

AUSTRALIANA

FEBRUARY 1994

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Vol 16 No. 1

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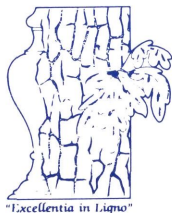
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THE AUSTRALIANA SOCIETY

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— SOCIETY PROGRAMME —

MEETINGS — 1994

THURSDAY,
24 FEBRUARY

Guest Lecturer: Anne Bickford, Archaeologist, Heritage Consultant and Excavator of the First Government House site, Sydney will speak on "Ceramics, Glass and other Artefacts from the First Government House Site".

THURSDAY,
7 APRIL

Guest Speaker subject to confirmation.

THURSDAY,
2 JUNE

Furniture Conservation Panel and Discussion.

THURSDAY,
4 AUGUST

Annual General Meeting and "Show and Tell".

THURSDAY,
6 OCTOBER

Guest Speaker to be announced.

THURSDAY,
1 DECEMBER

Christmas Party.

Society meetings are held at 7.30pm at the Glover Cottage Hall,
124 Kent Street, Sydney. Convenient street parking.
Drinks served 7.30 - 8.00 pm, followed by Australiana Showcase
(bring your Australian treasures for general discussion).
Lectures will commence at 8.30 pm.

Special Announcement

THE POWERHOUSE PRIZE FOR 'AUSTRALIANA'

The Australiana Society and the Powerhouse Museum announce that the POWERHOUSE PRIZE FOR AUSTRALIANA, sponsored by Simpsons Antiques, for 1993 was awarded to **Dr Dorothy Erickson** for her article, "English and the

Australian Eastern Colonies' Involvement in Jewellery and Silversmithing in Western Australia", which was published in *Australiana*, Vol 15, No 1 (February 1993).

The overall quality of the articles considered by the judges made their task difficult.

Entries for the **1994 Award**

must be submitted prior to 1 December, 1994 and entries are invited from members of the Society as well as non-members.

Articles published in the Society's journal during 1994 will be eligible, however previous entries (which might be published in 1994) are excluded.

Rules for Literary Award Prize

1. All entries are to be typed in double spacing; must reach the Editor no later than Thursday, 1 December 1994, and can be submitted by members and non-members (other than judges).
2. To be eligible all entries must be on a subject relating to Australiana and preferably be an item of original research. All illustrations for articles are to be supplied.
3. The authors for all articles submitted for the prize agree that the Society can publish those articles in the Society's journal whether or not a prize is awarded.
4. Articles previously published other than in the Society's journal during 1994, will not be considered.
5. The winning article will receive a prize of \$250 to be presented at the Society's Australia Day Dinner in 1995.
6. The judges will be appointed by the Society's Committee.
7. The judges' decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered into. The judges reserve the right not to award the prize if, in their opinion, the entries are not of a sufficiently high standard.
8. Articles received after Thursday, 1 December 1994 will be eligible for the 1995 award.

PETER R WALKER

Fine Arts

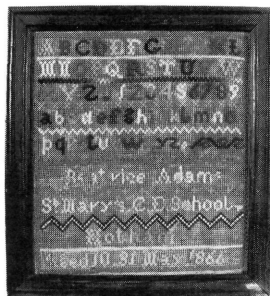
- Early Australian Artworks and Items of Historical Interest
- Pre 1840 British and European Decorative Paintings

An Early Australian Sampler worked by Beatrice Adams at St Marys School, Hotham in 1866.

Beatrice Adams was born on 11 February 1856 in Melbourne, Victoria. Her parents lived in North Melbourne in the District of Hotham. St Mary's Church still stands in North Melbourne.

The sampler is worked in coloured wools and is in its original frame which measures 31.5cm x 28.5cm.

Exhibited: Treasures from Private Collections, 1993. National Gallery Women's Association.



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Address to the Australiana Society:

26 January 1994

Margaret Betteridge

Members of the Australiana Society and friends, thank you for your warm welcome. Coming to the Mint for me is like coming home. For a large part of my life, and the first few weeks of my son, Simon's, life were devoted to this Museum and its friend, the Hyde Park Barracks next door. Being with members of the Australiana Society, so many of whom I count as my friends, is, after the events of the past few months, an invigorating and very enjoyable experience.

It is significant that the Society is here to celebrate the success of the Mint as Australia's first and only museum devoted to the display of Australian decorative arts. The history of how that happened is interesting to reflect upon. For many years, a dedicated group of Sydneysiders lobbied hard for the establishment of a decorative arts museum and the acquisition of the Mint by the then Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences seemed to offer them the solution they had been looking for. However, the concept for the fledgling Powerhouse Museum had begun to expand from its science and technology base to incorporate the decorative arts collections. Until then they had always been referred to as applied arts and viewed as by-products or decorative applications of more serious technology. It became clear that the Mint needed to develop a collection identity of its own. This realisation, combined with the pressure from other quarters to fully recognise the architectural and social history of the Mint, led to the development of exhibition concepts centred around Australian decorative arts. It was, of course, inconceivable that a museum could open in the Mint without the Museum's collection of numis-

matics, and to this was added the Vickery Collection of Philately, much to The Australian Museum's eternal delight! The confined spaces and difficult circulation pattern of the Mint led to the development of the thematic displays which have been preserved until this year. The vast holdings of the Museum were sifted through in a search to present a collection of Australian decorative arts of some significance and popular appeal. The earlier success of exhibitions like Australian Flora in Art and the First Fleet to Federation display at Lindesay by the National Trust Women's Committee reinforced our belief that such a museum could work and be successful and popular.

The contribution by The Australiana Society in strengthening the foundations upon which the Mint Museum was developed should never be under-estimated. Your regular meetings, lectures and inspections have consolidated a special interest group devoted to Australian decorative arts and your reputation for scholarship, research and information dissemination is held in high regard. I for one have consulted the exhibition catalogue for Sydney's Colonial Craftsmen, the exhibition at Elizabeth Bay House, on many, many occasions. Your contribution, too, to the development of collections of Australian decorative arts has been a positive one, and on many occasions I was able to show visiting dignitaries the kangaroo and emu fire dogs at Government House in Canberra, and the Launceston Horticultural plate at Admiralty House – both items treasured by The Australiana Fund.

The idea of a museum devoted to the display of Australian decora-

tive arts did not appeal to everyone for although there was growing interest in the field, some of it market driven, the objects were not considered highly aesthetic. Many of the objects lacked refinement, and in fact, some by today's standards were just plain bad taste. Take John Mason's highly decorated marquetry couch as one example! However, they chronicled the emergence of a national style, an acceptance of local materials and a growing confidence in colonial craftsmanship. It is a pity that the present politically driven republican debate lacks the nationalistic fervour which so characterised the development of a distinctly Australian style of decorative arts earlier this century.

While we curators were struggling to make sense of a disparate range of material of questionable significance and dubious taste, others were busy championing a different cause. A growing voice of discontent about the use of the Mint as a museum was becoming louder by the minute. The press were quick to seize on the debate, labelling it the "purist versus trendy" row and the museum was accused of unsympathetic treatment and a lack of respect for such an important architectural relic. I am forever grateful for this experience as it served me well during the recent and much publicised saga of a certain table. However, it remains a disappointment to me that the museum community were conspicuous by their absence in this debate which challenged the notion that "old buildings make great museums".

The Mint opened in 1982 amid the controversy about the future of Sydney Hospital and the conditions of nursing staff. A colourful

and very vocal gaggle of nurses accompanied the then Premier and the Governor into this courtyard and made their protests known in no uncertain terms, but this discontent took nothing away from the fact that the Mint had scrubbed up well. I was amused to read while looking back through my press clipping file by an item about the Mint which read: "The Mint remains one of the finest pieces of architecture in the land. This is despite the fact that someone – after they had cleaned and restored it back to its original sandstone brilliance – painted it pink!!!"

Memories of wonderful times flood back to me tonight as I recall the spirit with which museum staff, including Peter Timms, Robert Barton, Betty Gallagher, Pat Boland, Richard Peck and our hard working typist Shakun Nand worked, along with the museum's first organised team of volunteer guides. I have kept my distinctive yellow hard hat which allowed me access throughout the construction phase but the memory I treasure most is of arriving on Christmas Eve at 6am for the Public Works Builders Christmas Party when Betty and I were given honorary male status for the

day and beer and prawns for breakfast!

The Mint is on the brink of a whole new career. (So for that matter am I!!) Twelve years on, the road will not be littered with so many philosophical obstacles and an exciting new approach and a facelift will restore this wonderful building with a new sense of purpose, secure in the knowledge that its future as part of the Powerhouse is safe. Not a bad innings for a building, built on the proceeds of traffic in rum, which was deemed in 1816 to be in imminent danger of collapse. I wish the Mint well!!

From the Editor's Desk

VALE

Regular attendants at Australiana Society lectures will remember Norah Forbes, a valued member, who was an active contributor to "Show and Tell". I am saddened to report her death in December 1993. The Society extends its sympathy to her husband and family.

A JOLLY GOOD READ

Vauluse House, Historic Houses Trust NSW, 1993; Soft cover; 56pp; illust.; RRP \$7.95.

Not just another guide book. The informed and well written text by Michael Bogle, the curator of Vauluse House, provides visitors and general readers with a wealth of previously little known information and pictorial material relating

to the history of the site, its gardens, W.C. Wentworth and his family, together with a colour illustrated analysis of the present interiors including their furnishings. The Historic Houses Trust NSW have published a number of excellent booklets on its several properties. This one is particularly noteworthy.

SYDNEY'S NEWEST MUSEUM

The Merchant's House, a museum for children and their friends, operated by The National Trust of Australia (NSW) opened in January 1994. The Merchant's House is a rare 1848 Georgian townhouse and the home for the Trust's Australian Childhood Collection. It is a museum with a focus on young people

with a variety of exhibitions and activities programmed for 1994. Its address is 43-45 George Street, The Rocks. Open Wednesday to Sunday from 10am to 4pm. A gift shop on the ground floor is open 7 days a week from 9am to 5pm. Enquiries (02) 241 5099.

TREASURE TROVE

The recent sale at Sotheby's (6 December, 1993) of a mid-19th century Australian gold bracelet for \$72,900 would suggest that despite a recession the local Australiana market, for quality, is alive and well. Exceeding estimates of \$45,000-\$65,000 the bracelet attracted keen bidding from private and public collectors.

CORRIGENDUM

Australiana, Vol 15, No 4,
November 1993

Omitted captions, pp 90-96.

Plate 1: "Phoenix" trade mark.

Plate 2: Tea and coffee service for commercial use, circa 1928. (Reproduced from Phoenix Silverware catalogue, 1928.)

Plate 3: Trophy cups in EPNS. Cricket

trophy (left) bears the "Phoenix" mark. Golf trophy (right) bears the "Imperial" mark.

Plate 4: Vase stand, "Gum leaf" design with moulded glass vases inset, circa 1925. Vase stand bears "Phoenix" mark, plus "EPNS", "MADE IN AUSTRALIA" and "EC".

Plate 5: "Phoenix" Silverware, oxidized finish. (Reproduced from "Phoenix"

Silverware catalogue, 1928.)

Plate 6: "Phoenix" Spoons and Forks in EPNS. (Reproduced from Phoenix catalogue, 1928.)

Plate 7: "Imperial" salvers of modernistic design, and child's mugs, circa 1955. (Reproduced from Phoenix "Imperial" Electro-plated Silverware catalogue, 1955.)

Plate 8. "Imperial" trade mark.

The Great Kangaroo Hunt

Robert Hutchinson

Recently I went kangaroo hunting, not the "back o' Bourke", but the back of the dresser. Opening the door, I caught sight of one and the hunt was on. Sorry, I haven't mentioned that I was looking for trade marks on pottery, and in my house, that is a major hunt! I finally tracked down four indoors and one "Big Red" at the end of the yard, but more of him later.

The most common of the 'roo marks appears on Lithgow pottery (photo 1). This one appears on an oak leaf pattern plate, and is a version of the most common of the Lithgow stamps in use.¹ A Rockingham glazed safe stand has a similar mark.²

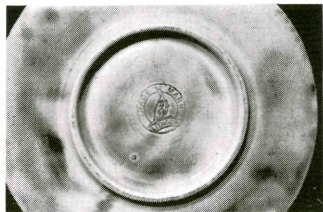


Photo 1.

A bit more hunting and a mystery one came into view (photo 2). An impressed mark, the dimensional figure of the kangaroo is in a shield shape, 25mm x 20mm, with "trade mark" at the bottom, and an unreadable word, possibly "Registered", across the top. The only other marking is 77/11. Could this piece, a vegetable dish, have been made for the Australian market, or was the mark just a British joke? The decoration is simple, the handles are bound ears of wheat "tied" with burgundy bands round the rim, it would date from approximately 1880-90s. The lid is missing.

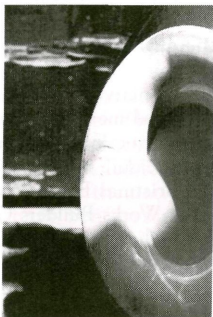


Photo 2.

Number four is the most impressive and interesting (photo 3). An armed 'roo? Doing his bit for his country? or just getting its own back? He may also be guarding Chandler's Depot. This sepia transfer is quite large, 85mm dia., and is on the base of a meat plate (for serving a roast of 'roo) decorated with two mid-blue bands to the rim, late 19th century. Whilst self explanatory to a point, Mimmo Cozzolino, while researching *Symbols of Australia*³, telephoned a Chandler's store enquiring about the Kangaroo at arms, met with an "I dunno".

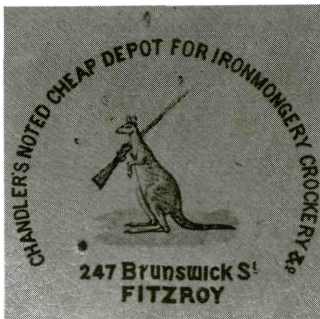


Photo 3.

Last but not least "Big Red" (photo 4). He was used by Lithgow to mark "sanitary and agricultural pipes, bricks and various other forms of earthenware goods"⁴. This is a fairly large mark 55x85mm and is possibly the earliest of the Lithgow Kangaroo marks c.1879. Another large kangaroo mark was also used, facing right with "Lithgow" in a banner below⁵, and is rare. "Big Red" is on a chimney pot on the barbecue, so he gets put to more use than the others of the herd.



Many years of collecting have gone into rounding up this small herd of 'roo, and possibly in time more will appear. Until then, the hunt is still on.

Photo 4.

References

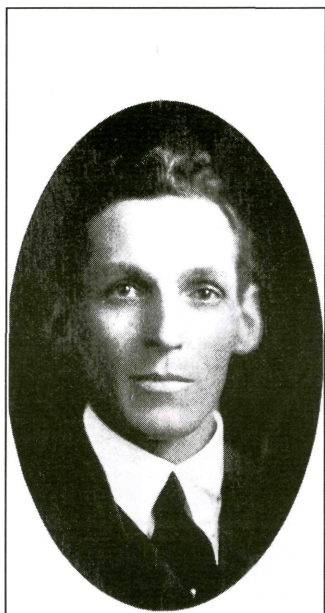
1. *The Lithgow Pottery* by Ian Evans. Flannel Flower Press, 1980, p33, no. 2.
2. *Lithgow Pottery*, p18.
3. *Symbols of Australia* by Mimmo Cozzolino. Penguin, 1980, p81.
4. *Lithgow Pottery*, p13.
5. *Lithgow Pottery*, p32.

Photographs: Andrew Simpson.

Australiana and the Australian-Made Preference League

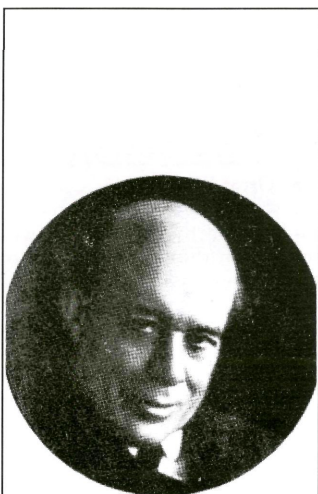
Desmond Barrett

In his article *Australiana and the Private Collector*, Kevin Fahy remarked: "The widespread public interest in Australiana is a relatively recent phenomena that springs from a nostalgia for the past and an awakening national chauvinism. By definition it embraces a vast range of objects related to Australia both local and overseas origin, the latter including items made especially for the local market or possessing local historical associations. Australiana in its broadest sense is all those tangible reminders of our collective past (Fahy, 1979, 10).



Mr. Fred R. Burley,
Founder and First President of the "Australian-Made"
Preference League.

Plate 1.



Mr. Wallace Nelson,
Poet, Orator, and Journalist, Official
Lecturer on the "Great White" Train,
also one of the Founders of the "Aus-
tralian-Made" Preference League.

Plate 2.

The Argument

In this brief article, I shall be concerned to explore the way in which the notion of Australiana, as applied to industrially made products,¹ was used broadly as a political rhetorical "tool" to re-negotiate the social and political role of Australian over "Imperial" products. It is further suggested that the shift to Australiana, as promoted by the League, underscored the politics of nationalism and the role of the Empire, which gave effect to the rhetoric of patriotism among the League's disciples.

The Australian-Made Preference League

The precise origin(s) of the League are not known, but toward the end of 1923 or early in 1924, Fred R. Burley (1885-1954) [Plate 1], had gathered together his thoughts on the matter for the formation of the League, which were eventually published in an article entitled *Preference to Australia*. The League, according to its own poet, orator, and official lecturer, Wallace Nelson (1856-1943) [Plate 2], was established by Burley to "discuss



Mr. W. R. Bagnall, M.L.A.,
Director of the "Australian-Made"
Preference League and Organiser and Di-
rector of the "Great White" Train.

Plate 3.

the wisdom of starting an association to propagate preference for 'Australian-Made' goods (Nelson,

1926, 16). Those who met with Burley, at Berlei House in Sydney, were to include Wallace Nelson, Mr H. Daniell (b. 1874) and Mr W.R. Bagnall (1882-1950), MLA [Plate 3], who subsequently was appointed the first Director of the organisation. With good intentions, these men settled on a seven-point manifesto² which, above all else, would "educate public opinion to appreciate the wisdom of giving preference to Australian-made primary, secondary and artistic products."³

Bagnall, for example, provided the economic rationale for the League's version of Australiana. His ideas conformed to the traditional mechanism of high tariffs, the geography of isolation, and the conventionalism of invasion through being vulnerable, *vis-à-vis*, a small population (Bagnall, 1926, 25). Moreover, locally produced artistic products, the League preached, would ensure that Australia would become a self-reliant, prosperous,

and secure nation. Furthermore, Australiana, in all its material form, would prosper the Empire, for to help ourselves, to believe in the social and economic value of locally crafted and manufactured things, is, the League further opined, a demonstrable act of loyalty to the Empire. Australiana, in the hands of a rhetorician such as Wallace, was proclaimed to be a politically and economically conservative ethos, walled in by introspective and reflective moods of economic self containment.

The Great White Train

To show that Australiana, as understood by the League, was more than the coy mutterings of disillusioned and disenchanted industrialists, politicians, and State's Governors,⁴ the novel, and cross-cultural fantasy of the Great White Train was employed to deliver their message.⁵

The train comprised fifteen exhibition coaches, which included a

stylish and elegant dining saloon [Plate 4]. The train made two extensive journeys throughout New South Wales, the first leaving Darling Harbour (Darling Island) on 11 November, 1925 at 3.30pm, while the second tour, which commenced toward the end of August 1926, covered mainly the North and South Coasts of New South Wales. A total of 6,500km (4,100 miles) were travelled on the tours. The *Official Souvenir* listed thirty-one exhibitors, and the Train's itinerary indicated that many of the major country towns in New South Wales hosted the Great White Train and nurtured the gospels of the achievements of Australian science, industry, and Her artisans.

Not only did the League serve up the rhetoric of nationalism and Empire through the 'medium' of the Train, the exhibitions were to fulfil a pedagogical function, namely, to teach by example, to reveal Australia's remarkable industrial development, and to praise the



Plate 4: The Dining Saloon on the "Great White" Train.



Plate 5: Advance Poster for the "Great White" Train.

expert labours of her artisans, all of which was aimed at informing the "simplest minds" about the range of Australian artifacts (Nelson, 1926, 40-43). Furthermore, the exhibition format was a soothing medicine to the brusque phenomenon of an industrial landscape. Indeed, only at night would the League show, on specially erected screens, "industrial pictures", while the visibility of the sensitively crafted objects could be best admired in the quiescent and poignant daylight of an Australian country town.

Conclusion

In their recourse to a well defined and articulated "industrial ideology", the Australian-Made Preference League re-defined and re-shaped the cultural associations of an artifact. The idea of Australianism was extended, by the League, to include Australian designed and made products, largely those which were machined, exchanged and ultimately disposed. Despite its professed neutrality on matters political, the League deliberately engaged in the rhetoric of nationalism and patriotism, by proclaiming

an allegiance to the Empire, and an unswerving belief in Australian manufacturers and artisans, as creators of useful things, to provide a measure of self-reliance, prosperity, and security.

And, as befitting an entry in a literary competition, it would not be entirely inappropriate to conclude with two poems, written by Nelson (1926) especially for the League, which capture the argument of this paper:

Song of Australia

Land of the fearless free
Girt by the silver sea,
What land compares with thee
Australia?

Child of a newer line,
No mighty past is thine;
Then let thy future shine,
Australia.

By work of hand and brain,
Gather power to maintain,
Right to thine own domain,
Australia.

Yet let old quarrels cease,
Earth's store of good increase,
Thy ways be ways of peace,
Australia.

Then upright, strong and pure,
In all men's love secure,
Thou shalt for aye endure,
Australia.

Land of the fearless free,
Girt by the silver sea,
We give our hearts to thee,
Australia.

The Song of the Train

Onward, ever onward
Goes the Great White Train
Onward, ever onward,
Over hill and plain.
Sometimes in the darkness
Sometimes in the day,
And this, in simple language
Is what it tries to say:

"Good people of the country,
Our compliments to you,
Come and see the wonders
Our artisans can do.
We know that you are working
But we are working too



The "Great White" Train.

Plate 6: The "Great White" Train.

To build a mighty nation,
Strong, and straight and true.

Yet bear this in remembrance,
Imprint it on the brain,
Repeat it to your children
Again and yet again.
Who buys imported products
From old lands or from new,
Sends jobs to other countries
For other men to do.

With such reflections, the League would use artifacts to underpin their ideological concerns, and as recent contemporary events have shown, Australiana has broader social and political considerations, which were foreshadowed by the League in the 1920s.

Notes

1. My concern in this paper is not with the private or public collector(s) of Australiana. Rather, my concerns are a little different, in that I explore and extend the use of Australiana, while maintaining its fundamental meaning, as

a theme for economic and political stability.

2. The full title of the League's manifesto was: *Objects of the Australian-Made Preference League*.
3. *Objects of the Australian-Made Preference League*, in: *Souvenir of the Australian Made Preference League and the Great White Exhibition Train*, p.102.
4. The patron of the Australian-Made Preference League, was Sir Dudley de Chair (1864-1958), the Governor of New South Wales from October 1923 to April 1930. It would appear that His Excellency had two main tasks to fulfil in his role as the League's patron. First, to inform Australians that the League was: "a truly national movement, without party or sectional aims. It only asks Australians to be true to themselves, and they will surely bring prosperity to all," and, to blow the Gold Presentation Guard's Whistle, for the departure of the exhibition train. See also, Newland (1993).
5. The Train was depicted in one of the many exhibition posters as consisting of two locomotives with English boilers, and American cylinders. In the *Official Souvenir* (1926), the sleepers were described as Pullmans, another triumph for English design and manu-

facture! Actually, the locomotive was a 36 class locomotive which entered service with the NSW Railways on 31 July, 1925 (Newland, 1993, 267).

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Desmond Barret is Curator, Science and Technology, at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

Ostentation and the Ostrich

Marjorie Graham

Now don't misunderstand the title – the ostrich itself was not “ostentatious”; it was an ordinary bird, peaceful enough unless threatened, and observing its own domestic habits. Unfortunately, for the ostrich, the males were endowed with glossy black and white feathers; and, from the days of the Ancient Egyptians, man coveted these feathers for the adornment of himself and his surroundings.

The zoologist will tell you that there are really five “races” – not species – ranging from North Africa to Asia; but, the ostriches we are talking about are the so-called domesticated, South African type. They are the world's largest living bird; up to eight feet in height when full-grown, and capable of a speed of nearly 50 mph. (Emus have been clocked by a car at 40 mph.) Traders carried the prized feathers in all directions, and inevitably feathers reached Europe.

The Black Prince (1330-1376) placed three white ones on his black shield, and this remains the badge of the Prince of Wales. The Elizabethan age saw Shakespeare writing of the gentlemen; ‘There's a dozen of 'em, with delicate fine hats and most beauteous feathers, which bow and nod at every man'. The Stuart period brought broad-brimmed hats loaded with ostrich plumes, for both sexes. Still an exotic item of finery, ostrich feathers were only for those who could afford them.

The 18th century saw ladies with the greater share of feathers; on hats, topping the high-piled hair styles, and for boudoir decoration. But in the mid-18th century, aristocratic ostrich plumes appeared on the London stage. And this is interesting, in the face of a much later development, reversing this trend; both in London and Aus-

tralian cities.

A painting of c.1760 depicts David Garrick and Mrs Pritchard in *Macbeth*; and, as was usual at that time, both wore contemporary costumes – forget about the wilds of Scotland. To her upswept hair Mrs Pritchard added small ostrich plumes. The lady has just grasped the daggers from the unresisting *Macbeth*. That was high fashion with Shakespeare on the stage.

An early reference to ostrich feathers with some Australian connection, is the transportation of Robert Cooper for receiving ostrich feathers and silk. Cooper was to do much better in Sydney, with gin distilling – not ostrich feathers – and by 1824 was able to start building his Paddington mansion, Juniper Hall, which still exists.

By the time the 19th century was well underway, the newly respectable London “Stage” was upwardly mobile, and had “usurped the leadership of fashion which had been held by the great ladies” – of “Society”, that is. In her 1952 book “Fashions in London”, Barbara Worsley-Gough saw this as a breaking up of “Society”; and, with hindsight, she was on track. The position in Australia was about parallel; but, not having an entrenched Society (with a capital “S”), the shifting fashion axis was less noticeable. In the 1890s, and especially the early 1900s, local and imported ladies of the stage did greatly influence fashion in Australia. Ostrich feathers entered a boom time, on and off the stage; with hats, gowns and fans, trains, necklets and boas.

Tiffany & Co., New York, mounted white ostrich feathers on mother o' pearl, finely painted sticks – real collectors' pieces. The last survivors here seem to have been vividly-dyed feathers, with pierced bone sticks. The children were



Plate 1: Miss Grace Palotta (in private dress).



Plate 2: Miss Ola Humphrey in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.



Plate 3: Miss Tittell Brune as *Dorothy Vernon*.

given these to play out of existence. In Australia in the 1890s, an interesting fan was carried by the visiting Mrs Brown Potter, in her role of Lady Teazle, in Sheridan's "The School for Scandal", first acted at Drury Lane in 1777. Presented in Georgian costume, the lady's tall, narrow fan strongly suggested that a lyrebird had been deprived of his tail feathers. On closer inspection of the photograph, it could be seen that an ostrich had made a contribution to the concoction. Was the lyrebird effect for the benefit of Australian audiences?

Years after the event, this story was told by the unlucky Sydney musician himself. Just as a visiting ex-patriate soprano swept on to the stage, he trod on her ostrich feather train. The wearer of the fabulous train was Madame Frances Alda. What to do? – quickly reassuring her, he hastily gathered up the broken feathers and hid them under his coat. The concert went on.

With fashion now being studied as an art form, it is worth taking a look at photographs of the period, which record the profusion of feathers considered "just the thing" in Australia. We see the ostentation of the stage filtering through to the quiet elegance of an after-



Plate 4: Miss Frances Ross.



Plate 5: Miss Florrie Forde. (Music Hall dress.)

noon visit, or say, a garden party.

Elegance is typified in the Talma photograph (English printed) of Grace Palotta, who would not have been out of place at the Royal Garden Party given by the Princess of Wales (later Queen Mary), in 1907. Miss Palotta came to Australia to star as Lady Holyrood, in the 1900-1901 recording-breaking musicale *Florodora*. The composer was expatriate Leslie Stuart, born in 1866 in Southport, Queensland. Grace Palotta returned several times; and her photographs, usually in post card form, are among the

most stylish. Restrained ostrich feathers, on and off the stage, added to this lady's charm.

Not so much perhaps in the case of Miss Ola Humphrey, shown here as Lady Blakeney in "The Scarlet Pimpernel". You mustn't be too hard on her rather overloaded dressing, hair and feathers. That was expected, and Miss Humphrey would not have disappointed her audience, nor herself. This is a Talma photo, but locally printed, c.1907-8.

Now to the American actress, Tittell Brune, who appeared so

many times on the Australian stage, that she has been referred to as an Australian. This Talma photo, again locally printed, shows Miss Brune in the title role of "Dorothy Vernon", which had its first Australian performance in Melbourne on Easter Saturday, 1906. Stage dressing was not necessarily correct to period – at least, as far as the ladies were concerned. So long as costumes had eye-catching opulence, and feathers were well in evidence, all was happily accepted.

When Miss Frances Ross sat for photographer Falk, numerous "glamour shots" were taken, and this one shows the undeniably beautiful actress with gracefully dressed hair, set off with a fine hat with black ostrich feathers. Miss Ross was a leading lady for Bland Holt; and, in 1907 appeared in "The Great Rescue". It was remarked that Miss Ross went through the spectacular car chase scene without ruffling one ringlet. (The critic was surely a jaundiced male.)

Florence Forde, born in Melbourne in 1876, made her Sydney debut in 1892, and in 1895 was off to London; and she never looked back. Miss Florrie Forde was soon at the top with the best music hall professionals, and her public loved her. The poor quality photograph comes from the cover of the still remembered song she made her own – *Down at the Old Bull and Bush*. The sheet music sold in Sydney for sixpence, so no one expected a fine portrait. It was enough that Miss Florrie Forde, then in her early 30s – and, you'll agree, a fine figure of a woman – stood out (or up) and beamed out from the cover. Of course she was "hit with everything". Music halls and pantomimes could always admit an extra feather or two. One thinks of the well-known picture of Nellie Stewart as Prince Charming. That one is a classic of its kind. Florrie Forde died in London in 1940, when music halls had all but faded out.



Plate 6: Drawing by D.H. Souter – 1905.

The war ended in 1945 and, in a changing society, formal Court presentations were soon discontinued. Debutantes from home and abroad no longer needed the traditional trio of ostrich tips to adorn their heads.

When D.H. Souter ((1862-1935) drew *When the Stormy Winds Do Blow*, he not only produced Australian black-and-white art, but added chic to his conception of the Australian girl. He depicted a confident, fashionably attired young woman out walking and gave her ostrich feathers. What emerged was an Art Nouveau-influenced fashion plate of 1905. Delightful.

So from where were all these ostrich feathers supplied? Feather

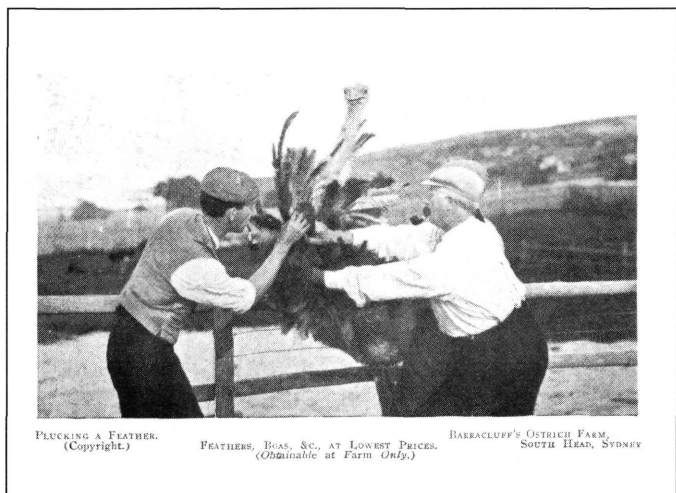
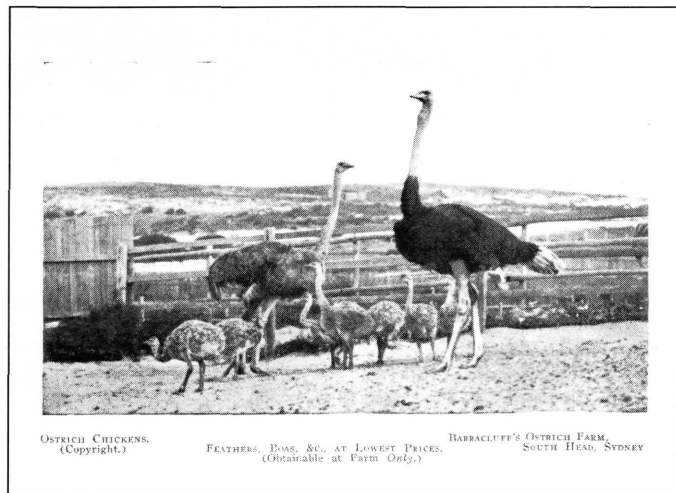
gatherers stopped chasing ostriches in the wild; and, inevitably, South Africa became the thriving centre of commercial ostrich farming. Much of the supply to Australia came from South Africa, but by importing breeding pairs, farming was established in Australia. At a meeting in Adelaide in January 1885, Malcolm's Ostrich Farming Company reported a "flourishing condition"; the nett increase during the half year, was 29, making a total number of 344. There was a "small profit" and the feathers sold had realised about £1,000. In 1890, the South Australian Ostrich Company was stated to be "now self-supporting, after having spent £30,000". But do note the next

statement: "Ostrich farming is in the near future expected to occupy an important position in the colonial industries, over 600 birds being now on the farm." When this was said, the Company Secretary was also acting in the winding up of the Commercial Bank of Adelaide – "the largest liquidation that has ever taken place in Australia". Widespread troubles, culminating in the early 1890s probably slowed sales of feathers, but the businessmen's long-term view had reckoned without Dame Fashion.

At the same company's meeting in May, 1896, the story was none too bright: weather had been dry; fodder had been an added cost; "expenditure on dams", all meant the season had been a poor one. The estimated value of feathers shipped, was £467.15.9. (Say, in modern terms, \$935.60.) On 30 April there were 668 ostriches on the farm. No breakdown in male/female is given. The picture was one of rising costs, aggravated by the South Australia weather pattern, and diminished sales. Besides, until an ostrich chick is a year old, its sex cannot be determined.

Females laid the eggs, but it had to be faced that only males had the prized black and white feathers, wherein lay the real profit. Described as a "dirty grey tint", female feathers were made up (if at all), as lesser items, such as feather dusters; which sold for 2/6 in 1916. Few women would be content with other than the glossy black and white. Such was fashion. White could be dyed to an even, silvery grey, but natural "dirty grey tint" – not if Madame could help it!

However, in the mid-1980s there was still some ostrich farming near Port Augusta; between 1989 and the early 1990s, pairs and chicks were auctioned in Victoria, and "Ostrich Investment" was variously offered to those inclined to "take a punt". Feathers again? – no: this time ostrich leather is the plan. There are export possibilities, and the suggestion was made that infer-



Plates 7 & 8: Two views taken at Barracluff's Ostrich Farm, Sydney. TOP: Pair and Chickens; BOTTOM: "Plucking a Feather".

tile eggs could be carved. The present writer has no current update.

Did someone ask "What about Barracluff?" in Sydney; which, by active advertising, was profitable; and, was to hold a Vice-Regal appointment.

This was shown on a nicely engraved business card, with "Phone Edgecliff 458". In the early 1900s J. Barracluff had established his ostrich farm on a desolate ten acres

of sand dunes, off South Head Road, Watsons Bay, and displayed his wares at the 1905-6 ANA Exhibition in Sydney. Barracluff was a feather "dresser", supplying made-up boas, stoles, fans, etc, and feathers sold "loose". Visitors were encouraged to buy feathers "while you wait". Not surprisingly, some male birds objected at being man-handled and plucked. More surprisingly, angry birds were photographed



Plate 9: Anthony Hordern's Sydney: cat. illust. for dust coat worn with an ostrich plumed hat (1910).

fighting back. Did visitors perceive this as part of the fun of the outing?

A photograph reproduced here, is most interesting – if you look closely at it. The male bird shows no white wing feathers: what you can see is a bit of white feather hanging down at the side of the body. One must assume that all white feathers have been stripped; leaving a lonely root of white. Seemingly, these photographs are c.1907/8: you can buy them, either with large mounts, or printed up as post cards. Popular with collectors, they are not cheap.

There is another big business importer/retailer/dresser of ostrich feathers; who, because of his coverage in the market, cannot be left out. John Miller was born in Manchester in 1866; went to South Africa in 1884 and worked on ostrich farms; and, probably in 1895 came to Australia. Settling in Mel-



Plate 10: Photo from sheet music – Miss Olive Morrell – a featured singer in the pantomime Mother Goose c.1907. She wears a fine boa with day dress. (J.C.W. Sydney and Melbourne season.)

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MILLER'S SPECIALTIES

The Women who comes to Miller's for her Hat makes no mistake. We show every New Shape and Colour that is correct. We stand behind every Hat with a guarantee for absolute satisfaction as to the style and wearing qualities—



Black or Navy Silk Hat, or Black Tagel Hat, trimmed with Two Black or White Lancer Plumes, or One White and One Black Plume.



Black Tagel Hat or Silk Hat, in Navy or Black, trimmed with Two White or Black Ostrich Feathers, & Ribbon Bow or Poale.



OSTRICH FEATHER NECKLET

21/-

POST FREE

Black, White, Natural, Grey, or Black & White mixed. Length 33 in. Finished with Tassel Ends.



OSTRICH FEATHER BOA

42/-

Post Free. Length 1 1/2 yds. Black, White, Grey, Natural, or Black and White mixed.



Black or Navy Silk Sailor Hat, good fitting, trimmed with Fashionable White Ostrich Ruche.

Here's a Bargain

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Fashionable Hat, in Glace Silk, Black or Navy, or Black Tagel Hat, trimmed with Lancer Plume, in Black or White. Very Special Value.



Black or Navy Silk Hat, or Black Tagel Hat, trimmed with two Ostrich Plumes in Black, White, Natural, or Black Tipped with White.



Smart Black Tagel Hat, trimmed with three Black Ostrich Tips, or Black Tipped with White.



Fashionable Hat, in Black Tagel, trimmed with Black or White Lancer Plume. Can be supplied in Black or Navy Silk Hat.

OUR LOW PRICES WILL NOT ALLOW US TO PAY CARRIAGE ON HATS OR MILLINERY—Mail Orders for these hats must be accompanied by 1/6 extra.—WRITE NOW, giving full particulars—If you have made your instructions clear we guarantee satisfaction — When forwarding money do so by Postal Note.

MILLER'S FEATHER SHOP

Plate 11: Advertisement for Miller's Feather Shop – Sydney. (The Sydney Mail, 8 November, 1916.)

bourne, Miller was advertising from his Prahran address in 1896, and in 1898 offered tips not only in black and white, but cream, brown and navy, at three for one shilling. Feather dyeing was not a simple job, but new dyes were developed, and Miller was prepared to give the

customers a change of colour. The chances were that he could afford to do this, as it was claimed that his factory absorbed all the Australian output, and much stock from South Africa. More retail outlets followed: Melbourne suburbs, and Sydney and Adelaide. Prices were

attractive.

In 1910 Anthony Hordern's, Sydney, illustrated a full-length dust coat worn with a towering ostrich plume trimming the hat. In 1915 the store offered some ostrich feathers, but also "Rich Marabout (sic) Feather Trimming". The marabout was a large, West African stork, and the downy tufts on its wings and tail were able to be made up with a fabric backing, and sold as yardage to be sewn on hats, dresses or anything else the ladies fancied. Marabout trimming was dyed more colours than the rainbow, and sold around one shilling a yard. This could be seen as competition for ostrich tips. It was affordable for many people, and this was an added discouragement for other sections of the community, when ostrich feathers were fighting a losing battle anyhow. In one sense marabout was the "next best thing", and, for a while gained popularity. But ostrich tip trimming was one thing: marabout was quite another. Could it be, that off the stage, all feathers were becoming just a bit "common"? – exclusivity, glamour, and quasi-aristocratic panache had worn thin.

In 1916 Miller was still advertising, but hats were less feathered; ostentation and opulence were not among his new millinery styles.

Barracuff closed about 1925; Miller was known to 1922, but was lost track of. World War I had its effects on fashion. Dresses were soon shorter; hats smaller. More and more ostrich feathers became the preserve of the stage, and the follies of Hollywood films. In the long run, showgirls were the best customers all over the world.

The strange thing is, that after so many hundreds of years, the ostrich market collapsed so completely, and in such a comparatively short space of time. Too much of a good thing perhaps; and perhaps too, familiarity bred contempt.

The author expresses appreciation to those who kindly made photos available.

A Colonial Watchstand

Clive Pickering

Occasionally a long forgotten item of Australiana resurfaces that provides us with a wonderful opportunity for a nostalgic glimpse of our fascinating colonial past. Often the catalyst that will unearth such a colonial treasure is simple good fortune. It was fortunate that I asked a chance question in the correct place at the correct time. That question provided me with my chance to unearth just such a colonial treasure.

I am now fortunate enough to have in my collection a rather unique and unusual Australian Colonial watchstand. This watchstand had, for the greater part of its life, remained entombed in an abandoned gold mine. Preserved in the undisturbed atmosphere of the man-made subterranean cavern until, by chance, it was rediscovered in the late '50s by an old gold fossicker reworking the diggings.

The circumstances that led me to this unique item of Australian horological memorabilia must be, in part, attributed to the above scenario. I say in part because there was also a deal of good fortune involved with the chance factor. My good fortune has however thankfully ensured the watchstand's preservation and subsequent return to the function for which it was designed all those years ago.

I had travelled some distance to meet with a gentleman who had some old clocks for sale. He was an interesting fellow with the kind of wizened features that suggested he had experienced a good deal of the harsher side of life in the Australian bush. Unfortunately the clocks he had for sale were not quite as attractive as they had been described over the 'phone.

The old gentleman looked a little crestfallen at not having made a sale. I was also a little disappointed

at the prospect of yet another fruitless Saturday afternoon so in an attempt to some of the tension in the air I asked quite casually if he had any other old things that he wished to sell.

His response to my casual question was quite remarkable: a broad grin appeared on his wily old face, his eyes sparkled and his nostrils flared. He seemed to sense the possibility of some no-nonsense bargaining in the air. He began to offer to sell me all manner of items from the 1950s and '60s which I kept politely refusing. I was in the process of moving towards the door when he made me an offer that stopped me in my tracks.

"I have an old miner's homemade cedar clockcase around 'ere someplace! But it ain't got no works in it. You'd be interested in that wouldn't you?" Four little words, "old", "cedar", "miner", "clockcase" – key words which inevitably conjure up visions of treasures to any self-respecting Australian collector.

Without waiting for my reply he began to rummage around in a cluttered cupboard muttering to himself "it's 'ere someplace, I remember putting it 'ere a few years back." Quite some time later and in a completely different part of the house a whoop of delight heralded the locating of the old miner's homemade clockcase which he carried across and pushed into my arms.

The old gent misinterpreted my initial look of genuine surprise at what he had just thrust into my hands to be a look of distaste. He started to tell me that he knew it was only a homemade clockcase and nothing special and that he had never cleaned it up and consequently didn't expect much for it. Yet my heart was fairly pounding as

I stared at the unique Australian treasure that I was holding. Yes it was cedar, it was homemade, it was extremely dusty and dirty, but it was also something very special.

The miner's homemade cedar clockcase was in fact a rather unique Australian carved watchstand, quite probably a product of the carving revival of the 1880s. During this period it was apparently considered a fashionable and fitting pastime for gentlemen to spend their idle leisure hours carving.

As I stood examining the watchstand I enquired as nonchalantly as I was able (given the circumstances in which I found myself) as to why he had called it a miner's clockcase. All the while certain he would hear my heart pounding. "Because I found it in an old abandoned gold mine" came his reply.

Sensing that I might be interested in the watchstand after all, he continued talking. He had been fossicking in an old gold mining area in NSW and had found the clockcase on a ledge at the back of an old mine shaft that he had reopened. It had been partially covered with rubble and there was no clock with it. He had had it for a good few years but because he had never been able to find a clock movement to fit into the stand it had been relegated to the junk cupboard where it had remained till now.

I realised that he was under the impression that a clock movement was supposed to fit into the vacant hollow face section of the miniature longcase clock that formed the central feature of the watchstand. I explained to him that this clockcase was in fact a watchstand and was never designed to hold a clock movement ...

Oh boy was that a mistake! His smile widened, as did the gleam in

his eye, once again his nostrils flared ... he knew for certain that I was interested in the watchstand. "Mmm," he said, "What's it worth to you then ..." and the battle began.

Much later I left the old gent's home, the watchstand beside me on the passenger seat, and a near empty wallet in my back pocket. Even though the ordeal of bargaining with the wily old gent had left me feeling exhausted, it had been well worth it to become the owner of such a unique watchstand.

Once in the comfort of my home I was able to make a more leisurely examination of the stand. However to better appreciate its unique features, it needed a thorough cleaning. Using an old toothbrush I began the process of carefully removing the years of accumulated surface dirt and grime from the crevices of the carved figures, base and to a lesser degree the grandfather clock. I then applied a few generous coats of wax polish, and buffed vigorously between each application. Gradually the patina that had remained hidden for all those years began to gradually reappear and the stand began to assume that wonderful warm glow of a well loved item of rustic furniture.

With the task of cleaning completed I was able to sit back and appreciate what I consider to be the unique features of this wonderfully practical old digger's watchstand.

The most traditional feature of the stand was the miniature round dial longcase clock and it was around this typical English provincial grandfather clock (a style popular in the English midlands in the second half of the 18th century) that the miner had constructed his stand.

Although the miniature longcase could be at best be described as a rudimentary example of a provincial longcase clock the miner had made a conscientious effort to enhance its overall appearance.

To achieve this he had made use of pine stringing in a simple decorative pattern on the clock's base. He had reversed the effect on the

door of the clock where he had used cedar stringing to decorate a pine door which he had then carefully attached to the trunk. A simple carved pediment had been used to adorn the hood and the dial had been highlighted with stringing around a raised dial section.

I had read that watchstands were quite popular in the 18th and 19th centuries and I imagine the concept that a miniature longcase clock would prove an ideal watchstand would hardly have escaped the watchstand makers and amateur carvers of the day.

Theories abound as to the role played by the humble watchstand in the homes of the early settlers. Some believe that in the early days people were by necessity more practical in their use of worldly possessions. When the man of the house did not have his pocket watch in his fob pocket it was placed in the watchstand for use as the family timepiece. Consequently there was little need to squander hard-earned money on the purchase of a clock for the household!

Others believe that watchstands were preferred in the sleeping quarters because the quiet ticking, non-striking watch was not injurious to a good night's sleep. Yet another school of thought is that it simply kept the watch in a safe and convenient place. Perhaps the maker of my stand had used it to keep his watch safe from damage while he was doing his back-breaking digging in the confined space at the mine face.

The only problem I could envisage with the miniature grandfather clock as a watch holder would be its lack of stability. The stand would need to sit on a very level and stable surface. This is especially true if we take into consideration the ratio of the miniature grandfather's height to its base. By adding the extra weight of a pocket watch when it was placed into position, the stand would indeed become top heavy and unstable. I do not think the type of dwellings that were

home to the goldfield diggers would have had too many level or stable surfaces on which to balance such an unstable type of stand.

The maker of the stand had overcome the problem of lack of stability by simply attaching the miniature longcase clock to a much larger and more stable base. This he had achieved by securing the clock to the base by means of a long handmade screw which passed up from beneath the new base and into the base of the clock. It was only when I removed this screw that I discovered the base was in fact not made out of cedar as I had earlier assumed but a more dense timber, perhaps eucalyptus.

In his endeavour to make the new base more attractive he had carefully carved the legend "TIME FLIES FAST" into a decorative banner carved across the front of the base. The banner stood out proudly against a carved patterned relief.

Perhaps readers will by now understand my frequent use of the term "unique" to describe this marvellous example of Australiana. One can hardly imagine a more Australian interpretation of the Latin quotation "Tempus Fugit" than "Time Flies Fast"!

The third and possibly the most interesting feature of the stand were the two carved female figures that formed the side supports for the grandfather clock and gave the stand an overall aesthetic balance. While they were not perhaps expertly carved, they were nonetheless quite competent examples of the art. As to the nationality of the women, one would have to assume, from the detail of their dress and hairstyles, that they were Grecian maidens.

As one of the aforementioned maidens is suggestively exposing a generous part of anatomy for all to see, it would appear fair to surmise that the carver may also have been a bit of a lad. One can hardly imagine such a risqué watchstand gracing the sideboard of any respectable



gentleman's home.

It was the ornate gold hands of a French pocket watch that warranted its selection as the timepiece to be displayed in the stand. The watch also featured an alarm function as well as a small sweep seconds subsidiary dial. These features, in addition to the watch's clearly visible and easily read Arabic dial numerals, made it the perfect choice to grace the void in the watchstand.

The watch was placed, from behind, into the circular dial section on the grandfather clock. A carefully designed cut-out had been carved into the rear of the clock to accommodate the leading edge of the watch. This ensured the face of the watch would sit in snug against the rear of the dial opening.

Once in place, the watch had originally been held secure against the timber. This had been achieved when a thin wooden panel slotted into specially cut grooves in the rear section of the hood of the clock. Unfortunately this delicate section had broken away at some time in the past, and I was forced to use an alternate method.

I cut a small piece of cedar to fit

snugly in the section behind the dial and I screwed a small brass keep on each side to secure the timber in position. I also glued a piece of felt on to one side of the timber. Not only would this protect the back of the watch but it would act as an extra form of padding to ensure the watch was kept safely in position.

The care that had been taken in the actual carving on the watchstand suggested to me that its creator was quite a proficient amateur carver. I am further convinced in this belief when I take into consideration the way the whole stand was devised and the competent way it was constructed. At the same time there is evidence of pride in a "job well done" and the care taken in the overall presentation of the stand.

Much has been said of the ingenuity of the early settlers and digger's, they were by necessity inventive and extremely practical. When you consider the way the miner had used a stand totally unsuited to the goldfields and cleverly modified it into a more robust, stable and functional unit, he assuredly qualifies as being resourceful, wouldn't

you agree?

When I examine the three components of the stand, the typical English longcase clock, the European flavour of the two lovingly carved Grecian maidens, and the solid base with its no-nonsense "Aussie" interpretation of that most famous Latin quotation "Tempus Fugit", I can't help wondering about the maker of my stand.

Was he a European "Digger" who had come to seek his fortune on the Australian goldfields? Was he young or old? Did he strike it rich, or like the majority of digger's, was he eventually forced to walk away from his claim penniless, carrying with him only those possessions he could carry on his back? Was this the reason he had left his watchstand discarded in his abandoned claim? These are questions that will forever remain unanswered.

One thing we do know for certain, he left behind a genuine conversation piece – a unique example of colonial Australiana – a piece of goldfields memorabilia that has stimulated many an interesting after-dinner conversation and will, I imagine, continue to do so for a good many years to come.

Furnituremaking in Sydney: 1832-1839

Assigned Convict Artisans

R.A. Crosbie

In September 1832 the *New South Wales Government Gazette* published a notice from the Assignment Board Office informing the public of the supervision of assignment applications.¹ This suspension was precipitated by a momentary crisis. In 1832 two thousand applications for assigned convicts had been submitted to the Assignment Board. The administrative system could not cope with this influx of applications. Attempts were subsequently made to improve the system of convict assignments to private individuals. The most obvious improvement was the commencement of systematic publication of *Wales Government Gazette*. A series of amendments to the assignment regulations were also gazetted.²

By 1835 the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the old assignment regulations led to the gazetted of a comprehensive set of new regulations.³

These new regulations restricted the powers of magistrates and enforced greater responsibilities on individuals receiving assigned convicts. The principal objective of the new regulations was to end the assignment of convicts in Sydney and Parramatta⁴ and to impose property qualifications on individuals attempting to obtain convict labour. The number of convicts a "settler" was eligible to receive was proportionate to the land taken up for cultivation. Convicts were classified, for example a mechanic being equal to the fees levied on two labourers. The new regulations did contain a number of inconsistencies, these reflecting the conflicting pressures of colonial society.

The transition from the old system of government utilising con-

vict labour by direct involvement in productive activity to the new system of supply by tender and the distribution of convicts to private individuals had made these new regulations essential. The macro effect was to encourage settlers with capital to develop large land holdings. On the micro level the regulations had to provide exceptions to allow commerce in the towns to continue. For example assignments were prohibited in Sydney and Parramatta. Two exceptions were allowed, new settlers could apply for necessary domestic servants and mechanics could apply for convicts in the same trade.⁵ Assignments made under the old regulations were also to remain valid.⁶ The reality was in the towns the "labouring class" was still predominantly convict.

In the 1830s government no longer engaged in production. The Engineer's Department had been replaced by the Colonial Architect's Office and the government workshops in Sydney closed. Whereas during the 1820s the Engineer's Department had organised convict labour to produce commodities for the public sector, in the 1830s the Colonial Architect's Office supervised the system of tendering as a means of supplying the needs of government. By 1835 all government involvement in the direct use of convict labour had ceased. The only exception being in the "secondary punishment" or "colonial conviction" system. For example convict iron gangs were involved in some road maintenance in the late 1830s but usually under the control of overseers who had "tendered" for the position.

The system of Macquarie and the early 1820s was being phased

out by 1826 and continued in a modified form alongside Tendering until 1832, when positive attempts were made to totally eradicate any government involvement in productive activity. The system of public works, the vast programme of road building and wharf development, the extensive government workshops with labour training and retraining and the education of convict youths were all abandoned for a system of contract by tender where every inducement was given to men of capital. Outside the towns the large landholders were encouraged to "develop" by being provided with a regulated workforce. The end of the government establishments allowed the surplus mechanics to be assigned to these large landholders.

In the towns the increase in population allowed commerce to expand in the 1830s. Commodities such as furniture were in demand and the established businesses could continue to obtain convict labour as well as emancipist and eigrant workers. Men from England with capital could rely on government support through the tender system. Ex-convict artisans continued to supply colonial demand often employing ex-convict mechanics. The success of such men was ignored by the gentlemen in the government offices. The capitalists began to increasingly import commodities and to act as warehouses of cheap foreign commodities.

The periodic listings in the *New South Wales Government Gazette* in the 1830s provide a means of analysing the convict workforce in the colony. In this paper I intend to examine the furniture trades in Sydney between 1832 and 1839. The use of these sources indicates

the size of the cabinet making workshops in Sydney. Similar studies could be undertaken for Parramatta and Newcastle. Further analysis of supplementary sources is necessary to recreate the structure of the industry. The methodology was to abstract data from these primary sources.

**New South Wales Government Gazette, 1832+, Returns of Assignment and Returns of Absconders, Runaways. *New South Wales Calendar and General Post Office Directory, 1832-37. *General Return of Convicts in New South Wales, 1837. (ABGR. Sydney. 1987)*

Several general conclusions emerge from this study. Absconding seems to have been sporadic and possibly motivated by chance factors. Runaways usually returned to and remained with the assigned master. Some remained in the employment of a past master after gaining ticket of leave status. For the furniture historian it is apparent that by 1832 specialised workshops were in existence and French polishing was practised. It should be realised that free artisans were employed alongside convicts. Colonial-born apprentices were also trained in these workshops. It may be significant that English masters with "capital" seem to have experienced labour relation problems. This probably reflects the inability of these masters to be responsive to colonial work practices. Convict mechanics who had been employed in the Lumber Yards under the Engineer's Department would have been employed in the Lumber Yards under the Engineer's Department would have been aware of labour relations which had evolved into a pattern of variance with the situation in England. Colonial employers did not have the total power assured by the Masters and Servants Act. In the colony this Act had been tempered by challenges to the apprenticeship system and wage determinations before the magistrates. In the country such combinations were suppressed with

draconian penalties.⁷ In the towns convicts did accuse their masters before the magistrates, did challenge "tasks set" and did form combinations. The culminative effect was by the 1830s a system of labour relations significantly different than the English model. Convicts from Ireland or Scotland also did not accept the preconceptions of a system alien to them. Employers who saw themselves as righteous gentlemen, such as Edward Hunt, had frequent problems with labour. In contrast Thomas Metcalf had no convict employees run away through the 1830s.

The demand for convict mechanics in the Sydney cabinet trade at the beginning of the decade is reflected in the following applications.

Return of all Applications for Male Convicts: 1 Jan-31 Dec, 1831.⁸

NAME	NO. APPLIED	
	FOR	ASSIGNED
David Bell	1	1
John F. Barrett	1	1
Morris Castle	1	1
Edward Hunt	6	3
Charles Roberts	12	2

EDWARD HUNT,⁹

Upholsterer

George & Jamison Sts, Sydney.

Hunt was well established by 1832. From 1832-1839 Hunt was assigned two convict artisans. These were:

Return, Aug 1834 a Cabinet Carver.

Return, Dec 1834 a Chair Bottomer.

His workshop also contained several convicts assigned before 1832 and he no doubt employed colonial-born and free apprentices and tradesmen. The size of Hunt's workforce is significantly lower than in 1828. From his application in 1831 it is obvious he attempted to maintain this large workforce. There are several possible explanations. The first concerns Hunt's use of labour before 1830. It appears he was taking pairs of sawyers for short periods and these sawyers periodically inflated the size of his establishment. The probable explanation is, Hunt was

financing cedar getting and re-sawing timber for sale on his premises. For this he would need a floating workforce. While government maintained the Lumber Yards, pairs of sawyers would regularly be surplus and available to employers such as Hunt. When government phased out its productive activity such seasonal supply would cease and short-term assignments would be discovered. No doubt Hunt retained the nucleus of his workshop, throughout the 1830s and was forced to employ free labour. The problem was not insurmountable if Hunt extended his importing and warehousing to accommodate changing market forces.

The frequency of absconding by his convict servants is apparent from the Returns. In 1832 Hunt had two assigned convicts received in previous years. These were:

William Fairley¹⁰ 42, per Camden. Native place Edinburgh. Upholsterer.

Robert Robinson, 29, per *Minerva*, York (Selby). Upholsterer.

Both men were frequent absconders.

Fairley Absconded:

Return, 28 Oct 1832.

Return, 24 Dec 1832 – Second run.

Return, 6 Feb 1833 – Notorious runaway.

Return, 1 Oct 1834 – A repeated absentee since 24 Sept.

Return, 24 Feb 1835 – since 18 Feb.

Return, 13 May 1835 – since 10th inst.

Return, 19 Oct 1835.

Robinson Absconded:

Return, 24 Dec 1832.

Return, 24 April 1833.

Return, 24 July 1833.

In August 1834 Hunt received an assigned cabinet carver. This was probably Samuel Dixon, 22.¹¹

Dixon Absconded:

Return, 4 May 1836.

Return, 13 Dec 1838 – Since Dec 11.

Return, 1 Jan 1840 – Since 23 Dec 1840.

In December 1834 Hunt received a chair bottomer. No absconder of this description is recorded. This

convict may have been Rich Newman, 20.¹²

It appears Hunt maintained at least two convict servants at any one time. No doubt these were supplemented by the employment of fare artisans. The absence of convict cabinet makers and polishers supports this assumption.

In the General Return of 1837 Hunt's servants are listed as: 3243. Henry Burgess, 21, per *Aurora* 1835.

7281. Samuel Dixson, 22, per *Surrey*, London, 1834 (cabinet carver assigned Aug 1834, note incorrect age).
22594. John Scarby, 26. Recovery 1836.

In addition, Hunt had three assigned females, Nos. 7554, 11372 and 13088.

J.F. BARRETT,
Cabinet Maker
George Street, Sydney, 1834-35;
4 Macdonalds Buildings, George St, Sydney, 1836-37;
Pitt Street.

Between 1832 and 1839 Barrett received the following assigned servants:

Return, 27 Feb 1833. Isaac Coates per *Mary* 4. Woodturner.

Return, 5 June 1833. William Robinson per *Mary* 4. Upholsterer.

Return, April 1833. A Chair Maker.

Return, May 1833. A Chair Maker's Apprentice.

One convict was present in 1832 having been assigned in the previous year. This was Thomas Bain, 65. Carver and Gilder.¹³

The following men absconded from Barrett:

Thomas Bain: Carver and Gilder, per *Clyde*, 65, East Lothian.

Return, 15 July 1835 – Since 12 July.

Return, 6 Jan 1836 – Since 1 Jan.

Isaac Coates: Wood Turner, per *Mary*, 19, Birmingham.

Return, 20 Aug 1834.

Return, 9 Dec 1835.

Return, 4 Jan 1837.

Return, 27 Sept 1837 – Since 23 Sept.

Return, 10 Oct 1838 – from Hyde Park Barracks.

The Chair Maker was Henry Dawson, 29.¹⁴ He was gazetted on 24 October 1834 as missing since 22 October.

The upholsterer William Robinson, per *Mary* 4, 21, York, was an equally determined absconder:

Return, 11 Dec 1833.

Return, 10 Sept 1834 – Absconds Iron Gang Cox's River since 4 July as Woodcutter.

Return, 2 Dec 1835 – Since 29 Nov.

Return, 13 April 1836 – Since 10 April.

Return, 23 Sept 1836 – Absconds T. Burrell, Pitt St, Sydney.

The identity of the chair maker's apprentice is unknown.

In 1837 General Return, Barrett's servants were:

Peter Richmond, 22, *Andromeda*.

William Robinson, 23, *Mary*.

Thomas Wilson, 21, *Royal Admiral*, 1835.

[N.B. In 1836 William Robinson is listed with Barrett, however he was transferred to T. Burrell on 23 Sept 1836.]

J.F. Barrett employed two to three convict tradesmen, the majority of whom absconded at periodic intervals. The habitual absconder was removed from Barrett's employ.

THOMAS METCALF (Metcalfe)
Cabinet Maker.

Bridge Street, Sydney;

Colonnade George St North.

Between 1832 and 1839 Metcalf received four assigned convict artisans. These were:

Return, 16 July 1835. Chair Maker and Turner.

Return, 27 July 1836. Woodscrew Maker.

Return, May 1836. Furniture Polisher 3 Sept 1836, French Polisher.

None of Metcalf's assigned servants were gazetted as absconders. In the 1837 General Return, Metcalf's servants were:

26976. John Wells, 22, Henry, Tanner. 1834.

Return, 27 July 1836, Woodscrew

maker.

Return, May 1836. Furniture Polisher, 3 Sept 1836, French Polisher.

None of Metcalf's assigned servants were gazetted as absconders. In the 1837 General Return, Metcalf's servants were:

26976. John Wells, 22, Henry, Tanner. 1834.

16505. Joseph McCarthy, 26, Surrey. 1836.

20870. Female.

24405. John Steele, 25, Marquis Huntley, 1835.

MORRIS CASTLE,
Cabinet Maker
85 Pitt Street, Sydney, 1833-35;
Cambridge Street, 1835;
Parramatta Road, 1835-37.

Morris Castle employed six assigned convict mechanics between 1832 and 1839. These were as follows:

Return, 15 Aug 1832. George Walton per *Portland*. Fancy Workbox Maker.

Return, 5 June 1833. John Jenkins, per *Prince Regent*, Chair Maker & Co.

Return, 10 July 1833, A Chair Maker.

Return, 6 Nov 1833, A Cabinet Maker.

Return, 26 March 1834, A Chair Maker.

Return, 27 May 1835, A Brass Finisher.

His workforce also included a chair carver assigned before 1832. This man was Denis Reading¹⁵ and he was gazetted as absconding on 28 May 1834.

Four of Castle's assigned servants absconded:

Return, 28 May 1834, Denis Reading, per *Captain Cook* 2, Surrey. Chair Carver.

Return, 11 June 1834, William Holt, 25, per *Camden* 2, Dublin. Chair Maker.

Return, 3 Feb 1836, William Quinell, 23, per *Lloyds*, Bristol, Chair Maker, since 30 January.

Return, 4 May 1836, William Quinell, Chair Maker, since 30 January.

Return, 31 Aug 1836, John Kelly, per *Susan 1*, Roscommon County, Turner, second run.

Return, 8 April 1840, William Holt alias Carr, 31, per *Camden 2*, Dublin, Chair Maker, 5 yrs, since 31 March.

**CHARLES ROBERTS,
Cabinet Maker. Sydney.**

Charles Roberts received four assigned servants between 1832 and 1839:

Return, 27 June 1832, George Jones, *Royal Admiral*, Cabinet & Chair Carver; Henry Smith, *Lady Faversham*, Upholsterer.

Return, 26 March 1834, an Upholsterer's Boy.

Return, 24 Dec 1834, a Groom.

Three men absconded from Charles Roberts. All three were probably assigned before 1832. They were gazetted as follows:

Return, 8 Oct 1834, Thomas Brittle, 22, per *Survey 5*, Birmingham, Turner, since 6 Oct.

Return, 8 Oct 1834, Nicholas Cosney, 23, per *Java*, Somerset, Cabinet Maker, since 6 Oct.

Return, 16 Feb 1836, William Surrey, 22, per *Favlec*, Sawbridge Wills, French Polisher, since 11 Feb.

In the 1837 General Return, Charles Roberts' assigned convicts are:

Alexander Aiken, 20, Sterling, per *Lloyds*, 1833.

William Surrey, 21, per *Fairlie*, 1833.

John Finn, 23, per *Hive*, Nottingham, 1834.

Nicholas Gosney, 23 per *Java*, 1832.

Moses Hyam, 32, per *Lady Faversham*, 1829.

It is apparent that Charles Roberts maintained a large workforce. Charles and his twin, Thomas, were successful tenderers for government contracts throughout the 1830s.

**THOMAS ROBERTS,
Elizabeth Street, Sydney.
Cabinet Maker.**

Between 1832 and 1839 Thomas Roberts received three assigned servants:

Return, 13 Jan 1832, Charles Clifford, *Marquis Hastings*, Brass Turner.

Return, 29 Aug 1832, John McFeat, Upholsterer.¹⁶

Return, 27 Nov 1833, a Bedstead Maker. (Before 1832, Francis Tobin, per *Ferguson*, 25, Dublin, Turner.)

Two of Thomas Roberts' assigned servants absconded:

Return, 20 Nov 1833, Francis Tobin, 25, per *Ferguson*, Dublin, Turner.

Return, 28 May 1834, Francis Tobin, from Mr Roberts, Elizabeth Street. Second run.

Return, 8 Oct 1834, Francis Tobin, since 6 Oct.

Return, 16 Nov 1836, John McFeat, per *John 3*, Edinburgh, Upholsterer, since 13 Nov.

**H.L. MILLER,
Upholsterer.
60 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.**

Between 1832 and 1839 Miller employed one assigned convict:

Return, 1 Jan-Mar 1832, Edward Bennett, per *Marquis Huntley*, Chair Carver.

One convict assigned before 1832 absconded:

Return, 26 Nov 1832, Edward Ploughman, 38, per *Prince Regent*, London, Upholsterer.

Return, 2 Jan 1833, Edward Ploughman, Hyde Park Barracks, second run.

No assigned servants were with Miller in the 1837 General Return.

**J. TEMLETON,
Cabinet Maker.
George Street, Sydney.**

Between 1832-39 Templeton received six assigned convicts:

Return, Nov 1835, an Upholsterer.

Return, Dec 1835, a Cabinet Maker, a Chair Bottomer, a Screen Printer.

Return, Jan 1836, a Wood Turner.

Return, Mar 1836, a Bedstead Maker.

One convict was gazetted for absconding:

Return, 3 Aug 1836, Thomas Harley, 30, per *Royal Sovereign*, Kent, Chair and Cabinet Maker.

Return, 5 April 1837, Thomas Harley, since April 2.

In the General Return of 1837 Templeton had eight assigned servants.¹⁷

**WILLIAM HIBBERD,
Cabinet Maker.
Lower George Street, Sydney.**

Hibberd received two assigned convicts between 1832-39:

Return, April 1832, Douglas Brand, per *Portland 4*, Carver and Gilder.

Return, April 1833, a Chairmaker.

One of these men absconded:

Return, 13 Jan 1836, Douglas Brand, per *Portland 4*, Edinburgh, Carver & Co.

Return, 20 Feb 1838, Douglas Brand, per *Portland 27*, Carver & Co. 4 yrs. Tolerable, since Feb 19.

In the General Return of 1837, Hibberd had three assigned servants.¹⁸

B.A. PHILLIPS

Phillips received two assigned convicts between 1832 and 1839:

Return, 28 Mar 1838, Chair Cutter, French Polisher.

No absconders were gazetted.

In the 1837 General Return, Phillips had two assigned servants:

John Jones, 19, *Aurora*, 1833.

George Lane, 20, *John*, 1837.

**JOHN SLEIGHT,
Cabinet Maker.
Castlereagh Street, Sydney.**

Sleight received three assigned convicts between 1832 and 1839:

Return, 6 Nov 1833, a Chairmaker.

Return, 15 Jan 1834, Upholsterer's boy.

Return, 15 Jan 1834, Cabinet Turner.

In the 1837 General Return, Sleight is not listed.

**S. SCARSS,
Bells Passage Lower Pitt Street,
1833-34; Campbell St, 1835-37.**

Between 1832 and 1839 Scarss received one assigned servant:

Return, April 1832, Richard Byrne, per *Captain Cook*, Cabinet Maker's apprentice.

Scarss is not listed in the 1837 General Return.

RICHARD HAYES,
Cabinet Maker.
Princess Street.

Between 1832 and 1839 Hayes received the following assigned convicts:

Return, Aug 1834, Chair Maker.

Return, Jan 1836, Chair Maker, since 14 Feb.

Return, Mar 1837, Wood Turner.

Return, Dec 1837, Chair Maker.

Return, April 1838, Cabinet Maker & Co. since 18 April.

One absconder was gazetted:

Return, 28 Mar 1839, Joshua Woodcock, 27, per *Surrey* 7, London, Chair Maker, French Polisher, since 26 May.

In the 1837 General Return, Hayes had five assigned convicts: (6299), Female.

Martin Thompson, 22, per *James Pattison*.

Joshua Woodcock, 23, per *Surrey* 1834.

Humphrey Perry, 35, per *John* 1837. (6299), Female.

JOSEPH SLY,
Cabinet Maker. Pitt Street.

Sly had one assigned convict gazetted between 1832 and 1839: Return, 30 Nov 1836, French Polisher.

In the 1837 General Return, Sly had four convict servants listed:

George Cook, 25, per *Lady Kennaway*, 1836.¹⁹

John Jones, 24, per *Mangles* 7, 1837.²⁰

George Harrison, 21, per *Charles Kerr*, 1837.²¹

John Hall, 38, per *James Pattison*, 1837.

A number of cabinet makers are listed in the 1837 General Return who appear to have never used convict labour. These are:

A. Adams, Castlereagh St, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

William Alphinstone, Elizabeth St, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

John Byrne, Lower Castlereagh St, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

George Bowman, Hunter Street, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

William Calton, Princess Street, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

John Earl, 51 Phillip St, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

Owen Elliot, 7 Upper Pitt Street, Sydney, Cabinet Maker.

Thomas Frasier, Pitt Street, Sydney, Wood Turner.

Several other cabinet makers listed in 1834 do not appear to have employed convict labour. These include:

Joseph Bridkirk, Clarendon Street.

J. Campbell, Elizabeth Street.

John Earl, Hunter Street, 1832; 51 Phillip St, 1834; 52 Phillip St, 1835.

Thomas Pearson, York St, 1833-37.

Further research is necessary to allow a detailed analysis of the structure of the Sydney furniture industry in the 1830s. Even so some tentative conclusions are possible. It appears only men with some capital were employing more than one convict servant. Those employing numbers of convicts usually have a household servant included amongst the assignees. This no doubt reflects the economic success of these employers. It is probable that such men were increasingly manufacturing for stock and probably involved in importing. Cabinet warehouses were certainly in existence and successful warehouses such as Hunt were establishing themselves as pillars of Sydney's commercial community. The recession of the late 1830s strengthened the position of these warehouse men and no doubt allowed them to further diversify away from dependence on cheap regulated labour when assignments were abolished in 1839.

Notes

1. *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 26 September 1832. Assignment Board Office, Sydney, 18 September 1832.

2. See for example, *New South Wales Government Gazette*, 1832, p.243. Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney, 20 August 1832. Regulation G.O. No. 18, 29 June 1831. *New South Wales Government Gazette* 1834, p.320. Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney, 30 May 1834. Enforcement of Pass regulations.
3. *New South Wales Government Gazette* 1835, p.287f, Colonial Secretary's Office, Sydney, 9 May 1835. Assignment Regulations.
4. Ibid. see Regulation No. 3.
5. Ibid. see Regulation No. 16.
6. Ibid. see Regulation No. 32.
7. See e.g. T.A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*. Maxmillan of Australia, 1969, p.39.
8. *New South Wales Governor's Despatches*, 1831. ML. A1210.
9. For details of Hunt's labour force before 1832 see my article in *Australiana*, Vol. 15, No.2, May 1993.
10. Indent. Camden England. Sydney 25 July 1831. William Fairley, 40. Upholsterer. Complete Literate. Protestant. Married. Native Place Edinburgh. Trial, Edinburgh. Steal shoes. 7 yrs. Former convictions 4 months - to E. Hunt, Sydney.
11. Samuel Dixon, per *Surrey*. Age 22. Native Place London, 7 yrs. Cabinet Carver.
12. Rich Newman, per *James Laing*, Age 20, Chair Bottomer, Native Place Kent, 14 yrs.
13. Thomas Bain, 60, per *Clyde*, 27 Aug 1832, Carver and Gilder, Excellent Literate, Protestant, Married, Native Place East Lothian. Trial, London. Pawnbroker's duplicates. 14 yrs.
14. Henry Dawson, 29, per *Adrian*, Native Place Lynn, Chair Maker.
15. Denis Reading, per *Captain Cook* 2, Native Place Surrey, Chair Carver.
16. John McFeat, per *John* 3, Upholsterer, Protestant, Literate, Housebreaking. 7 yrs.
17. 1837 General Return - Templeton, Nos. 19, 1668, 5144, 5749, 11455, 12794, 18632, 22921.
18. 1837 General Return - Hibberd, Nos. 2343, 12557, 15147.
19. Indent No. 234 - George Cook, 25, Protestant, Married, Native Place Norwich, French Polisher. Stealing Cloak, Surrey Quarter Sessions, 7/12/1833, 7 yrs, 5'10".
20. Indent No. 187 - John Jones, Reads & Writes, Protestant, Single, Native Place Nottingham, Chair and Sofa Maker. House Robbery, Somerset Quarter Sessions 7/7/1836, 7 yrs, 4 months previous conviction, 5'5".
21. Indent No. 105 - George Harrison, Reads, Protestant, Single, Upholsterer. Stealing Snuff Box and Picking Pockets, 4 yrs, Central Criminal Court, 7 yrs, 5'5".



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THE POOR MAN'S FROSTED SILVER CENTREPIECE

A cut kid leather centerpiece containing an Emu Egg 35.5cm high probably by Madame Bircher, of Adelaide, Circa 1881. She is recorded as making such articles in Frearson's Weekly September 1881, page 131. Similar examples may be seen in the Millicent Museum, Birdswood Mill Museum, and an example is shown in an unknown view illustrated in Australian's at Home by Lane and Searle plate 174.

With thanks to Terry Lane for pointing out the above.