Chapter Three

New Frontiers

> The land is, in short, open and available in its present state, for all the purposes of civilized men. We traversed it in two directions with heavy carts, meeting no other obstruction than the softness of the rich soil; and in returning over flowery plains and green hills, fanned by the breezes of early spring, I named this region Australia Felix.
>
> Thomas Mitchell, 1836.

While small numbers of sealers, whalers and bark cutters followed in the wake of Cook's first sighting of the Victorian coast in 1770, it was not until the mid-1830s that Europeans began to arrive there in any great numbers. They came initially across the strait from Van Diemen's Land in search of further pastures for their sheep and cattle. The first of these 'overstraiters' were Thomas Henty and his family who, in November 1834, established their property at Portland Bay. These were followed by two currency lads, John Batman and the hotelier and editor of the *Launceston Advertiser*, John Pascoe Fawkner. Both Batman and Fawkner looked on the new frontier as more than a place for grazing their surplus stock. For them it also provided a means of escaping from the malice and slights they had constantly to endure as the progeny of convicts. A womaniser and firebrand when drunk, Batman negotiated with the aborigines of the Dutigallar tribe to purchase large tracts of land around the future settlements of Melbourne and Geelong. He did this in the name of Tasmania's Governor, Sir George Arthur, and on behalf of the Port Phillip Association which comprised such Vandemonian luminaries as John Helder Wedge, James Simpson, Joseph Tice Gellibrand and Charles Swanston. According to the acerbic Fawkner, two shares in the land were also 'reserved for the British Ministers, by way of a bribe' (cited in Greenwood, 1975:77).

Recognising that neither Arthur nor the colonial government in Sydney would accept such an arrangement, Fawkner and some colleagues landed horses, cattle and men at Melbourne on 30 August 1835 where a hut was built, fruit trees and gardens planted, and soil tilled and sown with wheat, oats and maize. Here

they were 'discovered' by an incredulous Wedge during a subsequent tour of inspection of the Port Phillip Association's land holdings. Since Governor Bourke had proclaimed that any treaty with the aborigines was illegal, Wedge had no grounds for insisting the trespassers leave his land—a position that was forcefully pointed out to him by the interlopers. Faced with the reality that, for the time being at least, land in the new frontier could only be possessed by occupying it, Wedge backed off. In far-off Sydney Governor Bourke, too, accepted as inevitable the occupation of the lands of Port Phillip and appointed Captain William Lonsdale as the district's first magistrate of police. The squatters' camp thus became a recognised colony. On his arrival at Melbourne on the *Rattlesnake* on 1 October 1836, Lonsdale found present no less than 30 settlers, a number of dwellings—including a six-room weatherboard house belonging to John Batman—and in excess of 42,000 sheep.

The later 'overstraiters' were drawn from among those young men with means who came to Van Diemen's Land in the 1820s to benefit from the wool boom. Many had served in the Napoleonic Wars and, like all such veterans, yearned in peacetime for the adventure and excitement they had experienced in war. Others were Lowland Scots who had been forced by a combination of falling prices, rising rents and the enclosure laws, to leave their farming families in order to establish themselves elsewhere. Their relative youth and intelligence, combined with lessons learned from farming in Tasmania, made them, Billis and Kenyon argued in their account of the pastoral occupation of Port Phillip, *Pastures New*, the best possible type of settler for a new country: a 'young Britisher with colonial experience' (1974: 31). Unlike Batman and Fawkner, however, many had little attachment to the land they would seek to exploit. Their principal aim was to make sufficient money to enable them to return home and assume their rightful place among the landed gentry. As Jane Williams lamented during her voyage to Van Diemen's Land in 1820, most of the eligible young men on board were little interested in literature or lovemaking. They spent, instead, all 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 number of years they would return to spend their wealth in their native land (cited in Kiddle, 1963: 26-7).

Driven by a strong sense of adventure and determination to succeed, the Vandemonian 'squatters', as they were called, quickly

moved inland in search of new runs. Some, like Gellibrand and his colleague G. B. L. Hesse, disappeared or were murdered by aborigines. Others moving northwards ran into the 'overlanders'. These were squatters coming with their stock down from the settled districts of New South Wales and along the 'Major's line': the deep ruts left in the soil by the boat carriage of Thomas Mitchell during his exploration of Victoria in 1836. Like their Vandemonian counterparts, the overlanders included many 'young men of good families and connexions in England, officers of the Army and Navy [and] graduates of Oxford and Cambridge' (Gipps, cited in Kiddle, 1963: 43). Despite, or perhaps because of, their youth and distinguished backgrounds, they adopted a rough and ready lifestyle while *en route* to Melbourne and Adelaide. As one contemporary wrote:

> The gentlemen overlanders affected a banditti style of hair and costume. They rode blood or half-bred Arab horses, wore broad-rimmed sombreros trimmed with fur and eagle plumes, scarlet flannel shirts, broad belts filled with pistols, knives and tomahawks, tremendous beards and moustachios ... The arrival of a band of these brown, bearded, banditti-looking gentlemen created quite a sensation—something like the arrival of a party of successful buccaneers in a quiet seaport, with a cargo to sell, in old Dampier's time (cited in Billis and Kenyon, 1974: 50).

After reaching their destinations, the same writer assured us, these men with means exchanged their overland garments for 'the most picturesque and fashionable costume which the best Hindley-street tailor "from Bond Street" could supply'. Combing and oiling their hair in the style of Raphael or Vandyke, they attended the 'delightful evening parties' given by the leaders of 'Adelaidean fashion'. There these 'huge men with brown hands, brown faces and flowing beards' would astonish any new arrivals from England by taking up, at the invitation of their hostess, the 'basso in an Italian piece'.

The overlanders had also taken up runs extending from the Murrumbidgee River, through the Victorian Ranges down to the outskirts of Melbourne, and introduced a further 50,000 sheep and significant numbers of cattle into the area. They were not especially welcomed by the original Vandemonians although, as John Helder Wedge had discovered some years earlier, there was little these could do, beyond snubbing them socially, to prevent the new arrivals from squatting there. Over the same time, fleets of ships of all sizes continued to ferry sheep, cattle and other supplies and materials across the strait from Van Diemen's Land. This was

a hazardous business for man and animals alike. The journey could last nine days or more. There were few safe landing areas and so ships often ran aground or were wrecked within sight of the coast. Any cargo that wasn't lost or spoiled, had either to be rowed or carried ashore through the surf. Once on land the sheep in particular were exposed to attack by wild dogs or hostile natives. The losses were heavy but the numbers landed continued to grow. As one account of the times describes, the early squatters 'so quickly engulfed Port Phillip with a flood of sheep that by 1845 only the Mallee, the eastern ranges and parts of Gippsland remained unoccupied' (Broome, 1984: 23). Melbourne was also expanding rapidly. As early as 1839, the immigrant Jonathon Binns Ware was astounded to find on his arrival a fleet of ships anchored at the mouth of the Yarra. Within the town there were 'good shops with Drugs, Groceries, Haberdashery, Ironmongery; indeed each shop seemed to be quite an emporium' (cited in Younger, 1974: 183-4). Melbourne's inhabitants then numbered around six thousand with most of the well-to-do of Scottish origin.

The squatters, both large stockholders and small, moved inland from the colony's coastal settlements and wandered for miles in the wilderness in search of places that were not already claimed and could sustain their flocks. On finding a suitable location, they would leave traces of their occupation—a hastily erected bark lean-to or simple marks blazed on the trees—and return to the settlements to organise their finances and flocks and, after 1836, register their claims with the Commissioner of Crown Lands. They would then hire the necessary men, purchase sufficient food and supplies to see them through the first twelve months, and load all of these on bullock-led drays. Finally, 'with a great cracking of rawhide whips, the cumbersome equipage would lurch forward, the flocks going ahead and the drays creaking behind, spewing the dust from their four-inch wheels' (Roberts, 1970: 282). On reaching the run, they would begin by constructing a rough shelter which, as Marjorie Barnard described, usually comprised:

> ...a bark or slab hut with holes for windows, protected by flaps of bark; in exceptional circumstances there was a fire-place and chimney built of stones and clay. The furnishings were hessian bunks with sheepskin blankets, a slab table, a log to sit on, a pannikin for tea, an iron pot for cooking, and when the thousand-mile darkness closed down there was a wick floating in mutton fat to lighten it (Barnard, ...: 147).

This primitive dwelling became the run's head station—later home station and then homestead—in which its owner or manager and

his overseer lived. If there was no-one else present, other huts, called outstations, were built at convenient distances from the head station and, where possible, near existing water supplies. Under the convention of the time, the squatter and his herds then had sole access to all land within a three miles radius of each of the huts. The outstations would also provide accommodation for the shepherds who would each day move their flocks to new pastures within the run, watch over the sheep while they grazed across the scrubby landscape and, before dusk, herd them together and return to the outstation where the sheep would be corralled within a brush fence. This was to prevent them from straying in the night and to protect them from natives and dingos. On hearing the latter's 'most piteous howl', the shepherds and their dogs would immediately sally out in pursuit of them, 'for, if left alone, they would make no small havoc with the live stock' (Kirkland, ...: 197). Indeed, on gaining access to the flock, one dog alone could injure or kill as many as thirty or forty sheep before feasting on one of the carcasses or dragging it off to its lair. The carnage created by a pack of such marauders could threaten the squatter's very livelihood.

In addition to looking after their flocks, the shepherds would also treat the sheep for scab and other diseases, assist with the lambing of the ewes, and, in the early years in particular, help wash the sheep before they were shorn. They were supported in their tasks by hut-keepers—in later years, often, the shepherds' wives—who would maintain the out-stations, cook the meals, sweep out the yards, and watch over the sheep during the night. This last task was conducted from 'a movable watch-box...placed close beside the sheep-yards' and in which the hut-keeper, armed with a loaded musket, would slumber and dream of home (Mossman and Banister, 1974: 67). A rough shearing shed with a primitive wool press and, if the run included cattle, makeshift stockyards would complete the station's complement of buildings.

Like the tales of Australia's explorers, the accounts of the initial landings along the shores of Port Phillip and the journeys inland from these pockets of settlement focused on the men who led and financed the expeditions. In addition to those already named, these included such notables in society as Thomas and Somerville Livingstone Learmonth, C. H. Ebden, George Russell, William Cross Yuille, William Hamilton, James Dennistoun Baillie Alexander Mollison, W. J. T. ('Big') Clarke and George Duncan Mercer. Yet even the richest and most powerful of these men with means were unable to survive on their money and wits alone.

Their eventual success also depended on the efforts and toil of their largely unnamed and unsung employees. These included the crews of the ships that transported their cargoes across the sea from Van Diemen's Land; the overseers, bullock drivers, hut-keepers, timber splitters, shepherds, shearers and pastoral workers who built their runs and tended their stock; and the carters, carriers, couriers, clerks, shopkeepers, horse-breakers, labourers, domestic servants and the like who, later on and in various ways, helped develop and maintain the infrastructure needed to support the colony's expanding wool industry.

In the early years these men—for there were then few white women on the frontier—were largely either former or assigned convicts or their offspring, the currency. The small number of free immigrants who had undergone the long ocean voyage to Australia preferred often to remain in the towns rather than face further danger and uncertainty in the bush, and baulked at the prospect of 'walking after sheep' as they derided the task of shepherding (Roberts, 1970: 276). In any case, the squatters generally felt that 'an old hand, no-matter how drink-sodden, was usually a better proposition' in the outback than the new man, even though the 'members of the fraternity of misfortune', as Margaret Kiddle aptly described them, were often difficult to manage and showed scant respect towards their masters (Kiddle, 1963: 52).

The most valued employees were the overseers, stockmen and 'bullockies'. The overseers were men of experience who often ran the stations on their young master's behalf. The stockmen, mostly native-born Australians, were valued because they could ride like the wind, and were generally more resourceful, and cleaner, than their earth-bound compatriots. The bullockies, too, were thought more resourceful and, for government men, relatively trustworthy. Known to all 'by some humorous or grotesque nickname', they also affected a 'contemptuous indifference to hardships and dangers', and were widely 'celebrated for their colourful language' (Kiddle, 1963: 51-2). One such person was 'Dismal Jamie', a 'melancholy little man' who worked for the Kirklands and, when rebuked by a clergyman for swearing at his bullocks, replied in probably equally colourful terms that 'no one ever yet drove bullocks without swearing', and, in any case, 'it was the only way to make them go' (Kirkland, ...: 181).

At the bottom of the scale were the shepherds and shearers. According to Samuel Mossman and Thomas Banister (1974: 64),

who toured the western district in the early 1850s, the Australian shepherd was not the 'gentle prim-clad Lubin...described in the old pastorals'. He tended, rather, to be 'a long-bearded bronze featured "crawler" [ex-convict]...clad in a blue serge shirt, fastened around the waist by a broad leather belt, with probably a pistol stuck into it; a musket over his shoulder instead of a crook, and smoking a short black pipe in lieu of trilling the musical reed'. The shepherds and hut-keepers were probably the most important and hard-working of the squatter's retinue. They were also the most isolated of the workers, and the most vulnerable to attack or intimidation, either real or imagined, by blacks and bushrangers (with whom, admittedly, they were occasionally in league). Possibly because of this last factor, they were usually distrusted and looked down upon by the squatters and their other workers. This attitude was perhaps reinforced by the experiences of such overlanders as Alexander Mollison whose drunken shepherds and other assigned servants 'frequently endangered the very safety of the party by a spirit of unreasoning caprice' (Roberts, 1970: 154). But as Alexander Harris recounted, the hapless shepherds seemed also unable to please their often pedantic and avaricious masters who, in turn, were quick to both criticise and, if they could, exact punishment:

> The master grumbles if the flock is not allowed to spread; he says the shepherd must be keeping them together by severe dogging, and that running so close they cannot fill their bellies; for this, if the shepherd is a free man, he will often refuse to pay him his wages; if he is a prisoner, he takes him before some other sheep-holding settler in the commission of the peace and flogs him. On the other hand, if the shepherd suffers the flock to spread...and he loses sight of them and leaves them behind; or a native dog sneaks in among them...again, if the shepherd is free, the master refuses to pay his wages, and tells him to go to law and get them if he can...[or] if he is a prisoner he flogs him (Harris, 1986: 182-3).

Harris was describing the situation in New South Wales, but there is little doubt the same attitudes prevailed within the western and other districts of Port Phillip. Henry Clarke, who came from London and worked as a shepherd near Geelong, wrote home that most of his ex-convict colleagues were 'the scum of the United Kingdom' whose conversation comprised 'course, indecent jests, disgusting double entendres, filthy anecdotes, intermingled with swearing and blasphemous expressions'. He concluded that he was keen to leave the 'Sodom and Gomorrah' of the bush and take up a position in town (cited in Broome, 1984: 58). Even the normally compassionate Katharine Kirkland was often critical of

her shepherds and hut-keepers, describing their rat and flea-ridden dwellings as 'miserable places', and criticising them for feeding their masters off dirty plates and too often losing or miscounting their sheep.

The other workers most disliked by the squatters were the shearers. These were, again mainly ex-convicts or their progeny who hailed either from Van Diemen's Land—and went by the sobriquet of the 'Derwenters'—or from Sydney. Like the shepherds, they were disparaged for their foul and blasphemous language, their drunkenness and binge-drinking, their debauchery of the native and the few white women who were available, and their tendency to stir up trouble among the squatter's own workers. But most of all the shearers were disliked, and feared, for their strong solidarity and preparedness all to stop work should any one of their number be slighted or aggrieved. As Stephen Roberts described, the shearing season then, as now,

> ... was an anxious time for the squatter, for already the peculiarly irresponsible qualities that came to distinguish peripatetic sheep-shearers had developed, and a squatter could never be certain when his men would down their shears for some pretended grievance and move on. A bad shearer, reprimanded for hacking the fleece by a 'second blow', instead of keeping the clip clean, would as like as not call out his friends, and the squatter would have to rely on his permanent shepherds and his family. Once the last obstinate *cobbler*, the last recalcitrant sheep in a catching-pen, had gone under the shears, and once the *board* or floor was cleared, the squatter breathed again (Roberts, 1970: 294).

Life during the early years of the colony was uncomplicated and very harsh. 'I have never met with people living in a style more rude and rough', one observer of the Yarra settlement observed in 1838, 'or with less attention to comfort' (Thomas Walker, cited in Younger, 1974: 183-4). The same judgement could be applied to the squatters in the hinterland and arose largely because they neither owned their land nor could be certain they wouldn't lose it in an economic downturn or as a result of a capricious decision made by such despotic Land Commissioners as the notorious Captain Foster Fyans. There was little incentive, therefore, for the early squatters to construct dwellings that provided for anything more than their basic needs: shelter from the elements, somewhere to prepare their meals of mutton and damper, and a place to lie down. The huts of masters and men alike were, as a consequence, very primitive affairs and their occupants lived a generally 'sordid,

filthy existence', whatever their social background (Roberts, 1970: 284).

The early pioneers not only lived a harsh life but a very isolated and insecure one as well. There were no roads or bridges, no schools or stores, no medical facilities, and no access to religious services. The pains of child-birth had to be endured alone in rough bush huts. Those who died were laid to rest in simple bush graves, the burial service, if any, read by a family member or acquaintance. The squatters' children were educated by their mothers, those of the workers were left run wild. During the winter rains the settlers worried about floods, while summer brought the threat of drought and bushfires. There was little time for relaxation or leisurely pursuits other than reading and re-reading, by the light of the fire or a smoking mutton-fat lamp, letters, newspapers and books sent from home. Contacts with civilisation were limited to infrequent visits to Melbourne or Geelong or to more regular calls on those neighbours with wives or female siblings. Their huts were more likely to be plastered with mud and lime, to have windows and doors, a well-cultivated garden, chicken coups, and such comforts of home as chairs and tables, bookshelves and a pianoforte. Visitors to such stations as that of Katharine Kirkland could also expect to be fed such rare culinary delights as kangaroo soup, parrot-pie and, on Christmas and New Year's days, plum pudding and strawberry tart. Not everyone had the benefits of even this divertissement however. The isolation and alienation felt by many pastoralists, especially at Christmas time, was no better expressed than by John Eyre when he wrote (admittedly in hindsight):

> Christmas Day at last arrived…but how unlike Christmas at home. There was no solemn chants to awake you from your rest at the approach of the sacred day, no greetings in the morning, no affectionate wishes, no presents, no peel of merry bells…All that the men wished for or cared for was that they might have grog and get tipsy. If they could accomplish this they were satisfied to remain dirty and comfortless and miserable in all other respects (cited in Hall, 2002: 35).

During this time the masters were prepared to adopt the simple practices and uncomplicated lifestyles of their ex-convict and native-born Australian workers. The younger squatters even dressed the same, making it 'no easy task to tell who are gentlemen and who are not' (Kirkland, ..., 204). This apparent lack of concern with the niceties of established society was driven, in part, by the owners' single-minded determination to save capital.

Establish financial security first and the better things in life will follow was the guiding spirit of the times. Another cause stemmed from the kind of environment in which they found themselves. As Margaret Kiddle argues in her book, *Men of Yesterday*, the young capitalists may have 'carried with them their parents' exhortations of godliness, sobriety and hard work', but they were living in a colony with 'well established principles startlingly different from those they had been taught to believe should govern their lives' (Kiddle, 1963: 103). These prevailing values had their roots in the colony's convict past and were sharpened by the rigours of frontier life. They included 'an attitude of defiance' towards any form of centralised authority, a willingness to put their own pecuniary interests above those of others or of the community generally, and a tendency towards insensitivity, callousness and introspection.

Thus work requirements were given priority over the celebration of holidays or religion. Newcomers were treated with suspicion and quite often cheated or exploited in the pursuit of profits. A 'spirit of jealous possessiveness, typified by boundary disputes' became commonplace. Drunkenness, driven by loneliness, or boredom, or a sense of hopelessness, was rife among the men and a few masters. And the early years in particular were marked by violence and abuse especially of the aborigines. This was evident from the letters written by the early squatters to Governor La Trobe (Bride, 1898) and other accounts of the pastoral era. These revealed that most of the initial squatters had trouble with the blacks, as they called them, who objected to the whites being on their land and, as their native food disappeared, started stealing sheep and other stock. The stock losses were so great in some cases that the squatters were obliged to take on 'extra shepherds, hut-keepers and guns' to safeguard their livelihoods. Aboriginal women were regularly kidnapped by station hands for sexual gratification, aboriginal men were threatened and abused, and unknown numbers of both sexes were killed in retaliation for attacks against whites or unintentionally poisoned by baited carcases left out for the wild dogs. The combination of murder, disease and dispossession saw the number of aborigines in the district decline quickly and dramatically. Whereas the original squatters had regularly encountered hundreds of natives in some areas, by the 1850s most informed the Governor that 'numbers [were] now greatly diminished' or 'only a few stragglers remained'.

Conditions in the towns in the early years were little better than those of the inland runs. Until the late 1830s in Melbourne and much later in all other places, all but the absentee station owners and rich merchants lived in either tents or rough bark huts. There were no or only very limited services such as schools, roads or churches. The social life of the colony was raw and often violent especially as the number of inns and grog shanties increased. Most towns were surrounded by dense and oppressive bushland in which many settlers became irretrievably lost and, in summer, there raged massive fires. Winter rains quickly turned roads and tracks into impassable quagmires, and flooded rivers would carry away stock and their unsuspecting owners. During the normally cold season of Michaelmas the new arrivals had to endure simmering temperatures and millions of flies and other strange insects. In the face of such adversities some of the newcomers gave up and returned home. Others perished. But most got on with their lives and slowly adapted to their new environment and circumstances. As Richard Broome described:

> The climate compelled them to discard their waistcoats, braces and dark coats, and to consume vast quantities of rum or tea from quart pots. The social atmosphere induced them to speak and think a little differently, for Port Phillip was not England (Broome, 1984: 26).

Within this almost exclusively male world, the former convicts and their offspring generally fared well. Life was harsh and unremitting certainly, and there was sometimes bad blood between masters and men. Some were overcome by the vast loneliness of the bush or the hopelessness of their wasted lives, and committed suicide, returned to the towns or went mad, becoming the 'hatters' of the bush. Others drank their wages and themselves into a shuffling oblivion. But most enjoyed the rough company of their convict brethren, and appreciated both their relative freedom and a working environment in which they were judged more by their efforts than their pasts. The native-born Australians in particular thrived in an industry that relied increasingly on nomadic bands of itinerant workers who were beholden only to themselves and their mates, drove a hard bargain in contracting for the work, and got the job done quickly and efficiently. Over time they developed into a new kind of class, men apart, who were at one with the land. As a traveller in the 1840s remarked about a group of bullockies he encountered encamped at a waterhole, the men of the bush were a

> ... strange wild looking, sunburnt race, strong, rough and taciturn, they appear as though they have never lived in crowds, and have lost the desire and even the power to converse. So deeply embrowned were the faces, naked breasts and arms of these men, and so shaggy the crops of hair and beard, that a stranger had to look twice to be certain they were not Aborigines (cited in Younger, 1974: 174).

Such a view was a romantic one that belied the actual lives, experiences and practices of 'Dismal Jamie' and his colleagues, including their treatment of the very natives they were said to resemble. But it would hold firm at least within the minds and imaginations of many Australian historians and, as described in Chapter Seven, future social commentators. At last, it seemed, the convicts and their descendents had found their place not only physically but in our consciousness as well. Such a view was, of course, largely mistaken and those former convicts and their descendents who would come to Port Phillip in the years following the pastoral age would be confronted by a society every bit as class-conscious and concerned about convicts and convictism as those of the older settlements of Sydney and Hobart Town. Before we examine how and why this was the case, we need to look briefly at an alternative destination of choice for some of the Vandemonians, the colony of South Australia.

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As Batman and Fawkner were planning their initial forays into Port Phillip, the British Government enacted, on 15 August 1834, a bill to establish the colony of South Australia to be centred on the abundant pastures, varied forests and constant running streams found at the head of the Gulf of St. Vincent by the explorer Captain Charles Sturt. This new colony would differ from those already in existence in two important respects. First, no convicts would be sent there. Second, it was to be settled in accordance with the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and other 'systematic colonizers' who argued that the 'waste lands' of Australia needed to be sold rather than granted to prospective owners, and at a price sufficient to subsidise the import of 'respectable' immigrants who would work for the landed gentry until they could buy their own land.

Proclaimed at Holdfast Bay on 28 December 1836, South Australia developed slowly due, in the beginning, to the incessant quarrels between the local land commissioner and legal pedant, James Hurtle Fisher, and the colony's first governor, Captain John Hindmarsh, a naval officer, avowed Tory and 'mouther of loyalty

to altar and the throne' (Clark, Vol III, 1973: 49). Hindmarsh was sacked in 1838 and replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel George Gawler who dramatically increased expenditure on public works in Adelaide. The development of the colony beyond the capital continued slowly however; by 1839 only 170,000 acres had been sold of which a mere 443 acres were under cultivation. Included in these was land at Mount Barker that had been leased to German emigrants who arrived that same year on the sailing ships *Zebra* and *Catherina*. At the same time, there appeared in the colony squatters who had overlanded from New South Wales and Port Phillip with their flocks of sheep, herds of cattle and, to the consternation of the respectable denizens of Adelaide, their ex-convict and native-born stockmen, carriers and shepherds. South Australia's early economic success would be due less to the 'systematic colonizers' and their pious supporters huddled in the colony's capital, and more to the combined efforts in the hinterland of, on the one hand, its frugal, industrious and virtuous tenant farmers, and, on the other, the wild colonial boys and their tolerant if, at times, despairing, overseers.

The difficulties of converting the theories of systematic colonisation into practice led the British Government, in 1842, to replace the existing system of governance with one not unlike that of the other colonies. This 'caused universal satisfaction in the convict Colonies' (Greenwood, 1975: 75), and was also welcomed by many in South Australia. Although the change saw the newest governor, Captain George Grey, slash into his predecessor's public extravagances, the new arrangements were also thought to guarantee the colony's financial future. Those in society who held South Australia to be superior both to the older penal colonies and those, like Port Phillip, in which the dispersion of settlement had produced 'bush barbarism', were also pleased with the Government's decision to continue not to send convicts there. For, as Manning Clark described, the 'one menace' seen to threaten South Australians as they approached the end of the 1840s, was 'the old lags and bolters from the penal colonies' who had come with the squatters and overlanders, and 'intruded on their respectability' (Clark, Vol III, 1975: 368). As in the other colonies, these 'offscourings' and 'drunken abominations' had initially to be tolerated because no-one else was available or willing to work as stockmen or shepherds on the runs around Pekina and other remote locations.

> Only the old lags...and "fringe" men chose life on an out-station, out of reach of police, wives, and all the tormentors who either would not

> or could not leave the weak to follow the desires of their own hearts (Clark, Vol III, 1975: 367).

From 1847, replacements for the 'old hands' were becoming available as the continued growth and success of the colony's agricultural and farming pursuits—the latter helped by the appearance of John Ridley's mechanical thrashing machine—and the windfall profits from the copper mines at Kapunda and Burra, stimulated a renewed inflow of immigrants into the colony. One of these was Samuel Hickmott's youngest son, Henry, who, with his wife Sophia and two small daughters Emma and Eliza, landed at Port Adelaide on the sailing ship *Emily* on 8 August 1849. After his father was transported to Van Diemen's Land, Henry and his brothers lived and worked wretched lives in brickfields of the kind described in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853). A year after his marriage in 1848, Henry decided to emigrate to Australia. This decision may have been motivated by his desire to be reunited with his father or by a simple determination to escape the bustle, rancid smells and sheer grime of London life. The incentive to go would have been heightened by advertisements appearing in the London newspapers at the time encouraging artisans of all kinds to take up offers of free passage to the colony of South Australia. It may have also been influenced by an outbreak of cholera in England that same year which killed more than 53,000 people.

On their arrival in South Australia, the Hickmotts made for the town of Mount Barker, some 21 miles inland from the coast, and on the outskirts of which, at a place called Littlehampton, were a number of recently established brickworks. The journey, by bullock-drawn wagon, took a full day and required them to negotiate the steep climb to the top of the Mount Lofty Ranges. On reaching Crafter's Inn located at the highest point of the dusty track that wound its way up the slope, they were able to look back and see the whole of the bush-covered plain they had just traversed, the township of Adelaide, the creek and all the vessels lying at anchor in it, and the sea stretching beyond to the horizon. In front of them were deep valleys and further hills. These were all covered in sombre forests that were occasionally enlivened by the sweep of brightly-coloured parakeets and flocks of large white birds stationed on the tree-tops or wheeling and screeching their way across the silent landscape. While tired from the climb, much of which had to made on foot in order to reduce the stress on the animals, it is likely that they, like travellers before and since, were struck by the sheer beauty of the scene before them, and both

awed and exhilarated by the thought that they were to be pioneers in this strange and vast land.

The township of Mount Barker was proclaimed in 1836 and surveyed three years later. At the time of the family's arrival, it contained a local court and police barracks, a post-office, and two inns of which the Crown Hotel was thought the better establishment. It is likely that Henry and Sophia would have been struck by how much the place was like the rural areas of Kent. For the first settlers had cleared away much of the native flora and created in its stead 'a grassy park landscape with formal hedgerows of gorse and hawthorn…[where] the gardens abounded in British fruits and vegetables and the avenues were lined with the loveliest forest trees and garden flowers' (Schmidt, p. 55). Their impression of being at home would have been enhanced by the fact that most of the existing dwellings were 'wattle and daub' constructions, with whitewashed walls and thatched roofs. The rich black soil was also perfect for growing potatoes whose deep green foliage covered large parts of the valley and were cultivated by the many German and Irish labourers who lived there. Not everyone was entranced by Mount Barker, of course. A visitor to the area in 1851 subsequently reported that the place was neither very populous nor attractive:

> It contains about 250 inhabitants—perhaps rather less than more—occupying sixty tenements. The appearance of the township itself, embedded in the valley, is not favourable as contrasted with the scenery with which it is surrounded…some rubbishing fencing, and the piles of brushwood around the mill, together with the confusion of the blacksmiths and carpenters' yards, give it a factory-like effect, which the volumes of smoke heighten into dinginess (cited in Martin, p. 19).

But it is likely that Sophia loved the small cottage they would have been able to rent, with its tranquil and bountiful garden, and Henry would have appreciated the shed for his tools and the brushwood and spare wire he could fashion into a run for their hens. He began work either at Hombin's brickyard, situated near the Great Eastern Hotel in Littlehampton, or that of McDonald's which was located on the northeast corner of the site of the present Mount Barker showgrounds. Established in 1847, these two establishments supplied the bricks for the grand houses being built in Adelaide, and those in the region that were replacing the older wattle and daub establishments. These included Harrowfield House which remains in place today and attracted considerable local interest when first built as it was 'the first brick house in the

district, and was roofed with a new roofing material; galvanized iron' (Schmidt, ...).

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By the time Henry and his family settled at Mount Barker, the occupation of the bulk of the land stretching eastwards across the continent from the Adelaide Hills was near complete. Squatters' runs extended across the border of South Australia, through all of Thomas Mitchell's 'Australia Felix,' and into the foothills of Gippsland. Only the more mountainous terrain in the northeast corner of Port Phillip and the arid plains of the Wimmera and Mallee regions remained to be broached by a subsequent generation. As the fortunes of the two colonies and their inhabitants waxed and waned, the ownership of many of the runs changed hands. Others were broken up or divided among partners or family members. In spite of this, at times, frenzied speculation, the processes of grazing flocks, carting supplies one way and fleeces the other, and collecting the wool cheques continued, driven on by the apparently insatiable demand of Britain's textile industries and the investment capital the boom in wool had generated in both England and Australia.

Relieved of the daily burden of establishing and maintaining their runs, those successful Port Phillip squatters who decided not to return home turned their attention and energy to other things. Some set about achieving the quality of life they had earlier forgone in order to make their fortunes. Hunt clubs were established and packs of hounds maintained, gala balls and highland games organised, and thoroughbred horses bred, raced and gambled on at well-attended public meets. Theatres were increasingly patronised and a gentleman's lodgings—the exclusive Melbourne Club—established to enable patrons to dally in town in a manner that accorded with their emerging social status. Men who had once taken aboriginal women to their flea-ridden bed of boughs, now enjoyed the services of a more exclusive, though no-less diseased, clientele in Melbourne's brothels. Some enjoyed the pleasure obtained from investing their accumulating capital in further stock or land. Others turned to politics in order to secure both tenure over their land and greater control of their affairs.

For like their counterparts in the areas beyond the settled districts of Sydney, the squatters of Port Phillip did not own their properties but leased them from the Crown for a standard fee of £10 per run plus a small stock tax. These fees, paid annually,

guaranteed the squatter the right of occupancy over anyone except the Crown which could at any time under the 1831 Ripon Regulations, auction off all or part of their land. The squatters were justifiably unhappy with such a limited and potentially fragile tenure over the runs in which they had invested so much money, and on which most had worked so long and so hard to make profitable. They believed they had earned the right to own the land and strove to achieve this objective through their membership of the Legislative Council and by constant petitioning of both the Colonial Office and the Queen. While sympathetic to the idea of developing a more equitable approach to the issues of squatting and squatters' rights, the British Government and its representatives in the colony were also determined, in the beginning at least, that the country's remaining 'waste lands' should be held in trust for all of its citizens—British as well as Australian—and not be handed over to those who had occupied it illegally.

The conflict came to a head in 1844 when the hardworking and generally moderate Governor Gipps, who was nonetheless painted by his enemies as a military martinet, signalled the release of a new set of squatting regulations. These would limit all runs to an area of twenty square miles, and allow the squatters, after five years of occupation, to purchase at auction an area of 320 acres within the bounds of the property. If the purchase was made, he was then entitled to graze his stock on the remainder of the run for a further eight years, provided that he paid the necessary annual licence fees. If, and here was the rub, someone else purchased the first or a subsequent 320-acre block, the right of occupancy of the unpaid component of the run passed to them.

Although the proposed system went some way towards meeting their demands for greater security of tenure, it was, predictably, condemned by the squatters and their supporters. Large protest meetings were held at all major towns across the colony including at Batman's Hill in Melbourne on 1 June 1845. Here, according to Margaret Kiddle's wonderful account, a cavalcade of mounted horsemen 'from mountain and plain, bits and stirrups jingling, [and] horses snorting in the frosty air', joined with others on the roads leading to the meeting place. The gathering crowd was too large for the Mechanics' Institute to hold, so the meeting was held out of doors. It was preceded by a thousand-strong cavalcade which marched, with slogans and banners flying in the breeze, behind a kilted piper to Batman's Hill. On reaching the summit, the protesters halted, turned inwards and gave three cheers for

Her Majesty the Queen. The subsequent speeches were, if anything, an anti-climax, repeating the squatters', by now, well-known and rehearsed arguments. The real highlight of the day was the grand ball held in the evening at the Mechanics' Institute. As Kiddle related:

> This was attended by a crowd of about three hundred "comprising the whole wealth, rank and beauty of the town and an immense number of squatters from all parts of the country"... It was a rowdy affair; before the night ended every door in the Town Surveyor's office was smashed (Kiddle, 1965: 167)

The squatters, it seems, had not quite renounced their frontier ways. Whether influenced by the threat of further violence on the part of the colony's squatters, or the concerted actions of the NSW Legislative Council and the Pastoralist's Protection Association and their supporters in London, or the growing feeling among Britain's key policy makers that it may be time for the colonies fully to govern themselves, the Colonial Office let Gipps' proposals lapse in favour of the Imperial Waste Lands Act of 1846. This divided the colony's pastoral lands into settled, unsettled and intermediate districts. Squatters in the intermediate and unsettled zones could now lease their land for eight and fourteen years respectively. Lessees in the intermediate areas—which included the whole of the western district of Port Phillip—had first option on the auction of any land within their runs. Those in the unsettled districts were the only ones able to purchase land during the period of their leases. The annual licence fee for all districts remained £10 but was now applied to land with a grazing capacity of 4,000 sheep. A further 50 shillings was charged for every additional 1000 sheep able to be grazed on either the same or any additional land leased by the squatter.

With the tenure of their land now secure, many squatters began replacing their bark huts with permanent, and substantial, bluestone or brick houses, as well as the stables, shearing sheds, workshops, servants quarters, stockyards and miles of fences needed to support their thriving sheep or cattle stations. These developments saw more and more respectable women venturing to live 'up country', and life on the home stations become more civilised and regulated. Station schools were created for the squatters' children and those of their workers. Ministers of religion were provided with 'settled abodes', and, under pressure from the evangelists, the Sabbath began more regularly to be observed. Squatters who had earlier lived and slept in their work clothes now dressed for dinner. The natives trees on the home properties

were replaced by poplars, willows, palms and other exotics that were used to frame the station's sweeping carriageways and add texture and style to their manicured gardens. At the same time, churches, schools and Courts of Petty Sessions were pressed for. And small inland and coastal towns were established into which flowed increasing numbers of free immigrants.

Most of these new arrivals chose to remain in the colony's towns rather than work in the hinterland. The shortage of labour this engendered led some of the colony's squatters to import Chinese workers from Singapore. Others brought in ex-convicts from Van Diemen's Land. Still others petitioned the British Government to start transporting British convicts to Port Phillip. This last request was initially acceded to by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, who announced his Government would send out a moderate number of inmates who had served their probationary period in England's Pentonville Prison. This provoked an outcry in both Sydney and Melbourne. The *Sydney Morning Herald* labelled the decision 'Our Country's Degradation', while the *Argus* thundered that it represented 'bare-faced treachery' done 'at the bidding of a traitorous Executive and to gratify the insatiable cupidity of a few of the more greedy squatters who would sweep the bottomless pit to procure cheap labour' (cited respectively in Clark, Vol III, 1975: 415 and Kiddle, 1965: 160). Denizens of Melbourne threatened to sink any convict ship that sought to dock, and demonstrated in such numbers on the days the first two vessels carrying the unfortunate felons—the *Randolph* and the *Hashemy*—approached, that Governor La Trobe directed them to sail on to Sydney.

The supporters of transportation tried to brazen out the storm, telling Grey and the Colonial Office that the tub-thumpers in the towns were not representative of colonial opinion. They certainly didn't reflect the views of the native-born Australians who resented their parents and grandparents being branded as sources of 'moral filth' and, sickened perhaps, by the new chums' abject professions of loyalty to the Crown, were conspicuously absent from the speakers' lists of the anti-transportation meetings. But there was little they or the squatters could do against the tide of opinion of those who had come to the colonies in the belief that the transportation of felons had ceased and that they, as loyal British citizens, had the right to live in a free society. Grey eventually bowed to the pressure and reversed his decision, although not before some 1700 Pentonville 'exiles' had been landed at Melbourne and Geelong. Although influenced by the spirit of

liberalism that was then in place in Britain, the Secretary of State may also have been concerned by the 'menacing monition', being circulated by such Australian petite-bourgeois radicals as Charles Harpur and John Dunmore Lang, that his policy on transportation was preparing the way for a 'United States of Australia' (Clark, Vol. III, 1975: 445).

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With the help of their convict workers, the squatters with their sheep had, by 1850, overseen the development of both the infant colonies of Victoria and South Australia and the country as a whole. While the colonies were now producing a range of goods for export, the squatters' wool was the mainstay of the nation's expanding international purchasing power and its booming domestic economy. So great were the returns from the golden fleece, that economic progress in Australia during the period 1820 to 1850 'far exceeded that of any other British Colony, and [even] approached that of Britain herself' (Greenwood, 1975: 48). During this time the squatters and their men also undertook the second great journey of the white Australian experience, the colonisation of much of the country's south eastern hinterland. The treks by the squatters and their sheep saw the destruction of the nomadic communities that had earlier inhabited this vast inland space. They would also, paradoxically and over a longer period of time, lead to the demise of the pastoralists themselves and their almost unassailable position of power within colonial society. This was because, in addition to producing profits for all, the wool industry succoured the coastal *entrepôts* and inland towns from which would come subsequent and ever-strengthening calls for democracy and responsible government. As Marjorie Barnard nicely put it, the very measure of the squatter's triumph 'seemed to have embayed the colony in a pastoral tranquillity—or would have, but for the gadfly of the city' (Barnard, ...: 155).

Although the city-bound immigrants and workers would challenge the political power of the pastoralists, they would not substantially alter the broad cultural and social foundations that were put in place by the exclusives and other 'respectable' elements of early colonial society and were generally reinforced by the pastoralists. The possible (and partial) exception to this rule concerned the attitudes of the respective parties towards the convict classes. As we saw from the anti-transportation debates, the exclusives and the newly-arrived immigrants were as one in their unqualified condemnation of the convicts and convictism, a

reproof sharpened by the import and increasing influence of Victorian values and pretensions. While their opposition may have stemmed from different concerns and underlying interests, any former convicts or their descendents reading the newspapers of the time or listening to the soapbox oratories would have been stung by the violence of the language used, and left in no doubt about the strength of the convictions of their accusers. Subsequent outbreaks of hysteria in South Australia, Victoria and even, in later years, New South Wales, over the possible influx of felons from the south or west of the continent was evidence that these sentiments would change little over time.

The attitudes of the squatters, by contrast, was less uniform and more nuanced. Many who supported their continued transportation did so out of habit or for purely financial gain. They included men like Samuel Pratt Winter who, according to Manning Clark, 'went in for all the bizarre trappings of a gentleman, with liveried servants, groomsmen and thoroughbred horses, [and] desperately wanted convicts to keep his show going at the Grange' (Hamilton in the western district of Port Phillip) (Clark, Vol. III, 1975: 440). While happy to see more convicts entering the country, such men continued to view them more in economic than human terms and so, in their way, were no less contemptuous of the unfortunate felons than their outspoken opponents.

But others in Port Phillip in particular viewed their convict workers in a more human light, filtered admittedly through a nineteenth century patrician's lens. Because they were so dependent on their ex-convict and native-born Australian workers, the early squatters especially had little option than to tolerate, within certain limits, their rough manners and delinquent behaviour. Their shared experiences, and secrets, would have led some squatters to appreciate—most likely on reflection—the contributions made by the men to the development of their runs and the industry generally. And, perhaps more than most, they would have moved towards some understanding of why the convict classes behaved in the way they did. The relationship between these masters and their workers was probably something akin to that between officers and men who have served together in war. As with such veterans, time and reflection may also have served to wear down some of the sharper edges of the relationship and allow members of the two classes, within the appropriate contexts, to more easily span their social divides.

Thus George Russell, who first squatted on the Moorabool River at Miller's Flat, recalled with affection his two former convict workers, Big and Little Jack. Big Jack, who had been transported from Andover in Hampshire for machine-breaking, kept his master well-entertained with tales of his former employer, the Squire Sweetapple. Little Jack who 'was the opposite of Big Jack...with regard to size and volubility' worked as the cook and, according to Russell, 'got on very well in that capacity' (cited in Brown, 1935: 119). Another Victorian squatter, John Hepburn, who overlanded from New South Wales in 1838, later reported to Governor Lonsdale that the assigned convicts he brought with him were generally well-behaved and useful although two men, Edward Traynor and Bartholemew Williams, were 'both bad men and petty thieves'. Two former prisoners of the Crown, who had been with Hepburn from his Vandemonian days, were particularly well-regarded especially his hut-keeper George Cook who came to the assistance of Hepburn's wife when she was threatened by aborigines. While the former sea-captain and owner of the Smeaton Hill run was 'no advocate of prisoners', he informed the Governor that they were 'sometimes painted in worse colours than they deserve' (cited in Bride, 1969: 80).

This more tolerant view of the convict classes was not a universal one of course. If it did exist, it would have been privately held and not publicly expressed, and was slowly moderated by the gradual dilution of the old guard of squatters, and the gathering spread and momentum of bush society. By 1850, then, the arguments and presumptions about convicts and convictism that had long operated in Sydney and Hobart had also spread to the colony's last frontiers where it would again confront those emancipated convicts and ticket-of-leave men like Samuel and Thomas who, in 1854 and 1856 in their respective cases, would trek into the new areas in search of their own versions of freedom and liberty.