In the century after New Zealand became a Crown colony in 1840, an estimated 117,000 Scots made their way to Aotearoa, ‘the land of the long white cloud’, and until the early 1920s Scots constituted up to a quarter of all its immigrants from the British Isles. During the nineteenth century, according to James Belich, New Zealand was twice as Scottish as the British Isles, and indeed became ‘the neo-Scotland’.

Those statistics alone should have guaranteed New Zealand’s place in the premier league of host lands selected for scrutiny by the scholarship which for the last three decades has been ‘unpacking the kists’ of Scottish settlers and sojourners in many locations across the British world. Yet until recently this dimension of the diaspora has suffered from surprising historiographical neglect. Academic amnesia in Scotland may have been attributable to the persistent fascination with transatlantic migration, which began earlier and was consistently dominant in both proportional and absolute terms. Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, New Zealand scholarship was characterised by a general reluctance to challenge perceptions of the country’s homogeneous Britishness, coupled with a somewhat counter-historical concentration on the Irish, and a failure to look beyond the atypicality of the closed Gaelic community at Waipu in the North Island or the exceptionalism of the South Island’s Scottish heartland of Otago.

The need for serious and sustained study of New Zealand’s Scots was first articulated in 2002, at a conference hosted by Victoria University of Wellington’s newly established Irish-Scottish Studies Programme. Three years later, with substantial support from the Royal Society of New Zealand’s Marsden Fund, a research team was assembled to investigate patterns and impacts of migration from Scotland. By 2010, when the funding terminated, interim results were beginning to appear, not least in the form of doctoral dissertations, and the long-standing famine of published scholarship has recently turned into something of a feast.

*Unpacking the Kists* is the ultimate outcome of the Marsden-sponsored programme. It has been long in gestation, but is well worth the wait, demonstrating the benefits of collaboration, not only among academics, but also between historians, genealogists and local communities. This comprehensive and rigorous evaluation of the Scots in New Zealand is, on the whole, seamlessly written, while simultaneously displaying the individual fingerprints of both established experts and new scholars. More importantly, the quality of the research has generated a meaty but engaging textbook that will prove indispensable to an academic and general readership alike.

The opening chapter explains the project’s rationale and methodology. One of the two overarching aims was to increase knowledge of the Scots as a specific migrant group in New Zealand by demonstrating the distortions created by an undue emphasis on the country’s undifferentiated Britishness, exacerbated by the bicultural identification of Pākehā and Māori favoured by post-colonialists. The other was to integrate the study into established and ongoing international research into Scottish emigration and the Scottish diaspora. Within that framework, the three key objectives were to provide a nuanced quantification of the exodus with reference to precise origins, destinations, and demographic and occupational profiles, as well as overall numbers; to assess the migrants’ adaptation to various aspects of their new
environment through the lens of individual and community case studies; and to evaluate the processes by which the Scots and their descendants became, initially, New Zealand Scots and, ultimately, British New Zealanders.

The quantitative foundations are laid in the two subsequent chapters. Deploying genealogical data and associated case histories to demonstrate that the Scots were mainly young rural Lowlanders, who arrived, often in family groups, and broadly in proportion to their home county’s share of the Scottish population, Chapter two charts the five distinct phases of settlement. It emphasises that the immigrants were not pauperised refugees from the industrial revolution, or dispossessed victims of the Highland clearances, the latter being largely over by the time New Zealand began to attract settlers. Its absence of long-standing migration traditions, coupled with distance and associated costs, generated settlement patterns that differed from the chains and clusters that marked the transatlantic and Australian movements, except among those who came from the far north of Scotland, notably Shetland. The examination of these settlement patterns in Chapter three challenges the persistent perception that all Scots went to Dunedin, demonstrating that they developed business and personal networks in many other locations, including Canterbury and Wellington. Auckland, as a centre of manufacturing activity, was an obvious destination for textile workers from the western Lowlands; in the 1860s an estimated 19.45 per cent of miners on the South Island’s west coast were of Scottish birth; and the troubled special settlement schemes also recruited a number of Scots, especially from Shetland.

Chapter four uses as its key source two databases compiled from the six-volume, 16,000-entry *Cyclopedia of New Zealand* (1897-1908). The biographies of 2,503 Scots-born and – for comparative purposes - 5,105 English-born settlers have been scrutinised for indicators of the Scots’ contribution to New Zealand’s economic life. Despite the obvious limitations of self-selection in a subscription publication, coupled with male bias and middle-class dominance, the *Cyclopedia* quantifies, with detail not available elsewhere, the more speculative hypotheses of previous studies about occupational distribution. It confirms the Scots’ disproportionate involvement in farming, which they imported, along with a controversial enthusiasm for ‘improvement’, which was to have profound significance for colonial New Zealand. While also noting their prominence in the metal trades and the financial sector, the chapter avoids any claim of Scottish exceptionalism, pointing out that economic networks and success were shaped as much by class and pragmatism as by ethnicity and clannishness.

The next two chapters turn the spotlight on the settlers’ engagement with civil society and the environment. Since New Zealand was, until the late nineteenth century, a country where population growth was heavily dependent on immigration, the settlers shaped rather than simply contributed to civil society, although, as the authors point out, Scottish culture was never ‘hermetically sealed’, and its impact – examined through seven specific lenses - was moderated by colonial circumstances and the influence of other British ways. Their contribution to environmentalism was equally ambiguous. Since the 1990s the stereotype of the ‘green Scot’ overseas has captured the public imagination, but the Scots were essentially pragmatic, concerned with sustainable development rather than preservation *per se*, and eager to succeed by recreating the familiar landscapes and economic systems of their homeland. The tensions inherent in balancing the drive for rapid improvement with a commitment to conservation and the avoidance of large-scale degradation are explored through the careers of three individuals: colonial scientist, Sir James Hector, and the naturalists, George Malcolm Thomson and Herbert Guthrie-Smith.

Issues of adaptation, integration and assimilation are tackled in the next three chapters. Ethnic associational culture, which has been extensively scrutinised across the Scottish diaspora in recent years, favoured Caledonian societies rather than the St Andrew’s...
organisations that dominated the North American scene. Although benevolence was written into the constitutions of the ‘Caleys’, their overwhelming emphasis was on sport, particularly the promotion of Caledonian Games, which were inclusive, community-wide pursuits that integrated Scottish ethnicity with civic life throughout New Zealand. Moving from the public to the private sphere, the Scots – like other immigrants – arrived with ‘a basket of inherited traditions and folkways’. These were generally modified during three stages of settlement: the establishment phase, when the retention of familiar customs provided emotional security amidst the trauma of transition; the experience of ‘coming to terms’, when the practical utility of sentimental attachments was evaluated in the context of an evolving colonial society; and the era of cultural assimilation, when a composite New Zealand/British identity emerged among second-generation settlers, mainly after 1900.

A zeal for religion and education has been commonly identified as the hallmark of the migrant Scot on both the public and private stage. This stereotype is explored in the penultimate chapter, which highlights the ‘complex amalgam of religious and secular traditions’ that characterised settler Presbyterianism. By 1901 25 per cent of New Zealand’s religious adherents were Presbyterian, a statistic which not only made the country one of the most Protestant in the British empire, but also reinforced its Scottish ethos. Presbyterian influence was, however, modified by the need to reach an accommodation with the demands of an emerging colonial society, and puritanical practices sat – somewhat paradoxically – alongside heavy drinking and ‘larrikinism’. Leisure time was occupied by outdoor pursuits and cerebral activities, though the early emphasis on the self-improving function of public libraries was increasingly displaced by reading for pleasure.

The long final chapter adopts a comparative approach, revisiting key themes in the context of Scottish migration to other parts of the British world. Scots in New Zealand, the authors conclude, were distinctive, in comparison both with other British migrants to the country, and with Scots who settled in other New World destinations. Yet throughout the empire the Scots were always a minority compared with the English, and pending further investigation of the latter (which has been undertaken to some extent since this book went to press), James Belich’s contention that New Zealand was ‘the neo-Scotland’ cannot be fully tested.

Many thematic kists have been unpacked in this invaluable study, which should be on the shelves of any serious student of migration, the Scottish diaspora, or New Zealand history. Despite occasional repetition – notably the frequency with which readers are reminded of the dominance of Lowland agriculturists – the team is to be congratulated on avoiding the disjointedness of multi-authored works, as well as for maintaining focus and impetus over the course of such a lengthy project.