

The Rocks and Sydney: Society, Culture and Material Life 1788-c1830

submitted by

Grace Karskens

in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History

University of Sydney

June 1995

for Margot, Eliza, Isabel
and Leo Earl
and
for Richard

Grace Karskens, 'The Rocks and Sydney: society, culture and material life 1788-c1830'
Ph.D thesis, University of Sydney, June 1995.

A B S T R A C T

This study explores the early history of Sydney's Rocks area at two levels. First, it provides a much-needed history of the city's earliest, oldest-surviving and best-known precinct, one which allows an investigation of popular beliefs about the Rocks' convict origins, and which challenges and qualifies its reputation for lowlife, vice and squalor.

Second, by examining fundamental aspects of everyday life - townscape, community and commonality, family life and work, human interaction and rites of passage - this study throws new light on the origins of Sydney from the perspective of the convict and ex-convict majority. Despite longstanding historical interest in Sydney's beginnings, the cultural identity, values, habits, beliefs of the convicts and ex-convicts remained largely hidden. The examination of such aspects reveals another Sydney altogether from that presented by governors, artists and mapmakers. Instead of an orderly outpost of empire, a gaol-town, or a 'gulag', the Sydney the Rocks represents was built and occupied largely according to the tastes, priorities and inclination of the people, with relatively little official regulation or interference. While the Rocks appeared 'disorderly' in the eyes of the elite, it nevertheless functioned according to cultural rules, those of the lower orders - the artisans, shopkeepers, publicans, labouring people, the majority of whom were convicts and ex-convicts.

The Rocks also reveals a Sydney bearing the hallmarks of a preindustrial society. It was divided not in terms of modern classes, but according to multitudinous ranks within two great orders, the higher and lower, and it functioned vertically according to notions and habits of deference and obligation, by personal dealings and negotiations, and by ties of family, friendship, ethnicity, community and generation. The attitudes and habits of Rocks people towards marriage and gender-roles, childbirth and childrearing, to sickness, growing old, dying and mourning the dead, to privacy, work, leisure, and to time itself, also took the older forms. They were little affected by new notions of gentility and respectability, emerging in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, notions which reshaped manners and outlooks in western societies.

Yet Rocks people were obviously also familiar with modern concepts of commercialism and consumerism which had already revolutionised sections of English society over the eighteenth century. They shared ideas of material improvement, of 'getting and spending money', amassing property by whatever means, and they desired and owned fine clothes, jewellery, and ceramics. Hence the material dimension also reveals convict Sydney in a dramatically different light from the images of poverty, misery and domination. Material life also bespeaks constant opportunistic strivings and struggles, set within the broader, uncontrollable external forces of fate and fortune. The tension and dynamics between the two, and the mentality required for each, lie at the heart of the behaviour and experience of early Rocks, and Sydney, people.

CONTENTS

List of Figures iii

List of Tables vii

Abbreviations ix

Acknowledgements x

Introduction 1

Section I: Over the Water: The Rocks and the Dialogue of Townscape

‘This Long & Wished-for Country’ 28

‘Little Edifices Quickly Multiplied’ 31

The Preindustrial Town 49

The Governors’ Town 1788-1809 52

Macquarie’s Town 1810-1822 62

Legitimising Occupancy 1822-1830s 66

Townscape, Public Culture and the Panopticon Within 68

Section II: Community and Commonality: The Growth of the Rocks as a Locale

Patterns of Occupation 76

The Constables’ Notebooks 1822/23 80

A Statistical Profile 94

Reputation and Representation 102

The Culture of the Lower Orders 108

The Nature of Community 119

The Irish 130

S e c t i o n I I I : F a m i l y L i f e

- Sex 146
Marriage and Married Relationships 159
'My children I love as my life': Birth, Childhood and Growing Up 197
The Rising Generation: Education, Youth and Coming of Age 233

S e c t i o n I V : M a k i n g a L i v i n g

- 'Many Labouring people' 259
Masters and Servants 303
Boats for Pleasure and Burthen 322
Seaman and Landspeople 332
The Constables 343
Publicans and Dealers 352
The Meaning of Respectability 394
'Declining Life': Growing Old on the Rocks 407

E p i l o g u e 426

A p p e n d i c e s 434

B i b l i o g r a p h y 446

List of Figures

	<u>After Page</u>
Fig. 1: The Rocks and Sydney: location.	1
Fig. 2: The Rocks, Sydney: modern Sydney Cove Authority boundaries and original location, 1788-c1830.	1
Fig. 3: The Rocks in 1835.	1
Fig. 4: Glover Cottages, Kent Street, built 1822.	3
Fig. 5: Cadman's Cottage, 1816, below George Street.	3
Fig. 6: Steps connecting Harrington with Gloucester Street.	4
Fig. 7: A rare surviving glimpse of the water down the Suez Canal from Harrington Street.	4
Fig. 8: Flier for a historic walking tour: 'Walk the Wicked Waterfront', 1991.	6
Fig. 9: Unk White, 'From the Bridge Stairs', 1966.	7
Fig. 10: William Bradley, 'Sydney Cove Port Jackson', March 1788.	32
Fig. 11: Francis Fowkes (attrib.), 'Sketch and Description of the Settlement at Sydney Cove Port Jackson in the County of Cumberland taken by a transported Convict on the 16th of April 1788...'. 	32
Fig. 12: Charles Grimes, 'Plan of Sydney', 1800, showing leases granted.	32
Fig. 13: Charles Alexander Lesueur, 'Plan De La Ville de Sydney Capitale des Colonies Anglaises, Aux Terres Australes', 1802.	32
Fig. 14: James Meehan, 'Plan of the Town of Sydney in New South Wales by Jas. Meehan Assistant Surveyor of Lands by Order of His Excellency Governor Bligh 31 October 1807'. 	32
Fig. 15: William Bradley, 'Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, 1788'.	33
Fig. 16: Anon., 'A View of Sydney Cove - Port Jackson March 7th 1792'.	33
Fig. 17: Edward Dayes, 'Western view of Sydney Cove, 1797' c1796.	33

	<u>After Page</u>
Fig. 18: Edward Dayes, 'Eastern View of Sydney' c1796.	33
Fig. 19: Attrib. Thomas Watling, 'View of the Town of Sydney' c1800.	36
Fig. 20: Louis de Sainson, 'George Street', 1826.	36
Figs 21 and 22: Attrib. Thomas Watling?/Edward Dayes, 'A View of Sydney Cove, New South Wales' and 'Explanatory Description of the Publick Buildings &c of the Town of Sydney, Port Jackson,' c1800.	37
Fig. 23: Attrib. George William Evans, 'Sydney from the West side of the Cove', 1802.	38
Fig. 24: John W. Lancashire, 'View of Sydney Port Jackson, New South Wales taken from y/e Rocks on the Western Side of the Cove', 1803.	38
Figs 25 and 26: John William Lewin, 'Sydney Cove 1808', views to the west and east of the Cove.	40
Fig. 27: John Eyre, 'View of Sydney from the West Side of the Cove', 1810.	41
Fig. 28: John Eyre, 'View of Part of the River of Sydney in New South Wales Taken from St Phillip's Church Yard', c1812.	41
Fig. 29: Hand-cut pit with channels which served as an early well, excavated in Gloucester Street in 1994.	41
Fig. 30: William Dawes/Captain Hunter, 'Sketch of Sydney Cove, Port Jackson, In the County of Cumberland, New South Wales July 1788'.	54
Fig. 31: John Eyre, 'View of Part of Sydney, the Capital of New South Wales. Taken from Bene Long's Point' 1812.	62
Fig. 32: Robert Russell, 'Section No 62, Town of Sydney, Parish of Saint Philip', 1835.	67
Fig. 33: Extract from Harper, 'Plan of the Allotments or Ground in Sydney' 1823, known as 'Harper's Map of Sydney'.	76

	<u>After Page</u>
Figs 34 and 35:	
Major James Taylor, 'The Entrance of Port Jackson, and Part of the Town of Sydney, New South Wales', and 'The Town of Sydney in New South Wales' 1821.	76
Fig. 36: Major James Taylor, 'Part of the Harbour of Port Jackson, and the country between Sydney and the Blue Mountains' 1821.	76
Fig. 37: Major James Taylor, 'Parramatta River Sydney Harbour', c1819.	76
Fig. 38: Reynolds' Cottage, 28-30 Harrington Street c1830, elevation and plans.	78
Fig. 39: John Carmichael, 'George Street from the Wharf' 1829.	80
Fig. 40: H. Stuart Wilson, 'Cumberland Street', c1880.	80
Fig. 41: Joseph Fowles, drawings of Harrington and Jamieson Streets in 1848, from <u>Sydney in 1848</u> .	85
Fig. 42: John Hoskin, 'Jamieson House, Jamieson Street, Aug. 1934'.	91
Fig. 43: Augustus Earle, 'View of Port Jackson taken from Flagstaff, Sydney' 1826.	91
Fig. 44: Joseph Fowles, 'New Government House and Fort Macquarie from Princes Street' c1850.	91
Fig. 45: John Hardwick, Princes Street in 1853.	94
Fig. 46: Sophia Campbell, 'Sydney in All its Glory', 1817.	94
Fig. 47: Sophia Campbell, 'Sydney Church and the Regimental Mile from the Main Guard' 1817.	108
Fig. 47A: 'Wesleyan Chapel, Prince Street'.	108
Fig. 48: Anonymous, 'Farewell to Black-eyed Sue and Sweet Poll of Plymouth' 1790s.	146
Fig. 49: Detail from Sophia Campbell, 'Sydney Barracks 1817'.	146
Fig. 50: Engraving of a Sydney boys' school, 1838.	241

	<u>After Page</u>
Fig. 51: William Hawkins' drawing of his house in Harrington Street at the corner of Argyle Street, 1825.	276
Figs 52 and 53: Details from Major Taylor's panorama, 1821.	289
Fig. 54: Samuel Elyard, 'The Queen's Wharf' 1873.	325
Fig. 55: C. A. Lesueur 'Vue d'un quartier de Port Jackson' 1802.	325
Fig. 56: 'The Old Commodore, Billy Blue', c1840.	325
Fig. 57: J.B. Henderson, 'Cumberland Street looking South' c1855.	386
Fig. 58: George Roberts, 'On Church Hill' 1845, showing Ann Bushby's Dove and Olive Branch.	386
Fig. 59: George Roberts, 'The Punchbowl, Gloucester Street' 1845.	386
Fig. 60: The Whaler's Arms, originally the new St Patrick's Inn built in 1830, photograph 1900.	392

List of Tables

	<u>Page No.</u>
Table 1: Households and population by street 1822/23.	95
Table 2: Rocks people by civil status 1822/23.	96
Table 3: Rocks people: adults and children 1822/23.	96
Table 4: Rocks adults by civil status 1822/23.	97
Table 5: Rocks household types by street 1822/23.	98
Table 6: Rocks people by household status 1822/23.	99
Table 7: Civil status of Rocks householders by street 1822/23.	100
Table 8: Civil status of Rocks householders compared with civil status as a whole, in percentages, 1822/23.	101
Table 9: Comparison of household occupation numbers 1822/23 with household 'ownership' numbers c1820.	101
Table 10: Rocks people 1822/23 - 1828: traceable and untraceable by civil status.	122
Table 11: Mobility/stasis of traceable Rocks people 1822/23-1828, by status and showing location in 1828.	123
Table 12: Estimated number and distribution of Irish people on the Rocks by street, 1822/23.	130
Table 13: Estimate of Irish households on the Rocks, by street, 1822/23.	131
Table 14: Conception and birth profile, Elizabeth Boulton, 1806-1830.	220
Table 15: Rocks servants and masters/mistresses, by sex 1822/23.	303
Table 16: Rocks servants by civil status, 1822/23	303
Table 17: Rocks servants 1822/23: date of arrival in the colony.	308
Table 18: Rocks servants living-in and living-out, and average number per household, 1822/23.	308
Table 19: Occupation/status of traceable 1822/23 servants in 1828.	309
Table 20: Rocks masters and mistresses by civil status and street 1822/23.	311

	<u>Page No.</u>
Table 21: List of beer licences granted to Rocks people, 21 July 1810.	373
Table 22: Sample of Rocks people over 45 years old, in age groups, 1822/23.	409
Table 23: Ageing/aged Rocks men by occupation/status, 1828.	417
Table 24: Ageing/aged Rocks women by occupation/status, 1828.	419

A b b r e v i a t i o n s

ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AONSW	Archives Office of New South Wales
CCJ	Court of Criminal Jurisdiction
CSC	Colonial Secretary's Correspondence
HRA	Historical Records of Australia
HRNSW	Historical Records of New South Wales
JRAHS	Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society
ML	Mitchell Library
SG	Sydney Gazette
SQS	Sydney Quarter Sessions

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

The idea for this study germinated nearly a decade ago. I was commissioned to write a brief historical outline of a site between Cumberland and Gloucester Streets in the Rocks for the Department of Public Works. While the northern end was a vacant space, an ex-bus station littered with stored building materials, overgrown with creepers, at the southern end were rows of derelict nineteenth-century houses, boarded up (ineffectively) against squatters. But the rear spaces and structures of these houses were intact: laundries, lavatories, washing lines, paved yards and laneways; the whole simply left as it was, though quiet now, and weed-covered from disuse.

In researching that site, I discovered that, despite its billing as ‘birthplace of a nation’, a ‘historic village’ and suchlike, and the considerable sums invested in its restoration and preservation, the Rocks had no serious written history. At the time I was able to write an account from pictures and maps, directories and rate books, and the narratives of early twentieth century amateur historians. Yet the site remained a mystery, intriguing, an intimate glimpse of the forgotten urban world of the nineteenth century. What were these people like? What kinds of lives had they been able to make here? What individuals, families, communities existed here?

An Australian Postgraduate Research Scholarship awarded in 1991 gave me the opportunity to research and write the Rocks’ history on a full-time basis. Hence the first organizations to be acknowledged and thanked are the Department of Education, Employment and Training, and the Department of History at the University of Sydney. I had the good fortune to have

Professor Brian Fletcher as my supervisor. An historian of considerable standing, widely published, and also very busy, he provided enormous support in everything from the broader historical perspectives of colonial life, to the minutia of style and grammar, and well as never-failing encouragement. In the first years he provided sensible and tactful suggestions on keeping the subject under control. The thesis telescoped with astonishing rapidity from a complete history, down to a history to c1930; then it was to conclude with outbreak of Plague in 1900; and down once more to a history ending about 1860. Finally it became clear that a study using this methodology, range of fields and amount of detail should cover just the early colonial period, to c1830. Fortunately the shrinking process terminated there; else I should perhaps have written merely of 'The Rock'.

For such seemingly obscure people, there exists a wealth of information, much of which is held by the Mitchell Library and the Archives Authority of New South Wales. No research of this kind could be carried out without the courteous and helpful people who staff these reading rooms, people who fetch the books, drag out trolleys of old volumes, copy the documents, maps and pictures. Mention should be made of the enlightened staff at the Archives who, confronted with my excited gibberish over having discovered the District Constables Notebooks, waived the ten-page limit on xerox copies and provided me with all eighty pages. The statistical and social analysis of streets, households, families and neighbours which was so important to this study was thus facilitated.

The Sydney Cove Authority also holds considerable resources for research, particularly in the form of maps and pictures. Here I acknowledge the help of past personnel, heritage architect Noni Boyd, archaeologists Jane Lydon and Nadia Iacono, and more recently, archaeologist

Wayne Johnson. The process of research and writing involved discussions and consultations with these people, who work with the Rocks' material culture, as well as with many other colleagues and friends in the disciplines of both history and archaeology. I was fortunate that Carol Liston was undertaking similar research on the people of Parramatta; many animated and fruitful comparative discussions (and late nights) ensued. Other historians - Rhys Isaac, Shane White, Stephen Garton, Julia Horne, Penny Russell, John Shields, Hilary Carey, Shirley Fitzgerald, Marian Quartly, Linda Young, Paul Ashton - have given great assistance, some by reading this and related work, and providing critical comment, others in less formal ways, with suggestions, data, references, contextual perspectives, encouragement, enthusiasm, a patient ear; and so on.

In 1994 I was given the opportunity to apply what I had learned about the Rocks and its people to the research design and planning, and then the progress and analysis, of a major archaeological investigation on the Rocks. The site was that same one I had investigated in 1986, between Cumberland and Gloucester Street; there is, of course, pleasing symmetry in this. The convergence of the two disciplines is a first for Sydney, and marks a new direction in the interpretation of urban historical archaeology here. The initiation and success of the project is largely due to the foresight and energy of archaeologist Richard Mackay, of the firm Godden Mackay, Heritage Consultants, who remained determined and committed despite considerable opposition from archaeologists representing academic and professional organizations. Some of the archaeological evidence used in this study comes directly from that site, via the skilled, thoughtful and dedicated team with whom I have had the good fortune to work over the past year - thank you to Graham Wilson, Martin Carney, Dominic Steele, Matthew Kelly, Kate Holmes, Nadia Iacono, Kevin Barnes and the indomitable Iain

Stuart. I am also grateful for the assistance of archaeologist Wendy Thorp, who has also written about the archaeology of the Rocks, and who shares my interest in getting past artefact catalogues towards the people who lost or threw away all those 'small things forgotten'.

The 'Big Dig', as it became known, received a great deal of publicity and attracted thousands of visitors and volunteers. Among them were family historians, including Bob Failes, Val Garner, and Kate Wingrove and others, who are descended from Rocks people. I want to acknowledge their generosity in offering and providing me with painstakingly researched notes and family histories, and I hope this study and the one which follows will offer them something in return. Thanks similarly to Bob Bullivant, our accountant, who, as it turns out, is descended from Rocks publicans and dealers Charles Bullivant and Maria Ikin. Margaret and Bruce Williams helped me tame and harness the demon computer, and Margaret's professional skills in proof-reading and word processing, as well as her talent and interest in history, were essential in the production of the work.

Which brings me to my own family. My parents Francine and Bill Karskens have given unquestioning support over the years that this study has entailed, and helped out in countless practical ways. The steadiest support over the long haul came, as it does in all things I do, from Richard Waterhouse. In our often seamless and felicitous blend of domestic and intellectual, he was sounding-board, critic, friend, he shared enthusiasm for the inspirational discoveries, and during the more mundane and time-consuming phases and tasks, offered the constant encouragement and understanding that only someone who shares the delights and torments of writing history can provide.