

An environmental history of British settlement in Van Diemen's Land

The making of a distinct people,
1798 – 1831

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P J Boyce', written in a cursive style.

(Peter) James Boyce

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18 August 2006

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This thesis began when my daughter Clare was still a toddler, and my son, William, not yet born. Needless to say, it could never have been written without the help of family and friends, and especially the love and patience of my wife Emma.

Abstract

An Environmental History of British Settlement in Van Diemen's Land: The Making of a Distinct People 1798 - 1831

Van Diemen's Land received approximately 72 000 convicts, mainly from the British Isles and Ireland, between 1803 and 1853, and convicts and their descendants formed the large majority of the population of the island colony throughout this time. This thesis focuses on the environmental experience of this majority population in the first three decades of settlement. It argues that the history of British settlement of Van Diemen's Land, and consequently, to a not insignificant extent, Australia, has been distorted by a failure to recognize that the rigorous attempts to reproduce English rural society – social and environmental – were largely undertaken by a relatively small group of free settlers. The consequence of the failure to recognize the extent to which socio-economic background shaped environmental experience, is that the life-changing experience of the new land by a people without the capital or privilege to buffer them from an immediate experience of place, have been obscured. The thesis studies how the rich and accessible resources of the off-shore islands, coastal bays and estuaries and, above all, grassy woodlands of the midlands and east coast provided convicts and former convicts with an economic and physical refuge from the rigorous and often brutal attempts to turn them into a disciplined subservient labour force. This encounter with the new land occurred in the context of a populated and defended land, and while this thesis is not 'Aboriginal history', the Aborigines are inevitably central to the British experience, and the cross-cultural meeting and conflict are major themes within it.

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Introduction

Overview

The distinguished economic historian, R.M. Hartwell, saw the British settlement of Van Diemen's Land as a case study of "classic colonization, the movement of British people into empty lands and their attempt to reproduce the old society in a new environment."¹ Van Diemen's Land, of course, was not 'empty', and in the fifty years since Hartwell published *The Economic Development of Van Diemen's Land*, the Aborigines have received considerable more attention in Tasmanian history. Nevertheless, Hartwell's assumption that the old society was reproduced with unusual exactness in Tasmania continues to enjoy wide currency. The implications of conquest for both the Aborigines and the land are recognized, but the omnipotence of the British remains. Aborigines and the environment change, while the invaders themselves remain immutable.

This thesis is less concerned with how European invaders shaped Van Diemen's Land than with how Van Diemen's Land shaped the invaders. As such, it focuses on the distinctiveness of the Van Diemen's Land environment. Many of the fundamental forces that shaped colonization are common to other regions of the British Empire, notably New South Wales (of which Van Diemen's Land was administratively a part until 1825). These shared dimensions are comparatively well studied. In this thesis they are not denied, but are deemed to be insufficient to answer the question that most concerns it: *how did Van Diemen's Land change the British?* Three main parameters of difference are considered.

First, Tasmania is an island with a distinct environment. The contrasts with New South Wales remain obvious enough now, but in the early nineteenth century they were life-changing. The abundance of fresh water, temperate climate, reliable rainfall, readily available fertile soils and hospitable, largely uninhabited offshore islands rich in resources, were all important. But no difference was as

significant as the accessibility of open grasslands to the ports and estuaries of first settlement. In the history of Van Diemen's Land it was the native pastures, known today as native grasslands and grassy woodlands, adjacent to the northern and southern settlements, and present in much of the land between, that were most central to the British experience of the new land.² Tasmanian topography, in which hills and dense scrub are never far from these comparatively flat grasslands, was also of consequence. It made the much-contested hunting grounds far more difficult to monopolize compared with the vast flat plains of mainland Australia, because it reduced the power of both the gun and the horse. Of almost equal significance, at least before 1820, were the implications of the previous absence of the dingo from the island, with Van Diemen's Land being one of the very few places of human habitation on earth in 1803 where the dog was unknown to native herbivores. Because of this, hunting was far more successful than in New South Wales or almost any other site of British colonization, and from the commencement of the invasion in September 1803 the British had fresh meat in abundance.

The second important parameter of environmental difference is that the people the British encountered in Van Diemen's Land were distinct from the peoples of mainland Australia. The diverse communities of Tasmanian Aborigines had been isolated by rising sea levels around 12 000 years ago, ensuring that the British met with and fought a people who had survived and adapted to millennia of local environmental change, managing and creating the island's bounty so that it had become an Eden: rich in food, spirit and culture.

And finally, the British who settled Van Diemen's Land are themselves not easily equated with other New World immigrants, because of the collective experience of servitude and exile. It is a remarkable fact that Van Diemen's Land was largely settled by about 72 000 sentenced criminals (42 per cent of all the convicts to come to Australia) – some of the poorest and most despised of British subjects. This convict experience is not unique, but it is close to being so.

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Convicts were sent to other parts of the empire, but only in New South Wales did numbers correspond to Van Diemen's Land. And nowhere else, including New South Wales, did convicts and their descendants constitute the majority of the population over such a long period of time.

This thesis is concerned with what happened to the convicts, though not as seen through the lense of the penal system. It is rather the very land itself, upon which that system was imposed, that frames the investigation. The distinctive features of the land are the recurring themes in a chronologically ordered study that looks for environmentally induced change within the majority population, and finds it emerging to an unexpected degree with surprising speed. Within two years of settlement, convict kangaroo hunters, who largely fed the colony during the long French wars when supply ships were few and far between, were living year round in the bush, forging a new life in close interaction with the environment and the owners and defenders of the land. Violence with the Aborigines was ever-present, but did not define interaction with the indigenous people even when, from 1812, the British residents of the frontier lands became Australia's first pastoralists.

The land and resource claims made by the semi-nomadic hunter-pastoralists (many of them bushrangers) were not exclusive and, combined with comparative British military weakness, ensured forms of shared land use continued as the norm. The Bengal-cross cattle and tough traditional sheep meat breeds were let loose to wander largely where they willed, and for the stock-keepers and shepherds who loosely watched over them, pastoralism did not replace hunting but supplemented it. Controls over both the animals and their guardians remained very weak and, moreover, could co-exist with (and indeed benefited from) traditional Aboriginal land management.

The economic underpinning to Van Diemonian life made it difficult for the authorities to control and evict these bushmen even after the second wave of

British settlement began in the 1820s. Nevertheless, the arrival of a new wave of wealthy free settlers, who received grants of pastureland in proportion to their starting capital, had a dramatic impact on both white and black residents. Though not in great numbers relative to the convicts, free-settler claims over land and labour were absolute and war with the Aborigines was but one, though the most momentous, consequence. The grassy woodlands became an arena of contest – in which the colonial gentry eventually emerged triumphant. But the 'little Englanders' knew just one habitat, and Van Diemen's Land was more than its grasslands, leaving room at the geographical and social fringe for a Van Diemonian alternative to the social and economic order imposed in post-convict 'Tasmania'.

Historiography

This thesis can be positioned within a range of literature. It relates to studies of European colonization generally and nineteenth century Australian history particularly, but its main contribution is to the historiography of Van Diemen's Land. It is best described as environmental history, given the particular focus of this sub-discipline on the interaction of people and environment.

The questions it raises have been most often studied by environmental historians of North America. Since Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis argued that the primitive conditions endured by pioneers on the American frontier led them to discard their imported ways and become true Americans, the question of how the environment changed European immigrants has been at the forefront of American history. In recent decades Jordan and Kaups have suggested that the major questions have broadened to include:

To what degree were various contemporary European cultures implanted, modified, simplified, or hybridized in the overseas colonial setting. How great were the cultural influences exerted by the American Indian and

African slave? How potent a shaping force was the frontier experience? [And] in what ways did the physical environment of the North American continent influence the colonial culture?³

Karl Jacoby has recently argued that, despite this comparatively detailed study, North American environmental history has not acknowledged the extent to which socio-economic background shaped environmental experience. He suggests that “we need a social history that is attuned to rural life and the ecological relationships that shape and sustain it. And we need an environmental history that takes into account social differences and the distribution of power within human society”. Jacoby is concerned with “how ordinary rural folk interacted with the environment”, exploring what he has termed “the participant’s *moral ecology*... a vision of nature ‘from the bottom up.’”⁴

Australian Environmental History

The still developing sub-discipline of environmental history in Australia has generally focussed on the negative impacts of British settlement,⁵ and questions relating to the impact of the new land on the settlers themselves have not received much specialised attention. This subject has, however, been an important theme in general history, most notably in Manning Clark’s sweeping six volume *History of Australia*. Clark believed that the “subject on which every historian of this country should have something to say”, was “the influence of the spirit of place in the fashioning of Australians.” Clark’s central theme was the spiritual darkness at the centre of Australian life, which he believed began:

With that first cry of horror and disappointment of the Dutch seamen... Here, indeed, was a country where the Creator had not finished his work. Here nature was so hostile, so brutish that men in time believed God had cursed both man and the country itself, and hence its barrenness, its sterility, its unsuitability for the arts of civilized human beings... It was

going to take a long while before this cry of horror gave way first to wonder and then to delight. From the coming of the First Fleet in January 1788 to the middle of the nineteenth century, most men of sensibility were dismayed when they first saw Australia.

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, Clark argues, that settlers began to discover "compensating virtues."⁶ The foundation pillar for the themes pursued in Clark's monumental work is the very real struggle to survive what David Collins, Judge Advocate and later Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land, called the period of "great despair" in early New South Wales. In emphasising the broader implications of the hardship and suffering endured at Port Jackson, Clark is far from alone. Tim Flannery argues that "many of the great differences between American and Australian cultures" can be sourced to the fact that "the Australians found themselves facing adversity almost from the moment they entered the continent".⁷ And William Lines believes that: "in contrast to European preconceptions of North America, no antipodean invader ever entertained a sentimental vision of Australia as nature's garden, a prelapsarian Eden - quite the opposite. To the British, Australia stood in need of redemption."⁸

The difficulty with this perspective is that it has no relevance for early Van Diemen's Land. At least as far as the land was concerned (perceptions of the transplanted society were another matter), there were no cries of 'horror' or "disappointment" from new arrivals. The island was not experienced as "harsh" or "barbaric" - in fact, its beauty and innocence was frequently contrasted with the degraded humanity of the "great civilization" transported to it.⁹ And, more significant still, for the majority of the population the land, far from being a cursed place of darkness, was a benevolent refuge from the horror imposed by "civilized human beings".

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It is true that the environmental generalizations about the Australian continent – largely based on a difficult first decade of settlement and an unforgiving interior – do not fit many regions, but the contradiction is most manifest when considering the temperate, well-watered and fertile island that became the second locale for European settlement in 1803. In the nineteenth century this tension was largely resolved by the fact that, as Alan Atkinson has recently pointed out, “the usage of ‘Tasmania’ and ‘Australia’ to refer to two mutually exclusive places was common... Tasmania was not part of Australia... there were two types of soil and two types of landscape, both of them sea-girt.”¹⁰ But in the twentieth century, Tasmania – now with a small and ever-declining proportion of national population – was increasingly absorbed into the post-federation national narrative.

So marginal did Tasmanian history become as a result of this homogenising process that the obvious contradictions inherent within it have never been acknowledged, even when considering the early nineteenth century, a period when the importance of Van Diemen's Land must be admitted by even the most Sydney-centric of historians. For example, Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*, has generated an enormous body of historical research and debate since its publication nearly fifty years ago. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Ward argued that the essentials of the Australian character “were already fixed before 1851”, had emerged primarily from nomadic convicts and pastoral workers, and that “among the influences which shaped the life of the outback community the brute facts of Australian geography were probably most important” (particularly “scanty rainfall and great distances”), the obvious difficulties for his thesis of the very different environmental conditions experienced by some 42 percent of all the convicts to come to Australia have never been discussed.¹¹ Of course many, probably most, Van Diemen's Land convicts eventually left the island for the mainland – particularly Port Phillip – but surely this makes the different environmental experience of Van Diemonian convict colonizers more relevant to the national narrative, not less.

Thus, given the importance of Van Diemen's Land to early Australian history, a broader recognition of an alternative environmental experience among the majority population of the island is well overdue. What the *Sydney Gazette* described in 1822 as "our sister island"¹² was already the home of twice the number of sheep as New South Wales, and boasted an economy that by end of the decade "was almost two-thirds the size of the 'mother' colony".¹³ The population increased so rapidly that by the mid 1830s Van Diemen's Land was the residence of over a third of all Europeans in Australia¹⁴. The implications of the very different environmental conditions in the southern colony from the coastal scrub or vast grassland plains of New South Wales is not, therefore, a matter of only local interest. The distinct society spawned by the fact that the island's natural bounty was not so much greater than its sister colony, but more accessible to those without capital, is a central, and neglected, feature of early Australian history. The confluence of convict settler – some of the poorest and most reviled Britons anywhere in the empire – with a perhaps uniquely bountiful land produced a distinctive environmental experience that can not be easily subsumed into a single national narrative. Van Diemen's Land did not merely prefigure "the ruthless conquest of nature on the Australian mainland", but represents a complex challenge to the dominant paradigm of development posited by environmental and progress historians alike.¹⁵ In both Australian and empire history, there is perhaps no more important place than Van Diemen's Land to consider a "vision of nature 'from the bottom up'".¹⁶

It is not only misleading national generalisations about the environment that distort Australian history. Early nineteenth century Britain has also been homogenised in ways that conceal the possibility of a life-changing encounter with the new land. D.N Jeans suggests that Australia's late settlement meant "that the full power of the industrial revolution, lacking any sense of ecology, was brought to bear on the land."¹⁷ Tom Griffiths also claims that "Australia, unlike most other parts of the New World, experienced colonization and industrialisation almost coincidentally, a compressed, double revolution."¹⁸ That settlement

occurred post-Enlightenment is seen to be almost equally significant. William Lines concluded that "Australian settlement advanced under the guidance of the modern outlook, a uniform way of thinking devoted to the simplification of life and thought and to the formulation of efficacious techniques for the conquest of nature. Reason and violence built, on Australian soil, a new empire."¹⁹ But a paradox of much environmental history is that the legitimate emphasis on the impact of British economy and society has not translated into serious consideration of the implications of the complexity and diversity so evident in Britain during this period. 'Britain' is largely assumed to be a coherent whole, rather than a heterogeneous diversity of regions and peoples still in the process of uneven transition from a pre-industrial economy and society where many of the poor still had a world view little influenced by the industrial revolution or the Enlightenment. Moreover, a profound gap had opened up between the classes in this respect. E.P Thompson, in *Customs in Common*, has argued that:

customary consciousness and customary usages were especially robust in the eighteenth century... Historians ... have tended to see the eighteenth century as a time when these customary usages were in decline, along with magic, witchcraft, and kindred superstitions. The people were subject to pressures to 'reform' popular culture from above, literacy was displacing oral transmission, and enlightenment (it is supposed) was seeping down from the superior to the subordinate orders. But the pressures of reform were stubbornly resisted, and the eighteenth century saw a profound distance opened, a profound alienation between the culture of patricians and plebs.²⁰

Thus, while British culture was transplanted to Australia, there was more than one Britain. This was most obvious in Ireland, which may have been politically unified with the rest of the United Kingdom, but was in most rural regions indisputably a pre-industrial society in which, until the famine of the 1840s, even the Catholic Church had little control of how ordinary people shaped their world.

The implications of the resilience of pre-industrial custom are many. Take, for example, the notion of absolute private property rights, a central tenet of the transplanted society that undeniably transformed Australia. In the early nineteenth century, just prior to the last great wave of land enclosures, this relatively novel notion remained contested in England. Many smallholders, agricultural labourers and farm servants, as well as the itinerant poor, remained reliant on commonly owned land and communal rights over 'private' lands, to graze animals and gather food and fuel.²¹ And in much of Ireland the "produce of the infields and outfields was primarily for home consumption", with livestock – grazed on common lands often a considerable distance away in the hills – the main commercial activity. The stock were watched over by summer herders who lived in basic huts, with each community utilizing a designated territory.²² Similar pastoral and land use systems existed in parts of Scotland and Wales. When this context is recognized, the broader significance of Van Diemonian convicts and small land owners accessing the grasslands beyond the settlement for pasture without seeking exclusive possession – which facilitated two decades of largely shared land use – and the full implications of the later arrival of free settlers – with their 'modern' private property claims – can be understood. The eviction of both black and white residents of the grassland plains in the late 1820s and 1830s becomes part of a broader imperial struggle, and not a 'taken for granted' inherent right associated with the possession of legal land title. As John West lamented in his *History of Tasmania* (1852), "the English of modern times" did not comprehend "joint ownership, notwithstanding the once 'common' property of the nation has only been lately distributed by law". It was only because of this change, West suggests, that "the gradual alienation" of the "hunting grounds", implied for the Aborigines "their expulsion and extinction."²³

Van Diemen's Land Environmental History

Some of the limitations of Australian environmental history considered above are probably inevitable when the continent is studied as a whole. Tom Griffiths

points out that "environmental history often makes the best sense on a regional or global scale, rarely a national one."²⁴ Griffiths and Robin have explored the contrasting environmental histories within Australasia that result from the different ecologies and indigenous cultures of Australia and New Zealand. "What happens to humans" they ask, "when they try to possess such different lands?" The question is surely not only relevant to Australasia's eastern islands. The southern islands also "provide a dramatic contrast" from the largest land mass's "poor soils, little relief and slow rivers."²⁵

While the implications of environmental difference have not yet been considered in relation to Tasmania, the need for such research is at least suggested by Alan Atkinson's recent critique of Australian history. Atkinson has observed that "since the 1990s there has been deliberate efforts, by some historians, to break out of what Ann Curthoys has called 'our national straitjacket', our 'prison house of national history'". Curthoys' call is to look across constructed borders and consider Australian history in a larger context²⁶, but, as Atkinson suggests, it is equally important to consider to how nations "unfold *within* each other". Atkinson argues that "transnational history does not take full account of the nineteenth century multiplicity of nations, of nationhood as variously defined, mutually overlapping, frequently evanescent sense of community and place", and that, precisely because an "ambiguous identity" is so evident in nineteenth century Tasmanian history, the island "makes a first-class intellectual lever" to "lift up, expose and undermine absolutist ideas" about "the idea of the nation: national identity and national destiny". He points out that "on the one hand it has been part of Australia. On the other hand it has been, at least from an imaginative point of view, an island nation like New Zealand. It is worth pushing this ambiguity", he concludes, "as far as it goes."²⁷

It should be acknowledged that perhaps even Van Diemen's Land is too geographically and culturally diverse to capture any "evanescent" or, indeed, enduring "sense of community and place", and that this is perhaps one reason

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why local history has long flourished in Tasmania. The grassy woodlands and coastal bays and estuaries which largely frame British colonization before the 1840s, perhaps make the task a more promising one in the Van Diemonian era than in subsequent decades when expanding colonization made for quite diverse environmental experiences. Very little work has, however, yet been done in this area. Indeed, the only general account of Van Diemen's Land that could be described as an environmental history arguably reinforced the 'prison house of national history', rather than confront the national narrative with the ambiguities of the island experience. Sharon Morgan's *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England*, takes as its theme that: "almost everything the settler did was a recreation of the world which had been left behind" and "everything they did was shaped by their past experiences and beliefs".²⁸ Morgan's evidence is almost exclusively drawn from a privileged minority of free settlers, and almost exclusively located in the 1820s. The failure to locate her evidence either chronologically or by class means that the analysis is riddled with unacknowledged contradictions. Marked changes in social relations, agricultural practices, housing and the way of life of the poor – condemned by the privileged chroniclers she relies on – are presented without an apparent awareness of the extent to which they challenge her central conclusion.²⁹

Lloyd Robson's two volume *History of Tasmania*, the first of which deals with Van Diemen's Land, remains an essential text, but is distorted by fierce disapproval of the moral character of both free settlers and convicts. Negative character judgments are unconvincingly used to explain the emergence of a distinctive, but most unattractive, society:

I have sought to show... above all, how Van Diemen's Land became occupied by a set of people who had left Britain to escape imposts of various kinds and had then become quite obsessed with escaping all responsibilities of all kinds to anyone but themselves. The ferocity with which the Aborigines and bandits were dealt with is a profound measure of the character of the settlers in the island colony.³⁰

To Robson, "there was no 'society', for everyone ran down everyone else; robberies were committed with impunity and the inhabitants were like a set of vultures preying upon each other."³¹

Much closer to the themes of this thesis is Shayne Breen's *Contested Places*. While focused on one region - Tasmania's northern districts - and largely concerned with a later period, Breen's study broke important new ground in seeking a "reconciliation between social and environmental matters." Nature is here "presented as a powerful historical agent." The main theme is contest: "Aborigines and colonists fought for control of the country, convicts fought for dignity, tenant farmers fought for survival, nature resisted attempts to tame it, and the landed elites fought to control the rest. In a very real sense, the many places which make up Tasmania's northern districts were and remain contested places."³²

Breen notes that in the past two decades some other "Tasmanian histories have explored underdog resistance... This trend has been especially evident in Aboriginal history...[but] Richard Flanagan's *A Terrible Beauty*, Tim Jetson's *Roof of Tasmania*, and James Boyce's *Journeying Home* also portray common Tasmanian people as survivors and resisters to dominant others."³³ Flanagan researched the long history of interaction between Europeans and the environment in the 'wilderness' of the west coast; Jetson explored the history of the Central Plateau; and this author undertook a preliminary discussion of the themes researched in this thesis for the 1803-1823 period.³⁴ Simon Cubit has also looked at the European experience of place, asserting an enduring European cultural heritage in the Central Plateau.³⁵ Peter Hay argues against this focus on European history in wilderness areas unnecessarily causing a rift between natural and human-created values: "the culture-nature split emerging in Tasmania... is politically potent, socially divisive – and needless."³⁶

The focus on wilderness areas (that has emerged directly from the environmental struggles that have dominated Tasmania politics during the past 30 years), has had another unfortunate (although unintended) consequence: environmental history has almost exclusively been discussed only in the context of life in very remote regions. Even taken collectively, this body of work has not made the environment central to British history in Van Diemen's Land, and has even served to reinforce an assumption that it is only marginally relevant to the main narrative.

Since Alec Castles revived the concept, there has been the occasional discussion of a more far-ranging "Van Diemonian spirit" emerging directly from the experience of living in Van Diemen's Land. When he visited in the 1870s, Anthony Trollope found Van Diemonians to have "a spirit of their own which could not be at ease within a prison, even though they themselves were the master and the warden." Castles has noted that 'Van Diemonian' (or, increasingly, the deliberately evocative 'Van Demonian') also came to have a meaning in mainland Australia in the nineteenth century beyond its convict antecedents: "it could describe 'rowdy conduct', attributes of independent self respect." Castles argued that the Van Diemonian spirit "placed a premium on self help and endurance, simply to survive", and was characterised by a "strongly independent frame of mind, a deep suspicion of authority, healthy cynicism about it, a refusal to take things at their face value, a capacity to battle on in the face of adversity, and an ability to come to terms with difficult conditions."³⁷ His hypothesis has both an historical and contemporary resonance, but while there is evidence for a Van Diemonian spirit, Castles offers no convincing explanation for its emergence. The suggestion that authority was undermined by a different interpretation of the law in Van Diemen's Land, in the context of a range of customary legal practices, seems more likely to be another *expression* of difference than a primary cause for its existence.

In the past two decades there have been developments in convict studies which have implications for environmental history. Knowledge of convict society and forms of resistance has been greatly strengthened by the work of Hamish Maxwell-Stewart's study of bushrangers, and this thesis draws on his work.³⁸ It provides a correction to a long held and still widely defended view, that current and former convicts were especially "submissive, unprotesting and apolitical", because "they were inclined to submit to government direction and... not confront or challenge government in meaningful ways."³⁹ It is undoubtedly true that only a minority of convicts directly confronted the authorities, but as Maxwell-Stuart points out: "if all prisoners had passively accepted the terms of their subjugation there would have been no ironed gangs, no penal settlements and no pass system."⁴⁰ Even more relevant to this thesis, the understandable reluctance of most convicts to directly confront their gaolers led to quieter but, in some ways, more potent forms of protest. Many convicts sought lives of freedom, independence and dignity away from the oppressive and degrading gaze of the elite; turning their back, when they could, on submissive labour relations and the social hierarchy, even when it involved lives of material deprivation and hardship; surely a powerful expression of resistance to the dominant social and economic order.

One of the general limitations of Tasmanian historiography which this thesis seeks to address is the sparse study of the period before 1820. David Burn wrote in *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* (1840) of his adopted land that: "although actually existent during the preceding years, still her *virtual* nativity dates with 1820."⁴¹ And, with the notable exception of Marjorie Tipping's extraordinary research achievement, *Convicts Unbound*, which traces the individual stories of most of the convicts who arrived with David Collins in 1804, Burn's position has been the general view since. In his still significant, *History of Tasmania* (1852), John West described the first years of colonization as the 'dark ages':

the exhilarating influences of youth and vigour, usual in the first steps of colonization, were here unknown, and a civilizing agency rarely counteracted the social evils which prevailed. The transactions of those early days are scarcely colonial: charged with debauch and outrage, they denoted a time of social disorganisation – the dark ages found in the history of every country, where men have been their own masters, and remote from public opinion, which cannot be corrupted or controlled... During the administration of Colonel Collins, the progress of the colony was barely perceptible. There were no roads in the interior, no public buildings: the house of the Governor was a mere cottage, too mean for the accommodation of a modern mechanic.⁴²

West's history, which was able to draw extensively on oral memory, suggests how unusual, distinct and potentially fascinating this early era might prove to be with closer research. Whatever else the economy and society of the Van Diemonian 'dark ages' resembled, all contemporaries agreed, it was not England. Unfortunately, twentieth century histories of Tasmania have tended to share West's moral judgment about the foundation years, while showing even less interest in its content.

Manning Clark noted that Commissioner Bigge, who arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1820, just as the "dark ages" were drawing to a close, was "bored" by Van Diemen's Land. It was a place where:

there was no public discussion of the expediency of admitting ex-convicts to society or office, and no problem of surplus convict labour. Van Diemen's Land presented only the elemental problems of how to prevent a society lapsing into anarchy... in all his letters from Van Diemen's Land he betrayed an impatience to return to a society with issues of some importance and persons of some stature.⁴³

It is hard to escape the impression that Clark, like many other Australian historians, was similarly “bored” with Van Diemen's Land and impatient to return to the ‘main’ story. Yet Australian history before 1832 is much the poorer for its general neglect of Van Diemen's Land. The different experience of the environment on the well-watered fertile island can help qualify some of the more sweeping national claims, and point to the diversity of Australian experience across time, class, and region. Moreover, in the light of contemporary environmental and social challenges, the “issues of importance” can look very different and the “elemental problems” of a society on the edge of “anarchy”, where there was no “real development,”⁴⁴ seem far more pertinent. Perhaps early Van Diemen's Land can even provide an alternative to the competing metaphors of development/progress versus destruction/conquest that have largely shaped Australian environmental history. Both metaphors reproduce the imperial paradigm of monolithic immutable Europeans and thus prevent an engagement with the past that could widen our cultural capacity to imagine future change.

Not hitherto mentioned in this historiographical review has been Aboriginal history. In part this is because most of Tasmania's rich nineteenth and twentieth century heritage of writing about Aborigines has focused on the fighting which occurred in the Black War from 1824 to 1831 – which is not a major concern of this thesis precisely because it is already comparatively well researched. Keith Windschuttle's revisionist and much publicized text, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land*, has, as I have argued in some detail elsewhere, not challenged the principal findings of any of this large body of material and presented almost no evidence for its claim to have provided an “alternative version of its subject, a counter history of race relations in this country”.⁴⁵

Henry Reynolds' *Fate of a Free People*, largely concentrates on the political negotiations that occurred with a minority of Aborigines between 1830 and 1832,

and is therefore only marginally pertinent to this thesis.⁴⁶ Lyndall Ryan's *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* is more broadly relevant – exploring Aboriginal adaptation, resistance and change since British settlement.⁴⁷ And studies of the Aboriginal communities of the Bass Strait islands, by Stephen Murray-Smith and Irynej Skira in particular, have also been important to this research.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, despite the existence of “a whole body of historical work that argues for accommodation between settlers and Aborigines”⁴⁹ in Australian history since the early 1980s, and a recognition “that the frontier was more intimate and personal than previously allowed, that there was as much sharing and accommodation between black and white cultures as there was confrontation and violence”⁵⁰, there remains only very limited research on the Aboriginal-British encounter in pre-1824 Van Diemen's Land⁵¹. For this reason it receives greater emphasis in this thesis although, despite this attention, only tentative and provisional claims can, as yet, be made. It must also be emphasized that even in this subject area, this thesis does not attempt to be *Aboriginal* history. It remains a history of the British colonizers of Van Diemen's Land - a conquest that was significantly shaped by the encounter and conflict with the existing owners and defenders of the land.

End notes: Introduction

¹ R. M. Hartwell, *The Economic Development of Van Diemen's Land, 1820-1850* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1954) 6.

² These grasslands are of two types: lowland silver tussock grassland and kangaroo grass tussock grasslands:

Lowland silver tussock grassland is generally found on alluvial river flats less than 600 m above sea level... The dominant grass is silver tussock (*Poa labillardierei*) which is a narrow-leaved species that forms dense tussocks up to one metre in height. Lowland silver tussock grassland usually occurs in association with black gum (*Eucalyptus ovata*) grassy woodland.... Kangaroo grass tussock grassland is found on well-drained fertile valley floors in low rainfall, low altitude areas. It is also found on shallow soils on well-drained hill tops and ridges on basalt, dolerite and deep sands. It is dominated by kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*) which is a deep-rooted, summer-growing, perennial grass... Other common grasses of kangaroo grass tussock grassland include wallaby grass, weeping grass and tussock grass. Kangaroo grass tussock grasslands are often characterized by a rich variety of lilies, orchids, daisies and other herbs in the patches between the tussocks" www.bushcare.tas.gov.au/info/grassylo.htm, accessed June 2004

There may be as many as 50 different species in 10 square metres of this grassland. For a description of the various types of grassy woodland in Tasmania, including the now rare *Eucalyptus ovata* (black gum) grassy woodland "so favoured by the graziers and agriculturalists", see James Reid *et al*, *Vegetation of Tasmania: Flora of Australia Supplementary Series Number 8* (Canberra: Australian Biological Resources Study, Environment Australia, 1999) 274-282.

³ T. Kaups and M. Jordan, *The American Backwoods Frontier* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989) 1.

⁴ Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001) 3.

⁵ Some environmental history has acknowledged a greater diversity of experience, notably Geoffrey Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers: Australians Make Their Environment 1788 - 1980* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981). More recently, Tim Bonyhady has argued that "the environmental aesthetic is as deeply embedded in the culture as is resistance to putting environmental ideals into practice." Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 11. However, as Bonyhady acknowledges, the long history of environmental interest he documents had little apparent impact. Moreover, as his research focuses on a relatively privileged group, Bonyhady's work on the articulated appreciation of the new environment

contributes as little to understanding the often life-changing environmental experience of the majority population as does the history it legitimately challenges.

⁶ C.M.H. Clark, *Occasional Writing and Speeches* (Melbourne: Fontana, 1980) 32, 43-5.

⁷ Tim Flannery, *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and Its Peoples* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001) 291.

⁸ William Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991) 48.

⁹ Clark, *Occasional Writing and Speeches* 54, 32, 78.

¹⁰ Alan Atkinson, "Tasmania and the Multiplicity of Nations," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 52, no. 4 (2005) 191.

¹¹ Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977) 11. Ward's only attempt to address his neglect of Van Diemen's Land is the argument that the "concentration of Irish convicts in the mother colony was one more factor tending to make New South Wales the major seed-bed of the emerging Australian ethos. It also helps to explain the traditional feeling that Tasmania, which still has a lower percentage of Catholics in its population than any other state except South Australia, is 'more English' than the rest of Australia." Ward, *The Australian Legend* 56. But this legitimate point scarcely justifies the general neglect, and is also only true before 1840, as from this date until 1853 Van Diemen's Land received all the Irish convicts coming to Australia – exiled in large numbers in crime associated with the Irish famine. During this period Van Diemen's Land also received few free settlers at a time when the convict influence in New South Wales was being rapidly diluted by free immigration.

¹² *Sydney Gazette* 17 May 1822.

¹³ N.G. Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810 - 1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 98.

¹⁴ In 1836, Van Diemen's Land share of the non-Aboriginal population of Australia had reached 36.27 per cent - 43 895 people out of a total of 120 991. It declined thereafter but was still 28 per cent in 1841 and remained by a considerable margin the second most important centre of British colonization until the gold rushes led to the extraordinary expansion of Victoria after 1851. Figures calculated from C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966) 404-9.

¹⁵ Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* 48.

¹⁶ Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves and the Hidden History of American Conservation* 3.

¹⁷ D.N. Jeans, ed., *Space and Society* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1987) 6.

¹⁸ Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, eds., *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1997) 4. Tom Griffiths, "The nature of

culture and the culture of nature", in Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White, eds., *Cultural History in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003) 70.

¹⁹ Lines, *Taming the Great South Land: A History of the Conquest of Nature in Australia* 26.

²⁰ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993) 1.

²¹ Ibid. 127, 64.

²² John Mannion, *Irish Settlements in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 56.

²³ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 272-3.

²⁴ Griffiths and Robin, eds., *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* 12.

²⁵ Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin, "Environmental History in Australasia," *Environment and History* 10 (2004) 442, 455.

²⁶ Ann Curthoys, "Cultural history and the nation", in Teo and White, eds., *Cultural History in Australia* 28-32.

²⁷ Atkinson, "Tasmania and the Multiplicity of Nations" 193-7.

²⁸ Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 2.

²⁹ M.A. Staples notes these obvious contradictions within Morgan's thesis:

Juxtaposed are claims that Tasmania was very like England, and claims that it was not. There are claims that the geography and climate were very like England when Europeans first arrived, and claims that the landscape was alien and later similarities were the product of European intervention. Some rationalisation of these differing sources is possible, but Morgan does not offer it, and the contradictions carry over into her own text.

M.A. Staples, "Comparative Landscape, European Settlement, and the Myth of Little England in Tasmania," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 49, no. 3 (2002) 194-5.

³⁰ Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) vii.

³¹ Ibid. 70.

³² Shayne Breen, *Contested Places: Tasmania's Northern Districts from Ancient Times to 1900* (Hobart: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 2001) 3, xv.

³³ Ibid. 3.

³⁴ James Boyce, "Journeying Home: A New Look at the British Invasion of Van Diemen's Land 1803-1823," *Island*, no. 66 (1996); Richard Flanagan, *A Terrible Beauty: A History of the Gordon River Country* (Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse, 1985); Tim Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* (Launceston: Pelion Press, 1989).

³⁵ Simon Cubit, *Our Disappearing Heritage: The Cultural Landscape of the Central Plateau* (Launceston: Regal Publications, 1993); Simon Cubit, "Squatters and Opportunists: Occupation of Lands to the Westward to 1830," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 34, no. 1 (1987).

³⁶ P. R. Hay, "The Environmental Movement and Historical Scholarship: Patterns of Interpenetration," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 40, no. 4 (1993) 164.

³⁷ Alex Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 38, no. 3&4 (1991) 105-6.

³⁸ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" (Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990).

³⁹ Stefan Petrow, "A Case of Mistaken Identity: The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law," *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 6, no. 1 (1998) 23. Petrow is supporting the argument put by Henry Reynolds, "Regionalism in Nineteenth Century Tasmania," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 17, no. 1 (1969). Petrow argues: "the Van Diemonian spirit can be more appropriately attributed to the free settlers, especially large land owners, who brought with them and revered the traditions of the free-born Englishmen". But while Van Diemen's Land was the scene for what seems, by the timid standards of contemporary democracy, an extraordinary level of public debate and political dissent, the outrage of an elite group of free settlers at having the 'traditions of the free-born Englishmen' curtailed by the demands of a penal colony can hardly be equated with a distinctive *Van Diemonian* spirit.

⁴⁰ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 151.

⁴¹ David Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973) 14.

⁴² West, *The History of Tasmania* 38.

⁴³ C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia: From the Earliest Times to the Age of Macquarie* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1962) 341.

⁴⁴ Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* xiii.

⁴⁵ James Boyce, "Better to Be Mistaken Than to Deceive: The Fabrication of Aboriginal History and the Van Diemonian Record," *Island* 96 (2004); James Boyce, "Fantasy Island," in Robert Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003); Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803 - 1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002) 3. For a review of the debate see Bain Attwood, *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005).

⁴⁶ Henry Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People: A Radical Re-Examination of the Tasmanian Wars* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1995).

⁴⁷ Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2nd ed. (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

⁴⁸ Stephen Murray-Smith, "Beyond the Pale: The Islander Community of Bass Strait in the 19th Century," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 20, no. 4 (1973); Irynej Skira, "Tasmanian Aborigines and Mutton Birding" (PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1993).

⁴⁹ Bain Attwood, "Historiography of the Australian Frontier" in Bain Attwood and S.G. Foster eds., *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003) 174.

⁵⁰ Tom Griffiths, "The Language of Conflict" in *Ibid.* 148.

⁵¹ It has always been recognized in Tasmanian history – including in nineteenth century works – that there was a considerable degree of co-existence between the Aborigines and the British before 1824, and that the most intense period of fighting, commonly termed the Black War, occurred between 1824 and 1831. Pre-war contact was discussed by Frances Bladel in her 1971 thesis, "British-Tasmanian Relations between 1803 - 1828" (Honours thesis, University of Tasmania, 1971). More recently, Maria Monypeny, James Boyce and Shayne Breen (all based on theses completed at the University of Tasmania) have explored the issue, but none of these have given the subject the concentrated research it deserves. James Boyce, "Surviving in a New Land: The European Invasion of Van Diemen's Land 1803 -1823" (Honours thesis, University of Tasmania, 1994), Breen, *Contested Places: Tasmania's Northern Districts from Ancient Times to 1900*, Maria Monypenny, "Going Out and Coming In: Cooperation and Collaboration between Aborigines and Europeans in Early Tasmania", *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 5, no. 1 (1995-6).

Chapter One: Van Diemonian Sea Wolves

When European settlement of Van Diemen's Land officially began in 1803, the island was already well known to Europeans. Although not visited for well over a century after the Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman, briefly landed at Blackman Bay on the Forestier Peninsular in 1642 and named the new land after the Governor of the Dutch East Indies, from 1772 the island became a refuge for explorers of the southern seas needing a safe harbour, fresh food, water and fuel. Much of Van Diemen's Land, particularly the southern and eastern coasts, were therefore already well mapped, and its birds, animals and people documented in various annals of discovery before British settlement commenced. Many visitors, particularly the French, had been sensitive observers,¹ although the largest of their scientific expeditions, led by Nicolas Baudin, had, from an Aboriginal perspective, a disastrous consequence. Governor King in Sydney feared that the French had territorial ambitions and formalized the British claim through what Baudin described as a "ridiculous" and "childish ceremony"² in front of the French on King Island in December 1802. Whatever the real French objective, Baudin expressed scepticism to Governor King about such imperial claims:

To my way of thinking, I have never been able to conceive that there was justice or even fairness on the part of Europeans in seizing, in the name of their Governments, a land seen for the first time... it appears to me that it would be infinitely more glorious for your nation, as for mine, to mould for society the inhabitants of its own country over whom it has rights, rather than wishing to occupy itself with the improvement of those who are very far removed from it by beginning with seizing the soil which belongs to them and which saw their birth.³

But, by the time the Union Jack was raised (according to Baudin, "upside down") on King Island, the conquest of Van Diemen's Land was in fact already well underway. Van Diemen's Land had been first invaded by the British in

much the same way as their own land had been by Anglo-Saxon and then Viking raiders over a millennium before – coastal forays for plunder followed by gradually expanding periods of settlement and interaction with the native peoples.

The Bass St islands were the first areas to be colonized. The seal colonies were discovered after *Sydney Cove*, returning to its home port from a Calcutta trading run, ran aground near Preservation Island in February 1797. The entire crew was landed safely, along with a speculative cargo that included 7000 gallons of spirits. Some of these men were to live on Preservation Island for 12 months, and traces (including a brick hearth) of the “first English settlement in Van Diemen’s Land” were excavated in 2002. A long boat was sent to Sydney and two of the 17 sailors manning it survived to raise the alarm. The rescue and salvage boats sent from Port Jackson noted the quantity of seals available on the islands, and by October 1798, *Nautilus* was off Preservation Island sealing.⁴

Seal skins became the first significant exports from New South Wales. From the perspective of authorities in London, the profits were timely. As Joseph Banks had written in the same year the seal colonies were discovered, Britain had by then: “possessed the country of New South Wales more than ten years and not one article has hitherto been discovered by the importation of which the mother country can receive any degree of return for the cost of founding and maintaining the colony.”⁵ By 1803 the value of seal skins taken was reported as £303 046, involving the slaughter of 57 560 seals. In 1804, the peak year, 107 591 seals were killed but a price drop, due to over supply, meant that the total value of the slaughter increased only marginally in value to £324 632. Most skins were exported to China.⁶ These figures were many times higher than the collective annual budgets, or the total agricultural output, of all the British settlements in Australia combined until the mid 1820s. Wool exports did not reach a similar value until the late 1820s.

But such slaughter, as all sensitive observers noted (including David Collins, first Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen’s Land, and the French

naturalist, Francois Peron)⁷ was not sustainable, and in 1805 the number of seals killed dropped dramatically. Only 42 041 seal skins were traded that year (although higher prices meant that they were still worth £290 896).⁸

More sustainable than the seal colonies were the human communities that developed around them. The 1804 Sydney muster lists 123 'free' men in the "islands at the southward" and King reported that 180 people in all were known to be on the islands that year.⁹ As the most accessible seals were killed, and the easy money disappeared, a different form of sealing emerged in the islands. Men lived on the islands for months, sometimes years, at a time, and gradually began to form permanent settlements. They killed seals and kangaroo, sold the skins, ate the meat from these and other animals, and even had gardens and small farms with crops and goats. The small islands were attractive sites for settlement. The islands' abundant game had never known dogs or humans, and were easily killed (and in many cases, like the King Island emu, eventually wiped out). Even more importantly, they were 'empty' – there had been no Aborigines in the Furneaux Group for thousands of years. The risks faced by sealing parties working on the mainland were thus unknown to them.¹⁰

Until 1830, sealer colonization proceeded virtually independently of official sanction and, except in a nominal sense, was not under imperial control. A Sydney capitalist, W. Stewart, wrote to the Colonial Secretary in 1815 urging action against what he termed the "banditti":

There is a custom... of whale boats from 25 to 30 feet long, who clear out from the Derwent or Port Dalrymple each with two or three people on board, and after their departure amount to six or seven in number, then go equipped with arms and dogs to hunt for their living, and save the kangaroo skins as well as what seal skins they can; the elephant they kill and destroy for their tongues... The people are a banditti of bushrangers and others who are carried... after committing robberies and depredations on the industrious settlers and depriving them of their arms, dogs, boats and other property... they encourage men belonging

to vessels to desert and leave them in distress... and likewise to rob and plunder them.¹¹

Some attempts were made to bring the islands under imperial control – indeed, securing the fishery was one of the reasons Governor King gave for the official colonization of Van Diemen's Land in September 1803 – but little authority could in practice be exercised, and from 1803 the two streams of British colonization proceeded largely independent of each other.¹²

Sealers were not the only unofficial colonizers. Whales had been hunted in the waters south of Van Diemen's Land since 1775 when three whalers of the whaling house, Enderby, pioneered whaling in the South Seas, and the whalers spent extended periods ashore gathering food, fuel and water.¹³ In subsequent years, bay whaling, which became widespread in the 1820s and 1830s, was conducted in small boats from stations established in sheltered waters around the eastern and southern coast of Van Diemen's Land, such as Adventure Bay, Oyster Bay, Recherche Bay and Southport, also before the official settlement of these regions had commenced.¹⁴

Before 1825 it was these predominantly Van Diemonian sealers and, to a lesser extent, whalers, rather than the land-hungry squattocracy or official settlement parties, who were the major instrument of territorial expansion by the British within Australia. As seal colonies were wiped out, ships pushed further around the coast of Van Diemen's Land and then along the coast of southern Australia. King Island and Robben's Island in the north west of Van Diemen's Land and Schouten Island and Waub's Boat Harbour (Bicheno) on the east coast of the main island, were significant bases. Kangaroo Island became a major sealing centre as early as 1806 and permanent sealing communities were also established on many other South Australian islands,¹⁵ at Portland Bay, Port Fairy, Westernport and Phillip Island in what is now Victoria, and King George Sound and various West Australian islands¹⁶ – all well before official settlement of these areas. After a large colony of seals was discovered at remote Macquarie Harbour, sealers even established

themselves there, although its harsh environment made for a different, more provisional, form of community.

As official settlement proceeded along the southern coast of Australia from the mid 1820s, the colonizers encountered these wandering Van Diemonians. Major Lockyer, sent from Sydney to King George Sound to found the first settlement in West Australia, found sealing parties already resident, and noted that sealers had also traversed the Swan River. Lockyer complained that "alongside this legitimate and profitable though officially uncontrollable industry there was another association entirely illegal and objectionable: the existence of bands of runaway convicts."¹⁷ Similarly, the expedition sent to found a settlement at Westernport in 1826 found a party of sealers who "hailed from Port Dalrymple, they were living in Phillip Island and moreover had a couple of acres of wheat and some maize growing well."¹⁸

These men were not at the periphery of the colonization enterprise before 1820, but were its economic and cultural heartland. They were not 'isolated', at least compared with the official settlements of Van Diemen's Land, but lived along the main trading route connecting Europe, India, and Africa with Port Jackson and the Pacific. As David Day notes, sealing was part of "a complex web of trading relations... based on Sydney and criss-crossing the Pacific."¹⁹ Close ties were established with New Zealand, Mauritius and the Pacific Islands. But, especially as seal numbers declined, it was the ties with Van Diemen's Land, both through the official British settlements and with Aboriginal-controlled regions, which were the most enduring. Lower seal numbers meant lower returns, but it also meant that the bigger merchant-capitalists from Sydney left the industry, and a multitude of locally owned small boats, provided in exchange for a percentage share of the returns, supplanted them.²⁰ In May 1820, one of the residents of Hobart Town involved in the industry, James Kelly, told the British Government's Commission of Inquiry into New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land undertaken by John Thomas Bigge, that the sealers:

clear out from the islands sometimes in boats of their own and sometimes in boats that are called the property of individuals resident here. They generally take convicts in as they go down the harbour, and proceed to the islands where they subsist on kangaroo, wombat and emu. They also seduce the native women and have children by them, and instances have occurred of their purchasing them of their husbands in exchange for the carcasses of the seals after they have taken the skins off. They likewise sometimes carry them off by force and employ them in hunting kangaroos for their skins and also in killing seals, at which the women are very expert.²¹

The question of the sealers' relations with Tasmanian Aborigines is one of the more complex issues in Van Diemen's Land history. At an early period, sometime before 1810, the sealer communities included Aboriginal women and their children – most of whom were from the north-east of the island in the territory adjoining the Furneaux Group. Lyndall Ryan estimates in *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* that by 1820 there were about 100 Aboriginal women living with 50 sealers.²² Rebe Taylor has calculated that 22 named Aboriginal women from Van Diemen's Land went to Kangaroo Island alone, but "there were possibly many more who cannot be accounted for."²³ The French Navigator D'Urville, who met the sealers of Westernport, noted that there were five Aboriginal women from Van Diemen's Land with them.²⁴ The British Government emissary to Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, accounted for 74 women in the Bass Strait in 1831 and also gave the names of 14 others still on Kangaroo Island.²⁵

As Kelly suggested, some of these women were obtained through the cultural and trading ties that developed between the two communities, and others by force. The sealers, as Ryan put it, both helped save "Aboriginal society from extinction" and were "instrumental in the destruction of a number of Aboriginal tribes."²⁶ They were often brutal men who used violence against the women and their communities, but also provided a refuge from the invasion of their homeland. Taylor is critical of historians who assume "savagery and criminality went hand in hand" and asks that sealers "be liberated from the

recycled hyperbole of their savagery” so that “we can perhaps begin to understand their complex role in Aboriginal Tasmanian history. We can remember their brutality and the tribes they destroyed, without jeopardizing the important story of Palawa survival.”²⁷ Keryn James points out that the sealers were likely to have mind-sets of slavery, given the long history of this practice, and that slavery was not officially abolished in the British colonies until 1833.²⁸

What has been insufficiently recognized in the literature is the change in relations over time, and the diversity between regions. The sealers did not have the capacity to obtain women by force alone in the first period of contact, where the limited evidence available (to be reviewed in chapter three) suggests that some sealers even learned Aboriginal languages and had an identity in tribal life. But, as the sealing community grew after 1820, and white settlement spread, friendly relations largely ended, especially in the north-east where the sealers’ impact on Aboriginal communities was most severe. Robinson documents many examples of the violence that then accompanied the sealers’ relations with Aborigines. For example, on 10 October 1829, he wrote that:

The Aboriginal female Mary informed me that the sealers at the straits carry on a complete system of slavery; that they barter in exchange for women flour and potatoes; that she herself was bought off the black men for a bag of flour and potatoes: they took her away by force, tied her hands and feet, and put her in the boat; that white man beat black woman with a rope.²⁹

And on 15 October 1830, Robinson:

Asked Buller alias Jumbo who took her from her people. Said Munro [a leading member of the sealing community in the Furneaux Group] and others rushed them at their fires and took six, that she was a little girl and could just crawl; said she had been with Munro ever since. Said the white men tie the black women to trees

and stretch out their arms (showed me the way they tied them) and then they flog them very much, plenty much blood, plenty cry – this they do if they take biscuit or sugar.³⁰

Different gangs of marauding Europeans, in the context of the outbreak of sustained fighting across the island from 1827 to 1831, abducted women all over the island. On 11 April 1828 a Captain Welsh reported to Arthur:

A party of about 50 natives has for several years been to visit Brune Island and the southern channel, more particularly Recherche Bay, always assembling there on the arrival of any of the Govt vessels... Have always shewed the greatest friendship... Their chief is a woman named Nelson (very old)... They complained bitterly against the crew of a whaleboat who a short time ago went to the Straits on a sealing voyage... They had landed on Brune and taken three women.³¹

At the same time distinct regional differences can be identified. Robinson's first encounter with the sealers of Hunter Island in the far north-west does not fit the general picture, or match his later anti-sealer rhetoric. Here, in 1830, a small group of sealers were living with east coast women, but no local Aborigines, although the Aboriginal owners of the region were regular visitors and traders. One of the men, nineteen-year old Edward Hanson, was even a second generation community member.³² In 1830 it was clearly the armed shepherds of the Van Diemen's Land Company who the Aborigines in this area feared, not the sealers.

In the context of invasion and dispossession, as Ryan suggested, the sealers could be both participants in the conquest and the Aborigines' best hope for survival. 'Mary', whose harsh treatment by the sealers was documented by Robinson, actually died, like so many other Aboriginal women, under the 'protection' of Robinson at his first Aboriginal station on Bruny Island. John Freake, who handed out the rations at the Bruny establishment, had this to say at her inquest: "I knew Mary who died last week, the woman who came from the straits. She had a slight cold on her arrival but was otherwise very

strong and hearty... she spoke English tolerably well and once said to me, 'this bad place no eggs, no kangaroo, no milk... bad place no like Messer Munros de Straits good place plenty dere.'³³

The picture was complex, but, in the context of invasion and dispossession, increasingly grim. It is indisputable that the Aborigines of the east coast of Van Diemen's Land were devastated by the loss of women to the sealers, and the possibility of being reunited with these women was one of the principal conditions for peace sought by Aboriginal leaders. In 1831, of 66 east coast people relocated by Robinson, only four were women, and of the 75 east coast women he names, 57 had lived with sealers.³⁴ But it is also true that, for all the routine violence associated with relations with sealers, many Aboriginal women seem to have decided that there was more opportunity for a new life to emerge from the devastation in their home communities through remaining with the sealers than that afforded in the main island of Van Diemen's Land, or in the Aboriginal settlement established after 1830 for their protection. Many women chose not to go with Robinson to the Aboriginal establishments at Gun Carriage and then Flinders Island, and the sad history of both suggests the wisdom of their choice. But it is also true that Robinson's work nevertheless improved their lot. The sealers were increasingly older men (in 1830, only one of the sealers of the Furneaux group described by Robinson was under 40), and more than ever dependent on women who could now leave for the nearby official Aboriginal settlement whenever they chose.³⁵ In this context, it is not surprising that exploitation reduced considerably.

Life in the sealing communities has always evoked vitriolic commentary. Sixty years ago, Leslie Norman presented a picture of "rude, rough, wife-snatching" men, who were "wreckers, pirates, freebooters, slave-drivers, murderers, rum-swillers, sea-wolves, and sea-rats – ragged drunken beasts."³⁶ But the distinctive way of life that emerged as a result of the freedom from social controls, interaction with Aborigines and dependence on the environment has also been a source of interest. The *Sydney Gazette* reported on Captain Hammond's experience of meeting Europeans and Aboriginal women from

Van Diemen's Land living on Kangaroo Island in a "curious state of independence" in 1817:

They are complete savages, living in bark huts like the natives, not cultivating anything, but living entirely on kangaroos, emus and small porcupines, and getting spirits and tobacco in barter for the skins which they capture during the sealing season. They dress in kangaroo skin without linen and wear sandals made of seal skin. They smell like foxes.³⁷

The impacts of the cultural interaction on both sides of the encounter were frequently noted. John Boulton, who stayed with James Munro on Preservation Island in September 1824, wrote that the women were "clothed in a kind of jackets made of kangaroo skins" and that the men's "general appearance is semi barbarous... They wear a kangaroo skin, coat, caps of the same and moccasins (a kind of sandal fastened with thongs of hide)."³⁸ A shared community identity was becoming evident on the islands by 1830, including a common language and new forms of cultural expression.³⁹

For all the complexity embedded in this cross-cultural encounter, the colonization of Van Diemen's Land and southern Australia by the sealers indisputably led to marked cultural change on the part of the invaders as well as the Aborigines. Change was not a one way process and whatever judgements are made about the way of life that emerged from this process, it can not be characterised as a 'Little England'. The Van Diemonians of southern Australia are undoubtedly difficult founding fathers with which to come to terms, but they pose a challenging alternative to the cultural vision expressed in the formal British settlements. The English settlement that was established when a 23-year old officer, Lieutenant Governor John Bowen, stepped ashore at the Derwent River in September 1803 to found Hobart Town, was neither the beginning nor the end of a distinctively different Van Diemen's Land.

Endnotes: Chapter One

¹ A comprehensive coverage of the French visits is given in Colin Dyer, *The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772-1839* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 2005), and Frank Horner, *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia*, (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1987). The Baudin expedition in Van Diemen's Land was discussed by the author in James Boyce and Peter Hay, "Nicolas Baudin - the Bicentenary of the Expedition to Van Diemen's Land of an Extraordinary French Explorer," *40 Degrees South* 24 (2002).

² Dyer, *The French Explorers and the Aboriginal Australians 1772-1839* 9.

³ Horner, *The French Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia* 271-3.

⁴ Tim Jetson, "An Island of Contentment? A History of Preservation Island," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 43, no. 1 (1996).

⁵ David Day, *Claiming a Continent: A New History of Australia* (Pymble, NSW: HarperCollins, 2001) 49.

⁶ Eric Rolls, "Flowers and the Wide Sea: China and Australia with Special Reference to Tasmania," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 36, no. 4 (1989) 133.

⁷ Collins, while at Port Phillip in 1803, wrote to King: "I am of the opinion that the rapacity with which these people pursue this speculation will tend more effectually to extirpate these animals than could the establishment of any system which might introduce regularity among them". David Collins (edited by John Currey), *An Account of a Voyage to Establish a Settlement in Bass's Strait* (Melbourne: The Colony Press, 1986) 138.

⁸ Statement of Southern Whale Fishery, Mitchell Library [ML], CY 1747, Brabourne Papers Vol. 4.

⁹ Stephen Murray-Smith, "Beyond the Pale: The Islander Community of Bass Strait in the 19th Century," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 20, no. 4 (1973) 169.

¹⁰ For example, according to Knopwood's diary entry for 5 March 1805, Aborigines at Oyster Bay destroyed 2000 skins and the huts and provisions of a sealing party left there. Mary Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838 : First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1977) 78.

¹¹ *Historical Records of Australia: Series 3, Volume 2* [HRA 3/2] 575-6.

¹² Governor King in 1803 advised London that it would be "expedient to restrain individuals from resorting there in too great numbers, and to fix certain times for their visiting these places", but he made no attempt, or was unable, to do this. Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 10.

¹³ Will Lawson, *Blue Gum Clippers and Whale Ships of Tasmania*, facsimile ed. (Launceston: D&C Book Distributors, 1986) 23.

¹⁴ The sites where bay whaling occurred have been described in Michael Nash, *The Bay Whalers – Tasmania's Shore-Based Whaling Industry* (Hobart: Navarine Publishing, 2003).

A century-old description of the early history of what is now Freycinet National Park, and one of the most celebrated landscapes of Tasmania, is illustrative of the first wave of Van Diemonian colonization:

When the first settlers arrived at Great Swanport in 1821 there had already been established a local whale fishery... There were among these whalers, at least three men whose names should appear in a record of this kind; the first was Captain Hazard of the brig *Promise*. He is said to have been a Negro and a very successful whaler who operated in the vicinity of Schouten Island. The wing of Hazards... named after him, marks, it is said, his favourite anchorage... [Another] figure to appear on the stage about that time was that of a Tasmanian Aboriginal who was said to have been the most successful headsman on the coast, and was reputed to be able to kill his whale with a lance if it rolled when struck by his harpoon." G. M. Parker, "The Story of Great Swanport and Its People 1821-1908."

Thus the name of the resplendent Hazards, named after the Afro-American whaler, Richard Hazard, and increasingly packaged as a marketing icon of the 'new Tasmania' - most recently expressed in the name of a new five star resort – should serve as a reminder that there has always been a different Van Diemen's Land than that which officially began in September 1803.

¹⁵ J.S. Gumpton, *Kangaroo Island 1800-1836* (Canberra: Roebuck Society, 1970) v. John Hart recalled in April 1854 that on a November 1831 sealing voyage (where he bought only 150 seal skins compared to 12 000 wallaby skins and five ton of salt) there were 16-18 sealers resident on or near Kangaroo Island, mostly ex-sailors but also runaways from Van Diemen's Land who "lived generally on islands apart from the others, some on Thistle Island near Port Lincoln, and other islands in Spencers Gulf, and there was one man who had been unvisited for three years... He had two wives whose woolly heads clearly showed their Van Diemen's Land origin... he had every comfort about him. A convenient stone house, good garden, small wheat and barley paddock, with pigs, goats and poultry made him quite independent of the vessel except for tea and tobacco. He had collected 7000 wallaby skins. I sold these in Sydney for the Chinese market." John Hart recollections in Thomas Francis Bride, *Letters from Victorian Pioneers* (South Yarra, Vic.: Lloyd O'Neil, 1983) 51-53.

¹⁶ Five Aboriginal women from Van Diemen's Land were in Mauritius in 1826 and were repatriated to Sydney, two eventually returning to Launceston in 1827. There was also an 1842 report that Robert Gamble, originally from Van Diemen's Land, was living in Bald Island in West Australia with Aboriginal women and children. Brian Plomley and Kristen Anne Henley, "The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 37, no. 2&3 (1990) 52, 45.

¹⁷ Ronald Worthy Gribbin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol. 2, 1804-1828*, Vol. 2 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939) 645.

¹⁸ HRA 3/5, 827.

¹⁹ Day, *Claiming a Continent: A New History of Australia* 51.

²⁰ The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 10 December 1824 reported: "we understand that an extraordinary number of small colonial craft are employed this season at the sealing islands in the straits". George Meredith's 1824 agreement with sealers is listed in his papers – Meredith provided the boat and was to receive a quarter of the takings (Meredith papers, Archives Office of Tasmania [AOT] NSA 123/1).

²¹ HRA 3/3, 462.

²² Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981) 69.

²³ Rebe Taylor, *Unearthed: The Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002) 34.

²⁴ Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804 - 1828* 652.

²⁵ Taylor, *Unearthed: The Aboriginal Tasmanians of Kangaroo Island* 35.

²⁶ Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* 71.

²⁷ Rebe Taylor, "Savages or Saviours: The Australian Sealers and Aboriginal Tasmanian Survival," *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 66 (2000) 77-8, 84.

²⁸ Keryn James in Anne Chittleborough, Gillian Dooley and Rick Hosking Rick, eds., *Alas, for the Pelicans!: Flinders, Baudin and Beyond Essays and Poems* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002) 175-6.

²⁹ N.J.B. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 82.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 249.

³¹ AOT CSO 1/327/7578, cited in *Ibid.* 49.

³² Robinson described the sealing community at Hunter's Island in the following terms:

The sealers had several cabins covered with grass... at some distance a vast number of kangaroo skins was laid out. They had a great many dogs. I should suppose thirty. There was six Aboriginal females and one male Aborigine who had come to them about seven days before and was a native of this part. One woman was a native of this part and the other five were eastern women and had been living with white men several years. They had a grotesque appearance dressed in frocks made with the skins of kangaroo, with red caps.

One of the sealers was a "native of New Zealand... from the Bay of Islands... he had two women and was the head man among the sealers and considered the most honourable. He was very civil". Others were Robert Drew and David Kelly and "the half caste youth, named Edward Hanson". *Ibid.* 180. Hanson was described by Robinson as "a fine stout well-made young man about 18 years of age. He was a half-caste, his father a white man and his mother an aboriginal. He spoke the English tongue."

³³ *Ibid.* 105.

³⁴ Plomley, "The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community" 52.

³⁵ For example, Charley Peterson, sealer of Gun Carriage Island, told Robinson on 12 November 1830 that if he "took his women he did not know what he should do, as he could not help himself." Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 271.

³⁶ Leslie Norman, *Sea Wolves and Bandits: Sealing, Whaling, Smuggling and Piracy, Wild Men of Van Diemen's Land, Bushrangers and Bandits, Wrecks and Wreckers. With a Chronology of Curious and Interesting Facts Relating to Old Van Diemen's Land, and (from 1856) to Tasmania* (Hobart: J. Walch, 1946) 96.

³⁷ *Sydney Gazette* 5 April 1817, cited in Murray-Smith, "Beyond the Pale: The Islander Community of Bass Strait in the 19th Century" 170. This quote was incorrectly attributed to Captain Sutherland in 1819 by the South Australia Land Company in 1832 and their mistake has been commonly replicated by historians.

³⁸ Plomley, "The Sealers of Bass Strait and the Cape Barren Island Community" 55.

³⁹ As early as 9 December 1830, Robinson talked derisively of the "island slang". He also noted that "Island women" had dances "not known on main". Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 290, 95.

Chapter Two: The Early Years 1803 - 1808

Port Jackson precursor

Van Diemen's Land was officially settled by a small party from Sydney nearly 16 years after the First Fleet had arrived at Port Jackson, and five years after the first occupation of Preservation Island. Some understanding of the adaptations to the environment by New Holland Britons before 1803 is necessary both as a benchmark to assess subsequent Van Diemonian change, and to understand a critical source of the cultural mythology that has so distorted the island's separate and distinctive history.

The British struggle to survive in early New South Wales is well documented. Surgeon White had summarised the colonists' predicament in April 1790, writing that: "much cannot now be done, limited in food and reduced as the people are, who have not had one ounce of fresh animal food since first in the country; a country and place so forbidding and so hateful as only to merit execration and curses..."¹ David Collins, the Judge Advocate and second in command at Port Jackson until 1796, gave, in his *Account of the Colony of New South Wales*, a vivid description of the "great despair" in Sydney during the 1790s which resulted from the increasingly desperate food shortages. In July 1790 there were 488 on the sick list and 143 deaths. In 1791 another 163 died from sickness and, as even the nutritionally inadequate imported supplies of salted provisions ran out, by 1792 the death toll had passed 450 people and a partial evacuation to Norfolk Island occurred.² Nor was the problem quickly solved. As late as 1795 Collins could report that "the quantity of fish taken... was not often much more than equal to supplying the people employed in the boats with one pound of fish per man... Neither was much advantage gained employing people to shoot for the settlement", and by 1 July there was no salt or fresh meat in the ration at all.³

Although farming was difficult, the more immediate cause of the failure to procure fresh food was the lack of success with hunting and fishing. Eric Rolls has argued that the reason relatively few kangaroos were killed was because the animal was relatively uncommon at the time of European settlement.⁴ The other likely explanation for the British failure to kill much fresh meat was that the main British hunting technology, the gun, had a very limited application. Gun inaccuracy was such that up to the mid nineteenth century, "firing at ranges much over 100 yards was usually a waste of shot and powder. Even at this range the musket was unreliable: its only effective use was to pour volleys into massed troops at very short range."⁵ Given the inaccuracy of the firearms, it was extremely difficult to get close enough to shoot kangaroo, wallaby or emu. Burn reported of the kangaroo as late as 1840 that, "so watchful is that gentle, inoffensive creature, that it is almost impossible to get within gun-shot of it."⁶ Furthermore, guns were heavy to transport in the bush by foot, and, as the Danish adventurer who took part in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land and later returned as a convict, Jorgen Jorgenson, noted, "muskets and powder very frequently get wet".⁷

The British response to the difficulty of shooting native animals was to import hunting dogs. Presumably this strategy emerged at least in part from the observation of Aboriginal hunting methods, although the British were fortunate that colonization had proceeded in the last days of the widespread use of hunting dogs in their homeland.⁸ Variations of these large hounds, used mainly by this time to kill deer, were known as the deerhound, the Irish wolfhound, Highland deerhound and Scottish greyhound. Stonehenge wrote in 1867 that this animal "claimed his descent from the most ancient race in Britain", but, he reported, they were now little used.⁹ Such animals were often crossed with greyhounds in Australia. One settler reported on the outcome of such breeding: "the dogs used here to hunt the kangaroo have the shape and general character of the greyhound, but are very much larger in size, and coarser all together, uniting great strength with speed."¹⁰

The use of such animals did eventually bring some hunting success in New South Wales, but because the native animals had long since adapted to the dingo, widely employed by the Aborigines in hunting, there were still few killed, and a dependence on imported food remained.

This inability to obtain food, as well as the lack of appropriate clothing and shelter, meant that moving beyond the immediate environs of the settlement was still a very difficult matter for the British in the early nineteenth century. Early exploration trips in New South Wales were hampered by the need to carry all supplies, limiting their range and duration in 1790 to about 30 miles and five days. A decade later a British expedition could still only manage a maximum of 25 days in the bush.¹¹

The generally limited level of bush knowledge in Sydney on the eve of Van Diemonian settlement is revealed in the record of the Barrallier expedition of November 1802, although some significant adaptations are also evident. Glen McLaren, in *Beyond Leichhardt: Bushcraft and the Exploration of Australia*, notes that this party travelled furthest and remained out the longest of any expedition conducted to that time. Some indigenous foods could now be obtained, and tents - hot, leaky and too heavy to carry without horses - had finally been abandoned. Barrallier still had to take Aborigines with him to build effective temporary shelters, but after several weeks' practice he could state that the Aborigines were not "absolutely necessary to me in making the huts for myself, my people and the provisions at night".¹² However, despite such innovations, Barrallier's expedition was still a military style operation, involving frequent returns to supply depots. Under these circumstances travel in the bush remained a highly organized, clumsy and limited affair, with the environment an obstacle to overcome, not a potential resource on which to depend. The New South Wales bush remained, in late 1802, an alien and dangerous place for Britons.

This was, however, a time of rapid change. By 1805 Governor King preferred to employ on exploratory parties "men who had been in the practice of frequenting that part... who had been accustomed to live in the woods."¹³ These convicts and ex-convicts had learnt a lighter movement, probably from extended contact with the Aborigines, and accessed food and shelter direct from the bush. In February 1805 the *Sydney Gazette* termed these men "bush rangers", from the American term meaning "skilled frontiersmen".¹⁴

But it was in Van Diemen's Land that this adaptation to the Australian environment escalated most dramatically. When the small party under the command of John Bowen, a 23 year old officer newly arrived from England, began the first official British settlement in Van Diemen's Land in the spring of 1803, all echoes of White's "execration and curses" were to disappear with extraordinary speed.

The British at Risdon Cove in 1803

Governor King's reasons for founding a settlement at the Derwent in 1803 were primarily strategic and economic, although the advantages for convict management were also welcome. He informed London that:

My reasons for making the settlement are: - the necessity there appears of preventing the French gaining a footing on the east side of these islands; to divide the convicts; to secure another place for procuring timber, with any other natural production that may be discovered and found useful; the advantage that may be expected in raising grain; and to promote the seal fishery.¹⁵

The first encounter between the Aborigines and the British at Risdon Cove after the arrival of HM Brig *Lady Nelson* is now shrouded in silence as Bowen, who was on the whaler *Albion*, only arrived some days later, no doubt delayed by the

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capture of three whales on the journey.¹⁶ All that is now recorded is the new Lieutenant Governor's report to King that Aborigines had been "seen" before he arrived but "I have not made any search after them, thinking myself well off if I never see them again."¹⁷ Further details were given by John West in his 1852 *History of Tasmania*, presumably on the basis of oral testimony, but their veracity can no longer be verified:

The party dispatched from Sydney, to take possession of the island, who landed in September 1803, on their arrival at Risdon saw nothing of the natives. A solitary savage, armed with a spear, afterwards entered the camp, and was cordially greeted. He accepted the trinkets which they offered, but he looked on the novelties scattered about without betraying surprise. By his gestures they inferred that he discharged them from their trespass. He then turned towards the woods, and when they attempted to follow, he placed himself in the attitude of menace, and poised his spear.¹⁸

The only other documentary source on the matter, an Aboriginal recollection recorded in the diary of George Augustus Robinson in July 1831, suggests a less pacific first encounter:

In conversation with Woorradry.¹⁹ Said that he saw the first ships come to Van Diemen's Land when they settled at Hobart Town, called Niberlooner; that the Py.dare natives speared some white men who landed in a boat, one man in the thigh; that white men went after the natives, the natives see them come but did not run away, saw their guns and said white men carry wood; that by and by white men shoot two blacks dead, when they all became frightened and run away.²⁰

The occurrence of an early hostile exchange is also suggested in the oral testimony of the convict Edward White to the government-appointed Aborigines Committee in 1830, and in a written account by American Amasa Delano.²¹ Both

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claimed that a small Aboriginal child was abducted early in the Risdon settlement. Further evidence is that Collins wrote in mid May 1804 of a "former affair" having soured relations.²²

Regardless of what happened in the first weeks of settlement, it is possible that the long-term significance of settlement was at first missed by the Aborigines. Whalers had already joined explorers as visitors to the Derwent - the estuary being a well known source of food, water and timber, not to mention whales - and 49 Britons setting up their 'tent huts', collecting water, lighting fires and doing some hunting, could reasonably have been assumed to be more of the same. However, by the end of September, when Bowen reported that prisoners and soldiers have got "very comfortable huts", the different nature of this settlement would have been clear.²³

The environmental advantages to the invading Britons of the Risdon site have been little recognized by historians, who have tended to focus on its doubtful water supply. Risdon was recommended as the appropriate site for settlement by Bass and Flinders, following their 1798 visit, on the basis of its creek, fertile valley, rich soil, and that it was "well covered with grass" and had "grassy slopes." Bowen told King on 20 September 1803 that "there are so many fine spots on the borders of the river that I was a little puzzled to fix upon the best place." However, he chose Risdon Cove because of the water supply and, with the "extensive valleys laying at the back of it, I judged it the most convenient." Thus, both explorers and Commandant emphasised that there was rich pasture on hand. Risdon and its environs were open country, known today as grassy woodlands. Indeed, Bowen described the area as "more like a nobleman's park in England than an uncultivated country... very little trouble might clear every valley I have seen in a month."²⁴ These grasslands extended north from the valleys behind Risdon Cove for over a hundred miles. The first settler guide to be published in 1820 noted that Hobart to Launceston can be traversed on

horse-back "with almost as much facility as if the island had been in a state of civilization and cultivation for centuries."²⁵

The major advantage these grasslands afforded the British had more to do with kangaroo and emu than cattle and sheep. Much of the eastern shore of the Derwent and up the Jordan Valley, and further east to Pitt Water and the Coal River Valley, abounded in game, especially the forester kangaroo and the now extinct Tasmanian emu. Edward White recalled that "there were hundreds and hundreds of kangaroo about Risdon then."²⁶ And the sub-species of the mainland emu appears to have been, contrary to the limited information published on it, very common at first settlement. One early hunter recalled that emus were then plentiful about New Norfolk, Salt Pan Plains, the Coal River and Kangaroo Point.²⁷ The *Sydney Gazette* noted in its first report on "that settlement which the Commandant has named Hobart" that, "close to the settlement are abundance of Emues, large kangaroos, and Swans."²⁸

These open grassland plains were developed and maintained as hunting grounds through regular seasonal burning by Aborigines. Archaeologist, Rhys Jones, coined the term 'fire stick farming' in 1969,²⁹ but the systematic nature of Aboriginal land management was recognized in the nineteenth century. Edward Curr jr, a Van Diemonian pioneer emigrant to Port Phillip, believed there was an "instrument in the hands of these savages which must be credited with results which it would be difficult to overestimate. I refer to the fire-stick... he tilled his land and cultivated his pastures with fire." Curr suggested that "it may perhaps be doubted whether any section of the human race has exercised a greater influence on the physical condition of any large portion of the globe than the wandering savages of Australia."³⁰

The British were adept at living in grasslands and clearly appreciated having settled, for the first time on the Australian continent, in a comparatively familiar environment. They were to experience nothing comparable in New South Wales

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until the celebrated crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 by an expedition led by three large landowners seeking new pastures – Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson³¹ – and these lands were thereafter accessed primarily for grazing by a small elite, not as the hunting-pastoral common which remained Van Diemen's Land. Moreover in Van Diemen's Land the British hunting dogs killed the kangaroo and emu far more easily than on the mainland. Probably there were more of these animals, but certainly in a land where there was no dingo, they were considerably more accessible. The large 'boomers' and emus were familiar with no predator faster than the persistent but slow thylacine, and found the introduced carnivore a formidable foe.³²

Shellfish, especially mussels and oysters, were also readily accessible on the Derwent's eastern shore, whilst swans occurred in large numbers a short distance up the river. Such bounty ensured that there would be no repeat of the disastrous first few years at Port Jackson. For Bowen's small party of convicts, soldiers, and a few free settlers, Van Diemen's Land was a veritable Eden.

The abundant availability of food outweighed the problem of Risdon's doubtful water supply. The creek at Risdon was revealed by the summer to be inadequate to sustain a large settlement, but for a small military post it remained sufficient. The harbour was similarly good enough. A bridge and causeway built across Risdon Cove in 1850/1 caused the rapid and extensive silting of the upstream section of the original Risdon Cove. In Bowen's time, however, it could be reached by boat.³³

There were serious problems at Risdon but these related more to controlling the convicts and the independent and feisty New South Wales Corps than to obtaining food or water. Phillip Tardif has convincingly argued, in his comprehensive overview of the Risdon settlement, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania*, that Bowen was too inexperienced to be an effective first governor and lacked a basic knowledge of

Australian conditions. However, Bowen's choice of Risdon is no evidence of it. More pertinent is the young officer's misplaced doubts about the long term suitability of the Derwent generally for British settlement. After Bowen left for Sydney in January 1804, ostensibly to try convict offenders, a senior officer of scientific bent, William Paterson, reported to Joseph Banks in London that: "our accounts from the southward are not very favourable", and that the Derwent "from all accounts can never be of any great consequence. It is much to be regretted that when these surveys are taken that some person qualified to judging of soil and situation did not accompany them." Fortunately this assessment was soon to be corrected by someone much more qualified and experienced to make them. Paterson's letter concluded: "PS 14 March The Lady Nelson is just arrived from the Southward... Collins is much delighted with the Derwent."³⁴ David Collins, the veteran officer of New South Wales, had been placed in charge of a far larger expedition that had been sent direct from London about a year before, also on the basis of King's fears about the designs of the French. The long delay in reaching Van Diemen's Land was caused by the fact that Collins' first choice of settlement was Port Phillip Bay.

Port Phillip

The British sojourn at Port Phillip had many parallels with the challenging early years at Port Jackson. The biggest problem to emerge after landing in October 1803 was obtaining fresh food and, before the year was out, Collins had decided to evacuate to the sanctuary of Van Diemen's Land. Consideration of the short-lived Port Phillip settlement (that was located near present day Sorrento) is, nevertheless, important for two reasons. First, it highlights the limited applicability of British technology and knowledge to the Australian environment, even after 15 years of antipodean living. And, secondly, the Port Phillip experience became an important part of the cultural background the Britons brought with them to Van Diemen's Land, influencing responses to both the Aborigines and the land.

Marjorie Tipping, in *Convicts Unbound*, has studied the individual lives of all but five of the 308 convicts who left London with Collins on 24 April 1803 on board the *Calcutta*. Her analysis supports Maxwell-Stewart's conclusion that convicts and bushrangers were "broadly representative of the early nineteenth century working population of the British Isles."³⁵ Tipping concludes that they were handpicked, with almost all having trades suitable to begin a new colony. There were, for example, a dozen shoemakers, nine sawyers, four carpenters and five fishers. This was in marked contrast to the first fleet. But perhaps the more illuminating fact is that few practiced their trade after being transported,³⁶ indicating perhaps that their carefully selected knowledge had limited application in the new land.

The *Calcutta* convicts were a multicultural lot. There were six or seven Jews from the East End of London, a Pole, German, Portuguese, two Dutch, an Afro-American - the violin player William Thomas - and a French confectioner, Nicholas Piroëlle. There were also 17 Irish (although all were arrested in England), at least eight Scots, and the same number of Welsh. Their ages when convicted ranged from two boys aged nine, William Steel and William Appleton, to the 57 year old Romani (Gypsy), Robert Cooper.³⁷ A few educated convicts were on board, and at least one of these was a wealthy man. James Grove left England with his wife "without a sigh" and reported that the Governor and Chaplain treated his family kindly.³⁸

Of great subsequent use to Collins were seven recently disgraced soldiers who had been involved in the Gibraltar mutiny. These prisoners were hastily taken on board as part of a cover-up to protect their commanding officer, the King's son, the Duke of Kent (later to become the father of Queen Victoria), against whom they had mutinied on Christmas Eve 1802.³⁹

Although there was an overwhelming predominance of males, there were some women. Seventeen wives left England with their convict husbands, including two defacto partners, and journeyed with their six sons and five daughters. There were also the wives of eight male settlers. Finally, there were two individual women settlers, including Mrs Hobbs, a naval widow with five children.

This expedition had the benefit of antipodean experience, most significantly through Collins, but also James Carrett, a convict who was to become a man of some notoriety in Van Diemen's Land, who had illegally returned to England from New South Wales.⁴⁰ Given the Lieutenant Governor's background, it is not surprising that hunting dogs were on board. The Surveyor, G. P Harris, lamented the loss of his dogs on the journey out "as a good dog is invaluable at New South Wales both as a guard for our tents and to hunt kangaroos."⁴¹ Collins had better luck with his "large staghound, intended to keep him supplied with fresh game in his new home."⁴²

Nevertheless, hunting at Port Phillip was always difficult. Collins wrote to London on 14 November 1803: "I have been much disappointed in my hope of saving the salt provisions by the issuing of fish and kangaroo occasionally, but of the latter not one has yet been killed, and of the former but very few taken".⁴³ Harris expanded on this theme in a private letter to his mother the same month: "besides the want of water and soil, there is very little fish, except for sharks which are amazingly large and numerous - no quadrupeds of any kind have been seen except native dogs and two kangaroos which I saw while surveying but none have been killed." Fishing was equally frustrating and, as it would be for a later generation of Europeans in the area, "some fried coarse shark flesh" was already a "luxury". After the long voyage, this was a very serious matter: "such is the wish for fresh food after being six months starving on salt provisions of a miserable kind, that a dead fowl no matter how it died is most delicate". No wonder Harris was moved to describe this land, in "appearance truly delightful", as "the most deceitful I ever saw."⁴⁴

The first Lieutenant on the *Calcutta*, James Tuckey, who later wrote *An Account of a Voyage to Establish a Colony at Port Phillip in the Bass's Straits*⁴⁵ confirmed the futility of fishing in his report *General Observations of Port Phillip*,⁴⁶ but he did claim to have killed one kangaroo by 26 October, although the Chaplain and diarist, Robert Knopwood, did not eat his first until a month later – and "very excellent it was."⁴⁷ Such delicacies were not, however, for the lower orders. The convict, William Buckley, never tasted "the boomer" until he started living with Aborigines some months after his escape from the settlement.⁴⁸ By the end of January 1804, according to Harris, there had still only been two kangaroos killed, although the fishing had improved somewhat and they were taking considerable numbers of lobster with a hook and line and Aboriginal traps.⁴⁹ The shortage of fresh food meant there were major health problems at Port Phillip – there were never less than 30 people under medical treatment. Scurvy remained rampant and Collins later reported to London that there had been 18 deaths during the three months spent there.⁵⁰

The difficulty of securing kangaroo at Port Phillip reflected the problems that the British still had in hunting kangaroo on the Australian mainland, exacerbated by the antipodean inexperience of the imported hunting dogs. But it was Aboriginal resistance in the context of an under-manned and rebellious British military that explains why evacuation, rather than relocation to more promising locations within Port Phillip Bay (such as the nearby Yarra River), was decided on so quickly. As early as 8 November *The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* missionary, Samuel Crook, observed that "the objection against settling here is the number of natives and the small number of marines we have; so it is probable the colony will be removed to Port Dalrymple".⁵¹

Relations with the Aborigines had got off to a bad start. Collins, as his *Account of the Colony of New South Wales* reveals, well knew from his Port Jackson experience of the importance of establishing peaceful relations at the outset.

Chapter Two

However, the supply ship *Ocean*, with most of the officers on board, arrived before Collins on the *Calcutta*, and these less experienced men decided on a show of force to secure control. Crook was horrified that, when the landing party was met by a native brandishing a shield and a spear, Captain Mertho's party fired at and pursued the Aborigines, burning down their huts and stealing goods. Three others shot and killed another Aborigine and took ornaments and weapons.

It was only when Collins arrived that negotiations belatedly commenced and blankets and biscuit were exchanged.⁵² It was probably already too late. Soon afterwards, the first survey party led by Tuckey and Harris had a serious fight at Corio Bay, involving an estimated 200 Aborigines. Tuckey acknowledged that two Aborigines were killed, including the "chief" who seemed "to despise the superior effect of our arms".⁵³ Harris also described his near death at the hands of the natives, believing he had only just escaped being "grilled and eaten."⁵⁴

The realpolitik of invasion had now dawned on all. Even the idealistic Samuel Crook wrote that "it was thought necessary to show them the effect of firearms", and offered no further comment. Collins makes no mention of the matter in official correspondence, while Knopwood, on 23 October 1803, justifies it on the grounds that the natives would have killed if nothing were done.⁵⁵ The Britons became increasingly frightened after these incidents, fearing vengeance for the deaths. Large groups of Aborigines were believed to be gathering in the north, and noises that the settlers feared were war cries could be heard across the water. The fires all round were seen to be a particularly ominous sign.⁵⁶

The British were now largely confined to the small area secured around the settlement. Collins issued a general order on 20 November 1803 warning against travel even in the vicinity of near-by Arthur's Seat, since it was believed large groups of natives were gathering there. On 12 January 1804 he issued a stern warning against any act of provocation, ordering that the theft of "spears,

fish gigs, gum or any other article from the natives" would be punished for robbery, and "if any of the natives are wantonly or inconsiderately killed or wounded or if any violence is offered to a woman, the offender will be tried for his life." Convicts were forbidden to go to the seashore for crayfish from sunset to sunrise. All outlying huts were destroyed and everyone was required to concentrate around the main compound.⁵⁷

Collins knew there was good land and ample fresh water available nearby. The Scottish convict, David Gibson, one of the first runaways, first alerted him to the river at the head of the bay.⁵⁸ However, Collins informed Hobart that "were I to settle in the upper part of the harbour, which is full of natives, I should require four times the strength I have now."⁵⁹

Collins had originally requested a garrison of 100 men but received only half this number.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it was not primarily the number of men available, but their unreliability for the task at hand that limited his options. Collins' challenge, one that was to prove a recurring issue for subsequent commanders, was to assert effective control over the military. The rank and file were from a similar social background to the convicts. Moreover, they too were to some extent under 'sentence', generally seeking little more than to survive a prescribed period of poorly rewarded service. Pushed too hard there was always the possibility that they would identify a shared interest with the convicts, and, if not swap sides, at least withdraw from active risk-taking in the name of authority. One of the non-negotiables in terms of achieving effective rank and file cooperation consistently proved to be the provision of a liberal rum ration. This, however, produced its own discipline problems, especially as the military often drank with the convicts.

At Port Phillip the inherent tensions were soon transparent. Discontent among the marines grew alarmingly, and excessive drinking was a major problem. There were two court-martials, and by the New Year Collins was very concerned about the possibility of mutiny.⁶¹

Collins' creative response to this situation was to institute a measure that was to be refined by later governors – using convicts to police themselves. By offering indulgences to convicts to do the real work of the military a much more effective supervision was realized. Many of the convicts were experienced former soldiers, having served in the French wars, and had greater incentive than enlisted men to do the bidding of those who held the keys to their freedom. The Gibraltar mutineers in particular were to prove Collins' best and most reliable troops. Harris was very positive about these men: "they are fine fellows whom you might trust your life with and behave extremely well – they form part of the Night Association."⁶²

It was an effective internal stratagem – but insufficient in itself to overcome the larger problem. By the end of the year, Collins, faced with threats from Aborigines and military dissension, and the colonists' deteriorating health, decided, like many struggling European explorers had before him, to leave for the well known refuge of Van Diemen's Land.⁶³ The party sent to consider the option of Port Dalrymple in December faced Aboriginal resistance, and many shots were fired, but Collins seems to have settled on the Derwent even before hearing a report of this. He summarised to King the reasons for his choice:

The advantages which I must derive from establishing myself in a place already settled had certainly great weight with me... but a still stronger consideration than this determined my election of that place... I discovered an improper spirit among some of my military... on duly weighing the whole circumstance, together with the weakness of my party in point of numbers, I thought I could not do better than repair to the Derwent, where, by being joined by a detachment of the New South Wales Corps a spirit of emulation would be excited and check given to that discontent which had manifested itself among my own people. By this addition of strength I should, moreover, never have much apprehension

from a large sick-list, which indeed was once so great after the departure of the *Calcutta* marines that I was obliged to reduce the number of my sentinels by day, mounting a picquet in the evening.

In addition to these primary factors, Collins "conceived the local situation of the River Derwent more adapted for commercial purposes. Its position at the southern extremity of Van Diemen's Land gives it an advantage over every other harbour yet discovered in the straits", and he hoped it would be "a point of shelter to ships from Europe, America and India, either for whaling or other speculation" and "will be greatly resorted to."⁶⁴

Once the decision was made, events moved quickly. Most of the British were gone from Port Phillip Bay by the end of January 1804, although unexpected shipping delays meant it was nearly six months before the evacuation of the remainder was complete.

There were few fruits from the Port Phillip sojourn, although some Aboriginal technology was copied. Tuckey, whilst exploring near Cape Schanck, "built a little shelter resembling a native hut" and the building of similar huts would later prove essential for mobility in Van Diemen's Land.⁶⁵ Warm Aboriginal coats and rugs inspired both reproduction and theft. These were made, according to Tuckey, of 10 to 20 opossum skins "neatly sewn together".⁶⁶

Of the colonists, Groves was the most entrepreneurial in accessing the land's resources. He remembered being "occupied at Port Philip in looking after an alkali: it was so ordered by providence that I fixed on one, perhaps the most luxuriant vegetable in nature for yielding the marine alkali, or soda...I made a considerable quantity... of as excellent a quality as any you buy under the name of pearl ashes in London." Groves also made tea which he believed "equal to any of the common black teas sold in England."⁶⁷

Port Philip had, in one other matter at least, been a success for the British. Like Port Jackson, it had been what its political masters intended, a prison without walls. Of the 27 convicts who absconded at Port Phillip, 20 returned, six died and only William Buckley survived to live, with the help of the Aborigines (with whom he was to remain until 1835).⁶⁸ Collins was able to exploit the real threat posed by the land and the native people to control the convicts. He warned on New Year's Eve 1803 that:

We cannot but pity the delusion which some of the prisoners labour under in thinking that they can exist when deprived of the assistance of Government. Their madness will be manifest to themselves when they shall feel too late that they have wrought their own ruin. After those who have absconded we shall make no further search certain that they must soon return or perish by famine.⁶⁹

As the British prepared to leave for Van Diemen's Land a month later, Collins again took the opportunity afforded by the return of a forlorn runaway to warn of the impossibility of survival outside of imperial sanction. He wrote of those being now left behind that "they lived in constant fear of the natives by whose hands it is now more than probable they have by this time perished, or if this should not have happened how is it possible that strong hearty men... can exist in a country which no where affords a supply to the traveler."⁷⁰

Sullivans Cove: A land of plenty

The approach up the Derwent was recorded by G.P Harris: "we are now riding snug, about two miles from as beautiful a country in appearance as I ever saw... From the great number of fires we see all around it appears to be tolerably well inhabited." Whalers were again present to welcome the British, Harris recording that two "have very lately put in here without knowing of a settlement being formed." Harris's appreciation of the new land was no doubt facilitated by a

satisfied stomach. Even before arriving at Risdon Cove, he ate mussels and oysters gathered by the party that landed on 11 February in Frederick Henry Bay. Now the Surveyor looked forward to even better things to come: "I am in hopes we shall want no supply of game in this new settlement. We know kangaroo to be in great abundance." He was not disappointed, finding that the "woods abound with kangaroos and emus... Six or Seven kangaroos have been killed in a forenoon with greyhounds by the surgeon at Risdon Cove." The black swan was also in "astonishing numbers" and Harris considered it "excellent food, as white and good as any geese that I ever eat in England". Not surprisingly, Harris concluded that there was a stark contrast between the "barbarous shores of Basses Strait" and the "noble and fertile banks of the Derwent."⁷¹

A day after arriving at Risdon, the settler William Collins (no relation to the Lieutenant Governor) and Harris selected a site for a new settlement at Sullivans Cove, on the western shore of the Derwent (although Tardif argues that credit for their choice rightfully belongs with the convict surveyor already resident at Risdon, James Meehan⁷²). Harris described the location of 'the camp' (as it was colloquially known until the 1820s):

our settlement is formed about 16 miles from the mouth of the Derwent, one of the finest rivers I ever beheld... deep enough and large enough to admit the whole navy of Great Britain at once. The shores rise gradually into hills covered with fine grass and noble trees – we are settled on the left hand side going up in a small cove where there is an island and an excellent run of fresh water - the town is built on a fine gently rising plain.

The big trees then to be found near Mt Wellington also impressed the visitor:

The hills and sides of Table Mountain are covered with immense trees which all the year round are in verdure – some of the trees are of an incredible size. In an excursion I made a few weeks since towards the

mountains I saw one tree at the bottom of which was hollow and on the inside measured from side to side 14 feet 8 inches - and on the outside 44 feet round. It grew perfectly strait (*sic*) for full 160 feet before a single branch grew from it and was altogether the most stately tree I ever beheld.⁷³

Despite its attractions, the decision to settle on the western shore came at a cost. The main hunting grounds were now less accessible and potentially dangerous (especially for the majority who could not swim) boat trips across the river were required to access them. The extensive tree cover, hilly terrain and generally poor soils also limited the suitability of land around 'the camp' for agricultural and pastoral pursuits. Groves even believed that the "the country around is so hilly, the hills so stony, and the flat land so scant, that I am very much of opinion, after it has been tried a year of two... the colony will ultimately go up to Port Jackson, or north of it."⁷⁴ So limited was the land for farming that the free settlers opted to move up river to 'New Town', ensuring the first physical divide between the lands of the convict and the free.

Despite the undoubted necessity of an improved water supply, Collins' decision to relocate to Sullivans Cove was probably more about separating his settlement from that at Risdon Cove, than any other factor. It was immediately evident that the troublesome, aggressive and mutinous New South Wales Corps would be difficult to bring under control, and that their officers were unlikely to accept the authority of an officer of the Royal Marines. Thus, despite Collins' poor opinion of his own marines, and having coming to the Derwent with the stated intention of augmenting his military strength, he ultimately preferred no reinforcements to these unruly and discontented soldiers. Collins never made any use of their services and made no attempt to bring Risdon under his direct command until forced to do so by a direct order from King, contemporaneous with the outbreak of serious conflict with the Aborigines in May 1804.

It would not have been long after moving to Sullivans Cove before an associated advantage from the move became apparent to the Lieutenant Governor. The Derwent was a tribal boundary, and the move therefore provided an opportunity to begin diplomacy anew. The first contact with the Aborigines on the western shore of the Derwent is recorded by Knopwood on 9 March 1804: "many of the natives were about the camp... Cap. Merthow and Mr. Brown had an interview with them on the shore near the *Ocean*."⁷⁵ Relations with the Aborigines on the western shore of the Derwent remained comparatively peaceful for many years, and Collins must be given considerable personal credit for this. At Port Jackson he had studied and reflected on Aboriginal-settler relations, and *An Account of the Colony of New South Wales* includes extensive sections on Aboriginal customs. Collins' biographer, John Currey, notes that "none of his other activities in the colony were recorded in such detail or with such a sense of involvement."⁷⁶ Inga Clendinnen has observed that this interest matured over time and "as the slow years pass we watch David Collins ripen into an absorbed observer of native conduct, and a man capable of recognizing, indeed of honouring, a quite different way of being... [Collins] becomes our best and most sensitive informant on Australian ways of life and thought, especially in matters of justice and rights."⁷⁷

Collins can thus legitimately be described as the European 'expert' on Aborigines in the 1790s, despite the obvious limits to such expertise. At least he knew that, whatever the legal claims of the British, the Aborigines owned the land. Collins wrote in *Account* that: "they also have their real estates" including "hereditary property which they retained undisturbed".⁷⁸ On the basis of his interest in New South Wales, Collins' biographer, John Currey, is critical of his subject's failure to pursue his studies of Aborigines and promote cross-cultural contact in Van Diemen's Land, believing he "was not the man he had been at Sydney Cove. He had lost his vigour and the keen sense of enquiry that had once drawn him to the company of Bennilong and Cole-be." Currey argues that in Van Diemen's Land

Collins "showed little interest in the culture of the indigenous inhabitants" and was "often tired" and "sometimes showed a mood of depression".⁷⁹

However, whatever the Lieutenant Governor's emotional state, British policy toward Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land seems more reflective of learnt wisdom than physical or mental exhaustion. The mature Collins saw little value in promoting extended contact between Aborigines and settlers because he believed this had neither promoted peace nor benefited the Aborigines in New South Wales. Collins noted in his *Account* that such cultural exchange:

had not been yet able to reconcile these people to the deprivation of those parts of this harbour occupied by the English; but while they entertained the idea of the English having dispossessed them of their residences, they must always consider them as enemies.

Furthermore, "very little information that could be depended upon respecting their manners and customs was obtained through this intercourse", and even children "who had been bred up among white people... when grown up have quitted their comfortable abodes, females as well as males."⁸⁰

As Lieutenant Governor, Collins did not prevent contact between Aborigines and the settlers at the Derwent but, unlike Port Jackson, this was not officially encouraged or sponsored, and perhaps the English did know less of Aboriginal culture as a result. But during his tenure there is no evidence of any parallel to the 1789 smallpox epidemic that devastated the Aboriginal population around Port Jackson and Botany Bay, or the sustained violence evident at the Hawkesbury from January 1795, and this was probably, at least in part, also a consequence of this policy.

Some cross-cultural contact, especially on the western shore, did occur. The *Sydney Gazette* noted: "the natives are numerous and undaunted, even at the

explosion of a musket, but are very friendly to small parties they meet accidentally.” Tipping believes that it was probably one of the Pitt daughters whom James Backhouse met in 1832 and who recalled that in their early days at New Town they were visited by the Aborigines, with whom “the children were often left”, and who treated them kindly.⁸¹ Perhaps it was the same woman that the historian James Bonwick met late in her life, and who remembered as a child setting off from New Town to Mt Wellington with her brother, getting lost and falling in with some Aborigines with whom she was ‘kindly treated... She furthermore told me that when a girl she often met them in the camp, as Hobart Town was then called’.⁸²

We cannot be sure which groups of the South East people these early encounters involved. It is possible that they were with the Nuenonne, whose home territory was Bruny Island, rather than the Mouheneenner, whose territory encompassed Sullivans Cove. Both clan groups moved regularly between the Derwent and Bruny, but by 1804 it was the Nuenonne who were the most experienced at dealing with Europeans, because of the frequency with which explorers and whalers had visited Adventure Bay for food, water, timber and shelter. Only the previous year the Baudin expedition had spent a month anchored there, involving considerable cross-cultural exchange. This possibility is further suggested by the fact that the botanist Robert Brown had an interview with what he described as “the same party of natives that are generally in the neighbourhood of Sullivans Cove” at Simpsons Bay, South Bruny, in 1804.

Tensions, however, remained high on the eastern shore. In February 1804 Surveyor James Meehan’s notebook records that somewhere to the north of the settlement on the Derwent they were:

infested with a considerable body of natives who endeavoured to surround us – had taken one of my marking sticks – am obliged to fire on them... The natives are in a considerable body – assembled again and

endeavoured to steal behind a hill – on which, fired another gun and they dispersed for the night. Tuesday morning – the natives again assembled in a large body on a hill over us – all around with spears and in a very menacing attitude. They followed us a short distance and then stopped. They appear to be very dexterous at throwing stones. Them who surrounded us yesterday in such multitudes had no arms but a few waddys, but several of them picked up stones.⁸³

The fact that relations remained generally peaceful, if tense, is suggested by a *Sydney Gazette* record of another encounter. On 18 March 1804 the paper reported that Henry Hacking and the "Sydney native" who "attended him" had successfully hunted a kangaroo, only to be confronted by Aborigines who "made use of every policy to wheedle Hacking out of his booty, but as they did not offer or threaten violence, he with counteracting policy preserved it. Although they treated him with much affability and politeness, yet they regarded his competition with jealousy and indignation."⁸⁴

Given the reasonably peaceful relations with Aborigines and the abundance of fresh food, the first few months at the Derwent must have been, after the hardships of the hulks, the long voyage out and the hardships of Port Phillip, something like an adventure holiday. Groves recorded during this early honeymoon with the new land: "my good, my merciful, my gracious God has made this thorny bed a bed of roses - this bitter cup the sweetest draught that ever I took in life." He confessed to being "unaccountably indifferent" to going home, and to have been "completely stripped... of my desire to be in any other place than this – except that a sigh will sometimes plead for Old England – yet even this I would not wish at present."⁸⁵ Harris noted in more measured tones that, "were it not the great distance from home and the great expense paid for all the little comforts of life, a single man might live very contentedly and comfortably at least for a few years."⁸⁶

While there are dangers in the 'better off in Australia' argument (given the brutal experiences of many convicts, and the depth of loss associated with enforced exile), the contrast between the diet of the poor in Britain and Van Diemen's Land in the early years of settlement was undoubtedly marked. In 1803, the year that the *Calcutta* convicts left their homeland, Patrick Colquhoun estimated in his *A Treatise on Indigence* that the average income per family of the "lower orders" – comprising 67 per cent of the population – was £31 per annum for the 364 000 labourers, £55 for the 60 000 artisans and only a little over £16 for the 400 000 "paupers and cottagers". Colquhoun was alarmed at the increase in pauperism caused by the big price increases of the war years. These had reduced "the state of everyone who must labour for subsistence" to what he termed "indigence" – defined as "the state of those destitute of the means of subsistence". Colquhoun's analysis is substantiated by the fact that in 1803 over a million people – one in nine of the population – were said to be in receipt of poor relief, casual or permanent.⁸⁷ For these men and women, wheaten bread, let alone fresh meat, was a luxury, and hunger an almost daily reality.

The fresh meat available at the Derwent was all the more appreciated for the comparison with the Port Phillip fare that John Pascoe Fawkner, son of a convict and later to be a founder of Melbourne, recalled had been "salt pork, not of the very best quality at times, and a hard, almost black substance, served out as beef, but commonly called Old Horse".⁸⁸ By contrast, Groves thought kangaroo flesh "equal in quality to most foreign – not English – roast beef."⁸⁹ During the autumn and winter of 1804 the numbers of kangaroo and emu killed increased as the officers purchased experienced hunting dogs from Risdon and Sydney,⁹⁰ and by August the *Sydney Gazette's* informants advised that "wild animals are excessively abundant and delicious food, the flesh of the kangaroo by far superior to that of its species found here, and the emu plentiful."⁹¹

For everyday snacks, shellfish, a customary food of many Britons, was immediately available to all. The British crossed the Derwent to secure oysters,

although Sullivans Cove itself had abundant mussels. The importance of shellfish to the Europeans is easily overlooked due to its ready availability and low market value. With little profit to be made, and not requiring any particular skills, equipment, or official sanction to access, shellfish are rarely mentioned in official correspondence or officer reflections. One of the few foods less accessible at the Derwent than Port Phillip was lobster. Although Knopwood caught what he described as the "first" crayfish in the colony on 21 May 1805⁹², Knopwood (and presumably other settlers) had little subsequent success, except when Aboriginal women dived for them.

Scale fishing remained a frustrating experience. Groves described fish as scarce, but perhaps they merely appeared so, because of a dependence on hook and line, and no knowledge of sites or alternative techniques. As Aboriginal people avoided fishing, the necessary knowledge was hard to attain, and fishing became an occasional hobby of the elite with time to spare, rather than a core economic activity. Most Britons eventually came to the same conclusion as the Aborigines presumably had - with so many alternative food sources readily available, fishing did not provide an adequate return for the labour and energy expended. As late as 1840 David Burn noted in *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* that Hobart Town remained "very inadequately supplied with fish." This was not due to "deficiency of the commodity, as of the labour necessary to procure it."⁹³

Plant foods were much less important, although seaweed, widely eaten in areas of Scotland and Ireland, was an obvious food source. Robert "Bucky" Jones recalled in 1823 that seaweed was often eaten as a vegetable. The Aborigines also ate kelp and traded it with the Europeans in 1805. A first settler told Backhouse that when "provisions became scarce people often collected maritime plants on the sea shore." This may have been a reference to the coastal plant *disphyma australe* (pig's face) which, following the Aboriginal example, was also eaten from an early time.⁹⁴ John Fawkner told how he and other children would go to the shore to food for "wild parsley"⁹⁵ and "Botany Bay greens", described by

him as “a vegetable with a leaf in size and shape resembling sage. It grows on bushes about five feet high on the banks of the tidal portion of the River Derwent along with the wild parsley.”⁹⁶

Food was not the only essential of life amply supplied by the new land. Housing, too, was soon far better than the Port Phillip huts, remembered by Fawkner to have been little more than tents – timber rafters covered with canvas.⁹⁷ The developments in hut construction and design begun at Port Jackson led to a much improved substitute. By 1802 the British had come to understand that Australian hardwood timber had to be seasoned if it was not to warp. Tools and nails had also been adapted to cope with the much harder timbers.⁹⁸ Around the accessible, easy to work acacias a vernacular architecture began to emerge from the traditional British building technique of wattle and daub (using acacia limbs for ‘wattling’, or the lattice framework – hence the popular name of ‘wattle’). A mix of mud and lime was used for infill, with shells, probably Aboriginal midden deposits, having been burnt to obtain lime in New South Wales since 1796.⁹⁹ The use of shingles instead of reeds for roofing was also widespread there before 1803. These were significant innovations. They were described by Grant in 1801: “the houses of convicts in general are constructed with wattles, covered in shingles and plastered inside and out with clay, over which they put a coat of lime, burnt from shells.”¹⁰⁰

Fawkner’s description of his family’s first hut at the Derwent is a version of this style of housing, although the difficulties of working the available timber meant that “strips of canvas” still served for the door, whilst the roof “was thatched with grass.”¹⁰¹ The timber species most common in the immediate environment of the settlement were not suitable for splitting, leading Collins to request of King that “if some thousands of shingles could be sent to me, they would prove of essential service, because unfortunately none of our timber will split into that very useful article.” Blackwood, black peppermint, and certain varieties of stringybark soon

Chapter Two

proved more amenable, however, such that solid timber huts largely replaced wattle and daub in Van Diemen's Land during the first decade of settlement.

Extensive midden deposits at Ralph's Bay meant that lime was available, with convicts permanently stationed there to burn these reserves. It was to be many years before limestone was found, and even then it was of poor quality (although higher quality reserves were to be found in the north of Van Diemen's Land). The discovery of lime allowed bricks to be made, although the first products tended to be spongy and leak. Most were used for public buildings, although a sketch survives of Harris's first cottage, which had a brick chimney. Stone was used from an early time, with the first substantial house, belonging to Edward Lord, having a sandstone chimney.¹⁰²

Another short-term alternative to tents was the hollow trunks of the very large trees, which may have been further burnt out and shaped as shelters by the Aborigines.¹⁰³ The Pitt family were sleeping in a "hollow tree" in preference to a tent within days of their arrival at the Derwent.¹⁰⁴ One kangaroo hunter later recalled having slept for five years outdoors, sleeping "sometimes in wet weather... in a tree."¹⁰⁵ Caves, too, could be dwelling places. Even Knopwood slept in one, that he claimed could have sheltered over 100 men, near the Coal River in May 1808.¹⁰⁶

Despite the multifarious advantages afforded by Van Diemen's Land, however, the best appreciated factor in the move to the Derwent continued to be the abundance of fresh meat. Given its ready supply, control of this food source was recognized as essential for ensuring social control and penal discipline. The native animals of the new land were, as in England, designated 'game', and deemed, like the land itself, to be 'owned' by the Crown, with the privilege of hunting them a right conferred by the King's representative. English laws restricted hunting to those with an annual income of 100 pounds from a freehold estate, and this principle was carried to Van Diemen's Land, where only the civil

and military officers and their designated 'gamekeepers' could hunt.¹⁰⁷ This was seen as essential to social control because 'free' food undermined economic and social discipline. In the first year of settlement convicts could obtain fresh meat, but it had to be earned, not freely taken.

Such factors, as well as the need to preserve the colony's most accessible food resource, are also reflected in early conservation orders, most noticeably the almost immediate prohibition on the killing of swans. On 10 March 1804 Collins reported that he had heard "that the number of swans at the upper part of the Derwent River is noticeably diminished through their having been of late much harassed". He ordered that no one interfere with them to ensure "the preservation of this article of stock which may be hereafter of perpetual benefit as well to ships arriving from long voyages as to the settlements established in Van Diemen's Land." This protection order was repeated on 22 December 1804. The fact that these restrictions were in the spirit of the English game laws – and did not impact on the rights of the privileged classes – can be seen by the fact that, despite them, swan continued to be eaten regularly by the officers.¹⁰⁸

The hunting controls also ensured that extra convict labour could be secured free of charge. Harris informed his mother on 7 August 1804 that he was building a little place at a farm "about a mile from the town", by "employing workers (convicts) after Government hours and paying them in salt or fresh provisions, which I easily do at no cost to myself, in kangaroo flesh, having a couple of dogs that catch me one or two from 30 to 60lbs weight five or six times a week – and the people are glad to get it at the price fixed by the governor 8d p lb – that is giving *labor* for it at that rate instead of money."¹⁰⁹

Also important to the colonists' rapidly improving health was the plentiful, easily accessible fresh water supply. As with shellfish, the importance of this 'taken for granted', non-traded essential of life is easily missed. But it was a gift unknown in the prior lives of many of the convicts or the majority of the English population

for much of the nineteenth century. Moreover, its ready availability in the surrounding bush was a critical factor in the capacity to travel easily by foot. In an era where there were few horses to carry supplies until well into the 1820s, with those that existed the monopoly of the elite, the ready access to water was to be a critical factor in ensuring access to the resources of the land. "Thank God, there is water in the country, plenty and sweet enough," noted the "kangaroo man" in Charles Rowcroft's *Adventures of an Emigrant*.¹¹⁰

Collins understood the importance of clear water, and took immediate measures to maintain the purity of the Hobart Rivulet. On 21 February, "having at length been able to fix the settlement... in a situation that appears to be blessed with that great comfort of life, a permanent supply of pure running water", he "cautions the people against polluting the stream, by any means whatsoever" and "positively forbids their going into, or destroying the underwood adjacent to the water, under pain of being severely punished." Three days later the Lieutenant Governor appointed an overseer to keep "the camp clean and the stream pure from filth", and set aside a "proper place for a privy." Like the swan protection orders and the measures to protect the local timber resource,¹¹¹ the practical benefits of these conservation laws has led Tim Bonyhady to describe them as "predictably utilitarian".¹¹² However this does not mean that the British were altogether blind to ethical questions relating to the exploitation of the new environment, especially its rich pasture lands and the abundant and tasty herbivores that abounded in them. Knopwood's first sermon called on the officers, soldiers, free settlers and convicts to pray that:

God would bless and prosper all our undertakings in this infant colony, and increase the fruits of the earth, by which through his blessing, our lives and those around us, the natives of the land, may be amply supplied... let us give God thanks for the grass of the field... let us take notice of the great variety of those creatures which are made for our use... at the same time let us remember that our right in these creatures is not

absolute, we hold them for God... Thou has created all things and for thy glory they are and were created.¹¹³

Abandonment

In a land which so amply supplied the essentials of life to a people who had known hunger, cold and disease in their homeland, and had probably expected something worse in exile, thanks for the 'fruits of the earth' probably came easily. Groves wrote: "our health has been continued beyond calculation... it's being so contrary a life to that which we have been used to, that I am – as must anyone be – astonished at it." Groves noted that his boy "grows, is fat and more healthy than when he left England."¹¹⁴ Not even Eden itself, however, could have removed the oppressive sense of distance from home and the pain of loss that accompanied exile. This slowly grew over the coming year into feelings of abandonment as the newest imperial outpost was comprehensively neglected by London. For months that turned into years, the residents of the Sullivans Cove 'camp' waited in vain for the expected supply ships and further shiploads of convicts. Groves did not believe any more convicts would be sent to Sydney and that all would come to the Derwent. He noted the general disappointment when it was learnt that the next convict ship had berthed in Sydney, as indeed all subsequent ones until after Groves' death in 1810 were to do.¹¹⁵

Almost the only person of influence in London with an interest in Van Diemen's Land seemed to be Sir Joseph Banks, and Collins tried valiantly to provide him with information on potential resources that might increase the colony's status. Collins wrote to Banks on 20 July that there were so many whales in the Derwent that "three or four ships might have lain at anchor, and with ease have filled all their cargo". He suggested that, to "balance the expense attending sending them out", the Government should equip convict transports as whalers.¹¹⁶ Collins also sent off plants and animals to London, including a keg containing the uteri of two kangaroo "and a live animal known as the Devil", and he supported the

endeavours of the botanist Robert Brown, who was delayed at the Derwent until August.¹¹⁷ While Brown's work was sponsored by the navy, no one in the imperial government seems to have shown much interest in the potential utility of local timbers.¹¹⁸ It was not until the Naval Board Inquiry of 1819 that there was official follow-up to this early scientific work, and by then the imperial government's knowledge of Van Diemen's Land timber resource seems to have gone backwards.¹¹⁹

To sustain morale under such circumstances, Knopwood told the transported Britons to always think of home. On 13 May his sermon compared their experience with that of Old Testament Jewish prisoners who, also lamenting enforced exile, sat down and wept by the rivers of Babylon. The Chaplain then asked the assembled convicts and soldiers the same question posed by the Jews: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The answer, their pastor suggested, was to never forget your homeland: "If I forget thee O Jerusalem; let my right hand forget her cunning."¹²⁰

This message of encouragement was, by May 1804, timely. While there continued to be sufficient food and shelter, the imminent onset of winter meant that the honeymoon in the new land was over. The colder weather was, Collins observed, "severely felt by the people."¹²¹ The settling party was still reliant on cotton clothing of limited use in keeping out rain or cold, and supplies of even these were running low.¹²² Much more appropriate were animal skin clothes, shoes and rugs, but these were still not much used, and while kangaroo skin was soon tanned to make shoes, a long cold winter was endured before it was widely employed for other purposes.¹²³

The deteriorating situation was further exacerbated when relations with the Aborigines broke down in the late autumn of 1804. Conflict with the Oyster Bay people was of such a serious and sustained nature that it was the major factor leading to the evacuation of the Risdon Cove settlement shortly after.

The Risdon massacre

Details of the killings of Aborigines by the New South Wales Corps at Risdon Cove on 3 May 1804 are limited and contested. While the officer in charge during Bowen's temporary absence, Lieutenant Moore, provided a report justifying his actions, most of the evidence available was compiled by the 1830 Aborigines Committee that reviewed the events nearly 27 years after they had occurred. All that is definite is that muskets and a carronade (a ship's gun then being deployed in the settlement) were fired into a large mob of Aborigines that included women and children, and that there were three confirmed deaths. Moore claimed it was in defence of an attack on the settlement, but the one direct witness available to the 1830 enquiry, Edward White, disputed this, and it was not generally believed in Van Diemonian times. Nor do we know how many Aborigines died. White claimed there were "a great many of the Aborigines slaughtered and wounded; I don't know how many".¹²⁴ No one could give precise figures, as most of the injured (and possibly dying) were removed. Nevertheless, the impact of the musket and carronade fire into a large mob of people must have been considerable, and have engendered chaos. The fact that a small boy got left behind in the disorder is evidence of this. He was later christened (by Knopwood), Robert Hobart May - an unlikely namesake for the recent Secretary of State for Colonies and/or the Chaplain himself.¹²⁵

What has been often missed in reviews of the Risdon massacre post-1830 is the deep sense of vulnerability experienced by the British during the first year of settlement. By May 1804, the British had lived through a Van Diemonian spring, summer and much of an autumn, and had been regularly exposed - in the heart of a major hunting ground - to the main tool of Aboriginal land management, fire. This was a frightening experience for men and women for whom fire had hitherto been either a confined tool for heating and cooking, or a direct danger and threat. Fire had long been the ultimate means of popular protest in England, and thus

had strong cultural associations. At Port Phillip the British had interpreted Aboriginal burning as an act of aggression, and if this assessment had by now been moderated by observation and cultural contact, Knopwood's consistent nervous references to being surrounded by fire and smoke make it clear that the regular firing of the bush meant that Aboriginal power was a pervasive presence for the few hundred British huddled on the Derwent estuary. For the smaller group at Risdon, living in the heart of a hunting ground, this sense of vulnerability could only have been heightened, and a large group of approaching Aborigines likely to have inspired widespread fear.

Van Diemonian experience compounded a fear of Aborigines already forged on the mainland. As noted above, the threat posed by Aborigines was the major factor in the Port Phillip evacuation, and the aggressive response at Port Jackson to Aboriginal resistance from the mid 1790s – by the same New South Wales Corps that guarded Risdon – is well documented. Thus, those participating in the first settlement of Van Diemen's Land well understood the likelihood of a response by Aborigines to the occupation of their land. Collins even admitted to King, in September 1804, that he had not yet informed "the whole, that the Aborigines of this country are as much under the protection of the laws of the Great Britain, as themselves", even though "this essential point, having formed an article in my instructions, I should have issued a General Order at Port Phillip ... [and] repeated it here." Collins' explanation for the omission stretched the truth: "at present we have not any intercourse with them" and he was not "finding any disposition to straggle among the people." Both sentiments may have been technically true at that time, but given the number of 'runaways' at Port Phillip, the enthusiasm of the kangaroo hunters at the Derwent, and the extent of early contact and violence at both settlements, this was hardly an accurate summation of the recent past. A more plausible explanation for Collins' failure to follow orders was the likely response to issuing such proclamations while the British population was so low. Collins told King that he would "wait until my numbers are increased," before "I shall deem it necessary."¹²⁶ King's reply is also pertinent.

He acknowledged receipt of the despatch, but never commented on it, thus avoiding the need to sanction or censure Collins' lack of action. After many years in New South Wales, the difficulty of reconciling London's instructions for the protection of Aborigines with the invasion of their land and all that was consequent upon that, were well known to him.

The dangers stemming from this genuine vulnerability and heightened sense of fear were made greater by the poor military discipline and aggressive posture of the New South Wales Corps. As Tardiff has shown, the young and inexperienced Bowen was not an effective leader of these men. Relations between the Corps and Bowen were particularly fraught throughout April, and on 23 April mutiny had threatened, with Collins forced to intervene.¹²⁷

Such factors meant that a large group¹²⁸ of Aborigines approaching the settlement, even with women and children, was almost certain to be interpreted as a potential threat, and that the few nervous, poorly disciplined, and possibly drunk men guarding the small British outpost would be inclined to shoot first and ask questions later. The attitude of the convict, Edward White, who watched the Aborigines arrive and quickly concluded this was no war-party, stands as permanent testimony, however, that there was no inevitability about the terrible response.

The shooting started at about eleven o'clock in the morning of 3 May 1804 and continued for three hours until the carronade was fired and the Aborigines fled.¹²⁹ What happened in this time remains unclear. Were the Aborigines fighting back or just trying to rescue the wounded, small children, the elderly and the disabled, from the chaos of slaughter? Why were they pursued when they fled? Was this deliberately meant to be a final lesson or had a killing frenzy overcome all reason? An obsession to count the dead continues after 200 years, but it seems to miss the main point that Risdon was a terrible tragedy where the truth can now only be glimpsed.

Keith Windschuttle's *Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land* devotes a whole chapter to the "Killing fields of Risdon Cove" and uses this as his first example of how historians have fabricated the level of conflict between whites and Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land. Windschuttle concludes that Risdon "was a defensive action by the colonists in which three Aborigines were shot dead."¹³⁰ However Windschuttle's analysis to back up this claim is full of errors arising from his lack of understanding of the Van Diemonian context.¹³¹ His claim has no more historical credibility and is as much politically driven as those who assert 100 deaths and a blood bath. The balanced conclusions, based directly on the limited evidence available, are provided by the historians Windschuttle so derides. Ryan concludes that "at least three Aborigines were killed".¹³² Reynolds does not risk a figure at all, using it as an example of how difficult it is to estimate Aboriginal deaths in conflict with the British.¹³³

Unlike Windschuttle, Collins was outraged by the tragedy because of its implications for the settlers: "I well know these indiscriminating savages will consider every white man as their enemy", he told King, "and will if they have opportunity revenge the death of their companions." As an act of reconciliation he ordered that Robert Hobart May be returned to his people, although this seems to have been too difficult to arrange, and he is listed among the children inoculated with the small pox vaccine in Hobart during November 1805.¹³⁴ Collins' fears about the consequences of the massacre were confirmed within a few days when men sent to the eastern shore to collect oysters were beaten off with clubs and stone.¹³⁵ Over the next few years there were a number of documented incidents with the Oyster Bay people, including an attack on sealers in Oyster Bay in early 1805, the destruction of the lime kilns in June 1806 and, to be reviewed later, regular skirmishes with kangaroo hunters.¹³⁶

Collins responded promptly to these heightened security concerns. On 8 May he implemented the recently confirmed authority from King to take command of Risdon and advised that it would be evacuated as soon as the *Ocean* returned from Port Phillip with the final evacuees from the settlement there. The niceties of consultation with Bowen on this significant step were ignored. Moreover, despite his own troop shortage, likely now to be an even more acute problem, Collins chose to send all members of the New South Wales Corps back to Sydney, noting that "the trouble, which might attend bringing the remainder into a proper state of discipline, induced me to send the whole away."¹³⁷ The same shipping problems that delayed the evacuation of Port Phillip meant, however, that it was not until 9 August that Risdon returned to Aboriginal control.

What had seemed a good idea, settling on a major Aboriginal hunting ground, had proved to have major limitations. Collins had reason to be grateful for being based on the comparatively less attractive, but also less populated, western shore – even more so for it being the territory of another tribe. The tribal boundary provided by the river meant that, even post-Risdon, peaceful interactions continued with the Mouheneenner and Nuenonne people. Knopwood records that Aboriginal men were in the camp on 2 November 1804 and that a large cross-cultural meeting occurred at Brown's River.¹³⁸ To hunt and to access the best shellfish reserves and secure lime, however, the British still had to cross the Derwent and, despite the dangers, trips 'across the water' (as Knopwood termed them) became more frequent as the Commissariat reserves were run down.

Kangaroo dependency

After the arrival of the last of the evacuees from Port Phillip in June 1804, and the incorporation of a few refugees from Risdon into the 'camp', there were 433 European men, women and children on the western shore. Providing these people with the prescribed ration became increasingly difficult as the imported

food reserves were run down and not replenished by ships sent from either London or Sydney. Indeed, had it not been for the whalers the settlement would hardly have been visited at all.¹³⁹ Lacking imported supplies, for the officer class and those convicts who could work, kangaroo formed an even greater proportion of the diet. Knopwood records the increase in the numbers of kangaroo killed. So reliable had hunting become that by 20 September the Chaplain could describe it as "bad luck" when only one kangaroo was caught. Swans were also killed in increasing numbers.¹⁴⁰

The continuing abundance of indigenous foods meant that the people who could access such food for themselves or purchase it from others through labour or barter continued to eat well and stay healthy. Collins faced a dilemma, however, in relation to those who were ill and totally dependent on the ration. On 3 August 1804 he told London that they had "no less than 467 people under medical treatment since we first landed at Port Phillip."¹⁴¹ Surgeon Anson's medical returns for November 1804 show that at that time three marines, five free settlers and 28 convicts were sick and 21 in all still had scurvy, including John Pascoe Fawcner.¹⁴² Between July 1804 and the end of the year 18 of these people died, to join the 30 lost since the departure from England.

It was clear that a ration exclusively consisting of nutritionally-deficient salted food was the main reason why so many people had not recovered from the hardships of the voyage and the failed settlement at Port Phillip. To avoid further deaths, on 10 September 1804 Collins took what was to prove a momentous policy decision. He ordered the first purchase of kangaroo meat for the hospital: "the number of scorbutic patients increasing daily the Commissary is directed to receive kangaroo at 6d per pound from any person who may deliver such at the Public stores".¹⁴³ The immediate benefits from this action encouraged an expanded programme, with Collins advising on 27 September that:

The principal Surgeon having stated to the Lieutenant Governor that the Scorbutic patients under his care have considerably benefited by the fresh animal food... he requests that all those gentleman who have dogs will exert themselves in procuring an ample supply of kangaroo for the hospital. The numbers of this animal are at this time fortunately for us abundant.¹⁴⁴

Collins understood that there were dangers in this course of action but he had good reason to believe that the risks attached to creating a cash market for kangaroo, to fulfil what was seen as a short term need, were manageable. At this stage hunting rights were still controlled, dog ownership restricted and convict hunters remained assigned 'gamekeepers'. No convict at the end of 1804 could survive long in the bush and men gained access to its resources only with official help and permission. With profit and plunder concentrated and controlled, the full implications of the change in ration took some time to become apparent. Initially, only officers directly profited from the Government purchases.

By year's end Collins had good reason to be satisfied with the policy outcome achieved by the Government's purchase of kangaroo, and on 27 December he advised that, with the "number of patients at general been so reduced... fresh animal food is not longer required". Thus, the "Commissary will discontinue receiving [it] into the public store."¹⁴⁵ Scurvy had been comprehensively beaten – banished from Van Diemen's Land for a generation.

Port Dalrymple

By the end of 1804 the Derwent settlers were not the only official British residents of Van Diemen's Land. A party commanded by William Paterson, the senior officer of the New South Wales Corps, arrived at Port Dalrymple in the north of the island on 5 November 1804. Paterson initially chose a hill site, which he saw as "well situated for the protection of the settlement", and recorded that:

on the 12th a body of natives consisting of about 80 in number, made their approach within about 100 yards from the camp; from what we could judge they were headed by a chief, as everything given to them was given up to this person... from this friendly interview I was in hopes we would have been well acquainted with them ere this, but unfortunately a large party (supposed to be the same) attacked the guard of marines, consisting of one sergeant and two privates... the Guard was under the unpleasant act of defending themselves, and fired upon them, killed one and wounded another; this unfortunate circumstance I am fearful will be the cause of much mischief hereafter, and will prevent our excursions inland, except when well armed.¹⁴⁶

Paterson had already shown a readiness to use force against Aborigines in New South Wales. According to Collins, after Phillip's departure, Paterson had ordered a party of the New South Wales Corps to be sent from Parramatta "with instructions to destroy as many as they could meet with of the wood tribe (Bediagal) and, in the hope of striking terror, to erect gibbets in different places, where on the bodies of all they might kill were to be hung."¹⁴⁷ Perhaps this background in part explains the failure to peacefully negotiate land access in the north of Van Diemen's Land. Nevertheless, like Collins, Paterson seems to have well understood the practical advantages of peace. Despite the violence, negotiations continued and there was a friendly meeting with 40 Aborigines, involving the exchange of more goods, on 9 December. Relations remained tense, however, and Paterson reported on 8 January that "the natives are still strong, but constantly in the neighbourhood both of this place and western arm. One man fell in with about 16 of them yesterday."¹⁴⁸

Paterson, also in regular correspondence with Banks, followed Collins' strategy of enthusiastically selling the resource potential of the new settlement. In January 1805 he sent six tons of iron to England, "and if it proves serviceable

any quantity may be had". He also sent some green earth that he hoped might be copper and various birds and animals.¹⁴⁹ Paterson also reported favourably on the utility of the timber: "there remains no doubt but that most of it will be found superior in quality for ship building to any hither yet discovered in this part of the world."¹⁵⁰

One early find was of more immediate benefit. Paterson told Banks that "the pigs turned out on Green Island have dug out a farinaceous root which may be valuable, for the soldiers of the guard used it as a substitute for potatoes."¹⁵¹ *Gastrodia sesamoides* (native potato or potato orchid) was certainly a useful find, its roots being rich in starch and very nourishing.

Fresh meat was harder to obtain. While there were plenty of smaller wallabies around, George Town was not 'boomer' territory. In January 1805 Paterson wrote: "although the kangaroos are here in numbers, there has not been more than four large ones killed; and the smaller sort is hardly worth the expense of keeping a dog".¹⁵² Perhaps this partly explains why Paterson chose to move the settlement across the water to York Town.¹⁵³ Certainly there was more hunting success there. Paterson told King in March 1806 that "the receipt of kangaroo rather increases as I expected as the winter approaches."¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, another move was imminent. In March 1806 most of the settling party moved up the Tamar River to the present site of Launceston, to take advantage of the good soil and accessibility to open grasslands for cattle and game. Paterson, more familiar with the coastal scrub surrounding Port Jackson, was ecstatic about this country bordering the North and South Esk Rivers. He informed King that the ground on the North Esk extended "on both sides into considerable plains without a tree, and in many places farther than the eye can reach." It was "superior, both for grazing and tillage" even to the excellent land on the South Esk, "which I did not think could have been surpassed."¹⁵⁵ In August he told London that "where I have fixed our principal agricultural

settlement is the centre of the most superior tract of arable and grazing ground I have witnessed", describing it as an "immense tract of one of the most beautiful countries of the world".¹⁵⁶

Paterson was well aware of the dangers of allowing convicts to hunt these rich pasture lands, telling King that unless the "Government was to have proper people who could be trusted constantly for no other purpose, it will never answer for serving as a ration."¹⁵⁷ He considered the 612 Bengal cattle that arrived in the autumn of 1805 as "perhaps the most fortunate circumstance that ever happened to a new settlement", optimistically expecting that in three years these cattle would prove sufficient to "lessen the necessities of supplies from England of animal food."¹⁵⁸ But, lacking the southern settlement's reserves of imported foodstuffs, Paterson was forced to rely on kangaroo in the interim. He warned King on 14 November 1805 of the social and economic consequences of the Governor in Chief not sending supplies south:

I am sorry to observe that such a spirit of buying and selling dogs exists, and hunting kangaroos, if a stop is not soon put to it, it will in the end be the cause of much idleness, and consequently the neglect of cultivation. I have now restricted the settlers from having more than one dog between two, which I believe is considered arbitrary.¹⁵⁹

However, King advised Paterson that "the economy and preservation of animal food is of great consequence" and instructed "that as much kangaroo as can be procured should be issued in lieu of a part or the whole of the salt rations". Paterson was ordered to pay private individuals six pence a pound for fresh meat and to train dogs to hunt.¹⁶⁰ He responded to King that at least the price of wheat relative to kangaroo should be raised to provide a greater incentive to farm, but this advice was also ignored.¹⁶¹

King's 'English' solution to the social and economic implications of kangaroo dependency reveals the degree of difference emerging between the realities of Sydney and Van Diemonian life. He ordered that kangaroo only be purchased from "individuals who have leisure to hunt that animal."¹⁶² But the prospect of the officers doing their own hunting on Aboriginal territory rather than sending convicts servants to do it for them, or purchasing it cheaply from men in the woods for profitable resale, was unlikely. Convicts were prepared to risk danger for freedom, but the more privileged preferred to stay closer to home.

The kangaroo economy and its implications

By the autumn of 1805 the supply of imported food was also fast running out in the southern settlement and in May the rations of flour and sugar rations were cut. On 5 July 1805 Collins advised that, given "the supplies which the Lieutenant Governor has been for some time in expectation of receiving not having arrived... it is necessary to make every possible saving of the salted provisions now remaining in store", and the Commissariat "will therefore receive kangaroo at eight shillings per pound...and issue the same at the rate of one pound of fresh meat for one pound of salt meat."¹⁶³ After the first cold winter, a dependency on kangaroo skin for other purposes had also emerged. Kangaroo skin and fur was increasingly employed to overcome the shortage and ineffectiveness of imported clothing, footwear and rugs.

Harris wrote to his mother on 12 October 1805 about how central the kangaroo had become to British survival, poignantly contrasting hunting with nascent agriculture and pastoral pursuits:

We have lately and are now almost in a state of starvation having been on the allowance of 4lb bread, 2lb of pork per man pr week, owing to not having had any supplies from Sydney, but as we have such abundance of Kangaroo here we can never *want* – from two to three thousand (lbs)

weight a week having been turned into the store by the officers at 1/- pr lb which has considerably helped us on... I have got about 1 acre of wheat in this year (which considering is doing wonders) – My stock consists of 1 cow and calf – 1 ram 2 ewes – 2 ewe lambs 1 He goat – 4 females 2 female kids – 4 geese – 10 goslings – [?] fowls – Besides which I have a pack of Kangaroo dogs as good as any in the whole country – namely Lagger, Weasel, Lion, Boatswain, Brindle etc etc - & with those dogs I scarcely ever go out or send out (for I have two huntsmen) but get 3 4 5 or sometimes 8 kangaroos in a day or two – Some of the kangaroo stand 6 feet high and weigh from 100 to 130 or 150 lbs and fight the dogs so desperately so as sometimes to kill them and very frequently to wound them sadly – Sometimes we get emus (a large bird species of the ostrich) which are hunted in the same manner as kangaroo and make a worse resistance. They frequently weigh 80 or 90 lb and run (for they cannot fly) amazingly swift, so that the swiftest greyhound can get up with them – They are much coarser food than the kangaroo, which when young, is nearly as good as venison – it only wants fat.¹⁶⁴

Even soldiers could be employed in the hunt. In 1834 the Quaker missionary, James Backhouse, visited Hugh Germain, a marine private who came to Van Diemen's Land with Collins, "and was for many years employed in hunting kangaroos and emus for provisions, which the officers, whose servant he was, received from him; and sold to the Government." Germain claimed that, assisted by two prisoners, he returned an average of 1000 pounds of meat per month.¹⁶⁵

The most significant difference between the northern and southern settlements was the seasonal arrival of whalers at the Derwent. On 25 July 1805 Knopwood reported that there were four whalers close by and on 28 July "a great many whales" in the "river beyond town". Some ships spent months at a time in the estuary. The Chaplain recorded on 27 September that the *King George* had caught 100 tons of oil. Knopwood also recorded that the whalers did well at

Adventure Bay in the winter of 1805, one ship alone obtaining 70 tons of black oil in a month, and another 60 tons.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, while the whalers lessened the isolation of Hobart Town and facilitated the import of occasional supplies, on balance they probably increased the demand for kangaroo, as they provided another market for both meat and skins.

It was the Government Store, however, that was the engine for the development of a kangaroo-based market economy. It provided the only consistent and reliable cash market for fresh meat, ensuring that, combined with the sale of skins and demand from whalers, significant profits were to be made from hunting. An officer of the marines, Edward Lord, was already well on the way to becoming a very wealthy man on the back of his assigned convict game-keepers and a growing number of hunting dogs.

Their inability to sell direct to the Government Store meant that most of the convict hunters accumulated little capital themselves, although in 1805, in both the northern and southern settlements, a development occurred that was to have profound consequences – the monopoly ownership of dogs was surrendered. Hounds were too easily stolen and bred too fast to remain a restricted possession. On 24 March, Knopwood reported that he was "fearful that my kangaroo dogs should be taken away. It was the intention to rob me of my dogs."¹⁶⁷ In response, he stayed home himself "the aft and eve". It seems the Chaplain's own servants could not be trusted to protect them. This change frustrated continued official attempts to restrict the hunting of kangaroo. The dog, and consequently the main source of food and profit - the kangaroo and emu - ultimately could not be privatized.

The bush becomes home

The possession of a single dog, stolen or purchased, meant a convict could live independent and free in the bush. There had been a number of short term

absentees already,¹⁶⁸ but on 18 June 1805 Knopwood records the return of the first convicts to successfully live in what he describes, for the first time, as the “the bush” for more than a short sojourn. These five convicts had been absent nearly three months and the next year convicts were living in the bush even through the winter months.¹⁶⁹

The association of the bush with freedom was a dramatic, if unrecognized, moment in Australian colonization. Collins had only been stating the facts at Port Phillip when he warned that the armed runaways “must soon return or perish by famine”. Even in the first year in Van Diemen’s Land, the five prisoners that “got off into the woods” with muskets and gunpowder surrendered quickly.¹⁷⁰ Without dogs, the bush was a site of probable death, but with them, the grassy woodlands of Van Diemen’s Land became, within two years of settlement, a place of refuge. With no man-made walls to keep the few hundred prisoners contained (there was not a secure gaol on Van Diemen’s Land until the early 1820s), many convicts simply wandered off to live a life of quiet freedom in the well-watered, game-rich bush, well away from the subservience, labour and harsh punishments associated with servitude in a penal colony. With what seems extraordinary speed, a motley collection of British criminals had made the bush home.

Those who stayed in the bush without authorization as hunters were listed as absconders – the first bushrangers. 68 Calcutta convicts would be listed as having absconded at some time, some more than once.¹⁷¹ The settler and trader, James Gordon, summarized the origins of bushranging to Commissioner Bigge in 1820:

I think that it originated from a practice that prevailed as far back as the time of Govr. Collins, who, when provisions were not to be had, allowed the convicts to repair into the country and hunt for the kangaroo. In this they were joined by the officers servants, who went to hunt for their

masters. By this means, they got habits of wandering and obtaining subsistence. No outrages were committed by these men, but still Govt. cd. not call them in.(sic)¹⁷²

Police Magistrate Humphreys confirmed this view, telling the Commissioner that bushranging:

began in Col. Collins time when the colony was very much distressed for provisions... men were told that they must find food for themselves. The convicts thus obtained a knowledge of the country and of the means of supporting themselves in the woods. Many remained there, refusing to come back when ordered on the arrival of provisions, and many, who did come back, went out again.¹⁷³

An indication of how quickly the settlers came to be at ease in the bush is revealed in Knopwood's description of a holiday he took in the New Year of 1806 with Collins, Harris and the surgeon, Mathew Bowden. Imported tents and food were discarded, with the officers' servants instead supplying all their masters' needs from the environment. Knopwood records that they left Hobart at 4.30am on 2 January, and after breakfast at the Government Farm headed 40 miles up river where they "had two huts built." One of Knopwood's men then supplied the kangaroo and "at half past six" they "sat down to a very excellent dinner." The party arrived back on the evening of 4 January after what the Chaplain described as "one of the pleasantest excursions I ever took."¹⁷⁴

'Famine' and its implications

Though they had lost their dog monopoly, and despite the growing number of bushrangers, hunting continued to be very successful for the officers through most of 1805. From 3 August until the year's end, Knopwood's gamekeepers alone killed 66 kangaroo, to the value of £107.¹⁷⁵ Despite this abundance of fresh

meat and the ready source of profit it provided, officers began to depict tough times, and 'famine' and 'distress' entered their language. A careful reading of their comments shows, however, that there was no hunger or general food shortage as such, and that these sentiments rather relate to the exhaustion of familiar foods from home. Harris's October 1805 letter to his mother noted, for example, that "we have lately and are now almost in a state of starvation", but he also pointed out that, as "we have such abundance of kangaroo here we can never want."¹⁷⁶ Historians have perpetuated this misconception. Robson argues that from the winter of 1805 "a real starvation time sets in", but later acknowledges: "settlers never actually wanted for fresh meat though they grew weary of everlasting kangaroo and emu, even if the former was judged as good as venison."¹⁷⁷

It was the shortage of the British staple, bread, that most led to the exaggerated descriptions of famine that have persisted in the historical literature and cultural memory. 'To break bread' was to partake of food for early nineteenth century Britons, and to receive it daily was the most basic request of their God. As E.P Thompson puts it, if "the labouring people in the eighteenth century did not live by bread alone... many of them lived very largely on bread... Britain was only emerging from the... periodical visitations of famine and of plague, and dearth revived age-old memories and fears. Famine could place the whole social order on the rack." As recently as 1800-1 the poor had rioted when bread shortages caused big price rises and hunger became widespread.¹⁷⁸

Given the significance attributed to what a later free settler, George Meredith, called "that first of all earthly acquises,"¹⁷⁹ it is not surprising that Harris informed his brother on 17 October 1806 that "a famine prevails in this land" on the basis that he had not tasted *bread* for a fortnight. On 3 September 1807 he could write that the settlement was facing "starvation", on the basis of being forced to eat "kangaroo fried in rancid pork in lieu of bread."¹⁸⁰

There is, nevertheless, no doubting the anguish many Britons experienced without secure access to familiar provisions – especially flour, but also tea, sugar and alcohol. On 23 October 1805 Knopwood recorded the arrival of supplies on the *Governor Hunter*: "I may truly say that the colony was in a very dreadful distress and visible in every countenance. Had it not have been for the good success in killing kangaroos, the colony would have been destitute of everything. We had only three weeks flower [sic] in the colony and five weeks pork".¹⁸¹ The relief was only temporary and by the New Year the supply of almost all commodities had again run out. Harris wrote to his brother on 1 February 1806 that they were "as far as the deprivation of almost every comfort will allow, tolerably well – We have neither tea sugar coffee soap candles oil wine spirits beer paper cheese butter or money and if we had the latter those things are not to be procured."¹⁸²

The implications of the shortages of basic British foods were not only symbolic or emotional. To understand its considerable implications for Van Diemonian society, it needs to be recognized that the relations between convicts and authorities were complex, governed by customary expectations, rights and responsibilities as much as regulation and formal authority – as were all social relations in the rigidly hierarchical early nineteenth century British society.

On 7 January 1805 Collins articulated his view of the place of convicts: "the situation of the prisoners belonging to this settlement not seeming to be clearly understood", it needed to be recognized that that they were under the "protection of British laws", and "while under sentence of the laws the prisoners are to be considered as the servants of the crown to be employed under the direction of the person in whom his majesty has been pleased to visit that trust, the Lieutenant Governor of this settlement."¹⁸³ Collins consistently described the convicts as "the people" or "servants of the crown", explicitly drawing on customary expectations in relation to master-servant relations to ensure some degree of order. This continued to be the usual form of official language to

describe the convicts before 1820, with 'prisoner' usually reserved for those who were punished or sought for a colonial misdemeanour.¹⁸⁴ Convicts were thus offered, conditional on not re-offending, the status of servant in what Maxwell-Stewart has emphasised was essentially an "unfree labour system"¹⁸⁵, with customary (although still contested) rights and responsibilities. As E.P. Thompson has shown in *Customs in Common*, similar labour systems were common in England in the late eighteenth century, with masters clinging "to the image of the labourer as an unfree man, a servant in husbandry, in the workshop, in the house" and the "masterless man as a vagabond to be disciplined, whipped and compelled to work". Social and economic relations in England at this time were still governed largely by custom, not in the sense of traditional folklore, but as "a whole vocals of discourse of legitimation and expectation", in which, "far from having the steady permanence suggested by the word 'tradition... custom was a field of change and contest, an arena in which opposing interests made conflicting claims."¹⁸⁶

In this cultural context, Collins' inability to provide the set ration was widely seen as a violation of the rights of convict servants and an abrogation of official responsibilities that (no matter how unavoidable) had legitimate consequences in terms of expectations regarding labour. Collins reduced hours of work when tea, sugar, salted meat and other essentials were unavailable. On 27 November 1805 he noted that, "during the reduced ration of provision the Lieutenant Governor did not insist upon a strict observance of the hours of work", but given that "very nearly the full ration" had now been restored, all were expected to return to work. On 23 July 1806, "during the present scarcity of grain", working hours were again reduced. All work was to cease at noon, and at 11 o'clock on Thursdays and Saturdays. A similar social contract existed with the military. Knopwood reported that the marines on 4 and 5 January 1806 had refused to take reduced rations "according to the order of the Lieutenant Governor " and Collins had been forced to increase them.¹⁸⁷

The authorities' failure to provide the prescribed ration also resulted in a lenient response to early bushranging, as indicated by Knopwood's language. Until mid 1805, when supplies were available, the Chaplain/Magistrate used the word "deserted" to describe convicts who went into the bush, but later wrote of those who "absconded" or were "absent".¹⁸⁸ When supplies arrived and the full ration was temporarily restored, amnesties were often issued, and those who came in from what was still officially described, and even believed to be the inhospitable world beyond, receive paternal forgiveness if they confessed the errors of their ways.¹⁸⁹ Joseph Holt recalled how Collins dealt with early absconders at Derwent: "'Well', he would say to them, 'now that you have lived in the bush, do you think that the change you made was for the better? Are you sorry for what you have done?' 'Yes Sir.' 'And will you promise me never to go away again?' 'Never sir.' 'Go to the store keeper then... and get a suit of slops and your week's ration'." ¹⁹⁰

The exhaustion of local hunting-grounds

During 1806 the British confronted their most serious crisis since the invasion commenced. More than a hundred forester kangaroos a week were needed just to supply the ration during the previous year in the southern settlement alone (with perhaps double this being killed in total), and the kangaroo available within a day's walk of both settlements had been greatly reduced.¹⁹¹ The progressive evacuation of almost the whole population of Norfolk Island – ex-convicts and their descendents – to Van Diemen's Land from November 1805, exacerbated the problem by eventually doubling the mouths to be fed. Almost the whole population remained dependent on the government ration, with only ten of the 475 people in the southern colony on June 30 1806 not "victualled from the store."¹⁹² Yet domestic animals and agriculture were, as yet, making only a small contribution to total food needs and imported supplies remained precarious.¹⁹³

To maintain a supply of kangaroo in the face of escalating demand, the price paid by the Government was increased on 21 April 1806 from six pence a pound to a shilling. The price adjustment had an instant effect and on 27 May 1806 purchases were temporarily halted because of "the great surplus of kangaroo at present in hand." Whalers then kept the southern settlement supplied in large part with other products over the winter of 1806 but the crisis deepened in the spring. When Knopwood reported on 4 October that there is "scarce any provisions for the marines and prisoners", he also meant, for the first time, kangaroo. On 5 October the Chaplain visited Collins who "complained very much for the loss of kangaroo, none being in the store".¹⁹⁴ Collins issued a General Order the following day that:

Every person who possesses the means, will use the utmost exertions in furnishing the public stores with kangaroo... The officers who have had the services of several men for this purpose, will inform their people that if they continue to exert themselves in this season of distress their conduct will be noticed and rewarded.¹⁹⁵

Nevertheless, kangaroo remained in alarmingly short supply. On 13 October Knopwood wrote that "it is truly lamentable to see the distress that the people are in. Not a man able to do any work".¹⁹⁶ On 30 October 1806 the price for kangaroo and emu was raised to one shilling six pence per pound, but even with the big price increase, supplies remained limited. On 8 December 1806 the kangaroo ration had to be reduced and, for the first time, its provision could not be guaranteed: "as it cannot be expected at this season that a quantity of kangaroo sufficient to issue to everyone can be received, the Commissary will issue 7lbs therefore to each person as far as the quantity he has received will enable".¹⁹⁷

It was a similar situation in the northern settlement, where Paterson justified the extraordinary expenditure of £2114 (mainly for kangaroo) by the price rises caused by the exhaustion of local hunting grounds:

such was the slaughter of kangaroo necessary actually to preserve the lives of the people that the difficulty of procuring them in sufficient quantities became gradually so much greater, and they were daily driven to such increasing distances from our camps... that 1s 6d per lb was at last necessary to be given for such as could be tendered.¹⁹⁸

The kangaroo shortage must be kept in context – this was still no famine and the convict's health remained excellent. After all the descriptions of the hardships endured, on 17 November 1806 Knopwood reported that there had been only "one burial" in the last 12 months, "and that an infant three days old".¹⁹⁹ In *Convicts Unbound* Marjorie Tipping documents only six deaths in total from 1805 to 1808 (and none from malnutrition or disease) compared with 48 deaths in the first 18 months after leaving England when all had received the full prescribed ration.²⁰⁰ While it is difficult to confirm the exact number of deaths, or the cause of these, there is no doubt that, compared with the mortality standard among the labouring population of England in the early nineteenth century, Van Diemonian Britons, even at the height of the food shortages, remained very healthy. Kangaroo had become hard to get, but enough of it and other indigenous foods was still being obtained to ensure the good health of the settlement, even with the continued limitations of farming.

It had become obvious, though, that the British were in an increasingly vulnerable position, and to maintain food supplies, authorities had no option but to encourage convicts to hunt in territory far from even a semblance of official control. There was no prospect of policing the increasingly remote territory visited by kangaroo hunters given the low number and poor quality of troops available. Securing meat from remote hunting grounds would require convict

hunters to negotiate land access for themselves in the context of very serious white and black threats to imperial intent.

Bushrangers and the supply of kangaroo

Bushrangers presented the most immediate threat to achieving a secure supply of food and profit from remote grassland plains. The theft of hunting dogs meant that by late 1806 access to kangaroo and emu was, to a significant extent, in the hands of these men. Directly after his discussion with Collins about there being no kangaroo in the store, Knopwood observed on 5 October that "it is generally believed that the prisoners which are in the bush had taken many of the gentleman's dogs."²⁰¹ The subtleties of this change in dog control were shown in Knopwood's description of the theft, on 6 December, of his bitch 'Miss'. He reported that she was stolen from one of his men by "one of the bushrangers." On 15 December the men were again sent after the missing dog, as were Mathew Bowden's men – the surgeon had also had a dog "taken from him by the bushrangers." However the animals were not to be found, presumably because, beyond the official gaze, the boundary between servant and bushranger blurred. In what was to become a Van Diemonian tradition, a reward was the key to property recovery. On the 17 December the Norfolk Island settler, William Williams, claimed the ten pounds promised for the return of 'Miss'.²⁰² This was significant money, a year's income for some English labourers and about a fortnight's wages even for the Chaplain. Many had been transported for stealing less.

Stolen dogs were even more expensive to replace. Harris reported that the four he lost were valued at 25 guineas each.²⁰³ Henry and Mary Hayes had sold eight 'greyhound' pups, still nursing, for £80 in 1805 and, on 18 January 1807, Knopwood paid £25 for a dog.²⁰⁴ As more dogs were bred the price dropped, but one purchased on 12 October 1807 still cost Knopwood eight pounds.²⁰⁵

With such a high capital outlay, and given the animal's vulnerability to loss, the economics of kangaroo hunting for some officers became marginal. Those who wanted to make high profits needed to ensure that their dogs were protected and game access guaranteed. This required deals with bushrangers. The basis of such negotiations is clear: the officers could offer access to the one large cash buyer, the Government, while the bushrangers offered protection, land access and a guaranteed meat supply. In September 1807 Collins gave notice of two convictions for buying or receiving kangaroo and emu from the servants of two officers and advised that he was:

determined to punish in the most rigorous manner any prisoner, officer, servant or otherwise, who shall be known to procure kangaroo or emu from any of those miscreants now at large in the woods, or from any employed in hunting, or who shall supply the above with provisions.²⁰⁶

But the convicts who were living for extended periods in the bush legally hunting kangaroo were inevitably in various levels of contact with bushrangers, and the incentives for private arrangements were great. The officers who tacitly sanctioned their gamekeepers to negotiate deals became direct beneficiaries of the new order through the elimination of less savvy (or less corruptible) competitors, and profited from price increases caused by the reduction in supply. The result was that men like Edward Lord built fortunes while more honest hunters, like Harris, Bowden and Knopwood, had increasing difficulty in supplying any meat to the store at all.

The fact was that while the authorities depended on convict hunters accessing hunting grounds well beyond official control, there was little in practice they could do about controlling sources of supply. On 17 August 1807 Knopwood reported that the price of kangaroo had again reached 1s 6 d per pound. It is surely no coincidence that on 15 August Knopwood listed 14 current bushrangers "all armed and have plenty of dogs" (and the numbers of convicts who were living

independent of any authority for extended periods in the bush hunting kangaroo was greater again).²⁰⁷ Only the arrival of imported supplies could temporarily restore negotiating power to the Lieutenant Governor. The purchase of kangaroo was immediately stopped when a ship arrived in late October, "full rations" restored and on 30 November 1807 an amnesty offered to those in the bush.

The threat to official access to the kangaroo resource of the grassy woodlands posed by bushrangers was even more evident in the northern settlement, where, with no whalers to visit and trade with, the dependence on indigenous foods was compounded. From January 1807 Port Dalrymple was almost permanently reliant on kangaroo. Paterson described the consequences to London in April:

from last January the colony has existed entirely on the precarious chance of the chase, and kangaroo was the only food they depended on. In consequence labour stood still, and the inhabitants became a set of wood-rangers; and I much fear it will be some time before they are brought to the industrious habits which an infant settlement requires.²⁰⁸

In August he made it clear that his worst fears were now realized:

In my last letter I anticipated the evil consequences that was likely to arise from the necessity of making kangaroo the principal part of our animal food, which is now realized; for not less than 10 prisoners have absconded with their master's dogs, firearms etc, and are living in the woods and mountains, where (from their knowledge of the country) there is little chance of their being apprehended... It is but a few days since that two of these runaways (who have been absent for 16 months) seized two of the soldiers... robbed them of everything.²⁰⁹

More details were provided in a letter to Joseph Banks a few months later. Paterson pointed out that his last letter had warned of "the dangerous

consequences of our being under the necessity of employing convicts to furnish the colony with kangaroo... in lieu of fatted meat as well as dry provisions. My anticipation I am sorry to say has been verified... nine convicts... absconded with dogs and firearms". They had become, Paterson said, a "desperate banditry... I must give up the chase... my little force is so scattered." Paterson told Banks that he had available troops "barely sufficient to protect our stores and live stock".

On the positive side, the Bengal cattle were now rapidly increasing in numbers after their early high mortality, although the bushrangers threatened even this potential food supply. Paterson told Banks that the livestock "thrive better than any I ever saw, particularly horned cattle and sheep, but we are in daily dread of the bushrangers, as they are called, committing depredations on them. I am under the necessity of having two soldiers with each flock".²¹⁰

The risks posed by bushrangers were great, but an even more serious challenge was posed to official access to the increasingly remote main food source. During 1806-7, Aboriginal groups began to systematically resist white access to the main hunting grounds on which the sustainability of both communities depended.

Aboriginal resistance

Aborigines had sought to remove kangaroo from British hunters from at least March 1804, when Collins' gamekeeper, Henry Hacking, was confronted. Comparatively peaceful confrontations of this sort probably continued, but as British plunder escalated so did the Aboriginal response. The threat posed was increasingly evident from mid-1806, and corresponded with the penetration by Europeans into Aboriginal hunting grounds that were a greater distance from the settlements. Knopwood reports that a hunter was speared on 16 June 1806, with two dogs being killed and the kangaroos taken. On 27 December 1806 Knopwood noted that three prisoners, returning after being "absent in the wood for five months", had reported that "the natives took from them nine kangaroos

while they were hunting and their boat which they found again in three days search." On 14 February 1807 Knopwood described the killing of a kangaroo hunter, which sounds very much like a ritual spearing. The Aborigines took a convict hunter some distance from his hut "and one of the party throwd [sic] a spear at him." On 18 February Knopwood recorded that the "country [was] on fire by the natives who are very troublesome to the men out a- kangarooing." On 24 February he noted that "the distress of the colony is great", and four days later kangaroo was again taken and another hunter speared. Then, at the height of this crisis on 2 March, Knopwood's men killed two Aborigines. The Chaplain noted that "the natives have been very troublesome for a long time but not so desperate as lately." Another serious conflict was reported on 19 May:

My man Richardson came home, having been absent 19 days. He gave information that the natives had nearly killed him and dogs. The governor's people were out and fell in with them when a battle ensued and they killed one of the natives. The natives killed one of the dogs. It is very dangerous to be out alone for fear of them. They are so hardened they do not mind being shot at.

Knopwood had a dog wounded by the Aborigines on 1 August 1807, and another killed by them on 11 October.²¹¹

A central tenet of the so-called 'history wars' of our present times has been a concerted public campaign to downplay the level of conflict between whites and Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land, and in this context it is important to note that more than the four Aborigines recorded by Knopwood were almost certainly killed by the British in 1807. Keith Windschuttle has frequently highlighted Lyndall Ryan's belief that "a hundred Aborigines probably lost their lives" in early encounters between bushrangers, kangaroo hunters and Aborigines, seeing such a claim as prime evidence for the politically motivated 'fabrication' supposedly propagated by historians of Van Diemen's Land. Windschuttle

argues that there were no more deaths in 1807 than those recorded by the Chaplain in his diary.²¹² Considered in context, however, this much cited example well illustrates the limitations of Windschuttle's methodology. The only available account of the violence that occurred during 1807 is in Knopwood's private journal. In turn (with one possible exception), Knopwood only records killings done by, or in the presence of, his own servant. To assume that this represents a comprehensive record is to assume that the many gamekeepers assigned to other officers avoided the Aboriginal resistance witnessed by Knopwood's man, that at Port Dalrymple there were no violent encounters at all, and that contemporary observers who documented, in general terms, high levels of conflict with kangaroo hunters, were mistaken.²¹³

These episodes also illustrate the vast gaps in the government record, and the quiet acceptance of the killing of Aborigines by convicts to protect the interests of their masters – both rigorously denied in *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Knopwood was a magistrate as well as a priest, but showed no inclination to investigate or even report the death of two British subjects at the hands of his own servant. Nor did the Lieutenant Governor apparently investigate or report the killing of an Aborigine by his own gamekeepers. Given that the colony's food supply was at stake, the Lieutenant Governor, the magistrates and the other officers lacked both the motive and capacity to report or prosecute their convict hunters. It is not surprising that they turned a blind eye to the conflict and, moreover, did their best to prevent any inconvenient interference from either Sydney or London. In this context, to pretend that one officer's private journal is a comprehensive summation of the conflict clearly escalating between convict hunters and Aborigines in 1807 is clearly ludicrous.

In fact some other reports do confirm that violence between bushrangers and Aborigines was more widespread than the relatively few documented incidents suggest. John Murray, the Commandant at Port Dalrymple, recorded in September 1810 that the bushrangers were exercising cruelties on "natives and

others" and Lieutenant John Oxley reported in late 1810 that some of the 20 to 30 bushrangers "have forced the native women, after murdering their protectors, to live with them and have families." Governor Macquarie, after his 1811 visit, also recorded that "male convicts... betoken into the woods or bush... continually molest the natives of the country."²¹⁴

Nevertheless, while few would have refrained from active self-defence, most convict hunters would seem to have had little incentive, or capacity, to aggressively confront the owners and defenders of the land. The musket could only frighten those Aborigines still unfamiliar with its limitations, and the underlying ability of the Aborigines in bush warfare was well demonstrated over subsequent decades. Isolated white hunters, still learning their bush-craft, would have been no match for them in a sustained conflict. While some at the more deranged end of the bushranger spectrum (and the brutal backgrounds of some convicts meant that there were always a few of these) undoubtedly attacked Aborigines indiscriminately, such a high risk strategy is not likely to have been chosen by the average convict seeking to maximise his chance of survival. Most who took the high risk path probably suffered the fate of William Russell and George Getley who, according to contemporary testimony, "ill used the blacks", before being killed by them.²¹⁵ Richard Lemon and John Brown, escapees from Port Dalrymple from 1806 to 1808, also killed and tortured Aborigines on Brown's own testimony and there are contemporary newspaper accounts that the Aborigines had attempted to exact revenge.²¹⁶

Conclusion

By the end of 1807 the main challenges and opportunities of the new land were clear. The British had adjusted remarkably. Despite almost no clothes, food or shelter from home, the island had furnished these with remarkable speed. Critical to this success had been the introduction of a powerful new predator to the island, the dog, which killed kangaroo and emu with comparative ease. By

the end of 1807 men could walk from the northern to the southern settlement, the trip taking only three days,²¹⁷ and were living year round in the bush, feeding and clothing the settlements.

However, increased conflict with both bushrangers and Aborigines had exposed the inherent vulnerability of the British while they relied on indigenous food. Whether sufficient supplies could be maintained as the white population increased, given the exhaustion of the local and secured hunting grounds, the increasing power of bushrangers, and a vigorous defence of native hunting grounds by their Aboriginal owners, was as yet an open question.

There was hope that cattle and sheep would do well on the extensive grassland plains and undermine the kangaroo economy. However, maintaining private property rights over even these animals was challenging. Military strength was likely to remain inadequate to the task. Something other than force would be required to secure access to native grasslands for stock and kangaroo, in the face of both white and black resistance. The contest for control of the major resource of the new land was by no means resolved.

Endnotes: Chapter Two

¹ White to Skill 17 April 1790, in Alec Chisholm, *Land of Wonder: The Best Australian Nature Writing* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1964).

² David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1788-1801* (London: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1910) 77, 169.

³ *Ibid.* 78, 249.

⁴ Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 133.

⁵ Glen McLaren, *Beyond Leichardt: Bushcraft and the Exploration of Australia* (Fremantle, W.A.: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996) 46.

⁶ David Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973) 134.

⁷ N. J. B. Plomley, *Jorgen Jorgenson and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land: Being a Reconstruction of His 'Lost' Book on Their Customs and Habits, and on His Role in the Roving Parties and the Black Line* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1991) 56-7.

⁸ James Boyce, "A Dog's Breakfast... Lunch and Dinner: Canine Dependency in Early Van Diemen's Land", *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 51, no. 4 (2004); James Boyce, "Canine Revolution: The Social and Environmental Impact of the Introduction of the Dog to Tasmania", *Environmental History* 11, no. 1 (2006).

⁹ W. Beilby, *The Dog in Australasia* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1897) 125.

¹⁰ Louisa Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* (New York: Bunce, 1853) 171-2.

¹¹ McLaren, *Beyond Leichardt: Bushcraft and the Exploration of Australia* 33, 36-7.

¹² Barrallier Journal 12 November 1802, in *Historical Records of New South Wales*, 5, 773, cited in *Ibid.* 49. It was such "tent huts" that Governor King later instructed be erected on landing at Risdon Cove. *HRA* 3/1, 193.

¹³ *Ibid.* 39-40.

¹⁴ The term continued to be used occasionally with the original American meaning until the mid 1820s. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" (Ph.D Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990) 4-5.

¹⁵ King to Nepean 9 May 1803, in C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966) 75.

¹⁶ Michael Nash, *The Bay Whalers - Tasmania's Shore-Based Whaling Industry* (Hobart: Navarine Publishing, 2003) 35.

¹⁷ Bowen to King 20 September 1803, *HRA* 3/1, 197-198.

¹⁸ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 262.

¹⁹ Woorrady, a leading member of Robinson's conciliation party and husband of Trugannini, was an elder of the Nuenonne people of Bruny Island. He would have been a child at the time of first settlement. Woorrady also recalled the French explorers of the 1803 Baudin expedition in this conversation.

²⁰ N.J.B. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 375.

²¹ Amas Delano, *A Narrative of a Voyage to New Holland and Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1978) no page numbers; *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)*, (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1971) 259.

²² Phillip Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 2003) 142.

²³ Bowen to King 27 September 1803, *HRA* 3/1, 193.

²⁴ Margaret Glover, *History of the Site of Bowen's Settlement Risdon Cove* (Hobart: National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1978) 1, 10.

²⁵ Charles Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land : Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Diemen's Land* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1820) 111.

²⁶ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)* 259.

²⁷ James Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1837) 212.

²⁸ *Sydney Gazette* 16 October 1803, cited in Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania* 65.

²⁹ Rhys Jones, "Fire-Stick Farming", *Australian Natural History* 16 (1969): 224-228.

³⁰ Edward Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria (from 1841 to 1851)* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of S.A., 1968) 188-9.

³¹ John Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988) 54.

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- ³² Boyce, "A Dog's Breakfast... Lunch and Dinner: Canine Dependency in Early Van Diemen's Land"; "Boyce, "Canine Revolution: The Social and Environmental Impact of the Introduction of the Dog to Tasmania".
- ³³ Frank Bolt, *Old Hobart Town Today* (Hobart: Waratah Publications, 1981) 246.
- ³⁴ Paterson to Banks 10 March 1804, ML CY 1747
- ³⁵ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 230.
- ³⁶ M. Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* (Melbourne: Viking O'Neill, 1988) ix, 67-9.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.* 18, 25-7, 79.
- ³⁸ Benjamin Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* (London: W.Wells Gardner, 1859) 129, 36-7.
- ³⁹ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 33.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 19.
- ⁴¹ Barbara Hamilton-Arnold, ed., *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* (Sorrento Vic.: Arden Press, 1994) 27.
- ⁴² John Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 195.
- ⁴³ Collins to Hobart 14 November 1803, HRA 3/1, 36.
- ⁴⁴ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812 : Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 44-46.
- ⁴⁵ J.M. Tuckey, *An Account of a Voyage to Establish a colony at Port Philip, in Bass's Strait, on the South Coast of New South Wales, in His Majesty's Ship Calcutta, in the years 1802-3-4* (London: Longman, 1805).
- ⁴⁶ J.M. Tuckey, *General Observations of Port Phillip*, Brabourne papers Vol. 3, ML CY 1747.
- ⁴⁷ Knopwood Diary, 26 November 1803. Mary Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1977).
- ⁴⁸ John Morgan, *The Life and Adventures of William Buckley: Thirty Two Years a Wanderer Amongst the Aborigines of the Unexplored Country Around Port Phillip* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980) 41.
- ⁴⁹ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 50.
- ⁵⁰ Collins to Sullivan 3/8/04, HRA 3/1, 264; Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 72.

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- ⁵¹ Samuel Crook, *An Account of the Settlement at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip 1803*, cited in *Ibid.* 98.
- ⁵² *Ibid.* 77-8.
- ⁵³ J.M. Tuckey, *General Observations of Port Phillip*, Brabourne papers Vol. 3, ML CY 1747.
- ⁵⁴ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 50.
- ⁵⁵ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 26.
- ⁵⁶ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 80, 99.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 80, 94.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 72, 88.
- ⁵⁹ James Backhouse Walker, *Early Tasmania: Papers Read before the Royal Society of Tasmania During the Years 1888 to 1899* (Hobart: Government Printer, 1973) 96.
- ⁶⁰ Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life* 203.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.* 214.
- ⁶² The "Night Association" was the guard with the responsibility for supervising convicts during the night. Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 60.
- ⁶³ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 100.
- ⁶⁴ Collins to King 28 February 1804 in Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* 75-6.
- ⁶⁵ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 85.
- ⁶⁶ *General observations of Port Phillip*, J.M. Tuckey, Brabourne papers Vol. 3, ML CY 1747.
- ⁶⁷ Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* 140-3.
- ⁶⁸ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia*. Buckley survived to be a sad witness to the time when experienced Van Diemonian Britons would return to Port Phillip in 1835 and conquer the land with an ease which their fathers could not have imagined.
- ⁶⁹ Government Order 31 December 1803, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808, ML, AK 341.
- ⁷⁰ Government Order 29 January 1804, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808, ML, AK 341.
- ⁷¹ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 54-64.
- ⁷² Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania* 108-9.

⁷³ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 66.

⁷⁴ Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* 151.

⁷⁵ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 46.

⁷⁶ Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life* 86.

⁷⁷ Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003) 56, 251.

⁷⁸ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1788 - 1801* 327.

⁷⁹ Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life* 250-2.

⁸⁰ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1788 - 1801* 107, 45, 349.

⁸¹ James Backhouse, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co, 1843) 21, Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 123. This is given a broader context in Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A History Volume Two, Democracy* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004) 11.

⁸² James Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1969) 38-9.

⁸³ James Meehan Notebook , AOT LSD 355/3. H Ling Roth, *The Aborigines of Tasmania* (Halifax: F.King and Sons, 1899) 2.

⁸⁴ Hacking was originally a "pilot" on the *Sirius* sent to Port Phillip by King both as a punishment and for his potential utility to Collins. Initially it was the hunting skills of this man with his 15 years of Antipodean experience that was of most use and he became Collins gamekeeper. As for John Salamander, probably the first mainland Aborigine to travel in Van Diemen's Land in 12 000 years, Collins ensured his return to Sydney very soon after this historic encounter. The Victualling List for August 1804 records that Hacking, "pilot", Salamander, "native" and the botanist, Robert Brown, had been victualled on full rations since arriving at Port Phillip on 25 January 1804, and that while Salamander had returned to Sydney on 17 March 1804, Hacking was still present. *HRA* 3/1, 108

⁸⁵ Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* 146, 48.

⁸⁶ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 66.

⁸⁷ Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780 - 1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 20-22.

⁸⁸ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Reminiscences of Early Settlement at Port Phillip*, Fawcner Papers State Library of Victoria [SLV], cited in Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life* 218.

⁸⁹ Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* 143-4.

⁹⁰ For example, Knopwood's newly acquired dog secured him his first kangaroo on 13 March 1804 and on 26 March it caught six young emus. By April the Chaplain was eating kangaroo regularly.

⁹¹ *Sydney Gazette* 26 August 1804.

⁹² Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 83.

⁹³ Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 54.

⁹⁴ Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1981) 76; Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 118, 23. Tipping calls pig face by its synonym, *mesembryanthemum australe*.

⁹⁵ Probably sea parsley or *Apium prostratum*.

⁹⁶ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Reminiscences of Early Settlement at Port Phillip*, Fawcner Papers SLV. This plant was probably *Atriplex cinerea* or salt bush, according to Frank Bolt *Mercury* 20 March 2004.

⁹⁷ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Reminiscences of Early Settlement at Port Phillip*, Fawcner Papers SLV, cited in Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 68.

⁹⁸ J.M.Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988) 18.

⁹⁹ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1788 - 1801* 307; Graham Seal and Gwenda Davey, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993) 54.

¹⁰⁰ James Grant, *The Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery Performed in His Majesty Vessel the Lady Nelson... In the Years 1800, 1801, 1802 to New South Wales* (London: Printed by C. Rowarth for T. Egerton, 1803) 83.

¹⁰¹ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Reminiscences of Early Settlement at Port Phillip*, Fawcner Papers SLV.

¹⁰² Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History* 24.

¹⁰³ Both the explorer, James Cook, and the captain of a American whaler, Amas Delano, saw trees that they believed had been deliberately burnt out for shelters by Aborigines.

¹⁰⁴ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 123.

¹⁰⁵ Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse* 212.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 160.

¹⁰⁷ Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 34.

¹⁰⁸ Examples of this can be found in Knopwood's Diary of 26 and 27 October and 3 November 1804.

¹⁰⁹ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 65.

¹¹⁰ William Thomley (edited by John Mills), *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973) 13-14. This book, by Charles Rowcroft (who wrote under the pseudonym of William Thomley), is a novel, but is largely based on personal experience, and offers much of interest in its observations of the way of life of the poor.

¹¹¹ On 27 February 1804 Collins ordered that no "timber whether young or old near the encampment" was to be cut down without the Superintendent of Carpenters' permission, "as there is abundance of wood for fire everywhere about the settlement". On 9 March the timber on Hunter Island was also specifically protected.

¹¹² Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth* 3.

¹¹³ K.R. Von Stieglitz, *The Story of the Pioneer Church in Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 1954) 67-9.

¹¹⁴ Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* 145, 152.

¹¹⁵ Bensley, *Lost and Found or Light in the Prison: A Narrative with Original Letters of a Convict Condemned for Forgery* 152.

¹¹⁶ Collins to Banks 20 July 1804, ML CY 1747.

¹¹⁷ Warren R. Dawson, ed., *The Banks Letters: A Calendar of the Manuscript Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks Preserved in the British Museum (National History) and Other Collections in Great Britain* (London: British Museum, 1958) letter 20 July 1804, 248.

¹¹⁸ Collins informed Banks that: "I met at Port Phillip and he accompanied me hither, that sensible and scientific traveller, Mr. Brown" (Collins to Banks 20 July 1804, Banks Papers, ML CY 1747). It was August before Brown, originally the Botanist on Flinder's *Investigator*, could get a boat out, telling Banks that "much time was lost". Brown complained to Banks that his flora after a nine month visit "contained no more than 540 species, exclusive of cryptogamic plants." (Brown to Banks, 12 December 1804, Banks Papers, ML A78-3). Brown's work, published in 1810 as *Prodromus Florae Novae Hollandiae et Van Diemen 1802-5*, did not have much impact in Van Diemen's Land despite its revolutionary abandonment of the linnaean classification system. Perhaps being written in Latin did not help. The earlier French publications continued to be the botanical works usually cited in Van Diemen's Land.

¹¹⁹ Despite Paterson pointing out on 7 January 1806 that "the trees are a distinct species of eucalyptus of that found in the neighbourhood of Sydney" (Paterson to Banks 7 January 1806, Banks Papers, ML CY 1753), and Brown's early work for the navy, the Purveyor from the naval board, R. Mart, believed in 1819 that all the trees of Van Diemen's Land were the same as New

South Wales, except the "Huon River Pine tree and the Adventure Bay Pine tree." (R Mart, Purveyor, *Extract from the Report of the Purveyor of the Naval Board on the Timber of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* in Barron Field, ed., *Geographical Memoirs of New South Wales; by Various Hands ... Together with Other Papers on the Aborigines, the Geology, the Botany, the Timber, the Astronomy, and the Meteorology of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* (London: J.Murray 1825) 315-6.

¹²⁰ Knopwood sermon, Sullivans Cove, 13 May 1804, Ps 137 verse 5, "If I forget thee o Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, Knopwood Papers, ML A259.

¹²¹ Collins to Hobart 3 August 1804, *HRA* 3/1, 264.

¹²² Collins informed London that they were almost out of clothes and were very short of blankets. Collins to Hobart 10 November 1804, *HRA* 3/1, 388.

¹²³ By the end of 1804, Collins was able to issue a pair of locally made kangaroo skin shoes to all convicts. Tanning leather using an extract from wattle had been developed in New South Wales just prior to the settlement of Van Diemen's Land in 1803. Delano believed it made the "handsomest leather for boots and shoes that can be found and is durable". Delano, *A Narrative of a Voyage to New Holland and Van Diemen's Land* no page numbers.

¹²⁴ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)*, 259.

¹²⁵ Robert Hobart had been replaced as Secretary of State but Knopwood was unaware of this. It is perhaps more likely anyway that the first 'stolen child' of Van Diemen's Land was named by his 'god father', the Surgeon Jacob Mountgarrett, after the Chaplain, located in time and place. Mountgarrett's central role in the affair is recorded by Knopwood in his Diary. On the day of the massacre, 3 May 1804, he received the following note:

Dear Sir,

I beg to refer you to Mr Moore for particulars of an attack the natives made on the camp today, and I have every reason to think that it was premeditated, as their number far exceeded any that we have ever heard of. As you express a wish to be acquainted with some of the natives, if you will dine with me tomorrow, you will oblige me by christening a fine native boy who I have. Unfortunately, poor boy, his father and mother were both killed. He is about two years old. I have likewise the body of a man that was killed. If Mr Bowden wishes to see him desecrated I will be happy to see him with you tomorrow. I would have wrote to him, but Mr Moore waits.

Your friend

J. Mountgarrett, Hobart, six o'clock

The number of natives I think was not less than 5 or 6 hundred – J.M

Eight days later, Knopwood tells of the christening: "At 11AM Lt. Lord and self went to Risdon with Capt. Bowen. Mr Lord returned in the eve and I stayed there. I xtiand a young native boy whose name was Robert Hobart May." Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 51.

For a discussion of this incident see James Boyce, "Robert May: Real Name Forever Lost," 40 *Degrees South* 35 (2004).

¹²⁶ Collins to King 11 September 1804, *HRA* 3/1, 281.

¹²⁷ Currey, *David Collins: A Colonial Life* 220; Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania* 137-40.

¹²⁸ As recorded above, the size of the group of Aborigines was estimated by Surgeon Mountgarrett in his letter to Knopwood at five to six hundred. Although his own role in the affair makes him a questionable witness, and this figure seems unlikely in the context of the usual estimates of the population of Van Diemen's Land, the fact that gatherings of this size were also reported elsewhere suggests that perhaps some of the assumptions about the level of the Aboriginal population at the time of first settlement need to be revisited.

¹²⁹ For the most comprehensive review of the evidence pertaining to this incident see Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania* 144-48; Tardif, Phillip, "Risdon Cove", in Robert Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003) 218-25..

¹³⁰ Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803 - 1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002) chapter one, 11-28, 26.

¹³¹ Windschuttle claims that "White's awareness of events was not good" because the huts of two of the settlers he mentions were on the same side of the creek, not opposite sides as White recalled. Bowen's September 1803 sketch of the settlement is reproduced to 'prove' it. This sketch by Bowen was done in the same month as the settlement was formed. Governor King had instructed Bowen to erect "tent huts" on landing. These could be put up very quickly, and were not intended as permanent structures. Bowen's sketch is thus simply the site of initial camping places. It is very likely that by May the following year, one of the settlers had chosen to relocate across the creek. Windschuttle's dismissal of White's testimony about the likelihood of the surgeon, Jacob Mountgarrett, sending Aboriginal bones to Sydney, is similarly unsound. At this time convicts like White could have "direct knowledge" of what the "elite" were doing because the population was so small. Moreover, Mountgarrett subsequently showed himself to be interested in the scientific study of Aborigines, as were a number of his superiors in Sydney. His admitted dissection of one of the Aboriginal dead was probably for science, and he would have been very reluctant to 'waste' his 'ownership' of the first bones of a 'new' people. Windschuttle's claim that "the settlement did not have any quantity of lime at its disposal" so that the bones could not be

"packed in lime" (as White claimed) is also wrong. Lime stone had not yet been discovered but convicts were already permanently stationed at Ralph's Bay burning oyster shells, probably Aboriginal midden deposits, ensuring a regular supply of lime to both Risdon and Sullivans Cove. Finally, Windschuttle's claim that "Mountgarrett had no ostensible reason to down play the conflict. He was not part of the military. He had been replaced as colonial surgeon" misses the point. Since the arrival of Collins, Mountgarrett had effectively become, quite unwillingly, unemployed, and had a very good reason to maintain positive relations with those in Sydney who could, and did, secure him another official position. Overall, the reliability of Edward White's evidence to the Aborigines Committee about the Risdon massacre looks, then, reasonably good. James Boyce, "Fantasy Island," in Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003) 40-2.

¹³² Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* 75 (my emphasis).

¹³³ Henry Reynolds, *Fate of a Free People: A Radical Re-Examination of the Tasmanian Wars* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1995) 76-77.

¹³⁴ William Anson, surgeon, *Return of children inoculated with vaccine virus since its first introduction*, 19 December 1805, *HRA* 3/1, 346. The list includes "Robert Hobart May, a native of Van Diemen's Land", and Anson notes that "the above children were inoculated and took the infection in the most distinct and favourable manner." What happened to Robert Hobart May after this time is unknown, but the most likely explanation is that he was sent to Port Dalrymple to be cared for by his godfather, Mountgarrett, by then the surgeon there.

¹³⁵ Collins to King, *HRA* 3/1, 238.

¹³⁶ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* entries for 5 March 1805, 16 June 06, and 2 August 08.

¹³⁷ Government Order 8 May 1804, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808, *ML* AK 341; Tardif, *John Bowen's Hobart: The Beginning of European Settlement in Tasmania* 152, 61.

¹³⁸ Knopwood reported seeing 250 to 300 Aborigines at Brown's River on 9 October 1807, mostly women and children, the "men out a hunting". Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 145.

¹³⁹ Knopwood records that on 10, 12 and 13 August 1804 whalers were anchored off Sandy Bay catching whales in the Derwent. Collins' need to trade with whalers meant that he had no choice but to overturn his initial ban on them entering the Derwent, even though they continued to pose a threat to order and provide a potential means of convict escape. *Ibid.* 59.

¹⁴⁰ Knopwood records that at least 178 swans were taken by the whale boat *Alexander* from 14 November to 21 November 1804. *Ibid.* 69-70. It is not clear how such activities can be reconciled with Collins order banning the killing of swans. It may be that this only applied, in practice, to the Derwent, or perhaps the success with kangaroo and the abundance of other indigenous food had

made him less concerned about ensuring their protection. The most likely explanation is that such hunting formed part of the increasingly essential mutual interdependency and trade of the whalers and the settlement. Collins let them hunt fresh food, and in turn purchased from them their imported supplies.

¹⁴¹ Collins to Hobart 3 August 1804, *HRA* 3/1, 257-264

¹⁴² Cecil Billot, *The Life and Times of John Pascoe Fawkner* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1985) 37.

¹⁴³ Government Order 10 September 1804, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803-1808, ML AK 341.

¹⁴⁴ Government Order 27 September 1804, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803-1808, ML AK 341.

¹⁴⁵ Government Order 27 December 1804, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803-1808, ML AK 341.

¹⁴⁶ Paterson to King, 26 November 1804, *HRA* 3/1, 605-7.

¹⁴⁷ Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1788 - 1801* 247.

¹⁴⁸ Paterson to King 8 January 1805, *HRA* 3/1, 629.

¹⁴⁹ Dawson, ed., *The Banks Letters: A Calendar of the Manuscript Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks Preserved in the British Museum (National History) and Other Collections in Great Britain* 656.

¹⁵⁰ Paterson to Banks 7 January 1806, Banks Papers vol. 20, ML CY 1753.

¹⁵¹ Dawson, ed., *The Banks Letters: A Calendar of the Manuscript Correspondence of Sir Joseph Banks Preserved in the British Museum (National History) and Other Collections in Great Britain* 656.

¹⁵² Paterson to King 8 January 1805. *HRA* 3/1, 629.

¹⁵³ James Backhouse Walker, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, reported that the original orchard and two old huts were still at York Town. They were, moreover, the home of the son of the original convict gardener who had been left behind by Paterson following the settlement's evacuation to tend the orchard.

¹⁵⁴ Paterson to King, 10 March 1806, *HRA* 3/1, 658-9.

¹⁵⁵ Paterson to King, 10 March 1806, *HRA* 3/1, 658-9.

¹⁵⁶ Paterson to Castlereagh 12 August 1806, *HRA* 3/1, 661.

¹⁵⁷ Paterson to King 8 January 1805, *HRA* 3/1, 629.

¹⁵⁸ Paterson to King *HRA* 3/1, 634-5. In fact it was to be six years before these cattle began to significantly contribute to the food supply because most initially died and Aboriginal resistance restricted pasture access. Paterson reported on 14 November 1805 that the number had been reduced to about 250 (Paterson to King, *HRA* 3/1, 647). Then, when the surviving cattle were

taken inland the following month, Aborigines injured two stock-keepers and Paterson was forced into "transporting the cattle by water."

¹⁵⁹ Paterson to King, 14 November 1805, *HRA* 3/1, 645.

¹⁶⁰ King to Paterson 26 November 1805 in Kings Letter Book, 510-11, ML A2015.

¹⁶¹ Paterson to King, 11 December 1805, *HRA* 3/1, 649.

¹⁶² King to Paterson, 20 November 1805, *HRA* 3/1, 648.

¹⁶³ Government Order 5 July 1805, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808, ML AK 341.

¹⁶⁴ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 72-3.

¹⁶⁵ Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse* 36.

¹⁶⁶ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 88, 92, 91. It was appropriate that, when Knopwood recorded on 25 July 1807 that the first "publick house" was opened, it was called 'The Sign of the Whale Fishery'.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 80.

¹⁶⁸ Knopwood lists those who first 'deserted' the camp on 3/11/04, and his recording of absconders becomes consistent from 17 February 1805.

¹⁶⁹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 85. The runaways told Knopwood that "on the 2 of May when they were in the wood, they see a large tiger", the first documented thylacine sighting since official settlement began. Knopwood also pointed to the likelihood of further unknown life in the still mysterious bush beyond: "I make no doubt but here are many wild animals which we have not yet seen."

¹⁷⁰ Government Order 31 December 1803, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808, ML AK 341. Glover, *History of the Site of Bowen's Settlement Risdon Cove* 20.

¹⁷¹ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 129.

¹⁷² *HRA* 3/3, 252.

¹⁷³ *HRA* 3/3, 273.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 98-9.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 88-98.

¹⁷⁶ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 56.

¹⁷⁷ Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) 56, 69.

¹⁷⁸ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993) 189, 263.

¹⁷⁹ Meredith, George, "On the expediency of encouraging distillation in the settlements of New South Wales", 28 June 1820, Meredith Papers, AOT, NS 123/15.

¹⁸⁰ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 87, 95.

¹⁸¹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 94.

¹⁸² Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 85.

¹⁸³ Government Order 7 January 1805, Collins, David, *General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808*, ML AK 341.

¹⁸⁴ Government notices in the *Hobart Town Gazette*, for example, usually spoke of convicts as 'servants' unless they committed a separate crime, such as absconding, when they became 'prisoners'.

¹⁸⁵ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 217.

¹⁸⁶ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 36-7, 2, 6.

¹⁸⁷ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 99.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, Knopwood's diary entries for 3 November 1804, 17 February 1805, 24 June 1805, 26 September 1805 and 27 November 1806. *Ibid.* 65, 77, 86, 96.

¹⁸⁹ For example on 8 January 1806 Collins gave ten days warning for eight prisoners who, "having absconded themselves from public labour and being now at large in the woods", to return or be considered "outlaws". *HRA* 3/1, 537. All of these men returned, at least temporarily, and they were tried on 22 January. David Gibson, one of the few convicts to eventually become wealthy in Van Diemen's Land, was among them. Following the arrival of another supply ship there was a further general amnesty at end of 1807. Many prisoners who had been absent for much of the year then returned.

¹⁹⁰ *Memoirs of Joseph Holt, United Irishman*, in preface to, Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, 1788 - 1801* xxx.

¹⁹¹ The estimate that approximately 110 average sized forester kangaroos would have been required each week to maintain the ration is based on the European population of 481 in January 1805. The number of full rations required, allowing for the smaller ration granted women and children, is estimated at 400. The average kangaroo weight of 66 and 2/3 pounds, and the proportion of each animal taken in by the store, 65 per cent, is based on figures given in M. Fels, "Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 29, no. 2 (1982): 51-2. The total number of kangaroos killed would have been much greater again – perhaps close to 200 per week – as many kangaroos were hunted privately

for consumption, sale or barter. The demand generated by the whalers was also significant. Many more again would have been randomly killed or mortally wounded by the dogs without being retrieved.

¹⁹² AOT CO 201/43.

¹⁹³ In June 1806 there were still only 8 bulls, 96 cows, 88 calves, 5 oxen, 1 male horse, 5 female horses, 17 rams, 127 ewes, 21 lambs, 61 wethers, 1 breeding sow and 3 boars in the southern colony, and the emphasis still had to be on breeding, rather than killing stock to eat. AOT CO 201/43.

¹⁹⁴ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 116.

¹⁹⁵ Government Order 6 October 1806, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803-1808, ML AK 341.

¹⁹⁶ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 117.

¹⁹⁷ Government Order 8 December 1806, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803-1808, ML AK 341

¹⁹⁸ Paterson to Windham 29 August 1808, HRA 3/1 672-3.

¹⁹⁹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 120.

²⁰⁰ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* 112-3.

²⁰¹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 116.

²⁰² *Ibid.* 121-22.

²⁰³ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 99. The lost dogs were reported by Harris in a letter to his brother dated 14 May 1808 from York Town, but Harris seems to be describing events that occurred earlier in his home town, Hobart. A guinea was worth one pound, one shilling.

²⁰⁴ Fels, "Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811," 53.

²⁰⁵ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 146.

²⁰⁶ Government Order 15 September 1807, Collins, David, General and Garrison Orders 1803 – 1808, ML AK 341.

²⁰⁷ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 141.

²⁰⁸ Paterson to Sullivan 21 April 1807, HRA 3/1, 668.

²⁰⁹ Paterson to Sullivan 25 August 1807, *HRA* 3/1, 671.

²¹⁰ Paterson to Banks 13 November 1807 ML CY 2456.

²¹¹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 109-46.

²¹² Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2nd ed. (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996) 77; Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803 - 1847* 48-52. Windschuttle has returned to this example in nearly every one of the many articles and talks he has given on the subject, and clearly considers it one of his most potent pieces of evidence. These articles and talks can be accessed at www.sydneyle.com.

²¹³ Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803 - 1847* 48-50. The author has reviewed in detail the limitations of Windschuttle's methodology and his many errors of fact in James Boyce, "Better to Be Mistaken Than to Deceive: The Fabrication of Aboriginal History and the Van Diemonian Record," *Island* 96 (2004); Boyce, "Fantasy Island."

²¹⁴ Macquarie to Geils 8 February 1812, *HRA* 3/1, 466.

²¹⁵ Fels, "Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811" 60.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* 59.

²¹⁷ Knopwood reported that on 26 December 1807 a man arrived at Herdsman's Cove having walked from the northern settlement in three days. The first recorded overland trip had occurred in early 1807 when Lieutenant Laycock crossed from Port Dalrymple in nine days, causing, as West puts it, "great astonishment at Hobart". West reported that a loaded cart was subsequently sent to Launceston "and passed over the country without felling a single tree." West, *The History of Tasmania* 36.

Chapter Three: Access without Conquest: Aborigines, Bushrangers, and the British move into the grassland plains

In early 1808 the British position in Van Diemen's Land was more vulnerable than it had been at any point since 1803. The invaders were, for the first time since their arrival, experiencing the pangs of hunger that had been so familiar for many in their homeland. Dependent as they were on indigenous foods, especially the kangaroo that had largely been exhausted in the secured hunting grounds within a day's travel of the settlements, Aboriginal resistance and convict revolt threatened not only the officer's profits, but the colony's essential food supply. Knopwood's diary chronicles the crisis, and from May 1808 the Chaplain regularly reports, for the first time, "no success" with hunting.¹

The British knew that there was no shortage of wallaby, kangaroo and emu in the extensive grassy woodland regions beyond the secured territory. G.P. Harris wrote to his brother in May 1808 of his "march of 10 days" to Port Dalrymple "thro the finest country in the world... the quantities of kangaroos, emus and wild ducks we saw and killed were incredible."² By 1810 British hunters lived throughout this rich midlands region stretching about 200 kilometres from the northern to the southern settlements, and had secured the food supply of the colony. Parts of the east coast, central highlands and north-east were also regularly visited for their natural resources. So successful was hunting in these regions that by 1810 the price of kangaroo had dropped from one shilling six pence a pound two years before to only four pence a pound. The crisis of 1807-8 had been comprehensively overcome with astonishing speed.

Three questions arise from this considerable achievement. First, given the continued Aboriginal control of these territories, and the effectiveness of their earlier resistance, how was this remarkable access to both land and resources so quickly achieved? Second, what was the impact of the inevitable cross-cultural encounter? And, third, what were the implications of convicts living free and unsupervised so far from the loci of power of the colonial government?

The level of conflict with the Aborigines: 1808 - 20

The Aboriginal resistance to British kangaroo hunters moving into new hunting grounds that was evident in 1807 continued into 1808. On 2 February 1808 Knopwood reported that he "went across the water... [and] brought home two men from the lime-kiln; they were driven away by the natives who had killed two of their dogs."³ On 10 February 1808 Collins ordered that "the settlers are to be on their guard against... the natives who from circumstances that have formerly taken place have become very much irritated against us".⁴ Harris wrote in October 1808 that the Aborigines "have killed some of our servants whilst hunting and it is now dangerous to go into the bush but three or four together well armed".⁵

But in 1811, Governor Lachlan Macquarie, on his first tour of Van Diemen's Land from Sydney, noted a decline in conflict: "several years having elapsed since anything like a principle of hostility has been acted upon, or even in the slightest degree exhibited in the conduct of the natives, it must be evident that no deep-rooted prejudice exists in their minds."⁶ It is possible, though, that the Governor-in-Chief's informants had a vested interest in exaggerating how peacefully the unsanctioned but highly profitable move beyond the bounds of settlement had been. Certainly the Surveyor General of New South Wales, John Oxley, believed that the Van Diemonian bush was still a dangerous place in 1810 since, "from the many atrocious cruelties practiced on them by the convict bushrangers they [the Aborigines] avoid as much as possible the approach of a white man; they are however (in consequence no doubt of the treatment they receive) extremely troublesome to the solitary hunter, who has frequently narrow escapes."⁷ Even Macquarie seems to have changed his mind by 1812, now noting that the escaped convicts "continually molest the natives of the country".⁸ Knopwood's record of his overland trip to Port Dalrymple in 1814 indicates that the possibility of dangerous encounters was well understood.⁹

Nevertheless, the limited available evidence suggests that, though some Europeans directly confronted Aborigines, violence moderated after 1808. Some British residents of the grassy woodlands, like Edward White who lived near the Great Western Tiers for three years, were not even armed.¹⁰ There are also fewer deaths from violence documented after 1808, and none between 1810 and 1815.¹¹ James Bonwick, who detailed the extensive frontier violence of other periods, recorded a number of personal accounts of peaceful relations with Aborigines between 1814 and 1822: "others have told me that they were able to travel about the bush in perfect security between that period... several elderly ladies have narrated circumstances showing more geniality and friendly intercourse; as, the playing of their children with the Aborigines, and their boys going to hunt with the dark skins."¹² Other remembrances of life in this period also include personal testimonies of friendly relations. James Ross had largely peaceful interactions with the Aborigines at the Shannon in the early 1820's, as did George Lloyd at Pitt Water and beyond.¹³ Lloyd recalled that "when but a boy, I passed many happy days in following the chase with those primitive children of the woods."¹⁴ Settlers taking up granted lands after 1818 also record peaceful exchanges in their journals and letters.¹⁵ Knopwood recorded a number of visits by Aborigines even into Hobart Town during 1815-16 and again in 1818. Some visited his foreshore land around present day Salamanca Place to collect shellfish and receive bread, meat and potatoes, without any obvious evidence of the dependence or degradation associated with dispossession that was so evident in the mother colony¹⁶ (About this time, though, references begin to emerge to the 'town mob', which may have comprised dispossessed Aborigines.¹⁷). The seasonal firing of the bush by Aborigines also continued around Hobart Town to at least 1818.¹⁸ Other Van Diemonian writers and early historians, including Henry Melville, many of whom lived through these events, also claim that, after the early forays, major violence did not begin until the 1820s.

Despite the paucity and ambiguity of evidence concerning the nature of frontier relations between 1818 and 1820, it is clear that the convicts and former convicts

accessing the grassy woodlands of the midlands before 1820 had not conquered, and could not conquer, these prime Aboriginal hunting grounds. The access to Aboriginal land and resources enjoyed by these men during this period must be largely explained in other ways.

Were the pasture lands already 'empty'?

One possible explanation for the largely peaceful land access achieved between 1810 and 1818 is that, as seems to have occurred in some parts of mainland Australia, the pasture-lands had already been largely vacated through Aborigines dying from disease. While a reduced Aboriginal population may have facilitated land access in some regions of Van Diemen's Land, there are a sufficient number of recorded observations of large groups of Aborigines, comprising a full demographic (that is, including the infants and elderly), to suggest that before 1820 deaths from disease were limited.¹⁹ This, along with the fact that there is not one recorded British observation of an Aboriginal death by disease in Van Diemen's Land before the late 1820s, does not mean that many Aborigines did not die from this cause, but it does render it unlikely that there was a large-scale epidemic in the oft-visited grassy woodlands, such as decimated the Aboriginal populations of Port Jackson and Port Phillip soon after settlement.²⁰

The little information that there is suggests that Aboriginal immune systems had adapted to the British invasion, perhaps assisted by the long period of European exploration and the small, stable and healthy British population living in the island before 1818. Overall, the extended sailing time from England, whereby diseases were 'burnt out' on arrival, and the fact that only one more convict ship and few free settlers came to the island before 1816, along with the low level of people movement generally, the effective small pox vaccination program, the ready availability of clean water, and an excellent protein rich diet, made Van Diemen's Land one of the healthiest outposts of the British empire before 1820. There were definitely very few white deaths from disease. The limited sources available suggest that this may have been true of Aborigines, too.

Surgeon Mountgarrett told Commissioner Bigge in 1820 that at Port Dalrymple there was little disease and his main work was complications from old war wounds received by ex soldiers and sailors on active service²¹, and Surgeon Luttrell in Hobart Town told the Commissioner: "measles, hooping cough, small pox... None of them are known here, nor is scarlet fever." In response to a follow-up question concerning the diseases of the Aborigines, Luttrell replied: "I don't know any other than the cutaneous [skin] eruption I have just mentioned. We have had some in the hospital, that have been brought in the last stage of dysentery (*sic*)."²² Luttrell ran a temporary hospital specifically for Aborigines in Hobart in late 1819 in response to a number being ill with this condition. However, none seem to have died, and Sorell told the surgeon he wanted it closed: "the Lieutenant Governor finding Mr Luttrell's report that the native peoples are in good health, excepting the cutaneous disorder to which they are more or less liable, will desire that they may be conveyed into the country, so that the hire of the place occupied by them many cease on Saturday next."²³

The little evidence available from the Aborigines themselves also does not suggest that disease was a major killer before the late 1820s. Aborigines who gave their testimony to George Augustus Robinson during his extensive travel with them from 1829 to 1834, and subsequently at the Flinders Island Aboriginal establishment, never mentioned epidemics killing large numbers of people. They told Robinson that the destruction of game, loss of land, abduction of women, and violence were the causes of Aboriginal suffering, although once confined to gaols or exile, this situation changed rapidly.

Canine exchange and land access

A more likely explanation for the largely peaceful access to Aboriginal hunting grounds that most convict hunters quickly achieved after 1808 lies in the provision of goods sought by the Aborigines. In particular, the dog's previous absence from Van Diemen's Land provided Van Diemonian Britons with a major

advantage over their mainland Australian contemporaries seeking similar land access - possession of a product immediately sought by Aborigines. Aborigines used other British goods, including sugar, tea, tobacco, flour, blankets and even potatoes as they became available. And there is evidence from the new white land grantees in the early 1820s that Aborigines believed they had an established right to receive such products from those living on their country. But in the early years the supply of these products was limited and their appreciation by Aborigines not obvious. Dogs, though, were another matter altogether. While they were still being commonly speared in 1807-8, dogs very quickly afterwards became the main method of hunting by Aborigines living in the grassland regions. Rhys Jones argued that the adoption of the dog by Aborigines "happened in Tasmania so quickly that... the process would seem to have been instantaneous."²⁴ Some dogs were forcibly taken but it is likely that, as numbers built up, puppies and even adult dogs would have been readily given up in return for peaceful relations and permitted land access. Rhys Jones believed it was likely that dogs "entered the traditional exchange systems". The speed with which Aborigines adopted the dog makes it the most likely catalyst for land access arrangements with the British, although later the gift of other desired goods may have become as or even more important.²⁵

The documented role of dogs in the political negotiations conducted by George Augustus Robinson in August 1832 with the Aboriginal people of the north west, who still had few dogs, may be a replication of what occurred in the midlands a generation before. Robinson, who was ever careful with his purse, spent four pounds buying three dogs to cement a new relationship with them.²⁶ And the emissary's account of the banter across the divide of the Arthur River the following month is instructive, although by then Robinson controlled access to the Aborigines exiled family and community, and the power balance underpinning the negotiating context had been reversed: "said now they had dogs they could get plenty of kangaroo and wallaby... repeatedly called out 'give us some women and we will give you dogs'".²⁷

Three reports in the *Hobart Town Gazette* in 1816 are reminders, however, of how tentative, provisional and local were cross-cultural settlements. The paper noted that: "the black natives of this colony have for the last few weeks manifested a strange hostility towards the up-country settlers, and in killing or driving away their cattle"; and on 31 August, three Aborigines were reported killed by Government stock-keepers at New Norfolk, the latter claiming that they were resisting attack. By 19 October the *Gazette* warned those travelling between Port Dalrymple and Hobart Town "not to proceed without firearms". The following year the new Lieutenant Governor, William Sorell, took only a month to publicise his concerns about the overall level of conflict with Aborigines. On 24 May 1817 he issued an official order against the "habit of maliciously and wantonly firing at and destroying the defenceless natives or Aborigines of this island." Although the specific background to this order is not clear, it is most unlikely that Sorell was imagining things. Regardless of the significance of canine-facilitated cross-cultural exchange in many areas to the Aborigines and British alike, there was never universal peace in Van Diemen's Land.

Violence seemed to increase again in 1817-18, especially with the Oyster Bay people, whose territory extended from the eastern shore of the Derwent up the east coast as far north as St Patrick's Head (although it is possible that the apparent rise in violence only reflects the fact that more documents survive for this time). In November a hunting party from Hobart Town to the east coast, killing swans, kangaroos and seals, lost a man and all their booty. One woman in the Aboriginal party was "a native girl who had been some time among those at present walking about the streets of Hobart Town." The *Hobart Town Gazette* report remained optimistic, however, that with care, future incidents could be prevented: "we have only to hope that this unhappy circumstance will put persons who are in the habit of frequenting the woods and islands, on their guard in future", and ensure they do not go "any distance" without their arms, "which would probably in all cases prevent disasters of this description, and the necessity of proceeding to extremities on either side, so much to be desired."

On 17 April 1819, two further incidents were reported in the *Gazette*, both "between the stock-keepers and the natives near Macquarie River". In the first, involving James Gordon's stock-keepers, "a native woman accompanied them to the hut and took the food which was offered her" while Aboriginal men speared their sheep. At a similar time, at "the grazing ground of Mr Stocker... a serious affray occurred." It was reported that Aborigines tried to drive off the sheep and one stockmen was killed, one wounded and one Aborigine killed when this was resisted. The *Gazette* noted that there was an alternative version of the background to this incident: "a native woman... had been maltreated by two of the stock-keepers... she escaped... the tribes returned and attacked, as above described, the people and the flock." On 24 April 1819 the *Gazette* corrected its story to say no whites were killed, but two were seriously injured and "the chief was certainly killed."²⁸ Further large sheep losses were reported close to this area in December.²⁹

Cultural contact and meeting: Aboriginal children

The complexity of the cultural contact between the Aborigines and the British before the early 1820s was manifest in the experiences of the Aboriginal children who lived with the invaders of their homeland. Children were central to the cross-cultural encounter, but also most visibly demonstrate the suffering that was at the heart of the experience. They provided the hope that some cross-cultural understanding would emerge, while starkly revealing the limitations of even the most prolonged encounters. It is not possible to be exact about the numbers of children involved. By 31 December 1819, of the 685 children who had been christened by Knopwood, 26 were Aborigines,³⁰ but many other Aboriginal children lived with white settlers without being baptised. Details on the lives of individual children are frustratingly sparse, although sufficient to suggest that the circumstances by which they came to be living with the British, during the early period at least, varied considerably.

The child who lived with Maria McCauley, first in Hobart Town and then in Muddy Plains (around present day Richmond), provides an example of the difficulties of understanding this issue. Knopwood was friendly with Sgt. McCauley (one of the few 'bush-skilled' British soldiers from the early years of the colony) and even more so with his wife – who was a regular visitor to Knopwood's home – and the Chaplain's diary provides the only documentary evidence of this young Aborigine. It is all the more frustrating, therefore, that there no information is given except for the note of 26 December 1807 that "McCauley sent the little girl away that he kept."³¹

Knopwood gives no circumstances as to how the child came to be with this family or why the child was sent away, but the context of the times suggests the likely possibilities. Late 1807 was a time of heightened conflict between the Aborigines and the kangaroo hunters, and girl had probably been left behind or captured in a conflict with her clan. It is also likely that the Sergeant was subsequently ordered to release the child by Collins. The reasons for Collins ordering her release may have been similar to that of 'Robert Hobart May', captured after the Risdon massacre, when the Lieutenant Governor was concerned not to aggravate an already tense security situation, and skeptical about any purported benefits of keeping Aboriginal children.

The fact that the Lieutenant Governor's views on this matter were not absolute, however, is confirmed by the record left by Knopwood of a young girl brought in from Brown's River by Lieutenant Johnson's convict hunters in January 1806. Collins seems to have allowed what Marie Fels has suggested was probably a "misguided attempt to foster".³² It came to nothing, however, as two days after her removal, on 10 January 1806, the Chaplain recorded that "early this morn the little native girl which was brought into Hobart Town made her escape out of a window at Wiggins, a marine with whom she lived."³³

What is clear is that any official limits on keeping Aboriginal children largely ended with Collins' death in 1810. There were five baptisms of Aborigines within

six months of this (including some adults) and a further 31 up to 1820 in the southern settlement alone. Official sanction of the practice of keeping Aboriginal children under Collins' temporary replacement, Captain Murray, is confirmed by the fact that a number of the children baptized between 1810 and 1812 seem to have had the names of soldiers of the 73rd regiment, which had replaced Collins' marines. One of them, 'Lucy Murray', even had the patrimonial of the Commandant, perhaps explained by the fact that Lucy lived in the settlement with her mother, who was baptized on 4 November 1811.³⁴

The new political context probably explains why, sometime in 1810, the McCauleys again resumed the care of an Aboriginal child. They became the guardians of an infant boy who was to become 'Black Robert', one of the first Aborigines to be engaged by George Augustus Robinson for the conciliation expedition over 20 years later. In July 1829, Maria Busby (as she now was) replied through the Colonial Secretary to Robinson's request for Robert to be removed to the Aboriginal establishment at Bruny Island that: "my late husband Sergt McAlley found him at the Cross Marsh in 1810 and brought him home to me to nurse. He then appeared to be about 18 months old." Their subsequent relationship seems to have been a caring one, although still defined by the free labour provided: "all that I can say of him is that he has ever been a faithful and trusting domestic to me... best servant I have... therefore I shall part with him with the greatest regret."³⁵ There is no government record of this child, despite McCauley's official status. Nor does Knopwood ever mention Robert in his diary, despite his close friendship with the family and the Chaplain's broad pastoral responsibility to 'illegitimate' (as he classified Aborigines in his baptismal records) children.³⁶ Nothing is therefore known about the circumstances of Robert's capture. Was McCauley pursuing his family or was Robert found by McCauley at a stock-keeper's hut at Cross Marsh (near present day Melton Mowbray) – presumably after another undocumented violent affray?

Details of other Aboriginal children are similarly scant and make identification difficult. Captain John Brabyn (who took over at Port Dalrymple when Paterson

was forced to renew command at Port Jackson after the 'Rum' Corps Rebellion against Governor Bligh) wrote a list of complaints to Paterson in February 1809. These included that: "Fanny the native girl has walked out on Mr Dry and had not been seen since."³⁷ It was presumably another 'Fanny' who lived with the Hardwicke's at Norfolk Plains and was baptized by the Rev. John Youll on 12 January 1820, since the new Port Dalrymple Chaplain estimated her age at 11 years. 'Fanny Hardwicke' subsequently encountered Robinson in the Hobart Town gaol on 10 October 1829, when he reported she "speaks English well and knows not a word of the Aboriginal tongue" and lived with a sealer called Baker ("a man of colour").³⁸

Aboriginal children are occasionally referred to in the *Hobart Town Gazette*. For example, the paper reported on 13 December 1817 that: "we understand that a native black boy, late stock-keeper to Mr B Reardon at Pitt Water, has been found dead there, and is at present supposed to have been murdered." A week later the paper reported on the inquest into the death of the "native boy" now named as 'Paddy', which found that he "drowned by accident" while hunting ducks with his dog. An almost simultaneous inquest in the northern settlement reported on a "black native girl... drowned in South Esk River".³⁹ And, in what would now seem an almost comical legal judgment on one of the ancestral owners of the land if it were not for the horrific punishment meted out, on 7 February 1818 the *Gazette* recorded that three men, including "George, a black native" had been "charged with wandering in the woods without any visible means of obtaining a livelihood". They were sentenced to 12 months in the chain gang in consequence. Reference was also made to another 'George' in 1821. He had been "found in the woods near the River Plenty about 2 ½ years ago and has been since under the protection of the Lieutenant Governor and who was christened by the name of George van Dieman". 'George' had recently gone to England "in the care of William Kermode" and was then "supposed to be almost nine years old".⁴⁰

Many children seem to have left white families at adolescence, presumably because they desperately wanted to return to their family, community and home, and did so as soon as they were able. This understandable desertion of white society was often interpreted as proof that the innate 'savagery' of Aborigines could not ultimately be removed (the main reasons for Collins arguing, in his *Account*, that there was little long term philanthropic benefit in removal), or, more sympathetically, as the search for a partner.⁴¹ Certainly it was only very rarely that an Aboriginal young person brought up with whites was able to form a long term relationship without leaving British controlled territory. Catherine Kennedy and William Ponsonby, or 'Black Bill' – who married on 16 August 1830 – are two notable exceptions.⁴² And James George recorded in his diary in 1824 that at William Meredith's stock yards "the cattle was in charge" of a "black man and a gin."⁴³

It generally took violence for these young people to be much noticed by white officialdom. The first record of a serious incident is when "three civilized black natives" who had both "guns and dogs" were deemed responsible for "depredations" in March 1817.⁴⁴ Official details of this incident were recorded by Ensign Mahon in a report to his commanding officer on 17 March:

on the 13th, having received information that three civilized black natives had provided themselves with a few arms and dogs, and committed a robbery on Mr Beamont's cart at the Green Water Holes, I immediately went in pursuit of them, and succeeded in taking one of them (the other two escaped through the darkness of the night) and sent him into Hobart Town, with the articles I found with him.⁴⁵

In November 1818 two Aborigines were even sentenced to transportation, the *Hobart Town Gazette* reporting that:

Two black natives who have been long among the inhabitants, named James Tedbury and George Frederick, were charged with robbing Robin

Gavin of several articles, and James Goodwin of a musket at Coal River; after which they escaped to the woods, and were there apprehended, both armed. They were each sentenced to be transported to such part of this territory as His Honor the Lieutenant Governor may be pleased to direct for the term of three years.⁴⁶

While it is impossible to be definitive about the motivation of these Aborigines, it seems likely that some of the Aboriginal children who had lived with the British were by then reaching young adulthood, and making their primary loyalties known. Perhaps they were even exacting revenge for the circumstances of their capture. Once fighting intensified in the mid 1820s 'civilized' Aborigines came into greater prominence, both as potential conscripts and as feared enemies.⁴⁷ Knowledge of British and Aboriginal methods of warfare, lifestyle and language made men like 'Tom Birch' or 'Black Tom' both powerful leaders of the resistance and the principal agents through which negotiations were conducted and settlements reached.

Robinson's party included, and encountered, a number of these Aborigines, and some hint of their background is provided in his descriptions of them. Robert, for example, was of little value to the expedition, partly because, having been removed at such a tender age, he had no language skills, recognized tribal identity or name, and a low level of bush aptitude. Black Richard also lacked bush skills and had probably been with the British since infancy.⁴⁸ Furthermore, having other potential employers (at least before the hysteria of war made movement by any Aborigine, even a 'civilized' one, a hazardous affair), these men had little motivation or cause to endure the hardships Robinson's journeying entailed. Richard soon tried to leave the party, but his lack of survival skills meant he was forced to return. However Tom Birch, described by an excited Robinson after he conscripted him for the expedition as "a famous interpreter", was bilingual, had a tribal name and identity, excellent bush skills and, as a former resistance leader, few other options. Tom had clearly entered white care at a significantly older age.⁴⁹

Aborigines who had been raised by whites and were working as stock-keepers or on farms generally showed little inclination to join Robinson, and in this were supported by their employers and, initially, by Arthur. The circular letter sent out on 26 May 1829 addressed to settlers who had Aborigines employed, asked that they send their Aboriginal employees to the Bruny establishment, where they would be given "a portion of land... with every assistance... to bring the same into cultivation". But this seems, without follow-up by the Lieutenant Governor, to have been ignored by all but Maria Busby, and Arthur did "not see occasion for their [the settlers] parting with such natives as they have in their employ, provided they use them well it is just what I should wish."⁵⁰

As the fighting became more intense, however, there was much more pressure to 'hand over' all Aborigines for removal, regardless of baptism or their supposed legal rights as British subjects, and the contradictions inherent in the official policy were manifest. For example, Robinson blamed the departure of 'Dick', who had lived for many years with settlers at Longford Plains, on "the young O'Connor's, whom I am informed by the messenger gave him every encouragement... saying he was a free man... and the convict servants taunting him and saying 'you are not a free man now Dick... No, you are a prisoner now!' Robinson gave up the search for Dick on the grounds that "he would be sure to go to the white people."⁵¹

Why were Aboriginal children kept by the British? For some there was a religious and philanthropic dimension. The salvation of Aborigines through 'civilizing' the children was to be a persistent nineteenth (and, indeed, twentieth century) theme. Robinson, for example, told Arthur in mid 1829 that the Aboriginal children of the Bruny Island establishment "appear to be destined by providence as a foundation upon which the superstructure of Your Excellency's benevolence is hereafter to be erected". Robinson advised the Lieutenant Governor that "the children are now kept separate from the rest of their tribe" and he proposed "to

erect a dormitory for their accommodation" (these plans were never implemented as the high death rate led to the abandonment of the establishment soon after).⁵²

Philanthropic motivations notwithstanding, the most important reason why British settlers procured Aboriginal children was probably the unpaid labour they provided. Slavery was not abolished in the British Empire until 1833, and cultural attitudes were conditioned by centuries of exploitation of 'native' workers.⁵³ The value of Aboriginal children to the British was particularly significant in the period before 1818 because of the pervasive labour shortage. Only one convict ship from England arrived before 1816, and the sentences for many of the first arrivals had expired. These former convicts demanded comparatively high wages that were unaffordable to many small settlers, and it is therefore not surprising that the number of Aboriginal children living with whites increased rapidly after official constraints relaxed, especially as this corresponded with the move into remote grassland regions which magnified both demand for, and access to, this 'free' labour supply. The children's capacity to access the resources of the bush, and perhaps intercede with the owners and defenders of the land, would also have been highly valued. An added bonus to employing Aborigines, young or old, was that they were allowed to travel without restriction – unlike most former convicts – which made them attractive recruits for sealers, whalers and merchants. Tasmanian Aborigines were employed on missions that took them to Mauritius, New Zealand and many islands in Oceania and the Pacific.⁵⁴

Because of their capacity to work, and their knowledge of the bush's resources, it is likely that older children would usually have been preferred to small infants in white households. A late age of capture or recruitment is further suggested by the fact that most adult 'civilized' Aborigines had ongoing tribal identities and relationships. This does, though, complicate analysis of this issue. While infants are almost certain to have been refugees from armed conflict, left behind or captured because of their inability to keep up with their fleeing family, two questions suggest the possibility that the circumstances by which older children came to be living with the British were more varied.

In the 1808-20 period at least, when Aboriginal control over their ancestral lands remained largely intact, why is it that more Aboriginal children did not run away as the one who lived with the marine, Wiggins, did?⁵⁵ It is true that, with the move into new grasslands in the interior, the British were now crossing tribal boundaries. Children obtained through skirmishes or other means were now being removed from their homelands and the journey home, if possible at all, would often have been long and hazardous. But more puzzling, given the relative British powerlessness in the bush, is how so many were captured in the first place. As dispossession accelerated across the woody grassland regions and coastal bays and estuaries after 1818, this question becomes less pertinent. But, given the lack of any evidence for a dramatic level of population decline and break down in community structures before then, there may have been other reasons for Aboriginal children living with whites at this time. Did Aborigines see advantages in having some of their children spend time with the British? It is even possible that fostering arrangements were seen to bind the newcomers into reciprocal obligations. Simple curiosity about British life and access to food and products may also have played its part. There is just not enough information to know.

Perhaps the 'mystery' of how and why so many Aboriginal children came to be living with the invaders is simply evidence that violence and the level of dispossession and cultural disruption were far more widespread in the 1808-1818 period than the limited documentary record otherwise suggests.

Certainly this seems to have been the view of the early Governors. Davey's proclamation on 25 June 1814 is instructive:

It having been intimated to the Lieutenant Governor that a very marked and decided hostility has lately been evinced by the natives in the neighbourhood of the Coal River, in an attack they made upon the herds grazing in that district, he has felt it his duty to inquire into the probable

causes which may have induced them to adopt their offensive line of conduct, and it is not without the most extreme concern he has learnt that the resentment of these poor uncultivated beings has been justly excited by a most barbarous and inhuman mode of proceeding acted upon towards them, viz. the robbery of their children! Had not the Lieutenant-Governor the most positive and distinct proofs of such barbarous crimes having been committed, he could not have believed that a British subject would so ignominiously have stained the honour of his country and of himself; but the facts are too clear, and it therefore becomes the indispensable and bounden duty of the Lieutenant-Governor thus publicly to express his utter indignation and abhorrence thereof.⁵⁶

Sorell's detailed order of 13 March 1819 also contains two references to Aboriginal children. The first referred to a recent incident:

From information received by His Honor the Lieutenant Governor, there seems reason to apprehend that outrages have recently been perpetrated against some of the native people in the remote country adjoining the River Plenty, though the result of the inquiries instituted upon these reports has not established the facts alleged farther than that two native children have remained in the hands of a person resident above the Falls.

The second was more general. The "occasional outrages of miscreants" included that they:

sometimes... pursue the women, for the purpose of compelling them to abandon their children. This last outrage is perhaps the most certain of all to excite in the sufferers a strong thirst for revenge against all white men... With a view to prevent the continuance of the cruelty before-mentioned, of depriving the natives of their children; it is hereby ordered that the resident magistrates at the districts of Pitt Water and Coal River, and the District Constables in all other Districts, do forthwith take an account of all the

native youths and children which are resident with any of the settlers or stock-keepers, stating from whom, and in what manner they were obtained... No person whatever will be allowed to retain possession of native youth or child, unless it shall be clearly proved that the consent of the parents had been given; or that the child had been found in a state to demand shelter and protection... All native youths and children who shall be known to be with any of the settlers or stock-keepers, unless so accounted for, will be removed to Hobart Town, where they will be supported and instructed at the charge and under the direction of Government.⁵⁷

This order seems to have been ignored. There is no evidence that Aboriginal children were placed in the government's care as a result of it, or that the practice of child abduction ceased. At Richmond gaol in the new year of 1830 Robinson met with a captured Aboriginal woman who was in "extreme distress" at the "loss of her son". Robinson noted that: "this is not the first time I have had occasion to deplore the pernicious custom which prevails of separating children from their parents."⁵⁸ This "custom" was by then longstanding and is a reminder of the injustice and suffering inherent to the cross-cultural encounter.

Cultural contact and meeting: Aboriginal women

Relationships with white men and Aboriginal women became more common between 1808 and 1820 although, as ever, information is limited and difficult to interpret. These relationships have usually been seen as the result of abduction and violence for the purposes of slave labour and sex. From the mid 1820s this does indeed seem to be the dominant story, but before 1820, given the reality of Aboriginal power and control, the picture seems to have been more complex.⁵⁹

The extent of these relationships is difficult to establish as most occurred in remote stock huts. In 1830 the Aborigines Committee was told that "fourteen years ago there was constant communication between the stock-keepers and the

female natives.”⁶⁰ Commissioner Bigge heard contrasting views in 1820. James Gordon believed that “intercourse... between the female natives and the stock-keepers in the interior... is very rare if ever, and then only with such female natives as have frequented the towns.” Henry Barrett, however, claimed that “the black women frequently live with the English, and they quarrel and the women are turned away. I have heard the black men say sometimes that the English take their wives.”⁶¹ Much of the apparent contradiction probably reflects regional difference. Barrett was living near George Town, and in the north east many Aboriginal women lived with sealers and other whites, increasingly as a result of forced abduction. In the interior, however, although there were some ongoing relationships between white men and Aboriginal women, these were less common. But it must also be kept in mind that Gordon, a wealthy stock owner and merchant, would have been concerned to ensure that access to the grasslands regions was not threatened by philanthropic concern about native rights in London. Barrett, a former convict, had no obvious vested interest.

Studies into the relations between indigenous peoples and settler societies in which a first wave of white occupation did not significantly threaten indigenous people's control of their land may inform a deeper understanding of this sensitive issue in Van Diemen's Land. Van Kirk has argued that the relationship between Native American women and French fur traders “was not loose morality or even hospitality... This was their way of drawing the traders into their kinship circle” and created a “reciprocal social bond which served to consolidate the economic relationships.” Although they were sometimes degraded and debased, the fur traders provided women with new possibilities that supplied potential individual and community benefits. However Van Kirk also notes that “it is evident that the traders often did not understand the Indian concept of these alliances.”⁶² It is also important to remember that in Van Diemen's Land the period of indigenous control was only twenty years, with the power balance shifting rapidly after 1820, and the capacity of women to exercise any choice, let alone be active agents in taking advantage of new possibilities, thereafter rapidly declined.

Excepting the relationships between sealers and Aboriginal women in Bass Strait, the three best documented relationships between Europeans and Aboriginal women in Van Diemen's Land are those involving James Carrett, Archibald Campbell and George Briggs. Carrett was first named by Knopwood as an absconder in 1807. He became notorious for cruelty to Aborigines after James Hobbs repeated Carrett's sadistic boast, probably made when they were on a north-west exploratory trip together in 1824, to the Aborigines Committee in 1830. Hobbs alleged that Carretts (who was by then dead) had "told him that he had once cut off a native man's head at Oyster Bay, and made his wife hang it round her neck, and carry it as a plaything" and "from Carrott's manner he credited the story."⁶³

The relationships of the two other men are remembered for less horrifying exploits, Archibald or 'Richard' Campbell because he chose to live so close to Hobart, and George Briggs because he has so many descendants in the Aboriginal community today.

Campbell was one of the *Calcutta* convicts who spent much of the 1808-13 period in the bush. A beneficiary of a bushranger amnesty in 1814, he returned to live at South Arm where he and his partner became the catalyst for Aborigines visiting Hobart. Knopwood's first reference to this is on 7 July 1814 when he notes that "four natives came in that had been to South Arm. They had joined Richard Campbell who had a native woman living with him."⁶⁴ Another visit occurred on 20 August 1814 when the *Sydney Gazette* reported that "after receiving certain articles of clothing from His Honor the Lieut. Governor and other humane gentlemen of this settlement they were conducted through the streets by A. Campbell (a prisoner)." The *Gazette* reported that, as Davey wanted to also see the remaining Aborigines, the original party, with Campbell "accompanied by a native woman of one of the neighbouring islands, and who has lived with Campbell for some years", followed them to Betsey's Island, where "they all expressed a wish by Campbell's woman to see Hobart... Campbell brought 13 to town, who received every kindness and humanity from the Lieut. Governor, who

likewise clothed them. They were afterwards landed on the Island of Le Bruni at their own request". Bonwick described Campbell as the "forerunner of George Augustus Robinson" and a "courageous and benevolent convict" but, sadly, we do not even know his partner's name. The scant details available suggest she was from the long term heartland of the cultural encounter, Bruny Island.⁶⁵

New South Wales born George Briggs lived with several Aboriginal women in Van Diemen's Land and fathered a number of children with them. The christening of two of these, Hannah and Dolly, is recorded by Knopwood during a visit to the northern settlement in March 1814. Dolly later married Thomas Johnson at Meander River and had seven children, becoming the matriarch of a large and still growing clan. Most of the information on Briggs before 1818 is contained in the account by James Kelly of his circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in an open five-oared whaling boat in the summer of 1815/16.

James Kelly's expedition

The documented cultural meetings that occurred during Kelly's circumnavigation deserve detailed attention, as they reveal both the complexity of the exchange between Aborigines and the British and the extent of regional and national diversity across the island. Kelly, born in Parramatta in 1791 to a convict woman, was accompanied by four experienced bushmen. John Griffith was, like Kelly and Briggs, native born⁶⁶ and connected with sealing. William Jones and Thomas Tombs were *Calcutta* convicts, long-term kangaroo hunters and sometime bushrangers, as well as experienced boatmen.⁶⁷ This is particularly significant because it meant that their attitudes and responses were not those of visiting explorers from the outside world or the privileged urban chroniclers of a bush adventure, but were shaped by many years of living in Aboriginal lands. All four had lived for the majority of the previous decade outside the British settlements. Their assumptions and attitudes thus give insight into the perspectives of a small but experienced sample of ordinary Van Diemonian bushmen.

The first contact with Aborigines occurred the day after setting out when, on 13 December 1815, Kelly reported: "we attempted to haul the boat up on the south side Recherche Bay, but were prevented by a large body of natives giving us a tremendous volley of stones and spears."⁶⁸ Recherche Bay, since Bruni D'Entrecasteux's prolonged visit in 1792, had been a frequent resort of Europeans, especially whalers, and presumably, given the documented peaceful nature of French contact in the Bay, Aboriginal hostility had resulted from subsequent undocumented attacks.

The following day Kelly records a more pacific encounter:

in a small sandy bay to the northward of De Witt's Isles... we had a friendly reception from a large number of natives. We made them a few presents, consisting of sugar and biscuit... They seemed... to behave as if at a rejoicing, on account of their seeing new visitors... they brought down their women and children to see us, a token which shows friendship amongst these savages.⁶⁹

Presumably the welcome provided by these Aborigines shows they had enjoyed a greater degree of isolation and safety, although the ease of contact also suggests they had shared some level of friendly exchange in the past.

Kelly spent three days at Port Davey, which was 'discovered' and named on this expedition, and on the 21 December the explorers saw two Aborigines who "seemed very much alarmed at seeing us... We gave them two black swans, of which we had a good stock in the boat. They seemed delighted with the present." Kelly and his crew could well have been the first Europeans ever seen by these Aborigines. That night, about half a mile distance they camped at a spot they named "Crawfish Creek" in consequence of the immense number of crayfish that lay at the water's edge. Kelly claimed that "there were about three tons in one heap."⁷⁰

At the entrance to what they were to name Macquarie Harbour, Kelly documented the nervousness of the expeditioners as they travelled the unknown, but well populated, west coast. The fact that the "whole face" of the coast was on fire, was, he deemed:

a lucky circumstance for us. The smoke was so thick we could not see a hundred yards ahead of the boat. On pulling into the narrows, at the small entrance island, we heard a large number of natives shouting and making a great noise, as if they were hunting kangaroo. It is highly fortunate that the smoke was thick, for had the natives seen the boat pass through the narrow entrance, it is possible they would have killed every person on board, by discharging in their usual way volleys of spears and stones. In the afternoon the smoke cleared off a little, and we found ourselves in a large sheet of water near a small island where we landed, and found plenty of black swans on their nests, and plenty of their eggs. We remained for the night upon the island, thus keeping safe from the natives.⁷¹

North of Macquarie Harbour Kelly had an unplanned rendezvous when, after a day getting very wet and having:

just got a large fire made to dry ourselves... to our great astonishment, we were accosted by six huge men, black natives, each of them above six feet high and very stout made... They had one spear in their right hands, and two in their left... Our men were greatly alarmed... it was thought best to make gestures to them to come closer to us ... Our arms all wet and no means of defending ourselves, we were indeed in a very perplexing situation. Fortune... was still on our side. We had nine or ten black swans and a large wombat in the boat, that we had brought from Macquarie Harbour as fresh provisions. On our showing them one of the swans they seemed delighted, and came nearer to the boat... each of them had a spear between the great toe of each of their feet, dragging

them along the ground. We supposed they had never seen a white man before. It was thought best to try to barter with them for their spears, so that if we got possession of them they could not hurt us. We luckily succeeded in giving them four swans and the wombat for them all. They appeared very much pleased with the bargain they had made, and went away holding up one hand each as a sign of friendship. A great number of smokes were made along the coast, which we believed were intended as signals to the tribes. We remained on the beach that night, and drying our arms brought them into firing order, keeping – apprehensive of another visit from the natives – incessant watch.⁷²

Not for the first time, British vulnerability had created the space where a productive and peaceful exchange could occur. Fear, however, created tensions and misunderstandings that easily escalated to violence. On 4 January Kelly landed at Hunter's Island off the north-west tip of Van Diemen's Land and, seeing "a great many fires along the shore", Kelly "kept the boat and the arms ready, in case of an attack from the natives". An armed group of "at least fifty in number" soon approached and "began to advance slowly towards us near the fire." The British "held up" their guns and made "signs to them not to come any closer". The Aborigines, however, were not put off and forced a meeting, mocking the British pretension:

They held up their spears in return, accompanying their movements with loud laughing. They jeered at us... We thought it desirable to retreat to the boat, when suddenly they laid down their weapons in the edge of the bush, and each holding up both hands as if they did not mean any mischief, at the same time making signs to us to lay down our arms, which we did to satisfy them – for if we had retreated quickly to the boat, it was probable they would have killed every one of us before we could have got out of range of their spears. The natives then began to come to us, one by one, holding up both hands to show they had no weapons... there were twenty two came to the fire. We made signs to them that no more should

be allowed to come... When the chief came he ordered all to sit down on the ground, which they did, and formed a sort of circle around the fire. The chief ordered the old man to dance and sing, as if to amuse us...

What followed is something of a mystery. The experienced Briggs "brought two swans from the boat, one under each arm", presumably to cement the peaceful exchange. But Kelly reports that:

When the chief saw them he rushed at Briggs to take the swans from him, but did not succeed. He then ordered the men to give us a volley of stones, which they did – he giving the time in most beautiful order, swing his arm three times, and at each swing calling 'Yah! Yah! Yah!' and a severe volley it was. I had a large pair of dueling pistols in my pocket... and seeing there was no alternative I fired amongst them, which dispersed them; the other I fired after them as they ran away... We found several marks of blood on the stones in the direction that the natives ran away when the pistols were fired. Some of them were most probably wounded. We then got into our boat. Just as we were pulling away we received a large volley of stones and spears from the natives... but luckily no one was hurt. We landed on a small rock covered with birds. They were laying, and we got six bucketfuls of eggs – a good supply. This seemed to offend the natives as a number of women came down on a point of rocks and abused us very much for taking their eggs.⁷³

Why Briggs resisted the swans being taken is not clear. More certain, is that the British were 'saved' by their boat. The hidden pistols temporarily dispersed the unarmed Aborigines, but without a ready boat to flee in, there would have been little hope against such a large group.

The next meeting with Aborigines was on the north-east coast, where contact between the British and Aborigines, through the sealers, had been the most extensive. Kelly's record gives a unique insight into the established cross-

cultural exchange and the extent to which Briggs at least had assumed some identity and responsibilities in Aboriginal society (and his willingness to ignore these).⁷⁴ On 13 January:

At noon landed on Ringarooma Point; here we suddenly fell in with a large mob of natives, who, upon their first appearance, seemed hostile – but on seeing Briggs, whom they knew particularly well, the chief, whose name was Lamanbunganah, seemed delighted at the interview, and told him he was at war with his own brother Tolobunganah, a most powerful chief, and then on the coast near Eddystone Point. Tolobunganah was also one of Briggs's acquaintances. Briggs had left two wives and five children upon the islands during his absence at Hobart Town, and had taken this trip round the west coast thinking he might fall in with some of his black relations near Cape Portland. One of his wives was a daughter of the chief Lamanbunganah, whom we had just fallen in with, and he generally called his father-in-law Laman for shortness. The chief made enquiry after his daughter, and was told that she and her children were safe over at Cape Barren. Laman said he knew that, for he saw her smokes every day.

'Laman' sought Briggs' aid in an internal conflict. He had "had heard that five or six white men well armed were with his brother Tolobunganah at Eddystone Point, and that they intended to come and attack his [Laman's] tribe and kill them all". These were assumed "as a matter of course" by Kelly to have been the bushranger, Michael "Howe and his party". When Briggs was reticent, 'Laman' "told Briggs in a very hostile tone that he had often before gone with him to fight other tribes when he [Briggs] wanted women." The situation became very tense when:

Laman gave a loud cooe, and in two minutes we were surrounded by above fifty natives... We now got very much alarmed at the dangerous situation we were in, and as an excuse, Briggs told Laman that we would

go over to Cape Barren and fetch Briggs's wife, that we would also get five or six of the sealers to join us with plenty of firearms, and come over and fight Tolobunganah. Laman was much pleased...⁷⁵

Kelly confirms that Briggs "had acquired the native language of the north-east coast of Van Diemen's Land fluently" and that he often went "over from the island to Cape Portland to barter kangaroo skins with the natives, as also to purchase the young grown up native females... whom they employed, as they were wonderfully dextrous in hunting kangaroo and catching seals."⁷⁶

Rather than head north to Cape Barren, as Briggs had promised, Kelly headed south. After landing on a small island he enunciated the two reasons why off-shore islands were favoured European refuges: "while we were here we were safe from native attack", and there were "a number of seals lying on the rocks basking in the sun." On this occasion, however, "having no salt with us to cure the skins we thought it useless to kill them", though the next day, forced "to lie idle with a foul wind, and being all old hands at sealing", an alternative technique (commonly used to cure skins in North America) was employed:

we commenced killing and flinching the skins from the bodies, stretching them out upon the grass with wooden pegs. They were dried in the sun, and in one day became perfectly cured. This day we killed and pegged out thirty skins. The following day, 16th January, we killed, flinched and pegged out twenty five sealskins.⁷⁷

A "large number of natives" had by now gathered on the beach opposite the island, and on 17 January, when they found "the seals getting shy of coming up on the rocks", they "gave them a rest" and went to communicate with the Aborigines:

We did not go closer to the beach than musket shot for fear of being surprised by Howe's party. Briggs stood up in the boat and called out to

the natives in their own language to come to the waterside. They seemed shy until he told them who he was, when an old man rushed up to his middle in the water. Briggs called to him to swim to the boat, which he did, and we hauled him in. It turned out to be the old chief, Tolobunganah. Tolobunganah was overjoyed at seeing Briggs... Tolobunganah stood up in the boat and called to the natives. About twenty of them came down to the waterside; they all knew Briggs, and seemed glad to see him. We made Tolo a present of the four dead seals and the live pups, at which he seemed highly gratified. Immediately after they had obtained the seals six women came down, each with a dead kangaroo on their shoulders. Tolo ordered them to be brought to the boat... We felt obliged to... extract all the friendly information we could from the Aborigines relative to Howe and his party, as we were still of opinion... that they were close at hand, but the natives assured us that they were gone a long distance to the southward, towards St Patrick's Head.⁷⁸

The whaleboat crew and Aborigines agreed to continue the exchange and the next day was spent by both parties hunting – the British for seals and the Aborigines for kangaroo. The following morning “the whole tribe came down on the beach; there were about two hundred men, women and children, and at least fifty dogs.” But Kelly's party stayed wary and:

Tolo seemed much displeased at this evident want of confidence. The natives asked if we would bring over more seals on the following day. Briggs informed them that they were getting scarce and shy of being caught. Tolo considered that we had better take some women over to the island to assist in catching them. This course being agreed on, Tolo ordered six stout women into the boat. They obeyed with alacrity, evidently delighted with the prospects of the trip.

Over the coming days, mainly through the seal hunting skills of the Aboriginal women, which Kelly describes in some detail, a total of 122 seal skins were

obtained (worth, he claimed, a pound each in Hobart Town) and in exchange for the seal carcass, a further 246 kangaroo skins from the Aborigines. The combined value of the plunder and barter, according to Kelly, was £180 in Hobart. The trade was closed with a dance around the dead seals involving about 300 Aborigines, including many children.⁷⁹

Before completing the circumnavigation, Kelly recorded that a "large number" of Aborigines were seen at Schouten Island and "several" at Maria Island. The latter "ran along the beach calling us to go ashore, which we declined".

What can be made of these varied encounters? Five important themes emerge. First, there is evidence of the extent and diversity of the cross-cultural contact that had by then occurred in different regions of Van Diemen's Land. It is a reminder that what transpired at meetings between the Aborigines and the British varied significantly over time and place.

Second, a pervading nervousness is evident among those who had lived in Aboriginal controlled lands, even in places where contact had been most extensive. Even in the north-east, despite the personal links between Briggs and Aboriginal leaders, Kelly's account suggests that, for one side at least, profit drove the cultural exchange and mistrust remained pervasive.

Third, it seems that in 1816 the possibility of forced abduction of Aboriginal women outside their participation in inter-tribal conflict was low, and the capacity for Aboriginal retaliation very real. Briggs remained accountable to the Aboriginal elders for the women on Cape Barren Island, who were in contact through communication by smoke. It is significant that his wife was the daughter of a senior man, and the marriage had brought with it customary ties and obligations (even if Briggs disregarded these by not returning to Cape Barren as agreed). Rebe Taylor suggests that Kelly's presentation of Briggs and sealing generally may have been overly benign, as Kelly had business interests tied up in this trade and therefore a vested interest in not exposing high levels of violence and

brutality.⁸⁰ But, if so, his claim that the sealers assisted in Aboriginal disputes to aid the abduction of women, seems odd. Kelly was also open with Commissioner Bigge in 1820 (despite still being involved in the industry) that sealers sometimes forcibly abducted women.⁸¹ Kelly, like Briggs and the other expeditioners, was certainly no innocent – a number of Maoris were to die on a sealing voyage he led, and Robinson was concerned at “improper conduct towards the natives” at Kelly’s farm on North Bruny Island.⁸² But assessments of character do not go far towards explaining frontier relations, or the change that was soon to come. As Kelly’s account suggests, the balance of power, not a benign attitude, seems likely to have limited the sealer’s violence to Aborigines before 1816.

The fourth significant theme to emerge from Kelly’s report explains the vulnerability experienced by the British – their clear awareness that the whole coast, other than the small outpost at George Town, was under Aboriginal control. Kelly’s Aboriginal population numbers seem high in the context of current population estimates (which may be too low), but were consistent with prevailing opinion, including the official census, which estimated the Aboriginal population as twice that of the whites in 1818.⁸³ And regardless of how many Aborigines lived in Van Diemen’s Land in 1815-16, Kelly’s account does indicate that the overall impact of disease and violence on Aboriginal communities remained moderate. There is no evidence that there were few children or old people, those most vulnerable to death by disease, or that, even in the north-east, Aboriginal groups had yet lost a critical mass of their young women. Kelly’s circumnavigation provides further evidence that this was not the ‘empty’ land that awaited the British in some areas of the mainland, where smallpox and other epidemics sometimes cleared the path of conquest. In Van Diemen’s Land, 13 years after official white settlement began, and 18 years after the unofficial invasion commenced, Aboriginal political, economic and social structures were intact. It can be confidently asserted that this was a trip through the various language groups of Aboriginal Tasmania. For the time being, therefore,

pragmatic and prudent policy demanded restraint for those Britons seeking to travel in or profit from, an island still largely controlled by Aborigines.

Finally, despite the reality of Aboriginal power and control in most regions, Kelly's account does provide evidence that in some areas violence had already become endemic, and points to greater horrors to come by confirmation that sealers were forcibly abducting Aboriginal women, even if they still needed the help of rival clans to do so. Although Aborigines seem to have been to some extent incorporating sealers and bushrangers into customary ties and relations, the presence of the sealers and bushrangers was clearly affecting established relations – and this, too, probably increased violence and abductions. Perhaps the most worrying portent of all was that even where extensive peaceful contact had occurred, this had not mitigated the latent fear and aggression on the part of the invaders, and the foundation for the increase in violence that was to occur in the 1820s was thus already evident.

A new form of bushranger

With violence between the Aborigines and the British remaining limited before 1820, the main threat to the interests of the elite was internal. The records of the government officials of Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple make it very clear that between 1810 and 1818 bushrangers almost completely supplanted Aborigines as the main security concern.

The short lived *Derwent Star and Van Diemen's Land Intelligencer* reported on 3 April 1810 on the sudden death of David Collins at the age of 54, describing him as “truly a father and a friend. His humanity to the unfortunate victims under his care was most conspicuous, being ever more ready to pardon than punish the offender.”⁸⁴ The death of Collins left a vacuum in which the social contract and customs that had moderated relations between convicts and the authorities seem to have substantially broken down.

John Pascoe Fawcner wrote a chilling (unpublished) account of the suffering of the convict, George Watts, who married Collins' ex-partner, the Norfolk Islander Margaret ("Peggy") Eddington, soon after Collins' death. According to Fawcner, Watts: "behaved well, until ill usage, and tortured beyond bearing", led him to "the host of troubles he finally succumbed under". Fawcner recorded in considerable detail the bushranger's "mournful tale" which culminated in his death in late 1817 from wounds received when seeking to bring in fellow bushranger, Michael Howe, in a last desperate bid to gain a pardon.⁸⁵ Though centred around the particular charms of Watt's wife, and the alleged immorality of Knopwood as magistrate and pastor, Fawcner's story is intended to convey something of the power wielded by the small officer elite, who, without the check of an able commander, began to wield power indiscriminately in their own self-interest. To back up his claim that "many of the old officers of Hobart Town and Launceston did more to render the colonists unhappy by filling the woods with men driven to desperation by mental and bodily torture", Fawcner also gave the example of the bushranger, Paddy Kane, who, as he was waiting to be hung in Launceston, spoke from the gallows to the magistrate who had sentenced him: "it was you sir that drove me to the bush, you flogged me cruelly for a crime I never committed... and you would have flogged me a second time but I fled and the result is the gallows – you murdered me."⁸⁶

Fawcner does not record that he himself, this pillar of the Melbourne establishment, was himself punished severely at this time, for attempting to aid a convict escape.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, his explanation for the large increase in the number of hardened outlaws after 1810 is made more credible when the calibre of Collins' replacements is considered. Captain Murray, who was Commandant from 1810 to 1812; Edward Lord, who filled in between times; and Thomas Davey, who finally took up his posting as the new Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land in 1813, lacked the understanding and administrative skills to fulfill their challenging task – at least this was how it seemed to Lachlan Macquarie, their Commander in Chief in Sydney. Macquarie was scathing in his assessment of the character and competency of these men.

But it is also true that such factors alone are not sufficient to explain what Knopwood described on 19 May 1815 as the colony's "dreadful state owing to the bushrangers".⁸⁸ The lack of any higher court, that meant that most crime was punished in a summary manner, did not help matters.⁸⁹ Equally significant is the arrival of the first convicts to come direct from England to Van Diemen's Land in 1812 on the *Indefatigable*. Along with secondary offenders sent down from Sydney, the *Indefatigable* brought men to the island who had experienced a level of institutional brutality unknown to the *Calcutta* convicts. These men also lacked the personal relationships that mitigated violence in the small founding community.

Finally, and perhaps the most important factor of all, was the new found level of access to, and profit available from, grassland plains remote from the two main settlements and official control. This meant that not only did the powerful lash of injustice drive hardened men from the settlements, but freedom and profit provided an attractive lure to a bush life. West summarized the desperate situation that soon emerged:

Towards the close of 1813, the daring and sanguinary violence of bushrangers, reduced the colony to utmost distress: the settlers, generally of the lowest class, received their plunder, and gave them notice of pursuit. Their alliance with stock-keepers, who themselves passed rapidly, and almost naturally, from the margin of civilized to a lawless life, was well understood; nor could they readily refuse their friendship; the government, unable to afford them protection, left them no other source of safety. The division of the colony into those who had been convicts and those who controlled them, naturally ranged all of loose principles on the side of the outlaws. Nor was their mode of living without attractions: they were free: their daring seemed liked heroism to those in bondage. They not infrequently professed to punish severity to the prisoners, and like

Robin Hood of old, to pillage the rich, that they might be generous to the poor.⁹⁰

The threat posed by bushrangers is not nineteenth century hyperbole. Robson has argued that “during the period of Davey’s administration the bushrangers nearly took over Van Diemen’s Land”, and even parts of Hobart Town were not safe. The authorities held genuine fears in the summer of 1814-15 that most convicts would join the bushrangers and real power and effective government would pass to them. Certainly the bushrangers were increasingly strategic, and targeted active enemies. Police Magistrate Humphreys was brought close to economic ruin and Davey’s own farm at Coal River was twice raided.⁹¹

Such was the urgency of the situation that on 28 May 1814 Governor Macquarie proclaimed that all bushrangers would be pardoned of all crimes apart from murder if they surrendered by 1 December. A six month crime spree understandably followed.⁹² James Gordon, in evidence to Commissioner Bigge in 1820, described how this “promise of indemnity was injurious to the colony”. “They almost all came in”, he observed, “but not till the time granted was nearly expired”, and there were “a good many” robberies committed during the intervening period. Moreover, says Gordon, “all but one or two of the bushrangers and several others went out soon after receiving the pardon, and the practice of bushranging became worse than ever.”⁹³

On 25 April 1815 Davey declared martial law in Van Diemen’s Land. He did this in open violation of Macquarie’s orders, who wrote to the Deputy Judge Advocate, Edward Abbott, on 18 September 1815: “I have ordered Lt Govr Davey to revoke and annul his order for martial law as being illegal and unwarrantable; but I doubt very much whether he will obey my orders.”⁹⁴ There is evidence that later that year Davey took personal charge of a military expedition into the very heart of bushranger territory – the Central Plateau.⁹⁵

Davey also sought to undermine the economic foundation of bushranging by banning traffic in kangaroo skins and apparel from undressed skins. He even ordered that all kangaroo dogs be destroyed.⁹⁶ These widely ignored instructions were supplementary to the ending of the purchase of kangaroo meat for the Government Store, which Macquarie had ordered on the basis that “the purchasing of kangaroo flesh for the use of Government is a great encouragement to these bushrangers who are in the habit of supplying the inhabitants with it.”⁹⁷

Carlo Canteri argued in *The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805 – 1818* that closing the Government Store to kangaroo meat in 1813 was effectively circumvented because the bushrangers shifted their focus to domestic stock.⁹⁸ Maxwell-Stewart points out that there were many stock owners willing to sell on stolen meat as it was in their interest to supply the store without culling their own animals, especially as quotas were issued in proportion to stock held. The thirds system, whereby an owner gave stock-keepers a proportion of the natural increase in lieu of wages, allowed stolen stock to be easily concealed on crown lands, as establishing the ownership of any herd or flock was often complex.⁹⁹ Thus, as Humphrey told Bigge, most sheep robberies were ordered by “persons who have sheep of their own.”¹⁰⁰ While recognizing the bushrangers' partnership with small landholders, Canteri argues that the main financial benefits flowed to some members of the elite, with different bushranging groups under the protection of different private interests.¹⁰¹ In the case of the most powerful bushranger of this, or any other era, this was almost certainly true. From 1815-1818, Van Diemonian history was dominated by the struggle between the King's representative and the self titled “Lieutenant Governor of the Woods”, Michael Howe.

Michael Howe and Mary Cockerill

Michael Howe, a Yorkshireman who arrived on the *Indefatigable* in 1812, was the only Australian bushranger to pose the real possibility of an alternative authority

emerging to challenge that of the colonial government. Howe was much more than a celebrated outlaw, as later more famous bushrangers effectively were. His chosen titles, 'Lieutenant Governor of the Woods' and 'Governor of the Ranges', were not unfounded presumption. Howe corresponded both with Sorell and Davey "as though he was their equal" and in terms of local power and influence, he was.¹⁰² He was at the centre of an alternative power base and economic system that determined access to the main wealth-creating resources of the island – a man to be taken seriously by all those who wanted to travel through, reside in or make money out of the Van Diemonian bush.¹⁰³ There is little doubt that some of the most powerful men in Van Diemen's Land had arrangements with him and that the most profitable of these likely partnerships was with the colony's wealthiest individual – Edward Lord.

Despite being dispersed over large areas of the interior grasslands, including Howe's base in the Central Plateau, Lord's stock and property were never attacked by Howe. The first attack upon Lord's principle residence, his 35-room mansion at Orielton Park (built around 1814) was made in May 1817 – shortly *after* Howe had negotiated his terms of surrender and was residing in Hobart Town.¹⁰⁴ Thus, while the bushrangers damaged his competitors, the powerful former marine officer's own cattle empire expanded rapidly.¹⁰⁵ There is also evidence that Lord's stockmen sheltered and aided Howe, most noticeably in August 1814 when they helped in the rescue of two of the gang from the military.¹⁰⁶ Lord's probable partnership with Howe was only one part of his success – he also had influential political support, centred on his brother, a long-standing member of the House of Commons,¹⁰⁷ and Davey, who seems to have favoured him. Lord's domination of Van Diemonian trade was also an essential underpinning to his landed interests. But it is nevertheless true that the extraordinary growth in Lord's wealth during this period cannot be adequately understood without reference to his unlimited and unrivalled access to the vast native grasslands of Van Diemen's Land. Neither this land access, nor the largely unchallenged power Howe wielded in these areas, can be easily explained without positing a mutually beneficial partnership between them.

This is not to suggest that there were direct negotiations between the two men, but, rather, understandings reached between the groups they led. In this, the role played by Lord's wife and business partner, Maria Lord, may have been crucial.¹⁰⁸ As Kay Daniels has pointed out, the role played by the savvy Maria, who ran the merchant business and had the major responsibility for her husband's interests during his frequent trips to England, has been generally underestimated in accounts of Lord's life.¹⁰⁹ As will be explained in more detail in a later chapter, the unrivalled access to the native grasslands enjoyed by Lord's cattle may be largely due to Maria who, as a former convict, had the contacts and the cultural knowledge to arrange such matters.

Bushranger connections, however, permeated the civil structures of even 'respectable' colonial society. The Commandant at Port Dalrymple, Captain McKenzie, wrote to Davey on 14 August 1814 that "almost everyone here is, I firmly believe, more or less, a villain". His concern was well founded. One rebel was the former acting Deputy Surveyor General, Peter Mills, who (to escape his creditors) joined the bushrangers. He escaped again after capture, probably with the help of the Assistant Surgeon, John Smith, and the desperate McKenzie reported that "Thomas Hobbs the sentry has also absconded with him." Both Smith and his superior, Mountgarrett, were tried and acquitted in Sydney on charges of participating in stock stealing with bushrangers.¹¹⁰

One hundred men were supposed to have been members of Howe's gang at some time, and from 1815 his authority seems to have been accepted by all the bushranger gangs.¹¹¹ Most stock-keepers and hunters in the frontier lands had no option but to recognize Howe's authority, since on-the-ground he held the real power.¹¹²

Those who were targeted by Howe often faced ruin. Gordon told Bigge that he could not live on his land for four years prior to 1818 in consequence of the bushrangers. John Wade, Chief Constable, informed the Commissioner that he

resigned his post "on account of the losses I sustained by the bushrangers".¹¹³ A.W.H Humphrey may have regretted becoming a Justice of the Peace in 1810, as in 1815 he wrote to Bathurst that his "exertions to suppress and bring to justice these daring offenders has brought on him all the malicious mischief which their depraved minds were capable of contriving." This included his sheep being "taken way from their grazing ground... fifty and a hundred at a time and either destroyed or driven to distant parts", and the corn stack on his farm at Pitt Water being "wantonly set fire to in the dead of night", involving a loss of "upwards of £700". On another occasion, eight bushrangers broke into his house and "after plundering it of every portable article of value, wantonly and maliciously destroyed everything that they could not take away."¹¹⁴

Equally important to Howe's power and influence was the understanding he seems to have reached with the owners of the land. That Howe had contacts with Aborigines is clearly signalled by Kelly's report that in January 1816 Howe was in some sort of alliance with "Tolobunganah" and his people. Furthermore, the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 30 November 1816 reported that Howe's gang included "two black native girls armed as well as the men", whilst West and Calder noted that Howe reportedly meted out severe corporal punishment to any of his men who assaulted an Aborigine.¹¹⁵ And Henry Barrett, as likely to know as any, having lived almost alone in the abandoned York Town settlement since 1805, asserted that the Aborigines "did not" attack bushrangers, although there are documented exceptions to this.¹¹⁶

Critical to any understanding Howe reached with Aborigines would have been his Aboriginal partner, known to the British as 'Black Mary' or Mary Cockerill. The importance of Mary to Howe's control of the frontier lands is highlighted by the fact that his power largely ended with the breakdown of their relationship. Howe reputedly shot Mary during a pursuit in early 1817 in a failed attempt to prevent her being captured alive. On 12 April 1817 the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported that, following this betrayal, Mary led a military party to Howe's hideout on the Shannon. Almost immediately after, on 28 April 1817, Howe wrote directly to

Sorell, offering to give himself up and provide information to the authorities on his contacts and associates in exchange for a pardon. Sorell conditionally agreed to this and Howe came in to Hobart Town, being held under only limited supervision while Macquarie, who backed Sorell on the matter, forwarded the request for a full pardon to London.

The official investigation into the information provided by Howe never went far. Howe's depositions to Sorell and the magistrates, if they were ever recorded, are not now available. There is also no evidence of any action having been taken on the basis of them except an investigation of Knopwood, who was accused by Howe of "improper intercourse with people living in the woods" but was later cleared.¹¹⁷ A contemporary account claimed that Howe's "examinations by the magistrates were frequent, and his depositions voluminous and tedious; but notwithstanding his promise of a full disclosure of the supporters of the bushrangers, little information of worth, or utility, could be gained from him."¹¹⁸ This may have been a repetition of official assurances designed to protect those with influence in the colony. More likely it was a deliberate tactic. It was not in Howe's interests to betray his partners, and if the authorities were serious about getting him to do so, they would have removed him to comparative safety in Sydney, as was done with a number of other bushranger informers. As Canteri surmises, Sorell seems to have soon realized what the magistrates would have already known, that "a complete exposure of all the bushrangers interconnecting linkages would shake Van Diemen's Land to its very rum-cellars."¹¹⁹

Perhaps more surprising than the failure of internal investigations to seriously pursue this issue, is that the outsider, Commissioner Bigge, who investigated less serious matters with vigour, showed little interest in it. Only fragments of new information emerged. John Wade, the former *Calcutta* convict who was Chief Constable in Buckinghamshire from 1810 to 1818 with 30 convict constables under him, claimed that Thomas Hayes of Baghdad was the "very life and soul of the bushrangers at one time" and that a servant of the Deputy Judge Advocate Abbott, was closely connected with Howe. Abbott admitted to the

Commissioner that his servant, Ellis Beagent, had "intercourse with the bushrangers... during all the period in which he was in my service" (four years), but claimed to have known nothing about it.¹²⁰ What seems even more odd is that Edward Lord was almost the only person of any standing in the colony who never gave evidence to the Commissioner.¹²¹

As far as British officialdom was concerned, the question of Howe's probable partnership with the Van Diemonian elite seems to have been closed with the bushranger's convenient escape on 26 July 1817. It has been said that Howe was frustrated by the delay in obtaining a full pardon or feared it would not be approved by London.¹²² Maybe he found the confines of the settlement, social and geographic, a suffocating chain after the freedom of the bush. What is most likely is simply that he feared for his life. Given the number of powerful and not so powerful men he could potentially inform on, without a speedy pardon and departure from the island he would have felt extremely vulnerable. It is clear that little was done to prevent Howe's departure – he pretty much just walked out of Hobart Town – and that the Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple elite were thereafter united, for the first time, in a concerted common purpose to kill him. One of Edward Lord's stock-keepers was a principal agent of their eventual success.

During the last desperate year of his freedom, Howe became a conventional outlaw, with a 100 guineas reward (later doubled) and free pardon and passage to England for any "crown prisoner" who killed or captured him.¹²³ With Macquarie keeping Mary in Sydney, "lest she should renew her intercourse with Howe and be the means of protracting the terms of his submission",¹²⁴ Howe's most dangerous pursuer became Musquito, the New South Wales Aborigine captured by the British in 1805 after leading resistance in the lower Hawkesbury and subsequently exiled without trial to Norfolk Island and, in 1813 (when the evacuation of that island was complete), to Port Dalrymple. Musquito had assisted in the tracking of Howe and other bushrangers in an attempt to secure a

passage home. In October 1817 Sorell advised Macquarie that, as his help in this task had made him "odious" to other convicts, this was now to be done.¹²⁵ But with Howe again on the run, this commitment seems to have been conveniently forgotten and he was kept in Van Diemen's Land – perhaps employed by Edward Lord.¹²⁶ Sorell reported to Macquarie that Howe's final capture was precipitated when "his dogs, pistols, knapsack etc were taken from him" by "McGill... accompanied by Musquito".¹²⁷ The *Hobart Town Gazette* also reported, on 19 September 1818, that Howe had been seen near Fat Doe River and was pursued, "losing his dogs, knapsack and all that he had." The fact that the bushranger's earlier understanding with the Aborigines seemed to have broken down is also suggested by the *Gazette*: "from a paper found in his knapsack it appears that he has been much harassed by the natives and had been very nearly cut off by them several times." And in the first book of general literature published in Australia – *Michael Howe: the last and worst of the bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land*, printed in Hobart Town in 1818 – Thomas Wells gave the details of his final betrayal:

In the month of October a person named Warburton, in the habit of hunting kangaroo for skins, who had occasional opportunities for seeing Howe, communicated to a crown prisoner, named Thomas Worrell, stock-keeper to Edward Lord Esq. a scheme for taking him. Worrell agreed to the trial, and with Private William Pugh of the 48th Regt. a man of known courage... determined to lay in wait at a hut on the Shannon River, likely to be visited by Howe for supplies... On 21st of October Howe met Warburton near the place already mentioned... a severe encounter ensued; and finally, from well-directed blows on his head with their muskets, fell and expired without speaking.¹²⁸

Worrell (like Howe, a former soldier in the French wars) claimed that the bushranger, who was "covered with patches of kangaroo skins and wore a black beard", cried out "Black Beard against Grey Beard for a million!" as he fired for the last time. Pugh then "ran up, and with the butt end of his firelock... battered his brains out."¹²⁹

As a reward for their efforts, Worrell was given a free pardon and Pugh (known as 'Big Bill') a free discharge, and both, along with Warburton, also received a share of the reward money. Sorell also sought a pardon for McGill, but there was to be no recognition, not even a passage home, for Musquito. He was left to defend himself against the taunts and probable violence of those who considered Howe a hero, and the British of all social classes were to pay dearly for this betrayal. Mary, too, received no reward – except the right to be victualled from the Government Store. She died in the Hobart Hospital the following winter, less than nine months after her former partner.¹³⁰ During his bushranging career, Howe was reported to have been loyal to only two relationships – that with 'Mary' and his kangaroo dog, 'Bosun'¹³¹ – and, given the realities of Van Diemen's Land, well chosen they were. It is significant that the bushranger's loss of power in frontier regions coincided with the end of his relationship with Mary, and his final capture was precipitated by the taking of his dog.

Howe's head was brought to Hobart Town and displayed by the authorities as a public confirmation of imperial triumph, and Knopwood noted on 23 October 1818 that "a great many people" went to see it.¹³² Howe's body was "interred on the spot where he fell",¹³³ its return to the earth probably hastened by carrion loving Tasmanian devils.

The power wielded by Howe had made him a hero to the convict and ex-convict population of Van Diemen's Land. Even after Howe's death, those who betrayed him were ostracized by the majority community. His defeat was, to an extent, "the people's defeat – the defeat of their hope."¹³⁴ The year after his be-heading was the first ever in Van Diemen's Land in which there were no armed bushrangers fighting the authorities. The hope offered by direct resistance seemed to have suffered a mortal blow.

Sorell confidently proclaimed the end of bushranging, and this historic claim was marked by the title of Wells' short book, naming Howe as "the last and worst of the bushrangers of Van Diemen's Land." Wells believed that it "is nearly impossible that any bands of future bushrangers will be formed, or, if formed, that

they can exist so long unsubdued as those now happily exterminated.”¹³⁵ His account captures some of the archetypal and mythical aspects of the Howe story:

In his knapsack was found a sort of journal of dreams... From this little book of kangaroo skin, written in kangaroo blood, it appears that he frequently dreamt of being murdered by natives, of seeing his old companions... of being nearly taken by a soldier; and in one instance... his sister. It also appears from this memorandum book, that he always had an idea of settling in the woods; for it contains long lists of such seeds as he wished to have, of vegetables, fruits, and even flowers!¹³⁶

West noted that the plants were intended “to adorn the seclusion which he contemplated”, and described Howe’s retreat in the Upper Shannon: “the site was chosen with taste, in an open undulating country, stretching to the western mountains: the spot was secluded from observation, was covered with a large honey suckle, and on a rise sloping to the stream.”¹³⁷ The Howe mythos is thus distinctive from most bushranging stories in not being an attempt to ‘escape’ from an island prison, or even merely an angry challenge to convict oppressors, but representing the longing to establish a new way of life in the geographic centre of the island. Howe seems to have had no dream of walking to China or stealing a boat to South America – like the early escapees from Port Jackson and Port Phillip or later runaways from Van Diemonian convict hellholes – Howe’s dreaming place was located at the heart of Van Diemen’s Land itself.¹³⁸

Such mythically potent stories ensured that Howe was not forgotten. James Ross reported that, while on his 1823 expedition to the Great Lake (guided by a couple of Van Diemonian bushmen, including the recurring Carretts), the wife of one of Edward Lord’s stockmen told him, after being asked if she was lonely, that “sometimes at night ‘my cow’ came to her”.¹³⁹ Ross interpreted this to mean that terrifying memories of Howe haunted her but, given what the Lieutenant Governor of the Woods had represented in that part of the island in particular,

such a vision could just as well have provided comfort and amelioration from the dangerous, isolated and possibly hopeless reality of that unknown woman's life.

Bushranging controlled

Sorell's negotiation of generous terms of surrender directly with individual bushrangers had proved to be a highly effective short-term stratagem, and was a far more sophisticated approach than the general amnesty of 1814, because it undermined the bonds of solidarity on which the bushrangers' influence depended. The bushrangers' own preference for collective bargaining had been expressed in a November 1816 letter to Davey, signed by eleven of them and written in kangaroo blood, seeking a clear position from the Lieutenant Governor, "full and satisfactory – either for us or against us."¹⁴⁰ Howe was reported to have made his gang swear an oath on the Church of England Prayer Book to abide by their position.¹⁴¹ But such solidarity broke down when Sorell offered clemency to individuals who gave information and used their knowledge to assist the authorities.¹⁴²

For those who did not voluntarily return, the main approach continued to be to enlist Van Diemonian bushmen in the chase. There was nothing new in this approach. Ever since Lemon and Brown were captured by a ticket of leave convict, Michael Mansfield, in May 1808 after two years of dodging the soldiers, the authorities had sought the bush skills and knowledge of bushrangers, hunters and stockmen to capture offenders by offering rewards and indulgences. The abilities of these men meant that Aboriginal trackers were never as important in Van Diemen's Land as in New South Wales, although during the height of the emergency, when few Van Diemonians could be motivated to betray Howe or other rebel leaders, they were called upon. The most important tracker of Howe was Musquito, but an Aboriginal man the British called Dual also seems to have been transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1816 to help with the chase (although, unlike Musquito, he was returned in 1818 when the job was done).¹⁴³

Soldiers continued to be of limited use, although individuals and small parties usually guided by bushmen could prove effective as long as they were offered sufficiently generous rewards. Key personnel, along with convict informers, were compensated for what was designated as “secret service”, presumably to avoid being targeted for retribution.¹⁴⁴ One confrontation in George Town on 10 June 1817 highlighted the limitations of most rank and file soldiers. The Commandant of the settlement, James Stewart, reported that “a banditti of six bushrangers forced their way into the military barracks at George Town without opposition, and tied the hands of the six military men behind them; they afterwards with the aid of some of the prisoners robbed the Inspector of Works.” The seriousness of the crime was mitigated, however, by the fact that less than three months earlier, on 18 March 1817, the Commandant reported that a party of the 46th regiment had themselves committed a similar offence.¹⁴⁵

Equally crucial to Sorell's success in achieving the suppression of bushranging was his attempt, for the first time, to systematically regulate access to the grasslands and bring their occupation under some nominal form of official sanction. The *Hobart Town Gazette* noted, on 20 September 1817, that the “tickets of occupation for grazing grounds” were ready. The only upfront requirements to obtain a lease were that a small annual payment be made and that a stockyard be erected. But the fact that these tickets or licenses had to be renewed annually gave Sorell the potential power to remove access to the pasture-lands in the case of those he suspected of involvement in stock theft or support for bushranging.

These measures meant that by the end of 1817 the capacity of the bushrangers to determine access to the main resource of the colony, the native grasslands, was largely over. In six months Sorell had, it seemed, triumphed over the two most obvious threat to imperial authority: bushranging had largely disappeared and relations with the Aborigines remained comparatively calm.

But the threat to security posed by bushrangers and Aborigines proved more tenacious than the new Lieutenant Governor could have imagined, and it was to be another generation before the grassy woodlands of Van Diemen's Land were to be brought under government control. Meanwhile, isolated from official supervision and control, the convict frontiersmen (few of whom were named bushrangers), continued to forge a distinctive way of life that, although rough and frequently brutal, represented the emergence of a distinctive Van Diemonian way of life. Largely left alone in a land generous beyond their dreaming, a cultural revolution had been facilitated in the remote grasslands of Van Diemen's Land that changed the despised and exiled poor of Britain to such an extent that by 1820 English observers scarcely recognized their cultural kinship. Cut off by Aboriginal and bushranger power from supervision, regulation and punishment, they had built a society that gave a level of dignity and independence that could not have been imagined by the labouring class of their homeland. Such was the cultural transformation in this vagabond collection of exiles that it arguably represents one of the most rapid and fascinating evolutionary changes ever seen in the history of British peoples. Less than two decades after the invasion commenced, for these Britons at least, Van Diemen's Land had become home. And well before 1820, the economic foundation of their homemaking had moved from the hunting of indigenous animals to pastoralism. The grassy woodlands of Van Diemen's Land had become the site of Australia's first, and highly distinctive, pastoral economy.

Endnotes: Chapter Three

¹ Mary Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1977) 160.

² Barbara Hamilton-Arnold, ed., *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* (Sorrento Vic.: Arden Press, 1994) 98.

³ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 154.

⁴ Cited in James Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1969) 40.

⁵ Harris letter to sister 3 October 1808, Hamilton-Arnold; *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 100-1.

⁶ Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* 44-5.

⁷ HRA 3/1, 769.

⁸ Macquarie advised Andrew Geils on 8 February 1812, that "male convicts" have "betaken into the woods or bush where they continually molest the natives of the country". He instructed conciliation. HRA 3/1, 466.

⁹ When Knopwood travelled overland to Port Dalrymple in March 1814 (his first such trip), one of the men with him was chased by Aborigines as he hunted kangaroo (Diary 3 March). Coming back at the end of the month the Chaplain noted that at Stoney Valley "should you meet with the natives you must inevitably lose your life; the hills of each pass so high they would kill you with stones" (Diary 27 March). Stoney Valley is described as about 13 miles north of Baghdad. And on 8 November 1815 Knopwood records that "Mr Morgan's men" on the "Scantlands Plains" had reported that natives had killed 930 sheep and burnt them, although in these years of high stock thefts it is very difficult to trust reports from stock-keepers and shepherds living unsupervised in remote grassland regions, as Aborigines could provide a convenient cover for their own crime or inaction. Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 170-1.

¹⁰ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1971) 53.

¹¹ The lack of any documented deaths obviously does not mean that none occurred, but is one piece of evidence that the level of overall violence may have declined.

¹² Examples of peaceful cross-cultural interaction given by Bonwick included hearing from an old man of 200 Aborigines "quietly camping at Mr Archers run" in 1819, "and of seeing that same year a score of blacks assisting at Mr. Bonner's farm in harvest time, receiving potatoes and damper in payment." Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* 43-44.

¹³ On one occasion about sixty Aborigines helped Ross protect his crops from one of their fires. James Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Melbourne: Marsh Walsh Publishing, 1975) 84-5.

¹⁴ George Thomas Lloyd, *Thirty Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1862) 45.

¹⁵ For example, Peter Harrison mentions never being troubled by Aborigines (AOT NS 690/23). A group of Aborigines also visited the farm of William Barnes two or three times a year (AOT CSO 1/323/7578, 300), cited in Maria Monypenny, "Going out and Coming In: Cooperation and Collaboration between Aborigines and Europeans in Early Tasmania," *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 5, no. 1 (1995-6) 69-70.

¹⁶ Two Aboriginal women, three girls and two boys, camped on Knopwood's property, Cottage Green, from 15 to 17 November 1815. And on 22 May 1816 the Chaplain recorded that: "the party of natives that was at my home some time back came again this morn. I gave them potatoes and they made a fire at a little distance from the house." On 24 March 1818 Knopwood went with four native girls "down in my boat 6 miles on the river to Crayfish Point. There the native girls dived for the fish and caught a great many, and came home in the evening." The next day the Chaplain reports that he "waited upon His Honer the Lt. Govr." who "dind with me off crayfish." A similar excursion occurred on 26 March. On 14 November 1818 "a fresh tribe of natives, 1 woman, 5 girls, 2 boys came to my house. I gave them bread." On 15 November 1818 they came for bread again, "the 4 girls remaining with us as usual." On 26 November 1818 "all the native girls, 10 and 2 boys came as usual for their bread and each of them had a new dwg. of womes (*sic*) clothes, and the boys, from H.M. Stores." The girls were still at his house on 2 December 1818. Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 232, 277, 293-294.

¹⁷ William Williamson described these people in his letter to his sister from Hobart Town, 16 December 1820: "the natives here are the most despicable of the human race without cloathing of any kind. There is a party of thirteen or fourteen come into the town were they wander up and down without seeming to care – all stark naked carrying their lances with them and begging for sugar." AOT P.L 16/4.

¹⁸ Knopwood, for example, records the firing of the bush on 15 January 1818, noting "the country on fire by the natives."

¹⁹ Many of the official exploratory trips of Van Diemen's Land before 1825 observed large groups of Aborigines. The most illuminating of these accounts, because it involved a circumnavigation of the whole island, was that of James Kelly in the summer of 1815-16. This will be considered in some detail later in this chapter.

²⁰ For a discussion of this issue see James Boyce, "Fantasy Island," in *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Robert Manne, ed., (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003). Windschuttle, who believes that no claims about the number Aborigines who died from violence can be made beyond those definitively documented, nevertheless concludes that almost all other Aborigines died from disease, without providing one piece of direct evidence of this.

²¹ HRA 3/3, 418.

²² HRA 3/3, 501.

²³ Sorell to Luttrell 7 December 1819, HRA 3/2, 741-2.

²⁴ Rhys Jones, "Tasmanian Aborigines and Dogs," *Mankind* 7, no. 4 (December 1970) 263, 70.

²⁵ By the late 1820s Robinson's journals indicate that there was such an over abundance of dogs that the Aborigines restricted breeding. N.J.B. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 501.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 644.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 649-53.

²⁸ Windschuttle's summary of this evidence in *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* is "stock-keepers fight off attack by the natives". Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002) 388.

²⁹ The *Hobart Town Gazette* reported on 18 December 1819 that 300 sheep belonging to "James Triffitt" of New Norfolk were killed at Stoney Hut Plains. Out of 1000 sheep he could only find 200 alive, and he believed that the others had been driven off by Aborigines into the interior, although, as ever, it is possible that white stock thieves had used purported Aboriginal activity as a cover for their own actions.

³⁰ James Boyce, *God's Own Country? The Anglican Church and Tasmanian Aborigines* (Hobart: Anglicare Tasmania, 2001) 26.

³¹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 151.

³² M. Fels, "Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 29, no. 2 (1982) 64. Fel's argument is based on the fact that Wiggins had a wife and son, and his daughter Anne had recently died.

³³ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 99.

³⁴ Fels, "Culture Contact in the County of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811" 65.

³⁵ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 109.

³⁶ The lack of any comment about Robert and other Aboriginal children is at least a consistent, if frustrating characteristic of his diary. Unless children and young people were visiting Cottage Green and preferably helping him catch a few crayfish, they seem no more worthy of comment than the white children in the settlement. They seem, for the Chaplain at least, to have been an assumed, rather than remarkable, part of early life.

³⁷ Brabyn to Paterson 18 February 1809, *HRA* 3/1, 694-697. It was the rebel administration in New South Wales (that overthrew Governor Bligh) that pardoned Dry, who had been sent to New South Wales as a convict for his part in the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, and who subsequently became a large northern landowner and the father of Tasmania's first native born Premier.

³⁸ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 105, 82-3. The fact that the child who lived with the Hardwicks was the young woman in gaol in 1829 is almost certainly confirmed by Robinson's note that 'Fanny' "had been baptised by You".

³⁹ Inquest, 24 October 1817, *HRA* 3/3, 707.

⁴⁰ George was returned to Van Diemen's Land in 1827 after having become literate and reasonably well educated, with the forlorn hope that he might be given colonial government employ, but he died soon after.

⁴¹ For example, 'Thomas', who Robinson met in the Hobart gaol in 1829, had apparently "quitted Hodgson's employ... for a girl." Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 104. William Williamson wrote in December 1820 that "attempts have been made to civilize them [the Aborigines] but hitherto without success. They have been brought up from boys but when they were about 13 or 14 they have invariably ran away into the woods and become as hostile to the whites perhaps more so than the rest". AOT P.L 16/4.

⁴² The marriage in St John's Launceston is recorded in the *Colonial Times* 27 August 1830. 'Black Bill' became one of the very few Aborigines in Australia to receive a land grant. By a government order of 17 September 1830, published in the *Hobart Town Gazette* the following day, he, along with two Sydney Aborigines, received 1000 acres as a reward for his participation in John Batman's roving party.

⁴³ "Extracts from a Diary Belonging to James George", *Oatlands District Historical Society, Chronicle* no 2 (September 2002).

⁴⁴ *Hobart Town Gazette* 29 March 1817.

⁴⁵ Mahon to Stewart 19 March 1817, *HRA* 3/2, 474.

⁴⁶ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 28 November 1818.

⁴⁷ James Calder, for example, gives an account of two Aborigines, 'Murray' and 'Jack': "Both of them had lived much in Hobart Town, where they earned a living on the water, either as boatmen

or sailors, and both had visited the straits islands in the sealing season", before joining the north-east people in the resistance. J. E. Calder, *Some Account of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits Etc of the Native Tribes of Tasmania*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 1972) 94.

⁴⁸ For example on 19 July 1831, Richard was missing all night and was not found again until midday, Robinson noting that "he had been bewildered in a tea tree forest, and having been brought up among white persons he was not so well acquainted with the bush as the others." Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 381.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 119, 94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 102.

⁵¹ Robinson, worried about other Aborigines following Dick's example, records that "I told the other natives that I would put him in gaol." *Ibid.* 548, 50, 52, 61.

⁵² AOT CSO1/317-8. It should be noted that after meeting many children and parents separated by war and abduction, Robinson came to deplore the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their parents, although on Flinders Island they often lived apart. An example of Robinson's later views is given on the west coast in June 1833. Among the Aborigines he met with were "Towterer the chieftan and his wife; they were the parents of the little girl that was first removed... with the first division of the people". Towterer told Robinson that "from the time his child was taken he had been in great grief and he had since made every endeavour by smokes and other indications to induce my return, so that when I appeared his joy was extravagant in the extreme." Robinson observed that: "this feeling is by no means uncommon among this simple and untutored race. I have witnessed it on numerous occasions. It is therefore of vital consequence to the welfare of the aboriginal colony that no forced separation be allowed between parents and their children, and although it may appear (to those unacquainted with the aboriginal character) that on some occasions they seem to acquiesce in the separation of their children, yet this is not really the case. This acquiescence is the effect of fear, and they afterwards pine away and die." *Ibid.* 740-1.

⁵³ Keryn James in Gillian Dooley, Anne Chittleborough, Brenda Glover and Rick Hosking, eds., *Alas, for the Pelicans!: Flinders, Baudin and Beyond Essays and Poems* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2002) 177. James explores how the slavery mindset impacted on the abduction of Aboriginal women, but her analysis is equally pertinent to the removal of Aboriginal children.

⁵⁴ For example, the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 14 February advertised that Edward Lord was leaving the colony with "his two servants, Muskito and James Brown (natives of these colonies)". Musquito, an Aborigine from New South Wales who had been transported for his part in the resistance there, was later employed – as will be seen – in the pursuit of the bushrangers and subsequently became a key figure in the Aboriginal resistance in Van Diemen's Land.

⁵⁵ Even Robinson found that it was very difficult to keep children confined at the Bruny Island Aboriginal establishment. He noted that "their natural love of the bush and propensity to ramble

is here clearly exemplified." Given what a place of death the Bruny Island establishment had become, his comment that "no other motive could have urged them to leave a place where they are universally treated with the greatest kindness and regard" exposes a remarkable blindness to the suffering Aboriginal children endured there. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 69.

⁵⁶ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land* (London: Parliamentary Paper, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 23 September 1831, 1831) 36.

⁵⁷ *Hobart Town Gazette* 13 March 1819.

⁵⁸ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 93.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the complexity of this issue see Rebe Taylor, "Savages or Saviours: The Australian Sealers and Aboriginal Tasmanian Survival," *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 66 (2000).

⁶⁰ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)* 52.

⁶¹ *HRA* 3/3, 251, 380.

⁶² S. Van Kirk, "Women in Between: Indian Women and Fur Trading society in Western Canada", in R.D. Francis and D.B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History: Pre Confederation* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1990) 65-66.

⁶³ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)* 49-50.

⁶⁴ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 182.

⁶⁵ Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* 41. It is more definitively recorded that this Aboriginal woman died, while leading an exploratory party overland to the east coast in January 1820, at "Stoney Boat Harbour" (Coles Bay). Campbell and another former bushranger and *Calcutta* convict, Henry Rice, were also on this trip. *HRA* 3/4, 645-647.

⁶⁶ The term 'native born' is used as it was in colonial times – to mean someone born in one of the Australian colonies.

⁶⁷ K.M. Bowden, *Captain James Kelly of Hobart Town* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1964) 23; M. Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* (Melbourne: Viking O'Neill, 1988) 66.

⁶⁸ James Calder, *The Circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 by James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs; Edited from Their Own Accounts by James Calder in 1984* (Adelaide: Sullivans Cove, 1984) 13.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 15, emphasis in original.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 16.

⁷² *Ibid.* 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 19-21.

⁷⁴ As Maria Monypenny notes: "it would be a mistake... to assume that, because Aborigines were prepared to accommodate Europeans, they saw themselves becoming part of the European world. It is possible that, initially, they saw Europeans as becoming part of their world, and that it was on that basis that they were willing to cooperate with the newcomers." Monypenny, "Going out and Coming In: Cooperation and Collaboration between Aborigines and Europeans in Early Tasmania" 73.

⁷⁵ Calder, *The Circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 by James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs; Edited from Their Own Accounts by James Calder in 1984* 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 28.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 30-34.

⁸⁰ Taylor, "Savages or Saviours: The Australian Sealers and Aboriginal Tasmanian Survival" 76.

⁸¹ Kelly told Bigge that he had been employed in the seal fishery for five years and that "instances have occurred of their [sealers] purchasing them of their husbands in exchange for the carcasses of seals... They likewise sometimes carry them off by force and employ them in hunting kangaroos for their skins and also in killing seals, at which the women are very expert." *HRA* 3/3, 462.

⁸² James Kelly's sealing trip to New Zealand in 1818 led to the death of three Europeans at Maori hands, which Kelly believed resulted from "two or more of the people being shot by Europeans" (*Hobart Town Gazette* 28 March 1818). Robinson's concerns about Kelly's Bruny farm are given at Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 55.

⁸³ The 1818 census estimate put the Aboriginal population at 7000, and the white population at 3240. There was no basis for this estimate, but it does indicate that even the colonial authorities believed they were outnumbered, and had received no evidence of significant Aboriginal population decline. Many settlers believed Aboriginal population numbers were even higher. Williamson wrote in December 1820 that "the blacks are supposed to be about 10 000 in number but they have been driven mostly into the interior." AOT P.L 16/4.

⁸⁴ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 44. This was not just the official assessment of Collins. Harris noted in a letter to his mother on 23 August 1810 that: "whatever his failings may have been... he had virtues infinitely surpassing them and his loss has been truly and sincerely felt and deplored". Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 137. The main memorial to Collins was St David's Church, now Cathedral. In the manner of saints of old, a small wooden church was initially erected where Collins was buried, with its altar directly over the late Lieutenant Governor's grave, and the church named St David's in his honour. But the typically rough and ready Van Diemonian shrine was soon blown down, and the foundation of a second, decidedly more solid, St David's was laid in February 1817. This church was only knocked down when the current St David's was commissioned.

⁸⁵ These events are also described in Thomas E. Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Platypus Publications, 1966) 33-35.

⁸⁶ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Some account of the marriage and subsequent fate of George Watts, a prisoner*, Fawcner Papers SLV 366 1/6.

⁸⁷ While working as a baker in Hobart Town in 1814, Fawcner was sentenced to three years hard labour and a flogging for unsuccessfully attempting to aid a convict's escape. He was freed in 1816 and moved to Launceston in 1819. In 1835 he established a settlement at Hobson's Bay at Port Phillip and bought land at the first Melbourne auction in 1837. 'Background', Fawcner papers, SLV 366.

⁸⁸ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 205.

⁸⁹ West recorded that: "crimes of less magnitude than murder, or burglary under aggravated circumstances, were punished in a summary manner. To prosecute [by going to Sydney] was to encounter ruin: the person despoiled, while pursuing the robber, lost the remnant of his property; and returning to his dwelling, found it wrecked and pillaged." West, *The History of Tasmania* 356-7.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 358.

⁹¹ Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) 82, 84, 89.

⁹² West, *The History of Tasmania* 358.

⁹³ HRA 3/3, 253. Gordon, a magistrate at the time, also gave an example of what occurred as a result of the amnesty: "I took some depositions of a robbery of a house that had been committed during this period, and a man who was a witness and in the house at the time, deposed that, when he charged the men with being bushrangers, they said how dare you call us so, we are not bush rangers, we are free booters by authority of Governor Macquarie, and we may go about as we like till the time is out."

⁹⁴ HRA 3/4, 495.

⁹⁵ Kelly believed that when he left Hobart Town in December 1815 "it was believed" that Davey "had gone to the Lakes". Calder, *The Circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 by James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs; Edited from Their Own Accounts by James Calder* 23.

⁹⁶ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 81.

⁹⁷ Macquarie to Davey 30 January 1813, HRA 3/2, 13

⁹⁸ Carlo Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805-1818", (B.Litt. thesis [original unabridged version privately distributed by the author], University of Oxford, 1973).

⁹⁹ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990) 159-60.

¹⁰⁰ HRA 3/3, 279 discussed in Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805-1818" 112.

¹⁰¹ Discussed in Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 161.

¹⁰² George Mackaness, "Introduction", in Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 10.

¹⁰³ Howe's control of the interior is confirmed by the difficulty of conveying official despatches overland. This can be seen in the military's request to Kelly (once they confirmed he was not a bushranger) to convey a dispatch to Hobart Town but destroy it should he meet with the bushrangers. Calder noted: "it was not often at this period that the government could hold communication between Hobart Town and George Town", in consequence of Howe's formidable position in the bush. He repeatedly sent threatening letters to the Lieutenant Governor telling him that "he should open all his despatches, and that if the armed messengers who conveyed them were soldiers, he would hang them up by the heels to a tree, let out their entrails, and leave them hanging as he would a kangaroo." Calder, *The Circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 by James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs; Edited from Their Own Accounts by James Calder in 1884* 24.

¹⁰⁴ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 29.

¹⁰⁵ By 1821 Lord owned three ships, 35 000 acres, 6000 cattle and 7000 sheep. In 1823 he told London that his Van Diemen's Land assets were worth £200 000 and that he was owed another £70 000. In the colonial context where (for example) Sorell's annual salary as Lieutenant Governor was £500, these are extraordinary figures. For more information on Lord see E.R Henry, "Edward Lord: The John Macarthur of Van Diemen's Land," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 20, no. 2 (1973).

¹⁰⁶ Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805-1818" 139.

¹⁰⁷ Lord's brother, Sir John Owen, was M.P for Pembroke in Wales for over 50 years.

¹⁰⁸ Lord married Maria, an ex-convict from Sydney, in 1818, having already had two children with her.

¹⁰⁹ E.R. Henry has calculated that Lord made six trips back to England before 1824. If so, allowing for the extended voyage time (from 1812 at least), Lord probably spent more time away from Van Diemen's Land than in it.

¹¹⁰ HRA 3/3, 701-2, 957.

¹¹¹ Howe's leadership of the bushranging fraternity was evident early. McKenzie reported to Davey on 19 October 1814 that: "Capt Townson now resides here; he had been plundered by the bushrangers (or as they style themselves gentlemen foresters) to the amount of 150 pounds; those villains were headed by Captain Michael Howe". HRA 3/3, 703. After the 1815 death or disappearance of John Whitehead, who had been a leader of bushrangers since 1810, Howe's power became absolute.

¹¹² K.R. Von Stieglitz, *Tasmanian Bushrangers* (Evandale, Tas.: Telegraph Printery, 1951) 28.

¹¹³ HRA 3/3, 246, 310.

¹¹⁴ Humphrey to Bathurst, AOT CO 201/79 in Eustace Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain: A Collection of Choice Petitions, Memorials, and Letters of Protest and Request from the Convict Colony of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1977) 43-4.

¹¹⁵ Calder shares West's sentiment that he didn't know if this was due to "policy or humanity". Calder, *The Native Tribes of Tasmania* 46.

¹¹⁶ HRA 3/3, 381. The *Hobart Town Gazette* reported on 10 April 1819: "some crown prisoners who lately absented themselves from George Town have been taken after being attacked by the natives. One man was killed... another... dangerously wounded." Barrett's claim that Aborigines did not attack bushrangers may have been made in relation to men who lived in the bush for extended periods and, like Briggs or Howe, had some sort of relation or connection with them.

¹¹⁷ Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805 - 1818" 153; Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 13. The fact that Howe signalled out Knopwood, justly or otherwise, for having had contacts with bushrangers, may have been because he was a magistrate. It also suggests, however, that any links that existed with him were probably of little consequence, and adds credence to Fawcner's account of the role played by Knopwood in the career of the bushranger George Watts. Howe and Watts had not yet fallen out. Was the carefully worded charge against Knopwood of 'improper intercourse with people living in the woods' the bushranger's revenge?

¹¹⁸ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 30-1.

¹¹⁹ Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805 - 1818" 152.

¹²⁰ HRA 3/3, 315-6, 265.

¹²¹ Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805 - 1818" 318.

¹²² Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 31.

¹²³ *Hobart Town Gazette* 14 March 1818.

¹²⁴ Sorell had sent Mary to Sydney initially for her safety. Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* 46.

¹²⁵ Naomi Parry, "Many Deeds of Terror". www.evatt.labor.net.au/publications/papers.

¹²⁶ In the *Hobart Town Gazette*, 14 February 1818, Musquito is described as Lord's 'servant'.

¹²⁷ Sorell to Macquarie 18 November 1818, *HRA* 3/2, 367.

¹²⁸ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 37-8.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* 15.

¹³⁰ The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 3 July 1819 reported: "on Tuesday died in the Colonial Hospital the native woman usually called Black Mary... one time the partner of Michel Howe, and subsequently as a guide to the parties of troops which were employed successfully in subduing the gang of bushrangers; in which her knowledge of the country and of their haunts, and especially her instinctive quickness in tracking foot- steps, rendered her a main instrument of the success which attended their exertions. She had been victualled from His Majesty's Stores, and had received other indulgences in clothing etc; but a complication of disorders, which had been long gaining ground upon her, terminating at last in pulmonic asseccion, put an end to her life."

¹³¹ Von Stieglitz, *Tasmanian Bushrangers* 28.

¹³² Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* 292.

¹³³ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 38.

¹³⁴ Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805 - 1818" 31.

¹³⁵ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 38, 40.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 36, 37.

¹³⁷ West, *The History of Tasmania* 364.

¹³⁸ G.P. Harris wrote while in Port Phillip of the runaways: "these infatuated wretches all declare on their return that they intended to go to Port Jackson or China!!! And so ignorant were they that some had a compass drawn on a piece of paper". Harris to brother 12 February 1804, in Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* 60.

¹³⁹ Tim Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* (Pelion Press: Launceston, Tas.: 1989) 23.

¹⁴⁰ This fascinating and significant historical document is dated 13 November 1816. A copy made in 1817 is held in the AOT CSO 1/223/5399. It is reproduced in Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain: A Collection of Choice Petitions, Memorials, and Letters of Protest and Request from the Convict Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 44. According to Canteri, the original is held in the Public Record

Office London. Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805-1818" 336.

¹⁴¹ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 10.

¹⁴² For example, two bushrangers, Currie and Keigan, both received conditional pardons, described by Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 99.

¹⁴³ *HRA* 3/2, 794.

¹⁴⁴ The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 31 October 1818, in listing expenditure under the Police (colonial) Fund (or budget), noted extra payments to "parties of the 46th regiment in secret service to August 1817" as well as an "amount advance to crown prisoners employed on secret service". The following year, with the bushrangers' power broken, there was not the need for such secrecy and the Police Fund accounts published in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 9 January 1819 included "a reward due to a party of 48th regiment for apprehending six runaways."

¹⁴⁵ *HRA* 3/3, 720, 412, 719.

Chapter Four: Australia's first pastoral economy

The economic development of Van Diemen's Land before 1825 has been little studied. It has generally been assumed that there was little to say of the period before the grassy woodlands were alienated to free settlers, and the export wool industry developed. R.M Hartwell chose to begin his classic text, the *Economic Development of Van Diemen's Land*, in 1820 because, before this, Van Diemen's Land was merely a "prison farm on a subsistence basis".¹ Robson described early Van Diemen's Land as "a rum economy" where, although "money was an utter obsession", there "was hardly even a chair to be found anywhere."² Others have argued that "the colony made no progress whatsoever"³, and that there was "no real development" until 1818.⁴ Not only is it generally assumed that Van Diemen's Land made no 'progress' before the 1820s, but its economy is rarely distinguished from that of New South Wales, except in so far as the lack of development and associated degradation of Van Diemonian society was thought to be exaggerated by its greater isolation and smaller size.

These assumptions about the economy of early Van Diemen's Land are unfounded, even in orthodox economic terms. The high profits from kangaroo meat and skins have already been considered, and other products from the bush were also important. Agriculture, too, was significantly more successful than has been usually assumed. But the most important defining feature of the Van Diemen's Land economy before 1820, virtually ignored in the literature, was the development of the pastoral industry. The economic and social systems created by the years of kangaroo dependency facilitated access to land and labour for a rapid multiplication in stock numbers after 1810, and by 1819 Van Diemen's Land had over twice the number of sheep and cattle as the mother colony – about 172 000 compared to 80 000. The pioneer hunter-pastoralists of Van Diemen's Land were very different from the elite landowners and squatters synonymous with pastoral expansion in New South Wales. But it is this largely forgotten class of

somewhat disreputable ex-convict Van Diemonians who deserve acknowledgement as the real pioneers of the Australian pastoral industry.

Agriculture

Before embarking for Van Diemen's Land in 1820, George Meredith wrote to the Colonial Office to set out his claim to be considered a deserving free settler, noting that "a flourishing agriculture is the foundation of all real stability and permanent prosperity". Meredith dismissed the value of pastoral pursuits, as they employed none of the surplus labour so evident in the "the sad degeneracy of the present age", believing "every principle of just reasoning and moral feeling" supported the encouragement of "arable farming".⁵

Meredith's letter is an excellent summation of widely held values in early nineteenth century England, and the underpinning of British Government land settlement policy in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land before 1820. But the association between agricultural prosperity, economic development and social order was severely challenged in Van Diemen's Land. Meredith himself was not true to his strictures; like most free immigrants of the time, he largely abandoned growing crops, except to meet the demand of his own establishment. It was far more profitable to exploit the 'free' native grasslands than engage in agriculture. A new arrival in Port Dalrymple, William Barnes, observed in a letter to his brother in March 1824, that "there are not many of the respectable settlers who pay attention to agriculture except to supply their own families."⁶ As West noted, "agriculturalists are poor: it is the shepherd prince who is rich... nature is the great patron of his house."⁷

This does not mean that agriculture – largely undertaken by an earlier group of ex-convicts and Norfolk Islanders – had been unsuccessful, as is widely assumed. In fact, self sufficiency in wheat had been achieved as early as 1810, and the modest export demand satisfied. Macquarie informed Bathurst in 1814

that Van Diemen's Land had "by far a richer and better soil" than "this country" (New South Wales). It had "a fine climate" and certainly proved better suited to growing most English crops, with less likelihood of calamitous drought or flood, than the mother colony.⁸ A "gentleman from Carrington plains, district of Coal River" told the *Sydney Gazette*:

the want of maize which does not grow in Van Diemen's Land... is made amends for in the luxuriant growth of the potato and the pea and bean, which are employed in the rearing of swine as well in the support of man... Apples and pears attain a fine size and flavour; a variety of plums come forward to the desert; the grapes are beautiful and delicious; the walnut flourishes; gooseberries and currants, raspberries and strawberries thrive abundantly and seem as well disposed to harmonize with the equatorial differences of position as we ourselves appear to have done.⁹

Almost every crop grown in Britain was a success in Van Diemen's Land. Even those that were to largely disappear for over 150 years, such as hemp and grapes, were successfully grown.¹⁰

But market constraints meant that most production was for private use or barter. Wheat remained the main cash crop, driven by the demand generated by the Government Store. Port Dalrymple had "amply sufficient" wheat, with some to spare, as early as 1810.¹¹ Macquarie, on his 1811 tour of Van Diemen's Land, wrote that "there is at present every appearance of a plentiful and abundant harvest."¹² Drought in New South Wales in 1815 was such that the *Sydney Gazette* of December that year recorded that it was "a happiness to know that the Derwent crops are likely to be luxuriant, as from their redundancy we shall derive useful supplies." The paper had already reported in February that wheat had arrived from Port Dalrymple and in September a further 200 bushels arrived from Hobart Town.¹³ The *Hobart Town Gazette* wrote in June the following year that "nothing can show more the fertility of Van Diemen's Land, than the

exuberance of our late harvest" and that 25 000 bushels of wheat had been exported to Port Jackson.¹⁴ In 1817 the *Sydney Gazette* recorded another 5000 bushels of wheat arriving from the Derwent.¹⁵

While Van Diemen's Land became famous for its agricultural output, its farmers were widely condemned. The 'problem' was seen to be that agricultural output seemed to bear no relation to the effort expended or technology employed. The very ease with which agricultural producers met the limited demand for their products received negative comment because the high productivity was seen to reflect an unworthy return on the natural fertility of the soil, rather than conformity with the 'natural' social and environmental order. Edward Curr warned potential immigrants in the early 1820s to "beware how he places himself amongst these people, for they are in general as poor and as flagitious as idleness, encouraged by the almost spontaneous fertility of their lands can make them."¹⁶ The assumed preference was for both a well-behaved, hard working, submissive, agriculturally based peasant society and, paradoxically, 'modern' farming methods and land 'improvement'. Judgements on people and farming practices thus intertwined in contradictory observations on Van Diemonian rural life.

It is undoubtedly true that there was almost no evidence of the agricultural revolution accelerating at this time in Britain. On 29 June 1816 the *Hobart Town Gazette* reminded readers that "'Ye generous Britons venerate the plough', is the exhortation of the melodious bard", but few Van Diemonians were listening. The plough and oxen (let alone the horse, an even later innovation) had not replaced the hoe, and threshing was still done in the open air.¹⁷ As Semmens notes: "The ground was roughly cleared and then broken up with a hoe and the seed rough sown, or, as often as not, simply chipped in."¹⁸ On 4 December 1819, the *Gazette* reported on the first "portable threshing machine" to be used in Van Diemen's Land, but it would be another decade before this innovation was widely used.

Land clearing, artificial grasses, fencing, manuring and crop rotation were also ignored. Bigge complained that he had seen no one who had commenced and continued "any system of improvement" and that "the cultivation of artificial grasses in the southern part of Van Diemen's Land seemed to be altogether neglected". Furthermore, he found that "the cultivated lands of each farm are entirely open, and except upon an estate of Col Davey and one of Mr Lord, I did not observe a single fence".¹⁹ Curr also reported that farms were "rarely inclosed, and with two or three exceptions, is never sub-divided into fields... The beautiful appearance of a hedge... is unknown in Van Diemen's Land."²⁰ Jeffreys described the farm of A. Whitehead at Newtown as having "been in a state of cultivation during 12 or 13 years *without ever having been manured*", and yet the "miracle" was that "the sown ground has constantly averaged at the rate of 35 bushels of wheat per acre."²¹ Barnes wrote from Launceston in 1824 that there "are some situations near this town that have been tillage year after year for 17 or 18 years; therefore you may judge of the quality of this land."²²

Nor did such farming practices change much before the 1830s. Thomas Henty wrote in 1833 that "the farming is intolerably bad" and that farmers grow "wheat after wheat without manure for years together". Nevertheless the colony grew "more than we can consume" and despite the lack of any system "so evident to the English farmer", the returns were 20 bushels per acre.²³

Another aspect of the 'problem' articulated by contemporary observers about Van Diemonian farming practices was aesthetic. The relative openness of the country meant that farmers could work around the burnt stumps rather than remove them, and many observers found this unsightly. Godwin noted that "grubbing and burning is an optional expense and seldom incurred but by those who study ornament" and "not one in a hundred think it worthwhile to be at 30 shilling expense per acre."²⁴

Sharon Morgan, in what would seem to be a contradiction of her main conclusion that “almost everything the settler did was a recreation of the world which had been left behind” and “everything they did was shaped by their past experiences and beliefs”, acknowledges that “agricultural practice was very different from that of England”. Given her negative view of the impact of later more orthodox agricultural ‘development’ on land and people, it is surprising that she uncritically reproduces the judgement made by the proponents of this development, that older farming practices were “poor”.²⁵

Farming methods in fact achieved a high output with low input of labour and capital – the usual definition of efficiency. The failure to plough may have even, by reducing erosion and retaining moisture and soil fertility, aided a long-term sustainable yield.²⁶ Farmers were judged harshly not on economic grounds but because of a perceived failure to fulfil an English ideal of ‘real’ farming and ‘honest’ labour. Macquarie’s recognition of the “plentiful and abundant harvest” at New Norfolk during his Van Diemen’s Land tour in 1811 was typically accompanied by an exhortation to the farmers to “industry, honesty, sobriety and morality.”²⁷ Farmers who were said “to be so indolent as to depend upon self sown grain for a crop” may have had satisfactory returns – but were believed to be not working hard enough.²⁸ Barnes had never seen “such a slovenly set.”²⁹ But the fact is that the smallholders were judged for adopting a pragmatic and economically rational approach to the situation, growing what they needed and were able to sell, with the minimum of effort. And the fact that they did so with little concern for how it was done in England was because conditions were different. Even the free settlers had to acknowledge that in Van Diemen’s Land “those who were farmers at home” could not demonstrate much “advantage over their less experienced neighbours.”³⁰

There was little incentive, at any rate, for producers to increase production. The ever present Van Diemonian hazards of fire and wandering cattle, likely to reduce a year’s work to ashes or trampled fodder, meant that it was foolish to

over-invest in agriculture, as the 1820s free settlers were to find. The surveyor, John Helder Wedge, recorded in his diary on 19 November 1825 that a settler on the Lake River, living in a one room hut with his wife and eight children, had just had "a crop of corn entirely spoilt by the cattle."³¹ At the Shannon, James Ross was "on all sides surrounded" by Edward Lord's cattle. The damage was such that Ross "wished Mr Lord's cattle and himself... a hundred times back at Lawrenny or anywhere else in the remotest and most miserable part of Wales." Five to six hundred of Lord's Bengal beasts easily jumped the four foot high protective fence, and:

not half a crop was left behind, nor had I any remedy by law or otherwise. To impound the brutes was out of the question, for how could I get hold of them to put them in a pound without the aid of Mr Lords own horses or horsemen? And to go to law was equally out of my power, for there was but one lawyer in the colony and he was fed by the wonder of my enemies.³²

The most significant constraint on production though, especially for small farmers, was the limited, and increasingly monopolized, market. Once the supply of wheat exceeded demand during Davey's administration, Government purchasing systems systematically favoured the larger suppliers. Maxwell-Stewart has calculated from the March 1817 tender list "that only seven per cent of those proprietors cultivating under five acres of wheat negotiated a government contract in that year". Among those who had five to nine acres cultivated, the proportion fortunate enough to sell any wheat to the Commissariat was still only 24 per cent, even though 60 per cent of the 212 farms cultivated in the southern county had less than 10 acres under wheat. Maxwell-Stewart concludes from this data that "subsistence agriculture had replaced the primitive market in this sector of the economy" and/or that the "smaller 20-40 acre land grants were incapable of producing sufficient quantities of wheat to conclude a favourable contract."³³ The evidence presented to Bigge, however, suggests that

the reason small producers were locked out of government contracts was not incapacity but policies and practices which favoured an elite group.

The progressive exclusion of the majority of farmers from government contracts was not a question of efficiency. A 30 or 60 acre farm was not small by either English or Van Diemonian standards and, given the technology available, economies of scale could not have been achieved through larger grants.³⁴ Only in the poor soils surrounding Port Jackson can the argument that farms of this size were less efficient be reasonably sustained. Bigge's conclusion in his final report that, though a 50 acre farm could make money the prospect was a "forbidding one", is supported by Van Diemonien evidence only to the extent that it related to a discriminatory commissariat policy.³⁵ Surveyor G.W. Evans informed Bigge that the 30-50 acre farm "is fully capable of affording support to any person who cultivates it" and that "all those who have been industrious have been successful". Indeed, Evans believed that most of the recently arrived wealthier settlers with bigger land grants "have done nothing".³⁶

That a farmer's viability was not determined by the size of the farm but by the level of access enjoyed to the main market is well illustrated by the fact that big farmers could also go broke. A 600-acre farm at Pitt Water, owned by Sir John Jamison, was sold off to recover debts owed to James Gordon in 1819.³⁷ John Wadè, a large farmer and former *Calcutta* convict, who had 900 acres at Pitt Water, also had difficulties selling to the Store. He told Bigge that in 1819 "the whole of the settlers at Pitt Water were unable to send any wheat to the store on account of the distance from Hobart Town, the stores being filled before the settlers could arrive with it." Anthony Fenn Kemp, a leading merchant, told Bigge: "when that grain is wanted, it has been the practice for the Commissary to advertise and to state that the stores are open for the reception of wheat, and when they have the quantity they want, the stores are shut."³⁸ The twelve dealers who mainly supplied the Government Store in 1820, were merchant-farmers with warehouses near the Store (like Gordon and Kemp), not necessarily either big or

efficient producers.³⁹ The only option of other farmers was to sell their crop at reduced prices to the merchants, who later sold it on to the Government or other buyers at inflated prices. Many farmers were forced into increasing debt as a result, with credit supplied by the very same merchants.

The difficulties experienced by small farmers were thus primarily caused by inefficient and corrupt purchasing practices, not inefficiency. The fostering of a merchant monopoly was not an efficient or rational policy for producer or buyer. Sorell made some effort to prioritise purchases from producers, but as one settler, George Gatehouse, described, these regulations were easily circumvented: "the merchants generally borrow the names of the settlers which have little benefit from it." He believed that two thirds of supplies to the Government were made "borrowing settlers names by merchants."⁴⁰ At a local level there seems to have been little political will to confront such abuse. Later reforms, particularly the abolition of the quota purchasing system by Governor Brisbane in January 1822, were to the intended detriment of small producers, as tenders had to supply a minimum of 100 bushels or 2000lbs of wheat.⁴¹

Debts owed meant that merchants often had first call on the harvest even when there were other available buyers willing to pay a higher price. James Gordon testified that most settlers did not benefit from the high price of wheat that stemmed from increased demand in New South Wales after the Hawkesbury floods in 1817, as "the settlers were so much indebted at that time to the merchants that the whole came into their hands at that time in payment of their debts. The merchants, but particularly Mr Lord, sold [on] their wheat to Capt. Paxton of the Ship Pilot, who... gave 15 shillings per bushel."⁴²

The same problems and practices existed in Port Dalrymple. One farmer informed Bigge that: "for the nights previous to the opening of the store, the wagons and carts loaded with wheat collected at the outside of the store yard and remained till the morning", and that there was "great disappointment" when

most farmers missed out and had to get rid of their wheat "by paying it for those debts that they owed to the dealers in the town."⁴³

The dubious character of those in charge of the Government Store exacerbated the problem. Thomas Archer, in charge of the store from 1813–1817 at Port Dalrymple, noted that his predecessor, George Williams, "absconded into the bush...he remained in the woods six months and then gave himself up and was not employed again." Archer's own actions may not have been illegal, but they undoubtedly discriminated against small farmers and enriched his own pocket, laying the foundation for his subsequent fortune. Archer admitted that, when he began to employ tenders for meat in 1816, he "took respectability into account." He also acknowledged that there were frequent deficiencies in what was tendered and what was needed, and "of those who supplied deficiencies ... Mr Lord supplied very large quantities." In some circumstances Archer supplied to the Store himself, explaining to the Commissioner that "Mr Lord lent me the meat", and that this was "part of the patronage of the Commissariat Department." The fact that Lord supplied meat to both the northern and southern settlements, which was against the regulations, was also explained by Archer – the northern stock "belongs to his children."⁴⁴

There were few safeguards in place to check such abuse. Bigge actively investigated the Port Dalrymple Commandant, Gilbert Cimitiere, and his report to London censured Cimitiere for using his office to promote his own interests and for flouting Commissariat regulations.⁴⁵ William Broughton, sent down from Sydney to reform the Hobart Town Commissariat, wrote to Davey on 8 February 1817, complaining that Lord had been "allowed to put wheat into the stores" as payment for "duties in spirits landed". Broughton pointed out that this had meant that "the poor industrious settler... will have no alternative but that of selling his grain to the merchants at their own price or going into gaol." Broughton had underestimated Lord's influence; the only action taken on his complaint was that Broughton himself was stood down while a Court of Inquiry investigated Lord's

counter claims. Perhaps Davey's departure changed the politics of this situation as the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 28 May 1818 reported that the inquiry had been abandoned and Broughton reinstated, as Lord was no longer prepared to follow through with his complaint. No doubt he was aware of the risks to his interests posed by any balanced investigation. Certainly Macquarie's position remained that Broughton had been important in "rectifying and reforming the various abuses which had been practised for some years past in the Commissariat Department."⁴⁶

As their debts to the merchants increased, many small farmers were forced to use their land and stock as security to obtain goods on credit. Wade informed Bigge that as a result of such practices "I may safely say that at least two thirds of settlers in Pitt Water are insolvent."⁴⁷ And the merchants proved to be a litigious and unforgiving lot when a bad harvest, or low prices, meant repayments fell behind schedule – with most court time in Van Diemen's Land spent giving legal sanction to the seizure of the assets of the poor. There were 305 suits initiated in the Lieutenant Governor's Court which ended in the issuing of writs, almost all to small farmers, and many led to the properties being forfeited.⁴⁸ By early 1824 Barnes believed that "half the small farmers are ruined... The merchants are selling them up every day."⁴⁹ As Canteri concluded, "large merchant graziers obtained improved agricultural land by extension of credit and foreclosure."⁵⁰

The merchants seem to have operated in cartel and those that broke ranks, such as Roland Walpole Loane, paid dearly for it. Loane, who had arrived Van Diemen's Land in November 1809, became a rival of Lord. By 1820, according to testimony given to Commissioner Bigge, he had had been almost run out of the colony. Whatever the justice of Loane's many complaints, the wide community support he received seems to have been because he was the only source of genuine competition for goods that were usually priced far higher than similar items in Sydney. A memorial in support of Loane, signed by 68 people –

mostly small settlers – said that he attempted to counter the “systematic extortion so regularly practiced in the settlement.”⁵¹

One unexpected consequence of this concentration of profit was to strengthen the move to self-sufficiency and a dependence on the free resources of the bush and unallocated pasturelands beyond the settled districts – both for those who clung to their small holdings and for the growing class of landless poor.

Products of the land

On 8 October 1823 two ships left Sullivans Cove with characteristic and illuminating cargoes. The *Lusitania* took on board 26 bundles of kangaroo skin, five tons of wattle bark, one bale of possum fur and one bale and two cases of sundry skins, 52 bolts of whale bone and 61 casks of oil. The *Regalia* had seal skins, wool, wattle bark, Huon Pine, ‘cedar’ (probably blackwood or sassafras), possum fur and black swan skins.⁵² In November 1827 the chief exports to England (besides wool) were “whale oil, seal skins, extract of mimosa bark, dry bark, gum plank, whalebone and hides.”⁵³ These products were being exported by a small elite, and the profit was concentrated in their hands, but a large number of ordinary Van Diemonians supplied them. George Hobler, for example, paid workers £60 pounds to strip all the bark in a 3000 acre block in 1831, and “expected to make at least £500, perhaps double” on the deal.⁵⁴ An even larger group of people found an independent source of income in the ‘free’ resources of the bush. Maxwell-Stewart established that:

Small scale settlers used their land to provide timber for the Hobart market. Other settlers combined farming with ship and boat building, brewing, baking, flour milling, inn keeping, transport services, tanning and shoe making, to name but a few... in a majority of cases the land continued to supply the raw materials upon which other activities relied, for

example, four, barley, wood, stone, hides, meat, brick earth, charcoal, bark and shells.⁵⁵

But the topography of Van Diemen's Land meant that it was not only those with land that could sell bush products. Nearly everyone before the early 1820s, even those convicts living in Hobart Town, had ready access to unallocated land, and thus resources that could be bartered or sold with little or no capital investment. Noel Butlin has highlighted the critical economic role played "by the large array of ex-convicts, ticket of leave persons and some still under sentence who carried out craft activities, both processing products and selling their wares in a combination of small scale manufacturing/commerce." The main traded goods before 1820 (besides agricultural products) were "salt, lime... timber, kangaroo and seal skins, oil, lime [and] coal." Butlin notes that "these local inflows supplied a few items for export" but were "mostly for local processing and consumption."⁵⁶

The level of domestic demand should not be underestimated. The fact that Van Diemen's Land was a penal colony, with such a high proportion of the population in the employ or service of government, provided an engine for economic growth that even significantly larger British colonies lacked. Moreover, the penal bureaucracy and many of the prisoners it supervised continued to be concentrated in the two main settlements throughout the 1820s, resulting in the paradox that the Van Diemonian bush-based economy and culture was facilitated by a demand generated by what was an unusually urbanised society. In 1832, of a total population of 31,718, well over half – 17,508 – were still in Hobart Town or Launceston, and this proportion was even higher in the earlier decades.⁵⁷ Skins, firewood, shingles, other wood products and lime are five important examples of local products accessed by ordinary Van Diemonians to supply this market. While much of the direct labour was done by convicts, the proportion of the population who were 'government men' in the 1808 to 1818 period was the lowest of any time before the 1860s, and emancipists found their labour and products in high demand.

Until the mid 1820s no bush products were as important as kangaroo and seal skins, both for export and to meet domestic demand for knapsacks, rugs, clothes, shoes and caps. Both shepherds and stock-keepers continued to have kangaroo dogs and to spend much of their time hunting to supply this market. The *Hobart Town Gazette's* Christmas Day message for 1819 was: "it would be found very beneficial if the owners of stock were to limit or to get rid entirely of the dogs, which are now generally kept at the interior stockyards, and which induce the men to employ almost all of their time in hunting, losing sight of the flocks for days together." But it was to be another decade before the government's object would be realized. Meanwhile, as Gordon informed Bigge: "the principal occupation of Van Diemonian stockmen and shepherds" continued to be hunting: they "derive subsistence from killing kangaroos, and they derive a profit from the sale of the skins". The temptation to hunt kangaroo, Gordon confirmed, caused them to "desert flocks" regularly.⁵⁸ Even soldiers followed the practice.⁵⁹

Closer to the two main settlements, firewood was a more significant bush-based industry. James Ross wrote in 1822 that "people cut cart loads and barrow wood loads ... not a hundred yards from their own doors".⁶⁰ Even more important were shingles – which could be cut with nothing more than an axe. David Burn noted that peppermint "is the timber preferred for shingles (the thin slabs which cover colonial houses)", as it "possesses a remarkably close grain and very enduring quality."⁶¹ The Police Fund purchases listed in the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 9 January 1819 included £46 for 46 000 shingles from John Fawkner. Shingle consumption increased with the expansion in building activity during the 1820s and 1830s, one commentator noting in 1839 that they were an "article of great consumption in the colony."⁶²

Other timbers were accessed for a range of domestic purposes.⁶³ Stringy bark was split for palings and Oxley noted in 1810 that: "blackwood... from the beauty and lightness of this wood is of considerable consequence to the colonists, being

employed for every purpose of domestic use.” Oxley reported that sassafras was also used, though the “the blackwood [was] easier procured and esteemed of a superior quality.”⁶⁴ Blue gum and myrtle were widely used for house and ship building.⁶⁵

The most prized timber of all was the huon pine, but until the discovery of the west coast resource by the Kelly expedition in the summer of 1815/16 there was little of it to be had. The *Hobart Town Gazette* reported on 15 June 1816 that:

On the shores of this harbour [Port Davey] are great quantities of the timber named Huon Pine – the superior purpose of this wood for every purpose of joiners and cabinet work, from the closeness, regularity and beauty of its grain is acknowledged – it will also be eminently serviceable in the building of boats... from its lightness, buoyancy and indestructibility from worms.

Such was the level of timber exploitation in easily accessible districts that the Government had to take action to protect its own supplies. For example, the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 21 March 1818 included a notice that “timber and shells at and around Barnes Bay, Bruny Island, to the extent of two miles, being required for the use of Government, all persons are prohibited from using or taking any of the said timber or shells”. Burning shells – often Aboriginal midden deposits – for lime was done privately as well as by the government’s convict gangs.

Various mineral discoveries were also periodically exploited. The *Hobart Town Gazette* noted on 15 June 1816 that coal had “been found at various places in the isle” and that furthermore:

Good slate has been found; and a limestone quarry has been opened and worked within a mile and a half of Hobart Town – the mortar of which is

extremely good for mason's work, but not so good as shell-lime (which is to be had in the greatest abundance) for the plasterer's use – For the benefit of the farmer most excellent marle abounds everywhere; and limestone has been discovered in various parts of the country.

Manufactured items, including axes, farm equipment, furniture, clothing, footwear, candles and soap, were also significant contributors to the local economy. This was driven by the need to develop products adapted to the local environment and the fact that in such a small and isolated market imported products were expensive and sometimes unavailable. English axes struggled to break the resistance of local hardwoods, whilst imported farm utensils readily broke.⁶⁶ Curr recommended against bringing out English tools, "as they are not adapted by their strength, to encounter the roots and stones and the inequalities of surface... Indeed the implements of husbandry made in the colony are cheaper than those brought from England."⁶⁷ Evans similarly advised that colonially made farming tools were "better adapted to encounter the roots, stones and other obstacles to cultivation... than those manufactured at home", and that even English nails were "too fine for hard wood". He also observed that furniture was also "very good of the colonial manufacture, and cheaper, reckoning the cost of freight."⁶⁸ In 1820 the newly arrived settler, William Williamson, claimed: "every European manufacture sells for treble what they cost in England".⁶⁹

As the communication with farming districts was by river and sea, boat building was also important from an early time. The first vessel known to be built in Van Diemen's Land was the 40 ton schooner *Henrietta*, launched in December 1812.⁷⁰ These boats not only plied trade within Van Diemen's Land, but sailed to the Bass Strait islands, New Zealand, Mauritius, and further afield. The most significant 'run' was to Port Jackson. A number of ships regularly plied between Hobart Town and Sydney – such as the *Young Lachlan* owned by Captain John Howard.⁷¹

Isolation and a distinctive environment led to the creative use of local resources. The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 22 May 1819 had a "recipe for converting the fin tails... of the whale fish into glue (an article hitherto very dear in this settlement)." The Police Fund accounts listed in the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 3 April 1819 included a payment of 1 pound sixteen shillings for 'ochre' – widely used by the Aborigines. One settler gave the inside of his cottage "a coat of wash made from the whiting and some of the red ochre which is abundant in some parts of the country".⁷²

Enterprise was not only the prerogative of the free. Convicts were encouraged to engage in self or paid employment outside the hours set for government labour. Furthermore, before the early 1820s, those working in lime kilns or harvesting timber usually had government quotas to fulfil rather than set hours of work and thereafter could work for themselves. For example the Police Fund accounts of 3 April 1819 included a payment to "government [convict] sawyers for sawed timber in their own time" of fifty pounds.⁷³ And, as seen, convict stockmen and shepherds spent a good proportion of their time hunting both for meat and skins. Convicts with particular skills were also often let free to employ their trades in return for a weekly payment and the forfeiture of their ration to their masters. While this was meant to be a privilege of certain officers, many small farmers did the same with their assigned men – even when they had no particular skills – especially at quieter times in the farming year, although Sorell clamped down on this practice.⁷⁴ Others just put their assigned convicts to work at their trade and reaped the reward. Hamilton Wallace wrote to his father in 1825 that he had two convicts working at his store and "one of them is a tailor who I keep constantly at work".⁷⁵ The Land Commissioners found as late as 16 April 1827 that a settler on the Macquarie River "has lived on his farm solely by the profits arising from the sale of shoes made by a prisoner servant."⁷⁶

While these economic activities were undoubtedly important to the island's economy, the limitation of Butlin's revisionism is that he (along with other

Australian economic historians) has not sufficiently acknowledged the overwhelming importance of pastoralism in Van Diemen's Land. It was this single fact that most distinguished the island's economy from that of New South Wales until the early 1820s. Butlin pointed out that "the colonists in New South Wales had chosen one of the worst locations in which to attempt to grow sheep and they continued to do so while they remained in a coastal environment on the mainland."⁷⁷ But the implications of the obvious contrast with the immediate accessibility of native grasslands in Van Diemen's Land, some of Australia's best sheep and cattle country, have been largely ignored.

The economic importance of sheep and cattle

The extraordinary increase in sheep and cattle numbers in Van Diemen's Land after 1809 preceded a similar expansion in New South Wales by over a decade. The Derwent Muster of May 1809 showed there to be only 489 privately owned cattle and 1091 sheep.⁷⁸ By 1813 numbers had increased to 3894 cattle and 24 691 sheep, and the government was able to end the purchase of kangaroo, further increasing demand for the introduced herbivores. In 1817 there were about 11 000 cattle and 100 000 sheep in Van Diemen's Land, and by 1820 there were, as noted, around 182 000 sheep – over twice as many as in the mother colony. Oxley's 1810 prediction, that "this rich interior country will... contain at no distant period flocks and herds not inferior in size or number to the celebrated plains of Paraguay", had been fulfilled with remarkable speed.⁷⁹

Despite the economic significance of the spread of sheep and cattle in Van Diemen's Land, their short term environmental and cultural impact was moderated by the fact that their management was little different to that of the kangaroo. The Bengal cross cattle and tough traditional sheep meat breeds were let loose to wander largely where they willed. For the stock-keepers and shepherds who followed and loosely watched over them, pastoralism did not replace hunting but supplemented it. Controls over both the animals and their

guardians remained very weak and, moreover, could co-exist with (and, indeed, benefit from) traditional Aboriginal land management.

Butlin acknowledges this pastoral expansion but dismissed its importance on the basis that, "even though livestock increased rapidly, wool from sheep was almost entirely wasted."⁸⁰ The relevance of this qualification is, however, unclear. These animals were sheep meat breeds because there was little export demand for Australian wool, but while the wool had almost no market value, the meat most certainly did. Meat was sold both fresh and salted to the Government Store, to whalers, and to a variety of export destinations, including New South Wales. For example, Loane advised, in the Christmas 1819 edition of the *Hobart Town Gazette*, that in the previous four months he had "slaughtered no less than 120 000 weight of meat for the consumption of Port Jackson". Williamson wrote from Hobart Town in 1820 that "there has been a great flood at Sydney which makes this little place busy in killing and salting down meat and sending the same with wheat thither".⁸¹ There was even a live export trade, with the *Gazette* reporting, on 4 July 1818, that one ship carrying 1200 sheep and 12 cows, and another with 48 cows, had gone to Mauritius.

The free settler immigrants of the early 1820s recognized the economic value of sheep meat. When Curr wrote in 1824 that "in the flocks of Van Diemen's Land its true riches will always be found to consist", he did so on the basis of the "high price which has been given, and the constant demand which has existed, for meat."⁸² The 'first' official settler of the Shannon region, James Ross, wrote that he bought his sheep from an unauthorised long-term hunter-pastoralist, 'Dennis', because they were good meat animals: "I purchased a small flock of excellent sheep from him at 20s or four dollars each... and though the wool was not very fine, their carcasses weighed from 60 to 70 and some of them as high as 80 lbs. each." Ross explained why the wool was 'wasted': "at that time there was no thought of sending wool to England" and "if it were not necessary to clip the wool

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from the sheep annually for the sake of the animal's health, sheep owners at that time would never have troubled themselves to shear the fleece."⁸³

Butlin's statistics confirm the importance of sheep and cattle in Van Diemen's Land's economic development. The pastoral industry in 1817 accounted for 39.8 per cent of GDP in Van Diemen's Land, compared to 22.1 per cent in New South Wales. Pastoral expansion meant that Van Diemen's Land's GDP went from less than 10 per cent of the New South Wales total in 1810 to nearly 30 per cent in 1820, and was much higher than New South Wales on a per capita basis.⁸⁴ As Abbot and Nairn point out:

With only a quarter of the population the satellite dependency of Van Diemen's Land after 17 years of settlement had half as many cattle, half as many acres of wheat and half as many sheep again as the parent colony. That is six times the productivity (in these sectors) per head of population with an average income at 32 pounds, or about twice that of New South Wales.⁸⁵

In this context, Butlin's claim that "Van Diemen's Land farming was highly inefficient" seems to miss the point.⁸⁶ In terms of a return on the capital and labour employed it was a very productive and efficient enterprise indeed. The costs of this form of farming were minimal. Almost nothing was paid for access to the native grasslands and little labour was needed in proportion to the numbers of animals involved. Cattle in particular, as Curr noted, "receive little attention from their proprietors... they are suffered to range about uncontrolled." Moreover, they "breed very fast" and thus "are kept at very little expense to their owner."⁸⁷

Even sheep, watched over in England and New South Wales because of vulnerability to predators, climatic extremes and problems of access to fodder or water, were largely left to themselves in Van Diemen's Land. These animals may

have been, as Semmens has argued, “very badly managed” when compared with the coddled merinos of the next generation of pastoralists, but the tough meat breeds were hardy and self sufficient, thriving with minimal intervention.⁸⁸ Barnes noted that it was “really astonishing how fast the latter [sheep] increase: you may calculate on five young lambs in two years from one ewe,”⁸⁹ and Curr observed that a single shepherd could supervise over a thousand animals.⁹⁰ No wonder the Land Commissioners noted, in May 1828: “the lower order of settler consider the merinos as a curse to the colony, that they are eternally scabby, require much attention, and that they diminish in size. They therefore keep up the blood of the Bengal and Teeswater sheep”.⁹¹

Other competitive advantages were also enjoyed by the island's flock masters – including the mild climate and the fact that sheep did not need to be penned at night as there was no threat from dingos or other predators. Thomas Henty wrote that they “make no provision for their sheep in winter. All is left to dame nature”.⁹² Ross, reflecting on the time of his arrival in the colony (1822), remembered that “flocks of sheep at that time and for several years after... were found to thrive well and to increase faster by being left to rove for themselves unmolested and not shutting them up at night”⁹³ T.O Curling wrote from the Lake River in 1823 that “lambling and shearing goes on all year round... there is no drawback except the loss by sheep stealers”.⁹⁴ That there were little losses from indigenous carnivores - including the devil and the thylacine – is evident by the fact that almost no losses are recorded from any predator before feral dogs emerged as a problem in the late 1820s.

The point regarding early pastoral practices was that, as Harris noted, “stock costs nothing in keeping” since, as Burn pointed out, “Van Diemen's Land was aught beyond a vast common”.⁹⁵ Van Diemonian pastoralists had ‘free’ and unrivalled access to well watered grasslands, and under these circumstances there was no incentive to invest capital in more intensive, but less efficient, forms of farming.

Profit constraints

The main constraints upon pastoral profits in Van Diemen's Land prior to the outbreak of full-scale hostilities with the Aborigines were not related to environmental factors or poor farming systems. As the newly arrived settler, T.O. Curling, suggested in 1823, there was "no drawback except the loss by sheep stealers."⁹⁶ This, though, was considerable. "Robbery is not confined as in England to a single sheep or cow", Williamson observed. Rather, "whole droves are driven off at once and slaughtered".⁹⁷ Curr warned prospective immigrants that "sheep stealing in this island... is organised into a most complete system... this destructive practice is carried on to an extent which would scarcely be credited by those who are not acquainted with the colony."⁹⁸ Wallace, who had lost "37 ewes heavy in lamb none of which I could ever trace", informed his father that, "it is not at all uncommon for to hear of 200 to 300 sheep drove away from the different stockholders. In fact no person's property is safe in this colony."⁹⁹ Guy explained that "they take them through unfrequented parts of the bush and the land being generally dry you cannot trace them and kill and salt the meat when they have no opportunity to dispose them in any other way."¹⁰⁰

Because cattle were more difficult to steal in large numbers, they remained a popular livestock choice despite the lower price for their meat. Curr noted that "a solitary beast is sometimes killed, but the half of a herd of cattle never disappears in a single night, as is the case with sheep, it being necessary to have horses to drive them off the ground to which they are accustomed."¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as the Land Commissioners found on 11 May 1826, valuable working bullocks as well horses could be stolen: "we turned out our horses to graze and... they disappeared in the afternoon, it is a common custom for stock-keepers to 'plant' as they term it; that is to hide bullocks and horses, a reward is then offered, and the runaways are brought in."¹⁰²

Settlers' fortunes were largely determined by the extent to which they adjusted to this "complete system" and were able to arrange protection for their stock. The newly arrived John Leake, who was to become one of the richest men in Van Diemen's Land, wrote to his wife Elizabeth in 1823:

I feel great anxiety of the safety of our sheep and you must see that Robert and Edward never leave them out of their eye and I wish much that you inquire of the overseer what sort of person it is who sleeps beside them. They are a valuable property and if we should lose them it would strike at our very comforts here. I think Foster should make a sure place to lock them up without delay. Pray use every means of security as nothing else is of equal importance at present.¹⁰³

The most effective way to protect stock from the 'complete system' of stock theft was to work within it. The frontier pastoral lands were largely outside official control and supervision, but this does not mean that there was 'anarchy'. The same social and economic structures that perpetuated the loss of stock could also provide significant levels of protection from theft – for those with the right networks and knowledge. The result was that before 1825 (though only during this era), a rough and ready breed of local capitalists, a few of them former convicts or convict-born, had a competitive advantage over newly arrived free settlers, and the Van Diemonian gentry gained some surprising recruits. There must have been some irony for William Field, one of the largest stock-owners in the north of the island, to recall that his sentence in England was for receiving stolen sheep.¹⁰⁴ David Gibson and James Lord, patriarchs of establishment dynasties, were both *Calcutta* convicts (the former the same Gibson named an 'outlaw' after absconding in 1806).¹⁰⁵ Richard Dry, the first locally born premier, was the son of a large, former convict, landowner.¹⁰⁶ And, as noted, Edward Lord's former convict wife, Maria, was critical to his unrivalled success.

As well as minimizing stock theft, these experienced local capitalists also understood how to motivate and manage labour – the second (and closely related) threat to pastoral profits on the Van Diemonian plains. Shepherds and stock-keepers were either free men, tickets of leave holders, or assigned convicts, and Curr claimed that:

The wages of the two former classes are from 20/. to 50/. per annum, and those of the latter are fixed by the Government at 10/. – but the man who does his duty in the confidential capacity of a shepherd, is seldom limited to the last-mentioned low wages. Besides their wages assigned servants are entitled to a ration of one pound of meat and one pound of flour daily; but it has not been the practice to limit them to this ration: those who do put them on an allowance at all, give them a ration and a half with a sufficiency of tea and sugar...[that] from the great quantity consumed at stock-yards and farm houses... become a considerable expense to the settler, who usually purchases a quantity that would surprise a farmer in his own country, frequently not less than a quarter or half a ton of sugar and a chest of tea at a time... provisions, with the expense of carriage, cost about 35/. per man annually, to which when wages are added, we shall find that every shepherd and farm servant will cost at least 45/. and more frequently 50/. per annum.¹⁰⁷

While comparisons with English labour costs are difficult because of different prices and 'in kind' components, there is little doubt that, at least during the recession years that followed the end of the French Wars, the cost of employing a shepherd (even if a convict) in Van Diemen's Land was higher than in most counties of England.¹⁰⁸

Curr believed that convict labour costs in Van Diemen's Land were also higher than New South Wales, as:

in Port Jackson, where both stock and men are under a better system of management, it is not usual to allow farm servants anything beyond what is required to be given to them by Government regulations. Their ration is served out to them by an overseer; and the meat consists, for the most part, of salt pork, the weekly ration of which is no more than four pounds weight. Whatever tea and sugar they receive, is charged in part of their annual wages. In Port Jackson they seem to bear in mind that the colony is a place of punishment, a circumstance wholly forgotten in Van Diemen's Land.¹⁰⁹

In 1823 the newly arrived Samuel Guy complained that servants were meant to get £10 a year and rations, "but if you don't give him (should he be ever so idle) £20 a year he won't earn his porridge. I am confident one good workman in England will do so much work generally as three do here."¹¹⁰

Employers usually believe that workers are overpaid and better off than they are elsewhere, whatever the historical context, and complaints about the lack of a discipline in the labouring classes were a particular feature of British society during the transition years of the early industrial revolution. E.P Thompson points out that a big part of the population "had escaped from the social controls of the manorial village and were not yet subject to the discipline of factory labour", and "what was said by the mercantile moralists" about the failure of the poor "to respond to incentives and disciplines" was hardly neutral.¹¹¹ Van Diemen's Land workers were, however, in a stronger position to mount a resistance to established customs than their English compatriots before the late 1820s because of the labour shortage in the colony.¹¹²

In the frontier regions workers were far from direct supervision and in a particularly strong negotiating position, because, as Curr warned, there were "a thousand ways of retaliation" against a "strict" employer: "his ploughs are broken, his sheep lost, his working oxen are sure to be missing or lame."¹¹³ Fortunately

for both capital and labour, there was a distinctive Van Diemonian solution that largely overcame the interrelated profit constraints of stock theft and labour costs, while giving workers the autonomy most desired. The 'thirds system' effectively traded economic independence and social freedom for guaranteed profit.

Sheep and cattle – distribution and access under the 'thirds'

Under what was termed 'the thirds', the Van Diemonian elite, resident in the towns, obtained free and motivated labour by handing over a flock or herd to a worker prepared to risk frontier life, and paying the employee a proportion of the natural increase, usually a third, in lieu of wages. The custodian took the animals to the leased or granted land or, just as commonly, to unallocated grasslands. There he loosely watched over the animals, doing the necessary deals to minimize losses from bushrangers and Aborigines, while making money for flour, tea, sugar, tobacco and rum from the sale of kangaroo skins. Curr described this as "common practice" and it remained widespread until the late 1820s, mainly because, as Burn put it, it was the most effective way "to ensure the care and fidelity of their convict shepherds."¹¹⁴ Curling, after detailing the problem of stock-theft, nevertheless encouraged his correspondent to emigrate, as he would get "his grant of land... which he might either sell or let, and employ what capital he might have at liberty in grazing sheep on thirds... this system pays both parties well as 100 ewes in three years will increase to about 1100 sheep."¹¹⁵ Wallace, too, resolved his difficulties satisfactorily. After evacuating his land grant because of stock theft, bushranging and unsavoury neighbours, he leased his land for "£150 per year and let my cattle on the thirds, and my sheep on the fourths, all of which run on my own farm".¹¹⁶

The thirds system largely explains why, although there were some very large owners of stock, there "had been considerably more diffusion of resources than occurred in New South Wales." Maxwell-Stewart calculated that, in 1817, 46 per

cent of cattle and 52 per cent of sheep run in the county of Buckingham were owned by emancipists or convicts. In 1817, in the southern county¹¹⁷, there were even 113 men and women recorded as running stock but possessing no land, and they owned six per cent of the cattle and 22 per cent of the sheep.¹¹⁸ Even these figures, based on official returns, are likely to be conservative since ownership was not always easy to establish or readily declared, and early government musters probably underestimated the number of sheep and cattle owners dispersed across the remote interior.

Not only the stock of the urban elite and the landless poor was run on the largely unallocated grasslands. James Gordon told Bigge that most small landowners placed their stock "in the interior of the country and at a distance of 40 and 50 miles from the settlement... [with] a ticket of occupation describing in very general terms the tract of land that he is to occupy."¹¹⁹ The 102 tickets issued in 1817 provide the first official descriptions of how extensive such pastoral 'runs' had become. For example, the ticket of occupation granted to 'Stines and Troy' extended from "Prosser's Plains [near present day Orford] to Oyster Bay."¹²⁰ Three of the Norfolk Islander Triffets had runs "from Big [Ouse] River to Dick Browns River [River Dee]."¹²¹ Sorell advised in December 1818 that "passes given to crown servants from Hobart Town to the interior... may in future extend as far as the Macquarie River; which on account of the grazing ground now occupied in its vicinity by the stock owners of the Derwent, is... to be considered within the boundary of the settlement."¹²² Such remote areas were becoming sufficiently populated for disputes to occur. The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 6 November 1819 included an order against taking away timber and grazing stock from "Peters farm at York Plains" (nearly midway between Hobart Town and Launceston).

Despite the opportunities for self sufficiency and economic independence afforded by the largely open access to native grasslands and the thirds system, pastoral profit remained concentrated with the merchant elite. As with wheat, the

key to this was the control of the domestic and export markets, especially the Government Store. As the smaller pastoral players were excluded from this market they increasingly provided stock to the large merchant pastoralists, who sold it on. While the lure of a life of freedom and economic independence beyond the oppressive official gaze seems to have been worth the low financial return for many ticket of leavers and ex-convicts, there is little doubt that, despite celebrated exceptions, the control of key markets by a small elite meant that most stayed poor.

There has been little study of the first wave of Van Diemonien pastoralism. The fact that it did not involve exclusive or permanent possession of the land, or any legal title, probably explains this. Yet the fact is that the much-derided Norfolk Islanders and ex-convict smallholders, along with a landless group of semi-nomadic vagrants, are the unlikely pioneers of the Australian pastoral industry. And with lucrative profits for the elite to be made from facilitating this independent way of life for pastoral workers beyond official control, a distinctive Van Diemonian culture could continue to evolve.

Endnotes: Chapter Four

¹ R. M. Hartwell, *The Economic Development of Van Diemen's Land, 1820-1850* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1954) 11.

² Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) 70.

³ Trevor Semmens, "Food and Agriculture in the New Colony of Van Diemen's Land 1803 to 1810," *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 122, no. 2 (1988) 22.

⁴ Tim Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* (Launceston, Tas.: Pelion Press, 1989) xiii.

⁵ Letter to Colonial Office, 28 June 1820, Meredith papers, AOT NS 123/15

⁶ P.L. Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) 403.

⁷ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 515.

⁸ HRA 1/8, 306

⁹ *Sydney Gazette* 28 March 1818.

¹⁰ A vineyard had been planted by G.W. Gunning at Coal River as early as 1826. Eustace FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania : Letters, Petitions and Other Manuscripts Relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1980) 42.

¹¹ HRA 3/1, 763.

¹² Lachlan Macquarie, *Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales: Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1810-1822* (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, 1956) 59.

¹³ *Sydney Gazette*, 23 December 1815, 4 February 1815, 2 September 1815.

¹⁴ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 29 June 1816.

¹⁵ *Sydney Gazette*, 17 May 1817.

¹⁶ Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* (Hobart: Platypus Publications, 1967) 34-35.

¹⁷ B.M. Thomas, "Forest to Field and Fencing the Field," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 47, no. 2 (2000).

¹⁸ Semmens, "Food and Agriculture in the New Colony of Van Diemen's Land 1803 to 1810" 21. The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 18 January 1817 also used the term "chipping in wheat", whilst Widowson reported in 1829 that it was "not many years since when the plough might be said to be unknown in the island; the ground was then broken up with the hoe, similar to that used in the West Indies, and the corn brushed in with thorns". Cited in Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 29.

¹⁹ C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966) 399; Ronald Worthy Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828*, vol. 2 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939) 263; Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* 78.

²⁰ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* 119.

²¹ Charles Jeffreys, *Van Dieman's Land: Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Dieman's Land* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1820) 55, emphasis in original.

²² William Barnes letter to his brother, 15 March 1824, in Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* 402-6.

²³ Henty to William Humphrey, 3 April 1833, SLV MS 9038

²⁴ B. Godwin, *Godwin's Emigrant's Guide to Van Diemen's Land* (London: Sherwood, Jones and Co., 1823) 38.

²⁵ Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* 2, 29, 78.

²⁶ Given the negative judgements that have been made about early farming practices, there is some irony that 'no till' farming is again being increasingly used in Australia to grow crops, to maintain soil moisture and reduce erosion, as ploughing paddocks turns and exposes the soil to wind and sun, increasing farmer vulnerability to drought.

²⁷ Macquarie, *Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales: Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1810-1822* 59.

²⁸ Semmens, "Food and Agriculture in the New Colony of Van Diemen's Land 1803 to 1810," 28.

²⁹ William Barnes letter to his brother, 15 March 1824, in Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* 402-6.

³⁰ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* 58.

³¹ J Crawford, W.F. Ellis, and G.H. Stancombe (eds.), *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824 - 1835* (Hobart: Royal Society of Tasmania, 1962) 8.

³² James Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Melbourne: Marsh Walsh Publishing, 1975) 62, 67-8, 82.

³³ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990) 170.

³⁴ Of the 88 land grants detailed in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 14 February 1818, 77 were for less than 100 acres, with 52 of them for 50 acres or less. 30 acre grants were very common. The largest grant was for 600 acres, there were three for 200 acres or thereabouts and a few for 100 acres. Moreover not all 'small' farms had been granted to their holders. In 1820 Gordon believed that the "a considerable number of emancipated convicts... hold land by purchase." *HRA* 3/3, 247. The size of these farms reflects the English norm. As Holderness notes: "in spite of the

persistent tendency for the land to be amalgamated into larger farms right up until the late nineteenth century, some kind of median farm of 30-60 acres emerges, from a long series of estate surveys and inventories... a median farm of around 50 acres was remarkably tenacious in the face of so many changes in the organization of English agriculture between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries." B.A. Holderness, *Pre-Industrial England* (London: J.M Dent, 1976) 51-2.

³⁵ Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* 397.

³⁶ HRA 3/3, 320-322.

³⁷ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 18 September 1819.

³⁸ HRA 3/3, 311, 221.

³⁹ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 165-6.

⁴⁰ HRA 3/3, 352. Sorell explained the reasons for his attempt to restrict the sale of meat to the Government Store to those who owned land in a letter to the Commissary on 1 June 1820: "in a country where meat is scarce, or where the consumption is not equal to the produce, it may be unavoidable to provide meat for government wherever it can be obtained, but in a settlement where the producing of stock is so great, and the owners of large flocks and herds numerous, I concur there is not a shadow of ground for admitting in any instance, non residents and non holders of land or their agents, to a participation in the most important benefit which is the final object of the... system, to secure to the colonists a reward and encouragement for their labour." William Sorell, *The Sorell Letters: The Letters of William Sorell (1775-1848) Lieut.-Governor of Van Diemen's Land to Deputy Assistant Commissary General G.Hull, Hobart Town, 1820* (Sydney: St Marks Press, 1991) 14.

⁴¹ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 181.

⁴² HRA 3/3, 254.

⁴³ HRA 3/3, 437.

⁴⁴ HRA 3/3, 421-426.

⁴⁵ John Ritchie, *Punishment and Profit: The Reports of Commissioner John Bigge on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1822-1823; Their Origins, Nature and Significance* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970) 150.

⁴⁶ HRA 3/3, 613-4.

⁴⁷ HRA 3/3, 312.

⁴⁸ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 175.

⁴⁹ Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* 403.

⁵⁰ Carlo Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushrangling in Van Diemen's Land 1805 - 1818" (B.Litt. thesis [original unabridged version privately distributed by the author], Oxford University, 1973) 105.

⁵¹ *HRA* 3/4, 784.

⁵² Mary Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1977) 407.

⁵³ Arthur to Goderich 1 November 1827, *HRA* 3/6, 307.

⁵⁴ George Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler October 6 1800 - December 13 1882* (n.p.[California]: C & H Reproductions, 1992) 25-6.

⁵⁵ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846".

⁵⁶ N.G. Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 162-3.

⁵⁷ M.C.I. Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1953) 249.

⁵⁸ *HRA* 3/3, 250.

⁵⁹ To maintain morale, soldiers were allowed to hunt even at Macquarie Harbour and Port Arthur. Those posted to defend settlers from the Aborigines also seem to have, like the pastoral workers, spent much of their time hunting. For example, when Robinson passed the estate of Captain Woods on the Clyde the soldiers were absent, and "I concluded the soldiers were hunting kangaroo." N.J.B. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 546.

⁶⁰ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 6. The demand for firewood within an easy walk of Hobart Town was such that it soon became exhausted, and Edward Curr noted in 1824 that "firewood is become a most expensive article, and to obtain it is often difficult." Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* 9.

⁶¹ David Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973) 52.

⁶² Thomas James Lempriere, *The Penal Settlements of Early Van Diemen's Land* (Launceston: A Sesquicentenary Production of The Royal Society of Tasmania [Northam Branch], 1954) 61.

⁶³ Attempts at export began as early as December 1809 when Collins approved Loane's application to send "a quantity of timber in this settlement for the Calcutta market." Collins to Loane 3 December 1809, *HRA* 3/4, 723. Loane was still unsuccessfully attempting to develop an export market over a decade later. Bigge wrote to Sorell on 13 May 1822 about the failure of Loane's latest timber shipment to England, although Bigge's informant was "still of the opinion that if the wood had been cut at a proper time of year and had not been so exposed to the sun, it could have fetched a good price in England." AOT CSO 1/114/2840.

⁶⁴ HRA 3/1, 761.

⁶⁵ Lempriere, *The Penal Settlements of Early Van Diemen's Land* 61.

⁶⁶ Rowcroft wrote that "the camp axes were much longer in the handle and narrower in the blade than the English axes. The first cut showed their superiority." William Thornley (edited by John Mills), *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973) 41.

⁶⁷ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 94-5.

⁶⁸ George William Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land: With Important Hints to Emigrants, and Useful Information Respecting the Application for Grants of Land* (London: J. Souter, 1822) 116.

⁶⁹ AOT PL 16/4.

⁷⁰ Will Lawson, *Blue Gum Clippers and Whale Ships of Tasmania*, facsimile ed. (Launceston: D&C Book Distributors, 1986) 24.

⁷¹ *Hobart Town Gazette* 20 February 1819.

⁷² Thornley, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* 54.

⁷³ *Hobart Town Gazette* 3 April 1819.

⁷⁴ A government order, printed in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 10 October 1818, prohibited the settlers "to let servants free on weekly payment", noting with concern that it appeared "to be understood by some settlers that they are entitled to allow the crown servants assigned to them on the store to go at large or to employ themselves, exacting a weekly payment from the servants." Sorell noted that earlier regulations also forbade this, but like so many government orders issued in early Van Diemen's Land it had been widely ignored.

⁷⁵ Jack Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" (unpublished manuscript accessible at the State Library of Tasmania) no page numbers.

⁷⁶ Anne McKay, ed., *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-28* (Hobart: University of Tasmania in conjunction with the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1962) 60.

⁷⁷ Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810-1850* 181.

⁷⁸ M. Fels, "Culture Contact in the Country of Buckinghamshire Van Diemen's Land 1803-1811," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 29, no. 2 (1982) 66. In addition to these animals, the government owned 122 sheep and 322 cattle, of which 252 had arrived just six weeks before.

⁷⁹ HRA 3/1, 761.

⁸⁰ Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810-1850* 204.

⁸¹ William Williamson letter, 16 December 1820, AOT P.L. 16/4.

⁸² Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 65.

⁸³ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 65-6.

⁸⁴ Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810 - 1850* 140, 98.

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- ⁸⁵ G.J. Abbot and N.B. Nairn, *Economic Growth in Australia 1788-1821*, 327, cited in Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805-1818" 327.
- ⁸⁶ Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810-1850* 204.
- ⁸⁷ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 85-87.
- ⁸⁸ Semmens, "Food and Agriculture in the New Colony of Van Diemen's Land 1803 to 1810" 28.
- ⁸⁹ Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* 402.
- ⁹⁰ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land*, 71.
- ⁹¹ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 84-5.
- ⁹² Henty to William Humphrey 3 April 1833, SLV MS 9038.
- ⁹³ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 27.
- ⁹⁴ T.O. Curling letter to Sir T. Mantell from Guilton on the Lake River 14 November 1823, in Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* 321-3.
- ⁹⁵ Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 107; Barbara Hamilton-Arnold, ed., *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* (Sorrento, Vic.: Arden Press, 1994) 65.
- ⁹⁶ T.O. Curling letter to Sir T. Mantell from Guilton on the Lake River, 14 November 1823, cited in Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* 321-3.
- ⁹⁷ William Williamson letter 16 December 1820, AOT P.L 16/4.
- ⁹⁸ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 35, 38.
- ⁹⁹ Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" no page number.
- ¹⁰⁰ Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381.
- ¹⁰¹ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 87-8.
- ¹⁰² McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 8.
- ¹⁰³ Edward and Robert are later described as "the two shepherd boys." John Leake to Elizabeth Leake 16 May 1823, in *Reports on the Historical Manuscripts of Tasmania: Numbers 1-7*, (Hobart: University of Tasmania, Department of History, 1964) 47.
- ¹⁰⁴ G.M. Webb, "Twenty Men of Fortune," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 45, no. 3 (1998) 151.
- ¹⁰⁵ James Lord, who died in 1824, was particularly successful – leaving a fortune of £50 000. His son David was to become the richest man in Van Diemen's Land. See Richard Lord, *The History of the James Lord (C1757-1824) Family in Tasmania, Vol 1 James Lord* (Hobart: R. Lord, 1966) 5-11.
- ¹⁰⁶ For more information on Richard Dry see A.D. Baker, *The Life and Times of Sir Richard Dry* (Hobart: Oldham, Beddome and Meredith, 1951).
- ¹⁰⁷ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 71-3.
- ¹⁰⁸ Agricultural wages collapsed after 1815 in England, in most counties falling to between 8s. and 10s. per week. Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London: Methuen, 1969) 220. Even in 1824, farm wages in northern England (which were

higher than in the south) averaged only 11s 7d a week, and for labourers in Manchester and Bradford, 13s and 16s respectively. Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 132.

¹⁰⁹ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 71-2.

¹¹⁰ Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381.

¹¹¹ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993) 40, 396.

¹¹² The labour shortage emerged as the sentences of most of the first convicts expired, and replacements came only in small numbers. Other than the *Indefatigable* in 1812, Van Diemen's Land received no transports direct from England until 1816. In May 1809 Collins found it difficult to even maintain the public service, let alone meet the claims of the Norfolk Island settlers: "I should not mention this want of labouring people... had I not made several ineffectual applications to the Government at Port Jackson." Collins to Castlereagh, 10 May 1809, *HRA* 3/1. Davey complained in April 1816 to Bathurst that only 175 convicts had arrived since 1813, and that the practice had been to select the "worst and most profligate characters from the gangs at Port Jackson for these settlements." He asked London to send convict ships direct from England because he needed 1000 men. Davey to Bathurst 13 April 1816, *HRA* 3/2. These attempts to ease the labour shortage are discussed in John Williams, *Ordered to the Island: Irish Convicts and Van Diemen's Land* (Sydney: Crossing Press, 1994) 95-6. The labour shortage eased between 1816 and 1820 as more convicts were sent from New South Wales and, from 1818, direct from England, but demand for labour remained high throughout the 1820s.

¹¹³ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 120.

¹¹⁴ Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 10; Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 77-8.

¹¹⁵ T.O. Curling letter to Sir T Mantell from Guilton on the Lake River, 14 November 1823, cited in Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* 321-3.

¹¹⁶ Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" no page numbers.

¹¹⁷ At this time the northern settled districts were known as the county of Cornwall and those in the south, Buckinghamshire.

¹¹⁸ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 171-3.

¹¹⁹ *HRA* 3/3, 250.

¹²⁰ *HRA* 3/4, 575 -7.

¹²¹ The River Dee is marked as Dick Brown's River in G.W Evans map of 1821.

¹²² *Hobart Town Gazette* 12 December 1818.

Chapter Five: Van Diemonian Culture

The distinctive way of life associated with the pastoral economy was documented by John West, who believed the Britons living in the grassy woodlands had a “way of life somewhat resembling that of the Aborigines.” Drawing largely on oral memory, West provided a vivid picture of the Van Diemonian frontier:

The agriculture of this colony was long trifling: the convicts were chiefly employed as stockmen and shepherds: from the banks of the Derwent to the district of Launceston, the land in general was a wilderness, unfenced and untenanted: the men, stationed forty and fifty miles from their master's dwellings, were rarely visited, and were under no immediate control. They were armed, to defend themselves from the natives, and clad in skins: they lived in turf huts, thatched with long grass, and revived the example of savage life.

West believed that the ‘degeneration’ of Van Diemen's Land into ‘savagery’ became more pronounced after 1810: “while Governor Collins lived, some order was maintained: it was during the rule of his successor that the British standard covered a state of society, such as never before possessed the official sanction.”¹

West's emphasis on the distinctive ‘non-English’ way of life that developed in Van Diemen's Land was iterated a century later by M.C.I. Levy who believed that:

The back areas of granted lands were peopled by stockmen and shepherds – a breed of folk as wild as the wastes around them, and more savage and cruel than the native tribesmen... Round them gathered absconders and landless ‘squatters’; and from the admixture developed a widespread and pernicious system of stock thieving.²

Lloyd Robson also recognized that "a subculture developed in the persons of those who found a hunting and wandering life to their taste". He viewed bushrangers as "consummate bushmen" who "dressed completely in kangaroo skins from cap to moccasin" and "swam easily in the sea of convict and ex-convict stockmen, hut-keepers and genial servants"³ But neither West, Levy nor Robson explored this sub-culture in any depth – its wildness and 'savagery' both defined and marginalized it. The changes evident in British culture were seen to have been a fringe experience of those living isolated lives in the bush, and thus of little relevance to the main story. What has been missed is the extent to which the environmentally induced cultural change permeated even the settled districts in an era when small farmers were as much hunters and nomadic pastoralists as agriculturalists, and claimed the bush and coast that surrounded and divided the settled districts as a commons of 'free' resources to take, sell, barter or consume. Thus, while cultural transformation was most exaggerated in remote regions, the physical and cultural frontier was blurred by both the topography and economy of the island colony.

The character of this Van Diemonian culture was shaped by the experience of living in an already populated land, and the implications of this will form the opening reflections of the chapter. The characteristics of the distinctive way of life will then be explored where they can be most obviously identified – in obtaining the 'essentials of life': food, clothing and shelter. Other diverse cultural characteristics will then be considered. Finally, it will be argued that these cultural features were underpinned by distinctive demographic characteristics which ensured that they were reproduced in the first generation of native-born Van Diemonian Britons.

The focus on change should not, however, fail to recognize significant continuities with the way of life in Britain. Early Van Diemen's Land was predominantly settled by a people still influenced by the customs and social and

economic systems of the pre-industrial age. Agricultural and industrial change in Britain was slower and more uneven than is often assumed⁴, and E.P Thompson has persuasively argued that pre-industrial ways not only survived but were revived in the eighteenth century, with the Enlightenment having only a small impact on "plebeian" culture⁵. The prevalence of herbal medicines and sacred charms to protect from fever and illness,⁶ the search for indigenous plant remedies in Van Diemen's Land, the primeval fear of the woods and the haunting scream of the 'Devil' emanating from them⁷, and the mythical descriptions of the interior and surrounding islands as populated by Aboriginal 'giants', are a few indicators of how the experience of living in Van Diemen's Land interconnected with existing folk traditions and beliefs. However difficult it is to access such transmitted lore, it is important not to assume that the world-views of early Van Diemonian Britons were, as the generations of immigrants that were to follow them were to be, largely shaped by the 'rational' industrial age. Nevertheless, by the early 1800s many centuries had already passed since the vast majority of British peoples had been able to access 'free' food (or clothing or shelter) from the land. Even in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, the right to hunt had been lost and the animals, along with their habitats, privatized by king and lord. For most, moreover, it was already many decades since even the ancient common rights to grazing land had been lost, with the final large-scale episode of this human tragedy that effectively made the landless and the poor "strangers in their own land"⁸ contemporaneous with the early settlement of Van Diemen's Land. With the loss of traditional land rights, the essentials of life for the majority of the British population were increasingly only to be obtained through conforming to the rigid work discipline of the new agricultural and industrial economy. It was this restriction, more than overt punishment, that ensured compliance with the new order. Similarly, in Van Diemen's Land it was to be the free access to all that life required from the bush and sea that was to enable many convicts and emancipists to find an alternative to the discipline, conformity and subservience sought by their colonial masters.

Freedom in Aboriginal land.

The most remarkable feature of the Van Diemonian cultural evolution was that it was most evident in Aboriginal-controlled regions – still the majority of the grassy woodlands until the mid 1820s. This was both because the Aborigines created a ‘safety buffer’ from undue interference and supervision from an elite wary of the danger that the Aborigines posed, and through the direct influence that accompanied this cross-cultural encounter. While there were dangers involved in interactions with the indigenous owners, the promise of freedom from the oppression and subordination within the British enclaves was a sufficient reward for many convicts to risk living in Aboriginal-controlled lands. The extent to which this constituted a peaceful crossing of the cultural divide is difficult to establish through historical research. Certainly, as will be seen, a convergence in the diet and clothing of the two cultures is evident, but it is only the outcome, not the process of cultural change that can be established with any confidence. However, in imagining and exploring the possibilities it must be remembered that Aborigines controlled the frontier lands until the mid 1820s, and negotiation rather than confrontation remained the surest path to survival. In explaining how individual and small groups of comparatively powerless Britons not only achieved access to almost all the woody grasslands of the island, but developed a distinctive way of life adapted to this environment, the nature of contact with the existing residents must surely figure prominently. In a few cases (such as the use and construction of short term shelters, kangaroo skin moccasins and fire sticks), an obvious direct transfer of technology can be identified. But generally, on both sides, the process of cultural change was more complex than this. How, for example, did red ochre – one of the most traded items in pre-settlement Aboriginal society – come to be so widely used by Europeans that by early 1832 two Aborigines are recorded buying it from a Launceston store?⁹

The widespread hunting of the short-tailed shearwater, or mutton bird, by both Aborigines and the British provides a demonstration of the complexity of the

process of cultural interaction and change. Irynej Skira, in 'Tasmanian Aborigines and Mutton Birding: A historical examination', points out that mutton birds have not been found in coastal middens, and that the Hunter Island rookery off the north west coast is the only confirmed off-shore rookery that Aborigines had been able to access in pre-settlement times.¹⁰ While this is not conclusive evidence that mainland and accessible island rookeries (which certainly existed at least by the 1830s)¹¹ did not exist – the bird's absence from middens may indicate only different consumption patterns for this seasonal and localised food – there can be little doubt that the Aborigines' access to eggs and chicks increased markedly through interaction with the sealers who provided boat access to the richest and previously inaccessible rookeries in the Bass Strait.¹² The multifarious uses of the bird which developed in both cultures thereafter probably reflected the sharing of knowledge traditional to both cultures. As Skira and others have pointed out, eating and preserving sea birds and eggs has been a long practice in parts of the British Isles. Indeed, some offshore British islands, such as St Kilda, a now abandoned island in the Outer Hebrides off the west coast of Scotland, were almost totally dependent on sea birds. As an eighteenth century St Kilda native told the Rev. Kenneth Macaulay, great uncle to the famous historian:

The fulmar furnishes oil for the lamp, down for the bed, the most salubrious food, and the most efficacious ointments for healing wounds, besides a thousand other virtues of which he is possessed, which I have not time to enumerate. But to say all in one word, deprive us of the fulmar, and St Kilda is no more.¹³

Just as with the shearwater, the fulmar chicks were harvested "when the young birds are at their fattest, but just before they have learnt to fly". They too had to be caught by hand and quickly killed by twisting their neck or the oil would be lost. As would develop with the mutton bird, the oil – used for various purposes, including medicinal – was drained out by women holding the bird's bill

downwards and gently pressing, after which the feathers were plucked and the carcass salted. But this sort of specialized regional knowledge was not immediately available to most Van Diemonian Britons in the 1820s, and salted foods, oils and feathers little sought anyway. It is not surprising that the early British hunting of the mutton bird was closer to traditional Aboriginal practices, but as Aborigines were themselves permanently confined to off-shore islands on or near major rookeries, British traditions were drawn on to increase the utility of this essential resource.

Food

Fresh meat had been a luxury for most convicts before coming to Van Diemen's Land. Meat consumption within the labouring class in Britain declined dramatically from the late eighteenth century and stayed low until the 1850s. In some regions of the British Isles meat was hardly ever tasted by ordinary people during this era, while the better paid workers in towns usually had meat once or twice a week. While not in itself a measure of good health, in the context of the nutritionally deficient, protein poor substitutes, the decline in meat consumption had negative health impacts.¹⁴

The widespread recession which began soon after the Napoleonic wars ended in 1815 continued into the 1820s, and was especially pronounced in rural regions. This meant that many labourers went hungry, with barely sufficient food to survive. The First Report of the Select Committee on Emigration from the United Kingdom (1826) documented the extent of absolute poverty, finding many regions where there was such a surplus of labour that wages became depressed to the extent that they were "utterly insufficient to supply that population with those means of support and subsistence which are necessary to secure a healthy and satisfactory condition of the community."¹⁵ The context for this was the increased number of rural labourers totally dependent upon selling their labour to obtain food, and a rapidly growing population which increased the

supply for labour. It was not until the mid nineteenth century that living standards rose consistently.¹⁶

The abundance of high protein indigenous foods – shellfish, swan, seals, emu and, above all, kangaroo – and later the ready availability of mutton and beef, was therefore the main ‘positive’ for most convicts transported to Van Diemen’s Land before the mid 1820s. The settler William Williamson may have exaggerated, but the contrast he drew in 1820 between “our starving countrymen in England” and Van Diemonians who “grumble excessively if they don’t have three fresh joint meals a day”, was nevertheless a legitimate one.¹⁷

Of the indigenous food sources, kangaroo continued to be pre-eminent. It was eaten in different ways, although the most characteristic and enduring “national dish” in Van Diemonian cuisine became the ‘steamer’ which was enjoyed by all classes.¹⁸ This probably emerged from the pre 1813 convict ration - which often combined fresh kangaroo with salted pork. In 1823, the newly arrived free settler Samuel Guy declared that it “is beautiful roasted or steamed in its own gravy with a piece of pork – tis astonishing what a quantity of rich gravy it will produce.” The first meal of Jeffreys’ men on arrival at their new lands consisted of:

the hind-quarters of a kangaroo cut into mince-meat, stewed in its own gravy, with a few rashers of salt pork. This dish is commonly called a steamer, they add to that a sufficient quantity of potatoes, and a large cake baked on the spot, these people, have often declared that they never in their lives ate a meal with greater relish and appetite than they did this supper.¹⁹

Kangaroo was eaten throughout the day. A 14 year old boy giving evidence in a murder trial in 1817 described how, intending to have breakfast in his hut outside Port Dalrymple, he took “up the axe to cut up a part of a kangaroo” when, seeing the axe already bloody, “divided the meat with the second axe.”²⁰

Kangaroo and wallaby were the main staple of stock-keepers and shepherds, who invariably kept kangaroo dogs and hunted for skins on the side, but they were appreciated across the social classes. Later historians who dismissed kangaroo as "not even as good as mutton" would find few to back this claim in Van Diemen's Land.²¹ Williamson's opinion was that kangaroo was "as good as any venison".²² Rosalie Hare "frequently" enjoyed the steamer while sojourning at Circular Head in early 1828, it too reminding her of venison.²³ The poet and novelist, Mary Grimstone, who lived in Hobart from 1826 to 1829, referred to colonists clad in kangaroo skin trousers, and eating "that Van Diemen's Land luxury – a kangaroo steamer."²⁴ Over a decade later, Louisa Meredith wrote in *My Home in Tasmania* that kangaroo was "undoubtedly excellent when hung for a sufficient length of time and properly dressed", and she also praised the steamer "consisting of the meat and some good bacon finely minced and stewed in rich gravy", but her most fulsome recommendation was reserved for the "hind quarters roasted with hare-stuffing and currant jelly."²⁵ Kangaroo soup, made using the tail, was also standard, and much enjoyed, fare.²⁶ The enjoyment of kangaroo continued throughout the Van Diemonian era, and when the first Australian cookbook was published in the 1860s in Tasmania, Edward Abbot included a number of the long established recipes for cooking it.

Seafood, especially the familiar oyster, continued to be another excellent protein source, so easily procured that it scarcely seems to have even entered systems of barter until established as a significant export commodity in later decades. As Williamson observed: "Oysters and other shell fish are got for the trouble of picking them up at low water."²⁷

A few new indigenous meats also entered the diet, especially in areas where larger native animals were no longer to be found (which was much of the settled districts by 1830). Evans noted that "wattle bird is here reckoned a great delicacy."²⁸ Kelly and his crew in 1816 ate wombats, seals, swans and a variety

of eggs. Lempriere in 1839 wrote that the "the echidna is common and in the absence of fresh meat makes an excellent dish", noting that "when properly stuffed with sage and onion and roasted" it had "all the favour and taste of a goose". He also recommended the young wombat roasted as sucking pig but believed "the older animal is only fit for soup."²⁹

The other main food source was introduced animals. In the early 1820s, Evans reported that "horses, asses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, cats and rabbits, together with all kinds of poultry, have been brought to Van Diemen's Land, and thrive there abundantly."³⁰ Some of these became feral. On 18 April 1816 Knopwood "had a rabbit, the first I killd", and this animal was common in many regions by the mid 1820s.³¹ According to the Land Commissioners, wild goats were also established by 1826.³² But, above all, it was the remarkable proliferation of sheep and cattle in the grassland plains which increasingly determined the British diet. The traditional British meats, especially mutton, were abundant and cheap by 1820, and were eaten both fresh and salted. Good quality salt came from Kangaroo Island, although a rougher variety described by Williamson as 'very coarse indeed' was available locally from Salt Pan Plains to preserve the food.³³ Virtually unlimited mutton became a right of workers, convict and free, in the grassy woodlands until well into the 1830s. In 1834 Ellen Viveash complained of having to kill 400 sheep a year to feed "our numerous fencers and builders."³⁴

The only non-meat foods much eaten were wheat and potatoes. As already noted, wheat grew well and soon satisfied domestic demand. The flour was often made into damper. The convict, John Broxup, who was marched for eight days from Hobart Town to Launceston five days after his arrival around 1830, wrote of his journey:

We made large fires of wood and bark, and when the wood and bark had burned down we would open the ashes and put the dough in and then

cover it with the ashes from the wood and it produced as good bread as ever was eaten.³⁵

As with the mutton bird, the preparation of this food reflected cultural heritage as much as environmental adaptation as the "open-hearth baking of breads" was traditional to both the Scots and the Irish.³⁶ The Aborigines soon developed a taste for bread, and flour was commonly provided to them.

Potatoes were not as important – their weight made them difficult to transport – but they were often grown by smallholders. Knopwood reported on 4 March 1808 that there were two tons of potatoes in the store and that no more was needed. Oxley noted that they were grown "in great perfection".³⁷

A noticeable change from the English diet was the almost complete absence of dairy foods – milk, cheese and butter – before the 1830s. In July 1831 the newly arrived free settler, Mrs Fenton, could not find any milk for her baby even near the comparatively densely settled New Norfolk, and asked her servant what the children lived on. "Please mam, fried meat and tea", was the response.³⁸

Little use continued to be made of indigenous plant foods, although the native potato sustained its comparative popularity. Jeffreys noted that bushrangers substituted the 'wild yam' for bread, and Jetson notes that it was eaten in the Central Highlands.³⁹ The fungus 'native bread' was also occasionally eaten. The name given to the 'native carrot' suggests it probably was also. Fern root, the most widely available plant food in Tasmania, and another Aboriginal staple, was also eaten or drunk. Even Alexander Pierce, the runaway cannibal from Macquarie Harbour, did not survive on human flesh alone, but "boiled some fern and drank it".⁴⁰ Evans quoted a few edible plants, including *scheffleria* ("a new species of parsley, good to eat"), *plantago trienspedita* ("good to eat in salad, and one of the most useful plants this island furnishes") and "a new species of ficoide,

the fruit of which the natives eat.”⁴¹ Lempriere gave further details of the main indigenous plant foods:

The *gastrodia sessamoides* or native potato... is in general to be found among the roots of decayed trees and is parasitical... They eat best roasted or if after being boiled, they are fried. The native bread is a tuber which grows to the size of a man's head, the rind of which is a very dark brown. When cut the inside bears an exact resemblance to rice boiled hard and in flavour and taste, is nearly the same. It has been found at Port Arthur weighing as much as 27 pounds. The natives, it is said, discover the plants by a small leaf... The *solanum macinatul* or kangaroo apple, is a very handsome plant and the fruits, when perfectly ripe, pleasant to taste.

Lempriere also wrote in some detail of the "*polygonum adpressum* or Macquarie Harbour grape" which he describes as one of the "greatest ornaments in most of the gardens of Hobart Town in covering arbours, fences, etc" that "produces a fruit of a sub-acid taste, excellent for tarts and preserves" and had "leaves and branches [that] taste like sorrel and have been used as a anti-scorbutic medicine.”⁴²

A number of plant foods continued to be drunk as forms of tea. Jeffreys noted the bushrangers "drunk a decoction of the sassafras and other shrubs, particularly one which they call the tea-tree bush.”⁴³ Most refreshing of all indigenous beverages would have been the mildly intoxicating drink made by tapping the sap of the cider gum (*Eucalyptus gunnii*) in the Central Highlands.⁴⁴ The hunters and stock-keepers living in this region followed the Aboriginal custom of tapping the trees.⁴⁵ Lieutenant William Breton reported that:

The shepherds and stock-keepers which tend the flocks and herds on that elevated region are in the habit of making deep incisions wherever

an exudation of the sap is perceived upon the bark. The holes are made in such a manner as to retain the sap that flows into them, and large enough to hold a pint. Each tree yields from half to a pint daily during December and January, but the quantity lessens in February and soon ceases.⁴⁶

George Augustus Robinson found most of the trees had been tapped in late 1831 and "in some of these holes I observed upwards of a quart of this juice" which "my people greedily partook of." The evangelical Methodist and stalwart of the Bethel Penial mission also seemed to have enjoyed the drink, finding it to be "exceedingly sweet and well favoured".⁴⁷

Because of the difficulty of establishing which plants were potential food and medicinal sources by other means, it is almost certain that the knowledge of them – so much more widespread than in contemporary Tasmania – initially came through observation of, and interaction with, the Aborigines, although direct evidence for the transfer is again limited. The *Hobart Town Gazette* of 26 September 1818 provides a rare exception:

On Saturday afternoon as some labourers were employed in ploughing a small allotment of ground in Argyle St, the plough unexpectedly came in contact with a large root of a fungous nature. Several natives being on the spot, eagerly ran after one of the men, who from motives of curiosity were anxious to know what he had found, exclaiming '*Bringally*' (for bread-root); they quickly devoured large pieces of it. The owner of the ground (William Aston in Liverpool St) has some of this extraordinary production of nature in his possession, where it has been viewed and tasted by several persons, who esteem it is palatable.

The other significant components of the Van Diemonian diet were tea and sugar. These products were consumed in prodigious proportions – in part because they

were cheap. As Williamson wrote, "fine sugar is got from the East Indies 4d per pound which in England would cost 1s... tea also cheap."⁴⁸ Tea and sugar were often supplied to stockmen and shepherds, including convicts – not only at levels well above the official ration but often without any restrictions whatsoever – forming a substantial part of the employer's total labour cost. William Barnes wrote from Launceston in May 1824 of the "very foolish custom prevalent in both these colonies of giving servants tea and sugar morning and evening" amounting to "three ounces of tea and a pound sugar every week."⁴⁹ Such generosity may have reflected in part the extent to which these products were passed on by workers to Aborigines in payment for land access. Tea and sugar had, along with flour, been integrated into the diet of Aborigines accessing the grassy woodlands by the early 1820s, with regular visits to stock huts to access supplies accepted as the norm.

Clothing

European clothing was rarely seen in Van Diemen's Land outside Hobart Town or Launceston from about 1808 until well into the 1820s. Even in the main settlements it was principally the dress of a minority group – the officers, senior government officials and the few better-off free immigrants. In 1820 Bigge observed that "a great many of the convicts in Van Diemen's Land wore jackets and trowsers of the kangaroo skin, and sometimes caps of the same material, which they obtain from the stock-keepers who are employed in the interior of the country."⁵⁰

Van Diemonian clothing was not just a practical imperative caused by the shortages of allocated 'slops' or the expense of imported clothes.⁵¹ It soon became a matter of preference – proving far warmer and water resistant than clothes made of cotton or hemp. Animal skin clothing, rugs and even footwear also had the added advantage of being obtainable, and replaceable, while on the move in the bush, while British shoes and clothes (even the much tougher locally

made kangaroo skin, wattle bark tanned variety) were vulnerable to falling apart during extended sojourns in the bush.

Bushrangers, predictably, seem to have worn almost entirely kangaroo skin clothes. Jeffreys noted that bushrangers "construct their clothing of kangaroo skins, which they make into jackets, waistcoats, trowsers, shoes, hats and rugs to sleep in. Their thread is made of the sinews of the leg and tail of the same animal."⁵² Wells wrote in 1819 that Howe "wore at the time of his death a dress made of kangaroo skins."⁵³ The utility of such clothing is confirmed by the fact that their pursuers followed suit. James Ross wrote of an encounter in the Central Highlands in the mid 1820s:

we surrounded the hut, I peeped through the crevices between the logs, and there I saw not four but five men in bush dresses, but three of them soldiers of the 48th, whose faces were well known to me, guarding two bushrangers who they had apprehended near the Lakes the day before.⁵⁴

David Burn confirmed the widespread military preference for clothing made from native animals:

When the military were detached in pursuit of bushrangers, they were rarely, if ever, in uniform; their dress consisting of a grey jacket and trousers, trimmed with fur, kangaroo skin knapsack, opossum-skin cap, and kangaroo cartouch-box. This garb the bushrangers closely copied; hence mistakes constantly arose.⁵⁵

One example of the confusion that was possible occurred on 9 January 1816 when James Kelly and his fellow expeditioners arrived at George Town and were rushed by eight other Europeans "dressed in kangaroo skin". These men proved to be soldiers who had, in turn, thought that Kelly and his party were bushrangers.⁵⁶

Most early settlers also wore kangaroo clothing. James Reibey, a merchant at the Derwent, noted that the settlers were often clad in the "skins of animals."⁵⁷ James Dixon, who visited Van Diemen's Land in 1820, reported that "servants generally make kangaroo-skin jackets, and shoes of something of the same sort. Many of the settlers who are poor, frequently dress in articles of the same description."⁵⁸ Charles Rowcroft described his first sight of a "kangaroo man": "the principal part of his dress was a frock-coat made of kangaroo skin, or rather skins, dried with the hair on, and presenting a curious variety of shades from wear and dirt. A grizzly beard gave finish to a most ferocious appearance."⁵⁹

Kangaroo and possum skin rugs were also widely used, even by the elite. Just how large they could be is evident from the fact that Howe's gang once made four stockmen "lay down under the bed place and covered us over with a kangaroo rug to prevent us from seeing them."⁶⁰ By the late 1830s Lempriere was distinguishing between the fur of the wallaby and the kangaroo, with a preference for the former as:

The fur of these animals is far superior in colour and softness to that of the kangaroo, but the skins are smaller. Wallaby rugs and cloaks are much esteemed for the bush. Every person who had occasion to travel through the uninhabited parts of the colony can testify to the comfort of a good fur rug. They are in general about seven feet square, one half is laid under the body as a mattress, the other serves as a blanket.⁶¹

The increasing similarity between British and Aboriginal clothing is striking, but it was only in the widespread adoption of Aboriginal 'thongs' that indigenous garb was exactly reproduced. The Aborigines' use of pieces of kangaroo skin fixed to the feet with sinew was first recorded by Cook, and Van Diemonian Britons soon recognized their utility.⁶² Wells recorded that in May 1817 a military party chasing bushrangers had been "reduced to eat the skin mocassons from their feet."⁶³

Howe's gang had also reportedly been in the act of making replacement moccasins when surprised by an ambush.⁶⁴ James Ross reported, on an 1823 expedition attempting to reach Great Lake, that one of the guides, the familiar James Carretts, made a pair of kangaroo skin moccasins for Ross when his imported shoes fell to bits.⁶⁵ Direct and extended contact with Aborigines by both Carrets and Howe is, as noted in the previous chapter, well documented. Moccasin use, however, remained largely confined to bushmen and bushrangers, and in April 1823 the east coast settler, Adam Amos, equated a "suspicious appearance" with the wearing of them.⁶⁶

Kangaroo skin knapsacks were much more common – being the almost universal means of carrying essentials through the bush in a land where feet, rather than horses (which were uncommon before 1820⁶⁷ and remained unavailable to the majority of ordinary Van Diemonians throughout the convict era) continued to be the main means of overland transport. Surveyor and explorer, John Helder Wedge, recorded in April 1828 that prior to setting out on an expedition he "purchased 60 kangaroo skins" and that day the men were "employed making knapsacks."⁶⁸ A Victorian squatter noted as late as the 1840s that Van Diemonians could be distinguished from Sydneyites by their kangaroo knapsacks or "Derwent drums".⁶⁹

Shelter

A distinctively vernacular Van Diemonian architecture emerged early and developed two main forms – temporary shelter structures for ease of movement through the grassy woodlands and more permanent huts for longer term use.

Alternatives to tents as temporary shelters were necessary and actively sought. They were too heavy to carry without horses, in short supply, and ineffective in Tasmanian conditions – being unable to effectively cope with the extremes of weather that could be experienced. Tents were thus almost never used,

although, probably more for status and appearance's sake, the officers and free settlers occasionally sheltered under them.

As in the first years of settlement, the most obvious alternative shelters continued to be those to be found in the natural environment – caves, rock overhangs, and the hollowed out trunks of large trees. Jetson notes that rock overhangs and caves were widely accessed in the Central Plateau⁷⁰ and the Land Commissioners came across a man “whose abode was a cave in the rocks”, whilst three men who lived in a cave near Baghdad.⁷¹ Robinson, while in the north west near the Leven River in August 1830, “saw several large hollowed stringy bark trees, some of them twelve feet in diameter, which had been burnt by the natives.”⁷² With “heavy snow” that month, and “the natives playing at snow balls”, Robinson records that he took “my abode in a spacious hollow tree, the interior ten feet in diameter, with a large entrance for a door and a small aperture on one side for a window” and “though the weather was excessively cold... we felt no ill effect”. And ten days later a Van Diemen's Land Company official showed Robinson “the hollow trees the men had dwelt in at the commencement of this establishment”.⁷³

But temporary huts, not dissimilar to those constructed by Aborigines, were more commonly used for overnight accommodation. The capacity to erect huts very quickly from readily available materials which reflected the semi-nomadic lifestyle of kangaroo hunters, stock men, sealers, bushrangers, and even small farmers was crucial to the successful move into the grassland plains after 1808.

Burn noted that the “primary object” of the settler when “arrived upon his estate” is “to erect a brush hut or break wind, which is formed of the boughs of trees, and sometimes thatched in a rude manner with long grass.”⁷⁴ Josiah Spode moved to Prosser's Plains on the East Coast in 1829, and recorded on 19 May that “myself and men erected a temporary bush hut or break wind and a few days after we erected a temporary grass hut”.⁷⁵ The style of these shelters varied, but they

were usually variations of the distinctive Van Diemonian A frame – triangular shaped huts which were quite distinct from the “hip roofed box” which had an English derivation.⁷⁶ They usually used strips of bark for roofing, although Jeffreys’ hut was, as with Burn’s model, “completely secure from the inclemency of the weather by a covering of long grass.”⁷⁷

It is likely that these shelters were inspired by the not dissimilar designs that already dotted the landscape. It is not suggested that the temporary Van Diemonian shelter was an exact imitation of those used by Aborigines, but that the distinctive vernacular architecture probably took inspiration from and was guided by what was pre-existing and proven. Perhaps because of this experience, Aboriginal architecture was not derided to the extent that it was to be in a later era. Jeffreys believed that “the houses, or huts, are much better formed than those of the Port Jackson natives” and “the huts made by the natives of Van Diemen’s Land approach nearer the principles of regular architecture.”⁷⁸

The details of housing construction were rarely described. The privileged usually took both the huts and those who built for them for granted. Robinson, for example, stayed in these huts most nights when in the bush over a period of nearly five years but never once bothered to describe their construction in his journal. It is clear, however, that they were erected by his European assistants, not the Aborigines – who left mundane labour to these men, and sometimes showed a reluctance to construct the emissary’s shelter even when there were no servants available.⁷⁹ The visiting Quaker, James Backhouse, was more open to conversation with the “prisoner-guides”, confirming “our belief that there are many in this class far from being destitute of religious sensitivity”, but still provided no information on their taken-for-granted practical skills.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, some details of this vernacular architecture have been transmitted. James Ross, on arrival at his new land grant at the Shannon, wrote that he and his men:

proceeded to cut down some poles, of which we formed the skeleton of a temporary hut or shelter. These poles, the sprouts of young trees, grew around us, as they do in almost every part of Van Diemen's Land, tall and straight as a May pole. By tying two together within a few inches of the upper end, and fixing the others about three yards apart in the ground, we formed a good gable. The same was repeated a few yards off to form the other end of our intended wigwam, and by laying a pole with its extremities resting in the forks which the points of these gable pieces formed, the ridge was erected. We then cut some thick, umbrageous boughs and laid all round, leaving an opening at one end for a door or window. We piled up a heap of dry, dead timber, about three or four yards from the front, which being lighted, threw its heat and light and cheerfulness to its innermost recess.⁸¹

More sophisticated versions of these huts took a day or so to build and provided medium term accommodation for stock-keepers and others. Jeffreys told of how his men built a "a house rendered watertight" before sunset.⁸²

In the settlements, and sometimes on outlying smallholdings, somewhat grander huts were built. By 1820, wattle and daub techniques had largely, although not completely, been supplanted by less labour intensive and more environmentally effective technology. Log huts became the norm, made of split timber, with shingles almost completely replacing reeds as roofing. Guy wrote in 1823: "the stringy bark is in general used for building timber and the peppermint for shingles – they are extremely hard and durable when seasoned." The shift to shingles was in part because of their resistance to fire. Curr recommended settlers construct log huts covered with shingles, "for it too often happens that the turf huts thatched with grass or straw are burnt down."⁸³

Ross described the process of constructing a more permanent log hut:

we were fortunate enough to find a clump of that tall and stately gum trees, of that best and most useful species called stringy bark, within 300 yards of the intended spot... Though most of them were upwards of 100 or 150 feet high, they rose in that sheltered spot with stems quite perpendicular, as the mast of a man of war. We selected one of moderate dimensions to begin with, that is of about a yard in diameter, which from the straight, longitudinal apparent texture of the bark, peeling off here and there, in long pendant ribbons, we thought would split well.

After the tree was chopped down and stripped of its bark, a twelve foot piece was selected and

we rolled it out with the handspikes or small wooden levers which we cut down from the bush beside us, and began to divide and sub-divide it with wedges. It split with great ease in the straightest form, and with surfaces almost as smooth as if they had been planed. We obtained from it from 50 to 60 logs, or planks of from 8 to 12 inches wide, and about one and a half or two inches thick.⁸⁴

Burn gave more detail of the process of construction of the huts which were "generally of two apartments, an eating and a sleeping-room":

first four strong corner posts were sunk, then a somewhat lighter sort were up reared, into which were afterwards inserted the doors and windows. Strong wall-plates are then laid along; these are, in some instances, grooved; a heavy log, with a corresponding groove, being partially sunk in the earth beneath. Split gum or stringy bark slabs are then inserted and hammered close together, until the wooden wall becomes complete. Where the groove is unused, the one end of the slab is nailed against the wall-plate, the other being sunk some six or eight inches in to the soil, in

either case one of the gables is left for the chimney, whose ample dimensions and primitive masonry fills up the entire of this space. The tie-beams, connecting the wall-plates, are frequently adzed; and these, being laid with boards, serve as excellent bed-chambers for the juvenile branches. Thatch was the usual covering, until the hostile blacks rendered shingles necessary, as a precaution against their blazing fire-spears... It was rather uncommon to plaster the interior of these wooden walls, some having their interstices entirely open, others being caulked, as it were, with wool, and some being plastered outside. The geniality of the climate outside, and the roaring log-fires within, subjected the inmates to no hardship, and little inconvenience.⁸⁵

American influence, particularly what Jordan and Kaups have called the "midland tradition" – which evolved from Finnish and Scandinavian influences – is strongly evident in this Van Diemonian architecture and may have been transmitted through the American whalers. The British traditionally knew nothing of log hut building, and it was not until the mid eighteenth century that the English, Scots and Irish in North America had generally adopted midland log huts designs. Whole log huts, using notches rather than nails, were the most common design, but there was "a second less common American pioneer method" which involved "split-log" construction – whereby the timber was split lengthways as with fence rails – and it was this technique that became standard in Van Diemen's Land. Huts with interstices between the slabs made airtight through 'daubing' were also distinctive of the midland tradition. British influences on American log cabins had included the square shape, with a centred front and rear door and the chimney centrally positioned in the gable wall,⁸⁶ and this architectural style also became the norm in Van Diemen's Land.

The greatest virtue of Van Diemonian housing besides its functionality was its accessibility. Those without capital, including the convicts, were able to build their own huts. This was done from the beginning of settlement and continued to

be the practice in most regions throughout the nineteenth century. Even in Hobart Town, convicts commonly constructed their own accommodation until the mid 1820s, and some even received the indulgence of an allotment of land to build on. These were not legal land grants but the huts were recognized as belonging to the convicts. Police Magistrate Humphrey explained to Bigge that the allotments were held at the will of the Lieutenant Governor, and "it is only the house they have put upon it, that they would be allowed to sell." But as the surveyor, G.W Evans, explained, "the convicts look upon them as property and treat them as such, for they dispose of them in their life time and by will... But they are considered by Government as indulgences and not as giving a title to the soil." Convicts did not pay for their "permissive occupancy" and if the Government resumed the land they paid for the building by valuation. So widespread was this practice of urban development that, according to Evans, only 13 or 14 blocks in Hobart Town involved more than "a tacit permission of occupation." However, "the majority of the persons considered that the permission to build and occupy is equal to a grant or lease."⁸⁷

Evans explained that these allotments "are placed in a line of rotation in forming the new streets as marked out in the plan".⁸⁸ The usual block size was a quarter acre⁸⁹ so that, as Boyes wrote in November 1826, Hobart Town was spread over "three times the space of ground" as an equivalent size English village.⁹⁰ Jeffreys' claimed that there was "garden to each house" and "abundance of vegetables... remarkably fine and comprise all those reared in a garden of England" as well as "fruits in abundance."⁹¹ Ross observed, though, allotments where "no vestiges of horticulture were apparent except a sweetbriar bush, a few marigolds in full yellow blossom, and the remains of two cabbage stalks which had been nibbled by the goat."⁹²

The authorities intended that these homes would give the convicts a motivation to good behaviour. With logic that was to be widely echoed by conservative politicians facilitating home ownership among the working class in the 1950s,

Humphrey informed Bigge that convicts “become correct in their behaviour when they are possessed of a house and a small piece of land... for if such persons are punished... they are obliged to leave their property and to forego all the comforts it afforded them.”⁹³ It is not likely, however, that many government officials in the twentieth century context of ‘tough on crime’ and ‘anti-handout’ popular politics would be sufficiently courageous to endorse Humphrey’s belief that “some of the most abandoned may be made to conduct themselves well “by enabling them to acquire property”, or that the system “of allowing the unassigned convicts to find their own lodgings” was the best one available as “the present system of separation even in the towns tends to their moral improvement more than that of locking them up all together.”⁹⁴ Such, however, were the philosophical origins of Australian suburbia.⁹⁵

There was little official interference in or controls over what type of houses were built. Evans confirmed that no “particular description of house [was] required”, but the most common style was referred to as a “skilling”. The Surveyor told Bigge that Sorell’s order of 23 October 1817 “prohibiting the erection of buildings called skillings is not obeyed” as “the people have stated their poverty and that statement has been attended to.”⁹⁶ Skillings were described by Curr:

When a person of small means can procure an order (which is not only given to emancipated convicts, but also the prisoners of the crown) for an allotment of ground in the town, he usually commences by building what is called a *skilling* or *lean-to*, which composes the rear of his future house, and as his means improve he erects a front. The same method is pursued in all parts of the colony.⁹⁷

Ross named the few brick buildings existing in Hobart Town in 1822 and then noted that “the rest of the town was mostly composed of two room boarded cottages, with what is called a skilling behind.”⁹⁸ George Thomas Lloyd, who arrived in 1820, recalled that Hobart Town then had only about “15 or 20

buildings in it worthy of the designation of dwelling houses.” The remainder, “in number about 250”, were constructed “of various materials, such as split palings, wickerwork bedaubed with clay, and log and turf cabins of all orders of low architecture.”⁹⁹

Few bothered to furnish these buildings. Williamson noted that “there is hardly a chair in the colony”, and he had seen but two bed heads, believing that “almost all sleep in cribs or on the floor.” For those who desired such comforts, the accessible and easily worked acacias were often employed. In 1823, for example, the newly arrived free settler, James Sutherland, made a bed out of wattle.¹⁰⁰

Van Diemonian huts had two major advantages over imported building designs. First, they utilized building materials that were freely available in the bush through the possession of nothing more than an axe. Second, being cheap and easy to replace, these huts were adapted to the Van Diemen's Land environment, especially the ever-present likelihood of them being burnt down by fire.

Despite its functionality and accessibility, this vernacular architecture was generally judged through the eyes of those seeking a reproduction of the neatness and order of the English countryside. Macquarie noted in his journal while visiting the North Esk during his 1811 tour of Van Diemen's Land, that “the habitations of the settlers are wretchedly mean”. All regions where smallholders lived were similarly criticized by the Governor-in-Chief. At Sandy Bay “the farmhouses are miserably bad”, whilst in New Norfolk the “houses of the settlers are mean and badly built and themselves miserably clothed.”¹⁰¹

Nearly a decade later Bigge had similar sentiments about Van Diemen's Land, reporting that “habitations are small, and in a state of great dilapidation”.¹⁰² Negative comments continued to be made about Van Diemonian housing well

into the 1820s. In 1826 the Land Commissioners documented what they perceived to be the "want of comfort and neatness apparent in the abodes and farms of the settlers."¹⁰³ Curr, while more positive about Hobart Town, wrote of the 250 houses at Launceston as "hovels", and warned prospective immigrants that "the mention of a farm-house" must not "mislead" as these were:

usually built of sods, logs or straw; a few logs laid together in the style of the American fence, perhaps compose a pig-sty; and an open detached yard of the same material, serves to contain the working cattle. These are in the majority of cases the only features of a farm house in Van Diemen's Land, unless, indeed we think proper to add the disgusting appearance of wool, bones, sheep-skins, wasted manure, and the confused heaps of ploughs, harrows, carts, fire-wood, and water-casks, with a few quarters of mutton or kangaroo hanging on a neighbouring tree, and a numerous tribe of dogs and idlers; the former barking, the latter lounging about. Everything betokens waste and disorder, the total absence of industry and economy... Such is, for the most part, the uninviting state of a farm-house in Van Diemen's Land, so opposite to the comfort, neatness, convenience and frugality, which are conspicuous on the first approach to houses of a similar class in England. Though it would be too much to expect the economy, good order, and comfortable appearance in a new colony, where there has as yet been time for little more than what is necessary for existence; yet we too frequently see in the cottages and fields, much to remind us of the idleness and profligacy in which a great proportion of the inhabitants have been brought up, and but for which they would never have been colonists in Van Diemen's Land.

While Curr noted that "there are... residences that form a distinguished contrast to those I have just described", they were not "sufficiently numerous to become a feature in the colony."¹⁰⁴

Along with the negative judgements about the people and the houses they built came the assumption that 'progress' was to move from the rough bush structures to stone and brick residences. Historians, even those critical of settler elites, have generally assumed that that the desire to upgrade was universal. Morgan argues that the rough cottages were "intended to serve only until the settler could afford the time and money to build something more grand", and that the early "primitive and merely functional buildings" were replaced as soon as possible with "farmhouses and outbuildings [which]...were an attempts to transplant parts of English culture as well as a representation of the degree of success of the landowner."¹⁰⁵

Such graduating steps – from early huts to more solid wooden or wattle and daub constructions and finally to ever bigger brick and stone residences – was certainly the well documented experience of a small group of wealthy immigrants. The Merediths, for example, moved in 1822 from their first "turf cottage" to a "more substantial" wattle and daub home and finally, in 1836, to the substantial stone residence that was intended as the permanent family 'seat'. The Allports' progress was visually recorded by Mary Morton Allport from "Our Winter quarters" in 1832 – a bush A frame hut – to a more substantial log home completed in 1834 and then the final, and permanent, move to one of the large Georgian style stone dwellings that are still a familiar feature of the midlands today.

However the observations of the small minority of people who lived in such dwellings about the aspirations of the majority population do not substantiate the assumption that the commitment to continually upgrade was widespread. Rather, these privileged chroniclers commonly describe what was seen to be a disturbing satisfaction with the little they had on the part of the majority population. As early as 24 December 1806, Collins was upbraiding "the owners of unfinished huts." Macquarie, Curr and the Land Commissioners are but a selection of the 'respectable folk' who joined in chorus, with James Atkinson

complaining in 1826 that too many people grew accustomed to living in a bark hut.¹⁰⁶

Thus, while there is no doubt that prominent observers believed that ordinary people should be seeking to build English style farmhouses and cottages; there is little evidence that, outside a wealthy minority, such an aspiration was widely shared. Clive Lucas's view, "that all that we had in the country before at least 1850 was an architecture that was provincially British"¹⁰⁷, reflects a historical bias that emerges from the fact that most of the early shelters have long since burnt down or rotted back into the earth from which they came, leaving the more substantial British forms of housing, which only a privileged elite ever lived in, as the main visual record of Van Diemen's Land.

Naming the land

Part of the reason for the endurance of the cultural myth that Van Diemen's Land society represented the recreation of a 'little England' is the fact that so many contemporary Tasmanian place names remember Britain. However, this was not true before 1818, when most geographical features had been named by the ordinary people, especially the kangaroo hunters, stockmen and bushrangers who first visited them. The vernacular nomenclature at this time overwhelmingly remembered local people and local experience. This has been largely obscured by the fact that many of the major geographic features were subsequently 'renamed' as part of the broader attempt to remake the land and its people.

Explorers, immigrants, writers and mapmakers of the 1820s provide a record of the old names and the changes already under way. Important landmarks, like the Fat Doe River (Clyde) and Dick Brown's River (River Dee) had already been renamed, but examples of the older nomenclature survived, generally in less prominent and defining landmarks, including Herdsman's Cove, Native Hut Plains, Kangaroo Point, Black Bobs Rivulet and Tooms' Lake. West

acknowledged that “the popular names of places denote the character of tastes of their early visitors and heroes”, and gave as colourful examples, “Murderer’s Plains, Killman Point, Hell Corner, Murderer’s Tiers, Four Square Gallows, Dunne’s Lookout, Brady’s Lookout, and Lemon’s Lagoon.”¹⁰⁸ One now famous classical name which became nationally prominent in the 2004 Federal Election as the campaign to protect the old growth forest of the Styx Valley reached a climax, probably also has humble Van Diemonian origins. Burn believed “the reader may probably suppose” that the Styx River:

owed its title to old and endearing classical associations: such, however, is certainly not the case. Like many other things in the colony, it took its name from circumstances. Flowing through a rich and fertile valley, its banks are heavily timbered with huge superb trees, which from time to time have fallen into its channel, and nearly impeded its course. Time has stripped these trees of their bark and verdure; and as the bleached and tortuous boughs lie basking in the summer’s sun, the impression upon the unlearned convict’s mind is obvious – resolving itself in the *river of sticks*, which a corrector taste has since metamorphosed into a more antique and more distinguishable appellation.¹⁰⁹

Official exploration parties were responsible for some of the name changes. It is ironic that the ‘explorers’ were usually guided by some of the Van Diemonians who already knew and had named the sites. The first official explorer of the Lakes Country was unusually honest about this process: “although the country visited had been discovered by bushrangers and hunters and the expedition was accompanied by a guide with previous knowledge of the country, yet this journal by J. Beamont is the first available account of the country in the neighbourhood of the Great Lake.”¹¹⁰

Macquarie’s 1811 and 1821 visits to Van Diemen’s Land were the most systematic attempt to rename the land. The names of powerful Britons and

British geographical features were imposed without any regard for local nomenclature. Only occasionally did Macquarie even acknowledge the existing names – for example on 5 December 1811 he named “York Plains in honour of HRH the Duke of York... The name these plains have been hitherto been called by is Scantling Plains, from an outlaw runaway convict of that name having been killed there.”¹¹¹

But Macquarie’s efforts to rename Van Diemen’s Land were resisted and many of his nominations – especially those that commemorated the Governor’s Hebridean homeland, such as Ulva, Staffa, and Ormaig – have not survived.¹¹² Evans told Bigge that after new place names were given by Macquarie to districts and planned settlements from Port Dalrymple to Hobart Town, “particular pains were taken by putting up boards with the names painted on them, though lately they have been taken away.”¹¹³ This resistance was confirmed by Edward Curr: “I speak of these places by their local names. We cannot bring ourselves to be Highlanders and Shetlanders in a moment, notwithstanding our late Governor in Chief would seem to desire it.” Curr claimed that the new names:

remain confined almost to the proclamations which published them. There is already a degree of nationality in Van Diemen’s Land; people begin to talk of the good old times with which the old names are connected; and a Governor might as well abolish the English language by proclamation, as the names which are associated with former days. We still talk of the Fat Doe River, Gallows Hill, Murderers Plains, and Hell’s Comer. These names were principally bestowed upon them by bushrangers and the hunters of the kangaroo, who in fact have been the discoverers of all the good districts of the island.¹¹⁴

The eventual outcome of this process was what a later Governor of Van Diemen’s Land, William Denison, described as an “extraordinary

nomenclature", involving an "absurd mixture of common place names with sacred, historic or romantic ones."¹¹⁵

Fire

As we have seen, the Van Diemonian way of life was adapted to, and emerged from, one of the defining characteristics of the new land – fire. Fire discouraged significant investment of time or money in either houses or farms, and fostered semi-nomadic pastoral and hunting pursuits. Knopwood reported on the regularity of houses burning down even in the towns.¹¹⁶ It posed the single biggest environmental threat to property and life. The advice of the newly arrived settler, Thomas Gregson, to his wife in 1818 was sound: "take care with fire", he told her, and "teach the children not to be afraid of anything but fire".¹¹⁷

Bushrangers exploited the power that came with the flammability of the settled districts. The power associated with the practice and, more commonly, the threat of arson had long been familiar to the rural poor of Britain and Ireland. Hindmarsh has argued that "arson was arguably the most important mode of rural protest in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England."¹¹⁸ Indeed, a not insignificant proportion of English convicts, and even more of the Irish – including many women – were transported for this crime. This cultural heritage was soon applied in Van Diemen's Land – as early as 15 January 1807 Knopwood was reporting that Mountgarrett's house had been burnt down by the bushrangers Rush and Hunter.¹¹⁹ Arson continued to be a major concern throughout the transportation era. The wife of George Meredith, for example, wanted a servant taken to Hobart "as she had suffered much abuse from her and was afraid she would burn the place."¹²⁰ Not surprisingly, it was Michael Howe who made the most ambitious claims, informing Lieutenant Governor Davey in 1814 that his gang "could set the whole country on fire with one stick, and thrash in one night more than could be gathered in a year."¹²¹ This was no idle threat but, as will be seen, it was the Aborigines who were to come closest to realising it.

Fire may have been dangerous and potentially destructive of crops and property, but it was also an essential land management tool for both hunting and pastoral pursuits in the grassland plains. Aboriginal burning regimes provided far more cost-efficient pasture management than labour-intensive introduced grasses, and as a consequence the latter were virtually unknown.¹²² Van Diemenian pastoral use before the early 1820s therefore benefited from – indeed relied on – Aboriginal land management. But in areas where Aborigines had been dispossessed the British were forced to set the country on fire themselves. This was first experienced in New South Wales. In 1819 Wentworth noted that “the custom of setting fire to the grass is most prevalent during the months of August and January”, and that “however repugnant this practice may appear to English farmers it is absolutely unavoidable” in many districts.¹²³ T.O. Curling wrote in an 1823 letter from the Lake River in Van Diemen’s Land’s northern midlands that “the land is not thickly timbered about here all the underwood being burnt away as the grass is fired in summer.”¹²⁴ East coast settler, Louisa Meredith, noted in the 1830s that sheep owners “generally arrange to burn portions of their sheep runs at different times, so as to have a new growth about every three years. When this is neglected for a length of time... such a body of fuel forms that when a fire does reach it, the conflagration is thrice as mischievous in the destruction of fences as it otherwise would have been.” Meredith was well aware that this practice did not originate “with the colonists”, but that the Aborigines “practiced it constantly, knowing the advantages of destroying the dense growth of shrubs and coarse plants”.¹²⁵

Controlled burning was not an easy practice to implement. As early as 1813 there was debate in the *Sydney Gazette* about the best time of year for fires, because to prematurely lose the remaining feed before the rain came could be disastrous.¹²⁶ Burns often got out of control, too. When George Meredith began to burn off in 1828, he lost his own hut and furniture (although he received compensation for this after duping London about the source of the blaze).¹²⁷

Starting fires and keeping them going could be as hard as putting them out. 'Lucifer' matches were not invented until 1835 and, as James Fenton noted, they could easily get wet.¹²⁸ The established alternative, flint and steel, was expensive, potentially dangerous and even harder to keep dry. Ross wrote: "a settler should never be without his tinder box or substitute for it – the large perennial fungus, that grows sometimes to an enormous size on the trunks of the gum trees, commonly called punk, when dry serves as an excellent tinder, and as a match that will smoulder and hold fire for many hours."¹²⁹ William Thornley (the pseudonym for settler Charles Rowcroft) also "lighted a piece of charred punk" which he considered "as good for the purpose as the German tinder brought to the colony by some settlers." The other strategy described was to use "two pieces of lighted stick, or charcoal" that "crossed and in contact will keep alight". Thornley believed that "the settlers have borrowed this trick from the natives".¹³⁰

Music, dance and sport

E.P Thompson, in his review of eighteenth century British life, *Customs in Common*, argued for the existence of a "distinct plebeian culture, with its own rituals, festivals, and superstitions." Furthermore, "in the eighteenth century this culture was remarkably robust, greatly distanced from the polite culture", and "no longer acknowledged, except in perfunctory ways, the hegemony of the church." Thompson believes that the "revival of popular sports, wakes, rush bearings and rituals" is often missed by historians because "we are more accustomed to analyse the age in terms of its intellectual history".¹³¹ The Enlightenment is generally assumed to have banished most of the old customs, but among the poor there was little evidence of this. Manifestations of the revival in popular culture can be seen in Van Diemen's Land, where the British responded to the pain of exile and the injustices of servitude in the traditional way, through often well lubricated verse, dance and sport.

Henry Mayhew recorded that there were still more than 250 "street vocalists" who "live by ballad-singing alone" in London as late as the mid nineteenth century,¹³² and this "'underground' of the ballad singer"¹³³ found almost immediate expression in Van Diemen's Land. G.P Harris mentioned a soldier convict who "wrote some scurrilous verses on the Governor and some of his officers" and, threatened with a Court of inquiry, "had escaped to the woods". Convict verses about resistance and exile were also put to music – usually to the tune of a well known folk song.¹³⁴ The best known ballad maker in Van Diemen's Land was Francis McNamara, or Frank the Poet, well known to fellow convicts in the 1830s and 1840s. Frank was the most famous but far from the only ballad writer of his era. A collection of now lost ballads celebrating the exploits of the bushranger, Martin Cash, was handed to Cash shortly after he left Hobart in December 1844 for Norfolk Island.¹³⁵

As with the slaves of North America, songs both sustained spirit and were a form of resistance to imposed forms of behaviour and attempts to undermine communal identity. At the Launceston women's 'factory' (gaol) "singing, telling stories and dancing took up much of the women's time", while the man in charge of the Hobart factory, John Price, confirmed that the women spent time composing songs ridiculing the authorities. Kaye Daniels points out that Price (on whom Marcus Clarke based the character of Maurice Frere in *For the Term of his Natural Life*, and who was to become an infamously tyrannous commandant of Norfolk Island) "was an expert on 'flash language' and convict culture and better placed than most to understand these songs."¹³⁶ On occasions women were also punished for singing "obscene" songs in the factory – which posed a direct challenge to the imposed moral order.¹³⁷ According to Mrs Nixon, wife of the Bishop of Tasmania, matters were worse at the Brickfield Factory, which held over 400 women in Hobart Town in the mid 1840s. The women were left "in total idleness; they dance, play, dress up for acting" in what, Mrs Nixon believed, amounted to a "sink of iniquity."¹³⁸

Singing also occurred at executions. By celebrating the life of the condemned man, and expressing solidarity with him in his final fearful moments, such songs also a form of resistance to the intended function of the gruesome public spectacle. The established custom in Britain was that songs about the condemned individual were composed by ballad makers and sold to the crowd. One of Mayhew's informants claimed to have written a number of songs well known on the streets – including "Courvoisiers' sorrowful lamentation", the "hellegly... on Rush's execution... the life of Manning in verse" and even "the lament of Calcraft the hangman on the decline of his trade!"¹³⁹ In Van Diemen's Land such was the number of executions after 1825, and no doubt the shortage of ballad makers, that a song described by Gray as *The Song of Death* – which he believes was a traditional English prison song – was widely sung. At the execution of Mathew Brady and his gang "the whole gathering took up the singing and by the time the fourth verse had concluded five bushrangers were dead."¹⁴⁰

Singing together was also a convict response to other external threats. The Danish convict adventurer and leader of one of the roving parties pursuing Aborigines, Jorgen Jorgenson, reported that in July 1829 the Aborigines "had the audacity to threaten Mr Meredith's men, and when they began to sing in defiance, the natives re-echoed their song in derision from the rocks, and told them they would come soon and take them all."¹⁴¹

Whenever possible, singing was accompanied. One of the *Calcutta* convicts, the Afro-American William Thomas, was known as a violin player, although the first record of the fiddle being played is to be found in Alex Laing's journal. He described being ordered to play by Michael Howe after the bushranger visited his master's house at Pittwater in November 1816. The instrument was often played in public houses, but convicts in harsher circumstances could make do without it. A surgeon in the 1820s noted how convicts turned the jingling of their chains into music "whereto they dance and sing".¹⁴²

Unfortunately most of these songs and ballads, and even the dialect used to compose them, have been lost. They were not documented in official records "which use a sanitised language almost bereft of idiom".¹⁴³ There is one well-known exception. In 1852 John West noted that convicts still sang about the capture of the brig *Cyprus* in Recherche Bay en route to Macquarie Harbour nearly two decades earlier:

The prisoners who wage war with society, regarded the event with exultation; and long after, a song, composed by a sympathising poet, was propagated by oral tradition, and sung in chorus around the fires in the interior. This version of the story made the capture a triumph of the oppressed over their oppressors.¹⁴⁴

As Daniels concludes, such evidence suggests that "this was a subversive culture rather than an accommodating one,"¹⁴⁵ although perhaps it is misleading to present convict responses so starkly when a significant degree of accommodation was often a necessary component of resistance. Convicts and former convicts were in a complex relationship with the authorities. It involved patterns of submission and subversion which it is difficult to categorize. E.P. Thompson points out that hegemony "does not entail any acceptance by the poor of the gentry's paternalism upon the gentry's own terms or in their approved self image." Deference could be acted out "without the least illusion: it could be seen from below as being one part necessary self-preservation, one part the calculated extraction of whatever could be extracted." Hegemony did not prevent the poor "from defending their own modes of work and leisure and forming their own rituals, their own satisfactions and view of life." It offered "the bare architecture of a structure of relations of dominion and subordination, but within that ... many different scenes could be set and different dramas enacted."¹⁴⁶ A free settler of the 1820s, Mrs Fenton, highlighted how even strict conformity could be a form of convict resistance, through workers engaging in what appears

to be an early version of 'work to rule'. She contrasted her experience of Van Diemonian servants who had "no idea of doing anything beyond the letter of their instruction" with attendants in India who "never suffer you to see anything or place until fit for your reception."¹⁴⁷ In this context, Thompson concludes, it is necessary to examine the evidence "not with a moralizing eye ('Christ's poor' were not always pretty), but with an eye for Brechtian values – the fatalism, the irony in the face of establishment homilies, the tenacity of self-preservation."¹⁴⁸

The ambiguity inherent in convict cultural resistance was particularly evident in its most popular setting – the pub. The freedom of all ranks of society, including convicts and soldiers, to visit public houses – virtually unrestricted until the mid 1820s – is one of the most remarkable aspects of early Van Diemen's Land. Until the evening curfew (in Hobart Town in 1820 this was eight o'clock in winter and nine o'clock in summer), ordinary Van Diemonians – bonded and free, sailor and settler, policeman and prisoner – got drunk together on a highly alcoholic spirit known as 'rum', usually imported from India. There were 11 pubs in Hobart Town by 1818, and three others nearby – at Herdsman's Cove, Kangaroo Point and Clarence Plains. Most of these pubs escaped much official interference or elite patronage, serving as a place apart where the people's culture was let be and where daytime distinctions among prisoners and their gaolers – who were, after all, generally from a similar class background – were loosened. Such imperial slackness seems extraordinary from the perspective of even a decade later, but this was a time when there were no barracks or gaol for either soldier or convict, and when punishment options for both were few. Appeals to Sydney to fund these public buildings were ignored, and it was not until the island became a separate colony in 1825 that this issue was addressed. In these circumstances, having prisoners (and for that matter the almost equally intractable rank and file soldiery) concentrated each evening in recognized public houses probably aided after-hours supervision and was, paradoxically, a social control mechanism as much as a source of individual and group freedom. More importantly, it also aided public and private finance. The colonial government had almost no source

of revenue other than the excise on rum, and its sale was an easy source of profit to the merchant capitalists of the town.

Wine and beer were rarely drunk and almost all observers commented on the role played by imported rum in almost every aspect of Van Diemonian life. Securing willing labour from workers as diverse as convict shepherds and military guards depended on the provision of a liberal supply of this commodity. Williamson wrote that "almost all work is paid for by rum of the most wretched taste being brought from Bengal or the Isle of France and given to the workmen at the rate of 40s a gallon although it can be purchased from the captain of ships at 14s there being a duty of 10s a gallon on it."¹⁴⁹ The Land Commissioners were scornful of the importance of the spirit: "wheat, the staff of life, is the standard for wages in other countries, here rum is the alpha and omega."¹⁵⁰

Even when drinking tastes began to broaden, beer was not the main beneficiary. Richard Dillingham, a convict living in Sandy Bay, wrote home to his parents as late as 1837: "I can assure you that beer is but very little thought about in this colony. Rum and wine is the chief that is drunk".¹⁵¹ Imported wine – especially a highly alcoholic cheap variety from the Cape Province – was increasingly consumed, mainly because of the lower excise paid on it. Cider, especially on the East Coast, was also popular.¹⁵²

Despite the impression given by some shocked evangelical temperance advocates, there was more to Van Diemonian recreation than getting drunk. Sport was also popular. Horse races were held between 1813 and 1817 at a rough racecourse at New Town and from 1824 in Launceston. The Tasmanian Turf Club was formed in 1826¹⁵³ and in 1829 a petition was presented from 16 self-titled "native born" for a racecourse to help them "preserve amongst them the character of Britons." Arthur replied that: "I feel it difficult to conceive anything more injurious than the establishment of a race course", but he could do little to restrict the growing popularity of the sport.¹⁵⁴

Boat racing was also popular and was equally the subject of betting. There are records of boat races in Hobart Town before 1820 and confirmed races at Launceston from 1828. In the 1820s there were regular summer races on the Derwent, although organized regattas did not begin until the 1830s. Two celebrated rowing races occurred in 1828 between the crew of HMS *Rainbow* and local bay whalers. The native born Van Diemonians won on both occasions.¹⁵⁵

David Young has noted that participation in “horse or boat racing” was generally “beyond the means” of most current and former convicts, and their options were restricted to pedestrianism (“the nineteenth century term for foot racing and related athletics contests”), pugilism (bare knuckle “prize fighting” also known as “milling”) or “one of a number of blood or pub sports.”¹⁵⁶ The *Hobart Town Gazette* on 14 March 1818 described “milling” matches being held in a private field about a mile from town, and “numerous... spectators attended, all apparently much delighted with the afternoon’s entertainment”. This field had been a regular venue for some years and was known as the “Waterloo of fisticuffs.” Cock fights and dog fights also took place. The more gentle traditional English games of quoits and skittles were also widely played in the pubs.¹⁵⁷

In a colony with limited public entertainment, even duels were a spectator event, especially when it was one of the native born taking on the oppressors of their parents – the British army. The *Hobart Town Gazette* reported on 25 April 1818 that:

on Monday some dispute having taken place between a young man born in these territories and one of the military, they proposed retiring to the usual plot of ground to ascertain which was the best man. A number of persons went to witness the expected battle but... to their utter astonishment saw the place of action wholly occupied by about 20

constables... the vigilance of the police was peculiarly requisite to impede a practice subversive of good order.

Religion

Assessing the importance of formal and informal religion is a more difficult area of popular culture to assess. Christianity permeated popular culture, but as in both England and pre-famine Ireland, this did not necessarily equate with an acceptance of the teachings, authority or worship practices of the churches. Christian baptism and burial were the rituals that most connected church and people. John Youl, appointed as Port Dalrymple Chaplain in 1819, christened 67 children on his first visit to Launceston.¹⁵⁸ And most people, including condemned men, seem to have favoured repentance and reconciliation prior to facing their maker. Even one of the victims of the Macquarie Harbour cannibal escapee, Alexander Pierce, sought and was granted half an hour to first prepare himself with a prayer book the runaways had with them.¹⁵⁹

Although other practices of the institutional church were often ridiculed or ignored, some beliefs and customs that had their origins in a faith tradition that was understood to be 'Christian' – such as the hospitality owed to strangers – were taken for granted by both Protestants and Catholics.¹⁶⁰ Van Diemonian culture may have been very different from that associated with the evangelical revival or orthodox Catholicism, but the claim often made by 1820s observers that Van Diemen's Land was 'pagan' needs to be treated with caution. This accusation was frequently levelled in the early to mid nineteenth century, even within the British Isles, by those whose rigid Christianity scorned the people's traditional expressions of faith. The Celtic Christianity of rural Ireland and the western isles of Scotland, expressed through popular culture and Gaelic language, were, for example, forcibly suppressed during this era by Calvinist and Roman arms of the institutional church. By downplaying the extent of religious faith among the majority population of Van Diemen's Land, secular historians

have uncritically reproduced assumptions about what was 'true Christianity' without recognizing the extent to which these were located within nineteenth century institutional church structures.¹⁶¹ Perhaps it is evidence of how much the separation from formal religion expressed a resistance to establishment institutional structures rather than Christianity per se, that individual missionaries could be well received if they were prepared to move beyond the boundaries of formal worship. The Quaker visitors, Backhouse and Walker, found a receptivity to their spiritual message in the early 1830s, and the open air preachers who later ministered to isolated, mainly ex-convict smallholders also found considerable support.¹⁶²

Marriage and morality

The most common proof provided by 1820s observers of the moral degeneracy of Van Diemen's Land was the number of couples who lived together outside of marriage. Widespread condemnation of Van Diemonian relationship patterns persists today, reproducing rigid moral judgements based on sexual norms associated with the nineteenth century evangelical revival. But, as we have seen, to a significant extent Van Diemen's Land reflected the values of a British society of an earlier era – the late eighteenth century. E.P Thompson points out that "this was not a puritan culture, and Methodist and evangelical reformers were shocked by the licence which they imputed to it... But there is abundant evidence that the consensus of such communities was such as to impose certain proprieties and norms." Thompson argued that statistics on marriage rates and the number of children born outside marriage do not provide information on "marital norms, expectations, reciprocities and roles of couples when once committed to a household and children." And common law marriages remained a traditional custom in some areas of the British Isles during this period.¹⁶³

It was much the same in Van Diemen's Land. Even John West, who believed that "the transactions of those early days are scarcely colonial: charged with debauch and outrage, they denoted a time of social disorganisation – the dark ages found

in the history of every country", acknowledged that "the modern colonist will remember that the tastes of society have since that period been mollified, even in Great Britain; and that character can never be fairly judged when separated from the circumstances in which it is developed."¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, negative judgements persisted. Southerwood believed that Van Diemen's Land was a "great mass of vice and corruption"¹⁶⁵, O'Farrell that "the moral tone of the settlement was appallingly low; every kind of immorality thrived"¹⁶⁶ and Robson that "convicts and officers lived in a sort of moral anarchy".¹⁶⁷

There may be some truth in the negative moral judgements commonly made about Van Diemen's Land society, but the pattern of relationships is not evidence for it. In the first instance, the arrival of children, as today, often marked the formality of marriage. From 12 March 1804 to 31 December 1819 Knopwood christened 685 children, of whom 524 were children of married parents.¹⁶⁸ Youl married 41 couples on his first visit to Port Dalrymple.¹⁶⁹ Secondly, unmarried couples could also be in committed relationships. Dr Bowden and Maria Sergeant, the wife of a marine, were examples of the extent to which an 'adulterous' relationship could nevertheless be a loving and stable one. This partnership lasted from the voyage from London in 1803 until Bowden's death in 1814. Maria inscribed on her partner's tomb in St David's Park that their two children were left "with a disconsolate mother to lament the loss of their dear protector who fulfilled the duties of an affectionate father, a tender husband and a faithful friend."¹⁷⁰ The Governors themselves provide proof of the difficulty of generalising about the morality of non-married relationships. Sorell's relationship with his partner, Louisa Kent, was a marriage in all but name. Collins' two relationships in Van Diemen's Land were more akin to serial monogamy than degraded vice, and the children he had with Margaret 'Peggy' Eddington were publicly acknowledged, provided for and given his name. Bowen's two daughters with Martha Hayes were similarly treated.¹⁷¹ While the age and power gaps between the Governors and the 14-15 year old Eddington and Hayes disturb, at least Bowen and Collins did not hide their relationships in the way that 'polite'

society of a later era would encourage; or abandon their 'illegitimate' children to their fate. In significant respects, the openness of non-married relationships and the preparedness to acknowledge children born of them is surely a positive moral contrast to the hypocrisy too frequently associated with moral 'improvement' in the mid 1820s.¹⁷²

The customs of 'plebeian' England provide a more useful context for understanding Van Diemonian cultural norms around sex and relationships than the judgements of a later era and different social class. Even the implications of a documented wife sale in 1817 – commonly cited as proof of moral depravity¹⁷³ – are not so clear when considered in this context. The *Hobart Town Gazette* on 1 March 1817 reported that a wife had been sold for a gallon of rum and 20 ewes. E. P Thompson argues that wife sales became more common in the late eighteenth century, and puts this development in the context of divorce and remarriage, with the purchaser often the wife's lover in a society where there was no legal means to divorce except for the rich. The public nature of the exchange "in a plebeian culture which... had a high regard for rituals and forms" was often important for both parties, although the gender power imbalance and the potential for abuse remained.¹⁷⁴

The officers and officials generally adopted, and enjoyed, these more relaxed plebeian cultural norms. The respectable and newly married Quaker, G.P Harris, felt unable to "visit with my wife most of my brother officers because they have female companions", and found the place "very unlike old England".¹⁷⁵ But, as Harris suggests, few shared his social isolation. The Chaplain, Robert Knopwood, dined alone with married women, one of whom regularly stayed over at Cottage Green.¹⁷⁶ As ever, enjoyment could quickly become exploitation, especially in a context where power was wielded by a small group of civil and military officers with few checks and balances. It is impossible to know what truth there is in Fawcner's story of the love and marriage of Peggy Eddington and the convict George Watts (after the death of Peggy's former partner, Lieutenant Governor David Collins) being destroyed by an envious and vindictive Knopwood

abusing his magisterial power, but the inherent potential for such abuse cannot be denied.¹⁷⁷ Fawcner, himself the son of a convict, was one of the few commentators on early Van Diemen's Land to put its relationships and moral character in a favourable context, and his observation that "the prevalence of so much good moral conduct in the face of all this evil is worthy of comment" seems a balanced one.¹⁷⁸

Status of women

The much higher numbers of men in Van Diemen's Land, particularly pronounced before 1829,¹⁷⁹ may also have afforded opportunities to redress the power imbalance and potential for abuse of women inherent in both plebeian and middle class British culture, although violence and oppression of women was, undoubtedly, widespread. On 20 July 1807 Knopwood recorded, in colloquial Latin, that a "Mrs B" had told him that her husband "beat her at home and hurt her."¹⁸⁰ James Belbin was confined to the guardhouse in 1809 for hitting his daughter.¹⁸¹ Thus, while Robson's view that "the few adult females were extremely vulnerable"¹⁸² was certainly true, it is questionable whether violence and abuse were higher than in England or in the more 'respectable' Van Diemen's Land that was to emerge from the mid 1820s. Robson's implication that there was strength in numbers is of doubtful validity. In fact, the lack of women in Van Diemen's Land in the context of a comparatively non-punitive morality and a greater opportunity to engage in economic activity, on balance probably improved women's relative position, through ensuring a greater, though still restricted, range of choices.

One important option more readily available to women in early Van Diemen's Land than subsequently was to leave their husband. Although "the need for a protector (the government or an individual) rather than the opportunity for independence characterised the female convict experience and marked out its difference from that of the male convict",¹⁸³ at least the gender imbalance meant

that an alternative protector was usually never far away. This is reflected in the fact that female initiated separations – criminal behaviour in England – were reasonably common in Van Diemen's Land. The *Hobart Town Gazette* regularly carried notices from men advising that their wives had deserted them and that they would not be responsible for any debts incurred.¹⁸⁴ Sometimes separation was amicable, such as that between Mary and Charles Fletcher. Charles advised in July 1819 that no credit was to be provided to his wife, a "mutual separation having taken place between us".¹⁸⁵ But husbandly antagonism was more common, and the husband's legal right to prosecute those who harboured their 'stolen property' was occasionally brandished, though with little apparent effect. For example, in May 1819 William Ashton publicly advised that his wife Elizabeth had left him and that "person or persons harbouring concealing or maintaining her after this notice will be prosecuted... and who ever will give me information where she is... shall receive on conviction of the party or parties, the above reward [ten pounds]". In the same edition, John Cummings also gave notice that he would prosecute anyone helping his wife Anne to leave the colony or helping to conceal her after "absenting herself for some years".¹⁸⁶

The bush could be a safe refuge from angry and vengeful husbands, especially efficacious if the husband wielded official power. Josepitt Martin, constable, advised in February 1818 that: "my wife Jane Martin having withdrawn herself from her home without any just provocation and absconded into the woods with Benjamin Gibbs, an absentee, I do hereby caution all persons whatever against giving trust or credit to her upon my account as I will not be responsible for any debt."¹⁸⁷ It seems that Jane temporarily returned, but a new life in the bush beckoned again. On Boxing Day 1818, Josepitt warned:

whereas my wife Jane Martin is again walked away with herself without any provocation whatever, and I hear, has taken with a fellow who looked after cattle in the neighbourhood of the Macquarie River – This is to give notice that I will not pay for bite or sip or for anything she may contract on

my account to man or mortal and that I am determined to prosecute with the utmost rigour the law will admit any person or persons who may harbour or conceal or maintain the said runaway Jane Martin.

One *Hobart Town Gazette* account suggests that some men were more distraught than angry, with the bush a refuge from hurt and shame. In July 1816 the woman who had left Thomas Frisk advised that he had disappeared and that she feared he had killed himself, as a day or two after she had left "he dressed himself in her clothes". But the next issue reported his return "after several days wandering in the woods barefooted", although he soon left again, "taking with him his whole flock of sheep."¹⁸⁸

On and after his 1811 visit Macquarie tried to force women living with officers to return to their husbands or fathers. Captain John Murray was ordered "not to permit Assistant Surgeon Bowden to presume to molest Richard Sarjant of the detachment of the marines on account of his having had his lawful wife restored to him by my orders." Macquarie also directed that Humphrey's partner, Harriet Sutton, be returned to her father in Sydney.¹⁸⁹ However Murray himself was to be effectively dismissed by Macquarie in June 1812, paradoxically on the basis of the "extraordinary and highly unjustifiable step you have adopted of taking back and living with your wife, after being yourself publisher to the world of her shameful and abandoned conduct."¹⁹⁰

Even when women stayed with their partners, their capacity to leave must have given many women greater bargaining power and a consequent level of protection from abuse within a legal context that offered little of either. Whatever the real perils of relationships, most Van Diemonian women seemed to have preferred them to the dangerous servitude of domestic service – the main option for poor unmarried women in Britain. The lack of free female help, and consequent reliance on convict domestics, was to be the almost universal lament of the middle and upper class in Van Diemen's Land. "It is almost impossible for those families who study the quiet and morality of their children to endure the

female convicts... this state of things with eight in the family keeps me fully occupied", wrote Elizabeth Leake in 1835.¹⁹¹ And after the "woman servant" of another free settler, Mrs Williams, "broke into a spirit box" and "got tipsy", Mrs Williams' mother was reduced to "ironing clothes all day."¹⁹²

The implacably anti-transportationist John West was predictably savage in his assessment of the only domestic 'help' available, claiming that their influence:

on the tone of society, the temper of masters, the morals of children, and even the conduct of the convict men, has proved everywhere disastrous, unless checked by incessant vigilance. Smoking, drinking, swearing and prostitution, have very commonly formed the character ever present to the tender mind. The stranger entered perhaps a splendid dwelling, and found all the advantages of opulence, except what money could not procure – a comely and honest-hearted woman servant.¹⁹³

The few free immigrant women, and even the sponsored pauper immigrants, consistently avoided domestic service. The settler, Thomas Parramore, advised his fiancée in England that "the women are very independent and are almost sure to be married before the end of their service. Never think for a moment of bringing one out; the only benefit you would receive from it would be paying her passage."¹⁹⁴

Even convict women were difficult to keep in service. Until the mid 1820s there was little redress when a convict woman left assigned service to marry or live with a man, especially if that person was a soldier or official. George Hull complained on 30 August 1824 that his servant, Mary Higgins, had left his home in George Town to live with a soldier and was going unpunished except for a few hours work a day work, noting: "I conceive it to be almost absurd to keep any female in the home while any inducements are held out to them to act as Mary Higgins had done – and while they are afterwards allowed to go unpunished and

live without restraint".¹⁹⁵ The evidence to Bigge confirmed that virtually all the women convicts at George Town and Port Dalrymple lived with soldiers or settlers.

Punishing women convicts was in any case not a straightforward matter. With flogging, road gangs and places of secondary punishment ruled out, and Sorell's request for a female factory knocked back by Macquarie on cost grounds (he suggested that recalcitrant women be sent to Parramatta, and a small number were), there were few punishment options legally available before the female factories were constructed in the late 1820s and early 1830s, though the iron collar was occasionally, if illegally, used¹⁹⁶ and stocks were erected for a time in Launceston.¹⁹⁷

Marriage was not the only alternative to the perils of domestic service. Women lost many of their legal rights after marrying, even if, as demonstrated by Castles, they had more customary legal rights in Van Diemen's Land than England, including the right to be independent parties to legal actions.¹⁹⁸ Given this, women with land or small businesses – and there were a number of these – could be understandably reluctant to sign away their property and business rights. On 29 June 1816 the *Hobart Town Gazette* reported that Mary Hayes, who ran the Derwent Hotel in Elizabeth St, had married Thomas Stocker "after a tedious courtship of two years."¹⁹⁹

John Henderson, who spent a year in Van Diemen's Land in 1829-30 and wrote a book on his observations, was critical of the number of women choosing not to marry in order to keep their independence: "as no corporal punishments are admitted, females feel and act far more independently than men; they are more difficultly controlled... Their continuance, therefore, in an unmarried state, is exceedingly injurious." Henderson wanted women convicts to be compulsorily married off, "were it not merely to get rid of an enormous expense and troublesome charge".²⁰⁰

Marriage rates do seem to have increased from the mid 1820s, but unique Van Diemen's Land legislation passed in 1837 that provided for the maintenance of defacto wives reveals that many couples continued to live together without marrying and that, for mothers particularly, there were also risks and dangers (probably increasing over time) associated with this should their partner abscond.²⁰¹

Whether they married or not, living without a man was rarely a realistic option for convict and ex-convict women in a fiercely patriarchal society that showed little concern for their safety or wellbeing. Samuel Guy met a woman convict in Hobart Town in 1823 whom he recognized from his home town, noting that:

She appears to regret the loss of her husband and family and seemed hurt that she was known by any person here. I could not get her to explain for what crime she was sent out, but she lays the blame on Rosen, she is doing well here, she told me that she had a house of her own, she is living with a man but does not wish her husband should be informed of it, indeed I do not blame her altogether, as women are scarce – that if they do not live as a wife – they can scarce avoid doing worse.²⁰²

The path to economic and social freedom for women remained narrow and difficult, but it was probably wider in Van Diemen's Land before the mid 1820s than subsequently, and permitted a greater range of economic activity. Snowden, Daniels and Tipping have each documented the range of businesses conducted by women.²⁰³ Sarah Piroelle was one of the four licenced bakers in 1806, and Mary Hayes ran her hotel from as early as 1808. Early female landowners included Martha Hayes, Elizabeth Peterson, Hannah Fawcner, Hannah Power and Janet Gunn. Daniels and Snowden have directly linked this economic activity to a less rigid sexual morality and sexual division of labour.²⁰⁴ These were mostly wives of convicts with their husbands assigned to them as

servants. The female settlers employed labour and supplied the Government Store.²⁰⁵

Convict women could also exercise a surprising degree of economic independence. Many lived "on their own hands" – effectively having a ticket of leave and receiving their freedom in return for giving up their government ration. Sorell tried to formalize this, advising by a government notice of 3 January 1818: "all female prisoners not assigned to service, and who are allowed to be at large on their own hands... are requested to apply for a ticket".²⁰⁶

The wealthiest and most powerful woman in Van Diemen's Land was a former convict. Maria Risley married Edward Lord but soon became a powerful and independent business and community leader in her own right. Her life indicates how difficult it is to generalise about the life-choices available to women. Daniels, argues that:

The female entrepreneur, the convict whore, the happy family woman and the abandoned wife represent four major narratives in the debate about the nature and fate of women in colonial society. Too much time has been spent choosing between them. Maria Lord's story demonstrates that not all women were destined for the single fate suggested by these stark categories.²⁰⁷

Edward Lord's early marriage to Maria was a key reason for his economic success. Maria was the proprietor of Lord's Van Diemonian merchant house, the engine-room of his business empire. Her business acumen also enabled her husband to focus on fostering patronage through frequent and extended visits to England.

Maria's convict past was well known, and it is likely that she had to endure frequent taunts on this account. The Norfolk Islander, James Belbin, recorded in

his diary in 1808 that Lord was "turbulent and prejudiced against me, upbraided me with once being a convict which sarcasm retorted on himself."²⁰⁸ The following year the most overt example of protest by convict women in early Van Diemen's Land took place - and it grew from an appeal to Maria's class loyalties.²⁰⁹ A letter from G.P. Harris to Paterson in February 1809 contains an account of this incident. Edward Lord, in his capacity as magistrate, had detained the convict Mary Granger, and some of the other convict women had then gone to Maria to ask her to intercede. When Maria declined Martha Hudson abused her. Lord had Hudson flogged and, fearing "mutiny", issued a drum beat to arms that Harris says was only the second in the colony's history.²¹⁰ Harris told Paterson that "I have indeed since heard that some of the women who were spectators of the punishment rather loudly expressed their disapprobation and threatened revenge - that might possibly be the reason of the drum beating to arms."²¹¹ It is possible that since women were not normally flogged, other convicts and soldiers may have sympathised with the women's anger at this breach of law and custom and Lord had feared that the protest would spread.

Despite such ambiguities, Maria's convict associations would have brought significant business advantages in early Van Diemen's Land. Her associations and identity would have facilitated Lord's apparent ability to broker the deals with bushrangers that were the key to the rapid expansion of his cattle empire. Moreover, any social embarrassment would have been limited both by the relaxed nature of pervading custom and Lord's personal power and influence. It was not until free immigration to Van Diemen's Land increased after 1818 that the divide between convict and free became rigid. William Williamson claimed soon after arriving in 1820 that free settlers did not even marry convicts' daughters: "such is the policy here that no free person does marry them. They think themselves better than the convicts." During this time, despite her abilities, Maria's past as a former convict became such a political hindrance and social embarrassment to Lord that she was discarded, losing almost all she had worked for. This occurred precisely at the time that economic changes were

undermining the value of the connections associated with her previous identity. Williamson articulated the prejudices of the new immigrants towards Maria: "she pretends to set up for a fine lady but neither her manners or language are lady like...can neither read nor write." Janet Ranken, in a letter to her sister in December 1821, was even more pompous: "the society here is abominable. Mr Lord a man worth half a million money is married to a convict woman... Mrs Lord sent her daughter Miss Lord and her sister Mrs Simpson to call upon me when I came here but I have never returned the call yet nor shall I".²¹²

Parramore, present throughout the Lord's divorce proceedings in 1824, compared it to:

the trial of the Queen [Caroline]. Edwd. Lord Esq J.P brought an action against Charles Rowcroft esq.J.P. for crim. con. with his wife. The trial lasted 11 days and there was as much nauseous detail as in the other notorious trial. The same object as was attributed to the King, was said to be the aim of Lord – a divorce from a wife whom he is now ashamed of, because she can't read and can put herself into the most original passions and curse and swear.²¹³

Whether convict or free, old Van Diemonian or new immigrant, childbirth limited women's choices and posed direct dangers to them and their children. Birth control and abortion, although practised, were not written about and the predominantly middle and upper class male chroniclers probably knew little of this woman's world anyway. Henderson was one male observer who acknowledged these realities. He believed convict women in assigned service were forced to have abortions and was critical of this on the basis that it could "render inert the conception powers of the female when she is afterwards permitted to marry."²¹⁴ Abortions could, of course, pose far more immediate dangers than this.

But there was no safe option – childbirth, too, was a dangerous affair. The first known Van Diemonian midwife was Sarah Morney – a convict who arrived around November 1818 and had a very high reputation.²¹⁵ No doubt for many women she was literally a life saver. But the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 2 October 1819 gave notice of dramatic impending changes that were to marginalize midwives and their expertise during the nineteenth century. It published this notice: “W.M. Boston DM. Surgeon and man-midwife, from the University of Edinburgh... means to settle here and has assumed Mr Brannen as assistant partner in the surgical and midwifery profession”. The public were advised: “they have brought abundance of fresh and potent medicines, and are now ready to afford every assistance and relief to the afflicted.” No doubt middle class women unhappy to have a convict deliver their child would have provided Boston’s main market, but in this instance the more privileged were probably disadvantaged as a result. Besides such dubious ‘quacks’ undermining traditional women’s knowledge and practical experience, male doctors were expensive. Sutherland recorded on 30 March 1824 that the fee for a doctor’s attendance at his daughter’s birth was 20 Spanish dollars.²¹⁶ Regardless of the type of help received, several women and many babies died. The first European triplets known to be born in Van Diemen’s Land, to Catherine O’Neill on 28 December 1818, comprised three of these. They were born prematurely to Catherine at her home in Herdsman’s Cove (Gagebrook) just eight months after she had given birth to her last son.²¹⁷ Any visitor to a Tasmanian graveyard is poignantly reminded of just how common maternal and infant death continued to be throughout the nineteenth century – regardless of class, marital status or wealth.

The law

Castles has argued that there are identifiable Van Diemonian cultural characteristics, and that these “placed a premium on self help and endurance simply to survive”. Van Diemonians came to be associated with a “strongly independent frame of mind, a deep suspicion of authority, healthy cynicism about

it, a refusal to take things at their face value, a capacity to battle on in the face of adversity and an ability to come to terms with difficult conditions." Castles suggests that both the principle evidence for, and the main cause of the distinctive Van Diemonian spirit was the "working of the law and its institutions", which adopted "special characteristics of their own" from "the beginning of European occupation."²¹⁸ He argues that:

to officials at least, the existence of these customary practices varying the working of the criminal law deeply affected attitudes in Van Diemen's Land towards authority. From Collins onwards they seemed to be viewed as encouraging a disparagement of Government and fostering a lack of community discipline.²¹⁹

The difficulty with Castles' analysis is that his argument does not establish these distinctive legal practices as the main cause, rather than simply another expression of, the Van Diemonian spirit – which would seem more likely to be associated with broader economic and social factors. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that the arbitrary nature of offences was particularly resented.²²⁰ Evidence of this is provided by John Pascoe Fawkner – whose *Reminiscences* directly link the outbreak of serious bushranging to inconsistent and unjust sentences handed out by the magistrates after Collin's death. Fawkner's father was sentenced to 200 lashes and three years labour at the Newcastle penal station for robbing the Government Store (and Fawkner [jr.] was himself bound to good behaviour for 12 months).²²¹ Deliberate random brutality on the part of legally constituted authority is a proven method of ensuring submission and compliance, although generally an inefficient and costly one (as the inevitable resistance provokes ever more severe responses). But, whether Van Diemonian magistrates and authorities between 1810 and 1817 were the systemic tyrants of Fawkner's writings or just self serving, low calibre officers trying to impose order under circumstances well beyond their capacity to manage, is debatable.

Certainly some problems were not the officers' fault. The biggest difference between Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales was that capital offences – and there were over 200 of them – had to be tried by the Court of Criminal Jurisdiction in Sydney, since “this was not convened in Van Diemen's Land until 1821, when the colonial administration in Sydney was virtually shamed into sending it on circuit to the southern dependency by Commissioner Bigge.”²²² As it was usually considered too much trouble and expense to send relevant cases to Sydney, convicts “were tried locally by magistrates who had no legal authority to impose capital punishment or further sentences of transportation. They substituted heavy inflictions of the lash, put some of the convicted in irons, and ordered others to be displayed publicly in a pillory or the stocks.”²²³ Free settlers charged with serious offences were often treated quite differently and, according to Castles, in distinctive Van Diemonian ways – for example, they were regularly put on bail and enjoined to keep the peace for stated periods, with money securities provided to guarantee their good behaviour.²²⁴

Demographic factors

Certain distinctive and unusual demographic characteristics of early Van Diemen's Land combined to support the emergence of a distinct and resilient Van Diemonian culture between 1810 and 1820.

Most importantly, in no other period of the fifty-year transportation era were convicts such a low proportion of the population. By 1810 those who had left England in 1803 with seven-year sentences were free. Combined with the fact that there were so few convict arrivals, this meant that convicts were down to 16 percent of the population and even the government had to hire labour. In 1817 the proportion of convicts was still only 17.7 percent. By contrast, from 1818 through to the 1850s the proportion of the population who were convicts never again went below 30 percent.²²⁵

The significance of the low proportion of convicts in the decade preceding 1818 is that most Van Diemonians became largely free of direct controls over their movement, occupation and place of abode. The island effectively ceased, temporarily, to be a penal colony, although it remained a place of exile, with most convicts prohibited from returning to Britain even when their sentences expired. With future aspirations and hopes restricted to the island, homemaking became not only possible but probable.

The second distinctive demographic characteristic of the time was that a high proportion of the convicts who did arrive were Irish (although this was to change quite dramatically in the early 1820s, and the proportion of Irish thereafter remained low until 1840). Obviously the Irish were less likely to aspire to the reproduction of an English way of life – real or imagined.

A third distinctive demographic aspect of this time is that the majority of ‘free’ immigrants were themselves former convicts or their descendants. The emancipist Norfolk Islanders, rather than constituting a significant ‘outside’ influence as immigration generally does, had lived a subsistence smallholder island life since their evacuation from Port Jackson. As such, they tended to reinforce local Van Diemonian cultural transformation. Norfolk Islanders began arriving in October 1806, although the big majority, 554 in all, came between November 1807 and October 1808 – more than doubling the population. Norfolk Islanders came to be concentrated in the Norfolk Plains (Longford area) and the Derwent Valley (around New Norfolk), but they also settled Evandale, Clarence Plains (Rokeby), Glenorchy, Tamar Valley, Bridgewater, Pontville, Richmond, Pitt Water, Campbell Town, Antill Ponds and Sandy Bay.²²⁶ Harris wrote of their impact in May 1808:

At the Derwent we are rapidly increasing in population and consequence as a settlement – the evacuation of Norfolk Island will when completed bring about 900 free persons into the colony – which with their stock will

prove I hope a valuable addition, by reducing the enormous price of everything – We have already about 300 arrived & I have been fully employed these last 6 months in measuring out their farms having marked out between 3 & 4 thousand acres in small detached farms of 20 or 30 acres each on the banks of the Derwent.²²⁷

Most nineteenth century historians and commentators confirmed the cultural affinity between the new arrivals and Van Diemen's Land's own former convicts. James Backhouse Walker believed that the immigrants confirmed the "dissipated state" of the colony and that "as a rule, the Norfolk Islanders did not add much to the welfare and progress of the settlement at the Derwent... the great majority, idle and improvident in their old home, did not improve by removal."²²⁸ West's view of the Norfolk Islanders was that:

Their hopeless and dissipated state is remarked in every document of the times: their frail dwellings soon exhibited all the signs of decay and their ground was exhausted by continued cropping. Thus the exhilarating influences of youth and vigour, usual in the first steps of colonization, were here unknown, and a civilizing agency rarely counteracted the social evils which prevailed.²²⁹

These views, which reproduce those held by the elite towards the majority population generally, have been widely reproduced by historians in the twentieth century,²³⁰ although the prominence and writings of many Norfolk Island descendants has led to a more positive and balanced portrayal of them in recent decades.²³¹ Regardless of character judgements, it remains clear that the poor smallholders were fitting Van Diemonians, lacking both the capital and status that might have buffered them from a direct encounter with the environment and culture of their new home.

The final unusual, and highly significant, demographic characteristic of the 1808-1818 period is that once the Norfolk Island evacuation had been completed there was very little further immigration of convict or free. While there were some secondary offenders sent down from Port Jackson, the first and, for another six years, only convict ship that came direct from England was the *Indefatigable*, which arrived in 1812 with 149 male prisoners. Thus, the overall population increased only slowly, from 1321 in 1810 to 1933 in 1815.²³²

The combined impact of the peculiar type of immigrant and the low level of immigration was that local influences exerted an unusually strong influence over the society that emerged when a uniquely large proportion of the convict population became free. Furthermore, this culture had many years to consolidate before immigration again became the overriding defining force in cultural change.

The native born and the change in national character

The newly arrived Catholic Chaplain, Phillip Connolly, wrote to Bishop Poynter in London on 22 August 1822: "there is a certain degree of unusual levity and wildness" about the native born, "which some persons say, I think with justice, they derive from their intercourse with the indigenous inhabitants."²³³ John West saw the change positively, contrasting their "elegant form" and "open countenance" with the "different aspect" of their parents, "as if the new region restored the physical and mental vigour of the race."²³⁴

But it was equally common to observe that cultural adaptation was not confined to those born in Van Diemen's Land. All those removed to the island became participants in the change. The free settler, Michael Steel, complained to his brother in 1826 that he "would glad pay the freight of a young man or two from England to this country, but they most commonly grow quite different people when arrived in this country."²³⁵ Henderson believed it to be "extraordinary that

the removal of a native of England from his own country to another, peopled by British subjects, should occasion an alteration in his national disposition; such, however... is the case... The descent of mankind towards a savage life is easy and rapid."²³⁶

Henderson shared with Steel, and many of the free settlers and authorities, a concern about the implications of the local change in character on the labour force:

the free low-born European soon acquires a thorough acquaintance with the evil practices of the convict, and speedily becomes as little worthy of confidence; while at the same time he imbibes such ideas of liberty, equality and independence... that he is found to be afterwards completely incapacitated for the situation of a subordinate.²³⁷

Boyes drew a comparison with "the Americans":

the people of this colony very much resemble the Americans in their presumption, arrogance, ignorance and conceit. They believe they are the most remarkable men on the globe, and that their little island 'whips all creation'. They are all radicals of the worst kind.²³⁸

The following year Boyes wrote more positively, telling his English fiancée that:

you cannot imagine such a beautiful race as the rising generation in this colony. As they grow up they think nothing of England and can't bear the idea of getting there. It is extraordinary the passionate love they have for their country of their birth... There is a degree of liberty here which you can hardly imagine at your side of the equator. The whole country round, mountains and vallies, rocks, glens, rivers and brooks seem to be their own domain; they shoot, ride, fish, bathe, go bivouacing in the woods –

hunt opossums and kangaroos, catch and train parrots, wombats, kangaroo rats etc etc. They are in short as free as the birds of the air and the aboriginal natives of the forests.²³⁹

There were undoubtedly paradoxes in the emerging island character that would long remain evident. People saw themselves both as proudly Van Diemonian and loyal Britons, and there were tensions in this shared identity. For example, the native born were "utterly averse to fill the situation of petty constables or to enlist as soldiers" (presumably because of the oppression experienced by their parents).²⁴⁰ But, although they would not guard the convicts or police the people, many of the native born assisted the colonial government in the struggle against the bushrangers and, more consistently, the Aborigines.²⁴¹

Another cultural trait shared by the native born was the love of the sea. For the children of convicts, the medium in which social distinctions and official power dissolved was an attractive destination. Bigge wrote that "many of the native born youths have evinced a strong disposition for a sea-faring life and are excellent sailors".²⁴² Such career choice, however, reflected official policy as much as cultural traits. Most of the native born were excluded from land ownership and government office. Two thirds of the free whites in New South Wales in 1828 held only five percent of the land and the native born "deeply resented their treatment".²⁴³ Discrimination was just as pronounced in Van Diemen's Land during the 1820s (although a significant difference in the island colony was the greater accessibility of the poor to unallocated 'crown' land). In the 1820s land handouts became the monopoly right of an elite group of free immigrants, whose legal rights to the land, based on wealth and patronage, superseded all prior claim.

A new type of immigrant

West believed that this new class of settlers must have been dismayed by the very unEnglish society that they found, but he also believed that the beauties of the 'empty' native grasslands offered hope for a more prosperous future:

The narrow grants and wretched homesteads of the emancipist cotters, the sole farmers at the time of this immigration presented but little to peace. The settler, whose imagination pictured the rustic beauties and quiet order of the English farm, saw unfenced fields of grain, deformed with blackened stumps: a low cottage of the meanest structure, surrounded by heaps of wool, bones and sheepskins; mutton and kangaroo strung on the branches of trees; idle and uncleanly men, of different civil condition, but of one class; and tribes of dogs and natives. No green hedges or flowering meadows, or notes of the thrush and nightingale; but yet there was the park-like lands, the brilliant skies, the pure river and untainted breath of the morning.²⁴⁴

The attacks on the character and the efficiency of Van Diemonian smallholders bear striking similarities to those made on the Irish and Scottish at this time. In both cases unfavourable contrasts with both 'old English' (hierarchical ordered rural society) and 'new English' (improved and efficient agricultural productivity) were commonly made. In both cases the people were seen to be, if not quite 'savages', at least not fully 'civilized.' And in the penal colony, just as with the Celtic fringe, this judgement was to justify eviction and rigorous social control measures which would deliver exclusive 'ownership' and control of the most productive land to a powerful and privileged elite.

Endnotes: Chapter Five

¹ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 263, 355-7.

² M.C.I. Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1953) 271.

³ Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol. 1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) 79, 86.

⁴ For example, England's rural population continued to expand in absolute terms until 1851, although with the population as a whole trebling between 1750 and 1850, the rural proportion of the total population declined. Enclosure and the more intensive farming methods required more labour generally since, as Perkins notes, "machines, apart from the vastly unpopular threshing machines... were of little significance before the second half of the nineteenth century". Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 126-7.

⁵ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993).

⁶ For example, the settler, William Allison, had a notebook which contained lists of herbal treatments and sacred charms. AOT NS 261/1.

⁷ The Tasmanian Devil was termed the 'Devil' from the commencement of British settlement, and, as today, was heard far more often than it was seen.

⁸ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 179, 83.

⁹ An account for goods purchased for Tom and Woorady in early 1832 from a merchant in Launceston included jackets, trousers, waistcoats, handkerchiefs, tobacco, plums, pipes, sugar, tea, red ochre, marbles, fish hooks and fish line. N.J.B. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 687.

¹⁰ Irynej Skira, "Tasmanian Aborigines and Mutton Birding" (Ph.D thesis, University of Tasmania, 1993) 38.

¹¹ Thomas Lempriere, in a book published in 1839, noted that the mutton bird was "sometimes caught at the heads of Port Arthur". Thomas James Lempriere, *The Penal Settlements of Early Van Diemen's Land* (Launceston, Tas.: A Sesquicentenary Production of The Royal Society of Tasmania (Northern Branch), 1954) 72.

¹² It was the collapse in the relations with the sealers, and the Aborigines' continued eagerness to access the rookeries for what they believed would be short term expeditions on a familiar pattern, which provided George Augustus Robinson's main ruse to lure various groups of Aborigines into captivity between 1830 and 1833.

¹³ Charles Maclean, *Island on the Edge of the World: The Story of St Kilda*, (New York: Taplinger, 1980) 90.

¹⁴ John Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850* (London: Longman, 1986) 54-60.

¹⁵ C.M.H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966) 170-1. The solution recommended by the parliamentarians was to reduce labour supply by sending the "redundant population" to British colonies, including Van Diemen's Land.

¹⁶ The impact of the industrial and agricultural revolutions on living standards in Britain was very uneven throughout the Van Diemonian period. Wheat prices – the main factor in the cost of living for the labouring classes – had risen fast in Britain between 1793 and 1815, from 47s. a quarter on average for the decade before 1793 to 92s. per quarter on average in the decade after 1803. While wages also rose they did not keep up with this increase. Mathias argues that this fact, "supported by literary evidence, suggests deterioration", including "bleaker diets" and "a decline in non food purchasing, with standards probably lower than at any other time since the wars at the beginning of the eighteenth century". Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: An Economic History of Britain 1700-1914* (London: Methuen, 1969) 218-9. After the French wars wages collapsed and the situation became even worse. Many agricultural workers earned less than 10s per week and experienced absolute poverty, including malnutrition and hunger.

¹⁷ Williamson letter, AOT P.L 16/4.

¹⁸ William Thornley (edited by John Mills), *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973) 49.

¹⁹ Charles Jeffreys, *Van Dieman's Land: Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Diemen's Land* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1820) 69.

²⁰ *Sydney Gazette*, 4 October 1817.

²¹ Frank Crowley, *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1974) 10.

²² Williamson letter, AOT P.L 16/4.

²³ Ida Lee, ed., *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen's Land and Batavia in 1827-28* (London, New York: Longmans, 1927) 34.

²⁴ Michael Roe, "Mary Leman Grimstone: For Women's Rights and Tasmanian Patriotism," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 36, no. 1 (1989) 19.

²⁵ Louisa Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* (New York: Bunce, 1853) 177.

²⁶ For example, Pike had it as one of his first meals after his arrival in May 1823. Journal of William Pike, AOT mm 130. See also Thornley, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* 49.

²⁷ Williamson letter, AOT P.L 16/4.

²⁸ George William Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land: With Important Hints to Emigrants, and Useful Information Respecting the Application for Grants of Land* (London: J. Souter, 1822) 57.

²⁹ Lempriere, *The Penal Settlements of Early Van Diemen's Land* 64, 44, 72.

³⁰ Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land* 55.

³¹ Mary Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838: First Chaplain of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1977) 230.

³² Anne McKay, ed., *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-28* (Hobart: University of Tasmania in conjunction with the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1962) 5.

³³ Williamson letter, AOT P.L 16/4. When William Thornley's New Norfolk hosts were out of salt, 'Crab' found some in his pocket coat that the hostess knew came from "Salt Pan Plains" because it was "blackish and gritty". Nevertheless it was still "better than none". Thornley, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* 24.

³⁴ Pamela Statham, *The Tanner Letters: A Pioneer Saga of Swan River & Tasmania, 1831-1845* (Nedlands, WA: University Of Western Australia Press, 1981) 106-8.

³⁵ John Broxup, *Life of John Broxup: Late Convict of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivans Cove, 1973) 12.

³⁶ T. Kaups and M. Jordan, *The American Backwoods Frontier* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989) 118.

³⁷ HRA 3/1, 762.

³⁸ Elizabeth Fenton, *The Journal of Mrs Fenton* (London: Edward Arnold, 1901) 381.

³⁹ Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 133; Tim Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* (Launceston, Tas.: Pelion Press, 1989) 4.

⁴⁰ Alexander Pierce, *Confessions of Murder and Cannibalism*, ML A1326.

⁴¹ Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land* 54. Evans' natural history observations must be treated with care. He quotes the French naturalist, Labillardiere, that kangaroos lived "in burrows like a rabbit". *Ibid* 57.

⁴² Lempriere, *The Penal Settlements of Early Van Diemen's Land* 62-3. This is presumably the vigorous climber now known as the Macquarie Vine (*Muehlenbeckia Gunnii*) which the Plants of Tasmania nursery recommends for its excellence in disguising chook sheds!

⁴³ Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 133.

⁴⁴ Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* 4-5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*. 5.

⁴⁶ William Breton, "Excursion to the Western Range, Tasmania", *Journal of Natural Science* Vol. 2, 1846, 125, in J.R Skemp and T.E Burns, *Van Diemen's Land Correspondents 1827-1849*:

Letters from R.C Gunn, R.W Lawrence, Jorgen Jorgenson and Others to Sir William J Hooker (Launceston, Tas.: Queen Victoria Museum, 1961) 99.

⁴⁷ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* 534.

⁴⁸ William Williamson letter, 16 December 1820 AOT P.L 16/4.

⁴⁹ William Barnes Letter 5 May 1824, P.L Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) 406-9.

⁵⁰ Ronald Worthy Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828*, Vol. 2 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939) 235.

⁵¹ For example, Williamson noted in 1820 that "shirts are dear." AOT PL 16/4.

⁵² Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 133.

⁵³ Thomas E. Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Platypus Publications, 1966) 38.

⁵⁴ James Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Melbourne: Marsh Walsh Publishing, 1975) 107.

⁵⁵ David Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973) 67.

⁵⁶ James Calder, *The Circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land in 1815 by James Kelly and in 1824 by James Hobbs; Edited from Their Own Accounts by James Calder* (Adelaide SA: Sullivans Cove, 1984) 21.

⁵⁷ West, *The History of Tasmania* 47.

⁵⁸ James Dixon, *Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales, and Van Diemen's Land: In the Ship Skelton, During the Year 1820; with Observations on the State of These Colonies, and a Variety of Information, Calculated to Be Useful to Emigrants* (Hobart: Melanie Publications, 1984) 85.

⁵⁹ Thornley, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* 13-14. As has already been noted, this book by Charles Rowcroft (who wrote under the pseudonym of William Thornley) is a novel, but is largely based on personal experience, and offers much of interest in its observations of the way of life of the poor.

⁶⁰ HRA 3/2, 79.

⁶¹ Lempriere, *The Penal Settlements of Early Van Diemen's Land* 54-5.

⁶² Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 14.

⁶³ Wells, *Michael Howe, the Last and Worst of the Bush Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* 29.

⁶⁴ Carlo Canteri, "The Origins of Australian Social Banditry: Bushranging in Van Diemen's Land 1805 - 1818" (B.Litt. thesis [original unabridged version privately distributed by the author], Oxford University, 1973) 358.

⁶⁵ Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* 23.

⁶⁶ Diary of Adam Amos 1822-1825, AOT NS 323/1.

⁶⁷ In the 1820 census there were only 421 horses recorded, compared with the 6372 people, 28 838 cattle and 182 468 sheep. Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land* 112.

⁶⁸ J Crawford, W.F. Ellis, and G.H. Stancombe, ed., *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824-1835* (Hobart: Royal Society of Tasmania, 1962) 46.

⁶⁹ G.F. James, ed., *A Homestead History*, cited in Henry Reynolds, "Australian Nationalism: Tasmanian Patriotism," *New Zealand Journal of History* 5, no. 1 (1971) 19.

⁷⁰ Jetson, *The Roof of Tasmania: A History of the Central Plateau* xx.

⁷¹ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-28* 6; Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1* 197.

⁷² Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 206.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 200, 207.

⁷⁴ Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 112.

⁷⁵ Glamorgan- Spring Bay Historical Society notes, Aborigines file 399H.

⁷⁶ J.M Freeland, *Architecture in Australia: A History* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988) 12.

⁷⁷ Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 129.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ For example, in the evening of 19 September 1830 Robinson recorded: "whilst my servant was erecting the huts or shelters, I sent Mutteellee and Peevay to endeavour to discover the tracks of the natives." But on a later mission Robinson records that "although I was without servants they [the Aborigines] scarcely would render me assistance in the construction of my hut." Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 214, 530.

⁸⁰ James Backhouse, *Extracts from the Letters of James Backhouse* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1837) 43.

⁸¹ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 58.

⁸² Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 132-3.

⁸³ Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* (Hobart: Platypus Publications, 1967) 105.

⁸⁴ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 58-60.

⁸⁵ Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 112-3.

⁸⁶ Jordan, *The American Backwoods Frontier* 165, 35-7, 62, 209.

⁸⁷ *HRA* 3/3, 278 -9, 324-6.

⁸⁸ *HRA* 3/3, 326.

⁸⁹ *HRA* 3/3, 323.

⁹⁰ Peter Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Vol. 1 1820-1832* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985) 267.

⁹² Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 11.

⁹³ HRA 3/3, 278-9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ I am indebted to discussion with Dr. Aidan Davison of the Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania, for developing my thinking on Australian suburbia.

⁹⁶ HRA 3/3, 327.

⁹⁷ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 8-9.

⁹⁸ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 4.

⁹⁹ George Thomas Lloyd, *Thirty Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1862) 8.

¹⁰⁰ Sutherland Diary, AOT NP 61/1-3.

¹⁰¹ Lachlan Macquarie, *Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales: Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1810-1822* (Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, 1956) 69, 59-60.

¹⁰² Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* 263.

¹⁰³ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 2.

¹⁰⁴ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 42, 14-16.

¹⁰⁵ Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 51-2.

¹⁰⁶ Cited in *Ibid.* 53.

¹⁰⁷ Clive Lucas, "The Architecture of Van Diemen's Land to 1850", in Gillian Winter, ed., *Tasmanian Insights: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Thomas Stillwell* (Hobart: State Library of Tasmania, 1992) 127.

¹⁰⁸ West, *The History of Tasmania* 357.

¹⁰⁹ Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 97.

¹¹⁰ HRA 3/3, 952.

¹¹¹ Macquarie, *Lachlan Macquarie, Governor of New South Wales : Journals of His Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, 1810-1822* 64.

¹¹² Despite the resistance to the new nomenclature, renaming continued. At the end of 1826 the Land Commissioners called for a renewed effort to impose change: "in preference to naming lakes and rivers after individuals, we conceive that it would be better to suit the name to the situation, or in remembrance of places in Europe. McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land*, 74.

¹¹³ HRA 3/3, 321.

¹¹⁴ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 19-20.

¹¹⁵ Denison also noted in his journal on 20 February 1847 that the Bishop of Tasmania's wife, Mrs Nixon, "says she finds that the practice of giving scriptural names... produces an

unpleasant effect on the mind of her children... Jerusalem and Jericho for instance, being before their mind eye as two paltry convict stations." William Denison, *Varieties of Vice Regal Life*, Vol. One (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1870) 29.

¹¹⁶ For example, on 1 April 1807 and again in January 1808 there was a fire at McCauley's due to a "neglectful Norfolk Island settler". The threat of fire continued to feature in settler diaries and letters. Sutherland noted in his journal on 3 December 1823 that Anstey's "new log house" was destroyed by fire. Sutherland Diary, AOT NP 61/1-3.

¹¹⁷ Gregson correspondence, 1818 letter, ML A245.

¹¹⁸ Bruce Hindmarsh, "Scorched Earth: Contested Power and Divided Loyalties on Midlands Properties 1820-44," *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 6, no. 2 (1999) 69.

¹¹⁹ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838* 124.

¹²⁰ Diary of Adam Amos 17 March 1824, AOT NS 323/1.

¹²¹ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" (Ph.D thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990) 117; West, *The History of Tasmania* 360.

¹²² Aboriginal fire management was much more sophisticated than an annual burn off, and over time this was recognized by some of the British. Robinson recorded on Bruny Island on 3 April 1829 that he "traversed a vast extent of clear country interspersed with clumps" that he believed was "intended as a cover for kangaroo", and that this had "been done by the natives: when burning the underwood they have beat out the fire in order to form these clumps." Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 54.

¹²³ W. C. Wentworth, *A Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales, and Its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen's Land* (London: G. & W. B. Whittaker, 1819) 99-100.

¹²⁴ Letter to Sir T Mantell, 14 November 1823, in Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Volume 2, 1804-1828* 321-3.

¹²⁵ Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* 83.

¹²⁶ *Sydney Gazette*, 25 September 1813

¹²⁷ Lois Nyman, *The East Coasters: The Early Pioneering History of the East Coast of Tasmania* (Launceston, Tas.: Regal Publications, 1990) 56-8.

¹²⁸ While in the bush in 1839 Fenton had "to be careful to preserve my newly invented Bryant and May matches from the wet." James Fenton, *Bush Life in Tasmania Fifty Years Ago* (Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1891, reprinted Launceston, Tas.: Mary Fisher Bookstore, n.d) 40.

¹²⁹ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 57.

¹³⁰ Thomley, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* 106, 13. Most people in Van Diemen's Land believed that the Aborigines knew how to make fire even though they often carried it with them. The only significant evidence that they did not is that an Aborigine once told

Robinson this was the case. However, as Shayne Breen's review of this issue has pointed out, there were many examples of Aborigines withholding cultural information from Robinson by giving him a misleading answer, and, taken alone, this evidence counts for little. Shayne Breen, "Tasmanian Aborigines – Making Fire," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 39, no. 1 (1992).

¹³¹ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 64, 53-4.

¹³² Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: The London Street-Folk: Vol. 3* (London: Frank Cass, 1967) 190.

¹³³ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1977) 63-4.

¹³⁴ F. Gray, "Music of the Early Settlements of the 1800s," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 43, no. 2 (1996) 62.

¹³⁵ R.H.W. Reece, ed., *Exiles from Erin: Convict Lives in Ireland and Australia* (Basingstoke, Eng.: Macmillan, 1991) 151-72.

¹³⁶ Kay Daniels, *Convict Women* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998) 153.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* 264; Phillip Tardif, *Notorious Strumpets and Dangerous Girls: Convict Women in Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1829* (North Ryde, NSW; London: Angus & Robertson, 1990) 27, 1024.

¹³⁸ Journal of Mrs Nixon 30 September 1844, in Nixon, *The Pioneer Bishop in Van Diemen's Land* 32-3.

¹³⁹ Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: The London Street-Folk: Vol. 3* 196-7.

¹⁴⁰ Gray, "Music of the Early Settlements of the 1800s" 61.

¹⁴¹ Jorgenson to Anstey 29 July 1829, AOT CSO1/320/7578, cited in Bronwyn Desailly, "The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824-1836" (MA thesis, University of Tasmania, 1977) 41.

¹⁴² Gray, "Music of the Early Settlements of the 1800s" 61-2.

¹⁴³ Daniels, *Convict Women* 153.

¹⁴⁴ West, *The History of Tasmania* 425.

¹⁴⁵ Daniels, *Convict Women* 153. Daniels is critical of the fact that "convict women have for the most part been portrayed as disobedient rather than rebellious, and motivated by individual concerns rather than those of the group", noting that "while they 'scandalise', they seldom 'rebel', and their most extreme acts are seen as those that provoke disgust or shock in others." Daniels also notes that "manipulation of the system was almost universal". Daniels, *Convict Women* 142-4.

¹⁴⁶ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 85-6.

¹⁴⁷ Fenton, *The Journal of Mrs Fenton* 352.

¹⁴⁸ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 63-4.

¹⁴⁹ William Williamson letter, AOT P.L 16/4.

¹⁵⁰ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land*, 62.

¹⁵¹ Richard Dillingham letter, AOT NS 157/1.

¹⁵² For example, in the late 1840s Lieutenant Governor Denison noted that, on the east coast, cider "is made to a great extent, supplanting... ale and beer among all classes of the population." Denison, *Varieties of Vice Regal Life* 155.

¹⁵³ David Young, *Sporting Island: A History of Sport and Recreation in Tasmania* (Hobart: Sport and Recreation Tasmania, 2005) 4-5.

¹⁵⁴ Eustace Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain: A Collection of Choice Petitions, Memorials, and Letters of Protest and Request from the Convict Colony of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1977) 96-7.

¹⁵⁵ Young, *Sporting Island: A History of Sport and Recreation in Tasmania* 9-10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 14-15.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 16-18.

¹⁵⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette* 6 February 1819.

¹⁵⁹ Alexander Pierce, *Confessions of Murder and Cannibalism*, ML A1326.

¹⁶⁰ Ross reported that "the traveller was sure to meet with a kind reception wherever he went". Thornley documented a practice long associated with Celtic Christianity wherein a visitor was "quickly shown into the house and, according to the custom of the colony, food and drink were placed before him ere he was troubled with any questions." Thornley, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* 61. Louisa Meredith wrote that "the unfailing mark of hospitality" was "a steaming tea-pot of gigantic capacity". Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* 229.

¹⁶¹ Robson, for example, wrote of Van Diemen's Land as a "virtually pagan population, which in some areas had lost count of which day was the Sabbath." Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 122.

¹⁶² A pioneer settler of the north west, James Fenton, described how a Mr Waterford, a Congregational minister, ministered in the area before there was any church, pub, or shop. He preached in the open air and became a resident missionary from January 1845, and a chapel was eventually built with the strong support of his very poor flock. Many other dissenting missionaries followed, and their legacy can still be found in the considerable presence of these faith traditions in the north west today. Fenton, *Bush Life in Tasmania Fifty Years Ago* 67-70.

¹⁶³ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 444-5.

¹⁶⁴ West, *The History of Tasmania* 48, 38.

¹⁶⁵ W.T. Southerwood, "New Light on the Foundation of Australian Catholicism," *Australasian Catholic Record* 61, no. 2 (1984) 38.

¹⁶⁶ Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church in Australia: A Short History 1788-1967* 10.

¹⁶⁷ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol. 1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 59.

¹⁶⁸ K. R. Von Stieglitz, *The Story of the Pioneer Church in Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 1954) 36.

¹⁶⁹ *Hobart Town Gazette* 6 February 1819.

¹⁷⁰ M. Tipping, *Convicts Unbound: The Story of the Calcutta Convicts and Their Settlement in Australia* (Melbourne: Viking O'Neill, 1988) 118.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 105-6. See also Alison Alexander, *Governor's Ladies: the Wives and Mistresses of Van Diemen's Land Governors* (Sandy Bay, Tas.: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1987).

¹⁷² This is well illustrated by the fact that the main criticism levelled at Sorell, which was to lead to his recall, was not that he was having a relationship with Louisa Kent, but that he was publicly open about this, and treated her as his wife.

¹⁷³ Lloyd Robson claims that "nothing could better illustrate the moral tone of early Van Diemen's Land". Lloyd Robson, *The Tasmanian Story* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987) 8.

¹⁷⁴ Thompson, *Customs in Common* 405,44, 28, 54. Divorce for the poor was not possible until 1857 in England, but the rich could go through ecclesiastical courts and the House of Lords.

¹⁷⁵ G.P. Harris letter to mother, 12 October 1805, Barbara Hamilton-Arnold, ed., *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris, 1803-1812: Deputy Surveyor-General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land* (Sorrento, Vic.: Arden Press, 1994) 73.

¹⁷⁶ Knopwood notes in his journal that he dined alone with Hannah Power on 8 May 1808, on 2 April 1808 "Mildred Rose dind here", and on 5 April 1814 "I called on Mrs Lord; I dine with Mrs Collins." Mrs McCauley was a regular visitor to Cottage Green, often staying the night, as she did on 18 February 1814, 12 November 1815 and 16 March 1815. On 11 November 1807 Knopwood records that he gave two acres of land "to my friend Mrs Mcauley", without mention of her husband.

¹⁷⁷ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Some Account of the Marriage and Subsequent Fate of George Watts, a Prisoner*, SLV 366 1/6.

¹⁷⁸ John Pascoe Fawcner, *Reminiscences of Early Settlement at Port Phillips*, SLV 366.

¹⁷⁹ The first shipload of convict women destined solely for Van Diemen's Land had departed England in 1812. The *Emu* had 49 female convicts, but an American private warship attacked it and the ship was surrendered to the pirates. The women were landed at Cape Verde Islands and nothing more is know of them. Fourteen ships with convict women came direct to Van Diemen's Land from Britain between 1820 and 1829. The total number of women disembarked from them was only 1101, although a number more came from Sydney. Tony Raynor, *Female Factory Female Convicts: The Story of the More Than 13000 Women Exiled from Britain to Van Diemen's Land* (Dover, Tas.: Esperance Press, 2004) 38-42. The vast majority of the approximately 12 000 women convicts who came to Van Diemen's Land arrived in the 1830s and 1840s.

¹⁸⁰ Nicholls, ed., *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood, 1803-1838* 139, 682. The translation is by Nichols.

¹⁸¹ Belbin Diaries, University of Tasmania Archives, RS 90.

¹⁸² Robson, *The Tasmanian Story* 6.

¹⁸³ Daniels, *Convict Women* ix.

¹⁸⁴ See the *Hobart Town Gazette* 28 February 1818, 15 August 1818, 22 August 1818.

¹⁸⁵ *Hobart Town Gazette*, 31 July 1819.

¹⁸⁶ *Hobart Town Gazette* 22 May 1819.

¹⁸⁷ *Hobart Town Gazette* 28 February 1818.

¹⁸⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette* 20 July and 27 July 1816.

¹⁸⁹ Macquarie to Murray 1 December 1811, *HRA* 3/1, 458.

¹⁹⁰ Macquarie to Murray 1 June 1812, *HRA* 3/1, 475.

¹⁹¹ Letter to Mrs Taylor, Rosedale 8 June 1833, in *Reports on the Historical Manuscripts of Tasmania: Numbers 1-7*, (Hobart: Department of History, University of Tasmania, 1964) 51-2.

¹⁹² Mrs Williams Journal, 24 February 1837, in Philip Brown, ed., *Clyde Company Papers* (London: Oxford University Press.) 68.

¹⁹³ West, *The History of Tasmania* 510.

¹⁹⁴ Letter 7 October 1824, in D. C Shelton, ed., *The Parramore Letters* 55.

¹⁹⁵ AOT CSO 1/82/1871, reproduced in Eustace FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania: Letters, Petitions and Other Manuscripts Relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1980) 35.

¹⁹⁶ Commissioner Bigge learnt of the use of the iron collar on Alice Blackstone of George Town. Macquarie's subsequent inquiry into this incident found this to have been without legal sanction. Alex Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 38, no. 3&4 (1991) 112.

¹⁹⁷ Anne Bartlett, "The Launceston Female Factory," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 41, no. 2 (June 1994) 116.

¹⁹⁸ Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law," 112. Married women in Van Diemen's Land could be a party to legal actions, while English law said that their rights were essentially subsumed to their husbands. At this time women even acted as legal agents, usually, but not only, for their spouses. This right then lapsed for a century or more.

¹⁹⁹ Mary Hayes was the ex convict widow of Henry Hayes. Tipping, *Convicts Unbound* 123.

²⁰⁰ John Henderson, *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1965) 19-21.

²⁰¹ Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law" 113.

²⁰² Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381.

²⁰³ Dianne Snowden, "Women and Work in Van Diemen's Land", BA Hons thesis UTAS 1982, cited in Daniels, *Convict Women* 13.

²⁰⁴ Lindy Scripps, "Women's Sites and Lives: Historical Research," (Hobart: Hobart City Council, 2000) 53.

²⁰⁵ Tipping, *Convicts Unbound* 114.

²⁰⁶ Bartlett, "The Launceston Female Factory" 115.

²⁰⁷ Daniels, *Convict Women* 2.

²⁰⁸ Belbin Diaries 24 April 1808, University of Tasmania Archives, RS 90.

²⁰⁹ Kaye Daniels documents a number of examples of convict women protest. This is an important theme in this significant work, and a whole chapter is devoted to the previously neglected Maria Lord. Unfortunately Daniels missed this protest which illustrates her themes so well.

²¹⁰ If true, the only other drum to beat to arms had been sparked by Aboriginal fires some years earlier.

²¹¹ Harris to Paterson 14 February 1809, in Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris*, 111-12.

²¹² Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender, *Life Line: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788-1840* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992) 152.

²¹³ Shelton, *The Parramore Letters* 61.

²¹⁴ Henderson, *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* 22.

²¹⁵ Scripps, "Women's Sites and Lives: Historical Research" 86-7.

²¹⁶ Sutherland Diary, AOT NP 61/1-3.

²¹⁷ *Hobart Town Gazette* 2 January 1819.

²¹⁸ Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law" 106-7.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 109.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*: 110.

²²¹ *Hobart Town Gazette* 24 July 1819.

²²² Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law" 108.

²²³ *Ibid.*: 109.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* 408; Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 154.

²²⁶ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 60.

²²⁷ Hamilton-Arnold, *Letters and Papers of G. P. Harris* 99.

²²⁸ James Backhouse Walker, *The Deportation of the Norfolk Islanders to the Derwent in 1808* (Hobart: Government printer, 1895) no page numbers.

²²⁹ West, *The History of Tasmania* 38.

²³⁰ Marjorie Tipping describes the Norfolk Islanders as "mostly free by servitude, mostly Irish, mostly troublesome and very demanding", although the later arrivals were "better". Tipping, *Convicts Unbound* 124.

²³¹ The current Governor of Tasmania and former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, William Cox, is a direct descendant of a Norfolk Islander, John Cox, who resettled at Longford in 1813. Personal communication, 7 April 2005. The increasing interest and study in family history

provides a correction to the stereotypes that have characterized much generic history. An example of such work is Julie Davidson, "Norfolk Islanders of Clarence Plains: The Free Family Puts Down Roots," 2003 Knopwood Lecture: unpublished paper delivered at Rokeby High School, Tasmania, 2003

²³² Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* 408.

²³³ Westminster Archdiocese Archives, London, cited in Southerwood, "New Light on the Foundation of Australian Catholicism" 165.

²³⁴ West, *The History of Tasmania* 68.

²³⁵ Michael Steel letter to Joseph Steel 24 May 1826, AOT NP 41.

²³⁶ Henderson, *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* 44.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* 18.

²³⁸ Boyes letter 31 October 1830, cited in Wilfrid Hugh Hudspeth, *Hudspeth Memorial Volume: An Introduction to the Diaries of the Rev. Robert Knopwood, A.M. And G.T.W.B. Boyes* (Hobart: Committee of the W.H. Hudspeth Memorial, 1954).

²³⁹ Boyes letter 23 October 1831, in Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Vol. 1 1820-1832* 496-7.

²⁴⁰ John Molony points this out in relation to New South Wales, but it was equally true of Van Diemen's Land. John Molony, *The Native Born: The First White Australians* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 70.

²⁴¹ Knopwood records on 21 November 1825, during the height of the bushranger emergency, that "The young men who were born on Van Diemen's Land and those from Norfolk Island assembled and offered themselves to His Honor the Lt. Govm. Arthur to go after the bushrangers which was accepted." The assistance provided to the authorities in the fighting against the Aborigines, most notably the Black Line of 1830, is discussed in Chapter Eight.

²⁴² Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* 256.

²⁴³ Molony, *The Native Born: The First White Australians* 46, 48.

²⁴⁴ West, *The History of Tasmania* 59.

Chapter Six: The Coming of Little England 1818 – 1831

The new immigrant

After conflict with the French ended in 1815, and especially from 1820, Van Diemen's Land became an attractive immigrant destination for a small but influential group of wealthy free settlers. Many were escaping the agricultural recession in England that had accompanied the cessation of 25 years of more or less continuous war. Samuel Guy, who arrived at the end of the peak immigration year of 1822 (when about 600 free settlers arrived), wrote that his

sole motive for leaving England was that I was losing my property very fast and foresaw that times were not at the worst that there was no chance but everything I possesses would undoubtedly have been lost. I saw no place so likely to be comfortably settled as Van Diemen's Land.¹

For much of the 1820s these aspiring gentry preferred Van Diemen's Land to New South Wales. Commissioner Bigge noted that "next to the advantages of climate that Van Diemen's Land possesses, the facility with which the soil may be cultivated is one that has contributed to give it a preference in the estimation of settlers over the colony of New South Wales."² In May 1822, the *Sydney Gazette* reported on the preference of emigrants for southern settlements, and argued that "perhaps it is not altogether sufficiently established as a fact, that the interior of New Holland yields in no instance to the excellence and richness of the soil of our sister island."³

However, the advantages of Van Diemen's Land involved more than soil fertility. It was widely believed then, and for many decades after that, as George Evans, government surveyor and author of an early settler guide, put it, "the climate of Van Diemen's Land is perhaps the most salubrious of any on the globe for a

European." The comparative rarity of the extremes of drought and flood were also often commented on.⁴

But Van Diemen's Land's biggest competitive advantage undoubtedly remained the easy accessibility of the native grasslands. The fact that "the colonist has no expense to incur in clearing his farm" and "is not compelled to a great preliminary outlay of capital, before he can expect a considerable return" was recognized by Evans and the other authors of settler guides as the principal incentive for choosing island life.⁵

Such was the comparative advantage of the 'sister island' that by 1830, out of 71 000 non-Aboriginal people in Australia over 24 000 were in Van Diemen's Land. Moreover, the southern colony had 60 000 of the 126 000 acres in cultivation, more than half the sheep, more than half the customs revenue and more than half the exports. In short, as Norman has observed, "Van Diemen's Land was at this time bidding to become the principal colony".⁶

Credit for the rapid economic development of Van Diemen's Land during the 1820s is usually given exclusively to these "first shoals of free immigrants", even though convict numbers increased even more rapidly during this period. Burn argued that the settlers ensured that a "comparative desert, inhabited by little better than savages, possessing neither resources nor traffic" was "converted into a little commonwealth, teeming with industry and prospective wealth".⁷ Their work ensured, according to Melville, that "Van Diemen's Land had arisen from a wilderness... The seeds of industry had been sown."⁸ West agreed, arguing that "it is from the date of emigration that progress has been conspicuous."⁹ James Fenton's *History of Tasmania* (1884) continued this theme: the original settlers "lived in the free indulgence of their vicious propensities. The new settlers were men of intelligence and character."¹⁰

The prominence given to the role played by the free immigrants in the nineteenth century reflects more than the inevitable documentary bias towards the literate and wealthy. Early historians and commentators were concerned to establish that, although Van Diemen's Land had always been a penal colony, real development only began with, and could be directly attributed to, *free* settlers. They, not convicts, were to be the founding fathers of the new Tasmania.

Despite the explicit ideological purpose of this interpretation of early Tasmanian history, the indisputably significant impact of the free settlers of the 1820s has meant that the critical role they played in development has continued to be widely emphasised by historians. But what has been generally missed is that the biggest single change associated with the arrival of free settlers before 1830 was not in their use or development of the land, but in the exclusive claims made over it. Van Diemen's Land enjoyed a short-term speculative boom associated with rapid land alienation, but this proved to be a poor foundation for long-term progress. With the main wealth-generating resource of the colony given away without investment guarantees or benefit to public finances, Van Diemen's Land's boom was over by 1838 – its economic future effectively mortgaged to a few hundred individuals.

Land grants

As early as December 1820, Williamson wrote that he would already have to go at least 30 miles, "perhaps nearly 50", to get a land grant, "as all the best lands in the intermediate distance are granted". In 1823 Guy advised that a new settler "will now have some difficulty in obtaining good land except he gets into the infrequent parts of the colony – among wild natives." The next year Parramore confirmed that "it is indeed incredible how many people are searching for land in the interior; within five months have arrived five ship loads of immigrants from England and Scotland. At this rate Van Diemen's Land will be completely colonized in a very short time."¹¹

The statistics, even allowing for a couple of years' lag caused by the delays in processing grants, confirm how fast the grasslands were alienated in the 1820s. From 1804 to 1822 only 132 550 acres of land had been granted but from 1823 to 1831, when free land grants ended, 1 899 332 acres were given away.¹²

By June 1831, when the new Ripon land regulations (which ended free land grants) came into effect, almost all the profitable land had been alienated. Arthur had made sure of this by giving away nearly 250 000 acres of what then remained to new and existing settlers in the first half of 1831 – including the long coveted 100 000 government grazing reserve near Ross.¹³ This, according to Curr, extended from the Ross Bridge to Ely River, and comprised “the finest tract of land in the island”.¹⁴

Very little of the land alienated in the 1820s went to ex-convicts or their children. Macquarie fought a rearguard action for residual land rights for the ordinary people of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, arguing in early 1820 that:

it must never be forgotten that this is, at present, a convict country, originally established for their punishment and reformation; that at least 9/10 of its present population consist either of convicts, persons who have been convicts; or the offspring of convicts... Consequently some consideration appears to be justly due to so very large a portion of the population of the country.¹⁵

But such sentiments were rejected by Commissioner Bigge and given little consideration after Macquarie's departure. Bigge was critical of granting land to ex-convicts and recommended that land grants be restricted to free immigrants with a minimum of 500 pounds capital. The supposed maximum grant became 2560 acres, or four square miles, but this was not strictly applied until 1827,¹⁶ and, as James Fenton noted, “exceptions to the rule were freely admitted.”¹⁷ For

example, William Effingham Lawrence arrived in 1822 and received, with Sorell's support, a 12 000 acre land grant as well as having 2000 acres reserved for his son. Like so many others he then bought up the grants of others to further expand his property – 'Formosa' on the Lake River.¹⁸

Contrary to what is often assumed, however, small land grants did not totally disappear in Van Diemen's Land. Grants to the poor continued as an integral part of the reward system, a powerful means of conscripting ordinary Van Diemonians to the struggle against both black and white threats to the property of the elite. In the bushranger emergency years of 1825-6 the total number of grants under 500 acres reached 264 (compared with 124 grants over 500 acres). Nevertheless, smaller grants became an insignificant proportion of the total land granted. Even in 1825-6 the total quantity of land given away in grants under 500 acres was only 34 609 acres (compared to 137 600 acres for the smaller number of larger grants). In 1831 the 80 grants under 500 acres totaled just over 21 000 acres in all, but the 158 grants over 500 acres involved the alienation of 184 690 acres.¹⁹

Along with the change in land policy went any notion of concentrated settlement. While the geographical boundaries of settled districts had never been firmly set in Van Diemen's Land – there was no equivalent of the 19 counties of New South Wales – land grants before 1821 were only made in a few surveyed areas. This explains the *Hobart Town Gazette's* otherwise inexplicable claim of June 1819 that no "disposable crown lands" were available for grants.²⁰

By the following year land applications were being made in remote districts – with surveyors following settlers (often some years behind) rather than the other way round. In 1821, Macquarie marked out the sites of Perth, Campbell Town, Oatlands and Brighton en route from Launceston to Hobart Town (although they remained little more than the names of districts for some years). In his *Narrative of a trip to Van Diemen's Land*, published in the *Sydney Gazette* of July 21 1821, the Governor in Chief noted that these prospective towns:

are arranged with a due consideration to the accommodation and convenience of new settlers, they being all seated in the midst of extensive tracts of rich land, and forming at the same time, a regular chain of stations between Hobart Town and Launceston whereby the journeying between these places will be rendered both safe and convenient.

While the guide books pointed out that the permission of the Colonial Office was not needed to immigrate, London's sanction undoubtedly helped in the competition for land and most of the wealthiest settlers secured it. The official letter carried by approved immigrants reflected British Government land policy, instructing the Governor to make "a grant of land in proportion to the means ... of bringing the same into cultivation."²¹ But as Lord Bathurst noted in April 1827, "in the various orders and instructions from home respecting land, the use of the word 'cultivation' seems scarcely to have been duly regarded". Bathurst was prepared to be flexible about the type of investment appropriate to "a farm in the interior", but he wanted the regulations tightened to ensure that land was clearly held on "conditional tenure", with the settler obliged to spend the "full estimated value of the land" before it "being freed of its conditions." Bathurst sought to confirm the principle that "any settler who keeps large tracts of land uncultivated" risked losing it.²²

Despite such specific instructions, no notion of conditional land ownership was ever accepted in Van Diemen's Land. The settlers fought for, and in practice won, an absolute right over their property that commenced with first approval of the land grant, regardless of the regulations and laws that ordered otherwise. Despite the half-hearted attempts of successive Governors to implement British Government policy and ensure compliance with the conditions they had imposed, in reality there proved to be no limits on the settlers doing what they liked with the land – selling it sight unseen, leaving it 'waste', or sitting on it as speculative capital. Curr wrote, in 1824, that "until of late, grants of land were sold and

exchanged... without being actually located by the settler” and that, although a recent clause supposedly prevented sales within five years of the grant:

as may be supposed, there are various ways of evading the clause: but indeed in most cases no evasion has been practiced; for, in defiance of it, they have been sold in the most public manner possible, and have been bought without fear or scruple, in the confidence that such matters, would never be investigated.²³

William Barnes informed his brother, also in 1824, that “it is understood that you either cultivate or put stock upon your farm within five years, otherwise the government can take it back; but I believe this regulation is never enforced.”²⁴

The rapid acceleration in land value meant that a land grant was a financial windfall, well worth the lobbying and scheming often necessary to secure it. Barnes estimated he could sell his 1000 acre land grant for £800 in the same year he received it. This breach of regulation was not only common practice but, on occasion, rewarded. George Hobler was not the only favoured settler who, after selling his free land grant for considerable capital gain, sought yet another handout.²⁵ No taxes were paid on this misplaced state benevolence. Even quit rents – an annual property tax legally levied on land grants – were hardly ever honoured. Arthur tried to enforce the payment of the large amounts owed in 1831 but the Solicitor General found that any attempt to resume land would be denied by a jury (which would comprise other free settlers), and payment could not therefore be enforced.

The power of the Tasmanian gentry meant that, despite much of the land granted not having the prescribed capital spent on it and legally mandated quit rents being unpaid, no land was ever resumed. Even when settlers had lied about their personal capital to ensure the maximum grant, their absolute ownership rights were never questioned – perhaps because most of the land in the colony

had been so acquired. Arthur told London on 18 April 1828 that "the schedule of property which settlers exhibit on their arrival in order to gain land is faithless to a proverb".²⁶ Robson has subsequently been more generous – he estimated that "probably half the entire land granted in Van Diemen's Land to 1830 was obtained by evasion of the law".²⁷

Such widespread deceit is confirmed in settler's private letters. Hamilton Wallace wrote to his father in 1825 that: "I was only entitled to 500 acres however I managed to get 1280".²⁸ William Williamson, who told his sister that he sought to "do my duty to all as a truly honest man", nevertheless boasted of having "given in a fictitious capital" in order to receive his expected one thousand acres.²⁹

Extra grants were also obtained through bribing corrupt surveyors. G.W Evan's dubious practices were exposed by Arthur, but he escaped punishment on the grounds that the wages he received were so low that the payments from grateful settlers were a reasonable supplement to them. Some of his more adequately paid successors were little better. John Helder Wedge admitted in his journal to taking presents from settlers,³⁰ but this was not the only way he was enriched from his professional work. Here, for example, is the entry for 30 October 1828:

I received a letter from Mr Archer stating that he wished to see me on business and requested me to call at his house on my way out – Mr Archer informed me that he had proposed making an exchange of land [with] Jo. Bonney – the latter to take Mr. Archer's land at St Pauls River for his estate Wood Hall on the South Esk near Perth – and that if he had effected the exchange, he did it with a view of selling it to me – very considerate and if sincere, very friendly – but Qy (*sic*) – Mr Archer was aware that Bonney was under a promise of giving me the first offer of his Wood Hall property in the event of his selling it – remained at Woolmers all night.³¹

In January 1829 Wedge spent more time at Woolmers and surveyed Archer's purchases immediately on request. At the end of that year the favour was returned when Wedge sought Archer's assistance in the latter's role as magistrate in a matter concerning a dispute about the surveyor's own land.³²

The illegal and farcical nature of the land grab reached its climax in 1828 when Chief Justice Pedder found that the Governor had never had the right to parcel out Van Diemen's Land: "I fear that all the grants in the name of the Governor are void in law, and that none are good but those purport to be made by the King ... it is plain that the commission does not convey any estate or interest in the lands to the Governor."³³ As all land grants in Van Diemen's Land had been made in the name of the Governor, the Attorney General confirmed in 1829 that all grants were "utterly void". Settlers used this confusion to avoid quit rent – claiming they lacked "secure title to their lands" in a resolution at a public meeting opposed to quit rent collection in May 1831 – but an enabling process eventually confirmed the status quo.³⁴ Then, as Levy noted, 'the whole disreputable business was, as a matter of policy, glossed over.'³⁵

A belated change in policy came from London in 1831, after "the new Whig broom at the Colonial Office, Lord Howick, described the Australian land system as "entirely contrary to both reason and experience."³⁶ The essence of the new guidelines was that free land grants were replaced by land sales at public auction with a floor price of five shillings per acre.³⁷ A preference for concentrated land settlement underpinned this change, influenced by the writings of Edward Gibbon Wakefield who, partly based on the Australian experience, believed that the "essence of civilization is concentration", as "to permit a people to spread thinly is to invite a descent into barbarism".³⁸ Certainly there could be little dispute that the previous policy had not encouraged cultivation or investment, but few in Van Diemen's Land supported the idea of subsidising unemployed labourers to emigrate with the proceeds of land sales – meant to provide both the labour and market for the concentrated agrarian settlements.³⁹

At any rate, the Ripon regulations came too late to have a significant impact in Van Diemen's Land, where the best of the land was gone, and where the continued supply of convicts meant that the demand for free unskilled labour was, by then, largely met. The land still available to be sold was usually poorer country surrounded by existing grants. Moreover, getting access to roads, water and markets could be difficult for a new settler surrounded by established and often proprietorial settlers. Given this, the main practical effect of the new regulations was to cement and confirm the power of the existing land owners. They consistently outbid less privileged purchasers in what, until the late 1830s, remained a highly speculative and rapidly appreciating land market.

Critics of the land give-away

Van Diemonian land practice had a number of contemporary critics. The Land Commissioners, who journeyed across all the settled districts of Van Diemen's Land from mid 1826 to the end of 1828 delineating land boundaries and classification, were the most influential of these and their journals provide the most comprehensive record.⁴⁰ As Peter Eldershaw put it, "nowhere else are the abuses attendant on the free grant system more clearly set forth; the Journals could be called a handbook on the art of defrauding the Crown in the land."⁴¹

The Land Commissioners were particularly critical of the older style cattle barons. Edward Lord, by then owner or lessee of 75 000 acres, and David Lord (no relation) who, through small grants, had secured water sources and thus effective control of a vast territory about them, were harshly judged because of the impact of their unsupervised wandering cattle on bona fide agriculturists.⁴² But most of the newer land grantees were also criticized, principally because they invested so little, still preferring to make easy profits by placing sheep on unfenced-unimproved native pastures to developing farms on the English model.

The Commissioners argued, for example, that the land surrounding Oyster Bay on the east coast had been "most injudiciously granted away". By "having allowed such a man as Mr Meredith to cut and carve it out as he thought proper", they reported to Arthur:

one of the finest corn districts in the colony has been condemned at his option either to remain a wilderness of wild cattle to roam over, or to be leased out to a set of wretched tenantry, instead of being the property of an independent industrious community who would have cultivated and improved their own estates.⁴³

It should be pointed out, however, that the principal author of the Commissioner's reports, Roderick O'Connor, aided by his close relationship with Arthur and official appointments, was estimated by the *Colonial Times* on 21 December 1831 to own 30 000 acres of land. Perhaps this was an exaggeration, but it is more definitively known that by the time of O'Connor's death in 1860 he owned over 65 000 acres of Van Diemen's Land across 11 properties, and was one of the largest landholders on the island.⁴⁴

Another articulate critic of Van Diemonian land policy was Henry Melville. He wrote in his *History of Van Diemen's Land* that: "it is the extensive landowners that are now considerably blighting the energy of the colonists... These 20 000 acre gentry have scarcely any portion of the land cultivated" and yet were getting bigger each year through buying up smaller neighbours. Melville sought a property tax, but was long proved right in his prediction that this would be resisted by the "large and influential land proprietors – the ten and twenty thousand acre gentlemen". He called for existing large estates to be divided, "fair and equitable quit rent", crown lands to be granted in small lots, and a maximum limit of land ownership.⁴⁵

The Van Diemonian dispossession

As the land grantees moved onto their newly acquired estates, or had their retainers do so for them, they met and confronted not only the Aboriginal owners of the land, but the white Van Diemonians who had occupied the grasslands during the previous two decades.

A detailed account of such an encounter was given by James Ross – the 'pioneer' settler of the Shannon River. Ross found the land he initially sought already occupied, recording that "the sheep which this man tended, belonged to three or four different proprietors, one of whom had put them under his charge, and without further license or ceremony he had set himself down with them in this secluded spot." Ross "never saw a finer set of sheep than his flock appeared to be. The lambs... were thriving and numerous". A rare glimpse into the personal story of one of these pioneer pastoralists also resulted from this encounter:

I saw that he was a shrewd fellow and had not forgotten the cunning that he had learned in the old world... He was moreover now an old man, near 60 years of age, had been many years in the British navy (by his own account) and as many a fisherman or rather a smuggler at Deal, the accidents of which uncertain occupation had finally led to his visit to this colony – to his exchanging the busy scenes of a sea port town, or the racket of a crowded ship, for a silence and solitude that were not interrupted from months end to months end. He had been three years in his present retirement... His name was Dennis.⁴⁶

While Dennis's land claims were not supplanted by the first of the free settlers, there can be no doubt that as scores more moved in during the next few years, he would have been displaced. Curr advised new settlers that although "extensive tracts of good country" were "generally overrun by the flocks of herds

of other proprietors", they "are bound to remove them immediately upon receiving notice from any person who has located himself on the land on which they feed."⁴⁷ It is not surprising that such dispossession was rarely recorded – since the occupation was usually not official, the dispossession could not be either. The exceptions were when people resisted the land takeover on the basis of established custom or the existing residents had some legal basis for their claims.

Sorell accorded a rare recognition of the rights of established graziers when he defended their interests in a dispute with an early Macquarie Plains land grantee who wanted their stock removed from the surrounding land. He advised that "the Macquarie Plains being the chief grazing run for the stock belonging to the settlers of New Norfolk... can not be interfered with in the occupation thereof beyond the limitation of your grant."⁴⁸ However there was never any doubt about the right to evict other land users from land that had been granted or leased. T.W Birch advertised in the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 10 October 1818 that, "having authority from the Lieutenant Governor to occupy the tract of land adjoining Col. Davey's farm near the mouth of the Coal River", he was giving "notice to all persons who have stock grazing thereon... to remove the same without delay; as all cattle and sheep found trespassing on the said land ... will be impounded." This area had previously been the established common pasture of the small farmers at Pitt Water.

It is not surprising that claiming customary usage weighed little with the authorities in the 1820s, yet even legal claims could be disputed. William Kersall came to Port Dalrymple with Paterson as a convict and petitioned Arthur on 2 June 1828 for the return of his home. Kersall reported that for more than 20 years he had lived on a piece of land that he understood had been granted to him by Macquarie (the first ten years of which had been spent burning shells for lime), but was now facing eviction from a new land grantee. He testified that:

The General told me... to take my land where I had always resided – on the west side of the river and Port Dalrymple near opposite George Town... I have no other land but what is here stated neither have I sold or tried to sell any of the said land. I came to this country for life and if this is taken from me where is my inheritance.⁴⁹

Kersall's claims were dismissed when surveyor Frankland found no title or land order to back up his claims, noting, furthermore, that the land was not cultivated. Given the large number of missing land orders and titles – the Land Commissioners confirmed that many of the transactions in the early years were oral – and that only a small proportion of all grants were cultivated, such logic consistently applied would have led to the forfeiture of many bigger land grants. But none of the rich were evicted for similar reasons. Kersall lacked official support because of who he was, not because of the justice of his claim.⁵⁰

Despite the power of legal authority and the political clout of the new landowners, 'squatting' proved to be a difficult practice to stop. The Land Commissioners were positive about Arthur's efforts, but also documented, in November 1828, how widespread squatting remained:

Many... have not thought proper to avail themselves of the Government regulations which were evidently intended to prevent idle and 'bad' characters from 'squatting', thereby giving such extreme annoyance to all around them. The Government having held out such inducements to respectable settlers, it is now their duty to assist in so important a work. They are all eager enough to assist upon the removal of an obnoxious character, but, they should go farther, they should pay a little towards completing a work so happily begun.⁵¹

Squatting had a cultural legitimacy in England. Squatting on the 'common' and 'waste' lands (such as forests and fens) had been a traditional and widely

accepted practice for those without land for many centuries. Although the opportunity and right to do this had largely ended with the private enclosure of over six million acres of common field pasture and waste land through some 4000 Acts of Parliament and perhaps half as much again by 'agreement' between 1760 and 1815, cultural views and custom were slower to change.⁵² Dispossessing the poor, in both England and Van Diemen's Land, proved to be a long, and resisted, process.

One of the ironies of the Van Diemonian dispossession is that the new land owners were commonly given the information on, and guided to their granted lands by, the same class of men whom they were ultimately to evict. Ross, with three fellow passengers, followed standard practice and "clubbed together in hiring a ticket-of-leave man...who was acquainted with the country and would serve us as a guide."⁵³ Curr advised prospective settlers to dispense altogether with the expense of hiring a guide "as stock-keepers and other persons will be willing to direct him."⁵⁴ Ross found this to be true enough, as beyond the Clyde he was "fortunate enough to meet with a constable, who had been formerly employed in collecting the herds of wild cattle that roamed at large through that part of the country, and who undertook to conduct us to the most inviting spots."⁵⁵

George Meredith, 'pioneer' settler of the East Coast, was equally fortunate. He was led to Oyster Bay by Henry Rice, *Calcutta* convict and former bushranger. A shepherd joined Meredith's party at Spring Bay, guiding one of the group, Adam Amos, overland, while the others continued rowing. This man and another local "stock hand" later kept the whole group supplied with kangaroo.⁵⁶ At Oyster Bay, Meredith recorded in his pocket book that he "examined land round about – sent Mr Amos to examine land further afield – with a guide".⁵⁷

Merinos and new economy

While the new breed of settlers had a significant impact on Van Diemonian life, pastoral practices did not fundamentally change until the late 1820s. Arthur had reported to London in March 1827 that "the old system of keeping large herds of cattle not attended or looked after, except once a year for the purpose of marking the young, and drawing off those that are fat, is nearly at an end", but the contrary evidence presented by the Land Commissioners, who thoroughly documented the prevalence of this practice at this time, suggests that his claim was premature.⁵⁸

Sheep numbers continued to increase at a rapid rate during the 1820s, from 182 468 in 1820 to 436 256 in 1827, but the large majority of these remained the old sheep meat breeds.⁵⁹ Small quantities of wool were exported from 1820⁶⁰, but for many years this remained inconsequential. As late as March 1827, Arthur reported that the wool market had not been "inviting", although "a very marked improvement has recently been made in the breed of sheep by the importation of those with superior fleeces from Spain and Germany."⁶¹

It was only with the big increase in the price of wool in 1828 that the pastoral industry was transformed into one based on the merino and the export of wool. By 1830 there were 628 128 sheep and this number had risen to 911 357 by 1836. Most of the increase was in the wool breeds and by 1831 Van Diemen's Land had passed New South Wales in wool exports to Britain.⁶²

Burn described the effect: "lands were enclosed, huts disappeared, spacious houses and comfortable cottages" were built.⁶³ West believed that "the increase in pastoral wealth was "beyond oriental precedent."⁶⁴ The result was not only vast profits for a privileged few. Farming merinos for wool was a comparatively intensive operation and, as such, had dramatic implications for the established traditions of shared land use that had been possible with the older pastoral

practices. Exclusivity was now required to ensure the separation and care of valuable flocks, and ensure their protection from fire, theft, interbreeding, and predators. The much tougher meat breeds had thrived on indifference and Aboriginal land management regimes. But a successful fine wool property stocked with vulnerable and valuable merinos involved a significant capital investment that had to be intensively managed and protected. 'Trespassers' – white and black – were prosecuted, forcibly moved on or worse, while the independent hunter-shepherds were increasingly supplanted by a comparatively disciplined and subservient convict labour force – armed to protect their valuable charge.⁶⁵

The vision of little England

The new pastoral economy was closely associated with the cultural vision of the aspiring gentry. These immigrants differed from the Britons who had come to Van Diemen's Land in the first two decades, not just in terms of their freedom, wealth and privilege, but in the nature of their connection to England. They could, if they wished, 'go home'. For many free settlers, emigration to Van Diemen's Land was seen as temporary – a means of making enough money to live a comfortable life in England. Jane Williams, who traveled out to Van Diemen's Land in 1821-2, recalled that her fellow passengers spent much of their time "talking over the readiest and shortest mode of making their fortunes – displaying their love of country by always taking it for granted that in a certain given number of years they would return to spend their wealth in their native land."⁶⁶ Janet Ranken wrote to her sister in December of 1821 that "we all came here to make money and make money we will by hook or by crook."⁶⁷

But while many fulfilled this goal, the initial plans of others were modified by experience and time. Many settlers came to realize that they were better off in Van Diemen's Land than they could ever be in England. As Boyes reflected in

1830: "to this country our children must look, sooner or later, for their patrimony."⁶⁸

But a long-term commitment to life in Van Diemen's Land probably only increased the free settlers' determination to reproduce English culture in Van Diemen's Land and their increasingly obsessive concern to ensure their families' social status. Eighteenth century rural England, "firmly based on the twin principles of property and patronage"⁶⁹, was to be reborn in Van Diemen's Land with a vengeance.

Land image

The desire to recreate a little England in Van Diemen's Land did not, however, preclude an appreciation of the existing environment. The pervasive assumption that English people struggled to see beauty in Van Diemen's Land is an understandable one given the vigorous attempts to change the land. But while these efforts may seem to imply a disdain for the natural environment, the evidence suggests that the settlers thought differently. Almost all found Van Diemen's Land picturesque.

The first sight of Van Diemen's Land often inspired comment, not surprisingly given the grandeur of the southern coast, the D'Entrecasteux Channel, Mt Wellington and the Derwent estuary. Often this wonderful view could be extended for weeks, as ships waited for favourable winds to carry them up the Derwent. And there is little evidence of disappointment after closer inspection. The bush around Hobart Town was widely admired.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, it was the "plains"⁷¹ of the 'interior' – a pastoral arcadia with scattered trees, lagoons, hills and rivers – that attracted the most fulsome praise. Curr wrote of the "profusion of herbage and flowers" at "certain seasons of the year", and Ross of the visual panorama of vast grasslands "nibbled short by the kangaroos or wild cattle."⁷² To William Barnes in 1824 it was "certainly a most beautiful country", and to

Evans, "one of the most beautiful landscapes imaginable."⁷³ John Maude Hudspeth, who arrived in 1821, noted in his personal journal that the "beautiful and rich valley of Jericho" seemed "more like a gentlemen's park in England, laid out with taste, than land in its natural state."⁷⁴ Parramore described the interior as "plains just like English parks", and for Jeffreys they represented an "enchanted Elysium, which may more properly be called the Australian paradise."⁷⁵

That comparisons were commonly made between the grassy woodlands and English parks was not surprising. As Staples has pointed out, "that England was the term of reference for many settlers, who had come from England, and never been anywhere else, may seem self-evident. Tasmania could only be considered like or unlike what they knew."⁷⁶ And the contrast was not always to the advantage of the home island. Jeffreys suggested Salt Pan Plains resembled Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire "though infinitely more picturesque and diversified with wood, hill and valley..."⁷⁷

Such comparisons did not 'blind' the observers to difference. Ross observed that while "mother earth" was, "in general appearance, the same" it was:

specifically different. Indeed, upon close examination, I do not think there is a single indigenous plant or animal in the whole island, that is not essentially different from the old world, and even the fishes of the sea, which forms the connecting medium between all parts of the terraqueous globe, are equally distinct..⁷⁸

A considerable number of the settlers studied, painted, planted and wrote about these 'indigenous' plants and animals. Natural history was a popular hobby, whilst native shrubs were well known and widely planted in gardens.⁷⁹

Responses to the forests of Van Diemen's Land were more ambivalent, but even these could be appreciated. Samuel Guy wrote that "the timber is very different from England", but he enjoyed the change:

It is awfully grand to take a walk into the forest and see nature in all its beauty, the beautiful black wattle all in bloom – the tall and majestic peppermint and gum of immense size with strips of bark peeling from them and floating in the wind. Trees of every size torn up the by the roots from the trade winds and others dying with old age – in every direction is a sight beyond description.⁸⁰

Mrs Fenton, too, found much pleasure in the novelty of the forests: "I come as often as I can possibly find a time. The birds, the trees, the wild flowers, the lovely weather, are all strange. Oh how delightful it is to me..."⁸¹ Whilst some found it difficult to appreciate the "dark charred stumps" and "long strips" of bark, Ross argued that they "serve to create in the wilds of Van Diemen's Land, a sort of spectral mythology of its own."⁸²

The response to the wet sclerophyll forests is harder to gauge – they were admired from a distance but most Britons were fearful of closer contact. After two millennia of forest clearing in their home island, by the early nineteenth century wild woods were unfamiliar places and the dense forests of Van Diemen's Land understandably avoided. Not until the 1840s did land hunger drive the landless into their midst.

For almost all resident whites up to 1840, Van Diemen's Land meant reasonably open country – the grasslands, grassy woodlands, coasts, open highlands and some areas of dry sclerophyll forest in the eastern half of the island. And the documentary record indicates that the aspiring gentry appreciated these places and believed that Van Diemen's Land was beautiful. As the Land Commissioners put it, "were it not foreign to the nature of an official report here

we would expatiate on the beauty and magnificence of the scenery of the island generally."⁸³

It was not the environment that the free immigrants of the 1820s generally had trouble accepting, but the convicts. The beauty of the land was widely contrasted with the ugliness of its humanity. In turn, changing the people was widely equated with the cleansing of a beautiful land – a theme later taken up by the anti-transportationists. Williamson wrote that "the inhabitants are like a set of vultures... defacing one of the finest countries in the whole world."⁸⁴ Mary Leman Grimstone wrote that the convict, "like an ugly nose, spoils the face of the country."⁸⁵ Mrs. Fenton found in her new home at Macquarie Plains, "not one individual in the neighbourhood I either could or would associate with." Her solace, too, was the environment: "the banks of the rivers are so endless in rich variety of shrubs. I go miles along them with undiminished interest and never meet a human face."⁸⁶

The "contrast between the natural beauties" and "the moral turpitude of their inhabitants" led Curr to "exclaim with the poet":

Strange that where nature loves to trace
As if for gods a dwelling-place;
There man, enamoured of distress
Should mar it into wilderness.⁸⁷

Two societies: 'Van Diemen's Land' and 'Tasmania'

'Tasmania' represented the new society the free immigrants sought to construct upon the convict disgrace of Van Diemen's Land. The first printed use of this nomenclature (other than an 1808 atlas⁸⁸) was, appropriately enough, contained on the first page of the first settler guide, Charles Jeffreys' *Van Diemen's Land* (1820), the author noting that "Van Diemen's Land or Tasmania, is an island of

considerable extent.”⁸⁹ The name achieved greater prominence in a subsequent guide – *Godwin's Emigrant's Guide to Van Diemen's Land more properly called Tasmania*, published in 1823, and from the middle of the decade it achieved widespread use in print and in various clubs and associations,⁹⁰ including a Launceston newspaper and the Turf Club. Giblin concluded that:

It is not unreasonable to conclude that the colonists began about the turn of the quarter-century, to associate this new expression... with their conception of the colonial homeland they were striving to build up from the wild hills and dales... a fitting name, one worth contending for, had been found for a country that had no rigid relation with the degrading character sought to be imposed upon it.⁹¹

Nevertheless, few of the free settlers were yet anti-transportationists. Convict labour, along with the markets and the equally important and generally underestimated possibilities for patronage and office associated with a penal colony, were far too profitable for a felon-free island to be more than a long-term dream. Rather, what was intended, and what increasingly occurred during the 1820s, was that convict and free, broadly corresponding with the old ‘Van Diemen's Land’ and the new ‘Tasmania’, co-existed in what were almost totally separate social worlds.

As Melville described it, the new free settlers “never by any chance mixed with either the emancipists or the prisoners.”⁹² Their example was Arthur himself who (unlike all previous Lieutenant Governors) “always refused to meet convicts and emancipists socially.”⁹³ By 1830, this social distinction had become so ludicrously rigid (even by the standards of the home-culture) that Van Diemen's Land is perhaps best conceptualised as a caste-based society, with an untouchable majority excluded from almost all contact with their ‘betters’. In 1834 John Montagu was outraged that the wife of the Chief Justice, Mrs. Pedder, would even write to a woman whose grandfather was a convict. Distinctions were

upheld even after death. An ex-convict was not allowed to build a vault over his dead wife's grave, the Catholic Chaplain, Phillip Connolly, believing that "it is my duty to hold moral rectitude in such respect as to make some distinction... between the meritoriously conducted and those of a different class."⁹⁴ Bushrangers continued to mock this free settler snobbery. Martin Cash arranged for convict servants to smoke and drink in their master's presence, and one particularly sensitive settler was placed "at the foot of the table, between two of his own men." Cash noted that this was "enjoyed exceedingly" because "of the notions of exclusiveness entertained by the former."⁹⁵

The social separation of emancipists and free settlers was more pronounced in Van Diemen's Land than New South Wales during the 1820s, though the comparative success of emancipists in New South Wales in questioning this discrimination has meant that it is a better documented issue in the mother colony. Burn, arguing for the free settlers of Van Diemen's Land "to regain their rights as Britons", highlighted the differences between New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land:

The emancipist, that is, the conditionally pardoned class, are people of money and means in the former, whilst in the latter they possess no consideration – the tide of emigration which set up in 1820 having thrown all the power into the hands of the free people of Van Diemen's Land, whereas in 1820 New South Wales had been long established, and men, once convicts, were among its influential citizens.⁹⁶

The desire of free immigrants to differentiate themselves from the dominant convict culture had many unfortunate implications – not least of which was the petty snobby and superficiality that came to pervade the society of the elite. In 1828 Boyes advised his fiancée "to come as respectably as you can – remember that, you don't know and can't conceive the value of a first impression in such a colony as this", and he further warned: "if they were to suspect that any of their

intimates had sprung from a lowly origin – the cut direct would be spotted”.⁹⁷ Two years later, Mr Fenton warned his newly arrived spouse not to visit the house of his agent, for “as a merchant he is not visited by the first class, you would lose caste.”⁹⁸

The obsession with high social status, even among many of those who had been born and educated in a ‘lower’ social class, could cause much embarrassment. Edward Lord divorced his ex-convict wife, whilst George Meredith kept his spouse, the former governess of his children, confined to Oyster Bay. His reasons for doing so were acknowledged in a letter to her written in July 1827 during one of his frequent excursions to Hobart Town:

You express your regret not to be with me in Town and your apprehension that you shall never enjoy that pleasure... circumstances do not exactly conspire in favour of your visiting Hobart Town for the first time just now... when Mrs Meredith appears in the metropolis I hope... to see her only support the character of the lady but also enjoy the comforts and accommodations benefiting her rank and station in society... I only hope that you do not fail to remember all I ever saw and wrote to you about in qualifying yourself for moving in the circles for which you are ultimately destined.⁹⁹

Meredith believed that “at Swanport we may ruralize and live and appear as plain as we please – but in the world the case differs.”¹⁰⁰ To Meredith and his ilk, the ‘world’ was Hobart Town and by the mid 1820s ‘society’ there was taking itself very seriously: “the society is becoming very good. We have a great many gentlemanly men and hardly ever see a dag, except in the sea captains and the farmers”, Parramore wrote in 1824.¹⁰¹ But change was slower in Launceston,¹⁰² and outside the two towns, ‘dags’ were everywhere. In his 1824 guide book, Curr warned free settlers away from the many disreputable regions in both the north and the south of the colony. Near Launceston, he noted that:

the districts of Honeysuckle Banks, Patterson's Plains, Norfolk Plains on the South Esk, and the settlement on the North Esk, are principally divided into small farms, rarely exceeding fifty or sixty acres in extent. Nothing can surpass the native beauties and excellence in soil in all these places... But their possessors have done little beyond making them celebrated for their crimes.¹⁰³

In the south it was a similar story: "Kangaroo Point, Clarence Plains, and Ralph's Bay" he described as having "long been occupied by a class of persons similar to those who comprise the population of Pitt Water and the other older settlements, generally candidates for the fame which I have bestowed upon the inhabitants of Norfolk Plains on the north side of the island." Curr directed prospective immigrants to areas like "the district of the Coal River... The greater part of it has not been so long settled ...and a majority of the inhabitants are respectable free settlers, with large grants of land located during the last three years."¹⁰⁴

During the 1820s the free settlers' land take-over expanded their cultural influence. Not only the midlands, where most land grants were taken, but many of the old established regions of concentrated small farms changed in character as ex-convicts were evicted or sold up. The Land Commissioners reported on the change evident in Norfolk Plains by January 1828:

Norfolk Plains has always been described as containing the greatest proportion of bad characters in the island, they are now fast disappearing, and the small wretched farms with miserable skillings, are now occupied by respectable proprietors. It now bids fair to be a most flourishing settlement.¹⁰⁵

Van Diemonian culture, however, continued to have a highly profitable economic base through the 1820s, and this ensured that change was not uniform. The

generally critical tone adopted towards most of the freehold estates in the Land Commissioners' journals highlights how slow change was before 1828. 'Improved' estates like Woolmers, owned by Thomas Archer, were still the exception, speaking "forcibly for what may be done in Van Diemen's Land", rather than representative of a common reality.¹⁰⁶

The most obvious change in the late 1820s was undoubtedly in Hobart Town, which had been transformed from the rough convict village of self-made skillings of a decade before. When Mrs. Prinsep arrived in November 1829, full of apprehensions about what the infamous penal colony would be like, as she "walked up the High Street... she enjoyed a thousand English associations... carts and cottages, ships and shops, girls in their pattens, boys playing at marbles; above all the rosy countenances, and chubby cheeks and English voices."¹⁰⁷ But even in the capital the old co-existed with the new. An 1830 visitor reported: "Hobart Town is straggling, and looks more so than it really is, from the great variety of its buildings; the inferior houses of some of the first settlers still remaining by the side of the smart shops of later residents."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, by 1832 Arthur was reporting on the old way of life in the capital in almost nostalgic terms:

A taste for expensive houses and furniture is prevalent and gaining ground; and, but for the alternation of costly houses of recent construction with such of the primeval huts as are still permitted to stand as memorials of the infancy of the colony, I do not know there is anything in the appearance of Hobart Town, or in the manner of living of the inhabitants that would suggest in the mind of the newly arrived emigrant that where Hobart Town stands, there was, thirty years since, nothing but a wilderness."¹⁰⁹

Whatever the changes in the capital, as long as the vast majority of Van Diemonians were convicts or ex-convicts, the values and pretensions of the new

Tasmania would remain a minority concern. No visitor had to travel far to see farms looking "dreary and slovenly in the extreme – no attempt at neatness, no tidy inclosure... no little gardens."¹¹⁰

And the convict population continued to increase rapidly. Even as a proportion of the population, the number of convicts rose from its all time low of 17.7 per cent in 1817 to the 40 to 50 per cent range achieved in the early 1820s, where it stayed until 1839. Until this period (after which Port Phillip provided a real alternative) most convicts had little choice but to stay on the island when their sentences expired, so that those who were or had been prisoners formed the overwhelming majority of the population.

In the post-Bigge world there was little dispute about the place of convicts. They were meant to be the labourers for the country landowners, not peasant smallholders or bush entrepreneurs with their own stake in the land. But to achieve the desired transformation in the face of an unruly Van Diemonian culture and the economic system that underpinned it would prove a significant challenge, one that dominated government policy and preoccupied settler concern until the mid 1830s.

Endnotes: Chapter Six

- ¹ Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381.
- ² Ronald Worthy Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804 - 1828*, Vol. 2 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939) 263.
- ³ *Sydney Gazette* 17 May 1822, ML M26.
- ⁴ George William Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land: With Important Hints to Emigrants, and Useful Information Respecting the Application for Grants of Land* (London: J. Souter, 1822) 26, 28-9.
- ⁵ *Ibid.* 28.
- ⁶ Leslie Norman, *Sea Wolves and Bandits: Sealing, Whaling, Smuggling and Piracy, Wild Men of Van Diemen's Land, Bushrangers and Bandits, Wrecks and Wreckers. With a Chronology of Curious and Interesting Facts Relating to Old Van Diemen's Land, and (from 1856) to Tasmania* (Hobart: J. Walch, 1946) 40-50.
- ⁷ David Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973) 6-7.
- ⁸ Henry Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive*, facsimile ed. (Sydney: Hortivity Publications, 1965) 19.
- ⁹ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 515.
- ¹⁰ James Fenton, *A History of Tasmania from Its Discovery in 1642 to the Present Time* (Hobart: J. Walch & Sons, 1884) 51-2.
- ¹¹ William Williamson letter 16 December 1820 AOT P.L 16/4; Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381; D. C. Shelton, ed., *The Parramore Letters: Letters from William Thomas Parramore, Sometime Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor Arthur of Van Diemen's Land, to Thirza Cropper, His Fiancée in Europe and England, the Majority from 1823-1825* (Epping, NSW: D. and C. Shelton, 1993) 19.
- ¹² Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 22.
- ¹³ Peter Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Volume 1 1820-1832* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985) 439, 41.
- ¹⁴ Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* (Hobart: Platypus Publications, 1967) 27. Curr wrote that "I can compare this tract to nothing but an English gentlemen's park". He saw "the same variety of wood and lawns, rising ground and water" including "innumerable lagoons [and]... two fine streams."

¹⁵ Macquarie to Lord Bathurst, 22 February 1820, C.M.H Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966) 310.

¹⁶ Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) 199.

¹⁷ Fenton, *A History of Tasmania from Its Discovery in 1642 to the Present Time* 52.

¹⁸ E. Frank Lawrence, 1823 – *Before and After: A Story of William Effingham Lawrence, Tasmanian Pioneer and His Family* (Melbourne: The National Press, 1973) 23-6.

¹⁹ J Montagu, *Statistical Returns of Van Diemen's Land 1824-1836* (Hobart Town: James Ross, 1836) no page numbers.

²⁰ *Hobart Town Gazette* 19 June 1819. The paper recorded that "the applications for land made to the Governor... having been so numerous as to surpass very far what he expected... and there being further much difficulty in accommodating those whose claim to such indulgences may be admitted, owing to the present very great scarcity of disposable crown lands... no application for either lands or cattle will be received by him until the first Monday in June in the year 1820."

²¹ Lieutenant Governor Letters and Miscellaneous Papers Passing Direct to Lieutenant Governor 1821-1837, letter 7 August 1827, AOT GO 39.

²² Bathurst to Darling 2 April 1827, Lieutenant Governor Letters and Miscellaneous Papers Passing Direct to Lieutenant Governor 1821 – 1837, AOT GO 39.

²³ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 114-5.

²⁴ Letter 15 March 1824 in P.L Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935) 402-6.

²⁵ Hobler, who arrived in 1826, sold his first land grant for a "handsome profit" before lobbying in May 1831 for more free land. He certainly did not need such largesse – in 1832 he was making about £1500 per year from sheep alone and was also exporting cattle, hay and tan bark, although his later speculations were much less successful. George Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler October 6 1800 – December 13 1882* (n.p. [California]: C & H Reproductions, 1992) diary entry 18 May 1831; W.G McMinn, "A Pioneer Who Failed," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 13, no. 1 (1965) 22.

²⁶ Anne McKay, ed., *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-28* (Hobart: University of Tasmania in conjunction with the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1962) vi.

²⁷ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 199.

²⁸ Wallace also confirmed how easily grants could be sold on, noting "I have been repeatedly offered £700 for my grant." Jack Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" (Unpublished manuscript accessible at the State Library of Tasmania) no page numbers.

²⁹ Williamson letter, AOT P.L 16/4.

³⁰ For example, on 23 November 1825 Wedge recorded that a settler "offered me a present a handsome pocket compass". J Crawford, W.F Ellis, and G.H Stancombe, ed., *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824-1835* (Hobart: Royal Society of Tasmania, 1962) 8.

³¹ *Ibid.* 51.

³² *Ibid.* 51,57.

³³ Report June 1828, Lieutenant Governor Letters and Miscellaneous Papers Passing Direct to Lieutenant Governor 1821 – 1837, AOT GO 39.

³⁴ Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Volume 1 1820-1832* 464.

³⁵ M.C.I. Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1953) 269.

³⁶ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* v.

³⁷ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 198.

³⁸ John Molony, *The Native Born: The First White Australians* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 45.

³⁹ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 204.

⁴⁰ On 1 January 1825 Bathurst instructed New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land to institute a comprehensive survey and valuation of alienated and crown lands. Because the Ripon regulations had been announced by the time their report was completed, the policy impact of the Commissioners' work was minimal, but their now published Journals remain a very valuable historical document

⁴¹ Peter Eldershaw, "Introduction" in McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* xxxi.

⁴² *Ibid.* xxi, 81.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* xxiii-xxv.

⁴⁵ Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive* 129-132.

⁴⁶ James Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Melbourne: Marsh Walsh Publishing, 1975) 33-4.

⁴⁷ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 62. Curr was writing here specifically of land "beyond the eastern tier", but it is equally pertinent to all accessible well watered grassland regions.

⁴⁸ Ross to R. Barker, 10 January 1818, HRA 3/4 850.

⁴⁹ Eustace Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain: A Collection of Choice Petitions, Memorials, and Letters of Protest and Request from the Convict Colony of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1977) 159-60; AOT CSO 1/287/6834.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 98.

⁵² Harold Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780 - 1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 125-6.

⁵³ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 21.

⁵⁴ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 103. This passage also highlights how little threat was seen from Aborigines before 1824. Curr advised the new settler to "set out as soon as possible in quest of land... he should go on foot, and employ at least a month in his search. I know a gentleman who walked in this manner a thousand miles before he fixed upon his land."

⁵⁵ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 29-30. Ross's first sight of these vacant pastures along the Shannon River included a "large herd of fine cattle".

⁵⁶ Lois Nyman, *The East Coast: The Early Pioneering History of the East Coast of Tasmania* (Launceston, Tas.: Regal Publications, 1990) 12-13.

⁵⁷ George Meredith pocket book, 5 April – 4 Nov 1824, Parker transcript, Parker papers, ML.

⁵⁸ Arthur to Bathurst 24 March 1827, *HRA* 3/6 691-706.

⁵⁹ Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* 59; Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 260.

⁶⁰ The *Hobart Town Gazette* for 10 July 1819 advised of the successful sale of New South Wales wool in England and hoped that this would lead Van Diemonian stock masters "to consider the wool as well as the flesh."

⁶¹ Arthur to Bathurst 24 March 1827; *HRA* 3/6 691-706.

⁶² Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* 65.

⁶³ Bum, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 13.

⁶⁴ West, *The History of Tasmania* 59.

⁶⁵ These are important themes and will be more fully explored in Chapter Seven.

⁶⁶ Margaret Kiddie, "Vandemonien Colonists in Port Phillip 1834-1850," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 3, no. 3 (1954) 38.

⁶⁷ Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender, *Life Line: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788-1840* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992) 150.

⁶⁸ Peter Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press.) 355.

⁶⁹ Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* 44.

⁷⁰ Shortly after his arrival, William Pike "walked in the wood and gathered some wildflowers, which are the most beautiful I ever saw", and on a walk to Newtown he was "much delighted with the beauty of the scenery." *Journal of William Pike* AOT MM130.

⁷¹ Curr noted that "plains in Van Diemen's Land are not always, as the expression would imply, level land... that designation is [also] applied to hills which are bare of timber." Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 54-5.

⁷² *Ibid.* 22; Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 30.

⁷³ William Barnes letter 15 March 1824 in Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* 402-6; Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land* 74.

⁷⁴ Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804 - 1828* 306.

⁷⁵ Charles Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land: Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Diemen's Land* (London: J.M. Richardson, 1820) 85; Shelton, *The Parramore Letters* 19.

⁷⁶ M.A. Staples, "Comparative Landscape, European Settlement, and the Myth of Little England in Tasmania," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 49, no. 3 (2002) 194-5.

⁷⁷ Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 85.

⁷⁸ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 12-13.

⁷⁹ Mrs Fenton, who arrived in February 1830, noted that in Hobart Town "gardens surround almost all" houses, and include "hedges of scarlet geraniums, stocks, wallflowers and an unknown variety of native shrubs." Elizabeth Fenton, *The Journal of Mrs Fenton* (London: Edward Arnold, 1901) 351.

⁸⁰ Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381

⁸¹ Fenton, *Journal of Mrs Fenton* 361.

⁸² Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 24.

⁸³ McKay *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* Appendix A, 105.

⁸⁴ Williamson letter, AOT P.L. 16/4.

⁸⁵ M. Roe, "Mary Leman Grimstone: For Women's Rights and Tasmanian Patriotism," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 36, no. 1 (1989) 28.

⁸⁶ Fenton, *Journal of Mrs Fenton* 388, 90.

⁸⁷ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 34-5.

⁸⁸ According to Terry Newman's comprehensive coverage of this question, the map-making firm of Laurie and Whittle of London provided the first known use of 'Tasmania' in their 1808 atlas. Terry Newman, *Becoming Tasmania: Renaming Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Parliament of Tasmania, 2005) 5-6.

⁸⁹ Jeffreys, *Van Diemen's Land* 1.

⁹⁰ See Newman, *Becoming Tasmania: Renaming Van Diemen's Land* 37-54.

⁹¹ Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* 528.

⁹² Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive* 14-15.

⁹³ Joan Woodberry, "Andrew Bent and the Proprietorship of the Hobart Town Gazette: An Examination of Some New Letters," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 14, no. 2 (1967) 59.

⁹⁴ Eustace FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania: Letters, Petitions and Other Manuscripts Relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1980) 172.

⁹⁵ Martin Cash, *The Bushranger of Van Diemen's Land: 1843-44* (Hobart: J Walch and Sons, 1929) 106.

⁹⁶ Bum, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 28-9.

⁹⁷ Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Volume 1 1820- 1832* 395.

⁹⁸ Fenton, *Journal of Mrs Fenton* 344.

⁹⁹ Letter 22 July 1827, Meredith papers, AOT NSA 123/1.

¹⁰⁰ Sharon Morgan, "George and Mary Meredith: The Role of the Colonial Wife," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 36, no. 3 (1989) 126.

¹⁰¹ Shelton, *The Parramore Letters* 58.

¹⁰² Hamilton Wallace wrote to his father in 1825: "as to my remaining in this country or advising any of my friends to come this is out of the question. Certainly the soil is very good and the climate I really think the best in the world, but for society-comfort or happiness you cannot have it." Richards, *Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852* no page numbers. William Barnes, however, was more positive, writing to his siblings from Launceston on 5 May 1824: "I am delighted with the country and the society at Launceston is very good... I visit none but the very first people". Brown, *The Narrative of George Russell* 411.

¹⁰³ Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 34-5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 60.

¹⁰⁵ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 76.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 18. The Land Commissioners wrote of Woolmers that "everything here is on a most extensive scale. Carpenters, sawyers, bricklayers, blacksmiths and long list of labourers, a hundred working oxen, and about 10 000 sheep, he [Thomas Archer] has laid down a great quantity of very fine alluvial soil in English grasses. In short, this place speaks forcibly for what may be done in Van Diemen's Land."

¹⁰⁷ Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Volume 1 1820-1832* 291.

¹⁰⁸ Gillian Winter, "Under My Own Immediate Observation: Jane Roberts' Visit to Hobart Town in 1830," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 48, no. 3A (2001) 189.

¹⁰⁹ Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot* 249.

¹¹⁰ Fenton, *Journal of Mrs Fenton* 353.

Chapter Seven: Conflict and Control

Reform and resistance

Over a thousand convicts arrived in Van Diemen's Land between 1818 and 1820, and numbers steadily increasing thereafter. Nevertheless, demand for labour, associated with the privatisation and exploitation of the grassland plains, continued to be high throughout the 1820s. Discipline and control of this growing labour force continued to be the main challenge facing the colonial authorities, and achieved a concentrated focus with the arrival in 1824 of a highly capable administrator in the new Lieutenant Governor, George Arthur. By the following year, when Van Diemen's Land formally became a separate colony from New South Wales, authority had become concentrated in one office – that of the Lieutenant Governor – to a greater extent than at any other period in Tasmanian history. Even appointments to the Legislative Council and other government offices were largely within Arthur's personal control.¹ This unparalleled formal authority, combined with the relative trust and subsequent autonomy Arthur received from London (hard earned and sometimes precarious though this could be), and the capacity for patronage which the convict system and land grants made possible, gave Arthur more real power than any other Van Diemonian, or for that matter, Tasmanian, political leader has ever enjoyed.

Given that Arthur had the mandate, ability and power to undertake major reform, it is a reflection of just how resilient the Van Diemonian economy and society were that his plans for changes to the penal system were effectively resisted until 1828 and not fully implemented until the early 1830s, and that his economic and social agenda was never fully realized. As much as transformation was a defining feature of Arthur's tenure, so was the persistence of an alternative way of life that continued to represent a potent alternative to the plans and aspirations of the free settlers, colonial authorities and imperial government.

Reform under Sorell

Leonie Mickleborough, in *William Sorell in Van Diemen's Land*, is right to recognize that much of Arthur's reforms had their origins during Sorell's term of office from 1817 to 1824, and that this has been insufficiently acknowledged in recent historiography (although this was a popular point with Arthur's many contemporary enemies). Sorell established a regular weekly muster for convicts (including those with tickets of leave), passes for travel, better rewards and protection for informers, and the withdrawal of indulgences for settlers who cooperated with bushrangers.² An increasing number of convict indulgences were linked to good behaviour. As Samuel Guy wrote in 1823:

Before emigration was on so large a scale every encouragement were given to the convicts that was in the least industrious – but now there is many restrictions just issued that no convict shall hold no office under Government, not obtain a ticket of leave except he has lived with one master four years if transported for seven years, and if 14 years he must have lived with two masters, six years etc, that it will make their punishment a little more hard.³

And most famously, Sorell established the penal settlement of Macquarie Harbour – used primarily as a place of secondary punishment for convicts but also as a gaol to punish free Van Diemonians, especially for stock theft.⁴

What a focus on such official action can miss, is that many of these measures were, to varying extents, ignored, and in the frontier regions, which even as late as 1824 still encompassed most of the territory occupied by the British, they had almost no impact at all. Consider, for example, Sorell's wide-ranging order of 30 June 1821 against a raft of common practices that he rightly recognized as underpinning stock theft and lawlessness on frontier lands.⁵ Sorell ordered that sheep be yarded "at least once a week... under the inspection of the proprietor,

or a person of unquestionable trust, for the purpose of keeping the stock-keepers in check", and prohibited stock-keepers from keeping dogs. He even banned "the common practice with owners of flocks to allow their shepherds to acquire and keep sheep, which, indeed, in many cases form the medium of payment for their services", arguing that:

No practice can be more pernicious, or lead more to render it difficult to identify property of that kind, and to detect robbery; and it affords to the stock-men a cover frequently for disposing dishonestly of sheep belonging to their master. So long as this practice prevails, the sheep owners may expect themselves to be plundered by the direct act or secret connivance of their servants.

Sorell's instruction was explicit: the masters were not to "permit their servants to be at all owners of stock."⁶ What is most revealing about this order, however, is not its purpose but the failure to implement it – it is almost impossible to discern any resulting change in practice at all. There is ample evidence to confirm a lack of regular weekly supervision of stock-keepers and shepherds,⁷ the continued prevalence of these men hunting with dogs and selling the skins, and payment being made in stock through the thirds system. As late as August 1825 Arthur was still complaining to Bathurst that: "a more pernicious practice than... the Thirds cannot possibly exist in any country... It is the system on which sheep stealing, which is carried to such an alarming extent in this island... derived its origins and is still encouraged and perpetrated."⁸

Thus, as much as Sorell's proclamations show his understanding of what was required to control the frontier, they also reveal just how little power in much of Van Diemen's Land the government exercised during his tenure. Arthur himself concluded, soon after his arrival in 1824, and with some justice, that the convicts had only been "kept passive by a system of extreme indulgence, which I am sure the comprehensive mind of Colonel Sorell would never have suffered to exist had

he not been cramped in all his measures and unable to follow the dictates of his own judgment.”⁹

Economic constraints on reform

The structural nature of these constraints on government action was highlighted by the fact that even Arthur – remembered by history as ruthlessly autocratic – had a hard time explaining his inaction during the first few years of his tenure to a sceptical British Government. Given the powers vested in Arthur and his clear instructions to act, why was reform so slow?

The most obvious point, quickly made by Arthur, was that he lacked the military capacity to counter anticipated resistance to changes in established custom:

In resigning the command into my hands, Colonel Sorell expressed the opinion that the period had now arrived when measures of coercion and restraint might in greater safety be enforced towards the convicts; my predecessor however, had not himself ventured to take any step, and the only one I have presumed upon has convinced me that more rigid discipline cannot be introduced without opposition, and therefore with the present military force I cannot feel justified in attempting it.¹⁰

But this issue was soon addressed, and it is clear that the limitations to Arthur’s power went far deeper.¹¹ In a September 1825 letter to Under Secretary Horton the Lieutenant Governor was candid about the complexity of the issue: “I am behest with difficulties and quite at my wits end... The convicts have too much liberty and great evils result from it; but if my hands are strengthened, I hope to make transportation a punishment which, at present, it certainly is not.”¹²

The link between convict laxity and the preservation of settler profit is the key to understanding Arthur’s dilemma. Any challenge to the liberty of the stockmen-

hunters who roamed the frontier grasslands threatened the property of the elite. With almost no formal British authority existing in these areas, sheep and cattle could just as easily disappear as multiply and, from the perspective of the Lieutenant Governor, the masters were "in many respects, but especially as regards the safety of their property, quite at their [assigned servants] mercy, [and] are reduced by self interest, or perhaps in self defence, to adopt a system of indulgence, which it is not in the power of the governor to control entirely."¹³ Settlers and workers cooperated, tacitly or otherwise, in ignoring regulations that impinged on established custom, and until the increase in wool exports and the rapid alienation of land changed pastoral practices and the reach of official power, there was very little the Lieutenant Governor could do about it. As Arthur put it in January 1827, "where master and servant have an interest in deceiving, it is almost next to impossible to detect their scheme."¹⁴

Malcolm Smith, the Police Magistrate of Norfolk Plains, highlighted this policy conundrum in the winter of 1827. Smith advised Arthur, on the basis of having "just returned from visiting the remote stock huts to the westward", that "the present system of stock huts, which being removed from any controul, and the keepers being mostly prisoners are rendezvous for runaways and bad characters, as well as receptacles for stolen property or stock". Arthur agreed: "the strong persuasion of my mind is that these stock-keepers not only continually insulted and ill used the natives but they have harboured, aided and assisted the bush rangers. These men are in fact a most intractable evil". But, he lamented, "what is to be done?... if this is not allowed, the settlers will declare themselves injured and ruined – if it is, the evil is apparent."¹⁵

It was only when settler economic interests came to correspond with government policy that regulatory controls over labour in the frontier regions could be effectively enforced. The critical change came about with the dramatic shift to a wool based economy and the occupation of their privately owned estates by the free settlers, a process evident from the mid 1820s but dramatically accelerating

after 1828. Farming merinos for wool required the separation and daily supervision of valuable flocks, and their protection from fire, theft, interbreeding, and predators. The much tougher meat breeds had thrived on indifference, casual supervision and Aboriginal land management regimes, but a successful fine wool property involved a significant capital investment that had to be managed and protected. 'Trespassers' – white and black – were a threat, and lax labourers a major problem. Authorities and most settlers were, therefore, by the late 1820s, united in one object – the independent hunter-shepherds must be supplanted by a disciplined and subservient convict labour force – armed to protect their valuable charge.

Before the new regulatory regime could be implemented, however, a more immediate threat emanating from the convict bushmen of Van Diemen's Land had to be countered. Between 1824 and 1826 the colony faced its last serious bushranger insurrection, and defeating this became the first priority of government.

The last bushranger emergency

The most powerful of the bushranging gangs was led by the best known Van Diemen's Land outlaw, Matthew Brady. Born in Manchester of Irish parents and sentenced to seven years transportation for forgery in 1820, Brady had arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1821. He was subsequently sentenced to Macquarie Harbour for two years for twice trying to stow away to England, but escaped by boat with a gang of fourteen in 1824, landing in Storm Bay where food and welcome was found in a sawyer's camp. From then until his capture in April 1826, Brady launched a series of daring raids that soon became legend.¹⁶ Although the economic and social changes already in train meant that Brady's power never approached that of Michael Howe,¹⁷ the support of the still largely unsupervised stock-keepers, shepherds and hunters nevertheless ensured that Brady and his gang posed a serious challenge to imperial authority in frontier

lands.¹⁸ The Catholic Chaplain, Philip Conolly, wrote in April 1826 that they were "frightfully formidable... A wild forest country, with which they were better acquainted than their pursuers, afforded them easy retreat, which they secured in great measure, by dividing their spoils with shepherds, herdsmen (chiefly of the convict class) and others of bad character who were best acquainted with their hiding places... hundreds of men were unable to catch them."¹⁹ Robson has argued that these were "the last of those bandits who seriously threatened the extension of land settlement in the colony."²⁰ George Meredith is one settler who seriously considered quitting Oyster Bay for a more "secure asylum."²¹ Meredith's Hobart Town agent wrote a letter of sympathy in October 1825, and documented how the impact of the crisis was even being felt in the capital:

I was exceedingly sorry to hear of the extent of the mischief done by the Banditti at your house... In the town we are all soldiers and also special constables and do duty on guard every night thereby allowing all the military to turn out in quest of the rascals. I do not wonder at you contemplating a removal from your present residence, as your losses there have been very heavy and your unprotected state leaving you constantly exposed to the attack of any ruffians who may fancy themselves aggrieved by their masters, and who, in consequence, take to the bush.²²

The bushranger's power was also felt in the north. Wallace wrote from Port Dalrymple in September 1825 that "the country at present is in a most deplorable state with the bushrangers. It is impossible to travel from one township to another without being robbed."²³

The bushranging emergency also affected emigration. Ann Horden, passing though on her way to Sydney in 1825, described the "awful state of Van Diemen's Land" with "dreadful robberies and murders continually" and that Hobart Town consequently gave her "a kind of disgust... We landed most of the

passengers at Van Diemen's Land but they would most of them have been glad to have gone back again to London if they had enough to have gone back with."²⁴ In 1826 the number of free settlers arriving in Van Diemen's Land dropped dramatically, and the fear of bushrangers was an important factor in this. Even the Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, privately recommended to a Gloucestershire neighbour, William Lyne, that Van Diemen's Land had so many problems with bushrangers and Aborigines that he was better off going to New South Wales (although Lyne was persuaded otherwise while in Hobart Town en route to Sydney).²⁵

The threat posed by Brady to the authorities and the settlers was, as Maxwell-Stuart has highlighted, also ideological.²⁶ The social pretensions of the free settlers and the symbols of state oppression were famously targeted by Brady, with aspiring gentry forced to assume the role of their servants, soldiers being gaoled in their own cells, and so on. Little England was being effectively mocked, and the enormous popular support Brady received, and how rapidly his exploits became material for Van Diemonian legend, is a reflection of how deeply this challenge to the pretensions of the elite resonated in popular culture. As early as 1827 the mythic story of the gang's confrontation with their oppressors, *The Van Diemen's Land Warriors*, was banned and destroyed.²⁷

The threat posed to government authority and the encouragement Brady's exploits gave to convict workers meant that much of Arthur's penal reform agenda had to be put on hold while Brady was at large. Arthur explained to Bathurst in June 1826, two months after Brady had finally been captured (through the incentive of a 100 guineas reward and free pardon and passage to England for each convict involved in their capture²⁸) that:

The troublesome times I have described, when the prisoners were excited by a most mischievous faction, and when a daring band of their associates was in open arms, was no season to introduce reforms by the imposition

of greater restraints. I cannot therefore gratify your Lordship by representing that the wise and salutary system so often inculcated by His Majesty's Government to be observed in the treatment of convicts, has been introduced to any extent. The most that could be done was to prevent matters from becoming worse.²⁹

But commensurate with the ideological challenge posed by Brady's exploits was the propaganda victory won by the authorities in accompaniment of his capture and subsequent execution in mid 1826. With the taking of Brady, the colonial government's policy of constraint ended, and it embarked on a two-year killing spree without parallel in Australian history that was explicitly designed to shell-shock the population into submission.

The gallows

In 1822 James Ross complained, of the capital of Van Diemen's Land, that "the whole appearance of the town was dull and saddening... Even that ancient mark of civilization, the gallows, was then wanting in Hobart Town."³⁰ Capital offences (including stock theft) still had to be tried in Sydney – a strong disincentive to bring charges because of the time and costs involved in doing so. While more notorious stock thieves, such as John Smith, alias "Billy the Needle", were sometimes sent to Sydney to be made examples of,³¹ it was only with the establishment of the Supreme Court in 1823 that people could be sentenced to death by a court in Van Diemen's Land. Castles argues that Arthur's subsequent use of capital punishment was unprecedented in the colonial experience in Australia – there were 103 hangings in 1826/7 alone and 260 during Arthur's term of office.³² Bodies could be left in the open for months at a time, no doubt plucked at and slowly mauled by the many Van Diemonian carrion-eaters, as Arthur knew that it was not dying, but the desecration of the body after death, that was the most dreaded punishment in the popular mind.³³

Most executions were not for murder – this remained an uncommon crime in Van Diemen's Land – but for crimes against property; overwhelmingly stock theft. Despite the fact that the law had been changed in England in 1823 so that the theft of sheep (along with about 100 other crimes) was no longer a capital offence, Arthur's 'sheep stealing act' ensured there would be no such leniency in Van Diemen's Land.³⁴ Countering the systematic nature of this practice was seen to be fundamental to developing a subservient convict labour force, as the persistent threat posed by the potential disappearance of stock constrained the pretensions of over-zealous masters across the island. Arthur liberally used bribes (indulgences) to break down convict solidarity and bring men before the courts. The alleged receivers of stolen animals – particular the small land owners – were also executed. George Farquharson, who was accused of this crime in 1826, complained that "there was so strong a link of villany between the whole of the shepherds in the neighbourhood... that to discover sheep after they had once been stolen was utterly impossible." True enough perhaps, but he was hung anyway.³⁵

Gaols, road gangs and penal stations

After 1827 the number of hangings dropped off slightly, although the substitutes developed by Arthur as part of a sophisticated seven-layered hierarchy of penal punishment were scarcely more humane.³⁶ By 1834, 14.1 per cent of male convicts were on road gangs, 6.3 per cent were in irons and 6.9 per cent were at the newly built Port Arthur – that is, one in four were in "some form of work orientated punishment."³⁷ Furthermore, while the majority of convicts were still assigned servants, and usually another ten per cent or so had tickets of leave, convicts were regularly moved up and down the punishment/reward hierarchy so that the terrors of the new punishments were widely experienced and universally feared. Even ticket of leavers could quickly find themselves back in a public work gang through a minor breach of regulations, while a repeat offence was likely to see them placed in a penal institution. The terror of punishment greatly

increased the masters' power to extract work and subservience from their assigned servants – the return to government labour was now dreaded, and never welcomed as an escape from a tyrannical master, as it sometimes had been in earlier, less stringent times. In these circumstances, convicts were far more likely to accept acts of brutality from their master. In October 1826, George Hobler "thrashed" his assigned servant "with a stick to save myself the pain of flogging him legally."³⁸ Few convicts would see much point in complaining to a magistrate about such criminal assault – when the arbiters of justice were themselves largely drawn from the ranks of fellow land owners.

Though some free settlers differed with Arthur on questions of patronage, land and labour allocation, and the restriction of political rights, most applauded the success of the new discipline regime. The first measure to have a substantial impact was the chain gang, trialled in 1826 (as soon as Brady and his gang were safely dead) and permanently introduced the following year.³⁹ Chains had been used on a small scale in earlier years, but it was Arthur who extended this punishment into a dreaded, and common, part of convict life. A correspondent to Meredith wrote in late August 1826 that "the chain gang is one of the best things that has been projected in this reign, never were men better worked, better flogged (*sic*) and better managed than they are in the gang."⁴⁰

A few of the more sensitive, however, worried about the depths to which British civilization had sunk. The Government official, G.T.W.B. Boyes, was appalled at the conditions of convicts labouring on the Bridgwater causeway⁴¹, which he visited in October 1831:

Here the convicts labour, and with short intervals of refreshment and repose it may be said incessantly. They quarry stone, break it, shape it – or not as required, wheel it to the causeway and apply it either to form a foundation or in the erection of piers upon foundations already formed. The work is almost of an endless description – from the extent and depth

of the mud in which it is constructing, and the unhappy labourers are therefore not even cheered by viewing the progress of their daily toil.

Boyes reported that “modifications of punishment” could be “produced by varying the weight of and length of the chains” and that “the shortest are the most painful and embarrassing by affording the least possible space for the motion of the legs.” He “heard a man after receiving the cat o’ nine tails” say “that he would rather be hanged than forced to work in short chains.”⁴² Nor was there much respite after the day’s work was completed, with convicts being confined to cells seven feet long by only two and a half feet high. Boyes believed the horrific conditions owed their origin “to some modern Phalaris” (a notoriously cruel sixth century BC tyrant of Sicily).⁴³

Even Arthur described the chain gangs as “severe a punishment as may well be inflicted upon any man.”⁴⁴ The aim was to break convict resistance, with, as the Lieutenant Governor informed London in 1833, “idleness or insolence of expression or even of looks, anything betraying the insurgent spirit” leading “to the chain-gang or the triangle or to hard labour on the roads.”⁴⁵

Accompanying the new rigours of public labour were secure prisons and barracks. The administrative oversight of New South Wales, which continued until 1825, had greatly curtailed the amount of public building, and Arthur, arguing to a budget-conscious London in 1826 that “nothing effectual can be done until proper places for the accommodation and confinement of the prisoners with substantial gaols etc are erected”, ensured secure places of confinement for convicts were built in Hobart Town and then across the main settlements of the island from 1827.⁴⁶ No convicts were free after dark in Hobart Town from this time, excepting those who had earned this privilege through good behaviour. One prominent Hobart Town resident, James Grant, wrote to the Colonial Secretary in June 1827, urging that there should be no compromising with the rigorous new system:

For heavens sake let not the Governor ever be persuaded to depart from his own excellent system which has worked so well... not a man, who has not proved himself a good character, should be suffered on any pretence to have the disposal of himself after dark in this place. Otherwise the old system, which has been suppressed by the extraordinary exertion of the Governor will recur with only its positive horrors."⁴⁷

Soldier barracks took a little longer to build, but were seen as equally important to the cause of civil order. Lieutenant-Colonel Balfour wrote to Arthur in August 1826 that "without means to confine soldiers at night, and potential to punish them by confinement... it is almost impossible to take effectual measures for the prevention of crimes." But over a year later, in November 1827, Arthur was still lobbying London in an attempt to convince the imperial government of the importance of this issue in Van Diemen's Land:

the consequence of troops being dispersed... remote from their officers and lodged in unenclosed buildings is most destructive to discipline anywhere, but in a convict colony it leads to a connexion and intimacy between the soldiers and prisoners which is attended with the very worst consequences.⁴⁸

By the early 1830s, however, even this issue had been largely resolved and an almost impenetrable wall descended between the world of the prisoners and the soldiers who watched over them.

Sites of secondary punishment

Paradoxically, the new regime of penal discipline involved the closure of the infamous Macquarie Harbour in 1833. It had a limited capacity, was expensive to supply, and was too remote from the seat of authority to be a sustainable

proposition in the long term. The granting of much of the north west to the Van Diemen's Land Company in the mid 1820s sealed the penal station's fate through reducing the redeeming virtue of isolation – the near impossibility of convict escape. Its successor, Port Arthur, was far more expansive and easily accessible by sea, while being easy to secure from the settled districts by land. Far more systematic and purposeful systems of punishment and hard labour were developed at Port Arthur than had been possible or attempted at Macquarie Harbour, and it accommodated many more prisoners in both absolute and proportional terms.⁴⁹ Port Arthur's horrors are the best known and best documented aspect of the convict experience in Van Diemen's Land and nearly one in six convicts would spend time there. Even the majority of convicts who never saw the empire's largest gaol were greatly affected by it. Port Arthur deeply permeated the psyche of convicts, even after their sentences had expired. All knew that it was a hell that was never more than a magistrate's hearing away.

New policing and interior controls

Alongside the new forms of punishment were reforms to policing. As previously noted, all Van Diemen's Land Governors recognized that the most effective and efficient form of policing was to get convicts to do it themselves. But it was not until Arthur established the field police in 1826, as part of his strategy to deal with the bushranger emergency, that this policy was extended to its logical conclusion – the establishment of an official convict-staffed police force.

Arthur described the background to this development in a despatch to Bathurst in March 1827:

I was driven during the heat of bush-ranging to strengthen the establishment by the appointment of a field police, formed from the very best conducted prisoners, and stimulated to exertion by the hope of a mitigation of their sentence, which is promised after uniform good conduct

for three years... it was objected to by some on account of the danger which they apprehended from putting arms into the hands of prisoners, whose notorious fellow-feeling they considered would induce them support, if not to join the Banditi. The objection however proved totally groundless, and the employment of these convicts had a most powerful effect on suppressing bushranging by creating distrust and division among the prisoner population.⁵⁰

A high proportion of the field police were seasoned warriors – former soldiers in the French Wars that had raged almost continuously for 25 years until 1815. Many of these men had committed property crimes after being thrown into unemployment and poverty subsequent to being decommissioned without payment or support following the final victory at Waterloo. The high proportion who had enlisted as boys were particularly vulnerable in the economic down-turn which accompanied peace, as they generally knew no trade or adult life other than military service.⁵¹

Arthur's convict field police effectively supplanted his early plans for a gentlemen-controlled militia along English lines. Arthur had envisioned compelling "all free persons to serve in small corps in their respective districts for the defence of such district", but found that the "assistance" of the well-to-do in the bushranger struggle, "although well intended", was "so ill directed... I should not be disposed to avail myself again of such assistance."⁵² Early in 1827 the Lieutenant Governor concluded in a despatch to London: "I venture to hope that the appointment of this [convict] band altogether supersedes the necessity of any militia or yeomanry or any other local military force, and supersedes it most advantageously."⁵³

Integrated with the deployment of convict policemen were new coordination mechanisms. In early 1827 the settled districts were divided into five administrative districts, each under a district police magistrate. These officials

became Arthur's right hand men on the ground – enjoying extensive delegated powers and direct authority over the field police. Robson believed that, “due to this master stroke of delegation of power, by about 1827 Arthur had town and country in the island colony in a state of tranquility suitable for further land settlement and consolidation.”⁵⁴

Ideological control – assignment

Arthur's evolving system of social control did not depend only on state sanctioned killing, stricter punishment and more effective policing. Through the new systems of punishment, Arthur was able to refine the ‘unfree worker’ convict identity first promulgated by Collins and sustained since, and make it conditional on subservience. The aim of the new punishment regimes was to make the convict's ‘servant’ identity provisional and liable to be removed for even small acts of resistance. They were presented with a daily choice – to conform and maintain their rights and freedoms as unfree workers or be treated as criminals within a brutal punishment regime. The fact that in the 1820s convicts on assignment could increasingly be placed on the expanding free settler rural estates, meant that it was a choice that resonated with centuries of established custom.

There are striking similarities between the convict assignment system and farm service in pre-industrial rural England. B.A Holderness has described the latter in the following terms: “the farm servants, men and women... had their food and working clothes provided and received a small money payment at the end of their term of service. Hired usually at special fairs, they performed most of the specialist services of the farm.”⁵⁵ The “life chances” of these and other members of “the small communities, the villages, and tiny towns of the old society in which the average individual lived”, were, as Harold Perkin has put it, “controlled by a paternal landlord, employer or patron”, so that “resentment had to be swallowed”.⁵⁶ Unpaid farm servants were rapidly replaced by employed labour

during the nineteenth century, but during the 1820s and 1830s this way of life continued in many regions of England and would have been familiar to all. Far more effective than developing new social control mechanisms in Van Diemen's Land was, therefore, the appropriation of established forms of rural paternalism that had the legitimacy of custom and were accompanied by accepted patterns of social deference towards a small landed elite.

Commissioner Bigge had recognized the possibility of developing a cheap and effective model of convict discipline in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land through reproducing the social and economic relations of rural England. Bigge hoped to reproduce the hierarchy and stability so evident in the English countryside, and that convicts placed in a deferential master/servant environment would be morally reformed.⁵⁷ Arthur also believed that the reformation of convicts depended on ordered social relationships – the masters were to provide examples of a moral life and paternal but rigorous supervision. Maxwell-Stuart has argued that:

the paternalistic management of the Midlands and East Coast gentry... were held to play a crucial role in anchoring the management objectives of the Convict Department within the operation of assignment... there can be little doubt that the social ordering embodied in the estate environment was an important element of the convict system. Much stress was placed on the need for 'proper' master servant relations.⁵⁸

One paradox of this conception of convict labour is that it ensured, even as late as the early 1830s, that convicts on assignment had rights and privileges that continued to compare very favourably with those of prisoners confined in British gaols. Many visitors to the colony could not comprehend the reason for this. Jane Roberts noted in 1830 that convicts in private families:

are without any mark of disgrace, but apparently the same as hired servants in England; they are fed and clothed but receive no wages... It is said that they never forgive a person who accidentally calls them 'convicts'; they denominate themselves 'servants of the crown' and settlers invariably do the same.⁵⁹

Roberts believed that convicts should be confined to public works and Arthur often had to defend his administration from similar views, often sensationalised, that emanated from within both the British Government and English press.

Arthur and his key allies in the Colonial Office understood, however, that a servant identity and relative leniency for those on assignment was central to work output and the efficient control of a rapidly increasing convict population. Those who resisted labour or rebelled against subservience were not only punished by hard labour or solitary confinement, but by the loss of their dignity and identity. London sought to publicize the image of degraded and forlorn prisoners as a strategy in crime prevention, but to make such suffering a permanent or universal characteristic of the convict experience would have been difficult, costly and counterproductive.

Arthur therefore sponsored the established Van Diemonian custom that convicts – provided they submitted to authority – were 'crown servants' or 'government men'. Moreover, many of their long established rights, such as fresh meat, higher rations, working for themselves in their free time, building a home, drinking rum, going to the pub and forming relationships, were not altogether removed, but made conditional. They became, in effect, privileges to be earned, not rights to be claimed, although some sense of absolute rights, including the "distinct notion of the ration as a wage", persisted.⁶⁰

The convict, Richard Dillingham, expressed the ideology underpinning assignment in a letter to his parents in September 1836:

As to my living, I find it better than ever I expected, Thank God I want for nothing in that respect. As for tea and sugar I almost could swim in it. I am allowed two pound of sugar and quarter pound of tea per week and plenty of tobacco and good white bread and sometimes beef, sometimes mutton, sometimes pork. This I have every day. Plenty of fruit in the season of all sorts... and I want for nothing but my liberty but though I am thus situated it is not the case with all that come... For some through their misconduct get into road partys and some into chain gangs and live a miserable life.⁶¹

The practice of Arthur's penal system between 1828 and 1836 probably came closer to matching the ideals of the policy underpinning it than at any other period of Van Diemen's Land history, but complete realisation remained constrained by the extreme and paranoid nature of the Van Diemonian caste system. The main reason that the social structures of rural England were incompletely reproduced in Van Diemen's Land was not convict resistance, but free settler snobbery. Many convicts were willing to accept the status and condition of farm servants, but few settlers were happy to be yeomen. The English social pyramid had far more people in the middling ranks than at the apex, but in Van Diemen's Land most of the land grantees were scrambling for a place at the top. Octavia Dawson, who arrived in 1829, did "not like" Van Diemen's Land at all, because "the people... are very *high* or very *low*."⁶²

Arthur realized the problem. He argued that the very wealthy "are not the most likely masters to succeed in reforming their servants, but such as, having but few, are dally over them and with them". He advocated the immigration of a "description of yeomen-middling agriculturalists and independent men of good character and education – if possible married – who would be the most likely to carry into effect the object of reform."⁶³ But the Lieutenant Governor's own land policy, that saw so much of the best land given to so few, meant that while Van

Diemen's Land had aspiring gentry enough, it always lacked the very men that Arthur saw as the key to moral reformation.

The Land Commissioners also lamented the lack of yeomen farmers and fulsomely praised the few they found. Adam Amos perhaps came closest to their ideal settler:

wherever you go on the farm you perceive the hand of care and frugality. Paddocks laid down with artificial grasses, milch cows feeding in them, the daughters milking night and morning, making cheese and butter. Large fields full of corn... health and contentment to be seen in the countenances of all.⁶⁴

The lack of a yeomen class had its advantages for convicts and the continued evolution of Van Diemonian culture. Convicts were usually not supervised directly by their masters, who saw such work as beneath them, but by overseers, usually of a similar background and class to the convicts themselves. This did not mean that convict discipline was lax, just that more space existed for alternative values, relationships and customs than was suggested by the ideology underpinning assignment or the English ideal on which it was based. While Van Diemen's Land continued to comprise two distinct societies – the convict-derived majority and a small group of privileged free settlers obsessed with avoiding all contact with them – the people's culture could continue to enjoy a significant degree of autonomy. The world that convicts lived within was increasingly geographically confined and legally ordered by an elite determined to control and restrict their choices, but within these boundaries a surprising level of freedom continued to exist.

Ideological control – the church

The recreation of English rural paternalism required the reproduction of the institutions that underpinned it, and the most important of these was the established church. In the early nineteenth century, the Church of England was widely understood to be the foundation of the nation's social and economic hierarchy, and the most effective counter to insurrectionist and revolutionary sentiments crossing the English Channel. The Church was particularly associated with the privileges of the landed gentry: "I know nothing better calculated to fill a country with barbarians ready for any mischief" wrote Arthur Young, the agricultural propagandist, in 1799, "than extensive commons and divine service only once a month".⁶⁵

Despite the assumed importance of the Anglican Church, Robert Knopwood continued to be the only minister in Van Diemen's Land until 1818, when John Youl – an evangelical former missionary to the Pacific Islands – was appointed as Chaplain at Port Dalrymple. And, as in England, the inability of the established Church to effectively meet the challenges associated with social and economic change meant that it soon faced effective competition. Sorell had recognized the advantage of having an Irish priest in the colony, and the first Catholic Chaplain, the Gaelic speaking Phillip Conolly, was appointed in 1821.⁶⁶ The support of the British Government for the post was part of a Church-State partnership to control the Irish convicts, and the Catholic Church did not let its patrons down. In Van Diemen's Land, as in Ireland itself, the priests, while confronting the worst examples of religious discrimination, largely preached coexistence and submission to the imperial power.⁶⁷ Connolly sought an active partnership with the civil authorities, seeing them, indeed, as a buffer to the church's English Benedictine hierarchy. Patrick O'Farrell's conclusion that "from early in its Australian history" the Catholic Church "developed a view of English authority as repressive, unjust, brutal, persecuting, immoral, the sort of shackles from which the real Australia must escape", and "instead of buttressing the social

order... worked to loosen its bonds", has only limited application in Van Diemen's Land.⁶⁸ As the Irish political prisoner, John Mitchell, reflected from his exile in Van Diemen's Land, Catholic priests may "dislike British power", but "they hate revolution worse."⁶⁹

More significant to the protestant convict majority was the arrival of the Methodists. Soon after his arrival in Sydney in 1815, Samuel Leigh, the first Methodist Missionary to New South Wales, wrote a plea to the Missionary Committee in England to send a missionary to Van Diemen's Land, wherein were:

many thousands of British souls, many of whom are sunk almost upon a level with the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country, they have only one minister [Knopwood] whose age and infirmities renders him unfit for duty (besides he is a swearing, drunken, debauched infidel) who as a magistrate would oppose a missionary with all his might if he had no authority from home.⁷⁰

A number of Methodists visited from 1820, but none stayed on until the 21 year old William Horton in 1822. The Wesleyans' commitment to working with convicts meant that Arthur became a powerful patron of their outreach in the 1820s, and their influence was probably greater than that of any other denomination. But Arthur also worked closely with the new Church of England Chaplain, William Bedford, who arrived in 1823, and together they embarked on a moral crusade which had a significant impact, especially in Hobart Town. "The last year has not only added to the number of genteel people, but Mr Bedford's decisive measures and perseverance has greatly improved the morality of the people", wrote Bedford's friend, William Parramore, in October 1824. The Chaplain's measures included putting in the gaol or the factory every convict who lived in adultery, and some pubs lost their licence. Parramore optimistically believed that due to "Mr Bedford's vigilance... I expect to see the people sober

as well as chaste in another year.”⁷¹ Under the new regime, penalties for ‘harbouring’ a female convict, at least for the poor, were heavy⁷², although laxer standards still applied for the rich. Arthur wrote of “the frequent punishments inflicted on the female prisoners” for the “crime” of adultery, but the free settlers involved generally received nothing more than loss of official favour.⁷³ Unmarried convict women who became pregnant, whatever the circumstances, were punished with a return to confinement at an institution, and early separation from their children. In these circumstances it is not surprising that pregnancies were concealed, and that the first woman executed in Van Diemen’s Land was for infanticide. Mary MacLauchlan had reputedly been talked out of any public denunciation of the father by the Chaplain, William Bedford, because he was believed to be a gentleman.⁷⁴

The impact of such measures was summarised by Arthur in a letter to the Bishop of London on 17 October 1828:

The moral habits of the inhabitants of this colony are greatly improved within the last two years and the reformation in the character of the wretched convicts especially, is so striking that I may venture to speak of it without the apprehension of forming an incorrect estimate of the advantages of transportation over every other species of punishment, where suitable arrangements are perfected for the reception and the treatment of convicts in the colony.⁷⁵

An equally noticeable change occurred in the public behaviour of the elite. As Parramore pointed out, subsequent to Arthur’s arrival it was in the “interest of all who would stand well with the Governor to seem moral.” The young evangelical observed that “the Church from being nearly empty is now so well filled that it has become necessary to add additional pews.”⁷⁶

Schools, closely linked to the Church, were another critical means of social control and change. Convict schoolmasters maintained the early haphazard, but not always ineffective, education system, but in 1821 P.A Mulgrave was appointed superintendent of schools, and a non-denominational curriculum known as the 'National' education system in Britain, was introduced.⁷⁷

Church and schools were largely uncritical supporters of state policy. Matters were, however, more complex in relation to the press. In the early and mid 1820s Van Diemen's Land enjoyed a remarkable period of press freedom, in which Andrew Bent figured prominently. As Joan Woodberry has reflected: "Bent must have been one of the few men in history... able to print the notice of his own conditional emancipation in his own newspaper."⁷⁸ Certainly this former convict's takeover of the government paper, the *Hobart Town Gazette* must rank as one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of Australian newspapers and the ongoing struggle for a free press. Parramore summarised events in a letter of 23 January 1825. The *Hobart Town Gazette* was the "organ of government "until it:

threw off the shackles of the censorship nine months ago and boldly dismissed the Government editor. The printer being in possession of the only type in the island, Government have no alternative but to submit tamely to publish the Government notices in his paper till a supply of type can be obtained from England. This printer, a simple man, is now the tool of a coterie composed of the most depraved characters... The prime mover is a Capt. Murray, a man who was a convict for bigamy, and the Atty. Genl (sic) is his very intimate friend.⁷⁹

The *Hobart Town Gazette* was eventually brought under government control, but Arthur remained in constant conflict with other budding newspaper entrepreneurs, including Henry Melville and Gilbert Robertson. The Lieutenant Governor argued that a free press was incompatible with a penal colony, and he

was not afraid to imprison proprietors to prove it. But, in comparison with later years, a lively if not always well-informed public debate persisted.

Public debate remained, however, very largely the preserve of the free, and, unlike New South Wales, former convicts had little public voice. Resistance by emancipists to the claims of free settlers did not become part of the public discourse in the way that it did in New South Wales, although this does not mean that it did not exist. In 1822, Ross, en-route to his new land at the Shannon, reported that:

My one-eyed nursemaid exhibited symptoms of a strange hilarity – she sent all the settlers in the colony to a place usually acknowledged to be much warmer than Siberia – ‘they had no business she said in Van Diemen’s Land, which she averred belong, aye, and should belong too, to the prisoners only – it was their country, and their country it should be – Ducks and green peas! For ever! Hurrah!’ As she said this her hands followed the direction that her animated eye pointed to in the joyous regions above. She had been drinking the best part of a bottle of rum.⁸⁰

Attacking economic independence: changes to land grants

In some respects, the challenge facing the colonial authorities and land owners in developing a disciplined and subservient labour force was the same as that faced by the propertied class in England in the context of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. As Harold Perkin has noted, “traditionally, English workers, according to commentators from Defoe to Arthur Young, preferred to work just long enough to obtain their customary standard of living, and then spend the rest of the week in drinking and pleasure.” The labour discipline required by the new economy was contested but successfully imposed because ultimately “the choice before the individual worker was either to work or to starve.”⁸¹ Social control in

England was thus the outcome of dependency – people's economic dignity was conditional on their deference and conformity.

But in Van Diemen's Land, the bountiful earth countered imposed dependency. If the vision of the landed gentry and colonial authorities was to be realized in Van Diemen's Land, the economic independence based on the 'free' resources of the bush had to be restricted and regulated. As Gregory Phillips has pointed out:

The availability of alternative economic options, and particularly access to natural resources such as land or fisheries, provided people with a means to resist exploitation. Loss of options weakens their power to bargain over wages and conditions of employment. Enclosure of land, forest and fisheries has often been used to force people from self sufficiency to dependence on employment for a living.⁸²

The end of small land grants (except as a reward for information, or participation in the struggle against bushrangers and Aborigines) was integral to achieving this economic dependence. Even more critical was the exclusion of the poor from much of the grassy woodlands by the late 1820s through both large land grants to the free settlers and the eviction of the poor from the crown lands surrounding them – especially from country with ready access to water.⁸³

Even in Hobart Town it became difficult to obtain free clean drinking water because of the privatization of land along the banks of the Rivulet and, by the early 1830s, the once healthy population was succumbing to the diseases rampant in English towns and cities.⁸⁴

In the new regime, smallholder survivors from the earlier era were increasingly seen by the authorities and free settlers as a 'problem'. The Land Commissioners articulated these concerns to Arthur in June 1827:

We cannot conclude this Journal without addressing your Excellency on the subject of small grants. We have so recently seen the ill effects of them, and are so convinced that they are a serious evil, tending to demoralize the population already too prone to crime, that we consider it our duty to point out the mischiefs arising from them to your Excellency... By means of these small grants the system of sheep stealing is fully organized, those stolen from the north are driven to the south and vice versa. A constant communication is kept up, and notwithstanding the frequent examples that have been made, the practice is still carried on to a woeful extent. The evil does not rest here, were all these small grants done away with and stock runs prohibited, labour could be obtained at a much more moderate price, a life of idleness in a stock hut is the summit of a ticket of leave man's ambition, there he lies, taking a view of his sheep perhaps once a day, never moving to any other occasion except from the bed to the frying pan, or when a party is made to rob some unfortunate settler of his sheep, then he is all alacrity, nothing can withstand his dexterity and eagerness in the pursuit, like a boa constrictor he makes a huge prey, and then coils himself up until a fresh opportunity occurs of devouring another victim.⁸⁵

There was also an associated ideological objection to small farmers owning their land, rather than renting it as was the norm in Britain. John Henderson complained that the "Government has raised a competition between two classes which should have been inseparable... A class of men are raised above their proper condition", which he saw as "highly prejudicial to good order."⁸⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that there was so little official concern over the dubious methods of some merchant loan-sharks who increasingly secured first mortgages, and subsequently title, over many smallholdings. These were often subsequently amalgamated into the gentry estates.

Nineteenth (and many twentieth century) historians have reproduced the view that the amalgamation of smallholdings into large estates was a positive development. West's conclusion was typical. In his view the land takeover ensured that "the estates of the greater landowners were cleared of 'lurchens' who preyed on the flocks, since the small grants of land were productive of much real mischief and little benefit."⁸⁷

The concentration of land ownership was not in itself enough, though, to control the access of the poor to the free resources of the earth. Restricting access to land that was as yet without any British title would prove a far more challenging task.

Attacking economic independence: restrictions on land access

Sorell had made some attempts to control access to ungranted lands, mainly by issuing tickets of occupation, and in October 1818 he advised that men:

now in the interior of the country without any settled abode or fixed means of obtaining a livelihood, on pretence of hunting... are vagrants in the eye of the law... the Lieutenant Governor deems it his indispensable duty to cause all suitable steps to be adopted for putting an end to a system of vagrancy, so highly detrimental to good order, and to the security of property. The Lieutenant Governor therefore enjoins the magistrates and district constables to cause any persons who may be in the neighbourhood of their several districts, or may be found traversing the country, without any fixed dwelling or occupation, to be apprehended, in order to their being dealt with according to law.⁸⁸

As with so many of Sorell's regulations, this measure had only a limited impact, and in more remote regions was widely ignored. Burn believed that before the arrival of Arthur "crown lands [were]... overrun with men free by servitude or

ticket of leave". and that Arthur was the first to render squatting illegal and effectively empower the police to impound stock on crown land.⁸⁹ Whatever the legal technicalities, it was certainly true that it was only during Arthur's regime that access to crown lands was effectively restricted.

Arthur's impounding laws, which required stock to be fenced in, were aimed at the control of wandering people as much as animals. Castles has concluded that the Impounding Act, though "ostensibly dealing with the trespassing of sheep and cattle, was deeply involved with his [Arthur's] efforts to stamp on the independent entrepreneurial activities of emancipists and convicts, as well as controlling animal thefts."⁹⁰ The laws represented a direct attack on the old economic system, which in turn underpinned the social freedom of the bush.

The Land Commissioners well understood this issue, asking in May 1828: "so long as the colony remains a common, and it is at the option of every one whether he chooses to fence or not, how can any man count upon being repaid for his labor by agriculture, or how is the breed of sheep to be improved?"⁹¹ The Commissioners praised Arthur's laws, which allowed cattle and sheep on private land to be impounded and only released with the payment of a fee, but they also documented the slow and resisted nature of the change. Around present day Swansea they noted that in June 1827:

Mr Kermode has a large tract of land, scarcely a tree to be seen. He has a pretty good stone house, a large flock of sheep – and improves and cultivates. The way in which he is infested as well as all that part of the plains by D Lords cattle and others for miles around, as we ourselves had ocular demonstration, is truly distressing. That the pound regulations require revising, every one must allow, and anxiously look for, save and except the proprietors of wild cattle. Mr Loane's brutal observation, 'That the poor devils of settlers could not put his cattle to pound as they had not a horse among them', applies to all his class of settlers, who reside in

Hobart at their ease drinking their champagne, and brandy and water, while their hordes of wild cattle are destroying the crops of the industrious settlers with impunity.⁹²

Change was coming though. By the mid 1830s the impounding regulations and practices had been so strengthened, and the change from a wild cattle economy was so marked, that this issue, too, had largely been resolved in the favour of the 'industrious' settler'.⁹³

Attacking economic independence: controls over assigned convict labour

As his hand was strengthened both by underlying economic change and the plethora of penal reform, Arthur grew increasingly intolerant of settlers who allowed convict workers to engage in independent economic activity. The Lieutenant Governor for the first time effectively attacked "the system of the thirds... the allotting of small portions of land to convicts for their own benefit and... the custom of permitting convicts to work for certain times for their own labour", through ensuring that "breaches of regulations forbidding these practices were... punished by withholding assigned servants".⁹⁴ In the *Hobart Town Gazette* of 30 September 1826 Arthur warned: "if it shall be ascertained any settler makes payment to convict servants in stock, or apportions to them land for their exclusive benefit, or suffers them to be employed in any other than his immediate service, every support and indulgence of the crown will be withdrawn." This warning was reinforced by similar proclamations on 24 October 1827 and 23 June 1828. Moreover, through the personal responsibility he took for assigning convict labour, Arthur ensured that these were not idle threats.

The confiscation of profits made by settlers who benefited from unauthorised convict exploitation of crown lands was another strategy of the Lieutenant Governor. In June 1829 a small party from the Police Department went to Port Esperance looking for an escaped convict. They were unsuccessful in this, but

Josiah Spode reported to Arthur that “they have succeeded in bringing seven [other] runaway convicts, some of whom have been out for considerable periods... these men had been harboured by two or three bad characters in and upon Brune for the purpose of cutting timber for exportation, splitting shingles etc.” Found with the convicts at “Port de France” (Port Esperance) were “between 50 and 60 beautiful logs of pencil cedar... at another place they found about 20000 shingles ready for sending to town”. Arthur ordered these products to be confiscated.⁹⁵

Despite these measures, in the late 1820s large numbers of semi-nomadic convicts and ex-convicts still wandered the crown lands making a living from the resources of the bush. But as settlement increased, and licence systems began to be enforced, those who did so without official sanction were increasingly forced on to more remote and marginal land. The exclusion of the poor from the resources of the public lands was relentless, but the process was not without its contradictions. A number of the new industries paradoxically perpetuated the old way of life. For example, those who held the rights to strip wattle bark (used to tan leather) rarely did the labour themselves – preferring to contract out to workers who received, in lieu of a wage, a set price per volume. This guaranteed high margins for the privileged licence holders, but it also represented a welcome new opportunity for independence and a life of relative freedom in the bush for ex-convicts and their families.

Attacking economic independence: controls over hunting

A profitable trade in the meat and skins of the indigenous herbivores of the grassy woodlands remained the basis of the economic independence of many Van Diemonians in frontier lands throughout the 1820s and 1830s, and controlling this had long been a priority of the authorities. As had been the case since 1804, dog-control remained the central strategy to achieving this long-sought end. Sorell's wide ranging 1821 order included the threat to withdraw

convict labour from any "stock owner [who] should allow his detached stock-men to keep hunting dogs", as "neglect of the stock and habits of vagrancy, which are dangerous to the community, must be the consequence of the stock-men being suffered to hunt."⁹⁶ Again, though, it was less regulation than economic change that proved essential to successful reform. Only when the economy was no longer dependent on independent stock-keepers and shepherds living far from supervision, could hunting kangaroo be effectively controlled. The tool used to achieve this was taxation.

The first colonial tax introduced in Van Diemen's Land (other than the excise duties that were imposed from the beginning of settlement) was an annual levy on canines. The 1830 Dog Act and its 1834 successor were in part aimed at controlling the wild dog population, but they were also intended to "to keep a check on dogs used by the back-areas fraternity in their depredations."⁹⁷ The extra cost involved meant that, as forester kangaroos became rarer, and the open dog-friendly country was increasingly privatized, the economics of hunting with these big eating carnivores became marginal.

Controlling access to salt was also important to reducing the economic independence that could be achieved through hunting, as the salting down of hunted and stolen meats was integral to profit and survival for many Van Diemonian itinerants. Curr wrote of the new restrictions on taking salt from Salt Pan Plains: "at present an order exists placing the collection of the salt under certain restrictions, as depredators were in the habit of using it to cure their stolen meat." But William Kermode wrote to Arthur that control of Salt Pan Plains remained uncertain in late 1824:

One of the salt ponds... known by the name of the little salt pond and fifty chains distant from my grant of land on the Macquarie River, is the source of great annoyance and loss to me... it draws numberless herds of cattle and sheep stealers on to my ground – It is not four weeks since I counted

at one time upwards of 700 head of cattle and on another day a short time before, my men counted upwards of 900, nearly all on my farm – I find from the constant marks of people feet, that the pond is the resort of sheep stealers.⁹⁸

Kermode's proposed solution to the problem was, predictably, to have the plains privatised in his name and, although this plan was rejected, it was not long before this land was sold off and the "numberless herds of cattle and sheep stealers" finally and permanently evicted.

Controls over the sale and cost of labour

The high price of labour (compared with Britain), was seen as a major problem by the authorities and free settlers well into the 1830s. This was seen to have both economic and social implications. Not only did it raise production costs and reduce profits, but workers who could pick and choose employers, and earn a living with less than full time labour, were seen to be a threat to social order.

The labour shortage reached critical proportions in 1818. Sorell confirmed the wages to be paid to convicts (first set in December 1816) – ten pounds per annum for a man and seven pounds per annum to women, including rations and slops – and noted that "frequent disputes and misunderstandings" had "arisen between assigned servants and their employers, with respect to the rate of wages or compensation for their own time."⁹⁹ The Lieutenant Governor urged "the inhabitants and settlers to resist all exorbitant demands for labour" and punished 11 convicts for "illegally associating and combining themselves for the purpose of raising their wages", with one of them receiving additional punishment for threatening a man working for the "established price of wages."¹⁰⁰ The most effective stratagem to bring down the price of labour was, however, to increase supply, and Sorell asked Macquarie to urgently send more convicts to Van

Diemen's Land. The request was complied with, and Sorell wrote in October 1818 that:

It is a source of sincere gratification to the Lieutenant Governor that the large influx of people which His Excellency the Governor in Chief has been pleased to direct to this settlement during the last 12 months has conduced materially to the advancement and improvement of the colony, in affording the means of increased cultivation, of reducing the price of labour, and in generally bettering the condition of the settlers."¹⁰¹

But labour shortages persisted and in January 1822 Sorell set out a more detailed schedule of wages to be paid for various tasks, linking payments explicitly to output. Sorell warned that ticket of leavers:

making an exorbitant demand for harvest labour, and refusing to accept of work at a just and reasonable rate of payment, will be brought forward and will forfeit the indulgence of a ticket of leave. The settlers are earnestly recommended to reject every demand for harvest wages beyond what is just and reasonable; and to act in unison with each other in preventing the imposition... by reporting to the nearest magistrate or district constable any ticket of leave man who shall tender his labour and who shall refuse to work for equitable payment.¹⁰²

Despite this regulation, "actual charges were in the most moderate cases 50 per cent beyond the rates in the scale", wrote Edward Curr, while "in some... the actual charges are generally twice and thrice the rates established in that order."¹⁰³ Guy was another free settler who complained about the cost of labour: "you cannot get a good servant under fifty pounds a year or 5/- a day and their board." The Land Commissioners were still complaining in 1828:

What a dreadful state of things to see a parcel of fellows transported for their crimes living luxuriously upon the best of bread, meat, tea, sugar &c &c, and not content with such profusion refuse to work unless they obtain such wages as will ensure them rum, brandy and wine to regale themselves with... While their honest countrymen at home are dragging on a miserable existence.¹⁰⁴

But the Commissioners acknowledged that change was evident: "wages certainly have fallen within this short time at least fifty percent and from the number of seven years men daily becoming free, and the tickets of leave granted to men of good conduct, work will be performed at a much lower rate still."¹⁰⁵ In early 1829, the *Colonial Times* reported that:

the great decrease in the annual payment of wages is really amazing... Formerly it was impossible to employ a free farm servant under 40 or 50 pounds per annum, with provisions. Now mark the contrast. There are many who are now glad to be employed for their food and 10 pounds a year.¹⁰⁶

This was still too high for some. Henderson claimed that though the full cost of employing a man in England in 1829-30 was only seven pounds per annum, it remained much higher in Van Diemen's Land.¹⁰⁷

There is little doubt, however, that, although skilled workers and reliable shepherds still attracted a healthy premium on comparative wage rates in Britain,¹⁰⁸ the long term trend was down, as demand for labour tapered off and supply continued to increase. As wages fell the significance of the resources of the bush and the sea for maintaining economic independence through the supply of 'free' food, clothing, shelter and heating, and the provision of supplementary income, became more pronounced. Increasingly it was only the difficult-to-privatize bounty of the land itself that defended Van Diemonian workers against

the level of subject dependency and unquestioned subservience sought by their masters and the colonial and imperial governments.

Changes to poor relief

As in Britain, where the Poor Laws were radically reformed in the early 1830s, social control in Van Diemen's Land was increasingly seen to require a harsher and more restrictive system of charity relief. The comparatively generous systems of assistance that prevailed before 1820, when the aged and infirm were simply placed on the Government Store, were replaced by more limited aid conditional on behaviour.

In her comprehensive history of social welfare provision in Tasmania, *Poverty is Not a Crime*, Joan Brown documents the changes and also describes the significant differences that emerged between New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land after 1825. In the former relief was increasingly administered by charities, but in Van Diemen's Land, where the non government sector was much smaller, the government continued to be the dominate provider.¹⁰⁹ People often petitioned the Governor directly – especially single mothers struggling to feed their children. One of these women stands out. Maria Harrington's appeal to Arthur in 1835 was based on her Aboriginality:

I am a native born some part of my existence having sprung from the Aboriginal possessors of the soil, I have an infant depending upon me for support in which I have great difficulty to obtain. I am desirous of providing better for my child, and pray that Your Excellency will take into your humane consideration my birth and the right my forefathers had to the land, and in such humanity be pleased to grant me an order to locate a piece of land as in Your Excellency's wisdom shall seem meet.

Less unusual was that Maria's petition was rejected, with the Police Magistrate at Launceston condemning her to poverty with his judgement that: "this applicant is a very immoral character, now living with a man to whom she is not married, and undeserving any indulgence."¹¹⁰ The Lieutenant Governor's judgements left little room for sentiment. In May 1833 it was recommended to Arthur that the destitute whistleblower of the Risdon massacre, the former stock-keeper/hunter, Edward White, should be allowed rations as the colony's oldest resident, but this was overturned: "unless he is in such a state as to be admitted into the invalid establishment".¹¹¹

The largest single social welfare institution established by the Government in the late 1820s also had explicit social control objectives. Arthur, believing that "the colony is overrun with illegitimate children... born to no certain provision of inheritance but the vices of their parents and their consequent misery", proposed the establishment of an Orphan School in 1825, arguing that it should be "a school of industry, where labour as well as learning is taught."¹¹² By 1827 the facility was operational, and in 1832-33 moved to a purpose-built site next to the new church of St Johns, New Town. Boys were resident in a dormitory built adjoining one side of the church, girls on the other – sleeping in hammocks with about eighty children in each dorm. Only a small minority of the residents of the orphan school were actually orphans, and the institution is best conceptualised as Van Diemen's Land first children's home rather than an 'Orphan School'. This was where the 'illegitimate' children of convicts and the poor were removed, as well as the children of parents unable to care for their children because of illness, disability or poverty. Many Aboriginal children were also placed at the home. While selection criteria were subject to frequent review because of growing demand, Burn's summary in 1840 of the client population as comprising "the Aboriginal native, the illegitimate offspring of the wretched female convict, and the children of the reduced and bankrupt settler" remained broadly true.¹¹³ Children saw little of their parents, as the latter were regarded as a bad influence, one likely to undermine the rigorous discipline regime designed to mould the

children into labourers and domestic servants. The Committee of Management recorded on 15 May 1828 that "the following days be publicly advertised for parents seeing their children – the first Monday in the month of January, April, July and October from eleven till two in the presence of the master or matron."¹¹⁴ At the age of fourteen children were apprenticed out and forced to work for no money until they reached the age of eighteen. In the intervening years they were at the mercy of their masters, and little action was taken to address the obvious potential for various forms of abuse.¹¹⁵

The other main Government social welfare institutions were those established to accommodate pauper and invalid convicts and former convicts in what were Van Diemonian equivalents of work houses. They included the facilities at New Norfolk (from the mid 1830s also the hospital for the mentally ill and intellectually disabled) and Impression Bay on the Tasman Peninsular.

Economic reform

If Van Diemen's Land was to be fully integrated into the imperial economy and the chronic shortage of capital overcome, the barter economy and reliance on the 'holey' Spanish dollar needed to be replaced by a financial market based on imperial currency and a conventional banking sector. The *Hobart Town Gazette* had reported on what was meant to be the abolition of all "colonial currency" on 18 January 1817 but, as with so much regulation in this era, it was ignored. Ross documented how ordinary people as late as 1822 were rejecting English money as payment for their labour, one telling him "that a pillar dollar of the then oppressed country of Spain was the only coin he approved of."¹¹⁶ Arthur finally achieved the introduction of sterling, with the key to his success being the establishment of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land in 1823.¹¹⁷

The shortage of capital was eased further in April 1830 when English usury laws were abolished and replaced by a local Usury Act. The maximum legal English

interest rate of 10 per cent was removed in Van Diemen's Land, and the speculative capital market took off.¹¹⁸ Burn believed that this led to the "exorbitant profits of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land", and by 1839 four other banks were operating, all with dividend returns of 13 to 14 per cent.¹¹⁹

Despite the abolition of controls over capital, this was not a laissez-faire liberal economic reform, and regulations restricting the freedom of labour were actually considerably tightened (ensuring that former convicts progressively lost rights to leave jobs with poor pay or conditions and even to negotiate over these). Castles argues that the series of acts and regulations in the 1830s and beyond sought to "institute Napoleonic-style centralized administration processes to control the independent men of the 'convict class' in the community."¹²⁰ Most of these regulations were codified in the late 1830s, and further tightened in subsequent decades.

Aborigines

When the Methodist missionary, William Horton, reported on his Van Diemen's Land experience to the London Missionary Committee in 1822, he wrote of how safe it had been to journey through the British occupied districts of Van Diemen's Land: "in travelling no danger is to be apprehended from wild beasts... nor from the Aborigines... nor from serpents."¹²¹ In 1822, the Van Diemen's Land bush remained a hospitable refuge, and not only for itinerant preachers. For current and former convicts it was a safe haven from the brutality, subservience and economic dependence that increasingly characterised life in the settlements and freehold estates. Yet, only six years later, the prospect of a solo unarmed missionary or convict wandering the bush of Van Diemen's Land was an unlikely one. Almost all travellers, including Van Diemonian bushmen, by then travelled in well armed groups, and with good reason. The long period of comparative peace with the owners and defenders of the land had ended. The accelerating

Chapter Seven

free settler land grab for exclusive possession of the best hunting grounds of the island was being resisted by the Aborigines. Van Diemen's Land was at war.

Endnotes: Chapter Seven

¹ Arthur insisted on the administrative separation of Van Diemen's Land from New South Wales before he took up his appointment and pursued this matter vigorously prior to leaving London. It was an issue on which the merchants and leading citizens had also petitioned, which Bigge had recommended, and only the slowness of the bureaucratic machinations of Whitehall had so long delayed. Van Diemen's Land formally became a separate colony on 3 December 1825 and the Legislative Council, comprising nominated officials and citizens, was then established. Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1983) 140.

² Not all these measures were new, but many regulations, such as that mandating a weekly muster, had lapsed in many districts or had been only poorly enforced.

³ Samuel Guy letter to Thomas Guy, 4 August 1823, AOT NS 381.

⁴ For example, Silvester Lush, a *Calcutta* convict who had a 30 acre land grant at Black Snake, a few miles north of Hobart Town, was charged with receiving 36 sheep in 1824, and sentenced to 14 years at Macquarie Harbour. Eustace Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain: A Collection of Choice Petitions, Memorials, and Letters of Protest and Request from the Convict Colony of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1977) 79-80.

⁵ Given in full as Appendix 1 in Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* (Hobart: Platypus publications, 1967) 153-61.

⁶ *Ibid.* 154-5.

⁷ It was not until January 1827 that Arthur was able to report that the prisoners are now "continually mustered...the most remote stock-keepers only excepted." Arthur to Bathurst 7 January 1827, *HRA* 3/5, 480.

⁸ Arthur to Bathurst 11 August 1825, *HRA* 3/4, 318-9.

⁹ Arthur to Bathurst 23 March 1827, *HRA* 3/5, 621.

¹⁰ Arthur to Bathurst 15 August 1824, *HRA* 3/4.

¹¹ The military, which Arthur had considered "quite insufficient for protection or tranquillity", was reinforced to the Lieutenant Governor's satisfaction during 1826 to a full regiment. The 40th Regiment had 607 soldiers in the rank and file. Arthur to Bathurst 24 March 1827, *HRA* 3/6, 691 - 706.

¹² Arthur to Horton 14 September 1825, *HRA* 3/4, 366-371.

¹³ Arthur to Bathurst 23 March 1827, *HRA* 3/5, 624.

¹⁴ Arthur to Bathurst 7 January 1827, *HRA* 3/5, 480.

¹⁵ Eustace FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania: Letters, Petitions and Other Manuscripts Relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1980) 115.

¹⁶ K. R. Von Stieglitz, *Mathew Brady: Van Diemen's Land Bushranger* (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 1964) 4-10.

¹⁷ As Maxwell-Stewart has conceptualised it, most bushrangers after 1820 were products of "push factors" rather than pulled into rebellion by the lure "of clandestine economic opportunities" as they had been in the earlier period. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" (Ph.D. thesis University of Edinburgh, 1990) 204.

¹⁸ The *Hobart Town Gazette* on 14 October 1826 called for measures to "interrupt that silent understanding which so barefacedly subsists between these abominable wretches... and the distant stock-keepers".

¹⁹ Connolly to Bishop Poynter in London 19 April 1826, cited in W.T. Southerwood, "New Light on the Foundation of Australian Catholicism," *Australasian Catholic Record* 61, no. 2 (1984) 171.

²⁰ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 143.

²¹ Meredith to Kerr, 25 October 1825, Meredith papers AOT NS 123/15.

²² Kerr to Meredith, 23 October 1825, Meredith papers, AOT NS 123/1.

²³ Jack Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" (Unpublished manuscript accessible at the State Library of Tasmania) no page numbers.

²⁴ Patricia Clarke and Dale Spender, *Life Line: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788-1840* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992) 139.

²⁵ Lois Nyman, *The East Coasters: The Early Pioneering History of the East Coast of Tasmania* (Launceston, Tas.: Regal Publications, 1990) 59-60.

²⁶ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 210-11.

²⁷ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 144.

²⁸ Connolly to Bishop Poynter 19 April 1826, cited in Southerwood, "New Light on the Foundation of Australian Catholicism," 101.

²⁹ Arthur to Bathurst 21 June 1826, *HRA* 3/5 294.

³⁰ James Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Melbourne: Marsh Walsh Publishing, 1975) 6.

³¹ *Hobart Town Gazette*, November 1818.

³² Alex Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 38, no. 3&4 (1991) 114.

³³ For example, John McKay's gibbeted body was on public display for four months. Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 186.

³⁴ By the late 1700s in England, 222 crimes were punishable by death including robbing a rabbit warren, cutting down a tree, or stealing five shillings from a shop. But five laws passed in 1823

exempted about 100 crimes from this list, and further reforms between 1832-7 increased the number of exemptions further again.

³⁵ Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain* 125.

³⁶ In 1832 the breakdown was as follows:

Class 1 – ten per cent – ticket of leave

Class 2 – over fifty per cent – assigned servants

Class 3/4 – about one sixth – convicts assigned to public works and those in road gangs

Class 5 – about five per cent – chain gang

Class 6/7 – about five per cent – repeat offenders in penal institutions, hard labour and those working in chains.

Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol. 1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 144.

³⁷ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 99-100.

³⁸ George Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler October 6 1800-December 13 1882* (n.p. [California]: C & H Reproductions, 1992) 10.

³⁹ Peter Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Volume 1 1820-1832* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985) 486.

⁴⁰ Letter 31 August 1826, Meredith Papers, AOT, NSA 123/1. The identity of the sender is unfortunately not clear.

⁴¹ The building of the causeway across the Derwent River at Bridgewater commenced at the end of 1829 and involved 400-500 workers, but even by the time Arthur left in 1836 it was not complete, and it was not until 1849 that the river was bridged. Chapman, ed., *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes Volume 1 1820-1832* 486.

⁴² *Ibid.* 487.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 485-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 486.

⁴⁵ W.D. Forsyth, *Governor Arthur's Convict System: Van Diemen's Land, 1824-36: A Study in Colonization* (Sydney: Sydney University Press., 1970) 95.

⁴⁶ Arthur to Bathurst 21 June 1826, *HRA* 3/5 294.

⁴⁷ AOT CSO 1/73/1559; Fitzsymonds *Mortmain* 28.

⁴⁸ Arthur to Goderich 2 November 1827, *HRA* 3/6 316-318.

⁴⁹ It could be argued that Macquarie Harbour had something of the character of the old Van Diemonian order – its horror could be random in its impact, and was sometimes moderated by social and environmental factors – while Port Arthur represented the systematic application of brutal regulation consistent with the new regime.

⁵⁰ Arthur to Bathurst 24 March 1827, *HRA* 3/6 691-706.

⁵¹ John Broxup (the author of one of the rare convict autobiographies) wrote that he enlisted at the age of 15 in 1801, and served for the next 16 years, five years as a soldier and then 11 years on men of war, before "I was paid off and received no benefit." Broxup was transported for petty crime, but fled from the chain gang of Van Diemen's Land, "meaning rather to take my chance with the kangaroo in the woods than submit to the cruel usage I was subjected to." But other convict-soldiers found a measure of freedom in renewed service to the crown, as members of the field police. John Broxup, *Life of John Broxup: Late Convict of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivans Cove, 1973) 5-8, 15.

⁵² Arthur to Bathurst 15 August 1824, *HRA* 3/4 161-3.

⁵³ Arthur to Bathurst 24 March 1827, *HRA* 3/6 691 -706.

⁵⁴ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 160.

⁵⁵ B.A. Holderness, *Pre-Industrial England* (London: J.M Dent, 1976) 50.

⁵⁶ Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 37.

⁵⁷ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 179-80.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 218-9.

⁵⁹ Gillian Winter, "Under My Own Immediate Observation: Jane Roberts' Visit to Hobart Town in 1830," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 48, no. 3A (2001) 187-8.

⁶⁰ Maxwell-Stewart, "The Bushrangers and the Convict System of Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1846" 119. An example of the assertive protests convicts could take when denied their ration is given by Adam Amos in a diary entry in 1822: "my servant Thos. Clare who hath been with me since May 4th has shown grate dissatisfaction and been very insolent for several weeks, went off last Tuesday to go to Hobart Town to complain of want of victuals we having had no bread for several days, owing to the vessel not having arrived as we expected and no one in the settlement has any.... Clare went off again on Friday night and returned again this evening as the ship is now come into port. I reprimanded him for going and coming as he thought fitt he is one of the most hardened incorrigible scoundrels ever I met with in my life I wish from my hart I were shott of him [sic]". *Reports on the Historical Manuscripts of Tasmania: Numbers 1-7*, (Hobart: Department of History University of Tasmania, 1964) 4.

⁶¹ Richard Dillingham letter 29 September 1836, AOT NS 157/1.

⁶² Letter 11 August 1829 in Clarke, *Life Line: Australian Women's Letters and Diaries 1788-1840* 154-5.

⁶³ M.C.I. Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1953) 163.

⁶⁴ Anne McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-28* (Hobart: University of Tasmania in conjunction with the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1962) 91.

⁶⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1977) 61.

⁶⁶ The first Catholic priest in Van Diemen's Land was one of the French explorers, Father Ventenat, who danced hand in hand with Aborigines at Recherche Bay in September 1791. The first to live in Van Diemen's Land was a convict, Father James Harold. He was sent from New South Wales in 1807, and is likely to have had a clandestine ministry. But the first recorded Catholic mass was taken by Father Jeremiah O'Flynn, an Irish Cistercian who passed through Van Diemen's Land in October 1817. Sorell, with whom he dined, was keen for him to stay, although Macquarie was not so impressed and later had him deported. W.T. Southerwood, *Catholics in British Colonies: Planting a Faith Where No Sun Sets – Islands and Dependencies of Britain to 1900* (London: Minerva Press, 1998) 278-9.

⁶⁷ James Boyce, "The Catholic Church and State in Australia from 1800 to 1836," in *unpublished paper written for Department of History, University of Tasmania* (1994); Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 124-6.

⁶⁸ Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2000) 53.

⁶⁹ Letter August 1854, AOT NS 157/2

⁷⁰ To be fair to Knopwood, when the Methodist missionary Benjamin Carvaso was in Hobart Town in 1820, his journal shows that Knopwood was very cooperative. R. D. Pretyman, *A Chronicle of Methodism in Van Diemen's Land: 1820-1840* (Melbourne: Aldersgate Press, 1970) 8,11.

⁷¹ D. C. Shelton, ed., *The Parramore Letters: Letters from William Thomas Parramore, Sometime Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor Arthur of Van Diemen's Land, to Thirza Cropper, His Fiancée in Europe and England, the Majority from 1823-1825* (Epping, NSW: D. and C. Shelton, 1993) 53-4.

⁷² For example, John Butler, a "man of colour" and sailor who had been shipwrecked off Maria Island, petitioned Arthur from gaol on 24 January 1832. He was unable to pay a twenty pound penalty received for lodging in a house where a "female assigned servant" was found, with "no connection whatsoever" with him "as a foreigner and a stranger". Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain* 164.

⁷³ FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania* 115. In this memo Arthur acknowledged the double moral standard by rejecting an applicant for the post of district constable "as he is living in adultery and it would therefore be impossible (looking to the frequent punishments inflicted on the female prisoners for this crime) to employ him."

⁷⁴ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 184.

⁷⁵ Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain*, 200.

⁷⁶ Shelton, *The Parramore Letters* 53.

⁷⁷ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 121.

⁷⁸ Joan Woodberry, "Andrew Bent and the Proprietorship of the Hobart Town Gazette: An Examination of Some New Letters," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 14, no. 2 (1967) 50.

⁷⁹ Shelton, *The Parramore Letters* 65. The Attorney General, Joseph Gellibrand, played a central role in the clique of influential settlers opposing Arthur. He was soon dismissed by the Lieutenant Governor.

⁸⁰ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 52-3.

⁸¹ Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* 130.

⁸² Gregory Phillips, "Ecologically Sustainable Fisheries: Society, Politics, Biology, and Economics in Fisheries" (Master of Environmental Studies thesis, University of Tasmania, 1998) 24.

⁸³ Curr publicized this advantage to new settlers, writing in his settler guide that while the land grant of a couple of thousand acres may not seem unusually large, it "is a considerable point gained, when a settler has chosen his grant of land in such a situation as shall command an extensive run of country in the rear, not likely to be speedily located on account of its distance from fresh water, as few persons have lands so fertile or so extensive as to produce food sufficient for the stock. This is easily effected at present, while almost all locations are chosen with their fronts upon a stream of water." Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 54.

⁸⁴ The pollution of the water supply got progressively worse, so that by January 1850 Dr Robert Officer wrote to the Colonial Secretary bringing attention to "the numerous and disgusting nuisances which now abound in every part [of Hobart Town]... and which I feel assured are the chief causes of the severe sickness which has so long prevailed in this community. In the foremost rank of them stand the Government Slaughter House and the Town Rivulet, which are now literally one mass of disgusting putrescence." Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain* 229.

⁸⁵ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 63-4.

⁸⁶ John Henderson, *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1965) 49.

⁸⁷ John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971) 107.

⁸⁸ *Hobart Town Gazette* 3 October 1818.

⁸⁹ David Bum, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973) 10-11.

⁹⁰ Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law" 110-11.

⁹¹ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 84.

⁹² *Ibid.* 57.

⁹³ For example, on 14 January 1835, Ellen Viveash noted in a letter that they were going to get rid of all their cattle, except working bullocks, "as they are constantly getting into someones crops". Pamela Statham, *The Tanner Letters: A Pioneer Saga of Swan River & Tasmania, 1831-1845* (Nedlands, WA: University Of Western Australia Press, 1981) 121. In 1840 David Bum concluded

that: "the enclosing and sub-dividing of estates, together with numerous improvements in the breed and management, have rendered cattle-hunting nearly an obsolete story; the quiet Devon, Suffolk, Hereford, Fife, Ayresshire or Durham cow having superseded the half buffalo breed of earlier date." Bum, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 109.

⁹⁴ Forsyth, *Governor Arthur's Convict System* 94.

⁹⁵ AOT CSO 1/397/9004 in FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania* 172.

⁹⁶ Government Order of June 30 1821, listed in full in Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 154.

⁹⁷ Levy, *Governor George Arthur: A Colonial Benevolent Despot* 271.

⁹⁸ Kermode to Arthur 18 November 1824, in FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania* 44.

⁹⁹ *Hobart Town Gazette* 28 March 1818.

¹⁰⁰ Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law" 110.

¹⁰¹ *Hobart Town Gazette* 10 October 1818.

¹⁰² Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land* 161-3.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 113.

¹⁰⁴ McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land* 88.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Colonial Times* 13 February 1829, cited in R. M. Hartwell, *The Economic Development of Van Diemen's Land, 1820-1850* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1954) 86-7.

¹⁰⁷ Henderson, *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* 6.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Dillingham, a convict, wrote home to his parents on 29 September 1836 that: "a tradesman of any kind will get six to seven shillings per day and a farming man will get a dollar per day which is 4s 4d. On 19 November 1837 he informed them that "shepherds in this colony get from 30 to 40 pounds per annum and their board." AOT NS 157/1.

¹⁰⁹ Joan Brown, *Poverty Is Not a Crime* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1972) 11-14.

¹¹⁰ AOT CSO 1/789/16844 in Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain* 160.

¹¹¹ FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania* 228-9.

¹¹² Joyce Purtscher, "Children in Queens Orphanage Hobart Town 1828-1863", Kings and Queens Orphan Schools records, AOT SWD 28.

¹¹³ Bum, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 31.

¹¹⁴ Kings and Queens Orphan Schools records AOT SWD 24.

¹¹⁵ In 1867 a Royal Commission was held into the institution. Its findings were damning, the school being likened more to a prison than a benevolent institution. Joyce Purtscher, "Children in Queens Orphanage Hobart Town 1828-1863", Kings and Queens Orphan Schools records, AOT SWD 28.

¹¹⁶ Ross, *The Settler in Van Diemen's Land* 9.

¹¹⁷ Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol.1. Van Diemen's Land from the Earliest Times to 1855* 259.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Bum, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land* 30.

¹²⁰ Castles, "The Van Diemonian Spirit and the Law" 110-11.

¹²¹ Pretyman, *A Chronicle of Methodism in Van Diemen's Land: 1820-1840* 28.

Chapter Eight: Conflict with the Aborigines 1820 – 1832

Since permanent European settlement began in 1803, Van Diemen's Land had never known peace. Despite the localized negotiations that accompanied the first wave of British occupation of the midlands from 1808 to 1818, sporadic fighting continued. There was never a comprehensive peace, only understandings reached between Aborigines and individuals and small groups of whites that, although leading to some degree of shared land use, guaranteed no accord. Nevertheless, substantial constraints upon the power of the first wave of convict and ex-convict hunters and stockmen, and the non-exclusive nature of their land ambitions, undoubtedly limited conflict. James Dixon's narrative of his 1820 voyage described the Aborigines as "perfectly harmless".¹ Godwin wrote in his 1823 guide to Van Diemen's Land that Aborigines are "so very few in number and so timorous, that they need hardly be mentioned"². Evans observed that "two persons armed with muskets may traverse the island from one extremity to the other with perfect safety."³ In 1824 the *Hobart Town Gazette* concluded that "perhaps, taken collectively, the sable natives of this colony are the most peaceful creatures in the world."⁴

But the diversity and complexity of relations is not captured by the general overviews presented above. James Kelly informed Commissioner Bigge in May 1820 that he had never cultivated his 100 acre land grant on North Bruny Island because: "the natives are hostile; chiefly consisting of those that have been driven from the coasts of North West Bay and the banks of the Huon, and it would not be safe to begin to cultivate unless there was a sufficient number for protection."⁵ On the east coast, George Meredith informed Sorell in June 1822 that the settlers had initially built their huts "*contiguous to each other* without reference to the precise grants", in part as "protection against the natives, who were represented as numerous and likely to give us interruption on our first arrival."⁶ Why, too, if it is held that peace prevailed in the early 1820s, were so many Aborigines being held in Hobart Town gaol? A Wesleyan missionary "saw

several of the natives, men, women and children" at the penitentiary, "and truly these creatures are wretched indeed."⁷

Even before 1824, then, this was a highly charged, sometimes violent, cultural encounter. However it was not war, and for the majority of free settlers, as with the Government, the Aborigines were of little concern.

The transition to war

Tasmanian historians since Henry Melville have dated the beginning of sustained Aboriginal resistance to the year 1824, when there occurs a marked increase in documented hostilities.⁸ There is also some evidence that the Aborigines also dated the end of their old way of life, if not as precisely as this, at least to a general period in the early 1820s. In several instances the Aborigines travelling with George Augustus Robinson on his extended conciliation mission⁹ referred to nations and leaders in the context of either 1820 or 1826, with an emphasis on the changes that had occurred in the interim. Plomley notes that the significance of this is not known,¹⁰ but it would seem likely that '1820' is the Aboriginal estimate of how life was before the radical disruption, movement and breakdown in social, cultural and political life associated with dispossession and widespread fighting; and '1826' was the shorthand for the beginning of the new order associated with a harried life of resistance.

Perhaps the last large-scale (and at the time very surprising) visit of over 60 Aborigines to Hobart Town in November 1824 also needs to be seen in this context. Was this a final embassy to the increasingly intrusive invaders? William Parramore documented the event:

On the 10th of November we were visited by a tribe of 66 Natives... I met... on the Sunday after the 10th while walking from Church with Mrs. Bedford, 3 of them with great long coats, but nor a particle of covering

before... The Lt.Gov. on their arrival had them immediately provided with food and old clothes – and the second night they were conducted to the road men's hut four miles from town... The third day they were rather sullen and refused to sing the Kangaroo song, and moved off early the next morning.¹¹

The Aboriginal visit was in the first year of Lieutenant Governor George Arthur's term of office. Given Arthur's evangelical Christian conversion in 1811 and his record of support for indigenous people as Governor of Honduras, such a large and unexpected visit from the Aborigines to the main British settlement so early in his tenure might have been expected to be seen as a heaven-sent opportunity. Yet the Aborigines were quickly removed from the town and taken to a convict hut four miles away. This blatantly unfriendly and undiplomatic move was probably why they soon moved off, never to return in such numbers. The possibility that the Aborigines had grievances to discuss does not seem to have even been considered by Arthur (or later historians). Perhaps Arthur belatedly realized his mistake, as within a few days he had called a public meeting to discuss founding an "institution for the civilization and instruction of the Aborigines of the Island" which involved the Anglican Chaplain, William Bedford, and the Wesleyan Missionary, Ralph Mansfield. This meeting, on 15 November 1824, was also described by Parramore: "it was proposed to institute a school for the education of the natives' children and to grant 2000 acres of land to be cultivated by the adults if they can be brought to any sense of the benefits of a settled life."¹² The rules and regulations were drawn up, but the scheme was forgotten, and another attempt to found a native institution by Arthur in 1825 also failed. Parramore described the active opposition of some settlers, and Lyndall Ryan notes that the clergy do not seem to have been sufficiently interested to sustain it.¹³ As Mansfield informed the Missionary Society in London in June 1825, this was undoubtedly in part because "the formidable ravages of a banditti of convicts" had by then "completely absorbed the public attention."¹⁴

Aborigines also sought to visit Launceston in this period of increasing tension and conflict. Two months after the Hobart Town embassy, a group of Aborigines were fired upon as they attempted to approach the second centre of British settlement.¹⁵ The 160 Aborigines reported at Birch's Bay in the D'Entrecasteux Channel in 1825 (where there was a government logging station) were given better treatment – rugs, blankets and bread were reportedly provided – but there can be little doubt that, overall, relations were rapidly deteriorating.¹⁶ This was most clearly evident in the heartland of the cultural encounter, the grassy woodlands.

Changes in British Land use: the demand for exclusivity

The new free settler land claimants rapidly moving in to Aboriginal hunting grounds were generally dismissive of established claims, in contrast to the shared land use possible under the first wave of British occupation. The ideological justification of exclusivity relied on the relatively new concept of absolute rights over privately owned land that had underpinned the mass enclosure of common land in England. Few defended the traditional understanding that land title did not extinguish long-established customary rights. For most land owners, a legal grant meant that the rights of other land users, including the Aborigines, had been extinguished, and they had a right to defend their 'private property' whenever this was threatened by Aboriginal land use. Most would have agreed with Curr's statement to the Aborigines Committee: "the Crown sells us lands, and is therefore bound to make good our titles and possessions against previous occupants and claimants."¹⁷

To begin with Aborigines were usually permitted to visit their grassy woodland hunting grounds after free settlers had claimed ownership of them, but they were effectively prevented from accessing the resources which they provided. In contrast to the first wave of British settlement, the free settlers built permanent homes, planted crops (at least for the estate's use) and gardens, and imported

valuable stock. Aboriginal land management and hunting practices, which involved both dogs and, above all, fire, posed a direct threat to this investment. The continued possibility of mutual land use and co-existence in this context required adaptations and compromises that very few free settlers were prepared to contemplate. Moreover, the new immigrants had far greater power through their assigned convicts, paid workers, arms and capital to enforce exclusionary claims. The difference between the new settlers' and earlier white occupants' responses to Aborigines was not, then, primarily a question of character, but a consequence of the use of the land and a change in the balance of power at the frontier – although there were a few free settlers of compassion and integrity who seem to have welcomed Aboriginal visits, despite the potential economic cost of this.

Not surprisingly, it took some time for Aborigines accustomed to the co-existence associated with the first wave of British settlement to realize the extent of the change. According to his diary, Aborigines visited J.C Sutherland in March 1824 (five months after he had settled on his land grant), expecting to receive the customary payments from hunter-stockmen, but they were "forthwith ordered away". On 7 December 1824, Sutherland "received a visit of 31 natives" who were also "instantly ordered away". While Sutherland gave no information about how he achieved such a summary dismissal, it is unlikely that it could have been achieved without at least a show of force. Perhaps early conflict was only averted by a more cooperative neighbour. Sutherland reports that the Aborigines "went to Gatenby's where they had some bread." Only when the boss was away in May 1824 were more friendly relations promoted – it was presumably Sutherland's convict servants who, he reports, provided "six native females" with bread in his absence.¹⁸

The diary of one of the most respected east coast settlers, Adam Amos, provides another testimony of how visits by Aborigines were increasingly perceived. On 3 May 1823, Amos reported that:

My house was surrounded by natives, one a woman came to the door. I made signs for her to go away – she did and in a short time about six made their appearance amongst the brush in the river close to my hut. I fired small shot at about 50 yards distance they run off. I fired another piece loaded with ball over their head to let them know I had more pieces than one – I durst not leave the house as none of my oldest sons were at home nor my servant man... the natives made no more appearance.¹⁹

On 13 December 1823, when the Aborigines attempted to burn the bush, Amos sent his, "oldest son to shoot them again but missed by minutes". The following day, when "the natives who has been of late in the woods near my hut... set the grass on fire near my farm", Amos "thought it prudent to frighten them, having heard that they had thrattened to Mr Talbot's to burn my corn when circumstances gave them opportunity [*sic*]". Amos reported that he "sent my eldest son who was joined by two of Mr Meredith's men who fired on them and wounded one", and that "the mob, who appeared numerous, fled over the hill" where they were pursued "for some time", the men eventually returning "after dark with a quantity of spears." By 1824 east coast settlers forcibly evicted Aborigines from the Oyster Bay district whenever they were seen, despite this area being one of Van Diemen's Land most important regional food sources and seasonal gathering places. For example, on 18 January 1824, Amos reported:

I had a hunt after the natives on Friday they appeared above my plain. The boys and me set after them, when we came up to their fires they were gone across the river. We followed them for two hours and found them on a marsh about two miles from my farm on the east side. About 30 men. We fired they run away and left their dogs and spears which we destroy and brought some of them home and two dogs.

On 23 May 1824 Amos was again "after natives", and on 12 July 1824 he recorded that "my son James returned from hunting the blacks without ever seeing them."²⁰

It is not surprising that the Aborigines retaliated and the conflict rapidly escalated. Amos reported that one of Meredith's stockmen was killed on 6 June 1824 and on 26 July 1824 Meredith informed Arthur that he had distributed arms "amongst our various stock-men."²¹ Meredith made it quite clear to Arthur that he was prepared to kill Aborigines until a military force was stationed on the east coast,²² but the Lieutenant Governor seems to have been unwilling or unable to protest against this criminal behaviour towards what were, under British law, fellow British subjects. Indeed, no one in Van Diemen's Land was ever prosecuted for killing an Aborigine, despite the recent assertive claim in Keith Windschuttle's *Fabrication of Aboriginal History* to the contrary.²³ In fact, Arthur seemed sympathetic to the settlers' position, despite having many other differences with Meredith. He informed Bathurst, as part of a call for military reinforcements, that "the fears of the settlers have been much, and certainly justly excited, by the late unusual hostile proceedings of the natives, who have committed several murders."²⁴

The increasing conflict was not confined to the east coast. Wallace wrote from Port Dalrymple in September 1825 that: "we are very often troubled by the Aborigines of the colony in the bush and in the different townships. They travel in gangs of 300 to 200."²⁵

Most of the blame for the increase in hostility was initially blamed on Musquito. Following his pivotal role in the capture of Howe, Musquito had failed to receive his promised return to New South Wales and gradually resumed the active resistance to the British that he had begun in his New South Wales homeland. By 1823-24, he was a central figure in the conflict, especially in southern and eastern regions of the island. He was eventually tracked down and wounded at

Grindstone Bay by an Aboriginal youth called Teague, then living with the surgeon Edward Luttrell.²⁶ Musquito and a Tasmanian Aborigine known to the British as Black Jack were then taken to Hobart, where both were tried and convicted of murder, and hanged on 25 February 1825. The trial was widely criticized because the defendants were unable to testify due to their lack of knowledge of Christian teaching. Perhaps partly because of this, they were the last Aborigines to be hanged – Aboriginal prisoners were thereafter treated (and mistreated) more as POWs than criminals (although never legally defined as such), and prosecutions for murder were never pressed.

It was convenient for the settlers to blame Musquito for the increase in hostilities. Not only did this explanation deflect concerns about the consequences of the free settler land grab, but, as a New South Wales Aborigine who had spent much time with the British, his actions could be understood as that of an individual outlaw committing crime (this dubious and long-discredited view has recently been resurrected by Windschuttle²⁷) – a far less threatening interpretation of the increasing conflict than an uprising by the indigenous people. More thoughtful settlers, however, knew that the resistance was sourced far more deeply than any individual grievance, especially as it continued to increase after Musquito's death. On 15 December 1826 the *Colonial Times* was critical of government policy to Aborigines, which it saw as:

Impowering a class of people, so notoriously ignorant and uneducated as the generality of stock-keepers are, to hunt down and destroy their fellow man, for such the natives most assuredly are... That the Aborigines, or original possessors of the soil, have much cause to regret our settling amongst them, must be allowed by all; the kangaroo and other animals from which they derive their subsistence have greatly decreased and daily decreasing in number; and ought we not to endeavour to compensate for these and other evils which they have experienced at our hands?

But as conflict spread, public opinion hardened against the Aborigines. There were 72 documented incidents involving Aboriginal attacks or raids in 1827, compared with 29 in 1826, and the number of British killed or wounded increased from 30 to 52.²⁸ In this context, free settlers pushed hard for stronger government support for their private campaigns. In November 1827, 21 inhabitants of farms on the banks of the Macquarie and Elizabeth Rivers warned Arthur that they believed Aboriginal attacks were no longer about revenge but “a plan for the extirpation of the white inhabitants with whom they doubtless consider themselves at war.”²⁹ The Land Commissioner who was to become the largest landholder in Van Diemen's Land, Roderick O'Connor, wrote a personal letter to the Government in December 1827 asking: “can we live in a wilderness surrounded by wretches who watch every opportunity, and who take delight in shedding our blood?”³⁰ And Police Magistrate (and large landowner) of the Oatlands district, Thomas Anstey, who, in February 1830 was to be given overall command of the government roving parties sent out to capture or kill Aborigines, informed Arthur that “there seems to be no probable end to the destruction of lives and property which may arise from the desperation of these bloody thirsty barbarians”. Anstey claimed that “the outsettlers and stockmen are in a dreadful state of alarm and will not drive the stock sufficiently from home to afford them sufficient pasturage – the consequence of this will be ominous in the extreme.”³¹

From a settler perspective, matters got even worse during 1828. That year the number of Aboriginal attacks doubled from 72 to 144, and the number of whites killed or wounded in them increased to 78.³² In early spring the *Hobart Town Courier* concluded that the Aborigines “have formed a systematic organized plan for carrying on a war of extermination against the white inhabitants of the colony.”³³ Anstey, incensed by the killing of “defenceless women and children”, believed that the Aborigines “have withered their war whoop and that it is to be a war of extermination”.³⁴

Breakdown in cross-cultural relations

The outbreak of widespread violence meant that even established cross-cultural relations broke down. One of the few refuges for the harassed Aborigines visiting the rich Oyster Bay region after 1823 was the 700 acre land grant received by the Irishman, John de Courcy (Paddy) Harte. Harte seems to have had some sympathy with the Aboriginal cause, and had even given refuge to Musquito after pursuers were closing in on him in late 1823. The Aborigines seem to have continued to visit his farm, which was situated inland of the other early settlers, for many years, but Harte's stores were burnt by the Aborigines in 1829. After this incident his men reported that some acts of barbarity had been committed upon the Aborigines who had been in the habit of calling at Harte's property, "the mere relation of which makes humanity shudder."³⁵

In the summer of 1826-7 another man well known to the Aborigines, William Knight, a convict stock-keeper, was visited by Aborigines in the "westward country" (the land around present day Westbury and Deloraine). They stayed the day, no doubt conversing with the stock-keeper, as contact had been sufficiently common for him to speak their language. Yet just three months later Knight was involved in an attack on Aborigines and, shortly after, was himself killed.³⁶ This killing was long remembered and as late as 1893 an account of it was given to a local paper by a long time resident of the Deloraine district, Dan Picket, who noted that "Knight's grave may yet be seen at the lower end of one of the Mayfield paddocks, near the Latrobe Rivulet."³⁷ Another stockkeeper of 'the westward' country reported to have long-established relations with Aborigines was also killed as fighting intensified. An Irishman known as McHaskell, resident in the area since 1825, had "made friends with a tribe of natives who were... often supplied with provisions", but was killed on 5 February 1831.³⁸

The Surveyor, John Helder Wedge, later visited another stockman in this region who informed him that "when he first came the natives were very peaceable, but

they have been drove to commit outrages on the whites." This sympathetic man, described by Wedge as living "with a half-caste female, a stout well made person by whom he has had two children",³⁹ was Thomas Johnson, whilst the woman was Dolly 'Dalrymple', who became the matriarch of a large Aboriginal clan. Yet even they were to become unavoidably embroiled in violence.⁴⁰

As the realities of war engulfed the island, the space left for Aborigines, no matter how integrated, to live peaceably within white society largely disappeared. Even 'Black Robert' who had lived with the British since he was an infant and worked on farms all his life, was captured and put in gaol in 1830 by those seeking the government reward payable on captured natives, before Robinson arranged for him to be sent to Flinders Island.⁴¹ Robinson often did not help matters in this area; co-existence did not suit his vision of a separate Aboriginal settlement in the Bass Strait, and he aggressively tried, often successfully, to remove even those Aborigines who had found some degree of refuge in white families and wanted to stay where they were.⁴² Not least of the contradictions of invasion were that British land usurpers, like the sealers, could provide asylum to Aborigines from those seeking to 'protect' them. And not for the first time, nor the last, was the enduring contradiction of government policy seen – if Aborigines were British subjects and not a separate nation conquered by force of arms, by what legal right were they forcibly detained and exiled?

An unusually equal arena of struggle

Aboriginal advantages in the conflict were emphasised by nineteenth century writers, and they have been more recently reinforced by Lyndall Ryan in *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* and, especially, Henry Reynolds in *The Fate of a Free People*. The limitations of horses in the hilly and forested Van Diemonian terrain, the inaccuracy of contemporary guns and their limitations in an environment where rain and river crossings so often rendered powder useless, and the ever accessible retreat of thick scrub made killing Aborigines a challenging affair.

Furthermore, the inability of the British military stationed in Van Diemen's Land to adapt to a guerrilla war has been well documented. They were trained for the next conventional continental war and expecting to be involved only in convict guard-duty.⁴³ Yet another advantage of the Aborigines that has not been given the attention it deserves was their superior communications – Aborigines could send quite detailed information quickly over long distances through smokes. Robinson detailed this and other advantages enjoyed by the defenders in his journal in December 1831:

The natives have the advantage in every respect, in their sight, hearing, nay, in all their senses, their sense of smell also. They can smell a smoke at long distance... scenting a kangaroo roasting... They are at home in the woods; the whole country with few exceptions affords them concealment... They can perceive the smallest trace, much less the plain footmarks of white men. They can trace small animals. They can also do with small fires, the smoke of which is scarcely perceptible... They can subsist on roots and small animals and they know the passes and are well acquainted with the topography of the county. They will travel over the rocky ground where no traces are to be seen... Their mode of attack is by surreptition. They lay in ambush for some time before they make their attack.⁴⁴

Despite the advantages undoubtedly enjoyed by the Aboriginal defenders, the British fear of the small groups of Aborigines that survived in the settled districts after 1828 seems out of all proportion to the real threat they posed. The key to understanding this aspect of Aboriginal power was, as in the early years of settlement, the dread associated with that defining feature of the Van Diemonian environment – fire. Given the vulnerability of crops and houses to almost instant combustion, the Aborigines' fire sticks and war cries seemed to mock the property and pretensions of the aspiring gentry. Although Plomley claims that the use of fire by the Aborigines as a weapon was, in practice, limited,⁴⁵ there is

no doubt that the firing of estates did increase in 1828-9. Several stacks (comprising the year's harvest), settler huts, and standing crops were burnt to the ground, and many settlers believed that the continued use of this tactic would force them to evacuate their land. In March 1828 the "settlers in the neighbourhood of Swanport" sent Arthur "a statement of the danger... of being ultimately exterminated by the black natives" because of the "new system which these people are adopting, namely, burning our stacks as well as our houses and making their attacks in the night." These methods, the settlers complained, "render it impossible even for the largest establishment to protect itself... so great is the horror which they create."⁴⁶ One east coast settler, James Hobbs, complained in May 1830 that: "I think this is either the fifth or sixth time I have been burnt out by the natives... My loss has been very severe... In fact it is nothing less than having to commence again as a new settler... I know not what is to be done."⁴⁷ Another, John Allen, reported that he had lost his crops, house and three wheat stacks, "being the total loss of Your Petitioners first year hard labour and outlay as well as property to the amount of £300".⁴⁸ So culturally familiar (and feared) was this ancient form of British and Irish rural resistance against landowners that Melville records: "it is generally believed they [the Aborigines] were taught by some of the runaway convicts."⁴⁹

The impact that the use of fire had on public opinion and settler morale was most evident in the response to the 21 February 1830 attack on a settler of the Clyde, John Sherwin. Sherwin advised the Aborigines Committee that the Aborigines had called out "Parrawa Parrawa – Go away you white b-g-rs. What business have you here," as they burned the property. He believed that if "something is not speedily done, no one can live in the bush."⁵⁰ The settlers of the Clyde drew up a petition protesting what they saw as the government's soft line, arguing that the Aborigines threatened the "extinction of the Colony itself by firing our crops and dwellings."⁵¹ Even the most moderate of the press, the *Tasmanian*, hardened its line in response to this incident on 26 February: "there seems to be

something like a determination to destroy all before them. Extermination seems to be the only remedy. It is a dreadful one."⁵²

A far from equal fight

While Van Diemen's Land was an unusually equal arena of struggle compared to other regions of Australia, this characteristic of the fighting can easily be exaggerated as it largely pertains to the final stages of the war, when almost all the Aborigines who had accessed the settled districts were already dead, and traditional community life virtually destroyed. The small surviving groups of fighters that dominated settler concern and the official archive between 1828 and 1831 were a dangerous but, in reality, already defeated, enemy. The guerrilla fighters of these years were engaged in a desperate final resistance that chronologically varied in each region, but was always quite distinct from the earlier conflict, when whole communities were in the firing line. Their pursuers were relentless – and successful, as shown by the fact that when Robinson met with the survivors of the Big River and Oyster Bay tribes in the new year of 1832, their combined population numbered only 26.

The opportunity to kill large numbers of Aborigines was almost certainly over by 1829, but is in the four to five years preceding this that the main Aboriginal hunting grounds were conquered, and it is likely that most Aborigines were killed in these years. The available evidence suggests that even as late as 1825 most Aboriginal groups had a full demographic – including the elderly and young children – and that Aborigines continued to follow established paths and visit traditional resource-rich gathering spots at certain times of the year. By 1829 there were no such groups surviving outside of the west coast, with the small bands of warriors almost exclusively comprising fit and agile adults. Their radically new lifestyle of resistance marked the end of a sustainable community life. What had happened in the intervening years?

Probabilities, not certainties

Almost all the Aborigines who died before 1829, whether from disease, violence or any other cause, did so without any Briton documenting their death. Given this, the question of how so many Aborigines died, and so quickly, must work in the realm of probability rather than certainty. This is not an unusual constraint, and is integral to the consideration of most important historical questions. This has been accepted even by those historians who favour a conservative empirical methodology. The best known proponent of this school of historiography is the late Sir Geoffrey Elton, and in *The Practice of History* (1967) he pointed out that:

The ultimate problem of historical evidence, as has often been recognized, is that none of it occurs in isolation. The interaction and interdependence of things are... manifest... The discovery of truth requires not only... acquaintance with the available evidence and scholarly assessment of it – but also imaginative reconstruction and interpretation.

What is necessary, Elton recognized, is “the application of informed standards of probability.”⁵³ Keith Windschuttle’s alternative position, that “to make claims without evidence, especially about Aboriginal deaths is illegitimate”⁵⁴, would be consistent with this except for his indefensibly restrictive understanding of what constitutes evidence. Windschuttle insists that material that does not document individual deaths must be excluded – but, in a context in which the vast majority of deaths are not recorded, historians must engage with the full range of sources that document relations with the Aborigines in order to come to a sensible judgement about the overall level of conflict.⁵⁵ Fortunately, these sources are particularly rich in Van Diemen’s Land, and not only because of the comparatively well-studied government record. An unusually large number of observers documented the conflict and drew on personal experience and/or the oral testimony provided to them. Robinson, Melville, West, Bonwick, Calder, Burn, Lloyd and Jorgenson are particularly important non-government sources.⁵⁶

Any commentator who seeks to deny the relevance of most of this source material because it generally does not detail individual fatalities, must defend a position that is logically absurd. Does it follow, for example, that *no* Aborigine living outside of British settlements died from disease before 1828 because there is no confirmed report of any having done so? Would anyone seriously claim that *all* Aborigines died from violence simply because these are the only confirmed reports of deaths we have? If not, on what basis can a definitive claim be made that 'only' 120 Aborigines died from violence, because these are the only deaths 'plausibly' recorded?⁵⁷ It will not do – all available evidence must be considered, and Elton's 'imaginative reconstruction and interpretation' (what Bain Attwood calls "reading the signs"⁵⁸) must become a component of any historian's task, regardless of their historiographical preference.⁵⁹

When this broad range of evidence is considered, there can be little doubt that large numbers of Aborigines died from both violence *and* disease. But, as noted earlier, the lack of any observation of Aborigines dying from disease means it is highly unlikely that large groups of Aborigines were killed off by epidemics before they were confined and exiled, as is recorded to have occurred in other regions of Australia. This means that other explanations must be sought for the speed of the Aborigines' demise after 1824, and that the question of massacres – significantly qualified by historians in the twentieth century on the basis of evidence overwhelmingly pertaining to the 1829-31 period – be revisited. And the key to understanding why large numbers of Aborigines of the settled districts may have been killed before 1829 in a bloody slaughter despite the well documented Aboriginal 'advantages' in such a conflict, lies in the unusually long period of peaceful contact that preceded the outbreak of sustained violence.

Bush knowledge and the killing of the Aborigines

The nearly two decades of largely peaceful co-existence that had characterised the first wave of British settlement in the grassy woodlands of Van Diemen's

Land afforded distinct advantages to the free settler land claimants of the 1820s. The military may have been of limited use in the conflict, but the experienced Van Diemonian bushmen were another matter altogether. By 1824 these men knew the Aborigines' seasonal gathering places, camping sites and movements, and the roads that ran between them. While Aboriginal communities included small children, pregnant women and the elderly who could not easily escape, they were highly vulnerable to armed parties guided by such men. And Van Diemonian topography, although an advantage in the later guerrilla war, restricted the Aborigines' options to find alternative food sources and meeting sites. While small groups could find refuge in the rugged interior, a whole band could not. Given this cultural and environmental context, many Aborigines of the settled districts could have been killed with comparative ease. As Roderick O'Connor told the Government-appointed Aborigines Committee in 1830, Douglas Ibbens alone had killed half the "eastern mob" by "creeping upon them and firing amongst them". Far from being concerned about this behaviour, the Land Commissioner (depicted by Windschuttle as a Christian exemplar of restraint⁶⁰) presented it as evidence for his claim that "some of the worst characters would be the best to send after them."⁶¹

This view seems to have been privately shared by many settlers well before their activities were effectively sanctioned by the declaration of martial law on 1 November 1828. Hamilton Wallace led an expedition of such bushmen in a retaliatory party in 1825, and wrote to his father on 10 September that "on the second day under the Ben Lomond Tier we fell in with about 250 Aborigines". Wallace confirms that fighting occurred, and that a stock-keeper was speared, but gives no estimate of Aboriginal fatalities.⁶² On 21 February 1827 Michael Steel wrote to his brother that when Aborigines were seen, "I instantly armed all my men some on horseback and some on foot" and set off in pursuit. The next day "we fell in with them on the top of a mountain and poured a strong fire into them and killed their leader and one more... had the country been even and clear we should have killed or taken the whole of them."⁶³ On 15 December 1827, after

one of his splitters was speared by Aborigines, George Hobler similarly "armed four men who I hope will get sight of their night fires and slaughter them as they be around it"⁶⁴. A stock-keeper told Robinson that in retaliation for an attack on his camp at the Western Marshes in which one Aborigine was killed (elsewhere documented to have occurred in June 1827), he and other stock-keepers shot nine Aborigines around their camp.⁶⁵ Another stock-keeper related how a "whole tribe.... except an old man and a woman who begged for mercy and were suffered to go away" were killed at Middle Plains in this same region after being driven by men on horses into a lagoon.⁶⁶ The Conciliator also heard similar stories of mass slaughter in the upper reaches of the Emu and Jordan Rivers.⁶⁷ Gilbert Robertson testified to the Aborigines Committee that even the convict field police based at Richmond killed 14 Aborigines in a single incident in 1827.⁶⁸ By contrast, in the midlands and east coast there are no records of more than three Aborigines being killed in any one encounter after September 1829.⁶⁹

It is understandable that there is such an overwhelming bias in the literature towards the guerrilla and comparatively 'equal' second phase of the war even though almost all the Aborigines were already dead. The last period of the conflict, between 1828 and 1832, is, in contrast to the 25 years preceding it, extraordinarily well documented. The thirteen volume collection of Colonial Secretary Office records pertaining to Aborigines, first collated on the orders of the Lieutenant Governor, largely relate to the 1828 to 1832 period. Furthermore, it is not until after a legal immunity for killing Aborigines was provided by the declaration of martial law on 1 November 1828 that much of the killing gets reported – and most of the opportunities for 'easy' slaughter had passed by this time. Even so there remains sufficient evidence from the CSO records, especially for the first year of martial law, to demonstrate how effectively Van Diemonian guides could lead armed parties to the few remaining groups of largely defenceless Aboriginal men, women and children as they followed traditional roads and seasonal food sources.

A Van Diemonian fighting force

From 1828 Van Diemonian bushmen were encouraged to participate in the government's struggle against the Aborigines through a range of indulgences and rewards, particularly pardons for the convicts and land grants for the free. Many joined the field police, leading and guiding the official 'roving parties' that were established with the proclamation of martial law in the settled districts in November of that year. Far from being an ineffectual force in the pursuit of Aborigines, as they have often been described, the roving parties soon killed, or effectively broke up through sustained pursuit, the few remaining large groups of Aborigines still accessing the settled districts.

Consider, for example, the quick success afforded by the six armed parties sent out in the first weeks following the declaration of martial law. On 26 November 1828 a party of nine soldiers, two field police and "John Danvers, guide" left Oatlands. Eleven days later Aborigines were seen on the Macquarie River, "about two miles" from Tooms Lake. Danvers and Holmes, a (convict) constable of the Oatlands Field Police, reported that they "got near as possible to them that night" and on the

twelfth day... at daybreak we formed ourselves to surround them, one of them getting up from a small fire to a larger one discovered us and gave the alarm to the rest, and the whole of them jumped up immediately and attempted to take up their spears in defence and seeing that, we immediately fired and repeated it, because we saw they were on the defensive part, they were about twenty in number, and several of whom were killed, two only unfortunately, taken alive.

Danvers and Holmes also advised that they killed 11 dogs and brought in one canine alive, and captured a large amount of booty, including a gun and gun powder.⁷⁰ The *Hobart Town Courier's* Oatlands informant claimed on 13

December 1828 that ten Aborigines were killed in this incident. The tactic of surrounding the Aborigines around their fires, and then claiming that Aborigines had to be shot when they tried to escape (as they inevitably did), became a common tactic and reporting mechanism in the Tasmanian war. This incident also highlights how much research remains to be done on even the comparatively well-studied Colonial Secretary Office (government) records. This official report of the killing of ten Aborigines has never previously been documented.⁷¹

The killing of the Aborigines by the soldiers and their convict superior was clearly seen to have been a success. A day after returning to Oatlands Danvers and his party were again sent in pursuit of Aborigines. Meanwhile, another party of soldiers, convicts and ex-convict bushmen shot an Aborigine on 6 December "which we have reason to think took effect"⁷², while yet another, which left Oatlands on 5 December 1828 under the command of Ensign Lockyer and James Hopkins, Special Constable and Guide, were again able to surround a large group of Aborigines at night. They reported that on 7 December, near Hobbs Hut in the Black Hills, they surrounded 30 Aborigines and Lockyer "thought it best to watch them till night to surprise them by their fires". But a massacre was averted on this occasion by Aboriginal land management – they began using fire sticks so "we could not distinguish one fire from the other and then we lost them." It is possible, however, that this was the same group who were killed the very next day near Tooms Lake, and similarly possible that it was one of the last surviving clans of the Oyster Bay people. Regardless, the comparative success of armed parties in surrounding Aborigines in December 1828 suggests that killing Aborigines in this phase of the conflict was far easier than has generally been claimed. It is also clear that, facing this level of sustained threat and harassment, any sort of normal community life would have been impossible, regardless of how many Aborigines were directly killed, and that the indirect toll on health, lives and spirit at the forced abandonment of traditional food sources, meeting places, cultural practices and so on would have

been very high. Whatever their direct cause of death, in this context the physically vulnerable members of the community would have had little chance to survive.

The final occasion on which it would have been possible to kill large groups of Aborigines on the east coast or in the midlands occurred in 1829. Police Magistrate Lascelles of Richmond reported on 16 June 1829 that "eight or ten of the natives were severely wounded" in a skirmish.⁷³ And in September of that year the 'founder of Melbourne', John Batman, gave a final vivid testimony of the level of indiscriminate slaughter that was possible while whole communities of Aborigines, not small bands of warriors, remained the main enemy:

In pursuit of the Aborigines who have been committing so many outrages in this district... I fell in with their tracks and followed them with the assistance of the Sydney native blacks until we came to a number of huts... we proceeded in the same direction until we saw some smoke at a distance. I immediately ordered the men to lay down; we could hear the natives conversing distinctly, we then crept into a thick scrub and remained there until after sunset... and made towards them with the greatest caution at about 11 o'clock P.M. we arrived within 21 paces of them the men were drawn up on the right by my orders intending to rush upon them, before they could arise from the ground, hoping that I should not be under the necessity of firing at them, but unfortunately as the last man was coming up, he struck his musket against that of another party, which immediately alarmed the dogs, (in number about 40) they came directly at us the natives arose from the ground, and were in the act of running away into a thick scrub, when I ordered the men to fire upon them, which was done, and a rush by the party immediately followed, we only captured that night one woman and a male child about two years old... next morning we found one man very badly wounded in the ankle and knee, shortly after we found another 10 buckshot had entered his body, he

was alive but very bad, there were a great number of traces of blood in various directions and learnt from those we took that 10 men were wounded in the body which they gave us to understand were dead or would die, and two women in the same state had crawled away, besides a number that was shot in the legs... We shot 21 dogs and obtained a great number of spears, waddies, blankets, rugs, knives, a tomahawk, a shingle wrench etc etc. on Friday morning we left the place for my farm with the two men, woman and child, but found it impossible that the two former could walk, and after trying them by every means in my power, for some time, found I could not get them on I was obliged to shoot them.⁷⁴

The captured woman was later sent on to Campbell Town gaol and separated from her son, Rolepana, whom she had faced death to protect. Batman's own estimate was that the band they had fired on had numbered 60 to 70 men, women and children and about 15 had been killed or would die from the wounds. This incident was reported to Arthur, who noted the shooting of the injured Aborigines. Later Arthur wrote of Batman's sympathy for the Aborigines, but that he also "had much slaughter to account for."⁷⁵

By late 1829 the survivors of this slaughter had been reduced to a small group of hardened warriors, conducting a relentless guerrilla war with remarkable success. But while their heroic last resistance was a focus of British concern, and occupies a large proportion of the available records, it involved only a small group of people. The incapacity of the roving parties to encounter any more significant groups of Aborigines after Batman's foray does not reveal their ineffectiveness, as has been widely assumed, nor does it demonstrate the equality of the struggle. It is rather a sad pointer to just how few Aborigines were left alive, and to what extent community life had already been destroyed.

In the north-west the period of maximum slaughter was a little later, and was tempered by a much shorter period of co-existence. British settlement had been

so long concentrated in the grassy woodlands, coastal bays and offshore islands, that the people of the west coast and north-west still enjoyed, even in late 1827, not only a full age and gender demographic, but a largely unchanged traditional cultural and community life. But in only two years most of those Aborigines unfortunate enough to live on what had become, by royal charter, the private property of the Van Diemen's Land Company, were dead, and the way of life of the survivors radically transformed.

The Van Diemen's Land Company and the Aborigines of the north-west

The Van Diemen's Land Company surveyors arrived in the northwest of the island in 1826 to select the 250 000 acre land grant the Company had received (this was increased in 1828 to 350 000 acres in several blocks and the Company thereafter effectively monopolized the whole north west corner of the island). Like other settlers of Van Diemen's Land they were searching for relatively open grassland country, but having arrived comparatively late on the scene, were forced to conduct their search within a largely forested region. The surveyors found the Aborigines to be "entirely peaceful" throughout their explorations, even as late as 1827.⁷⁶ The remoteness of the district meant that the Aboriginal people had not been caught up in the fighting by then escalating in the settled districts.

The surveyors found the open country they were looking for at Woolnorth and the Hampshire and Surrey Hills, but, as Ian McFarlane points out in his comprehensive coverage of black-white relations in this region, these were not "naturally occurring features of the landscape; they were Aboriginal hunting grounds created over many generations."⁷⁷ The Aborigines were dependent on these reasonably confined areas and the coastal bays and estuaries for their survival. It is not surprising, then, that in the summer of 1827-8, 118 ewes were reported to have been speared on one of the best hunting grounds and sheep

pastures available, that in the vicinity of Cape Grim. The Company's reprisal, coordinated and led by their chief agent Edward Curr, was almost immediate.

The only independent report of the initial armed foray that followed the killing of the ewes is from Rosalie Hare, a young ship captain's wife on board the *Caroline* which had come direct from England to the new Van Diemen's Land Company holdings in January 1828 and remained there until March. She wrote in her journal that:

Natives are terrible robbers and do all the mischief they can to the settlers... Burning the huts of the shepherds and stealing their dogs are also the works of these incendiaries... But we are not to suppose the Europeans in their turn take no revenge. We have to lament that our own countrymen consider the massacre of these people an honour. While we remained at Circular Head there were several accounts of considerable numbers of natives having been shot by them (the Company's men), they wishing to extirpate them entirely if possible. The master of the Company's Cutter, *Fanny*, assisted by four shepherds and his crew, surprised a party and killed 12. The rest escaped but afterwards followed them. They reached the vessel just in time to save their lives.⁷⁸

In a report to the Van Diemen's Land Company Directors on 14 January 1828, Curr presented a different version of this event, admitting that the crew of the Company ship *Fanny* had gone in pursuit of the Aborigines, and had come across them sitting around their fires. But, on deciding to wait until the morning to attack, "not a musket would go off" because of overnight rain. As McFarlane suggests, it seems unlikely that the men would not have followed the usual practice in Van Diemen's Land and attacked the Aborigines while they were vulnerable around their fires, or have allowed their muskets to so readily and universally get wet.⁷⁹ Regardless, an official acknowledgement by the Company agent that there was an intent to kill Aborigines by a party made up of Van

Diemen's Land Company men, using the Company's ship, in retaliation only for the killing of sheep, provides a telling early example of the policy that was to be pursued towards Aborigines on Van Diemen's Land Company holdings.⁸⁰

Curr was always quite open about his belief that killing Aborigines was justified to defend stock, telling the Colonial Secretary that while he would not sanction them being fired on for stealing flour, if they attacked stock, "I should consider the case to be quite different... [as] if they should commit a wholesale slaughter of our stock it can have no other motive than our expulsion".⁸¹ Moreover, the constraints imposed by the law and government were virtually non-existent in Curr's domain, which was effectively an autonomous administrative region within the colony. Curr held absolute power because, as he himself acknowledged, he was "both master and magistrate, party and judge."⁸² Other free settlers were also magistrates, but none were so comprehensively at a remove from other free settlers or government officials. Curr did as he pleased to the Aborigines until they were decimated, with almost no reference to the colonial government.

Given Curr's professed policy response to the killing of sheep, and his near absolute power to put this into practice, it is not surprising that further retaliation for the killing of the Cape Grim ewes was not long in coming. Curr told his Directors on 28 February 1828 that six Aborigines had been killed and several wounded at Cape Grim and that "I have no doubt that this will have the effect of intimidating them and oblige them to keep aloof." He openly predicted more killings on the basis that "strife once begun with any of these tribes, has never yet been terminated, nor will, according to present appearances, but by their extermination."⁸³

As McFarlane has demonstrated, the Directors of the Van Diemen's Land Company were perturbed about Curr's attitudes towards, and treatment of, Aborigines, but Curr ignored their concerns.⁸⁴ Nor was the murder of British subjects reported to Arthur or investigated by Curr in his official role as

magistrate, even before martial law was declared. No inquiry, even token, was conducted into any killing for nearly two years. It was November 1829 before Arthur finally heard an account of what had occurred at Cape Grim nearly two years before.⁸⁵ The Lieutenant Governor asked Robinson to look into it, and one of the shepherds involved in the killing informed the emissary that they threw the Aborigines' bodies "down the rocks where they had thrown the sheep." An Aboriginal woman claimed that the shepherds had taken "by surprise a whole tribe" and "massacred thirty of them and threw them off a cliff." The Van Diemen's Land Company Superintendent, Alexander Goldie, separately confirmed to Arthur that the Aboriginal losses were "very high".⁸⁶

Goldie broke ranks only after it had become widely known that he had been involved in the shooting and butchering with an axe of an Aboriginal woman on a north-west beach in September 1829. In his original report to Curr on the incident, Goldie had unashamedly made it clear that he had intended the two women to be slaves, and although one had been killed trying to escape, the other

is in irons. I make her wash potatoes for the horses and intend taking her to the hills and making her work... the woman will not speak and is often very sulky. She broke her irons once...[but] I have no doubt she will work. Barras can make her do anything.⁸⁷

After this incident became known beyond the confines of the Van Diemen's Land Company, Curr chose to investigate it, and even seemed ready to make a scapegoat of Goldie if the government required one. The legal problem was that if the defenceless woman had died from her axe wounds, Goldie could have been indicted for murder. On the other hand, if the deadly wounds had been inflicted by the musket, the legal immunity afforded by martial law was thought to hold. In any event, the Solicitor General advised Arthur not to prosecute, to ensure that "the effect of the Proclamation [of martial law] was not to be forever afterwards destroyed" and the general "pursuit of these now sanguinary people"

not disrupted.⁸⁸ London also declined to intervene, except to add references to this incident to the other disturbing facts censored from the House of Commons Parliamentary Paper printed in September 1831, and incorrectly titled *Copies of all Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations lately carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land*. In the meantime Goldie, unaware of the reluctance of the government to prosecute anybody for killing an Aborigine whatever the circumstances, informed Arthur of other incidents involving the Company, including the Cape Grim massacre, to legitimize his claim that he had killed Aborigines with the sanction of his employer. He also informed the Company directors that even while supposedly conducting the magisterial inquiry into the woman's death, Curr had personally encouraged the killing of other Aborigines – offering rum to any man who could bring him Aboriginal heads.⁸⁹ Curr freely admitted this charge, and defended his determination to kill Aborigines in a letter to the Directors on 7 October 1830:

My whole and sole object was to kill them, and this because my full conviction was and is that the laws of nature and of God and of this country all conspired to render this my duty... it would have done good, it would have alarmed the natives... prevented them from attempting our huts again, made them keep aloof, given them a lesson they would have long remembered... As to my expression of a wish to have three of their heads to put on the ridge of the hut, I shall only say that I think it certainly would have the effect of deterring some of their comrades, of making the death of their companions live in their recollections, and so extend the advantage the example made of them.⁹⁰

Curr's failure to get his heads probably reflected that, as in other regions of the colony, the opportunity for large-scale slaughter of Aborigines was already largely over. By 1830, the surviving north-west Aborigines had withdrawn to more remote areas, changed their patterns of seasonal movement and resorted

to guerrilla style raids. Even this pattern of resistance had ended by 1832 when there was only one incident on Van Diemen's Land Company lands involving Aborigines during the whole year, and Curr could afford to be seen to generous to remnant survivors living near the Company HQ at Cape Grim.⁹¹ The progressive withdrawal from 1830 of sheep (and their shepherds) from the Surrey and Hampshire Hills (after the high losses of the winter of 1830 had proved these areas not suited for sheep) no doubt also eased the pressures on the Aborigines and reduced tensions. But the enormous toll on community life that had already occurred is shown by the fact that by the time Robinson belatedly returned to the region to extract the final removal between 1832 and 1835, the number of Aborigines had dropped dramatically. Of the 600-700 Aborigines estimated to be originally living in the areas that became Van Diemen's Land Company lands (and a number of accounts of large gatherings involving a full demographic from the early and mid 1820s suggest that numbers had not dropped off much before the occupation of their territory), by 1835 only about 100 survived. Only three Europeans were killed during the entire conflict in this region.⁹²

Van Diemonians and war

Arthur was well aware of how important the convicts and other Van Diemonian bushmen (almost always former convicts) were to the struggle against the Aborigines. Since the bushranger emergency of 1824-26 the Lieutenant Governor had relied on the convict field police, and his extraordinary decision to place soldiers in the roving parties under the command of convict constables (despite the predictable military resentment) is a demonstration of both the confidence he placed in them, and the extent to which an effective military response was dependent on their expertise. However it was the February 1830 decision to pay a reward for the capture of Aborigines that represented the Lieutenant Governor's most blatant attempt to enlist the poor in the war – the sum of five pounds per adult was insignificant to the wealthy elite, but a large

amount of money for Van Diemonian workers, hunters and a motley collection of bush vagrants.

Arthur also specifically set out to increase the total number of convicts in frontier areas. In September 1829 he advised London that "a very considerable augmentation of convicts" would be "most useful in affording protection to the settlers from the attacks of the Aboriginal natives,"⁶³ and in April 1830 Arthur requested that all convict transports be diverted to Van Diemen's Land to help in the fight:

I would anxiously hope that you would be pleased to recommend that all the transports about to sail with convicts from England... may be ordered to proceed to this colony – at once 2000 may be assigned away... and by distributing them principally amongst the settlers in the most remote parts of the colony, very great protection would be afforded at trifling cost to Government.⁶⁴

In addition to the bush knowledge that some possessed, the sheer number of convicts and former convicts engaged directly or indirectly in the struggle amounted to a potent British force. Almost all the killing of Aborigines was done by Van Diemonian bushmen, and since the 1820s they have been widely blamed for most of the violence committed against the Aborigines. But these men can never be charged with the same level of responsibility as those whose interests they served, and their scapegoating by both the government and the free settlers is too obviously self-serving to be accorded the respect it has often received. The opposing temptation, to assume a solidarity between the landless native born, convicts or ex-convicts and the Aborigines – because of a mutual experience of oppression by the land-owning class and officialdom – must also be avoided. John Molony's evidence to support his claim that the native born in New South Wales as early as 1806 "were conjoined to the Aborigines" and that the majority "treated the Aborigines as fellow Australians" is not convincing.⁶⁵

Regardless, in Van Diemen's Land the forms of co-existence possible before 1825 reflected the realities of the frontier, not any sense of solidarity, and with the outbreak of sustained fighting, virtually everyone was entrapped by the fearful logic of war.

Nevertheless, the fact that the poor had no property to defend and a far less exalted view of themselves certainly meant that they experienced fewer barriers to engagement with Aborigines when opportunities arose. On the Bass Strait islands convicts and boatmen regularly fraternized with Aborigines even during the war years, and Robinson's convict assistants (a critical part of the mission, the work of whom has never been properly acknowledged or studied) seem to have interacted much more naturally with them than the Conciliator.⁹⁶ A few of the stockmen and convicts who knew Aborigines, or had relationships with them, may, like Thomas Johnson, have regretted the conflict and blamed whites for it, but this was a sentiment more commonly expressed by a small section of the elite, most of them some distance from the daily fear of the frontier. Paddy Harte, an east coast landowner, was one of the few documented exceptions. In 1829, when Jorgenson's roving party sought supplies from Harte, they were informed "that the natives never came to any harm anywhere except when they knew that the d-d soldiers and constables were in the huts, and that he would never give a d-n for a receipt for the Commissariat."⁹⁷

Despite their participation in, and support for, the conflict against the Aborigines, most isolated Van Diemonians living in the bush probably continued to avoid confrontation when they could, not out of solidarity with the Aborigines, but, as before 1825, from a rational sense of self-preservation. It should always be remembered that almost all of the approximately 200 whites killed by Aborigines were shepherds and stock-keepers whose masters lived in the comparative security and comforts of the main estate or principal settlements. As Reynolds has pointed out, this is a casualty rate that was higher than for any war Australians have fought in other than World War One. For the white workers

living on Aboriginal lands, reason and self-interest still counted against an overly aggressive posture, despite the rewards and indulgences that could be payable for killing Aborigines. On 17 November 1831, for example, Robinson met with two armed stock-keepers hunting kangaroo: "they were accompanied by several dogs and had with them kangaroo skins". One of these men had recently "met four [Aboriginal] men and one woman... they did not interfere with him nor he with them."⁹⁸ Despite the intense bloodshed that defined the 1824 to 1832 period, and the vigorous conciliation mission that began in 1829, the most common cross-cultural encounter of the war years was neither violence nor engagement. In the final week of the Tasmanian war, on Boxing Day 1831, the Aborigines travelling with Robinson seeking to meet up with the remnant survivors of the Big River and Oyster Bay people, "returned from hunting" and informed the Conciliator that "they had met two white men with muskets". The Aborigines explained "that the two white men was frightened and run away", whilst they "also was afraid and also run away."⁹⁹

Most Van Diemonians sought neither conflict nor friendship with the Aborigines, but survival. The long standing fear held by white officialdom and many settlers that runaway convicts and Aborigines would form an alliance found expression in the novel by Charles Rowcroft, *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land*, but real life afforded very few examples of this, at least after the more justifiable concerns raised by the activities of Michael Howe.¹⁰⁰ Arthur publicized a claim made during the Black Line operations of October-November 1830 of a man being taken by a group of Aborigines who were purportedly under the command of an escaped convict named "Brown" who had been living with the Aborigines for three years. The Lieutenant Governor had the man's testimony published in full on 23 October 1831 to prove that the Aborigines have "had more than savage instinct for their guide in the various murders and robberies which they have perpetrated."¹⁰¹ But the remarkable fact is how few escaped convicts seem to have lived with Aborigines in Van Diemen's Land or sought refuge with them.

Perhaps if the Van Diemonian bushmen had realized the implications that a British victory and the expulsion of the Aborigines from the grassy woodlands held for their own freedom, Arthur might have had more to worry about. After 1832, the social and economic control of frontier lands by the elite was vastly strengthened, and the independence and autonomy of stockmen, shepherds, hunters and squatters was drastically curtailed in all but the most isolated regions. These men could now be much more easily evicted or brought under closer supervision, with patterns of subservience and systems of control soon instigated in much of the midlands that surpassed even Arthur's earlier reform agenda. Van Diemonian culture did not disappear in the 1830s, but it was increasingly forced to the social and geographical fringe, and the dispossession of the Aborigines had proved crucial to achieving this.

The land and war

What happened to the land when the people who had managed, created, and renewed it by their love and spirit over 30 000 years were removed? Such a question cannot be answered with historical evidence, except at the most superficial level. The most immediate and obvious impact was that wild dog numbers exploded. Although the Aborigines took many dogs into exile, even larger numbers were left behind, or had belonged to those now dead. Many were shot, but George Robson, of Surrey Hills, on 30 August 1832, complained that, "notwithstanding the numbers which are destroyed" they "harass and scatter our flocks in spite of every exertion." Robson reported being "overrun by dogs", though "comparatively free of hyena."¹⁰² In 1833 Arthur even diverted one of the conciliation missions to kill the wild dogs that had multiplied in the Eastern Tiers. Wild dogs kept the thylacine out of these grassy woodlands for a generation, although after distemper took fatal hold among the wild dog packs, the native marsupial returned.¹⁰³

Another environmental impact resulting from Aboriginal dispossession that was soon evident was the fact that some cleared or lightly wooded areas became overgrown once the regular burning of them ceased. The Hampshire and Surrey Hills, for example, rapidly returned to forest, and when small settlers moved into the north west forests in the 1840s they found many of the previously cleared areas already overgrown. According to James Fenton, Gunns Plains, discovered in 1859-60, was covered in trees only twenty years old.¹⁰⁴ With litter accumulation also resulting from the failure to regularly fire it, it is not surprising that, from the 1850s, large bushfires became a part of Tasmanian life. Immense fires across Mt Wellington were recorded by Lieutenant Governor William Denison on 23 February 1847, "extending through the whole neighbourhood to New Norfolk... and to Browns River."¹⁰⁵ The Quaker traveller, Frederick Mackie, visiting the Huon district in 1854, was pushed back by a bush fire in which eight lives were lost, and "houses and property were also destroyed". Mackie claimed that "such a conflagration has not been known before in the colony".¹⁰⁶ The serious bushfires of 1854, which reached the outskirts of Hobart, led to the Bush Fires Act, but in the absence of regular burning of the bush, regulation was unable to prevent periodic serious bushfires becoming a feature of Tasmanian life.¹⁰⁷

The environmental impact of dispossession was perhaps most pronounced in the last large area of grassy woodlands that had remained in Aboriginal control – the north east, not finally lost to Aboriginal people until the early 1830s. This region had become the final stronghold of the Tasmanian emu¹⁰⁸ and the forester kangaroo that elsewhere had been so devastated by hunting. Once the Aborigines had been removed, hunting increased sharply in this region, sealing the extinction of the bird and threatening the macropod with the same fate.

Keen amateur botanist, Ronald Gunn, wrote to Joseph Hooker¹⁰⁹ in November 1836 that "many of our animals and birds will become extinct or nearly so...

emus are now extremely rare and in a few years will be quite gone" and "persons may live in Van Diemen's Land for months without seeing one [kangaroo]"¹¹⁰

Environmental destruction on the east coast also seems to have intensified once the danger posed by the Aborigines was removed. On 6 January 1831, at Georges River, just north of present day St Helens, Robinson noted the great stench that came from "hundreds of carcasses of swans which had been plucked and thrown together in a heap", the wasted meat of white hunters "whose employment had been to kill and pluck swans for their feathers."¹¹¹ Louisa Meredith, who lived at Great Swanport from 1838 and was a keen observer of wildlife, never saw a black swan at the estuary named in honour of their early abundance.¹¹²

A more subtle, but long-lasting impact of Aboriginal dispossession was that it encouraged a more intensive use of the land. Less labour was now needed to profit from it, and the main risk to the investment was removed. Sheep were also moved into more marginal lands, contributing to the long-term decline of the ecological diversity of the grassland regions, now the most threatened and transformed ecosystem in Tasmania. Native annual grasses and introduced weeds replaced more palatable perennial grasses on many estates, and as soil was compacted and erosion increased, sliver grass colonized widely.¹¹³ Nor was it only the grasses that were affected. Jane Williams looked back to her arrival in 1822 and wondered where all the flowers had gone: "since the large flocks and herds....were introduced, the flowers have become comparatively rare."¹¹⁴

Perhaps the oddest environmental consequence of the dispossession of the Aborigines is that the trees began to die. Robinson first described this phenomenon near Oatlands on 3 November 1831: "the trees in the low land and small hills are fast decaying... in a few years there will be no trees left. I am informed that at the Clyde and Shannon it is the same and that the settlers say

they commenced falling into decay about three years ago".¹¹⁵ In April 1832, Between Entally and Westbury, Robinson also observed that "the trees here were like the trees that I had observed in other parts of the colony, were falling fast to decay."¹¹⁶ Mrs Williams also found that in some of the "fine sheep country" in the northern districts, "all the trees [were] dead but the wattles".¹¹⁷ And in 1844, the wife of the new Bishop of Tasmania (as he was prematurely titled), Mrs Nixon, wrote of the Oatlands district: "we observed one of those frequently recurring tracts of dead timber – large trees in which every branch and their trunks perfect, only leafless... The effect is most melancholy, as though the locust has passed over the land."¹¹⁸ Robinson attributed the deforestation "to the entire exhaustion of the subsoil"¹¹⁹, but this seems unlikely to have occurred so quickly, despite the erosion associated with over-stocking. The surveyor, John Helder Wedge, blamed "a very severe frost in 1825, or possibly to the drought of one very hot summer", but, as Mrs Nixon observed, "no one has satisfactorily accounted for it."¹²⁰

The most likely explanation is that the trees had been killed by possums, which increased in numbers with the removal of the Aborigines who had been their main predator (the Europeans did not begin to trap possums for skins in significant numbers until many years later). George Lloyd recalled that after the Aborigines were gone, brushtail possums "soon became so numerous" that farmers even had to keep packs of dogs to protect their wheat.¹²¹ In the main Aboriginal hunting ground of the grassy woodlands, where trees often occurred individually or in small groups, a possum population explosion would have had a noticeable impact on tree cover, as many of today's landowners of the Midlands, still defending remnant trees from possum damage, can testify.

Perhaps another explanation for the death of the trees lies in another realm of understanding. Who can know what grieving occurred when almost all the people who had been the land's continuous custodians for at least three times as long as any human beings had lived in Britain were, in the space of a single generation, virtually all killed or removed?

Endnotes: Chapter Eight

¹ James Dixon, *Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales, and Van Diemen's Land: In the Ship Skelton, During the Year 1820; with Observations on the State of These Colonies, and a Variety of Information, Calculated to Be Useful to Emigrants* (Hobart: Melanie Publications, 1984) 47.

² B. Godwin, *Godwin's Emigrant's Guide to Van Diemen's Land* (London: Sherwood, Jones and Co., 1823) 16.

³ George William Evans, *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land: With Important Hints to Emigrants, and Useful Information Respecting the Application for Grants of Land* (London: J. Souter, 1822) 14-15. As previously noted, Curr saw so little threat from Aborigines that he advised new settlers to "set out as soon as possible in quest of land" without even a guide, "on foot, and employ at least a month in his search", relying on "stock-keepers and other persons... to direct him." Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen's Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* (Hobart: Platypus publications, 1967) 103.

⁴ James Bonwick, *The Last of the Tasmanians; or, the Black War of Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1969) 44.

⁵ HRA 3/3 461.

⁶ HRA 3/4 446, emphasis original.

⁷ R. D. Pretyman, *A Chronicle of Methodism in Van Diemen's Land: 1820-1840* (Melbourne: Aldersgate Press, 1970) 37.

⁸ Henry Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive*, facsimile ed. (Sydney: Hortivity Publications, 1965) 30.

⁹ Robinson's mission was also widely known as "the 'Black Embassy.'" This terminology was, as James Calder pointed out, appropriate "enough in every sense". James Erskine Calder, *Recollections of Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin in Tasmania* (Adelaide: Sullivan's Cove, 1984) 24.

¹⁰ See, for example, N.J.B Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966) 310-12.

¹¹ D. C. Shelton, ed., *The Parramore Letters: Letters from William Thomas Parramore, Sometime Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor Arthur of Van Diemen's Land, to Thirza Cropper, His Fiancée in Europe and England, the Majority from 1823-1825* (Epping, NSW: D. and C. Shelton, 1993) 60-1.

¹² *Ibid.* 61.

¹³ Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1981) 90; Shelton, *The Parramore Letters* 61.

¹⁴ Mansfield to Wesleyan Missionary Society 30 June 1825, Bonwick Missionary Transcript BT53, ML, cited in Bronwyn Desailly, "The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824-1836" (M.A thesis, University of Tasmania, 1977) 25.

¹⁵ Reported in *The Tasmanian* 12 and 19 January 1825, cited in N.J.B Plomley, ed., *Weep in Silence: A History of the Flinders Island Aboriginal Settlement* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1987) 5.

¹⁶ Ronald Worthy Giblin, *The Early History of Tasmania Vol 2, 1804-1828* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939) 507.

¹⁷ Ian McFarlane, "Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Tasmania, 2002) 130.

¹⁸ Diary of J.C. Sutherland, AOT NP 61/1-3.

¹⁹ Diary of Adam Amos 1822-1825, AOT NS 323/1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Meredith wrote to Arthur that "so long as these wanton acts were confined to attacks upon my stock... I would not allow the offences to be visited personally upon their heads, but when I had one servant most dangerously wounded... and another barbarously murdered... it seemed indispensable to keep them at a distance." Eustace FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania: Letters, Petitions and Other Manuscripts Relating to Van Diemen's Land 1808-1845* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1980) 35.

²³ The first Supreme Court trial in Van Diemen's Land related to the killing of a 'black man'. Windschuttle assumes the 'black man' killed was an Aborigine, and angrily denounces those who have 'overlooked this'. The man was black, but not Aboriginal. The *Hobart Town Gazette*, the only available primary source, always used the word 'native' in describing Aborigines at this time.

²⁴ Arthur to Bathurst 15 August 1824, *HRA* 3/4.

²⁵ Jack Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" (unpublished manuscript accessible at the State Library of Tasmania) no page numbers.

²⁶ In a memorial to the Lieutenant Governor seeking land purportedly promised him, Edward Luttrell claimed that "under his protection a native boy named Tage" had captured Musquito, and been promised a boat. Luttrell complained that the boat was "composed of stringy bark in lieu of pure planks" and that Tage subsequently "flew to the bush threatening extermination to every white man." Luttrell "traversed the bush in quest of him" and claims he was to be granted 300 acres in return for bringing him back to the settlement. Eustace Fitzsymonds, *Mortmain: A Collection of Choice Petitions, Memorials, and Letters of Protest and Request from the Convict Colony of Van Diemen's Land* (Hobart: Sullivan's Cove, 1977) 55; AOT, CSO 1/72/1499.

²⁷ Windschuttle accepts no reason for the outbreak of major hostility in 1824 except the criminal actions of two “black bushrangers” – Musquito and Black Tom. Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002) 61-82.

²⁸ N. J. B. Plomley et al., *The Aboriginal/Settler Clash in Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1831* (Launceston, Tas.: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in association with the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 1992) 26.

²⁹ AOT CSO 1/316/7578, cited in Desailly, “The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824-1836” 38-9.

³⁰ O'Connor to Parramore 11 December 1827 AOT, CSO 1/323/7578 in *Ibid.* 58.

³¹ Anstey to Parramore, 26 November 1827, Arthur Papers, ML, cited in Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 43.

³² N. J. B. Plomley et al., *The Aboriginal-Settler Clash in Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1831* 26-7.

³³ *Hobart Town Courier* 18 October 1828.

³⁴ AOT CSO 1/316/7578, cited in Desailly, “The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824-1836” 39.

³⁵ Lois Nyman, *The East Coasters: The Early Pioneering History of the East Coast of Tasmania* (Launceston, Tas.: Regal Publications, 1990) 36, 91.

³⁶ Shayne Breen, *Contested Places: Tasmania's Northern Districts from Ancient Times to 1900* (Hobart: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 2001) 25.

³⁷ *Daily Telegraph* 25 November 1893, in K Bonney, ed., *Early Deloraine* (Launceston: Regal Press) 47.

³⁸ The oral accounts given by long time residents to the *Daily Telegraph* in 1893 claim that this man was erroneously called McAllister by West. *Ibid.* 19-20.

³⁹ J Crawford, W.F Ellis, and G.H Stancombe, eds., *The Diaries of John Helder Wedge 1824-1835* (Hobart: Royal Society of Tasmania, 1962) 219. The fact that the context for the breakdown in relations was the granting of land to wealthy free settlers is highlighted by Wedge's next port of call: “Capt Moriarty is a magistrate of the district and has a large tract of country in the western plains, fine land... been settled about 19 months and has built a stone house ... two soldiers are stationed here.”

⁴⁰ Johnson had arrived in Van Diemen's Land in January 1824 with a life sentence, and ever since had been a stock-keeper at the Meander River. Thomas Johnson petitioned Arthur to marry his Aboriginal partner on 29 September 1831: “Your Excellency's petitioner has for the last four years lived with a woman named Dalrymple Briggs, the daughter of an Aboriginal native by whom he has three children.” Police Magistrate Malcolm Smith noted her “courageous defence lately against the Aborigines – She is a capital markswoman never I am told missing her aim.” Arthur approved the marriage on 14 October 1831, and as the reward for her “resolute conduct”

ordered that "Thomas Johnson is to be free in Van Diemen's Land the day he marries Dalrymple Briggs and a suburban allotment of 20 acres is to be granted to him in any township in the interior – the grant bearing date the day on which she defended herself and children against the natives." They were married on 29 October 1831. FitzSymonds, *A Looking-Glass for Tasmania* 199-200. A Government notice of 22 September 1831, published in the *Hobart Town Gazette* on 24 September 1831, attempted to improve settler morale in the face of the vigorous Aboriginal resistance by "detailing the successful resistance of a SINGLE FEMALE to their attacks" (emphasis in the original).

⁴¹ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 283, 306. Robert arrived at Flinders Island, to live with a people he hardly knew, on 1 January 1831.

⁴² On 16 April 1831 Robinson went to collect two Aborigines living at Norfolk Plains. Two days later he reported having gone to "Mr Brumby's farm for the purpose of obtaining a domesticated Aborigine residing there". Two more Aborigines were removed from Norfolk Plains the following week. Aborigines were also removed from the military, including "Tilleniner alias James, a fine lad, but had acquired much bad language". Gilbert Robertson objected very strongly to Robinson seeking to remove "my servant John Woodburn" ('Jack of Swanport'). And Dr Smith gave an Aboriginal child to Robinson on 29 April 1831, but on hearing that the boy "does not like the situation he is now", unsuccessfully sought his return on 11 August 1831. *Ibid.* 342-6, 448, 70.

⁴³ This issue has been comprehensively considered by John McMahon, who concluded that: "the training doctrine of the army was preparation for a European campaign of the type conducted under Wellington in 1815. Company and battalion drill and volley firing were the tactical manoeuvres practiced. Independent patrol and field craft exercises were not conducted. Therefore neither by motivation, nor training, were British infantrymen prepared to take part in small-scale counter-insurgency operations. This limited their effective role in Van Diemen's Land." John McMahon, "The British Army: Its Role in the Counter Insurgency in the Black War in Van Diemen's Land," *Tasmanian Historical Studies* 5, no. 1 (1995-6) 58-9.

⁴⁴ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 552-3.

⁴⁵ Plomley et al., *The Aboriginal/Settler Clash in Van Diemen's Land, 1803-1831* 18-19.

⁴⁶ J.D Harte to Arthur 28 March 1828, AOT CSO 1/316.

⁴⁷ Hobbs to Anstey 20 May 1830, AOT CSO 1/315.

⁴⁸ AOT CSO 1/359/7578.

⁴⁹ Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive* 84.

⁵⁰ Aborigine Committee Minutes of Evidence 23 February 1830, AOT CBE/1.

⁵¹ Petition of 27 February 1830, AOT CSO 1/316/7578.

⁵² *Tasmanian*, The 26 February 1830, cited in Desailly, "The Mechanics of Genocide: Colonial Policies and Attitudes Towards the Tasmanian Aborigines 1824-1836" 43.

⁵³ G.R Elton, *The Practice of History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 76-77.

⁵⁴ Keith Windschuttle, "Whitewash Confirms the Fabrication of Aboriginal History," *Quadrant* 47, no 10 (2003) 8-16.

⁵⁵ See notes 60, 75 and 80 for examples of the sort of evidence deemed inadmissible in Windschuttle's methodology.

⁵⁶ David Burn, *A Picture of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Cat and Fiddle Press, 1973); J. E. Calder, *Some Account of the Wars, Extirpation, Habits Etc of the Native Tribes of Tasmania*, facsimile ed. (Hobart: Fullers Bookshop, 1972); George Thomas Lloyd, *Thirty Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1862); Melville, *The History of Van Diemen's Land from the Year 1824 to 1835 Inclusive*; N. J. B. Plomley, *Jorgen Jorgenson and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land: Being a Reconstruction of His 'Lost' Book on Their Customs and Habits, and on His Role in the Roving Parties and the Black Line* (Hobart: Blubber Head Press, 1991); John West, *The History of Tasmania* (Angus and Robertson, 1971).

⁵⁷ Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847* 364.

⁵⁸ Baín Attwood, *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005) 163-4.

⁵⁹ An empirical historiography does not mean that a historian assumes that there is a direct correlation between text and historical reality (which equates to a long discredited positivism), as seems to be implied by Attwood. *Ibid.* 161.

⁶⁰ Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* 299. Windschuttle cites O'Connor's views as an example of his claim that evangelicalism was an important restraining influence on settlers, despite O'Connor's aggressive views, and despite the fact that he was *not* an evangelical (and, indeed, later converted to Catholicism). O'Connor's claims about Ibbens' success in killing the eastern mob is also a pertinent example of the indefensibility of Windschuttle's standards of evidence. Despite Windschuttle's professed admiration for O'Connor, and his criticisms of historians for not taking the Aborigines Committee sufficiently seriously, evidence such as O'Connor's is not considered relevant in estimating the extent of violence against Aborigines because it does not document particular deaths. In *Fabrication*, Ibbens (and the others like him) is in effect assumed to have killed no one, and O'Connor assumed to be either a liar or misinformed, because no particular fatal foray involving the probably illiterate former convict was ever recorded.

⁶¹ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land (Including Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Committee for the Affairs of the Aborigines, 1830)*, (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1971) 54-5.

⁶² Richards, "Fifteen Tasmanian Letters 1824-1852" no page numbers.

⁶³ G Dow and H Dow, *Landfall in Van Diemen's Land: The Steels' Quest for Greener Pastures* (Footscray, Vic.: Footprint, 1990) 45.

⁶⁴ George Hobler, *The Diaries of Pioneer George Hobler October 6 1800 - December 13 1882* (n.p. [California]: C & H Reproductions, 1992).

⁶⁵ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 219; AOT CSO 28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 218.

⁶⁷ For example *Ibid.*, 197-8, 503.

⁶⁸ *Van Diemen's Land: Copies of All Correspondence between Lieutenant Governor Arthur and His Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Subject of the Military Operations Lately Carried on against the Aboriginal Inhabitants of Van Diemen's Land*, (London: Parliamentary Paper, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 23 September 1831, 1831) 49.

⁶⁹ The most comprehensive tally of the incidents between Aborigines and settlers is provided in H.A Wills, *A Tally of Those Killed During the Fighting between Aborigines and Settlers in Van Diemen's Land 1803-34* (www.historians.org.au/forumsupport/tally-VDL.PDF, 2002 [viewed August 2003]).

⁷⁰ "Statement of proceedings of an armed party of nine soldiers, two constables and John Danvers, guide, in pursuit of the Aborigines 9 December 1828, AOT CSO 1/319, correspondence file 7578, 320.

⁷¹ Windschuttle reported the *Hobart Town Courier* coverage of this incident, but was also unaware of the official report.

⁷² AOT CSO 1/319, correspondence file 7578, 353. This is yet another killing ignored in Windschuttle's supposedly comprehensive list of documented killings of Aborigines.

⁷³ AOT CSO 1/320/7578.

⁷⁴ Batman to Anstey 7 September 1829, AOT, CSO1/320/7578, cited in A.H Campbell, *John Batman and the Aborigines* (Melbourne: Kibble Books, 1987) 31-2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 32. Windschuttle's treatment of this encounter – reducing it to two deaths, sanitizing the quote and omitting to mention Batman's estimate of the carnage in text or footnote – provides a telling expression of the distortions created by his methodology. Because Batman only sighted two dead bodies, Windschuttle puts the figure at two dead, without reference or acknowledgement of Batman's much greater personal estimate of the number of Aborigines killed.

⁷⁶ McFarlane, "Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide" 91.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* vii.

⁷⁸ Ida Lee, ed., *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen's Land and Batavia in 1827-28* (London, New York: Longmans, 1927) 40-1.

⁷⁹ McFarlane, "Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide" 104. See also McFarlane's chapter in Robert Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003).

⁸⁰ That Windschuttle continues to defend what he now says was his deliberate omission of any reference to this incident in the *Fabrication of Aboriginal History's* extensive discussion and conclusions about the low level of violence on the north west frontier in early 1828, provides another example of the quality and ethical standards of his research. *Fabrication* includes a whole chapter of 46 pages and 109 footnotes which reviews the claims of violent killings of Aborigines on VDL Company holdings (not confining itself to the infamous Cape Grim deaths as the chapter title suggests), and concentrating on the months corresponding with or immediately preceding Hare's stay; but *Fabrication* never mentions, in text or footnote, Hare's account. In the October 2003 issue of *Quadrant* Windschuttle is explicit that Hare's journal was read by him, and indeed is scornful of those who "pretend I was unaware" of it. Windschuttle justifies the omission in *Quadrant* on the grounds that it was "itself seriously undermined by two quite separate pieces of information. That is why this incident does not appear in my book." The first is the "doubts raised by the diarist's own editor." The second is "a dispatch by the Van Diemen's Land Company on 14 January 1828 [that] described the *Fanny* incident. It reported that there was an attempt by the boat's crew to shoot some Aborigines but their powder was wet and their guns would not go off." Ida Lee, the diary's editor, did doubt the veracity of Hare's account; she believed that "it is probable that in writing of the conflicts between the two races Mrs Hare refers, in her journal," to a "second attack at Woolnorth." However, the reason for Lee's belief is easily explained: Lee was writing in the 1920s (Hare's diaries were published in 1927), and the Van Diemen's Land Company papers were therefore not available to her, as they only began to be released in the 1950s. These papers, as Windschuttle himself points out in *Quadrant*, have subsequently confirmed that a separate incident to the ones known to Lee did take place in early 1828, and that this involved the crew of the company ship *Fanny*. That Hare was not confusing the *Fanny* attack on Aborigines with any other is therefore no longer in any doubt; the basis of Lee's doubt has been completely removed. It is now clear that there are, simply, two versions of the one event: that of the VDL Company's agent, Edward Curr, who says no Aborigines were killed as the powder on the muskets was wet; and Hare's, who says a dozen were. It is legitimate to discuss the two sides, and reach a conclusion about the balance of probability (as another doubting⁷ historian, who Windschuttle quotes in support, Geoff Lennox, does). It is not legitimate, however, to have read both Hare's and Curr's description, and then have deliberately withheld any mention of the incident from the reader altogether, as Windschuttle admitted in *Quadrant* that he had done. Moreover, regardless of the judgement reached about the veracity of Curr's version of events, an official acknowledgement by the Company's Chief agent that there was an intent to kill Aborigines by a party made up of Van Diemen's Land Company men, using the Company's

ship, is directly relevant to Windschuttle's argument about settler attitudes to killing Aborigines and the low level of overall violence on the frontier. To have deliberately withheld all mention of this matter in a lengthy chapter reviewing the actions and attitudes of the Van Diemen's Land Company to Aborigines is not only unacceptable, but manifestly dishonest. Windschuttle, "Whitewash Confirms the Fabrication of Aboriginal History," 10-11.

⁸¹ Lee, ed., *The Voyage of the Caroline from England to Van Diemen's Land and Batavia in 1827-28* 181.

⁸² McFarlane, "Aboriginal Society in North West Tasmania: Dispossession and Genocide" 91.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 106-07.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 108.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 105.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 109-10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 123.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 126-7.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 121-3.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 125.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 133.

⁹² *Ibid.* 139. As in other regions of Van Diemen's Land, there is no direct evidence of how most of these people died, but of those that are known, almost all died from violence. Disease was probably a contributor, but again, a large scale epidemic seem unlikely since, as in other areas of Van Diemen's Land, there are no reports of Aborigines dying from disease until they were forcibly confined or exiled.

⁹³ *HRA* 3/8, 592-3.

⁹⁴ Arthur to Murray 15 April 1830, *HRA* 3/8, 824-5.

⁹⁵ John Molony, *The Native Born: The First White Australians* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000) 10-11. Molony's book explicitly does not consider Van Diemen's Land, but there seems little evidence for its ambitious claim even in relation to New South Wales.

⁹⁶ One of these men, Alexander McKay, went on to lead his own conciliation mission, and according to his later friend, J.E Calder, was angry at the deceit practiced upon the Aborigines (although Robinson blamed McKay for an incident when Aborigines were shot). Calder termed McKay "a humble and useful attaché of the Black Embassy", and is one of the few historians to acknowledge the crucial role played, especially in the first two years, by convict bushmen attached to Robinson's mission. Calder, *Recollections of Sir John and Lady Jane Franklin in Tasmania* 24. Even Robinson's journal and reports, which explicitly seek to ensure that no credit is given to these men, cannot disguise the central role they played in providing for the material needs of the conciliation mission, and for building relations with the Aborigines.

⁹⁷ Nyman, *The East Coasters: The Early Pioneering History of the East Coast of Tasmania* 36, 1.

⁹⁸ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 522.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 565.

¹⁰⁰ William Thornley (edited by John Mills), *The Adventures of an Emigrant in Van Diemen's Land* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1973). The battle scenes involving Aborigines and bushrangers in an alliance against the settlers are one of the sections of this book that are pure fiction.

¹⁰¹ Government notice 18 October 1831, published in *Hobart Town Gazette* 23 October 1831.

¹⁰² Robert Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 115.

¹⁰³ Thylacine sightings seem to have increased in the second half of the nineteenth century. One settler recalled that "when the dogs had gone, native tigers took over, notably in the east and around Tooms Lake." Alfred Burbury, "Alfred Burbury Memories from the Chronicles of the Burbury Family," *Oatlands District Historical Society Chronicle* 1 (December 2000) 29. An unfortunate consequence, however, was that the vilification and killing of thylacines then intensified. Comprehensive discussions of thylacine research are contained in Eric Guiler, *Thylacine: The Tragedy of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985; Paddle, *The Last Tasmanian Tiger: The History and Extinction of the Thylacine*; David Owen, *Thylacine: The Tragic Tale of the Tasmanian Tiger* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin) 2003.

¹⁰⁴ James Fenton, *Bush Life in Tasmania Fifty Years Ago* (Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1891 reprinted Mary Fisher Bookstore, Launceston, Tas., n.d) 113.

¹⁰⁵ William Denison, *Varieties of Vice Regal Life*, Vol. One (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1870) 29.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Nicholls, ed., *Traveller under Concern: The Quaker Journals of Frederick Mackie on His Tour of the Australasian Colonies 1852-1855* (Hobart: University of Tasmania, 1973) 173-5.

¹⁰⁷ Roger McNeice, "Bushfires", in Alison Alexander, ed., *The Companion to Tasmanian History* (Hobart: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, 2005) 59.

¹⁰⁸ Robinson, for example, did not see, or taste, emus until he was in the north-east. In December 1830 he saw three emus, the first he had seen. On 13 September 1831 he found it to be "very tender and pleasant." Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 288, 425.

¹⁰⁹ Hooker was a friend of Charles Darwin, and later became the Director of Kew Gardens and the compiler of the four volume *Flora Tasmaniae*. This eminent reference work was published by the British Admiralty in 1860 with the financial assistance of the Tasmanian Government.

¹¹⁰ J.R. Sjömp and T.E. Burns, *Van Diemen's Land Correspondents 1827-1849: Letters from R.C. Gunn, R.W. Lawrence, Jorgen Jorgenson and Others to Sir William J. Hooker* (Launceston, Tas.: Queen Victoria Museum, 1961) v, 59.

¹¹¹ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 308.

¹¹² Meredith noted that the destruction of black swans for feathers and eggs "very nearly" exterminated them, and that she had lived at Great Swanport "above two years" before seeing her "first wild one." Louisa Meredith, *My Home in Tasmania* (New York: Bunce, 1853) 76.

¹¹³ Neil Barr, *Greening a Brown Land: The Australian Search for Sustainable Land Use* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1992) 13-14.

¹¹⁴ Sharon Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania: Creating an Antipodean England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 112.

¹¹⁵ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 501.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 596.

¹¹⁷ Brown, ed., *Clyde Company Papers* 33.

¹¹⁸ Nixon, *The Pioneer Bishop in Van Diemen's Land, 1843-1863: Letters and Memories of Francis Russell Nixon, D.D., First Bishop of Tasmania* 34.

¹¹⁹ Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission* 596.

¹²⁰ Nixon, *The Pioneer Bishop in Van Diemen's Land, 1843-1863: Letters and Memories of Francis Russell Nixon, D.D., First Bishop of Tasmania* 34.

¹²¹ Lloyd, *Thirty Three Years in Tasmania and Victoria* 48. See also *Hobart Town Courier* 24 September 1831.

Conclusion

*All countries "bear some mark of their origin; and the circumstances which accompanied their birth and contributed to their rise affect the whole term of their being."*¹(de Tocqueville)

Stored in the vaults of the Bird Collection of the British Natural History Museum since 1838, have been the skins of two Tasmanian emus, the only remaining specimens of what was Van Diemen's Land's largest land animal.² Like the distinct King Island and Kangaroo Island sub-species, the Tasmanian emu fell victim to a predator unknown before British settlement – the dog. The eggs, chicks, and – usually after a ferocious fight – adult birds too, provided food for both the official and unofficial invaders who settled Van Diemen's Land and its offshore islands from 1798.

Given its importance, and the prominence which might be expected from the tragedy of extinction, the fact that few Tasmanians now know that there ever was a Tasmanian emu is illuminating. The emu and forester kangaroo (which also narrowly escaped extinction on the island and is now confined to regions far from the capital) on Hobart's coat of arms are seen as quaint decoration, not a picture of the city's birth. The city motto that underlines the posing animals, *Sic Fortis Hobartia Crevit* ("Thus by Industry Hobart Town Increased") – first used by Robert Knopwood in his diary on the last day of 1804 when the Chaplain, with evident pride and gratitude, listed his personal tally of the numbers of kangaroo his gamekeepers had killed – has been reduced to an obscure piece of Latin unrelated to the bounty framing it.³ Cultural memory has been so distorted by the mythology that Tasmania was a 'Little England' that the fact that the emu and the forester kangaroo were the main food source of the first British settlers is virtually unknown. There is no feast of Thanksgiving to remember the fruitfulness of the earth that sustained our founding fathers and mothers, and it is hoped that few would want to celebrate a bounty so

associated with such human and environmental tragedy. Nevertheless, the failure to tell the story of how the convict and the poor settler experienced their land of exile has influenced our understanding of what it means to be Tasmanian (and indeed Australian), and diminished the imagination needed for making a just home upon this conquered earth.

The Tasmanian emu, it is true, was not so different from its mainland cousins, but 12000 years of isolation and different environmental conditions made for some variations – most noticeably its smaller size – a distinctive feature highlighted in the coat of arms. And, while similarities with the emu's mainland cousins are obvious enough, it is surely the differences that define it. The same is true of Van Diemonian Britons, self-evidently related closely to British peoples everywhere, not least in New South Wales; but isolation and environment nevertheless produced some novel adaptations.

The starting point for the change that occurred was the convict experience. The vast majority of Britons who came to Van Diemen's Land had socio-economic and cultural backgrounds radically different from the elite free settlers, and this shaped their goals and values, and their experiences of the new environment. While there is no longer silence about Tasmania's convict past (indeed, the packaging of this 'cultural heritage' is an integral part of the burgeoning tourist industry), elements of the old public amnesia remain in the reluctance to claim the convicts as the true founders of Tasmania. Just as the Aborigines were for so long, the convicts are largely remembered as victims; passive prisoners in a world created by their masters. They were seen to be without 'culture' – that was something made, as Alan Shaw has seriously claimed, only by the "Colonial Office" and "sometimes private sources – the gentry or the so called bourgeoisie." Such an interpretation leaves no space for environmentally-induced cultural change, as free settlers and government officials were too buttressed from the new land by capital and privilege to be changed by it, no matter how much many of them appreciated its beauty and

novelty. Given this class bias, Shaw's conclusion is inevitable: "it was primarily because of the British connection that in 1855 colonial society had attained the shape and stature that it had."⁴ This is a widely shared assumption and it has deeply affected Tasmanian identity.

In 1824 Edward Curr wrote that "our highest aim is to exhibit on a small scale something like the beauties which rise at every step in the land to which we have bade adieu."⁵ These and similar sentiments have often been used to summarise the aspirations of British immigrants to Van Diemen's Land. But statements like Curr's need to be given a context. The period in which he wrote constituted watershed years in the history of Van Diemen's Land, when a new class of immigrant was arriving, men who were granted private property title over the grassy woodlands, and self-consciously aspired to recreate a little England with the personal profit and social status that came with the land handout. But Curr was writing about what he hoped Van Diemen's Land would now become, not what it was. As he lamented: "alas!, with all its inviting beauties, its riches and verdure, it is still Van Diemen's Land, – still the abode of felons; a moral evil, which, in spite of other advantages, will compel many to forgo the little less than paradise which it presents."⁶

The aspirations of most residents of this 'abode of felons' were a world apart from those of Curr. Most came from a life of grinding poverty in what was still essentially a pre-industrial society – the Industrial Revolution had only a limited and uneven impact in Britain before 1830 – and as E.P Thompson reminds us, the biggest change that came with industrialization was in "needs" and "expectations." Ordinary Britons in the early nineteenth century did not expect to have much in the way of possessions, and meeting the essentials of life on a day to day basis was still their primary motivation. In Van Diemen's Land, where environmental imperatives meant that many imported products – clothes, tents, tools, guns and salted foods – were commonly discarded, needs were simplified still further. The transporting of this raw human material to a land that

offered a degree of free access to the essentials of life that was unknown in Britain (where even wild animals were private property), led to the emergence of a people open to the radical lifestyle changes needed to take advantage of the bounty.

For a surprising number of current and former convicts, food, clothing and shelter came not from the payment of wages, prescribed rations or charity, but were the gift of the land itself. As the distinguished economic historian, Noel Butlin, has concluded: "Van Diemen's Land was an attractive, and for a time an increasingly attractive, place in which convicts and ex-convicts might be self supporting." Moreover, given their backgrounds in Britain and the alternatives on offer in Van Diemen's Land, these men and women would surely have rejected Butlin's judgment that this "was a limited merit."⁷ For those escaping grinding poverty, harsh penal discipline, boundless regulation and autocratic government, self sufficiency was not to be judged by its success in accumulating capital, but the extent to which it preserved life and freedom.

There is abundant evidence, then, that the Van Diemonian poor did not behave as economic models suggest they should, downsizing and discarding even when there were opportunities to upgrade and accumulate. Nevertheless, most Australian historians remain uncritically faithful to the assumptions of orthodox economics about human nature, and are guilty of what E.P Thompson has described as "crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour and function."⁸ Thompson does not suggest that it is possible to "return to pre-capitalist human nature", but points out, in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis, that "a reminder of its alternative needs, expectations and codes may renew our sense of nature's range of possibilities."⁹ Simon Schama also points to the hope that may be found in forgotten memories:

though it may sometimes seem that our impatient appetite for produce has ground the earth to thin and shifting dust, we need only poke below the subsoil of its surface to discover an obstinately rich loam of memory. It is not that we are any more virtuous or wiser than the most pessimistic environmentalist supposes. It is just that we are more retentive. The sum of our pasts, generation laid over generation, like the slow mould of the seasons, forms the compost of our future. We live off it.¹⁰

Van Diemen's Land surely provides a particularly fertile compost for contemplation. If it is a remarkable fact to be founded by convicted felons, it is even more startling to find how quickly and effectively these imperial rejects made their place of exile a home. And in a world that seems driven by the accumulation of material possessions, it is worth remembering that, for the vast majority, Van Diemen's Land was never a place where much money was sought or made. Home-making for former convicts was motivated by factors far more elementary than the pound or the 'holey' dollar – access, with dignity, to the essentials of life, and a life free from the controls and subservience of servitude.

The central paradox at the heart of the multifarious environmental experiences of Van Diemen's Land is that the penal apparatus of a mighty empire happened to be transplanted to a land that provided so well for those without capital or technology. In Van Diemen's Land there was no need to subdue the earth, invest capital or 'improve' farms, to live with decency and dignity. The ready access to cleared grasslands, fresh water, rich coastal resources, and fresh meat and skins in a land that had never known the dingo, ensured that the grassy woodlands of Van Diemen's Land were the first Australian environment that Britons made home, with a speed perhaps unmatched anywhere in the New World.

Furthermore, so far did these hunter-pastoralists move from the concentrated loci of imperial power, that their migration was effectively a move beyond the boundaries of British territory into that of Aboriginal nations, precipitating two decades of largely (although not totally) peaceful shared land use. If Anne Buttimer is even partly correct in claiming that "the criteria of rationality and truth in every culture have always been derived from its foundational myths", then, given the novelty and wonder of this environmental and cultural encounter, the story of what happened to the convict founders of Van Diemen's Land can only enrich contemporary reflection and debate.

The way of life of the poor came to pose a potent challenge to the elite, and this was crucial to the construction of Van Diemonian history. The many complaints of the land grantees and the colonial government about current and former convicts, living in their bark huts, combining hunting with farming, reluctant to work beyond the minimum hours or grow more than they needed, and drinking to the moment rather than saving for tomorrow, must no longer be reproduced as if these privileged observers were free from self-interest or their own cultural straight-jackets. The great challenge of the free settlers and colonial authorities in the 1820s was not to subdue the environment but to subdue competitors for the native pastures, and to develop a subservient labour force that would work the land and respect and defend the property of their masters. This conflict within the ranks of the British invaders, as with the struggle to dispossess the Aborigines from their traditional lands, was for a long time far more equal and unresolved than appears from the perspective of the twenty-first century, where tangible icons of the victor's spoils, from Georgian houses to Port Arthur, remain such visible features of Tasmania's landscape.

At one level 'Little England' undeniably and unambiguously triumphed, with almost all matters in contention seemingly resolved in favour of the elite. The penal system was refined, the grassy woodlands converted to gentry estates, and itinerant stock thieves locked up in the many gaols that were built across

the island, eventually underpinned by the fortress of Port Arthur. Aborigines were captured or killed, and the few survivors forced into exile. There was no negotiated settlement in Van Diemen's Land; the victor's terms were unconditional.¹¹ James Ross concluded his account of free settler pioneer struggles on an understandable note of triumph: "my flocks and herds were rapidly increasing... every day was adding something to the value of my estate, and the efforts which the government was making to put down the aggressions of both black and white invaders of life and property... proved, triumphantly successful." So well did certain free settlers cement this victory through the emerging economic, social and political structures of the new Tasmania after 1856 that, by 1875, 92 of the largest 100 rural estates were owned by families that had acquired land before 1832 (accounting, with the Van Diemen's Land Company, for almost half of all alienated land); and the gentry exercised more political power through Parliament and the arms of government (largely devolved in nineteenth century Tasmania to a local level where the landowners' influence was paramount) than had been the case even in Van Diemen's Land.¹²

On the other hand, what remained distinctive about the economic and social relations of the island is that, unlike much of North America or the Australian mainland, its geographical realities continued to pose a challenge to hegemonic claims. As the Land Commissioners noted in 1827: "land, composed of no particles but miserable sand and gravel, unfit for any purpose, and covered with wood, which can never be of any value, is extremely difficult to put a price on."¹³ This type of country was everywhere in Van Diemen's Land, ensuring that the frontier existed as a perpetual patchwork, rather than a continuous line retreating to ever more remote and far-off places. In the disturbingly close and 'useless' mountains, thick scrub, threatening forests, windswept coasts and the multitude of offshore islands, the common always beckoned, posing a challenge to the pretensions of those who would prematurely celebrate the coming of 'Little England'. Such country reached even into the fringes of the

capital. Mt Wellington may be, as Trollope put it, "just enough of a mountain to give excitement to ladies and gentlemen in middle life"¹⁴, but its very moderation, its near-perfect balance between accessibility and remoteness, made it invaluable to the poor. Like other mountain ranges, sheltered waterways, islands, and forests, it was, for a long period, too harsh and unprofitable an environment to be lived in or exploited by the rich, while being sufficiently accessible to provide free resources and sanctuary to ordinary folk. And, with its sister hills – like the rivers, reaching out across the land – framing even the midland plains of the gentry elite, human 'wild-life corridors' reached into the very heart of Little England's main domain.

Asserting the importance of these alternative cultural memories is not meant to suggest a Van Diemonian antecedent to modern environmental or cross-cultural sensibility. Van Diemonian connection to the land, and the complex cultural encounter associated with it, do not equate with any contemporary cause. Expressed appreciation of fauna, flora and landscape, and concerns about the ethics and legality of invasion, were in fact widespread in Van Diemen's Land, but this was a discourse carried on largely within the elite. It is impossible to know what convict settlers thought of such matters, and difficult to see what difference these sentiments ultimately made anyway. The central conclusion of this thesis is not that the convicts and their descendents were not implicated in massive environmental destruction and a human tragedy of almost unimaginable proportion. Rather it makes a humbler point – simply that our convict ancestors were changed by living in this bountiful and beautiful land, the home of an ancient and distinct people. And they were changed, too, by conquest.

Much blood was spilt, human and non-human, in Van Diemen's Land. There is no place of easy reassurance in its creation story, but there is a sense of something new being born in the blood and ash, something that has existed and struggled to survive ever since: the culture of a distinct people. This does

not and cannot redeem the crimes of our past; all white Tasmanians share the inheritance of a bloody conquest. But to present this story as a monolithic imperial success is to concede to the claims of those who triumphed – and wrote the island's histories. With politicians again talking of a 'new Tasmania' (and sounding ominously like their colonial predecessors), with their business partners monopolizing public resources for capital gain, and with global forces seeking to privatize all that is still common and to market even our very identity, it is more important than ever to remember that 'Little England' has never been the only story of Van Diemen's Land.

Endnotes Conclusion

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, cited in Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977).

² Knopwood Diary 31 December 1804. Translation of Latin by Mary Nicholls, *The Diary of the Reverend Robert Knopwood 1803–1838*. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery only has “an egg and some bones from the Tasmanian species, some egg shell and bones from the King Island species and also a feather from one of the King Island birds collected by Baudin in 1803.” Dr Andrew Rozefelds, Deputy Director Collections and Research TMAG, personal communication 9 September 2005. King Island emu specimens are held by the Natural History Museums in Paris and Florence.

³ I am grateful to the assistance of Brendan Lennard, Cultural Heritage Officer of the Hobart City Council, who advised that “the motto was first used by Council at the outset (ie from the 1850s), though the first ‘coat of arms’ was an unofficial crest. The present arms, formally granted in 1853, was largely designed by Alderman I. G. Anderson, an architect. The motto is featured on both the coat of arms and the earlier crest.” Lennard pointed out that Knopwood “has adapted the famous line from Virgil’s *Georgics*, where it is used in relation to Etruria – an important area of central Italy inhabited and governed by the Etruscans.” Personal communication 3 September 2005.

⁴ Alan Shaw, “The British Contribution” in Michael Roe, ed., *The Flow of Culture: Australian Studies* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1981) 74–5, 86.

⁵ Edward Curr, *An Account of the Colony of Van Diemen’s Land: Principally Designed for the Use of Emigrants* (Hobart: Platypus Publications, 1967) 11–12.

⁶ *Ibid.* 29.

⁷ N.G. Butlin, *Forming a Colonial Economy: Australia 1810–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 205.

⁸ E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Penguin, 1993) 187.

⁹ *Ibid.* 14–15.

¹⁰ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1996) 574.

¹¹ The evidence from Robinson’s journal is that a key group of Aborigines from the settled districts actively sought an agreement with the colonial government and believed that they had achieved this, but that by the time this had occurred, the real intention of the Government was removal by any means. By mid 1831, the goal of the colonial government, including its emissary to the Aborigines, was to place the Aborigines in semi-permanent exile on a Bass Strait island, and the negotiations were essentially a ruse to facilitate this. Robinson’s more benevolent motives of

1829-30, and Arthur's openness to a negotiated settlement involving the central question of land access during this period, have confused the issue. At the critical time, from October 1831, capture and deceit drove British policy. The contest over the grassy woodlands of Van Diemen's Land which had shaped the history of Van Diemen's Land since 1803, was thus not settled through negotiation. The Aborigines brought in by Robinson (by deceit) in the context and aftermath of a bloody war were understood by the British to be captives, and the assurances made to achieve their confinement were understood as a tactic to prevent further killing and end the resistance. There has not been the space to consider this complex question in this thesis, but it will be reviewed in a forthcoming book by the author.

¹² Shayne Breen, *Contested Places: Tasmania's Northern Districts from Ancient Times to 1900* (Hobart: Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 2001) 34; Henry Reynolds, "Regionalism in Nineteenth Century Tasmania," *THRA Papers and Proceedings* 17, no. 1 (1969) 16. One of the many paradoxes of Van Diemen's Land is that the British crown offered some level of protection to the convicts and Aborigines which was largely lost with self-government. This was expressed in the transportation debate of the late 1840s when Lieutenant Governor Denison had an alliance of sorts with former convicts against the denigration of them by many anti-transportationists both in Van Diemen's Land and Port Phillip. The Aborigines never forgot that the crown offered their best, if very limited, hope of recognition and redress. They directly petitioned Queen Victoria in 1847 on the basis of their historical rights, and right through to the 1950s, when the Governor was asked by Cape Barren Islanders to prevent their eviction from the reserve, there are examples of direct appeals to the Governor of the day. The famous petition presented by Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell direct to Queen Elizabeth II in the 1970s, which symbolizes the emergence of an assertive and confident contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal identity, was thus a powerful expression of the historical continuity of the Aborigine's cause.

¹³ Anne McKay, *Journals of the Land Commissioners for Van Diemen's Land, 1826-28* (Hobart: University of Tasmania in conjunction with the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1962) 27.

¹⁴ Anthony Trollope, *Australia* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1967) 530.

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