

CHAPTER 4

WORK

THE NEEDS OF WORKING PEOPLE

MUNGRA WAS A BOY of eighteen or nineteen who came from the hill country west of Calcutta. He was a Dhangar, one of a people who lived by farming their own soil, travelling from time to time to work as shepherds in neighbouring districts. In August 1837 he had been signed up for labour in the Australian colonies, and embarked with a number of other men on the *Peter Proctor*. Arriving in Adelaide in November, he and seventeen others were landed, together with Joseph Bruce, their contracted master. The rest, numbering 42, went on to Sydney.

Mungra and his friends were bound, or indentured, to Bruce's service for five years. Under recent Indian legislation their master was obliged at the end of that time to send them home at his own expense. Their pay was five rupees a month, twice what they could expect in India, but less than a sixth of the wage earned in Australia by unbonded men. They also got rations and an annual issue of clothing. Convicts did better with three issues a year. They were paid at least partly in Indian coin, although the Indians who went to Sydney had enough colonial money to make use of the savings bank there. A planter who was one of the main promoters of the scheme said that the Dhangars 'like to have the management of their own money, and are generally capable of taking care of it'. He advised masters not to try to save their wages for them.

These eighteen Indians were entirely on their own in South Australia. A *sirdar*—an overseer and interpreter, who in this case may have had some medical skill as well—had come on the ship, but he went on with the main party to Sydney. Bruce had spent time in India and knew their language, but he was a drunkard, currently obsessed with an unsuccessful love affair and thoughts of suicide. Their overseer in South Australia, Albion Cowley, was a labourer from Gloucestershire, ignorant of all matters Indian. According to Cowley the men worked from sunrise to sunset, with two and a half hours for meals. They ate rice and split peas, 'as much as they chose'.

Mungra was 'a good and willing workman'. Bruce hired him and the other men out to settlers, and in June 1838 several of them were sent to a new farming block

near Adelaide. There Mungra did 'some hard work' until he fell sick with a pain in the chest—though Cowley thought he said 'leg'. Without their own *sirdar*, and with no faith in the colonial doctors, his friends massaged him—so firmly, it appears, that they fractured seven ribs. On 2 September Mungra died. According to a coroner's jury who sat for two days on the case, he had been badly looked after. It was wrong, said the jury, for employees to be so uncertain of their own health and comfort; the government should see that 'these poor men' were properly protected by someone who knew their language and customs. The jurymen said nothing about the five years' bondage—longer than the term served by most convicts before getting a ticket of leave—or the five rupees a month.

Basic to the thinking of the coroner's jury was the belief that working people had certain needs, which their employers must recognise. The authorities usually had to contend with men and women demanding more than the minimum, or with arguments about what the minimum should be. Here there were no such demands and no such arguments. Indian labourers suffered the bare minimum allowed by an educated and property-owning public opinion. Indians, then, may serve as unhappy curtain raisers for our account of the needs of working people.

The Indians in South Australia were a subdued lot of men, sorely in need of protection. Those who went on to Sydney caused more trouble. They came ashore at Christmas time in 1837 and were all bonded to John Mackay who, like Bruce, had experience in India. Mackay's men were broken up into small parties and, as in South Australia, their labour was offered for hire. The *sirdar* went with the largest party, nineteen men, into the employment of John Lord, a Sydney merchant with land in the lower Hunter valley. There they worked mainly as shepherds, though according to Lord they were good at any farm work except ploughing. Lord found them willing and obedient. However, he said, 'they understand and look sharply after their own interests'.

Thirteen men, the second-largest party, were hired to Abercrombie and Co., of the Glenmore distillery near Sydney. They certainly tried to look after their own interests. Within seven weeks they had left the distillery and headed westward, possibly hoping to reach India. With two others, from Rose Bay, they were found camped by the highway halfway across the Blue Mountains. Mackay brought them before the Sydney bench on a charge of running away. Through their spokesman, Madhoo, they said that they had been starved and were cold. 'A dirty piece of canvass, tied around their loins, was the sole clothing of some of them.' They had also not been paid. Madhoo, who 'spoke with great animation . . . [so that] his earnest tone made a great impression', demanded more food and pay and clothes monthly. Once this was promised, the men went back to work.

It was a strange episode, because although the Indians had been forcibly—even violently—arraigned on a criminal charge the bench had behaved like a court of arbitration. We return to this matter of British justice and the Indians in chapter 9.

A certain method of bonding men and women—making sure of their service for some years—was an elusive dream for employers. They pursued it with great anxiety. Labour was scarce; astute workmen could make money by moving about, and many servant girls could marry when they liked. Masters and mistresses were plagued by wages higher than they liked to pay and by constantly having new people to break in. Skilled men were especially difficult to manage, because they knew how much they were needed. As a bricklayer in Western Australia told a friend in the mother country: 'It is not here as in England, if you don't like it you may leave it—it is here, pray do stop, I will raise your wages'. What employers wanted, then, was a system in which men and women would be tied to their work, and in which wages would be fixed for some time ahead.



Indian labour was very promising from this point of view. Good workmen might be signed up before they sailed—when they had no knowledge of normal pay and conditions in Australia—and the contract would stand in colonial law. Even better was a well-run system of convict assignment. Wages were not normally paid to convicts at all, and as long as employers provided a certain standard of food, clothing and shelter, they could rely on government support when it came to discipline. The convict's sentence was, at least in theory, the best means of security over a long period that employers could hope for.

As a compromise between these systems, employers in the colonies could also impose a form of bondage, or indenture, on free labourers from Great Britain or Ireland. This had been common in the North American colonies during earlier centuries—supplementing convict labour—but it was not known in Australia on any large scale before 1825. In that year fifteen families and nine single men had been brought from England by the Australian Agricultural Company to work on its large estate north of Sydney. More followed in 1826 and 1827. None contracted for more than seven years, so that by 1838 all terms were complete. The same was true of the labourers imported by the Van Diemen's Land Company. In Western Australia nearly all the first labouring families to arrive in the colony, during 1829 and 1830, came under indenture. But in the west the near failure of the settlement and the dwindling of capital meant that employers could not keep to their side of the contracts, and most of the original people were freed within a few years. The South Australian Company brought out indentured men, on three year terms.

The indenture system did not have the strong official foundation that the convict system enjoyed. In addition, wages were necessary. Bargains struck in India, it is true, could offer very little pay, but the British government was uneasy about Indian indentures because the system looked so much like slavery. Indians, after all, were subjects of the Queen. However, prospective employers saw advantages in recruiting indentured people that did not apply to convicts. The men and

My harvest home.
Harvesters bring in the grain
at Patterdale, John Glover's
farm in Van Diemen's Land.
The 'harvest home' was one of
the traditional high points of
the English agricultural year.
In this picture Glover seeks to
evoke the prosperity of the new
land and the romantic
illusions of the old one. Oil,
1840.

TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART
GALLERY

women could be chosen carefully for their skills and moral character, and the employer could recruit as large a workforce as he could afford. This was especially important in New South Wales. By 1838 the demand for convict workmen far outstripped supply. Employers complained that they had to make do with too few convicts and often with the least useful kind.

The bonding of Dhangar labourers began in a systematic way in South Australia and New South Wales with the boatload by the *Peter Proctor*. There was already a party of Indians—presumably bonded—at King George Sound in Western Australia. They had arrived in 1835. The twelve men were employed by J.L. Morley, mainly building houses in the new town of Albany. More Indians arrived in Western Australia in February 1838, indentured to Charles Prinsep, who wanted to establish a new settlement with them at Bunbury. Their ship, the *Gaillardon*, took others on to Sydney. The *Emerald Isle* followed during the winter, landing workmen in both South Australia and New South Wales. Prospects now seemed limitless, and by August some 1200 more labourers had been ordered from India, £5 having been sent from Sydney for each one. In Van Diemen's Land too there was considerable excitement about the idea: one disgruntled tradesman, who was afraid that wage levels would fall, said that landowners were considering bringing in 'some thousands of Indian labourers as articulated apprentices (or slaves)'. Importers had already partly succeeded in shaking local employers out of their old-fashioned preference for British labour. But the governments in London and Calcutta feared the slavery imputations too much to be enthusiastic.

The labour of indentured Chinese seemed promising too. At the beginning of 1838 £1500 was somewhere between Sydney and Singapore, on its way to finance the recruitment of 300 Chinese and their passage to New South Wales. The man responsible for this scheme was G.F. Davidson, a settler on the Paterson River in the lower Hunter valley, who had lately come from Singapore himself. Davidson maintained that Chinese were better than Indians: 'A tight curb on a China-man will make him do a great deal of work: at the same time, he has spirit enough to resist ill treatment'. He would also be extremely cheap, 'the cheapest labourer within reach of the Australian farmer', and thousands could be brought over with little trouble. The project came unstuck when the £1500 was temporarily lost in the post.

Maoris were another possibility. In July the *Sydney Herald* reported that Captain Robert Duke had sent to New Zealand for ten married and ten single men, aiming to try them as shepherds. A group of other gentlemen were prepared to follow his example with people from nearby islands. Clearly the dream of a cheap, reliable, non-British workforce scattered through the Australian countryside was a common one.

All the same, it was government policy to promote as far as possible the introduction of free men and women from Great Britain and Ireland—people who would make the colonies like their homeland. From 1832 to 1836 the British government had sent shiploads of single women, and a few men, to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land. They were volunteers with all or part of their fares paid for them. Employers in the colony were not consulted and the people were not indentured in any way. They were chosen mainly by local authorities in England and Ireland. Following complaints from the settlers that they were not getting the kind of labour they wanted, a new system was worked out. Government agents were appointed to recruit throughout the British Isles, with strict instructions as to the right type of people.

Another method of attracting labourers to the colony was the 'bounty system': the New South Wales government promised to subsidise the passages of

immigrants who had been chosen by employers for their own service, as long as they were of a certain type. As originally planned, the bounty system was obviously meant to interlock with a system of indentured labour, because employers were not likely to go to the trouble of finding and bringing out people without binding them somehow.

The bounty system did not work as it was meant to. The Macarthurs of Camden Park, near Sydney, used it thoroughly, co-operating with their friends George Macleay and the Dumaresqs. But few followed their example. James and William Macarthur had a brother in England who signed up 42 families—six of them from Germany—and a few single men, and engaged four ships to take them to New South Wales. The last sailed from Gravesend in November 1838. All the men were contracted to serve the Macarthurs for three years or, in the case of the Germans, five years. Otherwise the working of the bounty system was largely taken over by London shipowners, who made a profit by assembling people themselves.

Few free men and women could be expected to submit to the prospect of three years or more with one employer at a fixed wage. Those already established in the workforce would never do it. The only point at which labouring people could be contracted for years at a time was just before they entered the workforce: as immigrants or as children. Children were bonded as apprentices. Many colonial households depended on apprentices, who were indentured at about the age of fourteen for up to seven years. They were mostly boys employed in ones and twos by skilled tradesmen, although a few girls were apprenticed to dressmakers. The employment of boys and girls in straightforward housework and common labour was also sometimes made into a kind of bondage, and called apprenticeship. This happened especially with children from the orphan schools.

Free labourers who submitted to long-term bondage usually expected something in return. Only those who were completely helpless, such as orphans, were bound virtually for nothing. Indentured immigrants had at least the prospect of better wages than they could get at home. Apprentices could expect to learn something useful while they worked. In June a girl called Mary Noonan, who was apprenticed to Mrs Douglass, dressmaker of Market Street, Sydney, complained to the town magistrates that her mistress was not teaching her properly. In particular, Mrs Douglass stopped her from 'taking the measures from the *living subject*'. Mrs Douglass seems to have been anxious to retain this one special duty for herself, in order to keep her apprentice in some kind of subordination. Certainly Mary was clever, 'and knew as much in a few months as she (her mistress) did in three years and a half'. The magistrates agreed that this was unfair and set her free. With good incomes waiting for them, boys and girls were naturally impatient. Many boys made nuisances of themselves when they decided they knew everything, so that their masters would be glad to be rid of them early.



Milkmaid with wooden bucket. Undated pencil sketch by G.T.W.B. Boyes.

TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY



Indentured labour made up only a small proportion of the overall workforce. Generally, working men were either convicts or absolutely free. The same might be said of working women, except that marriage—a kind of indenture in itself—complicates the picture.

There were some employers who liked their workers to be free agents, up to a point. The Macarthurs, for instance, believed that free men were better and more willing workers than bonded ones. This idea affected even the convict discipline

at Camden, one aim being, 'where a man behaves well, to make him forget, if possible, that he is a convict'. Their indentured labourers were also not absolutely bonded. It was possible—though difficult—for them to buy freedom before their time was up. The Macarthurs were typical of the more skilled employers in their belief that a spirit of flexibility helped efficient labour relations.

It was even more important that at points of conflict masters should have the upper hand. In short, it was crucial that work discipline should be backed up by effective legislation and administration. New South Wales, South Australia and Van Diemen's Land all had their own laws designed to promote order in the workplace. In New South Wales an act 'for the better Regulation of Servants, Labourers, and Work People' had passed the legislative council in 1828. This was designed mainly to ensure that men and women who agreed to a period of service should actually work to the end of the period. At Camden Park in 1838 there were 31 men employed by the year and 14 by the week or day. Another 24 men were under indenture for three years, and there were about 60 convicts. Two women were employed by the year as house servants, and the immigrants' wives and children worked from time to time on a daily basis at the home farm or in the woolshed.

But Camden Park was exceptional. Throughout the colonies it was more common for work to be measured not by units of time but by the job. Even at Camden there were twelve free men who were paid only for work done, and they took their own time to do it. Others on the property added to their wages by job or piece work, or else they went backwards and forwards from one kind of employment to the other. On smaller establishments job work and piece work were even more important, and among employees in the remoter parts of the bush the system was nearly universal. This made for high wages. According to a gentleman who spent most of the year at Cassilis in the upper reaches of the Hunter valley, in that remote corner of civilisation 'They invariably insist upon a nominal price for their labour, much above its real money value'. Employers answered in kind by supplying rations at a cost equally theoretical and equally high, 'and thus a set of prices becomes established, called up-country prices'. Thus labouring men, even as the moved from job to job, had considerable control over the rural economy.

The 1828 act was seriously flawed as far as masters were concerned. It could not force men or women to finish work that they had agreed to do in their own time, and the working people in the colonies were able to claim many hours as their own. Employers found this a poor state of affairs, especially in New South Wales now that convict labour was becoming scarce and free labour more precious accordingly. It is not surprising that they were beginning not only to look forward to indentured labour but also to call for a new act of council. One possible model was the act passed in Van Diemen's Land at the end of 1837, which covered all kinds of employment. Anyone giving up a job 'before the same shall be completely finished', or in fact any employee 'guilty of any ... misconduct' could be liable to two months in gaol.

Agreements by the day and the week were hardly worth the trouble of enforcing in the law courts. This probably explains why the 1828 act did not much affect house servants. The two women at Camden Park were employed by the year, but probably most free women in these situations worked for briefer intervals, giving up at short notice. In Van Diemen's Land the all-embracing act of 1837 gave them less latitude. But whatever their terms of employment female servants occupied a peculiar place in the workforce. In a sense they were intimate members of the families they worked for, and to some employers it seemed indiscreet to chastise them publicly, with acts of council and police courts. If

possible, employers used private methods of discipline, which might or might not be to the servant's advantage.

Employers in New South Wales were not in a happy position. Their convict labour force was too small. Asians had yet to come in any numbers, and free British men and women were not only too few, but hard to control under existing legislation. In South Australia there were no convicts at all, and the principles by which the colony had been founded, aiming as they did at a thoroughly British settlement, made it hard for the settlers to hope for many Asians. British labourers had been brought out under indenture to the South Australian Company, but when labour was so scarce it was hard to keep them to their contracts. In January 1837 an act had been passed by the South Australian government which, like the Van Diemen's Land act, gave magistrates power to enforce all work agreements whatsoever. Like all such legislation, the act recognised that labourers and servants might have grievances too, but it did not give them much hope of redress. A water carrier, George Nicholls, made a speech in Adelaide in June 1838 against a system of laws 'framed for the benefit of the rich alone and not for the working people'. He surely included the Master and Servant Act.

Even the British government saw the legislation in this light. In December Governor Gawler was informed that the act was invalid: it put labourers and servants too much at the mercy of their betters. Whether the more recent act passed at Hobart Town would be disallowed on the same grounds remained to be seen, but the attorney-general there had already warned that it reduced free men and women 'to the condition of convicts'.

When such harsh laws were combined with a rigid system of indentured labour the results could be disastrous. On Kangaroo Island the South Australian Company had trouble during the whole year with its bonded men, who included both English and Germans. The company's operations—mainly whaling and sealing—were costly failures; conditions were poor, and men had the constant temptation of better work and better pay in Adelaide. However, the company's officers felt secure enough, especially under the current act, to treat with a high hand any sign of discontent.

Thefts at Kingscote, the company's headquarters, were only one expression of low morale. In February, when an officer stopped a labourer to ask about the contents of a cask he was removing from the company store, the man struck him in the face and, with the help of another, threw him down, hit him again and kicked him. Both men were instantly dismissed, but worse was to follow. Next day the entire labour force went out on strike. They said they were sick of the poor conditions, demanded more fresh water and cheaper provisions, and complained about the conduct of company officials. The Germans complained that they were especially badly treated. Unlike the British labourers, who had come at the company's expense, the Germans had paid their own passage from Europe. The dismissal of the two men, who were Germans, was the last straw. The company's response was typical of its autocratic behaviour. The officers let the labourers have more water, and free of charge, but they refused to budge on other issues. The manager on the island, David McLaren, had no sympathy for the Germans. He advised his superiors in London, to 'Send no more Germans, Tyrolese or foreigners on any account whatever'.

This outburst did not settle tensions. According to another of the company's officers, every young man on the island was ready to quit at a moment's notice. In his view the whole establishment 'was almost in a state of mutiny'. Late in 1838 the brawling and drunkenness of the people, and the unsatisfactory state of the company's investments, led to its giving up its island operations altogether.

THE NEEDS OF EMPLOYERS

At the end of each year in Van Diemen's Land the police magistrates who controlled the various districts on the island were required to send in general reports to the lieutenant-governor in Hobart Town, including statistics on a range of subjects. Several of these reports survive for December 1838. They are remarkably detailed, giving exact figures not only for the districts as a whole, but for every household or establishment within them. From this source we can learn something about how all kinds of enterprises were carried on, and particularly the size and type of workforce appropriate to each.

The two most useful reports are from the districts of Evandale—sometimes called Morven—and Westbury, to the south and southwest of Launceston. Evandale was better settled, with twice the population of Westbury. Sex ratios suggest that more of its people lived in family units: the number of males for every female was 2.7, compared with Westbury's 3.5. Convict men and women were less common in Evandale, leaving more work to be done by householders' sons and daughters and by other free men and women. Such differences are typical of the pattern throughout much of New South Wales as well, with the more remote and newly settled areas depending, as Westbury did, more on convicts than did the older ones. Yet even in more civilised Evandale, more than 70 per cent of all establishments had convicts, and of the 28 per cent which had none, a third were farms of forty acres or so, used mainly for wheat, and with one or two free men on their payrolls. The other two-thirds belonged to shopkeepers, artisans and labourers, with here and there a schoolmaster, a physician or a gentlemen of independent means. Probably their only employees were free servant girls.

In Westbury nearly every place employed convicts. There were few, if any, small farms worked mainly by the farmer's family, and the village settlements were scarcer and smaller than in Evandale. Only one man in Westbury, Robert Benson, is listed as a free labourer with his own household, apparently unconnected with any bigger establishment. He must have hired himself on piece work where he could among his richer neighbours. In Evandale there may have been as many as ten like him. Nearly all of them, like Benson, were married men, which partly explains their peculiar situation. Unlike most free labourers, who were single, they had households of their own. They did not live as part of some larger establishment—in a collection of cottages on a big estate—because most employers would have found it unprofitable to accommodate the whole family.

In both districts some of the bigger village households depended on male convict labour. In the village of Westbury, the district surgeon, M.R. Loane, the clerk of the bench, Charles Walker, and the schoolteacher and postmaster, Thomas Cole, had two convict men each. All three had their own dairy cows, and men of this class usually had gardens as well to keep the men busy. Successful tradesmen might employ as many as half a dozen convicts. In the Westbury district Wainwright the builder, who was currently busy with Richard Dry's new homestead at Quamby, had six together with some free men or boys, probably apprentices. In the two districts the innkeepers employed from two to five male convicts each. Innkeepers in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales usually employed men to do much of the work, including waiting at table.

Overall the most common establishments were those of sheep farmers. They varied enormously in size. There were eleven places with at least 5000 sheep, Quamby being by far the biggest: 25 000 acres, carrying 18 000 sheep and 2000 cattle. This was a frontier establishment. It had no women whatever, only two free men, and 28 male convicts; this is not counting Wainwright's building team. An



A great landowner's home, Van Diemen's Land. This house was completed at Clarendon, near Evandale, during 1838. It cost the owner, James Cox, more than £20 000, and imposed the classical lines and colonnades beloved of the landed classes in Georgian England on the bush landscape of Van Diemen's Land. Detail from watercolour by J. Fereday, c1850.

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example of more civilised prosperity can be seen in the establishment of James Cox, at Clarendon, a few kilometres to the south of Evandale village: 17 113 acres, 10 000 sheep, 600 cattle and 26 male convicts. During the year Cox completed his new house at Clarendon, one of the most imposing private buildings in Australia. He also settled on the estate a small community of free labouring families, who possibly included people who had lately arrived—without indentures—by the *Bussorah Merchant*, the only shipload of such families to come to Van Diemen's Land under the new immigration scheme. For its size—including at least twenty females—the free labouring community at Clarendon was unique on the island, although there were several like it in New South Wales, including Camden Park.

No evidence remains to show how Clarendon was managed from day to day but Cox's interests were much the same as those of the Macarthurs—fine wool and the breeding of good livestock—and it seems likely that he ran his estate as the Macarthurs ran Camden Park. At Camden a general overseer received the high wage of £50 a year. Beneath him there was a sheep overseer, promoted from £25 to £35 during the year, and a head groom, on £30. The other free men employed by the year were either shepherds or general labourers, and were paid between £10 and £25. All received, as well, basic rations—meat and flour by the week, free of charge. The head gardener, who was a gentleman botanist, and a schoolmaster were both paid at the level of the general overseer.

Many big establishments were built up by members of a single family pooling their capital, their land grants, their convict labour entitlements and their own energies. Among the biggest were those of the Macarthurs themselves and the Henty brothers, who had lately expanded from Van Diemen's Land to Port Phillip. A smaller and more typical example can be seen in one of Cox's near neighbours in Evandale, the artist John Glover of Patterdale, who ran 5300 sheep on 6100 acres. Glover had seventeen male convicts and apparently three free men on wages, one of them probably an overseer. He himself was in charge, and had contributed the main capital and the biggest land grant. Otherwise Glover occupied himself with

Veteran Hall, 60 kilometres west of Sydney, here viewed in the late 1820s. At the time, William Lawson employed on this estate an overseer, a clerk, a blacksmith, a wheelwright, three grooms (Lawson being a keen breeder of horses), nineteen labourers and two shepherds. Around the house worked a male cook and three other servants, one of them a woman. All but two were convicts.

By 1838 there were probably fewer convicts, for convict labour was more scarce. Lawson, nicknamed 'Old Ironbark', was a rich but unpretentious man, evidently happy to let his farm buildings clutter the approach to his home. He owned pastoral property elsewhere, but Veteran Hall was devoted largely to agricultural produce supplying the Sydney market. Undated watercolour by Augustus Earle.

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his painting—he had an exhibition room near the house. He had several grown sons, one of whom, James, was ‘chief farming manager’. James paid special attention to the livestock, which included, besides the sheep, 245 cattle and 26 horses. During the year he tried growing turnips to feed the cattle, with great success. Another son, John junior, had contributed his own land grant. He, too, was an artist, but was a good carpenter as well and had made all the gates on the estate. He also looked after the gardens. A third son, Henry, was the expert on cultivation. He lived elsewhere in 1838, but it was intended that he should take over from James in the new year. A fourth son, William, had his own place near Bagdad, much closer to Hobart Town, where he carried on ‘steady and independent’, as John junior explained, but he was at Patterdale for the first pea picking in December.

It is not clear exactly what the women did, except that Mrs Glover senior carried on ‘her old London family occupations’. She and James’s wife managed three convict women. They were lucky—or possibly unlucky—to have so many: ‘They ... do admirably for a time’, wrote John junior, ‘but then relax, and if spirits the secret idol of the country is not procurable for a little indulgence, they will decamp with scarcely the civility of a notice’. This sounds as if the women were not exactly subject to penal discipline. In fact it was typical of female convicts in service to behave as if they were free and, as with free women servants, many employers—though certainly not all of them—did not like taking their domestic troubles to the magistrates. The only alternative was to make their servants comfortable. The women might otherwise find ways of leaving, as they did Mrs Glover—‘without the slightest consideration for her feelings or convenience’—or else, like young apprentices, they made a nuisance of themselves until they were sent away.

The cultivation at Patterdale was typical of smaller sheep farms. The Glovers grew 60 acres of wheat, 30 of barley, 45 of oats and 12 of turnips, and they had 45 acres sown with ‘English grasses’, probably lucerne and clover. They had, as a Glover painting shows, a beautiful garden of English flowers, and also grew large quantities of peas and beans and two acres of potatoes. The crops were almost entirely for their own use. Beef and wheat were their main foodstuffs, with the turnips and most of the other cereals going to the cattle and horses. According to John junior, ‘Wool is the best staple article for reimbursement, of which we make the most of our stock’.

The police magistrate’s report shows 29 people on Patterdale, but John junior maintained that ‘we have commonly had altogether 30 to 40 beings to feed’. The extra mouths were no doubt those of casual labourers who came, for instance, at harvest time. In New South Wales, Van Diemen’s Land and South Australia the increase in the numbers of free people made for an increasing reservoir of labour for the crisis periods of the year. In New South Wales this was still much too small. As an alternative some landowners looked to the Aborigines. Here we have the very opposite of indentured labour. The Aborigines could not be bound by any contract, but many of them survived throughout their conquered territories—not of course in Van Diemen’s Land—and they could sometimes be persuaded to work in the fields. At Camden Park, William Macarthur had sixteen of them harvesting maize during May. They were paid $2\frac{1}{2}$ d a bushel—the standard rate—and over about ten days they made £3 14s 7d, which was paid to them as a team in the form of tea, sugar, tobacco, meat and flour.

In Western Australia settlers in the York district employed soldiers from the local detachment to bring in their wheat in November. The Aborigines, far from helping with the harvest, seem to have been interested in taking the grain themselves, and other soldiers had to be sent out on daily patrols, especially along the upper Swan, until all the wheat was in.

WORK IN THE TOWNS

Shelter is, after food and clothing, the basic material requirement of urban societies. A great deal of labour and capital went into the making and maintenance of Australian towns. Carpenters were the most numerous urban tradesmen in the four colonies, and sawyers, brickmakers and quarrymen fashioned timber, bricks and stone for the sites where the carpenters worked. Bricklayers, masons and a squad of labourers worked beside them, and shinglers, plumbers, glaziers and painters completed construction work.

During their first days and months colonial settlements huddled under bark and canvas. Aborigines often directed the newcomers to stands of timber where large and thick slabs of bark could be cut, just as they chose campsites and trees for overlanders. Temporary roofs were also brought in the holds of ships. Melbourne and Adelaide were still partly tent towns two years after establishment, where steerage passengers camped under canvas spread across boughs, like draymen and carters travelling inland, who spread tarpaulins from their loads and slept beneath their drays and carts with the covers hanging to the ground. Only cabin passengers could afford to bring with them properly designed tents. A tent divided into two rooms and stretched across a wooden floor would have cost the equivalent of several months' wages for a working man. Even in these raw settlements distinctions of class were clear.

Some wealthy immigrants who embarked at London brought Manning houses with them—wooden prefabricated buildings from a manufacturer of that name in London. Occupants added a roof of canvas, bark, thatch or shingles according to taste and opportunity. Manning's son used one of his father's houses when he migrated to Western Australia, and others were exported to the newer colonies, for sale to landowners who wanted a neat cottage without being able to spare men from the more profitable work of opening up their land. Demand stimulated imitation. In September John Crawford and Co. of Rundle Street, Adelaide, 'architects, builders and contractors', advertised portable houses made of local stringybark, cheaper than the imports and more quickly delivered.

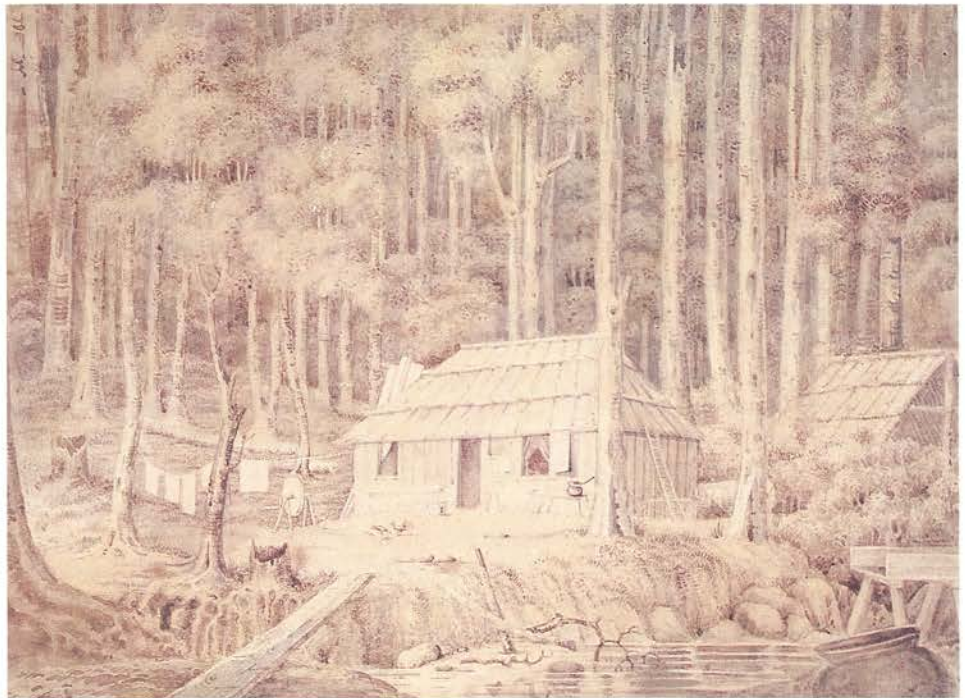


Tent dwellings, Adelaide, South Australia. Colonists, especially newly arrived steerage passengers, required temporary accommodation while permanent buildings began to take shape in Adelaide. Coloured aquatint after William Light, c1837.

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Sawyer's hut. *Sawyers were a vital element in the colonial workforce. Like stockmen, they were a breed apart, largely ordering their own lives. Grey and sepia wash, attributed to William Knight.*

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The first step of its erection was digging post-holes, of about two feet deep, at various distances round the circumference, and along the interior divisions, in which were placed posts ten feet high, squared on the four sides with the axe, excepting the two feet let into the ground, where the whole strength of the timber was left. Along the ground between these, as well as along the tops, wherever there was to be a wall, were laid ground-plates and wall-plates, of about the same size, and squared on the sides facing each other, and having a groove of about an inch and a half wide and two inches deep mortised into the flat sides their whole length. Into these grooves were fitted the two ends of the eight-feet slabs we had split with the maul and wedges. The roof was made much in the usual way, only, being for some time to come to continue covered with bark, the battens were not put so close together as they would have been if the roof had had to be shingled. The flooring-boards, according to the custom of the country, were six inches wide and one thick; timber being used so green, and the heat being so great, boards of any greater width turn up at the edges, so as in time to look like a row of spouts . . . Squares of a couple of feet each way were left open in the wall in various places for windows; at present, however, they were only fitted with shutters. (*Alexander Harris, Settlers and convicts, Melbourne 1953 (1847), 41–2.*)

Stringybark for buildings in Adelaide was cut by the tiersmen, so called because they lived and worked along the rim of the Mount Lofty Ranges. The word 'tier' had been used for the escarpment around the high plains of Van Diemen's Land and many of the tiersmen had learned their bushmanship and timber splitting there. Having escaped the stern masters and sour memories of the island colony, they now kept their distance from authority and employment in Adelaide. The tiersmen were joined by runaways from ships in port, some of whom had signed on as seamen in the convict colonies or in Great Britain to gain a one-way passage in search of anonymity and a fresh start. Other sailors had so detested the monotonous and dangerous bondage of shipboard life that they fled in the gullies and foothills of the ranges rather than serve out their articles.

Van Diemen's Land sent wood as well as woodsmen to the mainland towns. Half of the 110 vessels arriving in South Australia between the foundation of the colony and the middle of 1838 had sailed either from Launceston (36 voyages) or from Hobart Town (19), and among other cargo they carried beams, boards, palings,

laths and shingles, all useful in buildings, whatever the walls might be made of.

Adelaide seemed haphazard at first sight. Tents and buildings sprinkled across the plain stood among tree stumps and beside half-made tracks. Charles Newman, sixteen years old and hired in England as a shepherd by the South Australian Company, walked beside a bullock team towards Adelaide on his first day ashore, and came upon the immigrant barracks:

The earliest sign we saw of civilisation was a number of huts called 'Buffalo Row' after the vessel in which the people came out. I said to the lad who was with me (mind, we were both from Somersetshire, dressed in smock frocks reaching down to the calves of our legs), 'Sam, dost thee zee them pigsties down here; I wonder where the voaks do live'. These huts were made of reeds from the River Torrens . . . Finally we made a halt on North Terrace in front of a weatherboarded house. I looked gloomily at the rude structure and said to the driver, 'Is this the house we're to live in'. 'No', said the bullpuncher, 'That's the Company's Bank'.

The site of Adelaide provided excellent material for much better structures. The clay was good. *Pisé* houses, made of rammed earth left to harden in a buttressed and wooden frame, were cheap and were better protection against extremes of climate than either canvas or timber. For more ambitious buildings, brickpits were opened in the public Parklands by the river, in Thebarton and Hindmarsh just outside the town along the road to the port, and along the eastern boundary. Limestone lay close to the surface inside the town and in the Parklands, and was used for building stone and mortar. At the very time when Crawford and Co. was advertising its portable stringybark house, John Barton Hack, the Adelaide merchant, cartage contractor and grazier, was moving from his wooden residence to a stone mansion next door, sturdy enough to carry six bedrooms on the second storey and three attics above that. 'I have the outside plastered and rough cast and it looks quite imposing from the other side of the river.' The moulding inside was elegantly finished in cedar, brought from the forests on the east coast of New South Wales in a ship which Hack half owned. His vacated wooden house became the kitchen and storerooms for its splendid neighbour. Beside it a new stone store was rising, 27 metres by 9 metres, with doorways through which drays could enter for unloading. Hack thought his store alone would cost him £1000.

Builders were in a short supply in Adelaide, and labourers were scarce. Jacob Pitman, a young craftsman from Gloucestershire who arrived in May, was a master builder with a flourishing business by the end of the year. Three of the houses his workers had put up he kept for renting. Every last man was pressed into service, as Pitman told his sister:

Professional talent is little encouraged here; mechanics do the best. The following cases have come under my own observation, and they are only two of many. A young man, 23 years old of a good education, came out with us, who in Brighton was 'gentleman draper' and shopman generally; but on coming here no such 'things' are used, and being unable to work at any mechanical art he was glad to turn 'mortar-boy' to plasterers, which work he now follows! Oh the delicate fingers!!! Another person came here hoping to get up a classical school, but it would not do. He can work at no trade and is glad to be hired to cut reeds for thatching houses!!! Truly indeed does Franklin say 'he that hath a trade hath an estate', and my trade, which to me was neither credit nor profit is here both. I am now paying 7/- a day to a man who scarcely knows how to hold a tool and who spent his life in a cloth factory till he came here, having never learned the trade or professed it till now.

Timber station, Recherche Bay, Van Diemen's Land. Undated watercolour by Owen Stanley.

TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY



With labour in such demand workers were in a position to bargain. A meeting of mechanics was held in June to form what became the South Australian Builders' Trades Union Society. Investments in timber, brick and stone by people such as Hack and Pitman certainly boosted wages, but they inflated the cost of living faster still. Six days after the trade unionists held their first public meeting Jacob Pitman wrote home to his brother Isaac (who had lately devised a new and highly successful system of shorthand), telling him that Adelaide town lots, sold in England at a flat rate of 12s per acre, were now changing hands for £160 and £200. He had embarked on a land buying spree himself, and five months after his arrival was named manager for the consortium that was subdividing the village of Payneham and selling its 100 one-acre allotments for £10 each, in five monthly instalments. The manager of the Cowandillah Brick Company, George Alston, was secretary to the Adelaide New Land Company, which also issued shares on instalment.

Well-placed speculators, often involved in the construction industry like Pitman and Alston, formed the partnerships that parcelled out the surveys. The bait was offered to working people to own an acre of suburban South Australia, and the cost of this land mania was soaring rents in Adelaide itself. Food, imported goods and shelter together cost a great deal. It is not surprising that men in the building trades were unhappy with the wages they got, especially for the long hours they worked. But work they did, getting Barton Hack into his stone mansion and warehouse, launching Pitman's career as a landlord and providing shelter for the several thousand people who moved in 1838 from Buffalo Row, Coromandel Row and Emigration Square, the leaky immigrant barracks at the western end of North Terrace, into better quarters.

Land prices soared too in Melbourne, another town of canvas and freshly sawn wood, as we see in the next chapter, and stonecutters, masons and bricklayers came from Hobart Town and Launceston to meet the demand. The men of property who crossed Bass Strait to take possession of Port Phillip had left sleeping partners behind who invested with and through them in Melbourne town land. By 1838 men had come from Sydney to start businesses there as well, and their friends and backers speculated on a steep climb in the resale value of lots along the Yarra.

Sydney capitalists were also fuelling a speculative surge in their home town, encouraged by the influx of assisted migrants and flush with the proceeds—for many, more anticipated than real—of pastoral expansion. Rents soared. Builders and landlords laid heavy blame for the rising cost of shelter on the 'Act for regulating buildings and party-walls, and for preventing mischiefs by fire, in the Town of Sydney', which became effective on New Year's Day and was taken, almost without amendment, from the regulations in force in London since 1774. The central areas of Sydney were becoming thickly packed as proprietors tried to charge as much rent as possible. The town was still too small to fill the 2000 seats of the Royal Victoria Theatre, which Joseph Wyatt opened in March, but it was growing fast enough to provide tenants for every one of the 26 houses built by Wyatt in Brougham Place. This thoroughfare, between Pitt and Castlereagh streets, had been created at such small expense that the houses had no gutters and the place was a quagmire.

Crowding and over-hasty construction made 'mischiefs by fire' more likely than ever before. The new act forbade the erection of wooden buildings unless they were at least eight feet from the street and thirty feet from any building owned by someone else. Thatch and bark were banned in favour of shingles or, if possible, slates or tiles. Wooden verandahs, balconies, shutters, venetian blinds and external stairways were forbidden, and wooden outbuildings were discouraged by levying a separate surveyor's fee for every extra edifice. The act laid down thicknesses of

walls, particularly party walls, for various classes of building. All this was meant to stop sudden blazes spreading, sweeping away the lives of residents and the assets of their landlords.

Contractors and landlords protested that precautions appropriate to the largest city in the world were unnecessary, or too expensive, for the largest town in the four colonies. An amending act in September conceded some of the objections. Architects and builders had pointed out that colonial hardwood resisted fire more effectively than the Baltic fir and American pine used in London. It was also argued that the new wrought iron buttresses, railings and brackets would hinder the rush of fire, and that Sydney's climate especially called for verandahs, balconies, shutters, blinds and external stairways. These were now permitted if they did not obstruct the footpath. Because thatch and shingles were plentiful and cheap in Sydney, tiles and slates were not produced locally. The amended act therefore conceded that shingles of hardwood were as safe a covering as people could reasonably afford.

Two further concessions recognised differences between Sydney and London. The original act had laid down five classes of brick building. Each was redefined in September to include one more square in the groundplan than for the equivalent class in London. The climate and the lower cost of land meant that houses in the colony had larger rooms and higher ceilings. Colonial houses also needed to cover more space because they did not contain as many storeys. A substantial London dwelling had the workrooms and some servants' sleeping rooms in the basement, while other servants slept in attics. In Sydney, stormwater and seepage tended to flood the town basements, for basements were difficult to drain as well as to quarry wherever there was bedrock. Poor bricks and brickwork made fourth and fifth storeys hazardous, and kitchens and laundries separate from the main house kept living areas cooler during the summer. As for servants, many employers preferred that the sleeping places of convict and ex-convict employees not be on the same stairway as their own. Hence the final revision in the Sydney Building Act: the waiving of separate surveyor's fees in the case of brick or wooden outhouses, such as kitchens, laundries and servants' quarters, where these were added to the primary structure within six months.

The legislators continued to insist that an eighteen-inch party wall was the minimum thickness allowable. Robert Taylor, bricklayer and carpenter, had thirteen cottages in hand along South Head Road on the outskirts of town, nine feet high, twenty-four feet by twenty feet. He claimed he could only afford nine-inch walls. The space and money lost by thickening the walls would force him, he said, to a second storey, and of course to a higher rental. Edward Flood, who was building cottages nearby in Surry Hills for a carcass butcher, George Hill, said he could keep costs within workers' means only by reducing the size of the dwellings. Taylor and Flood were landlords as well as builders; Hill's mansion, Durham Hall, looked down on the tenements built for him by Flood. The tenants of such cramped quarters must have included the building workers whose labour made it possible for their landlords to take advantage of the booming demand.

Newspapers in Sydney, unlike those in Adelaide, do not mention a building workers' union in 1838. Being so much larger than other Australian towns, Sydney's construction sites were dispersed and its trades were clearly distinguished. Working men in embryonic Adelaide, by contrast, could meet more easily, and their numbers were small enough to encourage mingling. They used the plural in naming the Builders' Trades Union. In Van Diemen's Land a similar body had a more specific craft name: the Hobart Town Carpenters' and Joiners' Society. Like Sydney, Hobart Town was an old administrative and commercial centre; its public and private works were ambitious and there was a good deal of specialisation in

building skills. But unlike Sydney it was still compact enough for a union to keep in touch with all its tradesmen and to keep track of conditions across its industry. Carpenters and joiners in Sydney had tried to form a society in the winter of 1831, and one had existed in the winter of 1835, but the great rush of new buildings had overtaken it.

The problems that made organisation essential—particularly in sprawling Sydney—also made it hard to achieve. Building workers had to use every last hour of daylight and work in all weathers. They saw a multiplicity of workplaces, the locations of which shifted with each new job, and a multiplicity of employers whose needs might change just as often, so the chances of common and consistent action were limited. Tradesmen competed with each other for contracts, sub-contracts and simple short-term work. Protection against irregularity of employment and the erosion of wages was as urgent as it was difficult.

Unions tried to tackle these problems by acting as employment exchanges. They would designate a centrally located public house as a house of call, a place where tradesmen and employers could find one another. Usually a book was kept in which men looking for jobs would put their names and which prospective employers paid, say, sixpence to consult. Everyone could use the pub, for it stayed open long after darkness drove men from the workplace. During working hours, when union officers were at their jobs, the publican took care of the book. He offered space, perhaps a room, in return for the custom brought by the choice of his house as union headquarters. The Hobart Town Society had its house of call at William Champion's Jolly Hatters in Melville Street, and the Adelaide Builders met at Thomas Hornsby's Royal Oak in Hindley Street.

At their house of call unionists did the same things they did at the pub nearest work, on their own front steps and of course on the site itself. They swapped information, weighed up prospects and planned common action. They kept an eye on wages and conditions and on the understandable impulse of masters to strike harsh bargains. They looked out for their interests and looked ahead to the next, and better, job. The union and the house of call were extensions and formalisations of this basic industrial consciousness.

Labouring people had more to fear than industrial trouble: accidents at work, illness, untimely death and the unavoidable costs of a funeral. These were perils of a quite arbitrary kind, and they meant that all income ceased. The unions called themselves 'benefit' or 'friendly' societies because they existed also as a means of support for members and their families in times of crisis. The Maitland Trades Union Society, established in February with a Church of England clergyman as president, seems to have been formed specifically for purposes of mutual insurance. Its rules, which were printed, guarded a fund the principal claims on which would be sickness relief and a sum payable at death.

The trade origin is evident, too, in the name of the Australian Union Benefit Society, a body modelled on the Operative Masons' Benefit Society of London. Its fourth annual meeting was held in the Sydney School of Arts in January. The society had about 140 members, most of them ex-convicts. In order to be admitted they had to prove their steadiness and solvency, because the society's funds were depleted by any default on premiums—which were 3 shillings per month—and any behaviour that might increase the risk of illness or accident. It presently had more than £200 in the government Savings Bank. The chairman at the annual meeting, Thomas Cowlshaw, was a builder from London, and many fellow members were also building tradesmen. In 1837 Cowlshaw had won a massive government contract for the new government house in Sydney. The continuity of employment and regularity of payment that this gave those who worked under



him made them good candidates for his society. It also meant that they were unlikely to press instead for a Friendly Operative Society of Carpenters and Joiners, a union of workmen only.

Sydney also had an Oddfellows Lodge, established in 1836, which served the same need for the craftsmen who were initiated as brothers. A similar lodge met in Adelaide in 1838. These amalgams of convivial club and mutual insurance fund recruited largely from the new flood of assisted immigrants. In most towns men who had been lodge brothers in England were only beginning to identify each other by 1838, and were not well enough settled to think of applying to the parent body in England for a charter of incorporation. The lodge in Sydney, indeed, had chartered itself.

Lodges and similar benefit societies spread their risks by enrolling from a variety of occupations and, as with Cowlshaw's Benefit Society, included masters and other men of larger income. Thus, though they served a self-selected minority very well indeed, they were no substitute for a trade society. By now benefit schemes operated in Sydney in a more exclusive way among shipwrights and coachmakers, two trades which between them constructed and repaired most forms of colonial transport. The cabinetmakers of Sydney had likewise gathered a fund in 1833 to provide relief against unemployment, loss of tools by fire and the penury of widowhood. Their club also tried to enforce on their employers London prices for piecework.

Such efforts were confused by the presence of convict labour in some of the bigger workshops. During the year employees in the furniture trade joined with a number of the smaller employers in a 'Humble Petition of the Master and Journeymen Wood Turners of Sydney'. They complained to the governor about 'the assignment of turners who are prisoners to master turners in Sydney—an indulgence which enables such masters to reduce the price of turning to a rate

Building workers, Van Diemen's Land. Skilled workers—bricklayers, carpenters, surveyors, etc—were in heavy demand in growing towns and settlements. Here labourers work on ground already marked for foundations on a site outside Hobart Town, while builders go over plans. Colour aquatint by R.G. Reeve, after G.W. Evans, 1828.

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Roadbuilding accident. A rockfall sends a bullock wagon and one bullock over the edge of a partly built road across the Blue Mountains at Victoria Pass in 1830–31. Left foreground, a convict-built retaining wall; right, surveying equipment. Watercolour by William Govett, 1835.

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absolutely ruinous in amount when compared with that exacted for free labour', depressing both profits and wages. 'I have no reason', remarked Sir George Gipps, 'to suppose that the wages of Artizans of any description in Sydney are too low—and I cannot interfere in favour of the Petitioners'.

In printing offices most masters took advantage of convict labour if they could, and this consolidated the Society of Compositors as an aggressive trade union. The compositors had come together in 1835. By 1838 they had identified two threats to their livelihood. One was the taking on of many apprentices who, the society argued, would swamp the labour market, in the long run as well as the short run. The second was assignment of convicts, to the *Sydney Herald* office in particular, to help it fulfil its contract to print the *Government Gazette*. The compositors shared one thing with the other self-conscious trades—woodturners, shipbuilders, coach-makers: they all occupied fixed, identifiable workshop locations. This made it easier for union officials to keep track of their members, and for the men themselves to meet and act together.



The trade of tailoring was particularly sedentary, companionable and assertive. Tailors might make money working on their own, but they could not compete with workshops for large-scale or rushed orders because they lacked space, time and the capital to stockpile cloths. Many tailors worked for a master who could afford a clear room or rooms for business and a range of textiles, perhaps bought at bulk rates, to meet varying needs. A tailor's conversation with his fellows, with customers and with passers-by, was undisturbed by the noise of hammering or

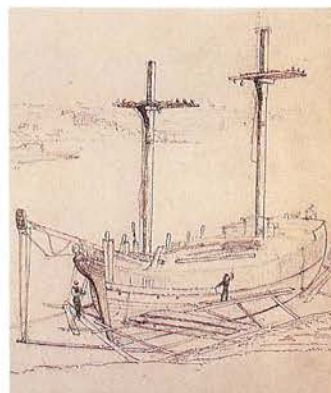
machines. There was plenty of opportunity to think things through. Whether workers should be paid by the piece or by the week, and how much, was a central question in disputes. Neither masters nor men were sure which they preferred. A tailoring establishment was not limited by the hours of daylight. It did not face the inexorable deadline of a newspaper office or a bakery nor the heavy capital costs that might follow from delay in completing a house or ship. Working tailors, particularly if they were paid by the piece, could take time off; they could cut and sew in a leisurely fashion for part of the week, moving fast and staying late on other days to catch up. From the master's point of view there was a case for stricter time-discipline—an insistence that certain work be done in certain times—because of the cost of lighting and the impatience of customers. But strictness was not always effective. Piece rates rewarded output, flat rates rewarded regular attendance at the shop from day to day. From the employees' point of view piece rates could force the pace, but flat rates could undervalue their work.

The masters had more scope for manoeuvre. The working tailors of Hobart Town had discovered this several years earlier when they tried to recruit fellow journeymen for a benefit society, linking it with a campaign for better pay. An irate employer claimed that the society called on his workmen 'to stick up for their rights, privileges and higher wages, and no longer to allow masters to make a property out of the sweat of their brow'. He had replaced his strikers with convicts. A newspaper sympathetic to the unionists estimated that over fifty tailors remained out of work in Hobart Town some months after the strike was broken. Memories of such a defeat were not a great encouragement to further action.

Displacement by convicts was not the only problem. Increasing numbers of assisted immigrants were arriving, drawn by propaganda promising high wages. Both employers and working tailors also had to contend with the fact that ready-made clothing formed a significant part of every ship's cargo from Britain, often underselling local goods. On average clothing and textiles made up half the value of imports, and whenever the balance between imported clothing and imported textiles shifted in favour of the ready-made goods colonial craftsmen feared for their jobs. For this reason the Hobart Town tailors' society did not live long. Men out of work, or liable to lose their work, could not afford subscriptions to a benefit fund.

The masters, at least, could spread their risk by retailing as well as manufacturing. J.G. Maelzer of George Street, Sydney, advertised in March 1838 that he had received high-quality textiles and finished gentlemen's garments on the *Upton Castle*, a ship that carried, in addition to the new governor, 'six fashionable workmen' who were indentured to Maelzer. Not content with bringing clothing and tailors directly from England, he sought 'a respectable youth' as an apprentice.

The garment industry also gave an income, however small, to women. Seamstresses at one end of the industry and laundresses at the other usually operated out of their own homes. Seamstresses had to find their own space and light. Laundresses used public wells and streams for water, and open space for drying. In Hobart Town the Wellington Rivulet was still used for this and many other purposes. Sydney had a newly installed supply of piped water, but the public standpipes remained few and far between, so that queues were long and cartage by bucket was a heavy strain. Affluent women were not driven to such occupations, so seamstresses and laundresses were likely to be found in small poorly built quarters or in tiny tenements. The rates they could charge were low in the older Australian towns. This was partly because of competition between women who needed an income to support themselves or who supplemented the family income, however pitiful the supplement might be. It was partly, as with other trades,



Boat under construction, Van Diemen's Land. Shipbuilding to support the whaling industry was a major industry in Van Diemen's Land. Ten boats were built in 1838. Undated pencil sketch by G.T.W.B. Boyes.

TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

because of competition from convicts. The female factories at Parramatta, Hobart Town and Launceston took in sewing and washing—hard labour for the inmates and revenue for the institution—and consistently undercut the free women.

Women in Adelaide fared better. Anne Cooke, who helped richer women with their housework, found that she could ask for wages equal to those of men and that girls and boys were in strong demand as well. Mary Watson, wife of a shepherd living five kilometres outside Adelaide, earned as much as her husband—while she shared his rations—for washing and pressing clothes sent from town. It was not just that the settlement was new, with so much that needed to be done quickly. Pioneer communities in Australia were usually rudimentary places, after all, with little call for women and children. But South Australia was a settlement formed by families, who expected amenity if not gentility. It still clustered in and around the town which the male workers were busily employed in building. People were conscious of maintaining standards of cleanliness, in apparel and in their homes, among the dust and tree stumps. They also demanded a diet superior to, and more diverse than, the meat and damper that typified communities where adult males outnumbered everyone else. So house cleaning, laundering, mending, the oversight of tiny herds of livestock and poultry, dairying, market gardening, the preparation and sale of food all provided employment for women and children.

In short, families in a busy town had to rely on other families—and pay them—for services they had no chance of performing themselves. There was one more, necessary, condition. A high rate of wages for women and children in Adelaide was sustained only as long as speculators reaped high profits in the land boom of the late thirties. Money *seemed* available to pay the wages—just as families needed to receive them in order to cope with the soaring cost of living.

WORK ON THE SEAS

Even a woman working the double shift at home, sewing for pennies and drudging for the family, might snatch moments of relaxation with neighbours or leave the house briefly to wander in the streets and paddocks. Even shepherds and hutkeepers, though tied to their sheep every day of the year, might stroll through the bush for part of the day. These could be scant and uncongenial consolations. Nevertheless, by comparison, the workplace of a deep-sea sailor was inescapable. Damp, cramped sleeping quarters offered the only escape from the deck and the rigging. Four months might be spent on the ocean between London and the colonies, perhaps two years between landfalls on a whaling voyage; twelve hours on and twelve hours off during good weather, and twenty-four hours on in foul, or when the ship leaked, or when the whales spouted, were harpooned, gutted and boiled down—with death likely for a man who went overboard or fell from the rigging, and for all whose ship sank under them.

Young Thomas Mort, who arrived in Sydney in February on the *Superb* as a migrant from Lancashire, saw it all at close quarters:

Well indeed I would not be a sailor for all the wealth of the Indies! Truly, their life is one of toil and cares and troublesome anxiety, subject as they are to be up both night and day, living in constant dread of dangers of the deep, their only food being salt pork and junk, hard biscuit and bad coffee. Their hammocks slung so closely together in a dark and damp hole, as to be almost suffocating, ever surrounded with filth and dirt and in fact encompassed with unpleasantness of every kind.

If a man cannot stand this, said Mort, 'let him stay on land'.

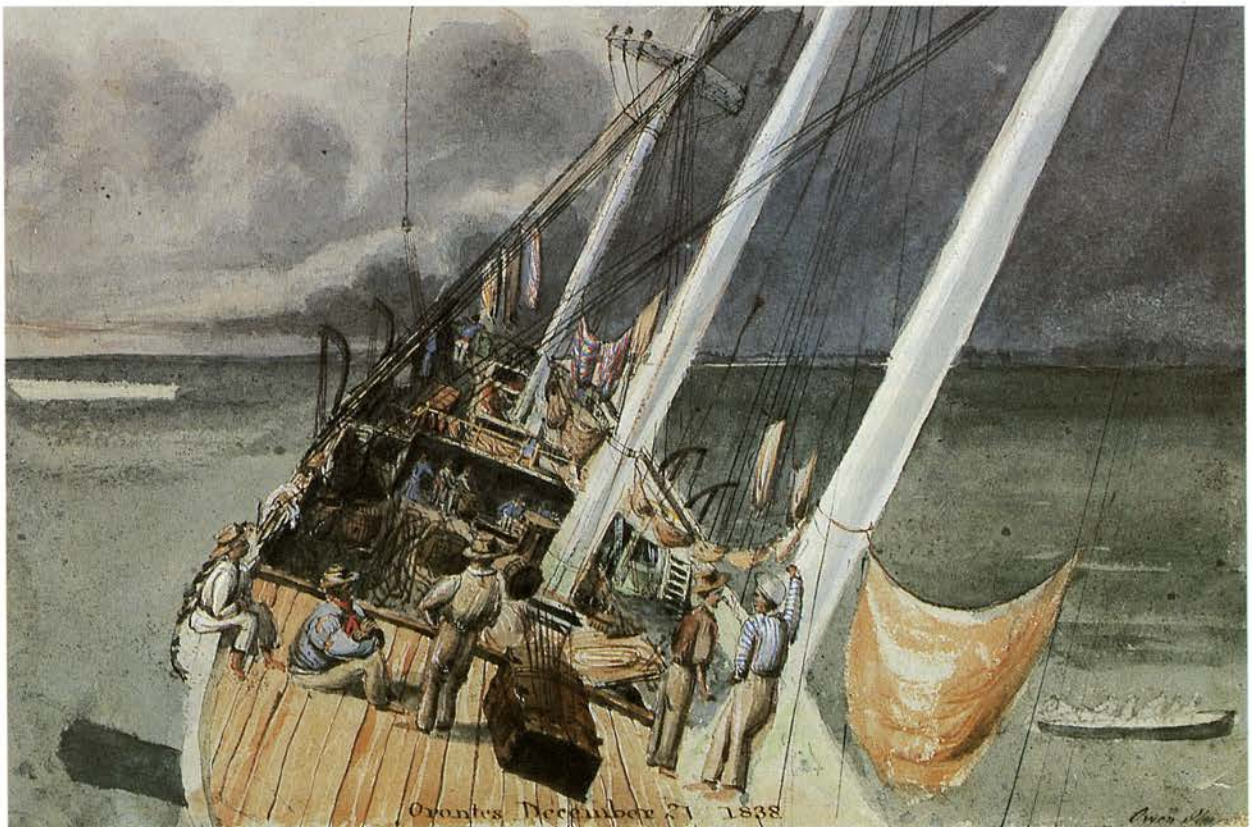
Ships were substantial capital investments. The safety of their passengers and cargoes mattered to communities at each end of the voyage, and even more to the people who had lives and money committed to a swift uneventful passage. Therefore laws gave civilian skippers something close to naval authority at sea, and courts ashore visited condign punishment on unco-operative seamen. There was no reason why a sailor should find enjoyment in the unrelenting company of his shipmates, but the shared conditions and the enforced intimacy encouraged common grievance and common action. Resistance to orders in port often earned a fortnight or a month in prison. Collective insubordination on the high seas was called mutiny.

Captain Grimes of the Sydney whaler *Woodlark* charged eight of his crew with mutiny in April. The *Woodlark* had put into Port Stephens on springing a leak. After repairs had been attempted Grimes ordered sails to be set. The eight sailors refused, saying the ship was still unseaworthy. They were brought to Sydney for trial. On the very day of the trial, six weeks later, the attorney-general secured their discharge from gaol on the pretext that the deposition against them lacked some necessary detail. Implicitly their protest had been conceded. They had served a sentence, certainly, but not one severe enough for mutineers. Captains like Grimes felt responsible to owners for completing a voyage as speedily as possible. Sailors like those on the *Woodlark* cared more about their own survival, and their instinct for self-preservation might work in the owners' interests if it meant the survival of the ship as well. Magistrates—and merchants—had to weigh the sailors' prudence against the captain's diligence.

Arguments while the ship lay at anchor in the port were another matter. Sailors were engaged for the round voyage, and a good deal depended on their

Ship's deck. The Orontes was run aground to avoid sinking, after striking a reef off the entrance to Port Essington. Watercolour by Owen Stanley, 1838.

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Seamen work aboard an American ship moored in Sydney Cove. This watercolour by Frederick Garling probably dates from 1854, but the wharves and warehouses were there in 1838.

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co-operation. Desertions and strikes slowed the turnaround, added to costs and represented the same kind of challenge to authority that the courts punished in landmen. Men who had signed articles in other ports for the return voyage, the normal procedure, were bound by those articles while at anchor. In such cases magistrates saw no point or profit in seamen's complaints and every reason to support the captain. Whenever sailors in Hobart Town struck work because they were stinted of provisions, the court branded them liars, docked wages for time lost and sent them to the treadmill. Sydney saw an exception to this rule when fifteen men from the *Alfred* were let off with a reprimand by the town bench. They had refused to work while a comrade remained below in irons. Perhaps the magistrate—perhaps the captain himself—thought that imprisoning the whole crew would simply hold the ship up further.

The courts and the captains agreed that the practice of crimping was unpardonable. A crimp, often a publican or boardinghouse keeper, helped sailors hide until their ship had left port and, when their savings had run out, offered them as crew to another vessel undermanned because its own sailors had deserted. This meant longer shore leave for the deserters and it may have increased the sailors' bargaining power with needy skippers. When a member of the Sydney water police named Faris found four men from the *Coromandel* hiding in John Johnson's loft, the maximum £10 fine was levied on Johnson for each deserter harboured, and Faris got half the amount as reward. Fines for crimps and rewards for informers were attempts to regain the initiative for the employers and to leave minimum room for manoeuvre to the men they employed.

The punishment for crimps was often more severe than for deserters, or at least for deserters who had signed their articles in the United Kingdom. The British laws governing merchant seamen provided physical penalties for neglect of duty in the

home port, but absence from work while abroad—in Australia, for instance—earned only a fine of 2s a day. In the middle of May, when the woolships rode at anchor in Sydney Harbour, laden for dispatch to England, the masters of fourteen of these vessels reported 106 of their men missing. The masters joined with leading merchants to petition the governor for stricter sanctions than the 2s daily fine. All the governor could do was to forward the petition to London, for he could not himself set aside legislation passed by the British parliament.

The New South Wales Merchant Seamen's Act of 1832 was more severe than its imperial counterpart. But colonial legislation could affect only colonial shipping, and men hired in the colonies such as those who worked the coastal vessels which swarmed in and out of Australian ports on short hauls. The men who had lately succeeded in forcing a pay rise for Sydney dock labour and ship refitting, from 2s 6d to 3s a day, and who had since tried again for 4s were not coastal sailors. The bold bargainers were wharf labourers, who suffered Sydney's rising cost of living, and sailors from the ocean-going wool ships and whalers, who had chosen the busiest time of year in the port, the summer and autumn, to make their demands. Their adversaries, the great merchants, ships' agents and shipowners of the town, had refused the second application, although they did offer food on the job in addition to the 3s wage.

In the coasting trade both owners and mariners sailed closer to the wind. Steamers, schooners, cutters and even river lighters carried grain from the Hawkesbury, Hunter, Tamar and Derwent, coal from Newcastle, hardwood from boat harbours and estuaries the length of New South Wales, fashioned timber from Van Diemen's Land, whale oil and wattle bark from the north shore of Bass Strait, merchandise and passengers between all the settlements that touched tidewater in Australia. Each boat's crew tended to be small, and each voyage represented an erratic shuttle that made any predictable and concerted action among crews hard to arrange. Most coastal voyages lasted only a few weeks and crews did not stay together from one voyage to the next. On shore they seem to have been part of a peculiar community, drifting as atoms and unconnected with the mass of the people. At work the link between owner and men tended to be stronger than it was for deep-sea sailors. Even if the owner did not journey with them, few weeks passed without his intervention.

Crew members on coastal runs in particular knew that their income depended directly on the frequency and freight of the voyages. This was why more than twenty armed seamen, with two captains, rowed one morning up the Macleay River from their trading ships moored in the estuary, and confronted Patrick Hayes, manager for his brother-in-law of a cedar-cutting station where there was timber ready for loading. The previous evening Hayes had offered them 6s for every hundred feet of cedar they took on board. The skippers demanded 8s. It seems that Hayes had earlier promised 8s or 8s 6d, which had been turned down because one of the shipowners in Sydney had hoped for even more. At first the sailors were incidental to this game of bluff, but when it came to a deadlock they refused to be sent empty away, or to bring home losing freight. For leading 'a riotous assemblage' Captain Collins, Captain Millie and a third man were sentenced to several months in Sydney gaol.

Because insurance through London was difficult to arrange, owners of Sydney's coastal vessels made their own mutual insurance provisions. By July 1838 owners of Sydney whalers had also decided on a mutual fund to cover their risks. Spurred by this activity businessmen in both Sydney and Hobart Town formed insurance companies before the end of the year which accepted marine policies side by side with life and fire. The Derwent and Tamar Fire and Life and Marine Assurance

Company appointed a manager and agencies in other ports, as did the Australian and the Sydney Alliance companies further north. There were no benefit societies for sailors. As far as proprietors were concerned, insurance for their ships was essential, insurance for their crew a less urgent matter.

AGRICULTURAL WORK

When we move in from the seaboard and the towns to the farms, great estates and pastoral runs, we find that men and women thought differently about their work and the people they worked with. As a result dealings between capital and labour were also different. This is especially true in the two convict colonies.

The story of Charles Carthy, a convict, shows how things were generally managed. Carthy was one of about a dozen convicts employed by William Balcombe at his sheep station near Bungendore on the Molonglo Plains in New South Wales. He was a young Irishman—sixteen years old when he came to New South Wales in 1829—with a red freckled face and an Adam and Eve tattoo. Balcombe, his master, was not much older. He had inherited the Molonglo property, 4000 acres (1600 hectares) freehold, from his father. To the men he was Billy Balcombe, or the Long Fellow. He had his own house on the place, and there were also a set of yards, a row of huts for the men and a barn housing in the early winter of 1838 about six hundred bushels of wheat. At least some of this wheat must have been grown on the place and, because they were far from any mills, every man ground his own ration of grain.

Besides the assigned convicts, Balcombe had several other employees, either free or with tickets of leave. They were employed throughout the year mainly in looking after the sheep, and the crops when necessary, but there were several skilled men—probably a shoemaker, a carpenter and a blacksmith or wheelwright, because these were nearly indispensable on a settled estate. The overseer was a ticket-of-leave man named Robert Griffiths—Big Bob to the other men—who had been assigned to his master's father as a wheelwright about ten years before. Catherine Griffiths, who passed as the overseer's wife, was probably the only woman. Balcombe himself was not married.

Carthy had been transported for seven years, but his time had been extended for misbehaviour. In May 1838, by his own calculation, he was free. One evening, as he ground his wheat, he asked another man what the date was. It was 8 May: 'I am a free man today,' said Carthy. However he needed a little cunning to be free of Big Bob. He was under orders to go next day to the nearest bench of magistrates, at Queanbeyan, to be punished for absence from his work. He left for trial on his own, as was usual, telling the overseer that he would not be free until the tenth. Then he ran away. About a week later he turned up at one of Balcombe's outstations, where he told the shepherd that he was going to a magistrate about his freedom. He also planned, he said, to put in a word about Big Bob, who could lose his ticket if he were living with a woman who was not his wife. And, he added, 'he would make Billy Balcombe rue the day as ever he was born'.

On the following Wednesday, at about nine o'clock at night, the men at Balcombe's were roused by a fire among the wheat in the barn. A haystack was also alight. In the brilliance of the blaze Catherine Griffiths saw a man near the stockyard: 'stooping with one hand on a fence, he had his hat in the other hand—he wiped his face twice with the sleeve of his coat, of the arm with which he held the hat'. It was Carthy, and this detail got him the death sentence in Sydney in August. Catherine and Big Bob went down to testify, and they took the trouble to be married while they were there. As for Carthy, he was not hanged, but he went to Norfolk Island for life.

Carthy had been at odds with both his overseer and the other men. He said before he left that he would make Balcombe's a 'starved place', and this is what the burning might have done. The wheat was the chief food supply for the winter. For their part the other men seem to have offered willing evidence against him. The case shows a common situation among men in the bush. Most convicts worked out their sentences fairly quietly, grumbling only among themselves or making up cheeky nicknames for their bosses; joining forces and going briefly on strike when they could agree that their rations were stinted or overdue. A few like Carthy went further. Sometimes they liked to boast that they could get officialdom behind them in an all-out conflict with employers. They apparently sensed the deep conflict of purpose that lay in their being both prisoners of the state and labourers for private enterprise. Even the burning was part of an old tradition in England and Ireland, which gave disgruntled workmen a way of drawing attention to cheating masters. Without the support of his fellow convicts, Carthy was not quite sure of himself. He never saw a magistrate about his freedom—he had the date wrong anyway—and he afterwards denied having anything to do with the fire.

Balcombe's sheep station was similar to some of the places in the more remote parts of Westbury, in Van Diemen's Land. It stood midway between two extreme types of rural enterprise. On the one hand were the farms in more closely settled areas, agricultural rather than pastoral, and supplying grain to the capital towns. On the other hand—mainly in New South Wales—were the distant sheep and cattle runs, where the stockholder had no clear title to the land, where there were no buildings beyond simple bark huts, no skilled men to speak of, no white women, and the most rudimentary methods of management.

In every colony the growing of wheat, like the building of houses, was a vital industry, central to the way of life of the people. If we go back to Evandale, we find nearly forty establishments whose main purpose was growing wheat, together with barley, hay and potatoes. Part of this produce was for use in Launceston, but part was consigned for sale in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne. There was a small, distinct group of big farmers at Evandale, with 400 or 500 acres each. They grew between 130 and 160 acres of wheat, three times the quantity of their smaller neighbours, with a yield worth at least £1000 a year. They also had unusually large crops of oats and barley. Each employed at least three male convicts but they also used a good deal of free labour, at an annual wage of about £20 each. Every farm of this kind relied on a workforce of about ten men.

The smaller wheat farmers planted between 30 and 50 acres. A few, probably men who could not call on family labour, employed as many as three convict men, but it was more common to use only one, and a few had none at all. Thirty acres was the minimum from which a farmer might expect a marketable surplus. Several had less, but they had other sources of income—mainly oats. David Gibson, of Pleasant Banks, had three convicts occupied with 50 acres of oats and 50 of turnips, the latter yielding three tons. Joseph Atkinson could boast 72 acres of potatoes, a prodigious crop, on which he likewise employed three convicts. These smaller farmers relied on workforces which, for their size, were similar to those at York in Western Australia, noted earlier in this chapter. Unlike the properties at York, they were labour-intensive, and geared to a thriving market.

In Western Australia wheat was by far the most important crop grown, though vegetables occupied more labour at King George Sound. The valley of the Swan River was the main wheat growing area and the other parts of the colony were, at most, barely self-sufficient. Even in the fertile district of York, cropped areas averaged no more than 22 acres. The scarcity and cost of labour were the main hindrances to cultivation. Western Australia, like the east, was also badly affected

this year by drought which kept the yield low. The experience of Richard Goldsmith Meares, who grew eleven acres of wheat at Guildford, and took off about five bushels an acre, may be typical of farmers throughout the colony:

STATEMENT OF THE CROPS ON THE SCHOOL MEADOWS, GUILDFORD
(ELEVEN ACRES)

Ploughing	£22.00
Sowing & harrowing	17.00
Reaping	22.00
Carrying	2.00
Threshing & cleaning	3.13s
	<hr/>
Expenditure:	£66.13s
	<hr/>
Income (57 bushels at 10s a bushel):	£28.10s

The method of itemising shows that everything was done by the job, possibly by teams of two or three men, this being common at Swan River. Ploughing and reaping together made up the most expensive items, at £2 an acre—more than twice as much as in the other colonies. At York, further upstream, the settlers asked for soldiers to help with the harvest. As the government controlled their pay, they were cheaper than ordinary labourers.

The Western Australian farmers had not tried maize, a cheaper crop than wheat, though their climate was warm enough for it. In New South Wales maize was vital for the smaller landholders, enabling them to forgo the expense of wheaten bread. Take for instance the tobacco farmers along the Paterson River, a tributary of the Hunter. The district had 104 farmers with less than forty acres under cultivation, an area so small as to suggest family labour alone, or one convict at the most. Many grew no wheat at all and four-fifths grew less than fifteen acres each, too little to feed any family for more than a month or so. Maize grew so much more abundantly that they used it to feed themselves, made tobacco their market crop, and tried a little wheat as well when the price was good. The maize they divided between their kitchens and their pigsties—meal for the one and siftings for the other. They also ate their own potatoes. Hominy, made of maize-meal and mixed with milk and sugar, honey or treacle, was a staple in the diet of such people, while 'green corn cobs roasted and buttered, were much relished'. In the opinion of one observer it was all this, together with 'abundance of milk' and 'moderation in flesh diet', that explained the good health of the farming people.

The county of Cumberland, around Sydney, together with nearby alluvial soil in Cook and Camden, was the main area of closer settlement in New South Wales, equivalent to Evandale and the valleys above Hobart Town in Van Diemen's Land. In addition to Sydney, there were three main towns in Cumberland: Parramatta, Liverpool and Windsor. The district of Windsor grew great quantities of wheat, though yielding barely twelve bushels an acre in 1838. The farmers around Liverpool gave most of their attention to wheat, and oats, for the stables of the metropolis. Others lived less by the sale of produce, mainly because their very small farms gave them no room to grow anything profitable. For instance, at Liberty Plains, near Parramatta, there were five farms averaging nearly fourteen acres each of maize, with a yield of seventy bushels. They also grew potatoes, two acres each. This year the potatoes flourished sufficiently to allow every man, woman and child about two good-sized tubers a day. The market crops were wheat—about eight acres each—and oats—about ten acres each. Sold in December, harvest time, these would have brought each farmer, on average, £84, but this was an exceptionally



Wheatfields along the road to Hobart Town. Undated watercolour by Owen Stanley.

TASMANIAN MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

good year for those few who had so much to sell. Last year's harvest, on which they were now living, might have brought in half as much.

By 1838 landholders were becoming skilful in their use of limited human resources. On the Paterson River, G.F. Davidson, whom we have met before as a hopeful importer of Chinese labour, had ten convicts and only twelve acres of wheat, so that his concerns were similar in size to the bigger farmers of Evandale. His tobacco crop was enough to occupy his men fully. His solution at times of crisis was to make them work in the evening, beyond the hour usually observed by convict masters;

this I had no *right* to exact; but my plan was, to keep a regular account current with every convict on the place, giving him credit so much for every extra hour he worked, and letting him know, every Saturday night, how much was due to him, which I allowed him to take out in any shape but money and spirits . . . It was generally taken out in tea and sugar; and I never had the slightest trouble in settling these little accounts.

At Camden Park William Macarthur did the same with his labourers, both convict and free. At the beginning of the year he had 31 acres of wheat still standing from the crop of 1837, and this occupied seven men for fourteen days. For working overtime they received nine shillings an acre between them, above their normal wages, less rations.

There were various other kinds of harvest on Camden Park for which Macarthur used different expedients. As we have seen, sixteen local Aborigines worked at the maize harvest in May. More important was the labour of English women and children, numerous at Camden since the first bounty immigrants arrived in April 1837. Their work was much as we have noticed around Adelaide. The wives of labourers were offered work at a shilling a day, and the children as

little as threepence, depending on their age; or else they were paid, like the Aborigines, by the job, which made it possible for them to earn a good deal more. Puah Parsons, the most willing female day labourer, put in $92\frac{1}{2}$ days altogether, at the tobacco, potatoes and maize during the winter and at the shearing in December, cleaning up after the men. Her children, Mary Ann aged ten, and Daniel aged seven, spent $123\frac{1}{2}$ days between them, at the vineyard cutting grapes in April, among the harvested maize in June—husking the cobs—and at other work.

However, even among the small farmers, women and young children took little part in the outdoor work beyond the farmyard. At Evandale most farmers, even those cultivating only thirty or forty acres of wheat, had at least one adult male labourer, a convict, and this was typical of all farming areas. Because unmarried men were so numerous, a distinct area of farm work had become exclusively masculine. This was true even at harvest. The colonies were rather behind the times insofar as they still used the sickle, rather than the scythe, for their wheat harvest. The sickle had one advantage: though smaller and slower than the scythe, it was light enough to be used equally well by men and women. Yet colonial custom allowed it to be used by men only. In other words, men had taken over work traditionally done—in the British Isles—by women as well. They had then persuaded themselves that such work could not be done well, or decently, by mere females.

Given the growing scarcity of convicts, particularly in New South Wales, and the high cost of free adult male labourers, the greater employment of women and children might appear to have been an obvious solution for employers. Families also—as the Macarthurs argued—tended to keep men from moving about. However, though several models for change were talked over by employers during the year, family labour was not the most popular of them. Indentured men from Asia and the Pacific were far more attractive.

The reasons are clear. During August and September, as we have seen in chapter 3, a committee of the legislative council sat in Sydney to consider the immigration of more working people from England as a solution to the labour problem. Landowners were asked whether married couples with children should be brought to the colony in large numbers, and most of them said that they preferred young single men who—like Asians and Pacific Islanders—might easily take on the work, the conditions and some of the discipline found suitable for convicts. Some had tried women and children on their own farms and pastoral runs, and found them worse than useless. Landowners from the remoter parts of the colony stressed this most, casting all the blame on the women themselves: 'Such persons have been observed to become indolent from habits contracted very probably on their passage out'—'The women will not work after they have been a short time in the country'—'The settlers cannot afford to maintain women and children who can not and will not do the least thing for their support'—'They decline generally to do out-door work, even at harvest time'. They also found that 'The parents generally discourage the children from working'.

Settlers closer to Sydney spoke less about laziness. At Camden William Macarthur found that only a few of his women would work at the wages he offered simply because they could find other work, such as needlework and washing, that paid better. The well-settled areas also gave other opportunities to children. Apparently parents were anxious, if possible, to get their sons into apprenticeships, even though as shepherds or farm labourers they could begin earning straight away.

Only a few employers realised that they and their old workforce might be to blame in not being able to adjust to new forms of labour—new to the colony but

sanctioned by long tradition in the British Isles. Several masters from around Sydney, all big employers on old properties built up over many years by convict labour, said that they would have trouble finding the right accommodation for women and children. In the Hunter valley local tradition was clearly the main obstacle. William Ogilvie complained that farm work in his area had come to a halt through want of labour, but he did not see more women as the answer: 'It has not been customary hitherto ... to put them to any outdoor work ... very few therefore can be employed on a farm, in proportion to the number of men'. Alexander Warren agreed: 'our farm arrangements, as yet, have been made with a view to the discipline of Unmarried men only'. The employment of married couples, he said, had caused trouble in the past because the other employees were not used to having women among them. But when family labour became the dominant system, the single men, 'our *present* male labourers, who are now so much addicted to restless, unsettled, vagabond habits of life', would benefit.

Opinions in Van Diemen's Land were much the same. Throughout both colonies masters and convicts had by this time worked out between them a *modus vivendi*, a pattern of action and response which both sides largely understood. For both parties fear made up an important part of the relationship: for the convict it was fear of punishment, which was often brutal; for the master it was fear that his livelihood and dignity would suffer through the laziness and intransigence of his men. Radical experiments might well destroy this delicate balance.



In New South Wales the only substantial market was Sydney, far from the boundaries of settlement. In the outlying areas—around Queanbeyan, Goulburn and Yass in the south, the western counties centred on Bathurst and Hartley, and at Merton, where the Goulburn River met the upper reaches of the Hunter—grain was grown almost entirely for local needs. The staple was wheat: in every district at least two-thirds and usually three-quarters of the acreage sown this year was given over to wheat. This was partly because the country was too high and too cold for maize to flourish. But it was also because of the tastes of the convicts, who were the main consumers in the pastoral districts.

The assignment regulations in both colonies specified wheat or wheaten flour as a part of the convict ration—twelve pounds a week—with maize only if the wheat gave out; and convicts stuck together well enough to ensure that their masters kept to the spirit of this injunction. G.F. Davidson found that convicts turned up their noses, as he put it, at maize, as fit only for animals. This was foolish, he thought: employers should make a combined effort to substitute half the wheat ration with maize. Others argued that the flour ration was too big; that the convicts should be made to expect, say, seven pounds a week, which would greatly reduce the cost of feeding them. But most understood the fine balance that existed in the bush between masters and men, and that the men must be satisfied where possible.

Throughout both convict colonies this applied also to the other main item in the convicts' staple diet—meat. In March the landowner Henry Beach gave the bench at Campbell Town, Van Diemen's Land, this account of one of his men:

The prisoner came to me on Friday morning and said he wanted some meat. I desired my son to give it to him. My son said there was none, but that he had ordered some to be killed. I told the prisoner that I was sorry he must wait a short time till some was killed. He replied in an insolent manner, 'Well, I won't work, and we have all made up our minds not to work until we get some.' I



A measuring bowl apparently used for convicts. 1 peck = $\frac{1}{4}$ bushel. Every male convict was entitled to 12 pounds of wheat every week, which amounted to roughly 1 peck.

KOGARAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

then sent for one of the other men, and asked him if he had sent me such a message. He said he had not. In order that they should have no cause of complaint I sent the prisoner and another man to catch a sheep and kill it.

Whether or not there really was an agreement among Beach's men, convicts certainly could join forces for easy, short-term purposes. In another Van Diemen's Land case seven men combined to refuse meat from a bullock with a broken leg. They maintained that it was spoiled, though their master assured them that he had served some to his own friends.

In such situations masters knew that it was better to avoid an outright conflict, which they could win only by calling in the law, a course that must upset the smooth running of farm and household. Besides, many old-fashioned masters valued their reputations among their men as good providers. It was part of the business of being a gentleman.

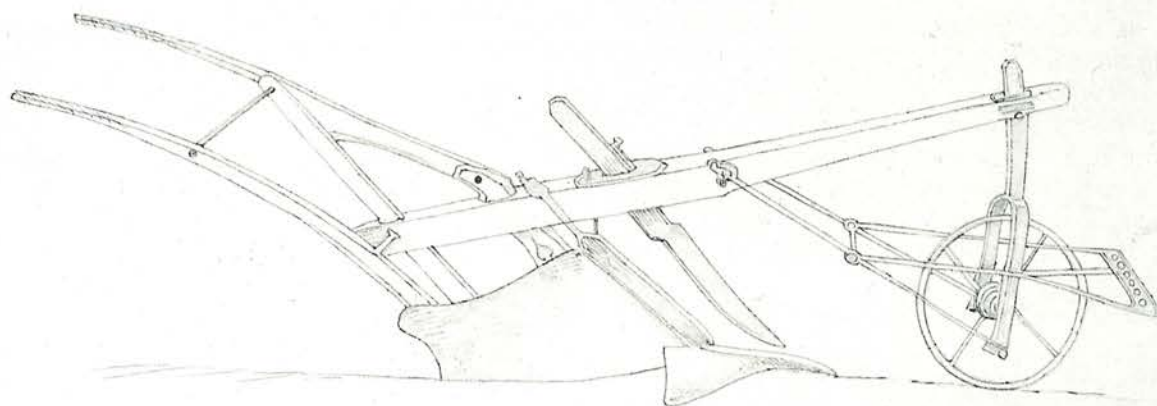
In New South Wales in 1838 much of the wheat failed because of drought. Around Camden Park, some farmers had what the local police magistrate called 'a partial crop' while others were making the best of their wheat by sending in the scythe rather than the sickle and using it as hay. Except for Merton in the upper Hunter, no inland districts suffered quite to this extent. But inland it was harder to find supplies: 'the farmer had to pay enormous prices for flour to feed his men; and the cart-hire came to nearly as much as the cost of the flour'. Even earlier in the year David Reid, one of William Balcombe's neighbours near Queanbeyan, had paid 10s a hundred pounds for carriage, probably about as much as he had already paid to the dealer. It was lucky for Balcombe that Carthy's fire destroyed only a fraction of his grain, or he might have faced similar expenses.

Had the weather been right the quantity of wheat sown in the interior would have been enough for local needs, assuming a yield of fifteen bushels an acre—the average in good years—and a consumption of fifteen bushels a head among the

Rural technology. The new environment sometimes demanded new methods, but much rural technology continued to be imported. This sketch shows an English horse-drawn plough used in South Australia in 1838. Blades and wheel are iron, central beam and handles are wood. The sketch was prepared as part of an order, probably by George Fife Angas, for four such ploughs to be imported.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES

A Beattie's Wood Plough, with an Iron Wheel.



*To Beattie's Plough as above
To John Beattie & Co. 1838
13 South Street
To John Beattie & Co. 1838*

white population. As it turned out Bungonia was the only district where the wheat crop yielded as much as this. Otherwise the yield was generally between five and ten bushels. Some employers must have been obliged to force maize on their men or be ruined. Much more maize was sown at the end of 1838 than a year earlier, which may be evidence of their success—or their desperation.

Normally the reaping of the wheat was the main harvest of the year. Men were needed in large numbers and at short notice if the grain was to be kept from spoiling. The wheat harvest made a sudden call on labour second only to the shearing. What labour was available? Probably one man reaping with a sickle could have cut about one-fifth of an acre in a day. If so, most of rural New South Wales had easily enough labour, overall, for the quantity of wheat sown. But such simple calculations may be misleading. Labourers could not, or would not, always move where they were most needed, and the number of labourers was fast being outstripped by the growing concerns of their employers. At Wingello, near Goulburn, Robert Campbell maintained that he needed to double his workforce of 50 to be thoroughly efficient. He would then, he said, 'be able by more extensive cultivation to grow a sufficiency of grain to feed them'. In the west the wheat harvest coincided with shearing. As the crisis approached Thomas Kite was one of many at Bathurst who foresaw 'great inconvenience . . . from the extreme scarcity of hands in this district'.

Even when men were on the spot they would not always agree to work, especially if they were convicts. John Douglas had been twelve years a convict in Van Diemen's Land when he confronted William Kermode, a gentleman with a crop to be harvested. 'I ordered the overseer to take the prisoner, and place him in the corn field with the sickle', said Kermode; 'The prisoner said he could not reap'. So he was told to make bands for tying up the cut grain. He made one or two and then went off to find some shade. 'He afterwards came back and took the sickle and reaped as well as any man in the field, but said he would not reap without wine.' Kermode had him punished and sent back to the government.

Another Van Diemen's Land convict adopted the high-handed tone used by Charles Carthy and showed the same reliance on his rights as a convict, or 'government man'. He refused to pitch hay. According to his master, 'He said . . . he knew what government work was, and said I was a damned poor settler, and that I ought not to be allowed government men, as I did not know how to treat them. He said I was a miserable gentleman'. Here was no reliance on benefit societies or trade unions. For convicts, the government orders for their rations and treatment were a means of insurance, and they certainly prevented anything like starvation. The government itself had given convict men and women, quite inadvertently, some common rights against their employers. With such rights went a shared identity and grounds for combination. Male convicts could more easily exercise such rights; assigned convict women came only in their ones and twos on to farms and pastoral stations largely made of men.

WORK WITH CATTLE AND PIGS

Trades union spokesmen in Sydney claimed that meat was one of the few items in the family budget that was cheaper there than in England. The high roads from the interior were thronged with beasts on their way to the slaughterhouse, particularly in this year of drought when woolgrowers relieved pressure on their pastures by culling herds. Working-class families in Van Diemen's Land, on the other hand, often settled for salted provisions, the export of livestock to the new mainland settlements of Port Phillip and South Australia making meat scarce and

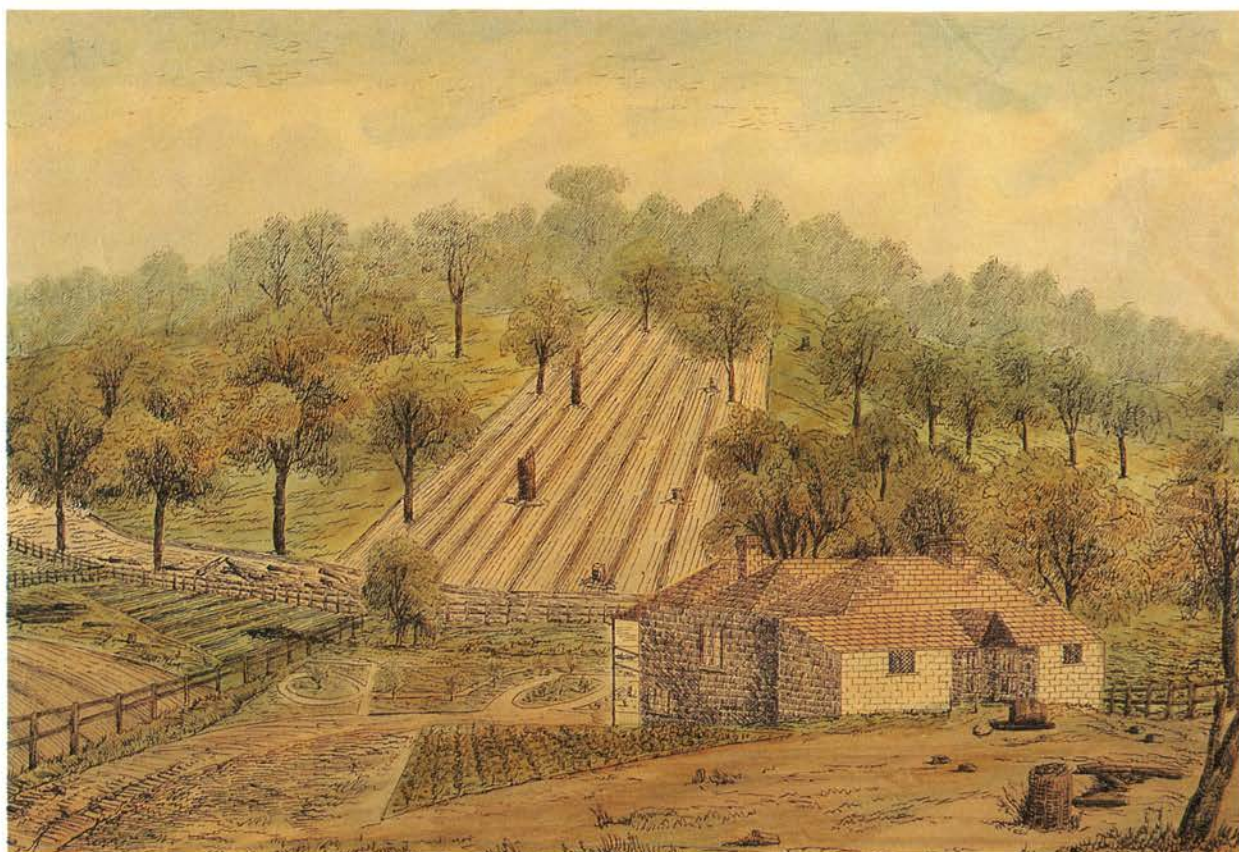
expensive on the island. Scores of thousands of sheep and cattle had been ferried across Bass Strait, especially from Launceston, in the last four years, and thousands more had trudged overland from the Sydney side since the beginning of 1837. These beasts and their progeny supplied Melbourne with all the meat required. Yet in Adelaide, also founded very recently, prices fluctuated widely. It took more time, trouble and expense to take stock over land or water to South Australia than it did to Port Phillip.

The arrival of several hundred head of cattle in Adelaide could well create a temporary glut after a period of scarcity. Charles Newman, the young Somerset shepherd whom we have met trudging into Adelaide, started work there as a butcher's boy. He maintained that he met almost every person in the town, for there was only enough business to keep two butchers going. By June a mere 1576 head of cattle, and 201 pigs, had come by sea since the beginning of settlement. Almost nineteen thousand sheep had been landed, but these had been bred for wool rather than meat and were kept alive as long as possible for the sake of an extra season's fleece. Cattle were different from sheep in many ways. They could be driven more swiftly to the abattoir, over rougher ground. Once there, each carcase fed more people. As the first two chapters have shown, the first herd of cattle to reach Adelaide by land arrived under Joseph Hawdon in the autumn, starting from Howlong in the upper Murray valley. It was followed in the winter by Edward John Eyre's three hundred head, and then by Captain Charles Sturt. It was Sturt who nine years earlier had led an exploring expedition down the Murray to its mouth, the first colonial party to traverse the route the overlanders followed.

The South Australians would have been foolish to kill every last one of these oxen, cows and heifers as soon as they arrived. Some cattle were wanted for milking, some for draught, and many for breeding, to make the people independent of intermittent supplies from far away.

A young Quaker businessman from Chichester in Sussex, Barton Hack—whom we also met earlier in the chapter—was the largest cattle owner in the colony. At the end of the year his herd was nine hundred strong. On his way to the new land in January 1837, he stopped in Launceston where he bought livestock and hired experienced stockmen. He made money from his team of bullocks which hauled loads between port and town. He made money by selling bullocks to other cartage contractors, or to landholders for ploughing, for three times the price he had paid for them. He made money from his dairy. He made money from the shiploads of cattle and merchandise his brother brought from Sydney and from Portland, although he did lose by a shipwreck returning from Launceston. And in March he became a foundation director of the Joint Stock Cattle Company, which bought some of his cows and paid him £2 per week to keep them with Hack's own herd.

Accumulation for Englishmen meant depletion for Aborigines. The hard-toothed, hard-hoofed European beasts that spread across the Adelaide plains cropped the tussocks and stamped down the pastures upon which kangaroos and smaller animals depended. Their sharp feet weakened banks along streams and pools, stirred up mud, disturbed waterborne life and threatened waterside vegetation. Clearance of trees and low growth reduced shelter for birds, possums, insects, goannas. The Kurna people, who were losing their country to Adelaide, were losing also a good deal of their diet, particularly the meats at the higher end of the food chain. They were threatened with the loss of even more of it if the editor of the *Southern Australian* had his way. In his paper he urged the governor to prohibit the use of the hunting spear, which to European eyes was a weapon for fighting men and for harming their flocks and herds. But spears were basic tools for the Kurna, used for capturing their game. If kangaroos fled before the



numbers and uproar of wethers and steers, how else could the Kaurna obtain their accustomed amount of meat except by killing one of these exotic animals?

To the south of the Kaurna lived the confederation of the Ngarrindjeri centred on the lakes at the mouth of the Murray and stretching along the coast in both directions. Hack's herds and those of the Joint Stock Cattle Company overlooked Ngarrindjeri land from Mount Barker, while Hack's whalers, side by side with those of the South Australian Company, camped during the colder half of the year in that segment of the confederation's territory which the invaders knew as Encounter Bay and Victor Harbour. The Ngarrindjeri enjoyed a wide variety of fish, flesh and fowl. They took so freely from running and salt water, thickets and pastures, that they could live an almost sedentary life in semipermanent villages.

Landseekers from northwards and castaways from southwards were given succour and guidance when they stumbled on this rich domain. The Aborigines also provided the messenger service connecting Hack's crews at Encounter Bay with his general office in Adelaide. Ngarrindjeri men and women helped carve the whales on the beach and boil the blubber, for which they received additions to their diet in the form of gin, tobacco and chunks of blubber. The whaling gangs themselves lived largely off salt meat and other stores, supplemented by whatever came within reach of their stewards' inefficient guns—noisy mechanisms that needed reloading for every shot. The stewards lacked the professional marksmanship of the Ngarrindjeri, whose implements were almost soundless and could be dispatched in far swifter succession than a musket's bullets.

The whalers were minor intruders by comparison with the horned cattle and fine-woolled sheep poised on the Ngarrindjeri's northern borders. Imported

Farmhouse and property, Lashbrook, South Australia. The price of farm products fluctuated wildly in Adelaide, but demand grew rapidly, justifying considerable investment. Here is a substantial stone house in landscape transformed by clearing, fencing, agriculture and gardening. This hand-coloured lithograph of the Reverend J.B. Austin's home was painted by his son, J.B. Austin junior.

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livestock were travelling across the continent further and faster than ever before. The provisioning of Melbourne and Adelaide caused only part of the new traffic. Buoyant wool prices in England and rapid growth in the colonies' population promised high profits to growers, who hastened to open up new runs. The lengthening drought spurred the search for fresh pastures. Experienced stock-owners knew that cattle should break in new grasslands even where sheep were to be the permanent occupants. A steer's large coarse bite cut down tough tall grasses to a height and consistency manageable by small-mouthed ewes and wethers, while a sheep, nibbling to the roots, would leave nothing behind for a hungry steer to get his teeth around. As steers moved faster than ewes and wethers, accompanied by men on horseback, so great swathes of pastures which had supported Aboriginal meat supplies for millennia were speedily gathered in to support species never seen in those parts before.

Because meat deteriorated almost instantly, unlike wool or grain, living animals, whether sheep or cattle, had to be transformed into carcasses as close to the consumer as possible. Even the bumpy carriage of carcasses across town, in the heat and dust of an Australian summer, could make them unfit for the table. Thus beasts which needed vast spaces to thrive must be driven into the centres of towns to die. This double imperative governed especially the location of cattle. Coastal valleys too damp for wheat and wool suited cows and heifers admirably. From the Shoalhaven and the Illawarra, Brisbane Water and the northern rivers, short sea voyages carried four-legged cargo all the way to the slaughterhouses beside Darling Harbour in Sydney. The sandstone country to the north and west of Sydney was far too extensive and arid to provide forage for large droving mobs destined for the capital. The main cattle region inland, therefore, lay southwest, on the stony high plains towards Braidwood and the slopes and gullies north and west of Goulburn. Herds passed through the Mittagong Ramp and the Bargo Brush on their last journeys to the fattening paddocks outside the capital.

Cattle moved long distances. In his wanderings through New South Wales, Alexander Harris, an English clergyman's son who lived and worked among the poor, took a keen interest in the cattle trade, as it seemed to him to call forth all the rough independence of colonial manhood. He watched the young native-born men, mostly the sons of convicts, following their cattle to the centre of civilisation, the Sydney market, from the unmapped bush at its edge. One he found—or so he said—on the Mittagong Ramp, driving a herd which had calved above Brisbane Water to his more spacious territory in the high Monaro. There the cattle would graze for eighteen months to gather strength for the final trek to market. The calves had already been drawn out of the Hawkesbury escarpment for branding and despatch, and at the end of the eighteen months their last round-up might be a chase through gullies and timber again.

Stockmen looked down on shepherds, quite literally, because stockmen rode horses while shepherds 'crawled', as the stockmen put it, after their charges, moving them daily from yesterday's droppings and flies and exhausted grass and scuffed earth, and folding them nightly against straying and the attacks of dingoes. Stockmen might also yard their beasts every night, but often they let them roam until a cliff or river formed a natural fence. This gave the guardians a period of glorious liberty from strict supervision, at the end of which they could look forward to the exhilaration of the cattle hunt when it came time to assemble the herd again. All this Harris greatly admired. Some at least of the station's hands must take part in any delivery on the hoof, so that drovers entered seaports and market towns as workmen even though they might then linger as tourists on a spree. Meanwhile wool reached the ships by plodding dray; the shepherd stayed behind.



*Stockman at full gallop
prepares to lasso a steer, New
South Wales. Undated
watercolour by S.T. Gill.*
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Bullock teams hauling wool across the mountains. For drivers the journey was largely by foot, always tiring and monotonous, sometimes dangerous. Undated watercolour by S.T. Gill.
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Men who worked with cattle, lifted above the earth and galloping far and wide across it, scorned the snail-like shepherd.

On a frontier liberty could be overdone. The Liverpool Plains, in the northwest of New South Wales, was an area lately invaded by both sheep and cattle, and by stockmen, including the young native-born men whom Harris liked so much. Among the biggest cattle owners was the patriarch George Hall. Hall had arrived as a young married man in 1802 by the *Coromandel*, among one of the first parties of free immigrants to come to New South Wales. He and his friends received small grants of 100 acres each at Portland Head on the Hawkesbury River. Hall specialised in breeding cattle, and in the following thirty years he and his family built up a herd of prodigious size. They expanded northwards, first to Dartbrook in the upper Hunter valley, and in the early 1830s across the Liverpool Range. By 1835 they had a string of stations leading northward to Wee Bollo Bollo, on the lower Gwydir, some 560 kilometres from their original headquarters.

By this time, too, George Hall was the senior figure in a complex network of families with capital and energies invested in the northwest. His fourth son, Thomas Simpson Hall, a highly skilled cattleman, was probably the most active, but a grandson, Joseph Fleming, also had cattle running near Wee Bollo Bollo, together with those of James Connolly, brother-in-law to both Fleming and T.S. Hall. These were managed by Fleming's younger brother John. John Fleming, though only 22, was the family representative in those parts, in the absence of older kinsfolk. As such, he stood at one end of a carefully constructed line of communication, along which cattle moved from watercourse to watercourse, between pasture and market.

Archibald and Thomas Bell, old associates of the Hall family, had a cattle run some 22 kilometres up the Gwydir, managed by an ex-convict named John Russell. Early in June, as we saw in chapter 2, John Fleming and Russell took one of their stockmen each to raid the Aborigines upstream, as far as George Hall's

A bush incident. A stockman shoots a wild bull near the junction of the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers, New South Wales. Cattle that had strayed and gone wild sometimes came down from the high country to join settlers' cattle. This bull had attacked the same stockman a day earlier, pursuing him for five kilometres; this time he was shot. Watercolour by Abraham Lincoln, from his *Australian Sketches*, c1838–44.

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station at Delungra. Three other men from runs downriver went too, and five more joined on the way. They killed at least thirty people, most of them at Myall Creek, which adjoined Delungra.

The massacre itself we know about already. The evidence taken afterwards gives us a unique picture of the lives of cattlemen on the remote outskirts of white settlement. The glorious—or inglorious—liberty is clear enough. Nowhere in that part of the country did proprietors live on the spot. On the upper reaches of the Gwydir we find agents for wealthy gentlemen, called 'superintendents'—William Hobbs at Myall Creek, for instance—who were addressed as 'Sir' by the stockmen. Further down, the standard of British civilisation was carried mainly by half-educated native-born men like John Fleming and by mere overseers like Russell.

On any cattle run there were one or more stations, each with one or two stockmen. One man might manage fifty or a hundred cattle. These became 'his' herd, and he might feel a real responsibility for them. Every station consisted of at least a hut, and most stations had hutkeepers. A clear line was drawn between the stockmen and the hutkeepers, who were seen as servants. They milked the cows, if any, and attended to the huts. They cooked the meals and waited on the other men. They did not join in the general conversation. At Bell's station John Deady, the hutkeeper, slept in a room by himself away from the fire. Hutkeepers had no reason for riding about and it may be that they were not given horses. They could visit each other for company and they found friendship among the Aborigines. No hutkeepers took part in the Myall Creek murders. The evidence of Thomas Berryman, Fleming's hutkeeper, reveals a man humble and ignorant, always receiving visitors—'I believe all the stockmen about are in the habit of calling here'—remembering exactly how they came and went because these were central events in his life, but ignoring or forgetting everything else.

Some hutkeepers did catch and remember parts of the conversation of the lordly stockman. The hutkeeper at Bell's heard talk 'of Chopping Spurs and Bridles and such things'; the hutkeeper at Wiseman's nearby said that his stockmen and visitors 'talked about Cattle . . . and during the night they sang a little'. These subjects may

well have filled the heads of such men. Horses and cattle yielded not only liberty but power, skill and speed, such as most convicts had never known.

Mobility conferred distinction on stockmen in other ways. Contemporaries described cattle stealing as a kind of vortex of disorder in the colonies, the heart of a criminal system. Because cattle, unlike sheep, could be hurried into remote and rugged areas and left to fend for themselves, busy overseers could be tempted to spirit away a calf or two before branding, or to take strays from another station, scorching off or modifying any existing brands, and hiding the cattle in the back country for later sale to a lax dealer or for passage to market intermingled with a legitimate mob. Well-managed stations had a book into which all births and sales had to be entered in order to check theft and carelessness. But the book's accuracy depended either on the presence and vigilance of the master or the diligence and honesty of his manager. Some masters calculated that their employees' goodwill might be gained by turning a blind eye. Shrewder proprietors held out to overseers the incentive of a stated bonus in livestock, so that the loss would be calculable and the man's stake in the property's good management acknowledged.

Whether acquired by stealth or grant, the possession of a few head of cattle helped fortunate rural workers and farmers' sons ascend to independence. A few sheep, certainly, could be grazed as easily among a master's flock as could a few cattle, but sheep promised independence only if they multiplied. Neither the fleece nor the flesh of a small number of them yielded much money, while a full flock of several hundred head required for its survival control over wide well-watered land, far beyond the means, financial or political, of most rural workers. Cattle, however, could ramble over marginal land while their owner worked at other tasks for cash. For most small squatters and smallholders this meant at best a qualified independence, because they still depended for income on offering their labour seasonally to richer neighbours. Cattle were foragers, and just as they fed on marginal land, so the smaller men among their owners hunted for wealth at the edge of respectable society.



Cattle were for killing, nearly all of them—even many of the working bullocks, which were preferred above horses as draught animals partly because they could be eaten in the end. Most sheep on the other hand were expected to grow a new fleece each year until they deteriorated to the scraggiest of mutton. Sheep were, to be sure, a regular part of the menu on the stations. There were, after all, a great many of them and, being smaller, they were less likely to decompose before the last cut was eaten. Retail butchers in the towns also brought live sheep into their yards for slaughter on demand. Those killed in Sydney had fattened on the Cumberland Plain or in the middle Hunter, just above the head of saltwater navigation on that river, often on properties owned by men who grew their wool on squatting runs further out.

In the older crowded towns the 'little butchers', as the trade called the retailers, did not have space enough to pen cattle. They went to the wholesale carcase butchers who built weatherboard slaughterhouses beside waterways into which the blood and offal fell. They were not confined to shopping or residential streets like the retailers, who had to dispose of offal as best they could by carting it away or keeping pigs. But the carcase men did face constraints on their location. In Sydney they gravitated to Darling Harbour, near its head where the slope to the shoreline was gentler, or nearby to Blackwattle Swamp Creek. Both areas were close to the cattle and hay markets where the droving route met the eastern edge

of town. Both areas counted on a supply of water. Experts believed that the animal would not taint if it drank just before it died. Careful butchers washed carcasses inside and out. After the floor was sluiced it was hoped that the action of the tide or the flow of the creek would carry the fluids deep into the harbour. The mudflats at the head of Darling Harbour thwarted these sanitary intentions whenever they trapped and absorbed any rubbish. As for Blackwattle Swamp Creek, much of the water upstream was drawn off by Tooth's Kent Brewery and Cooper's Brisbane Distillery to provide the liquid for their drinks. In the droughty summer the supply in the creek dwindled as the demand for alcohol increased, so that the muck downstream simply settled in the gully that ran beneath the main road into Sydney.

Associated noxious industries grew around an abattoir. Perhaps the oldest and largest factory in Sydney was the Wilshire brothers' leather, soap and candle works on Brickfield Hill. Fellmongers and tanners took the hides and cured them with the bark of the wattle trees found over so much of coastal Australia. Tanning also needed water, for softening the hides, turning them into leather, and cleansing the premises. The tallow vat boiled what the butchers and tanners left behind, providing the materials for soap and candles.

Slaughterhouses, butchers' yards, tanneries and tallow boilers were very, very smelly. Their operators made them worse by keeping pigs as scavengers. Pigs are naturally clean, but the drains and middens they were forced to trample turned into putrid mires. The faeces of a carnivorous pig smelt rank and its flesh bore a more pungent taste than that of free-range country-reared animals, or those that patrolled market sheds, breweries and other creators of vegetable waste.

Farms in the British Isles and the United States often ran small piggeries, whose inmates cleansed the farmyard and stocked the larder at the end of it all. The Australian bush offered less nourishment than the floor of a northern wood, but any property with its own garden, orchard, dairy and barn could support a few pigs. Travellers noted that they gorged themselves beneath the peach trees which grew effortlessly in coastal regions; their flesh must have been delectable. For the rest of the year they ate maize, on the cob and boiled, and peas where they were grown, and gleaned the recently harvested paddocks. However the problems of intense feeding, the difficulty of driving them any distance to market, and the cost in labour and materials of curing and salting large numbers of carcasses on the farm deterred all but a few landholders—and these had to be close to town by land or water—from the mass production of pigs.

WORK WITH SHEEP

William Adams Brodribb was the son of a lawyer who had been transported to Van Diemen's Land for forgery. In 1835, as a young man with about £500, he had come to New South Wales to invest in cattle. He thus shared in the movement of capital from the island to the mainland which was then beginning to gather pace. Landing at Sydney he had ridden south until he found what seemed to him suitable land in the Monaro, beyond the edge of freehold settlement. He had agreed to share the run with a friend, a much richer man, also from Van Diemen's Land. Each was to maintain his own herd, branded with his own mark. Brodribb had then returned to Sydney and bought two hundred head of cattle, draught horses and a cart. He also took on two men, one to manage the horses and the other to help with the cattle.

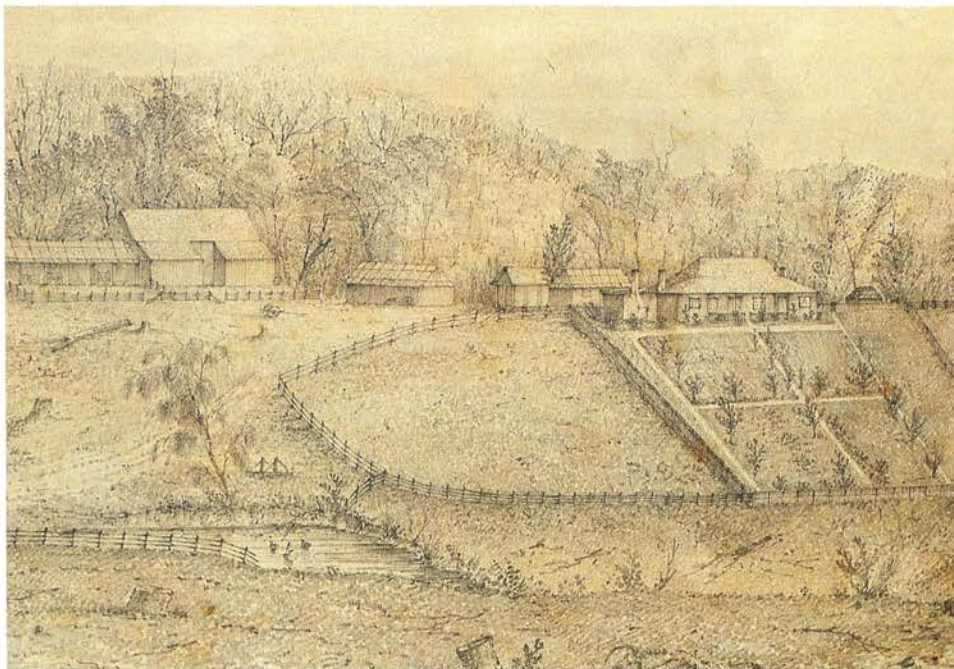
At the Monaro his herd was joined with that of his partner and they built themselves a two-roomed hut, another hut for the men and a stockyard. In 1837 Brodribb had been among the first to send cattle for sale in Melbourne. Finding

himself prosperous he bought out his partner and changed to the more lucrative business of growing fine wool. He sold his station and stock at a good profit—finding a buyer within weeks—and settled on a new run, more suitable for sheep, west of the mountains. He had 1200 ewes to begin with. He washed and shored his flock himself, with the help of his shepherd, another white labourer and ‘a few aborigines’. His own hut was the shearing shed, and ‘my hutkeeper pressed the wool with a spade, in a rough primitive box made by ourselves on the station’. By 1838, through economy and good management, Brodribb was becoming a considerable squatter, and he had his eye out for yet another step up.

Similar were the adventures of Thomas Haydon, who spent several months from September 1837 looking for a sheep station in New England, beyond the Liverpool Plains. At first Haydon was working in partnership, like Brodribb. His two partners included his brother and they were both richer and better established than he was, so he bore the risk and hardship of finding a run. In July he wrote to his family in Ireland describing his success:

I had been 300 miles from Sydney in the Bush [and] ... formed a Station ... about 100 miles from here. I intended to go much farther in the interior but luckily met with this one where there is no danger from the Blacks. Its very mountainous but a very good run. I had more trouble than could be imagined having no stockyards built ... and set the men to work to split timber to build a yard which took near six weeks during which time I had to sleep out—being winter made the nights very cold and in that part the frost was very cold ... I had to leave there three times ... and visit the sheep going along a dray track ... You'd laugh to see me mounted with my blankets before me, my quart pot for boiling tea and a saucepan for drinking out of.

His new home was not far from Myall Creek. After the stockyards, he organised the building of a slab and bark house, with a large room for himself, another room for a stockman, a storeroom and a kitchen. Later in the year he added a kitchen garden.



Sand Hills, Lake George district, New South Wales. This was the 750-hectare property of Captain W.B. Dobson RN (retired), eleven kilometres southeast of Lake George. It had four outstations and supported 5000 sheep, 250 head of cattle and 30 horses. Pencil drawing by Abraham Lincoln, from his Australian Sketches, 1838–44.

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Haydon's sharing a roof with his stockman, unlike Brodribb, may be evidence of egalitarian notions. Or perhaps it was for better security against Aboriginal attacks, despite those reassuring words to his family: this was about the time of the Myall Creek massacre. However, Haydon generally found that the Aborigines were useful. He had been barely a year in the colony, and was not yet used to the bush.

Persons must be very careful not to get lost or run the horses too much if far away from getting another. A person has as much as ever they can do to strive to steer for the different places. The trees are so thick in all parts and so many mountains. The first time I always take one of the Blacks with me after making him understand the place I want to go to. They are very good bushmen but [you] must watch them very close or they may steal away and leave you to steer yourself, but if they go once beyond the place they're used to they're no use at all with a man.

Nor were their services to be despised at a bachelor's headquarters: 'I have found some of them very useful: one of their kings for shooting ducks and stripping bark and his queen for different purposes in the kitchen'.

In his final year as governor, 1837, Sir Richard Bourke had observed that 'the greatly increased numbers of the Flocks and Herds in this Colony' and the high price obtained for Australian wool in the English market explained the prosperity of New South Wales. As we shall see in the next chapter, the boom conditions attracted English capital for investment in land purchases and further augmentation of the flocks. These interests were active at the great two-day sale by the entrepreneur, Thomas Potter Macqueen, in January 1838, at his Segenhoe estate in the upper Hunter, not far from the Haydons' home base. Ewes and lambs brought up to 36 shillings. It was not an occasion for 'twelve and sixpenny' bidders, as the *Sydney Gazette* noted:

A more numerous or more respectable company of buyers we have never seen congregated at any sale affected in the Colony. ... the warm competition between real judges of the value of sheep stock seemed absolutely electrical.

Wool production in Australia was no longer experimental and struggling to survive. It was now an established part of a flourishing economy.

Only men with good financial backing could initiate and sustain a pastoral operation at the edge of white settlement. It could take up to three years before any return on the initial outlay would be gained and ten years or more before profits appeared. In the early years only large companies or partnerships of investors and operators could afford this delay. In 1838 when the squatting rush was at its peak it was a speculative operation, largely financed by established landholders located in the settled counties, by colonial merchants with British business connections, and by investors seeking long-term profits from a raw material which, it seemed, could not be overproduced in the Australian colonies.

In March 1837 wool from the Van Diemen's Land Company realised up to 2s 6¼d a pound and the following year it brought 2s 8½d at the London sales. The boom in sheep and cattle caught the imagination of British investors and of young men who emigrated hoping to make their fortunes. Sheep owners came in three types. There were the large companies, such as the Australian Agricultural Company in New South Wales, the Clyde Company in Port Phillip and the Van Diemen's Land Company. There were the wealthy partnerships with substantial reserves of capital and livestock. These included sets of brothers who also acted as partners—the Macarthurs, the Dangars, and Samuel and John Bryan who opened

up the Wannon–Glenelg valley, west of Port Phillip, from Van Diemen's Land and Portland Bay. Then there were the working squatters with more slender resources. John and George Everett took up land in New England in partnership with the Halhed brothers and, with their stores brought from England, drove the first mob of 451 sheep the 400 kilometres from the Hunter valley to their squatting run, which they called Ollera. Samuel Pratt Winter and his sixteen-year-old brother, Trevor, established themselves inland from Portland Bay on the southern bank of the Wannon River in March 1838. The Winters had invested about £1000 in stores and stock to establish their station and had brought farm servants from Ireland with them. Like the Everetts, they lived in peace with the local Aborigines. There was less urgency and more care taken in some of these smaller enterprises, where employers shared dangers with their men.

Sheep runs needed much more labour than cattle runs. The sheep ran in flocks of up to a thousand, each of which—ideally—was in the care of a three-man team. Sheep runs also had to be relatively permanent, as sheep were slow and expensive to move. Therefore cattle were usually the pioneers in new parts of the frontier. They also helped, as we have seen, to make the pasture suitable for sheep. In New England, however, sheep dominated the tableland almost from the beginning. The Liverpool Plains were first occupied by men with cattle, such as George Hall, but by 1838 the establishment of the Australian Agricultural Company's station on the Peel River had led to a greater emphasis on sheep. This year 494 bales of wool were produced from the plains sheep. Haulage by wool dray from the interior was difficult and expensive, so that a mob of nine thousand wethers was walked some 240 kilometres over the ranges to be shorn closer to the port at Morpeth. The running of a large-scale pastoral enterprise such as that of the Australian Agricultural Company was bedevilled by problems of maintaining communications over long distances and keeping up a constant supply of stores. The company had eighteen drays continuously on the roads. Finding the labour to shepherd, wash and shear large numbers of sheep, and coping with the unpredictable Australian climate, which brought yet another drought at the end of the year, made matters worse. The problems of smaller growers, such as the Haydons, were simpler, for they lived more by subsistence and depended less on ready cash. Financial risks were not as pressing as risks to life and limb.

Larger enterprises could always get income from a variety of sources. While waiting for the return from sales of wool, big sheep owners created a useful cash flow by selling sheep, especially to newcomers. During 1838 the Australian Agricultural Company sold four thousand sheep, and some bulls and horses, and the Van Diemen's Land Company was enthusiastic about exporting sheep across Bass Strait to Port Phillip. Such enterprises also had various ways of tackling the labour problem. The Van Diemen's Land Company began to consider settling tenant farmers on its lands on generous terms, which would yield a permanent supply of casual labour. The company was also anxious for more convicts, bringing the total to 150 if possible. The Australian Agricultural Company employed about five hundred convicts, but this included men working on the coalfield. It had used indentured labour in the past, and many indentured families still worked for it. The Macarthurs at Camden and James Cox at Clarendon were also big sheep owners rich enough to settle dependent families around their homesteads.



Sketch by Abraham Lincoln of a pastoral outstation in an unidentified location. All large stock owners use outstations, as Lincoln explains:

From 3 to 4 miles is generally allowed between each station, such a space being considered equal to supporting the number of sheep usually kept in the flocks. The size of the flocks depends upon the nature and character of the country—if an open plain 1000 to 1200 may be grazed in one flock—open forest land will admit of 800 to a flock—whilst in close scrubby districts not more than 650 can be depastured together with any safety ... [Each] shepherd takes his flock out early in the morning, and returns in the evening, at which time the Watchman takes charge, and having folded them, lights a fire between the two flocks; ties his dogs to any trees which may be near, and then sleeps the night out in his Watch box.

Pencil drawing, c1838–44.
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The Dumaresq brothers—Colonel Henry Dumaresq, commissioner for the Australian Agricultural Company since 1833, and his brother Captain William Dumaresq—were both squatters with their headquarters in the upper Hunter valley. Colonel Dumaresq's estate at St Heliers had been developed into a considerable establishment since its original grant of 1826. Improvements on the farm included a mill house valued at £70; a weaving house, £150; a woolshed, £40, and wool press, £12; a blacksmith's shop, £40; five huts at £12 each and the homestead, £400. Captain Dumaresq lived nearby at St Aubins.

Colonel Dumaresq had a cattle station on the Liverpool Plains in the early 1830s. In autumn 1835 his brother formed one as well, at a place he called Tilbuster, at the heart of the New England plateau; he was at the head of a sudden rush to this part of the frontier. Soon afterwards Colonel Dumaresq decided to follow him, with sheep, and to transfer a good part of his capital to that remote part of the world. He divided his workforce at St Heliers in two and sent the smaller half, under his superintendent, A.S. Wightman, to his new station, which he called Saumarez. It was next to Tilbuster and on what was to be the main track northwards. Its size and position made it a focal point for settlement in the area. By the end of 1838 the establishment consisted of the head station and several outstations. About twenty men were employed altogether. There were no women, and there were probably fewer than ten white women on the whole New England plateau. The Colonel had about six thousand sheep on the run, and nearly eight hundred cattle, so that Saumarez, even without St Heliers, was nearly equal to Clarendon, the big Van Diemen's Land property noticed earlier in the chapter. Stock were often sent to and fro between New England and the Hunter valley and the drought conditions in the Hunter could account for greater numbers seeking relief in the high country. Cattle were killed to supply the men with meat, and the grown bullocks were driven down to the coast for sale and slaughter. Beef was also sold to the local stockowners who continually called at Saumarez for stores. Quarterly accounts show that up to 1100 pounds of beef, or a third of the station provisions, were sold to other squatters for their New England stations. Other items sold included flour, tobacco, tea, sugar, soap, seed wheat, clothing, boots and

knives. Payment was almost always on credit, by means of bills drawn on banks or other businesses. Supplies were brought in about twice a month and the drays were constantly on the track, taking wool down, and bringing supplies back from the Hunter valley.

The daily routine of a convict shepherd was monotonous and the hours were long. As with cattle, sheep runs usually had a head station with several outstations, each with two or three shepherds and a hutkeeper. These men took the sheep out at daylight, watched them feeding throughout the day and moved them back to a yard of hurdles at night. As there were no permanent, fenced enclosures for sheep, constant vigilance was called for. Dingoes, commonly known as native dogs, often harassed the sheep, particularly in heavily timbered country. At Saumarez extra rations of sugar and tea were given as rewards for dingo scalps. When droving parties travelled over a long distance they lit fires each night around the camp to keep the dogs away, and shepherds took turns to watch through the night.

At times men were not vigilant and if the sheep wandered away and were lost the punishment for convicts could be up to a hundred lashes, administered back within the settled counties—‘inside’ as the men called it. Men from Saumarez were away from their work for about a month by the time they walked the 240 kilometres to Invermein and back to be tried and punished. Occasionally a shepherd took to the bush rather than submit to this punishment. One of the government surveyors remarked that New England was the ‘home of Squatters and Bushrangers’.

The Dumaresq brothers were renowned for their efficient organisation, and for their relatively humane treatment of their assigned convicts. Contemporary accounts vary, however, according to the situation of the person describing activities on the estate. Charlotte Anley lived with the Dumaresq family for fifteen months as governess to their children, staying at the Australian Agricultural Company headquarters at Tahlee, at St Heliers and at Captain Dumaresq’s property, St Aubins. She observed that Sundays were kept as a day of rest, with church services morning and evening. She noted the strict discipline and the careful encouragement that her employers gave to the industry and good conduct of their assigned convicts. She formed the impression that the Dumaresq estates were oases in the Australian bush, otherwise a desert of uncivilised barbarity. Charlotte Anley’s romantic description of St Heliers, under its ‘beloved proprietor’, has an Arcadian quality:

The farm formed an extensive establishment, about half a mile from the private dwelling-house. Its superintendent [A.S. Wightman] and his family were Scotch emigrants; the wife, a singularly pleasing woman, possessing both piety and good sense, not always blended in the same character. She was surrounded by a large family of well-trained children, and everything around and about her, was so beautifully clean—in such perfect keeping, to use a painter’s expression, with the simplicity of her station, that I could scarcely realize the many disadvantages to which she was nevertheless necessarily subjected. The superintendent’s house properly stood in the centre of the prisoners’ ‘camp’, as it is called, a neat range of small wooden huts or cottages, each containing two rooms with a small garden, and shaded by a verandah which protected them from the burning rays of an Australian sun. Many of these were ornamented with a vine, which gave to them an additional appearance of beauty and comfort.

However pious and sensible the superintendent’s wife might have seemed to Miss Anley, in fact she lived in fear. Margaret Wightman, according to her husband,



A sheep dog on the alert while a shepherd dozes beside his empty bottle and rifle. Oil by S.T. Gill, c1839.

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was newly from England and the sights and sounds [of the convicts] filled her with horror ... The cruelly heavy chains were rivetted on their legs and remained there day and night. It was a wooden house and the men's quarters were so near that when they turned or moved in the night the clang of their chains were distinctly heard. At this dreadful sound my wife used to weep herself almost into hysterics. I have known her to cry the whole night through when the clanging of chains and groaning of the prisoners fell upon her ear. By day she saw both men and women working the treadmills and heard orders for men to be dragged off to the triangles to be flogged for the most trivial offences and by night drear prison sounds disturbed her rest.

Where one woman saw comfort and harmony, the other saw only terror and pain.

There may be truth in both these accounts. They also tell us about the women themselves, and about how most women in the colonies watched at a distance the masculine universe of rural work. Charlotte Anley looked down from the wide verandahs of St Heliers. Margaret Wightman listened in fear through the slabs of her timber cottage. Both understood only a little. The men themselves mostly found a way of reconciling comfort with terror, and harmony with pain.

Alexander Busby gives us a masculine view of the way things worked. He had a large sheep station, with about forty convicts, at the edge of the Hunter valley near Cassilis. Giving evidence to the supreme court in Sydney, he described a situation such as we have glimpsed elsewhere, in which masters and servants were constantly doing deals. Labour was offered in exchange not only for rations—and pay in the case of free men—but for the extra comforts which the employer could supply. Busby spoke mainly of grog:

as a matter of opinion I should say it is not necessary to issue spirits to men at sheep shearing, but it is generally done; ... it may be considered necessary as it is the custom.

It was so much the custom that if he had no grog the employer had to offer extra tea and sugar instead. If this was true of convict labourers, with free men an employer had even less room for negotiation. Free men insisted on at least a pint a day: 'if they are not liberally supplied they will not work'. Busby had tried free labourers at shearing, but had been forced to give them all they asked, and there had been an uproar among his convicts. He lost control: 'the whole establishment was in confusion; I have managed to do without them since'.

When both sides understood the rules there was certainly a chance of comfort and harmony. But Margaret Wightman knew better than Charlotte Anley: the whole system was circumscribed by violence. Most of it was inflicted by masters, who used the scourgers—or floggers—appointed by government to show where negotiation ended.

Occasionally masters were the victims. Turn again to the trial at which Busby was giving evidence. The other witnesses brought before the supreme court the scene of a small and remote sheep station at work. The master, John Jones, had spent the day with his overseer and eleven men, washing sheep. Grog and water were used in comparable quantities: 'they were in the water about five hours, and had one glass going in, two while they were in, and one coming out'. This was meant to keep their circulation up, for hours in the water could ruin a man's health. As they came home in the evening each man was given another glass, 'as they had worked hard and washed upwards of eight hundred wethers'. Some convict shepherds came in a little later, at eight o'clock, and the master chose this time to give out lambing prizes. Every shepherd who could show a lamb for each of his ewes was given £5. One of them demanded grog as well. Apparently he got it.

Then, after some of the men had drifted back to their huts, shouting broke out. One of the sheep washers, named Tufts, a convict with a ticket of leave, was calling his master 'all the thieves, robbers and vagabonds he could set his tongue to'. He and Jones had had some standing agreement that Jones was to recommend him for a pardon, and that he would also have some sheep after shearing—Tufts said four hundred. Jones must have decided to renegotiate, and he died for it. Tufts went for some shears and stabbed him in the groin, to a depth of five inches.

THE UNCERTAINTY OF WORK

We need to finish the chapter with some cautionary tales. Much of the detail so far points to a settled economy of labour, in which there were rich opportunities, or comfort at least, for those with a little luck and a willingness to toe the line. The chapter itself has moved in an orderly way, from one type of work to another, as a skilled housewife might let her eye run over a market stall, from apples to pumpkins to fresh green peas. We must finally take a different view, to wander with the hungry caterpillar, who can fill itself with this rich produce only as it chances upon it.

For many men and women work was a series of chances. Whatever the state of the labour market, looking for work, time between jobs, was a common experience, how common we cannot know. Even on the remote Murrumbidgee, according to a local squatter, 'hordes of men who call themselves free' came from time to time looking for work as shepherds. For such men movement had become a way of life. If they got pay in advance they would often disappear with it, 'leaving the sheep to the mercy of the native blacks and native dogs'. Others longed for security and comfort, and found it hard to come by. This was true of all classes. Thomas Coke Brownell had arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1830. For three years he was a government surgeon attending convicts. Then he tried private practice in Hobart Town, and failed because although his services were in flattering demand his clients would not pay their bills. Having used up nearly all his savings, in 1834 he took up farming at Brighton, near Hobart Town. Finding scant success—he had only ten acres—he moved to Bridgewater, where he attended as surgeon to the convict chain gang. Then in March 1837 the government established an elementary school at Bridgewater, and Brownell and his wife were appointed master and mistress.

This period was the peak of their success. The school brought £100 a year, and Brownell got another £100 as government catechist: he gave the convicts at Bridgewater religious instruction on Sundays. He also took up farming again, planting four acres of wheat with oats, potatoes and other vegetables. Smut destroyed the wheat, and in 1838 Brownell planted English barley instead. About the same time his new hopes of security were likewise blighted. He was notified that his salary as a catechist was to be halved, and that he might well lose it altogether.

Brownell now decided that he and his family could be safe and comfortable only if he were ordained as a Church of England clergyman. During the winter he began 'rubbing up [his] Greek and Latin Testament'. He needed the approval of the bishop in Sydney and feared that his Wesleyan background would tell against him. Then there was ordination itself: a voyage to Sydney in order 'that his Lordship may put his hand upon me', which in turn meant an expensive month away from home plus a fee of £30 to the bishop's clerks, in payment for the 'lordly touch'. With all the drawbacks—most of all, he did not want to be a clergyman—this seemed the only way of breaking the endless round of meagre hope and bleak despair.

More humble, but almost equally uncertain, was the case of Benjamin Sutherland, an upholsterer, who had arrived in Sydney as a free immigrant in 1833. In England, Sutherland had earned £3 or even £4 a week. His first job in Sydney paid him half as much, but with board and lodging included: 'I kept the books, and was salesman'. This lasted only a few months before his employer's business failed. He then spent about a year making furniture in partnership with his brother-in-law. He did all the upholstery and the business employed several men. This must have been unprofitable, because Sutherland gave it up when he was offered a job as storekeeper on an estate in the Hunter valley, at £30 a year with rations. Luckily he had no family to support, and this also made it easier to move around.

After eleven months in the Hunter Sutherland was employed, first by a gentleman with a new house to furnish, and then by W.H. Tyrer, a furniture maker in Sydney. At Tyrer's he 'had the management of the business'. He started at two guineas a week, without board and lodging, which was afterwards increased to £2 5s. In the boom period of 1837–38 he demanded £2 15s. When he did not get it he resigned. He was now trying a more hazardous method of work, contracting for small jobs by the piece for two Sydney furniture makers. The money was good—sometimes amounting to more than £2 15s—but there were drawbacks. He could not always get the materials he needed: 'I was often standing still'. Also he had to rely too much on the goodwill and continued prosperity of those who gave him jobs. Like Brownell, at the end of 1838 he stood at the precipice of the new year with nothing certain ahead of him. Really each day was a precipice.

The reason for such uncertainty was lack of power. Uncertainty is lack of power. Brownell's case shows that it was not only the poor and uneducated who could not control their means of living, and the schemes for bonded labour which were so common during 1838, as the convict system began to falter, show that even men better off than Brownell longed for certainty. But the poor suffered most and fought most desperately for power over the future. Trades unions, benefit societies and lodges were weapons in their battle, and so was that system of rights which the convicts believed in. So much was unpredictable. Some lost everything simply by doing what was expected of them in their daily work. This can be said of the Myall Creek murderers, who were hanged for activities which they knew their masters would have approved. It is more clearly true of William Lancaster, a tinplate worker—if we can believe his own story.

Lancaster had come to Van Diemen's Land in 1827 as a convict. He was first assigned to Thomas Wood, a lamp maker, who was responsible for lighting Hobart Town at night. While he was in Wood's service Lancaster 'made all the Government Lamps then in use in Hobart Town and was Government Lamp-lighter for two years'. Then Wood moved to Sydney, where we meet him in chapter 8. Fortunately Lancaster was due for his ticket of leave. He set up on his own in Hobart Town, and married, but 'from want of capital' he made no progress. He tried Launceston instead, where he worked for three masters in succession. The first moved to Hobart Town and the second went bankrupt, and during 1837 Lancaster took up with Thomas Bird who had a farm and a tin shop just outside town. It was as Bird's employee that Lancaster helped take a number of horses to Hobart Town for sale the following summer. While he was there he found his second-last master and arranged to work for him again. He hurried home to collect his family—there were now three children—and the wages due to him. But there, 'to his great surprise and astonishment', he was arrested for stealing a mare and foal, taken back to Hobart Town tried and sentenced to transportation for life.

It was in this crisis that Lancaster wrote to Governor Franklin, telling his story. He was to be sent to Norfolk Island where he would, as he put it, 'be for ever



separated from his wife and children who he dearly loves and who are equally attached'. For their part, he said, they must be reduced to 'the greatest degree of poverty and the extreme of distress'. He declared his innocence, but asked only that he might serve his time in Van Diemen's Land, 'where he may sometimes hear of, and perhaps see his beloved wife and offspring'.

Though he had no hope of a pardon Lancaster told the governor that he had done nothing beyond coming with his master to Hobart Town. He had been condemned, he said, because he did not have the power to defend himself:

being poor and having been unable to obtain payment of his wages from Bird [he] had not the means of employing counsel or of availing himself of any professional aid.

His ignorance had weakened him in other ways: 'being conscious of innocence and confident of acquittal' he had not thought of bringing in his second-last master, who might have vouched for his character. In fact, as a former convict, not much evidence had been needed to prove him guilty. Nor could he earn much sympathy. There is some irony in his appeal, placed beside the newspaper report of his alleged theft of the horses: 'The mare was taken away from the foal, which starved to death in consequence, and the mare was spoiled by being obliged to retain her milk'. This alone, said the newspaper reporter, made Lancaster's a crime of 'most atrocious character'.

Whether he was guilty or not, it could be said that the tinsmith and his family made sadder victims than the mare and foal.

The Vineyard, Parramatta. In this mansion, newly built and furnished for Hannibal Hawkins Macarthur, Benjamin Sutherland found work as an upholsterer when he returned from the Hunter valley. The building strives to assert that rich men, at least, could be certain of the future. Oil by Conrad Martens, 1840.

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Wool on the way to the wharf, Sydney. Having passed the tollgate at the southern edge of the town, a wool dray makes its way down George Street. Watercolour by John Rae, 1842.

DIXSON GALLERIES