From Dream to Reality: A study of British migration to Western Australia in the 1960s, with special emphasis on those who travelled on the SS Castel Felice

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Publication Details
Caunt, H. J. (2007). From Dream to Reality: A study of British migration to Western Australia in the 1960s, with special emphasis on those who travelled on the SS Castel Felice (Master of Arts (MA)). University of Notre Dame Australia.
http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/34
INTRODUCTION

To construct this unique contribution to the history of Western Australia I have used the words of over 100 British migrants who came here in the 1960s. Over a million people left the British Isles to migrate to Australia during the 1960s\(^1\). Over one hundred thousand migrants, not all of whom were British, came to Australia on the \textit{Castel Felice} between 1959 and 1969.\(^2\) She was one of the many ships travelling the route between Europe and Australia in the great post-war movement of peoples. The British migrants were labelled by many as ‘whingeing Poms’, but more recently Hammerton and Thomson have written of them as ‘Australia’s invisible migrants’.\(^3\)

My study is important and timely because many of the people who experienced the event are now senior citizens whose memories need to be recorded while it remains possible to do so. In exploring the experiences of over 100 British migrants who settled in Western Australia in the 1960s the thesis gives personal stories that have not been written before. Scholars have explored the experiences of other ethnic groups in Western Australia such as the Irish and Dutch as well as the displaced persons of Europe more generally.\(^4\) The British post-war migration to Australia had been recorded mostly in general terms.\(^5\) This thesis concentrates on the decision by Britons to migrate to Western Australia in the 1960s, their sea

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\item Hammerton and Thomson, passim.
\item James Jupp, various titles; Allen Richardson, various titles; Appleyard, various titles; Hammerton and Thomson, various titles.
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passage to Fremantle and the varying experiences of those who chose to settle here.

Many British migrants of this period came as part of the greatest and last sea-borne movements of willing peoples in the world. Towards the end of the 1960s the airplane took the place of the ship, to a large degree, as the means of bringing migrants to Australia. This important research has allowed the participants to tell, in their own words, the story of why they decided to come to Australia (and more particularly to Western Australia), the experiences of their travel to Australia and their arrival and settling in, and, in the end, why some chose to return to live in Britain.

To define the term British can be problematical; even the dictionaries cannot agree on a shared definition. One believes the British are ‘people of Great Britain or of the British Empire but more especially the English’. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is more specific, suggesting that the British are the descendants of the ancient Britons, and Britain is said to be ‘the whole island containing England, Wales and Scotland more fully called Great Britain’. Chetkovich also expresses the difficulty in defining the term ‘British’ for her doctoral thesis in 2003. She says that in modern usage ‘Britain is commonly used for the United Kingdom, a political entity in which England is the dominant part’. According to the Australian Department of Immigration, the United Kingdom was created in 1801 and comprised England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and such off-shore islands as the Isle of Wight. In the 1920s the primarily Catholic states of southern Ireland were partitioned and became known as the Irish Free State. In 1948 these states became the Irish Republic and left the British Commonwealth. Since then Irish Republicans are not be considered ‘British’, unlike the citizens of Northern Ireland.

The majority of my respondents departed from what might be more specifically called Great Britain, the largest island of the British Isles. In all, though, participants

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originated from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland and also the Irish Republic. They seem to have used the terms English, British and ‘from the U.K.’ indiscriminately in their responses. It is also apparent that the place from which they say they left on their migration journey was not necessarily their place of birth or where they were ‘from’. Many respondents had travelled around the United Kingdom for work, after marriage and for other reasons, especially those who had served in the armed forces. It remains particularly difficult to determine exactly how many of the post-war British migrants to Australia were in fact Irish. Official records of the time make no distinction between the nationalities of those passengers who left British ports, but list only the port of departure. Chetkovitch notes that the £10 assisted migration scheme was only extended to the Irish in the late 1960s, and that up to that time those Irish who wished to participate were forced to take up residency in England for six months before being considered eligible.\textsuperscript{10} The significance of this is that while this study examines the British experiences of migration to Australia, it is possible that some of the participants were of Irish origin, just as some of the thousands who left Britain for Australia on the \textit{Castel Felice} were also Irish. It is impossible to guess at what those numbers might be.

This thesis looks at the dreams, hopes and expectations of some of the thousands of assisted British migrants who came to Western Australia during the 1960s. They left a country which had a National Health and Insurance Scheme with free medical and welfare benefits, often in a time of booming employment, to travel 12,000 miles to the other side of the world either on their own or with their families. The decision to emigrate was often based on expectations raised by promises they found in migrant information publications. Some found their new life in Australia was all they had hoped for—and more. Others found their expectations were not fulfilled immediately and so were very unhappy when they tried to settle in Australia. It has been estimated that over 25\% of all people who migrated to

\textsuperscript{10} Chetkovitch, ‘The New Irish in Australia’, p. 65.
Australia from the United Kingdom (and all parts of Europe) in the 1960s returned to their homelands.¹¹

The major part of the thesis uses the words of over 100 Britons to tell of their decision to migrate, their voyage and their early years in Western Australia in the 1960s. To give depth to the work the actual words and phraseology of the responses have been used. Most travelled on the Castel Felice, the ship which brought my family here; thirty of them came in the same year, 1966. Some of the accounts are humorous, some are poignant, but all reflect the different experiences of those £10 Poms. It is unquestionably an immigration history. Thomson, who researched the accounts of post-war British migrants in the archival holdings at the State Library of Victoria and the University of Sussex in England, says there are noticeable differences in the accounts of the migrants made at the time of migration and those that were made later.¹² It may therefore be true, that had my participants been surveyed upon arrival in the 1960s, their responses might then have been different.

The study of immigration in Australia has been extensive, which is not surprising given the vast influence which assisted and unassisted migration has had on the nation since colonisation. (It is also true that Australia’s immigration story pre-dates 1788). Yet there has been surprisingly little attention paid to the large numbers of British migrants who arrived by ship in Western Australia during the period of the 1960s. Lost in the story of the declining White Australia Policy, these migrants were considered to be most acceptable because it was thought that they would blend invisibly and culturally into the Australian nation without effort. This assumption has also made them practically invisible in our history, yet their numbers alone make them worthy of attention. There were more than 1 million who arrived in the 1960s.¹³ Despite these numbers very little has been written specifically about these

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¹¹ Sherington, p. 148.
¹² Alistair Thomson, “‘The Empire was a Bar of Soap’: Life stories and race identity among British emigrants travelling to Australia, 1945-1967”, in Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (eds), Cultural History in Australia, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2003, pp. 203, 208.
¹³ Immigration-Federation to Century’s End.
British ‘boat people’ of the 1960s who came to Western Australia.

When I arrived from Britain with my family in 1966, I was one of many of the British migrants who came to Australia in that year. I am a ‘Ten Pound Pom’. I came with my husband and young family from the midlands of England to Western Australia on the Castel Felice and settled for the first two years in a forestry settlement of Pimelia just outside Pemberton in the south-west corner of Western Australia. In researching material to write the story of our migration experience I realised there was very little literature about the Britons who came to Western Australia in the 1960s. Though there are many academics, such as Jupp and Richardson\(^\text{14}\), who have written on British migration to Australia they tend to focus on the migrants’ political and cultural similarity to Australians; but these writings largely ignore the personal narrative. Few deal specifically with Western Australia, separated as it is by geography, psychology, politics, economy and in so many other ways from the eastern states. Others have written of the experiences of the Italian, Irish and Dutch migrants as well as the refugees and displaced persons who came to Western Australia in the years following the Second World War\(^\text{15}\). But few British migrant voices of the 1960s have been recorded. I realised that after forty years many of these migrants, like myself, were ageing and their stories needed to be recorded before they died.

**Research Design**

My thesis in some ways expands on the work of James Hammerton and Alistair Thomson who brought together two rich archives of testimony by post-war British migrants held at the University of Sussex in Britain and the State Library of Victoria.\(^\text{16}\) Using these primary sources their work is a general look at British migration from 1945 to the 1970s and gives an in-depth report on the phenomenon of the migrants who returned permanently to the United States.

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\(^{14}\) James Jupp, various titles; Allen Richardson, various titles; Appleyard, various titles; Hammerton and Thomson, various titles. (See Bibliography)

\(^{15}\) Chetkovich, Peters, Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home: Migration experiences between Italy and Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2001

\(^{16}\) Hammerton and Thomson, p. ix.
Kingdom. My work differs, and is more important to Western Australia, because it focuses on the experiences of British migrants coming to and settling in this state in the 1960s. Other writers, such as Jupp, appear not to have conducted surveys or interviews specifically with people who came to Western Australia in the 1960s, though Richardson did conduct a helpful survey in the 1950s of migrants who were then living in Medina, a suburb of Perth.\footnote{A. Richardson, ‘British Immigrants in Western Australia: Study of British migrants in Medina’, in C.A. Price, \textit{The Study of Immigrants in Australia: Proceedings of a conference on immigration research convened by the Dept. of Demography}, Australian National University, Canberra, 1960, pp. 33–43.}

It was decided that data could only be considered by the qualitative method. A case study would be an opportunity to fill the gaps in the understanding of the migration of British migrants to Western Australia. The data gathered is in the form of words and pictures rather than numbers and it could be assumed that the results might be generalized across the experiences of many British migrants arriving in the 1960s. Furthermore, it was impossible to guess at the size of the response from migrants until the study began.\footnote{David Evans and Paul Gruba, \textit{How to Write a Better Thesis}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2002, pp. 83–100.}

To make the study more manageable I chose to canvas the passengers who, like me, migrated here in the 1960s on board the \textit{Castel Felice}. In creating the history of those British migrants I wanted to use their own words to tell of their emotions on leaving home and the adventure of the voyage, the reality of life on arrival and if their new life fulfilled their expectations. Because of the age of the expected respondents I decided that the least intrusive means to find the information I required was by a questionnaire. Participants could then choose to answer some or all questions in the survey, or indeed not return the survey at all. A consent form allowed for the respondents to request anonymity in published materials. Some surveys were not returned and more than half the respondents requested that their anonymity be retained.

The survey, a copy of which can be found as Appendix 1, included the following questions:
Introduction

- What was the date of your voyage to Western Australia? (Include month and year if possible.)
- What were the names, approximate ages and occupations of those with whom you travelled?
- Why, of all the Australian states, did you choose to migrate to…? (e.g. Western Australia?)
- Where did you receive information about Australia before migrating?
- What were the official procedures you had to follow to apply to migrate to Western Australia? (eg: vaccinations, interviews, letters, documentation etc.).
- What were the reactions of your friends and family to your decision to migrate to Australia?
- What was your ‘home town? Could you describe your journey from home to the ship? For example, did you travel by private car, train or some other motor vehicle? Did friends come to wish you well? What were the emotions you remember feeling as you prepared to leave?
- Could you describe the voyage on the *(Ship Name or plane)*? Consider such questions as: How long was the journey? Was it a positive experience? Did you make friends with other people on board? If so, did you remain in contact with them after you arrived? Where did the ship stop en route? What were the conditions of your cabin like? Were people excited by the voyage and the promise of what lay ahead? Nervous? Were the food and other conditions of the ship good?
- What were your first impressions of Australia before you landed? eg: when first seeing land, or from tales told by other passengers.
- Did you have somewhere to stay, or was that arranged on arrival? Did you go directly there?
- If you went to a hostel what were your impressions of the: Accommodation, Facilities, Food, and Transport? Other.
- Did you (or your parents) obtain the work which you *had expected to gain* on arrival?
- How long was it before you settled into permanent accommodation? Was it near facilities such as work, school and shops?
- Did the reality of life in Australia match the promise which had been offered before emigration?
- In the first 3 years did you consider returning to Britain?
- Did you later consider returning to Britain?
- What made you stay in Western Australia?
- Did any of your family return to Britain, if so what made them return?
- Are you now happy with your life in Western Australia and your decision to migrate here?
- How do you think the life of you and your family has changed by moving here?
- Are you now an Australian citizen?

The survey was accompanied by a letter explaining the aims and objectives of the
research. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the University of Notre Dame’s Research Ethics Committee in August 2005. It was acknowledged in the project’s ethics application that some of the memories the survey might provoke could be distressing for respondents. Indeed, one of the participants writes, ‘I am reliving that time now and feel more upset now than I think I did then’. While similar feelings were expressed by others, some expressed pleasure at the opportunity to remember their past, especially when they did so in a family situation. One participant, who filled in the survey for his 92 year old father, said: ‘Thanks for the opportunity to do this we had a lot of fun talking about the past’.

The Maritime Museum of Western Australia lists on its Welcome Walls project the names of many migrants who travelled to Western Australia on the Castel Felice. Six participants were recruited through this source. Others were invited to contribute to this project through an advertisement placed in the ‘Can You Help’ section of the West Australian. Further publicity for the project was obtained through articles and photographs later published in the West Australian, the Western Australian Senior and the Fremantle Gazette.

Of the 128 people who responded to such advertisements, 102 completed and returned the survey I posted to them. Seven more surveys were completed by migrants who now live permanently in the United Kingdom. A list of my respondents by year of arrival can be found as part of the bibliography. They came from all parts of the British Isles including England, Scotland, Wales, as well as Northern and Southern Ireland. One respondent came from South Africa (though a British subject) and one from Germany. The participants brought a wide range of skills and experiences to Australia, which are listed, in later chapters.

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20 Name withheld, arr. May 1963, Survey 5.
21 ‘Can you help?’, West Australian, 13 June 2005, p. 46.
22 West Australian, 5 December 2005, p. 9; Western Australian Senior, November 2005, p. 5; Fremantle Gazette, 6 Dec 2005, p. 21. Note: Copies of photographs in appendices.
But some were young children when they made the journey and their experiences often differed to that of the older migrants. Four of the respondents later took part in interviews which I conducted to obtain further information on life in the United Kingdom in the 1960s. Transcripts of my interviews were sent to the interviewees inviting them to make alterations and sign the consent form before the material was used in this thesis. The completed surveys, tapes and transcripts of the interviews are kept in a secure filing cabinet in my home for possible use in further research. It has been suggested that this material would be a valuable addition to the holdings of the JS Battye Library. On the acceptance of this thesis I will ask
the participants if they would be willing to transfer the material to such an archive or if they
would prefer the materials to be returned to them.

Research for this project commenced in December 2004 and is based on careful
analysis of primary and secondary sources, including records held in the State Records Office
of Western Australia, National Archives of Australia, JS Battye Library of Western Australia,
State Library of Victoria and other academic libraries. Documents studied include shipping
registers, migration records, transcripts of interviews and materials published in the 1960s. It
was interesting that a catalogue search of the oral histories in the Battye Library revealed
records for such terms as ‘Polish migrant’, ‘Dutch migrant’, ‘Jewish migrant’, but nothing for
‘British migrant’. A search of the transcripts held there did not produce any material of
relevance to this project. Immigration records held in museums in Western Australia and
Victoria were also examined. In 2005 I attended a national conference on post-war British
migration held at the Immigration Museum in Melbourne. I met with prominent researchers
in the field at the one-day symposium and at the book launch for Hammerton and Thomson’s
publication, *Invisible Migrants: Post-war Immigration to Australia*. I was able to talk with
some of the leading academics in this field.

The extensive literature research in Western Australian academic libraries was
extended to academic libraries throughout Australia using the internet and inter-library loan
facility of the St Theresa’s Library at the University of Notre Dame in Fremantle. Efforts to
find informational publications produced by the various Australian departments, and other
sources, for prospective migrants had limited success, despite extensive searches in the State
Records Office, Battye Library and the National Archives in Western Australia. I also
searched the online catalogues of the National Library and the National Archives in Canberra.
Staff at the National Archives conducted searches but were unable to find relevant materials.
Five migration handbooks were made available by the National Library from its collection. I
found one publication at the Royal Western Australian Historical Society in Nedlands, and
was fortunate to be loaned some relevant material by the Reverend K. J. Patterson who was a chaplain on the *Castel Felice* in 1967. I was very disappointed to learn that a publication I had found in St Theresa’s Library in 2005, published by the Western Australian Department of Immigration in the 1960s, *What Every Migrant Needs to Know*, had been destroyed by the library at the beginning of 2006. This perhaps gives some indication of the value libraries have placed on such material.

It took many months to complete a detailed literature review. It was necessary to read works on post-war British migration to Australia and the political, economic and social conditions in both Australian and Britain at the time. I also studied the history of Australia since 1788 making particular note of the histories of assisted migration, Western Australian immigration and the experience of the British migrant. I needed to understand the law and policies covering immigration from the nineteenth century, changes which were implemented after Federation, and in particular the long term impact of the White Australia Policy. I also looked at the various schemes put in place to encourage British migrants to our shore, such as the Group Settlement Scheme of the 1920s. Many of these schemes were influenced by economic conditions both in Australia and Britain. I looked especially at the economic and social conditions of the United Kingdom and Western Australia in the 1950s and 1960s and at the changing relationships between Australia and Britain with the decline of the empire, other shifting international allegiances, the growing importance to Australia of the United States and the increasing attraction of the European Economic Community to the United Kingdom.

In developing the thesis I first looked at the history of migration to Western Australia from the indigenous peoples to the post-war era of ‘Populate or Perish’. I then concentrated on the wave of British immigration in the 1960s, especially the migrants who travelled on the *Castel Felice*, to settle in Western Australia. The surveys were received between July 2005 and August 2006. I created a database listing the answers to each question. The responses were analysed with the answers to each question being compared and contrasted to form
separate chapters in this thesis. In an effort to increase the number of respondents from Ireland and Wales I approached the media, and there were some responses to this request. I received one reply after an approach to the Western Australian Welsh Club. The approach to the Australian Irish Heritage Association was unsuccessful. It was also difficult to make contact with the British migrants who had returned to the United Kingdom to live; one contacted me from the original advertisements but I was only able to contact six other returnees. However, the subject of the returning migrants has been well covered in another project undertaken by Hammerton and Thomson.

The La Trobe/Sussex project on British migration to Australia found that some 75% of the participants travelled here as families, with or without children. The composition of the respondents to my survey shows a similar ratio. Jupp says families were favoured for assisted transportation and that many parents were approaching middle age when they came to Australia. They did so for the benefit of their children. This too seems to have been borne out by the responses to my survey as most of the participants came to Australia as part of a family. Many of the breadwinners were over 35 years of age when they arrived in Australia and some brought relatives who were over 50 years of age.

Although my thesis mostly addresses the experiences of migrants who came to Western Australia in the 1960s on the Castel Felice I received responses from migrants who came in the 1940s and 1950s, also a few from passengers on other vessels. Their contributions were not ignored but incorporated into the work where appropriate. Some of my respondents went initially to other Australian states and came later to settle here. Their stories have been included because their decision to migrate, the journey and arrival in Fremantle follows the same path as those who intended to settle in Western Australia. They also give a small

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24 ‘Ten Pound Poms’, Bulletin: The University of Sussex Newsletter, Http://www.sussex.ac.uk/press_office/bulletin/05may00/article5/html, (12/12/05); Hammerton and Thomson, p. ix.
window into the conditions at the time for British migrants who began their new life in other parts of Australia. A few respondents came by air, one as a backpacker and one on a motorcycle and sidecar. These different ways of travel give a broader insight to British migration in the era. The study intends to determine whether the reality of life in Australia fulfilled the expectations the participants held when they made the decision to migrate. In particular we will follow the tale of the four respondents who gave interviews telling something of their lives and experiences in Britain before deciding to migrate.

**Britain in the 1960s**

A comprehensive welfare state was in place in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the 1960s. The National Health Service provided free hospital, medical and dental treatment, and National Insurance and National Assistance took care of those who were unable to work for a living. However, in 1966 new thinking on both sides of Parliament brought a revision of the National Health Service and introduced charges for prescribed medicines. The National Assistance system was also changed to make supplementary payments dependent on a means test. These new measures were seen to have drawbacks because they could lead people to be caught in a ‘poverty trap’. Under the cohabitation rule, for instance, single parents with children to support could be deprived of benefits if they were found to be sharing accommodation with a person who was deemed to be able to provide support.

Britain in the 1960s experienced a decade of change which may have influenced the decision of some migrants to leave the country. In 1961 deflationary measures by the government caused widespread unemployment. Then, in 1963, tax changes increased people’s ability to buy houses and cars. In 1964 the Conservative government was ousted by the Labour Party. The new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, was determined to modernise

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28 Marwick, p. 264.
Britain. Housing was built at a rapid rate and older run-down areas were cleared. However the clearance of slum dwellings and the redevelopment of older suburban areas into high-rise housing disrupted formerly close-knit societies and increased crime rates.\(^{30}\) Disaffected youth provoked gangs of ‘mods and rockers’ to cause trouble in many seaside towns.\(^{31}\) Wages were increased and the steel industry was nationalised.\(^{32}\) It was expected these changes would bring about greater social equality and stop the strikes which had devastated the country. Efforts were made to regulate union unrest, but these measures could not be passed through Parliament. In 1965 the Trade Disputes Act (UK) made industrial stoppages even easier by giving trade unions full protection in cases of disputes involving redundancies. Wage freezes and wage restraints were introduced in an effort to stabilise the economy.\(^{33}\) In the late 1960s further attempts were made to join the European Economic Community while at the same time Britain reduced overseas commitments by withdrawing military forces east of Suez.\(^{34}\)

Britain had always prided itself on being the ‘spiritual home’ of anyone born in its empire.\(^{35}\) This attitude, however, was challenged as more and more Indian, Pakistani and West Indian peoples started to migrate to England. The British Nationality Act of 1948 gave free access to the United Kingdom for Commonwealth citizens who wanted to work or settle. More and more of these new settlers from the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent flooded into the country, until the Commonwealth Immigration Act (UK) was passed in 1962 in an effort to restrict their entrance with the introduction of a voucher scheme.

Colour made these new migrants visible and they tended to congregate in densely populated areas; some people saw them as a threat to the British way of life and feared the influx could lead to widespread unemployment of the white man. Race riots occurred in

\(^{30}\) Marwick, p. 339.
\(^{34}\) Fraser, p. 749.
\(^{35}\) Marwick, p. 230.
many British cities. The government, in an effort to address the problem, brought in the Race Relations Act 1965 (UK), which made it a criminal offence to incite racial hatred. In 1968 amendments to the Commonwealth Immigration Act (UK) effectively closed the door on free entry to all Commonwealth citizens, including many Australians, by stating that people who wished to enter freely must be in possession of a British Passport, only available to naturalised citizens of the United Kingdom, or to the children and grandchildren of such British citizens. Australians became like other foreigners and had to obtain visas to work in England. They were no longer welcome guests.\textsuperscript{36}

The 1960s saw the growth of such movements as Flower Power, the Hippies and a general youth culture, which rebelled against conservative society. In all areas there was declining moral restraint. Early in the 1960s literary censorship ended when D. H. Lawrence’s book \textit{Lady Chatterley’s Lover} was ruled as not obscene. Sexual permissiveness was portrayed in magazines and in the theatre.\textsuperscript{37} The fight for ‘women’s liberation’ and the introduction of the contraceptive pill heralded a movement towards more rights for women. There were an increasing number of women attending universities. Imported cultures such as the ‘disco’ from France and espresso coffee machines from Italy joined the mini-skirts, the Beatles and ‘pop stars’ in a further expression of the new freedom being demanded by young people with money to spend. According to Marwick some people thought that the stability of life, as they knew it, was breaking apart,\textsuperscript{38} while Levy writes that the whole moral fabric of England changed during the 1960s. Homosexuality was decriminalised between consenting adults, divorce laws were reformed, there was an increased use of drugs, especially LSD, institutions were openly criticised and capital punishment was ended.\textsuperscript{39}

Advances in technology supplied new and exciting means of individual expression and life enjoyment. The affluent youth could indulge in transistor radios, extended and long

\textsuperscript{36} Fraser, p. 746.
\textsuperscript{37} Marwick, p. 146; Fraser, p. 745.
\textsuperscript{38} Marwick, p. 680.
\textsuperscript{39} Levy, pp. 242, 320.
play records, modernised telephone systems and jet travel. For housewives there were more sophisticated washing machines, refrigerators and other domestic appliances, giving them the time to pursue careers outside the home. By the end of the 1960s Britain and France had co-operated in manufacturing the first supersonic jet airliner, the Concorde, and Telstar provided a transatlantic connection for television. So, as Lloyd says, ‘things were not too bad in England’. True, not all aspects of the home country’s society and economy were doing well, especially in the north of England where some factories were introducing automation reducing the availability of employment to the manual worker. The differences between the affluent south and the industrialised north were such that Levy says the journey between Liverpool and London was a ‘trip between two worlds’.

But was this reason enough to leave? What were the incentives offered to bring migrants from the British welfare state to a country where medical treatment had to be paid for and where there was less social security? In the 1960s over one million British migrants flooded to Australia. They left a Europe threatened by the Cold-War hostilities between Russia and the western alliance. But they found that in Australia young men were being conscripted by ballot to fight in Vietnam as Australia moved her allegiance from the British Empire to a reliance on the United States.

**Australia in the 1960s**

Australian social and economic conditions also changed rapidly during the decade of the 1960s, but perhaps not as quickly as in the United States, Britain and Europe. According to Gerster the 1960s in Australia was an ‘age of cults and fads’. In the early 1960s in Australia the sexual revolution was waiting to happen. The contraceptive pill may have been available,

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40 Marwick, p. 17; Fraser, p. 744.
41 Lloyd, p. 390.
42 Levy, p. 64.
but there was difficulty in finding doctors willing to prescribe it. Addictive drug use was not widespread; some say it was introduced to Australia in the late 1960s by the American troops on leave in Sydney from the Vietnam War. The conservative establishment of Australia in 1961 saw bikini clad girls being ordered from Sydney beaches for being improperly dressed. This attitude was perhaps epitomised by the scandal that arose when an English model, Jean Shrimpton, appeared at the Flemington racetrack on Derby Day in 1965 wearing a sleeveless mini-dress which was four inches above the knee—and no stockings or gloves! Society was scandalised. Lady Nathan remarked, ‘We do know so much better... we all dress correctly’. In 1965 literature was still censored, books were seized and booksellers prosecuted for stocking copies of The Trial of Lady Chatterley. In 1969 actors in the stage-play Hair were arrested and convicted for using obscene language.

There was no Australia-wide daily newspaper until the mid-1960s and all world news came to Australia from British sources. Television had been introduced in the 1950s; still it was often difficult to receive the transmissions in outlying country areas. Drive-ins were the most popular form of cinema for families and young people who owned a car. Mechanisation had reduced the need for agricultural labour and there was a movement of people from rural to metropolitan areas. There was high unemployment in 1960 and 1961 but the situation soon improved. Living standards also improved, people began to build larger houses and cigarette smoking was regarded as one of the social graces.

The Liberal Party was in power, and although there was a sense of stability there was also a fear of communism. The ‘domino theory’ forecasted the fall of Asian nations to

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46 James Cockington, Mondo Weirdo: Australia in the sixties, Mandarin, Port Melbourne, 1992, p. 56.
48 Don Scott, Lindsay Dan, Australia in the Twentieth Century, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 137.
49 Scott and Dan, p. 140.
Communist China and the subsequent invasion of Australia. Australians were also nervous of the growth in armed forces in Indonesia. For much of the 1960s Australia joined the United States to fight communism in Vietnam. Towards the end of the decade public resentment had built up against what some considered to be an unjust war and also against conscription by lottery as the means of selecting men to fight in that war. Peace rallies and student activism made this feeling known and there was public action by other groups such as the Women’s Liberation Movement.\(^{51}\) Activists also lobbied for improvements to political and other circumstances for Aboriginal people. The White Australia Policy was increasingly challenged as its supporters left politics. This was combined with pressure from the United Nations and the influence of the civil rights campaign in the United States.\(^{52}\) Bob Hawke, later to be the prime minister of Australia, suggested that Britain’s involvement with the Common Market forced Australia to trade with its Asian neighbours and break down the White Australia Policy. He says it was important to recognise that Asians were ‘worth equally with people from Europe to become citizens of this country’\(^{53}\).

**Sexism in Australia**

A major area of concern shared by many of the female participants in my study was the low status of women they encountered in Australia. In the 1960s Britain, Europe and the United States witnessed the rise in demands for greater respect of women in the workforce and in the home. Australia was still a patriarchal society as had existed in other western countries in the nineteenth century, and the continuance of this attitude can be partially explained by the ideal of ‘mateship’ which, according to Dixson, involves ‘powerful, sublimated homosexuality and is deeply antipathetic to women’\(^{54}\). Mateship, according to Clark, is a peculiarly Australian sentiment reserved for the ‘native born’ men which was founded in the early colonial period.


\(^{52}\) Gerster and Bassett, pp. 61–66.


when men far out-numbered women. Some form of dependable relationship was necessary in the harsh conditions that characterised Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This male bonding was partly responsible for the White Australia Policy and coloured the Australian male’s attitude towards women.\(^{55}\) Some aspects of this trend were reversed in the twentieth century, for example Australia was the second country in the world, after New Zealand, to give the vote to women. This right to vote was not granted as a national policy but by individual states over the period 1894 to 1909. Western Australian women gained the right in 1899. However, in other respects patriarchy remained firmly entrenched. Sims thinks the social standing of women in Australia ‘the ‘lowest in Western Democracy’.\(^{56}\) In the 1960s Australian women were expected to keep their place in Australian society as mothers and wives, and it was difficult for them to find a career in male-dominated professions or to take up places at universities. Burgmann says it was only in the late 1960s that women were given a more general education rather than being trained as housewives and mothers.\(^{57}\) Crawford goes further by suggesting ’maternal citizenship was the fundamental aspect of women’s identity’.\(^{58}\) They were expected to be dependent on the menfolk: father or husband. Although the first women’s liberation meeting was held in Sydney in 1969, until 1972 women were obliged to resign from the Australian public service on marriage.\(^{59}\) They were certainly not expected to work when they were pregnant. It was considered very modern when in 1966, the Reserve Bank allowed married women to take maternity leave—with pay!\(^{60}\) Migrant women found it strange at social events when the men always gathered (usually near the keg) at the opposite end of the room to the women. Females who joined the men were looked on

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\(^{57}\) Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *Constructing a Culture: A people’s history of Australia since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Fitzroy, 1988, p. 25.


\(^{59}\) Eveline, p. 189.

\(^{60}\) Geoffrey Blainey, *A Shorter History of Australia*, p. 216.
as abnormal.\textsuperscript{61} Women were not welcome in the male bastions that were the hotels; their place was outside with the children.\textsuperscript{62} ‘Quests’ such as the ‘Australian Beach Girl’ were popular among young women. For the married woman there was the ‘Housewife of the Year’ competition. These ‘quests’ promoted the ideal woman as being models of what men should expect in their wives.\textsuperscript{63}

In Australia in the 1960s female virginity before marriage and fidelity within it were still cultural norms. By the 1970s there had been an about face in attitudes to sexual mores, especially following the introduction and acceptance of the contraceptive pill and the legalisation of abortion.\textsuperscript{64} What I found surprising was that in all the material I read on feminism in Australia none of the authors spoke of the possible influence of the post-war female migrants on the improvement in the status of women in Australia. Perhaps this could be an area for further research.

\textit{The economy}

The booming economy, especially in Western Australia, was largely a result of the discovery and development of Australian mineral resources and the money the United States was pouring into Asian countries which, in turn, opened up those markets to Australia.\textsuperscript{65} Gold had always been a valuable Australian export, but in the 1960s other minerals also became valuable commodities. Uranium was found in Queensland and oil and gas exploration in the north-west of Western Australia produced export levels of these resources. Large deposits of iron ore were discovered in the Pilbara, bauxite in the Darling Ranges and nickel at Kambalda. Nickel and bauxite were processed and exported from Kwinana, south of Perth.

By the early 1970s mineral exports were Australia’s major source of income.\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{62} McDonald, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{63} McDonald, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{64} Cohen, pp. 52, 83; McDonald, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{66} Blainey, \textit{Shorter History}, p. 204.
\end{flushright}
investors, especially American companies, were involved in the development of these industries; so consequently a lot of the profits were sent overseas.\textsuperscript{67} Roberts writes that at the time of this expansion Western Australia accepted twice as many migrants as other states.\textsuperscript{68} However, my research into the passenger lists of the \textit{Castel Felice}\textsuperscript{69} shows that a minority of its passengers disembarked at Fremantle. At the same time that Western Australia needed more workers to develop its expanding industries during the 1960s, economic conditions improved to such an extent in Europe that it became more and more difficult to attract British or Western European migrants. As a consequence assisted immigration schemes were signed between Australia and Italy, Turkey and other Mediterranean countries.\textsuperscript{70}

Australians had always regarded themselves as British subjects, with loyalty to the British Commonwealth, as formerly to the Empire, but there had been a movement towards independence in Australia even before the need to call on the United States during the Second World War. In 1948 the \textit{Nationality and Citizenship Act} created the new legal status of ‘Australian citizenship’. In 1949 the words ‘British Subject’ were replaced by ‘Australian Subject’ on the front of Australian passports.\textsuperscript{71} However in the census of the time Australians were still required to describe themselves as British subjects and it was not until 1984, under the \textit{Australian Citizenship Amendment Act}, that the dual status of Australian citizen and British subject was finally ended. The recognition of the need to control access to Australia was recognised in 1958 by the \textit{Migration Act} which replaced the \textit{Immigration Restriction Act of 1901}. Differences included the deletion of the dictation test and the control of entry and departure of non-citizens, including the

\textsuperscript{67} Blainey, \textit{Shorter History}, p. 207.  
\textsuperscript{68} Hew Roberts (ed.), \textit{Australia's Immigration Policy}, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1972, p. vii.  
\textsuperscript{69} Australian Government, National Archives, \textit{Incoming passenger list Castel Felice arrived Fremantle 19/1/1966}, K259/4  
right of deportation.\(^{72}\) Later amendments to the White Australia Policy led to changes in the eligibility to be an Australian citizen, but it was not until 1984 that British subjects who were not Australian citizens were denied the right to an Australian Passport.\(^{73}\)

Charlie Fox writes that the 1960s was one of the most important decades in Australian history.\(^{74}\) Gerster says ‘there was a “cargo-cult appetite for all things American to such an extent that many Australians were confused about where their loyalties should be’.\(^{75}\) The rapidly changing scenario in Western Australia during the decade covered by this study meant that the incoming migrants were faced with not only political changes but also cultural changes as Australia moved towards multiculturalism. The conservatism of the long serving Liberal government was challenged by the social changes being introduced by an increasingly influential socialist movement. The White Australia Policy crumbled, and social and environmental movements became active. It was into these shifting sands that the migrants of this study came to settle.


\(^{73}\) Chesterman, p. 37.

\(^{74}\) Charlie Fox, ‘The Times They Were A-changing: The sixties was a time of transformation for Australia as a culture of slow moving, unified, Anglo-centrism became one of diversity and shifting boundaries’, *West Australian*, 12 August 2006, p.62.

\(^{75}\) Gerster and Bassett, p. 33.