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A Culture for All: Servant class behaviour at the Swan River in the context of the British Empire

*Shane Burke**

Tim Mazzarol's 1978 paper 'Tradition, Environment and the Indentured Labourer in early Western Australia'¹ is one of the earliest specific works that attempted to identify the psyche of the first British colonists at Swan River and the 'cultural baggage'—those fears, beliefs and backgrounds—they brought with them. About 80 per cent of the adult colonists to the Swan River were described by authorities as belonging to labouring and trade occupations.² These might be called the servant or working classes, and are hereafter simply referred to in this paper as the servant class. Mazzarol discussed the interaction of the servant class with the middle-to-upper classes—the colony's professionals and agriculturalists—in the context of the new cultural environment that formed with the new settlement.

Most members of the servant class in embryonic Fremantle (and other camps in the Swan River) were indentured for between three and five years to the professional-agricultural class who had paid their fare to the Swan River.³ The behaviour of some servants in the colony's first two years attracted the ire of many, including Lieutenant Governor James Stirling.⁴ According to Mazzarol, the conduct of the servant class affected the established affiliations between the two groups: to the professional-agricultural class, servants were supposed to be sober, hardworking and—most importantly—obedient; instead, they commonly refused to work unless provided with wages higher than what they had received for similar duties in Britain. George Fletcher Moore and William

* I thank the National Trust of Australia (Western Australia Branch), Department of Parks and Wildlife, The State Records Office of Western Australia, and the many people who have assisted and continue to assist with the research at Peel town.

1 Tim Mazzarol, 'Tradition, environment and the indentured labourer in early Western Australia', *Early Western Australia: Studies in Western Australia History*, vol. 3, 1978, pp. 30-7.

2 Abstract from General Muster Book, showing the Amount and Description of Population at the end of the Year; with a Supplementary Notice of Persons actually in the Colony, but whose Names had not been entered in the General Muster Book at the end of the Year', *Historical Records of Australia: Series III, Despatches and Papers Relating to the Settlement of the States*, vol. 6, Melbourne, 1923, p. 622. Available online at <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks14/1402751h.html#ch-03>. (Hereafter, *HRA III*).

3 R.T. Appleyard and Toby Manford, *The Beginning: European Discovery and Early Settlement of Swan River, Western Australia*, Nedlands, 1979, pp. 131-3.

4 James Stirling, letter to George Murray, published in *HRA III* p. 617; Eliza Shaw, Letters 1829 to 1853, manuscript. Mitchell Library, B164.

Tanner often complained bitterly about the behaviour of servants.⁵ Tanner considered that the poor quality of servants was 'the greatest draw back to our comfort',⁶ while Moore confessed that servants generally, and his own (John Eakins and James Diermott) specifically, 'soon find their own value and act accordingly'.⁷ Such reports show not only the opinion of employers regarding servants in the new colony, but also the mindset of those of the servant class.⁸ As Mazzarol states, it is clear from employers' accounts and servant behaviour that the two groups had different intensions in the new colony for those who had served as servants and workers in the old country.⁹ Furthermore, it is just as clear that the new cultural environment formed within the colony caused a re-evaluation of people's roles.

To make sense of servant behaviour in the first years of the Swan River, Mazzarol looked at the living conditions of agricultural labouring families in Britain in the 1810s and 1820s. Changes in the three-tiered British agricultural population structure (comprising landlords, tenant farmers and agricultural labourers) strained the living conditions of those in Britain at the lowest rung of the system. The resulting violence by agricultural labourers in the 1820s, committed mostly in the Home Counties from where many of the Swan River's servant classes hailed, was evidence Mazzarol used to suggest that the life experiences of some servants brought to the Swan River included a culture of dissent.¹⁰ However, while the servant classes to the Swan River most likely had knowledge of the agricultural riots, not all servants were necessarily from an agricultural background. Therefore, there are other reasons accounting for the mindset and the behaviour of the Swan River's servant group in the colony's early years—reasons that are all-embracing.

Mazzarol's research identified a vacuum in the investigation of Western Australia's historical past: the lack of knowledge about the life objective for most of the Swan River's first colonists. Without dismissing the possible past criminal action of some agricultural employees, this paper goes beyond those experiences and examines how the imported culture of the first British colonists explains the actions of many of the servants at Swan River, including those who had no previous work experience in agriculture in Britain.

Thomas Peel's camp at Peel town (also called Clarence), south of Fremantle, provides an ideal case study of the early colony's changing cultural landscape and, in particular, the changing relations between employers and their servants. Peel town was a temporary camp in coastal sand dunes occupied by some of the Swan River's first colonists between December 1829 and November 1830, at which point it was abandoned by most. Thomas Peel, like most other professional-agricultural people in Western Australia, wished for a seamless transfer of Britain's cultures and standards to the Swan River. However, both archaeological and historical evidence suggests that, like elsewhere at the Swan River, this was not the case. The behaviour of a group of individuals that altered the cultural landscape constructed by members of the professional-agricultural class at Peel town

5 George Fletcher Moore, *Letters and Journal, 1830–1848*, manuscript. J.S. Batty Library of West Australian History (SLWA), Acc 263A; Tanner family, *Family papers, 1831–1930*, manuscript. SLWA ACC2678A.

6 Tanner, 14 August 1833.

7 Moore, 11 November 1832.

8 *ibid.*

9 Mazzarol, p. 31.

10 *ibid.*, pp. 32–4.

suggest that servants were simply behaving in a way becoming of the British Empire that influenced all of its citizens globally.

The transference of British identity

The colonisation of Western Australia can be examined in the context of its role to spread British identity and to extend the reach of the British Empire, particularly from 1760 to 1860, but this is rarely done. There is, however, copious data about how one of the world's greatest empires influenced its citizens.¹¹ People of the British Isles were a highly variable and culturally complex amalgam of people from southern and northern England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, Jersey and Guernsey.¹² In the 80 years before the Swan River's settlement, people from these regions with different cultures had evolved an identity that included elements of politics and geography, citizenship and race, legal and administrative structures, moral values and cultural habits, language, and tradition—in sum, an identity called the British.¹³ But one should not think that being British melded all the cultural traits from the regions of the British Isles into a single entity to the exclusion of others—people of these regions usually, at the same time, considered themselves to be defined by both their regional cultures and their British identities.¹⁴

Those at Peel town and other Swan River camps were influenced by the growing industrial proficiency of Britain that had started decades before 1829. Aided by cheaper raw material from its colonies, an explosion of available new products had material consequences at all levels of British society. The mass production of goods at prices affordable to the masses made the British enthusiastic consumers of a wide range of items and made them the first modern consumer society.¹⁵ The adoption of increasing amounts of material culture, however, would have been sporadic amongst the British, following variations that were shaped by region, rank and occupation.¹⁶

When the British emigrated to Swan River, they transferred items thought appropriate for the colonising process but also reflecting culture and class. The remains of dwellings at Peel town suggest that some colonists brought transportable structures with them made primarily of canvas (tents and marquees) or timber (in prefabricated sections).¹⁷ These structures were practical and protected their owners from the elements, while refined earthenware food preparation and serving items with underglaze transfer prints—depicting the most modern range of scenes—exist at all sites, irrespective of the dwelling's

11 Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth Century Britain: Integration and diversity*, Oxford, 1988, pp. 45-6, 67.

12 James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World*, Oxford, 2009, pp. 456-9.

13 Susan Lawrence, 'Introduction: Archaeological perspectives on the British and their empire', in Susan Lawrence (ed.), *Archaeologies of the British: Explorations of identity in Great Britain and its colonies 1600-1945*, London, 2003, pp. 1-13.

14 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the nation, 1707-1837*, London, 1992.

15 Neville A. Ritchie, 'In-Sites,' *Historical Archaeology in Australasia: Some Comparisons with the American Colonial Experiences*, in Susan Lawrence and Grace Karskens, (eds), *Recent Work in Historical Archaeology in Australia and New Zealand: Historical Archaeology*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2003, pp. 6-19.

16 Grace Karskens, 'Revisiting the Worldview: The Archaeology of Convict Households in Sydney's Rocks Neighborhood', in Lawrence and Karskens, pp. 34-55.

17 Shane Burke, 'The Archaeology of Clarence: A Settlers' Camp from the Peel Association at Henderson', *Early Days: The Journal of the Royal Western Australia Historical Society*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2007, pp. 144-163.

occupation by labourer, tradesperson or the professional-agricultural class.¹⁸ However, tea cups and saucers of soft-paste English porcelain were present at dwellings occupied by the upper classes suggesting that the drinking of tea from expensive porcelain objects—and the symbolism associated with this act—was most likely done by professional-agricultural class groups only.¹⁹

The moral values of the British changed in the late eighteenth century, becoming more moderate compared to other European nations.²⁰ Accordingly, the colonisation of Swan River coincided with the repeal of the seventeenth-century Test and Corporations Acts which had precluded Roman Catholics and dissenters from public office or employment. The repeal of those Acts by a Protestant, Tory government occurred with little parliamentary opposition, though further Catholic emancipation proved more contentious.²¹ However, the two-to-one vote by the House of Lords passing the Roman Catholic Relief Act in 1829 highlighted, according to Evans,²² two important points. First, it was a clear indication that the monarchy's power had evaporated—King George IV was personally against the Act's passing and aghast at the vote's result; and secondly, it reflected Britain's gradual awakening to liberal tolerance that was the hallmark of a mature and successful state. Far from being desperately conservative, Britain's history is often considered dangerously radical.²³

Tied inextricably to Britain's growing industrial proficiency is what Asa Briggs called the 'Age of Improvement',²⁴ comprising influences and changes in society and culture difficult to define because we of the twenty-first century frequently still share these values. Individually, it included an ethos of singular agency and independence, reason, and the pursuit of bettering oneself by clean and moral living. For the British people, it was also a period of industrialisation, war and peace, constitutional change—and the changing attitudes of politicians towards it—and political development.

Changes in industry, consumption and philosophy made the British at the Swan River markedly different to English-speaking groups that had colonised the New World before the advent of industrialisation and the Age of Improvement. As Lawrence states, the British of the nineteenth-century had access to mass-produced objects—from ceramic tableware settings to tabloids—that made them more modern in aspects of their global interaction.²⁵ Industrialisation also influenced the British in subtle ways. Recent studies searching for the social origins of British emigrants and their motives for emigration have emphasised the importance of socioeconomic, political and religious conditions at home.²⁶ There has been a tendency, however, to study emigration from Britain to

18 Katherine Baker, 'Dinner Parties in the Dirt': An Analysis of Ceramics at Peel Town Western Australia, 1829–1831, Honours Thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, 2015.

19 *ibid.*

20 G.I.T. Machin, 'The Catholic Emancipation Crisis of 1825', *English Historical Review*, vol. 78, no. 308, July 1963, pp. 458–482.

21 *ibid.*

22 Eric J. Evans *Britain before the Reform Act: Politics and Society, 1815–1832*, London and New York, 1993, pp. 76–7.

23 Matthew Johnson, 'Muffling Inclusiveness: Some notes towards an archaeology of the British', in Lawrence, p. 18.

24 Asa Briggs, *The Making of Modern England, 1783–1867: The Age of Improvement*, New York, 1959.

25 Susan Lawrence, 'Exporting Culture: Archaeology and the Nineteenth-Century British Empire', in Lawrence and Karskens, p. 22.

26 Ian Whyte, *Migration and Society in Britain 1550–1830*, London, 2000, p. 104.

the colonies like the Swan River in isolation from internal population mobility. Many people of the rural population searching for better opportunities during this period,²⁷ combined with the pull from developing industrial cities like Manchester, made Britain's labouring population extremely mobile. Whyte, for example, considered emigration to the colonies simply an extension of internal mobility already evident in Britain. People and families who had migrated once were more likely to move again and to consider emigration an option.²⁸ The British at Peel town, Fremantle and the rest of the Swan River, irrespective of class, were a part of the massive social, economic, political and material changes affecting their homeland, and they arrived in the new colony more worldly and experienced in the stress of transmigration than has been previously considered.

The Landscape as Artefact

Humanly modified landscapes, often encompassing areas of many square kilometres, are frequently referred to as 'cultural landscapes'. Cultural landscapes encompass both human-human and human-nature associations, and incorporate both physical and socio-historical structures.²⁹ The physical structures comprise elements outside of human control, including, for example, climate, topography, subsurface geology, hydrology and other naturally occurring conditions. The interactions between people coexisting in the physical landscape compose the cultural landscape.

Researching the cultural landscapes of Western Australia's past is not new.³⁰ Gibbs and Hamersley showed how cultural landscapes—which are often autobiographical³¹—related to a leadership group's methods of controlling their servant classes by the demarcation of areas for specific uses, the subtle application of natural topography for panoptic purposes, and controlling resources. The cultural landscape formed at Peel town, however, is unique in the context of the colonisation of the Swan River because most of the individuals at the camp—about 490 men, women and children—were indentured to one man: Thomas Peel.³² Peel town is also exceptional because of the well-preserved material evidence associated with the camp, compensating for the meagre collection of written, primary sources that document what occurred there.³³

27 E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing*, London, 1970, p. 39.

28 Whyte, p. 105.

29 Charles E. Orser, *An Historical Archaeology of the Modern World*, New York and London, 1996, p. 138.

30 Martin Gibbs, 'Landscapes of Meaning: Joseph Lucas Horrocks and the Gwalla Estate, Northampton, Western Australia', *Historical Traces: Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. 17, pp. 35-60; Trent Hamersley, 'A 'Sterling' Command: An Investigation into the Cultural Landscape of the Settlement established on Garden Island, Western Australia, 1829', Honours thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, 2011.

31 J. Edward Hood, 'Social Relations and the Cultural Landscape', in Rebecca Yamin and Metheny K. Bescherer (eds), *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape*, Knoxville, 1997, p. 121; Rebecca Yamin and Metheny K. Bescherer, 'Preface: Reading the Historical Landscape', in Yamin and Bescherer, *Landscape Archaeology*, p. xv; James A. Delle, 'The Landscapes of Class Negotiation on Coffee Plantations in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, 1790-1850', in LouAnn Wurst and Robert K. Fitts (eds), *Confronting Class: Historical Archaeology*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1999, pp. 136-158.

32 Alexandra Hasluck, *Thomas Peel of Swan River*, London, 1965, pp. 46-48.

33 J.S. Batty, *The Cyclopaedia of Western Australia*, vols. 1 and 2, Adelaide, 1912-13; Hal Colebatch, *A Story of a Hundred Years: Western Australia, 1829-1929*, Perth, Western Australia, 1929.

The players: The people and their backgrounds

James Stirling first suggested establishing a British settlement at the Swan River in May 1827.³⁴ The oscillation in conversation between Stirling and his supporters, Colonial Office staff, and other individuals before the Crown approved the settlement's establishment in October 1828 is beyond this paper's scope. However, a major player in the formation of Peel town, Thomas Peel, was most likely already aspiring to use the British colonies to improve his personal standing when Stirling made the first approaches to the Colonial Office.³⁵ Peel was the second son of Thomas and Dorothy Peel and descended from the Robert Peel who founded the family's cotton manufacturing fortunes in the Oswaldtwistle area of Lancashire.³⁶ His family was consequently wealthy. After schooling at Harrow, Peel worked at a law firm and married Mary Ayrton in 1824.³⁷ As second son, he was not entitled to the family's wealth when his father died, but Peel's situation is unusual because his older and firstborn brother took up the cloth—usually a post taken by younger sons—instead of going into the family business.³⁸ Nonetheless, Thomas Peel decided not to follow his father in the business and instead emigrated.

Peel and his financier, Solomon Levey,³⁹ played an important part in the Swan River's founding, and arguably, the settlement would not have occurred in the way that transpired without Peel's application to bring a large colonising group to the Swan River. It was separate to, but worked with, Stirling's proposal to the Colonial Office to organise a fully-funded settlement syndication. Peel's initial proposal of November 1828 was staggering—the transfer of 10,000 people and 1000 head of livestock over ten years in return of four million acres of land,⁴⁰ but the Colonial Office balked and reduced the size of the land grant to one million acres.⁴¹

Peel's proposal does not state where the people who formed his colonising syndicate at Peel town originally came from, but some documents suggest that several were already acquainted in Britain with each other as friends (Lipscombe, Smith and Beale), brothers (such as William and Henry Forward, John and William Crisp, Paul and James Lockyer, Thomas, George and Daniel Syred) and brother and sister (William Russell and Elizabeth Betts), suggesting that 'word of mouth' between friends and relatives resulted in a group of indentured servants emigrating to the Swan River with him that were not complete strangers. Passenger lists for those that were indentured to Peel⁴² show an almost 3 to

34 James Stirling, application to Earl Bathurst for position as governor of a proposed colony at Swan River, *Historical Records of Australia: Series I, Governors' despatches to and from England*, vol. 13, 1923, p. 307. Available online at <https://archive.org/stream/historicalrecord00v13aust#page/n5/mode/2up>. (Hereafter HRA I).

35 Alexandra Hasluck, 'Peel, Thomas (1793–1865)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 2, Melbourne, 1967, pp. 320–322.

36 *ibid.*

37 *ibid.*

38 *ibid.*

39 Thomas Peel, Indentures of Thomas Eacott, 27 April 1829. SLWA Acc 4979A.

40 Thomas Peel, Sir Francis Vincent, Edward W.H. Schenley and T. Potter Macqueen, letter to George Murray, *HRA III*, pp. 588–90.

41 Horace Twiss, letter to Sir F. Vincent and Messrs Peel and Schenley, in *HRA III*, pp. 608–9.

42 Daniel Scott, Shipping Report Gilmore, W.H. Geary, 16 December 1829. State Records Office of Western Australia (hereafter SROWA) WAS 2932, Cons 103, 365; Daniel Scott, 'Shipping Report: Hooghly', P J Reeves, from London and *Egyptian*, William Lilburne, from London, 12 February 1830.

1 ratio of adult men to women. A disproportionate sex ratio of men over women is typical in most European colonisation events of the New World, but Peel town camp's ratio was less severe than the 5:1 and 6:1 ratios seen, for example, in the colonisation of North America by the English and French respectively.⁴³ Of the 83 adult women at the camp, 73 were married with families, while 201 children under the age of 15 comprised 41 per cent of the camp's total population.⁴⁴

It is difficult determining the number of people in Peel's group that fall into the professional-agricultural class, but we can suspect a middle or upper class standing for those who could afford cabin accommodation on board the ships. The Meares and Dunnage families who arrived on Peel's first ship *Gilmore* are of this class, but Richard Meares' contractual arrangements⁴⁵ with Peel to receive 1300 acres of land at 2 pence an acre and a nominal rent until payment for passage was forwarded to Peel indicates that even the middle classes were in some way indebted financially to Peel. In addition, some like Adam Elmslie and Adam Armstrong had worked for Peel as clerks in London and wished to secure land in the new colony.

The archaeology from two dwellings occupied by members of the professional-agricultural class at Peel town contain imported Chinese and Japanese porcelain that was available in Britain, but the artefacts' association with British East India Company objects such as brass buttons emblazoned with the company's lion and palm tree symbol suggest that some of the professional-agricultural class group already had experience living in British colonies. Furthermore, many ex-officers and ranks of the British military who had served in campaigns in the Iberian Peninsula, Egypt, the Low Countries and every ocean of the world meant that there was a knowledge of different cultures, experience in adapting to new environments and resilience.

The roles of those recorded in the passenger lists suggest that Peel had thought carefully about events and the order in which they were to occur in the future colony. Contractual agreements suggest that Peel's envisaged settlement was to develop in stages, with colonists' roles changing over time. Most men, including those with trades, were required to work for Peel as 'field labourers ... assisting in preparing and cropping the Land ... erecting and completing Houses, and all other necessary Buildings thereon and fences thereto'⁴⁶ for the first six months. For the next four and a half years they were to work as labourers or tradespersons. Three shillings a day appears to have been the standard rate of pay for everyone.⁴⁷ Of the 60 men on the second of Peel's ships, the *Hooghly*, with indentures to work initially for Peel as labourers, 32 had trade skills such as the Lockyer brothers as millwrights; Cooper, Weaver, Bond and Boothman as carpenters; Watts and Neale as coopers; and Spice and Edwards as brick makers and builders, to name a few. Ten gardeners amongst the group employed as labourers suggest that Peel

SROWA WAS 2932, Cons 36, 5, Letter 5; Daniel Scott, Shipping Report: *Rockingham*, E Halliburton, from London, 14 May 1830. SROWA, WAS 2932, Cons 36, 6, Letter 141.

43 Ivor Noel Hume, *The Virginia Adventure: Roanoke to James Towne*, Virginia, 1997.

44 Scott, shipping reports for *Gilmore*, *Hooghly* and *Rockingham*.

45 James Stone and Company, 'Thomas Peel and Captain Richard Goldsmith Meares: Articles of Agreement for Meares to take up 1300 acres of land in Western Australia', 1829. SLWA Acc 711A/3.

46 James Stone and Company, 'Articles of Agreement made and entered into between Thomas Peel and John Thomas, Carpenter and joiner', 1829. SLWA, Acc 711A/5.

47 *ibid*; James Stone and Company, 'Articles of Agreement made and entered into between Thomas Peel and Thomas Eacott, Labourer', 1829. SLWA Acc 711A/8.

was looking to initially develop small horticultural lots with his workforce, instead of large fields with crops of grain.⁴⁸

With the exception of Peel town, it is impossible to construct the demographics of the other camps formed by the Swan River's colonising group. Generally, however, there were similarities, like people lacking skills in animal tending roles like shepherds. As one would expect, however, embryonic Fremantle and Perth had many colonists of the professional-agricultural class. They had professional, managerial and executive skills such as surgeons, merchants, engineers, solicitors, lawyers and ex-army and navy officers who were to hold the Swan River's government positions. At Peel town, however, the professional-agricultural class comprised about only 10 per cent of Peel's group.

Peel town's material remains: The archaeology of stress

Setbacks blighted Peel's plan in the new settlement even before arrival at the Swan River.⁴⁹ The Colonial Office regulations applicable to the Swan River settlement were specific that colonists received land in order of their arrival, but Peel's scheme was exempt from this stipulation, with land set aside for the group between the coast and the Canning River as long as they arrived at the Swan River before 1 November 1829. However, the late arrival of Peel's first group of colonists in Western Australia aboard the *Gilmore* made the special arrangements null and void and resulted in the Colonial Office's regulations of land allocation determined by arrival date applicable also to Peel and his group.

The loss of all of the land promised to Peel by the Colonial Office due to their late arrival most likely strongly influenced the behaviour of all of Peel's colonists after they arrived. Peel had discussions with Stirling regarding the reinstatement of conditions, but many colonists at Fremantle and other camps waiting impatiently for land since August 1829—months before Peel's first ship arrived—meant special treatment for Peel's group by Stirling was an unlikely (and unwise) prospect. With Stirling and Peel discussing the scheme's outcome, the *Gilmore's* 175 men, women and children made camp opposite a beach at the south end of Henderson Cliffs, about 5km south of Woodman Point.⁵⁰ On 13 February 1830, the *Hooghly* arrived, adding an extra 180 souls to the camp, and three months later, the *Rockingham* contributed a further 152.⁵¹

Despite the distance of time, the material evidence of the colonists at Peel town camp clearly shows the major problems the colonists faced. The archaeological excavation of

48 Thomas Peel, 'List of mechanics and labourers etc engaged by of Thomas Peel esq, together with other settlers who came out to the new settlement under his auspices per ship *Hooghly*', 13 February 1830. SLWA Acc 184A.

49 Hasluck, pp. 67-70.

50 There are some that consider the camp was near Woodman Point, but there is a lack of contemporary primary historical sources supporting this claim and no archaeology from the period in this area. Furthermore, primary sources state clearly that the camp was near Mt Brown, with the quantity and extent of the archaeology supporting the primary historical documents. See J.S. Roe, 'Letter to T. Peel', 1836. SROWA WAS 1856, Cons 5000, item 56, letter 2957; Mary Ann Friend, 'Journal of a voyage to Hobart with first eye-witness account of the settlement on the Swan River, 1829-1831', typescript, n.d., p. 30. SLWA Acc 4453A; Colonial Department, 'Map of part of the Coast of Western Australia: From the Swan River to King George's Sound, Exhibiting also the Inland Tracts of the several Exploring Parties', drawn by L. Herbert Snr., London, August 1831. UK National Archives, CO 700/WESTERN AUSTRALIA2

51 Scott, shipping report for the *Rockingham*.

two structures—one a prefabricated timber dwelling and the other most likely a large canvas tent or pavilion—indicate that the colonists experienced a disaster very early after arrival suffered by many Western Australians since—destruction of possessions by bushfire. The dwelling owners' belongings, including brass balance weights, earthenware plates, bowls and glass bottles (complete but shattered by intense heat), and personal objects like clay smoking pipes, children's toys, and a man's shaving kit, were left where they were dropped in and around the structures. The destruction of the dwellings most likely occurred in February or March 1830 when bushfires swept through the camp, the accidental nature of its outbreak an example of how the British struggled to come to grips with their new physical environment.⁵²

The extent of the material remains of Peel town suggests that colonists from the three ships lived in a 30-hectare area. Excavations on mounds of sand and limestone cobbles that dot the landscape showed them to be the remains of large cooking hearths made by the colonists of local limestone and low-fired yellow brick imported by Peel. The hearths have near them artefacts linked to food storage (glass and ceramic bottles, tin cans), food preparation (course, redware cooking pots) and food service (such as refined earthenware plates, platters and bowl fragments).⁵³ Fragments of clamshell and pieces of tin can—the shell from the native species *Venericardia rosulenta*—suggest the consumption of a limited range of fresh and preserved foods, while pieces of a glass vial containing essence of peppermint and a refined earthenware pepper pot in an industrial slip pattern suggest that some of the foods eaten were disagreeable for some.

The cultural landscape of Peel town

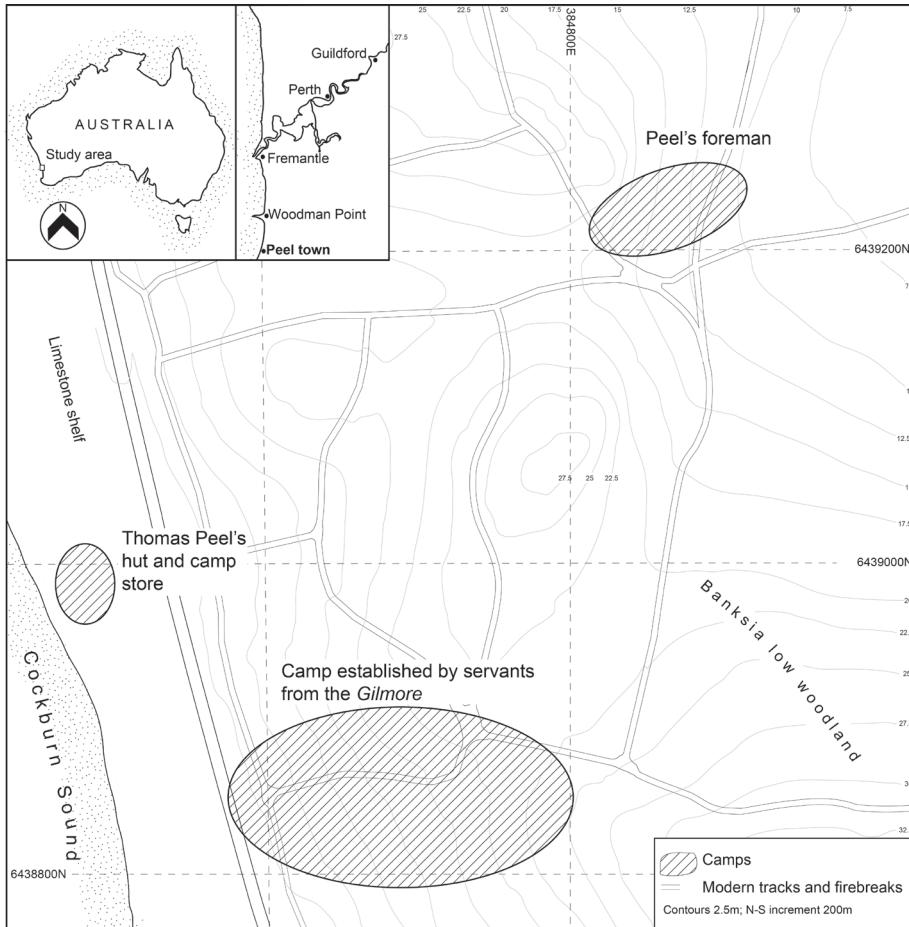
The archaeological and historical records individually provide a limited perception of the location and social status of those residing in various areas of Peel town. Combined, however, they give temporal and spatial data allowing an interpretation of the camp's cultural landscape. There were three distinct areas formed at Peel town shortly after the *Gilmore* arrived in December 1829 (see supporting maps). First, there was Thomas Peel's small administration and living area comprising his hut and store near the beach where the colonists landed.⁵⁴ Nearby to the east was the camp established by the servants and workers from the *Gilmore*. In the historical record, the camp is depicted as a collection of V tents and other structures.⁵⁵ The archaeology of the servant camp's location comprises a large artefact scatter of fragmented ceramic items, bottle glass and clay smoking pipes in a firebreak that parallels Cockburn Road. The location fortifies John Thomas' comment

52 Firestick farming by Indigenous Australians was often blamed for these incidents in the Swan River colony's early days. However, the archaeology of Peel town suggests that colonists' hearths and fireplaces were open, inviting the risk of fire.

53 Preserving food in cans dates from the late eighteenth century, while Morgan, the colony's colonial storekeeper, mentions the issuing of preserved meat to Peel in 'cannisters'. See Jane Busch 'An Introduction to the Tin Can', *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1981, pp. 95-104; and Colonial Storekeeper, With an account of Stores delivered to Mr Thos Peel, 1830. SROWA Acc 36, vol. 8, letter 12.

54 George Bayly, Journals of voyages on the *Hooghly*, 1830–1842. SLWA Acc 5106A/3; George Smythe, 'Survey of the northern boundary of Thomas Peel's grant near Clarence', sheet 1, 1830. SROWA WAS 234, Cons 3844, 142; Henry Sutherland, 'Cockburn Sound', 1830. SRWO WAS 32, Cons 3844, 155; Henry Sutherland, 'Cockburn Sound', 1830. SROWA, WAS 32, Cons 3844, 156.

55 Bayly.



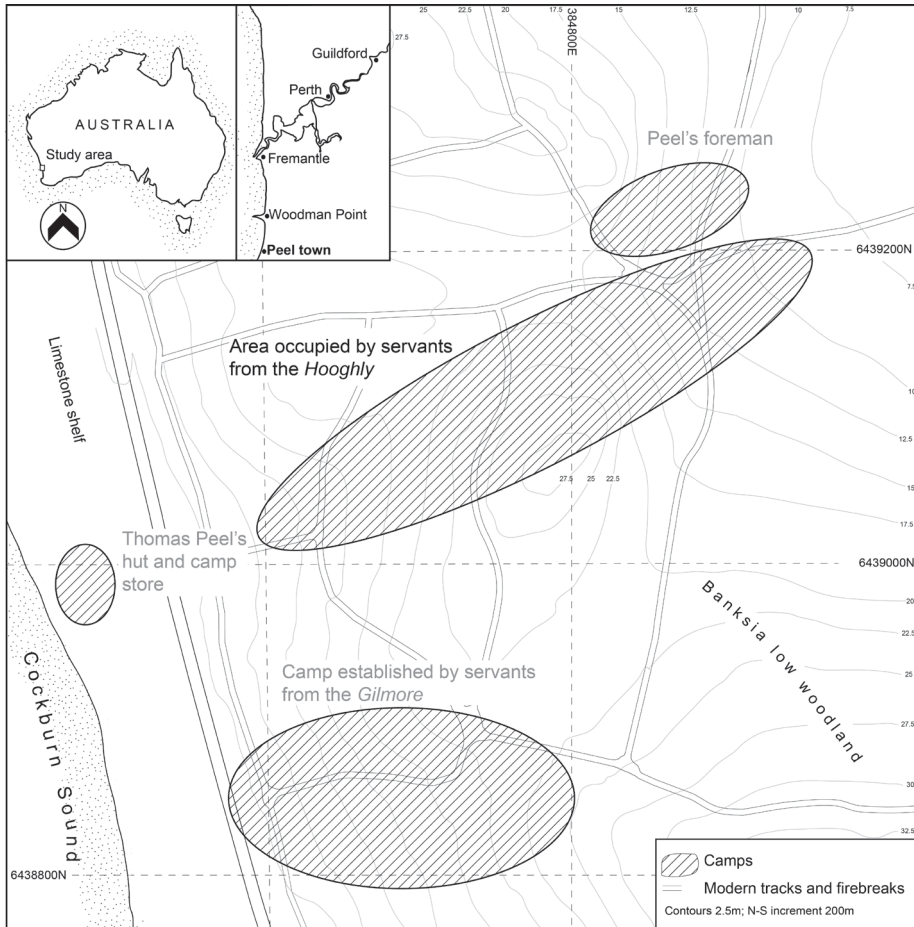
The locations of various groups at Peel town, shortly after their arrival in December 1829.

that he lived with other colonists from the *Gilmore* about 146 metres from Peel's store and 48 metres from the beach.⁵⁶

Accommodation for Peel town's foreman and other professionals from the third distinct area. Comprising the Bailey, Elmslie, Lyttleton and Oakley families, they and most likely others resided on the east side of a limestone ridge. Some of this group assisted Peel with the running of the camp, a claim supported by the archaeology of their dwellings including brass balance scale weights that would have been used when issuing rations, and many large and small inkbottles most likely associated with record keeping. This group was 420 metres from Peel's hut and store and about 500 metres north of the servants' camp.

Maintaining the control of a large group of ambitious people with real or perceived fears in a foreign environment was paramount for Peel, especially given the disappointment and jolt to morale that the group received after learning that land was unavailable.

⁵⁶ John Thomas, Letter to James Stirling, 5 June 1831. SROWA Acc 36, vol. 15, letter 38.



Location of those from the Hooghly at Peel town, shortly after their arrival in February 1830.

Segregation of different social or ranked groups is one method used by those in authority to maintain control, and Peel appears to have used this technique at Peel town. Stirling also used this method at Cliff Point on Garden Island between June and August 1829, and it was common at most Australian convict or military settlements.⁵⁷ Stirling established three distinct areas of function and class on Garden Island, with Stirling's dwelling on a hill overlooking the subordinate officers' accommodation to the south, and the camp's workshop and store area to the north.⁵⁸ Class segregation occurred at Peel town, but unlike Stirling, Peel did not use the camp's high ground to define status and to allow

57 Angela McGowan, 'Archaeological Investigations at Risdon Cove Historic Site: 1978–1980', [report], National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hobart, 1985; S. Hayes, 'Yorktown: The cultural landscape of the first European settlement in the North of Tasmania', *The Artefact*, vol. 28, 2005, pp. 4–14; J. Allen, 'Port Essington: The historical archaeology of a north Australian nineteenth-century military outpost', *Studies in Australasian Historical Archaeology*, no. 1, 2008; Hamersley.

58 Hamersley.

for surveillance. Instead, he maintained control over the group by regulating supplies from the store. Despite the large number of artefacts gathered from excavations or collected from surface finds, few were associated with consuming food gathered from local sources, with the shell of clams from some of the hearths and a few unidentified bird bone the only evidence of subsistence.⁵⁹ The historical record also notes that colonists struggled securing the area's plentiful bird and mammal food stocks.⁶⁰ In this context, Thomas Peel living near the store and maintaining surveillance of its precious provisions suggests that he recognised that overseeing the issuing of goods and food to the camp's members as a powerful mechanism of control.

Peel town's cultural landscape in February 1830 was of one group at two locales (Peel's store and dwelling and the camp's foreman) controlling others in another location (the servants) by segregation (which Peel insisted on maintaining), regulation of resources, and legally binding work contracts. Peel town's landscape before the *Hooghly's* arrival was actually an example of agricultural and particularly industrial landscapes like those created by land or factory owners to control servants in Britain.⁶¹ As stated, most on the *Hooghly* were indentured to work for Peel initially as labourers and later in their trades, similar to the roles of many from the *Gilmore*. One would expect, therefore, that they would join the *Gilmore* group of similar social standing when they arrived. Instead, however, they camped about 150 metres north of the *Gilmore* group and separate to them, constructing dwellings with hearths and depositing rubbish that presently forms Peel town's richest area of archaeology.

In the context of the Swan River's early days, the apparently benign action of the *Hooghly* colonists to occupy an area away from others of their class symbolises all the evils of servant class behaviour in the Swan River. Peel had carefully constructed the landscape to his benefit, but the area the *Hooghly* colonists selected brought them within metres of the *Gilmore's* professional-agricultural class' dwellings⁶² and completely changed the landscape constructed around the segregation of classes (see maps). Their decision effectively demolished the landscape of control.

The act of the *Hooghly* colonists occupying an area where they wished suggests disorganisation at Peel town, an analysis backed by the historical documents that state that members of the leadership group—Thomas Peel in particular—were often absent from the camp.⁶³ In the context of landscapes, however, the behaviour also indicates that the landscape constructed by Peel as a tool to control group behaviour was not recognised by the *Hooghly* colonists. Ingold⁶⁴ comments that for landscapes constructed to control groups to work effectively they must first be recognised by the group one wishes to control—in the case of the *Hooghly* colonists, this appears to be not the case. But there is more to this act of non-compliance—with the answer to the question why the

59 Bayly.

60 *ibid.*

61 Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape*, Gloucester, 1987.

62 Bayly; *Sydney Gazette*, 20 May 1830, p. 2

63 Lilian Heal, *Jane Dodds, 1788–1844: A Swan River Colony Pioneer*, Sydney, 1988; Alexander Collie, 'Report of an Enquiry into the Causes of Sickness recently represented to the magistrates in Quarter Session assembled, to exist among Thomas Peels Settlers at, or in the neighbourhood of, Clarence and of measures which may be adopted for alleviating it', 25 July 1830. SROWA Acc 36, vol. 8, letter 20-1.

64 Tim Ingold, 'The Temporality of Landscape', *World Archaeology*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1993, pp. 152-174.

Hooghly colonists behaved this way assisting in understanding servant class behaviour in the Swan River during this period. The reason for the *Hooghly* people's behaviour lies in what they brought with them culturally. Their conduct is more understandable in the context of individuals with British culture of the early nineteenth century. All colonists to the Swan River—including those of the servant class—had willingly left their former homes and lifestyle for one hopefully better—a desire not just applicable to the professional-agricultural classes like Peel. Furthermore, what occurred at Peel town with the arrival of colonists from the *Hooghly* suggests that personal improvement and aspiration were not class-specific for members of the British Empire—it also applied to servants and tradespeople who were not submissive or overly resistive, but just wished to better themselves. This was the mantra of the British, and this philosophy most likely applied to most of the servant classes brought to the Swan River. The mindset—no different to that of the professional-agricultural class—and ensuing behaviour resulted in a negative perception from the professional-agricultural class.

What the *Hooghly* colonists experienced immediately upon arrival at the Swan River also influenced their behaviour. According to Bayly, who was second officer of the *Hooghly*, passengers from his ship observed those from the *Gilmore* lying around idly and affected by alcohol.⁶⁵ As a result, the *Hooghly* colonists decided *en masse* to settle elsewhere instead of with inhospitable individuals of the same class.⁶⁶ To the professional-agricultural class at Peel town—Thomas Peel, the camp foreman and others—the *Hooghly* group's behaviour, like the behaviour of other servants in the Swan River colony who 'find their own value and act accordingly'⁶⁷ had an air of insubordination, and it is in this guise that most servant behaviour is presented in the Swan River's early days. However, the behaviour is understandable in the context of people simply wishing to better themselves.

Despite the changing landscape, Thomas Peel or his foreman still maintained control of supplies from the camp store. Conditions at Peel town worsened as the months passed. The material evidence left behind by colonists reveal the true hardships faced by Peel's colonists. Associated with the hearths are preserved layers of charcoal accumulated over the time of the camp's occupation. The charcoal in the layers formed by the hearths' periodic cleaning show an unusual pattern—the species of plant the charcoal come from changed over time. The oldest, basal layers comprise charcoal from local trees and plants like *Eucalyptus* and *Banksia*, but in younger deposits, it changes to *Quercus*, *Ulmus* and *Pinus*—oak, elm and pine respectively. The fragments of charcoal, like the words on the pages of a book, tell a story. As nearby sources of native vegetation for firewood dwindled because of overuse by the large group, colonists first had to extend their range of collecting local fuels. However, the imbalance between the energy and time needed for firewood collection versus the time before repeating the excursion was reached quickly, forcing colonists to find alternatives. The archaeology suggests that the alternative was to use timber objects brought with them from Britain as fuel. Other artefacts—like fragments of copper sheathing and sheathing nails—found with the layers of charcoal, propose that some colonists scavenged ship's timbers from the Cockburn

65 Bayly, 18 February 1830.

66 *Sydney Gazette*, 20 May 1830.

67 Moore.

Sound coast, while brass drawer knobs and small iron based hinges suggest that others used furniture. This implies severe stress but also heartbreak for all at Peel town, with the conditions resulting in a cultural environment unseen previously by most at the camp. The arrival of colonists from the *Rockingham* in May 1830 could not have improved conditions, but for some from this ship the stay at Peel town was short. Within four weeks of their arrival in mid-May 1830, 13 families and at least 12 single men had moved south to one of two sites: Mangles Bay and another near the Murray River.⁶⁸

On 7 July 1830, a group of 20 men and their families petitioned the magistrates at Fremantle for release from their contracts to Peel due to the non-payment of their wages.⁶⁹ A week later, the magistrates George Leake, Thomas Bannister and James Henty released four single men and two married men (and by default, their wives and children).⁷⁰ The decision by the magistrates was the death knell of Peel's planned settlement scheme. Over the next three weeks, all associated with the 7 July meeting obtained release, with five men, two women and three children leaving on 17 July and a further nine single men on 24 July.⁷¹ And it got worse for Peel. In October 1830, a deputation to the camp from Stirling suggested to the remaining Peel colonists that payment of their passage money to Peel would release them of their contractual obligations.⁷² Most took advantage of this suggestion and were gone by November 1830.⁷³ A few lingered until June or July 1831 though were 'mostly sick and cripples'.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Most primary and secondary written sources relating to the earliest days of the Swan River's settlement are disparaging of the servants and workers. They are portrayed in such documents as uneducated, ignorant and forced by circumstances in a changing Britain to live a hand-to-mouth existence there. They did, however, have value as labourers and servants to the professional-agricultural class in the new British colony of the Swan River. The rapid change in the cultural environment resulting from the colonisation of the Swan River presents a milieu causing behaviour from the servant classes that was considered untraditional and inappropriate. However, in the context of who the British were, the behaviour of the servants and workers was the model the culture espoused in Britain, and it appears that the professional-agricultural classes were naive in believing that 'traditional' meant workers and servants carrying out their wishes without question.

68 Collie; R. Robinson, W. Adams, J. Parsons, R. Palmer, S. Martin, J. Tuckey, W. Glyde, T. Ecott, R. Batts, J. Pollard and G. Read, Letter to James Stirling, 30 August 1830. SROWA, Acc 36, vol. 8, Letter 125.

69 Magistrates of Fremantle, Releasing 5 men from the servitude of Mr Peel: Thos Harrison, William Hird, John Outridge, William Dolton, John Smith, 17 July 1830. SROWA Acc 36, vol. 7, Letter 184, 187.

70 Magistrates of Fremantle, Releasing 6 men from the servitude of Mr Peel: Henry R Bond, Wm Russell, James Goodman, Wm Gaze, Ed Boothman, T Lipscomb, 17 July 1830. SROWA Acc 36, vol. 7, Letter 163-5.

71 Magistrates of Fremantle, Releasing 5 men; Magistrates of Fremantle, Releasing 6 men.

72 *Perth Gazette*, 7 May 1833, pp. 75-6.

73 Richard Meares, Letter to J.S. Roe, November 1830. SROWA, Acc 1856, Cons 5000, Item SDUR, Letter M1-67.

74 Adam Elmslie, Letter to James Stirling, 29 June 1831. SROWA Acc 36, vol. 16, Letter 102.

The Swan River colony's role more broadly in the British Empire has often been overlooked in Western Australian history and archaeology due to a focus on local history and archaeology. What the results of this research into the cultural landscape of Peel town show is that instead of interpreting the behaviour of servants taking advantage of a fragile cultural environment resulting from the colonising process, one might instead examine the behaviour in the context of deeds linked to a specific identity that had developed in Britain since about 1760 and which was applicable to all the Swan River colony's first colonists.

The Swan River's early days clearly show the life ambitions of the servant classes that comprised about 80 per cent of the first British society. Similar to the professional-agricultural class who saw opportunity in the expanding British Empire, the servant classes also saw the colonies as a vehicle to better their lives. The behaviour shown by some during the colonisation of the Swan River by the British as part of empire-building is a reflection of events occurring over all of the British Isles at the time but condensed in Western Australia into a small area with the Swan River as its backbone. The behaviour of Peel town colonists in July to seek advice from local magistrates versed in the British legal system is further evidence that those of the servant classes were aware of their rights and astute in its use as members of the British Empire.

It is oft-quoted, but Johnson's statement continues to resonate in the context of colonial encounters; 'let us give historical and *cultural* depth to all parties in that encounter'.⁷⁵ Bringing together the material remains from the first actions of colonists in the Swan River and by knowing their beliefs, fears and life experiences, one can make sense of behaviour that had previously been interpreted as insubordinate.

75 Matthew Johnson, 'Rethinking Historical Archaeology', in P.P. Funari, M. Hall and S. Jones (eds), *Historical Archaeology: Back from the Edge*, New York, 1999, p. 29. Emphasis added.