find snippets on New Education in their local Theosophical Society magazine, *Theosophy in New Zealand* (*TNZ*).[31] The 1917 edition of *TNZ* included quotes from Neill who's interest in progressive education remained neutral towards theosophical theory.[32] Neill did not easily tolerate Ensor's zest for the psychological practice of 'auto-suggestion' made popular by French pharmacist Émile Coué.[33] Crawford would later experiment with Coué's ideas. While Neill was open to Theosophy, he felt auto-suggestion contrasted with the high value he placed on complete freedom in education, as a result Neill broke away from Ensor's NEF.[34] Around this time, Shelley and Findlay experimented with Herbartian, Froebelian, and Montessorian ideas in connection with the Fielden School, under the auspices of the Manchester University Teachers College.[35]

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 385.

[29] "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 6.

Richard Bailey, *A.S. Neill*, Bloomsbury Library of Educational Thought (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014 [2013]), 35.

Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 45. Beeby suggests that the ideas of A S Neill 'may have percolated to an enlightened minority in New Zealand by 1920 but, except for Dorothy Baster and occasional references from Aschman, there was no sign of it in our training college.'

[30] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937."

[31] Ibid., 420-423.

[32] Ibid., 420-424.

[33] Johathan Croall, "The New Era," 1 ed., *Neill of Summerhill, The Permanent Rebel* (London: Routledge, 1983 [2013]), 108-109.

[34] Bailey, *A.S. Neill*, 31-58.

Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950," 125-126, 143. Neill established Summerhill School in England.

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 425.

Croall, "The New Era," 108-109.

[35] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 41-52.

Historians connect Theosophy to imperialism and pacifism in the Dominion in various ways.[36] The overall imperialism of Theosophy was suggested by René Guénon in 1945.[37] More recently historians consider gaps in research associated with the theosophical idea of a 'universal culture', especially where early European theosophists appealed to British colonies through orientalism.[38] Theosophical perspectives entangled Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Neo-Platonism, for positive social progression.[39] Linked to Theosophy are Aryan and eugenicist debates associated with race as described by Ellwood and Andrew Wood who both link these ideas to the 'New Zealand Myth'.[40] Edward Tregear's controversial book, *The Aryan Maori,* is described by Ellwood as a theosophical moment in Tregear's intellectual history that was later 'snuffed out' by his recognition of orientalism.[41] As an early member of the Wellington Theosophical Society, Tregear also wrote *Fairy Tales and Folk Lore of New Zealand and the South Seas (1891).*[42] The imperialism within Tregear's ideology has been discussed in Belgrave's assessment of Tregear's perspectives alongside Macmillan Brown's.[43] Importantly, Tregear and George Hogben were connected through Wellington's Philosophical Society.[44] The question is, how far and at what point were Crawford and Gwen immersed in this early atmosphere of theosophical thought, if at all? Helen May suggests Gwen was one of the first in the Dominion to adopt new education principles during the early 1920s.[45] Gwen understood theosophical theory reasonably well, and reasonably early on it seems.

Gwen's time at Christchurch Teacher's College was particularly stimulating, giving her further insight to new ideas, such as those of Charles Chilton and his wife Elizabeth. In her biography, Gwen included an image of the Chilton's during a Botany field trip in 1914.[46] At Canterbury College, Gwen and her fellow students saw themselves as part of a modern generation with new ideas that separated them from their older teachers:

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[36] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 114-115.
Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 71-75.
[37] Guenon, "Theosophism," 311-322.
[38] Julian Strube, "Theosophy, Race, and the Study of Esotericism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 86, no. 4 (2021): 1180-1189.
[39] Krämer Hans Martin and Strube Julian, Theosophy across Boundaries: Transcultural and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Modern Esoteric Movement, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=2499873&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306.
[40] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 104.
Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 39-41.
[41] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 102-105.
[42] Ibid., 101.
Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 39-41.
[43] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown."
[44] Roth, *George Hogben a Biography*, 118.
[45] May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 176-177.
[46] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 110.

> The friendliness of Teachers' College was a new experience. […] We realised too, that except in years, we were the equals of our own tutors in understanding, or in intellect, and that we had the capacity and the freedom to question, to criticise, to accept or reject as we pleased. Some of us, in fact, considered ourselves arrogantly as superior beings. […] We had Youths arrogance and opportunity to give expression to our ideas for the first time in our lives. We made life-long friends in the exchange of ideas and the sharing of companionship.[47]

Gwen's relationship with the Chilton's appears based on a mutual understanding of philosophical ideas associated with the role of nature in new education. The Chilton's were humanists, from several accounts it appears Charles was well associated with Christian socialist intellectual circles in Christchurch, hence his early affiliation with the WEA.[48] He was also a long-standing supporter of Garden City education in Christchurch:[49]

> Dr Chilton in his address said the members of the Beautifying Association should acquire a knowledge and love of the beauties of Nature, and he recommended the reading of Ruskin as a good start towards such and acquisition.[50]

Chilton's wife Elizabeth assisted Elizabeth Taylor in the development of the Christchurch Kindergarten and Creche Association.[51] Elizabeth was married to Christchurch's Mayor Tommy Taylor.[52] Associated with prohibition and temperance circles, Tommy and Elizabeth Taylor appeared as good friends of Frederick and Clara Alley.[53] May suggests the Christchurch Training College took some interest in Elizabeth Taylor's early work, particularly the adoption of Froebelian philosophy akin with learning through the joy of song, artwork, games and nature.[54] By 1914 Taylor included aesthetics in her kindergarten philosophy where 'the beauties of Nature' were introduced into the

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[47] Ibid., 111.

[48] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 15-16.

[49] "The Garden City, a Porgramme for Improvement," *Lyttelton Times*, 27 April 1911, 3.
"Obituary [Charles Chilton]," *Press*, 26 October 1929, 17.

[50] "Town and Country," *Lyttelton Times*, 22 August 1913, 6.

[51] "The Little One's," *Lyttelton Times*, 26 September 1913, 2.
"Women's Corner; Daffodil Day," *Press*, 11 September 1917, 2.
May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 78, 99.

[52] "Death of Mr T. E. Taylor M.P.," *Star (Christchurch)*, 28 July 1911, 4.
"Death of Mr Taylor," *New Zealand Times*, 28 July 1911, 1.
"Obituary the Hon. L. M. Isitt," *Press*, 30 July 1937, 12.

[53] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 46, 55.
"Council of Women," *Press*, 11 May 1950, 2.

[54] May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 99-100.
"A New Kindergarten," *Lyttelton Times*, 3 October 1911, 8.
"Kindergarten Work," *Lyttelton Times*, 14 December 1916, 5.
Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s," 19. Turbott connects Froebelian philosophy with Anthroposophy in the Christchurch kindergarten movement as early as 1901.

curriculum to enhance the 'natural use of hands and eyes' – to increase fine motor skills.[55] Impressed by an informal Montessori demonstration in 1915, the two Elizabeth's incorporated Montessorian philosophy in their Kindergarten methodology. [56] Elizabeth Taylor was instrumental in promoting the Montessori system of education within the WEA.[57] Her lectures appear to have taken place in 1916 under the guidance of Charles Chilton acting WEA president at the time.[58] Taylor's involvement in the WEA continued the following year as Montessorian methodology became 'part' of the WEA 'system', noted as beneficial not only for children, but also for adults, on a national scale.[59]

During the war years, the whole enterprise could be given a patriotic edge, by 1917 Taylor's kindergarten was described in the *Sun* as 'patriotic work second to none'.[60] Charles Chilton stated a year earlier: 'Nothing should be conducted in this country at present that did not help to win the war'.[61] Patriotic rituals played out in Taylor's kindergarten formalities during that time.[62] Roger Openshaw suggests education, including the kindergarten movement, committed to pacifism much later between 1929 and 1934.[63] Dougherty described Elizabeth as a 'campaigner on issues from prohibition to peace' fitting with this gradual change.[64] In 1921 Taylor stepped down from her role as kindergarten president, and by 1928 she actively promoted world peace.[65] Gwen's inherent interest in new ideas around education appear to have been influenced by both Taylor and Chilton's ideas and vice versa. While Gwen's ideas and approaches to education are more easily located through later connections in education, these earlier connections are very important.

Pacifism

Gwen appeared as an early pacifist, she found patriotic rituals rather 'peculiar rules'.[66] She described the death of her brother Eric during World War One as her 'most acute experience'.[67] For Gwen, Eric's passing epitomised a war void of intelligent reasoning for the immensity of lives taken. Gwen described the empathy and understanding offered by Crawford, his kindness helped her to accept grief

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[55] "Kindergarten Work," *Lyttelton Times*, 23 December 1914, 11.
[56] Chryssa, "For Women Folk; a Montessori at Home," *Star (Christchurch)*, 19 November 1915, 7.
[57] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 29.
[58] "W.E.A," *Star (Christchurch)*, 1 September 1916, 7.
[59] Idealist, ibid., 8 September, 7.
[60] "Our Free Kindergartens, Doing Patriotic Work," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 29 March 1917, 4.
[61] "Citizens Crusade," *Lyttelton Times*, 30 October 1916, 5.
[62] "A Kindergarten Birthday "Sunbeam" Celebrations," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 25 September 1915, 7.
[63] Openshaw, "New Zealand Primary Schools and the Growth of Internationalism and Anti-War Feeling 1929 - 1934."
[64] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 29.
[65] May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 78.
"[Obituary] Called Home, Mrs T E Taylor," *White Ribbon* 47, no. 4 (1941): 5.
[66] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*. 94, 111.
[67] Ibid., 111.

alongside the ethical dilemma of pacifism at the time.[68] E P Malone and later Openshaw, consider the progression of anti-war sentiment during New Zealand's interwar period was freshened by an awareness around child welfare.[69] Gwen did not hold back when she described physical abuse in primary schools, particularly when one Head Master's traumatic experience of war resurfaced irrepressibly as violence toward a primary school pupil.[70] Unchecked Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome in educational settings (or anywhere else), most likely encouraged pacifist views in bystanders, victims and possibly the aggressors as victims of war.[71] When the 1921 Education Act required teachers sign a patriotic 'Oath of Allegiance', both Gwen and Crawford kept pacifist or neutral perspectives under the radar.[72] Crawford's pacifism can be roughly measured by later newspaper articles on peace time education, he and Gwen openly illustrated pacifist views by at least 1937.[73] Their pacifist perspectives may have been influenced by their earlier interest in the work of Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw. Shaw's controversial essay *'Common Sense About the War*' was seen at the time as anti-war propaganda.[74]

Literature, Drama and a 'Hopeful Spirit'

Crawford and Gwen's interest in Shaw's writing and zest for drama arrived alongside Shelley as the newly appointed Director of Education at Canterbury College in 1920. By this time the two young friends were three years out from Teachers College having graduated at the close of 1916. Both appear to have continued studies and held strong social ties with Canterbury College. Crawford regularly borrowed books from the College Library.[75] The 'severe illness' which resulted in a serious setback with arthritis, left Crawford permanently confronted with mobility issues noted by Gwen.[76] 'The breakdown drove him to the [home] bookshelves, which were well filled, as his family were bookish' wrote Tom Mills.[77] Gwen visited Crawford regularly during his recuperation. When Shelley introduced the ideas of Scottish educationist Alexander Neill and plays by Shaw to Gwen, she enthusiastically shared the books with Crawford:

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Malone, "The New Zealand School Journal and the Imperial Ideology."
Openshaw, "New Zealand Primary Schools and the Growth of Internationalism and Anti-War Feeling 1929 - 1934."
Government, "Child Welfare Act of 1925, 16 Geo V, No. 22."

[70] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 166-167.

[71] War Nerves, "Ex-Soldier Teachers," *National Education* 11, no. 115 (1929): 292.

[72] N Z Government, "Education Amendment Act of 1921, No. 27," New Zealand, Section 11.1.
"North Canterbury [Oxford]," *Press*, 28 April 1925, 3.

[73] "No More War, Two Peace Demonstrations," *Press*, 12 November 1928, 10.
"Adult Education," *North Canterbury Gazette*, 24 August 1937, 7.

[74] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 111.
George Bernard Shaw, "Common Sense About the War," *Current History* 1, no. 1 (1914).

[75] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."

[76] Ibid. See Gwen's notes for '1915-1916', no page numbers.

[77] Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset," 16.

> I took A.S. Neill to Crawford, we read it together the "Dominie's Log" because it was what teaching should be, not as it had been perceived by us. He [Crawford] later read Pygmalion […] as Shaw wrote, so we read, heralding each play with excitement while the city recovered from the war and the flu epidemic. [78]

'He [Shelley] really lifted the lid off drama and poetry' wrote Gwen, she described his 'dynamic' teaching style, he 'contributed to bring new horizons to those who had been withering in the shadows of life'.[79] A deep sense of release from the previous years of war, grief, and influenza had distracted Gwen from her intended Bachelor of Arts degree: 'I danced and played the nights and days away to the detriment of my study'.[80] Carter's citation of R.M Burdon alludes to the possibility Gwen first met Shelley through Shelley's drama reading group, particularly if Gwen was one of Shelley's 'regular attendants' from which the drama society developed.[81] The *Christchurch Star* described Gwen's role in Hankin's drama *The Two Mr Wetherby's* produced by Shelley, the play was celebrated as 'a first' for the Canterbury College Drama Society.[82] Around this time Gwen found her niche in production work, but continued teaching at Christchurch East School.[83] Similarly, Crawford experimented with dramatic writing, his play 'The Shakespeare Society' took form as a theatrical production for pupils at Binzian Private School in Cashmere.[84] Both Crawford and Gwen were greatly influenced by Shelley's arts-based intellectuality, they would later find a way to include literature and drama in the Oxford experiment.[85]

In her reflection of December 1920, Gwen wrote 'a hopeful spirit was gradually emerging':

> This was the time of the slow recovery from the after-effects of the First World War. The loss of manpower and the subsequent lowering of the birth rate, then the epidemic of 1918 which followed the war, all caused a depression hard to surmount.[86]

The Christchurch *Sun* noted: 'The Churches are pursuing the spiritualists with increasing vigour because the agony of war has sent thousands of uncomforted adherents over to the temples of spiritualism'.[87] Christchurch's Bishop Julius intuitively felt the movement was just a phase, intending

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[78] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 47. Neill's teaching methods were well known to James Shelley.
[79] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," From 128.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 126.
[80] *Sunshine and Shadow*, 123.
[81] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 171.
[82] "College Drama," *Star (Christchurch)*, 21 September 1921, 8.
Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 123-124.
[83] "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 123-124.
[84] "Women's Corner," *Press*, 18 December 1922, 2.
"Page 1 Advertisements Column 7," *Ashburton Guardian*, 25 March 1922, 1.
[85] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 14.
[86] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 125.
[87] "Knocking on the Door," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 16 December 1920, 6.

it would pass with time.[88] This was the beginning of 'the silver age of spiritualism' described by Ellwood as a response to the insurmountable grief generated by the war:

> No figure brought it more into the news, or better epitomized what might be called the silver age of spiritualism, the 1920's, than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, and an avid writer and speaker on behalf of the spirit faith after the war. […] In the 1920s many of his audience undoubtedly shared with Doyle the pain of similar, still fresh losses to the demons of battle.[89]

Doyle's visit to Christchurch in December 1920 captivated the media, so did Shelley's more permanent arrival in the city five months earlier. Both men unpacked their missions for social change.[90] Both advertised lectures in the *Lyttelton Times*.[91] Doyle addressed an enthusiastic audience at the Theatre Royal with his lecture on 'Death and the Hereafter, the New Revelation'.[92] Directly underneath Doyle's advertisement was Shelley's up-and-coming WEA lecture on 'Bernard Shaw, The Jester' to be held at the Trades Hall. Notably, Shaw is said to have introduced Annie Besant to socialism much earlier.[93] Along theosophical lines, Shelley appeared to promote nature studies in primary schools. His vision for a Findlay style demonstration school had just been thwarted by the Dominion's Education Board.[94] The *Times* appeared more enthusiastic; they compared his 'sane' new idea in education with Doyle's idea of a 'New Revelation':

> Chiming appropriately with the complaint of our distinguished visitor, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, that modern life is tending to become so complex that nobody can understand things, comes the declaration of Professor Shelley in favour of bringing New Zealand's education system into closer relation with the primary facts of existence. [95]

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[88] "Bishop Julius," *Press*, 18 December 1920, 2.

[89] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 53, 54.

Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*. 199-205. Wood adds further context around Doyle's popular visit to Christchurch alongside spiritualism in Christchurch city during the 1920s.

[90] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 98.

[91] "Advertisements," *Lyttelton Times*, 11 December 1920, 2.

[92] "The New Revelation," *Press*, 16 December 1920, 6.

Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*. 199-205. For Conan Doyle tour details in Christchurch and wider Dominion.

[93] Annie Wood Besant, "Socialism," *Annie Besant: An Autobiography* (Cambridge University Press, 1893), https://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09011a&AN=mul.oai.edge.massey.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001086.6ed2d1c5.ef94.5325.ad83.1b01a14938e9&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306

http://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511910418.

Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 124-125. 'Shaw - who had been a close friend of Annie Besant before she became a Theosophist'.

Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 65.

[94] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*.

Tributes to Professor James Shelley, 00:26:41.

[95] "Principals of Education," *Lyttelton Times*, 16 December 1920, 6.

Shelley's entanglement with the 'silver age of spiritualism' appears evident through the ongoing lectures he offered to the Theosophical Society soon after his arrival in Christchurch.[96] An atmosphere of theosophical thought was sparked when Doyle proclaimed fairies had been photographed by children in a Cottingley Garden (Yorkshire), Doyle later wrote a book on the topic.[97] The extraordinary declaration triggered a Dominion wide media response. Some Christchurch Theosophists believed the story to be true, it aligned with European folkloric traditions, and Besant's teachings. The *Press* however, remained sceptical.[98] A representative of the British Theosophical Society at the time, investigated the images and concluded the photographs were indeed genuine.[99] More recently, Ellwood offers some scepticism: 'Undoubtedly Doyle was taken in a good deal more than he should have been, or than Holmes would have stood for.'[100] When Doyle's book, *The Coming of the Fairies,* appeared in 1922, fairy sightings in the Dominion escalated, 'fairy gardeners', 'fairy dogs' and even 'fairy horsemen' were reported by the *Press*.[101] A decade earlier, Scholar and Theosophist, Walter Evans-Wentz wrote an extensive thesis on folk lore in Celtic traditions.[102] The fairy gardeners, dogs and horsemen can be related to Irish fairy folk known as the 'Gentry' or in Scottish traditions, 'The Good People'.[103] Overall, the 'silver age of spiritualism' in Christchurch during the early 1920s adds wider context to Gwen and Crawford's affiliation with James Shelley at Canterbury College. Importantly, spirituality in the post-war context encouraged a renewed sense of belonging to the homeland. As Shelley promoted European trends in education through theosophical thought, the 'Gentry' and 'Good People' were in some small way a part of that narrative.

Spirituality and Belonging

Jenkins suggests NEF teaching methods (popular during the early 1920s) maintained that children should be free to express their 'spiritual energy' and 'spiritual powers' as part of the 'Universal

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[96] "Advertisements," *Star (Christchurch)*, 26 February 1921, 8.
Edward Branscombe, "Correspondence," *Press*, 1 April 1921. 7.
"Advertisements," ibid., 10 November 1934, 27.
"Social Life and Culture," *Press*, 12 November 1934, 13.
"Lecture by Professor Shelley," *Press*, 11 May 1935, 18.
[97] "A Fairy Story," *Star (Christchurch)*, 27 November 1920, 9.
[98] N Royds, "Fairies," *Press*, 1 December 1920, 7.
J R Hervey, ibid.
[99] "Snapping" Fairies," *Star (Christchurch)*, 29 January 1921, 2.
[100] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 56. Ellwood notes Doyle's popular publication *Sherlock Holmes*.
Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 203-205. Wood notes Doyle's 'gullibility'.
[101] "The Coming of the Fairies," *Press*, 30 October 1922, 6.
[102] Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, "The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries" (PhD Thesis, Oxford, 1911).
[103] Ibid., 1-16. 'Gentry' and 'Good People' in Celtic traditions: Fairy Dog – Scottish tradition page 40; Fairy Gardeners – Irish tradition related to the 1846-7 famine thought by some to have been caused by fairies, page 43; Fairy Horsemen – Irish tradition related to the Gentry huntsman, page 56.

Brotherhood'.[104] As an experienced teacher, Gwen noticed apathy in her young pupils at Oxford, their sense of belonging to the school was inhibited by their dank, dour classrooms.[105] To lighten spirits, and encourage belonging, Gwen took her infants outside in search of fairies.[106] Years later, school leaver Betty Gough discovered Gwen's name etched into a wooden desk at Canterbury College, the discovery compelled Gough to write to her old teacher.[107] In the letter Gough described her 'feeling of awe and wonder' when 'Miss Alley' (Gwen) took the class outdoors to see 'a ring of mushrooms' where 'fairy dancers' gathered to 'party'. 'Miss Alley' then read us 'a story about the party' wrote Gough.[108] Gwen encouraged the school to produce a 'fairy comedy' entitled 'Make Believe Land', the production, managed solely by Gwen, was reported in the *Press* as 'excellent'.[109] Crawford later composed a short poem about fairies for the children's corner of the *Christchurch Sun* and *Hawera Star.*[110] The fairies dressed in their 'aster petals trimmed with thistle-down', appeared somewhat European. Crawford's poetic prose was akin with the 'idealised' poetic world of 'Georgian verse' described by Hilliard as 'its own rarefied and almost self-contained poetic realm' containing 'sylphs and elves then popular in English poetry.'[111] Crawford's idea it seems, was to encourage family time, where children could form a sense of belonging with the natural world and local topography. These ideas in education appear different to those described in David Cossgrove's Fairy Scouts booklet where European folk lore merged with ideas of Māori mythology, which to a degree, acknowledged the indigenous world.[112] Cosgrove, a Scottish teacher at Tuahiwi Native School, incorporated elements of the Māori world into the early scouting syllabus.[113] Similarly, Georgian literary styles dabbled in both worlds.[114] The concept of belonging might link with these ideas. Gwen and Crawford's picnicking and partying flapper-like fairies in motor cars might have induced a sense of belonging to the European world. Cossgrove's scouting fairy realm might have induced a sense of belonging somewhere between the Māori and European worlds. Hilliard argues the 'high point' of the 'Georgian tradition' included a 'literary affect' to 'transform the indigenous into Pakeha cultural

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[104] Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950," 74.

[105] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 141-145.

[106] Betty Gough, "A Happy Discovery," in *Sunshine and Shadow: An Autobiography*, ed. Gwendolen L. Somerset and Naomi Morten (Auckland: New Zealand Play Center Federation, 1988), 150-151.

[107] Ibid., 150.

[108] Ibid., 151.

[109] "The Country," *Press*, 28 June 1922, 3.

[110] H C D Somerset, "Picnicking," *Hawera Star*, 22 May 1926, 18.

[111] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, 47-50.

[112] "Fairy Scout of New Zealand," *Star (Christchurch)*, 15 February 1919, 6. Cossgrove's book *Nga Toro Turehu – The Fairy Scouts of New Zealand*, was published in 1918 by The Lyttleton Times Company Limited.

[113] Helen Alison Dollery, "'Making Happy, Healthy, Helpful Citizens': The New Zealand Scouting and Guiding Movements as Promulgators of Active Citizenship, C.1908-1980." (PhD Thesis, Massey University, 2012), 85.

[114] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, 46. Hilliard refers to Quentin Pope's 1930 anthology, *Kowai Gold.*

property.'[115] He also noted, 'A writer is always in some way writing within a tradition, and in a sense that tradition itself "writes" *through* the poet.'[116] If *Littledene* resides in a Georgian atmosphere or tradition, the extensive Māori world (surrounding Oxford) appears shrouded by Crawford's stronger spiritual connection to the European homeland.[117] The two worlds are clearly differentiated, something other than cultural appropriation is happening here.

It is difficult to know how far Crawford and Gwen were influenced by Theosophy outside early NEF principles. In her autobiography, Gwen shared some of her vivid precognitive dreams and intuitions.[118] Many were associated with the process of life, and relationships. As discussed earlier, Crawford supported Gwen through the severe grieving process associated with her brother's death. Crawford's reflection on grief during his early childhood was illustrated through an inherited experience detailing the intermediary states of death. Crawford was affiliated with the Anglican Church in Christchurch, he acquired an Anglican 'Licence to preach and interpret' wrote Gwen.[119] He later became Grand Master for the Masonic Lodge in Oxford.[120] Theosophy, while tied to Christianity, is non-denominational, it draws on universal philosophical and religious concepts, reincarnation is fundamental to the teachings.[121] A S Neill touched on the concept of reincarnation in *TNZ* magazine in 1917.[122] When déjà vu captivated one of Gwen's young pupils at Oxford in 1937,

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[115] Ibid., 48-49.

[116] Ibid., 50.

[117] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 2.

Te Rūnanga Ngāi Tahu, "Tawera Native Reserve 897," (Te Wai Pounamu: Kā Huru Manu: The Ngāi Tahu Atlas Online, 2023).

"Tawera Native Reserve 18776: Native Land Court Award 1868: Occupational Reserve," (Te Wai Pounamu: Kā Huru Manu; The Ngāi Tahu Atlas Online, 2023).

"Oxford Native Reserves: Kaiapoi Native Reserves Act 1877: Occupational Reserve," (Te Wai Pounamu: Kā Huru Manu; The Ngāi Tahu Atlas Online, 2023). The Kā Huru Manu Atlas highlights the number of Māori Reserves located in the Oxford district; all share similar political narratives associated with Land Court developments since 1868.

Michael. Belgrave, *Historical Frictions: Maori Claims and Reinvented Histories* (Auckland University Press, 2013), 368-69. Belgrave details how changes in 'seeing' the long-term function ability of Māori reserves were not fully realised by the Waitangi Tribunal until 1991.

[118] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 94-95, 145, 199.

[119] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 15.

Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David." Crawford was a choir boy for St Paul's Papanui. Gwen noted that: 'His plays and youth work all centred around the church' from 1905 to 1913.

[120] Crawford was Grand Master for 'Lodge Tawera' in Oxford (Canterbury) 1935.

Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*.

Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*. Ellwood and later Wood provide discussions on Freemasonry in New Zealand and its connection to esoteric traditions.

[121] Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s." Turbott discusses the connection between Anglicanism and Anthroposophy in the Dominion.

Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950," 71.

[122] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 424.

she accepted without judgement her pupils proclamation he had been a 'caterpillar' in a past life.[123] 'A small incident' such as this, wrote Gwen, 'could renew the spirit.'[124] The 'caterpillar' event might have revealed to Gwen her pupil's strong sense of belonging to the school, or simply some forward momentum in new education by then. In his critique on Theosophy, René Guénon suggested the evolutionary concept of reincarnation appealed to leftist thinkers:

> Theosophism attaches considerable importance to the characteristically Western and modern notion of "evolution," and like most of the branches of Spiritualism, with which it is fairly closely connected through its origins, it associates this idea with that of "reincarnation." The latter conception seems to have first made its appearance among some of the socialist dreamers of the first half of the nineteenth century.[125]

Either way, Crawford and Gwen encouraged spirituality in alignment with individualism akin with NEF principles for higher learning.

Early Publishing

Beeby noted the scarcity of literary learning resources in Christchurch schools throughout the early 1900s.[126] During her early teaching career at Oxford, Gwen published primary education resources, the texts appear to have vanished over time, but the connections they reveal are significant:

> I now [c1922] wrote several small booklets (printed by L.M. Isitt & Co Christchurch). These included *The Tree Dwellers*, *The Cave Men*, and *Rahu the Maori Boy*. These books were widely used in schools I believe until the number printed ran out, and a fire destroyed L.M. Isitt's book shop.[127]

Gwen's publications appear to have been directly inspired by American educator and writer Katharine Elizabeth Dopp, who's earlier works include *The Tree Dwellers* (1904), and several books entitled *Cave Men* (1904-1906).[128] While Dopp's books are easily accessible, Gwen's have not come to light. With only Dopp's publications available to date, it is difficult to assess the similarity between Gwen's and Dopp's writing, other than identical titles. The fire Gwen described, did not destroy Isitt's bookshop, but merely damaged the storeroom, there is a high possibility some of her books survived, alongside the ones 'widely used in schools'.[129]

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[123] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 182.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Guenon, "Theosophism," 319.
[126] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 6-32, 106. Books on education were particularly 'scarce' during the depression years.
[127] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 148.
[128] Katharine Elizabeth Dopp, The Tree Dwellers, (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Rand McNaily & Company, 2021 [1904,1930]), https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/25098/pg25098-images.html.
The Early Cave-Men, (Chicago, New York, London: Rand McNaily & Company, 2015 (1904)), https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/50057/pg50057-images.html.
[129] "Isitt's Fire Reports Exaggerated," *Dominion*, 27 March 1926, 5.

While Crawford parked teaching for a while, he pushed forward with study, private coaching, and writing, leaving a decent paper trail. This shows his ability to work through personal health challenges. During his time at Canterbury, Crawford worked as editor for the *Recorder*, an official student periodical.[130] Available newspaper sources between 1919 and 1923 illustrated Crawford's creative capacity for writing both fiction and non-fiction. He achieved first place in a local writing competition in 1919, his quirky short story *Madeline Waits*, highlighted patience, commitment, and optimism.[131] Possibly a cathartic process for Crawford at the time, later articles from 1922, reflected Crawford's ability to positively channel his experience with arthritis. Articles included, *Learning Pains, The Educational Palsy*.[132] A month later *Mental Healing - The Need for Love of Living* was advertised in the Star.[133] Other works produced that same year included *The Portrait of Mr Du Getme* and *Measuring the Intelligence, Its Education and Economic Value*.[134] The following year, with Shelley's support, Crawford actively established and became president of the Papanui Literary Society.[135] Within six months the popular venture generated a 60 strong membership.[136] These early ventures in publishing and literature highlight Crawford and Gwen's abilities in adapting education around the needs of the community.

Psychology and Dance

Helen May connected Gwen's style of teaching with Dorothy Baster, one of the earliest known, yet reasonably invisible teachers to have inspired 'radical' changes in New Zealand primary education.[137] Baster arrived in Christchurch from England in 1920, her appointment at the Normal School infant department was recommended by Findlay (who also recommended Shelley's appointment).[138] Baster's experience at Letchworth Garden City School (connected to Beatrice Ensor), included qualifications in Froebelian education.[139] Baster appears to have been affiliated with Shelley and the

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"Page 11 Advertisements Column 4," *Star (Christchurch)*, 27 March 1926, 11.

[130] James Collinge, "Somerset, Hugh Crawford Dixon, ," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (2000).

[131] Crawford Somerset, "Madeline Waits," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 20 December 1919, 1.

[132] "Page 6 Advertisements Column 1," *Star (Christchurch)*, 20 April 1922, 6.

[133] "Page 8 Advertisements Column 1 [A Special Article Every Day]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 24 May 1923, 8.

[134] H C D Somerset, "The Portrait of Mr Du Getme, the Sub-Editor's Assistant," ibid., 18 February 1922, 3.

"Page 1 Advertisements Column 7," 1.

[135] "Papanui Paragraphs [a Literary Society]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 12 May 1923, 10.

"Papanui Paragraphs," *Star (Christchurch)*, 26 May 1923, 13.

"Papanui Paragraphs," *Star (Christchurch)*, 10 November 1923, 8. James Shelley connection.

[136] "Papanui Paragraphs," 8.

[137] May, *The Discovery of Early Childhood: The Development of Services for the Care and Education of Very Young Children, Mid Eighteenth Century Europe to Mid Twentieth Century New Zealand*, 174-177.

Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 115.

[138] "Current Notes," *Press, Volume*, 6 December 1940, 2.

Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 83.

[139] "Personal," *Evening Star*, 6 March 1920, 6.

Canterbury WEA by 1920.[140] She gave various lectures and later provided the 'Kindergarten Union' with training courses.[141] Alongside Shelley and Beeby, Baster gave talks on 'Child Psychology' for the Christchurch Practical Psychology Club, her radio broadcasts connected children with music.[142] Crawford and Gwen were also early members of the Psychology Club it seems. Dorothy and Gwen most likely met each other through college or WEA activities.[143] Each appeared at a Canterbury Women's Club celebration for students and teachers in 1920.[144]

Both Baster and Gwen experienced similar frustrations in their attempts to use common school reading texts in accordance with new education.[145] Carter describes the popularity of Baster's 1920s 'Live Readers' with illustrations by Shelley.[146] Beeby wrote that Baster belonged to 'an enlightened minority', whose methodology was inspired by philosophy, psychology, and education reform.[147] Beeby is to be included here, as a Canterbury College student by 1920, he found Baster's methodology insightful:

> …she was one of the first people to introduce into New Zealand ideas that were to revolutionise infant teaching. We felt, even then, that educational history was being made. I, for one, got the beginnings of an idea that has strengthened with the years – that sweeping reforms in teaching methods must begin in the infant room, and that they are likely to be started by women.[148]

Shelley encouraged Baster's experimentation with the dance form known as Eurhythmics.[149] Swiss composer and educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze developed Eurhythmics with help from Swiss child psychologist Édouard Claparède.[150] While still in Christchurch Gwen attended dance tuition with W

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[140] "W.E.A. Review of Summer School," *Grey River Argus*, 13 January 1922, 6.

[141] "Kindergarten Union Refresher Course," *Press*, 6 May 1929, 2.

[142] "Psychology of the Child: A Modern Study: Lecture by Miss D.G. Baster," *Press*, 27 October 1933, 19.

"Page 1 Advertisements Column 7 [Meeting]," *Press*, 26 October 1933, 1.

"Rhythm for Juniors by Jean Hay," *Press*, 23 November 1960, 2.

[143] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 55. Dorothy Baster was possibly noted as 'Dorothy Baxter' sitting next to Paul and Mable Shelley in the Oxford Summer School image on page 55. This might suggest an early meeting between Gwen and Dorothy.

[144] "Women's Corner," *Press*, 2 December 1920, 2.

[145] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 115.

Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 148.

[146] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 115.

[147] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 44-46.

[148] Ibid., 41.

[149] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 115.

[150] Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, "Music, Joy and the School," in *Rhythm, Music & Education*, ed. Harold F Rubenstein (London: Dalcroze Society, 1967 [1921]).

Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s," 52-53, 68. Eurhythmics was also used in Anthroposophy circles.

S Wauchop, a specialist in Russian ballet.[151] Gwen trained girls in dance and produced her own shows.[152] The results were much to her father's disapproval:

> I invited my father to attend one of our shows. I danced solo in one ballet and with a male partner in a new and wonderful dance – the 'tango'. He [Father] was absolutely silent on the way home. As we reached our gate I ventured timidly "What did you think of it?" He stopped and looked straight at me and said with a set face "I thank God my mother is in her grave"; and my world fell to pieces.[153]
>
> He washed his hands of me, he said I had gone to the dogs.[154]

Frederick's puritanism may have directed Gwen away from the tango, and her city dance teacher, but dance, acting and performance continued to be important to her. Sadie and Roy Willberg observed Gwen's experimentation with eurhythmics at Oxford school.[155] Dalcroze used kinesthetics to enhance musical learning through movement.[156] Gwen suggested this was in line with her programme for older children:

> We begged for the use of the neglected piano from the Infant Room and began to sing and dance to the tunes that had led country children for centuries in dance and song. The day always began with songs – easy tunes, catchy rhythms and movement, and without those heavy boots they responded gaily… until relaxation and enjoyment replaced defensiveness and fear.[157]

Gwen found that eurhythmics positively reduced anxiety in children, thus it enhanced their concentration. This mirrors something of Taylor's application of Montessorian philosophy in WEA circles to assist adult learning.

Another influence for Gwen and Crawford during the early 1920s was Gwen's close friend Noeline Bruce. Noeline was an educated young woman, a flapper, feminist, singer, WEA tutor and member of the Society for Imperial Culture.[158] Noeline and Gwen epitomised the 'Modern Girl', a juxtaposition of modernity and Victorian traditions outlined by Rachael Bell and Natalie Smith.[159] Gwen described Noeline as a 'lasting influence'.[160] When Gwen took the teaching position at Oxford District High, she stepped back, or at least backwards and forwards, from the 'fast young set' in

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[151] "Dancing," *Press*, 10 April 1920, 2.
[152] *Edwards & Company - Pilot Episode*, 28:23.
[153] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 124.
[154] *Edwards & Company - Pilot Episode*, 29:38.
[155] Willberg and Willberg, "Foreword," vii.
Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*.
[156] Jaques-Dalcroze, "Music, Joy and the School."
[157] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 142.
[158] Ibid., 124.
[159] Bell, "Introduction, a Nation on the Cusp," 14.
Natalie Smith, "The Modern Girl," in *New Zealand between the Wars*, ed. Rachael Bell (Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University Press, 2017), 256-279.
[160] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 126.

Christchurch: ‘Freedom or escapism? I have often wondered’ she wrote.[161] Both Gwen and Noeline shared a love for music, both maintained contact with their older teachers at college where social evenings were chaperoned by Elizabeth Chilton and Margaret Hight. [162] Like Shelley, they socialised at Dixieland Cabaret.[163] Noeline appears to have belonged to a Jazz Club.[164] Both shared ideas in music and drama as applied to education.[165] After completing an MA in 1921, Noeline enrolled in John (Jack) Condliffe’s WEA economics class.[166] Her feminist ideas around education for girls, made Noeline a popular WEA tutor by 1922.[167] Noeline encouraged Gwen to attend the Oxford WEA Summer School in 1920.[168]

Oxford Summer School 1920 - 1921

The WEA established in the Dominion by 1915 with the intention to develop a global culture through educated workers.[169] With support from the Canterbury Progress League, the first WEA Summer School in Oxford was the incentive of Shelley (Director), and Condliffe (Director of Studies).[170] Both men served in the war, Condliffe arrived home to New Zealand, Shelley immigrated, both had similar aspirations to develop society through education.[171] Prior to Crawford and Gwen’s arrival in Oxford, the Canterbury WEA shortlisted Oxford as an ideal place with friendly locals to host its first Summer School.[172] Arthur Ballard Thompson’s overview of the WEA provides an early historical critique of newsletters and reports related to the Oxford Sumer School from December 1920 to January 1921.[173] English historian David Hall later recapped Thompson’s findings then added further analysis of WEA reports expanding on Thompson’s time frame.[174] Roy Shuker’s 1984 publication highlighted the individuality of various groups working within the wider WEA, he suggested a barrage of networks developed around the political and social norms within the association.[175] Pat Moloney and Kerry

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[161] Ibid., 127.
[162] Stella, "Women Folk," *Star (Christchurch)*, 6 March 1922, 9.
"Dance at Dixieland," ibid., 11 September. 10.
[163] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 167.
"Dance at Dixieland."
[164] "Jazz Club," *Press*, 16 August 1924, 2.
[165] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 1-22.
[166] "University Degree Examinations," *Press*, 19 March 1921, 8.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 124.
[167] Noeline Bruce, "Home Economics Association; Civic Education of Women. Women in the Past and Today," *Star (Christchurch)*, 6 July 1922, 10.
[168] *Sunshine and Shadow*, 125.
Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 3.
[169] "The Press," *Press*, 26 August 1920, 6.
[170] "Summer School," *Lyttelton Times*, 6 October 1920, 9.
[171] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 115.
[172] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 54.
[173] Thompson, *Adult Education in New Zealand: A Critical & Historical Survey*.
[174] Hall, *New Zealand Adult Education*.
[175] Shuker, *Educating the Workers?: A History of the Workers' Education [I.E. Educational] Association in New Zealand*.

Taylor's compilation of *Essays on Socialism in New Zealand,* adds further understanding around the Dominion's political context during the time, particularly Lyman Tower Sargent's essay on Christian socialism and utopian thinking.[176] Sociologist Chris Brickell describes the influence of the WEA in small communities, he alluded to variations in summer school courses during the interwar period.[177] The Oxford Summer School was primarily arts and science based, a social science lecture on *Industrial Unrest* was noted by Crawford, other topics included psychology, literature, drama, geology, botany and economics.[178] In a detailed critique of the Canterbury WEA, Ian Dougherty describes the origins of the Oxford Summer School:

> One of the many ideas [Jack] Condliffe brought back from England became a New Zealand WEA institution: the residential summer school, pioneered by the CWEA. The American concept had been taken up by the University Extension in England, and then the WEA, which held its first summer school at Oxford University [England] in 1910. [179]

Interestingly, the 'American concept' alluded to by Dougherty, appeared as a form of communal education once initiated by Methodists and popular in the USA at the time.[180] In 1968 Condliffe's brief history on the WEA described the associations uptake in British working-class communities, to its missionary-like campaigns in the Dominions.[181]

It appears Gwen, (and possibly Crawford), were two of 70 WEA and College students who took part in the Summer School, another 200 places were set aside for the Oxford community.[182]

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[176] Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor, eds., *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand* (University of Otago Press, 2002).

Lyman Tower Sargent, "New Zealand Utopian Literature: A Short History," in *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, eds., Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor (New Zealand: University of Otago Press, 2002), 169-178.

[177] Brickell, "Those 'Other Sociologists': Social Analysis before Sociology," 9.

[178] Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*, 98.

Hugh Crawford Dixon Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)."

[179] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 11-33.

[180] Victoria Case and Robert Ormond Case, *We Called It Culture: The Story of Chautauqua* (Garden City, New York, USA: Doubleday & Company Incorporated, 1948), 154-171. In response to 57 bookings, the Chautauqua arrived in New Zealand by 1918.

Thompson, *Adult Education in New Zealand: A Critical & Historical Survey*, 99. In describing the Oxford summer school, Thompson implicitly compared the event with 'miniature Chautauquas' in America.

Condliffe, *The Beginnings of the W.E.A*, 11. Condliffe suggested that British WEA founder, Albert Mansbridge, visited Chautauqua in the USA.

Anthony Dreaver, "'A Yankee Affair': The Chautauqua in Levin," *Historical Journal (Otaki Historical Society)* 17 (1994): 12-16. Dreaver describes the 1918 NZ itinerary for Levin.

"Advertisements Column 4 [Chautauqua]," *Sun (Christcurch)*, 31 January 1920, 11. An early WEA advertisement for tickets to a 'Chautauqua' in the year prior to the Oxford summer school.

[181] Condliffe, *The Beginnings of the W.E.A*.

[182] Hugh Crawford Dixon Somerset, "Brief Report on Education and the Community in Oxford New Zealand, 1923 - 1934," (1935), 2.

Tutorials were focused on 'Psychology, Literature, Drama, Education and Economics.'[183] The lecturers included Charles Chilton ('The Economics of Health'), Hight ('Historical Survey of Relation of Town & Country'), Condliffe, ('The Growth of English Towns'), Shelley ('Mediaeval Miracle and Mystery Plays'; 'Modern Miracle and Mystery Plays'; 'Art and Industry'), Robert Malcolm Laing ('Botany and Geology'), C F Salmond ('Human Nature and Personality'), J B Gabbatt and Millicent Jennings ('English Folk Songs').[184] Laing appeared well known to the group for his talks on nature studies and natural approaches to teaching.[185] Lectures by C W Russell ('Local Government'), A H Tocker ('Industrial Unrest') and J Johnson ('Currency and Credit') added further interest to the event.[186] The summer school promoted the concept of higher thinking and living as noted in the following article submitted to the *Star*:

> Work should be the application of men's activity on the resources of nature, to produce those things by which they live and by their proper use to give them sufficient time to develop those higher tastes and desires inherent in their nature. The beauty of nature, the art of music, the delight of good literature, the enjoying of beautiful paintings: in fact, the full expression of one's own life should be the desire of all.[187]

Crawford described the positive reception the summer school evoked in the Oxford community.[188] He saw Oxford as remote enough to have developed a 'strong community spirit' outside Christchurch. Similarly, Chris Hilliard described social development through the intellectual working relationships between academics and rural communities.[189] Likewise, Dougherty's account of the Oxford Summer School detailed important interactions between leading academics and the rural community.[190] These relationships were well received in Oxford during the 1920s and 30s it seems, still, they appeared relatively novel for the time.[191] It has been suggested the summer school inspired Gwen to take up the teaching role at Oxford school.[192]

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[183] "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 44-45.

[184] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 126.

[185] Ibid.

"Obituary Robert Malcolm Laing (1865-1941)," *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 73 (1943-44).

[186] Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 45.

[187] Contributed, "W.E.A, Large Classes, Programme for the Season," *Star (Christchurch)*, 18 March 1921, 7.

[188] Somerset, "Brief Report on Education and the Community in Oxford New Zealand, 1923 - 1934."

"An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 45.

[189] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, 112.

[190] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 54-57.

[191] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 124-126.

Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 2-3.

[192] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 153.

The Alley Somerset Partnership

When Headmaster Lancelot Watson resigned from Oxford School in 1923, low staff numbers in the secondary department led to an exodus of pupils destined for Rangiora High.[193] The exodus placed Oxford school in danger of closing.[194] With encouragement from Gwen (promoted to Infant Mistress by then), Crawford took up a relief teaching position in the school's secondary department.[195] At the time, the Education Act ensured permanent teaching positions were not easily taken by teachers with disabilities, unless special circumstances applied.[196] Thus Crawford commenced his short term only teacher contract.[197] 'He was sent to his post for three weeks - he stayed for 15 years' wrote Mills![198]

Crawford arrived in the rural community in August 1923, he settled at the 'Reynox' boarding house, where Gwen also lived.[199] He juggled his interests in the Literary Society with teaching.[200] At the duration of his contract in December, Crawford returned to Christchurch. Newspaper articles illustrated Crawford's popularity as a teacher, pupils and staff at Oxford were sad to see him return to the city.[201] A note in the *Press* implied Crawford's time in Oxford had been positive.[202] The possibility of a renewed contract at the school soon materialized.[203] Crawford returned to his position as senior assistant, and once again settled at the 'Reynox'.[204] Crawford appears to have been warmly welcomed back by the rural community. As a qualified lay preacher, he took services at the local Anglican church and offered 'play readings' at the Reynox 'bed-sit'.[205] Gwen humorously noted how the 'bed-sit' became known as 'Boffins Bower'.[206] Thus the professional union between Gwen and Crawford began.[207] Beeby suggested the relationship was 'an alliance that influenced Crawford's thinking for the rest of his life'.[208]

Conclusion

The Somerset Alley partnership shared an educational philosophy developed prior to their arrival in Oxford. In the wider international context, the onset of World War One quietly prompted theosophical theory in demonstration schools in Britain by 1915. Wartime prompted the Theosophical

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[193] Ibid., 151-153.
[194] Ibid., 14, 152.
[195] Ibid., 148-150.
[196] N Z Government, "New Zealand Education Act of 1914, Part vi, 71," New Zealand, (1914), 37.
[197] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 152-153.
"Papanui Paragraphs [Waimari School]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 11 August 1923, 11.
[198] Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset," 16.
[199] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 152-153.
[200] Ibid., 153-154.
[201] "The Country, Jottings for Farmers [Oxford]," *Press*, 24 December 1923, 3.
[202] "Papanui Paragraphs News of the District [Personal]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 8 December 1923, 13.
[203] "Prize Givings [Oxford D.H. School]," *Press*, 24 December 1923, 13.
[204] "Papanui Paragraphs [Personal]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 2 February 1924, 11.
[205] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 153.
[206] Ibid., 153.
[207] Smart and Knight, *Pathfinders in Education: Seven Canterbury Educators*, 40.
[208] Beeby, "Introduction," xii.

Fraternity in Education (TFE) connecting Britain with India, and later the Dominion by 1919. Findlay's rational curriculum, related to the Garden City Education Movement in London, had already shaped several demonstration schools in Britain. Similar ideas in natural learning (Hogben's Findlay-like syllabus) formalised in the Dominion in 1904 remained largely underdeveloped. By 1914 the Christchurch Beautifying Association (connected to Charles Chilton), and the Kindergarten Association, (connected to Elizabeth Taylor), developed natural learning through nature. Theosophical ideology through Montessorian philosophy was taken up by the CWEA and Christchurch Kindergarten Association by 1915, these associations echoed similar trends encouraged by the TFE. Key figures in the local movement were known to Gwen through Chilton's Botany lectures, the College social scene, and family acquaintances. The imperialism of Theosophy within the patriotism of the war years existed alongside theosophical pacifism it seems. Gwen and Crawford quietly kept their pacifism to themselves, while Taylor and the Chilton's caught up later in the gradual change.

The overall post-war sense of connection with the European homeland encouraged heightened spirituality in Christchurch during the early 1920s. From Britain's demonstration schools arrived James Shelley and Dorothy Baster, each positively added to the already charged spiritual atmosphere inkling with theosophical ideas in education. The intellectual circle fostered ideas in Georgian prose, folk music, dance, drama, natural learning, and psychology. Also, from 'home' arrived the Irish Gentry and Scottish Good Folk in spirit form of course with their *horses*, *dogs* and *gardeners*… In the minds of many they evoked a sense of belonging, constructively used by Gwen at Oxford (and later by Crawford) to encourage concentration through natural learning. Crawford and Gwen found Oxford amid this dizzying mix of Claparède, Coué, Dalcroze, Frobel, Herbart, Montessori, Shaw, Neill, Ensor, Findlay, and fairies. With Condliffe and Shelley's approval, Crawford and Gwen would soon begin the Oxford experiment.

Chapter 4. Finding Littledene 1924 to 1938

Introduction

This chapter assesses the international, local, and political forces that shaped Crawford and Gwen's interest in social development. The OASL, WEA, and CSL are examined here as European ways of thinking within the historical context of the experiment. Gwen recalled a sense of 'freedom' when she arrived in Oxford.[1] She embraced opportunities to develop her ideas in new education at Oxford school. For Crawford, the move provided an opportunity to teach and continue studies by distance, he completed a BA in 1929, a PG Diploma followed in 1930.[2] Under Shelley's supervision, Crawford accomplished an MA with first class honours in 1931.[3] Crawford's thesis described the Oxford experiment from 1924-1930 akin with his WEA work in the community.[4] The Oxford study produced the social surveys used in *Littledene*.[5] The *Littledene* surveys (up to 1930) fell prior to the lowest point in the depression by 1931.[6] Gwen alluded to the limitations of the surveys due to the worsening economic situation by the late 1920s: 'Our lack of mobility was a disadvantage and hampered our visiting among the farming families'.[7] Published in 1938, *Littledene* outdated its survey period by at least eight years. Overall, *Littledene* spanned an important socio-political shift as the Labour welfare state came into being by 1935.[8]

Crawford's WEA work at the heart of the Oxford experiment, took place between 1924 and 1938.[9] The *Geographical Journal* of 1938 commended Crawford on his contribution to adult

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[1] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 127.

[2] Ibid., 153.

"N.Z. University Examination Results," *Press*, 22 December 1928, 19. French Stage One.

"N.Z. University Examination Results: Canterbury College Successes," *Press*, 16 Decemeber 1929, 14. Second BA in French Stage Two; Final BA Philosophy Logic and Ethics.

"University Examinations: Successes of Canterbury College Students," *Star (Christchurch)*, 5 January 1929, 2. Second BA in Education.

"University Exam: Results Published," *Star (Christchurch)*, 13 December 1930, 9. PG Dip in Social Science, Social Psychology and Outlines of Sociology.

[3] Smart and Knight, *Pathfinders in Education: Seven Canterbury Educators*, 37-39.

Crawford Somerset, 27 March 1935.

Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)."

[4] "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," i.

[5] Ibid., i.

[6] Ibid.

David Greasley and Les Oxley, "Regime Shift and Fast Recovery on the Periphery: New Zealand in the 1930s," *The Economic History Review*, no. 4 (2002).

[7] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 15.

[8] Dalley and Tennant, *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*.

Michael Belgrave, "Needs and the State Evolving Social Policy in New Zealand History," ed. Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History* (Otago University Press, 2004).

[9] Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*, 85-91.

education in the rural farming community.[10] *Littledene* was largely based on Crawford's WEA notes. Gwen's contributions were intrinsically linked to WEA incentives but were never funded by the association. The New Zealand Centre for Adult Education (NZCAE) later published Gwen's contribution to the experiment through her work with the Oxford community from 1921 to 1938.[11] The Oxford experiment was not widely understood outside NEF or local WEA circles during the time.[12] This chapter introduces the multifaceted character of the WEA's intellectual culture akin with left leaning perspectives over the time the *Littledene* study was made.

The timing of Crawford's second teaching contract in Oxford in 1924, coincided with the Reform Government's draft Mental Defectives Amendment bill. Historians debate the implications of the bill including its controversial eugenic sterilization clause.[13] Charlotte Macdonald's historiography on eugenics placed the bill in context alongside commonwealth countries akin with a 'globally dominant British empire' at the time.[14] Diane Paul assessed the Dominion's eugenics movement associated with Frederick Truby King's Plunket 'mentality' described also by Ellwood.[15] The draft bill proposed a nasty eugenic whack for underachievers in the state school system. Unsupportive (and suspicious) of psychological assessments, the bill held grave implications for children and adolescents needing time to reach academic standards.[16]

Ideas to change the educational environment rather than the child appear to have influenced the Oxford experiment. Crawford and Gwen collaborated with Oxford doctor Leslie Burnett, an influential figure in the OASL alongside Shelley.[17] Similarly James Strachan's 'Organic Curriculum', well underway at Rangiora High School, was based on environmental measures.[18] Crawford's educational philosophy outlined a similar environmental approach for the Oxford community:

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[10] ROB, "Australasia and Pacific," 557.

[11] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 4-22.

[12] A E Campbell, "Preface," in *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding 1921-1948*, ed. Gwendolen L Somerset, Arnold Hely Papers, No. 4. (New Zealand: Wellington National Council of Adult Education 1972).

[13] Hamish G Spencer, "Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928 ", ed. Diane B. Paul, Hamish G. Spencer, and John Stenhouse, *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

[14] Charlotte Macdonald, "Revisiting Three Eugenic Moments: 1903, 1928, 1937: The Disappointments and Hopes of Antipodean Progressives," ed. Diane B. Paul, Hamish G. Spencer, and John Stenhouse, *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 235.

[15] Paul, "Truby King, Infant Welfare, and the Boundaries of Eugenics."

[16] Oliver Sutherland, *Paikea: The Life of I.L.G Sutherland* (Christchurch, New Zealand: Canterbury University Press, 2013), 134-146.

Spencer, "Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928."

[17] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 105-112.

Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 19.

[18] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*.

> The aim of the actual experiment was to find out what subjects could be taken in a typical rural community and how they could best be taught with a view to enhancing country life.[19]

In the experiment, Crawford refused to include 'Eugenics' as a potential topic, he suggested it did not have the same allure as 'Science' might in the community.[20] The experiment focused on drama, psychology, art, literature, economics and music, with sociology added later.[21] Gwen fully contributed to the experiment, her teaching methodology at Oxford from 1921 already included drama and dance as vehicles for learning.[22] By 1925 Gwen informally established the 'Oxford Girls Club', her 'Drama Circle' developed around the same time.[23] The formal establishment of the 'Girls Club' appeared in 1926, the aim was 'to study folk dances and songs' wrote Crawford.[24] These ideas were akin with the Georgic tradition alongside the 'preservation' of folklore during the 1920s described by Paddy Bullard.[25] By the early 1930s the *Star* illustrated the Somerset's work as 'the centre of a cultural influence which radiates out into the homes of the people.'[26] Crawford also gave psychology, and sociology lectures in Christchurch.[27] Influenced by the Danish Folk school movement aligned with Swiss psychologists Nikolaj Grundtvig and Kristen Kold, Crawford believed learning should be a spiritual experience.[28] Grundtvig's philosophy resonated with what Adams described as the 'second wave' of theosophical thinkers.[29] These ideas were akin with Brown's earlier esotericism associated with environmental energies. Hilliard suggests the 1930s epitomised 'a pivotal movement in the

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[19] Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," i.

[20] Ibid., 94-95.

[21] Ibid., 57-58. Sociology was added in 1928, 'The time had arrived to do something to counteract' the 'extreme insularity of outlook' in the community wrote Crawford.

Somerset, "Brief Report on Education and the Community in Oxford New Zealand, 1923 - 1934."

[22] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*.

[23] Ibid., 12-17.

Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 49-63.

[24] "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 55-57.

[25] Paddy Bullard, "Introduction," in *A History of English Georgic Writing*, ed. Paddy Bullard (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 19.

[26] "W.E.A. Notes," *Star (Christchurch)*, 10 September 1932, 21.

[27] "Page 3 Advertisements Column 4 [Lectures]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 28 August 1930, 3.

"Canterbury College [Board of Governors]," *Press*, 29 April 1930, 14.

"Round the Suburbs [Spreydon Literary Society]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 31 July 1933, 3. Lecture on 'The Psychology of Fear'.

"Adult Education [Radio Lectures]," *Press*, 26 August 1933, 20. Lecture on 'Sociology and Humanity'.

"W.E.A. Notes [Country Work]," *Star (Christchurch)*, 18 November 1933, 26.

[28] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 48-49.

Johannes Novurp, "Denmark, Askov Folk High School," in *Educational Yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College Columbia University*, ed. I L Kandel (New York: Columbia University, 1940).

[29] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 25.

development of the life of the mind in New Zealand'.[30] Beeby celebrated the decade as 'an almost unbelievable opportunity to catch up with the thinking of the outside world.'[31] International intellectuality connected to the Dominion through academic circles, noted by Hilliard as 'a colonial echo of a cultural debate that went on in Britain.'[32]

Cora Wilding echoed the popularity of environmental interventions in contemporary health practices in Europe. She focused on health education through 'Natural Laws' where the benefits of sunlight and 'treasures of nature' could be applied clinically to children.[33] Historical perspectives on Wilding's Christchurch Sunlight League (CSL) have been provided by Wilson, Tennant, Daley, and Gush, all tend to agree eugenics played a part in CSL philosophy. From a fine arts background, Gush argues that aesthetics played a significantly greater role in CSL values, giving new insight to critiques around eugenics. The main question is, how far did the Oxford experiment align with positive eugenics in the atmosphere of 'eugenic conscience' described earlier by Tennant?[34]

The Social Movement

The 1924 committee of inquiry into the draft Mental Defectives Amendment prompted Shelley, and psychologist Ivan Sutherland (Victoria College) to voice their concerns over the ethical limitations of the bill.[35] Serious debates followed Theodore Gray's proposal for Eugenics intervention in the bill.[36] In particular, 'Clause 15' gave the director of education the power to submit to the Eugenics Council the names of underachievers in the state education system.[37] Shelley and Sutherand both argued that the practice of psychological testing should have been included in the bill.[38] Sociologists Thomas Hunter and William Horace, both of Victoria University, opposed the bill on similar grounds.[39] Further opposition came from Labour MP Peter Fraser, who insisted a healthy environment was crucial for positive childhood development, noted by Hamish Spencer:

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[30] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, 83.
[31] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 106.
[32] Hilliard, *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920-1950*, 98.
[33] Cora Wilding, "Health! Nations Awaken to Possibilities of Sun, Air and Diet," *Star (Christchurch)*, 7 September 1929, 7.
[34] Tennant, *Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps*, 103.
[35] Sutherland, *Paikea: The Life of I.L.G Sutherland*.
[36] Spencer, "Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928."
Sutherland, *Paikea: The Life of I.L.G Sutherland*.
[37] Government, "Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928." 404, Clause 15.
Sutherland, *Paikea: The Life of I.L.G Sutherland*, 140-41.
[38] *Paikea: The Life of I.L.G Sutherland*.
[39] Spencer, "Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928," 91.
Rachel Barrowman, "Histories of Victoria University of Wellington," (1999), http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-BarVict-c3.html. Somerset would later continue Hunter's practice in sociology at Victoria University.

> Fraser specifically cited the work of King and the Plunket Society in improving the lot of children as a reason to first concentrate on environmental interventions before worrying about eugenic solutions to possible genetic defects.[40]

Fraser clearly disliked eugenics, he found the bill illogical, as noted by Charlotte Macdonald who added, Fraser preferred 'environmental measures' akin with Truby King's Plunket.[41]

When James Shelley advocated open-air classrooms for healthy mental development in schools, he joined forces with Doctor Burnett at Oxford, fellow medical practitioners in Christchurch shared similar perspectives.[42] When consumption appeared in Gwen's infant class in 1924, Dr Burnett decided the old school buildings needed upgrading to healthy new alternatives, Gwen fully supported the idea.[43] Gwen encouraged her pupils to explore their outdoor environment, they made use of an old orchard on school grounds as an area for creativity.[44] Like Macmillan Brown, Gwen supported social reformer Thomas Carlyle who represented a Victorian version of Froebelian philosophy.[45] Froebelian philosophy connected with the Garden City Movement, and early NEF circles discussed earlier.[46] Gwen saw the garden space as a place for relaxation, higher concentration and worldly thinking:

> The orchard was old but remained a delightful corner for stories, acting of plays and games of imagination. We carried out our easels, and enjoyed the delight of working with no walls at all; no limit to our freedom to move, or see, hear or feel the open world around us.[47]

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[40] Spencer, "Eugenic Sterilization in New Zealand: The Story of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act of 1928," 101.

[41] Macdonald, "Revisiting Three Eugenic Moments: 1903, 1928, 1937: The Disappointments and Hopes of Antipodean Progressives," 228.

[42] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 106.

[43] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 154-155.

[44] Ibid., 25.

[45] Ibid., 25. Gwen's father Frederick included 'literature, music and natural growing things' in his teaching, these were described by Gwen as being at odds with the 'accepted' teaching methods of the early 1900s.

Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown," 14.

[46] Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education,1897-1913," 168.

Jenkins, "The Professional Middle Class and the Social Origins of Progressivism: A Case Study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950."

Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938."

Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937."

[47] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 156.

The idea of opening children to the 'world' via a garden space appears in tune with Garden City education, WEA, OASL and NEF philosophies, as multiple mechanisms akin with the 'Plunket mentality' described by Ellwood.

Shelley experienced turbulent times in establishing the OASL in Christchurch, 'For as the open-air school's movement moved from the medical to the educational domain', wrote Carter, 'so it became a social movement.'[48] The social movement however, connected with earlier ideas 'to relieve the burden of mothers with large families' noted by Tommy Taylor's 1911 application for three new Kindergartens in Christchurch.[49] The Philipstown Kindergarten was described as the 'first attempt to set up an open-air school in Christchurch.[50] A year prior to Shelley's arrival in Christchurch, Elizabeth Taylor promoted the new kindergarten, the buildings were described as 'large and handsome school buildings'.[51] In describing the value of the buildings to the minister of education years later, Elizabeth suggested that the 'open air' architecture had 'exceeded expectations': 'In the case of teachers, too, health was benefited: such rooms were almost warm enough to do without stoves, every possible ray of sunshine being admitted.'[52] Elizabeth Taylor and Charles Chilton were elected to the committee of the OASL in its early formation.[53]

The early 'open air schools' movement in Christchurch can be related to the Garden Cities movement in Britain, alongside the development of English pioneer schools described by Brooks.[54] These ideas appear to have reached Christchurch through lectures on the Hampstead Garden City experiment connected to Findlay, as described in Chapter 1.[55] Charles Chilton's earlier address to the Christchurch 'Beautifying Society' noted his opposition to 'private clubs' using the cities garden spaces. He encouraged garden spaces for 'literary and scientific societies' and suggested that a beautiful environment could change people's thinking:

> Dr Chilton made it clear that he looked on the question from a wider point of view than that of so-called beautifying alone. […] The whole question of improving and beautifying the city could not be approached successfully unless the people were impressed with the fact that they had a beautiful place and that it was worth their while to make it more beautiful.[56]

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[48] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 107.
[49] "Daffodil Day Again Aids Kindergarten Work in City," *Star (Christchurch)*, 11 September 1929, 3.
[50] "Open Air Rooms, Schools of the New Kind," *Press*, 5 December 1925, 8.
[51] "The Social Round," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 14 February 1919, 2.
[52] "Open Air Rooms, Schools of the New Kind."
[53] "The Sun Cure," *Press*, 12 May 1926, 10.
[54] Ron Brooks, "Professor J. J. Findlay, the King Alfred School Society, Hampstead and Letchworth Garden City Education,1897-1913," *History of Education* 21:2 (1992): 162-164.
[55] "General News," 6. Lectures were given by Samuel Hurst Segar brother-in-law of Macmillan Brown.
[56] "The Garden City, a Porgramme for Improvement."

Chilton also appeared as a member of the Christchurch branch of the 'Empire Service League' alongside Hight and Macmillan Brown; the group introduced 'an educational campaign' with social principles by 1917:

> The broad practical aim was to try to bring home to the individual a greater sense of his responsibility not only to himself, but to others, and to the State, and to demonstrate that, since right down at the bottom the interest of all sections were one, that which affected for good or ill other people would sooner or later affect our selves.[57]

These earlier ideas relate to A S Neill's educational philosophy in *A Dominie's Log* followed closely by Gwen and Crawford.[58] More importantly they relate to Macmillan Brown's 'eugenicism'.[59] The Empire Service's aim was to reach children through education, 'if children were the dearest pledges of the nation, they should be taught by the very best men and women'.[60] Similarly, the 'Garden City' campaign was to encourage spiritual development through natural spaces where social development could be achieved en masse. Gwen and Crawford's suggestion that a natural environment encouraged higher thinking, and enhanced creativity appears supported by this earlier generation of thinkers. Crawford later described the garden space as the first place where children could learn about their intrinsic connection to the world through their basic need for nutritional sustenance:

> […] it leads him to the larger gardens – the farms of his district – with a new vision. There follows the study of other lands and other peoples engaged in this close relation with the soil, with which he is a sharer through the international exchange of goods.[61]

Crawford's concept reflects something of the theosophical idea of one humanity. The social movements promoted by the earlier generation had not completely vanished but relied on new buds to form on the old laterals connected to the European world. Gwen and Crawford fostered those new buds. They naturally felt a sense of belonging in an atmosphere where non-sectarian spiritual science connected each to an innate sense of 'home'. This would have been comforting during their early years at Oxford away from family and friends.

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[57] "Empire Service, Branch Formed in Christchurch."
[58] Alexander Sutherland Neill, *A Dominie's Log* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1915).
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 111.
[59] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown," 108, 115.
[60] "Empire Service," *Lyttelton Times*, 26 October 1917, 2.
[61] Somerset, "Brief Report on Education and the Community in Oxford New Zealand, 1923 – 1934," 12.

George Manning

When John (Jack) Condliffe invited Crawford to teach WEA courses in Oxford, Shelley and 'Welsh immigrant', George Manning set the scene.[62] As a promising young student, Manning was recruited earlier to promote WEA incentives, his interest evolved after attending a lecture by Macmillan Brown.[63] Manning later enrolled in Condliffe's economics course at Canterbury College where he appears to have met Crawford.[64] As WEA organising secretary, Manning helped to secure council grants for WEA lectures.[65] In April 1924 Manning interviewed Oxford residents and council representatives to gauge their interest in a WEA class in Oxford.[66] As a potential WEA tutor for Oxford, Crawford was officially on standby when Shelley and Manning gave talks on the incentives of the WEA in rural education.[67] Shelley directed WEA lectures towards new education, he introduced the Oxford community to an impressive lecture on 'The Drama', his flamboyant style of teaching was observed by the *Press*.[68] The lecture included play readings, noted by Gwen as valuable in creating rural interest.[69] When Crawford delivered a novel psychology lecture to the community, he captured the attention of an appreciative Y branch of the Oxford WCTU.[70] Funding approval for regular WEA lectures was well underway by June.[71] Funding also appears to have been provided by grants from the Carnegie Corporation (New York) which included a 'rural only' stamp of approval

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[62] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 26.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Idealist, "W.E.A News and Notes," *Star (Christchurch)*, 4 August 1916, 7.

"Local and General," *Sun (Christchurch)*, 31 July 1916, 8.

Idealist, "W.E.A News and Notes," 7. Both Manning and Crawford participated in student debates between Canterbury College and the WEA. Chaired by Chilton, one debate questioned 'Whether Protection Would be in The Best Interests of Great Britain After the War'. Crawford's College team provided a pro-protection argument, while the 'victory' went to the WEA team through Manning's 'brilliant' effort.

Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 136.

Condliffe, *The Beginnings of the W.E.A*., 25.

Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 26.

"Ten Years as Mayor Marked by Fairness and Compromise," *Press*, 30 December 1976, 2.

Manning became Christchurch Mayor between 1959 and 1968. A year later he was awarded a knighthood, then an honorary doctorate in 1972.

[65] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 136.

"Educating Workers," *Star (Christchurch)*, 7 June 1921, 6.

[66] "The Country," *The Country Press*, 21 April 1924, 3.

[67] "The Country [Oxford]," *Press*, 11 June 1924, 3.

[68] "The Country [Oxford]," 3.

Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 47-48.

Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 4.

[69] *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 4.

[70] "The Country [Oxford]," 3.

[71] Somerset, "Brief Report on Education and the Community in Oxford New Zealand, 1923 – 1934," 2.

"W.E.A, Meeting of District Council," *Press*, 8 May 1924, 5.

noted by Carter.[72] Condliffe later wrote: 'One of the best ideas I ever had was to encourage Crawford Somerset and Gwen Alley to embark on their experiment in community development in Oxford.'[73]

Crawford and Gwen's intellectual circle reached well beyond Oxford. In 1925 a WEA summer camp was held at Springfield. With a feeling of internationalism, the camp included a lecture on Marxism, alongside an address from a League of Nations representative.[74] Peter Fraser, and Thomas Hunter attended various camps.[75] Fraser was no stranger to the WEA, having earlier attended Condliffe's economics classes in Wellington.[76] Left wing perspectives however, were greeted with suspicion when political courses stirred socialist fears within the WEA. Others saw the organisation purely as a vehicle for self-development.[77] It was put forward by Macmillan Brown that the vetting of courses might keep the organisation from becoming too politically inclined.[78] Thus Manning was under some pressure to set aside personal political perspectives. The CWEA however, agreed students needed 'a range of opinions' as described by Dougherty.[79] At the duration of the Springfield camp, the association reassessed their teaching methods, Shelley reported to the *Press*:

> The W.E.A was doing most valuable work in the community by attempting to raise the general level of culture, because, if the general level was not raised, then the higher branches of learning would be out of touch with life, which in turn would mean a lower standard all round.[80]

Manning continued promoting the WEA, he delivered talks alongside Gwen's friend Noeline Bruce, however, Manning's role was strictly secretarial and promotional during the early 1920s.[81] By the late 1920s Manning completed a diploma in social sciences, 'with honours in Greek', and an MA in economics, he became a polished WEA tutor.[82]

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[72] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 133.

[73] J B Condliffe, "Student Experience an Elusive Theme," *Press*, 2 May 1973, 19.

[74] "W.E.A Summer School," *Star (Christchurch)*, 5 January 1925, 11. Hight, Shelley and Manning gave talks at the Springfield Summer School where an excursion was taken to the proposed hydroelectric site at Otarama (Castle Hill). 'Mr V. Wilson (private secretary to the General Secretariat of the League of Nations at Geneva)' also attended.

Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 67. A talk on Marxism was given by Sid Fournier.

[75] *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 60-61. Peter and Janet Fraser, Walter and Lot Nash participated in the camp.

"Summer School to Be Held in Canterbury," *Lyttelton Times*, 6 October 1920, 9. Professor Hunter was proposed to have attended Oxford Summer School.

[76] Boshier, *Towards a Learning Society: New Zealand Adult Education in Transition*, 186.

Hall, *New Zealand Adult Education*, 54.

Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 25, 102.

[77] Hall, *New Zealand Adult Education*, 53.

[78] Dougherty, *The People's University: A Centennial History of the Canterbury Workers' Educational Association 1915-2015*, 62-69. In 1920 Baptist minister, Labour candidate and WEA tutor John Archer was accused by Leonard Isitt, and Robert Stout of promoting Marxist tendencies.

[79] Ibid., 67.

[80] "W.E.A. Tutors Conference," *Press*, 23 December 1925, 9.

[81] "Women's Corner," *Press*, 23 March 1921, 2.

[82] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 26.

Crawford's WEA Psychology lectures were extremely popular by 1926, he continued to use drama to illustrate difficult concepts.[83] Described as a great success, the WEA played a significant role in the creativity and wellbeing of the Oxford community.[84] Gwen implied the local clergy in Oxford were not always supportive of Crawford's WEA lectures, particularly when the lectures proved more popular than church services.[85] In 1927 Crawford offered various popular lectures to the Christchurch Practical Psychology Club, Gwen assisted his talk on auto-suggestion.[86] As already discussed Beatrice Ensor promoted lectures on auto-suggestion through the British NEF five years earlier.[87] Crawford appears to have been describing auto-suggestion in the following quote:

> I have always felt that as a teacher I must not intrude into the minds of my students or absolve them from thinking, but rather give them a patterned nucleus, minute but fully charged, around which their acquired data could crystallise. That is what I mean by the "living word" – simply the exchange of a token morsel of viable thought.[88]

By 1928 Crawford, Shelley, and Beeby provided a powerhouse of WEA lectures on psychology, each appealed to the widest possible audiences in Canterbury.[89] Beeby commented on Crawford's ability to engage with an audience through his 'mystical appreciation of a community'.[90]

Nikolaj Grundtvig

By 'living word', Crawford directly quoted Danish educational reformer Nikolaj Grundtvig: 'Reciprocal teaching is the ideal learning process engaged through the living word' (described also by Kemp Malone).[91] Both Crawford and Manning were drawn to Grundtvig's philosophy. Crawford

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[83] "W.E.A. Notes," *Star (Christchurch)*, 4 June 1926, 13.
Demos, "W.E.A Doing Much in Rural Districts," ibid., 18 June, 13.
"Three Motives Actuate Human Spirit: Truth, Goodness, Beauty," *Star (Christchurch)*, 2 July 1926, 6.
[84] "North Canterbury [Oxford]," *Press*, 20 October 1926, 3.
[85] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 153.
[86] "Lecture Given on Auto Suggestion," *Star (Christchurch)*, 27 May 1927, 7.
"Lecturer Discusses Psychlogy Theme," *Star (Christchurch)*, 30 August 1928, 11.
"Lecturer Discusses Value of Hypnotism," *Star (Christchurch)*, 29 August 1930, 5.
[87] Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," 744.
Croall, "The New Era," 108-109.
[88] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 49. This appeared in Crawford's Diary dated 1948.
[89] "Tutorial Classes," *Press*, 20 February 1928, 3.
"Canterbury College [Meeting of Board]," *Press*, 28 May 1929, 7.
[90] Beeby, "Introduction," xviii.
[91] Jonas Uffe, Warren Clay, and Broadbridge Edward, The School for Life: N.F.S. Grundtvig on Education for the People, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011), https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=515729&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306. Book. 354.
Kemp Malone, "Grundtvig's Philosophy of History," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 3 (1940), 284.

suggested rural education was an ongoing process, high school students should have the opportunity to continue studies well into adulthood:

> Long ago, somewhere in the twenties, I became interested in the work of Grundtvig and Kristen Kold in establishing the Folk High Schools of Denmark and in 1936 I was able to visit them. All through, I knew for a certainty, with conviction and fervour, that the "Living word" was the strength of any really great teaching – not just replacing the old arid grammars by something more modern, but by using words saturated with the essence of life. In common language, teaching had to be a continual communication with others, no matter how different other minds might be from one's own; moreover the communication had to be a two-way process…[92]

In 1922 Grundtvig and his student Kristen Kold, were reported in the *Christchurch Star* as two very deeply spiritual 'regenerators of Denmark'.[93] Adams places Grundtvig in tune with NEF philosophies.[94] Grundtvig's approach, as 'poet and [Lutheran] pastor' was noted by Johannes Novrup:

> Grundtvig thus aspired to establish a school which was to rouse and enlighten adult Danish youth, to prepare them for the dawning of a new era, the era of national freedom. His school was to be erected on a plan high above all party concerns. That is why he always called it a "royal" school. Its substance was to be an element common to *all* Danes, or, in the idiom of the present day, it was to build up in Danish youth a human community independent of all those concerns which engender or divide parties. Seen from a political standpoint, his folk high school was to counteract national disintegration through party formation, a process to be expected with certainty as a result of the hoped-for freedom; in brief, it was to make democracy possible. […] "The only object of the Danish folk high school," Grundtvig said about 1850, "is to awaken, foster, and enlighten that human spirit which may be and must be assumed to exist in Danish youth."[95]

Like Crawford, Manning appeared highly spiritual, he too was a lay preacher.[96] By 1928 Manning suggested the Danish movement might positively impact New Zealanders at a national level:

> It had been more and more Grundtvig's conviction that spiritual life is propagated through living men. It goes from one personality to another and the supreme expression of personality is the spoken word.

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[92] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 48-49. Kristen Kold, also known as 'Christen'.

[93] "Denmark, a Farmers' State; the Fruits of Co-Operation," *Star (Christchurch)*, 2 May 1922, 6.
The Loiterer, "Education for Farmer's, Amazing Danish System," *Ellesmere Guardian*, 12 August 1930, 8.

[94] Adams, "'The End of the Beginning'? An Examination of 'the New Education' and the New Education Fellowship (NEF) in New Zealand in the Interwar Period (1919-1938) with Particular Reference to the NEF Conference 1937," 25.

[95] Novurp, "Denmark, Askov Folk High School," 109, 110-111.

[96] Jean Sharfe, "Manning, George," in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography: Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* (2000).

> […] May not the W.E.A, which has no examination, and whose chief expression is the spoken word or discussion, do something similar for New Zealander's?[97]

There is something of Brown's esoterism in Manning's understanding of Grundtvig's theory. Crawford's understanding of Grundtvig's theory borders on an understanding of metaphysics:

> […] full preparation was essential to saturate the mind with a pool of facts and to set up currents and eddies of thoughts but not to formulate conclusions. Then, with a fully involved audience, the "living" truth would flash like an electric current emerging not just from me, but from all present. […] In every lecture there must be more than what is usually called communication; there must be a raising of the voltage. To carry the image a stage further, the lecture room must be a transformer.[98]

Crawford's description connects with theosophical thought, particularly auto-suggestion. It also connects with Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's idea of kinesthetics through Eurythmics, applied in education as an anecdote for 'over excited nervous systems' in post-war children:

> "Joy," in [Henri Louis] Bergson's words, "is at once heat and light." In certain exceptional persons this light glows from birth. But this is not the case with many children, and it is the function of teachers, by care and perseverance, to create in their obscure souls the ray of joy which at first may glimmer faintly and intermittently, but which eventually will illuminate and keep ablaze a whole earth of light and heat, ever increasing in warmth and lustre, and beneficence. This light will illuminate not only the present, but the future. It will guide humanity along its present path and to its ultimate destination. Not from without do we receive and assimilate it: it must irradiate from the centre of our being. Irresistibly, it must spread its lustre on those about us: not only those in our immediate neighbourhood, but upon apparent strangers.[99]

Condliffe dabbled in a similar metaphysical realm: 'Whenever a teacher scores a hit in the student's mind (which I have often compared with the dark chambers of nuclear physics) he not only transforms the material, but releases energy'.[100] Likewise, Gwen's adult recollection of Hogben's curriculum included the idea that an 'electric current' simultaneously sparked in the minds of her primary school friends.[101] Crawford and Gwen's circle believed that an esoteric positive energy existed through the spoken word, even thoughts were forms. These ideas connect with Annie Besant's book on *Thought Forms* associated with 'elemental essence' in nature.[102] Scientifically edgy,

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[97] George Manning, "The W.E.A," *Press*, 15 March 1928, 13.
[98] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 49.
[99] Jaques-Dalcroze, "Music, Joy and the School," 102, 100.
[100] Condliffe, "Student Experience an Elusive Theme," 19.
[101] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 25.
[102] Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*, (1905, 1925; London: The Theosophical Publishing House LTD, 1901), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16269/16269-h/16269-h.htm.

somewhat gnostic, and akin with the organic natural environment, Crawford and Gwen's ideas appeared theosophical.

James Strachan

Between 1925 and 1928, very few educationists were interested in developing their curriculums in keeping with environmental measures, those who did were noticed.[103] At Waitaki Boys' High School, Frank Milner experimented with 'practical and aesthetic subjects' akin with Hogben's curriculum described by Openshaw.[104] At Rangiora High, James Strachan's 'Organic Curriculum' was influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendentalist philosophy on nature.[105] 'The aims, and even the form of our school curriculum reveal the mind of Emerson' wrote Strachan in an evaluation of his social experiment.[106] Strachan's 'Organic Curriculum' eventually connected with Milner's influential post primary curriculum reaching national significance by the 1930s.[107]

Importantly, Strachan's curriculum appealed to Crawford and Gwen. Shelley's earliest contact with Strachan appeared in 1920, noted by Beeby:

> James Strachan, the gallant headmaster of Rangiora High School, was running a unique experiment in social education that was in many ways as radical as any new venture in England. […] Strachan was regarded with suspicion by many in his conservative rural community, and the significance of what he was doing escaped us as students. […] It was into this quiet backwater that James Shelley swept in 1920.[108]

The significance of Strachan's curriculum was somewhat evident by 1924 when the steady flow of students left Oxford School for Rangiora High.[109] Crawford was aware that Strachan's curriculum posed a conflict of interests regarding the survival of Oxford School.[110] Beeby suggested 'the two men met frequently':

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[103] Beeby, "Introduction," xiv. Beeby states that 'new theories were scarce and educational experiments were suspect'.

[104] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 155.

[105] Beeby, "Introduction," xiii-xiv.
Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 6.

[106] *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 6.

[107] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 163-176.

[108] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 45.

[109] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 152.

[110] Ibid., 148.

> He [Strachan] probably did more than anyone else to fix in Crawford's mind the full significance for a rural school of its natural and social environment and to sharpen his sense of the community as an organic whole.[111]

Crawford, Gwen, and Strachan later received Carnegie travel grants, an amount of competition is evident in the way their social experiments evolved.[112] Each experiment focused on social development, described by Strachan as 'fulfilment' and by Crawford as 'enhancing country life'.[113] Both experiments included the 'Law of Nature' as a Findlay-like philosophy for rural education, Shelley supervised Crawford's experiment, and mentored Strachan's.[114] Crawford was 'one of his [Shelley's] favourite students' noted Beeby.[115] The *Gazette* later celebrated Rangiora as 'the first country town to get an open-air school in New Zealand'.[116] Crawford described how the new open-air buildings at Oxford allowed children to obtain 'the greatest possible benefit of sunlight' where a sense of 'freedom' developed.[117] Strachan described the 'School Farm' at Rangiora including 'an extensive open-air classroom' where 'a new freedom and range of thought' could be achieved.[118] The 'sunlit rooms' at Oxford, wrote Crawford, were the result of a 'far sighted committee' whose next project was to include an arboretum on the school grounds.[119] Both Crawford and Strachan appealed to the idea that a healthy environment alongside nature enabled students to access concentration via relaxation, opening them to the world.[120] Their ideas resonated with what was later understood as 'Flow Psychology' coined by Mihāly Csikszentmihalyi during the 1970s.[121]

Indeed, Crawford and Gwen were focused on keeping student numbers from failing and falling at Oxford School.[122] At Rangiora, agricultural courses were well underway with lessons on

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[111] Beeby, "Introduction," xiv.

[112] Brehony, "A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938," 733, 755. Brehony noted 'competition' for 'funding and prestige' in NEF circles.

[113] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 5, 4-6.
Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," i.

[114] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*.
Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 67-86.

[115] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 43.

[116] "Sixtieth Birthday," *North Canterbury Gazette*, 31 October 1933, 6.

[117] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 75.

[118] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 37-38.

[119] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 75.

[120] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 17-31.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 172-174.

[121] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Applications of Flow in Human Development and Education: The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, (Springer, 2014), https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=cat09011a&AN=mul.oai.edge.massey.folio.ebsco.com.fs00001086.087f844a.a4b1.5d85.bde1.52fa2f0006cf&site=eds-live&scope=site&authtype=sso&custid=s3027306
http://ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/login?url=https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9094-9.

[122] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 68. Graph showing the decline of children attending school in Oxford between 1884 and 1934.

how plants turned sunlight into energy.[123] At Oxford new fruit trees were propagated on school grounds and offered to the community as part of a 'nutrition survey'.[124] Crawford established working relationships with local farmers so agricultural courses could be delivered outside the capacity of the school.[125] Crawford and Strachan engaged their respective communities in WEA courses, Crawford included 'Sociology through literature', Strachan blended 'General science and literature'.[126]

'We need more of the spirit of the Georgics in our land' claimed Crawford, in a plea for harmony through nature.[127] He focused on transforming his WEA students through Findlay's idea that 'the nurture of the human spirit' could achieve wonders in education.[128] In 1927 Crawford appealed to the Oxford Benevolent and Improvement League (OB&IL) to encourage secondary school children towards nature through 'independent scientific study'. Seconded by Dr Burnett, Crawford was given the task of drawing up the 'scheme'.[129] The significance of the bursary will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Crawford wanted students to engage in their local natural environment, this provided a step towards the larger international European environment. 'More important, perhaps', wrote Gwen, 'he [Crawford] gained the approval and confidence of parents and of his pupils.'[130] Crawford's appeal to reform the whole community towards spiritual harmony through nature was not that unpopular it seems.

The Mental Defectives Act and a Light Opera

The enactment of the Mental Defectives Amendment Act arrived in October 1928. Gray's eugenics board established itself, and psychologists were excluded from taking part in any of the boards assessments wrote Oliver Sutherland:

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[123] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 103, 119.

[124] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 82-83.

[125] Ibid., 82.

Crawford Somerset, "The Link with W.E.A," in *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding 1921-1948*, ed. Gwen L Somerset, Arnold Hely Papers, No. 4 (Wellington, New Zealand: Wellington National Council of Adult Education 1972, 1938), 10.

[126] "Canterbury College," *Press*, 28 May 1929, 7.

[127] Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 60. Crawford also lectured on literature from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe around this time, noted on page 2 in Turbott's thesis as 'anthroposophical thought'.

[128] Ibid., 82-83.

[129] "North Canterbury [Oxford]," *Press*, 16 April 1927. 3. Crawford was secretary for the OB&I by this stage.

Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 14-15

[130] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 153.

> Theodore Gray got much of what he wanted, and Ivan Sutherland threw his energy back into the clinic where the children he, Hunter and Gould dealt with might be kept out of the hands of Gray and off the register of the New Zealand Eugenics Board.[131]

While Sutherland worked to protect children through his practice, Shelley focused on expanding the Open-Air Schools movement, with Beeby's help Shelley developed Charles Salmond's psychology lab at Canterbury College.[132] Fraser was well acquainted with Shelley by then, he later supported the NZCER, and encouraged Shelley and Beeby alongside others to 'develop Labour's education policy in preparation for office' as described by Carter.[133] Fraser's dissertation included a vague description of 'cultural education', but more precisely suggested the old 'class-structured high school system' needed to be replaced with a flexible scheme, as described by Openshaw.[134] Gwen and Crawford's work in Oxford appeared in keeping with Fraser's later vision for education. By changing the environment alongside the syllabus, child development could be supported. A few months prior to the enactment of the bill, a counter argument against the eugenics council appeared in the *Auckland Star*. There is reason to think Crawford wrote the article under his adopted pseudonym 'Touchstone':

> By all means let us do what we can to develop in defective persons the full use of such faculties as they possess, but this sterilisation, segregation craze will mean merely another big expenditure with little to show for it beyond a bunch of medical men and other experts in good billets getting nowhere in particular.[135]

Gwen noted how Crawford's health had been compromised by 'wretched medical men and care […] that left him on crutches.'[136] The 'setback' was described by Tom Mills as Crawford's 'breakdown'.[137] Crawford and Gwen would do all they could to protect children by staying ahead of the bill.

Help appeared through Gwen's good friend Noeline Bruce, writing to the *Christchurch Star* Noeline suggested new ideas in modern Opera might benefit New Zealanders: 'The old struggle of youth with age, innovation with tradition – will the idea take hold? Is it feasible for New Zealand?

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[131] Sutherland, *Paikea: The Life of I.L.G Sutherland*, 146.
Ibid., 138, 141, 145.
[132] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 108-112, 116-117.
[133] Ibid., 198-199.
Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 131-132. Beeby gives an extensive description of his working relationship with Fraser, their 'differences in personal philosophy' are described in detail however each later agreed on the 'call for equality of opportunity' in education.
[134] Openshaw, Lee, and Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, 154.
[135] Touchstone, "Fit and Unfit," *Auckland Star*, 28 July 1928, 19.
[136] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David."
[137] Mills, "Life and Learning a Community Experiment: Interview with Mr. H.C.D. Somerset."

The lovers of music drama will do well to follow the experiment.'[138] By then Gwen's 'Oxford Girls Club' and 'Drama Circle' had a repertoire of successful productions.[139] Their 1928 light opera 'Cinderella' appears to have reflected Noeline's proposal to strengthen relationships between the young and not so young.[140] The production included 'eurythmic interpretations' reported by the *Christchurch Star* as 'unusual'.[141] Gwen's intention to include eurythmics did not centre on the value of entertainment, but rather on fostering community social development through joy in learning.

The Oxford experiment certainly kept ahead of the bill by providing a protective and supportive environment in community education. As a vehicle for rural social development in Oxford, Crawford's tailored WEA courses provided various pathways to higher education. These courses, alongside Gwen's extension work appealed to friendly societies, religious groups, and farming circles in the community.[142] By 1929 Gwen's drama groups were pumping, Crawford's WEA psychology courses had exceeded expectations.[143] The 'Oxford Girls Club' provided opportunities for school leavers to continue their skills in 'music, movement and drama', the group consisted of two classes, younger children made up one, while school leavers and adults maintained the second.[144] Gwen noted: 'The club made an important contribution to adult education in Oxford. It kept a close link with the school and became a recruiting ground for W.E.A. members.'[145] The club encouraged parents to take an interest in their children's education, it persuaded them towards new education.[146] Gwen believed that childhood development would thrive if women and girls at home had access to education.[147] From a multi-layered approach, the experiment encouraged the community to value education. It protected children as much as possible from the wrath of the Eugenics Council.

Cora Wilding's Sunlight League

Another popular European trend arrived in Christchurch via Cora Wilding, a well-educated, artistically talented, well-travelled health professional experienced in Heliotherapy.[148] In 1929, Cora submitted 'a series of articles' to the *Christchurch Star*, in one she praised the progress of the Open-

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[138] Noeline Bruce Peebles, "An Experiment in Grand Opera. Will Innovation Extend to New Zealand Stage?" *Star (Christchurch)*, 21 April 1928, 2.

[139] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 12-15, 19.

[140] Ibid., 12.

[141] Smart and Knight, *Pathfinders in Education: Seven Canterbury Educators*, 39.
"Cinderella," *Star (Christchurch)*, 3 December 1928, 15.

[142] Somerset, *Littledene Patterns of Change*, 86.

[143] Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 67.

[144] Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 153.

[145] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 13.

[146] Ibid., 12.
Somerset, *Sunshine and Shadow*, 25, 141.

[147] *Edwards & Company - Pilot Episode*, 54:10.

[148] Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936."
Gush, "The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League."

Air Schools League.[149] She noted the good work of Dr R B Phillips in Christchurch, and Dr Burnett at Oxford.[150] Her acknowledgement of the developments at Oxford school supported Dr Burnett's experimentation with 'shrub shelters' as outdoor rooms.[151] As discussed earlier, Shelley was well known to both practitioners through the OASL.[152] Cora described medical perspectives from Italian, French, German, Swiss, Swedish, Danish, Greek and English sources (some of which have been described by Wilson, Tennant, Daley and Gush). Her article signed off with a distinctly European tone under the heading of 'Sunshine and Daisies':

> SOUND HEALTH AND YOUTH GO HAND-IN-HAND WITH SUNSHINE AND FRESH AIR. THESE CHILDREN ARE BEING TAUGHT LESSONS GENERALLY AND LESSONS IN PARTICULAR ABOUT THE COMMON, BUT TOO NEGLECTED, TREASURES OF NATURE. – SCENES IN ENGLAND.[153]

Cora's article mirrored much of what Milner, Strachan, Crawford, and Gwen tried to achieve in their experiments at Waitaki, Rangiora, and Oxford, particularly where European models around 'Natural Laws' where adopted.

By 1931 Cora generated enough local interest to formalise the Christchurch Sunlight League (CSL).[154] The League promoted Shelley's argument that the poor mental health status of the Dominion's children, was mainly due to environmental problems.[155] Particularly the anxieties children faced in the education system. Shelley understood how children positively developed when given the space for creativity to be cultivated. To achieve success, the old curriculum had to go wrote Shelley:

> Let us remove from the child's mind the confining walls of lifeless syllabuses and let in upon him the direct rays of first-hand experience – observation and creative expression.[156]

Shelley's early CSL membership appeared alongside health and education officials acting on behalf of the Coalition Government.[157] Political agendas were kept in check by ministers Arthur Stallworthy (health) and Harry Atmore (education).[158] Fraser and Atmore had been responsible for educational assessments under the Parliamentary Recess Education Committee established in 1929.[159] Both

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[149] Wilding, "Health! Nations Awaken to Possibilities of Sun, Air and Diet," 7.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid., 7.
[152] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 106-112. Formalisation of OASL was 1925.
[153] Wilding, "Health! Nations Awaken to Possibilities of Sun, Air and Diet."
[154] "The Sunlight League [First Meeting Held]," 13.
[155] "Sunlight League," 17.
[156] J Shelley, "Care of Mental Health," *Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 16 May 1931, 11.
[157] "The Sunlight League [First Meeting Held]," 13.
[158] "New Health," *Press*, 9 May 1931, 17.
[159] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 109.

visited Salmond's 'psychological laboratory' where Beeby and Shelley carried out psychological research noted by Beeby:

> Fraser, who was deeply suspicious of psychological testing, made no effort to conceal his distaste for our use of mental tests in guidance and selection, and stalked out in the middle of the meeting.[160]

After Beeby completed his doctorate in psychology, Atmore unsuccessfully tried to secure government funding for experiments in industrial psychology.[161] Unable to convince the government of its worth, the worsening depression further complicated matters.[162] Beeby and his wife Beatrice (both trained in education under Shelley), then established an open-air playground for infants in Christchurch. Between 1932 and 1933 the CSL supported their venture.[163] Beeby's membership and close affiliation with the CSL can be traced via broadcasting advertisements.[164]

Crawford's affiliation with the league appears very temporary with one article contributed to the League's handbook in 1934.[165] Until more sources come to light, it appears Crawford was never a fully-fledged member. Wilding had a way of mustering 'male figureheads' into various League activities wrote Tennant.[166] Crawford may have simply been caught up in one of Wilding's fleeting recruitments. Either way Crawford's article appeared in the Leagues *Handbook for Health*, a booklet for young people exploring the great outdoors.[167] Crawford used the timely opportunity to promote nature studies in education:

> We find this law running all through nature; ugliness is repression, beauty is liberty. From this law the child is not exempt: he is in it all, along with rocks and stones and trees. His contact with nature, therefore, should be simple and direct – a living contact with pure sunshine, fresh air, and the reality of plants and animals in conditions where each can express its being in its own way. This is the only school where beauty dwells.[168]

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[160] Ibid.
"Psychological Research."
"("Star" Photograph.) Dr C.E. Beeby, Lecturer in Psychology, Tests a Student through the Chronoscope to Find the Speed of Re-Action of the Nervous System Control after a Given Signal. The Electrically Controlled Clock Records Thought Speed up to Thousandths of a Second."
[161] Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley*, 118.
[162] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 76-77.
[163] "Sunlight League [New Members Welcomed to Committee]," 8.
[164] "The Sunlight League [Second Anual Meeting]," *Press*, 20 May 1933, 12.
"Broadcasting," *Press*, 7 August 1933, 6. Christchurch 3YA broadcast by Dr C E Beeby, "Why Be Healthy?" Under the auspices of the Sunlight League.
"Broadcasting," *Press*, 3 September 1934, 4. Christchurch 3YA broadcast by Dr C E Beeby on "Mental Health and Industry", under the auspices of the Sunlight League.
"Health in the Community," *Press*, 6 June 1936, 22.
[165] H C D Somerset, "Childhood and Beauty," ibid., 29 August 1934, 18.
[166] Tennant, *Children's Health, the Nation's Wealth: A History of Children's Health Camps*, 104.
[167] "Sunlight: A Handbook on Health," *North Canterbury Gazette*, 8 November 1934, 3.
[168] Somerset, "Childhood and Beauty," 18.

Crawford believed every person young or old had a spiritual birthright to happiness. Like Shelley, he understood the dour education system was failing children who might otherwise be transformed through an appreciation of nature.

An Atmosphere of 'Eugenic Conscience'

Alongside Crawford's CSL article appeared Macmillan Brown's 'Two Kinds of Sunshine, Spiritual and Physical'.[169] In an assessment of Browns affiliation with the league, Susan Wilson suggested Brown 'lent a tone of respectability to the eugenic cause' by promoting positive eugenics within League articles.[170] However, Daley perceived from the same article Brown's 'genetically determined tinge', suggesting this was reasonably typical for the times.[171] Gush agreed with Daley that Brown held eugenicist ideals, but added that Wilding's camps were not about the 'eugenic transformation' of society.[172] Either way, Brown's article written four years prior to his passing at the age of 90, highlights an exceptional intellectual ability. Brown's far-reaching perspective on eugenics appears with clarity in Belgrave's MA thesis.[173]

Brown claimed that sunlight had both 'physical and spiritual' characteristics, the practice of positive thinking during the Depression was of utmost importance wrote Brown.[174] These ideas resonated with Helena Blavatsky's theosophical perspective of *The Sun as God* where Plato saw the sun as 'the production of good', and 'Socrates saluted the rising sun'.[175] Shelley's interest in Plato, Socrates, the CSL and Theosophical Society are noted. Strachan too, supported the CSL, he highlighted the 'physical and spiritual' elements within the 'organic curriculum', each balanced by an 'energy source in nature' he attributed to the sun.[176] For higher thinking amid the rays, wrote Strachan, some sort of anchor was needed, he metaphorically illustrated this as the root system on 'the tree of life':

> The fine arts should include all those activities of creation and recreation by which man expresses himself on the higher levels of thought and culture and asserts his humanity. They are the flowering and fruiting of the tree of life, which, though its roots are in the earth, yet aspires to the heavens.[177]

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[169] J Macmillan Brown, "Two Kinds of Sunshine, Physical and Spiritual," ibid., 15 August 1934, 18.
[170] "Eugenism," *Press*, 11 April 1931, 17.
Wilson, "The Aims and Ideology of Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League 1930-1936," 12-13.
[171] Daley, *Leisure & Pleasure: Reshaping & Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900-1960*, 135-137.
[172] Gush, "The Beauty of Health: Cora Wilding and the Sunlight League," 5.
[173] Belgrave, "Archipelago of Exiles a Study in the Imperialism of Ideas; Edward Tregear and John Macmillan Brown."
[174] Macmillan Brown, "Two Kinds of Sunshine, Physical and Spiritual."
[175] H P Blavatsky, "The Sun as God," in *The Secret Doctrine* (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1897; reprint, 1910, 1913, 1918), 279.
[176] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 4, 47.
[177] Ibid., 19, 35, 57.

Crawford understood the life giving qualities of the soil were fundamental to life, in much the same way Strachan believed in the 'tree of life'.[178] 'This does not mean' wrote Crawford, 'that it has become of the earth earthy; the aim has been to make rural life more worth living by extending its mental and spiritual environment.'[179] These ideas appear as a critique of the metaphorical 'eugenics tree', where the roots were seen as a multidisciplinary system of strength.[180] The 'eugenics tree' was based on the amalgamation of scientific disciplines. Crawford and Strachan included arts-based disciplines in their models for education, both agreed the arts supported higher thinking.[181]

Macmillan Brown noted much earlier (1908), how the fine arts provided a pathway to higher thinking, practice and appreciation should start with the very young he claimed.[182] During his work with the CSL, James Hight advocated for artworks depicting rural landscapes to be placed in public buildings.[183] In this way city dwellers could at least sense the natural environment amid their industrialised cityscape. In the atmosphere of eugenic conscience, fine arts were seen by the group as vitally important, as life itself in the right environment could be transformed or better still, become an art form.

Around this time Crawford submitted a series of 35 articles on education to the *North Canterbury Gazette*, again he went by the pseudonym 'Touchstone'.[184] The pseudonym might suggest Crawford did not want his health issues to jeopardise his important message. Fully trained, experienced, and highly qualified, his teaching position remained unlicenced due to his physical disability. Six years later, the same articles appeared in the *Grey River Argus* under Crawford's real name.[185] By then Savage's Labour government were well underway, another war endangered the 'homeland', alongside anxieties around fascism...[186] The context of the earlier 'Touchstone' articles appealed to new ideas in education akin with the natural world. It was not unusual for Crawford, or Strachan to describe children as biological forms. Where Strachan likened children to plants, Crawford likened them to flowers.[187] Of course, both understood children were far more complex

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[178] Somerset, "Some Few Autobiographical Notes for Anthony and David," 19. Crawford wrote: 'As he, [Father] turned over the deep black soil twinkling every here and there with glowworms he would think aloud all the time, telling me of the wonder of that black earth which was really the food of all living things.'

[179] "Brief Report on Education and the Community in Oxford New Zealand, 1923 – 1934," 7. Somerset, "The Link with W.E.A," 10.

[180] Harry Hamilton Laughlan, "The Second International Exhibition of Eugenics," in *Second International Congress of Eugenics* (New York City: Williams & Wilkins Company, 1921), 15.

[181] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*. 57.
Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 83, 87-94.

[182] Macmillan Brown, "Modern Education," 13.

[183] "General News [Use for Art]," *Press*, 13 September 1934, 8.
Aerial, "Radio," *Star (Christchurch)*, 4 August 1934, 19. Broadcast by Hight under the auspices of the Sunlight League.

[184] Touchstone, "The Education of Your Child: No. 1," *North Canterbury Gazette*, 3 February 1933, 4.
"The Education of Your Child: The Child's Needs: No. 35," *North Canterbury Gazette*, 6 October 1933, 7.

[185] H C D Somerset, "The Education of Your Child," *Grey River Argus*, 7 December 1939, 10.

[186] Belgrave, *Becoming Aotearoa: A New History of New Zealand*, 318-319, 362-364.

[187] Strachan, *The School Looks at Life: An Experiment in Social Education*, 17.

than plants! Their analogies appeared as a critique on positive eugenics. In the following extract Crawford likened teaching to gardening:

> […] it [teaching] is more like that of a gardener who grows a gardenful of flowers with a view to letting each be as beautiful as it can be. But don't carry the simile too far or you will be introducing pruning knives and poisonous sprays before the first crop of flowers is ready to open.[188]

These ideas were in keeping with Beatrice Ensor's democratic philosophy within the NEF at the time:

> We of the Fellowship believe passionately that only in a democracy is there freedom for the development and flowering of the human personality …. We must envisage the primary function of education as opportunity for the growth of the individual and the development in him of qualities and character.[189]

Towards the close of the Oxford experiment Gwen and Crawford had fostered extensive local and international WEA connections alongside NEF affiliations.[190] Beeby later reflected on the NEF conference held in New Zealand when he worked closely alongside education minister and Theosophist Henry Greathead Rex Mason (1940-47). A theosophical Labour movement has been identified by historians focused on Mason's role as minister of justice during the two Labour terms between 1935-1949 and 1957-1960.[191] Mason and Beeby fostered a strong working relationship based on mutual respect and trust, each successfully promoted new education alongside NEF principles.[192] Beeby wrote:

> The government was committed to the establishment of the welfare state, and we were glad to feel ourselves the educational arm of a wider policy of social reform. We were strengthened in this attitude by an underlying belief, fostered by the NEF conference, that education itself could cause change in society, even of only slowly.[193]

Beeby also reflected on NEF educationist Isacc Kandel's earlier criticism of the Dominion's education system. Kandel's ideas around 'promoting equality of educational opportunity' were not widely grasped in the Dominion during the 1930s wrote Beeby:

Touchstone, "The Education of Your Child: What Is a School?: No. 20," *North Canterbury Gazette*, 16 June 1933, 4.

[188] "The Education of Your Child: What Is a School?: No. 20," 4.

[189] Beatrice Ensor, "Sayings at the Conference," in *Australian Council for Educational Research: Education for Complete Living the Challenge of to-Day: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference*, ed. K S Cunningham and W C Radford (Melbourne, London, Edinburgh, New York, Cape Town, Bombay, Toronto: Melbourne University Press and Oxford University Press, 1938), vii.

[190] Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*.

[191] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality*, 126-127.
Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, 48-50.

[192] Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education*, 127, 154.

[193] Ibid., 133.

> […] our own school systems were based, in practice, if not always in theory, on the principle of survival of the fittest. […] It was only later that I began to see the full significance of what Kandel had said.[194]

Wartime PM Fraser later ran with the idea, however Beeby maintained, 'equality of educational opportunity' had been at the heart of their thinking alongside NEF principles during the 1930s if not earlier.[195]

Conclusion

What appeared as a bright new beginning in which society could be transformed through new education, coincided with concerns around the political enforcement of eugenic interventions. During the gradual political left turn, the Oxford experiment aligned ideas in new education around a critique on the biological form of positive eugenics. Various new practices in psychology appeared in the Dominion and developed alongside liberal idealism in education. Where psychology was excluded from the eugenics council, Crawford and Gwen's answer was to support vulnerable school children through individual educational development. Their approach was multifaceted and structural; it involved the community as an organic whole. They believed the natural (including metaphysical) environments provided a safe space to foster a healthy sense of belonging where access to concentration could be achieved. Thoughts were seen as biological forms having the ability as electricity might to connect individuals metaphysically through a release of energy. Once concentration access was achieved, higher thinking was maintained through the earth sciences, arts and social sciences in education. Soil, sunshine, aesthetics and psychology mattered in much the same way vaccines work to eliminate disease from society today. Various European perspectives on what a healthy society should look like resided within the Oxford experiment. Philosophies from Socrates, Plato, Grundtvig, Kold, Carlyle and Emerson created the philosophical 'sunbed' from which the Oxford experiment bathed in. Strachan's Organic Curriculum, Shelley's Open-Air Schools league, and later Wilding's Sunlight League all appeared to inject the law of nature to open children towards critical thinking away from the confines of materialism and insularity. Aesthetics, dance and drama were applied in creative ways to further develop a sense of community spirit. Plunket and the Oxford Benevolent and Improvement League supported the Oxford experiment for childhood development. When the Labour Government came into power by 1935, the groundwork for new education had a strong foothold in Oxford. Similarly, Theosophy had a foot hold in the Government through Mason's quiet leadership in justice and later education. The positive local eugenic conscience however, continued to strive towards egalitarianism and democracy in a 'survival of the fittest' mode

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[194] Ibid., 107-291.
[195] Ibid., 90-91, 104-5.

in education. When the international atmosphere thickened with fascism, the deeper meaning of equality of opportunity in education began to hit home. By the late 1930s progressive education with its appeal to individualism went from strength to strength. The Oxford experiment was in its final stages of development, the *Littledene* story was drawing towards a conclusion.

Chapter 5. Re-imagining *Littledene*

Introduction

By 1937 Crawford and Gwen completed their Carnegie scholarship travel throughout Europe and the USA. A year later the Oxford experiment ended and *Littledene* appeared in the Dominion's bookstores. Today the story of *Littledene* means many things to many people. This chapter re-imagines *Littledene* as a sophisticated blueprint illustrating Crawford's stratagem to reform the Oxford community through modern education. It suggests the Oxford experiment was intrinsically connected with the Sawston college experiment in Cambridgeshire beginning in 1924.[1] The main objective here, is to unpack the often-metaphorical tenor in *Littledene* to reveal the Oxford experiment through its close connection with the Sawston Experiment. The Oxford experiment was somewhat shrouded by the 'enlightened subjectivity' Crawford used in *Littledene*.[2] This was Crawford's subtle approach to remedy what he described in *Littledene* as a culturally barren, post-frontier farming society entombed in a lower to middle class utopia.[3] The 'Little Society' as he called them, had lost the gravitas of a class-based system, or 'Great Society' where intellectuality might have otherwise been taken seriously.[4] Henry Morris, Secretary for Education in Cambridgeshire held similar perspectives noted in his blueprint for Sawston:

> We are witnessing in this country through the extension of the principle of ownership the disappearance of the old land owning class, and at the same time a modification of the influence and authority of the Squire and Parson. There are social and political, as well as economic problems, arising out of this change. The responsibilities of leadership and the maintenance of liberal and humane traditions in our squireless villages (which are the rule not the exception in Cambridgeshire) will fall on a larger number of shoulders – they will fall on the whole community. the Village college will be the seat and guardian of humane public traditions in the countryside, the training ground of a rural democracy realising its social and political duties.[5]

Similarly, Crawford was deeply concerned by the power of the 'old order' in the Oxford community. In *Littledene* 'the Squire and Parson' appeared apathetic towards new education, as similarly noted by Morris in the Sawston experiment.[6] It seems neither Crawford or Morris suffered from conservative class snobbery or new intellectualism. Their experiments were not about producing

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[1] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 94.
Henry Morris, "The Village College," in *Being a Memorandum on the Provision of Educational and Social Facilities for The Countryside, With Special Reference to Cambridgeshire* (Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1925).
[2] Shelley, "Foreword."
[3] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 64.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Morris, "The Village College."
[6] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*.

academic communities. They simply wanted to restore critical thinking in the lower to middle class utopia, akin with the post-war context. Crawford hypothesised that critical thinking would reverse the ingrained insularity that disconnected the *Littledene* community from the 'Great Society' (European world):

> The Great Society has a way of making itself felt in out-of-the-way places mainly by technological penetration; it is seldom that it brings about a change through a new vision of learning. Yet this happened in Littledene in 1920 by the advent of a new idea – that of adult education: and this penetration marks a new era in the social organisation of the community.[7]

The 'new vision of learning' based on British New Education, arrived in Oxford through the WEA, its various disciplines related to psychology, sociology, and economics. Its spiritual context was theosophical in theory. Crawford methodically applied each discipline to encourage a spiritual and cultural renaissance in Oxford's core farming community. Likewise, Morris hypothesised a 'rural WEA' could help to consolidate the 'organisation' of 'education and recreational life' at Sawston:

> The Village college would provide the chance for creating for the countryside a new type of village leader and teacher with a new status and a wide function embracing human welfare in its biggest sense – spiritual, physical, social and economic.[8]

This evaluation will chronologically unpack the 'enlightened subjectivity' in *Littledene* to outline Crawford's theoretic understanding of the 'Little Society'. It will then assess the various environmental contexts Crawford used to evaluate the educational, social and spiritual needs of the core farming community at the heart of the experiment. It will demonstrate how Crawford then applied the mechanisms of new education (in line with the 'Great Society' and Sawston experiment) to open the community to a newfound sense of intellectuality and spirituality. The overall objective is to show that the rhetoric in *Littledene* clearly outlines the Oxford experiment, thereby defining Crawfords intention to restore both a spiritual and intellectual vein in the heart of the community.

'Geographic, Historical and Economic Patterns'

Littledene was a relatively 'new' rural community, Crawford characterised its development as the fusion of two natural worlds. One world, belonged to the 'Great Society' where the 'cultivated' loams of the European 'homeland' produced 'English grasses', cereals, and legumes.[9] The other was where a 'great forest' had once thrived beneath the Southern alps, where 'swift rivers' spilled 'without end'

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[7] Ibid., 87.
[8] Morris, "The Village College," i, vi.
[9] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 4-5, 10.

over the Canterbury plains.[10] Crawford poetically illustrated the 'entrancing loveliness' of Littledene's precolonial past, he noted how it had been a lifeway for coastal iwi 'in search' of 'bright plumaged native birds' of the 'great forest'.[11] He more candidly described Littledene's early colonial community as the inception of a 'remittance man' who arrived to 'tear down the age-old forest' to feed the hungry capitalists of Christchurch.[12] The early community launched their attack on the forest from the 'headquarters' of the 'pit sawyers', wrote Crawford. From 'branch to branch', they downed the 'white clematis' and marred the 'delicate ferns' he so tenderly described.[13] Still, Crawford perceived colonial Canterbury as terra nullius, thus the indigenous world remained shrouded in mystery in *Littledene*.[14] To Crawford, the familiar old troubles of the 'new' world were more easily recognisable. When the 'cultivated' old 'English grasses' appeared in Littledene, they arrived with sufficient labourers to develop the 'new pastoral industry'.[15] As more settlers arrived, they travelled not by way of bullock wagon, but by 'transplanting a vertical slice of English society to the new land'.[16] Thus, the 'Old Order' established its old ways in the 'new' land.

Crawford introduced the 'Old Order' as something other than progressive, he argued the community were stuck in a middle to lower English social class system dated from its colonial past. When Littledene's early mill owners and run holders 'demanded' roading and rail systems, Austrian immigrants arrived for 'road construction' work, yet very few stayed to farm in *Littledene*, many 'drifted away' wrote Crawford.[17] Inequal opportunities created earlier by 'Wakefield's scheme', made it almost impossible for labourers to secure property in Littledene:

> An adequate supply of labourers was assured by fixing the price of land high enough to prevent too easy a transition from the land-labouring to the land-owning classes.[18]

For many years land speculation continued to deter labourers from land acquisitions, as a result of the long depression, many of the early 'sheep runs' were divided into smaller blocks, then resold during the 1890s.[19] Difficult times during the Great Depression brought changes to national legislation, farmers were encouraged to secure farm valuations, 'price fixing' helped the 'average

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[10] Ibid., 2.
[11] Ibid., 1-2.
[12] Ibid., 2.
[13] Ibid., 3.
[14] Ibid., 1.
[15] Ibid., 2-3.
[16] Ibid., 3.
[17] Ibid., 2-3.
Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 3. Regarding Austrians in Oxford during the time of the survey, Crawford noted in his MA thesis that 'most of their descendants are still residing in Oxford.'
[18] *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 3.
[19] Ibid., 3, 13.

farmer' retain his farm wrote Crawford.[20] The core farming community developed from the 'new order' – Crawford's main focus group during the experiment.[21] He theoretically divided the 'new order' into a three tiered occupational hierarchy consisting of the lower class experimental labouring landowners, to the middle classed larger Sheep and Dairy farms.[22] Crawford assumed the unemployed would be 'absorbed' into the main group through seasonal work.[23] Overall, Crawford described the farming community as materialistically successful. He argued however, that they were emotionally imprisoned by 'the all-important matter of making a living.'[24]

Crawford set about trying to understand the socio-economic environment of the farming community, to do so he carefully assessed farmer's relationships with the land.[25] He analogically (if not theosophically) reasoned that the progression of the social environment was intrinsically related to the health of the natural environment which could be developed through new education. Crawford found the largest, and most profitable group, the sheep farmers, the least interested in sustainable farming practices alongside new education:

> Sheep-farming seems to be the more important because it occupies by far the greater area; but sociology takes more account of people than of acres, of human relationships than of bank balances.[26]

He noted dairy farmers who 'dabbled in sheep' followed similar capitalist tendencies, thus the core farming community 'easily abused' the land, the ancient loams wrote Crawford, were in 'grave danger' of 'impoverishment'.[27] In contrast, Crawford theorised the 'one horse' farm labourers on small holdings were a skilled minority, open to new education, many had already adopted scientific farming practices.[28] Thus, Crawford divided farmers into two groups, those open to new education (and the law of nature) and those not:

> There are, of course, exceptions to the average farmer here depicted. At the far end of the tussock land there is one who tries to stand aloof from the 'village life.' He would prefer the English organisation of farming – of village squire and tenant farmers. He is sceptical of the value of adult education; he thinks that the schools are going too far in their methods of teaching. He goes in his car to the city for his entertainment; he gives freely to the Church but will not support anything connected with the new education. At the other extreme is the ignorant farmer who has become miserly through a life of abnegation. He fears that the average farmer is too prodigal in his spending. He knows that modern

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[20] Ibid., 16-19.
[21] Ibid., 15.
[22] Ibid., 3, 11.
[23] Ibid., 12.
[24] Ibid., 10-11.
[25] Morris, "The Village College," i. Morris argued that 'the welfare of the countryside depends on 'better farming and better living'.
[26] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 9-14, 10.
[27] Ibid., 8-9.
[28] Ibid., 12, 28-29, 95-98.

> methods of education will produce a race of idlers and paupers. He never went beyond the second standard himself and is none the worse for it. The more education you have the more you want to spend. He is a pathetic figure.[29]

In his assessment of the natural and occupational environments, Crawford established rural education specific to the needs of the middle to lower class farming community. This first assessment appeared as a theosophical critique on the interconnectedness of the natural environment alongside spiritually. The wellbeing of the individual farm and farmer linked to the wellbeing of the wider community. Importantly, Crawford gained an understanding of the groups in which community education through the school and WEA could be tailored to.

'Homes and Homemakers' – 'Work and Leisure'

Crawford determined the intellectual development of the community could be studied through various material environments. He observed how farming families looked no further than their immediate environments for creative expression. He argued their intellectual development was dulled by their fascination with materialism:

> The sellers of cars, radios, electric light and telephones can revolutionise the work and play of a community in a way that the philosopher with his reasoning can never hope to do.[30]

Farming life in Littledene was mundane wrote Crawford, he described daily repetitions going on in cottage kitchens, clothes were fashioned, warmth was welcomed, cakes were an obsession.[31] A prizewinning 'sponge-cake' was the 'highest' form of artistry a farming wife might achieve. On cottage bookshelves, the alluring opulence of books with gilded spines informed Crawford only of their ornamental nature.[32] He suggested books of this 'unread' kind included 'religious subjects, dictionaries and self-educators', their tedium alone deterred readers from quality literature.[33] Tucked neatly into cottage beds were threadbare sheets and holey blankets, yet each home was an embroiderer's emporium, 'even the oven-cloths' were satin-stitched while 'under-clothes' remained bare.[34]

Everyday farming life in Littledene distracted the family from discovering the joys of fine art, any aesthetic-appreciation was stalled by a stronger will for material success.[35] 'It is impossible to

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[29] Ibid., 97.
[30] Ibid., 36.
[31] Ibid., 19, 21, 23-24.
[32] Ibid., 25.
[33] Ibid., 26.
[34] Ibid., 22-23.
[35] Ibid., 24.

take one sunset, some skill, and abundant leisure to make a picture' wrote Crawford.[36] The application of painting or sketching from nature was rarely practiced, children who attended local art classes preferred to copy illustrations, much to the tutor's displeasure.[37] An occasional masterpiece might find its way to a 'florid' kitchen wall wrote Crawford, but the artist seldomly found their way to art school.[38] The 'living room' radio had lowered the price of a music lesson, while musical accomplishment took on a utilitarian tone in the home.[39] Radios added much 'noise and confusion' to family life, except in the 'back country' where the 'noise' made a family feel 'less isolated' wrote Crawford.[40] Telephones took the place of social outings.[41] Outside the ringing gadget clad cottages, Crawford found farming husbands 'leaning on gates' contemplating their own sense of achievement in purebred stock.[42] The habit of 'leaning on gates' was an 'unconscious' form of 'leisure' that fell within the radar of ordinary working life and 'money making instincts' wrote Crawford.[43]

Group dynamics appeared as an important theme in *Littledene*, Crawford illustrated this through the psychology of 'leisure'. The sheep farmer lived, breathed and talked farming, endlessly at home, at the market, at the pub… but had difficulty taking any time away to understand himself emotionally.[44] Farmers even 'capitalized' on the 'genial climate' argued Crawford, working lengthy daylight hours indicated the extent a farmer would go to maintain his social status.[45] This behaviour was noted by Crawford as 'blood for drachmas', a direct quote from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* meaning to reap social kudos.[46] Crawford also argued that when leisure time was taken, it was not used 'profitably'.[47] Farm Labourers found leisurely pursuits impossible given long hours of work set out by their employees, work often invaded the weekend, personal chores on Sundays made labourers even busier.[48] Crawford noted how wealthy farmers sacrificed time-saving farm machinery to indulge in the latest Model T Fords, this he argued, was at the expense of the poor labourers leisure time. He mused there were many more cars than tractors in the farming community, tractors symbolised the

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 24.
[38] Ibid., 24-25.
[39] Ibid., 25.
[40] Ibid., 22.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 60.
[43] Ibid., 23-24, 57, 60-61.
[44] Ibid., 27-28, 32.
[45] Ibid., 27.
[46] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Julius Caesar*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 141, See Act 4, Scene 3.

Sitta von Reden, "Money, Law and Exchange: Coinage in the Greek Polis," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117 (1997): 159. The Latin meaning of 'drachmas' is 'to grasp' the obol (currency), six obols made up a drachma, these were clutches of metal sticks or arrows found in the graves of social elites to indicate their high status.

[47] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 32, 27.
[48] Ibid., 33-34.

indolent leisure seeking labourer, too sluggish to maintain a horse team.[49] Women used their leisure time by 'raising money' for various funds, 'months of leisure gone into needlework' sighed Crawford:

> They are getting from it a certain amount of self-expression, and in some measure they satisfy their instincts of creativeness in making the pabulum upon which bazaars and such like feed. But it is creativeness of a very low order and in no way progressive.[50]

'Social Organisation' – 'Passing the Time'

Crawford maintained that patterns of cultural transference entombed the early colonial community in a repetition of material coalescence. A sense of belonging was maintained in *Littledene* only where social life centred around the ordinary, tangible aspects of materialism.[51] Crawford related this to an earlier time when melancholy for the 'home land' was relieved 'only by planting the institutions of the old land in the heart of the new settlement.':

> The land had to be tamed; the spade was mightier than the pen. Ideas, untouched by outside thought, became enshrined in the family.[52]

Crawford argued that the emotional impact of the early settlement phase disrupted the transmission of 'critical thinking' over successive generations.[53] By 1868 however, the establishment of a 'Mechanics Institute' provided the community with an educational facility, described by Crawford as 'a powerful social force in Littledene'.[54] The institute lasted a few short decades, its 'death knell' argued Crawford, 'was sounded by the Workingmen's Club'.[55] Crawford was thwarted by the conservative nature of club protocol, the committee refused to entertain the idea of WEA tutorials:

> Some years ago a W.E.A. lecturer applied for permission to organise a tutorial class for Club members: the Committee found no difficulty in finding reasons for refusing his request. But at the next meeting a radio salesman sold them an expensive receiving set.[56]

It appears many in the farming community felt threatened by the WEA, radio broadcasts were a safer option it seems, or easier to dial off from speakers who did not talk back. Either way, Crawford was determined not to give up on his WEA work in the community.

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[49] Ibid., 35.
[50] Ibid., 54-57.
[51] Ibid., 51.
[52] Ibid., 37, 49-50.
[53] Ibid., 37.
[54] Ibid., 43-44.
[55] Ibid., 44.
[56] Ibid., 46.

Sociology empowered Crawford to find ways to understand the community at a psychological level. Works by contemporary American sociologist Edmond de S Brunner, deeply interested Crawford in a theological approach to the Oxford experiment.[57] Crawford noted how colonial variations in religious customs in Littledene resulted in small cliques where meaningful relationships might have otherwise developed in larger geographically confined groups.[58] The ideal Anglicised society Wakefield planned for Littledene was but a fragment in a wide multi-denominational landscape wrote Crawford, 'Littledenians' were uninterested in making new associations:

> The pretty picture thus painted of a little band of enthusiasts building their settlement round a church spire, a people dedicated to religion and education, a people with 'one church, one faith, one Lord' was far from being realised. [59]

In *Littledene* religion was rather more socially moral, than meaningfully educational. Crawford found very little acceptance for scientific understanding or 'modern thought' in any of the local religious networks.[60] The community lacked in critical thinking what they vainly made up for in 'fundamentalist' religious ideology, various denominations entangled themselves in traditional interpretations of the bible:

> Some ten years ago a W.E.A. tutor lectured on evolution and the origin of species and was careful to show the error of the popular monkey-man descent idea. He did his best to explain Darwin's work for science. The result was an impassioned sermon in a fundamentalist church. The preacher ended each outburst with 'you can believe that you are descended from monkeys if you like, but I'm not, I'm not, I'm not!'[61]

Crawford did not like the tentacles of religious fundamentalism that held the community back from accepting new perspectives. These early setbacks did not deter Crawford from his vision to reform the community spirituality through education:

> …In Littledene these [multidenominational] groups struggle side by side awaiting a new social sense, awaiting, perhaps, the time when education shall have shown the deepest needs of the individual – needs that can be satisfied only in the society of his fellows.[62]

Divided by religious 'dogma', the community found common ground for 'the all important matter of raising money' wrote Crawford:

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[57] Ibid., 27, 99.
[58] Ibid., 37.
[59] Ibid., 47-48.
[60] Ibid., 51.
[61] Ibid., 50.
[62] Ibid., 51.

> In the meantime the people are united into one group only on the more material side, where the issue [of spiritual 're-union'] is unclouded: that is why the parks and halls are so much more worthy of Littledene than are the churches.[63]

The 'parks and halls' of course, were secular spaces where the community gathered for WEA lectures and events. Crawford approved any organisation animated by the idea of social service, he highlighted the value of secular public meeting spaces where various groups mingled unhindered by socio-religious distinctions.[64] The new public hall 'stands as a symbol of the social life of Littledene' wrote Crawford.[65] The hall appealed to Crawfords vision for the consolidation of cultural and farming events in one public space. It also opened the community to the 'Great Society' through theatre and film, implicitly mirroring the Sawston experiment.[66] Yet Crawford was deeply concerned for young people pressured into a multitude of community events through an unhealthy overload of local organisation.[67] He argued that 'gregarious instincts', when confined to the community, deprived the young of finding time to understand the outside world.[68] Crawford noted the young had the most potential to progress towards critical thinking.[69]

By 1930 Crawford established a strong educational foothold in the community. He encouraged the local 'Benevolent and Improvement League' to fund a yearly 'Natural Science' scholarship for local pupils interested in the natural history of Littledene. 'It is essential' wrote Crawford, 'that the child should get his first knowledge from Nature, not from books'[70] This appears akin with both Nikolaj Grundtvig, and George Thompson's nature before books idea.[71] Crawford clearly encouraged children away from their cottage habitats where injurious books with gilded spines packed an awful sting. He wanted children to explore beyond their immediate material environment, as individuals they should be free from habituation:

> 'The Child has naturally an enquiring mind, especially towards Nature, and his enquiry should be a venture on his part.'[72]

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[63] Ibid., 57, 51.
[64] Ibid., 51.
[65] Ibid., 42.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 53.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 50.
[70] Ibid., 40.
[71] Uffe, Clay, and Edward, *The School for Life: N.F.S. Grundtvig on Education for the People*, 188. Grundtvig did not approve of 'book learning'. Books 'should be avoided as far as possible to encourage the joy of learning.'

Thomson, "A Naturalists' Calendar." Thompson used a similar approach: 'We hear a good deal about Nature studies in education, but knowledge of her treasures is sought and inculcated at second hand in books. No books can teach like the facts themselves, and only a little encouragement and observation are needed to get the interest aroused in the young.'

[72] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 100.

These ideas on natural learning illustrate theosophical influences in New Education at the time. While the school took new education on board, the popularity of Crawford's WEA activities and lectures slowly gained traction in the wider community.

Crawford had some ground to cover as far as the herd mentality of the community stamped out any progression made towards critical thinking. Crawford implied the farming community had not easily moved beyond their earlier assumption that the WEA were a dangerously radical group:

> The farmer is conservative, and loyal to the group to which he belongs: he is distrustful of any new group which may interfere with his customary way of thinking.[73]

In an attack on the 'inclusiveness' of the community, Crawford linked the above premise to the following 'sidelight' in his assessment of the Royal Jubilee Celebrations in 1933:

> It was decided to hold a procession in which 'every organisation could take part.' Most people found that they were eligible to take part on half-a-dozen counts. There was much preparation by all concerned. When the day arrived, the procession was half a mile long; everybody was in it. First came the brass band playing a march; behind the band, the various lodges in full regalia. Then a float representing Britannia and her colonies. There followed the displays of the Farmers' Union, the various sports' clubs, the Women's Christian Temperance Union and so on, and so on. The Salvation Army brought up the rear with its blood and fire banner. But few loyal Littledenians saw the procession; everyone participated so fully that the writer of this survey and a few latecomers were the only ones privileged to see it pass by.[74]

At first the above observation appears light-hearted, yet behind the humour is Crawford's astute awareness that a much deeper social problem had taken place. The irony of inclusiveness is suggested by the single quotation marks used in the first sentence to denote the possible exclusion of certain organisations from the parade. In a play on words the 'latecomers' appear as the more recent arrivals in the community. Had they been 'late' in getting to the parade they would not have been 'privileged' to see it 'pass by'. It appears that the WEA were not included in the procession. The wider context specific to local attitudes towards the WEA as a socialist political group are alluded to. It is most likely the 'latecomers' represented Crawford's WEA circle. As an important 'sidelight' the excluded group symbolised intellectuality, the 'privileged' critical thinkers watching the 'parade' of exclusivity unfold as a 'blood and fire' stampede. Crawford more simply wanted his readers to consider the meaning of 'inclusiveness' in an insular society:

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[73] Ibid., 61.
[74] Ibid.

> There is something too sheep-like in its make-up: its groups need the stimulus of new ideas. A more vivid personal contribution from the members of various groups would much to improve the social life of the place.[75]

'The Great Society and The Little'

In this chapter Crawford figuratively introduces the conception of the Oxford experiment through the birth of the 'Little Society' as a reformation of the old and new orders under the guidance of the 'Great society'. The various ways Littledene communicated with the 'Great Society' are described through various agencies including transport, radio, telegraph and tourism.[76] Those who visited Littledene from the 'Great Society' were described as city dwellers, intellectuals from the university, artists, and lawyers...[77] Alongside the important visitors arrived those who directly connected Littledene to new education through the WEA. However, new education had a limited niche in Littledene, only a very small group of local professionals and civil servants understood it's value.[78] As intermediaries between the two societies, the group included the local mail carrier, police officer, banker, 'retired schoolmaster', and a 'London doctor' living locally, each held some authority in maintaining the order of the 'Great Society' in *Littledene*.[79] Crawford noted how this group supported the Oxford experiment by providing the community with 'everything of value' in an 'undifferentiated' moral and ethical sense.[80] In return, the group clearly valued Crawford's work, they persistently supported his fight to consolidate schools in the district, the desired outcome took 'two years' wrote Crawford.[81] He suggested those who refused modern ideas in education were the wealthy (often older) generation of the 'old order' who easily influenced he 'new order'.[82] The 'old order' were the run holders, and fundamentalist preachers also noted as problematic in Morris's memorandum for Sawston. The placement of this chapter in the book, further symbolised the birth of the 'Little Society' in the order of the experiment. The following chapter on 'Children and Education' begins with the care of the very young, figuratively the 'Little Society' of 'Littledene' were very much in their infancy.

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[75] Ibid., 67. From 'Children and Schools'.
[76] Ibid., 61-65.
[77] Ibid., 62-65.
[78] Ibid., 62.
[79] Ibid., 62-66.
[80] Ibid., 64.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.

‘Children and Schools’

Crawford focused the Oxford experiment on ‘children and adolescents’ through various agencies akin with the ‘Great Society’.[83] He described the mechanisms of New Education in action, observed also in Henry Morris’s blueprint for Sawston College under the ‘Cambridgeshire scheme’.[84] To begin Crawford considered how patterns of urban drift threatened the wellbeing of the community. He was keen to see urban drift stabilized.[85] Keeping the educated in the community was also described in Morris’s blueprint:

> If we wish to build up a rural civilisation that will have chronic vigour the first essential is that the countryside should have a localised and indigenous system of education in its own right beginning with the child in the primary school. Itinerant adult agricultural education, rural libraries and village halls, will always be fighting a battle already half lost, if leaving the village system of elementary education as it is, we forget the children and the older boys and girls, and allow the ablest of them to be stolen by the secondary schools of the towns.[86]

> There would be no leaving school! The child would enter at three and leave the college only in extreme old age.[87] [The plan included] a nursery school room which would also serve for use as an infant Welfare Centre.[88]

Thus, the ‘scientific care of children’ alongside nutrition became an important dynamic in the Oxford experiment.[89] Crawford included a lengthy critique on the work of Plunket in the community, he valued their ideas around ‘natural feeding, sleep, sunshine and fresh air.’[90] Crawford hoped the school would maintain a Plunket philosophy to provide individual support for each child, including nutritional needs.[91] Crawford borrowed the first three concepts in the Sawston blueprint:

> (1) A nursery schoolroom which would also serve for use as an Infant Welfare Centre.
>
> (2) A primary school for children 5-10 years of age of the central village only.
>
> (3) A school providing a rural education of a secondary type for children from 10-15 or 16 years in the central village and the tributary villages of the chosen area… [92]

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[83] Ibid., 67.
[84] Morris, "The Village College," ii.
[85] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 68-69.
[86] Morris, "The Village College," ii.
[87] Ibid., v.
[88] Ibid., iii.
[89] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 69-71.
[90] Ibid., 69-71.
[91] Ibid., 84-86.
[92] Ibid., 101.
Morris, "The Village College," iii.

By locating the school in the 'central village' Crawford alluded to Morris's idea for the consolidation of schools in the district:

> There must be a grouping and co-ordination of all the educational and social agencies which now exist in isolation in the countryside: an amalgamation which, while preserving the individuality and function of each, will assemble them into a whole and make possible their expression for the first time in a new institution, single but many-sided, for the countryside.[93]

In *Littledene* Crawford highlighted how the recent consolidation of schools broke down barriers of exclusivity.[94] Crawford wanted to promote 'a philosophy of rural community education' providing closer interaction between teachers, pupils, parents and the wider community.[95]

The Sawston experiment promoted new school buildings, Morris's vision was for 'creative architecture' to 'express the spirit of the English countryside', buildings equally as alluring as the 'Parish Churches'.[96] The Oxford experiment included a similar vision for 'open-air' classrooms somewhat tailored to the spirit of the Oxford countryside. Many older residents in *Littledene* argued against the idea of new school buildings. Many had been stung by the old 'bookish' education system wrote Crawford:

> At a meeting in an old condemned schoolroom in the days before consolidation a wealthy farmer who owns a motor car and a radio said, 'This schoolroom was good enough for me and it is good enough for my grandchildren.[97]

Eventually, the old schoolrooms were replaced by 'open-air' classrooms, Crawford noted: 'The children find that the wall is down that parted their fathers from the world outside.'[98] Metaphorically, the new classrooms were designed to encourage children to see through the transparency of the material world. Similarly, the consolidation of schools further broke down the social 'walls' within the extended community. Crawford wanted to open the whole community to international ideas akin with the Cambridgeshire experiment.

Crawford's focus for the Oxford experiment was to demonstrate that the school curriculum should be closely related to the rural life of the community. He looked to the history of education in the district to show that an overly academic approach in the past amounted to very little social progress.[99] Crawford introduced two new courses, one provided an academic pathway to Matriculation, the other,

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[93] "The Village College," ii-iii.
[94] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 74
[95] Ibid., 71-72.
[96] Morris, "The Village College," v-vi.
[97] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 72, 64.
[98] Ibid., 75.
[99] Ibid., 72-73.

'Rural-Housecraft' included agriculture for boys and horticulture for girls.[100] Likewise, Morris introduced agricultural and horticultural courses at Sawston in 'accordance' with 'Ministry of Agriculture' guidelines.[101] With support from the 'Department of Agriculture', Crawford led pupils out into the community where a small minority of 'scientifically inclined' farmers assisted with the scientific farming course.[102] The school 'orchard' wrote Crawford, was also a community affair: 'The pupils learn methods of propagation and the trees are used to stock home-orchards on the plan of the school plot.'[103] Appealing to the long-term 'plan' were 'extensive' avenues of trees planted on school grounds, these were literally growing the 'arbor classrooms' of the future.[104] To further include the community in 'the work of the school', Crawford emphasised the importance of community drama productions.[105] Morris's blueprint featured the 'village hall' for 'school plays and concerts'.[106]

The Oxford school curriculum was based on the philosophy of psychologists Cyril Burt and John Dewey, both suggested intellectual developments depended on environmental factors, particularly the social environment.[107] The school also looked to Findlay's philosophical approach around an individual's right to refrain from certain religious scriptures offered in school.[108] Crawford observed how the philosophy of the Oxford experiment did not match with contemporary teacher training. He felt that the natural rural environment alongside 'rural sociology' should be considered as new compulsory training.[109] Crawford aligned the school curriculum with a country vibe to illustrate its future potential as a demonstration school in line with Sawston:

> …The need of the countryside will not be met until, by a recasting of the rural elementary school system, the villages are provided with an education primary and secondary, which will fit boys and girls for life (in its widest sense) as countrymen and countrywomen…[110]

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[100] Ibid., 79-82.
[101] Morris, "The Village College," iii.
[102] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 82.
[103] Ibid., 83.
[104] Ibid., 75.
Turbott, "Anthroposophy in the Antipodes a Lived Spirituality in New Zealand 1902-1960s," 13. Turbott notes similar approaches to education in Rudolph Steiner akin with Anthroposophy where 'a concern for the natural environment' included practical measures around 'agriculture and horticulture'.
[105] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 83.
[106] Morris, "The Village College," iii.
Somerset, "An Experiment in Rural Adult Education (Being a Socio-Educational Survey of an Experiment Conducted by the Writer at Oxford, New Zealand During the Seven Years 1924-1930)," 101.
[107] *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 82.
[108] Ibid., 84.
[109] Ibid., 77 fn.
[110] Morris, "The Village College," i.

'Adult Education'

Crawford presented the 'new vision' for education as a 'new idea' introduced in Littledene during the summer of 1920-21 when a group of visiting professors from Canterbury College arrived under the auspices of the WEA.[111] Their 'idea' linked to an English version of the WEA, carefully remodelled to suit the Littledene rural community.[112] Topics were introduced by way of literature, drama and art, each lecture was designed to lift the 'social organisation' of the community.[113] Crawford developed the 'idea' through the establishment of regular WEA lectures. He tried to lift what he perceived as an 'insularity of outlook' in the Littledene community.[114] Crawford understood that the Oxford experiment would never produce and academic society, his main objective was to change the environment to produce individual critical thinkers.[115] Crawford's WEA group promoted the consolidation of schools in the district, alongside new architecture:

> In the early days of the movement in Littledene the question of consolidation of schools came up. The tutor [Crawford] lectured on the subject and the classes became an important influence in forming public opinion. There is in no doubt that consolidation was expedited through the adult classes: through them also the balance in favour of an open air school was created. [116]

It is revealing that Crawford described the WEA group as a social 'movement'. Overall, Crawford focused on educating the whole community from the very young to the very old, he wanted to build 'a constantly expanding awareness of community.'[117] He described 'learning' as 'the work of the neighbourhood', he matched the school curriculum with adult education classes so school leavers could continue their education locally.[118] The WEA activities included a popular community 'Drama Circle' alongside a club for boys and one for girls outside school hours.[119] Crawford hoped Littledene might one day be recognised for its 'community spirit' akin with an 'international idea':

> The addition of an adult meeting room and library would turn the Littledene consolidated school into a village college on the lines of Sawston in Cambridgeshire… But with this difference - Sawston began in a village with little community life: everything had to be built up. Littledene, in common with many another township in New Zealand, has already developed a vigorous community spirit. It needs only vision to launch the community on new voyages of intellectual and spiritual discovery.[120]

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[111] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 88.
[112] Ibid., 86-94.
[113] Ibid., 87.
[114] Ibid., 91.
[115] Ibid., 89.
[116] Ibid., 90.
[117] Ibid., 91.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid., 89-91.
[120] Ibid., 94.

Unlike Sawston's medieval history, Littledene developed from the frontiers of colonialism. When Crawford tailored Morris's blueprint to fit the Oxford community, the essence of Sawston became entombed in *Littledene*. Hence, the 'local spirit' of the Oxford community was intrinsically related to the 'intellectual and spiritual' life of *Littledene* as the product of an 'international idea' in community education.

'Conclusion'

In his conclusion Crawford revisited the idea that Littledene was the fusion of two natural worlds, the indigenous world on the periphery of the post-colonial world:

> The casual visitor may come to Littledene and from an impression of a sleepy little township in a delightful setting of farmlands and wooded hills. He may take long walks in the shade of New Zealand beeches - tall old ever-green trees with black trunks like living velvet-trees whose branches are hung in early summer with the blood-red flowers of the native mistletoe. Every now and then in his walk he will emerge suddenly upon cultivated farmlands with English grasses underfoot, an English lark singing overhead and English sheep, Southdowns, Border Leicesters or Romneys, growing fat for the English market. He may go for a day's shooting of deer and wild pigs in the hills, or rabbits on the plains…[121]

Crawford wanted the community to experience a spiritual connection with the natural environment; he was certain this would reverse material coalescence and restore critical thinking. Modelled on Sawston, Crawford was sure he could reform the Oxford community by connecting them to new education. From the core farming community, a quarter participated in Crawford's WEA lectures and activities.[122] The overall farming community remained somewhat trapped in material coalescence it seems.[123] The application of new education appeared successful where fundamentalism saw social progression as a threat. With 'the school' as 'the intellectual centre' rather than the Church, individuals were free to develop critical thinking.[124] Crawford gave credit to the local doctor and schoolteachers who supported the experiment alongside new education.[125] There appears in his final reflection a sense that the Oxford experiment greatly enriched his own educational journey. He accepted the reformation of the rural community as a work in progress:

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[121] Ibid., 95.
[122] Ibid., 97.
[123] Ibid., 95-97.
[124] Ibid., 50-51.
[125] Ibid., 97-98. These names were not made explicit by Crawford. See below.
Somerset, *Two Experiments in Community Education: Oxford and Feilding, 1921-1948*, 19. The local Doctor was Dr Leslie Burnet, Lancelot Watson was the 'retired teacher', others who shared the 'vision' were 'Tom Doody, Jane Hawke, Rachel Ryde, Francis Engelbrecht, Steve Smith, the Kerr sisters, the Hendersons… as well as the never-failing co-operation of the school staff…'.

…the country is starved of educational opportunity, but it more than makes up for this deficiency in community solidarity. Its social life may have little direction; it may be dissipated in the service of unworthy aims; but underlying it all are forces that are the educator's opportunity. This study of Littledene has convinced the writer that the new education with its emphasis on the social nature of man need go no farther than the country to establish itself and demonstrate the true meaning of all that has been said and written on the subject of man and community.[126]

[126] Somerset, *Littledene, a New Zealand Rural Community*, 98.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to investigate how far the Somerset's projection of Oxford was influenced by a palimpsest of ideas introduced to them via the movement of intellectuals between Europe and the Dominion. In locating the Oxford experiment within the context of Crawford and Gwen's intellectual histories, this study finds that philosophies associated with the experiment, floated free from what historians understand so far of mainstream thinking in interwar New Zealand. Building on Chris Hilliard's notion that the mechanisms of cultural life are important in determining intellectual histories, this thesis finds that important patterns behaved within seemingly disparate mechanisms in the Oxford experiment. Furthermore, the imperialism of ideas akin with John Macmillan Brown's eugenicist esoterism appears to have emerged implicitly from within the power bases that informed the Oxford experiment. In *Littledene*, Crawford illustrated the farming community as a flawed society steeped in fundamentalism and anti-intellectualism. He did not like the superficial, culturally barren, materialistic utopia he found in Oxford; his answer was to spiritually and intellectually transform the community through new education. New education's theosophical edge encouraged Crawford's esoteric perspective of the community. Crawford understood that the 'survival of the fittest' mode in state education at the time, did not support individual learning needs, or the need for specialised rural education. The Oxford experiment appeared as the product of positive eugenic conscience influenced by the politically charged atmosphere around child welfare.

To interpret *Littledene* as a sophisticated blueprint for the Oxford experiment first required an understanding of Crawford and Gwen's sense of belonging in Canterbury. Their autobiographical material revealed a treasure trove of Ulster Irish and English family migration narratives. Written in adulthood, each autobiography clearly illustrated social and environmental responses to their childhoods in Canterbury. Each experienced a sense of detachment from their ancestral homelands in Europe. Gwen recollected enchanting stories from her Grandmother Alley's privileged life in Victorian Ireland, these stories were often intercepted by her mother's egalitarian feminist views entangled with yearnings for her English roots. Gwen understood that her early sense of detachment developed in a vacuum of Victorianism where first wave feminism clearly outlined the Dominion's egalitarian myth. She also understood that her sense of belonging in Canterbury developed through a deep connection with the natural world, including the Māori world as an imagined anglophile fairy tale. When Crawford reflected on his childhood search for Ulster in Canterbury's natural environment, the Māori world appeared mysterious, it only ever emerged on the periphery. The process of grief in early childhood, reminded Crawford that a strong sense of detachment had been transferred to him by his grandmother's longing for their Ulster homeland prior to her death. Adult memories of childhood detachment illuminated Crawford and Gwen's search for 'home' in Canterbury. Both understood their sense of belonging represented a deep association with the natural world. Thus, Nature became their structural approach in reconnecting the Oxford community to the

wider world. Their reflections illustrate how far each developed a strong sense of belonging as agents for social change in Oxford.

Where the Māori world in *Littledene* appears deliberately set aside through a universal approach, 'Littledenians' appear divided by their Victorian cultural and religious diversity. Thus, the Oxford experiment placed Victorianism as a dividing force in the community. In an attack on egalitarianism, Crawford argued that the overly academic, urbanised education system further divided the community. Importantly, the autobiographical material revealed various layers of societal discrimination through adult perspectives of the egalitarian myth. In *Littledene* the equality of opportunity in rural education appeared important. As a remedy for urban drift, Crawford introduced specialised rural education for the whole community; Gwen introduced educational opportunities for women and girls. This was a holistic approach to support rural children within the urban centric education system. *Littledene* was conceived between the remoteness of the old Māori world, and the reality of the 'Little Society' looking to the 'Great Society' for ideas to remedy urban drift. To lift Oxford from cultural emptiness, Crawford and Gwen looked to their ancestral homeland for the meaningful mechanisms of cultural life, they applied these ideas to encourage a sense of joy in learning. By tailoring educational needs around individuality, both appeared highly sensitive to cultural diversity in the community. Cultural diversity, however, appears shrouded within a theosophical understanding of one humanity in *Littledene*. Crawford understood but did not assess the cultural impact of urban drift on various groups within community. The full impact of urbanisation on cultural life, especially for Māori, was very difficult to foresee at the time, as Wiremu Parker pointed out.

Crawford and Gwen's social assessment of the community focused on the farming sector; they argued that societal development in rural education should be based scientifically on the law of Nature. At the time, soil could be studied scientifically, people could be studied sociologically, Crawford studied both. He concluded that the momentum of intellectuality in Oxford, had been broken by the land, rather than the people. Crawford noted that where occupational and religious organisations held the community in a superficial status of belonging through material coalescence, anti-intellectualism threatened the overall 'community spirit'. This was Crawford's environmental approach, away from arguments attributing social problems to human genetics at the time. In looking to reconnect the community to a new sense of spirituality through nature, Crawford and Gwen adopted a 'nature before books' approach. Similar ideas were at the heart of the Garden City Education Movements in Christchurch (by 1897), and London (1898). These movements were in tune with Findlay's rational curriculum based on Herbartian and Froebelian philosophies for the joy of natural learning. Formalised in the Dominion by 1904, through Hogben's Findlay-like curriculum, nature studies landed like thinly dispersed spores during Crawford and Gwen's Edwardian educations. At the time, George Thomson encouraged Hogben's nature studies away from books idea, Charles Chilton later encouraged nature books through the Christchurch Beautifying Association, while James

Shelley encouraged new education away from books by the 1920s. To include a spiritual element in keeping with new education, Crawford looked to the 'Great Society', he revived the 'nature before books' idea from Danish educationists Nikolaj Grundtvig and Kristen Kold.

Grundtvig's earlier ideas around spirituality and the 'living word' aligned with Crawford's interest in theosophical theory in new education. Émile Coué's popular auto-suggestion techniques applied by British new educationists, appeared as another mechanism in Crawford's stratagem to encourage positive thinking in community education. Auto-suggestion may have also proven useful in maintaining some control during high energy lessons away from books. Crawford maintained the important connection between spiritual relaxation and concentration. Thinking that concentration could be scientifically measured through the nervous system, James Shelley and Clarence Beeby experimented with the concept at Canterbury College. Annie Besant wrote earlier that various *Thought Forms* appeared in nature; these were theosophically understood as 'living essence'. Besant's ideas resonated with Macmillan Brown's similar esoterism. Both associated societal development with the transference of positive thinking through an 'elemental essence' it seems. Similarly, Crawford and Gwen described thoughts as electrical currents transferred from person to person through a living essence. Likewise, Strachan looked to Emerson's transcendentalism with much the same meaning.

These were environmental measures away from genetic critiques when the 1924 draft Mental Defectives Amendment Bill sat heavily on the shoulders of educators. Shelley openly opposed the bill; Crawford's opposition was defined later in the newspapers; his identity well-guarded by the pseudonym 'Touchstone'. This was most likely to deter any conflicts of interest regarding Crawford's position as an unlicenced, yet highly qualified and experienced teacher. Aware of the draft's implications for children, Crawford promoted child psychology, alongside sociology, his WEA lectures included drama and play-readings to encourage mental absorption of difficult concepts. As a vehicle for social progression, Gwen's drama circle appealed to teenage girls and women. Describing parents as first teachers, Gwen argued that rural children would benefit if mothers at home, and girls leaving school had opportunities to continue their education locally.

Gwen belonged to a new generation of female educationists; Dorothy Baster arrived in Christchurch from Britain in 1920; their stories are intertwined through earlier ideas in childhood education. Between 1913 and 1914, Elizabeth Taylor, Elizabeth Chilton and Chilton's husband Charles promoted nature studies through the Christchurch Beautifying and Kindergarten Associations. By 1915, Taylor and the Chilton's applied Maria Montessori's philosophy in the Kindergarten and CWEA networks. As a response to World War One, Montessori's ideas were intrinsically linked to the theosophical garden school movement in Letchworth, and Edinburgh (alongside Findlay's earlier curriculum). By 1915 lines of communication freely flowed through official theosophical education fraternities, linking Britain to India to the Dominion by 1919. That same year Taylor opened the first open-air Kindergarten in Christchurch, while the Vasanta Garden School opened in Auckland under

Beatrice Ensor's theosophical umbrella. With earlier connections to Findlay and Letchworth, Dorothy Baster promoted Froebelian ideas and child psychology through the Kindergarten Association and WEA. She gave lectures on Dalcroze Eurhythmics to teachers in training; radio broadcasts later aired her music sessions for children. Gwen experimented with Eurhythmics at Oxford school; by 1928 she combined Eurhythmic dance demonstrations with Italian operetta; her girls drama group took an unordinary Cinderella to the stage in Oxford. Gwen's contribution to the Oxford experiment remained implicit in *Littledene* but appeared later in her own publication. Thus, *Littledene* is explained as a blueprint.

The Oxford experiment was based around psychology, drama, dance, nature studies and aesthetics for educational development, with support from the local community Crawford and Gwen were free to experiment. The OASL were intrinsically connected with Oxford School through Shelley. Further interest in the Oxford experiment included Oxford's local doctor and retired headmaster. Their formalisation of the OASL in 1925 connected with the Garden City Education Movements alongside nature studies. At Waitaki Frank Milner experimented with Hogben's Findlay-like curriculum, while James Strachan developed the Organic Curriculum at Rangiora High, connected also to the OASL. Crawford shared an interest in Strachan's ideas, and vice versa, they experimented with agricultural science, arts and literature-based topics in their respective communities. Crawford however, looked towards the 'Great Society' when he based the Oxford experiment on Henry Morris's Village College at Sawston. The challenges Morris met with at Sawston, were similarly echoed by Crawford in *Littledene*. Each aimed to develop their respective communities through spiritual and intellectual transformation.

From the darkest days of the economic depression, the OASL promoted aesthetics, and natural sunlight for healthy childhood development, their work appealed to a positive eugenic conscience akin with Plunket philosophy. The Open-Air classrooms at Oxford were designed to open children to the world, the idea greatly appealed to Cora Wilding and the Christchurch Sunlight League by 1931. The CSL appealed to Macmillan Brown's esoterism where 'spiritual sunshine' encouraged positive thinking as a 'cure' for the recession. Under the auspices of the League Crawford promoted nature studies in education, Beeby and Shelley promoted child psychology, Strachan promoted physical education, Milner promoted outdoor education. The CSL appeared as a spiritual movement in tune with theosophical theory in new education, the very emblem of the sun, alongside Athenian ideals noted. Crawford and Gwen's plan for Oxford was to develop an organic community from an intellectual centre rich enough in cultural life to enlighten the perils of materialistic and capitalistic behaviours. From that centre, they opened the community to new ideas for living, they unlocked the insularity of farming groups by promoting a sense of belonging to an international idea. If a deeper sense of belonging within the local natural environment was achieved, critical thinking could follow. Rural education with plenty of sunshine, (and good food), would produce contented children grown

individually in spirit and intellect. In the atmosphere of eugenic conscience, new education was crucial in maintaining the 'living essence' within the 'local spirit'.

As a blueprint for an off-beat Christian based theosophical experiment in new education, *Littledene* portrayed the spiritual and intellectual journey of an isolated post-war, post-colonial, somewhat insular community. From the imperialism of Theosophy within the patriotism of the post war years, a place for pacifism existed. Crawford and Gwen found that place in the silver age of spiritualism. Their work in Oxford defines their sophisticated understanding of intricate physical and natural environments working in harmony. Their approach positively supported the social and cultural life of the community. However, further research is now needed to understand the extent of cultural diversity in the community during the time the Oxford experiment was produced. This should not detract from the meaning or importance of the experiment within the time frame it was written. In the ongoing atmosphere of 'survival of the fittest' in education, thoughts of a new war moved in, fascism sparked new fears… The deeper meaning of equality of opportunity in education was about to unfold, but this is another story. The intellectual history offered here has illustrated how from one war to another, the 'local spirit' of the *Littledene* community was shaped by ideas not altogether typical and certainly not mainstream for the time. It has shown that important patterns of intellect and spirituality existed within the disparity of ideas connected to the Oxford experiment. *Littledene* was a very local story behind an innovative and disruptive movement in education. As a blueprint for the Oxford experiment, it detailed a study of both national and international significance. Through their shared perspectives around detachment and belonging, Crawford and Gwen transplanted from their ancestral 'homeland' various mechanisms of cultural life to uplift the community. In the brightness of Littledene's sunshine, any 'Little Society' might grow towards finding their own sense of 'The Great'.

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