An Apparatus of Empire

The construction of official geographic knowledge in the survey departments of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land 1788–1836

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This thesis is submitted for examination
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I declare it to be my own original work,
and the product of my own research.
Synopsis

This thesis examines the survey departments of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land 1788–1836 in terms of knowledge and empire, specifically the official geographic knowledge of these colonies.

It argues against post-colonial interpretations of survey, exploration and cartography as exercises of arbitrary imperial rule, and situates these processes within their historical, institutional and socio-political contexts.

It traces the development of the departments within wider colonial governance, as bureaucracies and as ‘information societies’.

It distinguishes between ‘local knowledge’ of the colonies and the universal knowledges of science, as desired by metropolitan readers.

It examines how colonial surveyors recorded land ownership, and counters notions of survey as an expression of ‘mathematical cosmology’.

It explores the ‘official’ nature of the departments’ information, how surveyors asserted their personal and professional credibility, and how bureaucratic procedures constrained such expression.

By examining the reasons for creating maps, it draws a distinction between those which surveyors meant to use and those which they created for others merely to peruse.

Lastly, it looks at a variety of works which surveyors’ produced privately to further delineate the boundary between official and unofficial knowledge.

Ultimately it finds that, however much the survey departments were ‘hard-wired’ into the government apparatus, that same network also acted as a filter. Official geographic knowledge of the colonies largely stayed confined to the departments’ archives and the institutional memories of their surveyors, and generally only rose up the chain of command in a very synthesised and abbreviated form.
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**Introduction:**

‘Waste land is the chief element of colonization’

Empire is all about land. Empire is ‘all about’ a lot of other things besides, it must be said, and in recent years historians of the British empire have found it to be all about race, and class, and culture. But at a fundamental, even literal level, empire involves one or more areas of land being controlled from outside. This study examines the way the British empire controlled, or attempted to control, the land of the early Australian colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land. In particular, it looks at the work of the officials from those colonies’ survey departments who were charged with effecting this control. Even more particularly, it examines the forms of knowledge about colonial land that these officials created and employed in their work, how they communicated this knowledge from the field to headquarters and beyond, and what happened to it on the way. It is, if a category be needed, an institutional cultural history of knowledge and empire.

The government surveyors were often the closest figures that these settler colonies had to foot soldiers of empire. While not always the first Europeans to see ‘new’ lands, surveyors were usually the first officials to do so, and the first to officially describe that land. More importantly, in terms of physically shaping these colonies, it was the government surveyors who usually determined the routes for future roads and laid out town plans, and they who surveyed the properties of the steady stream of European

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3 Eg OED, defn II, 5a: ‘... an aggregate of subject territories ruled over by a sovereign state’. 
occupiers, effectively setting out the colonies themselves farm by farm. More than any other colonial figures, they oversaw the most fundamental of the multiple colonial projects in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land: land settlement.

These men – for this was a man's world – were a somewhat mixed bunch. The first government surveyor assigned to New South Wales, Augustus Alt, was a near-blind old man. George Harris, the first in Van Diemen's Land, was criticised for drunkenness, yet also painted birds and corresponded with Joseph Banks. James Meehan started his colonial life as a convict, but rose to hold one of the top civil positions in the government, while Peter Mills' career went the other way, and after a few unsuccessful years as a surveyor he took to bushranging. Surveyor General John Oxley was an ex-naval officer who hoped to find an inland sea, while his rigidly military successor Major Mitchell lent his name to rural Australian slang as an expression meaning to zig-zag. Individually and collectively they received more than their fair share of criticism at the time, for – befitting foot soldiers – they often stood in the firing line between grasping settlers and a restraining government. But by the mid-1830s, under the commands of Mitchell in New South Wales and George Frankland in Van Diemen's Land, both departments ran remarkably smoothly, given the conditions they faced, and their individual surveyors worked diligently and professionally.

These two departments, then, form the 'apparatus' of the thesis title. It is a metaphor inspired firstly by the new-fangled instruments of the period, about which both scientists and surveyors developed something of a professional fetish, and not a little by their better known exemplars, the navigational instruments and timekeepers described by Dava Sobel. The metaphor also exists in some of the recent literature on imperialism, and especially on knowledge and empire. For instance Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, calling for closer engagement with colonial institutions and their exercise of power, criticised especially post-colonial visions of 'an omniscient colonial apparatus' (meaning colonial administration as a whole), pointing out that the nature of such institutions was

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necessarily contingent on the people who built and ran them. Tony Ballantyne used a similarly structural (or constructural) image when he argued that:

if we are to understand the construction and dissemination of knowledge [across the empire] we need a fuller appreciation of what we might call the ‘architecture of empire’, its fundamental structures, the levels at which knowledge was created, consumed and transmitted.

This study answers in some way these calls, and it similarly argues that the structures of and within the survey departments (as described in Chapter 1) were vital not just in producing geographic knowledge of the colonies, but in warranting that information as credible and ‘official’, and in communicating at least some of that information to their superiors and to the empire at large.

The mechanistic metaphor requires one very important qualification, however, for in the same way that the survey departments rarely ran like clockwork, they and the wider government apparatus did not process the information produced without mediating factors. From the start, proponents of the theme of knowledge and empire have insisted that both ends of the information transaction be viewed in the same analytic field. Bernard Cohn, for example, took as a ‘guiding assumption ... that metropole and colony have to be seen in a unitary field of analysis’, as did Cooper and Stoler. More recently the trends for tracing the ‘networks’ of empire, and later still ‘transnational’ history, have both emphasised the links and connectivity between metropole and colony. This study takes a slightly different view. While it is clear that many elements of imperial culture and a more specific ‘colonial governmentality’ permeated the early Australian colonies and their survey departments, and that being part of the apparatus they were more or less ‘hard-wired’ into the network of colonial government, still they operated to a large extent below such influences. Few could be said to have been ‘imperial careerists’ of the mould

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8 Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Princeton UP, Princeton, 1996, p 4; see also Cooper and Stoler above.
described in the collection edited by David Lambert and Alan Lester, traipsing around the empire from post to post: while this is true of many higher officials such as governors and judicial officers, and of some church functionaries, most of the surveyors covered in this study migrated straight from Britain to one or other of the early Australian colonies, and most also stayed there. While endeavouring to avoid the notorious pitfalls of exceptionalism and nationalism, it is the primary contention of this study that the early colonial survey departments dealt in a distinctly ‘local knowledge’ of their colonial spaces, which had most currency only in the particular circumstances of the colonies, or even within the confines of the government and survey departments themselves, but which was either at odds with or irrelevant to what might be called more universalist, ‘imperial’ concerns.

‘Local’ here is, firstly, a simple geographic distinction: ‘colonial’ without the added connotations of that term. When Ballantyne called for more investigation into imperial knowledge networks, he considered that the starting point should be investigating ‘the development of “local knowledges”’. Here, however, he alluded to the knowledges of literally or effectively colonised others which imperial collectors were able to exploit and expropriate: the knowledges derived from Banks’ ‘cunning women’ of Lancashire, or from the Indian informants discussed by CA Bayly – that is, by implication, knowledge-as-commodity.10

The issue of European appropriation of Indigenous knowledge of the land in Australia holds a rather problematic place in this study. Surprisingly, in terms of the volume of records, but perhaps unsurprisingly in terms of colonial mind-set, there is only scanty evidence of surveyors employing and co-opting Aboriginal guides or labourers, or learning about the landscape from them. In some districts in New South Wales a few Aborigines are known to have intermittently joined surveying parties, but the degree of information exchange is difficult to gauge, because surveyors’ routine correspondence from the field almost never mentions such interaction. Although the contribution of Aboriginal guides to some more formal exploration parties is somewhat clearer, in

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10 ‘Empire, knowledge and culture’, p 127.
general the work of both exploration and surveying worked instead to erase Indigenous geographic associations and replace them with European meanings.\textsuperscript{11}

The second element to ‘local knowledge’ as discussed here is that it was not merely data to be appropriated, collected and archived, but also the ways of seeing and interpreting that data, ways of seeing which ultimately determined the sorts of data that had meaning in the first place: in other words, that it constitutes a distinct discourse. Within the work of the early Australian survey departments, the gulf between local and imperial knowledges appears most clearly in the case of Deputy Surveyor George Evans (Chapter 2). By 1816 Evans had successfully led three arduous exploration/survey expeditions in New South Wales and been praised by Governor Macquarie as a ‘useful and meritorious’ officer. The Colonial Office, however, had him removed from such prestigious duties because his expedition journals were only readily appreciable to someone familiar with the colony, and were less intelligible to a British readership. Evans, for instance, used local common names for flora, and in trying to give an impression of the quality of places he encountered he gave comparisons only to other local colonial places. John Oxley, his more imperially minded replacement, conscientiously constructed his narrative along the lines of detached universal science and a placeless British gentility. His landscapes were landscapes of sensibility, not practical potential, and with the Colonial Office’s assistance he published his journals in Britain and abroad.

One of the recent themes in empire and knowledge (or wider empire and science) literature is the importance of the sites of knowledge creation and inscription: ‘Where witnesses were located, both socially and spatially, counted in warranting the records they delivered’.\textsuperscript{12} Extending the suggestion of both a spatial and cultural divide between imperial and local knowledge, this study looks at the spectrum of knowledge forms and sites of land ownership between headquarters and the field. The colonial surveyors spent most of their time and work administering land subdivision and alienation, and they inscribed the knowledge of land ownership – its most fraught area – in sites ranging from formal documents, departmental registers and correspondence files to surveyors’

\textsuperscript{11} Private or non-official records, discussed in Chapter 6, give a marginally better view.
fieldbooks and sketches, physical survey pegs and blazed trees, right down to the level of individual and public memory of the survey in progress (Chapter 3).

Apart from the variety and, literally, groundedness of much of this knowledge, what is perhaps most striking is its increasingly closed nature. Colony-scale cadastral maps or census-like returns of agricultural production might have provided London or Government House with a fair representation of the progress of overall settlement, but such records had little practical use determining boundaries and resolving disputes in the field, at headquarters or in the courtroom. The description of a settler’s land that appeared in the official title deed, listing the directions and lengths of its boundaries in compass degrees and chains, was unintelligible (or at least technologically unattainable) even to the title-holder, let alone someone on the other side of the globe. Survey pegs and blazed trees could only be seen ‘on the spot’ and required a surveyor to physically verify them. Unsurprisingly, appeals to the Colonial Office in London about land disputes were routinely referred back to the colonies.

It is in this hierarchy of knowledge forms and sites that the next dimension of official geographic knowledge of the colonies suggests itself, that of authority: the authority of both the information and the information holder; or, from the point of view of the survey departments, what made it ‘official’. In filtering and adjudicating settlers’ often fraudulent and even more frequently conflicting claims, the survey departments were necessarily either privileging their own official knowledge over the more dubious, or enshrining as official a compromise position derived from multiple imperfect or disregarded sources of evidence. This required the mobilisation of the authority of both the department as a government body and the individual surveyors as government men. For the most part surveyors suggested the authority of their work by mobilising several socio-cultural markers of their credibility, but increasingly the survey departments also turned to internal bureaucratic mechanisms of control. A great part of the correspondence between headquarters and field staff had little to do directly with geographic knowledge, but involved questioning or verifying time spent on the job, work completed,

consumption of government stores, behaviour of assigned convict workers, even the social lives and respectable behaviour of surveyors (Chapter 4).

It might seem strange that in a work on colonial surveying the chapter on maps and mapping (Chapter 5) comes somewhat towards the end. In other studies, colonial survey and imperialistic cartography are taken to be almost synonymous. Cohn was careful to note that ‘survey as an investigative modality encompasses a wide range of practices, from the mapping of India to collecting botanical specimens’, but later and especially post-colonial writers, building in particular upon the ‘new’ cartographic history of JB Harley, have taken survey and consequent mapping to be the quintessential expressions of imperial detachment, surveillance and control. In this the Survey of India looms large, with Matthew Edney’s Mapping an Empire detailing the application on the subcontinent of the ‘mathematical cosmology’ of Enlightenment and consequently imperial thinking.

Again this study takes a slightly different tack. While acknowledging the power of maps and the various abstractions they entail, the institutional context of the survey departments offers – if not demands – a more practical perspective, and draws attention to how such maps were used within the apparatus of administering land alienation and settlement. As with the distinction between local and imperial knowledges, a substantial gulf emerges between generally smaller-scale maps and mapping projects, which aimed to show a limited amount of the specific information which played an important role in the departments’ duties, and larger-scale endeavours which catered to a more general ‘scopic desire’ but which had little immediate application – beyond satisfying that desire.

Lastly, and turning instead to a largely prosopographical treatment of colonial surveyors, their lives and colonial careers offer a different perspective on ‘official’ knowledge through their numerous unofficial works – that is either private or published

13 Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge, p 7.
books, paintings, pamphlets and other writings which they produced outside of their official duties. Among other things, the extraordinary detail and diversity of the geographic information within this corpus highlights the very narrow focus of the colonial survey departments proper. The relatively free passage of these works within the empire of information also starkly contrasts with the restricted official network of colonial government, for through these works surveyors addressed far more widely dispersed and varied viewers and readers than they usually did through official channels. In the earlier years surveyors generally directed such works to powerful figures in a bid to secure or recognise patronage. By the mid-1830s their principal target of such works was the local population. Colonial surveyors looked less towards a distant empire or capricious metropole, but were by then more securely embedded within the local societies which, through their survey of farm by farm over nearly fifty years, they had helped establish.

Setting some preliminary boundaries
The time-frame in question here may require some explanation. The starting point is clearly the beginning of British settlement and the consequent arrival of the first government surveyor, Augustus Alt, in New South Wales. The end-point of 1836 is more deliberately chosen. At its most basic, it is simply a means of limiting the otherwise extensive archival source material. From their inception, the Australian colonies were zealously bureaucratic. The Archives Office in Tasmania, whose survey department was by far the smaller of the two colonies, lists over a hundred shelf-metres of files in its Land and Survey Department series, with 131 volumes of ‘General correspondence’.

At the imperial scale, the mid-1830s have traditionally been seen as the end of the ‘second’ (or ‘middle’) empire and the start of the third, the time of a shift in British governmental policy away from gubernatorial despotism to colonial legislative councils and arms-length imperialism. Although CA Bayly has shown that this break was not necessarily an unheralded revolution in imperial thinking, and Zoë Laidlaw has revealed
that some aspects of it were more a shift of style than substance, a recognisable break it remains.¹⁷

Locally, the reasons for choosing 1836 as the end-point are more definite. In Australian historiography, traditional periodisation would take as the major turning points either the end of the long Macquarie period (1821) or the advent of responsible government (1842 in New South Wales).¹⁸ In the history of land settlement, however, the important break comes in 1836 with the legalisation in New South Wales of ‘squatting’ (the occupation, without formal ownership, of Crown lands). Stephen Roberts, the pioneer historian of Australian land settlement – with not a little rural romanticism and ardent nationalism – saw the pre-squatting years as a period of protoplasmic ‘quiescence’ before the ‘real story of Australia’s progress’ began.¹⁹ From the point of view of this study, however, the legalisation of squatting marks the end of governmental control over land settlement, ostensible though this may have often previously been, and the part that the survey departments played in this control. Thereafter surveyors had a greatly diminished role in physically shaping the colonies.

The year 1836 also marks a convenient boundary in that it saw the culmination of much work or development up to that time. In New South Wales two parallel projects were completed: Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell published his trigonometrical map of the ‘settled districts’ in 1834, and he gazetted the formal descriptions of the colony’s counties, hundreds and parishes in 1835. In Van Diemen’s Land the periodisation sits neatly with the end of Lieutenant Governor Arthur’s term of office (1836), but less easily in terms of land settlement. That colony never legalised squatting in the same way as New South Wales: by the mid-1830s most of its potential pastoral land had already been taken up – or so its land-hungry graziers claimed – and they instead had begun moving to the Port Phillip region on the mainland. More generally, the mid-1830s were effectively the high-point of the southern department’s early years. By the end of the decade, and

especially after Frankland’s death in office in 1838, it had been reduced to an 
administrative rump of just three and its field work largely privatised.

A mid-1830s cut-off point also helps limit the geographic scope and number of 
colonies discussed here. As opposed to the initially linked careers of the Van Diemen’s 
Land and New South Wales departments, 1836 saw the establishment of the completely 
separate colony of South Australia, with its own Wakefieldian system of land allocation 
and dedicated survey department. As mentioned, unofficial settlement started in the Port 
Phillip area around 1835, but it had no authorised surveyor until 1838 when surveyors 
from Sydney were sent south. Similarly, the Moreton Bay area (in future Queensland) 
was in 1835 still under New South Wales control. As a penal station of convict 
‘secondary punishment’, however, it remained both sparsely populated and sparsely 
surveyed until about 1840. The Swan River colony (Western Australia), settled in 1824 
with its own separate survey establishment under John Septimus Roe, has a legitimate 
claim to inclusion in this study. It has been omitted, with some regret, for purely practical 
reasons.
1 Dismantling the ‘apparatus’

Within two weeks of each other in April 1832, two very different pictures of colonial civil servants appeared in the Hobart press, both alluding specifically to surveyors. The first came in the Hobart Town Courier:

It has all along been one of the most striking characteristics of the present administration that whatever talent or ability was available in the colony, or from time to time emigrated to it, was uniformly engaged and employed in the service of the public, as far as circumstances would admit consistent with the imperious calls for economy of the present day, and we are glad to see that several gentlemen lately arrived, eminently qualified to benefit the public by their services, in road making and other branches of survey, have been employed by the government.1

According to a rival in the highly fractious newspaper business in Hobart, the Courier was ‘notoriously the organ of the Government’;2 and so likely to be a little partisan in its coverage of the appointment of a few relatively minor public officials. The Courier, however, wished to make a broader point about the character not just of such officials but of civil government itself.

As it continued:

This in fact seems to be the most beneficial sort of monopoly, which the powerful and influential hand of Government can exercise, and we should always wish to see the various important and responsible offices of Government filled by the first of characters: we do not of course allude here to the qualifications of rank, birth or riches, but to those of superior knowledge or acquirements, experience in the useful arts and duties of life, of strict integrity, just and upright and of true religious principles.

The newspaper subscribers of Hobart may not have faulted the Utilitarian ideal, of civil government harnessing the best of men to the betterment of all men, but they were far more likely to read of their local incarnation of government – ‘The System’ as another paper labelled

1 Hobart Town Courier, 14 April 1832, p 2.
2 The Colonist and Van Diemen’s Land Commercial and Agricultural Advertiser, 6 July 1832, p 1.
it

- over-exercising its powerful hand. Furthermore, when it came to civil officials as individuals the critics of Lieutenant Governor George Arthur’s autocratic regime saw nothing of usefulness, intelligence and integrity, but rather dull-wittedness, corruption and waste. Such failings were certainly insinuated in the second portrayal of a colonial surveyor, which appeared eleven days later in the Colonial Times:

A certain Surveyor had a cock and hen offered him by a gentleman at Brighton. The Surveyor lived thirty-six miles from Brighton, and the question was, how he could get this said cock and hen home. At last, after turning this important subject over and over again in his mind, he came to the resolution of sending a Government man and a Government cart, and four Government bullocks to Brighton, to fetch the said cock and hen. After sundry dangers, the cock and hen arrived safe at the residence of the said Surveyor. This is no cock and bull story, but a cock and hen truth.

In its mirth, the Colonial Times may have missed the broader conclusion from this volley. If this ‘cock and hen’ story was the worst case of corruption and waste that the Hobart newspapers could expose, then it was a testament to the standards to which colonial surveyors were held, and held themselves, at this time. In the colony’s earlier years there may have prevailed a rather grey area between surveyors’ official positions and their private interests, which might have granted them a degree of licence with public assets, but over the previous generation these had become much more clearly defined and enforced. Yet the lofty Courier also overstated its case of benevolent and rational rule. Far from having been ‘all along’ a characteristic of colonial governance, the employment of available professionals according to their specialities was a relatively recent occurrence in the early 1830s. Many individuals appointed to positions as colonial surveyors over the previous fifty years had come with a wide and not always readily applicable range of ‘arts’ and ‘acquirements’.

Both newspapers, for their different ends, strove to make a connection between the individuals and the institution which they served. Previous historical treatments of colonial surveyors, however, have tended to see them either as one or the other. A large body of biographical work tends to depict individual surveyors positively – often in fairly nationalistic terms – as pioneers, explorers or, in one case, as a potential ‘progenitor of the “Vandemonian spirit”’. Much of this treatment originates either from descendents or from modern surveyors

3 The True Colonist, eg 1 April 1836; 1 July 1836.
4 Colonial Times, 25 April 1832, p 2 (punctuation modernised).
5 Barbara Hamilton-Arnold, ‘GP Harris, surveyor and magistrate: A progenitor of the “Vandemonian spirit”’, Tas Res Assoc P&P, 42(1), 1995, pp 25–35. Many other biographical treatments, from sketches and ADB entries to full monographs, are noted in their place below, and in the References.
with an interest in their fellow professionals of bygone days, and despite some examples employing impressive archival research, they generally lack a critical, historical perspective.6 Those few previous treatments of the survey departments as institutions are generally better in this respect. Alan Jones’ *Backsight* gives a good account of the Van Diemen’s Land department across the whole nineteenth century, although the earlier colonial years – the focus of this study – feature only in the first few chapters. His main focus is on the professionalisation of surveying in Tasmania and the eventual formation of his sponsoring body, the Institute of Surveyors.7 The New South Wales department has been better served with a more prosopographical approach, from Bernard Dowd’s mid-twentieth-century series of biographical articles on the earliest surveyors general,8 to Terry Kass’s more recent monograph treatment of the same which extends right through to 2008 and doubles as a history of the Lands Department.9

The perspectives that these accounts offer on the internal dynamics of the survey departments do not, however, usually make it into more general history. Especially when such histories mention the departments in relation to settlement, they are more likely to recount contemporary opinions of their failings – especially at a crucial time around the mid-1820s – rather than note their achievements, or explain the reasons for both.10 In some cases this is fair enough. As this chapter shows, in especially the earlier years of each colony the survey departments were run in often shambolic fashion. But the newspapers of Hobart perhaps unwittingly both had it right in essence: despite some early lapses, by the 1830s the survey departments had developed into relatively efficient bureaucracies, at least by the standards of their day.

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The following re-telling of the history of the colonial survey departments up to 1836, while also a necessary introduction and context to the later thematic chapters, focuses on the departments as institutions. It also retains an element of biographical and collectively prosopographical analysis, in keeping with the largely personality-dependent nature of the even the later departments. In particular it looks at the internal structures and hierarchies of the survey departments, which tend to be lost in accounts focused on individuals, and from that base illustrate surveyors' changing relationships both internally and with other bodies, especially governor's offices and the Colonial Office, for these are the relationships that determined or affected the construction, recording and transmission of geographic knowledge. It also seeks to place the departments themselves within wider historical contexts: firstly, as bureaucracies typical of their times, with a blend of old and new forms of administrative practice; and secondly, as elements within the wider system of colonial administration, not just its structural network but especially its accompanying social fields or 'knowledge societies'.

Infirm foundations: Colonial surveying from the First Fleet

Colonial land surveying in Australia began with just one man: Augustus Alt. At first glance he appears an odd choice. Born in London in August 1734, the third son of a Hessian diplomat and his Scottish Jacobite wife, Alt had toiled through over thirty years in the British army, often in continental Europe serving in the staff corps of various forces, recruiting and liaising with Britain’s allies. Aged 53 by the time he disembarked with the rest of the First Fleet’s original British colonists to New South Wales, he was easily the eldest of the civil officials in Governor Arthur Phillip’s small ‘establishment’. Also oddly, Alt did not have had much – if any – surveying experience, and from his long military career only a brief posting to Scotland in the mid-1760s may have involved some road-building. His position was probably instead a relic of earlier but aborted plans to transport convicts to the island of Madagascar and use their cheap labour to build a strategic outpost there, an expedition in which Alt had been slated to serve as ‘engineer’ (presumably of the military variety) rather than land surveyor.11

Alt’s achievements in colonial surveying bear out the seeming perversity of his appointment, for surviving records suggest he did very little. Marine officers Watkin Tench and William Dawes oversaw most of the earliest engineering works in Sydney and Parramatta, although Alt made at least some contribution to early mapping of the Sydney Cove and harbour area.\(^{12}\) Within just four years of landing he applied to Governor Phillip to retire:

my present state of health is such that through various bodily infirmities I find myself left without any speedy hopes of relief at so advanced a period of life as mine, and feel that I can no longer carry on the duties of a surveyor with that satisfaction to myself which I could desire.\(^{13}\)

By that stage Alt had been joined by a deputy, Charles Grimes, whose arrival seems to have been the spur for Alt’s application. The fate of that application, however, reveals the first (and longest enduring) of the structural problems faced by the colonial surveyors – indeed the whole of colonial government in New South Wales – for the turn-around time of correspondence between Sydney and London made for much delay. Alt continued in his duties for a few more years, but his health continued to decline. Although officially assigned to Norfolk Island, Grimes took over surveying responsibilities on the mainland in early 1794, and another seven years passed before a later governor, Philip Gidley King, allowed Alt officially to retire ‘owing to Age and failure of Eyesight’.\(^{14}\) It then took sixteen months for the Colonial Office to receive notice of and confirm King’s decision, and a further seven months for that confirmation to arrive back in Sydney – all up nearly twelve years since Alt had first applied.\(^{15}\)

Grimes appears almost the exact opposite of Alt. Aged just eighteen at the time of his appointment, he made up for his obvious lack of professional experience with optimism, intelligence and ambition.\(^{16}\) Along with Alt he described the first land grants in the colony, including on Norfolk Island (see Chapter 3), he conducted more explorative surveys by ship of sites from Port Stephens north of Sydney to Port Phillip and King Island in Bass Strait, and he worked also in the earliest settlements in Van Diemen’s Land. Most of this, however, he achieved while still officially deputy. From the time of his formal appointment to the surveyor

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13 Alt to Phillip, 14 Nov 1791, *HRA* 1:1, p 302.
14 Grose to King, 25 Feb 1794, *HRNSW*, vol 2, p 126; King to Chinnery, 10 April 1801, *HRA* 1:3, p 87.

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generalship in 1803, Grimes held the position for over eight years, but he spent less than a third of this actively in office. He took leave almost immediately after his promotion and – since it required returning to England on family business – this lasted nearly two-and-a-half years. His second period away resulted from being drafted into the position of judge advocate when the New South Wales Corps deposed Governor William Bligh in early 1808. Sent back to England with despatches by the rebel administration only a few months later, the Colonial Office refused to allow Grimes to return to the colony. He eventually resigned in mid-1811, having been absent another three years.

Grimes’ filling in for Alt, and later himself requiring deputies to fill in for him, represents the dominant theme of the survey establishment in this long first stage of its history. With the turn-around time for communication with London delaying formal appointments, colonial administrators were forced instead to find stand-ins from the usually quite limited human resources available locally and to appoint them provisionally until confirmation arrived. This logistics problem also operated on the local scale, and as the colonial government progressively established subsidiary settlements – first Grimes’ original station on Norfolk Island, then briefly Risdon Cove near the later site of Hobart in Van Diemen’s Land in 1803, and Port Dalrymple on that island’s northern side a year later – each either needed a dedicated deputy surveyor or the secondment of one from another settlement. (The exception was George Harris, appointed from London as deputy surveyor for the proposed settlement at Port Phillip Bay and who accompanied Lieutenant Governor David Collins’ small colonising fleet in 1802-1803. Collins rejected Port Phillip as a viable site and moved instead to Van Diemen’s Land to found Hobart.) For over a decade up until 1812 just six men, varying greatly in professional expertise – not to mention some of the other qualities that the Courier later deemed indispensable in a public official – conducted nearly all of the work of the survey department in these dispersed settlements.

17 King to Sullivan, 7 Aug 1803, HRA 1:4, p 367; Gen’l Orders, 30 Jan 1808, HRA 1:6, p 272.
19 The best biographical sketch is in Barbara Hamilton-Arnold (ed), The Letters and Papers of GP Harris 1803–1812: Deputy Surveyor General of New South Wales at Sullivan Bay, Port Phillip, and Hobart Town, Van Diemen’s Land, Arden Press, Melbourne, 1994; see also ADB; and Chapter 6 below.
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Surveyors, deputy surveyors, and acting deputy surveyors for the time being

Among these almost occasional deputies, the long and at times troubled career of George Evans serves both to span most of this early period and to illustrate the dynamics of the surveyors’ office and work through this time.20 Evans arrived in New South Wales in late 1802 after having spent a few years working in the naval stores at Cape Town during its first but brief period of British control. When Britain returned that colony to the Netherlands according to the Peace of Amiens, Evans took his young family instead to Sydney, where Governor King appointed him to work in the government stores at Parramatta. Soon after, Grimes took his first extended leave, and with official deputy George Harris only just arrived in the south, King appointed Evans to act as surveyor general in Sydney in August 1803.21 Unlike both Grimes and Harris (who had previously practised law), Evans at least had some previous experience in surveying.

In a report regarding his civil staff a few months later, Governor King described the duties of the office of ‘Surveyor of Lands’ as self-evident: ‘The nature of his office is pointed out by its name. He surveys and allots all grants, leases of land, &c., under the Governor’s directions and control.’22 In this Evans was ably assisted by a convict, James Meehan, an Irish school-teacher and part-time surveyor prior to transportation, who had earlier been assigned to help Grimes.23 Together they surveyed, with rather more precision than their predecessors, the grants to small settlers along the river flats around the Sydney basin (again see Chapter 3). Evans also conducted some early exploration, and a report of his investigation of the Hawkesbury River – an important life-line for the main settlement – appeared in the Sydney Gazette in October 1804.24

Within six months, however, Evans lost his position, although with surprisingly little official fanfare. Normally notification of both appointments and dismissals appeared in the Gazette, and while governors were forced to act locally regarding their civil personnel they still usually asked London for confirmation. Neither occurred for Evans’ dismissal. Only a brief note in a later list of civil staff records that ‘George Wm. Evans did his [Grimes’] duty till 22nd

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21 Govt and Gen’l Orders, 10 Aug 1803, HRA 1:4, p 65. Harris’s efforts to obtain the position are discussed in Chapter 6, as are the more personal reasons behind King’s selection of Evans.
22 ‘Duties of Civil Officers’, encl 1, King to Hobart, 1 March 1804, HRA 1:4, pp 539–40.
23 Meehan was to have an equally long colonial surveying career: see esp Tony Dawson, James Meehan: A Most Excellent Surveyor, Crossing Press, Sydney, 2004; also Anne-Maree Whitaker, ‘James Meehan: Nearly Australia’s third surveyor-general’, Descent, 24(2), 1994, pp 66–70; ADB.
24 Sydney Gazette, 7 Oct 1804.
February, 1805, when being discharged for fraud, Henry Williams was appointed, who now does that Duty as well as Deputy Surveyor of Norfolk Island'. (There is little evidence of the nature of Evans’ fraud: he may have adjusted the conditions of his own grant.)

There resulted a typically convoluted case of musical chairs in the survey list. With Grimes on leave, and his first replacement Evans dismissed, Henry Williams – locally appointed deputy on Norfolk Island – stepped in as acting surveyor general. But Williams had already left Norfolk Island to work at Port Dalrymple measuring out grants for new settlers there, and yet another locally appointed deputy, Thomas MacQueen, stepped in to fill Williams’ place on Norfolk Island. All this left surveying duties on the mainland to James Meehan, still not officially appointed, although Governor King granted him a conditional pardon a few months later.

Little is known of either Williams or MacQueen. MacQueen, much like Meehan, had once been a teacher and he arrived a convict in 1791. King appointed him school-master on Norfolk Island, but he was dismissed for drunkenness and later imprisoned for debt. Neither MacQueen nor Williams appears to have had any surveying experience, and certainly Williams failed to impress Colonel Paterson at Port Dalrymple. In both a rare allusion to Evans’ dismissal and a testament to his already recognised ‘usefulness’, the colonel unfavourably compared the two:

if Mr. Williams was to remain here for Twenty Years, from his Survey you would not learn more of the Country than we do at present ... I am sorry Mr. Evans lost himself so much. Had that not been the case, had he been here, I should have been enabled to send you a decent-looking Chart.

Evans’ rehabilitation to the surveying ranks came after the officers of the New South Wales Corps deposed Governor William Bligh and sent Grimes back to England in early 1808. The active surveyors at the time comprised George Harris, still the only confirmed deputy and still in Hobart; MacQueen, apparently still acting deputy on Norfolk Island; and Peter Mills, a former midshipman under Bligh whom the new governor had inserted as deputy at Port Dalrymple in

25 'Civil establishment', encl, King to Camden, 30 April 1805, HRA 1:5, p 449.
26 Dawson, Meehan, p 31.
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place of the useless Williams the year before. Ignoring these, however, the rebel officers also opted for capable men currently on the mainland. They made James Meehan the acting surveyor general, and Evans – according to the official announcement – deputy surveyor assigned to Paterson’s settlement at Port Dalrymple, thus seemingly doubling up with Mills.

When Governor Lachlan Macquarie assumed command in 1810 he put an end to some of the confusion. Immediately recognising their skills, he continued Meehan and Evans in their positions; recognising their lack of skill, he soon after simply abolished the positions held by Mills and MacQueen. Mills’ career continued to decline. He briefly took to bushranging, but with about as much success as he had surveying. He was arrested, escaped, and was arrested again, but avoided criminal conviction on a technicality and was allowed to re-settle at Port Dalrymple. Along with other displaced Norfolk Islanders, MacQueen also moved to Port Dalrymple where he resumed teaching. Macquarie received damning accusations against Harris as well, including unfair reports of drunkenness, but he was saved from making any firm decision by Harris’s sudden death in office in late 1810.

In the aftermath of the rebellion against Bligh, the Colonial Office also at last began to take notice of the goings on in New South Wales. In 1812 the secretary of state queried Evans’ appointment as deputy surveyor in Port Dalrymple, pointing out that no such position existed in the official civil list as specified in the Treasury estimates. Thankfully for Evans, Macquarie was able to counter that the death of Harris had opened up a vacancy as the deputy surveyor of Van Diemen’s Land and he nominated him for that position instead. Some six years after Evans had resumed surveying, Lord Bathurst eventually acquiesced and confirmed Evans in the second position in 1814, although he remarked somewhat grumpily that ‘his appointment does not seem to have been altogether regular’.

The final settlement of the surveyor general’s position was even less regular. Grimes, the rightful incumbent, had been tainted by association with the rebels, and he languished in Britain...
for over two years while the Colonial Office wondered what to do with him. As a civil official he could not be tried by the same courts martial which the leading military officers eventually faced, but the authorities were also clearly reluctant to let him return to the scene of the crime, as it were, and he was denied passage back to New South Wales. Considered instead absent without leave, Grimes was also denied his salary, and with seemingly no other way out he resigned in mid-1811. John Oxley, a naval lieutenant in Sydney at the time of the rebellion, was also back in London having had the dubious honour of ferrying Governor Bligh back to Britain. Keen to return to the colony, he approached the Colonial Office for an appointment in Sydney, firstly as naval officer, then as surveyor general. According to John Macarthur, another of the rebels, Oxley agreed to pay Grimes £500 to resign and create the vital vacancy. Oblivious to any back-room deals, the Colonial Office appointed Oxley surveyor general in January 1812, and he arrived back in Sydney to take up his duties in November.

The department in the time of Macquarie

The long governorship of Lachlan Macquarie (1810–1821) was a period of great stability and growth for New South Wales, and is traditionally seen as something of a golden age, especially in comparison to the upheavals of the rebellion against Bligh or the simple struggle for survival in the colony’s earlier years. For the survey department – meaning the trimmed-down trio of Oxley, Meehan and Evans – this period was one of stability, but not growth. After Oxley had commenced duties in late 1812, these three served throughout Macquarie’s reign and well beyond, providing some much needed consistency to surveying practice and land administration, but they were not joined by any freshly appointed surveyors until 1821.37

Macquarie was very much a hands-on governor, keeping his surveyors both busy and mobile. He toured constantly, he planned and laid out new townships, and he ordered many

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35 John Macarthur to Elizabeth Macarthur (snr), 14 May 1812, SLNSW, Macarthur Papers, A2898, vol 2, pp 128–33. The accusation has generally been ignored or dismissed by Oxley’s more recent biographers (eg Richard Johnson, *The Search for the Inland Sea: John Oxley, Explorer* 1783–1828, MUP, Melbourne, 2001, p 5; Kass, *Sails to Satellites*, p 69), but Oxley had become engaged to Macarthur’s daughter Elizabeth and John mentions it relation to Oxley’s suitability: as prospective father-in-law he had every right to enquire into Oxley’s finances – including from Oxley himself – and he presumably had accurate information. Macarthur quashed the engagement because of Oxley’s debts, including to Grimes. (One earlier biographer, Eric Dunlop, treats Macarthur’s report as credible: see his *John Oxley*, OUP, Melbourne, 1960; and his entry for Oxley in *ADB*.) It is not known if Oxley ever paid.

36 Liverpool to Macquarie, 5 May 1812, HRA 1:7, p 481; the NSW ‘Blue Book’ of 1825 (SRNSW, CSO, NRS 1286 [4/251]) lists his appointment as from 1 Jan 1812.

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changes to the original centres of Sydney and Parramatta. Rural settlement extended across and began to fill up the Cumberland Plain between Sydney and the encircling highlands and Hawkesbury-Nepean River system, and pressure built to extend settlement beyond that barrier. Although private settlers made the first acknowledged crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813, Macquarie sent Evans to follow their track and further their discoveries, and for the rest of his governorship each of the three surveyors led explorative expeditions of various sizes and scope radiating from Sydney in all landward directions. These extended official knowledge of the mainland in a broad semicircle around Sydney, from the Shoalhaven Valley on the coast to the south, around through the Lake George and southern highlands area, westwards to Bathurst and the Lachlan and Macquarie Rivers, and north to the Liverpool Plains and along the coast to Moreton Bay.

The extent of exploration meant that the surveyors were frequently away from their more usual business of property surveying for long periods, however, and even that business stretched their time and availability. To use Evans as an illustration again: although nominally assigned to Van Diemen’s Land, he stayed on the mainland to help Meehan with the mass of property surveying that had accumulated through the time of the rebel administration. He and Meehan then moved their joint operations to Van Diemen’s Land to repeat the process in 1812. In 1813 Macquarie recalled Evans to the mainland to lead the expedition and survey the route for a road over the Blue Mountains. Evans finally moved his family to Hobart in 1814, signalling an expectation of his remaining there more permanently, but he was recalled to the mainland again in 1815, to accompany Macquarie’s tour to the new town of Bathurst and to lead another expedition; again in 1817, to accompany Oxley’s first expedition; and again in 1818 for Oxley’s second. 39

Apart from exploration, Oxley saw his role as administrative rather than active. A later governor noted sourly that Oxley would ‘never submit to the Drudgery of carrying on the details of his Department’ and he notoriously never surveyed a single property, leaving all such work to Meehan and Evans. 40 His original assignment, while he still held his commission in the navy,

38 On settlement progressively filling the Cumberland basin, see Brian Fletcher, Landed Enterprise and Penal Society: A History of Farming and Grazing in New South Wales before 1821, Sydney UP, Sydney, 1976, map p 202; and Dawson, Meehan, similar map p 103.
39 See Weatherburn, Evans, ch 6–11; also Evans’ testimony to Bigge, in HRA 3:2, pp 317–28. On Evans’ exploration see Chapter 2.
40 Ralph Darling, quoted in ADB.
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had been to conduct nautical surveys (for which he would have been much better suited): his
elevation to surveyor general caused some initial confusion over whether the Colonial Office
wished him to continue on that course or devote himself to land-based duties, and this took until
late 1814 to resolve.\textsuperscript{41} Even in administration Oxley was more of an ideas man than a practical
organiser. Soon after arrival he produced a new schedule of fees on various aspects of land
alienation, and pressed for extra allowances for his deputies to cover expenses such as clothing
and forage for a horse.\textsuperscript{42} Throughout his tenure he had a great deal to say on settlement policy,
not to mention various other policy areas outside his formal remit, in most of which he tended to
take a position at odds with Macquarie’s.\textsuperscript{43} In internal organisational matters, however, his lack
of ability clearly showed, especially in later years as the duties and paperwork of his office
grew.\textsuperscript{44}

This left Meehan and Evans to do the physical work, and Macquarie praised their efforts
locally and generously supported their occasional applications to London for raises of salary and
allowances for expenses. The language that Macquarie used in passing on such claims to London
reveals the qualities which he prized in these officers – in particular their ‘usefulness’ and ‘local
knowledge’ – and these attributes may be compared to those later touted by the \textit{Courier} in Van

Diemen’s Land. Of Meehan, for example, Macquarie wrote at various times:

\begin{quote}
A Most excellent Land Surveyor, active, diligent, and Correct ... strict Honor and Integrity
... very Useful local knowledge ... always found his Information perfectly Correct and his
Conduct altogether that of an honest, upright, Well principled Man.

not a more useful Officer serving under this Government ... his local and extensive
knowledge of every part of this Territory ... His Honor and Integrity are unimpeachable ...
an Useful and Meritorious Officer.

a most useful, deserving, Meritorious Man ... has rendered most essential Services to this
Colony ... very extensive Local knowledge ... strict honor and probity ... superior talents as a
Land Surveyor.

Mr. Meehan’s Services have been unremittingly useful in the Colony ... a man of real
worth and probity.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} Liverpool to Macquarie, 22 Apr 1812, and Macquarie to Liverpool, 17 Nov 1812, \textit{HRA} 1:7, pp 463 and 609–610;
Bathurst to Macquarie, 3 Feb 1814, \textit{HRA} 1:8, p 133.
\textsuperscript{42} Oxley to Macquarie, 27 Apr 1814, \textit{HRA} 1:9, pp 207–209.
\textsuperscript{43} See Johnson, \textit{Search for the Inland Sea}, passim.
\textsuperscript{44} Eg Oxley’s ‘letterbook’, the bound copies of official correspondence, mostly with Macquarie, contains an
average of under twenty letters per year for the nine years of its range: SRNSW, SG, Oxley’s letterbook 1814–
1822, NRS 13809 [9/2642]. See also Chapter 5 re his ‘filing system’ for maps.
\textsuperscript{45} Macquarie to Liverpool, 17 Nov 1812, \textit{HRA} 1:7, pp 609–610; to Bathurst, 4 Apr 1817, \textit{HRA} 1:9, p 351; to

22
Macquarie also supplemented — in fact doubled — the salaries of both Meehan and Evans by appointing them 'collector of quit rents' in their respective territories. Quit rent was a relic of late medieval land practices: it represented a monetary substitute for traditional services that feudal land-holders owed to their liege, such as furnishing soldiers or maintaining bridges. It had lapsed from usage in Britain by the eighteenth century, but survived in colonial possessions in the Caribbean and North America. Collection of the quit rent in the Australian colonial settlements was both complicated and spasmodic, however, with a maze of exemptions, delayed levy periods and varying rates. The constant trade in land through both mortgages and sales (neither with much formal registration or even record) muddied the waters further, and most settlers did everything they could to avoid paying.\(^{46}\) Although later governors made greater — but still mostly unsuccessful — efforts to collect the quit rent, in the Macquarie era the position of collector was little better than a sinecure, bestowed upon the deputies as a way of increasing their salaries. Certainly when Macquarie recommended Meehan for the position, and when Lieutenant Governor William Sorell did likewise for Evans, both suggested the pay as collector would be recompense for the poor salary from their regular surveying duties, not for the added work of collecting itself.\(^{47}\)

Such appointments, and some of Macquarie's other methods of ensuring loyalty through generous rewards, could be misconstrued by observers however. When towards the end of Macquarie's tenure the Colonial Office sent Commissioner John Thomas Bigge to conduct an enquiry into the administration of the colony, rumours and complaints which had previously remained muted instead found a ready ear. Thomas Davey, a former lieutenant governor of Van Diemen's Land who had been (to his mind) overlooked by Macquarie, launched a stinging attack on Evans almost as Macquarie's proxy. In a long written deposition to Bigge, Davey fulminated about the 'bad precedent' of Macquarie giving Evans the building materials from an old government barn, which Davey outrageously valued at £1000, and other marks of 'peculiar favor' towards Evans:

> his Excellency has additionally squandered the public money upon this 'selfish interested individual' by giving him £100 for his services across the Blue Mountains, and lavishing upon him at various periods 1,300 acres of land, six cows, four working oxen, and a horse,

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exclusively for the public service, but which, Your Memorialist is inclined to believe is vanished altogether. In fine, his Excellency has been very profuse in his favors to this man, which leaves behind them considerable abstrusity. 48

Bigge generally had bigger fish to fry than such petty jealousies, with his eventual reports setting broad policy outlines for the next decade or so. Nevertheless, part of his less deliberate legacy arose because, in giving these complaints a forum for official consideration, he elevated them above mere ‘abstrusity’. From the early 1820s, the probity of surveyors as public officials began to fall under increasingly critical scrutiny.

**Rapid expansion in the early 1820s**

At the beginning of 1821 the same three surveyors still served the expanding needs of the colony: Oxley and his deputy Meehan on the mainland; and a second deputy, Evans, finally stationed permanently in Van Diemen’s Land. From that time, however, the survey establishment began to grow rapidly in order to meet the demand of an equally rapid influx of free settlers. Over the next sixteen years, that complement of three expanded to two separate departments employing between them nearly 40 surveyors and almost as many support staff of clerks and draftsmen, all in an increasingly complicated institutional structure and exhibiting a much more recognisably bureaucratic culture.

While many ‘push’ factors in Britain drove the 1820s surge of immigration to New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land – especially the end of the Napoleonic wars leading to reductions in the armed services, and a post-war depression affecting prospects all round – the colonies themselves exerted substantial ‘pull’ factors, making them more attractive to prospective settlers. Some of these owed much both to the work of surveyors throughout the Macquarie period and to the promotion of that work in Britain. In particular the opening of the lands west of the Blue Mountains – through Evans’ 1813 follow-up exploration and road surveying, and both his and Oxley’s later explorations – offered great potential to the increasingly dominant pastoral industries. On the informational side, Oxley published his *Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales* in London in 1820; and Evans’ glowinglly positive immigrants’

Among those early 1820s immigrants were three young men possessed of some surveying skills — and good timing. In January 1821 Oxley expressed the urgent need for assistance in his department, due to the ‘great and increasing pressure of public business’, and he requested that Macquarie appoint two of these free settlers: William Harper and Henry Dangar. In July of that year, after what appears to have been a short trial period, Macquarie complied, effectively creating a third rank in the department — ‘assistant surveyor’.

At the same time, Lieutenant Governor Sorell similarly pointed out ‘the greatly increased and increasing business and duty in the Depy. Surveyor’s Office’ in Van Diemen’s Land, and recommended that Macquarie appoint the recently arrived Thomas Scott as assistant to an already over-stretched Evans, to which Macquarie also agreed.

With the arrival of these new assistants, James Meehan — who had been surveying for the colonial government for 22 years and claimed to have surveyed every farm granted by Macquarie — intimated his wish to retire. Harper, as the eldest and probably most experienced of the assistants, applied to fill the vacancy, and in Macquarie’s endorsement of his memorial to the secretary of state, he described Harper as:

perfectly well qualified to execute the Duties of such Situation. He went out a free Settler, with a young family to maintain, and is a young Man of excellent Character. I do therefore strongly recommend him for the Office in question.

Meanwhile, Oxley suggested dissolving Meehan’s secondary position as collector of quit rents and using the money to pay for another two assistants, recommending Philip Cavenagh and James McBrien. Much like Alt almost thirty years before, Meehan’s retirement plans were put on hold while despatches sailed to and fro, and while the Colonial Office quibbled over the size

49 Exploration and Oxley’s Journals are discussed in Chapter 2; Evans’ Van Diemen’s Land in Chapter 6.
50 Oxley to Macquarie, 27 Jan 1821, and Macquarie to Bathurst, 13 Aug 1821, HRA 1:10, 541–42; Sydney Gazette, 28 July 1821, p 1 (backdating appt to 1 July); see also ‘Blue Book’, 1825, SRNSW, CSO, NRS 1286 [4/253], p 98.
51 Sorell to Macquarie, 13 June 1821, HRA 3:4, p 15; Macquarie to Bathurst, 21 July 1821, HRA 1:10, p 532. Later lists date Scott’s appointment earlier, to May 1821, so he too may have served a trial period for which his appointment date was set back: see eg VDL Blue Book, 1825, AOT, CSO 50/2, p 25.
52 Meehan to Macquarie, nd (c Nov 1821), HRA 1:10, pp 710–711.
of his pension and his accounts of quit rents. But Macquarie's successor as governor, Sir Thomas Brisbane, still added the two new surveyors as further assistants to Oxley in mid-1822.

Within eighteen months, continuing pressures of survey work induced Brisbane to take on yet another three assistant surveyors, again from among recent immigrants: William Sharland in Van Diemen's Land in late 1823; and Robert Hoddle and James Richards in New South Wales in late 1823 and mid-1824. Meanwhile Brisbane's local appointments overlapped with another wave of commissions made in London, the recipients of which arrived throughout 1824: John Helder Wedge as assistant in Van Diemen's Land; John Ralfe, John Rodd and Heneage Finch in New South Wales.

After three rounds of additions within just four years, the New South Wales department therefore comprised eleven surveyors, the Van Diemen's Land branch another four. By that time Commissioner Bigge had made his final reports on the state of the colonies, and the Colonial Office's appointments reflected its desire to rectify the perceived problems with the administration of landed settlement, both in policy and personnel. As Bathurst loftily prefaced his notification of Wedge's appointment: 'I deem it expedient that the establishment of the Colonial Surveyor of Lands should be maintained in a State of complete efficiency'.

**Progress and problems of the mid-1820s**

For the survey department, the key planks of the post-Bigge reforms of the mid-1820s included the increase in surveying staff, already begun; changes to surveyors' salaries, perquisites and methods of payment; and, as part of the formal separation of Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales into two distinct colonies, the splitting of the survey establishment so that the Hobart branch likewise became independent of Sydney. The changes to settlement policy were more complicated, but in practice resulted in field surveyors working in more remote districts and measuring out larger properties than they had previously. These changes produced as many problems as they solved, however, especially internally where the additional level in the hierarchy of assistant surveyors raised various issues, both operational and structural. Bathurst

55 Bathurst to Brisbane, 23 March 1823 and 31 July 1823, *HRA* 1:11, pp 60 and 99.
56 NSW Blue Book, 1825.
57 See Ritchie, *Punishment and Profit*, pp 233 (re survey dept) and 247–52 (land policy).
58 Bathurst to Arthur, 1 Oct 1823, *HRA* 3:4, p 88; and in direct reference to Bigge's recommendations re the survey department, Bathurst to Brisbane, 31 July 1823, *HRA* 1:11, p 99.
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may have deemed (or dreamed) that a few appointments would produce ‘complete efficiency’, but it failed to materialise for some years yet.

Of the structural changes to colonial surveying, the most dramatic paradoxically proved the least fraught. Before the official administrative separation into two colonies, Deputy Evans had already been conducting the practical aspects of the survey service in Van Diemen’s Land with almost complete independence from Surveyor General Oxley in New South Wales. Their joint exploration days behind them, the two surveyors’ official dealings in the early 1820s mainly involved the collection in Van Diemεn’s Land of some fees in Oxley’s name and the more troublesome transmission of essential paperwork – ‘warrants to locate’ (permission for a settler to select land prior to official granting) and the final grand deeds which the governor had to sign.59 Indeed, so independent was Evans acting by the early 1820s that locally he appears to have been styled ‘Surveyor General’, although technically he did not achieve that rank until 1826.60 Administrative separation meant the Vandemonian lieutenant governor could issue warrants and sign grants for land on the island, removing the previous necessity of shipping them to and from Sydney.

The increase in the number of assistant surveyors, and the subsequent need for their individual direction, meant that the two surveyors general also began acting with much more personal autonomy. Throughout the previous decade Macquarie had often personally ordered the day-to-day activities of especially the two active deputy surveyors: now more usually the two department heads mobilised the assistants and directed them to their various duties in geographically quite dispersed areas. In New South Wales in the early to mid-1820s, the new wave of free settlers gravitated to a number of discrete regions at some remove from the central Cumberland Plain around Sydney: around Newcastle and along the Hunter Valley to the north; around the town of Bathurst to the west; to Argyle County around Goulburn to the south-west; and to the Shoalhaven area on the coast to the south. The combination of distance and local concentration made it more practical for an assistant to set up in one district for a substantial

60 See eg the title page to his Van Diemen’s Land, or the title cartouche of the accompanying map of the island [Plate 4] both discussed more fully in Chapter 6.
length of time rather than move around. Dangar, for instance, served most of his tenure in the Hunter district; McBrien likewise around Bathurst.\textsuperscript{61}

In Van Diemen’s Land the settlement pattern remained less scattered. It continued to expand from its original base around Hobart and along the Derwent valley, and began taking off in earnest along the rivers of the Launceston area in the north. Settlers also started taking up lands along the road between these two centres.\textsuperscript{62} Even so, by the 1830s the surveyor general in Van Diemen’s Land still assigned his assistants to smaller specific ‘districts’ within these areas:

\begin{quote}
\textit{as I had observed that their constant removal from one quarter to another had produced much embarrassment owing to its being so essential that they should acquire a most familiar acquaintance with the tracts of country where they were employed.}\textsuperscript{63}
\end{quote}

Structurally, the advent of assistant surveyors within each department added a lower layer to an official hierarchy formerly composed only of the surveyor general and his deputies. For the chain of command this posed few problems as the assistants’ subordinate position was clear. The New South Wales ‘Blue Book’ of 1825 – the ledger of government expenditure which listed all the civil staff, their salaries, allowances and so on – outlined the responsibilities of the surveyor general as being:

\begin{quote}
To set out and measure all Crown Lands appropriated to the use of Settlers in Town or Country under authority of Warrants from His Excellency the Govnr; to set out and mark all public Roads and Highways under the same authority; to receive and account for all Rents due on Crown Grants and Leases either in Town or Country, and account for the same quarterly; to report and prevent as far as possible all irregularities in the occupation of Crown Lands by Individuals not having proper Warrants to occupy the same and generally to act under the direction of His Excellency the Governor in all matters relative to Crown lands in so far as the Interests of the Crown are concerned.
\end{quote}

The assistant surveyors’ job description, on the other hand, read simply ‘To act under the direction of the Surveyor General’.\textsuperscript{64}

More problematically, having a surveyor general as the executive officer directing assistants in the practical work of a department left the older position of deputy, on the intermediate rung of the ladder, somewhat redundant. For the moment this issue remained latent: in New South Wales, Meehan continued regular surveying in the field, as he nearly always had done, while he waited for acceptance of his resignation; in Van Diemen’s Land, Evans acted as

\textsuperscript{61} See Atchison, John, and, Nancy Gray, \textit{Henry Dangar: Surveyor and Explorer}, Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society, Scone, 1974; and again McBrien’s internal correspondence file cited above.

\textsuperscript{62} See Thomas Scott, \textit{Chart of Van Diemen’s Land, From the best Authorities ...}, engr Charles Thomson, Edinburgh, 1824 [Plate 5].

\textsuperscript{63} See Frankland to col sec, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, pp 478–99 (esp p 485).

\textsuperscript{64} Blue Book, 1825, SRNSW, CSO, NRS 1286 [4/253], pp 100–101.
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de facto surveyor general while he waited either for official promotion or approval to retire. As will be seen, however, once both departments had settled into more complex structures after 1828, the two incoming deputies at that time themselves complained that they had no clearly defined role.

In the mid-1820s the more immediate structural problems of the assistants’ rank really arose within it, with the different avenues to appointment – local or imperial – for a time creating a two- or even three-fold division amongst them. When Macquarie made the first local appointment of assistants in 1821, he did so under two conditions that marked them apart from other officers in the formal government establishment – they were to hold office ‘until His Majesty’s Pleasure shall be known’ and their salaries (6 shillings per day) were to come from the Police Fund65 – both of which signified that the assistants held only a provisional post. As with some of the less regular appointments of deputies in previous years, locally appointed assistant surveyors sometimes had to wait years until his majesty’s pleasure should be known, and they operated in a form of employment limbo until such time as the Colonial Office confirmed their positions on the permanent establishment. For instance Hoddle and Richards, appointed by Brisbane in September 1823 and July 1824 respectively, both only achieved official permanency in July 1826.66

The significance of the Police Fund lay in it comprising monies collected in the colony by the government and paid out again to cover its general operating expenses, as distinct from the formal budget for the colonial establishment, set in the Treasury’s estimates and endorsed by Parliament.67 (Even the Colonial Office occasionally appointed assistants on the Police Fund if there was no room on the officially budgeted list.) During the earlier years of the colony, when all sorts of fiscal and monetary ad-hockery prevailed, the receipt of Treasury bills had been one of the great advantages of the officer class over emancipists and other free settlers and businessmen. Although at that time the colony’s civil officers had made less of this than their notorious military counterparts in the New South Wales Corps, and despite the more settled financial practices of the 1820s when the first assistant surveyors took up their jobs, a Treasury-

65 Sydney Gazette, 28 July 1821, p 1.
66 ‘Return of the Surveyor General’s Department’, encl, Darling to Bathurst, 7 Oct 1826, HRA 1:12, p 630.
assured income still represented a higher grade of credit than did a locally sourced wage.\textsuperscript{68} Official lists continued to divide surveyors according to the source of their salaries as late as 1826 when, in yet another Bigge-inspired reform aimed at reducing the financial burden on British taxpayers, both colonies began covering their operating costs from locally collected revenue, and this distinction between assistants ceased to exist.

The second and far more contentious issue among assistants involved seniority and precedence within their tier. As their numbers increased, assistants held an internal ranking from ‘first assistant’, ‘second assistant’ and so on. Such ranking nominally accorded to seniority – that is, length of service – and also nominally determined promotion, but the Colonial Office frequently upset such logical ordering by appointing someone a specific number assistant. Robert Hoddle, who joined the New South Wales department as second assistant in September 1823, was superseded by four successive appointments made in Britain, and in mid-1826 (after one of the appointees proved ‘worn out’ and was moved elsewhere) he held the position of fifth assistant.\textsuperscript{69} William Sharland, briefly second assistant in Van Diemen’s Land, became most annoyed when Lord Bathurst appointed John Wedge as ‘Second Assistant Surveyor of Lands’. Sharland wrote to his friends in England requesting (as Arthur reported it to the secretary of state) ‘interference with Your Lordship’.\textsuperscript{70} Just when the second assistant’s position seemed within his grasp – with Evans rising to surveyor general, and Scott and Wedge due to shuffle up accordingly – Sharland was surpassed once more when the Colonial Office posted out George Frankland, again specifically as first assistant.\textsuperscript{71}

The delayed revolution in settlement policy

One of the more dominant narratives within the history of Australian settlement traces the progression of formal land policy, rather than settlement itself. This narrative tends to run straight from the original policy of the earliest days – Phillip’s initial orders to allot land to time-expired convicts, and the 1793 decision to permit free land grants to colonial officers – to the

\textsuperscript{69} ‘Return of the Surveyor General’s Department’, 29 Sept 1826, \textit{HRA} 1:12, p 630. The ‘worn out’ surveyor was John Rodd: see Darling to Bathurst, 27 July 1826, \textit{HRA} 1:12, pp 454–56.
\textsuperscript{70} Bathurst to Arthur, 1 Oct 1823, and Arthur to Bathurst, 1 March 1825, \textit{HRA} 3:4, pp 88 and 293.
\textsuperscript{71} Bathurst to Arthur, 17 May 1826, \textit{HRA} 3:5, pp 233–34.
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‘Ripon regulations’ of 1831. Various governors through the intervening period had stamped their own impressions on settlement by adopting individual positions on such issues as
government farming and the balance between small and large land-holders, but the basic
mechanism of free grants to settlers remained relatively unchanged. The Ripon regulations, on
the other hand, abolished free grants altogether and restricted land alienation to sale only, and are
therefore generally seen as the most dramatic policy shift until the legalisation of squatting in
New South Wales in 1836.

Yet however great a shift the Ripon revolution may have been in policy terms, it had little
impact on the survey departments, nor as great an immediate impact on settlement as might be
expected. A generally overlooked policy change – the so-called ‘King’s Instructions’ of 1825 –
was far more important for both, particularly in New South Wales. Not only did these
instructions prefigure the important shift to the sale of land, but surveying work on at least some
aspects of the King’s Instructions dragged on for so many years after the introduction of the
Ripon regulations that it eclipsed that later policy, at least for the few years before squatting
changed the game completely.

The settlement policy outlined in the King’s Instructions arose from Bigge’s inquiries and
the criticism levelled especially at free grants to ex-convicts. Although some limited free
granting of land continued, the policy more directly catered to the new class of immigrating
capitalists, and it strove to place – and recoup – a monetary value on colonial land. The process
involved four stages: firstly, appointed commissioners would divide the colonies up into regional
units of counties, hundreds and parishes. They would then set a value for the land in each parish,
and a surveyor would divide each parish up into blocks of one square mile (640 acres). Finally,

72 See eg Fletcher, Landed Enterprise, ch 1; Stephen Roberts, History of Australian Land Settlement 1788–1920,
orig 1924, 2nd edn, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1968, esp chs 1–4; and The Squatting Age in Australia 1835–1847,
written 1925, orig published 1935, 2nd edn, MUP, Melbourne, 1964. Before Roberts the policy narrative may be
traced back through eg Marcus Clarke’s generally annalistic The History of the Continent of Australia and the
Island of Tasmania 1787 to 1870, Bailliere, Melbourne, 1877; and even further into the prolific field of
immigrants’ and land speculators’ guides stretching from the turn of the 20th century back to these same colonial
days, including one by surveyor Henry Dangar, Index and Directory to Map of the Country Bordering upon the
River Hunter ..., Joseph Cross, London, 1828 (discussed in Chapter 6).

73 Fletcher’s Landed Enterprise remains the authority here.

74 Eg the Ripon regulations are reproduced in CMH Clark’s Select Documents in Australian History 1788–1850
(A& R, Sydney, 1950), but the King’s Instructions are not.

75 The policy arrived first as preliminary advice (Bathurst to Brisbane, 1 Jan 1825, HRA 1:11, pp 434–44); and
formally as a large part of incoming Governor Darling’s overall brief (‘Instructions to Governor Darling’, 17 July
these blocks would be auctioned to prospective settlers, with prices starting at the set minimum value.

The most immediate structural result was an increase in staff, ostensibly to carry out the preliminary surveying required for the regional subdivisions and the internal measuring out of the smaller blocks, but also as a more general result of Bigge's recommendations regarding the under-staffed survey departments. In the year from August 1826, 'the exigencies of the Service' induced Governor Darling to appoint another four assistants to Oxley's department (Thomas Florance, Robert Dixon, George White and George Bowen), while the Colonial Office despatched another five throughout 1827 (Philip Elliott, Peter Ogilvie, John Thompson, John Abbott and William Govett). Evans, as head in Van Diemen's Land, considered the new method of subdivision and survey unworkable on that island, but the new lieutenant governor of the separated colony, George Arthur, appointed three 'temporary assistants' (William Malcolm, Henry Wilkinson and George Woodward) in May 1826. Despite this extra assistance, the carrying out of the King's Instructions stalled in both colonies, due in part to differences in their interpretation (discussed in Chapter 5) but principally because of problems at the head of each department. In New South Wales, Oxley suffered from increasingly poor health from the early 1820s, which meant that the department there lost direction for some years prior to his death in office in May 1828. The leadership of the Van Diemen's Land department remained equally uncertain for many years. In November 1824 Evans applied to retire, and in mid-1825 Arthur seemed happy to endorse such a move. But in a separate despatch the very next day, Arthur also accused Evans of having acted corruptly: he alluded to but gave few details of various rumours of him receiving 'douceurs' from settlers, and he laid out at length a damaging account of Evans measuring out a huge grant of nearly 12,000 acres - 4000 acres more than it should have been - to a wealthy free settler, William Lawrence.

76 Darling to Bathurst, 23 Jul 1827, HRA 1:13, p 459 ('exigencies', re Bowen); and see in general Blue Book, 1827, SRNSW, NRS 1286 [CSO, 4/255], pp 78–79.
77 VDL Blue Book, 1826, AOT, CSO 50/3, p 79. Malcolm was appointed and listed in the Blue Book for that year, but must have left quite soon and does not appear in the list for 1827 (CSO 50/4); rather he seems to have been replaced by Charles Wedge, officially a clerk who instead surveyed in the field (see LSD 1/81). Malcolm was re-appointed in 1832 (CSO 50/7, pp 105–106). On Evans' reaction to the preliminary advice re subdivision and rectilinear survey, see Chapter 5.
78 Johnson, Oxley, ch 21.
79 See Jones, Backsight, pp 41–46; Weatherburn, Evans, ch 13.
80 Evans to Brisbane, 16 Nov 1824, and Arthur to Bathurst, 10 Aug 1825, HRA 3:4, pp 311–315 & 570.
Evans was (mostly) innocent in the specific case, having acted on Sorell’s direct orders and according to accepted practice, and Arthur never went beyond vague inference in his other accusations, but the Colonial Office delayed Evans’ retirement for over a year.82

Meanwhile the new governor of New South Wales, Ralph Darling, convinced Arthur to appoint Edward Dumaresq – Darling’s brother-in-law – as surveyor general in Evans’ place in late 1825. Arthur then went out of his way to keep Dumaresq there, both by ignoring direct instructions from the Colonial Office and by impugning Evans’ first assistant, Thomas Scott, who should otherwise have succeeded to the position.83 Another round of despatches to and fro kept Dumaresq in office for nearly three years until the Colonial Office eventually quashed his appointment, but it also denied Scott the surveyor generalship and promoted George Frankland instead.84 Dumaresq admittedly made several changes to the internal administration of the southern department, but his heading of it was as precarious as Oxley’s health, so at precisely the time when the King’s Instructions required implementation, both departments lacked the leadership adequately to do so.

**A return of steady leadership: 1828 and beyond**

Despite the great changes in survey and settlement policy enunciated in the King’s Instructions of 1825, and despite also the rapid growth that the now separate departments experienced from the mid- to late 1820s, the greatest transformation for both occurred with the elevation of two new surveyors general in early 1828. Only then did the two departments, which had grown from the offices of just single surveyors in each of the settlements’ earliest years, start to resemble modern bureaucracies and function with the level of efficiency desired for so long.

Thomas Mitchell, New South Wales’ most famous surveyor general, arrived in mid-1827, officially to fill the deputy’s position vacated by Meehan a few years before. But with Oxley’s death openly anticipated, Mitchell accepted the appointment on the understanding he would succeed immediately to the head of the department.85 Upon arrival he went about reforming and further enlarging the department, and within three years it had doubled in size as a procession of

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82 Bathurst to Arthur, 7 April 1826, *HRA* 3:5, p 136.
assistants of both local and metropolitan appointment joined his ranks. Mitchell insisted that the King’s Instructions required a general topographical and therefore trigonometrical survey, and he pressed for more staff to carry it out, to all of which both the governor and Colonial Office agreed.

Part of the growth in the department can also be attributed to Mitchell’s personal empire-building, for in 1830 and 1831 he absorbed into his office two former branches of the public works department: ‘roads and bridges’ and the town surveyor. Over the previous few years these had been administered by seconded military engineers, with numerous superintendents under them running the many convict gangs working on the three ‘great’ roads out of the Sydney basin. For reasons of perceived economy, the Colonial Office ordered that the military officers be relieved, and their duties devolved to the survey department as the most logical candidate in the civil establishment. Mitchell’s office therefore took on the remaining personnel of these branches, plus also several specialist appointments made over the next few years. The arrangement, however logical on paper, proved unworkable, mostly because Mitchell and Darling could not agree on how the whole should work. The two conflicted in particular over the construction of a new pass at Mount Victoria on the road to Bathurst, and Darling tried first to wrest control of road-building back from Mitchell and then to have him removed completely. In 1831 Chief Surveyor Nicholson briefly headed a separate roads and bridges department, but the Colonial Office rescinded the move and eventually recalled Darling, so Mitchell remained in office and reclaimed a still-contentious control over roads and bridges.

The third element in the expansion of the department at this time comprised permanent support staff. During Commissioner Bigge’s investigations in the early 1820s, Evans had testified that he only occasionally employed a clerk to assist with official business, and paid him
from various fees due his office — meaning, at that time, from his personal income. The private receipt of fees for public services had been abolished in favour of augmented salaries as part of the mid-1820s reformation of the department, and from July 1825 Brisbane also added a government-appointed clerk (John Jackson) to the surveyor general’s list. When Mitchell took over the department two years later he had four draftsmen and two clerks — although he complained that the previous two ‘experienced’ clerks had recently been replaced by two ‘boys’ while the work they had to do had doubled. The workload presumably kept doubling: by 1836 his office staff included a chief draftsman, three probationary draftsmen (to replace the previous four who had all been promoted to assistant surveyor status), a chief clerk and another four regular clerks. Along with 20 surveyors, this made a permanent land survey department of 29, not including the roads and town branches which Mitchell still controlled (another four and two surveyors respectively), nor a host of over 20 ‘extra clerks’ possibly used more for piece-work. In addition an even bigger host of convicts laboured under the surveyors and superintendents of the road branch, while teams of six convicts each attended land surveyors in the field.

Most of the draftsmen were skilled technicians who, as the 1836 promotions show, often graduated to the rank of surveyor. Most of the clerks, on the other hand, had only ‘mechanical’ duties: that is, they were mere ‘copy clerks’ required to record all correspondence into bound letterbooks and registers. One among them, however, brought a specialist skill that had a great impact on the running of the department. Peter Louis Berni — a somewhat eccentric émigré of Corsican descent, who had been transported in 1825 and worked briefly as a teacher — joined the department in January 1827 specifically as a printer to work with a lithographic press which the department had recently obtained. He and later staff produced not just printed maps for the department and for the colonial government, but also various forms to regulate dealings both with the public and internally with assistant surveyors in the field (the latter are discussed in Chapter 4).
The department in Van Diemen’s Land had a much more modest trajectory through these years, in part because of the much more modest personality of its head, George Frankland. 97 Whereas Mitchell conflicted constantly with governors above him, Frankland rather more dutifully subordinated himself to his lieutenant governor throughout this period, George Arthur. Arthur had a particular penchant for economy, which for Frankland meant restrictions on what he could do personally and what direction he could take the department. Although Frankland’s office faced much the same pressures as New South Wales in terms of increased property surveying, Arthur made few appointments, always grudgingly, and only ever limited to ‘temporary’ status. He prevented Frankland from conducting a trigonometrical survey, such as Mitchell carried out in New South Wales, and he frustrated nearly all of Frankland’s plans for exploration. Along with his compliant Legislative Council, Arthur constantly criticised the size and efficiency of the survey department – which he was fond of pointing out was the second-most expensive of his government – and Frankland equally constantly had to defend his administration and the ‘efficiency’ of his field surveyors. 98

Despite this, the southern department did grow. When Frankland took over in 1828 the department comprised himself, three assistant surveyors, two temporary assistants and four clerks: a total of ten. At its height in 1832, it employed 23: Frankland and a new deputy, six active assistant surveyors, two more ‘supernumerary’ assistants (the former temporary assistants, now awaiting confirmation from London), and seven temporary assistant surveyors, while three draftsmen, two clerks and a ‘convict writer’ provided office support. 99

The arrival of deputies, as mentioned above, created some friction in both departments. Mitchell was notoriously jealous and seemingly threatened by capable subordinates, and after the arrival of Samuel Perry as deputy in mid-1829 Mitchell assigned him to various mundane office duties. Perry complained, and according to Governor Darling, ‘the Deputy Surveyor General was kept as a perfect Cypher in Sydney for nearly 18 months after his arrival, not being permitted, even during Major Mitchell’s absence, to see any but the Commonest Letters’. 100 Perry later played a mostly administrative role, although in private correspondence to Robert Hay at the Colonial Office Mitchell reported that his deputy did very little even of this. While Mitchell did

97 Unfortunately there is no adequate biography of Frankland, for he would make a rewarding subject: see (with a fair degree of caution) his entry in the *ADB*. 98 See for instance to opening vignette to Chapter 3. 99 VDL Blue Books, AOT, CSO 50/5 (1828) and 50/7 (1832). 100 Darling, ‘Notes in reply’, nd, encl, Darling to Murray, 28 March 1831, *HRA* 1:16, p 142.
not advocate abolishing the position, he stressed that Perry himself ‘certainly would not be missed’. 101 Despite Mitchell’s initial objections, Perry remained in the department until his retirement in 1853.

The position of deputy in Van Diemen’s Land was also difficult, with frequent friction between Frankland and Edward Boyd, who arrived to fill the position in late 1829. Part of Frankland’s difficulty in accommodating his deputy arose because Boyd had been wounded in action during the Napoleonic wars, and subsequently could only manage office duties. These conflicted with Frankland’s own responsibilities, however, generally leaving Boyd with very mundane procedural work. At one stage Frankland tried to establish Boyd in what was effectively a branch office in Launceston, but this stirred up both logistical and personal problems. Like Perry, however, Boyd lasted longer than such conflicts might suggest, staying with the southern department for twelve years, eventually as acting surveyor general. In 1841 he resigned and rejoined the army. 102

By the time the New South Wales Legislative Council’s legalised squatting in 1836, both departments had more or less completed the work begun under the King’s Instructions, and reached their peak in terms of sheer size and scope of work. With his trigonometrical survey complete, Mitchell published the topographical map of the settled districts of New South Wales in 1834 and London in 1835, also gazetting the descriptions of the counties, hundreds and parishes. The opening of settlement in the Port Phillip district in 1836 led to a further fracturing of his department, with several of his assistants moving south to form an almost independent branch there, another two left to become commissioners of Crown land – the officials created to administer the squatting districts – and by 1840 another two had left to take positions in the new colony of New Zealand. In Van Diemen’s Land settlement in general had stagnated by the mid-1830s, with the island’s graziers instead moving across Bass Strait to Port Phillip, and the demand for property surveying declined. Frankland gazetted his descriptions of counties, hundreds and parishes in 1831, and Arthur’s economising cut swiftly thereafter. By 1840, after Frankland’s death in office the year before, the department numbered just three, with the surveyor generalship temporarily empty, Boyd acting head and just two field surveyors remaining. Most of the physical surveying work was contracted out to private operators,

102 Reappointment see Burnett (col sec) to Frankland, 6 Aug 1829, AOT, LSD 22/6, pp 132–34; and on Boyd in general see ADB; Jones, Backsight, pp 83–87 and 107–111.
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avoiding some of the costs but also losing much of the department’s former control and responsibility. 103

The survey departments as bureaucracies: something old, something new

By 1836, the close of the period under discussion here, both departments clearly exhibited many features identifiable with classic, modern bureaucracy. It must be stressed, however, that such ‘rationalisation’ was incomplete, and many aspects survived both of customary, pre-modern practice as well as local idiosyncrasies from the colonies’ earlier years. While it is easy to dismiss such non-bureaucratic features merely as relics, or – as critics such as the Hobart newspapers did at the time – as the persistent tentacles of ‘Old Corruption’, the colonial survey departments were in fact fairly typical of their era. 104 GE Aylmer, writing of the British civil service in the late eighteenth century, noted that ‘the prevailing impression ... is one of an extraordinary patchwork – of old and new, useless and efficient, corrupt and honest’. 105 The colonial survey departments were much the same.

Of the six broad aspects that Max Weber described as characteristic of bureaucratic organisation, 106 the colonial survey departments throughout this period clearly served the specific jurisdictional area relating to settlement; its staff undertook official duties (as opposed to providing commercial services); under relatively stable authority; and with a methodical provision for the continuous fulfilment of those duties (albeit often conflicting with ‘imperious calls for economy’). Structurally they exhibited a clear internal hierarchy, especially apparent in their later stages, and they slotted into the wider chain of command in colonial governance, with above them respectively, the local colonial secretary, the governor and the Colonial Office.

Some others of these classic features appeared only partially, or only towards the very end of this period however. One such was the reliance on written record-keeping. The administration of the Australian colonies from the very beginning created a great deal of paperwork, but methodical official record-keeping only developed along the way, and another

reason for the perception of the Macquarie era as a golden age lies in the comparatively much fuller official archive detailing the actions of his administration. For the survey departments such comprehensiveness of official record came later still, with the appointment of dedicated clerks, and only in the post-1828 phase might they pass this particular test. Similarly with internal management by written rules, the colonial survey departments were bureaucratic late-comers. Mitchell produced a small volume of ‘Rules and Regulations’ for the New South Wales department in 1828, but no such collected volume existed for the Vandemonian counterpart, Frankland instead relying on numerous circulars to his field surveyors, much of this regulation also coming from Arthur rather than Frankland. Lastly, Weber’s criterion of internal management by trained specialists is absent completely from the departments even at the end of this period: instead surveyors general ran their offices as they saw fit, while the emergence within their hierarchies of head draftsmen, and especially chief clerks, suggests a more organic development of such mid-level administrative expertise.

As individuals the colonial surveyors again exhibited a mixture both of the features which Weber identified as defining rationalised bureaucrats, and of older characteristics. They generally viewed their office as a vocation, and its conduct as a duty in the service of the state (meaning, at the time, the Crown, or occasionally also the public). The surveyors’ tenure was also presumed to be for life: that is, they took on a permanent position as opposed to fixed-term contract, although numerous provisions allowed for retirement and resignation. Indeed some colonial surveyors and attached officials died in office: as mentioned above, Harris in 1810, and Oxley in 1828. One of George Frankland’s many chief clerks in Hobart, Russell Roberts, ‘died suddenly in the Street’ in 1833; and (moving beyond the formal parameters of this study) Frankland himself died in office in 1838; as did Mitchell in 1855. Finally, in keeping with Weber’s definitions, officials of the colonial bureaucracy generally enjoyed an augmented social

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110 Frankland to col sec, 26 Aug 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, p 465. Frankland had trouble keeping chief clerks, going through three in 1831 alone (LSD 61/1, p 182).
position by virtue of their office, although as the opening ‘cock and hen’ story suggests this too periodically came under fire.\textsuperscript{111}

Several more practical aspects of surveyors’ positions, however, reflect only partial rationalisation and hark back especially to earlier notions of public office as a private possession. Conforming in part to Weber’s criteria, by the end of this period surveyors’ ranks within the hierarchy determined their salaries, but in earlier years both the surveyor general and deputies also collected fees as part of their personal income. The pivotal time in this respect came in the 1820s, when officials’ rights to levy fees were converted into an augmented base salary. In more general discussions at this time, over either applications for raises or such cases as the possible corruption of Evans receiving \textit{douceurs}, governors and others often raised the need for surveyors’ salaries to be sufficient to guarantee their ‘independence’ from less regular sources of income, suggesting a shift in thinking.\textsuperscript{112}

Similarly conforming to rational practice, surveyors were appointed (rather than elected), but it is in the area of appointment in particular that older customary elements of government procedure – in particular patronage – survived into the mid-1830s. Against Weber’s ideal bureaucratic forms, appointment as a colonial surveyor in this period did not require a formal examination. Several surveyors general seem to have put potential employees through a trial period before recommending them for local appointment, but Mitchell only proposed a formal entry examination for surveyors in New South Wales in 1837; James Calder and James Sprent, in their suggestions to reform the Van Diemen’s Land department, did likewise for the appointment of contract surveyors there in 1840.\textsuperscript{113}

Nor were all surveyors appointed solely on the basis of technical expertise, and specialists appeared only towards the end of the period, particularly – as the \textit{Hobart Town Courier} applauded – in the fields of civil engineering and road-building. Before joining the New South Wales roads and bridges branch in 1830, John Lambie had worked in Britain with noted engineer and road-builder John MacAdam (after whom ‘tarmac’ and ‘macadamised road’ are named). Robert Russell, who became assistant town surveyor in Sydney in 1833, had previously

\textsuperscript{111}Questions of surveyors’ social standing, in relation to their credibility as gentlemen and as government officers, are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{112}See eg Sorell to Macquarie, 13 June 1821, \textit{HRA} 3:4, p 15 (‘independence’); Darling to Bathurst, 5 Sept 1826, \textit{HRA} 1:12, p 541–42 (‘place the servants of the Government beyond temptation’).

\textsuperscript{113}Kass, \textit{Sails to Satellites}, p 90 (Mitchell); Jones, \textit{Backsight}, p 109 (VDL).
worked under famous architect John Nash on his renovations of Buckingham Palace. At least eighteen others had professional surveying experience, mostly provincial work serving private estates and local parishes, but also including six from the army (two had trained with the Corps of Royal Military Surveyors and Draftsmen, and another two had instructed at Sandhurst). But almost as many had no or very little previous knowledge of surveying, being appointed as youths to be trained on the job, or on the basis of a more general ability in mathematics – such as school-teachers Meehan and MacQueen, or Peter Ogilvie whose references included a letter from a ‘Professor of Surveying and Mathematics’. 

Governors making appointments in the colonies tended to favour previous experience or some other ‘useful’ characteristics. Secretaries of state, on the other hand, frequently made appointments out of simple patronage, although it was usually second-hand patronage rather than a direct personal interest. Both John Rodd and William Govett came recommended to the secretary of state by Lord Harrowby; William Sharland by Lord Teignmouth and Sir Robert Inglis, while Edward Knapp’s father was the family physician to Lord Liverpool’s private secretary. Acting on the recommendations of great lords had its pitfalls, however. Harrowby had described Rodd as ‘a Young Man of considerable talent’, but Darling found him instead to be ‘advanced in Years, and appears to be worn out ... he is an Invalid, and unless removed will remain a Pensioner for Life’. Several later surveyors also owed their positions to the network of Peninsular War veterans, especially through the patronage of Sir George Murray: Hay appointed Mitchell on the urging of Murray in 1827, and as secretary of state Murray himself appointed deputies Boyd and Perry in 1829.

Lastly, by far the most influential aspect of earlier ‘cabinet’-style administration in the survey departments lay in the persisting centrality of both the person, and personality, of the surveyor general. Copy clerks, some draftsmen and even some surveyors may have been ‘replaceable parts’, but (certainly in the later period) the personality of the surveyor general

114 Darling to Murray, 24 Sept 1830, HRA 1:15, pp 739–40 (Lambie); and ADB (Russell).
118 Brooksbank to Hay, 16 Dec 1825, encl Hay to Darling, 3 Jan 1826, HRA 1:12, pp 140–41.
119 Bathurst to Brisbane, 21 Aug 1824, HRA 1:11, pp 350–51; Darling to Bathurst, 27 July 1826, HRA 1:12, p 455.
dictated the style of internal management, and thus the overall function, of the whole organisation. Related to this, but extending through the lower ranks as well, institutional knowledge also continued to be vital to both internal administration and the departments’ external activities. For instance Mitchell, trying to get more staff to cope with the rapidly increasing workload in New South Wales in 1828, pointed out to Governor Darling that although a few years earlier there had been several officers ‘personally acquainted’ with the applicants for land, and who ‘recollect[ed] every occurrence connected with the Department’, these men were now stationed at great distance around the colony.121

In some aspects this blend of old and new administrative practice worked to the departments’ benefit, offering a range of often complementary ways of carrying out their work (as discussed in Chapter 3, dealing with the recording of land ownership). In others, however, it created a tension between conflicting ideals (as is more apparent in Chapter 4, discussing surveyors’ intellectual authority). However, labelling discrete features as ‘old’ or ‘new’ and analysing the departments according to the perceived characteristics of modern bureaucracy imposes a teleological assessment. If the survey departments were elements of the apparatus of empire, they were appropriately pre-modern instruments; hand-made, fragile and fallible, the work of individualistic craftsmanship rather than precision engineering and manufacture. But they were still the precision implements of their day.

The context of colonial governance: From networks to knowledge societies

If administrative history offers the tools of a largely structural analysis of the colonial survey departments, recent work on the ‘networking’ of empire offers a more functional perspective.122 Intersecting as ‘network’ studies do with the similarly recent themes of world/global history and the even more catchily titled ‘transnational’ program,123 all generally emphasise the connectivity of empire. For the survey departments this is immediately relevant, but only up to a point. Clearly the departments were more or less ‘hard-wired’ into the network of imperial government. Similarly the various points along that network – the ‘centres of calculation’, or ‘nodes’, or now

121 Mitchell to Darling, Memorandum, 29 April 1828, HRA 1:14, pp 178–79.
more commonly ‘epistemic spaces’, or ‘knowledge spaces/places/sites’ — can be readily identified and to some extent described. But as especially those histories of science now stress, information exchange and knowledge production occurred within social fields and were therefore socially mediated: across the physical distances of empire and the social stratification inherent in government hierarchies, that mediation could be very great. So while the ‘knowledge sites’ were important in a materialist sense, it was the social relationships between the men in each, and between them and those higher up — that is, the different ‘knowledge societies’ — that most affected the transfers of geographic knowledge of the colonies.

The primary site in the construction of geographic knowledge of the colonies was the surveyor’s tent. Indeed in a court case in Hobart in 1836, the attorney general declared ‘It is known that every good surveyor is occupied as much in his tent as in the field’. It was generally in their tents, rather than anywhere more secure and established, that surveyors distilled the raw field data of their surveys down to the verbal descriptions of properties (discussed in Chapter 3) and drafted the maps (Chapter 5) which they regularly sent in to head office. They also received and replied to what they themselves portrayed as a steady stream of correspondence both from the department and private settlers. In other words, field surveyors generated one side, perhaps close to one half, of the enormous departmental archive in their tents.

Physically the tent and associated camp were ephemeral, but some idea may still be gained of the materiality of these spaces from various sources. The earliest maps of Sydney Cove in 1788 clearly show the ‘Surveyor’s marquee’ — Augustus Alt’s first official residence — appropriately on the edge of the newly established settlement, but for many years thereafter surveyors generally worked so close to their homes that they probably had no need to camp: when Evans conducted his first expedition over the Blue Mountains in 1813, he had no tent.

As for later years, Assistant Surveyor William Govett provides two illustrations which may be

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125 See esp Steven Shapin, Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if it was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore, 2010; and Chapter 4 below.


128 See Chapter 2.
Dismantling the apparatus

taken as characteristic of surveyors’ camps. [Plates 1 & 2] They typically comprised two tents, one for the surveyor and his equipment, papers and so on, and one for the convict labourers and assistants who filled out each field party. It is possible even to identify these labourers’ specific tasks:

1. man to drive & keep the Bullocks ... 1. man to cook & guard the Tents &c when the Party is on Survey – 2 men for the chain – 1. to carry an axe & Tomahawk for marking the Trees on Boundary lines & for clearing the way through thick Bushes & woods – 1. to carry the Instrum[en]t & a flag in order that the Surveyor may be at liberty to attend to the chain & make the marks & sketches in his Field Book as he proceeds.

Each party was also usually serviced by a bullock dray or cart, to carry their bulky provisions and other supplies – perhaps including chickens – while the surveyor himself went mounted on a horse.

Compared to some other mobile knowledge sites from around this time, the surveyors’ camps and tents were relatively humble establishments. Richard Sorrenson, for instance, describes the great cabins of naval survey ships in the Pacific from the late eighteenth century, and argues that these ships themselves contained so much sophisticated equipment for measuring the world that they qualified as instruments in their own right. Felix Driver argues similarly of the purpose-built wagon in which William Burchell explored southern Africa in the 1810s, as firstly an extension of the cabinet into the field, and again as an instrument itself. Significantly, both these more overtly scientific examples strove for universal applicability: that is, the practitioners in them could (ideally at least) employ their many instruments and reference sources to study any occurrence, encounter or specimen. By contrast, a surveyor’s tent and related camp had just the single purpose of surveying – unless an individual surveyor took along extra equipment for his own private pursuits, as Govett evidently did for painting.

Moving up the chain of command, ‘headquarters’ (as surveyors referred to their departmental office) is paradoxically less easy to describe, for even after it ceased to be housed in Alt’s marquee, it remained for many years in the official residences of surveyors general,

129 As the second illustration shows, the party may also have included Aboriginal ‘camp-followers’; on their physical presence but general absence within the archive see Chapter 6.
130 [Dumaresq] pencilled reply, Burnett to Dumaresq, 9 July 1827, AOT, LSD 22/4, p 44. In earlier years deputy surveyors only had three men assigned to them: see Evans’ testimony to Bigge; also Dawson, Meehan, p 17.
which are not always traceable. By the late 1810s, as he testified to Commissioner Bigge, Oxley maintained a reasonably permanent office in his official residence on Macquarie Street in Sydney, although at least part of the department archive still lay in the possession of his predecessor, James Meehan. Macquarie had three months previously assigned Oxley an unused room in the hospital building on the other side of the street, but this was probably merely window-dressing for the visiting commissioner.  

133 In Van Diemen's Land from the same period, Evans had no office at all, 134 and he appears to have used his private home for official business. Robert Hoddle, before moving on to New South Wales, had initially arrived in Van Diemen's Land looking for work, and he recorded having called at Evans' home in Newtown outside Hobart to make his application. 135 (This very permeable boundary between private home and public office may also have contributed to the rumours that Evans received presents from settlers.)

By the time Mitchell took over the New South Wales department in 1828, it had a substantial office. His 'Rules and regulations' of that year stipulated the uses of the various rooms and give an idea of the spatial organisation, and compartmentalising, of his growing workforce:

The room first on the right hand on entering from the Street will be henceforth a waiting room for the accommodation [sic] of Strangers who are invariably to be shewn into it in the first instance. The door of it is to be kept shut, and the Office Keepers are never to be allowed to sit in it.

The deputy surveyor general occupied the first room on the left, and behind him the 'surveyor at headquarters', while the chief clerk and his underlings had the second on the right. Upstairs, Mitchell took pride of place in the large front room, with one room reserved for the commissioners of valuation (or draftsman Berni when they were not meeting), another for the rest of the draftsmen, and a small room for the storage of maps, equipment and stationery. Mitchell specified office hours of 9 to 3 (although these seem not to have stayed fixed), and even noted how the office-keepers were to announce visitors. Later appended rulings give some indication of slightly less regimented office life, however: in 1830 Perry directed 'the person

134 Evans' testimony to Bigge, HRA 3:2, esp pp 317–318.
who broke the large table in the Drawing Room' to pay for its 'wanton destruction'; and in 1832 Mitchell banned long lunch-breaks.¹³⁶

Rather than see these sites as points along a network, however, with their superiors (governors, the Colonial Office) merely successive sites in the chain-of-command, this thesis sees them together as the first of three concentric 'knowledge societies'. Much if not most of the information produced in the survey departments stayed there, in the heads, field books and files of the surveyors and staff of the department. Some information, as explained more fully in Chapter 3, was too technical for non-specialists to understand anyway; more importantly, however, most of it was also too specific for outsiders such as the governor to make use of in any practical way. The primary field for the formation, recording, traffic, verification, negotiation, recording and use of the colonies' geographic information remained the institutional setting described above.

Immediately beyond the institutional setting was a local colonial knowledge society. For the most part, communication here meant correspondence between the surveyor general and the governor (and after the mid-1820s also the colonial secretary), and particularly Lieutenant Governor Arthur constantly required information from George Frankland, but the surveyors also dealt with other government departments and with the mass of private settlers. Beyond the colonies themselves they communicated with what might be called the imperial knowledge society, including the Colonial Office but also at times individuals and the reading public around the empire, and particularly in Britain. Information which was useful in the institutional setting therefore had to be effectively translated for the reception of these progressively wider readerships. As the following chapters show, that process was rarely straightforward.

¹³⁶ 'Rules and regulations', pp 1–5 (rooms); 24–25 (announcements); 30–31 (table); 32 (lunch).
Timeline of the tenures of government surveyors in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land 1787–1836.
In the middle of 1816, Deputy Surveyor George Evans had reason to believe his career was really going places. Three years previously, after the crossing of the Blue Mountains by the private explorers Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth, Evans had led an official follow-up expedition, in which he extended their discoveries another 100 miles into very promising country and surveyed the route for a road to the site of the future town of Bathurst. Governor Lachlan Macquarie proudly sent a copy of Evans' expedition journal to London, and richly rewarded him with 1000 acres for his valuable work. In 1815 Evans led another expedition, travelling a further 150 miles south-west from Bathurst to a river he named the Lachlan, for which a gratified Macquarie again heaped public praise and cash reward upon him. The colony seemed poised on the brink of substantial expansion, and Evans equally seemed poised to take the lead. As he wrote towards the end of this last trip, 'I see no end of travelling'. But in May 1816, after reading that latest journal, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Bathurst, deemed him unsuitable:

Although Mr. Evans is entitled to great praise for the perseverance with which he overcame the Natural Obstacles opposed to the Progress of his Discoveries, and the Activity with which he afterwards pursued his course Westward, yet he does not appear from the Style of his Journal to be qualified by his Education for the task of giving the Information respecting this New Country, which it is so desirable to obtain.

With these several strokes of the pen, Bathurst effectively removed Evans from the prestigious command of future exploration in New South Wales. Macquarie rather reluctantly placed Surveyor General John Oxley in charge of the next two major expeditions, with Evans merely 'attached' as second-in-command. Such an intervention was extraordinary. The Colonial Office determined broad policy and made or confirmed appointments to the civil

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2 Bathurst to Macquarie, 18 May 1816, HRA 1:8, p 115.
3 Macquarie to Bathurst, 4 May 1817, HRA 1:9, p 356.
The currency of 'local knowledge'

list, but more usually remained aloof from the immediate and internal administrative matters of the colony's official establishment.

The issue, on the face of it, lay in Evans' perceived deficiencies in literary 'Style' and 'Education', but beneath Bathurst's almost euphemistic criticisms ran deeper and wider concerns. Macquarie's initial selection of Evans epitomises many of the interpersonal issues at play within the small government administration of these earlier colonial years. As the institutional context in which Evans wrote his exploration journals, this back-story also helps explain his particular stylistic and intellectual approach: it allows for an examination that moves away from the predominantly literary (and in some aspects almost ahistorical) analysis of the recent post-colonial critique of such texts; and in re-emphasising Evans' immediate and more remote readerships, it points to the different currencies of his information at those disparate sites. In short, Evans' journals reveal an intellectual outlook with a distinctly local focus, 'useful' and practical in the colony, but leaving his imperial readers somewhat cold.

Bathurst's rejection of Evans highlights the division, if not outright incompatibility, between the sort of information and knowledge which had value in the colony and that which London thought desirable to obtain. Oxley understandably strove to meet metropolitan expectations in the journals of his subsequent expeditions, and the points of contrast between his and Evans' narratives — especially those discernable in Oxley's editing out of undesirable material — further delineate the differences between 'local' and the supposedly universal, imperial knowledge of the colonies.

Macquarie's initial selection of Evans

Evans' crossing of the Blue Mountains and subsequent expedition to the Lachlan River have not received much attention from historians. He did not publish his journals at the time, and owing perhaps to some of the stylistic failings which Bathurst criticised, they have remained relatively obscure texts. Similarly Evans as an historical figure has not entered the canon of famous Australian explorers and, apart from local recognition around the town of Bathurst, he generally rates a mention in only the fullest accounts. Even within more general histories

4 Evans' three journals are: 'Journal', SLNSW, C709 (reprod in Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society Journal, 1, 1948, pp 21–29) for his 1812 trip from Jervis Bay (hereafter JB); 'Assistant-Surveyor Evans' Journal 1813–1814', HRA 1:8, pp 165–77, for the Blue Mountains crossing (BM); and his 1815 Lachlan River expedition (LR: cited above, note 1). Of these BM is the most prominent: it features in full in George Mackaness' definitive collection of Blue Mountains journals (Fourteen Journeys over the Blue Mountains of New South Wales 1813–1841, Australian Historical Monographs, Sydney, 1950, vol 1, pp 26–40), but even it is only rarely excerpted in collections of more general Australian exploration narratives (eg in Ann Millar, I See No End of Travelling: Journals of Australian Explorers 1813–1876, Bay Books, Sydney, 1986; but not eg Eric Rolls, Visions of Australia: Impressions of the Landscape 1640–1910, Lothian, Melbourne, 2002).
of expansion and settlement at this time, the narrative tends to pass from the celebrated threesome of Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth straight to Oxley’s first expedition in 1817, with the gap perhaps filled by Macquarie’s more erudite comments from his tour along the new road across the mountains in 1815.5

The few historians who have looked more closely at Evans’ removal have noted his poor spelling, but otherwise have either implicitly or explicitly portrayed his replacement by Oxley as merely the natural course of events: Surveyor General Oxley was Deputy Evans’ superior in more ways than one.6 Keith Weatherburn, Evans’ biographer and greatest champion, offers as an additional reason the difficulties to long-distance navigation posed by Evans’ inability to fix latitude and longitude, and thus having to measure distances by chain.7 Matthew Ellis, one of Macquarie’s biographers, reports that Bathurst ‘cocked a snoot’ at the journals and notes that, following Evans’ lavish rewards, exploration had become a ‘profitable occupation’: reason enough for Oxley, through supporters in London, to pull rank.8 Helen Proudfoot also mentions Bathurst’s ‘rebuke’ of Evans’ writing, but of his replacement simply states that ‘Oxley was the obvious choice’.9

None of these, however, addresses the problem that Oxley had been in the colony and serving as surveyor general the whole time. If he were always the natural candidate, why had Macquarie initially preferred Evans? As with the issues involved in simply gaining an appointment as surveyor in this earlier period, the reasons for Evans’ selection lay as much in the politics of the still quite small colony – and especially in the interpersonal relations within the even smaller colonial administration – as they did in his intellectual abilities.

For the first 25 years of the colony, British settlement on the mainland had occurred predominantly within the Cumberland basin around Sydney, blocked especially to the west by the Blue Mountains. Despite several attempts of varying success to find a route over or

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9 Helen Proudfoot, ‘Opening towns, public virtue and the interior’, in James Broadbent and Joy Hughes (eds), *The Age of Macquarie*, MUP/Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Melbourne, 1992, p 70. It should also be noted that none of the above additional reasons hold up either: standardised spelling had yet to become pervasive, and Evans’ idiosyncrasies could usually be excused in someone of his generation; Oxley (or rather his then 2IC, Evans) also used a chain to measure distances during his first expedition; and the material rewards from exploration remained at the discretion of the governor, so were not guaranteed (eg Oxley received only £200 for that expedition: Macquarie to Bathurst, 13 Dec 1817; and reply, 19 Aug 1818, *HRA* 1:9, pp 727 & 829).
around the barrier, it was not until mid-1813 that a crossing was publicly recognised, after a small party led by Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and William Wentworth trekked to the western edge of the main plateau at Mount York. The settlement needed more land, and the fact that private settlers had mounted their own expedition demonstrated the impatience of the pastoralists with both geographic and government restrictions. In response, Macquarie needed to regain the initiative in exploration and settlement. Yet for another six months, he made no further move. Chris Cunningham, in his discussion of Blue Mountains exploration, writes that Macquarie was initially unenthusiastic, and that in any case so too were the graziers: it took another dry spring to convince the governor to act. Ellis sees bushfires in October 1813 as the spur to official action.

The more important factor, however, was that Macquarie had to wait for the return from Van Diemen’s Land of the one man in his establishment whom he thought capable of carrying out the task in the way he wanted – or as the Sydney Gazette put it, ‘in whose Zeal and abilities for such an undertaking he had well founded Reason to confide’. Perhaps uppermost in Macquarie’s mind, he wanted to verify and give the privateers’ discovery an official bearing. His later caution in stopping passage until a road was built, and then limiting traffic and subsequent settlement, are all accepted features of his wish to control the pastoralists’ expansion into the ‘new discovered country’. His very public praise and lavish rewarding of government surveyor Evans, compared to the low-key official notice of the private party’s return, is another clear indicator. More immediately, Macquarie seems to have wanted clearer knowledge of potential agricultural land beyond the mountains; to better the privateers by going further (and actually crossing the watershed); and, most importantly, to survey the route for the road that would be the necessary conduit of government authority. Meeting these three key goals required an officer from the survey department, which at the time numbered just three: John Oxley, James Meehan and George Evans.

10 From an extensive literature, see at one end Mackaness’ collection of original sources, cited above; at the other Chris Cunningham, Blue Mountains Rediscovered: Beyond the Myths of Early Australian Exploration, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1996, which also gives a good account of the less public attempts, successful and otherwise. Presumably the 2013 bicentenary of the ‘first’ crossing will occasion another flurry of publication.

11 Cunningham, Blue Mountains, p 143.
12 Ellis, Macquarie, p 264.
13 Sydney Gazette, 12 Feb 1814.
14 On their successful return, the privateers received a few lines in the Sydney Gazette of 12 June 1813 (see also Cunningham, Blue Mountains, p 16). Evans’ letter to Macquarie on his safe return was printed in full, along with praise by the governor (12 Feb 1814). Later, Macquarie mentioned Evans several times in public accounts of his vice-regal tour along the new road, and at the ceremony founding Bathurst (see Macquarie, Tours, 7 May 1815, p 101; ‘Govt and Gen’l Orders’, 10 June 1815, repro in HRA 1:8, pp 568–78.
15 Macquarie’s instructions to Evans have not survived, but the attention Evans places on these questions in his journal, especially the feasibility of a road, suggest a fairly specific brief. See also Macquarie’s paraphrase of
Oxley had arrived in the colony and taken up his post as surveyor general in November 1812, and he was the only surveyor on the mainland when the privateers made their crossing six months later. But Oxley was too close to the pastoralist faction for Macquarie's liking. Previously a naval officer, Oxley had been in Sydney for the last year of the rebel military officers' administration after their arrest of Governor Bligh. Most damningly, Oxley had been an intimate associate of the rebels' leader John Macarthur, and even at one stage engaged to his daughter Elizabeth. The opening up of the west was always going to be pivotal in the struggles between the government and the pastoralists over the course of settlement, and Oxley's factional affiliations may have been enough to dissuade Macquarie from sending him. Macquarie later described Oxley as 'intriguing and discontented', and Mrs Macquarie also thought him 'artful', and one of the several 'villains' who plagued her husband. As for his professional qualities, Oxley had not exactly shown the zeal which the governor praised so much in some of his other officers. Oxley's earliest recorded act as surveyor general was to apply for a raise, and during his first year in office he seems to have devoted most of his time to establishing his own property, although he did also tour some of the settled districts to acquaint himself with his domain.

At the time of the privateers' crossing, Oxley's two deputies - Meehan and Evans - were working in Van Diemen's Land remeasuring the grants of land that had been sloppily done by their predecessors and surveying the road between Launceston and Hobart. Both had been appointed by the rebel military officers after the overthrow of Bligh, but Macquarie was sufficiently convinced of their merits to keep them on, and in 1813 he was in the middle of a drawn-out campaign to persuade London to confirm them in their positions. As opposed to Oxley, who had obtained his position by directly applying to the Colonial Office, both Meehan and Evans owed their positions to Macquarie personally. This was Macquarie's style: he liked to have his own men doing his will in his colony.

Meehan was undoubtedly the better property surveyor. Initially a convict assigned to assist Charles Grimes, the previous surveyor general, Meehan had himself acted in that

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16 John Macarthur to Elizabeth Macarthur (snr), 14 May 1812, SLNSW, Macarthur Papers, A2898, vol 2, pp 128–33.
17 'List of Names ...', encl, Macquarie to Bathurst, 1 Dec 1817, HRA 1:9, pp 500–501; Ellis, Macquarie, pp 292, 410, 435.
18 Oxley to Liverpool, 13 Nov 1812, HRA 1:7, pp 683–84.
19 See Richard Johnson, The Search for the Inland Sea: John Oxley, Explorer 1783–1828, MUP, Melbourne, 2001, p 6. In Johnson's narrative, Oxley returning to and developing his 'Kirkham' estate forms a constant refrain, although it is not always clear on what evidence.
position for nearly four years before Oxley arrived, first under the rebels and then under Macquarie. Had the decision been based upon ability and experience alone, Meehan would almost certainly have kept the post permanently.\textsuperscript{20} In late 1821, towards the end of both Macquarie’s long governorship and Meehan’s even longer colonial career, Meehan claimed that he had ‘Measured all the Lands Granted from the Crown since your Excellency’s Arrival’.\textsuperscript{21} Macquarie went even further, declaring ‘there is not a more useful Officer serving under this Government’ and that Meehan had an ‘intimate acquaintance with the History and Cause of every Grant or Lease ever made in the Colony since its first Establishment’.\textsuperscript{22} However, Macquarie didn’t need a property surveyor for the follow-up expedition over the Blue Mountains, and Evans had various specific claims to being ‘useful’ that Meehan lacked.\textsuperscript{23}

Firstly, Evans had more of a civil engineering bent, vital for deciding the route for the road across the mountains.\textsuperscript{24} Macquarie already had some personal experience with Evans’ road-building, having inspected his work on ‘Curry Jong Hill’ during his first major tour of part of the colony in 1810,\textsuperscript{25} and during the deputies’ year in Van Diemen’s Land Evans probably took the lead in the road surveying duties.\textsuperscript{26} On top of these technical accomplishments, Evans had also already earned a name for himself as an explorer. In 1804, during an earlier stint as government surveyor, he had investigated by boat the branches of the Hawkesbury and Warragamba Rivers, efforts which Macquarie replicated, accompanied by a party including Evans, during that same early tour of 1810.\textsuperscript{27} Only a year before the privateers’ crossing, Evans had also made an successful overland trek from Jervis Bay back to the main settlement.\textsuperscript{28} Particularly on this last trip, Evans had demonstrated that he could


\textsuperscript{21} Memorial, nd, encl 1, Macquarie to Wilmot, 29 Nov 1821, HRA I :10, pp 710–711.

\textsuperscript{22} Macquarie to Bathurst, 4 April 1817, HRA I :9, 351.

\textsuperscript{23} It may also have been the case that Meehan’s greater cadastral skill meant he was too valuable to send off for an extended period: after a year in Van Diemen’s Land remeasuring every grant made there, he no doubt had a lot of paperwork to catch up on formally describing and registering these grants.

\textsuperscript{24} Although Evans’ exact qualifications are unknown, the best clue is that he had been ‘articled to an engineer and architect of note named Smeee’: see James Calder, ‘Australia’s first explorer’, Calder Papers, SLNSW, A594, p 507. While Calder is not always entirely reliable (see eg Weatherburn, Evans, p xv), Evans’ career bears out the suggestion in this case.

\textsuperscript{25} Macquarie, Journals of his Tours, p 25

\textsuperscript{26} See Macquarie to Maj Geils, 1 June 1812; and to Maj Gordon, 12 June 1812, HRA 3:1, pp 484, 721.

\textsuperscript{27} Sydney Gazette, 7 Oct 1804, p 2e; Macquarie, Journals, pp 20–22.

\textsuperscript{28} The journal of this trip (JB, cited above), is also discussed below.
negotiate the often difficult Australian terrain and vegetation, and this skill formed one aspect of what Macquarie called Evans' 'local knowledge'.

Local knowledge features in accounts of imperial projects in many colonies, but previous studies have generally taken it to be the knowledge of the indigenous population (particularly in India) which colonising forces either collected or co-opted. In the early Australian colonies, those more likely to be credited with local knowledge were the permanent European colonists, especially those whose occupations took them – legitimately or not – to and beyond the outskirts of the settled areas. Local knowledge also seems to have been practical rather than, for instance, scientific; professional perhaps, but also tradesman- or craftsman-like, such as Meehan's 'acquaintance with ... every Grant or Lease', or Evans' abilities in Australian terrain. Coming from the pens of the governor, the possession of local knowledge also suggests a social distinction. His Excellency did not need to concern himself with the petty details and hard-earned experience involved in the physical work of surveying; instead he relied on his underlings' knowledge and the authority which his recognition granted it. Macquarie's later tour along the newly constructed road to Bathurst is a classic example of him mustering his various subordinates' local and other knowledges to his own ends. He recalled Evans from Van Diemen's Land, saying he was 'Desirous of availing myself of the local Knowledge and Experience of Mr. Evans'. He also signalled he would take 'some other Scientific Gentlemen, to assist me in My Survey and Examination of the Quality of its Soil, Timber, and other Natural productions', and his multi-skilled party eventually included all three surveyors, as well as Sir John Jamison (whose qualification Macquarie listed as 'Kn[igh]t'), William Redfern (surgeon), William Cox (the road-builder), and John Lewin ('Painter & Naturalist').

For Macquarie's purposes, therefore, Evans was uniquely qualified to lead the 1813 Blue Mountains expedition, and on the back of his achievements in that trip also to lead another down the Lachlan two years later. Evans was a government officer, practical, skilled

29 See eg Macquarie to Davey, 25 April 1815, HRA 3:2, p 73.
31 Macquarie also credited Meehan with 'local knowledge' on various occasions: eg Macquarie to Liverpool, 17 Nov 1812, _HRA_ 1:7, p 609; Macquarie to Bathurst, 4 April 1817, and Macquarie to Goulburn, 17 May 1817, _HRA_ 1:9, pp 351 and 410.
32 Macquarie to Davey, 25 April 1815, _HRA_ 3:2, p 73.
33 Macquarie to Bathurst, 24 March 1815, _HRA_ 1:8, p 468; Macquarie, _Journals of his Tours_, p 89.
and experienced, and he was Macquarie’s man. He was also very successful in meeting the main practical goals of his expeditions: effecting passage, surveying the route and finding good land for agriculture. And he avoided serious accidents or deaths among his men, and caused none among the Indigenous peoples of the land through which he passed – a record which neither Oxley nor Thomas Mitchell, his more illustrious successors as surveyor-explorers, could claim. Why then did the secretary of state deem him unfit?

**Evans’ limited scientific knowledge**

In his fateful despatch, Bathurst enclosed a memorandum which made it clear he had scientific information most in mind. It directed ‘future Travellers’ to keep detailed diaries, and it listed the various items of interest which they should observe and describe. These included the climate; the directions and sizes of rivers and mountain ranges; descriptions of flora, fauna and minerals (especially their exploitable varieties); and information about the ‘Natives’ ranging from population and local vocabularies to their mode of government and ‘their Moral Character and Conduct’. It was also a categorical list typical of serious travel writing, with a long heritage going that reached back through the Admiralty’s instructions to sailors and Francis Bacon’s advice ‘Of travaile’. More generally than this, however, Bathurst’s memo could stand as a manifesto of Enlightenment enquiry into geography, natural history and ethnography, all-inclusive in its various headings, and equally applicable to Africa or Asia as it was to Australia.

A substantial part of Evans’ journals covers topics that appear in Bathurst’s list: given its encyclopaedic compass, that could hardly be avoided. Nevertheless, Evans exhibited little knowledge and not much interest in the more purely scientific aspects of his discoveries. In botany, for example, while he mentioned numerous tree species, he rarely described them in any detail: such information as he gave tended to be of an immediately practical nature, for instance the usefulness of their bark to make shelters (BM, 5 & 6 Dec). Likewise of animals, Evans frequently noted those that he and his party could kill and eat – kangaroos, emu and fish – but only a ‘Parrot’, leeches, and a ‘fly ... resembling a Native Bee’ (JB, 4 April) and the ‘Lockett bird’ (BM, 26 Nov) make up the inedible category. For neither flora nor fauna did he use the Linnaean system of taxonomy, instead favouring the local common names.

Again among botanical species, for example, he cited ‘Cabbage Trees’, ‘blue Gum-trees’, ‘Box Trees’, ‘Stringy Bark Trees’, ‘swamp Oaks’ or ‘Black Butted Gums’. The absence of further explanation seems to assume his readers’ familiarity both with the species and with local nomenclature.

Evans’ lack of intellectual curiosity appears most clearly in his attempts to describe particular discoveries. Within the literary genres of more traditional travel writing, descriptions of ‘singular’ features allowed the author to depart from the basic narrative of movement, and to enter a more philosophical or scientific frame of mind. Chloe Chard describes such digression as a ‘counterpoint to the mundane’. By contrast, Evans generally subordinated such observations among the detail relating to his party’s passage: effectively within the mundane. This may have been partly excusable in recurring items of interest such as tree species, but when confronted with more particular cases Evans missed the opportunity for such elaborate digressions, and in this he erred in scientific observation as much as in literary style. For example, during the Lachlan River expedition he noted that rain had:

dissolved [sic] a white sweet substance, that lay scattered quite thick on the Ground, particularly where the Grass was burnt; some Gallons might have been picked up in a very short time. I had previously collected a little; no doubt some scientific Gentleman may be pleased to give their opinion thereon. (LR, 20 May)

The limits of Evans’ treatment become apparent when compared to how Macquarie later paraphrased this same discovery. Although the governor also (more rhetorically) admitted to a degree of scientific illiteracy, he still managed a detailed description, offered no less than five illustrative comparisons, and proposed an ultimate source:

He also brought me a very Unusual and extraordinary Production, to which I am not enabled to give a proper or Scientific Name. It possesses much of the Sweetness and Flavour of Manna, but in appearance is different, being very white and of a roundish irregular Surface, not unlike the rough Outside of Confectioners’ Comfits and about the Size of large Hail Stones. From anything I can learn from Mr. Evans, this is not the production of any Insect, Tree, or Vegetable of that part of the Country; and I am thence led to Conjecture that it is a production of the same nature as is found in Arabia, and there called ‘Wild Honey’ or ‘the Almighty’s Sugar Plumbs,’ and Considered as a Dew.38

Of the other main objects of scientific interest, Evans’ personal attitude emerges most clearly in the area of ethnographic enquiry. Although hampered in such efforts by the extreme

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36 The Australian National Dictionary (OUP, Melbourne, 1988) lists all these common names as having appeared in relation to Australia or in local parlance long before Evans’ writing: eg ‘cabbage tree’ in 1770; ‘stringybark’ in 1799; ‘box’, ‘swamp oak’ and ‘black butted gum’ all in 1801.

37 Chloe Chard, Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600–1830, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1999, p 7.

38 Macquarie to Bathurst, 30 June 1815, HRA 1:8, p 609.
timidity of the ‘natives’, who studiously avoided his party, Evans’ descriptions of the few whom he did encounter exhibited none of the detached assessments of ‘genius and disposition’ that Bathurst seems to have wanted, but are much more subjective. One of his longer passages describing Aborigines comes from the Blue Mountains expedition:

there was only two Women and four Children, the poor Creatures trembled and fell down with fright; I think they were coming for Water; I gave them what fish we had, some fish Hooks, Twine and a Tomahawk, they appeared glad to get from us; two Boys ran away; the other small Children cried much at first; a little while after I played with them, they began to be good humoured and laugh, both of the Women were blind of their Right Eye. (BM, 21 Dec)

Other than the Aborigines’ basic age and gender, the only objective ethnographic observation that Evans included was the afterthought about the women being blind in one eye. The bulk of the scene relates the two parties’ much more personal interactions, and especially Evans’ sympathetic efforts to placate the children’s fears, paternal and paternalistic all at once.

Evans the artist

Although no scientist, Evans was an accomplished landscape painter, and when it came to describing geography, he much more frequently turned to his aesthetic sensibility. From the Lachlan expedition, for example:

a prospect appear’d at which I was highly gratified. I never saw a more pleasing Country. I cannot express my pleasure, I feel, in going forward; the hills we have passed are excellent land, well wooded; to the South distant objects are obscured by high hills; in the S.W. are very distant Mountains; under them appear a Mist as tho’ rising over a River; it has the like look round to West; but, beyond, the loom of low hills are very faintly distinguished. (LR, 23 May)

In its basic form this description may be partly panoramic, but it shows little similarity to the supposedly omniscient, Cartesian perspective suggested by especially Simon Ryan of such ‘prospects’. While Evans noted the position and basic bearings of some features, the effects of light and distance upon them seem equally if not more important to him. He did not portray himself as an objective floating eye detached from the country, but a feeling (‘gratified’ and pleased) actor moving within it (‘have passed ... going forward’).

In other landscape descriptions Evans accentuated his feeling presence further, and in one case he effectively passed over the visual and evoked the aural, tactile and perhaps even olfactory senses:

39 See esp Rienits, Early Artists of Australia, ch 6. Evans’ watercolour landscapes also feature here in Chapter 6, discussing surveyors’ private works including Plates 11 & 12.

40 Cartographic Eye, pp 6–8, 87–100.
the land here gets better and the Country has a fine appearance; it resembles the hills to
the Eastward of the Cori Linn at Port Dalrymple, and put me in mind particularly of that
part; the Trees being thin and light, the flats clear of Timber, a few Honey-suckles on the
Banks of the ridges, the Lockett Bird singing, and the seed of the wild Burnett sticking in
our legs. (BM, 26 Nov)

Mary-Louise Pratt would classify such a style as 'sentimental': a mode at odds with that of
the detached scientific or cartographic observer and which instead 'explicitly anchors what is
being expressed in the sensory experience, judgement, agency, or desires of the human
subjects'.41 (Note also the composite nature of this description, another feature it shares with
picturesque art and one which breaks away from any pretence at systematic observation.42)

One of Evans' landscape descriptions in particular illustrates the gap between the
technical panoramic and his own, chiefly aesthetic, observational modes:

I am deficient in abilities to describe it properly, but shall endeavour to do so by
comparing the Country to an Ocean, as it is nearly level, with the Horizon from N.W. to
S.W.: small Hillocks are seen at great distances of a pale Blue, shewing as land appears
when first discovered at Sea; Spaces clear of trees may be imagined Islands, and the
Natives Smokes, rising in various points, Vessels; it is a clear calm Evening near
Sunsetting, which shewed every part advantageously. (LR, 2 June)

Ryan deals at length with such oceanic imagery, suggesting first that the metaphor arose from
later explorers' thwarted desires for an inland sea, but also from the imperialistic motive of
homogenising the landscape as a cartographic 'blank' that had been diligently observed but
found featureless and uninhabited.43 Evans' use of this trope suggests none of this: he was
looking, at this stage, for a river not a sea; and his metaphoric ocean is hardly a blank, but
bounded by a distant shore, dotted with islands and busy with craft. Far from erasing the
evidence of Aborigines, Evans' linking of Indigenous fireplaces to ships might even be
interpreted as an acknowledgement of their appropriately nomadic occupation. However,
taken together this whole scene seems simply more of his typically painterly imagery. The
sea and especially the coast – whether ordered and sedate like this, or rugged and dramatic –
was another typically rendered scene in the picturesque mode, while the above description
also shares numerous points of similarity with more strictly topographical views of especially
Port Jackson from this period, including by Evans himself.44

(quote p 77).
42 See esp William Gilpin, Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty ..., Blamire, London, 1786, in
which he devotes the preface to a defence of composite composition.
43 Cartographic Eye, pp 118–21; see also Haynes, Seeking the Centre, pp 66–71.
44 See esp Evans, 'A view of Sydney N.S.Wales on entering the Heads the distance of Seven Miles', [1809], in
'Australian paintings by JW Lewin, GP Harris, GW Evans and others 1796–1809', SLNSW, PXD388,
vol 3, f 1 (and repro in Chapter 6).
Local knowledge, local perspective

The key to reconciling Macquarie’s esteem with Bathurst’s dismissal of Evans lies in his local knowledge, and how useful – even how intelligible – it was to both. As introduced above, Evans’ local knowledge took its basic, practical form in his (usually unremarked) ability to simply move through the local terrain, and being able to survey as he went. He mentioned this on only a few occasions when conditions became more difficult than usual, as for example ‘to climb up the hills we were obliged to crawl upon our hands and knees’ (LR, 19 May), or when undergrowth constantly entangled his chain (BM, 3 Jan). Tolerating the privations of the track may also be included, and that he considered these worthy of notice by his superiors is suggested by some of Evans’ later petitions, which summarise his career but tend to emphasise his efforts in exploration. For instance, in between the Blue Mountains and Lachlan trips, Evans applied for a raise in salary, stressing in his application his ‘arduous duties’ and especially the ‘unavoidable destruction of my apparel in travelling through the woods’.

Some of the more specifically local techniques that he recorded originated, either first- or second-hand, from Aboriginal knowledge. On the Jervis Bay trip, Evans had with him Bundle, an Aboriginal guide and/or translator. Evans did not record any dialogue with the local tribes, so Bundle may have been out of his linguistic range, but he had a more practical secondary role in his own bush skills. In that journal, Evans recorded that to cross a river he ‘set the Men to make a canoe’ (JB, 3 April). Bundle also helped in the crossing because he could swim while the others apparently could not, but this seems to be the extent to which the Europeans used Bundle’s Indigenous knowledge. Although their rations ran out towards the end of their trip, Evans made no mention of Bundle finding bush food.

Evans had no Aboriginal guide on his two later trips, but his men still employed at least one skill that presumably originated from Indigenous sources. On the Blue Mountains trip, the party sheltered most nights in bark lean-tos and, as mentioned above, Evans occasionally commented on trees’ bark in relation to its suitability for constructing one of these ‘huts’. Other aspects of his party’s practical ingenuity seem to have been homespun rather than

45 Evans to Macquarie, 1 Feb 1815, HRA 1:8, pp 474–75.
borrowed: as their boots wore out in the rough conditions of the Blue Mountains journey, his men improvised ‘pampoosers’ (moccasins) from kangaroo skin (15 & 30 Dec).\textsuperscript{47}

Evans’ local knowledge went beyond mere practicalities, however, and certainly beyond the ‘bush’ lore idealised by writers in the later nineteenth century and which features in especially nationalist accounts of some later explorers.\textsuperscript{48} Local knowledge in this case—and, as will be seen in later chapters, much of the usual work of the survey departments—was a whole way of seeing: an episteme, a \textit{mentalité}, centred on the colony, its needs, economy, and its incipient but distinctive culture. The use of local common names for tree species is a clear example, and in one such case Evans even suggested the use of local idiom: ‘they are what is called Black Butted Gums’ (LR, 31 May). Three other key features of Evans’ writing similarly betray his local mindedness: his naming of features, his repertoire of comparison, and his estimations of future use.

Bestowing the conquerors’ names over the landscape like so much imperial wild oats is justifiably seen as one of the first acts of taking possession. Evans was not shy of naming features as he went—at least on his two main expeditions—yet in all but four cases he used the names of local men, mostly fellow government officials: Mount Blaxland (BM, 26 Nov); Wentworth’s and Lawson’s Sugar Loaves (26 Nov); Evans’ Sugar Loaf (1 Dec); O’Connell Plains, Macquarie Plains (6 Dec); Mitchell Plains, Campbell River (8 Dec); Macquarie River (9 Dec); Mount Macquarie, Maclaine’s Peak, Antill’s Peak (LR, 16 May); Cox’s Spring (18 May); Mount Lachlan (22 May); Jamison’s Table Mountain, Mount Molle, Redfern Valley, Mechen Valley (23 May); Mount Lewin (25 May); Oxley’s Plains (28 May); the River Lachlan (5 June). Two of the exceptions were simply descriptive—the Fish River (BM, 7 Dec) and Mount Pleasant (10 Dec)—but only another two commemorated wider imperial connections: Bathurst Plains (BM, 10 Dec), in an apparently unsuccessful attempt to flatter the secretary of state, and Warwick Plains (LR, 7 June), after both Evans’ birth-place and the earl who was his highest-placed English patron. Such toponymy exhibits none of the sly double meanings noted by Paul Carter in James Cook’s naming of points and islands along the Australian coast, or in Macquarie’s laboured pun in dubbing the ultramontane, complete with hyphens, ‘West-more-land’.\textsuperscript{49} Nor does Evans indulge in the otherwise typical

\textsuperscript{47} The \textit{OED} lists ‘pampootie’ as being an Aran Irish term, but only from the later nineteenth century. Evans was possibly using the earlier Dutch term, \textit{pampoesje} (indoor slipper), picked up during his time in Cape Town (1798–1802): see \textless{}www.oed.co.uk/view/Entry/136631\textgreater{} (viewed 18 May 2012).

\textsuperscript{48} Even CMH Clark—certainly not a traditional nationalist—put Evans’ dismissal down to the ‘English distain for the man who had bush lore’: \textit{A History of Australia}, vol 1, MUP, Melbourne, 1962, p 297.

\textsuperscript{49} Carter, \textit{The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History}, Faber & Faber, London, ch 1; Macquarie to Bathurst, 28 April 1814, \textit{HRA} 1:8, p 150.
remembrance of English sites, fields of glory or beloved royalty. Instead he covered the landscape with the hierarchy of the local elite, thereby constructing it as their latest acquisition: Britain and the empire seem far, far away.

The second major local feature of Evans' writing is his use of comparison. In order to give an idea of the nature or quality of particular areas that he came across during his expeditions, he frequently compared them to other areas. The places to which he chose to compare them, however, were all other colonial sites: 'The [Shoalhaven] River resembles that of Parramatta to the West of the Flats' (JB, 31 March); 'this part resembles the Hawkesbury about Sackville Reach' (JB, 5 April); 'it resembles the hills to the Eastward of the Corri Linn at Port Dalrymple' (BM, 26 Nov); 'this place resembles the hill about Mount Hunter at the Cow Pastures' (BM, 14 Dec); or 'This part of the Country is a second Hawkesbury' (LR, 29 May). These were all places within the settled parts of the colony and, importantly, all places that Macquarie also knew personally. For instance, the governor had visited and himself named the 'Corri-Linn Cascade' in his 1811 tour of Van Diemen's Land, describing it as a 'wild romantic view'. Evans' comparisons would have have left anyone unfamiliar with these colonial landscapes - Lord Bathurst for example - none the wiser.

The third prominent aspect of Evans' localised vision is his perception of the possible future of the country. Evans twice made the common comparison of colonial landscapes to a gentleman's park - 'the distant hills ... appear as Grounds laid out' (BM, 4 Dec); 'the hills have the look of a park and Grounds laid out' (6 Dec) - which are generally interpreted as suggestions that the landscape was predisposed to English manorial possession and agriculture. Numerous other descriptions also perhaps envisaged something like English countryside: 'the hills are also covered with fine pasture' (BM, 11 Dec) or 'there are small Meadows clear of Trees' (25 Nov). Although it does not appear in the journal, Evans may have described 'Kangaroos in Numerous Flocks like Sheep'. Taken together, these seem more a continuation of Evans' painterly imagination, homely and Arcadian by turns.

Evans' more explicit estimations of future use instead tend to suggest more aggressive development through pastoralism: he noted a 'fine Grazing Country' (LR, 22 May); that 'Grazers may keep stock here to great advantage' (BM, 18 Dec); and more ambitiously 'the increase of Stock for some 100 Years cannot overrun it' (BM, 21 Dec). Of obviously state-based development, his vision of future townships only runs to 'this part of the Country

50 Macquarie, Journals of his Tours, p 67.
51 Eg Ryan, Cartographic Eye, pp 9-10, 74-76.
52 This appears in Macquarie's covering letter to Bathurst (HRA 1:8, p 609) and may of course be Macquarie's interpretation.
would make a Beautiful Settlement’ (LR, 9 April), although both the Blue Mountains and Lachlan River journals make it clear he was planning and plotting roads. But Evans’ vision of the future completely lacks the more grandiose ideas, current in his day, of burgeoning settlements, imperial progress or the spread of Enlightenment civilisation into the dark corners of the world. Even geographically, he did not – as others did soon after – envisage another Missouri or an inland sea: at most he expected that one river would flow into a slightly larger river (LR, 2 June). 53 Evans presented his work as simply bringing about more of the same sort of expansion and development that had already occurred in New South Wales, as if the colony grew by its own internal momentum and in isolation from the pressures or desires of an expanding empire.

**Intended, and unintended, readers**

Even those sympathetic treatments of Evans’ removal from command of exploration neglect to mention that in other contexts he evidently could write with at least some style and intelligence. Five years after Bathurst’s damning comments, Evans wrote *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen’s Land ...*, published in London by John Souter, and successful enough to warrant a second edition and a French translation (discussed in Chapter 6). Likewise other samples of his writing – such as departmental correspondence – demonstrate a style which, if not deliberately literary, was at least confident and professional. 54 That Evans made no effort to exercise these skills in his exploration journals – either at the time of writing, or by later editing and ‘polishing’ them – may be taken as another facet of his local-mindedness: he did not expect to be read by anyone outside a small circle within the local establishment, so raw information was better than literary affectation.

Evans framed both of his later two journals as (rather long) letters to the governor, with standard salutations ‘To His Excellency Governor Macquarie ...’ and valedictions ‘Your very obedient Servant’ or ‘I remain, &c’. 55 Evans also addressed Macquarie directly within

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55 JB had no such address, one of the reasons its attribution remained in doubt for some time: see MH Ellis, Notes on the journal [C709], SLNSW, Ae 3/17; also his introduction to the transcription in *Campbelltown and Airds Historical Society*, vol 1, 1948, pp 19–20.
each, for instance ‘I feel satisfied within myself and am happy I can meet your Excellency to say I have done my utmost in endeavouring to accomplish your wish’ (BM, 16 Dec). As well as the sites of comparison noted above, he also referred directly to places where he and Macquarie had been together: for instance he noted passing ‘the Ridge, I had the pleasure of conducting your Excellency round’ (LR, 15 May). Although Evans perceived Macquarie as his main reader, he was also aware that others might read his journals, but again locally, and solely for practical purposes. Apart from occasional comments relating to future road-building, he hoped that the Lachlan journal ‘would be clearly understood by any person, who may hereafter follow my Track’ (LR, 12 June). There is no sign that Evans envisaged his readership would be larger, or more critical, than that.

Apart from direct references to the governor, another sign that Evans expected only a local, familiar readership appears in the frank physicality of his journals, by which he intended to demonstrate his diligence and attention to duty. In his Jervis Bay journal, he reported that he had been bitten by a snake and laid up in pain for a few days (28–30 April), that he feared his weight might sink a canoe (6 March), and that he ‘fell upon my hip on a rock, which threw me head foremost into the River [and so] unable to proceed for three hours for a violent pain in my breast’ (17 March). His narratives of the Blue Mountains and Lachlan River trips contain less of such detail, he reported one occasion when, ‘from a sudden slip in climbing the hills, I am quite unwell with a pain in my left side’ (LR, 19 May), and more general fatigue frequently.

That these were all in part attestations of duty is suggested by some later memorials to the government. For instance, in 1824 Evans wrote to Governor Brisbane asking to retire and receive a pension, mentioning in particular these separate ‘fatiguing’ expeditions, all but ignoring his more regular official employment, and concluding that he had ‘been employed in the most active, arduous, fatiguing and distressing duties ... which have had at last the effect of breaking up your Memorialist’s Constitution’.56 Macquarie also acknowledged Evans’ physical contributions in various passages of praise: for example, after the Lachlan River trip Macquarie informed Bathurst that Evans had had to ‘Contend with many Difficulties, Hardships and Privations’, and that he had rewarded him with £100 ‘for his great personal Fatigues, extra Expenses, and important Discoveries’.57

But by narrating his bodily experience so openly, Evans also overstepped the bounds of respectability: as in crawling on hands and knees, quoted earlier, or that ‘Vines and Briers

57 Macquarie to Bathurst, 18 March 1816, HRA 1:9, p 61.
have almost stripped us Naked' (JB, 8 April). His most extreme case of such debasement went beyond simply losing personal dignity, and conjured up the more troubling vision of 'going native': returning across the mountains through an area affected by bushfire, Evans noted that the ash and soot from burnt vegetation 'makes us appear as Natives' (BM, 3 Jan). While walking and working to a state of fatigue might have been praiseworthy in Macquarie's eyes as a demonstration of Evans' 'zeal' and attention to duty, in the eyes of others this open physicality may have counted against him socially.

Importantly, these other readers occupied a social station significantly above that of Evans. Apart from Bathurst, Evans' journals also appear to have been read by others in London with an interest in science, possibly including Joseph Banks to whom the Colonial Office seems to have passed such materials almost as a matter of course.58 Bathurst, in his first response, stated that the discovery of the westward-flowing Macquarie River had 'excited general Surprize', and in telling Macquarie to select someone else to lead, his lordship mentioned also that he had 'declined acceding to the Offers, which have been made by Persons in this Country desirous of conducting it'.59 Later, on the same topic, he offered that 'little difficulty can exist in obtaining scientific persons here, not only willing but anxious to enter upon the great field which has been opened to them'.60 Especially with the escalation from 'desirous' to 'anxious', Bathurst's commentary suggests that a wider and at least partly scientific readership had read Evans' journals, had been disappointed, and was applying increasing pressure to ensure that a suitably educated person led any subsequent exploration.

While intellect ranked highest among Bathurst's generally vague criticisms, he certainly also noticed Evans' physicality. His lordship's final word to Macquarie on the issue arrived in late 1817:

You will not impute to me any intention of disparaging Mr. Evans's Exertions, when I express my doubts as to his possessing the Talents required to explore the Country with Advantage, and when I recommend that some person should be selected for that purpose, who unites to Mr. Evans's Perseverance and courage, some knowledge of those sciences which an Intelligent Traveller ought to possess.61

In Bathurst's estimation, Evans only exhibited attributes of physical stamina – exertion, 'Perseverance' and perhaps encompassing 'courage'. But Bathurst saw only limited value in

58 John Gascoigne, Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution, CUP, Melbourne, 1998, pp 190-98; and see below re seeds collected on Oxley's first expedition.
59 Bathurst to Macquarie, 4 Dec 1815, HRA 1:8, pp 639-40 (emphasis added).
60 Bathurst to Macquarie, 18 April 1816, HRA 1:9, p 115.
61 Bathurst to Macquarie, 30 Jan 1817, HRA 1:9, p 203.
such a limited man as George Evans. Instead his lordship and the anxious scientific persons advising him desired a more cerebral ‘Traveller’, with a set of ‘Talents’, science and intelligence. Colonial practicalities, imaginative complacency and local knowledge had no place in the empire’s information order: it wanted universalism, detachment and hypothesis.

Oxley: A different style of explorer

Having superseded Evans in command of exploration, Oxley conducted his first expedition in 1817. Evans had extended his discoveries in two directions from the site of new settlement of Bathurst: initially north-west along the Macquarie River into fairly rugged terrain, and in 1815 south-west to the Lachlan River. Following Evans’ suggestion of the likely navigability of the latter, Macquarie ordered Oxley to attempt to follow it to its mouth either somewhere along the southern coast of the continent or, as some theorised, into an inland sea. Although he led much larger and far better equipped parties than had Evans, Oxley’s faced almost constant frustration: first the Lachlan proved more difficult to navigate than hoped; then it flooded and made passage by land or water almost impossible. Oxley turned north and eventually came back instead to the Macquarie River, further downstream from where Evans had left off and in much more promising country. Thus in 1818 Oxley led his second expedition along the Macquarie River, but once more met difficulties in a flooded landscape. Frustrated again, he this time turned eastwards, crossed the Great Dividing Range and reached the coast at an inlet he deferentially named Port Macquarie. In 1820 he published his logs from both expeditions as *Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales*. 62

Oxley understandably strove to differentiate himself from Evans in his journals. He emphasised the scientific aspects of his travels, and wrote in a much more identifiably literary style. He also probably intended from the outset to have them published, and he therefore addressed them to a much wider and more public readership than Evans ever envisaged. As with Evans, however, a re-examination of Oxley’s work, in light of the contexts in which he constructed this text, further illustrates the division between supposedly universal, scientific knowledge and local knowledge of the colony. In particular the way Oxley edited his rough field journals highlights his efforts both to accentuate the positive, scientific aspects of his exploration and to downplay and even eliminate the perceived negatives of local association.

62 John Oxley, *Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales*, Undertaken by order of the British Government in the years 1817–18 by John Oxley, Surveyor General of the Territory and Lieutenant of the Royal Navy, London, 1820. (My thanks to Fisher Library, University of Sydney, for providing an electronic version.)
The first of these contexts which should be noted is that Oxley's expeditions resulted in far more than just text. When Macquarie despatched Oxley's journal from his 1817 expedition (meaning the fully edited and transcribed version), he also sent to London a map of the expedition's route, records of temperature measurements, dried specimens of over 500 plant species — among them 150 samples of seeds, including some for the Emperor of Austria, and others for Joseph Banks to pass on to the botanical gardens in Paris — also four paintings of botanical specimens by John Lewin, plus sketches of a "native chief" and some of birds also by Lewin, and one of an Aboriginal grave drawn by Evans. When Bathurst reported back that the whole had been submitted to the Prince Regent, he happily passed on:

His Royal Highness's Entire Approbation of the manner, in which the Expedition was prepared and in which it was conducted, reflecting equal credit upon the local Authorities and upon the Talents and Zeal of Lieutenant Oxley, and of the Officers and others who accompanied him. Despite the richness of the material assemblage from his expeditions, and the evident approval of his superiors — for even Macquarie changed his opinion of Oxley's abilities, as explorer at least — Oxley has tended to be judged solely on the basis of the published journals, and usually in literary terms. In this he has received a somewhat slanted attention, for his frustration with his lack of progress and disappointment with his discoveries coloured both his own writing and that about him. As its title suggests, the only full biography of Oxley — Richard Johnson's The Search for the Inland Sea — concentrates on his struggle with the infamous misconception of inland Australia. It deals predominantly with his two main expeditions, while all but ignoring his earlier life and naval career, and rather glossing over his generalship of the survey department.

While many other accounts of exploration and colonial expansion simply narrate Oxley's journeys, the closest analysis of his journals themselves remains that of Robert Dixon. This looks in particular at Oxley's struggle — and failure — to fit his published narrative into an epic mould drawn from the 'course of empire' thesis and especially the contemporary journals of American explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. From more recent analysis, Simon Ryan mentions and quotes Oxley several times, but selectively, for Oxley does not quite fit Ryan's template of 'self-actuated', heroic leader. He cites examples from Oxley's journals of picturesque scenery and park-like grounds, one formal panoramic description from a hilltop and another as a disembodied, surveilling eye.

63 Macquarie to Bathurst, 13 and 15 Dec 1817, HRA 1:9, pp 726–28; 729–30.
65 See eg his praise following Oxley's first expedition: Macquarie to Bathurst, 13 Dec 1817, HRA 1:9, p 726.
66 The Course of Empire, esp pp 91–102.
Surprisingly, given the relative scarcity of actual encounter, he also quotes five instances of Oxley mentioning Aborigines. But he does not mention, for instance, that Oxley wrote nearly fifteen years before the advent of the Royal Geographic Society, which Ryan considers as formative in standardising the style of exploration reportage. 

Less analytically, Helen Proudfoot has argued for the rehabilitation of Oxley’s place in Australian history and a reassessment of his achievements in light of the conditions in which he worked. She points out that his descriptions of the landscape were not always as negative as Dixon or others have portrayed, and that his achievements were great in spite of his own critical self-assessment. Her call to more closely investigate the technological and logistical problems that Oxley suffered and overcame is answered to some degree by John Whitehead. In his Tracking and Mapping the Explorers, Whitehead includes an extensive introduction focusing on exploration and surveying techniques, equipment, personnel and so on. His main aim, however, is geographic: to trace ‘where Oxley’s expedition routes are located in relation to the developed agricultural areas and the regional cities and towns of NSW’. The result is a meticulous (if rather visually cluttered) alignment of modern topographical maps and photographs with Oxley’s published journal entries, with a particular interest in historical geography.

In opposition to the above, therefore, the second context offering a larger view is that provided by the various earlier versions of Oxley’s journals, for these previous analyses have all relied exclusively on his published text. Oxley recorded his original daily entries in standard surveying field books, but he extensively edited these texts to produce the official versions that Macquarie submitted to London and which the Colonial Office presumably passed on to Oxley’s publishers. Only Whitehead claims to have referred to Oxley’s

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67 Ryan, Cartographic Eye, passim.
70 The original field books are mostly held in SRNSW: for the Lachlan River expedition, FB 130, 131 and 132 record daily entries (28 April to 29 Aug 1817) and Oxley’s subsequent editing marks, the first two also including meteorological records, while FB 133 is the surveying ‘station book’; for the Macquarie expedition, FB 138 and 139 contain daily entries, again edited by Oxley, the first also the met. readings. The SLNSW holds another field book (‘John Oxley notebook and letters ...’, MLMSS 589) containing the edited entries for his initial trip to Bathurst and the first week of the Lachlan trip (10 to 27 April).
71 The SLNSW holds a copy of what appears to be the result of Oxley’s first round of editing (‘John Oxley, Journal, 28 Apr–26 Aug 1817’, C166), and a slightly shorter – presumably re-edited – version in Oxley’s own handwriting microfilmed from Colonial Office records through the Joint Copying Project (‘Great Britain: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library, London, Manuscript journals of Australian explorers 1813–1874’, M1923, no 2). Unlike Evans’ BM and LR journals, the HRA does not reproduce Oxley’s official
original field journals, but he sees little difference between the various versions. He considers
the published version ‘an exact word by word copy of his Field Books, except for the large
number of corrections and omissions that were made at a later date’. His more telling
statement reverses this: that the field journals are ‘In all respects … the same as the text in the
Journals, except where [Oxley] has amended and corrected certain statements’. The
implication is that the only value of the originals lies in their correspondence to and
corroboration of the later published version, which assumes primacy and which is more
accurate and authoritative for the changes to it. Overall, Whitehead sees ‘Very little effort’ in
the editing and publishing of the final Journals, and his interest is, as stated, mostly
geographic: for him the surveying station book holds much greater value. 72

However, Oxley’s editing was far more extensive than Whitehead perhaps realised.
His original field logs are almost half as long again as his published journals, the result of at
least two rounds of heavy editing (plus possibly further emendations by his publisher). 73 This
editing offers a chance to move beyond the suppositions of the hitherto generally literary
analysis of Oxley’s exploration writings, and observe his deliberate efforts to present his
work and himself – that is, his ‘Style’ and ‘Education’ – in a certain way.

Accentuating education and science

Oxley was undoubtedly better educated than Evans, or at least better read – which for the
early nineteenth century meant much the same thing. Although joining the navy at the age of
fourteen, Oxley epitomised the rising and intellectually aspiring middle class. His personal
library, the details of which are known from an auction list drawn up after his death, is often
seen as exemplary of the self-educated colonial gentleman, and indicative of the reach to the
periphery both of Enlightenment thought and of current literary fashions. 74

On top of these superior personal attainments, Oxley also had several material
advantages in writing up his journals. In command of much larger parties with far greater
resources, Oxley did not face the difficulties Evans had in simply securing his papers and

MS journals sent to London, instead referring readers to the published volume (eg for the Lachlan trip, HRA
1:9, n 85), so these earlier versions have never been published.

72 Tracking and Mapping, vol 1, p 30. Whitehead’s different typefaces do not distinguish between the field and
published versions, but a spot check suggests he only used the originals for further navigational details: eg he
has not used several passages in the originals, but removed for the published version, which deal with topics
normally of great interest to him, such as non-mammalian fauna and geology.

73 Based on a full transcription of that part of the Lachlan trip covered by FB130.

74 Johnson, Search for the Inland Sea, p 230; Dixon, Course of Empire, p 92; and on his fiction see Elizabeth
Webby, ‘Reading in colonial Australia: The 2011 John Alexander Ferguson Memorial Lecture’, JRAHS,
keeping them dry. Evans served as capable second-in-command, relieving Oxley of much of the practical concerns of conducting an expedition, while the convict and ex-convict party-members provided various specialities. (On his first expedition these comprised a boat-builder, sailor, horse-shoer, horse-leader, harness-mender, butcher and a chain-man to assist with surveying.) Intellectually, Oxley also had recourse to accompanying specialists from whom to draw desirable information: on his first expedition, Allan Cunningham, lately arrived from the Kew Gardens and grandly titled ‘King’s botanist’, plus the rather humbler ‘colonial botanist’ Charles Frazer and ‘mineralogist’ William Parr; and on his second, Frazer again and Dr John Harris, military surgeon.75 Particularly in his first expedition journal, the influence of the botanists is clear, as it is also in the number of botanical specimens mentioned above.

Oxley’s editing, however, suggests that science and an educated writing style did not necessarily come naturally to him, but was something that he had to work at and deliberately emphasise for the benefit of his metropolitan readers. By far the most frequent and pervasive editorial changes that Oxley made to the original logs simply elevated his diction, and of these the verb ‘to go’ is the most common change. For instance, in entries from just the first few weeks of his Lachlan River trip he replaced go/went/gone with ‘advance’ (12 May); ‘performed’ (18 May); ‘proceeding’ (23 May); ‘explored’ (19 June). Other verb upgrades include ‘I occasionally made excursions’ (3 May); ‘found discovered’ (26 May); and ‘proceeded persevere’ (3 June).76

Another set of cases where Oxley changed or upgraded his diction suggests that he deliberately removed any expression that might have appeared too idiomatic or workmanlike: for example ‘The Horses knocked up failed’ (9 June). In particular, he consistently removed any of his naval or nautical idiom: ‘the Boats arrived safe, having had a very fatiguing Pull row’ (29 April); or ‘by the assistance of the glass telescope’ (6 May). The most striking of this sort of idiom came in Oxley’s use, and correction, of ‘all hands’ for the men of his party: ‘All hands ... every man’ (26 May); ‘All hands on the look-out for Water’ (6 June); ‘All hands Every man went ...’ (22 June). This recalls the editing of James Cook’s Endeavour journal by John Hawkesworth, who damned the captain with faint praise when he commented on his ‘very particular account of all the nautical incidents’. Hawkesworth minimised such

75 ‘List of the names and designations of the several persons ...’, Oxley, Journals, appx pt 1, attachment 1; there is no definitive list of the party in the second expedition, but see Johnson, Search for the Inland Sea, appx 3.
76 Unless stated, all quotes in the following sections refer to Oxley’s original field books of the Lachlan expedition (SRNSW, FB 130–32), by date of entry, with his editing shown as underlining for text added and struck through for text deleted or changed (as in Microsoft Word’s ‘track changes’ tool); underlining in the original has been rendered as italics here.
content according to his literary tastes, but subsequently ran afoul of 'nautical experts' including an already incensed Lord Dalrymple. In his own editing, Oxley tried to pass himself off firstly as a thoroughly terrestrial explorer, rather than a fish out of water, while more generally these emendations seem aimed at sanitising his diction to the standards of polite society – the drawing room rather than the ship's mess.

Oxley most obviously elevated his diction in passages relating to scientific topics, and these seem just as clearly intended to make him appear more learned: for instance 'The Trees on the immediate Banks of the River very large and Branched-ramified' (1 May); 'among the remains reliques' (22 June). In some cases he wrote himself a reminder above or in the margin to insert the right word: 'Several *Natives Companions* find more scientific name were seen' (11 May); and 'a hard sandy Rock qu. this word' (26 May). He also left blank spaces to insert these 'more scientific names' later, especially for the botanical names of various species, presumably to be supplied by Cunningham and Frazer: for instance 'a Creeping Vine ('...')' (30 May); 'a Species of Vine (Cassyta) and ... a Prickly Wire Grass ('...')' (10 June).

Oxley's treatment of geological aspects probably suffered from the relative paucity of Parr's actual knowledge of this admittedly infant science. (Prior to being appointed 'colonial mineralogist' by Macquarie, Parr had been a jeweller, convicted and transported to New South Wales in 1813. He was possibly attached to the expedition because Evans had earlier found what may have been amethysts.) Oxley mentions limestone in several places, and often comments on the rocks of various hilltops, but he deleted or abbreviated many of his more detailed notes regarding minerals: for instance 'about a Mile above where we stopped, Parr found an shining ore, in the bed of the River upon a small Bank. Which it is [obscure], it was found in very small grains' (5 May), and only his original field journal contains the following lengthy comparison between the geology of Mounts Stuart and Amyot:

```
after breakfast M' Cunningham and Parr landed on the South Shore, for the purpose of examining the M' Stuart, where as before mentioned limestone was found yesterday – M' Amyot entirely composed of Fine Granite, and it is something singular that a hill only separated by the River, should be composed of such a very different description of Stone – in the afternoon M' C returned, nothing new was found, and the limestone picked up
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77 On Hawkesworth's editing see JL Abbott, *John Hawkesworth: Eighteenth-Century Man of Letters*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1982, pp 137–86; also WH Pearson, 'Hawkesworth's alterations', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol 7, 1972, pp 45–72. One example of 'all hands' does survive into the published version (Part I, 2 Aug), where Oxley wrote of the men handling a raft. His alterations of whatever variety were not necessarily consistent, but here at least he may have considered 'all hands' a more appropriate, or even slightly ironic, usage.

78 See eg Macquarie to Bathurst, 4 April 1817, *HRA* 1:9, p 356 (a request for such an officer); and re amethysts see ML card catalog, citing J Arnold, 'Journal', 13 July 1815, C720, p 400.
yesterday did not appear to compose any part of Mr Stuart that was similar in its Rock, to Mr Amyot—a few bits pieces of a Red pigment were picked up on the Bank of the River near it. (7 May)

In the margin next to the deletion of the ‘shining ore’, Oxley inserted a note to himself ‘For the Further Min Chapter’, revealing that he at one stage intended to include such a thematic chapter. This may also have been the case for birds, for although detailed with some degree of scientific interest in the originals, they too rarely survived to the published version. Again, only his field journal includes:

the Boatmen shot a Bird of the Cormorant species, White Body Neck which was about 1ft long, upper and under sides of the wings thick downy feathers, Bill above 4 Inches long, hooked, Webfooted, 3 Claws with a thin Claw, broad fan tail, the Back and Wings, a dark Brown, with shades of Blue. Such birds are often seen near Lakes, and even on the Sea Coast. (29 April)

Minimising local connections

One more elaborate case in which Oxley strove to present a more educated image relates that some of his men had killed and eaten a dingo to supplement their reduced rations. His original allusion had simply stated that the dingo meat ‘was declared very good Mutton’, but he enlarged and further explained this to make the literary reference clear:

it was ... pronounced like Lord Peter’s loaf in the Tale of a Tub to be true good natural mutton as any in Leadenhall market and eaten accordingly. For myself I was not yet brought to the conversion of Martin & Jack. (18 June)

Jonathon Swift’s A Tale of a Tub, originally published in 1704, satirises ‘the numerous and gross corruptions in religion and learning’. The episode – in which Lord Peter insists that a few slices of bread are ‘true, good, natural mutton as any in Leadenhall-market’ and then bullies his brothers Martin and Jack into agreeing – parodies the practice of holy communion. Oxley’s intent in referring to the Tale may have simply been literary allusion aimed at accentuating his education, but it may also have been a social comment, intended to differentiate himself from the ‘some of our party’ who were Catholic Irishmen.

Another aspect of his deliberate editing was more certainly aimed at social differentiation, to the point almost of censorship. Oxley either removed completely or generalised mentions of the convict and ex-convict members of the party. Of these, Patrick Byrne suffered the most: ‘at 9 Byrne one of them returned’ (4 May); ‘I sent Byrne a man on Horse back’ (21 May); ‘Burns one of the party’ (15 June). After such editing Byrne retained

79 The episode comes from section 4 of the Tale; the quote re ‘gross corruptions’ is from Swift’s 1709 ‘Apology’ usually bound with it. Coincidentally, section 4 also describes Lord Peter purchasing a large continent—standing for Purgatory—‘lately said to have been discovered in terra australis incognita’.
only three mentions in the published *Journals* (25 July, 2 & 3 Aug), plus one indirectly as the person honoured by the name ‘Byrnes Creek’ (30 April). Other party members with even less of a part in the originals disappeared entirely: ‘Lewis’ (28 & 29 April); ‘Jones and Simpson’ (9 May); ‘Hubbard, Byrne & Simpson’ (29 July). Of the three scientific officers in the party, Cunningham survived the editing process almost unscathed, but Oxley removed Parr entirely, and he does not appear at all in the narrative section of the final *Journals*. The second botanist, Frazer – whom Oxley evidently did not consider in the same league as ‘Mr. C.’ – also received heavy editing, being removed a dozen times from the original of just the first expedition. Frazer eventually retained his place just twice in the published journal of that trip (22 June), while in the second Oxley only referred to him indirectly as ‘our botanist’ (26 Aug & 3 Oct).

Such efforts may appear to be a case of ‘the explorer’ – to use Ryan’s label for his composite literary archetype – passing himself off as the lone hero of his narrative, but two elements in Oxley’s usage suggest otherwise. Firstly, as stated, Oxley did not extend this censorship to Cunningham, nor to Evans whose role occasioned almost constant mention. In fact numerous passages of decision-making in particular suggest the existence of a gentlemanly command troika of Oxley, Evans and Cunningham which Oxley did not wish either to deny or dishonour. Secondly, Oxley freely names Frazer and Parr, with no sense of distain, in his letters to Macquarie summarising the expeditions on their return. The distinction lies in Oxley’s intended readership, with the deletion of convict and ex-convict party-members (including Parr) both a result of Oxley’s ‘exclusive’ leanings within colonial society – preserving his dignity in the eyes of the local elite – and distancing himself from the penal colonies more generally, for the sake of his imperial readers.

In other words, while Evans blithely used colonial terminology and comparisons, to the possible bewilderment of imperial readers, Oxley strove to minimise any such local connection. In direct contrast to Evans’ use of local common names for trees and his naming of sites after colonial officials, Oxley aimed to correct his use of the local common name for ‘Natives Companions’ (11 May) even though he wasn’t sure at the time of editing what it was. (The published version refers to ‘a species of bittern’.) Similarly, in naming ‘Fields Plains’, Oxley originally stated that he had named them ‘after Mr Justice Field’, which would have been enough to explain to a fellow colonist. He later changed this, however, to more

80 These letters were admittedly published locally in the Gazette, and were also reproduced in the *Journals*, but as appendices: *Journals*, pt 1, no 3; pt 2, no 5.
fully explain for the benefit of those unacquainted with the colonial establishment that he referred to ‘the judge of the supreme court of this territory’ (9 May).

Perhaps the most striking facet of Oxley’s universalist approach lies in his construction of just one single version of his journals to suit everyone. Evans admittedly wrote just the one version also, but he wrote directly to Macquarie for the governor’s immediate information, and seems to have accepted that Macquarie would paraphrase his findings for the benefit of the secretary of state and would overlay them with his own account in the local press. That is, Evans expected his ‘raw’ information either to be used immediately by someone who followed or to be filtered and synthesised as it travelled up the chain of command and beyond. As described above, the journals which Oxley eventually delivered to Macquarie were the same that Macquarie delivered to London and the same that the Colonial Office passed on to the publisher. The governor, who would have to make any immediate decisions based on the information which Oxley provided, did not receive a fuller or unmediated account, without embellishments and redactions. Instead, almost in a snub, Macquarie received the same shortened and sanitised version which Oxley considered appropriate for a metropolitan drawing room, and one which he deliberately aimed not at a local readership but at anxious scientific persons in Britain.

Despite the prominence of exploration in Australian history – both as the epitome of pioneer achievement in its nationalistic rendition, and as the quintessential expression of cultural colonisation in the post-colonial reaction – it was in fact a fairly extraordinary occurrence in the colonies, and certainly for members of the colonial survey departments. Oxley made one more major contribution to colonial geography with his survey of Morton Bay, but he did so by ship and never published an account. Instead other men from outside the survey department conducted the next few expeditions on the mainland in the 1820s and early 1830s, notably Charles Sturt and, having learnt the ropes under Oxley, Allan Cunningham. Not until 1831 did another surveyor undertake exploration identifiable as such, when Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell convinced a compliant acting governor to allow him to mount an expedition, and he did not publish his journal of this until 1839. As pressure increased on the survey departments to prove their efficiency and capability, critical (and thrifty) authorities

generally resisted requests to conduct this more prestigious but also more expensive action. Mitchell’s counterpart in Van Diemen’s Land, George Frankland, spent years lobbying his reluctant lieutenant governor to allow him to lead an expedition into the central highlands of that island, the results of which never made it to print at all. Surveyors in the field frequently explored around the edges of and in the gaps between the settled districts of both colonies, and in New South Wales officers criss-crossed much previously ‘unknown’ territory while employed on topographic surveys, but this simply formed part of their regular duties.

Colonial surveyors’ ordinary and far more voluminous work predominantly involved measuring and marking out individual properties, perhaps laying down a road or dividing up town allotments, and resolving the frequent property disputes between settlers that resulted. The pathways along which the information from these processes passed highlights the second extraordinary aspect of the Evans–Oxley episode, for this much more extensive yet specialised information stayed almost wholly within the colonies, and mostly within the files of the departments themselves. The trans-imperial pathways along which Evans’ and Oxley’s texts travelled – from the field to local authorities and on to London – reveals what might be called the ‘hard-wired’ connections of the apparatus of imperial government, and indeed the remarkable connectivity of that network literally circling the globe. Yet London very seldom received such unmediated information. Far more commonly, this same network in fact acted to filter the information which passed along it, for while Bathurst’s dismissal of Evans’ local knowledge may have resulted in a more scientifically minded Oxley taking over, it also showed the limited value of such knowledge beyond its local context.
3 The inscription of ownership

In 1833, Lieutenant Governor Arthur enquired of George Frankland, Surveyor General of Van Diemen's Land:

whether a large Map of the Island is hung up in the Survey Office, whereon are distinctly laid down such lands as are already granted, and those which are still open to Settlers; and if all persons who are desirous of inspecting it, are allowed every facility in doing so, by its being exposed in a public situation in the office; and also how long it has been the practice.¹

His request is revealing firstly in that Arthur seems to have never set foot in the surveyor general's office, nor had he any intention of travelling the short distance from Government House to see for himself. More implicit in his excellency's query is the suggestion that maybe Frankland's office didn't have said map, and that settlers wanting to know the important information had complained.

After five years in office, Frankland was used to such demands from his superior. With his characteristic blend of exasperated patience, he assured the governor that his office did display such a map, that according to the most senior of his officers there had been such a map for at least the last twelve years, and (with perhaps more exasperation than patience) that 'every one desirous of inspecting it has merely to walk in from the street without knocking at the door'. He went on to state that his office also displayed more detailed maps of each of the separate districts of the colony, all constantly up-dated, and should prospective settlers wish to visit any of these regions in person, that he furnished them with letters of introduction to his district surveyors who would provide 'every possible information as to the lands in their vicinity'. After several more pages outlining the demands that his office faced, and the diligent and rational ways that he coped with them, Frankland concluded with a list of the various other information sources that his office held. These included fifteen registers recording the details of land granted, sold or leased, thirteen bound letterbooks containing copies of all correspondence with the lieutenant governor's office, with officials of various

¹ Lane (colonial secretary) to Frankland, 8 July 1833, AOT, LSD 12, Unregistered corro, np.
other colonial departments and with private settlers, several more bound volumes of applications, warrants and administrative lists, plus various indexes to all of these: 39 volumes in all.2

This exhaustive array clearly attests to the extent of the bureaucratic urge within the colonial and indeed imperial governments. It also attests to the complexity of the processes of administering land alienation and occupation that had developed in the colonies by the early 1830s, and the record-keeping they consequently involved. But Arthur’s reference to ‘such lands as are already granted, and those which are still open’ reveals the predominant and most basic concern. Anxious ‘scientific persons’ in England may have desired information on plants, animals and Aboriginal pastimes, but the bulk of the work of the colonial survey departments – the demand for which dictated their manpower, took up almost all of their professional employment, and produced most of the complaints about their work – involved the determination of just one seemingly simple item of geographical information: who owned what where.

Settlement: Occupation, possession and ownership

Individual ownership of land features less than one might expect in the history of settlement in Australia, or even in Australian history more generally. It tends instead to be subsumed into, or submerged completely by, much vaguer relationships between land and people: by possession, or occupation, and especially by the catch-all term of ‘settlement’ itself. The traditional and usually nationalist narrative of Australian settlement emphasises the geographic spread of (implicitly non-Indigenous) occupation across the continent. Within this longer narrative, accounts of settlement in this early colonial period generally focus on the policy tug-of-war variably favouring small-scale farmers or large-scale pastoralists, often illustrated by listing the total acres of land granted by respective governors, or the divide between large and small grants within these, as indications of those governors’ political leanings.3 Such accounts cover the who, what and (in most cases rather more nebulously) the where,4 but the ‘how’ of land ownership either falls from view or is assumed to be relatively unproblematic.

2 Frankland to Lane, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, pp 478–99.
4 For some more detailed accounts of early ownership spread/dynamics, see Alan Atkinson, ‘Taking possession: Sydney’s first householders’, and Lynne McLoughlin, ‘Landed peasantry or landed gentry:
The bureaucratic urge: Frankland's list of office records, 1833

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Register of New Grant Deeds issued by Lieutenant Governor Arthur</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Register of Papers in the office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Register of allotments in Hobarton, as existing in the year 1826</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Register of Town Allotments located since 1828 – containing descriptions and Diagrams of the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Register of Lands purchased – with particulars of the Sale &amp; Measurements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Register of Counties, Hundreds, and Parishes – as recommended by the Land Commissioners and by the Surveyor General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Register of Crown Land leased</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Register of Town allotments ordered throughout the Colony with particulars</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Letter Books (Miscellaneous)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Memoranda of Papers Transmitted to the Government Officers, and to the assistants in the field</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Memoranda of authorities issued by Surveyor General to Individuals for cutting Timber on Crown Land, burning lime &amp;c &amp;c</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Memoranda of Papers transmitted to the Government Officers, and to the Assistants in the field</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Register of Town allotments ordered throughout the Colony with particulars</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Books of Reports of the Land Board – shewing the particulars of every Individuals claim for Land preferred since 1828, and investigated by the Land Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>List of Warrants of authority for Locating Lands during the administration of Governor Macquarie, Lieut Gover Sorell &amp; Lieut Govr Arthur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Frankland to Lane, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, pp 497–99.]

The post-colonial, anti-nationalist history from the 1980s challenged some of this narrative, in particular (and with growing intensity) by recasting ‘settlement’ as ‘invasion’. Within this revision, however, individual ownership of land generally continued to be subsumed within national-scale issues, especially the notion of terra nullius that had implicitly underpinned Britain’s original claim of sovereignty to most of the continent, but which the High Court formally debunked in its Mabo and Wik native title judgements in the 1990s.\(^5\) In a telling moment during the backlash to those rulings, then prime minister John Howard produced on national television a map showing the extent of Australian land supposedly ‘at risk’ of Aboriginal native title claims, in particular areas occupied under pastoral leasehold. With a large brown blob covering about 75 per cent of especially the interior and west of the continent, it might well have been a map of ‘settlement’ circa 1840, only with the traditional colour scheme reversed. The map’s unwitting admission, however, was that for a nation in which home ownership is an axiomatic ideal, Australians were still only renting most of their island home.\(^6\)

Closer to the issue and the scale of local and individual ownership, some writers from the 1990s pointed out that ‘the white settlers brought ashore an idea fundamentally foreign to indigenous experience: the concept of land as a divisible and alienable commodity, to be owned by an individual rather than a community’.\(^7\) Yet such statements were often little more than lip service to this cultural gulf, or attempts to link settlement and ultimately empire with an impersonal and insensitive Modernity. The cultural disparity explained in the first few lines, these accounts then followed the general narrative of ‘carving up the country’, of settlement-as-invasion, without necessarily exploring exactly what land ownership meant in the colonies or how it functioned and evolved. For instance, few noticed that authorities in especially the earlier colonies did create various classes of common land.\(^8\) Meanwhile the more analytical — and most prominent — of the post-colonial treatments of settlement, especially those of Paul Carter and David Day, focused instead on cultural modes of

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appropriation and possession. These again either skirted the issue of ownership or showed how colonising culture strove to paper over its absence or illegitimacy.\textsuperscript{9}

The ‘how’ of colonial land ownership has received its most consistent and direct attention within the narrower discipline of Australian legal history. In law the distinction between mere possession and formal ownership of land has always been clear: ‘possession is a fact, independent of other facts and of legal rules. Ownership, on the other hand, is the creation of law.’\textsuperscript{10} With its intrinsic reliance on history as precedent, even modern textbooks on Australian land and property law examine colonial land disputes and their resolutions, effectively covering many of the aspects of ownership which narratives focusing on possession, occupation and settlement tend to pass over. As the case history from this early colonial period clearly shows, ownership of land was rarely black and white, and the distinction between ‘such lands as are already granted and those which are still open’ was never quite so simple.\textsuperscript{11}

While frequently drawn into the noticeably prevalent land cases before the colonial courts, surveyors general and surveyors in the field quietly adjudicated and negotiated just as many if not more disputes over land ownership and the geographic definition of particular blocks. As the records which Frankland listed clearly show, the colonial survey departments devoted a great deal of time and work – and paper – to recording not just the lands granted and still available, but the all too many grey areas in between. They consequently inscribed ownership (and its variations) on much more than a single simple map, but at a myriad of sites ranging from all those registers and letterbooks at headquarters to the landscape of the colony itself, and ultimately within local community consciousness and memory.

**Title deeds**

The most authoritative means of recording ownership in the early Australian colonies was the grant or title deed, the official document by which the Crown granted ownership (‘tenure’ in the strict legal sense) of an area of land to an individual settler. Although the exact wording and style changed slightly over the fifty-odd years under investigation here, all title deeds


followed a fairly standard formula which set out who made the grant and his authority for doing so, who received the grant, the extent (that is acreage) and geographic description of the land, and the conditions attached. The example of an 1823 title deed for a grant to a relatively humble settler in Van Diemen's Land serves to demonstrate these main parts. The first is to identify the grantor:

By His Excellency, Sir Thomas Brisbane, Knight Commander of the Most Honorable Military Order of the Bath, Captain General and Governor in Chief in and over His Majesty's Territory of New South Wales and its Dependencies.

Not all governors were honourable knight commanders, but the rest is Brisbane's official vice-regal title. In 1823 the governor in New South Wales still controlled land allocation in Van Diemen's Land; the southern lieutenant governor took over and began signing grant deeds after that island became a separate colony in 1826. The next section spells out Brisbane's authority for granting land:

WHEREAS by His Majesty's Commission, bearing Date the Third Day of February, in the Second Year of His Reign, His Majesty did give and grant unto me full Power and Authority to agree for such Lands, Tenements, and Hereditaments, as should be in His Majesty's Power to dispose of; and them to grant to any Person or Persons upon such Terms, and under such moderate Quit-Rents, Services, and Acknowledgments, to be thereupon reserved to His Majesty, according to such Instructions as should be given to me, under His Sign Manual, which said Grants were to pass, and be Sealed by His Majesty's Seal of His said Territory and its Dependencies; and being entered upon Record by such Officer or Officers as I should appoint thereunto, should be good and effectual in Law against His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors.

In other words, granting land was part of Brisbane's job. The grandiloquent details of authorisation did not end there, at least not for ex-convicts who were also treated to a none-too-subtle reminder of their increasingly limited part in the burgeoning colonies:

AND WHEREAS by His Majesty's Instructions to me under His Sign manual, bearing Date the Fifth Day of February, in the Year of Our Lord One thousand eight hundred and twenty-one, and in the Second Year of His Reign, I am restricted from granting more than Thirty Acres of Land to each Emancipated Convict, Twenty Acres more in Case he shall be married, and Ten Acres for every Child who may be with him at the Settlement at the Time of making such Grant, without the Approbation of His Majesty.

The crux of the document, which follows, records the actual transfer:

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, that I, the said Sir Thomas Brisbane, in Pursuance of the Power and Authority so given and granted unto me as aforesaid, have Given and Granted, and by these Presents do Give and Grant ...

Whereas beginning sentences with 'whereas' and repeatedly using 'said' and 'aforesaid' both suggest identifiably written and legalistic communication, other elements in this paragraph –

12 AOT, LSD 354/6, Copies of land grants issued 1804–1823, p 8. By this time the NSW government used a standard printed form; italics in this quoted example represent the sections filled in by hand.
13 Copies of contemporary deeds of grant to free settlers (LSD 354/7) do not include this paragraph.
the imperative flourish ‘Know all men’, the first person ‘I’ and addition of the present tense ‘have Given and Granted and ... do Give and Grant’ – all instead hint at a spoken address, as if the document recorded and/or formed part of a public ritual or ceremony. This was not in fact the case, the only ritual involved in a grant deed being limited to the bureaucratic actions of signing, sealing and witnessing. But as discussed further below, the grant deed itself only came at the end of a much longer process of land alienation, some stages of which did include ritualistic elements.

To continue, however, the deed finally names its worthy recipient:

... unto John Pearce his Heirs and Assigns ...

This printed document notably allows for the possibility of ‘her’ heirs and assigns. Although women in the early Australian colonies enjoyed much greater legal and property rights than they did in Britain, grant recipients were predominantly male.14

... all those Eighty Acres of Land situate, lying, and being in the County of ........... and District of Melville, Van Diemen’s Land: bounded on the North East by a line bearing North forty degrees West forty Chains commencing at a mark on the edge of the Derwent River; on the North West by a line bearing West forty degrees South to a Run called the Dromedary Creek; on the South West side by the Dromedary Creek to the Derwent River; and on the South East side by that River ...

Governor King had divided the island of Van Diemen’s Land into the counties of Cornwall and Buckinghamshire either side of the 42nd parallel in 1804, but by the time of this grant the scatter of settlement, especially in the south around Hobart, had given rise to more specific and localised ‘district’ designations. Commissioner Bigge’s investigations and reports in the early 1820s had recommended new and more practical subdivisions, but the surveying work needed to accurately describe them took nearly ten years to complete, thus the striking through of the county designation here.15 The description of Pearce’s property, or rather the boundaries of it, is at last the specific geographic knowledge inscribed in this document, and the history and implications of this method of describing land are also discussed in greater detail below.

Before taking his wife and three children off to Dromedary Creek, however, John Pearce needed to be reminded of the numerous conditions attached to his grant:

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15 The regional subdivision of both colonies is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.
... saving and reserving to His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, such Timber as may be growing, or to grow hereafter, upon the said Land, which may be deemed fit for Naval Purposes;

This was one condition that stayed on the books for the whole period, and dates from the time it was realised that the Royal Navy was denuding the British Isles of timber.\(^\text{16}\)

... also such parts of the said Land as are now, or shall hereafter, be required, by the proper Officer of His Majesty’s Government, for a Highway or Highways.

Again, this reservation was a fairly standard condition, although occasional problems arose with earlier hand-written deeds which stipulated simply ‘a road’ instead of the more flexible ‘Highways or Highways’ here. In 1829 a Vandemonian settler complained that the conditional reservation of ‘a road’ on his grant deed meant only one.\(^\text{17}\)

To have and to hold the said Land hereby granted to the said John Pearce his Heirs and Assigns, for ever; free from all Taxes, Quit-Rents, Services, and Acknowledgments whatsoever, for the Period of Five Years from the Date of these Presents; but from and after the Expiration of the said Term or Time, yielding and paying therefore to His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, the Quit-Rent or Sum of One Shilling of lawful Sterling Money, yearly, and every Year, forever.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the collection of quit rents had been somewhat lax in the earlier years, with the collector’s position declining almost to the status of a sinecure, usually bestowed upon one of the underpaid deputy surveyors. However, increasing scrutiny and economy from the Colonial Office from the mid-1820s had local authorities administering these provisions more strictly, raising a great deal of protest and opposition – and simple tax evasion – from supposedly hard-done-by settlers.\(^\text{18}\)

Provided always, and it is hereby expressly stipulated, that so much of the aforesaid Eighty Acres of Land hereby granted, as exceeds the Quantity I am enabled to Grant to the said John Pearce under the before-recited Instructions, is to be considered as granted subject to the Approbation of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors: And Provided always, and it is hereby expressly stipulated, that the said John Pearce and his Heirs, shall in no Wise, either directly or indirectly, sell, alien, assign, transfer, or set over the said Land hereby granted, or any Part or Parcel thereof, within the said Term of Five Years:

The first condition above is another reminder that not all freed men were freed equally, but that some may have merited more land than his majesty had envisaged, on which occasion Brisbane needed to cover his bases in qualifying more generous grants – all of which in turn testifies to the ever-present claim of local expediency over imperial policy. The second condition, requiring John Pearce to hold his land for at least five years, was meant to

\(^{16}\) On this and future efforts to preserve timber (or not), see Tim Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2000, pp 5–8, and chs 6–7.

\(^{17}\) Stephen (crown solicitor) to Frankland, 20 April 1829, AOT, LSD 1/79, General corro, p 277.

encourage longer-term settlement, ‘improvement’ and industry. However, with official efforts to register land sales haphazard at best, this condition remained both poorly policed and widely ignored.

And provided always, that the said John Pearce and his Heirs, shall clear and cultivate, or cause to be cleared and cultivated, within the said Term of Five Years, the Quantity of Eighteen Acres of the said Land hereby granted ...

This last condition, originally the product of the concerns of the early settlements in staving off famine, was meant to encourage agriculture. It too went largely ignored, although by the 1830s in Van Diemen’s Land it had devolved into a technical loophole by which Arthur could threaten or punish the troublesome and unworthy, or could more easily reclaim land needed for public purposes under the general resumption clause, below, should the settler breach any of these conditions:

Otherwise the Whole of the said land hereby granted shall become forfeit and escheat to His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and these Presents shall be held and deemed null and void.

Lastly, the deed bears the governor’s signature, and John Pearce’s original would have borne the impression of the colonial seal in wax:

In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my Hand, and the Seal of the Territory, at Sydney in New South Wales, this Thirtieth Day of June in the Year of Our Lord One thousand and twenty three.

(signed) Tho. Brisbane

There follow also the signatures of the official witnesses:

Signed and Sealed in our Presence,

(signed) Rob Crawford
W Elyard Jun.

Finally, at least in the bound register of copies which includes this example, bureaucracy shows its hand by rather self-referentially recording that it had recorded the government’s version:

Entered upon Record, by me, this 30th Day of June 1823 } S Goulburn, Secretary & Registrar

This was not entirely a bureaucratic indulgence. As the before-recited instructions make clear, ‘being entered upon Record by such Officer or Officers’ was, along with the signing and sealing, part of the official endorsement of the grant. As no less an authority than Chief Justice Francis Forbes remarked from the bench of the Supreme Court in 1825, ‘No grant
could be valid that wanted any of the solemnities thus enjoined'. In effect this ensured that the inscription of ownership – or rather the inscription of the Crown’s quasi-contractual transfer of tenure of a block of land to the settler – remained two-fold: the grantee held the deed, which was his (or her) proof of ownership; while the government kept the officially registered copy, as its way of verifying the details.

From within this mass of legal jargon, authorities, regulations and conditions, the colonial surveyors were really only concerned with the geographic details of each grant: its extent in acres, its general location within the colony, and most particularly with its precise limits as set out in the description of its boundary circuit. When it comes to the inscription of ownership, two aspects of the colonial surveyors’ use of circuit descriptions warrant closer attention: the deeper historical roots of that method, including its possible alternatives; and the nuances within these descriptions, which appear throughout the fifty or so years under investigation here, and what they reveal about the finer details of the surveyors’ operations.

A circuitous history of circuit descriptions

The circuit description of land has a heritage that goes back to pre-conquest Anglo-Saxon usage in Britain, and ultimately to Roman models. Roman land surveyors used two methods for setting out the boundaries of parcels of land: ‘centuriation’, based on a constructed chessboard-like grid, and circuit description. They carried out centuriation on extensive plains such as the Po River valley, and it involved laying out a grid of parallel and perpendicular lines oriented to the principal compass points. The central axes of the grid were called the decumanus maximus and kardo maximus, and individual blocks could be located according to their co-ordinates within the grid, for instance 98 plots to the right of the decumanus and 75 beyond the kardo (or DD XCVIII VC LXXV).

A similar form of grid surveying was later widely used in the United States. The pre-Independence British colonies in America originally allocated lands ‘unsystematically’, in much the same way as in the early Australian colonies, but nearly all Federal lands (the republican equivalent of Crown lands) surveyed and alienated after 1785 – about two-thirds of the modern nation – were laid out in the ‘systematic’ or ‘rectilinear’ manner. The system identified blocks of land within a constructed 100-block grid by a number assigned


The inscription of ownership

consecutively as if along the lines of a page, that is from 1 to 10 left to right (west to east) along the top (northern) side, then 11 to 20 starting back on the left, and so on.\textsuperscript{21} Some government surveyors in New Zealand from the 1840s laid out a similar grid system.\textsuperscript{22}

Authorities in the early Australian colonies had some knowledge of the American system. Governor Lachlan Macquarie ordered surveyors to start using a version of the rectilinear system at the very end of his term in office, and his successor, Brisbane, issued similar directions in early 1822:

all Lands hereafter to be Surveyed are to be divided by long parallel lines running True North and South, east and West, into Townships of Six Miles Square, which are again to be Subdivided into Sections of one Square Mile to be numbered regularly from 1 to 36 Beginning at the N.W. angle of each Township.\textsuperscript{23}

Surveyors in New South Wales employed this system in a few places, such as the Hunter Valley where in the early 1820s Assistant Surveyor Henry Dangar set out 'townships' and standard areas of one square mile (640 acres) within a north-south/east-west grid, initially identifying blocks by the above system of numbering. But since most grants in this area exceeded 640 acres, the eventual properties seldom aligned perfectly with the constructed squares. Dangar records that a Mr Pennington, for instance, settled upon 1500 acres covering 'sections 31, 23 & 3/4 of 19 in township 26'.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, the township and section numbering system – which might be seen to echo the American method, or even to anticipate the parish and portion numbering of the later Torrens title system in Australia – played no part in the formal property descriptions. The title deeds to these lands still recited their circuit descriptions, that is the bearings and distances of each side of each property.\textsuperscript{25}

The survey department in Van Diemen’s Land resisted the rectilinear method of land division completely. When asked to comment on the new policy, Deputy Surveyor Evans advised Oxley that ‘it cannot be carried conveniently into effect in this Island on many accounts, but very particularly in consequence of the general want of Water experienced in

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\textsuperscript{22} See Giselle Byrne, \textit{Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand}, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2001, esp ch 2 and figs 11–12.

\textsuperscript{23} Oxley to Evans, 6 April 1822 (paraphrasing Brisbane’s orders of 16 March), SRNSW, SG, Oxley’s letterbook, 9/2642, pp 142–43; and E’s response, Evans to Sorell, 4 April 1822, pp 149–50 (in which he compares the landscape of VDL to America – although he had never been there). The attribution of the initial order to Macquarie rests on Oxley’s later account: Oxley to Darling, 26 Jan 1826, \textit{HRA} I:12, pp 379–89 (esp p 380).

\textsuperscript{24} Dangar to Oxley, 2 Oct 1823, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors: Dangar, 2/1526, pp 70–72.

\textsuperscript{25} See Dangar’s correspondence from the Hunter, cited above, passim; and his 1828 map of the Hunter district \textbf{[Plate 13]}. 
The inscription of ownership

the Interior during the Summer Months'. The unstated implication of the need for each
property to have a water frontage was the dominance of pastoral over agricultural land use:
livestock need fresh water, crops do not. Other reasons among the 'many accounts' which
made grid surveying impossible included the general hilliness of even the settled parts of Van
Diemen's Land. Following the rivers also allowed settlers to more easily pick out the better
areas of land, especially floodplains already naturally clear of trees.

Whatever the process of initial survey, the narrative style of colonial property
description derived from the second main form of Roman land subdivision, originally used to
describe 'waste' or 'unsurveyed' land in undulating or frontier regions of that earlier empire.
This method defined and area of land by reciting a series of natural or man-made landmarks
(including purpose-built boundary stones) from point to point around its perimeter. As noted
in the Latin surveying manual *De Agrorum Qualitate* by Frontinus, such land was described
as being 'bounded ... by rivers, ditches, mountains, roads, trees ... watersheds, or ground
occupied by another landholder'. The nature of unsurveyed 'waste' land precluded the
straight sightlines and fixed angles of centuriation, and in any case the mostly natural and
readily identifiable boundary markers were far more practical in such terrain. It is probable
that this style of circuit description was also the elder of the two forms, and evoked (perhaps
involved) religious processional practices similar to the ritual ploughing of a furrow around
the bounds of a proposed town.

With the fall of the Roman empire and subsequent decline both of the professional
discipline of surveying and of the technological ability to produce reliable instruments, only
the looser form of land description continued in use. Circuit descriptions appear in Britain in
the seventh century, probably as a Christian clerical legalisation of pre-existing cult and
cultural practices, as evidenced in Anglo-Saxon charters conferring or confirming the
ownership or access to certain lands. The form of such documents varied considerably
between regions and over the next few centuries, but generally followed a pattern similar to
later colonial grants: identifying the grantor and declaring his authority, naming the grantee,
describing the land, and listing the conditions attached. When such charters defined the land
in question in any greater detail than simply by location or name, they did so by narrating a
boundary circuit punctuated by various natural and man-made features. An example from the

26 Evans to Oxley, 10 April 1822, SRNSW, SG, Oxley's letterbook, 9/2642, pp 152–53 (and copy AOT,
LSD 1/11, General coro, p 49); also Evans to Sorell, 4 April 1822, Oxley's letterbook, pp 149–50.
27 Quoted in Dilke, *Roman Land Surveyors*, p 96.
late ninth century describes the boundaries of an estate in Wiltshire that King Alfred gave to that shire’s *ealdorman*, Æthelhelm:

First, along the Avon bank to stint’s ford; then to rush-slade; then to Tiolta’s ford; then to Wilsford; then so along the road to sand hill; then to Bottle; then along the wood; then across the wood to the gore; and so back to the Avon.  

Geometric straight lines and measured angles did not enter British land descriptions until about the sixteenth century. Under earlier feudal land-use systems, the exact spatial measurement of land area was not so important, particularly for the various degrees of communally and co-operatively used land. Given the lack of either accurate or standardised measuring instruments, land tended instead to be quantified by units of work, in turn determined by land quality and use. An acre was traditionally the amount of land that one man (and an ox) could plough in one day, and would vary depending on soil conditions. Even when area was calculated mathematically based on a field’s measured dimensions, land quality and use still came into the equation: one ‘rod’ might be considered 12 feet for arable land, but 18 feet for pasture or meadow, and up to 22 feet for rocky or wooded land, with a measured acre (160 square rods) again varying accordingly.

Such ‘customary’ units of measurement survived in Britain into the nineteenth century, but merely as relics, for the end of the medieval period brought three important and related developments. Firstly, land management of the often sprawling medieval estates increasingly became more systematically and centrally planned. The professional descriptor ‘surveyor’ – the word originally derived from the Norman French for ‘overseer’, and in relation to land meaning an estate steward – began to take on its modern meaning as a spatial measurer and recorder of land, reflecting those former stewards’ newer roles. Secondly, catering to this newly arisen and specialised profession, surveying manuals began to appear in English – albeit heavily cribbed from Latin precursors – the first being Master Fitzherbert’s of 1523. These reveal the increasingly geometrical approach to surveying, and right through to the nineteenth century such manuals predominantly covered mathematics, from the basic arithmetical functions through to the geometry of plain figures, with just the last few chapters explaining their practical applications to measuring land. Lastly, the

instruments needed for accurate and standardised land surveying also became available, although cost and manufacture meant that simple cross-staves (used for measuring angles and especially for constructing right-angles), and standardised rods and chains remained the most popular. Edmund Gunter invented the standard 22-yard chain that bears his name in 1620.32

Thus equipped, from about the sixteenth century estate managers and the emerging breed of professional surveyors began reorganising the agricultural lands of Britain in the loosely defined enclosure movement.33 Such men were concerned firstly with establishing the areas of existing parcels of land, in some cases so that displaced tenants and other land-users might be compensated, and then setting out subsequent fields. For them, irregular shapes posed more complex geometrical and arithmetical problems, so straight lines became all but mandatory and right-angles preferred. Circuit descriptions therefore no longer narrated a path which followed jagged or curving natural features such as streams or the edge of woodlands, but instead one that ideally ran around the four sides of a constructed quadrilateral before returning to the point of origin. This circuit around the field also became enshrined in surveying practice as a way of double-checking the angles measured — since the sum of the internal angles of a quadrilateral always equals 360 degrees — and is known in more modern surveying parlance as a 'closed traverse'.

To close the circuit of this historical traverse, its significance is two-fold. For a start, Australian colonial surveyors had an alternative method for describing areas of land, in contemporary use in the United States, but for various reasons they employed the circuit description instead. In using this form of land description, these surveyors not only preserved a much older — and, it should be noted, a pre-cartographic — heritage, but one that also carried narrative echoes of both the surveyor’s actual work in sighting and measuring the sides of the block, and the quasi-ritual often associated with that work.

32 Richeson, English Land Measuring, pp 31–35 and chs 4–5 (Gunter pp 109–110). One chain measures just over 20 metres or, more famously, the length of a cricket pitch.

Colonial circuit descriptions

However rich their heritage, the circuit descriptions in colonial grant deeds – with their generally formulaic structure and strings of measurements – could not contrast more starkly with the sorts of landscape descriptions produced by surveyors in exploration journals, even those of such comparatively limited writers as Evans and Oxley discussed in the previous chapter. Understandably, grant deeds and their property descriptions have received very little attention beyond their collective totals of acres granted and occasional biographical or legal interest in specific cases. Yet the bulk of the colonial surveyors’ work involved making those measurements, recording those details and distilling the resulting mass of data down to these terse litanies: these, rather than panoramic vistas and Arcadian elegies, are the surveyors’ colonial texts par excellence. By their very nature, the scope for analysis is admittedly not very wide, but several features within the range of colonial circuit descriptions reveal aspects of the surveyors’ work methods and, subsequently, of the official inscription of ownership in the colonies. The two most obvious of these are the fluctuating levels of technical detail, and the still frequent inclusion of less geometrically defined boundaries such as rivers and especially neighbours’ side-lines.

The famous first grant of land in New South Wales, issued by Governor Phillip to James Ruse on 22 February 1792, described his ‘Experiment Farm’ as the 30 acres ‘laying on the South side of the Barrack Ponds at Parramatta’. Other descriptions from these earliest grants to ex-convicts were equally basic, if not more so: Edward Pugh’s small block lay rather less distinctly ‘at the foot of Prospect Hill’.\(^34\) This initial lack of full circuit descriptions, with more precise details of the lengths and bearings of boundary lines given in John Pearce’s grant some 30 years later, possibly reflects the limited abilities and failing health of Surveyor General Augustus Alt, the only surveyor working on the mainland at that time. Descriptions of grants on Norfolk Island, where in 1792 Charles Grimes served as Alt’s deputy, contain slightly greater detail: Robert Watson’s 60 acres, for instance, lay ‘on the North side of the Cascade Run at Norfolk Island being Fifty Rods in front’.\(^35\)

Additionally, and in partial defence of Alt’s abilities, both of these early surveyors were constrained by the availability and quality of proper surveying instruments, the rather spasmodic introduction and use of which can be gauged by the changing level of detail

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\(^{34}\) Land and Property Management Authority (formerly Lands Titles Office), Grants of Land Register, vol 1-1, pp 1(1) Ruse; 35(1) Pugh. [This current copy contains confusing pagination in the form x(y).]

\(^{35}\) LPMA, Grants of Land Register, vol 1-1, p 3(1). As covered in Chapter 1, Alt had already applied to retire due to ill-health and poor eyesight by this time: Alt to Phillip, 14 Nov 1791, HRA, 1:1, p 302.
present in grant descriptions. Several grants made by Governor Philip King (1800–1806) contain distances measured in chains and ‘links’ – hundredths of a chain – and compass bearings in increments of 5 degrees. These, however, were restricted to Norfolk Island, and therefore probably the work of Thomas MacQueen, the island’s acting deputy surveyor at that time. Not until the large batch of grants authorised by Governor Macquarie on 1 January 1810 do grant descriptions regularly contain more precise measurements. The first of these, a grant of 1240 acres to Andrew Thompson, begins:

laying and situate in the District of Minto bounded on the North West side by Edwards and Ward’s Farm bearing North sixty degrees East forty-one chains, and East thirty-six and an half degree North sixty-one chains twenty links, commencing one chain South West of Ward’s South East corner ...

Although signed and sealed by Macquarie, these grants had been allocated by the rebel officers of the New South Wales Corps after their removal of Governor Bligh in 1808, and they were measured by James Meehan and George Evans, then acting as surveyor general and deputy respectively. As the level of detail in these grants suggest, Meehan and Evans had access to better technology – although only temporarily. When deposing Bligh, the rebels also seized from him several instruments that the surveyors had declared were ‘essential to the discharge of their public duties’. These included a circumferencer (the most sophisticated surveying instrument of the day, and capable of measuring bearings down to ‘an half degree’), one standard 22-yard chain, a theodolite and two compasses of different sizes. Meehan and Evans had to return these instruments when Bligh left for Britain in early 1810, however, and for a few years they do not appear to have had the capacity for more accurate measurements. The succeeding volume of grants in the register again contains descriptions with bearings down to 5 degree intervals, and throughout the 1810s both Meehan and Evans – and later incoming Surveyor General John Oxley – made several requests to London for surveying instruments. By the 1820s the colonial surveyors had much better equipment, with chains common and circumferencers almost standard issue. Henry Dangar even had two

37 See LPMA, Grants of Land Register, vol 3C-3, pp 58ff; and see MacQueen’s note re his work on the island, Sept 1805, interleaved betw pp 97(1)–97(2).
38 LPMA, Grants of Land Register, vol 1-5, p 1.
40 LPMA, Grants of Land Register, vol 2-6; re instruments see eg Macquarie to Liverpool, 17 Nov 1812 (enclosing Oxley’s request), *HRA* 1:7, pp 682–84; Evans to Macquarie, ‘A Demand for Instruments etc’, 1 Feb 1815, *HRA* 1:8, pp 475–76.
circumferencers with him in the Hunter region in the early 1820s, for he reported breaking 'my old favorite' and having to use another, possibly less reliable instrument.\footnote{Dangar to Oxley, 28 March 1822, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors: Dangar, 2/1526.1, ff 1–3.}

These changing capabilities of the earlier survey departments have an important corollary, for as the resulting property descriptions became more and more technical, and dependent on specialist instrumentation for their creation, they also increasingly inscribed knowledge that was intellectually, and probably financially, inaccessible to the average settler. Only a surveyor – which for much of this period meant a government surveyor – could verify, reproduce and possibly interpret the official information defining a property’s boundaries. In effect, therefore, the government increasingly held a virtual monopoly on this technical, almost arcane, form of knowledge.

That information of such importance as the definition of landed property remained largely unintelligible to the colonists who owned it would have produced chaos – or even greater chaos than prevailed in the system anyway – had it not been for these average settlers being able to call on other more accessible forms of knowledge recording their boundaries. Grant descriptions occasionally listed a public road as one boundary. Almost always they included reference to rivers and creeks along one or perhaps two sides – such as Dromedary Creek and the Derwent River in John Pearce’s grant – since as mentioned each farm usually needed access to fresh water. In both cases these geographic features provided relatively fixed and therefore reliable boundaries.

Less reliably, colonial circuit descriptions also almost always made reference either to neighbours’ holdings or their mutual side-lines – for instance ‘Edwards and Ward’s Farm’ bordering Andrew Thomson’s grant above. The resulting inter-reliance of whole strings of property descriptions is especially clear, again, in earlier grants which may have lacked the finer technical measurements, for instance a 1794 series of small grants to ex-convicts along the Hawkesbury River. One man who (with either Dickensian flair or penitent humility) went by the name of John Badlife, had his 30 acres ‘bounded on the East by an allotment to John Howard, & on the West by an allotment to Daniel Smallwood’; Daniel Smallwood, in turn, had his property bounded on the east by the grant to John Badlife and on the south (since he fronted a bend in the river) by that of yet another settler, Thomas Saunders. Saunders was bounded on the north by Smallwood, and so on.\footnote{LPMA, Grants of Land Register, vol 1-1, pp 121(2)–122(2); and see map in Ian Forster, \textit{Two Hawkesbury Settlers: The Story of Daniel Smallwood and Edward Weaver}, priv publn, Sydney, 1994, p 17.}
At times the inclusion of neighbours' side-lines reflects no more than a surveyor's short-cut: listing a previously surveyed and possibly marked border instead of measuring it again. In a revealing account of how Evans surveyed two blocks on the Nepean River in late 1803 or early 1804 – the first properties he ever measured in his long colonial career – he described sighting and measuring the boundaries of the first grant, to Captain Woodruff, in the regular way. But on receiving subsequent orders to fit a grant for William Chapman in between those of Woodruff and an earlier settler named Appledore, and owing to rain getting into the slightly damaged theodolite which he had with him, 'it never was marked or measured but on the chart from which the description was taken'. 43 Although obviously aware of the possible problems that estimating measurements from a map might cause, due to the sheer weight of work and lack of assistance Evans continued to use this method in his later career in Van Diemen's Land into the 1820s. 44

Whether derived from maps or the ground, the successive location of grants in relation to previous properties (as opposed to each being individually fixed to outside, neutral points such as trig stations) effectively made the colonial cadastre inter-dependent and cumulative, and its inevitable errors accumulated in proportion. As settlers began taking up the less desirable areas in between the prime locations snapped up in the first waves of settlement – in a broader version of Chapman squeezing in between Woodruff and Appledore – these errors became more obvious and troublesome. By the early 1830s, surveyors general in both colonies expressed frustration at being unable to 'connect' their surveys and maps of these previously discrete clusters of properties, both in the sense of simply combining them to form a larger chart, and through their cross-reference making them mutually consistent. 45

Problems with grant deeds

Despite the apparent simplicity behind the ideal of a settler holding a grant deed and the government registering the details, the system raised a few problems. The fact that handwritten deeds might contain clerical errors ('road' instead of 'roads') was merely the most superficial. At the other end of the scale, a more dramatic flaw came to light in the early 1830s when Crown Solicitor Alfred Stephen found that all the grants ever issued in Van Diemen's Land were invalid, on the grounds that Crown land could only be granted in the

43 Evans to [Meehan], 3 Sept 1805, LPMA, Land Grants Register, vol 3C, p 124a. Note that Evans' mention of using a theodolite in 1803 again contradicts Werner, who claims the first theodolite arrived in the colony in 1825 (cited in Kass, Sails to Satellites, p 7).
44 Eg Evans to Montagu, nd [late 1824], AOT, LSD 22/1, Letters from col sec, p 34.
45 Discussed more fully in Chapter 5.
king’s name, not in those of governors — as had been colonial practice. A similar review in New South Wales came to the same worrying conclusion. Despite understandable public dismay, this problem was easily fixed once local executive councils passed legislation re-validating existing grants. 46

While such legal problems generally lay outside the ambit of the survey departments, the way those departments issued deeds and levied fees led to some of the more purely procedural problems with grant deeds as a way of inscribing ownership. The government, either through the survey departments or the colonial secretary’s office, charged a fee to issue a formal grant deed. Since in most cases the settler already occupied the land, and since the department in its normal way had already recorded that the settler owned or at least had permission to occupy that piece of land, many landholders chose to avoid the burden of going in to town, paying out ‘lawful Sterling Money’, and collecting the deed itself. There also appears to have been a popular perception that the formal issuance of the deed, while giving more definitive proof of ownership, also more tightly bound the landholder to the various conditions attached. In 1835 Frankland noted that settlers in Van Diemen’s Land had proved reluctant to apply to have their official deeds drawn up in the mistaken belief that quit rents would fall due based on the date of the document’s signing rather than that of their taking possession, and that putting off collecting the deed effectively dodged the tax. 47

Another frequent and related problem arose because, by the time the government had prepared a final grant deed, the settler may have already sold the land (often disregarding the conditions forbidding this). This was especially the case with grants from earlier times when financial dealings involved much less rigid documentation, but it had become a major problem by the early 1830s when the authorities attempted to establish a more comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge of land ownership. Lieutenant Governor Arthur, ever vigilant in scrutinising the numerous returns of all his departments’ activities, queried in 1833 why some early deeds had still not been issued. Frankland informed him that a few months previously he had publicly announced that deeds to these older grants would be issued under the original grantees’ names — those being the only names in his official records — unless the subsequent purchasers came forward with proof of their claims. Most of these early grants were known (albeit unofficially) to have changed hands, but only a few of the new owners had felt


47 Frankland to col sec, 11 April 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, Letters to col sec, pp 152–54; see also Petrow, ‘Discontents’.
confident enough in their claims, and their paperwork, to apply for their deeds. Frankland had therefore abandoned the ‘experiment’, and the deeds remained un-issued. 48

The underlying problem beneath many of these issues rested on the fact that title deeds recorded only the final, formal stage in a much longer process of passing land from the Crown to private hands. As Oxley explained it to Commissioner Bigge in November 1819, the standard procedure for obtaining land seemed relatively straightforward:

With the exception of an order from the Secy. of State, all [applicants] are obliged at stated periods to present a memorial to the Governor, who on various occasions gives me a list of names with the number of acres opposite to each to be measured off to them; stating either by letter or verbally that they may take their allotments in any unappropriated part of the Colony. A notice is then put in the Gazette that those persons are to meet me at the several stations in which they require their land to be granted on certain days; & as many allotments as can be are measured off. 49

Evans gave much the same evidence when the commissioner moved to Van Diemen’s Land the following year (albeit with the added complication that applications and notifications had to pass back and forth between Sydney and Hobart) and similar accounts appear in several other contemporary sources. 50 However, the very frequency with which officials gave such accounts in fact reveals the frequency with which the system broke down or exemptions occurred. Commissioner Bigge’s very next question to Oxley asked whether he experienced ‘much difficulty & confusion in carrying out this procedure’, and Oxley had to admit the difficulty was ‘Very great, in fact it is almost impossible’. He went on at length lamenting the numbers of small grants, the general ignorance of the applicants, and the irregular manner of their application and subsequent granting – all no doubt music to the ears of the commissioner, who disapproved of small grants to ex-convicts.

While Oxley and Bigge tended to criticise the small, emancipist landholders, they were far less strident when it came to the wealthier settlers then obtaining larger grants, including those with orders from London whom Oxley characterised as exceptional in the opening of his first description above. The early 1820s saw sharply increasing numbers of this ‘better’ class of settler arriving both on the mainland and in Van Diemen’s Land, to the point where they changed from being exceptional to being the norm. Subsequent land policies, which favoured larger grants of land to these wealthier settlers and eventually stopped free grants to ex-convicts altogether, effectively amplified these problems. The wealthy settlers’ arrogance consequently replaced the emancipists’ supposed ignorance in

50 Evans’ evidence to Bigge, 22 March 1820, HRA 3:3, pp 318–319; see also eg Evans, A Geographical, Historical and Topographical Description of Van Diemen’s Land ..., Souter, London, 1822, appendix.
causing headaches for the officials meant to regulate them. In particular, these new settlers did not want to wait around for the ‘stated periods’ to make their applications, nor the ‘certain days’ to have their land measured. Although antecedents existed throughout the history of colonial land alienation, the particular evil of ‘permissive occupancy’ – allowing settlers to occupy and start developing land without prior survey and formal title – is generally ascribed to this period of increasingly unmanageable changes in immigration and settlement patterns.  

Even in the supposedly unexceptional procedure described by Oxley, the four stages of the alienation process are relatively clear, and of these only the middle two usually involved the survey departments. First, prospective settlers applied to the authorities, either the governor or, if still in Britain (and especially if they had the right connections) to the Colonial Office. In the early to mid-1820s, when the government granted land in proportion to a settler’s intended investment, surveyors general also became involved at this stage as they or their associated Land Boards were meant to assess their capital, but generally this stage lay outside the surveyors’ purview. Approved settlers then received a warrant or some other form of notification stating their right to a certain quantity of land. Next, the approved settler had to select a block of land, and at this second stage the issues raised by Arthur – knowing ‘such lands as are already granted and those which are still open’ and gaining ‘every possible information’ from the surveyors in the field – became paramount. Once a settler had selected an area of land, the department then had to record that selection, to prevent disputes between different selectors wanting the same land. Thirdly, a surveyor had to ‘locate’ – meaning measure, mark out and formally describe – the block, producing and recording the formal circuit description of its boundaries. Only at the end of these stages did the formal granting of ownership occur, if it occurred at all, with the deed bearing the governor’s signature and seal. Occupation, however, might occur at any stage along this process, or even precede it entirely.

The ‘irregular’ yet customary variation to the official procedure is revealed in the same 1825 court case in which the chief justice called for solemnities to be thus enjoined. Another appropriately named ex-convict, Robert Cooper, had applied for land near Sydney to build a brewery and distillery, and he had subsequently received verbal advice from Oxley that he could have an area beside the creek at Black Wattle Bay and bordering a garden used by the military garrison on land reserved as a church glebe. The confusion arose because the

assistant surveyor, James McBrien, measured a slightly different area to that which Oxley intended: McBrien took his survey from the garden’s fence, which lay inside the official bounds of the glebe, and he consequently measured off an area of Crown land on the wrong side of the creek. Oblivious to this, however, Cooper started to build his distillery, and claimed to have spent over £2000 by the time different government officials – starting ominously with the governor’s own private secretary – realised the mistake and ordered his ejectment. The Crown’s case, and indeed the chief justice’s summing up, was simple enough: Cooper had no formal title to the Crown land, and so should not have begun building his distillery. Although Justice Forbes saw some error in both Oxley’s and McBrien’s roles in the affair, the law was clear: ‘No loose usages could be set up in derogation of the King’s prerogative’. Thankfully for Cooper, the jury – the first civil jury empanelled in the Supreme Court of New South Wales – saw otherwise, and in a special verdict found that ‘Mr. Cooper obtained possession of the land in question, in the manner hitherto practised in the Colony’. Effectively, the jury found that ownership transferred, at least in part, at the start of the process, not just at the end.

‘Loose usages’: Recording selection and location

The official records of the penultimate stage – locations – ideally being the result of proper survey and measurement of the bearings and distances of the boundaries of the grant, took the form of standard circuit descriptions. The recording of selections, on the other hand, varied greatly. In earlier years, it often involved fairly ad hoc pencilling in of names on maps (as discussed in Chapter 5) or written and verbal promises from officials. In the mid-1820s Dangar received requests from selectors in the Hunter district in person, and relayed these to headquarters in Sydney to have them recorded:

Mr. Maxwell having visited this part of the Colony for the purpose of selecting land, under the authority of the Governor, I beg to inform you that he has selected the Sections adjoining Mr. Brown’s and to the Northward of his farm.

Dangar also usually recorded the date on which settlers had notified him of their selections, in case other parties in Sydney advanced claims to the same lands and priority became an issue – which also tends to suggest that confusions and crossed purposes still occurred.

Indeed one such confusion embroiled Dangar himself in much trouble. He and his brother William between them had been promised several thousand acres, which Henry

52 R v Cooper, 12 Feb 1825; and see Cooper in ADB, vol 1.
53 Dangar to Oxley, 18 Dec 1822, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors: Dangar, 2/1526.1, p 23 and passim.
54 See eg his comments re selections by Pennington of land marked as ‘reserve’ on a map: Dangar to Oxley, 2 Oct 1823, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors: Dangar, 2/1526.1, pp 70–72.
selected in the upper Hunter. At the same time he assisted another free settler, Peter Macintyre, select neighbouring blocks of land for himself, Thomas Macqueen and Macqueen’s brother. Macintyre later rejected the selections to the trio which Dangar had recorded, however: he claimed Dangar had effectively robbed him of valuable land by moving the agreed boundary lines to better accommodate his and his brother’s grants. Macintyre also then accused Dangar of trying to bribe him by offering a compromise position. Despite Oxley’s clear defence of his assistant, Governor Darling found Dangar at fault (in part because of a misinterpretation of some maps of these selections, as also discussed in Chapter 5) and he dismissed him from government service.55

In Van Diemen’s Land in the mid- to late 1820s, Dumaresq and then Frankland instituted more bureaucratic systems of recording selections which required the settlers themselves to submit a written application, including their own description of the land.56 William Brodribb described the 260 acres that he wanted to select at Green Ponds as ‘Bounded on the South side by a Grant to Thomas [illegible] on the west and North sides by unappropriated land and on the East side by the river Jordan’. This, however, was ruled ‘Not an approved Description’, possibly because the western and northern sides were too vague. Some descriptions in this register list distances in chains and links, and bearings in degrees, suggesting the assistance of either a government or private surveyor. Others are much less defined: for instance ‘Between the Cocked Hat Hill & Brumbey’s Punt’; ‘At a place known by the name of “Whiteford’s Hills”’.57 In general it seems that local circumstances, particularly the density of surrounding properties, dictated the amount of detail possible as well as the amount needed, and in most cases the district surveyor’s local knowledge usually helped resolve any misinterpretations — although these still occurred.58

The intermediacy of the selection and location stages of land alienation gave rise to further complications, both with that process and the parallel methods of recording it. Settlers could and did take advantage of this unresolved status by changing their minds or bargaining their way out of unwanted selections: for instance those which were found, after some experience, to be poorer land than the locatee expected; those which came with troublesome

55 See esp Darling to Bathurst, 11 March 1827, and ‘Report of the Land Board’, 28 Feb 1827, HRA 1:13, pp 149–56; also Dangar’s entry, ADB.
56 Much of this was ordered by Arthur: see Montagu (col sec) to Dumaresq, nd May 1826, AOT, LSD 22/3, Letters from col sec, p 23; Frankland to James Clark [settler], 14 May 1828, AOT, LSD 16/1, SG’s letterbook, p 130; and his later accounts of the new system, Frankland to col sec, 17 Sept 1834, AOT, LSD 61/2, Letters to col sec, p 102.
57 AOT, LSD 408/1, Register of location orders issued 1824–1850, pp 3 (Brodribb), 105, 107.
58 See eg Frankland to col sec, 2 Oct 1834, AOT, LSD 61/2, Letters to col sec, pp 108–110.
neighbours; or those which on subsequent survey were found to overlap with some other claim. The register recording location orders made between 1824 and 1830 in Van Diemen's Land is awash with deletions, amendments, abandonments, exchanges and cancellations, all ranging from the mundane to the officious. Brodribb simply changed his mind over the poorly described block of 260 acres quoted above, someone in the office noting 'Does not wish it here Mr Broadribb calls to say'. The government also gained some advantage in this flexibility, and the issue of locatees found to reside elsewhere (against the stipulated conditions of occupying the area listed) and those cases of accidental or deliberate encroachment could be more easily resolved at this stage than after final and formal granting had taken place. As recorded in that same Vandemonian register, James White was 'ordered to be removed' because his location encroached upon land reserved for Major McLeod; and Mr Greenhill's 300-acre location was 'resumed by order of Lt Govr on account of private sale contrary to Regulations'.

It also appears that wealthier and more powerful free settlers exploited the selection phase to displace previous occupants, especially ex-convicts who might have had an expectation of a modest grant at the end of their sentences, but perhaps no liking for the bureaucratic procedures they were meant to follow in officially obtaining one. Dangar reported soon after his arrival at the secondary convict station of Newcastle in the Hunter region that he had found 'numerous' emancipist and free settlers simply 'camping along the banks of the river' without having obtained any permission to select or locate there. A year later he described how James Mudie, an assertive new arrival from among the wealthier free immigrants, muscled in on an area of St Patrick's Plains that had been exploited – but not formally selected – by the more humble Hawkesbury cattleman John Howe.

In his usual matter-of-fact prose, but with a telling attention to different settlers' respective titles, Assistant Surveyor James McBrien reported what looks like another such example from the Bathurst area in 1823:

59 LSD 408/1, pp 3 ('Broadribb' [sic]), 23 (White), 26 (Greenhill). The 'someone', who initialled the note 'GW', was probably Temporary Assistant Surveyor George Woodward.

60 Dangarto Oxley, 28 March 1822 and 17 Jan 1823, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors: Dangar, 2/1526.1, pp 1–3, 24–26 (and see also Oxley to Dangar, 12 Feb 1824, same file, re the removal of such 'small' settlers). On Howe, see ADB, vol 1. Dangar was to have further disputes with the contentious 'Major' Mudie, as Chapter 4 will show; and further problems also with his own selections of land in the Hunter region, as recounted in Chapter 5.
I beg leave to report to you that Robert Raine Esqr has placed himself on the Fish River on that part formerly occupied by Mr Lowe. Captain Raine is placed on the Fish River (that part which is occupied by Patrick Burns) by his Brother Robert Raine.61 Of these two replacements, the first probably represents the more benign variety – wealthier settlers simply changing their minds – for Lowe, an established and relatively successful free settler from the Macquarie era, had already moved on when the recently arrived Robert Raine selected the land ‘formerly occupied’ by him. On the other hand, judging from McBrien’s change to present tense it seems that the ex-convict Irishman Patrick Byrne still occupied the area which Raine selected for his military brother. Denied the fertile river flats, Byrne appears to have eventually settled at Emu Valley Creek in hillier country further away from the growing township of Bathurst.62

A further problem with the inscription of ownership on selection and location orders arose when even less scrupulous settlers resorted to forgery and imposition. In Van Diemen’s Land in 1833, a Mr Griffiths claimed 500 acres that he had purchased twelve years previously from Michael Fitzgerald, who held the land on the basis of a location order issued by Governor Macquarie. On having the case referred to him and inspecting the paperwork, however, Frankland observed that:

> it will be clearly perceived that the word ‘Two’ has been altered to ‘Five’, and I may add that it is a matter of common report at Launceston that the alteration was fraudulently made in General Macquarie’s Ante Room a few moments after the Warrant had passed through his hands.63

The following year, and with a similar sense of incredulity at how brazen some settlers could be, Frankland responded to another claim referred to him by the lieutenant governor:

> James McDonald was fully aware that his order was for 320 acres, for I hold his written application to locate 320 acres upon that order, and I subsequently issued to him a Location Order for 320 Acres – which he seems to have most infamously altered to 1500, having also possessed himself of a letter from the Colonial Secretary addressed to J. MacDonald and intended for one John McDonald, of which document he seems to have fraudulently availed himself to sustain an unfounded claim for 1500 Acres.64

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61 McBrien to Oxley, 16 April 1823, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors: McBrien, 2/1555.3, p 5; see also Raine’s entry, ADB, vol 2.
62 See Robert Lowe and Robert Raine, ADB; the man McBrien called ‘Burns’ was undoubtedly the remarkable Patrick Byrne, a convict (per Archduke Charles, 1813) who had accompanied Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson’s crossing of the Blue Mountains, then acted as guide to Evans’ official follow-up (Evans called him ‘James Burns’) and William Cox’s road-building party, before again accompanying Evans to the Lachlan River in 1815, and Oxley’s two expeditions in 1817 and 1818. Macquarie granted Byrne a small area of land at Bathurst and in 1818 an absolute pardon as a reward for these efforts: see Byrne’s testimony to Bigge in Ritchie, Evidence to the Bigge Reports, vol 1, pp 182–84; and SRNSW, CSO, online index, <colsec.records.nsw.gov.au/indexes/colsec/b/F08c_bu-by-18.htm#P7931_226967> (viewed 20 March 2012).
63 Frankland to col sec, 26 Nov 1833, AOT LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, p 514.
64 Frankland to col sec, 7 Jan 1834, AOT LSD 61/2, Letters to col sec, p 3.
Inscriptions in the field

While all of this generally occurred at headquarters and on bits of paper circulating between the various arms of government and individual settlers, evidence on the ground provided much more tangible signs of property boundaries as records of colonial ownership. Roads and rivers have been mentioned; more specific markers included fences and survey pegs.

Fences might seem an obvious boundary marker, and certainly in Britain and other British colonial contexts they played an important role in inscribing ownership, but in the early Australian colonies they too failed in two ways. As Cooper's court case illustrates, fences may not have always aligned perfectly, or even approximately, with the official boundaries of an adjoining property. Particularly in relatively built-up areas, surveyors and later formally designated town surveyors had great difficulty policing the building of fences – which in towns usually meant garden fences – and their frequent encroachment into the formal lines of public streets.

Fences made even less reliable boundary markers in rural and especially pastoral areas, simply because they were often absent altogether. As indicators of improvement and colonial industry, early agricultural reports from the colonies regularly listed the acreages of land granted, cleared and sown to crops, but they made no mention of fencing and enclosure. With little incentive to fence uncleared land, and a decided disincentive to limit the grazing opportunities of the increasingly dominant pastoral industry, early colonial properties remained largely unfenced. When Arthur proposed introducing fencing legislation in Van Diemen's Land in the mid-1830s, which would have all but required neighbouring landowners to fence their mutual boundaries to prevent disputes and animals straying, he faced vocal opposition to what most settlers saw as unnecessary expense and regulation. It was not until much later that the practice of ring-barking trees (from the 1860s) and the technology of wire fencing (1870s) made property boundaries, and therefore the general cadastre, physically present and visible in the colonial landscape.

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67 Eg Alt to Grose, 26 Apr 1794, HRA 1:1, p 470; List of officers holding land, 31 Dec 1801, HRNSW, vol 4, p 648; 'Return of Number of Acres sown with Grain ...', 1 Mar 1804, HRA 1:4, pp 498–99; see also Pickard, John, 'Trespass, common law, government regulations, and fences in colonial New South Wales 1788–1828', JRAHS, 84:2, 1998, pp 130–39, who notes the lack of mention of fences in adverts to sell.

68 See eg Hobart Town Courier, 8 May 1836.

Not that the colonial government was particularly keen on unnecessary expense itself. In 1832 Frankland recommended to the lieutenant governor that ‘certain Brand marks’ be manufactured and used to indicate the corners of grants, and he asked that the legislative council protect such marks legally. Arthur approved the move – although with typical snideness he wondered why ‘so obvious a course should not have been adopted years ago’ – and he directed the convict establishment, with its cheap labour, to produce the stakes. A few years later, however, Frankland had to inform the lieutenant governor that he had been compelled to employ a private carpenter to do the job instead, as the Public Works department had had so much trouble ‘shaping’ the stakes supplied by the convicts at Port Arthur.  

The problems with these official, physical boundary markers went beyond simple costs and delay. Frankland noted elsewhere that he had been forced to remeasure some grants ‘owing to the boundary marks having been wilfully destroyed, for the purpose of giving the owners a larger occupancy of ground’. Meanwhile Assistant Surveyor William Dawson, laying out the town of Oatlands, suggested delaying the measurement and staking out of its urban allotments until each separate block had sold: ‘the Township land is so Sandy, the traffic of carts ... so great, & the number of cattle grazing round the town so considerable, that it would be next to useless (after an interval of Six months) to look for the marks used’.  

Despite these physical disadvantages, however, surveyors obviously used posts or stakes widely. According to testimony in a later legal case, in the mid-1810s Governor Macquarie had overseen Deputy Surveyor Meehan measure another disputed property at Cockle Bay which the surveyor marked out with stakes:

Meehan did meet the Governor, in whose presence he measured the land and defined the boundaries by driving posts into the ground [and] on one of those posts, a notice was set up, warning persons against trespassing; [and] those posts remained in the land for several years.  

Similarly Thomas Scott, remeasuring adjoining grants to Messrs Barker, Ford and Cawthorn in Van Diemen’s Land to verify their respective acreages, reported starting his surveys from

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70 Col sec to Frankland, 25 Jan 1832, AOT, LSD 53, Unregistered corro, np; Frankland to col sec, 18 May 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, Letters to col sec, p 164.  
71 Frankland to col sec, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, pp 478–99 (esp p 484).  
72 Dawson to Frankland, 24 Aug 1836, AOT, LSD 1/80, General corre: Surveyors (Dawson), p 16; and a similar situation in the town of Ross, 28 Oct 1836, p 22.  

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an originally erected stake marking their mutual corner, and it appears also on a sketch map
he drew at the time.\textsuperscript{74}

More commonly, however, surveyors simply marked convenient trees along the
sidelines and at the corners of properties, and both trees and survey stakes are often shown on
the maps of individual properties – Crown plans – that from the late 1820s surveyors
produced after measuring each.\textsuperscript{75} Trees also occasionally feature as the starting point in
circuit descriptions, and the ‘mark on the edge of the Derwent River’ which begins the
description of John Pearce’s property at Dromedary Creek was more probably a blazed tree
rather than a manufactured survey stake.

Once again, and despite their obvious convenience, trees did not make infallible
markers. As with stakes and pegs, they could be destroyed; more often surveyors might have
trouble simply relocating them, or interpreting the coded information that they bore. For
instance, in New South Wales John Edwards reported – in a reverse of the expression – that
he couldn’t find the tree for the woods: ‘Employed all day searching for tree, marked, where
Mr. Mathew left off tracing Creek’.\textsuperscript{76} And in Van Diemen’s Land, while measuring a small
grant to a Mr Walton, George Woodward misinterpreted some marked trees along the side-
line of Walton’s neighbour, Thomas Lascelles, and he wrongly marked out the second
property. Put in possession of this, Walton mistakenly cleared 2 acres of Lascelles’ land and
consequently claimed them as his. Woodward’s problem apparently arose because he had not
been taught the local methods of recording ‘off-sets’, for since a tree may not have grown
precisely on the line or corner, the information instead recorded in coded fashion the length
and direction from the tree to that abstract point. Some months later, when defending himself
against complaints of slowness, Woodward pointed out that unlike other newly appointed
assistants he had not initially been sent out under a more senior surveyor to learn the ‘mode
adopted in marking off the Grants &c’, and this resulted in him proceeding in ‘creeping
mode’.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Scott to Dumaresq, 7 Jan 1828, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corro: Surveyors (Scott), p 2 & sketch map.
\textsuperscript{75} See Chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{76} Monthly report, Jan 1832, SRNSW, SG, Letters from survs: Edwards, 2/1533-3 (reel 3064), p 32.
\textsuperscript{77} Woodward to Dumaresq, 5 Jan & 7 Sept 1827, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corro: Surveyors (Woodward #1),
pp 1 and 3. On later systems of coding pegs, trees etc see IH Marshall (ed), \textit{Marking the Landscape: A Short
Ritual and public memory

Where physical markers failed, ritual and memory had to suffice, and despite such practices leaving little record, their significance to especially the less literate among colonial society was perhaps far greater than the formal and technical records of the government. Patricia Seed, in her study of the ‘ceremonies of possession’ in the New World, points to the ‘remarkable ordinariness of English [acts of] possession’ compared to those of other European colonising cultures. Whereas the French claimed possession through elaborate ceremonies, the Spanish by official speeches, the Portuguese by celestial measurement and the Dutch by description, she portrays English claims as being expressed through more ‘mundane’ actions involving simple physical objects: the building of houses, the erection of fences and the planting of gardens. The English, unlike especially the French, were ‘anti-ceremonial’ and ‘usually lacked the self-conscious dimensions that characterize most actions we understand as rituals’. This perhaps takes an overly strict interpretation of ritual – and note for instance the elision between ceremony and ritual in the statements quoted above – for Seed also mentions (but rather downplays) two acts within the cultural vernacular of English colonisers in America which appear at least ritualistic: the exchange of a sod or piece of turf, and making a ‘perambulation’. For Seed also mentions (but rather downplays) two acts within the cultural vernacular of English colonisers in America which appear at least ritualistic: the exchange of a sod or piece of turf, and making a ‘perambulation’.78 Both also occurred in early colonial Australia.

The use of a sod or other sample of earth to symbolise a larger area again goes back to ancient precursors, and occurred for instance in Anglo-Saxon property rituals in England.79 The enduring legacy of the symbolism can be seen in Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s pouring of a handful of sand into the cupped palms of Vincent Lingiari, representative of the Gurindji people, to signify the granting of leasehold to land around Wattie Creek in August 1975. While there is no evidence of colonial surveyors handing settlers a sod of earth as a symbolic rendering of the granting of ownership, between themselves some early colonists performed such acts. Legal cases suggest that the exchange of a sod was a recognised practice in the early Australian colonies: in another case before the Supreme Court of New South Wales, it appeared in evidence that ‘In 1816 Michael Cassidy ... sold the land to one Davis, & gave him possession by digging up a piece of the ground’.80 Importantly, this trial report gives no indication that the act was in any way either quaint or antiquated, but rather that it was just another of the ‘loose practices’ prevalent throughout colonial property and financial dealings, especially among the less educated and possibly illiterate.

78 Seed, Ceremonies of Possession, ch 1 (English in general); p 1 (turf); pp 19 & 143 (perambulations).
The inscription of ownership

Perambulations were equally old and equally ingrained in British property customs. Also called ‘the beating of the bounds’, the term ‘perambulation’ comes from Norman French, meaning simply a walk around. The practice in Britain, however, goes back to earlier Rogation Day processions ordered to be performed by the Anglo-Saxon church in the late eighth century. Perambulations may have been involved also in Anglo-Saxon property transfers, as physical enactments of the written boundary descriptions in charters – which few at the time could have read – and may also ultimately derive from even earlier customs similar to the Roman ritual ploughing of a furrow, both mentioned above. In England, medieval and later perambulations involved dignitaries and other members of the public walking around the boundaries of a parish – or perhaps an estate – to delineate the area, and to identify and imprint in participants’ memories the various natural boundaries that may have been unclear, unmarked or unknown. Rogation processions survived the otherwise anti-ceremonial Reformation in England, and into the Hanovarian period they remained significant social events reinforcing community geographic identity. In medieval Scotland perambulations had a predominantly secular significance, and were especially important in arbitrating or resolving property disputes, and in reaffirming the frontier with England, although the practice there had waned by the nineteenth century.

Formal perambulations held neither legal nor ecclesiastic significance in colonial Australia, but settlers either by direction or choice frequently attended the surveyor while he measured and marked their properties. So too, it appears, did neighbours and occasionally other local officials, and by accompanying the survey party around the property’s boundaries these witnesses necessarily performed the same closed traverse. As Oxley’s testimony to Bigge indicates, in the earlier years of mostly ex-convict grantees the notice in the Gazette advising groups of recipients that they should get some land also ordered them to meet the surveyor at a designated time and place. Even in later years when free immigrant grantees dominated settlement, they too clearly accompanied and witnessed surveyors during their work. For example, in his account of remeasuring the three grants around the corner-stake mentioned above, Scott reported that ‘I took Mr Cawthorn the Chief Constable along with me, who knows all the marks, and was present with Mr Evans when he first measured the

81 Ceremonial perambulation is not to be confused with using a ‘perambulator’, a simple surveying instrument comprising a standard-sized wheel which, when pulled or pushed along, records distance in terms of the number of revolutions.

The inscription of ownership

land'. Another of the neighbours, Barker, was also present on this second occasion. A few years earlier, after measuring a location to a Mr Horne, Scott likewise reported that 'He [Horne] went round the boundaries with me and expressed himself satisfied with the measurement'. And of his most notorious survey – the initial measuring the scandalously excessive grant to William Lawrence which Arthur took as evidence of Evans' corruption – Scott later described how:

Mr. Evans came over [to Launceston] for the express purpose of measuring off this location. I had to perform the active part of the duty, Mr. Evans, accompanied by Mr. Lawrence, riding by my side all the time, directing where the Boundary Line was to be drawn.

Beneath Scott's somewhat perfunctory description, this last case in particular reveals a distinct social hierarchy of actors and observers: the senior official Evans and the wealthy and well-connected Lawrence both mounted in superior positions, presiding over and observing Scott, the subordinate civil servant, on foot to conduct the survey and direct an unmentioned team of convict labourers, who would have carried the chain, lugged the instruments around, hammered in the stakes and blazed trees.

By its very nature a property survey involved travelling around the block of land and observing its exact boundaries. While there may be no direct continuity between the earlier practices of parish perambulation and colonial boundary surveys, functionally they achieved a similar result, and to the extent that they involved a figure of authority conducting a prescribed action in the presence of witnesses, such surveys may be considered as rituals involved in inscribing the knowledge of land ownership in the memories of those present. So while the formal circuit descriptions of properties that appeared in grant deeds may have been too technical for the average settler to interpret, these same descriptions evoked and in a way recorded the embodied processes that went into producing them, and this prior method of inscribing ownership had far more immediate significance to colonial landholders.

Consultation and arbitration in the field

The real benefit, and importance, of inscribing cadastral knowledge in accessible forms – both on the ground itself and in the memories of neighbours and locals – arose in the resolution of disputes. Owing to the obviously contentious nature of property demarcation,

83 Scott to Arthur, 8 April 1825, AOT, LSD 22/2, Letters from col sec, p 6.
85 It may also be significant that nearly all colonial circuit description run clock-wise, or as pre-clock and certainly pre-cartographic societies in the northern hemisphere would have said, sun-wise.
and the many different ways in which the information of land ownership was inscribed between the office and the field, such resolution was more efficiently and more agreeably achieved ‘on the spot’ and through arbitration, rather than though authoritarian ruling from Government House, departmental headquarters or the courts.

This was especially the case in Van Diemen’s Land, due to a combination of factors: the many small-scale problems arising from the often imprecise measurement and recording of cadastral information for about the first 20 years of the island’s settlement; the closeness of its settled districts enabling relatively swift communication between office and field; and Frankland’s policies of assigning his assistants to specific districts for extended periods and of taking a generally conciliatory approach with the public. In consequence Frankland’s district surveyors served their areas almost as local agents of their department, and information clearly flowed freely in both directions. For instance Frankland’s orders to Joseph Fossey in November 1832 were fairly typical of his openness with official information: ‘I would wish you to be at the meeting appointed to consider the byeroads in your district on the 27th Inst. and to afford the Committee every possible information and access to the plans that you may have in your possession of the District’. 86 Conversely Charles Wedge, trying to decide the best route for a road to Oatlands through difficult terrain, told Frankland that he would obtain information from the local authorities: ‘I shall endeavour to get a Constable from Mr Anstey [the district magistrate] who is acquainted with the Country which the Road must go through’. 87

In property disputes between individuals, district surveyors likewise called upon both their own records as well as the various sources of information held by the conflicting neighbours and other locals, and tried to reach a resolution that satisfied everyone. In a long letter to Assistant Surveyor John Halls, Frankland laid out instructions for resolving two disputes in his district involving different members of the Amos family:

The first business of your Survey at Oyster Bay is to give me such data as will enable me to settle the question between Mr Lyne and Mr James Amos ... I shall be glad to receive any suggestions as to adjusting the question, which your knowledge of the Ground and your conference with the two parties will enable you to make with judgment.

The next question will be the Grants of Mr Storey, and another of the Amoses [who through problems with the selection process claimed the same land] ... If however you are able to induce the parties to meet each other half way for mutual accommodation, I shall be glad to hear it. 88

86 Frankland to Fossey, 13 Nov 1832, AOT, LSD 63/1, SG’s letters to assistants, p 23.
87 C Wedge to Frankland, 18 Nov 1829, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corrs: Surveyors (C Wedge #2), p 13.
88 Frankland to Halls, 26 Feb 1833, AOT, LSD 63/1, SG’s letters to assistants, pp 61–62.
Also taking the initiative himself, Thomas Scott reported that he had arranged a meeting with ‘Mr Reid and Mr Ruffey, with others adjoining them’ to resolve some disputes over their contested boundaries. Noting that such arbitration was not always successful, he reported to the surveyor general:

I am afraid I will not be able to please both Mr Reid and Mr Ruffey, as they are contending for one piece of land between their houses. Should I not be able to decide to their satisfaction (which I am now endeavouring to do) I shall submit where I think the Mutual boundary line ought to run, for your approval. 89

While the final ruling may have rested with Frankland, it is clear he only made that ruling having first devolved a measure of his authority to his assistants, and then reposing a great deal of faith in their judgement, all based on the multiple sources of information available to them in the field.

Not all such disputes could be solved so easily, however, and in the early 1830s both colonies established official bodies – the Claims Board in New South Wales; the Caveat Board in Van Diemen’s Land – to intercept and adjudicate land disputes before they reached the increasingly strained civil court system. With the respective surveyors general members of each, these official boards were constituted in such a way as to have similar access to and allow information from all sources, and explicitly to accept that the legalistic superstructure of law, land policy and bureaucratic regulation could only go so far. In wording that might suggest official acceptance of the chief justice’s thwarted ideals in the case of R v Cooper, the Act setting up the New South Wales version charged its members ‘to be guided by the real justice and good conscience of the case, without regard to legal forms and solemnities’. 90

In recognising the local validity of ‘loose usages’ in the processes of alienating colonial lands, these boards also effectively recognised the validity of the looser inscriptions of ownership that resulted.

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When Frankland answered Arthur’s question about a simple map with a lengthy exposition of his office’s functions and a long list of its many records, his intention was to present the department in his charge as operating in an efficient, rational and modern way. It is tempting, looking back, to recognise and emphasise these same modern-looking elements in the colonial surveyors’ practice: that the batteries of registers and alphabetical indexes reflect a (capital-M) Modern state atomising its subjects; or that the precision and abstraction of

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89 Scott to Frankland, 15 Feb 1834, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corre: Surveyors (Scott), p 27.
technical survey data represents the arbitrary detachment or ‘mathematical cosmology’ of imperial rule. Yet for all the individually isolating features of colonial bureaucratic procedure, others reflect community involvement: properties defined in relation to surrounding properties, neighbours and locals witnessing the ritualistic marking out of boundary lines, even lingering public memory that a man may have tried to fraudulently adjust his location warrant in the governor’s anteroom over a decade before.

Similarly, for all the apparently impersonal precision of land divided up into ‘neat squares’ and defined by compass bearings and chain lengths, the continuing flexibility and negotiability of settlers’ side-lines points to a much more human and responsive process of settlement, one that was arbitrated rather than arbitrary. Paul Carter considers that it was one of the features of Enlightenment geographical discourse that it ‘repressed the process, the contingency of its own procedures’. 91 This may be true of global or continental geography, at which scales the traces of its constructive processes do indeed shrink from view, but the fact that colonial property descriptions – the surveyors’ most prolific and technical inscriptions of geographic knowledge – also narrated their and other settlers’ physical passage around nearly every block of alienated land runs counter to this assertion.

From this rather longer litany of problems with recording land ownership by the colonial survey departments, it may also seem that settlement was indeed chaotic. Yet the system worked, after its own fashion, precisely because of this blend of new and in some cases very ancient forms of practice, and the perhaps awkwardly complementary range of knowledges that these produced.

1. William Govett, [Encampment & bullock wagon near the coast], watercolour, 35.2 x 50.7 cm, c 1840. (NLA, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK10120)

2. William Govett, [Surveyor’s camp], ‘Notes and sketches taken during a surveying Expedition in N. South Wales and Blue Mountains ... 1830–1835’, ink wash. (SLNSW, A330, betw pp 12–13)
4. George Evans, *Chart of Van Diemens Land, from the best Authorities, and from surveys by G.W. Evans, Surveyor General, Hobart Town*, engr J Tryer, John Souter, London, 1822, 76.9 x 60.3 cm, scale c 1:540 000. (NLA, Ferguson Collection, Map F500)
5. Thomas Scott, *Chart of Van Diemen's Land, From the best Authorities and from actual Surveys & Measurements ...*, engr Charles Thomson, Edinburgh, 1824, 82.5 x 58.5 cm, scale c 1:545 000. (NLA, Ferguson Collection, Map F513)
6. Thomas Mitchell, To the Right Honorable Edward Geoffrey Smith Stanley this map of the Colony of New South Wales, compiled from actual measurements with the chain & circumferenter, and according to a trigonometrical survey is (with the greatest respect), dedicated by his most obedient humble servant T.L. Mitchell, Surveyor General, engr John Carmichael, Sydney, 1834, 59.8 x 129.4 cm, scale c 1:540 000. (NLA, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK6228).

is respectfully Dedicated to Sir John Barrow President of the Royal Geographical Society &c &c &c

By his obliged Humble Servant, Robert Dixon, engr

JC Walker, Joseph Cross, London, 1837, 122 x 72.5 cm, scale c 1:506 880.

(NLA, Ferguson Collection, F891).
8. George Harris's topographic bird paintings in the Paterson portfolio: watercolour, c 24 x 20 cm. (SLNSW, PX388, ‘Australian paintings by JW Lewin, GP Harris, GW Evans and others 1796–1809’, vol 4, ff 2 (Falco), 4 (Pipra), 5 (Strix), 6 (Tetrao))
9. George Harris, Hobart, c 1805, pen, 11.5 x 18.5 cm. (NLA, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK313)

10. [George Harris], ‘GP Harris’ cottage, Hobart Town, 1806’, watercolour, 15.3 x 19.5 cm. (NLA, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK145)
11. [GW Evans], ‘A view of part of Parramatta Port Jackson’, [1809], watercolour, 21.7 x 34.2 cm. (SLNSW, PX388, ‘Australian paintings by Lewin, Harris, Evans and others 1796–1809’, vol 3, f 6)

12. [GW Evans], ‘A view of Sydney N. S. Wales on entering the Heads the distance of Seven Miles’, [1809?], watercolour, 22.5 x 36.1 cm. (SLNSW, PXD388, ‘Australian paintings by JW Lewin, GP Harris, GW Evans and others 1796–1809’, vol 3, f 1)
13. Henry Dangar, Map of the River Hunter, and its Branches, Showing the Lands reserved thereon for Church purposes, the locations made to settlers, and the Settlement and part of the Lands of the Australian Agricultural Company, at Port Stephens, Together with the Station of the Mission to the Aborigines belonging to the London Missionary Society, on Lake Macquarie, New South Wales, J Cross, London, 1 Aug 1828, hand-coloured, mounted on linen, 125 x 104 cm, scale c 1:200 000.
(NLA, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK646)
Making it official: Authority, credibility and control

If the technical knowledge of who owned what where remained a little hazy, knowledge of the colonies' wider geography often rested on equally shaky foundations. Unlike the ideal of a single official cadastral register, there existed no single and uniform geography of the colony in all the colonists' minds. Instead, the widely divergent experiences and knowledges of the mass of colonists – themselves widely distributed both socially and spatially – effectively produced a multiplicity of geographies. In consequence, 'official' knowledge had to be distinguished from an informational otherworld of rumour, conjecture and outright fraud. The official nature of this knowledge of the colonies rested upon the authority and credibility behind it, so those claiming to know something of the land, especially those whose position gave them the responsibility to report upon and record it, needed also to assert this authority.

The colonial surveyors and collectively their departments employed two strategies to authorise and make official the information which they amassed. Firstly, individual surveyors claimed credibility by suggesting that both they and their work exhibited certain characteristics which meant they could be believed. These bear many parallels to the sorts of claims being made by other contemporary writers and actors who faced similar issues of authority and credibility, be they travel writers and explorers around the globe, or scientists, professionals and ordinary gentlemen within Britain. Secondly, and developing especially towards the end of this period, bureaucratic mechanisms within both colonial government and the survey departments aimed instead to enforce reliability, and thereby credibility, by standardising and monitoring the professional practice of their officials. In the resulting tussle, between the ideal of an Enlightenment 'man of reason' and that of a dutiful public servant, bureaucratic procedures increasingly both controlled and verified surveyors' actions – and, ultimately, constrained the geographic knowledge that they produced.
Fabulous, nefarious and informal geographies

Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell opened the first of his published exploration journals with a surprising admission: ‘The journey northward in 1831 originated in one of those fabulous tales which occasionally become current in the colony of New South Wales respecting the interior country, still unexplored’. A recaptured convict runaway named George Clarke (alias ‘the Barber’) had reported seeing a mighty river flowing south-west to the sea, and Mitchell had seized upon the chance to mount a major expedition to investigate. The river proved fabulous indeed, but Mitchell’s publication of these journals marked the first major step in his campaign for a knighthood in honour of his services to colonial exploration, so it is significant that he cast his role as being as much one of chasing after this chimera – that is, verifying or debunking knowledge coming from a highly dubious source – as it was one of actual discovery, or authoritatively creating new knowledge. As he went on to explain:

The principal object of my plan was the exploration of Australia, so that whether the report of the river proved true or false, the results of the expedition would be, at least, useful in affording so much additional information; equally important geographically, whether positive or negative.2

Such Barbary tales were by no means a new thing in the Australian colonies; nor was the gulf between them and the often very different knowledge held by government officials, the better educated and the supposedly better informed. Forty years previously, within the first years of settlement, Marine Lieutenant Watkin Tench reported the more famous incident of several convicts who attempted to escape to China, which they believed ‘might easily be reached, being not more than 100 miles distant and separated only by a river’. Tench’s telling of the story is interesting in that he suggested the general body of convict settlers knew better, for they ridiculed the ‘extravagance and infatuation’ of the would-be escapees. Within a generation of Captain Cook’s landing and John Hawkesworth’s blockbuster edition of his journals, it seemed the global position of Sydney was well understood by all but dolts. Tench added his own layer of ridicule by framing the whole episode as an Irish joke.3

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2 Three Expeditions, p 3.
Not all such rumours were so fanciful, however, and attention has recently swung towards the various informal or alternative geographies of the colonies. On the going-to-China anecdote in particular, Grace Karskens questions whether in fact the joke may have been on those dismissive observers. She suggests instead that the escapees knew exactly where they were heading and made the claim ironically, either to cloak their real objectives or, by inspiring pity at their folly, to avoid a more severe punishment for absconding. In place of geographic ignorance, she argues that the convicts of especially the earlier colonial period possessed alternative and extensive 'nefarious' geographies, maintaining their own physical and social networks throughout Sydney's hinterland in order to escape, permanently or merely briefly, the strictures of the settlement proper.

In a similar vein, but moving beyond Karskens' emphasis on the illicitness of absconders, James Boyce highlights the informal geographies of various classes of settlers in Van Diemen's Land during much the same period. These include the presence and movement of sealers and whalers in and around Bass Strait and the Southern Ocean, establishing an interconnected maritime geography which only gradually came to be overlain by official naval charting and more established processing stations closer to settlement. In Van Diemen's Land itself, while its many bushrangers may have inhabited a nefarious geography that lay outside the ken of local authorities, more legitimate kangaroo hunters kept the colony alive through its early famine years by exploiting their own alternative geographies of the peripheries of settlement, and by the 1820s a widespread system of co-operative stock ownership with assigned convict shepherds (known as 'thirds') effectively insured capitalists' flocks against the lawlessness of the hinterland.

Nor, it must be noted, were these alternative geographies exclusively European: most drew extensively upon pre- and co-existing Aboriginal knowledge of country. Clarke had lived for many years with the Kamilaroi people of the Liverpool Plains, while many of the other European fringe-dwellers mentioned above learned and adopted Aboriginal geographies of these frontier/contact zones, as well as antagonised their Aboriginal hosts within them. Along a less fractious but equally revealing trajectory, Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow...
describe how Aboriginal people on the Georges River to Sydney’s south – including the resistance bands led by Pemulwuy around 1800, but also later landowners, family groups and even tourist operators – were able to move through and maintain a presence among the riverine gorges and mangrove flats, since these less desirable areas remained gaps in the dominant European geography of the region well into the nineteenth and even twentieth centuries. However, in contrast to the usually indigenous go-betweens directly informing imperial observers in many other colonial contexts, the intermediaries supplying geographic information to the government in colonial Australia at this time were more likely to be European – even if some or all of their knowledge derived ultimately from Aboriginal sources. The Barber certainly fits the mould of trickster informant as aptly as does, for instance, the colourful Indigenous go-between Bungaree.

From this multiplicity of geographies flowed a constant babble of reports regarding the country ‘further out’, and the task of substantiating or correcting these reports, in case the government needed to act upon them, fell to the survey departments. In a typical case from Van Diemen’s Land, Alexander McPherson, a landowner at Hamilton, wrote to Surveyor General George Frankland to report information from a (possibly illiterate) smaller landholder Thomas Triffett. Triffett had come upon some promising tracts of land while attempting to trace some stolen horses, and although either settler could have made use of the information himself, and simply grazed stock on these new pastures, both willingly passed it on and up to the relevant authority for further – and expected – government action. Triffett even volunteered to accompany what he must have thought a likely official follow-up expedition.

In addition to such rumours of the colonies’ wider geographies, accounts with far greater credibility originated from individuals conducting more deliberate exploration of the inland regions, and who could therefore be seen to be acting in some form of competition with the survey departments. As described earlier, Governor Macquarie sent Deputy Surveyor George Evans to cross the Blue Mountains in 1813, on the path taken by the three
private explorers Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth, specifically to reassert government authority over any westward expansion at that time. Twenty years later, although Mitchell suggested his first expedition was spurred by the Barber’s ‘fabulous tale’, he was far more concerned to trump the efforts of Charles Sturt and other non-departmental explorers. Importantly, he considered he had the superior claim since such work properly, and he suggested traditionally, fell under the surveyor general’s rubric: ‘Sir Patrick Lindesay [the acting governor], with due regard to the responsibility which my office seemed to impose upon me as successor to Mr. Oxley, at once accepted my proffered services to conduct a party into the interior’. 11

Whether on the grand scale of continental geography or the details of seemingly ever-flexible fencelines of individual settlers, this multiplicity of informal geographies – alternative and in many cases decidedly subaltern – posed a deeper problem for the local government, for they meant that the colonial frontier was as much epistemological as it was physical. While imposing law and order upon the nefarious elements remained the province of the local constabulary, the survey departments had to deal with those matters related to settlement within these doubly-grey areas. Procedurally this involved surveyors – usually in the field – determining rights to particular blocks of land, adjudicating conflicting claims and encroachments, valuing ‘improvements’ in order to compensate displaced occupants, and generally imposing cadastral and bureaucratic order. Epistemologically, all this meant making it official: effectively erasing these incipient yet informal geographies of settlement and replacing them with a single official version.

Hints of these disappearing informal geographies remain in the isolated huts or stockyards occasionally mentioned in surveyors’ reports and shown on early maps of these zones, and in the multitude of especially possessive placenames – such as Black Bob’s Creek or Blinkworth’s Hunting Ground – which, in contrast to the more official nomenclature drawn from British nobility and illustrious battlefields, instead recorded the settlements’ first wave of fringe-dwellers. In a neatly telling differentiation between simple topography and this less glorious realm of informal geography, George Frankland described one site to Hobart’s east as the ‘remarkable hill called by the barbarous name of Coal River Sugar Loaf’. In an equally explicit absorption of the peak into official geography, he ordered Assistant Surveyor William Malcolm to raise a post upon its summit and turn it into a trig station. 12

11 Three Expeditions, pp 2–3; on Mitchell’s rivalry with Sturt, see Foster, Mitchell, pp 117, 125, 149–50.
12 Frankland to Malcolm, 20 Dec 1832, AOT, LSD 63/1, p 32. It is still called the Coal River Sugar Loaf.
Yet this transformation from informal to formal geography, from unofficial to official information, raised yet another issue. Precisely because the colonial surveyors inhabited such a differentiated informational order, with reports coming from sources of greatly varying degrees of credibility — and exacerbated by these penal colonies having a reputation for nefariousness all round — distinguishing and distilling official knowledge involved not just gathering information, but also asserting the authority and credibility of individual surveyors and of their departments.

The intellectual authority of colonial surveyors

The colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land were not unique in granting to their constituents a certain air of unreliability that the more serious-minded felt they had to overcome. The question of the authority of writers addressing and conveying information to distant and largely unknown readerships arises in studies of both European and imperial travel writing, while broader and not necessarily literary issues have also emerged in histories of science, of the as yet uninstitutionalised professions, and of business relations. What has become increasingly clear from the convergence of these studies is that the authority which legitimised knowledge was largely, if in part indirectly, socio-cultural authority; and, secondly, that the different sources of this authority operated with variable currency according to the different — and especially social — contexts of that knowledge’s creation and reception.

Several years ago, literary historian Charles Batten identified the approaches that the more intellectual eighteenth-century European travel writers (relevant here as the forerunners to colonial travel writers and explorers) used to suggest they had greater credibility than their contemporary grand tourists, dilettantes, plagiarists and compilation-writers. Their techniques included using a progressive narrative format, including that of a journal; overtly and implicitly asserting that the writer had actually travelled; recording comprehensive and systematic observations; and adopting one of a relatively small set of writerly personae. Batten, however, tends to see such strategies as almost purely literary devices or tropes which operate within the text of the narrative, or at best as writers’ attempts to appease a hyper-critical literary review culture. In part his aim, like those critics, is to define the genre. He does not necessarily take into account the authors’ intent or the works’ wider reception.

More specific to colonial travel writing from the turn of the nineteenth century, Mary-Louise Pratt identifies two main literary modes by which authors established their authority, again through self-characterisation: the objectivity of the scientific or natural history writer, generated principally by establishing a distance between observer and observed; or the sensory, experiential reporting of ‘sentimental’ travellers, which relied more upon physical immersion and personal impact. The strategies she describes also tend to operate within the literary construct – and confines – of these texts, rather than in the historical realm of, for instance, the dialogue between author and readers.

In Australia, this form of post-colonial literary analysis had its high point in Simon Ryan’s study of mid- to late nineteenth-century exploration journals. He identifies writers’ sources of authority in such features as conforming to the image of an heroic individual; adhering to the Royal Geographic Society’s prescribed style of reportage; affecting the appropriate aesthetic and emotional reactions to either specific scenes and landforms or to the explored landscape in general; and in particular by figuratively constructing that landscape as a cartographic blank over which the explorer holds a form of possessive and creative power. Owing however to Ryan’s concentration on the artefact of the published journal, his analysis of their writers’ authority in particular becomes problematic, indeed almost ahistorical. He argues, for instance, that the ‘surprising’ inclusion of official instructions in published journals ‘undermines the picture of the self-activated explorer’. (In a similar vein, Bruce Greenfeld identifies official instructions as one of four sources of at times competing or ‘contradictory’ authority in the published journals of American explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.) However, such factors as might appear conflicting within the isolation of a single work would have been viewed as complementary by readers of particularly the earlier decades of the nineteenth century: in fact the more sources of authority the better. To a contemporary reader, instructions to an explorer from a governor (or president) would have demonstrated both the official nature of the expedition, granting the author/explorer a form of structural authority, and that he had the personal trust of a man in power to lead the expedition, and therefore a form of social and intellectual authority.

15 For one critique of the absence, in literary analysis, of the reception of such texts, see Robert Dixon, *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation and Colonial Governance*, UQP, Brisbane, 2001, esp intro.
17 *Cartographic Eye*, pp 38–39.
As the ‘cultural turn’ which produced such literary analyses straightened out again, various studies of colonial exploration and related texts began instead to stress the contexts in which these accounts were both created and received. Moving far beyond the texts themselves, Felix Driver put forward the concept of a wider ‘culture of exploration’ which included the physical, social and intellectual cultures of production, reproduction and reception of these colonial narratives. And again concerning Australian colonial texts, Robert Dixon’s study of Frank Hurley’s blend of science and showmanship in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aimed to place his various productions within their respective ‘domains of practice’.

Parallel to this evolving examination of travel/exploration writing, histories of pre-modern science have also increasingly pointed out the social, and often socially exclusive, elements that signified its serious and self-warranted endeavours. Perhaps best known, Dava Sobel describes the social barriers that confronted eminent clockmaker John Harrison in the late eighteenth century; while Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer and others have deconstructed the supposedly neutral, and therefore objective, sites of the scientific laboratory and public demonstration to reveal the social, cultural and institutional boundaries that defined their exclusive spaces and practices. In a more imperial context, histories of those nineteenth-century sciences which relied upon multiple observers and collectors from around the globe, such as botany or meteorology, also emphasise that, as David Livingstone succinctly puts it, ‘Where witnesses were located, both socially and spatially, counted in warranting the records they delivered’.

The unifying approach which effectively bridges all these areas is Shapin’s work on science and civility. In his *A Social History of Truth* he traces the loci of scientific credibility in Britain in the seventeenth century, noting their largely social and exclusionary nature. He describes a two-fold process of actors/writers establishing themselves as credible: externally, by distinguishing themselves from the long list of those assumed to be less credible

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(foreigners, women, Catholics, academics, the lower classes and the financially dependent); and internally by conforming to the image of a credible gentleman by exhibiting ‘perceptual competence’, maintaining one’s personal honour and Christian virtue, and conforming to ‘correct’ social modes of behaviour, especially polite conversation. He asserts that, ultimately, ‘Credible knowledge was established through the practices of civility’.  

Subsequent work on the history of science into the nineteenth century, however, notes an evolution away from the pre-eminence of modes of civility. As the sciences began to particularise – as signalled especially by the advent of specialised scientific societies from the turn of the century – the bases of credibility similarly shifted from civility, with its ideal of social (or at least sociable) inclusion, to more exclusive modes; from, as James Secord puts it, ‘scientific conversation’ to ‘shop talk’. The period under discussion here therefore falls within this transitional phase, when both modes of civility and modes of specialist practice warranted scientific knowledge.

One last set of studies relevant to an analysis of colonial surveyors’ assertions of authority, and one that similarly sees this period as a time of transition, is that concerning the emerging professions. Alongside the specific technical expertise needed, these studies again emphasise the importance of modes of civility – professional manners and etiquette – in these fields’ self-regulation and granting of authority. But as Marjorie Morgan notes, the early nineteenth century coincided with a shift in the link between such manners and professional prestige: from an early modern period when, through their own personal conduct ‘individual practitioners bestowed status on the professions’; to the industrial era when the reverse applied, and the profession made the man. She also notes another two-fold application of social/intellectual distinction, with an internal professional etiquette operating between practitioners, while a developing system of professional ethics regulated their external interactions with the public or clientele which they served. Further work on the conduct and status of professionals in colonial settings reinforces these findings, and notes also that,

because of the distances often involved, professional etiquette often manifested in a distinct epistolary field.  

The colonial surveyors may be seen to have operated at an intersection of all these areas in which credibility posed a problem. Their exploration journals obviously fall within that specific category of analysis, and within that of the more general field of travel writing, but it must be noted again that, compared to the vast bulk of the survey departments’ operations, such writings were exceptional rather than routine. Seeing exploration as merely a sub-set of the colonial surveyors’ many other roles therefore helps to emphasise the various contexts of production and reception of these more particular texts. Survey work in general fits better conceptually in the margins between early nineteenth-century science and the professions: science in the sense that surveyors employed relatively advanced technologies and instrumentation, including in more occasional investigations of what George Frankland termed at one point ‘the more philosophical branches’ of the service;  

and the professions in that surveyors held both an identifiable, technical occupation as well as a distinct role within the civil service. Lastly, the physical separation between the field and headquarters (and other readerships), and the surveyors’ consequent reliance on written communication, points to the largely epistolary nature of their information exchange, and thus the particular set of social factors at play.

Looking at the three broad types of claims to authority which surveyors made reveals especially how they needed to employ differing means for the different social worlds which they addressed. These three areas are, firstly, the institutional authority of holding office in the government and the survey department, usually expressed boldly to distant and anonymous readerships, but signified more symbolically in the colonies themselves, and redundant completely within the governmental apparatus. Forms of more purely social (that is, class-based) authority likewise ranged from expressions of aesthetic sensibility, aimed at anonymous readersips, to much more immediate concerns with manners and civility in the interpersonal relations with settlers or fellow officials. Lastly, surveyors might suggest their intellectual credentials to outsiders by alluding to their use of scientific instruments or

29 Frankland to col sec, Memorandum, 17 Sept 1834, AOT, LSD 61/2, p 105.
rational procedures, but since these were automatically assumed by their fellow surveyors, internally they instead chiefly validated their work by demonstrating professional diligence.

**The official authority of the colonial surveyors: Institutional membership**

Merely being officers of the survey department, and to a lesser extent members of the wider government establishment, provided surveyors with their principal claim to authority and credibility when reporting on geographic matters. It was, before all other considerations, what made their information *official* knowledge. But whether expressly or implicitly, surveyors proclaimed their institutional membership through different means, depending on the reader or observer. When it came to addressing the generally anonymous world of Britain and the rest of the empire, a simple statement of an official’s rank and title sufficed to recommend him over non-governmental informants on colonial affairs. In the colonies, however, where their fellow officers and settlers likely knew exactly where civil servants sat within the official hierarchy, these forms of distinction took more symbolic forms.

Mitchell was not alone in pointing out, as he did soon after recounting the Barber’s tale, that his official position as surveyor general recommended him above mere ‘votaries of fame or lovers of adventure’ to lead exploration expeditions.30 His predecessor, John Oxley, faced similar non-departmental competition from botanist/explorer Allan Cunningham, and he clearly trumpeted his own official credentials on the title page of his published journals: *Journals of Two Expeditions into the Interior of New South Wales, Undertaken by order of the British Government in the years 1817–18 by John Oxley, Surveyor General of the Territory and Lieutenant of the Royal Navy.*

Alan Atkinson writes that personal names were the ‘badges of the soul’, and that the exchange of signatures in correspondence or formal contract was like ‘a mutual salute in which each side gratified the dignity of the other’.31 Officials’ titles operated slightly differently, for they required no personal acquaintance with the individual, but rather a recognition of the office: if a signed name was an individual’s badge, then an official’s title was his flashy dress uniform. Mitchell, perhaps surprisingly, displayed only his military rank on his journals’ opening page, but when other colonial surveyors published various works in a more private capacity, several of them – including George Evans, Henry Dangar, William Govett and Nathaniel Kentish, all discussed in Chapter 6 – overtly mobilised their official status in order to recommend the veracity of their works to an imperial readership. As with

30 Three Expeditions, p 2.
Oxley’s *Journals* noted above, this usually entailed citing their official rank on title pages and dedicating their publications to the secretary of state for the colonies, with some cases also mentioning further traces of official status such as the amount of time they had served. The weight attached to formal titles might also be gauged conversely by the method of one critic to lampoon Mitchell’s inflated official dignity. In 1833 Nathaniel Kentish – by then a disgruntled former surveyor, for reasons which will become clear – advertised the prospectus for a new weekly newspaper to be called ‘The Surveyor General’. In a jibe at his erstwhile boss, who had recently taken over most of the Public Works department, Kentish pointedly clarified that ‘The Surveyor General’ was to be a ‘general survey’ of public life in Sydney, not of ‘all the located and unlocated Lands, Roads and Bridges, and Public Works within the Territory of New South Wales’.

At the local level of the colonies’ still quite small social worlds, and certainly inside the relatively small departments and government establishments, everyone’s position and rank was generally well known to everyone else. Before the First Fleet had even arrived, a midshipman on board the *Sirius* strategically introduced his younger nephew to Augustus Alt, whom he had already identified as being a ‘gentleman ... of good character and a principle [sic] officer ... he has the place of Surveyor-General’. In later years, locally published almanacs routinely printed the ‘civil list’, and appointments and promotions generally received notice in the government gazette. After resigning from his position as assistant surveyor in 1836, John Wedge even complained that the standard notice had not appeared, and he worried that:

> it will be inferred by the Public from such an omission that I must have done something to call in question my integrity as a public officer or to compromise my character as a Gentleman, and that I was consequently *allowed* to retire without notice – without even the courtesy shewn to the lowest servant under the Government.

Ranks and titles remained important, but in internal administrative correspondence, writers usually reduced the often grandiose formal titles of surveyors general and even of governors to the basic rank plus a polite acknowledgement of the rest: ‘&c &c &c’. Many surveyors, in signing off internal correspondence, included their own title, ‘Assistant Surveyor’ or more often an abbreviation such as ‘Ass’ *Syg*’, but even that was by no means a universal usage. In more social contexts, the title ‘Mr Surveyor’, which recognised the institution without getting

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32 Sydney Gazette, 18 May 1833, p 1.
33 David Southwell to Mrs Southwell, 4 June 1787, *HRNSW*, vol 2, p 672.
34 JH Wedge to Frankland, 21 July 1836, AOT, SG’s general corro, LSD 1/81 (JH Wedge #1), p 5.
into the specifics of its internal hierarchy, appears to have been the common form of address for the assistant and deputy ranks.

For individual surveyors at the personal and social level, institutional membership brought with it other readily apparent markers of their authority. The allocation of a government horse – especially in the earlier years when mounts remained quite scarce in the colonies – provided one significant symbol of a surveyor’s place in the official establishment. The assignment of a horse to George Evans, when he took up his post as deputy in Van Diemen’s Land in 1814, ruffled the feathers of one military officer, who felt his honour slighted by the apparently higher status conferred: ‘surely I am entitled to be mounted in preference to Mr. Surveyor. I conceive myself very improperly treated.’

The continuing social status and authority of a government horse was signified in 1823 by Evans riding beside the wealthy settler William Lawrence during the ritualistic marking out his property featured in Chapter 3 – although it was probably not the same horse. By that stage surveyors instead received a ‘forage allowance’ on top of their regular salaries in order to maintain a horse, but even these subsidised mounts appear to have been viewed as symbols of rank and therefore privilege. In 1836 William Sharland had to pay a fine of £5 for employing convicts, assigned to the department, on personal business: their errand, however, had merely been to return to Frankland two of his publicly foraged horses – deemed private property by an over-zealous constabulary and the courts – so he could ride back to meet Sharland the next day.

In the field – where assistant surveyors needed most to assert their official authority to carry out the contentious work of property delineation – survey parties also received government equipment, including tents and food rations, and the parties were themselves made up of specifically assigned convicts: all again valuable resources. Bushrangers in Van Diemen’s Land, for instance, made a point of targeting government-issue equipment and rations, to the extent that in the field one convict party-member always remained at camp during the day to protect it. Convicts assigned to these parties also occasionally destroyed this same equipment – especially by burning tents – as a form of industrial protest.

By the 1830s, convicts were themselves highly sought after, and those assigned to survey duty were also likely to be the better-behaved and more industrious men, making them doubly

35 See Macquarie to Davey, 21 Sept 1814, HRA, 3:2, pp 68–69; McKenzie to Davey, 19 Oct 1814, HRA, 3:3, pp 702–703.
36 Hobart Town Courier, 27 May 1836, p 4 (Sharland’s defence alluded sarcastically to the constables’ zeal). The anti-government Colonial Times (31 May 1836, p 7) tried to draw a connection between the charge, Sharland’s landholdings, the attorney general’s representation of Sharland at appeal, and general government corruption.
37 See eg Frankland to col sec, 6 Aug 1828, AOT, SG’s letterbook, LSD 16/1, pp 272–74.
valuable.\textsuperscript{38} In 1833, in a move to placate jealous private settlers who complained about the shortage of assigned labour in Van Diemen's Land, Arthur reduced that colony's survey parties from six convicts to five, and would have made them four had not Frankland strenuously defended their necessity.\textsuperscript{39}

**The authority of a gentleman: Aesthetic sensibility**

Civil office customarily bestowed a less tangible perquisite, in that it conferred a form of respectability or gentlemanly status upon the official. In Britain in the early nineteenth century, while the senior bureaucrats and politically appointed heads of government departments generally came from the aristocracy, even the clerks of the Home and Colonial Offices considered themselves gentlemen.\textsuperscript{40} Likewise as the list of 'professions' recognised as such by contemporaries opened up – from the traditional triad of doctors, lawyers and clergymen to the newer technical vocations, including engineers and surveyors – their practitioners also assumed respectable gentlemanly status.\textsuperscript{41} Such assumptions did not go uncontested, however, and while studies of exploration and travel texts point in particular to their authors' mobilisation of social authority through literary displays of aesthetic sensibility, within the more immediate and interpersonal relations of the colonies – both between surveyors and settlers, and between fellow officers – the niceties of manners, honour and etiquette became far more important.

The interpretation of explorers' aesthetic views of the landscape is another of the areas of ahistoricity within the post-colonial analysis of exploration writing. Ryan, for instance, argues that explorers' use of picturesque description conflicts with the scientific 'truth' they otherwise tried to record; that 'aesthetic excitement' was incompatible with 'scientific accuracy'.\textsuperscript{42} This in part insists on an overly narrow interpretation of scientific 'truth' – possibly because of an overly literal reading of the common prefatorial pledge of travel writers to give an 'unadorned' report. It also ignores the complementary relationship

\textsuperscript{38} Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, pers comm; and see Frankland to col sec, 19 June 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, p 439.

\textsuperscript{39} Burnett (Arthur's priv sec) to Frankland, 20 Aug 1833, AOT, SG's general corr, LSD 1/79, p 321.


\textsuperscript{42} *Cartographic Eye*, ch 3, esp pp 54–56.
between art and science that remained quite strong at the time. Greenfeld, despite his view on official instructions mentioned above, argues that a display of aesthetic taste lent the explorer a more universal source of authority, which in his analysis is one that Lewis and Clark (or rather their editor Nicholas Biddle) employed to transcend the 'conflicts' between the others. Other studies of exploration and science also illuminate how the expression of an emotional response, even to the point of bewilderment or madness, was common practice at the time. Whether transcendent or merely complementary, and regardless of how it sat with other elements within the confines of a particular text, displaying an aesthetic sensibility remained important because it functioned as a socio-cultural marker in the social worlds to which authors directed their writing.

In early colonial surveyors’ exploration writing, the use of picturesque imagery and related demonstrations of an aesthetic appreciation of landscape form a consistent but relatively minor theme. George Evans’ painterly descriptions of landscapes, and even the effects of light upon them, have been discussed in Chapter 2. While Oxley deliberately strove to demonstrate a more scientific outlook, he could still produce an emotional, picturesque description when a suitable scene became available:

imagination cannot fancy anything more beautifully picturesque than the scene which burst upon us. The breadth of the valley to the base of the opposite gently rising hills was, between three and four miles, studded with fine trees, upon a soil which for richness can nowhere be excelled ... In the centre of this charming valley ran a strong and beautiful stream, its bright transparent waters dashing over a gravelly bottom, intermingled with large stones, forming at short intervals considerable pools, in which the rays of the sun were reflected with a brilliancy equal to that of the most polished mirror.

Oxley’s far more frequent laments at the monotony and lack of aesthetic appeal in the otherwise barren or flooded plains of New South Wales still effectively made a claim to possess such a sensibility, albeit a thwarted one. Mitchell, as Ryan rightly points out, was

44 Greenfeld, 'The problem of the discoverer's authority', pp 17–18, 23ff.
46 Journals, part 1, 19 Aug 1817; see also Chapter 2 here; and Robert Dixon’s reading of this particular quote, in The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in the English Colony of New South Wales 1788–1860, OUP, Melbourne, 1986, pp 96–97.
47 Oxley was also perhaps adopting a descriptive trope from Indian travel/exploration narratives, which saw the subcontinent’s plains as ‘an uninteresting inundated country’: see Matthew Edney, Mapping an Empire: The Geographic Construction of British India 1765–1843, UChicP, Chicago, 1990, p 71.
‘particularly concerned with defining [himself] as a man of taste’, and he often alluded to various scenes’ picturesque qualities, even name-dropping famous artists of the genre – such as naming ‘Mount Salvator’. 48

Within the more in-house reports of explorative missions, surveyors only occasionally employed recognisable literary tropes of landscape description. These, however, tend more towards the awe-inspiring, sublime end of the landscape spectrum. For instance, James Calder (as paraphrased by Frankland in a report to Arthur) described a chasm on Maria Island in such terms:

In the Southern Peninsula after crossing ‘Cape Bald’ the traveller suddenly finds himself on the Brink of an enormous perpendicular abyss, 400 feet in depth, and communicating with the sea by a large natural arch-way in the Cliff, which is 120 yards distant. The awful impetuosity with which the surges rush through this arch-way, and dash their foam up the orifice can be more easily imagined than depicted. 49

When describing the dramatic headwaters of the Shoalhaven River and its surrounding ranges, William Harper likewise referred rhetorically to the landscape’s inconceivability:

I have made the River in one place but it is impossible for me to convey to you anything like an adequate idea of the terrific but picturesque appearance of the River. The Horizontal distance from Bank to Bank may be estimated a 1½ Miles and the perpendicular depth to the bed of the River from ½ to ¾ of a Mile, both Banks forming the Most rugged Mountains and perpendicular Cliffs that can be conceived. 50

Both cases in fact suggest a blurring of sense and sensibility: using the language of sensibility as much to convey the writer’s aesthetic education as to emphasise the scale and singularity of the landscape features – the latter of which may have been more relevant to their scientific, geological interpretation. It is notable for instance that both gave specific measurements, while elsewhere in his report Calder (or Frankland) considered various formations on Maria Island in light of then current geological theories concerning sea-level rises and volcanic catastrophism.

In the more usual day-to-day correspondence of the departments, with their general economy of expression and preoccupation with the mundane business of surveying settlers’ properties, a sense of the beauty (or otherwise) in the landscape is almost entirely absent. As with others of these predominantly social authority markers, an avowal of personal taste and accomplishment would have been redundant in internal correspondence since the individuals knew each other anyway. This is not to say that surveyors generally lacked an appreciation of

48 Ryan, Cartographic Eye, p 61.
49 ‘Notice on Maria Island’, Frankland to Arthur, 20 June 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, pp 182–85.
50 Harper to Oxley, 27 Feb 1824, SRNSW, SG, Letters from ASs, 2/1542-2, [np]. On inarticulacy and landscapes’ inconceivability see eg Ryan, Cartographic Eye, pp 83–86; Chloe Chard, Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600–1830, Manchester UP, Manchester, 1999, ch 2.
landscape: in their more personal endeavours, numerous surveyors displayed artistic abilities ranging from the amateur to the very accomplished (again, see Chapter 6). They just did not need to mobilise these abilities to suggest credibility to their colleagues in the departmental hierarchy.

Nevertheless, one area of more routine survey business where visual appreciation did occasionally match a concern for physical utility was in town planning, although here its expression appears more a concern for civic and imperial pride – towns and cities being considered the epitome of civilisation – than a form of personal recommendation. The ordered arrangement of buildings on streets and of these streets themselves was an important factor in government policy and practice, with Governors King and later Macquarie being the most assiduous town-planners. From roughly the mid-1820s, both colonies usually employed a designated ‘town surveyor’ whose duties partly involved regularising streetscapes. The survey departments proper, as much as they were involved, did demonstrate at least occasional attention to civic landscape aesthetics. When, for instance, Frankland advised the Van Diemen’s Land government what land to resume to build a road to the growing district of Sandy Bay near Hobart, he commented of his selection that ‘by this assignment a beautiful drive will be obtained’. Later, when it came time to find a site to build a church and school there, he neatly connected practicality and prettiness: ‘None appears to be so eligible whether as regards facility of access, supply of fresh water, centrical situation, or beauty of scenery as Mr Sharpe’s farm’.

Officers and gentlemen

In surveyors’ more usual face-to-face dealings with settlers and fellow officers, literary sensibility gave way to more immediate reflections of social attainment and authority, especially through personal manners and notions of gentlemanly honour. However, colonial society was notoriously prickly about the niceties of address and general etiquette, and surveyors as government officials were certainly not exempt. Several cases reveal a troublesome blurring of the boundary between the official and more private worlds, in which lapses of personal etiquette played a part, and which ultimately affected the credibility and authority – and even the jobs – of the surveyors involved.

51 The office tended to migrate within the government structure – at times autonomous, at others attached to either the public works or survey departments – and so its officials and work have a similarly transient place in this study: see Chapter 1.

52 Frankland to col sec, 4 Feb 1830, AOT, SG’s letters to the colonial secretary, LSD 61/1, ff 52–54; and 9 Oct 1834, LSD 61/2, f 111.
Although at the time the most experienced surveyor in the Van Diemen’s Land department, in 1834 Thomas Scott had an acrimonious correspondence with one settler which, in that settler’s mind at least, lessened Scott’s authority and made work relations difficult. As Scott reported to Frankland:

Mr James Rei bey ... will I imagine either protest against his land being measured by me, in consequence of the letters which have already passed between us, or if he does not I should wish to avoid giving him any farther cause for complaint.

Two days later he wrote that:

it will be a very unpleasant duty to be upon the land of almost the only man I am aware of on this side of the Island, who cannot feel satisfied, after the letters he has written, that I should be the officer sent to measure his estate. 53

Scott did not explain the source of this dispute, but clearly his standing in terms of simple institutional authority was not enough to satisfy the settler of the legitimacy of his work. As described earlier, field surveyors faced with property disputes generally had to rely on compromise and communal arbitration as much as they did on their legalistic authority as government officials, and in such cases personal bearing and interpersonal relations — including through the mail — obviously became important.

While Scott’s problems emanated from a private settler, some years previously Henry Dangar faced difficulties within the small official establishment at Newcastle in New South Wales. Although not confined to correspondence, Dangar’s dispute shows the tensions that could arise between officials because of the two contradictory social arrangements that governed their interactions: on the one hand gentlemanly civility, predicated on an ostensible equality among gentlemen; 54 and on the other hand government hierarchy, which insisted on clear gradations of rank.

In the early 1820s, Newcastle functioned as a ‘secondary penal settlement’: a prison within a prison for offenders who had been convicted of further crimes in New South Wales. But the area was also rapidly attracting wealthy free settlers eager to take up the good land in the Hunter Valley — land incidentally made known through Dangar’s work. These new settlers included the increasingly notorious ‘Major’ Mudie, and in early 1824 Dangar was called into town to answer a legal summons which Mudie had brought before Captain Gillman, the military commandant of the settlement who acted also as local magistrate. Gillman quickly dismissed Mudie’s complaint, but he instead took Dangar to task for failing ‘in a point of etiquette’. Dangar, knowing he would see Gillman the following morning before the case began, had not called upon the commandant to pay his respects when he first arrived in Newcastle. For this lapse Gillman declared him ‘unworthy of being

53 Scott to Frankland, 7 and 9 May 1834, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corre, pp 8–9.
54 See Shapin, Social History of Truth, chs 1–2.
regarded in the light of a Gentleman'.\(^{55}\) In a long letter to Oxley to defend himself, Dangar reveals the interconnectedness of personal honour and professional standing. Denying the charge, he argued that the dispute ‘could only be regarded as a private matter’. But as he framed it, within the government ranks there was no clear boundary between public and private, personal and official.

Gillman had initially sent Dangar a message, presumably either asking him to call or rebuking him for not, and which according to its recipient bore an ‘uncandid face’.\(^{56}\) Worse, it was delivered by a ‘Convict clerk’, whose position in the settlement’s small government establishment began to make the dispute both more public and official. The next day, Gillman attacked Dangar ‘while sitting in the Magisterial chair’ (and again ‘in the presence of a convict clerk’). This was the principal cause of Dangar’s complaint: that Gillman cast personal aspersions with the official authority of magistrate behind him, and in public. Yet the rest of Dangar’s counter-charges against Gillman describe the commandant’s own personal faults: his ‘ungovernable ebullition of rage’, his language, his initial ‘uncandid’ letter. And these personal failings, Dangar suggested, rendered Gillman himself unworthy of office: ‘Respecting the place [ie the court], tho’ the unprecedented conduct of Capt'n Gillman prevented my respecting the individual ...’. Likewise, Dangar considered that, while the ‘stigma’ on his own personal reputation remained, both ‘yourself [Oxley] & the world must esteem me as unworthy of retaining that office which I now have the honor of holding under the Colonial Government’. Not only did he regard his ‘character as suspended’, but his job as well.

While Scott and Dangar had conflicts with settlers and other government officials, the greatest transgressor of the internal blend of official and gentlemanly etiquette was Nathaniel Lipscombe Kentish, a surveyor attached to road parties between Sydney and Liverpool. Unfortunately he was not far enough away from headquarters to be outside Mitchell’s range of inspection and surveillance. Kentish appears (though partly on his own evidence) to have been a capable surveyor and especially a good manager of his convict work parties. One of his convict overseers, Ellis, was viewed in the area around their base at Liverpool as a sort of unofficial constable to whom settlers could turn if they had troubles with other convicts.\(^{57}\)

Mitchell, however, was unsatisfied and, as always, jealous of any of his subordinates who

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56 Dangar’s attached copies of the letters do not survive, but Gillman’s own letter-writing style evidently left something to be desired. Later in the year he was himself prosecuted over an equally uncandid letter to a Mr Vicars, who interpreted it as a challenge to a duel: see ‘R v Gillman’ [20 Oct 1824], Australian, 14, 21 and 28 Oct 1824, <www.law.mq.edu.au/scnsw/html/r_v_gillman_1824.html>.
might presume to outshine him. Again according to Kentish, Mitchell conducted something of a vindictive campaign to put Kentish in his place, including by attacking Ellis. In November 1832 Kentish went so far as to write to the secretary of state, Lord Goderich, complaining of Mitchell’s ‘persecution’. In forwarding the letter, however, Governor Bourke sided with Mitchell, and criticised Kentish’s language and manner in writing.\textsuperscript{58} Before Goderich’s response came back, and after more provocation from Mitchell, Kentish fired off another complaint, and this time Bourke felt compelled to sack him immediately for ‘addressing to me and to the Surveyor General ... very improper letters’.\textsuperscript{59}

Kentish’s second letter in fact began properly enough: ‘Sir, I have the honor to reply to your letter dated the 2d Inst received by last nights post. I have personally given directions for the immediate removal of Ellis’s Gang towards Bawler’s Bridge according to your instructions.’ He went on to defend himself against some of Mitchell’s charges by asserting (with perhaps some hyperbole) the facts: Ellis and his gang, though undermanned, had done more work that any other in the colony; the Liverpool Road, on which the gang worked, was equal to any road he knew in England, and far better than any locally; and the Menangle Road, which Mitchell had told him to move, took the best route to avoid boggy lowlands. Kentish also listed several members of the settler elite and civil establishment who would, he said, back up these claims. But going beyond mere refutation, in some of the other points which Kentish countered he implied the faults lay instead with Mitchell, including in his own personal conduct. The absent placard that Mitchell had complained about, which was meant to display road gang regulations, had never arrived from headquarters: this was contrary to Mitchell’s stated intent, suggesting he was not true to his word. Kentish also criticised his superior for the ‘upbraidings and reprimands’ dished out to convict overseers and ‘hapless subaltern Officers’ alike. The real sticking point, however, appears to have lain in Mitchell’s intemperate verbal orders to Ellis and his gang to cease taking firewood to Kentish’s house whenever they took the carts into Parramatta for rations. Firstly, Kentish pointed out this was another perquisite of office which all of his colleagues still enjoyed, but he also described Mitchell’s manner of delivering this edict through convicts (rather than through an official letter) as ‘ungentlemanly’ and ‘underhand’. Obviously worked up by now, Kentish wrapped up with a stinging penultimate paragraph:

Sir, I know not how to dissimulate, this conduct is worthy of you, it is in keeping with your complaint [about the road] in the very teeth of truth & justice ... it corroborates as

\textsuperscript{58} See Bourke to Goderich, 3 Nov 1832, \textit{HRA} 1:16, pp 791–92.
\textsuperscript{59} Bourke to Goderich, 10 May 1833, \textit{HRA} 1:17, pp 115–116.
strongly as facts can do the justice, the occasion, the necessity, of my complaint to Lord Goderich of your continued persecution, of which it is another act. Reverting to more proper form, he signed off ‘Your humble & Obed. Ser.’, Nat Lipscombe Kentish. 60

That a ‘hapless subaltern’ such as Assistant Surveyor Kentish could write a letter from the back-blocks of New South Wales to His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies in London – and be confident that it would receive due attention – demonstrates the connectivity of the colonial government apparatus. Governor Bourke’s damning comments in forwarding it and presenting the case to Goderich, and the fact that by the time it arrived Goderich had been replaced by Edward Stanley, conversely reveal how mediated and provisional that network could be. Stanley simply dismissed the complaint, ‘much surprised that Mr. Kentish should have forgotten himself so far as to enter upon so objectionable a correspondence’. 61 Instead he reaffirmed that the surveyor general was alone responsible for the internal management of his department, implicitly reinforcing that interpersonal relations were perhaps even more important than structural ones.

The authority of science

If an aesthetic sensibility and honourable behaviour signalled social attainment, an appreciation of the topics and methodology of science equally proclaimed intellectual attainment. Once again, however, while the generic expectations of exploration reportage allowed considerable scope for scientific content, the more usual activities of surveying did not. Some of the few exceptions included the very specific issues relating to either surveying itself or the quality of the land. In August 1826, for example, Thomas Florence reported two months worth of measurements and calculations of local magnetic variation, done it seems on his own initiative, at various places between Sydney and the Shoalhaven district. 62 Florence had only just been appointed to the New South Wales department, after a wide-ranging surveying career including service in Upper Canada and some contract surveying in Van Diemen’s Land, and this exercise may have been partly an attempt to establish his professional credentials. Also in the mid-1820s, New South Wales surveyors routinely

60 Kentish to Mitchell, 6 April 1833, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors, 2/1546-4, pp 93–98; it is also reproduced in HRA 1:17, pp 117–120 (although this copy notably lacks the valedictory flourish).
61 Stanley to Bourke, 2 Sept 1833, HRA 1:17, p 207.
62 Florance to Oxley, 12 Aug 1826, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors, 2/1536-2, [np]. Geomagnetism was still poorly understood in the early 19th. James Ross didn’t find the site of the North Magnetic Pole until 1831, and the progressive movement of what are in fact various magnetic poles not realised until even later: see eg A Jonkers, *The Earth’s Magnetism in the Age of Sail*, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore, 2003.
collected soil samples from each district to return to headquarters along with the more usual maps and property descriptions. This occurred, however, under instruction from Oxley rather than from individual surveyors’ personal interest or inclination, and it is also unclear what use Oxley made of them. The collection and despatch of such samples, therefore, could only function as a recommendation of the surveyors in terms of diligence and obedience, not as evidence of a superior mind that was curious as to the import of ‘minute particulars’.

In contrast, those areas of early nineteenth-century science that were more commonly practised in the colonies but which were less directly relevant to surveying – most notably botany, zoology or ethnography – are almost entirely absent from the departments’ regular internal transactions, so that an attention to such matters can hardly be seen as an internal recommendation to a surveyor’s work. One rare exception, outside of the deliberately more expansive exploration logs, is a brief report from Assistant Surveyor John Wedge to Frankland in Van Diemen’s Land: ‘I was within 3 hours of getting a live platibus [sic], the booby having killed one he had in his possession about that length of time before I arrived at his hut’. That Wedge commented at all suggests some shared interest, but he relegated this information to a postscript after an otherwise business-like letter concerning a settler’s desire for wider river frontage and his own request for more HHH pencils. From the near-silence on these topics in the survey departments’ archives it appears that, if more purely scientific knowledge did regularly pass from field to headquarters, it occurred at a more personal (verbal) and unofficial level – but even this would have been hampered by field surveyors’ long tours of duty in distant areas.

This is one of the more surprising features of the routine work of Australian colonial survey departments, considering their place within the otherwise generally scientifically minded empire. In British India, as Matthew Edney has described, company surveyors were expected to report upon an exhaustive list of scientific topics encompassing physical topography, natural history and both historical and contemporary human geography. Edney argues that it was the cumulative archive of this encyclopaedic program – an appropriately Oriental luxuriance of information – that constructed ‘India’ in the minds of its British occupiers and of observers back at home. It is indicative of the very different imperial needs

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63 See eg Dangar to Oxley, 5 Jan 1824, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors, 2/1526-1, ff 110–112; Dangar cites Oxley’s letter of 10 Feb 1823, although Oxley’s instructions from Brisbane of that date only ask for descriptions, not samples: Goulburn (col sec) to Oxley, 10 Feb 1823, SRNSW, CSO, Letters sent, 4/3507, pp 312–313.

64 Wedge to Frankland, 25 March 1833, AOT, General corre, LSD 1/11, p 303 (the ‘booby’ may have been this letter’s official subject, a Mr Talbot, but the ‘hut’ may suggest some other fringe-dweller).

65 Edney, Mapping an Empire, pp 44–46
and governmental role in the early Australian colonies that their survey departments (and the archives they created) so single-mindedly concentrated on the processes and records of land alienation.

While the topics of nineteenth-century science may have featured only in some few surveyors’ exploration narratives, two intrinsic and interrelated features of scientific and rational practice were vitally important in lending authority and credibility across the full range of colonial survey work: careful and methodical observation, and the use of instruments to enhance (and in their own way simultaneously authorise) those observations. Technical instrumentation characterised Enlightenment science and especially scientific travel and exploration. It also played an important role in Britain’s initial engagement with Australia, James Cook’s Endeavour being primarily engaged on an astronomical expedition, and brimming with telescopes, several versions of experimental chronometers and the latest in other navigational equipment. 66 Throughout this period, whether on land or sea, most explorers of Australia continued to indulge something of an instrument fetish. Among surveyor-explorers, for instance, Oxley’s party in 1817 carried the usual navigating equipment – compasses, sextants and telescopes – plus the land surveying equipment of possibly a circumferencer and certainly a couple of surveyor’s chains, as well as a barometric altimeter, to measure height above sea level, plus another barometer and three different sorts of thermometer to record the weather. 67

For the more prosaic practices of surveying land, similar specialist instruments were essential. As detailed in Chapter 3, formal grants of land in the colonies specified each property’s boundaries using directional bearings and chain lengths. Although many of the earlier descriptions cite bearings in increments of five degrees, suggesting surveyors used only a compass, most include measurements down to half a degree, reflecting the use of a circumferencer – a larger version of a compass, mounted on a tripod and including a spirit level to set the instrument to the horizontal. 68 The availability, maintenance and repair of these surveying instruments features constantly within regular correspondence, but only as a logistical concern, not as an assertion of professional or intellectual authority. Along with the


67 Oxley’s attention to meteorological measurements was particularly cutting-edge: see Vladimir Jankovic, Reading the Skies: A Cultural History of English Weather 1650–1820, Manchester UP, Manchester, 2000.

technical, slightly arcane, legal descriptions on those grants, the basic mechanical requirement of such instruments put the ability to delineate property boundaries out of the practical (and possibly financial) reach of individual settlers. Apart from the few private surveyors who operated in the colonies from the late 1820s, the government through its surveyors retained a near monopoly on this technical expertise – both the knowledge to produce it, and the knowledge it produced.

Surveyors did record an enormous amount of evidence of their methodical observation, using these technical instruments, in the form of their survey field books. In these they noted each and every leg of each and every route survey, all the same lengths and angles of property boundaries that appeared on grant deeds, and much more besides. But, perhaps surprisingly, they did not mobilise these records as proofs of their professional care and diligence. Within the survey departments, fellow officers automatically assumed the use of proper practice, so individuals did not need to mention instruments or describe their methods as ways of bolstering personal credibility. These field books also seem to have remained in each surveyor’s possession for much of the time, as detailed personal records of their own work and to which they occasionally referred in response to queries from headquarters. Although archived eventually in the office, there is little evidence that in-house officials there referred to them, or needed to. Conversely, to anyone outside the department such information would have been all but unintelligible, and so similarly redundant as a way of suggesting that the surveyor had obtained his information in a credible way.

**Observational competence, complete narrative and demonstrable diligence**

Instead of alluding to the manifold, intricate details of their professional methods, surveyors stressed their more general attentiveness as a way of suggesting their observational competence, particularly in terms of their efficient use of time. Such claims again varied depending on intended recipient, from the genre-specific tropes of published exploration literature through to regular internal reports from the field in a progression of styles from narrative letters to printed forms. In particular these internal claims also merged into suggestions of more specifically institutional ideals regarding attention to duty and professional diligence.

Within the more formalised exploration journals, largely directed to anonymous readerships, surveyor-explorers demonstrated systematic observation through accepted
literary tropes. Batten identifies the most basic, and most pervasive, of these as emphasising the completeness of the narrative: the literary and/or structural suggestion of constant, gap-free report, most obviously through the journal format itself.\textsuperscript{70} Such a narrative structure had become the standard template for factual and geographic travel writing long before the settlement of the Australian colonies, and was a characteristic especially of nautical logs, and thus published nautical journals such as Cook’s. Those surveyors who undertook major inland exploration expeditions in the Australian colonies—Evans, Oxley and Mitchell—and even some who took more minor excursions, such as John Darke in his trip to the ‘Peak of Teneriffe’ in Van Diemen’s Land,\textsuperscript{71} all used the journal format. To ensure there were no time gaps in the published journal of his second expedition, Oxley even included a short appendix recording eleven days of looser field notes written by his deputy Evans during a separate foray while Oxley and the remainder of the party were stuck with their baggage on sudden floodplains.\textsuperscript{72}

A similar suggestion of comprehensive narrative occurs in some of the earlier departmental correspondence, and surveyors frequently combined it with a more specific attestation of diligence: following orders. In the first half of the 1820s, many of the letters from assistant surveyors to headquarters observed a general pattern of acknowledging their receipt of instructions, narrating the survey party’s passage to the relevant district, and then their commencement and possibly completion of the ordered work. Within this chronology, surveyors made an especial effort to account for time and movement, and as with more formal and published travel writings, they usually covered each day. For instance, in early 1824 William Harper reported back to Sydney his activities at the beginning of a posting to the county of Argyle in the New South Wales:

\begin{quote}
In conformity with my Instructions I beg leave to acquaint you, that after receiving our provisions at Liverpool on the 14th Ult. we proceeded on our journey into Argyle and arrived … on the Evg of the 23d without meeting the Smallest Accident … On Saturday the 24th I commenced tracing from the Crossing Places of the Stony Creek … I then proceeded along the road Eastward to where the Shoal Haven road branches off, then along that Road to my present station near the Crossing place of Shoal Haven River.
\end{quote}

Later in this same letter Harper also reports a loss of eleven days—again noting the specific period—after he was stung by a scorpion.

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Pleasurable Instruction}, esp pp 86–91.
\textsuperscript{71} ‘Peak of Teneriffe: JC Darke’s account of his explorations in that region’, 19 Mar to 8 April 1833, and ‘Journal of an Expedition Southwest of the Peak of Teneriffe’, 13 May to 1 June 1833, AOT, LSD 1/91, General corro, pp 45–65 and 67–77.
\textsuperscript{72} ‘Diary of Mr Evans ... from the 8th to the 18th of July 1818’, \textit{Journals of Two Expeditions}, pp 377–79.
\textsuperscript{73} Harper to Oxley, 27 Feb 1824, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors, 2/1542-2, np.
By the 1830s, assistant surveyors' attention to time and motion in the field became concentrated in more standardised and regular reports, at first monthly and, in Van Diemen's Land where communication was easier, also weekly. Surveyors again made such reports as a list of days. For instance in his weekly report for April 1833, William Sharland listed each day and was careful to list both work and any work-related reasons for time away from it:

11 April 1831. Answering letters
12 — Plan of Road
13 — Finished Plan of Road
14 — Went to Hobart town to procure [Screws?] for Compass, and drawing Stationery and other articles from the Survey Office.
15 — Marking off allotments at New Norfolk —
16 — Returned to the Clyde.  

There is a clear parallel between travel and exploration writing's journal format, surveyors' narrative letters and later weekly returns, and later still bureaucratic forms and timesheets, in that all in slightly different ways accounted for time. However, between the (admittedly genre-driven) travel author or surveyor's providing the information, as a way of bolstering credibility, and the bureaucratic insistence on auto-surveillance, there is clear shift in agency from claims volunteered to information required. The effect that these later forms had on surveyors' geographic information is discussed more fully below; their impact on surveyors' intellectual and even moral authority is made clear by the more institutional and internal variants of their claims to observational competence, in particular to professional diligence, for these forms of report limited the opportunities to make such claims.

A few years before Sharland’s succinct weekly report quoted above, he made a far more direct avowal — and defence — of how he spent his time on the job after someone had criticised his conduct in the field. In response to a rebuke passed down from Government House, Sharland replied that 'Whoever stated to the Lieutenant Governor that "I visit New Norfolk Every Saturday" stated what is incorrect'. He went on to explain in some detail that he only visited his rented house in that town once a month, in order to study records stored more securely there than he could in his tent, and that he never left his post in the field to do so until after 3 PM on a Saturday.  

Other surveyors also got into hot water over their attention, or inattention, to duty. Frankland sent constant warnings and 'please explain' letters to John Halls throughout the summer of 1832 and 1833, including in April that 'I have by Common Report that you have for several days been at Sorell, but it would have been more satisfactory to have received the

74 AOT, LSD 220, 'Draft journal of WS Sharland's official duties', [np].
75 Sharland to Frankland, 30 June 1831, AOT, SG's general corre, LSD 1/81 (Sharland), p 5.
intelligence from yourself'. In New South Wales, as Alan Andrews recounts, Mitchell frequently admonished his assistants, engaged on the topographic survey in often very rugged terrain, for taking too long to complete their tasks or to move from one site to another. Some surveyors even felt that their colleagues' absences might damage their own professional standings. Also in 1833, Frankland thanked another assistant, Raphael Clint, for informing him that John Seymour had left his post. Although Frankland felt he also had to reprimand Clint for the 'dictatorial' tone of his letter, he allowed that this arose in part from 'the anxiety which you very properly express, that the work on which I am at present employing you, should be prosecuted with Vigour and in a manner calculated to support your Character'.

The scorpion sting which Harper suffered suggests one last aspect of diligence which surveyors stressed especially to their immediate superiors: bodily impact. While the post-colonial interpretation emphasises the disembodied nature of explorers as detached eyes above the landscape, and while some surveyor-explorers did tend to downplay their personal physicality in their published narratives, in other contexts – and especially in the records of their day-to-day work – surveyors' bodies were surprisingly present. This relates to diligence in two ways. As Harper reported it, his encounter with the scorpion meant time away from work that he then had to explain. But there is an additional sense in his and other examples that surveyors also reported such injuries to suggest the lengths to which they were prepared to go in order to do their duty, whereby such bites, bumps, burns and abrasions represented honourable wounds, signifiers of their efforts and sacrifices.

Evans' physicality, as he recorded in his exploration journals directed personally to Governor Macquarie, has been described in Chapter 2: for instance his being bitten by a snake, fears his weight might sink the party's bark canoe, or injuring his hip in a fall – all from his 1812 trek from Jervis Bay back to Sydney. Oxley, by contrast, was far more reticent in his published journals: the physical difficulties of the boggy ground, for instance, was something which in his narrative the party and the packhorses faced, not Oxley himself. Evans later suggested that Oxley suffered throughout this second expedition from 'a

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76 Frankland to Halls, 7 Nov 1832, AOT, SG, Letters to surveyors, LSD 63/1, pp 20–21; 22 Nov (p 24); 27 Nov (p 27); 13 Dec 1832 (p 29); 25 Jan 1833 (p 41) and 23 April (p 97). Halls managed to survive these lapses but was nominated for 'reduction' (ie redundancy) in late 1835 (Frankland to col sec, 22 Dec 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, pp 126–27).

77 Alan Andrews, Major Mitchell's Map 1834: The Saga of the Survey of the Nineteen Counties, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1992, pp 60 (to Hoddle); 74 (Elliot); 115–117 (Ogilvie); 156–57 and 166 (Govett); 169 (D'Arcy).

78 Frankland to Clint, 3 Feb 1833, AOT, LSD 63/1, Letters to assistant surveyors, np.
complaint of the Bowels’, which might explain why most of the party stopped while Evans made what in the published journals is an appendicised side-trip.\textsuperscript{79} Oxley, however, could never with any propriety admit such bodily functions to the world at large. Internally, writing to their surveyors general, assistant surveyors could be far more candid. In 1826, Thomas Florence informed Oxley that he had ‘Sprained a Tendon of my left Leg’;\textsuperscript{80} in Van Diemen’s Land in 1835, John Seymour reported that he had been bitten on the hand by a dog, and subsequently confined to bed;\textsuperscript{81} and John Darke described how, having narrowly survived hypothermia during a blizzard atop the Peak of Teneriffe, he then suffered the opposite extreme when his tent caught fire in the night and severely burned both his legs.\textsuperscript{82}

Among these examples, however, Harper’s remains the clearest exemplification of the link between manly forbearance and diligent attention to duty, in particular by the way he framed his account:

The whole preliminary part of my Duty would before this time have been performed had I not had the misfortune to have been bit by a Scorpion on my right foot while in Bed. Next Morning my foot & leg to the Knee was inflamed and swollen to an alarming degree and latterly became nearly Black. I applied a number of Leeches from the water holes as near to the wound as possible which considerably abated the inflammation, though the only temporary relief I had from the most excruciating pain was when I had my leg immersed in cold water. I was eleven days confined from field duty.\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Bureaucratic control and resistance: ‘Plotting in Tent’}

As outlined in Chapter 1, the early colonial survey departments could not be said to have been ‘rationalised’ bureaucracies in Weberian terms. Although by the 1830s the two separate departments shared considerable similarities in some basic features such as filing systems, each continued to be dominated by the individual personalities and styles of their surveyor general. Consequently the relationship that most governed information pathways within the departments remained the interpersonal relationship between each surveyor general and his assistants – as the case of Kentish shows. A more clearly impersonal, bureaucratic form of administration was developing through this time, however, and both its style and surveyors’ responses had implications for the sources of authority behind the information that they produced – especially surveyors’ diligence.

\textsuperscript{79} Evans to Governor Charles Fitzroy, Memorial, [28 Nov 1848], ML, Ae 3/9 (for dating see notice of receipt, Edward Deas Thomson (col sec) to Evans, 28 Nov 1848, ML, Ae 3/11);
\textsuperscript{80} Florence to Oxley, 29 Oct 1826, SRNSW, SG, Letters rec’d from surveyors, 2/1536-2, ff9–11.
\textsuperscript{81} Seymour to Frankland, 27 Jan 1835, AOT, LSD 1/81, SG’s general corr: Surveyors (Seymour), p 7.
\textsuperscript{82} Darke, ‘Peak of Teneriffe’, pp 55–59 (blizzard) and 76–77 (burns).
\textsuperscript{83} Harper to Oxley, 27 Feb 1824.
In the place of those earlier narrative letters and regular reports that surveyors sent back to headquarters and described above, access to printing equipment – from the late 1820s for the New South Wales department, and the early 1830s in Van Diemen’s Land – meant that the departments could prepare standard reporting forms for field surveyors to fill out. The column heads for each day on the first version of the Van Diemen’s Land department’s weekly report simply ran: ‘Date / How Employed / No. of Grants Measured / No. of Acres / Remarks’. By 1835 surveyors in Van Diemen’s Land also filled out monthly reports, which reduced the amount of space for ‘Remarks’ – where previously surveyors had mostly reported their various excuses for not working – and added a column for ‘town lots’. The New South Wales versions were monthly and slightly more elaborate, with a separate descriptive section for ‘Remarks on the Country surveyed’ (more on which below). In fact so taken was Sydney headquarters with the idea of standard forms that, when for whatever reason the printed versions were not available, the office clerks appear to have produced hand-drawn versions in faithful imitation. This regime of form-filling, which the assistant surveyors quickly recognised as a method of auto-surveillance, inspired various forms of resistance. Surveyors in Van Diemen’s Land appear to have initially shared something of a school-boy joke at the expense of Frankland’s system of weekly returns. In August 1832 he circulated some revised rules, the first of which stipulated that, when a surveyor had spent the whole day drafting maps, ‘he is not to content himself, in describing the employment of that day, by inserting the words “Plotting in Tent” …’. Frankland presumably appreciated the pun about their canvas-cloaked conspiracy – why else spell it out? – but his assistants’ real intent was perhaps more subtle. Surveyors were already complaining about the amount of paperwork they had to get through in the often very difficult conditions of the field, and in reports of their activities both before and after the introduction of these forms, surveyors frequently listed whole days spent writing and replying to letters, both from settlers and headquarters. These regular weekly and monthly returns just added another layer of paperwork, and an extreme brevity of expression – school-boy surliness to follow their quashed rebellion – both helped get through it and registered a protest.

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84 Weekly reports from Oct–Dec 1832, AOT, AS’s weekly reports and quarterly returns, LSD 222/1; and Monthly reports, eg Jan–March 1835, LSD 222/10.

85 See Elliot, manuscript monthly report, Sept 1828, SRNSW, SG, Letters from surveyors, 2/1534, p 16.

86 Memorandum, 2 Aug 1832, AOT, SG’s letters to surveyors, LSD 63/1, f 7.

87 See, for instance, Sharland’s ‘Journal’ for 11–16 April 1833 – quoted above.
NEW SOUTH WALES

MONTHLY REPORT of the Progress of the Surveying Party under the order of Assistant Surveyor ________ employed on Surveying Duty ____________ between the 1st and ___ Day of ________ 1828

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measured Miles of Distance</th>
<th>Square Miles Surveyed</th>
<th>Report of the Country Surveyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries of Lands</td>
<td>Trace of River</td>
<td>In measurement of Lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trace of Ridges or Roads</td>
<td>In marking Section</td>
<td>General Survey of Hills or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lines</td>
<td>Rivers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOIL:** Whether alluvial, or Forest Land, or Rocky and Barren.

**HILLS:** Whether Rocky and Broken or undulating and of easy Access.

**RIVERS:** Their width, fords, the nature of their bed, and quality of the water.

**WOODS:** The description of timber, and whether they are thick, and impenetrable, or partially covering the country.

Native Names of places to be in all places inserted where they can be ascertained.

R. HOWE, GOVERNMENT PRINTER

Some other expressions of resistance, however, were stronger and more clearly a reaction to the obvious implication of such reporting – that surveyors may not have been diligent. Joseph Fossey, who along with Henry Hellyer joined the southern department in 1832 after five years of private surveying for the Van Diemen’s Land Agricultural Company, initially refused to submit a regular report. Importantly, his reasoning seems to have rested more upon a point of personal and professional honour than an issue of workload: ‘it is the first time in my Life that I have ever been asked for such a thing, and I shall not begin now’. Fossey even threatened to resign over the insulting requirement.88 (He must have relented, for he was still employed six months later, when he again threatened to resign because the government would not provide him with more guns to defend his party from Aborigines. Frankland, incidentally ‘disapproving’ of the tone of Fossey’s letter, called his bluff and accepted his resignation.89)

Part of the problem, at least in Van Diemen’s Land, was that much of this reporting regime originated from outside the department, for it was Arthur and his colonial treasury which particularly wanted to know how the members of the survey department – the second-most expensive in the colony after the convict establishment – spent their valuable time. In New South Wales, while surveyors regularly reported to Mitchell, including on those printed forms, it was much more of an internal device: Mitchell resisted as much as he could any outside interference in his department, even from governors.90 Arthur, however, was not above making almost obsessive inquiry into his underlings’ work practices, and was always on the lookout for savings. In the earlier years of his governorship, his private secretary – who could also keep a straight face when confronted with absurdity – had wryly informed the acting surveyor general, William Dumaresq, that ‘the attention of the Lieutenant Governor has been much drawn to the constant demand for small Articles [and he] observes that such supplies as “Tea Kettles” &c &c are not furnished in New South Wales’. Some days later he reported that Arthur had since made ‘particular enquiries’ concerning the rations of tea and sugar which survey parties routinely received, although unlike the luxurious tea kettles these supplies survived his cost-cutting.91

89 See Frankland to Fossey, 2 and 19 April 1833, AOT, LSD 63/1, pp 83–84; 91.
90 See eg Foster, Thomas Livingston Mitchell, esp chs 4–5 dealing with his fraught relations with Governors Brisbane and Darling.
91 Burnett to Dumaresq, 25 Sept 1827, AOT, LSD 22/4, Letters from col sec, pp 69 & 77; see also Frankland’s defence of assistants’ field stores, Frankland to col sec, 6 Aug 1828, AOT, LSD 16/1, SG’s letterbooks, pp 272–74.
Arthur’s surveillance of surveyors’ time, while not so petty, had similarly strict motives. Frankland’s third rule from the ‘Plotting in Tent’ circular, concerning the weekly reports to be submitted to the lieutenant governor, made this all too clear:

The Journals being not only intended to shew what professional work has been performed each day, but likewise to declare whether any portion of that day (from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M.) has been devoted to any occupation besides the Public Service, the Assistant Surveyors will be scrupulously particular in narrating all that they have done during those hours and in reporting all their movements during the same.92

On one of his later returns WH Babington was indeed ‘scrupulously particular’, stating in response: ‘I certify that during this week I have not been employed in any way but in the service of Government from 9 of AM to 4 of PM each day’.93

The underlying significance of these forms is that they betray a change in the relationship between field surveyors and their superiors, whether governors or surveyors general. Many of the items of reported information were efforts to quantify – and thereby to both encourage and enforce – aspects of the surveyors’ work which until then they had been proudly asserting themselves as evidence of their professional and public service diligence. By replacing the need for more expansive narrative letters with a largely statistical summation, such forms effectively took away from the surveyors one of their main avenues for claiming personal authority.

‘Barren and Rocky’: The bureaucratic constraints on knowledge formation

Another important side-effect of this sort of surveillance and reporting was a similar limiting of the scope surveyors had to describe the landscape in which they worked. The trend away from narrative and discursive letters to single-item reports, and the growing standardisation of language especially on printed forms, both constrained the content of knowledge about the colonies and restricted the avenues for knowledge transfer from field to headquarters and the higher levels of government. Consequently, from the early 1820s (when the departments became big enough to require and produce correspondence between headquarters and field) until the end of this period, there is a discernable diminution in the amount of more general geographic knowledge communicated, directly or circumstantially, in surveyors’ regular correspondence.

92 Memorandum, 2 Aug 1832, AOT, SG’s letters to surveyors, LSD 63/1, f7.
93 Return 10–15 Dec 1832, AOT, LSD 222/1, [np].
Starting in 1823—before standardised printed forms came into use in New South Wales—Henry Dangar, for example, reported back to Sydney using a traditional narrative letter format. In it he described ‘Township No. 8’ on the Hunter River as:

Flat alluvial soil extending SW from the river, from one to two miles broad. – Forest land undulating of the first & second class. – Structure generally hard sandstone. South part watered by ponds, which are brackish during Summer.94

Others were even more descriptive, and for instance William Harper’s blend of science and aesthetics in describing the admittedly more dramatic ranges and ravines inland from the Illawarra region in 1824 has been mentioned above. Similarly, in a fairly standard narrative letter to headquarters in Van Diemen’s Land in 1829, Charles Wedge managed to communicate a wealth of information regarding both his work and the landscape:

I have also finished the Survey of the Jordan [River] to its entrance into the Great Jordan Lagoon. The land in the boundaries of the Survey is hilly and the hills of a good quality – The land in the bends of the Jordan which was purchased by Benjamin Jones is of a bad quality, scrubby and rocky the rock with which it abounds is freestone; it is covered with gum trees of stinted [sic] growth and abounds in Kangaroo – The Jericho tier (hills so named) is very good for the purpose of grazing sheep and in common with high hills generally in the Colony the West side of it is barren being much exposed to the heavy westerly winds which generally blow at this season of the year – The Timber with which it is covered are gum trees and She-oak, and upon some parts of it Iron stone is to be found, in marking off Jones Grant I found it slightly affected the needle.95

By 1827—just before the introduction of printed forms—field surveyors in New South Wales submitted regular monthly ‘progress reports’ to headquarters in Sydney, but to do so they still used a relatively loose narrative letter format, complete with descriptive passages. For instance, in part of his report for April of that year, Thomas Florence gave a description of another part of the Hunter district that combined both personal experience and detached observation:

This part of the Country is so flooded, that the cattle [ie the oxen which pulled the party’s supply cart] have to go up the creeks Six or Eight miles, ere they can cross them. The quality of the Land may be termed ‘Second Class’ thickly timbered forest hills with good, and bad soil on different sides of them, with stony tops.96

This categorisation of land quality as ‘first’ or ‘second class’ was an initial step in limiting the surveyors’ descriptive scope, but as seen especially in the second example, the open letter style that surveyors used at this time still allowed them to elaborate.

The use of printed forms on which surveyors had to report their work went several steps further towards constraining these previous descriptive possibilities. Most simply, these

94 Dangar to Oxley, 9 Oct 1823, SRNSW, Letters from surveyors, 2/1526-1, f 75. ‘Township’ only vaguely implied urban planning: it was simply an area 6 miles square (ie 36 sq miles) and precursor to the ‘parish’ (25 sq miles) as ordered in 1825 (see Chapter 5).
95 C Wedge to Frankland, 13 March 1829, AOT, SG’s general corro, LSD1/81 (C Wedge #2), p 3.
96 Florence, monthly report, April 1827, SRNSW, Letters from survs, 2/1536-2, [np].
forms physically limited the amount of space available, providing room for only a few words per area. The New South Wales forms further compounded this restriction by, first, defining which features surveyors were meant to describe - soil, hills, rivers and woods - and then prompting them in how to describe them. Under the four descriptive headings in the 'Remarks on the Country surveyed' section of his printed form for September 1828, Philip Elliot (shown in italics) inserted the following information:

**SOIL:** Whether alluvial, or forest land, or rocky and barren

*Barren and Rocky covered in general with thick Scrub*

**HILLS:** Whether rocky and broken or undulating and of easy access

*Rocky and Broken, and in many places inaccessible*

**RIVERS:** Their width, fords, the nature of their bed, and quality of the water

*The breadth of the Shoal Haven River in some places is about 4 Chains, in others not more than one, fordable in many places, the bed of it chiefly G[avel] and water very clear*

**WOODS:** The description of timber, and whether they are thick, and impenetrable, or partly covering the country.

*Thick and impenitrable.*

That Elliot was mechanically following the options given for soil, hills and woods (if not their orthography) is obvious - 'Barren and Rocky' soil, 'Rocky and Broken' hills and woods 'Thick and Impenitrable' (sic) - in contrast to the more open description for rivers, the prompt for which notably lists features rather than options. Some surveyors did go into what detail they could fit in the limited space provided. In his form for March 1829, Edward Knapp wrote of the 'Woods' from one part of the Illawarra district: 'On the banks of the creek Cabbage tree Cedar Sassifras and almost impenetrable Brush Timber of the [obscure] Stringy Bark Blue Gum Box apple tree &c'. Such expansive reporting on these forms was rare, however. Describing both the hills and soil of another part of the Illawarra in August, and under the same prompted options as appear above for Elliot, Knapp twice simply wrote 'Both'.

Perhaps more insidious than this parrot-like adoption of the standardised language on the forms themselves, similarly worded descriptions also began to appear outside of those confining columns. Returning to Elliot about six months after he submitted the first form quoted above, but in a more traditional narrative letter - in which one might expect a reversion to a looser descriptive style - Elliot still echoed the form's restrictive terminology:

'I found the Country so tremendously rocky and broken that it was utterly impossible to

Headquarters having defined hills in terms of either ‘rocky and broken’ or ‘undulating and of easy access’, those two options became the default descriptions.

On top of these physical and lexical constraints in describing the land, these forms and similar reporting mechanisms encouraged a third and even more limiting practice. As mentioned, their primary purpose was surveillance, not of the geographic field but of the field surveyor’s work, especially time taken and surveys performed – and surveyors were well aware of it. As such, their regular reports, which had once communicated many aspects of their work and experience moving throughout the colonial landscape, degenerated into mere timesheets. Those columns allotted to ‘Remarks’ in surveyors’ reports, for instance on the printed weekly forms that from late 1832 were bound and presented as quarterly returns to Arthur, became spaces to give reasons for absence or slowness; the landscape itself either disappeared completely or featured only as causing some frustration to normal work.

Of the various claims to authority surveyors that made to support the information which they supplied, by the early 1830s diligence and personal character remained the strongest. Opportunities to exercise, let alone express, the less directly relevant qualities of aesthetic appreciation or scientific attainment became increasingly restricted, and even surveyors general found it difficult to get away from daily duties and mount the sort of expedition where they might indulge – and display – such interests. It is notable that most of the surveyors producing substantial and more descriptive private works from about the mid-1820s (discussed in Chapter 6), did so after having resigned their commissions. Serving surveyors’ avenues to claim authority likewise constricted, with their perquisites under attack and both their characters as gentlemen and diligence as professionals coming under often openly sceptical scrutiny. By the mid-1830s, bureaucratic mechanisms and printed forms increasingly replaced the earlier opportunities that surveyors had enjoyed to boast of their diligence with a need to defend themselves against the implicit assumption that they were not. More and more they were becoming cogs in the machine.

Had it not been for the various other ways in which surveyors continued to communicate with headquarters, the silencing effect of these forms would have been a far

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100 Elliot to Mitchell, 4 June 1829, SRNSW, Letters rec’d from survs, 2/1534, pp 36–37.
101 See eg Assistant Surveyors’ weekly reports and quarterly returns 1832–1838, AOT, LSD 222. By the start of 1836 (LSD 222/14) the inserted ‘Remarks’ had become noticeably less detailed.
Making it official

more complete erasure of landscape – of basic topography, of previous Indigenous and informal European occupation, and of the natural and man-made environments – than the theoretical blank which Ryan and others attribute to the ‘cartographic’ gaze of explorers. And this erasure arose not because the writers, in this case surveyors, felt themselves above the land, either spatially or morally, but because they were reacting to outside pressure and control that saw their work simply in terms of properties marked out, miles travelled and acres surveyed. As it was, such bureaucratic mechanisms did not effect a total erasure, since surveyors continued to report from the field and the landscape continued to feature – even if, again, it was partly as the site for their diligence or exculpation. Importantly, however, these more limiting and even placeless returns, the actual or de facto timesheets, were the records more likely to pass higher up the chain-of-command. This style of bureaucratic control, which also took the authority to know away from surveyors, therefore continued the trend discussed in Chapter 3, that saw geographic knowledge about the colonies remaining almost solely in the hands and heads of surveyors or in the registers and letterbooks at headquarters, with the higher and more removed levels of colonial administration learning – or wanting to know – very little.

Scott’s mini-map served several quite specific functions. Most obviously, it recorded the end-point of the land alienation process described in Chapter 5: it was a graphic representation of the boundary circuit description of a particular block of land which appeared eventually on the settler’s official title deed. It also served to record that Scott was performing his duties conscientiously. A letter is made clear by Surveyor General George Frankland’s response to some similar mini-maps which he received from another of his assistants, W.H. Habington, a few years later: “The accompanying diagrams are on so small a Scale that there is no ascertaining their Area ... Be so good as to plot them on the regular printed forms, some of which I now send to you.” Someone in the office, probably Frankland himself, used these individual property plans to calculate the area depicted and check that it

1 See Monthly report, Oct and Nov 1831, AOT, LS 322, Descriptions of land surveyed, ap.
2 Thomas Mitchell, To the Right Honourable Edward Gough Cranstoun, Esq. A map of the Colony of New South Wales, compiled from actual measurement with the chain & circle, &c. &c. &c. &c. &c. &c. &c. &c. (Dec 1828), Sydney, 1829, also published by James Gardner, London, [1831].
3 Frankland to Habington, 26 March 1830, AOT, LS 63/1, Letters to surveyors 1833–1835, f 79.
5 Used or perused: Mapping the colonies

The survey departments produced an enormous array of cartographic representations of the colonies. At either extreme of this spectrum, in terms of size, scope, detail and purpose, sit two maps. Assistant Surveyor Thomas Scott produced the first in Van Diemen’s Land in 1831.¹ One of several depicting individual properties he had surveyed, he sent it in to headquarters in Hobart according to standard procedure. The second was Surveyor General Thomas Mitchell’s topographical map of the entire ‘settled districts’ of New South Wales, engraved, printed and on sale to the general public in 1835.² Scott’s map was so small it could fit on a postage stamp, Mitchell’s so large it required three sheets to print it. Although both formed, in their own ways, part of the imperial effort to see, know and control the colonial landscape, these two maps also exemplify the gulf in the intentions behind their respective creation. Despite its miniature size, Scott’s map was meant to be used; Mitchell’s merely perused.

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¹ See Monthly reports, Oct and Nov 1831, AOT, LSD 221, Descriptions of land surveyed, np.
² Thomas Mitchell, To the Right Honorable Edward Geoffrey Smith Stanley this Map of the Colony of New South Wales, compiled from actual measurements with the chain & circumferenter, and according to a trigonometrical survey is (with the greatest respect), dedicated by his most obedient humble servant T.L. Mitchell, Surveyor General, engr John Carmichael, 59.8 x 129.4 cm, scale c 1: 540 000, Sydney, 1834; also published by James Gardner, London, [1835].
³ Frankland to Babington, 26 March 1833, AOT, LSD 63/1, Letters to surveyors 1833–1835, f 78.
matched the settler's entitlement, to ensure the field surveyors were neither inaccurate nor corrupt. The 'regular printed forms' which Frankland sent out are yet another example of the centralising and bureaucratising trend within both departments from the late 1820s. They enforced standard scales to assist with this checking, and so that draftsmen at headquarters could more easily and accurately copy each single property plan onto a conglomerate town or parish map. These were the main uses to which the department put Scott's map: the physical object was transmitted and manipulated in order both to verify the specific information on it and to record that information in the departmental archive.

Of the intended use of the second map, in Mitchell's announcement of its forthcoming publication he compared the mammoth trigonometrical survey that lay behind it with similar efforts on the European continent and in Ireland. These, he argued, had been accomplished 'with a view to draining morasses, the formation of roads, and as the source of other improvements'. Having repeated the process locally, he hoped that 'this means of ultimate improvement to a country, must certainly accelerate its progress to that state, and the development of its resources generally'. This would have been an ambitious claim to make of his broad-scale topographic map, which showed very few morasses — and these only indistinctly — and few other resources generally. It did show the 'great' roads, already formed, between the main outlying settlements, but the map's scale, level of detail and representation of topography were not sufficient in themselves for any such engineering works. As it was, Mitchell really referred here to the survey from which he had constructed the map: his more revealing statement about the map itself came when he presented a finished copy to the colony's Executive Council. Listing what he saw as the three main tasks of his department — the division of the colony into counties, the surveying of grants and the construction of main roads — he declared 'That I was fully impressed with the importance of these duties, and animated with sufficient zeal for their performance, I have the honor to submit as a proof the accompanying Map'. That is, the map of the colony was really only the executive summary of an even larger and more detailed body of work that he had distilled and reduced in order to satisfy his superiors at one glance that he had done it all conscientiously. Mitchell's map was meant to be merely perused, hopefully admired — and set aside.


Reading maps

Rhetoric such as Mitchell’s, that his map would somehow lead to the sort of civilising progress beloved by his contemporaries, is too easily accepted within a post-colonial narrative of monolithic imperial rule and the arbitrary yet detached exercise of power. Indeed, whether it be Pope Alexander dividing the globe between Portuguese and Spanish interests in the late fifteenth century, or other European powers ‘carving up’ Africa in the late nineteenth, since the early 1990s maps have frequently been portrayed as some form of imperial remote-control device: draw a line and change the world. Brian Harley wrote exactly thus in one of his early, seminal works setting out the program for what he described as ‘new cartography’: ‘the graphic nature of the map gave its imperial users an arbitrary power that was easily divorced from the social responsibilities and consequences of its exercise. The world could be carved up on paper.’

More general historiography of Australian settlement has also occasionally portrayed surveying or mapping in ways that suggest the superficiality and arbitrariness of colonial occupation. Geoffrey Blainey, for instance, described early settlement as ‘Portions of the land of the Aboriginals near Sydney were allotted in neat squares to selected men’; Penny Russell referred once to how ‘Explorers, surveyors and settlers strung their imaginary lines across the map’; and post-colonial lexicographer Jay Arthur, explaining the Australian English term ‘line of road’, wrote ‘It is sometimes just a line, a surveyor’s mapline ... “someone somewhere sat in an office and drew lines on a map”‘.

As discussed in Chapter 3, while the lines and compass bearings used to record property officially in the departments’ archives involved a degree of imaginary-ness, the historical process of identifying a settler’s boundary involved a much greater degree of both physical and social groundedness – in the form of marks on trees, pegs in the earth, neighbours’ fences and witnesses’ memories. Similarly, when it comes to analysing the departments’ maps, it is important to see beyond the cartographic abstractions necessary to

8 ‘Unsettling settler society’, in Martin Lyons and Penny Russell (eds), Australia’s History: Themes and Debates, UNSW, Sydney, 2005, p 23. (Having acted as copy editor on that collection, I admit however that this was something of a throw-away line alluding to this very thesis before Penny, and I, really knew what direction it would take.)
represent landscape on a piece of paper to their social, institutional and physical contexts, in this case contexts of both the processes involved in making these maps and how historical actors then employed them in the wider processes of colonial administration. Furthermore, for the purposes of this study on the internal operations of the survey departments, it is at least as important to examine what colonial surveyors wrote about maps, to explore how they thought of them and what they did with them, as it is to interpret the maps and their symbolisms themselves.

A general case in point is the representation and meaning of blank space on a map. According to the maps-as-power interpretation of colonial cartography, blank space was epistemologically troubling, representative of a lack of power, or (somewhat paradoxically) a geographical vacuum that could be easily overwritten. Paul Carter, for instance, writes of the nineteenth-century map that:

Such a map, with its ability to fix even blankness beneath the inflexible ... grid of longitude and latitude, was essentially an instrument for performing geometrical divisions. Located against the imaginary grid, the blankness of unexplored country was translatable into a blueprint for colonization: it could be divided into blocks, the blocks numbered and the land auctioned, without the purchasers ever leaving their London offices.11

The main premise of Simon Ryan’s analysis of Australian explorers’ narratives is that their texts constructed a cartographic blank (albeit a figurative one) which they could then write over with their travels and discoveries.12

This is far from the whole story of officials using maps in attempts to know, show and control land in the early Australian colonies. Cases did of course occur when departments or governments wanted blank spaces ‘filled’ simply to remedy a lack of knowledge, and in many instances it was literally (or graphically) a blank area on an existing map. Some clear examples come from Mitchell’s instructions to his assistants working on the trigonometrical survey – that is, the numerous survey and mapping projects that combined to make his 1834 map. One typical sketch map, from instructions to an assistant in 1831, shows a blank area north of Bell’s Road in the Blue Mountains, bounded by a few previously triangulated and

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11 The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History, Knopf, New York, 1988, p 204.
plotted high-points but devoid of any intervening features: its otherwise blank space contains only the written instruction ‘Country to be Surveyed by Ass’ S’ Rogers’.  

Perhaps more importantly to the work of the survey departments, the task was not so much filling in blank space per se as removing a space of error, conjecture or misinformation, including the informal and ‘nefarious’ geographies that were far more problematic to colonial administration. For the government surveyors, it was not enough to record geographical information, they had to get it right as well. Mitchell wrote, in that same article announcing the publication of his 1834 topographic map, that ‘the truth contained in the blank spaces of an accurate map is more valuable than the hills and rivers portrayed on one not perfectly true’.  

Here he particularly had in mind the few non-departmental explorers then operating within what he considered to be his territory. Later in the same article he criticised the botanical explorer Allan Cunningham for ‘so erroneously’ describing the Peel River, and he disparaged unnamed ‘exploring gentlemen’ for their lack of rigour when compared with his own hard-working assistants. Similarly in Van Diemen’s Land, when requesting permission to divert some of his department’s resources on an expedition into the territory west of Hobart, George Frankland argued:

> It might, at first sight, be considered that any one – not a Surveyor – who was inclined to explore these Districts would be enabled to convey sufficient information to the Government ... but experience proves that in such inland travels amongst thick forests, unless the Traveller keeps a regular Chart progressively constructed of his courses and distances, he returns to the settled Districts believing that he has been in quarters which he has not even approached.

The territory which Frankland wanted to explore illustrates another historical departure from the idea of troubling blank space, for there, prior to the expedition which he eventually sent out, the state maintained power through a lack of knowledge. In Van Diemen’s Land, convicts trying to escape to China were not as worrying as those held in places of ‘secondary punishment’ escaping and returning to plague the settled districts. In the 1820s, the southern colony’s main station for secondary punishment lay at Macquarie Harbour on the west coast of the island. Between it and Hobart stretched about 180 kilometres of rugged forested highlands which were thought to be the perfect prison wall, since to get lost there meant

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13 Mitchell, ‘Tracing referred to in Mr Rogers’ Instructions...’, 31 Oct 1831, SRNSW, NRS 13886, Sketch books, vol 1, f206. Similar sketch maps are indexed for Larmer (vol 2, f36), Rusden (2:61), and Stapylton (2:56); see also similar instructions, Mitchell to D’Arcy, 24 July 1833, quoted in Andrews, Major Mitchell’s Map, pp 177, 181–82 and map p 181.


15 Frankland to col sec, 19 Feb 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, pp 412–413.
certain death. To keep it that way, Arthur had forbidden any expedition into or mapping of much of that area, so that no knowledge would exist which potential escapees could exploit. It was not until the early 1830s, when the penal station was being closed and ‘the policy of allowing the intervening districts to remain unexplored, cease[d] to exist’, that Frankland asked if he could send an expedition westward: ‘The nature of the proposed service is to make a military reconnaissance of the whole extensive tract of country ... and thus to fill up at once, the great blank now observable in the general map of Van Diemen’s Land’. 17

As these examples demonstrate (and as in the previous chapters’ discussion of written texts), the approach taken here is to draw on some of the cartographic deconstructionists’ interpretations, but ground both these and their subject matter more firmly in their historical, material and social contexts. This is in line with, for instance, a more recent collaborative study of colonial cartography led by Norman Etherington. While acknowledging that colonial survey and mapping were obvious extensions of imperial power, he argues that any appraisal of such maps still needs to be ‘qualified by attention to peculiar circumstances and contingencies’. 18 Similarly, Jeremy Black rejects what he sees as the post-colonialists’ search for ‘cartographic conspiracies’, and calls for a re-examination of maps within their social and political contexts. By looking at how the different levels of colonial administration used and viewed maps, this chapter also follows Black’s assertion that it is ‘more valuable to underline the degree to which space was ... understood differently by contemporaries, and to see this as a central problem for contemporary map-makers and map-users, not as an opportunity for deceit’. 19 In this respect it is worth noting that while Frankland wrote of a cartographic ‘blank’ to Governor Arthur, who rarely left the environs of town, his instructions to Temporary Assistant Surveyor John Darke, who led the expedition, referred instead to the known rivers and peaks on what was then the western edge of settlement. 20

Within the colonial administration, these different understandings of space are reflected, albeit simplistically, in the three basic scales on which surveyors and draftsmen...
constructed their maps. For officers in the survey departments, concerned as they were with the nuts and bolts of colonial settlement, property-scale maps (usually of a more reasonable size than Scott’s and Babington’s) and parish- or district-scale cadastral maps were the most valuable. Here the two major uses for maps were to double-check and record the all-important information on land alienation, and to submit actions for approval to higher authority, usually the surveyor general. These comprise the vast majority of the maps which the survey departments produced. Maps of a whole settlement or colony, on the other hand, catered to a broader spatial perception, and were more likely to be produced for or requested by external viewers such as governors and the Colonial Office or for the general public, to all of whom the minutiae of cadastral administration – bearings, distances and corner-posts – held little significance.

The internal uses of maps: Ubiquity, practicality and organisation

One of the clearest cases of a higher power wanting or expecting a colony-scale map featured at the beginning of Chapter 3. In 1833 Arthur enquired of Frankland ‘whether a large Map of the Island is hung up in the Survey Office, whereon are distinctly laid down such lands as are already granted’. In response Frankland not only assured him that such a map existed, but exhaustively listed all the written (as opposed to cartographic) registers, letterbooks and so on that his office used to record land allocation in Van Diemen’s Land. Frankland’s point – and the point made in that chapter – was that this vastly more detailed written material was more important to the increasingly bureaucratic running of his office. This is not to say, however, that cartographic records were unimportant: they were a vital and ubiquitous part of the surveyors’ professional paraphernalia. But at a very practical level, as an alternative to written text and as a mechanism for recording information, maps had both advantages and disadvantages.

Within colonial surveyors’ daily correspondence, ‘maps’, ‘plans’ and ‘charts’ (they used the terms all but interchangeably) comprised one of the constant forms and subjects of

21 For the sake of clarity, I usually describe these scales according to the areas shown – ‘property’, ‘parish’, ‘district’, ‘settlement’ or ‘colony’ – rather than in more relative terms such as ‘small’ and ‘large’, or mathematically by fractional scale.
22 Lane to Frankland, 8 July 1833, AOT, LSD 12, np; Frankland to Lane, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, pp 478–99.
report. As suggested by the number of days listed as having been devoted to ‘Plotting in Tent’ or such like, surveyors spent much of their time distilling and recording the results of their surveys into cartographic form. Alongside other day-to-day problems – with weather, rations, transport and convicts – lacking the right maps also provided one of the field surveyors’ standard explanations for delays in completing the various tasks that headquarters had ordered. Map availability could even affect the running of a whole department, and it lay at the heart of one of the major disputes between Frankland and his deputy Edward Boyd in Van Diemen’s Land. Frankland ordered Boyd to set up a branch office in Launceston to serve the northern half of the island, but Boyd could not do so without the appropriate maps, and he accused Frankland of deliberately hampering his effort by withholding them. Frankland defended himself from the ‘highly subversive’ attack by pointing out the delays in producing up-to-date copies.  

The main logistical problems here arose because, while so-called ‘mechanical’ office clerks could relatively easily transcribe written texts, accurately drafting or copying maps required different skills and materials, and much more time. Until the mid-1820s, surveyors had to draft and copy their own maps, as the department did not employ any dedicated draftsmen. The first officially listed draftsman was John Jackson, appointed in July 1825 to the New South Wales department. Even in the early 1830s, when the then separated departments employed at least three designated draftsmen each, they still had difficulty satisfying demand, both internal and, especially in Van Diemen’s Land, demand from the lieutenant governor and the Colonial Office. Problems in the field with the supply of paper, pencils and instruments, however prosaic, also occurred frequently. Possibly to make this exact point, Scott drew his batch of mini-maps on what appear to be just scraps of tracing paper, and he perhaps also intended them to remind headquarters of the constant need for proper supplies.  

Due to their constant use and traffic, as well as the basic privations of the field, maps were also perishable, even completely destructible, which created further problems for field surveyors (as it does for the researcher). Examples of water-damaged or torn maps also abound, and although the traces of lost and destroyed maps are obviously more scanty, written sources occasionally mention them as being so. In Van Diemen’s Land in 1832, for

24 Boyd to Frankland, 26 Aug 1833, AOT, LSD 1/80, General corro: Surveyors (Boyd), ff 6a-b (see also 17 Oct, 13 Sept 1833, ff'8, 12); Frankland to col sec, 26 Aug 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, pp 465–67.
26 For an actual request for tracing paper, see Dawson to Frankland, 17 July 1835, AOT, LSD 1/80, General corro: Surveyors (Dawson), f 8.
instance, Assistant Surveyor Joseph Fossey informed headquarters that he would have to re-draft and re-submit one of his regular batches of maps because some bushrangers had intercepted the mail and stolen the originals.27

Lastly, since maps were necessarily both loose-leafed and portable — again, as opposed to the usually bound registers and letterbooks of written correspondence — they were also harder to keep track of and organise. While the above problems were all part of the basic exigencies of conducting operations over a vast physical area, the need for internal organisation of the cartographic archive within headquarters eventually came to reshape the departments themselves, in the forms of specific procedures, and dedicated officers and spaces. In the mid-1820s, as the volume of the New South Wales department’s maps began to grow, Oxley’s lack of administrative skills began to become apparent. On returning to the office after a bout of illness, and finding that one of his assistants had tried to arrange and file all the department’s maps, Oxley reportedly threw them all on the floor — saying that only then could he locate what he wanted.28 Incoming surveyors general in both colonies in the late 1820s found much to lament in their predecessors’ administrations. In 1827 Edward Dumesq, acting head in Van Diemen’s Land, complained of the state of that department’s records in general — ‘neither Plans nor Papers had been kept with any order or regularity’29 — as did Frankland on taking over from him, and as did Mitchell of the New South Wales office when he took over it in 1828.30

Their criticism arose partly because all three men already had some experience with more rationalised organisational structures: Mitchell having served in the Staff Corps during the Peninsular campaign, Dumesq with the Revenue Survey in India, and Frankland with both the army and survey in India.31 But it arose also from their partial bewilderment as newcomers, lacking the unrecorded but accumulated knowledge of official business and departmental organisation held by their subordinates. In 1828, for example, Scott (with over seven years in the department) wrote from the field to Dumesq (with barely two) to explain a disputed property boundary, and he made a point of also informing his superior of the...
relevant map's existence and whereabouts: 'There was a sketch made ... it is now in the bundle of small plans & rough sketches in the office'.

Faced with this over-reliance on memory and institutional experience, the newly appointed surveyors general of the late 1820s quickly moved to remedy the situation, and the subsequent and more identifiably bureaucratic organisation of their departments is another indicator that both offices were moving away from the more personal ‘cabinet’ structure of the earlier era. Within these new arrangements, the departments’ cartographic records attracted especial attention. Mitchell, in the ‘Rules and Regulations’ which he drew up for his department in 1828, even made this new brand of organisation physical, with maps clearly separated from written texts, and ‘order’ the prevailing refrain. Listing the various rooms in the office and their uses, he identified two specifically for the drafting of maps, while a third was:

set apart for the arrangement of all maps in alphabetical order for the better preservation of the order which is essential for the purpose of ready reference; this room will be locked, and only entered by the Surveyor General and chief Draftsman.

To create the position of chief draftsman, whose duties he also there spelled out, Mitchell permanently transferred one of his newer assistant surveyors, John Thompson, to headquarters. Significantly, Thompson had previously worked in the library of the Colonial Office and so he presumably brought organisational as well as drafting skills. As a reassigned assistant surveyor, the chief draftsman initially received an assistant’s salary of £200 a year, but subsequent raises reflect the importance of the new position – as well as Thompson’s tenure in it. His pay soon rose to £300, and in early 1835 Governor Bourke informed London that he had raised it further, ‘the Surveyor General having acquainted me that he would lose the valuable services of Mr. Thompson if the addition of £100 a year was not thus made to his Salary’. Bearing in mind that in 1828 the New South Wales department had only employed designated draftsmen for the previous three years, Mitchell’s re-organisation and emphasis on the cartographic side of operations attests to its rapidly growing importance.

32 Scott to Dumas, 7 Jan 1828, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corrob: surveyors (Scott), p 2. It was also Scott who later confirmed for Frankland that the office had displayed a general map of the colony for the previous twelve years: Frankland to col sec, 11 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to the colonial secretary, p 445.

33 ‘Rules & Regulations of the Surveyor General’s Office 1828’, SRNSW, NRS 13932 [5/2700], pp 3–7: rooms 6 and 8 were drafting rooms; room 7 for filing. Perhaps undercutting the apparent regimentation, the map storage room doubled as an equipment and stationery cupboard.

34 See Hay to Darling, 10 March 1827, HRA 1:12, p 147, plus Thompson’s references from Meyer (Colonial Office librarian) and Pawley (Quartermaster’s Office, Horse Guards), p 148.

35 Bourke to Rice, 6 Jan 1835, HRA 1:17, p 627. At £400, Thompson’s salary placed him on a level with Robert Hoddle, the most experienced surveyor in the NSW department and six years Thompson’s senior: see NSW Blue Book, 1835, SRNSW, NRS 1286 [CSO, 4/266].
**Maps as cadastral records**

As the most important (and troublesome) part of the survey departments’ duties, the recording of land ownership – the cadastre – was obviously the most important geographic feature of their maps. For representing this information maps excelled, albeit, as above, within some very practical limits.

The information that colonial surveyors generally represented on their cadastral maps was what might be called ‘hard’ knowledge: it was essentially data, meaning it was recordable, storable, transmissible, verifiable and reproducible. Numerous cartographic historians have noted the connection between the evolution of the science of cartography and the needs of property definition. Indeed from cartography’s post-Roman re-emergence in the Renaissance until well into the nineteenth century, the great majority of mapping in Britain and continental Europe owed its existence to (usually private) concerns with the definition of landed property, and the complementary technologies of surveying and mapping developed and adapted to those very ends.

The method of describing property according to a circuit around its boundaries may have echoed earlier social practices such as perambulation, but by the beginning of the nineteenth century surveyors wrote such descriptions as the mathematical measurements of the lengths and bearings of each side of a geometric figure, and they were thus easily mapped. The caveat to this mappability of colonial cadastral information, however, is the same as that for the formal property descriptions incorporated on title deeds: they represent only the end-point of an often drawn out and messy process, and they were only ever one part of a multi-level and multi-sited system of recording ownership.

To continue the parallel between the survey departments’ written records and their cadastral maps, the latter fall into two broad groups: property plans, and district or parish maps. Property plans, as suggested above, recorded the equivalent of the formal circuit description of each property. They also often showed various related information, such as descriptions of trees or stakes marking corners and side-lines, occasional topographical information, and even more occasional ‘improvements’ such as huts or fences. From written records it is clear that from about the mid-1820s, field surveyors drafted and submitted regular batches of such plans to headquarters, although as the mini-maps which Scott and


37 For similar caveats (that cadastral maps were ‘partisan’ and ‘can be understood only in the contexts of the balance of power and balance of interest’) see Kain and Baigent, *The Cadastral Map*, p 344.
Babington sent to Frankland suggest, it took a while for uniform practices of scale and presentation to develop.38

The second and perhaps more important type of cadastral maps, at least from the perspective of surveyors in the field and their departments, were district- and later parish-scale maps. If property plans were analogous to title deeds, district and parish maps resemble the alphanumeric registers: they were detailed enough to record on the one piece of paper the basic relevant data of about a hundred rural properties, perhaps more in urban parishes. These represent the predominant scale of spatial thinking in the field and to a lesser extent at headquarters, for it was on district and parish maps that the departments spatially coordinated the many individual properties and other extraneous land allocations. While not usually sufficiently detailed to help resolve, for instance, the niceties of single boundary disputes, district and parish plans clearly showed information such as unoccupied land, who neighboured whom, potential water access, or through which properties a public road passed: not just who owned what where, but where each block sat in relation to the requirements of the local community and the government. Thus the disjuncture observed in Chapter 3 is apparent also in the cartographic cadastre: that while one part of the bureaucratic apparatus tended to individualise settlers as discrete items, the practicalities of defining and administering land ownership continued to embed settlers within their communities.

Paradoxically, the apparent ease and clarity with which maps can display property boundaries and ownership also created difficulties, for it was equally easy to display false, misleading or simply outdated information. Apart from simple filing, one of the chief draftsman’s main duties in New South Wales involved graphically recording the selection and eventual granting of blocks of land:

It will form part of his duty to mark on the proper plans, 1st The selections of Land which appear in the Half Monthly Return Book by writing in Pencil the name of the first applicant for each portion of Land. 2nd When such lands are subsequently disposed of by a Government Order, by coloring the situation on the plan, and printing the names of the Grantees.39

These ‘proper plans’, held in the office (and under lock and key), then became the single, official cartographic record of the progressive settlement process; although note that even here a variety of methods – pencil, pen, shading – was required to distinguish the various stages of the land alienation process, and that without adequate knowledge of what each method signified it was still open to misinterpretation.

Apart from physical security, the rigour of this bureaucratic procedure— the single officer responsible for transferring the information from two periodical written authorities onto the single official plan— had become necessary due to the less regular practices of recording and mapping land occupation and ownership by earlier administrations. In Van Diemen’s Land in the early 1820s, as Frankland later outlined while trying to explain a ten-year-old dispute between Messrs Kerr and Amos, ‘Persons were in the habit of applying loosely to have their claims charted—and such was often done by Mr Evans—as sufficient authority for possession’. Problems arose when two settlers wanting the same land made their claims, or had them recorded, by different means: on a map, in person or in writing. While Evans’ successor Dumaresq had not usually employed ‘such informal Acts of giving possession’, in the case of Mr Kerr he had accepted his ‘verbal application’; unfortunately Amos had already ‘applied to Mr Dumaresq for the same lands, and had his name put down for it on a rough plan’. Frankland’s terminology here—‘applying loosely’, ‘informal Acts’, ‘rough plan’— betrays his opinion of such a slap-dash approach, and it was probably such cases as this that led to the further reform whereby applicants had to submit more detailed written descriptions, in some cases similar to the technical circuit descriptions, in order to select land.

In New South Wales, from much the same era, apparent discrepancies in the recording of land selection on the department’s official maps lay at the root of a dispute which eventually cost Assistant Surveyor Henry Dangar his position. A Hunter settler, Peter McIntyre, complained that Dangar had effectively robbed him of valuable land by reserving it instead for himself and his brother. Governor Darling (probably influenced by prejudicial reports coming from Dangar’s Newcastle nemesis Captain Gillman) was inclined ‘from the first’ to doubt Dangar’s probity, and he referred the case to his colonial secretary, Alexander Macleay, and subsequently to the Land Board. Despite Oxley’s strong assertions that Dangar had done nothing wrong, the contrary perception on the part of both Macleay and the Land Board arose from what the board members telling described as a ‘simple inspection’ and (twice) ‘a bare inspection’ of two official maps. The first of these maps showed several blocks under the names of their original selectors, Dunn and Rapsey; the second ascribed them to Dangar and his brother, as they had since purchased them. The recording of blocks of land in the names of their original grantees was standard departmental practice: its job was to

40 Frankland to col sec, 17 Sept 1834 and 2 Oct 1834, AOT, LSD 61/2, pp 102 and 108–110.
41 Discussed in Chapter 3; and see the generally chaotic ‘Register of location orders issued 1824–1830’, AOT, LSD 408/1.
administer the alienation of land, not (at this stage) its subsequent conveyance. The board members, however, suspected cartographic subterfuge. They suggested that Dangar himself had written the original grantees’ names on the first official chart so that the transactions would ‘remain concealed from public observation’, and they endorsed Darling’s dismissal of him.42

Lastly, the ‘the utmost state of irregularity’ in this area verged on the absurd. In 1828, Assistant Surveyor Edward Knapp reported from Pitt Town in New South Wales that ‘an original chart of this Township by Mr Meehan Ast Surveyor signed approved by Govr Macquarie is lying in the hands of a publican of the name of Smallwood’ and, more worryingly, that Smallwood had ‘been in the habit of allotting parcels of ground to ... inhabitants of the district’.43 Small wonder Mitchell wanted his ‘proper plans’ locked up.

Farce aside, this episode raises the related issue of the appropriate level of public access to these official records of land ownership. The point of the chief draftsman’s system of filing was not simply orderly archive, but ready retrieval. Mitchell’s ‘Rules and Regulations’ also stipulated that ‘On the letter and number of any map being handed to the chief Draftsman, he will immediately find that map’, and at least some of these requests were so Mitchell, his deputy or assistants could consult with visiting members of the public.44 In Van Diemen’s Land, Frankland similarly stressed that his office’s cartographic records, including those held by surveyors in the field, were open to members of the public who wished to inspect them.45 He also instructed field surveyors, when consulting with various communities over such local issues as the placement of by-roads, to provide ‘every possible information and access to the plans that you may have in your possession of the District’.46

It is notable in all these cases, however, that an official stood by to ensure the public did not misinterpret (or alter) the map and its information, for while allowing access, the government remained protective. Draftsman Peter Bemi was dismissed from the New South Wales department in 1831 for the ‘highly improper conduct’ of providing ‘an Individual with the Copy of a Map, which enabled him [the individual] to obtain a Cause against the

42 See Report by Land Board, 28 Feb 1827, and Darling to Bathurst, 11 March 1827, HRA 1:13, pp 149–56.
44 ‘Rules and regulations’, pp 10–11; Mitchell also outlines the procedures for visitors, even down to how the ‘office keepers’ were to welcome and announce them (eg pp 1–2, 23–24).
45 Frankland to col sec, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, esp pp 479–80.
46 See eg Frankland to Fossey, 13 Nov 1832, AOT, LSD 63/1, Letters to assistant surveyors, pp 21–22.
Government in the Supreme Court'. Draftsmen in the late 1820s, not very well paid and usually only employed provisionally, were allowed to reproduce maps to sell privately to settlers, but the practice appears to have been stopped in the early 1830s. Settlers thereafter still had recourse to private surveyors, a few of whom had set up businesses in both colonies by that time, and references to privately produced maps occur occasionally in departmental correspondence. For instance, it was with the help of a ‘private Chart of the neighbourhood’ that the artist John Glover tried, ‘in a most unhandsome manner’, to have Assistant Surveyor William Dawson confirm a fraudulent fence line in Van Diemen’s Land in 1832.

**Internal uses: Checking, approval and the ideal of accuracy**

The second major internal use of maps within the survey departments involved checking and seeking approval: field surveyors submitting their day-to-day work to headquarters for double-checking, as Scott did with his mini-maps, or department heads submitting either specific or collective works to their immediate superiors in the colonies, as did Mitchell in presenting his topographical map to the Executive Council. Both those cases, however, occurred at the end of the period under discussion, and represent the more developed procedures of that era. Up until the mid-1820s the departments were so small that such internal checking was barely practical, and in particular when the ‘department’ comprised only a surveyor general and one or two deputies, these few officers also frequently worked side by side, obviating the need. Acting head James Meehan and deputy George Evans, for instance, spent nearly a year in Van Diemen’s Land in 1812 and 1813 working together surveying and re-surveying farms, and laying out the central Hobart–Launceston road: any double-checking of each others’ work would have happened on the spot, not later by reviewing the results.

At this early stage the map-checking procedures instead occurred between the surveyors and the governor – who, as the elaborately worded title deeds made clear, was ultimately responsible for land alienation anyway. Although evidence on much of the workings of the department within the government is fairly scanty until at least the mid-1820s, a government notice issued by Oxley in 1821 spelled out the role of maps within the general procedure at that time, and it is probably representative of this earlier phase (for the farms of the more humble settlers at least):

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48 See eg Frankland to col sec, 31 May 1832, *AOT*, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, p 311.
49 Dawson to Frankland, 23 Nov 1832, *AOT*, LSD 1/80, General corro: Surveyors (Dawson), f 16.
the Surveyor General has received Instructions from His Excellency the Governor, to proceed on or about the 15th April, to mark out the [promised grants] as speedily as possible ... which service completed and the Map approved by His Excellency, the several parties will be required by Public Notice to select their Farms, and take possession thereof.50

Only a few years later, orders to Dumaresq on his taking over the department in Van Diemen's Land reveal the differences in both the rapidly increasing pace of settlement and individual governors' inclination to supervise. Arthur's private secretary informed Dumaresq that 'the Lieutenant Governor will see you every Saturday morning at twelve o'clock, upon the subject of the Boundary lines on the Locations ordered, when you will be pleased to point out on the Map, the spot comprized in each Description'.51 As the volume of settlement, survey and subsequent mapping increased in Van Diemen's Land, so too did gubernatorial surveillance. It is, however, also significant that Arthur required his surveyor general to be on hand for this exercise, both to make explicit the surveillance element but also to translate the technical descriptions and to help interpret the map.

By the 1830s, with both the number of assistant surveyors in the field and the volume of the cartographic (and written) materials that they submitted to headquarters increasing, the checking of incoming maps occurred internally by either the surveyors general or their now office-bound deputies. In 1832 Frankland ordered his deputy, Edward Boyd, to take on this role:

I have recently directed the Assistant Surveyors to transmit their original plans to me at stated periods, in lieu of the reduced maps which they were before in the habit of sending in, with the view of having better means of checking their calculations of the areas of each grant, and I request that you will have the goodness to take charge of that particular branch of the duty of this Department, inserting the results of your computations in the form, which I gave you a few days since.52

This was the sort of checking that Scott's mini-maps faced. Mitchell, far less willing than Frankland to remain in the office himself, also tried to pass this more mundane sort of work to his deputy, Samuel Perry – albeit un成功fully. Mitchell complained privately that Perry instead lived 'a life of ease, quite free from care', and that after any time away from headquarters, when he left such office work in Perry's hands, he always had to take care of great back-logs himself when he returned.53

The point of such checking, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, was two-fold: firstly to ensure assistant surveyors carried out their work diligently, but secondly to

51 Montagu to Dumaresq, 6 Jan 1826, AOT, SG, Letters to the Lt Govr, LSD 22/3, f 5.
52 Frankland to Boyd, 2 June 1832, AOT, LSD 24, Letters to District Surveyors, np.
ensure they did it accurately. While the ‘new’ cartographic historians have striven to demystify what they see as modern cartography’s self-legitimising aura of factuality and truth – by pointing out and deconstructing the many subjectivities, abstractions and inaccuracies that necessarily lie beneath any map – others have noticed that historical practitioners were well aware of these weaknesses. Separate comparisons by eighteenth-century geographers of sets of maps covering France, Scotland and Ireland all revealed great discrepancies and distortions. In India, as Matthew Edney’s study of the Great Trigonometrical Survey shows in depth, the ‘cartographic ideal’ of its surveyors and promoters was constantly – and knowingly – compromised by those same idealists searching for a ‘technological fix’ to its impracticalities.

In the same way, colonial surveyors (and to a lesser extent their masters) were well aware of the possible errors and discrepancies within single maps, between maps, and all too often between maps and the ground they were meant to represent. To cite just a few typical examples, William Harper reported from Camden County in New South Wales that Stony Creek was ‘erroneously marked in the Chart as Black Bob’s Creek, the latter being more to the Westward about 1 Mile’. In Van Diemen’s Land, Thomas Scott noted of one map that ‘The Derwent had been laid down opposite this Grant too much to the Westward’; while William Dawson commented that ‘The survey from which the official plan has been constructed appears to have been made during the Summer months. At all events the course of the River at present varies in some parts greatly with the course laid down.’ Contrary, again, to interpretations that Enlightenment science and geography erased the traces of its own constructive processes, to the fellow practitioners of this particular branch of geographic enquiry the lines and symbols on a map in fact signified those prior processes. In each of the three examples cited above, the reporters did not claim that the error lay with the map itself, but in the process of constructing it: a creek ‘erroneously marked’; the Derwent ‘laid down’ wrongly; the ‘survey ... made’ in a different season. Just as the verbal property descriptions

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54 See eg Harley, ‘Deconstructing the map’ and ‘Maps, knowledge and power’; Christian Jacob, ‘Toward a cultural history of cartography’, esp p 196; and more broadly see Pickles on historians confronting cartography’s ‘crises of representation’: *A History of Spaces*, ch 2.
56 *Mapping an Empire*, esp part 3; and on more general scepticism of ‘mathematical cosmology’ in earlier eras see Jess Edwards, *Writing, Geometry and Space*.
57 Harper to Oxley, 27 Feb 1824, SRNSW, SG, Letter from ASs, 2/1542-2, np.
58 Scott to Dumaresq, 7 Jan 1828, AOT, LSD 1/81, General corrs: Surveyors (Scott), f 2; Dawson to Frankland, 15 Oct 1835, LSD 1/80, f 12.
narrated the ritualistic closed traverse of the physical survey, so did lines on maps suggest, to surveyors at least, the prior sighting and chaining of the lines on the ground. This is part of the reason that earlier surveyors such as George Evans felt confident enough to describe properties as measured from his maps rather than physically remeasuring their sidelines with existing neighbours. Ultimately, however, the errors produced also proved the unavoidable weaknesses of such thinking – and it was probably also Evans who laid down the Derwent too far to the west.

Knowing the fallibilities of the mapping technologies that they employed, surveyors therefore needed – or felt they needed – to make the same sorts of rhetorical claims that they made in their written texts in order to assert the authority and accuracy of their work. These claims fall into two categories: those in their accompanying texts, meaning the letters, reports and even timesheets submitted with these maps from the field; and more symbolic claims on the maps themselves. Much of the first – and more common – category has been discussed already in Chapter 4: in their communications with headquarters field surveyors made constant reference to the time and care with which they carried out their duties. In the case of accuracy and authority in map production, the sheer number of days spent plotting also attested to their diligence. Such carefulness could even form part of a surveyor’s defence against reprimands over the length of time required to produce maps: to one such rebuke George Woodward’s simple, if somewhat testy, riposte was that ‘[I] always thought I should do them correctly’.59 However, in the same way that the introduction of statistical timesheets and forms eroded surveyors’ opportunities to make such claims about their duties in general, so too did such procedures affect their claims respecting map-making.

As for claims made on maps themselves, various cartographic historians have also highlighted the rhetorical messages conveyed in for instance the elaborate title cartouches and accompanying pictorial iconography of many printed maps from this period. Colonial surveyors, particularly field surveyors, had much less recourse to such opportunities, and even the relatively few maps printed by the departments usually adhered to a more typical Georgian austerity. Despite this, printed versions still provide the clearest examples of rhetorical claims, both to their accuracy and their official nature, with their titles generally citing the surveyors’ or drafters’ names and ranks within their departments, and frequently also that the map was based on the ‘best authorities’ and from ‘actual surveys and

59 Woodward to Dumaresq, 7 Sept 1827, AOT, LSD 1/81, Gen’l corro: Surveyors (Woodward #1), f 3.
Printed maps also more commonly displayed some of the more symbolic suggestions of geographical rigour, such as borders and graticule (the framing grid of longitude and latitude), or detailed scale bars.

In their more everyday maps used for internal purposes, field surveyors rarely had such expressive opportunities. There was little point in adding a graticule to a map on such a small scale as they would draft for a property plan for instance, but even in such maps surveyors still had some scope to suggest and claim diligence and personal authority. The files of ‘sketch maps’ among the New South Wales department’s archives – which by this designation the office evidently deemed somehow substandard or incomplete – reveal some of these features (including by their absence). The more basic, such as the thinness or straightness of lines, are not particularly startling elements of a map until they are absent from one: then a map’s very sketchiness, as a sign that the surveyor was making no attempt at or claim to accuracy, suggests the significance of such features in other more polished versions. One such example by Felton Mathews shows, with barely a single straight line, the blocks of settlers along the Narara Creek on Brisbane Water. Since by this sketch map Mathew only wanted to show the two proposed sites for a government wharf on the creek, such specifics as the bearings and distances of the settlers’ boundaries, or their accurate representation, were unnecessary.

Other cartographic elements, more open to stylistic or artistic treatment, might also allow for rhetorical treatment. In particular the compass arrow or compass rose, as well as signifying the universal ‘truth’ to which all maps were orientated, offered draftsmen and surveyors an opportunity for self-expression. The simplest form, usually found on even the most basic sketch maps, was just an arrow: that is a straight line with some form of pointer at one end. Yet these pointers could be far from uniform, and the care and skill taken to draw the more elaborate examples – which include such devices as modified fleurs de lis – may also be taken as rhetorical assertions of the care and skill that their drafters employed in constructing the rest of their maps.

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60 See eg the maps of Van Diemen’s Land by George Evans and Thomas Scott, or of New South Wales by Mitchell and Dixon, discussed later in this chapter. On similar claims to the ‘best authorities’, see Edney, ‘Reconsidering Enlightenment geography’, pp 187–88.

61 SRNSW, SG, Sketch maps, NRS 13886 [X754], vol 1, f 15.
As with written assertions of accuracy, however, the fact that both surveyors and their abilities were usually well known by their correspondents meant that their greatest assertion to accuracy lay not in any map or other work in particular but in the social, professional relationship between such officers. From the earliest years through to the later phase of the departments at their heights, surveyors general or their superiors clearly rated surveyors according to their technical proficiencies. As described in Chapter 1, for instance, Colonel Paterson cast doubt on Deputy Surveyor Henry Williams' ability to produce a ‘decent looking’ chart of Port Dalrymple in 1805; and in 1828 Mitchell wrote privately to Robert Hay with a frank appraisal of his assistants’ talents, with comments such as ‘almost the only individual on whose angles ... I have placed any reliance’ (Robert Dixon); ‘a very accurate and indefatigable surveyor’ (George White); ‘not much distinguished either by ability or assiduity’ (Phillip Elliot); ‘the ablest delineator of ground in the department’ (William Govett); ‘has transmitted several well executed plans’ (Henry Butler); and ‘the ablest draftsman in the department’ (Henry White). 62

Settlement- and colony-scale maps

The mapping of discrete national and colonial spaces, or of their distinct frontiers, has rightly been seen as integral to the identification of those spaces as political units, and in some cases future nations. In particular the European national projects of mapping France by the Cassinis, and Ireland by the Ordnance Survey, are seen in such light. Among numerous
similar colonial examples, Edney argues that efforts by the East India Company and others to depict the whole of the subcontinent on a single map led directly to the British spatial conception of ‘India’; while Graham Burnett describes the long-lived consequences of Robert Schomburgk’s survey of the borders of British Guiana.63 Further, as Zoë Laidlaw notes, the cumulative impact of the imperial cases of these cartographic exercises allowed observers, such as bureaucrats in the Colonial Office, to conceive of a truly global empire rather than disparate settlements and colonies.64

The efforts of colonial land surveyors were unnecessary to produce the single cartographic conception of Australia, however, since it fell to Royal Navy officers – in particular James Cook, Matthew Flinders and Phillip Parker King – to survey and define the coastlines of both the continental mainland and the island of Van Diemen’s Land to the south.65 Even by the mid-1830s, however, formal settlement in both colonies covered only a small portion of their nominal areas, so any colony-scale mapping necessarily entailed a great extension of the land surveyors’ usual range of knowledge and information, and in particular the maps of New South Wales from this time would be more accurately described as settlement-scale, since that is all they usually attempted to cover. Mitchell’s topographic map bears the title ‘Map of the Colony of New South Wales’, but it is more generally known as his map of the ‘nineteen counties’, referring to the much smaller (though still extensive) area which it displays.

Even then, from the outset those charged with administering a whole settlement had a natural wish to have a map of the whole settlement, but again most early efforts at this were carried out by men outside the survey department proper. Lieutenant William Dawes drew the famous early ‘Sketch of Sydney Cove’ included in Arthur Phillip’s *Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay ...* (1789); and Dawes’ fellow marine officer Watkin Tench drafted ‘A Map of the hitherto explored Country Contiguous to Port Jackson ...’, which stretched out to the Hawkesbury and Nepean Rivers and the eastern escarpment of the Blue Mountains, for his *Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson* (1793).66 The earliest broad-scale map of the New South Wales settlement by a colonial surveyor appears to be that by Charles

64 Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*, pp 188, 204.
Grimes [Plate 3], sent to London by Colonel Paterson and published by Aaron Arrowsmith in 1799. *A Topographical Plan of the Settlements of New South Wales...* shows much the same topography as Tench’s map of six years earlier, although in slightly more detail. In addition it displays in minute delineations the properties of settlers up to that time, who are listed in tables for each district. By about 1820, however, the increasingly scattered nature of settlement in New South Wales made any attempt to depict the whole on one map impractical. Arrowsmith published a loosely topographic chart of the known parts of the colony in 1822, based especially on Oxley’s discoveries, but Mitchell’s topographic map of 1834 appears to be the next attempt.

Once again, the situation was slightly different in Van Diemen’s Land. Here the prospective cartographer had the two great advantages of an already well-defined coastal outline of the much smaller island colony, as charted originally by Flinders, and a settlement pattern predominantly lying either relatively close to the main centres of Hobart and Launceston or along the main north-south road between them. This internal unity, as well as the rapid spread of settlement along that central axis, is clear in a series of maps of the island produced by its government surveyors from the early 1820s.

The first, by Deputy Surveyor George Evans [Plate 4], appeared in print in 1822, having been published in London to accompany his *A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen’s Land...* (a semi-official work discussed more fully in Chapter 6). Dated to the previous year, and drawn from ‘the best Authorities, and from Surveys’, within its intricately traced outer coastline it shows (in order of declining detail) the central road – which Evans and Meehan had surveyed with a chain and compass in the early 1810s – the main settlement ‘districts’ shaded in blocks, and some much more loosely portrayed flanking topography. If, as Frankland later assured Arthur, the southern department had a map of the whole colony hanging outside its office twelve years prior to 1832, it originally may have looked something similar to this. However, land-hungry settlers would have had to refer instead to more detailed district plans, for the broad-scale map lacked the level of cadastral detail necessary to locate available land.

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Apart from complementing his own book, Evans’ spur to produce this map appears to have been some more recent naval investigations around the island and the coincidental enquiries of Commissioner Bigge. In January 1821 Sorell despatched a set of five manuscript maps with Bigge’s homeward-bound secretary Thomas Hobbes Scott (no relation to the surveyor). All drafted by Evans, these comprised two charts of the newly investigated Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour, a general chart of the island incorporating these and other recently acquired details of the island’s coasts, and two much more detailed cadastral plans of the Derwent and Port Dalrymple areas ‘in which the District and Grants of Land are described’. Evans published chart, however, appears more like a simple key to these separate districts: indeed it may have been derived directly from a map that he used during his testimony to Bigge’s enquiry in 1821, in which he pointed out these districts.

A few years later a much better representation of land ownership in Van Diemen’s Land appeared on another published map drafted by Evans’ subordinate (and later mini-map drafter) Thomas Scott [Plate 5]. This clearly shows in minute detail the properties of the larger landowners, strung along the rivers and the main central road, with their names again listed at the side in tables for each district. It also shows much more topography than does Evans’ earlier version, in particular around the coasts and again the relatively newly charted inlets of Macquarie Harbour and Port Davey, as well as across the northern and eastern sides of the island – in the latter of which Scott had himself worked during the previous few years.

Incidentally, the legend (in more ways than one) in the otherwise blank space between Hobart and the penal station at Macquarie Harbour on the west coast, reads:

The Passage across from Macquarie Harbour to the Derwent is not yet practicable. Several of the runaway Convicts from the latter [sic: former] place in attempting to reach the Derwent have died on the road, another party, after having killed one of their comrades to preserve their own lives, were obliged to return and give themselves up to the Commandant.

However, by the 1820s it was becoming increasingly difficult to represent the progress of settlement in any legible detail on such a broad-scale cadastral map, and surveyors also started running into – or becoming aware of – more technical problems with mapping on such

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70 Sorell to Bathurst, 16 Jan 1821, HRA 3:4, pp 4–5. Although both dated 1819, the NLA holds what may be manuscript copies of the two cadastral maps: ‘Map of the settlements on and near the Derwent River Van Diemen’s Land by G.W. Evans, Dy. Surveyor Genl. Hobart Town, 1819’, 79.8 x 65.7 cm, scale c 1:95 000, Map RM734; and ‘Map of the settlements at Port Dalrymple, Van Diemen’s Land, G.W. Evans, Dy. Surveyor Genl., 1819’, 61.6 x 81.1 cm, scale c 1:126 720, Map RM733.

71 See Evans’ evidence to Bigge, HRA 3:2, pp 317–28 (esp p 320).

72 Thomas Scott, Chart of Van Diemen’s Land, From the best Authorities, And from actual Surveys & Measurements, by Thomas Scott, Assistant Surveyor General of Lands on the Island, Most respectfully dedicated to His Honor Wm. Sorell Esq. Lieut. Governor of Van Diemen’s Land, engr Charles Thomson, Edinburgh, 1824, 82.5 x 58.5 cm, scale c 1:545 000.
a scale. As emigrants took up lands in between the formerly scattered clusters, both survey departments encountered problems with what they termed ‘connecting’ their district-scale maps. By ‘connecting’ they meant overcoming the accumulated errors of the multiple surveys of individual properties, often over many years, that had gone into constructing each district map, as well as adjusting for both the poorly understood magnetic variation and the slightly irregular curvature of the earth, all in order to make the topography and property boundaries from one district coincide and align with those mapped for its neighbours.

In New South Wales, Mitchell made special provision for ‘connecting’ district-scale maps: ‘The large room adjoining the map room is set apart for the construction of connected maps and surveys of the country’.73 And as soon as Frankland took over the southern department in 1828, he too expressed frustration with the paucity of the available maps of the island.74 In 1832 he proposed employing another assistant – Raphael Clint – specifically for ‘connecting’ the plans coming in from his district surveyors ‘which are now so advanced as to require to be thrown together by a series of general observations unconnected with boundary considerations’.75 A year later, while trying to convince Arthur to allow him to begin a trigonometrical survey, Frankland again alluded to the technical necessity of connecting district charts:

These operations will enable me to connect the different Districts already Surveyed in detail, and anticipate the gratification of laying before the Lieutenant Governor at no distant Period, a complete and accurate Chart of the principal Districts of the Island.76

As will be seen, however, Arthur was generally uninspired by technical concerns when there were more pressing needs to be addressed.

The division of the colony: Misinterpreting the ‘King’s Instructions’

Despite the emergence of these technical issues, the impetus to carry out trigonometrical surveys and eventually produce general topographic charts of the early Australian colonies really came from London. Equally unexpectedly, it emanated not from an imperial ‘scopic desire’ to see and control the whole of each of those spaces, but from the more prosaic need to reform the settlement process. In fact the wishes of the Colonial Office were in this instance not cartographic at all. Yet in the clash between policy and practice, and through an at times wilful misinterpretation of direct instructions, this policy reform led ultimately to the mammoth trigonometrical survey of the settled districts of New South Wales and Mitchell’s

74 Frankland to col sec, 16 July 1828, AOT, LSD 16/1, SG’s letterbook, pp 233–34.
75 Frankland to col sec, 7 Sept 1832, AOT, LSD 61/1, Letters to col sec, pp 354–55.
76 Frankland to col sec, 1 July 1833, LSD 61/1, pp 487–88.
topographical map of 1834. Given that the project dominated the work of the New South Wales department for over six years, it is worth re-examining the toing-and-froing over the new land policy and especially its survey element, for this clash also reveals a disjuncture, both between the spatial thinking of London and that of the local colonial administration, and between their respective understandings of the processes of survey and map construction.

Commissioner Bigge's reports of 1822 and 1823 criticised the long-standing method of simply granting land free, especially to ex-convicts, and he made numerous recommendations to improve the system's probity and efficiency. The result was a drastic revision of settlement policy, spelt out in what became known as the 'King's Instructions', which arrived in the colonies in preliminary form in early 1825, and more officially as part of incoming Governor Ralph Darling's orders of July that year. Under this new system, the governors of the now separate colonies were each to appoint 'Commissioners of Valuation' to carry out a 'general survey' of their territories and divide them up into the progressively smaller units of counties, hundreds and parishes. The commissioners were then to set a minimum price for land in each parish, depending on its quality: settlers with sufficient capital could buy large blocks of land at that set price; less well-endowed aspirants could apply for a free grant, so long as they satisfied the local government that they could improve the land to a set percentage of its initial value within a certain time. While previous settlement policies had been aimed at feeding the colony and reforming ex-convicts by encouraging industry, money clearly now ruled, and commentary between the Colonial Office and the colonies (both leading up to and after these instructions) dealt almost exclusively with the questions of price, down-payments and other financial arrangements.

In both correspondence at the time and subsequent accounts of this important policy shift, the geographical questions – the necessity for a wholesale subdivision of the colonies in the first place, and the appropriate method of carrying it out – largely dropped from the discussion.

The King's Instructions contained a mixture of precision and flexibility when it came to the spatial division. On the one hand, they stipulated exact areas for the successive commission...
subdivisions: counties were to contain 1600 square miles, hundreds 100 square miles, and parishes 25 square miles. On the other hand, since the boundaries of these units were meant to follow natural features such as rivers and ridgelines, which could not be expected to yield nice round numbers, the eventual areas of these units could fall short of or exceed the ideal figures by up to a third.81 This inbuilt flexibility implies that London envisaged that the division could be done without recourse to accurate surveying and mapping: precise measurement would only need to occur internally to each parish, after it had been loosely defined and commercially valued by the commissioners, to lay out the square-mile grid within which future properties were meant to fit. In short, when the King’s Instructions ordered the commissioners to make a ‘general survey’, it meant a general qualitative rather than a strictly quantitative survey.82

However, ‘general survey’ meant something very different to a modern surveyor general who, acting also as the head commissioner of valuation, effectively determined how to carry out these instructions. In both New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land the heads of the survey departments immediately interpreted the King’s Instructions as requiring a general topographic survey. Furthermore, arriving as these orders did at about the same time that both departments began running into problems trying to ‘connect’ their various district-scale cadastral charts, they also realised that an accurate general topographic survey could only be made within the more rigorous framework of a general trigonometrical survey. In effect, they found in the King’s Instructions a solution to a more local problem of which metropolitan authorities were surely ignorant.

In part this re-interpretation stemmed from historical factors, for work on a general survey and division had already begun in New South Wales, albeit somewhat haphazardly. Governor Brisbane (presumably anticipating Bigge’s recommendations) ordered Oxley in early 1822 ‘to survey the Colony, and divide it into Counties, Townships and Sections of a Square Mile’.83 Importantly, this process would have involved the sort of accurate survey that the later King’s Instructions seemed to strive to avoid, for in Brisbane’s scheme both the ‘townships’ – at 36 square miles, slightly bigger than the later parishes – and the internal ‘sections’ were all meant to fit within an east-west/north-south rectilinear grid.84

81 The relevant sections of Darling’s orders are in HRA 1:12, pp 113–114.
82 See Chapter 1: ‘Survey’, and ‘surveyor’, carried a much looser meaning at the time, as any form of both qualitative and quantitative assessment or valuation. Qualifications such as ‘land surveyor’, ‘road surveyor’ or ‘surveyor of customs’ were often necessary to distinguish specific roles/professions.
83 See Oxley to Darling, 26 Jan 1826, HRA 1:12, pp 379–89 (esp p 380).
84 See eg Oxley, passing on these orders to his deputy in VDL: Oxley to Evans, 6 April 1822, SRNSW, NRS 13809, Oxley’s letterbook [9/2642], pp 142–43.
As it turned out, however, in 1822 Oxley’s department had too few staff, and he felt that extending such a survey at that time would have been ‘extremely tedious’. Four years and the appointment of several assistants later he told Governor Darling he could now see ‘nothing to prevent such parts of Your Excellency’s instructions, as relate to the divisions of the Territory into Counties, Parishes etc., being carried to the fullest extent’. Despite his optimism, this was really a roundabout way of admitting that he had not yet started on the division. As early as 1821 Oxley had drawn up formal descriptions of the new counties of Camden and Argyle, using natural features such as rivers, but any further work on either a general division or a general survey had been limited to some of his assistant surveyors marking out rectilinear ‘townships’ and sections in those areas which were then attracting new settlers. In particular Henry Dangar surveyed, mapped, marked out and recorded selections in the Hunter River district according to a system of numbered townships and sections, both of which, owing to the relatively flat topography, he formed within a regular grid. Meanwhile a ‘sketch map’ showing part of the new settlement region of Argyle suggests the field surveyor there toyed with the idea of setting the rectilinear grid on the diagonal, to better align with two creeks running north-west into Lake George.

The real leap from general to topographical survey came with the arrival of Thomas Mitchell, initially as deputy to an ailing Oxley and by early 1828 as surveyor general in his own right. Mitchell immediately pressed for more staff and resources, and in a memo to Darling he outlined the department’s workload as he saw it. He began, tellingly, with hard figures: the settled part of New South Wales then effectively extended across 33 180 square miles, which would make sixteen counties containing about 1600 square miles, each county containing 64 parishes of 25 square miles, all requiring boundaries following natural features. While acknowledging that the ‘medium’ figures stipulated in the King’s Instruction for each unit were flexible, he stated unequivocally that ‘A Survey must be made before the Commissioners can determine the Superficial extent [of a county], or subdivide the same into hundreds and Parishes of given superficial dimensions’. Darling backed him up, and informed London in May 1828 that ‘Major Mitchell is decidedly of opinion that a Trigonometrical Survey should be immediately commenced as a Necessary foundation to the

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85 Oxley to Darling, 26 Jan 1826, HRA 1:12, p 380.
86 For the county descriptions, see Oxley’s letterbook, f 79; for Dangar, see SRNSW, NRS 13763, Letters rec’d from surveyors (Dangar) [SG, 2/1526.1], ff 1–159; see also Dangar’s map, showing these gridlines [Plate 13].
87 SRNSW, NRS 13886, Sketch maps, vol 2, [X754], f 116.
88 Memorandum [Mitchell to Darling], 29 April 1828, HRA 1:14, pp 178–79.
more particular Survey of the Colony', and that he had accordingly authorised Mitchell to do so.\textsuperscript{89}

Although Mitchell's reasoning is not explicit, his assumption of the need for an accurate topographical and therefore trigonometrical survey, in spite of the instructions' intended flexibility, appears to have rested on two bases. Firstly, he reasoned (logically enough) that the commissioners could not select natural features for boundaries until they knew where they were. Secondly, he seems to have placed excessive emphasis on sticking to the stipulated 'medium' sizes for the different subdivisions. On the first, the 1820s had seen a significant surge in settlement, most of which occurred in newer regions at some remove from Sydney, and the now far-flung assistant surveyors, such as Dangar in the Hunter district, were doing much more preliminary exploration of the hinterland, as opposed to surveying individual properties, than they had before – or would since.\textsuperscript{90} Mitchell, on the other hand, was in mid-1828 still relatively new to the colony and not yet personally familiar with the general lie of the land. Reporting one of Mitchell's first trips to the outlying areas of settlement at this time, Darling commented that it would 'afford him an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the Country which circumstances have not hitherto permitted'.\textsuperscript{91} So merely finding out what rivers and ridgelines existed, and even roughly where they lay, was a necessary first step to using them as boundaries to define the variously sized divisions.\textsuperscript{92}

Of the preoccupation with precise areas, some of this may be attributable to the rectilinear division and survey that Brisbane had ordered earlier. There was also from the mid-1820s much greater attention paid by various levels of authority to the exactness of surveys for individual settlers, which may be taken as a shift in general mind-set. This, as described above, took the form of increased scrutiny within departments that the areas mapped matched the areas granted. More dramatically, it manifested as far more severe criticism from governors of an earlier semi-official policy of effectively compensating some settlers, whose grants encompassed especially rocky or swampy land, by not counting such unusable areas in the total officially described. This had, for instance, been one element in the dispute over the scandalously excessive grant to William Lawrence in Van Diemen's Land that effectively cost George Evans his job. Later, with the general topographical survey

\textsuperscript{89} Darling to Huskisson, 13 May 1828, \textit{HRA} 1:14, pp 176–78.

\textsuperscript{90} Dangar is still remembered in the Hunter region as an 'explorer', although he does not usually feature in the national version of that canon: see eg John Atchison and Nancy Gray, \textit{Henry Dangar: Surveyor and Explorer}, Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society, Scone, 1974.

\textsuperscript{91} Darling to Huskisson, 13 May 1828, \textit{HRA} 1:14, p 176.

\textsuperscript{92} See eg his 'On the trigonometrical survey ...', p 341.
finally over and the Executive Council deciding whether to approve the new subdivision boundaries, Mitchell was at pains both to state the exact areas of each county and to explain at length the reasons for anything above the ‘medium’. Both the council’s minutes and Governor Bourke’s covering despatch, informing London of its decision, likewise concentrated heavily upon this issue.\(^{93}\)

In addition, and separate to any consideration of the actual orders, Mitchell also clearly wanted to conduct a trigonometrical survey of the colony for purely personal reasons. As Edney has described, this survey technique was considered the technological pinnacle of the time, and conducting such a program in New South Wales would have held a far greater attraction to a man like Mitchell than the drudgery of surveying farms. Just before leaving Britain he published in London a short but technical treatise, *Outline of a System of Surveying* \(^{94}\), explaining the principles of a trigonometrical survey, and Mitchell’s 1828 memo to Darling reveals he was also well informed about the concurrent Ordnance survey of Ireland, for in it he used a comparison of the workforce and area covered on that island as part of his argument for more staff in New South Wales.\(^ {95}\) The enormous labour and expense – both private and departmental – that he devoted to produce the final 1834 topographic map similarly testify to the element of professional pride and ambition that induced him to re-interpret his instructions so tendentiously.

The implementation of the King’s Instructions played out very differently in Van Diemen’s Land, but nevertheless with the same belief that they necessitated an accurate topographic and therefore trigonometrical survey of the island.\(^ {96}\) When Oxley passed Brisbane’s anticipatory orders on to his southern deputy in 1822, Evans replied that the system of rectilinear subdivision was completely impracticable in that colony, due both to the ruggedness of the landscape and the need to settle along watercourses.\(^ {97}\) (It should also be said that such a survey would probably have been beyond Evans’ abilities, both technically and organisationally, and certainly beyond the capacity of his two-man department at that time.) Arthur did later appoint commissioners of valuation, but far from pricing unsettled parishes with a view to selling them off to new colonists, their work mostly entailed valuing

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\(^{94}\) *Outlines of a System of Surveying*, for Geographical and Military Purposes, Comprising the Principles on which the Surface of the Earth may be Represented on Plans, Samuel Leigh, London, 1827.

\(^{95}\) Memo, 29 April 1828, *HRA* 1:14, pp 178–79.


\(^{97}\) See Evans to Sorell, 4 April 1822, and Evans to Oxley, 10 April 1822, SRNSW, SG, Oxley’s letterbook, 9/2642, ff 149–50 and 152–53 (and copy of second letter, AOT, LSD 1/11, General coro, p 49).
the 'back runs' of existing settlers — and volubly venting their disapproval of the mismanagement that they saw endemic in the whole system. 98

Soon after his arrival in late 1827, Frankland began a 'military' (that is, trigonometrical) survey, but Arthur's reluctance to increase the department's staff, or indeed spend anything over a bare minimum, meant he had to abandon the idea almost immediately. 99 Knowing the governor's mind, on the question of broad-scale subdivision Frankland and his fellow commissioners instead argued in favour of retaining the existing administrative units — 'police districts' — rather than try to impose a new layer of parishes and hundreds: 'we deem it quite premature to pretend to form such minute subdivisions, while so small a portion of the Island has been surveyed'. 100 By 1833, with the 'perplexing arrears' of property surveying better under control, Frankland was able to have one of his assistants, James Sprent, make the few triangulations necessary to 'construct a new Chart of the Territory whose accuracy I could certify', 101 although this was not anywhere near the scope and rigour of the trigonometrical survey in New South Wales.

Meanwhile, correspondence between London and both Australian colonies had continued to focus on the financial side of settlement policy, and Darling's advice of 1828 that he had authorised Mitchell to commence a trigonometrical survey elicited only a short reply from the secretary of state saying that he would appoint more surveyors to help with it. 102 Significantly, the secretary at the time was Sir George Murray, Mitchell's former commanding officer and assiduous patron. Matters, and ministries, had changed by the 1830s. The incoming secretary of state, the Right Honourable Edward Stanley, complained that the commissioners of valuation for New South Wales had not been sending in their regular reports, and he was annoyed to discover that the King's Instructions 'seem to have been misunderstood [by Mitchell] as authorising if not requiring him to proceed immediately to construct a Trigonometrical Survey of at least the whole Colony'. He roundly admonished

99 Frankland to col sec, 16 July and 26 July 1828, AOT, LSD 16/1, pp 233–34; 260–61; contra Jones, Backsight ('The colonial government ... determined to apply the trigonometrical system to the production of a general map of the entire island', p 72).
100 Frankland to col sec, 1 May 1828, AOT, SGs letterbooks, LSD 16/1, pp 110–111.
101 Frankland to col sec, 9 July 1833, AOT, LSD 61/1, pp 478–91 (esp pp 487–88). Sprent extended some of this preliminary work between 1847 and 1853, but the project was then abandoned a second time: see Jones, Backsight, pp 76–77; and Peter Monaghan, 'Surveying: Early days around Tasmania's trigonometrical stations', Surveying Australia, 4(3), Sept 1982, pp 9–21.
102 Murray to Darling, 26 Nov 1828, HRA 1:14, pp 480–81.
Mitchell for the 'unsatisfactory results', the 'deficiency of information', and for having thus 'devoted a considerable portion of his time and labour at the expense of other objects'.

In response, Mitchell quibbled. Compared to the surveys of England and Ireland, he argued through Governor Bourke, 'nothing which can with any propriety be called a trigonometrical Survey of the Colony ... has been or could be attempted here'. This merely added misrepresentation to his earlier misinterpretation, for Mitchell had been keen enough to publicise his survey as trigonometrical in his announcement of the map's publication, and internally he had referred to it as trigonometrical all along. Fortunately, before Bourke forwarded this dubious defence, Mitchell was able to present his finished topographical map of the nineteen counties to the colony's Executive Council [Plate 6], together with those counties' precise descriptions and measurements. The mammoth general survey which London had tried to avoid was already achieved.

Both intent and outcome aside, at the heart of the misinterpretation of the King's Instructions there lay a conflict of spatial perceptions: unusually, it was an inversion of the usual difference between local and imperial visions. While the Colonial Office was for the most part more generally minded and, as in this particular case, more concerned with colony-wide policy, it also recognised that when it came to the contentious topic of valuing land it had to consider more specific yet variable local circumstances. (This insight must really be credited to Bigge, who had been 'on the spot' gathering first-hand knowledge of the colonies, their lands and especially settlers' wishes.) The key to the new settlement-through-sales policy consequently involved the valuation of individual parishes, the larger subdivisions of hundreds and counties being intended mostly as ways of specifying and locating these (as in 'the parish of X, in the hundred of Y, in the county of Z'). To men who ran a global empire, a parish of just 25 square miles must have seemed a ridiculously small area. On the other hand, the colonial survey departments - normally preoccupied with the particular details of individual properties, but knowing that the problems really emerged when they tried to accurately record them all within the connected cadastral jigsaw for the whole colony - considered that to apply the new policy they needed first to carry out an accurate general survey; only then could they progressively tighten their spatial focus to consider the smaller units like parishes - the 'minute subdivisions' as Frankland termed them.

103 Stanley to Bourke, 15 June 1833, HRA 1:17, p 144.
104 Bourke to Stanley, 10 Oct 1834, HRA 1:17, pp 550–56.
105 Bourke to Stanley, 5 May 1834 (plus Mitchell’s report, and minutes of Exec Council), HRA 1:17, pp 417–29.
An aside on counties, hundreds and parishes

Before attending to Mitchell’s trigonometrical survey and mapping of the nineteen counties, it is interesting to consider the subdivisions which the King’s Instructions ordered the colonial surveyors to create. However new-fangled their instruments and procedures, in constructing counties, hundreds and parishes they again fell back on some particularly ancient British usages.

Lexically the ‘counties’ of Britain derive from Norman French *counté*, but geographically they date further back to the ‘shires’ and various other ethnic regions of the Anglo-Saxon era, some of which in turn are thought to have corresponded to even earlier kingdoms of the immediately post-Roman era of Germanic invasions. By the eighth and ninth centuries, the Anglo-Saxon shires had settled into relatively fixed administrative areas ruled by an *ealdorman*, and after the Norman Conquest by an *eorl* and/or shire-reeve (sheriff), all of whom were subordinate to and owed allegiance to their monarch. To counties were subsequently imposed over or within the non-Anglo-Saxon regions of Britain – Devon and Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, Ireland – as these fell under English rule. In the early nineteenth century counties remained important administrative centres, with a particular significance to the early Australian colonies because it was generally this level of the judicial system, the county assizes and quarter sessions, that sentenced convicts to transportation.

Intermediate subdivisions within British shires and counties varied in name and size, including the ‘ridings’ and ‘wapentakes’ of Yorkshire and the ‘lathes’ of Kent, but the most common term was the ‘hundred’. Again of Anglo-Saxon or earlier Germanic origin, its derivation is also obscure, but thought to refer originally to an area of a hundred ‘hides’, being the region required to furnish a hundred armed men. Apart from such militia, the hundred’s chief administrative significance lay in its civil court, a role which also persisted into the nineteenth century – although they were by then gradually losing their powers to more centralised county courts.

Parishes too had existed as a unit of land area in Britain for centuries before they came to be imposed on the Australian landscape. Originally derived (both lexically and geographically) from the *minster parochia* of the Anglo-Saxon church, and functionally equating to a diocese, by the early Middle Ages parishes had become more commonly identified with small regional churches – effectively as subdivisions within a diocese. These

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churches tended to serve and be centred upon manorial estates, so ecclesiastic parishes were usually superimposed over those secular estates' existing shapes and boundaries – including their dependence on natural features such as rivers, roads, ridges and woods. The Anglo-Saxon estate granted to Ealdorman Æthelhelm, the circuit description of which featured in Chapter 3, became and still closely overlaps the current parish of North Newnton in Wiltshire.109 The Tudor governments of the sixteenth century adopted, or co-opted, the ecclesiastic parish as the smallest area of civil administration, and parish councils became responsible for such local duties as maintaining roads and militia, recording births, deaths and marriages, and especially for organising poor relief – thus the expression ‘on the parish’. In his study of the social significance of the parish, David Fletcher writes that for ‘ordinary people in England ... the parish was the government’, at least for the century or so leading up to the great reforms of the 1830s which also centralised many of these functions.110 Somewhat paradoxically, therefore, civil parishes were being established in the Australian colonies just as they were stripped of much of their meaning in Britain.

**Mitchell's trigonometrical survey and topographic map**
The seven-year process of the trigonometrical survey of the nineteen counties and the drafting and engraving of Mitchell's topographic map has been fully – and admirably – recounted by Alan Andrews, so only a brief synopsis is required here.111

Firstly, it should be noted that the theory and ideal procedure of a trigonometrical survey is avowedly mathematical and systematic, especially when compared to the very different style of surveying colonial properties, which as already described also entailed various social and ritualistic aspects. Mitchell's survey comprised two broad phases with several steps within each. The first phase involved establishing the web of triangles, with their vertices at selected highpoints within sight of each other, and then calculating the distances between them and ultimately their positions relative to each other. Mitchell himself took charge of the initial survey from the selected peaks, generally not trusting his subordinates with the precise measurements of bearings between them. He then used a combination of trigonometry, measured latitude (and to a lesser extend longitude), and recently determined data on the curvature of the not-quite-spherical globe to calculate their

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positions. He also measured several baselines – the two major ones at Botany Bay and Lake George – but he used these as a check to previous calculations rather than as a starting point for them (as had been employed in earlier triangulations, such as that between London and Paris in 1784).

The less technical but far more extensive second phase required Mitchell’s assistant surveyors to travel all over the nineteen counties and ‘fill in’ the topographical details – mostly just watercourses and ridgelines – between these located highpoints. Ideally this part of a trigonometrical survey should have proceeded either by taking bearings from each internal feature to the surrounding vertices/highpoints of each triangle; or, conversely, by systematically taking the bearings of all internal features from each vertex and then locating each feature by the intersection of two (or more) of these bearings. However, Mitchell’s surveyors more usually conducted ‘route surveys’, tracing a central route of accurately measured distances and bearings from point to point and noting the ‘off-set’ distances to features left and right of that line. They also simply sketched in topography by eye and used more occasional bearings to specific features in order to ‘anchor’ the sketch within those previously located features. Regardless of the relative rigour of their techniques, it was in this phase that the real work of the survey occurred, both in terms of the enormous number of man-hours that went into it and the amount of information that resulted.

In between their regular work of locating properties to settlers – and with not a little hectoring from their surveyor general – almost the full roll-call of the New South Wales assistant surveyors produced over 900 smaller topographic maps from these feature surveys. At a scale of two inches to a mile (1:31 680), their level of detail made these feature maps the most useful outcome of the trigonometrical survey. It was these rather than the full map (at a scale of about 1:540 000, a near one-twentieth reduction) which showed the requisite detail for such ‘improvements’ as roads or drainage works. In his submission of the final map to the Executive Council, Mitchell claimed that these 900 feature survey maps were ‘of the most accurate description, and must ever be considered valuable documents for the compilation of Maps on a much larger scale’. His claim proved no idle boast, for when fronting yet another enquiry into his administration of the department over twenty years later,

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112 Andrews reproduces several of these ‘feature survey’ maps (plates 4, 30, 31, 34, 36, 38, 39, 41); see also Andy Macqueen, Frederick Robert D'Arcy: Colonial Surveyor, Explorer and Artist c 1809–1875, priv pubn, Wentworth Falls, 2010, plates 5–10.
Mitchell revealed that these feature survey maps were still in the office and still being used.113

The final topographic map of the nineteen counties may have been a great technical achievement, but its shortcomings as a work that could be of interest and use to the general public become apparent when it is compared to a similar version produced and for sale by Assistant Surveyor Robert Dixon a few years later [Plate 7].114 As noted above, Mitchell had praised Dixon for his accuracy in his letter to Robert Hay, and he likewise recognised Dixon's contribution to the survey in the announcement of the topographic map's publication.115 But in May 1836 Dixon took leave to return to Britain on family business, and on the ship back he spent his time drawing up his own map of the nineteen counties, using copies of the numerous smaller maps that he had kept from his time helping compile the original. This he published the following year through Joseph Cross (a rival to Mitchell's London printer) and dedicated it - outside of the more usual circle of government patrons - to the doyen of Britain's geographical community, Sir John Barrow.116

Dixon's map had a few advantages compared with Mitchell's. At the very basic level, it was slightly bigger, more colourful, and printed on a single sheet of paper. More importantly, Dixon dispensed with most of the intricate but visually messy topographical information and opted instead for a cadastral layer. This showed the larger individual properties in especially the outlying areas of settlement, which were then the focus of settlers' attention, plus shading en masse the more densely occupied areas of the Cumberland Plain around Sydney. Mitchell unfortunately never stated why he had eschewed this cadastral information, although part of the reason would have been that, like the 'proper plans' in the office which his chief draftsman continually had to update, any such fixed details would have quickly become obsolete. Dixon, by contrast, reaped a triple benefit. Firstly, he avoided the extra engraving time involved in all the hachuring necessary to represent the mountain ranges...
that sweep right through the middle of the area that these maps covered. He also avoided the visual problem of the several gaps and blank spaces among that topography which occurred in Mitchell’s version. And, crucially, he attracted a bigger market. As Arthur had expected of a general chart of Van Diemen’s Land, the public and prospective settlers especially wanted to know what land was already taken and what was still available. By catering to that more commercial desire, as opposed to the more philosophical interest that the natural topography shown on Mitchell’s map might have satisfied, Dixon’s version proved the more attractive. It went on to a second and updated edition in 1841, a third in 1842 and a fourth in 1847.117

Mitchell had spent about £900 (nearly a year’s salary) on the engraving and printing of his map, and he had sought permission to publish and sell it ‘as well as to reimburse him in the expense ... as to obtain whatever reputation as a geographer and an artist the production of such a work ... may obtain for him’.118 Dixon therefore stole his thunder on both counts, and when he returned to the colony Mitchell at first refused to reinstate him: although Dixon appears on the department’s books again in 1837, his career was decidedly patchy thereafter, being suspended twice over the next four years.119

Satisfying the Colonial Office: Frankland and the ‘philosophical branches’

Back in 1833, in the same complaint about Mitchell’s misinterpretation of the King’s Instructions quoted above, Stanley made the extraordinary claim that the Colonial Office possessed no maps of New South Wales at all, apart from ‘a skeleton map of the chief points of a Trigonometrical measure ..., three or four plans of Roads, and a statement of the proposed natural Boundaries of the Counties’.120 This dearth probably owes much to previously despatched but loose-leafed maps being removed from their accompanying correspondence in the files, or removed from the office entirely to be engraved and printed – such as seems to have occurred with Oxley’s map of his expeditions. But Stanley’s dismay at the ‘deficiency of information’ about New South Wales may have been exacerbated by the steady stream of cartographic material arriving more dutifully from Van Diemen’s Land, for while Arthur’s tight-fistedness precluded anything like a trigonometrical survey, it did not stop him from making constant cartographic demands on Frankland’s department, nor from blithely passing on equally onerous requests from London. The metropolitan end of this

117 The SLNSW holds copies of the 2nd and 3rd edns; the NLA has copies of the 2nd and 4th.
118 Bourke to Stanley, 5 May 1834, HRA 1:17, p 419. Mitchell’s salary at that time was £1000 pa: see NSW Blue Book, 1833, SRNSW, NRS 1286 [4/264], pp 82–83.
120 Stanley to Bourke, 15 June 1833, HRA 1:17, p 143.
traffic might more clearly represent an imperial ‘scopic desire’, although the context of what Zoë Laidlaw describes as the ‘information revolution’ in the Colonial Office in the mid-1830s suggests a wider and not specifically visual desire. Frankland’s reaction at the colonial end, on the other hand, reveals the ineffectuality of any such desire, and he was caught continually balancing duty and capability, utility and uselessness.

In September 1833, for instance, Arthur requested a map of the holdings of the Van Diemen’s Land Company – a mere 350 000 acres on the remote north-west corner of the island – to despatch on the imminently departing Penelope. In response Frankland informed him that all his draftsmen were already employed trying to finish other maps for the Colonial Office to go on the same ship. Within a few months Frankland asked Arthur to appoint another draftsman specifically for the ‘constant plan drawing which is now required for transmission to the Secretary of State’. (He succeeded in this at least: Thomas Lister joined as an assistant draftsman a few months later in April 1834.) In September that year, and again passing on a demand from the Colonial Office, Arthur requested not only a new map of the whole island, but accompanying data on the latitudes and longitudes of its major towns. Aptly expressing the dilemma Frankland faced between what he saw as two competing desires on the part of his masters, he effectively used Arthur’s own pragmatism to deny him: he stated he would comply only once ‘the exigencies of the Country admit of this Department being employed in the more philosophical branches of the profession’.

Later still, and in a marked escalation, Arthur reminded Frankland that the Colonial Office wanted ‘periodical returns’ of copies of all the maps that his department produced, plus again the latitudes and longitudes of various places. Frankland assured him that one periodical batch of copies had already been ‘made and transmitted to London in strict conformity with the order’, and he again pointedly mentioned that ‘the time of several of my Assistants has been devoted to the business for a considerable period’. Significantly, Frankland then added a second rejoinder:

As I fully expected, these tracings proved of no service whatever to the Secretary of State’s Office, and I received intimation accordingly ... You are aware that my Officers are mostly employed in Surveying detached Locations [ie rural properties] and that to send to England copies of such plans of Estates, would be of no service to the Secretary of State.

121 Laidlaw, Colonial Connections, ch 7.
122 Frankland to col sec, 2 Sept 1833 and 27 Jan 1834, AOT, LSD 61/1, p 472 and LSD 61/2, p 12.
123 See VDL ‘Blue Book’, 1834, AOT, CSO 50/9, pp 103ff.
124 On similar imperial desires re India, see Edney, Mapping an Empire, pp 85–91.
125 Frankland to col sec, Memorandum, 17 Sept 1834, AOT, LSD 61/2, p 105.
Specifically addressing the bureaucratic mind-set that continued to plague him, Frankland ‘beg[ged] leave that the former memorandum ... may be considered as cancelled’.126

In contrast, what Frankland considered to be the appropriate way to illustrate, for his remote superiors, the ‘philosophical branches’ of his department’s work is suggested in the results that he more enthusiastically forwarded from James Calder’s survey of Maria Island in 1835. This was one of the more overtly scientific examinations conducted under Frankland’s orders and Calder’s description, as transcribed and paraphrased at length by Frankland in his own report, systematically covered the standard categories of enlightened interest: the separate classes of mammals, birds, reptiles and plants, and the general and more singular features of the island’s geology and topography.127 Frankland’s descriptions of the accompanying graphic and cartographic material, however, suggest that he placed it within a distinct hierarchy of diminishing detail to match its recipients and their assumed use of it.

Firstly, much like Mitchell’s 900 feature survey maps, Calder’s original map from his survey of Maria Island stayed in the department’s head office: it ‘require[d] to be copied’ before Frankland could forward a version to Arthur, and he proposed ‘preparing a reduced copy ... for transmission to the Secretary of State’.128 Since copying necessarily introduced a degree for error, and reduction even more so, this resulted in the governor and the Colonial Office receiving progressively less accurate and less detailed versions of the original information. The reason, as with those property plans dutifully but uselessly sent to London, was that neither the lieutenant governor nor the secretary of state needed such minute detail. Of the reduced copy which he eventually sent to London, Frankland declared that ‘It will explain at one glance the general features of the Island’. At the same time he included a landscape sketch for ‘the purpose of conveying an idea of the [northern] aspect of Maria Island’.129 Compared to the information necessary for the department’s purposes, including at that time rival applicants for grazing licences on the island, Frankland expected the reduced map for the secretary of state to receive but a glancing perusal, and to give him but a general idea.

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126 Frankland to col sec, 27 July 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, pp 197–98. (He fobbed off the request for longitudes by pointing out that ‘my Department is not furnished with a Chronometer’.)
127 ‘Notice on Maria Island’, Frankland to col sec, 20 June 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, pp 182–85.
128 Frankland to col sec, 29 Jan 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, p 132.
129 ‘Notice on Maria Island’. Similarly, the map depicting Frankland’s own expedition in 1835 was ‘intended to illustrate the subject’: Frankland to col sec, 23 July 1835, AOT, LSD 61/2, p 191.
Even more than do their written records, the colonial survey departments’ cartographic output reveals both the constant problems that these officials faced in acquiring and recording knowledge of the colonial landscape, and their often quite surprisingly great achievements in doing so. It is in the departments’ cartographic output also that the differing spatial perceptions of the various levels of colonial administration appear most clearly. Those maps more directly implicated in the colonial project of controlling land were not the seemingly omniscient broad-scale maps of whole colonies, but the hundreds if not thousands of plans defining individual properties and dictating where the myriad of settlers’ boundaries should run. While there may have been a ‘scopic desire’ on the part of distant or higher officials for broad-scale maps of the colonies, or even a technical desire on the part of surveyors general to create them as a way of improving the accuracy of their more fractured and smaller-scale work, ultimately there persisted a substantial gulf between the practicalities of colonial administration and the actual benefits that might be reaped from such ‘philosophical’ endeavours. Alice Walters writes that the social cachet of polite science and its paraphernalia was so great in the late eighteenth century that wealthy collectors and dilettantes commissioned copies of the latest scientific and professional instruments, often constructed of finer materials than those actually used by contemporary practitioners.\textsuperscript{130} Settlement- and colony-scale maps, especially those sent back to London, may be seen in much the same way, as decorative but ultimately useless simulacra, toy versions of the more professional and utilitarian maps that never left the offices and tents of the colonial surveyors.

When Robert Dixon published his own version of the trigonometrical map of the settled districts of New South Wales, in direct competition with Thomas Mitchell's more officially endorsed chart, he contravened a rule of the British and imperial civil service forbidding an official from profiting commercially from his public position. As rules went it was really more of a guideline, and one as ill-defined as it was ill-observed. In 1837, when the Colonial Office got around to producing an authoritative edition of its regulations for colonial civil servants,¹ the issue of officials publishing unofficial works in the course of their government duties did not feature, and it continued to languish in a grey area of custom and precedent.

As the case of Mitchell's map shows, or that of Oxley publishing his exploration journals nearly twenty years previously, the heads of departments had always been granted a fair degree of licence to publish, as private individuals, their work or that of their departments. But they had usually first sought explicit permission to do so from their imperial masters, and also usually dedicated the final product to them. More widely, Britain's particular form of scientific imperialism had blurred the distinction between state and private endeavour, and the participation in Royal Navy expeditions of Joseph Banks and Charles Darwin – this entanglement's two greatest civilian beneficiaries – roughly bookend the period of this study.² Countering this, however, were equally broad perceptions that government officials should not cash in on their privileged positions, and even as late as the 1830s such apparently opportunistic acts carried the whiff of 'old corruption'.³

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¹ Rules and Regulations for the Instruction and Guidance of the Principal Officers and Others in His Majesty's Colonial Possessions, W Clowes, London, 1837; and see Chapter 1.
² See eg Tony Ballantyne (ed), Science, Empire and the European Exploration of the Pacific, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004; John Gascoigne, Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution, CUP, Melb, 1998.
Officials’ unofficial views

Not all surveyors commercialised their government position as blatantly as did Dixon, but a remarkable number produced personal works of various forms which drew either directly upon their official employment or from their particular colonial experience – works which therefore record a wealth of geographic information and knowledge. With the addition of more strictly private records, such as diaries and letters, these amount to a corpus of material that can be seen as an unofficial parallel to the official record which has been the focus of this study so far. Previous chapters have repeatedly touched on the differences between official government knowledge of land ownership and geography in general – as inscribed in the departmental archives of registers, reports and maps – and the more informal colonial geographies, the anecdotal and ‘nefarious’ geographies contained in the rumours and experiences of the mass of private settlers. Surveyors both physically and epistemologically traversed the frontiers between these geographies and, whether verifying legends of mighty rivers or adjudicating a disputed fence line, a large part of their job entailed trying to bring the two together. The value of their unofficial works therefore lies in how these descriptions both contrast, and help define the limits of, that official viewpoint.

The following, while necessarily only a small selection of the colonial surveyors’ private works, examines three broad aspects related to this epistemological frontier.\(^{4}\) Firstly, and most obviously, these works usually show a dramatically different perception of the colonial landscape. In contrast to their official recording of space in for instance the technical terms of chain lengths and compass angles, in their unofficial works surveyors depicted and described the colonies through a variety of far more subjective modes. Some of these modes complemented, or even comprised part of their professional skills. Topographical drawing, for instance, remained part of a land (and nautical) surveyor’s repertoire well into the nineteenth century,\(^{5}\) and many colonial surveyors extended such professional skills to more recognisably artistic landscape painting. As one simple indicator, nearly a third of the colonial surveyors commissioned before 1836 appear in The Dictionary of Australian Artists.\(^{6}\) Other surveyors employed different skills and other genres that had less or no

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4 A note on the selection: The genres in which colonial surveyors dabbled out of office hours are many. The following sample represents something of the range across these genres, which necessarily also involves the particular personal and generic contexts of each – hence the largely prosopographical element to this chapter. This selection also ranges across the nearly fifty years of this study, the earlier examples here hopefully redressing some of the imbalance brought about by the relative paucity of official records from that period, compared to the better-documented later years.


relation to surveying: George Harris was an accomplished natural historian; James Larmer recorded several ‘vocabularies’ of Aboriginal languages. While governmental procedures and forms constrained knowledge formation, these private works reveal colonial knowledge unconstrained, with perhaps personal diaries occupying the opposite extreme.7

Secondly, whether these unofficial works circulated only within local and personal networks, or reached a wider and anonymous readership through formal publication, they reveal alternative pathways of information transfer. These, again, provide a stark contrast to the structural rigidities of the governmental apparatus. In doing so they also suggest, to a greater extent than the bounded transfer within that apparatus, the continuing currency of colonial knowledge between colonies, throughout the empire and especially back in Britain. There is, however, one discernible shift. In the earlier years of this period, surveyors used their extramural activities especially to help cultivate personal patronage links with specific figures. After about the mid-1820s, as such patronage declined in immediate relevance,8 ambitious surveyors seeking to make a name for themselves instead tended to address their unofficial works to wider public markets and discourses, be they commercial, political or intellectual.

Despite these contrasts, the third way that these unofficial works illuminate the concept of official knowledge lies in how their authors continued to mobilise their authority and credibility specifically as government surveyors – whether their structural association through mere employment, or the authority of experience gained through the practice of their official duties – to reinforce and promote essentially personal views. In many of these private works surveyors explicitly cited their governmental rank, length of time in the service and in the colonies, and the ‘on the spot’ experience which that service entailed as ways of bolstering their claims about and descriptions of the colonies. Put simply, official service not only helped obtain but also helped warrant unofficial knowledge.

Overall, by illustrating the range of the unofficial conceptions of the colonies, held by the same men who determined the official view, such works both help define the boundary between official and unofficial knowledge, and blur that very same line – for that boundary was always as indistinct and permeable as that between legal settlement and the colonies’ informal geographies.

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7 Several surveyors’ diaries have survived, including those of Robert Hoddle, Thomas Mitchell and Charles Wedge, but as they were intended for only very limited circulation they are not discussed here.
8 See esp Zoe Laidlaw, Colonial Connections 1815–1845: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government, Manchester UP, Manchester, 2005, esp ch 5; and Chapter 1.
George Prideaux Harris: Artist and natural historian

Some of the earliest surviving private works of a colonial surveyor come from Deputy Surveyor George Prideaux Harris, who accompanied Lieutenant Governor David Collins’ 1803 expedition which, after abandoning their original site at Port Phillip, moved on to establish a settlement at Hobart in Van Diemen’s Land. Harris was perhaps not a very accomplished surveyor, and his reputation certainly suffered at the hands of various detractors following his death. His real interests, however, lay in natural history, and his efforts in this line, as evidenced through his letters and a few surviving paintings, clearly demonstrate especially the first two aspects of surveyors’ private works outlined above.

Harris hailed from a well-to-do Quaker family from Exeter in Devon. Well-educated and the eldest son of a respectable businessman, in 1802 he worked as a lawyer in Plymouth — gateway to the empire. He seems to have sought a more adventurous life following the unsuccessful courtship of a young lady, and was fortunate in having the right contacts. His family had connections with Plymouth parliamentarian Sir William Elford, and may also have known Collins, a fellow Devonian. More importantly, Harris’s brothers Tom and Henry both worked in the War Office, which at that time was also responsible for the colonies, and undoubtedly on their advice George applied for the position in Collins’ establishment. The Harris brothers’ War Office colleague Michael Foveaux — himself brother of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Foveaux of the New South Wales Corps — also ‘kindly interested himself’. Harris received his appointment in March or April, and sailed in the Ocean on 24 April 1803.

On board during the six-month journey Harris established good relations with his messmates, including Marine Lieutenants William Sladden and Edward Lord, and fellow civil officers Adolarius Humphrey (mineralogist) and Mathew Bowden (surgeon). ‘At any rate’, he informed his mother, ‘we have all been good friends, which is not always the case in a Mess.’ He seems to have eagerly picked up what he could especially from the two scientific gentlemen. His journal of the voyage records their dissection of his dog, which he suspected had been poisoned, and later a detailed description of their own symptoms of food poisoning.
suggesting the input of ‘my friend’ Bowden. After a stop-over at Teneriffe he gave an equally
detailed account of its geology, presumably drawing upon Humphrey’s expertise.¹¹

Harris’s own expertise lay in natural history, and in letters to family he frequently
mentioned a fellow bird collector, Mr Comyns, in a way that suggests Comyns was both
friend and ornithological mentor. Despite stopping at Rio de Janeiro during what he
considered the wrong season for birds – his time was instead ‘completely taken up in viewing
the beautiful country, collecting Shells, Insects, etc’ – Harris did manage to obtain some live
birds for Mr Comyns, ‘which I shall stuff when they die’. Later, from Port Phillip before the
expedition quit for Van Diemen’s Land, he sent ‘some capital Birds etc’ to ‘my good friend
Comyns’, but worried they might not make it back via Sydney and the high seas.¹²

While these preliminary episodes clearly show Harris’s own private interests, and his
prior personal networks of information exchange with friends and family, he also used the
currency of natural history, both in the colonies and in Britain, to try to advance his career as
a surveyor. Barely settled at the new site of Hobart, Harris heard that his superior in New
South Wales, Surveyor General Charles Grimes, had resigned. He quickly wrote to brother
Henry, asking him to encourage Michael Foveaux to again ‘interest himself [and] use his
kind efforts to get me this appointment’. To grease the wheels, as it were, he sent some
samples of shells for Henry to pass on to his ‘friends Mr. Foveaux and Mr. Merrish’. (To
Joseph Foveaux, who did not share his desk-bound brother’s loftier interests, Harris sent ‘the
papers’ – possibly newspapers forwarded from Britain – and books.)¹³

In the event Grimes only took leave, with George Evans and then Henry Williams
filling in as acting surveyor general in Sydney, but Harris continued to campaign for
promotion. Soon after the 1808 rebellion by the New South Wales Corps in Sydney, during
which the rebels transferred Grimes to judge advocate and effectively created a vacancy in
the surveying list, Harris spent a period at Port Dalrymple as the guest of Colonel Paterson,
the corps’ somewhat reluctant commanding officer. Here Harris once more pressed for the
surveyor generalship, received Paterson’s encouragement, and again wrote to brother Henry
to further his case in London.¹⁴

¹¹ Harris to Dorothy Harris, 17 July 1803, *Letters & Papers*, p 21, and Harris to Henry Harris, 17 July 1803, pp
24–25 (re messmates); and ‘Journal of Occurances’, pp 27–28 (dog and Teneriffe), 30 (symptoms), 31
(Bowden).
¹² Harris to Nancy Harris, 17 July 1803, *Letters and Papers*, p 24; Harris to Henry Harris, 17 July 1803, p 24;
Harris to Dorothy Harris, 6 Nov 1803, p 45.
¹³ Harris to Tom Harris, 15 Nov 1803, *Letters and Papers*, p 49; Harris to Henry Harris, postscript (sub diem
11 Feb 1804), p 57; Harris to Henry, 7 Aug 1804, p 63.
William Paterson was another noted natural historian, having in his early twenties published an account of his travels in southern Africa and later collected extensively while on military duties on the subcontinent. Paterson was also a friend of Joseph Banks, who had helped him get elected to the Royal Society in 1798. In short, Paterson was one of the best qualified and certainly the best connected natural historian in the colonies at the time. A portfolio of watercolour paintings from the Australian colonies, identified as having belonged to Paterson and dating from this period, contains several either by Harris or copied from his originals by another colonial artist John Lewin. The copies include one of Paterson’s farm at Port Dalrymple and other landscapes from around that area, while Harris himself signed a series of six paintings of birds. In seems clear from these that Harris cemented his relationship with Paterson through both his artistic and scientific gifts, and hoped thereby to advance his official position. Again, stuck in Van Diemen’s Land, Harris’s campaign came to nothing: the rebel officers in Sydney opted instead for the more capable James Meehan to act as surveyor general.

Harris’s ambitions in natural history were, however, neither all so local nor all so career-oriented, and it was possibly through Paterson’s recommendation that Harris himself wrote to Joseph Banks. In 1806 he submitted to the great man, as head of the Linnaean Society, drawings and anatomical descriptions of the previously undescribed Tasmanian tiger and Tasmanian devil, humbly stating that, if Banks deemed them worthy of publication, ‘I shall be amply repaid for my labours’. Both descriptions reveal Harris’s scientific accomplishments, detailing each species’ morphological features, including such aspects as dentition and skeletal structure, the results of dissection, even some attempt to describe their habits and habitat. At the same time Harris also mentioned to Banks a much more extensive project: over the past few years he had amassed some 150 drawings of ‘Birds, quadrupeds, Fish, Insects etc etc’ for a proposed six-volume work to be entitled ‘Illustrations of the Zoology of Van Diemen’s Land’. Harris promised to send some colour samples by the next 15

15 On Paterson see ADB.

16 ‘Australian paintings by JW Lewin, GP Harris, GW Evans and others 1796–1809’, 4 vols, SLNSW, PXD 388 (Harris/Lewin landscapes, vol 1, ff 1–6; birds, vol 4, ff 1–6). For attribution of ownership to Paterson see Rienits, Early Australian Artists, pp 163–65; Richard Neville, Mr JH Lewin: Painter & Naturalist, SLNSW/UNSWP, Sydney, 2012, pp 148–49; also Anne-Marie Whitaker, ‘Mrs Paterson’s keepsakes: The provenance of some significant colonial documents and paintings’, JRAHS, 90(2), pp 136–51. On the dating, Harris’s signed birds are all 1806; Lewin’s landscapes were copied in 1809, from Harris’s originals all dated 1808 — presumably painted during this pointed visit.

17 See Chapter 1.
With accompanying line illustrations engraved from Harris's sketches, both anatomical descriptions appeared in the Linnaean Society's *Transactions* in 1808 – making Harris the first of the Australian colonial surveyors to be published in Britain – but for the larger project Banks would have waited in vain. Harris struggled to secure adequate painting materials, many of his specimens were destroyed by ants, and he became increasingly distracted by both his official duties and his young family. He had throughout the life of the settlement acted also as a magistrate, and spent several months of 1809 under house arrest following a dispute with Edward Lord over the summary flogging of a female convict. Harris took on the responsibilities of the commissariat in late 1809, just in time for it to furnish the lavish funeral of David Collins, who died early the following year. Following Collins' death Harris added the role of editor of the *Derwent Star* to his duties, making it into print a second time with his report of the state funeral. Finally, in October 1810, Harris also died, from what appears to have been the last in a series of increasingly frequent epileptic seizures. His personal papers from the colony have not survived beyond a few official reports and letters. (Indeed a great deal of the whole settlement's official paperwork, including of the commissariat, were reportedly destroyed in a suspiciously convenient fire immediately following Collins' death.) The published descriptions of the Tasmanian tiger and devil, plus the half-dozen paintings of birds in the Paterson portfolios, are all that remain of Harris's proposed great work on colonial natural history.

Harris’s bird paintings [Plate 8] clearly demonstrate his abilities as a natural history artist, with precise draughtsmanship and vivid colouring. Their most distinctive feature in the context of geographic knowledge, however, lies in their backgrounds. Ornithological historian Christine Jackson describes the usual depictive style of the time, as exhibited for instance in John Lewin's contemporary *Birds of New Holland* (1808), as 'bird-and-branch': the subject perched on a truncated branch or twig, with either no background or perhaps a


19 Various letters home include requests for paints and paper, while others reveal him to be besotted both as a husband and a father: *Letters and Papers*, passim.


plain grey shadow to ‘lift’ the figure from the page.\textsuperscript{23} In part this presentation emphasised the birds as the sole item of interest, without distraction, but it also reflected the fact that they were usually shot, stuffed and nailed to the perch before being painted. To the cabinet-keepers and ornithological theorists in Britain, accurate delineation of birds’ colouring and features, and the number and variety of specimens, were more important goals than noting or identifying the species’ original habitats. Even the fashion for regional collections, as evidenced by some contemporary British publications, simply reflected the logistical problems of finding or obtaining specimens from further afield – a problem that collectors around the empire, whether motivated by science or profit, exploited.\textsuperscript{24} Despite this, only one of Harris’s surviving bird paintings (and one not from the portfolio) uses the ‘bird-and-branch’ style: it shows a ‘little horned owl found at Ceylon’ and possibly depicts an item from Paterson’s collection.\textsuperscript{25}

In contrast, Harris placed four of his six Vandemonian birds within recognisable landscapes of Hobart and its surrounds. His ‘Van Diemen Hobby’ sits before Ralph’s Bay and the mouth of the Derwent River; the ‘Speckled Manakins’ perch overlooking little Hunter Island and the settlement on Sullivan’s Cove; a ‘Little Spotted Owl’ roosts in front of Mount Direction on the eastern side of the river; while snow-capped mountains from the Huon River area rise behind ‘Quail No. 1’. Two further pictures, a ‘Sandpiper’ and a ‘Kingfisher’, show more generic scenery which still gives a vivid idea of the local landscape.\textsuperscript{26} That Harris may have originally intended all these for publication is suggested by his signing them ‘delt GP Harris 1806’: ‘delt’ being the attribution of the artist to go alongside that of engraver in the eventual published version.\textsuperscript{27} (In his other signed paintings, for instance the Ceylonese owl or another of a ‘Trigger plant’, Harris used a simpler ‘GPH’.\textsuperscript{28})


\textsuperscript{25} ‘The little horned owl found at Ceylon’, nd, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NLA, NK10452.

\textsuperscript{26} ‘Australian paintings by Lewin, Harris, Evans ...’, vol 4, ff 1–6. Although fairly easily identifiable, the landscape features are also named in pencilled captions at the bottom of the four mentioned.

\textsuperscript{27} ‘Delt’ is the abbreviation of ‘delineavit’, Latin for ‘he drew it’.

\textsuperscript{28} ‘Trigger plant in flower’, nd, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NLA, NK322.
Surviving examples of Harris's more deliberate landscapes fall into two loose groups. The first group are basically topographical sketches, usually of the settlements themselves, and probably intended as a visual record suitable as a form of official report [Plate 9].

Topographical sketching was part of a surveyor's skills, and in this at least Harris seems to have been ably qualified. From as early as his reconnaissance of Port Phillip in 1803, Collins appreciated Harris's professional draftsmanship, and Harris proudly told his mother that the lieutenant governor had included some of his sketches in an official despatch. (Always on the lookout for personal advancement, he hoped this 'may be something in my Way'.) Late the next year, following Harris's exploration and report on the Huon area, Collins again favoured his 'Eye-sketch of the River' by forwarding it to Governor King in Sydney, as did King by sending it on to London.

Harris's landscapes in the portfolio - both Lewin's copies and bird backgrounds - more clearly conform to the conventions of the picturesque. His views of Cataract Gorge near Launceston (or at least their copies) depict the rugged rocks and precipitous heights typical of the genre as dictated by such arbiters as William Gilpin. The bird backgrounds show less detail, and less of the generically requisite 'texture', but for instance the steepness of the mountainsides and the height of the sky both give them a sense of drama. However, by portraying such distinctive topographical features, these landscapes go beyond the purely aesthetic: these identifiable landmarks played a part in the formation of place. Cataract Gorge remains a topographical icon and tourist attraction of Launceston, just as Mount Wellington (as Table Mount became after Waterloo) is of Hobart, or Port Jackson - another constant subject for contemporary colonial artists in New South Wales - is for Sydney. Whereas Gilpin's picturesque landmarks tended to be distant places, such as the Lakes District or the Alps, that artists and tourists only visited, Harris's landmarks form the backdrop to what he also depicts as his and other colonists' daily existence. In his portfolio pictures his fellow officers fish or row below the cataracts, for instance, while the clearest juxtaposition of...
landmark and *habitus* comes in another 1806 painting (attributed to Harris) that shows his own cottage in Hobart with Table Mount in the background [Plate 10].

As with regional bird collections in Britain, any suggestion of an incipient appreciation of integrated natural ecology would be anachronistic for Harris’s depiction of colonial birds within their environments. Yet the addition of these geographically specific backgrounds still complements his science, as practised in his day, in two ways. Firstly, they suggest both that he had painted the birds ‘on the spot’ and perhaps more importantly – given the more usual stuffing and mounting – that they were still alive at the time. In his letter to Banks, Harris stressed that his illustrations were ‘drawn from life’, the implication being that they were therefore more accurate and reliable. Secondly, by linking the specimens with distinctively colonial landmarks, and thereby colonial places, Harris also attested to their exoticism, signalling that they were also distinctively colonial species, and thus all the more interesting to science (and valuable to collectors) because for it. A slightly later artist, probably Joseph Lycett, made a similar effort in the natural history paintings adorning two ‘collector’s chests’ produced in the convict establishment at Newcastle in the late 1810s. These similarly show bird and mammal species within distinctive topographic views of that settlement and its surrounding area.

Had Harris been able to combine the same level of scientific detail evident in his descriptions of the Tasmanian tiger and devil with the authority, flair and wider interest of his bird paintings, and extended this to the 150 species that he mentioned to Banks – and have the whole thing published – he would have easily eclipsed all other works on Australian natural history from that era. George Shaw’s *Zoology of New Holland* (1784) contained just twelve plates of illustrations, based on earlier sketches or specimens collected on Cook’s voyages; Arthur Phillip’s *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay ...* (1789) boasted 55 plates, of which about thirty represented natural history subjects; John White’s *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales ...* (1790) included 65 plates of ‘non-descript animals, birds, lizards, serpents, curious cones of trees and other natural productions’, which he had at least painted himself; while Harris’s closer contemporary John Lewin managed a relatively paltry eighteen plates in his *Birds of New Holland* (1808). While any comparison is something of

33 ‘GP Harris’ cottage, Hobart Town, 1806’, watercolour, 15.3 x 19.5 cm, NLA, Rex Nan Kivell Collection, NK145.

34 Harris to Banks, 31 Aug 1806.


36 On Australian ornithological and natural history texts of the period see in general Walters, *Concise History of Ornithology*, pp 62–65; Tim Bonyhady, *The Skottowe Manuscript: Thomas Skottowe’s Select Specimens*

37 ‘Australian paintings by Lewin, Harris, Evans ...’, vol 1, f7 and all vol 3; see also ‘Notes re GW Evans, 16 June 1971’, ML, PXN 265; Rienits, Early Australian Artists, pp 163–65. The best biographical treatment of Evans to date is Keith Weatherburn, George William Evans: Explorer, A&R, Sydney, 1966 (also 2nd edn, Australia’s Interior Unveiled: A Biography of George William Evans 1780–1852 – Surveyor, Explorer and Artist, private pubn, 1987); and see (also by Weatherburn), ADB.


39 Govt and General Orders, 10 Aug 1803, HRNSW, vol 5, p 201 (appointment); the only official mention of his dismissal (on 22 Feb 1805) is a note in the list of the Civil Establishment, enclosed in King to Camden, 30 April 1805, HRA 1:5, p 449.

40 Paterson to King, 11 Dec 1805, HRA 3:1, pp 651–52.

41 ‘Australian paintings by JW Lewin ...’ and ‘Notes re GW Evans’ (PXD 388 and PXN 265). The copies are: vol 3, ff 1, 2, 3b, 5 and 7; those dated: vol 1, f7 (1809); vol 3, f2 (1809, orig 1807), f3b (1805, orig 1805), f4 (1809), f7 (1809); see also Rienits, Early Australian Artists, pp 163–65. Given the other copies are all
Like Harris, Evans appears to have hoped that these private works would help him obtain public office, and like Harris, he was not entirely successful, for the rebels instead made James Meehan the acting surveyor general. But they appointed Evans deputy surveyor for Paterson’s pet settlement of Port Dalrymple—even though no such position officially existed. Fortunately, by the time London got around to querying the ‘irregular’ appointment, Governor Macquarie had taken over, and he too had come to recognise Evans’ talents both as surveyor and as artist. In one of Evans’ first submissions to Macquarie he enclosed charts of his surveying, demonstrating professional ability, and also offered his services ‘to Sketch any Views’ during the governor’s upcoming tour of the settlement. On his new-found patron’s recommendation, the Colonial Office eventually confirmed Evans as deputy surveyor for Van Diemen’s Land, filling the place of the late George Harris.

Chapter 2 describes how Evans’ exploration journals reveal the artistic sensibility with which he (at times) viewed and described the landscapes that he travelled across, and how he both overtly and implicitly addressed his accounts to Macquarie personally. These addresses included his comparison of ‘new’ places to others that they had visited together during Macquarie’s frequent tours of inspection, suggesting a shared appreciation for their picturesque scenery. Some of Evans’ surviving landscapes do depict such ‘natural’ scenes, but most others reveal a slightly different aesthetic, in particular one concerned more with the built environment; not natural beauty, but civic and colonial progress [Plate 11]. These too, whether by intent or happy coincidence, flattered Macquarie and his own conception of the colony.

Evans’ earliest known paintings date from soon after his arrival in New South Wales in 1802, and mostly show scenes from around Parramatta and Windsor. Exhibiting what colonial art historians Rex and Thea Reinits describe as ‘draughtsmanship of a high professional order’ and ‘unusually high technical skill’, they present these then relatively young settlements as neat, pretty villages. Later pictures of Sydney Cove and Hobart, including two panoramic series of sketches attributed to him, trace the development of these colonies.

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1809, the lone dating ‘1805’ on the picture of Government House, P’matt (f 3b), probably refers to the date of the building as originally depicted, rather than the time of painting/copying.

42 Govt and General Orders, 27 Oct 1809, HRNSW, vol 7, p 222 (also Sydney Gazette, 29 Oct); on the position’s non-existence see Liverpool to Macquarie, 17 Nov 1812, HRA 1:7, p 481.

43 Evans to Macquarie, 1 June 1810, SRNSW, Col Sec: letters rec’d, 4/1723, (reel 6042), pp 306ff.

44 Bathurst to Macquarie, 3 Feb 1814, HRA 1:8, p 126.

45 On his tours see Lachlan Macquarie, Journals of his Tours in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land 1810–1822, Public Library of NSW, Sydney, 1956.

46 Early Australian Artists, p 163.
more built-up centres. Although Evans brought a great deal of both artistic skill and visual sensibility to his paintings – for instance in his extraordinary twilight view up the harbour towards Sydney in the Paterson portfolio [Plate 12] – his oeuvre in general is more clearly, and more rigorously, topographical.

In 1820, and anticipating retirement, Macquarie made clear his appreciation of Evans’ depictions of the development of the colonies when he acknowledged a gift from him. So gratified was the governor with Evans’ painting of Hobart that he asked for several more, in the same dimensions, showing some of the other main settlements. Macquarie’s name lives on today all across the colonial space, including in the moniker of the ‘Macquarie towns’: the five towns of Windsor, Richmond, Castlereagh, Pitt Town and Wilberforce that he supposedly planned himself along symmetrical and systematic lines early in his governorship. That title could with equal justice extend to all the settlements of his era, so assiduous was Macquarie in regularising streetscapes, erecting public buildings and generally stamping his own impression on the colony. In requesting a set of paintings of these principal settlements, the outgoing governor was effectively asking for a visual record of his own achievements. In asking one of his subordinate officers to act as his personal artist, he quite blatantly blurred the official/ unofficial divide.

As well as providing an extra entree to men in power, Evans’ artistic leanings led to connections within the (admittedly small) network of other amateur and professional artists in the colonies. This is a reminder that while both he and Harris employed their unofficial works to help forge patronage links and improve their professional careers, their respective interests in art and natural history were first and foremost personal endeavours, perhaps even these men’s truer vocations which surveying merely facilitated. Although no concrete collaboration can be established, the similarities between Evans’ style and that of Lewin make it at times difficult to separate their unsigned works. Indeed, one painting in the Paterson portfolio, ‘Front of Sydney Church 1809’, was at first attributed to Lewin; Evans’ signature was

48 Macquarie to Evans, 12 June 1820, [memo version], SRNSW, Col Sec, Letters rec’d, CGS 897 [4/1744; reel 6049], pp 368–69.
49 See eg Grace Karskens, The Colony: A History of Early Sydney, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2009, esp ch 7. She describes Macquarie as ‘a grid man’ (p 197). Macquarie was ably assisted in this town planning by especially James Meehan, so it may be more fairer to say that Macquarie laid out the general principles while Meehan laid out the streets (see also Tony Dawson, James Meehan: A Most Excellent Surveyor, Crossing Press, Sydney, 2004, ch 5).
discovered during restoration work in 1987.\textsuperscript{50} Certainly the two artists knew and associated with each other in the 1800s and 1810s: both, for instance were members of the Parramatta volunteer militia; both accompanied Macquarie on his tour over the Blue Mountains in 1815, Lewin as official artist; and Evans named Mount Lewin after the painter during his Lachlan River expedition later that year.\textsuperscript{51}

Van Diemen’s Land, where Evans served during the late 1810s and early 1820s, offered fewer opportunities to mix with fellow artists, but he seems to have quickly forged a link with the Lempriere family. Thomas James Lempriere immigrated to Van Diemen’s Land in 1822 and began a trading business, and later painted landscapes and portraits, including working on commission to the wealthier settlers of the island.\textsuperscript{52} Evans married Lempriere’s sister Lucy in late 1825, shortly before he resigned from his post and left the colony.\textsuperscript{53} Back in England, Evans became friends with the far more eminent artist John Glover,\textsuperscript{54} and may have taught drawing; more certainly, when he returned to Sydney in 1832, he took up the position of drawing master at the King’s School in Parramatta. At the same time he opened a bookshop on Bridge Street in Sydney, leasing the rooms above as a studio to yet another prominent colonial artist, Conrad Martens, for whom he continued to act as agent for many years.\textsuperscript{55}

**George William Evans: Geographer**

While Evans’ painting appears his more important and enduringly personal endeavour, he also crossed the official/unofficial line by writing one of the first geographies of Van Diemen’s Land. Unlike the direct personal lobbying involved in the traffic of natural history specimens or colonial artworks, the genesis of this published description of the island is

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\textsuperscript{50} On general similarities see ‘Notes re GW Evans’, PXN 265; and Rienits, *Early Australian Artists*, pp 146–47.

\textsuperscript{51} See roll of Parramatta Association, encl 12, King to Hobart, 12 March 1803, *HRA* 1:4, p 578; for Macquarie’s tour, see *Journals of his Tours*, pp 89–110 and Govt and General Orders, 10 June 1815, *HRA* 1:8, pp 568–76; for the naming of Mt Lewin see ‘Journal of Assistant Surveyor Evans’, 25 May, encl Macquarie to Bathurst, 30 June 1815, *HRA* 1:8, p 615.

\textsuperscript{52} *ADB*, *Dict Aust Artists*, pp 461–62. Lempriere is generally considered to have started painting only in the mid-1830s: however the quoted diary entry (in *Dict Aust Artists*) is inconclusive, while the Evans connection may suggest an earlier interest.

\textsuperscript{53} Weatherburn, *Evans*, p 103, n 30. Thomas Lempriere later painted the only known formal portrait of Evans: ‘Portrait of George William Evans’, [1847], oil, 29.6 x 22.5 cm, SLNSW, ML33.

\textsuperscript{54} See Weatherburn, *Australia’s Interior Unveiled*, p 108.

representative of the wider and often more tangled networks of unofficial information transfer both within the colonies and from colony to metropol.

As described in Chapter 2, Earl Bathurst had considered Evans' exploration writings sub-standard, and Macquarie preferred to have his own version of the crossing of the Blue Mountains published locally in the Sydney Gazette. Consequently, none of Evans' official exploration journals made it into print at the time, beyond a few days worth which Oxley used to fill a gap in his own Journals of Two Expeditions. (In fact Evans' most notable contribution to published exploration literature came through his illustrations for Oxley's edition.) In 1822 Evans redressed the situation when his A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land appeared through London publisher John Souter.  

Evans' book was preceded by a slightly longer but suspiciously similar work from colonial mariner Charles Jeffreys, Van Dieman's Land [sic]: Geographical and Descriptive Delineations of the Island of Van Dieman's Land, published two years earlier by JM Richardson. Morris Miller has outlined the complicated cross-plagiarism between the two: some time around 1817, Evans wrote a topographical description of the settled districts of the island; Jeffreys either borrowed or more surreptitiously gained a copy, and built his Van Dieman's Land around it; Evans then felt compelled to publish, in order to reclaim the material as his, and he updated the original description in 1820; William Wentworth, acting as Evans' editor in London, obliged by constructing A Geographical Description around the reworked material, adding passages from (among multiple other sources) Wentworth's own Statistical, Historical and Political Description of ... New South Wales and, returning the plagiarism favour, even copying from Jeffreys' book. Miller estimates that Evans' original 'core' of the eventual book, being the majority of the two chapters on natural and civil geography, amounts to about 40 of its 140 pages – although it should be noted that such plagiarism and compilation was neither uncommon nor particularly frowned upon in early nineteenth-century publishing.  

56 A Geographical, Historical, and Topographical Description of Van Diemen's Land: with important hints to emigrants and useful information respecting the applications for grants of land: together with a list of the most necessary articles for persons to take out: Embellished by a correct view of Hobart Town, also, a large chart of the Island, with the soundings of the harbours and rivers: Added, an abstract from the General Muster-books for the years 1819 and 1820, and a list of the Civil Establishment, John Souter, London 1822.  
57 E Morris Miller, 'First two books on Tasmanian geography by Jeffrey's (1820) and Evans (1822); with comments on Jeffrey's plagiarism of Evans' work and Wentworth's contributions to it', Tas Hist Res Assoc P&P, 7(4), June 1959, pp 59-65.
The permeable official/unofficial divide is apparent throughout *A Geographical Description*, for while it was a private publication, it constantly stresses both Evans' position within the government establishment, and his access to official information. The title page describes Evans (erroneously) as ‘Surveyor General of the Colony’, while his preface opens more accurately with ‘Having had the honour to fill the office of Deputy-Surveyor General of this Island since the year 1811’ (p v). Evans’ name and official rank sit mid-way down an appendicised list of the ‘Civil Establishment’ (p 138), embedding him within the whole governmental apparatus in Hobart, while the map included in some volumes (for an extra 7s 6d, doubling the cost) bears the title ‘Chart of Van Diemen’s Land from the Best Authorities, and from Surveys by G. W. Evans, Surveyor General’. Both Evans’ preface and his editor’s ‘advertisement’ at the beginning of the book point out that, as a surveyor, he has greater authority than Jeffreys on matters geographical; while in place of the usual rhetorical protestation that the author only ventured into print with the encouragement of friends, Evans submits his book to the public ‘at the recommendation of several very high and most respected officers, both in New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land’ (v). Internally, while Evans does not intrude himself with first-person statements, he (or Wentworth) quotes at length from what are pointedly described as ‘official’ documents, included several of Macquarie’s reports of his tours, and Colonial Office advice for prospective emigrants.

Given this obvious closeness to the colonies’ administrators, it is not entirely surprising that Evans describes both natural and civic geography in unremittingly positive terms. The climate is ‘salubrious’ (26); the plains in general ‘beautiful’ (28); the scenery along the Derwent River ‘extremely beautiful, and in places highly romantic and picturesque’ (37). Hobart is ‘pleasantly situated’ (62), ‘its streets branch at right angles’ and a ‘beautiful stream’ runs through it (63); Newtown is a ‘pleasant hamlet’ (63) while further along the river nestle the ‘neat farms’ (37) of ‘industrious’ settlers (66 & 77). To the north ‘the traveller passes over a beautiful tract’ (76), and there are more ‘verdant districts’ (77–78). A long quote from Macquarie lauds the island’s roads (84–85); Evans himself considers that the natural resources around the mouth of the Tamar River in the north of the island will enable it to ‘become the Naval Arsenal of these seas’ (40–41). Indeed, the number of size of the island’s many harbours ‘cannot fail to be productive of the most beneficial effect; and will materially assist the future progress of the colony’ (47). In all, Evans’ description of Van

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58 Evans’ official rank at the time was deputy surveyor general: he seems to have been accorded the grander ‘surveyor general’ locally, in recognition of his near independence from his nominal superior, Oxley, on the mainland, and perhaps in anticipation of the formal separation of the two colonies (see Chapter 1).
Diemen's Land seems a latter day version of his exploration writing, extolling at once the
colonial landscape's scenic beauty and economic potential. Further, while the book is
obviously not addressed solely to Macquarie, the governor and to a lesser extent his
Vandemonian deputy, Lieutenant Governor William Sorell, are equally flattered. Noting, for
instance, Macquarie's founding of Elizabeth Town, Evans comments that the governor had
'made it his duty to facilitate every means for the encouragement and comfort of the
industrious settler, and the future prosperity of the dependency of Van Diemen's Land' (66).
Later he states that the settlers hold 'high feelings of gratification' towards Macquarie for his
benevolent rule, 'all aided by the wise, judicious, and successful exertions of his honour
Lieutenant-Governor Sorell' (111).

Even the 'core' manuscript's history shows something of Evans' blend of personal
and official purposes. He states in his preface, by way of proving original authorship, that
Sorell had read the draft description in late 1819, and that early the next year 'my little
manuscript had the honour to guide His Majesty's Commissioner of Enquiry (Mr. Bigge) in
his travels through the island' (p vi). The political context of this specific and official
readership links A Geographical Description - or at least Evans' original core - with his
paintings, for Bigge's enquiry was widely known to have had the progressive administration
of Macquarie in its sights. With the apparent endorsement also of Sorell, the systematically
ordered and glowing positive description of settlement in Van Diemen's Land guided Bigge
in both the geographical and, implicitly, philosophical sense. Evans' geography was as much
a political defence of Macquarie's distinctly liberal form of colonial progress as his paintings
were a private celebration.59

What Commissioner Bigge made of this guidance goes unrecorded: while he was not
overly damning of Sorell, he more firmly espoused the Tory line that Van Diemen's Land
should be a punishment for convicts, not an Arcadia for free settlers.60 Responses to the
eventually published volume were equally mixed. It received a lengthy treatment in Britain's
Quarterly Review which, while huffing with editorial hauteur that Evans had described the
island 'very imperfectly', still paid him the compliment of quoting and paraphrasing the book
for much of the article.61 Sorell's successor George Arthur, who criticised especially the way
large freeholders dominated the pastoral districts that Evans' had so positively described,

59 Bigge travelled overland from Hobart to Launceston in April 1820: see John Ritchie, Punishment and Profit:
The Reports of Commissioner John Bigge on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land
60 ADB.
dismissed both Evans’ and Jeffreys’ accounts of the island (plus another by Edward Curr) as ‘highly exaggerated’. Regardless of either faint public praise or official disdain, Evans’ *Geographic Description* easily outstripped Jeffreys’ version, and it went on to a French translation in 1823 and a second English edition a year later.63

**Henry Dangar: Emigrant’s guide**

However exaggerated they may have been, the three books from the early 1820s describing Van Diemen’s Land effectively comprised that colony’s somewhat belated literary baptism, for no such extended publications dealing with it had until then appeared. Indeed, part of the reason that the *Quarterly Review* devoted so much space to paraphrasing Evans’ *Geographical Description* may have lain in the island’s relative obscurity within supposedly informed, public discourse in Britain. (Although, in another salient note of contrast between different streams of information flow, newspapers, word-of-mouth and private networks must have compensated for the lack: as the *Review* noted in 1822, the island’s white population had doubled in the previous two years, largely from free immigrants who must have gained their information somewhere.)

New South Wales suffered from no such obscurity, as a constant procession of publications – including books, journals, prints and maps – had traced the mainland settlement’s growth since the half-dozen or so monographs narrating the voyage of the First Fleet and the initial years of settlement. While many of these very early descriptions of New South Wales emanated from colonial officials, until 1828 only John Oxley from among the mainland surveyors had ventured into print with his exploration journals – and as described in Chapter 2 he had only done so having obtained explicit Colonial Office approval and material assistance. The first of the mainland surveyors to make a fully private foray into print culture was Henry Dangar, who in that year published his *Index and Directory to [a] Map of the Country Bordering upon the River Hunter ... a complete emigrant’s guide.*64 As had Evans’

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63 *Voyage à la Terre de Van Diemen, ou, Description Historique, Geographique, et Topographique de cette Île, Bureau des Annales des Voyages, Paris, 1823; History and Description of the Present State of Van Diemen’s Land: Containing Important Hints to Emigrants, with Abstracts from the General Muster Books for the Years 1819, 1820, 1821, and the Lists of the Civil Establishment, John Souter, London, 1824.*
64 Henry Dangar, *Index and Directory to Map of the Country Bordering upon the River Hunter; the lands of the Australian-Agricultural Company,* with the ground plan and allotments of King’s Town, New South Wales: containing a detail of the annual quit rent and amount of the redemption of the same; also historical notes upon the tenure and principle of granting lands in the colony since 1810; also for the guidance of emigrant settlers, a description of the unlocated country in the vicinity of Hunter’s River; useful geographical notes on Liverpool Plains; the present regulations and conditions upon which grants and sales of land are made by government, with observations thereon, with a view of the present state of agriculture in the colony, price of
work on Van Diemen's Land, Dangar's ostensibly geographical description of Hunter region addressed multiple aims: to promote the colony to prospective settlers, to promote himself personally, and to make at times quite overt political comment on the administration of 'land affairs' during the respective governorships of Sir Thomas Brisbane and Ralph Darling.

Dangar had arrived in New South Wales as a free immigrant seven years previously. Due to the 'great and increasing pressure of public business', Oxley asked Macquarie to employ him, along with another recent arrival William Harper, as assistant surveyors, and in July 1821 they became the first to hold that official rank. Most of the pressure on government surveying in the early 1820s came from the rapid spread of settlement away from the central Cumberland Plain into four newer zones: the Shoalhaven area to the south, the Goulburn Plains to the south-west, around Bathurst west of the mountains, and inland from the secondary penal station at the mouth of the Hunter River. Dangar spent nearly all his surveying service in the last of these, but not without controversy. His difficulties with incoming Hunter settlers over the selection of land featured in Chapter 3; while his contretemps with Newcastle commandant, Captain Gillman, were related in Chapter 4. Dangar was eventually dismissed in 1827 for, in Governor Ralph Darling's words, making 'his public situation subservient to his private views and interests'. Dangar was probably removed unjustly, but having been fired he most certainly converted his public situation into private interest. After returning to England to protest his dismissal he not only published his map [Plate 13] and Index, based on his government work, but was able to impress the London directors of the Australian Agricultural Company, in whose employ he later returned to the Hunter as company surveyor.

As with Dangar personally, the relationship between his Index and officialdom is mixed. His book is, first and foremost, a private publication. Dangar offers his 'useful information' in the hope it will 'entitle me to commendation, if not reward': a reminder that while sales may not have been particularly lucrative, wider recognition could be. Yet, like

land, advice to settlers, &c. the whole forming with regard to land affairs in that colony, a complete emigrant's guide, Joseph Cross, London, 1828.


66 Oxley to Macquarie, 27 Jan 1821 and Macquarie to Bathurst, 13 Aug 1821, HRA 1:10, pp 541-42. On the position of 'assistant surveyor' within the then growing establishment, see Chapter 1.

67 For a detailed account of land policy and settlement in the early 1820s see Carol Liston, 'New South Wales under Governor Brisbane 1821–1825', PhD thesis (History), University of Sydney, 1981, ch 4; also Brian Fletcher, Colonial Australia before 1850, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1976, ch 3.


Evans, Dangar overtly mobilises his official position, or former position, to help claim credibility. Both the full title — *by H. Dangar, six years second assistant surveyor of Crown lands in the colony* — and his preface cite his government service in the hope that, according to the latter, ‘However small my pretentions as a writer [that service] will warrant my present attempt’. As well Dangar openly credits the assistance of government surveyors Henry Finch and James Ralfe, claims the ‘countenance of John Oxley, Esq. Surveyor General of the Colony’, and dedicates his map to former governor Brisbane. However, in a surely dangerous backhander to London, he also reveals that he had forgone seeking ‘further patronage, by attending to the etiquette of first intimating my intention’ to publish to the Secretary of State, and instead ‘entered immediately upon the labour ... in some measure to beguile the tedious hours of a long sea voyage’. Against convention, his book carries no dedication at all.70

Internally, the *Index* is something of an eclectic mix. The ‘index’ part itself, about a fifth of the whole, comprises a tabulated list of the properties granted in the Hunter Valley counties of Northumberland, Durham and Roxburgh. There follow details of the land granting and allocation system, and a lengthy and more geographical description of the three counties, especially their ungranted portions but also including sections on such topics as towns, harbours and roads. Dangar reproduces excerpts of the relevant (and numerous) local land regulations since 1810, with his own commentary upon them, followed by another lengthy section on especially the natural history of the further interior regions (copied from Allan Cunningham’s description in the local press). Finally, by somewhat roundabout way of extolling the agricultural potential of the valley, he includes a copy of the chairman’s address to the second meeting of the Hunter district’s Farmers’ Club. The unifying feature of all this is Dangar himself, and it is in his framing commentary, and especially that on the land regulations, that his own political position — and some lingering chagrin at his sacking — is manifest.

In general, Dangar supports those policies and regulations that made it easier for settlers to obtain, develop and trade land with minimal government interference. The index of properties acts also as a long real estate advertisement, for as well as grantees’ names and acreages it includes the respective amounts of annual quit rent or lump-sum ‘remittance’ due on each, expressly for the information of prospective buyers. Regarding the local regulations on land — the most contentious area of public administration during his tenure as surveyor71 — Dangar notes approvingly, for instance, that Governor Brisbane had issued a retrospective

70 *Index*, title page and preface, pp [i] and iii–vii.
71 See Liston, ‘NSW under Brisbane’.  

ruling to counter Arthur’s threat to revoke Vandemonian grants that had been sold, against their stated conditions, within the first five years. Whereas Arthur had been ‘spreading terror’ through his ‘zeal for his Majesty’s interest’, Dangar lauds the more pragmatic Brisbane’s ‘sound discretion’. Similarly, on Brisbane’s successor’s new system for settlers to lodge applications to land with the surveyor general’s department, Dangar comments that ‘This is the first of General Darling’s local orders on land affairs; here is nothing grievously unjust towards the public, but a great deal of unnecessary form’. 72

Whereas Evans’ Geographical Description grew from and was initially directed towards the personal networks of powerful figures within the colonies, Dangar’s Index marks the beginning of a transition towards surveyors more deliberately addressing a wider and anonymous public readership. Likewise his political comment (although obviously tinged by personal animosity to Darling), broadens from Evans’ praise of individuals to a more theoretical standpoint, particularly Dangar’s critical treatment of land regulations and policy in general. Despite this, it was probably his attention to the basic commercial realities of land settlement that helped Dangar achieve a far greater reward from his work than Evans ever received. The Australian Agricultural Company brought Dangar back to New South Wales, and he worked for it over the next three years surveying and securing its million-acre grant. Unsurprisingly, given the two main thrusts of his Index, Dangar himself engaged in much land speculation in the Hunter region, and had amassed over 300,000 acres by 1850, as well as assisting his brothers in the same endeavour. He also entered political life, campaigning (unsuccessfully) for one of the first elected seats in the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1843, and eventually enjoyed six years as member for Northumberland before retiring in his late fifties. 73 Both his employment as a government official and his unofficial Index based on his work clearly paved the way to later success.

William Romaine Govett: Journalistic geographer

While Evans’ and Dangar’s 1820s descriptions of the progress of the colonies appeared in the traditional form of published monographs, by the mid-1830s British print culture was itself progressing. Advances in printing technology and a relaxation in stamp duty created a sizeable market niche for cheaper and more frequent publications – the penny weeklies –

72 Index, and p 71.
73 See ADB.
which in turn opened new avenues for authors to supply them with copy. Although many of
these periodicals quickly attained a reputation for frivolous lower-class entertainment or
radical politics, one at least hoped ‘to broaden the mind’, ‘elevate the spirit’ and provide
‘basic knowledge of practically all things for those with the desire to learn them’. This was
the Saturday Magazine, launched by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. With
an encyclopaedic list of interests and drawing on a blend of original material and extracts or
compilations from elsewhere, the magazine enjoyed a highly successful run between 1832
and 1844, and at its peak it claimed a circulation of 70 000. In its pages, through a series of
twenty articles published between May 1836 and September 1837, New South Wales
appeared in a more journalistic light, written and illustrated by one-time colonial surveyor
William Romaine Govett.

Govett was another West Countryman, born in Tiverton, Devon, in 1807. Well
educated and from a well-connected family, he obtained an assistant surveyor’s position in
the New South Wales department in 1827 with the help of the prominent local Ryder family
(the Lords Harrowby). Arriving about the same time as Thomas Mitchell, the incoming
surveyor general was at first concerned by Govett’s youthful exuberance; by the time Govett
took voluntary redundancy in 1833 he had earned his superior’s rare respect. Mitchell even
paid him the equally rare honour of naming a waterfall near Blackheath – Govett’s Leap –
after him. Back in Britain, and possibly in need of money, Govett turned his hand to
recording his impressions of the colony, and in December 1835 submitted them to the
Saturday Magazine.

While Evans and to a lesser extent Dangar had been keen to portray both settlement
and civic progress in a good light, Govett – not as closely bound by patronage obligations to
former colonial masters – was more circumspect. In describing the town of Sydney, for

74 See Gaston Renard’s introductory essay ‘The Saturday Magazine’, in William Romaine Govett, Sketches of
New South Wales: Written and Illustrated for The Saturday Magazine in 1836–1837, ed Gaston Renard, priv
publn, Melbourne, 1977, pp xiii–xxv; and more generally Simon Eliot, Some Patterns and Trends in British
76 Biographical treatments include ADB; Annette Potts, ‘William Romaine Govett’, in Sketches of New South
Wales, pp xxvii–xxxii; and on his surveying, see Alan Andrews, ‘Govett’s luck: Assistant surveyor Govett and
the southern tributaries of the Colo River’, JRAHS, 63(4), Mar 1978, pp 263–69; and Andrews, Major
Mitchell’s Map 1834: The Saga of the Survey of the Nineteen Counties, Blubber Head Press, Hobart, 1992,
var pp.
77 Untitled report, encl. Mitchell to Hay, 22 Sept 1832, CO transcripts, Misc letters: NSW 1832, ML A2146, pp
Govett’s Leap see Potts, ‘Govett’, pp xxv, xxvii.
78 Potts, ‘Govett’, p xxix. The orig manuscripts and various letters are in ‘William Govett: Notes and sketches
... 1830–1835’, ML, MSS, A330; the National Library of Australia holds several ink sketches and
illustrations, including the originals of those appearing in the Saturday Magazine (p xxx).
instance, he paid greater attention and higher compliment to its natural features than to the
cityscape. The harbour was impressive, its moorings comfortably deep, and the opportunities
for ‘healthful’ bathing among its secluded coves numerous. In the town itself, while the
streets met at right-angles, they were only ‘tolerably’ wide and the sidewalks remained
unpaved. Of the town’s architecture, he thought there were some ‘fine’ hotels and even some
‘neat, elegant and roomy’ cottages along the side-streets, but the public buildings were either
‘exceedingly plain’ or ‘unsightly’. He dismissed the ‘massive’ stone portico adorning the
plain brick walls of Sydney’s principal church as being ‘in wrong taste’.79

Somewhat ironically, for a former government officer responsible for placing settlers
on their land, Govett treated settlement in rural areas with much the same ambivalence. In
lengthy geographic descriptions of the counties of Argyle and Camden, he noted approvingly
the names of several of the larger landholders or their properties, but he was generally more
ruedful about the effects of the ‘tide of civilized population’ upon the once idyllic wilderness:

houses and elegant cottages are everywhere to be seen; farms are fenced in ... a township has
been established, a court of justice erected, and the very spot which but two years before
might have been admired for its solitary beauties, was soon disgraced by the gibbet.80
As opposed to narrating a ‘course of empire’ or advance of civilisation,81 Govett’s ‘sketches’
of these settled areas deal more with their landscape, plants and animals, usually in terms
easily recognisable as a picturesque tour: a narrative describing the comfortable progress of
the explicitly identified ‘traveller’ or ‘explorer’ through uninhabited forest in between grand
views and more ‘singular’ landforms such as waterfalls, peaks and headlands. At the same
time, not entirely lost to reverie, he gives some more detailed descriptions of the main types
of trees, the different species of kangaroo, and two dedicated articles on snakes and the
‘native monkey’ (koala). As with his geography, this material is not overly scientific or
technical, and he relates much of it in the form of anecdote: the exhilaration of a kangaroo
hunt, his dog being killed by a blacksnake, or an Aboriginal man wrestling a koala down the
length of a tree.82

By far the greatest single focus of Govett’s Sketches – eight of the twenty articles,
plus numerous references in others – is Aboriginal people, either those who travelled with his
survey party, or locals whom he made a point of going to see. Although mostly written as an

79 ‘Some account of Sydney and Port Jackson ...’, Sketches, pp 65–71 (quotes p 65).
80 ‘A brief sketch of the County of Argyle’, Sketches, pp 21–26 (quote 26); ‘County of Camden’,
pp 81–83.
81 See esp Robert Dixon, The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788–1860, OUP,
Melbourne, 1986.
82 Sketches, pp 23–25 (trees); p 38 (kangaroos); the dedicated articles are ‘Snakes’, pp 40–43; and ‘On the
animals called “monkeys” ...’, pp 59–61.
exposition of ‘manners and customs’, this too is largely in the form of anecdotes which show Govett as both ‘on the spot’ observer and invited participant. Some of the customs which Govett describes smack of racial stereotype – such as a corroboree, which he compares to what might ‘take place in the infernal regions’, or the ‘despicable’ method of courtship (via club and kidnap) – and he repeats the already well-established myth that the Indigenous population of Van Diemen’s Land had been ‘wholly exterminated’. Yet Govett was also willing to reframe in a more flattering light some Aboriginal ‘manners’ which Europeans usually described in negative terms. His report of three men cooking kangaroos, for instance, contains few of the allusions to barbarity and ravening appetite that other observers frequently employed. Instead, he accentuated their systematic methods and ingenuity with the few tools they possessed. In general he praised the athleticism, energy and skills of the Aborigines – at least those he had observed in their ‘natural state’ in the interior.

Govett spelled out his larger project, in describing the manners and customs of Aboriginal people, in the first article discussing them: he wanted to redeem the ‘natives’ from the all too pervasive notions placing them at ‘the lowest state of degradation’ where they hold ‘no attractions to curiosity’. He hoped instead that:

A fair, plain, and detailed statement ... of the manners, customs, and peculiarities of this despised race, may not only be interesting, but will also tend to show that ... they are not so degrading to human nature as they have sometimes been represented to be, nor so destitute of intellect and understanding as to be unworthy of our anxiety for their improvement.

His approach was therefore both intellectual and compassionate, suitable to the medium of the Saturday Magazine and in line with liberal thought in Britain. On the most immediate question of frontier violence plaguing the colonies, Govett’s attitude accorded with the more considered – and official – position of the time: he admitted Aboriginal attacks on white settlers, but stressed these were neither ‘every-day occurrences’ nor sufficient cause for the ‘universal terror and hatred’ being fomented by critics in the colonial press. He argued instead that the trouble was largely the fault of unsupervised convict and ex-convict labourers, sent into the colony’s hinterlands, who had provoked the Indigenous locals by their ‘vicious conduct’ and ‘unnecessary acts of violence’.

83 Sketches, pp 18–20 (corroboree); p 15 (courtship); p 6 (VDL extermination).
85 Sketches, p 6.
86 Sketches, pp 6–7; cf Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlement); with the minutes of evidence, appendix and index, House of Commons, London, 1837, pp 10–11.
With his articles appearing through 1836 and into early 1837, Govett’s attention to Aboriginal people was well timed, as humanitarian interest in Britain had recently turned from freeing slaves to the treatment of the empire’s indigenous subjects. The Select Committee investigating the treatment of Aboriginal peoples around the empire, the most prominent achievement of this new incarnation of the movement, sat from mid-1835 and drafted its final report in early 1837—a period overlapping the submission and appearance of most of Govett’s articles. What Govett hoped to gain personally from their publication is unknown; so too whether he deliberately addressed this particular readership—although, given that he probably started writing earlier and while he was still in the colony, it seems more likely coincidence. He received a modest payment from the magazine, but unlike Dangar his venture into print did not reap any other immediate recognition or reward. His later career appears undistinguished and he died, aged just 40, in 1848.

Writing of humanitarian activism in this period, Zoe Laidlaw (following Patricia Hollis) notes that the formation or moulding of public opinion ran a distant third to the far more direct measures of appealing to individual members of parliament, and mobilising special-interest lobby groups. Consequently, studies of the Select Committee and the information sources contributing to it—by Laidlaw, plus especially Alan Lester—tend to concentrate on the more intimate, interpersonal networks forged in particular between missionaries and humanitarian politicians. Govett’s sketches, by contrast, offer a politically more neutral but still well-informed view, addressed to a wider public readership and therefore providing a wider social context to those specific networks. While Govett eschewed any of the overtly religious moralising characteristic of the humanitarian campaign generally, he presented the experience of a trusted government official who had worked with and closely observed Aboriginal people in New South Wales, and seen first-hand the effects of colonisation upon them.

87 Govett’s ADB entry hints at a ‘personal crisis’ and moral reform, but gives no details.
90 On moralism see Laidlaw and Lester, above, plus eg Elizabeth Elbourne, ‘The sin of the settler: The 1835–36 Select Committee on Aborigines and debates over virtue and conquest in the early nineteenth-century British white settler empire’, Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, 4(3), 2003. Modern readers will note, however, that Govett seems blind to his own culpability in facilitating colonisation through his survey work, even to the casual affront he himself offered to his Aboriginal companions by, for instance, bribing them with
Similarly, most Australian historians of especially the clash of ideologies that erupted in New South Wales after the Myall Creek massacre in 1838 have tended to depict the two sides as comprising the rapacious landholders of the frontier, allied with politically radical agitators and newspaper editors in Sydney, effectively shunting down an isolated and all too small official voice from the governor, attorney general and chief clerics, pushing the home government’s line. Less clearly partisan yet still sympathetic voices such as Govett’s are, however, gaining more attention. Maggie Mackellar’s study of Port Phillip squatter Niel Black, and Penny Russell’s shorter treatment of Australian Agricultural Company manager Robert Dawson, both reveal settlers at least squeamish about and determined to stay aloof from frontier violence – even as they benefited from its consequences. From such voices it begins to appear that the perceived imbalance in the colonial polity may be exaggerated. While never a silent majority, nor were the sympathetic only a whispering few: from Govett and others there appears that there existed in New South Wales a more loudly murmuring bloc of settlers who likewise deplored the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal people.

**Surveying with Aborigines: Various diarists and sketchers**

In writing about Aboriginal people at all, Govett departed markedly from the official practices and preoccupations of the colonial survey departments. In their vast departmental archive, surveyors made very little mention of those Indigenous Australians who, in many parts of New South Wales at least, frequently accompanied them and their survey parties in the field. Those surveyors writing more generically recognisable exploration narratives did make (usually passing) mention of a few Aboriginal companions: Evans recorded that a man named Bundle accompanied his party during the survey around Jervis Bay and the overland trek back to Sydney in 1812; Mitchell used Aboriginal guides and interpreters extensively on
his three expeditions. But the more routine, and far more voluminous, daily correspondence from field surveyors to headquarters remained almost completely silent on the subject. In part this was just another aspect of how the surveyors' official reporting styles and printed forms limited their communication to the bare technical details. It also reflected the more general and usually unthinking British dismissal of Aboriginal occupation: Aboriginal presence and prior custodianship did not feature in the bureaucratic and legalistic niceties of alienating Crown land to white settlers, so it required no comment by the men charged with carrying out that process. As Govett's articles indicate, private and other unofficial records tell a different story of Aboriginal–surveyor relations, and are a very clear case of such sources both complementing and delineating the bounds of official discourse.

Based on Mitchell's published journals, field notes and extensive private diaries, DWA Baker has identified four categories of Aboriginal relationship with his exploration parties: 'professionals' (a few individuals who formed lasting relationships with Mitchell and became members of his parties for payment); 'hired help' (guides with some experience of Europeans who agreed to assist temporarily, usually only within their own country); 'passers on' (members of more inland tribes who agreed to introduce Mitchell's party to neighbouring tribes); and 'camp followers' (various hangers-on, including children, who occasionally attached themselves to his party for food and protection). The first three of these categories are less relevant to the different structure and activities of field survey parties, but some evidence from Govett and other surveyors – especially those working on the trigonometrical survey in the less settled areas of New South Wales – certainly backs up the existence of guides and camp followers.

Govett's published articles, as mentioned, contain numerous references to Aboriginal travelling companions and often close observations of their activities. He also left a lengthy manuscript journal, made during his time in New South Wales, which includes several inkwash depictions of his party's Aboriginal camp followers, including men, women and children [Plate 2]. That both European firearms and Aboriginal spears lean out of reach against his tent in one picture suggests that the two groups had established a great deal of

96 In an enormous literature, see esp Henry Reynolds, The Law of the Land, Penguin, Melbourne, 1987. For the surveyors, this blind spot was not entirely racial: as discussed in Chapter 3, their work also regularly ignored or erased the informal and 'nefarious' geographies of white settlers.
97 Baker, 'Exploring with Aborigines'.

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mutual trust – although, perhaps of equal significance, in the same picture Govett placed his convict party-members separately in the background, away especially from the Aboriginal women. 98

Robert Hoddle had similarly peaceable relations with local tribes and individual Aborigines, but mixed feelings on the race as a whole. In 1823 Hoddle felt safe enough in Aboriginal presence to stay alone with one group when he became ‘benighted’ near Bong Bong and could not reach his own campsite in the dark. Later that year, as he surveyed an alternative route across the Blue Mountains, Hoddle listed in his party ‘2 Black Natives’ who appear to have acted as guides. 99 But his attitude changed depending on circumstance. Accompanying Oxley to explore Moreton Bay in 1824, Hoddle described the local Indigenous people there – who had had little experience with whites – in terms reminiscent of the idealised ‘noble savage’: ‘a fine looking race of men ... in general very friendly’. A year later as he surveyed north of Bathurst, where race relations had deteriorated rapidly, his position became more confused:

Savages should be treated with great caution: not to fear them, nor give offence. Either they will take an advantage of. Show them you are superior, but do not treat them with contempt. The whites are frequently the aggressors by interfering with their women, but nothing can justify the means they take of retaliation: by indiscriminately murdering, by craft, the first person they meet. It is true we have destroyed the kangaroos, and disturbed the animals they principally subsist upon, which is another source of complaint. But I must leave this subject to those who can argue and write better. 100

Later in 1825, after the declaration of martial law west of the Blue Mountains had sparked a virtual open season on the local Wiradjuri people, Hoddle again blamed whites, specifically bushrangers, and noted also that the ‘Government are very remiss, in not sending out police or soldiers to apprehend these lawless villains’. Amid the mayhem, and perhaps seeking protection, one ‘black native’ attached himself as a personal assistant to Hoddle: he was ‘one of the tribe that were remarkably inclined to do every little office of attention, [so] that a white man might not be ashamed to show his goodness of heart, by similar acts of kindness’. 101

98 William Govett, ‘Notes and sketches taken during a surveying Expedition in N.South Wales and Blue Mountains Road by William Govett on staff of Major Mitchell, Surveyor General of New South Wales, 1830–1835’, SLNSW, A330; see esp [Surveyor’s camp], between pp 12–13.
100 Diary, 7 Oct 1824 and 22 April 1825, in Colville, Hoddle, pp 64, 76–77.
In all Hoddle’s position appears as qualified as his goodness of heart, and is best summed up by the few paragraphs he later devoted to Aboriginal people in his ‘A chapter on Port Phillip’, an 1841 guide for prospective immigrants to that new subsidiary colony (and yet another publication which blurred the official/non-official line). Here he noted qualities both good and bad: Aboriginal ‘cunning and treachery’, propensity to theft, even the rather melodramatic possibility of their ‘knocking out my brains and feasting on my carcase’. But he also noted their ‘redeeming qualities’, such as their kindness to their children, and that they were ‘remarkably clever’ at tracking and sheep-work. In a repeat of his somewhat circular argument from the mid-1820s, he predicted that ‘As emigration advances, and the country becomes occupied by whites, the race will become extinct, unless better steps are adopted for their preservation’; such steps might be some form of compensation, but meanwhile hunger would drive the Aborigines to steal from ‘solitary settlers, who are in self-defence compelled to take steps which will exterminate [the] race’. 102

The case of a third surveyor, Granville Stapylton, who likewise freely allowed Aboriginal camp followers, yields rare additional evidence of interactions between Aborigines and the convict members of a survey party. 103 In 1840 Stapylton and one of these convicts were killed by a group of Aboriginal men, several of whom had accompanied the survey party for some time on and off while Stapylton surveyed in the mountains south-west of Moreton Bay. The subsequent depositions of the convict survivors reveal that the party and their camp followers had enjoyed fairly close relations for some time. To varying degrees the convicts could all cite the names, give physical descriptions, and even narrate some of the personal histories of the more regular Aboriginal attendees – Corbon Bob, Bogee and Merry Dio. Most noted that Corbon Bob had a deformed toe; Patrick Kelly, however, related that Bob had told him he had injured his foot in a fire. The convicts reported also that Stapylton had supplied these men, plus a youth and a child who accompanied them at one stage, with flour and sugar from the party’s rations. None suggested any particular motive for the attack, and the investigating officer, Commandant Gormann of the new penal settlement at Moreton Bay, automatically attributed it to savage ‘treachery’, plus Stapylton’s carelessness with his firearms. 104

103 Although by rights falling outside this study’s cut-off date of 1836, the details and especially the convict voices coming from this incident make it worth including here, however briefly. I would like to thank Marion Diamond (then of the University of Queensland) for directing me to these.
104 Gormann to Mitchell, 20 June 1840, plus depositions, SRNSW, SG, Letters from survs (Stapylton), 2/1582A, pp 301–326. Two of the Aboriginal men were eventually tried and hanged as accessories to murder,
While such sources attest to Aborigines at least accompanying survey parties, further details — such as what specific roles they may have played and the nature of the consequent transfer of geographic information — are less clear. Baker’s study of Mitchell and his Aboriginal companions suggests that individuals acted particularly as guides for other surveyors. Mitchell directed his assistants to record on their maps Aboriginal placenames or the names of local ‘chiefs’, which implies he expected his field surveyors to forge relationships with the locals that would enable such information gathering, and for instance Hoddle is notable for having recorded Aboriginal names for many sites around Mudgee, north of Bathurst. 105 Govett’s articles reveal a more multi-layered relationship: both his personal interaction with several Aboriginal men, from whom he learned much about the surrounding country and its plants and animals, as well as a more detached anthropological interest in manners and customs, suitable to the literary context of the Saturday Magazine.

Another surveyor worthy of note for a more intellectual approach is James Larmer. In 1832 he recorded the Aboriginal names for the points and islands in and around Port Jackson, and in a long subsequent career he amassed separate vocabularies from the peoples of Brisbane Water, the Hunter River, Batemans Bay and the Shoalhaven area, and west to the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers. The terms in his lists seem somewhat arbitrary, even random, but they cover a wide array of subjects and circumstances suggesting a great variety in forms of interaction. The vocabulary for the people of Brisbane Water, for example, begins with the words for black, white, hard, soft, tomahawk, pipe, musket and kill. 106

Nathaniel Lipscomb Kentish: Pamphleteer

Assistant Surveyor Nathaniel Lipscomb Kentish resisted labelling Aborigines ‘savages’ — he preferred the term ‘Blackfellows’ — but his mind and unofficial pen were preoccupied with equally heated political topics. 107 The son of a naval surgeon and trained as a civil engineer, Kentish had taught surveying and drawing at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst in the late 1820s. Retrenched in 1829, he gained an appointment as a surveyor in New South Wales,
where he worked in the troubled roads and bridges branch, the object of a clash of wills between Mitchell and Governor Darling. Kentish’s histrionic letters of complaint against the surveyor general’s ‘persecution’ of him, which led to his dismissal in 1833, featured in Chapter 4. Undeterred by London’s condemnation of these examples of his writing as ‘so objectionable a correspondence’, Kentish went on to a lengthy career as a colonial newspaper editor and enthusiastic pamphleteer. In particular he felt that his experience as a serving and former government officer, in charge of hundreds of convicts on road-gangs, uniquely qualified him to comment on the politically divisive issues of transportation and convict discipline.

Kentish’s first publication came out in 1831, while he still held a position in the roads and bridges branch. Having been unable to speak at a public meeting debating the content of an address to be sent to the king, and thinking that the notes he had jotted down while waiting were too long to be printed in the local press, he had these notes – plus a letter already passed over by the Sydney Gazette, as well as an extract of what he claimed was an unfinished manuscript on the history of the colony – published as a pamphlet by Sydney printer Alfred Hill. If the genesis of Thoughts on the Proposed Address ... suggests the frustration of a man with much to say struggling to be heard, it was a feature that continued for most of the rest of his life.

Following his sacking and on the eve of embarking for London, Kentish made his own public address at Sydney’s Royal Hotel. Here, as well as reciting some rather overblown ‘patriotic’ poetry, he called for subscriptions to a journal which he proposed to publish in London, covering colonial affairs and to be called ‘The Surveyor General’. His voyage home degenerated, however, and after leaving a leaky ship he spent five months in New Zealand waiting for passage back to Sydney. Making a perhaps sheepish return in 1834, given the ambitions with which he had left, he instead had his Royal Hotel speech – poetry and all – published as a pamphlet entitled The Present State of New South Wales. In place of the abandoned journal, Kentish also then began his own colonial newspaper, The Sydney Times, which he edited a little sporadically until forced to close four years later. The Sydney Times resembled more of a literary magazine than a general newspaper, and in particular it allowed Kentish to indulge his penchant for verse, but he also used it as an organ for political

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108 Stanley to Bourke, 2 Sept 1833, HRA 1:17, p 207; see Chapter 1 for Roads and Bridges; and Chapter 4 for ‘improper’ letters.

109 Thoughts on the Proposed Address and Petition of the Colonists of New South Wales, to the King, A Hill, Sydney, 1831; on its origins see p v.

110 See Chapter 4. His prospectus for the newspaper first appeared in the Sydney Gazette (18 May 1833, p 1); and see also the Gazette’s coverage of the Royal Hotel event (31 Aug 1833, p 2).
commentary. In 1838, once again wishing to contribute to a colonial petition to the throne, the paper's final issue included his proposed 'Memorial to the Queen upon Colonial Affairs'. This he also printed as a 25-page appendix to yet another pamphlet, The Political Economy of New South Wales, which appeared late that year and may be taken as the culmination of his political thinking throughout this period.\textsuperscript{111}

Fittingly, in terms of his newly chosen profession as a 'politician' – by which he meant political commentator – the conception of the colony that Kentish expressed in his pamphlets rested more on the social and political than the strictly geographical. The clearest link between his brief government employment and these personal works lies in the claims to authority and credibility which he made to support his views. Kentish described himself on the title page of The Present State as ‘three years and half an officer of the civil establishment’, and later in the same pamphlet, in relation to the control of prisoners, claimed that ‘few people can speak from greater experience than myself, who have had some thousands of convicts under my superintendence’.\textsuperscript{112} In the later Political Economy he made a broader and more ambitious claim, but one still founded initially on his government service, at that stage already five years in the past:

My pursuits as a Government Surveyor upwards of three years, nearly the whole of the time in the Road branch of the Department, with from 500 to 1000 prisoners in my charge – my duties compelling me to be frequent in my visits to every part of the County of Cumberland; and [as] Editor of my own Newspaper, have necessarily given me as thorough and practical knowledge of the Colony and its Politics – of its peculiarities, its advantages and disadvantages – and of its present circumstances and future prospects, as perhaps it has fallen to the lot of any individual to acquire.\textsuperscript{113}

When it comes to describing those peculiarities, however, and especially in comparison to for instance Govett’s contemporary geographical ‘sketches’, Kentish was decidedly vague. He cited in several places the colony’s fertility, mild climate and ‘natural wealth’, but specifically – or rather, generically – as economic ‘advantages’: they allowed industrious settlers to make a much better living than they might have in Britain.\textsuperscript{114} Besides these generalities, he noted very few individual features of the colony, although one exception reveals his unremittingly political viewpoint. Where Govett, in describing the townscape of Sydney, had deplored the new church portico in terms of architectural taste, Kentish cited it


\textsuperscript{112} Present State, p 4; also his providing church services (p 4) and discipline (p 10) for convicts.

\textsuperscript{113} Political Economy, p 13 (italics in original).

\textsuperscript{114} See eg Present State, pp 2, 5–6; Political Economy, 'Memorial', p iii.
as an example of government extravagance. He thought the money would have been better spent on ‘small, unostentatious and unexpensive’ churches for the moral improvement of the convicts.  

In engaging with the political debates of his day, Kentish’s writings offer a further contrast to those other surveyor-geographers detailed above. Despite their various motives and sympathies (and with the exception of Govett’s more personal anecdotes), those other writers described the colonies in ostensibly objective terms: as the focus of potential immigrants or as the experiences of an imagined ‘traveller’. Kentish unashamedly positioned himself subjectively, as part of his ‘adopted country’ and among his ‘fellow countrymen’. In doing so, and along with many other political commentators in the fractious 1830s debates, Kentish was forced to straddle an awkward, even paradoxical, conception of the colony and its people as an identifiably separate space and polity, yet one that remained beholden and loyal to its imperial master; between the colony’s social and cultural similarities to Britain, and its local exceptionalism. Kentish claimed that New South Wales was, among all Britain’s colonies, most like the parent, yet at the same time he insisted that New South Wales possessed various ‘peculiarities’ which rendered the colony different to Britain, indeed rendered it unique.

Apart from the obvious fact that Kentish did not mean to give a strictly geographic description, he also did not need to: his main intended readership comprised those ‘respectable and experienced Inhabitants’ who were already familiar with it. Although both Thoughts on the Proposed Address and Political Economy concerned submissions to the throne – the centre of the centre of empire – and although the latter was ostensibly dedicated to the secretary of state, Lord Glenelg, Kentish’s principal object in both pamphlets was to persuade his fellow colonists what issues those submissions should raise. In contrast to other surveyors’ published works, which were produced in Britain and generally aimed at a British market and readership, Kentish published all his pamphlets in the colonies, and the

115 Present State, p 4 (sic).
116 See esp Political Economy, pp 9 and 10.
117 On the political debates of the period see John Gascoigne (with Patricia Curthoys), The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia, CUP, Melbourne, 2002, esp ch 3; Alan Atkinson, Europeans in Australia: Democracy, vol 2, OUP, Melbourne, 2004..
118 Eg Political Economy, p 9 (comparison to UK); full title and p 13 (peculiar).
119 In Political Economy in particular Kentish emphasised that he addressed the ‘respectable’, ‘intelligent’ and ‘experienced’ colonists: see eg title page (p i), dedication (p iv) and p 13.
information pathways which he engaged remained almost wholly local. Indeed at times Kentish did not seek a market at all. The ‘Advertisement’ in the front of Political Economy proclaimed he was sending it to ‘the late Subscribers of his Newspaper ... the magistrates, landed Proprietors, and assignees of Convict Servants throughout the Colony, gratis’. Extant copies of both Thoughts on the Proposed Address and Present State still bear Kentish’s handwritten addresses to their intended recipients, respectively the General Emigration Society and the Reverend Henry Carmichael ‘with best Compliments from the Author’. Kentish’s forays into print represent a serving and former colonial surveyor broadcasting his views of the colony by publishing locally in the colony for a largely colonial readership.

As a personal epilogue, while the collapse of the Sydney Times in 1838 may have put an end to his political activities in New South Wales, Kentish continued a multi-colonial career as elaborate as his verse. He served briefly as a surveyor in the new colony of South Australia in 1839, and as a contract surveyor in Van Diemen’s Land in the early 1840s. On that island he re-entered the world of public letters, publishing an Essay on Capital Punishment in 1842, and in 1846 a volume of bush poetry that drew in part on his later work as a field surveyor. He also unfortunately ran foul of rival literati, resulting in the publication of yet another two pamphlets defending himself from ‘infamously false and malicious libel’. Kentish thereafter moved to Port Phillip, but again his troubles followed. In 1849 he spent a short time in prison for attacking one of his detractors with a stockwhip, and his business ventures floundered. His last contribution in print brought him full circle, with his 1858 Valedictory Letter to his Acquaintances including also a ‘Treatise on Penal Discipline’, the issue with which he still claimed some experience from his early surveying days and which had in part first inspired him to address his fellow countrymen.

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Rather ironically, colonial surveyors conveyed in their private works much of what Lord Bathurst might once have accepted as ‘the Information respecting this New Country which it is so desirable to obtain’. Colonial surveyors on other continents may have had encyclopaedic briefs to investigate everything from global geography to ethnic eating habits, but in the early Australian colonies the job came first, and the job was restricted to the voluminous but also monotonous details of land alienation and settlement. Even Mitchell’s great trigonometrical

120 The ADB states that Kentish acted as an immigration agent in the early 1830s and that both Present State and Political Economy were directed to this end. This may be a misinterpretation of his comments in Present State, where he only offered to act as the colony’s agent in London, which he never reached.

121 Thoughts, SLNSW, MJ 2 Q 25; Present State, NLA, MS3228.
survey, which had immediate technical benefits for the service, was deemed an extravagance by the Colonial Office. Harris may have had the leisure to painted birds in early Van Diemen’s Land, but by the 1830s – the time of Govett and Kentish – surveyors wanting to make a name for themselves did so after having left the department. Where once personal relationships with figures in power had offered the hope of improving a surveyor’s life or career, greater promise now lay in political and commercial avenues. Indeed together these last two contemporaries suggest another development: Govett’s writing for the *Saturday Magazine* reveals a metropole more engaged and interested in the empire, perhaps even finally acquiring a taste for local knowledge; the political constituency which Kentish addressed suggests a colony no longer reliant upon the metropole.
In 1836 the New South Wales Legislative Council passed the *Crown Lands Occupation Act*. Beyond the ‘limits of location’ – the outer edge of the nineteen counties which Mitchell had gazetted a few years before – a grazier could occupy any amount of land for the nominal rent of just £10 per year. Appointed commissioners henceforth administered the several ‘squatting districts’, which together covered an area many times that of the nineteen counties and which within just a few years stretched across much of the south-east quarter of the continental mainland. Settlers wishing to make a fortune from colonial land no longer had to beg the secretary of state or the governor for a grant, nor prove the value of their assets that they might obtain one commensurate with their ability to render it productive. Now they barely had to lay out any ‘lawful Stirling money’ at all.

The major land policies of the previous ten years, the King’s Instructions of 1825 and the Ripon regulations of 1831, had sought to recoup some return from nature’s bounty, that it might be put to use for the benefit of the whole colony through immigration assistance and public works. But the graziers didn’t want to wait around for surveyors to mark out prescribed areas and auction them off at 5 shillings an acre. Continual protest meetings and petitions forced a dramatic back-down. The era of government control over the emerging shape of settlement ended.¹

For Stephen Roberts, the pioneer historian of land settlement, ‘the story’ of squatting commenced innocently enough with sheep, but then he was fond of passing human action off on to animals, of conflating benevolent and bucolic imperialism:

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¹ The parallels with the current fracas over recouping something more for the nation from its extensive mineral resources may occur to Australian readers.
From Bass Strait to Pandora Pass, cattle and sheep were moving onwards; everywhere, the lowing and bleating invaders were showing themselves a more relentless force of occupation than regiments of red-coated soldiers, and were passing over plain and mountain alike.2

Recently the pan-imperial scope of the passing of the squatting legislation has received more critical attention, especially the formative experiences of the liberal-minded governor and ‘imperial careerist’, Richard Bourke, under whose rule the Act eventually passed.3 But whatever influences may have gone into the solution, the need for one in the first place was more home-grown.

Over the half century leading up to this break, the colonial surveyors had not always had a complete control over the colonies’ lands. Some settlers had always managed to find a way around government regulation, whether convicts fresh off the ships taking to the bush, a publican allocating town blocks to his customers from a chart that happened into his possession, or a well-connected immigrant convincing a pliable lieutenant governor to let him and his infant brother take up double the usual allowance plus a bit more for good measure. But, precipitately, by the early 1830s surveyors and the government were catching up, measuring properties more rigorously, mapping the whole nineteen counties in New South Wales, finally collecting quit rents, and even making the supposedly tyrannical demand that settlers fence their properties to stop their animals straying. It wasn’t just the livestock feeling fenced in.

While the tenor of government policy had been moving towards the sale of Crown land at market value, the trajectory of the settlers’ compromise solutions had always been in the other direction. Critics such as disgruntled former surveyor Henry Dangar railed against bureaucratic procedure and ‘unnecessary form’, and the first jury allowed to decide a civil case in the Supreme Court forced the government to enshrine ‘loose usages’ into its land administration instead. By the time another disgruntled former surveyor, Nathaniel Kentish, started churning out pamphlets in the 1830s, there existed a similarly disgruntled and politically active constituency for him to address. The legalisation of squatting may have signalled a loss of government and departmental control over land and settlement, but it may also be seen as the settlers’ reaction to a perhaps belatedly effective control.


3 Zoe Laidlaw, ‘Richard Bourke: Irish liberalism tempered by empire’, in David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds), Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century, CUP, Cambridge, 2006, ch 4 (discussing Hazel King, ‘Richard Bourke and his two colonial administrations ...’, JRAHS, 49, 1964); and see also King’s entry for Bourke in ADB.
Despite this perhaps generous assessment, the colonial survey departments had only ever imposed a distinctly local form of control; or rather they effected a level of control which was based on their distinctly local knowledge. From Evans’ descriptions of river flats looking like other colonial river flats, to property boundaries defined as much by community memory as technical measurement, the survey departments mostly saw the colonial landscape either on its own terms or on the terms of their fellow settlers. London usually preferred a universalist approach, but botanical specimens with Linnaean names didn’t help decide where to build a road through tangled hills.

Local usages most clearly dominated the work of the survey departments in the range of sites in which surveyors inscribed the specific knowledge of land ownership. Although their instruments came from metropolitan artisans, and some of their techniques derived from ingrained ancient British customs, the knowledge of land ownership appeared either in the departments’ official records or in more ‘grounded’ sites from pegs and marked trees to witnesses memories. Such information was largely unintelligible to observers outside its immediate context, including in some cases its physical and social contexts.

Mapping similarly reveals a split in the different scales of spatial perception between the departments and their superiors. While property maps served as parallels to the circuit descriptions in the written archive and record the specific information of land ownership, parish and district-scale maps displayed the colonial landscape at a community level – useful for the district surveyor who had to work there. Maps of a whole colony could be pretty, but were also pretty useless, and what practical value they held lay in the much more involved survey work behind them, not at the scales required to show such a large area on one sheet of paper.

Control, however, can cut both ways. In order to exert some control over the colonial landscape, and bring into some form of agreement the official geography of the colony and its more informal and ‘nefarious’ geographies, the department needed also to control its surveyors. While they themselves asserted their credibility and diligence through a variety of means, by the 1830s bureaucratic measures increasingly replaced such avenues with statistical returns and internal rules and regulations. Such moves constrained the amount and forms of knowledge which surveyors in the field could communicate even to their immediate superiors in headquarters.

With such avenues restricted, the often surprising differences between official and unofficial knowledges continued to appear in surveyors’ private works. The diversity of this
material, and the apparently far more free avenues along which this information passed, highlights the very closed nature of the networks of imperial government. That network may have offered connectivity across the globe, but in practice it remained highly mediated. The local knowledge with which surveyors exercised control over the landscape of the early colonies remained almost wholly in their heads and fieldbooks, and in the battery of registers and files in each department’s headquarters.
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