Flashy, Fun and Functional

Studies in Australasian Historical Archaeology

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Sarah Hayes

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Contents

List of Figures vii
List of Plates ix
List of Tables x
Abbreviations xi
Acknowledgements xii

1 Introduction 1
  Archaeology of the Middle Class 3
  The Multiplicity of Melbourne's Middle Class 4
  Consumerism and Cultural Capital 5
  Gentility and Respectability 6
  Methods 6

2 Early Melbourne and 300 Queen Street 8
  Early Melbourne 8
  300 Queen Street 10
  Archaeological Investigations at 300 Queen Street 10
    Artefacts 13

3 Personal Histories 15
  John Thomas Smith 15
  Ellen Smith (Née Pender) 18
  Children 18

4 Architecture and Spatial Layout 20
  Architecture 20
  Situation 21
  Interior Layout 21
    Ground Floor 21
    First Floor 22
    Basement 23
    Second Floor Addition 23
  Fittings and Finishes 23

5 Artefacts 24
  The Lower Cesspit Deposit 24
  Cesspit Deposit Formation 25
  Cataloguing Methods 26
  The Assemblage 26
  About the House 26

    - Domestic 27
    - Collectibles/Decorative 28
    - Garden 28
  - Eating and Drinking 28
    - Food Service 28
    - Tea Service 32
    - Food/Tea Service 34
    - Beverage Service 34
    - Food Storage 36
    - Beverage Storage 36
    - Food/Beverage Storage 38
    - Food Preparation 38
  - About the Person 38
    - Personal 38
    - Jewellery 39
    - Clothing 39
  - Health and Hygiene 40
    - Pharmaceutical 40
    - Hygiene 40
  - Recreation 41
  - Sewing 41
  - Work 41
    - Clerical 41
    - Agricultural/Pastoral 42
  - Provenance 42

6 Life at 300 Queen Street 43
  - Family Roles 43
  - Servants 44
  - Dining 45
  - Drinking and Smoking 47
  - Social Events 48
  - Leisure 48
  - Shopping 49
  - Personal Appearance 50
  - Health and Hygiene 51

7 Cultural Capital and the Road to Success 53
  - Situating the Smiths 53
  - The Smiths' Brand of Cultural Capital 55
  - Redefining the Middle Class 58
  - Conclusion 58

Works Cited 60
  - Archival Sources 60
  - References 60

Index 68

List of Figures

Figure 1 John Thomas Smith, 1872 (Creator: Thomas Foster Chuck; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 1

Figure 2 Ellen Pender (Source: Margaret Torning Foster, descendent). 1

Figure 3 300 Queen Street, Melbourne (Source: Peter Maltezos). 2

Figure 4 Location of Melbourne, Victoria also showing Viewbank approximately 25 kilometres north-east of the city (Source: Ming Wei). 2

Figure 5 Location of 300 Queen Street within Melbourne's CBD (Source: Ming Wei). 3

Figure 6 Melbourne from the south side of the Yarra Yarra, 1839. Also showing 'J Smith Store' (Creator: J. Carmichael; Engraver: J. Adamson 1841; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 9

Figure 7 Excavation plan showing backhoe trenches and location of cesspit (Square 3) (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984b:30). 11

Figure 8 Image of the cesspit from the original report (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984b:47). 12

Figure 9 Stratigraphy of the cesspit showing the locations of the upper and lower cultural deposits (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984b:28). 13

Figure 10 John Thomas Smith (Source: Parliament of Victoria Re-Member https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/re-member/details/730-john-thomas-smith. 15

Figure 11 The Queen's Theatre, c.1880–1885 (Creator: Charles Samuel Bennett; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 16

Figure 12 A Group of City Fathers, 1862 (John Thomas Smith third from right) (Publisher: Alfred Martin Ebsworth; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 16

Figure 13 Funeral of the Late John Thomas Smith, MLA, 1879 (Publisher: David Syme & Co.; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 17

Figure 14 Presumed appearance of the original two-storey residence, west elevation (Source: Nigel Lewis and Associates 1982:32). 20

Figure 15 Ground floor plan, 1849 (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984a:23). 22

Figure 16 First floor plan, 1849 (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984a:23). 22

Figure 17 Basement plan, 1849 (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984a:23). 22

Figure 18 Second floor plan, 1859 (Source: Scott-Virtue 1984a:23). 23

Figure 19 Summary of ceramic tableware vessel forms. 28

Figure 20 Transfer-printed and hand-painted Chinoise pattern plate (HA1651 – note glaze run and other flaws). 28

Figure 21 Chinese flowers plate from matching set (HA1641). 32

Figure 22 'Alpine' pattern plate from matching set (HA1716.1). 32

Figure 23 'Dagger Border' pattern plate (HA1649). 32

Figure 24 Tea pot lid (HA1723). 32

Figure 25 'Cyrene' pattern saucer made by John and Thomas Lockett (HA1728). 34

Figure 26 Panelled, mushroom decanter stopper (HA1891). 35

Figure 27 Decanter stopper with sloped down finial (HA1926). 35

Figure 28 Moulded dyed-bodied ware jug (HA1672). 35

Figure 29 Bristol glazed stoneware bung jar (HA1570). 36

Figure 30 Whiteware mustard jar (HA1655). 36

Figure 31 Champagne bottle (HA1747). 37

Figure 32 Case gin bottle (HA1781). 37
Figure 33 Dixon's Genuine aerated water bottle (HA1802). 38
Figure 34 J. Schweppes & Co. torpedo aerated water bottle (HA1803). 38
Figure 35 Ointment/cosmetic pot (HA1590). 38
Figure 36 Small, cylindrical medicine bottle (HA1833). 40
Figure 37 Hexagonal single dose medicine bottle (HA1835). 40
Figure 38 Flat sided light blue medicine bottle (HA1826). 40
Figure 39 Apothecary type bottle stopper (HA1890). 40
Figure 40 Transfer-printed chamber pot (HA1657). 40
Figure 41 Detail from 'A Group of City Fathers, 1862' showing John Thomas Smith in his white top hat (Publisher: Alfred Martin Ebsworth; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 51
Figure 42 John Thomas Smith, 1863 (Creator: Samuel Calvert; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 51
Figure 43 The Smith Monument, *Melbourne Punch* 1855 Vol.1, p.78 (Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au). 53

List of Plates

Plate 1	Transfer-printed and hand-painted Chinoise pattern plate (HA1651 – note glaze run and other flaws).	71
Plate 2	Chinese flowers plate from matching set (HA1641).	71
Plate 3	‘Alpine’ pattern plate from matching set (HA1716.1).	71
Plate 4	‘Dagger Border’ pattern plate (HA1649).	71
Plate 5	‘Cyrene’ pattern saucer made by John and Thomas Lockett (HA1728).	72
Plate 6	Bristol glazed stoneware bung jar (HA1570).	72
Plate 7	Whiteware mustard jar (HA1655).	72
Plate 8	Transfer-printed chamber pot (HA1657).	72

List of Tables

Table 1	Summary of area 1 lower cesspit contexts.	24
Table 2	Summary of date ranges by phase.	25
Table 3	Summary of materials.	26
Table 4	Activity group numbers including confident and possible activity attributions.	27
Table 5	Summary of domestic artefacts.	27
Table 6	Summary of food service artefacts.	29
Table 7	Summary of decorations on ceramic food service vessels (positively identified pattern names are in bold).	30
Table 8	Summary of matching tableware sets.	31
Table 9	Summary of tea service artefacts.	33
Table 10	Summary of decorations on tea service vessels (positively identified pattern names are in bold).	33
Table 11	Summary of matching teaware sets.	34
Table 12	Summary of beverage service artefacts.	35
Table 13	Summary of food storage artefacts.	36
Table 14	Summary of beverage storage artefacts.	37
Table 15	Summary of personal items.	39
Table 16	Summary of recreation artefacts.	41
Table 17	Summary of provenanced artefacts.	42

Abbreviations

ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AOT	Archives Office of Tasmania
BDM	Birth, Deaths and Marriages Records: written in-text as ‘BDM Place of Jurisdiction, number with type of record (b = birth, m = marriage, d = death) / year’, where Place of Jurisdiction is NSW (New South Wales), QLD (Queensland) or VIC (Victoria)
LUV GLL	Land Use Victoria General Law Library, Laverton
MCC	Melbourne City Council; in Public Record Office Victoria listings MCC records are held under VA 511 Melbourne (Town 1842–1847; City 1847–ct)
NRS	New South Wales Record Series [in State Archives New South Wales listings]
PROV	Public Record Office Victoria
SANSW	State Archives New South Wales
VA	Victorian Agency [in Public Record Office Victoria listings]
VPRS	Victorian Public Record Series [in Public Record Office Victoria listings]

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1
Introduction

Each time Mayor John Thomas Smith (**Figure 1**) walked through Melbourne in the course of his business he was sure to have with him a 'daily largesse of £5 or £6 in silver ...' which he duly distributed 'amongst the poor and needy' (*Bendigo Advertiser*, 31 January 1879:3). He was a well-known figure, recognisable by his stout build, white top hat, shirt frills and cutty pipe (Eastwood 1976:151). Much criticised in the local paper for his brash ways and underhand dealings, his false ostentation and harsh reaction to the Eureka uprising (*The Argus*, 19 September 1848:2–3, 30 May 1850:4, 5 September 1856:5, 1 May 1857:5; Hocking 2004:154–157), he was nonetheless a successful and benevolent man who supported a number of charities and championed improvements for the working man (*The Argus*, 31 January 1879:6; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 31 January 1879:3).

What makes Smith so interesting to me as a historical archaeologist is the trajectory of his life from his convict parentage to Mayor of Melbourne; specifically, the role that cultural capital played in the family's rapid rise and how this related to Melbourne's changing and diversifying middle class. John Thomas Smith was born in May 1816 to John, a Scottish shoemaker transported around age 18 to 21, and Elizabeth, colonial born daughter of convict parents. He was apprenticed to a builder and joiner in Sydney and might have had indentures as a clerk in his youth. He made the move that would redefine his life in 1837 when he travelled to Melbourne and became an assistant teacher at the Aboriginal Mission Station on the Yarra River. Not long afterwards he married Ellen Pender (**Figure 2**), the daughter of an Irish Catholic publican, and they had five sons and four daughters. His wealth increased after his marriage: he became a hotel owner, then operator of a theatre – the first in Melbourne. His success culminated in his becoming Lord Mayor of Melbourne by 1851 and being re-elected multiple times (Hetherington 1964:92; Eastwood 1976:150–151). He remained a wealthy property owner and businessman from that time on.

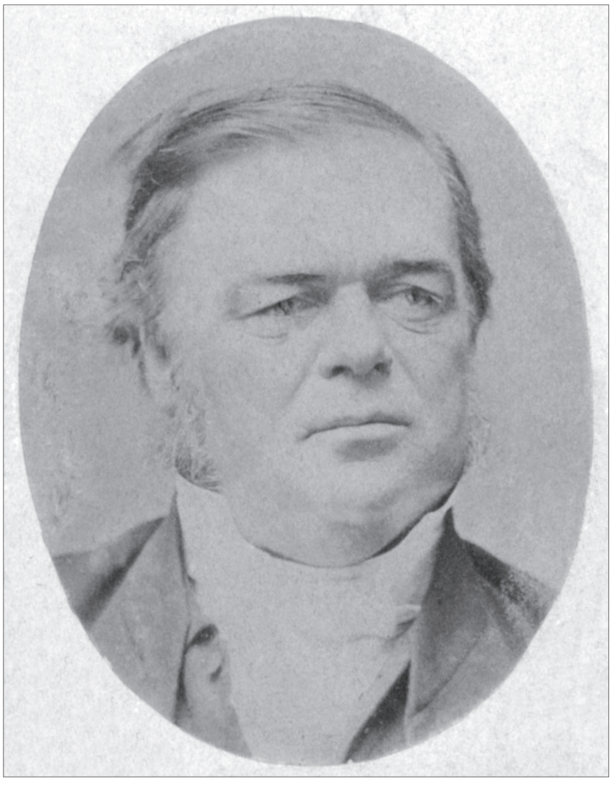

Figure 1: John Thomas Smith, 1872 (Creator: Thomas Foster Chuck; Source: State Library of Victoria, www.slv.vic.gov.au).

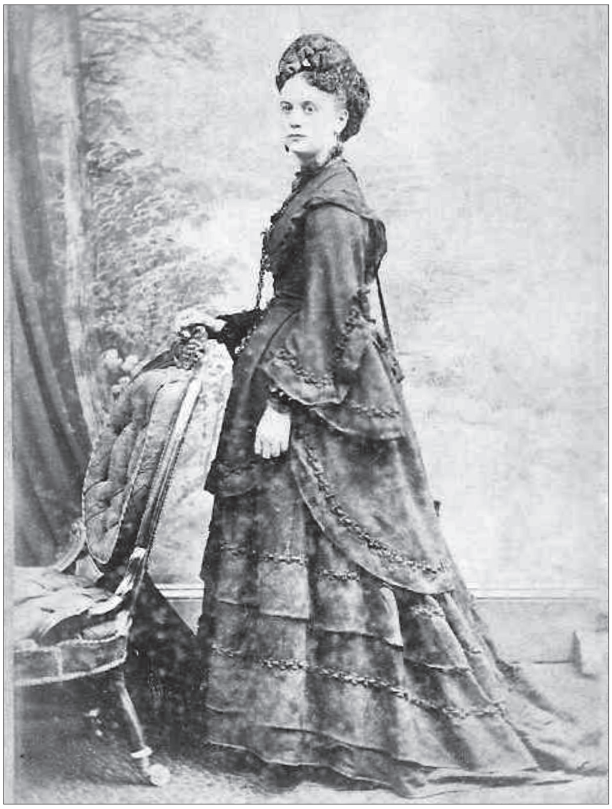

Figure 2: Ellen Smith (Source: Margaret Torning Foster, descendent).

Smith took every opportunity available to him at this unique time and place in history. Melbourne was a free settlement, commencing officially in 1839, and was proud of it. Yet the unclear backgrounds of migrants in the early years coupled with the fact that those from lowly backgrounds dramatically outnumbered the upper crust created a golden opportunity for social mobility (Cannon 1975:207–208; Swain 2005:668–669). Smith, and his family, are representative of those new Melbournians arriving prior to the gold rush who successfully negotiated their way into the ranks of the middle class and in doing so redefined the nature of society. This was the epitome of the Australian dream – to move beyond the status you were born with.

The Smiths' home at 300 Queen Street, Melbourne, which they occupied from 1849 until 1860 (**Figure 3**), provides an opportunity to explore the use of material culture in their upward social mobility. The Georgian manor comprising eight rooms and four cellars was one of the first town houses in a fashionable residential part of Melbourne (Priestley 1984:26–27) close to Flagstaff Hill (**Figure 4** and **Figure 5**). The home is now an office building with a tower in what was once its backyard. Beneath this tower lie the remains of the Smith family's cesspit. The heritage significance of the site meant that when it was redeveloped as offices in the early 1980s it was subject to an archaeological investigation.

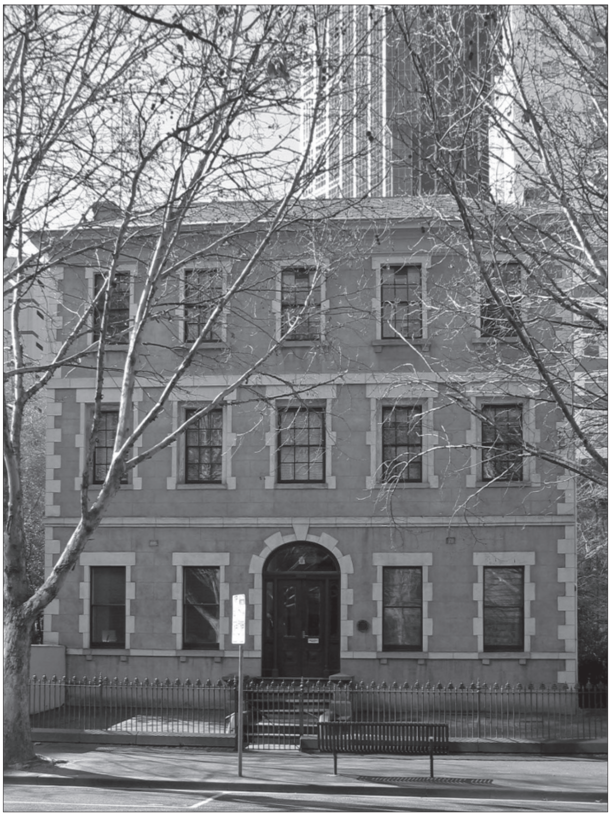

Figure 3: 300 Queen Street, Melbourne (Source: Peter Maltezos).

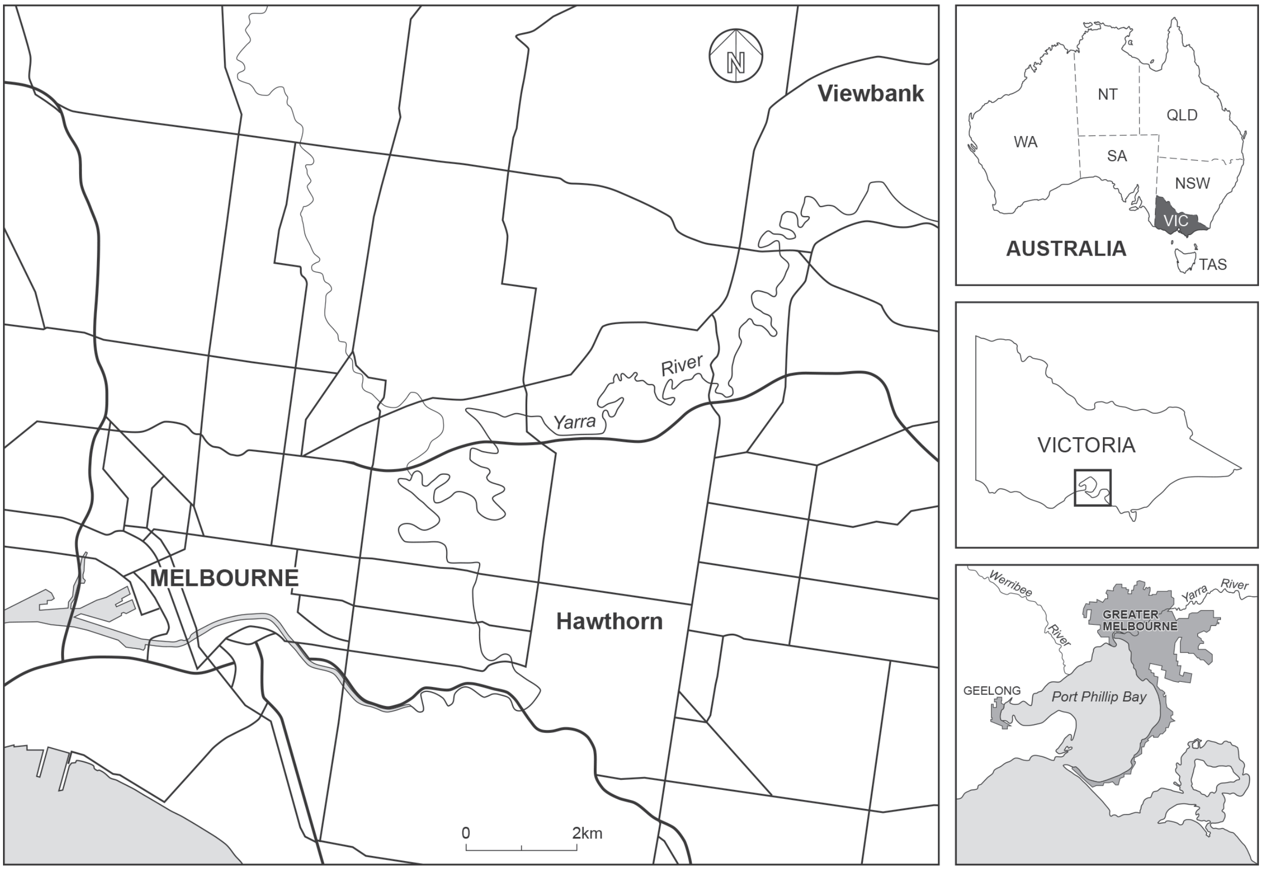

Figure 4: Location of Melbourne, Victoria also showing Viewbank approximately 25 kilometres north-east of the city (Source: Ming Wei).

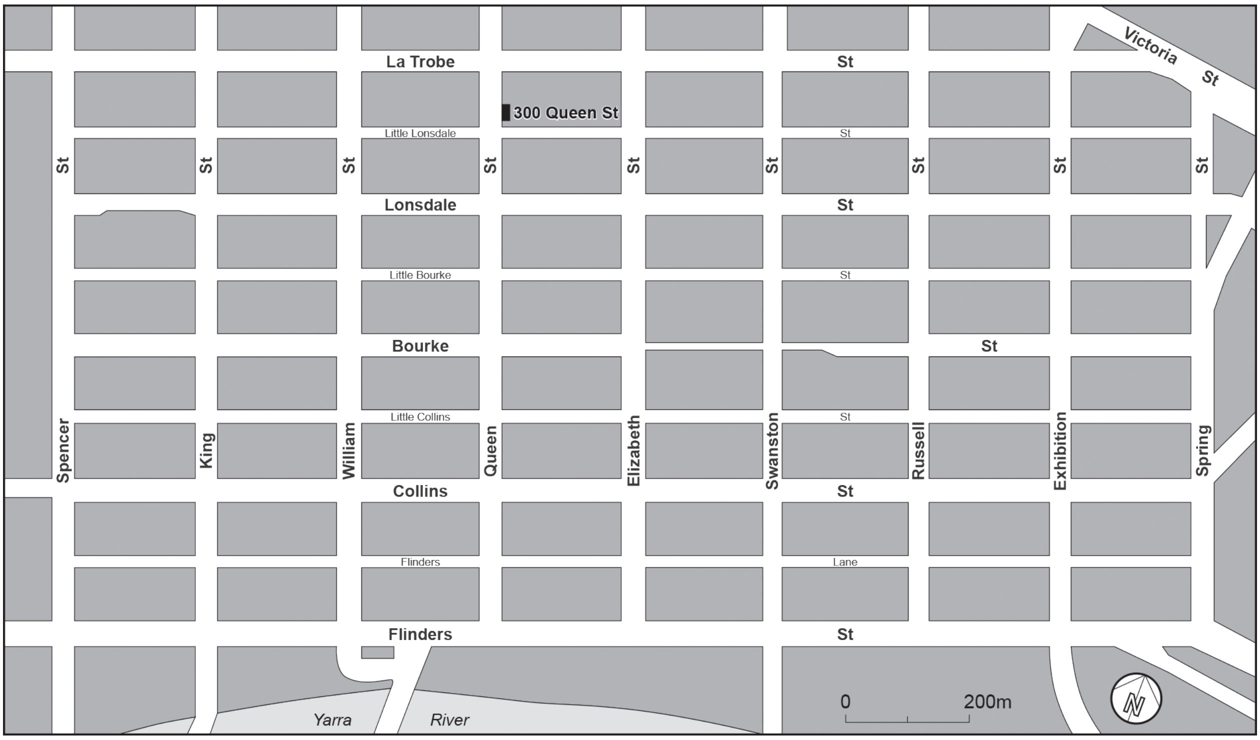

Figure 5: Location of 300 Queen Street within Melbourne's CBD (Source: Ming Wei).

One of the earliest urban excavations in Australia, it was undertaken by Allom Lovell and Associates and Judy Birmingham (Scott-Virtue 1984a, 1984b) and included monitoring of works within the extant building and excavation of the yard (more details on the excavation are provided in Chapter 2). No catalogue was created due to lack of funding and the assemblage has languished in storage at Museum Victoria ever since. The excavated cesspit is of particular interest here as it was filled with artefacts associated with the Smiths' occupation of the site including tableware, teaware, food storage containers and personal items. The assemblage provides a rare opportunity for the archaeological study of a middle-class domestic site in an urban setting and of cultural capital in this era.

Archaeology of the Middle Class

Over the past almost 20 years numerous calls have been made for studies on middle-class material culture in Australian historical archaeology (Lawrence 1998:13; Murray and Mayne 2001:103; Karskens and Lawrence 2003:100–101; Crook et al. 2005:27; Crook 2011:592; Murray 2011). It is essential to study the full range of class positions and consumer behaviour in order to characterise assemblages and study class differences (Praetzellis et al. 1988; Karskens and Lawrence 2003:101; Hayes 2014:1). Middle-class sites are subject to archaeological investigation far less frequently than working-class sites as they are most often located in suburban areas where commercial development is less frequent and is less likely to require excavation for cultural heritage management purposes. However, four notable studies have made important inroads in this area: my work on Viewbank Homestead on Melbourne's outskirts (Hayes 2007, 2008, 2011b, 2014), Quirk's study of Paradise in the Queensland Goldfields (2008a, 2008b), and research at La Trobe University by Lawrence and others on Willoughby Bean's parsonage in regional Victoria (Lawrence et al. 2009) and the aspirational Thomas household at Port Albert (Prossor et al. 2012). These studies partly grew out of the need to contextualise and understand the numerous urban working class assemblages excavated as a result of cultural heritage management compliance (McCarthy 1989; Lydon 1998; Mayne and Lawrence 1998; G. M. H. Consultants 1999; Karskens 1999; Lydon 1999; Karskens 2001; Murray and Mayne 2001; Crook et al. 2003; Crook and Murray 2004; Lampard 2004; Murray 2006; Lampard 2009; Lampard and Staniforth 2011; Murray 2011). Collectively the studies have made important inroads into characterising middle-class assemblages and have provided insights into the role of material culture in social status and social mobility.

In order to expand on this existing research, the *Suburban Archaeology: Approaching an Archaeology of the Middle Class in 19th-Century Melbourne* (DP1093001) Australian Research Council project was initiated. This multidisciplinary project, conducted jointly by La Trobe University, Deakin University and University of Melbourne, sought to understand the construction of middle-class identities in the context of the growth of modern cities by using history, historical archaeology and museum studies to examine material culture. My research for the *Suburban Archaeology* project has re-examined and expanded on my previous work on Viewbank homestead, published earlier in this monograph series (Hayes 2014). In the current volume, which forms part of the same project, I am seeking to extend the study further and begin to look at the multiplicity of Melbourne's middle class – or the internal variety and changing structure of the middle class. As a side note, I realise that Queen Street is urban not suburban but, in the earliest years of the colony when population numbers were smaller than today, areas of the inner city were residential in nature and similar to the suburban areas that evolved later.

Historical archaeologists have predominantly viewed class as a hierarchical scale through which people and their lifestyles can be described based on empirical evidence (Wurst and Fitts 1999:1; Wurst 2006:191, 197; Lawrence and Davies 2011:252–253). In this vein, the four studies on Australian middle-class sites mentioned above have primarily focused on what class can contribute to our understanding of the site itself and how the people living at the site situated themselves within society. As comparisons emerge between these sites and others, the more apparent the internal diversity of the middle class is both in terms of the nature of the sites and the characteristics of the assemblages. As more information is gained a problem emerges: what I might describe as a middle-class site might not fit that description for others. This is largely the result of the constantly changing nature of Australia's middle class in the 19th century. As I see it, this does not need to hinder the study of class nor does it render the concept of class irrelevant in the Australian context. Instead, it creates the opportunity to utilise these differences in examining the noted diversity.

I use the terminology of working, middle and upper class here, but treat these groups as flexible and fluid. My approach to class is not to determine definite class position, nor to create a more accurate description of class in Australia but rather to group like people in order to use the concept of class to examine how individuals were improving their position and the role this played in formulating and changing society. To me it is not so much a hierarchical spectrum but about different modes of life. This approach has its genesis in the works of Giddens (1973) and Bourdieu (1977) which focus on describing different lifestyles and how they relate to social formation, status negotiation and social change. These will be discussed in more detail below.

The Multiplicity of Melbourne's Middle Class

Melbourne in the 19th century was growing into a vibrant, global city and new arrivals, from elsewhere in Australia and from around the world, were seeking to secure a livelihood and improve their position. The middle class in Melbourne became increasingly diverse with opportunities for social mobility changing considerably over time (Swain 2005:669). The golden period of opportunity for upward mobility was from settlement until the 1880s (Cannon 1975:207–208). Mobility created competition within the middle class, and as the 19th century progressed the Australian middle class became a highly stratified social group with various conflicting interests (Young 2003:10, 14).

This process of redefining the middle class is not a new subject in Australian history. Much has been written about the blurring of class distinctions (Davison 2000:9–10), egalitarianism (Hirst 1988; Thompson 1994:5), and the emergence of a highly stratified middle class (Young 2003). The process of redefining the middle class was hugely influential to Australian society. As previous research has shown, historical archaeology has unique contributions to make in understanding the transformation of the middle class. The role of material culture in transforming society can be explored by accessing the ordinary homes and possessions of the different people who belonged to the middle class in the 19th century.

It is apparent that Melbourne's middle class was made up of a number of distinct groups of people in the 19th century. When examining the internal variety of Melbourne's middle class, I find it useful to group immigrants based on similarities in their class backgrounds, generation, time of arrival in the colony and lifestyle once in the colony. I used this approach with reference to the Martin family in my earlier work on Viewbank homestead and it was useful in terms of not only characterising their material culture but also understanding their position in society (Hayes 2014:3–4). With this approach I am not attempting to create an alternative hierarchy, but rather to group like immigrants in order to examine the formation of the middle class in the new colony.

The Martins were part of a group I termed the 'established middle class' and had a firm position of authority in the colony (Hayes 2014:4). This group was made up of early settlers and colonists of middle class backgrounds who brought their gentility and privilege with them to the new colony. They exploited the pastoral opportunities available in Victoria and became wealthy and influential members of society.

In this monograph I focus on another group, which I term 'aspirational early immigrants'. This distinctly different group was also arriving in Melbourne from the earliest years and predominantly comprised the children and grandchildren of convicts or working-class families from New South Wales and Tasmania who were seeking to improve their position and ultimately achieved their middle-class status over the course of their lives. Many of these arrivals became successful hoteliers, businessmen, merchants, shopkeepers and craftsmen. These 'aspirational early immigrants' were, in spite of their working class or convict backgrounds, seeking entry to the ranks of the middle class (see Russell 1994b:15, 2010:113; Young 2010:136). For the purpose of this study, the material recovered from the Queen Street cesspit provides a representative sample of the material culture of 'aspirational early immigrants' in Melbourne.

The 'established middle class' could claim authority over the title of middle class and sought to establish themselves as a kind of landholding, pastoral aristocracy (Swain 2005:669). However, 'aspirational early immigrants' challenged the 'established middle class' and by doing so began the process of formulating a diverse middle class. Further negotiation of what it meant to belong to the middle class occurred later with the influx of a third major group: those seeking their fortune from the gold rush in the 1850s (Russell 1994b:15, 2010:113; Young 2010:136). The archaeological study of the impact of this third group remains for future study.

The timing of arrivals and characteristics of these groups will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. By examining these groups and their material culture, similarities and differences can be interrogated in order to understand the multiplicity of Melbourne's middle class and the role of material culture in the formulation of new class structures.

Consumerism and Cultural Capital

The diversity of goods available in Melbourne in the 19th century allowed for decision making. The essential principles in the anthropological study of consumerism are relevant here, as for my previous work on Viewbank (Hayes 2008, 2014:2), namely that goods can be regarded as texts that are open to multiple readings, and that consumer choices have symbolic meaning (Douglas and Isherwood 1978; McKendrick et al. 1982; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987; Spencer-Wood 1987; McCracken 1988; Friedman 1994; Miller 2008, 2010). Studies of consumerism have been popular in historical archaeology and have further developed ways of viewing the social meanings of commodities in society (e.g. Orser Jr. 1994; Gibb 1996; Wurst and McGuire 1999; Majewski and Schiffer 2001). Consumer studies focus largely on interpreting the intentions, beliefs and behaviours of people in the past.

While Marxist examinations of class focus on what people produce for society (i.e. labourer, clerk, banker etc.), agency theory instead focuses on what people consume. Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) theory of social practice has understandable appeal and applicability in historical archaeology and has been applied in a number of studies (e.g. Wall 1992; Lawrence 1998:8; Mayne and Lawrence 1998; Shackel 2000:233; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001; Russell 2003; Young 2004; Hayes 2008; Rotman 2009; Hayes 2014; Lawrence and Davies 2015). Bourdieu argues that the main determining factor in class is cultural capital, but that social (relationships), economic (wealth) and symbolic (legitimised) capital come into play (see Skeggs 1997:8). Cultural capital is learned predominantly from family, and includes values and tastes which are culturally authorised (Webb et al. 2002:x). Bourdieu (1984:77) emphasises food, furniture and clothing, or what we consume as part of everyday life, as the most important indicator of class distinction. *Habitus* is the term used by Bourdieu (1977) to describe the deliberate and subconscious understanding of the behaviours and practices appropriate to one's place in society. Cultural capital is not imposed, but is continually changing depending on the values and opinions of self and others. Further, goods actively pass on and structure culture.

In relation to class, historical archaeologists have used agency theory predominantly to look at how people in the past sustained, projected and maintained their position in society and what this reveals about social hierarchies and social mobility (see Casella and Croucher 2010:2). It is also possible to go further and look at how consumer choices in turn influence class structure and society.

Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) emphasis is on the reproduction of social hierarchies in current society and the effects of society on individuals. Giddens (1984) goes further with his structuration theory and sees both the structure and agent as influencing social systems. The feedback loop implicit in this enables the study of change and acknowledges that individuals can influence social structures. I draw on both theories in this study in order to examine how the Smiths were defining their position and how this in turn influenced Melbourne society.

As with my study on Viewbank homestead gentility will be linked to cultural capital, and the role of respectability is added to the mix. A number of other researchers in archaeology, history and sociology have usefully linked gentility and respectability with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (e.g. Skeggs 1997; Praetzellis and Praetzellis 2001:647; Russell 2003:168; Young 2004). Many of the material goods that play a role as cultural capital are found in the archaeological record and can be interrogated to interpret the values and position of the people who owned them. In turn, material culture can be used to interpret the role of gentility and respectability as cultural capital (see Ames 1978; Goodwin 1999). The interrelationship of these two brands of cultural capital and their potential for understanding class and society will be further developed elsewhere (Sato and Hayes in prep), but the roles of both gentility and respectability are important to understanding cultural capital at Queen Street and will be discussed further below.

Gentility and Respectability

Studies of class in Australian historical archaeology have frequently involved discussions of respectability and gentility. The majority focus on the working class and view respectability as a unique and defining characteristic of that group (e.g. Lydon 1993a; Karskens 1999; Lawrence 2000; Lampard 2004). Other studies have looked at gentility as a social strategy in projecting (Quirk 2008b; Lawrence et al. 2009) and/or defending (Hayes 2008, 2014) middle-class status. However, respectability has also been viewed as a social strategy (Lampard and Staniforth 2011) and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Collectively, this research shows the diverse approaches to gentility and respectability both by people in the past and by the researcher, and highlights the potential of further developing these concepts for the Australian context where class hierarchies were fluid.

The approach of the researcher to class, gentility and respectability needs to be considered and can be summarised as the emic versus etic issue. From an emic perspective, researchers view these concepts as concrete ideas that existed in the past and that people followed. In this case, research aims to understand how people in the past recognised their class and to reconstruct their motivations and engagement with gentility and respectability as fixed notions. From an etic perspective, the terms are used to describe a cultural phenomenon in the past where our analytical perspective and measurement of engagement with these terms (e.g. income, social position, tastes etc.) are explicitly imposed onto past people in order to address research questions. I take the latter approach. For me the question is not whether class aspirations and adherence to gentility and respectability were intentional, rather, it is about how these concepts can be used in research to examine society.

My approach here is a continuation of the one I developed for research on Viewbank homestead (Hayes 2008, 2014:3–4), where class is used as a concept to explore the similarities and differences between groups of people in order to examine social formation. Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of cultural capital, and in turn gentility and respectability, are used as etic values useful for identifying the roles particular groups played in class formation. This approach acknowledges the effect of the researcher on interpretations and the limitations of descriptions of the past which are subject to the complexities of truth, bias and meaning. It can, of course, be difficult to isolate the role of class in identity and individual consumer choice from other factors such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Wurst and McGuire 1999; Rotman 2009:1; Casella and Croucher 2010:2–3; Shackel 2010:58–60). However, by taking an explicitly etic stance it is possible to see that we do not do something because of our class but what we do can be understood using class as a concept.

With the above in mind, I find it useful to conceptualise gentility and respectability as operating separately to class, as particular brands of cultural capital that could be adopted, appropriated or adapted by different groups in different ways for different purposes. Classes are defined quite often by respectability or gentility, but the relational aspects of these are overlooked. How they were intertwined and related to each other is particularly important for debates about the middle class. Here, and in ongoing research (Sato and Hayes in prep; Hayes 2017:6–7), the terms are defined diacritically: that is, each in relation to the other. Respectability in Melbourne society is defined as being determined primarily through possessions and deeds, both of which were not predetermined by familial status or upbringing, and as being strategic in nature with a strong emphasis on materialism. This is in contrast to gentility, which is defined as being defensive in nature with an emphasis on protecting status, and determined by upbringing and manner which cannot be copied or appropriated. There is much overlap in the Victorian era between values and behaviours that constitute gentility and those of respectability: refinement, good taste, manners, morality, religious observance, avoidance of idleness, constructive leisure and domesticity (Russell 1994b:60; Marsden 1998:2; Mitchell 2009:261–266). However, it is the *nature* of each brand of cultural capital that is important here. These definitions have been developed specifically to examine class structure and negotiation in 19th-century Melbourne (see Hayes 2014:2–4, 2017:6–7).

My previous work on Viewbank homestead (Hayes 2008, 2014) found that for the 'established middle class', and families like the Martins, gentility appeared to be inherent and served a distancing function to protect their group from those of non-middle-class backgrounds who were seeking entry to their ranks. In so doing, they also created a sense of inclusion and perpetuated the class system that benefitted them. It is anticipated that the Smiths engaged with gentility and respectability in the 19th century in a way particular to their purpose, and that this will be reflected in their material culture.

Methods

The interpretations in this study will be based on the reconstruction of the Smiths' household using all available evidence, not just artefacts. The archaeological record is only ever a partial representation of the material culture of people in the past. Variations in deposition patterns, occupation periods, reasons for discard and decomposition of certain materials mean that an assemblage is only ever a sample of a sample.

Personal histories, the home itself and the artefacts will be used together to reconstruct the household to create the most complete possible picture which will then form the basis of interpretation (see Murray 2006).

After presenting the early history of Melbourne, the site and the excavation (Chapter 2), personal histories of the residents both before their arrival in Victoria and once in the colony are used to establish the background, aspirations and success of the residents (Chapter 3). Next, the house and grounds are considered as material culture that can further inform an understanding of life at the house. This will involve a detailed analysis of the spatial layout of the house, the use of rooms and the architecture (Chapter 4). The material culture the Smiths left in their cesspit will then be analysed focusing on life in and about the house: eating and drinking, personal appearance, health and hygiene, recreation and work (Chapter 5). This information will then be integrated (Chapter 6) in an exploration of the daily life and lifestyles of the Smith family. These three branches of evidence and the reconstruction of the household will then form the basis of interpretation of the role cultural capital, and more specifically gentility and respectability, played in the Smiths' rapid rise and how this relates to Melbourne's changing middle class (Chapter 7).

This study provides important comparative material for the archaeological examination of Australia's middle class. The 300 Queen Street site is a rare example of a middle-class urban site accessible for archaeological investigation and provides a unique addition to the studies mentioned above. The Smith family at Queen Street came from very different backgrounds to the Martins at Viewbank, and their material culture provides an excellent opportunity to examine the distinctive way in which these Melbourne immigrants, who I describe as the 'aspirational middle class', were negotiating their position, and to further contribute to understanding the formation of the middle class in Melbourne. As we will see, cultural capital not only aided in propelling John Thomas Smith to his position as Mayor but also, ultimately, pushed boundaries and reinvented the acceptable in Melbourne society.