



Melbourne in 1888, by Frederick McCubbin.
*The young McCubbin had been a baker's apprentice in the western
end of the city, not far from the scene depicted here.
By emphasising the height and massing of the city buildings
and foreshortening the perspective, he suggests the
towering aspirations of the boom metropolis. Oil, 1888.*

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

THE CAPITAL CITIES

THE PROGRESS OF AUSTRALIA was most spectacularly demonstrated by the growth of its capital cities. To stand on Circular Quay amid the noise and bustle of a great metropolis and imagine the dense wood of gum trees, wattles and honeysuckles that the first Sydneysiders had entered just a century before was to grasp the whole story of conquest and settlement in a single graphic scene. The capital cities were the beachheads of economic expansion and their growth had more than kept pace with the development of the interior. 'In these colonies, perhaps for the first time in history, is presented the spectacle of magnificent cities growing with marvellous rapidity, and embracing within their limits one-third of the population on which they depend', noted the statistician Timothy Coghlan.

The marvellous transformation on the shores of Port Jackson was paralleled by an equally marvellous progress of Sydney's younger rivals. In barely fifty years Melbourne had overtaken Sydney as Australia's most populous city and by 1888 regarded itself as 'the metropolis of Australia'. Brisbane was the fastest-growing capital city and, although Adelaide was undergoing a recession, it dominated its hinterland more completely than any other capital. Perth, the smallest, was growing as fast as the largest, Melbourne, and even Hobart, which had been stagnant for decades, was experiencing a brief revival of its fortunes.

POPULATION OF THE CAPITAL CITIES IN 1888 (THOUSANDS)

Sydney	358
Melbourne	419
Adelaide	115
Brisbane	86
Hobart	34
Perth	9

Each capital city had a character of its own: a subtle blend of scale, scenery, climate, architecture and culture. When the Canadian journalist Gilbert Parker toured the colonies he divided their capitals into two groups—Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane in the one, Perth and Hobart in the other. A more precise classification would have put Sydney and Melbourne in a metropolitan category, Adelaide and Brisbane in an intermediate or provincial category and Hobart and Perth in the class of mere towns. The first two were among the ten largest cities in the British Empire and compared with such important American cities as Boston and Baltimore, but the smallest were outranked by several Australian provincial towns, Perth was about the size of Geelong and Hobart was smaller than Ballarat.

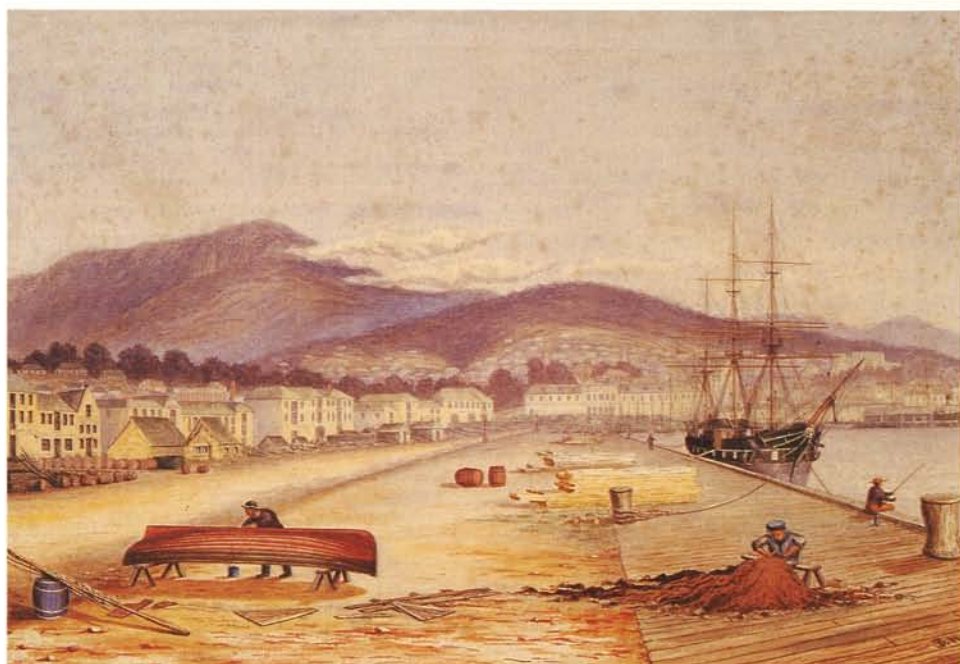
It was often the physical appearance of the cities that stuck in visitors' minds. They took away mental postcards of Sydney's breathtaking harbour, Melbourne's towering architecture, Adelaide's border of parklands, Hobart's splendid mountain backdrop, Brisbane's lush tropical gardens and Perth's sun-drenched riverflats. They remembered Brisbane's wide-eaved bungalows surrounded by banks of hibiscus and oleander, Sydney's sandstone terraces marching up and down steep harbourside streets, Adelaide's limestone cottages standing in flat gravel yards and Melbourne's red brick villas strung out along miles of ramrod thoroughfares. Beyond these physical contrasts they detected more elusive qualities of mind and spirit. Sydney was portrayed as the most English and conservative, Melbourne as the most expansive and progressive, Adelaide as the most comfortable, clean and godly, Brisbane as the most rudely vigorous, Hobart as the most genteel and lethargic and Perth as the most isolated and inward-looking of the capital cities.

Such deft generalisations were the city boosters' stock-in-trade. What they concealed was the striking economic and cultural similarity of the Australian capital cities, especially compared with their European or American counterparts. All were products of British colonisation, established within the previous century and decisively shaped by the history of the previous fifty years. Each was the main port, railway terminus, administrative centre and capital market for a self-governing colony of predominantly British and Irish settlers. Each had evolved a similar

Adelaide. Watercolour by Henry Grant Lloyd, 1888.
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Hobart. T.S. Henry, 1890.
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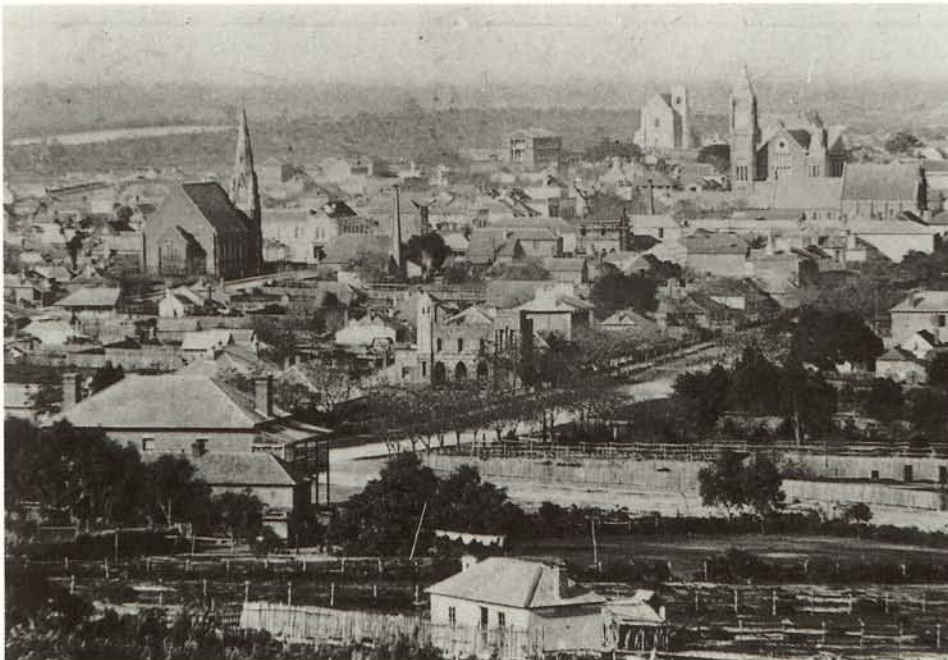


MALE WORKFORCE OF THE CAPITAL CITIES: PERCENTAGES

	<i>Melbourne</i>	<i>Sydney</i>	<i>Brisbane</i>	<i>Hobart</i>	<i>Perth</i>
Professional, entrepreneurial	5	6	7	8	6
Independent business, clean-handed employees	29	31	30	28	34
Artisans, skilled & semi-skilled manual	42	36	42	45	32
Unskilled manual, menial	24	27	22	19	27
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

mixed commercial, industrial and service economy with a broadly similar range of occupations.

The physical contrasts between the cities were less notable than the social contrasts within them. Each was a mosaic of economic subregions and social classes: of central business districts, wharves and railway terminals, industrial areas, cottage and villa suburbs. The traveller from the Rocks to Darling Point in Sydney or from Toorak to Footscray in Melbourne covered more social distance than the voyager from Sydney to Adelaide or from Hobart to Brisbane. The inhabitants of waterfront districts, whether they happened to be in Fremantle or the Rocks, Port Adelaide or Port Melbourne, experienced much the same physical and economic environment, the same work rhythms and the same sense of community.



Perth.
BATTYE LIBRARY

Visitors accustomed to the glaring contrasts between London's West and East Ends, or between New York's Fifth Avenue and the Bowery, sometimes missed the more muted social divisions within Australian cities. In their older inner areas dominated by cottages, workshops and pedestrians, the social divisions that mattered were small ones, between front and back street or between hill and flat. But as the railways and tramways pushed the city into the countryside, lengthening journeys to work and creating new rings of specialised industrial and residential suburbs, so the divisions between rich and poor were more definitely etched upon the city's map.

Life in the capital cities, people believed, was different from life on the farm or in the country town. As the months passed and the seasons changed, so did the rhythms of country life. 'Yet what matter the months to a town-dwelling man?' a Brisbane journalist asked.

In the towns there is little use in taking note of the months, for in truth the months make little perceptible difference to town living. They may lighten trade a little or dull it; they may change cricket to football, they may open the doors of an extra hundred homes to the destroying angel ... But, broadly speaking, town life the months alter not: A Saturday night in November is on Queen Street as a Saturday night in February or June.

The rhythms of city life were set by the fluctuations of the stock exchange, the movements of ships, the regular pulse of the steam-driven factory, the timetable of the suburban railway. Reflecting yet transcending the seasonal rhythms of the countryside, they created the complex choreography of human movement and activity that was the prevailing spirit of the capital cities in 1888.

Collins Street, Melbourne, looking west from Swanston Street. New commercial buildings, cable trams, wooden paved streets and telephone wires gave the centre of the city an air of metropolitan bustle, which photographers began to capture using the new dry plate technique to reduce exposure times.

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BOARDROOMS AND MANSIONS

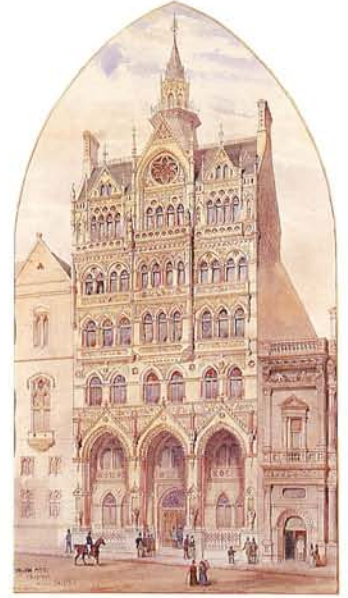
The capital cities were the citadels of Australian capitalism. Each was the main port and capital market for the colony it ruled and the home of its most influential men of property. A moneyed elite numbering no more than 5 per cent of the population owned more than half the colonies' wealth and most of these rich men lived in the capital cities. From their offices and boardrooms they issued the commands that felled forests, sank mines and fenced stations all over the continent. From city railways and telegraph stations radiated the iron rails and copper wires tethering the bush to the trade routes and markets of the world.

The command posts from which the men of property directed their all-conquering armies clustered along Sydney's Pitt Street, Adelaide's King William Street, Brisbane's Queen Street and Melbourne's Collins Street. Seated on the dummy of a cable car gliding westward down Australia's most fashionable thoroughfare, Melburnians could review the sources of their city's prodigious wealth. From the Treasury, the colony's most powerful financial institution, they passed first through the sedate precincts of 'Doctors' Commons', home of the most distinguished physicians and surgeons. Nearby, behind the grey stone facade of the Melbourne Club, were the city headquarters of the wealthiest and most venerable squatters while a block or so to the west, on the corner of Russell Street, was Scots Church, their spiritual home.

As the tram descended towards Swanston Street, the passengers noticed that the traffic became noisier and the buildings taller. They passed the newly completed portico of the town hall, the political stamping ground of the city's merchants and shopkeepers, and the offices of the *Argus* newspaper, their public voice. The shady northern side of the street between Swanston and Elizabeth streets was lined with smart cafes, ladies' outfitters, jewellers, music shops and lending libraries. 'The Block', as it was popularly known, was the city's most fashionable promenade, and between the hours of 3 pm and 6 pm, passers-by could glimpse the wives and daughters of Melbourne's richest men parading in their finest attire.

Beyond Elizabeth Street, pleasure abruptly gave way to business. Petticoats and parasols were supplanted by high starched collars and black serge suits. Within their towering new offices, auctioneers and officials of building societies followed the dizzy progress of the land boom, while on the pavements outside the Melbourne Exchange, stockbrokers and speculators discussed the latest finds at Charters Towers and Broken Hill. Near the corner of Queen Street, beside the mock Venetian head office of the English, Scottish and Australian Chartered Bank, tradesmen were at work on the new headquarters of the Stock Exchange of Melbourne. This was the heart of the financial district, and from 10 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon its banks, insurance offices, solicitors' chambers, auction rooms and exchanges throbbed with the same rapid pulse. 'There is no doubt whatever that people move more quickly here, that they decide on things more rapidly', a Sydney writer remarked. In the hectic world of finance fortunes could be made and lost in moments. Inscribed on a fine pendulum clock above the opulent banking chamber of the E.S. & A. Bank was the stern motto *Tempus anima rei*: Time is the soul of things.

A ten-minute ride down Collins Street was enough to suggest how mighty and how various were the rivers of wealth that met in the Australian metropolis. In the smaller capital cities, wealth and power were more tightly concentrated. The steady seepage of talent and capital from Tasmania to the mainland had made Hobart into 'a sleepy place' dominated by a remnant of shabby gentlefolk and professional men. In Perth, a few rich men—the heads of the so-called 'six hungry families'—



New Stock Exchange, Melbourne. Ink and watercolour impression by William Pitt c1888. Pitt, a young Melbourne-born architect, followed the local fashion for 'Venetian Gothic' commercial buildings that William Wardell had set with his 1883 design for the English, Scottish and Australian Bank. Behind the grand facade of the Stock Exchange was a Great Hall, also in Gothic style.

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controlled the city's fortunes. Charles Harper had first made his fortune in the 1860s as a pastoral pioneer in the northwest; now he was not only the colony's foremost grazier but a big investor in irrigated orchards, iceworks and the infant pearling industry. He was promoting schemes for mining guano and growing sugar. A member of the Weld Club and a prominent Anglican layman, Harper was a director of the Western Australian Bank, the colony's leading financial institution and co-owner of the *West Australian*, its principal newspaper. His new mansion Woodbridge at Guildford on the Swan River, stood on the estate of a founding father of the Swan River colony, Captain James Stirling; under Harper it remained the apex of the colony's financial, social and political life.

Charles Harper, Perth's leading man of property.

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Bigger cities evolved more complex networks of power, shaped by their dominant industries and founding traditions. The systematic colonisers and religious dissenters who had founded Adelaide had always considered themselves a superior breed to the people of the convict-tainted eastern colonies and their descendants still controlled the city's fortunes. South Australia's slow growth and largely agricultural hinterland had limited the opportunities for large capital, while the concentration of settlement had fostered close ties between Adelaide and the country. Many of the city's leading families, such as the Elders and the Barr Smiths, had interests in pastoral properties and mining as well as shipping and banking.

Adelaide's sixty leading families were closely bound together through their common education at St Peter's College, membership of the Adelaide Club and residence in the same exclusive neighbourhoods. Some of the wealthiest landed families lived in mansions on the city's outskirts, such as the Barr Smiths' estate at Mitcham, but business and professional men like Sir Richard Baker and Charles Bagot gravitated to the elegant townhouses overlooking the city and the Torrens

A rich Adelaidean and his family pose on the verandah of their mansion in Hutt Street.

STATE LIBRARY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



from North Adelaide. Ties forged through business, education or social intercourse were often strengthened by marriage. In 1888 Robert Barr Smith's daughter Joan married Thomas O'Halloran Giles, son of the colonial manager of the South Australian Company and a rich pastoralist in his own right. Two years earlier her sister Joanna had married George Charles Hawker, head of another wealthy grazing family. In all, the Barr Smiths came to be linked through marriage to fourteen of the city's sixty leading families.

Next to Hobart, Adelaide was the most stagnant of the capital cities and the intermarriage of its leading families reflected a closing of the ranks in the face of economic decline. Brisbane, on the other hand, was the fastest-growing, and its elite was correspondingly fluid and open. Many of Queensland's richest men gained their fortunes in places far from Brisbane, and only a few of the oldest and wealthiest planters and cattle kings could afford to exchange the heat of Cairns or Cloncurry for the suburban delights of Toowong or New Farm. Yet graziers continued to dominate such elite institutions as the Queensland Club and the legislative council. As a 'branch office' town for Sydney and Melbourne businesses, Brisbane lacked its own powerful commercial elite, and the resulting vacuum was largely filled by professional men and civil servants. Claude Whish, inspector of surveys for the lands department, entertained a fair cross-section of Brisbane's elite at his home on the city's northern outskirts. They included the headmaster of the Church of England Grammar School, the local manager of the shipping and mercantile firm, Gibbs, Bright and Company, a mining engineer and the widow of a knighted politician. Almost one-third of the new members entering the Queensland Club in the 1880s were professional men, while in the parliament, as one disgruntled merchant noted, lawyers exerted 'a predominating influence'.

In the biggest cities, people were increasingly judged by where they lived. The mansions of Sydney's rich clustered on widely separated promontories overlooking the harbour at Hunter's Hill, North Sydney, Vaucluse, Point Piper and Darling Point. As the aspiring Sydney bank clerk turned off the New South Head Road towards Darling Point he gained a vivid impression of the power and opulence of the city's ruling class. At his back were Fiona, the estate of the banker and sugar refiner Edward Knox, and Quambi, the stately Italianate mansion of the chief justice, Sir Frederick Darley. Amid the cypress trees crowning the promontory he glimpsed the steep gables and tall chimney pots of Greenoakes, the home of Mrs T.S. Mort, widow of the great woolbroker and shipyard proprietor, and the spire of St Mark's Church, which her husband had endowed. The Morts, like many of the city's other wealthy merchants, shipowners, wharfingers and agents, derived their fortunes from the constant seaborne traffic that passed by Darling Point on its way to and from the city wharves.

Closer to the waterfront were Lindesay, home of the ironmonger and parliamentarian John McIntosh, Swifts, the forty-two-room gothic castle built by the brewer Robert Tooth and Carthona, the charming manor house inherited by the pastoralist J.S. Mitchell from his father, the explorer Sir Thomas Mitchell. Landed and commercial wealth, the old rich and the new shared a common urban territory. Among newcomers to Darling Point in 1888 were the industrialist Henry Hudson and the merchant Samuel Hordern.

If Adelaide was the most aristocratic capital city, Melbourne was the most plutocratic. 'Money', the novelist Ada Cambridge observed, 'is the gauge of social consequence in Melbourne'. The city contained about 40 per cent of Victoria's population but about two-thirds of its richest citizens. Almost half of the very richest Victorians, with fortunes of more than £50 000, were pastoralists. Several of the most venerable Scottish pioneers, including Francis Ormond, Sir Samuel

Robert Tooth and family in the grounds of Swifts, Sydney. From left, Robert, his sons Douglas and Selwyn, his wife Helen, and Leonard, Beatrice, Muriel and Vera. Swifts was the second house of that name built by the Tooth family on the Darling Point site. Similar in style to Government House, it had a larger ballroom.

TOOTH AND COMPANY



Wilson, Sir James McBain and John Currie, had retired from the land to their Toorak or St Kilda mansions. In 1888 Sir William Clarke, a baronet and the colony's largest landowner, moved into his newly completed East Melbourne mansion Cliveden. Built at a cost of £20 000, Cliveden was staffed by twenty-one servants. A journalist invited to tour the place gawked in astonishment at the antique Elizabethan furnishings of the great hall, the priceless Italian marble and ceramics of the drawing room and the awesome proportions of its grand ballroom. 'Altogether the whole house is almost dream-like in its consistent harmony and elegance', he decided.

Next to the governor, the Clarkes stood at the very top of Melbourne society. Sir William's leadership of the Turf and the Freemasons and his wife Janet's leadership of the charity network gave them command of the best circles. Their lavish hospitality eclipsed even that of Government House. The viceregal ball held to celebrate the opening of the Centennial Exhibition was followed a week later by Lady Clarke's own ball, 'such a magnificent event as to leave all previous entertainment in the background'.

Free from the workaday routines of other city dwellers, pastoralists sojourning in Melbourne could adopt the leisured life of a self-styled aristocracy. 'I have done nothing all week but run about and see people', remarked Fanny Barbour, the daughter of a well-connected Queensland grazier in the midst of a Melbourne stay. Her days and nights were spent in a whirl of parties, balls, picnics, skating expeditions, art shows and weddings. Managing her time brought difficult decisions about which invitations to accept and which to decline, whom to call upon and whom safely to neglect. In her circle social engagements and acquaintances were ranked according to whether they were 'jolly' or 'a bother'. Yet amusement was not the main criterion for deciding where to go or whom to meet. 'Life', Fanny confided in her diary, 'is like a game of whist'—the aim was to play your hand as best you could. Playing well meant improving one's social standing and ultimately, for a young woman of Fanny's class, one's marriage prospects. For Fanny social life was a serious game for, as she frankly admitted, 'I like my own set of people ... I don't care for ... the second class as acquaintances'.

While pastoralists predominated among the very wealthiest Victorians, they were outnumbered almost two to one by city merchants, financiers, professional men and urban landowners among those owning from £15 000 to £50 000. Henry 'Money' Miller, who died in 1888 leaving a fortune of £1 621 000 in city real estate, shares and bank deposits, was Melbourne's richest man. Like some other city capitalists he had also invested in pastoral property and his sons, Arthur and Septimus, kept up the style of landed gentlemen, joining the Melbourne Club and leading the local hunt club Findon Harriers to hounds. His daughters had married well: one lived in England as the wife of a British general, others were married to leading lights of the Melbourne legal and medical professions. A generation earlier, the wholesale merchants of Flinders Lane had led the urban elite. Their economic prospects were now declining, and the few socially prominent merchants, such as Sir Frederick Sargood and Sir James Lorimer, owed their position to colonial experience and political influence as much as to sheer wealth.

Melbourne was the most industrialised of the capital cities but only a few successful brewers, boilermakers and biscuit manufacturers ranked with the wealthiest landowners and financiers. Like many of Melbourne's other rich men, Thomas Guest owed his rapid rise to the extraordinary opportunities of the gold rush. In 1856, as an immigrant of 23, he had founded the city's first steam biscuit factory, and thanks to energetic management and an expanding market, the



Sir William Clarke, aged 59, was the leader of Melbourne society, and his mansion Cliveden, completed in 1888, was a centre of extravagant hospitality. The drawing room held a priceless collection of marble statuary, ceramics and antique furniture.

COLLECTION OF RICHARD AITKEN



business had so prospered that by the late 1880s he employed over 100 people and his William Street premises were valued at £65 000. He lived at The Elms, in St Vincent Place, South Melbourne's most fashionable street, but he had recently purchased a large block of land in Glenferrie Road Hawthorn, and had engaged an architect to draw up plans for a mansion. Thomas Guest was entitled to feel pleased with his success, which had paralleled the growth of the city itself. After a visit home to England early in 1888 he returned convinced that Melbourne was destined to become 'the London of Australia'.

Proud of his adopted home, Guest remained a sober judge of its economic prospects. At the height of the land boom several large manufacturers, including Guest's main competitors, Swallow and Ariell, were floated as public companies, often realising huge speculative profits for their former owners. The stockbrokers Byron Moore and J.B. Were approached Guest with a similar proposal. 'Do it', Were promised, 'and I guarantee you will be able to buy it back for half the money in six months'. Guest refused. He disapproved of such manoeuvres and feared that the rush of speculative flotations would cause 'a big crash'. Besides, he had no wish to become a mere managing director responsible to an outside board: 'I have grown so [used] to the business that ... I find it ... a real pleasure rather than a trouble to be rid of.'

Guest was not interested in quick profits; his mind was set on distant goals. 'My greatest ambition in life', he confided, 'is to see my sons and daughters happily settled and good useful members of society respected by all those whose opinions are worth having'. His second son, William, had recently graduated from the University of Melbourne and was embarked on a legal career. His youngest, Edgar, was still at Melbourne Grammar where his classmates, a mixture of pastoralists', businessmen's and professionals' sons, included Clive Clarke, son of the baronet. 'I don't expect him to be a learned man', Guest admitted, '... but I think he should make a very good man of business'.

Amy, the Guests' daughter, had just become engaged to R.W. Dickinson, another old Grammarian and rising lawyer. She had already turned down a handsome young Englishman whom she had met on the voyage from London and 'a young medical student of good family' in Melbourne. Dickinson, Guest believed,

Thomas Guest and son. 'I believe in the master setting the example ...', wrote the successful manufacturer to his wayward son. The strength and severity of old T.B. Guest, photographed in formal attire during the centennial year, contrast with the studied nonchalance of young Tom, seen here (second from left) with sporting companions during the Scottish leg of his European tour.

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was 'a very discreet choice'. 'There is satisfaction that we have known the young man since he was a little boy and [he] is thoroughly good natured and kind with a very fair prospect in his profession.' A further advantage of the match was that young Dickinson, who already had 'a good connection', could smooth the entry of his future brother-in-law into the Melbourne legal fraternity.

Guest's greatest hopes, and deepest anxieties, were for his 26-year-old eldest son, Tom, the future head of the firm. He aimed to instil in him the wide vision and decisiveness of the true captain of industry. 'Avoid the strain incurred by trying to do so much detail work yourself', Guest advised him.

I believe in a master setting the example of punctuality and prompt attention to anything he undertakes to do and seeing that others do the same but it is just a mistake to do inferior work that you can get done for you at little cost while you may be employed thinking out large and more important matters.

A man of simple tastes and frugal habits, Guest wanted his son to have the poise and polish of a gentleman, and he sent him on an extended tour of the 'Old Country'. He encouraged him to 'study English manners and customs' yet, like a well-meaning Polonius, he also lectured him on the dangers of 'a life of entertainment and display'. Tom evidently found it difficult to acquire one without the other, for his father constantly chided him for spending and drinking too much, and keeping company with 'young men of desolute [sic] habits'.

As the gold-rush generation of self-made men reached the end of their working lives, the tensions of the Guest household were experienced by many other rich families. Success often made old men overbearing and hard to please; comfort often made their children lazy and self-indulgent. The potential for discord was great, but not as great as the interest of both parents and children in their mutual prosperity. Conflict was normally followed by compromise; but as young Tom Guest came to recognise, it was the old folks who held the purse strings, and who usually had the last word.

ON THE WATERFRONT

Sydney was Australia's maritime metropolis, its character formed by its relationship with the sea and with the seaborne commerce that flowed in and out of its mighty harbour. The city still huddled close to the shore and most Sydneysiders caught daily glimpses of blue water and ships' rigging through upstairs windows and down steep harbourside streets. Even in the heart of the city the sea was never far out of sight. Looking down Pitt Street the ships seemed, as people often remarked, to 'lie in the street'. Maritime concerns dominated their city's skyline. Descending Pitt Street towards the harbour, Sydneysiders observed the palatial warehouses of the leading woolbrokers and importers, the offices of steamship companies, brokers and insurance agents, and the dense traffic of lorries and carts making their way to and from the wharves. At the foot of the street they entered the great urban drama that was Circular Quay.

From its centre near the newly rebuilt Customs House, Sydney residents looked out on the never-ceasing yet ever-changing passage of people and produce through 'the chief water gate of the city'. To the left, along the western shore of the Quay, were berthed the great black-hulled vessels of the Peninsular & Orient line. Nearby on the wharf, gangs of labourers hoisted bales of newly shorn wool into the hold, watched from the deck above by Lascar seamen in their red and blue smocks. From the ferry stations at the centre of the Quay, waves of commuters hurried towards the workshops and offices of the city, while the flotilla of steam

ferries flitted from city to suburb and from shore to shore. To the right along Bennelong Point, were the moorings of the Orient, Messageries Maritimes and Norddeutscher companies, where the largest and fastest of the European steamers disembarked their passengers. Here, surrounded by piles of sea trunks and distracted by the shouts of porters and boarding house runners, immigrants caught the first glimpse of their new home. Here, too, as the young immigrant painter Charles Conder showed in his brilliant 1888 painting, 'The Departure of s.s. *Orient*', colonial exiles farewelled travellers returning home. Circular Quay, he perceived, was not only the threshold between land and sea, but the symbolic frontier between Australia and the world.

No other Australian capital could boast so imposing a front door. Visitors coming ashore at Port Melbourne had to make a five-kilometre rail journey across a swampy industrial wasteland before they arrived in the heart of the Victorian capital. Port Adelaide and Fremantle were even further from their capitals, and while the river wharves were close to the city centres of Brisbane and Hobart, neither could accommodate as much oceangoing shipping in such fine style as did Circular Quay. Even Circular Quay, however, catered for only a fraction of Sydney's shipping; most of the rest, including the scores of small coasters and colliers which fed and fuelled the city, were banished to Sydney's shabby back door—the gap-toothed shoreline of privately owned wharves and warehouses that stretched from Millers Point along the eastern shore of Darling Harbour.

In one hundred years of ramshackle development, the Darling Harbour waterfront had deteriorated into a fetid slum. Many of its wharves were derelict, their decks mantrapped with loose and missing planks, their piles tottering on worm-eaten stems. Gasometers, coalyards, smokestacks and dilapidated sheds lined the shore. On the city side, the wharves gave access via a network of tortuous alleys to Sussex Street, the main artery conveying the incoming supplies of wheat,

Circular Quay from the Customs House, c1888. Cab drivers and street sellers await the arrival of passengers on the Manly and Watson's Bay steamers while beyond, along Bennelong Point, a tug nudges an Orient liner to its moorings.

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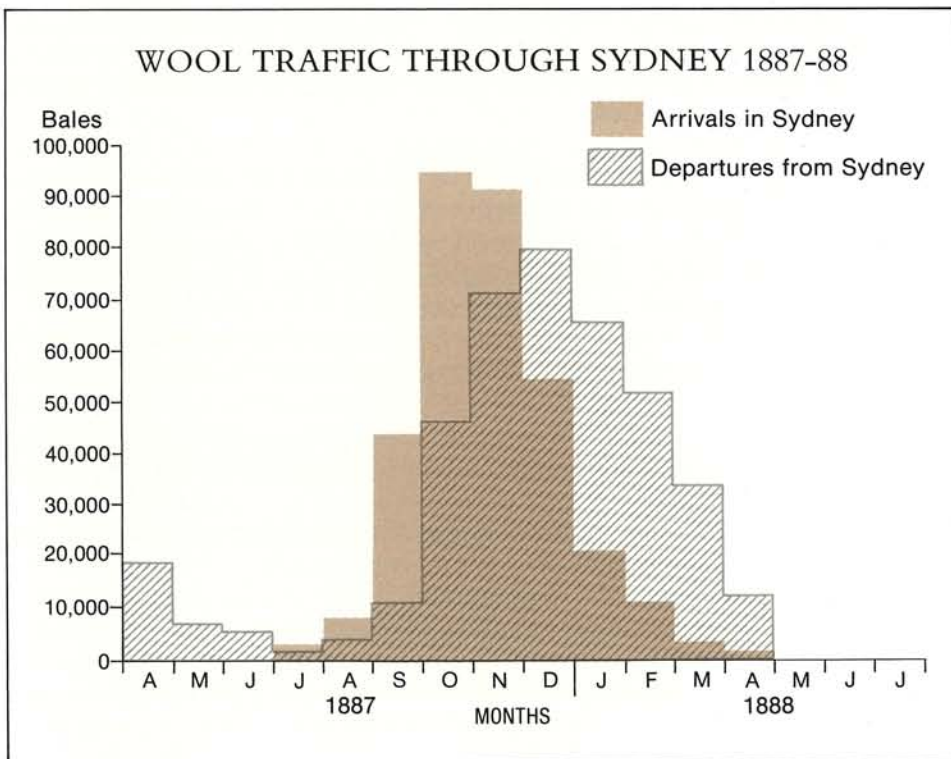




potatoes, hay and live poultry to the city produce markets. The upper reaches of Darling Harbour beyond Pyrmont Bridge received the bilious outflow of a thousand factories, boiling-down works, drains and privies, and its murky waters were accessible only to small, shallow draughted vessels of 200 to 500 tonnes. But it provided convenient wharfage for raw materials destined for the nearby iron foundries, timber mills and railway workshops.

Darling Harbour from the Rocks.
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The movement of shipping through the port of Sydney, quickening and slowing according to the hours of the day and the seasons of the year, established the rhythms of the entire metropolis. The heartbeat which regulated all other trades was the yearly cycle of the wool trade. Wool comprised more than half Sydney's exports in money terms, and the five months during which the wool clip was arriving and being despatched was the busiest time of the year. The first bales came in from the far north and west of the colony around the end of August and the



GARY SWINTON

files of wagons lumbering into the great warehouses around Circular Quay lengthened during October and November, after shearing cut out in the more closely settled districts. The first wool steamers embarked late in September and the outward flow peaked in January and slowly subsided during February and March. By April it had become a trickle.

Eighteen-year-old Ted Brady worked as a timekeeper on the wharf beside Dalgety's warehouse at the tip of Millers Point. Employed to mark and record the passage of the hours, he also observed the changing rhythm of activity around the Quay. 'In the wool season', he noted, 'the harbour side is like a vast hive'. Heavy wagons groaning under their high-piled loads came grinding to the wharves. The straining draught-horses backed the wagons against the doors of the shed, and storemen with sharp hooks fell on the load and wheeled the bales to hydraulic presses where they were bound with steel bands and stencilled with the shipper's mark. The compressed bale was then conveyed to the dockside, picked up by a winch and swung into the ship's hold, where in the hot, fluffy darkness, sweating wool stowers assisted by mechanical screws packed it into a solid block of cargo. While the wool was being loaded, the steamer was also being replenished with coal and provisions. To young Brady it was an exciting and exotic world. Everywhere he saw 'life, action and human character'.

At the height of the season, stevedores and wharf labourers worked around the clock to keep the ships moving in and out of the port. Men reeled about the wharves red-eyed from lack of sleep; tally clerks nodded over their office tables, while timekeepers and overseers worked until dawn computing time and wages. Once the season was over, all this feverish activity suddenly ended. 'I have seen pretty nearly all the men [in the port] employed one day, and the following morning I have seen 600 or 700 sitting idly on the wharves', one wharf labourer recalled. Through the busy months of mid-summer a man might be fully employed and earn as much as £3 or £3 10s a week; but in the dull winter months he might find work on only two days and average no more than 15s a week.

Dock labour was recruited as the demand arose, and jobs often became available only at short notice. A ship would arrive in port and often the stevedore would walk from house to house waking the members of his gang to begin work. Once on the job, the wharf labourer's toil was regulated by the task rather than by the clock. Beginning at 6 am, a gang might stay on the job until the whole of the cargo was discharged, even though that was until eight or ten o'clock at night. Labourers preferred to take all the work they could while it was going, rather than risk idleness at the end of their shift. Keeping time was something they left to the timekeeper or overseer, though they often suspected that, as the only owner of a watch, he sometimes gave them short time. 'It is the timekeeper, or the overseer, who puts on the labour, who takes out his watch and notes the time and we rely on it', one of them remarked.

Most of Sydney's maritime workforce lived close to the waterfront, particularly in the crowded neighbourhoods overlooking Circular Quay and Darling Harbour. The landscape of the Rocks, as the area had long been known, reflected its simple social structure: from the warehouses, stores and pubs which lined the wharf, the ground rose steeply along narrow stone stairways and winding streets towards the small green oasis surrounding the observatory that crowned the peninsula. Down nearest the quay, in the back lanes and alleys adjoining Lower George Street and Cambridge Street were the gambling houses and opium dens of the district's most notorious denizens, the Chinese. Near its summit, along Upper Fort Street and Argyle Place, overlooking the harbour, were the pleasant terraces of merchants, mariners, solicitors and harbour officials.



McMorrow's hotel, Sussex Street, Sydney, one of more than fifty hotels in the neighbourhood of the Rocks. Drink was an integral part of waterfront society; as labourers walked to the docks in the early morning they often stopped for a tot of hard liquor, their 'morning' as they called it, before commencing work. At noon, children were sent to the pub to fetch a jug of ale. Drunkenness was also common, and more than one-third of the persons arrested for drunkenness in New South Wales appeared before the water police court at Circular Quay.

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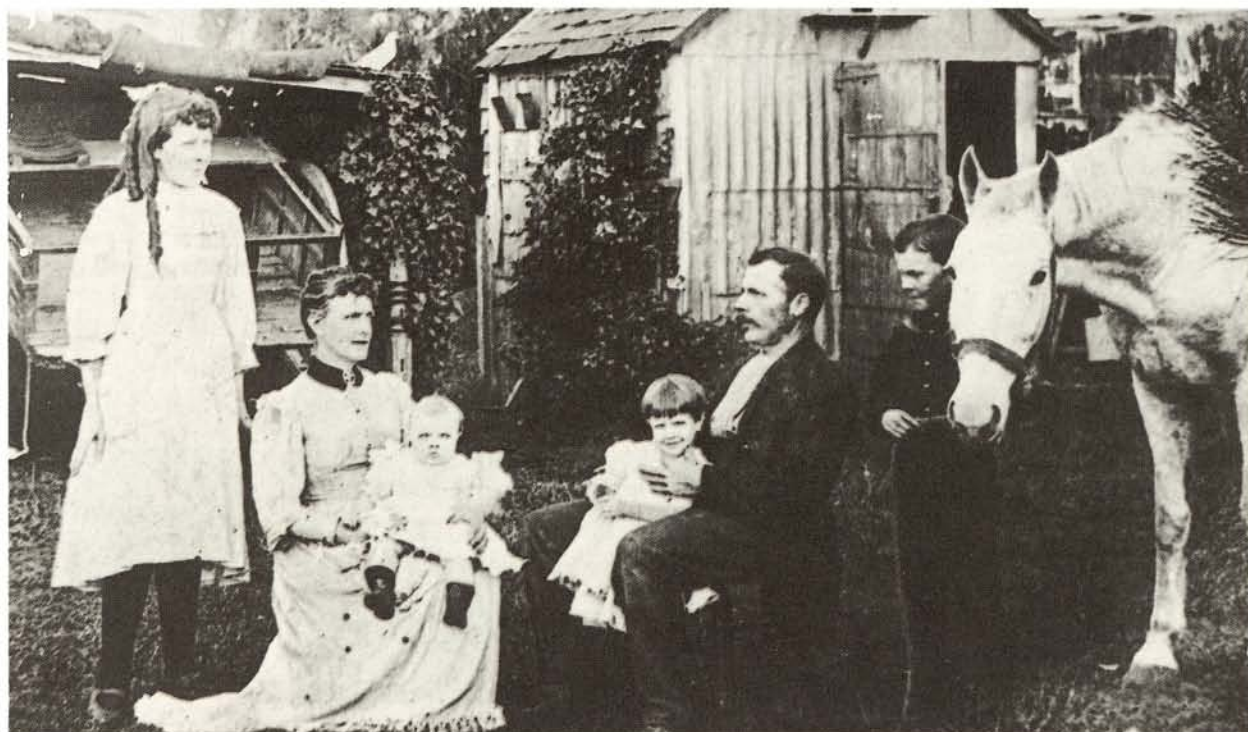
Cambridge Street, Sydney. This area, in the heart of the Rocks, was home for a population of wharf labourers, sailors and other itinerants. Its crowded terraces and cottages were a notorious breeding ground for typhoid fever and a reputed haunt of vice.

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The great army of wharf labourers, coal lumpers, seamen, stevedores, firemen, night watchmen and other waterfront workers occupied the intermediate areas along Kent and Sussex streets facing Darling Harbour, around Millers Point and especially along the steeply terraced streets facing Circular Quay, such as Harrington, Gloucester and Cumberland streets. Rents in the Rocks were high—often twice as high as for comparable houses in the suburbs—and accommodation, particularly in the midst of the wool season, was overcrowded. But, as one wharf labourer explained, ‘we have to live in close proximity to the wharves or we should miss the work often enough’.

The Rocks was probably the capital cities’ most proletarian community. More than half its male workforce consisted of labourers or wharf labourers, and most of the rest had unskilled jobs directly related to the waterfront. Port Melbourne was also Melbourne’s most thoroughly working-class district, but only about 30 per cent of its male workers were unskilled labourers. In the course of their lives, residents of the Rocks often moved from one phase of maritime work to another. More than three-quarters of the wharf labourers and coal lumpers were said once to have been seamen. ‘It is generally the way that a young fellow coming home from the sea falls in love with a coal lumper’s daughter. That is where we get our union from’, the secretary of the Coal Lumpers’ Union observed. Local publicans and boarding house keepers were often old salts who maintained traditions of mateship and hard drinking learned at sea. Some were said to be in the pay of ‘crimpers’, who induced sailors on shore leave while incapacitated by drink or under the pressure of drinking debts to abandon their ships and sign aboard other outgoing vessels.

Many wharf labourers were also birds of passage who lived in boarding houses or lodgings and moved in and out of Sydney in response to the fluctuating demand for labour in the city, at sea or in the bush. Men who worked upcountry during the shearing season would follow the bales to town in the hope of picking up a job on the wharves. Others worked on the wharves in summer and spent winter at sea.



Struggling English immigrant Thomas Dobeson poses with his wife Sarah and his family behind their home in Ney Street, Botany. By the early 1890s, when this photograph was taken, the number of his children had grown from his beloved 'pigeon pair' to four. The eldest, Mary, nears adolescence while young Charles is now able to handle his father's ancient 'Arab steed'. A white dove, incongruous symbol of domestic peace, perches on the cartshed roof.

CHARLES DOBESON

The waterfront was a zone of constant movement, and it attracted those who moved most easily and most often, especially young single men. The proportion of bachelors living in the waterside wards of Sydney was twice the city and three times the suburban average.

The fluctuations of the wool trade were most evident in places like the Rocks, but their effects percolated through the unskilled labour market of the entire city. In 1888 the yearly downturn was worsened by a general fall-off in trade. With the approach of autumn the crowds of idle working men camping in the Domain were larger than usual. Journalists reported more beggars in the streets and charity workers noticed that the queues at soup kitchens and dosshouses were lengthening. By March, 7690 men were registered at the Casual Labour Board, many married with children, including a surprising number of recent British immigrants.

Among the crowds was a 34-year-old pattern-maker from Yorkshire, Thomas Dobeson. Dobeson had landed in Sydney in 1883, accompanied by his wife Sarah and his four-year-old daughter Mary. Like most immigrants, he had come with high hopes of prosperity, but in 1888 he remained as poor as when he arrived. 'These last five years have been thrown away', he complained. 'I have made no progress at all.' Only by stringing together odd jobs had he been able to keep his family from penury. They lived in a simple wooden cottage at Botany on the bleak southern fringes of the metropolis, within sight and smell of the glueworks, fellmongeries and tanneries that gave the district its unsavoury reputation. Their neighbours—Chinese market gardeners, fishermen and factory workers—formed a community that was marginal socially as well as geographically. Dobeson called it 'Struggletown'.

Although they lived a long way from Circular Quay, the Dobesons recognised the impact of the wool trade upon the city's fortunes. 'Our exports', Tom noted '... consist of Raw materials that require very little labour ... beyond being sent away'. The neighbouring fellmongeries, abattoirs and tanneries enjoyed a short

season of high activity in the early months of the year, then subsided. Those employees who could went up country in search of work. Dobeson himself sometimes thought of following them or of going to Melbourne where he had heard that work was more plentiful, but he could not afford to uproot his family and hesitated to leave them on their own.

So he resigned himself to the never-ending search for work within Sydney itself. 'I consider it harder to look for work than the work itself', he remarked after a long stretch of worklessness.

A man out here must be of strong tough material. He must have a pair of strong legs. The distances to and from the various places where he is likely to obtain work is sometimes great.

Sometimes he walked thirty kilometres a day and in a week he might have visited workplaces as far apart as Sussex Street in the city, Granville, Botany and Randwick. When jobs were hard to find it was important to be quickly on the spot when work was advertised. 'Off I go, fair heel and toe', he would say, as he raced from one rumoured opening to another. All too often when he arrived he would find that the job had been taken or that he was at the end of a long queue of applicants. When he did get a job it was often because he simply happened to be on the spot at the right time, or because someone had tipped him off. No wonder he became bitter towards those politicians who portrayed New South Wales as 'a working man's paradise' and asserted that there was plenty of work for willing hands. One day he answered an advertisement for a job in George Street and arrived to find the place crowded with unemployed men. After they had waited for some time the boss arrived and announced that he had already engaged a man that morning. Dobeson spoke up in protest. 'We are not seeking work, sir', he explained sarcastically. 'We are only looking round to see if there is any unemployment about. Our minister for works says there is none.'

Dobeson's was a life bedevilled by insecurity. He was unable to look forward to regular employment. To fill in the dull days between jobs he sometimes wrote of his troubles in an autobiographical narrative. 'Out of work again', a typical passage would begin, then go on to recount the woes that had befallen him since his last idle spell. He told his story informally, without reference to times or dates. He recorded no daily or weekly routines, and saw his life as a capricious cycle of work and worklessness, rather than as a steady and purposeful journey.

Lack of steady wages drove Dobeson to self-employment. With his wife Sarah he opened a small shop near their home in Ney Street, Botany. The profits were slim, the customers were slow to pay, and at the end of two and a half years, the business owed more than thirty pounds. 'We are jammed up proper and no mistake', Dobeson admitted. He also tried to put his cabinetmaking skills to work by making articles for sale and bidding for small building contracts. But always, it seemed, there was a middleman to take him down or a scrounger to undercut him. 'There is always a swarm of these reptiles about to take the job at half your price', he complained. Dobeson's only productive asset was his horse and cart. The horse was an old nag which he allowed to run loose over the swampy flats near his home. When he had nothing else to do, Dobeson captured his 'arab steed', got out the dilapidated cart and took to the road to scrape a living. He sold potted plants from door to door and carted sand from the nearby sandhills to city building sites. Apart from their unprofitability, Dobeson considered hawking and carting low-caste occupations, though not as shameful as some other street trades. 'We must draw the line somewhere', he decided, 'and I draw it at selling fish, newspapers, matches, oranges in a basket, etc'.

None of Dobeson's many jobs yielded him more than a few weeks' steady pay. In his best spell he made about ten shillings a day, but his average earnings during the late 1880s were nearer four or five shillings a day. How he managed to support himself and his family is not clear. One consolation was that his home, at least, was his own.

There is no landlord who has a habit of knocking at the door every Monday morning in his three storied hat [with] a black bag and pocket book to receive the rent . . . We are our own landlord and glad of it too.

Dobeson had built his house, a seven-by-nine-metre wooden cottage, with his own hands, and was adding to it as he found the means to do so. In 1888 he was not quite finished, and still owed forty pounds or so on the land and materials, but with their pump of clear water, neatly cut lawn, cart shed and tomato patch, the Dobesons were more self-sufficient than many of the inner-city unemployed.

Like most poor families, the Dobesons lived on debt. Dobeson borrowed money from friends, acquaintances and customers to finance his shoestring business ventures and, like many other hard-pressed tradesmen, he sometimes robbed Peter to pay Paul. Debt also kept the Dobesons' household finances afloat. Sarah Dobeson bought her supplies on tick and paid for them belatedly and grudgingly. If her husband made a few pounds she would call on each of the local tradesmen, paying ten shillings here or a pound there, but holding back enough for tram fares and other daily needs. 'We would be chumps to give it all up', Dobeson believed. 'If that don't pacify them, I tell them to go to blazes and wait for it.'

The Dobesons denied themselves almost everything except the bare necessities. No longer could Tom accompany 'the Lady of the House', as he still called her, into town on Saturday evening to buy the weekly provisions and indulge the children with a toy or a few sweets. Taking Sarah shopping, he felt, would only make her discontented and inclined to 'play old Harry' when they got home. Dobeson himself was a teetotaler and in a sense self-denial came naturally to him. He displayed little of the fecklessness common among residents of the Rocks, though he did once wager a few shillings on a foot race. He lost. Poverty undermined his self-respect and drove him into resentful isolation. His patched and shabby clothes made him self-conscious about his appearance. 'My elbows', he remarked, 'has a bad habit of showing themselves through my shirt sleeves; my knees also seem to have an intense desire to show their faces through my pants'. The family was too poor to afford any form of paid entertainment. Even a sociable game of Saturday afternoon cricket—a pastime Dobeson formerly enjoyed—cost a shilling or two for wicket hire, a ball and the cost of hiring a van to take the team to 'away' matches. Poverty, in short, increased the insecurity and loneliness that they already suffered as recent immigrants. 'There is no friendship to speak of', Dobeson complained. 'I cannot say we have a single friend. No sentiment here, all money, money . . .'

In public debate the unemployed were often portrayed as potential revolutionaries. When a government labour bureau was established in April 1888, the unemployed, according to one of its officials, were 'at the point of revolution'. Dobeson attended one or two meetings in the Domain, but the only shape he could give to his political aspirations was a vague faith in tariff protection. He resented the rich and powerful without knowing exactly how they contributed to his misfortunes. He had heard it said that 'people who has plenty and more than they can spend are as a rule not happy'. Dobeson himself thought that this was a kind of unhappiness he would be prepared to risk. 'I would have a hard try to be happy', he promised, ' . . . or break my neck in the attempt'. Towards his employers he had

mixed feelings. One or two who had done their best to keep him in work he respected, but he also kept a long mental blacklist of bosses who had wronged him.

His greatest scorn was reserved for the representatives of government: the emigration agents who had told him such 'fairytales' about 'this land of promise'; the civil servants with their comfortable billets and pensions; the local aldermen who came begging for his vote at election time and scratched each other's backs the rest of the year; the politicians who were all talk and egotism; even the governor, Lord Carrington, who uttered such 'bosh' and 'blatherskite' about the contentment of the Australian working man. Of Sir Henry Parkes, Dobeson's opinion was far from complimentary. A venerable statesman in his own eyes, to Dobeson he was nothing but 'an old fraud'. He administered great amounts of public money, yet he had gone bust himself three or four times. He preached virtue to others, yet was himself, so Dobeson had heard, 'anything but a moral man'. He told working men to practise humility, yet 'his own bump of self-esteem [stuck] out like unto a large potato'. Dobeson did not think he should actually be hanged, but it might be beneficial to the country, he thought, 'if he got mixed up in a big railway accident'.

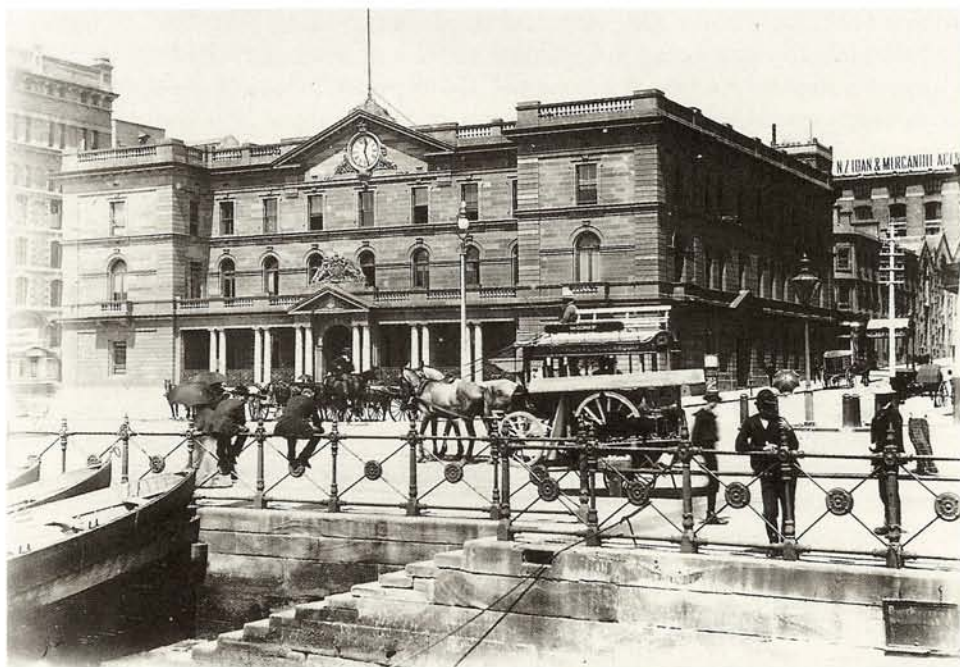
Dobeson's hardships made him cynical rather than rebellious, despairing rather than desperate. In his blackest moods he felt no anger, only a kind of numbness. 'I have no ambition, no hopes, no pleasure (only the children), no money, no marbles, no nothing.' He was too isolated and too taken up with the everyday struggle for survival for his resentment of the government, strong though it was, to reach 'the point of revolution'. His humour was the bitter humour of the defeated man whose only weapon against his oppressors is ridicule.

Yet by 1888 the insecurity that Sydney's maritime economy imposed upon Dobeson and other underemployed and migratory workers was gradually lessening under the influence of the new steam technology. The wool clip now arrived from upcountry stations by steam-driven railways and was despatched for Europe by fast steamers. While each of the new steamers required more space to berth than the old sailing vessels, the time and labour required to turn them round were much less, thanks to steam winches and hydraulic cranes. Unlike the old sailing vessels whose movements were always at the mercy of wind and tide,



The Dobeson cottage, built in stages by Dobeson himself.

CHARLES DOBESON



The remodelled Customs House, Sydney, with clock.
MITCHELL LIBRARY

steamers generally followed a set timetable of sailings. They arrived more punctually and stayed more briefly. The old pattern of shipboard life in which long and often arduous periods afloat were followed by long and more leisurely spells in port was supplanted by a new pattern in which faster and more regular voyages alternated with fleeting visits ashore. A ship's officer sailing out of Sydney on some coastal runs scarcely had time to get home and see his family before he was due back on board. 'He would scarcely have known them by daylight, never seeing them only at night.'

Along the waterfront, the more regular pattern of sailings brought a new sense of stability to daily life. As if to symbolise the new regime James Barnet, the colonial architect, designed the facade of his remodelled Customs House, which was opened in May 1888 to incorporate an illuminated clock that would be visible, day and night, from all quarters of Circular Quay. Public clocks were also installed on many of the back wharves. Among maritime workers the new consciousness of time became apparent in their unions' demands for more regular and constant hours of labour. Wharf labourers preferred to be paid by the hour rather than the ton and pressed for the introduction of the eight-hour day in those sections of the shipping trade where it was practicable. They insisted upon their right to regular smokos and were critical of overseers who gave them short time. Stevedores were in no doubt that steam shipping had moderated the fluctuations of wharf labour. 'The work is more regular now than it was twenty-five years ago', one declared.

As work became more regular, some observers noticed a subtle change in the labourer's morale and outlook. It was generally agreed that hard drinking, so long a feature of waterfront life, was on the decline. Domestic habits were also said to be improving and some maritime labourers were moving away from the waterfront slums to new cottages in Leichhardt and Balmain. The missionaries and tract distributors who patrolled the Rocks could take little credit for these signs of reformation, for the locals notoriously showed little interest in conventional morality or religion. They were less inclined to churchgoing than to concerts and lectures on free thought, one of them believed. A more likely explanation is that

the steady rhythm of steam-driven commerce, reinforced by the trade union ideal of the eight-hour day, had created an environment a little more conducive to domestic virtue. The greater regularity of waterfront labour also helped to curb the improvidence and intemperance of those who once waited on winds, tides and seasons for their precarious livelihood.

WORKSHOPS AND COTTAGES

Moving away from the sleazy environs of the waterfront, the Australian city dweller entered a more orderly landscape. Streets became broader and straighter, docks and warehouses gave way to workshops and factories and crumbling tenements were replaced by neat terraces with picket fences and flowerpots at the windows. Instead of the spiky outlines of masts and cranes, the skyline was dominated by gasometers and football grandstands. Mission halls and soup kitchens, the refuges of the dependent poor, were replaced by mechanics' institutes and temperance halls, the meeting places of intelligent artisans. Instead of sailors and wharf labourers lounging at open windows, the bystander observed children playing in the street while their mothers stooped to polish the brass doorsteps of freshly painted cottages. This was the territory of the respectable working class.

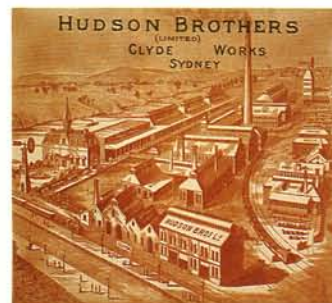
In each of the capital cities, the central business district and the nearby wharves and railway yards were girded by a band of mixed industrial and residential suburbs. In Sydney they extended from Waverley to Alexandria in the southeast through the older, more densely settled districts of Redfern and Newtown to the western outposts of Balmain and Leichhardt. From their old strongholds in the riverside suburbs of Collingwood, Richmond and South Melbourne, Melbourne's artisans had fanned out to create a new band of weatherboard suburbs stretching from Footscray in the west through Flemington and Ascot Vale to Brunswick and Northcote in the north. Adelaide's industrial belt was centred on the city's West End, but extended westward along the Port Road through Bowden and Hindmarsh, with smaller outlying settlements at Woodville and Thebarton. In Brisbane, the working classes clustered along the lower-lying reaches of the Brisbane River at Woolloongabba and Milton and northward along the gullies of Fortitude Valley. In the smallest capitals, Hobart and Perth, the few small workshops that constituted the cities' only industrial base mingled with the shops and residences of the city centre.

The sight of factory chimneys towering over the cottages of the inner suburbs led some observers to predict an Australian industrial revolution. The first colonial factories had grown up along the waterfront. Small engineering shops and slips repaired visiting vessels while biscuit manufacturers and brewers provisioned their crews. Abattoirs, wool washeries and flour mills processed the meat, wool and wheat produced by the settlers of the interior. But the new factories of the 1880s were bigger and more complex than their predecessors. As railways leaped across the continent and tall buildings dominated city skylines, thousands of new jobs were created for boilermakers, engineers, iron founders and brickmakers. Soaring land prices led some old-established firms to sell off their inner-city sites and build large new factories on the city fringe.

Hudson Brothers, the largest locomotive and carriagebuilders in New South Wales, left their old premises beside the Redfern railway station for an 80-hectare site beside the Parramatta River at Granville. The new works, modelled on the latest American factories, comprised specialised blacksmithing, fitting, wood-working, boilermaking, metal founding and carriage building shops. Some of Hudsons' nearly eight hundred employees lived in the firm's nearby cottages, but

Chromolithograph by Troedel and Company.

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Guest's biscuit factory, West Melbourne. Thomas Guest made his fortune by applying steam-age technology to the production of biscuits. His factory, depicted here in an advertising brochure, was reputed to be the most up-to-date in Australia but the youngsters who tended his steam-cutting machines disliked the tedium of the work and the iron discipline of the management.

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

imagination, but they employed only a minority of industrial workers. Even in Victoria, the most industrialised of the colonies, factories of more than fifty employees drew only half of the registered factory workforce and only half the industrial workforce was in registered factories. Australian industry was still dominated by old trades conducted in small workshops. Workers employed on the traditional handwork associated with horses—saddlemakers, coachbuilders, wheelwrights—were more numerous than those in the new railway and tramway industries. More men were employed as farriers than as engineers. Many more women worked as dressmakers than as clothing machinists. Big factories were far outnumbered in the inner city by the scores of tiny airless workrooms occupied by tailors, milliners, saddlers, printers and cabinetmakers. Only if they happened to turn from the main streets and into the back alleys of Surry Hills or Fitzroy or climbed the rickety stairs to the upper storeys of a warehouse in Goulburn Street or Flinders Lane would most city dwellers glimpse this vast, hidden industrial zone.

Even a relatively large factory often retained the atmosphere of a small workshop. Twenty-nine-year-old Fred Coneybeer made horse collars for Holden and Frost, one of Adelaide's largest carriage builders and harness makers, but the workshop behind the firm's Grenfell Street premises had more in common with a village smithy than a modern factory. A photograph of Fred with his workmates shows five men in shirtsleeves squatting on low stools with horse collars in different stages of completion stretched over their knees. More samples of their craft are hung from the walls or strewn on the floor which is covered with straw, the material used for packing the collars. Beside each man are the tools of his trade—a round-headed mallet and a heavy wooden block. No system of production could have been simpler. Each man was a factory complete in himself, setting his own pace and making the entire product from beginning to end. Like

Fred Coneybeer (centre) and his workmates.

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many skilled hand workers, Coneybeer was paid by the piece, an arrangement he preferred because, as he said, it enabled you to be 'more your own boss'. The craftly dignity of the group is evident in their dress—the neckties, the bowler hats—and by their level gaze into the camera. There are hints, too, of the camaraderie of the workshop. The bottle of ale at Coneybeer's feet is juxtaposed with the tea billy on the right. A shelf of books (trade manuals?) and a pet cat signal the mental and emotional warmth of their companionship.

The tempo of daily life in the Grenfell Street workshop changed with the seasons. As Sydney's rhythms were governed by the yearly cycle of the pastoral industry, so were Adelaide's strongly influenced by the main industry of its hinterland, wheat growing. In late summer, farmers counted the returns from the harvest and placed orders for new carriages or farming equipment. 'In the summer we have a rush of work to do, and we have to do it', an Adelaide coachbuilder testified. Coneybeer worked almost every weeknight from February to May, sometimes staying back at the shop until 9 pm or 9.30 pm or taking work home and 'grafting', as he called it, into the late hours. By the end of the busy season he was tired and sick and the long hours of sitting on his stool had brought on an attack of piles. At the end of autumn, business rapidly fell away. By July, at the bottom of the yearly cycle, he seldom arrived at the workshop before 9 am or remained after 6 pm and his earnings had fallen to about half the high-season rate.

Despite these slack spells, Coneybeer's earnings during the busy season were enough to keep his family in modest comfort throughout the year. Not all seasonal workers were as fortunate. Only a few doors away, in the crowded back streets off Hindmarsh Square, scores of tailoresses and shirtmakers followed the fickle fortunes of the clothing trade. Almost five hundred women were estimated to work in the trade in Adelaide, many taking out work from city manufacturers to their cottages in the nearby suburbs of Hindmarsh and Bowden. At the beginning of the summer and winter seasons the click of sewing machines was heard far into the night; by mid-season—May or November—the level of activity had fallen by half, and by its end—July or January—work almost completely ceased.

Coneybeer's was skilled handwork and his labours were well paid. But the supply of semi-skilled tailoresses constantly exceeded the demand, and their labours were miserably rewarded. For widows with dependent children or wives with sick, idle or absent husbands it was almost the only kind of work available. 'I am obliged to do it', explained Elizabeth Rogers, a Bowden shirtmaker. 'My husband is sick and I have four children to keep. There is no other work.' Many of the 5000 other women clothing workers in Sydney and Melbourne shared her predicament, though most were probably supplementing the earnings of lowly paid male relatives rather than supporting their families alone.

Respectable working men looked upon the tailoresses with a mixture of pity and disdain. It would be better if married women were excluded from the workplace altogether, one of them believed. 'Then we should have women in their proper place, at home, instead of men sitting idly at street corners while the women were away working to keep them.' Manly independence for the working man often meant domestic slavery for his wife. It was a point of honour among tradesmen to be able to support their families by their own labours and shame descended on a household in which the wife took in piecework, laundry or boarders. Within his own home, the respectable artisan ruled supreme. A Brisbane working man remarked that he 'ordered' his wife to do the shopping before 6 pm. 'Do you "order" your missus . . . or do you ask her?', his surprised hearer enquired. 'I reckon I am head of the family', the working man replied, 'and when I say "I want you to do a thing before six p.m." I expect her to do it'.

Holden and Frost's premises,
Grenfell Street, Adelaide.

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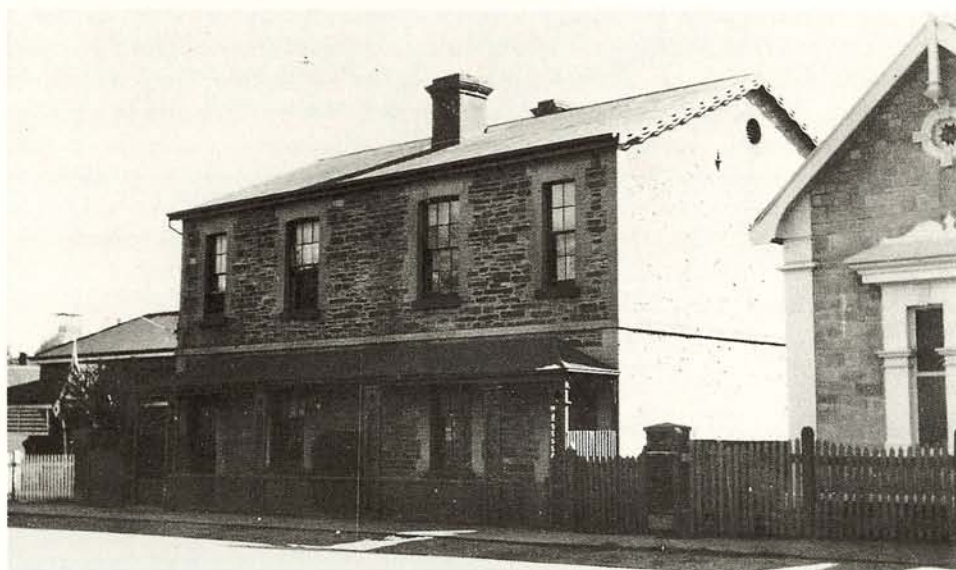


Fred Coneybeer lived with his wife Maggie and infant daughter Olive at the home of his in-laws in Mackinnon Parade, North Adelaide. Maggie's father and brother had left home to work at the new silver mines at Broken Hill. So the Coneybeers shared the house, a substantial brick cottage, with Mrs Thomas, her unmarried daughter, Polly, and her son, Will. Fred assumed the responsibilities of the man of the house, leaving the cooking and cleaning to the women, but occupying his spare evenings with mending shoes, framing pictures and other manly chores. His diary portrays an affectionate, harmonious household. 'It is rather a nice picture', he wrote of the family one Sunday evening,

Maggie playing hymns on the piano, baby Olive running after Will all round the parlour laughing at the top of her voice and Mrs. T. looking on your humble servant in the midst of it all trying to scribe.

North Adelaide was the oldest of the city's suburbs and it retained the intimacy of the old 'walking city'. At its elevated western end, where the mansions of Brougham Place and Strangways Terrace looked down across the parklands towards the Torrens and the Adelaide Oval resided Australia's most snobbish urban elite. The land sloped away to the east and the central portion of North Adelaide, along O'Connell Street and its pleasant side streets, belonged to shopkeepers, clerks and other lower middle-class folk. The Coneybeers lived at the far eastern end in a little enclave of artisans' and labourers' cottages known as Lower North Adelaide.

Although he lived within a few blocks of the Bagots and Bakers, Coneybeer's life was a world removed from theirs. It revolved around the poles of work and home and was bounded by the compact, inner-city network of workshops, friendly society meeting halls, theatres and hotels. Every morning he walked across the parklands to the Grenfell Street workshop. Only if the weather was bad, if he had a heavy load to carry or if he was tired or ill did he take the more roundabout tram journey. The walking city both limited and widened Coneybeer's social horizons. Except for an occasional train trip to Largs Bay or a mushrooming expedition to Bundeleeer, he knew little of life beyond the city, or even of Adelaide itself beyond his own locality. His circle of workmates—'the boys' as he called them—all lived close by. He seldom walked home without a workmate to accompany him or without chatting to a friend along the way. 'Jim [Davis] and I



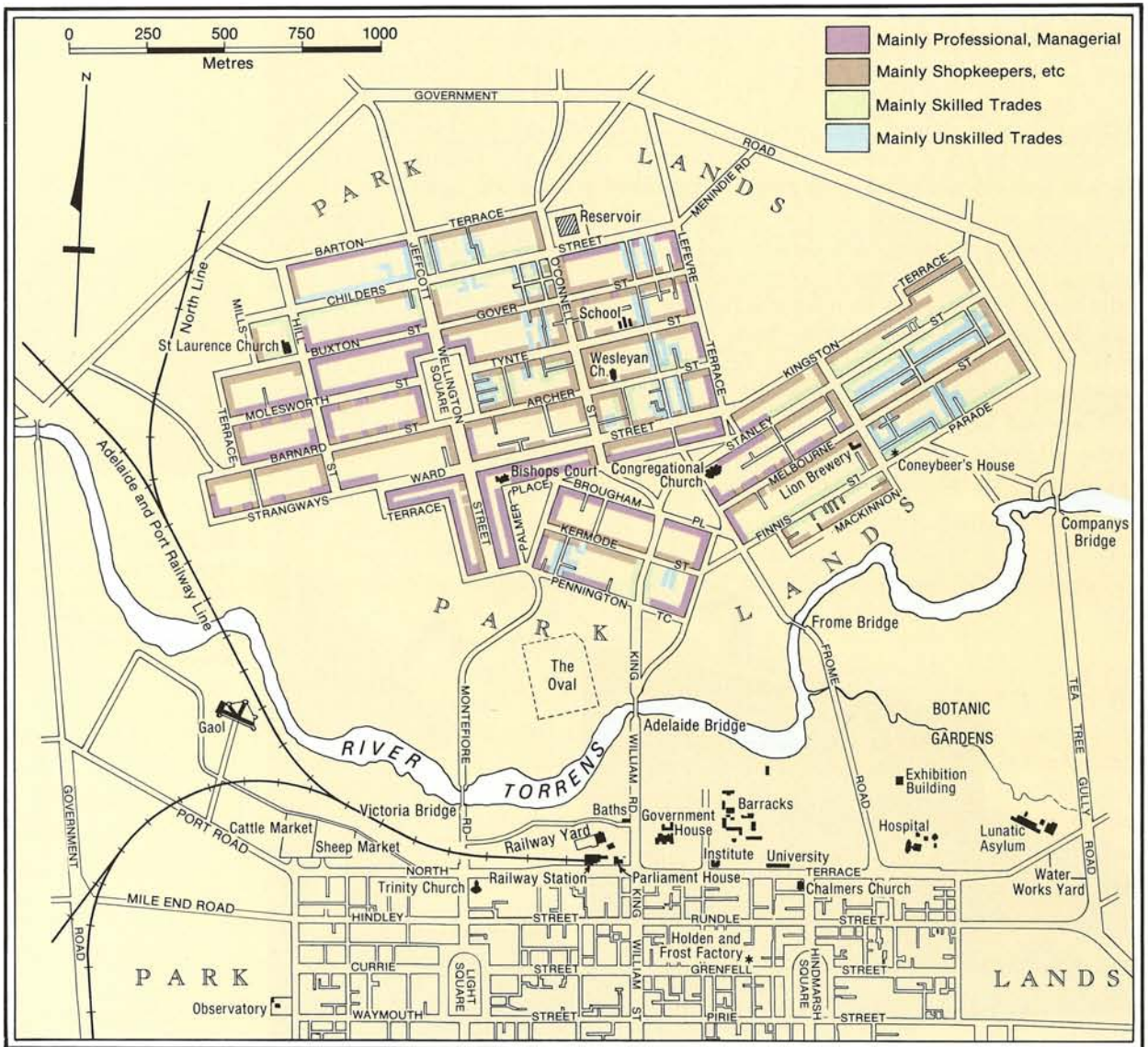
The Thomas' house in Mackinnon Parade, North Adelaide, where Fred and Maggie Coneybeer lived.

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went down for Charley [Hills] and then we went for a long strole around town', he reported one summer evening. 'We met several we knew ...'

Coneybeer's workmates were also the companions of his leisure hours. Some employers encouraged conviviality within the workplace and devotion to themselves, by sponsoring sporting teams, brass bands and picnic excursions. Once a year the firm would hire a train to transport its workmen with their wives and families to a picturesque spot on the outskirts of the city, there to regale them with food, drink, party games and *bonhomie*. At the end of the afternoon an old hand would raise his glass to propose the health of the employer and the continued prosperity of the firm. In the capital cities, however, this traditional style of work-based leisure was being challenged by semiprofessional sport and commercialised entertainment. Coneybeer continued to make his friends at work, but it was as theatregoers and spectator sportsmen that they usually spent their leisure hours. Snowy and August were Fred's companions in their Friday night expeditions to the Theatre Royal. On Saturday afternoons he was usually joined by Jack,

Fred Coneybeer's Adelaide.
GARY SWINTON





'Snowy, August and I went to the Theatre Royal to see "The Pickpocket"', reported Fred Coneybeer in March. He enjoyed a Friday night excursion to the theatre with his mates, usually to see a comic opera or melodrama.

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Charlie and Jim on the hill overlooking the Adelaide Oval, where they followed the fortunes of the Tritons cricket team, watched Adelaide's footballers do battle against Norwood and rejoiced in the victory of their hero, Dick Davis, in the one-mile (1.6-kilometre) bicycle championship of Australia.

The distinctive artisan ethic of self-help and mutual improvement nurtured by the camaraderie of the Grenfell Street workshop also sustained Coneybeer's strenuous participation in the network of savings banks, friendly societies, trade unions and working-class organisations. His social calendar reveals a compulsive joiner, as absorbed in the web of voluntary organisations as Dobeson was estranged from them.

Monday was the regular meeting night of his friendly society, the Sea of Hope Lodge of Oddfellows. The Oddfellows was one of the largest of the several orders of British friendly societies transplanted to Australia in the 1840s and 1850s. Devoted to ideals of brotherhood and mutual assistance, its main function was to provide sickness and funeral benefits to members. Friendly societies were most common in working-class suburbs. Adelaide, where voluntary organisation was traditionally strong, had a higher proportion of friendly society members than any other capital city. Every month or two Coneybeer would attend his 'club' as he called it, to pay his subscription and join in the jollification that was still a feature of lodge activity. In August he was persuaded to take part in the Oddfellows juvenile concert and sang a couple of humorous songs—'His Lordship winked at the counsel' and 'Johnny don't wriggle the baby'—for which he received a 'deafening encore'.

By the 1880s, though, the convivial element of friendly society activity was declining and, like most working men, Coneybeer maintained his membership for economic rather than social reasons. As a pieceworker, his earnings fluctuated with his personal exertions and could thus be calamitously affected when his work was interrupted by illness or injury. In November he cracked his knee against a chair



Richard Davis of Adelaide, winner in Melbourne of the Austral Wheel Race for 1888, with his 56-inch (142cm) Tyler Racer, manufactured in Adelaide. Pictorial Australian, Dec 1888.

and was unable to work. (A collarmaker used his knee as a prop.) So he went to see the friendly society's doctor, who put him 'on the lodge', and for the fortnight he was off he received a meagre but all-important dole.

As the friendly society guarded the artisan's health, so the trade union aimed at protecting his livelihood. Coneybeer had joined the union, the United Saddlers', Harnessmakers' and Collarmakers' Society, shortly after its foundation in 1883 and five years later, while still in his twenties, he had become a power in the growing trade union movement. Trade union affairs claimed much of his leisure time. On Tuesday evenings the Saddlers met at the Sturt Arcade Hotel. Friday evenings were occupied by meetings of the Trades and Labour Council at the John Barleycorn Hotel. In January he was elected president of his own trade union. 'I will have to attend every night now', he reminded himself. In February he became vice-president of the Trades and Labour Council and later in the year, when work eased off at Grenfell Street, he was elected president.

Through the activities of the TLC Coneybeer came in touch with an industrial system disturbingly at odds with his own notions of craftly independence. Only about one in four of Adelaide's workers belonged to a trade union and as economic conditions worsened many tradesmen were hard pressed to maintain established wages and conditions. Coneybeer saw the engineers fail to maintain penalty rates for overtime when non-members outnumbered members in many shops. He saw the Tailors' Society demoralised and almost destroyed by the competition of underpaid female outworkers. In May 1888, when a boatload of Chinese immigrants arrived in Port Adelaide, he joined the general hue and cry about 'the Yellow Agony'. 'All Australia', he warned, 'must wake up to the danger'.

Outwardly proud, the respectable working man was inwardly afraid. His independence was a precarious possession, hard won from the enemies around him and within that threatened to drag him down among the rough and unrespectable. Life, he instinctively believed, was dangerous and uncertain, and only his own self-discipline and the brotherly help of his fellow working men kept him from ruin. He was afraid of the sweaters and improvers who undermined his craftly status. He was afraid of the foreign manufacturers and Chinese immigrants who threatened to undersell his produce in the colonial marketplace. He was afraid of the foul-mouthed, ill-clothed neighbours who defiled the sanctity of his suburban home. The trade union was the collective mouthpiece for these fears.

For the ambitious Coneybeer, though, trade unionism was also a stepping stone into the exciting world of working-class politics. With his fellow unionists he was an enthusiastic supporter of George Cotton, the radical land reformer who won the seat of Adelaide in the house of assembly by-election in April 1888. As president of the TLC, Coneybeer began himself to experience the pleasures and temptations of public office. He hobnobbed with businessmen and politicians. 'We waited on the Mayor Sir Edwin Smith', he noted after a trade union deputation. 'He invited us into his parlour and we had whatever we like to drink and biscuits.' He was also invited to attend the mayor's banquet on the Prince of Wales's birthday, the first representative of the TLC to be so honoured.

The climax of the trade union year was the Eight Hour Day. As president of the TLC, Coneybeer was given a free ticket to the Adelaide festivities. In the morning he reviewed the battalions of organised labour as they marched behind their billowing banners through the streets of the city; in the afternoon he joined the crowds enjoying sports and speeches at the Old Exhibition grounds. 'The champagne was flying around but I contented myself with soda water', he recalled. By 1888 Eight Hour Day had the atmosphere of a victory celebration. Shortly after the 1888 demonstration a liberal parliamentarian, Dr Sylvanus Magarey, introduced a

Sturt Arcade hotel, Grenfell Street, meeting place of the United Saddlers' Society.

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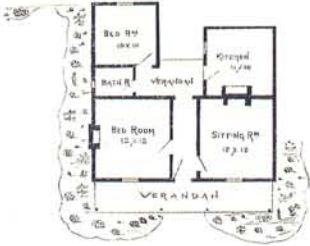


Eight Hour Day procession in Melbourne. Illustrated Australian News, 1 May 1889.

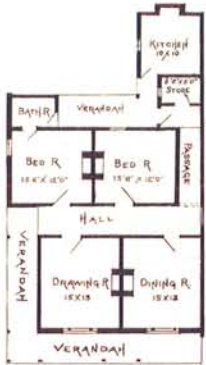
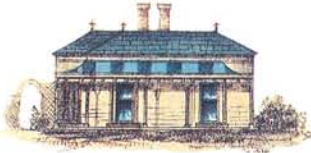
motion into the legislative council to formalise eight hours as ‘the legal day’s work’. Yet many urban working men had still to share the spoils of victory. Most shop assistants worked up to twelve hours a day, while clerks could be called upon to work at any hour without additional pay. Like Coneybeer, many pieceworkers experienced fluctuating hours and earnings. The demand for an eight-hour day was an appeal for a stable minimum as well as for a maximum day’s work.

Supporters of the eight-hour principle believed that shorter hours would make working men more intelligent and virtuous. ‘The lessening of the hours of labour’, prophesied Dr Magarey, ‘would give time to think; opportunity to cultivate home life—to cultivate the domestic virtues, and indulgence in mental recreation, whether in the study, the garden or the field.’ He imagined brawny bricklayers descending on the public libraries to devour Darwin and John Stuart Mill. Employers, on the other hand, worried that shorter hours would mean slimmer profits and that more leisure would only provide greater opportunities for vice. They pictured hordes of idle larrikins heaving lumps of road metal through the windows of insolvent shopkeepers. All that most working men wanted, however, was more time for the innocuous pleasures of a prosperous urban society. Old believers in the humble dignity of toil were coming to appreciate the attractions of the music hall, the football field and the suburban garden. Work was no longer an inescapable and constant duty woven, like Adam’s curse, into the very fabric of the universe. ‘Man’, wrote the Brisbane socialist William Lane

is not born to labour any more than are the flowers which blossom in the fields or the birds which seek their food through the air. Labour is not the end of living; it is but the means. The end of living is happiness . . .



Economical homes for the working classes, Melbourne. These designs by the architect Nathaniel Billing were among several advertised by the Universal Building Society. A borrower of £250 with his own land would expect to repay about 13s 6d a week, almost one-quarter of a typical tradesman's wage; he could rent a similar house for 11s 6d a week. But as the building societies emphasised, the purchaser could look forward to a rent-free old age. The £600 house was probably beyond the reach of most wage-earners. Sands and McDougall, Melbourne directory, 1885.



The respectable working man's scale of values was aptly reflected in the prizes offered by Melbourne's Eight Hour Day organisers in their 1888 art union or lottery. The first prize, symbolising his love of home and desire for petty ownership, was a block of land in the new industrial suburb of Northcote. The second, which expressed his aspirations to leisure and culture, was a Collard and Collard piano. The third, denoting his punctuality and fondness for smart attire, was an English gold lever watch.

'Would you happen to know an eight hour man if he came in?' a Brisbane shop assistant was asked. 'Sometimes I think I could', she replied hesitantly. An 'eight-hour man' was distinguished more by his attitudes than his appearance. People often remarked on the prosperous look of the crowds at Eight Hour Day demonstrations and works picnics. But the dark Sunday suits, bowler hats and fob watches of the men and the elegant hats and dresses of their wives and daughters, were merely outward tokens of an inner state of mind.

Before he set off with Maggie and Olive on their holiday to Melbourne, Fred Coneybeer purchased a new bowler hat and collected his pocket watch from the repairers. The advent of the mass-produced American pocket watch brought a great change in male fashion as fob chains appeared on working-class, as well as middle-class, waistcoats. But Coneybeer's watch, and his diary and his bankbook, were also the props for a psyche regulated by a discipline of its own. 'Grafting' and 'delving'—the old words he used for manual labour—dominated his daily life. He was a teetotaller, and in 1888 he vowed to give up smoking as well. Each week he deposited some of his earnings in the savings bank and after the birth of his darling daughter he put an extra 2d for every horsecollar he made into her money box. He subscribed to the *Picturesque atlas of Australasia* which appeared in regular monthly parts during 1888. It was his obsessive tidiness, one suspects, that made him fill his idle moments with picture framing and rearranging books on shelves. Even his favourite sayings—'no mistake' and 'you bet'—betrayed a craving for security and order.

The ultimate symbol of security and independence was a home of one's own. 'One of the reasons we want an improvement in the hours of labour', said an Adelaide cabinetmaker, 'is to enable a man to improve his own home'. Standardised working hours also promoted the regular earning and saving that would enable working men to buy their own homes. A large minority of skilled working men in the capital cities were home owners or purchasers—many more, in proportion to their numbers, than among clerks and labourers. 'The first duty ... of a working man is to acquire a home', declared the *Australasian Building Societies' Gazette*. 'Once you have a home you are an independent man—a free man—which you cannot claim to be as long as ... you are at the mercy of your landlord.' The building societies, which had been founded by working men on the friendly society principle of co-operative thrift, had been gradually transformed into large business empires controlled by high financiers. But they remained a popular means of home ownership among skilled tradesmen; the rows of free-standing timber cottages appearing on the outskirts of Northcote and Footscray, Hindmarsh and Fortitude Valley, Waverley and Leichhardt, showed the continuing power of the artisan ideal of independence.

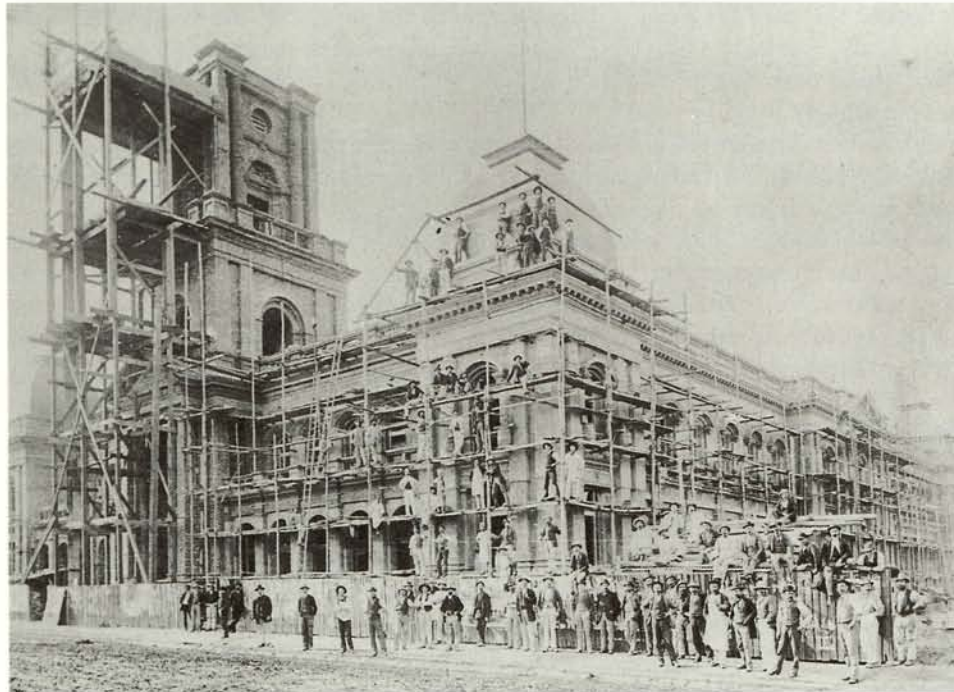
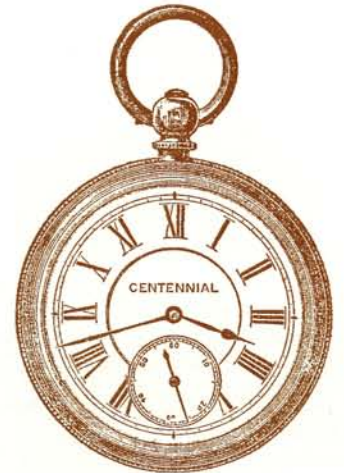
In September 1888 the governor of New South Wales, Lord Carrington, paid his first visit to working-class Leichhardt. At home Carrington had served on an inquiry, led by his friend the Prince of Wales, into the housing of the British working classes. More than once he had recalled the horrors of 'Outcast London' to warn Sydneysiders of the dangers of jerry-building and overcrowding. But Leichhardt, with its rows of free-standing, and largely freehold timber cottages,

impressed him with its 'most flourishing condition'. 'This', he noted, 'was typified by the large number of well-dressed children to be seen, and the well-to-do and apparently contented condition of the inhabitants generally'.

Carrington had come to open the district's new town hall. The late 1880s was the heyday of municipal palace-building. Land values soared and borrowed money was cheap. Immigrant tradesmen, the stalwarts of most inner suburban councils, recalled how their fathers' generation had celebrated England's industrial progress in the grandiose town halls of Manchester and Leeds. As pioneers of a new urban civilisation, they naturally followed suit. Melbourne's Richmond (1869) and South Melbourne (1880) had set the fashion in municipal town halls closely followed by Sydney's Redfern (1870) and Five Dock (1885). In 1888 about a dozen mainly working-class suburbs (Fitzroy, Collingwood, Brunswick, Hawthorn, Northcote in Melbourne; Leichhardt, Balmain, Canterbury, West Botany, Hurstville and Parramatta in Sydney) were building or extending town halls. Apart from the municipal offices and a council chamber, they usually included a large hall for civic ceremonies and entertainments, a library or literary institute, and a suite of lodge rooms for the local friendly societies. Thus were the respectable artisans' aspirations to leisure, culture, health and political power fulfilled under the one roof.

Every town hall worth the name was crowned by a great ornamental tower with a four-faced turret clock. Working-class Collingwood paid Melbourne's leading clockmaker, Thomas Gaunt, £200 for a fine clock with illuminated faces that could be read from almost every part of the Collingwood Flat. Poorer Leichhardt built a smaller tower and postponed the purchase of a clock. Rising above the workshops and factory chimneys, the gasometers and football grandstands, the town hall clock symbolised the new temporal disciplines governing the lives of the urban working class. Like the fob watches appearing on artisans' waistcoats, and the winning of the eight-hour day, it helped to establish the firm co-ordinates of time and space within which respectable working people increasingly lived their lives.

Town and Country
Journal, 7 July 1888.



Men at work on the Collingwood Town Hall, one of the grandest of Melbourne's new municipal palaces. The clock tower was still to be completed and Thomas Gaunt's clock installed.

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COLLINGWOOD

THE SUBURBAN FRONTIER

A man stood on the corner of Flinders and Swanston streets watching the waves of Melburnians arriving to begin the day's work. In the half-light of dawn a file of market gardeners' wagons, piled high with potatoes and cauliflowers, lumbered across Princes Bridge towards the city markets and by 7 am bands of labourers began to make their way towards the riverside wharves and warehouses. Soon smartly dressed tailoresses and shopgirls were seen alighting from the Prahran and Brunswick cable trams; then just before 9 o'clock, the last rush of merchants, lawyers, bankers, clerks and public servants pushed through the gates of Flinders Street railway station and surged towards the offices and banking chambers of Collins Street.

By 1888 many city workers, especially the growing army of professional and office workers, arrived for work by train or tram from the city's spreading suburbs. More than three hundred trains a day steamed in and out of Flinders Street station, and almost half the city's people lived beyond the bounds of the old walking city.

Melbourne was the most suburbanised of the Australian capitals. From Heidelberg in the north, its middle-class commuter belt swung south and east through a wide arc of gentle hills and valleys towards the sandy beaches of Brighton and Sandringham. Sydney's suburbs were comparatively cramped. With only 20 per cent fewer people, Sydney occupied less than half Melbourne's area. 'Sydney', an astute visitor remarked, 'curls in upon itself; Melbourne grows outward'. The harbour blocked Sydney's expansion to the north, and its hilly, rocky environs and narrow, winding streets made travelling by public transport costly and time-consuming. Except for the elite harbourside suburbs of Woollahra and Vaucluse, middle-class suburbanisation was largely confined to a wedge along the southern railway through Burwood and Ashfield and a sprinkling of ferry travellers at Hunters' Hill, Mosman and Manly. Brisbane's expansion was also curbed by geographical barriers, especially the swampy bends of the Brisbane River and the steep slopes of the surrounding creek gullies. Its middle-class suburbs followed the railways along a diagonal line to the northeast and southwest of the city. Only Adelaide enjoyed geographical advantages comparable to those of Melbourne and, despite its much smaller population, more than one-third of its people already lived beyond easy walking distance of the city centre. Hobart and Perth remained essentially walking cities except for the tiny minority of carriage folk who could afford to take advantage of the pleasant lower reaches of the Swan and Derwent rivers.

The last waves of city workers had climbed the ramps at Flinders Street station when John Hughes alighted from the 10 am train and made his way towards his tiny office on the first floor of the Cobden Buildings in the heart of the Queen Street commercial district. Hughes was the secretary of the Widows, Orphans and General Medical Benefit Society, a small medical insurance society catering mainly for 'the respectable poor'. He ran its city office, attending to subscribers' enquiries and occasionally visiting sick members at their homes in the inner suburbs. It was an undemanding job; Hughes could often quit the office by 4 pm. But it left him plenty of time to pursue his other more exciting career as a director and Melbourne agent for the Great Western Long Tunnel Mining Company. The Great Western was among dozens of speculative mining companies that had sprung up in Melbourne during the boom. It aimed at cashing in on the phenomenal success of the famous Long Tunnel mine at Walhalla, but the Great Western's operations were on a much smaller scale and Hughes's occasional trips to Walhalla and Rushworth inspired more doubt than hope of success. Still, he evidently enjoyed



Poster for George Taylor's Wynnstay Estate, Armadale, Melbourne. Land boomers like Taylor used the most up-to-date methods of advertising, including chromolithography, to promote the attractions of their estates, such as proximity to the railway and to the mansions of the rich, of which Taylor's own Wynnstay was one.

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his toehold in the glamorous world of boom finance. He liked yarning with his fellow directors over a glass of whisky after their quarterly meetings and listened avidly to the latest rumours from the stock exchange, hoping perhaps for a tip that could prosper his own 'specs'.

Hughes's was a life regulated by the railway timetable and the humdrum routine of the office. Every day the conscientious bookkeeper entered in his diary his times of departure and return and the number of miles he had travelled to and fro. 'All things seem the same', he remarked one sunny autumn morning. 'The same routine at office, the train, the people. When will it change? I hope soon and that God will bless me in my mining speculations.' Then, he promised himself, he would return in triumph to his birthplace in England and introduce his folk to his 'native Australian wife'.

Like many clerks and professional men obliged to keep up a respectable appearance, Hughes had remained unmarried into early middle age. Some banks and insurance companies forbade their employees to marry until they had attained an adequate salary. But it was not money alone that had kept him from marriage. Over twenty years earlier the young immigrant had returned to his native Manchester to learn of the sudden death of his childhood sweetheart, Parmelia. 'John, you will never get married, I am afraid', his mother had confided as the disconsolate youth turned again towards the antipodes. Hughes was a sociable man, fond of music and dancing. Often over the years he had dallied with other girls. 'The ladies of Melbourne', he had appreciatively remarked, 'are second to none!' But always, just as dalliance was ripening into love, he had abruptly ended the affair.

Then, one Saturday late in 1884 he noticed an advertisement for a land auction at Prospect Hill on the newly opened Box Hill line.

SPLENDID INVESTMENT!

Beautiful Scenery, Splendid Soil and Country Air!

Easy Access and Close to City!

High, Dry, Healthy, and Natural Drainage!

Cheap Locality, and Rising Prices

Small Deposit and Easy Terms

PROFIT and PLEASURE!

He applied for one of the free railway passes offered by the estate's promoters and boarded the train for Camberwell. But he never reached the marquee on the summit of Prospect Hill for as he walked up the hill, he spied a young lady, eighteen-year-old Emily Hochkins, 'a rustic beauty like my Parmelia'. He engaged her in conversation and escorted her back to her parents' nearby home. Hughes's long bereavement was over. Twenty months later they were married at the bride's lodgings in Hawthorn.

Fifty-seven Bayview Street, Prahran, where the newlyweds set up house, was part of a brand-new estate, just ten minutes' walk from the Hawksburn station. Prahran was the very epitome of a middle-class suburb, destined, its promoters believed, to become the 'great sub-centre' of the metropolis. The building of the Gippsland railway had opened up some of the choicest land in the southeastern suburbs and by 1885, when Bayview Street was formed as part of the Pridham estate, the surrounding hillsides were already dotted with 'houses suitable for rising professional men'. To the north of the line the mansions of Toorak stood proudly in their spacious grounds; in the shallow valley to the south, profit-hungry land jobbers were busily slicing the broad acres into hundreds of pocket-handkerchief allotments. From their front doorstep John and Emily Hughes looked across one



John and Emily Hughes on their wedding day, 25 March 1887.

C.J. HUGHES

of the suburb's narrowest streets on a row of single-fronted timber cottages. John nevertheless gave their address as 'Toorak'.

By 1888 the suburban frontier had extended far beyond Prahran and the district's energetic developers had spread their fame to the remotest corners of the metropolis. John Crews and Thomas Arkle, the creators of the Pridham estate, belonged, like many of their fellow land boomers, to Prahran's chapel-going, teetotal elite. Models of sobriety and thrift, they had grown rich by selling dreams of suburban respectability to the masses. George William Taylor, whose mansion Wynnstay stood within view of Hughes's cottage, was the richest of them all. Reared among the Calvinistic Methodists of north Wales, he had once considered entering the nonconformist ministry, but found his real vocation as Melbourne's arch land syndicate promoter. Taylor lobbied for railway lines and bought and sold land all over the metropolis from Brighton to Broadmeadows and from Box Hill to Bacchus Marsh. Yet he remained, first and foremost, a Prahranite. Elected mayor in 1885, he built a new town hall, spent £30 000 on new parklands and treated 3000 guests, including the governor, to a lavish reception at Wynnstay. 'By enterprise, industry and integrity he had made a very large sum of money', he boasted. Even at the height of his fame, when he was invited to contest a Welsh seat in the House of Commons, he continued to serve in the Prahran Volunteers and preside over the Prahran football club. When he departed for England, 200 of his local admirers chartered a steamer to accompany him down the bay, waving their hero 'bon voyage'.

Nowhere else in Australia was suburban transport as lavishly provided or land booming as reckless as in Melbourne. Sydney's transport was dominated by short-distance carriers, such as horse omnibuses and trams. Sydneysiders used public transport almost as often as Melburnians, but while trains carried about half Melbourne's paying commuters they carried only about one-tenth of Sydney's. By 1888 horse-drawn omnibuses had been almost banished from Melbourne's streets by the faster cable trams but on Sydney's narrow, crowded streets they still competed successfully with the slower steam trams.

Land boomers operating through 'railway leagues' and parliamentary deputations pushed suburban railway development to the top of Victoria's political

George Taylor, land boomer.
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Chapel Street, Prahran (centre), accessible by both train and tram, was one of the busiest shopping centres in Melbourne outside the central business district. When John and Emily Hughes moved into Bayview Street, they bought most of their furniture here, and John often called in to buy supplies on his way home from the city. Prahran Advertiser, Supplement 1890.

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Cable tram of the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company. The gripman and the more adventurous passengers rode the open 'dummy' or grip car at the front, while the rest rode with the conductor in the saloon or trailer car. Cable trams were powered by a continuously moving underground cable driven by a stationary steam engine. The tram was attached to the cable by means of the grip through a slit in the roadway.

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agenda. 'My dear Gillies', an anguished local member wrote to the premier and minister for railways,

the people of Doncaster are plaguing the life out of me to get a survey of the proposed line from Canterbury to Doncaster. Can you inform me when you are likely to undertake the survey?

The land booming mania reached into the highest levels of government. Six of the eight members of cabinet were directors of building societies or mortgage companies, and many parliamentarians headed suburban land syndicates.

In Sydney businessmen were also urging the government to improve the city's railways. The main terminus was inconveniently located at Redfern, two kilometres south of the city centre, and a Railway Extension League formed by city businessmen and commuters from the southern and eastern suburbs was agitating for an extension of the railway from Redfern to Circular Quay. Speedy railways connecting the city to the nearer suburbs, argued the mayor of Glebe, would enable city clerks to lunch at home with their wives. But the free-traders and country politicians who dominated the parliament did not want to spend government money on city transport. Of the four short suburban railway extensions announced in June 1888, three were goods lines serving port or industrial areas. Sir Henry Parkes explained: 'It was of far more importance to the citizens of Sydney and to the residents of the suburbs that railways should be carried into our remote districts . . . than to carry the railway into Sydney.'

A monster petition and a great deputation of influential citizens eventually persuaded Parkes to change his mind. In August he unveiled plans for a grand railway extension running from Redfern south to Circular Quay then looping through the eastern suburbs of Paddington, Randwick and Kensington to rejoin the Illawarra line at Erskineville. He even talked, in his oracular way, of a future bridge spanning the harbour to the developing north shore suburbs. But as if to purge his liberal conscience, he simultaneously announced his intention of leasing the government's unprofitable suburban tramways to private operators.

Public transport development in the smaller capital cities lagged far behind that of Sydney and Melbourne. Adelaide's wide streets and flat terrain were well suited to the privately run horse trams that had appeared in the late 1870s. The suburbs,



Redfern station, Sydney. Passengers alighting from the trains here had a choice of transport for the 2km journey to the city centre. Some took the double-decker steam tram; others travelled by the old-fashioned but still popular cabs and horse omnibuses. Still others made the journey on foot.

MITCHELL LIBRARY

particularly to the south and east of the city, grew rapidly until the mid-1880s, but by 1888 the boom had flagged and several of the more venturesome tramway companies had failed. In Brisbane, on the other hand, suburban expansion was still vigorously under way. When William Westgarth, an old Melbourne merchant now living in England, passed through on a centennial tour of the colonies, he was amazed to see land selling for £300 to £700 an acre seven to ten kilometres from the city. The first suburbs had spread out along the gullies of the Brisbane River valley, following the routes of the main trunk railways to Ipswich, Sandgate and the south coast. Working men living as far afield as Cooper's Plain were appealing for special commuter services and the first truly suburban railway, joining the city to Fortitude Valley, was under construction. A privately run horse tram service, begun in the mid-1880s, had been extended as far as Woolloongabba in the south and Breakfast Creek in the north, with spur lines to Bulimba, New Farm and West End. Brisbane was the fastest-growing of the Australian capitals, but by 1888 even its suburban developers were running into difficulties.



In the gathering dusk a man stood watching the crowds of home-bound workers streaming into Flinders Street railway station. He followed them in imagination as they journeyed home along the railway, visualising the loving wives and eager children standing at cottage doors and marvelling at 'the wide ocean of happiness that underlies the turmoil of human lives'. For jaded city men, tired of the artificiality and conflict of business life, the garden suburbs offered a welcome retreat into nature and domestic peace.

When John Hughes boarded the evening train to Hawksburn, he looked forward to evenings of domestic tranquillity. 'I rested the evening enjoying my wife's company' was a typical entry in his diary. A few evenings later he was 'resting content in quietude'. After his long, lonely bachelorhood, Hughes was a ready convert to married life. A few days after their wedding, the newlyweds

symbolically renounced their old lives by going through all their old letters and burning anything likely to revive old, unhappy memories. As a bachelor Hughes had enjoyed his evening walks through the city 'seeing and being seen'; now he seldom ventured out except for a walk with his dog Nero or a shopping expedition with Emily to nearby Chapel Street. He took up home hobbies: framing pictures, making fern baskets and constructing a garden grotto representing the Rock of Gibraltar. He named their suburban haven Broughton, after his birthplace, and had a brass nameplate erected over the verandah.

Emily was also a devoted home-maker. While John happily made a cage for their pet cockatoo, she rested from the day's housework reading a chapter from a devotional book, *Heaven our house*. As mistress of the house, she aimed at creating a happy haven for her homecoming husband, similar to the one poetically described by another 'household fairy'.

The dear little wife at home, John
 With ever so much to do—
 Stitches to set, and babies to fret,
 And so many thoughts of you—
 The beautiful household fairy,
 Filling your heart with light,
 Whatever you meet today, John,
 Go cheerily home tonight.

But Emily was still a young woman and looking after their cottage cannot have absorbed all her energies. Sometimes she accompanied John on the morning train, keeping the office while he made calls about town. Occasionally she persuaded him to visit her family or join in a homely evening around the piano with a few friends. 'Retired to bed tired out with playing for the amusement of my wife and her friends dancing', he wrote after one strenuous evening.

Compared with the rowdy street life of the waterfront or the inner city's convivial network of clubs and pubs, the railway suburb seemed a sleepy place. Nothing but the clip-clop of the baker's horse and the distant whistle of the locomotive disturbed its calm. Its detached houses standing behind their high hedges encouraged a private and formal way of life. 'The only place outside a man's house where he could get to spend an evening was either a public house or a prayer meeting', complained a resident of one new suburb. Some suburbs strengthened their exclusive reputation by introducing building regulations designed to keep out public houses, factories and working-class cottages.

The suburbs' most important public institutions were their churches. Rising above the sprawl of slate and corrugated iron roofs, their red brick spires witnessed to the suburbanite's yearnings for a life beyond the dead level monotony of his own environs. Churchgoing was more popular in the suburbs than in other parts of the capital cities. The nonconformists led the advance, permeating the suburbs with a vigorous subculture of Sunday schools, choirs, Bands of Hope, missionary leagues, mutual improvement societies and cricket teams. John Hughes sometimes accompanied his wife to the nearby Church of England and on Sunday evenings she occasionally read aloud from the Bible. Their faith, cheerful and unperplexed, mirrored the tranquillity of their everyday lives.

Yet the high hedges could not hold all life's calamities at bay. In mid-January Hughes was appalled to hear of the sudden death of his landlord, 24-year-old Louis Palmer. Palmer had called at 57 Bayview Street only a few weeks earlier to announce his approaching marriage and to request the Hugheses to move out. They agreed to hand over in July. Meanwhile Palmer rented a cottage nearby. On

The evening train to Hawthorn, by Tom Roberts. From his vantage point on the Yarra bank, Roberts looked across the Flinders Street railway yards towards the city. The spires of the Scots and Independent churches are silhouetted against the darkening sky, while in the foreground the beam of a single headlight and a plume of steam and smoke marks the passage of the Hawthorn train. Oil, 1888.

COLLECTION OF ROD ELLISON



The advent of the mechanical lawnmower enhanced the advantages of suburban living by enabling householders to maintain a pleasant expanse of lawn without the heavy labour of scything. Sydney Mail, 3 Nov 1888.

the morning of his wedding day he got up and went round to clean up a right-of-way at the back of the house, which was in a filthy condition. By the time the job was done he was feeling dreadfully sick but, in spite of his aches and pains, he went through the marriage ceremony. Next day his condition worsened, and on admission to the Alfred Hospital he was found to have typhoid fever, a condition directly caused, his doctors said, by inhaling the poisonous atmosphere in the uncleansed right-of-way. Less than a week after her wedding day, his young bride was a widow.

Every summer thousands of Australian suburbanites were struck down with typhoid. In Melbourne, where the toll was heaviest, the public hospitals sometimes had to pitch tents in their grounds to take the overflow of writhing, sweating victims. Typhoid was not the greatest killer of Australian city dwellers—tuberculosis and diphtheria, for example, took more lives—but because it descended suddenly upon healthy young people, it was dreaded more. Doctors knew, moreover, that it was a preventable disease, caused by bad water and drainage. The unpaved, unsewered streets and jerry-built cottages of the typical boom suburb were its natural breeding ground.

The typhoid scare swept almost all the capital cities. A sewage-choked stream running through the centre of Hobart gave it a higher risk of typhoid mortality than any other capital city. In Melbourne, where the old cumbersome pan system of sewerage collection had become hopelessly inefficient and expensive and where underground sewerage had still to be introduced, typhoid mortality was 50 per cent higher than in partially sewered Sydney. Brisbane's steamy climate, the memory of recent floods and the rapacity of land developers, who were selling off riverside swampland and ill-drained slopes along Fortitude Valley, strengthened public opinion in favour of more stringent sanitary measures. Only Adelaide, where a complete system of underground sewerage had been installed since the early 1880s, could afford to feel safe. 'I know of no city the sanitation of which is ... so nearly perfect as that of Adelaide', a South Australian doctor boasted to his Melbourne colleagues.

The benefits of sanitation and the penalties of neglect were most apparent in Sydney. Since the early 1880s, the city and its nearer suburbs had been connected to the Nepean water supply and the Bondi sewer outfall. Their death rate, especially for typhoid and other epidemic diseases, had steadily declined. But in the belt of unsewered southern and eastern suburbs stretching from Waterloo to Ashfield, jerry-builders continued to run up their gimcrack terraces and death rates remained high. In one sensational case four of the seven members of the Jones family, then living in a small terrace in Gowrie Street, Newtown, went down with typhoid. Three of them, 34-year-old William Jones and his two children, later died. Their home, it turned out, had been built over an old claypit and its foundations were sunk into a mixture of earth filling and household garbage deposited on the site by the local council. When sanitary inspectors visited the place they detected the stench of sour earth seeping up between the floorboards while drainage from the household ran directly through open drains into the soggy soil. What made the slaughter of the Jones family so scandalous was that the insanitary condition of the neighbourhood, known locally as Frogghollow, had often been brought before the authorities. Four years earlier a local clergyman had led a doctor, a newspaper reporter and an alderman on a tour of inspection. Letters appeared in the newspaper, sermons were preached in local churches, but as one of Jones's neighbours gloomily observed, 'nobody done anything'.

'Doing anything' was usually up to the local councillors, many of whom, like the civic fathers of Prahran and Newtown, had themselves often committed or

A BAD SMELL



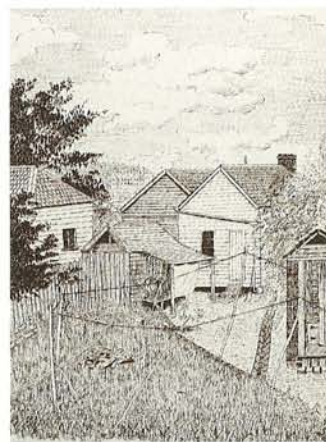
Alexander Sutherland's A bad smell was one of several pamphlets issued by the Australian Health Society in its campaign to alert city dwellers to the hazards of poor sanitation and drainage. By 1888 the old miasmatic theory of disease, which asserted that diseases such as typhoid resulted from poisonous vapours or miasmas in the atmosphere, was losing ground to the new theory of bacterial infection.

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condoned sanitary misdemeanours. Shortly after Louis Palmer's death the Prahran council carried out a complete inspection of the city's houses and ordered some two hundred occupants to repair leaking privies, unblock drains or fill up noisome cesspools. Some ratepayers wanted to prevent the construction of blind streets and narrow alleys and compel subdividers to submit drainage plans for their new estates. More regulations, warned the land booming councillors, would only make it harder for ordinary working people to get their own block of land. 'It would retard progress', said George Taylor. But as the typhoid toll mounted, opinion gradually turned against the most reckless developers. John Crews, Thomas Arkle and George Taylor all retired from municipal affairs after the 1888 elections and their successors pledged support for a more united attack upon the city's insanitary conditions.

Towards the end of September the suburbs felt a sudden quake of panic. Melbourne's soaring land prices peaked and then began to plummet. The auctioneers folded their marquees and the crowds of eager bidders drifted away. 'The land boom squashed and many of our leading parliament men implicated in the land swindles', Hughes noted in November. Everyone was asking: 'Has the land boom collapsed and are we to have a season of depression?' Could the great surge of urban progress be coming to an end? George Taylor, who had recently disposed of some £3.8 million of his own landholdings to a public company, tried to soothe troubled investors. 'He had never heard of a single instance of the people who had purchased land from him having lost money by their speculations', he declared.

The collapse of the land boom confirmed Thomas Guest's forebodings. 'As yet we are only at the beginning of the troubles and it is impossible yet to see what troubles are before us—it may be very severe but we hope not', he wrote to young Tom at the end of the year. But for most Victorian city dwellers, life went on as usual. Fred Coneybeer visited Melbourne in the midst of the crisis but noticed only the prosperity of the Victorian metropolis compared with his depressed Adelaide. Tom Dobeson, in and out of work for half a decade, could expect no worse than he had already experienced. Even John Hughes surveyed the bursting of the boom with composure. He had no land syndicate shares to worry about and, as prices and rents declined, he would be free, unlike many of his mortgaged neighbours, to move on to cheaper quarters elsewhere. In September, he and Emily had moved to a new Broughton at the end of the cable tram route in Albert Park. Their thoughts were now on more momentous matters than the price of suburban land or dreams of sudden wealth, for in February Emily was expecting their first child. Hughes spent New Year's Eve cleaning the household clocks, then, as midnight approached, he and Emily sat on their front verandah listening to the cacophony of singing, church bells and railway engine whistles wafting on the warm northern breeze from the city centre. Secluded from the city's noise and bustle, they felt themselves lifted above its clockwork routines. The new year, the expectant father believed, would be 'one of the greatest epochs in my life'.



A Brisbane backyard. This rare glimpse of a suburban backyard comes from the sketchbook of Hugh Hamilton, a recent immigrant from Britain, and shows one of the most potent sources of urban disease, the household privy (foreground right).
BRISBANE CITY ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM