

Wollongong was the third-largest port in New South Wales after Sydney and Newcastle. With a population of 3000, the town was surrounded by fertile agricultural and dairying country. The harbour had been enlarged and deepened to cope with the growing export of agricultural and dairy produce, and most importantly, coal. Most of the coal pits were connected by rail with the port, and the Illustrated Sydney News wrote that 'the Wollongong coal is said to be preferred by Her Majesty's ships, and some of our largest steam Companies, to any coal procurable in the Southern Hemisphere'. The town was well laid out, with fine houses, banks, churches, stores, public buildings and hotels, and had a School of Arts, a Turf club, a Gaslight Company and two newspapers, The Illawarra Mercury and the Wollongong Argus. Illustrated Sydney News, Supplement, 15 Oct 1887.

CHAPTER 6

THE SOCIAL MAP

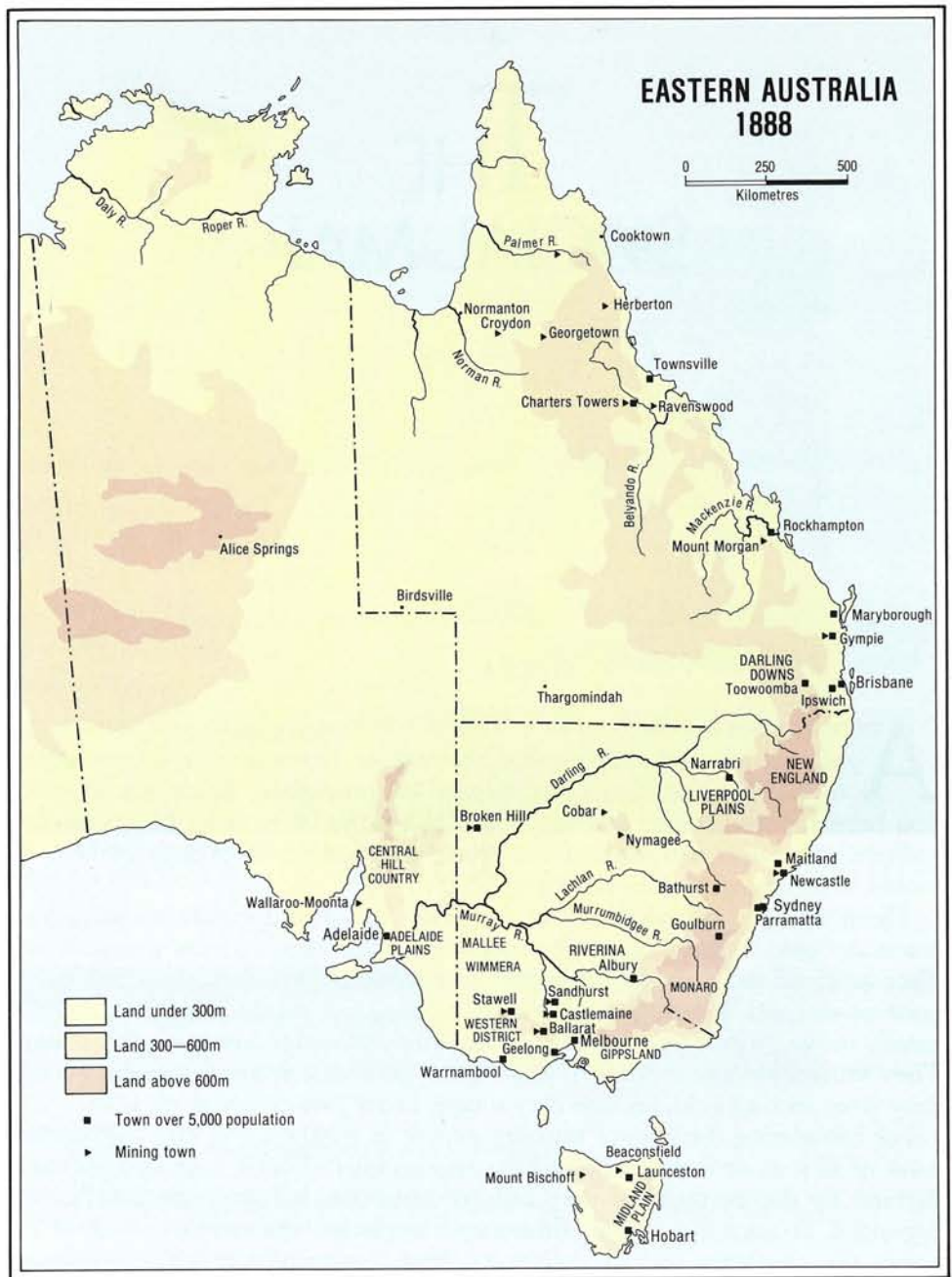
AUSTRALIA was divided into six colonies. The boundaries were drawn on the political map and people called themselves Tasmanians or Queenslanders more often than they called themselves Australians. There was competition between the colonies and the flames of jealousy were fanned by politicians and newspaper editors, who knew that promoting the interests of their own colony would win votes and sell newspapers.

There was also a physical map of Australia that showed mountains and plains, rivers and deserts, and this was the more important map for most people. Their place on it affected their daily routines, their working lives, their chances of being poor or well-off. When they moved to a new place on the map, they did not usually move for political reasons or because they wished to live in another colony. They moved because they were looking for greener pastures for sheep, because they were seeking gold, because they sought better jobs or any work at all.

For considering the lives of ordinary people in Australia, the map that matters most of all is an economic map and the regions into which it is divided are those defined by the occupations they followed and the industries on which they depended. To trace the outline of this map is to glimpse the variety of ways of life across the continent and to understand how powerfully people's livelihoods influenced the rest of their lives.

THE INLAND CORRIDOR

The plains and the slopes of the Great Dividing Range formed an inland corridor of open grassland that stretched south for 3500 kilometres from northern Queensland to Victoria and then turned west to St Vincent's Gulf in South Australia. The inland corridor had been the heartland of Australia since pastoralists started to occupy it in the 1820s, for this was fertile land. The sheep grazing here grew fine wool for export and in good seasons the golden wheat stretched to the horizon.



This map does not reflect the many changes that were occurring in the area it covers. South Australia had annexed the Northern Territory in 1863, but in 1888 had still not decided what to do with it. North Queenslanders were agitating for the creation of a separate colony. New mining towns were being established, while older ones, such as Ballarat and Charters Towers, were becoming inland cities.

GARY SWINTON

For most of its length, the corridor was five to six hundred kilometres wide. It was flanked to the east by forested mountains and narrow coastal plains; and on the coast, about a thousand kilometres apart, were the capital cities of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Colonial governments had built railways across the mountains to link the cities to the corridor. This large and fertile tract of land, geographically so far from Europe, was, in its economic and social life, a part of European capitalism.

To the west, the corridor gave way to arid grasslands and then to desert, that part of the continent that Australians as early as the 1850s had named the Never-Never.

The Never-Never was even further away than the Outback. It stretched from the saltbush plains west of the Darling River to the Indian Ocean, from the Great Australian Bight in the south to Arnhem Land in the north. The Never-Never occupied over half the continent.

Two areas, where the corridor directly flanked the coastline, had been of special significance in the history of the corridor. One was the Western District of Victoria, from which pastoralists had ventured out in search of new land. Much of outback New South Wales and Queensland was now settled by Western District pastoralists or their sons. The second point where the corridor met the sea was on the Adelaide plains. Dry grassland wheat farming began here in the 1840s and had now spread out across northern Victoria and into southern New South Wales. These two areas had become important because of their accessibility, still a key factor in Australian land settlement, as pastoralists in the Kimberleys of Western Australia were now learning the hard way.

The essential feature of the corridor was its suitability for pastoralism and for wheat farming. In this respect, some smaller outlying grasslands also formed part of the inland corridor. The midland plain of Tasmania was by 1888 a mature pastoral society that retained close links with the inland corridor as an exporter of stud sheep and as the home base of full-time shearers. The corridor reappeared in the southwest of Western Australia; in the north it stretched precariously across Arnhem Land to the Kimberleys.

Along the corridor three great industries—pastoralism, agriculture and mining—had developed since the 1820s. Each industry changed in response to developments in technology, the discovery of new resources and changes in world demand for primary products. In each industry, people moved outwards from the settled areas and sometimes retreated again when conditions worsened. Miners moved in search of new deposits of gold, silver and base metals, pastoralists in search of land or in retreat from drought. Sometimes pastoralists had to give way to wheat farmers as the southern wheat-belt expanded into the areas they occupied.

The industries competed for land, labour and capital, but each industry also complemented the others. In some times and places, pastoralist and farmer competed, and sometimes fought, for control of land, but farmers and their sons also supplied much of the pastoral labour force. In 1888 the rise of properties combining pastoral and agricultural activities on the inland slopes of the mountains in New South Wales had begun to blur the old distinctions. Mining rushes drew men away from pastoral stations and farms, but also created inland markets for pastoral and farm produce. As people stocked new pastoral land, built farmhouses and fences, developed mines and set up shops in country townships, so networks were built up to connect them to each other and to the distant capital cities. The most obvious networks were roads and railways, but people also began to build churches and schools and to create communities. Developing patterns of industries, constant movements of population, changing demands from the cities, meant that people of the inland corridor were living in a world of movement and change, of social and economic tensions.

Miners had moved along the inland corridor from the rich parent goldfields of Ballarat, Sandhurst (Bendigo) and Castlemaine in Victoria. The main migration of mineral discovery was anti-clockwise around the continent, to Queensland in the late 1860s and 1870s, and on to the Kimberleys in the early 1880s and southward to Yilgarn by 1888. Gold was the original attraction, but the combined output of tin, copper and silver now nearly equalled the output of gold.

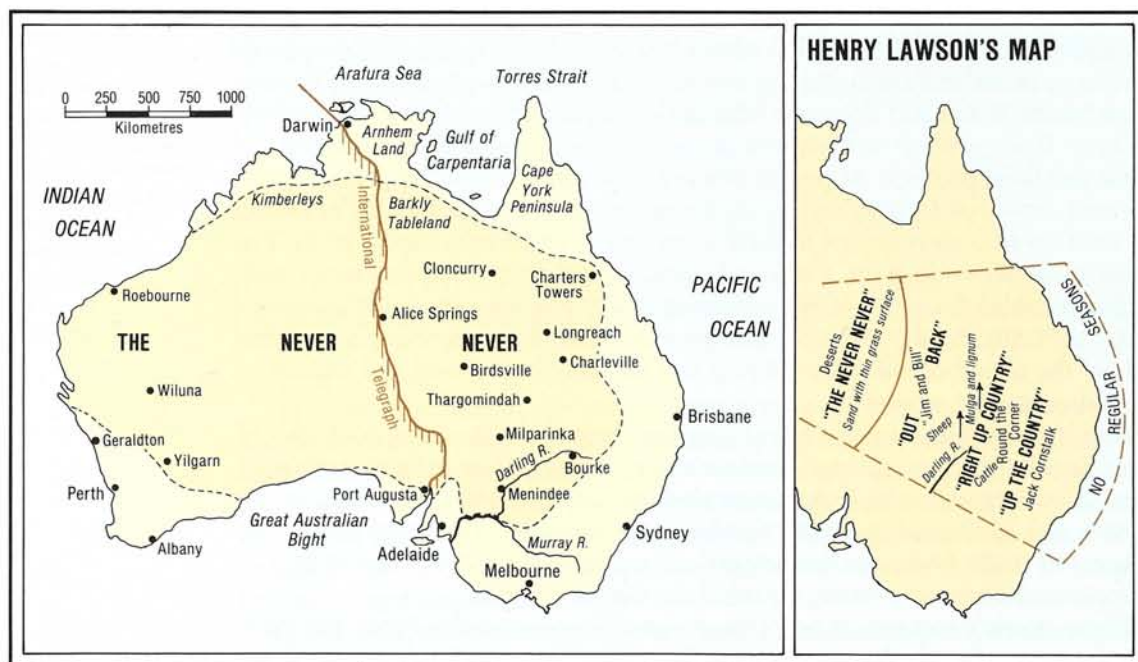
Half the world's exports of wool now came from Australia. From the early 1860s the pastoralists had embarked on heavy investment, buying land from

colonial governments and constructing fences, dams and station buildings. The outcome was a highly profitable industry with a very efficient use of labour. Shepherds had now given way to a small permanent labour force of boundary riders and station hands on each property and a large migratory labour force of construction workers and shearers. The new method of paddocking created a nomad tribe of bush workers.

Wheat growing, the third great industry of the open grasslands, used strippers, winnowers, seed-sowers, heavy ploughs and other implements to produce a large output per man. The unit of production was the family farm, comprising the farmer, his wife and perhaps a labourer who was often a son or the son of a neighbouring farmer. The new technology was pioneered on the Adelaide plains in the 1840s and the wheat-belt spread in the 1870s and 1880s to the northern plains of South Australia and across to the Wimmera and central plains of Victoria. By 1888, half of the Wimmera farmers were South Australian. The migration had started into southern New South Wales. The old wheat-growing regions, in Tasmania and the coastal areas of Victoria and New South Wales, could not compete and became backwaters. The expanding industries of the inland corridor led to government railway construction, encouraged the growth of inland towns and villages servicing local pastoral, farming and mining hinterlands and contributed much to the rise of the capital cities.

Forest society developed later than grasslands society. This might have had important consequences for Australian history, for the grasslands were a big man's frontier and the forests a small man's frontier. The Australian sequence of occupation differed from the north American, where the forest areas were settled first and only later did people move out to the plains. In Australia, the early convict settlements were confined to the coast, but from the 1820s onwards the open grasslands were the arena of rural economic development. From the 1820s to the early 1880s, the forests were the forgotten frontier of Australian history. Prospectors cut narrow paths into them and mining towns were established. Timbercutters took out the best trees along river frontages. Cattle thieves and

In Old colonials (1882), A.J. Boyd described the Never as 'the far outside country beyond the centres of civilization'. Henry Lawson described it as 'a phantom land, a mystic realm' in Short stories and sketches 1888-1922.



bushrangers operated at the edge of forest and plain and retreated into the forest. Farmers cut clearings around hamlets on wagon routes or cut into the forest edges to cart timber for railway sleepers, fenceposts and mining timber.

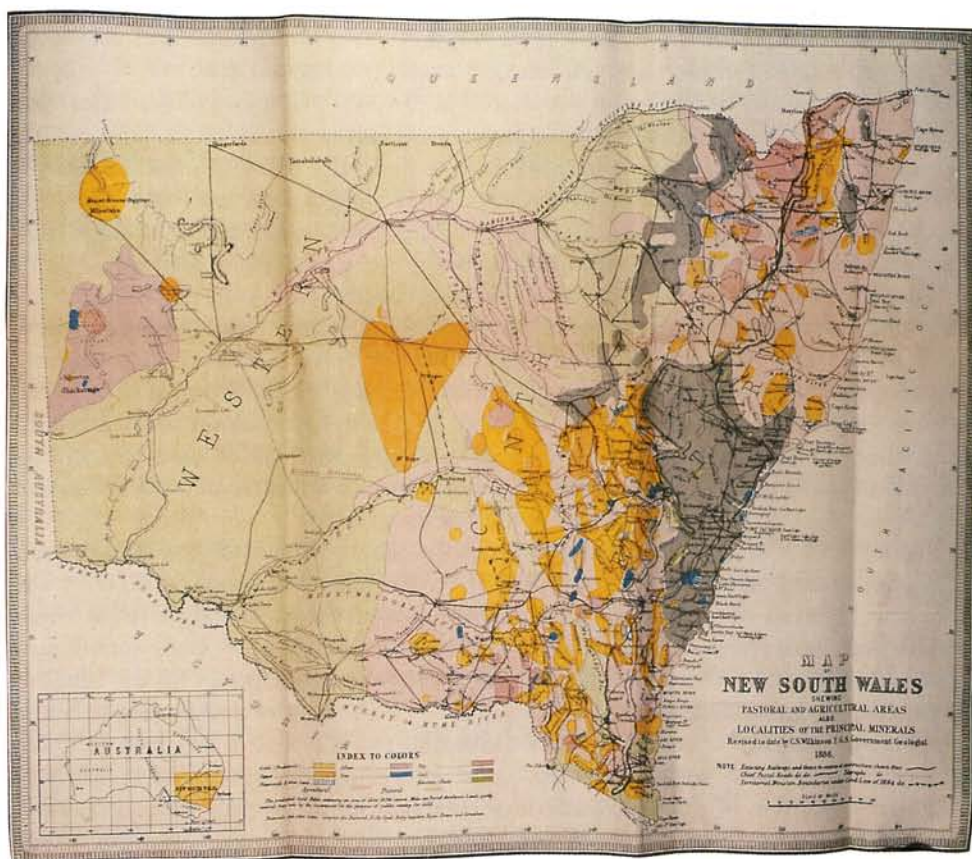
But the main assault on the forests started in the 1880s. The rise of the cities now created large markets for foodstuffs. Specialised communities of orchardists and market gardeners expanded in suitable areas close to the cities. On market days in Melbourne, lines of carts came from the Dandenongs to the east and from the market gardens to the southeast, to the central produce market. From Gippsland, farmers who had migrated with their sons from the old declining farming areas of the central Victorian goldfields were sending butter and milk to Melbourne's expanding consumer market. The extension of the railway had opened up new tracts of dairying country, and cream separators and refrigeration were beginning to change the face of the countryside. A new dairying industry was also growing on the south and north coasts of New South Wales. In Queensland the northward migration of sugar growing gathered pace, as the area under cane more than trebled in a decade. In Tasmania, pioneer farmers laboriously cleared the north coast forests and exported potatoes to the mainland cities.

From the start of European settlement, the inland corridor and the coastal forests had been settled and developed by people whose ideas had been formed by the economic system of capitalism. They moved into an area that seemed to them untouched, and swept aside the Aborigines who had neither built fences nor cultivated the land. There were no existing forms already imposed on the land, no peasant farming, no feudal system to be replaced. These new people were free to grow crops and raise animals to sell on the markets of the world. Efficient methods of production, new technology and machinery, together with the rich and abundant resources of the inland corridor, enabled output to expand more rapidly than the labour force. In 1888 only 25 per cent of the Australian workforce was employed in pastoral and agricultural activities, compared to 40 per cent in the United States. High rural productivity underwrote the growth of cities and towns.

CITIES AND TOWNS

Australia was highly urbanised in 1888, with half of its people living in cities or towns. Thirty-six per cent lived in the six capital cities, and 14 per cent in other cities and towns with minimum populations of 2500. Melbourne's population was 470 000, with 4 out of 10 Victorians living in the city. Sydney had a population of 400 000 people, one-third of the colony's population. Perth, with only 16 000 people, had one-third of Western Australia's population. The large provincial cities were mining cities—Ballarat, Sandhurst (Bendigo), Broken Hill, Charters Towers and Newcastle. Melbourne was ten times larger than Ballarat, its nearest rival, Sydney was nine times larger than Newcastle, and Adelaide was twenty-three times larger than Burra (which had begun as a mining town). In Tasmania, however, Hobart was not much larger than Launceston.

The importance of the cities and towns also showed up in the distribution of the workforce into three broad groups. The pastoral and agricultural industries accounted for 25 per cent of workers, the manufacturing, mining and construction industries for 35 per cent and the service industries for 40 per cent. Some workers engaged in manufacturing, mining and construction lived in the country, but the large majority were urban. So, too, were most of those in the service industries such as trade and commerce, banking, education, entertainment, medicine, law and the other professions, government employment and domestic service. The large size of the urban sector and the dominance of service industries were characteristic



C.S. Wilkinson, Notes on the geology of New South Wales, Sydney 1882.

of an advanced capitalist economy and of a high wage economy. It was the high wage rate for most workers, compared to Britain, that created a large demand for manufactured goods, housing and a range of services.

The size of the cities puzzled and troubled Timothy Coghlan, New South Wales statistician, who wrote that 'the abnormal aggregation of the population into their capital cities is a most unfortunate element in the progress of the colonies'. Henry Hayter, the Victorian statistician, declared that professional, domestic and commercial classes 'do not create wealth', believing that only the primary and manufacturing classes did that. Why were the cities so large? Most immigrants preferred living in them to going out into the bush, well-off country people often retired to the cities, many itinerant workers left their wives and children there. In every colony the proportion of women to men was higher in the city than in the country.

Above all, the cities offered jobs. The capital cities were centres of government. Railways channelled people and goods into them. There were good economic and geographical reasons for this choice of routes, but the political process, especially alliances between city merchants, financiers and others involved in the export trades, and country people, helped to centralise the railway system. Flour milling, brewing, and other manufacturing activities had started to migrate from country towns to capital cities.

The cities also grew because of the work they did and the products they supplied for rural industries. The great wool warehouses were landmarks around the ports that connected the grasslands with the British and European textile cities. Linked manufacturing industries included the noxious trades—tanneries, boiling-down

works, scouring works and abattoirs. The cities supplied agricultural implements, fencing wire and other goods to country people. In various ways, urban functions created by the grasslands industries were captured by the cities and helped them keep growing. The largest cities now began to generate their own economic growth. Rapid population increase, high wages and low interest rates, fed by a large inflow of British capital, generated the building of houses, factories and shops. The construction boom created linked demands for public utilities such as gas, water and road extensions and stimulated quarrying, brick making and manufacturing.

All these forces came together to produce a new type of city, found only in Australia and other regions of recent settlement. It was a commercial city. Its geography displayed the economic and social forces at work. Its working people had to live within walking distance of their workplace, so that the ports and inner industrial suburbs formed a dense working-class society. Some of the rich still lived in the city centre, but in Melbourne and Sydney at least they were being eased out by shops, warehouses and slum dwellings. They moved to gentlemen's estates and to new residential suburbs that grew rapidly in the 1880s.

The geography of the city in 1888 was a map of economic development and of class formation. The map also showed a great diversity of occupations. Each city had some large factories and hundreds of small workshops. Most factory girls, for example, worked in small dressmaking and millinery shops. The service industries were mostly small businesses, employing only a few hands each. Because Australia had fairly high wages and therefore a strong and varied demand for goods and services, the range of occupations was wide, and this produced a complex pattern of social classes, with a large and diverse middle class. Australian cities lacked the strong class divisions of British industrial cities such as Manchester or Middlesbrough, where one industry, whether cotton textiles or steel, dominated a society.

PEOPLE MOVING

Life in city and country depended on exploitation of the grasslands and forests. Over many thousands of years, the Aborigines had worked out a balance with nature, so that resources were not lost, but in 1888 the Europeans were still vigorously depleting resources. The process of capitalist expansion in 1888, as in any other year, was one of ceaseless movement in response to the push and pull of market forces. The labour market accommodated most but not all who wanted work. It paid university professors £1000 a year and unskilled labourers £100. It sent shearers on annual migrations along the inland corridor, but immobilised dock workers in slums at the ports. Thousands of labourers travelled from Adelaide to get work in Melbourne's construction industry. British capitalists invested huge sums in Melbourne's building boom and in the Broken Hill silver mining boom, creating jobs and movements of people. Pastoralists, farmers and miners advanced to new locations. Bank officers, policemen, schoolteachers, commercial travellers and others moved as their employers directed. The number and diversity of mobile people reflected the vigorous and exploitative nature of British capitalism at work in a new country of settlement.

Aborigines were victims of this process. Their movements in 1888 were desperate responses to the destruction of their way of life. They retreated from the advancing pastoral frontier. The loss of their lands and the search for subsistence drove many into shanty camps outside country towns, and others were immobilised on reservations. Only in deserts and in the tropical forests of north Queensland did Aborigines follow the migration rhythms of an ancient culture now nearly destroyed.