McCabe, Jane. "Independence." *Race, Tea and Colonial Resettlement: Imperial Families, Interrupted*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 145–166. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474299534.0018>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 08:40 UTC.

Copyright © Jane McCabe 2017. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Independence

What is to become of Kalimpong? Are the Indians taking it over? A good thing Dr Graham isn't alive to see what seems to be the fate of a brilliant dream and undertaking.¹

Annie Larsen (nee Brown), a 1920s emigrant, posed her pessimistic questions to James Purdie in 1951, after India had gained Independence from Britain, after John Graham had died, and at the beginning of the decade when the Kalimpong settlers (as I refer to them hereafter) consolidated their place in New Zealand society. Her bluntly stated sense of alienation towards 'the Indians' communicates a stark detachment from her own heritage and reflects the British leanings of the Anglo-Indian community. This chapter interrogates the notion of independence from multiple perspectives: individual, national, racial and familial. Indian nationalists had always been dogged by British paternalism regarding their readiness to rule. To what extent, then, might we draw a parallel between India achieving political 'adulthood' and the Kalimpong settlers standing on their own two feet in New Zealand? With Graham deceased, and their tea-planting fathers returned to Britain, the severing of ties between India and Britain took on greater emotive significance. In this chapter I argue that the Kalimpong settlers' stoic, silent turn towards a New Zealand future was profoundly affected by Indian Independence.

Few scholars have explored the ripple effects of Indian Independence in former settler colonies. In New Zealand, Tony Ballantyne has shown that there was considerable local interest in Indian politics in the early twentieth century, as has Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, who argues that, contrastingly, in the post-Independence period India became 'rather peripheral to New Zealand's view of the world'.² The Kalimpong scheme provides excellent ground upon which to extend these studies, by exploring the transnational reverberations of this declining relevance for families that were spread across India, Britain and New Zealand. As we have seen in previous chapters, these dispersed families

had been operating in a particular way, often through the central node of the Homes at Kalimpong, for some decades. How would they, and indeed the greater 'Kalimpong family', function in this changed political structure? As I will argue, the archival ruptures brought about by Independence again highlight the multiple ways in which political shifts are directly tied to the making and unmaking of familial narratives.

For Homes graduates, Independence intensified the aspiration of family reunifications outside of India, and this put pressure on those already settled abroad to assist those 'left behind' to emigrate. During 1950s and 1960s, the era when many descendants were laying down their early memories, aspects of the dispersed Kalimpong family dynamics were becoming concretized. Kalimpong settlers perhaps gave up the hope of ever visiting India, or seeing their mothers again. This kind of internal closing off surely goes some way to explaining their subsequent silence over their Indian heritage. So too does the finding that while some New Zealanders were able to assist their siblings to gain entry permits, others were not, and never saw each other again. Bringing together the narratives of two substantively different strands of Kalimpong families – the outward-looking Indian strand and the inward-looking New Zealand one – this chapter crosses over national narratives, exploring assumptions about the settled nature of New Zealand versus the unsettled nature of India in the 1950s through the experiences of individuals and families who had to find some kind of resolution to their own life stories.

In important ways this chapter is the transnational culmination of this book, certainly from the perspective of the original Kalimpong settlers. The sections oscillate between India and New Zealand, beginning with an outline of the process of 'Indianization' at the Homes that was already under way before Graham's death in 1942. I then locate the Kalimpong settlers within the opportunity structures of mid-twentieth-century New Zealand, using a survey of electoral rolls from 1946, 1949, 1954, 1957 and 1963. This data was collected as a means of stepping outside the main narrative structures under examination thus far, the Homes and the familial, to assess the New Zealanders' geographic and social mobility according to official sources. To some extent, my findings accord with the Homes narrative and Graham's positive claims about the scheme after his 1937 visit. Beneath this veneer of success, however, the drama of families fragmented by the scheme continued to play out. Hence I return to the Indian context, reopening the files for families that had siblings placed in both India and New Zealand.

‘Indianization’ at the Homes

With the emigration scheme halted by the New Zealand government and British withdrawal from India widely regarded as inevitable, John Graham’s focus turned entirely towards placement of Homes graduates in India and mending the historically difficult relationship between Anglo-Indians and their Indian ‘brethren’.³ Graham was to spend the last few years of his life attempting to build a new sensibility into his institution in the hope that it would continue to have some relevance in a nation that would soon sit outside the British Empire. His public rhetoric on the matter was backed by changes at the Homes to appease local interests. In 1939, for example, Graham responded to pressure from the Nepali community in Kalimpong by allowing five Nepalese children to be admitted as Homes boarders.⁴ There had always been an allowance for 25 per cent non-Anglo-Indians, but in practice there were never more than a handful of local pupils, none of whom were boarders. Graham expressed his reluctance over the matter, writing that the Homes was ‘founded for a definite class of needy children and is supported as such’. As Simon Mainwaring states, Graham’s fundraising network was ‘primarily interested in a community that had a British connection’.⁵ His hand was forced as the British connection waned.

Graham did not live to see the change in governance of India. He did celebrate fifty years of service with the Kalimpong mission in 1939. Already an elderly man of some frailty, Graham had a series of heart attacks in 1940 that left him gravely ill. Although in name he continued as superintendent, his duties effectively ceased. Graham died on 15 May 1942. His biographer, James Minto, emphasized the local outpouring of respect in the multicultural funeral proceedings: the road through Kalimpong was lined ‘with an astonishing concourse of people’, the service was conducted in Nepali, and lamas from the Kalimpong *gompa* paid a ceremonial tribute.⁶ Minto noted the extensive coverage of Graham’s death in the press in India and Britain; his passing also received mention in New Zealand publications.⁷

James Purdie’s appointment to the position of acting superintendent after Graham’s death provided some continuity for the New Zealand community. Purdie had been secretary at the Homes since 1908 and it was he, rather than Graham, who had kept up correspondence with many of the New Zealanders. But it was Reverend James E. Duncan, a Scot born in Darjeeling, who would lead the Homes into the new era. Arriving from Scotland in 1944, Duncan took on an institution in financial crisis. Four cottages had closed during the Second

World War and the roll had dropped to 500 pupils. Duncan was forced to look for alternative means of support in a changing social and political climate. Rani Maharaj Singh, national president of the YWCA and wife of the first Indian governor of Bombay, delivered an address at Kalimpong for the 'Homes Birthday', the last in British India, in September 1946. 'I have come to claim you children for the land of your birth', she stated, 'the time has come for you to know and love and serve the real land of your birth ... and finally to give up the prejudices with which you have unconsciously looked upon her glorious culture.'⁸

Britain's withdrawal from India on 15 August 1947 had immediate consequences at the Homes, with two significant measures implemented by the board on 1 October. The first was a change of name for the institution, removing the 'St Andrews' and 'Colonial' to be simply known as 'Dr Graham's Homes'. The second was to raise the ceiling of non-Anglo-Indian pupils to 40 per cent. Duncan's reward for these changes was a grant of one lakh rupees from the Indian government, a much-needed donation given the Homes' total debt of over two lakhs.⁹ A process of 'Indianization' was put in place through the language of instruction and local teaching staff. Sri C. Rajagopalachari, governor of West Bengal, visited the Homes in May 1948 and addressed both issues when he stated that 'you must begin by getting the teachers and house staff, or whoever it may be, to talk to the boys and girls in Hindi'.¹⁰

James Purdie relinquished his role as secretary in 1946, but did not leave Kalimpong permanently until 1951. Archival practice in this period reveals the shifting allegiances and uncertainty over the future of the Homes. Despite Purdie's lingering presence, the personal correspondence he received from graduates between 1947 and 1952 is held with the Kalimpong Papers at the National Library of Scotland (NLS) in Edinburgh, rather than in the files at the Homes in Kalimpong. Evidently Purdie regarded these letters as belonging to him and not the institution. The subsequent deposit of the letters at NLS also opens access to material that sheds light on the eventual emigration of many Homes graduates; more so than if they had been stored in family files at Kalimpong.¹¹ Of the large stack of letters Purdie received between 1947 and 1952, only a small proportion originated in New Zealand. The rest were written by graduates in locations around the globe; firm evidence of the eventual emigration of many of those placed in India. In this way Independence, a key driver of this exodus, softens the perceived disruption caused by the Homes emigration scheme. In other words, settlement outside India became a likely scenario even for the graduates who were not 'sent' to New Zealand.

The content of the letters to Purdie in this period illuminate the process of renegotiating relationships to this institution that was being 'Indianised', an institution that had been central to the functioning of many families and of course to the larger 'Kalimpong family'. From 1947 onwards, New Zealanders who wrote to staff at the Homes mostly did so when they required information (such as birth certificates); they began their letters by introducing themselves as former pupils and then made their requests. Their correspondence with Purdie, on the other hand, was more personal, updating him about their own situations and those of other graduates. The earliest letter from New Zealand in the Purdie collection was received from Thornton Kennedy, a 1938 emigrant living in Palmerston North. Attesting to the vertical (i.e. intergenerational) reach of the Kalimpong network, Kennedy gave news of not only others in the 1938 group, but also of several 1920s emigrants. Yet according to Kennedy, the majority of 'our boys and girls' were in Auckland or Wellington; already the early southern settlers were slipping out of the Kalimpong collective memory.¹² Also of note in Kennedy's letter was his hope, and expectation, that Purdie would be able to reconnect him with his siblings placed elsewhere. As the last link to the early graduates, Purdie remained a pivotal presence in the broken and dispersed Kalimpong families.

These letters to Purdie reveal the continued arrival of small numbers of individual Homes graduates around the time of Independence. Unlike other Anglo-Indians who wished to enter New Zealand in this tumultuous period, they had family and friends to call on for assistance with permit applications and settlement. Frank Donaldson, for example, was married with several children when he arrived in 1948. He initially stayed with Betty Hall (nee Gammie) in Auckland, who hosted other new arrivals too. Within a year, Donaldson had bought a house and was working for the Customs Department.¹³ Kenneth Storey wrote after emigrating in 1947 that New Zealand was a 'great country' and asked for Purdie's assistance for George (presumably his brother) to follow. 'There is no need for a permit', Storey suggested, just proof of being a 'British subject by birth'.¹⁴ Immigration rules were a common topic in the letters to Purdie, and the various advice offered suggests that policies regarding Anglo-Indians continued to be unclear in what was a period of significant change in the spheres of immigration and citizenship in New Zealand.¹⁵

The uncertainty around these rules also resulted in rifts between siblings (or friends) when requests for assistance were not met. It was not always possible to secure permits, and there was perhaps an understandable reluctance to risk one's own uncertain status in order to 'sponsor' a new entrant. Here then was

another point of rupture for many families and further cause for silence in subsequent decades. Inevitably, the cracks between the Indian and New Zealand branches of these families widened as the common imperial existence that was integral to the Homes scheme was severed. Unclear rules of entry affected the Kalimpong settlers' desire or capacity to ever travel back to India; indeed, apart from war service, most never travelled overseas after placement in New Zealand.¹⁶ Descendants have attributed this reluctance – at least in part – to their parents' awareness of the continuing restrictions on Anglo-Indian migration and uncertainty about their own largely undocumented status.

Settlement: 1950s New Zealand

The reluctance of Kalimpong settlers to travel internationally in their later lives might also be attributed to the nature of their early 'mobility', which comprised two significant upheavals, first from the tea plantations to Kalimpong and then across the ocean to New Zealand, both involving painful separations and journeys into entirely unfamiliar surroundings. This history of coerced movement is an important platform from which to consider their subsequent local stability. All faced a period of adjustment after initial placement in New Zealand, which has been traced in the preceding chapters using reports from the *Homes Magazine* and letters from the Kalimpong files. In this section, electoral roll data reveals that for majority of emigrants the initial adjustment period was followed by a marked tendency for geographical stability. Thus, as the possibility of participating in any meaningful way in their extended imperial families faded, the Kalimpong settlers established robust new branches of those family trees – firmly woven into the fabric of suburban life in 1950s New Zealand, yet invisible to both their British and Indian origin families. The Kalimpong settlers worked, they voted, they owned homes, they served on school committees, and they raised their children as 'New Zealanders'.

A scan of electoral rolls over five election years (1946–63) gleaned data for the majority of Kalimpong settlers. Of the 130 emigrants, 14 died prior to 1946, and 3 left New Zealand. Two of those who left returned to India: Peggy O'Brien contracted an eye infection shortly after arriving in 1925, was quarantined for a month and then 'ordered to return' by New Zealand authorities; and Mary Chaston, a 1920 emigrant, left in 1936 with plans of completing nurses' training there.¹⁷ The third was a veteran of the First World War who moved to Australia.¹⁸ Excluding the three who left and those who were deceased by 1946, the maximum

number of persons who could be included in the survey was 113. Of those, 85 (39 men and 46 women) were located in at least one of the electoral rolls for this period.¹⁹ Locating them among the wider population of New Zealand required collating the full range of private and public sources deployed in this book, cross-referencing in multiple ways to confirm individual identity with absolute certainty. Two observations are thus immediately possible: first, almost all of the emigrants stayed in New Zealand, and second, most were located in the electoral rolls, indicating a high degree of incorporation into civic life.

For geographical location, I used the addresses listed in electoral rolls to group the emigrants by province. I wanted to know where the emigrants settled, the extent to which they moved away from their initial region of placement, and their mobility during the study period. Regarding settlement, Wellington had the highest number of emigrants in each of the five years (around 30 per cent), followed by Auckland and Otago at around 20 per cent. While these three regions were expected to dominate given the initial placement of emigrants there, the proportions did indicate a definite northward drift, away from Otago, and a clustering in Wellington. Still, over half of the emigrants (forty-seven of the eighty-five) did settle in the region where they were placed. Stability during the study period was remarkable, with only twelve of the eighty-five emigrants moving to a different province. Several of those who moved did so at retirement age: George Langmore, Leonard Williams and Helen Savigny all moved from Dunedin to the North Island for this reason. Setting this rate of movement alongside other local studies suggests that the level of transience among the Kalimpong emigrants was low in both absolute and relative terms, but it also conformed to the pattern among the colonial populations at large of a slowed rate of interprovincial migration after marriage.²⁰

The electoral roll data revealed a gendered difference in geographic mobility, in reverse to the earlier transience of Kalimpong men.²¹ In the study period (1946–63), the women were more mobile than the men, especially in moving away from their initial province of placement. Of the twenty-two women placed in the South Island, fifteen had moved north by the late 1940s. The three who relocated to Wellington all became active in the local Kalimpong community. Esther Graham and Dora Moller moved northwards with their farmer husbands, Esther to Marlborough and Dora to Canterbury, and each established connections to others from Kalimpong in their new places. Therefore, although marriage was a determinant of where the women settled, they showed a strong inclination to seek out other Homes graduates. In contrast, of the twenty men placed in the south, only eight moved northwards. The three who settled in

Auckland – Sydney Williams, Henry Holder and Eric Boardman – all went there immediately after returning from war. John Graham did not meet any of them in Auckland in 1937 and they are not known to have been involved in the local community. The numbers are small but there is a definite sense that the development of Kalimpong communities in the north was characterized by these dynamics – earlier women settlers moving northwards and connecting with later arrivals, hosting events and providing opportunities for social contact that left an indelible mark on the next generation, who developed close relationships to these much-loved ‘aunties’.

Gender was significant for a different reason when collecting occupation data. As other researchers have noted (and acted upon), women were recorded in the electoral rolls only as ‘Married’ or ‘Spinster’.²² For the Kalimpong women, information from private sources indicated that many, both married and unmarried, worked throughout their lives. I will return later to the women’s actual work, but my response to this hurdle when using official sources was to analyse the occupational information from the electoral rolls for their husbands instead, in order to at least gain a sense of how the married women fared economically. As it turned out, the number of Kalimpong women’s spouses and Kalimpong men was almost identical, and their occupations early in the period suggested they occupied a remarkably similar economic status. Since the Kalimpong women all married pākehā (white) men, my response to a gender issue facilitated a unique ground upon which to test race as a limiter of social mobility.

Comparing the two groups of men suggests that Indian ancestry did not hamper the Kalimpong men’s advancement into higher occupations.²³ Knowing that they all began their working lives in New Zealand as farm labourers, there was a general and definite trend of upwards mobility, since none listed farm labour as their occupation in the final electoral year of the study period. Moreover, compared to the women’s spouses, fewer were engaged in manual or unskilled labour. Those among the Kalimpong men who did continue to labour at the lower end of the occupational spectrum were variously employed on the railways, in factories, or as general labourers. This aligns with the urbanization of 1950s New Zealand, away from the rural sector and towards increased opportunities in manufacturing or in public works like the railways – somewhat ironic given the historic (and continued) association between railway work and the Anglo-Indian community in India.²⁴

Setting aside the movement ‘up’ from farm labour, several of the Kalimpong men who arrived pre-1921 achieved a clear rise in occupational status during

the study period. Sydney Williams, the 1908 arrival who wrote to Graham when he and his brother took up rabbiting and seasonal work in Central Otago, eventually settled in Auckland. In the electoral rolls he moved from an initial entry as a 'faultman', to the rest of his career as a 'line foreman'. Henry Holder, another early emigrant who moved to Auckland, was a 'manager' for the first three electoral roll entries and 'accountant' in 1957. Wilfred Snelleks, a 1920 emigrant who was placed and stayed in Dunedin, was a 'timberyard man' for the first two electoral years and a 'clerk' for the last three. Snelleks's son-in-law described Wilfred as having an 'excellent career' in this clerical role for the Labour Department where he acted as the 'chief rehabilitation officer' for returned servicemen.²⁵ Descendants of Holder and Williams were similarly positive about their fathers' career progress and job satisfaction.

Others among the Kalimpong men moved upwards in occupational status by establishing their own business. Leonard Williams (Sydney's brother) owned a hairdressing and tobacconist business in Dunedin for over thirty years. James Bishop was a grocer in Wellington for all of his entries in the electoral rolls. Tom Spalding was listed as a motor mechanic between 1949 and 1954, before using his tea planter father's inheritance to purchase the business and become a 'garage proprietor' for the remaining years of the study period. Tom Watson was a milk vendor in 1946 and a poultry farmer for the next three entries. Only two other men ended up owning farms. Charles Moller had one listing as a 'poultry farmer' before being listed variously as 'farmer' and 'dairy farmer' for the rest of the study period. Richard Hawkins was a farm labourer for the first three electoral years (and for the twenty years prior), and became a dairy farmer in his own right in 1957 as a result of winning a ballot for returned servicemen. This very small number of farmers is an important finding given that the entire scheme was predicated on the idealized trajectory of moving from farm labourer to farmer.

The seven men who arrived in the 1938 group were noticeably higher in occupational status than the earlier emigrants. Only Hamish Tweedie was ever recorded in an unskilled occupation, and he moved upwards to a position as a storeman. Of the other six men, two were recorded as clerk or public servant, two were carpenters, one was a lineman and one an insurance agent. None worked in the rural sector (during the study period) and none were self-employed. These often white-collar occupations placed the final group in employment that was far more conducive to settlement than rural labour. Unsurprisingly then, the 1938 group were very stable in location too. All five men who settled in Wellington lived in the district of Lower Hutt. These differences between the

1938 male arrivals and their earlier counterparts can be attributed to the rise in education standards at the Homes, and to the reduced emphasis on farm training when emigration to New Zealand halted in the late 1920s. In addition, several of the 1938 group gained experience in clerical positions in India while waiting for an opportunity to go to New Zealand, and during their service in the Second World War.

Despite not being trained for farm work, the 1938 group entered New Zealand upon the same justification as the early emigrants: to fill rural labour shortages. The family archive and memories passed down by one 1938 emigrant, Fred Leith, provide a fascinating insight into the disjuncture between the circumstances of the later emigrants and the original model for emigration into which they had to fit. Leith's descendants have documents that he brought as evidence of his qualifications from the Homes and La Martiniere College in Lucknow.²⁶ A letter from the principal of La Martiniere College gave a glowing account of Fred's sporting and military achievements, and his general 'ability, diligence ... and pleasant personality'.²⁷ Fred then worked as a clerk for a shipping firm in Calcutta before joining the 1938 group to New Zealand. Fred's high standard of education, leadership roles and work experience would perhaps have surprised readers of the *Evening Post* article who were informed of the group's arrival thus: 'The shortage of suitable farm labour in New Zealand was alleviated to a small extent yesterday by the arrival of a small party of Eurasian Youths at Wellington under a scheme arranged by the St Andrew's Homes in Kalimpong, India.'²⁸

The story of Fred's early life in Wellington passed on to his children was that he hated his initial position on a farm, as it meant living in a 'shack' on the property and performing menial labour that he had no training for.²⁹ The situation was resolved when Fred responded to a reprimand from his employer by telling him that he was an accountant, not a farmer. Immediately, Fred was given a room inside the house, and soon found clerical work in the city. He was living at the YMCA when war broke out several months later. Fred relished the opportunity of war service, achieving the rank of sergeant-major and, according to his son, regarding the war as the 'highlight of his life'.³⁰ Fred re-sat his accountancy degree at a New Zealand university after the war, and went on to have a long career in accounts work. Though his son believed his 'colour' prevented him from achieving promotion commensurate to his duties, Fred's story illustrates what might be thought of as a 'false start' in the Kalimpong men's farm placement – a downward movement from previous employment in India that was largely hidden from the public record. It was up to the men themselves to correct this mismatch as they found their place in local communities.

The women too had to adjust to the reality of situations that had been portrayed as almost glamorous in the *Homes Magazine*. In 2014 I met one of the women from the 1938 group, Beryl Radcliffe, still alive and well at ninety-three years old, living independently in Australia. As soon as we sat down to talk, Beryl made an unprompted statement: 'My only regret is that no one ever asked me if I wanted to go to New Zealand.'³¹ In a sharp reminder of the uneven social settings they had to navigate over the course of their lives, Beryl spoke of resenting her initial domestic placement because she was 'treated like an Indian' or 'a coolie' – expected to eat separately from the rest of the family. Furthermore, she understood emigration to New Zealand as being sent away from India and a further rejection by her father, rather than an opportunity. Beryl's only positive memory of her initial placement was that the problems she had with the family led to her friendship with Janet Fraser, the wife of the politician Peter Fraser, who intervened in the situation and assisted her into a hospital nursing position. Talking to Beryl revealed the real ambiguities of this lifeway. She was very bitter about the separation from her family and about early difficulties in New Zealand, yet a portrait of Graham and of the 1938 group were on prominent display in the sitting room of her modest home in Queensland.

From a descendant perspective, even without details from their parents about this early period, there is an expectation that the transition to life in New Zealand, towards that stable 1950s existence, must have been a difficult one. Descendants have also understood their parent's turn away from India with the arrival of their own children. But what has remained suppressed in the *Homes* narrative and absent from familial stories are continuing ties to Kalimpong and to greater India.

Two families: Across the divide

A narrative of uncertainty for those placed in India presents a stark contrast to the story of stable settlement in New Zealand in the 1950s. In fact, both of these narratives have been integral to the development of the other. Most descendants believe that their parents were fortunate to be placed in New Zealand. Even if there are strong feelings around the familial separations and cultural loss brought about by the scheme, it is assumed that placement in India would have been more difficult. These same beliefs were evident in the 1950s, and affected the experiences of *Homes* graduates in different destinations. Correspondence between siblings and friends kept Indian events current in the everyday lives

of New Zealand emigrants. In turn, the aspirations of those 'left behind' in India were shaped by news from abroad, which saw emigration, an increasingly central aspect of Anglo-Indian identity, kept firmly in their minds.³² A rich understanding of these dynamics is afforded by the Homes personal files for the Moller and Gammie families, both of whom had siblings 'stuck' in India in the 1930s. Their letters afford glimpses of day-to-day life for graduates in India, moving along established Anglo-Indian circuits but within the Homes network and with a surprising degree of continued involvement by Graham.

Peter Moller was the fourth of Paul Moller's children to leave the Homes. He was preceded by Dora, who went to New Zealand in 1920; Charles, who chose not to emigrate with Dora and then regretted it; and Elizabeth, who was in the 1925 group to New Zealand. Peter's correspondence with Graham tells us not only of his own movements in India, but of his two brothers who were placed in India and later settled in New Zealand. His letters, which continued for over thirty years, were often motivated by requests for assistance with local employment and possible emigration. He first wrote to the Homes in April 1925, two months after he had been placed with the Government Telegraphs in Calcutta. Peter was living at a boarding house with Mrs Rogers in Sooterkin Lane, where he had 'every comfort I require', but asked that more Kalimpong men be sent to the boarding house as he was lonely 'living in a house where there are no other fellows from my school'.³³ Eight months later, Peter wrote from another boarding house in Calcutta. In this and many other letters Peter complained that a career in telegraphs was not as 'bright and prosperous' as he expected.³⁴ He pleaded with Graham to assist him to secure the next opening for a 'jutewallah'.

Peter devoted much space in his letters to expressing his regret at not studying harder and choosing telegraphs as a career. His requests for assistance show the extent to which Indian placements continued to rely on Graham in employment matters. In February 1926 he wrote to Graham after reading about jute apprenticeships in *The Statesman*, asking Graham to 'make a way' for him by 'giving me a letter directing me to the Head Office, alongside with a strong recommendation letter'.³⁵ In late 1926 he wrote from the YMCA in Calcutta, noting his expectation that Graham would 'drop in' on his way back to Kalimpong, and mentioning five telegraph trainees from the Homes who were staying there. Peter later recalled a guest at the YMCA giving a presentation on opportunities for any Kalimpong men with a 'Senior Cambridge Certificate'.³⁶ He also described reunions of Homes graduates. His letters contain ample evidence of an active and dense network of connections that provided residential, occupational and social support to those living in Calcutta.

In these letters Peter also asked about emigrating to New Zealand with his brother Charles.³⁷ In 1925 he wrote that, unlike Charles, he was 'not so very anxious to go to N.Z. quite so soon, as I should like to know and experience India more for myself'.³⁸ Thus he would still like Graham to 'transfer his services to the jute' and hoped that this would allow him to save enough for his passage to New Zealand.³⁹ In 1926 he wrote of meeting with Charles and discussing their prospects. Evidently they both regarded Charles as better qualified for emigration; Charles suggested he would emigrate first and Peter could follow 'a few months later "God willing"'.⁴⁰ Two months later his plans were more concrete: 'Chas has privileged me to go out with him to N.Z.,' he wrote, 'so could you kindly fill in all the necessary items in my form, and let me know what else requires to be done'.⁴¹ As with his desired transfer, emigration was seen by Peter as only being achievable with the assistance of the Homes. Peter reported that Charles was anxious about the likelihood of securing entry permits, but their hopes were kept alive by news of the group soon to depart for New Zealand:

By the way our school batch will be sailing on the 26th this month. What lucky souls they are? I always seem to be very unlucky! How many children are sailing out this time? I remember last year's happy crew. I drove with them to the docks, and when I landed there, I didn't in the least bit feel like returning back.⁴²

Peter's description of seeing the emigrants off at Calcutta reveals a level of connection between the New Zealanders and those placed in India that might not otherwise be imagined. The *Homes Magazine* often described social functions in Calcutta where local businessmen, clergymen and politicians gathered to see off the emigrants; but no mention was ever made of other graduates being present. The separation created in the pages of the *Homes Magazine* between those placed in India and those sent abroad masked some very real connections between the two. The option of going to New Zealand was kept to the fore of Peter's thinking in several ways: contact with his brother, seeing off groups from Calcutta, reading the *Homes Magazine* and his own correspondence with emigrants. He wrote regularly to his sister Dora and several others in New Zealand, one of whom sent him a 'bundle of N.Z. papers'.⁴³ 'There's not a soul amongst the lot of them that regrets having left India,' he wrote, 'they all write cheerful letters regarding their life and new surroundings'.⁴⁴ His words speak to the unsettling, everyday consequences of Graham's belief that news of the emigrants would be a source of hope for those who remained in India.

For the next decade, Peter's letters alternated between 'Telegraph Bachelors Quarters, Atul Grove, New Delhi' and 'Northview Quarters, Simla' where he and

five other telegraph workers from Kalimpong spent April–October to escape the heat of the Delhi summer. Their movements were determined by historic routes, residences and occupations specific to Anglo-Indians in India; yet he wrote in a similar tone to letters from the men in New Zealand, of a ‘merry gang’ of Homes men progressing well, and sending birthday greetings and thanks for the *Homes Magazine*. Unlike the New Zealand reports, however, these letters from India were rarely published in any length. Again we witness the archival consequences of Homes priorities, here favouring the emigration scheme as a persuasive means of generating funding. Another contrast between the New Zealanders and the Indian placements illuminated by Peter’s letters was that of proximity, to ‘home’ but also to political unrest. In 1930 Peter wrote of his impending visit to Kalimpong: ‘I intend taking three months leave and mean to make an absolute rest-cure holiday of it. To me there is no better suited place than good old Kpg for this.’ He was unable to ‘confirm the rumour afloat up there that there will be five of us coming up ... as we are all doubtful of our positions in this present chaos and waiting to see how we are going to be affected by it.’⁴⁵

Peter’s queries about emigration were revived later in 1930 when he wrote that he was ‘sorry to hear that New Zealand was compelled to close its doors to us due to the unemployment there’, particularly because he was hoping that his younger brother Dennis, who was about to leave the Homes, would be sent there. He asked whether Purdie thought that New Zealand would ‘close its doors to us for good?’ and pleaded that every effort be made to send Dennis.⁴⁶ Two years later he asked that Dennis be ‘grafted into the jute business, now that he is about to leave school.’⁴⁷ Several months later he wrote again pleading for assistance with his younger brother, lamenting that ‘my influence in this respect would not be giving the boy a fair chance of getting the best – which you only can give.’⁴⁸ By 1933 Dennis was working onboard the SS *Nurjehan*. Satisfied with this seafaring career for his brother, Peter did not write to Graham again until 1936, when he announced his intention to marry, and requested birth and baptismal certificates to make this possible.⁴⁹

In 1947, some months after Britain’s withdrawal from India, Peter wrote to the Homes superintendent, James Duncan, from Calcutta, where he was spending time with Dennis and his family.⁵⁰ There was no indication that the upheavals around Independence spurred Peter into seeking emigration until 1951, when he referred to correspondence with the New Zealand trade commissioner in Bombay. His enquiries coincided with letters regarding the same from Dennis, who emigrated to New Zealand in 1953 and encouraged Peter to follow upon his impending retirement. Peter was ‘favourably disposed to this’ but suggested

it was 'too premature to make a final decision now'.⁵¹ This letter also carried the news that his eldest sister, Dora, had died, leaving two teenage boys. Peter closed by noting his 'permanent' change of address, back to Atul Grove in Delhi. He had 'at last been allotted quarters' and ended his letter saying, 'I am very comfortable now'.⁵² His final letter was written to the Homes superintendent in 1956.⁵³ His thirty-year correspondence with the Homes narrated a life that was punctuated by recurring thoughts of joining his family in New Zealand; yet it is clear that he too had found a settled place in the 1950s in an independent India, as many Anglo-Indians did.

Over a similar time frame, the Gammie family file contained much correspondence regarding three siblings 'left behind' in India. The first letters of the 1930s, however, focused on the branch of these families that was rarely mentioned, the British side. On 20 October 1930 H. E. Tyndale, a planter and friend of John Gammie's, wrote to Graham informing him of Gammie's death in his bungalow the previous afternoon and requesting information about the remaining children in the Homes. As he had not left a will, Tyndale took it upon himself to visit one of Gammie's five siblings, George, while on leave in England. George then wrote to Graham in Kalimpong promising at least his portion of his brother's estate to the Homes for the upkeep of the children. George's letter shows the extent to which British relatives were shut out of these interracial families, stating that 'the existence of this family was absolutely unknown to me and it was a great shock to me to know the truth'.⁵⁴ He was now faced with making decisions about the children's futures based on the information relayed by Tyndale, but required clarification: 'I understand that my brother sent money also to New Zealand? Do you happen to know how much he sent and to whom? I am sorry to give you so much trouble but I am so hopelessly in the dark'.⁵⁵ George's interest in his nieces and nephews speaks to a missed opportunity to be a part of his brother's family, owing, one assumes, to John's expectation that his siblings at home would take a dim view of his interracial family.

The eldest four Gammie children had all been sent to New Zealand over the course of the 1920s, leaving Gavin, Alexa and Kathleen at the Homes when their father died. Gavin was placed in Calcutta in the early 1930s. His first letter to Purdie was written in 1933 from Birkmyre Hostel, a residence for Kalimpong boys in Calcutta. He and two other graduates had been placed at Balmer Lawrie, a manufacturing company, and were 'finding no difficulty whatever' with their employment; however, they were feeling the cold, and he requested some winter clothes be sent to them.⁵⁶ A year later Gavin wrote again, claiming that he had 'nothing to grumble about and with all my school pals down here I feel quite

at school again.⁵⁷ From Gavin's letters, it is clear that Birkmyre was fulfilling its purpose as a centre of support and familiarity for the young men placed in Calcutta and, like Peter Moller, he continued to seek the Homes' assistance in employment matters from within this protective network. Two years later, in mid-1936, Gavin wrote to Purdie with a clear purpose:

This letter is to remind you that the three of us, J Thompson, G Daunt, and I have finished our 'Electrical Training' in Balmer Lawrie. Ours was a three year course which concluded on May 15th. We are still hanging on as apprentices, but I should be very pleased if you will give us some advice regarding our future welfare.⁵⁸

Family matters were also a high priority in these letters to Purdie, initially prompted by a death notice in a local paper for a J. W. Gammie in *The Statesman* in 1934.⁵⁹ Gavin wanted to know whether this was a relative, and asked too about his father: when had he died? What details did Purdie or Graham have about him, and his extended British family? In 1936 Gavin continued to press for this information, asking for 'as much information as you can concerning my parents' and a birth certificate, given that he was 'about to start on my own'.⁶⁰ This belief that he needed to know about his background in order to move forward included a desire to contact his mother, writing in a very matter of fact tone that 'I don't know whether my mother is alive or not, but if she is will you tell me her address'. As we learnt in Chapter 2, in his twilight years Gavin understood that he was sent to the Homes because of his mother's death. Here the archives reveal that it was only later in life that he can have made sense of his upbringing in this way. Coming to terms with these early separations and unknowns was a lifelong process, a blinkered journey through obfuscated documents, missed opportunities and unasked questions.

The next letters regarding Gavin were written early in 1938, when he was dismissed from his employment at 'Roslyn Dairy Farm' in Rangoon. His employer, Miranda Wisheham, wrote to Purdie about the situation, as did Gavin. While Wisheham complained that Gavin was disrespectful, his version of events echoed his brother Fergus's complaints in New Zealand. 'It was not through bad temper alone that I left,' Gavin explained, 'but that we on the farm were not getting fair-play'.⁶¹ Having received letters from Fergus and Betty informing him that he was to go to New Zealand, Gavin hoped that 'this last episode will not let down my chances'. He asked Purdie to recommend him 'to any farm, if possible a dairy farm', while he waited for the opportunity to go to New Zealand.⁶² Five years after his departure from the Homes, Gavin was still working very much

within the Kalimpong support network with the expressed hope of emigrating. The following year Gavin wrote from a dairy farm in Opotiki, in the North Island of New Zealand, thanking Graham for 'the privilege in being sent out' and responding positively to advice of the amount he would be required to repay the Homes for his travel.⁶³

The youngest sibling, Kathleen, emigrated alongside Gavin in the 1938 group. Like Gavin, she had worked for Miranda Wisheham in Rangoon prior to departing India. Wisheham's letter informing Purdie of Gavin's dismissal was primarily to tell him that Kathleen had arrived safely accompanied by 'the ladies'.⁶⁴ Her letter indicated that she was a regular employer of Kalimpong graduates, and she gave news of two housemothers, Miss McCrie and Miss Shaw, taking leave at the farm. Wisheham hoped that upon returning to the Homes they would 'tell you and Dr Graham of our little world here'. Here was another segregated imperial space – like the Homes in Kalimpong, the tea plantations in Assam and railway colonies for Anglo-Indians, set up as havens from the unruly country outside, tasked with 'keeping India at bay', and in this instance an important stop on the Homes circuit.⁶⁵

The other daughter of Gammie still in India, Alexa, was placed with the Barnes family in Cachar, Assam, in 1936. This saw Alexa, the child of a tea planter, returning to a tea-planting district to work in her modified status as an Anglo-Indian domestic worker.⁶⁶ This proximity to her origins with such a clear downward progression makes it plain why Graham was less inclined to publicize the placements in India, and the children's tea-planting heritage. Alexa was well placed according to letters from her employer, but things soon took a troubling turn, stimulating a flurry of correspondence between Assam, New Zealand, England and the Homes. In November 1937, Alexa wrote an anxious letter to Purdie, explaining that her sister Betty had asked Graham (while he was on his 1937 tour) to send herself and Gavin with the next group. Meanwhile Mabel Barnes had suggested that she accompany the family to England for their upcoming leave. Purdie, presumably made confident of the future of the scheme upon Graham's advice, advised Alexa go with Barnes and emigrate after returning to India.

When he was making preparations for sending the 1938 group to New Zealand, Graham wrote to Alexa at her Assam address asking if she would join them. Mr Barnes replied to Graham after opening the letter in Alexa's absence, noting the 'awkward situation' that Alexa was in England and not due to return until October 1939.⁶⁷ Graham wrote that he understood the difficulty in 'getting her back here in time' and suggested putting her off 'for another year'. He noted,

however, that 'she should go ultimately, because all the other members of her family – something like seven – will be in New Zealand'.⁶⁸ As the time drew near for the 1938 group to depart, Betty and Fergus wrote separate letters to Purdie imploring that Alexa should be included in the group that would bring Gavin and Kathleen to New Zealand.⁶⁹ There were no replies to these letters in the file; however, a short reply to Barnes stated with confidence that Alexa would 'go with next year's band'.⁷⁰ Graham's desire to see the Gammie family reunited was laudable, but it was his confidence in the resumption of the scheme that caused Alexa to miss the final opportunity to emigrate to New Zealand.

Alexa's distraught reaction upon learning that her siblings had gone to New Zealand ended her employment with the Barnes family.⁷¹ The Homes committee in London stepped in, offering to find her 'a post ... for the return voyage to India' through the 'Ayah's Association in London'.⁷² Remarkably, the only way to realize emigration from this situation was to utilize Graham's British network to get back to India and realign herself with the Homes. The London office did find assistance through the 'Amahs' and Ayahs' Home', which secured a post for Alexa with a Mrs Clark who was returning to Rangoon.⁷³ From there, Alexa wrote to Purdie asking for a position with Miranda Wisesham 'until it's time for me to leave for N.Z.'. ⁷⁴ She then wrote from the Clarks in Rangoon describing her unhappiness with the work. In August 1939 arrangements were made for Alexa to travel to Kalimpong, and from there she was placed with a family in Baluchistan. Alexa apparently settled into life there. Her sister Betty wrote now only of her sadness that 'she [was] the only one left behind'.⁷⁵

Alexa's future was perhaps a typical outcome for the Homes women who were placed in India. Eighteen months after her arrival at Quetta, in Baluchistan, her employer informed Purdie that Alexa was to marry a British soldier.⁷⁶ Alexa wrote from England in 1943, where she and her husband and baby had 'arrived home just a few days before Christmas'.⁷⁷ 'I am quite settled down', she wrote, 'and enjoying life here.' She requested a birth certificate, noting that 'I do need a birth certificate in this part of the world'.⁷⁸ Alexa wrote once more to the Homes, in 1951. Descendants of the Gammie family in New Zealand confirmed that Alexa stayed in England for the rest of her life, which caused some strain with her siblings though they did maintain contact.⁷⁹ This relationship was improved in the years prior to Alexa's recent death with a welcome visit from her New Zealand nephew and his family. Like Peter Moller, she reached a point in life beyond which the prospect of emigration to New Zealand lost its appeal. But like many Homes graduates who settled in England, there was the issue of proximity to her British family, which must have caused some unease.

The Wellington community

In New Zealand, a series of events after Independence mark the beginning of the collective memory for Kalimpong descendants in Wellington, and help to illuminate the complex and affective functioning of a local community connected on the multiple axes of birth, marriage and the Homes upbringing. The first event was the marriage of Gavin Gammie to Fred Leith's sister, Isabella, late in 1949. Theirs was to be one of five marriages between Homes graduates, three of which involved Gammies. Fred and Gavin had both emigrated with the 1938 group, while Isabella was another graduate 'stuck' in India during the 1940s. She entered New Zealand in February 1947 after a concerted effort from Fred, along with his father and James Purdie in India, to have her leave India prior to Independence. Isabella was one of only eight Anglo-Indians who had been granted permits by July that year, and even this gained political attention as enquiries from India, Burma and Ceylon increased significantly.⁸⁰ She was listed in a response to a parliamentary question about Anglo-Indian immigration, and singled out as an example of the policy of admitting a small number under 'special circumstances'. As the response articulated, 'In the case of I. N. Leith, her brother had previously been admitted to New Zealand and had served overseas with the New Zealand forces.'⁸¹

On New Year's Day 1950, Margaret Olsen, a former housemother settled in New Zealand, wrote to James Purdie about 'The Wedding', held at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Lower Hutt, the district in Wellington where numerous Kalimpong settlers lived. Olsen named twenty Homes graduates among the guests, which imbibed a 'real Kalimpong atmosphere'.⁸² All of the Gammie siblings except Alexa were present. Olsen wrote about the wedding with great sentimentality: 'If you had been there Mr Purdie the picture would have been complete. You would have been proud to see the faces of the old boys and girls as they met that day and see the two Kalimpongites united.'⁸³ Reflecting on the challenges of her own role at the Homes, she asked Purdie to 'tell the Aunties of Kalimpong that it is well worthwhile, when in later years they meet their old girls and boys again, to see their faces, and the reality of their appreciation'.⁸⁴ Olsen's involvement in the wedding reminds us of the continued place for former housemothers in Homes graduates' lives and the wider Kalimpong family; and that this familial attachment was often reciprocal, especially for the housemothers who did not marry or have children of their own. When Olsen died many years later, she left the photograph albums of her Kalimpong life to Sylvia Slater, the only child of two 1920s Homes emigrants.

The next memorable event brings the South Island community into the frame, but again highlights regional disparities between north and south. In 1952, Ella Horgan and another staff member from Kalimpong spent ten weeks travelling the length of New Zealand, showing a film about the Homes called 'The Lollipop Tree' and collecting donations. Horgan's list of signatures in a letter to Purdie during the trip was noticeably bereft of southern supporters. In Dunedin, the women did meet 'your old friend Mr Kennedy', who 'enjoyed the film'; however, the gathering Kennedy organized in a Presbyterian Church there 'wasn't well attended'.⁸⁵ Kate Wilson (nee Pattison, a 1916 emigrant) wrote to Purdie about Horgan's visit to Christchurch, noting from the film that things had changed since her day: 'We had no servants when I was in school, I think those children are spoilt, don't you?'⁸⁶ In Wellington, the response was more positive. Several descendants, young children at the time, remember viewing the film at an event Horgan described as a 'grand reunion'. It brought together Kalimpong settlers, their spouses and children, who all watched the film and sang 'Happy Birthday' to the Homes.⁸⁷ These were the descendants who grew up knowing about the Homes, with nostalgia for Kalimpong and affection for their fictive kin, but still affected by the silence that will be discussed in close detail in Chapter 8.

Skipping ahead fourteen years to 1966, a third and very special event reunited the Wellington settlers as they reached retirement age. They were formally invited to Government House for morning tea with the governor general, Sir Bernard Fergusson.⁸⁸ The last British-born governor general of New Zealand, Fergusson's specific connection to the Kalimpong settlers is not known, though he did have military connections to India. His knowledge of the Kalimpong scheme most likely reflects the close relationships that continued between the women and the influential Wellington families that employed them in the 1920s and 1930s. The photograph taken that morning reinforces the evidence of social status discussed earlier; the coming of age of a group of people who found a place in the respectable working classes (Figure 7.1). Descendants have been surprised to discover in the Homes files that many of their parents were still in contact with Kalimpong at this time, most commonly writing to the staff there to request birth certificates in order to apply for a pension.

Official links between the Homes and New Zealand also continued. These sporadic reconnections affected and were facilitated by the existing Kalimpong community. A 'second wave' of emigration saw half a dozen individuals from the Homes 'sponsored' to New Zealand by local families in the 1960s; and James Minto, a long-serving principal, visited New Zealand in 1965 and 1968.⁸⁹ By this

Figure 7.1 Kalimpong settlers at Government House, 1966. Front row, at centre: Lady and Sir Bernard Fergusson. Courtesy Gammie private collection.

time the Homes functioned largely by offering a British education to fee-paying students both locally and from other parts of India, while continuing with a sponsorship programme for Anglo-Indians and other disadvantaged children. The last British tea planters did not leave India until the 1970s, and remarkably, the tea agency policy restricting British women on the plantations to managers' wives persisted, and thus offspring of white planters and local women continued to be sent to the Homes until this time.⁹⁰

Despite the policy of 'Indianization' at the Homes, it was not until 1971 that the first non-European principal, Bernard Brooks (presumably Anglo-Indian or Indian Christian), was appointed. Brooks visited New Zealand three times in the 1970s as part of a wider Homes outreach to Commonwealth countries in difficult times, meeting with Wellington settlers and their families on each occasion.⁹¹ Financial problems also spurred the last-known visit to New Zealand by a Homes principal, Howard O'Connor, in 1990. By this time the Homes was severely caught up in the political unrest stirred by local groups resentful of Bengali governance of a majority Nepali community. It was this agitation – mostly economic but occasionally violent, with forty deaths in Kalimpong in the first few months of 1988⁹² – that disrupted the travel of the earliest New Zealand descendants who travelled to Northeast India, seeking information about their

elderly grandmother's intriguing and often troubling family history that ended abruptly with an 'orphanage in India.'

Four letters written in 1951 draw together the transnational lifeways explored in this chapter. In July, Peter Moller wrote to the Homes from New Delhi about the prospect of emigrating to New Zealand, listing the names and addresses of his three siblings there which he asked to be passed on to the New Zealand ambassador. Six weeks later in Wellington, Isabella Gammie sat down and wrote a letter to James Purdie, and touched on the way that having children of their own caused the Kalimpong settlers to reconsider their own early lives. She related a conversation with her brother Fred, whose son John was five years old and, as Isabella reminded Purdie, the age that Fred was when he was sent to the Homes. Fred had asked Isabella 'whether I could imagine him sending young John away now?'⁹³ This was a new and difficult vantage point from which to reconsider their past. In October, Annie Larsen also wrote to Purdie from New Zealand, expressing in stronger terms her alienation from the land of her birth and probably her maternal ancestry, as cited at the beginning of this chapter. Then, two weeks before Christmas, Alexa Gammie, now sister-in-law to Isabella, wrote to the Homes from a 'new address' in England, explaining that she and her family were in a council house. 'I must say that we are settled down at last,' she wrote, requesting her 'health records' and thanking staff for the regular copies of the *Homes Magazine*.⁹⁴ The past was becoming the past. In different national settings the emigrants had moved on from the uncertainties of their early years, giving themselves some solid ground to find distance from all of that, but continuing to engage lightly with their Kalimpong past. Fortunately, and perhaps deliberately, these intermittent reflections left traces for the next generation to pick up.