

## John Ballance - not a lone voice

**John Ballance was by no means the only Ulster voice calling for equality of opportunity in New Zealand during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

True many have also heard of the Rev Rutherford Waddell, Presbyterian Minister in Dunedin, South Island from 1879 to 1919. The Ballyrone, Co Down native whose 'Sin of Cheapness' sermon and work with garment trade workers did so much to ensure a better lifestyle for those in the textile industry - a sector worldwide where producing cheap throwaway clothing can depend on having very poorly paid workers.

However, another native of Ulster has been recalled for her efforts to ensure the new nation was based on fairness for those working in factories. The Ulster History Circle has erected a blue plaque at Killeshandra Church of Ireland, Co Cavan, to commemorate Margaret Scott Hawthorne (1869-1958).

*Photo of Margaret Scott Hawthorne in the Church in which she was baptised in 1869*



This pioneer of women's rights in New Zealand was born on 17 January 1869 to Henry Scott and Anne Maria Kenny. Margaret was their second daughter and one of six children all born in the townland of Cornafean. On 28 January 1880, Margaret's father advertised the family farm for sale being 1.5 miles from Crossdoney Station of the Midland and Great Western Railway. Small farms and rural unrest encouraging many to seek larger farms and a better lifestyle in NZ.

It was from Crossdoney Station that the Scott family travelled to London to board a three-masted barque, the 'Halcione'. The ship arriving after 90 days at sea in August 1880 at Lyttleton, near Christchurch, New Zealand. The 'Halcione' carried only 25 passengers and a large general cargo so although a tedious journey Captain Parker made passengers most comfortable. At the age of 11 and living outside Christchurch Margaret Scott continued her education, before training as a tailoress. but found conditions in the clothing industry were poor. So became active in the Trade Union Movement.

At just 23 in 1892 she became the first female secretary of the Christchurch Tailoresses' and Pressers' Union. Her objective was to improve women's working conditions with proper remuneration for long hours worked. Margaret first came to national prominence when elected as vice president in 1894 to the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council. Margaret was later appointed to manage the Women's Branch of the Department of Labour in Wellington and from this appointment came the establishment of a Women's Employment Bureau. Her promotion to the position of Inspector of Factories enabled Margaret to investigate the working conditions throughout New Zealand where women and girls were employed to ensure Factories Act 1894 rules were met.

She believed that, without organisation workers can have very little power to better their economic or social conditions. For over 20 years this redoubtable Ulster woman spearheaded campaigns to improve conditions for woman workers and was the first female to achieve a position of status in NZ public service. Married twice and with one daughter Margaret Scott Hawthorne died in Auckland on May Day 1958.

Chris Spurr, Chairman of the Ulster History Circle, said: "Margaret Scott Hawthorne made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of women in New Zealand during the late Victoria era. The Ulster History Circle was delighted to commemorate this Cavan-born pioneer with a blue plaque at the church where she was baptised. The Circle would like to thank the Rector and Vestry of Killeshandra Church of Ireland for their assistance and the Ulster-Scots Agency for their financial support towards this plaque."



*Councillor Clifford Kelly, Cathaoirleach Cavan County Council, Brad Burgess, and T.D. Heather Humphreys, Minister for Social Protection and Rural & Community Development who unveiled the Blue Plaque.*



*Chris Spurr, Chairman-Ulster History Circle, Brad Burgess, New Zealand Ambassador to Ireland and Maud Hamill, Hon Secretary, Ulster History Circle.*

One is left pondering on links between Margaret, Rutherford Waddell and Premier John Ballance. Clearly they brought from Ulster a passionate belief in fairness as they strove for a more liberal society and helped lay the foundations of the world's first welfare state.

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